

Protect Bhabadaha from waterlogging

Govt should implement TRM to resolve this long-standing issue

We are gravely concerned by the persistent waterlogging in Jashore's Bhabadaha area following the heavy rains in August. This area, in fact, has been plagued by waterlogging since the early 1980s, primarily due to the construction of embankments and sluice gates that disrupted the natural flow and dried up nearby rivers. In recent years, waterlogging has not only deteriorated in Bhabadaha but also spread to neighbouring areas. Currently, at least 300 villages in Jashore's Abhaynagar, Manirampur, and Keshabpur, Khulna's Dumuria and Phultala, and Satkhira's Sadar and Tala upazilas are grappling with severe waterlogging, affecting around 10 lakh people.

Reportedly, over 200 schools in these areas have been inundated, depriving thousands of children of education, while around 50,000 farmers in 10 upazilas of the three districts are facing uncertainty over growing the Boro crop this season, as about 96,000 hectares of farmland remain waterlogged. The situation is dire and requires proper interventions.

Unfortunately, the authorities have allowed this problem to persist for decades despite a proven solution being available: the Tidal River Management (TRM). Since 1982, the Bhabadaha Water Drainage Movement Committee has advocated TRM to policymakers, yet their calls have largely gone unheeded. Local influential figures, benefitting from shrimp farming in the waterlogged areas, have also obstructed efforts to address the issue, leaving farmers and ordinary residents to bear the brunt. Although the previous Awami League government implemented several projects spending crores of taka, these were not scientifically sound and failed to provide lasting solutions.

Pumping out water from the affected areas and dredging nearby rivers can offer only temporary relief, so locals need a permanent solution. That's why implementing TRM is crucial. Under this method, a canal, which connects a river to a beel, is dredged to allow river water to flow into the beel so that the sediment is carried in and the low-lying area is elevated. Some sediment is then carried back into the sea during low tide. This approach allows water to enter the beels for gradual land reclamation. Over time, the raised land within the embankment becomes higher than the surrounding riverbed. Local communities have previously implemented TRM in some beels with successful results, but political influences, including those of shrimp businessmen, have repeatedly hindered this approach.

Reportedly, if waterlogging continues even for a few more days, it will severely impact Boro crop cultivation for the next season. Therefore, immediate action is needed from the government. For a long-term solution, the government should begin implementing TRM in the region. It is promising that Syeda Rizwana Hasan, adviser to the environment ministry, has pledged to resolve the issue. We hope her words will soon translate into action.

A welcome move for migrant workers

Dedicated airport lounge highlights the critical role of remittance earners

We applaud the opening of an exclusive lounge for migrant workers at the Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka. Long demanded by migrants to ensure seamless journey, this step by the interim government aligns with other reassuring measures it has taken since August 8, including securing pardons for 57 jailed Bangladeshi migrant workers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and initiating talks with Malaysian authorities for re-recruiting Bangladeshi workers.

Reportedly, migrant workers, whose remittances form the backbone of Bangladesh's economy, are often subjected to neglect and harassment at the airport. Although fancy displays were installed inside the airport during the last regime, hardly any arrangements were made to ease migrant workers' travel experience. Many workers travel from remote parts of the country, enduring long journeys and the anxiety of venturing abroad, only to face unkind treatment from airport staff upon arrival. The same poor reception greets them when they return home.

The newly opened lounge provides much-needed rest and relief for the workers—before they embark on another long and sometimes hectic journey—as well as subsidised snacks priced lower than the typically overpriced airport food. Moreover, 100 volunteers sponsored by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) will assist them at the airport. These efforts, however, should not diminish the need for training regular airport staff to ensure better treatment for our remittance earners.

Given that remittances are one of our primary sources of foreign currency, it is extremely important for the government to prioritise this sector, especially in light of the country's foreign currency debt. Authorities should also address other key issues faced by migrant workers including high cost of migration, recruitment irregularities, wage theft, abuse by foreign employers, and inadequate support from Bangladeshi missions abroad. Expanding into new labour markets through diplomacy, or expediting recruitment in established ones like Malaysia and UAE, should remain our priorities, but not at the cost of workers' rights.

We hope the government will continue to take meaningful steps to support them in their journey to earn remittances, and ensure that they are treated with the respect and dignity they deserve, both at home and abroad.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



Nevado del Ruiz volcano erupts

On this day in 1985, Mount Ruiz in the Cordillera Central of the Andes, in west-central Colombia, erupted twice, burying the town of Armero on the Lagunilla River and killing an estimated 25,000 people.

The case for internal reforms in political parties



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When a country's politicians seek nationality or residency rights in foreign countries, it signals that its politics has reached an impasse—a dead end—with leaders hedging their bets with an exit strategy should their careers become untenable. This disturbing tendency has become evident in Bangladesh after a report revealed that 24 politicians who served as ministers, advisers or members of parliament during the tenure of the ousted Awami League government hold foreign citizenship or residency cards. They have allegedly acquired these privileges by concealing information, which constitutes a breach of both the law and Bangladesh's constitution. Article 66 of the constitution clearly states that a person who acquires foreign citizenship or pledges allegiance to a foreign state cannot serve as a member of parliament.

This disregard for the people and country they were supposed to serve can be attributed to the erosion of the electoral system, breakdown of good governance, pervasive financial corruption, and unchecked money laundering over the 15-plus years under deposed autocrat Sheikh Hasina. Her misgovernance displayed traits commonly associated with fascism, such as curtailing electoral democracy, stifling political and cultural liberalism, establishing family-centred rule, using security forces for personal and crony interests, and scapegoating political or social groups to deflect blame for any national failure or crisis. Above all, there was an extensive personality cult built through state-funded propaganda.

In Bangladesh 2.0—following Sheikh Hasina's fall and her subsequent refuge in India on August 5, 2024—the state reform drive of the interim government has focused on various areas, including the electoral system, constitution, judiciary, civil administration, and media. However, one of the most essential components of state reform—politics and political parties—has been relatively absent in the reform agenda or even public discourse.

In the case of politicians who have shown divided or no loyalty to Bangladesh by secretly obtaining foreign citizenship, their parties must also share the blame, as there

is currently no effective monitoring process for nominating parliamentary candidates or even vetting aspirant party members. Sadly, the charters and rules of political parties are often not aligned with national laws and electoral procedures.

Public discourse has long highlighted the need for MPs to exercise independent judgement in their legislative duties, calling for amendments to Article 70 of the



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

constitution, which reads, “A person elected as a Member of Parliament at an election at which he was nominated as a candidate by a political party shall vacate his seat if he resigns from that party; or votes in Parliament against that party.” Many argue that MPs should be allowed to vote independently—except in cases of no-confidence motions and finance bills—to strengthen democratic practices. However, Bangladesh's major political parties, including the BNP and Awami League, lack internal democracy. Therefore, before considering constitutional amendments, it is crucial to reform party charters to promote internal democracy.

In recent decades, major political parties have increasingly placed absolute trust in their top leaders, elevating them to near-unchallenged

sometimes turning violent—are likely to continue in today's changed political scenario.

Even the nomination process for party tickets in parliamentary or local elections resembles a quasi-feudal system, where grassroots leaders or aspiring candidates have minimal influence. A select group of central leaders decides on nominations based on criteria known only to themselves.

Considering the gravity of all such undemocratic intra-party practices, political parties in Bangladesh need to reconsider their governance structures, taking cues from liberal democracies around the world. They should embrace internal democracy at every level of decision-making, moving away from practices that centralise power among elites or family dynasties. Politics should be seen as a mission,

Further reforms should be made to the Representation of the People Order, 1972. Key positions within political parties must be elected by secret ballots in councils, ideally under the Election Commission's supervision, to prevent unopposed or uncontested selections. The commission should also audit party finances annually, mandating transparency in political funding by requiring parties to disclose their donors.

Finally, we must ask: should individuals who lack absolute loyalty to Bangladesh be barred from joining political parties? Should parties voluntarily revoke membership of individuals with foreign citizenship or residency permits, given that they cannot legally run in national elections? The answers should not be difficult to reach.

ACHIEVING SDG 10

Can we reduce income inequality by 2030?



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NAWSHAD AHMED

The first target under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #10 reads, “By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 percent of the population at a rate higher than the national average.” This calls upon all nations to bolster the income of the bottom 40 percent of the population by promoting economic, social and political inclusion of all people, irrespective of their sex, age, physical conditions such as disability, religion, race, class, ethnicity, etc. The achievement of this global target requires creating appropriate and equal opportunities, empowerment of women, and reduction of poverty and inequality. The ongoing work of the interim government's public administration and constitutional reform commissions needs a focus on these aspects so that the future elected government may work to fulfil SDG 10, as Bangladesh has only six years in hand to establish substantial improvements on this global goal.

There are data challenges with regard to having a proper understanding of the income inequality situation in Bangladesh. According to UNDP data, the income share of the bottom 40 percent of the country's population

is 11 percent. In sharp contrast, for the top 10 percent, the income share is 43 percent. Based on Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES), 2022, the income of the bottom 40 percent population grows at 7.7 percent per annum, while the annual growth rate of income of the total population is 9.1 percent. The HIES 2022 shows that the top 10 percent of households increased their share of wealth to 40.91 percent, around 2.83 percent rise since 2016. The bottom 50 percent of the households had 19.05 percent of the total income in 2022, which came down from 20.23 percent in 2016.

Even though the country achieved progress in poverty reduction, the income Gini coefficient has been on the rise. It increased from 0.458 in 2010 to 0.499 in 2022. During the same period, consumption Gini coefficient increased from 0.321 in 2010 to 0.334 in 2022. The data from surveys over the last two decades clearly shows that income and wealth inequality is growing in Bangladesh. Whether we consider the well-known measure, the Gini coefficient, or an alternative measure like the Palma ratio, and compare the income share of the top 10 percent with the income

share of the bottom 40 percent, we get the same result, which demonstrates that inequality is consistently rising in our society.

The constitutional commitment of ensuring social and economic equality among the citizens of the country can sustain without resulting in major social and political unrest. However, there is no reason to assume that income and wealth inequality will come down automatically. The common strategic options that are available to reduce inequality are participatory planning and inclusive development, pro-poor budget formulation and implementation, skills development, progressive taxation of income, adoption of appropriate legislation, scrapping of discriminatory laws, realistic minimum wage fixation, improved governance, effective measures against corruption, containment of inflation, promotion of social protection measures, investment in small and medium enterprises, and greater investment in the social sector.

In Bangladesh, the major challenges hindering the achievement of economic and social equality are: low public expenditure on education, training, health, rural development and social protection; poor direct tax collection and a culture of tax evasion; high level of selection error in social protection schemes; and high percentage (12.6 percent) of female-headed households with limited assets and means of production. The benefits of economic growth in the country have gone to the upper-income groups while the poor

remain marginalised. The “pro-poor growth” concept is not being applied properly. Programmes and projects that benefit the poor need to be taken up in a greater number. Micro credit and SME loans should be increased to help accumulate assets of small entrepreneurs and create additional employment in the formal sector. The high inclusion and exclusion errors in the social protection programmes must be corrected through a bold and one-time correction of the beneficiary list. Irregularities in the banking sector, money laundering, and tax evasion must be curbed with a strong hand. Health and nutritional services must be freed from corruption and mismanagement, so that the vulnerable population gain access to the benefits of these public services.

A vital issue that exacerbates inequality is the overwhelming centralisation of the decision-making process. The politician-bureaucracy nexus is strong, and this keeps people out from participating in the governance process. Unless the attitude of the politicians, bureaucrats and policymakers change towards a more people-centric approach in planning and development as well as local governance, the level of inequality is unlikely to come down in the near future. Additionally, the political parties should be committed to the greater good of the general people instead of continuing the culture of benefiting a select few, and adopt social-democratic norms for economic development with strong emphasis on securing socioeconomic equality in the country.