

## LOSS AND DAMAGE

## Why Bangladesh needs more ambition

LAM-YA MOSTAQUE

## A freedom fighter's unique protest

High time to correct the faulty freedom fighters' list

THE extraordinary way a freedom fighter in Jamalpur has protested the discrepancies in the process of listing freedom fighters should be a wake-up call for the nation. Abul Hossain, according to a report by *Prothom Alo*, sent a letter to the local UNO asking not to give him a state funeral when he dies. He also asked for freedom fighters medal to be taken away from him. The reason for his anguish is simple: He does not want to be lumped with a group that includes fake freedom fighters. There have been numerous reported and proven cases of how corruption and inefficiency has led to the inclusion of imposters in the official freedom fighters list. In 2014, the government revoked more than three thousand fraudulent freedom fighter certificates, including that of six secretaries.

It is unfortunate that in the 46 years since we achieved victory, our governments have not been able to come up with a genuine list of freedom fighters. So far, successive governments have revised the list six times. Even, the definition and criteria of freedom fighters have changed ten times. Whenever the government of the day attempted to revise the list, it mysteriously grew longer, in spite of the fact that many freedom fighters have died without the years. Such callousness in a document as valuable as this is an insult to our freedom fighters and to our Liberation War. Our freedom fighters risked their lives to liberate their motherland, not for material gains. It is high time the government finalised the criteria and definition, and conducted an extensive probe to settle the list and put an end to this absurd mockery. It is the least we can do to honour our freedom fighters.

## Farewell to a people's mayor

A champion of the ordinary citizen

THERE is no doubt that ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, who passed away on December 15, before anything else, was always a champion of the downtrodden. True, he was an Awami League stalwart who had been in active politics since his university days. But his priority, his love and passion had always been for his city, Chittagong, in particular for the ordinary Chittagongians who fondly referred to him as *Qadir Bir*—a hero of Chittagong. The sea of thousands of people at his funeral is testament to his popularity as a mayor of this city.

A freedom fighter, Mohiuddin Chowdhury was elected three times to the mayor's office, serving the Chittagong City Corporation for 16 years. All throughout he has, unstintingly stood up for his fellow Chittagongians, even if it meant being at odds with the political party he belonged to for most of his life. His love for his city was so great that he even refused a ministerial position when offered, because he did not want to be separated from his people.

And there are many examples of his genuine empathy for the distressed and the downtrodden. During the devastating 1991 cyclone, Chowdhury showed his humanitarian side by arranging a field hospital for those wounded and sick as well as for the orphans. He also set up the Chittagong City Corporation established maternity centres, a nine-post-secondary colleges, computer training centres, a midwife training centre, a healthcare research training centre as well as centres to promote adult literacy.

Leaving aside all controversies, there is no doubt that Chowdhury was a mayor who won the hearts of many ordinary Chittagongians by listening to them and genuinely trying to address their problems as best as he could. We hope his successor will emulate that side of him.

IN the world of climate change negotiations, "loss and damage" is arguably one of the most debated issues. During COP23 last month, presided over by the island nation of Fiji—largely affected by climate change itself—the conversation on loss and damage gathered steam.

Although a universally accepted concept of loss and damage does not exist, the term can be defined as the negative effects of climate variability and climate change that people have not been able to cope with or adapt to. "Loss" refers to the complete loss of lives, species, etc, while "damage" is something that can be repaired (such as infrastructure). The main idea is that the countries that are most vulnerable to climate change are entitled to economic compensation from the polluter countries.

For a LDC (least developed country) like Bangladesh, climate change can pose serious pressure on the progress of development. Even though Bangladesh emits a small amount of carbon each



A man resorts to a raft to go home, as heavy rains led to floods in Beanibazar, Jamalpur.

PHOTO: ABM AMINUL ISLAM

*Australia and the European Union were against including financial discussions in the negotiations of COP23, saying that there is "insufficient statistical evidence" that extreme weather events such as typhoons were singularly caused by climate change.*

and the impact of climate change is only getting worse.

In 2017 Bangladesh saw one of the biggest floods in its history. The number of tropical storms has also increased in the past years. In an opinion piece for the Climate & Development Knowledge Network, Dr Saleemul Huq wrote: "When residents in the coastal district of Sathkhira in Bangladesh were asked a decade ago, only two percent said increased saline levels caused by sea level rise were having an adverse effect on crop yields, livelihoods and their health. Today, over 80 percent say they are affected." In this reality, it is imperative that we, as a country, rightfully demand support in order to face the adverse impact of climate change.

"Loss and damage" has a long history of being neglected. Only in 2010, the words "loss and damage" appeared for the first time in the negotiating text of COP16. Progress was made when in Warsaw COP19, loss and damage was fully institutionalised into the UNFCCC through the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage (WIM).

However, progress since then has

been slow. Even though "loss and damage" was mentioned in Article 8 of the Paris Agreement, there is no provision for financial compensation. In 2016, the countries decided to work on a five-year-plan to address the slow onset impacts and migration. The financial part however remained elusive.

At COP23, the discussion on loss and damage has been heated. The donor countries—and even countries that are typically in favour of climate change negotiations—are very uninterested in talking about loss and damage. Australia and the European Union were against including financial discussions in the negotiations of COP23, saying that there is "insufficient statistical evidence" that extreme weather events such as typhoons are singularly caused by climate change. Switzerland and the US are also strongly opposed to discussions on loss and damage.

But for countries like Bangladesh, the issue of loss and damage is an all-important one. Compensation from loss and damage can go a long way in financing the fight against climate change. In order to achieve that we need

to focus on scientific research that will support our demands on a global level. Technological support is just as important as financial support for countries like Bangladesh—and it's also as important as talking about compensation.

Luckily, there is solidarity regarding loss and damage among major parties of climate change negotiations. The LDCs and Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) are advocating for loss and damage to be a separate agenda of its own, with the WIM being a permanent body within the convention. The "G77 plus China" group has also adopted the same position as them. They are also advocating for the introduction of innovative forms of finance to fund loss and damage.

Bangladesh is known all over the world as a leader of climate change negotiations. Thus, Bangladesh—both to the government and civil society alike—needs to raise its voice on this issue and demand its rights to support its efforts in combating climate change.

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year, it is one of the most climate-affected countries in the world. Each year we are slowly losing land to sea level rise. The increased intensity of natural disasters is becoming harder to handle

## Fewer risks, higher rewards

The promise of better labour migration governance in ASEAN

TOMOKO NISHIMOTO and NENETTE MOTUS

ON December 18, 1990, the ILO adopted the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. For the next decade, ASEAN civil society led the momentum for observance of this date as International Migrants Day. A day to bring to the forefront the human rights of migrants, to shed light on their contributions and make their voices heard.

employers and recruiters, and governments. Low-skilled migrant workers comprise a large percentage of people on the move in ASEAN but remain highly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Women migrants are particularly susceptible to these risks due to undervaluing of "women's work" and lack of labour protection in the jobs available to them.

A joint study<sup>1</sup> released by ILO and IOM for International Migrants Day calls for further action to make labour migration fairer and enhance its

recruitment from workers to employers. Migrant workers help to grow crops, manufacture goods, build homes and infrastructure, and provide services that are essential to people's lives in the region and worldwide. This movement is facilitated by recruitment agencies and brokers who regularly charge excessive fees to migrant workers. In other words, the current model of international labour recruitment is largely based on exploitation of workers, which is unfair considering the critical role that migrant workers play in filling labour shortages.

employers' representatives and the International Recruitment Integrity System (IRIS) developed by the IOM and a multi-stakeholder coalition.

Secondly, enhance access of all low-skilled workers, but especially migrants, to education and civic society training that matches employer needs. Building partnerships between employers and training institutions in countries of origin and destination is essential to develop market-driven curricula that benefit national and migrant workers and businesses. Increasing skills development and validation would further diversify and strengthen the economic contribution of migrant workers.

Thirdly, ensure that women and men migrant workers are fully covered by labour and social protection laws, regardless of their jobs, and can access justice and remedies for abuse. Currently, many migrant workers are employed in sectors that offer limited protection, especially for those working in the informal economy. Introducing effective legal and institutional provisions for protection of labour and human rights of migrant workers will enhance their gains from migration, as well as prevent a race to the bottom on working conditions in destination country labour markets. The recently adopted ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers and its forthcoming plan of action can enhance regional cooperation on this issue.

At present, migrant workers often have limited ability to control whether they have a positive or negative migration experience, regardless of the decisions they make. Decreasing the risks and increasing the rewards for migrant workers, their families and their communities requires changing the status quo for labour migration governance within ASEAN.

We should all stop to consider the ways in which we benefit from the contributions that migrant workers make to our economies and societies. Let us pay them back by ensuring that they receive the fair treatment and opportunities which they have earned.

<sup>1</sup>Risks and rewards: Outcomes of labour migration in South-East Asia is a new publication by ILO and IOM.

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Foreign workers boarding a bus at the end of their shift at a construction site in Kuala Lumpur. A ILO/IOM survey has found that 73 percent of workers going to Malaysia had borrowed money to pay for migration, working on average for a whole year to repay the loan.

PHOTO: AFP

This is a time to reflect on the progress made in protecting the rights of migrant workers in ASEAN and the challenges remaining in ensuring that their migration experiences are safe and beneficial.

The most recent ILO estimates are that 20.2 million migrants originate from ASEAN countries, with nearly 6.9 million migrating to other countries within the region. The prosperity of entire economic sectors and geographic regions is heavily dependent on the output and earnings of these workers.

However, the rewards are unfairly and unequally shared by migrant workers,

contribution to inclusive and sustainable growth and development in the ASEAN region. To establish a baseline from which to measure progress towards these goals, the study developed the Migration Outcomes Index. The index broadens the way migration outcomes are measured by balancing social and economic concerns instead of narrowly focusing on the scale of financial remittances received.

Based upon the results, the report proposes several key changes to labour migration governance within ASEAN countries.

First, shift the costs paid for

Decent jobs should not be for sale.

The ILO/IOM survey found that 73 percent of workers going to Malaysia had borrowed money to pay for migration, working on average for a whole year to repay the loan. Growing recognition of the "employer pays" model and action by governments and businesses globally and regionally is a promising trend. International benchmarks on ethical recruitment that guide and support this change are reflected in the General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment formulated by the ILO, along with governments, workers and

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Keep BCS out of political influence

Every year a huge number of jobseekers take part in BCS exams to realise their dream to become a first-class government officer. A candidate has to go through three phases of examination: preliminary, written, and viva voce. However, a newspaper recently reported that an influential Awami League leader tried to influence the process by writing a letter to the public administration minister, recommending a candidate.

While the leader later argued that such a recommendation might not be necessarily effective, the practice of this kind of influence is itself unethical. BCS officers are expected to maintain a high ethical standard in their professional life. I would urge the BPCS authorities to introduce a condition that they will disqualify a candidate, political or not, who is recommending a candidate.

Abul Khaer, By email

## Reaping demographic dividend

Our country has been going through a golden age of demographic dividend since 2014. It is a period when the young population of the country outnumbers the elderly. Japan, Singapore and many other nations developed themselves by utilising their young generation properly during this period.

If we fail to use the potential of the youth, we have to suffer in the long run. Our vision to become a middle-income country will not be successful. We earnestly urge the policymakers to pay due attention to the youth in their productive activities by investing more in education and creating new jobs.

Abdur Rashid, By mail