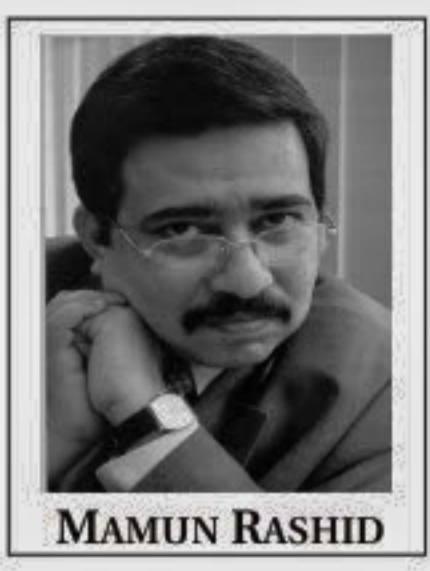


THIRD EYE

Social safety net



MAMUN RASHID

BANGLA DESH, right from its birth, has eyes glued on poverty alleviation and reduction of inequality and injustice. Poor growth has been the expressed agenda of all political regimes. Be it the longest serving, loud and clear M. Saifur Rahman, or soft-spoken Kibria or a man "with Tagore in his heart" A.M.A. Muhith, all subscribed to the idea of protecting the "people at the bottom of the pyramid" through various social safety net programmes (SSNP). Their lieutenants at the ministry of finance, like Dr. Akbar Ali Khan, Zakir Ahmed Khan, Siddiqur Rahman Chowdhury and Dr. Mohammed Tareque were also moving on, holding the umbrella for the disadvantaged, mostly the passenger population.

The other day, I had the opportunity to attend a discussion on ultra-poor organised by Brac and budding economists at Dhaka University Economics Department. The session was told that Bangladesh has one of the most effective SSNPs in South

Asia and there has been visible impact on poverty index due to the cohesive implementation of those programmes. Added to those were various programmes undertaken by many non-government organisations (NGO), especially in rural Bangladesh as well as urban slums.

However, the absence of comprehensive data makes it difficult to track the expenditure of the SSNPs. World Bank (2006) estimated that during FY1996-97 to FY2004-05 period, on an average, the government expenditure on SSNPs was to the tune of 0.8% of the GDP and 5.7% of the total public expenditure. In fact, the definition of SSNP is undergoing several changes. For example, Pension for Retired Government Employees and their Families was being operated but was not recognised when a more comprehensive data on SSNP budget was presented in FY2006-07. In FY2010-11, this programme accounted for 20% of total safety net budget.

Efforts towards widening the SSNPs in recent years are evident in Bangladesh. In FY2010-11, 8 new programmes were introduced under SSNP. Budgetary allocations for SSNPs as a share of total budget increased from 8.4% in FY2006-07 to 14.8% in FY2010-11 (Figure 3.8). As a share of

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GDP, allocation for SSNPs also doubled in the last five years, reaching 2.5% in FY2010-11 compared to FY2006-07.

The draft Sixth Five Year Plan (SFYP) document has proposed to increase public expenditure on SSNPs to 3% of GDP in FY2014-15. Even with the recent rise, Bangladesh seems to be spending far less than other regions. World Bank (2006) showed that, on an average, South Asian economies spent 4% of GDP in SSNPs whereas the expenditure of East Asia and Pacific was about 8% of GDP.

With visible results, the ministry of finance is ready to come up more strongly on poverty. Some are of the opinion that the target market should be squeezed to make this more effective, some say the allocation should

be more to make this worthwhile. However, most felt that only the ministry of finance could not ensure the positive impacts much unless line ministries like food, agriculture, health, education, women and children affairs come up with befitting and performance driven execution plan.

People do talk about decentralisation too these days, since moving to and fro takes much time and at times seriously deters implementation. Many have focused on quality expenditure management, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes at the ministry and directorate levels. Expected implementation is also influenced by too much political intervention at the ground level. We also need to decentralise these with a

	Allocation in FY10 revised budget (crore Tk)	Allocation in FY11 (crore Tk)	Increase (%) in FY11 over FY10 revised budget	Share of Individual Programme in FY11 (%)
Employment Generation				
Employment Generation for Hardcore Poor (EGHP)	1076	1000	-7.1	5.1
National Service	36	190	422.1	1.0
Rural Employment and Rural Maintenance Programme	185	140	-24.3	0.7
Food-for-Work (FFW)	928	994	7.1	5.1
Vulnerable Group Development (VGD)	595	638	7.3	3.3
Test Relief (TR)	898	954	6.2	4.9
Conditional Transfers				
Stipend for Primary Students	575	750	30.5	3.8
School Feeding Programme	7	18	157.5	0.1
Transfers				
Old Age Allowance	810	891	10.0	4.6
Honorarium for Insolvent Freedom Fighters	225	360	60.0	1.8
Allowances for the Financially Insolvent Disabled	94	103	10.0	0.5
Emergency Relief				
Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF)	1097	1536	40.0	7.9
Open Market Sales (OMS)	1072	1190	11.0	6.1
Total Safety Net	16706	19497	16.7	100.0

Source: Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh

performance stick at the Union Parishad level and make sure they reach out further to the target market.

Safety net programmes should be seen as a real test case for development by its peers and partners. Irrespective of party affiliation, all public representatives should get to

see the "distribution economics" working for them. At the end of the day, further political accountability, democracy and tolerance can take this country to the next trajectory of growth.

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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW OF HASSAN MAHMOOD KHANDKER, INSPECTOR GENERAL OF BANGLADESH POLICE

'We are attaching utmost importance to community satisfaction'

The present government has given top priority to the development of police which stands to be a big booster in the process. Now it is we who are to cash in on it," said Hassan Mahmood Khandker, Inspector General of Bangladesh Police, when Mohammad Ali Sattar, Assistant Editor of The Daily Star caught up with him in his office last week.



STAR

The Daily Star (DS): What improvements have taken place since you took over?
HMK: Actually, it is not something like "Veni Vidi Vici." In fact, policing is not a handiwork of a single individual; rather it is a big team work with a bigger responsibility. Let it be known here that a good deal of concerted and coordinated efforts is on to bridge the gap between the police and the people by ensuring an enabling atmosphere to dispel age-old misgivings regarding police activities. At least, I can say this much, we are not far away from where we ought to be at the moment. Add to that, the present democratic government is taking all the measures to make police vibrantly operative by ensuring positive work culture. Let there be no confusion that the frequency of crime seems to be reducing gradually and things are taking a turn for the better. Community satisfaction is all we are looking for. Now it only remains to be seen how best we can project our image by scaling up services. We are always at the service of the people even if we have various occupational limitations and shortcomings.

DS: What are the impediments in carrying out your responsibilities?
HMK: At the moment, what we need is a refreshing departure from the past. Our resources and logistic support are, by no means, adequate, given the immensity of our responsibility and enormity of task. Our volume of work and nature of job call for special compensatory packages, which have been missing so far. Much remains to be done to make police fully workable and functional. We have to come up with a cost-effective and home-grown solution to bring about a managerially effective scenario. The encouraging bit here is that the honourable prime minister herself has already given the message, loud and clear, that every measure will be taken to enhance the capacity of Bangladesh Police. We are trying to eliminate structural deficiencies and address organisational inadequacies by using our meagre resources judiciously with a time-bound and measurable target.

DS: Tell us something about the police reform.
HMK: Police being the "visible face of the state," deserve to undergo a lot of change to be able to meet the challenging needs of the dynamic scenario of the country. It is encouraging to note that reform in police is a priority of the present government. This prime and pivotal police reform issue happens to be an oft-discussed, oft-repeated subject nowadays. There are no two opinions that the police have to become an effective and viable instrument of change in a democratic society. The proposed Draft Police Ordinance-2007 includes legislative reforms to strengthen internal and external oversight, prioritise community policing, reorient the police to the changing politico-economic environment, and transform the police from colonial policing to a democratic one. In short, a cultural shift is needed to turn the police from force to service. You will possibly agree with me that we cannot expect a quantum jump in the implementation of the police reform. In fact, there is no quick fix to bring any tangible change. Reform is a continuous process. Changes should always take place in a graduated scale rather than overnight. Cosmetic change or random window-dressing cannot bring any viable change. Reform must be holistic and all-inclusive. We are confident, the reform, in the truest sense, will take place phase by phase.

DS: Are you planning to strengthen the police, what are your plans?
HMK: A radical paradigm-shift is imperative to transform Bangladesh police force into an effective instrument of service. A viable, professionally reliant but publicly accountable police is crucial to the development of stable democracy. We need a police service professionally competent, operationally neutral, functionally cohesive and organisationally responsible. Actually, we need an effective institutional design. Keeping that in view, we are focusing on skill development, capacity enhancement and technology to go to the next stage. Technology-based, intelligence-led, proactive and innovative policing is what we

seek to get started on a strong footing. To keep track of the time, we emphasise on specialisation in specific fields. The honourable prime minister has also reiterated the same in her various speeches. We are trying to strike a balance between our affordability and people's desirability. We encourage mutually productive activities between the citizenry and the police through community policing. We have already made a modest beginning in the process. Our emphasis is on Total Quality Management (TQM) and Total Quality People (TQP).

DS: Political influence over the police. How do you look at it?
HMK: In fact, it depends on how best one can lead on the ground. The person taking the lead has to be able to take the heat with the light, to say the least. The unpalatable truth is that we tend to see things not the way they are, but the way we are. It will be utopian to expect that everything has to fall into place for us to win the game. Rather, we have to be able to stand firm to turn even the stumbling block into a stepping stone by applying our discretion, acumen and prudence. On my part, let me make it plain to you that I have never faced problems of this sort so far. To be precise, all we need is a singleness of purpose to assert ourselves.

DS: The crossfire incidents, how do you justify them? Should not the Rab or police be more careful and judicious in dealing with criminals or may be innocents?
HMK: A key question which comes up here is that some quarters, willy-nilly, try to look away from the grim reality. They seem to be refusing to see reality for what it is. It really makes sense to say that we should go beyond a trite generalisation. Instead of crying wolf, let us pinpoint how, where and why things go wrong, if any at all. Police or Rab members are the sons of this soil, they are not alien. So why should they allow things to come to such a critical pass? The

obvious corollary is that to uphold and ensure people's as well as their own lives at a critical time, they have got no other options than to apply right of private defence. They are legally entitled to go to this length with a view to securing their own as well as public life and property. Again it is to be mentioned here that they are legally bound to justify their acts, failing which will obviously bring legal sanction for them. So rather than drawing premature conclusion, let's wait and see the whole course of action on the part of the law enforcing agencies. However, every effort must be there to make sure that by all means human rights are robustly upheld. And in the process faultlines are to be squarely addressed. And we are all for it. We have given out our bottom line of "zero tolerance" in case of any negligence of duty or any other aberration on the part of the law enforcers. More to the point, we expect sensible demonstration on the part of the citizenry when police becomes casualty in the line of duty.

DS: The latest episode, Limon shooting by Rab, do you expect a proper impartial investigation by police?
HMK: I firmly believe we have all what it takes to have a fair and just investigation regarding the case in question. Vigorous investigations from concerned units are already on to find out the facts regarding the matter. I appeal to the good sense of the discerning people and the thinking minds to be with us in this regard and some good will surely come of it, I assure. Truth must not be casualty at our hands, rest assured.

DS: What measures have you taken for tackling of crime of all sorts in the country?
HMK: Due to our resource constraints, we have taken need-based approach. We have already initiated proactive policing in dealing with crime. Efficient and effective use of human and material resources (practical and cost effective) is our priority. We have

put intelligence at the heart of policing. We are developing information management service, and promoting greater public engagement in reducing crime through community policing. We give special emphasis on computerisation. Criminal data-base, forensic lab, DNA lab, modern technology-based police control room are already in place to facilitate our crime shooting activities. We are going to enhance the use of technology in operational activities, detection of crime, collection, collation and dissemination of information. It is comforting to note that we have achieved vibrant and visible success by substantially curbing religious militant groups and extremist outlaws. We are taking every possible measure to prevent women oppression, drug and weapon trafficking, trafficking in human beings, organised crime and other day-to-day crimes. In CID we have introduced Organised Crime Unit. More so, to deal with technological crimes like cyber crime, money laundering etc., we have launched a Cyber Crime Unit in CID. The development of professional capacity of our members is one of our priorities. In fact, we are outlining a strategy to move on a way to shift gear in skills and technology to go to the next stage. Again let me say here, all the stakeholders of the society have to come up to remove crimogenic atmosphere. Crime prevention should, in no way, be seen as a single-handed responsibility of police.

DS: What are you planning to enhance the image of police?
HMK: In fact, public trust in police is a potent tool. You know, image building depends on a plethora of factors. We have already initiated proactive policing that seeks to strengthen solidarity, cohesion, synergy, social discipline and mutual trust in communities. A real service-oriented, citizen-friendly policing will accommodate all its schemes to fine-tune the collective expectation and aspirations of the people. Scaling up services through citizen advocacy and action in the shape of "community policing" is the need of the hour. Our approach is to raise general awareness level among mass people that police is out and out a "caring organisation." Introduction of community policing, model thana, service delivery system, open house day, victim support centre speak volumes for our sincerity in the process. We are attaching utmost importance to community satisfaction through even-handed and non-discriminatory policing to earn more public confidence. We believe, police needs to be revamped to give it more punch, mobility and motivation. The present government has given top priority to the development of police, which stands to be a big booster in the process. Now it is we who are to cash in on it.

DS: Thank you for your time.