

Death in police firing

Shocking and avoidable

It is not only regrettable but also reprehensible that seven people were killed in police firing on a crowd that was expressing their grievances against rural electrification service in a certain area. It is all the more unfortunate because a similar incident had caused the death of two persons at the same spot early this month.

Whatever may have been the compulsions of the police, the killings should and could have been avoided with some judicious and deft handling of the situation by the law enforcing agencies and the local administration.

It is also with a degree of trepidation that we notice a trend in violent expression of grievances particularly against any erratic performance of public service providers. There must be some internal mechanism to sort these problems out before these erupt into a violent form.

While the public have the right to ventilate their grievances, the authorities should be sensitive to the need for correcting wrongs whenever pointed out, in good time. What happened in Kamsat the other day only highlighted the authorities' lack of anticipation since this was the second incident related to the matter of overcharge by the REB and also the local samity's failure to provide the service as committed by them. We cannot understand why should the authorities have charged flat rate for services regardless of whether these were provided or not? We ask why the killing in Kamsat on 4 January this year not addressed promptly and why if the demands of the public were genuine these were not redressed in good time to avoid the subsequent incident?

Not only do we demand that there is a thorough investigation into the killings, it is also important to find out why it occurred at all.

Let's not forget REB is a success story which needs to be only taken forward.

ACC's consultative meetings welcome

The outcome should be translated into action

THE embattled Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) may have given itself a sense of self-esteem after taking a brunt of public criticism for being a non-starter, painfully long enough. Apparently, it has found a niche at Chittagong port. Its corruption prevention approach has had a constraining effect on the free-for-all wheeling and dealing at the premier port of the country.

ACC chief Justice Sultan Hossain Khan's application of a consultative method in the series of meetings he has been holding with the stakeholders viz representatives of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry, shipping agents, clearing and forwarding agents has proved useful. With the outcome of such interaction in his hand, he then had the ACC team meet the officials of Chittagong customs and port authorities. At the end of the interactive consultative process, the ACC, the stakeholders and users were able to evolve a set of decisions whereby they seem equipped now to try and curb corruption and irregularities in the port.

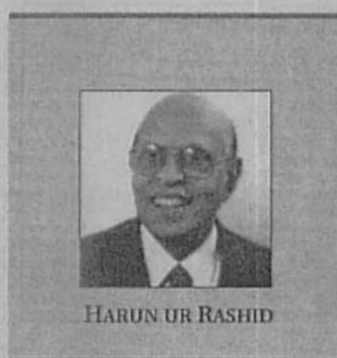
It has been our firm belief that effective coordination between users and operators on the one hand, and that between the stakeholders and the governing authorities on the other is key to increasing efficiency of the port as well as to the containment of corruption and irregularities by a system of check and balance.

The ACC chairman has promised to monitor the activities at Chittagong port through a vigilance team as intelligence agencies kept round-the-clock watch over the loopholes through which corruption and malpractice are spawning.

The most effective anti-dote to the malaise, however, would be introduction of an automation system which will help successfully avert the highly distracting phenomenon of the parties blaming each other for corruption and irregularities. It is heartening that the suggestion has come from insiders: the stakeholders and customs and port officials.

We are now interested in seeing the decisions implemented.

Does our foreign policy meet the challenges of the time?



HARUN UR RASHID

FOREIGN policy is never static. It has to adjust with the changing situation of domestic and external factors. Foreign policy may not only consist of responses to events but is geared for possible responses to likely events on the regional and global landscape. Response to events is not based on a knee-jerk reaction but a thought-through process ahead of events.

In other words, foreign policy is pro-active and is ready ahead of time with policy options on what may occur on the regional and global scene and its impact on the country.

A country's foreign policy cannot be separated from its domestic policies, as both are the two sides of the same coin. Both aim to achieve improvement of quality of life for the people.

The foreign policy of a country has to take into account its geography, history, natural resources, size of population, stage of economic development, culture, and religion. Policymakers in Bangladesh naturally assess the country's strength and weakness, and opportunity for and threat to Bangladesh in the light of the hard realities.

There is a saying that foreign policy begins at the frontiers. Geography has placed Bangladesh with India and Myanmar as neighbours. Bangladesh cannot change this fact. Bangladesh is surrounded on three sides by India. It is a small size territory (4.38 per cent approximately of the size of India) with 140 million (about 12 per cent of India's population) people. Furthermore, India is a regional power and big powers have acknowledged it. Bangladesh has to live with this hard reality.

It is often said that Bangladesh should pursue an "independent" foreign policy. Independence in foreign policy is a misconceived term. No country can get rid of regional environment and limitations. The world is inter-dependent, inter-penetrated, and inter-connected, and inter-governmental organizations continue to play an increasing role in

the international order. States are bound by rules and commitments made in the larger interest of global law and order.

Viewed from this perspective, sovereignty of states is not unfettered and is limited by rules of international law. For example, a state cannot perpetrate cruelties on its nationals in such a way as to deny their fundamental rights, and humanitarian intervention is legally permissible. The corollary of this doctrine is that no country can pursue an "independent" foreign policy in the inter-dependent world. What is possible is to pursue a policy to maintain political independence, free from foreign interference or interven-

tion. The term "national interest" is often used in international relations. It is a generic term and is variable. What constitutes "national interest" today may not remain permanent in future, depending on internal and external situations. No country is either a permanent friend or enemy and what is permanent is to advance its national interest. One of the pillars of national interests is to ensure that no country, especially its neighbour, remains unfriendly to Bangladesh.

No country is free from foreign manipulation or pressure. This is more so when a small country does not have the same security perception as that of a big neighbour. All countries have intelligence outfits and they are used among other things for espionage, sabotage, disinformation, subversion, and terrorist activities. Foreign influence is to be addressed with resources and counter-intelligence.

What Bangladesh can achieve and cannot achieve will have to be considered on an objective assessment of its geo-political factors. It is of no use to have an impractical or idealistic vision that cannot be implemented, given Bangladesh's constraints of resources, military and economic power, and its physical location on the eastern fringe of South Asia, bordering the northeastern states of India and Myanmar.

At the dawn of the 21st century, Russia and European Union, as a counterpoint to the US in the coming decades.

(iv) Although there is a rivalry, China and India are increasingly tied up as strategic partners in economic cooperative efforts. Both are hungry for energy and look out opportunities in hydrocarbons sector to meet their insatiable demands.

(v) Both China and India are keen to integrate their economies with that of Asean. Their participation in the last December East Asia Summit in Kuala Lumpur demonstrates this fact.

(vi) Asean wants access to big markets of China and India.

Bangladesh is confronted with the changing pattern of geo-political scenario, and some of these deserve mention:

(i) India and Japan are being viewed by the US as counter-weight to contain China's dominance in the Asia Pacific region.

(ii) Indian Ocean is gradually getting militarised by many of its littoral states as part of their security. Many states have established military infrastructure projects that are intended for power projection.

(iii) Both China and India are not comfortable with the existence of only one superpower in international arena. They want a multipolar world and may join with

glue that binds cooperative bilateral relations between a small and a big neighbour in Europe.

Third, the game of blaming other countries for its failures and inactions is counter-productive and will not impress outside powers any more. Gone are the days when a weak country can put powerful countries against one another, for instance Afghanistan played US against Soviet Union during the Cold War period.

Fourth, as a self-respecting nation, Bangladesh has to take responsibility for its actions and failures within its borders. For instance, why hasn't Bangladesh taken steps to manage water resources projects within its borders? Why has the Ganges Barrage project, conceived in 1977 or the Farakka-Paksi-Mawa project, been gathering dust for so long?

Bangladesh has certain rights under international law on the utilization of waters of common rivers and to obtain those rights, Bangladesh has to develop its projects to assert its rights. It is of no use to accuse others for Bangladesh's failures in developing and implementing water resources projects.

Fifth, it is well understood that Bangladesh will continue to maintain friendly relations with Islamic countries, given the majority of the population is Muslim (88 per cent). However, Bangladesh's exports that go to Islamic countries constitute only 3.76 per cent in 2002-03. Apart from sentiments, trade is the

Some fundamentals of foreign policy

Some of the fundamentals deserve mention as follows:

First, a region is constituted with group of states tied together with similar climate, history, culture and language. Geographical contiguity of states leads naturally to regional cooperation which constitutes one of the foundations of foreign policy.

Second, at the time of India's rise to industrial power, Bangladesh should be seriously examine whether it should be a strategic partner with India. The decision however depends on assessment of Bangladesh's gains and losses. This is a delicate task of balancing act for policy makers.

It is noted that the disparity in the size of economies of Bangladesh and India has implica-

tions for the distribution of gains on each country. One needs to consider the fact that Bangladesh may gain more than India in some area, while reverse may be the case in other area. It is the total gain that has to be assessed for Bangladesh.

The asymmetry in gains is nothing new between a small and big neighbour. There are many instances where a small neighbour has maintained cooperative and beneficial relations with its big neighbour (for instance, Switzerland and France; Czech Republic or Austria and Germany. Although such examples may not provide a neat formula for Bangladesh, it is necessary to examine and analyse what is the

glue that strengthens bilateral relations.

Other relevant questions are: does Bangladesh get more favourable treatment from Islamic countries than non-Muslim countries do? Do Bangladeshis working in the Islamic countries get fair and decent treatment from the authorities? Where do they invest their billions of petrodollars? How many heads of states of Islamic countries have visited Bangladesh during the last 34 years? (Saudi Arabia's King is expected to visit India in near future). Relationship is not a one-way street. It needs both sides to equally reciprocate to consolidate relations.

Sixth, economic globalization

foreign resident diplomatic missions and international organisations in the country are not silent spectators. They write analytical reports to their authorities on the state of affairs in the country.

Whatever Bangladesh missions overseas do or say, they may not be credible to the outside because the picture on the ground does not tally with the sanitized version of the facts, dished through missions abroad. Such efforts degenerate into government propaganda and are self-defeating.

Ninth, as part of diplomacy, informal or Track II diplomacy seems to be the norm when issues or inter-state disputes are too politically sensitive for officials to negotiate. Track II dialogue consists of specialists or retired officials who are able to discuss candidly issues or disputes in their private capacities with a view to resolving them.

The function of Track II diplomacy is to bring out the essential points of a dispute in an objective manner. When the points are analysed, states may be able to see through much clearer the fundamental points of a dispute and it helps to come to terms with one another.

Track II diplomacy is not a substitute for negotiations at a governmental level but aims to supplement the efforts by the officials. It is hardly seen that Bangladesh has used Track II diplomacy to iron out differences or disputes with its neighbours.

Foreign policy does not confine itself to political and diplomatic relations with other countries. It covers the entire gamut of external relations in areas, such as trade, foreign aid, foreign direct investment, water resources management and exploitation of natural resources.

Despite improvement in socio-economic sectors in the country, Bangladesh continues to suffer a negative image internationally. This is primarily because of the current confrontational domestic politics in the country. Furthermore, neglect in creation of Ombudsman, ineffective anti-corruption machinery and lack of good governance only work to destroy some of the gloss over the social and economic gains in the country.

Bangladesh cannot ignore the emerging geo-political scenario and must be prepared to re-cast its foreign policy so as to be relevant and appropriate to meet the challenges.

Barister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

BOTTOM LINE

What Bangladesh can achieve and cannot achieve will have to be considered on an objective assessment of its geo-political factors. It is of no use to have an impractical or idealistic vision that cannot be implemented, given Bangladesh's constraints of resources, military and economic power, and its physical location on the eastern fringe of South Asia, bordering the northeastern states of India and Myanmar.

Who's really lifting the economy?

MURAD QURESHI

WHILE the NGOs gets all the attention in the international development field in Dhaka, there is a group of people who are more reliable than the politicians who make the right noises and the businesses that invest in the developing world.

They are the migrants workers sending money back to their families. Many of them are often the cleaners, mini-cab drivers and waiters serving the developed world economies. Something that has only recently been acknowledged by the World Bank and the Department for International Development (DFID) in the UK but not by the international development NGOs like Oxfam.

Migrants around the world send home \$167 billion each year - with £2.7 billion coming from Britain alone last year -- this has grown so quickly that according to the World Bank it is now more than twice the size of the world's development spending. The World Bank calls this migration "a powerful force for poverty reduction" with the money coming from an estimated 200 million people now living in countries where they were not born.

DFID recognises that these remittances are hugely important for people on low incomes in the developing countries and this money plays a huge role in promoting international development and fighting poverty. This puts into context who's doing what for the developing world and because it is not sexy enough it's the untold story of international development.

And by doing two things we can make this money work even harder for the developing countries. Firstly, as the World Bank and DFID emphasise, we can reduce the high cost of sending money "back home" and secondly, the developed world could give tax relief so that their international development contributions match their remittances -- given that they are addressing poverty better than our aid programs are.

In recent times there has been concern over the alleged security surrounding the unofficial flows. But what better way to make these flows official than by giving tax

It is estimated that 2 million Bangladeshis live and work outside the country and send back \$3.8 billion. Furthermore the migrants remittances have been historically larger than the elusive business investment into the country. The formal flows of almost \$4 billion in 2004 was some 6 per cent of GDP and more than 3 times greater than foreign aid.

relief breaks which don't involve a lot of bureaucracy. Moreover these flows are often greater than the official flows of aid. In 2004-5 the UK's Bangladeshi community sent back almost \$300 million -- largely in response to floods in August. That's more than twice the official aid that flows from the UK to Bangladesh, and that pattern is repeated time and again across other ethnic communities in the developed world.

But the UK Bangladeshis are only one part of the story. It is estimated that 2 million Bangladeshis live and work outside the country and send back \$3.8 billion. Furthermore the migrants remittances have been historically larger than the elusive business investment into the country. The formal flows of almost \$4 billion in 2004 was some 6 per cent of GDP and more than 3 times greater than foreign aid.

The World Bank Annual Global Economic Prospects Report of 2006 suggests that remittance

inflows into Ghana have helped cut its poverty level by 5 per cent, Bangladesh by 6 per cent, and Uganda by 11 per cent. In addition, remittances appear to help households maintain their consumption levels in the face of economic shocks and adversity. Remittances help increase household income, provide investment in education and health and bolster entrepreneurship. It's not surprising to see that two of the biggest recipients of remittances in the world at present are the world's next two economic superpowers, India and China, with both receiving just over \$20 billion annually.

The questions this poses is how to make it easier and cheaper to send back monies and how can we match these flows in official aid budgets, particularly as they are known to directly cut poverty and contribute to emerging economies.

But there is another side to the coin, what are developing countries receiving the remittances

doing? Well if you look at the third biggest recipient of remittances, Mexico with just over \$18 billion coming annually, predominately from the US, the government at both the national and federal levels is matching their contributions dollar for dollar. So every dollar sent from the US, gets another \$2 dollars from the Mexican government, particularly in infrastructural investment like roads.

In the meantime, the Indian Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs, Oscar Fernandes is giving voting rights for overseas citizens of India on a new basis, overseas citizenship though not dual citizenships. This would give 1.5 million Indians in the UK political rights in India and making them a force to reckon with which the Indian government welcome, as the Indians appreciate that is not a zero sum game and will greatly help the investment climate in their economy. It will offer them the right to invest in property in India, which is barred and least we

forget, visa stickers on their foreign passport allowing them lifelong visa-free travel to India.

Despite or maybe because of political stunts in the developed world nothing much changes, as evidenced from the G8 summit in Edinburgh on debt, aid and trade. The campaigners wanted the unpayable debts of the world's poorest countries cancelled. But in reality the debt relief between now and 2008 will go to Iraq and Nigeria.

The campaign urged \$29 billion more aid per year. Within months the US said it was unsure it would commit itself and European finance ministers also backtracked, especially France and Italy. And as for trade, it became clear at the World Trade Organisation talks in Hong Kong that the main trading blocs are years away from agreeing a deal to cut subsidies and lower tariffs for the poorest countries in the world.

But as many developing countries governments now know, the people you can really rely on to dig deep into their pockets are the migrant workers. This puts in context, who's actually doing what for the developing world.

Clir Murad Qureshi AM is a councillor in the London Assembly.

OPINION

The appalling state of the office of the CEC

SHAMSHER CHOWDHURY

I have been closely following the unfolding of events at the office of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC). The more I probe into it the more agitated I become. What really annoys me is that whenever something goes wrong with any of our high profile public institutions, without exception every one hastens to blame the Administration; office of the CEC is no exception. The media has all the stories as to how the Administration has desecrated the institution alongside the Opposition who have also become hyperactive, and demanding the removal of the CEC etc. All this is fine and I too say that something should be done about it, sooner than later. But what I fail to under-

stand is that each and every one carefully sidetracks the issue of the burden of the guilt, which rests also on the shoulders of the officials concerned or individuals involved.

I am unable to understand, as to why people who have been otherwise "successful" prior to their taking up such assignments, involve themselves in such controversial acts, which do cast aspersions on the moral and ethical fibers of their character. What is it that makes them stand through such insult and hatred by the public at large? I guess these people know no better. The ruling Coalition may have this purpose of allegedly using the Commission to gain advantage during the forthcoming elections but surely these high profile officials do

The turmoil at the office of the CEC persists. None in the governmental circles, neither the CE of the Administration nor the President of the country appears to be least interested in resolving the standoff and streamlining the messy affairs prevailing at the office of the CEC. I find it absurd. The crisis must be resolved.

realise that in due course they would be simply thrown into the dustbin of history as adversary of democracy and into oblivion. One wonders as to what prompts them to cling to their offices. Are they driven by those compulsive factors that cause hunger for raw power and authority at all costs? It's also a reflection of a kind of cheap and poor mindset. On the other hand I believe if they were to resign today they would become heroes in the eyes of the entire nation. I keep thinking and ask

myself: would not they be happier and better off living and passing their time in the comforts of their homes with families? I guess I am being naïve. Some one once tried to explain to me that, chaos, confusion, high tensions and insults are essential ingredients in the lives of people to keep them going to overcome that! Maybe.

The whole nation is shocked and mystified by the total disarray at the office of the CEC while none other than the CEC chose to be away from his office on grounds

that are shrouded in mystery and confusion. I am not a politician and certainly have no intention of being one ever. It is ridiculous to find that the honourable CEC had not been "even in talking terms" with two of his Commissioners and then suddenly becomes active and calls for a meeting of the entire group of four inclusive of the two who joined the Commission only the other day. I find the entire squabble resembling some cheap and petty dispute with an honourable judge

being at the center of it all! I also shudder to think as to how a newly elected Commissioner on the very first day of assumption of his office term the high court directive on the preparation of the new voter list as "unlawful"? To say the least, the manner in which the CEC is conducting his business is obnoxious. I often wonder could it be a reflection on the capabilities of the honourable Judge. I wish it is not.

While I am thinking about the office of our CEC my mind also

shudders back to the parallel institution in neighboring India. Ever heard anything otherwise of its former chief, Mr. T.N. Seshan who left a permanent impression on the minds of the people of India as the very symbol of courage, honesty, fairplay and justice? I wonder as to what legacy our CEC and his office will leave behind?

The working of the office of the CEC has also damaged the image of judiciary as it continues to flout court orders. Clearly in recent times the CEC has flouted court orders and directives on more than one occasion.

The turmoil at the office of the CEC persists. None in the governmental circles, neither the CE of the Administration nor the President of the country appears to be least interested in resolving

the standoff and streamlining the messy affairs prevailing at the office of the CEC. The entire Administration seems hell bent upon in bending one of the key organs of the Constitution and in the process leave behind a failed legacy, the burden of which has to be borne not just by us but also by our future generations. I wonder are the heads of our government and state are suffering from the illusion that, by not making a move in resolving the debacle at the CEC's office they are being perceived as neutral? If so they are sadly mistaken. The entire crisis is certainly also the result of moral and ethical failings of its key players more than anything else. I find it absurd. The crisis must be resolved.

Shamsher Chowdhury is a freelance contributor.