

# Death by police torture

Govt must investigate for its own credibility

THERE have been too many custodial deaths for us to take the latest one lightly. There have been too many such instances being brushed under the carpet for us to not to protest vehemently on this instance. We want to stress with the maximum emphasis possible that the government should immediately institute a high powered inquiry—not a department one—to investigate the latest death in police custody of 26 year old Shamim Reza who was tortured by police to extort Tk 5 lacs for sending him to court.

An MBA student and part time sand trader, Shahim was picked up on suspicion of being involved in the recent murder of four members of a family of local union parishad chairman. Taken in for questioning the police, it is alleged by family members, had asked for the above ransom in exchange for assurance that Shahim would no longer be tortured and sent to court. He was sent to court where he confessed after which he was sent first to a hospital in Narayanganj and later to DMCH where is died.

While police denies torturing him the inquest by a magistrate confirms torture mark on the victim, and hence we believe the family's allegations to be true.

We strongly protest the unchecked custodial deaths that have been occurring over the years and repeat our demand for the most comprehensive investigation on this instance and punishment of the delinquent police officials.

# Closure of Ashulia factories

Garment production in jeopardy

At a time when all major stakeholders, both domestic and foreign, are actively engaged in thrashing out critical issues on safety, pay hike of workers in the garments sector, the Ashulia industrial belt is experiencing volatile protests. The result has been the shutdown of some 60 factories. Needless to say, the demands for better pay, lunch allowance and other benefits reflect valid grievances. Yet they could not have come at a worse time.

The shutting down of production at so many factories has every chance of having a domino effect on other plants in other parts of the country. Were that to happen, it could deal a severe blow to an already strained apparels industry. The sector has been reeling under the pressure of frequent countrywide shutdowns due to the confrontational politics that has gripped the country over the past few months. Firm orders for garments are there with the industry and supply deadlines have to be met in a timely manner.

A new wage board is in the offing, one that may well see foreign buyers' participation. Any significant change in the rules of business takes time to take effect. Overnight transformation is simply not possible due to the complexities involved in negotiations, especially with so many stakeholders – the government, industry owners and labour unions. Maintaining law and order in the industrial belts must be a top priority for authorities. It is time for restraint, not agitation.

## Grameen Bank Commission steps

DR. HOSSAIN ZILLUR RAHMAN

SOME hard truths need to be stated on the reported move by the government and its Grameen Bank Commission to seal government control over the iconic institution and various independent institutions bearing the Grameen name that are successfully addressing other dimensions of poverty. The move is ill-advised, morally indefensible and incongruous to the government's goal of transforming Bangladesh into a middle income country espousing goals of equity. The legal and procedural moves come in the backdrop of an unfortunate saga of vendetta against Nobel Prize winner professor Muhammad Yunus that has pained impartial observers both at home and abroad over the last three years.

The Finance Minister has been on record about the continued good performance of GB and partisan critics of micro-credit have failed to dent the importance given to micro-credit as a critical instrument to address poverty. Why then this unremitting spite against a well-performing bank for the poor when in contrast we see the sorry spectacle of public sector banks that were on solid financial foundations only a few years ago now mired in rampant corruption, mis-governance and financial mess?

The government may not be fond of Professor Yunus but it should not allow its dislike to warp its larger policy goals of promoting performance-based sound institutions that are alleviating poverty and strengthening the possibility of graduation to a higher middle income status. The reported threat from the Grameen Bank Commission towards the legally independent institutions bearing the Grameen name that are addressing other dimensions of poverty is also out of step with democratic norms and values but sadly in sync with a growing tendency towards intolerance and control. Where will all these take us? Certainly not towards the dream of a prosperous and just society based on sound principles and norms that was the founding aspiration of 1971. I will request the government to take a pause and keep the larger interest of the nation in focus.

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# The need for a poverty museum

CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

The study found that as of 2013 a total of 1.6 billion people are still sitting in the pipeline of "multidimensional" poverty. Out of them, the poorest one billion live in 100 countries. More specifically, most of the bottom billion lives in South Asia, and India alone has 40 percent of them, another 33 percent living in sub-Saharan Africa. The developed, upper middle-income countries are home to only 9.5 percent of people trapped in extreme poverty.

Compared to the past, fewer poor people inhabit the earth and more people are richer. The numbers speak for themselves. The proportion of people in the developing world living on less than \$1.25 a day was 20.6 percent in 2010, down from 43.1 percent in 1990 and 52.2 percent in 1981. Even better, Bangladesh is amongst the "star performer" nations including Rwanda, and Nepal where poverty level has been consistently going down and deprivation disappearing fast. The next batch of countries waiting to ride this freedom train includes Ghana, Tanzania, Cambodia and Bolivia.

What does that mean for the world? Abject poverty banished, the world will become a more glamorous place to live. People will still go without food, but only to fast or diet as starvation will be a thing of the past. The anger of hunger will be conquered. There will be roofs over heads, clothing for everyone, and perhaps sufficient recreation to enjoy the finer things in life.

It was British writer George Eliot (pen name for Mary Ann), who said that nobody could be wise on an empty stomach. Does that mean we are going to have more wise people 20 years later? That's a critical question, because what will people do with so much space freed up in their minds? The anxieties over the basic needs gone, what will

POVERTY is getting poorer, and that is the big news. A study done by Oxford University's poverty and human development initiative tells us that acute poverty will be eradicated within 20 years. We aren't hearing it for the first time. Our very own Dr Muhammad Yunus said something in the same vein when he gave his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in Stockholm in 2006. The Oxford study is one more source to confirm that poverty, the greatest evil in human history, is heading for the museum.



If poverty is more than money, why is money the only measure of affluence?

people think when the stomach is full and the mind is unencumbered? Will they seek more knowledge? Will they get involved in more humanitarian causes? Will they read more books? Will they travel more distance? Will they be happier as a result?

One cannot deny the importance of poverty reduction. Poverty has been the bane of human existence for centuries. It has been bringing starvation, sorrow and exploitation that led to unspeakable horrors. Humans have been forced to do inhuman things whenever hunger howled in their bellies. Poverty is the most basic form of human sufferings, the mother of most miseries. The lowest point in existential crisis, it makes a morsel of food the highest point in pursuit of happiness.

The Oxford study that came after the UN's latest development report assures us that poverty's force, like a dissipating storm, is weakening. It tells us that the world is witnessing a 'global rebalancing' as higher growth in at least 40 poor countries is rescuing millions from the dangerous dungeons of poverty. The study also claims that never before in history have the living conditions and prospects of so many people changed so rapidly.

The study talks about a new and interesting measure of poverty. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) developed by Dr Sabina Alkire and Dr Maria Emma Santos in 2010 has a fundamental assumption that poverty is more than money. The index includes ten indicators to calculate poverty such as nutrition, child mortality, years of schooling and attendance, cooking fuel, water, sanitation, electricity assets and a covered floor.

If poverty is more than money, why is money the only measure of affluence? When American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson said that the greatest man in history was also the poorest, he was talking about Jesus Christ. Our national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam eulogised poverty for bestowing greatness upon him and embellishing him with the glory of Christ. Generations to come will scarcely believe that poverty could ever enrich anyone.

In our frenzy to reduce poverty, are we also reducing ourselves? We are ingesting the squalors of poverty, and tidying our homes and cities while making ourselves filthy inside. What need does to the body, greed is doing to the soul. We are heading for a new existential crisis, jumping from the frying pan into the fire. A poverty museum will be a must to remind us that once upon a time in this world money wasn't everything in life.

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## MYANMAR'S ROAD TO DEMOCRACY

# Not without challenges



TAN HUI YEE

IN his landmark visit to the United States, Myanmar President Thein Sein made all the right noises: He called for an end to inter-communal violence and a national identity that would include people from all faiths. He talked about sharing power and resources to bring about peace with the armed Kachin ethnic minority.

Yet he also told American media that the military "will always have a special place" in Myanmar's government, highlighting intractable issues on the country's road to democracy.

The visit is at best "one more milestone in a steady course of development," says Dr Michael Montesano, a visiting research fellow at Singapore's Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

The visit comes two weeks before Myanmar hosts its first ever World Economic Forum East Asia meet. Long isolated from the West, it is now slowly being reinstated and this visit is a key punctuation mark in that process.

The resource-rich country used to be known for its good education, and is now trying to make up for lost ground as potential investors beat a path to its door.

The US, meanwhile, has much

interest in courting the strategically located country to measure up to China's influence in the region.

Still, Myanmar's military continues to play a significant role in its economy and politics. A quarter of all seats in its fledgling Parliament are reserved for it.

While former general Thein Sein "is aware the military needs to redefine its role," it remains one of the biggest challenges in his presidency, said Lex Rieffel, a senior fellow at think-tank Brookings Institution.

During their White House meeting, US President Barack Obama, in a concession to the former pariah state, referred many times to Myanmar instead of Burma, a colonial name preferred by opponents of the former military regime and up until recently used by the US.

While he praised his counterpart's "genuine efforts to resolve longstanding ethnic conflicts," he also expressed concern about the recent violence directed at Rohingya Muslims, a minority group that has fled the country in thousands. Human rights groups have alleged official complicity.

Thein Sein later addressed this publicly in Johns Hopkins University, saying the violence was "extremely tragic" and reiterated an

earlier call to bring the perpetrators to justice and end "all forms of discrimination."

But Dr Maung Zarni, a visiting fellow at the civil society and human security research unit of the London School of Economics, says there were credible allegations "that the officials and state security organisations themselves were directly or indirectly involved in the mass violence."

In a Washington Post interview on Sunday, Thein Sein reiterated the troubling official line that the Rohingya were not considered part of Myanmar's races. "We only have Bengalis who were brought for farming" during British rule, he said.

Meanwhile, Myanmar has reportedly over 100 political prisoners still behind bars. While Obama acknowledged the "steady process" in their release over the last two years, analysts noted that any developments on this front are and will continue to be tightly controlled by the government.

Last Friday, Myanmar released some 20 prisoners, following a pattern of amnesties timed to coincide with high-profile meetings.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Letter of the week

#### CTG issue

Some of your readers have opined that a referendum should be held on CTG issue. The matter is not as simple as it sounds. Who will conduct the referendum? If it is proposed to be held under the incumbent election commission, the results are a foregone conclusion. So we are back to square one.

S. Ahmed  
Gulshan, Dhaka

#### Meetings venue

In Bangladesh we constantly talk about democracy but hardly practice it. The political parties do whatever they like ignoring people's wish. In Dhaka hardly a day passes without traffic jam. Political parties are contributing to this woe by organising political programmes on the already choked thoroughfares of the city.

I am against any ban on democratic rights. But considering the city's traffic condition, I would request the political parties to choose a venue which will not hamper traffic. The international trade fair venue can be an option.

Kabir Hossain Taposh  
Banani, Dhaka

#### Good German initiative

A news item, published in your daily on 16 May, notes that the German government will provide 2.5 million euros for a project giving job reintegration support to those who have become disabled in the collapse of the nine-storey Rana Plaza in Savar. I would like to thank the German government for taking such an admirable initiative to do something on a permanent basis in order to help the disabled workers' families.

Rafikul Islam  
BAU, Mymensingh

### Escape ladder or death trap!



Daily Star's front and second page photographs of 19<sup>th</sup> May say it all. It is not a fire escape, but a potential death trap! If there are one hundred people in each floor, in case of fire or earthquake, six hundred people will rush out and try to climb down by the rickety ladder. Can the flimsy and wobbly ladder take the load of so many simultaneously rushing down? The answer is a big "NO"! The ladder will collapse due to the load, and they will mostly end up falling down in a heap!

I doubt if these ladders were designed with safety as a consideration, or was it just eyewash to satisfy regulation and nothing more?

Engr. S.A. Mansoor  
Dhaka

### Comments on news report, "Everest triumph ends in tragedy," published on May 22, 2013

#### Ash C.

He planted the Bangladesh flag on the highest peak of the world and lost his life while returning! What a tragedy! What a loss of a young brave heart! May his soul rest in peace.

#### Raf Chow

So he was not conditioned to make this trek. Costly mistake. I am feeling very sorry for his family. May he rest in peace and may Allah shower His Blessings on the bereaved family.

#### Haha

A brave Bengali has died. Commiserations to all his family members.

#### Iftekhar Hassan

Rest in peace, great Bengali adventurer!

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### "Tarique for mounting pressure on govt." (May 22, 2013)

#### Peaceful citizen

Maybe he can "enlighten" us about how corruption gets ingrained in the government and how best it can be tackled, and also how to stop the bureaucrats from being subservient to the ruling class. Prince Tarique, you would be welcome by all if you opened your mouth on this matter, or please shut up as we are fed up with these cheap talks.

#### subterraneo

Mr. Tarique, why not elaborate on the reasons why you are currently in London at the time of need of the country? Or why not elaborate on your deeds during your mother's reign?

#### truthprevails53

The corrupt son speaketh from the den.