

Cattle market hemming in hospitals

Relocate it immediately

A cattle market in the Agargaon area has put the lives of scores of critical patients in jeopardy as it blocks the approach to some major hospitals in the city. Desperate to get redress, the health ministry on Monday sought the home ministry's intervention, as the relevant authority, the LGRD ministry, wouldn't listen to its plea.

It is not only patently irresponsible, but also an instance of utter insensitivity to public welfare and access to medical facilities on the part of LGRD ministry. The ministry looks after the affairs of the local government bodies, the Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) in this case which leased out the space for the cattle market.

The chaotic situation created by the flow of sacrificial animals and their handlers is blocking the access to hospitals, hindering medical treatment of citizens, and causing impediment to public mobility in that busy hub of hospitals.

Is it not strange that the existence of a traumatology and orthopaedic hospital, a paediatric hospital, cardiovascular and mental hospital, among others, did not cross the minds of DNCC officials even for a moment when they decided to let a cattle market operate there? One is dismayed at DNCC chief executive's logic that they did it out of compulsion as there was no other alternative venue at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. What can be a more unabashed advocacy for pure profiteering than this to dismiss all other considerations including working of the hospitals in the interest of a huge number of patients?

The government must move to see that the cattle market in question is relocated immediately away from present site.

The old menace returns

Clamp down on the criminals

ONCE a scourge during national holidays in the past, gangs of criminals who employed medicines to render their victims unconscious, some of whom dying in the process, are now back in vogue this year. According to what has been published in a national Bangla daily, we understand that there have been more than 380 such reported cases in the month of September and two unfortunate individuals have met their deaths. We are informed by the police that special squads have been deployed to combat this menace. But given the fact that tens of thousands of people will be carrying cash to procure sacrificial animals, it remains highly suspect whether the mere deployment of more police will be an answer to the problem.

That the police do not treat such crimes seriously unless there is a death involved automatically serves to encourage criminal elements to engage in such behaviour. When we take into account that these crimes remain highly underreported, coupled with the fact that there is an inertia on the part of authorities to registering such incidents as crime leading to a situation where crimes like these are not prioritised for investigation, precisely how will deployment of special squads help stem such crimes remains a mystery. Given the unusually high volumes of cash transactions that will take place prior and during Eid-ul-Azha, we would certainly like to see more police vigilance to crack down on these criminal gangs but also a follow up on filing and pursuance of cases against them.

Question on question papers?

ABDUL MATIN

THE results of the admission test of the 'Kha' unit of the University of Dhaka for the 2014-15 academic session were very disappointing. A total of 40,565 students sat for the test against 2,221 seats on September 19. Of them, only 3,874 students i.e. 9.55% passed. Only two students qualified for enrolment in the English department. The results raised questions about the standard of education in the country. The minister for education, on the contrary, finds the admission test system faulty and unacceptable. Recently, we noticed a trend of linking the success of the government with the success of the students at the school final examinations. The results are ceremoniously presented to the head of the government by the chairpersons of the school boards in front of TV cameras and the government seems to be happy with the high rates of success of the students without assessing the quality of their education.

The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) provides data on mathematics and science achievements of US students compared to that of students in other countries (excluding Bangladesh). Corrective measures are taken in the States if the US students are found to lag behind others. The US universities do not conduct any admission test but take into consideration the results of school final examinations and SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) or ACT (American College Testing). The SAT, a standardized test on mathematics, critical reading and writing, is widely used for admission into US colleges and universities. It is managed by the College Board, a private non-profit organization. The ACT consists of math, English, reading (including a subsection on social studies) and science reasoning tests and is administered by Everett Franklin Lindquist, a competitor to the College Board. ACT also conducts proficiency tests on specific subjects.

In our country, the school boards must be allowed to set their own standards without interference from the government. We should have a central standardised system of examinations like SAT or ACT, without leaking question papers and without allowing unfair means at examinations, to facilitate admission into colleges and universities. We may call it CAT (College Admission Tests). The tests must be administered by an independent and autonomous body, called College Admission Board (CAB), consisting of university and college teachers. CAT can also conduct proficiency tests on specific subjects. Like many countries in the world, we should also join the TIMSS group of countries for evaluation of the standard of our school education.

There is no reason to conduct experiments on our students. What is wrong if we learn from the experience of others?

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

Should Bangladesh take al-Zawahri's threats seriously?

STRANGER THAN FICTION



TAJ HASHMI

THE answer to the question planted in the title of this article is a definitive "NO". There is absolutely no reason to take Ayman al-Zawahri seriously or consider his threats "ominous". If al Qaeda could, it would have attacked Bangladesh by now. Between February and September this year, Zawahri has circulated two video speeches, the first one primarily focused on Bangladesh and the second one mainly focused on India. The fugitive head of al Qaeda, which is fast losing ground to more radical ISIS and its ilk, in his hour-long speech in September declared that the terror outfit had set up a new branch in the Subcontinent with a view to waging jihad and establishing an Islamic caliphate across the region.

Unfortunately, Zawahri's wishful thinking – reflective of his desperation and despondency – evoked lots of over-reaction among analysts. Prime Minister Modi seems to have reacted the right way by outright rejecting the speech as delusional. He eliminated all speculations about Indian Muslims' vulnerability to al Qaeda propaganda.

Some analysts seem to have read too much into the text of the speech. Hence the apprehension about impending terror attacks by al Qaeda in Bangladesh! Unfortunately, some people also mix up events, ideologies, organizations and people by linking them all with al Qaeda, JMB, HUIJ, or some other Islamist outfit. While the Bangladesh polity is sharply polarized between pro- and anti-Awami League people – especially after the 5th January Elections – it seems Zawahri's video speeches are godsend for those who want to vilify their political rivals as offshoots of al Qaeda.

One finds a parallel between Zawahri's and bin Laden's video speeches. Weeks after 9/11, when American troops had decimated al Qaeda's strongholds in Afghanistan, bin Laden in one of his video speeches told the world that he was planning another mega attack on America, which would make 9/11 look like a noisy party. As bin Laden was full of gibberish and wishful thinking, so is his successor. Terrorists love to exaggerate their strength and brag invincibility. Verbal threat is an old strategy to terrorize one's enemies.

One may recall what followed another video broadcast by Zawahri in February this year. Condemning the killing of some Hefazat-e-Islam activists in May 2013, the al Qaeda Chief urged Bangladeshi Muslims to launch an Intifada against the Hasina Government. Within days of this broadcast, a mysterious attack on a prison van took place at Trishal near Mymensingh (105 kilometers off Dhaka). Several gunmen – purportedly members of a proscribed Islamist terror outfit (JMB) – killed one policeman and rescued several JMB prisoners. Within days police arrested some of the criminals involved in the attack. Interestingly, they did not belong to any Islamist group but to a secular party. This dramatic episode is a glaring example of using Islamist terrorism as the bogeyman for political purpose.

Since people often confuse all Islam-oriented groups as offshoots of Islamist terrorist outfits, we need to understand the fundamentals of terrorism, along with the modus operandi of certain Islamic and secular parties. Political violence is not synonymous

with terrorism. Some elementary aspects of terrorism are: a) Terrorism is asymmetrical warfare; b) Ideologies (secular or religious) and socio-economic conditions – not crime – draw people toward terrorism; c) Terrorism is a means toward an end, not an end in itself; d) Terrorists mostly kill total strangers and innocent people, NOT for the sake of killing but to terrorize their enemies by drawing people's attention, to achieve their goals – "Publicity is the oxygen of terrorism" (Margaret Thatcher); e) Terrorism is different from crime and insurgency – insurgents primarily attack police, military and law enforcers, and terrorists target innocent civilians; f) Criminals kill, abduct and plunder surreptitiously, and terrorists brag about their violent acts; and g) When terrorists lose capabilities to perpetrate terror (run out of followers, money and arms), they often terrorize their enemies by verbal or written threats.

We need to know why people deliberately implicate even innocent people with terrorist acts. This is cry wolf method. People love to draw other's attention and sympathy towards them to their advantage, and they also do it to fight the purported (common) enemy together. As common men and women – like the shepherd in the Aesop's Fables – cry wolf to draw people's attention, so do politicians across the world. But politicians resort to cry wolf not to make fun but for the political and economic dividends it fetches to the table.

There is a plethora of examples in this regard. The latest being some Western leaders' alarmist views – including Obama's and Cameron's – about how serious the ISIL or ISIS threat is to the security of the world. In 2003, we heard similar cry wolf from George W. Bush, Tony Blair and others about Saddam Hussein's "capability and wish" to attack the West. Tony Blair outperformed others by raising the alarm that Hussein's (non-existing) chemical weapon-laden ballistic missiles had the capability of reaching London in just 45 minutes.

The cry wolf method is possibly over-used in Bangladesh. Here politicians and their followers frequently blame their political opponents as agents of certain countries, or even as sponsors of Islamist terrorism. In 2000, the Government did not allow President Clinton to go outside the capital city by road as "rumor had it", terrorists would ambush his motorcade. Overuse of the cry wolf method has not only turned some politicians into objects of ridicule, but has also made counterterrorism a difficult task in Bangladesh. Politicians' gimmicks, "terrorists are coming", and "so and so are al Qaeda agents", on the one hand trivialize genuine terrorist threats, and on the other, inadvertently help the terrorists' cause by unnecessarily hyping up terror threat. We must not lose sight of the fact that Zawahri and his ilk want to terrorize people, if not by bombs by verbal threats and intimidation.

In sum, it is not fair to single out Bangladeshi leaders and analysts in this regard. The way some Western journalists – Bertil Lintner, Eliza Griswold and others – once hyped up the terrorist threats to Bangladesh is simply unacceptable. Bangladesh, with poor governance, poverty, inequality, youth unemployment, and last but not least, rapid Wahhabization of the culture, cannot be immune to Islamist militancy and terror for an indefinite period. In view of this, leaders, analysts and laymen should think twice before they play the terrorism card. Bangladesh has lots of tightrope walking in the coming days.

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Why is Indian outward FDI shying away from South Asia?

SAMAN KELEGAMA

THERE have been promises of greater Indian investment in South Asia for a long time. A report produced by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 2007 argued that India would play a key role in investing in South Asia and this in turn will stimulate intra-regional trade in the region. The report made special reference to the rapidly growing Indian IT industry and identified it as a potential investor in South Asia. The ADB argued that business process outsourcing, knowledge process outsourcing, call centres and other IT related sub-contracting would shift to regional countries as a response to increased costs of doing business in India.

It predicted that a somewhat similar experience to Japanese foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows to ASEAN countries in the 1980s – the so-called 'flying geese' phenomenon, whereby industries are first established in more developed countries then move progressively to less developed ones – would be seen in South Asia with FDI from the Indian IT sector taking the lead. But this hardly happened over the last five years, with Indian IT investors preferring countries like the US, the UK and Singapore for investment rather than other South Asian countries.

The total FDI outflow from India to the rest of the world increased from US\$ 20 million in the early 1990s to US\$ 15 billion by 2011, albeit with some fluctuations. India is the largest investor among South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries in South Asia but the regional share of Indian outward FDI has declined continuously from 4.5 per cent in 2003-2004 to a mere 0.1 per cent in 2006-2007. Generally, FDI from large developing countries like China and Brazil is heavily concentrated in other developing countries. But during the past decade, the destination of Indian FDI has shifted in favour of developed countries and transitional economies. This has partly contributed to the decline in the South Asian share.

A study of Indian outward investment by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in 2004 identified four reasons why Indian FDI generally flows to developed countries. First, Indian firms are looking for international brand names, for instance, Ranbaxy Technologies acquiring the French firm RPG Aventis in 2003 and Tata Tea acquiring UK-based Tetley Tea in 2000. Second, access to technology and knowledge has been a strategic consideration for Indian firms seeking to strengthen their competitiveness and to move up

the production value chain; one example of this would be Wipro acquiring the American firm Nerve Wire Inc.

Third, the success of Indian service providers in outsourcing IT Services, BPO and call centres by firms in developed countries has exposed them to knowledge and methods of conducting international business, which in turn has induced outward FDI with demonstration and spill over benefits. Fourth, securing natural resources has become an important driver for Indian outward FDI. For example, Hindalco acquired two copper mines in Australia, and ONGC has bought a 20 per cent stake in the Sakhalin-I oil and gas field in Russia. All these factors point to Indian firms wanting to develop a portfolio of locational assets as a source of international competitiveness and visibility.

But, leaving aside these factors, the general business climate in the South Asian region is also a factor that discourages Indian FDI. Most South Asian countries rank low in indicators of the ease of doing business although they still possess the comparative advantage of low labour costs. Regional countries also fear Indian domination and therefore are much friendlier to non-Indian sources of FDI. For example, in Bangladesh in the early 2000s, the Indian group Tata's proposal to invest US\$3.6 billion in a urea fertiliser plant and a steel mill and the Mittal Group's proposal to invest US\$2.5 billion in a steel mill, both fell apart due to domestic political developments.

In Sri Lanka, the Indian Amul Company came to the market in 1997 for liquid milk production and functioned till 2000, and then pulled out its investment due to trade union hostilities in the factory incited by the milk powder import lobby in Sri Lanka. In the Maldives, the GMR Group of India, which embarked on an airport modernization project in 2010, had to exit the project due to unilateral termination by the Maldivian government in 2012. The point to be noted is that in general, there is a non-friendly attitude (not necessarily hostile) towards Indian FDI in the region.

With low intra-regional trade (5 per cent), the trade-investment nexus is weak in the SAARC region. Perhaps it is time to make investment liberalization a priority item on the SAARC agenda if more Indian outward FDI is to be seen in the region. More broadly, there also needs to be a change in attitude both from India and its neighbours if more investment from India is to flow to the South Asian region.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Justice for Felani

Felani Khatun, a 15 year old Bangladeshi girl became the worst ever victim of border killing in history when she tried to cross the Bangladesh-India border on 7 January 2011. The Indian authorities failed to provide justice at the first trial, thanks to their indifference. The Indian court acquitted Amiya Ghosh, the killer of Felani, of the charge of killing.



The retrial of Felani killing has started again as the verdict of the first trial was rejected by Felani's father. We, the people of Bangladesh demand a fair trial this time. Our government should play a more active role in this regard.

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Aminbazar speed breakers need urgent repair

It is our common practice that whenever any accident occurs, we become very aware for a few days. But as time passes we forget the whole thing. After the tragic accident on the bridge near Aminbazar, speed breakers were constructed on both sides of the bridge. But now these speed breakers are completely worn out and in need of urgent repair to avoid any future accident.

Eid and puja are imminent and a large number of people will go home to celebrate the occasions. Let us hope that everybody will enjoy a safe journey.

Pradip Das
On e-mail

Is poetry dying?

"Is poetry a dying art?" by Kaiser Haq published in TDS on September 27 has touched us who are concerned about literature in current age. The number of books published each month and the number of sustainable literature journals points to the simple fact that production and promotion of knowledge here is actually going down the drain.

People write in their leisure time, which is not adequate. Nobody has the time or the needed focus to do adequate research before writing a fiction or non-fiction. There was a time when writers were avid readers. Tolstoy wrote Anna Karenina from the scratch thrice. Is it possible to write a novel that big in current times, let alone rewriting it for the sake of quality?

I blame mostly the decline in the quality of journals/periodicals. In the past, people used to make a living by writing in journals. I do not believe that we have a shortage of readers. And of course, people still read poetry with great love. I think we just fail to meet the demands of different kinds of readers here.

Ariful Hossain
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Comments on news report, "54 primary schools illegally occupied," published on September 27, 2014

MH Khan

School lands, railway lands, rivers, village markets etc. – all are occupied by influential people and their goons. Nobody cares and nothing will be done regarding this, not at least in the near future.

"Share of loot led to Keraniganj 4-murder" (September 27, 2014)

Sayed Rahman

Why those two innocent kids had to die untimely?

"Trapped by rickshaws" (September 26, 2014)

Sayed Rahman

The report shows the utmost callousness of the SUV driver as well as the rickshaw pullers. Impatience and recklessness of drivers, commuters and pedestrians have turned the roads of Dhaka into death traps.

"The finance minister as a lightning bolt" (September 26, 2014)

Touchstone

This man is his own enemy and he seems to be not accountable to anyone. Either it is senility or inefficiency that is responsible for his actions.