

Saudi Arabia to lift 7-year ban

A welcome move

SAUDI ARABIA will lift a seven-year ban on the recruitment of Bangladeshi workers is undoubtedly good news for Bangladesh and for thousands of aspiring overseas job-seekers. It is even more encouraging that the Saudi government has pledged to bring down the cost of recruiting Bangladeshi workers to the kingdom dramatically and allow private companies to hire Bangladesh nationals.

Saudi Arabia, which remains the largest manpower market for Bangladesh, recruited about 150,000 Bangladeshis each year until 2008. But following the ban, allegedly for malpractices in the recruitment system, the annual average of recruitments came down to around 10,000. With the lifting of ban, new and hopefully improved opportunities will be created for intending migrants. It has been stated that both the Bangladeshi and Saudi governments would work together to build the capacities and skills of Bangladeshi workers and equip them with relevant knowledge of labour laws and work culture of Saudi Arabia. This, if implemented, would certainly make our workers more competitive in the Saudi market, enable them to take better-paying skilled jobs and reduce the likelihood of being exploited by their employers.

Last year in February, in another welcome move, the Saudi government declared that it would allow Bangladeshi workers who did not get their iqama renewed to shift sponsorship to another employer without previous employer's approval.

We congratulate both the governments for their commitments. As we work together to facilitate a cost-effective and transparent recruitment process, we should also attempt to further streamline practices which tended to limit workers' flexibility and impinge on their rights.

Journo brutalised by cops

A most condemnable act

THE way the Dhaka University correspondent of the New Age was beaten up by a police ASI and his group on Sunday seems that the law enforcers apparently had a grudge against him which they vented, in a manner that required the victim of their brutality to need medical attention. Reportedly, the police assault on the said journalist started when he was apprehended on the road which continued all the way to the police station and, for quite sometime, after he was hauled inside the police station.

The reason why the said journalist, who happens to be a student of the university also, incurred police wrath was that he wanted to record in his camera the police violating the very rule that they had introduced recently, and which they were supposed to enforce, i.e. the rule prohibiting pillion riding that the said ASI was indulging in.

We condemn the action in the strongest possible terms. Even if the said journalist had erred in observing traffic rules, as the police allege he had, he could have been proceeded against under the existing law. Why must a citizen be physically tortured by the police? And the journalist was tortured in the cruelest manner, going by the report. Why should a journalist be prevented from performing his duty?

This not an isolated case; such police cruelty occurs more often than not with no room for the victim to seek redress. We believe that unless the errant policemen are taken to task for their gross highhandedness such behaviour will continue in the future.

The fictionality of the petrol-bomb thrower

ADNAN MORSHED

I have long thought about what motivates a petrol-bomb thrower in Bangladesh. Who is this person? What kind of social background and/or economic class does he come from (I am assuming this is a man, though there have been recent reports of female bomb makers at home)? What is his occupation? Is he driven by political ideology or money? Or, both? How does he fare in the job market? Is he unskilled and desperate to earn some money by clandestine means? Is he a naïve political cadre? Is he a religious fanatic? Is he brainwashed? Is he a heartless anarchist who has no understanding of his tragic infliction? Will his violence on behalf of someone somewhere be rewarded with political favours in the future? Is he merely a dispensable and despicable foot soldier at the wretched bottom of the political pyramid?

After his "successful" operation, where does he go? Who does he meet with after his action? Does he ever come in contact with the beneficiary or beneficiaries of his cruel action? Does he even care to know who the beneficiaries of his violence are? How does he feel seeing the devastating effects of his surreptitious action? Does he feel any compassion or remain unaffected seeing burnt bodies or the screaming kid whose body is 80% burnt?

Who is he really? Could you profile him please?

This was my plea to friends on the social media.

While seeing the burnt bodies of innocent people is heart-wrenching, it is also important to know who the perpetrator of this type of calculated violence is. The answers that I received wove a tragicomic tapestry of anxiety, lament, opportunism, the-nation-is-held-hostage-by-corrupt-politicians fatalism, and they-did-it-first, so-they-do-it-now justifications.

The petrol-bomb thrower is an anonymous figure. He works with stealth. He is like an apparition who disappears swiftly after he hurls his cheap but deadly weapon of mass destruction. Nobody seems to know him. Actually no one seems interested to know him. As we barely see any follow-up report in the media, it is safe to assume that the police or the intelligence personnel hardly undertake any forensic investigation of the planned violence of this faceless killer. So, what we get is only news of burnt buses, burnt trucks, burnt bodies, and, ultimately, our own conscience at the burn unit. Maybe the public doesn't know that the police know who he is. Who knows?

What happens in the wake of burnt bodies is equally problematic. First, we

routinely read about scorched bodies in the newspaper and show our sympathy from a safe and sanitised distance.

Second, and more crucially, we are treating the figure of the petrol-bomb thrower like a fiction, as if he can exist only in our imagination or we can craft him to suit our own political interests. Instead of demanding from the government and its law enforcement agencies dogged pursuit and prosecution of this invisible terrorist (and his patron), most of us are projecting our own impression of who the petrol-bomb thrower is or might be. And, by indulging in the presumed fictionality of this real killer, we are morally complicit in his violence.

The petrol-bomb thrower has many faces. To one group, the opposition party hires paid mercenaries who wreak havoc in society and strike fear at the very heart of the nation's body politic, thus undermining the government's power to rule. Another camp thinks that the devil with the Molotov cocktail is a covert agent of the ruling regime, whose nefarious work would show that the opposition party doesn't care about the people, even

than setting passenger-filled buses ablaze and "it is the best way to draw the attention of the government." Some think that he is a religious fanatic who is just carrying out an outsourced work, although on behalf of multiple parties with a shared political agenda. According to another group, he is an opportunistic fundamentalist who wants to create a dysfunctional society which can return to peace only through its "ISISisation."

Some think abject poverty dehumanises the lowest rung of the food chain and produces monsters that kill with calculated nonchalance and even pleasure, as most grittily depicted in Fernando Meirelles' *City of God* (2002), the brutal story of gun-toting favela boys in 1970s Rio de Janeiro.

Some claim the petrol bomber is the inevitable consequence of a long patronised partisan cadre culture, rooted at the party-based occupation of university dormitories. To some, he is the epitome of a morally bankrupt and ungovernable society. He is an infernal symbol of the lawless city. He is a disenfranchised,

equally elusive higher monster. He is a delusional miscreant who thinks that his violent insurgency would one day be rewarded by someone high up in the party's chain of command.

However, all of these are projections. They seem to suggest that there is no single typology for the petrol-bomb thrower. His presumed indeterminacy and invisibility provoke the imaginations of his many-faced evil persona. Many of us opportunistically and strategically imagine who he is only to claim the legitimacy of our own narrow political beliefs.

Ultimately, we shouldn't care who he is. We should want him captured and brought to justice, exemplary justice. In the process, his patron or patrons should be exposed. Only in this way can we create a rational culture, a culture in which we can reason rather than taking self-fulfilling partisan positions, while people die senseless deaths. Profiling him is fine, as long as it leads to his arrest and prosecution. Burning innocent people on the bus has always been wrong and will always be wrong. Finding tit-for-tat justifications, or any justifica-



when they meet their tragic ends. Another recalcitrant group justifies the action of the bomb thrower by claiming that he is a desperate political functionary, who has no other means left for his (and his patron's) political survival other

unskilled, and unmarketable urban youth who got sucked into a profitable yet self-destructive political cul-de-sac. He is a slumdog millionaire, always available for hire to carry out incendiary operations. He is an elusive monster working for an

tion whatsoever, for his killing mission is morally wrong.

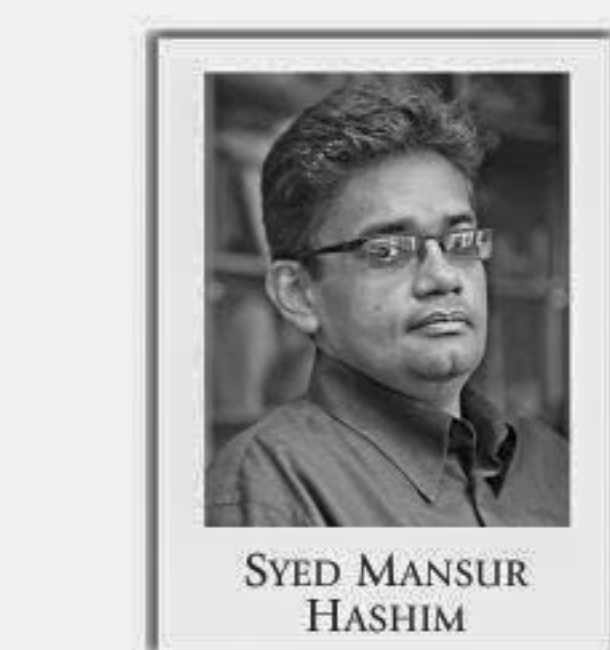
The writer is Associate Professor, School of Architecture and Planning, the Catholic University of America, and author of *Oculus: A Decade of Insights into Bangladeshi Affairs*.

Ganging up on the Germans

THE common currency Euro is in a bit of a mess. Ever since the austerity measures were introduced, southern European nations in the European Union (EU) have had to swallow the bitter pill of 'austerity.' Social benefits took a hit and thousands lost their jobs. Unfortunately, such bleak measures have not worked out too well for countries like Greece, one of the countries that are hammering for debt cancellation. Germany, the strongest economy in the Union is now under collective fire for having pushed the "austerity agenda."

It is interesting to note that according to some international media outlets that Germans apparently never wanted to be part of the Euro! Whether that is true or not we will probably not know unless put to a plebiscite. Despite the safeguards, checks and balances put on governing the Euro: "Fiscal and monetary transfers between nations were specifically banned, and rules were put in place that would supposedly ensure fiscal discipline. None of them has proved equal to the task, and none of them is ultimately compatible with a single currency that actually works."

Like the United States, Europe too has resorted to printing its way out of recession, a move strongly opposed by Germany's Bundesbank. The number of countries that have been openly critical of German policy started with the Greeks and now joined by Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England, which has openly attacked the policy. Ironically, Britain is not part of the 'Euro' regime. Besides the Greeks, the



Spaniards and Italians are not too happy with Bundesbank either. To top it all off, a win by the "We Can" in Spain to Syriza's victory in Greece isn't going to help the German blitzkrieg.

As pointed out in the *Economist* article 'Charlemagne: Greece and its discontents:' "The ascendancy of Syriza is spreading political fears in two related ways. The first, much fretted over in Berlin and Brussels, is that Greece's euro-zone partners may feel obliged to offer Mr. Tsipras goodies as a 'reward' for his victory, weakening the hand of reformers in other countries. Such concerns may indeed mean that Mr. Tsipras finds it harder than his predecessors to win concessions. The second is that his victory will embolden Podemos and similar parties elsewhere. Spain and Portugal hold elections later this year; Ireland no later than April 2016. Today polls suggest that the anti-austerity parties will do well in all three." What we gather from the article is that voters across the union are disenchanted with mainstream parties to deliver them from the Euro crisis and are increasingly willing to vote for, what had hitherto been common understanding "fringe" parties. So where does that

leave Germany? If things continue the way they have been, the Euro may well be doomed.

With so much haggling going on what works and what doesn't, it will be interesting to see how Germany plugs the hole in the Eurozone. As pointed out by *The Telegraph* in a recent article "From the start of the crisis it has been obvious to all dispassionate observers that it can only really end in two ways. Either the eurozone must move rapidly towards the sort of transfer union which Germany has spent the last 15 years resisting, or it must be reconstituted in more sustainable form that is the monetary separation of Germany and its satellites from the less competitive south, arguably including France. European elites have been in a state of denial about this choice, with their response to the crisis characterised by grudging incrementalism. There are too many egos, too many careers and too much vested interest bound up in it all to admit reality."

Rather a gloomy picture. But there it is. With Greece and Spain going radical left with support from unlikely allies on the far right, it will be interesting to see whether Eurozone will survive in the long run. And anti-austerity policies being hugely unpopular in economies less advanced than Germany's, the ones who have been hardest hit by policies perceived to be formulated largely in Berlin will find no favour and the people of these countries will be looking for someone to blame.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Efficient traffic management system needed

I fully endorse the sentiment expressed by the writer, in his piece "Remembering Zaglul: Not a requiem but a will to remedy needed" published in TDS on January 30, 2015. He mentioned our failings as "It is our misfortune....." I would like to say that is the dominance of corruption and unwillingness to create an efficient system that is the root cause of the problem. Instead of issuing license to untrained and incompetent drivers in exchange of money, license should be issued properly. If the minister fails to remove unfit vehicles from the roads then he should resign. It must also be looked into why police turns a blind eye to the traffic rules violations.

In order to have an efficient traffic management system, the city corporations, R&H, police and BRTA must work under one umbrella.

Bazlur Rahman

Uttara, Dhaka

Do our lives matter?

On 16th January, 2015, a second-year student of East West University was killed under the wheels of a covered van in the capital's Badda area. She was returning home from Baridhara on a rickshaw with her classmate.

This type of tragic road accidents is pretty common in recent times because of recklessness of the driv-

ers and lax traffic control. I urge the authority concerned to create separate lanes for rickshaws and bicycles on the busy roads. I believe

"NO GAS, POWER IF BLOCKADE CONTINUES," PUBLISHED ON JANUARY 31, 2015

Bangalee1971

Awami League owns the country. Therefore, they can do whatever they like.

Commander

When others suffer for her, she also deserves the same.

"CALL OFF BLOCKADE FOR EXAMINEES' SAKE" (JANUARY 31, 2015)

New Generation

Throwing petrol bombs at innocent people is a heinous crime as is staying in state power unethically with 5% vote. So, we do not know who is more responsible - but for the sake of general people's life and property, the stalemate requires to be resolved immediately.

A typical Bangladeshi

It's interesting to note how The Daily Star is pleading the BNP-led alliance for withdrawing the blockade when the answer is in the hands of the government.

that would reduce the number of rickshaw and heavy transport collision. Also, our request to all drivers and rickshaw pullers to obey the traffic rules while driving on the road. Accidents can take place any time but if the rules are followed properly, it can be reduced.

Md. Towfiqur Rahman

East West University



PHOTO: STAR

Save the innocent people

BNP-led continuous blockade is going on throughout the country and there is no sign of returning to normalcy. More than 40 innocent people have already died, many more are struggling for life in the burn unit of different hospitals. The government and law enforcers have failed to control the situation. They are only giving empty threats to the unknown anarchists but there is no sign of improvement. The real culprits are out of reach, moving freely on the streets and hurling petrol bombs on innocent people.

The government is unable to give us security. It is indifferent to brutality; it just wants to cling to power. Nobody is paying heed to the call for dialogue. We, the common people want peace and security. We want to go to our workplace and return home without the fear of becoming victims to petrol bombs.

Md. Ali Akbar

Tejgaon