

Exempt print and electronic media

Registration should only be for online news portals

THE government's move to make print newspapers obtain registration for their online editions is neither logical nor necessary. In fact it is counter-productive. All newspapers have gone through the official process of getting government approval through obtaining a "Declaration" and have been operating for years, many for decades. It is the same for television channels which operate under official license; hence their online version should be included in this authorisation. Thus newspapers should not require additional registration for their online editions which are the extensions of the parent organisations and not separate entities. The registration process, therefore, should only be confined to those news portals which are exclusively online and have not obtained official permission to operate from any official body so far.

Online editions of newspapers and television channels in Bangladesh, like the rest of the world, have been introduced in response to the demand for internet versions of media content. For Bangladeshi print and electronic media, online editions are crucial for millions of expatriate Bangladeshis all over the globe to be in touch with their country.

The government, therefore, must give a clear directive that only unregistered, purely online news portals must go through the registration process. Online editions that are inseparable parts of the newspapers should be run under the existing Printing Presses and Publication Act and not be lumped together with unregistered online entities.

Aborted eviction drive

The Mayor must not give up

WE fully endorse the Mayor of Dhaka (North) City Corporation's move to free public spaces of illegal occupation and make them available for the benefit of the general public. However, we strongly denounce the unruly behaviour of some of the so-called transport workers who resorted to violence and even confined the Mayor for three hours. Not only that, on-duty journalists were also subjected to assault. A large part of the main thoroughfare in Tejgaon was blocked, resulting in heavy traffic congestion in the capital. This is totally unacceptable.

As the matter stands, a good part of Tejgaon-Sat Rasta area is occupied by trucks parked helter skelter at any time of the day, impeding vehicular movement. The terminal that was built 72 years ago is now inadequate to house trucks, resulting in illegal parking in the adjoining areas. To make matters even more grievous, the land of the terminal has been encroached upon over the years where illegal structures have been built by individuals.

The action of the Mayor was indeed in public interest, which, it is now apparent, did not go down well with some elements in the transport workers union. Cleaning one of the busiest roads in the city will considerably reduce trip time and vehicular queuing. The Mayor has said that he will not bow down to muscle power, and we hope that he will not.

No public space can be occupied by any private establishment. In this regard we urge the Mayor of Dhaka (South) City Corporation to replicate his DNCC counterpart's move to rid the capital of illegal establishments.

Lessons from the banking mela

OPEN SKY



BIRU PAKSHA PAUL

THE recent five-day banking mela (fair), held at the Bangla Academy premises, was the first of its kind in Bangladesh's history. It also provided a role model for many

other developing nations that aspire to ascertain sustainable growth through financial inclusion. All 56 banks and other financial institutions came together for the banking Olympic to celebrate the passion for working for the economic wellbeing of the country. It left a couple of lessons for us.

The whole banking industry has to redefine itself to comply with the tenets of developmental central banking, which Bangladesh Bank now exercises while operating monetary policy. Accordingly, sheer profit maximisation by any means can no longer be a 24-hour dream for the commercial banks in a country like Bangladesh where the majority of the poor are still unbanked. Both state and private banks must constantly update their strategies to make their products and services available to the unbanked and vulnerable people of the country. Thus, empowerment of the poor and women in particular should be central to the strategic intent of the entire banking industry. The current central bank governor, being a development economist, is constantly urging the banks to explore all possible avenues that can empower the poor without compromising the core duty of preserving macro-stability.

What is the problem if the banks do not pursue the path of financial inclusion? Why do they need to invite the poor into their premises when thus far the neatly decorated and often air-conditioned offices are typically reserved for the affluent? The answers to these questions point to both ethical necessity and existential concerns. A bank may consider itself clever by ignoring these questions. In the long-run, however, the



Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Atiur Rahman flanked by senior bankers visits Banking Fair Bangladesh-2015 on Bangla Academy premises in Dhaka on Nov 27, 2015.

PHOTO: BANGLADESH BANK

bank will dig its own grave if it doesn't embrace financial inclusion in a stratified society like Bangladesh where the super rich tend to default on loans. In contrast, the middle class and the have-nots have a healthy record of repaying their debts.

Most important is the necessity of achieving and maintaining a moderately high growth rate for Bangladesh, which is impossible without three things: liberalisation, an environmental standard, and widespread employment of the national workforce across the sectors in the economy. And a balanced participation in the economic activity is a far cry without financial inclusion. If national growth drops, the whole banking industry will be at risk. Hence, the banking industry must adopt all possible strategies that eventually benefit the growth potential of the economy. And thus financial inclusion is inevitable for ensuring sustainable growth. That was the vital message of the five-day banking mela.

If a moderately high growth rate above 6 percent cannot be maintained, doing business in Bangladesh will be difficult for most banks, triggering the

possibilities of mergers, acquisitions, and even bankruptcy. And the most important sector to ensure that respectable growth rate is agriculture. Thus, it is all banks' responsibility to closely monitor the progress of agriculture and to facilitate the needs of the farmers in a timely manner. Three percent growth in agriculture may look much lower than the 6 percent growth in services and the 8 percent growth in industry, but that three percent is the engine of empowerment for all other sectors. Agriculture employs almost 40 percent of our workforce. A one percentage point drop in this important sector will surely reduce growth rates in the two other sectors through a drop in consumption demand, but impact on national output will not be of the same magnitude if growth rates marginally drop in those two sectors.

Loud was the call for humane banking for the employees – a notion often ignored by the rich bank owners who keep on changing chief executives until their profits mount the pinnacle. If the employers do not strike a balance between work and life, activity and

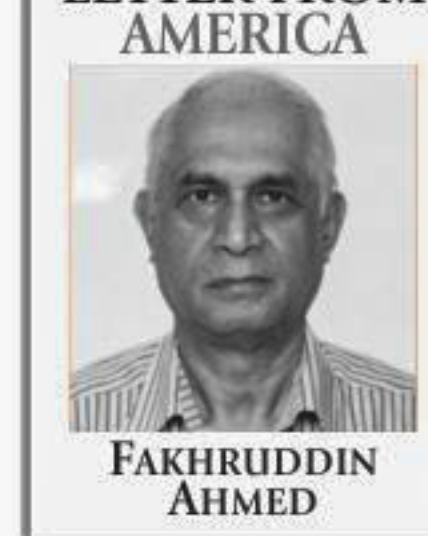
scope for education, and task and training for their employees, future productivity in the financial industry will fall. In the knowledge economy index, Bangladesh ranks 26th out of 28 developing nations in Asia. Does it not alert the banking sector? Bank CEOs can take the lead in devising effective strategies to facilitate after-office education and training for their employees to stimulate future labour productivity which is also linked to the nation's growth potential.

The mela offered an excellent opportunity for mingling and interaction. Being organised by Bangladesh Bank and thus staying under a single umbrella, all 56 banks learned from each other with the spirit of healthy competition. Bank bosses met the customers face to face and understood the necessity to improve the quality of services. A five-day mela cannot accomplish all the goals the banking industry ought to pursue, but it certainly gave new momentum to the commitment of building a vibrant, transparent and accountable banking nation.

The writer is chief economist of Bangladesh Bank.

MUSLIMS ARE COMING !

LETTER FROM AMERICA



FAKHURUDDIN AHMED

ON my visit to the local post office last week, I noticed a young woman at the counter wearing a hijab. When my turn came, she addressed me in a perfect American accent, "May I help you?" I said, "Yes." Seeing that my letter was addressed to the Bangladesh Consulate in New York, she said softly in perfect Bangla, "Onek shomoy lagbe."

She seemed to know that Bangladesh would take a long time to process my request.

Bangladeshis at home will never understand how rejuvenating it feels when a stranger addresses a Bangladeshi in Bangla in America. Because of my six-foot frame, all my life I have been hearing, "You don't look like a Bangali," especially from Pakistanis, who seem to think that there is a height limit for Bangladeshis! Even Bangladeshis sometimes express surprise: "Apni Bangladeshi?" (You are Bangladeshi?) What pleased me about this young lady was that she was absolutely certain that I was Bangladeshi. There was a lot more to be happy about what this young lady represented.

Here was a US government worker, representing the United States Postal Service, wearing a hijab, something that would not be allowed in France. This encapsulates the difference between assimilation in France (and Western Europe) and America. This is one reason why homegrown terrorism that manifested itself in the form of the Paris attacks on November 13 has escaped America. (All 9/11 terrorists were foreign nationals.)

Terrorist attacks in Paris have highlighted the high degree of alienation and non-assimilation among Western Europe's immigrant population. The terrorists sprang from France and Belgium's disaffected immigrant communities. The root cause of the estrangement can be traced back to the colonial history of the Western European nations.

France's restive immigrant population is predominantly from its former North African colonies – the so-called Maghreb nations of Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. For hundreds of years France was the colonial ruler of these North African Arabs. Some festering vestiges of the unequal relationship, and consequent resentment, still linger among the descendants of the former masters and their subjects.

America has thus far been in an enviable position to avoid the scourge of homegrown terrorism. Immigrants have found it far relatively easier to integrate into the American melting pot than to assimilate in Europe. America has always been a haven for the world's persecuted. That noble tradition is now under attack.

Republicans in Congress and those running for president are against accepting any more of the 4.1 million refugees fleeing the civil war and ISIS-triggered carnage in Syria. Thirty Republican governors oppose resettling Syrian refugees in their states. Senators Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz, children of Cuban refugees themselves, want to shut the door on Syrian refugees.

The current vetting regime for Syrian refugees – which involves biometrics, the FBI, the State Department, Homeland and other security agencies, and takes 18 to 24 months to complete – is so thorough that only about 1800 Syrian refugees have been granted asylum in the last five years.

Germany reported in October that 103,708 Syrians filed for asylum in 2015, of which 57,000 have been

already accepted, and the most of the others will be, soon. The success rate for Syrian asylum-seekers in Germany is 93.2 percent. Germany will spend around \$6.6 billion caring for the 800,000 refugees and migrants expected to enter the country by the end of 2015.

Despite the Paris massacre, President Hollande has reiterated France's pledge to accept 25,000 Syrian refugees in the next two years. Yet, President Obama's commitment to admit 10,000 Syrian refugees next year has been met with a firestorm of opposition from the Republicans. While the Republicans reflexively oppose immigration, this time their real targets are the Muslims.

According to a poll, 76 percent of Republicans, and 42 percent of Democrats believe that American and Islamic values are at odds. Former Governor Jeb Bush and Senator Ted Cruz want to allow Christian, and bar

ment camps at the first opportunity, just as President Franklin Roosevelt had interned Japanese Americans during WWII.

After every Muslim terrorist attack in the post-9/11 West, the demagogues immediately demonize Islam – a religion of 1.6 billion people – as the perpetrator. The subsequent clampdown feeds the terrorists' narrative that there is no room for Muslims in the secular West that has purportedly declared war on Islam. ISIS's explicit aim is to eliminate the so-called "grayzone" – the western acceptance of Muslims.

There is no penalty for egregious anti-Muslim rhetoric. Estimated to be between 2.5 to 8 million, America's Muslim citizens are too weak to retaliate. Trump has stood by his blatant lie that "thousands and thousands" of Arab Americans in Jersey City, New Jersey, across the river from Manhattan, celebrated as the twin



PHOTO: SOLIDARITY-US

According to a poll, 76 percent of Republicans, and 42 percent of Democrats believe that American and Islamic values are at odds. Former Governor Jeb Bush and Senator Ted Cruz want to allow Christian, and bar Muslim Syrian refugees from entering the US.

Muslim Syrian refugees from entering the US. Donald Trump would mandate all Muslim Americans to register in a database, track their movements, and require them to carry faith-identifying cards. If Trump had his way, he would probably ship all Muslims to intern-

towers came down on 9/11!

Muslim Americans have thrown in their lot with America. Their fate is intertwined with America's. It is not only hurtful, but also counterproductive to label them as fifth columnists, which they are not. They are as patriotic as any other group of Americans, and serve America as teachers, physicians, engineers, lawyers, businesspeople, government workers and in the armed forces. They would do anything to thwart attack by ISIS or its clones on America.

America must also consider the possibility that notwithstanding its altruistic intentions, invasion, occupation and bombing of Muslim nations may result in blowback. Muslim terrorism was unknown in America before the US-led Gulf War I in 1991. Perhaps, if America doesn't fight them abroad, they won't have to fight them at home!

Republicans demand strong leadership from President Obama against ISIS while opposing his "stay-the-course," "reduce-ISIS-controlled-territory," "no-American-boots-on-the-ground" military strategy, and hamstringing his Syrian refugee policy. It is imperative that the world's military leader also be its moral leader. If America refuses to admit more Syrian refugees simply because they are predominantly Muslim, it will cede the global moral leadership to Germany.

The writer is a Rhodes Scholar.

COMMENTS

"Shias feel insecure" (November 28, 2015)

Lotus

Some misguided elements are trying to create unrest all over the country.

Hasna Rahman

The government must catch the criminals before the situation gets out of hand.

Ahona

Bangladesh has been a land of peaceful coexistence for so many years. We cannot let the bigots spread hate through their criminal activities.

Abedin Hussain

We need an all-out effort to combat militancy.

Sumaya

Where is the country heading to?

"Shell-shocked family wants justice" (November 28, 2015)

Lamia Khondkar

There should be no place for religious extremists in our country.

Anonymous

The government should bring the perpetrators to book as soon as possible.

Abdur Rahman

We condemn these heinous acts of brainwashed bigots.