

End of Razzak saga

Such incidents should not recur

WE are glad that Nayek Razzak of the BGB has been returned to us by the Myanmar authorities, though it has taken longer than it should have. Between two friendly neighbours it was an incident that shouldn't have occurred in the first place, and the inordinate delay, we want to impress, in responding to the BGB request for a flag meeting following the abduction should have been avoided.

Manning border per se cannot be an easy task and when the border happens to be the midstream of a wide river, as is the case with a segment of Bangladesh - Myanmar border defined by the Naf River, there is bound to be confusion while manning such stretch of territory. But those possibilities should be factored in the operational procedures that guide the conduct of border management agreed by the two parties.

Good border management also requires regular coordination between the commanders at the very lowest level where meeting at short notice is the key to diffuse any tension or remove misunderstanding. Apparently, such an arrangement between the two border forces is absent; otherwise it shouldn't have taken for the local commanders eight days to meet.

It also appears that there is more to the 'misunderstanding' that the state minister for home had referred to following the abduction. And the DG BGB's comment that the abduction might be connected to smuggling of yaba must be given due cognizance. There is need to beef up the BGB strength on the Naf river, in particular at the point where the incident occurred, it being a route of smuggling of yaba whose source lies in the many yaba manufacturing centers inside Myanmar territory close to the border.

Police in plainclothes defy directives

How under the watch of senior officers?

WE are concerned that law enforcers are continuing their drives in plainclothes, despite a written directive on June 17 from the Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner that operations of 'civil teams' should be halted immediately. The DMP Commissioner issued another letter on June 21 warning all police stations to stop these drives and detailing specific conditions under which civil teams can be deployed.

These directives have come amidst widespread allegations that law enforcers in plainclothes are carrying out illegal activities, including threats and intimidation to people to extort money. Plainclothes law enforcers have also come under scrutiny following allegations of abductions and disappearances by people claiming to be law enforcers in civil clothes. The police headquarters and senior officials have given repeated instructions to the police stations over the months to ensure that activities of civil teams are stopped, but there continues to be allegations of law enforcers conducting their drives in minibuses or Legunas at night.

Under the circumstances, the DMP itself, worried about the work and image of the institution, has directed that all civil teams be abolished without delay. Civil teams can be formed for arrests of criminals and seizure of arms and drugs under the guidance of the Deputy Commissioner, and be done away with immediately; in addition, the joint commissioners of Operations and Crimes must be informed prior to the formation of the teams.

We laud the DMP Commissioner's directive; however, the DMP must ensure that the directive is implemented and exemplary action taken against guilty police officers, unit heads and OCs of concerned stations so that plainclothes policemen, misusing their powers, do not harass ordinary people.

COMMENTS

"A neglected community"

(June 25, 2015)

Md Nasir

We all are human beings. So all should be treated equally irrespective of their cast and creed.

"Rony was drunk while shooting"

(June 25, 2015)

Abrar Amin

He should be charged with double murder.

Nasrin Sultana Jolly

If he can't control himself after getting drunk, then he should have put himself away from society long time ago. He definitely should be charged with capital offense.

Hiren Singh

Killer is killer, whatever he is; either drunk or sober.

Talukder Arif

These people don't understand the misery of the poor people.

"India restore some pride"

(June 25, 2015)

Hafeejul Alam

Indeed India restored some pride but for Bangladeshi cricket lovers, there were certainly a few questions about the Tigers and their management. It is not understood as to why captain Mashrafe, being the toss-winner, preferred India to bat (which is highly unusual in ODIs). Why the star performers like Mutfazur, Tamim and even Shakib failed to perform as they did in other two matches? What was wrong with them? To sum up, the performance of the Tigers in the previous two ODIs was no match for their third one. Was it just a normal defeat for Bangladesh or help India restore its pride for whatever reasons?

SELIM RAIHAN

MANUFACTURING is now an overwhelmingly salient component of the Bangladesh's export composition, thanks largely to the rapid expansion of the garment industry. From a small base of only around US\$ 32 million in 1984, garment exports have grown to around US\$ 25 billion by 2014, accounting for more than three-quarters of export earnings. Garment has been an important contributor to growth and employment generation in Bangladesh. Female participation in the formal labour market underwent a major shift with the rise of the garment industry in Bangladesh. It provides direct employment to over 4 million people, 70 per cent of whom are female. More than 50 per cent of the manufacturing labor force is now employed in this sector, and the sector accounts for 30 per cent of the investment in manufacturing. Therefore, the story of the growth of the manufacturing sector in Bangladesh over the past two decades has been the story of the success of the garment sector.

There is no denying the fact that the success story of the garment industry in Bangladesh lies in its comparative advantage generating from the country's large pool of unskilled labor. Considering the fact that Bangladesh's Asian neighbors and competitors such as India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and China also have large pool of unskilled labour, it is certainly astounding how Bangladesh has been able to retain its comparative advantage till date and has enjoyed continued export growth. While cheap labor has been the single most important advantage of Bangladesh, the local industry has flourished in spite of numerous challenges, e.g., high cost of doing business, weak infrastructure, weak governance, and labour unrests.

There have been concerns with regard to the compliance issues and the work place safety in the garment industry in Bangladesh, and in the last couple of years these issues have become very critical for the future of this industry. There is strong international pressure, in the form of the threat of cancelling large preferences in the markets of Western countries, if labour conditions are not improved. Quality competitiveness is getting increased priorities over price competitiveness, and of course, quality of a product embodies the standard of living of labour being used in the production process. These concerns should be addressed in a positive way

as an opportunity to build industry's reputation in the global market. This calls for, among many other things, to deal with labor issues in the garment industry carefully. In this context issues like wage, workplace security, fringe benefits, workplace environment etc. need to be resolved on a priority basis. Current labor practices prevalent in the garment industry need to be improved in order to make the sector sustainable. Improvement of the labour condition is closely linked to the enhancement of the productivity of labour. There is equally a need to invest in training workers to move up to the higher value added garment products. The BGMEA and the government should collaborate with each other, with help from relevant international agencies, to be able to work effectively in this area.

In order to maintain the competitive advantage, there is a tendency of putting downward pressure on workers' wages and benefits. In this context, for the workers' welfare, there is a critical need for reducing the cost of doing business in Bangladesh.

The garment industry of Bangladesh is now at a crossroad. It is now time to focus on how Bangladesh could retain its comparative advantage and continue its success story. Reliance on only the mass pool of unskilled labour doing things in the old way would be not sufficient. Careful examination of Bangladesh's comparative advantage in the garment industry reveals the fact that the nature of this advantage is primarily static in nature. This suggests, retaining the static comparative advantage will be highly challenging in the future given the increased competition from other countries, growing stringent compliance issues, and the fact that to what extent the country will be able to enhance its competitiveness in doing business.

Therefore the sector should aim for generating dynamic comparative advantage which would ensure sustainability of this sector in the future. There is a critical need for enhancing labour productivity, moving up to the higher value-added products through introducing new technology along the production line spurting innovation, and enhancing Bangladesh's competitiveness by reducing the cost of doing business.

It is also essential to keep in mind that comparative advantage doesn't necessary translate into competitive advantage. Given an environment of high cost of doing business, in order to maintain the competitive advantage, there is a tendency of putting downward pressure on workers' wages and benefits. In this context, for the workers' welfare, there is a critical need for reducing the cost of doing business in Bangladesh. The garment industry is constrained by a host of such costs. High lead-time is an important challenge for this industry. Inefficiencies at ports and related internal road transportation further aggravate the problem. Amongst others, lack of investment fund and working capital, high interest rate, poor physical infrastructure, poor law and order situation, invisible costs of doing business, etc. are major impediments to export prospects. These factors will eventually determine the competitive advantage of Bangladesh's garment industry and exports. Addressing these issues require strategic planning and its adroit implementation.

The future of the garment industry will be critical for Bangladesh's socio-economic development. Although the evidence on trade-growth and trade-poverty relationships as found in academic studies is still far from being conclusive, the growth of garment exports has been associated with the overall economic growth of the country accompanied by a remarkable progress on poverty alleviation. Even without going deep into such hotly debated subjects as whether the export sector has been the 'engine' of growth and to what extent the growth has been equitable to reach the poorest groups, it can be said that the garment-led export growth process has established a direct link between trade and poverty in Bangladesh by creating massive employment opportunities. And the sustainability of this industry also depends on how carefully and properly the issues related to the welfare of the workers are addressed.

The writer is Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Executive Director, South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM). Email: selim.raihan@econdu.ac.bd

The privileges of a white terrorist

NAHELA NOWSHIN

JUNE 17 saw one of the deadliest attacks on a house of worship in recent decades. Nine people, all of whom were African American, were shot dead in cold blood at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, a historically black church in Charleston, South Carolina. The alleged shooter is Dylann Roof, a 21-year-old white male, who opened fire after he spent an hour at the Bible Study. A photo of Roof wearing a fleece jacket decorated with the racist flags of apartheid-era South Africa and the former colony of Rhodesia (now known as Zimbabwe) surfaced, pointing strongly towards his racially motivated killing spree which police officials have called a hate crime.

In the US, where African Americans are routinely abused, discriminated against and killed by a system designed and cultivated throughout centuries to work against them, it would be nothing short of ignorance to say that the Charleston massacre has come as "shocking." It would also be wrong to say that *this* particular hate crime has kick-started a conversation about race in America. There is already an ongoing debate about race and justice for black communities because African Americans never really stopped coming under attack simply for the colour of their skin, be it by the police, media, or politicians. And this isn't the post-Civil Rights era, nor is this a post-racial world.

However, it seems like more and more people, including whites, are becoming aware of the double standards of the media whenever it's a case of the white guy behind the trigger. How many remember, or have even heard of, the white gunman who fired automatic weapons and left explosives at the Dallas police headquarters on June 13? Had his name been Abdullah or anything else that remotely pointed to him belonging to the *Arab* or *Muslim* clan, pictures of him along with his life history would have been splattered on every news outlet -- since it fits in perfectly with the western narrative of the foreign "terrorist" whose (oil-rich) country must be invaded and people

arbitrarily killed with unmanned death machines to keep American soil safe. Had he been black, you surely would have heard about his past run-ins with the law, gang affiliations, and a horde of other reasons that explain his "thugery," doesn't matter how true. The prejudiced portrayal of African Americans in American society extends to every other sphere, including the entertainment industry where black rappers only make the news when they're either locked up or dead and the Oscars are dominated by white males.

But let's talk about the perks of white privilege that come with being a white

And who isn't familiar with the free pass of mental illness that whites have whenever they feel like going on a killing spree? Right after the Charleston massacre, an MSNBC anchor said, "We don't know his mental condition," as if the racist nationalist flags Roof was wearing weren't enough of an indication of his diabolical motivations.

Elliot Rodger, a half white 22-year-old, killed six people before committing suicide last year in California. In a video posted on YouTube, titled "Elliot Rodger's Retribution", he claimed that he wished to exact revenge on the world "for being rejected by women and to punish sexually

who are actually mentally ill.

Recently, FBI Director James Comey said that he wouldn't label the Charleston shootings terrorism, even though Dylann Roof confessed to investigators that he wanted to "start a race war." Award-winning journalist Glenn Greenwald rightly pointed out the malleability and the selective usage of the term "terrorism" which is nothing more than a tool of propaganda.

It seems like Muslims and blacks have a monopoly on the terms "terrorist" and "thug" that they are quickly characterised by due to their "evil intent". But the white culprit is a "suspect", "shooter", or "attacker" whose motives must be carefully deliberated. Brown and black men are inherently savage but the white man's barbarity is an exception. Racial markers such as "Arab" and "black" are clearly designated in headlines but you won't see the white male's race being identified nearly as often. The white killer is a "lone wolf" and his act an "isolated incident", but when a person of colour commits a crime, entire populations that share his race or religion must be held accountable for his wrongdoing and prove that they aren't guilty by association. Muslim and black victims are somehow responsible for their own deaths but the white killer has an explanation.

150 years after the emancipation of black people from slavery in the US, America's racial wounds are still fresh and it's startling how little things have changed. The Confederate flag, a racist symbol of the seven slave states and a dark reminder of the slavery era in colonial US, continues to fly high at the South Carolina State House. What's even more disgraceful is the fact that the flag, a sign of oppression and feudalism, wasn't even lowered to half-staff in the aftermath of the Charleston massacre.

Frequent attempts to detach white men's crimes from the broader context of racism and white supremacy are akin to ignoring the history of hate movements of white nationalism. And there's no doubt that it'll take many more deaths of people of colour at the hands of white mass murderers before people realise that a "terrorist" or a "thug" can very well look white.

The writer is a journalist at The Daily Star.



terrorist, white murderer, white thug, or white what have you. *There seems to always be a rationale behind a white person's criminal act.* When three Muslim students were shot dead in their own apartment in North Carolina on February 10 by Craig Hicks, a 43-year-old white man, the police came up with the preposterous assumption that the shooting may have been motivated by an ongoing parking dispute since Hicks "obsessively photographed the couple's parking spots." Comedian Aamer Rahman sarcastically remarked on Twitter, "I just realised that the War on Terror is just a big parking dispute."

active men for living a more enjoyable life than his." Eight months after his mass murder, the Santa Barbara Sheriff's Office released a report alleging "he suffered from a number of mental health issues throughout his childhood, and he received treatment up to his death." Never mind the fact that he was a misogynist who felt entitled to women's bodies in a culture where women are endlessly objectified and sexualised. Never mind the fact that calling every other cold blooded white killer "mentally ill" not only partially absolves him of the responsibility and punitive consequences of his crime(s), but also stigmatises those

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

We need healthy politics

As a graduate of the erstwhile Ahsanullah Engineering College (which became BUET later on), I would like to profusely thank Md Mizanur Rahman Himadri for his eloquent Op-Ed piece "SONY: Don't think we are dead" (TDS, 20.6.2015). The loss of an innocent life killed in crossfire between feuding factions of the then ruling party activists, the fact that the perpetrators have not been brought to justice even a decade after.

Every ruling party since 1991 has relied on the muscle power provided by their student and youth wings in the wrong-headed thinking that they are needed for winning the next election. Plenty of editorials have been written urging the authorities to rein in their so-called activists. But nobody listened. People expressed their frustration by throwing out the incumbent party at every opportunity except the 5th January, 2014 election which remains controversial.

The simple truth is, the way to win consecutive elections is good governance and not through muscle power and tolerating misdeeds.

Not holding elections in student bodies for fear of losing them also contributed to the malaise. Leaders of tomorrow grow up through exercise of healthy politics in the universities. Sabequn Nahar Sony's death would not be in vain if our leaders learn the simple truths.

Engr. ABM Nurul Islam, Milton, GA 30004, USA

Unemployment problem rising

On June 23, 2015, The Daily Star published an interview of Professor Serajul Islam Choudhury. In his interview, Professor Serajul Islam talked about some crucial problems of our country which also include unemployment problem. As per Economist Intelligence Unit, 47% of our graduates are unemployed. The ILO figures show that Bangladesh is in 12th position among the top twenty countries where unemployment is rising. Every year some 2.7 million young people are becoming eligible for jobs whereas only 0.7 million of them are getting jobs. All these figures and data show how alarming the unemployment condition in our country is. I think government should think over this issue seriously and take concrete measures immediately.

Ashok Sarker
Comilla