

Woes of illegal migrants

BITTER TRUTH



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

LURED by the promise of lucrative job offers and better future, thousands of Bangladeshis have fallen victims to unscrupulous brokers and fake manpower agents. Many of these illegal migrants have perished in the rough seas and others have seen their dreams shattered by the cruel hand of fate. Many of them have been arrested by police in foreign countries and are behind bars.

The most recent tragedy occurred in the Bay of Bengal when traffickers in Myanmar opened fire on a trawler carrying over 300 people illegally to Malaysia. It was a consequence of their attempt to take more passengers. After getting a phone call from the traffickers, their accomplices in Myanmar came in three boats and fired indiscriminately on the passengers, which killed five Bangladeshis and left 151 injured. Fortunately for the migrants, getting an SOS from the attacked boat, coast guards sent out rescue teams and they were towed back to Teknaf. Such boat tragedies continue to take a heavy toll year in and year out.

For the past decade, Cox's Bazaar, Jessore,

Bogra, Narsingdi, Kushtia, etc. have become busy recruiting centres for people seeking their fortune abroad. Every year, hundreds of young men -- all of them unemployed and mostly from low income families -- take the foreign route with dreams of finding better jobs and making better money. While some may occasionally strike it rich, most end up in hell holes, only to be deported to their home country as paupers. Others, like the 5 Bangladeshis who perished in a boat tragedy off the coast of St. Martins in the Bay, meet an even crueler fate.

It is also the get-rich-quick dream which fuels the vast network of travel agents, brokers and manpower recruiting agents, many of them fake but emboldened to run the trafficking business because they enjoy the patronage of a section of law enforcers, immigration and airport staff, as indicated by the members of the inter-ministerial body that investigated the racket.

Smuggling of illegal migrants is a thriving industry worth a few hundred crore taka a year. On average, a few thousand youth are illegally sent to different countries every month through a well-knit network of shady travel agents who have links with local touts and international syndicates. The going rate for the US and Canada is about Tk. 4 lakh to Tk. 6 lakh per person, for Europe it is Tk. 4 to Tk. 5 lakh, while it is Tk. 2 lakh to Tk. 3 lakh for the Gulf and Malaysia. According to trade sources, nearly 50% of the money changes

hands as bribes to some officials in embassies, immigration and airport staff and the police. The rest is shared as profit.

Not surprisingly, because of the appalling economic condition, lack of employment opportunities in the country, rise of terrorism and violence, and partisan conflicts, touts and fake recruiting agents can lure the gullible youths with tempting offer of jobs or even citizenship status in countries like Canada, Spain and Italy. Most of the agents are fly-by-night operators having bases in places like Doha, Abu Dhabi, Saudi Arabia, Italy and Spain. They arrange the deal for payments in a phased manner. Malaysia bound passengers are first taken to Thailand where the traffickers hold them as hostages. The families of the hostages are then contacted for more money apart from what they have already paid. Once the money is paid through such overseas agents, they are then made to avail the trip for Malaysia by another boat. But the unfortunate part of the story is that, in many cases, these hapless Bangladeshis get caught either by the Thai or the Malaysian police and their dreams get shattered.

Because the economy of the most desired destinations are not as booming as they were before, most of them have closed their doors against migrant workers and tightened their asylum laws. Still there has been no letup in human smuggling. Shady travel agents have been thriving because of alleged police patronage. The police have arrested six per-

sons including 2 Thais, 1 Myanmar and 3 Bangladeshis connected with the recent tragedy in the Bay of Bengal. All these facts suggest that this racket is fueled in collusion with inter-country or overseas syndicates.

The question that arises is why are these youths trying to flee the country and take to the high seas that eventually swallow them alive? It is undeniably true that unstable political situation, closure of once vibrant industries like jute, textiles, steel, etc. and consequent lack of employment opportunities have propelled the youths to flee the country in search of jobs and better living elsewhere.

In our 43rd year of independence, it is a shame that half our people live in such appalling poverty and that so many of them have to go away from the country to escape deprivation and misery. Was it democracy that prevented investments in roads, electricity, agro-based industries and, most important of all, in education, that would have created jobs in rural Bangladesh?

If we have an educated and technically trained population, especially in the IT sector, then even billionaire Bill Gates will make substantial investment in the country. This is what happened in India. Bill Gates visited India in 1998 and made heavy investments in IT sector industries in Bangalore and Hyderabad. Thousands of skilled IT specialists having basic training in India are now working in Silicon Valley in the US.

It is undeniably true that basic infrastructure

has to be built up to draw such investments. Despite all the potentials of cheap labour, a vast cohort of labour force and congenial climatic conditions, the country remains perpetually poor. It is suffering from poverty of ideas and not of resources. The country is poor due entirely to bad governance.

Some politicians and bureaucrats discovered how easy it was to make huge amounts of money by keeping Bangladesh poor and undeveloped. We did not even notice the changes taking place in China and East Asia, did not even begin to notice that these countries were getting ahead of us because they had realised that prosperity came from sound economic policies, not from political cleverness. The present ruling AL party came to power with massive majority in the parliament. The ruling party could do a lot of things for the country had they fixed up their mind to ameliorate the condition of the masses, not through self-service but through commitment and dedication.

Given the political will, the government could have initiated any people-oriented policy it wanted during the past years it was in power. And today we could have been a much richer country instead of languishing among the 100-odd poorest countries in the world. Consequently, our youths would not have to risk their lives and sail the high seas in search of a better life.

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No to drug abuse and illicit trafficking

M.A. JABBAR

THE United Nations General Assembly designated June 26 as the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. The Day raises awareness of two important issues -- World Drug Day and the Blue Heart Campaign against Human Trafficking. Established in 1987, the day is now in its 27 year and its pro-health campaign is stronger than ever.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) invites individuals, non-profit organisations, the private sector and member states to get involved by: (i) organising outreach or institutional events to mark June 26 (ii) spreading the word about the campaign through individual's network and contacts (iii) using the campaign slogan and logo in promotional products, websites and social media, and (iv) donating funds to local NGOs to support drug prevention and treatment efforts, or making in-kind contribution to the campaign and related events.

Investigations reveal that: (i) around 210 million people, or 4.8% of the population aged 15-64, took illicit substances at least once in 2010 (ii) cannabis users comprised the largest number of illicit drug users in 2010 (129-190 million people) (iii) in 2007 and 2008, some 16 to 17 million people used cocaine worldwide, and (iv) in 2008, global heroin seizures reached a record level of 73.7 metric tons.

The first international conference to discuss the world's narcotics problem was convened in February 1909 in Shanghai. This forum became known as the Opium Commission and it laid the groundwork for the elaboration of the first international drug treaty, the International Opium Convention of The Hague (1912).

Trafficking in fraudulent medicine

Fraudulent medicines pose a considerable public health threat as they cannot cure, but may harm and even kill patients. Compounding this public health risk is the fact that the supply chain for medicines operates at a global level and, therefore, a concerted effort at the international level is required to effectively detect and combat the introduction of fraudulent medicines along this supply chain. The 20th session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) adopted Resolution 20/6 on fraudulent medicines, otherwise referred to as falsified medicines, due to concern about the involvement of organised crime in the trafficking in fraudulent medicine.

At the same time, Resolution 20/6 highlights the potential utility of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), for which UNODC is the guardian, in re-enforcing international cooperation in the fight against trafficking through its provisions on mutual legal assistance, extraction and the seizing, freezing and forfeiture of the instrumentalities and proceeds of crime.

UNODC, in cooperation with other United Nations bodies and international organisations, such as the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the International Criminal Police Organization (ICPO/INTERPOL), as well as relevant regional organisations and mechanisms, national regulatory agencies for medicines and, where appropriate, the private sector, civil society organisations and professional associations, assist member states of the illicit supply chain, in particular distribution and trafficking, to better utilise the experiences, technical expertise and resources of each organisation and to create synergies with interested partners.



Bangladesh perspective

As a peace-loving country, Bangladesh has always expressed solidarity with the international communities/bodies for upholding human rights and values, and the health and wellbeing of the people. As a member state, Bangladesh is very serious about combating drug abuse and illicit trafficking, and is committed to materialising the UN policies and strategies in this respect. With that end in view, the Narcotics Control Act was passed for the control of narcotics, and treatment and rehabilitation

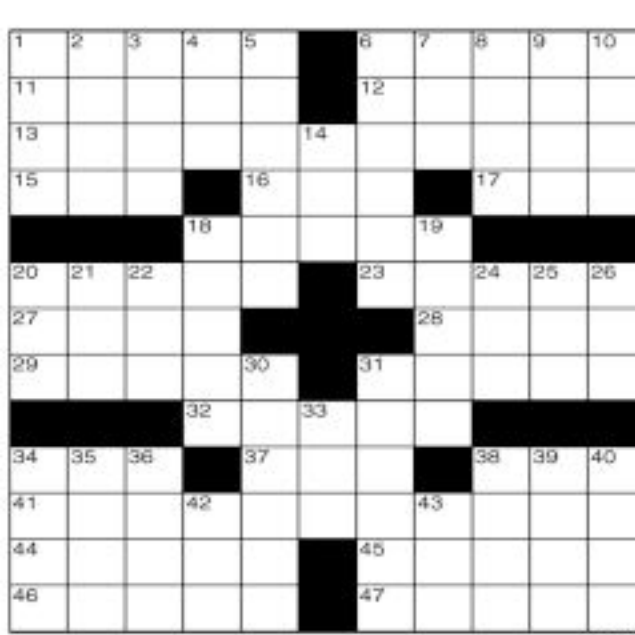
of drug addicts. The department undertakes many programme for health and welfare of the people, which include educational and publicity measures for creating necessary public awareness about the evil effects of narcotics.

Bangladesh became a signatory to the Convention on Psychotropic Substances 1971 and the UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in 1988. It has signed and ratified the Saarc Convention on Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1990. Its parliament ratified all the UN Conventions to support, advance, and cooperate with international efforts to combat and control the drug menace.

Bangladesh entered into a bilateral agreement on technical assistance with the USA for drug abuse prevention and control, and received equipment for the purpose. It also receives facilities for domestic and overseas training, fellowships, and study tours from the DEA, INM, USIA of USA, Jica of Japan and from the governments of UK and France. Training facilities were also provided from DAP of the Colombo Plan Bureau, Saarc, Unesco, ILO and UNODC. On the other, Bangladesh hosted a good number of Saarc workshops, seminars and symposiums during the last few years.

As drug problem is not limited to a particular country, international cooperation is essential along with government efforts. Moreover, health personnel, public representatives, social workers, NGOs, religious leaders, school teachers, and individuals must work together to prevent and raise awareness about the threat posed by drug abuse and illicit trafficking. There is no way to compromise with the problem other than prevention for a safer world. Working together, we shall achieve the goal.

The writer is Executive Secretary of ADHUNIK, a national anti-tobacco organisation.



Martyrdom has always been a proof of the intensity, never the correctness, of a belief.

Arthur Schweitzer

CRYPTOQUOTE

SXBP OZ NQP ZMIZNKAJP XY KSS SOYP.
PBPTLNQOAZ OZ JXAAPJNPC OA SXBP,
KIZXSMNPSL PBPTLNQOAZ.

-- EMSOK JKHPTXA

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:

THE SMALLEST DEED IS BETTER THAN THE GREATEST INTENTION.

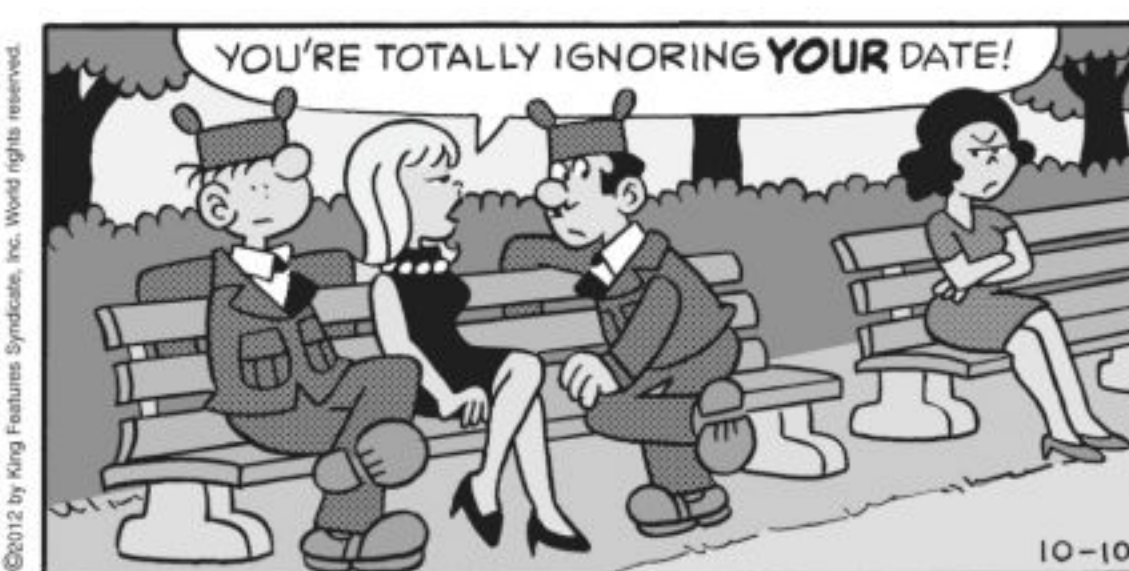
-- JOHN BURROUGHS

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.

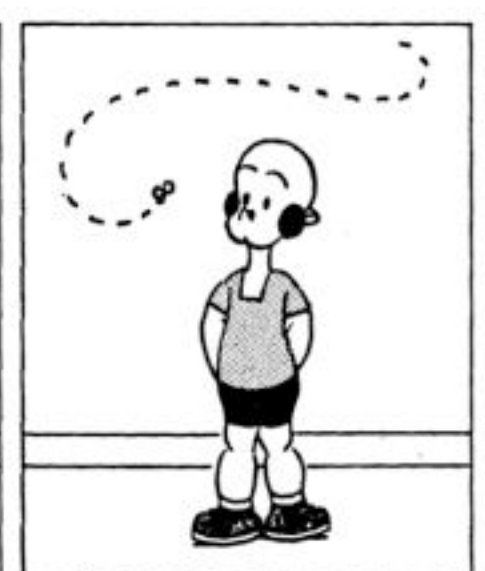
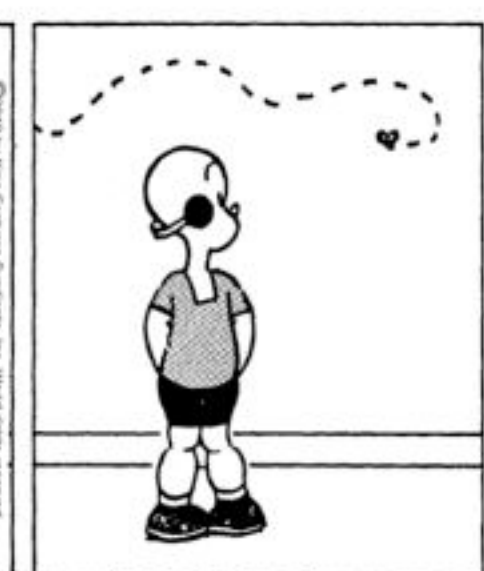
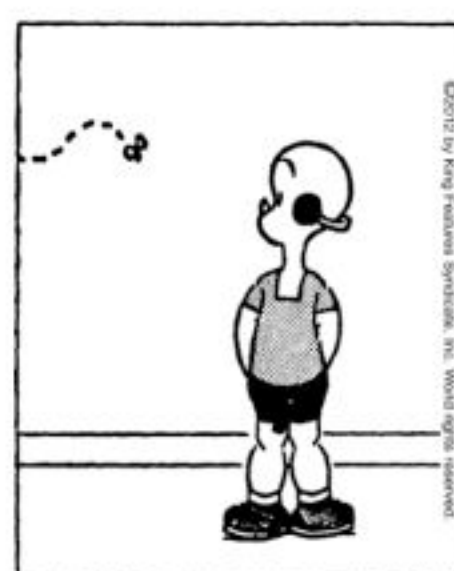
BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



HENRY

by Don Trachte



CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- 1 Fishhook parts
- 6 Jeweler's unit
- 11 Concerning
- 12 Martini extra
- 13 Late night star
- 15 Had lunch
- 16 Smoked salmon
- 17 Finale
- 18 Olympic sleds
- 20 Friend of D'Artagnan
- 23 Stuns
- 27 Free of fat
- 28 Like Lincoln
- 29 Borders
- 31 Slightly drunk
- 32 Cellulose fiber
- 34 Stunned wonder
- 37 Suede shade
- 38 Swiss peak
- 41 Late night star
- 44 Joust wear
- 45 Unbilled role
- 46 Goes through
- 47 Tale

DOWN

- 1 Mexican peninsula
- 2 Somewhat
- 3 Colosseum setting
- 4 Idler
- 5 Record needle
- 6 Sweet talked
- 7 Everyone
- 8 Annoy
- 9 Stratford river
- 10 Care for
- 14 London weather
- 18 Solitary type
- 19 Lustrous fabric
- 20 Stout relative
- 21 Media mogul Turner
- 22 Crone
- 24 Skip, as TV ads
- 25 Chicago trains
- 26 Crafty
- 30 Nymph chasers
- 31 Invigorating drinks
- 33 Himalayan beast
- 34 Cracked
- 35 Marionette mover
- 36 Austen book
- 38 Clip contents
- 39 Lewd look
- 40 Stratagem
- 42 Like Camaby Street fashion
- 43 Small rug



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