

Crime spree before Eid

Make the streets secure for cattle traders

Arise in crime before the Eid holidays has been a common phenomenon for many years. This Eid, cattle traders have become a prime target. Saturday's audacious hijacking of 15 cows from a truck near Manik Mia Avenue by a machete-wielding gang indicates the absence of proper patrolling by the law enforcers in the main roads. In this incident the truck was ambushed by the gang that forced some of the truck occupants into a minivan and beat them up while some of the other robbers took off with the truck.

There have been similar incidents of cattle robbing in the last few days with traders and their staff being made unconscious with drugs, beaten and even killed before the cattle was stolen. Needless to say, these traders, apart from the physical and mental trauma of being robbed and assaulted, will have to go home empty-handed this Eid and with debilitating monetary losses.

What's more, traders of cattle have to pay huge amounts of extortion money to various groups before they reach the market. There are allegations that certain deviant law enforcers are also part of such extortion. The number of extortion points and the amount demanded increase significantly before Eid, extracting a heavy financial toll on cattle traders and truck drivers.

It is unacceptable that despite assurances from law enforcement agencies and the government of beefing up security during Eid, such crimes should go on unabated.

While there must be greater presence and vigilance of police patrols on highways and main roads, effective measures have to be taken by law enforcement authorities to stop the pernicious spread of extortionists, in uniform or not.

Journeying over pot-holed roads

When may we expect deliverance?

EID is upon us again. A time of joy and rejoicing as people leave Dhaka city by the thousands to be reunited with their families in respective home districts. But half the joy dissipates into annoyance on the actual travel itself. The journey home to Tangail, for instance, takes double the time, i.e. six hours instead of the usual three. Apart from the extra traffic during Eid abnormal tailbacks are caused by vehicles navigating treacherous roads that are pot-holed and dilapidated. The usual explanation from the concerned ministry is that incessant rains have managed to undo all the hard work the roads and highways division have done in the preceding weeks. Is it so insurmountable a task to have roads that are fairly unbroken during the time of the two Eid holidays? Why must we go through this torture twice a year, every year?

According to the police, some routes like Dhaka-Tangail highway see a four-fold increase in vehicular movement, from 5,000 to 20,000. This is normal. What is not normal is the sorry state of the highway. With the authorities apparently not enforcing their earlier decision to prohibit slow moving transportation like three-wheelers, the rundown state of the highways will increase the probability of serious accidents. Every major accident on a highway costs lives; it also results in hours more added to tailbacks. People pay taxes and it is expected that some of that government revenue is spent to make the roads better.

COMMENTS

"3 killed as police fire on protesters"
(September 19, 2015)

Allien Martin

I have no words to condemn these policemen.

Mubarak Hussain

They killed people with the bullets purchased with the money of taxpayers.

G K Md Nasarullah

Three unarmed people killed by police! So unfortunate and painful; police are supposed to save lives, not kill them.

"Slimy Hatirjheel"
(September 19, 2015)

Hasan Tareq

That's one of the reasons why Dhaka is the 2nd least liveable city in the world.

"A for Ahmed, B for bomb, C for clock"
(September 19, 2015)

Nadim Mahmud Emon

It's just an example of how most Westerners view Muslims.

Ditto and more...



RUBANA HUQ

WHAT does the US gain by not restoring the GSP facility? And what do we lose?

The debate about why Bangladesh should win GSP back and why the US should not be giving it has been going on for the last 27 months. As for your columnist, following tweets of United States Trade Representative (USTR) has become a disappointing habit, just because there's no good news in sight.

It started back in June 2013 when Bangladesh became ineligible to receive trade benefits under the GSP programme while exporting to the US. Even though GSP never included readymade garments, the \$34.7 million worth of tobacco, sports equipment, porcelain china and plastic products that were being exported to the US suffered the blow. This added more damage to Bangladesh's image. USTR chief Michael Froman had then commented that there were some "serious shortcomings in workers' rights and workplace safety standards in Bangladesh." Bangladesh was punished for letting Rana Plaza happen. Bangladesh was punished for overlooking rods jutting out from extremely distressed columns in that building and for not having strictly enforced closure of the structurally compromised building. Fair enough.

This year, so far Bangladesh has sprung up in more than one USTR discussion. In January 2015, a USTR-led interagency review concluded that while Bangladesh had made progress over the last year to address fire and building safety issues in RMG, further improvement is needed, which must include serious worker rights issues,

before reinstatement of GSP could be considered. In July 2014, again an interagency review led by the Office of the USTR concluded that they were seeing "some improvements" while they still remained "concerned about the large number of factories that have yet to be inspected, the lack of progress on needed labour law reforms, and continuing reports of harassment of and violence against labour activists who are attempting to exercise their rights." USTR also added that the government was behind schedule in carrying out many hundreds of critical safety inspections in garment factories, as well as in meeting its commitments to hire additional inspectors. In August 2015, the US renewed trade preferences for 122 nations around the world, but Bangladesh was excluded from the list. In that review, Froman said there was still "more work to do" and urged the government to accelerate its efforts "to ensure workers' rights and to take measures to address continuing reports of harassment of and violence against labour activists who were attempting to exercise their rights."

Finally four days ago, when a delegation from the Office of USTR held a meeting with a home team in Dhaka, there were unofficial reports on Washington apparently not being happy with labour standards at our end. While Bangladesh claims that it has fulfilled most of the 16 conditions under an action plan for improving working conditions and workers' rights, the US team, led by Michael J Delaney, assistant representatives (at USTR) for South and Central Asia, probably will still want to know the steps taken by the government before they finally review the GSP status soon. Unofficially, following the meeting, the Bangladesh side may have been concerned about the US "shifting goalpost". While Bangladesh has also

recently firmed up the Rules of Implementation of the Bangladesh Labour Law 2013; while 235 factory inspectors, 218 new fire fighters, 51 new building inspectors have all been employed leading to fulfilment of a few conditions that were required for the GSP eligibility; while 3,407 garment factories out of 3,668 have been inspected, will it be fair on Bangladesh to receive a set of new questions relating to yet another standard of inspection? Will USTR continue to ask questions on trade unions?

No matter how many humane stories are reported, no matter how many great factories the foreign delegations visit, somehow Bangladesh is having a tough time convincing the rest of the world that it's changing and probably it has far better workplace ethics than many in our part of the world. The fact that major retailers and brands subject us to regular reviews on labour conditions, and the fact that we must comply is a message that is not being conveyed clearly enough. Perhaps the delegates visiting the world class factories know that there may be many factories which are not like the ones that they are being shown and that there may be many more which don't have the same floors, the same machines or the same gloss. Perhaps it's time to show them samples of all types of factories, and assure them that all that could have been remedied in terms of labour practices have been done at even the smaller and medium size factories; it's time to tell them that there may be factories in shared buildings and perhaps there's a space crunch there, but that does not disqualify the products that they have been producing for so many years and that even smaller factories have become better with social compliance. Ultimately it is the social compliance that matters as that is the only area where the owners

and the workers bridge. An owner who adopts a humane approach towards the workers cannot be negligent towards his/her own workers' safety. Our factory buildings may not have been entirely retrofitted or fully relocated overnight, but reality is that the US, EU and the rest of the world needs to allow Bangladesh two more years to remediate structural shortcomings and also look into more humane stories that this land can offer through a proper projection of the four million workers engaged in the sector. A couple of simple and clear messages need to be conveyed to them:

Deviations don't define sectoral performance. Overnight cosmetic treatments with increased price pressure and practices won't help. The general standard of compliance has gone up by all rules set by either prescription or proactive remediation undertaken by all the stakeholders in the industry. Therefore, at a time when fair wages are being discussed, when the number of unions are going up and when every owner is meaningfully engaging with workers in every sense of the word, USTR should kindly take into consideration that rating Bangladesh's labour and safety standards in its reviews need to be done with a little more compassion and, of course, with a clear understanding of the four million workers' dependence on the sector. A refusal to restore GSP facilities will only delay the path of progress that Bangladesh has embarked on, as it will be a moral dent on the industry. Bangladesh couldn't have done better in the last two years. Therefore reviews should not have the same observations of the earlier reports, rephrased and pasted on it. The report card should not be a case of a simple "ditto", as Bangladesh has gone beyond the dots and done a lot more.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Why border walls fail



REECE JONES

CALL this the Year of Border Walls. In 2015, Estonia, Hungary, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia all announced or began the construction of barriers on their frontiers. We may live in an era of globalisation, but much of the world is increasingly focused on limiting the free movement of people.

At the end of World War II, there were only five border walls around the world. Today, according to Elisabeth Vallet of the University of Quebec at Montreal, there are 65, three-quarters of them built in the past 20 years. And in the United States, Republican presidential candidates are promising more. The Republican frontrunner, Donald Trump, has repeatedly proposed building a wall along the entire border with Mexico. And on a Sunday morning talk show, another Republican candidate, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, described building a wall on the US-Canada border as "a legitimate issue for us to look at."

And yet existing border walls are neither cheap nor effective. Israel's wall in the West Bank cost more than \$1 million per mile to construct. According to US Customs and Border Protection, building and maintaining the existing 670 miles of border fencing on the US-Mexico border would cost \$6.5 billion over the barrier's expected 20-year life cycle. At this price, fortifying the remaining 1,300 miles of the Mexico border would cost more than \$12.6 billion. Erecting a wall along the 5,525-mile border with Canada would cost almost \$50 billion and would cut through an airport runway, an opera house, homes, and businesses that currently straddle the border.

Nor is there much evidence that border walls work as intended. To be sure, prisons demonstrate that short, well-guarded walls can be extremely effective at preventing movement. But even prison walls are only as effective as the guards who ensure that they are not breached, and guards can be susceptible to bribes. The recent escape of the drug cartel leader Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman from a Mexican prison highlights another vulnerability of border walls: tunnels. Since 1990, the US Border Patrol has found 150 tunnels beneath the US-Mexico border. Those with money will always be able to cross borders using fake documents, bribes, or innovative infrastructure.

Indeed, fortified frontiers are most effective at stopping poor migrants and refugees. And even then, rather than preventing migrants from entering, fortifications all too often funnel them toward more dangerous crossing points. The result is a mounting toll of predictable deaths. The International Organisation for Migration estimates that from 2005 to 2014, some 40,000 people died attempting to cross a border.

Unlike prison perimeters, borders can be thousands of miles long, which make them difficult to monitor properly. The US employs more than 20,000 Border Patrol agents; but even if they were all on duty at the

equally effective without a physical barrier. At best, walls and fences only slow people down, making them a poor investment from a security standpoint. They are similarly ineffective from a military perspective. Missiles and airplanes can fly over them and tanks can smash through them.

And yet, despite their high cost and low efficacy, walls remain popular among policymakers and politicians. They provide imposingly tangible evidence that something is being done about migration. High-tech surveillance and boots on the ground may be more effective at preventing people from crossing a



Mexico-US border wall

same time, each would need to guard a 1,700-foot section of the border.

Of course, equipment like cameras, motion sensors, drones, helicopters, and vehicles allow agents to watch long sections of the border. But the necessity of monitoring border walls points to one of the fundamental truths about them: historically, most have proved to be pretty useless. The most famous sections of the Great Wall of China were overrun within a few decades of their construction. When Germany invaded France in WWII, it simply went around the Maginot Line. The Berlin Wall fell within 30 years of its construction.

Indeed, border guards and their equipment can be

border, but a wall can be used as a political prop. If Trump ever builds his wall, he should build a really nice one, like the Great Wall of China. Then one day it might become a popular tourist attraction – and finally serve a useful purpose.

The writer is a professor of geography at the University of Hawaii – Manoa, and author of *Border Walls: Security and the War on Terror in the United States, India, and Israel* and the forthcoming *The Violence of Borders*.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Do justice to the "Champions of the Earth" award

We congratulate PM Hasina for winning the "Champions of the Earth" award in recognition of Bangladesh's far-reaching initiatives to address climate change. We hope the PM will make sincere efforts to tackle the disastrous environmental conditions of our country.

Bangladesh's Constitution was amended in 2011 to include a constitutional directive to the State to protect environmental and natural resources for current and future generations, along with wetlands and wildlife. But these directives remained only on paper; the actual picture is the opposite. When the people of the whole country are protesting the building of Rampal Power Plant and South Asian human rights activists are urging the government to suspend construction of that plant near the Sundarbans as it will wreak havoc, the government is paying no heed. Referring to PM's winning the "Champions of the Earth" award, Prof. Anu Muhammad said, "The award would become a burden for her if this project goes on, destroying the Sundarbans." Therefore, the PM should do justice to the award and stop building that power plant.
Nur Jahan, Chittagong

The sorry tale of a medical admission seeker

I know a girl who took the medical admission test for the second time this year after preparing herself for more than a year. She did very well in the model tests at the coaching centre she attended. She did well in the actual admission test as well. Naturally, she had high hopes of making it to a government medical college. After the result was published, she found out that she scored 175 marks but her merit position is 7777! Therefore, she cannot get into a government medical college, no matter how good her marks are. The irony is that many of her friends made it in DMC, CMC and other public medical colleges as they had access to the leaked questions. Now, this girl is in much despair and sees no light at the end of the tunnel. There are many more cases like hers. The government must identify the culprits and award them exemplary punishment.
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