

Another hike unjustified

Leave gas price be

WITH the public hearing regarding another round of gas price increase underway, businesses have already expressed their concerns about its possible impacts. The hike may also affect transportation costs, cost of electricity production, cost of living and of essential commodities, according to the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce, increasing economic sufferings for citizens in the process.

Spinners, textile millers, gas station owners and others have already called on the government to leave the price be as it is. With the recent slump in economic activities arising from the Gulshan attack, businesses rightly fear that another price hike will have a massive negative impact on their profitability, leave them struggling against foreign competitors on the international market and cause them to lose market share. Domestic increases in the price of commodities forced on by a price hike, on the other hand, may redouble financial burdens on citizens.

The authorities concerned should clearly not let that happen. Moreover, with the government increasing prices only as recently as last September, and a number of times over the past years, it is difficult to justify another round of price hike particularly given the dull business environment. Thus, whatever benefit, if any, the government may accrue from an increase will irrefutably be negated by the costs arising from it for businesses and citizens alike.

The government should, under the circumstances, not go ahead with the proposed price increase. Instead, with prices on the international market being low, it could look to import low cost fuel as suggested by the DCCI.

TIB report on ACC

Time to plug the holes

TRANSPARENCY International report, according to which a meagre 37 percent of the accused are convicted in graft cases, is disappointing. As it is, the number of complaints that the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) receives is small given that a staggering 68 percent of the citizens in the country are reportedly hit by the menace. To make matters even worse, most of the graft investigations that the ACC conducts are not completed in due time. It is time for serious introspection to find out the causes that have led to many cases ending without conviction.

Moreover, if the institutions intended to fight corruption lacks teeth, it is only natural that graft accused will make use of legal loopholes to go scot free. The allocation of fund for case investigation and appointment of lawyers is indeed meagre compared to the number of cases the ACC receives a year. Also, a dearth in logistics and manpower is evident in the cases it has lost.

Needless to say that corruption has spread its tentacles far and wide and is eating at our social and economic growths. Countries that have been successful in reducing this menace have done so by adopting a multi-pronged approach that includes increasing the operational ability of the institutions that fight corruption. The ACC should focus on capacity building, especially in skills and logistics. A good legal framework, along with structural independence and neutrality, is imperative in building a strong ACC. It must invigorate the process of inter-agency coordination and draw out specific plans to combat corruption. This is a fight that we cannot afford to lose.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Afghanistan: Time for an exit strategy

Two weeks ago, President Obama announced that the US would bring down its troops in Afghanistan from 9,800 to 8,400, changing his original plan to reduce the number to 5,500. His decision suggests that conditions on the ground are not as promising as he expected them to be, and maintaining a larger number of troops is important as he believes "it is in our national security interests...that we give our Afghan partners the best opportunities to succeed." The president, however, did not spell out what success actually means.

Indeed, even if the US stations three times as many troops for another 15 years or more, the US cannot rescue Afghanistan from the quagmire in which it finds itself. That reminds us of the Vietnam War—a needlessly prolonged conflict with no prospect of victory—except that the war in Afghanistan is even more complicated and becoming increasingly intractable.

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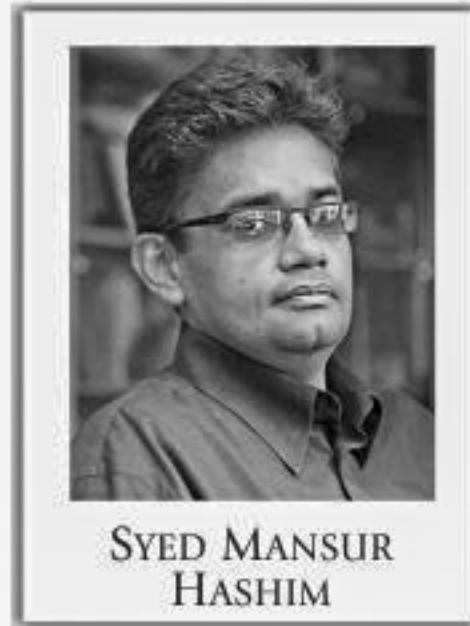
COMMENTS

"Service providers link up with DSCC" (August 4, 2016)

Towhid Sagar

It's a good initiative but it's the implementation that matters. We, the Dhaka city dwellers, want a clean, healthy and secure city to live in. And this will be possible if the relevant authorities perform their duties properly. And also the level of corruption has to be curbed.

Turkey's Syria headache



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

FIVE years into the 'oust Assad' campaign, Turkey finds itself isolated in the region and beyond. After a narrow escape from a failed coup attempt,

President Erdogan may finally be rethinking his Syria policy. Because the arming of rebels that included hard-line Islamists has not only contributed to the killing of some 280,000 innocents, it also brought upon Turkey the problem of millions of cross-border refugees and failed to put a dent against the Kurdish Workers' Party, i.e. PKK. The overly ambitious foreign policy of the Turkish government where Erdogan found himself at odds with Egypt, Libya and of course Syria, has done little to raise his profile in the region. That the Syrian engagement is a foolhardy experiment where the rebels cannot bring down Assad is now all the more evident with Russia's entry into the conflict.

While support for Sunni groups allied against Assad have not made much headway, the pro-Kurdish forces have effectively seized Turkey's southern borders and more alarmingly appear to enjoy the strong confidence of both the Americans and Russia! This is unthinkable from Ankara's point of view and hence a rethinking is obvious. Changes, in fact, are evident from a reshuffle in the top echelons of administration; Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu was replaced in May and this man is deemed to have been the architect of Turkey's foreign policy.

The most important change is related to Syria. That Assad has the unwavering support of both Russia and Iran is an established fact. Both nations have committed man-and-material that not only ensures the survival of the regime but forged alliances with the Kurds to take the fight to the Islamic State (IS). To think about a 180 degree shift in policy is unthinkable for Turkey. Yet to continue the proxy war is already proving too costly and given Ankara's increased isolation amongst its allies in NATO, particularly the US and European Union, the time for eating some "humble pie" is already being played out (Erdogan has

apologised to Russia in a letter of regret of the shooting down of the jet incident in 2015). The Turkish government has come down from its high horse and sought rapprochement with Israel. And indeed, going by what has been reported in international press of late "Mevlut Cavusoglu, Turkey's foreign minister, was quoted by RIA, the Russian news agency, as saying Ankara and Moscow should work together for a political solution on Syria after meeting Sergei Lavrov, his

attributed to Ankara's flawed interventionist policy in Syria. For, Turkey has much bigger problems on its hand than the removal of Assad. It wishes to see a weakening of Kurds and marginalisation of IS, but for that to happen Erdogan will require Putin's assistance – and the only way that can happen is if Turkey moves away from its regime-change policy in Syria. As pointed out earlier, Turkey has begun a reshuffle and is relieving some officials that head

emerge in mainstream Turkish politics as a potent political and military force and Turks have been trying for decades to push the Kurdish question to the sidelines. Hence, for Turkey and its national and regional interests, there needs to be some form of dialogue that will help Erdogan to disengage from the region without losing face.

The Syrian conflict has gone on for long enough. Too much blood has been spilled and has drawn in too many



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Russian counterpart" in late July. The time for rapprochement has gained momentum as Ankara comes to terms with a suicide bombing that took 43 lives in Istanbul's main international airport. That IS was blamed for the attack merely goes to show the futility of funding and arming Sunni rebel groups (some with seriously dubious jihadi credentials) has come back to haunt Turkey today. Years of hawkish foreign policy has landed Turkey with broken alliances, a loss of trade and worse of all, allowing militants and insurgents to attack Turkish soil with impunity. Today, Turkey too is suffering the full brunt of extremism, some of which can be

the Syria campaign. Reports have emerged that Ankara recently sacked its intelligence official responsible for Syria – the move sends the signal that perhaps there will be a shift in Turkey's hard-line position on Assad's removal.

The diplomatic flurry is happening behind the scenes and Algeria has been active in trying to diffuse the situation between Syria and Turkey. A normalisation of relations is not even on the cards at this point; what is on the cards is to find some middle ground whereby Turkey moves away from its staunch position of a Syria minus Assad situation. The Syrian adventure has actually helped Kurdish separatists to re-

foreign powers into the quagmire. It is time for military disengagement and political dialogue between nations and not combatants. Only when there is peace in Syria can there truly be regional stability. Yes, atrocities have been committed on a massive scale on both sides and although human rights organisations will not be happy, the alternative to a negotiated settlement involving Syria, Turkey and other powers is to effectively prolong a war that has already descended into a war of attrition with no clear winner.

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Searching for the shadowy Canadian leader of ISIS in Bangladesh

AMARNATH AMARASINGAM

"YOU must be kidding, bro," a friend of mine from Windsor, Ontario, tells me when I ask him about Tamim Chowdhury, the purported leader of ISIS in Bangladesh. "He was a quiet guy. Definitely religious. But a leader? I don't think so." He was not the first to express surprise when I asked around about Tamim. He did not seem to have made an impression on the people he met. Or so I thought.

The name Tamim Chowdhury first came on my radar in early 2015 when I was doing interviews with friends of another Windsor jihadi who had gone off to fight in Syria: Ahmad Waseem, known as Abu Turab, who was killed in March 2015 in Tal Hamis. Tamim's name was floating around as someone who may have also left for Syria. I jotted down his name, but then became busy with other things.

Some months later, I spoke to another friend of Waseem's and remembered to also ask about Tamim. He seemed a little surprised, and remarked that Tamim, facing harassment from law enforcement in Canada, had decided to simply move back to his home country of Bangladesh. Nothing to worry about, he said. I was skeptical.

The next time I saw his name appear, it became clear that Tamim was indeed important. A colleague of mine, who asked to be anonymous, pointed me to the ISIS Study Group website (which as of this writing has gone offline) where Tamim was mentioned as one of the leaders of ISIS in Bangladesh. A few months later, Zayadul Ahsan published an article in *The Daily Star* further cementing this theory. I started asking questions again, trying to find more people who may have known him in Windsor, and asking several jihadi fighters that I was in contact with in Syria. One of these fighters would provide a clue.

Connecting the Dots
 One of the most famous blogs amongst journalists and analysts of Canadian foreign fighters is called "Beneath Which Rivers Flow." It was an important blog, because it contained biographical details of two jihadis who had left from Calgary, Alberta, to fight, and eventually die, in Syria: Damian Clairmont and Salman Ashrafi. The most

recent post was a letter to the mother of Damian, Christianne Boudreau, arguing that she should be proud of his sacrifice and proud to be the mother of a martyr. All the posts about Damian are signed by an individual calling himself "Abu Dujana al-Muhajir". According to some individuals I interviewed, this blog was "owned" by Ahmad Waseem, but he allowed friends of his to post on it from time to time.

In a casual conversation about who this "Abu Dujana" might be with a Canadian fighter in Syria, he remarked: "I don't know his real name, but he is of Bangladesh background and was from the 519 [area code for Windsor] area." It seemed pretty clear that he was talking about Tamim Chowdhury. I realised that I was perhaps looking for Chowdhury in all the wrong places. He was certainly from Windsor and was friends with Ahmed Waseem. But Waseem had spent at least two years in Calgary, and returned home to Windsor, before leaving for Syria.

I had seen no evidence at the time that Tamim ever went to Calgary. But, if Tamim was Abu Dujana, the individual who wrote glowing eulogies of Calgary jihadi fighters, then he had to have spent time there. If this was true, our notion of the "Calgary cluster" of fighters just got more interesting.

As I wrote in *Jihadology* [an online blog] last year, one of the first clusters that the Canadian public became aware of was in Calgary. The Calgary cluster consisted of Damian Clairmont, Salman Ashrafi, Gregory and Collin Gordon, Farah Shirdon, and a few others. While they were friends, their biographical details are quite varied. Ashrafi was born Muslim, educated at the University of Lethbridge, held a prestigious job at Talisman Energy, and was married with a child at the time of his departure in November or December 2012. In November 2013, he engaged in a suicide attack in Iraq that would kill him and 40 others.

Clairmont, on the other hand, was a white convert, suffered from bipolar disorder, was a high school dropout, and was homeless for a time in Calgary. Clairmont and Ashrafi were close friends and part of a study circle, at the 8th and 8th musallah, a storefront Islamic centre in downtown Calgary, with the Gordon brothers and several others. The Gordon brothers are featured prominently in *Dabiq* 15.

In interviews with their friends in Calgary, it initially seemed evident that Clairmont was the dominant personality, and influenced many of the other young men. Clairmont would leave Calgary in late 2012 as well. He fought with the Al-Qaeda affiliated Jabhat Al-Nusra, and was captured and killed by the Free Syrian Army in January 2014.

However, this image of the Calgary cluster is starting to change.

What We Know So Far
 As I searched for more information on Tamim, on the night of July 1, 2016, five militants stormed the Holey Artisan Bakery, took hostages, and eventually hacked 24 people to death. If Tamim was the head of ISIS in Bangladesh, he was clearly behind this attack. Indeed, Bangladeshi police admitted in late July that Tamim was the mastermind. The fact that a Canadian was orchestrating attacks in Bangladesh has likely also led to some intelligence sharing between the two countries.

Once the trail led to Calgary, I started reaching out to friends there for more information about Tamim. The Bangladeshi media had produced two photos of Tamim, which I promptly sent to them. They confirmed that it was the same Tamim they remembered seeing in Calgary. Then things got interesting, and several details started falling into place.

This is what we know about Tamim Ahmed Chowdhury so far, even though several of these details still need to be made more precise:

He was born on July 25, 1986. It is not clear yet if he was born in Canada or Bangladesh (probably the latter), but he is indeed a Canadian citizen.

He likely attended J.L. Forster Secondary School in Windsor. He competed for the school in a variety of track and field activities in 2004.

He graduated from the University of Windsor in Spring 2011, with an Honors in Chemistry, but probably majored/minored in other fields as well.

Some time after graduating from Windsor, he traveled to Calgary. It is unclear whether he moved to Calgary, or simply traveled back and forth several times. The latter seems more likely since those I spoke with in Calgary only remember him

intermittently. He seems to have stayed low-key perhaps, and did not mix too closely with the Muslim community there.

One source says he remembers Tamim hanging out with Damian Clairmont at the 8th and 8th musallah, where Damian, Salman Ashrafi, Collin and Gregory Gordon, another individual named Waseem (last name unknown, but not Ahmad Waseem), and a few others held a private study circle. According to friends of theirs, Damian was likely the one who took a leadership role over the group, but it could be that Tamim was equally influential.

The same source says that Tamim almost certainly went to Syria, either directly from Calgary or from Windsor, "probably" in late 2012. Another source claims he saw Tamim hanging around the University of Calgary in 2013. This is further complicated by the fact that religious leaders in Windsor say they asked Tamim not to engage with youth at the mosques, clearly worried that he was potentially radicalising them. This was possibly some time in 2013 as well. As such, details on when exactly he traveled to Syria are still murky.

From Syria, Tamim likely found his way to Bangladesh, perhaps even on direct orders from ISIS leadership [*The Daily Star* would like to add here that the government has denied the existence of ISIS in Bangladesh]. However, it is not clear when he landed in Bangladesh. One could venture an educated guess that the speed at which he took over ISIS in Bangladesh necessitated that he had some kind of "evidence" from ISIS central to "show" potential recruits.

Dabiq 14 features an interview with the "Amir of the Khilafah's Soldiers in Bengal," named as Shaykh Abu Ibrahim al-Hanif. Nowhere in the interview is there mention of Canada, Calgary, Windsor, or Tamim, but, again, one could venture an educated guess that it is the same person.

As of this writing, there are mixed reports about whether Tamim may have crossed into India, or whether he is in hiding in Dhaka. On August 2, the Bangladeshi government put a 20 lakh (\$25,000USD) bounty on his head.

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