

## Suspicious blaze at Kalyanpur slum

Utter disregard for humanity

THE fire that was allowed to burn down the shanties and shops at the Kalyanpur slum shows utter disregard for human lives. The circumstances of the fire raises question and we condemn, in the strongest possible terms, those who tried to stop the fire brigade vehicles from reaching the spot to tackle the fire. According to a number of slum dwellers, they belonged to the ruling party.

The eviction drive to free a piece of government land was suspended after the High Court ordered the authorities to stop the eviction for three months during which the latter was barred from harassing and threatening the residents without specific allegations. Then came the fire which, according to news reports, many local residents believe was lit by ruling party men who would benefit most from several projects when the land is freed.

We support the government's initiative to recover land from unlawful occupation. But there must be a proper and humane way to do this. How are the residents of the slum going to survive the winter without a place to live? Could the authorities not wait till the winter was over? Where will they go from a place they have called home for so many years? Where does the muscle power to obstruct an emergency vehicle emanate from? More importantly, how could a market and a slum be constructed on government land in the first place?

An investigation should be launched immediately to find out if there was any foul play behind the Kalyanpur fire. And in the long run, the government should come up with more humane ways to free up land from illegal occupation.

## Water filters sans safety certificates

Threat to health of users

THIS may come as a surprise to the bulk of consumers in Bangladesh, but manufacturers and importers of water purifying and filtration equipment do not need to get their products certified as safe. The irony of the situation is that most of the suppliers make lofty promises of providing water "as safe as boiled water" while others go to the extent of stamping "approved by BSTI", primarily because consumers suffer from the erroneous perception that the Bangladesh Standards Testing Institute (BSTI) is the approving authority. Given that WASA has been struggling to supply adequate and safe piped water to city residents and failing, a large percentage of city residents have to resort to purifiers to filter bottled water.

So what is to be done? The Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research has tested some of the products available in the market. Many of them did not pass the test on quality. Why is it that a gadget that has to do with the health of its users can be marketed without conforming to certain standards? The BSTI is the appropriate agency to approve the marketability of the product. And it should be equipped, not only with testing equipment, but with manpower to conduct regular drives in the market to hold to account unscrupulous traders who make claims like their product "removes 99.99 percent bacteria." Guilty parties must also face severe penalty.

## COMMENTS

"OC talks like AL man"  
(January 21, 2016)

Meraj Hossain

It is amusing that this OC feels comfortable to identify himself as a close relative of the local MP rather than a police officer. Undoubtedly, a partisan police officer!

Mohammed Arif

He might get promotion for his flattery!

Nirob Sikder

I think he forgot that he should serve the people, not the ruling party. This OC should be dismissed immediately.

Abul Kalam

He could be awarded instead of being dismissed! After all, he is contributing to AL.

Abdul Jabbar Sinha

This is so disappointing.

Alamgir Mahmud

It's not his fault; he might get encouraged by the IGP's remark on Golam Rabbani and the SI who tortured him!

Mokshed Ullah

Flattery is the best way to get promotion in Bangladesh, so he is doing no wrong!

Toriquel Islam Khan

This man must have been a BCL leader in his student life!

# 2016: A new beginning for the world and Bangladesh

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

THE year 2015 that has just ended has been a landmark year for both the development as well as climate change discourse at the global level as three major agreements were reached under the United Nations. The first was the Sendai agreement on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) that was achieved in March 2015 in Sendai, Japan, the second was the agreement of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in New York in September 2015, and finally, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (CC) achieved in Paris in December 2015.

All three of these global agreements have fifteen year time horizons from 2016 to 2030 to implement the agreements and goals that we agreed upon. Hence, starting in 2016, all the countries of the world, both collectively as well as individually, will need to find ways to implement these major agreements from 2015. I will give below some thoughts on why I believe this is a major new opportunity for the whole world in general, and Bangladesh, in particular.

PARALLEL TRACKS OR STRANDS OF A ROPE

Along with the 17 SDGs on various development, environmental and governance related issues, and the DRR, I would argue that the climate change goals are in fact two distinct goals, one for adaptation and another for mitigation, and so if we add these two, we get a grand total of 20 goals across SDGs, DRR and CC.

The origins of these 20 tracks were quite separate with different constituencies being involved and different negotiating tracks being used to reach the global agreements. However, when it comes to implementing them, there is so much overlap between them as well as the opportunities for synergies that we need to think of ways to avoid overlaps and attain synergies. My own metaphor is to think of them as either parallel tracks (the current default situation) or as twenty independent strands that need to be woven into a rope that connects them with each

other at various points. The collective strength of the rope is many times stronger than the individual strength of each strand.

To pursue this metaphor further, I would say that there are at least five points of intersections between these twenty strands of the rope, namely at the global, regional, national, local, and most importantly, individual levels. Let me elaborate on how this works on each level.

GLOBAL LEVEL

At the global level, the sum of the three global agreements and 20 global goals is to tie all 200 hundred nation states and seven billion people on the planet together as never before. Just to pick one example, the climate change mitigation goal depends entirely on all countries doing their fair

Each country can only do so much on its own, and needs to cooperate with its neighbours to achieve the goals that require actions across ecosystems, such as river basins in our case, that span several countries.

COUNTRY LEVEL

Every single country, both rich as well as poor must now figure out for itself, how to best link the 20 strands to make a national level rope that suits the circumstances of the country. In the case of Bangladesh, this is already taking place, as the government is distributing responsibilities for each of the 20 issues to particular ministries within the government and ensuring that they are linked across the ministries. The Planning Commission is likely to play a key role in

LOCAL LEVEL

At the local level, most communities are already engaged in linking all twenty issues in their daily lives, as they do not separate environmental issues from their routine lifestyle. However, it is important for the communities to be empowered and enabled to act as agents of change, and not just recipients of assistance from above. Hence, community level actions to link all twenty strands of the global agreements will play an important role.

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Finally, it comes to each of us as individuals to realise the opportunity and responsibilities placed upon us both



PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

share of greenhouse gas emission reductions. No country can do it alone.

The three global agreements also tie together both the developed as well as developing countries, bounding them to take actions in their own countries, unlike the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which only required the rich countries to provide funding to the developing ones.

REGIONAL LEVEL

There are also a number of connections that can be made at the multi-country level, the most important of which is for each country to work together with its neighbours. Thus, it is critical for Bangladesh to work with the other countries in South Asian region, particularly the countries that control the rivers that flow into Bangladesh.

ensuring that the synergies between the strands are achieved.

Another important actor in enabling all twenty strands to be effectively linked is the Parliament, through both the enactment of legislation, if and when needed, but more importantly through its oversight function of the different ministries.

It is also important that this process of formulation, planning and even implementation not be confined within the government alone, but include all other major stakeholder groups, such as the private sector, civil society, education sector, research sector and media, who have important roles to play. Linking stakeholder groups is an important part of building synergies and linking the different strands together at the national level.

as citizens of Bangladesh as well as global citizens. I would argue that average Bangladeshi citizens, with our enormous diaspora and our increasing links through the internet, are already amongst the most globally connected. Therefore, this can become a major asset for the country as it moves forward.

The outside world and Bangladesh has the opportunity to work with each other at local, national, regional, global and individual levels to embark on a new way of thought, so that when we look back in 2030, we can say that 2016 was the beginning of a better world.

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## PROJECT SYNDICATE

# The public sphere's new enemies



CHRIS STONE

BEFORE November's terrorist attacks in Paris, it was legal to stage a demonstration in a public square in that city. Now it isn't. In Uganda, although citizens campaigning against corruption or in favour of gay rights often faced a hostile public, they didn't face jail time for demonstrating. But under a frighteningly vague new statute, now they do. In Egypt, government authorities recently raided and shut down prominent cultural institutions – an art gallery, a theater, and a publishing house – where artists and activists once gathered.

All around the world, it seems, the walls are closing in on the space that people need to assemble, associate, express themselves freely, and register dissent. Even as the internet and communications technology have made speaking up publicly technically easier than ever, ubiquitous state and commercial surveillance has ensured that expression, association, and protest remain constrained. In short, speaking up has never required more courage.

For me, this shift could not hit closer to home. In November, the Open Society Foundations (the global philanthropies of George Soros, which I lead) became the second organisation blacklisted under a Russian law, enacted in

May, that allows the country's prosecutor general to ban foreign organisations and suspend their financial support of local activists. Because anyone who engages with us is subject to possible prosecution and imprisonment, we have had no choice but to cut off relations with the dozens of Russian citizens we supported in their efforts to preserve some fragment of democracy in their country.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with regulating public space and the organisations that use it. In the early 1990s, some new governments in Eastern Europe, Africa, and Latin America, underestimating the power of an active citizenry and civil society, failed to regulate adequately advocacy organisations and the space in which they work. But over the last two decades, as active citizens have toppled regimes in dozens of countries, governments have moved too far in the opposite direction, imposing excessive regulations on those organisations and that space. In the process, they are criminalising the most basic forms of democratic practice.

In some cases, governments do not even bother to create a legal precedent for their actions. Last spring in Burundi, President Pierre Nkurunziza assumed a third term in office, despite the two-term limit enshrined in the Constitution. When citizens took to the streets to protest, they were violently suppressed.

Even countries with some of the world's most robust democratic traditions have been cracking down. After the Paris attacks, France and Belgium (where the plot was planned and

organised) suspended civil liberties indefinitely, transforming themselves overnight into what are, at least by statute, police states. In both countries, demonstrations have been banned; places of worship have been closed; and hundreds of people have been detained and interrogated for having voiced an unconventional opinion.

This approach is exacting a heavy toll. Thousands of people who had planned to

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protest at the United Nations climate talks last month had to settle for leaving their shoes. It was a startling image, illustrating how fear can overrun the commitments needed to maintain open societies and political freedoms even in Europe, the birthplace of modern citizenship.

There is no simple formula for regulating public space or safeguarding peaceful political dissent in an age of terrorism and globalisation. But two basic principles are clear.

First, the world needs stronger international governance of the movement of people and money, and fewer restrictions on speech, association, and dissent. Lately, governments have been moving in the wrong direction. But 2016 offers plenty of opportunities for correction, in areas ranging from trade to migration.

Second, non-profit organisations working to improve public policy need the same rights to secure international funding as for-profit entrepreneurs seeking to provide goods and services. Foreign direct investment should be encouraged, not hindered, regardless of whether it will support goods production and job creation or stronger public policies and more active citizenship.

The responsibility for changing course does not fall exclusively on governments. All of us who value open public space must stand shoulder to shoulder in support of the policy frameworks and institutions that safeguard it. Now is a time for solidarity across movements, causes, and countries.

When simply taking up the activism of a concerned citizen can land you in jail and fear of surveillance encourages mass passivity, single-issue politics is not a winning strategy. The best way to defend public space is to occupy it, even if you are championing a cause different from that of the person standing next to you. In 2016, we must fill – and thus protect – that space together.

The writer is President of the Open Society Foundations. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2016. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### US-backed dirty wars

In a stunning development, Guatemalan police recently arrested 18 ex-military leaders on charges of committing crimes against humanity during the decades-long US-backed dirty war against Guatemala's indigenous communities. The ex-military leaders face charges of ordering massacres and forced disappearances during the conflict which led to perhaps a quarter million deaths. Many of the arrested former military leaders were backed by US, including Manuel Benedicto Lucas

García, who had worked closely with US military officials to develop a system of attacking the highlands where Guatemala's indigenous Mayan communities reside. The system involved decapitating and crucifying people.

It's not at all uncommon for the US to step in and change things there if it doesn't like it. When Guatemala elected a communist president, US sent in the Marines. US feels they have a right to interfere in the affairs of Central America. Of course,

they did exactly the same thing in Lebanon years ago. When they elected a pro-communist president, Eisenhower sent in the Marines. And Lebanon has had nothing but grief ever since. The same thing happened in Vietnam. When they looked like they were about to have a pro-communist government, US stepped in to make sure they didn't! Ted Rudow III, MA CA, USA