

Police Week – a time for introspection

Make the force people-oriented

THE five day Police Week 2017 started yesterday with much festivity and enthusiasm among the police force. While we applaud the 132 police officers and constables who have been awarded for their commendable work and dedication, we cannot help but point out that this occasion is ideal for some introspection within the force and also those who are supposed to be overseeing its functions. This is because the public perception of the police is at a significantly low level stemming from the blatant politicisation of this vital component of governance and public security.

There is, unfortunately, politicisation in both recruitment and in the way the police force is used by the ruling party of the day, and this unsavoury tradition has lingered through consecutive regimes. Added to that is the inadequate pay and perks of the police at the lower and middle rungs of the ladder resulting in disgruntlement and incentivising corrupt practices.

The ultimate consequence of these anomalies is a lack of accountability of the force allowing errant members to abuse power. Allegations of extortion, torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings have blemished the image of this crucial force and overshadowed all the good work that it members do. Political appointments also compromise the quality of candidates and deprive the worthy ones who could have been assets to the organisation.

The police are supposed to be the protectors of the state and the people. Instead, they often evoke fear, resentment and mistrust among the public. We want a people-oriented, modern police force, and for that the first thing that needs to be done is to de-politicise it and make it accountable to the public. Only then will people have confidence in its members rather than fear.

Extracurricular activities in schools

Translate PM's call on ground

WE welcome the PM's statement that schools should give extracurricular activities as much importance as studies. The comment is indeed timely for it has come at a time when very few open spaces have been left for recreational purposes for children.

Most of the private schools in big cities lack play-ground, as a result of which sport remains absent in the life of most of the students. There is hardly any government-run facility for track and field and other sporting events. Not only that, some major playgrounds are being encroached upon, depriving the children of the outdoor activities necessary to build a healthy and wise nation.

While we have burdened the students with books, we have squeezed the other avenues through which children can make their hidden talents flourish. Worse still, a society with a huge youth population like ours is susceptible to disruptions if it does not channel the energy of its youths into the right path.

We believe that the PM's comments need to be followed through with actions on the ground. It is critically important to revive the club culture at schools so that students can pursue their areas of interest such as debate, trekking and philately. Bangladesh National Cadet Corps (BNCC) and Scout and Cubs should have branches in all educational institutions and a student's participation in them can be made mandatory. Government-run sport bodies must hold inter-school tournaments in all disciplines, and sport, especially track and field, needs to be incorporated into the school curricula. On top of it all, it is important to create a child-friendly sporting infrastructure.

ROHINGYA PERSECUTION IN MYANMAR

Sign of hope, or business as usual?

THE OVERTON WINDOW



ERESH OMAR JAMAL

THE Rohingyas are a people struck by tragedy. Persecuted in their home country, Myanmar, over 65,000 of them have fled to Bangladesh between October 9, 2016, and January 5, 2017, according to a report from the United Nations Office of Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs. Every day, as reported by The Daily Star, scores of Rohingya people, mostly women and children, are seen dotting a 15 kilometre stretch of road from Ukha to Teknaf in Cox's Bazar.

Having barely escaped with their lives leaving all their belongings, if any, behind, they are seen begging on and around the roads there. Hoping for someone to stop for a moment, sympathise with their sufferings and lend them some assistance, however trivial it may be.

The persecution of Rohingyas in Myanmar is, of course, nothing new. It has been going on for quite a while now. But ever since the attacks on Myanmar's border guard posts on October 9, 2016, it has again escalated. This is obvious from the fact that, on average, over 1,000 Rohingyas have been entering Bangladesh every day since late last year, while the previous rate of Rohingya influx was 50 a day.

From the looks of various reports concerning the latest round of crackdown on the Rohingya people, it seems that some sections of the Myanmar authority have not been shy in handing out collective punishment to all Rohingyas, regardless of their innocence or guilt.

Although some had expected things to improve for the Rohingyas under the stewardship of Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, no such signs are currently visible. In fact, many have gone so far as to criticise her for her nonchalant attitude towards the sufferings of the Rohingyas, particularly her reluctance to condemn the attacks on occasions and for playing them down at times.

And this has been the official stance of the Myanmar government for years now - to deny that the Rohingyas are being persecuted as severely as reports suggest. And in all honesty, with the rest of the world being busy dealing with other problems, it has served them well in avoiding taking any responsibility for the atrocities that have been committed against the Rohingyas.

But for how long can the government of Myanmar insist that the Rohingyas are not being persecuted mercilessly? For how long will people avoid asking: "Why then are Rohingyas fleeing Myanmar, risking their lives to resort to begging on the streets of Bangladesh or elsewhere"? Surely begging is not a profession many would take up willingly.

Even the UN, which some believe, has played a less than impressive role in helping to find a solution to the Rohingya crisis, seems to have lost its patience with the Myanmar government. The UN Human Rights envoy to Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, for example, said at a news

briefing in Yangon that the Myanmar government would "appear less and less credible" if it continues being defensive in response to the allegations of persistent human rights violations against Rohingyas (UN rights envoy: Myanmar losing credibility, Bangkok Post, January 21).

Furthermore, shifting from the UN's routine position, she said: "I must remind again that these attacks took place in the context of decades of systematic and institutionalised discrimination against the Rohingya population." Some strong words indeed, which, members of international observant groups have, unfortunately, failed to use with regards to the persecution of Rohingyas in the past.

With such strong words coming out even from within the ranks of the UN, is it a sign of hope for the

to avoid a repeat of the 2015 'boat people' crisis", referring to the thousands of Rohingyas who fled Myanmar in boats for Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand in 2015.

Finally, he urged on the whole of South Asia to unite in an attempt to resolve the crisis, warning that it may otherwise explode into something much bigger — such as increasing petty crimes, human trafficking and various forms of militancy — which will obviously harm the region as a whole. But for various geostrategic reasons, many leaders in South Asia have so far refused to condemn the government of Myanmar, despite the possible long term dangers its policies may pose to their respective countries.

But with the passing of time, it is becoming clearer by the day that things cannot be allowed to continue as



Residents displaced by conflict flee from Maungdaw in the Rakhine State on October 13, 2016.

PHOTO: AFP

Rohingyas? Will the international community finally take the matter as seriously as it should have all along? It will, of course, be unfair to include all nations under that umbrella. The Malaysian Prime Minister, for example, has already condemned the handling of Rohingyas by the Myanmar government quite severely.

He has even gone so far as to push "the Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the world's largest Muslim intergovernmental organisation, to apply pressure on Myanmar to end the persecution and killing of ethnic Muslim Rohingyas in the country" (Myanmar urged to end persecution of Rohingya, Bangkok Post, January 19). Encouragingly, he said: "I believe I speak for all neighbouring countries when I say that we want

usual. It is time for the other leaders of the region to realise that and heed the warning of the Malaysian Prime Minister and condemn the atrocities being committed against the Rohingyas.

Although one could take the comments made by the UN Human Rights envoy to Myanmar as an encouraging sign, what is needed is for the leaders of South Asia to solve the problem through dialogue before it gets much bigger and leads to many more atrocities than what has already been witnessed. It is a challenge which must be faced head on, rather than be criminally avoided, as it has been, despite the tragic consequences.

The writer is a member of the Editorial team at The Daily Star.



Six-point Asean secrets Trump should know

KAVI CHONGKITTAVORN

NEW United States President Donald Trump must be "fantastically" happy with a "wonderful" Asean because it is the only "great" regional organisation that has no military might and has not been at war. The problem is, he might not know about the grouping at all.

Here is a six-point dossier on the 50-year old Asean and its top secrets.

First, Asean is not too weak and is not too strong as a regional organisation. It was established in 1967 out of a desire to prevent conflicts and wars and to promote peace and stability. After three days of "sport-shirt" diplomacy in Bang Saen in August five decades ago, as former Philippine President Fidel Ramos described it, the foreign ministers from the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore signed the Bangkok Declaration.

This 752-word document, excluding their long names, has saved the region from the scourges of many potential wars.

Like the European Union, Asean should be a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize in the coming decade, given its long and impressive stretch of peace and stability. Well, the US has one less region to worry about.

Second, Asean members talk a lot

meetings.

On an average day, at least two or three meetings are being held. That makes it approximately 1,200 annually. Last year, Laos cut it down to less than 1,000 meetings.

The Asean members discuss and consult a lot until they reach a consensus — very few organisations have that kind of perseverance.

It is an open secret that sometimes when Asean members agree they do so not because they thought it was the best

They have to be sure all promises could be delivered. Failure is not an option.

Quite often, outsiders do not understand the Asean way of handling challenges, whether they are disruptive or longstanding issues. In short, slow but sure is a preferred approach.

Fourth, Asean is not a military alliance akin to the Northern Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). So, Asean is not taking any advantage of the US and it is an important US strategic partnership - a

for American people. Asean is the fourth largest trade of the US worth about USD226 billion in 2015. And the US companies are the biggest beneficiaries of the grouping's prosperity and modern lifestyle. More and more US companies want to invest in Asean, not stay away.

In 2014, they pumped in nearly US\$25 billion.

With economies of new Asean members such as Vietnam and Myanmar growing, investment opportunity will augment even more.

As a group, Asean is Asia's third-largest economy after China and Japan, and the seventh-largest in the world with a combined GDP of USD 2.4 trillion. By 2030, it could be the fourth largest in the world.

Today, Asean has a total population of 646,352,702 persons and over 65 per cent are under 35 years old. Under the Obama administration, the US has been cleverly engaged in winning hearts and minds of the Asean youngsters. The Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative is an inexpensive programme to promote the networking of people-to-people ties that will keep Asean-US ties in the hands of future generation.

Sixth, each year Asean hosts one of the world's most important leader-only security forum, known as the East Asia Summit (EAS).

Leaders from Asean and dialogue partners, including the US, China, Russia, Japan and India will to the capital of Asean chair to forge common positions on critical global issues such as epidemics, terrorism and climate change.

This forum is gradually becoming more dynamic and interactive, which could in the future transform into a new regional architecture.

If Trump decides not to attend the EAS at the Clark Airbase (he can easily find an excuse given his caliber) during his first year of presidency, it would be a big loss to US security interests. Other participants are eager as always to inject their ideas and energy into the emerging security framework.

This is a series of columns on global affairs written by top editors and senior writers from members of the Asia News Network and published in newspapers across the region.

The writer is a former Assistant Group Editor of Nation Media Group, publisher of the English-language daily, The Nation, Thailand.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

The High Court must protect the toiling masses

Tolls on various roads and streets are being taken forcefully from rickshaw van and auto-rickshaw drivers. Needless to say, this malpractice puts further pressure on a socio-economic group that is already struggling for its livelihood.

Article 14 of our constitution says, "It shall be a fundamental responsibility of the State to emancipate the toiling masses — the peasants and workers — and back-ward sections of the people from all forms of exploitation." I, on behalf of these downtrodden and poverty-stricken people, humbly appeal to our Honourable High Court Division to implement rules to effectively put a stop to this illegal practice.

Md. Golam Azam
Gurudaspur, Natore

How can students achieve quality education?

It is a matter of concern that a large number of teachers in Bangladesh lack the proper quality, skills, and training for their teaching practices. The students mostly depend on guidebooks and coaching centres with the aim of passing exams, and are therefore deprived of genuine quality education from an early age.

Technical education must be implemented by teaching students using a more practical, hands-on approach. Their dependency on guidebooks and coaching centres should be broken. The Education Ministry should take essential steps to create more training opportunities for instructors and improve our education system.

Toufik Ahmed
Department of International Relations,
Rajshahi University

If Trump decides not to attend the EAS at the Clark Airbase during his first year of presidency, it would be a big loss to US security interests.

among themselves. Outsiders often describe the regional grouping as a talk shop. Indeed, it is. But that is nothing to be ashamed of. Those talks have not been in vain as they have effectively prevented wars and promoted cooperation.

There would be less talks in the future, meaning fewer meetings, if the current Asean chairmanship, the Philippines, has its way. Manila wants to streamline Asean

solution but rather it was the lowest denominator that all members would accept.

In Indonesia, it is called *mushiwara* or the art of bringing everybody together to make decisions by consensus rather than choosing winners and losers, which has helped Asean to survive without any "exit" from the 10-member grouping.

Asean seldom says "you are fired" because it prefers to say "you are hired" — to be inclusive and people-centered.

Third, Asean has a long standing tradition - it does not promise what it cannot deliver. It is a bit different from Trump's style of leadership. Say it out loud first and then follow-up on those promises. In Asean, action speaks louder than words — that is the reason the regional grouping has so many action plans. For the Asean Vision 2025, a total of 571 action plans have been identified for the next 10 years.

That explains why Asean goes slow before any decision is reached.

