

SECOND SUBMARINE CABLE DUE NEXT YEAR

Ensure uninterrupted service

IT surely is good news for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services, as work on the second submarine cable is due to be completed in 2016. A Franco-Japanese joint venture is set to connect the country to a backup submarine cable, known as SEA-ME-WE-5, which once installed and made functional will ensure that the nation does not get disconnected as has often been the case. The fall back option apart, having a second submarine cable translates into seamless flow of data for end users. Presently, whenever the lone submarine cable gets disconnected, it plunges the country into "digital" darkness for up to eight days, an unthinkable scenario in today's globally connected world.

Although the new connection is slated to increase bandwidth up to 1,300 Gigabits per second (Gbps), there remain concerns whether users will be able to take advantage of the new speed. Given the experience with the first submarine cable, the state-owned Bangladesh Submarine Cable Company Ltd. (BSCCL) that has overseen the current submarine cable since 2008 only made 50Gbps available to customers, despite having at its disposal 200Gbps. That means 25 per cent utilisation with the rest of the market demand being met by private companies. With the market for bandwidth growing at an estimated 70 - 80 per cent per annum, questions naturally have arisen whether utilisation of bandwidth for the second cable will meet the same fate as the first. We hope not.

ONE MORE GHASTLY MURDER IN THE CITY

Curb the culture of impunity

IN a macabre attack with a hammer, a former college teacher was murdered in her apartment in the capital on Monday. The husband of the deceased and her two daughters were severely injured. This proves once again that a family is not secure even in their own home.

The victims' relatives suspect that the attack may have been related to the husband's involvement in the stock market business. The attacker, Zahir, was known to the family; so he entered the apartment with cakes and a flower bouquet, a pretence of a belated birthday wish to Sitangshu, a BRTA official and husband of the deceased. Later he brutally attacked Sitangshu and his family members and set the house on fire.

A few questions stare us in the face. The way the attack was carried out indicates utter dehumanization and insensitivity of the attacker. Secondly, due to frequent occurrence of such grisly murders, there has been a demonstrative effect of a sense of impunity on persons with a criminal bent of mind. Thirdly, it indicates the poor security arrangements in many apartment buildings.

In the current situation of prolonged political instability law enforcing agencies devote most of their energy and time to tackling oborodh and hartal related fallouts. It seems among the police the political assignments are getting priority over their regular duty of controlling crimes in the society. We urge the government to bring the murderer to book immediately and give him exemplary punishment. Let us not forget that the extremely poor rate of conviction in such crimes encourages their recurrence.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Crowd management to avoid stampede

This refers to the report, "Stampede kills 10 devotees" (March 28). In a country like Bangladesh, such incidents occur at regular intervals. What is needed is crowd management. People who visit temples should be educated on safety aspects. Coordination is also needed between temple authorities and the law enforcing agencies. We don't want any more tragedies like this.

Deendayal M. Lulla
On e-mail

"Development vs democracy"

I read with intense interest the above piece written by Fahmida Khatun published on March 30. She tried to make a conclusion drawing on the political performance of Singapore and Bangladesh during the last four decades. But my contention is that it goes far beyond.

Mr. Lee is a leader bestowed with rare qualities of statesmanship. I would like to bring forward a few of the cases just mentioned by Mr. Lee in his autobiography "From Third World to First: The Singapore Story- 1965-2000". Mr. Lee crushed highhandedly any chance of corruption. He just heard from somebody that his Minister of Work took bribe. He called that minister and told him to come with the truth otherwise he would sack him and call a press conference the next morning. The next morning the minister's body was found hanging from the ceiling fan. Mr. Lee always said that the public servants must be paid at the highest rate for similar work in the market. His view was that if the public servants are not paid enough they would resort to corruption. How right he was can rightly be traced in Bangladesh.

He always believed in high standards of infrastructure and high quality of public servants. For this he would send the civil servants to study at the best universities of the USA and UK and ensured that they returned home to serve the motherland. He ensured racial harmony. During the sixties, race riots between the Chinese and Malay communities were not uncommon but in those instances, Lee ensured justice by quickly executing capital punishment to the offenders of the Chinese race even though he himself was a Chinese. If you want to find a comparison with Bangladeshi leaders, only Sher-e-Bangla might match but others in Bangladesh will cut a sorry figure.

Bazlur Rahman
Uttara, Dhaka

The eerie sound of silence

NO STRINGS ATTACHED



AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

IT'S almost like a ritual killing that will happen every now and then. The word 'blogger' has become the most hateful word in the dictionary of religious extremists. Ironically the masterminds behind the killers and many of their supporters are themselves bloggers, blogging on their websites hate and intolerance, encouraging, applauding the idea of chopping up someone for expressing their own thoughts.

Was Oyasiqur Rahman the March target, one cannot help but wonder as we shudder at the way he was killed - with cleavers that slashed at his throat and face - a signature style mastered by these self appointed members of the moral police. Avijit after all, was the February target and symbolically slashed to death at the Ekushey Boi Mela outside Bangla Academy. What could epitomize more the notion of free speech and progressive thinking than this event held inside that particular venue?

We cannot help but think who else is in the hit list that included Humayan Azad, Ahmed Rajib Haider, Avijit Roy and now Oyasiqur. In Avijit's case what was just as appalling was that out of all those bystanders watching the killing and even taking pictures, only one brave soul came forward to help Avijit and his wife Bonya, bloodied by their assailants, and take them to the hospital. There were policemen nearby but they didn't do anything. An official probe has rejected the idea of police negligence and Avijit's father Professor Ajay Roy has rejected the probe as he rightfully considered it to be biased and therefore ineffectual. Avijit's self-proclaimed assailant Farabi has been arrested but the killers who actually carried out the assassination have not been found. One cannot help but ask - will they be, ever?

This time some individuals did come forward even though it was too late for 27-year-old Oyasiqur. But at least two of the attackers were caught, ironically by two brave transgender individuals derog-



Oyasiqur Rahman

Both killers are students of well known madrassas and neither of them even knew what a 'blog' was. All they cared was that they had been commanded by their 'hujur' - their spiritual leader that this man had to be eliminated because 'hujur' said that he was working against Islam.

atorily labelled 'hijras' and considered the rejects of society by the majority of this country's people. The so-called 'normal people' watched in silence. Perhaps there is a message in that.

Now that two of the killers have been caught the police have enough evidence to work with. Both killers are students of well known madrassas and neither of them even knew what a 'blog' was. All they cared was that they had been commanded by their 'hujur' - their spiritual leader that this man had to be eliminated because 'hujur' said that he was working against Islam by condemning an atheist's murder on social media. The police have said others besides the three assailants may have been involved in the murder - a 'sleeping cell' tactic carried out by extremist groups. We can only hope that the police and the government will make sincere efforts to catch the masterminds of these killers, failing which there is likely to be more such gruesome assassinations.

This brings us to the disturbing truth that many of our young people are being brainwashed by these hatemongering

extremists who implant ideas that have little to do with the actual tenets of religion and everything to do with twisted interpretations of faith. And we as a nation have allowed this to happen over the decades, looking the other way when such crimes have been committed. This is because when you claim you are doing something, anything, in the name of religion you are practically invincible and enjoy total immunity. Faith can be easily abused to satisfy the basest of desires - the desire to beat, kill, humiliate, grab someone else's land or just slaughter someone because you don't like how they think. It is easy to abuse religious beliefs because any kind of dissenting opinion or theological debate has been culled with the use of terror. At many gatherings even the most learned scholars sit quietly while the cleric gives his fanciful, sometimes preposterous, version of what he thinks is the most righteous way to live. They may have absolutely nothing to do with what the religious texts say but who will dare challenge him? More importantly, who really knows enough to be able to challenge him?

A few weeks ago the news of three British teenage girls running away to Syria to join ISIS and possibly marry their members sent shock waves all across the world. For us it was all the more frightening because they were all South Asian, two of them Bangladeshi. Their families say they have no clue why their daughters/sisters ran away and pleaded the UK government for their return. These girls went to good schools and came from fairly well-to-do families. So why did they choose to abandon their families and go into an unknown world from where they may never return?

There have been many such incidents of young girls and boys all over the world becoming radicalized, joining extremist groups and carrying out deadly missions that include suicide bombings and premeditated killings of targets considered opponents of the ideology preached by those groups.

Somehow, somewhere, we are doing something wrong. Families are supposed to be nurturing, instilling good values in their young. Religion is expected to make people better, kinder, more tolerant human beings. It is these ideals that attract people to embrace a religion - because they want to be better persons and so that they can help their fellow human beings. That is what most major religions of the world have been based on.

We do not know how the killers of Oyasiqur have been brainwashed into being so cold-blooded, inhuman and devoid of moral conscience. Many of us may not endorse the opinions of Oyasiqur or Avijit or any of the other bloggers/writers who have been systematically assassinated. Some of us couldn't care less what their opinions were. But if we are to claim ourselves to be human beings we must all be united in our condemnation of the idea of taking another life because of a different point of view.

The writer is Deputy Editor, Editorial & Op-ed, The Daily Star.

No place to belong

THE UNWAVERING PERSECUTION OF ROHINGYAS

NAHELA NOWSHIN

THAI authorities detained 76 migrants including six suspected Rohingyas in Thailand's southern Nakhon Si Thammarat province on Monday. The group is said to have been heading to Malaysia in search of work. In January, a group of 98 suspected Rohingyas were also found in pickup trucks in southern Thailand.

In a controversial move, Myanmar's government revoked temporary voting rights of people holding identification cards seeking citizenship after President Thein Sein declared on February 11 that said ID cards will expire on March 31, 2015. Presidential office director Maj. Zaw Htay said that the government's decision "automatically annuls the right" of temporary residents holding "white papers" to vote in the upcoming constitutional referendum. White card holders are now required to hand over their cards by May 31. The white papers were introduced in 2010 by the former military junta to allow non-citizens such as the Rohingya and other minorities to vote in a general election.

The Rohingya, one of the most persecuted minorities in the world, are internationally recognised as de jure stateless. The ethnic Muslim minority is denied citizenship under the country's military-drafted 1982 Citizenship Law. Sectarian violence and statelessness have resulted in structural impediments to progress for the Rohingya because of a lack of access to basic necessities, and restrictions on their freedom of movement and discrimination stemming from long-standing discrimination and repression of the minority.

CONFLICTING NARRATIVES

Moshe Yegar, heralded as an authority on the history of Muslims in Myanmar and author of "The Muslims in Burma", traces the origins of the Muslims of Arakan (now known as Rakhine) back to the ninth century when Muslim seamen first reached lower Burma and Arakan. According to Yegar, events such as the Mogul invasion, Burmese invasion and WWII which saw large-scale transnational movements of Muslim populations, played an important role in shaping the demography and politics of future Arakan. Today, the Arakanese Muslims call themselves Rohingya.

The other narrative, mainly driven by Buddhist nationalism, within Myanmar is that modern day Rohingyas are descendants of colonial-era (1820s) immigrants from Bangladesh. This dominant narrative has been challenged by

many sympathetic to the Rohingya cause. One of the claims that refute this narrative is Francis Buchanan's (a surgeon with the British East India Company) firsthand account of travelling to Myanmar in 1799 and meeting with native Muslims who called themselves "Roinga," indicating the presence of self-identified Rohingyas years before British rule.

POLITICISATION OF IDENTITY, RACE, RELIGION

For years, people of Arakan were known as Rakhines until some started being referred to as the Rohingya because of linguistic differences. Soon, the politicisation and dichotomy of the two identities ("Rakhines" for the Arakanese Buddhists and "Rohingyas" for the Arakanese Muslims), the foundations of which were laid in the colonial-era, led to the continued subjugation and statelessness of Rohingyas.

Changes in the demographic composition in the 1960s and 70s in Arakan due to large numbers of Buddhists migrating eastward provided the Myanmar government with the opportunity to use divisive tactics of race and religion to consolidate support. The government blamed the demographic transition of the declining number of Buddhists on illegal migrations from neighbouring Bangladesh. To make matters worse, in 1976, an alleged coup involving both Arakanese Buddhists and Muslims failed to come to fruition. Fearing the increased likelihood of an armed rebellion by Rohingyas residing in villages, the government forced the migration of more than 150,000 Rohingyas into Bangladesh by mid-1978.

The democratic movement that united the Arakanese proved to be a threat to the military regime following the end of Ne Win's rule in 1988. The age-old tactic of race and religion came in handy once again as the regime successfully drove a wedge between the relations of Buddhists and Muslims. The military, backed by China, cultivated an artificial racial situation in order to maintain a larger population of racially Mongoloid Buddhists in hopes of consolidating power with its "populist policies."

STATELESS TO REFUGEE

The antagonism of the local populations in the border regions towards Rohingyas can be attributed to multiple reasons including the criminalisation of the ethnic group by the police on both sides of the border. The transition of their

status from that of *stateless* to *refugee* has had severe consequences, and fuelled the militarisation of pro-Rohingya political fronts making the situation even more volatile.

Whether or not the Myanmar government is exploiting the conflict-ridden region to attract developmental funds and foreign investment by driving Rohingyas out of their homes and forcing them into physical labour has come into question. For Rohingyas, multinational companies' investments in the region and the resulting economic relationship between the Myanmar government and the international community means their plight being "doubly marginalised" - nationally and internationally.

IGNORED FOR TOO LONG

The prevailing debates about the Rohingyas' origins seem to serve as a convenient pretext that does nothing but detract from the current, much larger issues arising from their continued persecution. The failure of Myanmar's government to recognise them as citizens has prolonged their stateless status and deteriorated their condition. The 1982 Citizenship Law makes it nearly impossible for the Rohingya to ever attain citizenship; this draconian law represents one of many forms of institutional oppression and systematic denial of the minority's universal and inalienable rights.

The Rohingyas' abuse, humiliation and state-sanctioned paralysis have become normalised. Even the use of the word "Rohingya" in Myanmar is controversial as it invokes deep fear among Buddhists that the minority may seize their homeland. The deplorable humanitarian conditions and undocumented status of Rohingyas in Bangladesh, Malaysia and Thailand among other places have been reduced to mere headlines; pro-active approaches and viable solutions for this humanitarian crisis are severely lacking. Despite there being an agreement among six South Asian countries on a "regional solution," visible leadership is yet to be seen.

The Rohingyas, although portrayed as highly disempowered (and they are on many levels), must be recognised for their resilience and strength in the face of such cruel adversity. As refugees, their skills of adaptation and determination to survive are remarkable. While the international community ignores their worsening plight, the Rohingyas continue to fight to prove their existence everyday.

The writer is a journalist.

ROHINGYA FACTBOX

RAKHINE

- Home to **80%** of Rohingyas in Myanmar
- 2012 Rakhine State riots left nearly **140,000** displaced

STATELESSNESS

The 1982 Citizenship Law

- left **810,000** stateless in Myanmar
- declared them "NON-NATIONALS" or "FOREIGN RESIDENTS"
- DOES NOT RECOGNISE** them as an ethnic minority

RESTRICTIONS ON

- Movement, marriage, childbirth, home repairs and construction of houses of worship, and other aspects of everyday life

SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATORS

- Maternal mortality stands at **380** deaths per **100,000** births in Maungdaw - double UNICEF's figure of 200 countrywide
- Prevalence of acute malnutrition in northern Rakhine state is continuously above **15%**, the emergency threshold set by WHO

NUMBERS IN EXILE

BANGLADESH
232,584

SAUDI ARABIA
450,000

PAKISTAN
240,000

THAILAND
120,000

MALAYSIA
70,000