

No tokenism with safety of workers, please!

BGMEA should do a thorough job

WE note that a monitoring team of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) has identified three garment units in and around the city as being highly risky in terms of their infrastructure. How much solace we can derive from this, in the face of mounting concern for the extremely poor safety standards prevailing in the industries, particularly in garment factories, is anybody's guess. Needless to say, it does not even scratch the surface of the problem. After all, only 169 out of 45,000 garment units have been surveyed post-haste and an incredibly small number of them were found to be highly risky, only three to be precise.

The inspection was carried out under rather limited terms of reference which was to find out the units housed in time-expired buildings. Of course, this is an important area of concern in the light of the KTS garments tragedy, but then there is a whole range of other components and issues pertaining to the safety standards for workers.

The fundamental issue here is the highly seasonal post-facto reaction of the BGMEA to any fire or stampede mishaps in garment units. Each time a serious accident would take place, they came out with all sorts of statistics and claims, giving assurances of a radical improvement being effected in the safety standards from that point onwards. We would keep our faith with these until another series of disasters came to belie all their claims and assurances. It becomes clear that nothing has been done to improve the safety standards at the factories.

The garment sector has enjoyed public appreciation and goodwill for its tremendous contribution to the national economy. And let us not forget that the garment owners, manufacturers and exporters have also made huge profits from the sector. But, by their incorrigibly callous indifference to worker safety standards, the huge profits notwithstanding, they have basically done injustice to the nation's appreciation, sympathy and goodwill, not to mention the media support for the important role the sector played in the economy.

They have got enough time and warning to improve the safety standards, but, to our utter disgust, we witness that beyond expressing sympathy and condolence for the members of the victims' families they have done very little to pre-empt future accidents. The garment sector leaders have not used their authority and elective clout to have the safety standards enforced by the manufacturing units.

Let's sound a cautionary note that no halfhearted measures or palliatives would satisfy the workers, the public, the civil society and the media any longer on the safety question. So, address the issue with a genuine commitment, sincerity and thoroughness to make a difference in the life of workers.

A kid-glove treatment

Principal's conduct needs probing

IT is our opinion that, in the aftermath of the unrest at Eden College, the government decision to transfer the principal, Prof. Firoza Begum, to officer on special duty (OSD) status is a thoroughly inadequate action for what we can only call gross negligence of duty on her part.

The principal has played a shameful role by all accounts in the recent violence that swept through the Eden College campus, and her conduct merits scrutiny rather than moving her to the sidelines.

In the first place, she stood idly by while JCD cadres summarily evicted some 20 students from the hostel. Her initial dereliction of duty was compounded when she ordered the college hostel closed in order to nip the ensuing protests in the bud, even though exams were still ongoing, and many students had no place else to go.

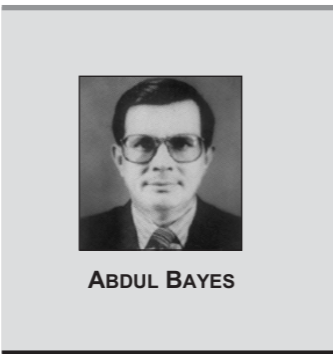
Finally, when this highhanded action of hers led to major demonstrations, she haughtily refused to even meet with the aggrieved students to hear their very legitimate complaints, made inappropriate comments denigrating the demonstrators to the press, and permitted the goons to physically assault the demonstrators, sending three of them to the hospital.

There is no word other than disgraceful to describe Prof. Firoza's conduct. She has virtually acted as 'an agent' of the goons, who have imposed a reign of terror over the campus, abandoning her duty as custodian of the students in her charge.

In addition to all this, there is the more fundamental question of the rampant criminality that has polluted the campus, with the goons squad selling space in the hostel and even admission into the college for money. This kind of criminality could not have occurred without the connivance of some in the administration, and as the head of the administration, the principal must take the ultimate responsibility.

To restore any semblance of dignity to the office of the principal, the authorities need to suspend her, and initiate a thorough investigation into the whole affair, and if need be, draw up proceedings against her.

When globalisation is good: Insight from India



ABDUL BAYES

THE Foundation for Advanced Studies on International Development in Tokyo (FASID) had emerged as a centre of excellence in economics, particularly in development economics. Students from different countries (including Bangladesh), and under the umbrella of various scholarships, come here to acquire degree in economics. Eminent economists of the world are also invited to present guest lectures.

One of the world's top economists, K. Otsuka, works as the Director of the Program with Professor Yujiro Hayami, T. Sonobe and K.Kajisa, among others, on board the innovative institution.

There I met Professor Kaliappa Kalirajan. Originally from Tamil Nadu state of India, he is settled in Australia but now serving as a professor at FASID. The first sight, I thought he might be a "descriptive and non-mathematical economist" like many of us, but the subsequent experience of sharing his room, unveiled just the opposite trend.

Beneath the surface, his enthusiasm on econometric works drew my attention and I had the opportunity to go through some of them (shelving, for the moment, the question of how much I understood!). I found one research article (with Kanhaiya Singh of NCAER, Delhi) as relevant in the context of Bangladesh. The paper is titled: "Globalization Strategies and Poverty Reduction across Indian States."

Defining domain

The authors sensibly start with a definition of globalization at the very outset, seemingly, to clean the smoke off the screen. In popular parlays, globalization goes to mean

everything -- free movement of pin to plane. I jokingly say to my students that it is a free movement of everything across countries, excepting of course, immobile land and mobile governments. EU is, perhaps, an example where my joke turns out to be real.

Neither real is the news that globalization is a recent phenomena, as often alleged. If we take international connectedness between nations -- increased flow of trade, investment and communication -- then globaliza-

theorem are points to the premise set. On an empirical plane, the experiences of East and Southeast Asia with regard to human development and global integration economically tend to support the dominant view. But the negative correlation in the case of some countries is also not behind the curtain. The authors argue that although globalization could gear up aggregate productivity and growth through competitive pressure and "induced

period of analysis and their contribution to national GDP also varied. There is in evidence little convergence, implying less integration of states with national economy. States like Gujarat, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Maharastra, Punjab, and Rajasthan remained out of the national average while Haryana, West Bengal, Karnataka, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh traveled in tune with the national average. There has been an appreciable reduction in poverty

into service sector, dominantly in the communication sector. Capital intensive FDI employed skilled workers at the cost of poor and unskilled workers.

Industry and agriculture

Industrialization increases the pace of poverty reduction. If FDI could flow to industry and agriculture, possibly the pace of poverty reduction could be more prominent. States with higher initial level of poverty witnessed a better pace

and perhaps more importantly, has a better labour rations record than Maharashtra. Economic history of Japan and East and Southeast Asia confirm the causality between education, growth, and poverty reduction.

Policy points

For globalization to be good for poverty reduction and removing regional differences, affirmative steps are needed to develop infrastructure in less developed regions. Second, there is an urgent need to undertake reforms in agricultural sector and small-scale sector to attract FDI in employment and income generation agricultural processing activities such as food processing and agro-exports. Third, national and international coordination in agricultural policy making should get priority.

Hayami-hypothesis

The authors conclude their observations by drawing upon Yujiro Hayami's thesis of the importance of county-specific institutions in determining growth process, the importance of proper institutions to facilitate sustained investment flows including FDI in labour-intensive productive pursuits. The fact that China leads and India lags in an era of globalization, could be due to differential responsiveness of the institutions involved in making globalization a success. The success of East Asia, and also Japan in development boils down to the basics of facilitating institutional arrangements. Pending that, globalization may not be good for poverty reduction.

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BENEATH THE SURFACE

For globalisation to be good for poverty reduction and removing regional differences, affirmative steps are needed to develop infrastructure in less developed regions. Second, there is an urgent need to undertake reforms in agricultural sector and small-scale sector to attract FDI in employment and income generation agricultural processing activities such as food processing and agro-exports. Third, national and international coordination in agricultural policy making should get priority.

tion has been happening over the last 50 years. In fact, as I read in a very recent article by Paul Streteen in the FASID library, the world seems to be less globalized now than it was 30 to 40 years ago. The ratio of immigrants per 1,000 Americans was higher and visa and passport was almost a non-requirement during that period. There was freer movement of commodities across countries.

However, the paper alluded to earlier posits economic globalization that implies increasing openness, growing economic interdependence and deepening economic integration between countries. Again, to be to the point, they paid particular attention to the impact of industrial reforms and foreign direct investment reforms (international capital mobility) on poverty reduction at the state level. Therefore, globalization is proxied by the share of industrial product to real Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) and the ratio of approved foreign direct investment to GSDP.

Hovering hypotheses

Theoretically, several hypotheses hover round the relationship between globalization and poverty reduction and human development. Globalization allows improvement in production technology and generation of employment. Hecksher-Ohlin and Stolper Samuelson

innovation," its impact on an equal income distribution is not automatic.

Economists like Francisco Rodriguez and Dani Rodrick and also Joseph Stiglitz established empirically how globalization greases income inequality which, at times, may aggravate poverty in some countries and in some regions. Perhaps, propelled by the position taken by these economists, the authors' question is: Have India's globalization strategies significantly contributed to poverty reduction across states?

Indian insights

India's globalization strategies have their roots in the economic reforms ushered in 1991. Some of the strategies include: complete liberalization of private investment encouraging Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), freeing industries from direct government controls and eliminating licensing in most areas, opening the banking and financial sector for private competition, reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers etc. En passant, the package of policies is similar to that in Bangladesh during the same period of time.

Growth and poverty

That the growth performance of India due to economic liberalization is adequately documented in available literature. The states have diverse pattern of growth during the

paripassu economic growth over the years. While growth across states varied, there were also variations in the pace of poverty reduction. The question is why the pace of poverty varies across the states and whether globalization has anything to say on the variations.

Multi-variate regression

The causal connection was sought in terms of taking the annual rate of poverty reduction in percentage points between two national poverty surveys of 1993-94 and 1999-2000. Among the explanatory variables, came up initial poverty level, literacy rate, FDI, Migration, share of industry to real GSDP (industrialization), share of agriculture to GSDP (impact of agriculture on poverty) and other variables each measured in well defined manner.

FDI necessary but not sufficient

The authors observe that FDI flows, which are one of the important components of the globalization strategies in India, are not strongly favourable for poverty reduction. Why? Because it is not FDI per se that reduces poverty but the type of investment (export oriented or import substituting), FDI links with the host economy and conditions in the host country that go to affect poverty. Most of the FDI in India flew

than states with lower poverty. Importantly, in poorer regions, agriculture was more important in reducing poverty, disconcertingly though, India is yet to see an agriculture-friendly globalization strategy. Between agriculture and industry, the impact of industrial growth was stronger than the impact of agricultural growth, implying positive contribution of globalization on poverty. The authors are of the view that despite relative strength of the industrial sector, a robust agricultural sector is needed to reduce poverty. But the fix is that development of the agricultural sector depends not only on domestic policies but also on increased access to developed markets. Ironically, developed countries tend to turn a deaf ear to this and thus, allegedly, indirectly contribute to the state of perilous poverty in developing countries.

Literacy-led growth

Literacy rate significantly affects poverty, and investment, both domestic and foreign, is closely linked to the level of literacy. For example, Ford has chosen a joint venture project in Tamil Nadu state and not in Mumbai, known to be bastion of brisk business. It is because the former has a more literate, more educated work force,

Transparency the key to JMB interrogation

NURUL HUDA

THE people of Bangladesh are happy with the recent arrest of JMB chief Shaekh Abdur Rahman and his second in command Siddiqui Islam 'Bangla Bhai' along with some of their accomplices. A couple of other central leaders and a good number of their followers, however, still remain in hiding.

Reward worth Taka 50 lakh each was announced for information leading to the arrest of either of the two kingpins. It remains still unclear who would get the reward money though it has already been officially confirmed that the money would be paid.

People have reason to feel happy as both Rahman and Bangla Bhai were responsible for at least one and a half dozen major bomb incidents in the country, which have claimed the lives of at least two hundred people and left at least a thousand others maimed during the last decade.

The nation is still haunted by the tragic memories of incidents of bomb attacks at Ramna Batmul on Bengali New Year's day, Christian church in Gopalganj, Udichi cultural function in Jessore, CPB rally in Paltan, and Awami League rally in Narayanganj during Sheikh Hasina's rule.

During the rule of the present BNP -led alliance, bomb attacks were conducted with precision in a well co-ordinated manner on August

17 last year in 63 out of 64 districts, sending shock waves through the entire nation.

The bomb operations were conducted with efficiency also on AL rally at Bangabandhu Avenue in the city, claiming the life of AL leader Ivy Rahman and a couple of dozen others, and again in Habiganj, killing AL leader SAMS Kibria and some others. Another incident of bomb explosion took place at the Sylhet shrine of Shah Jalal (RA) on British High Commissioner Anwar Chowdhury.

People expected national unity to face the threat posed by JMB but instead both the major political parties still remain engaged in blame game and mudslinging against each other. In democratic culture there will be battle of wit and intellect between the ruling party and the opposition but that should not in any way turn into bitterness or personal hostilities as is being witnessed in our country.

The Awami League led 14-party combine has been describing the arrest of Rahman and Bangla Bhai as a stage managed drama and

demanding interrogation of those detained by an independent commission for ensuring transparency and neutrality in the process of investigation. As national elections are due early next year, the demand of the AL-led combine is likely to become stronger with the passage of time.

The AL- led combine has expressed doubts that if the JMB leaders are interrogated by Rab and policemen, the findings may not be neutral as a section of alliance leaders had connections with Bangla Bhai. Abu Hena MP, was expelled from BNP for bringing similar charges against some top leaders of Rajshahi region. The AL and its allies would intensify their demands for conducting fair investigation when general elections come closer.

If required, those on the suspect list should be brought under interrogation process as fingers have already been pointed at some leaders of the BNP-led alliance as national interest should get the top most priority. If such action is taken, it would also enhance the

country's image on one hand and pay dividends to the alliance on the other. If such actions require expulsion of some leaders, the BNP-led alliance can do so as that would pay them dividends for not becoming blind or biased to party interests.

Those responsible for conducting the interrogation and investigation into the cases have to prove their honesty and integrity by showing total neutrality. The government should ask the concerned authority for issuance of periodical official statements as the people have a right to know the progress of the findings, also through official channel. Unless there are official statements, media would run speculative stories leaving the chance of creating confusion among the people.

If the investigation is conducted maintaining transparency without influence, which is definitely possible, the country's image will be brightened. Utmost care has to be taken to leave no scope of misunderstanding over the process of interrogation and investigation. The intensity of people's hatred against

the Islamic militants behind bomb attacks claiming lives of innocent people, has been demonstrated through celebrations following the arrest of the JMB leaders along with their accomplices.

Those responsible for conducting investigation, I am sure, would be able to round up the remaining followers of the JMB and unearth, if any, their foreign connections. Another aspect which needs attention of the investigating agencies is to find out answers to questions like who could gain out of the country's instability and disruption of democracy. The attacks were conducted, as it appears, for short term and long term gains.

The detection of certain irregularities in bank transactions in some branches of Islami Bank and issuance of the show cause notice by the Bangladesh Bank is seen as positive progress in unveiling the sources of funding of Islamic militancy in the country. It remains to be seen what will happen following submission of the findings to the Home Ministry.

It also needs to be unearthed

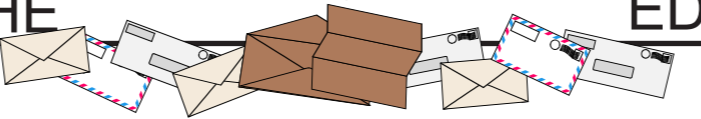
through interrogation where from the JMB men had their training. The findings of the investigating agencies should be made public. There is no reason to feel complacent over the arrest of Rahman and his second in command Bangla Bhai as some of their accomplices remain still at large.

It is high time that both the ruling party and the mainstream opposition sat together and reached understanding on major issues of national interest so that no third group can play foul with our country. Some quarters are already engaged in a heinous campaign against Bangladesh describing it as a 'failed state.' Either of the two major political parties, I am sure, cannot but protest this. But if they protest together, the protest is sure to become stronger and more effective.

The arrest effort has to be intensified so that the militants can be eliminated. The relevant agencies of the government need to remain ever vigilant against attempts to reorganize similar forces under different names aimed at destabilizing the country's nascent democracy and disrupting the development process.

Nurul Huda is a Special Correspondent of BSS.

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.

Role of China

I want to hail China for the courageous stand that they recently took against the one-sided claim by the United States against weaker and poorer countries of so called human rights violations. I take this opportunity to call upon all other nations repressed and dictated by those powerful nations to stand straight and strong against any sort of blame and or claim or demand of following their dictates. I would reiterate in the language of the Iranian President that "days are over for issuing threats or dictations." The US or the other powers don't have the exclusive right to put pressure on others or to possess nuclear power. And I am confident the Iranians will face any consequence valiantly that might result from possible sanctions by the UNSC. The US published 'Human Rights Record 2005', mentioning

Bangladesh's human rights condition as 'poor' doesn't hold good when the veracity of the very report isn't beyond doubt, and especially when the US itself could not vouch for such a quality any more. We haven't forgotten about the state of affairs at Guantanamo Bay or Abu Ghraib and the recent merciless torture of innocent Iraqi youngsters. Only closure or shifting of such inhuman detention & torture camps won't clear the US of unprecedented violation of human rights. These killers should not dare to publish statistics of others' records. China has listed the severity of a few violations by the US authorities which include 287 incidents of illegal electronic surveillance of innocent civilians, phone calls, emails and house trespasses by FBI agents. They are talking about actions by the Rab & police, whereas according to records, Los Angeles police shot dead, last July 14, a child of 19

months while arresting another person; a New Orleans police officer mercilessly assaulted on 9 October a retired teacher. According to the Los Angeles Times report of last March only seven complaints were settled from over two hundred of police misbehaviour and torture. And as per the report of last year by the Justice Department 22 lakh 67 thousand and 787 are behind bars till the end of the year 2004. Isn't this brief info enough to justify that the US doesn't have the credibility to judge the state of human rights in other countries?

AF Rahman
On e-mail

BCS exams

We all know that the preliminary questions of the 27th BCS exams were leaked, whatever the PSC claims. Now I am concerned about this year's written exams as the

possibility of question leakage cannot be ruled out. Because a section of PSC employees and some people are reported to have started bargaining with examinees to sell the questions.

The matter needs to be addressed in all seriousness, as the future of the nation depends on proper and smooth holding of such important exams.

A Rahman
An examinee

Cartoon controversy

The world has been shaken by a little storm in a cup of tea that brewed in Denmark some months ago. A cartoon depicting the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (pbuh), as published by a Danish newspaper offended millions of Muslims across the globe.

They claimed it was freedom of speech. Apparently the freedom of speech & action applies only

when western interests are at stake. We Muslims are being demonised by certain western zealots. Let's come to the point, a few misguided men are engaged in subversive activities in the name of Islam. But we all have to know that they are misinterpreting Islam as a religion. We must remember that Islam is a religion of peace. Religion obviously is compassion, not a lethal weapon.

If we have done anything wrong, anyone can criticise us. But no one has the right to hurt our feelings.

Md. Toufiqur Rahman
Rothkola, Kishoregonj

Discriminatory crossfire?

We read quite often that outlaws are killed in crossfire after they have been captured. On the other hand, none of the JMB militants captured so far has been killed in

crossfire.

We would like to know why crossfire discriminates between JMB outlaws on one hand and outlaws of other kinds on the other hand. Is somebody calling the shots from behind the screen?

Michael Smith
On e-mail

In-depth review

Hats off to Rounaq Jahan for the in depth book review with a "depressing" title "We've Learnt Nothing from History". The review is so thorough that one feels as if s/he has read the book.

As acknowledged, a good book like this provokes many questions for the reader. My question is why? If the purpose of History is to teach us then what was the obstacle for which we learnt nothing? For learning is a two way communication.

Another question. Whom does

"We" refer to? The rulers or the ruled? The military, political, bureaucratic rulers or the multi-lingual people with a common faith? Any ordinary person is able to give a reasonable account of the follies and foolhardy events and escapades during the past five or more decades.

And what does "Nothing" refer to? To my mind to learn nothing is an impossible situation, similar to being fatalistic, a sort of mental rigidity and regimentation.

I couldn't agree more with the reviewer's felt need for empirical research into political involvement of NSI and DGFI, or personal accounts by privileged persons who witnessed historical events. However any move in this direction by a researcher or writer is faced with insurmountable challenges; even if this entails a straightforward documentation on regular and routine activities. All information and communication are labeled as

"sensitivity of the highest order." When such is the mindset, research and writing continue to stay put.

Farida Shaikh
On e-mail

Living in darkness?

By publishing cartoons some European newspapers attacked Islam and our great Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh) without knowing the very meaning of Islam (Peace). They have deviated from the path of truth and like Abu Jehel and Abu Lahab have selected a path that is cursed.

The prophet of Islam is universally recognised as a great man whose contribution to mankind was tremendous. But it seems the cartoonists were not aware of the greatness of the man who changed the world in a perceptible way through preaching Islam.

Manirul Hassan
Dhaka University