

# THE EURASIAN CENTURY

## Moving forward with BRICS and BIMSTEC



**THE OVERTON WINDOW**  
ON his return from an extensive speaking tour in China recently, historian, researcher and bestselling author, William F. Engdhal wrote that "a Eurasian Century at this point is unstoppable" ("The Eurasian Century is Now Unstoppable", *New Eastern Outlook*, October 10). Central to his analysis was the Chinese-led One Belt, One Road initiative (OBOR) aimed at connecting countries "from China across Central Asia, Russia, Belarus, Iran and potentially Turkey", through the largest public infrastructure projects in modern history.

A detailed proposal for building an extensive, modern network of high-speed train lines from the Pacific coast of China and Russia through Central Asia and into Iran was already presented by China's economic planning organisation and the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Commerce last year. At the crux of OBOR's connectivity ambition are two main routes.

On land, it will focus on jointly building "a new Eurasian Land Bridge from China via Kazakhstan on to Rotterdam" and land rail corridors that "include developing China-Mongolia-Russia, China-Central Asia-West Asia, China-Pakistan, Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar, and China-Indochina Peninsula economic corridors". At sea, it will emphasise the joint building of transport routes connecting major sea ports along the Belt and Road, connecting "present China ports at Haikou and Fujian with Kuala Lumpur's port in Malaysia at the Malacca Strait passage, Calcutta in India, Nairobi in Kenya and via the Suez Canal to Athens and beyond".

Together, they would form a comprehensive "circulatory system". China has already signed memoranda of understanding with more than 55 countries and regional organisations to that end. The President of China has also personally visited more than 35 countries to discuss its implementation. China Railway



PHOTO: SPUTNIK DENIS BOLOTOSKY

Group and China Communications Construction Company have finalised "contracts in 26 countries". Work on "40 energy projects have begun" in 19 countries along the Belt and Road.

These are only some of the key progress made in regards to the great Chinese vision, one, which other countries also seem to share. They include, primarily, the BRICS countries, as evident from the newly formed BRICS Development Bank's willingness to fund projects within the OBOR initiative. But that's not all the BRICS countries are doing. Over the last one month, they have been making deals left, right and centre.

During the eighth BRICS summit in Goa this month, "Russia and India signed 18 agreements, including contracts on arms and energy cooperation" ("How BRICS Members Will Benefit From Leaders' 'Goa Retreat', *Sputnik*, October 16). On the same day, the BRICS Business Council also recommended

members "to form a new rating agency for emerging economies". According to the Chairman of the Council, Onkar Kanwar, "Deepening trade will be an important part of BRICS agenda in the foreseeable future".

During the summit, leaders of The Bay Of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) member states — Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Thailand, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka — were also present and held talks with BRICS leaders on various issues. Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister told *Sputnik*, "The BIMSTEC idea of inter-regional infrastructural and political connectivity of various regions is important".

His words resonated with President Jinping's action even before the summit began as well as during it. President Jinping's milestone visit to Bangladesh that led to the largest ever pledge of assistance to Bangladesh by any single country, for example, and his vow to cooperate more with Sri Lanka and

Myanmar after meeting the two countries leaders separately at the Goa summit, are good indicators of greater cooperation within South Asian and Southeast Asian countries, that was repeatedly emphasised by all the leaders who were present.

Mr. Jinping again reiterated China's commitment towards such goals. *China Central Television* (CCTV) quoted him saying, "Both groups [BRICS and BIMSTEC] belong to the big family of developing countries" ("President Xi attends BRICS-BIMSTEC leaders' dialogue", October 17). They "share common desires in safeguarding world peace and regional security, as well as the common needs for economic development and improving people's livelihood and benefits" and, hence, should "join hands and make concerted efforts to enhance policy communication and coordination, complement each other's advantages and promote regional economic integration".

His closest ally in world politics today,

Russia's President Vladimir Putin again backed his sentiments. Mr. Putin stressed after the Goa declaration that BRICS is a "key element" in the embryonic multipolar world ("BRICS continues its advance, one step at a time", *RT*, October 18). In terms of working with BIMSTEC, in a similar fashion to China, Russia too has been making deals and increasing cooperation with its member countries. Increasing the volume of bilateral trade between Russia and Bangladesh to almost USD 1 billion in recent years, is a testament to such attempts succeeding ("Russia's NPP Near the Bay of Bengal", *New Eastern Outlook*, October 21).

Bangladesh has, in fact, become "a major supplier of seafood and textiles to the Russian market, while Moscow is exporting metal industrial products and heavy machinery to Bangladesh". Most strikingly, according to official data, in September alone, "Bangladesh imported about 245,000 tons of grain from Russia", which accounts for a significant portion of all Russian exports.

Thus, it cannot be denied that Bangladesh is starting to receive some benefits of Eurasian countries working together already. Other countries of this vast landmass too can share in the success by keeping to the pledge of leaders present at the summit. What every country of Eurasia can also take away from all this is that if they do work together, given the current world setting, this century can truly be a Eurasian Century, as underlined by Mr. Engdhal.

With that in mind, Russia and China, the two most powerful countries of this region, should continue and, indeed, increase providing their support to other countries and leadership to the various development projects involving all of Eurasia. Other powerful countries that fall within its boundaries such as India, should also take up a more proactive role. With their leadership, support and knowhow, other countries will surely be itching to join in and take development and cooperation to a new level, while working towards ensuring peace and prosperity for all of Eurasia and its fascinatingly diverse group of people.

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## THE BUSINESS OF WAR

NADIA KABIR BARB

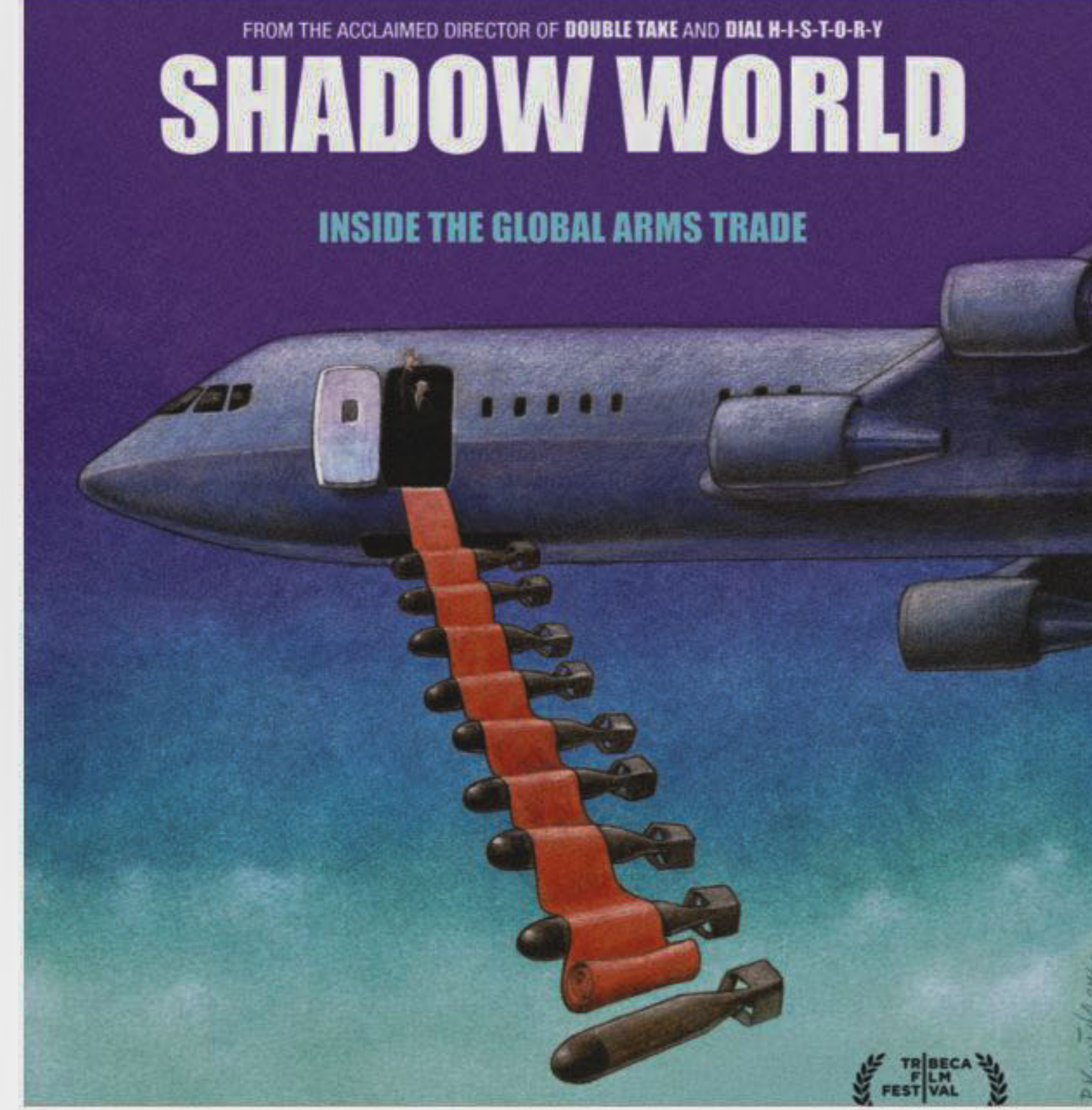
THERE is a conspiracy theorist lurking inside most of us. Some have the unshakeable belief that Elvis Presley faked his own death or that a UFO landed in Roswell, New Mexico and the US government covered up the story. Others suspect that AIDS is a man-made disease, Princess Diana's death was not an accident and that we are constantly being watched by Big Brother. It can be hard to resist the temptation to speculate, analyse and expound on different theories, ranging from the inane to the truly frightening. At the end of the day, there is some comfort in the knowledge that it is just conjecture. But when these conspiracy theories turn out to be based on the truth, it is not always as simple and as satisfying as 'I told you so'. On the contrary, it can be deeply distressing, especially if the reality is far worse than the speculation.

*Shadow World*, a hard-hitting and thought-provoking documentary directed by Johan Grimontprez and written by Andrew Feinstein based on his book *The Shadow World: Inside the Global Arms Trade*, gives us an insight into the extent of corruption that encompasses the global arms trade. As many have suspected, not only is global conflict lining the pockets of politicians, senior military personnel, weapons manufacturers and businesses, governments around the world are also complicit in profiting from death, destruction and the human suffering of millions. And the scale of it is breathtaking. From billion dollar handshakes that take place between governments to multi-million-dollar backroom deals and bribes, the film confronts us with the harsh reality of the global arms trade and the actual cost of war.

Where there is conflict, there is money to be made. With so many countries involved in regional disputes or an arms race, either manufacturing or amassing weapons and investing in military technology, there is an opportunity for the arms manufacturers, often from wealthier more developed economies, to sell, often to corrupt elites in less developed countries. 'World peace' is a utopian ideal more honoured in word than in deed.

According to The Institute for Economics and Peace, a think tank that has produced the Global Peace Index (an attempt to measure the relative position of nations' and regions' peacefulness) Iceland is the world's most peaceful country, followed by Denmark, Austria, New Zealand, Portugal, Czech Republic, Switzerland, Canada, Japan and Slovenia. Their findings also state that Botswana, Chile, Costa Rica, Japan, Mauritius, Panama, Qatar, Switzerland, Uruguay and Vietnam are the only countries free from conflict — only 10 out of the 162 ranked countries. In other words, we are a world at war and we live in a cynical world where war, not peace, is ultimately a business.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Sipri), a leading independent research body reported that the total sales of arms, including military services of the top 100 arms companies in the world, was over USD 400 billion in 2010. Britain is currently the second biggest arms dealer in the world with the US taking the number one spot. This is hardly surprising when both the US and the UK have the biggest weapons manufacturing companies such as Lockheed Martin (US), BAE Systems (UK) and Boeing (US) to name a few. It was an eye opener having



attended the screening of the documentary and having the opportunity to talk with Andrew Feinstein. According to him, "The trade in weapons accounts for around 40 percent of all corruption in all world trade. Those who make the decisions to go to war are often the very same people who benefit materially and politically". The reality is that peace is not profitable. He goes on to say, "Arms deals are done by a combination of governments, politicians, senior military officials, intelligence operatives, the weapons makers and arms dealers, all of

whom ultimately benefit. This ensures that these powerful forces collude to ensure the outcome is best for them rather than in the national interest." The decision to go to war is not borne out of any noble sentiment and is effectively financially motivated. It can affect economic and foreign policy. A prime example of this is Dick Cheney, the former United States vice president. Cheney was one of the primary proponents of the invasion of Iraq and his former company Halliburton, in which he still had a significant stake, benefited from the invasion, to the sum of USD

39 billion. *Shadow World* suggests that as a consequence, Cheney's personal wealth increased exponentially. Unsurprisingly, the invasion was camouflaged in a cloak of nobility. The narrative to the voting population was based on untrue and unproven allegations of existing weapons of mass destruction. The consequences are still being felt not just by the population of Iraq but by the rest of the world.

As tax payers, we are also complicit in the actions that our governments take and the ensuing consequences. We are effectively funding wars in countries based on the most tenuous of reasons with the money going towards a defence budget that we have no control over. To put things in perspective, since 2010, Britain has also sold arms to 22 of the 30 countries on the UK government's own human rights watch list. The UK has, at various times, sold weapons to Saddam's Iraq, the Ayatollah's Iran and the Taliban in Afghanistan, even in conflict with each other.

Since civil war broke out in March 2015 between the Western and Saudi-backed government and Houthi rebels in Yemen, Saudi Arabia has launched airstrikes with devastating consequences, killing over 10,000 people. The most recent bombing was of a funeral, killing 140 civilians and injuring almost 600 people. Despite these attacks being widely condemned as having violated international humanitarian law, the US has approved a USD 1.15 billion arms sale and the UK government has pledged over £3 billion worth of weaponry since the beginning of the conflict.

The symbiotic relationship between the UK and Saudi Arabia has a long history. Saudi Arabia has been a major buyer of UK weapons since

the 1960s. Through candid interviews with investigative journalists, military personnel, activists and even arms dealers, *Shadow World* shows us how embedded the culture of mutual back scratching and profiteering truly is. The biggest and most controversial deal was the Al Yamamah deal that took place between the UK government and Saudi Arabia in 1985. At the time, the financial benefits from the deal were thought to be so lucrative that the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher stepped in to lead the negotiations in person. Her direct intervention with Prince Bandar and King Fahd helped to clinch the deal for the BAE, cutting France out (which was in mid negotiations with Saudi Arabia at the same time). Al Yamamah turned out to be the world's biggest arms deal, bringing in over £43 billion in revenue for the BAE over the course of the next twenty years. What was shocking were the sums of money paid in commissions and bribes to Saudi royals through agents, brokers and middlemen, estimated by the police as being more than £6 billion. Despite this becoming public knowledge, no one has been prosecuted nor made accountable.

Feinstein states, "The trade in weapons is a parallel world of money, corruption, deceit and death. It operates according to its own rules, largely unscrutinised, bringing enormous benefits to the chosen few, and suffering and immiseration to millions. The trade corrodes our democracies, weakens already fragile states and often undermines the very national security it purports to strengthen."

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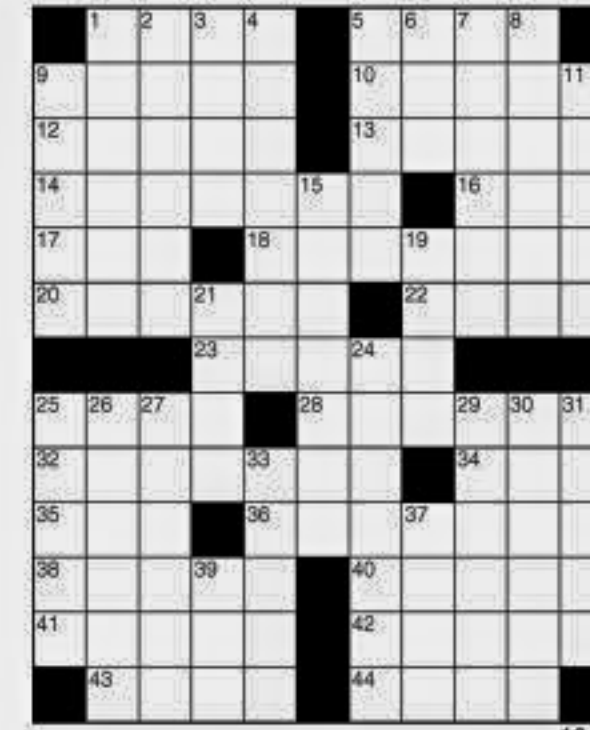
### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

#### ACROSS

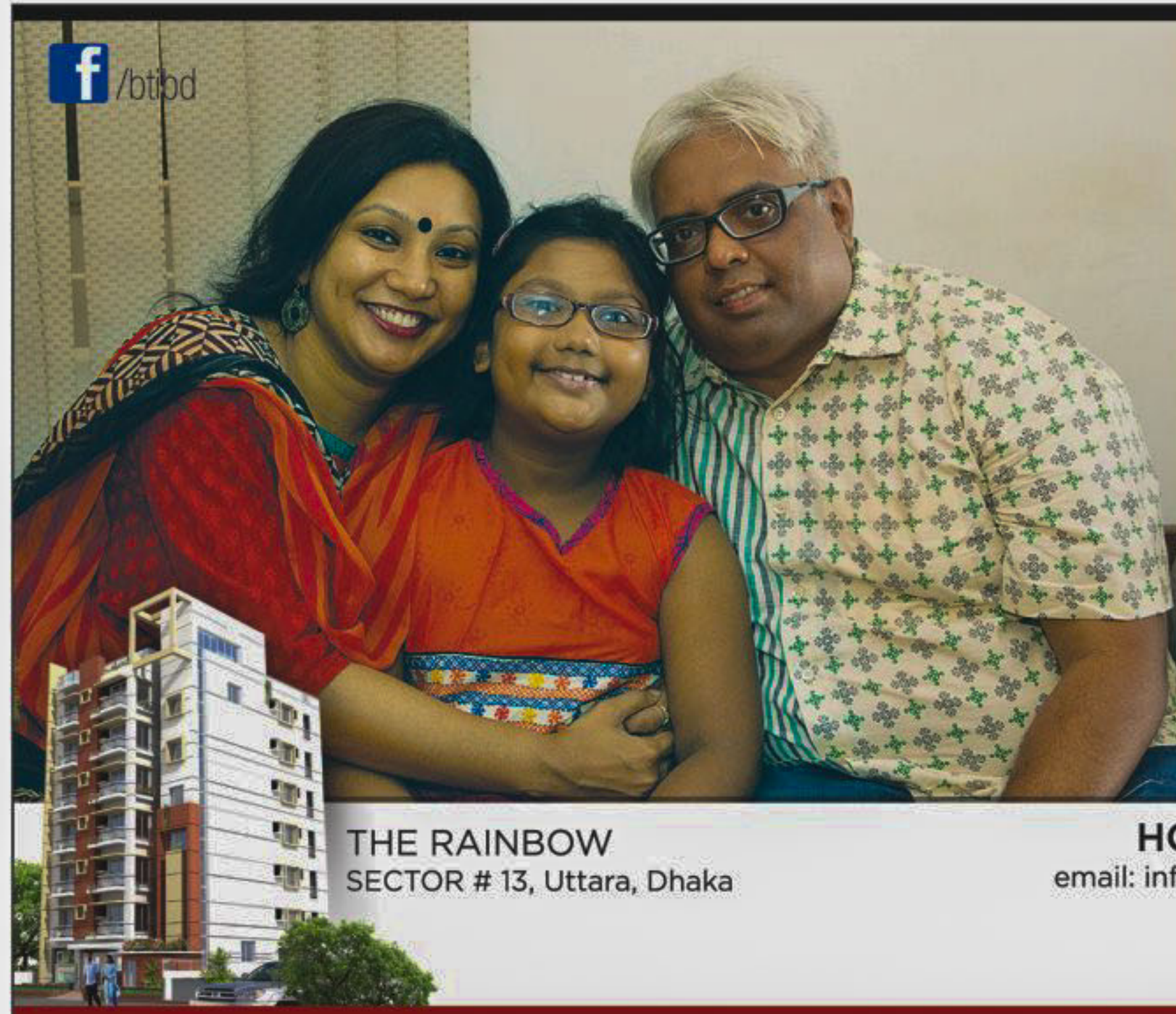
- 1 Frost, e.g.
- 5 Two -somes
- 9 Last inning, usually
- 10 Story meanings
- 12 Peace goddess
- 13 Musical symbol
- 14 Fit for breaking
- 16 Originally called
- 17 LAX info
- 18 Layered dish
- 20 Burglar alarm part
- 22 Vichyssoise veggie
- 23 Bush's successor
- 25 Lucy's love
- 28 European capital
- 32 Clarify
- 34 Ring great
- 35 Superior's address
- 36 Say inadvertently
- 38 "In & Out" star
- 40 Breathing
- 41 Party prep
- 42 More pleasant
- 43 Clockmaker Thomas
- 44 Bustles

#### DOWN

- 1 Sea rover
- 2 Like some shows
- 3 Sicilian spouter
- 4 1958 horror film
- 5 Rx amounts
- 6 "Gross!"
- 7 Juice choice
- 8 Peaceful
- 9 Evenings, in ads
- 11 Command to Spot
- 15 University of Wyoming site
- 19 Sighing cry
- 21 Field material
- 24 Big Sky setting
- 25 School fixtures
- 26 Banishes
- 27 Pixie
- 29 Quilt cloth
- 30 Martini garnishes
- 31 It has a blade
- 33 Hebrew letter
- 37 Glided
- 39 Fruitcake ingredient



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