

DISTRUST OF POLICE

# Neither good for public nor for police

KAMAL AHMED

**G**OING by social media trends, the arrest of the alleged rapist of the Dhaka University student has failed to convince a significant number of people that he is indeed the real offender. Some politicians too in their public statements have cast doubts about the integrity of the investigation, comparing it with the infamous case of Joj Miah, from whom the police had obtained a confession for the grenade attack on the Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina. The reason for such cynicism, however annoying it may be for the law enforcing agencies, is trust deficiency. Unfortunately, there's little evidence that the police have taken any note of it. At least, media reports on events and discussions during the recently held Police Week do not reflect any such concern.

Like previous years, there were demands for more resources, perks and privileges. The demands requiring more spending commitments from the public exchequer in recent years have got sympathetic considerations from the government too. In most cases, the government was too generous, which many critics allege were largely driven by political objectives. Such allegations got credence due to the frequent excesses against the opposition parties and overtly partisan behaviour of some police officials. However, most of the time, what ignited public debate was not the demands for more resources and privileges, instead, it was about granting unusual power and lessening accountability of the police. Since 2017, police have been consistently demanding scrapping of the provisions

on prevention of cruel and inhuman torture in custody, which has outraged human rights activists and the wider populace.

This year, there was a call for joint efforts to deal with the massive case log. It was suggested that lower court judges, public prosecutors and police should work together to identify ways to dispose of around 35 lakh cases pending trial in the lower courts. However, this apparently innocuous suggestion of quicker disposal of cases opens up a serious question about the role of the judges. Bringing in lower court judges under any mechanism spearheaded by police is particularly alarming as it is very likely that the perceived independence of judges will be compromised. Any discussion among a judge, the prosecution and an investigation officer on a pending trial will give an impression of *ex parte* hearing, which removes the notion of fairness.

From the deliberations, it is evident that police bosses are unhappy with the existing system and hence are demanding its replacement. At present, there are committees in all districts headed by the Deputy Commissioner or District Magistrate to assess the law and order situation, prevent various disruptive activities and review cases. Discussion on review committees came up following one official sharing his experience that the existing committee was unduly influencing and intervening in the investigation of criminal cases. If this assertion is true, then certainly, this issue requires reform. But surely, that should not be an exercise involving judges which might be termed as an *ex parte* action.



Unfortunately, neither police nor the bosses at the ministry of affairs have taken any notice of quite a few important factors that have contributed to such huge backlog of cases. And those are largely political in nature, to be more precise, partisan in favour of the ruling party. Among those, the largest are false or fake cases. It is not just based on the opposition's allegations which might have some exaggeration. In 2015, the UNDP's Justice Sector Facility (JCF) publication titled "A best practice handbook for the criminal justice system" noted: "A major cause of the backlog in criminal cases and the burden on the police, courts and prisons is the number of false cases laid in Bangladesh. Knowing that a person can be locked up for many years waiting for trial to be finalised, some people lodge false claims with the police and courts, so

their enemies are arrested and kept in custody".

And now we know that not only political or business rivals make false claims, but that police have been doing it for quite some time as well. In 2018, the Human Rights Watch in a report based on its own research said, "Numerous cases have come to light in which accused people are either dead, were abroad or hospitalised at the time when the alleged offence took place." It cited a few examples among which one Saiful Alam Nirob, a BNP activist, who was facing 267 cases. He ran against the Home Affairs Minister in the parliamentary election held in December 2018. It also noted the number of cases filed against top BNP leaders. BNP itself claimed that more than three lakh members of the party had been sued. One of the most disturbing trends noted by human

rights activists is that besides naming hundreds of activists in such cases, police add an unspecified number of unidentified suspects that sometimes exceeds a thousand. Though BNP bears the major brunt in the official crackdown against dissent, students, workers and various professionals also face similar false and frivolous cases.

Another notable reason for such backlog of pending cases is the misuse of laws like the Digital Security Act, preceded by Information Communication and Technology Act and Defamation related acts. Though most of the legal provisions do not allow a third party to sue for alleged defamation, abusing the DSA has become the norm as police and courts are entertaining claims made by non-affected parties. Furthermore, police and courts are registering multiple cases scattered all over the country on a single alleged violation of law.

Last July, the law minister told the UN's Committee Against Torture (CAT) that the first ever judicial audit carried out in the country had found that the conviction rate for crimes by law enforcement agencies was just 3 percent. So, it is quite pertinent to ask whether this incredibly low conviction rate reflects the alleged widespread abuse of power by law enforcing agencies.

Seeking more resources and legal authority to curb crime and maintain peace and security can only be justified when people, who the police are supposed to protect, fully trust them. Unfortunately, that trust deficiency is on the rise and reversing the trend is becoming even more urgent.

Kamal Ahmed is a freelance journalist based in London.

## 2020: A year full of danger

FARHANA HAQUE RAHMAN

**L**ET'S face what lies ahead with open eyes: 2020 is going to be a very tough year for the world, and developing countries in particular. The infant decade has already begun with thousands fleeing to beaches in Australia from raging bushfires, and the Middle East bracing for more conflict after a US air strike in Baghdad killed Iran's top general.

But even as the world needs a concerted and decisive response to its challenges, we risk more of the backsliding and indifference towards humanity that in 2019 characterised the behaviour of many powerful governments, from Australia to the United States, from Brazil to China.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has cited wars, the climate crisis, gender-based violence and persistent inequality in warning that the world is well behind meeting the deadlines of its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2019 SDG report showed momentum for positive change, but also identified several areas that need urgent collective action: the climate crisis, human suffering, quality education, and gender discrimination.

Many countries and stakeholders have indeed responded with pledges of "SDG Acceleration Actions". But we need to be brutally honest about the gulf between past promises and action.

Warning that the world will still have 500 million people in extreme poverty in 2030, Mr Guterres has called for this to be a Decade of Action. But surely he didn't envisage what President Donald Trump had in mind with the drone strike he ordered that killed Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad on January 3. Iran quickly pledged "tough revenge" and "World War III" was trending on Twitter.

Even without further conflict in the region, the proxy war fought in Yemen

between Iran and Saudi Arabia is expected by the UN to continue as "the world's worst humanitarian crisis" in 2020 after nearly five years of fighting. An estimated 24 million people, or 80 percent of Yemen's population, will remain in need of aid.

Worldwide 168 million people will need humanitarian aid and protection in crises across more than 50 countries in 2020, according to the UN's emergency relief coordinator. The UN humanitarian affairs coordination office (OCHA) launched its Global Humanitarian Overview 2020 with an appeal for nearly USD 29 billion in aid from donors. "It is the highest figure in decades," Mark Lowcock, head of OCHA, said, blaming climatic shocks, large infectious disease outbreaks and intensifying, protracted conflicts for an increase of some 22 million people in need last year.

Armed conflicts are already killing and maiming a record number of children, with women and girls at higher risk of sexual and gender-based violence than before.

The UN Children's Fund UNICEF has called for USD 4.2 billion for its 2020 emergency appeal to reach 59 million children with life-saving support in 64 countries. This is more than triple the funds requested in 2010.

"Around the world today, we're seeing the largest number of children in need of emergency assistance since we began record-keeping. One in four children lives in a country affected by conflict or disaster," said Unicef Executive Director Henrietta Fore.

UN risk assessments were blown off course by worse than expected climate crisis-related events, such as drought, flooding and tropical cyclones.

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agribusiness monocultures of cattle, soy and sugarcane, and launch a major reforestation project on already degraded lands.

But Mr Bolsonaro is also joining by Mr Trump, who will seek re-election this year, in abandoning climate leadership and damaging global conservation efforts.

The latest mantra for climate scientists and UN envoys seeking to broker global agreements is that "2020 is the last best chance" to turn the tide of the climate emergency. Under the 2015 Paris Agreement countries pledged to review and, hopefully, ramp up their efforts to cut greenhouse gases by this year, meaning that a lot of effort is needed ahead of the crucial UN climate conference, COP26, to be held in Glasgow in November.

As noted by climate news site Carbon Brief, with key emitters such as the US, Australia and Brazil hostile towards international climate action, a lot now hangs on China and the EU acting as one to maintain the Paris Agreement's momentum.

But China, along with Brazil and India, have been called out by the Association of Small Island States as actively blocking ambitious outcomes in discussions on carbon credit.

Last month's COP (Conference of the Parties) in Madrid was widely viewed by climate activists as a flop.

Protestors outside the conference hall, including Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, demonstrated the yawning gulf between their aspirations and of those inside procrastinating governments.

The diplomatic Mr Guterres said he was "disappointed" at the outcome and added the major emitters of greenhouse gases need to "do much more" in 2020.

Indeed. Much, much more.

Farhana Haque Rahman is Senior Vice President of Inter Press Service. Courtesy: Inter Press Service



PHOTO: SAEED KHAN/AFP

Firefighters struggling against the strong wind to secure nearby houses from bushfires near the town of Nowra in the Australian state of New South Wales.

the climate emergency have been dealt a most severe blow by the policies of Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro.

Deforestation of the Amazon, the world's largest tropical rainforest, soared in 2019 to levels not seen in a decade. Protected areas have been opened to mining and agricultural conversion, and murders of environmentalists have increased. Commenting on the global picture, Rhett Butler, founder of the Mongabay non-profit environment website, said: "After a decade of increased deforestation, broken commitments, and hundreds of murders of rainforest defenders, the 2020s open as a dark moment for the world's rainforests."

Agronomists such as Carlos Nobre and Thomas Lovejoy warn that the Amazon is reaching a critical tipping point as it shows signs of shifting from humid tropical forest towards degraded wooded savanna which would result in the release of massive amounts of carbon into the atmosphere. It is urgent that Brazil move away from unsustainable

agribusiness monocultures of cattle, soy and sugarcane, and launch a major reforestation project on already degraded lands.

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### ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

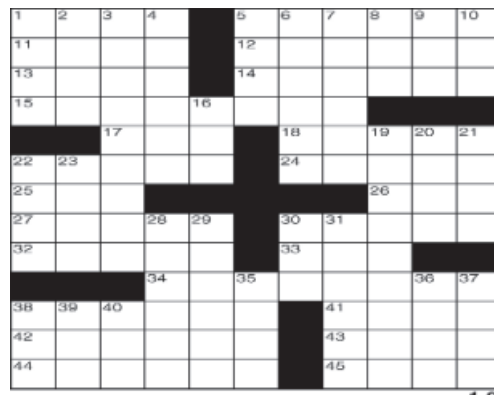


**JANUARY 15, 1759**  
British Museum opened to the public

Established by an act of Parliament in 1753, the British Museum—which counts among its world-renowned antiquities and archaeological holdings the Elgin Marbles and the Rosetta Stone—opened to the public this day in 1759.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- |                     |                            |                             |
|---------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>ACROSS</b>       | 38 Seasoned sausage        | 9 Inquire                   |
| 1 Folded food       | 41 Falafel holder          | 10 Sailing site             |
| 5 Brawl             | 42 First game              | 16 Pig's place              |
| 11 Pressing need    | 43 Computer symbol         | 19 In a precarious position |
| 12 Rest             | 44 Staircase posts         | 20 "Got it"                 |
| 13 Pharmacy unit    | 45 Addition column         | 21 Some wines               |
| 14 1867 purchase    |                            | 22 Dove calls               |
| 15 Cruel            |                            | 23 Pop's sister             |
| 17 Termite's cousin |                            | 28 Polished                 |
| 18 Hymn singers     | <b>DOWN</b>                | 29 Tooth layer              |
| 22 Batter of verse  | 1 Waiting rewards          | 30 Wagon puller             |
| 24 Good judgment    | 2 Opera piece              | 31 "Never mind!"            |
| 25 Anjou answer     | 3 Quite aloof              | 35 Knights' titles          |
| 26 Slugger Williams | 4 Like some chats          | 36 School near Windsor      |
| 27 When expected    | 5 Greek group              | 37 Works leather            |
| 30 Arson yield      | 6 Keepsakes                | 38 Pop's boy                |
| 32 Boat's back      | 7 Cochise's people         | 39 Orangutan, e.g.          |
| 33 Runner on snow   | 8 Trig function, for short | 40 Detective Archer         |
| 34 Babe's bed       |                            |                             |



### YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

SEPT AVON GAIT ANN THEM JASON AXON BLUES SET ITALIC RED SLOPES  
SQUIDS TUNNEL RODNEY TO TO PRO SCRAM LIZA LINER ADOPT FLUX SPA WOOL HUES OTTO

### BETLE BAILEY



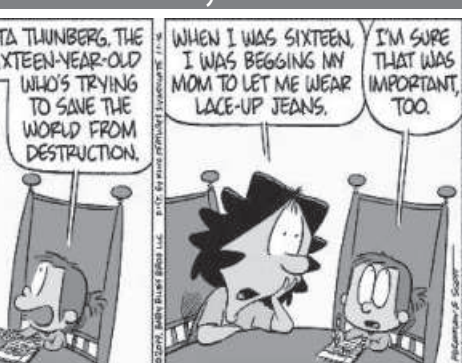
### by Mort Walker



### BABY BLUES



### by Kirkman & Scott



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