

Fuel prices to be cut

Why did it take so long?

PRICES of fuel, particularly furnace oil is slated to be cut by Tk15 – 16 per litre within a week whereas other types including octane and diesel prices would be cut within a few months as per a government decision. This is a long overdue decision, particularly in light of the fact that oil prices in the international markets flattened out nearly one and a half years ago. We are informed that cut in prices will not be pegged against international pricing; rather it will be done on the basis of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation's (BPC) profitability. It is ironic that whilst the price per litre of furnace oil stands at less than Tk 30 per litre in the international market, BPC has been selling the same at Tk 60 per litre. Hence the cost of electricity generation by power plants remained high, and while BPC made bumper profits, the government ended up paying subsidy to keep price of electricity within reach.

We are also perplexed as to why it will take a month to rationalise prices of petrol and octane, and as to why BPC must continue to enjoy Tk 25-30 profit per litre! The rationale that BPC must be given time to recoup its losses despite the fact that all its bank loans have been repaid, tells us that the consumers are being squeezed for the purposes of making profits. It is high time that we join the league of other nations where pricing of fuel be adjusted automatically with fluctuations with the international pricing.

A law to improve university standards

A welcome move

IT is a positive move that the cabinet has approved of a draft 'The Accreditation Council Law, 2016', that aims to ensure the standards of higher education. We have seen all too often, entities claiming to be universities, cropping up and continuing their operations without maintaining the quality of education that such establishments are expected to provide. Many private universities, moreover, charge exorbitant tuition fees but do not provide students with the services to justify such high costs. Despite government directives, many well-reputed universities have hiked up their fees but not provided the best academic learning and basic facilities such as proper campus environments and laboratories. If the law in question addresses such issues, that would indeed be a laudable endeavour.

The proposed council will review the academic standards of the universities and give ratings based on their findings which will be posted on a website. This should increase the competitiveness of the educational institutions – public and private- and hence in principle, improve the overall standards of higher education.

We however, would like to caution, that the draft law in question must not in any way become an obstruction to the growth of educational institutions that offer higher studies. It would be counterproductive if the implementation of the proposed law becomes entangled in bureaucratic gridlocks that may hamper initiatives that truly deserve accreditation. If the proposed law is executed in an efficient way by qualified members of the council, this may bring about a boost in the quality of higher education, something our young people deserve in order to be at par with their global counterparts.

COMMENTS

"Voice for justice gets louder"

(March 28, 2016)

Md Elias

This country is no longer safe for women; be it at school, college, university, police station or "protected areas".

"Mesmerising Mustafiz"

(March 27, 2016)

Labonyo

Mustafiz played superbly throughout the entire tournament. We are really proud of him.

She is mine



KNOT SO TRUE

RUBANA HUQ

HE could have been ours. She could have been our daughter. She could have been returning home after a dinner, stopped at a traffic signal, dragged out of the car after being surrounded by a group of beasts, and carried off to a quieter spot to be raped and murdered. She could have been our daughter returning from work, unaware of her surrounding, tired of traffic, and walking the last half a kilometre back home, just to be assaulted on the road by goons who would rarely be tried. She could have been our daughter, raped by lust and dumped in the ditch and we would never know how. The body, which is now to be exhumed for fresh autopsy, could have been our daughter's; the stories written on all national and local dailies could have been ours.

Many of us may shudder now, but Tonu really could be our child. All of them could have been ours. While we realise this, we also need to admit that with time, we have all gotten worse. The number of abuses has soared while most of us stand desensitised. Back in 2008, Mahila Parishad had reported that 30 percent of the rape cases are carried out by influential people, 18 percent are by relatives, 31 percent by neighbours, 10 percent by guardians and 11 percent through official quarters. 31 percent of these rape victims were between 11-15 years of age. From 1997-2010, the Legal Aid Department of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad reported 55,995 cases of abuse against women above 14 years of age, out of which, there were 7,232 cases of rape, of which 1,372 women died after being violated and 2,854 were gang raped. According to Odhikar, 338 women and children were raped in a period of nine months in 2012, out of which 68 were gang raped. According to data compiled between 2010 to 2013 from 24 dailies, 8,210 women and 2,273 kids were physically abused, 766 women and 1,674 children were raped; 480 women and 413 children were gang raped; 366 women and 573 children suffered sexual harassment; and 716 women and 132 children suffered from burns inflicted on them, bringing the total number of victimised women to 9,619 and children to 4,704. In September 2014, the number of rape cases was 45 and it doubled the next month (October) to 90. In the last two years (2014 and 2015), almost 4,500 cases of violence per year have been registered with the police. According to Ain-o-Shalish Kendro, 846 women and children were raped in 2015, while the Bangladesh Mahila Parishad reports 1,092 rape incidents, and Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF) reports that 199 kids were raped in 2014, and 521 children were raped in 2015. The One Stop Crisis Centre of Dhaka Medical College reports that four to five women are reported to be raped every day, while the 14 units of Women and Child Repression division of the police has recorded 22,291 cases of abuse in

2014 and 21,220 cases in 2015.

A regional study in 2013, conducted by the United Nations based on anonymous interviews with more than 10,000 men aged 18 to 49 years from Bangladesh, China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Papua New Guinea revealed that nearly 25 percent men surveyed admitted that they have raped a woman at least once in their life. Ironically, two-third of these men had never faced any legal consequences.

Sadly, we have selective memory. Sadder, in spite of all the data and statistics, reportage and commentaries, is the fact that we don't align with common protests outside our bubble; saddest still is that we move on to the next meaningless moment of the mundane without a trace of memory, regret or tear.



PHOTO: STAR

Otherwise, we would have remembered Yasmin from 21 years ago, who was raped by three policemen, and lay exposed in public with her dead body being poked at by policeman before the crowd. Otherwise, we would have remembered the false medical report of Yasmin jumping from the police van, and the subsequent protest raging through Dinajpur, where police fired against the protesters and killed 17 on August 29, 1995. Otherwise, we would have remembered the 14-year old Yasmin riding on a Dhaka-Thakurgaon coach, on her way to see her mother Sharifa, waiting at a bus stop, being picked up by a police patrol van, being violated and left on the highway. Otherwise, we would have all risen by now, just like the city of Dinajpur, which flared up,

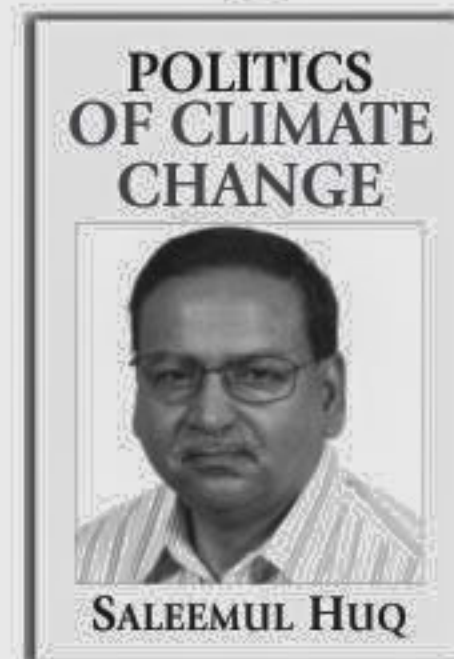
Today, we should all collectively grieve for all our daughters who have left us forever. Today, we might as well all be a part of Tonu, otherwise, history will shame us all.

Today, it is also imperative to recollect that it was the leaders and supporters of Awami League who stood by the case of Yasmin Akhter way back in 1995. With the same party in power today, hopefully, justice for Tonu will not have to wait for two more years. Hopefully, this time around, power will not numb, and instead expedite justice, keeping in mind that it's easy to use tragedy as a political tool but not safe to sit on it for long.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.

DIGITAL BANGLADESH

Right to information and climate finance



POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

SALEEMUL HUQ

AS Bangladesh and the world enters post-2015 era with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and Sendai Action Plan on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) - all meant to be achieved by 2030 - it is time to think out of the traditional 'development box' and do some innovative thinking and planning going forward. This is especially relevant for Bangladesh, as we aim to graduate from Least Developed Country (LDC) status by 2021.

I will put forward below some ideas on how the nexus of the vision for a Digital Bangladesh together with the citizens' Right to Information (RTI) can combine with climate finance to help Bangladesh make the transition from LDC to middle income status in less than a decade.

First of all, there is need for a change in our own mindset. We need to stop thinking of ourselves as "poor and vulnerable" (and hence dependent on the charity and help of others) but rather as masters or our own destiny (where we seek, as well as offer, solidarity and assistance to and from others). This has particular manifestation in weaning ourselves off of Official Development Assistance (ODA) or aid from rich countries to LDCs, to looking to access the growing pot of global climate change finance that will start at \$100 billion a year from 2020 onwards, and will grow larger every year after that.

We need to then look at using the opportunities presented by digital technology to link every citizen in Bangladesh, with a focus on the younger generation, not with a view to solely connect with the global information world but to also enhance the availability of online information at national level to inform and capacitate the citizens of the country to make better decisions on both development as well as tackling climate change impacts.

This will be a concrete way to fulfil the dream of Digital Bangladesh.

Next we need to focus on the citizens' Right to Information (RTI) Act to enable them to play a pro-active role in both their own as well as the nation's

development. The government of Bangladesh has made laudable policies for empowering citizens through RTI but actual implementation in practice still lags behind the promise. As will be explained further in the article, we need to understand how the application of both digital technology with RTI in the specific case of accessing and utilising climate change finance from the global to the national and local level over the coming half a decade can combine to enable Bangladesh to transform itself from an LDC to middle income status.

In the Paris Agreement on Climate Change agreed by signatories last December, the rich countries promised to provide \$100 billion a year, with the amount

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increasing each year after that, to the poorer countries to tackle climate change. This funding would be channelled mainly through the Green Climate Fund (GCF) which has already started to allocate funding to developing countries. Thus, while ODA is likely to decline (or at best stay at the same level), climate finance will grow over time. Also, if Bangladesh graduates from being an LDC, it will no longer be able to access grant based ODA anymore. However, it will still remain a vulnerable developing country, and hence, be eligible for climate finance. Hence, it would make sense for Bangladesh to turn from ODA to climate change finance over the coming years.

One of the major conditions for accessing global

climate finance is not simply to assert our vulnerability to climate change, but rather demonstrate that we have robust systems in place in the country, to provide transparency in how the climate funds are flowing and also have means of accountability, including independent monitoring and evaluation.

Unfortunately, so far, our performance on both transparency as well as accountability has not been very good. Fortunately, there is still time to improve this before the major climate change funds begin to flow.

The use of digital technology now allows all countries, even developing countries like Bangladesh, to take advantage of the latest digital technology to make information available in real time to everyone through the internet. Thus, for example, the government could immediately upload on the internet information on every project it approves, the moment the decision is made. This has become standard practice at the board meetings of the GCF, for example. The Economic Resources Division (ERD), which is the National Designated Authority (NDA) for the GCF in Bangladesh, could start the ball rolling by adopting this good practice, and others (including other government ministries, NGOs and donors) could then follow it.

Ensuring transparency of flows of climate finance is only part, albeit a very important part, of the need to ensure accountability. To complete the other parts of the puzzle, both governmental agencies, such as the Independent Monitoring and Evaluation Department (IMED) and the Parliamentary Standing Committees, as well as the media and NGOs and even citizens need to play a role. This is where the RTI policies of the government, that already exist, need to be better implemented. By doing so, the citizens of the country can hold the government to account.

Bangladesh has already established itself as a pioneer on various aspects of tackling climate change, including Community Based Adaptation (CBA), climate finance at national level and mainstreaming climate change into planning and development. It now has an opportunity to lead the world in combining climate finance transparency and accountability using RTI while also contributing toward the goal of Digital Bangladesh.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Did media act responsibly?

After the killing of Sohagi Jahan Tonu (a second-year student of Comilla Victoria College) inside the Comilla Cantonment area, no newspaper or TV channel immediately highlighted the issue with due importance until the news created a huge stir on social media and people come out on the streets to protest the incident. Why the media has acted in this manner is not clear to us. They should give extensive coverage to these kinds of crimes instead of being silent.

Jahanara Begum
 Nayapaltan, Dhaka

Unity to combat terrorism

The horrific and cowardly attacks in Brussels Airport and Metro Station that killed at least 34 people and injured 250 once again proves that unity and cooperation among nations is the key in tackling terrorism. Countries should bury their differences and stand united against terrorism.

P. Senthil Saravana Durai
 Maharashtra, India



PHOTO: DAILY MAIL

Increasing expenses in Dhaka

I was shocked to see a report in The Daily Star which states that living in Dhaka is as expensive as in Montreal. But if we compare the living standards of these two cities, where does Dhaka stand? Last year our capital was branded as the 2nd worst livable cities in the world after Damascus, the capital of war-torn Syria. On the other hand, Montreal is ranked as one of the best livable cities in the world. The anomaly is just mind-boggling.

Kowsar Rahman Sadit
 Uttara, Dhaka