

## Women's contribution grossly undervalued

Recognise their full productive worth, accord them due place

THIS is a huge eye-opener to the contribution women make to the national economy, quietly from behind the scene -- patently unrecognised, unapplauded, and taken for granted. But what they produce is tangible and measurable. And, what's more, their role is irreplaceable, admitting of no substitution whatsoever.

In a pioneering research effort, annual household work by women in the country, which is entirely unpaid, has been estimated in monetary terms at around Tk.675,398 crore, making for 87.2 percent of last fiscal year's GDP.

What we now need to do is to put monetary value to the substantially unmonetised contribution of women, factor this into the system of national accounting and reflect it on GDP by way of recognising their services and enhancing their self-esteem and status. This should lead to a mind-set change and macro-economic policy-making that is friendly and non-discriminatory to women.

The figure for unpaid work is 5.4 times higher than the total of women's paid services. Thus, the opportunity cost involved is huge. If the women were to work in paid jobs freed up from some of the unremunerated workloads they could be independent earners. That is why emphasis is laid on increased accessibility to drinking water, natural gas for cooking and setting up of Day-care centres which will give women opportunity for self-development.

With a greater sense of self-worth, the full potential of women as productive asset will be easier to realise. If earlier, we approached women development issues from human rights, moral or fairplay angles, we now have a compelling economic angle to put them squarely on equal footing.

## Jihadi coalition in Bangladesh

### Nip in the bud

REPORTS about activities of militant groups are dominating the media of late. The latest on the formation of a coalition of some religious extremist groups although raises concerns but comes as no surprise. Not to expect birds of the same feather to flock together, particular groups with similar ideology and aim of establishing that ideology as a political dispensation in the country, would be a folly on the part of those that are engaged in countering the menace of religious militancy on ground.

The law enforcing agencies deserve kudos for anticipating the militants who were apparently preparing to conduct terror acts inside the country.

We believe that the 12 militant groups that are proscribed and many that are not, carry the same agenda and would eventually pool resources towards both recruitment of manpower and conduct of terror acts in the country.

The recent catch suggests immediate action on several aspects of the counter-terrorism drive. Firstly, law enforcing agencies must address seriously the recruitment drive of the militant groups. Clearly they are trying to catch them young with a long term plan as is evident from the fact that one of the four HUIJI cadres netted on Saturday was recruited when he was a sixth grader. Secondly, arrested militant leaders are still being able to provide guidance and direction to their cadres from inside jail. This speaks of the lax supervision of jailed militants. It may also be an indication that there are militant sympathisers in sensitive places in the administration.

These are priority tasks if the militant groups are to be

## No room for hegemony in global banking

ABDUL MATIN

TWENTY-one Asian countries, including Bangladesh, recently signed an MoU as founding members for the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) with the aim of funding rail, road, power and other projects across the region. The Bank is expected to be launched by the end of the next year with an authorised capital of \$100 billion, while the initial subscribed capital is expected to be around \$50 billion. The AIIB will have its headquarters in Beijing. Unfortunately, Japan did not sign the MoU even though it is an important Asian country with the world's third largest GDP. Australia, Indonesia and South Korea did not attend the launching ceremony as the United States expressed concerns about "the new rival to Western-dominated multilateral lenders" according to Reuters. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) was initially cool but later gave a cautious welcome to the AIIB. "Given Asia's huge infrastructure funding needs, establishing the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank to provide additional resources for infrastructure investments is understandable," ADB President Takehiko Nakao said.


How does the AIIB affect US or western interests and what are their concerns? "The matter of the World Bank (WB) is different. They (WB) invest money across the world. AIIB will invest only for the infrastructural development in Asia," explains Finance Minister A.M.A. Muhith of Bangladesh. "Bangladesh is now ready for big investments. That's why we'll welcome assistance from agencies other than the World Bank and ADB," he added. Bangladesh has bitter experience with the WB regarding the financing of the Padma Bridge project. When the WB cancelled its credit for the project on suspicion of corruption, even before disbursement of the WB funds, Bangladesh had no other option but to finance the project from its own funds. It thus had very good reasons to join the AIIB as a founding member.

The domination of the WB by a single country or a group of countries is most undesirable. The world economic order is changing fast. According to the London based Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR), China will overtake the US economy, now on top, and India will displace Japan as the third largest economy by 2028. If economic development of the developing countries is the aim of the top economies of the world, there is no room for domination or hegemony in global banking. All the economic powers, including the emerging ones, must be allowed to play their due roles in both regional and global development.

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

# Mirpur Biharis' cry for justice

KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATTAHUL ALAM

SOME four months and a half have passed since the gruesome arson attack on the Kurmitola Bihari camp in Mirpur in which nine members of a family were burnt to death. From media reports based on versions of the victims, residents of the camp, local Bangalees and eyewitnesses of the incident have left no doubt about who the attackers were and why they committed the barbarity.

The metropolitan police and the fire brigade promptly formed committees to probe the incident, while the Detective Branch (DB) of police took up the job of unearthing the truth.

The official version of the truth about the arson remaining as elusive as ever, the plot further thickened with the death of Mohammad Yeasin last month under questionable circumstances in road a mishap. He was the head of the family of which nine members were burnt alive and taking care of his lone surviving, though badly burnt, child, Farzana, 15.



Saturday's edition of this paper carried the tragic story of orphan Farzana, who, despite her unbearable condition, still dares to dream of a better future for herself. But what has the future in store for her? Her chance for getting justice has about vanished with the death of her father, who, identifying some suspected perpetrators of the arson attack from the video clips on mobile phones, was said to have been planning to lodge a case against them.

Considering the pace of the police investigation into the case, and the attempts at misguiding the process of getting to the truth by the local politicians connected with the powers-that-be, there is little hope, unless there is a miracle, that the orphaned Bihari girl will ever see justice. And justice seems to be a fool's dream in situations where it is not the culprits, but victims, who are on the run to avoid the wrath of the powerful as well as of the law-enforcers, who are but doing the latter's bidding. Small wonder the horrifying tale of savagery against the members of the poor Bihari community of Pallabi in Mirpur, like similar others committed against the poor and the

helpless at other places in other times, is about to be consigned to oblivion.

Even if those who have the power to do and undo things to suit their sweet will are, for the time being, able to sweep under the carpet what happened to the Kurmitola Biharis, or, more particularly, to Farzana's mother, six siblings, a three-year-old nephew and sister-in-law, won't be able to wipe out neither the truth, nor the memory of the tragedy from the victims. It would be a crying shame for a people that claims to be civilised, democratic and believers in the rule of law, to allow the perpetrators of the crime to go unpunished.

Farzana, or the family that is looking after her, may be too afraid to pursue any case against the criminals who burnt her family members to death, or even to prosecute the operators of the bus that crushed her father to death under its their wheels. But what is holding the police from prosecuting the bus driver, who might provide a valuable clue to the entire plot including the motive behind bumping Yeasin off using a speeding vehicle? The evidences are too obvious and are screaming out for attention.

The fact remains that those who perished in the fire were murdered in cold blood, however much those behind the mindless atrocity may attempt at making light

of it by describing the incident as the fallout of infighting among the Bihari residents of the camp, or as a mere accident.

The arsonists and their masters knew full well that given their extreme vulnerability as a community living on the margins of the mainstream of life, no one would lift a finger to help the Biharis of Kurmitola camp, even if a catastrophe befell them. And their assumption has proved true so far. But the Kurmitola Biharis' inability to bring their tormentors to justice should not be seen as a failure of this community alone.

It has in fact been our collective failure to apply law against the wrongdoers in general and provide security to the victims, regardless of who they are. The criminals of Pallabi have got away with their dastardly crime in the same way as they have been doing in a hundred and one other cases day in, day out across the country. When law fails to act in a particular instance, while criminals revel in it, it is a victory of lawlessness over law.

So long as the Biharis are living under the law of Bangladesh, they have every right, like any other citizen of the country, to be protected by the state. In the case of the Kurmitola Bihari camp residents, the state has doubly failed in its duties: First, it failed to protect the camp-dwellers from the arson attack, and second, it has failed to bring the arsonists to justice. And in this manner, it has only given undue indulgence to criminals and lawlessness. It's indeed a shame on our law-enforcement system.

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## Ebola's next frontier

HRISHABH SANDILYA and DANY SHOHAM

WHICH countries, beyond those in West Africa, are most susceptible to the Ebola epidemic? Most epidemiologists do not fear much for the developed world, with its effective quarantine measures and tracking procedures, or even for sparsely populated developing countries. An outbreak could easily be contained in both groups of countries. But large, densely populated areas, lacking the proper containment mechanisms are highly vulnerable.

India, with its large emigrant population (the second largest in the world), high urban density, and inadequate public health-care infrastructure, potentially has the most to lose if the Ebola virus spreads. Links to West Africa are close and go back over the last century, with almost 50,000 Indians or people of Indian origin living in the region.

Indeed, scores of people fly between Accra, Lagos, Freetown, Monrovia, or Abidjan and New Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta, or Chennai on a daily basis, transiting through the Middle East or Europe. While exit controls are in place in all of the international airports in the affected regions, the virus's incubation period (which averages eight days in the current outbreak but can be up to 21 days) means that someone with no symptoms from a recent infection could make the trip to India without triggering alarms.

Recent personal experience at New Delhi airport indicated that nominal arrival checks, as the government requires, were loosely enforced, with a number of passengers exiting the terminal holding completed Ebola information cards that should have been handed to immigration officials. It seems unlikely that India's government will be able to keep tabs on all of the arrivals from West Africa.

Population density in India's mega-cities is as high as 10,000 people per square kilometer, and can match that level even in second- and third-tier cities, as slums mushroom to accommodate large-scale migration from rural areas. Spending on health-care infrastructure has been woefully inadequate, failing to keep pace with burgeoning urban populations.

Outside of the large cities, most health-care facilities are unable to provide anything more than primary care. World Bank data show that India currently has 6.5 doctors, 13 nurses, and nine hospital beds per 10,000 people -- levels that are less than half the global average and far below what the World Health Organization recommends.

Given these factors -- urban density, congested slums and shantytowns with poor sanitation, drainage, and sewage, and weak health-care infrastructure -- it is easy

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to imagine how the Ebola virus could spread rapidly. A single infected person who arrives from West Africa and is then untraceable could easily trigger an epidemic.

India's government insists that it is prepared. But, with limited resources and equipment and poorly trained medical support staff outside of the large metropolitan areas, it is easy to imagine the disease hitting health workers, as recent cases in Madrid and Dallas -- not to mention West Africa -- demonstrate. Indeed, because Ebola presents symptoms similar to malaria, dengue fever, and other endemic tropical diseases, medical workers may not take adequate precautions -- or, worse, may send patients home in a highly contagious phase.

The government's options are limited. The health-care system faces deeper systemic challenges that cannot be addressed overnight or only in response to Ebola. What the authorities can do is improve their tracking of all passengers arriving from West Africa, just as the United States and the United Kingdom have begun to do.

Ideally, all passengers arriving from the region would be quarantined on arrival and monitored for symptoms for at least eight days. But that would be unfair, and the government's capacity to implement such a programme across all of India's international airports and seaports is dubious.

Instead, all arriving passengers from West Africa need to be alerted to the symptoms of the disease, instructed how to monitor themselves, and made aware of the importance of seeking medical attention at the first sign of illness. Moreover, it is essential to educate health-care workers in all urban areas about the virus and its symptoms, and to train them to ascertain patients' medical and travel history.

The current Ebola epidemic in West Africa reflects a fundamental ecological imbalance. A virus that previously infected the fruit bat has crossed over to humans, whose population growth and density is at odds with the support that the natural environment can provide. That imbalance is hardly unique to Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

While it is probable that Ebola will surface in India in the near future, an adequate response is possible, as Nigeria has shown. Lagos, where the Nigerian authorities have done a remarkable job of preventing the spread of the virus, closely resembles India's megapolises. India's government should take note.

The writers are lecturer on South Asian politics at Charles University in Prague, and Senior Researcher at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar Ilan University, Israel, respectively. They are Visiting Fellows at the Institute of Defense Studies and Analyses (IDSA) in New Delhi. This commentary reflects the authors' personal views, not those of the IDSA.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Hashem's offbeat professional career

The front page report of Anisur Rahman and Md. Fazlur Rahman, "Bend it like Hashem," in TDS, Oct. 25 is a real life example of determination, faith and hard work paying off. I hope the story of MA Hashem and the making of his fortune from cane furniture is read by people who are searching for a way forward. Decades back, he abandoned the prospect of doing masters in Economics in Chittagong University and went all out for the cane furniture venture that paid off. Today MA Hashem is well established and well-off in a profession he himself chose and that could be an example for many of our country.

Engr. S. A. Mansoor  
Dhaka

### Monica Lewinsky against cyber bullying

Very recently, I read a report in The Daily Star based upon an interview with Monica Lewinsky. After reading it, my respect for her has increased. I have no interest in her past life; I appreciate her courage to face the reality. Her life story can definitely bring positive change in the life of many Asian girls.

On the one hand, she is bold enough to confess her every deed; while she has taken a strong stand against cyber bullying, on the other. Every year a large number of people get harassed by cyber bullying. We all should welcome her mission to end cyber bullying as it is the demand of time.

Pradip Das  
On e-mail

### Bad apples among Bangladeshis in the US

Eleven individuals, including store owners and employees who are Bangladeshi immigrants, were attested by the FBI and other US federal investigators for 12.5 million dollar SNAP fraud (food stamp) in Hamtramck, a suburb within Detroit, Michigan. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), previously known as food stamp, is a federal taxpayer funded programme for the needy and low-income families to help ease their food budget and offer nutritional assistance. The needy and low-income families receive SNAP card, which works like a debit card to purchase prescribed food items which include grocery, baby formula, fruits, vegetables, etc. and they are not allowed to purchase wine, liquor, cigarettes, etc. by using the SNAP fund. SNAP fraud is when SNAP benefits are exchanged for cash. This is called trafficking and it is against the law.

According to the investigators, the eleven individuals were exchanging the benefits for cash and selling items not approved by government assistance programs. In return, the stores added a surcharge or service fee to the recipients' withdrawal of SNAP fund. You can learn more on this from this site: <http://www.fbi.gov/detroit/press-releases/2014/law-enforcement-crackdown-on-food-stamp-fraud>.

The people of our community are very industrious; but this kind of fraudulent activities of a few unscrupulous businessmen and food stamp recipients would tarnish the reputation of the whole Bangladeshi community. We should strongly condemn and denounce the unlawful and dishonest activities which were committed by these few bad apples of our community.

Nawfal Talukdar  
Woodside, NY, USA

### Comments on news report, "Influentials on the wrong side," published on October 23, 2014

Prof. M. Hoque

Riding on the wrong side of the road or riding faster than the approved speed limit by our ministers or MPs or party-boss is nothing new; it is as old as our dear country.

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### "SI Anwar held" (Oct. 23, 2014)

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

These sorts of arrogant policemen give the entire force a bad name. This man must be punished for his heinous crime.

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### "Only sister left to mourn 6 deaths" (Oct. 22, 2014)

Punam Nath

It looks as if there is no end of reckless driving. How long will we have to deal with such accident?