

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

Graduating from the 'Least Developed Country' status

Gas crisis in the city

Proper management plan is crucial

GAS supply in the city, fitful in other seasons, gets more erratic in the winter, causing untold sufferings to the end users. This time it has turned even worse as the consumers are getting much less gas than they need. The crisis becomes particularly acute in the daytime, upsetting the pattern of the residents' everyday life. The plight of private consumers, especially of the children and the elderly, is manifold, for the erratic presence of gas makes life a daily struggle for survival.

There is no denying that a fall in the supply of gas is due mainly to its scarcity at the production level. We understand that the authorities have not been able to gear up the implementation of some important projects, causing a drop in production when it is aligned with an ever increasing demand. This, coupled with poor planning and widespread pilferage, has led to the ordeal of a constricted supply of gas. To make matters more grievous, the city dwellers have been kept in the dark about the impending crisis, which, there is no reason to believe, the authorities did not see coming.

While in the long run the key to the crisis lies in exploring more gas fields and finding new sources of energy, we believe that, the authorities urgently need to put a plug in the faulty supply lines and illegal connections. Also, private users have to be sensitised about wasteful use of gas. Rationalisation of the use of gas is a must. This is especially so for the nation's burgeoning economy, which demands an increased use of gas in growth-driven sectors. On top of it all, an overhaul of gas supply management plan is the order of the day.

AL men strike again

Will unruly elements be reined in?

A high school headmaster was allegedly beaten up by a local Awami League (AL) leader and his gang in Gangni upazila of Meherpur on the first day of the New Year. The altercation between the headmaster and this "leader" arose because of the former's refusal to include an individual the leader had recommended as president of the school's management committee. First of all, there is the procedure of election to be followed when selecting school management committees and such schools are not the personal property of any political party activist or leader.

The victim, a former freedom fighter, was beaten up in the most barbarous manner! He was literally pummeled with hammers. His refusal to acquiesce to an unjust demand led to this lesson in manners being meted out by the perpetrators. This is not the first time local ruling party activists have acted in this fashion. Indeed, we have been reporting these incidents for some time now. The question now is not about how fast the police can apprehend the perpetrators, rather, the seeming impunity with which such party activists go around brutalising people who have the guts to refuse their unjust demands.

Rule of law is what counts in any civilised country, and that is what the masses want above all else. Precisely how long will the ruling party allow this sort of criminal activity to continue is what concerns us and rest of the country. Is this the sort of image AL would like to portray to the electorate when it goes to the polls in not too distant a future?



SALEEMUL HUQ

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina has declared Bangladesh's ambition of graduating from being a Least Developed Country (LDC) within a few years. This is no doubt, a

laudable aim and should be achievable through the right policies to raise the growth rate and reduce the poverty levels through investment in industries, infrastructure and education.

However, there is one aspect of under-development that is as important as the economic aspects but is sometimes ignored. This is the ability to think for ourselves. As long as we remained dependent on donors, whether bilateral or multilateral, to attract investments, we were tied by the need to depend on foreign consultants for the expertise on where, how and what to invest in.

Becoming economically independent will also require the country to develop its own capacity to carry out research, gather evidence and feed analysis into national planning both for the public and the private sector.

This requires the cultivation and development of the intellectual capital of the country which resides in public and private universities, research institutes and think tanks of which Bangladesh now has many in number. The challenge now is to enhance the quality of research that is done in the country and making sure that it is indeed demand-driven and its results feed into policymaking, planning and practice.

A modest start along these lines has been happening in Bangladesh when it comes to research on how to tackle the global as well as national and local challenges of climate change.

Several years ago, research institutions of the country working on climate change came together to form a platform called Gobeshona that brought together over



PHOTO: STAR

Thus when it comes to the issue of how to deal with the adverse impacts of human-induced climate change Bangladesh is already well out of being an LDC and on the way to being a global leader on adaptation to climate change.

thirty public and private universities, national and international research institutes and think tanks as well as NGOs and private sector researchers to

share the results of their ongoing research through a web-based platform which now has an archive of over a thousand publications on climate change in Bangladesh and to hold regular monthly seminars amongst the research community. Starting in January 2015 they have held an annual conference that linked the researchers to policy makers and planners of the country to disseminate research results to users.

The second annual Gobeshona conference was held in January 2016 and the third will take place on January 8-12 at the Independent University, Bangladesh in Dhaka. The four-day event consists of three days of scientific paper presentations by several hundred scientists from different disciplines and parts of the country and the fourth day is a Science-Policy-Dialogue Day where the latest scientific findings are shared with relevant policy makers and planners who provide feedback and advice on what kind of research they will need in the future. Thus a valuable feedback loop has been established within just three years

of developing demand-led research that is relevant to the needs of the country.

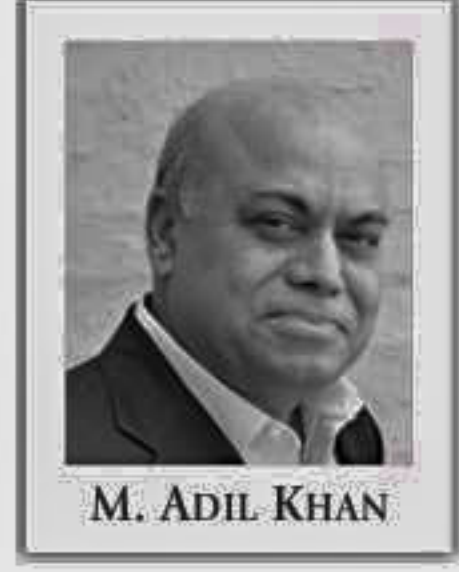
One of the features of this year's third annual Gobeshona conference on climate change research in Bangladesh is the presence of a number of observers from other LDCs in Asia and Africa who have come to learn from Bangladesh's experience on climbing up the knowledge ladder on how to tackle climate change.

Bangladesh is on the road to becoming one of the leading centres of global research and knowledge on adaptation to climate change and is already starting to share that knowledge not only inside the country but also in other countries around the world.

Thus when it comes to the issue of how to deal with the adverse impacts of human-induced climate change Bangladesh is already well out of being an LDC and on the way to being a global leader on adaptation to climate change.

The writer is Director, International Centre for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University, Bangladesh. E-mail: Saleem.icccd@iub.edu.bd

The search for a permanent solution for the Rohingyas



M. ADIL KHAN

2016 did not end completely hopelessly. In late December, 13 Nobel Laureates including Professor Muhammad Yunus and 10

global leaders wrote an open letter to the President of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and its members decrying the Rohingya carnage in Myanmar as "amounting to ethnic cleansing", that the crisis has "the

potential for genocide" and that it "has all the hallmarks of recent past tragedies - Rwanda, Darfur, Bosnia, Kosovo". The letter warned that "If we fail to take action, people may starve to death if they are not killed with bullets."

Criticising Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's de facto leader, the letter stressed that, "Despite repeated appeals to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi we are frustrated that she has not taken any initiative to ensure full and equal citizenship rights of the Rohingyas" and as a result, "We urge the United Nations to do everything possible to encourage the Government of Myanmar to lift all restrictions on humanitarian aid, so that

people receive emergency assistance... we urge the members of UN Security Council to put this crisis on Security Council's agenda as a matter of urgency, and to call upon the Secretary-General to visit Myanmar in the coming weeks as a priority." The letter also emphasised that in case the current outgoing Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon fails to visit due to shortage of time, the incoming Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (who has already assumed the position since January 1, 2017) must make the proposed visit a priority in his agenda.

Indeed, the letter, a much needed step in the right direction, is a reminder that ethics and morality that have been more international aid givers in the affected areas, something that the letter itself has also asked for, is important and should be done at the earliest, but this is no permanent solution.

For a permanent solution to the Rohingya question we have to dig deep. Indeed, given that Myanmar law has disallowed citizenship to the Rohingyas who have been living in Rakhine state since the eighth century, the lack of citizenship itself is at the root of the Rohingya crisis. The Myanmar Buddhists are not particularly welcoming to Muslim Rohingyas (Buddhists monks have been at the forefront of numerous attacks on Rohingyas) and Aung San Suu Kyi herself

campaign that at the end would have the capacity to influence member states to act. The Rohingya issue warrants both urgent and durable actions and therefore solutions should be both short- and long-term.

Firstly, in the short-term, it is important to get the humanitarian aid to the suffering community the soonest. Second, investigation of the crimes committed by the Myanmar military and others and bringing the perpetrators to justice and compensating those that have suffered must figure high in the agenda. Creating enabling conditions for the displaced Rohingyas to return to their homes to pursue livelihoods freely without obstruction (in recent times the military even barred them from fishing, their main source of income) is key. Also, during the resettlement period, given that Myanmar's military track record is anything but confidence enhancing, provision of an international force to join the Myanmar authority to oversee the process may also be given serious consideration (Malaysia has already hinted at joining such an arrangement).

The long-term solution has to be explored in the context of a state and a society that have very little tolerance and affection for a community that is racially and religiously different and that has faced relentless persecution over the years. The continued persecution has led to the current refugee crisis endangering regional security.

In a recent article entitled "Sanction Myanmar And Give The Rohingya A State Of Their Own" in Forbes, Anders Corr states that "like other stateless and unrepresented Muslims, [the Rohingyas] are at risk of producing a persistent terrorist threat" and he suggests an out-of-the-ordinary solution saying "the toughest of peaceful measures, including negotiations for provision of an independent state of Rakhine to the Rohingya" may be the way to go.

Corr's solution is somewhat extreme and impractical. Instead, setting up an autonomous unit in Myanmar in areas where most Rohingyas live and administering the unit within the framework of Myanmar under the joint governance of a UN peace-keeping force (or a multi-national regional force), a police body constituting of Rohingyas (to be set up) and Myanmar authorities, i.e. a one-country-two-system solution, could be a more viable alternative to consider.

The writer is a former UN senior policy manager.



Rohingya Muslims take to the seas to escape sectarian violence in Myanmar.

PHOTO: AFP

potential for genocide" and that it "has all the hallmarks of recent past tragedies - Rwanda, Darfur, Bosnia, Kosovo". The letter warned that "If we fail to take action, people may starve to death if they are not killed with bullets."

Criticising Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's de facto leader, the letter stressed that, "Despite repeated appeals to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi we are frustrated that she has not taken any initiative to ensure full and equal citizenship rights of the Rohingyas" and as a result, "We urge the United Nations to do everything possible to encourage the Government of Myanmar to lift all restrictions on humanitarian aid, so that

prominent by their absence than presence in recent times have not completely deserted us and that at a time where most governments have failed to stand up for humanity, the letter has internationalised the Rohingya tragedy.

Furthermore, the letter, which is an unprecedented occurrence by itself in the sense that a group of Nobel Laureates have joined hands to rebuke a fellow Laureate, is also a signal that Aung San Suu Kyi's charms that once mesmerised most people seemed to have ceased to spread their spell.

Now the question is - where do we go from here? Immediate humanitarian aid by the

is somewhat apathetic towards Rohingyas. This highlights the extent of political and racist alienation the Rohingyas face vis-à-vis the state as well as the society; thus a patchwork solution is no solution. The letter also fell short of suggesting a permanent solution; it left the matter to the UN.

Knowing the meandering and lengthy way UN works and that the UN operates through member states that have conflicting interests a permanent solution that is acceptable to Rohingyas, who have no state to represent them directly, would be hard to come through UN's known process. Ideas for a permanent solution must come from a worldwide citizen

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Dirty footbridges

It is very unfortunate that most of the footbridges of the city are so dirty that pedestrians feel discouraged from using them. For example, the foot over bridge connecting BIRDEM and BSMMU is full of peeled banana skin, cigarette filters, plastic bags and what not. We wonder where the cleaning staff of the City Corporation is. In every city in the world cleaners start their work early in the morning to keep the city clean. But here in Dhaka it seems that they never set foot in the footbridges. If not every day, can they clean out the garbage at least once a week? It is also the responsibility of the residents not to throw garbage in public places like these. This is our city and we all have an obligation to keep it clean and tidy. I think it is time that authorities started fining people who pollute indiscriminately. Maybe that will stop those who do not think twice to throw out a plastic bottle or a plastic bag in the middle of the road or on a footbridge.

Sirajul Islam,
Former Resident Manager,
Padma Oil Co Ltd. Dhaka.
7/2 Paribagh, Dhaka-1000

