

Intra-party rivalry and people's woes

Dumping garbage on public thoroughfare

SOMETIMES certain human activities defy logic, but dumping garbage on the street by one faction of a political party to foil the programme of another faction of the same party is beyond anybody's comprehension. This loathsome act was triggered by intra-party rivalry between two local stalwarts of Dhaka City Awami League.

Factional rivalry in the AL and its manifestation in violence in almost every arena have resulted in many deaths and disruption of education and law and order. This phenomenon has been all the more pronounced since the last election that has left the ruling party without an opposition worth the name and its cadres and appendages without a political rival to go after. Consequently, various factions of it are engaged against one another.

However, what is reprehensible is that it is the public which is inflicted the pain and distress as a result, as was also the case this time. Truckloads of trash were dumped on the road which impeded movement of vehicles and pedestrians, but even worse, the filth was stacked in front of a school making life of the students miserable. One wonders how three truckloads of filth could be commandeered by ordinary persons. But added to the discomfort was the clash between the two rival groups that caused injury to many and damaged several vehicles.

The spectacle that was put up is really the ugly face of politics in this country, and made even more so when factions of the same party go at each other's throat on paltry matters. This was literally a dirty job and a classic case of cutting off the nose to spite the face, because whosoever had done it has managed only to sully the image of the party.

Getting close to USD 1 billion export target

Cash incentives needed for local software companies

BANGLADESHI software developers are turning out to be quite adept at providing ICT-related services to cater to the growing export market. This fiscal, the country earned USD 800 million and the government target of reaching USD 1 billion next year is very much within reach. Going digital and turning Bangladesh into a hub for software development have been key interest areas for the government and considerable resources are being allocated every fiscal. It appears that these efforts are beginning to pay off.

The export earnings of Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) members have been growing healthily these past few years. More than 60 percent of the net foreign exchange earnings come from software export. That we have moved beyond the lower end of the market (outsourcing) to more value added products like software reflects growing capabilities of our programmers. When we learn that software made in the country is being exported to 70 countries worldwide, we are elated. Some of the leading companies are competing with foreign companies and landing deals in foreign countries. This gives us hope that this sector should be recognised as an emerging export sector.

This brings us to the question of whether firms falling under the aegis of ICT and IT products and services should enjoy "cash incentives" by the government. If we want to engage the vast majority of educated but unemployed youth productively, then the area of software programming must be recognised as a budding export sector. The government should implement the 10 percent cash incentive declared last year for ICT export earnings to encourage more youth-driven companies to come forward, because this sector requires minimal capital expenditure and more human capital.

The psychology behind communal attacks



SHAGUFTA HOSSAIN

who are in some way smaller, weaker, younger or in any way more vulnerable than the bully. Experts such as Brenda Morrison, Assistant Professor, School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University, insist that bullying is mostly about power and control at all levels of analysis and across all social domains.

It is a deliberate and repeated attempt to cause harm to others of lesser power. It's a very resilient behavioural style, mainly because bullies get what they want.

On Friday, November 10, at least 30 Hindu houses were burned and vandalised by a mob at Thakurpara village under Rangpur district over a Facebook post allegedly "demeaning Islam". On the night of November 4, hundreds of people gathered in front of Paglapeer Mosque in Rangpur Sadar for bringing out a procession demanding the death penalty for the accused Titu Chandra Roy for his alleged Facebook post. Around 10,000 to 12,000 people, from Badarganj, Gangachara and Taraganj upazilas of Rangpur and Jaldhaka of Nilphamari, carrying sticks and brickbats, gathered in the area. Later they marched towards Horkoli Thakurpara village, around one kilometre off Soleya Shah Bazaar.

Around this time last year, a *New York Times* report quoted police officials saying that four other similar episodes were recorded in Madhabpur where crowds ransacked four Hindu temples and households. And the day after, gold jewellery and cash left by worshippers at a Hindu festival were stolen from a temple in Chittagong. Another confrontation occurred in the northeastern town of Chhatak the same day where several Muslim men converged at a mosque near a Hindu temple, and pelted it with stones.

Am I the only one who is feeling a sense of déjà vu? Last year, a synchronised attack was carried out on the Hindus in Brahmanbaria's Nasirnagar upazila, vandalising around 100 homes and at least five temples and looting valuables over a Facebook post "hurting Muslims' sentiment." The attackers also beat up over a hundred people of the minority community and ran through eight Hindu localities, including Kashipara, Daspara, Ghoshpara, Duttapara and Nomoshudropara.

The then Superintendent of Police at Brahmanbaria was quoted by *The Daily Star* as saying that around 150 to 200 locals attacked five temples in Nasirnagar upazila and vandalised seven to eight idols and homes and injured two people.

As the news of the Facebook post spread, violence spilled over to the neighbouring Habiganj district where a Hindu temple in Madhabpur bus stand area came under attack.

The mayhem in Brahmanbaria also began with a Facebook post—a doctored photograph that shows an idol of a Hindu deity on the picture of the most revered place of pilgrimage for Muslims — supposedly published from the account of Rasraj Das. Much similar to an incident in Cox's Bazar's Ramu in September 2012, when the Buddhist community was attacked, following a claim that a Buddhist youth had insulted Islam on Facebook.

While the mysteries surrounding the most recent incident are yet to be unravelled, an investigation by *The Daily Star* on the Brahmanbaria attack later found the Facebook post was faked to

term "zealot" means one who is zealous on behalf of one's Creator. The term derives from Greek (zelotes), "emulator, zealous admirer or follower." However, it took on stronger religious connotation in the 1st century when during a political movement which sought to incite the people of Judaea Province to rebel against the Roman Empire, "zealotry" was the term used by Josephus for a "fourth sect" or "fourth Jewish philosophy" during this period.

It's interesting because, while it is a term that is presently laden with negative connotation, it probably wasn't when initially coined. Zeal could be, and often is, a good thing. Being zealous isn't necessarily problematic either. However, when zeal spills over into acts of aggression and violence, particularly in situations where there is no reason to feel threatened on account of one's faith,

behaviours. What is conflict and whether or not it is conflict that is causing an uneven power dynamic or the uneven power dynamic that is causing conflict are things to ponder.

Maybe the underlying conflict embedded decades ago during colonial times manifests today in various violent incidents. Or maybe conflict is deliberately kept alive. Some theories indicate that bullies may act out of low self-esteem, wanting to improve their social status, or feelings of anger or frustration. So, maybe we are so insecure about our faith that it feels like a part of us is always under attack. Maybe it is a combination of things that drive this behaviour. I have yet to understand.

But part of the act of bullying results from a desire to dominate others and having a lack of remorse or failing to recognise this behaviour as a problem.



The trail of destruction left in the wake of attacks on Hindu houses at Thakurpara village in Rangpur on November 10.

justify the violence. In case of the most recent event in Thakurpara, Titu was arrested last week. Primary investigation on the part of the police had found that the Facebook post was uploaded from somewhere in Rangpur's Gangachhara from the account of an individual named Md Titu on October 28. Ziton Bala, Titu's mother, and locals said Titu could not read and write and they did not believe that he could create or upload the post. Also according to them, Titu lived in Narayanganj and he had never visited that village in the last four to five years.

In all of the above-mentioned cases, a term that was frequently used to speak about those who carried out the attacks is "zealot". Incidentally, it is one of my favourite words in the English vocabulary. I like it because of the range it offers. The

it's time to ask yourself, when you are engaging in acts such as this, are you really acting on behalf of your belief? Or are you acting to justify having power over a people?

Acts such as the above-mentioned ones are not acts of zeal. When a majority group, i.e. ones with power, wreaks havoc on the lives of a minority group, i.e. the ones with less power, the act is about domination, a demonstration of power. By virtue of humiliating and harming those who are perceived to be weaker, smaller, on a micro level, these are acts of bullying.

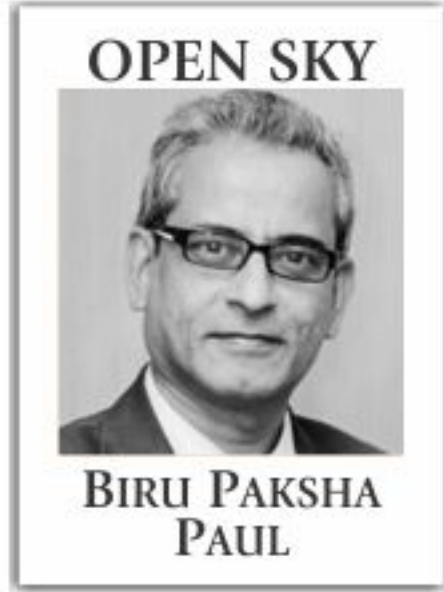
There are several theories about why people bully. Traditional models of power and conflict have theorised that conflict creates a situation where the personal power of one actor over another is sought and increased through bullying

So let us begin by recognising this behaviour as a problem. Let us first understand that there is nothing zealous or glorious about burning homes, temples, lives. Let us recognise that we are feeding our egos, not answering to some divine calling. We are being bullies, who carry out harmful acts in an unequal power spectrum, to validate power over instead of engaging in dynamics that facilitate power with.

It is those women and men who are pulling the victims into shelters, opening their homes, holding their hands forming human chains to protest against atrocities committed against their neighbours, who are zealous. It is the ones who act out of kindness, who act on behalf of their belief. Or at least, that is the way I see it.

Shagufta Hossain is the founder of Leaping Boundaries and a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*.

Record economic growth and the tasks ahead



BIRU PAKSHA PAUL

THE 7.28 percent economic growth achieved in the last fiscal year, which the government has reported recently, is the second highest growth rate in Bangladesh's history. The country registered the highest growth of 9.6 percent in 1974, but it should be dealt with caution. The post-independence year of 1972 saw the highest negative growth of 14 percent, making the 1974 figure look exceptionally high since it rose from a very low base. If we ignore the 1974 figure, the country has earned 7-plus growth a total of five times—in 1978, 1981, 2007, 2016, and finally in 2017. And the 2017 figure is the highest among them. While this is a cause for celebration, this makes our planning for tomorrow tougher than ever before.

Although the World Bank, IMF, and ADB may not be as optimistic, they all have to acknowledge that Bangladesh has entered a phase of moderately high-speed growth. The main challenge is to maintain the momentum in the coming years in order for the country to graduate to an upper-middle-income status by 2031, when per capita income would need to be greater than USD 4,000. Per capita income growth, which is roughly equal to GDP growth minus population growth, is more crucial to development. The population growth of 1.3 percent is taking a toll on our GDP growth, and the main policy task of the government is to bring the population growth down to 0.5 percent as soon as possible.

When a nation achieves a moderately high growth rate, the economic agents tend to behave desperately to scoop up profits however they can, even by damaging the balance of the ecosystem. The environment becomes a victim of the profit vultures. Ensuring the protection of the environment should be a top priority for the government. Maintaining a decent work-life balance is crucial to public health, which can help increase labour productivity in the coming days. Due attention should be given to updating knowledge and skills. And improving the quality of higher education is the best strategy to ensure a steady performance in public health, labour productivity, technology, and the environment. Bangladesh's performance in the

knowledge economy sector is frustrating and calls for further government investment in modernising the education sector. Otherwise, the 7-plus growth is doomed to failure.

The government would do justice by making the institutions target 8-plus growth. The financial sector is heading toward uncertainties and encouraging default behaviour. Depoliticising the institutions and bringing a professional ambience in the banking sector are essential for the record growth to continue. The regulators, including the central bank and the securities and exchange commissions, must be given more independence to act more professionally and productively.

The justice system should be divided based on the nature of functions such as financial matters, family issues, infrastructure regulation, traffic rules, domestic businesses, and external affairs. Otherwise, everything will remain tangled in British-style formalities and sluggishness. Constant brainstorming for reforms must be welcome, and private think-tanks as well as members of the Bengali diaspora should be engaged in strategizing an investment boom for the country. A 29-percent investment rate can never achieve 8 percent growth, which will need at least 34 percent investment regularly in the medium run.

Let us also think if we are encouraging savings too much. And this is true, reflecting a saving rate of 31 percent being higher than the investment rate. This tendency will bring idleness in the culture of entrepreneurship. Building modern infrastructure needs more outlook than funds. There should also be the courage to carry out "creative destruction." If the old airport is a hindrance to modern businesses, we need to build another by replacing it.

The fact is, a fiscal reform is crucial to maintaining this record growth. A country with 7-plus growth along with a tax-GDP ratio of as low as 10 percent is a wonder of the world. And this "miracle" is destined to die. We're lucky that the main impetus behind the growth has come from private enterprises as well as public spending on infrastructure. That said, our public infrastructure spending is 2.87 percent of GDP, which is much lower than India's almost 5 percent and Vietnam's 10 percent. Infrastructural bottlenecks are another barrier to growth acceleration. Given the low

tax-GDP ratio and weak budgetary capacity of the government, building adequate infrastructure remains a challenge unless the projects are competitively outsourced to global construction agencies. The responsibility of tax collection should be given to a full ministry, and tax offices should be established at Upazila levels, targeting 20 percent tax-GDP ratio in five years.

A new department for infrastructure administration can be helpful. If you buy a new car and do not go for its servicing, the vehicle may fall into disrepair any time soon, making your initial investment a haemorrhage of resources. This is exactly what is happening in many of our mega infrastructure projects. I think the initial plan for any project should include at least 30 percent of its budget for infrastructure administration. More magistrates and a special police force are needed to oversee vehicular movements and to stop anarchy in the transport sector.

At a growing stage of an economy, two sectors, transport and construction, play a crucial role in accelerating growth. Unfortunately, these two sectors in Bangladesh are at the root of public sufferings. As a result, their growth compared to the size of GDP has remained stunted. The shares of both construction and land transport sectors were 6 percent of the GDP in 2000. Despite one and a half decades of impressive sectoral transformation in the country, these two sectors contributed only 8 percent to the GDP in 2016. As different surveys showed, the sectors are the highest sources of corruption, requiring massive reforms.

Agriculture's growth of close to 3 percent, industry's growth of slightly over 10 percent, and services' growth of 7 percent jointly made the total economic growth of 7.3 percent. All the growth figures are acceptable except for the industry which can, and should, grow over 15 percent to help the country reach the upper-middle-income status by 2031. We need to change our attitude to make this happen. Induction of meritocracy and expertise instead of just obedience in all institutions must be ensured if the government really wants to fix the institutions for sustained growth to advance the nation.

Biru Paksha Paul is an associate professor of economics at a US university.
Email: birupakshapaul@gmail.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Awful level of congestion

Last Friday, I visited one of my friends in the Dhakeshwari Temple area and stayed there for some time. Then I went to meet a relative in the Sobhanbag area. I started from Motiheel at 3pm and it was around 9:30pm when I got back home. Though I wanted to meet another relative, who lives nearby, I couldn't. Overall, I stayed with my relative and friend for around an hour and a half, and the rest of my time was wasted on the way.

This has become a permanent feature of our life in Dhaka. I think disciplined vehicular movement may reduce this city's traffic congestion significantly. Decentralisation can also help the cause. I would like to urge the authorities to explore new ways to solve the traffic problem as soon as possible.

Sheuly Haque, *By email*

Warring parents should prioritise their children

Recently, *The Daily Star* published an article titled Universal Children's Day - Making a difference, which drew my attention. How often do we think about the children deprived of love and affection because their parents are fighting over their custody after divorce? Unfortunately, this has become a global phenomenon of late.

Children should not be a subject of dispute between two warring parents eager to settle scores with one another. Children should enjoy love, affection and access to both the parents at will. Parents who got divorced or are separated from one another need to understand that their children need both of them for their upbringing.

Deendayal M Lulla, *Mumbai*