

## GROUND REALITIES

## Terribly insecure young girls

*Convict their killers!*

WE are deeply worried over some recent incidents of young women dying in unnatural circumstances. Only days ago, the death of Hena from beating inflicted by the imposition of a so-called fatwa caused outrage all over the country, to the extent that her body needed to be exhumed for a fresh post-mortem. We eagerly wait for justice to be done to those who killed Hena as also those who provoked the killers into their sinister act.

Even as we mull over the atrocity which caused an end to Hena's life, we come by horrifying reports of the abduction and killing of a teenager named Tumpa. Apparently, she had been out celebrating Valentine's Day and while she was returning home late in the evening, she was abducted and killed. What makes Tumpa's death all the more stupefying is the fact that she was murdered eight months after her brother was killed by goons who had taken umbrage at his admonition to them over their stalking of his sister. Add to the killing of the siblings the suicide of Serafina Mardi, an indigenous teenager, ten months into her rape in Godagari of Rajshahi on Monday. Indeed, the incidents of rape and murder over the past few months leave little doubt that many of these crimes are related to sex and have been committed with an unabashed sense of impunity. It certainly disturbs us that at a time when women's empowerment is the buzzword in our deliberations on socio-economic realities, it is ironically women who keep falling prey to the predatory instincts of malevolent elements in the country.

The authorities keep informing citizens of the good job the police are doing in maintaining law and order, even though there are some perfectly valid reasons to question that position. The deaths of the women mentioned above surely give the lie to the assertion that all is well on the law and order front. Unless swift, drastic measures are taken to haul in the criminals responsible for the deaths of Tumpa (and her brother), Hena and Serafina, similar crimes will occur, to a point where it might become difficult for the authorities to roll conditions back.

## Libya steeped in turmoil

*Foreign nationals insecure*

AFTER Tahreer Square in Cairo it is now the Green Square in Tripoli. Libya is in a state of anarchy. The mass upsurge has brought the statecraft to a grinding halt. Indiscriminate killing of protestors by the government forces and supporters has brought about total disintegration of law and order in the country. The civil unrest is getting worse every moment.

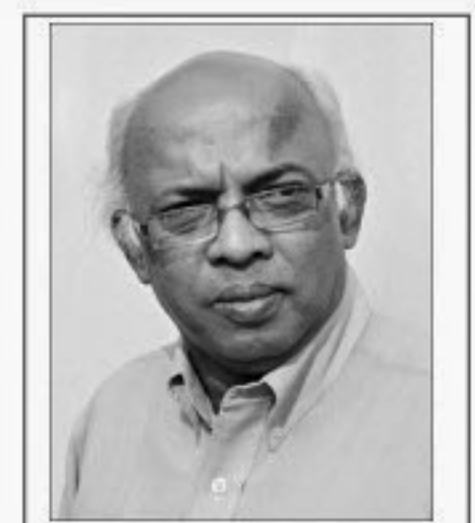
We express our concern about the Bangladeshis who are caught in the tumultuous circumstances. The anti government rioters have gone wild. They stormed a construction site outside Tripoli and took around 2000 workers of different nationalities hostage, of whom 450 are Bangladeshis. Many suffered injuries in the process. Some 40 to 50 South Koreans working at the site were also wounded. Uncertainty looms large about the fate of some 50,000 Bangladeshis now living in Libya. This is highly perturbing news for us.

Reports from various sources confirm that the country has plunged into mayhem and its now a free-for-all situation. There's no government at work. Terming the opposition as seditious elements, Gaddafi's son has only added fuel to fire. Senior Libyan aides and diplomats have already defected from the government and lent support to the opposition.

The whole region seems to be seething in a cauldron. It is for sure that the long serving rulers shall have to listen to the people and address their grievances at the soonest possible. Still their days seem numbered anyway.

Meanwhile, diplomatic efforts under UN auspices must get underway in order that no harm is done to foreigners and that they are repatriated to safety. For its part, Bangladesh government should take an initiative for early repatriation of our citizens until calm is restored and situation normalised for their return to places of work.

# Our future is in our past



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

THE good news for us is that we could soon be going back to secularism through some needed changes coming into a constitution much trilled with over the decades. The bad news is that those changes could likely be of the kind that will render the secular spirit of the constitution hollow to the point of being meaningless.

Suranjit Sengupta, who has of late been keeping us informed of what the ruling party, or parliament in that proper sense of the meaning, plans to do where taking us back to the constitution as it was enacted and adopted in 1972 is concerned, has not exactly been helpful in having us get our thoughts straight on this issue. He is not to be held responsible for the intellectual muddle we are in about the constitution as it ought to be.

He speaks for his party which, over the decades, has loudly defended the non-communal nature of the Bengali people. It was this singular, remarkable position of the Awami League which helped us out of the quagmire that was the state of Pakistan through a spirited, necessary war of national liberation in 1971. The Awami League's place in history is therefore assured.

But now comes this critical question of whether, if at all, we can truly go back to a secular constitution despite all the big noises being made around the issue. Contradictions have never been the foundation of a con-

stitution, any constitution, in any country. And yet we are now being told, in so many words and by the Awami League, that what we will end up having in the name of a secular constitution is actually political confusion.

Observe the grim realities as they keep coming up. The Bismillah factor, first imposed on the constitution by Bangladesh's first military dictator Ziaur Rahman, will stay there and yet we must imagine that the changes the Awami League government plans to bring about in the constitution will re-transform our polity into a secular undertaking. You can imagine as

pens to be a homeland for people of diverse religious groups, for indigenous people straddling different zones of culture. Yes, it is predominantly a Muslim country. But the far bigger truth is that those who follow the Islamic faith in Bangladesh have never flaunted their belief system, have indeed consistently upheld their cultural nationalism as the basis of the foundations of their state. Which is why what the country's second military ruler, Hussein Muhammad Ershad, tried doing in his times through declaring Islam as Bangladesh's state religion, has never quite taken us away from our secular,

which one we happen to be paying obeisance to, can be pulled down to earth at huge risk not only to divinity but to the spirituality which religion always embodies for us.

The point is simple, clear and irrefutable: we uphold our faith, be it Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism or animism, in terms of the canons handed down to us centuries ago. There is another equally simple, clear and irrefutable point: we do not dilute the appeal of faith by pulling it down to the level of the temporal -- and we will not cause an adulteration of politics through an injection of the communal into it.

Besides, we will not let go of our history, which is that in 1966, it was the secular nature of the Six Points which caused a sea change in our politics.

In 1971, we waged war for freedom as Bengalis driven by the spirit of secularism. In that war, being a Muslim or a Hindu or a Christian or a Buddhist or a Chakma or a Garo was irrelevant. We were all on a long, tortuous march towards creating a state for all Bengalis, a country where every citizen would enjoy the same rights, exercise the same responsibilities and dream the same dream.

Let that old dream, punctured through with so many stabs of nightmarish authoritarianism, return in revitalised and reinvented form and substance. Our future is in our past. It is in the constitution we gave ourselves precisely a year after freedom first came rushing into our yards, into the pulsating crevices of our expectant souls.

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AMIRUL RAJIV

*Our future is in our past. It is in the constitution we gave ourselves precisely a year after freedom first came rushing into our yards, into the pulsating crevices of our expectant souls.*

much as you wish. It will not help, for if you stick to the Zia idea and yet tell us that you are moving away from it, you only give out a strong impression of being ready to compromise on fundamentals.

And compromise is not always a healthy thing, especially when you deal with values. This country hap-

liberal moorings.

Let us be blunt here. The Zia and Ershad periods were aberrations in Bangladesh's history; and what is done in moments passed in the shadows of the historically aberrant must be done away with as swiftly as possible. Faith is always a matter of individual belief. And God, no matter

stance. Our future is in our past. It is in the constitution we gave ourselves precisely a year after freedom first came rushing into our yards, into the pulsating crevices of our expectant souls.

QU XING

IT'S unfair to impose unrealistic international duties upon the country which still needs to raise its development level.

Now China's GDP has surpassed that of Japan to become the world's second largest, some Western media, which predicted that China was on the brink of collapse a short time ago, have begun to claim that China is no longer a developing country, and therefore should shoulder more international responsibilities.

China has never shunned its international duties, it bore great pressure in helping the world economy recover from the Asian financial crisis of 1997 and the international financial crisis of 2008. China's huge debt reduction and development aid to African countries has received high praise from its recipients.

However, as statistics from major international organisations indicate, China is still a developing country according to its current level of development and it cannot accept "responsibilities" out of line with the country's level of development.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which calculates a "human development index" for each country based on three indices -- average life expectancy, education and living standards -- ranked China 89th in 2010 and as a developing country with "a medium level of development."

The World Bank and IMF both rank China as a lower middle-income country.

The country's industrial and

employment structures and rate of urbanisation are typical of a lower middle-income country. While China has made considerable progress in strengthening overall competitiveness, progress in modernisation still

Forum, China ranked 79th in the world in the maturity of its science and technology.

China's technological innovation capability is poor. It's spending on research and development is far lower

# China's real responsibilities

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lags significantly behind.

In the 2010 World Competitiveness Yearbook released by the International Institute for Management Development (IMD), China ranked 18th.

China has performed well in the development of the domestic economy, international trade, employment, public finance, the labour market and scientific infrastructure, but is not as competitive as it could be in terms of international investment, business legislation, management practice, health and the environment.

Of the 12 indices examined in the Global Competitiveness Report 2009-2010 issued by the World Economic

than that of the major developed countries and Chinese enterprises have few research and development facilities. The great majority of the patents for inventions in the area of high technology in China come from overseas.

The nation also spends much less on education than developed countries, has insufficient medium and high-level personnel and has a much lower overall level of human resources than developed countries and emerging industrial countries. The low proportion of

China's population with a high school education has become a bottleneck in efforts to improve the quality of China's human resources.

The average world level of spend-

ing on education is 4.9% of GDP and the level of most countries is generally not lower than 4%. According to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, actual investment in public education in China accounts for only 2.4% of its GDP.

The rapid development of China's economy in recent years has greatly increased the size of China's economy but it has also increased the gap between the rich and the poor.

China's Gini Coefficient -- a commonly used measure of wealth inequality -- reached 0.47 in 2010, higher than those of developed countries such as France (0.327), Switzerland (0.337) and the United States (0.408). China has made great achievements in poverty alleviation in recent years, but there is still a great deal that needs to be done to help the poor.

During the 30-plus years of reform and opening-up, the country has moved into the front ranks of the world in terms of overall strength and competitiveness in some fields. This is undoubtedly a great achievement. But most of the indices, such as those for economic and social development, education, health, science and technology, indicate that China is a developing country and still has much to do to.

China cannot accept responsibilities that would threaten its economic and social development.

The writer is president of the China Institute of International Studies. (C) China Daily. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement with Asia News Network.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

February 23

- 1836**  
The Battle of the Alamo begins in San Antonio, Texas.
- 1870**  
In the United States, post-Civil War military control of Mississippi ends and it is readmitted to the Union.
- 1898**  
Émile Zola is imprisoned in France after writing "J'accuse", a letter accusing the French government of anti-Semitism and wrongfully imprisoning Captain Alfred Dreyfus.
- 1917**  
First demonstrations in Saint Petersburg, Russia. The beginning of the February Revolution.
- 1918**  
First victory of Red Army over the Kaiser's German troops near Narva and Pskov.
- 1969**  
Sheikh Mujibur Rahman given the honorific "Bangabandhu" at a public meeting in Race Course (now Suharawardy Uddyan).
- 1991**  
Gulf War: Ground troops cross the Saudi Arabian border and enter Iraq, thus beginning the ground phase of the war.
- 1998**  
Osama bin Laden publishes a fatwa declaring jihad against all Jews and "Crusaders"; the latter term is commonly interpreted to refer to the people of Europe and the United States.