

## CROSS TALK

## The case of the 'disappeared'

### Absolute need for the govt. to act

It appears that people of various political shades are disappearing into the darkness of night, the latest victim being M. Ilias Ali, Organising Secretary of BNP's Sylhet division. That the missing individual's spouse must come out openly and request for the prime minister's intervention in an effort to unravel the mystery of this disappearance hardly inspires confidence in law enforcement agencies.

Actually the drama has brought to light the government's apparently half-hearted attempts to locate Mr. Ilias. Equally dumbfounding is the rapidity with which BNP Chairperson pointed the finger directly at the ruling party accusing it of foul play in the event, in effect, putting the government in the dock.

Whilst the eruption of violence in Sylhet division may be understandable, given the nature of confrontational politics in the country, what stands out markedly is the fact that the 'hartal' programme declared by the opposition within hours of the incident, points to a line of thinking that focuses on political agitation, rather than an insistence on investigation of a serious crime and bringing the culprit to book.

In the final analysis of things, the government must not only act but also be seen to be doing something about Ilias's disappearance, which puts it to a litmus test. According to the first quarter report of 2012 by Odhikar, a human rights organisation, six persons have suffered 'disappearing' acts. What is of interest here is that no law enforcement agency has any news or clues about the status of these missing individuals. Such lack of concern cannot be condoned in any civilised society that propagates to uphold the rule of law, and it is here the State appears to be floundering.

## Shifting Sagar-Runi case to RAB

### Poor reflection on police efficiency

THE High Court has been constrained to order the transfer of the journalist's couple murder case from the detective branch to RAB, there being no palpable progress in the inquiry into the murder in the more than two months since the unfortunate couple were found murdered in their apartment on 11 Feb.

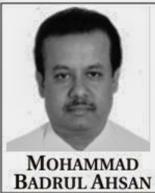
We would hope that the relevant persons, particularly the Home Minister and the IGP, comprehend the meaning of such an order. This we are afraid is a testimony to their abhorrent and unacceptable inefficiency, and particularly that of the DB.

We feel the Home Minister owes not only an apology but also an explanation to the public for several reasons. Firstly, given that there has not been any breakthrough in the case she has been hoodwinking the people all along by offering false hopes when all the time she was well aware of the status of the probe. She started with initially assuring a breakthrough within 48 hours and since then has been painting a false and make-believe situation to the people. We were, unfortunately, being fed on virtual lies as apparent from the admission by the DB to the HC bench that there has been precious little by way of progress in the case. Just think of the condition of the relatives of the victims who are eagerly waiting to see the killers nabbed and brought to justice.

This too is a reflection on the abysmal inefficiency of the Home Minister and the abominable way the case has been handled so far. We wonder why, knowing that the DB investigation was going nowhere, did she not act proactively and entrust the job to other better equipped departments in her ministry instead of waiting for the HC to do so?

We demand a quick breakthrough in the case and

# The Suranjit Paradox



MOHAMMAD  
BADRUL AHSAN

A midnight money run that went bad has landed all of us in trouble. The APS to the railway minister got sacked. A general manager and a security official of the railway got suspended. The rail minister stepped down from his post, before mutating into a minister without portfolio. The rest of us have been reeling under the impact of these events. We are still scratching our heads.

The minister resigned, as he said, for the sake of fair investigation. We don't know if he is a victim or a villain because his exit and then limited return have left us in a no-man's land. Did he quit because he was innocent? Or, did he quit because he was guilty? If he is innocent he should have stayed on the job. If he is guilty, he shouldn't have remained a minister in any capacity. What we have now is a scandal in suspended animation.

The most scandalous thing about any scandal is that those who pretend innocence are almost always guilty. My favourite definition of scandal is that it is when respectable wrongdoers run out of luck. Here is a man, who provided us exhilarating sound bites over the years. When he had to bite the bullet, we thought it could be destiny. It convinced us this "smart Alec" politician had run out of his luck.

That's not how it looked 32 hours after his resignation. If he was a minister before, he is a minister now. The label has changed, not the bottle. Crime has been separated from punishment. The minister got punished for abuse of power. Then he got rewarded for his addiction to it.

All in all, the minister's resignation

has left a bad taste in the mouth. In the one week between the night when a rebellious driver took carload of cash to the BGB authorities and the afternoon the railway minister announced his resignation, this nation has watched a political stalwart crumble like a house of cards. He fretted, he fumed, mumbled and stumbled, but all that time giving the impression of a man who was uncomfortable with himself.

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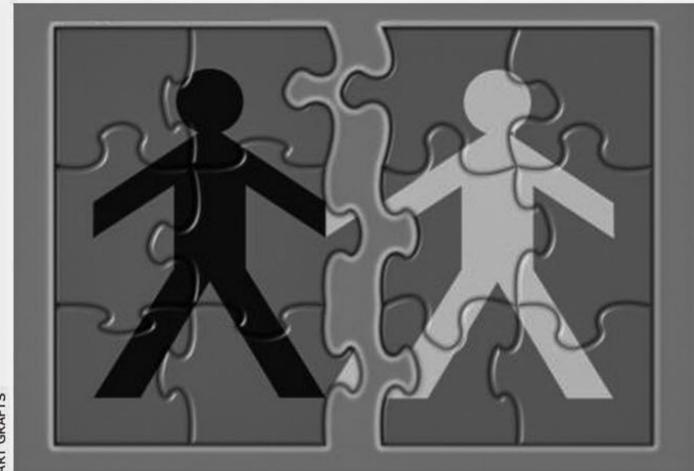
For a while we thought the government also was uncomfortable with him. Our perception proved right when the minister resigned and talked about taking a pause in his political journey. Now it seems the whole thing has been a load of hogwash. A man who resigned over alleged corruption has been reinstated in a bizarre play of what can be called the law of conservation of ministers. It is as if a minister once created cannot be destroyed. He can only change his location within the system.

True, the whole episode smacked of conspiracy. There are many moneyed people in this country, and those who have money have cars and

those who have cars have drivers. And many of these drivers run money every day between destinations, a lot of it possibly being dirty given the level of crime and corruption committed in this country. If all of these drivers were to succumb to their conscience, this Golden Bengal would be in shining splendour today. While it can't be ruled out that the money scam has been an act of ven-

Murphy's Law that if anything can go wrong, it will. Perhaps he was still digging when he was already in a hole. Perhaps he wanted to prove his innocence by showing that he wasn't hiding anything.

But the minister obviously never heard of the Easterlin Paradox. It is a concept in economics that affluence doesn't bring happiness after a certain point. He only invited unhappi-



ART GRAFTS

geance by his enemies, the minister himself has been his worst enemy. I say it because the minister has showed poor skill in money management. It was bad planning for him to put all the good things in his life within a single week.

Even if the money recovered from that car wasn't going to him, how does he explain the hefty sum of 50 million taka his son paid to get the telecommunication license? What about the shopping mall in his hometown that reportedly cost 170 million? Why did he decide to open it at a time when the feverish pitch of cry for his head was at its peak?

Perhaps the minister thought of

ness through successive news of his newfound affluence. He only made us evermore suspicious that the railway minister himself could have derailed.

For a long time to come we are going to scratch our heads. If the minister had clean money why did he wait until four and a half months after he became a minister to flaunt it all at once, also within the same week? The long question can be condensed into an easy mnemonic. The Suranjit Paradox is what I would call it.

The writer is Editor, First News and an opinion writer for The Daily Star. Email: badrul151@yahoo.com

## | The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

# The high cost of gambling on oil

JOSEPH P. KENNEDY II

THE drastic rise in the price of oil and gasoline is in part the result of forces beyond our control: As high-growth countries like China and India increase the demand for petroleum, the price will go up.

But there are factors contributing to the high price of oil that we can do something about. Chief among them is the effect of "pure" speculators -- investors who buy and sell oil futures but never take physical possession of actual barrels of oil. These middlemen add little value and lots of cost as they bid up the price of oil in pursuit of financial gain. They should be banned from the world's commodity exchanges, which could drive down the price of oil by as much as 40% and the price of gasoline by as much as \$1 a gallon.

Today, speculators dominate the trading of oil futures. According to Congressional testimony by the commodities specialist Michael W. Masters in 2009, the oil futures markets routinely trade more than 1 billion barrels of oil per day. Given that the entire world produces only around 85 million actual "wet" barrels a day, this means that more than 90% of trading involves speculators' exchanging "paper" barrels with one another.

Because of speculation, today's oil prices of about \$100 a barrel have become disconnected from the costs of extraction, which average \$11 a barrel worldwide. Pure speculators

account for as much as 40% of that high price, according to testimony that Rex Tillerson, the chief executive of ExxonMobil, gave to Congress last year. That estimate is bolstered by a recent report from the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis.

Many economists contend that speculation on oil futures is a good thing, because it increases liquidity and better distributes risk, allowing refiners, producers, wholesalers and consumers (like airlines) to "hedge" their positions more efficiently, protecting themselves against unseen future shifts in the price of oil.

But it's one thing to have a trading system in which oil industry players place strategic bets on where prices will be months into the future; it's another thing to have a system in which hedge funds and bankers pump billions of purely speculative dollars into commodity exchanges, chasing a limited number of barrels and driving up the price. The same concern explains why the United States government placed limits on pure speculators in grain exchanges after repeated manipulations of crop prices during the Great Depression.

The market for oil futures differs from the markets for other commodities in the sheer size and scope of trading and in the impact it has on a

strategically important resource. There is a fundamental difference between oil futures and, say, orange juice futures. If orange juice gets too pricey (perhaps because of a speculative bubble), we can easily switch to apple juice. The same does not hold with oil. Higher oil prices act like a choke-chain on the economy, dragging down profits for ordinary businesses and depressing investment.

When I started buying and selling oil more than 30 years ago for my nonprofit organisation, speculation wasn't a significant aspect of the industry. But in 1991, just a few years after oil futures began trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange, Goldman Sachs made an argument to the Commodity Futures Trading Commission that Wall Street dealers who put down big bets on oil should be considered legitimate hedgers and granted an exemption from regulatory limits on their trades.

The Commission granted an exemption that ultimately allowed Goldman Sachs to process billions of dollars in speculative oil trades. Other exemptions followed. By 2008, eight investment banks accounted for 32% of the total oil futures market. According to a recent analysis by McClatchy, only about 30% of oil futures traders are actual oil industry

participants.

Congress was jolted into action when it learned of the full extent of Commodity Futures Trading Commission's lax oversight. In the wake of the economic crisis, the Dodd-Frank Wall Street reform law required greater trading transparency and limited speculators who lacked a legitimate business-hedging purpose to positions of no greater than 25% of the futures market.

This is an important step, but limiting speculators in the oil markets doesn't go far enough. Even with the restrictions currently in place, those eight investment banks alone can severely inflate the price of oil. Federal legislation should bar pure oil speculators entirely from commodity exchanges in the United States. And the United States should use its clout to get European and Asian markets to follow its lead, chasing oil speculators from the world's commodity markets.

Eliminating pure speculation on oil futures is a question of fairness. The choice is between a world of hedge-fund traders who make enormous amounts of money at the expense of people who need to drive their cars and heat their homes, and a world where the fundamentals of life -- food, housing, health care, education and energy -- remain affordable for all.

The writer, a former U. S. representative from Massachusetts, is the founder, chairman and president of Citizens Energy Corporation.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

April 20

1526

The last ruler of the Lodi Dynasty, Ibrahim Lodi is defeated and killed by Babur in the First Battle of Panipat.

1653

Oliver Cromwell dissolves the Rump Parliament.

1657

Freedom of religion is granted to the Jews of New Amsterdam (later New York City).

1770

The Georgian king Erekle II, abandoned by his Russian ally Count Totleben, wins a victory over Ottoman forces at Aspindza.

1876

The April Uprising, a key point in modern Bulgarian history, leading to the Russo-Turkish War and the liberation of Bulgaria from domination as an independent part of the Ottoman Empire.

1922

The Soviet government creates South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast within Georgian SSR.

1946

The League of Nations officially dissolves, giving most of its power to the United Nations.

1961

Failure of the Bay of Pigs Invasion of US-backed troops against Cuba.

1998

German terrorist group the Red Army Faction announces their dissolution after 28 years.