

## **Hasina's peace model and realities on the ground**

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Recently in New York, the Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina presented her new global peace model for development at the 66<sup>th</sup> annual session of the United Nations General Assembly. She stated that her peace-centric development model was inspired by her life experience and she always fought for peace throughout her life.

Sheikh Hasina's peace model is based on a set of six goals. These are: eradication of poverty and hunger; reduction of inequality; mitigation of deprivation; inclusion of those excluded from participation in development; acceleration of human development; and elimination of terrorism. Nobody will disagree with these six motherhood principles. In fact, these are not new. What is funny about Hasina's peace model is the glaring contradiction it has with her own domestic policy and actions. Our experience tells us that Hasina always talks tall and does little.

Sheikh Hasina's governance model being implemented in Bangladesh does not provide any credible evidence that she really does what she preaches. Any real development model is based on certain universal principles such as democracy, rule of law, intolerance to corruption, and equal and fair treatment of all. Such a development model needs to be people-centric, making people the centre of all economic and social policy for development.

Since her election to power in December 2008, Sheikh Hasina does not appear to have been practising democratic rule in the country. Like her predecessors, it is basically one-person rule where Hasina does not care about other people's views, even the views of her own party members to take corrective measures to solve problems. She remains arrogant and adamant to what she personally believes in. Sheikh Hasina has become another Khaleda Zia who used to take pride in being called the uncompromising leader of the nation! The recent amendments to the constitution of Bangladesh exemplify Hasina's arrogant and insensitive attitude, devoid of expected political sagacity of an experienced politician and prime minister like her.

Sheikh Hasina condones wrong doings of her ministers and other party members – examples being the communications and the shipping ministers and the members of her student organisation Chatra League. This kind of actions gives wrong signal to her governing machinery that they will remain untouched and are immune to any accountability. Often she makes show-off warnings that nobody will be spared if they commit wrong-doings and are engaged in criminal activities.

I am not sure about how Sheikh Hasina's economic policy is contributing to reduction of social and economic inequality. Certain population groups, especially the poor and lower middle classes are leading their daily lives with all sorts of economic disadvantages. They are tremendously suffering due to ever-increasing inflation and price hikes which are often

attributed to the manipulations by certain big businesses and commercial cartels. Some of these cartels are reported to be connected to the ruling party.

All the economic indicators are showing that social and economic gaps are increasing, with certain sections of the society getting richer to the detriment of some other sections. Did the share market scam lead to reducing economic inequality? The gigantic losses suffered by over two million share-holders due to manipulated share pricing have further exacerbated the rich-poor gap in the country. None of the big players identified as responsible for the share scam have been brought to justice, whereas the prime minister Sheikh Hasina continues to lecture on establishing justice in the society.

Where is the justice and mitigation of deprivation when criminal cases filed against the ruling party members during the care-taker government of Fakhruddin Ahmed have been withdrawn while cases against members of other political parties have been allowed to go through the normal legal procedures? Does this bear evidence of rule of law and equal and fair treatment of all citizens irrespective of party affiliations? Political flamboyance does not establish democratic rule. Democracy is not just holding elections every few years; it is a mindset which is manifested in its practice.

Can there be peace in a country where law and order situation deteriorates on an ongoing basis? Peace is the absence of conflict and freedom from disturbance. The society is rife with endless conflict and ever-increasing violence. There is no peace – neither political nor social. People are experiencing conflicts and civil disturbances in every sector in the society – in educational institutions, government organisations responsible for inviting tenders for development works, factories and also in general administration.

We hardly find common grounds anywhere in the society, which has the potential to lead to dangerous conflicting situations. This situation is not conducive to creating a cohesive society to pursue a common goal of sustainable national development and establish right conditions to solve real problems facing the country. The two main reasons for the existing conflict, I believe, are large scale politicisation of every aspect of administration and letting loose a reign of terror by different cadres of the ruling political party. All these boil down to seeking to establish undue authority and making quick money through corrupt practices such as tender rigging, extortions and other illegal means. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. This applied to past governments in the country as well.

Charity begins at home. Expressing political rhetoric for peace and presenting simplistic ideas at an international organisation like the United Nations only makes Hasina a laughing stock at home and abroad. Her so-called peace model can be dubbed as “much ado about nothing”, I suspect.

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