

## Extortion on highways

### Ensure hassle-free Eid journey

WE welcome the decision to mount police vigil on highways to prevent extortion by lawmen and transport organisations during the rush Eid season. It is often seen that law enforcers create hassles by stopping transports frequently at various spots in the name of checking papers of transports and drivers only letting them off after getting bribes. It causes serious disruption in the travel schedule, leading to long tailbacks of transports. The passengers have to bear the cost of palm greasing as well as loss of travel time. Transport organisations also have a share in the booty. Due to frequent interruptions in the journeys, many resort to reckless driving to make up for the lost time which often results in deadly accidents. Consequently, the Eid journey turns out to be a nightmare for most people.

Overall, the need to plan for and cope with the huge pressure on the whole transport system during festivals is never adequately addressed. More transports should be introduced for long routes. Various transition spots particularly at Tongi, Chandra, Gazipur Konabari and Savar Bazar should be kept free of roadside makeshift structures. If garment workers were to get their salary and bonuses in good time they could plan their journey in a way that would lessen the last minute pressure. On the whole, proper coordination among the law enforcing agencies, transport organisations and other stakeholders to ensure a hassle-free Eid journey can hardly be overemphasized.

## What after the Greek referendum?

### Negotiate a sustainable solution

ON July 5, the Greek people unanimously voted "No" in the country's referendum on whether to accept the terms of the EU bailout, with a convincing 61 percent of people rejecting the austerity measures brokered by European powers. Whatever may be the merit of the argument for or against rejection of the recent bailout, there can be no doubt that the referendum was a victory for democratic expression, with the people themselves deciding their fate at such a critical moment in Greece's history. The Syriza-led government's negotiating position has certainly been strengthened by this unequivocal and unanimous mandate from its own people.

Greece now stands at a new juncture of history, one where it must decide how best to move forward and rebuild its economy. As of now, it is yet to put forward any new proposal to secure a deal with creditors, despite urgent appeals from the EU to do so. Greece must come up with a comprehensive plan before the final deadline on Thursday; it must also look inward and confront the fundamental reality of economic mismanagement of successive years that has resulted in this crisis. The EU, too, must accept the new reality of Greece's rejection of its terms, and come to the negotiating table with more lenient conditions for the country that will bolster economic growth rather than asphyxiate it further.

From outward signs, a Greek exit from the EU following the 'No' vote does not seem imminent; neither the Greek government nor the EU seems inclined towards this harsh option that would not only prove costly for the struggling nation but for the Euro zone as a whole. The time for finger-pointing is long past; we now hope for meaningful talks between Greece and the rest of EU, with both parties bringing pragmatic and sustainable solutions to the table.

COMMENTS

"WHO GETS TO DEFINE YOU?"  
(July 6, 2015)

▼

Emas Jubaer

Progressive laws and regulations are of course welcome, but it's time to dispose of social and religious taboos, it's time to introduce sex education in schools, it's time to be tolerant to others and most importantly it's time to change your mentality and learn not to be hateful to others for their sexual preferences, their looks, their religions and who they are.

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Jaba Dey

Hijras are transgender, which basically means they were born in the wrong physical body. In their mind, they are women, but they are stuck in a man's body. Bangladesh does not have the resources to help these folks, because the mental health care department in Bangladesh is woefully underdeveloped and so is the understanding of gender identity, transgender issues etc. So these transgender folks, out of desperation, join the hijra community where they can fully express themselves. Nobody enjoys a life of ridicule and derision. So, I have tremendous respect and admiration for our hijra population, because of the bravery they show in the face of such pain and humiliation, only to chase their dreams of self-expression.

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Ibrahim Zaman

But how will the government verify whether the candidate is cheating or not. Can you guarantee that males or females will never try to capitalise on this opportunity?

"Fazle Hasan Abed wins World Food Prize" (July 3, 2015)


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Tanvir Islam

Congratulations, Sir Abed, on winning this prize and putting another feather on Bangladesh's cap.

# FOR YOUR VOTES ONLY

CLEAR AS MUD



AHMEDE HUSSAIN

BANGLADESH along with some of its South and Southeast Asian neighbours presently stands at a crossroads. Nepal, after a devastating earthquake and frequent communist inflicted political turmoil is trying, albeit slowly, to get back to its feet. Bhutan is opening up, so is Myanmar (Burma). The latter is significant on many counts, for Bangladesh's immediate southeastern neighbour is rich in energy and mineral resources and its geographical proximity to China makes it a future hub of economic growth.

Myanmar, however, remains dangerously unstable. It has not yet been able to bring peace in some of its restive provinces. That, coupled with a rising Buddhist extremism across the country, makes the country a dangerous place to do business. But it will not be long that Myanmar, with its cheap labour and untapped market, will become an important economy in the region.

In fact, the region is brimming with economic activities. Thailand, Myanmar's southern neighbour is a newly industrialised economy whose US\$1.054 trillion GDP's two-third comes from export. According to Switzerland-based IMD, Malaysia's economy is one of the most competitive in the world, ranking 14th in 2015, higher than countries like Japan, United Kingdom, South Korea and Australia.

Not only the ASEAN, Bangladesh also stands at the confluence of economic growth.

Nestled between China and India, the two 'sleeping giants', Bangladesh can become a bridge between these two economies, not to mention that it can also become a future hub for ASEAN businesses. Bangladesh's entrance into the 51-member club of lower middle income economies is significant as it will help Bangladesh attract foreign investment,

not to mention commercial loan. Having said that, for Bangladesh, becoming a middle income country is still a far cry. The country badly needs to make infrastructural developments and to make that happen it can always take help of India and China. Building new bridges and highways can help Chittagong and any future deep sea ports to become a hub for China, Nepal, Bhutan and the Indian north-eastern economies to foster growth. But before the country can hurry in that direction, Bangladesh badly needs

transparent election was the caretaker system, which had been abolished by the 2008-2013 Awami League (AL) government.

Such a move from the part of the AL was indeed surprising, for the party along with the Jatya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami launched a series of violent street agitations in the mid-nineties that forced the Khaleda Zia led Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government to pass an amendment to the constitution which established the provision for a

permanent solution. The very existence of the CG is a public declaration that democracy in a country is still at its infancy and its politicians have failed to build democratic institutions.

It is true that there have always been other ways to solve the present political impasse. Of them, one, perhaps, is a power sharing proposal that Sheikh Hasina had given in 2012. Khaleda Zia refused to even talk to her AL counterpart over the modalities of the interim government, doing her part in blocking the hope of any negotiated settlement of the crisis.

Even though the AL government has successfully handled the BNP's latest spate of street agitation and the country did not witness any political violence in the last four months, the crisis is far from over. What used to happen every five years, over the transition of power, might now happen every year. The situation is terrible as it is, to make it even more grievous, infrastructural development and connectivity will not be able to bring about the desired goal if we continue to live with the danger of an impending instability. That, however, does not mean that the government should immediately resign or reinstate the CG system. As a starting point, the government can call a national unity conference at which all the important issues that the country is facing can be discussed. It can include issues such as economic development, the caretaker government, the future of war crimes trials and terrorism.



PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

to set its house in order.

The unstable nature of Bangladesh's politics and the annual spate of violence that it gives birth to is one of the biggest hurdles that the country faces before its economic progress. There is no denying that since the restoration of democracy, Bangladesh has flourished both economically and politically. But as it happens in all nascent third world democracies, power transition in Bangladesh has never been smooth as it has always been strewn with political violence. One of the major safeguards that used to exist to hold a free, fair and

caretaker government (CG) to create a level playing field in the general election.

One will not be exaggerating if one says that the abolition of the CG has opened the window before mistrust, violence and tyranny in Bangladesh's politics. It has also opened the floodgate of opportunities for anyone and everyone who wants to disrupt the country's economic development, permanently opening a fissure in the country's democratic politics. There is no denying that the CG is a stopgap measure that can never be treated as a

Bangladesh is standing at the entrance to the world of economic development. On one hand are the people of this country whose resilience has fuelled the country's economic growth, on the other are the country's squabbling politics that leads a degenerative Bangladesh. It can become the gateway to North-eastern India, Nepal and Bhutan, thus becoming a centre of growth at the heart of South and Southeast Asia. Or it can remain where it is at now—a lower middle income country and a frontier market. Bangladesh has to choose which path it wants to take.

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## Four Nations' Motor Vehicles Agreement

# Where does Bangladesh stand?

BOTTOM LINE



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

BANGLADESH, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) jointly signed a Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA) in Thimphu on June 15 and formulated a six-month plan to implement the deal, which will allow the movement of cargo and passenger vehicles among these four countries. The deal will open up the sub-region in an unprecedented scale for investment, trade, people-to-people contact which will have multiplier positive effects on the sub-region.

Transforming transport routes into economic corridors could potentially increase intraregional trade within South Asia by almost 60 percent and with the rest of the world by over 30 percent, according to experts. At present, intra-trade among the four nations is less than 5 percent while within ASEAN it is 32 percent, 50 percent within European Union, and 68 percent in the US-Canada-Mexico trade bloc (NAFTA).

The deal includes a time-table for formalisation of the BBIN MVA. The protocols are to be signed by August, preparation of bilateral (and perhaps trilateral/quadrilateral) agreements/protocols for implementation of the deal by July, negotiation and approval of these agreements by September and installation of the prerequisites for implementing the approved agreements by December and staged implementation from October.

A BBIN friendship motor rally is planned for October to highlight the sub-regional connectivity and the scope and opportunities

for greater people-to-people contact and trade under the BBIN initiative.

Many transportation experts believe that the timetable for implementation of the agreement by six months is too inadequate because existing infrastructure needs to be vastly improved and it may take not months but years.

The MVA deal is apparently very attractive but the devil is, however, in details. Certain conditions in the agreement such as cabotage restriction to transportation of goods, requirement of English or local language (Hindi, Nepalese and Bhutanese language) speaking Bangladeshi drivers and installation of vehicle tracking system would be impediments to Bangladesh, say experts.

Cabotage restriction means that Bangladeshi trucks may move to Bhutan, India and Nepal with Bangladeshi goods but cannot pick up Indian, Bhutanese or Nepalese goods on their way back to Bangladesh. That means Bangladeshi trucks have to return empty. The other two conditions, namely Bangladeshi drivers who are skilled in English or local languages, and installation of a vehicle tracking system may also be disadvantageous for Bangladesh.

The question is whether it is profitable for Bangladeshi trucks owners to use their vehicles for this purpose. Given the present scenario, it would be better to use Indian trucks for the movement of Bangladeshi goods. Observers suggest that the authorities in Bangladesh may start negotiations with the three other countries to ensure that benefits from this deal accrue to Bangladesh.

Another difficulty appears to be the easy availability of visa to these countries. Unless visa access is made easier between the countries, the movement of goods and people will be hampered.

It may be noted that sub-regional

cooperation in connectivity, food security, energy, water resources and management, cross-border terrorism and environmental degradation owes its origin to the 2011 Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development which was signed in Dhaka during the visit of former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

The preamble of the Agreement, in particular the last paragraph of the preamble, states that "cooperation at the bilateral, sub-regional and regional levels will accelerate development and enable the two countries to realise their developmental aspirations, shared destiny and common vision of a peaceful and prosperous South Asia."

In the past, India always insisted on dealing with issues with Bangladesh on a bilateral basis, even when the issue needed regional cooperation. For example, for the augmentation of the waters of the Ganges, under the 1977 Agreement, India rejected Bangladesh's proposal in the 1970s in engaging co-riparian Nepal, although the rivers in Nepal substantially contribute to the flow of the Ganges. Moreover, Nepal, India and Bangladesh are co-riparian nations of the Ganges.

Former Indian PM Manmohan Singh reportedly asserted that many of UPA's programmes were being repackaged and marketed as initiatives of the BJP government and that his successor had been a better salesperson than he was. Whatever the case may be, by signing the Framework Agreement, India has departed from its past stance of bilateralism and has finally agreed on the cooperation of sub-regional and regional level on areas such as water, energy, food security and environmental degradation.

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

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Solving train ticket crisis

Eid-ul-Fitr, one of the main religious festivals of the Muslims is knocking at the door. There will be excessive demand for train tickets this season as a large number of Dhaka's population will leave the capital to be with their near and dear ones. We have known that train tickets will be on sale from July 9, 2015. In the past, homebound people had to stay overnight at the Kamalapur railway station for collecting tickets. Hundreds of people had to leave the station empty-handed. Several thousand people suffer every year due to the mismanagement in the ticket selling system. The government should instruct the railway authorities to abide by the rules in order to prevent passengers' harassment. It should also take necessary steps to ensure that home-goers get their tickets at a fair price. Online sale of train tickets can also help reduce passenger harassment. So, we hope people won't have to face any problem in getting tickets



PHOTO: STAR

this time and will be able to celebrate this Eid without much suffering.  
Nujhat Tabassum Anna  
Business Administration Department, EWU

Project to prepare cities for earthquake

This refers to the news report, "New scheme to protect 4 cities from earthquake: WB to fund 96pc of Tk 1,381cr project". I am relieved that such an initiative has been taken at a time when people of the country feel helpless as they consider themselves unprepared to face a devastating earthquake.

I would like to suggest that building construction rules may restrict the height of the buildings depending on the severity of earthquake factor in the zone. The authority concerned should identify unsafe buildings with old structures and poor quality construction. We welcome the timely move and look forward to the implementation of the project.

M. B. Huda  
Former chief architect  
Ministry of Public Construction & National Housing  
Government of Zimbabwe