

Risha's death painful

Arrest the killer, punish severely

WE are deeply disturbed by the death of Suraiya Akter Risha who was stabbed to death by a stalker at the entrance of her school. It is shocking all the more because it has happened despite a number of social movements against sexual harassment have been launched in the country after some well publicised cases of stalking related deaths. Also, Risha's family had already lodged complain with the law enforcers, yet the police could not find him, and the stalker went on harassing his hapless victim before killing her in broad daylight.

The incident clearly highlights our failure as a society to protect the vulnerable. While demanding the immediate arrest of Risha's killer, it has to be admitted that stalking is a reality in our country. It seriously restricts a woman's mobility, confines her to the four walls of the household and is an affront to the kind of society we aspire for.

However, to prevent such an incident from occurring, the victims of sexual harassment must seek redress of the law, and a cell comprising of female police officers can be formed at all levels for quick reaction. Also, we believe that arrest and speedy trial of such offenders will deter harassment. There is no alternative to rolling out a set of awareness campaigns that will ostracise male aggression from the fold of our social fabric.

The loopholes in the existing provisions regarding stalking and sexual harassment such as Dhaka Metropolitan Police Ordinance, the Penal Code of 1860 and the Prevention of Women and Children Repression Act that are exploited by the perpetrators to wriggle out should be addressed.

Different approach needed

Rescheduling policy not helping loan recovery

INFLUENTIAL and wilful defaulters were continually taking advantage of the loan rescheduling policy by pressurising banks to reschedule their troublesome loans on flimsy grounds. This impedes on banks' ability to recover loans, increasing their likelihood of becoming irrecoverable long-term according to the findings of the Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management study.

Whereas loan restructuring only works when applied to deserving cases, according to experts, central bank statistics show that banks rescheduled 50.1 percent more bad loans in 2015 compared to 2014. In line with the findings, this intensification indicates to the possibility of irrecoverable loans increasing. Furthermore, by perpetuating doubtful loans, chances of recovery are not only decreased but injection of public money is also needed repeatedly just to prop them up.

Also of concern is that most of the rescheduling was not based on borrowers' cash flow and repayment ability, violating the concept of due diligence and central bank's regulatory guidance of not rescheduling doubtful loans. In most cases, such violations have been a major cause for the failure to recover rescheduled loans the study found.

The deplorable condition of the financial sector because of all these violations, seemingly being done deliberately, is a major worry for the overall economy. Thus, the authorities need to take a strong stance to make the necessary corrections. Habitual defaulters should be restricted from taking loans from banks and wilful defaulters held accountable. Recapitalisation of banks using taxpayers' money should be made conditional on improved loan recovery for now and stop completely in future.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Olympics--not the ultimate measure of success

Is performing well the ultimate measure of success? Just take a glimpse at the Rio Roll of Honour. While the top half of the list comprises of China, Russia, Brazil, Kenya, Jamaica, Colombia, Iran, South Africa, North Korea or Ethiopia; the bottom half gets represented by the likes of Singapore, Ireland, Norway, Austria and Finland. Iceland or Bhutan does not even feature in the list! Now take a look at the Human Development Index. While Singapore, Austria and Iceland rank high up in the list of human development index, China, Brazil, Ethiopia, North Korea do not fare so well. Therefore, instead of making sporting achievements the ultimate yardstick of success, we should see to it that our respective countries can hold their head high by ensuring food, health, education and justice for all.

Kajal Chatterjee
Kolkata, India

5-year Indian visa

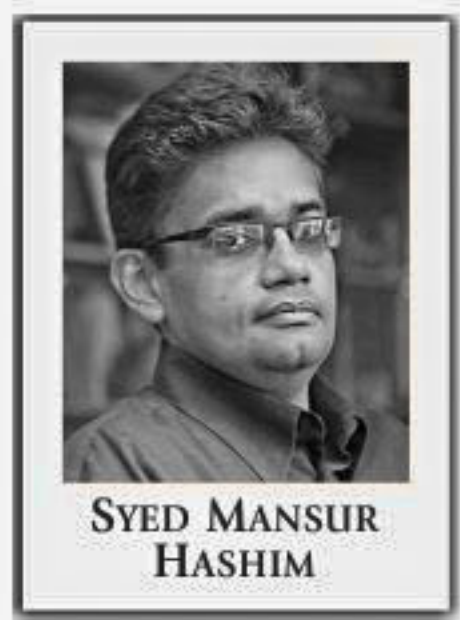
We are glad to learn that the government of India is seriously considering issuing five-year multiple visas to Bangladeshi senior citizens (those above 65 years of age). We wholeheartedly welcome and greet the move. We suggest that males above 65 years of age and females above 60 years of age are considered as senior citizens in this regard.

The move will immensely benefit the economy of India. We would request the relevant authorities in India to expedite and implement the decision at the earliest.

Dr. SN Mamoon
Dhaka

Management of LP cylinders

Better regulatory body needed



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

EVERY day, we see news of a CNG-driven vehicle or Liquefied Petroleum (LP) cylinder used in households bursting and most recently, the explosion that rocked at the Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP) plant in Chittagong that caused release of toxic substances into the surrounding areas and atmosphere. In each of these incidences, whether great or small, we find a common thread and i.e. the lack of adherence to safety protocols and procedures. While the BCIC probe committee will submit its report to relevant authorities, the adverse impact of the accident is not lost upon anyone. We may have a situation where there is a real possibility of public hazard as ammonia-affected water may flow into the Karnaphuli River unhindered.

Currently, it is the Department of Explosives that is entrusted with the job of issuing licenses to companies that are responsible for installing facilities that store hazardous and flammable gas (this includes CNG and LP). Is it remotely feasible for that department alone to oversee this gigantic task? Going by what has been reported in the press recently, the government is embarking on a major move to introduce LPG at household level. This is in line with the government's plan for primary fuel diversification and there are plans also to introduce LPG gas stations for automobiles, in an effort to reduce the dependence on CNG (that is produced from our steadily depleting natural gas reserves). The Energy and Mineral Resources Division (EMRD) under the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources (MPEMR) has prepared the first-ever policy guidelines for installing re-fuelling stations and their maintenance. Again, the Department of Explosives will issue licenses to auto-gas station and conversion workshops. Indeed, the new policy makes it mandatory for license seekers to get permission from the Department of Explosives prior to getting

an approval for the setting up of a re-fuelling station and/or conversion workshop.

Now if we go by what is stated in the policy, the distance between auto-gas refueling stations and workshops from one to another should be at least 1km away in city corporation and district town areas, while it should be at least 2km for other areas. Even if the policy is strictly adhered to, and we assume that the LPG gas implementation policy timeline remains effective, we are looking at hundreds of

When we take into account the total number of LP gas cylinders in the country, the rough estimate is about two million cylinders. The import, filling and transportation of LP gas by state and non-state entities is done after obtaining requisite licenses from the Department of Explosives. These licenses are obtained and renewed on the basis of terms and conditions laid out under LPG Rules 2004 of the Explosive Act, 1884. Given that these high pressure cylinders are exploding on and off at household, commercial and industrial levels, we

of household stoves in the foreseeable future. A typical LP gas cylinder must be regularly checked for safety. Again, the handling of these cylinders during movement and storage requires certain safety procedures to be followed, which are obviously not being followed because otherwise we probably wouldn't have had to experience the Bogra blast that caused three casualties and injured some 13 other individuals. And if authorities actually move to transplant CNG with LP cylinders, the number of cylinders will jump by a few hundred thousand again.



The damaged gas tank and pipes of DAP Fertiliser Company Limited in Anwara upazilla of Chittagong. An explosion at the factory caused the damage.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

When we introduce mass distribution of LPG (since policy dictates that 70 percent of the population will be brought under LPG consumption over the next five years), we need to take a closer scrutiny at the safety procedures involved here.

new re-fuelling stations and workshops coming up in the next 12 months. Looking beyond the LPG dispensing points, we have the issue of storage facilities and their upkeep are another story altogether. Media reported on August 20, 2016 that some 300 LP gas cylinders exploded at the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) storage facility in Bogra that prompted authorities to order BPC to recheck the safety on LP gas cylinders, and as we understand it, there are some 500,000 cylinders in BPC inventory.

obviously have a quality assurance problem. The gas used in these cylinders are flammable, and with LPG - highly flammable. When we introduce mass distribution of LPG (since policy dictates that 70 percent of the population will be brought under LPG consumption over the next five years), we need to take a closer scrutiny at the safety procedures involved here.

The DAP plant incident may have caught the big headlines, but we should be equally worried about the safety of LPG cylinders that will connect millions

What all this points to is this: there is the need of a greatly expanded regulatory body whose sole job will be to check that safety measures on cylinders. Whether this will be the current Department of Explosives or another department is a question best left to policymakers. But given the huge volume of cylinders that will flood the market in the next three to five years, can we remain complacent on the issue of safety?

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PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

Reviving arms control in Europe



FRANK-WALTER STEINMEIER

EUROPEAN security, to the surprise of many, is under threat once again. So, once again, Europe's security must top our political agenda.

Even before the Ukraine conflict began in 2014, there were growing signs of a brewing confrontation between rival blocs. This new confrontation, however, is not defined by antagonism between communism and capitalism, but by a dispute over social and political order - a dispute about freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights - as well as by a struggle for geopolitical spheres of influence.

Russia's annexation of Crimea violated international law and called into question the very foundations of Europe's security architecture. Moreover, the nature of conflict, as Ukraine has demonstrated, has changed dramatically. So-called hybrid warfare and non-state actors are playing ever-greater roles.

New technologies - offensive cyber capabilities, armed drones, robots, and electronic, laser, and standoff weapons - carry new dangers. New combat scenarios - smaller units, higher fighting power, faster deployment - are not covered by today's existing arms-control regimes. The danger of a new arms race looms large.

Ever since the *Harmel Report*, which redefined NATO strategy back in 1967, the West has followed a two-track approach to its relations with Russia: deterrence and détente. NATO renewed its commitment to this dual strategy at its Warsaw Summit earlier this summer. We adopted the necessary measures to provide military reassurance, and at the same time, reaffirmed our political responsibility for cooperative security in Europe.

This dual approach is subject to an inherent difficulty: deterrence is real and visible to everyone; but détente must also be real and visible if it is to play its part. Whenever this policy balance is lost, misperceptions arise, and little remains to counteract the risk of escalation.

To mitigate this risk, we should advance a concrete goal: the re-launch of arms control in Europe as a tried and tested means of risk-reduction, transparency, and confidence building between Russia and the West.

Arms-control agreements, history has demonstrated, are not the result of existing trust - they are a means to build trust where it has been lost. In 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis brought the world to the brink of nuclear confrontation. Soon after the crisis - when the US-Soviet relationship was at an all-time low - both superpowers decided that it was time to work across the divide, through small and concrete steps. This principle was also at the heart of Willy Brandt's *Neue Ostpolitik* in the 1960s and 1970s.

Today, new and deep rifts have opened up between Russia and the West, and I fear we will not be able to close them in the near future, however hard we try. No one should underestimate the challenges we face in this regard, especially given manifold crises - in eastern Ukraine, Syria, Libya, and elsewhere - at a time when we are not immune from renewed escalation or further

setbacks. Only one thing is certain: If we don't try, peace in Europe and beyond will be tenuous. So we should heed the lesson of détente: however deep the rifts, we must try to build bridges.

Unfortunately, the existing arms-control and disarmament regimes are crumbling. Russia is no longer implementing the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, which led to the removal of tens of thousands of tanks and heavy weapons from Europe in the years after 1990. Likewise, the transparency and confidence-building mechanisms enshrined in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's 2011 Vienna Document have grown increasingly ineffective, and Russia opposes the steps needed to modernise them.

The OSCE's Treaty on Open Skies, too, is being limited in its application. And Russia's annexation of Crimea has rendered obsolete the Budapest Memorandum. The trust that was carefully accumulated through decades of hard work has been

traditional, large armies, taking resources such as transport capabilities into consideration accordingly);

- integrate new weapons systems (for example, drones);
- permit effective, rapidly deployable, flexible, and independent verification in times of crisis (carried out by, say, the OSCE);
- can be applied where territorial status is disputed.

On these complex issues, we want to launch a structured dialogue with all those who share responsibility for European security. The OSCE, which Germany is chairing this year, is one important forum for such a dialogue.

It's not certain that such an undertaking can succeed at a time when world order is eroding and relations with Russia are strained. But it would be irresponsible not to try.

True, Russia has violated basic principles of peace territorial integrity, free choice of alliances, and



squandered.

Yet, at the same time, Russia has repeatedly called for a new debate on conventional arms control in Europe. In this sense, it is high time to take Russia at its word!

Re-launching conventional arms control should be based on a principle that was at the heart of Brandt's *Ostpolitik*: security in Europe must not be framed as a permanently adversarial process. Security is not a zero-sum game. Increased security for one side must not be perceived by the other side as reducing its own security. So, in my view, a re-launch of arms control must cover five areas. We need agreements that:

- define regional ceilings, minimum distances, and transparency measures (especially in militarily sensitive regions such as the Baltics);
- take into account new military capabilities and strategies (smaller, mobile units, rather than

recognition of international law - that are non-negotiable for us in the West. But we must likewise be united in seeking to avoid an upward spiral of antagonism and confrontation.

In the West, as in Russia, our world seems increasingly dangerous. Extremist terrorism, savage conflicts in the Middle East, failing states, and the refugee crisis imply risks for all Europe. Security capabilities on both sides are stretched to the limit. Nobody wins and everyone loses if we exhaust ourselves in a new arms race.

By re-launching arms control we can make a tangible offer of cooperation to all those who want to shoulder responsibility for Europe's security. It is time to try the impossible.

The writer is Germany's Foreign Minister.
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