

Combating Jamaat

Needs cooperation cutting across party lines

JAMAAT has been resorting to hostile actions against the law enforcing agencies for quite sometime. The latest clash between Jamaat and the police was on 19 January in Sundarganj of Gaibandha district. And we notice a very dangerous trend where the police have been deliberately targeted, as was the case in Sundarganj where, reportedly, Jamaat-Shibir men ambushed a police team. The ensuing clash lasted for nearly five hours and resulted in injuries to 55 persons including 22 policemen.

The recent clashes have followed police attempt to round up Jamaat-Shibir cadres wanted in cases of violence and arson committed last year following the pronouncement of Sayeedee's death sentence on February 28, 2013.

The questions that one must ask are, whether the spurt of violence by Jamaat indicates a new tactic and what their ultimate objective is. It is necessary to do so in order to devise appropriate strategies by the state to combat the party. We are not quite sure whether tackling the issue as merely a law and order problem, as is being done presently, is the correct approach. We believe it is not. Drive to arrest alleged criminals is one thing but if the objective of the joint forces is to render the party politically ineffective through this drive than the government's strategy is patently flawed.

Jamaat is not simply a law and order problem. While its violence must be condemned and curbed, there is urgent need to devise appropriate strategy, both political and security, in order that the party can be effectively countered both as a terrorizing outfit and also as a political entity.

Mess along New Eskaton road

The flyover project spells hardship

IN recent times, it isn't only lengthier traffic jams, lack of substitute and bypass roads and narrower space for pedestrians but also dug out earth and huge pileups of construction materials and machineries that keep worrying citizens. A case in point is lack of co-ordination and systematic planning along the Eskaton road, centered on Moghbazar-Mouchalk flyover's hectic construction activities. It is an important diversion of link road to several arterial roads crisscrossing the extended area.

Prior to any development work it is essential to assess the impending pressure on the transport movement and take necessary measures to mitigate its negative impact. This is known as the Traffic Impact Assessment (TIA) study. The purpose of a TIA study is to assess the impacts of any development work on the transport network and find out the possible solutions to the problems by involving the city authority and also the people of the locality. A TIA report outlines the expected impact of such development work on traffic and suggests the methods needed to control the traffic situation. Construction authorities should be accountable for executing a TIA report prior to any construction project.

We draw urgent attention of construction firms and responsible authorities to the need for synchronizing their activities along New Eskaton road that lessens the inconvenience of the people.

The Jamaat factor

SHAHRIAR FEROZE

BNP must clarify if Jamaati votes are more important to it than the public animosity of its ties with Jamaat-e-Islami. Sadly it's not behaving as per its political ideology and located far away from where the public wants BNP to be. Even the mounting global pressure is failing to persuade BNP to cut its ties to Jamaat. Jamaat's recent attacks on the cops in Gaibandha only re-affirms how violently reckless its becoming in terms of spreading its anarchy-based political creed.

We don't know why but it could be that BNP's key decision makers are not guiding it in the right direction or perhaps there are divided loyalties within the party regarding Jamaat. BNP should address the wishes of the public and the international community for that matter. The truth for BNP is to realize that vote banks are built on public choices, so it should give public opinion the top priority regarding its political alliance with Jamaat. If guided by political astuteness, then BNP should have realized that it was the public who twice gave it mandate to rule, not ensured by a handful of constituents of Jamaati strongholds.

If there is any practice of democracy inside BNP, then there be an internal poll on how many of its leaders think it should slash its ties with the right-wing Islamist party. Unquestionably, there will be many who would cast their votes against BNP's Jamaati ties. Now that the global voice is being raised to cut all ties with Jamaat-e-Islami, BNP should seriously consider its political strategies based on what grounds it wishes to sustain as a political force in Bangladesh. On the other hand it's up to the government, to pinpoint specifically what's their actual position on Jamaat. There are several options but dealing with Jamaat would need a coherent approach cutting across party lines.

Awami League, as yet, has not declared what it plans to do with an isolated Jamaat - if BNP splits with Jamaat. Many fear that they may have to witness an Al-Jamaat alliance of sorts. According to some political analysts, a banned Jamaat is likely to emerge as a potentially dangerous organisation with a different identity. Such ominous possibilities should be analyzed too. The call for a dialogue by the rulers with BNP, provided it leaves Jamaat could have come earlier before the elections. Why did not it come then? What's the motive now? To conclude, Jamaat's vote bank factor should be ignored by the two political parties for the benefit of the country.

SYED MANSUR
HASHIM

Where will the jobs come from?

BY United Nations estimates, manufacturing contributed to around 470 million jobs worldwide in 2009 and one in six jobs came from manufacturing in 2013. Whereas manufacturing remains on the decline in the developed world, the trend is reverse for the emerging economies. Bangladesh for its part has seen its share of industrial labour rise from 200,000 in 1970 to around 1 million in 1990. Going by data presented in UNIDO's 'Industrial Development Report 2013', 61 per cent of the labour force was involved in agriculture and a mere 7 per cent in manufacturing in 1950. A half century later, agriculture has nosedived to 20 per cent, but unfortunately manufacturing has risen to about 17 per cent and the bulk of the labour force is now engaged in services. Still Bangladesh now occupies a place in the Top 10 list of global manufacturing countries employing some 5.1 million people and having a 2.53 per cent share of global manufacturing employment. More remains to be done if manufacturing is to become a serious player in the economy.

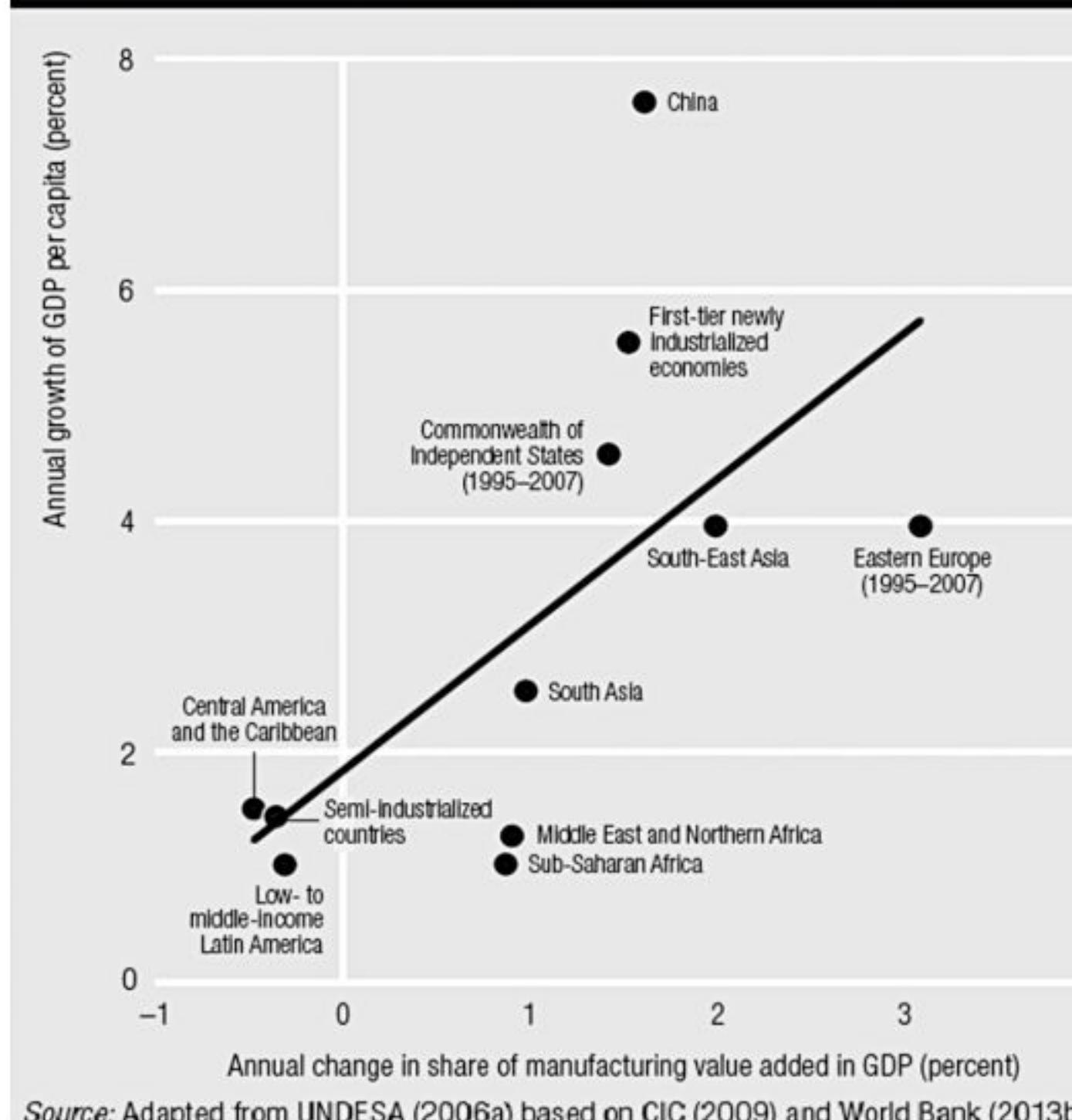
For Bangladesh, the catalyst for industrial growth has come primarily from the boom in textiles and readymade garments in the early '80s. Compared to Cambodian firms, Bangladesh lagged behind in productivity. According to one study (Fukunishi and Yamagata, 2013), Cambodia "achieved its productivity growth through several channels: a high rate of firm turnover facilitated the closure of unproductive firms and the entry of productive companies, and among those that continued operating, process innovation and greater educational attainment of workers came into play... Cambodian garment firms thus successfully mitigated the adverse effects of increased wages on competitiveness by lifting productivity, while the Bangladeshi firms absorbed rising costs by reducing the large profit margin that they had enjoyed under the Multifibre Agreement (MFA), which allowed it preferential exports to developed countries."

What transpires from the above is that Bangladesh remains in the low-tech segment of the industry. Looking beyond the flagging skills of the labour force, poor infrastructure has played its part to stagnate industrialisation in the country. The overall investment climate and cost of doing business that involves everything from number of days to install a telephone line to the power outages all continue to weigh against the growth of manufacturing. Surely, Bangladesh could do better, especially in light of the fact that South and Central Asia registered the second highest growth in manufacturing over a five year period 2007-12. Indeed, manufacturing continued to register strong growth despite the global slump that burst in 2008. Despite attaining a 7.1 per cent growth in industrial output, Bangladeshi manufacturing value added per capita lags behind at US\$101 compared to Cambodia's \$124.

Is this truly a surprising outcome? For Bangladesh to move higher up the global manufacturing chain, at least as far as manufacturing is concerned, it needs to move from "lower - to higher-tech, from lower value-added to higher value-added, and from lower productivity to

higher-productivity sectors." Government policy plays a major role here in terms of providing quality education and making it possible for technical educational institutes to impart required skills to the labour force. Lowering communication costs by way of developing mass transit systems such as railway can help reduce time it takes for products to reach markets - both domestic and international. Allocation of land for exclusive economic zones, replete with means of production that include power and infrastructure all fall under the purview of prudent government policy - this could go a long way in encouraging meaningful foreign direct investment in high-tech sectors and the "spill-over effects" that

Economic growth and changes in the share of manufacturing value added in GDP, selected regions and country groups, 1970-2007



Source: Adapted from UNDESA (2006a) based on CIC (2009) and World Bank (2013b).

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propel local industry to perform better in a bid to survive.

All the above point to structural change in terms of policy, and it essentially falls upon the government to be the driver of change. Industrial policy must address a number of issues. For a country like Bangladesh where RMG dominates the scene, increasing manufacturing efficiency and productivity in collusion with improving the infrastructure remain the best bet for improvement. While infrastructure improvement is a mid to long term affair given Bangladesh's track record of getting communication and power projects off the ground, improving skills through better education is possible in the short term. It is here that policy must concentrate in the near term. For a country of 160 million+ population, a mere 3.2 per cent of the labour force is engaged in manufacturing. Unless the problems associated with lower productivity are addressed, the need for developing industrial skills will remain unaddressed and efforts to industrialise continue to suffer.

The writer is Assistant Editor, *The Daily Star*.

The drug industry's poison pills

GLOBAL HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

MUHAMMAD H.
ZAMAN

ONE does not need to spend a lifetime in the global health-care sector to appreciate that substandard or counterfeit drugs are a major public-health hazard. These bogus products have infiltrated pharmaceutical supply chains from Azerbaijan to Zambia, wrecking the most promising programs to control, manage, and eradicate deadly diseases. Yet little is being done to stop this criminal activity.

Growing up in Pakistan, I realized how vital it was for my mother, like any educated parent, to know which drugs and phar-

macies could be trusted. Little has changed since then. Local pharmacists from Lahore to Lusaka continue to sell a variety of brands of the same drug at different prices; and shopkeepers are called upon to give a candid opinion of their benefits and shortcomings.

Unfortunately, the problem runs a lot deeper than a few bad drugs sold at the corner pharmacy. Around \$75 billion of substandard drugs are sold annually, causing an estimated 100,000 deaths worldwide, and making many more people seriously ill. The trade in inferior drugs also undermines fragile public-health systems in poor countries. As well as killing consumers, the effects of bad drugs can be passed from parent to child, and even create new drug-resistant strains of diseases that threaten us all.

Yet the fight against substandard drugs has never been taken as seriously as other global health crises such as malaria, HIV, or maternal and infant mortality. This may be because there is no obvious solution.

But, in seeking answers, we must first acknowledge that the issue is larger than just counterfeit medicines. Many legitimate manufacturers worldwide, whether through complacency or incompetence, lack adequate quality controls. In some cases, deficient storage and refrigeration systems turn safe medicines into dangerous substances.

Unfortunately, those drug makers then take advantage of developing countries' weak or poorly implemented legislation and corrupt officials to pass their products through local supply chains and into shops. Public ignorance or apathy means that those responsible are able to avoid prosecution.

The technical expertise and equipment needed to detect

inferior products is usually beyond the financial reach of many developing countries. But there are low-cost alternatives. One approach, for example, would be to include on packaging a "scratch code" that includes a phone number for consumers to call in order to check that the batch number matches an authentic product. But, while this approach would certainly help to catch counterfeits, it would miss the substandard or degraded products made by legitimate firms, which are tested only by the consumer - and often at great cost in terms of health risks.

It is therefore imperative to develop new detection technologies that will work in poorer countries, and that complement existing systems such as bar codes. Detection technology must be capable of analyzing all forms of a drug - whether powder, pill, capsule, or syrup - and of detecting several different grades of quality, not just the junk. It must be simple, affordable, adaptable, and scalable; and it must work at all stages of distribution, whether at customs, in hospitals, or in remote villages.

But technology alone will not be enough. Regulators, hospitals, and drug-safety authorities must take the lead, rather than placing the burden on often poor and uneducated citizens who are struggling to care for loved ones.

The search for new, sustainable solutions, requires at least three initiatives. First, we must encourage innovation by offering research grants to support small initiatives or large-scale projects (like campaigns to fight HIV, malaria, and maternal mortality). Ideally, an international group would coordinate and develop all of the ideas and products, and take them from the laboratory to the field.

Second, we need to harness the creativity and commitment of young students, so that they understand the devastating impact of bad pharmaceuticals and become motivated to make a difference in people's lives.

Third, we must make use of the media. Just as the world cries foul when an illegal shipment of ivory is uncovered, we must launch campaigns in the press, on television, and online to bring to account any trader, state official, or company caught selling or promoting low-quality drugs.

In this way, we will remind those in the industry of a fundamental premise: their most precious commodity is not a blockbuster drug, but the public's trust. If drug makers and pharmacists cannot protect their customers' health, they cannot protect their business.

The writer is Director of the Laboratory for Molecular and Cellular Dynamics at Boston University.

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(Exclusive to *The Daily Star*)

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Foreign diplomats' concern

We understand the concern of the US and European Union diplomats in Bangladesh on the state of democracy here. I am sure they understand the limitations of democratic elections particularly in a country where 80% of the electorate are uneducated. You just have to look at Egypt to understand that.

We would like to request the diplomats to meet all parties in the 18-party combine and not only the BNP. 18-party does not mean only BNP, there are 17 other parties. But the diplomats are only talking with the BNP. It is only when they exchange views with all members of the 18-party alliance that the diplomats will understand what a frightful situation awaits Bangladesh if these parties come to power.

Farhad
Dharmundi, Dhaka

Why this disparity in textbook distribution?

More than half a month has passed and we have received only 4 books out of total 12! I'm a student of an English medium school under the National Curriculum and Textbook Board and a JSC candidate this year.

We study under the same curriculum as the Bangla medium students and have to sit for the same exams with same question papers and compete with them, but never get our books at the same time in 1st January book festival! Is it fair to make us sit for the same public exams but not provide us with the same facilities? Even we noticed government's concern about the O'level and A'level exams under British curriculum, but none cares about us. Our request to the government is, please distribute our textbooks on the same day when you distribute books to Bangla medium students.

Ipshita Malat Rahman
Scholars Home School & college
Sylhet

Comments on news report, "US wants fresh polls by June," published on January 17, 2014

Jafar Iqbal

Fresh poll in 2019 is the wish of Sheikh Hasina. How much power US holds to make it one day sooner?

Anonymous

It will take 5 minutes. All they have to do is make UN implement an existing law: no non-democratic country can take part in UN missions.

Aasfisarwar

We would like a fresh poll even earlier than June where a CTG or UN supervision must ensure that Rakib and Hasina can no more manipulate and engineer ballot box stuffing.

Mortuza Huq

If the international community does not want to see Bangladesh moving towards one-party rule, they must take this challenge of holding a credible election within months very seriously. The vast majority of the people of Bangladesh will support this stand.

Bangalee1971

My suggestion would be to hold a new election by the end of March 2014.

Tearful Bengali

Bangladesh should not bow down to the US. Election will be held when the situation is conducive and when the people of Bangladesh want. Let BNP go through a reform process that is very much needed not only for their survival but also for the survival of the nation. AL must also go through some badly needed soul searching. Jamaat issue must be dealt with first. An early election will not solve Bangladesh's existential problem.

Nasreen Chowdhury

We hope that Awami League and BNP have learnt from their mistakes and will respect the will of the people. Hold free and fair election without violence and regain credibility as a democratic country. It's not democracy when people are denied their voting rights. That's a violation of people's constitutional right, and that is more important than anything in a democracy.

Zman7

The whole nation and the world however know and have seen that the opposition not only threatened that they would not allow the Jan 5 election to take place, they carried out massive violence to scare away voters. Many voters therefore failed to go to the polling stations to cast their votes. And you are saying AL denied people's voting rights!!

Anonymous

Yes, they had an election where 5% people voted. They failed to provide security. So stop blaming others.

Zman7

Don't you remember the fiery video-message of TZ in which he urged the BNP supporters to resist and stop the election at any cost? Fear of violence stopped a large number of people from going to the polling stations to cast their votes. And that is the reason for the low turnout in the election. And you are saying AL denied people's voting rights!

Anonymous

A few of us went to the polling station to cast our votes and to our surprise we came to know that our votes were already cast by someone.

Vikram Khan

Can Bangladesh demand polls in the US? I don't think so. Keep out of our business US; you've already done enough damage!