

The EC's appeal for PM's help

It reveals its powerlessness

WE are aghast at Election Commissioner Shah Nawaz's appeal to the Prime Minister, seeking her intervention to stop some of her party men from breaching electoral codes during the municipal polls campaign. While we appreciate the EC's candour, we cannot help but be exasperated by this admission that the Election Commission has no control of the election process and has failed in addressing the blatant violation of electoral norms that continue with impunity.

The allegations that the returning officers are not doing their job by refraining from taking adequate actions against violators, is a cause for concern. It is these returning officers who play a key role in making sure that all candidates stick to the electoral codes of conduct. Thus it is crucial that they live up to their constitutional obligations.

What the election commissioner has said about such incidents marring the government's image should be taken seriously. If the municipal elections, where there is no power shift in the regime, are conducted with so many irregularities, how can people have confidence in the election process while trying to elect their candidate? Under the current circumstances, the prospect of a free and fair municipal election appears to be very dim.

The open disregard for electoral rules by ruling party men and the EC's obvious inability to take any action against them, has made a deep dent in our democratic journey. The Prime Minister may be very well served by taking the EC's appeal in all seriousness.

Khulna's latest water solution

These projects should be replicated

WE are filled with a sense of optimism to know that a much awaited scheme to supply 110 million litres of safe water to half of Khulna city's dwellers is underway. With the severe salinity of two major rivers Bhairab and Rupsha, in addition to supply shortages, Khulna city has been facing a water crisis for years, causing immense suffering to its residents. At present only a quarter of the population has access to safe water – with the supply falling drastically short of demand.

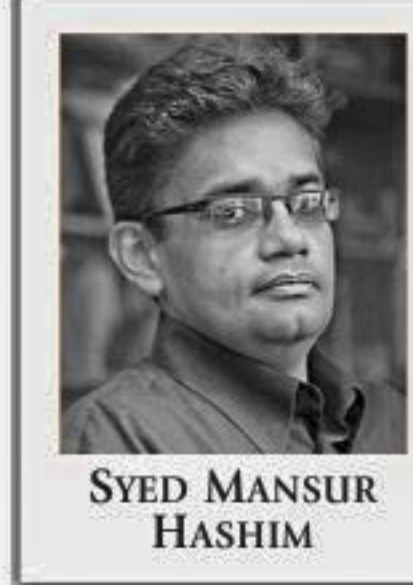
The project, moreover, will ensure safe, potable water for as many as eight lakh people who remain outside the formal coverage. This means fewer epidemics of waterborne diseases and a significant improvement in the quality of life in this area.

It is heartening that the government, with the help of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), have been able to design this impressive scheme that seems to have all the ingredients of a success story.

The claim that it has been designed in keeping with climate change impacts, is however, debatable. Whether the plan to build a reservoir to store over 77 crore litres of untreated water as backup in case of extreme salinity of the regular water supply will actually be an adequate solution, remains to be seen.

Water contamination and shortage of supply have been perennial problems for residents of most urban areas in the country. With a growing urban population and over extraction of water from deep tube wells that often lead to contamination and depletion of the water table, there is greater likelihood of a water crisis in the cities. Projects like this, therefore, should be replicated in all urban areas. That will make life considerably easier for millions of urbanites.

Entrepreneur turned saviour



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

BACK in April, 2015, the world watched in horror as news flashed around the globe of a ship capsizing in the Mediterranean and hundreds of migrants perishing in the aftermath. Often cited as one of the worst migrant disasters, it was also the time that unleashed a very lucrative trade for people smugglers, who made windfalls in profit by

ferrying thousands from politically unstable regions in the Middle East and Africa to Europe.

While the sharp rise in deaths due to accidents in sea triggered a row in the EU on whether to allow these migrants to set foot on its soil, the efforts of two individuals showed us that it is possible to save human lives without changing national or even common market policy towards refugees. The April tragedy brought together an American named Christopher Catrambone and Italian Regina Catrambone, both successful entrepreneurs in insurance and risk management, to do something about providing safe passage, providing medical care and ultimately assist in the asylum process of the hapless migrants.

Mr. Catrambone is a 31-year old, owner of a successful multimillion-dollar company, who decided to go on a holiday with spouse Regina and daughter on their 24-metre yacht for a three-week cruise that took them off Malta and very close to the shores of North Africa. Incidentally, the yacht came across a sunken migrant boat with no survivors and something changed for all of them. Enter the Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS), which describes itself on its website as "the first privately-funded mission to assist migrants at sea. Its primary aim is to reduce loss of life during dangerous migrant crossings". The company specialises in "search and rescue" operations. The Tangiers Group owned by him is in the business of providing medical, insurance and risk management to a global client base. Subsidiary companies employ some 100 employees who manage some 20,000 medical and service providers, and interestingly, the group's operations base is in Malta.

Given that the expertise to mitigate risk already existed in the companies founded and headed by Christopher, and that his team in effect saved lives in conflict zones, perhaps the urge to reach out and save the lives of the distressed, who had abandoned everything in their homeland in the faint hope of reaching a haven on the distant shores of Europe, appealed to the man. The word desperate is what best describes people who choose to brave choppy waters of the high seas on rickety boats that were never designed for ocean travel. It is hardly a wonder that thousands died during those fateful months.

MOAS' journey has not been without hiccups. Traditional donors and international NGOs were less than sceptical about his ideas. As pointed out in an article in The Guardian in July 2015: "Setting up Moas was not cheap, with monthly operating costs of up to €600,000. Two rigid-hulled inflatable speedboats with twin 70-horsepower engines were bought to ferry migrants to the Phoenix. Catrambone hired an experienced search and rescue crew as well as leasing two helicopter drones and their operators from the Austrian company Schiebel. He was determined to get out to sea, however, and Regina agreed that they could

estimated at more than 3,400.

This was a family affair. Christopher assisted speedboat crews in missions. His wife and daughter, on the other hand, helped in the care of migrants once they reached the shore. And these people needed help; from Rasha, an 18-year old soft spoken English-speaking Syrian native, who saw both her parents being killed when her boat went down, to Hakim Bello who was fleeing war-ravaged Syria. They all needed help – medical, papers, asylum-seeking advice, the works. To what end they were successful in getting these people refuge in Europe is not known. What is known is that



Regina Catrambone (R) and Canadian doctor Simon Bryant aid a Nigerian man who fled Boko Haram's reign of terror.

PHOTO: MARCO DI LAURO

cover the 10-week operation in 2014 with a further \$2.3m of their own money."

The couple took their fleet to the Mediterranean, off the Libyan coast, in August 2014. Over the next 10 weeks, the "Phoenix" and its crew is credited with saving 1,462 people and assisted a further 1,500 to reach Italian navy vessels stationed in the area. Those numbers take on new meaning in the backdrop of the fact that during the period of March to October, it is estimated that some 100,000 people were squeezed into overcrowded vessels, many of which routinely sank from Libyan shores and the death toll was

that Christopher Catrambone decided to make a difference, which he did along with his family. MOAS's philosophy is best described by its founder: "Wealth can be very short-term. We are not trying to be crusaders. We're just being humans, keeping hold of our dignity". He and Regina Catrambone have been recognised for their efforts "for offering a lifeboat when the EU wouldn't" and is a recipient of the prestigious "100 Leading Global Thinkers" by Foreign Policy in the Challenger-category.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

Message of Kaushik Basu for Bangladesh



BIRU PAKSHA PAUL

OPEN SKY ECONOMICS can turn into an inspirational story if the economist deals the subject with passion and insight. That is what Professor Kaushik Basu did while examining the strengths and weaknesses of the Bangladesh economy.

His strong assertion for globalisation could create both debate and determination toward the gradual acceptance of the market economy. He compares globalisation to gravity, stating that it is there and it will be there whether you like it or not. The wise way would be to invent a way to turn gravity to our favour. Water flows downward by its intrinsic property, he further states. Smart people will convert that property into hydroelectric power. In the same vein, Dr. Basu sees the sources of strength for Bangladesh, such as the demographic blessing and geographic location, that could take advantage of the benefits of high, effective demand and connectivity.

The Chief Economist of World Bank, Professor Basu, delivered a public lecture on December 13 in Dhaka. He asserted that what Bangladesh has achieved over the last four decades is nothing less than a fascinating development story. The country was once doomed to fail but it has emerged from ashes with steadily rising growth. Social indicators are not perfect, but the major numbers exceed those of many other developing nations including India – an emerging giant whose per capita income is almost 1.5 times higher than Bangladesh's.

This implies that if Bangladesh's per

capita income catches up with India's per capita, Bangladesh will be placed in a more advanced position than the latter in almost all social indicators, indicating the country's leading role in protecting the poor. Professor Basu's visit has been instrumental in changing the relationship between the current regime and World Bank.

When journalists catapulted arrows of criticism on how the World Bank handled the case of the Padma Bridge, Dr. Basu instantly congratulated the Government of Bangladesh on undertaking the mega project with self-financing capacity. Kaushik applauded Bangladesh for moving ahead with its dream project without fear, almost echoing Rabindranath's verses, "Where the mind is without fear, where the head is held high..."

Although the acrimony between the two parties had taken place before Dr. Basu joined the World Bank, he did not disown any incidents of the past. Rather, he viewed the matter from a positive angle by asserting that a good outcome may often show up after bad history. Professor Basu ascertains that the bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and the World Bank has now reached a new height of mutual respect. And Bangladesh has earned that status by spearheading the titanic project with unflinching determination. No one ever thought that the Senior Vice President of World Bank would be so effusive in brightly painting a developing nation like Bangladesh. Our country gained both morally and psychologically from Dr. Basu's visit to Dhaka.

The day the Prime Minister inaugurated the construction of the Padma Bridge also marks the day the Chief Economist of World Bank landed in

Dhaka. The confluence of the two circumstances may appear intriguing. Some were curious as to why the two events occurred simultaneously. But there is no connection between them. Primarily, Kaushik Basu is the guest of Bangladesh Bank. The central bank invited Dr. Basu much in advance as the chief guest of an international workshop held in mid-December, and Dr. Basu honoured the call from Governor Atiur Rahman.

Gradually, Dr. Basu's programme began to unfold, comprising various high profile meetings including ones

the rural economy and to learn about financial inclusion, an essential strategy Bangladesh Bank has been campaigning for to promote inclusive growth and consequently, sustainable development.

Kaushik Basu sees Bangladesh as being on the cusp; lying between moderately high growth and the actual takeoff. Seldom have we seen such optimism and econometric rigour in the analyses of even local critics. Basu claims that few countries of the world were fortunate enough to maintain an average growth of 6-plus percent for 12 years, as maintained by Bangladesh.

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with the PM, Finance Minister, and Planning Minister. They were all impressed by Dr. Basu's wisdom to read the inner strength of the Bangladesh economy. Professor Basu places enormous importance on patriotism and the country's united spirit and thus, paid homage to Bangabandhu, who he considers to be a visionary and a great leader. While meeting the Prime Minister, Kaushik did not forget to mention his mother, who was originally from Jessore. And thus he could convince our leader about his candid feelings for Bangladesh.

Dr. Basu was very enthusiastic about

When Basu speaks, economists listen to both his diction and predictions. Basu's economics is both statistical and inspirational since this game theorist sheds light on moral qualities. Basu's main message for Bangladesh is to ensure that this takeoff happens by investing in infrastructure and accelerating growth in a balanced, inclusive fashion. Kaushik Basu believes that a vibrant Bangladesh will soon turn into a marvelous development model – a story that will radiate awe and inspiration on the globe.

The writer is chief economist of Bangladesh Bank.

COMMENTS

"Struggling with identity"
(December 20, 2015)

Amina

Nowadays American Muslims often feel the need to prove how American they are to distance themselves from the radicals. It's so unfortunate!

Razia Begum

Anti-Muslim sentiments swell in America which is not a good sign.

Hashem Miah

Mr. Donald Trump, please stop your anti-Islam and anti-Muslim propaganda.

Anonymous

Racism is so prevalent in America yet they claim themselves to be the biggest practitioner of democracy.

Jahanara Begum

Following the massacre in San Bernardino, California, by a young Muslim couple, Muslims are in fear for their safety and struggling with their Muslim-American identities.

"Not third gender, female"
(December 17, 2015)

Lubna Jebin

The government has acknowledged them as 'third gender' but they have to choose either male or female even in their national identity card or passport and they write 'hijra' after their names! So the recognition is still on pen and paper, not in practice.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Climate deal and some questions

This refers to the report, "Climate deal 'is world's best chance'" (Dec.13). Now the agreement is done but have the rights of the world's most vulnerable communities been protected? Is the agreement full of promises, but little substance? The increase in population is the root cause of climate change and needs to be tackled first.

It would have been better if this global conference had been held through video conferencing. Think of the savings in terms of money.

Deendayal Lulla
On e-mail

Evict the billboards

A few days ago, DNCC mayor Anisul Huq took a bold initiative by conducting an eviction drive against the illegally parked trucks in the Tejgaon area. The mayor truly deserves our appreciation. We, the DNCC dwellers, would like to ask the mayor to take the same initiative in removing the billboards from DNCC area. These billboards are nothing but utter nuisance, as they can be very dangerous for pedestrians and also rob the beauty of the city. Let us all strive for a clean, green and liveable Dhaka.

Dr. Shamim Ahmed
On e-mail

