

Attack on Satkhira temple

Bigotry must be nipped in the bud

WE are unnerved by the news from Satkhira where six idols of a Hindu temple have been desecrated by miscreants only hours before the start of the Durga Puja. Police high ups have visited the spot assuring that the incident will be investigated. Additional police will be apparently deployed to avert any further untoward incident.

While we hope this is a stray act of vandalism that will be duly punished after the perpetrators have been caught, it is expected that the government will take extra precaution in the coming days of this festival, the biggest one for the Hindu community. This is all the more important at a time when there have been reports of extremist elements trying to destabilise the country.

We cannot emphasise enough the need to reassure all minority groups that their right to practice their religion will be protected and upheld. The government on various occasions has in fact publicly announced such assurances and has also taken steps to beef up security at vulnerable spots. But the recent attack on a pastor as well as past incidents of vandalism in temples and other religious sites is proof that more needs to be done in terms of ensuring safety of religious minorities. The most important step would be to find the culprits behind these attacks – past and present - and bring them to book. The security forces have to be extra vigilant during such religious festivals.

In addition, there must be a spontaneous mass awareness regarding the need to maintain religious harmony. Here the media – print and electronic – must work wholeheartedly to promote religious tolerance and a complete rejection of bigotry.

Youth with extraordinary courage

Let it be an example

KUMAR Bishwajit Barman has stopped about 700 child marriages and saved many teenagers and adults from the deadly claws of drug abuse in the northern district of Kurigram. Five years ago, as an 18-year-old boy, he established a school to provide them with free education and make them aware of the ills of child marriage and drug addiction. Despite facing threats from influential people, Barman pitted himself against these social evils, fought them with extraordinary courage and determination and held them to a standoff - all with the help of a few friends and local government officials.

He has also made the highest personal sacrifice, choosing not to enroll in Rajshahi University even after clearing the entrance exam with flying colours so that he could continue his work with his 'school of hope'.

In a country where more than 50 percent of girls are married off before the age of 18 and drugs have ravaged even small towns and villages, Barman's story inspires awe. He challenges the oft-used axiom that people are powerless. In giving a second chance to all these people, he is likewise, giving a lifeline to all of us. Kumar's selflessness will no doubt, evoke our sense of responsibility towards the community.

Our hope is that Bishwajit's sacrifice inspires people - young and old - all over the country to take the initiative to fight social menaces that stand in the way of progress. Such noble endeavours should be given support by both the government and the private sector.

THE NOBEL MIND ON ECONOMIES of poor countries

MACRO MIRROR



FAHMIDA KHATUN

THE winner of the 2015 Nobel Prize in the field of economics, Angus Deaton, professor of Economics and International Affairs of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International

Affairs, Princeton University, spent his career working on consumption, poverty and inequality. While announcing the winner of the award, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences mentioned, "Deaton's focus on household surveys has helped transform development economics from a theoretical field based on aggregate data to an empirical field based on detailed individual data."

Professor Deaton's major focus is on measuring consumption at the individual household level by using household surveys and analysing detailed data. Instead of aggregate measures in economics such as gross domestic product, Professor Deaton is interested in how households consume, for example food, or how much they spend on housing or health. His work on measuring consumption provided better understanding of poverty and ways to fight it. To him, consumption, not income, is a better measurement of poverty.

The very choice of the field of Deaton's work has relevance for economies around the world, where poverty, malnutrition and inequality are ubiquitous. In one of his popular books, *The Great Escape: Health, Wealth and Origins of Inequality*, Deaton delineates how the world has become a better place to live than ever before, as strides on progress have been made by countries. However, poverty and inequality continue to be present in so many countries. And this is observed not only in poor countries, but also in rich



Angus Deaton, winner of this year's Nobel Prize in Economics.

PHOTO: AP

countries, such as the USA.

Deaton takes a strong position on the role of foreign aid in recipient countries. His scepticism about aid effectiveness is also valid in the case of many aid receiving countries, including Bangladesh. He believes that aid to poor countries given by donor countries are driven by economic and political interest of donor countries, and thus did not do much to improve the situation of recipient countries. He claims that such aid has given rise to corrupt government in poor countries. Rather, foreign aid in these countries stands in the way of the development of institutions which are critical for taking development forward. So instead of foreign aid, he suggests the removal of trade barriers, such as import quota and high tariffs on goods produced and exported by low-income countries. He also suggests that the money allocated as foreign aid could be used for research on diseases in poor countries or to increase agricultural productivity of those countries. His diagnosis is that in most cases, the attempt to do good for poor countries lack adequate understanding of those countries due to which countries are

more harmed than benefited.

Angus Deaton is optimistic about changing policies by being associated with the government machinery. He urges his students to work on and within their own governments for the development of their countries. While Deaton's call for working for the motherland is encouraging, the reality is rather challenging. In poor countries, where poverty and lack of governance go hand in hand, "a few good men" in the corrupt system cannot really do much. They would rather be made "outcasts" in that very political system, and would be forced to leave behind their noble ideas. Who would know this better than us? Without deep diving into the overall reform of political and social institutions, development will continue to fall short of the expected level.

Deaton's work is about using data to formulate policies. Inadequate and inaccurate data on poverty and malnutrition make it difficult to understand the extent of progress on these indicators. As a result, the knowledge on the efficiency and effectiveness of resources spent on poverty alleviation becomes murky. This

also obstructs the enforcement of accountability of public resources. Deaton eloquently discusses in his book, *The Analysis of Household Surveys: A Microeconomic Approach to Development Policy*, how features of data can be presented for broader understanding through simple descriptive statistics or graphical illustrations. However, he is careful about too much dependence on statistics. He attempts to make a balance between statistics and economic theory. He thus warns "technique is never a substitute for the business of doing economics."

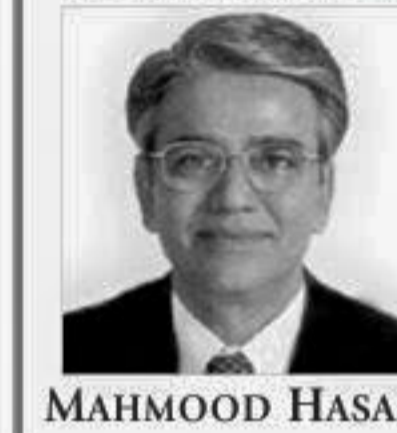
Recognition of Deaton's work comes at a time when inequality has become a growing concern for the world, despite reduction of poverty levels by a great extent when compared to 1990. Last month, global leaders committed to reducing inequality within and among countries through the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals at the United Nations. His Nobel Prize also comes at a time when SDGs have laid importance on "high-quality, timely and reliable data desegregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts". To fulfil this, the SDG declaration has emphasised enhanced capacity-building support to countries.

In Bangladesh, availability of in-depth and real time data at the household level is still limited. Not only does the capacity of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) need to be strengthened, but the independence of the BBS is to be maintained as well, in order to have reliable data from its surveys. Deaton's Nobel Prize should remind us that policymaking in the area of poverty reduction will continue to be less effective unless there is an improvement in data production and dissemination at the national level.

The writer is Research Director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, currently a Visiting Scholar at the Centre for Study of Science, Technology & Policy, India.

Delhi plays "Big Brother" to Nepal

FROM A BYSTANDER



MAHMOOD HASAN

CRISIS has struck Nepal for the third time this year. First, it was the devastating earthquake in April that cost more than 9,000 lives. Then the violence related to the drafting and promulgation of the country's Constitution that took 45 lives. And now the landlocked Himalayan nation has been locked by the big

southern neighbour, India.

Finally, after bickering for seven years, the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal promulgated the new "democratic" and "secular" Constitution on September 20, 2015, much to the ire of India. And from September 23, 2015, an unofficial blockade was imposed by India. The question here is why is India peeved?

The new Constitution has divided Nepal into seven provinces as part of a federal state. This is a major source of discontent that has sparked street violence. The Madhesi in Terai, the Tharus in the west and the Janajatis in eastern Nepal are frustrated, as they feel deeply marginalised.

Madhesi are people of Indian origin, living in Terai, the plain land in the south adjoining Bihar in India. They are culturally different from the hill people and constitute 51 percent of Nepal's 27 million population. Actually, the protests have taken shape of a complex confrontation between the people of the plains and the "hill elites" – the upper caste Hindus, constituting 15 percent of the population - who have traditionally ruled from Kathmandu.

Nepal is entirely dependent on India for all its essentials, which pass through Nepalgunj, Birgonj, Janakpur and Biratnagar border points. Madhesi angered by the Constitution had blocked the road entering Nepal from India. India too has apparently asked its officials at the crossings not to allow vehicles to enter Nepal.

While the constitution drafting process was going on, India had repeatedly asked Nepali leaders to address the grievances of the Madhesi people. Delhi also asked Kathmandu to go slow on promulgating the charter, as there was widespread anger against certain provisions of the Constitution. But Nepalese Prime Minister Sushil Koirala went through a motion of consultations with different parties and promulgated the Constitution through the so-called "fast track". Clearly, Nepali leaders did not heed Delhi's counsel and

hurriedly endorsed the document. This is what appeared to have angered Delhi.

Before the promulgation of the Constitution, Indian Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar was in Kathmandu on September 18, 2015, as special envoy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to talk to Nepali leaders. He asked them to resolve the differences through dialogue. Jaishankar argued that violence provoked by the new Constitution has spilled over to India, as Madhesi have been crossing over to Bihar to escape police action. Besides, Bihar is currently going through phased state elections, which began on October 12, 2015. India cannot let the elections be prejudiced by overlooking the plight of the Madhesi.

Soon after the Constitution was made public, Delhi asked Kathmandu to amend seven of its Articles: (i) Article 11 (6): Delhi wants citizenship granted

India-Nepal relations are extremely intertwined not only because of their religious affinity - both are predominantly Hindu societies - but also because of India's security concerns.

automatically to foreign women - meaning Indian women - married to Nepali men; (ii) Article 42: related to representation of various groups in government jobs. Delhi wants "proportional" representation based on population. This will give Madhesi 50 percent or more jobs in the state structures; (iii) Article 84: related to electoral constituencies based on percentage of population so that Madhesi gets constituencies in proportion to its population; (iv) Article 86: related to representation in the parliament. Madhesi parties want representation on the basis of population; (v) Article 281: related to delineation of constituencies from 20 years to 10 years; (vi) Article 283: regarding citizenship. India wants naturalised citizens, meaning Madhesi, to be eligible to hold posts of presidents, prime ministers, etc. (vii) Madhes province to include five adjoining districts.

It is clear that India, from the very beginning, has pushed for protection for the Indian origin Madhesi. The Madhesi leaders have also looked upon India for support and backing.

The sentiment in Nepal is against this stance of India. People seem to be united against what they consider to be a blatant interference of India. Effigies of Modi have been burnt in Kathmandu. People widely believe that the Terai protests were instigated. All the major parties, despite having their differences, have come together to defy this stance. Nepali Ambassador D K Upadhyay in Delhi said that Nepal will look beyond India if the blockade continues.

The three-week unofficial blockade has had devastating effects on Nepal, though the Indian External Affairs Spokesman denied any such move. The suspension of fuel supply had practically stopped all economic activities in the country. However, from October 12, some vehicles carrying fuel have entered Nepal, easing the supply shortage.

Nepal's big northern neighbour, China's reaction has been muted so far. However, Beijing cautiously reacted when Chinese flags were burnt in Terai, saying that China was not "anti-Madhesi and believes in a stable Nepal". The Nepal-China Jilong border crossing, which was damaged by the earthquake, has been reopened. Essential supplies have been coming in from China, as the effects of the blockade continue.

India-Nepal relations are extremely intertwined not only because of their religious affinity - both are predominantly Hindu societies - but also because of India's security concerns. Delhi has always wanted to have a friendly government in Kathmandu. During the days of the monarchy in Nepal, relations were strained as successive kings tried to be assertive, independent and stood up to India. It reminds one of the 13-month long blockade of 1989, during the days of King Birendra, over transit privileges.

In May 2015, Sushma Swaraj, India's External Affairs Minister, tried to allay fears amongst neighbours by stating that India was not a "big brother" but a caring "elder brother". She was speaking in the Indian Parliament while passing the Bangladesh-India Land Boundary Agreement. Indian PM Narendra Modi also made all the friendly gestures and made tall promises to Nepal when he visited Kathmandu in August 2014. All of that now sounds remote.

The writer is a former ambassador and secretary.

COMMENTS

"He showed no remorse"

(October 16, 2015)

Faisal Ahmed

He showed no sign of remorse, why would he? His uncle is still alive!

Faisal Mohammad

Because his family is wealthy and powerful.

Shoukat Ara Amin

Criminal activities should not be encouraged, we want justice.

Dennis Rozario

He is an unlicensed, underage driver behind the wheels, driving recklessly, drinking while driving. He injured four people and police were at the scene. Now the police still needs to wait for the victims to file complaints?

"WHEN THE TAIL WAGS THE DOG - MODI'S RSS CHALLENGE"

(October 15, 2015)

Mahmoodul Hasan

BJP is facing a tough time controlling its allies.

"Govt seeks stay on HC orders"

(October 14, 2015)

Latifa Akhter

When the government itself seeks stay on a High Court order that directed a criminal to surrender (no matter whether he is a ruling party MP or not), it only encourages the ruling party goons to commit more crimes.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Justice for Rajon

The prime accused in Rajon murder case, Kamrul Islam, was brought back to Dhaka on October 15. We urge the government to punish him as per the law. We hope that Rajon's family will receive justice for their son's murder at the hands of such brutal killers. We expect the government to show no mercy to the perpetrators.
Nafis Nihal Ferdous
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Sylhet



PHOTO: RASHED SHUJON

More green channels should be set up

Currently, there is only one green channel for arriving passengers at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. This causes a total gridlock. Passengers become unruly and try to cut the line only to get ahead of other patient, law abiding passengers.

Since there are many exit doors which are kept locked all the time, I suggest having more X-ray machines set up in front of other exit doors so that passengers can exit quickly. Lines should be marked with ropes so that passengers trying to cut the line are sent back, all the way to the end of the line.

Aminur Rahim
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