

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
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Free thinking under attack again

We strongly condemn

IN two violent and gory incidents yesterday, four publishers and bloggers were attacked resulting in the death of one and severe injuries to three others who were in critical condition till going to press. These are direct attacks on our freedom of speech and thought and we condemn them in the strongest terms.

In one incident Ahmedur Rashid Tutul, a friend and publisher of Avijit Roy, along with two colleagues, was attacked in his office in Dhaka by a group of men, reportedly armed with machetes and guns. In the other incident later in the day, Faisal Arefin Dipan, another publisher, was attacked in Shahbag and succumbed to his injuries.

The way these attacks were carried out speaks volume about the ever increasing recklessness of the extremists who commit such crimes. In the first case, the armed assailants reportedly barged in Tutul's office in broad day light and locked him along with two of his colleagues from outside. All three were stabbed and at least one of them was shot.

The question that looms large at this point is this: Did the law enforcement agencies provide Tutul with adequate security, if at all, after he filed a complaint with the police, being threatened with death on Facebook following the murder of Roy earlier this year?

These attacks give a new dimension to the whole thing: not only bloggers, but also those associated with them are now being targeted. And the extremists seem to be operating with impunity. Regrettably, so far, of the five blogger-murder cases, some progress has been made only in one. There must be a well-coordinated effort to identify these extremist groups as well as their sources of funding, anticipate their actions and catch and award them the due punishment.

Cargo vessel route through Sundarbans

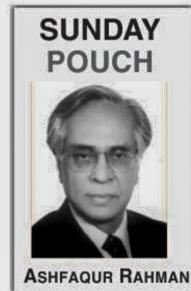
Enforce recommendations of probe team

THE three-member investigation committee formed in the aftermath of the sinking of a coal-carrying vessel in the Shela River in the Sundarbans has put the blame squarely on the vessel operator. The probe committee has recommended that such vessels be banned from operating in the mangrove forest to avoid future accidents of this nature, and we agree with the recommendation. The Sundarbans is a world heritage site and is home to many species of flora and fauna, and it is inexplicable that vessels carrying harmful loads are plying the river with impunity at the cost of the delicate ecological balance of the forest.

The latest sinking should serve as a wakeup call for the authorities. We await the decision of the Department of Forests on what it intends to do with the report and recommendations made thereof, because MV GR Raj is not the first vessel to sink, and we suspect that unless steps are taken to limit the navigation of commercial vessels, it will certainly not be the last.

The other sticking point in these incidents is the slow pace with which agencies get into gear over a salvage operation. Back in March, we witnessed the dearth in preparedness to deal with an oil spill. The refusal to use chemical agents to contain the spill, and the sheer confusion among various agencies led to wastage of precious time. Setting up of a permanent monitoring mechanism to monitor marine vessels is imperative as is the formulation of contingency plans on how to deal with spills and sinking of vessels.

The emerging positives of Bangladesh



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

RECENTLY, the well-known Boston Consulting Group wrote a piece entitled 'Bangladesh - the surging consumer market nobody saw coming'. It categorically states that the country is emerging as the 'world's next growth opportunities for consumer product companies'. Incredibly, every year about two million Bangladeshis join the ranks of the middle class and the affluent. This surge is seen as reflecting the quick graduation of Bangladesh to the level of a low middle income country from that of a least developed country. Policymakers in Bangladesh predict that the country would graduate to a middle income country with \$5000 + per capita in another five years. By 2025, about 30 million people will join the middle class here.

Bangladesh's heretofore growth story was unfortunately overshadowed by the growth story of neighbouring India. But the reasons behind Bangladesh's own success story are fast becoming apparent. The fact that microcredit has spawned all over the country but has not affected inflation is another great sub-story. Besides garment manufacturing, footwear, pharmaceuticals and IT services have led the country to reap immense benefits. A consumer society whose median age will just be 24 in the near future will do wonders for manufacturers, whose consumer base will expand significantly. Add to this, the burgeoning foreign remittance of Bangladeshi workers and professionals now working abroad. Not only the spending, but the cash backup works as a mix for consumer expenditure in quality goods.

Yet the Bangladesh story does not end there. From 2000, the country pulled its shoestring and began to rise, making significant improvements in the basic condition of people's lives. Life expectancy began to improve, and now stands at 70 years. The country can pride itself on having overtaken the life expectancy of neighbouring India by five years. This is in spite of India's citizens having more per capita income. Bangladesh has also taken giant steps in

improving health and education. Today girls' education has crossed 95 percent, surpassing the education level of boys. Another great progress is in infant mortality. Child mortality has also more than halved and is now falling more rapidly. Maternal mortality has fallen by two-thirds. Today females live two years more than males. A unique phenomenon in Bangladesh today is that the rate of poverty reduction is more than the rate of growth per year. All this is the secret behind Bangladesh's growth story.

Several factors seem to have contributed to this success. Birth control in Bangladesh has never been coercive; it has always been voluntary. This has

potent that it can be dubbed as the 'Bangladesh magic' behind growth.

Meanwhile, food production in this tiny country has grown three times since 1971. What was the international basket case of Henry Kissinger of yore is turning into an almost food exporting nation. The Bangladeshi farmer is also diversifying crop production into vegetables and fruits as well as exotic food items. An extraordinary strategy used by Bangladeshi farmers was the use of high yielding seeds and irrigation to grow crops, turning the winter crop (Boro) into the largest yielding crop season.

The phenomenal growth of Bangladesh can also be attributed to the huge amount of foreign remittances sent

programmes. The other extraordinary phenomenon of Bangladesh is the expansion in the growth of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). From the global giants, the Grameen Bank and BRAC, there seems to be an NGO for all worthy causes in Bangladesh.

Yet two aspects of Bangladesh are disappointing. The first is corruption. Like measles, it has pockmarked the society. It is not only a rent seeker but a policy drifter too. It contorts and deflects priorities. It becomes virulent at times. The other is dysfunctional politics. People are politically conscious but there are politicians and professionals who serve their own interests more than that of society.



PHOTO: STAR

encouraged couples and especially mothers to understand the path they need to take to build a happy family. Today, the fertility rate is 2.3, which is slightly above the replacement level. Add to this the widespread growth of female education. Two other phenomena have buttressed this achievement. The boom in the garment industry - Bangladesh is now the second largest garment exporter in the world just behind China, a behemoth in this field. The other is the introduction of microcredit that fuelled the income of women in the entire country. These two growth elements have pumped money into the pockets of women who have spent mainly on health, education and nutritious food. This combination is so

by 10 million expatriate Bangladeshis. These remittances are serious money in the pockets of families and are spurring trade as well as small scale industries. A fascinating phenomenon of Bangladesh is that the diaspora does not belong to the poor families only. The middle income professionals are also a part of it.

The social safety programmes have leapfrogged and is now 12 percent of the GDP in the country. The present government of Sheikh Hasina is particularly sensitive to the needs of the vulnerable people in society. The Bangladesh society is now going through a rebalancing exercise. In spite of the country's cantankerous politics, there is a consensus in favour of social

The government under the Prime Minister is trying to contain corruption by introducing digital technology in delivering goods and services. One of the remarkable things in this sphere is the use of the internet for government procurement and collection of revenue rather than for tendering and solicitation. About 20 percent of government purchases take place through the internet. But the use of digital technology needs to be sped up. Bangladesh needs course correction fast to achieve Bangabandhu's *Sonar Bangla*.

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

Engaging the World in Syria



ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER

A global security crisis of historic proportions is raging in the Middle East, and spreading by the day, as millions of refugees flee Syria and Iraq. The crisis is now affecting not just all of Syria's immediate

neighbours, straining their resources and exacerbating social and ethnic tensions; it now directly involves all of the current permanent members of the Security Council except China. It is time for all would-be permanent members of the United Nations Security Council - namely, Germany, India, Japan, Brazil, and Egypt - to step up.

The desire for a political settlement that could end the Syrian civil war is palpable; but just what that settlement would look like remains open to debate - or to further conflict. Indeed, Russia and the United States are circling each other like boxers before the contest actually begins, supporting different factions and trying to ensure that their allies in the multi-sided conflict are advancing, or at least holding ground.

The need for broad cooperation - and the support of the entire UN Security Council - is apparent. That is why US Secretary of State John Kerry is talking to the Russians, the Saudis, and the Turks to build support for a new round of international talks. And the UN and Arab League's special envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura, has created a set of working groups, chaired by Europeans, to "create a

framework for concrete talks between Syria's government and opposition."

In enabling a peace deal, a coalition of countries that are not yet directly involved in the crisis could be very helpful. Such a coalition - involving, say, Germany, India, Japan, Brazil, and Egypt - could increase the pressure on President Bashar al-Assad to negotiate by convincing Russian President Vladimir Putin that the world is watching his deal-making efforts closely and that his prestige is on the line.

Moreover, coalition members could convince other relevant regional players to push for a lasting peace. Germany, for example, already recognises that the only long-term solution to Europe's refugee influx lies in eliminating the need to flee, and has begun to make some moves. Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier travelled to Turkey in September to help broker a deal on keeping refugees in Turkey, in exchange for restarting talks on Turkish accession to the European Union. A leading German foreign policy expert, Volker Perthes, is chairing one of de Mistura's working groups.

The other countries have yet to take action. But they, too, have plenty of motivation - and plenty to offer.

India - as well as Pakistan - has a great deal to gain from strengthening Southwest Asian trade, energy, and investment ties. Since the signing of the Iran nuclear deal, India has been contemplating renewing the plan for an Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, with the participation of China and Russia. But that will be impossible without a settlement in Syria and a decision by Iran to stop supporting Hezbollah.

India has a strong relationship with Iran, underpinned by long-standing

cultural, social, political, and economic ties, with India now funding an overhaul of the Iranian port of Chabahar, which will give it direct access to Afghanistan. This places India in a strong position to push Iran to put pressure on Assad. Likewise, India can leverage its relationship with Russia - it remains a major importer of Russian arms - to help drive progress.

Japan's potential contribution also involves Iran, with which Japan has lately been pursuing a closer relationship - not least because Japan needs Iranian oil and gas. Earlier this month in Tehran, the Japanese and Iranian foreign ministers agreed to begin negotiations on a bilateral investment treaty. Japan also wants to speed up implementation of the Iran nuclear deal, so that it can take advantage of the business opportunities that will result when economic sanctions on the Islamic Republic are lifted.

But if Iran is truly to rejoin the international community, it must play a constructive role in its region. Japan, which now aspires to enhance its own role on the world stage, must not shy away from making that clear. A bonus here is that Japanese and Indian interest in the Syrian peace process could spur China to play an active role in reaching, rather than blocking, a solution.

Brazil, despite confronting plenty of domestic problems right now, is also in a position to help. Not only does it have substantial ties with Russia; it is also linked to Turkey, exemplified by the two countries' 2010 effort to broker a deal with Iran over its nuclear programme.

Moreover, in 2011, Brazil put forward a concept paper at the UN outlining how countries seeking to implement the "responsibility to protect" doctrine

should behave. With the Syrian government - through its murder of tens of thousands of civilians with barrel bombs and poison gas - having more than fulfilled the criteria for triggering the international community's obligation to intervene, Brazil could suggest what an intervention that reflected the principle of "responsibility while protecting" might look like.

Finally, Egypt - a perennial candidate for a permanent or rotating African seat in a reformed Security Council - has important relationships throughout the region, particularly with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries that are directly supporting some Syrian opposition groups. The government of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who has emphasised the need for a comprehensive political settlement, is tacitly supporting Assad, but is also deeply concerned about the Islamic State. Egyptian diplomats are thus excellent candidates to exert pressure for compromise.

Many of these countries' governments might say that the Syrian conflict is too far away to affect them directly. But global leadership does not simply mean enjoying the prestige that accompanies presumed power. The UN Charter requires countries to use their power to identify "any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression," and to decide which measures must be taken "to maintain or restore international peace and security." The Syrian crisis is a major "threat to the peace," and the world must address it together.

The writer is the President and CEO of New America. Her latest book is *Unfinished Business: Women Men Work Family*.
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(Exclusive to *The Daily Star*)

COMMENTS

"Islamic State: Let it not be a red herring"

(October 29, 2015)

Ahmad Hussain Abir

These killings are intended to create a "crisis" and give the US an excuse to expand its influence in this region.

"Army gets first female trainee pilots"

(October 29, 2015)

Mukul Hossain

It's really encouraging to see our girls venture into new territories.

Aklima

This will inspire many girls and women to take up challenging jobs.

"BSF kills Bangladeshi"

(October 29, 2015)

Sadaf Amrita

They keep killing Bangladeshis while our government does nothing.

Mohammad Mohid

What would have happened if BGB killed an Indian citizen? Why is our government not doing anything to stop these killings?

Sabir

Where are the human rights organisations now? Why are they silent?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters@thedailystar.net

Footpaths in Hatirpool

The Hatirpool kitchen market is one of the busiest in Dhaka city. But the conditions of the roads and footpaths here are deplorable. The shop owners throw dirty water and garbage directly onto the roads. The footpaths are in a worse condition; they are occupied by fruit-vendors or vegetable-sellers. Not an inch

of footpath has been spared by the shop owners for the pedestrians who have to take the risk of walking on the roads to get past the market. This situation cannot be allowed to continue. We urge the authorities concerned to take necessary steps to free the footpaths and repair the roads along the Hatirpool market.

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Establish a statistical institute

The World Statistics Day is on October 20. It's a matter of concern that the day is ignored by our media. Obviously lack of awareness about the importance of reliable statistics is the reason behind such a poor response to this day. We hope that the enactment of the

"National Strategy for the Development of Statistics" by the government would help provide a solid base for building a national statistical system. I urge the Prime Minister to establish a statistical institute in Bangladesh. In 1974, Bangabandhu laid the foundation for that by setting up Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.
Syed Badrul Haque
Lalmatia, Dhaka