

Zero killing along the border

Ball is in India's court

WE welcome the assurance by the DG of the Indian Border Security Force that killings of Bangladeshi nationals along the border would be brought down to zero. Although the figures of those killed by BSF firing have come down it would be a very good confidence building measure if the killings were brought down to zero immediately because even one death of an innocent civilian is one too many.

And in this context we find it difficult to accept the argument of the BSF that its personnel use minimum force to save their lives, which is a euphemism for firing in self defence. If one were to analyse each of the deaths that have occurred over the last several years there is nothing to show that the unfortunate victims had in any way threatened the safety of the BSF personnel or they were even armed with lethal weapons. And most of the killings occurred singly. A single individual posing a threat to a BSF out post is rather an unconvincing argument.

Having said that, let us stress that it is not our intention to enter into a debate on the issue. The moot point is that border killings send the wrong signal, and it creates the perception that the situation at the borders is hostile. That is certainly not conducive to the furthering of our bilateral ties.

Those who manage our borders on either side of it must comprehend the unique nature of the Bangladesh - India border and a very sensitive approach is needed to manage it. When the two countries have taken recourse to several confidence building measures along the border like coordinated patrolling, one wonders why this aspect has been neglected. Border killings should be brought down to zero and in this regard we feel the onus is on India.

Formalin-free Malibagh kitchen market hullabaloo

Touching the fringe of a wider malady

MUCH is being made about the lone Malibagh market having become formalin free! As though a rare scientific feat has been accomplished. The sense of achievement is however, quite justified when you think of the obvious, pervasive and lethal health hazard in our daily food intake that seems to have become the norm.

While we welcome at least one toxin-free kitchen market, we cannot rejoice in the fact that city dwellers from other areas are swarming Malibagh bazar when they have a natural right to unadulterated food at every market in the city.

The technology has always been available to detect chemical toxin in edibles for sale and it is also affordable. But none in authority ever cared to take the rudimentary precaution even in the face of media reports and public outcries over pervasive adulteration of food. The citizens have been subjected to nothing short of murders by poisoning. And, yet such a massive public health interest was sacrificed at the altar of crass commercialism.

The administration's inability to ensure access to safe food is the biggest example of governance failure. Aberrations in as sensitive an area as nutrition, public health and well-being were allowed to be the rules with an impunity that should shame us all.

As if in substantiation of our point, Malibagh kitchen market has been 'detoxified' not by any government intervention but through an initiative of FBCCI and Malibagh market management committee.

If the issue is to have a Tk 1.35 lakh worth of a chemical detector installed in all the markets of Dhaka city what is stopping the government including DCC making metropolitan markets chemical free? The private sector has already come forward and a greater assistance from it is only to be expected.

The campaign for safe food implies a lot of other things than merely monitoring the retail outlets. From import to wholesale, the network needs to be flushed clean of chemical adulteration. Basically for perishable goods to be preserved for a reasonable shelf-life, a string of warehouses

Ageing in the 21st century: A celebration and a challenge

ARTHUR ERKEN and NIRJHARINEE HASAN

TODAY, October 1, 2012, is the "International Day of Older Persons." And on this day, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and HelpAge International will launch a publication entitled "Ageing in the 21st Century: a Celebration and a Challenge." Such a publication could not come at a more opportune time, as population ageing is one of the most significant trends of the 21st century! Around the world, two persons celebrate their sixtieth birthday every second! With one in nine persons in the world aged 60 years or over, projected to increase to one in five by 2050, population ageing is a phenomenon that can no longer be ignored.

Population ageing is happening in all regions and in countries at various levels of development. It is progressing fastest in developing countries, including in those that also have a large population of young people, like Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, the number of persons over 60 years of age is projected to increase from about 9.8 million people today (or 6.5% of total population) to 18.1 million people (or almost 10%) by 2026 and 44.1 million people (or 20.2%) by 2051. The ratio of people aged 60 or above to children under the age of 15 years might be about 5.7 times higher over the next half century due to the growing number of older persons and at the same time the reduction in the number of young people. Also, the old-age dependency ratio will be almost triple from 5.4 to 16.2 in Bangladesh between the years 2000 and 2050. But is Bangladesh ready for the expected rapid increase in the number of its citizens over 60 years of age?

Let us start with a story, the story of Hazera Bewa. Hazera is a widow of 65 years old, has a family of four daughters and one son. When she was young, she had strength and energy. She took care of her kids, even sacrificing her meal just to get smile on the face of her children. They have become parents of their own and have

families to take care of. Her four daughters live with their families far from Hazera's village. She lives with her only son and his family. But life is not easy. Since she does no longer have the strength and energy, she has become a burden on the family. She is completely dependent for her daily needs and care on her son's family. She's frequently tortured by her son, her daughter-in-law, and even at times by her grandchildren. Oh, how she wants to love her grandchildren, convey to them the stories she knows. Instead, she spends her life in isola-

own elderly members. But these rapid changes and transformations are beginning to break down these traditional family-based and community-based care systems. As a result, many elderly people in Bangladesh suffer from poor financial support, old-age diseases in the absence of proper health and medical facilities, exclusion and negligence, deprivation and socio-economic insecurity. Still, and thankfully, most elderly in Bangladesh pass their days amidst the tender care and support, mostly provided by their extended families. But will this situa-

To face the challenges and also to take advantage of the opportunities resulting from population ageing, the UNFPA/HelpAge report calls for new approaches to the way that societies, workforces, and social and inter-generational relations are structured. We must ensure that all older persons can live with dignity and security, enjoying access to essential health and social services and a minimum income through the implementation of national social protection floors and other social investments that extend the autonomy and independence of older people, prevent impoverishment in old age and contribute to a more healthy ageing. Moreover, we must support communities and families to develop or maintain support systems which ensure that frail older persons receive the long-term care they need and promote active and healthy ageing at the local level to facilitate ageing in place. And, we must ensure the inclusion of ageing and the needs of older persons in all national development policies and programmes. These actions must be sustained by strong political commitment that ensures an effective integration of ageing within the larger processes of development. People everywhere must have the opportunity to age with dignity, respect and security. This requires that we develop a new rights-based culture of ageing and a change of mindset and societal attitudes towards ageing and older persons, from welfare recipients to active, contributing members of society.

We know that Bangladesh will take the required measures to use the opportunities presented by a rapidly ageing population and reduce the challenges associated with it, through the finalisation of the National Policy on Ageing which aims at achieving many of the points raised in this piece. We wish everyone a happy International Day of Older Persons!

The writers are Country Representative, UNFPA and Country Director, HelpAge International Bangladesh, respectively.

Still, and thankfully, most elderly in Bangladesh pass their days amidst the tender care and support, mostly provided by their extended families. But will this situation last? With the number and proportion of older persons growing faster than any other age group, and in an increasing range of countries, there are concerns about the capacities of societies to address the challenges associated with this demographic shift.

tion, feeling depressed and helpless.

Sadly, Hazera's story is not unique. More and more senior citizens in Bangladesh are experiencing the same sense of loneliness, feeling misunderstood, and even feeling worthless. Therefore, on this special day, commemorating the virtues of old age, of wisdom and experience, let's celebrate the senior citizens in our midst, their contributions, to our lives, to our society. After all, they are the foundation on which our countries have been built.

The process of ageing in Bangladesh is taking place at a time of rapid socio-economic and demographic transition, with lifestyles changing, kinship bonds weakening and family compositions undergoing rapid transformation. Bangladesh has a long tradition of looking after the elderly and it is expected that families and communities will care for their

tion last?

In a way, ageing is a triumph of development. Increasing longevity is one of humanity's greatest achievements. People live longer because of improved nutrition, sanitation, medical advances, health care, education and economic well-being. But it also presents social, economic and cultural challenges to individuals, families, societies and the global community at large. It is how we choose to address the challenges and maximise the opportunities of a growing older population that will determine whether society will reap the benefits of the "longevity dividend." With the number and proportion of older persons growing faster than any other age group, and in an increasing range of countries, there are concerns about the capacities of societies to address the challenges associated with this demographic shift.

| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

The Arab spring still blooms

MONCEF MARZOUKI

THE violent demonstrations that have spread across the Muslim world in recent weeks have convinced many in the United States and Europe that the Arab revolutions that began in late 2010 are now officially over and that the democratic project has failed. Bitterness and a sense of impending catastrophe are replacing the enthusiasm that followed the toppling of dictators in Tunisia and Egypt last year.

Now there is ominous talk of an "Islamist Fall" and a "Salafi Winter" after a supposedly failed Arab Spring. To these skeptics religion is the driving force in Arab politics, and hateful anti-Western slogans and the killing of America's ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens, are evidence of a "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West.

While these fears are understandable, such alarmism is misplaced. The Arab revolutions have not turned anti-Western. Nor are they pro-Western. They are simply not about the West. They remain fundamentally about social justice and democracy, not about religion or establishing Shariah law.

The democratization of Tunisia, Egypt and other countries has allowed a number of extremist free riders into the political system, but it also has definitively refuted the myth that democracy and Islam are incompatible. Islamists are political actors like any others. They are no more pure, more united or more immune from criticism than anyone else. Islamist parties are now free to take part in political debates and to win

seats in legislatures and governments. However, these political changes also have rendered the divisions among Islamists more apparent than ever before.

Islamists span a wide ideological and political spectrum, yet many observers still seem to believe that extremist Salafi groups represent a majority. They are wrong. Radical Salafis who advocate violence and Shariah law constitute a very small minority in Tunisia, and even in Egypt they are vastly outnumbered by more moderate Islamists. They are a minority within a minority, and extremely

our tourism industry and ruin our country's peaceful reputation. As a democratic government, we support the Salafis' freedom of expression, but advocating violence is a red line. Those who cross it will be arrested.

The strength and importance of extremist groups have been unduly amplified by the news media. Images of angry Muslim mobs, like the one featured on a recent cover of Newsweek, once again revived the old Orientalist trope of a backward and hysterical Muslim world, unable to engage in civilized and rational debate or to undertake peaceful nego-

only about 3,000 in Tunisia. Counterprotests denouncing the violence also took place in Benghazi, Libya, after the killing of Ambassador Stevens. Numerous Muslim leaders have implored believers not to respond to provocations, and no demonstration occurred last Friday after a French newspaper published demeaning caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad.

The attempts by journalists and anti-Islamic filmmakers to stage a sequel to the Danish cartoon controversy of 2006 are in vain. Most Tunisians firmly condemn the violence that took place against the United States embassies, even if they were personally offended by anti-Islamic provocations emanating from the United States and Europe.

They are frustrated by how this unnecessary uproar has made more arduous the struggle for what matters most to them: building new democratic institutions, creating jobs and halting the exodus of Tunisian boat people seeking a better life in Europe.

These are difficult tasks for any country, and the challenge is even greater for new democracies in the post-revolutionary Arab world. We are in a race against poverty. At this crucial moment the West must not abandon us. It must continue to aid Tunisia in strengthening democracy and the rule of law, securing our borders to stop arms from reaching extremists, and creating economic opportunities that give our citizens hope.

The writer is the president of Tunisia.

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unpopular among both religious and secular Tunisians. They do not speak for all Tunisians, all Arabs or all Muslims.

The goal of these violent extremists is not political participation, it is the creation of chaos. We should not forget that, before attacking American symbols, these extremists had degraded Tunisian symbols, such as the flag and national anthem.

Despite their small numbers, the danger they pose cannot be dismissed. Tunisia's economy depends on the millions of foreign tourists who visit each year. If Salafi extremists were to attack only two or three foreigners in Tunisia, it would destroy

tiations -- in other words, incapable of conducting political affairs.

However, that image is a distorted fantasy. It does not represent any sociological or political reality. Arguing that the groups who have recently staged violent demonstrations represent the entire Arab population is as absurd as claiming that white-supremacist groups represent the American people or that the Norwegian right-wing mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik is representative of Europeans.

The demonstrations that took place against the anti-Islamic video "Innocence of Muslims" involved small numbers of extremists -- there were

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

October 1

- 1880**
First electric lamp factory is opened by Thomas Edison.
- 1887**
Balochistan is conquered by the British Empire.
- 1918**
World War I: Arab forces under T. E. Lawrence, also known as "Lawrence of Arabia" capture Damascus.
- 1928**
The Soviet Union introduces its First Five-Year Plan.
- 1946**
Nazi leaders are sentenced at Nuremberg Trials.
- 1949**
The People's Republic of China is established and declared by Mao Zedong.
- 1965**
General Suharto rises to power after a coup that alleged to the Communist Party of Indonesia. In response, Suharto and his army massacre over a million Indonesians suspected of being communists. The killings of 7 army officers happened in the early hours of 1 October 1965.