

Murder of Italian national

IS 'link' remains unproven

WE condemn the killing of Italian citizen Cesare Tavella and express our deepest condolences to the bereaved family. That the killing was pre-planned and carried out by professionals is obvious.

It is the alleged IS link that has lent credibility to the claim by some quarters that Bangladesh is linked to international terrorist operations. We seriously question the veracity of this claim and echo the doubts expressed by our Prime Minister. This view of the global media, we are constrained to suggest, is mostly based on a single source, which is a website called Site Intelligence, specialising, putatively, in monitoring Jihadi activities, and not verified through any other sources. Therefore the claim of an IS link remains very tenuous. We, therefore, urge the global media to re-examine and re-verify the veracity of the source.

The killing has occurred at a time when the Australian cricket board, Cricket Australia, has delayed the Australian tour of Bangladesh on grounds of security. We are not sure what has prompted the US, Canada and some European countries to issue travel alerts to their citizens regarding Bangladesh. The government should seek specific information from these countries regarding the 'threat' in Bangladesh, if not done already. And our agencies should seek active collaboration of their counterparts in these countries to get the facts in order that appropriate countermeasures can be initiated and fears allayed immediately. It is absolutely imperative that we put to rest any concerns about Bangladesh becoming a haven for global militancy.

Illegal occupation of public space

When will this trend stop?

THE sight of horse carts and horses occupying main thoroughfares in Dhaka city further crystallises the reality that is the dangerously shrinking public space in the capital. The photograph of mules being kept under a major flyover in Old Dhaka, along with the horse carts, published yesterday in this daily, illustrates the extent of the problem.

Although the practice of misusing public spaces isn't anything new, the gravity of the situation increases by the day in light of a growing population, buildings and number of vehicles on the streets. This paper has highlighted over the years the illegal encroachment of public space by small businesses, adding to a long list of contending issues Dhakaites have to live with everyday.

That millions of inhabitants of one of the fastest growing megacities in the world should have to navigate roads taken up by livestock is absurd. Such actions not only diminish public space but also exacerbate the degrading environmental conditions and poor air quality, posing the threat of respiratory diseases and other ailments. With reeking garbage carelessly piling up on the streets, parked horse carts and livestock add to the filthy smell polluting the air.

Along with crises of waterlogging, scarcity of drinking water, waste mismanagement, traffic congestion and power cuts, dwindling public space is yet another avoidable, public nuisance that affects ordinary people the most.

The municipal corporations and relevant authorities can no longer continue to ignore their responsibility of preventing thoroughfares and pavements from illegal occupation by horse carts, welding shops, food carts or what have you. The authorities should move quickly to free the roads encroached upon and restore them to their rightful users.

China's Belt and Road Initiative

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

THE 'one-belt-one-road' (OBOR) initiative is the most talked about agenda - which has captured the imagination of a great many people, both supporters and detractors of the idea - to have been enunciated by any Chinese leader

since the Four Modernisation programme implemented by Deng Xiaoping beginning in 1978. The only difference perhaps is the fact that the implementation of the latest Chinese formula is predicated on the involvement of a host of participating countries situated along the 'belt and the route', while the latter was more internal oriented. But the ultimate objective was and is economic.

While the Four Modernisation programme was designed to rejuvenate the Chinese economy, the latest initiative, first introduced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, seeks to economically integrate relevant countries through the revival of the old trade routes - the Westward Land Route and the Maritime Silk Route - both combined under the rubric of OBOR. The concept seeks involvement of these countries for regional and global economic development where all the stakeholders become equal beneficiaries. Understandably, China's leading role in this will establish it more firmly as the number one (it already is, at least on the basis of purchasing power parity) economy in the world. According to one scholar, that China is already the leading economy in the world had been acknowledged way back in 2010 in a Pew Global Attitude Survey where more Americans, British, French, Germans, Russians and Japanese believed that the

Chinese economy was larger than US', belying the Goldman Sachs Report of 2007 that it were not to happen before 2027.

At a time when the world is torn apart by conflicts, and the mad rush to capture, or influence the control of the world's resources through direct and proxy wars, has reached a sickening level, when nations are falling apart causing immense human misery due to imposed wars, when hearths and homes are being discarded to escape the wrath of war, we have a new idea thrown up by the Chinese that should bring people and countries together through, not hogging, but sharing of resources and where interdependence of countries, which are in different stages of development, becomes a tool of their economic growth, only more equitably. And that is what came out very loud and clear at a forum of media men - 122 of them from 60 different countries - organised by *The People's Daily* in Beijing very recently. The forum was entitled "Media Cooperation Forum on One belt & One Road."

There are of course both the stated and implicit motivations of the progenitors of the idea which embraces both the strategic and the economic realms. And this further reinforces the view that economic consideration remains the major motive force of all initiatives, plans and agenda. But what catches one's interest is the repeated emphasis by the Chinese on the fact that the OBOR will provide a bridge between minds and bring civilisations closer. History teaches us that when minds are brought nearer, misperceptions and misgivings start to disappear. And the need for deeper economic cooperation would motivate the countries to dedicate more resources for shared economic goals and which would in turn make it easier to involve in consultations to benefit from the wisdom of others and synergise the ways and means of implementing the idea. What a deeper

economic cooperation would also help do is harmonise development efforts, reduce competition and, most importantly, reduce the potential of conflict.

Although the idea is planned to be inclusive in all respects with multi-dimensional ventures and is more than only an infrastructure project involving IT, financial integration, cross-border trade and investment and the Chinese emphasise on three NOs - no hegemonic aspiration, no interference in others' internal affairs and no sphere of influence - there are still misgivings in some countries about China's motivation behind the initiative.

Officially India is yet to declare support for the project as it sees the idea being 'mired in curiosity', according to an Indian participant in the Forum. And there are apprehensions in India too about China's "grand strategy" and "hegemonic aspirations." South East Asian countries share similar reservations, owing to the existing territorial disputes, including South China Sea. They are also unsure of the effect the projects might have should there be economic instability in China itself. On the other hand, some scholars fear that the US may try to scuttle the scheme fearing that the project might jeopardise its predominance of the sea routes. And according to Michel Chossudovsky, US policy stands in the way of the OBOR strategy and it is busy conquering economic space through war rather than cooperating.

We, on our part, should welcome the restoration of the old silk route and economic integration. However, there is need to sensitise all the 60 countries in the route about what it actually is. The multiple objectives of the initiative must be prioritised and an implementation strategy worked out to meet the ends.

The writer is Associate Editor, *The Daily Star*.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PERSONS

TURNING GREY INTO GOLD

SHAMSHAD AKHTAR

JUST a few decades ago, the population of the Asia-Pacific region was dominated by the young. Now, as birth rates have dropped and life expectancies improved, the population is ageing. Twelve percent of our people in the region are already over the age of 60. By 2050, this figure will rise to one-quarter of the whole population. Never before have countries aged as rapidly. It took France 115 years and Sweden 85 years to become aged societies, but for Vietnam and Thailand, it will take only 20-22 years. The region risks getting old before it gets rich. So how do we address this crisis of a rapidly ageing population in our region?

It is clear that the demographic window of opportunity for the region, which opened with a surge in the working-age population, is closing. Take China for example, 67 percent of its population is of working age today, but this has started to change. Forty years from now, this will have shrunk to only half, with almost one-third of the entire Chinese population older than 65.

Does this mean that our region will inevitably lose its economic dynamism? Not necessarily - if we prepare properly, and act now. The International Day of Older Persons, celebrated on October 1 every year, provides us with a good opportunity to reflect on how best to prepare for these new challenges and opportunities.

There is still ample scope to increase labour force participation, even as working-age populations decline. In many countries across the region, large proportions of the population, especially women, remain excluded from labour markets. For example, in the Republic of Korea, only 56 percent of women of working age participate in the labour force, and in South Asia, less than a third do. Going forward, countries will have to adopt more active policies to encourage and enable women's labour force participation. Countries with an increasing aged population might also consider policies attracting orderly and reliable international migration as an additional

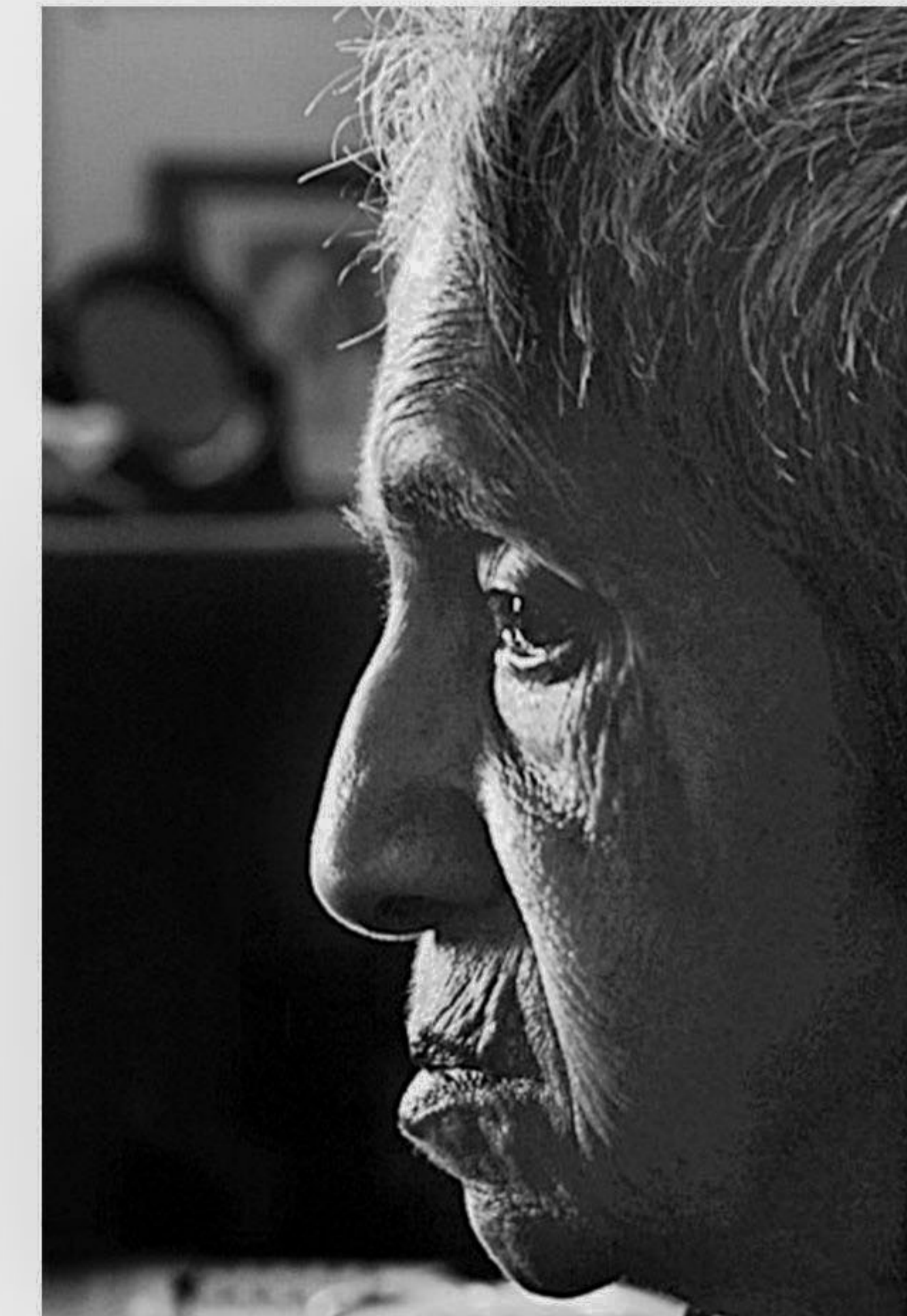


PHOTO: ZAHEDUL I KHAN

option to address key potential labour shortages.

Another key element which must be addressed to sustain economic growth is how to increase productivity. When countries age, their economic structure should move from labour-intensive industries to more technology-oriented ones. This entails improving the quality of education and promoting

technological upgrades and their widespread adoption.

We also need a new system of intergenerational solidarity. In the traditional system, older persons were looked after by their children. But these traditional systems are breaking up as a result of increasing industrialisation, increased women's labour force participation and rural to urban

migration. However, we can turn these changes into another opportunity. We can turn ageing population into a second demographic dividend, with financially-secure, healthy older persons, empowered to focus their decades of accumulated experience, wisdom and wealth to stimulate new economic growth. The specific needs of older persons can also spur innovation and demand for new products, as well as create job opportunities in care industries. This will only work, however, if we act now to ensure that older persons are provided with the means and opportunities to contribute to society. Currently, only about 26 percent of working-age people in the region contribute to pension schemes. We need to further develop pension systems to increase savings and to sustain domestic demand. We also need to introduce principles of solidarity into pension systems, and especially address the needs of women.

Population ageing plans must be at the centre of development, not an afterthought, and the time to act is now. Comprehensive policies, developed and implemented in collaboration with older persons, are urgently needed.

With the right preparation, we can benefit from a golden generation of healthy, wealthy and active older persons. In 2002, the United Nations brought countries together in Madrid to agree on a global way forward: to treat older persons as actors of development; to ensure their health and wellbeing; and to create enabling and supportive environments for them. In the new sustainable development agenda, adopted last week, older persons have a role to play in almost each of the new goals. The UN stands ready to support countries to put these plans into action, and to secure future societies for all ages in Asia and the Pacific.

The writer is Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). She is also the UN's Sherpa for the G20 and previously served as Governor of the Central Bank of Pakistan and as Vice-president of the MENA Region of the World Bank.

COMMENTS

"BSF says sorry for firing"
(September 20, 2015)

Prethibe Biswas

Will an apology bring those people back?

Petros Mendes

This is not the first time nor will it be the last. Stern actions must be taken against them.

Kezaul Karim

What if BGB kills a few of them and then offers an apology?

"Shot for protesting injustice"
(September 20, 2015)

Faisal Ali

We want justice.

Mijanur Rahman

Don't cry for justice. In Bangladesh, justice is only for the influential.

"Bangladeshi taxi driver sets example of honesty"
(September 19, 2015)

Shawkath Srijon

Really great work! You have made us proud with your honesty!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Increase the number of seats for women

Nowadays, in cities, a large number of women use public buses as a means of transport. Their number is increasing everyday as women's participation in the workforce and outside activities has also increased in this modern world. But it is a matter of sorrow that there are only nine seats reserved in the buses for women, children and disabled people. And there are also many buses in which there are no reserved seats for women. Women have to face severe difficulties in reaching their workplace or destination due to this.



We urge the government to take this issue seriously and increase the number of reserved seats for women in buses.
Zerin Akhter
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A different type of agitation

The private university students rejoiced and expressed their satisfaction after the government revoked the 7.5 percent VAT on private universities. With the slogan "No Vat on Education," the students continued their movement showing great patience. What is remarkable is that not a single car or any other establishment was damaged during the movement. Their non-violent movement has created an example to be followed by all.
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