

Drive against unfit vehicles

Make it a regular phenomenon

ON November 10, the BRTA with police assistance cracked down on unfit vehicles plying Dhaka city roads. According to BRTA data, some 350,000 vehicles are operating in the country without fitness certificates, 93,000 in Dhaka city alone. While we wholeheartedly welcome this crackdown against vehicles, including public transports, that have not bothered to take fitness certificates, we remain sceptical as to whether a summary drive will achieve desired results. With many buses staying off the road altogether, all the drive managed to do was add to the woes of some 15 million residents of the capital.

The crux of the problem is that the laxity with which police treats the issue of enforcing regulations with regard to vehicles carrying proper documents has given rise to a sense of impunity. And it is not merely a question of fitness only; rather the issue of fake licenses too must be addressed. When one takes into account that unscrupulous drivers and owners of vehicles can buy their way out of a sticky situation with speed money, the whole purpose of making vehicle owners adhere to the rule of law turns futile. It is interesting to note that since the beginning of this clampdown, BRTA has received some 800 applications to regularise fitness certificates.

The drive should not be a one-off matter. Rather it should be regular phenomenon, and only when police and BRTA authorities get serious about checking these anomalies on a regular basis will attitudes change for the better.

Boko Haram's war on Nigeria

Their violence defames Islam

THE latest act of violence of the Islamist group in Nigeria has taken the lives of more than 50 innocent students of a school in the north-eastern Nigerian town of Potiskum on Monday. While the insurgents have been targeting primarily schools and educational institutions – its name, Boko Haram, stands for “Western education is forbidden” – security forces, and even the UN headquarters in the capital, have been targeted too.

Regrettably, the Nigerian military has not been able to effectively check the spate of violence perpetrated by Boko Haram despite the state of emergency declared in the north-eastern region of the country since May 2013. There is no palpable effect on the insurgent group nor has the effort to restore normalcy in the region borne fruit. In fact its writ in the north-eastern region of the country is being gradually established.

Regrettably too, the world is witnessing another so called Jihadists group who wants to establish their kind of Sharia in the country. What, however, it completely overlooks is that it is violating the very teachings and injunctions that it wants to establish in the country. Indiscriminately killing innocent people, and that too children, because they are taking western education, or keeping 200 female students hostage for over six months, is not what the Koran or the Sunnah teaches. It must realise that the path of religion is not traversed through means of brutality, and their cause, if any, cannot be served by the strategy of violence they have adopted. And even more, their atrocious acts provide fodders to the detractors of the religion.

Digital cheating and stealing!

ABDUL MATIN

IN this digital age, it is no wonder that some misguided persons would adopt digital techniques to cheat or steal. On occasions, their expertise surpasses that of the professionals! During a recent admission test at the Dinajpur's Hajeer Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University, a student was using what looked like a calculator. It was later found to contain a camera and a SIM card so that it could be used as a smartphone. The student was taking pictures of the question paper and sending images to his accomplices outside. The answers were appearing on the screen soon afterwards.

A Bangladeshi hacker could access any bank account using any ATM card if he only knew the PIN. He learned the technique from a mate while serving a jail sentence abroad. He installed secret cameras in some ATM booths in Dhaka dodging the security guards. From the recorded images, he could read the PIN numbers of the users and withdraw cash from their accounts.

A hacker in the States was able to reprogramme the machines so that it registered \$1 only while it dispensed a \$20 bill. In a matter of days, he could steal thousands of dollars and live a lavish life. Another person was able to steal \$14 million from ATMs in two days. A global network of thieves once drained cash machines around the globe of an astonishing \$45 million in hours. ATM hacking is very common all over the world. It is estimated that the total annual global losses due to ATM fraud now amount to over \$1 billion.

Imagine the ingenuity that is required to convert a calculator into a smartphone, to invent a system that allows any ATM card to access any account or to reprogramme the machines. How much time, effort and expertise are wasted to apply such fraudulent techniques! Could they not achieve miracles if they used their expertise and energy for good causes? Some could perhaps be Edisons! They could make millions by patenting their inventions. I am sure the inventor of the calculator-cum-smartphone could invent new devices for application in communications. The hackers of ATMs could similarly design systems to improve the security of banks and earn millions of dollars.

Psychoanalysts will know better why some people choose fraudulent methods to earn their livelihood even though they are quite capable of earning handsome amounts through legal means. Will better parental care and grooming during childhood, better education and proper counselling motivate them to pursue honest paths?

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

The red is in its place



KNOT SO TRUE

RUBANA HUQ

THERE is a picture that calls for attention in this column. It is from the New York Times on the 29th of October in an article titled: 'Enslaved Abroad, Oppressed at Home' with a subheading of 'Modern day slavery in Bangladesh'. The illustration that accompanies the piece has taken the red from our flag and has positioned it at the figure's feet. Fortunately Bangladesh stands undivided on at least the issue of independence and the red circle, signifying the blood shed in this land for securing freedom is here to stay. The red in the center is for the people of the land to keep. The red circle just cannot be pulled out of the flag and be chained to our feet. The green and the red are inseparable and if ever they are pulled away from each other, like the article on the New York Times did, then one should cry in pain and protest. The article talks about a "Rahela'r Ma' (Rahela's mother) who was only known by her daughter's name and then when she died, her chores were taken over by Rahela who was so young that she couldn't even properly grind spices. Point is that just because it happened at the writer's own home, does not make it an everyday Bangladeshi reality. Our female enrolment at primary school level is up and instead of being slaves our young women actually pack their books and go to school. The article also wrongly referred to the minimum wage in Bangladesh for readymade garment sector as USD 50 whereas we are currently standing at USD68. The obvious emancipation of the female labor force in the garments sector need not be illustrated here. Three million plus female workers contributing to the major portion of export earnings only reflects the dignity of these women. They are more liberated than most of us can hope to be and labeling them as 'slaves' would be the worst mistake of this century. The utterly regrettable negative depiction of labor practices at home has unfortunately, in reality, become a part of our social psyche.

The slavery in the deep Thai jungles that the writer refers to is a much bigger reality than the working conditions at home. The shots fired at 28 migrant workers from Bangladesh who were picking strawberries in Manoloda in Southern Greece, is an even harsher story. Those who shot them walk free while those who worked under inhumane conditions still remain aggrieved. There are heart-wrenching stories like the one of Safiya, the Bangladeshi woman who drowned at Dabiya beach in Dubai, while she tried to save the kids of her employer. The story makes one wonder about the right price tag one ought to attach to the lives of the migrant workers.

Fortunately, these are the workers who take our nation up to being one of the top ten remittance recipients with a \$15 billion dollar per year and unfortunately they are the ones who suffer the harshest treatments abroad. One also needs to understand that there's exploitation way beyond our own borders. Recent reports of widespread labor violations by employers in the Southern California garment industry are alarming. The U.S Labor Department has conducted 221 investigations of American employers almost all in and around Los Angeles and has discovered that workers were missing \$3 million of total wage. Also recently, fresher allegations of 46 malpractices have been lodged by American Federation of Labor and Congress of

Industrial Organization against Bangladesh, which include harassment of the workers wanting to form unions and being allowed the freedom to collectively bargain for wages.

The labor situation in Bangladesh is way beyond the regular discourse of wage and while there is a long way for the employers to go in terms of bridging with labor, the labor will continue bargaining for what they need. This is a separate negotiation that ranks way above the international depiction of "oppression". Our workers are not in chains. They have a voice and when confronted, they revolt. And if ever they fail to voice out their demands, the media and the activists stand by their sides. They are not complacent and if ever there is a need for correction, it has to be from within and never be prescribed by outsiders who have a different take on our land.

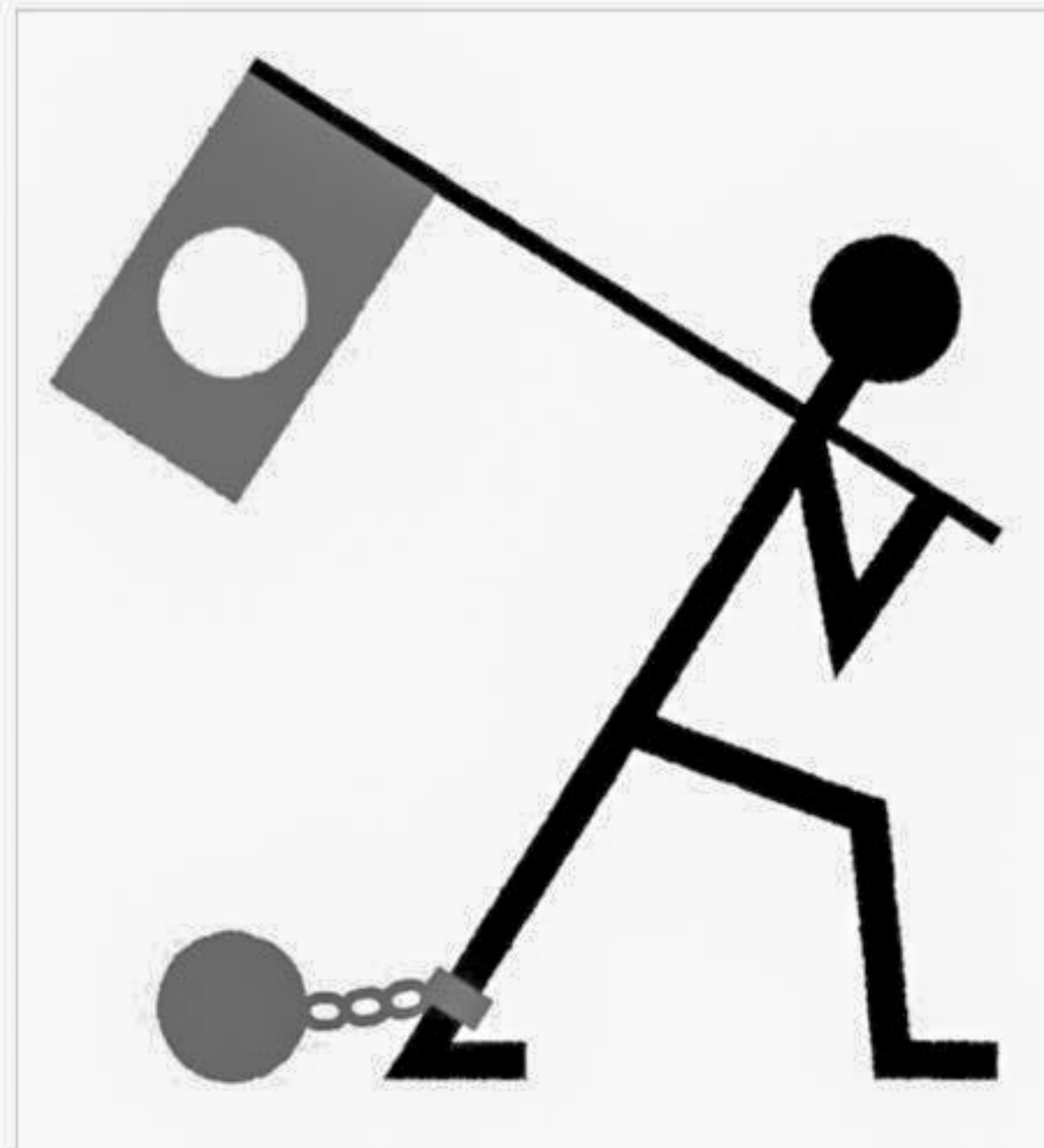


PHOTO: THE NEW YORK TIMES

For ninety minutes yesterday, your columnist was glued to the screen watching two four-year old children: Rahul and Protim from Shutarkhali union in Dakop Upazila in Khulna district. May 2009 had changed their lives, swept their homes away. The sounds of the waves crashing against the shore encompass 'Shunte Ki Pao' (Are you listening?), the ninety-minute long film set on a single road of Shutarkhali. The road tells a tale of the cruelty Cyclone Aila had unleashed upon the inhabitants of the area. The movie bears no message of grief. The actors are all regular yet remarkable people from Shutarkhali who just want to move forward. So do the little Rahul and Protim. They are not the "bonded" slaves of Bangladesh; they rather are the picture-perfect snapshot of Freedom. It is not the storm or the tidal surge that defines our people; it is the resilience that sets us apart from the rest of the world. So while nature rages, and while the tin roof is blown away, the protagonist Rakhi stays firm and fits drawers in to her closet frame. One can't dare to call these people bonded, enslaved or defeated. Our people champion the race called Life...

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.

APEC at the apex



CHINA WORLD

KEVIN RUDD

THE significance of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in Beijing consists not so much in what is on APEC's agenda as in what transpires on the sidelines. Meetings between Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Barack Obama; as well as Xi's meetings with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe loom especially large. These bilateral relationships constitute much of the strategic undercurrent of East Asian security at a time when the region's long-term geostrategic stability has come into question.

The core reality is that the Asia-Pacific region comprises a group of rapidly globalizing twenty-first-century economies sitting on top of a set of nineteenth-century national tensions. That contradiction matters for the entire world, because the region accounts for some 60% of global output. Economically speaking, where Asia goes in the future, the world will follow.

But Asia is home to a multiplicity of unresolved territorial disputes. It is the epicenter of underlying tensions stemming from China's rise and its impact on the United States, the region's established power since World War II's end. Indeed, many of the region's territorial disputes pit China against US allies.

More broadly, the region's rifts are endemic: a divided Korean Peninsula; territorial disputes between Russia and Japan, China and Korea, and China and Japan; the unique circumstances of Taiwan; and conflicting maritime claims in the South China Sea involving China, the Philippines, Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Taiwan. There are also long-standing border disputes between China and India, and between India and China's ally, Pakistan.

As if that were not worrying enough, Asia has become the next global arms bazaar, with military outlays in the region now higher than in Europe. Moreover, six Asian states have nuclear weapons.

Both the tone and the content of the China-US relationship are a cause for concern. China argues that it is subject to a US policy of isolation and containment. It points to America's "rebalancing" strategy, to military and/or diplomatic support for those countries with which China has bilateral territorial disputes, and US support for Japan's revision of its post-WWII "peace constitution" as a precursor for what China views as significant Japanese rearmament.

The Chinese also see the commercial equivalent of containment in the US-proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership, which includes Japan but excludes China. Furthermore, Chinese leaders point to what they regard as intrusive US human-rights diplomacy aimed at fomenting political protest within China (including Hong Kong) and undermining the regime's domestic legitimacy.

The US, no surprise, disputes these claims. For starters, the US argues that it is the various states of East Asia that have actively sought American support for their security, owing to their collective concerns about China. Moreover, the US insists that it is not containing China (as it did the Soviet Union); on the contrary, China's economic rise has been facilitated by access to US markets, as well as to global markets through American support for Chinese accession to the World Trade Organization.

On human rights, the US argues that there are indeed fundamental differences between the two countries' political traditions and current systems. But, in the American view, this is vastly different from an organized national strategy of undermining the Chinese state and its institutions.

For these reasons, the bilateral strategic-trust deficit is growing. Xi, to his credit, has advanced what he describes as a concept for "a new type of great power relationship," one that seeks to avoid what others have concluded is the near-inevitability of long-term conflict between a rising power (China) and the established power (America).

It is imperative that both parties try to close the trust deficit. Doing so calls for a framework of what I call "constructive realism."

Such a framework embraces realism about areas of contention defined by significant conflicting national interests and values. These issues should simply be peacefully managed over time, until sufficient political capital has been created in the rest of the relationship to address them directly.

At the same time, it is "constructive" in the sense of identifying areas of sufficient commonality to create new public goods, such as bilateral investment treaties, a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula, and a global agreement on climate change. A constructive realist approach should also begin to sketch the broad outlines of a long-term "common security" concept for East Asia.

The outlook for the China-Japan relationship appears somewhat better. Just a few months ago, the bilateral relationship had sunk to an all-time post-war low, owing to a toxic cocktail of territorial disputes over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, Japan's handling of its wartime history (particularly prime ministerial visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine), and Chinese fears about Japanese rearmament.

But now both governments appear to have recognized the growing risk of unintended conflict in the seas and airspace around the disputed territories, given the sheer concentration of naval and air assets in a limited space and the absence of effective protocols to manage incidents and prevent them from escalating. Both sides have concluded that even limited armed conflict would be disastrous.

Moreover, with Japan and China facing increasing economic uncertainty, they have recognized that it makes sense for the world's second and third largest economies to remove major political impediments to expanded bilateral trade and investment. For these reasons, barring any last-minute diplomatic indelicacies, the APEC Summit is likely to represent the start of a formal thaw in Sino-Japanese relations.

APEC, an Australian diplomatic initiative launched 25 years ago, was originally conceived as an exclusively economic forum. Fortunately, it has also become an annual forum for US, Chinese, Japanese, and other leaders to engage with one another on critical questions of long-term strategic stability. The future of the region's economy and the global economy – and the stability upon which they are predicated – will be powerfully shaped by the outcome of these deliberations.

The writer is a former prime minister and foreign minister of Australia, is currently Senior Fellow at Harvard University's Belfer Center.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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AIIB an alternative source of funding

Recently 21 Asian countries including Bangladesh made history by being a part of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The main purpose of this bank is to provide fund for the infrastructural developments across this region. AIIB is a perfect alternative to ADB as well as World Bank.

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 role in both regional and global development.

Mohammad Iftekhar Hossain
EMBA student
Jahangirnagar University

Overuse of social media

We are living in an age where technology is everything. Social media is a part of it. But the young generation of our country has been spending too much time on Facebook, LinkedIn, twitter, etc., ignoring their studies and other work. They are becoming reluctant to read books. Everything should have a limit. Maybe our young generation is overusing these social networks which will eventually bring negative results for them and the nation as a whole.

Anas Ahmed
Chittagong

Dismal performance by secondary level students

A few days back, I went to Murari Chand High School, Fatepur, Sunamganj to disburse stipend money to meritorious poor students. I asked them some questions just out of curiosity to know whether they were qualified for getting the stipend. I was very shocked when the students of class IX and X could not tell me which group they belonged-- science, commerce or arts/humanities! They even couldn't spell the word 'arts'!

If this is the condition of students at secondary level, it is hardly surprising that only two students got the pass marks in this year's admission test for English department at the Dhaka University.

Gopal Chandra Borman

On e-mail

Comments on news report, "Hail the girl," published on November 9, 2014

Abdullah M. Rafi

Nice work done by The Daily Star. Capital punishment is the only thing that the culprit deserves.

Snr Citizen

The girl is no less than Malala in a different context. She must be offered free studentship (including books and foods for free) up to HSC level by the education ministry. She is an excellent example of determination. She has to be encouraged and rewarded.

Molla A. Latif

We salute the brave girl and hate the culprit. We will appreciate if police perform their due roles.

Truthprevails53

I wish her good luck. The monster who committed such crime must be tried.

"2 secretaries quit" (Nov. 7, 2014)

Sayed Haque

What about those who issued these fake certificates? Shouldn't they be punished?

"The railway minister and his trophy wife" (Nov. 7, 2014)

Nationalist

It is his private life and decision. We should all bless the couple instead of criticising or mocking them for the age differences.

"No disparity in primary and secondary education" (Nov. 6, 2014)

Sharif Muhammad

It's really encouraging for Bangladesh; at least we have overcome disparity in primary and secondary level education. But yet a long way to go to achieve equal opportunities for girls in higher education. I think the two key obstacles women still face are the lack of social equality and prejudice about girls in society. Now the government should make a plan to overcome the obstacles to ensure women's spontaneous participation in education, economy and development of the nation.