

## Saving the Sundarbans

### Respecting nature is in our best interest

A lot has been said about the possible dangers posed to the Sundarbans by the Rampal power plant project. But what has perhaps escaped our notice is the growing industrialisation near the Rampal power plant which too has the potential to do great harm to the Sundarbans and its biodiversity.

According to a report on October 25 in our front page, a few industries have already been seen to have sprouted up near the power plant. Signboards dotting demarcated plots for new industrial complexes are also noticeable and all of them are within 14-16 kilometres of the Sundarbans. What is surprising, however, is that according to officials, only three out of these numerous industrial plot owners have permission from the government to set up industries there.

Why the Sundarbans is so vital has already been discussed on numerous occasions and at length. Given its indispensability, can we continue to play this dangerous game of chicken by setting up more and more industrial complexes, increasing the possibility of something going wrong, resulting in a disaster that will all but destroy this one of a kind mangrove forest? When the British left India, the Sundarbans was 37,813 square kilometres. Today it has already shrunk to a mere 10,000 square kilometres — 6,000 in Bangladesh and 4,000 in India. With the planned industrialisation so close to it, surely that will be reduced even more.

The authorities cannot allow this to happen, as it has been proven again and again, that when humans stop respecting the environment, it is humans themselves who are the worst sufferers. There is no need for us to relearn that lesson the hard way.

## Abuse female expatriate workers face

### Take stern measures against recruiters

THE additional secretary at the expatriates welfare and overseas employment ministry recently stated at a seminar that “we have observed that young female domestic workers become victims of sexual abuse abroad”. This is hardly news but certainly we appreciate the government’s candour in the matter that our female migrant workers, primarily in the Middle East, are being subjected to physical abuse. The government is yet to commit to ILO Convention 189 for the Protection of Women Domestic Workers, and, even further back in 2010, it had promised to provide cell phones and local SIM cards for female migrant workers which they could use to communicate for help, but that apparently went nowhere.

The fact is that we have unscrupulous recruiting agencies and brokers who are involved in a racket that put our female workers abroad in near-servitude conditions where they have no rights.

If we were to take the example of neighbouring India, where the government has gone as far as blacklisting some unethical agents for their alleged involvement in cheating and exploiting female workers, much of the agony faced by our workers could be avoided.

Why is it that the authorities are reluctant to move against repeated allegations of abuse by female expatriate workers against recruiters? It is high time we ratify the ILO convention and take steps to formalise the sector. Our embassies abroad must have a dedicated labour officer who will answer a hotline which can be accessed and most importantly, the government must take up these repeat violations of human rights with host countries.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Recruiting teachers for university level

All university authorities, public or private, always try to select the best candidate. But what is the definition of a “best candidate”? Some experts rely on the highest CGPA records, while others also emphasise on class demonstration – how the candidate delivers his/her speech to help students understand the topic. Good teachers have the ability to express their ideas clearly and encourage students to develop their own views. Selecting university teachers should be a combined process including CGPA, class demonstration and the personality of the candidate.

Md. Shahadat Hossain Mir  
Daffodil International University

### A hard fought test

Little did the debutant Mehedi Hasan Miraj know that he would be able to extract the best bowling figure on barely starting his cricket journey. Shakib Al Hasan got his own share of achievement by taking one hundred and fifty test wicket. Moeen Ali and Adil Rashid tightened the screws of the score board with their unplayable deliveries. Our team did a commendable job by successfully taking twenty wickets. Who would have thought the match would roll onto the fifth day with an inexperienced cricket team up against the mighty strength of the English side? With a lot of things at stake, at the end of the day, the pitch made all the difference.

Muhtashim Uddin Ahmed  
Dhanmondi

# TAVELLA'S KILLING: Whose claim is correct?

### STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN  
NDC, PSC (RETD)

Gulshan diplomatic zone on September 28 last year. We are now even more perplexed regarding the actual perpetrators a year after the episode. It was perhaps the first incident of attack on a foreigner on our soil and all kinds of speculative comments came forth from many quarters as to who might be involved in the killing.

What has confounded the matter is that the contradictory findings on the killing come, surprisingly, from the same agency, albeit from two different elements of the police. And the second disclosure, by Rab, lends a different tenor to the case framed by the DMP.

According to the statement of Rab issued on Oct 21 2016, Cesare Tavella was shot dead by a militant group. The press release of Rab listed 19 attacks claimed by the “Neo JMB”, and the killing of the foreigner in Gulshan diplomatic zone on September 28 2015 had featured at the top. On the contrary a charge sheet was submitted in July last year by the Detective Branch of the DMP, who investigated the Tavella murder case, on the basis of completely different findings in which seven persons, including MA Quayum and his brother, have been indicted.

Obviously, only one of the two investigating agencies is right. One cannot say who but two different outcomes of two separate investigations into the same case is a very rare occurrence if at all. How does one reconcile two different findings basing on one of which trial proceedings have already started? The DMP has the “confessions” of the accused to go by while the Rab claim is based on “documents” recovered from the dens of Neo JMB cadres. Certainly one would

We are now confronted with two very different findings of two investigations on the killing of the Italian Aid worker Cesare Tavella, shot dead by some assailants in

have to be discarded for the other, unless of course it can be established that the seven DMP accused had truck with the neo JMBs. Thus the natural question that emerges from the foregoing is why two different results of investigation of the same case, and what does it do to the merit of the case instituted by the DMP?

Given the credentials of the top accused in the list, he being joint convener of the BNP’s Dhaka city unit and a former ward commissioner of the erstwhile Dhaka City Corporation, and

would only help to combat the matter better, if not, so much the better. An open mind leads to sound conclusions. Otherwise that would only divert the attention from the main course of investigation, the long term effect of which is that such cases remain unresolved with the actual perpetrators getting away or exploiting the loopholes, as might happen in this case, to evade justice. One recalls the vehemence and conviction with which some senior police officials put their case that Tavella

without a predetermined notion many of these could have been resolved well before, and many of the savage killings could well have been anticipated.

Clearly, the consequence of such positions, assumed without fully investigating a case such as this, is that the credibility of not only the investigating agencies but also of the government is put on the line. And even more, a very sensitive and important case which has drawn tremendous international attention has been



The four suspects arrested over the killing of Italian national Cesare Tavella.

PHOTO: STAR

his brother, the political undertone of the matter is quite palpable. One can be forgiven for thinking that the outcome of the investigation was predetermined. The ‘Jodge Mian’ saga is only too fresh in our mind not to see these developments as ominous.

This paper had highlighted the need for a thorough and fair investigation of the case and that it was not in any way politicised. We had also suggested that if an IS link was found in the process it

murder was a political conspiracy to reap political dividends. Understandably, there was a natural disinclination to be associated with anything that had to do with IS.

Evidently, with IS claiming responsibility for the killing, as were the claims for most of the killings in 2015, there was compulsion on the government to disprove the IS claim. Regrettably, the effort to do so has gone waste. Had these cases been approached

trivialised.

The government’s security and intelligence agencies are national assets and no undertaking that can fritter away their efforts should be assigned to them. The facts are incontrovertible, the findings are not. One wonders whether the cause of justice will be served in this case.

The writer is Associate Editor, *The Daily Star*.

# When suffering becomes a propaganda icon



SAEED NAQVI

Vegas earlier this week.

Clinton simulated a lump in her throat describing the child with burns as evidence of indiscriminate Russian bombing of civilians.

The pro- and anti-Russian strand has consistently run through the debates. Clinton has dwelt on Russian perfidy in the West Asian mess while Trump distanced himself from the Cold War rhetoric. According to him, Russian cooperation should be welcome to fight terrorism.

Earlier, Christiane Amanpour of CNN thrust the very same photograph of the Syrian boy under Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov’s nose during her high profile interview in Moscow. This, she said menacingly, is a “crime against humanity”. Lavrov contemplated the photograph with some emotion. “This is a tragedy”, he said without a change of expression.

Lavrov is too suave a diplomat to get into an argument with reporters. I am sure he knew that the painful picture has gone viral on social media. A multi-million dollar propaganda machine has been placed at the disposal of the so-called Syrian opposition by an alliance led by the US and which includes Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey.

Propaganda these days will always invite counter propaganda. It turns out that a video of how the “Syrian boy” photograph was manufactured has gone viral too. I have acquired a clip of this video.

A “fixer” lifts the boy on his shoulder and brings him into a trailer which has been set up as a field studio. The boy, looking more weary than in pain, is made to sit on a chair. Media is then ushered in for an extended photo session. A hapless toddler is thus brought into focus as an iconic symbol of Russian brutality. As the photo session progresses, the “fixers” and the “minders”, all wearing white helmets, are laughing – they are thrilled at the success of their enterprise.

This sleight of hands is the latest I have noticed in my line of duty for decades as a foreign correspondent.

The uses of the media to advance strategic foreign policy ends can be traced, in recent decades to say Radio Free Europe, to soften up communist states. This was during the

Cold War.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the use of the media in foreign interventions reached new heights because of lightning advances in technology. But let us abide by the Syria story for our purposes. When I visited the country in August 2011, an imitation of the colour revolutions (Orange “revolution” in Ukraine) was on evidence. In other words, images of slogan shouting crowds were amplified by the media, creating an illusion of a popular, nationwide insurrection.

It is true, there was restiveness in Hama, halfway between Damascus and Aleppo. This was not new. The district has always been a centre for the Muslim Brotherhood. A major uprising in 1982 was so brutally crushed by Hafez al Assad, Bashar Assad’s



Five-year-old Omran Daqneesh was removed from a collapsed building in Aleppo, Syria on Aug 18, 2016.

father, that nearly 10,000 Brotherhood members and sympathisers were killed. But on this occasion when the restiveness in Hama erupted into a demonstration, US ambassador, Robert Stephen Ford and French Ambassador, Eric Chevallier played a role novel in global diplomacy: they joined the demonstration against the government they were accredited to.

Indeed, the duet made appearances in Homs, on the Lebanese border and Dera, near Jordan. When I asked why western ambassadors were being allowed to stoke a revolution, one of Bashar al Assad’s senior advisers threw up her hands:

“This shows how far we have been penetrated.”

The ambassadors did not just provide

moral support to the opposition by making a personal appearance in the trouble spots; they also provided the insurrection with state of the art communications technology.

According to James Glanz and John Markoff of *The New York Times*, “The Obama administration is (in 2011) leading the global effort to deploy “shadow” internet and mobile phone systems that dissidents can use to undermine repressive governments that seek to silence them by censoring or shutting down communications networks.”

The NYT reporters described “one operation out of a spy novel in a fifth floor shop in L street, Washington, where a group of young entrepreneurs, looking like a garage band, are fitting deceptively innocent-looking hardware into a prototype ‘internet in a

suitcase.” It was all in preparation of an elaborate “Liberation Technology Movement”.

None of this technology has enabled the US and its cohorts to cover themselves with glory in Syria. The so-called “moderate opposition” has been an illusion, a sort of cover for terrorist groups like Al Nusra.

Pushed onto the back foot on this issue, Amanpour screwed up her nose and asked with marked aggression:

“You are not suggesting the United States is helping terror groups.”

Lavrov’s non reply was pithy:

“When it comes to the Al Nusra, I am not

sure.”

The writer is a senior Indian journalist, television commentator and interviewer.

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