

An unjustifiable human cost

Make shipbreaking safer for workers

We are shocked by the news that at least six workers involved in shipbreaking and recycling were killed in the first three months of 2018, the latest as recently as Wednesday morning. It's also pathetic that shipbreaking is turning from being one of the "greenest" industries (because of recycling) into one of the deadliest, with the number of deaths and injuries to workers rising steadily. *The Daily Star* report on the deaths quoted a Brussels-based NGO that said that between 2005 and 2017, at least 181 workers were killed in accidents in different breaking yards in Sitakunda, Chittagong, which houses the world's largest shipbreaking industry.

We have frequently highlighted the poor safety conditions in these yards and also stressed the need for improving safety as well as the overall living and working conditions of the workers. Although industries that involve physical labour generally lack safe working condition in Bangladesh, the human cost of this fast-growing industry is too great to be ignored anymore. Dismantling a ship is itself a daunting task because of the risks associated with it. And doing it without proper safety gear and necessary pre-demolition caution is like inviting disaster. Regular monitoring to check safety standards is thus an important part of how a shipbreaking industry functions—something that has been regrettably missing in Bangladesh's case.

Shipbreaking is proving to be profitable for Bangladesh, but the authorities—those in the industry as well as the government—must understand that workers' safety comes first and it's not in contradiction to the principles of profits. Making the shipowners respect and obey the safety rules is the responsibility of the government.

Employment in industrial sector down

Take steps to boost investors' confidence

ACCORDING to the latest Labour Force Survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), employment in the industrial sector for the current fiscal added a mere 300,000 people over the last seven years (an average of 42,857 jobs per year). This is not good news for a country that is on track to graduate from least developed country status in 2024. This is alarming because according to economists, our economy has not reached a saturation point of creating employment. Given the premise that we are now a lower middle-income country, our share of employment in the industrial sector must increase until we reach middle-income status. Most of the jobs being created are in the services sector (3.9 million) over the same seven-year period.

So why is this happening? One thing that has emerged is the gradual shift from labour-intensive processes to automation in the RMG sector, which is the largest employment generator in industry in Bangladesh. This means that not only are the prospects for new employment diminishing, but we are looking at layoff of unskilled and women workers too.

However, the biggest problem that has plagued the economy is not automation but lack of new investments. The inadequacy of private sector investment in industrial production is the principal reason for this downward trend in industrial employment. The danger of this sluggish growth in industrial jobs translates into fewer formal jobs for skilled workers. Government policy must look to providing incentives to boost diversification of industrial output—beyond RMG, steel and pharmaceuticals, if it wants to reverse this downward trend.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Measuring true losses of climate change

Each year, the coastal regions of our country are affected by different types of natural disasters triggering huge losses. This is not a new phenomenon.

The media often highlights the economic loss that people and the country have to endure because of them. However, there are other damages that are sometimes difficult to estimate in terms of their economic value. For example, a fisherman displaced due to a cyclone has not only lost his property, but also his identity as a fisherman.

After having to move into slums in big cities such as Dhaka or Chittagong, those who are affected by such disasters are forced to change their professions, losing their traditional identities. This type of loss cannot be ascribed a monetary value, nor measured as such.

The media should highlight these aspects and losses that arise from climate change as we prepare ourselves to deal with the problem of climate change.

SM Saify Iqbal, Dhaka



PHOTO: AFP

Is a federal party possible?

BETWEEN THE LINES
KULDIP NAYAR

WHEN former Congress President Sonia Gandhi said that they would not allow the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to return to power, she hinted at joint action on the part of the Opposition. It also means that she does not want Prime Minister Narendra Modi to run for a second term. On its own, the Congress does not have the numbers to pose any threat to the BJP-run government or Modi.

In all probability, as things stand today, Modi looks good enough to return to power. The three reverses in recent by-elections to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies notwithstanding, the BJP is capturing power in state after state and spreading its tentacles slowly but surely. Yet, 2019 general elections are some way to go and the impending state election in Karnataka and the subsequent ones in other states later this year would be the real test to assess Modi's strengths and weaknesses.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has taken the initiative to get the non-BJP parties together for a federal structure to contest against the BJP in 2019. To underline the Congress cooperation, Mamata has said that she is in touch with Sonia Gandhi daily. In fact, the leaders from other non-BJP ruled states are constantly in touch with each other to see the possibility of a federal structure.

If you recall, the Janata Party was a federal structure. It did not last its course and fell because the then leaders, particularly the top ones like Morarji Desai and Charan Singh, would quarrel in public all the time, much to the exasperation of the people. Then the Jana Sangh wielded power because the opponents were a divided lot. Once the non-Jana Sangh parties came together, the Jana Sangh government was reduced to a minority.

The federal structure that would come up, courtesy of the top leaders like Sonia Gandhi or, for that matter, Mamata Banerjee, has to take a leaf out of the book of the Janata Party and learn to work together. The moot question would be who among the leaders has enough support to be the prime minister. Once this question is settled, things will fall into place and the federal structure could survive.

The question that India faces today is that if pluralism, the nation's ethos, is defeated, which forces would come to



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power? The BJP seems to want to divide the people. They have been trying for a pro-Hindu government in some shape or the other. The RSS, which is the

mentor of the BJP, is playing its role to perfection to help realise the dreams of Modi.

This is where the new federal combination has to be careful. It would be better if they came up with a Minimum Common Programme with all parties endorsing the views and aspirations of all leaders. This is just one important issue which the top leaders of non-BJP have to address as the people's interests should be above everything else.

For the idea of India, which is founded on secularism and democracy, the parties based on religion or castes should have no place in the federal structure. The danger is that various elements would try to pull it in different directions to corner power. Even individual leaders should keep the country's unity ahead of personal or party interests.

If they learn to live together, the warning about their disorder would be repulsed. Secularism would have gone through the fire to prove its intrinsic strength. With coalition politics inevitable in India, the best possible way to defeat the idea of BJP or, for that

matter, Modi and his cohorts, is stay together and learn in the process to rule together.

The BJP cannot defeat the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi, unity in diversity. In fact, what it has done is prove Gandhi right. Unity of India could face the danger of separatism. Pakistan, whom I wish well, is the fallout of the mistrust in the Hindu majority. Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who was an apostle of Hindu-Muslim unity, said that he could not trust the majority, the Hindus. This mistrust is the reason why people left their homes after partition. One million were killed on both sides and Hindus and Muslims went apart further.

The RSS looks like it's copying the idea of division. Its philosophy is nothing and is making a mockery of Gandhi's preaching. The RSS elements did not succeed as the communal forces could not silence Gandhi. They had to ultimately kill him. I had seen the letter which Nathuram Godse wrote in defence of what he did. He avowed respect to Gandhiji but argued that the country would suffer if the Mahatma had lived longer.

I recall one incident from his prayer meetings. I was present when, before the Mahatma started his meeting, one person from Punjab got up and said

that he would not listen to the Quran. At the meeting all the three scriptures—the Gita, Quran and Bible—were read. Gandhi said that there would be no meeting until the objector withdrew his dissent. For days, there was no prayer congregation. It was resumed only after the person finally withdrew his objection.

Today, when the fanatic RSS guides the government in appointment of teachers, librarians and heads of academic institutions, there is little hope for merit to take over. Under the circumstances, how can a federal party fight against such elements? The danger to the nation is from those who think that since the country has 80 percent of Hindu population, they have the right to rule.

Leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel saw to it that there would be no Hindutva. They converted the then assembly into a constituent assembly to have a constitution. India is ruled today not by the 80 percent but by the constitution which assures one vote to one individual. Even when the Hindus are in a majority, they cannot subvert the idea of India because the constitution is supreme.

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Peace Over War

The world needs to prioritise people and prosperity over death and destruction

SYED YUSUF SAADAT

PACE is often defined as the absence of violence, conflict, hostility, or war. Yet this definition is not only derogatory, but also deceptive. Peace is not merely the absence of violence; it is the vanquishing of oppression by independence—the victory of justice over injustice. You cannot separate peace from freedom, because a man cannot have his peace unless he has his freedom. If an oppressive society lacks violence, the society is nonetheless not peaceful, because of the injustice fuelled through oppression.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), USD 1,676 billion was spent on military expenses globally in 2015. Research has shown that only 13 percent of this amount would

percent, the US can double its expenditure on education, which would then contribute towards achievement of SDG 4 (education for all).

The 2030 agenda for sustainable development is a continuation of the development agenda set in the 90s, known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The new agenda sets a way forward where the world as a whole considers a comprehensive agenda which encompasses both socio-economic and environmental issues. The notion of peace is a central element of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and makes an appearance twice in the SDGs.

Peace features as one of the five components of sustainable development or "5 Ps" that include people, planet, prosperity, and partnership. Peace is also incorporated in SDG 16 (promote peaceful and



A Syrian man carries his two girls across the rubble following a barrel bomb attack on the rebel-held al-Kalasa neighbourhood of Aleppo in September 2015.

PHOTO: AFP/KARAM AL-MASRI

suffice in ending poverty and hunger worldwide. On the other hand, 12 percent would be required for universal primary and secondary education, and a mere five percent could ensure healthcare for all. Hence, globally a reallocation of resources from weapons of war to pillars of peace can play an instrumental role in achieving the SDGs.

The same is true for individual countries. For example, in 2016, the United States spent USD 68 billion on education, which was roughly one-tenth of its USD 611 billion military expenditure. Thus, by cutting back on its military expenditure by only 10

inclusive society) and SDG target 16.1 (significantly reduce all forms of violence). However, one may still argue that the general discourse on SDGs has not adequately emphasised peace as a prerequisite for SDG attainment. Nevertheless, the United Nations aptly points out that "there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development."

In order to acknowledge that peace is a prerequisite for sustainable development, we simply need to take a cursory glance at war. War, as a game of death, turns people into casualty statistics in a news report. War is a

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catastrophe on the face of the planet that obliterates the probability of prosperity or partnership. Every cannon fired and every missile launched sets us back in terms of sustainable development. According to a study, it takes 14 years to recover economically, and 25 years to rebuild state systems and institutions, after a typical civil war that lasts seven years.

There is not even an iota of doubt that in order to achieve the SDGs, countries all over the world need to prioritise peace over war. However, there is an evident lack of commitment to peace which is manifested in the gulf between the words and actions of countries worldwide. This is profoundly demonstrated in the issue of nuclear weapons. Opinion polls have shown that in seven of the nine nuclear-armed nations, the majority of the people are in favour of nuclear disarmament. Yet according to the Global Zero Nuclear Weapons Cost Study report, USD 105 billion was spent on nuclear weapons worldwide in 2011. This is three times the amount of official development assistance given to Africa in the same year. Every hour six people die due to hunger. Nevertheless, USD 12 million is being spent every hour on the production, maintenance, and modernisation of nuclear weapons. Continuation of this state of affairs makes the achievement of the SDGs a far greater challenge than it would have been otherwise.

It is futile to try to recall bullets once they have been fired. Instead, bullets must be taken out of the gun in the first place. In today's world of drones and nuclear weapons, it is imperative for each one of us to understand and acknowledge the supreme significance of peace if we are serious about sustainable development. The sooner we realise this, the better. For we must live together as brothers and sisters or perish together as fools. Instead of pointing fingers at each other, let us defeat those who are pointing guns at all of us. And thus, let us engage our efforts towards the fulfillment of the SDGs which call for peace and prosperity.

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