

Deficits in combating extremist violence



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE Daily Star has editorially ventilated frustrations in the slow investigation of bomb explosion cases and the inability of the enforcement units to forestall such incidents. Concerned citizens have expressed identical views and the civil society has impressed upon firm political resolve in tackling the extremist depredations.

Those wishing to take a deeper look into the matter have to appreciate that whether in fighting or controlling or even containing the so-called religious extremism, the first step is to understand and appreciate the very prevalence of such elements in a given society and its pernicious effects on the way of life of the citizens. Unfortunately, in Bangladesh, we have been periously late in awakening to the realities on ground. This is not to discredit anybody or apportion blame to any particular political party because the growth and muscle flexing of the obscurantist elements has not been limited to the tenure of one regime. Cumulative inaction of the regulatory authority resulting from a lack of appreciation by policy-makers about the mindset and modus-operandi of the extremists has brought us to the present state of affairs.

The constitutional position vis-a-vis the programme of the extremists leave no room for any ambiguity. While at the macro-level it may be a matter of political direction to sort out disagreements through dialogue and persuasion, the field-level operatives, both in uniform

and plainclothes must have clear directives and of action for preventing violent subversive actions.

We have to admit that the reality of the threat of violence and subversion from some religious outfits and institutions was abundantly clear from the first quarter of 1999. The attack on eminent poet Shamsur Rahman, the planting of extremely high-powered bombs at meeting place and helipad in Kotlaipara under Gopalganj district where the then Prime Minister had official programme, the discovery of huge explosives and bomb making materials at Sonar Bangla Soap Factory at Gopalganj owned by Mufi Hannan (now in custody), the attack on Communist Party meeting at Paltan Maidan and at the Bengali New Year cultural function at Ramna Park, to mention a few, were credible evidence to the steadily growing mischief making potential of the extremist groups.

There was credible information about some apparent charitable and voluntary bodies which were receiving funds from abroad for activities that were doubtful and could not be satisfactorily explained. The fact that some such bodies have now been asked to close their activities in Bangladesh and that the expatriates from Middle Eastern and African countries working in those organisations have now left is clear testimony to their association with Bangladesh elements believing in un-constitutional ways of achieving their socio-political objectives.

Whether extremist elements have flourished due to the support and encouragement of ruling parties and the establishment may be a matter of probe, but the threatening reality is that they have not been under effective surveillance. The determination and deadly attack at the state apparatus with attendant panic are adequate proof of the unhindered growth and sustenance of persons and organisations who want to upset the constitutional way of life. Our failures are manifest reality.

We may have to ask ourselves if a perception has developed among the terrorist groups that the Bangladesh state is inherently incapable of meeting their challenge and that it has become soft and indolent. We may have to ascertain if quite a few parties have developed a vested interest in a soft state, a weak government and ineffective implementation of the laws. Simultaneously, are foreign funds flowing substantially to various organisations and groups which serve, willingly or unwillingly, the long-term objective of some political parties suspected to be aligned or sympathetic to the regional or international terrorist network?

Since terrorism of the so-called Islamic extremists have increased in its very nature thereby demanding changes in the strategy to counter it, are we ready to seriously study the problem, one may ponder. This is natural because we do not witness credible attempts being made to examine links between terrorist groups, the

conditions in which they had spawned, the politician-militant nexus and other forms of patronage these groups receive, the proliferation of small arms leading to the growth of private armies etc. The question is, are we trying to appreciate all the factors that contribute to the 'quality and extent' of internal security threats? Another specific question could be whether our failure to deal with the terrorist crime is largely attributable to the inefficiency and corruption of the law enforcing machinery.

What may or may not be done to counter the malevolence of the extremists concerns every right-thinking Bangladeshi but equally, if not more significant, is what kept the state apparatus in a deep slumber while the bigots carried on virtually undisturbed. There is a creeping suspicion that there never was a dispassionate appreciation of the real threat scenario. In other words, was there no effort to pinpoint the threats posed to our democratic polity and by extension to our independent national existence? These questions should bother us because patriotic citizens of the People's Republic of Bangladesh must know that.

Justifiable worries have been ventilated about the fate of investigation of bombing incidents in Bangladesh with particular reference to 'Udichi' tragedy of March '99. It may be relevant to mention here that the connected criminal case ended in charge sheet in December 1999 and the trial finally concluded in 2006. All accused

persons have been left off for insufficient evidence and the investigating officer faces a stricture from the court for apparently perfunctory work. The questions as to who is at fault and in what degree can be established only by scrutinizing all the concerned papers and documents by competent personnel.

One has to admit that in the fitness of things every criminal case should be disposed of on its own merit. That is the ideal. There are, however, objective conditions in Bangladesh to doubt that the fate of some cases, if not many, did not have the benefit of such ideal standard. The inordinate delay in the holding of trial of the 'Udichi' incident should not escape the attention of concerned commentators. Some cynics say that the expeditious holding of this trial may have produced different findings. This writer is not sure but would like to dwell upon certain facts and circumstances of our socio-political existence and in particular the perilous political polarization of our society that has a definite bearing upon the basic regulatory function of investigation by the state agency, the police.

The pernicious culture of playing to the tune of unscrupulous political masters or pandering to their unwholly wishes by the investigating agencies and other sensitive state agencies has not occurred all on a sudden. Spells of un-constitutional rule, particularly during 1982-90, have substantially damaged the ethos of our public service including the investigating agen-

cies. While leadership deficits account for some malfeasance, the real damage has been done by an insensitive and myopic dictatorial establishment that was hell-bent to screw all regulatory and corrective institutions. The unwholesome effect of such institution-bashing is now being felt by a concerned citizenry. One is, however, not oblivious of the fact that the democratically elected but temperamentally dictatorial regimes since 1991 have been any better in realizing the damage done to the professionalism of the services. The halo and clan of public service has meant little to the political leadership who have spent more time and energy in fostering the growth of pliable and time-serving personnel for achieving their selfish goals.

While the public's right to be informed cannot be denied and the nation's concern for the safety and security of innocent lives cannot be brushed aside, we will perhaps do well to look at the factual dimension of the bomb blasts in a dispassionate manner. Almost immediate apportioning of blame mostly on rivals of the other camp by responsible persons after each occurrence has become a pathetic recurrent reality. Indiscreet and uninformed comments in such sensitive matters further compound the environment in our society where almost everybody -- from the humble to the mighty -- has some expertise on law and order, observes a cynic who has been in the business of law and order for quite some time.

What, however, is not attracting our attention is the predicament of the investigating agency in a situation marked by opposing pulls and lack of adequate scientific support in a professional manner without any influence peddling. Readers may recollect the time, energy and resources devoted to the investigation of the explosion incident that led to the death of Rajiv Gandhi of India. It needs to be emphasized that unnecessary and motivated haste in the investigation of such cases might prove

counter-productive.

While the police must unearth and detect the bomb blast cases and prevent such incidents from happening by dint of quality intelligence, they cannot be expected to put a complete stop to such incidents because of circumstances beyond their control. Extreme views advocating and implementing annihilation of the opponent is a sad socio-political reality of our society and in rooting out this menace the police is at best a marginal player. Similarly, the so-called extermination campaign of class enemy by apparently ideologically motivated elements cannot be effectively controlled by adopting a purely conventional law and order approach. Extremism of the so-called fundamentalist variety can be countered by a joint strategy of persuasion and tough action, with political direction being conspicuously pronounced.

In all the above matters, the acumen needed is political sagacity and patience to fight the painfully long battle against extremist depredations and insurgency. If it is a political battle with armed support and not the other way, we will definitely overcome the present predicament sooner than apprehended. Violence must not be allowed to be a way of our life along with a political consensus to abjure it. The police, admittedly, in this regard have a secondary role to perform and that relates to prevention of some description and intensive investigation once the damage has been done. Let us make sustained efforts to facilitate the organization in acquiring the hallmarks of a professionally upright body.

There is no denying that we will definitely put ourselves and our future generation in peril by our inability to let a truly professional investigating agency grow in accordance with the dictates of the law. Viewing criminal occurrences from a political angle only will be ruinous because that would not only be a damper to the growth of professionalism but also in the process shatter the remaining confidence reposed in the vital institution of the State. We still have pockets of

excellence in our investigative outfits and it shall be in the fitness of things to allow such outfits to attain professional excellence without being tainted by any direction. Let the actual facts and circumstances of the incident be ascertained as is the job of the investigator and let that be placed before the court for adjudging the guilt.

Our intelligence organization needs to work under pragmatic political leadership and if properly and professionally steered, it does not threaten our liberties. If we operate by the book, we will be adequately informed of the perils which face us. If we do not know the designs of the so-called religious extremists, then we could well be isolated and our liberties, too, could be in jeopardy. Therefore, we must be ready to deal with all aspects of the not-very-visible war of the bigots with all its ramifications and fronts, supported by external resources. The last thing we can afford to do now is to put our intelligence in chains. Its protective and informative role is indispensable in time of unique and continuing violence in the name of religion.

Democracy has to allow the interaction of different shades of opinion or divergent views to ensure the vibrancy of a pluralist society. However, that does not mean that there will be freedom to convert the entire country into a theocratic dispensation by application of force and intimidation and the litigant public has to approach the clerics for resolution of disputes and judgement, as demanded. There is a challenge to our way of life. This must be realized by the mainstream political parties who are pledge-bound to uphold, protect and preserve our constitution. Therefore, the visible enemy must be caught by the forelock and be dealt with under the law. A sovereign republic born out of a historic struggle entailing epic human sacrifices demand that. We must not fail.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is a columnist of The Daily Star.

Determining future dates for fasting and Eid

PROF. DR. ANWAR-UL KARIM

FROM any location on the earth, the moon appears to be a circular disk which, at any specific time, is illuminated to some degree by direct sunlight. Like the earth, the moon is a sphere which is always half illuminated by the sun, but as the moon orbits the earth we get to see more or less of the illuminated half. During each lunar orbit (a lunar month), we see the moon's appearance changes from not visibly illuminated through partially illuminated to fully illuminated, then back through partially illuminated to not illuminated again. Although this cycle is a continuous process, there are eight distinct, traditionally recognised stages, called phases. These phases designate both the degree to which the moon is illuminated and the geometric appearance of the illustrated part.

These phases of the moon, in sequence of their appearance, are: 1. New Moon, 2. Waxing Crescent, 3. First Quarter, 4. Waxing Gibbous, 5. Full Moon, 6. Waning Gibbous, 7. Last or Third Quarter, and 8. Waning Crescent. Following waning crescent is New Moon, beginning a repetition of the complete phase cycle of 29.5 days average duration. In Fig-1 all these eight moon phases in a month can be seen for March 2008.

Although full moon occurs each month at a specific date and time, the moon's disk may appear to be full for several nights in a row if it is clear. This is because the percentage of the moon's disk that appears illuminated changes very slowly around the time of full moon. The moon may appear 100 per cent illuminated only on the night closest to the time of exact full

moon but on the night before and night after will appear 97-99 per cent illuminated; most people would not notice the difference. Even two days from full moon the moon's disk is 93-97 per cent illuminated. During the lunar phase of new moon, the moon's unilluminated side is facing the earth; the moon is not visible (excepting during a solar eclipse). The moon may appear 100 per cent unilluminated only on the night closest to the time of exact new moon, but the moon's disk may appear fully dark for more nights because the illumination changes very slowly around the time of new moon.

The phases of the moon are related to (actually, caused by) the relative positions of the moon and sun in the sky. For example, new moon occurs when the sun and moon are quite close together in the sky. Full moon occurs when the sun and moon are at nearly opposite positions in the sky -- which is why a full moon rises about the time of sunset, and sets about the time of sunrise, for most places on earth. First and last quarters occur when the sun and moon are about 90 degrees apart in the sky. The relationship of the moon's phases to its angular distance in the sky from the sun allows us to establish very exact definitions of when the primary phases occur, independent of how they appear. Technically, the phases new moon, first quarter,

full moon, and last quarter are defined to occur when the excess of the apparent ecliptic (celestial) longitude of the moon over that of the sun is 0, 90, 180 and 270 degrees respectively.

The first time that the thin waxing crescent is visible after new moon, low in the evening sky just after sunset, marks the beginning of a month in the Islamic calendar.

The earliest astronomical criterion for ascertaining the crescent's first visibility goes back to Babylonian era. The simple criterion based on the observational data was used by early astronomers. The Babylonian criterion is more a rule of thumb which may be stated as follows: 1. At local sunset, moon's age must be more than 24 hours i.e. from the time of conjunction to the time of evening of observation. 2. Moonset should take place at least about 48 minutes after sunset.

Sightings of moon younger than 20 hours are rare and sightings of moon older than 24 hours are not uncommon although the visibility may at times require it to be more than 30 hours old.

The moonset lag criterion is simple enough and is perhaps more meaningful to a layman who can now easily understand that the local moonset should follow considerably after the local sunset and never before (i.e. conjunction must take place before the local sunset) and can easily estimate the chance

of visibility on a local evening reasonable accurately.

The moon has a powerful allure -- it is full of beauty, legend, myth and romance. The phases of the moon are caused by the relative positions of the earth, sun and moon. The moon goes round the earth in 27.3 days, or 27 days 7 hours 43 minutes, on average. This measurement is relative to the stars and is called the sidereal period or orbital period. However, because of the earth's motion around the sun, a complete moon cycle (New Moon to New Moon) appears to earthbound observers to take a couple of days longer: 29.5305882 days to be exact. This number is called the synodic period or "lunation," and is relative to the sun.

The sun always illuminates the half of the moon facing the sun (except during lunar eclipses, when the moon passes through the earth's shadow). When the sun and moon are on opposite sides of the earth, the moon appears "full" to us, a bright, round disk. When the moon is between the earth and the sun, it appears dark, a "new" moon. In between, the moon's illuminated surface appears to grow (wax) to full, then decreases (wanes) to the next new moon.

The specific dates and time of future moon phases are already known or can be calculated as shown in Table-1. According to internet claim, future moon phases

to the year 4999 are already available.

The dates of moon sighting in Bangladesh for the first three lunar months of the current 1429 Hijri were declared by the government. With corresponding new moon data from Table-1, moon's age at local sunset from the time of conjunction and moonset time lag which is the time difference between moonset and sunset at Dhaka have been calculated following the procedure as shown in our previous article: Moon sighting for Eid, The Daily Star, December 8, 2007. All three above moon sightings satisfied the Babylonian criteria of moon's age and moonset time lag.

Round the year the moon, as it orbits the earth which orbits the sun, comes into conjunction with the sun at new moon at different specific instants of 24 hours of a day as shown in Table-1, at noon or afternoon, before or after sunset, at night or around midnight, at dawn or in the morning, etc. But after conjunction with the sun, the moon can be first seen as young crescent only after sunset in the western horizon for a very brief period. If on a new moon date as in Table-1, moon sets earlier than sunset at a place of observation, the new crescent cannot be visible there on that date. Similarly, if a particular conjunction takes place after local sunset at any place, ques-

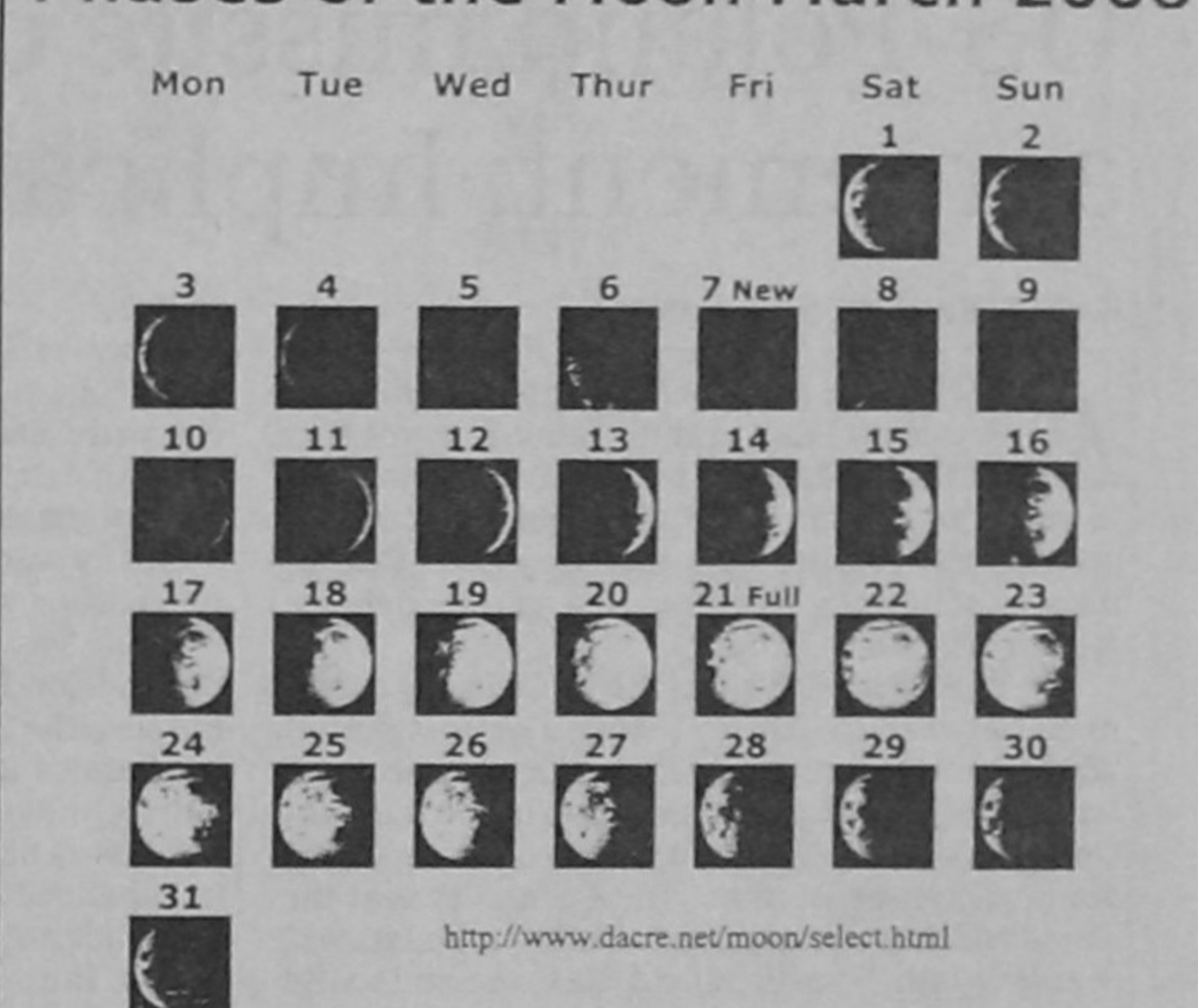
tion of moon's visibility there on that date does not arise. Any claim of moon sighting on such evenings by any person anywhere on earth, from the viewpoint of astrophysics, is incompatible. Hence Eidul Fitr celebration of 1429 Hijri on September 30, 2008 or Eidul Azha celebration of 1429 Hijri on December 7, 2008 at any place on the earth would be astronomically incorrect.

New moon for Ramadan 1429, from Table-1: August 30, 2008, 1958 GMT which corresponds to August 31, 2008, 01 58 Bangladesh Time. New moon for Shawwal 1429, from Table-1: September 29, 2008, 8 12 GMT, i.e. 14 12 Dhaka time; using the moonset and sunset time, one finds that the moon sets 12 minutes before sunset at Dhaka on that day. Using the two Babylonian criteria as mentioned earlier, Ramadan fasting is likely to begin on September 2, 2008 Tuesday and Eidul Fitr is likely to be celebrated on October 2, 2008 Thursday in Bangladesh.

Reports indicate that fasting begin and Eids are celebrated in USA, Australia, Europe, as well as in some other parts of the world on different days by different communities. Every month of the Islamic calendar begins with the first crescent moon, low in the evening sky just after sunset, which is a visible beginning unlike the solar month. Each month starts with its own new visible crescent after the corresponding astronomical new moon and all the Muslims are obliged to accept the first visible crescent as the definitive announcement from the Almighty Allah of any new month.

The writer is former professor of King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Phases of the Moon March 2008



<http://www.dacre.net/moon/select.html>

TABLE-1
2008 Phases of the Moon

Universal Time (GMT)			
NEW MOON	FIRST QUARTER	FULL MOON	LAST QUARTER
D H M	D H M	D H M	D H M
JAN 8 11 37	JAN 15 19 46	JAN 22 13 35	JAN 30 5 03
FEB 7 3 44	FEB 14 3 33	FEB 21 3 30	FEB 29 2 18
MAR 7 17 14	MAR 14 10 46	MAR 21 18 40	MAR 29 21 47
APR 6 3 55	APR 12 18 32	APR 20 10 25	APR 28 14 12
MAY 5 12 18	MAY 12 3 47	MAY 20 2 11	MAY 28 2 57
JUN 3 19 23	JUN 10 15 04	JUN 18 17 30	JUN 26 12 10
JUL 3 2 19	JUL 10 4 35	JUL 18 7 59	JUL 25 19 42
AUG 1 10 13	AUG 8 20 20	AUG 16 21 16	AUG 23 23 50
AUG 30 19 58	SEP 7 14 04	SEP 15 9 13	SEP 22 5 04
SEP 29 8 12	OCT 7 9 04	OCT 14 20 02	OCT 21 11 55
OCT 28 23 14	NOV 6 4 03	NOV 13 6 17	NOV 19 21 31
NOV 27 16 55	DEC 5 21 26	DEC 12 16 37	DEC 19 10 29
DEC 27 12 22			

<http://www.stormfax.com/moon.htm>

HUMAN RESOURCES

Meeting challenges of capacity building

RAJU ADNAN

CAPACITY refers to an organisation's ability to achieve its mission effectively and to sustain itself over the long term. Capacity also refers to the skills and capabilities of individuals. For individuals, capacity building may relate to leadership development, advocacy skills, training/speaking abilities, technical skills, organising skills, and other areas of personal and professional development.

Capacity building programmes, however, operate on many levels -- they serve individuals, organisations, geographical or interest communities or the non-profit sector as a whole. For the following reasons capacity building

programmes are undertaken worldwide as well as in Bangladesh.

- To acquire new knowledge and skills
- To have an attitudinal change etc.
- To turn humans into assets
- To mobilise resources
- To utilise the limited resources and make them more productive.

Bangladesh, indeed, politically as well as on the economic front, is at a critical juncture and facing a difficult and challenging time ahead. However, I am confident that with the emergence of a visionary and capable political leadership, backed by oversight from the ever conscious civil society and private sector, and the citizenry, Bangladesh will be

able to translate the challenges into opportunities.

- Our country does not have any training policy. In places where a resemblance of training policy exists it isn't vigorous enough to ensure systemic human resource development. There are two special features of industrial relations in Bangladesh. The labour movement is highly fragmented and politicized and government plays a central role in industrial relations.
- However, excessive politicisation and fragmentation of the labour movement has a negative impact on industrial relations and is likely to discourage investment. Inter-union rivalries often disrupt public sector enterprise.
- There is lack of common

understanding of the importance of capacity building, which is responsible for the non-systemic and ad-hoc training method.

- In most organisations, training is not job focused rather the two most common influences are welfare and political considerations.
- The economy for a variety of reasons cannot absorb the training cost of most of the workforce even if they have genuine desire for training.
- Mismanagement of funds and lack of belief in the bulk of training and education programmes is another hurdle.
- There is no national minimum wage for Bangladesh. The National Pay Commission fixes the monthly allowances and

other remunerations of the non industrial public sector employees. The National Wage and Productivity Commission fixes the wage and fringe benefits of public sector industrial workers at an average interval of 5-7 years. Government appoints these commissions. The Minimum Wage Board determines wages of individual private enterprise on demand. Due to this factor the scope of collective bargaining is very limited. Only elected collective bargaining agent (CBA) can raise an industrial dispute. If the employer-union negotiation fails, any one party may ask the Registrar of Trade Unions to conciliate.

- There is lack of clear understanding about systematic human

resource policy, comprehensive strategic plan for human resource development, which includes a policy and expectation statement from top management, enabling organisational structure, sufficient budget and physical infrastructure, responsive programmes, and an integrated linkage to other human resource management systems. Therefore (1) reviewing human resource management practices; (2) adopting a structured approach for staff development; (3) improving the effectiveness of training; and (4) achieving better business results have become essential.

- The training plans to organisational, job and individual needs through a competency-based model has not yet been emphasized in Bangladesh.
- Here there is little knowledge about labour regulations. The majority of workers are unaffected by the regulations. Bangladesh has three types of labour markets, viz. rural informal, urban informal and formal. The formal labor market is characterised by a contractual employment relationship and is governed by labour laws and regulations that protect the worker, such as minimum wages and allowances and limitations on the employer's ability to fire employees. The rural and urban informal labour markets are not covered by protective labour regulations.
- There is no responsibility among the employees which is another challenge closely related to the need to develop a culture of

learning and innovating that is how to encourage employees' self-responsibility for learning.

Bangladesh's development challenges are critical and manifold. To tackle these challenges, the country needs capable, knowledgeable and skilled persons, political leadership, pro-poor economic agenda, business friendly policies, efficient but smaller bureaucracy, decentralisation, strong local government and opportunity for the participation of the poorest. The country also needs to invest more for human resource and skill development so that it can rise to the challenges of a competitive and globalized world.

Raju Adnan is a BRAC intern.