

## We condemn the attack on three families

*Give exemplary punishment to perpetrators*

MEMBERS of the minority community have reasons to be concerned over some recent incidents in which quite a few of their families came under attack. In the latest attempt at grabbing land, some hoodlums attacked three Hindu families in Puthia under Rajshahi district and at least 12 people had to be hospitalised with injuries. It happened only a few weeks after land grabbers, allegedly masquerading as developers, tried to evict a Hindu family from their home in Dhaka city.

The Puthia incident reportedly also bore a mark of political vendetta as the locals believe that the victims were punished for voting a particular party in the last general elections. So, it is not only the land and property which work as the driving force behind such assaults, but it seems the vulnerable are also paying a price for freely exercising their voting right!

Now, this cannot continue in a society having an iota of respect for the rule of law and rights of citizens, irrespective of caste, creed and religious identity. It is obvious that the attackers exploit vulnerability of minorities. Then the question that arises is, why should they be so vulnerable? The constitution and the laws of the land guarantee equal rights to all citizens. So, the government and the law enforcers must exercise their responsibility of safeguarding the rights of the minorities to the fullest extent.

Such a gross violation of rights of any segment of the society will have to be dealt with an iron hand, because that is where the real test of a democratic and pluralistic society lies.

The Puthia incident should send a strong signal to the government that our traditions of religious tolerance and communal harmony will have to be stoutly defended against the machinations of a handful of communal and boorish elements. They must be dealt with firmly if we do not want to be seen as a nation not capable of protecting rights of all citizens. It is definitely not enough to talk about minority rights -- something more has to be done to stop the criminals exploiting their miseries.

The matter should be fully investigated and the culprits and their mentors, if any, will have to be identified and legally proceeded against. They must not go unpunished.

## Threatened reserve forests

*Govt must act fast and with force to save the precious resource*

LOOTING of the reserve forests in the Chittagong Hill Tracts has reached alarming proportions. The way the illegal loggers in collusion with some dishonest forest officials are depleting the forest resources of Rangamati has again become glaringly evident from a recent report in this paper. But one would again notice the too familiar practice of evading responsibility by the officials concerned, who are pointing fingers at others for the mischief.

Small wonder, the forest officials, on their part, far from accepting responsibility complained of manpower shortage in combating the looters of the forest, including some local people and even Rohingyas. But their denial comes at sharp variance with the statements of some locals, who have admitted to their involvement in illegal logging in Ryingkhiyang reserve forests in collusion with some forest officials.

What also is worrying is that the finger has been pointed even at a local lawmaker for his alleged instruction to the foresters against conducting any raid on a depot in Chittagong where plundered timbers are taken for onward sales. As expected, the allegation was refuted in no time thereby leading the man in the street to wonder about the mystery of the fast vanishing reserve forests under the four upazilas of Rangamati.

Who are then the culprits depleting the forests day in day out? Someone must know. If foresters think they are understaffed and inadequate in number in the face of the powerful gangs involved, then why are they not urging the government to provide them with necessary support? The situation has come to such a pass that the authorised timber merchants of the area from the tribal community have sought the intervention of the state minister for forest in stopping illegal logging in the area.

It appears the gratuitous plundering of the forests has become too ordinary an event for the authorities concerned to take serious note of. It is going on without let-up along with similar other crimes involving grabbing of khas lands and rivers. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of acres of forestland have disappeared. If the situation is allowed to continue unabated, it will be a big question whether there would be any reserve forest left in the country in the future.

It is, therefore, time the authorities came out of their slumber and took urgent and decisive action to save the Rangamati reserve forests. If necessary, the government should arrange deployment of additional forces to help the forest department in its fight against the illegal loggers. At the same time it should take steps for punishing the forest officials, if any, involved in the crime as well.

## Who killed Bangabandhu?

The long and short of it is that the army failed to respond, due to failure of the channel of command, when the country's president, along with his family, was being killed by some of its errant members. This is a collective guilt we must shoulder and which cannot be washed away.

SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN

THE usual response to the question that we have gotten used to hearing is why, of course, the assassination was carried out by a group of misguided army officers. But the answer is not quite as simple. And recently released documents of the US State department indicate the involvement of more than only the so-called disgruntled officers.

We have a very canny knack to explain away such acts as being the work of wayward groups, as being a spontaneous outburst of some pent up grudge. We have done it for August 15, 1975 and very recently tried to characterise the BDR killings in the same vein. But the fact that the president was alerted several months before August 15 by more than one country, if not our intelligence agencies, negates the claim that the plan was spontaneous and nobody had any wind of it.

The question that is being asked of those at the helm of affairs in the army at that time, of whom, regrettably only the CAS is alive, is whether the killings could have been anticipated and whether or not the alleged inaction to prevent August 15 amounts to being complicit in the matter.

It seems that the suddenness of the violence caused the AHQ to suffer a shock that infused total inertia in the leadership, and which in turn allowed a handful of army officers to perpetrate the most heinous act the country has ever witnessed, without any resistance whatsoever, either before or after the tragic incident.

Although the timing may not be right, but can we fault anyone, particularly one that

has suffered personal loss in that tragic incident, for demanding to know why a handful of army officers and men went unchallenged, what actually went wrong and why, and that too when the mutineers' tanks were without the main gun ammunition? One realises that revisiting the issue might expose many bitter truths. But we should be able to face it.

While for now within the space available we will address only the issue of "who" in Bangabandhu's killing, perhaps an equally important question, and one that our historians will have to address is "why" he was killed. Was it his supreme self confidence that no Bengali would ever do what the Pakistanis did not dare, or was it his too nationalistic an attitude that caused him to meet the same fate as Allende's? Or may be his internal policies and political philosophy that did not meet with the approval of some; or was it an attempt to reverse the result of the Liberation War? These will require dispassionate study.

The then CAS has been put in the dock for his failure to get pre-warning of the impending action of the mutineers and to put down the mutiny with the forces available to him. On the contrary, the mutiny passed off as a "successful revolution" and all the rest that followed is in front of us. It is a matter of conjecture as to what might have happened if the mutineers were resisted, but they were not.

It is a fact that the mere shock caused by the tragic event had pulverised the military leadership, but are we not trained to absorb shocks and keep our wits about? But does inaction mean complicity in the matter? In hindsight perhaps we can come out with



The responsibility is collective.

many theories. But on ground the reality was that appropriate orders from the AHQ did not issue on time nor did the units respond to command timely. There was a wait and see attitude, which might have given the impression that there was acquiescence to what had happened? It is true also that some in the chain of command wanted to put down the rebellion and restore command in the army, but failed to do so for whatever reason.

The long and short of it is that the army failed to respond, due to failure of the channel of command, when the country's president, along with his family, was being killed by some of its errant members. This is a collective guilt we must shoulder and which cannot be washed away. And it is futile to hide behind any excuse whatsoever. That was when Bangabandhu was physically eliminated.

Those who are calling the then chief of account must also realise the reality on the ground. There was not a single word of protest from any political quarter that we know of -- did the silence indicate endorsement of the act? How does one reconcile to the fact that some political personalities had welcomed the change? One had not heard any protest from the AL followers either, and most of their top ranking leaders, those who were not busy taking oath as ministers in the new government, were busy doing what they do best in times of crisis, make themselves scarce. That was when Bangabandhu was politically eliminated, temporarily though.

So, to the question that who killed Bangabandhu, the answer is simple and bitter -- we all did.

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## Growth, inequality and poverty

Empirical evidence shows that inequality of income is an inevitable consequence of growth, which is essential for alleviating poverty. Development strategy in Bangladesh should, therefore, focus on accelerating growth, complemented by targeted measures for the benefit of the poor without being too concerned about inequality.

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THE most commonly shared development objectives are growth and equity. Growth is usually measured in terms of either aggregate GDP or per capita income. Equity has been traditionally measured in terms of income distribution of which Gini index is a summary indicator (the index is calculated on a scale of 0 to 100; the higher the number, the greater the inequality). Over the last couple of decades, poverty alleviation has been added as an independent dimension to the concept of equity.

A large number of empirical studies, both cross-sectional and inter-temporal, have been conducted to examine the links among growth, inequality and poverty alleviation. These studies were largely inspired by the pioneering work of the well-known economist Simon Kuznets published in 1955. Based on cross-sectional evidence, this study found that as countries grow, inequality initially increases, but starts falling at higher stages of development, giving rise to the so-called "inverted-U hypothesis" characterising the relationship between growth and inequality.

I had contributed to and supervised two Escap studies on growth, inequality and poverty in the late 1990s. In one of these I wrote that the inverted U-hypothesis "at best reflects a trajectory of development followed by certain countries in the past, rather than an inherent validity of increased inequality as a precondition for, or as an inescapable consequence of growth."

I feel less sanguine about this statement now. Based on a review of recent experiences of Asian countries (Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam), I am inclined to the view that increased inequality is an inescapable consequence of growth, if not a precondition.

### What do the numbers show?

Based on data for the early 1990s and the latest available years (between 2004 and 2006), it is observed that of the ten countries mentioned above as many as seven recorded an increase in inequality, measured by Gini index. In the case of Pakistan, it remained unchanged between 1996 and 2006. But Pakistan has not been a star performer in terms of growth. It had the second lowest growth rate among the ten countries during 1990-1997 period and the fourth lowest during 2000-2005 period.

In Malaysia, Gini index fell between 1989 and 2004; the country's growth rate also declined drastically to 4.8 percent during

2000-2005 from 8.7 percent during 1990-1997. And Gini index increased in 1997 before the country was hit by a negative growth of over 7 percent in 1998. In Thailand also Gini index fell between 1992 and 2004, so did its growth (7.5 percent during 1990-1997 and 5.4 percent during 2000-2005). Besides, the country had a negative growth of 10.4 percent in 1998.

In contrast, countries whose growth rates increased between the two periods (Bangladesh, India, Philippines) or whose growth rates remained high (China, Vietnam) experienced heightened inequality. In Indonesia, Gini index declined between 1996 and 2002 in the backdrop of sharply negative growth in 1998; but as growth accelerated, Gini index rose again such that by 2005 the number was higher than in 1996.

The above picture leads to the unsavoury conclusion that inequality is an inescapable by-product of growth. However, growth appears to be an effective antidote to poverty. During 1990-1997 period, eight of the ten countries recorded higher growth than during 1980-1990, excepting Pakistan which witnessed a substantial decline (but the rate was still reasonable at 4.3 percent) and Thailand where growth rate remained about the same -- at a high level of 7.5 percent.

During 2000-2005 period, though some of them could not reach pre-1998 crisis high levels, all of them recorded substantially positive growth ranging from a mini-

mum of 4.2 percent in Sri Lanka to 9.6 percent in China. In consequence, poverty, measured by the proportion of people below the poverty line, fell considerably in all countries.

The forces underlying the above portrayal of growth inequality-poverty nexus have been extensively discussed in the literature on development economics. Some key elements are briefly noted below.

### Why does growth increase inequality?

- Growth leads to a shift in composition of output in favour of manufacturing and high-skill services away from agriculture in which income is usually more equitably distributed.
- Within the agricultural sector, policies to enhance productivity involving input subsidies and output price support benefit the larger land-owners more than the poor with little or no land.
- Growth requires higher levels of savings and investment. The policy measures to accomplish this encompass tax holidays, accelerated depreciation, rebate or exemption of income taxes on dividend, greater reliance on indirect taxes (particularly Vat), lower tax rates on interest income etc. These measures enhance returns to the owners of capital, which is almost invariably unequally distributed.
- Inequality tends to increase within labour income as the demand for skilled labour and professionals required for accelerated growth outstrips the supply and, consequently, the income gap between them and unskilled labour (whose supply is more abundant) goes up.
- Regional inequality increases as benefits of growth do not percolate extensively to geographically disadvantaged regions with limited access to ports, transport, energy, financial services etc.

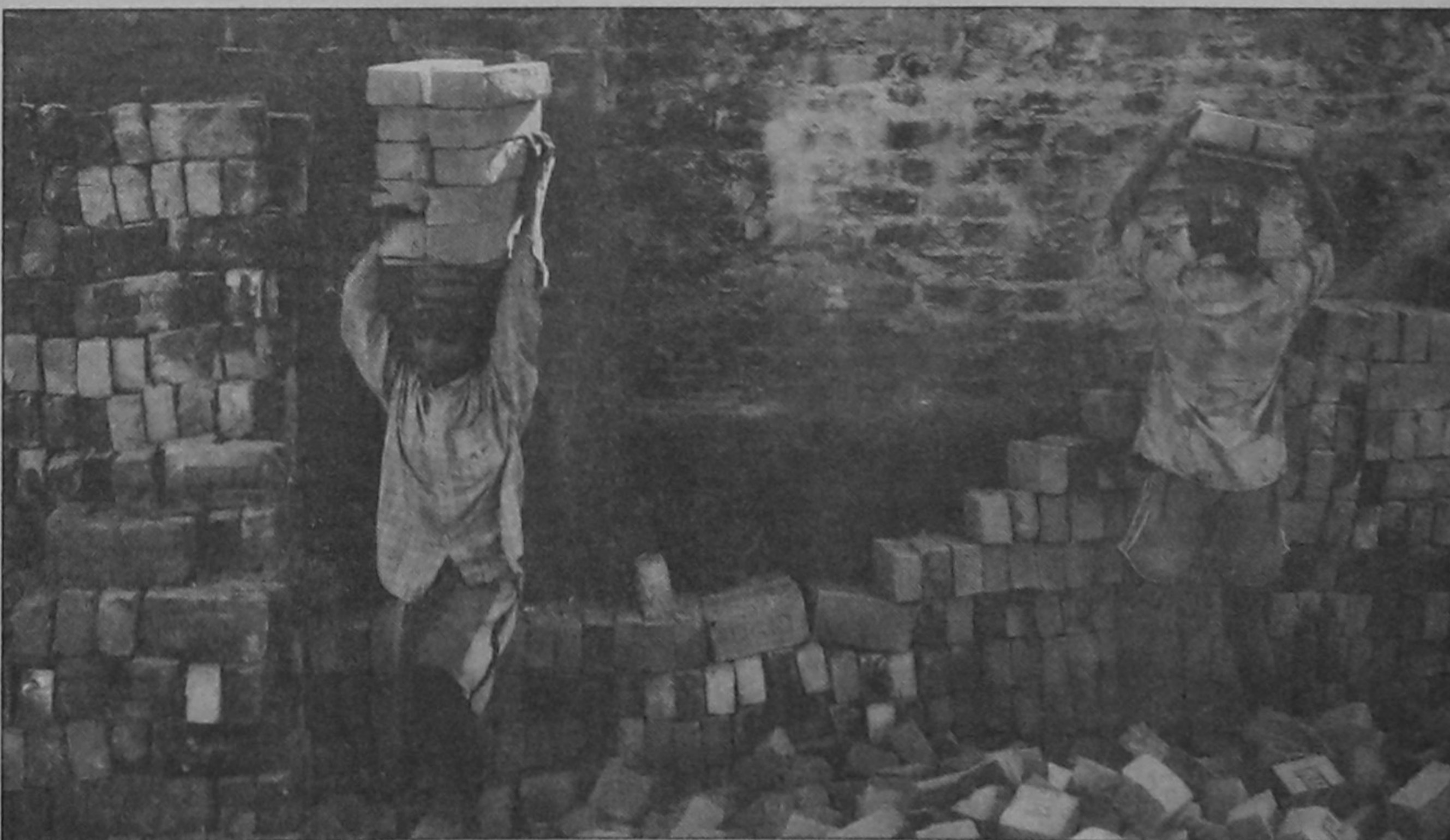
### Why does growth reduce poverty despite increased inequality?

- Growth creates more employment, also for poor, unskilled workers. Apart from direct employment, the poor benefit at least partially from the "trickle down" effect of growth.
- Growth generates more resources for the government to deploy for provision of extensive public services such as preventive and primary health care, education, rural infrastructure (e.g. roads, water resources development) etc., which benefit the poor.
- With greater availability of resources, governments are in a stronger position to expand the coverage of programs specifically targeted to redress the plight of the poor.

### Policy implications for Bangladesh

- Bangladesh needs to accelerate growth in order to alleviate poverty at a faster rate. At the present stage of development, poverty alleviation should receive the highest priority, not inequality of income distribution.
- Measures aimed at accelerating growth should be complemented by further strengthening of the existing social protection measures specifically directed to the poor. Leakages should be minimised.
- Though rising inequality appears to be an inescapable consequence of growth, cross-country evidence does not show any monotonic relationship between the rate of increase of inequality and the growth rate. Hence, there may exist limited policy space to mitigate increase of inequality, though not eliminate it. Efforts should be made to identify areas where policy actions can accelerate growth without seriously aggravating inequality.

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They build the house, others live in it.