

Three cases of 'policy paralysis' in Bangladesh

Attack on RPI principal reprehensible

Why can't BCL be reined in?

STUDENTS dragging a principal by his neck and throwing him into a pond is an unthinkable act. However, in Rajshahi this is exactly what happened when some activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), led by the institute's BCL unit joint secretary, attacked the principal of Rajshahi Polytechnic Institute (RPI). All because, the principal—a man of ethics—did not give in to BCL's ludicrous and whimsical demands, including allowing two of its members to appear for examinations, despite them not meeting class attendance requirements.

This incident once again brings to light a persistent problem within the student wing of the Awami League: the belligerence of BCL that has probably been reinforced by the impunity they have been accorded by the ruling party for the crimes they keep committing. Over the last decade, the power of BCL has increased manifold, to an extent where they not only bully students, teachers and senior administrators of educational institutions, including universities, but also illegally extort money from university authorities and physically torture students in the "torture cells" that they maintain at residential halls for students—a dark reality brought to light by the recent death of Buet student Abrar Fahad. According to newspaper reports, a similar "torture cell" has been found at the RPI by an investigation committee. How dare the BCL commit such an act of atrocity? The attack on the principal was essentially an attempt to murder; the principal might have drowned had he not known how to swim.

The fact that such attacks are still being carried out, despite the ruling party's assertion that they would not tolerate such belligerence of BCL, reveals the uncaring attitude of BCL towards their parent organisation or the rule of law, for that matter. The prime minister, through her actions, has sent a strong message to the BCL, which has either not reached them or the BCL is simply impervious to the warnings of their party head.

The Awami League's formula to contain the spiralling problem of BCL's activities by expelling party activists is clearly not working. It is high time the party considered legal measures against unruly elements of the BCL in order to demonstrate that no one is above the law. It can start by taking stern legal actions against those BCL activists who have been found involved in crimes; these elements should be brought under legal proceedings. Otherwise, BCL's culture of terror will be irreparably detrimental to our education system, destroying an essential pillar of our nation.



SELIM RAIHAN

"POLICY paralysis" can be described as a situation where critically important laws and reforms are not undertaken or, even if undertaken, not implemented as a result of a lack of commitment from the government or the inability of the political and economic elites in the country to reach a consensus over the nature of reforms. This is also reflected in the indecisiveness of the government in the areas of public policymaking. Policy paralysis can also refer to a situation where, even when policies for reforms are adopted, they remain mostly limited to paper, and the government fails to implement them. It can be argued that the government's failure to carry out critical economic reforms on time due to "policy paralysis" can result in a high cost to the economy and society as far as ongoing development challenges and larger development goals are concerned.

Bangladesh is expected to graduate from the LDC status by 2024, and studies have shown that along with this graduation, the country is going to face stiff challenges in its major export markets, which can lead to negative development implications. Also, as the country aims to achieve the uphill targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 and become an upper-middle-income country by 2031, three major areas of policy reform have become vital. However, the syndrome of "policy paralysis" are also quite apparent in all three areas.

The first area in which one can detect this syndrome of policy paralysis is the

fiscal sector, where both the lack and the ineffectiveness of reform processes are resulting in a declining share of tax revenue in the gross domestic product (GDP) since 2011. Bangladesh's tax-GDP ratio is one of the lowest in the world. In recent years, the average tax-GDP ratio in Bangladesh has been only 8.7 percent, while countries like India, Nepal, Malaysia and Thailand have the tax-GDP ratios of 11 percent, 17.5 percent, 14.3 percent, and 15.8 percent

compliance along with identifying the loopholes and closing them to prevent tax leakages require a firm and credible commitment to reform.

The second case of policy paralysis is in the financial sector. Since 2011, the banking sector has been experiencing a rising ratio of non-performing loans (NPL) to total loans. The rising NPL is not the cause but the outcome of a serious institutional failure as well as political patronage in the banking

of the central bank. While there is a genuine need for a comprehensive banking-sector reform and the central bank needs to be given full autonomy and independence with regard to its regulatory responsibilities, very little effort from the government has been observed in this regard. Therefore, elites' lack of credible commitment to reform is a constraining factor behind establishing better governance in the banking sector.

The third case of policy paralysis concerns the staggeringly low shares of public spending on education and health in GDP, which remained unchanged around 2 percent and 0.4 percent respectively or declined over time for the past two decades. Bangladesh is near the bottom of the list of countries with the lowest ratios of public expenditure on both education and health to the GDP, which were less than 2 percent and 0.39 percent respectively in 2018. By contrast, in recent years, the average public education expenditure ratios are 3.3 percent for the LDCs, 3.1 percent for other South Asian countries, 4.3 percent for the lower-middle-income countries, 4.1 percent for the upper-middle-income countries, and 5.2 percent for high-income countries. Furthermore, the average public health expenditure ratios are 1.2 percent for the LDCs, 1 percent for South Asian countries, 1.3 percent for the lower-middle-income countries, 3.3 percent for the upper-middle-income countries, and 7.8 percent for high-income countries.

With such a poor public spending record in education and health, it is impossible for Bangladesh to register substantial progress towards attaining SDGs by 2030.

Dr Selim Raihan is a professor at the Department of Economics, University of Dhaka, and Executive Director at the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM). Email: selim.raihan@gmail.com



respectively. A study by Bangladesh Planning Commission in 2017, on the resources required for attaining SDGs in Bangladesh, estimated that the country's tax-GDP ratio needs to be increased to 16-17 percent by 2030 to achieve many of the SDGs. This seems to be a very ambitious target given that the tax-GDP ratio in Bangladesh has been on a declining trend in recent years. There is a need to get rid of the policy paralysis in this case. Improving the tax base, reinforcing tax administration and

sector. While the NPL ratio was as low as 6.1 percent in 2011, the ratio started to rise since then, and by 2018 it stood at 10.4 percent. By contrast, countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia have NPL ratios less than 3 percent, reflecting much better governance in their financial sector. The quality of governance in the banking sector in Bangladesh has been highly compromised by weakening regulations, unsound provisions backed by political patronage, and lack of independence

Congratulations on a landmark win

A good beginning to build upon

IT was a historic win, the first victory against India on the Indian soil—a redemption of the situation when an imminent victory ended in defeat three years ago in Bengaluru. Coming against a team that occupies one of the top positions in all forms of the game, the win is even more creditable. There are some interesting statistics associated with the match. It was the 1000th international T20 match. Interestingly, not only that it was the second lowest Indian total against Bangladesh, batting first, the lowest, 146 had eluded us three years ago.

The Bangladesh team gelled well booking the players for their second lowest total. The players deserve our unreserved appreciation for displaying the professional élan that one expects from a team that have been in the international arena for the last two decades. Admittedly, they started the tour with a degree of trepidation in the absence of two of our leading players—Shakib and Tamim. India is a formidable team, and is unbeatable on the Indian soil, well almost, as the Tigers have proved.

If anything, the emphatic win has proved that our cricket is not dependent on one or two players. When it comes to the crunch, the boys can rise to the occasion, the combination of the old hands and the new blood was so visible in their performance with the bat and the ball, and it shows the younger lot are prepared and willing to shoulder responsibility.

The start has been good and we hope the end will also be on a high note. But the win shouldn't go to their head. The team should build on the win and make winning a habit and not an exception. We wish the Bangladesh cricket team the very best for the rest of the tour.

NATIONAL ADAPTATION PLAN Realigning our climate change goals

MD FAHAD HOSSAIN

IN climate change jargon, the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate change and its effects seeking to moderate or avoid harm or exploit beneficial opportunities is defined as adaptation. Being one of the most at-risk countries to the impacts of climate change, adaptation has become a priority for Bangladesh. The National Adaptation Plan (NAP) process is one tool at the disposal of the government of Bangladesh in this regard.

The NAP process was established under the Cancun Adaptation Framework in 2010 at the sixteenth session of the United Nations Climate Change Conference, known as Conference of the Parties (COP). At the seventeenth COP, the following objectives of the process were agreed upon: (a) to reduce vulnerability to the impacts of climate change by building adaptive capacity and resilience, and (b) to facilitate the integration of climate change adaptation in a coherent manner into relevant new and existing policies, programmes and activities. Guiding principles and four flexible elements as initial guidelines for the process were also adopted specifying the process as country-owned, country-driven, gender-sensitive, participatory and transparent.

Expanding on the four elements, in 2012, the Least Developed Countries Expert Group (LEG), a constituted body under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) mandated to provide technical guidance and support to the NAP process, developed comprehensive technical guidelines to help the governments steer through the process.

Each of the four elements comprises several steps. The generic guidelines are non-prescriptive and are not equally fit for all countries. As different developing and Least Developed Countries have different national circumstances with different development priorities, they can customise the steps and their sequence as needed.

In contrast to the National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA), established in 2001, NAP is a continuous, progressive and iterative process rather than a one-time programme. NAPA was aimed at addressing urgent and immediate adaptation needs of the Least Developed Countries containing a set of climate change adaptation projects, while NAPs are medium to long term plans.

In 2015, three ground-breaking international agendas were adopted in three different months, cities and forums but having major shared goals. Many of these goals are achievable through climate change adaptation planning and, needless to say, their proper implementation.

in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels." Article 7 of the Agreement establishes the global adaptation goal of "enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change, with a view to contributing to sustainable development and ensuring an adequate adaptation response in the context of the temperature goal." Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the mainstay of Paris Agreement, outline the countries' intended actions towards achieving both goals. NAP is another available tool

were due to climate-related hazards such as floods, storms, droughts and heatwaves. Thus, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation are woven together.

"Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" containing 17 goals (SDGs) was adopted in September 2015, during the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit. The targets of the SDG 13—taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts—resonate directly with the objectives of the NAP process. Several other SDGs are contingent on adapting to climate change. For example, SDG 1, 11 and 13 have direct linkages with the SFDRR which could be delivered

for the NAP process can draw on those indicators as appropriate.

Bangladesh is a global leader when it comes to tackling climate change. The country was one of the first two countries to complete their NAPAs in 2005. It has already accomplished some of the steps associated with the NAP process. A roadmap for developing a NAP was approved in 2015. A Nationwide Climate Vulnerability Analysis—a major building block for the NAP process—was completed in 2018. BCCSAP 2009 (now being updated) has done most of what a NAP should do. With a USD 2.8 million grant received from the Green Climate Fund, the process of NAP formulation



Vapour is released into the sky at a refinery in Wilmington, California.

PHOTO: REUTERS/BRET HARTMAN

noted by the Agreement in meeting its adaptation goal.

Aiming for "the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries", the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) was adopted in March 2015 at the World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction. To achieve the aforesaid outcome, SFDRR set forth four priorities for action and seven specific global targets. According to a 2018 study, between 1998 and 2017, 91 percent of all disasters and 77 percent of the economic losses caused by them

through the NAPs.

All three agreements, having the same timeframe, have overlapping goals that relate to climate change adaptation. This provides an ideal opportunity for us to achieve the targets of these international agendas in unison which would shape the global development pathways until 2030.

Monitoring is a crucial part of the SDGs and the SFDRR, and the fourth element of the NAP process is Monitoring, Review and Reporting. There exist two sets of indicators having synergies among some to track the progress made in achieving the SDGs and the SFDRR. Development of a Monitoring and Evaluation framework

has commenced recently.

Since there is an opportunity to translate the goals of the three international agendas into national actions in an integrated manner in line with the national development priorities, Bangladesh should keep this in mind while formulating its first NAP. In addition, doing so can help avoid duplication of efforts by different stakeholders, thereby saving resources and ensuring that the impacts of climate change do not undercut the developmental gains.

Md Fahad Hossain is a former National Adaptation Plans and Policy intern at the United Nations Climate Change Secretariat (UNFCCC) and currently works at the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD).

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Proving the skeptics wrong!

I was profoundly saddened by the news that Bangladesh's leading cricketer Shakib Al Hasan was handed a two-year ban (with one year suspended) by the International Cricket Council after the 32-year old had accepted three charges against him of breaching the ICC Anti-Corruption Code. The news broke my heart as it did that of many cricket-lovers of our country, especially given that Shakib's contributions played a leading role in many of our glorious victories.

After the news broke out, many fans at home and abroad had become skeptical about the team's chances against India in the ongoing T20I series in the absence of Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal. Much to our delight, however, Bangladesh delivered a landmark win against India in their first match in New Delhi on Sunday, proving the skeptics wrong. With 20 runs required from 10 balls, Mushfiqur Rahim hit four consecutive boundaries to bring up his half-century and reduce the equation to four runs from the final over. Skipper Mahmudullah Riyad hit the winning runs with a six to give the Tigers their first T20I win over India in nine attempts. This goes to show that as a team, even with two vital members missing, we can triumph. Best of luck for the remaining matches Tigers!

Mahmud Ul Alam, Rajshahi