

HC rule on begging-related violence

A duty to protect the weakest

FOLLOWING hair-raising media reports of children being brutalised, maimed and forced into begging, comes a welcome suo moto rule from the High Court on the government for its inaction regarding such incidents. The court has also directed it to take measures against the culprits.

Yet again, the courts have had to come to the rescue of basic human rights to life and security after a human rights organisation sought legal recourse in the matter. The ruling is certainly positive. However, it must be kept in mind that, though the onus may be on the government, the responsibility of preventing these horrific crimes lies with the law enforcement agencies. They do not require -- indeed, they should not have waited for -- a court order to induce them to do their duty. In an ironic twist of circumstances, the agencies that should have taken action against the crimes, will now have to prove why their inaction should not be considered illegal. True, RAB has busted a gang, but it can be safely stated that this is just the tip of the iceberg. The rackets that exploit and violate the poorest groups must be unearthed and dealt with a heavy hand.

Abduction and rape of young girls, forcing them into prostitution, and maiming of boys, resulting in a helplessness which can only be offset to an extent by begging, are extreme case scenarios. However, physical violence is not the only or even the prime factor that compels children to beg for a living -- abject poverty is. According to a survey carried out in 2005, Dhaka is home to some 27,000 beggars who earn 100 taka per day on average, while those in regional towns earn much less. Begging -- which is restricted in the capital by the Dhaka Metropolitan Ordinance 1986 but which remains unimplemented, as also pointed out by the court -- is the last resort in the struggle to survive. A parliamentary bill passed in early 2009 also outlawed begging, putting a one-month jail sentence on those caught in the act and the government has even pledged to eliminate begging within the five years of its tenure. In order to strike at the root of the problem, however, the most vulnerable groups in society must be lifted out of extreme poverty. Socio-economic programmes are necessary for their economic uplifting and social security. Until this happens, the concerned agencies and the government at large have the fundamental task of protecting the weakest members of society from even greater dangers than those already dealt them by fate.

World Cup ticket fiasco

A bad beginning leaving a lesson for future

CERTAINLY a large number of cricket fans will have their hopes to see the ICC World Cup live inside the stadium dashed. The entire episode of ticket sale has been a mess at best. It was very disheartening to see the initial enthusiasm left dampened. One had hoped that such an important aspect of the tournament, would have been organised in a more professional and skillful manner. We have been thoroughly disappointed by what we have witnessed so far.

To start with, one detected a degree of opacity in the process of sale of tickets including making public the number of tickets that would be made available to them. In fact the BCB came out with three different figures on three different occasions, the last being on the 1st of Jan, confounding the confusion.

And to add to the confusion, the ticketing and seating committee did not know the exact number of tickets to be put on sale for the public till even the day before the tickets went on sale because, reportedly, of, "mounting demand for tickets from different communities". Was is not only predictable? One couldn't have expected a more slipshod manner of handling a basic aspect to an international event that Bangladesh is hosting to its great pride.

This brings us to the very important question of the total tickets made available for open sale to the public, which is dependent on the seating capacity of the match venues. The two venues in Dhaka and Chittagong are not as big as the Bangabandhu National Stadium which is a multi-purpose venue. We should have known that we do not have a large-capacity stadium entirely devoted to cricket were importance of the pitch and the right kind of outfield are also key elements.

We understand that chairs had to be placed on the galleries as per requirement of the ICC, but knowing the large following of cricket in the country, and given that the ICC World Cup takes place every four years Bangladesh's turn should have been put to optimum use. Therefore, shouldn't the organisers have thought it prudent to increase the seating capacity of the match venues? As it is, at any given time 25 thousand people throng a stadium for a local match, not to speak of a cricket world cup! We fail to understand also the logic of keeping more than 30 percent of the tickets reserved.

If there is one lesson that the authorities must learn from it, it is that there must be bigger and more spacious cricket venue to cater to the increasing number

Is the perception close to reality?

HABIBUL HAQUE KHONDKER

LET us consider two important, internationally considered reliable, recent reports on corruption to understand the position of Bangladesh.

One report is put out by Transparency International, which examines perception of corruption and explains that, in the words of the 2010 report: "Perceptions are used because corruption whether frequency or amounts to a great extent a hidden activity that is difficult to measure. Over time, perceptions have proved to be a reliable estimate of corruption." How reliable perception is as a basis of estimate of reality is a difficult question to answer, and I leave it to the psychologists and philosophers to tackle.

In the Corruption Perception Index 2010 of Transparency International, Bangladesh's position has clearly improved compared to the past.

Bangladesh's rank is 134. Compare this to Maldives' and Pakistan's 143, Nepal's 146, or Myanmar's 176.

The Arabian Gulf countries have done well. Qatar, with its 19th rank, is within the top 20 and the United Arab Emirates ranked 28 is within the top 30.

Bangladesh is no longer at the bottom of the stack. That unenviable position has been taken by Somalia, ranked 178. Somalia is a country where the institution of state has almost melted.

In the ranking of countries, Denmark, New Zealand and Singapore tie as the countries with the least corruption, with a score of 9.3%. Bangladesh's score is 2.4%. So, Bangladesh has to go a long way to go to eradicate corruption. Can corruption be completely eradicated? This is both a philosophical question as well as a practical question.

The other data on corruption comes from the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Report 2010 (Table 6 Empowerment). This data records the number of people who were victims of corruption. Here, the report records the percentage of people who "faced a bribe situation." The table shows the position of Bangladesh compared to selected countries in Asia and elsewhere.

Readers take note that New

Zealand, which is ranked No. 1 (along with Singapore and Norway) as the least corrupt country in the ranking of Transparency International's corruption perception index, ties with Bangladesh insofar as victims of bribery are concerned. However, Singapore's record here is consistent with TI's index. Having lived half of my adult life in Singapore and having done some research on the subject I can attest to this fact.

This comparison shows that if we compare different data sources we will find some consistencies and sometimes we have to settle for lack of such consistencies. Be that as it may, the issue is practical. It is not just an academic issue to write scholarly papers on.

The question is: is there corruption (however defined) in Bangladesh? The answer is: yes. Is corruption declining? My answer is: yes. And one of the reasons for that is that the government and the people are becoming more aware of this problem. This is where organisations such as Transparency

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International and its local affiliates must be given credit. Their whistle blowing along with that of the news media makes the society, including the government, more alert.

What is also remarkable is seeing the consistency between what the Transparency International is suggesting and what the present government

is doing. One of the recommendations of TI is to increase transparency through e-governance. That is exactly why the prime minister has recently demanded of various ministries that they should upload last two years activities, their accomplishments, etc on the website.

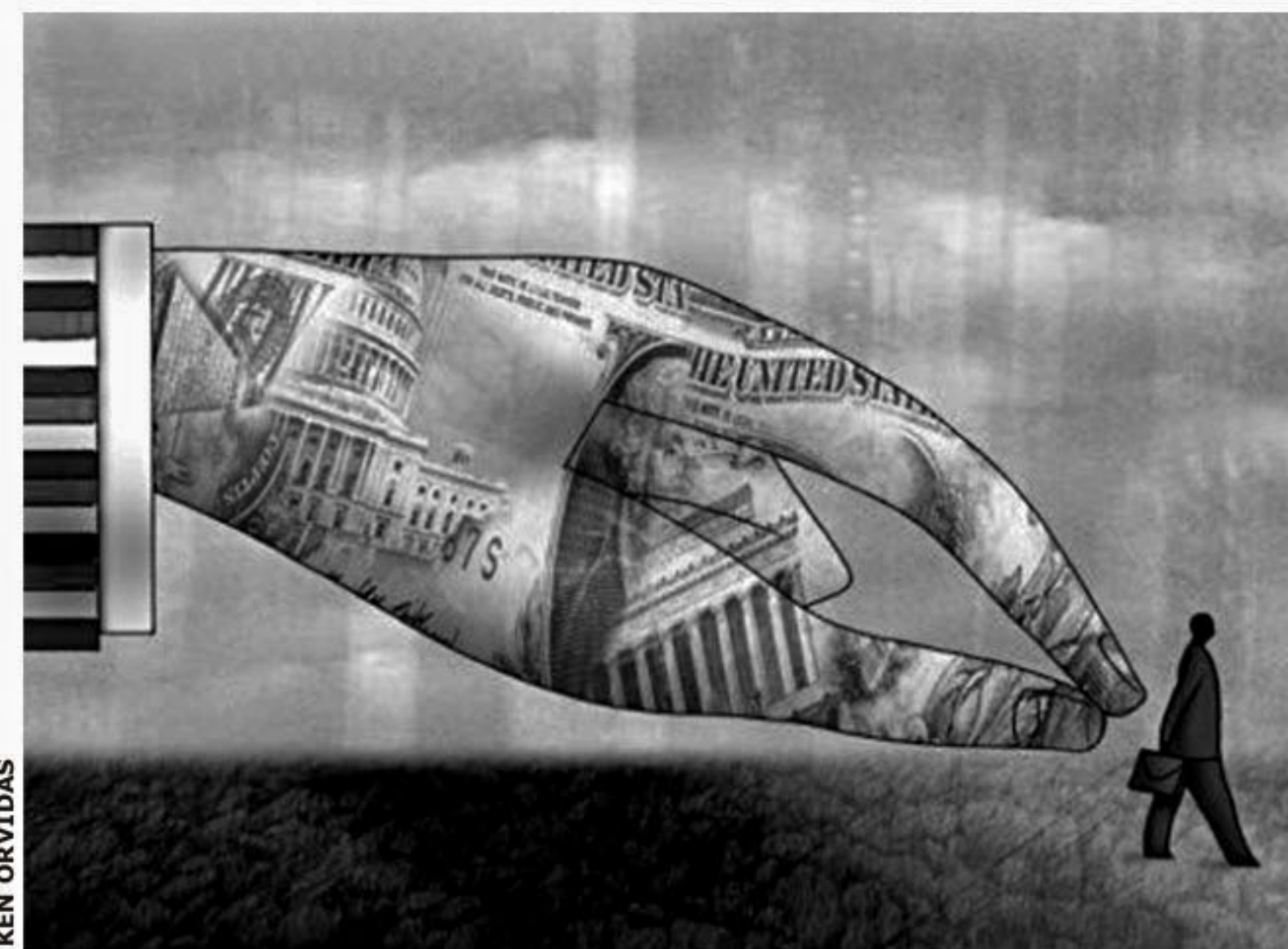
The role of digital technology, especially internet, in fighting corruption cannot be over-emphasised.

Recently, I conducted a small-scale online study on this subject. I asked my respondents whether they heard of the

ation of such a portal in Bangladesh. What this portal in India does is that it records various incidents of bribery where the victims write in to report where and how and how often and to whom they had to give the bribe to. Yes, such a website can be misused by unscrupulous people, but it is a chance worth taking.

The present government has shown some realism in targeting its goal to make Bangladesh a middle-income country by 2050. A similar goal must be set for corruption reduction. Let's try

Human Development Rank	Country	Corruption Victims in 2010 (%)
1	Norway	5 %
3	New Zealand	9 %
4	USA	9 %
27	Singapore	1 %
38	Qatar	8 %
97	Philippines	13 %
119	India	15 %
129	Bangladesh	9 %
36	Hungary	34 %



KEN ORVIDAS

website "Ipaidabribe.com" (a website hosted in India). I found that a majority of my respondents were unaware of this website. However, when I asked them if internet could play an effective role in improving governance, 90% of the respondents said yes.

The majority of the respondents in my online survey also supported cre-

to achieve Bhutan's rank of 36 or 5.7 score by 2020. The government must work with and not against organisations such as Transparency International for they share a common goal.

Dr. Habibul Haque Khondker is a Professor of Sociology and co-author of Globalization: East and West (London, Sage: 2010)

| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

How to stay friends with China

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI

THE visit by President Hu Jintao of China to Washington this month will be the most important top-level United States-Chinese encounter since Deng Xiaoping's historic trip more than 30 years ago. It should, therefore, yield more than the usual boilerplate professions of mutual esteem. It should aim for a definition of the relationship between the two countries that does justice to the global promise of constructive cooperation between them.

I remember Deng's visit well, as I was national security adviser at the time. It took place in an era of Soviet expansionism, and crystallised US-Chinese efforts to oppose it. It also marked the beginning of China's three-decades-long economic transformation -- one facilitated by its new

China, with each side accusing the other of pursuing economic policies that run contrary to accepted international rules. Each has described the other as selfish. Longstanding differences between US and the Chinese notions of human rights were accentuated by the awarding of the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize to a Chinese dissident.

Moreover, each side has unintentionally intensified the suspicions of the other. Washington's decisions to help India with nuclear energy have stimulated China's unease, prompting increased Chinese support for Pakistan's desire to expand its own nuclear energy potential.

China's seeming lack of concern over North Korea's violent skirmishes with South Korea has given rise to apprehension about China's policy on the Korean peninsula. And just as

likely to grow as both countries face difficulties at home.

The pressures are real. The US need for comprehensive domestic renewal, for instance, is in many respects the price of having shouldered the burdens of waging the 40-year Cold War, and it is in part the price of having neglected for the last 20 years mounting evidence of its own domestic obsolescence. Our weakening infrastructure is merely a symptom of the country's slide backward into the 20th century.

China, meanwhile, is struggling to manage an overheated economy within an inflexible political system. Some pronouncements by Chinese commentators smack of premature triumphalism regarding both China's domestic transformation and its global role. (Those Chinese leaders

edge that each needs the other.

A failure to consolidate and widen their cooperation would damage not just both nations but the world as a whole. Neither side should delude itself that it can avoid the harm caused by an increased mutual antagonism; both should understand that a crisis in one country could hurt the other.

For the visit to be more than symbolic, Presidents Hu and Barack Obama should make a serious effort to codify in a joint declaration the historic potential of productive American-Chinese cooperation.

They should outline the principles that should guide it. They should declare their commitment to the concept that the American-Chinese partnership should have a wider mission than national self-interest. That partnership should be guided by the moral imperatives of the 21st century's unprecedented global interdependence.

The declaration should set in motion a process for defining common political, economic and social goals. It should acknowledge frankly the reality of some disagreements as well as register a shared determination to seek ways of narrowing the ranges of such disagreements. It should also take note of potential threats to security in areas of mutual concern, and commit both sides to enhanced consultations and collaboration in coping with them.

Such a joint charter should, in effect, provide the framework not only for avoiding what under some circumstances could become a hostile rivalry but also for expanding a realistic collaboration between the United States and China. This would do justice to a vital relationship between two great nations of strikingly different histories, identities and cultures -- yet both endowed with a historically important global role.

Zbigniew Brzezinski was the national security adviser in the Carter administration. © The New York Times. Distributed by The New York Times Syndicate.



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diplomatic ties to the United States.

Hu's visit takes place in a different climate. There are growing uncertainties regarding the state of the bilateral relationship, as well as concerns in Asia over China's longer-range geopolitical aspirations. These uncertainties are casting a shadow over the upcoming meeting.

In recent months there has been a steady increase in polemics in US and

America's unilateralism has in recent years needlessly antagonised some of its friends, so China should note that some of its recent stands have worried its neighbours.

The worst outcome for Asia's long-term stability as well as for the American-Chinese relationship would be a drift into escalating reciprocal demonisation. What's more, the temptations to follow such a course are

who still take Marxist classics seriously might do well to re-read Stalin's message of 1930 to the party cadres, titled *Dizzy With Success*, which warned against "a spirit of vanity and conceit."

Thirty years after their collaborative relationship started, the US and China should not flinch from a forthright discussion of their differences but they should undertake it with the knowl-