

Remittances bounce back

Women expatriate workers' contribution significant

UNBOUND remittance from expatriate workers in the Middle East in fiscal year 2014-15 stood slightly above US\$9 billion reflecting a rise of 8 percent from the level of previous year. The boost in remittance after a few years of stagnation is attributed to the fact that the two main foreign labour markets for our expatriate workers, i.e. Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have resumed taking Bangladeshi workers. Interestingly, we find that more and more women are travelling abroad as expatriate workers to not only the major destinations, but to new countries like Jordan as well which has hired some 12,924 women to be employed in various sectors.

Out of some 308,000 Bangladeshi workers who found work abroad during the first seven months of 2015, more than 56,000 are women. That there is a growing trend of women finding more opportunity to work in international labour markets is welcome news. Jordan, although not finding a place in the top nine countries that generate remittance from Bangladeshi workers, has secured second position after UAE in ranking for top destination where our female workers are headed. The trend should be encouraged for recruiters to break into non-traditional markets and look at sectors where there is a demand for women to be employed. With Jordan having recruited mostly women in the January-July period, there is no reason why the performance cannot be replicated elsewhere.

Primary schools in wretched state

Enrolment in Old Dhaka falling?

A report published in this daily yesterday revealed the awful conditions of Islamia UP Government Primary School in Sutrapur of Old Dhaka. Four other schools in the same area are in no better state.

To focus on Islamia UP Government Primary School, students and teachers alike fear for their safety due to its appalling condition which often leads to rainwater dripping from the ceiling and plasters falling off the walls. The recent earthquake scare has further worsened the sense of security of teachers and pupils. The school, which has only four usable classrooms left, has seen a sharp decrease in enrolment over the years due to its dilapidated condition. The number of students in 1990 was 600 whereas it now stands at a shocking 51.

That students and teachers should have to worry about their safety in an institution that is supposed to provide a safe environment conducive to learning is extremely concerning. How exactly does the government, having made primary education compulsory for children, expect a rise in primary school enrolment when schools are left badly neglected? Long-standing encroachment by influential locals upon land allocated to the institution in question has made it even more challenging to renovate the school. There we urge the administration's intervention to mitigate the situation.

Overall, we draw the attention of the primary education ministry to the lack of primary school infrastructure countrywide and the threat of land-grabbing posed to schools in order to ensure a safe and productive learning environment -- a basic right of every child. Since the underprivileged rely on government run primary schools, the authorities should be obliged to provide safe access to them.

COMMENTS

"Muhith hints at reducing fuel prices"

(August 24, 2015)

Kazi Mottakin Hossain

Those of us who have cars that run on with liquid fuel will get some relief after the implementation of this decision.

Humayun Kabir

Low fuel price encourages its smuggling to our neighbouring countries, especially India. The government should keep an eye on that.

"Road given to AL men"

(August 23, 2015)

Akash Ahmed

Don't worry! If BNP comes to power, they'll take it back from AL men and make it their own. Most Bangladeshi politicians are the same.

Saad Al Zakerin

Once I saw a cartoon in the newspaper where Khaleda Zia was giving her elder son the whole of Bangladesh as a gift; this is the same thing happening here.

Latifa

Not only roads, but also ponds, rivers, lands etc. are also given to the AL men.

Tyra

AL men don't need to be given things; they can occupy things with their muscle power.

STRANGER
THAN
FICTION



TAJ HASHMI

OF late, an influential ruling party MP has registered his contempt for the latest rounds of extra-judicial killings by the RAB in Bangladesh. Although it is evident from his statement that he is angry with the paramilitary outfit only because it has started killing ruling party "activists", yet one may congratulate the MP for speaking up against extra-judicial killings. Better late than never!

Civilised human beings everywhere consider extra-judicial killing inhumane, barbaric, and a relic of the pre-modern past. No democracy can allow this barbarism in any name or excuse. Interestingly, while the police in Britain, Australia and New Zealand either carry no firearms, or when they carry them, they keep them hidden from public view, one senior Bangladeshi police officer stated publicly early this year, "The government has armed the police not to play kabaddi with them," but to use them, he implied. This lack of respect for human life is an important factor behind all extra-judicial killings by law-enforcers in Bangladesh.

It is sad that law-enforcing agencies, which are maintained with taxpayers' money, have been engaged in extra-judicial or illegal killing of civilians with impunity. It is even sadder that initially Bangladeshis across the board started congratulating the RAB for killing hardcore criminals -- mainly killers, muggers and extortionists -- in

dubious "encounters" or "cross-fires".

The saddest part of the story is that hardly anybody in Bangladesh, who is influential enough to change and modify government policies, has come forward to stop this barbaric system of killing criminals and suspects, without giving the victims the due process of law.

Unfortunately, most members of the civil society, lawyers, religious leaders, lawmakers and politicians, professionals, traders, students and the hoi polloi in general have not come forward against these killings for the sake of upholding the sanctity of the rule of law, and independence of the judiciary.

Sadly, people across the board seem to have lost faith in the efficiency, honesty and integrity of law-enforcers. This is ominous. The upshot is the least desirable mass acceptance of extra-judicial killings among every section of the population in the country. People only grumble when their own kith and kin or party members fall victim to "cross-firing", as the ruling party MP is doing today. It is noteworthy that the average Bangladeshi knows what the expression "cross-fire" implies. Nobody in Bangladesh seems to be convinced by the stories one reads in the newspaper about so-called "cross-fire" incidents. Hence the use of inverted commas -- as we see media doing so -- before and after the expression!

It seems, while the people, media, and government agencies are busy playing a cynical hide-and-seek game with each other by tossing the stories of "cross-fire" in the air, the world looks at Bangladesh with total dismay and disbelief. The UN, human rights organisations, governments and individuals in various countries are worried about the state of affairs in

Bangladesh. While others worry about the violations of human rights in the country by law-enforcers, some Bangladeshis seem to be blindly following the Machiavellian dictum: "End justifies means". How long this expediency will sustain, is the question!

What even many highly educated people do not realise is that the combination of strong and overpowering government machinery with weak, vulnerable and powerless people does not signify the strength of a country. This happens in colonial setups and where there is an erosion of democracy. And Bangladeshis cannot forget that they achieved their independence in the name of overthrowing the overpowering influence of the military and law-enforcers, through democracy and the rule of law. While the creation of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) without strengthening democratic institutions and the judiciary in 2004 was an imprudent, shortsighted measure, empowering this law-enforcing agency to engage in extra-judicial killings is simply a gross violation of the Constitution. Unfortunately, the successive governments since 2007 have not stopped the extra-judicial killings.

Interestingly, the rationales for special guards and police forces have always been maintaining "law and order" and ensuring "crime free" societies. And eventually, the thin line between criminals and political dissidents disappears without being noticed by anybody.

This, however, does not mean that I am comparing the RAB with special guards and secret police of yesteryears. What I imply here is: there is an inherent danger in empowering any law-enforcing agency with extra-

judicial power and authority to kill hardcore killers and criminals. Extraordinary extra-judicial power to kill criminals with impunity often backfires. As now we know, the many suspects and even innocent people have been killed in the name of "cross-fire". Most importantly, there are examples of Special Forces turning into extortionists and criminal gangs themselves in various countries.

Although some democratic countries around Bangladesh also condone extra-judicial killings by law-enforcers through so-called "encounters", Bangladesh has no reason to consider them its role models. Since the "Spirit of Liberation" of Bangladesh was all about ensuring the freedom from fear, hunger, extortion, injustice and unaccountable governance, there is no room for any extra-judicial killing and military rule in the country. Any extra-judicial killing, irrespective of the victim's race, religion, criminal background or political affiliation, is an affront to the Constitution and the spirit of Bangladesh.

Since torture, death penalty and extra-judicial killings are not antidotes to violent crimes like murder and rape, extortion and sedition, there is no room for "end justifies means" type Machiavellian thoughts. Those having a soft corner for extra-judicial killings must realize that the democratic world is fast abolishing death penalty as a mode of punishment for criminals. Human rights activists in general even consider death penalty as "judicial murder". In sum, every life matters, and an extra-judicial killing is an extra-judicial killing -- immoral, inhumane and unconstitutional.

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The ugly face of the Bangkok explosion

BOTTOM
LINE



BARRISTER
HARUN UR RASHID

NO country is now immune to domestic or internationally-linked terrorism. Terrorism broadly falls into various categories, such as ideological or class-struggle or cross-border terrorism.

The Bangkok explosion on August 17 shocked everyone because of its intensity and extensive damage. At least 20 people died and many were injured in the attack on the Erawan shrine. In a separate attack on August 18, an explosive device was thrown at a pier in Bangkok. No one was hurt, but the authorities have not ruled out a link between the incidents.

A massive hunt is underway for a man wearing a yellow T-shirt and black glasses, who was seen in security footage leaving a backpack on a bench at a Hindu shrine where a blast killed 22 people and wounded at least 120. Meanwhile, two foreign tourists were reportedly cleared by the police.

Immigration posts have been alerted to look for the slightly built suspect, who the police said may have been wearing a wig. They are also looking at interviewing motorcycle taxi drivers who brought the man to the shrine and later drove him back. They were working on the theory that he was not acting alone.

Observers say that the explosion is unlikely to be motivated by domestic politics; the scale of the damage is too great and too messy. If someone wanted to fulfill a domestic agenda, such carnage would be unnecessary. Thailand has seen incidents in the past where someone would throw a grenade, which injured a few people, to get their political message across, but that is where it generally ended.

The Erawan shrine is a popular tourist attraction, and if one really wanted to cause maximum impact, this would be the obvious target. Thai culture is Buddhist and values religious tolerance. There is no aggressive Buddhist front in the country as found in Myanmar or Sri Lanka. Such a religious location is not the kind of target any Thai rebel would choose, which suggests to analysts that those behind the attack may not be Thai.

Police released a sketch and video of their main suspect, who has been described as foreign and is believed to have been working as part of a network. The reward for the wanted man now stands at 3

million baht (\$84,000). The shrine was reopened to the public on August 19.

In his weekly address to the nation, Prime Minister General Prayuth Chan-ocha said he would "expedite all investigations to bring perpetrators to justice". He has said the incident was the "worst attack on Thailand" ever. The attack aimed to "discredit the government and create a climate of fear to deter tourists," said the Thai police chief, Somyot Poompanmoung.

There have been many speculations on the origin of the bomb explosion. One unconfirmed report says that it could be an act of revenge for the deportation

of Uighur Muslims from Thailand to China. Police sources said Uighur militants in Xinjiang province may be responsible for the blast, according to reports in the Bangkok Post and other Thai media.

Thailand sparked international condemnation in July when the country deported 109 Uighurs, a move human rights groups said violated international conventions. The deported Uighurs had arrived in Thailand in 2014, claiming to be Turkish and asking to be sent to Turkey.



Other Uighurs forcibly returned to China have faced arrest and criminal prosecution which the

analyst for the International Crisis Group, said the bombing was a "new type of attack for Bangkok" that doesn't bear the marks of typical violence in the past decade from political instability or separatists.

"Police are not ruling out anything, including politics and the conflict of ethnic Uighurs who, before this, Thailand sent back to China," he said. Thai security forces have increased security nationwide, fearing further attacks.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Make pedestrians use the footbridge

It's so nice to see the beautiful footbridge on Airport Road but it's very sad to see the pedestrians not using it and still crossing the road putting both themselves and the motorists in danger. I understand it's impossible to post policemen over there 24/7 to make people use the bridge; but one thing that can be done is to build the partition wall more than 6 feet tall, separating the two lanes in order to make it impossible to climb and therefore compelling pedestrians to use the footbridge.

Aminur Rahim
New DOHS, Mohakhali, Dhaka

Garbage everywhere in the city

Garbage is a major source of environmental pollution. Everyday a huge amount of waste is produced in urban areas. These wastes are dumped beside the main road or in public places. How long will we have to tolerate this unbearable situation?

Sitara Ahmed
Uttara, Dhaka

