

IT MUST BE STOPPED

MALIK SIRAJ AKBAR

THE horrific cycle of killing of secular bloggers in Bangladesh, which has already claimed at least four lives this year, and the fresh murder of publisher Faisal Arefin Dipon, in Dhaka, the Bangladeshi capital, on October 31, is deeply disconcerting. The Ansar al-Islam, an Islamic extremist group, which identifies as the local affiliate of al-Qaeda, has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Mr. Dipon and another publisher, who was attacked in a separate but similar violent incident on the same day, were targeted because they had published the work of secular blogger Avijit Roy, a Bangladeshi-American, who was killed by the Islamic extremists on February 27. Roy's wife, also a blogger, was critically injured in that attack. According to the BBC, other bloggers who have been killed in 2015 in the same fashion include: Washiqur Rahman (March 30), Ananta Bijoy Das (May 12) and Niloy Neel (August 7).

Starting from the January 7 shooting of the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoonists in Paris by an al-Qaeda-affiliate, 2015 has been an incredibly chilling year for free speech practitioners and defenders. While attackers in Paris and Dhaka have the same set of ideological belief, they have hit totally different targets i.e. cartoonists and bloggers. This means writers, bloggers, journalists and cartoonists are all equally at high risk of being targeted by religious extremists should they assert dissenting views. The Paris shooting indicated that such fanatical attacks are not solely confined to poor developing countries. However, the occurrence of an attack on free

speech in one part of the world does not justify a similar attack in another country.

The Bangladeshi government has disappointed not only its people but also the free thinkers across the world by describing the October 31st tragedy as an "isolated incident". *The Daily Star*, an English language newspaper, has rightly pushed back in response to the "isolated incident" remark attributed to the country's Home Minister, by

to carry out more attacks."

In some countries, many heinous crimes go unpunished under the guise of patriotism. In an attempt to divert attention from their failures, governments insist that foreign media and human rights groups want to defame their countries by continuously highlighting the 'negative' things that happen inside their frontiers. That's not an acceptable excuse to spare the Bangladeshi government

been killed for producing secular contents, should people who purchase and read these books also prepare to be the next target? That is certainly not what the country's founding fathers had envisioned. Bangladesh, led by progressive intellectuals and liberal politicians, gained independence from Pakistan in 1971 after a violent war. Today, Pakistan is in the grip of Islamist violence where the Taliban regularly assassinate their

providing a recipe and a template to their counterparts elsewhere in the world on how to eliminate dissenting bloggers. Bangladesh, please stop it. If the government in Dhaka does not set a successful precedence in punishing these assassins, they have to know that these attacks will not stop here.

Emboldened by the government's lack of action, the extremists will eventually expand their attacks on liberals, politicians, journalists, writers and anyone who disagrees with their views and approach. After all, these extremist organisations use terror as a first step to force the local population to surrender before them but their ultimate goal is to overthrow the existing system and attain political power so that they enforce Islamic rule in Bangladesh. Afghanistan and Pakistan are two classic examples for the Bangladeshi government to examine and understand the jihadist mentality and ambitions.

The antidote for Bangladesh, or any other country that is currently in the grip of radical Islam, is not submission to fundamentalists but more secularism. The only way to counter obscurantist views is to further democratise the society and protect free speech. Avijit Roy dreamed of a Bangladesh where no child's brain is manipulated or robbed of critical thinking. He wanted kids to learn science and think rationally. That should have actually been the government's policy and not solely the dream of a lone blogger. It is still not too late. Bangladesh should immediately curb the incoming wave of extremism and protect its existing secular space.

The writer is a US based exiled Baloch journalist and 2014-15 Edward Mason Fellow, Harvard Kennedy School. © The World Post, Huffington Post



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

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describing his stance as "humiliating". With these attacks, the newspaper noted, "our nation's soul is under threat."

Writing in the same newspaper, columnist Meghna Guhathakurta argued:

"Terming these as "isolated incidents" is one way of depoliticising them. Such statements will only embolden the terrorists

over its failure to arrest and punish all perpetrators of the past attacks on secular bloggers. Radical Islamist groups are increasingly expanding their attacks with absolute impunity.

People have begun to question: Who will be the next target in this unstoppable series of assaults? If the writers and publishers have

ideological opponents. Bangladesh cannot allow Islamic extremists to use its land with impunity. Such negligence causes catastrophic consequences.

Stunned, scared and outraged, the world is watching these shocking attacks on secular bloggers and publishers in Bangladesh. Terrorists operating in Bangladesh are

SANCHAYAPATRA A Trojan Horse

OPEN SKY



BIRU PAKSHA PAUL

MARTIN Luther King once said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." A similar principle applies to the economy. A distortion in one market creates disturbances in other markets across borders. Outrageously high interest rates offered on the National Savings

Certificates (NSCs), which we call Sanchayapatra, have long been distortive to deposit rates in commercial banks in Bangladesh. We are gradually turning into a risk avert, lazy saving society, dampening the spirit of private investments. A saving glut has been crippling the vigour of entrepreneurial venture. John Menard Keynes, who warned about this paradox, had said that saving is a vice.

The national saving rate of 30 percent, which is the ratio of savings to GDP, has already reached the investment rate, and the appetite for investment demand seems to be dull. We are gaining more fat than burning. In an emerging economy like Bangladesh, a savings rate lower than that of investment by even 10 percentage points is not surprising. Actually, it is normal. The ensuing saving-investment gap that also relates to fiscal and current account deficits can easily be financed through foreign funds with cheaper interest rates in the age of globalisation. Financing the budget deficit with a high-interest bearing and thus expensive Sanchayapatra is not only dampening investment appetite, but also resulting in big expenditure for the government's future budget in the name of interest payments on Sanchayapatra.

When the government sets an interest rate which is much higher than the central bank's, savings are likely to move from the banking sector to the government coffers, paralysing the effectiveness of monetary policy to a great extent. It is akin to a situation where the referee throws an additional soccer ball in a field when the players have been chasing one ball all the while. The resulting distortion, therefore, must be avoided by implementing policy consistency between fiscal and monetary bodies. Since the interest rate is a monetary instrument, the central bank should have full control in determining the

upper and lower bounds of interest rates. Suffice it to say, we will hold the central bank responsible for any failure in monetary aspects. We cannot expect the driver to steer the motor vehicle safely and efficiently without letting the driver be in full possession of the steering wheel, accelerator, and brakes.

The recent sale of Sanchayapatra's has fulfilled almost 40 percent of its annual target only after a quarter in the current fiscal year, suggesting a saving bubble in the economy. Sanchayapatra's net sale was 3 times higher than the target in the last fiscal year. While the average deposit rate in the banking system is roughly 7 percent at

best. That would also justify a 7 percent average deposit rate in the banking system. Otherwise, the disparity would gradually become distortive. It is snatching away potential deposits that would otherwise have ended up in the banking sector and thus would have further lowered interest rates, making investments more attractive than they are now.

Whereas Sanchayapatra was supposed to support the poor, widows, retirees, and the vulnerable, in reality it is feeding the need and greed of the rich. The rich are not interested in being engaged in the capital market. Why would they take unnecessary risks in the stock market if

reducing the share of the Annual Development Programme (ADP). The interest liability of Tk 33 thousand crore in the budget is more than one third of our ADP. And NSC interest payments hold a major share of it. The share will keep growing day by day and will gradually squeeze the growth of the development budget in the future. This Trojan horse will do more harm than good.

We should not view the critics of Sanchayapatra as a counterparty to welfare. There are better ways to ensure welfare for the poor, widows, and pensioners. Just like India has started the sale of pension funds, we can develop numerous pension products with

Sanchayapatra – a supposed welfare instrument – is actually a Trojan horse that threatens the future of our development budget, and thus reduces growth potentials for the nation. The higher the sale of NSCs, the higher the future interest liability which will definitely eat up a bigger pie of our budget, reducing the share of the Annual Development Programme (ADP).



present, NSC rates are as high as 11 to 12 percent. The additional 4 to 5 percent is attracting the saving bees aggressively towards Sanchayapatra. This kind of huge interest rate disparity in a single market is chaotic for the economy in many ways.

High interest rates on NSCs are preventing banks' deposit rate from falling and thus keeping lending rates considerably high. NSCs offered interest rates as high as 13 percent when inflation was close to 12 percent in 2011 and 2012, giving a real rate of return of 1 percent. Now inflation has cascaded down to as low as 6 percent, causing Sanchayapatra rates to roll down to 8 percent at

equivalent returns can be pocketed without hassle? A high interest rate regime cannot stimulate the stock market. The US reinvigoration of the stock market in the post-2008 period was made possible through a historically lowest interest rate regime.

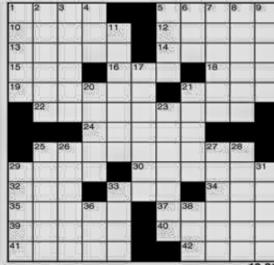
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longer maturity and thus enable the government to use the funds for long-term infrastructure buildup. In addition, we can avoid maturity mismatch already prevalent in the financing method related to Sanchayapatra. Thus, the issue of helping the elderly and women can better be addressed by devising a smarter pension plan without eroding the future of development financing. The Trojan horse must be checked in advance to prevent the nation from falling into monetary distortions and a future budgetary debacle.

The writer is chief economist of Bangladesh Bank.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| ACROSS | DOWN |
| 1 Sow chow | 1 Play the banjo |
| 5 Haunted house resident | 2 Rent agreements |
| 10 Met performer | 3 Focused |
| 12 More bloody | 4 Luau dish |
| 13 Math comparison | 5 Sailor's quaff |
| 14 Final letter | 6 Scenery chewer |
| 15 Mex. neighbor | 7 Salem setting |
| 16 Food additive | 8 Musical transitions |
| 18 Candy counter buy | 9 Streetcars |
| 19 Blunder | 11 Vulcan's lookalike |
| 21 Miseries | 17 Haunted house resident |
| 22 Haunted house residents | 20 Flower part |
| 24 Track horse | 21 Most terrible |
| 25 Haunted house residents | 23 Serving collections |
| 29 Cello's cousin | 25 Dakota city |
| 30 Will subject | 26 More pious |
| 32 Shocking swimmer | 27 Name in a 1984 breakup |
| 33 Galena, for one | 28 Layers |
| 34 Lingerie item | 29 Sporty Chevy |
| 35 One Halloween choice... | 31 Kind of kitchen |
| 37 ... and the other | 33 Tom Joad, for one |
| 39 Famed Roman fountain | 36 106, to Caesar |
| 40 Conductor Georg | 38 Sturgeon eggs |
| 41 Like haunted houses | |
| 42 Spirit | |



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

RAFTS BABAR
ARROW ALONE
SCENE LOUITS
TAN PALERMO
ARCO TUB BAD
SOHO GOTON
QUO YEN
CUTUP ASPS
BOA SSE TOW
ERRATUM RUE
GOTME BEENET
ANEAR ERECT
TARPS RATES

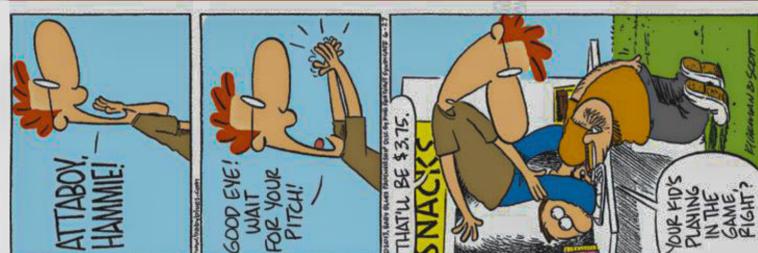
BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott



QUOTABLE Quote



PATTON OSWALT

American writer and actor

So when you spot violence, or bigotry, or intolerance or fear or just garden-variety misogyny, hatred or ignorance, just look it in the eye and think, 'The good outnumber you, and we always will.'