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FOUNDER EDITOR
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Devastating earthquake

Taking lessons from Nepal's disaster

SATURDAY'S earthquake with its epicentre near the Nepalese capital Katmandu has wreaked tremendous havoc in that country, and whose ripples reached us too. It has so far claimed the lives of more than 2000 people in Nepal. Our heart goes out to the people of Nepal. The Nepalese people and the government need everything that the world can offer, and we are sure that the government of Bangladesh will come forward and respond quickly with all possible help to alleviate the sufferings of the quake affected people. Already the Bangladesh government has sent help.

Bangladesh felt the after shock twice with an intensity of IV and III respectively and even a milder tremor on Sunday afternoon. Although we did not suffer any major damage all natural disasters have lessons for everybody, more so when that occurs in a neighbouring country.

While no one can predict earthquakes, the likelihood of it hitting Bangladesh in the near future is quite high. There are definitive actions the government can take to reduce its impact both in terms of loss of lives and of property through adequate preparedness. There cannot be any compromise on building code and it is for the government to ensure that it is adhered to strictly. There should also be more investments on infrastructural development like acquisition of modern equipment and technology for post disaster relief and recovery operations.

Last but not the least, serious efforts must be made to make people aware of actions they should take to ensure their safety in the event of an earthquake.

Attacks on mayoral candidates

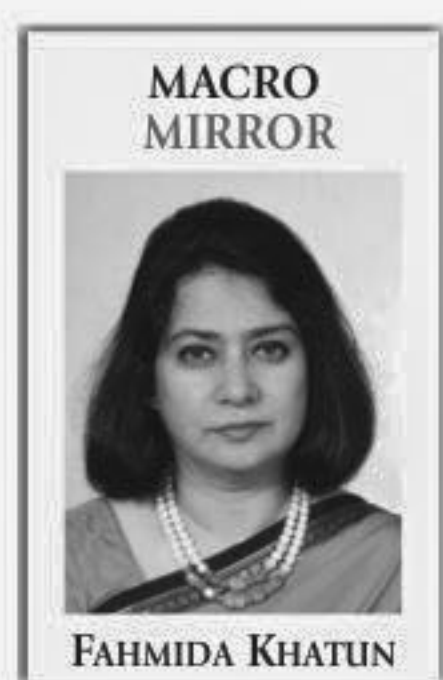
Keep the atmosphere congenial for polls

AS hectic campaigning for the city corporation polls was entering its final day yesterday, blatant attacks were wreaked on two mayoral candidates. First, it was Mahi B Chowdhury's car that came under attack in the wee hours of the night when the Bikalpa Dhara-backed candidate of DNCC polls was returning home from a gas station with his spouse. The second onslaught was inflicted in broad daylight on BNP-supported mayoral contestant for Chittagong city corporation election M Manjur Alam.

Goons wielding hammers, brickbats and bamboo sticks fell on Mahi's car and Manjur's entourage. Mahi was injured in the eye; it could be more serious. Obviously, the targeted attacks point to police slack based on perhaps selective indifference. Ultimately it reflects on the administration; for, it is the government's responsibility to protect all candidates from harm's way. More than a citizen's right to safety it is a question of defending the integrity of an electoral process against all forms of intimidation and threats.

We also heard of firing at a councillor candidate's procession and slashing of a candidate's finger. These criminal acts including the attacks on BNP chairperson's motorcade should be seriously probed into and people responsible for such nefarious acts need to be held to account. There have been allegations of interference in the campaigning by some candidates. Where the complaints are specific and genuine they should be addressed to instill a sense of public confidence in the electoral process.

How happy are we?



FAHMIDA KHATUN

MACRO MIRROR
LAST week the World Happiness Report 2015 was launched in New York. The report shows that Switzerland is the happiest country in the world followed by Iceland, Denmark, Norway and Canada. Where does Bangladesh stand? We are 109th in the ranking among 158 countries which were surveyed. Before discussing why our position is low and what that implies, let us try to understand what such happiness indicators want to tell us.

The underlying reason for carrying out such studies is that material accumulation cannot bring happiness in human life. One has to look at the personal mental and physical wellbeing. True, one needs income to buy food, to live in a house, to have safe water and sanitation, to access education and health facilities and to save for future uncertain periods.

Money is a necessity. But how much money does one need to be happy? For an impoverished family a small sum of money makes a huge difference in their lives. They need money to upgrade them from extreme poverty and to have a decent life. Does a rich family have the same amount of gratification by acquiring that small amount as a poor family would have? Surely, not. In fact, at a certain point of time the rich may not find as much pleasure in running after money as they used to. In economics, this has been described by the law of diminishing marginal utility. That is why happiness is relative and is not achievable through financial gains as it is derived from feelings of satisfaction.

Wellbeing of a person cannot be measured by the traditional estimate of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Real wellbeing includes satisfaction and happiness of individuals. GDP gives an idea of the economic condition of a person which could indirectly tell something about the wellbeing of the person, but only partially. Economies have mostly focused only on material opulence, ignoring the crucial elements of quality of life. Therefore economists, during the last two

decades have been exploring concepts which go beyond GDP and can reflect on some of the non-material aspects of life.

In fact in 1990 when the United Nations Development Programme started to bring out the Human Development Report that introduced the Human Development Index (HDI), it declared that the report was "more than GNP growth, more than income and wealth and more than producing commodities and accumulating capital". HDI looks into three aspects of life, namely, a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living. Bhutan launched the concept of Gross National Happiness back in 1972 that has four pillars, such as good governance, sustainable socio-economic development, cultural preservation

and environmental conservation.

the lowest level of life satisfaction. A comparison of various index and rankings is interesting. A country may be rich in terms of GDP, but poor in the HDI. Just to give an example, Sri Lanka ranks 104th in GDP per capita and 73rd in the HDI, and is ahead of five other South Asian countries including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan and Nepal. However, on happiness ranking it is placed 132nd, last among these countries. Another interesting finding is that though Pakistan is a lesser performer than India in case of both GDP per capita and HDI and ranks 132nd in GDP per capita and 146th in the HDI, its happiness indicator is higher than India and ranks 81st. India ranks 117th on the happiness scale which is also lower than Bangladesh even though Bangladesh is ranked 142nd both in cases of GDP per capita and HDI. Another revealing finding is that China, being a much richer country and with higher HDI than the above South Asian countries with ranking 89th and 91st respectively, is ranked 84th on the happiness scale.

So why don't the numbers match and follow the same trend? This only reflects that even though countries may have higher income, they may not have invested in their social capital which can bring a change in human lives. Of course, no methodology is perfect and no measure can capture the notion of subjective wellbeing fully. However, these indicators can at least provide the magnitude of various dimensions of wellbeing. For policymakers, they carry an important message. Income is a critical ingredient for human development. But income by itself is not an end. It is a means to achieve other objectives of life. While the objective of policymakers should be to achieve higher economic growth, they also have to allocate resources for health, education, environment, social protection, security, good governance and law and order. If people can count on the government during periods of difficulty and perceive it to be free of corruption, the happiness indicator improves. This may have been the case in South Asian countries though apparently it may look contradictory.

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COMPARISON OF VARIOUS INDICATORS

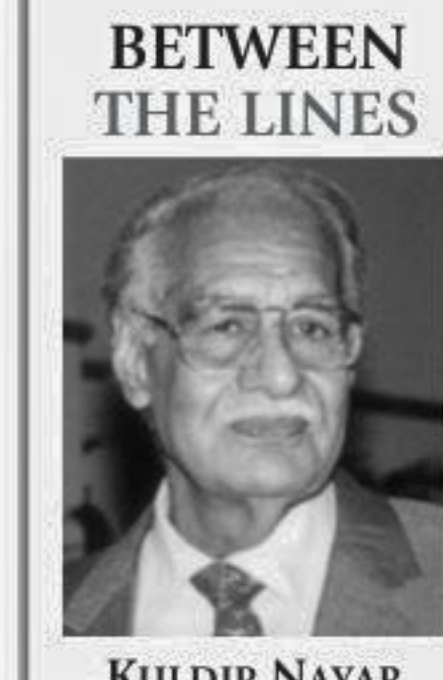
COUNTRIES	GDP PER CAPITA 2013 (based on PPP)	HDI 2014	HAPPINESS RANKING 2012-2014
BANGLADESH	142	142	109
BHUTAN	114	136	79
INDIA	124	135	117
PAKISTAN	132	146	81
NEPAL	155	145	121
SRI LANKA	104	73	132
CHINA	89	91	84

SOURCE: WORLD BANK, UNDP AND WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT 2015.

and environmental conservation.

The World Happiness Report is another initiative that was introduced following the UN Resolution in July 2011 that placed 'happiness' on the global development agenda. The Happiness Report takes six variables into account to measure happiness. These are: GDP per capita, healthy years of life expectancy, social support, trust, perceived freedom to make life decisions, and generosity. The estimates are based on surveys by the Gallup World Poll data collected for each country between 2005 and 2014. People were asked about their satisfaction with life on a ladder with 10 steps. They had to choose a step where they would stand in terms of life satisfaction, where 10 is the highest and 0 is

Importance of being Rahul Gandhi



KULDEEP NAYYAR

BETWEEN THE LINES
RAHUL Gandhi is in the news for one reason or the other. Recently, the debate was on his 57-day leave of absence from the country. In fact, Rahul himself should have talked about his

passion for chanting if that is what he was doing in Myanmar. That the party leaders, except her mother Sonia Gandhi and Congress President, have preferred to make his absence as his private affair does not help.

Public leaders have no private life once they are in the people's domain. People like their leaders to take them into confidence. It gives them a vicarious satisfaction of intimacy. Jawaharlal Nehru, Rahul Gandhi's great grandfather, always talked about his trips abroad to people in public meetings and also conveyed to State chief ministers in letters that he wrote every fortnight.

Today's debate is about Rahul's vitriolic attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the Land Acquisition bill. Not that Modi is above criticism. But Rahul's remark that the Prime Minister had brought down the reputation of India by saying in Canada that they were cleansing the litter left behind by the previous regime was churlish. It would have been better if Rahul had preferred to stay quiet on Modi's observation in Canada.

I recall when Inder Kumar Gujral, then in the opposition, was in Geneva, he resisted the temptation of criticising the Congress. He said that he had plenty opportunities to do so in the country itself. Why should the dirty linen be washed abroad?

Many will agree with Rahul that Modi

should have avoided commenting on domestic politics while in foreign countries. Ideally, there should be a bipartisan approach in comments on this subject. In fact, this was the attitude continued to be reflected till the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power. The party behaved like the opposition party even while in office. Unfortunately, that habit has become stuck with the BJP.

Rahul's biggest asset is that he is from the dynasty that has guided the party from its inception. His mother Sonia Gandhi will see to it that he succeeds her. But the disadvantage from such a practice is that the merit in the party is ignored. Nehru did not allow Morarji Desai to have his due because he had his daughter, Indira Gandhi, in mind. Maybe, the dynasty has given the country a sense of continuity but it has put several genuine claimants in jeopardy. It is a Hobson's choice which a democratic country can ill-afford.

The absolute majority that Prime Minister Narendra Modi got in Parliament showed that the nation wanted to move from this scenario. The resurgence of the BJP was essentially an expression against the Congress, not for the former. By and large, the country has come to develop a secular temperament, realising that only parochialism will undo the idea of India. The pro-Hindutva BJP too, has come to realise that. Home Minister Raj Nath Singh has endorsed this view in a recent speech.

The 10-month non-rule of Modi shows that the rhetoric during the election campaign has not gone beyond the paper. This may have disappointed the core of Hindutva. But Rahul Gandhi has found in it a climate favourable to him. He seems to have drawn a page from his grandmother Indira Gandhi's book to make the most of the situation. She played the garibi hatao (oust poverty) card and rehabilitated the Congress at a time when there were fissures appearing

in the party.

In the same manner, Rahul has coined the phrase of suit-boot ki sarkar. He too has realised that the criticism of the rich goes down well in a country where the have-nots abound. His party has, however, gone miles away from the ideology of socialism which it once proudly owned and propagated. In this way, the Congress has somewhat repudiated Nehru who would say that a country which had so many poor people had no option except to move left.

Rahul, whatever the jibes of the BJP, has touched the respondent chord. The untimely rains have damaged wheat crop in northern India, particularly Punjab

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and Haryana, India's granary. The case in Maharashtra is no different from most states in the north. It is a bitter story for the mango and sugarcane growers. For the state's beleaguered farm sector, crippled by two drought years in 2012 and 2014 and recurrent hailstorms and unseasonal rainfall, the latest blow came as recently as earlier this month when a fresh hailstorm destroyed standing crop including, cruelly, some ready for harvest.

The state government may bail out the farmers but cannot do this to a great extent because their financial condition is not too happy. Rahul has found a convenient target. But this does not help

in the long run. It may be a scoring point during elections. The political parties have to join hands to face the calamity which has befallen the country, not on a particular political organisation.

The opposition built on the basis of the Land Acquisition Bill which is counter-productive. The Congress itself had moved a similar legislation when it was in power. Of course, the consent of farmers and social impact have been wrongly dropped from the BJP's bill but, as Prime Minister Modi has said, he is open to suggestions which indicates that he may agree to some points which Rahul has made.

Rahul's attack on the government may give a wrong impression that he was for a progressive setup. Jyotiraditya Scindia was quick in saying that his party was not anti-corporate because he knows that all political parties draw funds for elections from industrial houses and businessmen. Whether the Congress, with its close connection with the corporate sector, can reclaim its constituency among the poor is yet to be seen. But if the perception of Rahul's speech spreads such an impression, he would have underlined his importance.

The writer is an eminent Indian journalist.

COMMENTS

"BANGLA-wash accomplished"
(April 23, 2015)

Hasin Punno

Congratulations to Bangladesh team and also special thanks to Sourmya Sarkar.

"Attack on BNP Chairperson's motorcade"
(April 22, 2015)

Mohammad A. Auwal

Thanks for this timely editorial. No matter how strongly the PM and her party leaders frame these attacks as staged dramas (on the part of BNP), the common people will see that the BNP leader was wrongfully attacked and deserves sympathy. These attacks were uncalled for; it would have been smarter on the part of AL if they had provided security for the campaign of Khaleda Zia instead.

Akm Fazlul Bari

Khaleda Zia should be allowed to campaign unfettered as long as she does not violate the election code of conduct.

"Yunus among top business pioneers of all time"
(April 21, 2015)

M. Karim

Congratulations, Dr Yunus. Turning collateral free credit to poor women with 99% recovery is quite extraordinary in banking practice.

"Forging Unity"
(April 19, 2015)

OpeeMonir

When BSF kills our citizens in the border areas regularly, I am not ready to believe "the high-point of cooperation and coordination" simply because I do not see it.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Bangla-wash against Pakistan

It's a great time for Bangladeshi cricket fans to celebrate the Bangla-wash. After 16 years, Bangladesh defeated Pakistan and this time it was a 3-0 defeat. I consider it the greatest achievement in our cricket history.

Many congratulations to our Tigers. More successes are expected from our cricket heroes.

Md. Imran Hossain Molla
Assistant Manager (IR)
Mongla EPZ, Bagerhat



FIROZ AHMED

Severe load shedding in Paribagh and adjacent areas

We draw the kind attention of the authority concerned to the fact that for the last three weeks, the inhabitants of Paribagh, Elephant Road and the adjoining areas have been facing severe load shedding. Power failure takes place here every other hour throughout the day.

According to news reports, power generation of the country is at its peak now. What then explains this situation? It would be a great relief if the authority concerned takes necessary actions to mitigate the sufferings of the inhabitants living in these mentioned areas.

Sirajul Islam
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