

# Tangail arson case mind-boggling

## Police laxity appalling

THE unrecognizable charred remains of a mother and her three girl children need no words to describe what a shocking savagery those poor souls were subjected to on the night of Monday. But so far as the reports go, the outrage was part of a revenge killing alleged to have been committed in a premeditated fashion by a neighbour named Jahangir Hossain who had wanted to marry the eldest of the three victim girls, Monira, but failed.

The most disconcerting aspect of the tragedy is that it was not quite unforeseeable. If only those concerned and the police could keep close tabs on the goings-on surrounding the disputes between the two sides over the failed marriage, the heart-rending incident could be averted. It was more so, because the main suspect of the arson attack, Jahangir, was spotted in the evening of the fateful night carrying petrol from a local filling stations. Isn't it surprising that the unusual incident did neither raise any question, nor suspicion in the minds of locals who noticed it?

It is further learnt that after a village arbitration in presence of the upazila chairman nullified Jahangir's bid to marry Monira 10 months ago, he became desperate and started to harass the girl and her family members. One wonders, why didn't the village elders and upazila chairman take steps to protect the girl's family, whose male earning member is an expatriate worker?

The long arm of the law must now catch the culprit and bring him to justice.

# Inbound remittance picking up

## Efforts needed to remove fetters

BANGLADESH is back in the green as it posted strong remittance earnings to the tune of US\$15 billion in the current fiscal. As per a World Bank forecast, remittance is set to grow by more than 8.6 per cent this year compared to a meagre 2.66 per cent in the preceding year. There is every reason to rejoice at the surge in remittances helped by a reduction in cost of transfer of funds with the introduction of technology that has helped process digital payments. Similarly, the lifting on a freeze on taking in Bangladeshi expatriate workers by key international labour markets, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE has helped matters substantially.

While those are the positive aspects of the growth in remittances, there is every reason to keep up efforts to remove the legal bar in other Gulf countries. We simply cannot overemphasise the crucial role remittances play in helping Bangladesh meet crucial import bills. Given that Bangladesh has yet to attract significant foreign direct investments on a year-to-year basis, foreign exchange earnings by way of remittance remain a vital lifeline for the economy at large.

Looking beyond traditional labour markets remains a key concern for future growth of expatriate labour from Bangladesh. Skills development remains an Achilles' heel for our workers to move up in the value-added chain. The question of effective labour officers in our foreign missions remains an issue and needs to be addressed in the near term so that the question of 'legality' of our workers abroad does not arise in the future.

# And quiet flows the Ganges -- In the wrong direction

SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN

THE Burdwan blast has thrown a new light on the activities of religious extremists in our part of South Asia, particularly Bangladesh and the Indian state of Paschimbanga (PB). According to reports in the Indian media the persons killed while preparing IEDs were from Bangladesh and suspected JMB cadres. It is yet to be fully ascertained whether the dead persons are indeed from Bangladesh. One of the dead was married to an Indian and had been living in that country for the last seven or eight years. However, if the media reports are true then there are reasons for Bangladesh to be concerned on several counts.

It is clear that these extremists chose a more friendly space to plan actions against us. In fact the PB government is being accused by the centre for soft-peddling on the issue of extremism and terrorism. Our anti-terrorist activity resulting in arrests and trial of a large number of their cadres had successfully stifled the extremists' existence and had compelled them to seek safer pastures across the border where they received safe sanctuary. And that the IEDs they were preparing were meant to be used inside Bangladesh too.

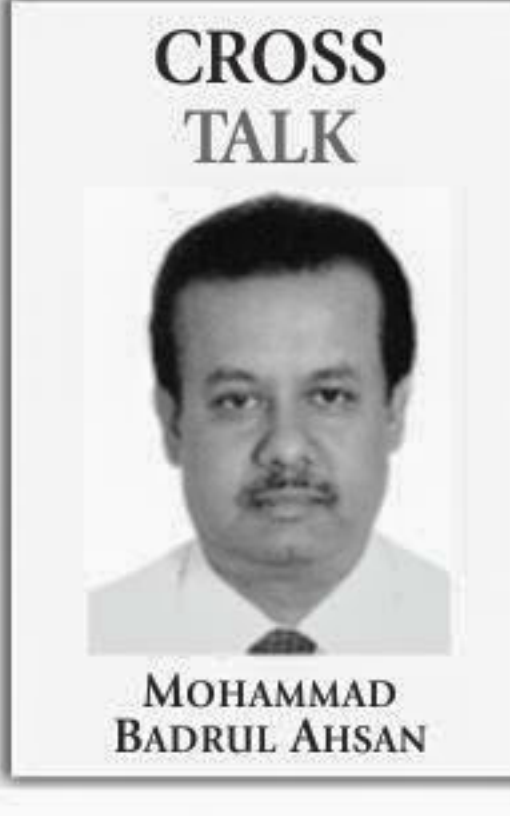
The revelation through the Burdwan blast has come in the wake of two major developments of the recent past. One is the alleged use of a part of Saradah chit fund to finance Jamaat in Bangladesh to destabilise the government. And in this members of the ruling TMC in Paschimbanga are also alleged to be involved. The other is the statement of al-Qaeda chief Zawahiri of creating AQISA, or al-Qaeda in South Asia.

The Burdwan incident confirms the apprehension that there is a close nexus between religious extremists in both the countries. However, while that link is only to be expected since terrorism straddles international borders what is most worrisome is the complicity of some PB ruling party members in this. The house in which the alleged extremists were putting together the bombs belongs to a member of TMC and in fact it also housed the local office of the party.

We have to wait and see how the Centre in India deals with the issue. There is already a tussle between the Centre and PB as to who should investigate the Saradah fund transfer. How does one deal with a terrorist situation that involves members of the ruling party of the state? While Bangladesh must watch the developments carefully it must insist that India take effective measures to ensure that that its territory is not used by groups hostile to Bangladesh. Bangladesh has addressed India's security concerns. India cannot fall short in fulfilling its obligations to Bangladesh.

The writer is Editor, OP-Ed and Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

# Toward a new world moral order



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE world has changed before, and it's changing now. If we hated the sins not the sinners in the past, that game is turning on its head. Starting last month, Europe is supposedly including illegal activities in GDP calculation, counting incomes from gambling, smuggling, drugs and prostitution. Next time roads, parks, highways and dams are built and government subsidies go to power, healthcare and education sectors in the European countries, some of that money will not only be soaked in blood, sweat and tears of the sinners but also tempered with legitimacy for their sins.

In 1998, an ILO survey showed prostitution accounted for 2% to 14% of GDP in four countries: Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. The latest is that prostitution and illegal drugs are contributing around \$16 billion a year to the British economy. In future, the net will widen to accommodate illegal employment, gambling, pirating of software and fencing of stolen goods.

Is the world coming to terms with the sinners and their sins? The EU members such as Germany, Hungary, Austria and Greece, where prostitution is legal, already include the revenue it produces in their national accounts. In the Netherlands, drug money has been long included in GDP calculation. Italy already includes much of its shadow economy in GDP estimation, but hopes to increase it by 2% adding drugs, prostitution and black market cigarettes and alcohol. Gambling is a big source of government revenue in some countries, the United States leading the pack.

Sinful acts are increasingly making economic sense to the world, also preparing itself to take a lenient view on the sinners. In 2009, the US state of Nevada, which allows paid sex, was considering a tax of \$5 for each transaction. State senator Bob Coffin even worked the numbers. He figured out that taxes imposed on existing brothels could raise \$2 million annually and legalising prostitution in large cities like Las Vegas could bring \$200 million to the state coffers. That year another US state, Rhode Island, was contemplating a ban on prostitution but was forced to change its mind due to a \$661 million hole in the budget.

It was also in 2009, when the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy estimated that Americans

spent at least \$64 billion a year on illegal drugs. Every state in the United States, except Hawaii and Utah, allows gambling that ranges from state lotteries to racetracks to casinos. In 2007, such activity generated more than \$92 billion in receipts. Once Atlantic City and Las Vegas were the two major gambling hubs in the country, but other US cities are now sprinkled with casinos. Legislation is under way to repeal the federal ban on online gambling. According to Pricewaterhouse Coopers, it alone could yield as much as \$5 billion a year in new tax revenues.

These are but examples of how money can manipulate morality. And there is no dearth of logic to justify it. The prophets of pragmatism argue that since the fight against these vices had proven futile for centuries, the governments might as well legalise and tax them. It was argued that legalisation would end black markets that generate huge amounts of what economists call "deadweight losses," or activity that doesn't contribute to increased productivity. It also costs time and resources to enforce laws against these vices.

A 2006 study done by the former president of the US National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Law, Jon Gettman, found that marijuana was already the top cash crop in a dozen states and among the top five crops in 39 states, with a total annual value of \$36 billion. A 2005 cost-benefit analysis of marijuana prohibition by Jeffrey Miron, a Harvard economist, calculated that lifting marijuana prohibition could save \$7.7 billion in law enforcement costs. It could also generate more than \$6 billion a year if taxed at the same rate as tobacco and alcohol.

Victor Hugo writes: "Sin is a gravitation." Like gravitation defines everyday life and the structure of the physical universe, sin defines everyday life and the structure of the moral universe. Samuel Butler explained further when he said that the function of vice is to keep virtues within reasonable bounds. The mind rotates on its axis, creating its own night after day.

There're cultures where blood money is paid to victims or their families for rape and murder, and it protects the offenders from their vengeance or sanctions of law. After gambling, drugs, smuggling and prostitution are decriminalised, a new world order is going to emerge. Virtue will distinguish from vice like economists differentiate demand from want. Shuffled like a deck of cards, morality is undergoing a transformation, which dictates that vice is virtue backed by purchasing power, lack of which is a vice unto itself.

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# Dengue control is everyone's responsibility

POONAM KHETRAPAL SINGH

DENGUE is the world's fastest growing vector-borne disease. An estimated 50-100 million dengue infections occur annually in over 100 endemic countries. Ever since its detection in the early 1950s, there has been a 30-fold increase in dengue incidence. Almost half of the world's population is currently considered at risk of contracting dengue. The South-East Asia Region contributes to more than half of the global burden of dengue. About 52% of the world's population at risk resides in this Region. The disease is endemic in 10 of the 11 Member States and India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand are among the 30 most endemic countries in the world. More than 400,000 cases of dengue were reported in this Region in 2013.

The good news is that deaths due to dengue have been brought down substantially. This is because of greater awareness amongst treating physicians on the proper use of WHO protocols in providing care to dengue patients. This is also attributed to increased knowledge amongst communities to seek early treatment for symptoms that resemble those of dengue.

However, the worrying part is that the number of cases has been increasing year after year. To understand it, we need to comprehend and keep pace with the changing epidemiology of dengue, especially the multiple ecological factors that influence its spread. Being a vector-borne disease, ever-increasing numbers and varieties of mosquito-breeding habitats are being created with rapid and poorly planned urbanisation, globalisation, consumerism, poor solid waste and water management and increasing population movement without adequate measures to prevent vector breeding. Climate change is also influencing ecology that encourages vector breeding.

Dengue and other vector-borne diseases share common socioeconomic determinants that include reduced access to health services, housing, sanitation and water supplies as well as poverty. Efficient, effective and sustainable prevention and control of vector-borne diseases requires not only the application of biomedical tools, but also interventions to address these factors.

The accumulation of modern non-biodegradable products such as automobile tyres, plastic containers and tin products because of actions or inactions of sectors other than health provides a conducive environment for prolific breeding of Aedes aegypti and Aedes albopictus vectors of dengue. Hence, effective and sustainable prevention and control of dengue requires interventions that address these factors in an integrated and multisectoral approach.

Recognising the importance of a multisectoral approach and to advocate utmost need for Health-in-All-

Policies, the health ministers of the South-East Asia Region, in their recent meeting in September 2014, adopted the Dhaka Declaration on Vector-borne Diseases. The Declaration encourages a "whole of government" approach against diseases such as dengue. The theme of World Health Day 2014 focused on vector-borne diseases to acknowledge their public health importance, raise global awareness and increase commitment on controlling them.

Global evidence conclusively shows that dengue control can never be achieved or sustained without community empowerment and ownership. Unfortunately, there is lack of awareness on the role of vectors in the community and the vital contributions that they can make to prevent dengue by mitigating vector breeding in their respective surroundings. Even the best public health system in the world will not accomplish the desired task of containing dengue without the active participation of communities in



this endeavour. Communities must work with public health authorities and also prevent accumulation of material where water gets stored, thus allowing mosquitoes to breed. The simple preventive step of protecting mosquito bites by wearing clothes completely covering the body can help a lot in cutting short the transmission of this infection.

For many infectious diseases, good vaccines are available. Extensive work is ongoing to have a safe, efficacious and affordable vaccine against dengue too. WHO has been supporting these R&D efforts. A few candidate vaccines are now in advanced stages of clinical trials. We look forward to their early availability to public health systems in developing countries.

Till vaccines become available, dengue control activities have to be a synergistic combination of multisectoral activities based on sound public health actions, including integrated vector management and active participation of individuals, families and communities in reducing the sources where mosquitoes breed. The battle against dengue can be won only through concerted actions by all.

It is indeed the responsibility of every citizen to fight dengue.

The writer is Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia Region.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Nuremberg Int'l HR Award for a Bangladeshi

Amirul Haque Amin, an activist dedicated to promote workers' rights in the textile and garment industries in Bangladesh, has been awarded the prestigious Nuremberg International Human Rights Award 2015. This has been announced by the Jury in Nuremberg (in Germany) on 28th September 2014.

Amin is the president and co-founder of the National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF), a platform of trade unions in Bangladesh. The NGWF has been committed to promote rights and dignity of workers in the export-oriented readymade garment sector since 1984.

For the first time, after its introduction in 1995, the Award has been announced to an activist who has been fighting for social and economic human rights, the Jury mentioned. By doing so, the Jury would like to draw attention to three important issues referring to RMG sector in Bangladesh: protection of workers' rights at local level, consumers' conscience and awareness for responsible consumption and promotion of economic ethics. This recognition to a workers' rights activist in Bangladesh has come at a time when the issue of workplace safety and security and workers' access to freedom of association and collective bargaining have come to a forefront following two major industrial disasters, e.g. fire at Tazreen Fashions in 2012 and collapse of Rana Plaza in 2013.

**Uttam Das, Ph.D.**  
Advocate (Attorney)  
Supreme Court of Bangladesh  
Dhaka

## Benefits of organic food

Organic foods are foods that are grown from crops under organic agricultural practices without using chemical fertiliser and insecticides. Similarly, eggs and meat from poultry and livestock raised under natural environment, not under captured unnatural condition, are also organic foods. It has been found through research that organic eggs are good for human health.

It is true that crops grown through organic agriculture is good for health but the problem is crop production in this system is rather difficult, while the yield is also not enough to meet our needs. Still we can go for homestead and roof gardening to produce some vegetables for our own consumption. Large farms can raise poultry birds under open environment to produce organic eggs without feeding the birds artificial chemical based feeds.

**Professor M Zahidul Haque**  
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System, SAU, Dhaka

## Proposed hike in gas price exorbitant

I became astonished to read the news item, "Household gas may get costlier" published on TDS, September 23, 2014. It is stated that the government has prepared a proposal to raise the household gas prices and after the hike, it might be Tk 750 or 1000 for using a double burner stove, whereas a household currently has to pay Tk 450 a month for a double burner stove.

I don't get what kind of price hike is this, from 450 to 750/1000! Does the government think this is an affordable price for the middle and lower class people of the country? I don't want to talk about the upper class because they always get the privileges, but how on earth someone can propose such an abnormal hike of gas? The government showed the reason that they are doing this with a view to reducing consumers' reliance on piped gas and encouraging them to use liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). But they are not considering the fact that currently, an LPG cylinder costs between Tk 1300 and Tk 1400. The government should keep their lame excuses to themselves before befooling the people by showing weird reasons for arranging a hike.

**Momtaz Imam**  
On e-mail

Comments on news report, "Announcement of movement 'when it is high time': Khaleda," published on October 7, 2014

**Shubhro Ahmed**  
Hope BNP's wait for opportune moment does not coincide with any sort of terrorist incident.

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"Durga Puja and our religious sentiment" (October 5, 2014)

**Eleven**  
Latif Siddique has been kicked out of the party because he talked bad about the prime minister's son. He hurt Muslim sentiments so many times in the past but nothing happened to him.

**Dev Saha**  
Thanks to the author for making a truthful write-up. Does anybody really care?

**Sandip**  
Rule of law should prevail. The government should act promptly and resolutely.