

# Verdict in Ramna blast case

## Solace to the families of victims at last

WITH the verdict pronounced by a Dhaka court on Monday, the nation has finally been able to set the course of justice in the deadly Ramna Batamul blast case. Of the 14 accused of perpetrating the savage attack on a Chhayanaut programme on Bangla New Year's Day in 2001 that killed 10 people and injured scores of others, eight have been handed death penalty, while six others will serve life imprisonment.

The culprits behind the Ramna blast deserve the punishment as awarded by the court simply because they had not just killed and injured some individuals by their sinister act. Actually, their target was the very cultural moorings and ethos on which the nation and the state of Bangladesh stand. In that sense, the magnitude of their crime outweighs the punishment they received.

The near and dear ones of the victims of the Ramna blast, we hope, will find solace in the fact that the perpetrators have been brought to justice. The waiting time from 2001 to 2014 is undoubtedly a long one for them to see justice. Despite the delay, it has been a landmark verdict that has struck hard at the psyche of impunity. Hopefully, it will strike fear in hearts of terrorists who might be waiting in the wings to commit similar heinous crime in the future.

The imperative is to get to the root of the problem and duly address it at its source to eradicate the politics of hatred and forces of obscurantism in society.

# Proposed duty raise on LPG cylinders

## Concern for quality crops up

THE use of LPG as household cooking fuel is relatively new in Bangladesh. Yet industry insiders say the demand is rising at nearly 400,000 new users every year. With the duty structure on foreign cylinders slated to rise by 5 per cent in the current fiscal, the fear is that consumers may turn to local manufacturers to buy their cylinders. The problem is safety. With little government oversight on the manufacturing process, accidents due to low build quality cannot be ruled out. The consequences of cylinders packed with LPG exploding in a kitchen setting will be explosive, to say the least.

As argued by major suppliers of LPG in the country, the revised duty structure will cost end users anywhere between Tk500 and Tk800 more. When one considers the fact that authorities are unable to provide piped gas outside of Dhaka and Chittagong, the market for LPG is bound to grow with each passing year. With hundreds of thousands of new users adopting LPG as household cooking fuel, safety must be a top priority and concern for authorities. According to media reports, even the state-owned Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation opts for imported cylinders on safety grounds. Until authorities develop the capacity to properly certify locally produced cylinders to be safe, it would be wiser not to revise the duty structure in a manner that could, potentially, put a lot of end consumers at risk.

# Slavery is not extinct

## A.B.M. NURUL ISLAM

RECENTLY I had a chance to see the city of Philadelphia while visiting our daughter in the United States. The quickest way to know a city is to take a guided tour, which we dutifully did. We came to learn that Philadelphia was the temporary capital of the United States (1790-1800) while the capital (Washington) was being built in the District of Columbia. Two US presidents lived here, namely, George Washington and John Adams. More importantly, it was here that US Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution was "drafted, debated and signed". The Declaration of Independence was first read out here to the public to the accompaniment of tolling of the famous Liberty Bell which has inscribed on it the words, "Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof".

Following the guided tour, we walked around the historic area to have a feel of this important city in US history. Part of the former Presidential mansion along with the original foundation has been preserved as a monument. What attracted my attention though was a recent addition....a concrete wall with nine names engraved on it. Eight of the names was of one word only, the ninth having two. These were the African slaves who worked in George Washington's presidential mansion. The stark simplicity of the monument tells the world that a nation that announced in its Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal" continued to practice the inhuman system of slavery until it was brought to a violent end through the American Civil War (1861-65).

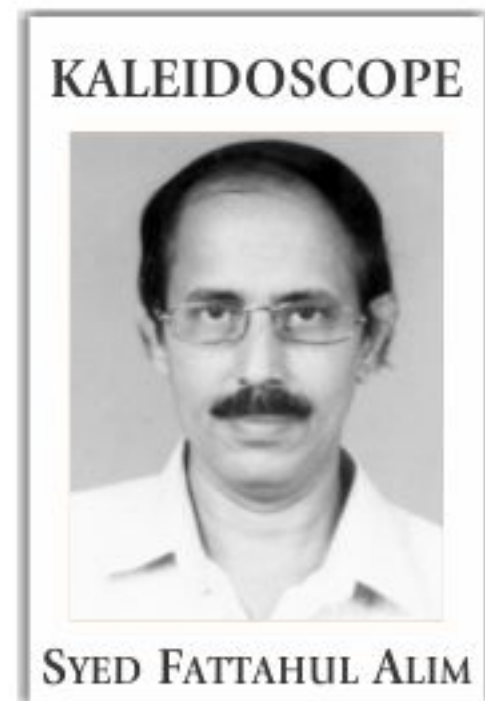
What attracted my attention was the news that US State Department in its latest annual report on human trafficking has degraded Thailand and Qatar for their continued mistreatment of migrant workers. US Secretary of State John Kerry declared firmly, "It is not a 'form of slavery', it is 'slavery'". The latest revelations did not come from any Labour Attache of a third world embassy in Bangkok or Abu Dhabi, but the credit goes to undercover journalists of The Guardian, UK.

My thoughts went out to our Bangladeshi brethren who sweat it out under the desert sun while being treated shabbily and bolster our foreign currency reserves. What have we done for them in return? Often the migrant workers are tied to a single employer, cannot change jobs, paid less than promised or go unpaid for long periods, their passports are seized and they cannot leave the country if they wish to do so. Our embassies ought to ask its officers to leave their air-conditioned rooms sometimes and go and meet our workers to learn of their actual living conditions and complaints and bring it to the notice of our Government for taking appropriate measures.

Slavery is not extinct in this cruel world as yet.

The author is a former IAEA official

# Anti-formalin drive: Should it continue?



LAST week fruit traders called a strike, organized a human chain and so on protesting destruction of chemically-treated fruits by police. Alleging that the police were destroying large quantities of their commodities based on findings of what they termed, inappropriate formalin detection kits, they demanded that the drive be stopped forthwith.

The police drive has definitely hit the fruit traders hard, which is why they have come out on the street in protest. We would urge more discretion from the police in their anti-formalin campaign so that no genuine and honest fruit trader, whose commodity is not contaminated with toxic agents, is harassed or his fruits destroyed. But then what should be our attitude towards those traders whose commodities are not free from toxic chemicals? Don't those deserve to be destroyed? Otherwise, won't the consumers of those fruits be unfairly exposed to serious health hazards? So our appeal to all those fruit traders who are critical of the ongoing anti-formalin drive: can you put your hand on your heart and assure the public that all of your commodities (fruits, or otherwise) are free from poisonous chemicals?

The question of 'inappropriate kits' used in the drive is certainly a valid point raised by fruit traders that merits serious attention from the authorities concerned. But it cannot, under any circumstances, be a sufficient reason to stop the ongoing anti-formalin drive forthwith. The anti-formalin drive authorities should be supplied with the appropriate kits. At the same time, as suggested by others, bodies comprising experts on the subject be formed to oversee the anti-formalin campaign.

The general Secretary of the Bangladesh Fresh Fruit Importers Association Md. Sirajul Islam on June 20 made a frank admission that use of a particular kind of device to detect formalin or other toxic preservatives or ripening agents in their fruits by the mobile court-led drives over the last two years has left a negative impact on consumers. They (consumers) have about stopped eating fruits, he added.

Obviously, Sirajul was expressing his frustration from a fruit trader's point of view. But had he put himself in the consumers' shoes it won't be hard on his part to understand why the public are so averse to eating fruits. As a leader of fruit traders, he should have been able to get to the root of the issue long before the drive against chemically-treated fruits had began in the country. But so far we haven't heard anything from business leaders about prevailing upon their unscrupulous members to stop their dangerous practice of adding poisonous chemicals to their commodities in the name of preserving or ripening fruits,

vegetables or fishes. They showed little concern about how these toxic-chemical-treated perishables like fruits, vegetables or fishes are slow-poisoning the entire nation, how formaldehyde (formalin), calcium carbide, organophosphates (pesticides), industrial dyes and so on used as preservatives, ripening or colouring agents are damaging liver, kidney, bone marrow and respiratory system of the consuming public. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1987 classified formaldehyde as a substance that may cause nasal and nasopharyngeal cancers including even leukemia, if subjects are exposed to it over a long time. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) also came to the conclusion in 1995 that formaldehyde can cause cancer to humans. Regrettably, the business community leaders have remained silent and indifferent while the dishonest traders have been indiscriminately adding this lethal poison to fruits, vegetables with impunity. Now as soon as some action has been taken against these irresponsible traders, the leaders have raised their voice in support of the 'affected' traders.

We don't deny that some excesses might have been committed in the ongoing campaign against poisonous-chemical-treated fruits. As alleged, the kits used to detect chemicals in fruits may have been inappropriate for the purpose. And as a result some untainted fruits, if there were any, might have been destroyed and their owners affected. We express our sympathy for the affected traders. But the financial loss the honest traders so affected has suffered is nothing compared to the damage the major chunk of the toxic-chemicals-treated fruits have been inflicting on public health over the years. Will the businesses concerned be able to compensate for this irreparable damage done to public health?

Basing on the reports of tests conducted by the Institute of Food Science and Technology of the BCSIR on June 2 and June 11, the leader of the fruit importers association claimed that "all imported and local fruits are fruits are 'formalin free'". The samples on which the BCSIR lab conducted its tests on the mentioned dates might have been formalin-free. We have no information if the BCSIR samples were selected randomly from the market and, even if those were so, one cannot still draw the conclusion that all fruits in the market are formalin-free. To make such claims, one would have to conduct tests everyday on a massive scale on random samples collected from fruit sellers at every nook and cranny in the city. And it is exactly for this reason that the drive against the unscrupulous fruit traders who mix poisonous chemicals with their fruits should continue.

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# The World Cup's sickening message

KENT BUSE and SARAH HAWKES

ONE billion people watched the opening match of the FIFA World Cup in São Paulo, Brazil, and hundreds of millions more will tune in at some point during the month-long tournament. For FIFA's six major partners and the event's eight official sponsors, this audience is nothing short of a gold mine. Indeed, they pay tens of millions of dollars in the hope that some of the magic of the "beautiful game" will rub off on their brands – and it very well may. For viewers, however, that is probably not a good thing.

The run-up to the kick-off was not without drama for at least one of FIFA's partners, Budweiser, which was accused of compelling Brazil's government to overturn a national law banning the sale of alcohol inside football stadiums. Despite widespread opposition to repeal of the law, FIFA was resolute: "Alcoholic drinks are part of the FIFA World Cup, so we're going to have them."

Sponsorship by companies like Budweiser, McDonald's, Coca-Cola, and the convenience food giant Moy Park brings millions of dollars to the game. But what message does it send to the global audience? Promoting alcohol, sugary drinks, and fast food may mean massive profits for corporations. But it also means worse health for individuals and a costly burden on countries' health-care systems.

Instead of focusing exclusively on alcohol's potential to fuel violence inside stadiums, the media should be emphasizing the damage that alcohol and processed foods are causing to the world's population every day. Consumption of such products continues to rise – not least because of multi-billion dollar global advertising campaigns. Over the last decade, global soft-drink sales have doubled; per capita alcohol consumption has risen; and tobacco use has increased. Making matters worse, most of this growth is occurring in low- and middle-income countries, which are the least equipped to handle the coming health crisis.

One factor underlying such threats to public health is classification. Health experts have traditionally lumped diseases into two categories: communicable diseases, which are caused predominantly by infection, and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) – that is, everything else.

Among the NCDs, four conditions contribute most to early death or disability: cardiovascular disease, chronic lung conditions, cancer, and diabetes. In 2010, these four conditions caused 47% of all deaths, including nine million deaths in people under 60 years of age.

The main risk factors for developing these conditions – smoking tobacco, excessive alcohol consumption, being overweight, and insufficient physical exercise – reflect deeply ingrained unhealthy behaviors. Given that these are precisely the kind of behaviors that companies like the World Cup sponsors are encouraging, a better disease classification would be pestilentia lucro causa (PLC), or "profit-driven disease."

The over-consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and energy-rich processed foods are often framed as lifestyle "choices." But the determinants of such choices are often removed from people's immediate control. The strong associations between PLCs and, say, poverty or gender suggest that wider social forces exert considerable pressure on individual behaviors affecting health.

Addressing the PLCs calls for a new approach to health, and to the organizations charged with protecting it. The current system does not empower the United Nations and

other technical agencies concerned with health governance to confront the determinants of poor health effectively. Large corporations have resources, lobbying power, advertising budgets, networks, and supply chains of which the UN can only dream. And while the World Health Organization skimps by on \$2 billion a year, the tobacco industry rakes in \$35 billion in annual profits.

What steps can be taken to level the playing field? As any football pundit will tell you, success depends on teamwork. First and foremost, consumers must be better informed about the long-term impact of sponsors' products. After all, the most effective way to compel companies to change is to stop purchasing what they sell. When people raise their voices – say, to ban advertising for breast-milk substitutes or to demand access to life-saving drugs – big corporations often listen.

Second, policymakers must be realistic. While there is certainly room for optimism about technological advances that will help to control treatment costs, the fact is that treating a growing share of the world's population simply is not feasible. Indeed, the World Economic Forum estimates that the four major PLCs cost the global economy \$3.75 trillion in 2010, well over half of which was spent on medical care. In this context, prevention strategies are crucial.

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Third, businesses have a critical role to play. Beyond being a key aspect of corporate social responsibility, curbing PLCs – and thereby ensuring the health and productivity of current and future generations – is in firms' interest. Voluntary codes to limit sugar in soft drinks and reduce salt levels in processed foods are a positive step; but they are far from adequate.

Finally, every successful team needs a strong manager. In the battle against the PLCs, international and national regulatory authorities must fill this role, setting and enforcing the rules of the game to protect the health of people worldwide.

The World Cup has a profound social impact, including on global health. FIFA has a responsibility to ensure that the tournament's viewers are not receiving a message that could make them sick.

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Check Ramadan price hike

Ramadan has come again. Every year during this month, the prices of all daily necessities rise. This happens due to the dishonesty and greed of some selfish businessmen, as they want to earn more profits by creating artificial shortage of commodities. The government should take all necessary steps to keep the food prices under control during this holy month of Ramadan.

Arif Mujumder  
Baridhara, Dhaka

## Controlling import and use of formalin

In a report published in TDS on June 15, there was an idea put up by Prof. Faroque of DU's Pharmacy department. The idea is quite pragmatic and should be adopted as soon as possible. Increasing the duty and taxes on formalin can be a measure to stop the widespread use of it. Only authorised users would be allowed rebate on the penal duty and taxes after proving records. The authorised users' physical stock and records or consumption should be verified and inspected periodically.

Similarly, formalin imports should be restricted, and a full inquiry about the importer should be made mandatory. All their sales and deliveries also need to be verified.

Concerned citizen  
On e-mail

## Lungi-clad men are pariahs?

On my recent visit to South Asia's largest shopping mall in Dhaka, I witnessed a very sad state of affairs. A very senior citizen, who seemed to be coming from the countryside, was stopped by the guards at the entrance of the said shopping mall because he was wearing lungi. They didn't allow him to enter the mall. When I inquired, the guard said that it was a direct order from the general manager and he might lose his job if that elderly person was caught on CCTV wearing lungi and roaming inside the mall.

My question to enterprises like these: why are they ashamed of lungi? Many people roam around wearing three quarter pants, but it doesn't bother them. And even if a foreigner enters the mall wearing shorts, they don't stop him. Then why stop our lungi-clad fellow citizens?

Syed Raiyan  
Gulshan 1, Dhaka

## Comments on news report, “Unopposed MPs unquestionable,” published on June 20, 2014

### Hardreality

Ruling party used constitution, disregarded intellectuals' opinion, sidelined democracy and most of all, deprived people of their voting right just to stay in power. The ruling party does not care about people anymore. If they did, they would do everything to bring all the opposition parties in the election. Keeping the main opposition out of the election was their main strategy.

### Fakhrul Islam

So all future elections can be made unopposed, as it does not contradict with the spirit of the constitution.

### Zman7

The HC verdict brought a big sigh of relief among many people including those who voted in the Jan 5 election and those who truly love and value constitutional democracy.

### Hafeejul Alam

It is very sad that eminent jurists like Dr Kamal Hossain and barrister Rafique-Ul Huq brought politics into the domain of law. The High Court verdict reflects the true spirit of our constitution and there should be no more politics on the matter.

### Molla A. Latif

If voters do not have any choice to vote for but one, why should they vote?

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## “62pc rise in Swiss bank deposits” (June 21, 2014)

### Hardreality

Ruling party has got another great success (!) to brag about and can put it in their resume. Thanks to two unknown main rival parties for creating an unstable country; hail to those who did not take any action against tax-evaders; praise to those who put some rich people's interest above the country. Long live government!

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## “Bangladesh reclaims top spot” (June 21, 2014)

### Tangled Abstract Fallacy

Fantastic achievement of our valiant troops! We are proud of our armed forces, and we must eliminate all anti-liberation forces inside our beloved country.