

# THE HOME MINISTRY DIRECTIVES ON CHT AFFAIRS

## Big brother is watching you

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

In free and independent Bangladesh, the government has essentially ordered the suspension of basic rights and imposed special restrictions on people's speech, movement and association for an indefinite period in a particular part of the country.

If you work on *adivasi* rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in some capacity, you may be familiar with an uncanny feeling that you are being followed. That your steps are being monitored, assessed and filed away for future reference, that your conversations with *adivasi* communities and leaders are being *overheard*. Initially, you try to shake off this feeling thinking that you are being paranoid, but soon this eerie impression becomes a part of the way you interact with the people and civil and military administration in the CHT. You know that you may be stopped, interrogated, asked to declare your identity and purpose of visit, and even threatened by various powerful quarters at any moment, without any real justification, and that if they do so, there is likely very little you can do.

You need no longer wonder who's following you, because according to a recent government order, if you are visiting the CHT and want to work with or talk to local *adivasi* communities on any issue, you will be *required* to "ensure the presence of local administration and the military/BGB", so that your conversations can be duly supervised and censored by the government. This means that indigenous groups cannot seek support or advice, voice demands, challenge government poli-

cies or even share their life experiences with civil society watchdogs, academics, journalists, development practitioners and other national and international organisations, without surveillance and fear of severe repercussions. But does this also mean that if I were to visit my friend M. Chakma (name not disclosed for obvious reasons) now living in Rangamati, I won't be allowed to talk to her without an officer present? The report further dictates that "check-posts at the entrances of the CHT will be made more active." Let's take a moment to allow all that to sink in: in free and independent Bangladesh, the government has essentially ordered the suspension of basic rights and imposed special restrictions on people's speech, movement and association for an indefinite period in a particular part of the country. Incidentally, there are no restrictions on visitors talking to Bengali settlers in the area.

The order, signed by State Minister of Home Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, and dated January 18, 2015 charts out 11-point decisions on CHT affairs that are, for the most, part unconstitutional, undemocratic and in sharp contradiction to the CHT Peace Accord 1997. If previously foreign nationals had to inform the district administration of their visits, now they must seek permission from the Home Ministry a month in advance. Permission will be granted, states the report, only upon "receipt of

a positive report from the intelligence agencies under the Home Ministry." In addition, foreign nationals will have to declare their arrival and present their travel itinerary to the Deputy Commissioner/Police Superintendent. And of course, they will then be shadowed throughout the visit by officials. If the rest of Bangladesh is accessible to foreign nationals with a visa, why must there be special provisions and systematic surveillance of foreigners visiting the CHT? If the move was to ensure 'security' for foreigners, then why would they have to go through a vetting process by intelligence agencies and inform a month in advance?

The report further states, "Other law-enforcing agencies will have to coordinate their work with the 24 Infantry Division who are responsible for the overall law and order enforcement in the CHT." This essentially means that the military will continue to be superimposed on the civil administration there. But why must this be in an area that is NOT an operational zone, nor an insurgency-infested region? The role of the military as well as BGB should be to protect the borders, as per their mandate, not to enforce law and order. One can only deduce that the government has forgotten that it ever signed a Peace Accord where it promised to withdraw all temporary military camps from the region. Seventeen long years since "peace" was officially "estab-

lished" in the region, why would we find the military still in charge of the civil administration, in sharp contradiction to the rest of the country?

While rights groups have been advocating for mixed policing (appointing more *adivasi* and women police, for instance) for a long time in order to address communal violence and tension in the region, the directive states that, "[m]easures will be taken to carry out a phased transfer of former members of Shanti Bahini employed in Police/Ansar in the CHT." This implies that an already overwhelmingly Bengali law enforcement will be made even more ethnically homogenous and unrepresentative. This would inevitably end up serving the interests of Bengalis living there as opposed to the *adivasi* communities.

There can be no denying that the CHT has become a hostile place, not just for the *adivasi* communities, but also for those visiting and working on *adivasi* rights. Last year, the CHT Commission delegation, consisting of some of the most venerable civil society members of Bangladesh, was attacked in the presence of law enforcement members. No one was arrested. A month later, when the CHT coordinator made a personal visit to the CHT, she was again assaulted. These attacks, carried out with complete impunity, were no doubt made to intimidate them and "teach them a lesson". The

latest directives send a clear signal that the government will not tolerate dissenting presence or activities in the CHT.

The instruction to "UNDP to send a report about the implementation progress and results of the 160 million USD development projects undertaken by them in the last 10 years" is also telling in this regard. While I am all for more accountability of UN institutions, the fact that only this programme was singled out from hundreds of projects, all of which are audited, evaluated and monitored at multiple levels through similar arrangements with the government, shows that the government wants to ensure that NGO activities in the region – which are never too radical to begin with – are now further diluted down and made 'kosher'.

Instead of implementing the CHT Peace Accord, the government, which has always professed to be pro-*adivasi* and pro-minorities, seems to be taking a hard-line stance of eradicating dissent through surveillance and even arms, if necessary. The discriminatory treatment of *adivasi* communities has now reached a new height with the imposition of these restrictions on freedom of speech, movement and association. This simply cannot go on in what we claim to be a democratic and inclusive Bangladesh.

The writer is a keen follower of CHT affairs.

# KSA Lifts Ban: What Next?

DR MAHFUZ KABIR

AFTER six 'long' years, manpower market in Saudi Arabia is going to reopen for Bangladesh. It is the biggest ray of hope in the diplomatic front in recent times despite overshadowing darkness in the polity. Notwithstanding embargo since 2008, Saudi Arabia is the biggest destination of Bangladeshi manpower having about 29 per cent of 9.17 million overseas employment of Bangladeshi as of 1 February 2015 as per BMET database. It is also regarded as the most significant place for Bangladeshi skilled, semi-skilled and less skilled workers, and an important yardstick of the country's image as a labour-exporter.

For long Bangladesh has been pursuing manpower export as an alternative to accommodate its gigantic labour force in suitable domestic sectors. At the advent of the twenty-first century there have been significant changes in sectoral composition of the domestic economy that bears non-trivial ramifications for employment. Agriculture, which has long been providing the largest share of jobs for the entire labour force, has been releasing jobs fast in numbers. Industries, especially manufacturing, continued to perform impressively at a nearly double digit rate in the last three fiscal years.

Since manufacturing, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), is likely to determine jobs along with a vibrating service sector, growth of these two sectors is crucial and show positive direction. A majority of manufacturing is accounted for by RMG which is based on semi-skilled and unskilled labour, along with few others like electronics and electrical, leather, food processing, etc. However, they appear to be too feeble to absorb the ever-increasing unemployment and acute under-employment. Services are growing with many structural constraints, and therefore would not be that prospective for rapid job creation as an alternative of manpower export for international labour market.



Bangladesh is now enjoying the celebrated 'demographic dividend' as around one-third of its population is aged 18-40 years as per BBS data of Population and Housing Census 2011. A significant portion of this manpower, with training and skill-development, can be exported to promote external employment and earn foreign currency. Even though there is a debate on whether remittance is being channelled to productive sectors, this magnificent foreign exchange inflow (cumulative 135 billion US dollars since 1976) is contributing significantly to maintain a healthy reserve with a positive impact on balance of payment.

Reinvigorating the Saudi Arabian market was therefore a very high priority for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who paid a visit after resuming office and consulted with King Abdullah to relax the moratorium and resolve the issue of 'Akama.' This

achievement, owing also to positive efforts by Saudi diplomats, provides fresh impetus to the dynamics of manpower export of the country.

Middle East is not only the prime destination for Bangladeshi manpower but also hosts majority of the share of short to medium term workers. Continuing good relations with major destinations of Bangladeshi manpower like Saudi Arabia and brightening the country's image are vital for the country's economic diplomacy. Among others, engagement with various unlawful and deceptive activities worked strongly behind the sanction, thereby damaging our country's image as a notable source in the international manpower market. It also paved the way to gain competitive edge for India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam and even Nepal over Bangladesh in the Middle East market for quite some time.

Jobs in Saudi Arabia are mainly short-term with specific contracts with workers returning home after the contract period's expiry.

Bangladeshi workers are employed in diverse sectors from less to skilled to professional workers. However, a hefty chunk of Bangladeshi workers is engaged in growing infrastructural development and economic diversification projects.

Since Bangladesh has got the lucrative Saudi market back with a significant reduction in the cost of migration, there is no way to let the opportunity down. Therefore, the government must effectively implement Overseas Employment and Expatriate Welfare Act 2013 to curb rampant unethical practices in the supply side and enhance service provision to workers by the Mission including regular counselling after migration. The Saudi economy is becoming well diversified with manufacturing and

construction having gigantic shares in its GDP. Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority (SAGIA) reveals many investment opportunities in transport and logistics among hubs and cities. The country is also eyeing to invest nearly 100 billion dollars by 2022 encompassing rail, road, air and sea port, and supportive logistics with a massive expansion of its transport sector. It is also likely to invest another half a trillion dollars in power, telecommunications and IT, waste management, commercial and residential industries, education and health sectors by this time. Thus, the country is going to offer many opportunities for Bangladeshi workers in the foreseeable days. In addition to jobs in semi-skilled and skilled categories, Bangladesh would be able to send engineers, architects, surveyors, health professionals, accountants, auditors and IT professionals among others which would contribute to remittance.

To best utilise the unfolding opportunities in Saudi market, both government and private sectors need to undertake rigorous pre-departure training and orientation regarding its law, culture, manner and etiquette, sanitation and hygiene, and Arabic and English for workers. Training should also cover overall and job-specific for semi and less skilled workers who are the overwhelming majority in proportion. Training, motivation and support must also be provided to migrants for networking and nurturing good practices.

Migrant workers are real envoys of Bangladesh to the world. Backed by mindful and responsible hands of both public and private sectors, they are on a big mission of presenting their graceful root.

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## CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS  
1 Postmark feature  
5 Play groups  
10 Perfect place  
11 Block-heads  
13 Parachute pull  
14 January birthstone  
15 First name of 34-Across  
17 "Aw, shucks!"  
18 Some horse shoes  
19 --tree (cornered)  
20 Methane or ethane  
21 Pinochle score  
22 Pole tossed by Scots  
25 Parker of films  
26 Finished  
27 Salon stuff  
28 Fellow  
29 Store giveaway  
33 Show -- (entertainment industry)  
34 February honoree  
35 Late hour  
37 Foot or furlong  
38 Said no to  
39 Shakespearean king
- 40 Body shop challenges  
41 Whirlpool
- DOWN  
1 Model sticker  
2 Sun-dried brick  
3 -- cotta  
4 Put in peril  
5 Some smokes  
6 Washington's successor  
7 Army address  
8 Languages  
9 Church topper  
12 Unwavering  
16 Get news of  
21 Chemistry class model  
22 Did a thorough search of  
23 Made use (of)  
24 Chemical solvent  
25 Hammer part  
27 Reduces to powder  
29 Group of ships  
30 Like fillets  
31 Homer work  
32 Ledger item  
36 Coq au --

*The greatest enemy will hide in the last place you would ever look.*

— Julius Caesar

Yesterday's answer

M	A	C	A	W	S	L	A	D	D
A	R	A	R	A	T	I	C	E	R
C	O	S	T	L	Y	F	I	F	E
E	M	A	I	L	R	E	D	I	D
S	A	S	S	F	I	R	I	N	G
		A	S	I	F	T	E	E	
	P	I	N	K	F	L	O	Y	D
	M	E	N	T	I	T	E	M	
A	R	T	E	R	Y	I	R	O	N
S	C	E	N	T	S	C	U	B	A
K	A	N	T	S	U	R	F	E	D
E	L	S	E	A	R	O	U	S	E
D	E	E	R	T	E	N	S	E	R

### BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker

### CRYPTOQUOTE

12-29

XDKO ZBOU, RANOU DKFVXZ XDFX INWW AI PDKKV, JBXD OKGKV F XDNADUX AI ZAVVAJ; XDK AWQ UAKZ ANX, ENX XDK UWFQ RANOU RKFV PASKZ SKVBWR BO XASAVVAJ.

-- KSBWR SBWWKV

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:  
FOOTBALL IS FOOTBALL AND TALENT IS TALENT. BUT THE MINDSET OF YOUR TEAM MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE.

-- ROBERT GRIFFIN III

### A XYDLBAAXR IS LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.