

Developed countries must honour their pledge

The world cannot afford more broken promises in regards to climate change

At the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has pointed out that effective action plans to address climate change are not possible without adequate, sustained, and flexible climate finance, and we fully agree with her. This is what experts—along with leaders of vulnerable and developing countries—have been saying for nearly a decade. The rich countries agreed to begin providing USD 100 billion per year from 2020 to address the needs of developing countries, at the 2009 Copenhagen climate summit. While, according to experts, even that amount is insufficient compared to the finance needed to adequately address climate change, many saw that as a good start. Unfortunately, the rich countries have so far failed to make good on that promise.

According to the UN’s “Emissions Gap Report 2019,” USD 1.6-3.8 trillion is needed annually between 2020-2050 to avoid global warming exceeding 1.5 degrees Celsius. That the rich countries have been unwilling to provide the miniscule amount they promised in comparison to that, does not instil much confidence in their willingness to act upon their promises in regards to addressing climate change. Yet, the reality is that these rich countries are the biggest carbon emitters in the world—and have been for decades. Developing and climate vulnerable countries have mostly been the sufferers of that, as their carbon footprint is much smaller in comparison. Therefore, it is only fair—as even the rich countries have admitted—for them to provide the developing and vulnerable countries with some of the funds that they require to take action to both address climate change, as well as mitigate for the resulting losses. Why, then, have the rich countries failed to do what they agreed to do, for over a decade? The answer can only be a lack of sincerity to the suffering of developing countries and/or a lack of concern for the urgency with which this issue must be addressed.

At this year’s climate summit, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is not only representing Bangladesh, but 48 most vulnerable developing countries, who are members of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF). As such, her blunt statement urging the rich countries to keep their promise is surely commendable. The CVF has already demanded for the rich countries to provide USD 500 billion between 2020 and 2024, and we hope that this fund can be secured—as grants, not through other ambiguous channels as we have seen climate funds being delivered before—during negotiations at the summit.

Without the necessary finance, plans to address climate change cannot be put in motion. In the absence of effective action, we fear that the entire planet will be in great danger, as experts have warned. Therefore, we hope that the world leaders—particularly those representing developed countries—will take cognisance of this reality, and instead of repeating empty rhetoric, they will take meaningful actions, including in the form of providing the finance required for developing countries and the world to address climate change.

Economic opportunities, education necessary to fight militancy

The findings of ATU are eye-opening

A study recently conducted by the Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU) of police has revealed some eye-opening findings related to militancy, including the fact that economic hardships are pushing people down the path of radicalism. By analysing the data collected from 1,217 militants, arrested in connection with militancy and terrorism between 2001 and 2020 in three metropolitan cities and eight divisions, the ATU has found that poor socioeconomic status and religious bigotry have dragged these people—mostly aged between 31 and 40 years—into militancy.

According to the study, eight out of every 10 militants arrested in the last two decades came from poor socioeconomic backgrounds and from the country’s northern districts. The ATU has also looked into the militant outfits’ recruitment strategy and found that the extremist groups recruit a significant number of their operatives by “misinterpreting religion” and using online platforms.

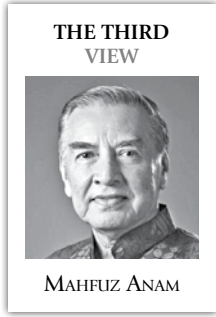
That people from low-income backgrounds would be easy targets of militant outfits should not come as a shock. That is why the study found a large population from our northern region to be involved in militancy, as they are lagging behind economically compared to the rest of the country. While the study has identified the presence of many madrasas in some areas of the northern region to be a reason for the growth of extremism, it has also found that 80 percent of militants are from mainstream education backgrounds. That means that we need to broaden our perspective while talking about fighting terrorism and militancy, rather than identifying and focusing on any specific group. Blind faith or religious bigotry is, no doubt, closely related to education—or lack thereof. And that needs to be dealt with through special attention to what is being taught at our education institutions and at home. We also need to understand the fact that many people are joining these outfits to earn a living after being influenced by people who are misinterpreting religion, as stated in the report.

The research by the ATU is certainly helpful in understanding and tackling militancy in the country. So, to root out this menace, more comprehensive research should be carried out on a continuing basis. While the ATU has made some recommendations to tackle militancy, such as keeping a constant watch on the activities of militants hiding abroad and those who have gone into hiding after securing bail from courts, enhancing cyber intelligence, etc—all of which are important—the government should also focus on reducing poverty and making education accessible to everyone to effectively fight militancy.

Meanwhile, strengthening counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation activities, ensuring assistance and security of militants trying to get back to normal life, and rehabilitation programmes are all equally important as well.

OUR TEAM AT T20 WORLD CUP

A metaphor of present-day Bangladesh politics



At the very start, I say with as much vehemence as I am capable of that a game is a game. Every tournament should be a contest of the exceptional and the best sports person should win, and we would all celebrate their excellence. It is primarily meant for the players who, through a lifetime of passion and commitment, training and sacrifice at a personal level, would endeavour to fulfil his or her dream of being the best in their favourite sport. In the process, we see some awe-striking quality sporting events.

But as nationalism crept in, sport became weaponised to bring “pride” for the nation and the players themselves got swayed into it, as they enjoyed the national adulation that resulted from it. It reached its tragic peak during the superpower rivalry, which was a contest not only between two countries—which



Empty polling centre at Purbobhag Model Govt Primary School, Dakshin Surma upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

is bad enough for sports as it is—but was also one between two ideologies. At the height of the Cold War, in addition to Soviet Union’s sporting victories, successes of Eastern European communist countries were all proclaimed as the success of the socialist system, along with its ideological and related regimentation.

Ideological thrust may have gone, but sports as a part of nationalistic image building is alive and well and more powerful and, at the same time, harmful as it is fed by life-threatening doses of “hate-steroid” through the ever-expanding presence of social media. The “public” treatment of Indian bowler Mohammed Shami and Bangladeshi batsman Liton Das and the abuses they had to suffer for their performance is far beyond nationalism and ideology. Racism has

reality of public opinion, we stop the expression of public opinion itself, with intimidation, violence and unjust laws.

Everybody knew—at least the journalists did and they wrote about it ceaselessly—about the folly of making our players go through the preparatory matches on low bouncing, spin supporting and generally slow pitches. This was in direct contrast to the hard-hitting fast pitches of the host countries where the World Cup is being played. Yet we opted for such a pitch only to be able to say that we defeated Australia and New Zealand. These results, the leaders of our cricket board thought, would give such a boost to the confidence of our players and would so strengthen their morale that we would have a sterling performance ahead of us.

The only problem was that it was based on falsehood. The results were contrived. The so-called well-planned preparation was actually a well-planned disaster. It brought us shame instead of pride, it destroyed whatever confidence the sports-mad and team-adulating Bangladeshi fans had in our team. Worst of all, it broke the very backbone of self-assuredness that a player needs to face his very first ball in front of a huge crowd and a far bigger TV audience.

Our team’s performance in the latest T20 World Cup makes for such a striking metaphor of our politics that no one but sycophants will miss it. For the last 30 years—save two, though a large part of those two years were spent in preparation for the election of 2008, which brought the present ruling party in power with a thumping majority of its own—we have been practising democracy. But what have we to show for it?

Over the years our elections have gotten more and more contrived. They have shifted from the hand of the voters to those of election officials, the police, the intelligence bodies, the bureaucracy and local musclemen.



Bangladesh captain Mahmudullah Riyad (L) screams in frustration following their three-run defeat against the West Indies in the T20 World Cup.

PHOTO: AFP

The Election Commission, such a prestigious body in most democracies—Trump would triumph many times over under one like ours—has made a laughing stock of itself. No amount of public disillusionment has had the slightest impact on our election authorities to prod them to inquire into the quality of the elections that they hold. Is election just some massive logistical undertaking? What about public faith in them? Shouldn’t they have done some survey as to what voters think about their performance? If they have done any, we would be happy to know the outcome. The fact that election disputes take years to be resolved and sometimes even overshoots the tenure of disputed election

never prompted them to reform.

There is nothing in our system called voters’ education. This is something that the Election Commission should undertake throughout the year, teaching people about their rights and, not to forget, obligations in a democracy.

Right now, local government elections are going on and what we see is the violence and the corruption. Have we heard anything about empowering the local government bodies, decentralising power from Dhaka, relaxing somewhat the strangulating bureaucratic hold over the local bodies? There has been virtually no devolution of power in the real sense. All the local bodies—union parishad, upazila parishad, zilla parishad—consist of elected people’s representatives. But they all work under the supervision of the Local Government Division of the relevant ministry who have the power to fire them. A case of bureaucrats having the last say over elected people’s representatives.

A fundamental institution of democracy is the parliament. Ours have the dubious honour of not having debated any significant issue facing the country. If the Covid pandemic and climate disaster couldn’t have been considered by our parliament as worthy of special sessions or even just debates, then what would move their hearts and minds is a question far beyond my ability to answer.

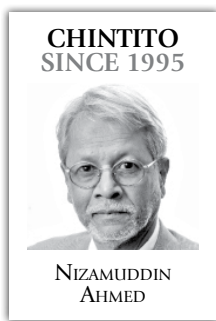
Similarly, in our T20 World Cup preparation we fix our pitch so that outside teams cannot play, train our bowlers to suit the pitch and win matches and declare we are ready for the world, and lose the very first match against a team whom we should have beaten. Did the team play badly? Yes, but they were a disabled team to start with—disabled by those who forced them into wrong preparation, false hope and a make-believe journey that was never there.

So also in our democratic journey, we hold elections in which the deeper truth than what the results reveal is known to all. Because the truth is also known to those who wear the garlands of “victory”, they lack the confidence to speak the truth, and because they don’t speak the truth, a make-believe world of victory and self-righteousness is created which leads to more make-belief and greater self-righteousness, and so the cycle of mischief continues to spin in its downward spiral.

I am told that all teams tamper a bit with the home pitches. So, what if we over did it? Well, we know what happens when we do so. Will the lessons from cricket have any good influence on our politics? In cricket there are international matches that tell us that we are on the wrong path. In politics, the only self-correcting mechanism is the elections. If we have done away with it in everything but name, then that correction prospect is non-existent for us.

Mahfuz Anam is the editor and publisher of The Daily Star.

Guns, but more Roses



In case you have not noticed, climate is not the only manifestation that has changed drastically over the last decade. People have too.

There is flood in Scotland, but there is hope in Sudan

BBC reported on October 29, “Days of heavy downpours have brought significant flooding problems across the south and west of Scotland. Travel has been disrupted, bridges washed away and people evacuated from their homes.” Unthinkable even a few years ago.

Following a military coup on October 25, thousands of Sudanese began spontaneous demonstrations against the armed forces, and in support of the ousted civilian Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and his cabinet. Protesters carried Sudanese flags and chanted, “Military rule can’t be praised”, and “This country is ours, and our government is civilian”, as they marched across Khartoum (Reuters). Unthinkable a couple of decades ago.

Sadly, there have been high civilian casualties, the regular price for democracy that we too had to pay for 24 years.

There is wildfire across Greece, but there is guarded optimism in Afghanistan

Heatwaves of unprecedented longevity, and wildfires across the summer have destroyed more than 1,000 km2 of ancient pine forests in Greece. They have blackened swathes of Attica near Athens, scorched parts of ancient Olympia and obliterated north Evia’s magnificent forests (The Guardian, August 29). Human suffering includes loss of livelihoods. Inconceivable, say 15 years ago.

It all happened so quickly in Afghanistan. Donald Trump signed the Doha accord with the Taliban in February 2020, ensuring complete withdrawal of US troops by May 2021, but the fall of Kabul happened under Joe Biden’s call on

August 15, 2021. Considering their hard-line Sharia administration during 1996-2001, the 2021 Afghan protests against the Taliban started almost immediately. Led by Islamic democrats and feminists, people feared misogynistic attitude of the Taliban, more perhaps than the Taliban’s fearsome paramilitary power. The dare was evident on the streets across Afghanistan. Inconceivable 20 ago.

Typhoons are lashing the US coast, but there is Spring in Myanmar



Protesters gather to demonstrate against the February 1 military coup, in downtown Yangon, Myanmar, on February 8, 2021.

PHOTO: AFP

Repeated Atlantic hurricanes have been unrelenting, causing havoc on the east and southern coasts of the United States. Atlantic waters have become warmer in the last few years, bringing to land about 50 named storms, unusual in the region. Ominously it is predicted that the situation is very much likely to worsen with hurricanes becoming a common and regular phenomenon. Unimaginable in times gone by.

Meanwhile, in neighbouring Myanmar, protests, locally known as the

taking it lying down. Unimaginable with the army in control.

Climate is raising havoc Down Under, but there are loud voices in Hong Kong

Continuous warming, increasing number of bushfires, prolonged droughts, frequent cyclones, heatwaves and floods, rising sea levels, impaired biodiversity, ravaged coral reefs, unprecedented damage to properties and infrastructure, and threatened public health among disadvantaged communities are among the greater climate concerns of Australia (Energy Matters, October 3). This

was beyond imagination only a few years back.

It is more or less common knowledge that China has a “one-country, two systems” policy regarding its Special Administrative Regions. And yet, the proposed extradition legislation stirred up massive Hong Kong protests in 2019-2020. Steered mainly by students, also on the agenda of the protesters were demands for democratic reform, and the fear of losing their extraordinary autonomy. Marches and rallies turned violent, leading to three deaths, and three thousand injuries. There were over 10,000 arrests and 2,500 prosecutions, which go to show the extent of public rile, spirit and involvement. This was beyond imagination only the other day.

In this millennium, democratisation of information technology, extensive use of social networks, swapping of knowledge, broad civil awareness, and intrinsic yearning for freedom have given voice to oppressed people in the most unlikely areas. People have in recent movements snatched courage from thin air to vent their anger in search or in defence of democracy. Despite unusual intimidation, brutal oppression and point-blank target practice, there is an innate longing to showcase human dignity and mettle, a thirst for liberty and the rule of law.

People are on the streets again, metaphorically with flowers, in the spirit of the 1960s. Sixty years ago, “flower power” represented non-violence and harmony, blooming from “the passive, peaceful resistance movement of the time, which was rooted in the opposition against the Vietnam War”.

All of a sudden there is collective realisation, sporadically all over the world, that many voices are not easily shut downable; perhaps never in the long run. That a few lives can be sacrificed for a larger gain. Whose? It does not matter, for they are all for one, and one for all.

Nizamuddin Ahmed is professor of Architecture, a practising architect at BashaBari Ltd., a Commonwealth Scholar and Fellow, a Baden-Powell Fellow and a Woodbadger Scout Leader, and a Major Donor Rotarian.