

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
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## Recrudescence of extremists

*Exercise extreme vigilance*

QUITE a few extremist dens have been busted over the last several days. And that is a matter of both comfort as well as alarm. We are happy for the fact that the law enforcing agencies have successfully anticipated several groups of extremists, belonging, reportedly, to the JMB, in Dhaka and its surrounding areas as well as in Chittagong.

Apparently, these radicals have chosen major conurbations to set up their operational base, and what one can assume from this is that they were about to launch operation on a large scale to wreak extensive damage in terms of loss of life and destruction of property, given the type of weapons and the quantity of explosives recovered after the raids.

However, what worries us is the fact that after being in limbo for the last several years, the JMB has decided to activate itself. And this has been particularly noticeable after the recent execution of the two war criminals. It seems that the assessment of the intelligence agencies about the JMB and writing off the extremist outfit as being neutralised was a tad premature.

We are worried too about the fact that the terrorists have managed to acquire army combat cloth /uniforms and high velocity small arms, and one doesn't have to ponder too much as to what their intentions were.

While we commend the agencies for their efforts, we must not let down our guard. Without appearing to be alarmists we should recognise the fact that these extremists are out to create serious trouble for the country, and the sooner the masterminds and their financiers are identified and nabbed, the quicker we will be able to put down these elements.

## The stakes are way high

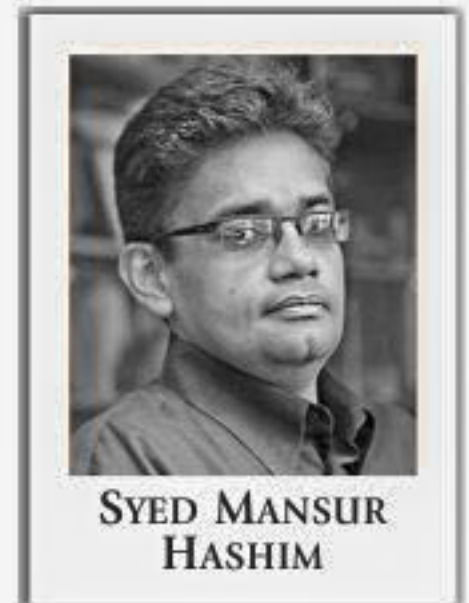
*Focus on institution building*

BANGLADESH, despite making some significant improvements in economy, is yet to establish an egalitarian society based on accountability and the rule of law. This is primarily due to the country's failure in building strong and sustainable democratic institutions that safeguard and oversee the symbiosis between the people and the government. It all happened at the expense of good governance, as highlighted in a study report made by the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development. Added to this dismal list are the two major squabbling political parties, the feud between which, on numerous occasions, has rendered the parliament ineffective. Parliamentary proceedings too have been seriously hampered by the persistent boycott of the opposition in the last four parliaments.

It is indeed disconcerting to note that whatever we have gained since the restoration of democracy, in a mass upsurge in 1990, is now at risk. The inefficacy of the Election Commission to hold free and fair polls was exposed during the 10th parliamentary election. More disturbing perhaps is the election that took place, where we witnessed the main opposition's attempt to thwart the election through coercive force, giving birth to anarchy and lawlessness.

Presently Bangladesh stands at a crossroads. Dysfunctional democracy coupled with misgovernance and lack of accountability is a recipe for disaster. Our economic and social advancements could be hampered, if not reversed, if the flourishing of effective democratic institutions continues to falter.

# Russia has options



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

FROM Turkey to the European Union (EU), the search for alternatives to Russian gas is on. The Syrian fiasco continues to fester and with the drowning of a Russian warplane by Ankara, no one can say for certain that peace will come anytime soon to the troubled land. Although on the surface, there is acrimony between the State of Israel and Turkey, they do have a common interest at heart, i.e. to break Russia's resurgence as a player in the Mid-East. Then of course there is the question of securing alternative energy sources, one that would neutralise Russia's energy diplomacy.

However, for any concrete joint venture between Ankara and Jerusalem to take place, to say explore the massive natural gas find Israel made offshore a few years ago, would require overcoming domestic opposition. That notwithstanding, there are massive hurdles to overcome before Israeli offshore gas lying at the bottom of the Mediterranean could be piped to Turkey and beyond. The question of planning, financing and actually building a pipeline is not in years but decades. There are also serious technical hurdles to be overcome, but what is clear is that some sort of rapprochement is in the offing between these two countries. And one should not forget that it is not only Turkey that would benefit from such extraction of gas; Egypt and Jordan are two Arab States that have full diplomatic relations with Israel, so to say, there is no demand for Israeli gas in the region is simply not true.

Whatever may be the outcome of these talks, it is quite certain that EU will be exploring all options to neutralise the Russian energy export option in the coming years. So where does that leave Russia? It is not inconceivable to see an EU free of Russian gas a decade down the line. What is clear of course is that Europe does not necessarily have to be the largest consumer of Russian energy exports. Indeed, going by international media reports, we understand that the Minister for Russian Far East Development Alexander Galushko made the following statement in March 2015: "there is a huge foreign market, closer than Moscow. The world's number one economy - China, number three - Japan, and the most dynamically growing economy - Indonesia." The Chinese connection is already there

whereby it is expected that annual export by Russia to China will reach 100 billion cubic meters. Europe, on the other hand, consumed 146 billion cubic meters of Russian gas in 2014.

As we near the end of 2015, we find Russia having sealed a 30-year contract worth US\$400 with China and infrastructure development in full swing to take Siberian gas to China. The emerging energy alliance between Russia and China goes beyond natural gas supply. Again, going by media reports, we understand that an agreement has been reached sometime October this year with Singapore's state-owned Pavilion Gas for the supply of liquefied natural gas. When we take into account reports that

the energy sector, but it would work to their advantage to having a source closer to home to meet energy needs. Looking beyond ASEAN, we find Russia reaching out to other associations like the Eurasian Economic Union that consists of Central Asian countries - the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia and Belarus.

One country to watch will of course be Japan. That Japan has introduced direct yen-rupee trade, which effectively decreases exchange rates, points to a growing relationship between these two countries. It is interesting to note that Russia has taken steps to set up special economic zones on its Far East border and this step is attracting wider interest in the Asian region. Japan is



PHOTO: AP

*It is easy to see that Russia is pivoting towards Asia, and in a very big way. Like the EU, Russia too is hunting for new markets except that it has already found some markets and in the process of going after new ones.*

Russia is looking to clinch a deal with the Indonesian government for a series of high power, floating nuclear plants, it is easy to see that it is pivoting towards Asia, and in a very big way. Like the EU, Russia too is hunting for new markets except that it has already found some markets and in the process of going after new ones.

The prospect of exporting Russian nuclear technology to Asian economies in the ASEAN cannot be ruled out. It would be natural for say, Vietnam to explore that option. We do not know for certain if Thailand and Malaysia would be interested to join the growing number of Asian economies to explore Russian overtures in

not the only Asian superpower, after China that is looking into energy ventures with Russia; trade with South Korea is at an all-time high.

At the end of the day, as we take stock of the energy roulette being played between the West and Russia, it should not come as any surprise that Russia will look to the East to shore up its fortunes on the energy-export issue. A spin-off from all this economic activity would certainly be a growing Russian influence in the Asian region - which experts predict will drive the global economy in the coming decades.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

# Numbers game, here we go again

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

LIKE a bad penny that turns up again and again, our main opposition leader has once again mired her party and herself in her favourite controversy on the history of our Liberation War. This time the tirade is not against the founder of the nation directly or about the declaration of independence, it is about people who died during the Liberation War. She has questioned the oft-quoted number of people who died during the war, she has declared there is much debate about the number. We should be grateful that she has not questioned the number of women who were raped by the Pakistan army during that period, but perhaps she has reservations about that too. Close on the heels of her announcement came another diatribe from one of her party men, a bottom-of-the-rung leader who insulted the martyred intellectuals. He called them "fools" because they "allowed" themselves to be killed by the Pakistani army agents by staying home on the fateful night. Perhaps all of the innocent people who died in Dhaka on March 25 were also "fools" because they did not leave the city the day before!

The only parallel to the BNP Chairperson's proclamation and that of her minion can be found in the statements of General Yahya Khan and his flunkies when he claimed that their army never killed civilians in the then East Pakistan. They claimed to be on a mission to put out rebellions of armed political gangs and establish peace. The Pakistani leaders, including Bhutto, the man who would follow Yahya Khan as the leader of a broken Pakistan, never stood up to fact that their army massacred millions in Bangladesh. But then it was a natural thing to do for Pakistan

and its leaders. Acknowledging massacre of civilians in the name of restoring peace was something that would make their country a protector of war criminals and supporter of war crimes. To them, no such thing as a massacre of innocent millions happened. Therefore, the war crimes and the trial of war criminals are a mockery for them.

The announcements and speeches of the BNP chairperson and her loyalists may appear outrageous and irrational, but there is a method in this madness. The most significant aspect of this bizarre statement is its timing. For much of this

year, when the war crimes trial was in progress and several key war criminals were convicted, the chairperson or her party refrained from making any comments or register any protest. It was assumed that the passivity of the party was perhaps due to affiliation of the convicts with another political party. But the party remained largely impassive even when one of its own front ranking leaders was tried and sentenced to death for war crimes. It seemed like the party or its chairperson was not willing to stick their neck out protesting the sentences.

So what prompted the chairperson to come out with an outlandish question on the number of deaths now? Raising questions on the number of people who died in the war is only a distractive issue. It makes no sense to raise the issue after forty four years of independence when the person making such outlandish remarks headed the government of the country twice in the past. If this had been a concern for her, she could have formed a commission in her first term and settled the controversy a long time ago.

It is interesting that the BNP chairper-

son's revival of the question on the number of war deaths comes in the wake of the recent criticism of the execution of "two politicians" for war crimes by the Pakistan government. The previous year, the Pakistan Parliament had passed a resolution condemning the first execution of a war criminal. In none of the cases, however, had the Pakistan government indicated that it was protesting because it had a political interest in the individuals, but because the trials were "not fair". It was expressing its protest against the judicial process with

a subliminal question on the whole issue of war crimes. How can they be war criminals if the war crimes they are supposed to have committed never took place according to them? This is the nub of the question. By raising the number controversy, the BNP chairperson has, in a sense, questioned the gruesome atrocities committed by Pakistan in 1971. Did the Pakistan army launch an all-out war on the Bangalees at all? Or was it just a "mercy mission" by the Pakistan Government to put out rebellions of a section of "misguided people" as claimed by General Yahya Khan? If the latter is true, the Government of Pakistan and its army were actually saving the nation! If some people helped the army in that effort, they were only doing their patriotic duties. If some innocent civilians died during that, they were only accidental deaths. There were no war crimes!

I know this is bizarre logic, but statements that question our nationhood and beliefs can be only explained in that light. What such statements ignore is that crimes against humanity are not judged simply by numbers, these are judged by their viciousness and enormity. By questioning and debating the number of deaths, we cannot deny the enormity of civilian massacre in 1971 and the damage it caused. It is one of the fundamental memories that brought our country together. No leader is worth his or her salt if we ignore this. By reducing the number of deaths in the Holocaust, we cannot deny the enormity or devastation caused by the Holocaust. Will this knock some sense into those who deny such massacres?

The writer is a political analyst and commentator.

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## COMMENTS

**"Top men fled; risk too high"**  
(December 27, 2015)

Jainab

I don't understand how these two men fled the scene as the place was guarded by police so tightly. Police should have been more cautious.

**"Pak diplomat 'withdrawn'"**  
(December 24, 2015)

Arif Ahmed

Bangladesh should cut all types of diplomatic relations with Pakistan.

Tinni

The allegation of her involvement in terror financing should be seriously investigated.

**"SMS threats continue"**  
(December 24, 2015)

Amina Begum

The government should ensure the safety of minority people.

Hashim

Why don't the authorities just trace the SMS and track down the culprits?

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Popularising traditional jute products

Recently, while passing through the busy streets of Dhanmondi, an elderly vendor carrying a few bags and mats caught my attention. I was amazed to see the beautifully stitched jute bags and mats. Despite his old age, the man was shouting at the top of his voice to grab attention of the passers-by. But most pedestrians walked by without even noticing. Mostly the middle-income

people, who are unable to afford expensive decorations for their home, bothered to respond to him.

The rising popularity of branded bags and mats has taken over our attention towards jute products. The feeble hawk at the corner of the street deserves much more appreciation for his hard work. And a platform needs to be provided to these people so they can properly display these traditional artefacts. To increase the popularity of our traditional jute products the big companies can play an important role.

Waseka Shahid  
On e-mail

### Solar-powered car by BRAC team

Recently, I came across a news report which stated that a team of BRAC University teachers and students have developed a solar-powered car. This two-seater car is powered by solar panels via a battery, reaching a speed of 60km/hr. I think BRAC should hold talks with local reputed car assemblers and explore the possibilities of assembling such cars locally. The government should also provide support to such initiative as this can curtail our import of motorised vehicles.

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