

## Terror attacks continue

### Find the masterminds

THIS time the attack on an Ahmadiyya mosque in Rajshahi's Bagmara upazila was aimed particularly at creating terror within that community. We have said this before and we say it again; Bangladesh has no history of sectarian violence. The pattern of going after soft targets in other districts is a worrying development. That we now have an alleged suicide bombing incident at Bagmara means that the situation is heating up. We are informed by law enforcers that they suspect the hand of JMB in the attack. The latest incident comes on the heels of a major successful crackdown on militants who had holed up in Dhaka's Mirpur area on Christmas day with enough bomb-making material to launch a major campaign of terror.

With the killing of foreigners and now attacks on places of worship of minority communities and various sects of Islam, it should be clear what these elements are aiming to achieve. These extremists have been lying low for so long and have decided to act, and there is a pattern in their operations. Despite success in pre-empting some of these extremists, the attacks are continuing, and it is disheartening to see that only operatives are getting caught in the raids prior to or in the aftermath of an incident. The real masterminds are managing to remain elusive.

While catching foot soldiers involved in acts of terror is certainly a commendable job, can we really bring the problem under complete control without apprehending the ringleaders?

## Pahela Baishakh sexual assault

### Sexual predators still on the loose

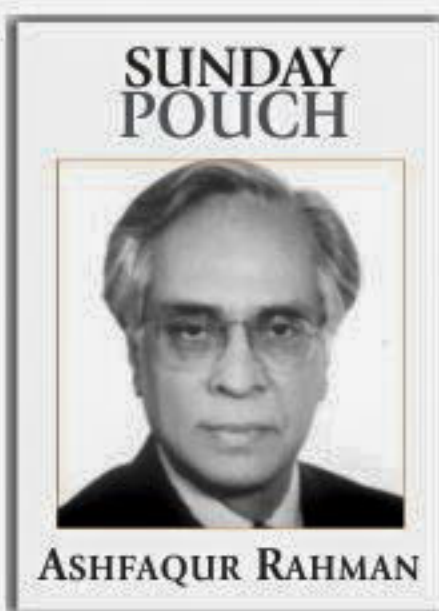
AFTER eight long months the police have submitted the final report on the sexual assaults on Pahela Baishakh, offering precious little in terms of catching the culprits. Initially they had denied the entire incident. One wonders what one should attribute to the fact that till date not a single attacker has been arrested - lack of capability or indifference. The question is all the more relevant considering that there were police on duty nearby while the horrible assault on around 20 females, including a minor, was taking place; two of the culprits had been handed over to the police but they were released later for reasons best known to them.

It is also very strange that the police department, after grudgingly acknowledging that these offences did take place, that too after public outrage and release of footage on social media, posted pictures of the alleged sex offenders in the papers with an offer of one lakh taka for information leading to their arrests. Despite such 'evidence' nothing has happened and we are still waiting for justice.

The performance of the police regarding the probe into this matter raises questions about the culprits and their ability to dodge the law after carrying out such perverted acts.

Sexual assaults on women and girls cannot be tolerated in a civilised society. It is the responsibility of law enforcing agencies to remain extra vigilant so that such deplorable incidents do not occur. When unfortunately they do, as on the Pahela Baishakh, they must act promptly to apprehend and arrest the culprits, no matter who they are. The perfunctory treatment of this case will only give license for such barbaric assaults to be repeated.

# The changing face of Bangladesh



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

AS the sun starts setting on 2015, it is perhaps time to give a look at how well Bangladesh fared economically this year. The country abounds with sceptics and political doomsayers. And yet there seems to be chinks of light penetrating the opaque glass that surrounds these doom mongers.

2015 saw complex political turmoil in Bangladesh. There were also structural constraints that soured economic growth inside the country. Moreover, 'global volatility' also presented a threat to the country. People began the year with dread and a sense of hopelessness. Yet as days passed, the country witnessed macro-economic stability. This spurred the country's GDP growth and reduced poverty. This year the country stepped into the low middle income status, shedding for all practical purposes the least developed economy status. This was more than a generational change and we started to regain our confidence as we pulled out of the economic morass.

But challenges do remain; these challenges include political uncertainty, infrastructure deficits such as poor roads, ports and airports as well as a poor service sector. Regulatory obstacles also bedevil growth planners. Yet, neither the government nor the people of Bangladesh seem to be disillusioned. The nation worked hard to ensure capacity utilisation. This pushed various sectors to concentrate on investments. As a result, internal investments gradually picked up. Employment figures were on the increase. About 1.3 million jobs were created and added to the economy. This also helped to depress inflation and by the end of the year, prices not only stabilised but also reduced. The fall in international commodity prices, especially cost of petroleum products, added to a stable economic growth. The increased participation of women, thanks to widespread education for girls over the past few years, also gave substance to form. The most striking part of all of this is that a job friendly growth momentum is starting to be visible within the country.

There are several other areas where the Bangladesh economy is doing well. Significant is the improvement in the balance of payments situation despite the deficit in the current account. The reason lies in continuous injection of foreign exchange in the economy, due to increased foreign remittance every month by Bangladeshis working abroad. The figures could be close to \$1.5 billion each month. Add to this the induction of foreign exchange earned by exports, especially readymade garments. Bangladesh shot up to be the second largest exporter of readymade garments in the world, following only China. Of course the government must be credited for having a consistent fiscal policy. This has allowed macroeconomic stability in

the economy. The relentless search for new markets for our readymade garments around the world has also spiked the economy. However, do not forget that the recent fall in international oil prices could have brought greater dividends to the economy. But the government in order to recoup its past losses due to heavy subsidies given to national oil suppliers continues, for the moment, to charge exorbitant price for petroleum supplies. This has put inordinate pressure on people's domestic budget.

2016 promises to be another critical year for the Bangladesh economy. This time the government needs to increase the annual GDP growth from an average of 6 percent per annum to about 7.5 to 8 percent in order to reach the status of a middle income country. But this

industries and the service sector. Special Economic Zones is the need of the day. The government has therefore proposed to set up 100 such zones. But this means that an excellent regulatory environment needs to be created. It has to ensure financial sector accountability as well as exchange rate flexibility. When this is on the way, the government has to ensure connectivity both within and outside the country. Recently, the government penned agreements with India, Nepal and Bhutan to ensure better connectivity by land and sea where feasible. But such connectivity needs to be established with China as well as Myanmar.

Bangladesh is now at a historical crossroads. 2016 will be crucial for deepening and widening the



PHOTO: STAR

means greater investment in order to create better and more jobs. More women need to be inducted in jobs and business organisations through training programmes. Institutional barriers need to be reduced so that more and more young women can join the labour and entrepreneur market. At the same time, the country needs to shift from agriculture to higher productivity industries as well as the service sector. Simultaneously, Bangladesh needs to pilot its demographic growth so that it does not lose its demographic dividend. Induction of more women in the workforce will allow Bangladesh to continue with this dividend.

The year ahead will be challenging, as the economy needs to attract large scale private investments in its

Bangladesh economy. For this we need to bring changes in our foreign and economic policy as well as our regulatory system. Politics, for long, has been a bane to our growth. Yet it is recognised that politics is the grease that can ease growth. Our politicians now need to act with great wisdom without any pettiness. If the past is any proof, Bangladeshis have suffered greatly because of the narrow and partisan approach of politicians to growth. 2016 should be different. We must ensure that politics is turned to a possibility of growth and prosperity.

The writer is a retired ambassador and columnist of *The Daily Star*. E-mail: ashfaq303@gmail.com

## COMMENTS

**"Russia air strikes kill 200 Syrian civilians"**  
(December 23, 2015)

Elius Raihan

Innocent Syrian civilians are not responsible for the crimes committed by IS. Therefore, killing innocent people by air strikes is the same crime that ISIS is committing.

Abdullah Al Mamun

Two hundred Syrian civilians have been killed by Russian air strikes, but obviously, it's not a terrorist act!

Harun Ahmed

Air strikes won't solve IS issue. Russia and other western countries need to change their strategy.

**"There are controversies over how many were martyred in the Liberation War."**

--BNP Chairperson **Khaleda Zia**

Khairul Chowdhury

Some people always fail to understand that genocide is genocide, regardless of the number. Khaleda Zia should be sensible enough to understand this.

Nafiza Islam Khan

After 44 years of independence, she is still doubtful about the number of martyrs!



NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

AN awfully successful real estate mogul, an outrageously prosperous business magnate, a terribly popular TV host, a filthy rich golf enthusiast worth \$4.5 billion, an

unsavoury bigoted racist politician, and an offensively foul-mouthed orator - this is hardly the résumé of a typical president of the USA. But, Donald, incessantly blowing his 'Trump'-et, has managed to claim pole position, and sustainably so, for the Grand Old (Republican) Party nomination for the 2016 polls.

If the strategy of the 69-year old New Yorker (described as 'irresponsible' and 'ignorant' by even neighbouring Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau following his Muslim tirade) is to give the opposition the advantage, the Democrats could not have done any better.

From the very beginning of his acerbic campaign, to draw support of his Republican partisans, Donald Trump has tried to advocate parochialism, which is selling well in the opinion polls.

Early last June, Trump slurred Mexicans by planning to build a wall, paid by the Mexicans, to separate the US from its neighbours, because he considered all Mexican immigrants - legal and illegal, criminals and rapists. *Trumpson tambien inmigrantes!*

Busy as he remains with his empire stretching up to Dubai (oops! a billboard has been brought down), Trump has no idea that the US-Mexico border is 3,145 km (1,954 miles). Given the more important obligations of the president, Trump, if nominated (God forbid), and if elected (OMG), will need

more than two terms to build the wall. At the rate of the 13,170-mile long Great Wall, Trump's 'barrier of seclusion' (preventing almost 250,000 legal crossings annually) would take almost three hundred years, and he would definitely need Mexican workers. I hope he does not live that long.

Trump is on record calling his presidential competitors losers and stupid. He is so much of both that in this time and age, he believes Saudi Arabia wouldn't exist without the US. And his idea of world economics is limited to his understanding that Americans can't get jobs 'because China has their jobs'.

**From the very beginning of his acerbic campaign, to draw support of his Republican partisans, Donald Trump has tried to advocate parochialism, which is selling well in the opinion polls.**

Despite being an aspirant to lead a democracy in America, Trump easily reminds you of some of the most despotic rulers, who granted the opportunity, would probably propose to name his country TSA, the Trump States of America in line with his Trump Tower, Trump Palace, Trump Plaza, the Trump World Tower, Trump Golf clubs, Trump hotels, Trump restaurants, Trump ice rinks, Trump (TV) Productions, Trump... The world could be overtrumped.

Early this December, after the terrorist attacks in San Bernardino, California, Trump panicked (a US president cannot do that) and demanded that all Muslims be barred from entering his country until the nation's leaders can "figure out what is going on". In his state of

apparent lunacy, Trump overlooked the almost three million Muslims resident in the USA, and did not outline any deportation policy for them.

This shocking rhetoric came after his November salvo, following the Paris attacks that killed 130 people, when he called for creating a database to track Muslims in America. Two months earlier Trump had declared that he loves Muslims.

His public rantings are targeted towards buoying opinion polls, and he has succeeded each time. "Mr. Trump has a track record of making surprising and even extreme comments whenever he is overtaken in opinion polls by other

of opposite ideals and different religious groups were quick to reject Trump's anti-Muslim remarks. His Republican rival, former Florida Governor Jeb Bush termed Trump as a person "unhinged" (read deranged). "Reprehensible, prejudiced and divisive", was how Hillary Clinton summed up Trump's bizarre idea, denounced by groups representing Jews, Christians, Muslims and other convictions as well as civil rights advocates.

Eboo Patel, President of Chicago-based Interfaith Youth Core, said, "I'm standing in a building right now where I am looking up at the (108-storied) Sears Tower, which was designed by Fazlur Rahman Khan," a structural engineer born and educated in Bangladesh, and a Muslim. You could name a thousand other immigrants who shaped what today is the US of A, and the world.

Why does Trump go about doing his business (err politics) like so? He has not built his worldwide, including Muslim Middle East, empire on sheer foolishness. No one asked, which goes to show no one gives a \*\*\*\* for his theatrics, but I shall volunteer.

Being the entrepreneur he is, Trump has done his homework. He has seen the rise of polarisation along religious lines in India, and how Democrat Obama's tea-mate Narendra Modi benefited. He studied the growing popularity of Marine Le Pen's xenophobic Nationalist Front in France. He observed how Suu Kyi remained quiet to woo mainstream voters despite systemic violence and persecution against minority Rohingyas in Myanmar. Trump devised that to win he must gather the support of those who will be untied in division.

The writer is a practising Architect at BashaBari Ltd., a Commonwealth Scholar and a Fellow, a Baden-Powell Fellow Scout Leader, and a Major Donor Rotarian.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### On drought and flood

Recently I came across a news report which states that thousands of cattle are dying in South Africa due to severe drought. It has been said that the present drought is the most devastating in the past 20 years. I think other countries including Bangladesh should take a lesson from this unfortunate natural calamity. Importance should be given to monitoring the climate, ensuring an efficient water management and keeping a reserve of cattle feeds.

Consider the serious flood caused by incessant heavy rains in the Indian city of Chennai and adjoining areas. The flood was caused due to filling of canals

and water ways running through the city. Due to the sudden flooding, life in Chennai city came to a standstill; school and colleges had to be closed. In fact, our mega city Dhaka is also in the same condition. Most canals and drains in Dhaka are either clogged which causes flash floods even after a short rainfall. The present government is trying to re-excavate the blocked canals and water ways. But further action is needed to create a sound drainage system for the quick discharge of rainwater in and around Dhaka city.

Professor M Zahidul Haque  
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System  
SAU, Dhaka

### Pakistani journalists are at risk

Journalists who work for discovering truths are at great risk all over the world. The attacks on several journalists in Pakistan prove that there is no security for journalists in that country. The government of Pakistan must show seriousness in stopping such incidents.

Aqil Baba  
On e-mail