

Trafficked 'without a trace'

Address the root causes

THE mystery regarding the whereabouts of the seven Bangladeshis who were reportedly lured and trafficked to Myanmar instead of Malaysia, their promised destination, is no mystery at all. Rather it is a tragic story—all too familiar—of a group of underprivileged, desperate people falling victim to human trafficking, where human lives are bought and sold without any regard for human dignity.

The victims are in various jails in Myanmar, according to a list prepared by the Special Branch of Police last year. But neither the Bangladesh Embassy in Myanmar nor the Myanmar Embassy in Bangladesh has confirmed that. It doesn't come as a surprise given the absence of proper cooperation among law enforcement agencies and a lethargic pace of investigation, as revealed at a seminar jointly organised by the government and USAID earlier this year.

Human trafficking in Bangladesh has complex origins. Many victims, poor and unemployed, come from areas affected by natural disasters and climate change. In the absence of formal migration channels, they become easy preys of human smugglers. And trafficking cases are seldom filed under the proper law, making the job of prosecutors extremely difficult. A delay in setting up special tribunals, and an inoperative state of counter trafficking committees at the local levels also exacerbate the situation.

Time and again we have talked about enhancing the capacity of law enforcement agencies and legal practitioners, increasing coordination among relevant ministries and departments, raising awareness and implementing the National Skills Policy. But without a firm political will of the regional governments to address the root causes, it will be impossible to curb the crisis that has alleged links to influential people in concerned countries.

Playgrounds turned marketplace!

Return it to its owner – the school

NO student should have to be in a position where they have to utter the statement: “We are always scared of being kicked or butted by cows.” Or that their classes are disrupted due to the activities of a bazaar on the school premises. Though the distinction between a school and a market are obvious, it is non-existent when it comes to Durgapur Government Primary School.

The grounds of the school in Durgapur Union in Bogra have been taken over by local businessmen to serve as a makeshift marketplace. The utter callousness of land-grabbing of school premises to build a marketplace with an unhygienic latrine is beyond words. What is more appalling is the failure to address the aberration after repeated complaints to the higher authorities.

The school in question has repeatedly done well in terms of producing quality students. The school authorities and the teachers are a dedicated bunch. And yet the entreaties from teachers, the headmaster, and even the president of the school's managing committee have fallen on deaf ears. In some cases these have even been met by threats to the school's staff and students.

The case for taking swift action is not only about the blatant abuse of power by the local market committee but also about preserving the quality of the school. Land grabbing is not new in this country, but to subject school going children to the environment of a bazaar by taking over the place for learning should have jolted authorities to action already. We strongly urge that the primary education department of the Upazila take swift action to ensure that the playgrounds of the school are reclaimed for the students, and not give in to the power of business at the expense of the children.

COMMENTS

“JnU students continue class boycott”
(August 23, 2016)

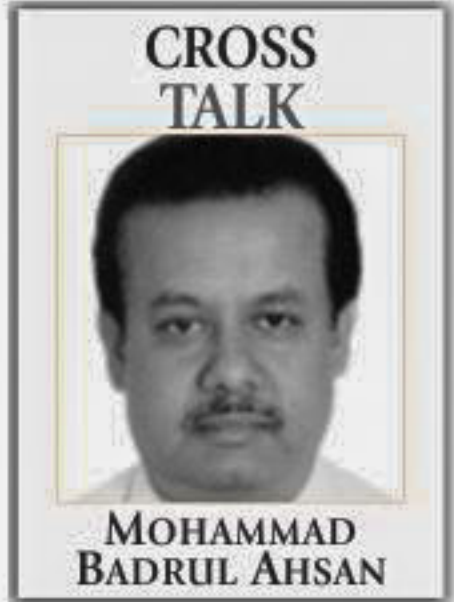
Mohaiminul Islam Nayem

Although I am not a student of JnU, I support their demands because they are right. Students need dormitories to live in.

Lamin

What about the JnU halls that were grabbed by police, ward commissioner, ex-MP and other people?

Is Bangladesh politics heading for a deadlock?



CROSS TALK
MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

ONE thing certain about politics in Bangladesh is that it has an evolving order in the midst of an emerging chaos. If closely observed, it's right now abiding by Newton's first law of motion. The object at rest stays at rest, while the object in motion stays in motion with the same speed and in the same direction. One of the assumptions of the law of inertia is that it doesn't change unless acted upon by an unbalanced force.

So the ruling party stays in power, while the opposition stays opposed. It's almost certain now that the period between now and the middle of next year could be crucial for BNP. Rumours are out that its chairperson might land in jail for one or many of the charges brought against her, and warrants are being issued and withdrawn in her name perhaps by the way of testing the water before the plunge. She and some of her trusted associates might also get implicated in some case or other. More turncoats might leave the party, pushing it towards a split.

It's obvious that the government is working to have BNP cut down to size. And let us say, the look of things suggests as of now, its days are going to be very challenging. One of the two largest political parties in this country has every possibility of being shunted to a siding, at least until the next

parliamentary elections. Come what may, the political arena is likely to get more polarised. What does it mean for the future besides giving a clear signal of victory for the ruling party and its leaders? One-sided politics has the tragedy of an amputee, haunted forever by the ghost of his missing limb. Whether we recognise it or not, politics in this country will be haunted by the ghost of its missing half. A political party enjoying large public support can't be simply erased from the public mind. Even if the party and a few

more unrest in the country before yet another coalescent force rises from their ashes. The Etruscans in ancient Italy measured the period of time from the moment that something happened until the point in time that all people who had lived at the first moment had died. They called it a saeculum. Legend has it that the gods had allotted a certain number of saecula to every people or civilisation. The Etruscans, for example, believed they had been given ten saecula.

words, when the political parties turn to destroying instead of defeating each other, politics loses its context. That's when power struggle has national parties behaving like the Visigoths destroying a civilisation. People get crushed like chilies between mortar and pestle of two contentious sides. One of the many ironies of history is that it repeats itself, and it happens due to the dismal fact that nobody learns from his mistakes. BNP once thought it could crush its enemies and usurp power forever, as if deceleration doesn't work where there is no kinetic friction. The grenade attack on August 21 must have been motivated by such a senseless ambition.

Now that BNP faces systematic elimination, it proves the age-old adage that he who digs a pit will fall into it. If this two-and-a-bit time ruling party looks frazzled and flustered today, it's because what goes around comes around. But nowhere does the circle close when the victim turns into the victimiser, evermore perpetuating the cycle of vengeance!

Whether BNP stays or not, Bangladesh politics is heading for a deadlock. Politicians may win or not, but politics for sure is going to lose. Instead of moving forward, democracy will have to restart. Meanwhile, the people of this country may have to sit tight and watch a smouldering tragedy in progress.

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ASEAN, China can leverage neighbourly ties to improve global position



ED ZHANG

IN early September, China will host the 2016 G20 Leaders' Summit in its scenic city of Hangzhou. But soon afterwards, it will hold a high-level event with the ASEAN, to take place in Vientiane, capital of Laos. The big power club is for swapping ideas on some of the world's long-term issues. But no long-range relations can match the closeness between China and Southeast Asia. The dispute of South China Sea, thorny as it may be, cannot overshadow the long-standing relations between the Chinese people and their southern neighbours, and even less the geo-economic future they are bound to share. News, by the way, came on August 17 that China and the 10-member group already agreed to finish a framework for a code of conduct in 2017 to ease tension and avoid conflict in the disputed waters. Indeed, in the age of globalisation, geo-economics can be an important kind of resource. One country can leverage its good neighbourly relations to improve its global positioning. This is obviously the case for China as it is for ASEAN. At present, according to Chinese data, except mutual import and export among the member countries, China is already the largest partner with ASEAN, accounting for around 15 percent of its total trade, larger than the United States, EU or Japan. In investment, in the first five months of 2015, mutual capital commitment between China and ASEAN exceeded USD160 billion. China's foreign direct investment was certainly not a small amount in a time when most companies were hoarding cash. The geo-economic relations between China and ASEAN have several aspects of significance: First, ASEAN is an important power bloc, especially economically. The total value that its 10 member nations produced was USD2.4 trillion in 2013, close to the GDP of France. According to OECD, for the 2016-20 period, ASEAN's average growth rate is projected to be the third in Asia, after only India and China (with India as the leader). Most noteworthy is that this is perhaps the only regional economy that can keep growing on a generally low level of government debt. Even in the most alarmist investment reports, the region can still turn out markedly better growth prospects than most other parts of the world. In all likelihood, this growth momentum will carry on, as the region is projected to become the fourth-largest economy in the world in 2050. Second, ASEAN has unique features. They don't easily

go away, and are likely to result in closer ties between China and Southeast Asia. Right now, Southeast Asian cities have taken over more and more processing operations relocated from China since 2008, to serve the markets in both the developed and more advanced developing countries. Throughout ASEAN, the percentage of people living in the cities is projected to rise from about 47 percent in the mid-2010s to 56 percent in 2030 and then 67 percent in 2050, according to the UN World Urbanisation Prospects (2014 revision). This being the case, the region is really one of the few places in the world able to combine an abundant labour supply, many coastal cities and port facilities, and a large number of small, flexible processing factories. Such operations may have a good chance to stay in Southeast Asia for not a short period of time, but for so

environment, business usually recovers more quickly in societies of lower income and simpler industrial activities. But the stability and prosperity of Southeast Asian economies will in turn increase the demand for Chinese machinery and services. China-ASEAN trade was USD472.16 billion in 2015, accounting for 11.9 percent of China's total merchandise trade with the world. In 1991, the volume was only less than USD8 billion, accounting for less 6 percent of China's trade with the world. Also, according to the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, from January to May this year, the construction contracts that China received from ASEAN amounted to USD10 billion, showing an increase of 8.2 percent year on year. This was after a 41.2 percent increase in the construction deals that China received in 2015. As ASEAN's middle-class is expected to be more than



long as they are matched by good public infrastructure and education. The new Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), founded in late 2015 on a Chinese initiative, can provide additional financing towards such purposes. It has been some time now that international investors are talking about the possibility for building “another China” in Southeast Asia. In order for that to eventually happen, local governments will have to learn to build and manage their common channel for enormous capital. But step by step, this will happen. Thirdly, on the part of China, it must learn to be an all-round service provider to participate more successfully in ASEAN's development. Despite its current slowdown and adjustment to new realities in the post-crisis world, China should really see it in a positive light that Southeast Asian countries are both picking up the manufacturing activities left from the Chinese shore. China will receive due returns. In a post-crisis

double in 2025 to include 125 million households, its new consumers will buy not only brands from the West and Japan, but also products from China. For all the years since the 2008 global crisis, Southeast Asia has been an unsung hero in the world. Despite all the seemingly messy ethnic, religious and territorial relations, people really can't name any major, insurmountable uncertainty when comparing with many other parts of the world. All the nations here have managed to keep up stability, politically and financially. And by doing so, they have contributed to peace and development in the world. They have supported no protectionism. They have curbed extremism. Indeed, as a regional environment, one can hardly think of a better case in the world today. It is an environment that makes China feel both lucky and proud to be its neighbour. The writer is Editor-at-large, *China Daily*.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Indigenous people's day

The International Day of the World's Indigenous People is observed on August 9 each year to protect and promote the rights and cultures of indigenous people. It is the perfect opportunity to emphasise indigenous people's pivotal contributions for tackling development challenges and the management of natural resources to the fight against climate change. Every country has its own indigenous peoples who continue to live in such ways they have been living for centuries without being polluted by the changes taking place in the urban areas and from the modern fashion to their surroundings. This day also recognises the achievements and contributions that indigenous people make to improve world issues such as environmental protection.



This year's theme of the day is devoted to their right to education. It is a fact that the right to education has not been fully realised by many indigenous people and a critical education gap exists between indigenous people and the general population. They have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. Let us recognise and celebrate the valuable and distinctive identities of indigenous people all over the world. Let us work even harder to empower them and support their aspirations. Zeeshan Nasir On e-mail

Death of Afsana

This refers to the news report “Frustration as probe sees little progress” published in The Daily Star on August 21, 2016. It is really frustrating to see that the police have failed to ascertain the place of Afsana Ferdous' (an architecture student) death, let alone catch the criminals. We want the perpetrators to be brought to book as soon as possible. Belayet Hossain On e-mail