

Opposition rally under attack

Why this application of force?

WE condemn the police charge on the opposition demonstrators on Mirpur Road and Dhanmondi Road 27 on Sunday, which resulted in more than 100 people being injured, including some front ranking politicians of the 14-party opposition alliance. The police were apparently trying to thwart the alliance's plan to lay siege to the Election Commission Secretariat, but the way they set about achieving this goal looked overtly and senselessly aggressive.

The police turned their ire not only on the opposition activists, but also on innocent people. Reportedly a pregnant woman was severely beaten up and a clinic was teargassed, as police committed all sorts of excesses in their attempt to break up the opposition demonstrations. It has been a sad repetition of the brutal application of force that law enforcers have been opting for while facing opposition rallies and processions in the recent years.

We strongly feel that the opposition must be allowed to organise their programmes within the ambit of a democratic culture as long as they are non-violent and peaceful. Otherwise, the biggest casualty will be democracy itself. Even when police intervention is needed to avoid a descent to chaos, there are better ways of handling such situations. The police must try to contain, and not confront, the agitators, for that seldom serves the purpose of maintaining law and order.

Having fully accepted the opposition's right to organise peaceful rallies and voice its legitimate grievances, we would like to say that the opposition parties should carefully weigh the situation that is created by any programme obstructing movement of people. The inconvenience that people face has to be taken into consideration. How responsible or sensible was it on their part to basically create a traffic jam? The traffic on Mirpur Road, a major artery in the city's communication system, remained blocked which could only mean insurmountable difficulties for a huge number of commuters. Could the political parties think of a designated place in the city for holding rallies which would cause much less dislocation?

We once again condemn the police excess and brutality and reiterate our belief that the opposition must be given space for peaceful demonstration and dissent.

A noble gesture

Shining example for the rest of us

THE decision made by Prothom Alo editor Matur Rahman to donate his Ramon Magsaysay award money to charity was a gesture of tremendous generosity and largeness of character and shows that the spirit of nobility and self-sacrifice in the cause of the common good is alive and well in Bangladesh.

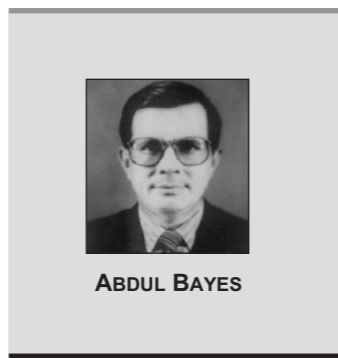
We live in difficult and often dispiriting times with daily evidence of the propensity of people to put their own self-interest or that of their family or their political party first. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that the biggest problem the country faces right now is that too many people are too willing to sacrifice the national interest for their own narrow gain.

But this is not the whole story. Bangladesh is also filled with millions of folk who wake up every day and toil in obscurity and for little reward to make this country a better place. We owe everything we are to these unsung heroes who work tirelessly and selflessly for the betterment of the country and this is why we have made the advances that we have and what gives us hope for a bright future.

Matur Rahman's gesture is an inspiration for such people. The amount of money that he has donated to charity is not insignificant by any means. Tk 33 lakh would be a lot of money for a businessman or industrialist, but for a newspaper editor who has spent his entire working life in the profession, and whose humility and modesty of living is well known to all, it is monumental act of generosity.

We take special pride in the fact that Matur Rahman is a leading light of the journalistic community and feel that his act of generosity brings credit to the entire profession. Matur Rahman is an exemplar of all that is best in the country and in the profession. He has done all of us proud and reminded us that with more people like him that there is nothing we cannot achieve as a nation. Moti Bhai, we salute you and are proud to be associated with you.

Land for lads and literacy for ladies?



ABDUL BAYES

THE book that I am reading now: "Land and Schooling: Transferring Wealth across Generations" has been published jointly by The Johns Hopkins University Press Limited and the International Food Policy Research Institute in 2004. Authored by A.R. Quisumbing, J.P. Estudillo, and K. Osaka, the book aims to delve deep into the factors that affect the distribution of land inheritance and schooling between men and women across generations. They also envisage examining the consequences thereupon for the distribution of income and consumption expenditures within the household.

The analysis is based on household surveys in selected rural communities of the Philippines, Sumatra in Indonesia, and Western Ghana. I have an intention to reach my readers with most of the observations of the authors -- as they are pertinent and pointed to policy making also in Bangladesh. But, for the sake of shortness of space today, allow me to submit, at times paraphrased, some of the observations drawn from the section on background and rationale of their research. It appeared to me relevant in the sense that the ongoing debate on gender equality could, perhaps, benefit from the empirics discussed in the book.

The bearing of the book

Particularly, the importance of the book to me lies in its linking of land inheritance and education to well-being. We heard much about the increasing role of female education

and its impact, but possibly, the least has been heard on land inheritance issue. Whereas, in rural areas, passing down land and providing an education are the main pillars through which parents pave the way for the future welfare of their children. Empirical evidence cited by the authors tends to show that, in terms of social and economic rights, gender biases in favour of men are less significant in Southeast Asia than in sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia. In much of Africa, for example, women have unequal access to land, more commonly gaining weak land rights through their husband upon marriage. Gender gaps in education portray a similar pattern: East Asia, Latin America, Europe, and Central Asia have the highest gender equality in education, South Asia has the lowest.

Determinants of decisions

In Southeast Asia, where farming is male labour intensive, parental preference in land inheritance may favour sons. Among the Ilocanos of Northern Philippines, for example, parents traditionally gave a portion of their land to the newly married son as gift. In the Ilocanos, the practice is both primogeniture and ultimogeniture. In the former case, the eldest child alone inherits parental property, while, in the latter situation, the youngest one is prized with paternal property. This, of course, depends on the availability of land. Compared to this, among the Llonggos of Panay Island in the middle Philippines, daughters and sons may receive land rights more equally and independently, although for land constrained

households, children who help the parents in farming receive more land than do their siblings.

In Indonesia traditionally land has been bequeathed from mother to daughters in a matrilineal inheritance system. Where rice and cinnamon production are equally male and female labour intensive, the share of land is equal. But in rubber and paddy fields, males get rubber lands and females paddy fields subject to the suitability of operations. The system at present is egalitarian rather than matrilineal.

The authors of the book hypothesize that emerging gender patterns in land acquisition and schooling respond to changing perceived opportunities available to adult men and women. Parents are careful in their choice of distribution of land and educational opportunities among children considering both their old age and the well-being of the children. The foremost consideration is the likely return from land and education and for male and female. It is being argued that in areas where market and social institutions reward male farmers and female human capital, parents allocated land to the lads and literacy i.e. education, to the ladies. It is also postulated that the gender difference in schooling is affected by the perception of the private returns to schooling. The costs of investing in schooling of girls who work longer hours for household activities may be higher because of higher opportunity costs of time. Although school fees are the same for both, distance is a disincentive to schooling of girls, as parents are concerned for security

of daughters and they have to pay for transportation as they do not want girls walking long distances.

Again, parents may consider investment in schooling of girls less attractive in the wake of women earning less than men and providing less support in old age. Empirical evidence cited by the authors shows that in both developed and developing countries females earn, on average, only 75 per cent as much as males. Ipso facto, parents may act on lower returns to daughters' education. In societies where women move to the households of their husbands, thus limiting the ability to transfer resources to parents, investment in daughters appears even less desirable.

The authors then wrote about several episodes including the attitude of teachers and parents in affecting schooling attainment. For example, teachers may think that girls are no good at mathematics or parents may think that schooling is more important for boys than for girls, holding other things constant. In the Philippines, in contrast and according to an ethnographic study, parental decisions are also affected by children's decisions. Philippine parents invest in the schooling of girls because they are more studious, patient, willing to sacrifice, and interested in studies, which are traits likely to earn success in schools. Boys, on the other hand, are more prone to vices such as drinking, and are fond of roaming around and playing with their barkada i.e. peer group.

Parental decisions regarding wealth transfers could impact upon

gender income inequality over time because returns to land and human capital are major components of rural household income. Greater access to land and increasing schooling might also empower women to bargain. More importantly, the distribution of income at household level between men and women has ramifications for other members and also for the society. Let us turn to that aspect.

Money and men

Men generally spend higher proportion of their income on tobacco and alcohol compared to women contributing larger share of income on food and children's health care. In Brazil, the effect of women's unearned income on child survival probabilities is almost 20 times that of men's unearned income. In Taiwan, women's income share has a significant positive effect on the budget shares allocated to staples and education and a negative effect on the budget share going to cigarettes and alcohol. Even in patriarchal societies such as in Bangladesh where women generally bring fewer assets to marriage and where husbands control most of the resources, women's assets have a positive effect on educational expenditures; they also reduce girls' rate of illness. It thus appears that differences in access to land and education by men and women could have important effects on the welfare of the household.

Leaving aside the private returns positively pointed to increased allocation of resources under women's control, empirical

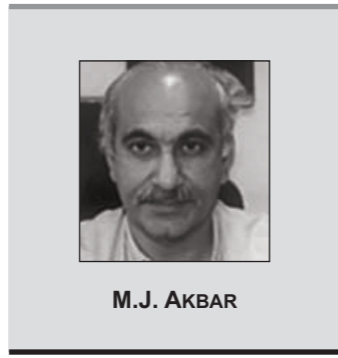
evidence also highlights the higher social returns from such increased access. For example, as cited in the book, Schultz argues that regions that have most successfully promoted equal education for men and women -- East Asia, Southeast Asia and Latin America -- also fared well in terms of economic and social development. This did not happen in South Asia and Africa. The other benefits of female education are reduced fertility and improvement in child survival. Empirical evidence shows that a three-year increase in the average schooling is associated with as much as one less child per woman. In countries where girls are only half as likely to go to school as boys, there are on average 21.1 more infant deaths per 1,000 live births than in countries with no gender gap. In addition, improvement in women's status also reduces child malnutrition. For example, 43 per cent of the total reduction in child malnutrition is adduced to increased women's education.

Concluding observation

In the above paragraphs, I have just given a background to the policy relevance of research undertaken by A.R. Quisumbing, J.P. Estudillo, and K. Osaka on land and schooling. The background and the rationale for research have been drawn from an arsenal of researches done before by various scholars and amply acknowledged by the authors. Hopefully, in our next installments, we shall highlight the results of their research as far as the sample areas are concerned.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

The quiet Indian



M.J. AKBAR

IF you want to hear the Indian story, listen to the sound of silence once the roar of the explosion has ebbed away into time.

India's weakness is institutional. We have not found the means, although doubtless there is the will, to prevent terrorist action of the most brutal sort, in the cavernous heart of our most vaunted cities, whether it is aimed at shoppers in a public bazaar in Delhi on the eve of Diwali or worshippers at the Sankatmochan temple in Varanasi. India's strength is the reaction. One is referring to the reaction of the people, for the reaction of the authorities is almost perfunctory: a lot of initial bustle, and then the hope that yet another tragedy will disappear, unwept, into the misery of dusty files. There is anger in the popular reaction, for only the supine do not get angry. But this anger does not degenerate into hysteria.

The terrorist has two objectives. The first is immediate: he seeks to leave pools of blood on the streets. The second is strategic and perhaps more important: he seeks to lace the lines, the thin lines that separate communities, with poison. The Indian people know that communal

Poverty feeds violence, and subsistence-level poverty is still the fate of four hundred million Indians. Communal anger is always hovering as a menace over stability, its noxious fumes wafted by despair. This too is shrouded in silence, but it is a different kind of silence. The story of India can be heard in both kinds of silence.

peace is the best answer to vicious terrorism, and the only way to frustrate the strategic design.

A self-proclaimed separatist group from Kashmir has claimed responsibility for the terrorism in Varanasi. The simple response is that the future of Kashmir cannot be determined by injecting fear in Varanasi. Those who think they can weaken the resolve of India do not understand the depth of India. This depth is not just geographical and demographic; India also has great reserves of psychological depth. That is what both Hindus and Muslims of Varanasi displayed when they were tested.

The test is becoming more difficult of course. There has been what might be called a fundamental change in the level of provocation. There is nothing new about Hindu-Muslim tension. Where there is a relationship, whether individual or collective, there will be both amity and the occasional spot of tension. Islam came to India through merchants and traders from the earliest days of the new faith, as it did later to South-East Asia, and Muslim communities appeared not only along the coast of Gujarat and Kerala but also in the interior cities of the North. Since then Hindus and Muslims have interacted commercially, socially -- and politically. The first Arab-Muslim armies appeared in Sind in 711, the

same year that the western momentum took Arab armies into Spain. But while Spain fell comparatively easily, the expansion of what might be called political space froze in the deserts of Sind. The Thakur principalities of Rajasthan, Punjab and Afghanistan maintained their power for another four centuries until Pritiviraj was defeated in the second battle of Tarain (Pritiviraj won the first battle of Tarain).

The story of kings is different from the narratives of people. The communal riot in its present manifestation is, by and large, a phenomenon of post-feudal India. Its causes form a pattern from the trivial to the significant, but are familiar enough to suggest that it is more often fomented rather than natural. What is undoubtedly true is that politics has been a principal agent provocateur, including the politics of democracy.

But whatever the cause, popular conflict very rarely extended to attacks on places of worship or deities: there was a sense that the sacred should be kept above conflict. This is not completely true, but it is largely correct. But the violence of terrorism is significantly different: it is aimed as much against the sacred as it is against the people. It does not require a degree in nuclear physics to appreciate that the Sankatmochan temple in

Varanasi was selected in order to incite Hindu anger against Muslims, and inspire perhaps a Gujarat-style reaction. The variance is another clue in the argument that this attack has been planned by un-Indian if not non-Indian elements.

What the people preserve, so often the government manages to squander.

Let me note a second institutional weakness: the remarkable tendency of governments to sound triumphalist long before any real victory is evident on the nearest horizon. The trumpets are always out to herald a mirage. In Delhi, a mirage is neither a desert phenomenon nor a fighter plane; it is a working philosophy, a way of life.

For a few weeks now it has been commonplace to hear, including from Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, that Indian Muslims have rejected violence thanks to the therapeutic virtues of Indian democracy. As a proposition it has the merit of not only being virtuous but also broadly accurate. But what is largely true should not be misconstrued as being wholly true. There is also the danger that someone with an agenda might want to prove the opposite. But it seemed that this proposition was not put into circulation accidentally, or only because it was true. President George Bush's entourage joined this catchism in preparation

of their leader's visit to India. While this was of course a just and justified tribute to India, it was also part of the wider discourse to sell the future of Iraq as a democracy and thereby to rationalise the occupation of Iraq. President Bush is searching for democracy these days in Iraq, rather than weapons of mass destruction. Ironically, democracy in Iraq is beginning to look more and more like a weapon of mass destruction.

Be that as it may, Varanasi brings the agenda back to India, and its unsolved problems.

India is a nuclear power straining to become an economic giant with seriously solid military muscle, and with the proven capability of reaching its ambitions within a believable timeframe. It has a growing right to a place on the high table of world affairs, and the world, now led by the United States, is taking this claim seriously. But India also faces a grave danger, one that could sabotage its dreams.

This danger is internal, not external. It is a problem of governance, not of the people. It is the danger of an institutional ego that sends the government's head into the heady superstructure of nuclear clouds, and, through an opposite of the gravitational pull, lifts its feet high above the harsh realities on the ground. The ground

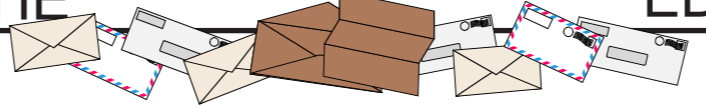
is swarming with cancerous problems. Varanasi is only an instance: security is so porous that terrorists who operate out of Kashmir can disdainfully slip into Varanasi and set off blasts that kill and maim hundreds. The real tragedy is that the perpetrators will never be found. The police has now become accustomed to alibi punishments: a few scapegoats to be sacrificed for public consumption in the hope that immediate passions are assuaged.

There is a parallel network of violence operating in India. No one really knows if Naxalites, spread across the breadth of the country, have linked up with separatists in Kashmir and Assam or not. All of them certainly have a common purpose, which is the destabilisation of government and governance.

Poverty feeds violence, and subsistence-level poverty is still the fate of four hundred million Indians. Communal anger is always hovering as a menace over stability, its noxious fumes wafted by despair. This too is shrouded in silence, but it is a different kind of silence. The story of India can be heard in both kinds of silence.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Our cricket

The boys failed to give a good account of themselves in the Test matches against Sri Lanka. Though they managed to avoid innings defeat, the Lankan wins were quite crushing. I believe batting is the department where we are performing well below the expected level.

There is nothing called a middle order in the team's batting. Even the top order is also very brittle. Players are getting out to highly irresponsible shots which even learners would not make.

Are they not listening to the coach? Things are going wrong. A quick response is needed to check further damage. Is Mr. Whatmore thinking about our main problem?
Aziz Ahmed, Dhaka

Anniversary

supplements

The anniversary supplements of your daily were great pages indeed. While browsing through the sports pages in one of such issues last night, I came to notice some interesting and important facts that made me happy and enthralled!

In the first place, I would like to thank you for the fact that you featured on Grandmaster Niaz Murshed who happened to be the first GM of the subcontinent and brought us great glory, name and pride. At this point, I feel like adding that it was Niaz who introduced the Bengali nation to people beyond our boundaries and popularised the game in the country. Thus paying due tribute to him is a must. Your featuring of our second Grandmaster, Ziaur Rahman, was also praiseworthy.

One points needs to be mentioned with much pain at heart: you aren't covering chess adequately. My earnest request is, please focus on chess the way you did in the past.

Finally, I feel enthralled to point out the brief introduction of the sports writers that you made. It was indeed nice to notice the innocuously interesting facts about them.

Rafiqul Islam Rime
Agrabad, Chittagong

Road accidents

Road accidents are on the rise and turning out to be usual events of our life.

No one can insure a safe return home as so many deaths are occurring owing to accidents. The reasons behind these accidents are considered to be as follows:

1. At present, we notice that drivers are not skilled and professionally trained. Most of them are not experienced enough; they only learn how to drive but they have shortage of technical or traffic knowledge. A question might arise as to how these drivers are acquiring licence without having proper training.

It is often heard that many of them are managing it by bribing the concerned authorities. About getting training from any recognised training centre, these drivers' version is that they cannot receive training from any recognised institution as these are costly.

2. In our country, vehicle owners do not spend much in maintenance unless these fall into serious trouble and this carelessness can be very costly. Usually, prior checking is never done. As a result, accidents

by brake failure are a common thing.

3. There is a tendency among heavy vehicles to allow an unlimited number of passengers to board the buses for extra earning. Consequently, we often hear that many passengers are killed in overloaded buses that lose balance.

4. Many accidents take place due to pedestrians' lack of awareness. Besides, in our country traffic policemen are so poorly trained and skilled that they don't have proper sense of directing traffic: when to stop and when to move.

5. Finally, the road condition in many places is very poor.

Roads are dug round the year. The authorities concerned should look into the matter.

Rubab Abdullah
Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

Pakistan and the US

No country would be able to do what the poor Pakistan has been doing for the 'US Evil Empire' but they have always taken a u-turn and granted sheer humiliation in return after enjoying our support. What the poor Pakistan has been doing for Afghanistan & the Afghanis is unmatched in history but the US has spared no chance to let us down.

Afghanistan was the second country after Iraq which was not willing to recognise the newly born Pakistan after its birth. But Pakistan has been playing its due role in the region.

Aftab Alam, Swat, Pakistan
On e-mail

Terrorism and

militancy

We are noticing for the last few days that both the print and electronic media are using the terms 'terrorism' and 'militancy' interchangeably. To day's Daily Star (8-3-06), for example, has used the term 'militant/militancy' several times on the front page while reporting on Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai.

Terrorism in social science means the systematic and organised use of violence and intimidation to force a government or community to act in a certain way or impose unilaterally certain demands. Terrorism goes against human rights in all aspects, but not always militancy. The militants may have legitimate demands/ not inconsistent with human rights and international law. Thus, Tamil Tigers, Hamas, IRA, ethnic resistant

forces in Asia, Africa and Central Asia, for example, are militants not terrorists. The affected vested interests in the establishments do invariably brand them as terrorists, as the Pakistani forces used to be called our freedom fighters 'terrorists'. The JMB's activists are pure terrorists, not militants.

So, please do think again before you extend the status of militants' to the JMB activists. They are terrorists, not militants.

Sirajul Islam
Asiatic Society of Bangladesh