

## Judge being held to account

### Will restore judiciary's image

THE Chief Justice deserves compliments for initiating action against a recently retired judge who, reportedly, dispensed hurried judgments immediately prior to his retirement to the extent that he disposed of 20 cases between 4 and 10 days and set free all the accused of 20 cases. No wonder it is judges like Faruk Ahmed who taint the image of the judiciary by abjuring the norms of trial process causing miscarriage of justice.

While we appreciate the CJ's action we feel that ex-Judge Faruk Ahmed's case may just be the tip of the iceberg which merits the CJ's immediate attention, and we urge him to use the weight of his office to go deeper into the functioning of the entire judiciary, particularly the lower judiciary, whose working has come in for critical appraisal of international watchdogs like the TI (B) from time to time.

Sometimes the media has been undeservedly accused of demeaning the judiciary. We want to humbly state that it has never been the intention of the media to denigrate the judiciary, which remains the last resort of the general public for redressal of their complaints. On the contrary it is the likes of the former judge that the media want to expose through objective reporting.

Needless to say, the image of the judiciary receives setbacks from time to time because of the way judges like Faruk Ahmed distort the process with ulterior motives that do nothing to serve the cause of justice. And it is by holding such people to account can the image of the judiciary be restored, as will be the inevitable result of the CJ's action.

## Underage drivers

### Make licensing procedure more stringent

ONE of the key reasons behind mounting road accidents in Bangladesh is that vehicles are often driven by inexperienced underage drivers. Devoid of any formal driving lessons, knowledge in traffic rules and aided by a corrupt licensing system, a huge number of juveniles take to the wheels -- only to make our roads more dangerous. The reason behind the increasing number of teenage males picking driving before they are matured is because the driving profession in Bangladesh was never regulated.

It is alarming to see underage drivers go about behind the wheels with impunity. And the excuse of shortage of manpower of the police to check this offence is untenable. It is unacceptable that errant underage drivers should continue to pose threat to the lives of the public.

According to the Accident Research Institute (ARI), at least 3,000 fatalities are recorded from around 3,500 police reported accidents on the roads across our country. The figure indicates that the safety problem in Bangladesh is grossly overlooked -- with some 60 to 150 fatalities per 10,000 motor vehicles. An underage driver is more prone to cause an accident than an adult.

Both the traffic police and the BRTA should play a more responsible role in this regard. Coupled with a stringent licensing procedure, we feel that it should be also made mandatory for all future drivers to attend courses to gain adequate knowledge about road safety and safe driving. If needed, existing traffic laws should be updated.

## PINAK-6 SALVAGE OPERATION

### Search more on the sides of the river

MONZUR CHOUDHURY

THE tragic launch accident in Padma, the salvage team's incessant efforts, mourning of grief-stricken bereft relations of the victims, impel me to participate in the ongoing task of locating the wreck with some humble advice, if it is worth accepting by the team. As an officer of the concerned department of BIWTA, I participated in and guided many salvage operations in our inland rivers (including the Padma, Jamuna and Meghna).

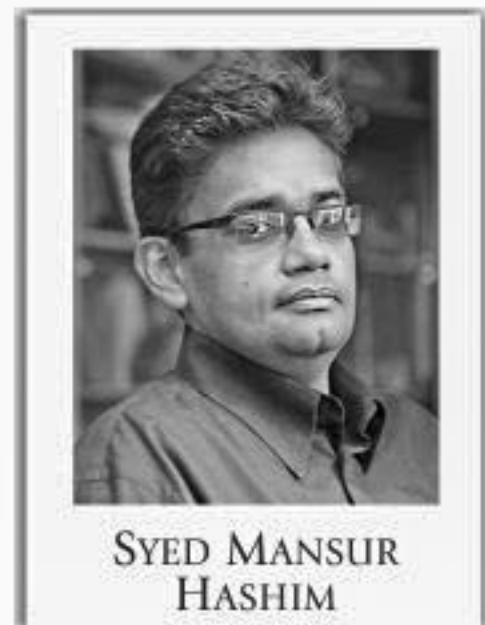
There are some guiding parameters that need to be followed for earmarking the area for sweeping, scanning, sounding, etc. to locate the wreck. The following information is required for organising the search:

- (1) Was the launch making a crossing? I guess it was doing so from Shibchar towards Lohajang;
- (2) Did the sinking take place in the main channel, or before or after passing across the main channel? If before, then the wreck is supposed to be pushed aside towards the right bank (Shibchar bank); if after, then towards the left bank (Lohajang side). The wreck generally cannot remain in the main channel. Hydraulic character of water pushes aside anything heavier than itself and failing to flow with it at the same speed;
- (3) In the area concerned, the highest water velocity at average depth in the deepest channel of the river is around 18 km/hr (about 9.5 knots); at other spots it is 5.5 km/hr to 10.5 km/hr (3.1 knots to 5.8 knots). This happens in July-August. The stronger the current the more forceful is the push;
- (4) So the wreck will be within about 10 kms downstream if on the Lohajang-Mawa side because it is the deeper side with stronger current, and within about 5 kms downstream if on the opposite shallow side, from the spot of sinking
- (5) If the wreck is lying on the side, there is chance of finding eddies and vortexes on the water surface. If the wreck is fully capsized, the surface water there may be smooth.

I would, therefore, advise the team to concentrate their search more on the sides of the river. The suggestion, however, does not guarantee finding the wreck.

The writer is former director of BIWTA.

## Are we ready for Ebola virus?



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

THE government has issued a 90-day health alert for the Ebola virus in Bangladesh. Medical teams are to be deployed at all points of entry into the country. Going by what has been published in media; we are informed that a special 20-bed unit has been opened up at Kurmitola General Hospital to quarantine and treat suspected Ebola patients. These are positive steps. Although less than 2,000 people have died globally from Ebola, there is every suspicion that the disease could very well reach alarming levels unless steps are taken to contain it. And although we may think we have taken requisite steps to prevent Ebola-carrying passengers from entering the country and mingling with the mainstream population, our lack of expertise in dealing with this particular disease cannot be overlooked.

The Ebola hemorrhagic fever has been around since 1976, with the first recorded case reported in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with some 318 reported cases. The disease was spread by close personal contact and by the use of contaminated needles in syringes in hospitals and clinics. Indeed, if one looks at Ebola outbreaks since then, it has spread from Africa to the United States and travelled across to Europe and South Asia. Though there were no fatalities in the US or elsewhere in the few stray incidents throughout the '80s, the situation evolved in the '90s when Ebola started to kill in Africa. In 1994, the Ebola virus claimed some 31 lives in Gabon, i.e. 60% of the victims died. A year later, it struck again in the DRC with some 250 out of 315 people contracting the disease dying.

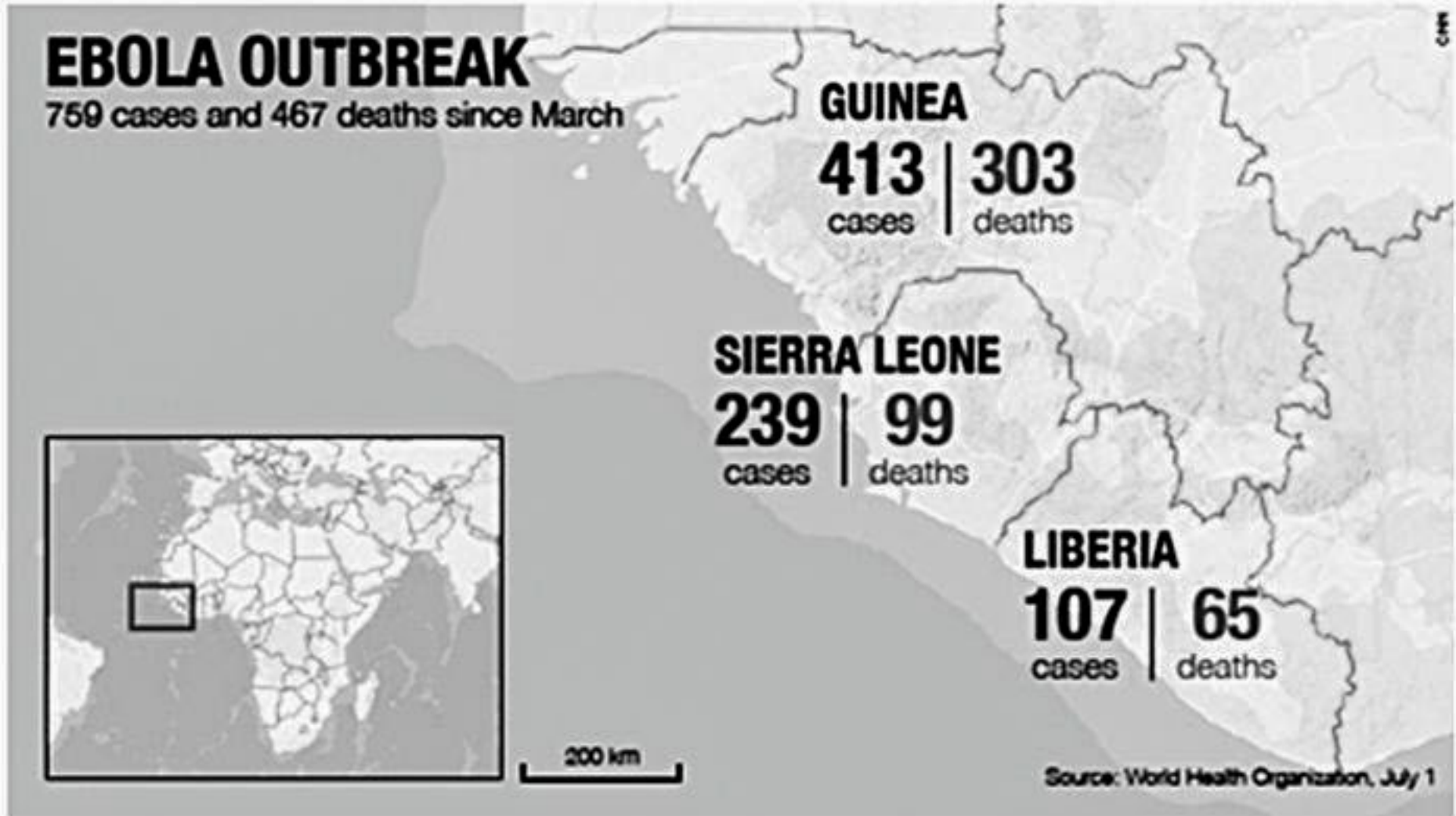
The rate of fatalities has risen and fallen from country to country and there is no set pattern on how and where Ebola has struck. But what is known is that close contact with the blood, secretions, organs or other bodily fluids of infected animals causes the first contracting of the disease. Thereafter, human-to-human transmission, "with infection resulting from direct contact (through broken skin or mucous membranes) with the blood, secretions, organs or other bodily fluids of infected people, and indirect contact with environments contaminated with such fluids. Burial ceremonies in which mourners have direct contact with the body of the deceased person can also play a role in the transmission of Ebola." Men who have recovered from the disease can transmit the disease on to their partners for up to seven weeks after recovery from the illness.

As Ebola has been around for nearly four decades, its diagnosis is possible provided laboratory facilities and trained medical staff are available. The problem lies in the fact that no licensed vaccine for the Ebola virus is available currently. Though several vaccines have been tested, none are ready for mass market launch. Hence, critically ill patients require intensive support care. As mentioned before, Ebola is a communicable disease that is often spread through families and friends because they come in close contact with "infectious secretions when caring for ill

persons." This makes the disease particularly dangerous as treating an infected patient can spread at record speed within a clinic or hospital unless proper precautions are taken. In the event, hospital staff are not wearing proper protective equipment like gowns, masks and gloves, the probability of their getting infected and starting a chain reaction to a wider population cannot be ruled out.

According to the WHO, all countries in West Africa are on alert. Countries like Ghana and Togo are collaborating with the WHO to prevent and monitor potential cases. Again, no system is foolproof. With so many people travelling locally and internationally, it is a nightmare scenario for health authorities to contain the situation at the source. For a country like Bangladesh, that has a sizeable non-resident Bangladeshi population, including hundreds of personnel -- both military and civilian -- in Africa, it becomes imperative to take the matter seriously. Though till now the outbreak has not moved across any country border and medical facilities are up and running in most western ports of entry, the same cannot be said for developing nations like ours.

Effectively screening incoming passengers on international flights, checking the disembarking sailors in our ports, looking for possible infected patients among the

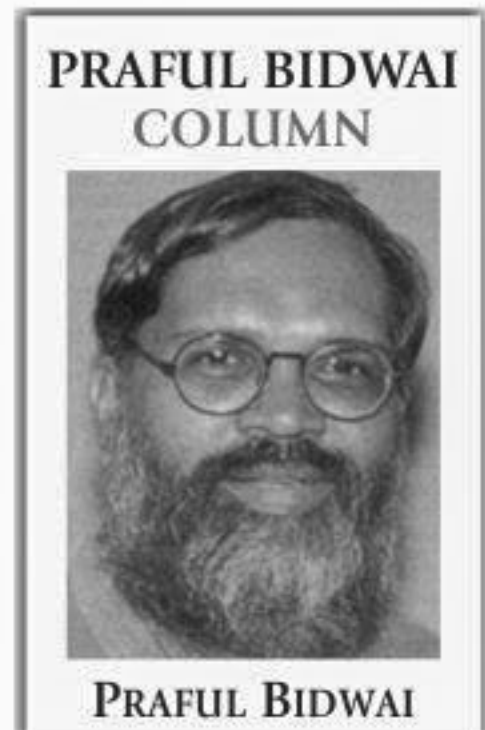


thousands of travellers who use the land entry points into the country present a mammoth task for our health authorities and medical practitioners. Just because no major outbreak has been reported in any neighbouring country is hardly room for comfort. Yes, the resources required for an operation such as this is going to be mindboggling and hardly possible to field without external assistance.

The WHO is one agency that has comprehended the potential of Ebola to reach endemic status within a very short time unless a global initiative is jointly undertaken by governments around the world, and that means commitments in terms of both financial and physical resources. The good news is that Ebola can be quarantined by isolating anyone with symptoms while testing is carried out. Taking proper precautions while providing medical care and methodically tracking down all those they were in close contact with at the time of getting sick. Bangladesh does not have the resources of Central Disease Control of the United States, but it has extensive experience in handling many diseases over decades. What is required is to coordinate with international agencies to set up facilities and train personnel to deal with this menace before it hits mainstream population. At the end of the day, prevention is better than cure.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

## Natwar's 'Disclosures' are hollow



PRAFUL BIDWAI

INDIA'S former foreign minister Natwar Singh is no ordinary diplomat-turned-politician. A part of the Establishment for half-a-century, he is well educated, widely travelled, a witness to major events, and capable of reflection. So readers expected a great deal from his memoirs *One Life is Not Enough*.

Regrettably, Singh's book, and especially his subsequent interviews, largely disappoint -- not because his account is controversial, but because it's unilluminating, largely self-justificatory, and often contradictory. He's too preoccupied with depicting himself as a victim of Congress machinations, and the Iraq "oil-for-food" scandal, to be fair. He ends up viciously attacking Sonia Gandhi.

Singh sheds no light on a tumultuous period which saw the Cold War's end and India's re-alignment towards US, in which he played a part. Yet he claims to be a staunch defender of Non-Alignment.

Singh shows no comprehension of the broader social-political forces which brought the Congress to power under Gandhi. He confines himself to palace intrigue.

Singh says Gandhi is an "ambitious, authoritarian and stern" *prima donna*, who behaves like "royalty." But he was himself a *darbari*, who always flaunted his Bharatpur royal legacy (and his marriage into a princely family). His calling card was his proximity to Gandhi, not his own political base.

Many of Singh's claims are unsubstantiated -- for instance, that she spied on UPA ministers, or that she had official files brought to her residence. As UPA chair, she was legitimately consulted over official policies; this could be done without files being transferred.

Singh calls Gandhi "authoritarian," "capricious" and "Machiavellian," and says "politics has coarsened her." He may be right. But he was comfortable with her ways for decades. He can't claim credit for politically grooming her, and also condemn her. Her persona didn't suddenly change after the Volcker report's release in October 2005, when Singh was in Moscow.

Singh's grouse is that she didn't invite him to explain his role in the "oil-for-food" payments to Indian "non-contractual" beneficiaries, including himself, the Congress, and Reliance Industries.

These were among the 2,400 firms/individuals named worldwide, based on Iraqi records, without verification. The Congress declared itself clean and said Singh would defend himself. This, he suggests, left him with no choice but to quit.

This was endorsed in August 2006 by the Justice Pathak committee, which said Singh used influence to get the oil deals, although he received no money. Jagat was expelled from the Congress.

Singh was dismissed from the cabinet and suspended from the party. He soon announced his resignation from the Congress at a BJP-sponsored rally, where he bitterly attacked Gandhi. He and Jagat first hobnobbed with the Samajwadi and the Bahujan Samaj Party. Jagat later became a BJP MLA. None of this shows Singh in a complimentary light.

Even less edifying was his 2004 position supporting the US-UK-sponsored UN Security Council Resolution 1546 giving "sovereignty" to an Iraqi US-puppet government, and authorising an American-led 160,000-strong "security-and-stability" force. At a July press conference with Secretary of State Colin Powell, he said India was "delighted" with 1546 and might consider sending troops to Iraq -- in violation of stated policy. He soon had to retract.

Singh professes adherence to Non-Aligned policies and global nuclear disarmament. Yet he also boasts that he was an architect of the 2005 US-India nuclear deal. But this sealed the India-US "strategic partnership," legitimised India's -- and America's -- nuclear weapons, and meant abandoning global nuclear disarmament.

Singh claims Gandhi told him she was under "great" US pressure not to appoint him foreign minister. He also says the US eventually got him out through the Volcker "conspiracy."

This makes no sense! Nor does his statement that Manmohan Singh had no foreign policy. Right or wrong, he had one: new alliances to contain China, and BRICS and various regional blocs.

Singh claims that Rahul's vehement opposition, not Gandhi's "inner voice," "was the reason for her not becoming prime minister." Rahul's opposition probably weighed, but Gandhi must have had other considerations too, including the BJP's xenophobic "anti-foreigner" campaign. She decided against becoming PM in 1999, according to former aide R.D. Pradhan.

Singh betrays rank racism when he attributes Gandhi's "ruthlessness" to her "Italian origins." He could have been more dignified in criticising the Congress's organisational culture -- he was part of it -- and paid attention to its policies, which he doesn't.

Like good sycophants, Congress leaders have condemned Singh's book wholesale. But he's right about one thing: Rahul lacks "fire in his belly," a must for a leader, especially in today's Congress.

The Congress's crisis is grim: it has no clear class/caste/community base, no coherent programme, no grassroots organisation, no democracy. It seems destined to lose the coming election in its former bastion Maharashtra despite reserving jobs for the Maratha ruling class. The sooner it recognises the enormous burden from the non-delivering dynasty, the better.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

## LETTERS

### TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Minister's rants against journos

A few years back we went to Moulvibazar to perform one of our plays at the invitation of a local theatre group. The venue was Saifur Rahman auditorium. Later, our group was invited for tea by Syed Mohsin Ali, present social welfare minister, at his residence.

During our conversation, Mohsin claimed himself to be a wounded freedom fighter. To prove it, all on a sudden, he got up and put off his shirt and vest to show the scar on his body. At this we, all the team members present there, especially the ladies, felt very embarrassed.

I am astonished how this type of ill-mannered person dares to call journalists dirty chaps and people without character. May Allah save us from people like him who has been given the responsibility to take care of the welfare of society.

Tabibul Islam (Babu)  
Drama worker  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

### Points needing clarification in broadcast policy

The government has prepared a broadcast policy. Among the 'key points' published in The Daily Star on August 5, I am confused about a point which is, "Anything demeaning armed forces, law enforcement agencies and government officials who punish people for criminal offences can't be broadcast." Does this mean that they are never involved in any criminal offences, or that their offences should be kept secret, or that they are licensed to do any criminal offences?

I would like to raise another concern. To pay due respect to our cultural values, there should be a policy on dress code to be followed by men and women working in the electronic media.

Sarker Javed Iqbal  
Mirpur-2, Dhaka

### Killing children falls within Israel's rights?

I have no words to express my disgust. How could Barack Obama nakedly declare that "Israel has the right to defend itself"? Can he then also justify their killings by saying "They have the right to kill innocent civilians indiscriminately including thousands of children and target barbarously the hospitals, schools, the UN shelters, etc."?!

A F Rahman  
On e-mail

### Comments on news report, "Crackdown on Tuba workers," published on August 8, 2014

#### Zaman Rahman

I wonder how and why the government and the PM remain silent when such an injustice is taking place; workers are being tortured and not being paid their due salaries.

#### Roni Rahman

If the workers worked for 3 months, then they must be paid 3 months' salaries. No ifs and buts about it. That is legally and morally binding.

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### "Workers confined, forced to take partial payments" (August 7, 2014)

#### Delwar Hossain

We all should stand by the side of these garment workers.

#### Humayun Hyder

Nothing is going right at the Tuba factory; the workers were locked inside the factory and some outsiders with the help of police were trying to force the workers to take two months' salary from the BGMEA. The police also did not allow porters to enter the factory on the ground that they didn't want untoward incident in the factory. Well, this is not the right way to treat workers. In a democratic country everybody has the right to express her/his grievances.

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### "The Broadcast Policy: A euphemism for media control" (August 7, 2014)

#### Zia

The new broadcast policy of the government is not people-friendly. The policy has the entire make up of 'control' under the euphemism of 'monitoring'. The spirit of the media to speak the truth will be greatly curtailed. I also agree with the notion of the author that the media should not compromise, but remain as close to the truth as possible. Lastly, impartiality in the eyes of the government may not fit well with the notion of impartiality of the public. With this law in place, the public's view and notion of impartial news will be lost because journalists may not be able to cover news that may seem impartial to them but not to the government.