

The tragedy of Malaysian flight

Truth, not politics, must be the focus

ONE disaster breaks hearts. A second one scares the world over the growing hazards to international travel. Not long ago, a Malaysian Airlines flight went missing without a trace. And now the shooting down of flight MH 17 raises an entirely different set of questions. One is pretty certain that a missile attack brought down the aircraft on the Russia-Ukraine border. As many as 298 lives have been lost. The calamity, for that is what it is, has left a whole world reeling in shock and pain.

The blame game that has already begun about who brought the plane down must swiftly turn into a meaningful and impartial inquiry into what actually happened. The United States and Ukraine have pointed the finger at Russia. For his part, President Vladimir Putin has made it clear that the country in which the plane came down, in this instance Ukraine, bears responsibility. The clear feeling is one of global politics being brought into play.

Obviously, the international community must now zero in on those who fired the missile or missiles at the jetliner. Given that pro-Russian Ukrainian rebels dominate the region where the plane was brought down, emphasis on what kind and number of missiles they have and how they came by them is a necessity. At the same time, focus should also be on both the Russian and Ukrainian governments in order to see if elements on either side were involved. Unless this question is speedily answered, there is every likelihood of such a tragedy being repeated.

The tragedy goes to highlight the imperative of securing international air travel against newer dangers. Our hearts go out in sympathy for the bereaved families.

Thumbs up for domestic RMG market

Remove bottlenecks to aid growth

KERANIGANJ has become the hub for readymade apparels produced by small factories that cater to the domestic market for both adults and children's wear. With some 8,000 small factories churning out products ranging from children's clothing to T-shirts and jeans, they service the lower and middle income groups of Bangladesh. Indeed, from what has been published in this paper, sales touch Tk1,000crore during the month of Ramadan.

What is interesting to note here is that denim (jeans) constitute 50 per cent of total output and quality is up to the mark. With a pair of jeans retailing at wholesale level ranging between Tk50 and Tk100 below that of other wholesale markets in the country, Keraniganj has been propelled in to a different playing field. With retail pricing ranging at around Tk300 for mediocre quality and pricing going anywhere up to Tk2,000 for superior finish, we are seeing the emergence of a parallel RMG sector that caters purely for domestic consumers.

Needless to say, the Keraniganj model can and probably will be replicated successfully in other parts of the country. Yet, domestic apparel producers are not bereft of problems beyond their control. Infrastructure inadequacies like power outages hamper production; poor condition of roads and the haphazard manner in which factories have grown are some of the issues that need to be dealt with to avoid incidences of fire and even building collapse. The sector needs recognition and access to banking credit to realise its full potential. These are areas where the government must step in to help facilitate growth of this sub-sector.

Beating children does them more harm than good

SIR FRANK PETERS

THERE is a horrific misconception in some societies that beating children helps them become better people. Some people even have the audacity to equate corporal punishment with discipline, which is totally ludicrous.

The many lifelong dangers caused to children by corporal punishment in schools (and homes) is well documented. In 1979 Sweden became the first country in the world to ban the torturing of its children. 35-years later many countries still see no harm maiming a child for life, physically or mentally or both; despite the overwhelming evidence collected over the decades that clearly show corporal punishment to be morally wrong and of no benefit to society.

This is a fact eminent Bangladesh High Court Justices Imman Ali and Sheikh Hasan Arif recognised and made corporal punishment unlawful on January 13, 2011, for the greater benefit of Bangladesh.

Indian psychologist Usha Nursaria said most Indians beat their children during their growing years. Then the children repeat the mistake with their own children.

The same applies to Bangladesh. The idea that inflicting violence on children is going to make them better citizens is illogical, preposterous, and totally absurd; just like squeezing fruit doesn't enhance its quality.

No sane human being would inflict torture on the child they profess to love and cherish, or allow anyone else to. It speaks volumes for the mentality of the 19 American states that still condone paddling in their schools and why their prisons are full to capacity.

Anurag Pandey, Principal of Suyash Convent, said corporal punishment is destructive to a child's development, but there is an alternative.

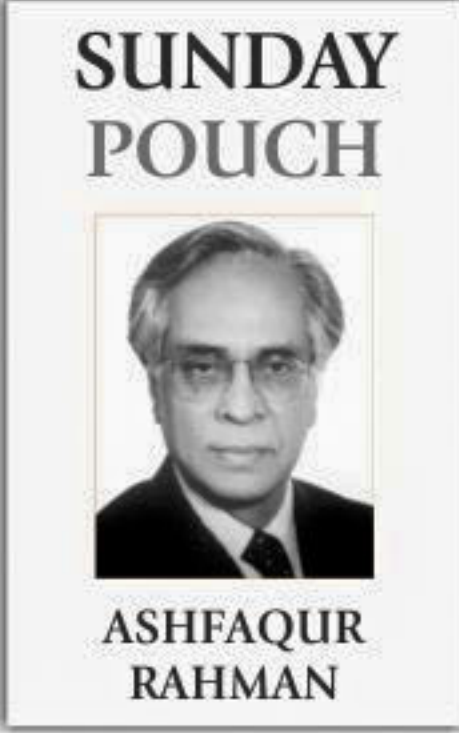
"Showing positive appreciation for students goes a long way in boosting their morale.

"This appreciation is complemented by incentives to work hard and it focuses enduringly at the non-performers by making them realise the worth of responsibility through assignment of posts like class monitor to these children. We have a unique tradition of awarding the 'Star of the fortnight' to a child showing drastic change. In cases where teachers find a child extremely unruly, the current teachers interact with the former teachers for earlier experience with that child; which is to find the reason behind the child's behavior and address that."

Corporal punishment benefits no one, but harms everyone in society. Stop the rot.

The writer is a former newspaper and magazine publisher and editor, an award-winning writer, humanitarian, a royal Goodwill Ambassador, and a loyal foreign friend of Bangladesh.

How do we post our diplomats?



OVER the past 42 years the total number of posts and the cadre strength of the Bangladesh foreign service have not expanded significantly. Hence, on many occasions it has been difficult to post officers against the vacant posts. The work of the Foreign Office, especially in the political sections of embassies, has suffered. Many attempts had been made in the past to recruit more foreign service officers through the Bangladesh Public Service Commission. But there is an utter lack of brilliant candidates who can occupy the posts in the foreign service -- the total intake has always vacillated between 10-15 officers each year. This is not enough to meet the requirements.

But the more difficult challenge is to send officers to those stations where the country needs their presence. Every officer, since his induction, seems to be keen to join in those few posts available in English speaking countries like the USA or the UK. There are, therefore, few takers of posts in non-English speaking countries like Russia or China or even Brazil. Perhaps the main reasons are the unfamiliarity of the language of the country and the fact that schools for children and hospitals for treatment of the older family members are not always available. If this is the trend, then it will be very difficult for the government to develop a diversified and knowledgeable foreign office. It is often difficult to find senior officers to be posted as ambassadors and high commissioners in non-western countries.

So the need of the hour in the Foreign Office is to consider career planning for officers when they begin their assignments, both at headquarters at Dhaka and in the missions abroad. One of the first requirements is to send specific officers for language training in certain countries around the world. Thus, we may send young officers for Chinese language training or German or French or Arabic or even Portuguese as the case may be to take up posts when vacancy arises in our missions in the countries where those languages are spoken. Today, there are only a small number of languages offered to our young officers and so there are a few officers who do not seem to be eager to build up a career surrounding a certain language and culture. The other aspect is that there is hardly any repeat posting of an officer to a country or countries where he is adept in the language. An officer, after an initial assignment in a country whose language he has learnt, is sent to other countries. Subsequent postings are also far away from the countries where he could use the language he has learnt. So his learning of the language soon goes to waste. There is no career planning for him.

Bangladesh diplomacy is on the threshold of a new era, where new problems and challenges are to be faced. With a population of 160 million and on the way to being a middle income country, we cannot but have extremely professional diplomats to run the affairs of the country. We are likely to be a developed country by 2040. We cannot rattle along with policies and methods of the past.

As the world is becoming globalised, an argument is heard that English is increasingly being used the world over for conduct of foreign relations. But this is so only in multi-lateral negotiations and in tripartite talks. But in bilateral negotiations, knowledge of the host country's language still has great value in understanding the mindset of the counterparts. For Bangladesh, there is now a growing importance of diplomacy in developing relations. Unlike the past, aid and grants are no more the need of the hour. Our interest now is to access new markets and also to find employment opportunities for our people. Unless our foreign service personnel are good in the local language and culture they would be at a disadvantage vis a vis other countries that are doing the same but with a team of diplomats who are very adept in the language and have a better understanding of the culture and of how the people and their leaders think. Besides, the growing geo-strategic position of Bangladesh has brought forward the need to understand how other countries, especially where a diplomat is posted, use their geo-political position to take national advantage.

In this context, it is important to reshape the posting policy of our diplomats. The new policy should be time befitting and should not be unfair to an individual officer.

The top brass at the foreign office enjoy full discretionary powers to post diplomats. They post an officer to western capitals if he has been especially loyal and obedient. A new dispensation has to be introduced where the discretionary power is reduced. The decision making of a posting must be based on a set of criteria which includes the history of his past postings as well as the officer's requirements. For example, if an officer needs to be posted in a developed western country because of his personal or family's medical needs, this must be given some weight in the decision making. Also, if there is a special educational need that must be taken into account for giving him at least one posting in a western country, this too must be taken into account. But it must be remembered that the high official of the Foreign Office must be the ultimate decision maker. On the other hand, an officer who has enjoyed a number of consecutive postings in a western country must be given a tour of duties in Asia, Africa and Latin America. He must acquire the skills to run a mission in different environments.

Bangladesh diplomacy is on the threshold of a new era, where new problems and challenges are to be faced. With a population of 160 million and on the way to being a middle income country, we cannot but have extremely professional diplomats to run the affairs of the country. We are likely to be a developed country by 2040. We cannot rattle along with policies and methods of the past.

The writer is a former Ambassador and a commentator on current affairs. E-mail: ashfaqur303@gmail.com

Leadership and a downed plane

ANDREW EAGLE

THE tragic downing of flight MH17 is now a test of leadership. While some politicians have demonstrated respect for lives lost and reacted with restraint, others have sought to capitalise on tragedy to propel self-serving, national and geopolitical interests.

The downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine once again reminded that the world is interconnected to an unparalleled degree. The loss of almost 300 lives shows how localised unrest can have a devastating impact on people far removed. We can never know how many of MH17's passengers considered East Ukraine's struggle as anything beyond a news curiosity. Yet that turmoil claimed their lives.

Information allegedly retrieved from tapped phone conversations and online statements from pro-Russian fighters would seem to implicate them. The same evidence suggests the plane was mistaken for a military aircraft and targeted by accident.

It wouldn't be the first time that has happened. In 1983 a Soviet military jet downed a Korean Airlines flight near the Russian island of Sakhalin. In 1988 a ground-to-air missile launched from a US warship in the Persian Gulf destroyed Iran Air flight 655. In each case the death toll was similar to this latest incident. The Ukrainian military also mistakenly attacked a Russian passenger aircraft over Crimea in 2001, killing 78 people.

Given that such events are foreseeable it is important to consider why East Ukraine was not declared a war zone for aviation purposes so that airlines could be allocated alternative, safer routes. What degree of responsibility rests with the International Civil Aviation Organisation?

Secondly, given that even the US military can similarly err, unless and until proven otherwise it cannot be considered likely that a proactive strike against an airliner by pro-Russian fighters, of questionable military training, was deliberate. The early evidence suggests it was not.

In these circumstances it is unfortunate that several politicians have shown a willingness to use this tragedy in pursuit of their political and geopolitical objectives. It is a second tragedy when untimely deaths are so denigrated.

In the US, outspoken Republican Senator John McCain took an early opportunity to threaten "there would be hell to pay" if it was shown mistaken identity caused either Russia or pro-Russian rebels to shoot down the aircraft. To his credit he was not prepared to conclusively finger point without conclusive evidence, but given the history of the 1988 Iran Air flight he could have better considered the question of intent before jumping to threats of punishment.

Of greater concern was the reaction from Kiev. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko was quick to tweet "MH17 is not an incident or a catastrophe, it is a terrorist incident." Would he characterise the Ukrainian military's misadventure in 2001 in the same way?

Poroshenko's reaction demonstrates how divorced from moderation his administration has become. Such provocative words can only confirm the ongoing fears

held by East Ukrainians and raise questions as to what sort of politics the west is supporting.

In leadership, Poroshenko appears to struggle, as he does not seem to have either the skill or desire to truly move towards reconciliation with the east. A greater leader could have taken this tragic opportunity to do just that. Indeed one did: Barack Obama.

The US president referred to the incident neutrally, as "a terrible tragedy," and along with the leaders of several EU countries called for a truce in Ukraine to allow a thorough investigation. Sometimes criticised for having achieved little, Obama has on this occasion shown the world will likely regret it when his more advanced if inconsistent leadership skills are gone.

Vladimir Putin offered full cooperation in any investigation while denying Russian involvement. Given that last week the Russian state media was congratulating rebels for seizing BUK missile launchers from a Ukrainian air force base, the type of missile required to reach a low-flying airliner, Putin's statement may be accurate.

Nonetheless, the incident highlights the unintended consequences of meddling in Ukraine's political development, something which the US, the EU and Russia have all engaged in.

Bizarrely, perhaps the most extreme reaction came from



the antipodes. Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott felt at liberty to accuse Vladimir Putin of needing to explain such "wanton killing," perhaps wishing to be seen as strong by an Australian public mourning its 28 nationals killed.

"The bullying of small countries by big ones," Abbott said, "the trampling of justice and decency in the pursuit of national aggrandisement, and reckless indifference to human life should have no place in this world." In that he is right. The problem is, with the Australian government currently holding 153 Sri Lankan asylum seekers including children locked in a windowless room on a boat secretly positioned in the Indian Ocean for nobody knows how long; and with a case brought by Timor-Leste under way in The Hague concerning allegations of Australian commercial spying against its much smaller neighbour, Abbott's words look less about Ukraine than his own government. Their hyperbolic nature reconfirms Australia is unlikely to be taken seriously by the international community in the near future.

The world is interconnected as never before. It's a pity that when solid leadership is most required it all too often proves elusive.

The writer is an English Instructor and Feature Writer at The Daily Star. He lived in Donetsk, Ukraine, in 2002.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Germany and spying

This refers to the report, "Germany to spy on US: Minister" (July 9). Germany cannot be that naive after it learnt that America's NSA spied on Chancellor Merkel's mobile phone. Germany woke up after one of its agents was selling state secrets to the US in return for cash. In today's world, every nation spies on every other nation and it is an open secret. Conditions after the Second World War were different from existing ones -- there were no internet and mobile phones in those days and the word satellite was alien. The world now cannot exist without these three things.

There was no need for Germany to refrain from spying. Germany has the required technology and is one of the biggest economies of Europe and the nation needs to safeguard its economic interests. Why cannot Europe have one unified spy agency where all European nations will work together and be as powerful as the NSA?
Deendayal M. Lulla
On e-mail

Thoughts on WC final

It is perhaps more justified to discuss the success of Germany in the WC final than reviewing the failures of Argentina. I think both teams played pretty well. But luck favoured the Germans. And the refereeing in the World Cup was not above criticism. Is football going to get a third referee like a third umpire in cricket to determine offside, handball in the penalty box, etc.? The German team did some rough tackling and the Argentines were overstressed, especially their key player, Messi. I think if D. Maria were fit and played in the final, Argentina could have won the golden trophy.

Anami
California, USA

Comments on news analysis, "Police behaviour shames the state," published on July 16, 2014

Hyder
Police atrocities have once again crossed all civic norms. I strongly feel that the government should initiate a probe committee headed by a judge and find out the facts.

This member of the police force deserves punishment so that it remains an example and such outrageous behaviour will not happen again.

Abul Kashem
Exactly. The behaviour of the police shames the state, but not the present government. Their smiling faces and speeches prove that they have no shame over whatever is happening in the country.

Mortuza Huq
When a government without a mandate runs the country, these things happen. Therefore, I suggest that civil society, the media and the rest of the forces of conscience of the country focus on bringing back real democracy in Bangladesh through a credible and inclusive election without any delay.

Mofi
Thanks for writing such a timely article. Kindly keep writing. Otherwise the culprits will do the same again once we forget this incident.

Nasirullah Mridha, USA
This killing took place due to the lack of supervision by the police high-ups.

Aasfiswar
Rabbi's father is not the only one. A lot of fathers, brothers and sons were murdered in cold blood.

Mohammad Rahman
The SI should be brought to justice by the home ministry immediately, without interference from any quarter. I hope the SI suffers the same pain Suján suffered.

"Board meeting minutes fake!" (July 16, 2014)

Abul Kashem
Can any sympathiser of the present unethical government rationalise this corruption?

"No relief on highways" (July 16, 2014)

Abdul Jabber
The government has become deaf so as not to hear about public sufferings and miseries.

Mohammad Rahman
This proves what lip service our communications minister is paying when public sufferings on the roads remain unabated.