

Wealth statement revelations

Astounding level of acquisition in five years

ON the eve of the general election, ruling alliance candidates have disclosed their wealth statements to the EC through affidavits. We are simply taken aback at the vast sums of money and property owned by several lawmakers at the end of their tenure.

It is worthwhile to note that when the present government took office five years ago, the prime minister had stated in parliament that Members of Parliament (MPs) would submit wealth statements on becoming MPs and at the end of their tenure, and that those would be made public. Besides the finance minister and a few others no one had complied with the requirement. It is a standard practice in most democracies because that is deemed as a tool for ensuring transparency and accountability not just on the part of elected representatives but also of the public officials.

We are appalled to find that a section of ministers and MPs have gone from modest means to acquiring riches over the current term in office. Indeed, many have become owners of industries and are on the board of several companies. Now that declared wealth statements are available, the Anti-Corruption Commission should try and investigate how this wealth came to be in the possession of the candidates.

While we are heartened by their declarations which are in the public domain, unless these are placed under scrutiny there is no way knowing whether they would stand the test of verification and auditing

Jamaat-Shibir stranglehold in Satkhira

Break it, save people from atrocity

EVER since Sayedee verdict and particularly after the execution of Quader Mollah, violence in all its insidious forms has been ratcheted up by Jamaat-Shibir elements in Satkhira. By barricading roads with felled trees and cutting up highways they have gone about their destructive mission within isolated pockets targeting minority community members, AL leaders and activists.

The area between three kilometers off Kadamtala road junction and Boikary in the north of Satkhira is under Jamaat-Shibir control, they are keeping vigil at important points, bashing vehicles, ransacking businesses and carrying out arson attacks. Among their ploys have been relaying rumours, spreading panic and trying to keep the journalists off.

While piecing together the reports, one is left aghast at the level of violence. In about a month's time 10 AL leaders and workers have been killed, three Jamaat-Shibir workers have lost lives in clashes with police. Add to this, the damages wreaked on 70 households and business establishments belonging to AL and members of minority community. All this has triggered an exodus of inhabitants to Khulna town and the capital city.

Against this backdrop, a campaign has been launched by the joint forces since Sunday to put a brake on the deteriorating law and order situation. All logistic support needed to tackle Jamaat-Shibir mayhem should be provided by the local administration and the higher authorities. Support mechanisms would have to be found among the local people as an antidote to extremist violence.

Resolutely supporting wrong

EDITORIAL: The Nation

IT appears that a large segment of the political leadership is facing tremendous difficulty in coming to terms with certain ground realities. Perhaps all they require is a little assistance, and so it shall be offered: East-Pakistan is no more. In its place, there exists an independent, sovereign state, known as Bangladesh. It is inhabited by Bengalis. Not former or future Pakistanis, just Bengalis. Those who find the facts stated above far too obvious and think that there is no need to reiterate the unmistakable, are advised to take a brief look at the National Assembly (NA) resolution passed by the lower house of the Parliament against the execution of Jamaat-e-Islami (Bangladesh) leader, Abdul Quader Mollah. Apparently, forty-four years are just not enough for some to recover from a bad break-up.

While speaking on the issue in the NA, Interior Minister Nisar Ali Khan claimed that Mr. Mollah was hanged for 'supporting' Pakistan and remained true to the cause of a united Pakistan till the very last day of life. He further claimed that the nation was deeply saddened by the execution of the veteran JI leader. False, all of it. Of course, it doesn't help that Bangladeshi PM, Ms. Wajid, is not immune to playing politics on the issue either, claiming that there is "no place" in Bangladesh for supporters of Pakistan.

Although Mr. Mollah's charge sheet is quite extensive, 'supporting' Pakistan during 1971 isn't listed as a crime anywhere. It does, however, contain allegations of murder and rape of several men, women and children, and those are precisely the heinous crimes he was tried for, convicted and executed. Being a seasoned politician, Mr. Nisar is surely aware that there are far better ways than torturing and killing dissenters to express patriotism and struggling for unity. Secondly, if in Mr. Nisar's infinite wisdom, it is a matter of pride for a Bangladeshi national to seek a 'united Pakistan' till his last breath, what opinion does he hold for a Pakistani citizen who seeks a united India? Thirdly, Pakistan has no right poking its nose in the internal matters of another country. The ongoing trials in Bangladesh are the fulfillment of the election promise of its PM, Sheikh Hasina Wajid. Let us not forget that a life imprisonment sentence failed to satisfy the Bangladeshi populace, who took to the streets demanding a death sentence instead. But, even if that was not the case, it is none of Pakistan's business. Their aggressors, their victims and their decisions. Just because we are not interested in taking our criminals to task, doesn't necessarily mean that the rest of the world must act with the same callousness.

Bangladesh has already recorded its protest with the Pakistan's High Commissioner and demanded the resolution be withdrawn. The nation is not in favour of portraying convicted murderers and rapists as heroes of the 'cause'. Stop embarrassing us.

The mistake Pakistan is making!



minister realise that it was people like Mollah who, due to their criminal activities, brought disrepute that led to the break-up of Pakistan. He used the support of the then Pakistan government for personal gain. He was also used by the occupying Pakistan army to terrorise people into submission. So how was Mollah instrumental in safeguarding the unity of Pakistan?

The resolution was initiated in the Pakistan parliament by the Jamaat-e-Islami. The party of cricketer Imran Khan, called Tehrik-e-Insaf, supported him and so did the government party of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. But the resolution was in no way bipartisan. The Pakistan People's Party, which is a major political party, declined to support the resolution. So did the left party in the parliament. There are serious dissenting voices within the Pakistan parliament on this issue.

Mollah was a Bangladeshi national. He was arrested to face charges of murder, rape, arson and looting of private property. He faced a legally constituted court and after due legal process was convicted and punished. Bangladesh has all the legal right to prosecute its own citizens and punish them. This is its sovereign right. The Pakistan Parliament, by passing a resolution condemning this legal act, has only tried to interfere in the internal affairs of Bangladesh. The interior minister by his initiative has involved the Pakistan government and, therefore, has complicated the matter. Feelings in Bangladesh have been legitimately aroused and, therefore, we see the outburst in the form of political marches and demarches.

In fact, if the Pakistan parliament had moved a resolution to formally apologise for all the deaths and destruction in Bangladesh in 1971 caused by the Pakistan army and their collaborators, it would have been appropriate and time befitting. It would not only have sown the seed of understanding between the two countries and people, but would have also started the process of closure of this

horrible chapter in our history.

It is a pity that the new generation of politicians in Pakistan is not well versed about the history of the two countries. They seem to have been fed with stories that are distorted and time serving. Pakistan was clearly defeated in our War of Liberation in 1971. As long as they cling to their version of history, we may have to see more resolutions and more actions that tend to distort our bilateral relations.

One of the major reasons for this state of affairs in Pakistan is that it did not stage the trial of 195 Pakistani war criminals who were let off under the Delhi Agreement. In 1974, the foreign ministers of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh met in Delhi (after the Simla Conference) and had agreed to let these Pakistan army officers and civilians who had planned and executed the genocide in Bangladesh to return to Pakistan. It was assumed that they would be tried by the Pakistan authorities once they were there. Pakistan has not acted on this so far. A big gap exists in Pakistan's collective memory about what these individuals did during the occupation of the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Pakistan must consider looking into this.

For the present, the resolution passed in Pakistan parliament has aroused strong feelings in Bangladesh. This is natural. But we must not allow this to go out of hand. Bangladesh is known all over the world as a moderate and a thinking nation. We have shown our mettle on many occasions. We are now shown off as a model nation in South Asia. Why should we allow this good reputation to go while reacting to an unreasonable assertion made by a section of people in Pakistan with myopic sense of history? We must protest peacefully and let all know that we are likely to take up the matter at higher levels in the future. We should not resort to foolhardy tactics.

Bangladesh and Pakistan have much to lose if we attempt to break off relations. In any case, we have not arrived at that point. Good counsel should prevail on both sides and we must allow quiet diplomacy to straighten out the wrinkles in our relationship. Both the countries are members of Saarc and we have strategic interests that need to be protected. As members of the OIC and the Commonwealth we have acted together in the past and we hope to do so in the future. Our trade relations are growing and we can do better. Let us see how Pakistan can soothe our hurt feelings in the future. On that will depend how quickly normal relations are restored.

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Trading up from poverty



push for the trade-facilitation agreement that was reached earlier this month at the World Trade Organization's ministerial conference in Bali.

To be sure, the incidence of poverty worldwide has reached an historic low, with the extreme-poverty rate (the share of the population living on less than \$1.25 a day, in purchasing-power-parity terms) falling in 2010 by more than half since 1990. But that still leaves more than one billion people worldwide living in extreme poverty. Moreover, progress has been uneven, with poverty rates having declined far more in East Asia and Latin America than in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In order to cope with this changing global context, the World Bank has introduced a new objective to guide its poverty reduction efforts: promoting sustainable, shared prosperity by monitoring the income growth of the poorest 40% of every country's population. Indeed, we are rethinking how we define success in development and how we provide trade-related support to developing countries.

Trade's relationship with poverty is variable and complex. Increased trade benefits consumers by reducing the prices of goods and services. It gives the poor access to a wider variety of commodities, while providing firms with a more diverse selection of inputs.

But increased trade can also eliminate low-skill factory jobs and reduce agricultural prices -- outcomes that disproportionately hurt the poor. In India, for example, poverty has declined more slowly in areas where farmers face increased foreign competition. Given constraints on inter-sectoral labor mobility, stemming from barriers to skills acquisition and rigid labour-market regulations, the poorest workers have few options when such changes occur.

As a result, increased trade may demand difficult adjustments in the short term. Individuals may need to change their consumption habits; labour may have to be reallocated across sectors; and some workers may have to adjust to lower wages, at least temporarily. Some firms will grow, while others will contract.

Experience has demonstrated that, with forward-looking policies, governments can enhance trade's benefits and mitigate its negative impact on the poor. Policymakers can promote retraining programmes for displaced workers and remove regulatory obstacles that impede their flow into thriving, export-oriented sectors. And, in order to protect farmers, they can eliminate export

restrictions and ensure that timely, accurate market information is accessible.

With such policies in place, the World Bank's efforts to bolster developing countries' trade linkages could facilitate substantial poverty reduction. For example, we help developing country governments connect firms, farmers, and households to markets and supply chains, thereby fostering increased investment and boosting economic activity.

Furthermore, we support infrastructure development projects, enabling countries to build the roads, bridges, and ports that link traders to markets. For example, a \$1.8 billion highway project in Kazakhstan is facilitating trade-related transport across the country, stimulating the economies of the country's poorest provinces, and creating more than 30,000 jobs. In Nepal, the Bank is financing reconstruction of the steep, dangerous, and busy road that carries most of the country's exports to India, and it is supporting the government's efforts to connect some of the country's remotest districts to the main road network.

The World Bank also helps countries to establish clear customs rules that more effectively protect traders from inconsistent treatment or solicitations for bribes. And we

are working to address costly border inefficiencies. For example, we are helping to simplify and modernise trade procedures through Cameroon's Douala port, and we have helped the government of Laos to establish an online portal that provides traders with access to all relevant laws, procedures, schedules, and forms from border-management agencies. Moreover, since 2010, the International

Finance Corporation, the Bank's private-sector lending arm, has been promoting the integration of small and medium-size enterprises into global supply chains by increasing their access to capital. The \$500 million Global Trade Supplier Finance programme, a joint investment and advisory initiative, is currently providing short-term finance to thousands of emerging-market SMEs.

In order to maximise the impact of such initiatives, world leaders should cooperate to build and maintain an open trading system. The WTO's Bali conference provided an important opportunity to develop a new trade-facilitation agreement that expedites the movement, release, and clearance of goods at border stations; clarifies and improves trade-related rules; enhances technical assistance; and encourages cooperation among border-control agencies.

But the agreement that was reached in Bali cannot succeed unless wealthy countries and donors agree to support developing countries' efforts to enact related policies and reforms. Given this, it is crucial that developed-country policymakers recognise that a more efficient, better integrated, and more inclusive global trade regime will benefit all countries.

With genuine commitment from the international community - and the appropriate domestic policies in place, trade can be a powerful force for poverty reduction.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Our debt to the 'Muktis'

Knowing of the magnitude of loss of lives and of dignity of our women, an international journalist said, "If blood is the price of freedom, Bangladesh paid it too much." Although we earned our victory with the help of India, the saga of our freedom fighters' sacrifices would continue to inspire us for generations to come. Pakistani soldiers dreaded the 'Muktis,' (freedom fighters, FFs) as 'Muktis' had taken the vow to die to liberate the country. As elsewhere in Bangladesh, four teenagers from my village from poor households left their homes to join the Mukti Bahini. Two were martyred, while other two came back victorious with others. They used to be the bread earners of their families, but they left for freeing our homeland. It is the saddest part of our history that many FFs died in dire poverty and many martyrs still remain untraced.

A. H. Dewan
South Kafirul, Dhaka Cantt., Dhaka

Mandela freed his people of hatred

We've seen a very few men like Mandela in the last century. As pain is the most profound experience of human life, (not joy or love) it has formed Mandela as a man of rare qualities, of incredible strength, of balance. Having gone through unspeakable level of cruelty and injustice, Mandela has not become bitter and hateful and that is his hallmark. He surely has brought an unconventional meaning of freedom to his society by being freed from hatred and resentment.

Freedom is true when it is self-driven and when it is driven by others it is a form of slavery.
Abdur Rob Dewan-Syed
London, UK

A big 'tragedy' of errors

The condition of our country has become one big 'tragedy' of errors between two parties with the people stuck in the middle. The clash, death and destruction have become an integral part of our politics. No side seems to care for the deaths of so many people. Continuous strikes and blockades have made the public shocked, motionless and passive. The deadlock in educational and business institutions is one big farce for our politicians. The biggest joke seems to be the upcoming election where half of the parliamentary seats have already been won by sole candidates scoring in empty fields even before the election begins. Only in times like these we realise how exceptional Bengalis are from the rest of the world. While most of the intellectuals are busy storming their opponents and expressing their grave concerns over talk shows and seminars, our country burns like hell. But who cares? As long as the twisted game of thrones continues we are but spectators of a big 'tragedy' of errors.

Shams Rashid
Dept. of EEE, BUET

Comments on news report, "8 BCL men to hang," published on December 19, 2013

Rezaul Karim

Good news, indeed. This needs to be an exemplary punishment, so that such incident does not repeat in Bangladesh again. I hope the government will execute them soon. I also hope they do it in an open space, maybe Paltan or Suhrawardy Uddan, in front of millions as lesson to all criminals.

SM

Carry out the verdict ASAP following all legal process.

Jafar Iqbal

All the 21 murderers should be hanged.

Saima Rouf

"Defence lawyers rejected the verdict and said they would appeal against the convictions with the higher court"—how narcissistic the lawyers must be to defend these parasites? Such lawyers, whose only goal in life is to make money, should not bother being a lawyer.

Ben10

If all the crimes and violence of BCL in past five years would have been in media records, then I am quite sure by now half of BCL could be in jail.

Ash C.

Why no action against the police force who stood as bystanders when the gruesome murder of poor Bishwajit took place? They are equally guilty for not intervening to save the victim as well as not apprehending the killers—obviously because the killers belonged to the AL. However, I have serious doubt if the guilty will actually serve their sentence!

Ramur

Bravo Bangladesh! Make the criminals pay.

Iftekhar Hassan

Salute to the judge who handed these so-called students death sentences (actually hooligans of Awami League) for one of the most gruesome murders. I remember, my grandson and granddaughter could not sleep that night after watching the beating to death video of this poor boy on YouTube.

It is about time PM Hasina went to Bishwajit's family and did all she can to comfort and compensate that family not from state funds but from Awami League's fund.