

# Rising 'demon-cracy' eating fragile democracy

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S UDDENLY things turn dramatic. Something happened to the 'crime lord' of Narayanganj! He himself is now accusing his men of killing his men. He is also accusing Rab of killing elected councillor Nazrul and 6 others. On May 4, Nazrul Islam's father-in-law Shahidul Islam alleged that some Rab members (including commanding officer and one major) killed Nazrul in exchange for Tk. 6 crore from Nur Hossain and other accused (*The Daily Star*, May 5). Later, Shahidul presided over the meeting where ruling party AL MP Shamim Osman accused Rab and his close associates of murdering Nazrul and others. But the MP, known as godfather, has started saying these things -- accusing his party men and Rab of abduction and killing -- only after people's outrage against abduction and killing has spread all over the country.

Who are these big and small 'lords' actually? Yes, they are accused by the local people of everything that makes citizens hostage to a group of criminals. In fact, Narayanganj is a concentrated form of the whole country, a place for free-style extortion, abduction, disappearance, land grabbing and killing. Victims range from general citizen, children, opposition party worker, protester, business partner, competitor, to their own party men.

According to data sheet compiled by Ain O Salish Kendra, a total of 268 persons have been kidnapped across the country from 2010 to March 2014. Bodies of 43 of them were found and 24 were released. Rest are still missing. Some 53 persons were abducted using the name of law enforcement agencies in 2013. 39 persons have been abducted from January to March

this year. Among them, 12 bodies have been found and four of them have come back. We all know that things have worsened in April.

In another estimate, more than 20 children, including Twaki, were killed in the last one year in Narayanganj alone. Police headquarters statistics showed that 168 incidents of kidnapping and abduction were recorded in October-December, 2013; while the figure was 196 for January-March in 2014 (*New Age*, May 4).

These statistics did not include killing by police or Rab in the name of crossfire or encounter. One may find interconnection between the two streams of killing and disappearances. This is not just a 'law order problem,' or 'failure of law enforcing agency.' The whole situation appears to be anarchic, but if we go deep we may find an organised system of plunder, extortion and grabbing. Abduction and killing are the outcome of this mad race for money and power.

Both the size and the proportion of illegal, underground, unreported and criminal economic activities have increased on an unprecedented scale in the last decades. One unpublished study by the ministry of finance estimated the size of this economy as minimum 50% and maximum 83% of Bangladesh's GDP. This particular economy encompasses bribery, crime, arms trade, employment of professional criminals, corruption, grabbing, women trafficking, illegal commissions to approve projects harmful for the country, and leakages from different government's projects. The bigger the government project, the bigger the pie.

The quickly-formed super-rich class of the country is mostly a product of this economy, and they also happen to dominate the political arena. Nur Hossain, the

accused killer and longtime associate of Shamim Osman, is a case here. The rise of the quick-rich and Mafia lords and their domination over policy makers cripple institutions and make the *Jamindari* style rule work. This scenario also gives ample opportunities for global grabbers to promote their agenda too.

In 2001, the world entered into 'War on Terror' era, a free license for the US to occupy countries and kill people. In the name of fighting terrorism, it has been terrorising the whole world. Every country, including Bangladesh, formulated its own version as well. Agencies and forces were formed, trained and organised. Here, extra-judicial killing was institutionalised in 2002, during BNP-Jamat regime, with 'Operation Clean Heart.' In 2004, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) was formed. Since then, we have been reading monotonous stories of killing of 'terrorists,' cruel incidences of not only killing but also labelling them as 'terrorist' -- like the US model operating around the world. Therefore, extrajudicial killings have not stopped with the changing of governments. Thousands have been killed without any accountability, with no investigation afterwards! No law works except immunity for the killers!!

In 2011, the *Guardian* (January 26) reported that "a Bangladeshi paramilitary unit that receives training from British police has resumed killing people in so-called 'crossfire'.... (earlier) ceased the killings briefly after the existence of the British training programme was disclosed in US diplomatic cables posted on the internet by Wiki Leaks last month."

The killers wearing official dress or those who are invisible have their own agenda too. Money; grabbing land; working as

hired goons; taking control over terminals, transport, markets; leasing land, forest and water bodies; grabbing tender to secure orders of high cost roads, bridges, flyovers, toll booths -- everything involves violence, reported or not. Only those who can make necessary contact and contract, win! But violence may not end there.

Therefore, as we witness in Narayanganj as elsewhere in Bangladesh, wealth and power accumulation process takes a primitive form. Official 'development' programmes and the process of primitive accumulation work as twins, in that they go together, help each other, rationalise each other and strengthen each other. Government policies increased the scope and legality of corruption, criminality, resource-grabbing, commissions from bad deals with foreign companies, and gangsterism. With the rise of consumerism, money madness spread wildly. Persons enjoying power supersede institutions and law of the land. That creates conditions for the rise of godfathers or mafia lords, which obstructs democratic exercises in every sphere of the society.

Therefore, on paper we have democracy, in reality we feel every moment that we are surrounded by demons, living under the rule of 'demon-cracy.' Every moment, 'demon-cracy' is eating weak democracy. Hence, no institution is working. Here political power, money and muscle work against majority of the people. We feel suffocated. Only when people rise collectively, express their anger collectively, do we find breathing space. But we need to do much more to have sustained human moments.

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## Declare war against DRUG LORDS

SHAHNOOR WAHID

R EPORTEDLY, the message of "zero tolerance" from the high-ups in the government regarding proliferation of drugs in the country has prompted the law enforcing agencies in Teknaf and Cox's Bazar to go all guns blazing at the drug lords and small time peddlers in those areas. In the last two weeks one or two big time drug smugglers, especially of yaba from across the Myanmar border, have died in gunfights with the law enforcers along with some of their lackeys. This apparently has sent a very strong message across the dens of the smugglers in the entire region.

Media reports say that small boats carrying yaba consignments on the Naf river, and motorcycle gangs ferrying yaba from Teknaf to Cox's Bazar and further into various destinations, have vanished in thin air since the operation by Rab and the police was launched. One thing that has come out loud and clear from the successful operation is that if there is no interference from any powerful quarters, law enforcers can do their job with precision. They deserve kudos for the good work done so far.

The prime minister deserves special thanks from the citizens for empowering the law enforcing agencies with sufficient firepower and authority to eliminate the vicious gangs that are destroying the lives of millions of people in the country. That the PM meant business this time around is evidenced in the death of a local yaba gang leader, who was known to be close to a powerful man of the ruling party, in a gunfight with the law enforcers. We expect more from the authorities as names of some big time leaders of the ruling party as well as of other major political parties have surfaced in the investigation of both government intelligence agencies and that of the media.

A national Bengali newspaper has recently given a graphic description of the numerous factories where yaba is manufactured inside Myanmar; which group owns which factory; who buy them from Bangladesh; how the drugs come to the Bangladesh border, and who distribute them inside



the country. It was excellent investigative reporting and it was obvious that the reporter took a lot of risk to his life to collect the information.

We keep hearing the name of a local MP who along with his entire family is involved in smuggling of yaba from Myanmar. It is said that they have become multi-millionaires dealing in drugs. If the allegation turns out to be true then one would like to ask the question why and how a man of such criminal disposition could contest elections and become a public representative? Concerned citizens want to see such criminal elements removed and put away for life so that they may not exploit the good name of any party and criminalise the entire society. A drug smuggler must not be allowed to enter the sacred precincts of our Parliament.

The timely assault on the drug smugglers in Teknaf and Cox's Bazar by the law enforcers is producing results, therefore, it should not be abandoned on any consideration, at least not on political consideration. The PM should tell the Rab, BGB and police in clear terms to uproot the entire network and splinter the nexus of drug smugglers from the region so that not a single piece of yaba can enter Bangladesh from now on. BGB should reinforce vigilance at the border areas with Myanmar, and Rab and police should swoop down on the roadside peddlers and send them to prisons. A bilateral discussion meeting could be arranged at the ministerial level between Bangladesh and Myanmar to destroy all yaba making factories in the border areas and thereby take the relations between the two countries to a new height.

Meanwhile, similar drives against the drug lords and peddlers in other parts of the country where drugs like heroin, cocaine, yaba, phensyl, etc are sold and bought openly should be launched with equal intensity. If small peddlers find it difficult to sell drugs in the capital and other towns they will slowly become frustrated and switch over to some other profession. The social welfare department can take up a programme to seal off as many sources as possible for the drug addicts and rehabilitate the peddlers with vocational training.

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# Will our emerging economy turn into emerging market?

M. AMINUL ISLAM AKANDA

B ANGLADESH is one of the ten new emerging countries as recognised by the Coface, a French credit insurer firm. It is expected to be among top twenty-five countries in terms of per capita income in 2050 and earlier was among the next eleven emerging economies according to an estimation of Goldman and Sachs, the world's leading investment management firm. Many economists are hopeful of reaching the World Bank threshold per capita income of \$1,130 in 2016 and getting the status of middle income country (MIC) maintaining a growth rate of 5.4%. Moreover, our prime minister wishes to attain high income country (HIC) status, for which she will soon turn her Vision 2021 into Vision 2041. However, it depends on closing the gap between potential and actual progress in the economy.

The bases of our economic potentiality are demographic opportunity, non-interventionist orthodoxy and macroeconomic stability. JP Morgan placed Bangladesh in the Frontier Five for its potential human resources with more than half of the population below 24 years. We have \$20 billion foreign exchange reserves, equivalent to 12.8% of the gross domestic product (GDP). Moreover, the economic freedom index shows that we advanced to 'mostly unfree' from 'repressed' status, and our trade-openness also increased from 20% to 50% of the GDP during the last two decades. About 14% export growth over a few years and a negative import growth in the last year have kept the government far from any external debt burden, which is now only 20% of the GDP.

Moreover, the fiscal management is stronger because of a gradual increase of revenue collection from 8.3% to 13.4% of the GDP during 1991-2013. In addition, the economy has experienced over 6% growth and

stepped up in poverty and some social indices.

However, we are far below the targeted growth and investment-GDP ratio for Vision 2021, which are achievable at most 6% and 27% this year against next year's target of 8% and 32.5%, respectively. Now the question is whether it would be possible to lift investment, the private part of which declined from 19.7% to 19% of the GDP during 2009-2013. The finance minister is worried about such a downtrend as it is the lifeline of our market economy, accounting for more than three-quarter of total investment. On the other hand, the government has lifted its portion to 7.9% of the GDP in 2012-13, beyond its projected figure for the next year. This is essential to improve physical infrastructures that are too inadequate to offer positive marginal return from new investments. Likewise, our private investment on transports has even extended to the Mercedes-Benz bus that faces problems with traffic congestions. Don't our private investors find rationality of investing for poor infrastructures and excessive transaction costs?

This much private investments come after a long confusion with capitalistic transformation from a socialist policy taken to break peripheral capitalism just after independence in 1971. It was not easy to transfer our state-owned enterprises to the private sector even with incentive-oriented denationalisation policy. However, some politicians-cum-investors became opportunist industrialists only for incentives in the late 1970s. The industries were endowed with sick-industry syndrome that contributed almost 16% to the GDP over the 1980s. Subsequent to rigorous open-market policies, the private sector started to invest in a few industries, businesses and services in the early 1990s. Foreign direct investment (FDI) was virtually zero in the 1980s, but increased to over

\$300 million in the late 1990s and recorded its highest at \$1.47 billion in 2012-13. Much of the investments went to a few high-productive services like telecommunication, banking, education and health-care in the 2000s. Lately, the FDI inflow has also been shifted to the ready-made garments (RMG) and knitwear industries, but the industrial sector as a whole has lagged behind. RMG, the major employers of poor workers, has lifted its export to \$20 billion within our export market of \$25 billion.

We have an open domestic business environment to allow sales maximisation of medicines even. In the meantime, a few over-investment traps are visible in services like petty shop keeping and auto-rickshaw driving because any new entry within limited customer group might incur losses in a state of natural monopoly. The situation is a bit different in case of high value-added and branded products where the top-layer consumers, with either black or white money, are largely motivated. The trickle down of which will raise effective demand that may lead our economy to 'mass consumption' from a 'take-off' state. Such a Giffen consumption nature will raise importing, franchising or licensing. Meanwhile, the brand has come in product promotion tool that is not related to producing at home or abroad. Will not such an emerging market limit economic growth in our rent-seeking economy?

Our product market is more efficient for its higher global competitiveness index (GCI) of 4.1 compared to 3.8 for labour market efficiency. Notwithstanding our bad governance and political instability, low wage reflects skill deficiency, but we are proud of using it as a trump card for expansion of our RMG industry. Shouldn't we make our large labour market efficient with proper skill development? Being a large RMG and knitwear producer in the world,

we are yet to brand ourselves, but are producing for global brands. Won't we be able to equip our expatriates with proper skill development? The government is very happy with the macroeconomic benefits from double-digit export and remittance growths but is far from calculating the microeconomic pains of the RMG workers and expatriates. Isn't it necessary to invest on skill development of our young generation to contribute in the domestic market and to compete in the global labour market?

Our economy demands huge investments to raise production capacities for diversified value-added products. So many international ranks in favour of emerging will not help the economy emerge other than adequate private investments. Our investment policies are supportive with incentive packages and the government tried to set a single-digit interest rate. Meanwhile, our private investment crossed our domestic saving in 2008-09 but reversed last year, might be due to political turmoil. There is a roundabout fall in investment due to a large fall in import of capital machinery from \$2.32 to \$1.1 billion during 2010-2013. The government cannot show any weak justification for this trade-off between low imports and high reserves. Moreover, any negative import does not necessarily justify import substitutions; rather it may be filled with illegal production and illegal border trading. This is the way how a large effective demand with insufficient domestic production might turn our market economy into an all-embracing market. It is high time for the government to take real care to curb corruption, conflicts, bureaucratic inefficiencies, infrastructure deficiencies and illegal trade so as to uplift investments and achieve emerging economy in the end.

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## CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

**QUOTABLE Quote**

*The conflict of forces and the struggle of opposing wills are of the essence of our universe and alone hold it together.*

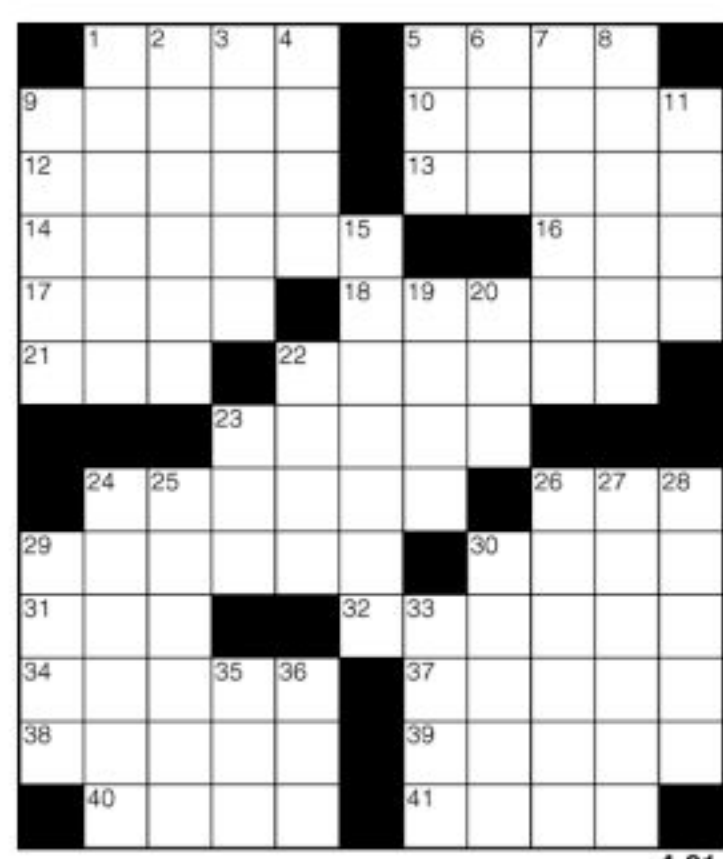
**Havelock Ellis**

**ACROSS**

- Gift attachments
- Newspaper section
- Fashionably dated
- Chairs
- Cast member
- Chapel topper
- Cook's herb
- Sillet
- The Emerald Isle
- Go to
- Glimpse
- Frightened
- Drummer's partner
- Sundae topper
- Angeles
- Decided, parentally
- Identical
- Industrious insect
- Cook's spice
- Surprised sounds
- Dinner setting
- Hawaiian hello
- Catkinbearing tree
- Salon sound
- Warm up

**DOWN**

- Computer expert
- Clothes
- Clump of trees
- Aching
- Burro
- Agent, for short
- Asian capital
- String of pearls
- Track events
- Dispatch
- Cook's coloring
- Deuce beater
- Black goo
- Broadcasts
- Nurished
- Venice byways
- Tries to pick up
- Letter after kappa
- Eggy dish
- Rocker Bob
- Sweeping story
- Hackneyed
- Nevada neighbor
- Letter after upsilon
- Tree fluid



**CRYPTOQUOTE**  
LEP JSXDLPDMDJP GT LEP OSNLNMGSL SU  
LEP TSXK, MDH LEP PBPT CMNW GLT  
GDLPLDLSDT.

-- CMNJXT LXXKGXT JGJPNS

**Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:**  
PLANS ARE ONLY GOOD INTENTIONS UNLESS THEY IMMEDIATELY DEGENERATE INTO HARD WORK.  
-- PETER DRUCKER.

## Yesterday's answer

AMES HOOPS  
LAVES ARROW  
ARENA SENSE  
RON LAP ATE  
MOSAIC STEP  
NOREASTER  
INDIE  
EASTEREgg  
SANE MODEL T  
ARK NYC MAR  
SNARE CLINE  
HEROS OUNCE  
ARABS VIES

**A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW**  
One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

## BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



## HENRY

by Don Trachte

