

How many more mass graves need to be unearthed?

SYEDA ROZANA RASHID

FOR the last few days, a series of news on modern-day slave trade and human trafficking in the 'Dark Triangle' of Bangladesh, Thailand and Malaysia have been making headlines in national and international media with the discovery of mass graves in the forests of Shangkhla, Satung and Sadao districts of Thailand. The investigative reports of Asia News Network suggest that over the last eight years at least 250,000 Bangladeshis and Rohingyas were smuggled to Malaysia through Thailand. As the reports show, the fortune seekers were trapped in the vicious cycle of abuses including torture, starvation, captivity, ransoms, forced labour, and humiliating deportation. In the worst cases, they were beaten or starved to death when the perpetrators were unsuccessful in collecting ransoms from family members back home. The victims had to pay from around Tk. 250,000 to 450,000 as costs of the voyage, ransoms, charge for 'receive house', intrusion bribe to authorities at destinations and costs of repatriation.

The medieval atrocities that the victims were subjected to not only implicate a serious insult to humanity and violations of human rights, but also raise important questions as to how much we care about the safety of these people who risk their lives to make a better living through overseas employment, which in turn contributes on a large scale to the national economy.

Labour migration from Bangladesh started in 1970s when the Gulf and Southeast Asian countries experienced an economic boom. The number of migrants has increased manifolds since then, hitting a total of 8.9 million in 2014. However, little progress has been made so far to ensure safety, security and rights of the migrants at home and abroad. The dirty, dangerous and demanding jobs abroad are still reserved for unskilled Bangladeshis. Despite all the atrocities driven by rampant poverty, unemployment and underemployment, youths still find migration abroad as an assuring alternative. For many aspiring migrants who cannot meet the legal requirements, irregular migration becomes a means to overcome the obstacles and gain access to foreign employment. In effect, the mass graves have once again proven that just like the chances of a better livelihood, the risks in migration are unevenly distributed where it is the

poor, uneducated and unskilled people shouldering the greatest burden of risk.

What concerns me next are the ways in which the incident unveiled the unholy nexus between migration and human trafficking. Irregular migration of Bangladeshis is just as common as regular migration. Although it is the least desirable form of migration, many migrants consider this better than being unemployed at home. Migrants believe that if they can somehow reach their destination and get a foothold, the risk would be worth it. Evidence from Japan shows that huge wage differentials enable irregular Bangladeshi migrants to accumulate sufficient savings to start their own business after only a few years in Japan. With the closure of the Japanese labour

Teknaf and St. Martin's Island at the south-east most border of Bangladesh have become 'Malaysian airports' and safe havens for traffickers to carry out operations. The elements of deception, torture, captivity and forced labour implies these are not mere cases of 'illegal border crossing' and should not be dealt with immigration laws of countries concerned. There is no doubt that these are incidents of 'human trafficking' from both legal and occupational point of view, which should be stopped at any cost. Since irregular migration and trafficking share a grey area, my concern is that these type of incidents may severely alter Bangladesh's image from a 'labour exporting' to a 'slave trading' country resulting in huge control over our man-

a Tier 3 state as per the human trafficking index indicating its inability to punish and control the traffickers.

Within the above context, my question is how many more mass graves need to be unearthed to change our laidback attitude in the matter? We have heard our state authorities say many times that little can be done as people are desperate and the syndicate is beyond reach. Thailand has already taken the issue seriously as the EU and the USA have started threatening economic sanctions. It has sought multilateral cooperation to halt the activities of traffickers and it is high time that Bangladesh takes the issue on board. The government must carry out massive raid and anti-trafficking drives at Cox's Bazaar, Ukha,

Police brutality again!

They need a code of conduct

WE deplore in the strongest possible terms the police brutality on the activists, some of them women, who were demanding the arrest and trial of criminals who, as an organised gang, sexually harassed a number of women during the Bengali New Year.

We believe that citizens have the democratic right to vent their outrage against the onslaught on women's dignity and physical safety. The way the police swooped on the demonstrators with truncheons, watercannons and tear gas shells and indiscriminately used those on the protesting students have left us shell-shocked. We are in a state of disbelief that the police could resort to repressive measures in such a brazen fashion. Our outrage is all the more pronounced in the backdrop of lack of progress in the investigation, let alone the denial mode, on the ghastly sexual harassment incident on Pahela Baishakh.

Where there should have been a statement on the headway made on the issue, the police handled the demonstration in a way that suggested, we hope not, sweeping the matter under the carpet. Let's not forget that the police are the front face of the government and as such are expected to behave as a disciplined force that it is meant to be. The government should formulate a code of conduct for the law enforcers and apply it so that we do not have to witness such a public display of brutality, which reflects badly on credible governance.

Rice import fallout

Farmers are being deprived of fair prices

THE government has finally decided to impose a 10 percent duty on foreign rice to curb import of the grain. Needless to say this measure comes too late for the farmers and millers of the country. The high yields of Boro, Aus and Aman have become burdensome rather than a boon for the growers in the wake of massive import of rice. It has led to the plummeting of the market price of local varieties; many farmers have had to sell their crops at almost half the production cost, incurring huge losses.

The imposition of an import duty, after almost half the Boro output had already been harvested and most of it sold at a pittance, shows a lack of foresight from the government side in terms of making sure the farmers get fair prices for their crops.

With the prices of duty-free imported rice earlier on, being lower than those of local grains, markets have been flooded with low quality, cheap, foreign rice. Officials have justified this befuddling import spree, saying the low quality rice was meant for cattle. This is hardly credible in the face of the market reality of abnormally low prices of local rice varieties.

Millers and farmers have been urging the government to restrict rice imports but to no avail until now. For a government widely known for being agriculture friendly it is hard to fathom why such a policy of importing rice would have been adopted when there are bumper crops of the local varieties.

We hope the government will, through the new import duties and other measures, protect our farmers' interest.

COMMENTS

"Salahuddin in Rab custody: Khaleda"
 (May 10, 2015)

Babul Ahmed

Do not forget that your government created RAB.

"The assertive look"
 (May 9, 2015)

Abul Khan

Like many others, I witnessed the sledging episode in the Khulna Test. An arrogant Wahab Riaz came running furiously to Sarkar probably with verbal abuses (That's not sledging, by the way) when he failed to bowl him (Sarkar) out. Sarkar, rather new in Test cricket, was totally confused. However, Shakib, a veteran, did not allow it to go unnoticed. He stood his ground. Wahab did the same thing with Watson of the Australian team in the last World Cup. Some supporters of the Australian team denounced Wahab from the gallery. Wahab should have been fined more than Shakib because he was the one who initiated it. The assertive look from Shakib was necessary.

Tawhidur Rahman

Shakib did the right thing by standing up to Wahab.

"Mominul touches Sir Vivian Richards"
 (May 9, 2015)

Moin Uddin

The little genius of Bangladesh. We're proud of you and many congratulations to you.

Duvvu Ramesh Kumar Reddy

Congratulations to Mominul Haque for this great achievement! Wishing him a great performance in the upcoming matches.

SM RASHED AHMED

DEFYING all predictions of a close-run election mainly between the Conservative and the Labour Party and the possibility of a hung parliament, David Cameron's Conservative Party won an unexpected margin of victory over the Labour Party. The electorate gave him the right to lead the UK for a second term without the need for a coalition government.

Serious political analysts believe that the outcome of the United Kingdom's general election is expected to reshape British politics including the future of the UK itself.

The new government of David Cameron would be required to deal with a number of critical and challenging issues. This includes, among others, an 'in-out' referendum on Britain's membership of the EU to be held in 2017; the possibility of a renewed demand for Scotland's separation from Britain; and a rethinking on the first-past-the-post system following the political landslide victory of the Scottish National Party (SNP) which won almost all of Scotland's 59 seats with barely 5 percent of votes it got nationally. Political observers feel that the astonishing result of SNP victory points to a potential breakup of the United Kingdom.

The second term of David Cameron is most likely to be a difficult and testing time for him and the Conservative Party. The outcome of the 'in-out' referendum on UK's continued membership of EU is expected to either appease Euro-sceptic backbenchers in his party or lead to erosion of his support amongst them depending on the outcome. The prospect of the people opting for a vote "out" of the EU, though not one of David Cameron's preferred option, cannot be ruled out. In any case, even if Cameron campaigns against a Euro exit, it is felt that he would be required to placate his right wing over human rights issues.

Incorporation of EU Law of human rights into British Statutes is believed to be opposed by some senior Tories who strongly feel that this might provide foreign criminals with too many protections as UK legal decisions can be appealed in Strasbourg. David Cameron is expected to enter into serious negotiations with EU ahead of the referendum.

The landslide victory of SNP reflects the profound change in Scottish politics and underscores the swing to the SNP cause for Scottish Independence with SNP becoming the third largest party in the United Kingdom. The reason its success is attributed to its largely dedicated and innovative election campaign on social media which no other parties

could match. Many of its candidates are young; Mhairi Black, a 20-year old candidate of SNP defeated Douglas Alexander, the veteran old guard of the Labour Party, in a shocking election outcome. It is said that Mhairi Black is the youngest MP of UK in over two centuries.

The main cause for SNP's incredibly huge margin of victory is largely believed by political observers to be due to SNP's campaign thrust that Scotland is fundamentally different from the rest of the UK, socially more liberal and far more left-wing. Scotland being so different from the UK should call for its separate statehood. With the Conservatives returning to power in the UK, the push for Scottish independence is expected to acquire a renewed urgency and garner significantly greater support. If the 'in-out' referendum in the UK results in its exit from the EU, this would give much greater impetus to the movement for Scottish independence.

Significantly, the Conservatives with a single seat in Scotland would virtually become an English-only party. Clearly, David Cameron faces formidable challenge in stemming the tide of Scottish independence. He would be required to come forward with substantive proposals for devolution of powers and bolder constitutional reforms to keep Scotland within the UK. This would amount to almost a new federal United Kingdom.

It is hard to predict the complex evolution and the shape of UK's politics following the outcome of the general election. It appears that the working of the Westminster parliamentary system, based on the first-past-the post system, has important implications for Bangladesh politics characterised by recurring political crisis. It is said that this type of Westminster polity suits the genius of the British people. It is time for a

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rethinking on the nature of our polity to ensure democracy based on good governance. This should enable Bangladesh to leapfrog from the present status of a least developed country to a middle income and eventually a modern, developed one.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Rampant use of siren

I remember that I could hear only certain kinds of siren when I was a child. That was before the Liberation War. When the then governor Monayem Khan went somewhere with his entourage, we could hear the siren go off. The other siren I can remember was when an ambulance rushed to a hospital. Also, an occasional siren or the loud ringing of a bell would tell us that a fire had broken somewhere and the fire service was moving fast to douse the fire. In all these cases other vehicles and pedestrians would stop on the side of the road to make way. This is unthinkable nowadays.

My point is not to criticise the non-cooperative attitude of the people, but to know

whom to support and why. Now different departments are using sirens as they wish, sometimes even changing the sound of the sirens to create a greater impact. So, it has become very difficult for the public to know the importance of the sirens. Most peculiar are the sirens used by the police department. They frequently change the sirens while on the move. I don't know which siren means what. I doubt if the police persons themselves know.

The rampant use of sirens creates confusion. When I am thinking an ambulance is trying to move ahead, I see a police vehicle or vice-versa. I believe each department should use a unique siren so that we can understand them and support them accordingly.

Sarker Javed Iqbal
 Mirpur-2, Dhaka

Controversial ad

I am totally shocked reading the news "New York City buses must show 'killing Jews' ad, judge rules," published on April 22 in your daily. A judge has ruled that New York City's buses must display a controversial ad that refers to Muslims killing Jews. It's just another conspiracy against the Muslims in order to portray them as terrorists. Islam is a religion of peace and it must be stopped being misinterpreted.

Ripu Sen
 International Islamic University
 Chittagong



Rescue workers carry coffins containing the human remains of migrants exhumed at the weekend at an abandoned jungle camp in the Sadao district, Thailand.

PHOTO: AFP