

Women are drivers for growth

Higher GDP growth rate possible

WOMEN'S participation in the Bangladesh economy stands at 34 per cent, as opposed to 82 per cent for men. According to the recently unveiled World Bank report titled 'Women, Business and the Law', Bangladesh can add a further 1.8 per cent to its current GDP growth of 6 per cent annually. We fully endorse this finding as our experience since the '80s has shown that the readymade garments (RMG) revolution was made possible by a largely women-led workforce. Equally important is the contribution of women to agriculture.

The report looks at the laws which affect women's economic prospects, and include, accessing institutions, using property, getting a job, providing incentives to work, building credit, going to court and protecting women from violence. Bangladesh is the home of Professor Yunus's globally acclaimed micro credit model, which has helped uplift millions of poor rural women out of abject poverty and helped transform their lives by enabling access to credit and help small and medium enterprises (SMEs) flourish. These SMEs now form a major cornerstone of our economy and a large portion of them are owned by women.

The recommendations made by the World Bank are valid ones. Laws that hinder women's development should be reviewed by the government to ensure greater participation of women in economic activities. For instance, widows do not enjoy equal inheritance rights, professional women face discrimination at work, and availing credit from established financial institutions for women is not as easy as it is for men. These and other bottlenecks need to be addressed with some urgency.

A school where dreams are born

A good example to emulate

THE school for underprivileged children in Laxmipur of Rajshahi offers promise. Situated on a donated piece of railway land, the 'School of Hope', established and run by 24 university students, offers free education, books and school supplies to 35 children who found all doors of opportunities slammed before them.

In recent times, we have seen similar initiatives by university students to extend a helping hand to impoverished children in different parts of the country. The school in Rajshahi stands out among them simply because it has instilled in its pupils dreams of becoming whoever they aspire to be in life. A student named Shimu who was kidnapped and abandoned only to find her mother go missing wants to be a TV journalist so she can find her. Another child whose father was murdered dreams of becoming a judge so he can seek justice.

In a land too long in the thrall of fatalism, the school in Laxmipur promotes the idea of the rational, autonomous individual shaping their own destiny. However, mostly dependent on financial contribution of the operators and a couple of philanthropists, it needs assistance. The school immediately needs a high-speed internet connection lacking which the online courses offered to students are sometimes interrupted. We draw the attention of the Ministry of Education and non-government organisations to provide them with adequate facilities.

Like a ripple going out of a pond, the lessons learned from an institution like this can go out all over the country spreading the message of education for all.

COMMENTS

"Re-registration of mobile SIM from Sunday"

(September 10, 2015)

▼
Esha Aurora

Isn't there an existing database? What are they doing with that? How incompetent do you have to be to not utilise the database of the already registered numbers?!

▼
Zahid Hassan

That will hinder the criminals from committing crimes like kidnapping and asking for ransoms using unregistered SIM cards.

▼
Abul Naser

It's a good initiative from the government to stop illegal activities.

▼
Ana

How many times do we have to register our SIMs?!

"Kids must not take written test"

(September 9, 2015)

▼
Abdullah Al Shafi

Our PM has, after all these years, very rightly pointed out a long unresolved issue. I heard her speech on TV. She said the truth and I express my profound thanks to her.

▼
Siam Rahman

At last, one good decision. Thank you PM.

▼
Potaka

Education is children's basic right. They should be allowed to enroll in schools without taking a written test.

HAS AYLAN KURDI DIED IN VAIN?

STRANGER THAN FICTION



TAJ HASHMI

ALTHOUGH hundreds of nameless refugees from Africa and Middle East have perished in the Mediterranean in the last one-year, the world will never forget the image of the three-year old, cute and well-dressed Aylan Kurdi in a red shirt and blue pants, whose body was lying face down in the sand of Bodrum in Turkey. He died last week along with his mother and five-year old

brother. Everybody seems to have said everything possible on this tragic death. Don't we have anything new to add to the story? Of course, we have.

Aylan's death has brought us to the Dickensian threshold of history: We have entered our "best of times" and "worst of times"; we are going through a season of "Light" and "Darkness", and through the "spring of hope" and "winter of despair". The cute little boy has proven through his death, the Arab World is more volatile now than while Saddam Hussein and Muammar Qaddafi were around. Thanks to the electronic media revolution, Aylan's image has entered people's living rooms, bedrooms, and workplaces. He now lives in people's heart. Now, Western Europe's love for Arab and Afghan refugees has overpowered Islamophobia.

How can any Muslim thank Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany and Prime Minister Juha Sipilä of Finland enough for their generosity? Merkel said: "Every person who comes is a human being and has right to be treated as such." And Finland's Prime Minister has offered a room in his house to a Muslim refugee family. Germans who were once imperialists – invaded countries and killed millions for their lebensraum or "adequate living space" for the German people – are now providing lebensraum to non-German Semitic Arabs, Kurds and Afghans.

"Who Failed Aylan Kurdi?" the question Ross Douhat has raised recently (New York Times, Sept 5, 2015) is the most pertinent one today. We all failed Aylan Kurdi, collectively. I agree with Douhat: "... the United States chief among them." Since the US is mainly responsible for all the major post-World War II problems in the Third World, it "had a responsibility to prevent the Syrian war from developing, and a responsibility to protect its victims once it did."

As his death has evoked global support and sympathy for him, his family, Syria and humanity, it has also agitated millions across the world. Sensible people don't give a damn to Arab monarchs, dictators, and their promoters. People now question why millions of innocent people – women, children and elderly – got killed in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and elsewhere during the last four decades; and people are still getting killed in civil wars, aerial bombings, drones and missile attacks. The way innocent people are dying at the hands of Islamist terror outfits, especially by the mysterious Islamic State, is beyond any explanations.

We have reasons to believe that the sudden rise in anti-US sentiment within and beyond the Muslim World has something to do with the image of Aylan Kurdi's body, lying face down in sand. People seem to be

carrying more anti-US signs and banners in Western cities than before! One such banner has become viral in the social media: "You lied about Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya – You are lying about Syria and Iran." The Obama administration must pay heed to what the ordinary people say and think in the East and West. Only by restoring a just peace in the Middle East, the US can sell itself as a protector of freedom and democracy.

Despite the surge in pro-Syrian and anti-US sentiment in the world, the Obama administration seems to be overreacting to some unsubstantiated claims of a Russian military build-up in Syria. US Secretary of State John Kerry has already threatened his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov over phone that additional deployment of Russian troops and military aircraft in Syria would lead to an armed conflict between the two largest nuclear powers. Meanwhile, France and Britain have declared

elected nationalist government of Dr Mosaddeq to reinstate the pro-Western Shah.

In view of the above, it seems as if Aylan Kurdi's death is a by-product of the decades-long neo-imperialist interventions across the region, so is his death a catalyst of change in Syria, Europe and the whole world, which we are going to witness in the coming decades. What Washington, Riyadh, Tel Aviv and their satellites in the Arab World have failed to notice is the growing resentment of the ordinary people against neo-imperialist balderdash, lies and conspiracy theories. Even people in the US have started questioning the logic of invading countries to usher in democracy à la Iraq, Libya, or Syria.

Last but not least, the courage, desperation, dexterity and defiance of people – as are evident in the hazardous mass migration process of tens of thousands of



they are stepping-up bombing in Syria, and Australia is likely to follow suit.

Aylan Kurdi's death has re-affirmed the following facts: a) the beneficiaries of imperialist and neo-imperialist designs are still around in Syria and beyond; b) nobody is going to win an all out war in the Middle East; and c) only a just peace in the region can save the world from the ongoing long war, which began in Palestine, not long after the end of World War II. The US intervention in Syria – since 1949 – has further aggravated the situation.

In March 1949, the CIA-sponsored coup d'état toppled the nationalist President Shukri al Quwatly and installed Colonel Husni al-Zaim – the "American Boy" – to power. Between 1949 and 1955, America staged five military coups in Syria to complete the democratisation process in the country. In 1953, a CIA-sponsored coup in Iran toppled the democratically

Arab, African and Afghan refugees quite for some time – make one wonder if the process is the harbinger of what former Algerian President Houari Boumediene predicted would happen, in the UN General Assembly in 1974:

One day, millions of men will leave the Southern Hemisphere to go to the Northern Hemisphere. . .

Boumediene's above assertion, on the one hand, reflects Muslim (or the Third World) desperation for equal opportunity and human dignity, presumably denied by the West; on the other, this also conveys the ominous message to the West that the Third World has been aggrieved and willing to fight for their rights and dignity. Has Aylan Kurdi's tragic death further precipitated the process?

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*.

Saffornising the institutions

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDEEP NAYAR

UNDERS TANDA BLY, there is a sense of horror over the Bhartiya Janata Party government's decision to 'modernise' the Jawaharlal Nehru Museum at Tin Murti in New Delhi. The BJP spokesman has explained that the present museum tells only the Nehru side of national struggle for independence, not the entire story.

Ironically, the people to put forward the demand are those who did not contribute even a bit to the national movement. Their role, if any, helped the British rulers.

What the BJP has in mind is to saffronise the institution. The party made a similar attempt when Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was at the helm of affairs. But he firmly resisted every move to reinterpret history. He recognised the role Nehru had played to win freedom and gave him full credit. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is of a different kettle of fish. He openly seeks guidance from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which runs down the national struggle because it was never part of it.

Re-doing Nehru museum under the Modi rule means the induction of outdated ideas into history. Nehru moulded the nation after independence and gave it a scientific temperament. Nehru's biggest contribution was the concept of

secularism. At the time of partition, when Pakistan chose to be an Islamic state, he kept India secular. Probably, this is what the BJP does not like and wants to change the very character of the museum. Why doesn't the BJP have a separate museum where it can present the history in the way it wants to?

Not long ago, I was at Pune and found to my dismay that the Agha Khan Palace, where the British rulers would detain the icons of our freedom struggle, like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, has been converted into an environmental park. I have no grudge against parks. But the places consecrated by the nation's blood, should have been preserved in their original shape so that the coming generations would see them as they were. Decoration, however honest in intent, extinguishes the original spirit.

In contrast, the Jalianwala Bagh at Amritsar has been preserved as it was. It retains the air of martyrdom and still maintains the centrality of the well. When one sees it, one can imagine how the people must have jumped into it to escape the relentless firing by the British-led soldiers. They were punished because of the 'humiliation' of one British woman who heard a hissing sound while passing through a bazaar. Protesters at the Jalianwala Bagh were only parading against the British rule. Theirs was a struggle for independence. Sadly, after killing hundreds of people, the remark made by one British soldier was that they wished they had more ammunition.

Indeed, places like the Jalianwala Bagh are the real temples. They remind us of

the pain and pangs of our national struggle and of those who sacrificed all in the fight against the British. The places are in no way less important than the scriptures which we revere and cherish.

Unfortunately, the places of worship—temples, mosques, churches and gurdwaras—are becoming more in number and vulgar in decoration. Followers mistakenly have come to believe that the use of marble or gold makes the place more endearing to worshippers.

Unfortunately, the buildings which did not contribute at all to the freedom struggle, have come to occupy positions of importance. Still worse are the efforts to substitute the ethos of pluralism with the ideology of parochialism. It is unthinkable how any party or person can demand a memorial for Nathuram Godse who killed Mahatma Gandhi.

BJP, an outfit to spread Hindutva feelings, should understand and appreciate the emotion which was misleading the Muslims at that time. Even if it is assumed that the Muslims knowingly marshaled behind the demand for Pakistan, how are the Indian Muslims to blame for what happened 70 years ago?

When we are not blaming the generation, which was supporting the British, why should we pick on the Muslims whose forefathers helped create Pakistan? An average Hindu has not forgiven Muslims for the vivisection of India. At the time of tension with Pakistan, many Hindus still suspect the Muslims.

Even otherwise, Hindus maintain distance from Muslims. Social contacts

between the two communities are more or less absent. And both live in the world of their own. It was different in my generation. We visited one another's house and ate together without feeling that we were doing anything extraordinary.

Today things have changed. A Muslim woman professor told me that one day a few Hindu girls stood up in the classroom and asked her why she was in India when she should have gone to Pakistan. No one in the classroom objected to the girls' remarks. I cannot blame the educational system, but I do blame the teachers who had created such an atmosphere where students could ask such questions.

True, partition on the basis of religion has told upon India's ethos of secularism and lessened the importance of Muslims in the affairs of India. But this feeling goes against the letter and spirit of our constitution. We are not a Hindu rashtra but a secular, democratic republic as the preamble of our constitution says.

BJP does not seem to realise that it does not have any Muslim icon in its ranks. I hope that things would change for the better. But how can they when the party wants to establish a Hindu rashtra and continues to keep the Muslim community at a distance? Sadly, the party is trying to change the very ethos of our country. Even in the midst of our national struggle, we were conscious that Pakistan would be an Islamic state. Still, we declared that India, after the British left, would be a secular state and we adhered to that undertaking.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Hateful writings, ruthless killings

I am an ordinary person living an ordinary life. I am not so knowledgeable that I can be a blogger, or a member of our intelligentsia or a political party. Yet, I am disturbed by the ways religions, especially Islam is being targeted by some over enthusiastic so-called free thinkers in the name of freedom of speech. As a result, some religious fanatics have got the opportunity to create

anarchy in the society and started murdering the bloggers in a very ruthless way.

No sensible person can support either the hateful writings against Islam or the heinous murders of the bloggers. Hurting religious beliefs is as disgusting as is the murder of the bloggers. The bloggers must write constructive things without hurting any religion and the coward, fanatic killers must be awarded with due punishment for their crime.

Sultana Zaman
Chittagong

Lower middle income status & second least liveable city

It is heartening to know that we have attained lower middle income status, after more than four decades of our independence. Hopefully, we shall join the league of middle income nations by 2021.

Meanwhile, many still inhale the most polluted air, live below the poverty line and are surrounded by corruption in all spheres. We bear the stigma of the second least liveable city in the world for our capital Dhaka. There is very little for the government to be satisfied with, as our economic status cannot erase the stigma of being the second least liveable city.

Syed Badrul Haque
Lalmatia, Dhaka