

Stamping out stalking

Community and administration need to act as one to combat it

AFTER dozens of girls took their own lives to escape the indignity of being persistently harassed and abused and after other victims the bullies themselves had finished off, the High Court (HC) has finally come up with its orders to the government to frame policy guidelines to tackle the grave menace to society.

What the government has been doing so far to root out the social menace hardly measured up to the utterances the administration high-ups and leaders made from time to time. As a result, the stalkers were further emboldened to go on with their crimes. Things have come to such a pass that, the stalkers have now turned against guardians of the victims who dared to protest the crime.

Meanwhile, a father committed suicide, as he was unable to protect his daughter from being regularly persecuted, while a teacher was murdered---in both cases it was the stalkers who had a hand in those sad endings.

In fact, the HC's order is a ringing confirmation of the scale, intensity and pervasiveness of the crime of stalking and its consequences. Going to a great length, the HC directives issued to the government provide a detailed outline for the different tiers of the government and the ministries to go into action against the stalkers. As for example, the deputy commissioners, the police superintendents and those at the top like the Inspector General of police (IGP), the home secretary, and the law secretary have been separately asked to do their parts.

The tragic incidents of bullying and stalking of girls do not take place overnight. The tormenting of the victim girls goes on for a long time before it comes to the knowledge of the family, the neighbourhood and the community at large. And for the victim girl and her family to face the tormentors with courage, the neighbourhood and the community must have to stand to behind them. For the purpose, the local elders, UP members, ward commissioners and the youths regardless of their party affiliations need also to be involved. And the entire exercise should take on the character of a fully-fledged social movement. Alongside social resistance, the local administration should form local vigilance teams involving the police, Ansars and VDPs in order to eradicate the bane.

Now the big question is, will the HC orders to check the crime of stalking be duly translated into action? In the present case, one would be looking forward to befitting government steps to galvanise the administration and society into launching a successful campaign against the crime of stalking.

We end on a note of asking: How many stalkers have been convicted and punished so far with a deterrent effect, lest any one else should dare it again?

Responding to brighter jute prospects

The approach must be grounded in reality

IN the northern region of the country, small and medium private sector jute enterprises are springing up -- thanks to a spurt in bank-rolling. The prospects for export of quality raw jute and jute manufactures have brightened for some time past. This is in direct proportion to the synthetic products losing ground in the world market which is showing a greater preference to natural fibre in an era of climate change.

Not only is the jute a cash crop but it has also a great potential for job creation in the manufacturing sector of a wide variety of jute goods. Thus its place in the economy remains undimmed. While, therefore, welcoming the new trend in private sector enthusiasm, we also notice a new move aimed to bolster jute industry in the public sector. A restructuring plan to revamp 27 state-owned jute mills to turn them into profitable concerns is being finalised. The idea is to hand these over to 'efficient and experienced entrepreneurs' who then would run these as public holding companies off-loading shares to the capital market to garner finance.

While governments have usually sought to divest sick industries there have been few takers of losing concerns. Besides, these ran up huge debts with the banks. Take for instance the 27 public sector jute mills of which 19 are in operation. But just; for these have accumulated Tk 2060 crore in defaulted loan. Last year alone, these were in the red to the tune of Tk 91 crore. Evidently it is a tall order to transform them into profitable business. The state-owned banks refusing to lend them money and government counting huge amount in subsidy, something extraordinary had to be thought up. In brass-tacks, Bangladesh Bank has refinanced 16 jute mills by an injection of Tk 500 crore to buy raw jute for the next season. And the BJMC's own requirement is Tk 365 crore in the current season.

The basics must be gotten right. It is at the productivity level that the government must focus on. We need to produce quality jute and ensure remunerative prices to farmers who received a raw deal in the last season because of a glut. The machinations of the farias will have to be checkmated through quicker lifting at the growers' level much as the latter are supplied with timely inputs.



Rupganj project: A good idea gone awry

While the government had very rightly, in recognising the needs of the army, approved the project one wonders whether the army should have involved itself in directly going into negotiations for purchase of land, whatever the volume of it may be.

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HAVING been in uniform for the better part of 34 years it is difficult to remain detached from anything that relates to the military, particularly to the army. It is even more difficult when an incident happens to be demonstratively manifest and resides in the realm of civil-military relations, which, in the context of Bangladesh, still remains very obscure.

One never wishes, much less, expects that the army would be pitted against the people and even less, have to face the anger of the public on matters that have nothing to do with the execution of official responsibility or is a part of their operational duty or an executive fiat. In fact, the incident had to do with the welfare of officers and men.

It was deeply distressing to see Rupganj happen. One has not forgotten the May 2007 Dhaka University incident that has left indelible marks on the collective psyche of the nation. While on the one hand military vehicles and personnel were targeted, equally reprehensible was the way some students and teachers were treated by the

law enforcing agencies at that time; and it all started from a very injudicious decision of the military authorities at the planning level and of the ineptness of the commanders on ground. It was exploited by the trouble mongers too.

In Rupganj things could have been worse. If what happened on October 23 was the result of clumsy work of local commanders dealing with purchase of private lands, that the officers and men were able to extricate unscathed from the spot, and with only a few casualties on the civilian side, is both due to good luck and quick thinking of these very officers on the spot.

One hears of plots, conspiracy and intrigues behind all that happened in Rupganj. That is perhaps the case, but then there was the readymade opportunity for mischief mongers to exploit. And why did the matter come to this? What is even more unacceptable is the blame game that was indulged in by the two political parties.

While it is well to go after the trouble mongers and take up the cosh against the favourite whipping boy for any lapses, the intelligence agencies, it will be advisable to

introspect at all levels on the issue dispassionately. We do not want repetition of such incidents. We cannot have a situation which pits a section of the public against the army.

Reportedly, the situation resulted from issues involving purchase of private land by the army for providing land for housing under Army Housing Scheme (AHS).

There are all the good reasons for the army chief to address the urgent welfare needs of his men. And a roof to take shelter under after retirement is perhaps the most pressing need. That was to a very large extent provided for under the DOHS scheme. However, this project also included JCOs and ORs, which was not then case with the DOHS scheme. But land under the DOHS scheme was becoming scarce, and it was only natural for the army to look for alternatives. And, understandably, the project was approved by the government, and funded entirely by the contribution of army personnel. The project, therefore, had the dual character of being both private, being privately funded, and having the sanction of the government it became very much an official venture.

So far so good, but it would not be wrong to suggest that the modalities employed in running the venture were perhaps not quite appropriate. While the government had very rightly, in recognising the needs of the army, approved the project one wonders whether the army should have involved itself in directly going into negotiations for purchase of land, whatever the volume of it may be.

Understandably, a realtor was employed for the purpose that was discarded after sometime, having not come up to the army's expectations. And the consequence of involving in something that the army personnel are not trained to do, nor have done so before, is Rupganj of October 23.

This was a housing scheme for army personnel, and it is for the government to fulfill the genuine welfare needs of the services. One feels that having given the army the approval for the project the government should have arranged for lands without allowing the army to deal directly with the landholders. The MOD and its agencies could have been involved for the purpose of purchase of private land.

Not surprisingly, the situation has been exploited by the mischief mongers. Apparently, misinformation was spread and deliberately fed to the local people to turn them hostile to the army, like the rumour that their lands would be acquired. And this was done with an ulterior motive to protect their vested interest. We understand that all the demands of the locals were acceded to by the AHS authority and things sorted out in the presence of representative from all sides. So why the clash?

A thorough probe must be carried out into this incident to identify the instigators. Certainly, there is more to it than what has appeared in the media.

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India: Road to world leadership

The latest phase of globalisation has certainly propelled India forward, but the nation is still far from assuming world responsibility that its economic advance seems to suggest. For all its progress, India remains a "premature power."

SHYAM SARAN

NOT so long ago India only evoked poverty and mysticism. Now the country's name is invoked as a kind of poster child of globalisation whose fast growth makes it a world leader. If the earlier view was oversimplified, so is the current one.

The latest phase of globalisation has certainly propelled India forward, but the nation is still far from assuming world responsibility that its economic advance seems to suggest. For all its progress, India remains a "premature power."

Despite status as a poster-child of globalisation, India is not a newcomer to the world scene. Always a crossroads culture, India has had a long history of global engagement. Throughout history it has influenced and in turn been influenced by other cultures. Its geographical position placed it at the intersection point of both major land and sea routes, whether it was the ancient Silk Road of caravans or trading ships following the monsoons both east and the west of the Indian Peninsula.

Not surprisingly, the average Indian considers engagement with the world a familiar activity. Indians are comfortable with other cultures and remarkably adaptable to different environments. Therefore, talking about India and the world should not imply that India's interaction with the world, its embrace of globalisation, is a departure from its history.

Quite the contrary, India's reintegration into the global economy is more the reassertion of a normal historical trend, not a departure.

Of course, contemporary globalisation differs from historical versions. It is certainly larger in scope and geographical spread. It is

more extensive and intensive. Between 1980 and 2002, it's estimated that global trade volume tripled while global GDP doubled.

Today, global trade represents 35% of global GDP. In the decade between 1998 and 2008, global capital flows increased from about 5% of global GDP to nearly 17%. Therefore, India deals with a world far more interconnected and interdependent than ever before.

This has brought unprecedented prosperity but also many new challenges in its wake, including the erosion of traditional concepts of national sovereignty and territory-based state authority. Therefore, while India possesses the right genes to manage globalisation, it must deal with a contemporary version unprecedented in scope and diversity of the challenges.

The current international landscape offers some clues to future trends: First, the world is no longer dominated by just one predominant power and an ascendant alliance headed by it. Now there is a cluster of major powers. US remains the pre-eminent power and the ascendancy of the West continues.

However, there has been a trend towards the diffusion of economic power as well as political influence, steadily changing relative weights of different powers. Over the past two decades the centre of gravity of global economic power has shifted towards Asia -- a consequence of sustained, accelerated economic growth in China, India and others in the region as well.

Therefore, in dealing with global and cross-cutting issues, such as energy security and climate change, food and water security, maritime security, international terrorism and drug-trafficking, dealing with pandemics and other public health issues, the active participation and cooperation of major

emerging economies are indispensable.

Secondly, even though asymmetries in power distribution remain, the very nature of transnational issues makes it impossible for the strongest nation in the world, or a coalition of industrialised and developed countries to find solutions to global challenges.

Global regimes to address such challenges can no longer be imposed on the rest of the world by the most powerful countries. If the emerging economies can't always prevail in shaping the global arrangement in any particular area, they certainly enjoy the negative power to prevent such arrangements being imposed.

This has been apparent at the stalled Doha trade round where collective opposition of the Group of 20 in which countries like India and Brazil played a key part in resisting pressure by developed nations to liberalise. It was in evidence at the Copenhagen Climate Conference, where again concerted opposition by developing countries blocked the European Union-led push to transfer the burden of climate mitigation on poor nations.

This may create the impression that emerging countries have been obstructive in international negotiations. Quite the contrary, they are now more effective in safeguarding their own perceived interests.

The interests of premature powers, like India, differ from those of established powers. The hallmark of a "premature power" is that in overall GDP terms, in terms of share of global trade and investment and even absolute size of its professional and technical labour force, a country may have a large global footprint.

Nevertheless, in terms of domestic economic and social indices, it remains a developing country: Per capita income would be a fraction of a mature developed country and, though the country appears rich, it confronts major challenges of poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition and disease. This pattern of development differs from that of established industrial economies, where an increase in their share of the global cake went hand in hand with the steady improvement of individual and social welfare.

Therefore, in playing a global role, emerging economies face an acute dichotomy -- on one hand they are expected to take on greater responsibility and make a larger contribution to the management of what are called the "global commons."

But they continue to seek a global regime that can deliver the resources and instruments to tackle significant domestic challenges. Indian leaders confront this tension all the time. Finding the right balance between the demands of a global role and the imperatives of domestic challenges is never easy, but must be sought in every case.

One of India's foreign-policy objectives has been to demand a place in decision-making councils of the world. The claim to a permanent seat on the UN Security Council or G-20 membership represents this aspect of India's worldview. But there is the constant reminder -- much of the influence wielded is because India can lead, shaping the attitudes and positions of a larger constituency of the developing countries.

And of course, in terms of development challenges, India's situation is not so different from countries emerging less quickly: India wishes to sit at the so-called "high table," then misses the umbilical cord still connecting it to the constituency of the developing world.

India is drawn back into both conduct and rhetoric that the affluent find anachronistic. Grow up, they say; don't forget you're in a different league. In some ways, yes; in other ways, no.

This dichotomy will confront India for several years to come. On each item of the global agenda, India must seek an item-specific balance, where its role as a global actor does not undermine its ability to deliver the basic development needs of millions of its citizens.

The balance it seeks must of necessity remain relevant to their interests. Otherwise, India will not sustain its global role.

Shyam Saran is the former foreign secretary of India. ©Yale Center for the Study of Globalization. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement.