

## Barbaric torture and murder of a child

### Inhumanity unbound

TODAY, as a nation, we are ashamed of what we have become; we are ashamed of the barbarians amongst us, who find perverse pleasure in the torture and death of a child, so much so that they record the act and share it gleefully on Facebook. We have no words to describe our shock and revulsion at the heinous behaviour of the four men who tied up a 13-year-old child and beat him over a prolonged period, as the boy begged for mercy and a glass of water. A 28-minute video, uploaded by these men to flaunt their torture procedures, shows the extent of the perpetrators' monstrosity; it is so horrifying that it's all but impossible for a sane person to sit through the whole thing and witness in full the criminals' warped mentality.

The brutes allege that they were teaching the child a lesson for "stealing". Such vigilante violence is unacceptable as it is; but the sadistic nature of it, with the men jeering and egging each other on to hit harder, goes beyond "ordinary" instances of vigilante violence; it speaks of the depravity of the human soul to such an enormous extent that it ceases to be human at all.

The incident must have happened within the hearing distance of a number of people; why, we wonder, did they not find it in themselves to dissuade the perpetrators or report the act to the police?

We offer our condolences to the family of the victim, who must live with the inconceivable pain and horror of knowing how their child met his death. We demand the most stringent of punishments for these perpetrators for whom torture and murder are sadistic entertainment.

## Water management mess

### Flush it clean of corruption

AS it is, there has been a deficit of .2 billion litres of potable water in the capital and the only water treatment plant in Saidabad is unable to meet the growing water supply needs of the burgeoning city. To make matters even worse, the piped water supplied in Dhaka is not drinkable. The situation turns acute during the lean season when Dhaka Wasa provides its customers with germ-infested malodorous water. Now, thanks to a TIB-led research we know what ails this vital utility service.

It seems that the chain of control in both Dhaka Wasa and the Bangladesh Water Development Board has been in tatters. From selection procedure to issuance of work orders, both the government-run bodies have become infested with corruption. As the report finds out, Wasa employees in league with political activists have formed area-based syndicates that are virtually controlling water supply in the capital. Not only that, the BWDB officials who have been entrusted with responsibilities for the water resources do not oversee project work or report to the headquarters.

We urge the government to immediately probe allegations of corruption in Dhaka Wasa and the BWDB. Basically it is an issue of governance and should be addressed as such.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



### We need a clean city

Every day people throw tons of garbage here and there littering our own city. As a result, the environment gets severely polluted and it affects our health. Citizens must change their attitude and stop throwing garbage indiscriminately. At the same time, the City Corporation should also maintain its duties to keep the city clean. We urge our mayors to take effective steps to solve this problem. We deserve a healthy city to live in.

Farzin Haque  
International Turkish Hope School

### To all the powerful and influential people

We stepped into 44 years of victory and we claim to have achieved so much. My questions are very simple. I am an international student from Bangladesh. Bangladesh is our pride and glory. But why does my mother feel insecure when I tell her I will come back? I am sure many mothers feel the same way. Why can't girls walk freely on roads? Why is the living standard so low? Despite working so hard people are struggling. Why do mothers want to marry their daughters off early fearing for their safety? I bragged about my country with my international friends about the Sundarbans and they were so excited to visit my country, but sadly we could not even protect the world's largest mangrove forest.

Do we ever wonder why people who actually contribute to the country never get credit? Why do we keep complaining about the corrupt system but never dare to strive for change in the fear of death? Do we really have rights as a citizen to express our views? I want the answer to all these questions and a guarantee that I will be unharmed for raising these questions.

Farhana Islam  
Banking and Finance Law  
University of the West of England (Bristol)

# ARABISATION OF BANGLADESH

## An Asset, Liability or Threat?



**STRANGER THAN FICTION**

VISITORS to Bangladesh, who enter the country for the first time through the Hazrat Shah Jalal International Airport in Dhaka, might get the wrong impression about the major languages spoken in the country. Even before disembarking the aircraft, the first thing they notice is the name of the airport in bold Arabic letters on top of the airport building, along with Bengali and English on two sides. There was no Arabic sign on public buildings and thoroughfares until the late 1970s, when religion was inserted in the Constitution by General Ziaur Rahman. The introduction of Islam as the "State Religion" by General Ershad in 1988 was a big step towards further Islamisation of the polity.

However, these steps towards Arabisation and Islamisation were at best nothing more than symbolic gestures, in a country afflicted with tremendous identity crisis; and at worst politically motivated, opportunistic, and hypocritical.

Nevertheless, playing with people's religious sentiment for the sake of legitimacy by the rulers, and their appeasing the Islamist parties and individuals with Islamic symbols like Arabic signs, and Islam as "State Religion" have already backfired. Unabated cultural Arabisation and Islamisation in the long run could drag the country towards religious extremism.

Arabisation is a generic term. I define it as a process of adopting elements of Arabian culture by non-Arab Muslims and non-Muslims, in historical and contemporary perspectives. One may mention all areas of acquired habits by human beings, including religion, language, politics, law, social customs, food habit, art, attire, and music in this regard. This happened after the phenomenal rise of Islamic empires. Awe-stricken Europeans learnt Arabic and indigenised Arabic/Islamic culture – art, architecture,

philosophy, music, medicine and science – in the 9th and 13th centuries during the heydays of Arab/Islamic empires. Historians are unanimous about Arabic/Islamic contributions to European Renaissance.

We need to understand the Arabisation of Bangladesh in historical as well as in the contemporary socio-political, psychological and geo-political perspectives. Overwhelming majorities of people in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia adopted Islam and Arabised their language and culture soon after the expansion of Islam by sword, trade and other means; what is Bangladesh today is no exception in this regard. However, as Islam came here through Persianised Turco-Afghan-Iranian conquerors and Sufis, Bangali Muslims' religious beliefs, vocabulary and rituals – very similar to elsewhere in the subcontinent – have been predominantly Turco-Afghan-Iranian rather than Arabian.

However, Bangali Muslims retained their language, script and many other aspects of the indigenous Bengali culture in the wake of mass conversion. Some of them are still unwilling to give up certain indigenous/Turco-Persian rituals and beliefs – such as showing reverence to dead Sufis/Pirs, and believing in certain cults, including the *Satya Pir*, the Bangali Muslim version of the Hindu *Satya Narayan*. In sum, a syncretistic Islam evolved in Bengal, which ultra-orthodox Wahhabi-Faraizi-Deobandi-Salafi Muslims have been trying to supplant with orthodoxy, at least for the last 200 years. Their success is partial.

Thanks to the Persian influence, Bangali Muslims (very similar to Indian and Pakistani ones) often use the Farsi *khuda* and *paighambar* to denote Arabic Allah and *rasul* (messenger or prophet), respectively. Despite the ongoing Arabisation process, Farsi not Arabic is still widely used as the "Islamic language" in Bangladesh. Thus Farsi *namaz* for prayer (not Arabic *salat*); *roza* for fasting (not Arabic *saum*); *Ramzan* for the fasting month (not Arabic *Ramadan*); and *jaynamaz* for prayer mat (not Arabic *musalla*) are integral parts of Bangali Muslim vocabulary.

However, due to the patronage of ultra-conservative Arab Muslims and their local adherents in Bangladesh, sections of Bangladeshi Muslims are fast indigenising ultra-orthodox Wahhabi-Salafi ideologies, practices and vocabulary. Meanwhile, many Bangladeshi Muslim women have adopted the previously unknown, the Middle Eastern *hijab*, which is a variant of the Lebanese Catholic nuns' habit. Muslim men and women in the country are fast adopting some weird and hitherto unfamiliar Arabic expressions and Arabian practices in the name of purifying their faith.

Now many Bangladeshi Muslim children have unique (often difficult to pronounce and remember) Arabic names. Many Bangali Muslims have discarded certain old rituals during milad in commemoration of the birth of the Prophet. They have introduced new ones from the Arab World. Bangladeshi Muslims at home and abroad organise *halaqa*, religious gatherings for learning about Islamic theology from one or more speakers, followed by intense question-answer sessions, prayers, supplications and food; mostly in segregations, Muslim brothers and sisters sitting in separate chambers.

Of late, the hitherto unheard of Arabic expression, "*Allah Hafiz*" (introduced by General Zia ul-Haq in Pakistan) to bid good-bye to someone, is gradually replacing the Farsi "*Khuda Hafiz*" (May God protect you) in Bangladesh.

Appraising the Arabisation process in Bangladesh is difficult. The phenomenon is as strange as the stories of *The Arabian Nights*. One is not always alert enough to notice the changes that have already crept into the psyche of the nation – and the ongoing undercurrents of the process – in the realms of Islamic religion, rituals, and popular culture in the country since the 1970s. Sometimes the government, but mostly adherents of "Islam-loving" political parties, cultural organisations and Islamic scholars flaunt, push and glorify Arabian culture in the name of one religion. Bangladeshi Muslim workers in the Gulf countries – labourers to professionals – have also

been Arabising the popular culture in the country. Due to inadequate knowledge of Islam, neither these workers nor their relatives, neighbours and friends differentiate between Islam and Arabisation.

As Badruddin Umar has brilliantly explained in his writings, many disempowered Bangali Muslims during the British period nurtured a romantic extra-territorial loyalty towards Afghan-Arab-Iranian-Turkish lands, their language, rituals, and attire and food habit and identified themselves as descendants of "original Muslims" from outside India. Tracing one's origin to the Middle East and Central Asia or to some aristocratic families is still fashionable in Bangladesh. It indicates Bangladeshi Muslims' identity crisis and inferiority complex. Many of them still fail to identify which one is their primary identity, Muslim or Bangali.

The quest for Arabisation has some similarities with a section of the Hindu population's quest for upward mobility through the Sanskritisation process, by indigenising Brahmin culture, food habit, attire and gods in South Asian history. Although Arabisation has elements of non-Arab Muslims' quest for upward mobility, it is also an elite plan of action to politically hegemonise mass consciousness.

In sum, since the late 1970s, Muslims of Bangladesh have failed to distinguish between what is Islamic and what is Arab. Arabisation of the popular culture has become synonymous with the Islamisation process in Bangladesh. This synonymy is ominous. It has long-drawn implications for the country. Moderate Muslims, liberal/secular Bangladeshis, and the friends of Bangladesh need to understand the long-term consequences of this slow and steady transformation of the popular culture of Bangali Muslims. Cultural transformation of people is a major step towards their political orientation and makeover.

The writer teaches security studies at Austin Peay State University. Sage has recently published his latest book, *Global Jihad and America: The Hundred-Year War Beyond Iraq and Afghanistan*.

## GREEK DEFAULT

# A defining moment for Europe



**FROM A BYSTANDER**

OVER the past couple of months, a Greek tragedy has been in the making. Domsayers had made all kinds of prophecies – regarding Greece, Europe, the financial world, and the Euro. The issues are so complex that many do not understand what's going on. As the saying goes, it is all Greek to them.

On June 30, 2015 Greece was supposed to repay IMF €1.6 billion, which it did not have. Greece thus defaulted on this payment. For months the IMF, European Central Bank (ECB) and European Commission – known as Troika – have been warning Athens that defaulting on this payment would have serious financial consequences for Greece and rest of the Eurozone. Many experts predicted that payment default could push Greece out of the Eurozone.

Greece merrily borrowed since it joined the Eurozone in 2001 and used the money to create a bubble economy. It expanded its welfare spending, increased salaries, undertook non-productive development projects (e.g. Olympiad 2004) – without actually raising economic output, which brings in revenue. Massive tax dodging, pension and social security payments actually depleted its coffers.

By 2009 when Greece was drifting towards default in paying the creditors, the Troika asked Athens to go for stringent austerity reforms. Though some reforms were done the overall situation did not improve to pay off the creditors.

In 2010, the ECB had to bail out Greece, for the second time and imposed a stiffer austerity regime. Five year later in 2015, the Greek economy is in ruins. Its GDP shrunk by 25 percent, which now stands at €185 billion, unemployment rose over 26 percent, and its banks have no cash. Greece's debt ballooned to €323 billion (\$359 billion) – an unsustainable 177 percent of its GDP.

The Greek default narrative is more about politics than economics. EC leaders are at loggerheads with Athens, playing parochial politics. When the radical left Syriza party formed the government in Athens under Alexis Tsipras for the first time in January 2015, Brussels bureaucracy and European leaders were unhappy.

For the past several weeks Greece and the ECB were locked in acrimonious debates in Brussels, each accusing the other of bad faith. Greek government relations with its creditors have become nasty. When Greece asked for the third

bailout fund, Troika demanded more reforms from Athens. Tsipras accused European leaders of being autocratic and anti-democratic. Leftist Tsipras is seen in Brussels as a trouble maker. It is not surprising that most Eurozone leaders want to see his back.

For Tsipras, unless he got a substantially restructured deal, Greece will never come out of the vicious debt cycle. Talks broke down on June 26 as Tsipras refused to capitulate to creditors' demands. He called for a referendum on whether to accept the EC austerity proposal for the release of funds or reject it.

Tsipras asked his 10 million compatriots to vote 'No' to strengthen his hands

turn around its economy as the debts will continue to hang like Damocles sword.

Athens has submitted a "credible reforms" plan approved by the Greek parliament for the EU summit. The plan includes huge tax hikes and drastic spending cuts. Athens is asking for €53.5 billion with debts restructured and a three-year bailout. If the summit agrees and Troika loosens its strangle hold on Greek economy, it will be a pyrrhic victory for Tsipras, as the Greek plan is more demanding than the one ECB offered in June. Tsipras said he is "ready for an honest compromise".

There is ambivalence among European leaders on whether to pull Greece out of its cash crunch or let it fall

Eurozone is the way the euro is managed. The monetary policy of the Eurozone and the Greek Central Bank is controlled by the ECB. The fiscal policy is left to member governments. This dichotomy is a recipe for disaster. Normally the government and central bank of a country have to work in close partnership to regulate the monetary policy and fiscal policy to keep the currency stable and economy out of danger.

The 'No' vote has shaken stock markets around the world. A flurry of meetings continues in Brussels while America is concerned that a Greek meltdown may lead to upheavals in global markets. Eurozone finance ministers are currently discussing the Greek plan before the EU



to negotiate a better deal. Sixty-one percent Greeks voted 'No' on July 5. Though many said that the referendum was a waste of money and time, Tsipras needed it to renew his mandate. The result hardened the position of creditors. And Tsipras painted himself in a corner.

Tsipras's brinkmanship is unlikely to lessen Greek woes. Tsipras knows either way any deal will go against Greece. He desperately needs cash to reopen Greek banks, i.e. get the third bailout fund. If he doesn't get a viable deal, Greek banks will collapse -- meaning Greece has to quit the Eurozone, thus resulting in a Grexit.

Greece then will have to go back to its old currency – the Drachma. If this happens, Greece will take a pretty long time to

off the Euro cliff. German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is actually the main pillar of the Eurozone and Greece's biggest lender (€68.2 billion), has ruled out "agreement at any price". EC President Jean-Claude Juncker, however, said a deal can be made.

Economic theory says that austerity and growth do not go together. Eurozone is a funny place where economic theories are practiced in an upside down manner. When a country is going through depression, Keynesian theory requires that government increases investments to stimulate the economy. Cutting back investments depresses the economy further.

The most ludicrous system of the

summit meets.

The surreal drama surrounding the crisis will no doubt redefine relations among members of the Eurozone. ECB cannot afford to push Greece out of Eurozone, as that may encourage other debt-ridden countries like Portugal, Spain, Italy and even France to restructure their debts. Grexit is too chilling a thought to contemplate. It will not only weaken the Euro, European security built around Nato will also be in jeopardy, particularly when tensions with Russia are on the rise.

It is a defining moment for a badly battered Project Europe.

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary.