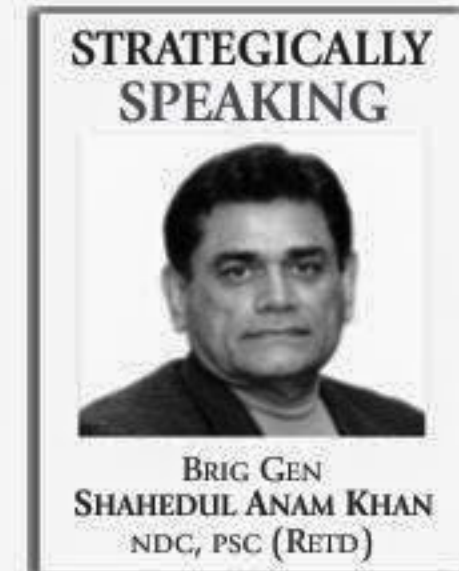


We can definitely do better in governance



BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN NDC, PSC (RETD)

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING
THE state of governance in the country has gone completely awry because of the absolute disregard for all the eight or nine essential elements that ensure good

governance. But the most important of these, which are being defiled by all the stakeholders, are accountability and participation.

People seek good governance from the government of the day, but while seeking the panacea in being well-governed, we forget altogether, and all too often, that we individually and collectively must participate in the process of governance to ensure accountability and the application of the other elements. Because, as they say about conflict, disorder cannot survive in society but for our participation. If good governance is a collection of public good and delivery of public good, then it also requires "good public" too to accomplish that. And that is so because bad governance or misgovernance degenerates to "non-governance" when there is collusion of state agencies and some individuals or groups to transgress laws for acquiring "individual good". What we have today is not bad governance or misgovernance but "non-governance" being inflicted on us. Some examples occur below.

As for accountability, take the legal system or the process of law for example. Money helps criminals escape punishment but the innocent is framed in false cases. Lack of accountability accords impunity to state agencies who arrogate to themselves the right to be judge, jury and executioner. And when the floor of the parliament is used to support breaking of the law by those that are supposed to ensure its application, as was done by a member of parliament on April 9, speaking in favour of extrajudicial killings, one cannot but shudder at the imports of such utterances.

Power or close proximity to it lends the transgressors invisibility, only to the law enforcing agencies though, even when their images have been captured in CCTV. Some law-keepers become law-breakers and do the biddings of powerful quarters in exchange for money. And all because of the absence of accountability at every level, and unlimited power going to the head. Sensational murder cases are virtually swept under the carpet since the

suspected perpetrators possess money or power or both.

Judiciary is neither separate nor independent. Can that be possible when magistrates perform twin functions of both executive and judiciary, an undesirable arrangement in the interest of justice, and the service of district and session judges, their transfer, promotion, etc. are controlled not by the Supreme Court but by the law ministry? And what does one make of the BCL cadres playing the role of an auxiliary force of the police in beating up agitating students? It was not for the first time that they had done so when BCL cadres beat up anti-quota

And where in the world would one find concrete pillars on footpaths to keep motorcyclists off the pavements? And there is a High Court ruling against the use of walkways by two-wheelers. Once when I accosted a young man using the pavement to avoid the usual jam, his prompt and befitting reply was, "Go and stop the cars with flying flags from using the wrong side of the road."

It is only on our streets that you would find people so wilfully risking their lives to cross the street. Only yesterday this paper carried a picture showing a few young men crossing a road divider on Dhaka-Aricha highway

and the road is their racing track. The fate of two young people, one fighting for his life after being crushed between two jalopies, and other facing invalidity for life after the rickshaw she was travelling in was hit by a reckless bus driver, speaks of the total breakdown of traffic discipline. And nobody can touch the errant drivers because their boss happens to be a powerful person.

Ensuring good governance is the function of the government. And the consequences of bad governance are revealed in the following quotation. "Once Confucius was walking on the mountains and he came across a



protestors inside DU on Monday. Has law enforcing been outsourced to an ancillary organ of the ruling party?

Another aspect that has refused to be governed, and which we as individuals contribute a great deal to, is the traffic in Dhaka city. I guess it is the same in other large cities /towns in Bangladesh. Our respect for traffic rules is demonstrated by our diligent and steadfast violation of them! The efforts by the police to use ropes when the red-light comes on to prevent the motorists, pedestrians and two-wheelers from jumping the light demonstrate our indomitable propensity to violate norms.

that was reinforced with pointed spikes to make it impassable. But nothing can deter a Bengali. They seemed to be totally unconcerned about the fact that they were putting their own matrimonial prospects, if not their life, at risk. It not only reveals that as Bengalis, violating rules is our inherent right of birth; it also betrays either the inability or unwillingness of the traffic police to enforce the law.

The roads and highways are at the mercy of the reckless drivers. Their wantonness is responsible for the large number of deaths on the roads. They feel they are at the control of a "nascar"

woman weeping by a grave. He asked the woman what her sorrow was, and she replied, 'We are a family of hunters. My father was eaten by a tiger. My husband was bitten by a tiger and died. And now my only son!' 'Why don't you move down and live in the valley? Why do you continue to live up here?' Confucius asked. And the woman replied, 'But sir, there are no tax collectors here!' Confucius added to his disciples, 'You see, a bad government is more to be feared than tigers.' (Lin Yutang - Chinese Author)

Brig Gen Shahedul Anam Khan, ndc, psc (Retd) is Associate Editor, The Daily Star.

Two new prospective industries

Focus should be on diversifying the economy

THIS newspaper ran two reports yesterday that revealed a positive picture of the economy's future.

The first one describes the government's plan to provide a handful of incentives including tax exemptions to the pharmaceutical ingredients manufacturers, with a view to capitalising on the patent waiver for the manufacture of pharmaceutical products extended to the least developed countries. The second report underscores the bright prospect of the ceramics industry, highlighting the fact that new investors are pouring money into this industry, creating new jobs.

The experts have long emphasised on the need for Bangladesh to diversify its economy and reduce its dependence on the garment industry. In that context, the government's incentive to the pharmaceutical industry and the new flow of investment in the ceramics industry might prove crucial for the economy.

In the first case, if the government's incentive eventually convinces the investors to set up reagent production factories in the country, it would certainly reduce import of raw materials worth Tk 50 billion. Bangladesh is currently the only LDC that produces pharmaceuticals, thus enjoys the patent waiver. If the production cost decreases due to the availability of raw materials at a low rate in the domestic market, Bangladeshi pharmaceutical industry would enjoy a competitive advantage over its counterparts in other countries.

The government should identify similar export-oriented industries and provide them with such incentives. As a growing economy and a populous nation, it is imperative for our government to help the industries create more jobs to realise our full economic potential. And the more we diversify our economy the safer we are in the long run.

Blatant disregard for traffic rules

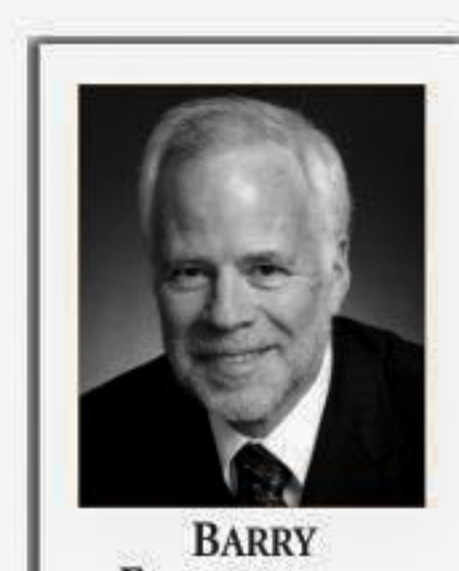
Violators put themselves and others at risk

A picture on the back page of this newspaper on April 11 shows a number of young men scaling an iron railing on the Dhaka-Aricha highway to cross the road in Savar Bus Stand area. Such sights are very common both on highways and on city roads. What it points to is our disregard for traffic rules, which are there for public safety, but apparently our citizens think it quite within their rights to break the law whenever they feel like it. One might ask precisely what would happen if one of these jay walkers lost a footing here or there and impaled himself on one of these iron spikes. Has it dawned upon any of the young men (shown in the picture) that they may cause themselves serious harm whilst trying to perform this insane act, just to spare themselves a few extra yards of walking?

We talk about road safety and how transport drivers drive recklessly on the roads. We have written endlessly about jaywalking and how they increase the likelihood of accidents. What we now need are stiff penalties for jaywalkers who put oncoming traffic at risk because they just feel like crossing the road or highway whenever and wherever they wish to. City corporations and local municipalities have put up foot-over bridges so that pedestrians may cross the road safely. But it appears that our citizens are more at ease jumping over fences because they are either too lazy to take the overhead passes or think it is the responsibility of oncoming traffic to swerve past them. Enough is enough. It is time to penalise lawbreakers with fines that will make the practice of jaywalking so expensive that it will act as a deterrent.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Can a trade war be averted?



BARRY EICHENGREEN

PROBABLY the question most frequently asked of international economists these days is: "Are we seeing the start of a trade war?" This is not a question that admits of a simple yes-or-no answer. In contrast to a shooting war, there's no government declaration to mark the official outbreak of hostilities. Tariffs have been raised and lowered throughout history, for reasons both good and bad.

Even when the reasons are bad, moreover, tariff increases do not always provoke foreign retaliation. There was no retaliation, for example, when President

responding to US actions, raising the risk of escalation by an erratic US leader. President Donald Trump's threat on April 5 to impose tariffs on an additional USD 100 billion of Chinese exports, provoked by China's response to his own earlier action, points to just this threat of escalation.

That said, there are still reasons to hope that sanity will prevail. First, Trump has been forced to nuance some of his earlier actions. He exempted Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, the European Union, Mexico, and South Korea from his steel and aluminium tariffs, minimising the impact on those countries and also on domestic metal-using industries. Foreign governments and domestic businesses objected to the initial across-the-board tariff, and so did the stock market, through its negative reaction. The market will exercise a

For its part, China should maintain its calm and steady hand. But it should also show a willingness to address valid US concerns when the US takes a WTO-based approach to pursuing them—for example, by relaxing its joint-venture rules and strengthening its intellectual-property protections.

aluminium and steel.

The irony is that US intellectual-property concerns are valid. But neither those concerns nor Chinese retaliation will win the US any sympathy, because the administration's latest action comes on the heels of bogus US steel and aluminium tariffs, trumped up, as it were, on national security grounds. This sequencing and reckless use of the tariff instrument encourage observers to dismiss even valid concerns as fake news.

Is it still possible to avoid the worst? The soonest the administration's USD 50 billion of proposed tariffs can come into effect is at the end of a 60-day comment period. This gives foreign governments, business, and the stock market time to push back.

Feeling the heat, the Trump administration could choose to nuance its intellectual-property policy, just as it nuanced its steel and aluminium measures. Rather than imposing sweeping tariffs, it could tailor its actions to the intellectual-property dispute. It could use the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States to reject bids by Chinese companies in specific sectors where the US possesses valuable intellectual property. It could pursue its complaints through the WTO. Those who question whether the administration has any inclination of going this route should note that it did, in fact, file a WTO complaint against Chinese technology licensing practices in March.

For its part, China should maintain its calm and steady hand. But it should also show a willingness to address valid US concerns when the US takes a WTO-based approach to pursuing them—for example, by relaxing its joint-venture rules and strengthening its intellectual-property protections. For those still hoping against hope, the good news is that, behind the scenes, the US and China are still talking.



Some say that China's leaders have no choice but to exercise restraint. Because it runs a surplus with the US, China stands to lose if bilateral trade grinds to a halt. But that's like saying that one country stands to lose more than another in an exchange of nuclear weapons.

In fact, Chinese policymakers have broader motives. Because China has a higher export-to-GDP ratio than the US, they are more concerned with preserving the global trading system; by eschewing escalation, China avoids jeopardising it. And by appealing to the WTO, it positions itself as a champion of free and open trade. It demonstrates constructive leadership of the multilateral system. To the extent that other countries rely on China for preserving the trading system, they are correspondingly less likely to object to China's other strategic initiatives, in the South China Sea and elsewhere.

Now comes the hard part. On April 3, the Trump administration announced its intention to impose tariffs on USD 50 billion of Chinese exports, in response to industrial espionage, licensing, and other intellectual-property concerns. Obviously, these trade actions are much larger and more dangerous than those affecting USD 3 billion of Chinese

Richard Nixon imposed a 10 percent across-the-board import surcharge in 1971, arguably in violation of both the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (the forerunner to the World Trade Organization) and United States law.

But there's always the danger of events spiralling out of control. China has clearly indicated its intention of

moderating influence on the president, if anything can.

Second, China's response so far has been carefully calibrated, in each case almost exactly matching the breadth of US action. Doing less would have been seen as lying down in the face of US provocation. Doing more would have been seen as a dangerous escalation.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Exemplary punishment for rapists

As a father, I am anxious about my daughter's safety. It seems the country has turned into a safe haven for rapists. Hardly a day goes by without a story of someone being raped somewhere in the country. Women are not safe anywhere, not even within the four walls of their homes. What terrifies me most is that even a female child of 5-6 years of age is not safe.

The government has miserably failed to ensure safety for our girls and women. Ensuring exemplary punishment for rapists under the speedy tribunal act can put an end to this crime. We must exert more pressure on the state machinery so that they make sure no incident of rape ever takes place.
 Pushpan Chowdhury, Chittagong

Insurance sector in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's insurance sector has not flourished remarkably in comparison to the developed world. Citizens in the developed world insure most of their properties and assets. They do it on their own initiative, because they are aware of the possibility of risks around them.

Bangladeshis are generally ill-informed about the insurance sector. If the government encourages the public offices that run welfare programmes to insure public properties, people would be encouraged as well. On their part, the insurance companies should properly and quickly settle all claims. A combined effort will help the insurance sector to flourish in Bangladesh.
 Md Arifur Rahman Sumon, By e-mail