

Crackdown on casinos

Only political will can eradicate waywardness of ruling party associates

WE applaud the government for the recent crackdown on casinos illegally operating in the city by some Jubo League leaders. Rab has raided at least five clubs and detained around 183 people and arrested a Jubo League leader for running such an establishment. In fact, according to a news report of a Bangla daily, there are at least 60 such casinos in the city, most of them run by Jubo League members with some foreigners on their payroll. It has been estimated that around Tk 120 crore worth of gambling takes place in these casinos every day. The PM has heavily criticised these leaders and has asked the law enforcement agencies to clamp down on these casinos and arrest those responsible for it. This is definitely a positive move on the government's part and seems to be a part of a new plan to root out criminal elements from the ruling party affiliates. Just before these raids, two leaders of the Chhatra League were removed from their positions after allegations of extortion in the Jahangirnagar University development project scandal emerged in the media.

True, it is obvious that these casinos have been operating for a long time and without any hindrance from the authorities until now. Thus it is very likely that errant members of law enforcing agencies have turned a blind eye to these activities carried out by members of the youth front of the ruling party. The elaborate set up of these casinos in various club houses and rented buildings indicates well-planned, well-organised operations. Although it has taken a while to get to this point where the political influential are being taken to task for illegal activities, it is better late than never. The waywardness of members of the various appendages of the ruling party has been reported an unmet number of times in the media and it's clear that it has reached unprecedented levels. Eradicating such unruliness and blatant defiance of the law in these organisations, which enjoy the patronage of the ruling party, will require political will. We hope that these raids and removals are not mere cosmetic exercises and that the government will go the whole hog and eliminate all these unruly, corrupt elements who are giving the ruling party a bad public image.

Interpolation in the voter list

Alarming state of security in election commission offices

WHILE inclusion of names of ineligible persons in the national electoral role may appear innocuous and dismissed as being a result of human error, the systematic and conspiratorial way some staff in the election commission offices in Dhaka, Chattogram and Cox's Bazar have exploited the lax security system in these offices to insert the names of Rohingyas in the electoral roll raises serious concerns about the security of some of our national institutions.

The staff of these three offices have colluded with an outside syndicate to insert names of Rohingyas in exchange for a large sum of money. While some technical experts in the Dhaka EC office and computer operators in Cox's Bazar have disregarded the matter of national security for money, they have been able to do so because of the absolute lack of security in these offices. The matter was detected only when one such person went to the Chattogram EC office to have a NID issued in her name. But nobody knows exactly how many of these Rohingyas have been issued with NID.

It beggars belief that anyone would be able to take out an official computer from an election commission office without being detected. And the fact that an official laptop had been missing for two years without anyone noticing it is pathetic. This means that there is no periodic stocktaking of office equipment at all. One of the arrested staff is well known for his corruption, yet transferring him to another election commission office was the most severe "punishment" he was awarded. Not only that, he eventually managed to get back to his original place of appointment. The matter has serious security implications since many criminals and non-Bangladeshis can get a NID and eventually passport through this syndicate. We suggest a thorough security survey of all the election commission offices in the country be undertaken immediately, and physical security geared up instantly. Offices such as the ECs ought to be treated like a national mint and nothing less. And those officers who failed to exercise their oversight functions should be made example of.

Expanding social protection

What are the challenges for a developing country like ours?



SELIM RAIHAN

ONE major challenge faced by policymakers in most developing countries is that though conventional measurements of poverty are useful in identifying the poor people in general, these measurements fail to capture the critical sections of the population who are vulnerable and extreme poor, and are left out for various reasons including gender, age, geographical location, disability and many other social factors. While the reduction in poverty is an important policy agenda, many poor and extreme poor people as well as vulnerable communities can be left out through the conventional scanners of different poverty reduction programmes. Therefore, social protection is primarily intended to complement the poverty reduction programmes through which this left-out population can be brought under the coverage. It is imperative that an effective designing of social protection system takes into account a comprehensive understanding of the poverty and vulnerability situation of a country, while at the same time be dynamic and forward-looking.

Though country experiences vary, social protection in general covers policies and programmes designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability through labour market interventions for the efficient functioning of labour markets, interventions related to social insurance to reduce people's exposure to risks, and social assistance interventions to enhance people's capacity to manage economic and social vulnerabilities, such as unemployment, exclusion, sickness, disability and old age. Also, strengthening of the social protection systems is aimed to promote women's empowerment and gender equality.

The economics of social protection involves three major aspects: (i) what proportion of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) the government is spending on social protection; (ii) the approaches of social protection; and (iii) financing social protection.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets a clear vision for action to expand coverage of social protection systems and measures for all, with a view to eradicating poverty and reducing inequality, including gender inequality.

What is the economics of social protection? In my view, the economics of social protection involves three major aspects: (i) what proportion of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) the government is spending on social protection; (ii) the approaches of social protection; and (iii)

targeted. While universal approach argues for social protection for each person, critics claim that universalism is not cost-effective and unfairly distorts individual efforts, and, therefore, targeting should be a better solution. Also, there are debates on whether net income should be considered while determining a needy population, or the capabilities approach should be undertaken as income is misrepresented and, in many occasions, fails to unearth the root causes of poverty. Furthermore, there are debates over the means of

very low tax-GDP ratio, governments in many developing countries face fiscal constraints in expanding social protection programmes. Concerning raising tax revenue, governments also face the challenge of expanding the tax base and taxing those who have the capacities in paying taxes but evade paying.

As countries develop, ideally, for generating government's revenue, the reliance on indirect taxes should decline while that on direct taxes should increase. It is a common feature in many developing countries that a large number



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PHOTO: STAR

financing social protection.

On the first aspect, recent data on public social protection expenditure as a share of GDP (for the latest available years) for 173 countries suggest that while most of the developed economies spend quite a high proportion of their GDPs on social protection (15-30 percent), a large number of developing countries spend very low on social protection. Bangladesh is placed at the bottom of the list of countries with a share as low as only 1.6 percent. It is important to mention here that with very low spending on social protection, many of the SDGs are highly likely to be left unrealised in Bangladesh.

On the second aspect, there are debates concerning the approaches of social protection, whether social protection should be universal or

social protection, whether cash transfer is better than programmes based on transfers in kind.

Finally, a major aspect related to the approaches of social protection is the growing acceptance of undertaking a lifecycle perspective, which helps to understand the impacts of demographic change on countries. With the change in the structure of the population over time, the policy attention and allocation of public resources to address lifecycle risks and challenges should also change.

The third aspect is related to financing social protection. Many developing countries face a critical challenge in mobilising resources for social protection programmes. The tax-GDP ratio is very low in many developing countries. For example, Bangladesh has a tax-GDP ratio of less than 10 percent. With a

of potential taxpayers, which include many ultra-rich people, remain outside of the tax-net or pay a negligible amount of taxes.

Also, many economic sectors, capable of paying taxes, are either fully exempted from paying taxes or enjoy the privileges of paying a substantially reduced amount of taxes. It should also be highlighted that governments in many developing countries suffer from the usual problem of not getting their priorities right. Therefore, while governments allocate resources for many "low-priority" activities (from the view-point of development perspective), the resources left for social protection remain very inadequate.

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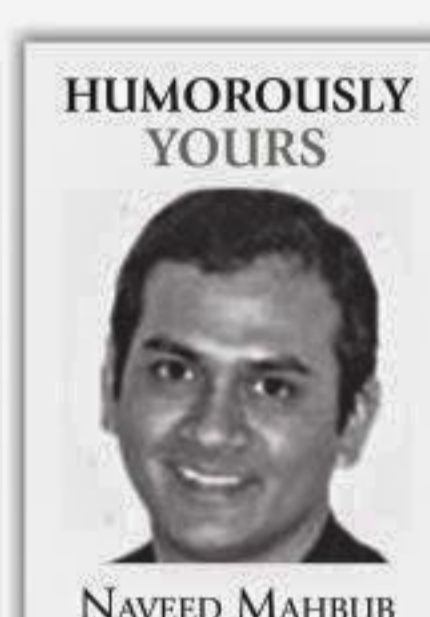
Double Trouble

have a black and white one (yes, yes, mom has asked me several times to fix the blown-out picture tube). So, I watch next door at my friend's place—the talk of the neighbourhood. For they have bought the brand new, top-of-the-line Sony Trinitron colour TV. Wow! This is what blonde-mullet-in-motion looks like. Awesome!

Let us forget the selfless contribution of "Trinitron" by the mighty "Sony" for the zillion colour ecstasy, no one dares peel off the sticker boldly displaying on the top left corner of the monitor, where no man (in a colour-TV-acustomed world) has displayed before, the words "Sony", "Trinitron" and a swarm of fat, red dots. With a third of the monitor's prime real estate gone, MacGyver, through some sadistic pleasure, chooses to make his gadgets at that very corner of the TV screen, nicely eclipsed by "Sony", "Trinitron" and the dots. On reflex, we careen our necks and almost fall off of

imposing on someone ELSE's private family time at HIS place, enjoying HIS snacks while watching HIS TV, purchased with HIS hard-earned money, warranting every bit of double protection for the screen that HIS choice. This is also our national DNA of putting two layers of protection against every dire consequence (except for the Aedes mosquito), so as not to take any chances. This is why there is the seat cover on the seat of the car, the former to protect the latter that is never to be seen nor enjoyed. This is why there is the extra screw bolted on to the "Toyota" insignia so that it does not end up at an auto parts shop to be re-purchased by the original owner. This is why there is the sticky leather cover on the steering wheel so that the seasoned driver ends up with carpal tunnel syndrome. This is why there is the "oil cloth" on the table cloth on the table top so that we see the embroidered table cloth yet don't stain it (let's face it,

And then? What really is the result of the double trouble? Sure, a plethora of golden, silver, platinum, titanium, aluminium A+'s, but have we really taught our children to solve problems and to think laterally?



NAVEED MAHBUB

GIVE him a piece of wire, a nut, a bolt and a small sheet of aluminium foil, and MacGyver makes a Mach 2.0 aircraft in the blink of an eye. For us with wide eyes and narrow choices of TV channels (in fact, just one), the man with the blonde mullet (a term I learn many years later from seeing hillbillies in checked flannel shirts driving pickup trucks in the deep Midwest) is my hero. A hero more so, since I am an electrical engineering (EE) student. Not that I have the desire to be Mr Gadget, but rather to form a deterrent against mom from whom I constantly get flak: "What [electrical] engineering are you learning, huh? I had to call the electrician whereas you could've fixed the fridge!"

Yes, this is the curse of the EE student, whose calibre is predicted based on his abilities to fix any conceivable contraption that requires batteries or the power from the electrical mains. Thank heavens I am not also required to fix the "tennis racket"—for this is the time of the unborn mosquito zapper.

So MacGyver is my ray of hope that one day I will make mom proud by fixing the malfunctioning refrigerator with spit and rubber band.

The weekly anticipation of my favourite TV series has my heart racing for another reason—the fear of the inevitable power outage. MacGyver, if only you were here, you could fix load shedding with a banana leaf and the outer shell of a coconut. Remember, this is the time when video-on-demand means kids demanding to watch video (TV) in lieu of being taken into custody by the private tutor invariably choosing to come during one's favourite TV show. The option to record, rewind and replay at the time is through the "2-in-1" radio-cassette recorder. Young readers, I know this is Swahili, so Google up—if unsuccessful, try searching "dinosaur".

Then comes colour TV. But we only



our stools, as if hoping to see his hands in action "around" the annoying sticker.

But this is not my TV, nor is it my dad's. In fact, I am merely a neighbour

we are the ones who invented the "bone plate", the absence of which prompts us to use a bigger "bone plate", aka, the table top itself). This is why we immediately go to the "mobile doctor shop" to buy the

screen "protector" and the phone cover so that we don't put scratches on our expensive smart phones...

It is this very DNA that deprives our children of the late afternoon exercise as they run from one private tutor to the other or one coaching centre to the other, where the "coaches" are not too dissimilar from the coaches of Bangladesh Railway trains or the Bangladesh cricket team—expensive while with questionable efficacy and short shelf lives. All this jazz to merely "reinforce" the learning that was imparted that same morning in school. (Well, "running" from one tutor to the other at least is their exercise, for there is no field to play on and no fresh air to breathe anyway.)

And then? What really is the result of the double trouble? Sure, a plethora of golden, silver, platinum, titanium, aluminium A+'s, but have we really taught our children to solve problems and to think laterally? Or, are we, at best, making them MacGyvers, half covered by "Sony Trinitron"?

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Building pollinator sanctuaries

Globally, there is an increasing threat to insect pollinators like bees, moths and butterflies, and certain species of flies and beetles that are responsible for cross-pollination of over 80 percent of globally important crops.

Recently, an organisation called Farming Smarter in Canada has launched an experiment to conserve pollinators such as honey bees and native bees. By using a combination of locally grown annual and perennial crops and wildflowers with varying flowering periods, the project is establishing Pollinator Sanctuaries to attract insect pollinators. So far, the experiment has shown excellent results. This demonstrates that a mixture of annual and perennial crops with varying flowering periods can extend the bee foraging cycles beyond the conventional season. Such multiple-crop-based Pollinator Sanctuaries can help establish small local ecosystems, conserve insect pollinators, serve as grazing pastures and help in soil reclamation, etc.

This method can serve as a model of low-cost conservation for countries like Bangladesh.

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