

Chaos on campus

BCL's action tarnishing government's image

THE recent unrest on university campuses caused by the ruling party's student wing Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) activists has a pattern to it which is worrying. In only the last two days, they beat up a student at Buet, ultimately leading to a campus shutdown; created chaos at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST); and assaulted police personnel at Rajshahi University. The first case arose from a "scuffle" between senior and junior students which later evolved into a physical altercation leaving one of the student's hand broken. The second incident occurred at a reception where BCL members presented a memorandum to the University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman against the current apparently "corrupt" administration. The third was allegedly provoked by derogatory remarks made against the Prime Minister by police personnel which led to one policeman being made to do sit ups holding his ears in public and physical injuries. The motives may have varied but the perpetrators were of the same wider group, though, as is the norm, in at least one of the cases, the BCL's official position was that the culprits are not associated with the organisation.

BCL has made scores of headlines in the last three years for its unlawful activities, from tender-snatching to outright violence. Yet we have seen little in terms of action to rein in the unruly elements of the ruling party. True, the party itself claims to be dissociated from the student wing, but the fact that the latter seems to be getting away with its illicit activities raises questions as to from where it derives its power.

We are deeply concerned about the suspension and disruption of activities at academic institutions in the country and call upon the authorities to nip the problem in the bud before it takes even more magnified proportions. Each incident must be investigated and the perpetrators appropriately punished. They must be made to understand that, no matter who they are or what influence they may have, their wrongdoings will not be tolerated.

State of law and order and human rights

Take ASK report seriously

WE are deeply disturbed by the Human Rights Review Report-2011 of Ain-o-Shalishi Kendra (ASK), a human rights watchdog which, among other things shows an increasing trend of mysterious and enforced disappearances in the country. It negates the oft-repeated claim by the government that the state of law and order in the country has never been as good as now.

The report says that no fewer than 51 persons vanished between January and December last year of which 15 bodies were recovered. This is nearly four times more than the figure of enforced disappearances in 2010. And as many as 92 people were killed in so-called crossfire and more than a hundred died while in custody of the police.

What makes the matter even more disconcerting is that the accusatory fingers are being pointed at the law enforcing agencies, particularly the rapid action battalion for the disappearances. The report is another grave indictment of the failure of the state to provide safety of its citizens. And there cannot be a situation worse than one where the state becomes the cause of the insecurity of its people.

These are grave indictments which agencies must themselves do all they can to be heedful of and compliant with. The human rights body is not much wrong in its assertion that the agencies are either unwilling to act or are unable to do so, being under the control of some influential quarters. And it is for its own good that the agencies nab the culprits, whoever they may be.

The details of the report should be taken seriously by the government. These enforced disappearances crossfire-killings and deaths in custody must be stopped. Not only does the government stand to lose credibility for its failure to fulfill its election pledge that it will stop extrajudicial deaths, the serious degradation of human security has also a grave consequence on our social fabric as well.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

January 3

1431
Joan of Arc is handed over to Bishop Pierre Cauchon.

1749
The first issue of *Berlingske*, Denmark's oldest continually operating newspaper, is published.

1782
Sylhet District in north-east Bangladesh is established.

1919
At the Paris Peace Conference, Emir Faisal of Iraq signs an agreement with Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann on the development of a Jewish homeland in Palestine and an Arab nation in a large part of the Middle East.

1925
Benito Mussolini announces he is taking dictatorial powers over Italy.

1993
In Moscow, George H. W. Bush and Boris Yeltsin sign the second Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START).

Looking at US economy 2012

A.R. CHOWDHURY

IT may not be obvious, but the US economy has been getting better. After a fairly miserable first half of the year, the economy grew by 2% in the third quarter and is likely to accelerate to more than 3% growth in the final quarter of 2011. While there are a number of signs that recent momentum could carry into next year -- job openings are on the rise, the unemployment rate is trending down and corporate profits relative to GDP are at their highest level in over six decades -- the economy does not operate in isolation. There are two major risks to the US outlook: the expanding financial crisis in Europe and fiscal restraint from Capitol Hill in Washington. On both fronts, the risks have intensified in the last few months.

Despite the uncertainties, growth has picked up recently. Auto output and sales have rebounded as Japanese supply lines have reopened and production increased. Earlier weather disruptions have eased and the partial reversal of oil price spikes has helped discretionary income. Consumer spending is rising at the fastest rate in a year and business spending on equipment is growing at double-digits.

The financial supports for growth are improving slowly but overall conditions still represent a modest risk for the economy. Bank credit is rising again, led by a growth in business lending, while consumer credit card limits are edging up. However, financial stress indicators are elevated and contagion from the European sovereign debt crisis could feed through the banking system. Volatile markets caution that investors lack confidence in policymakers' abilities to head off contagion.

The lack of any revival in housing remains the key shortfall in the broader recovery and prospects favour very modest gains in home-building. Although home prices have steadied in many parts of the country, vacancies and inventories are high, while more than a quarter of mortgages are under water.

The relative weakness in construction and finance along with ongoing retrenchment in the state and local

sectors has contributed to slow employment gains and we expect the jobless rate to decline very little in 2012. Although the recovery has netted 2.3 million new jobs since early 2010, the employment-population ratio is near a 30-year low and there are four unemployed workers for each job opening. Despite strong profits and historically-wide margins that

declined; unit labour costs have stopped falling but wage growth remains modest and consumers have resisted business attempts to flex new pricing power.

Monetary policy is expected to remain focused on supporting financial conditions throughout 2012. With inflation within desired ranges and unemployment stubbornly high, we

extend accommodation.

A major impediment to US growth over the next few years will be fiscal restraint. The Congress has just extended last year's payroll tax cut and emergency unemployment benefits for two months. If these measures are allowed to expire in February 2012, this would reduce economic growth by at least 0.5 percentage points in 2012 with the bulk of the impact absorbed in the first half of the year. We expect policymakers to come to an agreement to extend the tax cut. But there are considerable risks surrounding this expectation.

The risks to the outlook from fiscal policy do not end there. The failure to reach an agreement in February means that under current law, steep automatic spending cuts are scheduled for January 2013. While the automatic spending caps will likely be reversed or replaced with less front-loaded cuts before they come into effect, the mere anticipation of the cuts is likely to make some reductions in government spending unavoidable. This headwind, in combination with spending cuts as part of the debt-ceiling deal, reductions in infrastructure spending and declines in state and local government aid will likely reduce economic growth by 0.5 percentage points in 2012.

While gridlock is likely to continue to characterise the US political scene over the next year, the election in late 2012 may serve as a catalyst for more decisive post-election action on some of the outstanding fiscal questions facing the economy. The bottom line is that fiscal policy is likely to be a drag on economic growth for many years to come. And, while the federal government absolutely needs to address its long term deficit issues, there is a risk that they will cut spending too much and too soon, sucking demand out of the economy at a time when the private sector is still finding its feet.

All told, the US economy continues to grow, and has even shown some encouraging resilience over the last few months. Still, while progress has been made, pitfalls continue to mark the road to recovery.

The writer is Professor and Chair, Department of Economics, Marquette University and Advisor, Federal Reserve Bank.



The US economy continues to grow, and has even shown some encouraging resilience over the last few months. Still, while progress has been made, pitfalls continue to mark the road to recovery.

typically have signaled strong labour markets, policy uncertainties may be exacerbating firms' reluctance to expand.

Recent signs of easing price pressures will continue in 2012. Core inflation has been below 2% for sometime now. Earlier factory bottlenecks have loosened; pipeline prices have

do not expect federal funds rates to rise until sometime beyond 2013. Recent easing moves have had favourable effects, but financial conditions remain weaker than normal. Fed officials have kept the door open to expanding the balance sheet again but their likely first option will be to use communications strategies to

Imperative of updated police legislation

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

AS the establishment celebrates the three-day Police Week 2012 from today, the imperative of updated police legislation after forty years of independent existence assumes special significance. Since there is universal agreement that the purpose of police legislation is to establish an efficient and effective police service that gives top operational priority to servicing the needs of the public, the fitness of the Police Act, 1861 can certainly be called into question.

The 1860 Police Commission entrenched the use of Irish constabulary system in British India because it afforded the most effective means available to quell indigenous movements or rebellions. It is only natural that such a system no longer has a place in modern democratic Bangladesh.

Broad political agreement, however, is essential for enactment of new police law and reforms to be successful. The major political parties have to accept that direct political control of the police has to stop if democratic policing is the objective. This has been the case in Northern Ireland and Kenya. If "grand political bargain" cannot be struck, there should be earnest efforts to achieve bipartisan consensus on the issue of police reforms.

To avoid the confusion created by the undefined use of "superintendence" in the Police Act 1861, it is critically important for updated police legislation in Bangladesh to

unmistakably demarcate the roles and responsibilities of the police and the executive. There has to be a formal articulation to ensure that no one is able to control or direct the Inspector General to investigate a particular offence, enforce a law against a particular person, or make a personnel decision that is properly

efficiency and effectiveness of the police service it monitors.

Public trust in the oversight body will be weakened if it is seen as a government functionary. The inclusion of independent members will strengthen public perception that the body is truly non-political in nature. In Bangladesh, while creating

The draft police ordinance, 2007 does a reasonably good job of addressing the deficiencies of the Police Act, 1861. It charts out a modern approach to policing that is encouraging. Enactment of updated police legislation brooks no further delay.

within his power.

In the light of Bangladesh's constitutional and democratic status strict dual control is no longer an appropriate form of oversight. The dual control of our police that has been in practice for 150 years needs to be changed. In our context it is important that we succeed in providing a clearly articulated and circumscribed role for the executive magistrate in relation to the police that acknowledges the former's position in overall district coordination.

The Police Act, 1861 does not establish anybody to insulate the police from illegitimate control, and does not set up an independent mechanism to monitor and inspect police performance. Bangladesh may look for such a system in Northern Ireland, South Africa and Kenya in particular and seek to secure the maintenance,

an oversight body in pursuance of updated police legislation, one has to consider making appointments on the basis of merit and not political considerations.

The proposed oversight body should formulate specific performance standards that the police organisation can meet, and draft policing plans that the police can follow. We can gain helpful insight from the Indian State of Kerala that appoints three external experts each year to assess police performance.

We need to pass new policing legislation that is consistent with Bangladesh's constitution and reflects the democratic aspirations of the people. For clearly defining the police-executive relationship, creating institutions that can properly monitor the police for both performance and conduct, and ensuring that the police

effectively engage with the community it is meant to serve, the provisions of the Police Act, 1861 are demonstrably inadequate.

Kerala has transparently drafted and passed new police legislation that has ushered in an era of greater police professionalism. Conversely, Pakistan illustrates the dangers of attempting police reform without political consensus.

Experience in other countries has shown that if the requisite political will is brought to bear on the issue of modern police legislation, the passage and implementation of progressive police legislation can help a country's transition from regime style policing to one that is more democratic in nature. Such legislation creates an opportunity to improve the delivery of its policing services.

The draft police ordinance, 2007 of Bangladesh intends to promote effective and efficient policing. It attempts to deliver fair and impartial policing that is free from partisan control and ventures to provide for accountability, both to the law and the community. It also aims to protect and vindicate the human rights and human dignity of all.

The draft police ordinance, 2007 does a reasonably good job of addressing the deficiencies of the Police Act, 1861. It charts out a modern approach to policing that is encouraging. Enactment of updated police legislation brooks no further delay.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is a columnist for The Daily Star.