

# Investing in women

## A boost for development

ECONOMIC development efforts are being hampered as women in our society are largely excluded from employment opportunities and relegated largely to the role of caregivers at household level. According to experts, for any country to develop economically and reduce poverty, women must be allowed to enter the mainstream job and business environment. Investing in women is not only the job of policymakers. Rather it requires a change in perceptions of our largely male-dominated society that would open up opportunities for women to play a role similar to their male counterparts in taking the country forward.

Although Bangladesh has made commendable progress in advancing girls' education, school enrolment and maternal health, it is their skills that need to be developed so that they may play a more productive role in the workforce. This would mean greater investments to be made in training and education so that we may see women involved in skilled jobs paying higher wages and not merely in labour-intensive occupations such as the garments industry.

Significant challenges to making such a transformation exist, primarily due to societal perceptions on what a woman should or should not be allowed to do. The mindset is changing but not fast enough. Besides, access to opportunity is still lacking. As per one international study conducted by Washington-based International Research Centre for Women, nations experienced the largest reductions in poverty rates where women's participation in the labour force grew fast.

# Sundarbans exposed to risks

## Unesco's apprehensions should be addressed

THE concerns expressed by UNESCO's World Heritage Site for the Sundarbans should draw serious attention of the government. A prominent Bangla daily reported that the UN body fears that construction of Rampal power plant near the Sundarbans, navigation of large containers through it and establishment of industries near the forest will pose threats to the already vulnerable mangrove forest. The mangroves are of immense geo-morphological and economic importance for the country. The Sundarbans also acts as a natural wall against fury of natural disasters. People in general, independent experts, environmental organizations and media, both local and international, have been expressing their concern over the projects in many ways. The government claims that it is seized of the issues but is yet to come out with any comprehensive answer to the questions raised.

Not just Rampal power project, the government is going for more power plants and allured by establishment of power plants near Sundarbans, an array of industries violating environmental laws is on the drawing board. Previously, this newspaper revealed the government's allowing industrialists to purchase land in areas adjacent to Sundarbans and providing site clearance to install industries uncomfortably generously. The UN organization has called upon the government to revisit these initiatives and urged for "comprehensive Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of development in the Sundarban" before undertaking any development project near the ecologically sensitive area.

We think that the concerns and suggestion flagged off by Unesco's World Heritage Site merit urgent measures. Bangladesh being very vulnerable to climate change can hardly overlook the importance of her most precious coastal natural resource.

# The fading Saarc initiative

EDITORIAL: The Hindu (INDIA)

IN the past six months, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has won praise for several foreign policy initiatives. But across the world, it was Mr. Modi's decision to invite the Saarc leaders to his swearing-in ceremony that has stood out as a 'game changer.' While other international forays, to Japan, the US and Australia, and multilaterals such as BRICS, essentially built on the previous government's efforts, the Saarc invitation was completely Mr. Modi's own idea, and came when India was at a low ebb with all its neighbours. It is then disappointing to see that just half a year later, the Saarc moment has faded, and the meeting between the South Asian leaders did not produce much more than a few face-saving agreements forged at the last moment. While Nepal was the host of the event, it had been hoped that India's leadership would squire the event to a more glorious outcome and into a show of real solidarity. One factor adding to the optimism ahead of the event was that along with Mr. Modi, most of the leaders have been elected or re-elected to office in the last two years, and carried their country's mandate if they agreed to bold measures to achieve the 18th Saarc Summit's theme of "regional integration." India cannot possibly be blamed for the fact that they did not do so, but it did not expend the required extra effort for that either.

To begin with, Mr. Modi ignoring Nawaz Sharif as the latter walked up to the podium during the inaugural session, set an uncomfortable tone to the entire Summit. India and Pakistan have many differences, and Pakistan has much to answer for when it comes to tackling terror, but the lack of basic pleasantries at the inaugural session, when the two prime ministers came face to face for the first time since May, effected a chill that was not dispelled even after their very warm handshake at the closing session. Next, China's attempt to enter the Saarc grouping was opposed successfully by India, but not before differences between member-states over the issue were exposed. India would do well to counterpoise China's economic weight by engaging its neighbours more deeply to formulate a consensus, instead of being seen as obstructing a closer Saarc-China engagement. This is not unthinkable, as geographically and culturally India has more in common with its Saarc neighbours than China can ever hope to have. The truth is, India comes into its own on the world stage when it carries the neighbourhood with it. That is why Mr. Modi's out-of-the-box ideas of inviting Saarc leaders or of a Saarc satellite are applauded everywhere. Similarly, it will take creative thinking to realise the dream projected by his own words when he spoke at the summit, saying it is not enough to be close, but Saarc countries need to be together too.

# Dilemma of punishing jaywalkers

MD. RIZWANUL ISLAM

THERE would be few pedestrians in the streets of Dhaka who have not routinely or at least occasionally jaywalked and have literally put their lives at the mercy of the brakes of motorised vehicles. As a pedestrian in Dhaka, I can fully appreciate that in a country where generally the hands of the traffic police dictate the movement of traffic, in most parts of the city, pedestrians have very little choice but to indulge in this illegal activity. There is no denying that jaywalking is very dangerous. It also impedes smooth movement of vehicles and contributes to traffic jam. But the recent heavy-handed approach to punish jaywalkers seems to be based on flawed assumptions. It is also a skin-deep response to a much deeper problem.

If ensuring safety of lives is the intention of the movement to punish the jaywalkers on the spot by fining or imprisoning them, then the same concern should encourage the law enforcers to come down heavily on those

motorists who flout the law by driving in the lane opposite to the legally demarcated one and on those motor cyclists for whom driving on the footpaths is the way for avoiding traffic on the road. A jaywalker's violation of law poses the biggest risk to her/his safety. On the other hand, a motorist on the wrong lane or a motorcyclist driving on the footpath not only poses a risk to her/his life but also to the lives of other motorists, motor cyclists, and pedestrians. When a jaywalker is punished for jaywalking and a car driving in the wrong lane of a road is untouchable it tells the jaywalkers that the laws of this land are only for ordinary men and the arm of the law is not long enough to catch those who can openly ignore them.

Unlike typical criminal offences, most of the traffic offences are offences not because they are patently immoral, but because any deviation from them would hinder achieving certain objectives such as maintaining safe, orderly, and efficient movement of pedestrians and vehicles on the roads. Thus, while people need not be attuned to or be reminded of the fact that an offence is an offence, traffic offences are not necessarily the same. People follow them not because their conscience tells them that violating the law is immoral, but because they feel that it would disrupt orderly movement on the roads. In other words, many traffic rules are followed because

people are accustomed to following them. Consequently, when the law enforcers selectively apply this rule on some selected roads in Dhaka, it would be natural for many to fall foul of the law just by habit as almost all the foot overbridges and underpasses in Dhaka are not maintained well enough for people to use them. For physically challenged persons, people suffering from certain diseases, children, and senior citizens, it is even more difficult to use the foot overbridges. Few motorists care for zebra crossings and in many roads they are either non-existent or are difficult to find.

Instead of punishment of pedestrians, Dhaka city needs a much better developed public transport service or reducing traffic jams. A more planned transport network for Dhaka is a matter for experts and beyond the scope of this short piece. But one need not be a rocket scientist to appreciate that it is only natural that a city with a very high proportion of private transports would suffer from chronic traffic jams. To ease this, a tax for owning multiple cars or a congestion surcharge on vehicles using certain busy roads

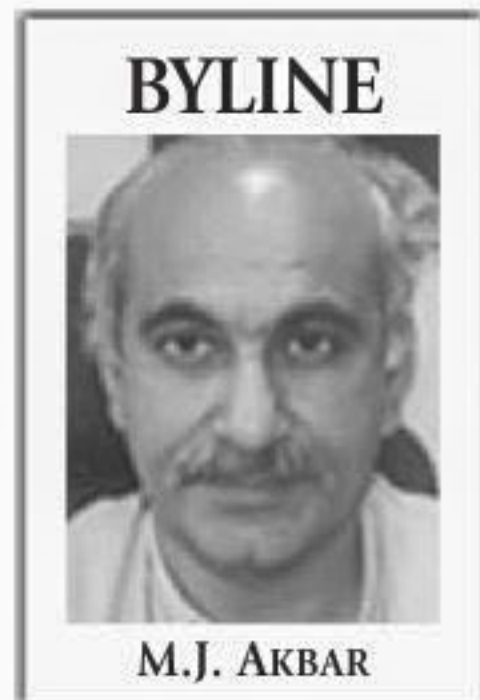
in peak hours may be a good starting point. Public transport must also be more regulated and, in particular, stopping of buses randomly must be stopped. The number of public buses needs to be increased and the quality of service has to be improved. The foot overbridges must be made easily usable. Without these measures, the punitive measures against pedestrians will not be able to address the issue of traffic jam and at best have a modest impact on greater road safety.

This whole drive against pedestrians is yet another example of arbitrary and selective application of laws on the more vulnerable section of the community. How much contribution this measure can make in ensuring road safety and speeding up traffic on the roads is uncertain, but two outcomes are more or less certain. This measure to punish the common people causes undue suffering. If the roads of Dhaka are more pedestrian-friendly, most people would not have to be forced to obey the law, they would rather do that voluntarily for the sake of their personal safety. After all, a common man in Dhaka stakes his life on the brakes of the drivers of motorised vehicles simply because, in most cases, there are no reasonable alternatives available.

The writer is an Assistant Professor of Law, BRAC University.



# The fourth great war, for modernity



M.J. AKBAR

WARS begin with a preamble, mostly confused, and end with a postscript, often bitter. The link between Versailles in 1919 and 1939 is standard knowledge. The Cold War began at Yalta, where Europe was divided between victors who then mobilised to protect what they had won. If the Cold War ended with Soviet defeat in Afghanistan, then that is precisely where the war against terrorism began.

It should not come as a surprise that allies in Afghanistan turned on each other almost immediately after victory. The conquerors of 1945 did much the same. But if America and Europe are shocked by the sudden swell of Islamism, it is only because they ignored the second narrative of 1919, the dismemberment and colonisation of the last great Muslim empire, the Ottoman Caliphate. After a troubled century, the First World War has looped back to link with the fourth.

Less than seven decades before 1919, Britain had buried what was left of the Mughal Empire on the Indian subcontinent, home to the largest ethnic Muslim population in the world. [The more ribald Victorian politicians teased their Ottomans with the thought that Queen Victoria was the real Caliph, since she had far more Muslim subjects.] In 1919, a startling thing happened: every single Muslim land was colonised or occupied by Europe. The humiliation was almost too much to bear.

As Muslims from the Ganges to the Nile searched for revival, they also took comfort in lament. A powerful motif was the romance of the Caliphate, which became more glorious in memory than it had ever been in reality. The Caliphate represented security for Islam and its holy cities in an age when Muslims were under siege; it was an emotional symbol of glory; and its law, Sharia, was reassuring to Muslims who perceived it as a safety net against the potential tyranny of their own despots. In India, Mahatma Gandhi used the high-voltage appeal of the Caliphate to draw Muslims into his mass campaign, between 1919 and 1922, against British rule. The ultimate irony, of course, was that Turkey abolished the Caliphate in 1924.

Turkey, under Mustafa Kemal, took a rational route into the 20th century. It recognised that Caliphs, like the Hapsburgs and Tsars, belonged to an age that had outlived its utility. The Indian Muslim elites eased their anxieties by carving out, with a British knife, a separate state in 1947, Pakistan, a unique country that straddled either side of a subcontinent and fondly believed that

faith could unite what God's geography had divided. Pakistan could have become a Turkey in South Asia; instead it attempted to mix theocratic impulses with democratic intentions, and succeeded in achieving the worst of both worlds. Pakistan became the first Islamic state in the post-colonial era, and, inevitably, a sanctuary for myriad terrorists flying the flag of jihad in order to gain popular legitimacy.

The Arab world was cut and stripped with abandon by its British and French masters after 1919, and turned into a haven for neo-colonisation. Neo-colonisation, of course, is the grant of independence on condition you do not exercise it. This might have worked if it had been accompanied by economic empowerment and democratic freedoms, but perhaps the suggestion itself is a contradiction. Family systems soon blurred the difference between personal wealth and national resources. Every experiment, whether born on the left or right, gravitated towards soft or hard dictatorships. The West did not help by using war, or regime change through more insidious means, to protect its domination.

Any failure of modernity is an invitation to an imagined past. As other models, from royal paternalism, to Nasserite populism, to Baathist liberalism, to Army despotism, and finally a brief upsurge of democratic spirit, collapsed, or were suppressed, the last idea standing was a return to faith. Except that no one quite knew what this meant in a contemporary context.

to arouse a jihad that has become demented in its search for chaos wrapped in the illusion of liberation. The degeneration has been swift. Today, the region between Pakistan and north Africa is an arc of turbulence, in which most governments survive in isolation while nations spin out of control.

A fundamental requirement of jihad in Islamic theory is that it can only be declared by the state. The dangerous proliferation of maverick jihad is evidence of the dangers when practice abandons theory. This, however, is little solace to this jihad's targets: the "far enemy," principally America; the "near enemy," or those hostile to them in their immediate environment; and the "third enemy," countries which "occupy" Islamic space. India and China [because of Muslim-majority Xinjiang] are in the last group.

When, or how, this war will end is difficult to assess. But we can be certain of this: it will devastate Muslim communities long before it damages others.

The writer is Editor of The Sunday Guardian, published from Delhi, India on Sunday, published from London and Editorial Director, India Today and Headlines Today.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

## New slave trade thru' sea routes

On November 17, 2014, Bangladesh Navy rescued 600 overseas job seekers from a large trawler in the Bay of Bengal while being trafficked to Malaysia. Human trafficking to Malaysia and



Thailand is a regular occurrence at that area. Many thousands of people are being trafficked from Bangladesh to Malaysia by the dangerous sea route every year. Some of them are being sold as slaves in the deep forest of Thailand. They are forced to do extremely hard work and sometimes without any payment.

Human trafficking is a serious crime. Due to lack of awareness among public, the traffickers can do their business easily. The government should take immediate steps to stop this practice forever. At the same time, the traffickers should be punished sternly.

Md. Al-Amin Jony  
School of Business  
Asian University of Bangladesh

## Truth about Bt brinjal

This refers to the letter "Why this propaganda against Bt brinjal?" by Md. Ali Hossain, published in TDS on November 18. There is no propaganda; it is the fact about Bt brinjal as published in TDS on November 1 by Samshad Nowreen. On January 22, 2014, the agriculture minister handed over the Bt brinjal saplings to 20 farmers in Gazipur, Jamalpur, Sherpur, Rangpur and Pabna for cultivation. Only one of the 20 Bt brinjal fields succeeded while 13 were fully and the rest six were partially damaged. The farmers demanded compensation (The New Age, September 1, 2014; The News Today, September 8, 2014; The New Age, May 7, 2014).

Many international organisations and individuals including Japanese Citizens Network for Sustainable Food & Agriculture protested against the release of Bt brinjal in Bangladesh. Bangladesh, a country of origin of brinjal is obligated to save it from genetic pollution (Cartagena Protocol). Bt brinjal is a GM product and has all the adverse impacts and threats of genetic modification including death, allergy, cancer, surviruses, antibiotic threats, resurgence of infectious diseases, birth defects, interior toxins, lowered nutrition, toxicity to soil, extinction of seeds, super pests, killing beneficial insects, poisonous to mammals etc.

Another thing, in his letter Md. Ali Hossain has confused the readers by mentioning BR-II rice (Gazi). It should be corrected either as BR-II rice (Mukta) or BR-14 rice (Gazi).

Dr. M.A. Sobhan  
Mirpur-1, Dhaka

## Comments on news report, "Saarc fails to fly, again," published on November 27, 2014

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed  
Compared to the EU or ASEAN, SAARC is too disorganised with neighbours, not trusting or cooperating with each other.

Shazia Immlli  
Pakistan is not ready to sign any agreement. They have been trying to stall Saarc for the last 30 years.

## "People forced to use shabby pavements, footbridges" (Nov. 27, 2014)

Redgreen  
VIPs have the power to disobey the red signal and drive through the wrong side but poor people are being forced to obey the rules.

## "Ailing Biman wakes up to rude reality" (Nov. 28, 2014)

Snr Citizen  
Soon all these cosmetic measures that have been talked about will fizzle out. Biman as an airline will continue to suffer. Biman needs a bold CEO/MD. It is no rocket science. Strict commercial considerations and quality control, professional staffs are the guiding elements for success. Let the cleansing start right now!

## "Hughes stops" (Nov. 28, 2014)

Dev Saha  
It is very sad news for the cricket fans. These bouncers are truly lethal and can kill anybody any day. But they are also essential for the bowlers to intimidate the batsmen. More protective gears for batsmen are needed.