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Police have demands, so have we

They must regain public trust

THIS year's Police Week has come with a lot of new demands from the members of the force, including perks like special residential facilities for high ranking officers, business or executive class air tickets for additional IGs when touring abroad, postings in Bangladesh missions abroad and "interest-free advance" for buying personal vehicles. These demands are in addition to other demands that apparently still have not been implemented (such as increase in compensation for death or injury while on duty) despite directives from the PM. The PM from her side expressed her frustration that her directives were not followed through by the ministry.

At the outset we want to praise the police for their effective containment of terrorist activities in carrying out which they have shown extraordinary courage and professionalism.

While the police force of any country should have their demands met as long as they are reasonable and deserving, in our country, can we really say that the police force have lived up to the public's expectations? What about the public's demand for a police force who will protect their basic rights, a force they can trust and have confidence in?

In recent years, members of law enforcement agencies have been accused of terrible crimes that include custodial deaths, conspiracy to murder, protecting rapists and other criminals by not including them in charge sheets, extortion and sexual harassment. The number of such incidents, which are only the ones that made it to the media, are high enough to be worried about. We, the public, expect members of the police force to be of high moral calibre. But the reality is that the public image of the law enforcement agencies leaves much to be desired. Extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances have only helped to make ordinary people be fearful of law enforcers rather than trust them as their protectors.

It is crucial to make sure that our law enforcers get good salaries and facilities they are entitled to in order to make them more efficient and dedicated. This is especially true for lower ranking law enforcers who should be paid adequately for the long, harsh hours they work and be given decent accommodation and other facilities. However, the demands seem to be mainly for high officials and not for the ordinary police. Before budgets are increased to reward the high-ranking officers, it would be wise to implement reforms in the police force in terms of greater accountability, transparency, fairness, efficiency (especially in proper investigation of cases) and rooting out any form of corruption. Without these reforms, merely increasing the number of police personnel and giving extra perks to the bosses will not produce the "police of the people" our PM has asked for.

Kora community on the verge of extinction

The state must protect their constitutional rights

A report by *The Daily Star* published on January 6 has revealed the sufferings of the Kora community, a small ethnic group living in Dinajpur's Biral upazila. Although around 200 Kora families used to live in the upazila before Bangladesh's independence, at present only 21 families are there. Reportedly, this small, impoverished community has been living in constant fear of being persecuted by the local powerful people who have already grabbed most of their land. According to British land records of 1943, the Koras used to own 55 acres of land but now the community possesses only 15 acres. The remaining 40 acres of land have already been grabbed by the local influentials. These powerful grabbers have also attacked the people of the community to drive them out of their ancestral land. Being intimidated by them, around 30 Kora families left for India in the last 15 years.

It is unfortunate that these people are being called "outsiders" by the local influentials despite the fact that they have been living in the country since the British period and had played an important role in the country's development – they took part in laying rail tracks during the British rule, and many of them had fought for the country's independence in 1971. Regrettably, after the country's liberation, consecutive governments have failed to ensure their basic constitutional rights, including land rights and basic education for their children. Their unique language and customs are also on the verge of extinction.

The Kora community needs protection from the government so that their ancestral land cannot be encroached upon by the local powerful people. In addition, the government should create job opportunities for them and bring them under the social safety net programmes. Unfortunately, it is not only the Kora community that has been facing persecution; other ethnic communities of the country have also been facing torture and exploitation by the powerful local people. In order to build an inclusive society, the problems these communities have been facing for years need to be addressed urgently. All the ethnic communities should get the rights granted by our constitution.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Ensure fairness of the upcoming elections

The upcoming elections of Dhaka South City Corporation and Dhaka North City Corporation, scheduled to be held on January 30, are important for many reasons. Since voters have lost their confidence in the voting system because of the widespread irregularities in the last general election as well as other local elections, this is the chance for the government and the Election Commission to win back people's trust in the system.

The elections will only be acceptable to the public if they can vote for the candidate of their choice without being intimidated by any quarters. We don't expect any violence or destructive activities before, during or after the elections. The Election Commission must ensure that there is a level playing field so that all the candidates can run their election campaigns in a good environment.

Md Zillur Rahaman, Gandaria, Dhaka

Trump may start a war with Iran but can he end it?

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN, NDC, PSC (RETD)

Did Donald Trump really mean what he said—that it was to prevent war, and not make one, for which a top Iranian military commander was hit in Baghdad on his instructions? Will it de-escalate the prospect of war, as he claims the assassination was intended to do, or will it lay open an imponderable prospect of a serious conflagration between the US and Iran?

As the NYT says, it is not so much if the extrajudicial killing was justified as whether it is wise to take an action that is dangerously fraught. The Trump tweets (alliteration unintended), which are often nothing better than rantings of an uninformed and injudicious mind, are anything but de-escalatory in content.

Killed along with General Qasem Soleimani in the same drone attack was the deputy head of the Iran-backed Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), a Shia force organised to fight ISIS and recognised by the Iraqi government as an independent military force, a one-time US ally in the fight against ISIS.

It was not the first time that the US has made a so-called pre-emptive or preventive attack, and that too without a shred of evidence, under a US law backed up by the misrepresentation of Article 51 of the UN Charter. The attack on Soleimani was carried out under the same authorisations to, as the Pentagon says, "deter any future Iranian attack plan". Remember the first time the US did so in recent times under this very law? It was on March 20, 2001 when the US attacked Iraq, justifying Operation Iraqi Freedom on manufactured and cooked intelligence and preceded by nearly a hundred excuses posted as justifications for the attack on Iraq, and eventually killing a one-time US and Western ally in the Middle East. Of course, Saddam had no weapons of mass destruction (WMD) at all, neither did he host any Al Qaeda fighters in Iraq.

Soleimani was supposed to have been planning to kill American diplomats and service members in Iraq and throughout the region, and his assassination (for that was what it was) was an act of self-defence, as the US claims. Soleimani, according to the US, was responsible for the deaths of thousands of US servicemen. One could well ask whether the myriad instances of political killings, coups and counter-coups, and the countless clandestine actions to destabilise governments that the CIA has been involved in all over the world fit the accusations that the US is now blaming

Soleimani for doing. Obviously, all these are mere rhetoric; the real intention of Trump is to provoke Iran to take precipitate actions offering a direct justification for Trump to hit Teheran militarily and fulfil what he had promised Netanyahu. The killing of the Iranian commander is another of such provocations that had started with the scrapping of the Iran nuclear deal in May 2018.

Predictably, Trump's action has engendered criticisms internationally, including from European leaders. The Democrats call it illegal on the grounds that the US cannot simply go

Iranian generals. A member of the IRGC and known as Iran's "shadow commander," he had led the Quds Force since 1998, and was reportedly the mastermind of Iranian military operations in Iraq and Syria. The US considered him a thorn on its side and wanted to do away with him to "make the world safe again". The obvious question would be, is it so? Is the world any safer than before January 3, 2020? If that is so, then why is the travel advisory to the US citizens in the region to leave Iraq and the region? Should we understand that the calculus determining the degree of safety for US

to achieve by his war against Iran. And if there is a breakout of war, let there be no doubt that it will not be restricted between the two antagonists only, but will surely involve almost all the countries in the region also.

The US president has tweeted that he has 52 Iranian targets on his sights. And he has made a terrorist-like threat, threatening to wipe out these targets many of which, according to Trump, are of cultural significance to Iran. We do not know what these targets are. But whatever they are, will destroying those meet the US' political objective? Will that make Iran change its policies?



General Qasem Soleimani, who was killed in a drone strike last Friday, was one of the most powerful Iranian generals.

PHOTO: MURAD ZEGER/REUTERS

about killing military commanders of a sovereign country. And one may well ask, where are the intelligence and incontrovertible proof that an attack on US soil or interest was unquestionably imminent? Does the justification of self-defence sell with the right-thinking people? Even the Iraqi parliament has condemned the attack, calling it a violation of the country's sovereignty and of international laws. But it is futile to seek a moral or legal justification of the US military action. In fact, one is at a loss to find out if there has been any military venture—major or minor—by the US since the end of WWII that was legal or had UN approval.

General Qasem Soleimani was definitely one of the most powerful

citizens is different than what it applies in the case of others?

It will do well to remember that killing a leader does neither stem the purpose and the cause he was serving, nor deter any further action on the part of the group that he led, just in the same way as the departure or death of a head of government or the executive president of a country would not interrupt the policies the party in power were following.

One should not rule out a reaction from Iran: what kind and when/where, is uncertain. The time, place and target will be of Iran's choosing. It seems that Trump, in spite of what he would have us believe, wants a war and is bracing for one, too. It is thus pertinent to ask as to what political objective Trump wants

Every military venture the US has involved itself in since the WWII, except for one, has ended in disaster. As Afghanistan and Iraq show, military option is not the solution to a conflict that is enmeshed in a very deep-seated political undertone. Where the objectives are at best nebulous, the outcome of the war is likely to be the kind that we witness in Iraq and Afghanistan. Trump needs to be educated in the self-evident truth that one may start a war but ending it may not be in one's control. And in a war where he may not be able to put together a "coalition of the willing", that will be even more so.

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How the SDG costing exercise can help meet the targets



SELIM RAIHAN

THE Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are some ambitious development objectives with a total of 17 goals with 169 targets spanning economic, social

and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. To achieve the targets by 2030 will be a daunting task for a large number of developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Especially, the low-income and lower-middle-income countries are lagging behind others with respect to achieving a large number of targets envisaged in the SDGs. The Sustainable Development Report 2019, led by Prof Jeffrey Sachs, presents the SDG Index for all UN member-states to show how countries differ in SDG implementation. An analysis of the data of SDG Index for 162 countries suggests that countries with lower per capita GDPs have lower SDG indices. The high performers in the SDG Index are mostly from the high-income and upper-middle-income countries. Bangladesh has a ranking of 116 among the 162 countries. Rankings for other South Asian countries are as below: 153 for Afghanistan, 84 for Bhutan, 115 for India, 47 for the Maldives, 103 for Nepal, 130 for Pakistan, and 93 for Sri Lanka.

Similar to the era of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), countries have a chance to show better performance during the SDGs period as well. There is a political buy-in, both at the global and national levels, to demonstrate that countries are on track to achieve SDGs by 2030. Governments of the developing countries have expressed their commitments towards achieving SDGs as one of their priority areas and have undertaken different initiatives. This provides a

unique opportunity to put in some genuine efforts to achieve several of the important development targets of the SDGs in countries who are lagging behind considerably.

It should be mentioned that developing countries, especially the low-income and lower-middle ones, also face the problem of prioritising different SDGs. However, common problems in these countries include low or unsustainable economic growth, low or stagnant private-sector investment, poor infrastructure, low level of

can have different meanings for different actors and stakeholders. To some, it can be an undertaking that produces reasonably detailed estimates of the costs needed to implement specific projects or sectoral plans in line with the targets of SDGs. To others, it can be a broader analysis to provide useful guidelines for policymakers about the resources needed to achieve the SDGs at the macro level.

Why is the SDG costing exercise important? It is important because there are only 11 years left to implement the SDGs, and for most of the developing

mobilisation, assist in prioritising initiatives, raise public awareness, and offer the government new approaches of delivering through the cost savings as well as a synergistic strategy for implementation of the SDGs.

There is a need for synchronisation of costing across SDGs. Since there are critical interlinkages among different SDGs, it is important to look at integrated costing approaches which can deal with broad cross-sectoral synergies as opposed to any standalone calculation for specific SDGs. There is no denying that well-designed and integrated multisectoral approaches can be cost-effective, considering the resource constraints in the developing countries.

As mentioned before, there are serious challenges in financing resources for SDGs in most of the developing countries, especially given the fact that the capacity for domestic resource mobilisation is weak and the options for external financing are limited in many of these countries. Given the changing global scenario, for financing SDGs, developing countries will have to rely more on domestic sources, and this is, no doubt, a big challenge. Achieving SDGs also, therefore, requires systemic changes in the attitude and mechanisms in developing countries that govern and channel financing. It also requires exploring and exploiting the potential options of scaling up and diversifying financing opportunities commensurate with the ambition articulated in the SDGs. Developing countries need to explore all possible sources of financing including public, private, and public-private partnership, non-governmental organisations, foreign direct investment, foreign aid, and remittances. It is also important to note that mere generation of resources would not ensure a successful implementation of the SDGs if institutional and governance-related aspects are not properly addressed.

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industrialisation, a high degree of informal jobs, slow job creation, high incidence of poverty, growing overall and gender inequality, environmental degradation, etc. One of the fundamental challenges these developing countries face is making available the huge amount of resources required for meeting the aforementioned development targets. In this context, the SDG costing exercise can be very relevant.

What is the SDG costing exercise? It

countries, the resource requirement is huge. Therefore, without a comprehensive understanding of the resources required to implement different components of the SDGs, it becomes a difficult task for the countries to integrate SDGs into their national budgetary and planning processes. The SDG costing exercise can help accelerate the implementation of development efforts, facilitate discussions on integrated approaches to financing, identify fiscal space and resource