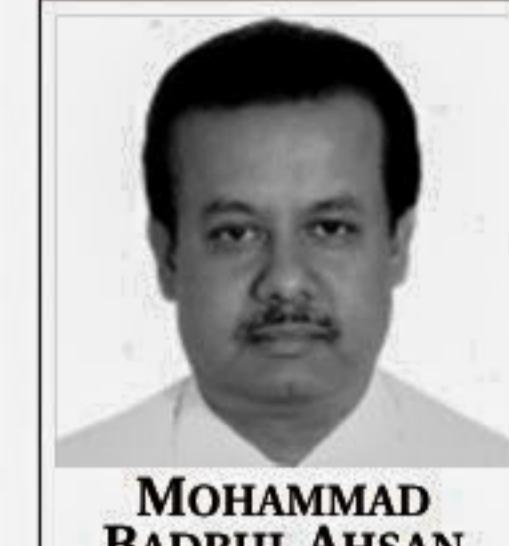


CROSS TALK

Quantum mechanics of a double murder



MOHAMMAD
BADRUL AHSAN

THE grisly murder of a journalist couple last Friday only further intensified the horror of life in this city punctuated by what we can call psychopathic peekaboo. A hardworking man returned home at 2:00 am after a long day's work and then death popped out on him when it was least expected. The killers also killed his wife, but spared the couple's 5-year-old only child. God knows, this child would die countless times for the rest of his life haunted by the horrible images of his dead and brutalised parents flashing before his eyes.

The psychopathy of this horrible crime comes from the bizarre and gruesome nature of killing two human beings. The investigators are looking for clues to connect cruelty with causality in the manner Archimedes discovered that any floating object displaces its own weight of fluid. How the victims are killed often tell why the killers have killed. Crime displaces its own weight of motives.

Here comes the peekaboo part of the story. It is believed the killers were already inside the apartment when

the man came home. It is inferred from the broken egg shells found in the kitchen that his wife had treated the killers to dinner with fried eggs. She must have had tea and conversations with the killers all that time exuding cordiality and affection. Then peekaboo! Intimate people turned into ultimate enemies when vicious murderers jumped out of them. Smiling faces turned into ugly grins and pliant hands stiffened to grab knives. Friends instantly transformed into fiends.

Every murder is definitely shocking, but it is also something that happens every day. And death at the hands of one's friends is nothing new. *Hurumzai* (a Bangla film) once cried out, "Thou too Brutus!" when a cabal of assassins were stabbing him to death and he found his friends among them.

But this type of killing is different from others, because it always kills twice. The soul of the victim succumbs to the shock of bewilderment before his body does to blows. Whatever reasons may have exploded into last Friday's tragedy, it's futile to evaluate them on moral rectitude.

The Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh has appealed to newspapers to exercise prudence in terms of what they are going to write about it.

There is a concept in quantum mechanics that observing something can change it. It's too much focus on this case that may eventually lead to its imperfections. The members of the journalist community have the right and a moral obligation to demand justice. They can also breathe down the neck of police to see it doesn't neglect the investigation.

However, what they shouldn't do is expect themselves to be treated differently from rest of the country. When was the last time journalists had been urged to exercise caution in their coverage of thousands of murder cases before? Why should this murder story get speedier investigation than others? We should focus on the murder and let the police work on motives.

The challenge for all of us right now is to see that we don't get stuck in the muck but rise above it instead. As mentioned before, each victim in the algebra of this exponential homicide has died two deaths. Each of them must have died an early death when friends brought down the knife on her or him. Each was finished once before being finally finished off.

But the victims would have been more shocked if they had lived to see

the circus that has been going on over their unfortunate deaths. And they would have been heartbroken to know that they were being treated as journalists, not as human beings. It would have been another story altogether if their murders were connected with their work. It's still possible. We don't know.

Until then, the couple, who lived as journalists, died as human beings. We should focus on the murder and let the police work on motives. For the larger society, the bigger concern isn't even the motives of this murder, but that those motives are becoming a cottage industry.

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New gas reserve at Sangu A heartening news

THE discovery by an Australian gas exploration company Santos that a modest reserve of gas has been found at a Sangu well in the Bay of Bengal is an elevating piece of news.

The new find holds special significance for Chittagong as it will now be possible to supply between 20 and 30 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) of gas to its fuel-starved industries.

The latest gas find follows on the heels of an announcement in early September 2011 by Petrobangla, the state-owned mineral oil and gas company, that it has struck a new gas structure at Rashidpur with a reserve of about 3 trillion cubic feet (TCF).

It was further reported that once it went operational, Rashidpur field would make available 55 mmcf gas in the near future.

It is worthwhile to note that the 18 gas fields now in operation can produce around 2,064 mmcf of gas, while at the moment the country needs around 2,500 mmcf of gas. The latest find of gas at Sangu, albeit in a small way, will go to reduce that widening demand-supply gap of this crucial energy source.

The discoveries augur well when the country is experiencing severe gas crisis that has negatively affected production in the industries, forced some power plants to stop production of electricity and even impacted negatively on the day-to-day lives of its citizens.

Though the exact amount of gas at the new site in question in the Bay is yet to be ascertained, still the expectation that the port city's industries will be assured of at least two years' supply is rather comforting. Once they get used to the supply they will be only looking for assured continuity of it.

We think the success at the Sangu will encourage other international oil companies operating at different other fields as well as Petrobangla to step up their efforts to discover new gas fields to solve the country's need for fuel.

Condition of Upazila health complexes deplorable

Fill in the vacant posts first

DISMAL condition of local hospitals in delivering services has been brought to light once again by a news item carried in a leading Bengali daily. The health complex in Tahirpur Upazila in Sunamganj district has not had an appointed doctor in three years. The Upazila health and family planning officer, who supervises the administrative affairs, also got transferred out six months ago. What is worse, all the ten posts for medical officers have been vacant since 2009 and there is only one trained nurse against the requirement of ten in a 31-bed health complex.

More alarming is the fact that in the absence of a trained doctor, the ward boy and the night guard are even delivering gynaecological and emergency services, exposing the patients to serious health hazards.

We are appalled by this revelation because thousands of poor village people with little access to healthcare facilities are entirely dependent on the Upazila health complexes. But when it is without a doctor, and that too for three years, it not only deprives people of their right to healthcare but also puts them at risk of being wrongly treated, which can bring about fatal consequences. Under the circumstances, we would expect the health ministry's intervention to make sure that all the vacancies are filled in immediately.

The picture is no better even when the posts are not vacant. Appointed medical officers at Upazila health complexes are reportedly found to have remained absent from their duties. Without any permission from concerned authorities, they rather spend more time in towns and cities where they have ample opportunities for private practice.

In this connection, we recall that the prime minister in her address to the inaugural ceremony of the 19th Bangladesh Medical Convention in March 2011 warned doctors of punitive actions if they were negligent in performing their duties outlying areas. Now we want to

| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

Come on, China, buy our stuff

ADAM DAVIDSON

THE first time I visited China, in 2005, an American businessman living there told me that the country was so huge and was changing so fast that everything you heard about it was true, and so was the opposite. That still seems to be the case. China is the fastest-growing consumer market in the world, and American companies have made billions there. At the same time, Chinese consumers aren't spending nearly as much as American companies had hoped. China has simultaneously become the greatest boon and the biggest disappointment.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. In 2000, the US forged its current economic relationship with China by permanently granting it most-favoured-nation trade status and, eventually, helping the country enter the World Trade Organization. The unspoken deal, though, went something like this: China could make a lot of cheap goods, which would benefit US consumers, even if it cost the country countless low-end manufacturing jobs.

And rather than, say, fight for an extra bit of market share in Chicago, American multinationals could offset any losses because of competition by entering a country with more than a billion people -- including the fastest-growing middle class in history -- just about to buy their first refrigerators, TVs and cars. It was as if the United States added a magical 51st state, one that was bigger and grew faster than all the others. We would all be better off.

More than a decade later, many are waiting for the payoff. Certainly, lots of American companies have made money, but many actual workers have paid a real price. What went wrong? In part, American businesses assumed that a wealthier China would look like, well, America, says Paul French, a longtime Shanghai-based analyst with Access Asia-Mintel. He notes that Chinese consumers have spent far

less than expected, and the money they do spend is less likely to be spent on American goods.

There is a long list of missteps, French says. Home Depot, for example, overestimated the desire for do-it-yourself home projects and high-end materials in a country with an unbelievably cheap labour force and a thriving black market. Kodak learned it couldn't forever dump its unsold film on a consumer base looking to make their first cameras digital ones. The Gap had to learn that a thriving middle class does not want to dress shabby-chic. In general, French says, European companies have done much better than American ones because they've had to practice selling across borders and cultures for decades.

Many US executives also assumed that as China got richer, its citizens would spend more of their income. But the opposite has happened: The country's savings rate is growing faster than its spending. China's households save more than a quarter of their income, considerably less than 4%.

Some argue that this is because of millennia-old Confucian frugality. Others say it's more prosaic. When China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, it famously conceded that it would break "the iron rice bowl" -- to get rid of the millions of decent-paying (for China) government jobs with fairly generous (for China) benefits. Partly as a result, a successful professional in Shanghai knows that she will have to bear any future health care or retirement costs for herself and, because of the one-child policy, for her parents and grandparents too.

Yet probably the greatest barrier to Chinese consumption is the policy of China's Central Bank. Every month, the US buys around \$35 billion in goods and services from China and sells around \$11 billion back. That, of course, leaves a \$24 billion trade deficit. Currencies work like any other salable good in that they adjust based

on supply and demand. Every month, the US is demanding a lot of yuan and China is demanding few US dollars. The natural result should be for the dollar to get weaker as the yuan gets stronger.

But China's government prevents that adjustment by artificially increasing the demand for dollars, spending much of that \$24 billion surplus on US Treasury bonds. This sounds boring, but it effectively makes all Chinese exports somewhere around 25% cheaper and all US imports to China, effectively, about 25% more expensive. Sure, we get to buy cheap stuff made in China, and by selling so many Treasury bonds, our interest rates -- like those for credit cards or mortgages -- are lower. But the long-term impact is disastrous. Many eco-

nomic analysts, from Dean Baker on the left to David Boaz on the right, argue that all that easy money from the US helped make the housing bubble much bigger and last longer, which created a far bigger crisis than the one we already have.

The currency intervention also functions as a massive inequality-generating machine. US-based behemoths, which own or use many of those exporting Chinese factories, benefit, as do their shareholders. And because more than 90% of US stocks are owned by the wealthiest 20%, the spoils are disproportionately concentrated at the top. Meanwhile, lower wages, lost jobs and crippled manufacturing employment fall on the less wealthy.

The economists that I spoke to estimated that China's currency policy has cost the US between 200,000 and 3 million jobs. Of course, the wide range suggests that these are little more than educated guesses. But a broad picture does emerge. US manufacturing employment has fallen by around 6 million over the last decade. If China had allowed its currency to adjust naturally, life might be much better for many former American factory workers.

Now is a particularly good time to put pressure on China's economic planners. Many market analysts fear that China's economy is slowing down considerably, a prospect that suggests the country will keep the yuan weak for years to come. Given this, it may seem odd that China's currency policy isn't the beginning and end of every single political stump speech. After all, it's probably the one thing that, if changed, could instantly bring both jobs and more equality to this country. I can't think of any other economic agenda that would receive the support of unions and big business, free traders and protectionists, Wall Street Occupiers and tea party veterans.

Every president since Clinton has been trying to persuade China to float its currency. A number of Republican presidential candidates, including Mitt Romney, support pressuring China. But candidates always talk tough. Presidents opt for a gentle, nudging approach. They know that China, alone, gets to decide.

The writer is co-founder of NPR's "Planet Money," a podcast and blog.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

February 17

1871

The victorious Prussian Army parades through Paris, France after the end of the Siege of Paris during the Franco-Prussian War.

1933

Newsweek magazine is published for the first time.

1979

The Sino-Vietnamese War begins.

1998

Nagorno-Karabakh War: Armenian troops kill 7090 Azerbaijani civilians in the village of Qaradaöly.

2008

Kosovo declares independence.

2011

Libyan protests begin. In Bahrain, security forces launched a deadly pre-dawn raid on protesters in Pearl Roundabout in Manama, the day is locally known as Bloody Thursday.