

## Hassles of Benapole - Jessore road travel

What is the logic of seven-layered checking?

THAT people travelling on road between Benapole border and Jessore should be subjected to checks not once or twice but as many as seven times, thrice by the BGB and four times by the police, defies logic. And what is more galling is that even those that have come across the border and have gone through customs checks should have to suffer the same torture. This in spite of the fact that there are no rules that permit law enforcing agencies to subject passport holders to random checks after they have gone through the relevant procedures at the customs and immigration, except on specific information.

The matter has come to our attention following the recent report of the travails of an expatriate Bangladeshi couple at the hands of the police on that road. Presumably, it is not a one-off case but an everyday occurrence. And reportedly, the check post was illegal, something that the higher authorities were, surprisingly, oblivious about!

Yes it is the duty of the BGB and police to check and discourage smuggling and ensure our safety, but BGB's writ runs inside the 5 kilometres limit from the border. However, we fail to understand why the same person should be subjected to search thrice by the same agency.

The stories that come out from the suffering passengers suggest that the motive behind the search is not quite the concern for security or to stop smuggling. Had that been so, then some human-friendly ways could have been devised by the agencies concerned to ensure that the concerns for security and smuggling were addressed along with ensuring the comfort of the travelers.

## Ekushey Book Fair

Ensure foolproof security

WE appreciate the move by Bangla Academy to provide security to the *Amar Ekushey Grontho Mela* through a number of measures including the setting up of two Rab camps, multiple checkpoints and watchtowers and banning of hawkers from entering the fair premises. We hope that these steps prove to be adequate to prevent any untoward incident during the fair which, since its inception in 1984, has grown into the largest book fair of the country and engages the community throughout the month of February. Sadly, this is also where writer-blogger Avijit Roy was hacked to death last year and Professor Humayun Azad brutally attacked in 2004.

It is, therefore, imperative that this year the authorities leave no stone unturned to provide safety and security to the public who have the right to participate freely in an event that is so intrinsically linked to our glorious language movement.

The key to assuring a safe and comfortable environment for large crowds like in the book fair is the planning for their management. We hope that the law enforcement authorities have done their homework by taking into account all elements of such a large event especially the significance of the fair, characteristics of the facility, size and demeanour of the crowd, methods of entrance, communications, crowd control and queuing. Volunteers can also serve as an effective buffer between uniformed security and the public in tense situations.

Last but not least, we call upon the public to stay vigilant about any trouble monger.

## COMMENTS

**"Police should now start using body-cam"**

(January 29, 2016)

Md Shawkat Hossain

The idea is good, but the camera should be hidden within the uniform with audio recording like in the developed countries.

Faisal Rahman Khan

This is not the solution, if a policeman wants to take bribe, then he'll find a way.

Lotus Lenin

Watchdogs also needs to be watched and should work under surveillance.

Foyzal Kabir Abir

Who will keep the records of videos?

Nurul Alam Anik

Good question. The video records should be broadcast and saved in a server.

Md Ferdous Amin

This should have been done 5 years ago.

Saleem

It is a good initiative.

Md Istiak Uddin

# CORRUPTION HURTS

MACRO MIRROR



FAHMIDA KHATUN

AFTER experiencing many ups and downs over the last four plus decades, the economy of Bangladesh has transformed into a promising one on many accounts. This is evident not only through higher economic growth, but also through less volatile economic growth. Despite being a least developed country, the volatility of long-term economic growth in Bangladesh has been lower than many developing countries. Also, notwithstanding various shocks such as the global financial crisis of 2007-08, domestic political uncertainty and frequent weather variability, the country has been able to hold on to its growth momentum during the last decade.

The impetus of higher economic growth in Bangladesh has come from various enablers, including domestic regulatory policies and global linkages. A favourable policy environment and continuity of policies have been the key factors behind the strong growth of Bangladesh. Domestic regulatory measures have been coupled with global policies and institutions that contributed to economic transformation in the country. For example, market access by a number of developed countries has boosted readymade garments export from Bangladesh. Access to the global labour market by Bangladeshi workers has been a source of increased national savings. Remittances have created a vibrant rural economy, as the families of remitters now have more disposable income. Thus, increased amount of investible resources generated through the incomes of the export-oriented RMG sector and remittance of migrant workers have contributed to the sustainability of a higher growth in the country.

However, there are a number of binding constraints that hinder faster development, which range from infrastructural deficiency to technological limitations to administrative complexities. The Seventh Five Year Plan (2016-2020) of the country emphasises on infrastructure as a critical development priority towards fulfilling the government's vision of becoming a middle income country. In the past, a number of mega projects in the transport and communications sector have acted as a boost for development. For example, the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge has connected the eastern and western parts of Bangladesh. As a result, inter-regional trade in the country has improved. This infrastructure has contributed to stimulate economic growth by facilitating inter-regional, cross-river transport of passengers and freights, and transmission of natural gas, telecommunication and electricity.

Technology has contributed to improve efficiency and alleviate poverty in recent times. Automation in banks, ports and other offices has improved the quality

of services and reduced the time lag in transactions. This has also facilitated exports. Increased access to technology has created income opportunities for the young population. The use of mobile telecommunication in the development sector has brought spectacular results in remote villages of Bangladesh and helped promote inclusive growth. Farmers are now able to receive market information through mobile services. A large number of women enjoy the services provided by mobile technology. The demand for technology is high in all spheres of administrative activities as well. It can be used as a tool for fighting corruption, a problem we are grappling with.

Recent figures of Transparency International show that the Corruption Perception Index remained unchanged in 2015. Bangladesh scored 25 out of 100, which is the same as that in 2014. In terms of ranking, Bangladesh's position is 13th from the

institutions which underwent reforms. But those reform initiatives did not result in much improvement in economic governance.

Reforms of the public administration remain an unfinished agenda till date. Though the government has expressed its willingness to improve transparency and accountability in public administration, substantive initiatives have not been undertaken, except for a new pay scale for government officials. But the major task for cracking down on corruption is to establish accountability.

Another crucial area of reform is strengthening the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). The creation of ACC in 2004 was part of donor conditionality that a watchdog body be formed which would be independent of government influence. Many donors tied their financial support with the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures of the government. However, the institution did not receive necessary



bottom among 168 countries that were listed in the ranking of corruption. Though such index creates a lot of debate in our country, the prevalence of corruption and its negative role in the economy cannot be denied. The finance minister himself refers to corruption time and again. Sometime back, he also mentioned that 2-3 percent of our GDP is lost due to corruption.

Stamping out corruption needs improvement of governance across all sectors. Institutional reform is crucial to achieve this. The first generation economic reform measures in Bangladesh led to the opening up of its economy in the 1990s. But they were not coupled with reforms and strengthening of institutions at that time. During the following decades, a few regulatory and institutional reforms were undertaken to accelerate economic growth, albeit on a limited scale. The banking sector is one of those

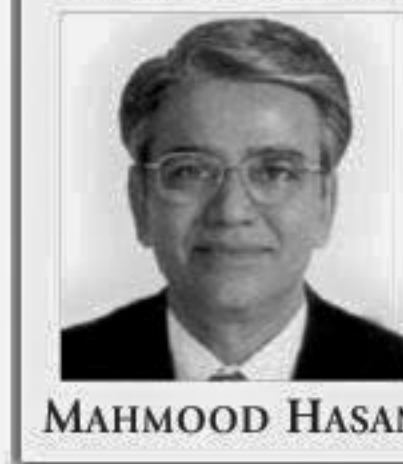
legal, administrative and institutional support from subsequent governments. As a result, it is unable to discharge its responsibility without political pressure. The autonomy of the organisation is also constrained by inadequate financial and human resources. The Sixth Five Year Plan and the Perspective Plan of the country referred to the strengthening of ACC, so that it can function independently. This is yet to be achieved.

Economic development of Bangladesh has so far been autonomous of governance to a large extent. However, to improve the efficiency of its development efforts, and to propel economic growth, corruption has to be rooted out. Corruption maintains the status quo and thus stops the wheel of development from moving forward.

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

## Myanmar gets ready for NLD government

FROM A BYSTANDER



MAHMOOD HASAN

Aung San Suu Kyi.

The November 8, 2015 general elections in Myanmar had returned Suu Kyi's NLD with a massive mandate. The 2008 Constitution of the country reserves 25 percent of the seats for the military in each of the two houses. Out of 440 seats in lower house, 110 seats have gone to military appointees. NLD won 255 seats out of the remaining 330, which were up for election. The incumbent Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) managed only 30 seats; the remaining 45 going to other parties. In the 224-seat upper house, 56 were taken by unelected soldiers, leaving 168 seats for election. NLD secured 135 seats, USDP got 11 seats and other parties took 22 seats.

The new Parliament will go into session on February 1, 2016, when the process of electing the new president and key posts of the parliament will be completed. The names of the elected MPs have already been announced by the Election Commission. With the recent announcement of names of the military MPs, which includes two major generals, the formation of the new legislature is complete. Fifty years of military rule will come to an end when the new government takes office from March 2016.

The election of the president will go through an interesting process. The elected members of the upper house and the lower house will each nominate a

candidate. The unelected military MPs of the two houses will nominate one candidate. Among the three candidates whoever gets majority of votes of the two houses combined will become the next president. The two other candidates will become vice-presidents.

The NLD nominations for the Parliament posts have been made keeping in mind ethnic sensitivities and representations. Win Myint, representing Burmese ethnic majority, will be the speaker of the lower house. His deputy will be T Khun Myat, an ethnic Kachin and member of USDP. The speaker of the upper house will be Win Khaing Than, an ethnic Karen, while his deputy will be Arakanese Aye Thar Aung from Arakan National Party. Suu Kyi's strategy

hailed the election as a "triumph for all of Myanmar's people". He promised to help the new government with the transition process. Speaking on USDP's defeat, Thein Sein said that his party had not launched reforms in order to hold on to power. Thein Sein, a retired general, deserves credit for being instrumental in reforming the political process that eventually led to credible elections in November 2015.

Aung San Suu Kyi (70) knows that she cannot become president because of a Constitutional bar, and considering that there are several challenges in the transition process. She has been meeting Army Chief General Min Aung Hlaing and President Thein Sein to discuss a smooth transfer of power. She also met

board. Given the structure of the Parliament and the political alignment, the military MPs are likely to behave like an opposition party.

Suu Kyi's election victory has come with tremendous expectations from the people, who want quick economic development and political freedom. The major challenge for Suu Kyi is to bring the different separatist ethnic groups to a peace process as quickly as possible. Procrastination in dealing with ethnic wars will give the military an opportunity to meddle in the affairs of the government.

According to the Constitution, three important ministries of the government - defence, home affairs and border control - will not go to NLD ministers but will remain under army control. To further strengthen the army's role, Thein Sein has decided to merge the Ministries of Immigration and Population with the Ministry of Home Affairs. This will make the ministries even more powerful, particularly because government bureaucracy is mostly manned by military officials.

From the way the power transfer process is moving, it is clear that Suu Kyi is making compromises to build trust with the anxious military. Suu Kyi does not want to curb the military's power; she wants to bring them under civilian control. Even after winning convincingly, she is negotiating with the military for transfer of state power, as she does not intend to rock the boat too much, too soon. Suu Kyi does not want a repeat of the 1990 election when the military refused to transfer power.

It is clear that the NLD government is not going to get full powers - it will have to share it with the military. It will be what the Tatmadaw calls a "disciplined democracy".

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary.

**Clearly there is lack of confidence in the armed forces. The military is suspicious that the new civilian government may resort to vengeance and throw some of the generals behind bars.**

is to build a broad based support for her government.

In a statement before the elections, Suu Kyi said, "I'll be above the president [who] will be told exactly what he can do". There are some speculations that Suu Kyi's personal physician Tin Myo Win (64), former political prisoner and her confidante, may be nominated to become the next president. Whether the military will accept a proxy president is not clear at this stage. Suu Kyi seems to be influenced by the Indian Congress-led UPA government where Congress chairperson Sonia Gandhi called the shots.

President Thein Sein, in his last address to the outgoing legislature, has

strongman Than Shwe (82), former president and head of USDP, who is still very powerful and wields considerable influence over state affairs.

Clearly there is lack of confidence in the armed forces. The military is suspicious that the new civilian government may resort to vengeance and throw some of the generals behind bars. Hence, the safety clause in the Constitution - 25 percent seats will be reserved for the military. The Constitution stipulates that to amend it, three-fourth majority will be required in both houses of the Parliament. This means that since NLD does not have 75 percent seats - to pass any amendment, the military MPs will have to be on

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Adieu, JFR Jacobs

I would like to appreciate The Daily Star's coverage of Lt. Gen. JFR Jacob highlighting his contribution in bringing about a swift end to our War of Liberation.

Rest in eternal peace, our dear friend. You have earned the respect of a grateful nation.

Engr. ABM Nurul Islam  
Gulshan-2, Dhaka



### Take care of ailing family members

Blessed are those who are well and have no serious disease or physical disorder. But eventually all of us will grow old and start having health problems. In many families, I have seen that if someone falls ill, others treat him or her like a burden. Family members should share the pain

and the suffering of the patient with love and empathy. That will greatly reduce the physical and mental trauma patients often go through and restore the normal lifestyle of the family.

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