

**N'ganj mayhem***Life and property lost under most unfortunate circumstances*

**H**ELL broke loose in Naryanganj Monday, as rampaging garment workers clashed with police. At least one worker was killed and 50 others injured in an unprecedented surge of violence. This left a large number of shops, vehicles and houses damaged.

The violence erupted after the workers agitating in support of their 18-point demand failed to reach a negotiated settlement with the owners of Pantex Garments Factory. Newspaper reports indicate that rumours and speculations fuelled the crisis beyond control. For example, rumour spread in the industrial enclave that labour leaders had been kept in captivity and also that police had killed six workers and removed the dead bodies. Police and the district administration have, however, said one garment worker was killed in the clashes.

Another reason cited for the violent outburst is that labour leader Mahbubur Rahman Ismail was arrested after the tripartite negotiations among the district administration, owners of Pantex and labour representatives collapsed.

Whatever might be the cause behind the riotous situation which kept Narayanganj cut off from the rest of the country for nearly 12 hours, it is evident that the channels of communication between the workers and the owners were not utilised in the best interest of the two sides. There was mistrust and misgivings which finally found expression in a bloody carnage.

But what we would like to say in clear terms is that the problem should not have been allowed to blow out of proportion. Nobody has the right to damage property belonging to others. Similarly, law enforcers were expected to show the utmost restraint before resorting to an extreme measure like opening fire on the garment workers. It was an avoidable tragedy which has cost a valuable life and left property worth crores of takas damaged.

Such violence in an important industrial sector has far-reaching economic implications that can hardly be ignored. We suggest the government constitute a probe body to find out why the matter came to a head and police had to open fire on the garment workers. That hopefully will clear the deck for a serious dialogue to ensue between both sides leading to the resolution of any differences.

**Primary education initiative***This one has to succeed*

**W**E are heartened to note that a massive \$1.815 billion initiative to comprehensively overhaul primary education is about to be launched. The government is to foot 64 per cent of the bill with the rest being funded by donor organisations. This commitment to primary education is good news both for the children whose educational opportunities will thereby be enhanced and also for the rest of us who will reap the benefits of a better-educated population.

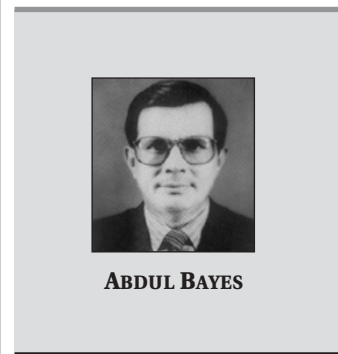
Especially noteworthy is the attention that the initiative places on targeting children at the bottom end of the socio-economic spectrum. If we want to progress economically and socially then we must make sure to provide opportunity to all. Let us hope that the programme succeeds in bringing the reform to the education sector that is needed.

The first problem to be tackled is class-size. The student-teacher ratio in primary schools is a bloated 55:1 with the ratio swelling to 67:1 in government schools. So the first step in improving the primary education system is to hire more teachers.

But just hiring more teachers is not enough. We need to make sure the calibre of the teachers hired is high to ensure that the students get the best possible education. This means comprehensive and up-to-date teacher training and improved salaries and conditions so that we can attract quality candidates to the field.

Capacity building alone will not suffice. The entire educational system today is rife with abuse, irregularity and inefficiency which must be thoroughly rooted out if primary education is to be meaningfully improved on a durable basis.

The primary education initiative that has been announced is a good and overdue first step, but it must be followed up by true commitment to long-term reform with the vision to create a sustainable educational structure that will serve the needs of our children long into the future.

**Does Bangladesh benefit from trade liberalisation?****ABDUL BAYES**

**I**N a recent research report released by the World Bank, Dr Sadiq Ahmed and Dr Zaidi Sattar dwell on an issue that has long been a bone of contention in Bangladesh. Truly speaking, like in many other countries, it has also been a matter of meaningful debate in this part of the world. But as the authors noted "much of this debate is often fueled by perceptions rather than a careful review of the underlying analytical framework or empirical foundations". Ipso facto, in their report titled "Trade Liberalisation, Growth and Poverty Reduction -- *The Case of Bangladesh*", the authors apparently anchored on anecdotes and empirical evidences to submit the "sunny side" of the policy changes from protection to openness. It could be a "bombshell" to those "burning" hearts that tend to bracket trade liberalisation as a bane rather than a boon for Bangladesh. And allow me to submit that most of the papers that I have come across over the years -- except the one I am talking about -- were propelled by perceptions. I reckon that this report could be an eye-opener not as what they said but as how they said what they wanted to say.

**The rationale**

The authors started with a rationale for undertaking the research. It appears that they wanted to protest the populist view that trade liberalisation and economic integration has been a

drag on development and a drive towards deindustrialisation. But what is the reality on the ground? "Informing this debate with a good analysis of the analytical and empirical foundations of trade protection and the gains from trade openness will facilitate more informed debate on this major subject. This in turn would likely lead to support for further trade reforms. The objective of this research is to provide the analysis".

**Theories and empirics**

**A priori**, greater openness is likely to contribute to higher growth and lower poverty in Bangladesh by (a) improving productive and allocative efficiency; (b) factor accumulation and investment; (c) knowledge spillovers; (d) improved income distribution and (e) government policy improvements. Since Bangladesh is a labour abundant country, *a la* Heckscher-Ohlin and Stolper-Samuelson model, expansion of international trade opportunities will likely support the growth of labour-intensive export industries, promoting employment and income. The authors also developed empirical evidences on trade openness and economic development as espoused by scholars from time to time and for different periods of time. The section on Trade Openness and Economic Deregulation in Bangladesh succinctly summarised the policy regime episodes on reforms related to 1972-2002. Progress with Trade Liberalisation was placed in sequence

with structured information. **The impacts** The authors delineated three distinct phases to compare and contrast the indicators such as average growth rate of GDP, average per capita GDP growth, average inflation rate, poverty Head count and trade GDP ratios. The periods could be identified as 1972-75 (period 1), 1976-90 (period 2) and 1991-2000 (period 3). In analytical discourse, admittedly, such

categorisation of periods is often criticised on the grounds that policies and programmes continue to cross regimes to result in overlapping. However, in the face of no other better comparable yardsticks, the route chosen by the authors could be considered as acceptable. The Bangladesh trade-GDP ratio, a standard measure of trade openness, rose from an average of 11 per cent in 1972/75 to 17 per cent in 1990 and further to 30 per cent in 2000. Both imports and exports grew as a share of GDP, with imports growing from an average 8 per cent in 1971-75 to 18 per cent in 2000 while exports expanded from 3 to 12 per cent during the same period of time. Per capita GDP growth moved from negative 1.1 per cent to posit a positive 3.1 per cent. Inflation rate came down from a peak of 47 per cent per annum to perk at 6 per cent. Poverty head count index fell from as high as 88 per cent to 50 per cent in 2000. By and large, according to the

macroeconomic management that helps maintain low inflation to preserve the competitiveness of the exchange rate...."

Manufacturing GDP growth was significantly robust in the 1990s compared to the 1980s --fairly broad based with strong contribution from small and medium enterprises. Manufacturing employment surged from 3 million in 1985/86 to about 6 million in 1990/91 growing nearly at 20 per cent per annum compared to a long term trend of 3.3 per cent. Without substantial downsizing in evidence in the public sector in the 1980s, the growth in employment must have been generated by the private sector.

The authors dwell on the development of real wages -- a better indicator to justify a change. "On average, real wages of unskilled workers in manufacturing grew by 2.4 per cent since FY1973 liberalisation. Which is faster than per capita GDP,

and importantly, faster than real wages of skilled labour during the third phase of rapid trade". The trend seems quite in tune with the prediction of the theory that trade openness pushes up the price of unskilled labour. Agricultural real wage -- albeit slower though -- also posited a positive growth at 1.5 per cent per annum. "Putting together the output, employment and wage picture, it seems that the Lewis model of unlimited supply of labour fits well with Bangladesh agricultural scene.

Faced with low average productivity and massive underemployment, the pace of labor absorption in agriculture is contracting, simply because agriculture is unable to create enough jobs to absorb the growing rural population". On the other hand, non-agricultural employment and output expanded fast but, disconcertingly, without driving up the marginal productivity and real wages growth noticeably in agriculture. "So the "turning point" whereby real wages in agriculture are driven up by contracting labour availability in agriculture is yet to come". This observation is substantiated by empirical evidences encompassed by researches of Dr Mahabub Hossain and Dr Wahidudin Mahmud. However, the authors opine, "overall, it is fair to conclude that deregulation and trade liberalisation have been favourable for supporting a modest increase in real wages of unskilled workers throughout the economy"

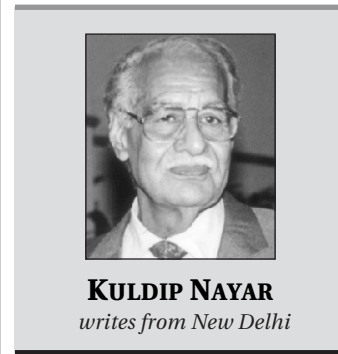
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adding further that agriculture lagged behind in the race not for liberalisation but for a lack of it. The inequality question was duly on board. The authors agreed that increase in income inequality reduced the poverty impact of growth but that could be averted appreciably had public sector been more sensitive to push for more pro-poor growth by supporting investment in agricultural policies. The authors found the argument of "deindustrialisation 'unfounded'" as "notwithstanding the contraction of inefficient protected industries, overall manufacturing output grew much more rapidly in the 1990s than in earlier periods. Also, manufacturing employment and wages of unskilled workers grew significantly". Given the empirics and the analytical discourse at their disposal, the authors landed, not surprisingly perhaps, with a faster pace of liberalisation rather than trade protection.

**Epilogue** In a recently held seminar on South Asian Trade Regimes, organised by the BIDS and the World Bank, one paper observed a negative relationship between trade liberalisation and Bank economists on the plea that growth is determined by a volley of variables and trade liberalisation is just one of the factors. The same reasoning would, perhaps, rule over the present research. To corner the critics, more rigorous econometric exercises are needed to drive home the point that Bangladesh benefitted from trade liberalisation. I personally feel so but fail to establish. Till that regression results come, we have to bank on World Bank's observations. Undoubtedly, a post liberalisation period is better as far as the movements of the indicators are concerned.

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**Commissions and omissions****KULDEEP NAYYAR**  
*writes from New Delhi*

**I**T was Question Hour in the Rajya Sabha, India's upper house. Members stood up one after another to lament the absence of action against those who had killed 3,000 Sikhs in the first week of November some 19 years ago. Home Minister I. K. Advani admitted in reply that the guilty had got away without any punishment. The house was angry. The Congress benches were embarrassed because the killings had taken place in the wake of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination on October 31 a few days earlier. Many considered it a revenge of sorts against the community whose three security guards at her residence had shot her dead.

Yet, the Rajya Sabha wanted to know why none had been punished even after several years, more so why the administration had failed to give the Sikhs any protection. A one-man commission was appointed under the chairmanship of Justice Nanavati, a retired Supreme Court judge, to probe.

I think neither the government nor the commission understood the real purport of the MPs' irritation. They wanted a commission, somewhat on

the lines of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission appointed in South Africa, to know why the Apartheid rule lasted so long and why thousands of people were killed whose only fault was that they were black. Top white leaders volunteered to pour their heart out.

The Nanavati commission should have worked in the same way. It should have provided a forum to those who wanted to have the guilt off their chest, the catharsis for the perpetration of killings. If assured that their

statements would not be used as a testimony against them, many Hindu leaders might have come forward to tell the truth.

After a lapse of nearly two decades, when every bit of evidence has almost disappeared, the commission's aim should have been to know why the Sikhs as a community were targeted. The constitution says that the Sikhs are Hindus. Even otherwise, they have blood relationship. In Punjab, the tradition in many Hindu families has been to make their eldest son a Sikh. With such ties, why the crime of the security guards visited on the community? Even the most distinguished and liberal Sikh writer, Khushwant Singh, had to seek shelter

at the Swedish embassy. Not many came to the rescue of their Sikh neighbours or their friends. Why all bonds broke off when the fanatics took to the streets?

It is true that weeks before Mrs Gandhi's assassination, there were killings and lootings of

Hindus in Punjab, primarily by the militants under the guidance of Bhindranwale, a fundamentalist at Amritsar. Was the pogrom at Delhi an expression of the anger which had

through the back door and still not welcomed. I threw open the front gate. I expected protest from the commission's security officers who prodded even Scotland Yard to threaten the withdrawal of its policemen posted at India House. But I never imagined indignation on the part of secretaries to the Government of India. Their committee sent me a telegram: "It was felt that our High Commission in London should be cautioned against his open-door policy as it increased the

threat to the High Commission and to its personnel."

This indicated how even the passage of time had not lessened the suspicion of topmost bureaucrats against the Sikhs. I had expected the bureaucracy to make amends for the wrong it had done to the entire community. The 1984 killings would not have probably taken place if by the bureaucracy, including the police, had risen above bias. The army was not called for two days reportedly to give time to the rioters who were confident that the police would look to the other side when they would be busy doing the "job." The Nanavati commission has been given an extension of another six months. It can take more time but it

must set its sails right. At present it is covering more or less the same ground which the earlier commissions have done. It has served notices to 14 persons, including some top Congress leaders, to appear before it. Similar notices have been sent earlier. Locating the guilty is important but more important is to know why they were harassed even at as distant places as Indore, Patna and Jamshepur?

The reason why it is necessary for the Nanavati commission to go deeper

into the rioting is the religious temperament which looks like building up. The Sikh clergy is at it again. A conglomerate of fringe Sikh organisations met at Chandigarh last week to oppose the Akalis who control the guardwars. There is once again a danger of the same thinking taking roots: religion can be mixed with politics. This sort of inclination has landed the state in trouble many a time before. A resolution on Khalistan was placed before the fringe organisations which they rightly

rejected. But why some elements are at their old game, trying to disturb Punjab, the most peaceful state in the country?

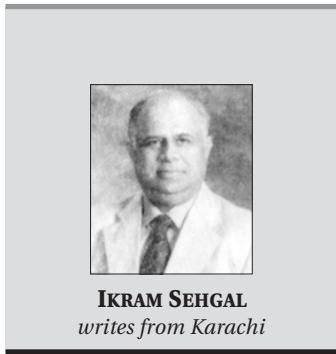
Back to the basic question: why the

Sikh community feels that it is safe within the particular borders? And is there no obligation on the majority to see that the Sikhs, who are only two per cent of the population, feel their security lies in the unity of the panth? If Nanavati commission can propose how to rebuild confidence among the Sikhs, its report would be worth all the delay. The community would also like to know where it went wrong to invite the wrath of Hindus.

The oft-repeated question remains: why Operation Bluestar was launched? True, Bhindranwale had made the Golden Temple a state within the state of Punjab. Was there no way other than a military operation to flush out those who did not number more than 350 and who were armed with a few light machine guns, hand grenades, .303 rifles of World War I vintage and an old bazooka? The answer to such questions may help Nanavati commission to get at the truth.

So far the commission's sittings are mundane, without purpose. My own experience confirms this. I appeared before the commission one year ago. All the questions were directed at what I saw, the killing or the looting. I had not seen either. I said nothing on the subject. But when I remarked that why politicians behind the killings were not being exposed, there was silence. The record of my testimony sent for authentication to me has not been picked up till today? Does it indicate negligence or a pre-planned report that may not find fault with politicians?

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**A votary of citizens' rights****IKRAM SEHGAL**  
*writes from Karachi*

**W**HILE the fundamental rights of every citizen is enshrined in the Constitution, it is very rarely that more than lip-service is given to these. Essentially these rights are called freedoms e.g. freedom of free speech, freedom of worship, etc. Every regime claims that its main reason for existence is to protect the basic rights of the common man, in actual fact all governments without exception allow far less freedoms than that guaranteed under the Constitution. Instead of being sacrosanct and complete, the quantum of these freedoms vary with the regime in power, more particularly depending upon the man in charge. That is the paradox that those who struggle for citizens' rights have to solve, how to make the rulers separate the institutionalised freedoms from individual cynosure and that it is wrong

as well to apply different measures to various freedoms. There is another complication, even if the man (or woman) at the very top generates sincere goodwill for the basic rights of every citizen, is the mechanism of governance that he manages strong enough to withstand manipulation lesser by managers in government down the line, with or without the knowledge of the person at the apex of authority?

To provide awareness to citizens about their rights Air Marshal (Retd) Asghar Khan, alongwith a few like-minded citizens, established the Society of Citizens' Rights (SCR) in 1997 as a non-profit and non-governmental organisation. SCR is dedicated to the citizens of Pakistan, its basic function is to ensure and protect the freedom and basic rights as articulated under the Constitution of Pakistan, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the Human Rights Conventions of the United Nations. The Society provides a neutral platform for citizens to discuss national issues of social, economic and political concern, believing that there is an urgent need to create awareness amongst the citizens of Pakistan about the social problems they face through seminars, workshops and publications. The underlying idea is to encourage debate in organised fora and disseminate the proceedings of the discussions to concerned citizens. There is open cynicism among

our youth for the role played by their elders in sustaining moral and ethical values inculcating the citizens' basic rights. This cynicism has to be addressed.

The Board of Governors of SCR believe that SCR aims can be accomplished by adhering to a set of objectives, viz (1) create awareness amongst the people of Pakistan about the social problems facing the country

with a view to improving the quality of life for the people, (2) create public awareness through seminars, workshops, publications and coverage in the media, (3) provide every citizen the right to easy access to affordable and quick justice, (4) provide every citizen the right to an effective and transparent political system, i.e. elections, passing of bills in the parliament etc, (5) bring about maximum decentralisation of executive and administrative powers of the government, (6) create a greater degree of accountability for members

of the executive, legislative and judiciary councils, (7) create equal opportunities for women to play their role in society without discrimination, (8) freedom to worship, (9) give every citizen the right to easily access education, (10) alleviate poverty, (11) provide access to information and freedom of expression, (12) hold opinion polls to elicit public opinion on social, economic and political

objectives. Late Omar Asghar Khan was a genuine social worker extraordinary, he went the extra mile in promoting what he strongly believed in.

Since its formation SCR has organised various Seminars in Islamabad on, viz (1) "Corruption and Accountability" (Dec 19, 1997) and "Kalabagh Dam and Alternatives" (May 16, 1998) in collaboration with Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, (2)

issues, (13) enlist the support of government and other agencies in such a manner and in such programmes that may promote the objectives of SCR (14) develop contacts with development organisations both in the country and abroad for sharing knowledge, experience and technology and (15) execute business to become self-supporting.

It may be pertinent to note that the son of the Founder-Chairman Air Marshal (Retd) Asghar Khan, played a major role in formulating the objectives and then acting on these

confined itself to conducting public forums, publications, coalition building and research studies. To that end the Society has also published a report on "Mapping of Civil Society Organisations in Pakistan" which includes a directory (profiling) of 131 Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) which are covering major urban areas of four provinces of Pakistan. This is an important document as it provides credibility to genuine organisations in the field. As a part of its research work, SCR has also conducted an extremely interesting and impartial "Review of

"Rediscovering the Quaid's Vision" (July 31, 2000) and "Write-off of Foreign Debt" (August 19, 2000) in collaboration with The Asia Foundation and (3) "Role of Armed Forces in Politics" in collaboration with FNS and The Asia Foundation on December 16, 2000. The activity reports on each Seminar have been written and circulated amongst relevant individuals and organisations. The Members of the Board of Governors have noted that there is a requirement to hold such Seminars in the four provincial capitals and other major

**AS I SEE IT**

Among the outstanding personalities who have stood up for citizens' rights in Pakistan over the years and have suffered for it, Air Marshal (Retd) Asghar Khan occupies a prominent pedestal, a position of pride. A man of great honour and integrity, his hallmark is decency and concern for his fellow citizens. He has struggled long and hard for democratic principles, not succumbing to the allure of high office to forsake them.

Under the collaborative programme of The Asia Foundation (the foundation) under Pakistan NGO Initiatives (PNI) to facilitate public dialogue and coalition building on topical issues relevant to establishing democratic politics and governance in Pakistan, SCR has also carried out a number of activities during August 2001 to June 2002. Till now, SCR has

the Election Commission's Code of Conduct".

Naturally activities of organisations like SCR require funding; such organisations cannot raise funds like normal charity organisations e.g. charity balls, walks, etc. Funds have to be specialised for specific event, donors will not give funds to organisations lacking credibility and purposeful intent. SCR has been fortunate that in support of its activities it has got funding from viz (1) The Asia Foundation and Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, (2) membership and other fee/dues prescribed by the Board of Governors of SCR, (3) donations/bequests received by SCR, (4) contribution from sources acceptable by the Board of Governors of SCR and (5) earnings of SCR which arise on account of its working. SCR appreciates funding from interested donor agencies for both specific and genial purpose.

Future plans of SCR include, viz (1) conducting one seminar per month or at least 10 seminars per year in Pakistan in collaboration with other Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the capital cities of all provinces of the country and Islamabad. The theme of the seminars, subject to the approval of the Board members, could be "right to education", "right to health" and "legal rights" etc (2) re-organisation of SCR by setting up working provincial chapters in each

provincial capital city, (3) publishing a monthly newsletter and (4) meeting with representatives of donor agencies and holding further consultative meetings with prominent citizens to discuss matters pertaining to SCR's future activities and funding.

Among the outstanding personalities who have stood up for citizens' rights in Pakistan over the years and have suffered for it, Air Marshal (Retd) Asghar Khan occupies a prominent pedestal, a position of pride. A man of great honour and integrity, his hallmark is decency and concern for his fellow citizens. He has struggled long and hard for democratic principles, not succumbing to the allure of high office to forsake them. A daring man, his finest moment came in his hour of supreme grief, in coping with the loss of his beloved and illustrious son Omar. If my tears did not come when I went to Abbottabad to condole with the family, they certainly came later at perceiving the stoic dignity in which he, his wife and Omar's family conducted themselves. Of such mettle and character is greatness made! If the Society which the Air Marshal founded and nurtured can even partly inculcate in themselves his wisdom, strength of character and sincerity, the lofty aims and objectives set out by the Board of Governors can be fulfilled.

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