

Protect human rights of all

Break the trend of rights violations

MUCH progress has been made towards economic development in the last year but sadly the same cannot be said about the state of human rights in the country. Throughout 2017, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, violence against women and children, and attacks on minorities remained widespread. These were the findings of the annual report released on Sunday by rights body Ain o Salish Kendra.

Although the Bangladesh government has received much admiration from the international community, and rightfully so, for giving refuge to hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas who fled violence in neighbouring Myanmar last year, its role in protecting the human rights of all in the country left much to be desired. An overall climate of fear has taken hold as mysterious disappearances of people from all walks of life made the news and abuse of Section 57 of the ICT Act to clamp down on social media led to restrictions in people's freedom of expression. Attacks on Hindu homes in Rangpur and in Adivasi villages in Langadu last year also proved that the state is not fulfilling its due role in protecting minority communities and their rights.

It is high time that the state and all relevant actors realised that any vision for the country needs to take into account the importance of valuing people's rights. As a new year begins, we would like to see the rights of all citizens take precedence over everything else. The government must adopt policies of zero tolerance towards human rights violations and see to it that justice for all is ensured. We hope with new strategies formulated by law enforcement agencies, this year will paint a brighter picture where the protection of human rights is a reality rather than a far-fetched dream.

Invest in creating better teachers

Lack of quality teachers in schools

WE are dismayed to see the lack of efficient teachers leading to poor results for board examinations published on Saturday. *The Daily Star* reported a drop in the pass rate in the Junior School Certificate (JSC) exams under the eight general education boards from a 9.79 percentage points fall from that of the previous year to 83.10 percent this year.

The results were particularly poor in English and Math examinations and latest reports cited poor quality of teachers as one of the main reasons behind this. It is not surprising that educationists are pointing out that the children are not acquiring the required base in English and maths for a lack of skilled teachers, particularly in non-government schools in rural areas. According to the latest government report cited on *The Daily Star* report, around 88 percent of the 78,415 teachers giving English lessons at secondary level did not study English as a core subject in graduation and master's levels. The remuneration that teachers are offered getting is far from adequate which discourages one to take on the profession. Upon joining the profession, the training they receive is insufficient.

The government must understand that education is the bedrock of development. It deserves an adequate budget and training institutions to build capacity of teachers. English and Math are necessary competencies to have in a country like Bangladesh that aspires to achieve middle-income status. Teacher training programmes and a lucrative remuneration package to encourage brighter minds to take on the profession should be encouraged. We urge the government to recognise education as the first and most important step we can take as a nation to fix all our other problems and invest accordingly.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Mumbai fire tragedy

It is shocking that at least 14 people were killed in a fire incident at a pub in Mumbai, India. As a resident of Mumbai, I know that India's major financial city is facing a lot of issues like poor infrastructure, official apathy and, of course, corruption. The previous foot-over bridge tragedy in Mumbai is still fresh in mind.

It is true that business activities, the large number of corporate companies, showbusiness and the growing population are all adding pressure to Mumbai. But at the same time, basic necessities and services should be protected. In fact, ensuring them and the enforcement of safety norms and rule of law will go a long way in making Mumbai more beautiful than it is now. For this to come true, the authorities should wake up and act now.

P Senthil Saravana Durai, Mumbai

Rohingya repatriation

Rohingya repatriation is proving to be a difficult process as Russia and China are complicating the matter in the UN Security Council by obstructing the way to holding Myanmar responsible. However, we appreciate the sanctions imposed by the United States on Myanmar military's General Maung Maung Soe who oversaw the brutal crackdown. We expect that other influential countries will follow suit. Only if key individuals involved in the entire affair are held responsible will Myanmar feel the pressure.

Shafkat Rahman, By e-mail

Bangladesh economy in 2017 and the way forward



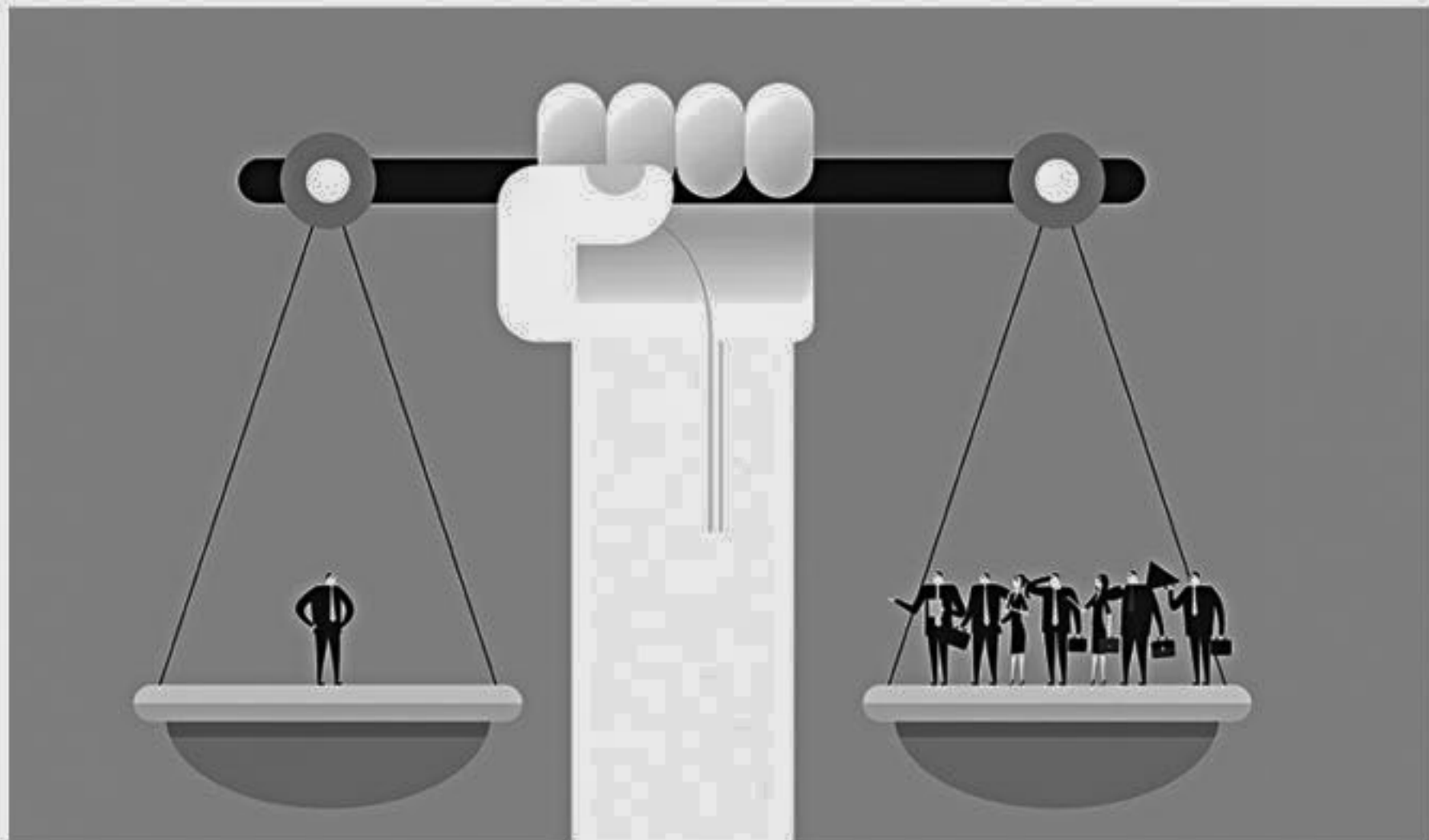
MACRO MIRROR
Fahmida Khatun

FOR Bangladesh 2017 has been a mixed year of achievements and challenges. Though some macro indicators reflect the positive trends, the overall strength of the economy is weakening due to a number of developments toward the second half of the year. One of the major achievements of the economy has been a 7.28 percent economic growth in FY 2016-17 breaking the six percent cycle that continued for a decade or so. Like previous years, major boost of growth has come from the industrial sector followed by the services sector. Though average inflation has been around 5.5 percent, food inflation is showing an increasing rate in recent months, mainly because of agricultural loss due to two rounds of flood.

Investment is a major impetus to Bangladesh's growth. Target was set to increase investment to 32.7 percent of GDP in FY 2016-17, keeping in mind the need for a growing economy. In FY 2016-17, investment as a share of GDP went up to 30.5 percent, a marginal increase from 29 percent in FY 2015-16. However, the private sector's investment has been almost stagnant since FY 2015-16 hovering around 23 percent. The major boost has come from the public sector that saw an increase to 7.4 percent in FY 2016-17 from 6.7 percent in FY 2015-16.

Domestic savings-GDP ratio increased by only 0.3 percent in FY 2016-17 while national savings-GDP ratio declined by 1.2 percentage point to 20.6 percent in FY 2016-17 from 30.8 percent in FY 2015-16 in the backdrop of the large current account deficit. This has narrowed the gap between national savings and total investment as a share of GDP for the first time in recent years, which otherwise displayed a gap implying that resources are not fully utilised.

The external sector has been a source of strength for the Bangladesh economy for several years. This has changed in recent periods. Export growth in FY 2016-17 was only 1.7 percent as opposed to the target of 8 percent. A glimmer of hope is in the horizon with both RMG and total exports picking up during July-December of FY 2017-18. However, imports growing at a higher rate than exports led to a negative current account balance that continued during July-October of FY 2017-18. In FY 2016-17 remittance earning growth experienced a negative growth of (-)15.9 percent despite increase of manpower export. One important reason for low remittances despite high growth of manpower exports is the flow of



remittances through informal channels. Strong Bangladeshi Taka against the US Dollar also played a role for low export and remittances growth to some extent. Though remittances have started to pick up in recent months it is not significant since it was negative during the last fiscal year.

In 2017, the banking sector exposed further weaknesses through major indicators such as rise of non-performing loans, lower capital adequacy and the overall lack of governance in the sector. Though the period of BASEL III

implementation is approaching in 2019, most banks are not prepared. The government has been recapitalising the state-owned banks for their loss every year without any fruition. This has been an unfortunate example of using public money towards compensating for the greed of bank defaulters. The proposed law allowing more members of the same family to be directors of the privately-owned banks and extension of their tenure are apprehended to further deteriorate the governance in private banks. Despite the central bank's attempt to improve performance of the banking sector, improvements are not visible yet. The independence of the central has been gradually diminishing due to political influence. If reform measures

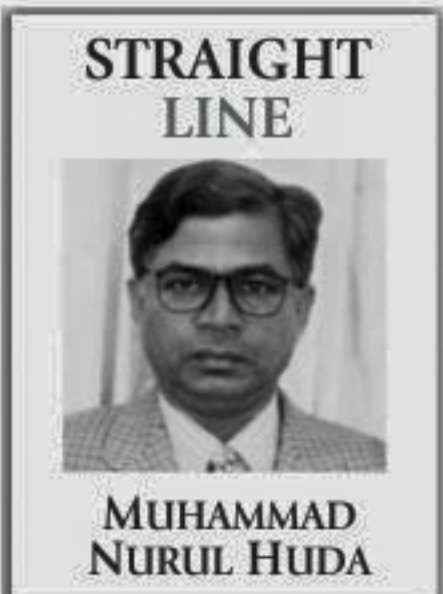
Bangladesh from August 25, 2017 onwards following a fresh round of torture and killings by the Myanmar army. Rohingyas moved into Bangladesh in thousands every day, bringing their number in Bangladesh to one million in total if the previous influx of the seventies and the nineties are taken into account. Though they are supported by the international community, some fiscal burden will befall the government of Bangladesh which will have budgetary implications.

The year 2018 will be a turning point for Bangladesh in many ways. Bangladesh will prepare to graduate from the least developed country status in 2018. It will also continue its efforts toward becoming a middle-income country. Additionally, it will continue to implement the sustainable development goals (SDGs). These will hinge on a number of factors such as accelerated resource mobilisation, higher investment, efficiency in infrastructure implementation, skilled human resources and strong institutional set up.

Lastly, Bangladesh has placed significant emphasis on the growth rate of its gross domestic product while the quality and distributional aspects of GDP growth have been overlooked. Incremental benefit from such growth has accrued to the rich rather than the poor. It is disturbing to note that top 10 percent possess 38 percent of Bangladesh's total income while the bottom 10 percent only has one percent of the total income of the country. High growth is yet to be translated into generation of enough income for the poor, creation of employment, access to quality education and better healthcare for all, and above all, reducing income inequality. In the coming years, policymakers must make broader development goals their objectives instead of being overwhelmed by narrow growth targets.

Fahmida Khatun is the Executive Director of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh.

Looking beyond the failures of policing



STRAIGHT LINE
Muhammad Nurul Huda

THERE could be no two opinions on the significance of responsible law enforcement in a democratic polity. At the same time, one can link lack of good governance to a climate in which enforcement of the existing law, particularly criminal law, is not attended to in the right earnest. Media reports indicate that Bangladesh would have fared much better in international parlance if not for the worrying infringements of civil liberties. This assessment is distressing when one sees Bangladesh's commendable achievements in other socio-economic indicators. It may, therefore, be time to take a dispassionate look at the factors contributing to such a scenario and devise measures for improvement.

There is no doubt that a long string of "bad news" stories have adversely affected public perception of the police. One needs to look beyond that and ask if we, as a society, have really ventured to create a caring and responsive police organisation. Have we seriously pondered why an inherited colonial system has been expanded and strengthened to ensure continuation of its repressive role instead of going for a system that truly serves the people?

One needs to take a historical perspective to understand this. The fact is, Bangladesh had attained independence after a bloody independence struggle and then adopted a liberal, democratic constitution while retaining the colonial administrative, police and judicial structures, without recasting them to meet the demands of the changed situation. How can you promote liberalism with a colonial mindset?

The colonial police system operated in the light of the imperial ruler's need to establish a relationship of control, coercion and surveillance over a subject population. The question is, how would such a system fulfil the aspiration of an independent democratic polity?

The above reference has been cited to highlight the systemic deficit and to understand what happens when the institution is afflicted by organisational, managerial and policy crises.

The tasks, however, are multiple and daunting. In particular, the alleged human rights violations pertaining to extra-judicial killings and the enforced disappearances demand special attention. Our credentials as a democratic polity would not attract critical feedback if we could firmly reject,

and disown, the mentality that those who could not be dealt with within the law have to be dealt with beyond the law.

Another disconcerting point that comes to mind relates to the so-called political withdrawal of criminal cases. Although late in the day, it may still be beneficial to examine if such withdrawals by administrative fiat are an undermining of the criminal justice system.

Coming to the specifics of policing, can our citizens expect that the alleged selective application of law against opponents—political or personal—at the behest of persons of influence will not become a norm? Shall we make genuine efforts to ensure that the police are not perceived as agents of the party in power, and are in fact members of an organisation publicly maintained to enforce the law? The police need to be a provider of service to the community,

punishment. The situation has not changed much.

The politician's mind has to appreciate that the Police Act, 1861 was principally aimed at administering a static, immobile and backward rural society living in villages and small towns. It envisaged exercise of authority without local accountability. It presupposed a society without any constitution, basic and fundamental rights, organised public opinion, and mass media projecting the public interest. The need, therefore, is to initiate informed debates and ultimately enact a suitable police act, as has been done in a neighbouring country.

A reasoned view is that police and law enforcement reforms need to be done in tandem with reforms in the criminal justice system, and in broader governance we need to overcome the inertia by stirring a moribund system into action.



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and not be an entity exposed to exploitation.

As far as basic reform is concerned, it is still not too late to initiate action. Our politicians know very well that policing in Bangladesh has been by and large a one-sided affair, with the communities having little or no say in local policing plans and strategies that affect them most. Our politicians, including legislators, know very well that the Police Act of 1861, the key police law, is silent on the issue of community consultation. This law focused on the responsibility of communities to ensure order, and should any member steps out of line, the whole community would face vicarious

Enforcement reforms, if left unattended, will only undermine our security.

The organisational objective is important because in the colonial model the policemen are accountable to their superiors, rather than the public or the law. Their duties are tabulated for them, and there is little or no room for discretion—clearly, such a police force would dictate a very different relationship between police and society. The distinction between society and state and between state and government gets blurred.

We have to remember that a police organisation which is controlled is a source of great power to its controllers. Has there been any societal effort to

While the prevalent wisdom of a section of our society shifting all the blame onto the politicians is untenable, it is also not in the broader public interest to make sweeping observations like "people are not safe even in their bedrooms, rape is common, murders are frequent, mugging is routine like a traffic jam," without the benefit of appropriate analysis and statistics and cognizance of the broader perspective. It is time for substantive police reforms to plug the systemic holes, control the deviants and, where necessary, weed out the bad hats.

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