

Another hartal, another death

Who will recompense for it?

HARTAL which precipitates violence and deaths is uncalled for. This is precisely what we witnessed in the death of school teacher Shamsun Nahar Jharna in Noakhali during BNP-called dawn to dusk hartal on December 29. She sustained deadly injuries when pelted with bricks by pro-hartal elements. Will the BNP answer for her death?

Hartal may be a political right but it cannot be forced upon others. Nothing can be gained by maiming and killing ordinary citizens who must go about their daily business. The culture of intimidation and wanton violence against people and property are completely unacceptable. We certainly do not want to see a re-enactment of the violent days of protests that gripped the nation in the last few months of 2013. Parties must exercise restraint on their activists so that innocent blood is not spilt.

There are rumours of more hartals in the coming days and weeks. Our principle stand is against hartal that brings no good to either the people or the country. That notwithstanding, we are witnessing a gradual shrinking of political space for the main opposition party. BNP rallies and processions are not being permitted. Indeed, if one goes by recent events, the authorities imposed Section 144 in Gazipur but BCL activists nevertheless brought out procession under the very nose of the police whilst the opposition party was harried.

The opposition should be afforded its legitimate room for peaceful assembly and protest, and that is the expectation of the people too.

Border killings

Nothing can justify it

THE latest round of biannual talks between Bangladesh and India has just concluded in Dhaka. And we are rather surprised that the DG BSF actually defended the past killings of Bangladeshis at the border by his men. He claimed that the killings were "necessitated" because the lives of his troops were under threat, and that they would have been killed had they not open fired.

Despite repeated assurances from India to bring down the number of border killing to zero, as many as 26 unarmed innocent Bangladesh civilians have died at the hands of BSF this year alone, according to a human rights body. Although the figure is lower than that of previous years, but even 26 killed, we feel, is 26 too many. Border killings are unwarranted, especially between friendly neighbours, and it should be brought down to zero.

The DG BSF's comment defies logic when we consider that most of those killed had no lethal weapons on their bodies, and a majority of them were innocent cattle-grazers. And we wonder if all the instances of firing were as a last resort. The Bangladesh Guideline for Border Authorities 1975 stipulates the duties of the border forces as authorised to arrest criminals and hand them over to the other side; this consideration and tolerance must be displayed in the actions of the border forces.

Given that we are very close neighbours with a long shared history, border and trade interests, a more humane and sensitive approach is needed towards managing, what is, indeed, a very unique border.

DISAPPEARANCE OF AIRASIA FLIGHT

Questions over aircraft safety

EDITORIAL, THE JAKARTA POST

FOLLOWING the disappearance of the AirAsia flight to Singapore on Sunday, all our hopes are pinned on the ocean and land areas being scoured for any sign of the aircraft and its passengers – areas much smaller compared with the year's earlier tragedy of the lost Malaysian Airways plane.

AirAsia flight QZ8501 with 162 people, departing from Surabaya, lost contact following the last communication between its pilot and air traffic control two and a half hours after taking off at 5:36 a.m. Air traffic was reportedly heavy as the pilot, formerly with the Air Force, asked air traffic control for permission to turn left and climb higher to avoid thick clouds. After permission was granted, but only to turn left, the details become unclear, other than that contact with the aircraft was then lost.

Pending investigations, all efforts are now focused on locating the Airbus and its passengers. On the part of authorities and AirAsia's management, equal focus must be on helping distressed families and keeping communication channels open amid agonizing uncertainty.

The incident involving PT Air Asia Indonesia, part of the Malaysian AirAsia group, adds to the long list of Indonesia's aviation accidents. We can blame the weather, aircraft manufacturers or human error within airline management, the crew or air traffic control. But regardless of the investigation findings, Indonesia needs to work hard on its safety record.

It was only in 2009 that Garuda Indonesia was allowed to fly to Europe after being banned in 2007, along with three other domestic airlines, from the continent's airspace, following several accidents. The lifting of the ban five years ago cannot make us complacent. We have unresolved factors that heighten the risk of flying beyond a pilot's skills – such as inadequate runways, crowded airports and airspace, flight delays and tight competition in the industry, amid high operation and maintenance costs.

In 2011, the visiting president of the International Civil Aviation Organization, Roberto K. Gonzales, told the media here that Indonesian airlines' compliance with international safety standards had reached 80 percent, compared with 50 percent in 2007.

In the face of no option but to book an airline seat, any traveler should be able to depart in the expectation of flying and landing safely, without having to consider the implications of that remaining 20-percent shortfall. International awards mean a lot to airlines, as is clear from their commercials; but they seem to forget that passengers are more interested in their own safety than in admiring those awards.

As efforts continue to locate the AirAsia aircraft, with the help of neighboring countries, travelers everywhere expect that airlines and national authorities do everything they can to ensure their safety. Meanwhile, our prayers are with the families.

Buzz of death



THE whole nation has been buzzing with the news of Jihad falling into the well, drowning and dying. Media partners from beyond our own borders also have covered the news so much so that one of them, Asia News Network reported "No sign of boy who fell into well in INDIA". Bad news makes excellent columns. That's all that counts. Why would anyone care about a

Khadiza Begum and a Nasiruddin who just lost their son? Apparently the most important factor was who began the rescue effort, how it failed, who was sued and finally how the government needs to be ousted because of this failure. Unfortunately, the discourse on any tragedy is often capitalised to the max with political expediency and continuous live coverage in South Asia. In this case, there were cameras hanging from the branches, within feet from the scene of the rescue, with booms recording every single movement, every single byte, whisper or rumour. And what made it worse was the intensity of the tragedy of a live child stuck in a well, gasping for air and not making it to the surface alive.

Forty-two years ago, on Oct 13, 1972 Uruguayan Air Force flight 571 crashed into the snowcapped mountains of Andes and had 16 out of the 45 passengers come out alive after 72 days. Twenty-seven years ago, Jessica McClure Morales, an 18-month old toddler who fell into an eight-inch (20 cm) well casing 22 feet (6.7 m) below the ground, was rescued after 58 hours by using water jet cutting, a technique which used, with an industrial tool, a mixture of water and abrasive substance. Twelve years ago, on July 24, 2002, nine Pennsylvania miners got trapped under millions of gallons of water, 240 feet underground, yet pinpointed their location via satellite tracker, while rescue crews drilled a narrow hole down into the shaft, pumped in air to pressurise the chamber, kept the water at bay and finally lifted by drilling a larger hole after 77 harrowing hours. Eight years ago, on the 23rd of July 2006, army engineers in northern India rescued a little boy, Prince, trapped down a 60-foot (18-metre) village well for two days in a town called Kurukshetra in the northern state of Haryana. Soldiers pumped in oxygen, fed milk to the child, dug a parallel shaft and rescued the little one who slipped, slithered down the narrow shaft and fell into the bore well which was left open by the construction workers. Just a year ago, on December 30, 2013, in Carroll County, Georgia, Megan Winter, a 7-year old was rescued from a well that was around 40-50 feet deep. The smallest firefighter went to save Megan and after an hour, with the help of rigging a pulley system, firefighters pulled her out. Just seven months ago, a robot with a built-in camera that can stream images from depth was developed by a plumber, Manikandan in Madurai. This robot is designed to save children trapped in bore wells. Manikandan had also rescued a three-year old boy in the Theni district of Tamil Nadu. For the last five years, at least six children have

lost their lives in that state in abandoned wells.

There are many more stories of courage sprawled all over the pages of history. Some get covered, some don't. Some make heroes, some villains. Some sing success and some failures. Four days ago, our very own Jihad, a four-year old child trapped in a 600 feet-deep water pump in Shahjahanpur colony was declared dead at 3:45 pm on the 28th of December, 23 hours after falling into the well. The Fire Service Chief and Civil Defense gave up at 2:40 pm, and handed the operation over to Railway engineers. The State Minister for Home announced way before that there was no one in the trap. Another agency termed the news of the child being trapped as sheer "rumour". Meantime, five young and bold men used a locally developed metal-rod cage to pull the child out of the 17" wide well.

What followed the tragedy? To begin with, a 199 crore taka project to upgrade the Fire Service and Civil Defense department is set to be approved by the government which will procure three excavators (60-ton capacity each), one crane, four turntable ladders, water tenders, 12 towing vehicles and other necessary equipment. This is all with the objective to strengthen the department. However, what needs to be remembered is what fished little Jihad was only a homemade tool invented by just five men of courage.

Secondly, angry locals demolished a house made by the pipeline contractor and vandalised the police station. That we react with extreme violence in the face of a failure is very usual in our culture. Often altercations lead to broken glasses, broken jaws and fractured skulls. Violence in retaliation is routine in our part of the world.

Thirdly, a couple of petitions were filed which sought for probe into the failure of the government agencies to rescue the boy while another claimed compensation of Tk. 3.1 million for the death. Jihad's father Nasir Uddin also filed a case with Shahjahanpur Police Station on Saturday midnight, accusing 7/8 persons including the farm 'JSR' owner and Railway Engineer.

Fourthly, the Police took the boy's father to their custody after the state minister for home had doubted if the boy had fallen into the pipe. Apparently they had "good intention" behind this. While his son lay trapped at the bottom of the well, the father suffered inhumane interrogation just because someone powerful thought it was all 'fiction'. Truth has a habit of being trashed as imagination in the land we live in. Ironically, a lie and a piece of truth often interchange their position in the hands of the powerful manipulators.

In the midst of it all, Jihad's body rests forever in Nagerhat village under Gosairhat upazila in Shariatpur District after the autopsy confirmed his death from drowning 2 hours within his fall. Khadiza, Jihad's mother will probably never stop weeping for her son and will always wait for him to return. For her, he could not have vanished from the well; for her, his death hasn't happened. In tragic times like this, a mother wishes to be buried in place of her son. Khadiza needs to grieve alone. Spotlights are for heroes; real people with real losses deserve better.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Putin's winning streak



SINCE Russia invaded Crimea last summer, the West has relied on a strategy of economic sanctions and international isolation to compel the Kremlin to withdraw its support for the rebels in eastern Ukraine. But Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent series of diplomatic successes – in particular, with Iran, North Korea, and Pakistan – has all but negated the effectiveness of this strategy.

To be sure, Putin was shunned at last month's G-20 summit in Brisbane, with the Australian hosts and Western leaders berating him in bilateral meetings for violating Ukraine's sovereignty and creating a rift with its Western economic partners. Putin left early, proclaiming that Western sanctions were harming European economies more than Russia anyway.

But Putin was not deterred, proceeding to launch major initiatives with countries of vital security concern to the West, boosting Russia's diplomatic leverage and enhancing its value to its most important, albeit still coy, partner: China. As Putin declared in a recent interview, his government is committed to ensuring that Russia does not become internationally isolated behind a new Iron Curtain.

With Iran, the Kremlin has launched a joint bank that will enable Russian companies to expand bilateral trade without using Western currencies or worrying about Western financial sanctions. The deal builds on this summer's "oil-for-goods" agreement, whereby Russia will exchange its own goods for as many as 500,000 barrels of Iranian oil daily.

Bilateral security cooperation also progressed, with the Russian Navy holding a three-day maritime exercise with Iran's Caspian fleet. So far, efforts to weaken Russia's relationship with Iran – not to mention its other major Middle Eastern ally, Syria – have repeatedly failed. In October, Russia's United Nations ambassador, Vitaly Churkin, faulted the US-led initiative against the Islamic State for its failure to involve Iran and Syria, which he called "logical allies in the fight against terrorism in the region."

Moreover, Russia has signed an agreement that will ensure that its own firms remain the dominant foreign players in Iran's civil nuclear-energy sector, even if a nuclear deal leads Western powers to ease sanctions on Iran. Under the terms of the deal, Russia will help Iran construct at least two more nuclear reactors – and as many as eight.

The new plants, like Iran's first Russian-built reactor at Bushehr, would be subject to International Atomic Energy Agency monitoring and use only Russian-made nuclear fuel, which would be returned to Russia for storage to prevent Iran from developing dangerous nuclear technologies. Still, Russia has agreed to train more Iranian nuclear experts, and may allow Iran to manufacture some of the components of the uranium fuel rods itself.

the country. This opened the way for new development projects and increased bilateral and regional investment. For example, Russian firms are planning to help rebuild North Korea's railway network in exchange for access to the country's undeveloped mineral resources.

Russia has hosted more senior North Korean leaders than any other country this year, including the reclusive leader Kim Jong-un's special envoy, Choe Ryong-hae, a senior official in the ruling Workers' Party, who spent an entire week meeting with Russian political and economic leaders. In fact, Russian officials have indicated that Putin is prepared to become the first head of state to meet with Kim, who is eager to deepen ties with Russia to compensate for his faltering relationship with China.

November was also a good month for Russian diplomacy in Pakistan, with Sergei Shoigu becoming the first Russian defense minister to visit the country since 1969. During his stay in Islamabad, Shoigu and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif signed an unprecedented agreement that could establish a framework for joint military exercises, reciprocal port visits, and a wide-ranging dialogue on regional security issues.

Moreover, the Kremlin has relaxed its opposition to Pakistan's full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, along with China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. And the Russian government has agreed to sell Pakistan as many as 20 Mil Mi-35 "Hind E" heavy attack helicopters to aid in the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking.

Until now, Russia has refrained from selling advanced military equipment to Pakistan, in order to avoid damaging its relationship with India. But, as Russia's strategic relationship with India has strengthened, including through a joint mechanism to purchase and deliver Russian weapons to the Afghan government, Putin has gained the confidence to bolster cooperation with Pakistan. The announcement of several more bilateral deals during Putin's recent visit to India suggests that his confidence was merited.

All of this could augment Russia's leverage with China, which has an interest in increasing its influence over Iran, North Korea, and Pakistan, but has subtly sought to exploit Russia's isolation. Russia's vast natural-gas wealth also appeals to China, which drove a hard bargain in the two countries' recently concluded 30-year, \$400 billion gas-supply deal.

By giving key regional actors alternatives to bowing to US pressure on issues like nuclear non-proliferation and the fight against terrorism, Russia's recent maneuvers have complicated American diplomatic efforts considerably. Though Putin has not broken from the international consensus on these issues, he could block progress in order to compel the US to change its policies toward Ukraine, Syria, and other countries. As a result, a dangerous global security situation could become even more so.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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What has happened to the Air Asia plane?

This refers to the report, "AirAsia plane goes missing" (Dec. 29). This is the third Malaysia-linked plane incident, the first one being the Malaysia Airlines MH 370 (disappeared on March 8, 2014, over Indian Ocean en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing; search still continuing). MH 17 was shot down over eastern Ukraine



on July 17, 2014, by hostile elements. Now AirAsia Flight QZ8501, with 162 on board, en route to Singapore. It raises the issue of whether the training of pilots is good enough to give them the ability to fly in turbulent weather. Turbulent weather is normal over the Indonesian airspace, as it falls under inter-tropical convergence zone. Another important issue is passengers' right to know the age of an aircraft, number of flight hours, etc., before they fly on an aircraft. This unfortunate incident also raises the question: is air travel safe? Flying is supposed to be the safest mode of travel. One hopes that the missing plane will be found soon, and also the causes behind this incident.

Deendayal M. Lulla
 On e-mail

When they forgot they were enemies...

British soldiers were spending Christmas Eve 1914 on a French battlefield during World War I. After four months of fighting, over a million men had perished in the bloody conflict. The bodies of dead soldiers were scattered between the trenches of the opposing armies. It was in the middle of a freezing battlefield in France that a miracle occurred! British troops watched in amazement as candle-lit trees appeared above the German trenches. "From the German parapet, a rich baritone voice had begun to sing a song... I remember my German nurse singing to me... the grave and tender voice rose out of the frozen mist. It was all so strange... like being in another world," a young British soldier wrote in his diary. "Silent night holy night. All is calm. All is bright." When the German soldiers finished singing, the British decided to retaliate. Rather than retaliate with the roar of a cannon, the army chaps from England sang, "The first Noel, the angels did say, was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay..." When the boys from jolly old England finished, "Born is the King of Israel!", the enemy began clapping and struck up a rousing rendition of "Oh Tannebaum!" When the British troops began singing "Oh Come All Ye Faithful!" it was at that moment that the Germans immediately joined in. They were singing with the enemy. This was the most extraordinary event taking place in the middle of a blood-drenched battlefield! Two opposing nations were singing the same Christmas Carol in the middle of a fierce war. It is recorded that enemy soldiers greeted each other in the no-man's-land that just minutes before had been a killing zone. Soldiers wished one another a Merry Christmas and agreed not to fire their rifles on Christmas Day.
 Ted Rudow III, MA
 CA, USA

Comments on news report, "Rescue or fiasco?" published on December 28, 2014

Snr Citizen
 We are ill-equipped and unskilled to face such man-made disaster. Our rescue operation was too slow and unorganized. We have wasted a lot of time and thus lost Jihad.

Dev Saha
 We have been failing our children whether they are on the streets or trapped in the wells. I am sure nobody sees the problem that way.

Md. Ali Akbar
 We should be ashamed as a nation! No precautionary measures have been taken by the authorities while digging such a dangerous hole. The rescue operation was abandoned by the fire brigade declaring there was no sign of human body inside!
 We salute the local boys who did not give up their hope! They could not save the boy but they have shown how indifferent the government machinery is to the life of our people.

"Railway responsible"
 (December 28, 2014)

OpeeMonir
 Only appropriate action by punishing those who are responsible for gross negligence and appropriate compensation to the family can stop this. The rule of law must be upheld.