

Death of a jute worker in Ctg

Why police action often leads to such tragedy?

THE incident of a jute mill worker in Chittagong dying in the hands of the police leaves us shocked beyond comprehension. And before commenting any further on the tragedy we would like to ask the relevant authorities: Why must the police continue to take human lives, especially when those humans happen to be poor, hard working factory workers or day-labourers going to the authorities with their rightful demands? We understand often it necessitates resorting to baton charge, but beating a person to death is simply unacceptable.

In the case of the workers of Amin Jute Mills, they had queued up at the mill gate for payment of their daily wages accrued for nearly three months. That is a long period to wait considering the low wages workers get in this country and rise in prices of essentials. But, instead of taking their plight into consideration the mill management allegedly kept on giving them false dates. And at one stage when the frustrated workers began to agitate angrily, the mill authorities called in the police. Reportedly, most of the agitating workers came from the northern districts that are now under floodwater and they have been asking for the wages so that they could send the money home to their family members. We strongly feel the humanitarian aspect of the situation has been ignored by the mill authorities.

We believe the tragedy in Chittagong could have been averted had the mill authorities been less callous and more proactive. Before engaging a labour force it is only logical to have the needed funds ready so that wages can be paid in time. And we also believe the death of the worker could have been prevented had the police been more restrained in handling crowd behaviour.

While we condemn anyone engaging in violent clashes with the members of the law-enforcing agencies, we at the same time fail to give any credence to a force that is trigger-happy. There may be one hundred reasons to bring a crowd under control, but there can be no acceptable reason to cause death of a single person while doing so. And yet, we often see tragic end of lives whenever police goes into action to quell an angry crowd. This brutal, unfriendly face of our police force reminds us of that of the colonial era. We regret that after 36 years of independence this has not changed.

EC's move to talk with politicians welcome

Govt must ensure that conditions conducive for talks are maintained

AT long last, ban or no ban on indoor politics, the Election Commission (EC) has decided to engage political parties in a dialogue over its draft electoral reform proposals beginning next month. Accordingly, they are planning to send the draft proposals announced by them as early as April 3 to the political parties for their study towards the end of the current month. We wonder why the move, now being made, regardless of the ban on indoor politics, couldn't be taken earlier to advance the process of electoral reforms.

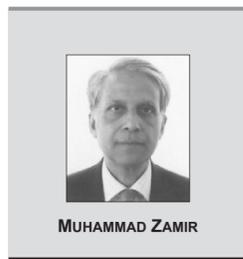
As a paper have consistently urged action on two fronts: On the one hand, we counselled the government to lift the ban on indoor politics to carry forward the reform agenda; and on the other, we advised the EC to move with the political parties to initiate dialogue with them. With the political parties in a state of flux, we suggested that letters of invitation be addressed to the presidents and secretaries-general of political parties by designation leaving it to them to send their representatives. This is what the EC has actually decided to do now. What stopped them from doing it earlier?

Since from the beginning the EC was clear in its mind that intra-party reform was for the political parties to carry out while the EC was involved with its electoral reform proposals, nothing should have stood in the way of the EC to conduct discussion on its reform agenda with the political parties.

As with the preparation of voter list, so with the initiation of a reform process, the EC has given mixed signals. At one stage, they gave the impression that the political parties had to complete their intra-party reform processes before the electoral reform agenda could be taken up. There was even a suggestion that 'making or breaking of political parties' must come to an end before the task of electoral reform were taken in hand.

Such phases thought to have been over now with the EC's fresh decision, the political parties must make the most of the overture to cooperate in bringing about the much-needed electoral reform. Meanwhile, the onus is on the government to create condition for talks and then maintain it.

Can Bangladesh achieve sustained growth?



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

IT has been comprehensively established across the globe that economic growth is the most potent force for the eventual eradication of poverty. International experience also indicates that growth in productivity is an important contributor in the fostering of human development.

The World Bank Office, Dhaka, in a recent report (published end July, 2007) entitled 'Bangladesh: Strategy for Sustained Growth' has underlined an interesting observation. Mr Xian Zhu, the Country Director of the Bank has remarked that poverty rate in Bangladesh has "declined steeply from 58 percent in 1992 to 40 percent in 2005, a period over which income growth has picked up markedly, and impressive progress has been made on many key human development indicators despite serious weaknesses in governance, notably corruption". Most interesting!

The report highlights a few other factors. It points out that over the last three decades many 'doubts and doubters have been disproven' with regard to the economic viability of Bangladesh. In this context it has been stated that 'life expectancy in Bangladesh has risen from 50 to 64 years. Population growth rates of 3 percent a year have been halved ... Child mortality rates of 240 per 1,000 births have been cut by 70 percent. Literacy has more than

doubled, and Bangladesh is on track in meeting its Millennium Development Goal on gender parity, having already achieved the goal in primary and secondary schooling'.

These gains have been seen as 'the result of targeted government efforts and exemplary social entrepreneurship'. It has also been suggested that such a movement forward owes a 'primary debt to income growth, the strongest engine for raising living standard and reducing poverty'.

These comments are indeed

benefitted human development.

Nevertheless, despite such positive reports, we are forced with many continuing negatives. In this regard I agree with the observations of the World Bank in certain areas. Bangladesh will need to 'deepen its industrial base, further its economic integration with global markets and unleash the growth potentials of its major urban centres', especially Dhaka.

Various reform measures will also need to be addressed for achieving the desired macroeco-

poverty reduction strategy. I have over here deliberately used the term reduction and not alleviation.

It is at this point that I will also stress on another serious failing that exists within our economic system. I am referring here to our less than perfect method for gathering data and eventually transforming them into statistics. More often than not, our Bureau of Statistics ends up being a problem rather than the answer. Qualitatively, it suffers from several constraints -- both in terms of qualified, trained personnel as

make the rapid transition to Middle Income Country (MIC) status where our per capita gross national income (GNI) can reach US\$875 by 2023. They consider that this will be possible if the average per capita GDP growth holds at the 3.5 percent level of the last 10 years (assuming GNI growth equals GDP growth). They have also suggested that this process could be accelerated if Bangladesh is able to raise its per-capita growth to 6 percent, implying GDP growth at a challenging, but not impossible, 7.5 percent.

between our rural and urban economies. Such a step will be assisted through the imparting of greater vocational training at the grassroots level. This will encourage micro-enterprises, build capital and provide employment. It will, almost certainly, also increase prospects of agro-processing. Given capacity building, better phyto-sanitary, storage and packaging facilities, it will also add to our export diversification potential.

If we can broaden our manufacturing base, develop our financial and managerial skills and our credit extension arrangements; we will have crossed the most important hurdles. This will lead to enhanced competitiveness.

Our per capita GDP in 2005 in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms was just under US\$2,000 compared to India's US\$3,486, China's US\$6,572 and Malaysia's US\$10,843. This scenario can however change and will change if we can garner the necessary political will, have a committed political leadership and good governance.

We will need a long-term strategy, which will have to be implemented without political interference and bias. We have our bottlenecks and weaknesses but these can be overcome. We have skills constraints, but we can improve upon them through effective re-structuring, fiscal sustainability and continued monetary prudence.

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POST BREAKFAST

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significant when analysed against the backdrop of sluggish, mediocre average yearly GDP growth rate of 1.2 percent achieved between 1972 and 1989.

It has also been revealed that since 1990, due to market deregulation and privatisation measures, reforms in the areas of macro stabilisation, trade liberalisation and financial deregulation, per capita GDP growth has attained an average of 3.3 percent. This rate, almost triple of the previous average has been more than double that of the median country worldwide and three times that of the median low-income country.

It would appear that the economic advances since the 1990s have largely been due to productive reforms having coincided with political democratisation. This apparently also underpinned and

nominal stability. Emphasis will have to be given towards the strengthening of tax mobilisation and reducing the corrupt practice of 'systems loss' in the energy sector. There will also have to be review and reforms pertaining to principles associated with external trade.

Similarly, our economic strategists and planners need to rebalance their policies and focus more on hitherto neglected structural areas. This should include due consideration being given to economic and corporate governance, urban management, infrastructure (particularly power sector, ports and transportation) and labour skills. Few can deny that these are especially important for strengthening factor productivity. If we can get our act together and juxtapose these with reduction in corruption, we can then definitely move forward in our

well as resources. In both, short as well as intermediate terms, this is affecting our research and subsequent development measures. We are being hamstrung because of this and the shortcomings need to be removed.

There are other areas which also need our attention: (a) the linkage between remittance received from our expatriate workers, rural development and micro-entrepreneurship, (b) the question of disguised unemployment and partial unemployment both in the rural as well as the suburban areas and (c) the dynamics and effect of our informal economy. These have to be reviewed in the context of our existing economic matrix and a meaningful and functional equation arrived at.

The economists in the World Bank feel that Bangladesh can

One can only comment that this desirable trend has been achieved in China, Korea and Thailand. It is now being attempted in India. It has however been possible in these countries because of certain important factors -- large dosages of FDI, a shift from agriculture to industry and services, deepening of integration with global markets and emergence of dynamic urban centres. These elements have facilitated quick transformation.

These countries have also had to, on a fast track basis, generally improve their labour productivity rates through the enhancement of labour skills. There is a lesson in this for us as well.

I believe that Bangladesh has a chance to move forward quickly if we can, in addition to the requisite reforms in the regulatory area also try to increase connectivity

Men of straw



KULDEEP NAYAR

writes from New Delhi

AT the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, India woke to freedom. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru assured the nation that "long ago, we made a tryst with destiny and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge." The pledge he spelled out meant the ending of poverty, ignorance and disease, and inequality of opportunity. Mahatma Gandhi had promised earlier to wipe out every tear from every eye.

Yet, after 60 years of independence, we have not been able to provide clean drinking water to our people, in fact, not even regular supply of water. And our official admission is that 260 million in the population of one billion are destitute and 390 million illiterate.

Independence has not improved the plight of the poor in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal either. The deprivation of the lower half increases as the region further adopts the Western (should it be the World Bank?) model of development. The growth rate may be impressive, but it leaves an ordinary person way behind and helpless.

The difference between low and high salaries would generally be

1:15. It is now 1:500, and even more. The worst part of this type of development is that it has squeezed out sympathy and consideration from our society. It has ceased to care, and it is no more sensitive to the misery of the neglected, the ousted, or the victims of disease or disaster. Funds are collected out of pity, not because of real feeling.

Not long ago, people talked about the poor. There was compassion in their approach. The civil society lost it in its focus on the growth rate.

ends justify the means, the common man has been crushed. There doesn't seem to be any hope of his coming up.

How can it happen when indiscriminate privatisation is edging out the small and the weak from the system? It is going to be more ruthless in the days to come. The government is withdrawing from various sectors completely or partially. True, this lessens its liability. But what about the working conditions of those who have been

travelled through all the neighbouring countries. I have found them far from settled. Even after six decades of independence, they are in flux. They are free in name only, and they are the ones who bear the burden the most. Their primary suffering is because the rule of law does not exist and the police have been contaminated. Minorities in most countries are insecure.

All nations in the region swear by democracy, but they have lost it in essence. Some have only a sem-

bread shall escape taxation. Only air will be free and the blood of these hungry millions will be on the head of Mr Atlee (then Prime Minister). These are men of straw of whom no trace will be found after a few years."

His was a remark of a defeated imperialist who had lost the profit-making empire. Yet, there is no doubt that leaders in South East Asia have shrunk in stature. They are small men who have come to occupy big positions. They want power, not to advance the public interest but to secure their own personal or party gratification.

In the last few months I have

BETWEEN THE LINES

No doubt, the countries in South East Asia have made progress. Some fallout of development has trickled below, but very little. The task of building is stupendous. But the rulers are doing the opposite, permitting the speculative builder and greedy landlord to drive hideous scars across our countryside, straggling over our ancient civilization. The people did not fail the rulers. The latter did. They still do not know how to govern, how to stay clean, and how to fulfill the pledge that economic independence will follow political independence. They have turned out to be men of straw.

Even liberal thinking has become ossified into pragmatism. What was once the Left is today part of the establishment. Its revolution is confined to appointments and transfers. On the other hand, vulgar consumption is rationalized in the name of entrepreneurship.

The poor are seen lacking in the initiative and hence suffering. The value system has changed. Even the ethical behaviour is absent. Big is big building, big dam or big bank balance. Everything has come to revolve around money. Success is itself assessed in terms of the assets you have. In this race, where

thrown to the wolves? They do not get even the pittance of a salary regularly. The railways are one example.

People in the countryside, still eking out existence from the shrinking tract of land they possess are suffering the most. Their output has gone down and the price of inputs has gone up. The support price leaves them with practically no margin. Still, they are a proud lot. Unfortunately, they prefer suicide to the shame of insolvency. In the last few years, one hundred thousand farmers have taken their own lives. These are travails of develop-

ment, some argue. But why should all the sacrifice and suffering be the fate of the common man? He gave his all during the independence movement. What about those who wallow in luxuries in every regime and in every clime? Nehru's pledge of dedication by the nation was not for the betterment of a few.

During the process of transfer of power to India, Winston Churchill said: "Power will go into the hands of rascals, rogues and freebooters. Not a bottle of water, not a loaf of

balance of it. Some are regretting its loss, and some have a sturdy shell without substance. Their jingo nationalism is their pride. What was common to all these countries is the violation of human rights and an array of draconian laws to chastise critics and opponents.

Protection of rights of individuals is the central edifice on which the concept of democracy is based. But the very right has become a relative term. Rulers use the police and the bureaucracy -- now an instrument of tyranny and terror -- to suppress people. They were the ones whom Nehru promised to ameliorate.

Addressing e-governance interoperability issues

FOKHRUZ ZAMAN

WE all know about the meter-gauge and broad-gauge in the railway system. Most of our eastern railway tracks (meter-gauge) are not the same as our western railway tracks (broad-gauge). A train cannot move from meter-gauge to broad-gauge, since these are not inter-operable. For an east-west train journey, one has to board another train.

Similar are the issues with the different brands of cell or mobile phone chargers, which are not inter-operable. The same goes for other incompatible ICT (Information and Communications Technology) systems. Interoperability issues create inconveniences; which increase cost, decrease effectiveness, and blur transparency.

e-Governance, the electronic services provided by the public administration, facilitating citizen participation, is no longer a dream or luxury for our country. Our government has taken several initiatives to introduce e-governance.

The government has started using ICT services and software wherever it can. Now each ministry/division has its own website. These websites are intended to provide information and services to our citizens and businesses.

But the different minis-

tries/divisions don't follow standards while developing their management information systems (MIS), websites, and portals. This caused interoperability problems since they did not follow any common/standard framework keeping the inter-ministerial/inter-divisional processes/communications issues in mind.

Most of the e-governance initiatives so far have created islands of information, difficulties in data interchange, and inefficient communication among the government, the businesses and the citizens. Technology incompatibility is only a piece of this "Interoperability Issues Puzzle" in e-governance initiatives in Bangladesh.

Incompatibilities in government processes, diverse and distributed working groups, people, teams, multiple interest perspectives, and interest groups, all create much larger issues for interoperability than the technology alone. We have hardly noticed any re-usability of elements like government processes, architectures, designs, and technology components in e-governance applications developed so far.

To address the e-governance interoperability issues, the PMO/CAO (with technical assistance from UNDP) has initiated the formation of the BD-eGIF (Bangladesh

Bangladesh, as a developing nation, cannot afford to incur the huge costs of ineffectiveness, inefficiency, inflexibility, and non-transparency of its governance anymore. Many countries in the world have been reaping great benefits from e-governance by harnessing their government processes with a solid framework of technology policies and their phased implementation. Although we are late-entrants into this interoperable e-governance arena, we can learn from the experience of other eGIF initiatives in the world.

eGovernance Interoperability Framework) team very recently.

This team will create a national interoperability framework after consulting all the relevant stakeholders in the process. The framework will set out the Bangladesh government's overall processes, interoperability policy and scope, technical policies, standards and guidelines, and management processes for achieving interoperability and information systems coherence across the public sector.

It will contain descriptions and recommendations of selected processes, standards, technologies and protocols, which will serve as the underlying fabric for designing and implementing e-governance applications in Bangladesh.

The BD-eGIF will be a live entity, and will evolve with time. It will define the essential pre-requisites for a joined-up and web-enabled government. It is a cornerstone policy in the overall e-government strategy of

Bangladesh.

e-Government is essentially about government serving the needs of the citizen in a better way. The BD-eGIF will be an enabling framework for delivering the services seamlessly and coherently. The primary objective of e-governance is to provide client-centric, comprehensive government services to the public. However, within this objective the goals should be efficiency, improved levels of services, and cost effectiveness.

This cannot be achieved through initiatives spread across the public sector; and so far, the e-governance initiatives in Bangladesh have resulted in "islands of information, incompatible data standards and ineffective communication among the government, businesses and citizens."

To provide one-stop comprehensive services, we must enable the seamless flow of information across the diverse and distributed public

bodies and services. The BD-eGIF aims to be an important step towards harmonizing the use of ICT across the government.

Thus, the benefits of the BD-eGIF will be:

- Allow easier and more comprehensive access to public services
- Provide a way for citizens and other stakeholders to avail services and, thus, reduce effort in dealing with the government online.
- Enable better and more efficient management of e-governance products and services by reducing redundancies and overlaps.
- Help government agencies work closely together electronically.
- Make systems, knowledge and experience reusable from one agency to another.

The BD-eGIF will not happen overnight. We will need to adopt iterative, incremental, and integrative processes to achieve our goals. Although we can easily get the global

technology standards and specifications for eGIF, we won't be able to implement those without active support from all the relevant stakeholders. And that is the greatest challenge for BD-eGIF, meeting which will require advocacy, time, energy, passion, persuasion, and executive leadership from the top.

To start with, BD-eGIF will make standards/guidelines in the following areas:

- User interfaces/look and feel for the government web sites/portals.
- Content navigation for the government web sites/portals.
- Content management system framework for the BD e-governance portal.
- Document and data interchange/unicode Bangla font, keyboard.
- Network and system development.
- Project management/system operations and monitoring.

BD-eGIF will recommend using open standards and the redesign of administrative processes, taking advantage of available technology. According to BD-eGIF, government policies should be focused on the following high-level principles:

Effectiveness: e-governance should not be limited to putting existing services online; it should also enable the delivery of entirely new services. We now have passport forms on the web, we could also have the new police verification service and status checking associated with that, and more.

Efficiency: integrating local, regional, and national administrations should cut costs and improve access to information. A police inspector at Natore can query the Sathkha police station and records for a fugitive criminal in that area at anytime. And many more....

Flexibility: citizens and companies should have multi-channel access to e-government services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Say, 3 persons are using PC, PDA, and cell phones on 3 different days and times, including holidays, they all should be able to access the e-government services almost equally.

Transparency: e-governance services should be easy to find and to use. Access to information should be the right of the citizens, to create a free and fair government. Say, you

have a file in the AG office for approval, you will be able to track the file's progress from their website and portal.

Bangladesh, as a developing nation, cannot afford to incur the huge costs of ineffectiveness, inefficiency, inflexibility, and non-transparency of its governance anymore.

Many countries in the world have been reaping great benefits from e-governance by harnessing their government processes with a solid framework of technology policies and their phased implementation.

Although we are late-entrants into this interoperable e-governance arena, we can learn from the experience of other eGIF initiatives in the world. We may need to organise and solidify our grounds based on the ground-realities. But with a strong set of core values, clearly articulated vision, and proper strategy, we shall overcome someday soon!

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