

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

Silent victims of trade-offs



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

FROM the state to celebrity to institution, twisted minds either commit horrifying crimes, all under the wraps of normality, or abet in them. The "sewer of deceit" is scarcely laid open in real-time. It is either unraveled posthumously, or through deferred autopsies, if you like. In both cases, at best diminished traces of forensic evidence would be available to go on with. An exercise in moral rage whose potency has long expired as the victims had suffered quietly. Belated moral platitudes cannot heal the wound, but only reopen it.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon had to react to a UN internal report leaked through BBC admitting "grave failure" to protect civilian lives (some 40,000 at least) in the closing months of Sri Lankan civil war in 2009. The admission of failure has been explained away by a UN expert as being a "trade-off" between gaining access to the serving areas and turning a blind eye to the government's excesses. Since Rajapaksa's troops controlled the access, the UN mission had to turn its eyes away from the atrocities on the ground. But in the name of reaching humanitarian assistance, what the UN ended up doing was leaving a large segment of humanity to the wolves.

The Sri Lankan representative to the UN bluntly said, the "UN is not a supranational body," implying that it had to act within the restrictions placed on its movement by the government of the day. But with what mandate the UN had been working there needs to be reexamined closely if any future breakdown in the system is to be averted in any crucial area of bloody turmoil.

Now turn to child sex abuse scandals within the BBC. These have brought 90-year long reputation of the most trustworthy broadcasting corporation in the world in the line of fire. But the enthusiasm to put down the fire seems to outpace public outcry stoking the undying embers, as it were. The British taxpayers who finance the corporation to work completely independently of government feel hard done by and entitled to a reform of the BBC ways.

The scandal over shelving last month an investigation into allegations of paedophilia centered on late television star Jimmy Savile, has hit the BBC hard. The fact that he is dead only means a guaranteed immunity to prosecution, though. Yet, it cannot hush up the tales of perverse forays of Savile which are gushing forth. They leave a bad taste just not in the British mouths but also those of millions-strong audiences of BBC around the world.

Here too was a trade-off on two levels. For one thing, the so-called "groupies" -- boys and girls -- swooned over celebrities so much so that they had to pay the price for the amorous idiosyncrasies of a sex maniac of an idol. This came into fashion in the '60s and continued into the '70s. The sleaze in private life of public figures were going off the radar screen.

What was more to the "compromise" is the fact that Savile raised such huge amounts in charities through his Newsnight programmes that the top brass in BBC looked away as he went about his mischievous exploits under the veneer of defrauded good natured

PR. In 1980, he was reportedly caught red-handed and an investigation was about to be ordered into when it was frozen on its track as he put out a threat of stopping £4 million in charities to Adenbrook Hospital in Cambridge. He used to bring children around for care and take advantage of their vulnerability. Altogether, 300 allegations of paedophilia have been reported against him. Whilst he should be turning in his grave at the news, the rest of the world is turning to his grave for what an "epitaph" he has had hanging down the slithery tableau at his tomb.

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The third tale makes a compelling reading. It is about the human-forsaken Rohingyas who are relentlessly persecuted by the state of Myanmar because of their imposed status of statelessness since 1982. Pre-that point in time they were covered by a citizenship act and, therefore, eligible for rights to domicile they have been robbed of in brazen defiance of standard national and international laws by fell

stroke of a hermitically ruled country.

If anything, the West is trading off a just humanitarian and legal cause of minority Rohingya Muslims against what it sees as the opening up of Myanmar through democratisation and the prospects of investments in a resource-rich country. As they vie for geopolitical dividends on their shopping list they have conveniently forgotten the Rohingyas, the worst victims of most brutal ethnic cleansing in the contemporary world. They have potent ways to leverage the Myanmar government in according citizenship rights

to the Rohingyas. They can, among other things, take recourse to a staggered withdrawal of sanctions as well as linking investment to normalising the lives of Rohingyas as equal citizens with the majority ethnic groups.

An unassailable ground for Rohingyas' acceptability lies in the fact that ramping up of ethnic tensions runs counter to democratisation of Myanmar society. For this will only strengthen the army in Myanmar who may use it as a fodder to stage a comeback to power. Therefore, striking an equilibrium between the minorities and the majority is in the best interest of Myanmar's complete opening up and taking its legitimate place in the comity of nations as a vibrant democracy.

We heartily welcome President Obama's choice to visit Myanmar. It will have served its full purpose if in addition to cheering Aung San Suu Kyi and President Thein Shein to embrace greater political liberalism, Obama succeeds in persuading them to grant citizenship rights to Rohingyas. This will help foster a pluralistic multiethnic culture to underpin democracy in Myanmar.

On an optimistic note, may we add that Padmavati-fame poet Alaol (1609-1680) had been a courtier at the Rosang i.e. Burmese King's court. During Alaol's effective poetic life between 1659 and 1673 Rosang King's chief minister Magan Tagore became his admiring disciple. Such is the depth of historical ties between Myanmar and Bangladesh. The bouts of hermitage that Myanmar has rolled out of inspires us to expect a benevolent neighbour in Myanmar willing to relieve us of the pressure of Rohingya dilemma.

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Unesco braving crisis at 68

QUAZI FARUQUE AHMED

UNESCO continues to remain in high esteem in the eyes of all concerned with education, science and culture throughout the world, even in the face of "crippling" fund cuts by the USA. The specialised agency of the United Nations enters 68 years today. It was thrown into severe financial crisis in October 2011 when Washington cancelled its grant on the issue of full membership of Palestine. Unesco was forced to slash spending, freeze job hires and cut programmes after the US fund cut, which made up 22% of its budget. The organisation, which promotes global education and supports press freedom among other tasks, started the year with a deficit of \$150 million out of \$653 million in its budget for 2012 and 2013. To cover up the deficit, UNesco, under the leadership of Irina Bokova, the 60-year old former Bulgarian foreign minister and the first ever woman Director General, created an emergency fund to obtain cash, primarily from other members. She managed to raise \$69 million, including \$20 million each from Saudi Arabia and Qatar, as well as smaller donations from countries including Turkey, Indonesia and Algeria. It has also received specific project funding from countries that have particular interests in certain fields. However, it fills gaps, but not in the long-run, Bokova said.

Unesco implements activities in education, natural sciences, social and human sciences, culture, communication and information. It supports research in comparative education, and provides expertise and fosters partnerships to strengthen national educational leadership and the capacity of countries to offer quality education for all. This includes eight specialised institutes in different topics of the sector and an international network of 644 Unesco Chairs, involving over 770 institutions in 126 countries. Unesco has official relations with 322 international non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Most of these are "operational," and a select few are "formal." The highest form of affiliation to Unesco is "formal associate," and the 22 NGOs with formal associate (ASC) relations occupy offices at Unesco. Prominent among them are: (1) Education International (EI), (2) International Association of Universities, (3) International Council for Film, Television and Audiovisual Communication, (4) International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies (5) International Council for Science (6) International Council of Museums, (7) International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education, (8) International Council on Archives, (9) International Federation of Journalists, (10) International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, (11) International Federation of Poetry Associations, (12) International Music Council, (13) International Social Science Council, (14) International Theatre Institute, (15) International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, (16) World Association of Newspapers, and (17) World Federation of Unesco Clubs, Centres and Associations.

In view of its recognition of the role of teachers in education, Unesco has undertaken steps for improvement of the status, standard and overall contribution to quality of education by teachers in

Bangladesh. A series of studies have been conducted including status and capacity development for primary and secondary education in 2008, inclusive education in 2009, and capacity development of Non Formal Education (NFE) teachers/facilitators in 2010. The findings of these studies contributed to the formulation of National Education Policy in 2010 and gave a better understanding of Unesco's instruments, namely Unesco and ILO Recommendation concerning Status of Teachers (1966) and Unesco's recommendation regarding teachers' status in higher education (1997). Unesco Dhaka office has published the translated version of the two Recommendations. Recently, it has started dialogue on shadow education system and private tutoring -- which is a huge problem in the country in terms of amount of investment by the parents. The book *Confronting Shadow Education System* has been translated into Bangla and disseminated to policymakers.

In connection with the three-day meet of cultural diversity ministerial forum which began in Dhaka on May 9 this year, Irina Bokova visited Bangladesh for the first time. Delegates from 30 Asia-Pacific countries participated in the programme. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated it at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre and Irina Bokova attended as guest of honour. There was a joint statement titled "Dhaka Declaration" on the concluding day with a special call for strengthening cultural cooperation in the perspective of sustainable development in the region. Dhaka University conferred Doctor of Law on her during the visit.

During her hectic Dhaka visit, Irina Bokova also visited Brac Centre. "Education should be about something more than just read and write, it's about sustainable development of education, it's about knowing our environment, about taking initiative and much more than that." She said this while in conversation with Sir Fazle Hasan Abed on May 9. They talked about Brac's activities in the education arena. The innovative approaches of Brac Education Programme like boat schools in haor areas, mother language based school for ethnic children and special education opportunity for children with special needs came up for discussion.

Bangladesh became a member of Unesco on October 27, 1972. I have already mentioned the role of Unesco Dhaka office which represents the Paris-based headquarters. But I do not have adequate idea about the activities of Bangladesh National Commission for Unesco (BNCU). I believe however, that there is scope for expansion of its functions, especially in assisting and drawing teachers' training programmes in their related fields, particularly before bringing any change in the syllabus; development of curricula etc., and facilitating various programmes for the improvement of education, culture, science and technology. The assistance of Unesco and the experiences of its national commissions in different countries can contribute significantly. I strongly hold the view that BNCU should be run and managed on an autonomous basis with a non-partisan character. The education ministry should play a facilitating role. The instance of South Korea may be cited as an example.

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UK aid and trade for development

ROBERT GIBSON and SARAH COOKE

EARLIER this month the British Prime Minister David Cameron co-chaired a meeting of the UN High Level Panel to help shape the future of international development. The panel agreed its main focus should be on eradicating extreme poverty. At the United Nations in September, the prime minister had called on the Panel to produce a bold and ambitious plan. He is convinced that this generation can be the first to eradicate absolute poverty by putting in place the building blocks that take countries from poverty to prosperity: the absence of conflict, corruption and injustice, and the presence of property rights and the rule of law.

He also re-affirmed the UK government's commitment to spending 0.7% of Gross National Income on overseas aid from 2013, calling on others to honour their promises to the poor.

We know that aid works. Last year alone, UK aid to Bangladesh helped 180,000 people lift themselves out of extreme poverty. It also gave 70,000 more people access to micro/small loans and secure savings facilities, supported 800,000 children in primary education, provided 168,000 people with sustainable access to clean drinking water and improved access to sustainable sanitation facilities for over one million people.

UK aid provides excellent value for money for the UK taxpayers.

Despite economic growth averaging 5-6% a year since independence, around a third of the people of Bangladesh live below the poverty line. Eradicating poverty requires tackling the root causes rather than the symptoms. It requires economic growth that is fuelled by open economies. And open economies are themselves best ensured by open societies: rights for women and minorities; a free media; integrity in government and the freedom to participate in society and have a say over how the country is run.

The UK aid programme is focused on these lines. It supports Bangladesh's aim of middle income status within the next decade. Our programmes are designed to align with national objectives. We work closely with the government of Bangladesh, local institutions and organisations. By 2015, we will help to lift 1.5 million people out of extreme poverty, improve access to clean drinking water for 1.3 million people and adequate sanitation for 2.8 million, get more children a better quality education, improve family planning, reduce deaths in childbirth and help people cope with the effects of climate change.

We will also help address the barriers to trade and investment to make it easier to do business in Bangladesh; help develop the skills of young women and men seeking employment; and strengthen key democratic systems and government institutions.

When people can get a job and a voice they can take control and build a future free from poverty. To do this, people need information. Between 2007 and 2009, BBC Sanglap provided accurate, impartial information to over 25 million Bangladeshis and gave over 4,000 people the direct opportunity to debate with those who will be seeking their vote. 62% of audience members who were surveyed said that the programme had made politicians more accountable.

UK aid also funds grass roots, community level programmes implemented by NGOs. The Manusher Jonno Foundation supports over 100 local organisations that work with poor and marginalised people and communities to obtain public services, social safety nets and assets such as khas land -- things they have a right to by law but which the system often denies them.

And the UK has played a global leadership role to improve transparency of information by development agencies themselves. We practice what we preach by publishing our own project documents on our website (www.dfid.gov.uk).

Aid can and is helping to put in place the building blocks for prosperity. Economic growth is needed to deliver prosperity to all. The rapid growth that Bangladesh seeks can only be achieved through increased trade and commercial investment.

Trade with the UK doubled to £2 billion a year between 2006 and 2011 and a further £2 billion of UK investment projects to date are supporting economic growth and bringing jobs to Bangladesh. 70 British companies are investing here. In the garment industry, where 10% of Bangladesh exports go to the UK, UK companies like Tesco have joined forces with DFID to help develop workers skills and bring much needed improvements to the conditions for workers. The right investment climate will encourage more investment from overseas.

As our Prime Minister David Cameron has said, Britain is a country that keeps its promises to the poorest in the world. That includes to those here in Bangladesh. The UK is bringing aid and trade together to help Bangladesh reach middle income status and ensure that the poorest in Bangladesh can share in this greater prosperity.

Robert Gibson is the British High Commissioner to Bangladesh and Sarah Cooke is DFID Country Representative.