

# WAKE UP, Mrs. Bangladesh

FOUNDER EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI

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## State-owned banks continue to bleed

Whatever happened to the reforms?

WHEN the finance minister states that some state-owned banks (SoBs) flout the rules to give loans to dubious entities and individuals without collateral, it is a frank admission that things are anything but normal. It is unthinkable that after major financial scams like Hall-Mark and Destiny a few years ago that rocked the banking sector to its foundations, we continue to experience incidences where a gold trader can get a loan worth Tk 151 crore without any major scrutiny. The question we have to ask is whatever happened to the multi-pronged reforms that were supposed to bring some check-and-balance into how loans are approved.

Despite what is being stated at policy level, the loan scam at Rupali Bank shows major discrepancies. While Tk 60 crore was approved by the board, the remainder Tk 73 crore required no approval. Even more interesting is that the documentation related to the unapproved amount has magically disappeared. There have been allegations that the order to bypass scrutiny measures came from the "top". Now if there is even a modicum of truth in there, we must assume that the SoBs have degenerated into money pits for the well-connected, and funds, that are public funds to begin with, are open for grabs.

Financial irregularities have now become entrenched in SoBs and only serious political will can pull these institutions out of the red. The alternative would be for the finance minister to keep putting in thousands of crores of Taka every fiscal year in annual bailouts. This is a total waste of public expenditure and for what? Allowing such malpractices to continue merely affect financial stability and growth prospects of SoBs.

## Pedlars of children's death go free

Let investigators be investigated

FIVE officials of a pharmaceuticals company that allegedly manufactured toxic paracetamol which led to the death of 28 children in 2009 were acquitted on Monday. The learned judge in the case was unequivocal in his statement: the prosecution had utterly failed to prove the charge.

It seems to us that the authorities went out of their way so that these criminals could walk free. From the start, the investigation was set up to fail. Autopsy was not performed on any of the 28 children to confirm the existence of diethylene glycol, and the case reports were replete with inaccuracies and withholding of information. Even Prof Mohammad Hanif, the doctor from Dhaka Shishu Hospital, who found the presence of toxins in the drug, was not made a witness.

These barely scratch the surface; a myriad of loopholes, shoddy investigation procedures, and a complete apathy from the Drug Administration has resulted in the inevitable outcome of the case.

All this, we have seen before too, in the case of the 5 drug companies accused in 1992. Why the long delays and wilful negligence in collection and presentation of evidence? Is the Drug Administration merely incompetent, or is there some incentive for them in seeing these pedlars of deadly drugs are acquitted? We concur with Prof Hanif that this is a matter of regret for the entire nation. Selling deadly medicine is a crime that cannot go unpunished.

While we demand that the role of the Drug Administration in its shoddy handling of the case be investigated and a new investigation launched against Rid Pharmaceuticals, we wonder whether the court had any option at any point in time during the trial, when the lacunae were emerging, to order fresh investigation.



RUBANA HUQ

**KNOT SO TRUE**

I saw a butterfly following me around. Usually, butterflies mean either death or marriage in the family. Every time, I see one, I shudder in fear and uncertainty. This time was a little different. It's because there was a marriage in the family. My daughter was getting married. For the last 15 days, butterflies have followed me around the house, around the wedding venue, and around the places I have been visiting. An aunt nailed her logic and told me, "It must be your mum." That the spirit of my mother who has been gone for the last 12 years could take the form of a butterfly surprised me, but the thought of it was nevertheless, comforting. My daughter, in turn, had a completely different angle. She said, "These butterflies must be drawn to high tension and energy. Therefore, they crowd around people when they wed or die." Her logical angle was a little shocking, but I accepted it with grace. After all, there is an entire generational gap that stands between us today, and no matter how much I am in sync with what she reads, sings, listens to and believes in, there is a huge difference in how we perceive our worlds and how we choose to act within them. And I am proud of the young. I am proud when I hear them say that they do not need big weddings, big expenses and big celebrations to mark the most important chapter in their lives. I am proud when I heard my little one tell me that she needs nothing from us but a small celebration marked with love and at home. At her initial request, I tried drawing up the guest list and stopped at 50. The list could go on forever, but the names beyond 50 did not seem to evoke much memory. My youngest daughter had the final argument, "As it is, out of the 1000 people you invite, only 50 will wish you well; the rest will only talk about the jewellery, the food and the clothes. So, why bother?" I wish I had the courage to listen to my daughters

and walk away from all the elaborate arrangements that I, in reality, invested my time, resources and effort in. With no offence meant to any, I must admit that most of us often forget that it's marriage that counts and not the weddings. The fun-filled festivity, the hall packed with curious people, the food spread, the critical hospitality et al. make little sense. The carnivalesque *holud* with lit up trees,

ashamed. The fact that I had given in to the demands of the society and of the contemporary had finally put a permanent dent in my self-esteem. Amidst all this, the fact that my daughter at least stood her ground and wore only deshi *Benarasi* from Mirpur at her wedding made me proud. The fact that the younger generation has more conviction and faith makes me believe in tomorrow.

grooms from all over the world going through the wedding motions, we also wonder about the seriousness of marriage. While the Western bride tosses her bouquet, the bride from Congo is forbidden to smile; the couple from Mongolia must kill a chicken; some brides marry a tree; a South Korean groom tolerates his feet being whipped by the bride's family; a groom from Fiji presents his father-in-law with a whale's tooth; a Mauritian bride gets chubbier before marriage; a Japanese bride having a traditional Shinto ceremony wears white from head to toe; including makeup, kimono and hood, demonstrating her maiden status has to "hide" her "horns of jealousy" she feels towards her mother-in-law; a Kenyan dad spits on his little girl leaving with her husband; we rarely notice our children slipping into another world of unfamiliarity.

We look forward to giving our daughters away and yet, in truth, how many of us keep in touch with the brides post wedding when many of them face domestic violence in one form or the other? How many of us are actually aware of the fact that out of the 11 highest ranking nations labeled for domestic violence, three are from South Asia including India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. How many of us know that in our own land, according to a report of Ain-o-Shalish Kendro, between January and October 2016, 548 women have been raped, 29 have died by rape, and 7 committed suicide after rape. While I gave my daughter away, I remembered a poem I wrote almost ten years ago. The poem was titled: *Wake up, Mrs. Bangladesh*:

"Wake up, women...  
Shadharon (average) is not your land...  
You were meant to be an epidemic.  
So be it.  
Pass it to the next voice lying  
In your next room  
Invade her heart;  
Be brutal in the process  
Wake her, shake her up and tell her  
That all that you have wrongly taught her for so long  
Was simple Routine."

It's time to do away with routine. The young women in Bangladesh are never to be given away to complacency or tradition. They are only meant to breathe the fire of freedom.

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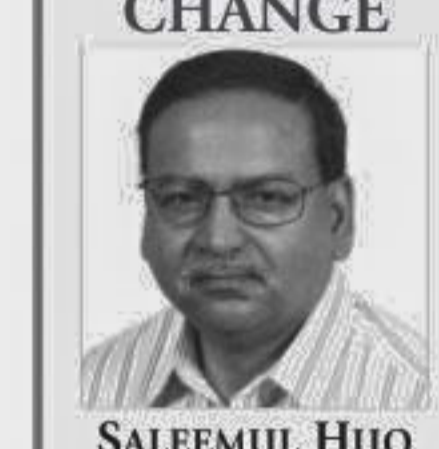
large stages, Hindi music being played and being danced to, may convey a sense of fun and laughter, but it certainly does not reflect our tradition or culture. A friend from India who flew in for the wedding gaped in surprise and told me, "OMG! You even have Punjabi songs!" I was truly

Rituals, festivals and ceremonies turn us into people who we rarely are or were. In a grand scale of things, how much does a flower arrangement on the table matter? For that matter, I suspect if the jewellery worn by the bride is ever worn again because of the lack of wearability. While we watch brides and

## COP22

# Vulnerable countries take the lead in commitments

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

previous statements questioning the existence of human induced climate change and his threat to withdraw from the Paris Agreement.

It took a few days for the delegates in Marrakech to recover from the shock and rally around to ensure that even if the US decided to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, or even from the UNFCCC itself, the remaining 194 countries would carry on with their commitments to tackle climate change because it was the right thing to do.

In the end, even the US negotiators, including Secretary of State John Kerry, who had negotiated the Paris Agreement at COP21 in Paris just a year ago, also stated that as President Obama was still in the White House and the US had ratified the Paris Agreement, the US would join the other 194 countries in actions to implement the agreement.

However, the biggest breakthrough occurred on the last day of COP22 when the 48 countries of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), under the leadership of Ethiopia, declared that they were committed to achieve 100 percent renewable energy by 2050, and in many cases by 2030 or even before.

This commitment to take action by the most vulnerable developing countries was the main final outcome of the COP and was covered by the world media as a demonstration of commitment to actions

under the leadership of the most vulnerable countries.

This commitment also marks a key turning point for the CVF countries, as they have now moved away from their original aim of highlighting their own vulnerability and advocating for actions by others to keep the long term temperature goal to 1.5 degrees, to now showing the way to global leadership to actually achieve that goal.

be revisited.

Another aspect of the CVF is the addition of the V20 finance ministers group, who have also been meeting and developing plans for more South-South cooperation amongst the CVF and other developing countries, as well as South-North cooperation with developed countries. Bangladesh and the Marshall Islands have been



Protesters attend a climate change march on a highway in Manila.

As a founding member, as well as previous chair of the CVF, Bangladesh is also now committed to achieving 100 percent renewable energy by 2050. This will not be a trivial task for us, but can certainly be achieved with the right policies and investments.

Bangladesh already has one of the world's fastest growing solar home systems with over five million units sold, supplying lighting to nearly 20 million poor people. This is an excellent basis to expand into bigger systems for other purposes.

However, there is also a contradiction in the country's policy with regard to investing in coal-powered electricity plants, which would force us to depend on fossil fuels for decades to come.

Hence, if Bangladesh is to fulfil its pledge to become 100 percent renewable by 2050, the policy on coal-powered electricity generation will need to

paired to develop such South-South as well as South-North partnerships on behalf of the V20 group. As the Marshall Islands will become the next chair of the CVF after the term of Ethiopia expires in two years, it is a great opportunity for Bangladesh to join the Islands in taking these partnerships forward.

Thus the CVF, which started as a small group of vulnerable developing countries in 2009 under the leadership of the Maldives, has now come of age and has grown to 48 countries, becoming a global leader in tackling climate change and implementing the Paris Agreement. As a key member of the CVF, Bangladesh can also continue to show leadership within the group.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Shocked at the police's treatment of the college professor

Fulbaria Degree College's demand to be turned into a government college was legitimate, yet the police unleashed a reign of terror to foil their demonstration. The police, as the report goes, busted the teachers' room and obstructed the transportation of the injured teacher to Mymensingh Hospital.

What kind of democracy is this, in which demonstrations for a public interest issue lead to loss of lives?

A. H. Dewan  
On email

### Death compensation for road accident

It is absolutely shocking that death compensation for road accidents presently stands at a meagre Tk 20,000, based on Insurance Act 1938 enacted by the British rule.

It is normal for countries to review and alter levels of compensation taking changing socio-economic conditions into account. Our current level of compensation, however, has remained unchanged for the past several decades.

The concerned authorities should consider increasing the limit to at least Tk 250,000. It might deter reckless drivers from breaching traffic regulations, and provide much needed financial assistance to dependents of deceased victims.

Ehsan Ul Haque  
On email

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