

Good news about remittance

Better policies could improve earning further

THAT contradictions can bring out the underlying strength in a situation can be a pleasant surprise is brought home by an extraordinary development in Bangladesh's foreign exchange earning. In spite of around nine percent decline in manpower export this year from the recorded 2.71 lakh Bangladeshi wage earners overseas last year, the figures in earning instead of decreasing has increased. Whereas it was \$3.5 billion last year with more people on the job abroad, the earning figure has closed on an upbeat note of \$4 billion this year.

How did it happen? Two reasons have been attributed to the higher remittance takings. First, and chiefly, the new system for remitting money through the official channels is a simplified one allowing for quick delivery of money at points of destination. We could assume that some stringent measures lately taken by Bangladesh Bank may have discouraged many Bangladeshi wage earners from taking recourse to hundi, the hitherto preferred fast-track route for money transfer. Whether it has significantly checkmated money laundering or not should be a matter for study and investigation. The second reason for the interesting spurt in earnings against odds is put down to an increase in the number of our skilled workers finding jobs abroad and sending money to their relatives at home. The appreciation of the dollar value only increased the receipt in taka term at the level of the beneficiaries, which is another gain in the bargain.

Our one achievement is more money coming through official channels and the other, of course, is the concomitant increase in the level of forex remitted to the country. So, this then is one bit of strength leading to another of it. And, if only we can now break new grounds in terms of manpower marketing, our earnings would be so much the greater.

Our expatriate welfare ministry must now strive to formulate a fresh policy framework focusing on new areas and building capacities among people for absorption abroad through greater skill training in accord with periodic demand assessments relating to the targeted markets.

Kushtia police firing unwise

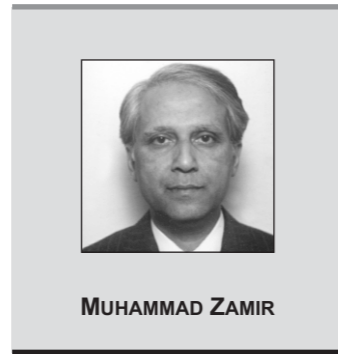
Loss of lives should have been avoided

WE are deeply shocked and saddened by the incident, which took place the other day in a village in Kushtia where three innocent lives were lost in police firing on an unruly mob while trying to bring things under control. The police were trying to stop illegal sugar cane crushers operating in a sugar mill area. As much as it is the business of the law enforcing agencies to maintain law and order, it is also important to see that the measures taken are rational and proportionate to the actual requirement on the ground. It is our feeling that things were carried out too far and such extreme measures like resorting to firing could have been avoided as already observed by the chairman of the local union council who said in no uncertain terms that the situation could be brought under control through use of tear gas only. Admittedly, however, the members of the public also did not behave rationally and their behaviour was reflective of having little respect for law and order.

The incident also appears to be the result of an uncoordinated and ill planned action. The Officer in Charge of the local Thana says that the police contingent did not include a single personnel from his Thana; the entire contingent was apparently brought in from the District Headquarters. We also find it rather strange that, as told to the media, the OC also was totally unaware of the entire operation. It is our firm belief that in tackling issues of the nature the authorities must involve the entire gamut of the local Administration first. This issue of illegal crushers in the vicinity of the mill is one that exists for years and hence an expertise in dealing with such incidents on the part of the law enforcing agencies should have been in place by now.

We are deeply concerned about rising incidents of the nature in recent times. We hope that the Administration will ensure that no repetition of such incidents takes place in the future. We believe not only tackling but also prevention of such incidents is quite possible given the wisdom, will and sincerity of purpose.

European response to WMD proliferation and terrorism



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

FOR the past few years the world has been engrossed in the fight against militant terrorism. What started with 9/11 has since become part of our daily life in most countries in Asia, Europe and North America. We have seen the emergence of this pernicious factor also in Bangladesh. Millions of people are hostage today in the hands of misguided militants. They are seeking solutions to problems through the juxtaposition of religious fervour and violence.

Such events have encouraged various countries to re-evaluate their options with regard to disarmament, non-proliferation and potential acts of terror. They have been forced to adopt measures compatible with the high-risk scenario.

The European Union has also initiated steps in this regard. They are now beginning to play a more inter-active role in the global effort not only towards non-proliferation but also in the containing of terrorism. Such involvement has been a good thing.

This is also understandable, given the fact that, the international security environment has become more complicated than the world has ever known. New terrorist threats and the highly complex nature of negotiations between the EU and Iran have clearly shown their need for new responses to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). This active engagement has also been acting as a brake to unilateral action by any individual country.

The EU is now playing a role in encouraging these new responses by helping to strengthen the interna-

tional system on non-proliferation and pursuing multilateral solutions through close cooperation with its partners. EU negotiators appear to believe that they must build on what has been done so far and fill in the current gaps.

The European Union today has a simple Security Strategy (ESS). It identifies proliferation of WMDs and terrorism as the two major threats to world security. The European Council has accordingly adopted a preventative EU strategy against

through the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), a global programme aimed at preventing the trafficking of WMDs and related materials to and from states and terrorist groups. Following the Madrid and London attacks; the EU Council also updated its threat assessment and priorities, including the protection of physical resources, nuclear and biological.

I am writing about the EU response to these twin issues and their initiative because of their

measure is now being seen as part of a widely shared international system and the best way to prevent the proliferation of WMDs.

It is beginning to be apparent that the EU today believes in a night-mare scenario. This involves the intersection of terrorism and WMDs. They also consider that the global security environment requires greater attention, given the situation in Iran, North Korea, Palestine and Iraq. They are also worried about the existing weakness of interna-

two interesting trends in terrorism: the significant increase in the number of fatal attacks between the period before 11 September 2001 and 2004 (in 2004, there were 4,985 deaths associated with terrorism compared to 777 in 2000); and the fact that terrorists are still relying heavily on the use of explosives, with 255 of 678 -- or 38% -- of terrorist acts carried out in this way.

Participants in this workshop, after exhaustive discussion, recommended that the EU should "pick the

Many in contemporary Europe believe that militant Islam is firmly entrenched in that continent. They also feel that it is incumbent on authorities to begin a prevention policy immediately. In this context they are trying to identify the sources of terrorism and recruitment. They are also trying to create a matrix, which would not only identify possible motives of suicide terrorists but also help prepare their potential profiles. Strategic analysts however agree that putting together such a profile has become more difficult now that common denominators have been swept aside with the emergence of women bombers.

European security specialists are also acknowledging that it is becoming increasingly difficult to infiltrate terrorist cells through under-cover agents. Two factors are severely impeding their efforts -- 1) the language barrier (few officers in European police forces or the CIA have linguistic skills in Afghani and Iraqi dialects); and 2) the reliability of sources, who often accept money but provide false information in return. Nevertheless, they are not giving in, particularly at a juncture, when NATO's association with Asia continues to grow.

The recent upsurge of militant violence within our own country is presently being tackled with foreign assistance. In this context, I strongly suggest that the relevant authorities should consider approaching the European Commission for help in this regard. Accessing to information and data from the European security agencies might enable us to find out how our local militants are obtaining funds as well as the items required for making explosives. They might also be able to help us in stopping the trafficking of weapons.

This will be my last column for this year. Accordingly, I take this opportunity to wish all my readers best wishes for a Happy New Year. May it bring for them prosperity and peace.

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POST BREAKFAST

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the proliferation of WMDs. This approach is based on two main principles.

The first is effective multilateralism. The EU believe that this can be achieved through support for the United Nations and verification agencies like the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In 2004, its Council adopted a joint action initiative in support of an IAEA programme to combat nuclear terrorism. Through this programme, the EU helped to increase the physical protection of nuclear installations and radioactive sources (e.g. hospitals, waste sites, etc.) in the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Furthermore, the Council also supported the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which monitors the compliance of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

The second principle targets international cooperation. Here, the EU stresses the need for better synergies and more coordination with international partners such as US, China, Japan and Russia. The EU and its member states have undertaken such cooperation

closer association in Asia. This has been one of the important areas of their participation in contemporary international relations. In a way, this has also been one of the few steps that has been welcomed as being less controversial in nature and character.

The EU's association and interest in safe use of nuclear energy has stemmed from the fact that it relies largely on this source for much of its demand. Consequently, they also have very stringent guidelines with regard to radioactive sources. Some have claimed that the EU code of conduct is even stricter than those of the IAEA.

Greater consciousness about the environment has also led the Union to work on new regulations for the import and export of radioactive materials and a peer-review process. A "WMD clause" has accordingly become an important element in agreements with third countries as part of the EU strategy. Such a clause, for example, has been inserted in agreements with Tajikistan, Albania and Syria, and action plans for all the countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy. Such a

proliferation regimes and the Non-Proliferation Treaty. They are also thinking about the rise of non-state actors and the impact this has had on deterrence; the availability of dangerous materials (in hospitals, industrial sites, third countries like Russia); and the role of technology and communications in spreading knowledge about how to carry out terrorist acts.

Analysts within the EU today, particularly in the EU Institute for Security Studies in Paris, the Institute of Terrorism Research and Security Policy in Essen and the Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung in Brussels have been stressing on how crucial it has become to differentiate between threats and potential consequences. Hence, they are now classifying radiological dispersal device or "dirty bombs" as WMDs because although they have only a limited ability to cause casualties, they have a high ability to cause disruption (e.g. panic, economic turmoil, decontamination issues).

It would be interesting to refer here to certain observations that were made in a recent workshop in Brussels in the European Policy Centre. Researchers pointed out

low hanging fruit" in its approach to dealing with terrorism. Wisely, it was also suggested that the Union should focus on what is easiest to implement -- the protection of toxic chemical transport networks, rather than investing billions to prepare for unlikely terrorist scenarios such as a nuclear device going off in city. From this point of view, the EU analysts have shown greater maturity than their counterparts in the USA.

Another aspect also drew the attention of the EU security strategists. They focused particularly on the new scourge of suicidal terrorism. Opinions were expressed that the incidents in London and Madrid had revealed that suicide bombings were not only a powerful and dangerous threat to society but also that such action were easier and cheaper for causing destruction and panic than WMDs. The EU has consequently, most appropriately, termed this weapon as a "flexible technology." We in Bangladesh need to learn from this analysis. The EU also recognises now that suicide bombings are becoming more complex to combat because the profiles of terrorists are becoming increasingly difficult to identify.

When have media misled people?

MOHAMMAD KABIR

POLITICIANS look for scapegoats for their own failures. In Bangladesh, the easy scapegoat is the media. A government minister's criticism Wednesday of the media, saying that local newspapers and the electronic media for, what he said, misleading the nation proves this fact once again.

Much has been written and said about our ministers' paranoia for media-bashing. But the question is: when did any Bangladesh government, in the history of the nation, use the media as a tool for economic and political development? The state has always tried to shut the media up whenever the latter tried to be objective. The media had to take the blame of doing even yellow journalism.

There's no denying the presence of yellow journalism in Bangladesh. Nor any other country in the world is devoid of it. But the way our politicians, at first instance, blame Bangladesh media of yellow journalism certainly arouses paradoxical laughter. Weighing the wrongdoings of the media and the same of politicians is likely to bring more bad news for the latter.

The media personnel in Bangladesh have never said they were holy cows and not susceptible to committing mistakes; neither have they ever boasted about their successes. On the other hand, not a single politician in Bangladesh has

ever admitted that s/he had done any mistake. According to our politicians: they are always matchlessly right.

Take a break; look at the reality for your own good. It has now become imperative for Bangladesh politicians to take lessons from other countries that have successfully made the media a nation-building tool.

If one takes a look at the recent development around the world as far as the media is concerned, this

ation of a French international news network. Now, 18 years later, his dream is en route to being realised. Like Aljazeera, CII will provide a counterpoint to CNN, BBC, and the ubiquity of the English and Anglo-American worldviews.

Does this ring any bell? If it still doesn't, think about US President George Bush's alleged plans for bombing Aljazeera. This allegation, Bush said, is baseless. But think about it from another point of view. If he at all wanted to bomb Aljazeera,

frequencies? Certainly, they don't earn money from Bangla-speaking population; rather, they spend money to stay in close contact with the same population. Do they serve as the mouthpieces of their respective governments? Sometimes, yes they do, at least when giving an editorial judgement. Most of the time, those governments try to just remain present in the minds of the listeners. When a listener listens to NHK, s/he certainly thinks about Japan; when s/he listens to DW,

Leave aside using the media as a propaganda tool. Is the government using the state-controlled media properly when it comes to convince the masses and promote democracy and development? The state-run media is a shameless example of violating democratic norms. On the other hand, the electronic media (the government minister means the newly-established private TV channels), of which the government boasts of giving permission to, are actually the moneymaking

wrongdoings? Is it because it calls the spade a spade? Is it because it points out the failures of our leaders? Who else is expected to do that except the media? Our leaders themselves? The bureaucrats? You must be joking! Well, it must be the donors then!

An assessment of the present electronic media would reveal, a great vista of opportunity for these very politicians has opened up to defend their failures. They should at least give this credit to the media. The media is also giving them an access to communicate with the masses. Our leaders must remember that media these days have become a strategic tool for nation building across the world.

They must also remember that 14 Bangladeshi journalists had lost their lives over the last four years; they surely were no suicide bombers; they were killed. Surely, they were not misleading the nation.

If one wants a country's economic development, if any, to be truly portrayed, one actually needs to free the media and let it play its due role. The job of the media is to do both: report activities as well as inertia. Our leadership needs to accept this fact, and lead.

Mohammad Kabir is a freelance contributor.

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should open many eyes.

The BBC World Service has decided to launch an Arabic TV and information service. BBC's Arabic TV service is expected to go on air in 2007. This came when Aljazeera announced it would launch an English-language channel at the start of 2006. In France, the culture and communications minister Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres announced on November 30 the launch of a "chaîne d'information internationale" (CII), dedicated to giving French spin on world news following the model of CNN, BBC World and Al Jazeera. Back in 1987, then Prime Minister of France Jacques Chirac called for the cre-

why would he want that? Because Aljazeera is believed to be one of the most credible anti-US policy propaganda machine in the Arab world. The absence of Aljazeera would certainly give the Bush administration an upper hand for propagating his foreign policies across the world, especially in the Arab world. He is apparently losing the propaganda war against many opposing forces.

Well, this may seem too big a picture and example for Bangladesh. Let's ask a question to ourselves: what do BBC, VOA, DW, NHK, Iranian Radio etc., gain from broadcasting Bangla news, current affairs and programmes on their

s/he without doubt thinks about Germany. The same is true for all these radio and TV frequencies. This helps in building a positive image in the minds of overseas listeners.

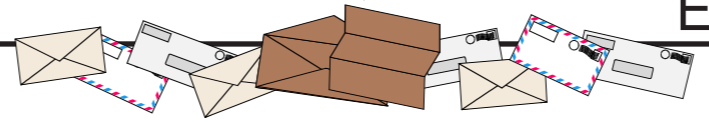
When has Bangladesh thought of doing something like that, at least at the regional level? It may be poor for running a global operation, but not as poor for running Hindi, Urdu, Nepalese and English service. India's Akash Bani has all these services including Bangla. These services could have assisted building the country's image abroad, which, according to politicians, local newspapers and electronic media is being tarnished to blatantly.

machines of its political allies.

It is the media in Bangladesh that has promoted all government-sponsored development schemes -- starting from immunisation to acid violence. They didn't have to be ordered by the government for these initiatives. It is the media that ask them to break political deadlocks; it the media that editorialise ideas for Bangladesh politicians; it is the media that encourage the government as well as opposition politicians on national issues; it is the media that encourage them to forget petty party issues.

So, why this slur on the media? Is it because it strikes at the root of all

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Stampede

I read about the stampede that happened in one of the garments factory where 50 were injured, 2 critically.

It's really very sad that the workers are not given proper training in the factories. Actually their life has been put at risk! It's very usual that if a thousand run towards the same gate, stampede would occur.

Not just the workers suffer due to such accidents but also the "work". Why not do something for benefit of both and to avoid such accidents in future? A proper training should be given to the workers how to escape when something harmful happens inside the factory. There should be different fire exit doors so that through each door, a fixed number of workers can leave. That the crowd gets divided and goes out easily.

And to make the workers understand and act fast, training should be given by triggering false alarm sometimes, at least once in a month. So that they act promptly

when actually any fire breaks out.
Anjana
Gulshan-1, Dhaka

Uniting forces?

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in a huge public rally in the city's Paltan Maidan urged the nationalist forces and those who believe in Islamic values to get united to build a happy and prosperous Bangladesh. (The Daily Star December 22, 2005)

Is this ambivalent basis right for unification? Nationalism and Islam is two different things. There is no nationalism in Islam itself. If somebody believes in Islam they will be united on the basis of Islam. Unification of the nationalist or secularist is not exactly Islamic.

Sometimes the leader of the opposition or other secular leaders urge to unify the favoured force of Liberation War. Such calls are not Islamic because Muslim must be unified on the basis of Islam. Muslims may also be united on the basis of secularism, nationalism or the others but these will be contra-

dictory to their fundamental belief.

Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition both are secular but as most of the people in Bangladesh are Muslim, they use Islamic sentiment to go to the power. This is nothing but using Islam in politics. We see the prime minister starts her election campaign from the shrine of Hazrat Shah Jalal and so does the opposition leader. She also started election campaign after performing Umara (informal Hajj) and wearing a headscarf to attain the support of Muslims.

Both of the leaders are hypocrite as they use Islam in their self-interest to go to power. On the other hand Jamaat-e-Islami is also using Islam to go to the power. They want to make a nationalist Islamic state that is also not Islamic. So everybody is using Islam as they like. But we, the Muslims in Bangladesh who know Islam as an ideology should raise voice against these opportunists and should reject the politics of BNP, AL and Jamaat.

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Militancy problem

Bangladesh is suffering from the deadly problem of militancy over the recent years. After the liberation war, I think, this is the most dangerous problem. Although there were also other national problems like corruption, unemployment, illiteracy, political instability and many other crises. But militancy problem overrides all the above problems and has spread its fang in our country. Anyway Bangladesh is not alone suffering from this problem, it is a global problem indeed.

Why Bangladesh is facing this problem; especially suicide bombers? Some are saying that this is generated from madrasah like institutions. I think not so. Because, we see also JMB cadres are from general education. The induction behind this issue is misinterpretation of religion and allurements of paradise is after world. On the other

hand, religion-based politics is also one of the vital causes behind this issue. The so-called religion based political parties are not doing their politics according to Islam. They are exploiting it. Lastly I would like to conclude seeking this, the mainstream political parties like BNP and AL to be more serious and sincere in motivating people.

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Why are they here? — Niko's advertisement (Dec 15) is a travesty of fact, if the various reports in the newspapers are to go by. They portray themselves as "one of Canada's best"; but their activities as reported in the press possibly earns them the label as "one of Canada's worst".

They hire, train and provide higher education to Bangladeshis in Canada, because employing this skilled and trained Bangladeshi manpower is much cheaper and more cost effective compared to hiring overseas personnel!

They have a vision and are committed because their vision in reality is to make money, in whatever way possible (even inflating reserve estimates?) so that their profits can swell. There is nothing wrong in making money, but the way Niko goes about it is immoral based on falsehood and palm greasing, as reported.

They dare because they do not care, taking advantage of our top-most ranking in the corruption scale, and which I believe they encourage perhaps? They refuse to give up, making hay while the sun shines. They did not run away, because ordinary people, and to an extent the government have forced them to be here, till their misdeeds contributing to the Tengrattila blowout is identified and indemnified.

S. A. Mansoor
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Now is Jadav, then was Partha

The reactionary fascists want people to believe that a Hindu extremist, late Jadav Saha, was

involved with the Netrakona bombing that killed nine people and injured numerous others. The same reactionary forces put Partha in jail after the August 21st bombing in order to prove that a foreign intelligence agency was trying to destabilise Bangladesh and make the country a failed state.

Expansionist and imperialist forces do indeed try to install puppet governments in order to carry out economic exploitation and militaristic expansion. However it is now clear that the agents of local and foreign reactionary forces who want to enslave the entire population in the name of religion are perpetrating the recent series of bombings.

Tireless efforts by members of the civil society (Dr. Kamal Hossain, Barrister Sultana Kamal, Barrister Sara Hossain, to name a few) buttressed by newspaper (The Daily Star, Janakantha, Jugantor) columns resulted in the release of Partha. In case of late Jadav Saha, the perpetrators of religious reactionary fascism shamelessly went after his dead body in order to

mislead people by injecting communal equation in the whole sordid affair. However they failed miserably in their attempts since people in Netrakona in particular and in Bangladesh in general have rejected the stories planted by stooges of the right reactionary fascism. Of course the religious right reactionaries are no different from the reactionaries who want to enslave people in the name of ultra nationalism.

We all hope that progressive forces will be successful in their efforts to stop the authorities concerted from harassing late Jadav's family, and to defeat the reactionary forces and establish true people's democracy.

Michael Smith
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