

## Down two points in ranking

### Simplify business process

ACCORDING to the World Bank's (WB) latest edition of business-environment ratings, the country slipped down two notches to rank 174 out of 189 countries globally. That it is now more difficult to 'start a business' and it is harder to get 'access to credit' speak volumes of the regulatory problems new enterprises and old ones face in the private sector. It is not a happy position to be in, especially when other countries in the region are doing much better than Bangladesh; India comes in at 130, earth-quake ridden Nepal landed at 99 and even violence-ridden Pakistan scored 138.

In spite of the government's assurance to ease the process of starting a business we have gone down in five indicators and remained static in the other five. It now takes 19.5 days to start a business in the country against an average of 15.7 days in other South Asian countries. Bangladesh is lagging behind because much-needed reforms that would significantly cut down lead times in dealing with construction permits, getting electricity, registering property, getting credit, paying taxes, etc. – all of which affect how fast a business can get up and running – have not come about.

It is critical for policymakers to take a closer look at the declining performance because such global benchmarks are what foreign investors refer to when considering the country to be a good place to invest in. A poor showing in rankings are indicative of a less-than-average performance on regulatory issues. Without serious reforms to improve business and investment climate, it would be futile to expect Bangladesh to draw investors both from home and abroad.

## Educating the physically challenged

### A gem of an organisation

WE commend The Manab Kalyan Trust of Pabna for assisting higher education of 135 physically challenged students, many of them visually impaired. Starting with six extremely poor students, in 1994, the trust, founded by a college professor, now imparts specialised education through Braille and recorded lectures to blind students, some of whom aspire to become civil servants and academics upon completion of their postgraduate studies.

In a country where several barriers preclude persons with different abilities from leading a normal social and economic life and accessing essential services like education and health, this extraordinary organisation sets a shining example of how a helping hand can make a difference in the lives of those who are often bypassed by ambitious development programmes and projects.

What's remarkable about the Manab Kalyan Trust is the fact that it instills in students the courage and determination to overcome their limitations, often an important factor behind success and failure in life, not only for them but all of us.

The measure of a society is how it treats its people including those physically challenged. Currently dependent on donations, the institution needs government support to extend its mission to help the most vulnerable members of the community. And at the macro level, allocation of funds has to be increased to meet their special needs for education, health and integration into the society and the economy, enabling them to live a meaningful life as citizens.

# Is it humanly possible to be honest?


 CROSS TALK  
MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

HONESTY is the best policy, but where does it begin? When leaders are liars, lawmakers are lawbreakers, teachers are tricksters and others aren't who they say they are, it's impossible to find honesty at its registered address. Honest individuals don't steal, lie or fail to keep promises. They are honourable people, who are comparable to goods made to specification or sold in exact weight. Nobody can be true to others unless, first, they are also true to themselves.

Thus being honest is all about being truthful, although it's not enough to speak the truth unless one also lives by its example. Anybody telling the truth but not practicing it is a hypocrite, while cowards hide the truth out of fear although they may not necessarily abandon it. Liars treat truth with flexibility and convenience. It is attire for them that must change with every occasion.

But how much honesty is humanly possible? There are many examples of people, who died for telling the truth. There have also been people throughout history, who lived within their means without indulging in any form of corruption. One can find examples of generous people, some of whom have given their entire fortune to charity. Misers are dishonest people; they live in wretched conditions to save and hoard money despite their solvent positions. Average people exercise honesty in

moderation. They tell the truth when it doesn't hurt, spend within their means, save according to their needs, and occasionally tweak their moral positions to avoid deprivation, harassment or threats of persecution and death. They are averagely honest, neither champions nor chumps but watch every step. Marginally honest and marginally dishonest, these people are reasonably ambitious without being excessively arrogant.

Wealth is involved. Infidelity is dishonesty because it's betrayal. Influence peddling is dishonesty because it's unfair. Muscle flexing is dishonesty because it's coercion. Nepotism is dishonesty because it's discrimination. Election rigging is dishonesty because it's manipulation. Bribery is dishonesty because it's perversion.

When all of these phenomena persist in a society or a country, how can its citizens be honest? It's often asked

Honesty is the pillar of rationality, because human character without it plunges into chaos.

Is honesty a divisible element? Can the same person be partially honest and partially dishonest? Can the same father take bribe and raise an honest family? Can the same leader cheat his followers and still adhere to his ideology? Can the same doctor neglect his patients, yet claim to follow his professional ethics?

Conscience is to honesty what nursery is to plants. It has been argued by scholars that the Greek term for conscience meant sharing knowledge with oneself. Each and every one of us is doing that sharing every wakeful moment. Each of us has the conversation with himself before he engages in conversation with others.

This is why honesty, like charity, begins at home. Unless one is honest with oneself, one can't be honest with rest of the world. And this is also why it must be mentioned that different types of crops grow on different types of soils. For example, root vegetables grow well in sand. Corn, squash, pumpkins, and okra do well in clay soil. Beets, cabbage, and carrots do well in alkaline soil.

In some markets child labour is essential, but illegal in many. Polygamy is prohibited in western societies but practiced in the east. Some societies have same sex marriage, although most frown upon it. Tax evasion is fun for some people, but taboo for the rest.

Humans vary from country to country. So does humanity. Honesty is humanly possible to the extent people are a function of their country.

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Honesty is one area where the haves are definitely the have-nots. Affluence is somewhat inversely related to honesty because beside hard work and talent, it also involves manipulation and deceit. French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon coined the slogan "Property is theft!" He argued that if he were asked what slavery is, he should answer in one word that it's robbery.

But material worth isn't the only battleground for honesty. People are also dishonest where neither money nor

which came first between the chicken and the egg. Similarly, one can ask if honesty can be the best policy before the best policy is honest. In other words, is it possible for an individual to become an island of perfection in a sea of distortions? Can a blotting paper avoid smudge when thrown in a puddle of ink?

One of the overriding goals of modern civilisation is to bring the rational out of the animal. The rational by definition is having or exercising the ability to reason. The animal, on the contrary, is behaving in a wild, aggressive or unpleasant fashion.

# Tethered to old positions


 BETWEEN THE LINES  
KULDIP NAYYAR

HOW soon has Geeta, a deaf and dumb girl, disappeared from newspaper columns and television networks is not surprising. It only shows the depth of hostility between India and Pakistan. Islamabad did make a gesture by returning her. India should have reciprocated more positively and tangibly.

Instead, the response was tepid. The media in both the countries dropped the topic quickly as if it was something which should be shunned.

In any other country, such a step would have been analysed and re-analysed to highlight the positive side. Even limited rapprochement between America and Cuba would have been exploited as an opportunity to settle their problems. But the crust of hostility between India and Pakistan could not be broken despite Geeta's return after more than a decade.

A new chapter of friendship should have begun in relations. But there was nothing like that even remotely. The problem is essentially with a large section of people in India who still recall the "vivisection of Bharat Mata".

Pakistan is a reality. It came into being some 70 years ago because the Muslims wanted a country of their own. They felt that they would be overwhelmed by the preponderant majority of Hindus. But the community did not realise the warning sounded out by the eminent leader Maulana Abul Kalam Azad that after the establishment of a Muslim state, Hindus would get more consolidated. His wish that there should not be any partition is different from the attitude of disdain and derision that prevails in greater parts of India.

I recall the speech by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in Lahore, the city to which he had led a bus, that Pakistan was an entity by itself and required no outside recognition. His words had come as a soothing balm for the Pakistanis who still feel that India has not accepted it. I was present at that civic reception. His words appealed to the Pakistanis so much that one of them, a friend, requested me to tell Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif not to give any speech because he could not match the heights which Vajpayee had touched.

Geeta's return is an opportunity for both India and Pakistan to pick up the thread the two had left in Ufa (Russia). The two had agreed that they would tackle terrorism jointly. India's insistence that it would discuss only terrorism is following the agreement in letter, not in spirit.

The cause of terrorism, according to Pakistan, is the absence of a solution on the Kashmir problem. Islamabad made the mistake at that time of demanding the specific mention of Kashmir. It should have agreed to discuss terrorism and brought in Kashmir on the plea that terrorism cannot be stopped until Kashmir is discussed.

It was childish on the part of both prime ministers when they were avoiding each other while staying at

the same hotel in New York where they had gone to attend the UN General Assembly session. Both delegations were probably making sure that they would not meet. There came a chance when they ran into each other. But they could not help but raise their hands in recognition at the time, since they were within a whispering distance. At least they showed a modicum of maturity then.

Former Prime Minister Vajpayee would often say that you could change your friends but not your neighbours. Even when his party, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), vehemently opposed to having any truck with Pakistan, he took the initiative to break the ice. He arranged for a meeting in Agra between him and General Musharraf. Vajpayee wanted the two countries

Establishments on both sides should realise that they are denying their people schools, healthcare centres and panchayat ghars by diverting money from development to defence. Even purchasing a bomb ware would increase their economic backwardness and it would, in no way, help the betterment of the common man.

If the Geeta episode can reverse the trend, it would be a miracle. Otherwise, both sides will continue to wallow in poverty. The choice is not between do and die but sustenance and survival. The two countries continue their traditional animosity. It depends on Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Nawaz Sharif to break the vicious circle of enmity and arms. The prospects are very little and not rosy.



to contain hostility. It is another matter that he could not make any headway. It is said that the present Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj had raised some objections to the formula that the foreign secretaries of both countries had devised after sitting for the entire night.

The current situation is becoming curiouser and curiouser. Both countries do not talk to each other and still avow that they want good relations. I am sure that the talks must be taking place through the back channel. But there is nothing to show that things are improving. Ceasefire violations have increased and there are no letups in acquiring arms. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif accused India in New York of buying more weapons, and defended his country if it were to do so.

The Geeta incident has created an atmosphere of goodwill. But this has been spoilt by some irresponsible remarks. One Pakistani dignitary said that India should return the prisoners languishing in Indian jails. Another remarked that people like Geeta living in India should be given back to Pakistan.

But what they do not realise is that Geeta was not a prisoner and her return is to her own country. In the melee or argument, some 15 years have been lost. Both countries have already consumed 70 years in their futile stand. It is time they realised that the public have borne the brunt of this enmity on two sides and continue to suffer backwardness. They deserve a better deal.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

## COMMENTS

### "Rape, violence against women on rise"

(October 27, 2015)

Bushra Mollick

Violence against women in Bangladesh is nothing new. Domestic violence, child marriage, acid attacks and sex crimes are common. In order to protect women, the government needs to enforce stricter punishments on anyone who commits these crimes. We also need to teach men to respect women from an early age.

Sifat Ahmed Masum

Parents should stop treating their sons and daughters differently.

Saad Hassan Hasib

We all have women in our lives who have shaped our very existence and who mean the world to us. It is the responsibility of a man to respect women and protect them at all times.

Faisal Rahman Khan

This is alarming news for all of us.

Abul Bashar

We all must be united to stop violence against women.

### "Lone website that 'finds ISIS link'"

(October 27, 2015)

Anonymous

Why is Rita Katz so eager to associate IS with the killing? What is her motive?

Shanina Armin

It seems that they have taken it upon themselves to link Bangladesh with IS.

### "Bangladesh is safe"

We have been listening to Sir Frank Peters on BBC where he asked listeners not to postpone or cancel any visit they had planned for Bangladesh. He described Bangladesh as "one of the safest and friendliest countries he's ever visited" and he's visited 80 countries. Bangladeshis revere, respect and, in many regards, protect foreigners, he said. When asked about the recent murders in Dhaka, he said that murder is common in every country, but rarely is a foreigner murdered in Bangladesh. He can only remember three killings of foreigners during the 20 years he's been visiting the country. He added that he has

visited and stayed in many villages in Bangladesh and he has always found the people to be warm and friendly. Before concluding the interview he advised that anyone planning on visiting Bangladesh to not be any more cautious than they would be while visiting any other country.

I was so happy to hear someone try and inject sanity into the situation that's become a source of embarrassment for Bangladeshis. We know Bangladesh is a safe place to visit, but Sir Frank is the first foreigner I know to stand up and say so for all to hear.

Angelina and Sorif Islam  
Brixton, London

### "What will kill RMG: TPP or Fear?"

This is in reference to the above write-up published in TDS on October 14. I do not agree with the writer that the RMG sector will face a severe blow for security fears. It will affect the tourism sector, no doubt. But for buyers of RMG, I don't think it will. I do not think the garment sector will fail.

Bazlur Rahman  
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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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