

Still no headway in investigations

Coordinated efforts of security agencies crucial

It is of concern that little palpable headway has been made in the investigations of the killings of Italian aid worker Cesare Tavella and Japanese national Kunio Hoshi that took place within a span of five days. Although it has been established that both foreign nationals were murdered in a premeditated manner, intelligence and law enforcement agencies seem to have hit a snag in terms of finding the killers. Meanwhile, a flimsy claim by supposed IS militants has created a sense of panic and confusion.

This is worrying for Bangladesh on several counts. Apart from security alerts from several countries to their nationals in Bangladesh, there have been reports of international retailers postponing meetings in Dhaka with garment makers because of security concerns after the two murders. The possible linkage to IS militants is spreading paranoia, smearing our image internationally. Such connections should be properly probed into with conclusive results to allay the fear of IS targeting foreigners on Bangladeshi soil.

The killing of foreign nationals must be treated as special cases and investigated expeditiously. The investigations are being led by the CID and DB and we understand that other agencies are working on them too. We think it might be more expedient to coalesce all investigative resources and entrust one single agency to lead both investigations. If need be, assistance can be sought from international agencies. These might help the government unravel the mystery faster.

Teachers' protest continues

Their grievances need immediate redress

TEACHERS from the university to the primary levels have been agitating for over a month. In the background of the World Teachers' Day that was observed yesterday, we feel sorry to see the way teachers at public schools, colleges and universities are treated in the country. Manhandling and physically abusing teachers at educational institutions by goons belonging to some student organisations have been on the rise. As though these ghastly incidents are not enough, the new pay scale approved this year deprives the teachers of some perks they have been enjoying for a long time.

So grave is their predicament that the teachers have been forced to resort to protests to make home their demands against the eighth pay scale. However, their demands, it seems, have fallen on deaf ears. They are set to abstain from administering admission tests slated to start in two days. The primary school teachers might not take part in the primary terminal examinations this year.

It is indeed surprising that while public servants have witnessed a significant rise in their salary under the new pay scale, teachers, who build the future leaders of our country, have been deprived of some facilities that they had been enjoying.

In its electoral pledge, the Awami League had promised a separate pay scale for the teachers. It is high time that the government came good on that. We earnestly hope that it will sit with the teachers to address their legitimate demands, sooner rather than later.

COMMENTS

"BNP chief Khaleda Zia might have a link with the killing of Italian citizen Cesare Tavella. This should be investigated."

—AL acting general secretary **Mahbubul Alam Hanif**

Nirjon Pranto

People do not believe in false accusations, they want proof.

Shahir Nazib

What a joke! May be one day the AL members will say that Khaleda Zia is responsible for all the earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, the IS, the refugee crisis and so on.

Ask Tushar

They are suffering from BNP phobia. That's why they are blaming BNP for everything.

Ahmed Sojol

It is worth remembering George Orwell's remark: "Political language is designed to make lies sound truthful."

Eeziel Mammon

When will the blame game stop?

Abdullah Al Mamun

Seems like he knows more than FBI, CID, RAB and the Police!

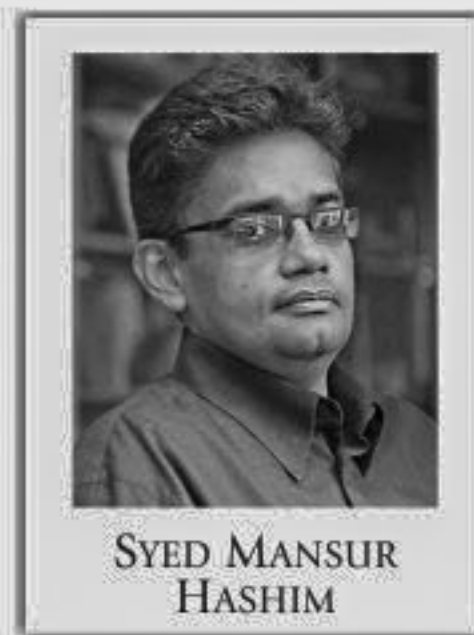
"Have we voted for the MP so that he can kill my child?"

—Selina Akter, Mother of Sourav, who was shot allegedly by Gaibandha-1 MP Manzurul Islam Liton

Suman Syd

They really don't care about us.

Closed door policy unhelpful



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

EUROPEAN member countries of the European Union (EU) have effectively scuttled the whole issue of significant Syrian migration to the common

market. Whilst this may prove popular for the incumbents in Hungary and other likeminded governments of the former Warsaw Pact, there is a downside to this policy. If we are to go by what has been published by the "Manpower Employment Outlook Survey for the third quarter of 2014, which is based on interviews with over 65,000 employers in 42 countries and territories", the countries hammering for non-entry of migrants in to EU are also some of the worst hit when it comes to finding enough workers to get their respective economies moving in the right direction.

As pointed out in an article in *The Economist* recently, "With their pristine rooms and green courtyard, the new psychiatric clinic and geriatric and dermatological wards cost \$19m. But what the hospital in Bydgoszcz in north-west Poland does not have is enough nurses and carers. As a result it can only fill half of its 236 beds. Such labour shortages are common in eastern Europe. Construction, manufacturing and technology firms are struggling to find enough workers. And shortages are likely to get worse as populations age rapidly". That basically sums up the situation.

East European leaders like the Hungarian prime minister may be winning the "hearts-and-minds" game of the local electorate, as his government erects a new fence running the 175km Serbian border, but the economy in that country, like many across the eastern half of Europe have lots of vacancies for less-skilled jobs, which is hampering growth of various sectors - vacancies that could be filled up by the thousands of relatively well-educated Syrian refugees who have been barred entry. One can understand that the issue of immigration

is a touchy subject in the EU, which is still reeling from recession. However, to base arguments on nationalistic lines is unfortunately not going to resolve the "ageing problem" of these countries.

Going back to the Employment Outlook Survey, we find that Poland is in need of 50,000 IT professionals who have not been found, translating into two out of five firms being understaffed. Czech (18 percent) and Slovak (28 percent) firms are struggling for

economies like that of Hungary to reach its full potential.

According to *The Economist*, reliable data on how many of the Syrians hoping to get into the EU fall into what skill category is scarce. That they are relatively well-educated means they could, potentially fill-the-gaps of several sectors in dire need of workers in several EU economies. We are talking about manual labour as opposed to highly-skilled occupations like engineering. These

near to mid-term.

The hostility being displayed is misplaced at best. After all, the people seeking entry and refuge today are not the "Muslim hordes" that swept through Europe centuries ago. Whipping up such sentiments seem strangely out of context today, especially given the human resources crunch some EU countries are experiencing. Yes, there are security questions, but none that cannot be dealt with proper screening. While West



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employees too. And here it gets interesting: Apparently nearly half of Hungary's firms could not find requisite employees (particularly engineers). The country's institutions do produce good engineers, but then, given the economic opportunities offered by other EU countries, particularly Germany, the shortage isn't being dealt with. The survey points out that although these labour shortages have not adversely affected the growth of the respective economies, they are hampering

include construction, agriculture, the services industry (shop assistants, bakers, carpenters, etc.). The "ageing population" factor simply cannot be wished away. This combined with a declining birth rate is going to force many EU countries to start opening their doors to economic migrants very soon. And although Poland has been fortunate to get thousands of Ukrainian seasonal workers to come in, the demographics will force policymakers to rethink this closed door policy to migrants in the

European nations like Germany has embraced the opportunity of beefing up its labour force by taking some of the migrants, eastern European countries are yet to come to terms with economic realities on the ground. The political ramification of this "no entry" policy is that the EU is in danger of losing the credibility to advise the rest of the world on human rights. And that is not a comfortable situation to be in.

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THE SYRIAN WAR

Russia joins the fray

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

AT last Russia has decided that it will not be in the sidelines any more. After much speculation among western powers about its role in the four-year long Syrian war, Russia has come out full force to defend its long time regional ally, President Assad. In a sense, this is a chess game that Russia has waited for long, to see how the pawns fall and when to strike with its knight. And this is no white knight, as they say in the investment world. This is a knight with a long sword that strikes only when the time is ripe in a battle.

Russian intervention is no surprise; the surprise is why it took so long. Russian interest in the Middle East goes back to the Cold War days when it openly supported the Ba'athist regimes of the area, Syria and Iraq. Earlier, it had supported the dictatorial regime of Nasser in Egypt until the regime's collapse and turnaround of Nasser's successor to the West. The Iraq War did not stir much protest from Russia. In fact, its silence was a boost for the coalition forces to march ahead and dismantle the Saddam regime. It watched silently as a Saddam-less Iraq imploded, and a once united country broke in fractious groups that fought with one another, and ceded territories to hostile forces.

Unlike Iraq or Egypt and Libya, Russia had a strong foothold in Syria. The Syrian port city of Tartus hosts a Russian naval base dating back to the Soviet era. The relationship between Russia and the Syrian Ba'ath party is over five decades old. Most recently, Russia was one of three countries to vote against a formal

UN Security Council condemnation of the Bashar al-Assad government for alleged attacks on civilians in the city of Homs in February 2012. It also opposed any sanction or intervention against the government.

The important question, despite the openly friendly ties between the Assad regime and Russia, is why did it take so long for the country to rally around the beleaguered regime? The steps that Russia has taken recently, like sending

war planes to bomb rebel-held places, would perhaps have taken the Syrian War to a different course, had these been taken at the beginning of the conflict. Was Russia really testing the waters or was it waiting for events that would make its intervention less menacing?

When Russia declared its intention to send its war planes in Syria, it was purportedly to strike ISIS, the rogue entity the US had wanted to destroy earlier with coalition forces but was unable to accomplish for so long. But the bombs did not drop on ISIS strongholds but on other rebels fighting the Assad regime. Within a couple of days of Russia joining the war, it became clear who it was fighting for.

There are many reasons why Russia did not jump in the fray to save its ally at the beginning. First and foremost is that the Syrian conflict did not begin as a war. It started, as in the case of neighbouring Middle Eastern countries,

committed external support, and staying power of the regime, which benefited from silent but strong support from a powerful country - Russia. The people's movement gradually turned into a Civil War, unlike Egypt and Tunisia, when the rebel groups fought with each other for political control, giving the Assad regime more time to regroup and continue his resistance with his loyal army.

As the rebel groups feuded among themselves, an entity that was hitherto looking for an opportunity to further its

political goal found the opportunity to consolidate. This was the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) that would claim chunks of territories, which it was able to seize from a fleeing Iraqi army and defeated Assad forces. Russia waited till the time was ripe; it intervened when ISIS became a tremendous force to deal with and a common enemy of the Syrian regime and neighbouring Iraq.

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Are the US and its allies complicit with Russia in this new war game? At least not on paper. Officially Russia's efforts to salvage one of the cruelest dictators from a deep hole would be anathema to all who despise the acts of President Assad against his people. But unofficially, an alternative to him in Syria in the form of ISIS is equally unacceptable to the coalition.

The Syrian war is not going to end soon, at least unless there is agreement between Russia and the western powers, and their coalition on how to deal with Assad. An Assad departure may be desirable, but nobody wants to risk seeing a reprise of what happened in Libya after Gaddafi's ouster. A Syria with ISIS in place is not something the western coalition or Russia would like. The question is who goes first - Assad or ISIS?

The writer is a political analyst and commentator.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Hajj flights should be reorganised

During Hajj, Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport of Dhaka becomes overly congested, both inside and outside. We should use the other two international airports in Sylhet and Chittagong to reduce the needless suffering of the Hajj pilgrims. It would be easier for Hajj pilgrims from Sylhet and Chittagong to fly directly to Saudi Arabia instead of travelling to Dhaka first. Aminur Rahim

New DOHS, Mohakhali, Dhaka



Trigger happy parliamentarian!

The Gaibandha-1 MP who reportedly shot a 10-year-old boy should be given the harshest punishment under law and made to pay the maximum compensation to the family of the victim.

A voter
On e-mail