

## The killing of the BDR men

*Such incident is antithetical to good neighbourly ties*

THE killing of two BDR men by India's Border Security Force the other day is an act that cannot but cause deep concern in Dhaka. Coming at a time when there are noticeable changes for the better in relations between the two countries and especially when the foreign secretaries of the two countries have been meeting in Delhi, the shooting by the BSF has laid open to question the modus operandi on which it operates at the border. Indeed, in the past too there have been reports of indiscriminate firing by the BSF on people in Bangladesh territory and especially of BDR personnel.

While it remains our hope that the situation does not get any worse than it has already, it is also our expectation that swift, corrective action will be taken to roll back the damage already done. The BSF has claimed, every time such conditions have occurred, that it has acted against cattle smugglers operating from within Bangladesh. In the present circumstances, however, the images of the dead BDR men only belie the Indian claim. Moreover, there is the disquieting instance of the BSF intruding into Bangladesh and shooting the two Bangladeshi men dead. If evidence were at all needed, the seizure of a speedboat used by the BSF, along with other items, is out there. The sadder part of the whole sordid story is that the BSF is yet to issue a statement of regret over the incident. There are the figures to show how Bangladesh has been at the receiving end of the BSF's trigger-happy attitude. In the first half of this year, as a report by a human rights body shows, 32 unarmed Bangladeshis were killed in BSF firing. In the same period, 22 other Bangladeshis were injured, with yet another 22 being abducted. The irony is that when policy makers in India and Bangladesh are engaged in devising ways and means of improving bilateral relations, such spur-of-the-moment acts as the incident in question can only undermine the whole exercise.

We hope that such incidents will not recur, that indeed the BSF will in future desist from resorting to unprovoked firing into Bangladesh territory. At the same time, we think it is time to consider a new approach to be taken to flag meetings between the two sides. The general impression is that flag meetings usually take place after an incident has already taken place. We suggest that frequent and regular flag meetings be held in order for the BDR and BSF to keep themselves updated on conditions. We also think that the decisions made at the official level should of necessity percolate down to the ground, where it is the personnel of the two forces who matter. It seems those with weapons act on the spur on the moment.

We offer our condolences to the families of the dead men and pray for the salvation of their souls.

## Anti-dumping issue

*Committee must become proactive in country's interest*

WE are concerned at the news of huge quantities of foreign goods being regularly dumped in the country by overseas manufacturers. A report in the business page of this daily gave details of how despite the existing international law prohibiting export of goods at a lower price than the price in the domestic market, many countries are flouting the law, especially when exporting goods to Bangladesh. And because of this practice, one can easily see how shops in every corner are overflowing with imported consumers goods, mostly cheap and substandard as far as price and quality are concerned. This no doubt is forcing the local manufacturers to face uneven competition and financial loss at the end of the day. But World Trade Organisation (WTO) clearly states that export of a product may be termed dumping if the exporting company sells it at a price lower than the price it normally charges in the domestic market. Bangladesh has officially adopted the anti-dumping rule in 1995 following an agreement at the WTO but so far it has not been able to reap any benefit from it.

Although under the WTO law an aggrieved company can lodge complaints to its government against dumping and the government may take the matter up with WTO, Bangladeshi manufacturers have never lodged any such complaints seeking action for violation of the law by foreign exporters. It is further disconcerting to learn that local manufacturers are quite unaware of the process of filing anti-dumping complaints and that they are not well informed of the domestic price index of products in other countries.

We understand that the Bangladesh government had formed a high-profile committee a year ago to look into the matter but it was unsuccessful in completing the task of identifying the sectors that were affected by the dumping problem. The committee also failed to submit any report to the higher authorities within the given time. Now that a reshuffling of the committee has been done by the commerce ministry it is likely that the business sector will expect some immediate and positive action that will bring some results. We hope, this time around, the committee will live up to the expectation of the local manufacturers by taking the dumping issue to international courts, if necessary.

## Remittance and resilience in rural areas



ABDUL BAYES

THE seven billion dollar remittance flow into Bangladesh should be seen as a sign of relief when the economy is caught in a catalogue of economic crises. This amount is roughly 12% of our GDP. Analysts say that our workers from foreign countries sent more money this year to help families faced with price hike. For us particularly, right at the moment, the sauce matters -- not the source. However, foreign exchange flows are not an unmixed blessing, as they might fuel money supply to further inflationary spiral unless properly "sterilized" by the central bank. Assuming that happens, such a big rise in remittance could keep us cool for a while.

Since we are at the moment preparing a report on the state of the rural economy -- based on a Brac-backed household survey in 62 villages -- we shall take our

**BENEATH THE SURFACE**  
The government should also see that these poor households are faced with fewer constraints while planning to send members abroad. The statistics on rural remittance clearly show that poor households have large enough contribution to GDP in terms of producing food or earning foreign exchange to justify special "rural bias" policies or development programs.

readers to rural remittances. That is, we shall talk on the changes in the size and sources of remittances that rural households tend to receive from their migrated members -- within or outside country.

### Remittance as income

Remittances now account for one-fourth of rural household income and roughly the same proportion of rural households have members who have migrated. This compares with about 10% and about 6% respectively in 1988. Thus, during the last two decades, the share of remittance to total household income more than doubled and the share of receivers quadrupled!

Admittedly, the average share so estimated could have concealed the fact that only the rich were rewarded with remittances, because, they had the resources to send members outside, especially in foreign countries. But

we can show that remittances matter for the poor also, no matter where the money comes from.

Thus our survey data show that those who have only homestead land, appear to receive 22% of their household income from remittances, and households with 50 decimals of land derive roughly 18%.

This compares with about 3% and 4% respectively in 1988. Quite obviously, the members of these poor households had been helping them from outside and as years rolled, remittances also rose to increase their resilience. The highest share of remittance income (about 30%) applies to households owning 50 decimals to 2.5 acres of land. Thus the rich are getting richer through remittance -- but the poor are also moving fast in the same direction.

### Destinations and costs

About one-third of the migration

is destined for overseas, double the figure in 1988. Migration to another district drastically increased to 53% from 11% during the same period of time. But within district migration is now less than before. Four-fifths of remitted money now comes from abroad compared to two-thirds in 2000 and about half in 1988. Remittance from another district almost halved, and from within district fell. That means, the share of local remittance has been falling overtime and that of foreign has been rising. Cost of migration is now on average Tk 221,212 compared to Tk 121,777 in 2000. However, the cost of migration increases marginally with the level of education of the migrant.

### Poor to be praised

A very interesting observation is that 44% of the total remittance now comes from members of poor households compared to one-third in 2000 and one-fifth

in 1988. Whereas, in 1988, about half of the remittance used to come from members of rich households. Their share had been falling over time to one-third of the remittance flow. It shows that most of the remittance that we are proud of now is contributed by the poor households. But, unhappily, this group faces a barrage of barricades while sending their family members abroad. If Sylhet district could claim a few ministers in the cabinet because of Sylheti contribution to foreign exchange earnings then, we reckon, a few ministers from the poor could also be included in the cabinet for the same reason.

### Education and occupation

It appears that a higher proportion of educated members are now migrating than before. For example, the share of migrants with no formal education declined from 15% to 6% between 2007 and 2000 while that with primary education is up from 19 to 24%. However, the proportion of migrants with SSC+ education soared from 24% to 40% during the same period of time. A gleam on the occupational status shows that more than 60% of the migrants are with jobs, 15% with study, 4% business, and 13% as wage

labour.

### Conclusion

Earlier in this column we tried to argue that increased remittance income could be one of the factors that keep farms away from distress sales of paddy. We could, perhaps, establish that our hypothesis is not far from the field level evidence. In the realm of discussion on remittance in Bangladesh, however, it is often forgotten that the poor rural households have a big contribution in enlarging the size of the cake called "foreign exchange reserves."

In fact, their contribution had been rising over time. The government should heavily invest in education and technical training to export human capital overseas. The government should also see that these poor households are faced with fewer constraints while planning to send members abroad. The statistics on rural remittance clearly show that poor households have large enough contribution to GDP in terms of producing food or earning foreign exchange to justify special "rural bias" policies or development programs.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University. Comments to: [abdulbayes@yahoo.com](mailto:abdulbayes@yahoo.com).

## The convicted and corrupt at the polls



A.N.M. NURUL HAQUE

ELECTIONEERING has kicked off in four city corporations and nine municipalities for the August 4 polls, as the candidates running for mayor and ward councillor posts have formally started their campaign after the Emergency Power Rules (EPR) was relaxed further. But allowing a good number of convicts and corrupt people to run in the polls is surely a disturbing development. Most of these contenders are ward commissioners, who were either behind bars or in hiding after promulgation of the emergency.

A report carried by Prothom Alo on July 13 stated that 16 mayoral candidates whose nominations have been declared valid for the August 4 polls are accused in 34 criminal cases on various charges that include murder, illegal possession of firearms, and extortion. Some of them are among the graft suspects listed

by the ACC, and due to loopholes in the existing electoral laws they have emerged as candidates.

Many of the councillor aspirants, whose nominations were accepted by the district election office, face various charges including murder, extortion, and corruption. Some of them, convicted by trial courts and out on bail granted by the High Court, are now running for re-election in an animated mood. According to media reports, at least 14 incumbent commissioners contesting in the Barisal City Corporation poll for councillor's posts are accused in various criminal cases.

Whether an electoral candidate can be disqualified from contesting in polls on conviction by a trial court for offences involving moral turpitude, or be allowed to contest in polls while his or her appeal against the verdict is pending in court, is an important issue that still remain

unresolved.

In the absence of specific legal provisions, the EC has decided that a convicted person is eligible for contesting in polls while his or her appeal is pending in a court, but legal experts have opined that a convicted person becomes disqualified on conviction by a trial court.

The Constitution in Article 66(2) (d) states: "A person shall be disqualified for election as, or for being, a member of Parliament who has been, on conviction for a criminal offence involving moral turpitude, sentenced to imprisonment for a term of not less than two years, unless a period of five years has elapsed since his release."

EPR also clearly states when a person will be disqualified for election, and it has no contradiction with the Constitution. According to the Constitution and EPR, there is no scope for a person who has been convicted

for a criminal offence to contest in the polls.

The special courts set up at the MP hostel in Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban complex to try corruption and extortion cases filed against detained political bigwigs have so far convicted 112 persons, including a large number of politicians. Most of the convicted politicians belong to two major political parties, BNP and Awami League.

A report published in the daily Jugantor on June 14 says that the government has black-listed 15 former ministers and lawmakers of BNP for their involvement in massive corruption. Out of them 11 are in jail and four are absconding.

The government is also preparing a list of the most corrupt politicians in AL and Jamaat-e-Islam, which will be sent to their respective parties. Besides taking proper actions against these political bigwigs as per the law of

land for their involvement in massive corruption, the government will request their respective parties not to nominate them for the election.

The way things are going in the upcoming city corporation and municipality polls is quite enough for one to realise that persons of dubious and questionable credentials cannot be barred from contesting in polls, unless specific provisions are added to the electoral laws. The political parties are not likely to pay any heed to the request for nominating clean candidates, as top leaders of the major parties are behind bars.

Re-appearance of the convicts and the corrupt in the run-up to the city corporation and municipality polls has worried us all. It is quite obvious that they will try their best to influence the electoral process by means of money, muscle, and misuse of power to win. The voters, who are mostly poor and unorganised, have little chance to evade these evil designs. Eventually, the vile elements of the society will stage a comeback to power and will re-start their old game with refreshed energy.

The chief adviser and the army chief have urged the people to apply their wisdom and judgment in electing competent and honest candidates in the upcoming polls. But the people

are quite disappointed that the old faces, most of them of dubious reputation, are showing up in the upcoming polls with their belied pledges.

The council of advisers approved the draft of the Representation of the People Order (RPO) Ordinance 2008 on July 13. It is a commendable development that the government is adding a new provision to the RPO to disqualify contestants convicted by a trial court for criminal offences involving moral turpitude. This should be done immediately as this caretaker government is committed to rid the country's politics from the grip of the corrupt, crooked and criminal. Otherwise, all the developments so far made to bring a meaningful change in the political landscape will boil down to a farce.

The nation is now passing through a crucial period in the transition to a durable democracy. The people are eagerly awaiting the promised election, as the country desperately needs a fresh start with dedicated leadership. The successful holding of August 4 polls is a test case for the EC before the parliamentary polls in December. Therefore, the EC must try its best to hold the upcoming polls free from all evil influences.

A.N.M. Nurul Haque is a columnist of The Daily Star.

## The necessity of inter-faith dialogue



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

### GOING DEEPER

**The very fact that Osama bin Laden has taken refuge in terrorism testifies that his brand of Islam does not enjoy the affection of the great majority of the Muslims. The unreserved condemnation of the entire Muslim world of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and its support of the decimation of the Taliban when the US-led coalition forces invaded Afghanistan are further testimonies, if any are needed.**

logue currently being held at Madrid, so essentially needed for social cohesion in multi-religious countries, will be put to the test by the results the conference achieves.

One cannot but wonder whether Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran who is representing the Vatican in the Madrid conference can dissociate himself from the spirit of the speech delivered by Pope Benedict XVI at the University of Regensburg in Germany in which the pope had extensively referred to a dialogue between Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Paleologus and an unnamed Persian scholar that presented an unsavoury portrayal of Islam.

Robert Kagan in his book *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* considers the struggle of

radical Islamists, "the most dramatic refutation of the convergence paradigm," is doomed to fail because "in the struggle between traditionalism and modernity, tradition cannot win -- even though traditional forces armed with modern weapons, technologies, and ideologies can do horrendous damage."

Ultimately, Robert Kagan feels, Islamic radicalism may have less impact on international affairs than the struggle between great powers and between forces of democracy and autocracy. French theorist Oliver Roy also concludes that globalisation has reduced Islam to Westernised cultural and ideological forms like Christianity and that a single Islamic form no longer exists.

Giles Keppel, on the other

hand, is not as quick as Francis Fukuyama to declare the victory of liberal democracy and therefore mankind's end of ideological evolution and "the end of history."

Keppel in his book *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* is more cautious because the militants are no longer illiterate and disorganised but have an, incredible sense of geopolitics. Even in conservative Iran, female literacy is around 80% and the marriage age is 22 years (though legally it has been brought down to 9 years).

In contrast to Oliver Roy's surmise that Westernisation and globalisation has become pervasive in Muslim societies, Keppel fears that if the Muslim diaspora in the West decides to join hands with the radicals

then the Western world may have to opt for historian Niall Ferguson's prediction about developed economies "retreat into fortified cities ... [of a] Dark Age more dangerous one than the Dark Age of the ninth century."

Such apocalyptic predictions pre-suppose a united Muslim ummah in revolt against the modernity and enlightenment that the Judeo-Christian world had ushered in centuries back. This kind of presupposition may be faulty because the Muslim society today is fractious, there are internecine conflict among different sects professing Islam including Saudi Arabia where the ruling family is fighting a precarious battle to retain their control over state machinery, a battle being waged by an educated class imbued with Western values that would like to see Western institutions of governance with greater accountability of the leaders to the people and the clerics who are hell bent to retain their leadership and would like to keep a system of Islamic faith that is "pure" in their eyes and any deviation from it would lead the

Muslim society towards "degenerative Western way of life."

The very fact that Osama bin Laden has taken refuge in terrorism testifies that his brand of Islam does not enjoy the affection of the great majority of the Muslims. The unreserved condemnation of the entire Muslim world of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and its support of the decimation of the Taliban when the US-led coalition forces invaded Afghanistan are further testimonies, if any are needed.

The soft power that the US had been using after the Second World War, albeit acceding to "democracy deficit" in many parts of the Islamic world as dictated by the circumstances of the Cold War, had won the hearts and the minds of the developed and the developing worlds till the Bush administration decided to use hard power by invading Iraq.

Except that the invasion ousted Saddam Hussein's regime, the benefits accruing to the Iraqi people consequent upon his disappearance are yet to be seen. What is certainly being perceived is the dislike of the policies of the Bush admin-

istration, not only in the Islamic world, but also among the allies of the US, and, more importantly, among the people who belong to faiths other than Islam.

Harvard Professor Joseph Nye in his new book *The Powers to Lead* has recommended that "effective leadership requires a mixture of soft and hard power skills that I call smart power. The proportion differs with context." The admission by US defense secretary Robert Gates of "creeping militarisation" of US foreign policy and calling for further strengthening of the US State Department because in the future security threats are more likely to emanate from poor or failing states than from rising powers supports the use of "smart power" that Joseph Nye is now advocating.

One may ignore Islamophobia, but the world has been victim of Islamic militancy on innumerable occasions and Bangladesh has been no exception. A prominent economist has calculated that the net profit of institutions run by Islamists amount to about 12 billion takas annually, out of which ten per-

cent is spent on regular party activities, providing remuneration and allowances to about half a million party cadres, and running armed training camps. He observed that while the number of primary schools since liberation has doubled, that of Dakhil madrasahs has increased eight-fold.

Delhi-based South Asia Intelligence Review in one of its report linked "increasing activities of Islamist extremists with then ruling coalition" in Bangladesh and then Indian foreign secretary warned that India would not ignore her neighbours' conduct "to allowing the use of their territories for cross-border terrorism and hostile activities against India."

Our authorities, by and large, have been dismissive of Indian allegations levelled against Bangladesh. One hopes that for the sake of peace in this region all countries of South Asia would respond to the security concerns of the member states of Saarc so that terrorism does not act as an impediment on our way to further socio-economic progress.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.