

Blockade telling upon economy severely

Transportation with police escort not sustainable

WITH the countrywide blockade hitting its third day, we are in a situation that leaves Dhaka city largely disconnected from the rest of the country. Although BNP-led 20-party alliance activists could not field much of a show of force in Dhaka, there has nonetheless been an increase in arson attacks on vehicles that has gutted both passenger cars and buses. The latest move by authorities to give protection on highways for export-laden covered vans can only have a very limited success, given that thousands of such vehicles actually ply on various routes every day. The problem is one of both logistics and timing as escorts will change from district to district.

Any failure in coordination between the various district police forces will inevitably put such convoys at risk. It is little wonder that many bus and van owners have expressed anxiety over such plans. And it is not only that exports are threatened by the continuation of violence but the fact that inter-district buses are offline means thousands of passengers cannot communicate among the districts. That goods laden foodstuffs cannot get into Dhaka is sending prices in wholesale and kitchen markets on an upward spiral. In all, these are warning signals for the economy as a whole. Ad-hoc measures cannot normalise conditions. That can only be ensured if the political mercury is lowered in consideration of the primacy of the economy.

Reopening of Shela Route

How are the concerns to be allayed?

WE are concerned over the government's decision to reopen the Shela route defying the recommendations of environmentalists and UN experts following the spillage of 358,000 litres of furnace oil in the Sundarbans area.

We have noted with increasing apprehension the authorities' lackluster attitude towards the protection of the Sundarbans prior to and since the oil spill took place and spread over a vast area of the largest mangrove forest in the world, endangering its flora and fauna. The decision to reopen the Shela route, in spite of opposition from the Forest Department itself, signals a continuation of its refusal to prioritise the Sundarbans. The decision also violates the Bangladesh Environmental Conversation Act (2010) which prohibits the operation of commercial vessels through the forest.

Although the shipping ministry has stated that vessels will ply the Shela river in a "controlled" manner, and that no oil tanker or coastal ships will be allowed through the channel, the concerns about the extent to which this will be implemented cannot be brushed aside. The ministry also claimed that the dredging of Mongla-Ghasiakhal channel will be completed by next June. However, the fact that only 7% work has been completed so far -- the Shela route having been opened as an alternative to this channel in 2011 -- the timeframe seems overly-optimistic at best.

We urge the government to complete the dredging as a matter of top priority and ensure that no oil tanker or coastal ships can pass through the channel in the meantime. In the long-run, however, the government must prohibit the operation of commercial vessels through the Sundarbans.

Democracy, dead or alive?

ALAMGIR KHAN

WHETHER Schrodinger's cat is dead and alive at the same time has been in discussion since 1935, and has led to new advances in physics and brought Nobel Prizes for some scientists. The Nobel Prize can be hanging now over the heads of our great political leaders. We already have a Nobel Prize for peace thanks to Professor Yunus. Rabindrnath Tagore gives us the satisfaction of having a Nobel Prize in literature. But we have nothing in physics. The year 2015 has started with the possibility of our national leaders bagging one. Their contribution is the theory that democracy can be both dead and alive at the same time in our quantum world of politics. The Nobel Committee can define it as a discovery in physics because there are many things, such as party-men with *lathis*, arrest, throwing bricks and other exercises -- which are purely physical, not theoretical at all.

Awami League celebrated January 5 as a Day of Saving Democracy and the BNP observed it as a Day of Killing Democracy. Now this is Schrodinger's paradox: whether democracy was saved or killed this day last year in Bangladesh. Schrodinger's cat is in the same state at the same time while it is in the box. But whenever someone opens the box and peeps into it, the cat is in only one state, either dead or alive. In our case, when Khaleda Zia and her disciples look into the box democracy is in, they find it dead for a year. But when Sheikh Hasina and her disciples look, they find it alive and kicking for a year. Can it be both at the same time? An English daily editorial of January 7 denies it by saying 'democracy in Bangladesh' is neither alive nor dead.'

In whatever state democracy is in Bangladesh now, it is more or less injured. Democracy is not something to make fun of. It must not be something like Schrodinger's cat put into a box, which looks like one thing to one leader and another thing to another. They should give relief to people by neither celebrating nor mourning the day on their own. Let common people have some say about it.

The writer writes on theatre, education and socio-political issues.

MODI INVITES OBAMA TO REPUBLIC DAY CELEBRATION

Redefining Indo-US relations

BOTTOM LINE



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

and his critics.

He wants to show that India under his leadership is not trapped in the ideological moorings of the past. Most significantly, Modi is giving every indication that he has no time for the meaningless rhetoric of "non-alignment." He will work with anyone and everyone to secure Indian interests, the most important of which for him is to take India on the path of economic and military power. His main objective is to project India, which can play a key role regionally and globally.

When Modi became the prime minister, people normally expected that he would keep American leaders/officials at arm's length because he was denied visa for the US while he was the chief minister of Gujarat. The opposite, however, has now occurred. That means he can ignore his personal grudge for his country's interests.

Why did Modi take this pragmatic step?

First, India and the US seem to be natural allies, both are large, multi-ethnic and religiously diverse nations that embraced democracy after colonial rule. India and the US grew closer than any other time in their history during the tenures of both President Bush and President Clinton.

Second, India realises that without American cooperation and technology, it cannot progress economically and become an economic power in Asia.

Third, nuclear power is the fourth-largest source of electricity in India after thermal, hydroelectric and renewable sources of electricity. Nuclear energy is essential for India and the nuclear deal with the US in 2005 provides it. In 2014, India put forward an insurance plan for nuclear suppliers that is consistent with Indian liability law but does not scare away foreign private companies, including the US. India also wants to import solar and other renewable energies as well as shale gas from the US.

Fourth, terrorism highlights a convergence of interests of both countries in confronting this menace. India reck-

ons that it is America that can exert pressure on potential "enemies" that are likely to destabilise the country's stability from within and from the region. Furthermore, large Asian Pacific countries such as Indonesia, Japan, Australia and South Korea are keen to engage India and the US on security issues.

Fifth, India's size, population, skills, resources and potential can make a major contribution as a "global partner" with the US, whose goal is to fashion a comprehensive strategic partnership in South Asia and South East Asia. India's role in the Asia Pacific region stands to be one of the most important new developments over the next decade in the context of a Trans-Pacific 21st century in which the rise of Asia has already started.

Sixth, another area is ripe for enhanced defence cooperation. Modi has highlighted the need to modernise India's armed forces and the US can play a significant role in helping to fill Indian defence requirements.

Finally, Modi is aware that India with its huge potential economy and manpower has the ability to maintain an independent foreign policy by promoting its closer ties with Russia, European Union and the US at the same time.

The invitation to President Obama by Prime Minister Modi seems to be redefining the terms on which India is likely to engage with the world in the coming years. Pragmatism coupled with a more confident assertion of Indian interests is likely to be the hallmark of his government. He has reached out to China, Japan, Australia,



Myanmar, Israel among other countries, and will, reportedly, visit Germany and the United Kingdom in near future. It is remarkable that in just eight months into office, the US president, the Russian president, and the Chinese president visited India.

Indian analyst Raja Mohan writes: "Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to invite Obama, and the American president's acceptance reveal the scale and scope of the mutual understanding that appears to have emerged out of the meeting between the two leaders in September... Over the next two months, Delhi and Washington will have the opportunity to clinch a broad set of ambitious agreements -- ranging from defence and counter-terrorism at one end to economic agreements at the other."

While India's strategic partnership with the US is welcome to most of its territorially small-sized neighbours, apprehension emanates from stresses when they are not sure of their position in the new geopolitical environment and how such close India-US relations would impact them and their foreign policy.

The writer is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

Controlling remittance outflow to India

TAYEB HUSAIN

CENTRE for Policy Dialogue (CPD) has recommended that the government should form a committee to investigate the large remittance outflows to India. This remittance is fully legal and is sent by the 500,000 or so Indians who work in Bangladesh.

It is reported that Bangladesh stands 5th among the 15 nations sending remittances to India after UAE, USA, Saudi Arabia and UK. In 2013, remittance from Bangladesh to India was about \$ 3.716 billion. Is it not amazing? However, that is the official figure. According to other sources, an almost equal amount, if not more, is sent through *hundi* and other illegal methods.

We often hear from Indian media and politicians that it is only Bangladeshis who migrate to India and take jobs in that country. They call the illegal immigrants "vote banks," referring to some political parties that, they say, ignore the problem because of political reasons. Their allegation may be true to some extent, but what about Indians living and earning their bread in Bangladesh?

Many Indian citizens are taking jobs in Bangladesh through foreign companies, NGOs and other legal and illegal businesses. Bangladeshis generally do menial jobs in India and contribute to the economy through hard work in exchange for meagre wages, whereas most Indians are gainfully employed in attractive jobs in Bangladesh, earning handsomely and remitting millions of dollars to India.

People migrate to faraway places for a better life, and there is no harm in it. But the problem is that the Bangladesh government does not have a strict labour policy, or control over migrant labourers. No doubt controlling illegal migrant workers is not possible in a country where administration is weak and there is alleged corruption.

But what about well paid jobs in Bangladesh that foreigners, mostly Indians, take away from Bangladeshis? We have Indians gainfully employed with foreign companies, NGOs, garment sector, trading and almost all branches of business. They also have shops and business houses all over Bangladesh.

Foreigners, mostly Indians, employed in Bangladesh do not do any specialised job but ordinary administrative work in all levels, for which there is no shortage of Bangladeshi candidates. For example, why does a British

company need to appoint an Indian as a clerk or a junior level officer when there are many qualified people in the country who can do that job perfectly well? Does not Bangladesh need to control this? But how? I can give examples from Sweden and explain how the country overcomes such problems.

Generally, no job in Sweden is given to a foreigner when a candidate with proper qualification that the job demands is available in the country. However, there are always exceptions for highly qualified jobs. In such cases, any EU citizen (and sometimes anybody) can apply, and the best one is given the job as per the EU directive. Nevertheless, it is normal that the Swedish candidate is favoured most of the times and gets the job. What is most important is that anybody working in Sweden (and in most EU countries) must have work and residence permit. Thus, the government knows how many foreigners work in Sweden and how many of them have residence and work permit. It is a way of checking illegal immigrants and maintaining full control over the job market.

Bangladesh can control its job market by careful planning and introducing "Work and Residence Permit" for foreigners. For example, if an Indian company needs a junior officer let it bring him from India with proper documents indicating that he is an Indian citizen and the company needs the person for a particular skill s/he possess. The company may not bring and hire someone from Singapore or Sri Lanka when such a skilled person is available in Bangladesh. A foreign company has a right to bring and employ people from the mother country, but employing a person from a 3rd country must not be allowed. Thus, Bangladesh can obtain many attractive and well-paid jobs for its citizens. The basic idea of foreign investment is for generating jobs, but if those jobs are taken away by foreigners what is the need for foreign investment?

Controlling foreign workers in Bangladesh is an utmost necessity for protecting Bangladeshi job market for Bangladeshi people. In our economy can we afford to offer jobs to foreigners when we don't have jobs for ourselves? I am not suggesting making Bangladesh an "Iron Curtain" land, but we must do something that can safeguard job interest of our people, especially when the employment situation in the country is so appalling.

Sent from Sweden.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Let's clean up the country



This letter is in reference to the news "When system fails" published in TDS on January 4, 2015. It was so heartening to see the volunteers cleaning up the streets being frustrated by the authorities' oblivion. I really hope others will learn from them and develop a civic sense and stop throwing rubbish and litter everywhere. Not littering the streets is half the battle won. Cities in all our neighbouring countries are cleaner and well taken care off than ours.

Thanks to the volunteers for their work.

Aminur Rahim
New DOHS, Mohakhali
Dhaka

Thanks to Ferdous Imam and her family

Bangladeshis are generally not known for expressing 'thanks'. Oh yes, they say it with their eyes, with their smiles, but somehow they feel they might choke on the words to speak them.

Writing a letter of thanks via a national newspaper is thoughtful, courageous and an exception to the rule. And to you, Ferdous Imam, I sincerely thank you and your family for having done that for your kind thoughts directed to me. (Ref: TDS 3rd Jan. 2015). I am overwhelmed. I firmly believe that if a person believes in what they are doing and is self-motivated enough, they can achieve anything, despite the obstacle course that impedes their progress. It is a well proven fact that corporal punishment in schools is singularly the greatest deterrent to the development of a child and not only is it not necessary, totally ineffective, but it is very harmful. It is the child abuse that robs them of their self esteem, belittles them, steals their Godly child qualities bequeathed to them at birth that often ruins them mentally or physically or both for life. How any Bangladeshi parent can claim to love their children and allow the good (the Godly qualities) they love in them to be beaten out by ignorant 'teachers' is way beyond my comprehension.

The education system of any country is the foundation on which the nation is built. While corporal punishment is allowed to continue in the classroom, Bangladesh will never reach its true potential - impossible! The damaged children of today are the broken adults of tomorrow. It pleases me greatly, Ferdous Imam, to read that you and your family members are happy and I thank you for the bouquet of thanks presented to me.

Sir Frank Peters
Gulshan, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Dr Kamal for national unity to overcome political standoff," published on January 4, 2015

Dev Saha

These two parties are totally incompatible to sit down and talk.

Kamrul Manir

Dr. Kamal Hussain should be heard by the police. Article 37 of our Constitution ensures the citizens of their right to assemble. Only for public health and disciplinary reasons it can be restricted. There is no law to ban the assembly and police has no authority to disallow any meeting.

Binodbangali

Law and order is primarily handled by police but obviously the incumbent government has the ultimate say.

"Khaleda at office, police outside" (Jan. 4, 2015)

Dev Saha

Please let her come out and exercise her rights. How can this be good for democracy?

"Shelter, education for all children" (Jan. 4, 2015)

PlainSpeaker

It is very much possible if the leadership of the country is honest and wants it sincerely.

sirajulmo@yahoo.com

Congratulations to our PM for this wonderful step. Children are our assets and we should not let them ruin. Educating children means getting a better nation.