

Bangladesh progresses eight points

We still have a long way to go

It is heartening to see Bangladesh achieve an eight-place leap in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business 2020 index. In the latest edition of the study the country scored 168, as opposed to 176 in the previous year's index. The index is based on a cluster of regulations affecting 10 areas of life of a business: starting a business, obtaining construction permits, getting electricity, registering property, accessing credit, protecting minority investors, paying taxes, trading across borders, enforcing contracts and resolving insolvency.

Although it is a major improvement for Bangladesh, the achievement is overshadowed by how other SAARC nations have done. India, for instance, improved its performance by 14 points to 63rd place; Pakistan progressed 28 points to 108th place and Nepal secured 94th position, with an improvement of 16 points. Indeed, Bangladesh's rank is lower than all its SAARC neighbours except Afghanistan. That said, what is important is to point out that Bangladesh's progress was made as it made reforms on three fronts: obtaining an electrical connection in Dhaka; lessening cost of setting up a business by reducing fees on registration and name registration fees; and removal of certifying fee for digital certificates.

While the progress is encouraging, much more needs to be done. When the bigger picture is taken into account, our rank (168) remains well behind all competitor countries in the region. Bangladesh still lags behind in crucial areas like enforcing contracts (189), registering property (184), trading across borders (176), etc. Despite improvements, a Bangladeshi company must wait an average of 115 days to get electricity connection. What it all boils down to is that we need to expedite reforms and put them on a fast track because every other nation, which are our competitors in the export arena, are moving ahead with regulatory changes to help businesses set up faster than us. Scoring a better score in indices like this one has a direct correlation to attracting foreign investment and though we congratulate the government for finally getting the ball rolling in the right direction, it is not time to start patting ourselves on the back just yet.

Quality training key to removing skills gap

Govt needs to play a leading role here

AS Bangladesh climbs up the ladder in the global economy, the need for homegrown talent and skills required by a changing job market is being increasingly felt. At a discussion organised by *Prothom Alo* on October 23, experts talked about the importance of bridging the skills gap in the private sector. They identified lack of coordination among the various training providers including government entities, development partners, and NGOs as an important barrier to proper skills development. The irony is, while Bangladesh depends on foreign remittances from its expatriate workers, the dearth of skilled labour in the country often results in the recruitment of foreign nationals, thereby causing a huge amount of money to be remitted out of the country.

A major portion of foreigners are employed in the RMG sector where, according to the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), at least 13 percent of factories hire skilled people from India, Sri Lanka and other countries. Equipping our workforce with the right skills, both technical and managerial, can largely prevent this and resolve to some extent, the crisis of local employment. Lack of skills is, of course, only part of the problem. While we need proper skills—which means, first, identifying in-demand skills, providing young jobseekers with coordinated training, and giving them standardised certificates acceptable to all employers—we also need to focus on generating enough employment for them as well as removing regulatory barriers to entrepreneurial initiatives. The need for proper skills and the need for creating employment opportunities go hand in hand.

Unfortunately, Bangladesh has been saddled with a jobless growth for some time now and, with over a crore of unemployed people straining the economy, it needs to find a solution fast. The importance of building a strong training framework to act as a support system for the private sector cannot be overestimated. The National Skills Development Authority (NSDA) can lead and coordinate this process. We agree with the experts that the training policy in the upcoming Five-Year Plan should be inclusive, taking into account women and the marginalised sections of society. Also, the education sector needs a major overhaul in keeping with the interests of the recruitment sector. All this will require a comprehensive job-and-growth policy centred on local employment, for which the government has to play a leading role.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Religions preach peace

As every nation on this planet has people from multiple religions, it is crucial that religious harmony exists for societies to function in a civilised manner. Bangladesh, considered as a secular nation, is also home to people of diverse beliefs. Recently, the falsely alleged Facebook comment by an individual who follows Hinduism, sparked a mass riot where religious zealots unleashed grave harm upon the Hindu community. The outcome left four dead and hundreds injured.

But we all know that no religion preaches the message of hatred, yet, due to the misconduct of some evil men, innocent people continue to suffer tragic consequences.

All religions emphasise on humanism. So, it is high time that we stop hurting the religious sentiments of other communities. Therefore, religious criticism should be dealt with keeping humanity in mind, and definitely not through violence and hatred.

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EDITORIAL

Ominous attack in Bhola and the imperatives

STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

IN this newspaper it has been editorially observed that "circumstantial evidences gathered so far leave no doubt in our mind that the Bhola incident did not happen, it was made to. And the purpose was very clear—to embarrass the government and to show that our claim of universal religious tolerance is based on a weak foundation." Such comments are indeed matters of grave public concern and while citizens will expect a comprehensive enquiry to find out the causative factors of the incident, the culpability of individuals and quarters responsible and remedial measures, it is also time to ascertain as to why the tolerance threshold and mischief-mongering of a section of our people has reached an unspeakable level.

Quite clearly, the incident in Bhola not only embarrasses the government, it also portrays the entire polity in a very abominable shade. In fact, the incident and the aftermath in which religious minority individuals and their properties were attacked and vandalised, seriously offends our democratic sensibilities and questions our pluralist ethos. We have to admit that attacks on minority communities and their property have

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Pieces of broken furniture lie scattered on the floor of Sri Sri Gournitai Ashram in Bhola's Bhawalbari after the temple was attacked by religious zealots over hate conversations through Facebook messenger app on October 20, 2019. PHOTO: COLLECTED

demonstrated the immensely sad but blunt reality that even after 48 years of independence, these communities remain vulnerable to diabolical communal assault.

On a sub-continental perspective, one could speak volumes about the genesis of communal friction tracing as far back as the conquest of India by Muhammad Bin Kashim. Others could refer to the communal award of early twentieth century by British colonial rulers that according to them was a corollary to the divide and rule policy; still others would point an accusing finger at the two-nation theory resulting in the partition of India on communal lines that according to them sanctioned communal politics.

The debate on the origin of sub-continental communal divide and the resultant tension, as also the identification of the malevolent actors, could go on indefinitely without producing durable solution for the sufferers. Hence, it is time to find out whether or not the number of Hindus has decreased over the years, particularly since the creation of the People's Republic of Bangladesh in 1971 and if so, why? Has

the mindset of the majority community really changed for establishing the ethos of equal rights society?

We in Bangladesh need to ask whether it is religion per se or the politicisation of religious identity and the mobilisation of this identity for community and state ends that have resulted in communal violence. We also need to find out whether the emphasis is on contests for power and resources.

Experience indicates that quite often the outbreaks of communal violence have not been the result of spontaneous outbursts of passionately held religious beliefs; they are carefully planned and orchestrated and occur within a context of political mobilisation. Violence has been facilitated by the ability of officials and criminals to behave and act with impunity. It has been seen that in circumstances in which the State acts resolutely, violence-prone situations do not erupt into large scale disturbances.

The question is, in Bangladesh why do we, at times, witness attacks on Hindu properties? Is creation of hatred a ploy for some influential people to grab property?

Simple common sense should tell that the ferocity of the attacks is caused by the victims' weakness and the perpetrator's immunity from the process of law. Are the mischief-makers too powerful to be dealt with?

The public leaders cannot be part of a deliberate effort to realign State and cultural power in the interest of the majority because that will result in non-Muslim minorities being defined explicitly or implicitly as second-class citizens of Bangladesh. It is only proper that the flowering of a nation demands proactive action from the State. Finally, let us bear in mind that the concept of "Ummah" in the historic "Medina Charter" included all faiths.

Globally speaking, the subcontinent inclusive, the gradual marginalisation of the minority in public affairs has been a sad spectacle. In such a scenario, Bangladesh should earnestly venture to create an environment wherein the minority enjoys equal rights and is assured of equal protection of the State.

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A campus without student politics

Could Khulna University be a model?



TANJIL SOWGAT

RECENTLY I went to a fourth-year class at Khulna University to hear about students' request to reschedule their class viva. When they were making their points, I was looking at their faces and

was telling myself how lucky I am that I did not have to see any of my students severely beaten body. At that very moment, I found myself to be blessed and privileged that my students and their predecessors have said no to partisan politics on campus since 1991. Yet, I remembered that keeping away from the mainstream student politics has never been easy for this campus and that came at a cost.

My memories took me back to my old days when I was also a student and collectively acted to keep Khulna University free of the so-called political activities. Since there were no political demos or rallies or even cultural events, we seldom made national news. When the students demanded anything from the administration, we had to try hard to claim a space for our news coverage. If lucky enough, we celebrated a small coverage on the last page of the not so popular newspapers. Since we did not make much noise or news, we remained unrecognised by many at the national level. We were often mistaken as students of the then Khulna BIT. My friends in other universities often told me that we are almost like schoolboys, who are still mentored and nourished by teachers. They mocked us as we failed on many occasions to show solidarity with political movements on the national level. We missed chances to become heroes of the nation. People remarked that we would get more central allocation and funding if we practised politics. In fact, our campus life lacked adventures as there were no firefights, fights or bloodshed.

However, our seniors convinced us, and we were adamant that we did not want to be used for any evil practices.

Although we knew about pre and post '71 student movements, we also were careful

about the misuse of student politics by different parties at different times, especially since 1975. Our commitment was to have a university life that would not leave our parents worried all the time.

We wanted not to kill or be killed, and we were devoted not to close our campus for political reasons fuelled by student leaders. We managed to do that, and the legacy continues. This was not achieved without paying a price. Students are often scared to raise issues to the authority lacking any political power. They often compromise their rights on the streets of Khulna when encountered by local youth leaders. Many I am sure felt, and still feel, powerless and helpless at times. Another high price of setting politics aside is the lack of ability to make a name for oneself as a leader or future leader. Graduates of this university are often not among the trusted when it comes to giving a post or position for an important role.

Some even argue that because of the lack of political identity, they feel they get left aside as they cannot show that their political philosophies flourished

during their campus life. In spite of all the failures, Khulna University never lost a life in political violence, it was never closed down because of fights between rival groups and it never saw any teachers harassed by its students.

If someone is surprised about saying "no" to politics and would like to know who is behind this, I would tell them that the credit or discredit goes to the students and also the citizens and leaders of Khulna. Students made a lot of sacrifices in terms of power, money, influence, but never bowed their heads and are still trying to survive. The people of this city never wanted their children to fight while they are supposed to be receiving an education and therefore, local leaders and citizens came forward to resolve the issues that could have led to the entry of partisan politics in the Khulna University campus.

Khulna has been a unique case in the map of Bangladesh's public universities. I am not sure if this is bad or good. My pride of it is surely due to my affiliation as a student and a teacher. But those who



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In spite of all the failures, Khulna University never lost a life in political violence, it was never closed down because of fights between rival groups and it never saw any teachers harassed by its students.

want to follow Khulna University as a model and want to say "no" to politics must be ready to accept the reality of students' powerlessness and inability to get instant reactions. They would also have to stop waiting for student-led movements and activities. Saying no, however, will give us a peaceful campus with no political posters, no threats on young lives and no session delays because of violence. Following the Khulna case, the word "no to student politics" can only be established if citizens, students and political leaders share the same view and are on a mission to establish a pro-education student community.

Before I finish, I must come back to where I started. The students of the fourth-year course finally withdrew their request and agreed to attend the viva. They wanted this as they realised that the earlier they complete their graduation, the sooner they can complete their graduation. Since their key aim for coming to university was to get educated and to contribute to society and their families, none of them wanted to fall behind and waste time on things that would add little to their future and would instead harm them.

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