

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

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Festive boon for the economy

Sustain the momentum

WITH Eid-ul-Fitr around the corner, retailers are rushing to meet the huge demand for apparels by opening new stores and keeping shops open for longer. Pre-Eid shopping is seen as one of the biggest revenue generating periods for our economy. This is when local retail outlets are buoyed both by the seasonal demand and the substantial inflow of remittance sent by Bangladeshi people living abroad for the purpose of Eid shopping. For this reason, it is a halcyon time for our economy as the exchange of money from buyers to sellers creates a favourable multiplier effect. At the same time, the flow of remittance has increased the supply of dollars in the economy, making the local taka stronger.

Crucial to this uplifting of the economy is the recent political calm and stability inside the country. Many traders believe that a calm political atmosphere is fundamental to the boost in shopping by the locals. We hope that this calm political atmosphere prevails well beyond Eid-ul-Fitr so that we are able to build on the uplift provided by Eid sales. The boom in shopping not only leads to increased sales but also demands in other sectors of the economy as well, such as the banking and advertising sectors as buyers and sellers interact vigorously during this time-frame. It is thus a responsibility of the government to fully utilize the potential of Eid-ul-Fitr to impact our economy positively.

BIWTC's old vessels

Need to ensure they are safe to travel

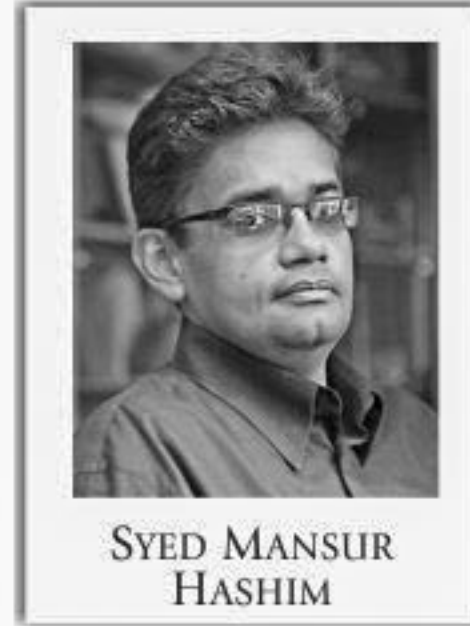
ALONG with its regularly scheduled services, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) is adding to its fleet strength with repaired old vessels to meet the rush of Eid travellers. The BIWTC's reinstating some nearly eighty year old ships back into service highlights the inadequate fleet capacity of the state-owned corporation. More to the point, would the increased fleet strength, the way it's being done, upgrade the safety status overall? This question begs a satisfactory answer.

Especially restoration of four paddle-wheel steamers, the PS Ostrich, PS Lepcha, PS Mahsud, PS Turn, besides the screw-wheel motor vessel, the MV Banglaee, entails not only massive facelifts but their age-old storm warning systems and safety precautionary methods and capabilities will also need to be upgraded with advanced technologies.

MV Banglaee is our first home-made passenger steamer but it was suddenly withdrawn from service after four months of its commissioning, having been made with poor quality material and reportedly incurring losses. The steamers will not only need to be mechanically fit to carry the expected load, but adequately equipped with buoyant devices for keeping people afloat in an emergency. According to shipping laws of our land no ship is permitted to operate if it's older than 30 years. And the economic life of a water vessel is maximum 25 years.

So there are enough reasons for caution to be exercised in restoring old and expired ships. Given the shocking incidents of boat and ferry capsizes in Bangladesh ensuring

Gaza bombed by deadly darts



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

IT is interesting to note that the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) claims "as a rule, the IDF only employs weapons that have been determined lawful under international law, and in a manner which fully conforms with the laws of armed conflict." Physical evidence of munitions like flechette shells is turning up in Gaza. As stated in an article recently published in *The Guardian*, B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights organisation, describes a flechette shell as "an anti-personnel weapon that is generally fired from a tank. The shell explodes in the air and releases thousands of metal darts 37.5mm in length, which disperse in a conical arch 300 meters long and 90 meters wide."

Jane's Defence Weekly describes the flechette as: "The IDF is using a modified version of US-supplied M494 105mm APERS-T rounds, acquired in the 1970s. Their wide "kill radius" renders flechettes particularly deadly. Their use in heavily populated areas contravenes two basic principles of the laws of war. The first is the prohibition against indiscriminate attacks, which means that forces cannot use weapons or mount attacks that do not or cannot distinguish between civilians and military objectives. The second is the requirement to take all feasible precautions to avoid or minimize harm to civilians when choosing method and means of attack."

And although not outright banned by international law, B'Tselem contends "other rules of humanitarian law render their use in the Gaza strip illegal. One of the most fundamental principles is the obligation to distinguish between those who are involved and those who are not involved in the fighting, and to avoid to the extent possible injury to those who are not involved. Deriving from this principle is the prohibition of the use of an imprecise weapon which is likely to result in civilian injuries."

This is hardly the first time the IDF has used flechette shells in combat. The same human rights organisation attributed the death of nine Palestinians in Gaza from the munitions in 2001 and 2002 and it is alleged that they have been used also in Lebanon. Prior to this Israel has been found to have used artillery shells containing white phosphorous in Gaza during Operation Cast Lead in 2008 and 2009 that caused scores of extensive burns resulting in deaths amongst the populace. Going by a report published by B'Tselem on January, 2011 titled 'Flechette Shells: an illegal weapon,' it is found that Israeli forces have used flechette shells against the Hezbollah and other militias in Lebanon.

Non-combatants have paid the price of such muni-

tions. As pointed out by B'Tselem: "On 9 June 2001, IDF soldiers encamped at the Netzarim settlement fired several flechettes in response to Palestinian gunfire at the encampment. Three Palestinian women, who were living in a tent site in the Sheikh 'Ajalim neighbourhood near the settlement and were not involved in the firing at the army encampment, were killed by flechette darts; Hikmat 'Odeh Alla Salmi al-Malalheh, 17, Nasra Salem Hussein al-Malalheh, 65, and Salima 'Omer Ghanem al-Malalheh, 32. Another man and woman in the tent site were seriously injured.... On 30 December 2001, three minors were killed by flechettes that were fired near Beit Lahiya: Muhammad Ahmad Lubad, age 17; Muhammad 'Abd a-Rahman al-Madhun, age 15, and Ahmad Muhammad Banat, age 15."

One could fill pages upon pages on the number of deaths and injured resulting from the use of flechette shells in the various "conflicts" where the IDF is purportedly defending the homeland against "aggression" by terrorist organisations. And it is not only an Israeli human rights group that is making noise. The findings of the Israeli organisation have been supported by



SOURCE: INTERNET

A flechette shell is "an anti-personnel weapon that is generally fired from a tank. The shell explodes in the air and releases thousands of metal darts 37.5mm in length, which disperse in a conical arch 300 meters long and 90 meters wide."

international groups like the *Human Rights Watch* which issued a statement on 29 April 2003 categorically demanding that "Israel should stop using flechettes." That the use of "such anti-personnel weapons in densely populated areas makes the risks of civilian casualties intolerably high under international law."

It is very convenient for the Israeli Supreme Court of Justice to state that it would not intervene in the army's "choice of weapons because use of flechettes was not banned outright in international law." While that may be true, the indiscriminate use of such weaponry is immoral against the populace of Gaza where the density ratio makes it impossible to distinguish between military targets and non-combatants. However, given the arguments put forth by rights groups and their response by Israeli government institutions, we may safely assume that the flechette shells will continue to be deployed in Gaza resulting in deaths and injury of a civilian populace that has no place to hide against the flechette.

The writer is Assistant Editor, *The Daily Star*.

Germany: After one hundred years

SIMANTINI KRISHNAN

JULY 28, 1914, was when the First World War broke out in Europe. Preceded by assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, the conflict quickly spread across the continent and enveloped its major powers. Germany, which had emerged as an industrial powerhouse following unification under the leadership of Otto Von Bismarck, jumped into the fray in the hope of containing the threat from France and curbing the ascent of Britain. Germany's defeat in the war sowed the seeds for the Second World War, which led to the division of Germany and its ouster from the club of powerful nations. Since then, Germans have sought redemption in many ways. They buried their Nazi past and rebuilt the country from scratch. In recent years, Germany has emerged as an economic powerhouse carrying the European Union on its shoulders. In the centenary year of the First World War, it is appropriate that Germany's victory in the soccer world cup be hailed as the moment when a country and its people truly emerged from the dark shadows of the last century.

In his last days, Hitler proclaimed that the German people must be held responsible for the government they had given to themselves, and therefore for the Second World War. Destroyed, dismembered and enslaved after the war, Germany paid reparation in both cash and kind. The scientific, technical and industrial knowhow plundered by the allied countries from post-war Germany were worth billions of dollars. The hardship lasted many years, but without impeding reconstruction efforts. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked a new beginning for the Germans. But the cost of German reunification was not easy to bear, and the country carried the tag of the sick man of Europe for many years after. Germany may have won the world cup on three prior occasions, but it is the latest win, coming on the heels of a long and arduous path to complete recovery that is being seen as culmination of the series of challenges that the German people faced and overcame at different moments over the last hundred years.

One remarkable achievement of post-war Germany has been the near total elimination of retrograde nationalism from its politics, culture and discourse. The exploitation of Germany by the allies could have been fertile ground for sowing the seeds of resentment. It could have been the wellspring of reactionary ideologies, especially among the new generations of youth. Banned from taking pride in a rich civilisational heritage,

young Germans did not indulge in angry rebellion. There was, instead, an active process of internalisation of the horrors inflicted by a government on its own people. School curriculum played a central role in facilitating this transformation. Denial of the holocaust was criminalised as Germany went about reclaiming its leadership role in international affairs. Such harsh and painful methods of learning democratic attitudes over three-quarters of a century have paid rich dividends. The German team is being lauded for exemplary conduct and remarkable shows of sportsmanship, while graceful German fans are being eulogised in the western media. The conduct of fans in both victory and defeat is being invoked in comparison with countries where emotions have found release in violence.

Politics and sport have seldom belonged to separate universes. The history of twentieth century sporting events is testimony to this. In the last one hundred years, several countries including Germany faced sanctions from the international sporting community. After the First World War, the International Olympic Committee banned Germany, Austria, Hungary, Turkey and Bulgaria from participating in the summer games of 1920. Germany was disallowed in 1924 as well. After the Second World War, Germany was disqualified from the Olympic Games of 1948 and the soccer world cup of 1950. When West Germany lifted the world cup barely four years later in 1954, the country was already on the

path to economic recovery. The catastrophic conditions of the post-war years were left behind, and Germany was soon to be a leading industrial nation with low levels of unemployment and a rapid rate of debt repayment. West Germany's second world cup win in 1974 coincided with reconciliation efforts with East Germany amidst fears that this would enlarge Moscow's influence in Europe. The third victory in 1990 was when the two Germanys were just three months away from reunification. Thus, the latest triumph happens to be a first for united Germany.

Germany's fall from grace began with its invasion of Belgium on August 1, 1914. It is only fitting that its triumph on the world's grandest sporting event has happened on the eve of this day one hundred years later. An economic powerhouse, a cultural worthy and a sporting champion, the redemption appears to be finally complete.

The writer is a London-based political scientist.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Communications minister's empty words

The people in the lower income bracket have been facing enormous difficulties during their journey home and back to Dhaka at the time of Eid every year. The main reasons for such sufferings are: the miserable condition of roads, insufficient number of public transports and excessive transport fare. The communications minister has declared that this year, the journey of the home-bound travelers will be smoother than before as the roads would be repaired.



The reality is, within such short period of time, it is not possible to repair hundreds of kilometers of roads. Moreover, it is rainy season which is not a good time for any construction work. We want to know why he didn't take the initiative from the beginning of the year. We expect actions from a minister, not just empty words.

Badsha Solaiman
Assistant Teacher
Civil Aviation High School
Tejgaon, Dhaka

Irrational bus fare hike

Last Friday I went to Gabtoli bus stand to buy a ticket for Dhaka-Khulna route. I was astonished when the man inside the bus counter asked tk 800 for a ticket, the real price of which was tk 470 only!

During Eid, transport fare goes up by 70%-100%. Most people in Dhaka struggle to make both ends meet. How can they afford this increased, illegal bus or launch fare? The communications minister should look into this matter on an urgent basis.

Md. Masud Rana
Department of Sociology
University of Dhaka

Scary prospect of another political agitation

BNP said it is planning to go for street movement after the Eid. Does this mean that more people are going to be burned alive, more trains will be derailed, and more properties destroyed? I still remember the horrors of the last year. Our economy received a devastating blow and the country got bad publicity all over the world.

I know my writing will not have any effect on our leaders. But my plea to them is: please just keep it in mind that your movement will only hurt the ordinary people, not the ruling party.

Aminur Rahim
New DOHS, Mohakhali
Dhaka

Comments on news report, "BASIC Bank: Blatantly looted," published on July 17, 2014

SM
And AL goes after Grameen Bank?!

Nasirullah Mridha, USA
Basic Bank's former chairman and managing director got the large portion of this embezzled money. Why is ACC still waiting to nab the alleged bankers after getting the BB's report?

"Suchitra's home freed at last" (July 17, 2014)

Abul Kashem
Establishing a museum in the name of late actress Suchitra Sen is important. At last the 'progressive' forces have won the battle.

Muzzy703
Happy to see the existence of sanity and justice in my motherland.

"Ex-chairman in thick of things" (July 18, 2014)

Akhtar Shah
It's alleged that the chief and his partners in the alleged scam have very 'thick and heavy' wallets!

MJZ
I only hope that rogue Bachhu hasn't fled the country. He owns lavish penthouses and apartments in Singapore and Malaysia.

"Our wonderful Bay" (July 13, 2014)

Nds
Wait, let BNP come to power. They will definitely recover Talpatti.

In Memorium

Golam Mostaqim, a witty and committed civil servant

SYED NAQUIB MUSLIM

GOLAM Mostaqim, a former secretary to the Government of Bangladesh passed away on July 11. He was 61. Mostaqim was extremely accessible, friendly, candid, honest, and unpretentious. Coming from a middleclass family of Manikganj, he could empathise with the difficulties the ordinary citizens of our country usually face in government offices, therefore he was always prompt and transparent in the disposal of business. He never left his office keeping files unattended.

Mostaqim studied English literature in the University of Dhaka and developed a liking for Dr. Samuel Johnson who influenced him profoundly. He was a tireless talker and a habitual walker. While in college, he joined the Liberation War at the age of eighteen.

He was somewhat impulsive, moody, and outspoken. But those who could read him well liked his childlike simplicity and enjoyed his association.

Mostaqim was also noted for his sparkling wit and fine sense of humour. Quick intelligence was his forte. He excelled in making witty remarks that would educate his peer audience.

Mostaqim visited many countries in various capacities to represent Bangladesh very effectively. It is still not clear to me why he developed a kind of fascination for a particular country, Germany. He visited Germany at his own cost, taking leave from the government. His favourite novelist was Ernest Hemingway, from whom he used to quote very frequently. Whenever he found us in a depressed mood for any reason he would invariably cite lines from Hemingway.

Mostaqim had been fighting for life for the last one year without showing any tangible sign of recuperation. That gave us the signal that he was poised for departure from this mundane world. Sir Thomas Browne says in his classic work *Religio Medici*: "We all labour against our own cure, for death is the cure of all diseases." Mostaqim's disease has been cured by his untimely death.

The writer is a former Secretary to the Government of Bangladesh.

