

Where have all the missing persons gone? It is for police to solve the mystery

THE statistics are frightening for any society that prides itself on its civilisational credentials, and even more so for any government that claims to be the rule of law and human rights. As per a human rights watchdog report, there were 72 cases of enforced disappearances between 2009 and 2012. And in 2013, 68 persons were abducted which spiked to 88 in 2014. The surprising aspect of it is that, of those gone missing in 2014, bodies of 23 were recovered from different places in the country. 47 unfortunate persons were picked, allegedly by law enforcing agencies, in 2015.

There are a few questions that the agencies need to answer. How can they pick up people from their homes in front of the family members, as reported in the media, and yet deny having done so? How is it that a few that had gone missing, and which the police claimed to have had nothing to do with, have been subsequently produced by the police before the court on various charges? And how do they account for so many dead bodies that had turned up, most of those were of people reported missing by the family and alleged to have been picked up by the law enforcing agencies? In many cases there were witnesses of the abductions. And how is it that most of the victims belong to the opposition?

In most of these cases the finger, unfortunately, has been pointed at the law enforcing agencies. They will have to resolve the mystery. They better find the killer gang that has abducted nearly 300 people since 2011 if they want to absolve themselves from the accusation of being complicit in the abductions and the killings.

DMP collecting personal information Worrisome for the public

THE latest move by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) to distribute forms to house owners and tenants asking for all kinds of personal information is baffling. The forms ask for details such as passport, phone, NID and license numbers, marital status, religion and email addresses. The initiative, which was not publicly announced, has caused panic among the people.

DMP officials claim that this is part of ongoing security measures in the wake of recent militant attacks. Apparently, this central database will help the police to catch militants who take temporary shelter in the city and then escape after committing various crimes. It is not clear how collecting this information will help to arrest terrorist activities especially since the perpetrators often use aliases and do not usually have long term residency in the places they attack.

The forms, moreover, do not have any official monogram to authenticate that they are indeed being issued by the DMP. While it is important for the police and other law enforcing agencies to have as much information as possible for the sake of security, collecting personal information of all residents to do so seems unnecessary. The authorities already have basic details of citizens through NIDs and MRPs (Machine Readable Passports). Unfortunately, given the public's basic lack of trust in the police, because of allegations of harassment, this move by the DMP is unlikely to have any positive results. Creating a database of militants, especially those who have been arrested before and freed on bail, seems more logical than creating a sense of unease among ordinary citizens by requiring them to give confidential

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Tejgaon truck stand

I appreciate and welcome the initiative recently undertaken by the Dhaka City Corporation (north) Mayor Annisul Huq to evict the illegally parked trucks in the middle of the road at Tejgaon. Everyday, city dwellers face a lot of hardship in moving from one place to another due to illegal occupation of roads and intersections by transport owners. We all must come forward and cooperate with the honourable mayor in his drive to uphold the public interest.
MD. Abdur Rob
Former English teacher, BAF Shaheen College

COMMENTS

"Digital ban in digital Bangladesh?"
(December 4, 2015)

Md Saiful Islam Dilan
It's called digital impertinence.

Elias Khan
Everything should have a limit.

Forhad Hossain

Well, nowadays it's possible to track any user through technology. The government should do that rather than block websites.

The pleasure of giving



MACRO MIRROR
FAHMIDA KHATUN

THE recent announcement of Silicon Valley's power couple - Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and his doctor wife Priscilla Chan - sparked reactions from both ends. Their pledge on the occasion of the birth of their daughter Maxima Chan Zuckerberg to give away 99 percent of their Facebook shares as donations is perhaps the best way to celebrate her birth. They will give the money earned from the share for the advancement of human potential and promotion of equality. As a tech giant, they will naturally give priority on broadening the use of internet and technology in developing countries and also on clean energy. But critics were prompt to point out that they were trying to avoid tax on their fortune worth \$45 billion. Zuckerberg of course clarified the tax issue adequately. But then cynics discarded their good intention as they don't believe that such sporadic charity can change the world in any manner.

Similar sentiments were echoed by sceptics when Warren Buffett, along with Bill and Melinda Gates, initiated the 'Giving Pledges' - a campaign calling billionaires to donate most of their wealth for philanthropic causes - in 2010. They received positive response from more than 130 billionaire couples and individuals from as many as 14 countries. Of course, such charity of some of the richest people in the world is like a drop in the ocean. The need for eradicating poverty, ensuring access to health and education and dealing with so many other problems that the world is facing today is enormous. That is why global attention has now shifted towards bringing as many partners as possible in the development finance landscape. In addition to overseas development assistance by governments and private finance such as foreign direct investment, philanthropic flows from private foundations are recognised as an important source in the area of development co-operation, even though their share is still insignificant. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the share of philanthropic flows from foundations and NGO's own grants was only 6 percent of the total external finance pie in 2012. The progress, however, is noteworthy. Over a period of nine years, the volume of such funds has increased by almost ten times. This is thought to be an underestimation since it is difficult to get actual data on private donations.

The culture of philanthropy is not uncommon in our part of the world. Many educational and religious institutions, hospitals and other infrastructure have been built by wealthy personalities of Bangladesh. Education and medical support to individuals were provided by many. Even today we see similar benevolence of certain affluent families in the country. But whether that has increased

at the same rate as economic prosperity of those families is something to be explored. From only a few rich people during post-independence, we now have a few hundred super rich families whose net worth would be equivalent to millions of dollars. Tax figures of the National Board of Revenue may not be a reflection of the real picture, but their lifestyles are. Many of them can comfortably set up smaller versions of the Rockefeller or the Carnegie Foundation. Of course, there are many who prefer to do charity quietly. But most private donors like to bring their charity to public notice. There is nothing wrong in doing so as long as their money is spent for a good cause and such charity is not used to boost their self-interest or in

has been made by the rich, we find efforts to accumulate resources in our country even in the most primitive manner, so that these can be left behind to be enjoyed by their family members, generations after generations. That is why the arrival of a newborn is celebrated not through sacrifice of wealth, but through more accumulation. How will they give to others if they themselves have to embezzle public money from banks and capital markets to meet their own needs? They have to be adorned with Rolex and Burberry after all. Some of them, of course, following the footsteps of Robin Hood, are trying to give back to the society a part of their stolen money in various forms. We, like



Mark Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla with their newborn daughter Maxima.

AFP PHOTO / COUTESY OF MARK ZUCKERBERG

hope of some favour. But quite often, the spirit of giving gets diluted in the race to getting something in exchange.

A curious mind may ask how many of today's rich in our country have the magnanimity to bequeath 99 percent of their wealth for the welfare of the society. We shouldn't be surprised if we find no one. We have gradually turned into a society where people are judged by their bank balance, not by their quality and honesty. The power of money wipes out the distinction between good and bad.

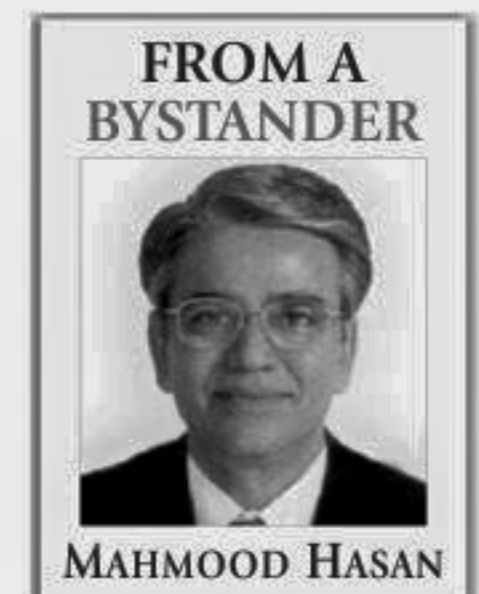
As opposed to giving away almost all of what

cowardly spectators, have to play the role of grateful and appreciative citizens. You will otherwise be branded as an outcast and as unsocial. The fear of being segregated from the rest of the society is ingrained amongst us. Most of us love to follow the trend, but not create or break the trend.

A few years back, a group of neuroscientists in the USA found that the feel-good factor works behind altruism. One wonders how much of this is applicable in our case.

The writer is Research Director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

The Commonwealth needs to be reformed



FROM A BYSTANDER
MAHMOOD HASAN

THE biannual Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHGOM) was hosted by Malta from November 27-29, 2015.

Surprisingly, the conference did not get enough media coverage and passed off unnoticed. The only news that came through was what Queen Elizabeth II did or said during the conference.

The Heads of Governments of 53 Commonwealth countries deliberated upon the theme, "The Commonwealth - Adding Global Value". At the end of their serious (?) deliberations, the leaders issued two documents - the 53-paragraph Final Communiqué and a 13-paragraph Statement on Climate Action.

The Communiqué summarises the deliberations of the leaders under 15 rubrics. Under "Peace and Security," the leaders affirmed that radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism pose a serious threat to the world and called upon members to counter it. The leaders urged member states to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Communiqué observed that migration, if properly managed, can deliver economic and social benefits. The heads reaffirmed their commitment to work together to create an enabling environment to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals. The document is full of normative rhetoric.

The "Statement on Climate Action" expressed deep concern at the threat posed by climate change, which continues to grow. The leaders called for the need of an ambitious agreement at COP 21 in Paris (November 30 - December 11). The leaders welcomed the Commonwealth Green Finance Facility (CGFF) which will support environmental projects in Commonwealth countries. The CGFF will start with a working group bringing together representatives from Australia, Britain, Canada, Malaysia, Nigeria and financial companies

including HSBC and PricewaterhouseCoopers. The \$1 billion facility will be capitalised initially through "green bonds" and is expected to be fully operational by the end of 2016. The leaders, however, refrained from committing themselves to limit CO2 emissions below 2° C.

The meeting also reorganised the 9-member "Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group" (CMAG), which now includes Cyprus, Guyana, India, Kenya, Namibia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Solomon Island and Malta. Composed of foreign ministers of participating countries, CMAG is mandated to uphold the principles of the Commonwealth. It can punish a member state by suspending it from the Commonwealth for violating core

irrelevant and unfamiliar to many member countries. For more than six decades, the organisation defined its objectives and mandates as it moved from summit to summit, until it adopted the Charter in December 2012. The charter identifies 16 core values and principles - for instance democracy, human rights, good governance etc.

Critics describe it as a talking club. Many have been questioning the existence of the "morbid" organisation. What is it good for? "Unreformed, the Commonwealth deserves to die. Improved, it could be rather useful," was the refrain from *The Economist* following controversies surrounding the CHOGM in Colombo in 2013, when several

all the other members are developing countries in need of huge development assistance.

The other criticism is about the leadership of the organisation. Inter-governmental organisations should be led by charismatic leaders who have the ability to bring together leaders of member states for a purpose. The Secretariat is also a deadweight because of its ineffective bureaucracy. Former secretary generals have all spoken of their disappointments about the incompetence of the Secretariat.

Since the organisation is hamstrung by paltry budgets, the CMAG has grown powerful, deciding which member has to be punished for violating Commonwealth principles. Nigeria, Pakistan and Fiji were suspended for overthrowing democratic governments. They, however, were readmitted. Zimbabwe, accused in 2002 of destroying democracy, withdrew in 2003 and never came back. Sri Lanka also came under heavy criticism for its alleged war crimes against the LTTE. The organisation has become more active about democracy, human rights, etc, rather than development. Interestingly, it talks about high ideals but compromises when confronted with reality.

The only time when members feel happy to project themselves as part of the Commonwealth is when the Commonwealth Games come up every four years. The number of medals member countries get becomes a matter of pride. A commentator remarked, "The Commonwealth is a group of nations designed to support international cricket matches."

When the decolonisation process gained momentum at the end of WWII, Britain, eager to maintain relations with its former colonies, created this club. Commonwealth of Nations was formed following the London Declaration of 1949.

This diverse group of countries of 2.2 billion people (one-third of the world population) can do a lot if it is overhauled. To be effective, the Commonwealth has to be reformed. It needs to enhance its budget to strengthen CFIC, get an imaginative Secretary General and take some bold initiatives regarding world trade and climate change.

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary.

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principles.

At the Malta conference, the leaders appointed the sixth Secretary General of the Commonwealth. There were five candidates from Dominica, Botswana, Guyana, Tanzania and Australia. Baroness Patricia Scotland (60) is the first woman to be chosen for the post. Born in Dominica and raised in Britain, she is a former Attorney General of Britain. The unofficial rule is that the nationality of the Secretary General should be from within the Commonwealth. This time it was the turn of the Caribbean. Patricia's candidacy was proposed by Dominica and she will take over from Kamalesh Sharma (India) in April 2016.

The Commonwealth of late has come under criticism for being

leaders skipped the conference.

The significance of the activities of this organisation are no longer felt among many members. The primary reason for this is funding, which determines how far and how deep the organisation can involve itself in a member country. The budget is divided into three separate tranches - the Secretariat Fund, Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) Fund and the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFIC).

The total budget was less than £50 million in 2012. With such small budgets, there is very little the organisation can do for its 53 members with diverse needs. Besides, only eight members - the UK, Canada, Australia, India, Nigeria, New Zealand, Brunei Darussalam and Kenya - are top contributors to the CFIC. Almost