

Police constables deserve better

Gruelling work schedule is inimical to their efficiency and mental health

MANy have this image of a police constable as someone wielding his baton, chasing after peaceful bystanders, unnecessarily harassing the commuter or a rickshaw puller, or taking bribes from anyone he can by exploiting his distress. This enduring image, however incomplete, often comes with unprintable adjectives, which shows that the challenge a constable faces is not just on the streets. But little do we understand or care to know about the kind of life they live as a part of the police force—under strenuous conditions, navigating a gruelling work schedule. Do we ever spare a thought for those constables who, while we enjoy our holidays, are out on the streets to ensure that we are safe?

A constable occupies the lowest rung of the hierarchy in the police force. He has to be ready 24/7 to respond to any call. While the number of police members in Bangladesh has exceeded 200,000 by now—the majority of them being constables—the people-to-police ratio (1:816) is still woefully below the United Nations or international standards. Thus, the law keepers are constantly overworked and consequently physically and mentally overstressed.

As per a report published by this paper, a constable has a long work shift consisting of nearly 12 hours. Considering the other ancillary duties and obligations, they hardly get a full night's rest before starting on the next day's round of duty. And the pay and allowances they get are hardly enough to maintain a family under the present conditions. Therefore, many of them have to resort to irregular means to make both ends meet. It appears from the report that many of the new entrants to the post end up disillusioned by the nature of their duty, because it is not quite what they expected before joining. Instead of excitement, they are facing drudgery. To cap it all, they hardly get a break from their job to go on leave. This takes a heavy toll on them, which some cannot endure and end up taking their own lives.

We believe that there should be a serious analysis of police personnel's duties to see whether they are being employed optimally, and how manpower resources can be managed to make the best use of the existing workforce without excessive pressure on individuals. No human being can work 24/7 or round the year without getting a break. Leave must be allowed under all circumstances, and that calls for efficient HR management. A taxed mind and overworked body are not only inefficient, but prone to making mistakes as well. And if that person happens to be a policeman, it can be very dangerous—for him as well as the public.

Politically linked individuals behind communal violence?

The authorities must ensure culprits are brought to book, regardless of political affiliations

SO far, hundreds have been arrested and around 85 cases have been lodged against thousands in relation to the communal attacks that took place in 16 districts across Bangladesh, since the Cumilla mayhem during Durga Puja on October 13. As police continue their investigations into this latest spate of communal attacks, we are deeply concerned to find that links between the recent violence and individuals with political backgrounds and/or connections are beginning to surface.

According to a report in this daily, Iqbal Hossain, the man suspected of instigating the violence in Cumilla by putting a copy of the Quran at a puja mandap, named an aide to Cumilla Mayor Moinuddin Ahmed Babu as one of the people who incited the crowd to carry out the attacks. On Saturday, Rab disclosed that a local Chhatra League leader and his accomplices instigated the mob to burn down homes and shops of the Hindu community in Rangpur's Pirganj upazila on October 17. Media reports also suggest that leaders and activists from different political groups have been arrested in Chandpur, Chattogram, Feni, and Noakhali, including a former UP chairman, although a majority of them are from BNP-Jamaat backgrounds.

While we commend the actions that have been taken so far to bring the perpetrators to book, we cannot help but point out the gravity of the situation, where members of political parties are suspected to be stoking the fires of sectarian violence. Affiliations of these alleged perpetrators with the ruling party are all the more concerning, since it is the mandate of the party in power to protect minority communities and ensure their security and ability to live in peace.

We hope that the government will make every effort to ensure that justice is served, but that is not enough—the authorities must take serious and concerted measures to ensure that communal and anti-liberal ideas are not allowed to take root in party politics. In this regard, every political party in the country has to make a commitment. The damage to communal harmony that has been caused by the recent attacks is an issue of national security that cannot be taken lightly, and anyone who is part of this sinister plan must be dealt with accordingly, regardless of their political affiliations.

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

THE two-week-long 26th Conference of Parties (COP26) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is scheduled to begin in Glasgow, Scotland on

October 31. This article is for the benefit of both journalists and readers who will be following the climate conference and want to understand what will be happening there over the course of two weeks.

As one of the few people who has attended every single one of the previous 25 COPs, I would like to share some tips on what events to follow, and how to follow them effectively.

There are a few prevailing misconceptions about COPs in general, and some misperceptions about COP26 in particular. The first misperception is that it is being described as a summit of government heads who are coming to Glasgow in order to make a new agreement.

The COP is an annual meeting of officials from every country that is a party to the UNFCCC, to review progress and agree on new actions. It takes place over two weeks, with the first week involving a meeting among technical experts and bureaucrats, and the second week involving a high-level meeting where ministers arrive to make the final political agreement.

So the COP is not a summit of leaders, but the heads of governments are sometimes invited by the head of the government of the host country. In this case, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has indeed invited world leaders to attend the opening day, which is designated as the Leaders' Day. Many heads of governments, including US President Joe Biden, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina have accepted this invitation. Others like Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin will

not attend the event in person, but their governments will be fully represented at the conference.

So, whether a world leader goes to Glasgow or not is completely immaterial to the success of the meeting. Even if they go, they will only have a photo with Prime Minister Boris Johnson, but will have no real input for the negotiations, which will only begin after the leaders have left Glasgow.

The second misperception is that a

mayors, and parliamentarians.

Of course, due to the restrictions on international travel caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, there will be fewer people in attendance this year. Nevertheless, there may be up to 20,000 people in Glasgow during the two weeks of COP26.

The location where the official government negotiations take place is designated the Blue Zone, and for the duration of the COP is under the

Thunberg and thousands of youth who not only hold their own events, but also organise a big march on Saturday in the middle of the two-week conference.

This march by youth and others can bring up to a 100,000 people to the streets.

Finally, there are many journalists who attend the COP, usually towards the end of it, to cover the final outcome. Nowadays, in addition to the usual global media, there are also many journalists from developing countries. Bangladesh usually has a good number of journalists at the COP each year, including several TV channels who do daily live reports from the venue.

Now, let's look at the major issues that are likely to be on the agenda for COP26. Although there are a large number of agenda items to discuss, three major issues stand out. The first and most important is how we are doing in maintaining the cap of 1.5 degrees Celsius temperature rise, as per the agreement at COP21. This will be calculated by adding up each country's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), which gives their plan for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Unfortunately, as per the NDCs submitted so far, we are headed for a 2.7 degrees Celsius rise—much higher than the planned 1.5 degrees—so every country will have to raise their ambitions severalfold.

The second important item is money. The developed countries pledged to provide developing countries with USD 100 billion a year starting from 2020 onwards, but failed miserably to fulfil that pledge. They must deliver it to regain any semblance of credibility going forward.

Thirdly, and this is indeed new, the issue of loss and damage from human-induced climate change, which has become a reality that needs to be discussed at a high level in COP26 to be considered a success. My own litmus test for the success of COP26 is the extent to which the developed countries are willing to take the issue of loss and damage seriously.

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People take part in the Global March for Climate Justice ahead of Glasgow's COP26 meeting, in Milan, Italy, on October 2, 2021.

PHOTO: REUTERS

new agreement will be negotiated in Glasgow, which is not at all correct. The main agreement was the Paris Agreement at COP21 in 2015, and subsequent COPs are focusing on how to better deliver the Paris Agreement, rather than coming up with a new Glasgow agreement.

It is important to note that there are many things happening in the city hosting the COP each year, of which the official negotiations by governments is only one part. Of the tens of thousands of people from around the world who go to the COP, most are not negotiators, but represent different groups of stakeholders, including civil society, companies, youth, indigenous peoples,

jurisdiction of the United Nations. Access to Blue Zone is restricted to the UN badge-holders only.

The COP host country also provides another venue for holding many side events and meetings in the Green Zone, where access is much easier and where many NGOs and others hold networking events.

The business community also has a big presence in every COP, but they usually book all the five-star hotels in the city and hold their own events, where they can wine and dine selected delegates from key countries.

In recent COPs, we have also had the presence of Swedish climate activist Greta

Bleak Prospects for Least Developed Countries

ANIS CHOWDHURY and JOMO KWAME SUNDARAM

THE outlook for LDCs is grim.—the latest United Nations (UN) assessment of the prospects for the least developed countries (LDCs) notes recent setbacks without finding any silver lining on the horizon.

Half a century ago, LDCs were first officially recognised by a UN General Assembly resolution. It was built on research, analysis, and advocacy by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The landmark 1971 declaration drew attention to LDCs' unique challenges and pledged support from the international community. The UN has convened four LDC conferences since then, with each adopting a 10-year programme of action for national

development, OECD countries have not given LDCs much access to their own markets. Allowing more meaningful "duty-free, quota-free" (DFQF) access is, thus, crucial to LDCs.

Helpful 97 percent DFQF access for LDCs to developed country markets was agreed upon at the 2005 World Trade Organization (WTO) ministerial conference in Hong Kong. But most LDC exports are concentrated in a few tariff lines, such as agricultural products and textiles, and are still subject to constant re-negotiation.

Tariff reduction alone is no panacea as non-tariff measures have posed barriers to LDC exports. Regulatory standards—e.g. "sanitary and phytosanitary" requirements—and Rules of Origin clauses limit LDC eligibility for preferences. Even when requirements are met, onerous procedures can still frustrate access. Also, preferential arrangements—like the European Union's "Everything but Arms" initiative and the US' "Generalised System of Preferences" (GSP)—have often been arbitrarily implemented.

Needing frequent Congressional approval makes GSP unpredictable, ever subject to capricious new conditions. Thus, some US lawmakers are demanding that GSP renewal—which expired on December 31, 2020—should be subject to conditions such as particular human rights, rule of law, labour or environmental regulation priorities.

Trade concessions? Despite the lofty 2000 Millennium Declaration, OECD countries have conceded little since. After the African walkout at the 1999 Seattle WTO ministerial conference, the promise of a "Development Round" brought developing countries back to the negotiating table. Launched in Doha after 9/11, "with much rhetoric about... global unity," there was little enthusiasm among rich countries. Still pushing developing countries to open their markets more, rich countries demanded that they lower tariffs to nearly zero in sectors never previously covered by multilateral trade agreements, including agriculture and services.

Refusing to recognise tariffs as poor countries' means to protect their farmers and ensure food security, the OECD demands ignore their own heavy subsidisation of food agriculture. Also, LDC protection of their modern services—still in "infancy"—is deemed necessary to withstand transnational competition.

OECD countries became more protectionist after the 2008-2009 global financial crisis, later pursuing bilateral, regional, and plurilateral free trade agreements. In December 2015, the



The headquarters of World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva, Switzerland.

PHOTO: REUTERS

governments and "development partners." But actual progress has been disappointing, with only seven countries "graduating." The list of LDCs has grown to 46 as more "qualify" to join. With the fifth conference due in Doha in January 2022, some critical soul-searching is urgently needed for efforts not to be disappointing yet again.

The failure of development partners to meet their commitments has been a major long-standing problem. Only six of the 29 partners from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have kept their promise to give at least 0.15 percent of their national incomes as aid to LDCs.

As the 1969 UN definition of official development assistance (ODA) has been compromised, the UN report

LDCs account for only 0.13 percent of global trade. But despite touting trade liberalisation as necessary for

development, OECD countries have not given LDCs much access to their own markets. Allowing more meaningful "duty-free, quota-free" (DFQF) access is, thus, crucial to LDCs.

Despite DFQF market access, the margins of preference (MoP) for LDC products have been squeezed by other developing countries' exports. MoP refers to the difference between preferential rates for LDCs and other rates. These may refer to the "Most Favoured Nation" (MFN) rates available to all countries, or preferential rates available to some.

Meanwhile, tariffs have fallen with MFN liberalisation—in some cases to zero. Tariff cuts have deprived LDCs of important revenue. The "Aid for Trade" (A4T)—purportedly to promote exports—has never tried to compensate developing countries for lost tariff revenue. Moreover, A4T conditionalities make them less developmental. A4T is often used for trade policy capacity building—typically focused on encouraging LDCs to open their markets more, as desired by rich countries—rather than enhancing LDCs' productive capacities and capabilities.

Even if market barriers are reduced, most LDCs still lack the infrastructure and support services to export much more. OECD countries demand LDC trade liberalisation even before they have developed sufficient productive capacities. Hence, even "graduate" LDCs fail to become internationally competitive.

International solidarity critical While LDCs' lot remains dismal, new challenges have emerged. For many LDCs, global warming poses an existential threat. The pandemic has also worsened their lot. Inadequate international fiscal support and the high costs of containing the pandemic meant 2020 saw LDCs' worst growth since the 1980s' lost decade.

The UN report acknowledges that even the meagre progress "painstakingly achieved on several dimensions of development, notably on the fronts of poverty, hunger, education, and health" has been reversed. Besides emerging challenges, the LDCs conference must also address the roots of their condition.

LDCs' development trajectories and options are shaped by the global environment. Besides foreign trade, concessional international financing is key to LDC progress. The latest UN LDCs report proposes new "international support measures," but recent trends suggest they are unlikely to materialise.

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