

## Another solar success!

### Sarishabari model should be imitated elsewhere

WE applaud Sarishabari Sales and Distribution Division of Power Development Board (PDB) for adopting the on-grid solar plant as an alternate means of producing electricity. According to a report by this newspaper, the environment friendly power plant has contributed to reduce load-shedding from 7-8 hours to roughly 2 hours per day in an area with more than 17,000 consumers. This model should be replicated in other parts of the country where local power distribution departments are struggling to meet demands. The case for solar power plants, a renewable source of power, is simple. They are far less harmful, and not costlier, than conventional fossil-fuelled power plants. In many countries around the world, the amount of electricity produced by photovoltaic solar plants occupies a considerable percentage of their entire power generation. Germany, for example, plans to use nothing but renewable energy by 2050. While that may be an ambitious, if not fanciful goal for us, we can at least install more such solar power plants to supplement the national electricity generation. So far the way to meet the increasing electric energy consumption has been through expensive sources such as nuclear and coal-powered plants or quick rentals. But, renewable sources of power such as solar plants and wind power can really help ease the electricity shortage while keeping the environment safe. The government should install solar panels on rooftops of public buildings and in khas lands. In addition, it may initiate campaigns to encourage people to install photovoltaic systems in their homes which would not only reduce their individual electricity cost but also the pressure on the national grid.

## The ugly business of posters

### Why can't the law be enforced?

AS election season is on full swing we the ordinary citizens have to bear with the eyesores that are the thousands of posters plastered on every wall, bridge, letter box, lamppost etc. They are of prospective candidates in the coming elections. Needless to say that the indiscriminate posterage all over the city (and other towns in the country) have significantly contributed to the ugliness of the city already scarred by indiscriminate construction, lack of greenery and careless garbage disposal. We actually have a law, the Graffiti Writing and Poster Sticker Control Act 2012 that prohibits graffiti and posters on walls beyond designated places and violators can be punished with a fine of Tk 5,000 to Tk 50,000 or imprisonment from 15 to 30 days. Obviously this law has no teeth when it comes to preventing plastering of political posters.

Most of the posters are of prospective candidates from the ruling party and they can be seen from Malibagh to Bangla Motor. A picture of the pillars of the Mouchak-Moghbazar flyover says it all. But what is most disappointing is that the mayor of Dhaka South City Corporation is saying that his office cannot do anything because it will make political leaders react. Are we to believe that the mayor, who is in charge of enforcing the rules of posterage in the city, has no power to do so? Another official of the city corporation has expressed the sheer helplessness of the city corporation when it comes to getting political party members to abide by this law. The late mayor of Dhaka North City Corporation, had cancelled the licences of six renowned coaching centres for violating the instruction of removing its illegal banners, posters and festoons from the roads. Such bold moves are necessary and the city corporations and political parties must work together to make sure that the law is honoured. The walls and pillars must be free of this menace.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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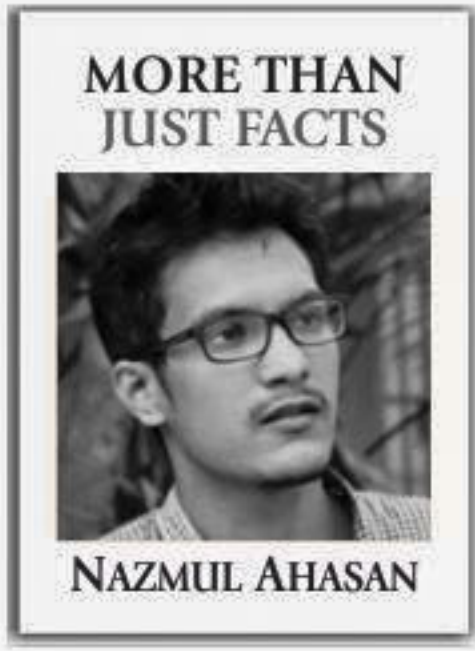
### Another Naria-like tragedy looming

Moinot Ghat in Dohar Upazila is one of the most attractive tourist spots near Dhaka. Thousands of visitors come to this place every day. However, due to river erosion, it is daily decreasing in size. Just 10 years ago, a number of villages were located near the area before being devoured by the Padma River. The river swallowed arable land, houses, schools, mosques, health complexes and the union council building. What is even more concerning is that despite the erosion continuing, the authorities concerned remain completely apathetic to the plight of the people. The authorities must do something to avoid another Naria-like tragedy.

Md Mizanur Rahman, University of Dhaka

### Application fee for govt jobs

According to World Bank data, Bangladesh's current unemployment rate stands at 4.2 percent. Compared to other countries, Bangladesh, in that regard, seems to be in a better position. However, many of these jobs are government jobs. And many public and other autonomous departments, except for banks, charge Tk 500 or more as job application fees. While the amount may sound meagre to some, it is a burden for unemployed students who have to continually apply for as many job positions as possible. The government should stop charging such fees. Juel Rana, University of Dhaka



leading the constitution drafting committee. He then went on to serve as the foreign minister, until the brutal killing of Bangabandhu. In the early '80s, he was proactive in bringing Sheikh Hasina, now the prime minister, to Bangladesh from her exile in India. With her backing, he ran as the opposition Awami League's candidate in the '81 presidential elections, albeit unsuccessfully.

He left the party in the '90s and formed a new one, Gono Forum. Since then, his political significance only dwindled, until now. He is now spearheading an effort to unify belligerent opposition groups belonging to different aisles of the political spectrum. If his so-called "National Unity Process" (provided that it manages to secure BNP's political and grassroots backing, as expected) succeeds and decides to go to the polls slated to be held in December or January, it may pose a considerable challenge to the decade-long rule of the AL. With him in the political field is AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, former president and Bikalpa Dhara party chief. The fact that Sheikh Muhammad Shahidullah, the convenor of the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports, is also a part of the process lends further credibility to the endeavour.

As of now, the only issue that bars them from forging a grand opposition alliance is Jamaat-e-Islami, the party that infamously opposed the Liberation War in 1971 and is now in electoral alliance with the BNP.

While almost everyone involved in the unity process is in consensus that the controversial Islamist party wouldn't be a part of the possible grand alliance, the leftist parties and Bikalpa Dhara are insisting that BNP must sever its ties with Jamaat, fully.

In particular, a phrase—"indirect anti-liberation force"—included in the

REGARD-LESS of his distinguished credentials as a jurist and academic, Dr Kamal Hossain was once a formidable politician. He was the country's first law minister,

# Will the 'National Unity Process' succeed?



Leaders from different political parties and organisations join hands at a meeting organised by the National Unity Process at Mahanagar Natya Mancha on September 22.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Kamal-Chowdhury joint statement, who wouldn't be welcomed in the unity process, was interpreted by many in the BNP as being directed against them. While several leaders in the unity process clarified that the term was not mentioned to refer to the BNP, Mahi B Chowdhury, Bikalpa Dhara's spokesperson and Badruddoza Chowdhury's son, doubled down in implicating BNP in a subsequent interview with Prothom Alo on September 17.

"If Jamaat is linked with BNP and the latter is a part of the unity process, there's a risk that Jamaat could indirectly be associated with the process," he told News 24, a news channel, on October 1, explaining his point. "If the issue of the anti-liberation forces is not resolved prior to the final announcement, Bikalpa Dhara would not remain in the process," he added.

However, such insistence may have something to do with seat sharing rather than ideology. Bikalpa Dhara's founder Badruddoza Chowdhury has a long history of associating himself with anti-liberation individuals while occupying important positions in the BNP. It was reported in Kalerkantho, among others, on July 12 that Mahi B Chowdhury, on behalf of the Jukto Front—an alliance of four small parties including Bikalpa Dhara, demanded that BNP must concede at least 150 seats to its partners

in a bid to bring a balance of power, should they form the next government. Therefore, it may be a zero-sum game for Bikalpa Dhara: If BNP parts ways with Jamaat, Bikalpa Dhara and other small parties would be able to seize more seats from BNP.

However, some other influential people in the unity process appear to be apathetic to the Jamaat issue. Mahmudur Rahman Manna of Nagorik Oikya, for one, is keen on forging the greater unity at any cost. "Jamaat is not a big deal at all for our unity process," he told The Daily Star on September 28, while clarifying that it wouldn't be a part of the unity process.

Dr Kamal, too, prioritises on striking a unified bloc. "We are now trying to forge a greater unity and Jamaat will not be a barrier to the unity process. The important issue now is the greater unity among the people and also the political parties. This is why we are focusing on it," he told The Daily Star the same day.

Oli Ahmed, chief of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)—a partner in the BNP-led 20-party alliance—in a party meeting held on September 28, went a step further by heavily criticising his former comrade Badruddoza Chowdhury for his party's persistence with the Jamaat issue.

While the opposition groups are still at loggerheads over the terms and conditions, they have managed to shake

up the political scene, to be fair to them. They may not matter individually when it comes to the ballot-box, but when unified, they represent quite a formidable political force opposing the incumbent. That is a scenario that the ruling party would like to avoid.

The AL initially welcomed the potential alliance, under the presumption that these groups would not be able to overcome their differences, notably, over the issue of Jamaat, hence, would fail to join hands with each other. However, now that the possibility of a new united opposition front has become very real, the ruling alliance leaders—including the prime minister herself—have launched blistering attacks targeting their counterparts saying that, "killers, money launderers and usurers have joined hands against the Awami League government."

Meanwhile, the ruling party has also initiated efforts to expand its own alliance, with its general secretary urging leftist organisations, including the Communist Party (CPB) and the Socialist Party (Basad) to come under its umbrella, only to be rejected. Such unease signifies that, at least for the time being, these otherwise politically not so powerful individuals must have been able to significantly shake up the status quo by banding together.

Nazmul Ahasan is a member of the editorial team at The Daily Star.

## PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

# One hundred years of ineptitude



In fact, the 2008 crisis will most likely be remembered as a watershed moment, but not because it led to reforms that strengthened economic resilience and removed vulnerabilities. On the contrary, leaders' failure to discern, much less act on, the lessons of the Great Recession may open the way for a series of fresh

governance institutions and regulations at both the national and international levels must be drastically improved. Yet not nearly enough has been invested in this effort. Beyond regional bodies like the European Union, international financial governance has remained largely untouched.

Worse, because the partial fixes to the financial system will enable even more globalisation, they will end up making matters worse, as strain on already-inadequate governance and regulatory frameworks increases, not only in finance, but also in other economic and technological fields. Meanwhile, enormous financial investments focused on securing a higher rate of return are likely to fuel technological innovation, further stressing regulatory systems in finance and beyond.

Major technological advances fuelled by cheap money can cause markets to change so fast that policy and institutional change cannot keep up. And new

global crises of the twenty-first century and, say, the Great Depression in the 1930s or, indeed, any past stock-market crashes. Because of the financial sector's growth, more actors benefit from under-regulation and weak governance in the short term, making today's crises more difficult to prevent.

Complicating matters further, the systems affected by today's crises extend well beyond any one regulatory body's jurisdiction. That makes crises far unrulier, and their consequences—including their long-term influence on societies and politics—more difficult to predict.

The next crises—made more likely by rising nationalism and a growing disregard for science and fact-based policymaking—may be financial, but they could also implicate realms as varied as migration, trade, cyberspace, pollution, and climate change. In all of these areas, national and international governance institutions are weak or incomplete, and there are few independent actors, such as watchdog groups, demanding transparency and accountability.

This makes it harder not only to prevent crises—not least because it creates opportunities for actors to game the system and shirk responsibility—but also to respond to them. The 2008 crisis cast a harsh spotlight on just how bad we are at responding quickly to disasters, especially those fuelled by fragmented governance.

To be sure, as the Hertie School's 2018 Governance Report shows, there have been some improvements in preparing for and managing crises. But we must become more alert to how developments in a wide range of fields—from finance to digital technologies and climate change—can elude the governance capacities of national and international institutions. We should be running crisis scenarios and preparing emergency plans for upheaval in all of these fields, and taking stronger steps to mitigate risks, including by managing debt levels, which today remain much higher in the advanced economies than they were before the 2008 crisis.

Moreover, we should ensure that we provide international institutions with the needed resources and responsibilities. And by punishing those who exacerbate risks for the sake of their own interests, we would strengthen the legitimacy of global governance and the institutions that are meant to conduct it.

As it stands, inadequate cross-border coordination and enforcement of international agreements is a major impediment to crisis prevention and management. Yet, far from addressing this weakness, the world is reviving an outdated model of national sovereignty that makes crises of various kinds more likely. Unless we change course soon, the world of 2118 will have much reason to regard us with scorn.

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Demonstrators with 'Occupy Wall Street' occupy One Police Plaza, headquarters of the New York Police Department, on September 30, 2011 in New York

PHOTO: AFP/STAN HONDA

crises, economic and otherwise, in the coming decades. However serious those crises turn out to be, historians a century from now will likely despair at our short-sightedness. They will note that analysts and regulators were narrowly focused on fixing the financial system by strengthening national oversight regimes. While this was a worthy goal, historians will point out, it was far from the only imperative. To prepare the world to confront the challenges posed by globalisation and technological development in a way that supports sustainable and equitable growth,

markets can emerge that offer huge payoffs for early adopters or investors, who benefit from remaining several steps ahead of national and international regulators.

This is what happened in the run-up to the 2008 crisis. New technology-enabled financial instruments created opportunities for some to make huge amounts of money. But regulators were unable to keep up with the innovations, which ended up generating risks that affected the entire economy. This points to a fundamental difference between