

Sanctions on Iran lifted

Victory of dialogue over confrontation

WE welcome the lifting of the long-running international sanctions against Iran. It will certainly help the country to recover from the consequences of the embargo that the country was under for so many years. As Iran emerges from a virtual economic isolation, its assets in the western countries will now be unfrozen and it will be able to trade freely with the outside world.

The change is the outcome of a deal between Iran and the P5+1 group of world powers that include the US, UK, France, China and Russia plus Germany. The negotiated settlement of such a long-running crisis has indeed restored our confidence in the international negotiation process. It is a testimony to the success of dialogue over brute force, which should be replicated in all the flashpoints across the world.

We congratulate President Barack Obama and the Iranian leadership for the sagacity with which they have handled the negotiation process. For both sides, it was a difficult decision to make. This is especially so for the Iranian leadership which has to abandon its nuclear ambition that was one of the rallying cries of the hardliners. Having said that, we are constrained to revisit the underlying issue of the abolition of nuclear weapons. There are countries and entities that have circumvented international laws to get their hands on the deadly bomb. Instead of reprimanding them through sanctions, we have witnessed that some members of the international community have helped them make such a lethal weapon. While welcoming Iran in the nuclear non-proliferation club, we call for the removal of all nuclear arsenals from the face of the earth.

Bangbandhu Bridge lights off to save electricity

What about saving human lives?

WE are aghast by the discovery of a Daily Star report that during the horrific pile up on January 9 on Bangabandhu Bridge that left six people dead, the lights of the bridge, were off. Experts and eye witnesses have said that poor visibility due to thick fog and lack of illumination led to the accidents. Even more shocking is that generally only half the lights are on because Bangladesh Bridge Authority (BBA) claims it is 'saving electricity' by doing so. Does this mean that the BBA, which is responsible for the bridge's maintenance and smooth functioning, is more concerned about saving electricity rather than lives?

It is clear that the BBA was least concerned about the challenging weather conditions, in this instance, poor visibility, which in any case, warrants extra precautions to be taken. Primarily this includes keeping all the sodium lights on until the fog clears. This small detail could have prevented the catastrophic pile up. In addition, the authority could have suspended vehicular movement until visibility improved, slowed down the release of vehicles from toll booths and forewarned drivers of the situation. But for Providence, the consequences in terms of lives lost and damage to the bridge could have been even more.

In this case the authority should have tailored the lighting system according to weather conditions. Unless the BBA does its job properly, utilising the manpower and resources at its disposal, there will be more accidents, more lives lost and damage to the Bangabandhu Bridge, especially during times of reduced visibility. Such utter negligence calls for an immediate reform by the government in the management of the bridge.

COMMENTS

"Price cut not on govt's mind"
(January 17, 2016)

Mohibullah Mohon

Is it true that BPC really wants to recover its losses of the past? It seems illogical.

"The BNP chief [Khaleda Zia] has brought to the fore again the initiative [to determine the number of war martyrs] taken by Sheikh Mujib. You [Khaleda] have highlighted Sheikh Mujib, rising above meanness. That's why I would like to thank you."

- Zafrullah Chowdhury, Gonoshasthaya Kendra founder

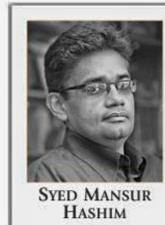
Syed Najmul Hussain

He is provoking unnecessary controversy in a bid to draw public attention.

Alamgir Mahmud

Unfortunately, Dr. Zafrullah is not well-recognised by the present generation. Thousands of wounded freedom fighters were treated in the Gonoshasthaya Kendra that he established. He was an expatriate doctor working in London but came back to the country in 1971 and was in the frontline of the war to treat wounded freedom fighters.

Global oil price slump and Bangladesh



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

IRANIANS have reason to be jubilant. Sanctions in place since 2006 have been lifted. Economic sanctions had been placed progressively by the US, EU and the UN in response to that country's nuclear programme. For Iran, it means the US repaying Iran an estimated US\$400 million in funds frozen since 1981 plus interest worth \$1.3 billion in interest. It means nearly \$100 billion of Iranian assets that were frozen are now unfrozen. But more importantly, a sanction-free Iran is now expected to double its oil export to 1.1 million barrels of crude oil and a further 500,000 barrels soon afterwards.

When we think of the impact of the re-emergence of Iran as a major oil exporting nation, the incoming Iranian crude spells trouble for existing oil producing nations ranging from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Venezuela, Brazil and Russia and a further slump in oil prices from the current sub-\$30 per barrel is expected. It is of course very good news for major oil-guzzling Asian nations such as China and India. Indeed going by what has been published in international media, both these countries and others like Japan and South Korea are all lining up with Tehran to ink oil-import deals.

With an unfettered Iran to sell as much crude oil it wants, it will inevitably push prices downwards, because the country intends to produce and sell up to 2.5 million barrels of oil per day by next year. Iran has been marketing its oil aggressively. It intends to provide discounts to old customers, which will only intensify the downward price spiral of oil. KSA will be forced to match dollar per dollar in discounts if it wishes to match deal-sweeteners that Tehran will offer. It is impossible to predict how much further the price of oil will go down, but even a blind man can see that prices are on their way down in the international oil markets.

In the midst of all this of course, we

are stuck with a price regime in Bangladesh that has been oblivious to what is going on in the rest of the world. The incessant foot dragging by the government on revising downward oil prices is simply unrealistic. The favourite argument dished out on a regular basis by officials and ministers alike is that since BPC has, over the years, sustained losses, it is now making up for lost revenue. It is disheartening to note that the government in all practicality does not have a clear policy on fuel price adjustment. Had we had one in place, then it could lead to a situation where domestic fuel prices would be adjusted to revision in prices in line with the trends in the international markets. In this age of oil glut and record low prices, precisely what the government has been doing to increase its capacity to store more oil and increase its refining capacity is anyone's guess. Since, the original short-term plan to produce electricity by employing rental/quick rental power plants that run on furnace oil has now literally

precious liquid at discounted prices should not be taken lightly, especially in light of the heightened tensions between KSA and Iran.

As per a projection put forward recently by the country's leading think-tank, the Centre for Policy Dialogue

in phases of litre of diesel and kerosene would certainly go a long way in reducing the unit per cost of electricity generation and aid in lowering the levy charged by transportation companies on the transportation of goods over the road network.

As per a projection put forward recently by the country's leading think-tank, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), we find that a 10 percent reduction in fuel prices could propel the country's GDP growth rate by 0.3 percent, or in dollar terms, nearly \$5.2 billion; raise its export earnings by another 0.4 percent and household consumption by about 0.6 percent.

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At the end of the day, Iran's re-entry into the world of oil should be welcome news for oil-consuming countries. It has been welcomed by major Asian economies. Indeed, China which is the world's biggest importer of oil from the Middle East has taken



become our long-term future, would it not make more sense for us build up our storage and refining capacity, so that Bangladesh may build up its stocks of crude oil, in the event, that we may take advantage of going into long-term contracts with countries like Iran? Building up such stock of the

Those are serious numbers. A reduction in domestic fuel pricing would have a chain reaction (positively) leading to a reduction in cost of living for consumers, already hard pressed with inflation on house rent, food, transportation to school fees. A general reduction, if necessary,

notice and the Premier Xi Jinping is making a visit to the region and Tehran is on the list of stoppages. The message is loud and clear: low oil prices are here to stay. The question is what are we going to do about it?

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

Do our children have the right to education?

MANZOOR AHMED

DOES the Constitution of Bangladesh recognise education as a right? The plain answer is no. It mentions the provision of universal education as a directive principle of state policy in the often cited Article 17. In its three clauses, Article 17 calls for a) establishing uniform, mass-oriented universal education, free and compulsory, as determined by law, b) relating education to needs of society and producing trained and motivated citizens to meet the needs, and c) removing illiteracy within such time as determined by law.

So what is missing? A roundtable was hosted on the subject by the Parliamentary Caucus on Child Rights and Save the Children on January 12. The background note argued that Article 17 is a statement of principle, an expression of aspiration, and not a constitutional pledge.

Does this matter? It matters because a directive principle cannot be used as a basis for challenging government or anyone else's action or inaction in a court of law. A provision for citizen's right can be. A right incorporated in the Constitution is 'justiciable,' to use a legal jargon.

Barrister Amirul Islam, one of the framers of the Bangladesh Constitution, said at the roundtable that the call for a guarantee of a constitutional right to education was misguided. He argued that it is already there in the directive principles. In his view, we should concentrate on what is said in Clause (b) to meet the needs and create trained and motivated citizens.

In making his point, Islam ignores, or

is unaware of, what has been found necessary by many countries in the world, including our neighbours – India, Nepal, Pakistan, Maldives and Sri Lanka. They have inserted specific provisions in the national Constitution about the state's obligation to fulfill children's right to education. These measures have helped to galvanise public opinion, to hold the state responsible for neglect and failure, and have prodded authorities to action with legal sanctions when necessary.

India's 86th constitutional amendment adopted in 2002 prepared the ground for the Right to Education (RTE) Law enacted in 2009. The Act is seen as a compromise that was reached after a long debate in political and academic circles – with opinions divided between shades of how much more should the law embrace. There was no opposition to the idea of a right to education guarantee.

A law, even a constitutional provision, does not necessarily solve complex and intractable social, economic and political problems. It can and does provide a legal umbrella, specifies responsibilities for action, establishes the ground for seeking legal remedies for neglect and inaction, and creates opportunities for legal activism by civil society. This is what can be seen in India and elsewhere.

RTE Act led to provision for a hot mid-day meal in schools for over 150 million children in India under a rule by the Supreme Court. The rule was issued when some states and schools were looking for ways to avoid full implementation of the law. RTE requires profit-making, private schools to reserve 25 percent of their new admission for under-privileged children in the school's

neighbourhood. The law establishes standards for school facilities, teachers and learning materials for all schools, and mechanisms for enforcing the standards. Oversight and reporting mechanisms for how RTE is being achieved are in place in each state.

Have the problems of providing quality basic education for all children in an equitable way been solved in India as a result of the constitutional pledge and RTE Act? The answer is no. These steps have signaled the national resolve and priority and have prompted a higher level of effort and greater progress than it would have been possible otherwise.

Other prominent speakers at the roundtable – the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament, Advocate Fazle Rabbi; MostafizurRahman, Minister of Primary and Mass Education; and Dr. Enamur Rahman, Chair of the Parliamentary Caucus on Child Rights, and several MPs present – found an argument to their liking from Barrister Islam.

They went on to express their doubt about the need for some modifications of the Constitution to back up the fundamental principle with a specific recognition of the right to education. This could be done by adding an article on children's right to education in the section on various rights-related articles of the Constitution. This is what has been done in other countries.

Deputy Speaker Rabbi even argued that the 15th amendment of the Constitution adopted in 2011, which prohibited any amendment contrary to the fundamental character of the Constitution, prevented any amendment on RTE. He appears to be giving too broad an interpretation of the 15th amendment. An addition to insert chil-

dren's right to education could hardly be regarded a change of the fundamental character of the Constitution; it would only reinforce a fundamental principle already in the Constitution.

Speakers noted that the Compulsory Primary Education Act, in the book since 1990, was not well-formulated and did not protect children's right to education. In any case, National Education Policy 2010 foresaw universal primary education up to class eight. In fact, universal and compulsory education needs to be extended further to include secondary education in an aspiring middle income country. This is one of the targets of Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 (SDG2030) endorsed by global leaders at the UN in September 2015.

Speakers at the roundtable mentioned the draft comprehensive education law in preparation, which would reflect the major objectives of the education policy. "The Cabinet found shortcomings in the draft and it has been sent back for remedying the weaknesses," said Mr. Mostafizur Rahman, Minister of Primary and Mass Education.

It was suggested by speakers that the deficiencies in the 1990 Compulsory Primary Education Act could be corrected and incorporated in the new comprehensive education law, turning it into a Right to Education law. This would only reflect the government's stated development priority and earn for itself public acclaim for its commitment.

The commitment of course has to be backed up by budget provisions and other steps to improve governance, management, and quality of instruction to fulfill children's right to education.

The writer is Professor Emeritus at BRAC University.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Torturer cop should be punished

Recently, an assistant director of Bangladesh Bank was beaten mercilessly by a SI of police for Tk 5 lac as extortion, which once again raises the question: how safe are we, the general people? Only "closing" or suspending the offender is not enough; we want exemplary punishment.

Md. Abdul Karim
Alamdanga, Chuadanga.

"All Muslims are not terrorists"

This refers to the above mentioned letter published on Jan 9. It is high time that the myth that "All terrorists are Muslims" or "All Muslims are terrorists" was shattered. The fact remains that terror groups belonging to all religions create/created mayhem in many parts of the world. The Maoists, who have terrorised innocent people right from Nepal to as many as 10 states of India, are not affiliated with any Islamic flag. Two Indian Prime Ministers have fallen to bullets or bombs of non-Muslim terrorists. During the terrorist attack in Mumbai (November 26, 2008),

as many as 30 percent of the victims were Muslims, though the community constitutes hardly 15 percent of the population in India! When fanatics from Pakistan (claiming to adhere to the Islamic faith) feel no qualms in shooting Indian Muslims to death, then why should religion be associated with terrorism? When will we wake up to the fact that terrorists are nothing but heartless butchers who kill anybody irrespective of his/her religious affiliation? Those who associate terrorism with Islam to sow the seeds of religious hatred should be seriously condemned.

Kajal Chatterjee
Kolkata-114, India