

Bangladesh performs well in inclusive growth

Structural gaps need filling

According to a report published by ESCAP titled 'Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2015', Bangladesh is ahead of both India and Pakistan in terms of inclusive growth. Bangladesh being one of the more densely populated nations in South Asia, which may be a plus or a minus point, depending on how we utilise this largely young population. Although many other nations in the survey are dependent heavily on foreign trade, the case of Bangladesh like many South Asian nations is more insulated i.e. domestic consumption plays a big role in the economy. This has helped it weather the big shocks that came with the global financial downturn in 2008.

The report highlights that unemployment is relatively high in the country. Yet, we have not been able to achieve higher growth due to structural weaknesses like infrastructure bottlenecks, particularly in energy and power and lower productivity. More attention needs to be paid to development policies that focus on narrowing the income gap and increasing and equal opportunities for the educated youth. The report points out that higher growth cannot come if the rural populace is sidelined in the development process; a revision is required to contain the huge subsidy trap, investing in education and raising government investments to improve general healthcare.

The country has excelled in the South Asian perspective primarily because of policy interventions in reducing poverty and improving food security. Serious challenges lie ahead and it will not be possible to meet all goals, but sustainable development can only succeed if growth is made more inclusive.

Violence against women

Should protectors be perpetrators?

According to women's rights organisation, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, 44 women have reportedly been victims of gender-based violence at the hands of law enforcers. The alleged perpetrators in 40 of these cases were policemen. The statistics, which were compiled based on reports in 10 national dailies, are highly alarming, particularly as they may only be a fraction of the actual number of such cases.

The cases filed against police personnel include murders of wives, dowry-related violence, rape and abuse, as well as violence inflicted on women during protests and rallies. Harassment of women from families of suspects and death threats targeted towards women have also been reported.

Violence against women is an urgent issue that needs to be addressed by the state. However, if state agencies themselves become perpetrators of such violence, where will women turn to for justice? In addition, questions remain as to how impartial the investigations can be if police members themselves are involved.

The chauvinistic attitude of law enforcement agencies has been a major hindrance to ensuring justice for gender-based violence, as the insensitive police reaction following sexual assaults at TSC were to clearly highlight. The consistent refusals of the police in acknowledging the severity of the sexual assaults and the unwarranted attacks on young protesters demanding a swift investigation of the incident tell a disturbing tale of police apathy and brutality. The Police IGP's comment that the TSC sexual assault was the "mischief" of a few "naughty" boys portrays the extent of gender insensitivity of the police.

The government must adopt a zero tolerance policy for sexual harassment and inculcate gender sensitive values among the law enforcement personnel. Otherwise the public, especially women, will continue to mistrust them.

COMMENTS

"Next 50-60 years to see frequent quakes: Expert" (May 13, 2015)

Asif Nahyan Kabir

The closest dangerous fault lines near Bangladesh are in Bhutan and Assam of India. For those Bangladesh may be subject to massive earthquake shocks. That's all. There's no epicentre in Bangladesh which are that bad to cause destruction or major harm.

Anik Rahman

Earthquakes can't be predicted.

Sifat Us Sabir

All of this is based on probabilities. No one can define the time or magnitude of an earthquake, but it's certain that it will release its stress due to the movement of the Euro-Asian plate.

"Thai police seek 20 more trafficking suspects" (May 11, 2015)

Sharuddin Numan

Good to see a lot of concern about it in media. Hope it will not go away after a few days.

"Less crop land, less food" (May 10, 2015)

Santo Reza

We need a total master plan for utilising our lands properly. Without that, we cannot stop land fragmentation. If the land fragmentation process continues, gradually we will face a man-made famine in the near future. The government should be concerned about it.

The blurring of distinction between law enforcement and law breaking

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

Often it seems that we get confused as to who the law breakers are and who the law enforcers are after reading the newspapers or watching the news. In a normal state of affairs such confusion is unreal because law enforcers would be typically those who citizens trust to protect them from miscreants, criminals, and other anti-social elements. These law enforcers are a part and parcel of a civil administration that would be trained as a disciplined force to save and protect the society from elements who represent the opposite end of the spectrum. In a normal society, people feel secure because they know that this disciplined force is trained to protect them, and not harm them. In most countries and societies all members of this force, known as the police, are viewed as friends and protectors not their adversaries.

Unfortunately, this is not a common sight in societies and countries where law is applied whimsically. This is not common in countries where the law enforcement machinery is handicapped by a serious gap in training and education in professionalism, human rights, and behaviour.

The most recent incident of police actions to control a crowd of protesters who were manhandled is perhaps not the only episode of excessive use of police power in history. The incident received global coverage because of the nature of the protest, which was to highlight apparent police ineffectiveness in stopping sexual crimes against women. In their effort to stop the protesters, the police used any means they could, including beating and assaulting women protesters.

There have been many more egregious occurrences of excessive police force in the past involving ferocious beatings of the kind that we witnessed in this case. In some cases, the victims had to be hospitalised. Some of the incidents get reported, many others do not. Most often these incidents are forgotten until new episodes get our attention.

There is no exact definition of excessive force, but the term can be used to describe force greater than what a reasonable police officer would use under the circumstances. But it is reasonable to assume that during a chaotic social situation, the law enforcement officials will be expected to take all measures to restore law and order. However, the police can take such a step when the situation demands such actions. In a normal unarmed street protest, the police can stop the protesters either by commanding them to do so over a microphone, failing which, they can apprehend the protesters if they deem them dangerous to the surroundings. In



most cases such actions are enough. In more serious cases when the lives of the police are threatened, they may resort to riot preventing methods that include tear gassing, water spraying or, in extreme cases, firing bullets.

I do not think the demonstrators, who protested the April 14 sexual assault, posed any serious threat to the cops to be eligible for such inappropriate and harsh response. I also do not think the police reacted in this manner because the protesters broke any law as of such. A civil protest is a legal right of a human being so long as it remains peaceful. Sadly, the excesses happened because we do not have accountability either in our governance or in our administration. It took place because over the years the law enforcement machinery was used at will by various parties to fulfil different purposes other than ensuring the law and order of the country. Our police forces, therefore, feel that they can get away with any violation of law as long as they do not 'annoy' the state authorities.

It is not like the excessive use of police force is unique to our country. Even a perfunctory look of exploitation of power by law enforcement agencies all over the world will show enough evidence of such

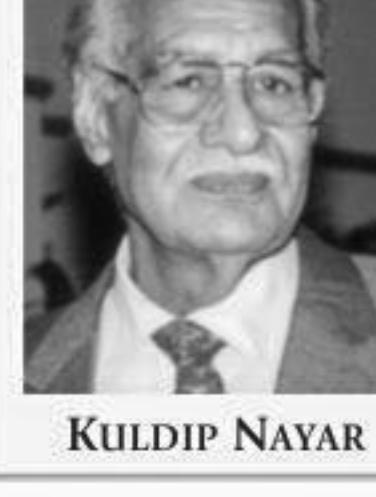
misuse. In recent months, several US cities were rocked by protests over excessive use of police force. In all the cases, the officers were dismissed, or arraigned in a court of law. But the narrative on the abuse of power by police officials does not end with the dismissal or the arraignment of the misbehaving officials. These incidents led the state officials to further analyse police training and reform it to ensure better handling of law and order situations.

Reforms of official training of law enforcement forces and better handling of relationships with the public can only happen in countries and societies that are on a firm and well-established platform of good governance, transparency, and accountability. It cannot happen in a vacuum. Our law enforcement officials can be trained in the latest crowd control methods and law and order restoration techniques, but their performance can only be improved with more accountability and transparency in their day to day work. This lucidity and liability will happen only when it becomes the norm for not only the police but also for the state and the government.

The writer is a political analyst and commentator.

Courts tilt towards rich

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYAR

AS a law abiding citizen, I have faith in the court to rectify the wrong done to me. I have never been cheated except when the Emergency was declared and I was detained without any

rhyme or reason.

The two-judge panel accepted my wife's habeas corpus petition and released me. The reason for my release was that since I did not belong to any political party and pursued my journalistic work professionally, there was no ground to detain me. Both the judges were, however, punished. The senior judge S. Rangarajan was transferred to Sikkim and Justice R.N. Aggarwal was reverted to the Sessions Court from where he had been elevated. Both the judges were sacrificed at the altar of press freedom.

Never have I suspected influence, pressure or money coming in the way of justice. But the two recent judgments have shaken my faith in law courts. In the first case, actor Salman Khan has been released on bail without spending a minute in jail and, in the second, J. Jayalalithaa who had to step down as chief minister of Tamil Nadu, has been exonerated from the charge of having amassed wealth disproportionate to her known income.

Granted the lawyers must have argued well. Both Salman and Jayalalithaa can afford the best of legal brains in the country. But the judges, who heard their cases, too have to see that they deliver justice

however weak the prosecution is.

I am sorry that this has not happened. It is not because the lawyers had the better of judges, but because other considerations must have come in. My firm conviction is that influence, if not money, worked. These are fit cases for a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to look into under the Supreme Court. It would be a travesty of justice if the verdicts against Salman and Jayalalithaa are accepted and nothing else is done in the matter.

Take the case of Salman. The trial court

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does come to the conclusion that he was driving the car in a drunken condition and he killed the people sleeping on the pavement. Rightly, a sentence of five years is pronounced because that is the minimum the judge could have awarded under the law.

However, the actor gets an interim bail before the case is taken up for a regular bail in Bombay High Court. There, the judge suspends the sentence

pending the hearing of Salman's appeal. True, it is his prerogative. But would he do so in the case of an ordinary citizen? The VIP status of the culprit seems to have been the main criterion for taking a lenient view of the crime.

I wish the judge had taken into consideration the orphaned families of the victims. He even does not recommend more compensation to the Rs. 19 lakh which Salman had himself deposited and which the court had not distributed to the victims for 13-long years, the period for which the case was not complete. Salman's influence or money power came in handy to delay the case as long as possible and the police were a willing partner.

The Parliament should take note of it and ensure that the machinery of law does not move slowly and slovenly. There is no politics in it. Only money has mattered. Surely, the system can devise ways to stop the well-to-do from committing a crime and getting away with it. This can happen provided the MPs act according to their conscience, not the party whip which again is politics.

One exception that comes to my mind straightaway is the Sanjeev Nanda's hit-and-run case. Even after a protracted proceedings and inordinate delay, Nanda was convicted and sent to jail. His father was the former naval chief and still he could not save Sanjeev. On the other hand, Salman uses his influence and escapes jail even though it can be argued that his sentence has been suspended. In the case of another actor, Sanjay Dutt, there were so many furores because he was released on parole many a time.

Coming back to Jayalalithaa's exoneration, it is equally amazing. The luxury in which she wallows is not a matter of perception. It can be seen and assessed in terms of buildings

and other visible things. The judge is entitled to give a culprit the benefit of the doubt, but closing his eyes to realities amounts to favouritism. Why the concession will be the question asked straightforwardly?

The judgment stated that the total income of Jayalalithaa was Rs. 34.76 crore. If Rs. 13.50 crore, added by mistake, is deducted, the income would come to Rs. 21.26 crore. But the assets of Jayalalithaa are Rs. 37.59 crore as accepted by the judge. There is still a difference of Rs. 16.32 crore between the assets and the actual income. But the judge stated that the difference came to only Rs. 2.82 crore which is 8.12 percent above the income. However, the special public prosecutor said that Rs. 16.32 crore translated to assets 76 percent above known income. Obviously, there was a mistake somewhere that needs to be rectified.

That the judicial system is tilted towards the haves is a fact which cannot be denied. There is no provision of referendum in the constitution and parliament will not be included to interfere because both the main political parties, the Congress and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), will never agree to radical changes. Their real base is the middle class, not prone to anything drastic.

The verdicts in the cases of both Salman and Jayalalithaa may have shaken the nation. The Narendra Modi government has still four years left in its five-year term. Therefore the nation, however handicapped, has to wait for fresh elections, which may be contested on different issues altogether. Still some changes need to be made so that the lower half has also access to remedies to get their due.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Discourtesy of KA staff

A few days ago, I along with five Bangladeshi doctors was coming back to Dhaka from Tehran via Kuwait Airways (KA) by flight no. KU/283. We had attended an international conference where we were invited as international lecturers. When the flight started from Kuwait, the chief cabin crew started announcing in English and Hindi/Urdu. The passengers were mostly Bangladeshi expatriates. We called one of the cabin crews and asked why the announcement shouldn't be given also in Bangla since it was a Dhaka bound flight and most of the passengers were Bangla speaking. The chief crew said they didn't have any Bangla speaking

crew; if we wanted to file a complaint it could be done in the form supplied. I wrote a complaint to the captain. A few minutes later the chief crew showed up. She said that the captain had read the complaint and warned us not to make noise and if we said anything more, he would take us back to Tehran and hand us over to the police. We got scared and didn't say anything else. We have heard from some Bangladeshi who are regular passengers of Kuwait Airways that the Pakistani, Indian and Kuwaiti staff always behave in a discourteous way with the Bangladeshi. Is this a fair policy by an international airline?

Prof. Dr. Md. Zillur Rahman

Director and consultant

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Best wishes, Tigers

Our cricketers have been playing superbly since the World Cup. Their team spirit is really praiseworthy. We have some talented players like Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Taskin Ahmed, Rubel Hossain and Soumya Sarker. We expect them to continue their outstanding performances. Best wishes for the Bangladesh cricket team.

Md Zonaed Emran

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