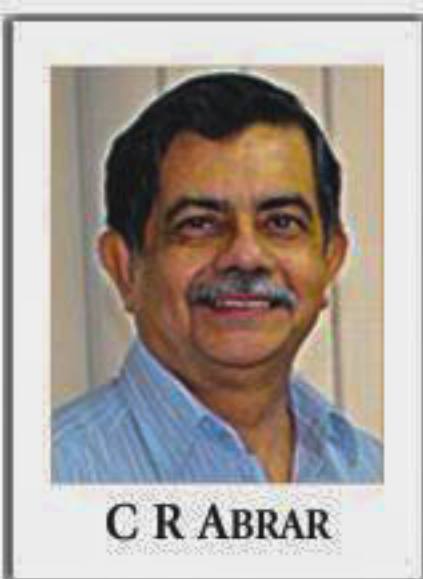


What do the manifestos contain?

Rights, "black laws" and law enforcement



C R ABRAR

manifestos are essentially public declarations of aims, intentions and policies that contesting parties put forward before the electorate.

Admittedly, the poor performance of political parties in implementing their lofty promises in the past has created a degree of apathy among the voters about the manifestos. No less an important contributory factor has been the propensity of major parties to use their brute majority in parliament to rush through legislations subverting established arrangements arrived at through national consensus and passing bills that have major ramifications for the maintenance of the delicate balance between various arms of the state. In doing so, the parties concerned go well beyond the purview of their manifestos. It is against this backdrop of general indifference about the manifestos that the formation of a national united front (hereafter referred to as Oikyafront) has generated a degree of interest on the policies that political parties and alliances are peddling in this round of general elections. This article is an effort to examine the provisions pertaining to rights, "black laws" and law enforcement in the manifestos of the major protagonists.

In its manifesto the ruling Awami League (AL) vows to institutionalise democracy. In section 3.1 the party assures that "democratic values and spirit" will be upheld and "the Constitution will be the supreme guide in administering the state". On the question of rule of law and protection of human rights (section 3.2), it promises to create conditions in which "all citizens would enjoy protection of the law and access to assistance and legal aid". It also pledges to preserve the independence and dignity of the judiciary. The party declares "to resist any move that



curtains human rights" and assures "promotion of rights that are universally acknowledged".

In "creating a people-friendly law enforcement agency" (section 3.4) the AL promises to beef up the law enforcement agencies, including the police, with adequate personnel. Emphasis has also been laid on shoring up their institutional capacity through allocation of more land and resources for infrastructure, equipment, transport and new technology to combat terrorism and cybercrime.

It is interesting to note that the commitment to build flats for journalists and support the plan to construct a 21-floor building at the national press club tops the list of objectives and plans under "media freedom and free flow of information" (section 3.30). Controlling yellow journalism through creation of a national media commission is another objective. Other plans include ensuring protection of media personnel, building their capacity through training, ensuring fair distribution of government advertisements, and the assurance not to use any law against the press.

The manifesto of the Oikyafront begins with highlighting what it states to be the reality of involuntary disappearances, extrajudicial

killings and thousands of ghost cases. In order to address those it promises an end to state violence and establishing an all-party Truth and Reconciliation Commission (section 1).

On the question of "ensuring freedom of expression" (section 3) the alliance makes an unequivocal commitment to scrap the draconian Digital Security Act, 2018. It also promises to uphold full freedom of expression. Oikyafront pledges that there will be no direct or indirect control of the state over the media and also over social media. Citizens will be accorded the right to criticise government measures and office holders. Included among the right is to post cartoons and caricatures.

The Oikyafront has generated a detailed set of proposals on law enforcement (section 12). It makes a firm commitment to cease enforced disappearances, and launch investigation into past cases of disappearances. It makes a whole array of commitments regarding issues that citizens find themselves currently weighed down with. Included among those are: bringing down instances of lodging of fictitious cases to harass to zero, ensuring that all cases reported are duly recorded, that no one is arrested without a warrant, implementation of the High Court directive that no one is arrested

by plainclothes men, prohibiting torture in remand and making the police bureau of investigation independent. A few fresh initiatives on law enforcement have also found their place in the Front's manifesto. Those are: providing compensation to those who are implicated in false cases and action against police officials involved in such cases, and ensuring proper implementation of the defamation law so that only those directly aggrieved could file cases.

On the question of the media (section 24) the Oikyafront manifesto highlights investigative journalism, setting up an independent press council and declaring newspapers as an industry that deserve state incentives. As a response to long-standing demands of media workers the manifesto also commits 100 percent guarantee of protection of journalists in conducting their professional role, conducting trials of the deaths of all journalists including Sagar and Runi (the journalist couple murdered in their own flat) and in the case involving torture and harassment of journalists during the road safety movement.

In its own manifesto the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) declared that all law enforcement agencies, including the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), will be held to account. It also pledges to structurally transform Rab as an additional armed police battalion that will be under the Ministry of Home Affairs and states that all agencies, armed forces and civilian, should only be run in accordance with their respective charters.

In line with Oikyafront's manifesto the BNP also promises freedom of expression, tolerance of criticism of the government and removal of online monitoring mechanisms. One of the defining features of the BNP document is its promise to abolish the much abused Special Powers Act, 1974; Digital Security Act, 2018; and the Official Secrets Act, 1923.

A comparative assessment of the manifestos reveals interesting variations between the parties in their approach to rights, "black laws" and law enforcement. Although the Awami League has underscored to uphold "democratic values and spirit" and to ensure "citizens' recourse to protection of the law", very little concrete steps have been charted out to realise such

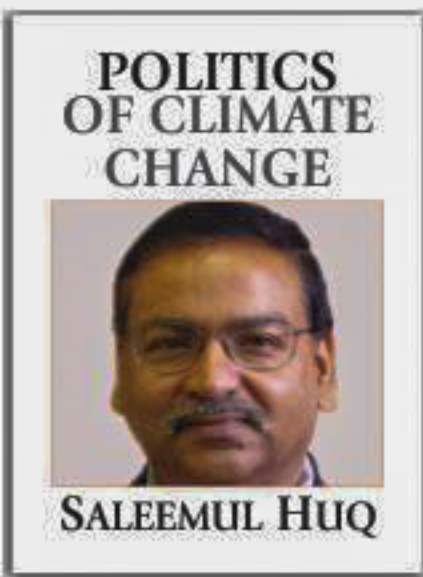
lofty goals. The section on law enforcement focuses primarily on improving the institutional capacity of the forces and does not state anything about how best to ensure their accountability. Despite public demands for their amendment, if not annulment, the complete silence of the AL on the "black laws" such as the Special Powers Act, Official Secrets Act and the Digital Security Act appears to convey the message that those would be retained in their current form if the party comes back to power.

In contrast the Oikyafront's manifesto details out remedies of some of the pressing concerns of citizens, particularly those who are politically active. Its acknowledgement of the reality of extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances, custodial torture, ghost cases and the like and its planned corrective actions are likely to resonate among the voters. The Front's commitment to scrap the DSA, 2018, implementation of the provision of existing laws that demands that law enforcers respect citizens' rights (including the ones to criticise political leadership), and make law enforcers accountable are also measures that are in tune with the aspirations of the people who expect rule of law to prevail in the land.

In the past, while in power, the BNP shied away in implementing its electoral promises in 2001 of scrapping the Special Powers Act and the separation of judiciary. The party is also responsible for launching the infamous Operation Clean Heart that subsequently led to the creation of the Rab. While in office the party introduced the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 containing the tarnished Section 57 (that was sharpened by the subsequent Awami League government). Against this backdrop of unfulfilled promises it is a challenge for the party to convince voters that it will not renege on its 2018 commitments. One hopes that being in the receiving end of the state's machinations over the last few years will convince the party leadership to deliver on their promises this time around, if they are elected.

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2018: A tipping point for climate change



SALEEMUL HUQ

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on 1.5 degrees which made two very clear scientific findings. First that there will be a world of difference in the severity of adverse climate change impacts between a temperature rise of 1.5 and 2 degrees. It is not just that poor countries would be the only ones to suffer but all countries will suffer very severe adverse impacts with a 2 degree temperature rise. Just to give one example, it will mean the loss of the entire Great Barrier Reef in Australia, one of the great natural wonders of the world. Secondly, it asserted that, even though it would be difficult, it was still possible to keep global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees if all countries acted together to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by reducing use of fossil fuels and switching to 100 percent renewable energy no later than 2050.

The second important point was the ability of the scientific community who study extreme climatic events to make attribution to human induced climate change in real time rather than retrospectively. To give an example, when Hurricane Harvey hit Texas in 2017 and caused significant flood damage in the city of Houston, scientists took a year to make the attribution that the rainfall

associated with Harvey was 30 percent higher due to enhanced temperatures in the Gulf of Mexico at that time which was attributable to human induced climate change.

Then a year later when Hurricane Florence was coming towards the eastern coast of the United States of America in 2018, the same scientists were able to predict, even before the hurricane hit land, that the rainfall associated with the hurricane would be 50 percent higher due to the unusually elevated temperature in the Atlantic Ocean at that time due to human induced climate change. Scientists were also able to make similar assessments in real time for Typhoon Mangkhut which hit the Philippines and China and also, the severe wildfires in California.

This is an extremely important scientific breakthrough as it now enables us to attribute loss and damage to human induced climate change and not just to natural events as before. To cite just two significant examples, nearly a hundred people lost their lives in the wildfires in California, and when Hurricane Florence hit North Carolina it caused toxic coal pits at several coal-fired power plants to overflow their embankments spilling toxic coal ash into the river and causing significant harm to drinking water sources of several towns downstream. This is important as the coal pits were supposed to be able to withstand normal hurricanes (which occur every year) but were not able to withstand the abnormal hurricane due to climate change. Thus the entire damage from the toxic coal ash spills is attributable to human induced climate change.

A third significant event in 2018 was the recently completed 24th Conference of Parties



15-year-old Greta Thunberg with a sign that reads 'School strike for the climate', during her protest against climate change on November 30, 2018. Greta has camped outside Swedish parliament in Stockholm and refused to go to school until things change.

PHOTO: EPA

(COP24) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held in Katowice, Poland where the Rule Book for implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change was agreed upon. However, the more significant debate that took place was the refusal of the Trump delegation with Saudi Arabia, Russia and Kuwait to "welcome" the IPCC Special Report on 1.5 degrees (which had indeed been requested by the UNFCCC at COP21 in Paris). This was very clearly a power play by the fossil fuel companies who control the governments of these four countries trying to turn back the tide on tackling climate change. They only achieved a Pyrrhic victory by fighting over one

word as they brought far more global attention to the findings of the IPCC Report by challenging it than would have happened if they had just quietly welcomed it!

The most memorable, and by far more important and lasting impression from COP24, was and will continue to be the speech given to the world leaders there by Greta Thunberg, the 15-year-old school student from Sweden, who shamed them for their inaction. She has since set off a global movement by school students and young people everywhere who are challenging the role of their leaders in taking climate change as seriously as it deserves to be taken. The post-2018 global struggle on climate change is

now being transformed into a fight between the young and the old in every country, where the young will eventually triumph.

This is particularly significant in the US where Trump and his Federal government are most blatantly supporting fossil fuel companies, but where the governors of states like California, mayors of cities like New York and heads of companies like Tesla are challenging him and going in the opposite direction. The recent mid-term elections for the House of Representatives which brought in a significant majority of younger Democrats, who fought on the platform of "green jobs", are an excellent example of this new "young vs old" paradigm on climate change.

Finally, in the context of Bangladesh where we have now had over a decade of planning to tackle climate change and also in implementing hundreds of projects in many sectors within and outside government, 2018 will mark the end of the first period of the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP). From 2019 onwards we will embark on its second phase up to 2030. This will enable Bangladesh to become a pioneer in demonstrating how to enable transformational adaptation at the national scale in order to become the world's most climate resilient country by 2030.

Thus the pre-2018 narrative for Bangladesh was that we were one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change but the post-2018 narrative is that we are on the way to becoming the most resilient.

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W. E. B. DU BOIS
(1868-1963)

American sociologist, historian, civil rights activist

The cost of liberty is less than the price of repression.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Musical phrase

5 Horsey

11 Concerning

12 British landscape painter

13 Full range

14 Big schnoz

15 Lumber unit

16 Dyeing tubs

17 Bangor's state

19 Binary base

22 Pageant crown

24 Got up

26 Plot unit

27 Challenging

28 Sports summary

30 Lies low

31 Cabinet wood

32 Starts business

34 Flimflam

35 Bar bill

38 Fix

41 Singer Feliciano

42 Source of answers

43 Wee bit

44 Money worker

45 Moral flaw

DOWN

1 Iran money

2 Wild about

3 Forced walk with arms pinned behind the back

4 Turkish topper

5 Patriot Allen

6 Brokers' numbers

7 Coffee dispensers

8 Quill need

9 Maiden name

label

10 Mess up

16 By way of

18 Region

19 Woodland

20 Had on

21 Betting info

22 Scarlett's home

23 Chilled desserts

25 Like dimes

29 Curlycoated dog

30 Spell

33 Check writer

34 "What the --!"

36 Concerning

37 Trounce

38 Hold up

39 History segment

40 Chess piece

41 Triangular sail

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12-12

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

A L A S H E M A N

S A B E R E L I T E

S T R E A M L I N E S

A T A S A P N A T

M E D I C I J O S E

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A S I A I M E A N

P A N S N A T T E R

A C T P E I O W E

C H O R U S L I N E S

H E T U P S A C R E

E T O N S N E A T

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

I WOULD LIKE TO OFFER YOU A PROMOTION

I'M VERY HONORED, SIR!

NOT YOU. I WAS THINKING OF MAKING OT TO OUR MASCOT

GREG! MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

DAD, I NEED SOME HELP WITH THIS COMIC. I'M DOING

WHAT KIND OF HELP?

WHAT'S THE BEST SOUND FOR PASSING GAS: FARP! BLATT! OR PEBBTL!

HMM...

WE'LL HAVE TO DO SOME RESEARCH

YOU WILL DO NO SUCH THING!