

NARENDRA MODI'S INDIA and recoil of a gun

Amended Money Laundering Act

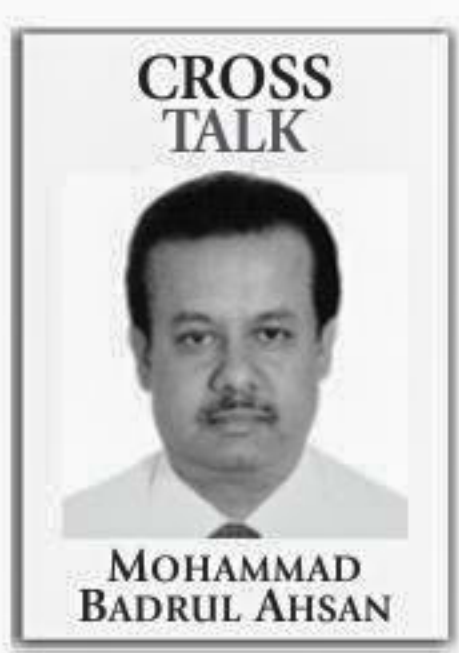
Government should rethink

WHILE we understand the need to trace and block the illegal transfer of monies inside and outside the country, our fear is that the newly amended anti-laundering act could potentially be misused. That the investigative agencies are being empowered to seize local property of those accused, bypassing the court system entirely, would open up the Pandora's Box. The original law states that investigating authorities can issue order, upon approval of the court, to confiscate illegally earned money while the new ordinance stipulates, "If a property, money or income linked to money laundering cannot be traced the accused person's money or property of equal value can be confiscated or seized." And that is what begs the question. An accused has to be proven guilty and allowed the opportunity to defend himself. Moreover, the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU), which will no longer be answerable to the central bank on investigations launched by it, will have an oversight authority over it. On the other hand, who is to ascertain the veracity of the findings of the investigating body? Bypassing the judiciary may expedite investigations, but, the courts are there for a reason; it allows an accused to defend himself in the face of accusation. Though being touted as a prerequisite for effectively combating laundering money and terror financing, it is imperative for the BFIU to have some form of surveillance by the central bank. The government should reconsider the idea of making an investigating authority also the adjudicating authority.

VAT on English medium schools

Is education a commodity?

THE Supreme Court has stayed for eight weeks a High Court order halting collection of VAT on tuition fees paid to English medium schools. While the legal process will run its normal course our appeal is to the government to treat education across the country equally. We believe that the government's policy of imposing value added tax on tuition fees of English medium schools since 2007 is unfair as it reduces learners to nothing but consumers. We understand the importance of expanding the tax net in order to produce revenue for financing development projects and programmes, but singling out English-medium schools in such a manner is discriminatory and runs counter to the government's promise to ensure inexpensive education for all. The government had levied a 7.5 percent VAT on the tuition fees of private university students in this year's budget but eventually rescinded the decision following mass protests in the capital last month. We suggest that not only should the government revoke its policy of levying tax on English medium schools, it should also ensure that the parents are not burdened with gratuitous payments that many of these schools impose on them. We want to impress upon the policy makers that education, be it English-medium or otherwise, is a public good and investing in it pays more than anything else in the long run. We, therefore, repeat our call to the government to exempt English-medium students from the burden of VAT.



CROSS TALK
MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

INDIA under Narendra Modi is working like the recoil of a gun, when forward thrust is producing backward momentum. In most small arms, that momentum is transferred to the ground through the body of the shooter, while in heavier guns, it's transferred through its mount. In India, that momentum is being transferred to the ground through organised hatred and a spate of hate crimes. In other words, India right now is switched to Newton's third law of motion as every action produces, if not equal, but opposite reaction. While Prime Minister Modi is busy promoting his country abroad, India is descending into serious chaos. One Muslim man near Delhi was killed by a Hindu mob for eating beef, although the meat found in his fridge was mutton. In another instance, a Muslim man was beaten and stripped by Bajrang Dal in Mangalore for making a conversation with a Hindu woman. Another Hindu organisation in Mandvi, Gujarat, banned Muslims from entering all dance venues during the recent Navratri celebration to "protect the Hindu girls" from them. A 90-year-old Dalit man was burned alive for trying to enter a temple in Uttar Pradesh. The list goes on. This week 300 people were forcibly converted to Hinduism in a

village near Varanasi. It was conducted by an organisation called the Dharma Jagran Samanvya Samiti, which handed over the Gita and Hanuman Chalisa to the converts under its Ghar Wapsi (Home Coming) initiative. Only a few days ago, ghazal maestro Ghulam Ali was sent back to Pakistan after Shiv Sena objected to his Mumbai concert. This far-right group allegedly smeared the face of a man with ink in Mumbai, because he was organising the book launch of a former foreign minister of Pakistan. All of these incidents took place when the Indian prime minister was positioning his country as the logical destination for foreign business and technology giants. Many of these giants have already responded to his call. They have pledged to include India in their bucket lists. Meanwhile, a progressive India has been regressing in some fundamental ways. Religious and caste tensions have always simmered under the surface of its political and social dynamics. But the world's largest democracy managed to surge ahead, keeping the undertows of prejudice and superstition at a subliminal level. Now that simmering tension is boiling over again, as religious animosity and the class conflict are sparking renewed vitriol and violence. And this time it's different from before. Until the election of Narendra Modi, the Indian governments appeared determined to stamp out these pockets of national contentions. But that tide has turned over the last one year since the Hindu extremists vowed to make

India a Hindu state. Many Indians are resigned to the belief that much of the ongoing madness has the political blessings of the ruling party. In protest, 41 eminent Indian writers so far have returned their awards. If we apply the template of history on the Indian situation, Narendra Modi's India stands at a critical juncture comparable to Lyndon Johnson's America with a reverse twist. For

carries his own baggage of extremist records (the Gujarat riot in 2002), his government hasn't strongly come out against mushrooming tragedies of minority persecution. The prime minister himself has been tongue-in-cheek in his condemnation, his harshest reaction uttered at an election rally in Begusarai, Bihar on October 8. He asked the Hindus and Muslims if they wanted to fight each other or poverty. When lives are lost and sentiments are hardened, that rap on the knuckles is too little too late. No doubt it was a legitimate question for all Indians, but it failed to convey a strong message to the Hindu extremist groups, who have the missionary zeal spiked with a hooligan's heart. Love Jihad, Ghar Wapsi, Shuddhikaran and other extremist measures are mere excuses for Hindu fanatics to impose their parochial minds and political might on others. It's a matter of degree not of kind that these fanatics are militants in saffron garb. Narendra Modi's India is undoubtedly ambitious. It's an emerging global power, which by now is a foregone conclusion. But can India sustain this momentum if inner conflicts continue to subvert its strength? Nations are a lot like individuals when it comes to dealing with inner demons. Friedrich Nietzsche explained the recoil when he said that if you look long into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you.

All of these incidents took place when the Indian prime minister was positioning his country as the logical destination for foreign business and technology giants.

centuries, the United States seethed with racial hatred as segregation and lynching had reduced the Black American into targets of the white supremacists. And it was not until Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and sent the federal troops to Alabama the following year that racial discrimination in the United States was broken like a bad spell. In India, it's going in the opposite direction. While the prime minister

of relabeling existing aid as supporting climate action." Fortunately, French President Francois Hollande has been urging industrialized countries all along to up the ante before the Convention starts on November 30. As I mentioned in an op-ed in The Daily Star entitled, Climate Agreement in December: A Miracle in Paris? (August 1, 2015), Hollande had warned that there will be no agreement in December if these countries do not offer a plan to pay the 100 billion euros needed annually to finance the transition to renewable energy in developing countries. This sum, as I argue above, is only a low-ball estimate of the money needed to help developing countries make the shift to greener energy, adapt to climate change, and deal with the losses and damages they will inevitably suffer from such impacts as sea level rise, droughts and storms. Janos Pasztor, Assistant UN Secretary General on Climate, echoed a similar sentiment at a conference last month in Paris when he said, "Financing is

Financing gap in climate action

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

AT the forthcoming Climate Change summit in Paris, two parallel threads of conversations will take place in different conference rooms: one relates to reduction in carbon emissions, and the other pertains to capacity building to cope with the effects of climate change. The first one will attempt to tally up the promises made by individual countries (or groups) to reduce their carbon emissions. The other, less well-publicised conversation will, in the sidelines, strive to rack up the commitments made by mostly rich countries and the private sector to fund the adaptation and mitigation efforts necessary to complement the CO2 reduction drive. It is well-known that access to finance will play a pivotal role in climate change policy, following any agreement in Paris. Unfortunately, it is emerging that since the strongest advocates for financing is a group - mostly from developing countries - that has less clout than the perpetrators of global warming, i.e., the developed countries, there will be a major shortfall in this account.

According to Climate Interactive, a think tank affiliated with MIT, the carbon reduction scenario, after adding up all the country-offers made so far, show that global temperature in the year 2100 will increase by 3.5°C (6.3°F). These projections are based on Intended Nationally Determined Contributions or INDCs announced by each country to cut back its emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) and have a range of uncertainty from 2.1 to 4.6°C (3.7 to 8.4°F), down from the 4.5°C (8.1°F) of warming above pre-industrial levels forecast if nations continue on the business-as-usual track. Barring some last minute changes, or any major announcement by major emitters' (China, US, EU, India, Russia and Japan) meeting at the INDC Forum in Rabat, Morocco this week, it appears that there is a significant gap between the carbon reductions necessary to keep global warming to a level below 2°C and the INDC offers made so far. This shortfall or "INDC Gap" only adds to the total cost of, and investment necessary for, mitigation and adaptation.

Now, if we turn our attention to the other component of the climate agreement, we notice a major problem. At the international climate negotiations at Copenhagen in 2009, world leaders gave a commitment to mobilize investment funds of \$100bn per year to combat climate change. As mentioned above, the \$100 billion target was based on the goal of keeping temperature rise to below 2°C. Even if we consider \$100 billion annual financing promised by rich countries as a benchmark, according to all accounts there is a big Climate Finance Gap. The estimates of this gap vary from 40 to 70 percent according to the sources you use. A recent report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) found that rich countries have made a commitment of only \$57 billion. This is the most optimistic estimate of the Climate Finance Gap,

i.e., 43 percent. However, even this low estimate is beset by problems of double-counting and includes commitments made by multilateral development banks. Other estimates show a much wider gap in financing. In a scientific paper published recently in Climate and Development, Prof. Sam Fankhauser and his associates from the London School of Economics discuss the various areas where gaps have emerged, and warn of a bleaker picture. Another comparable dire prediction emerges from the International Energy Agency, which estimates that the world needs \$1 trillion a year between 2012 and 2050 to finance a low-emissions transition. The Paris Convention and the negotiations that will lead to a successful conclusion will inevitably be followed by "rounds" of meetings to narrow this financing gap. One of the hosts of COP21, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon is aware that the

absolutely key. \$100 billion is not that much when we want to change the whole world into a no-carbon future. For that we need trillions. " Various estimates, including some done by Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and OECD, show that given the uncertainty in world economy and austerity measures undertaken by developed countries, the financing gap can be met only by investments (including FDI) from the private sector. I don't want to sound like an alarmist, but there is increasing concern that the upcoming Paris Conference may witness the same type of bickering that bedeviled the last major climate conference in Copenhagen unless efforts to close the financing gap is nailed down soon.



"financing gap" is likely to emerge as a major stumbling block during the Paris negotiations. Earlier this month, it was announced that finance ministers of developed countries are to discuss climate finance and possibly to agree to a "finance package" on the sidelines of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank annual meetings in Lima, Peru, from October 9-11, 2015. While the World Bank, European Investment Bank (EIB), and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (ECRB) have all announced that they are planning to scale up climate-related lending, some NGOs have expressed serious doubts about this talk. To quote Wendel Trio, Director of Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe, "The pledges represent important political steps at a crucial time but the donor countries need to provide more clarity on their details. This cannot just be an exercise

The writer is an economist and educator who writes on public policy issues.

COMMENTS

- "MP denied bail over shooting child"**
(October 13, 2015)
▼
Fahim Dad Khan Rupok
And he exited the HC through the front gate without being arrested! Only possible in Bangladesh.
- ▼
Abdul Hafiz Dewan
Today's breaking news says the government seeks stay on his surrender order. This is a nasty precedent.
- ▼
Mahbubul Alam
Exemplary punishment should be given to him.
- "KSA will stay in charge of Hajj: Saudi prince"**
(October 12, 2015)
▼
Ronnie Muiz Khan
It is a business to them. They make billions of dollars every year out of Hajj. They wouldn't let this opportunity go out of their hand.
- ▼
Salim Uddin
But you must ensure the safety of pilgrims first. Why do Hajis lose their lives every year?
- "Dhaka in dark about handover of bodies"**
(October 12, 2015)
▼
Mohiuddin Al Husainy
Did anyone from Bangladesh government send any request for inquiry to Saudi Arabia like Iran did?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Declare the US air strike a war crime

The US Department of Defense has said that it would make "condolence payments" to the families of those killed and injured in the US air strike that hit a hospital run by Doctors Without Border in Kunduz, Afghanistan on October 3. At least 22 people were killed in this aerial bombardment. The dead included 12 staff members and 10 patients, including three children. Doctors Without Borders said that 24 of its staff members are still missing following the US air strike. The medical charity is pressing for an international commission to investigate what it calls a war crime. We agree with them and urge the international



community to declare it as a war crime.
Ted Rudow III, MA
CA, USA

Methane from human solid waste

Every year, thousands of tons of human waste are produced in Bangladesh which can be a great source of methane. It can also be used as a substitute for coal. Thailand started this method of producing methane more than ten years ago. Previously it used to import all liquid and solid fuel. Bangladesh can learn from Thailand and find a viable solution to its growing energy crisis.
Engr. S A Mansoor
Dhaka