

Proliferation of teen gangs

Manifestation of a social malaise

A report in this daily yesterday shed light on the shocking proliferation of teen gangs in Uttara where over two dozens of these groups operate. On January 6, Adnan, a fourteen-year-old boy, was beaten to death by a few local boys in Uttara as a result of their rivalry. Many others have also been victimised by these 'teen gangs', including a small trader who had to get 122 stitches on his body which bears the marks of assault with sharp weapons. Violent activities and graffiti of gang names scrawled across walls depict the audacious attitude of these people, whose leaders are either college dropouts or local thugs.

What we are witnessing are the ramifications of a frustrated youth population, 25 percent of whom, between the ages of 15 and 29, remain inactive, i.e. they are neither in the education nor economic cycle. It is also compelled by the need to identify with a particular band. Furthermore, the glaring lack of cultural centres, libraries and public spaces such as parks and squares have paved the way over time for these youths to easily go astray and become involved in what seems to be a growing ominous culture.

This is a dangerous trend and the government should recognise it as such. There is an urgent need to create more opportunities for the youth population, which this paper has repeatedly voiced. Law enforcement agencies must also locate these gang members and bring their criminal activities to a halt before it spirals out of control. This is a wake-up call for parents to establish open communication with their children, attend to their needs and better monitor their activities.

Who ensures fire safety in markets?

City corporations have to step in

A report in this newspaper has revealed that over 20 markets belonging to the two city corporations are woefully lacking in effective fire safety equipment on their premises. The issue of fighting fire came to the fore during the outbreak of fire that went on for most of a day in the Gulshan 1 kitchen market that gutted more than 300 shops. Now, while traders, shop owners and corporations trade blame on one another, it is time we had shared responsibility. Why not leave it to corporations to install fire safety equipment in markets as per requirement (the cost of which will be borne by building owners) while it be the job of shop owners' associations at these markets to maintain the equipment?

We are all silent spectators every time a fire breaks out at these multi-storied markets, but it is the ordinary people who get caught up when a fire rages out of control. And despite repeated promises by authorities that substantive action will be taken after each incident, we seldom find any real effort to tackle the situation. If building owners do not maintain firefighting equipment then they should be penalised heavily. Since city corporations give permits to construct buildings, they, in conjunction with the fire service department and WASA, are the best to specify what sort of equipment must be installed in these markets. This is not rocket science. Dhaka is not the only city in the world to have multi-storied markets. But this continuous shifting of blame is hardly conducive to solving the fiery problem.

RAB's methods need reevaluation

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING


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THE issue of reassessing RAB's operation was dwelt on in these very columns when the gruesome murders came to light in April 2014. The verdict in the seven-murder case compels one to do so again. And one must respectfully take issue with the home minister when he says, as reported, that RAB will run the way it has been operating and that there is no need for changes within it.

It was by an act of Providence, and rank bad luck of the killers, that the dead bodies were discovered by some locals, found floating in the river. It was perhaps nature's way of expressing its resentment at the most dastardly act of cruelty, and caused the bodies to surface despite all the precautions taken by the killers to ensure that they did not. And had they not been discovered, the seven would have been added to the long list of 'missing' and these RAB officers would have continued with their ways, acting as hired killers in exchange for money.

The government is calling it a victory for the rule of law, and nobody can contest that. And we hope that the government would, by the same token, and with the same promptness that it claimed credit for the 'victory of the rule of law', acknowledge its inability to solve many sensitive as well as high profile murder cases, where investigations are still pending and where the list of 'missing' and encounter deaths is growing longer and longer without any satisfactory answer from the law enforcing agencies.

That said, it was not as if there was no subtle effort to foot-drag on the case needing the orders of the High Court for the main accused to be taken into custody. It is remarkable that the three sacked military officers were roaming free with the allegations on them for the murders, for almost a year after the commission of the crime, and this led to all sorts of speculation. And the fact that some of the culprits spent most of the trial period in sick bay in public hospitals, there were grounds to fear that attempts might be made to tamper with the case. Happily, the case was spared the tortuous and lengthy trial and belying all

apprehensions that there might be soft-peddling of the legal process, the verdict came very quickly. It is the role of the High Court and the effort of the trial judge that had been primarily responsible for the trial to be completed within the time that it was. The conduct of the trial, and its quick conclusion have certainly enhanced people's trust in the legal procedure.

However, the issue compels a relook at the operations and staffing policy of RAB, and the oversight mechanism of the force, since the terms of reference of

how many of the 'missing' are the victims of errant RAB officers, who may have used their clout in return for money. The Narayanganj murders are a case in point. Reportedly, there are allegations of many disappearances against the former CO of RAB-11, and according to one newspaper, his headquarters was a veritable slaughterhouse.

It is surprising that given the intricacy of the Narayanganj killing operation, which initially was not expected to be so because there was supposed to be

the existing law regulating professional activities of the law enforcing agencies including RAB. We do not know if such laws have been changed with regard to the professional activities of RAB.

That RAB has drawn flak as an organisation is not due entirely to its own acts of commission or omission. As we have said before, patronisation of crime, politicisation of the law enforcing agencies, using it against political opponents, and the attempt to combat crime by circumventing the legal and judicial process by successive



Nur Hossain, right, a convict in the Narayanganj seven-murder case, along with another convict inside a prison van before they were taken back to jail on January 16.

PHOTO: STAR

RAB, to my understanding, having undergone a change from what the initial intention behind forming the force was. It has moved away from the specialised or 'elite' task and has got involved in day to day law and order problem like the police, and has in effect supplanted the police instead of supplementing it. Was that the initial intention? The expanded TOR have allowed the RAB officers, at the lower levels particularly, to exceed their remit, ill-defined as they are, and engage in activities with the knowledge of the higher authorities. And one wonders

only one target, and the rest were unfortunate victims of circumstances, the perpetrators managed to keep the higher authorities in the dark. And this had exposed the severe systematic flaw of the force. And it also shows how greed can transform persons belonging to a well-trained force into vicious individuals. But perhaps a sense of impunity had a lot to do with the actions of the officers and men of this unit. And this was the reason why the High Court was pleased to issue a rule upon the government on March 7, 2015 to explain why it should not be directed to amend

governments are the real problems that have to be addressed. RAB is but the manifestation of the larger problem that the nation is beset with.

Therefore, apart from strengthening the internal oversight mechanism and defining clearly its terms of reference through laws it must also be freed of political interference. Otherwise, Narayanganj will be repeated and RAB's achievements, of which there are many, will continue to be overshadowed by such unwarranted events.

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Is globalisation reversible?

OPEN SKY


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OVER every summer, I leave the US to visit my village in Nalitabari where I look after construction work and run an online class for the students of mainly upstate New York. This is called globalisation. Sometimes I go to the Garo Hills branching from Meghalaya, or travel by boat on the river of Vogai while responding to important emails or checking my balance after a mobile transaction – a scene beyond imagination in Bangladesh some 30 years back. All thanks to globalisation.

Of late, we are wasting more and more energy carrying out a confused propaganda against globalisation, claiming that it is in reverse gear. However, it never was and it never will be. The issue is how we see and define globalisation. The main strength of globalisation comes from technology that does not regress – whether we like it or not. The two major events on the global stage last year, Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, seem to have once again solidified the conviction of those who have been anti-globalisation since long. But that is a misinterpretation of these two victories,

globalisation, some of whom are Nobel laureates. Of course, they present facts but often these facts are honey-coated with their biases and prejudice. But globalisation has many wings; it is a comprehensive, complex dynamic. And only labour migration cannot explain the whole story. Among other dominant determinants are capital, technology, knowledge, and above all human

perish. Endicott, the birthplace of IBM, saw jobs being outsourced to China and India, and could do nothing to hold them back, because the company treated the whole world as a single village for the sake of greater output and profit. Basic economic laws have empowered globalisation to keep on moving. No mighty commander was able to dictate

him are no longer a part of this world order.

Noted Indian economist Jagdish Bhagwati initially believed in socialist closed-type planning, but later turned into a globalisation guru. His student and Nobel Laureate of Economics Paul Krugman believes that the good side of the big monopolistic competition that has spread over the world can guarantee lowest prices. Hence, fighting Walmart becomes almost impossible for local small businesses.

Some of us might be confused to see a drop in inter-country labour migration, which we immediately credit to a reversal of globalisation. New apps of Microsoft in Seattle can instantly be downloaded in Rangamati. But capital movements depend on how we handle a myriad of rules and regulations that we have bureaucratically built over time. The movement of labour is even more complicated, and therefore, the slowest. Capital does not have any choice, but workers have religion, taste, language barriers, and above all, family bonds. Hence, uprooting workers from one culture and asking them to adopt another is difficult. Capital from one country and workstations at various countries build a style, which makes globalisation even more sustainable today.

In the early 1990s, many were opposed to three terms: globalisation, liberalisation, and free market economy. Some critics bundle all three items together and associate a similar (negative) connotation to all of them. Needless to mention, all three terms differ slightly in their meaning. Liberalisation mainly refers to the easing of trade; the main rationale of a free market economy is efficient pricing; but globalisation mainly refers to global travelling of capital, labour, and technology – a prerequisite that eases global integration of production and consumption. Tagore's hope for a borderless world is definitely far from reality, but inter-country dependence, as proposed by David Ricardo's theory of comparative advantage, is inevitable – and so is globalisation.

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which mainly banked on anti-immigration sentiments and some mistakes in state policies of the respective governments.

Many critics are now extremely hyperactive in their fight against



psychology that helps us understand and learn about different cultures. Capital flows from one side of the globe to the other in a couple of seconds, and so do knowledge and technology. Resisting this phenomenon by a simple display of 'likes' or 'dislikes' is nearly impossible.

But why would we resist globalisation? It goes against the basic Darwinian motion of evolution. No one would like to get back to the age of clumsy typewriters when computers are readily available. I witnessed the death of two upstate New York cities, Endicott and Cortland, because they could not swim upstream against globalisation and the principles of profit maximisation. Cortland was noted as the origin of a world-class typewriter company, Smith Corona, whose slogan was 'commitment for excellence.' But any excellence that is myopic or does not figure in technological growth is doomed to

this march. Had it been possible for any force to block this forward motion, the US could have done that to save millions of jobs outsourced to other countries in the last 20 years. And a large segment of US businesses would rather outsource their jobs to further their cost-lowering drive.

It is better to brainstorm which institutions we need to build to face the growing challenges of globalisation rather than blindly believe that some 'saviours' will reverse globalisation to protect the inefficient local mills and factories. Businesses are the main force behind global integration. Capital travels from one country to another for the sake of a better interest rate. Modern *kabuliwalas* are around and we need to deal with them for direct portfolio investment. There is no point in waiting for the kind-hearted *kabuliwala* of a Rabindranath Tagore story; people like

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Mymensingh in dire need of reform

I cannot stress enough on the horrible state of the environment in Mymensingh city. All kinds of waste, including medical waste, are discharged beside the Mymensingh-Netrokona highway near the metropolis. The extreme air pollution makes it almost impossible to live and travel in the local areas. These factors have been causing all sorts of illnesses among the civilians, from diarrhea to other respiratory and airborne diseases.

I urge the local authorities to take immediate redress and relieve us from this suffering.

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Habiganj needs more vegetables

Bangladesh has experienced fast growth in its vegetable cultivation, especially in Dhaka and Chittagong districts. Thanks to Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC), Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) and the farmers in particular, city dwellers have access to various vegetables for their meals around the year. However, a recent trip to Habiganj revealed to me the stark dearth of vegetable growth in areas beyond Narsingdi, despite winter being the most intensive season for growing vegetables in Bangladesh.

Under these circumstances, the BADC and DAE should take the initiative to supply seed and other such inputs, and motivate farmers to grow more vegetables in the Habiganj district.

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Dhaka