

Why we need a policy framework for displaced people

Martyred intellectuals being sorely missed Their loss remains irreparable

It would be misplaced to suggest that the large-scale elimination of our intellectuals on this day 47 years ago was a hurriedly drawn up idea by the Pakistanis when they realised that the end was inevitable. The cold-blooded long-term plan of the marauding Pakistani military machine, to purge the intellectuals from the soil of Bangladesh, finally culminated on December 14, 1971. Some of the brightest sons and daughters of the soil were killed as a part of one of the worst genocidal acts since 1945.

The killings had started right from the night of March 25, 1971 as the main targets of the killers, the students' halls of residence and the teachers' residential complexes, suggest. The best way to cripple a nation is to deprive it of its thinkers, its writers, its philosophers, its journalists, whose works influence the collective psyche of the nation. It is their thoughts that add value to people's life and work as a beacon to the path of fulfillment of their ambition.

The Bengali intellectuals had proved to be a thorn on the Pakistanis' design to subdue Bengali nationalism and the aspirations that the feeling generated, a feeling that was inspired by the Bengali intellectuals starting from the very seminal stages after the creation of Pakistan. Regrettably, they were helped by some Bengali collaborators, without whose active support the Pakistanis would have perhaps survived much less than the nine months that they did.

As we mourn the loss of the intellectuals, we are acutely aware of their absence in these times when the nation could have benefited from their guidance and contributions to the nation's progress. Our culture is under threat from some obscurantists who want us to shed our binary character and assume a singular form. Their narratives need to be countered with rational arguments and not merely by sentimental outbursts. While we lament the loss of some of the brightest intellectual minds, let us resolve that never shall we allow the fissiparous forces to take root and that the eclectic, inclusive and syncretic nature of the people of this land must never be lost.

Bankers' assurance isn't convincing Focus should be on better management of banks

THE soaring amount of nonperforming loans (NPLs) jumped to 11.5 percent of outstanding loans by the end of September, a figure kept artificially low by rescheduling not justified by borrowers' performance. It is apparently nothing serious, we are now being told by top bankers who are highly esteemed in their profession. Is the public expected to take them seriously?

If everything was hunky-dory, why did the government have to salvage some banks by doling out Tk 136 billion of taxpayers' money in the last seven years? If we have nothing to worry about, why have defaulted loans grown by 176.5 percent between 2009 and 2016? If it's not a big deal, how about giving the money back to the state's coffers?

A managing director of a bank said bankers were not responsible for NPLs because banks disburse loans after scrutinising documents of prospective borrowers. We understand there are times when things go beyond control of a bank's management, but to dismiss the problem out of hand is not only unprofessional but also unethical as it amounts to duping the depositors. The fact that poor management is behind the rise of NPLs is quite well established.

We are being told that even the collapse of Lehman Brothers in the US didn't raise much hue and cry as did the scandals in Bangladesh. Bank bosses are trying to assure us, but such a complacent and inappropriate analogy is extremely worrying.

The fact that the country is experiencing solid economic growth doesn't necessarily indicate that the financial sector isn't suffering from any crisis. Both can happen simultaneously. Moody's, a top international credit ranking service, has recently said the outlook for Bangladesh's banks is negative, "despite the country's robust economy."

We believe that instead of self-serving laudation, the banks should address their poor record in managing banks. The press briefing would have been better utilised if we were informed about how they are planning to improve the management of the banks that is increasingly being overburdened by decisions and policies making the financial sector increasingly weak.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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It's hard to be hopeful about the upcoming election

Elections constitute one of the most important pillars of any democracy. It is a crucial indicator that can help judge a country's democratic standards.

The last election held in Bangladesh in 2014 was far from ideal, with most of the MPs elected unopposed. As for the next election, the level playing field remains elusive with only weeks to go until Election Day. The way the police and the administration are behaving is hardly impartial.

Those responsible for conducting the election have a duty to ensure that it is a free and fair one. Otherwise, people will remain hopeless in the face of violence that we have already witnessed as soon as campaigning kicked off.

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MOHAMMED MAMUN RASHID

IN more than 50 countries around the world, some 40.3 million individuals have been uprooted from their homes and displaced in their own countries as a result of conflict or human rights violations. Natural disasters, meanwhile, have caused the displacement of millions more.

The coastal zone of Bangladesh covers 19 out of its 64 districts. Twelve of those districts are lagging behind in their capacity to deal with climate change.

A large percentage of our population live in coastal areas where they mostly depend on fishery, agriculture, forest, local transportation, salt production and so on for their lives and livelihoods. Bangladesh is already vulnerable to the gradual effects of climate change and extreme events related to it. The condition of the coastal belt is worse. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) confirms Bangladesh's vulnerability: "Sea level rise is the most often cited cause of predicted mass-displacement within Bangladesh as a result of climate change. Widely quoted figures range from 13 million to 40 million people displaced, generally based on assumptions of a one metre rise in sea levels."

The annual report 2017 of Internal Displacement Monitoring Center shows that Bangladesh has 946,000 internally displaced people. This number is mounting as 50,000 people are becoming homeless due to natural disasters every year. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts that within 2050, Bangladesh will lose 17.5 percent of its land, which includes 30 percent of land used for food production. This is undoubtedly a major threat to the country from the perspective of its economy, employment, food,

agricultural resources, national harmony and livestock. And will additionally exert severe pressure on cities like Dhaka and Chattogram.

Environmental problems, in the present discourse, has been identified as a predominant driver of displacement. However, Bangladesh has a set of policies, plans and institutional initiatives that both directly and indirectly address sudden-onset events and slow-onset processes of climate change, its potential impacts and adaptive measures. Even zone-specific policy and development strategy highlight the main adverse effects of climate change and identify adaptation needs. For instance, Coastal Zone Policy (2005) and Coastal Development Strategy (2006) include climate related issues. In 2005, the Government of Bangladesh launched its National Adaptation Programme of Action

lack of adequate and reliable data on climate induced forced migration in Bangladesh—as well as shortage of comprehensive national data, union or sub-district based accurate data, and data on the exact trends that concern rural-urban migration in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh prepared its Disaster Management Policy-2015 for reducing vulnerability to natural, environmental and human-induced disaster at a manageable and acceptable level. Focus on community level preparedness, response, recovery, and rehabilitation, have been prioritised. Mainstreaming disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in all the sectoral policies and plans have been addressed in this policy. But it does not address the issue of displacement, or the indicative measures for rehabilitation of displaced people. National Health Policy-2011 sets 19

quality education, value-based learning, environment, gender, provisions for the hard-to-reach areas and mainstreaming education for displaced children.

The Seventh Five Year Plan (2016-2020) has included environment, climate change and disaster management for sustainable development under separate chapters. This plan acknowledges that climate-induced coastal submergence will be one of the major causes of population displacement. Though this plan has set some project terms, such as rehabilitation of climate victims, char development and settlement; implementation of such initiatives is very slow and may take displaced people a long time to access.

Bangladesh adopted and reformed a number of policies and some are still being worked on. For example, the "Education Policy 2010" has been



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(NAPA), which marked the beginning of a long journey to addressing the adverse impacts of climate stimuli including variability and extreme events and promoting sustainable development in the country.

Bangladesh also has a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (2009-2018), which acknowledges the issue of environmental displacement. Proposed programmes have been undertaken for monitoring internal and external migration that have adversely impacted population, and to provide them with support through capacity building for rehabilitation in new environments. Nevertheless, the programmes do not indicate how such people will be identified and how their needs or rights will be assessed. Unfortunately, there is a

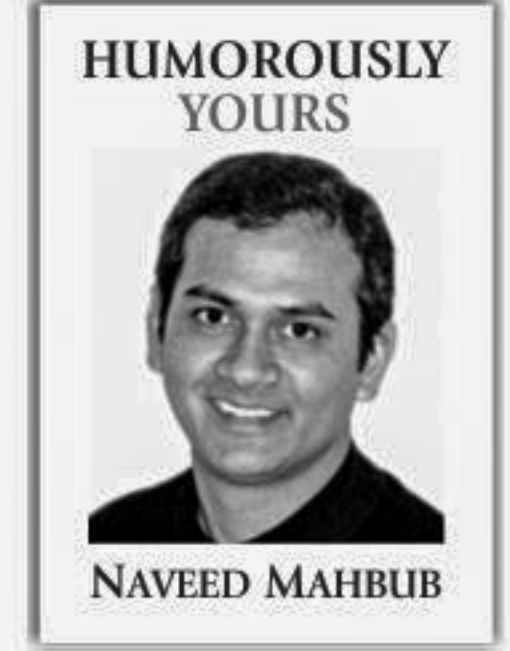
specific objectives for quality healthcare. Significant issues and concerns like accessibility to disadvantaged people, gender equity, immunisation, family planning, mobile clinic, climate-change induced diseases and e-health have been addressed. Resource constraints, weak management, climate change, and unplanned urbanisation are some major challenges. Though this policy focuses on many aspects, it does not clearly explain health rights, psychosocial support, and reproductive health of displaced people.

National Education Policy-2010 has been widely accepted as a comprehensive guideline. It has been designed through a consultative process. Major objectives of education have been well defined. And education policy especially emphasises

extensively appreciated. But there is no national policy that comprehensively addresses the issue of displacement. To some extent, a few sectoral policies merely indicate some courses of action for rehabilitation of displaced people rather than explicitly laying out comprehensive protection measures. That is why the government of Bangladesh should conform to the UNHCR 1998 Guiding Principles by developing a national policy to protect internally displaced persons (IDPs), with particular emphasis on the dignity, social, economic, and cultural rights of climate victims.

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It's part of growing up



THE photo of the boy from St Joseph's School is flashed during the news on BTv, the only broadcasting channel in the country. His gone missing is national news. Two days later, there is a collective sigh of relief as he re-emerges, unscathed. Domestic interrogations yield that he got a detention at school and fled to his village home to escape the wrath of his parents.

As I have no village home to run to, I have no choice but to sheepishly go up to mom to report the receiving of my first ever detention slip.

"Oh, it's part of growing up." She says matter-of-factly.

Wait, that's it? Mom is an instant hit in school as "it's part of growing up" becomes the catch phrase. As part of growing up, I become bolder in my mischiefs and seek out several more detentions in the ensuing months, carefully optimising to ensure I don't reach 10 in the academic year that triggers the dreaded Transfer Certificate.

Then why the fascination with the after-school exercise of writing 1,000 lines of "A quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog"? Well, the detention class isn't exactly a windowless prison cell, but a regular classroom with glass windows and a clear view of the other classrooms being used by Siddiqui's Tutorial where the rare sight of the opposite gender flocking on the otherwise androgen laden grounds of the all-boys' St. Joseph's is worth getting a step closer to being kicked out of school. In a convoluted, risky but kosher way, that's the best we can do to satiate our adolescent hormones. We envy the boys of Siddiqui's with the only consolation of knowing that they are not allowed to talk to their female cohorts. And thus, the advent of romance in Morse code and sign language...

Growing up with the motto "It's part of growing up", the genes of mom have passed on to me. Coincidentally, a similar parallel flow of genes trickles down to my arranged wife. The parents of our own teenager of 2018, are thus a major source of embarrassment for her whereas several of her class friends put themselves up to us for adoption. But as per conventional wisdom, the cool parents are really bad parents, for we high five our teenager for getting her first C as "it's part of growing up", we make her miss school so that daddy can take her on a *Motorcycle Diaries* trip to Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos where she

that's why we both went to Berkeley to vicariously live the 60s), we have thick skin. We actually WANT to be poked so that we can counter-poke in good spirits. Maybe that is why the parent-teacher meetings are a dreaded exercise not for our kids nor for us, but for the teachers, who are unfortunately dealing with a beatnik comedian and a free-spirited banker.

But for parents to be loosely wired like the Mahbubs, rightfully and thankfully, it is an exception rather than the rule. "It's part of growing up" is thus a subjective and not universally objective definition. As a nation where we can't

Even God forgives, and we, mere mortals, can't? But then again, we are Bangladeshi humans, we will humiliate in public, not only the child, but drag the parents to the hall of shame.



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falls in love with history, geography, culture and more so, the Bangla language that doubles as a code language in a foreign land. The wife and I give her a free reign to smell the beauties of life even at the cost of possibly flunking a year, which, in our selfish ways, gives us an extra year's lease prior to the onset of becoming empty nesters. The daughter is the one who reprimands us: "Baba, Ma, for Heaven's sake, can you PLEASE be a little strict with me?"

As bohemian parents more aptly fitting the flower child era (perhaps

even fill out a single page form without glancing at that of the person next to us filling out the line where it says "Surname", it is not unexpected that we lack the confidence to answer questions without the proverbial crutch called cheating. Let's ask ourselves, whether even once in our lives, we, in Bangladesh, have not peaked at the answer sheet of the person next to us. It is not that we are not prepared, it is just that we have been crippled into not being able to fly solo. And we can't fly solo is because we have to rely on private

tutoring, we have to rely on private tutoring is because our regular classes are deliberately *The Fast and the Furious*, literally and figuratively, with the endings always prompting another sequel off of class hours. As a result, we run from one private tutor to the other and have no time to diversify our emotions beyond grades, and it is because we can't diversify our emotions is why life is single track, and it is because life is single track is why we think life comes with no second chances, and life gives only one chance is because life is just BBA, engineering or medicine.

Yes, it is wrong to cheat. But life can come with a second, third, ..., Nth chance. Even God forgives, and we, mere mortals, can't? But then again, we are Bangladeshi humans, we will humiliate in public, not only the child, but drag the parents to the hall of shame. Remember Tagore's *Chhuti*? It is a vulnerable age, where, in a society and system where every conceivable and expected psychological issue, far from being treated professionally and with passion, is considered a figment of imagination, curable in an instant with a single slap.

Fire a rocket, respond with a rocket, if at all, but for Heaven's sake, not with an ICBM. It's just not worth it...

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