

## Saving Cox's Bazar beach from encroachment

*Need to create a guideline and implement it*

COX'S Bazar sea beach, the longest and unbroken seaboard of the world, is now in danger of being laid to waste. The present sight of the beach is shocking as it is littered with unplanned structures from makeshift sheds of bamboo and hay to permanent cement and brick buildings running as hotels, restaurants, gift shops and so on. One can also spot piles of brick and various construction materials on the coastline as well as signboards at different places declaring the names of title-holders of those sites.

If development of tourism in Cox's Bazar is the main objective of the government, how could it then allow such construction spree to go on unchecked? As reported in this paper's lead news, the district administration, despite the Department of Environment (DoE)'s directive, was not forthcoming with action to stop the senseless grabbing of land and construction work on the beach. On the other hand, the district authorities, are trying to excuse themselves on a plea of government bodies like the forest department's as well as the government high-ups' involvement in the grabbing activities on the seashore.

Sadly though, the government's continued inaction in stopping such illegal construction activities and demolishing those structures already built is only contributing to encouraging the despoilers of the Cox's Bazar beach to go on with their encroachment uninhibited.

There is no gainsaying the fact that increasing its attractiveness is part and parcel of the beach's development. But destroying the landscape of the seashore with unauthorised structures is not the way to do that. As reported, both the government itself and the private individuals and organisations are at fault in destroying the topography of the beach.

Ironically though, there is already a government order since 1999 that declares the entire beach area from Cox's Bazar to Teknaf 'ecologically critical.' How then is it possible that government organisations themselves, let alone the private companies and individuals, are carrying out such activities that are detrimental to the beauty and ecological balance of the seashore in violation of that government order? The government must put its foot down to stop such activities forthwith.

While we are also for the private sector's involvement in the development of sea beach that does not mean it should take anarchistic proportions through its over-commercialisation in private hands. Moreover, under no circumstances, the beauty and the unspoiled virginity of the landscape can be compromised. So, in order to develop the seaside with an eye to keeping the panoramic view, the environment and the biodiversity of the landscape intact, the government should think up a guideline involving local and international experts on the subject and ensure that its observance is made mandatory for the public as well as private sector entrepreneurs.

## Lawmaker's attempted high-handedness

*Such conduct can erode government's credibility*

OUR attention is drawn to the observation made by the FBCCI President, in presence of the Finance Minister, while addressing a gathering at the inaugural program of online VAT return submission in Dhaka on Tuesday last. This relates to an issue not exactly relevant to the occasion. However, it's a matter of importance.

According to reports, the FBCCI President, referring to a news paper report said, a ruling party MP assaulted an Executive Engineer of Water Development Board in Barisal over a tender, he apparently wanted to go his son's way. He was later forced to leave the place under police protection to save him from public wrath.

Malpractice or in other words 'abuse' of power by ruling party lawmakers and their henchmen is nothing new. It has gone on for a long time now. We are appalled to say, that in spite of the Prime Minister's reminders and tough warnings to the ruling party leaders, ministers and MP's, to eschew abuse of power including nepotism, things have not changed much. These fell on deaf ears; the lure of money got the better of their best judgement.

It has become a culture that the tendering process has to be won by the influential as in most cases it is the ruling political heavyweights that carry the day. Even scuffles and gunfights are known to have occurred revolving round the tender business.

On a related plane, there were reports of the Bangladesh Chitra League cadres involved in meddling in tender businesses which somehow made ruling party high ups invoke the RPO provision saying that they were not responsible for BCL actions anymore, as it was separate entity.

We call upon the authorities to delve deep into the matter and carry out a probe into the alleged Barisal incident. If it comes true, appropriate action should be taken against the attempted abuse of power.

We would also like to see all the government institutions and departments function professionally without outside interference. This is important to enhance the



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## TIB's unwarranted predicament

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FOR an organisation like the TIB, corruption watchdogs that we should be indebted to, rather than subject to unnecessary harassment, it is only natural to incur the wrath of those who feel affected by its work, but are not quite mentally up to looking at the positive side of the matter.

The TIB has been rendering yeoman service to the nation through its various work related to corruption. It has an extended ambit of activity not confined only to yearly publishing of statistics on corruption but also playing a leading role for the elimination of corruption from the society like elaborate research and advocacy programmes for policy change and institutional reform for creating conditions for reducing corruption and promoting good governance in Bangladesh.

And for any government it is delivering good governance that must occupy most of its time and for which most of its effort also should be devoted. Those that wish to cleanse the system have a lot to thank such organizations for. And even its detractors should have to acknowledge that TIB has been more than transparent in its deeds and words.

It doesn't surprise us that both the major parties have in equal measure been highly critical of the TIB's performance in the past. While, for example, the TIB corruption perception index was heartily welcomed by a party while in opposition, its attitude was reversed

when it found itself back in power, and found the very message extremely uncomplimentary and unflattering. The very report that was used to run down a political opponent on one occasion was trashed on another. However, when the TIB comes under attack from both the major parties it is a very good indicator that the work being done by it is very objective and entirely non-partisan.

The recent TIB survey report published on December 23 has managed to kick up enough dust to have elicited the interest of the highest judiciary of the country. And one of the reasons for that is the report that shows 84% of the households surveyed had to cough up money to get the services of the service sector, and of the service sector the top of the chart was occupied by the judiciary, land administration and law enforcement agencies.

Needless to say, such phenomena as exposed in the findings of the survey are not something new and have not come about overnight. The TIB report has confirmed what was common knowledge, reinforced, one must admit, through a universally accepted and tested survey methodology. It is not a matter of perception but a reality born out of people's experience with the sec-

tors mentioned in the report, as indeed the findings of the survey are.

Not surprisingly, it is the part of the report dealing with the judiciary that, predictably, drew most attention and most adverse criticisms from the administration. Basically, the criticism focuses on two issues. The first query is about the total sample size and, second, the question of credibility, although ulterior motives were also ascribed to the TIB.

The law minister summarily rejected the TIB report, terming it as misleading

on the grounds that such findings are the views only a few people. Motives were attributed to the TIB, the most absurd being that the report has been produced in order to derail the trial of the war criminals. It was even suggested that the TIB be closed down.

According to the state minister for law, the judiciary is an autonomous institution and the judges do not take bribes. Even if we accept his comments without reservation (the chief justice might find it hard to agree with him), reading the report nowhere does one come across judges being singled out as corrupt. To my understanding, judiciary refers to a system that is involved in dispensing justice, and the system includes other elements than the judges alone.

As for the sample size, the methodologies in determining the sample size (6,000) and the process (multi-stage random sampling) have followed the internationally and nationally accepted norms. Nowhere does a household survey at national level involve the entire population, and if in any national household survey like this it were possible or necessary to ask the whole population, then there would have been no need for the survey science at all.

The criticism that the report lacks credibility since it was prepared on the basis of perception and not investigation is grossly misplaced. The survey very clearly indicates that what have been projected are not perceptions or opinions of those polled but their experience in dealing with the service sectors. And only those who interacted with a particular sector were asked about their experience of corruption. Accordingly, 10.9% of the respondents were found to have sought judicial service, which duly reflects the reality of the national proportion of justice seekers.

It is good to see that the highest judiciary has reacted as it should have, with equanimity and poise. It has asked for details of the survey, and one hopes that it will, if need be, seek the advice of pollsters, surveyors, and statisticians to clarify matters.

It will do us well to register the message instead of chastising the messenger.

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## Time to span distance

KULDIP NAYAR

QUAID-E-AZAM Mohammad Ali Jinnah said soon after winning Pakistan that his country would never mix state with religion. The forces which are today trying to assert are going against the undertaking he gave. The killing of Punjab governor Salmaan Taseer indicates not only religious extremism but also the disdain shown to Jinnah's teachings.

No doubt, liberal Taseer characterised the law of blasphemy against women as "a black act." But this was his opinion, which he never enforced on the government. Fundamentalists do not tolerate any other viewpoint. But Pakistan is a democratic polity which allows dissent.

It is strange that the killing has been criticised by the Pakistan People's Party. Others are either quiet or go over the exercise of criticism for show. And the role of some ulemas is tragic because they are supporting what the assassin has done. They are giving the murder an interpretation that may be grist to the propaganda mills in the West.

The killing brings to my mind the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. In her case also, the security guards used the gun meant to protect her. But that was a protest against the army's entry into the Golden Temple, the Sikhs' Vatican. The community has come to forgive the government after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress president Sonia Gandhi sought apologies in parliament and at the Golden Temple.

Pakistan's case is different because extremism is on the rise. The more fundamentalisms are propitiated, the more they get strengthened. The Taliban on the one side and the bigoted among the people on the other can be harmful to the nation's development and progress.

New Delhi can be of some help in the situation by starting a dialogue with Islamabad. People in Pakistan may see in the talks a way out of the impasse they face on so many fronts. India's foreign

minister S.M. Kirshna may be justified in his statement that Pakistan's posture of "compulsive hostility" towards India would not help a serious and sustained dialogue between the two countries.

But this was a curt reply to Pakistan Prime Minister Yousuf Reza Gilani's speech that his country and India could not afford another war, stressing that a dialogue was the way out to resolving differences. New Delhi should not forget that Pakistan is a nuclear power. I recall the warning that Dr. A.Q. Khan gave me when I interviewed him. He said that Pakistan would use the bomb "if you ever tried to do what you did in East Pakistan."

True, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh agreed to separate terrorism from dialogue at Sharm El Sheikh. But Indian opinion was so horrified over the 26/11 attack by terrorists on Mumbai that no government can afford to move forward without the assurance that terrorists' camps in Pakistan have been dismantled.

Pakistan can say, as its spokesman has pointed out, that India is obsessed with the 26/11 attack even after two years. But this argument does not sell in the country which has suffered at the hands of terrorists. Islamabad will have to do something whereby people in India are assured that no attack would take place from across the border. Islamabad has said that there is no terrorist camp on its soil. Why doesn't it invite India to see itself that the

terrorists' camps have been dismantled?

No doubt, Pakistan is itself a prey to terrorism and there is hardly any week when bomb blasts do not take place, even on as secure place as the police headquarters. And it does not help if Islamabad is chided that it gave birth to the Frankenstein of jihadis, which is beyond its control.

Both are facts: India's fear of terrorist attack and Pakistan's helplessness in reigning in the fundamentalists or, more so, the Taliban. Yet, it is also a fact that the two countries cannot seek a solution to the problem they face unless they begin to talk.

**India and Pakistan must resume talks. And once they begin they should not break until they find a solution to the problems. Both countries may have to recede from their firm positions. But governments and political parties should not mind even losing face.**

Terrorism itself may find the joint approach of the two countries a deterrent.

New Delhi and Islamabad can blame each other till the cows come home. But there is no right or wrong of case when the two sides are not even willing to sit across the table. The real reason is that they live in the past, distant and near. How long will they carry the baggage of history assuming Kashmir is the core problem? Nobody can justify what has been happening in the state. But it is not a black or white situation.

The other young man was a Kashmiri pandit who had sought shelter -- and vocation -- at Mumbai. He was equally bitter because his family had been forcibly ousted from his house at Srinagar and some members got injured in the process. He blamed writers like me who "sympathised" with those who were out to break up India.

In a way, both reminded me of India and Pakistan nourishing the wounds of partition and polarisation. The two youth were as intractable as the two countries are. The Muslim Kashmiri was so angry that he did not mind if the valley alone was made independent, roughly 80 lakh people. The Kashmiri pandit wanted to go back to Srinagar but could not brook the idea of a status outside India. How do the twains meet?

There are too many hands involved in the mix of Kashmir. Abdul Ghani Bhatt of Hurriyat has said that Mirwaiz's father and Abdul Ghani Lone were killed by the terrorists, not by the security forces or any other government agency. The terrorists are playing havoc in both the countries. They have to be eliminated. There is no other option. They may be operating in one country or an area today but they will spread to engulf the entire region tomorrow.

From whichever point you may start, you end up with the same option: India and Pakistan must resume talks. And once they begin they should not break until they find a solution to the problems. Both countries may have to recede from their firm positions. But governments and political parties should not mind even losing face. Because the alternative is perpetual confrontation which people in the region do not relish. They want to live in peace so that they can improve their standard of living and meet people across the border -- the people with whom they have shared sorrow and happiness for hundreds of years.

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