

## Transit deal with India

*It must involve adequate homework from Bangladesh side*

**T**HIS paper has been consistently in favour of greater connectivity, regionally and inter-regionally. We are also for a wider scope for trade and commerce with India. As it is a vital and significant window of economic growth, we have all through remained a vocal supporter for a well thought out transit deal which will be win-win for both sides. We believe with adequate homework, transit can usher in a new era of bilateral relations between our two countries, serving as an example for others to emulate.

In view of the fact that transit is a highly complex, delicate and multi-faceted issue, Bangladesh must thoroughly prepare itself before signing any agreement. We must not jump into reaching a deal without properly examining its various aspects. Transit is an international phenomenon and there are many examples to learn from.

However those opposing any kind of transit agreement with India under any circumstances have, we feel, kept themselves in the dark about the advantages of economic linkage and in most cases they oppose it without understanding and thoroughly going into the subject at all.

The fundamental guiding principle in our negotiations on transit should be that the deal must bring maximum benefits to both sides with especial focus on Bangladesh as our economic challenges are enormous.

At this stage of the discussion we are forced to point out that public has been mostly kept in the dark on this issue. We must remember that in Bangladesh transit is as much, if not more, a political issue as it is an economic one. Therefore solid public support is a precondition for its durability, to gain which we must take the people into confidence and tell them about the advantages of transit. Keeping silent on the issues being negotiated, as we seem to be doing, is likely to be counter productive.

We want the whole discussion on transit to proceed expeditiously which must be backed by credible and in-depth examination of all the issues involved.

## Saving coastal mangrove

### forests

**Strong action needed**

**D**ESPITE the existence of a government ban on felling of trees until 2015, destruction of forests has been going on unabated. The Char Bestin mangrove forest in Patuakhali district did come under attack in broad daylight on Thursday. Villagers supported by a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) were allegedly involved in cutting down some 5,000 trees from the mangrove forest.

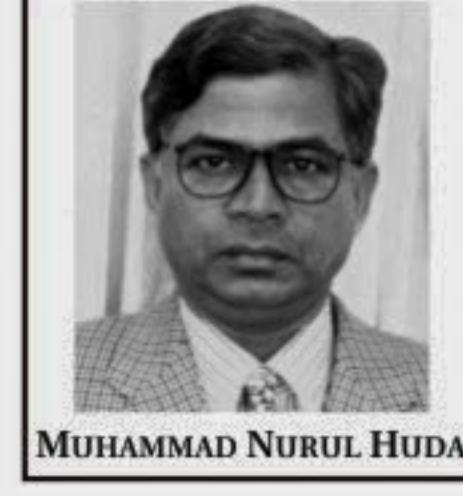
Surprisingly, this has happened despite an instance of stopping a similar attempt at destroying a neighbouring mangrove forest on Char Kukrimukri by a High Court order. It appears, neither the existing government ban, nor the instance of the High Court's recent intervention could strike any fear in the hearts of the greedy loggers of the char in question.

One is surprised by the role of the Patuakhali district administration in this case. Its action to stop the said forest's destruction came rather late. It could also be learnt that the local administration had allocated a large swathe of the mangrove forest to some landless farmers. But were the settler beneficiaries also given the licence to plunder the forest with abandon? And how did the NGO, which has denied the allegation, as reported, got involved in the felling of trees in the first place? Was the entire incident of forest robbery going on without the knowledge of the administration? The administration owes an answer to all these questions.

The forest department, too, cannot avoid its responsibilities. Apparently, they remained a passive observer when the country is being stripped off its precious green top cover relentlessly.

We hope the government would mount a prompt investigation into the Char Bestin case and bring the culprits to justice. In the same breath, we would also expect that strong action would follow in the future cases of for-

# Law enforcement cost of hartal



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

**T**HE debilitating adversity on the life and living of many, particularly, the working class, caused by the

36 hour hartal of 12-13 June last is much too recent to be erased from public memory. While the general population is yet to recover from the shocks and after shocks of the hugely unsettling hartal phenomena, there is talk of another hartal this time for 48 hours. The optimists would like to bank on the pragmatism of the political class to ward off the ominous second hartal.

There could be no two opinions on the extremely harmful impact of hartal on the national economy as also the crippling effects of such phenomena on our socio-political existence. In so far as the facts and figures pertaining to the hartal related cumulative losses are concerned, we have a near saturation of data. Those data speak very eloquently and poignantly that are understood and appreciated by all, politicians inclusive. However, hartal continues to be a pathetic recurrent reality.

There is no doubt that hartal in our parlance has serious public order implications. Consequently, when hartal takes place the police are directed to intervene in a big way to restore and sustain order. Over the years of our democratic progression since 1991 the police are being increasingly deployed to control and contain public order situation from deterioration and aggravation.

The cynics would like us to believe that police is the arch villain of the hartal face-off or tragedy as one may describe it. Others say that circumstances compel policemen to appear in menacing combat gear to scare and subdue the fierce looking protesters. Quite often in the police-protesters engagement excesses are committed. We have all been used to witnessing the disturbingly confrontational scenario during hartal such engagement

is disturbing because police in a democratic polity are expected to endear themselves to the community. No wonder, every hartal makes a dent on police image.

only) and rental charges comes to TK.

7 lakh while cost of dry cooked food for continuous deployment stands at TK. 7 lakh 30 thousand.

It is thus seen that one dawn to



QAMRUZZAMAN/DRINKNEWS

***The point for consideration is if our political class would really appreciate the national losses, both economic and human, due to hartal-driven public order situation.***

What, however, often goes unnoticed is the huge monetary cost of public order management consequent upon hartal, in addition to the unquantifiable dimension of law enforcement during such abnormality. The country wide cost for law and order enforcement in hartal would be staggering and we would not venture into that. For facility of understanding, we may, however, look at the expenditures incurred by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police only during the recent 36 hour hartal.

According to sources, that professionally liaise with the lawmen of the metropolis, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police itself deployed 10,300 personnel of different ranks whose average pay for a day comes to TK. 47 lakh 26 thousand. Expenditures for petrol-oil lubricants for government and 300 requisitioned transports (for hartal

dusk hartal costs the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) TK. 62 lakh. One 24 hour hartal pushes the cost to TK. 01 crore 23 lakh while 48 hour Hartal enhances the expenditure to TK. 1 crore 85 lakh. It is pertinent to note that the same number of manpower and transports have to be deployed on the day preceding the hartal which means that in the event of prolonged engagement the expenditures have an escalating and compounding effect.

The above figures exclusively relate to Dhaka Metropolitan outfit and do not include supportive units like RAB, Armed Police Battalion and Para-military elements who are routinely required during hartal.

A sensitive aspect that affects the tax-paying public is the fear of insecurity during hartal hours in different neighbourhoods of Dhaka city where

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## Afghanistan's last locavores

PATRICIA MCARDLE

**M**ANY urban Americans idealize "green living" and "slow food." But few realize that one of the most promising models for sustainable living is not to be found on organic farms in the United States, but in Afghanistan. A majority of its 30 million citizens still grow and process most of the food they consume. They are the ultimate locavores.

During the 12 months I spent as a State Department political adviser in northern Afghanistan, I was dismayed to see that instead of building on Afghanistan's traditional, labor-intensive agricultural and construction practices, the United States is using many of its aid dollars to transform this fragile agrarian society into a consumer-oriented, mechanized, fossil-fuel-based economy.

In 2004, the Energy Department carried out a study of Afghanistan. It revealed abundant renewable energy resources that could be used to build small-scale wind- and solar-powered systems to generate electricity and solar thermal devices for cooking and heating water.

Rather than focus on those resources, the U.S. government has spent hundreds of millions of dollars to build large diesel generators and exploit the country's oil, gas and coal reserves. The drilling of new oil wells may provide unskilled, poorly paid jobs for some locals, but the bulk of the profits will likely flow overseas or into the pockets of a few warlords and government officials.

U.S. taxpayers' dollars are also being used for energy-inefficient construction projects. During my year in Afghanistan, I sat for hours in meetings with local officials in remote mountain and desert locations, sweating or freezing -- depending upon the season -- inside concrete and cinder-block schools and police stations built with American aid.

These projects are required to adhere to international building codes, which do not permit the construction of traditional earthen structures.

These structures are typically built with cob -- a mixture of mud, sand, clay and chopped straw molded to

***Long after U.S. forces have departed, it will be these rural farmers, not Afghanistan's small urban population, who will decide whether to support or reject future insurgencies.***

form durable, elegant, super-insulated, earthquake-resistant structures. With their thick walls, small windows and natural ventilation, traditional Afghan homes may not comply with international building codes, but they are cooler in summer and warmer in winter than cinder-block buildings. They also last a long time. Some of Afghanistan's oldest structures, including sections of the defensive wall that once surrounded the 2,000-year-old Silk Road city of Balkh, are made of cob and rammed earth. In England, people are still living in cob houses built before Shakespeare was born.

Renewable energy and sustainability aren't just development issues. They are security issues, too. Seventy percent of the Defense Department's energy budget in Afghanistan is spent on transporting diesel fuel in armored convoys. In a welcome attempt to reduce this dangerous and expensive dependence on fossil fuel, the Marine Corps recently established two patrol bases in Afghanistan operating entirely on renewable energy.

Unfortunately, it is too little, too late. Had a renewable energy program been initiated a decade ago, when the United States entered Afghanistan to

help overthrow the Taliban, Washington could have saved billions of dollars in fuel costs and, more important, hundreds of lives lost in transporting and guarding diesel fuel convoys.

Along with advocating the construction of a pipeline to carry natural gas from Central Asia, across Afghanistan and into Pakistan, the United States is also helping fund a 20th-century-style power grid that will compel Afghanistan to purchase the bulk of its electricity from neighboring former Soviet republics for decades to come. Even if this grid survives future sabotage and political unrest in Central Asia, its power lines and transmission

towers will be carrying this imported electricity right over the heads of rural Afghans and into Afghanistan's major cities despite the fact that the U.S. Central Command has identified the lack of access to electricity in rural areas as a major obstacle to sustaining the gains achieved by our counter-insurgency strategy.

Sustainable development in Afghanistan has taken a back seat to "quick wins" that can be reported to Congress as indicators of success: tractors that farmers can't repair and that require diesel fuel they can't afford; cheaply built schools; and smooth but wafer-thin asphalt, which will never stand up to Afghanistan's punishing climate without costly annual maintenance.

If donor nations dismiss Afghans' centuries of experience in sustainability and continue to support the exploitation of fossil fuels over renewable energy, future generations of rural Afghans will be forced to watch in frustrated silence as the construction of pipelines, oil rigs and enormous power grids further degrades their fragile and beautiful land while doing little to improve their lives.

And long after U.S. forces have departed, it will be these rural farmers, not Afghanistan's small urban population, who will decide whether to support or reject future insurgencies.

The writer is a retired foreign service officer and Navy veteran, is the author of the novel "Frishata." She serves on the board of directors of Solar Cookers International.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

June 25

1944

World War II: The Battle of Tali-Ihantala, the largest battle ever fought in the Nordic Countries, begins.

1947

The Diary of a Young Girl (better known as The Diary of Anne Frank) is published.

1948

The Berlin airlift begins.

1949

Long-Haired Hare, starring Bugs Bunny, is released in theaters.

1950

The Korean War begins with the invasion of South Korea by North Korea.

1975

Mozambique achieves independence.

1991

Croatia and Slovenia declare their independence from Yugoslavia.