

Youths as propellers of robust growth

Invest in human capital now

ACCORDING to a report recently published by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 47.6 million or nearly a third of Bangladesh' population comprise young people, aged between 10 and 24 years. To take advantage of this huge demographic potential, policymakers need to make targeted investments in developing human capital; for it is the youth population that has the capacity to become drivers for change and growth in the country. Although Bangladesh has made commendable progress in primary school enrolment, more needs to be done to ensure quality education, one that is compatible with global standards. Efforts need to be made to effectively contain child marriage so that more girl children can finish their education, reduce health risks and become part of the workforce.

The government has a key role to play in this transformative process. Policies need to be conducive and geared towards young people in terms of providing better health services and quality education. Job creation and promoting an environment for entrepreneurs remain key challenges for government policymakers. National budgets need to focus on reducing child mortality, ensuring better nutrition and sanitation and supplying safe drinking water - all of which will lead to better health for children. Investments are needed in secondary education and health services focusing on girls so that they may play a greater role in the workplace.

Serious impediments remain to thwart the normal growth of youths in the country. Yet, these can be tackled provided the State takes care to implement macro-economic policies that will help expand employment opportunities for young people.

Right to Information

Time journalists lead the way by using it

THE Right to Information (RTI) Act, if used judiciously, can be a powerful instrument for the governed to hold the government accountable. However, despite the crucial role RTI can play to shed light on the corrupt and unlawful practices of politicians and public and private institutions, journalists in the country have so far been largely unenthusiastic about using it.

Even five years after its enactment, RTI has reached only 5% of the total population. It is usually argued that the demand for information is minuscule because there is hardly any awareness of the benefits that RTI Act can deliver to the users. As far as journalists are concerned, however, the demand for information should be insatiable. Media outlets should highly encourage the use of RTI and build the capacity of journalists so they may challenge individuals and institutions through investigative journalism using RTI.

The Information Commission and Information Ministry which, so far, have collaborated with Dhaka Reporter's Unity to train nearly a thousand of its members, should expand their support, increasing the number of journalists trained exponentially.

If more journalists use the act, the problems in its implementation - for instance, non-compliance on the part of most government and non-government authorities - will become more visible to the public. We believe that media and public outcry can oblige institutions to act accordingly or at any rate compel the government to take legal action against non-compliance institutions.

Meanwhile, journalists should take a pro-active stance to

Moghbazar-Mouchak flyover construction: An everyday deadlock

SHAIMAH, NABILA, SHADLEE, NASIR, SALEHEEN

TRAVELLING through Moghbazar and Mouchak area is a nightmare now, as building of an 8.25 km flyover, which started two years ago, is being undertaken without any effective traffic management system to tackle the situation. No alternative routes were marked out, nor was the number of traffic police increased. The whole construction is, in fact, awfully mismanaged, adding to people's already troubled life in Dhaka city.

I take this route everyday to go to my university as I live in Banglamotor, and I have to be stuck in traffic for at least 1.5 hours. Construction of a flyover is supposed to be a normal affair, but the way the work is being done here is putting us in utter misery. We wonder if the authorities take any notice of the devastating effect on public life caused by the construction work. Lack of coordination among the workers is one of the major concerns in the way of execution, along with the roads being congested with construction equipment and materials like rods, cements, and bricks. Thus, whatever space is required for vehicles to move has been narrowed.

Even walking on the footpath is a struggle now. The whole route, from Moghbazar-Mouchak-Shantinagar, is thick with polluted air. There is so much dust in the air that the passers-by can hardly see, or inhale properly. Children are the prime victims of this daily situation, as this route links some of the biggest and renowned schools and colleges of the city. There are also small accidents taking place every now and then, wheels of buses often get stuck in the holes dug up for the construction work, causing the traffic jam to become worse.

We have come to know recently that the contractors have stopped working with a view to increasing the amount of contract by at least 100%, blaming change in design. It is a normal in Bangladesh that the contractors are always gainers if work is delayed for any reason. Some unscrupulous engineers and officials of the government are closely associated with the contractors for mutual benefit.

We hope that the authority concerned will come up with something effective to resolve this issue.

The writers are students in the Department of Business Administration, East West University.

The High Commissioners' Dhaka exercise

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN ndc, psc (Retd)

The 'firsts' are always welcome events. Particularly when that happens to be related to an exercise that deals with the state of Indo-BD relationship. The interlocutors were the practitioners of diplomacy engaged in the pursuit of enhancing their respective country's interests while trying to improve bilateral ties. While some of them were perhaps more successful than others it was good to see them revisiting the condition of the current Indo-Bangladesh relationship, and flagging the points that they felt needed to be addressed quickly to enhance bilateral relations. And unlike meeting of scholars they talked turkey and what the two countries should do to further strengthen bilateral relationship.

If India's relevance to Bangladesh is immense, a fact that no one in Bangladesh ever loses sight of, the fact is that to India Bangladesh is equally significant, if not more. This is a reality not lost upon the Indian policy makers either. But we wonder whether our policymakers have ever quite internalised the reality. For one thing we share the longest borders, much longer than Indo-Pak border and, regrettably, for a while this was the moist troublesome border, more than Indo-Pakistan. While many in Bangladesh rue the fact that it is India-locked, many Indian policy makers and scholars lament the fact that the entire Indian North-East is Bangladesh-locked.

Several issues emerged from the meeting, three of which we would like to flag here. It was not surprising to see that the high commissioners were fairly unanimous on the need for India to deliver on its commitment to reciprocate Bangladesh's action to address India's priority -- its security concerns. The commitments to Bangladesh relate to the LBA, sharing of the waters of common rivers and addressing the trust deficit.

Before one delves into what needs to be done to improve bilateral relationship, going into the trust deficit first will be in order. It was generally agreed that the greater responsibility must fall upon India for generating confidence and building trust. And trust building is inherently integral to India's delivering on its commitment to Bangladesh. All other issues like cooperating in the areas

of security to combat terrorism, economic integration, trade and investment are equally important but can proceed in full gear only when the two very crucial issues for Bangladesh -- the Land Boundary Agreement and finalising the Teesta water sharing treaty -- are addressed without further delay.

A question often asked among India watchers in Bangladesh is whether India will deliver, and, notwithstanding Delhi's willingness to fulfill its commitments, can it actually deliver, given that the factors influencing decision and further progress in these two issues are not quite entirely in the hands of the Indian government alone.

We are told that the Modi government is taking steps to bring the LBA to the parliament. On this issue the Manmohan government faced resistance not only from Mamata but also from the Assam BJP. That is understandable since implementing the LBA would involve ceding territory to Bangladesh. Reportedly, Mamata has relented on the LBA issue on the condition that persons living in Indian enclaves to be ceded to Bangladesh and willing to go to India are adequately compensated. The question is will the Assam BJP climb down from its stated position that the deal is a sellout?



On the sharing of waters of common rivers, the Teesta deal is still facing resistance from Mamata. However, an idea with regards to waters of common rivers has been bandied for quite sometime. And that emphasises more on 'management' of water rather than sharing of it. Management is a wide term and one wonders, given that more than fifty rivers that flow into Bangladesh flow down from India, what sort of management one is talking about? One can manage things when those are under one's control, and the waters of the common rivers are something that Bangladesh has no control on.

So, can India deliver? Some cynics pose a counter question -- does it have to? When India has got all that it wanted -- its security concerns addressed, and transit virtually given free -- why should it be in a hurry to meet Bangladesh's concerns?

While India may have gained many things from Bangladesh in the last six years, Indian leaders must not overlook the fact their country will lose on trust if they do not reciprocate in equal measure quickly.

The writer is Editor, Op-Ed and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

Rajshahi University and the death trap

PRANAB KUMAR PANDAY

HOW long will teachers keep losing their lives in the Rajshahi University campus? This is an important question that we all should address with great seriousness. Rajshahi University has been seeing killings of its teacher since 2004 when Professor Mohammad Yunus was killed when he was taking a morning walk. Professor Taher Ahmed was killed and kept inside manhole in 2006. The latest inclusion in this list is Professor A.K.M. Shafiqul Islam (Lilon) who was killed on his way back home from the Department of Sociology.

Members of the Rajshahi University family cannot understand why Professor Lilon was killed in such a manner. Like the majority of the teachers, I also knew him as a very pleasant personality. He always kept himself busy doing research and academic work. For the last couple of

when he was carrying the dead body of his father at such an early age? It is more painful for the parents of Professor Lilon because the death of a son is the weightiest thing to carry. Thus, we do not want such incidents in anyone's life.

It is really unfortunate to see that public university teachers are being harassed and killed very often. It is extremely regrettable that the perpetrators have not yet been identified. These incidents are creating a sense of insecurity among the teachers of public universities. They are also indicative of the deterioration of law and order in the country.

Whatever the motive of the killing was, we want the perpetrators to be identified and arrested very soon, and face trial. Everything in Bangladesh is considered from the political perspective. We do not want to assume or predict anything before the investigation is over. We, the teachers of Rajshahi University, are united to demand punishment of the killers. At the same time, we do not want harassment of any innocent person. But, we want to see that the killers are identified and tried in the court.



years, he was practicing Baulism, being inspired by the philosophy of Lalon fakir. Although he was a registered member of the teachers' wing upholding the spirit of freedom fighters and progressiveness, he was not so active in the political arena. Thus, it is very difficult to figure out why he was killed.

Being peace-loving members of the society, we do not want to see any death of this nature. It is very difficult to forget this sort of killing. Such killings will have a very significant social impact since they create a sense of insecurity within the society.

The worst sufferer of this killing is Zebin, his son, who had lost his mother when he was a child. He started his university life last year. He has lost his father at a time when he needed him as a guide. After losing both parents, how will he continue his life? Can we imagine his pain

The president and the prime minister deserve special appreciation for keeping constant watch on the progress of the progress of the investigation. It is reported that the Prime Minister's Office is monitoring the progress. The president, while delivering his speech in the convocation of the Rajshahi University of Science and Technology (RUJET), instructed the law enforcing agencies to take necessary action to identify the killers.

I would also request the government to take the necessary initiative for taking care of Zebin, who is passing through a traumatic situation after losing his father. We, the members of the teaching community of Rajshahi University, will also provide all sorts of assistance to him whenever required.

To conclude, death is not at all desirable for anybody. And it is quite heartbreaking if anyone is murdered. It is the duty of the university administration and the law enforcing agencies to ensure safety and security of all having association with Rajshahi University. If that can be ensured, only then will we be able to come out from the death trap.

The writer is a Professor in the Department of Public Administration, University of Rajshahi.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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We want a vigorous drive against unfit vehicles

The population of Dhaka is more than 16 million. But there are not enough public transports for this huge population to move in the city and many of the vehicles lack the fitness to ply the city roads. These unfit vehicles pose a risk to the lives of the passengers and pedestrians. In addition, many of the drivers are either without driving licenses or carry fake ones.

We know that BRTA has already started a countrywide drive against unfit vehicles and drivers without licenses. We hope, it's not a mere drive for a few days. We want a vigorous and meaningful drive against fake drivers and unfit vehicles.

Anonymous
On e-mail

Managing and utilising wastes

According to a statistics, every year around 22.4 million tons of waste is produced in Bangladesh which mainly comes from human consumptions, mills and factories, transportation, sewerage etc. Bangladesh lacks a proper waste management system which results in an unhealthy environment almost everywhere in the country. We often see piles of wastes on the roadsides and footpaths spreading unbearable stench. People suffer from various air-borne diseases including nasal and respiratory ailments due to their exposure to such wastes. The authorities concerned must take necessary steps to introduce proper waste management system in the country to solve this problem. The government can set up biogas plants using wastes to meet the demand of gas in households and industrial sectors.

Tazmila Hasin, MD. Kaif ahmed
BBA student
East West University
Dhaka

"Cheers for BCL"

So there you are. We are going to have BCL cadres replacing BCS cadres soon. This is nothing new though, just an extension of what the finance minister suggested quite a few years ago when he reportedly wrote to the public administration ministry to have party men exclusively in all the higher echelons of civil service. By the way, the process has apparently been underway since long. A formal declaration is waiting only.

Anonymous
On e-mail

Comments on news report, "Imam's remarks prove govt influenced Jan 5 polls," published on November 15, 2014

New Generation

It's known to each and every citizen of the country.

"Poor's income not tax-free?" (Nov. 16, 2014)

Moazzem Hossen

We allow wealthy businessmen to evade tax but force the poor to pay taxes on every penny from their hard-earned savings.

Amzad Hossain

The NBR is penny wise but pound foolish.

"Mozena vs Tofail: Who pays for US tariff on Bangladesh's garment export?" (Nov. 16, 2014)

SM

Another equation is that the US importer is paying tax on RMG from Bangladesh and then passes it on to the end customer. The end customer also pays sales tax. So, the ambassador is technically correct from a taxation point of view. But in reality Bangladeshi RMG manufacturers are forced to sell at a lower price and the buyer dictates the terms. Tofail needs to do some pricing homework to explain it better.

Rafid Muhaisin

Thanks to the writer for such an informative article.

"Pricier, next year" (Nov. 17, 2014)

Soma

All the time the middle and lower income people have to bear the burden of price hike.