

Seeking int'l support for development

We support PM's call

We echo the prime minister's call to the development partners gathered at the Bangladesh Development Forum for their sustained support to Bangladesh in its pursuit of unimpeded development. The premier is justified in making the appeal to the international community given the country's extraordinary success in achieving most of the targets of the MDGs, all the while sustaining a steady rate of six-plus annual GDP growth despite a global economic meltdown and political unrest here at home.

Going forward, we, however, face some formidable hurdles, namely, energy sector reform, infrastructure development and competitiveness as per recommendations of some development partners. Reforms are necessary in the pricing policy to attract investment in the energy sector and the tax-GDP ratio has to increase to arrange financing in the infrastructure sector, according to a senior official of the IMF who also stressed the importance of generating more revenue from domestic resources and removing the barriers of doing business.

All these are sound economic advice. But to what extent these policies will actually work depends largely on good governance which also includes aid utilisation and public safety. Reportedly, more than half of financing of social and physical infrastructure still comes from foreign aid. That being the case, efficient utilisation of aid and the implementation of programmes assume importance.

Therefore, improving governance and safety - preconditions for foreign investment and aid - should be the priority in the 7th Five Year Plan and the government, civil society organisations, academia, private sector and development partners should work together towards reaching this shared goal.

Dire state of Dalits

Introduce affirmative action

We are appalled by the level of discrimination that 5.5 million Dalits in the country have been subjected to. We laud Bangladesh Harijan Oikya Parishad, Friends Association for Integrated Revolution and Manusher Jonno Foundation for conducting a survey on one of the most marginalised communities among us. But for the report a dark aspect of our society would have remained unknown to us. It is beyond belief that in such a day and age, a segment of our society should be living in such a decrepit state.

It is preposterous that Dalit children are not allowed to enrol in most of the schools; in the others, they are subject to bullying by teachers and fellow students for their parents' profession. It is even worse at the tertiary level where only 25 Dalit students were admitted last year. It is no less than shocking that in these times, the Dalits are not allowed to have food with the others.

The unjust and prejudicial treatment of the Dalits stands in clear violation of the country's constitution, which categorically prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, religion, gender or ethnicity. Despite this, the crimes committed against the Dalits seem to be going on unabated. This demands a string of affirmative actions for all-round progress of this and other marginalised groups. To do that, we must concentrate on capacity building and strict enforcement of the quota system for Dalits in educational institutions where members of the community live. A mass awareness campaign against such practice is also in order.

COMMENTS

"Call for justice gets louder"
(November 14, 2015)

Alamgir Mahmud

Find out the political godfather of Nur Hossain and bring him under trial too.

"Oishee given death penalty"
(November 13, 2015)

Tarek Molla

There is no doubt that Oishee committed a heinous crime by murdering her parents. But I think instead of hanging her to death, the society should look into why she committed such an unthinkable crime and try to rehabilitate her. The fate of her brother should also be taken into consideration.

Sanama Faiz

I don't support this verdict. She should have been sent to a rehabilitation centre.

Matiur Rahman

No person who is mentally sound can kill his or her parents in this manner. Perhaps the girl is not mentally stable. She needs treatment not punishment.

Tahia Mirmy

Why don't we allow kids to kill their parents and then have them treated as 'mental patients'? Cold blooded killers eventually become psychopaths. There is no treatment for killers. That said, leaving her in a jail cell to rot for the rest of her life would have been, enough.

Biman Kumar

I think she has been awarded the right punishment and it should be implemented as soon as possible to set a precedent.

Counting a woman's worth

MACRO MIRROR



FAHMIDA KHATUN

MORE than anywhere else in the world, in Bangladesh we are probably very curious about other peoples' personal lives. We try to gather as much information as we can when

we meet people. Then we situate them accordingly within our mental frame and talk about them afterwards. One of the first questions directed towards women when we meet them for the first time is what do they do, meaning if they work or not. Of course, this is not to know whether they work at home or not. Women will work at home. That is normal and taken for granted. They will cook food, clean dishes, wash clothes, do groceries, rear children, care for the elders and manage the household. We are not interested to know that. We want to know if she works at an office or has a business that gives her an income. A common response from women to this 'unsolicited' question is 'no, I don't do anything'. And when they reply, I have noticed, among many, a look of embarrassment. Of course a few smarter ones have started to recognise themselves as 'homemakers'.

This is not only a reflection of the mentality of both the questioner and the respondent, but of the society as a whole. There was a time when women's work outside their home was not widely accepted or looked at positively in our society. Over time, this has changed significantly, among both women themselves and their families. This is a positive shift contributing to personal and social progress. In the national statistics, this is reflected through higher

female labour force participation rates. From a mere 4 percent in 1974, female labour force participation rate has increased to 36 percent in 2010. But a majority of them - over 90 percent - work in the informal sector, with low and unpredictable income. As a result, their contribution to the economy is much lower than that of men.

In fact, despite an increase in the total working age of the female population, women's contribution to GDP is only about 30 percent. This is not only due to their greater involvement in the less productive informal sector but also

Recently, the Centre for Policy Dialogue and Manusher Jonno Foundation conducted a comprehensive study that assessed both women and men's involvement in various activities. The objective was to understand the time use pattern of people and to estimate the value of women's unaccounted work. Women and men in 5,670 households across 64 districts of Bangladesh were interviewed through a detailed questionnaire. A total of 8,320 female and 5,320 male aged 15 years and above from these households took part in the survey.

Findings of the study are revealing. It shows that, on average, time spent by a

would increase the size of the GDP as well. This is one aspect of women's work. The other issue is to increase their participation in the job market and give them opportunities to earn. Their participation in paid work is constrained due to their multifarious roles within their families. Even those who are engaged in paid jobs, do part-time and low paid jobs in low productive sectors such as agriculture. The aforementioned study also found that not all women are interested in being involved in paid jobs. Only one-fourth of those who are not in any job at present expressed their willingness to work outside home. It's not only because their families disapprove of their work, but they themselves prefer to give time to their families. Therefore, many of those who are looking for work would like to work as a part-timer so that they can perform their household responsibilities as well.

Two inferences emanate from this. First, women's decision to take part in paid work is still influenced by family members who are prejudiced against women's participation in the workforce. Second, the employment pattern of women will take some time to change. Even if they are offered full-time employment many women have to forgo the opportunity as they are overburdened with household chores. Thus the deep-rooted attitude about women's role has to be changed. Policymakers have to recognise women's unaccounted work through incorporating those into the national accounts. The final objective, however, is to bring more women into the labour market for paid jobs -- a job that will give her security, status and self-esteem; a job that would increase GDP many folds and make growth inclusive.

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because they are engaged mostly in unpaid activities within the household which are not counted in the traditional measure of GDP. This is a serious shortcoming of the system of national accounts worldwide. This is the cause of women's weakened position in the family and society. In many families, without an income, a woman has no worth. They remain as an object of neglect, insult and torture. But are they really worthless?

female member of a household on unpaid work is about three times higher than that of a male household member. And the value of women's unpaid household work is equivalent to 76.8 - 87.2 percent of the GDP. The price of women's unpaid work is 2.5 to 2.9 times more than their income from paid work.

Inclusion of this value which remains outside the sphere of traditional GDP accounting will surely increase women's contribution to GDP substantially. It

ISLAMIC STATE
Unlike any that came before

SYED MANSUR HASHIM

EVIDENCE emerged in 2014 that the IS' success in the battlefield had a lot to do with the disenfranchised Ba'ath party members of Iraq. We were confronted by a "marriage of convenience" between hard-line Islamists and former members of deposed Saddam Hussein's army of Iraq. Indeed, two top deputies of IS' self-proclaimed

Caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, are former Iraqi Ba'athists. Abu Muslim al-Afari al-Turkmani, suspected to be a former senior Special Forces officer and a member of military intelligence in Saddam Hussein's army, was subsequently killed in May, 2015 in a bombing. Abu Ali al-Anbari, another former Ba'athist, plays a more political role overseeing the local councils and political envoy of IS.

The IS has benefited greatly from its association with Iraqi Ba'athists who brought with them military and political expertise. In fact, without their direct participation, it is highly suspect whether the militant group could have pulled off operations like the capture of Nineveh Province and its capital, Mosul in 2014. They say, war makes strange bedfellows; for former henchmen of Saddam Hussein, the continued existence of IS provides an opportunity to return Sunni rule to Iraq sometime in the future; for IS, the continued association means more territorial gains or the opportunity to hold on to territory already gained and selling the dream of a living, breathing "Caliphate", a citadel of hope for disillusioned Muslims globally, to congregate and fight for their version of holy war.

What has emerged of IS' top leadership from investigative journalism is that almost all are of Iraqi origin, who, at one time or other, served in the military and security apparatus of Saddam's Iraq. Yet, there have been rifts between Ba'athists and the core IS leadership. To what extent these will manifest themselves in the near term is, of course, open to interpretation. While Ba'athists largely believe in a secular state, IS believes in the "caliphate", an Islamic Order based on an extreme version of Salafist thought that essentially states that anyone or any group opposed to its rule is either an apostate (murtad) or an infidel (kafir). Whether that rift will create deep divisions in the order is perhaps an argument best left for the future.

IS has transformed itself from a mere terrorist organisation to one that can broadly be classified as an insurgent movement. It holds large parts of Syria and Iraq. Militarily, it has undergone metamorphosis from secret cell-based hit teams to military divisions that have changed the hit-and-run tactics to campaigns conducted to conquer and hold territory. IS continues to attract thousands of new followers. Iran's ever-expanding

sphere of influence and the establishment of Shiite rule in Iraq, the ousting of minority-Sunni led government after the US-led invasion, disenfranchisement of the Iraqi Sunni minority from positions of influence are all contributing factors to IS's success.

Today we are confronted with attacks made either by IS (or in its name) from Beirut to Paris. We are faced with a group that has successfully recruited fighters from Belgium to Chechnya. It has managed to strike at the heart of Europe, where the backlash against Syrian refugees will do little to stem the tide of violence which shows no signs of abating even as the IS core is increasingly under threat from a US-led coalition on the one hand, and a Russian and Iranian-backed Syrian



army acting in collusion with Shiite militias on the other. The group is a multinational outfit, drawing an estimated half of the 15,000 foreign fighters from five countries, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Jordan and Turkey; the rest have come from all over the place including Europe.

Looking beyond military capabilities, the IS has invested heavily in trying to gain legitimacy through endorsement of religious scholars which give it mileage as a serious alternative religious base. As per a report published by the New York-based intelligence firm in November, 2014, The Soufan Group, Islamic State "is reported to have recruited a Saudi officer... to enlist

respected preachers on its behalf. This effort led to the Islamic State appointing three principal Sharia leaders, Omar al-Qahtani, a Saudi national who changed his name from Abu Hafs to Abu Bakr in homage to his leader; Turki al-Bin al-Ali, also known as Turki bin Mubarak bin Abdullah, Abu Dergham, and Abul Humam Bakr Bin Abdul Aziz al Athari, who is based in Bahrain having been expelled from his United Arab Emirates for his Salafist/Takfiri preaching; and thirdly Osman al-Nazeh al-Asiri, a Saudi national who went to fight in Syria in early 2013 and was prominent in arguing the case for The Islamic State in its dispute with Jabhat al-Nusra. Bandar bin Sha'alan has also recruited donors and coordinated the recruitment of fighters. He now plays an important

role in the media efforts."

IS has successfully demonstrated that it is capable of organising attacks far from its "shores", it has added large swathes of territory that it has held for years and is in the process of gaining the competence of "governing" these territories. The fight against this outfit is not only a military one; it is also an ideological one. Until we take that into cognizance, the "caliphate" will continue to exist in one form and another and radicalisation of disillusioned youth cannot truly be checked.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Praiseworthy speedy trials

We laud the government for the speedy trials of the murder cases of Rajon and Rakib. The brutal and horrendous murders of these two innocent boys outraged the whole nation. The government heeded the public outcry, expedited the judicial process and dispensed justice. We expect the government to follow this precedent in all other sensitive cases.

Nawfal Talukdar

USA

We will never have such polls

This has reference to TDS editor Mr. Mahfuz Anam's commentary titled "When will we have such polls again?" published on November 13, 2015. While the people of Myanmar had been deprived of democracy until these elections, we lost our hard-earned democracy not knowing whether we will ever get it back.

Mr. Mahfuz Anam said that after the August 21 grenade attack, Sheikh Hasina could not trust Khaleda Zia. It may be so but what does that have to do with the election to be held

under a non-partisan government? Would it be wrong to assume that the Awami League got the feeling that they might lose the election had it been held under a caretaker government? That seems like the probable answer to why people's demands were ignored. But they went ahead anyway and formed a government in a very strange manner.

Nur Jahan

Chittagong