

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA SUNDAY AUGUST 8, 2021, SRABAN 24, 1428 BS

Series win against Australia

Let's keep our heads cool

A series win against Australia in cricket sounds almost unbelievable, no matter in what format of the game. Australia took us for granted and suffered from overconfidence which is known to have played havoc with leading teams especially when they are playing with opponents known for their vulnerabilities. They imposed very harsh conditions for visiting Bangladesh compelling BCB to enforce unusually strict measures including forcible exclusion of our star T20 batsman, Mushfiqur Rahman and Liton Das due to health guideline issues.

However, that does not take anything away from our historic and exceptional performance so far. In a low-scoring wicket to hold the Aussies down on three consecutive occasions speaks volume of our bowlers led by Mustafizur, who has kept the visitors guessing as to how to read him. All through the series he was principally responsible for the host team's as-many-dot-balls-as-possible strategy, with his cutters keeping the visitors bewildered. The last match's penultimate over by him was a master display of thoroughly outwitting the batsmen.

As we celebrate, and there are plenty of reasons to do so, we cannot but point out that our top order batsmen have consistently under-performed in this series and there is very little evidence that they are learning from their mistakes. Some shots of seasoned batsmen looked down right infantile coming at moments when the team needed them to score most. Even our middle order batsmen, as a whole, cannot be said to have risen to the occasion. It was the lower-middle order that came together and saved the day.

Mahmuddullah Riyad, provided low key but effective leadership in maintaining high energy level, discipline and overall grip on the game. His timely bowling change decisions were superb.

Perhaps the real good news of the day is the coming together of several youngsters that is changing the face of the Bangladesh team. They are a fresh bunch, unencumbered by the weight of legacy teams nor burdened by the thought of maintaining their own image. They are highly skilled, confident, free-wheeling and dashing players who are out there to enjoy the game as they bring in results. They have outdone themselves and must now show in maturity and temperament what they have shown in skills and tenacity.

The most important takeaway is that no team is invincible if challenged with hard work, justified confidence and a well-entrenched desire to win based on intelligent strategy and preparation. For Bangladesh, the just concluded Zimbabwe tour provided a much needed confidence booster which may become a game changer if we can build on our learnings. However, unlike in the past when we allowed some historic and really significant victories to get into our heads and thus take our eyes off the task of maintaining our form, fitness and regime, we must not get carried away and treat our series win with maturity and circumspection. But for now, we savour the series win.

Vegetables retail for high prices, farmers get nearly nil

Why are the poor not prioritised in govt's lockdown planning?

A RECENT report by this daily revealed how, despite a 10.7 percent higher yield than last year, vegetable farmers are having to bear the brunt of selling their produce for tragically low prices while urban kitchen markets collect hefty profits for the same. Lakhs of farmers up north are bracing themselves to suffer losses amounting to tens of thousands to even one lakh taka. The reason for such huge losses to vegetable farmers is the reason now familiar to all in business: the lockdown and its impacts on supply chains.

Before the lockdown brought about by the Covid-19 second wave, Hashem Ali from Bogura was selling his courgettes for Tk 25 per kilogramme. Now the best he can get for the same quantity is Tk 7. Similarly, Jashore's Jasim Uddin has to now sell a kilogramme of his pointed gourds for at most Tk 5 and each bottle gourd for Tk 10-12. This used to be Tk 25 and Tk 30-40, respectively, before the lockdown set in and affected his earnings. The scenario is the same for all vegetables in the north, where farmers are having to sell them off for at least 50 percent less than what they would get before. Many farmers fear that they may not be able to cultivate vegetables in the winter season either, due to these losses which are making it difficult for them to pay their labourers and maintain their land.

Meanwhile, countryside movement restrictions have driven up the prices of vegetables in city kitchen markets, which is a burden on the already hard-hit consumers of the middle and poorer classes. Though wholesale traders are able to buy vegetables from farmers at dirt-cheap prices, transporting them to the capital costs around three times more, resulting in sky-high retail prices. The number of vegetable-laden trucks coming into the city is also down from 50 to 10 daily, according to the president of South Bengal Vegetable Traders Cooperative Society.

Certain decisions made by the government as of late (such as the one regarding the reopening of export-oriented factories) has sadly made it abundantly clear where on its priority list workers of poorer classes fall. The Department of Agricultural Extension estimates there are at least 80 lakh vegetable farmers in Bangladesh, working through the seasons to ensure the country has healthy food to put on all its tables. Yet, from these farmers to migrant workers, we have a tendency to neglect the ones who do the most for our economy and wellbeing through their work.

Vegetable farmers should not have to suffer the brunt of supply chain disruptions. We believe they should not only be compensated duly for their losses, they must also be protected from similar losses during any future lockdowns. We would urge the government and concerned authorities to prioritise the survival of those who are most vulnerable to lengthy lockdowns.



A view of Bay of Bengal from Sandwip, Chittagong.

PHOTO: HOSSAIN TAREQUE/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Can we be bold enough and integrate Nature-based Solutions into Blue Economy?



HASEEB MD
IRFANULLAH

BEFORE answering the question in the title, let's look into Nature-based Solutions (NbS) and Blue Economy. Over the last couple of years, NbS as a concept has received global attention, especially in climate change discussions. NbS are actions we take to protect, sustainably manage, restore, even create, a wide range of ecosystems—from hilly forests to freshwater wetlands to coastal mangroves, for example—to tackle one or more big challenges of our society, such as climate crisis, food insecurity, environmental degradation, and poverty. A crucial aspect of such ecosystem-based actions is they directly support human wellbeing in terms of nutrition, income, health, and safety. But at the same time, they increase biodiversity, maintain ecosystems' integrity. This "dual benefit" separates NbS from hardcore biodiversity conservation and conventional community development through agriculture, aquaculture or animal husbandry.

Blue Economy, on the other hand, is the sustainable use of marine and coastal resources for economic development. It encompasses all established sectors, such as oil and gas extraction, shipping, and industrial fishing, as well as emerging sectors, such as marine energy, blue health, and marine biotechnology. Although human civilisation and prosperity are built on maritime transportation and oceanic resources, Blue Economy—with present global worth USD 3 to USD 6 trillion per year—has renewed our attention to the untapped riches and opportunities of our seas for a climate resilient future.

Although we rarely discuss NbS and Blue Economy together, they do have some similarities. First, maintaining socio-economic development under constant socio-political and environmental changes is a critical challenge for all nations, especially in on-going climate crisis. NbS can tackle such societal challenges by sustainably managing marine and coastal biological resources, which is also a core component of Blue Economy. Second, NbS have strong economic element within them:

when we design an NbS intervention, we calculate its economic feasibility to make it implementable, acceptable, and sustainable. Similarly, economic analyses of maritime sectors are essential to identify viable options for investment. Third, once we find an NbS intervention working well in certain context, the next logical step is to scale it up in other suitable locations by mainstreaming it into policies, plans, and projects. Likewise, elements of Blue Economy which embrace sustainability and resilience, such as coastal rehabilitation for climate change adaptation or ocean finance and insurance, need to be integrated into a country's sustainable and resilient development pathways.

Although Blue Economy in Bangladesh involves a wide range of ministries and divisions, our conversation is often dominated by exploration of oil and gas, development of shipping industry, and establishment of new sea-ports

is praised as evidenced-based fisheries management; in 2019, Bangladesh was ranked 47 among 152 countries given the occurrence of illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing in its waters and the country's response to it. Even if we talk about developing non-extractive eco-tourism as a part of Blue Economy, St Martin's Island alone shows how badly we have failed to save it from destruction despite declaring it an Ecologically Critical Area (ECA) 22 years ago.

On a positive note, Bangladesh is effectively protecting the Sundarbans, in recent years, through participatory management and SMART patrolling. Bangladesh Forest Department created green belt on more than two hundred thousand hectares of coastal land since 1966. Together with UNDP, the Department improved the resilience of coastal communities through afforestation and reforestation programmes since 2008. In June 2019,

We have heard of a Blue Economy Action Plan supposedly drafted as a comprehensive planning document. While this action plan needs to be aligned with the above short- to long-term national plans, it is also important to make it public to gather peoples' opinions and start an inclusive planning process. Besides, the on-going formulation of the Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan 2030 still has the opportunity to embrace Blue Economy and NbS to make Bangladesh a "resilient delta".

Third, our maritime policies and practices, and changes in them, should be based on evidence. If we want to build a strong deep-sea fishing fleets, for example, we should know how much fish could be harvested annually to making fishing sustainable. While glorifying the positive impacts of fishing ban, we should know how the fishers of Moheshkhali survived 130 days' lockdown (March–May) and fishing ban (May–July) last year and how they are doing this year as the lockdown and ban overlapped.

Fourth, when it comes to climate finance, Bangladesh not only created a trust fund with about USD 450 million and implemented about 800 projects in the last 10 years, it has also mainstreamed climate budget into all relevant sectors. The Bangladesh Biodiversity Act, 2017 has a provision for "Biodiversity Conservation Fund", which is yet to be created. This biodiversity fund, along with the climate trust fund, can be a dual funding source for supporting NbS as a part of Blue Economy.

Fifth, in the wake of the Covid-19, NbS and Blue Economy should be part of our economic recovery plan. We need to appreciate that NbS can create jobs, diversify livelihoods, and offer business opportunities through restoring degraded coastal and marine ecosystems, sustainable fishing, following ecosystem approach to aquaculture, managing and sharing benefits from MPA, and combining conventional coastal protection infrastructure with NbS as a means of adaptation.

The initial enthusiasm built around Blue Economy, soon after the resolution of the maritime boundaries with our neighbours, lost its way in recent years. By integrating NbS into Blue Economy, we can regain our lost momentum.

Dr Haseeb Md. Irfanullah is an independent consultant working on environment, climate change, and research systems. His Twitter handle is @hmirfanullah

To integrate NbS into Blue Economy, first, we need to shift our mindset and start seeing our coasts and seas as thriving ecosystems made of biodiversity, not as commodity. Taking this first step is crucial.

along with improving the existing ones. In January 2017, the government established the "Blue Economy Cell" under the Energy and Mineral Resources Division to explore, conserve, and sustainably collect and manage natural and mineral resources. Over the last four years, however, the Cell offered limited leadership to advance Bangladesh's Blue Economy agenda.

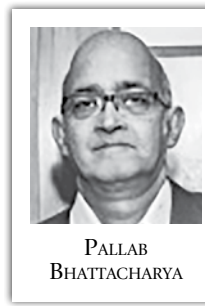
In terms of marine biological resources, ilish, which is 12.15 percent of our total fish production, often dominates our discussion on fisheries. Shrimp and other coastal aquaculture make up a significant portion of our coastal economy. These, however, underscore the exploitative and intensive nature of our fisheries management and are often criticised for not thinking of biodiversity conservation as they destroy non-targeted species due to unsustainable practices. While 65-day fishing ban on the Bay of Bengal

the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock declared 3,188 square kilometres of the sea on the south and south-west of the Nijhum Dwip as a marine reserve or marine protected area (MPA). All these actions are NbS, if both human wellbeing and biodiversity benefits are ensured, and can effectively contribute to Blue Economy.

To integrate NbS into Blue Economy, first, we need to shift our mindset and start seeing our coasts and seas as thriving ecosystems made of biodiversity, not as commodity. Taking this first step is crucial to transform our extractive and exploitative approach to Blue Economy into sustainable and resilient approach.

Second, Bangladesh's 8th Five Year Plan (2020–2025), Prospective Plan of Bangladesh 2021–2041, and Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 sufficiently talk about Blue Economy as well as ecosystem-based approaches to sustainable development.

Breaking fast and bread: Rahul Gandhi style



PALLAB
BHATTACHARYA

to discuss a joint strategy against the Modi government for the monsoon session of Parliament on the issues of the Pegasus spyware row, controversial farm laws and a sharp surge in fuel prices. On the table was a "sumptuous" platter. No less substantive was the political agenda at the meeting.

It was the third time in just about a week that Rahul chaired such meetings with like-minded opposition parties. The brief of the August 2 outreach exercise was not confined to firming up a common strategy against the government in Parliament. It went beyond that—how to unify the opposition against Modi for the next parliamentary elections in 2024.

The Congress Party's media managers lost no time to mount an exercise to project Rahul as the leader of a combined opposition who is ready to step up and take on the role of a unifier-in-chief in the fragmented opposition camp. The party took to Twitter to describe the August 2 meeting as "historic" and "this is the trailer for 2024."

The party's carefully-crafted image-building exercise for Rahul was supplemented by the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty's scion when he put out a video prepared by the party team of his meeting with the opposition leaders. It was a script for creating a perception that Rahul has found his mojo as the face of a joint opposition. It also aims at countering criticism both within the Congress and

outside that Rahul shies away from challenges and responsibilities, particularly when the party is in dire straits. A few days before August 2, Rahul had chaired two meetings with opposition leaders and the Congress had sought to project such exercises as part of "project-Rahul-at-the heart of opposition unity."

Most importantly, the August 2 meeting is supposed to carry the message that Rahul is ready to take over from her aging and ailing mother Sonia Gandhi, the interim President of the Congress, not only as the head of the party, but also as the undisputed leader of the entire opposition.

him the most. According to *India Today*, Rahul's attendance in the budget session of Parliament was 54 percent, compared to the average of 80 percent for all Lok Sabha MPs. He did not attend a single sitting of the Lok Sabha last monsoon. But this monsoon sitting, he has not only been leading his party's charge against the government on the Pegasus snooping, but also on farm laws and fuel price issues. On the symbolism front, Rahul drove a tractor to Parliament in a show of solidarity with the agitating farmers protesting against the farm laws and then cycled his way from the Constitution Club

like Mamata, Nationalist Congress President Sharad Pawar and Samajwadi Party founder Mulayam Singh Yadav have remained uncomfortable with sharing the dais or table with Rahul largely due to the generational gap and had been more at home with Sonia. Interestingly, Pawar, Mamata and Mulayam were not present at the August 2 meeting. Instead, their parties' representation at the meeting was downgraded by the presence of lower rung leaders. Even TMC floor leaders in the two Houses of parliament were not present in that meeting. Besides, Congress' political rivals like Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh, Aam Admi Party in Delhi and Janata Dal (Secular) (Congress former ally) in Karnataka stayed away from the August 2 meeting.

The Congress and the TMC have sought to project Rahul and Mamata respectively as occupying the pole position in an anti-BJP alliance. Both the parties face, in much starker forms, the onerous task of expanding their footprints across India that could give them an acceptable pan-India determining role in politics and bring the opposition parties together. The contours of opposition unity seem to be emerging after the Mamata-Sonia-Rahul meeting in Delhi recently. Close on the heels of that meeting, TMC leaders visited Agartala and poached on seven Tripura Congress leaders as part of the efforts by the Mamata-led party to spread its wings beyond the borders of Bengal with an eye on 2024.

Media reports also have it that some dissident leaders of CPI(M), which had ruled Tripura for years before being voted out by the BJP in 2018, are also eyed by the TMC as its potential recruits in Tripura in the run up to the 2023 assembly polls in that state.

Pallab Bhattacharya is a special correspondent for The Daily Star.



The August 2 meeting is supposed to carry the message that Rahul is ready to take over from his aging and ailing mother Sonia Gandhi.

PHOTO: IPS

A notable fact about the August 2 meeting is that it saw Rahul breaking bread with the opposition without the presence of Sonia for the first time. Rahul himself quit as vice president of the party soon after the Congress' debacle in the 2019 parliamentary polls and has since then refused to reconsider it.

Not so long ago, the same Rahul was often criticised by the media for his not-so-infrequent "disappearing" acts during parliament sessions and the party's crises when the Congress needed

to parliament after the breakfast meeting along with some other opposition leaders to protest against the fuel price hike.

Will Rahul be acceptable to the entire opposition like Sonia? That question remains to be answered. Unlike in the past, the Trinamool Congress, the fourth biggest party in the Lok Sabha with 22 lawmakers, attended the August 2 meeting, just a few days after Mamata Banerjee had met Sonia and Rahul in Delhi. It is an open secret in political circles that a number of veteran leaders