

# Approaching month of Ramadan

## Keep prices in check

PERHAPS nowhere else in the world does one notice a sudden rise in prices of essential food items in months of festivities other than in Bangladesh. Come the month of Ramadan particularly, and also Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha, certain items of food preferred by the consumers become dearer.

Admittedly, there is an increase in the demand of these items, but that is not of such a great volume that can explain or justify the two to threefold price rise of all these items. And it is not that there is dearth of these items in the market either. The only reason is the despicable profiteering motive of the sellers who wait for the month of Ramadan to rip the common man off and make whirlwind profits of a year in that one month only.

This has become a nauseating repetitive phenomenon, as have the assurances of the governments and the inevitable results. The buyers are left at the mercy of the sellers.

This time too the commerce minister has assured the countrymen that the government would ensure that the food prices are kept in check. However, some of the essential Ramadan items are already showing an upward tendency and there are reports that some wholesalers have already stocked up on these items to create an artificial shortage.

When the market is manipulated by the sellers to offset the market mechanisms, the government must also intervene to offset that. In addition to seeing that there are no shortages in the market by intervening wherever necessary, it must also move quickly against hoarding as well as ensure strict vigilance on all the major outlets to keep constant check on the prices.

# Declining river navigability

## A situation requiring to be addressed effectively

SUCCESSIVE governments have failed to gauge the importance of dredging of the major rivers and tributaries in the country. That negligence has finally caught up with us. As per what has been discussed in the parliament on June 18, we are informed that navigability in nearly 7,500 km of waterways has been lost over the last four decades. Now that presents policymakers with a big headache since internal waterways constitute a major trade route and loss of navigation over such long stretches is hardly acceptable. We are informed by the minister of shipping that the government has undertaken measures to bring back the navigability of 53 major rivers at a cost of Tk11,500 crores to the national exchequer.

While we appreciate the efforts of authorities to undo the damage done over time, we remain concerned as to whether dredging alone will redress the situation. According to the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), waterways have shrunk significantly since 1975. There are many reasons for this and not all are due to change in global climate. Manmade interventions through the building of gigantic dams in upstream countries are causing havoc with the major rivers in Bangladesh. Whilst we take issue on these with the neighbouring country, we can certainly prioritise the dredging of our rivers on a regular basis. That would in part go a long way in reducing the various accidents that occur at regular interval on our rivers and save lives. Proactive measures to protect our rivers must be a priority area for the government.

# The politics of extradition

SHAHRIAR FEROZE

QUESTION: With Nur Hossain along with three accomplices in Indian custody, and India-Bangladesh extradition treaty in effect, what would be the most interesting outcome to watch?

Answer: The politics behind the extradition process. Will India use Hossain's extradition as a bargaining tool or not? Well there is enough reason to think along this line. Though the extradition treaty between Bangladesh and India came into effect late last year with handing over of the instruments of ratification, there was a condition specified. According to the Hindu's news report of October 24, 2013, the treaty will allow exchange of convicts sentenced for more than a year in prison but will not be applicable to political prisoners and asylum seekers. Both sides have the option to cancel the treaty with a six-month notice.

Even if we take that neither of the countries will cancel the treaty prior to a six months notice any time soon, how can we be sure that Hossain will not seek political asylum and not be granted one? Moreover, if the option of seeking asylum is applicable to him? The provision for seeking asylum or not. Coupled with this comes the condition of timeframe of a prisoner. Anyone who is sentenced for more than a year in prison will fall under the category of extradition. But what if Hossain is sentenced for less than a year and then released?

This skeptic's mind races back to the arrest of ULFA General Secretary Anup Chetia in 1997, and back then we did not have an extradition treaty with India but now we do. The point in this regard is that in spite of an existing treaty he has not been handed over to the Indian authorities as yet, and we don't know why. After the Barasat court placed Nur Hossain on an eight-day remand in police custody last week our expectation for extraditing him mounted in the midst of conflicting statements concerning details of his arrest by the state minister and Awami League general secretary. Are we to believe that the members of the ruling party are divided on the issue of Nur Hossain's extradition? Or if some of the ruling party members are too busy to follow media reports on Hossain's arrest?

Given the facts of the extradition process the top brass of our police still believes that if a negotiation at a higher level -- probably between the two prime ministers -- takes place, and a mutual decision is reached beyond the predetermined conditions of the extradition treaty, then it won't be difficult to extradite Noor Hossain to Bangladesh.

However, with Modi in power -- devoted to deter all 'Bangladeshi infiltration' into India -- we expect somehow the criminal Nur Hossain to be handed over to Bangladesh. Besides being a criminal, Nur Hossain is also an infiltrator from Bangladesh who is not supposed to have any place -- at least in Modi's India.

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CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

HE prime minister has said that the BNP chairperson and her son should be taken on remand to find their involvement in the killing of a late president, who is also the founder of their party besides being the husband of one and the father of the other. She made that ludicrous comment in her response to another ludicrous comment made by the late president's son who wants the prime minister to be remanded because his father was assassinated 17 days after she had returned to the country in 1981. While taking potshots at the opponent is the favourite pastime of our politicians, in more civilised countries both leaders would have been indicted either for perjury or suppression of facts.

Because they have spoken in the manner as if both sides knew how the late president was killed and who had killed him. If there is any substance to their claims, they should be asked to produce evidence corroborating their mutual vilifications. If it's no more than political balderdash, both sides should restrain from sully the memories of a war hero, who is also one of our iconic national leaders.

Historians could give us the other solution provided they wrote objective history devoid of their subjective orientations. There have been extensive deliberations from a US journalist pointing his finger at the most noted political chameleon of this century in this country, who may have killed two birds with one stone. It's a shame that an outsider had to find that truth for us while our homegrown scholars remained clueless or succumbed to political silence.

We are now constrained to listen to such versions of history, which are comparable to instant coffee. Instant coffee is commercially prepared by either freeze-drying or spray drying, after which it can be rehydrated. Advantages of instant coffee include speed of preparation, lower shipping weight and long shelf life.

Instant history is popular amongst us for pretty much the same reasons except that it will hurt this nation if it acquires shelf life. If one senior BNP leader has been brewing history from his instant packs in London and Kuala Lumpur, the prime minister and her acolytes are also doing the same thing at home. All of them are playing a hoax on us by injecting their delusions into our minds.

# American involvement in Iraq: Damned if you do, damned if you don't

TAHMINA RAHMAN

LOOKS like America has got itself into a very sticky situation. No matter how hard it tries to stay away from what seems like a brewing civil war in Iraq, it cannot just turn a deaf ear to the formal request made by Iraqi Prime Minister Nourie Al-Maliki for American assistance. On one hand, America has this bitter experience of a poorly planned, overstretched and expensive war in Iraq that toppled the Saddam regime and created a power vacuum that is still to be filled by a strong, non-sectarian and credible leadership. On the other hand, being the only superpower with the capacity to project military power on a global level and some responsibility to end what it started more than a decade ago in Iraq, America needs to strike a balance between not meddling into the internal affairs of Iraq and preventing the violence from spreading to the wider Middle East.

The president is walking a very tight rope here and he is taking his time with the military advisors. What exactly are the options open to the president right now? He has already ruled out 'boots on the ground' although more than 200 American troops have been sent to protect the heavily fortified Green Zone in Baghdad. There are speculations that Obama is pondering over a number of options which fall short of total military commitment. These could range from reconnaissance flights to sending limited number of military advisors and conducting air strikes. Given the current status of morale and training of Iraqi Security Forces, such restricted involvement of the USA is not likely to produce big results. As Senator John McCain said, "Air strikes are not easy."

America does not have reliable intelligence to conduct such strikes in Iraq. ISIS is not your typical target for air assaults. It doesn't have specific command and control centres, military bases and air defense sites. So, American air strike at this point might cause civilian casualties and destruction of properties. But the technical nature of possible American engagement is not the only dilemma facing the Obama administration right now. General David Petraeus, former Director of CIA and Commander of the ISAF, has warned against any American action that might favour one fighting sect over the other in Iraq. If US assistance is viewed by the Sunnis as giving the Shiites undue favour, then the whole situation might turn for the worse. Especially when the US failed to intervene in Syria, any American action that might give the Shiite militias and Shiite dominated Iraqi Security Forces an edge over the Sunnis will add fuel to the fire of sectarian violence.

America realises that it might have to do the uncomfortable job of working with Iran in containing a common enemy in the Middle East. Iran has already proved eager to intervene in the situation. Talks have been held between the two countries. If America is not going to be drawn into

# Instant history is our new constant

It's because those who know truth are sitting on the sideline. There are still many of those alive, who could tell us what had happened or help us find the grim facts. It seems they don't feel the pressure to make a clean breast of it, determined to take their secrets to their graves having truth concealed in them like coffins ensconced in burial vaults.

At times this concealment has been deemed necessary by nations. During the Second World War the victorious Red Army committed mass rape across Prussia and eastern Germany as they closed in on Berlin. They forced the men to watch the violation of their women before their eyes. Scores of German men and women went to their graves carrying their shame sealed in their hearts. The living Germans never wanted that the humiliation of them, their mothers and grandmothers should be held up to the public eye.

In some cultures people draw the line between confession to the wrongs they have done to others and those others have done to them. It may not make the world a better place, but Arnold Schwarzenegger revealed in his memoir that he had a raunchy relationship with Brigitte Nielsen even when he was courting his future wife Maria Shriver. Hollywood actor Warren Beatty should be a cult figure to the womanisers of the world because he confessed to bedding 12,775 women including big names in music, modeling and movies. Some women might feel vindicated that in one single day Beatty's sister and Hollywood actress Shirley MacLaine consorted with three different men.

Some people, who do not wish to be embarrassed in their lifetime or face the wrath of friends and colleagues, resort to embargos. Indian leader Maulana Azad had written his autobiography but asked the last 30 pages of the book to be disclosed 30 years after his death. Former US presidents have put documents in time capsules that can be opened only so many years after their deaths.

Other nations find the burden of truth hard to bear at the national or individual level, which forces them to confess at some stage of their life. Memoir writing is a cottage industry in the West, because people tend to seek release in their admissions. It's called repressed memory syndrome when that burden reaches the clinical stage.

This nation has reached that clinical stage when the history which it can't recall is affecting it consciously. That explains why politics has lately turned into a mental disorder.

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the whirlpool of violence in Iraq, it might need to pick a side in this 'proxy war' between Iran and Saudi Arabia that has taken the form of a sectarian feud. Obama also knows the peril of cooperating with Iran. Not only will it affect the nuclear talks, but also enrage thousands of various factions of Arab Sunni extremists who would love nothing more than taking up arms against their Persian foes. It's not like Iran is very fond of Al-Maliki. It knows all too well that stronger Shiite militias in Iraq might not serve long term Iranian interests in maintaining a strong hold on Baghdad. Although the exact nature of US-Iranian cooperation over Iraq has not yet been finalised, the talks of it have already made Israel nervous.

The Israeli Strategic Affairs minister voiced concern over a compromised position of the US over Iran's nuclear issues due to the recent developments in Iraq. But if America does

not get involved in some assertive capacity in Iraq soon, it would not be immune from the effects of violent changes taking place there. ISIS has already taken control of the largest oil refinery in Iraq and this is definitely not good news for secure supply of petroleum. Energy security is not the only thing that should make America concerned. While the city of Baghdad has the capacity of 'swallowing' armies and might not fall in the hands of the ISIS as easily as it is feared, the prospect of long term violent civil war is very real. As Obama weighs his options in Washington, he might have to do the difficult task of 'choosing the lesser evil' as none of his choices are free of controversy. Using Al-Maliki as the scapegoat for all the troubles in Iraq will not improve the situation. This is a test case for the 'Obama doctrine' that postulates less direct involvement in the distant corners of the planet and more security for the Americans. It remains to be seen how prudently Obama handles the situation without causing further deterioration of America's global leadership position or stirring criticism and opposition at home.

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Drone with a human face

For a change, drone brings pizza and not bombs! This epoch-making good news based on PRI's report from Mumbai was published by a local English daily recently. A very useful role for the 'drone' has been initiated in India! Drones may, in future, take up the role of postmen and similar such door to door delivery services.

Engr. S. A. Mansoor  
Dhaka

## Our cricket must improve its fielding

If a batsman gets out, none rebukes him; if a bowler fails to take wickets, none blames him much. But a fielder who drops a catch is never pardoned. He is criticised by fans and commentators who continue to give reference to that missed catch. In case his team is defeated, the blame goes to the man who has missed the catch.

The remedy of this is to practice and practice. Fielding is a big part of cricket. Good fielding can lead a team to win a match. Bangladesh cricket team should seriously practice all types of fielding, which will help them progress in cricket.

Shafkat Rahman  
BIAM Laboratory School  
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## Getting GPA 5 shouldn't be an end in itself

This year the pass rate of SSC exam is about 93 percent which is 3 percent higher than the previous year. All are happy with the result particularly the education minister and PM.

Today in our country the goal of education is not earning knowledge but scoring GPA 5. Many of us know that teachers nowadays are being instructed to give excessive marks. And the recent phenomenon of question paper leakage has made the situation worse. Students know how to get question papers before the exam! So why should they study hard? I sometimes get very much depressed by the overall situation. God knows what is waiting for us in the future.

Saad Khan  
Uttara, Dhaka

## Comments on news report, "Kit itself unfit," published on June 17, 2014

Afrina Khanam

I don't think this kit can't measure formalin. Rather it may be a ploy plotted by these fruit traders. They are trying to prove that there is no formalin in fruits and it's just the fault of the machine. If there is no formalin in the foods, then why they run away whenever the drive starts? They are trying to prove themselves innocent. But this won't work, I guess. The customers are more cautious now!

Akhtar Shah

This is what happens when standards get lowered, since entry into the establishment (civil service) does not take place on the basis of merit but through fake exams/tests and party affiliation. Over time, such people have now become a majority. Don't be surprised, this will unfortunately continue! The nation has been infested with "yes men", who even render decent and competent people (civil servants) ineffective.

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## "Biharis point fingers at Elias" (June 16, 2014)

Bakhtiar Hussein

It is clear to people that the sinister Mollah gang want to grab the lands of these poor people. It is an example of Awami hooliganism.

Akhtar Shah

Mr. Mollah has to "look after" his voters for any future election. Therefore he sees no harm in offering "free" illegal electricity to them, temporary or otherwise! Do remember readers Mr Mollah is a ruling party lawmaker and therefore he's perfectly entitled to make his own laws vis-à-vis supply of power to any one he chooses! I doubt if he knows the extent of the subsidy the public purse has to cough up to import fuel for power generation!

Aasfisarwar

There are several videos on the internet where the arsonists have been filmed. Why do not the police arrest those whose faces are clearly identifiable? Nine people in Mirpur were burned alive and one was killed by the police fire when the Biharis were defending their properties and lives. I am assuming our illegal MPs and partisan police are not realising how a spark can quickly engulf the whole country including their empires.