

IPU Conference in Dhaka

A landmark event for the country

It is a matter of pride for Bangladesh to host the largest gathering of parliamentarians from abroad, for the five-day Inter-Parliamentary Union conference. We warmly welcome the delegates and hope they will carry back good memories of our country. The focus of the conference is on ways and means to end political and economic inequality for upholding democracy and human rights. There could not have been a more relevant issue than this since, regrettably, democracy today finds itself increasingly under duress with more elected regimes failing to uphold democracy. It is difficult to argue with those who contend that the greatest threat to democracy is not 'autocracy' but 'illiberal democracy'.

But that said, we hope the IPU Conference would be able to highlight the centrality of the parliament in the good governance of the country. What needs to be highlighted is that there is more to democracy than elections only. Regrettably, of all the democratic institutions and practices, elections are seen as the be-all and end-all of democracy. The focus should be equally on the body of people who fill the House of the People, the MPs, their quality and their output. While the parliament is accountable to the people, how do we hold MPs accountable to those who have voted them to office? It is said that while MPs claim to represent the people, in effect they become the representatives of the party only.

We hope that the Conference will also be able to flag the point that popular vote does not justify a majoritarian steamroller, and unless elections are free and fair they will lose their relevance to the people.

Jaywalking policemen

When will we learn?

THE number of reports and editorials over the years we have published about jaywalking, especially on the Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, is staggering. In 2015, we wrote about a drive by the authorities to stop this practice of crossing the road through busy traffic instead of taking the over-bridges. Our report then shows that despite the presence of executive magistrates and officials of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, people were blatantly ignoring the law and their safety at the Bangla Motor intersection. This was despite the fines and other punishment meted out to offenders a few hours earlier. Again, in February 2017, the police started a drive to stop jaywalking near the capital's Kakoli intersection, where mobile cars were set up and around 86 pedestrians were fined.

Yesterday, a photo published by this newspaper, unsurprisingly, showed pedestrians hopping wire fences to cross the busy road near Karwan Bazar. What is surprising is that the photo also showed several members of the police doing the same. The barbed-wire fences were installed only about a week ago because of the frequent accidents caused by jaywalkers getting hit by vehicles recently.

Our refusal to use the foot over-bridges -- essentially opening up ourselves and others on the road to the possibility of an accident to save a few minutes of our time -- is shameless behaviour. It is all the more abhorrent when those indulging in the same practice are the police. We expect our police to lead by example; they must be practitioners of the law they are supposed to uphold. It was their duty to deter the practice then and there, not be an example of flouting concerns of safety.

Penalties have not worked, and the picture now shows policemen, parents with their children, and physically challenged people who would rather risk their lives than take an over-bridge. When will we learn?

Budget for regions lagging behind



FAHMIDA KHATUN

many of us may not have empathy for them at all. Some of us may even be blissfully unaware of them.

National statistics provide information on macro indicators of growth, income, employment, education, health, etc. Information on several micro indicators such as access to water and sanitation, structures of houses, level of solvency and many more

DISCUSSIONS on the upcoming national budget in Rangpur during the past weekend revealed a number of issues. Some are new, some old. But all are important. Sitting in Dhaka

apparent improvement has been observed in, for example, the lifestyle of the people both in urban and rural areas. Clothes, food habits, access to amenities and general lifestyle indicate a change among a large section of people. One does not see as many unclothed children in the villages with bloated tummies infected with diseases or rickshaw pullers with only a piece of cloth around the neck as in the past. Death due to silent famines like Monga is also unheard of these days. Access to housing, sanitation, electricity and communications has improved the living condition of the poor in a major way.

While all these may be attributed to the impressive improvements in some of the macroeconomic indicators, inequality still persists in the country. A feature of this inequality is reflected

clean water. For example, in Rangpur, incidence of extreme poverty is highest, availability of electricity is lowest, use of mobile phone and computer is lowest and economic solvency is also lowest compared to six other divisions. Surprisingly, even though poverty is high, labour force participation rate in Rangpur division is high and unemployment is low. This paradoxical situation may be due to the fact that those who are employed are either employed in low income jobs or are underemployed. Lower income opportunities are also reflected through lowest bank savings and bank loans in the region.

Public policy can play the most important role to reduce the gap between the advanced and less advanced districts. The issue of regional disparity

A few years back, the government coined the idea of district budget in an attempt to make fiscal measures decentralised through involving the local government. In FY2014 budget, the Finance Ministry prepared the first district budget for Tangail on a pilot basis. Six more district budgets for Khulna, Chittagong, Barisal, Rajshahi, Rangpur and Sylhet were proposed in FY2015. However, this initiative was dropped the following year. Lack of strong local government administration is blamed for this unsuccessful proposal. Of course, those district budgets in no way could be termed as complete budgets. They mainly set aside some government expenditures to be implemented at the district levels. And the other part of the budget -- resource



are also available. These give us a pretty good idea about the socioeconomic situation of the larger sections of people across the country. But what we miss in statistics are the ground realities experienced by the people. We also miss the insights of local people themselves who have a clear understanding of their developmental problems and the way out. Some of the issues raised in that pre-budget dialogue in Rangpur organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue, RDRS and Citizen's Platform on SDGs on April 1, 2017 made me reflect on a few aspects of our national budget once again on my way back to Dhaka.

Bangladesh has achieved steady growth and also performed impressively in the area of human development. There is also no denying that an

through regional disparity. That is, the progress has not necessarily been equal across the country. Prior to the construction of the Jamuna multipurpose bridge the disparity between the eastern and western districts of Bangladesh was distinctive. The eastern parts such as Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions used to be ahead of the western part that includes Rajshahi, Rangpur, Khulna and Barisal divisions. Striking disparity amongst regions has narrowed to a large extent due to economic progress and efforts towards equitable growth by the government but disparity among regions still exists. This disparity is revealed through income, social indicators, employment opportunities, consumption, infrastructural facilities, and access to

deserves to be a central issue of the development planning and policymaking process. The national budget is an instrument to implement those policies. However, the effectiveness of our budget is limited to a large extent due to the way it is formulated and implemented. The process of consultation with various sections of people to get their suggestions before budget formulation is well appreciated. But participation of broader sections of people at the grassroots level and political representatives of people are lacking. As much as the budget formulation has to be a consultative process, its implementation should also be participatory. The demand has to be assessed from the field. The allocation has to be based on the need.

mobilisation -- was not within the capability of local governments.

In order to have any meaningful decentralised policy implementation, the budget-making process should involve the local administration, law makers, and all stakeholders. This can increase efficiency of resource allocation and improve accountability of implementation of budget proposals. This can also expedite efforts towards diminishing regional inequality. The success of budget implementation at local levels will underpin the achievement of the government's commitment towards the agenda of "leave no one behind" as enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals.

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

45 YEARS OF CANADA-BANGLADESH RELATIONS

Progress made and potentials unexplored



SYED MUNIR KHASRU

1971. The situation of the refugees and their number were reported to the government of late Canadian Premier Pierre Trudeau, which led to increased financial assistance and humanitarian support in West Bengal and the then East Pakistan borders. Canada also was one of the first western countries to recognise Bangladesh as a sovereign state on February 14, 1972. The Late Pierre Trudeau was posthumously conferred the Friends of Liberation War Honour award by Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on September 16, 2016.

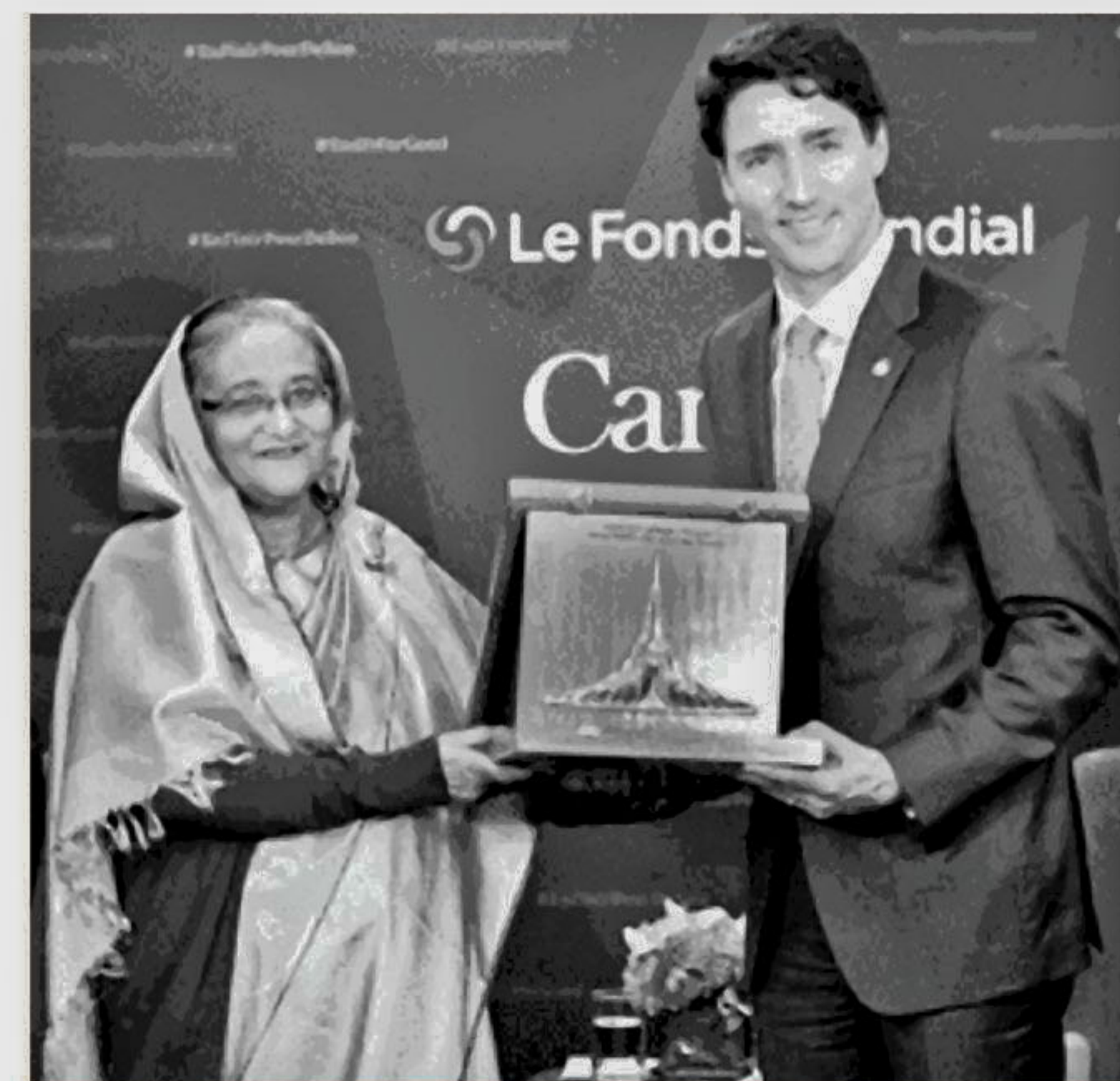
In the early post-war years, the support of Canada was limited to reconstruction and rehabilitation and gradually moved into good governance, primary education, health, agriculture, environmental sustainability and women's empowerment. Both countries have since then established robust bilateral ties based on mutual core values of democracy and diversity. The Government of Canada confirmed Bangladesh as a country of focus in South Asia in 2014. The decision was based on Bangladesh's ability to effectively utilise development assistance. In 2014-2015, Canada provided bilateral aid worth up to USD 70.32 million. Canada's development projects in Bangladesh endeavour to create opportunities for children and youth and to encourage sustainable economic growth. Gender equality, environmental sustainability, and good governance are emphasised in major initiatives.

Canada supports development in education, health, and economic growth. The programmes encourage Bangladesh to focus efforts on improving the quality of education through increased access and gender parity. In the field of health, Canada has funded initiatives that improve access to healthcare and

medication as well as maternal and child health delivery systems. The assistance also reinforces employment-generating businesses, promotes international trade, facilitates building employable skills for the youth, simplifying legal, fiscal, and regulatory frameworks for business development, and developing public sector financial management.

supported the provision of public financial management training to more than 6,600 government officials, installed improved information technology (IT) infrastructure and provided extensive IT training to over 1,200 officials and staff to help improve audit procedures in Bangladesh.

The volume of bilateral trade has



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina hands over the "Friends of Liberation War Honour" award to Pierre Trudeau's son and Canada's incumbent PM Justin Trudeau after her bilateral talks with him at Hyatt Regency Montreal, Quebec on September 16, 2016.

PHOTO: PID

A joint cooperation strategy was signed in June 2010, which supports a coordinated approach and a strategic division of labour between development partners and Bangladesh. Governance is an important pillar for Canadian partnerships that entails capacity building, economic management and increased accountability and efficiency of government institutions. Canada has

crossed USD 2 billion in the fiscal year 2014-15 and is expected to reach USD 5 billion by 2022. Canada is now one of the top seven export destinations for Bangladeshi manufacturers of RMG, leather, and jute products. Bangladesh enjoys duty- and tariff-free access into its markets for many products including apparel, woven, and knit. After India, Bangladesh is the second largest source of

Canadian merchandisers' import from South Asia. Bangladesh is the third biggest market for exporting pulses for Canada, and a significant export destination for cereals, vegetables, iron and steel. Another notable fact is that, Bangladesh is the second largest Canadian agri-food buyer in South Asia.

There is scope for greater collaboration and business-to-business linkages in the SME sector. For increasing trade, establishment of common accreditation board for product standards would be useful. Public private partnership for infrastructure development also is an area unexplored but with immense potential. New areas of cooperation should ideally contain three components -- i) addressing needs and challenges of Bangladesh, ii) fewer, larger projects with long-term goals, and iii) capacity building and empowering institutions for sustainable development.

Canada has supported initiatives upholding human rights and advancing democratic values. Canadian support to empowerment of civil society outfits and think tanks has made significant contribution in improving governance and strengthening accountability. Political freedoms and civil liberties enhance moral authority of a country and this in turn provides the legitimacy to advocate for reform and offer assistance. This is evident in the Canadian support for concerted efforts in strengthening labour standards and rights issues that address child marriage. Bangladesh can seek Canadian cooperation in managing undocumented migration and efforts towards resettling Rohingya refugees. The Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Program can be strengthened further by incorporating counter-terrorism capacity building and engagement with different stakeholders. Canada, the land of multicultural principles, has much to offer in terms of soft power like education, literature and art. To end with the words of wisdom of the Late Pierre Trudeau, "The past is to be respected and acknowledged, but not to be worshipped. It is our future in which we will find our greatness".

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Extrajudicial killing:

A threat to the rule of law

The Daily Star's headline "Shootouts killed 44 in 3 months" on April 1, 2017 has drawn my attention. The report was published by the Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK). In February, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal expressed the government's stance against extrajudicial killings in Parliament. But the ASK report reveals that 58 people have died from extrajudicial killings between January and March this year. Every citizen has the right to justice even if there is an allegation of crime against them. We urge the law enforcement agencies and the Home Ministry to address this problem of extrajudicial killings prudently and immediately. Human rights organisations should also be more vocal against it. Rule of law and equal justice for all should be upheld to ensure good governance in the country. Md Selim Reza

Jahangirnagar University

Provide free skills tutorial videos

I was quite happy with the news of BRAC signing a MoU with a2i to provide technical training to the youth. No doubt, to develop a county rapidly, training the youth is of utmost importance. Face-to-face training is of course more effective in maintaining the quality of training, but it also limits the number of people the initiative can reach.

I would like to suggest that the government provide online video clips on different skills by renowned experts and professionals. These can be uploaded on a government website, free to be browsed and downloaded by the general public. This will ensure high quality of the training programmes and will also reach a large number of people across the country. Mawduda Hasnin, Rajshahi