

## Villager-BGB face-off!

*It was entirely avoidable*

WE are saddened by two BGB men's death in a road mishap that took place on Friday at Phulbari on the Dinaipur-Dhaka highway. The motorcycle that the ill-fated BGB jawans were riding collided head-on with a truck speeding towards them from the opposite direction leading to the tragedy. Unfortunately, the killer truck's driver and his assistant could flee the scene 'unchallenged'. This led to clashes between enraged BGB men and local people, so informed the commanding officer of the service's Phulbari battalion headquarter. As a result 13 villagers were injured, three of whom bore bullet wounds.

While condoling the premature deaths of two BGB men and sympathizing with their colleagues' sense of shock, what we fail to understand is the impulsive manner in which jawans from the battalion HQs came down on the locals, beating them with truncheon, even damaging their business sheds and properties.

At the same time, one cannot support the wild and rowdy behaviour of the local people, especially their disrupting traffic flow for hours on an important highway.

Needless to say, the crisis created over the road mishap could entirely be avoided, if only the issue of nabbing the driver and his assistant and holding a probe into the accident was left to the police. Evidently, in this case the BGB men overstepped by taking law into their own hands. Such behaviour is out of sync with its image as a disciplined force.

## GSP suspension affecting US firms

*Consider renewal, review Bangladesh's case*

SINCE the suspension of the GSP scheme in July 2013, it's not only Bangladesh but US firms too that are also bearing the brunt. The loss for the US firms has been an estimated at \$2 million per day and the total amount of loss, to date, is no less than \$850 million. According to a speaker of the US House of Representative some US business firms are not only losing money, laying off workers; cutting workers' benefits and compensating for higher taxes, but many are facing closure as they are failing to remain competitive in the market. The reality is a huge number of US entrepreneurs consist of sole proprietorships, and majority of these are small businesses that can least afford a regular loss caused due to GSP suspension. However, if this continues then many small US business firms are likely to suffer abjectly.

While welcoming the internal demand in the USA to end suspension of GSP, we urge Bangladesh to fulfill all 16 conditions for a renewal of GSP facility. Though Bangladesh benefits a meagre \$26 million out of a total export of some \$5.58 billion to the US but holding GSP privileges plays a role in enhancing one's commercial repute.

At any rate, now it's up to the US lawmakers to decide how soon they withdraw the GSP suspension proviso.

## Will racial mistrust disappear from US?

ABDUL MATIN

THE grand jury consisting of nine white and three black members decided on November 24 not to indict white police officer Darren Wilson for shooting a black unarmed teen Michael Brown on August 9. The incident was followed by protests and demonstrations by both blacks and whites all over the United States. They are outraged by the decision of the grand jury and are back to the streets again. The immediate reaction against the jury's verdict was violent in Ferguson in Missouri where the shooting had taken place. The demonstrators taunted the police, shattered windows and set fire to several cars and buildings. The protests were relatively peaceful in other cities though rioting was reported in some places.

Lawyers for Brown's family denounced the grand jury's decision as "unfair". His parents, though angered by the decision, did not support the violence. President Barack Obama denounced destructive behaviour and criminal acts of rioting and said that those responsible should be prosecuted. He however admitted that the frustration seen by the grand jury's decision had "deep roots in many communities of colour who have a sense that our laws are not being enforced uniformly or fairly". In a separate incident two years ago, Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African-American high school student, was shot and killed by a mixed-race Hispanic in Sanford, Florida. Last year, a jury, consisting of five white women and one Hispanic, acquitted him. In an unusual move, President Obama said, "Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago... If a white male teen would have been involved in this scenario, both the outcome and the aftermath might have been different." The racial discriminations in the States were abolished by the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth amendments to the US constitution between 1865 and 1870 but racial mistrust still haunts the multi-racial society. No African American, irrespective of his/her social status, is immune to this mistrust. The current protests may soon subside but will the mistrust disappear soon?

It is obvious that laws alone cannot eliminate racial mistrust. It requires a change of the mindset of the people. This change will not come unless the growing children of all races, including the whites, get the same lessons on race relations at home and at school. Now, children grow up with one notion at home whereas they are taught another, an idealistic one, at school. All parents and teachers must talk in one voice. Moreover, there should be more social interactions and integration among the different racial groups. This may help to reduce the mistrust gradually but when it will be eliminated is anybody's guess.

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

# On chain of command

C R ABRAR

DURING the month of November in otherwise drab political environment rhetoric of the holders of high offices of the State filled up a portion of space of the dailies and airtime of the television channels. Observations and exchanges of the head of a statutory body and that of a powerful branch of a law enforcement agency provided interesting and insightful perspectives about how they viewed each other.

The case in point has been the public tiff that broke out between the Chair of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) authorities. Unable to control his disgust at the high handedness of the police who allegedly shot Nafis Salam, a 32 year old, from point-blank range in the Mohammadpur area of the city on 17 October, the NHRC Chair rightly observed that the "One (police) cannot shoot a person point-blank in the leg or waist – no law in Bangladesh gives this right to any agency". Reacting to the claims of the police that the victim was a member of the banned Hizbut Tahrir he noted, "police have no right to shoot at anybody even if he is linked with an outlawed outfit".

The NHRC chief was sharing his views with the media as he visited the victim at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital on November 6. The statement betrayed his frustration and needs to be understood in the context of increased incidence of resorting to lethal force by the members of law enforcement agencies in dealing with alleged criminals what is generally presented as 'shoot-outs' and 'cross-fires'. Instead of taking those comments in their proper stride the DMP Commissioner's office took a public position that baffled not only the Chair of the NHRC, but also ordinary citizens.

The DMP authorities blamed the Rights Commissioner for "breaching law and norms" despite holding an important "constitutional office of the government". The Joint Commissioner of the DMP (detective branch) is on record stating that the police "will inform the court through the investigation officer of the case of his (NHRC Chair) visiting an accused without permission". In other words, the DMP felt that the NHRC Chair breached the law by visiting the accused at the hospital.

In defending the Chair's prerogative to make such visits the NHRC in a statement clarified that National Human Rights Commission law had authorised such visits by Commission members to hospitals, prisons, educational institutions and childcare homes, without permission from the authorities concerned. The Commission reminded its detractors that the NHRC was not a government agency, rather a statutory body driven by its own laws. It also censured the police for the delay in preparing the inquiry reports of the alleged incidents of rights abuse and noted, "lower tiers of police in many cases care little about the instructions of high command".

Media reports inform that the Deputy Commissioner of DMP (media and public relations) had his swipe at the Rights Commissioner for not visiting wounded members of police force or the family members of the deceased cops. Presenting figures of those killed, maimed and wounded during the 2013 political turmoil he raised the question "Why is he (the NHRC Chair) taking side of the offenders?"

## Fighting The New Green War

# Medha Patkar's contribution

PRAFUL BIDWAI  
COLUMN



PRAFUL BIDWAI

A distinguishing mark of the Modi government is the determination with which it's diluting, even scuttling, India's already-weak environmental regulation system to promote "fast-track clearances" for industries, and curtail people's access to natural resources.

That will increase environmental destruction, pollution and related illnesses, and cause economic regression, not progress. According to the World Bank, India is annually losing 5.7 percent of GDP to environmental degradation—more than its income growth. (<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/07/17/india-green-growth-necessary-and-affordable-for-india-says-new-world-bank-report>)

Immediately on taking power, the Modi government changed the composition of the Expert Appraisal Committee, a specialist body to examine projects' environmental impact, and the Forest Advisory Committee, which decides on the diversion of forest land to mining and industry. It reduced the National Wildlife Board's independent experts from the mandated eight to one.

Within 100 days, these committees cleared 240 of 325 pending projects in coal-mining, roads, power-plants and oil-exploration, diverting over 7,000 hectares of forests, and sanctioning a road through the Kutch Desert Sanctuary, the sole breeding-site of flamingos. They also allowed oil and gas companies to expand capacity without environmental scrutiny.

Within 11 days of taking over, the new environment minister lifted the moratorium on industrialisation from eight "critically-polluted" clusters, including highly-poisoned Singrauli (Uttar Pradesh-Madhya Pradesh) and Vapi (Gujarat), where cancer and neurological disorders are rampant.

His ministry allowed mid-sized coal mines to expand without a public hearing. Irrigation projects affecting a sizable 2,000 hectares will no longer require environmental clearance.

The government is trying to bypass the Forest Rights Act, which grants rights to indigenous tribes over forest lands and requires their "prior informed consent". This is a vicious assault on some of India's poorest people.

Perhaps the worst part of this "silent war on the environment" is the just-submitted high-level committee report on amending key environmental laws. It has recommended fast-track clearances for power, mining and roads; self-certification of compliance by project-promoters (notorious for misleading/false reports); and more state-level project clearances.

In these turn of events, perhaps most disconcerting was the NHRC Chair's observation that, "the police personnel of a particular district seem to be above the law ... they are becoming increasingly audacious". "Police of this particular district are consistently committing offences ignoring the chain of command taking ill advantage of the district's name", he observed. This is a serious indictment against the law enforcement agency. The Rights Commissioner must have his own reasons for going public on this. We could take issue with the NHRC chief about going public on the parochial bias of the police high command. However, we are shocked at the reaction it elicited from the DMP sources. Firstly, the DMP statement of November 6 claimed that NHRC Chair's remarks went against investigation and accused him of "instigating militancy". The agency labeled such outrageous accusation on ground that it identified Nafis as a member of a banned militant outfit. Therefore by its reckoning by standing up for Nafis the Rights Commissioner promoted militancy. The NHRC Chair held his ground firmly and went on argue that even if anyone was a member of a banned organization the police have no authority to shoot him. He is quite right. If the high command of the police force needs to be imparted such a basic lesson on human rights then perhaps only God can help the citizenry of this land.

Secondly, while rebutting the claim of biasness of the police force in favour of a particular district the DMP statement pointed finger at the NHRC Chair for "echoing" a (similar) statement made in December last year. In all certainty the DMP was alluding to BNP Chair Khaleda Zia's outburst on the police personnel when she asked the obstructing police officers if they hailed from the district concerned. Such innuendo targeting the head of an important statutory body of the State by members of law enforcement agency only speaks volume about the depth of abyss of indecency that we as a nation have stooped into. Furthermore what is regrettable that there was no censure, let alone condemnation, of this insolence from any quarter.

If the DMP really felt that the Rights Commissioner's statement was unfair and uncalled for and had "hurt the sentiment of the people" and "would give wrong message to the world about Bangladesh's stance on militancy" then it should have conveyed its response through proper channel to the concerned body, i.e., through the Home Ministry via the Inspector General of Police's office. Instead of engaging in oratory and one-upmanship in a disorderly way, grievances should have been put across in a respectful and civil manner. That is what the people expect of a disciplined force.

During the controversy the DMP spokesperson reiterated that there was no problem with the chain of command in police and they were performing their duties within the bounds of the laws and regulations of the country. If the DMP high command and the civil administration that supervises it earnestly share such a view then there is every reason for the citizens to be concerned about. If not anything else, this tiff between the NHRC and the DMP has established beyond doubt that there exists a serious problem in the chain of command of the country's elite branch of law enforcement. The sooner it is acknowledged and acted upon, the better would it be for all concerned.

The writer teaches International Relations at the University of Dhaka.

## LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### No step yet to stop question leak

I am completely dumbfounded to learn from the media reports that once again question paper of an exam has been leaked and this time it's the PSC question. Question paper leak has become a common phenomenon nowadays in the country, but after much uproar from all concerned, very little or no steps have been taken by our education minister to stop this malpractice.

I have been teaching a student of class five for two years. He said, "Sir! I feel terribly disappointed after knowing that most of my friends have got the questions. How is it possible?" I couldn't answer him. Everyone is getting questions on Facebook of every public exam, but still our minister has done nothing to stop this!

Arifur Rahman  
Dhaka

### Welcome DMP drive against jaywalking



PHOTO: STAR

The recent initiative taken by Dhaka Metropolitan Police against jaywalking has encouraged many pedestrians to use footbridges. Jaywalking is dangerous and absolutely unsafe. If people use footbridges, underpasses and zebra-crossings to cross the road, it could reduce road accidents to a great extent. At the same time, the sorry states of the pavements and footbridges should be improved. The authorities concerned should take effective steps for that.

Mahamudul Hasan  
Bangladesh Agricultural University  
Mymensingh

### Black Friday and poverty in US

Black Friday is one of the busiest shopping days in the USA. There are two popular theories as to why the day after Thanksgiving Day is called Black Friday. One theory is that the wheels of vehicles in heavy traffic on the day after Thanksgiving Day left many black markings on the road surface, leading to the term Black Friday. The other theory is that the term Black Friday comes from an old way of recording business accounts. Losses were recorded in red ink and profits in black ink. Many businesses, particularly small businesses, started making profits prior to Christmas. Many hoped to start showing a profit, marked in black ink, on the day after Thanksgiving Day.

Just like so many of our other holidays, the true purpose behind having a holiday called "Thanksgiving" is being totally obliterated by a tsunami of greed. Meanwhile, more Americans than ever are living in poverty this year and very few people even seem to notice. However, perhaps we should all take time this week to remember the tens of millions of Americans that are going to be deeply suffering this winter. They keep telling us that "the recession is over" and yet poverty continues to spread like an out of control plague. But for most Americans life is still relatively "normal", and so the horrible suffering going on out there doesn't really affect them.

Ted Rudow III, MA  
Palo Alto, CA, USA

### Comments on news report, "Latif Siddique lands in jail," published on November 26, 2014

Redgreen

If the government were serious, Latif would have been arrested when he landed at the airport.

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### "Bangladesh Asia's new energy superpower?" (Nov. 25, 2014)

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

I fail to understand why Bangladesh is still not putting any effort to estimate and extract shale gas and oil, if we have any.

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### "First clear the sidewalks" (Nov. 25, 2014)

Snr Citizen

First clear the sidewalks by removing garbage, construction materials, shanties and makeshift shops.

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### "71 warship reduced to heap of scrap" (Nov. 23, 2014)

Enayet Mowla

This ship played a big role in the Bay of Bengal during our Liberation War in 1971.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.