

Interference saps police performance

Good governance hindered

A recent meeting of superintendents of police (SPs) at the police headquarters brought to the fore difficulties faced by law enforcers in carrying out their duties due to pressure from lawmakers. Apparently, ministers and members of parliament in many constituencies are at loggerheads with one another which compound their problems. The police often come under pressure to release alleged criminals or to sway the investigation process altogether.

Although the police chief has instructed SPs to carry out their duties as per law, this is easier said than done. And a glaring example of not only influencing police work but also physically interfering in their law enforcing duties is the recent case of a ruling party lawmaker from Natore forcibly releasing a suspect in public from RAB custody on August 12. This is a flagrant violation of law and merely reinforces the difficulties faced by law enforcers in their work.

While we appreciate the IGP's instruction to his force to exercise "zero tolerance", the grim reality is that the force will not be able to discharge its responsibilities in an atmosphere of neutrality when there is so much interference from the top. Merely blaming poor performance of some policemen will hardly improve the situation.

The state of governance will show little sign of improvement until the government gets serious about reigning in some of its overzealous leaders and members of its student wings who treat themselves above the law. Failure to do so will only hamper good governance and establishment of rule of law.

Private universities flouting rules

UGC must take stern action

It is disappointing to note that a great many private universities are violating the conditions and rules set out by the Private University Act-2010, despite repeated reminders from the University Grants Commission (UGC) to comply with the provisions. For instance, only 17 of the 52 private universities which were supposed to move to their own campuses have not done so, even though the September 15 deadline – the third deadline so far – for universities to relocate is fast approaching.

While private institutions for graduate and post-graduate learning were a dire necessity, these have been sprouting up all over the country in crammed buildings with no breathing space, lacking standard classrooms, libraries or laboratory facilities. This is not conducive to learning. It is important to understand that the universities are not commercial ventures and that their main objective is to provide quality education; as such, it is imperative that they invest in infrastructure that boosts the overall university experience of students.

What is also of concern is that the quality of education in many of these private institutions remain sub par. A distressing number of universities invest little or no money in research and lack enough qualified teachers, run as they are, for the most part, by part-time faculties.

It is encouraging that the UGC Chairman has, in a recent meeting, warned the universities of stern action if they fail to comply with the conditions of the Act. However, the UGC must properly monitor the activities of the private universities and deal with non-complying universities with a firm hand, to ensure that these institutes impart real education rather than dispense certificates only.

COMMENTS

"Lawmaker snatches 'criminal' from Rab"
(August 13, 2015)

▼
Ashit

Wow! What a nice country we are living in!

▼
Lifat

Did the PM read that news?

▼
Otasi

The ruling party men have all the power now. We no longer need the police and the Rab!

▼
Lota

I agree with you! The government should retire all of them and save the money!

"80km the max"
(August 11, 2015)

▼
Marjanul Fattah Aziz

Very impressive decision. Make sure that buses and trucks abide by the rule.

▼
Kalo Jam

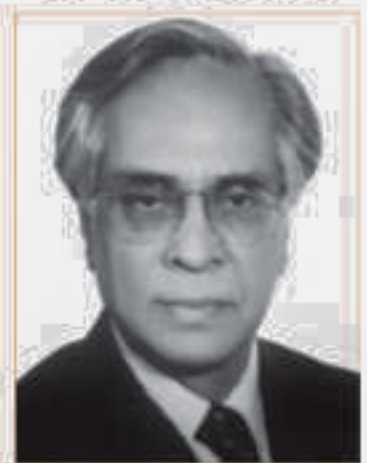
Don't blame the trucks; when they are loaded, they barely reach 60 kmph. It's the buses that are the terror on the highway.

▼
Zareef Hossain

How are they going to keep track? Speed gun? Speed camera? Do we have those?

Some unfinished business

SUNDAY
POUCH



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

NO doubt Bangladesh has come a long way and resolved several outstanding bilateral issues with India. Among the major ones are the finalisation of the maritime boundary between the two countries, the transfer of the enclaves to Bangladesh as opted by the residents as well as the finalisation of the land boundary. Visits by the head of governments of India and Bangladesh have over time

given more content to the bilateral relations and a plethora of activities such as trade, connectivity and investment in communication. Thanks to the wise leadership of both India and Bangladesh the two countries have come closer. The two countries are asymmetric in size, population and defense capabilities. Yet Bangladesh has acted in a mature way to clear the backlog of tasks. Today both India and Bangladesh have a whole pack of agreements and memoranda of understanding on several vital matters of mutual interests.

However neither has India been so fortunate with her other neighbours nor have these other neighbours received consideration from India. With Pakistan she has fought three wars and was involved in many skirmishes. With Sri Lanka she was enmeshed in the island country's internal ethnic war and paid a heavy price in men and material. She had her outstanding Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi give his life on this count. India had used deft diplomacy or even overbearing behaviour to keep her other two immediate neighbours, Nepal and Bhutan, in line, and to keep the peace in their respective areas. India's relationship with her biggest neighbour China has been cordial in spite of its humiliation in the Sino Indian war in 1962. India seems to now seek a peaceful future for herself.

It is precisely this fact that has prompted Bangladesh to work with India. Together they had agreed to international arbitration to resolve the issue of maritime boundary. It is in that spirit that India agreed to finally delineate the land boundary with Bangladesh. It also agreed to the apportioning of enclaves between the two countries in a spirit of goodwill.

Yet there are a few more issues that must be resolved quickly in the near future. Their peaceful resolution will help put the bilateral relationship on an even keel.

The foremost issue before the two countries is the equitable sharing of the waters of the fifty or more common rivers. This is a complex, expensive and not easily resolvable matter. Both the countries suffer water shortage during the dry season and floods during the monsoon. Lives are lost and crops damaged each year when unpredictable nature spreads havoc in the two lands. Bangladesh is the largest delta in the world where the three river systems coming from India flow through her to the Bay of Bengal. What, therefore, is the way out?

Both the countries must pool resources and bring modern technology not only to tame the recalcitrant common rivers but also provide water when there is

water flow as and when needed by each country. This plan should, if plausible, take the need of south India into fund and feasibility permit. Why should we let sweet water drain to the sea when we all need it, if we are able to accumulate and supply it on time? Let the water that devastates our land turn from a bane to a boon for all these four countries. A sophisticated matrix can be developed by our engineers, mathematicians, geologists and agricultural experts. Nothing should be made free and water retained and supplied on time to each country and region should be paid for. All this may sound woolly but it can be made feasible and doable. Just apportioning water by sharing the flow of common rivers is not time-befitting anymore.

The sharing of the Teesta river waters is doable now. River linking in India would make the overall situation worse in the region. Temporary arrangements cannot meet permanent needs.

The other matter that demands attention of all stakeholders in Bangladesh-India relations is border killings. This should be stopped once and for all. India has built the border fence with padlocked gates to stop infiltration and smuggling. Can India answer why it has to kill or maim citizens of Bangladesh when the Indian border guards control access to the gates and the gates are locked or opened by them? The border guards are there to discourage illegal border crossings and smuggling of goods. They are not there to kill.

Finally, it seems that relations between the two countries cannot grow healthily if trade with Bangladesh is always in India's favour. As of today, India sells too much to Bangladesh and buys too little from her. This situation is getting worse as India is lax in checking its goods that are smuggled to Bangladesh. Again Bangladesh seems to be burdened with non-tariff and para-tariff barriers. It is imperative that India lift them meticulously and swiftly. No one says that that exports and imports should be at par. But they cannot be skewed in favour of India, like it is now.

India should make special dispensation for Bangladesh through easier flow of Bangladeshi goods that will help bring equilibrium in the balance of trade. India would be surprised how much the trade volume could grow and how much she would benefit. If Bangladeshi goods were sold anywhere in the world, India would also be a great beneficiary. The future of trade between our two countries would no doubt be brighter.

The writer is a former Ambassador and a commentator on current affairs. E-mail: ashfaq303@gmail.com



severe drought. Let us agree to a timeline when both countries should pool both internal and external resources not only to study the behaviour of the rivers and draw common plans to tame but also to rejuvenate the rivers as weather changes. A massive plan to store water when there is an excess of it in our flood plains and in the upstream storage areas, and in between mountains of Nepal and Bhutan can be made. A most modern and if need be a complex storage system must be planned, built and operated to release water in times of need to farmers in all four countries. Due compensation must be given from a common fund to countries cooperating in this huge plan to increase

Myanmar president's palace coup

LARRY JAGAN

MYANMAR'S president Thein Sein has launched a palace coup within the ruling party to shore up his support and end the presidential hopes of his rival, the speaker of the lower house Thura Shwe Mann. It also comes immediately after a massive shakeup in the army hierarchy – with nearly two hundred senior officers having retired or in the process of stepping down – and a major reshuffle in Cabinet.

This appears to be the final act in a battle between the two key giants in the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) that has intensified in the last few months – becoming increasingly public. The latest move though seems to have been orchestrated by the army, and the former military leader, Than Shwe, may also have been behind it.

In a midnight raid on the USDP headquarters in the capital Naypyidaw, led by several Cabinet ministers, the police surrounded the Union Solidarity and Development Party's offices and prevented anyone from leaving, according to a source inside the building. Shwe Mann, the acting chairman of the party – as under the country's constitution Thein Sein could no longer run the party after he was elected president – and the general secretary Maung Maung Thein were removed from their official positions in the party.

The vice chairman Htay Oo has been appointed temporary chairman. He has been increasingly critical of Shwe Mann over the past year, and is known to be close to Than Shwe. He has also distanced himself from Thein Sein – being an ardent supporter in the first two years of his presidency – but has become increasingly concerned about Thein Sein's indecisiveness over the past year or so. "He is regarded as the man in the middle," said senior party officials on condition of anonymity. Htay Oo is now joint party chairman with President Thein Sein.

But it remains unclear where this leaves the president and his chances of seeking a second term in office. What is clear is that this was timed to make changes to the party's list of constituent candidates and the rejection of the retiring military officers. Today (Friday) is the deadline for the party lists to be submitted to the Union Election Commission – and then there is a further week when changes can be made.

It remains unclear where this leaves the president and his chances of seeking a second term in office. What is clear is that this was timed to make changes to the party's list of constituent candidates and the rejection of the retiring military officers.

"What is certain is that this 'coup' will have a significant impact on the country's transition to democracy," said political commentator and former political prisoner, Dr Than Myo Thein.

With elections less than three months away, the struggle is over who should run for the party in the forthcoming polls – and in which constituencies. Maung Maung Thein was in charge of the selection process and Shwe Mann – as the acting Chairman – approved the

lists. Prominent ministers were left out, and Thein Sein declined to run for parliament because of health concerns. But the main concern was the party's rejection – under Shwe Mann's instructions – of the former military officers who wanted to join the party and run for parliament. Earlier this week, 149 senior officers retired from their army posts to enter politics. But at the party convention on Wednesday, only 59 of the former army officers were accepted as candidates.

Tensions between USDP factions and the military surfaced in June, when the party backed a motion – on Shwe Mann's initiative – that would have ended the military's de facto ability to veto constitutional amendments, as any change needs at least 75 percent of parliament to approve it, and under the constitution the military have 25 percent of the seats. Shwe Mann has taken several swipes at the military in parliament in the last few months, causing them to take offence. But it has been his blocking of the retiring senior officers entry into the USDP that has precipitated the recent showdown.

In the past, these military officers would automatically have joined the USDP – as most of the ministers and MPs did before the 2010 election, including both Thein Sein and Shwe Mann. This is part of the usual military shake up and annual promotions at this time of year. But this year has added urgency and significance because of the upcoming elections.

Naturally this batch of officers expected to join the USDP, become election candidates, and some to become ministers in the next Cabinet or be appointed Chief Ministers in the fourteen state and regions. But only a third of them were welcomed into the party, according to sources close to the army. Fearing he would lose control of the party, Shwe Mann blocked most of them from becoming party members, and entering politics under the USDP flag.

Within the army at the very top Shwe

Mann has begun to be openly called a traitor, according to military sources. "The last time that happened," said a former military officer, who declined to be identified, "was [former intelligence chief and prime minister] Khin Nyunt before he was arrested and put under house arrest [in October 2004]." The speaker has obviously broken unwritten laws of the army – especially in trying to change the constitution.

The USDP MP Thura Aung Ko – who recently had a headache – said the divisions within the party were irreconcilable. The current showdown is obviously the result of a movement within the party to get rid of Shwe Mann, once and for all. "When it happens,

it will be the night of the long knives," said a source in the president's office a few weeks ago, on condition of anonymity. So now that coup has been launched.

Former senior general Than Shwe reportedly sent a message shortly before the USDP Central Committee meeting in June warning them to keep the party from fracturing. "You three [Thein Sein, Min Aung Hlaing and Shwe Mann] must learn to cooperate well," he reportedly said. "or I may have to take things into my own hands," he allegedly said.

At present Thein Sein – with the army chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's support – certainly has the upper hand. But he is by no means sure of emerging as the president after the elections. Some analysts also fear that this coup may mean the elections will be delayed. "The polls on 8th November are almost certain to be postponed now," said Dr Yan Myo Thein. And under the constitution, the electoral commissioner can delay them up until the end of January 2016 – five years after parliament first met and elected Thein Sein as president for his first term in office.

The writer is a specialist on Myanmar and a former BBC World Service News Editor for the Asia region.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

"No longer street children"

A photo along with the above caption published in TDS on August 13, 2015 caught my attention. The photo was about two orphan siblings Md Nasir Ahmed Shamim and Mehedi Hasan Sabuj who got a guardian in Md. Shawkat Hossain, the senior judicial magistrate of Chandpur. The latter took the responsibility of these two children's bringing up and schooling. I would like to thank him personally for his exemplary act of kindness. His compassion would make all the difference in the lives of these two children.

In our country, especially in Dhaka, there are thousands of street children roaming around. The affluent class should follow the footsteps of Md. Shawkat Hossain



PHOTO: STAR

to mitigate the sufferings of these street children.
Samiul Raijul
School of Business
North South University, Dhaka

Extortion using elephants

Recently, I have noticed a person who uses his elephant to extort money from car owners along the busy streets of Uttara and Abdullahpur-Mirpur. The man threatens to smash the cars if they do not pay up. He does not accept small bills, only large ones.

A few days ago, my wife and I were the victims of that man's extortion. The local police know everything but do not take any step to stop it. I would like to draw the attention of DMP to take legal action against this man.

Bazlur Rahman
Uttara, Dhaka