

Where is the DoE?

Brick kiln burning wood

A photograph published in this newspaper on Tuesday, show hundreds of maunds of wood illegally and openly being burnt every day to fuel brick kilns containing iron chimneys by the Doarika River in Barisal's Babuganj. Law enforcing agencies have, meanwhile, been turning a blind eye to the environmental damage that is being caused by such action, thus, paving the way for its continuation.

Concurrently, it is important to remember that there are hundreds of other locations around the country, if not more, where the same is happening. In a 2014 World Health Organisation report, Bangladesh was ranked fourth among 91 countries with worst urban air quality. And according to the Department of Environment (DoE), the presence of pollutant particles in the air in places like Dhaka is more than six times the healthy limit.

Not surprisingly, according to the director of the project that measured air qualities in different localities, one of the main reasons for such high presence of air pollutants was brick kilns. So the question is, where is the DoE in stopping all of this? Did it not look at the revelations of its project? Is it not aware that thousands of maunds of wood are illegally being burnt every day, even though it is there for all to see? The logical answer would be, of course it is; it is just not doing anything about it.

This must change. And the directive must come from the highest level of government, so that the DoE and other authorities shake off their deplorable attitude and perform their designated duty.

Israel defies world opinion

Will the UN sit on the sidelines?

ISRAEL has just declared the creation of thousands of more homes in settlements that were annexed in East Jerusalem. This is a direct defiance of a recent United Nations (UN) resolution. Israeli PM Netanyahu, the loose cannon in contemporary Israeli politics has accused the outgoing US President of backstabbing Israel and setting in motion events that led to the "shameful" UN vote. The landmark vote that was endorsed by all members of the 15-strong Security Council with the US abstaining is perhaps the strongest signal the world body has ever sent to the State of Israel, but will that be enough? Our past experience tells us it is not. Dozens of resolutions have been passed by the UN over the course of decades condemning Israeli actions that have marginalised both Palestinian's right to land and human rights and yet Israel has gone ahead and done what it deemed fit.

We find the dismissive nature of Israeli policymakers towards the UN a great affront. With President-elect Donald Trump supporting no action against continued Israeli settlements; it seems that the Resolution may end up on the shelf like earlier ones. Israeli occupation of land that is rightfully Palestinian has been an ongoing process since the 1967 war and the international community has largely turned a blind eye to such activity.

While we laud the body in coming out with a near-unanimous decision to condemn this act, has the time not come to take punitive measures against this rogue nation? Wars have been launched on nations for committing far fewer atrocities and heads of nations forcefully removed for human rights violations. Why should Israel be above reproach as it willfully bulldozes structures and uproots entire Palestinian communities from their ancestral homes?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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RIP George Michael

Never in my life have I heard an English song more beautifully composed and soulfully sung than 'Careless Whisper' by British singer and songwriter George Michael. In this once-in-a-century kind rendition, he just sang his heart out. Only this song in point is reason enough to remember him for. Despite his demise, he and his works will remain vividly alive in the hearts of millions of his fans all the world over. RIP George Michael.
Jewel, *Rajshahi*

Saving mankind

20th century marked a turning point in our realisation to save mankind. It was evident more than ever before that advancement in science in the form of rapid industrialisation has given rise to serve atmospheric degradation, emission of green house gases into the atmosphere of our planet Earth. The unabated race for growth and development by developed countries is the root cause of the global warming. Developing nations are facing increased natural calamities like cyclones, floods, droughts etc. climate change.

Climate change incidents have become global concerns for the whole of mankind. For addressing this, global leaders resolved under the auspices of United Nations to reduce emissions of GHGs to minimise global warming which, in its turn will help protect mankind from adverse impacts of climate change. Bangladesh and other coastal and island nations, which are most vulnerable, should move all UN bodies to make developed countries to cut GHG emissions to required levels for a cooler planet.

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Female terrorists: What is so new?

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

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ARE we reading too much into the involvement of women in terrorist acts in Bangladesh? This by no means is a new spectacle. The so called weaker sex has always been a part of terror ever since the phenomenon was exploited to create psychological and physical havoc on the target, be it the state or a particular segment of the population. They have been the vector of death and destruction in equal measure with their male counterpart, and perhaps more efficient at times in carrying out their tasks.

So why should we go about suggesting, as one notices being done in some sections of the media by some commentators, that what we witnessed in Ashkona on December 24, of a women blowing herself up with a suicide vest, is a new development. It may be so in Bangladesh, but so is the character of terrorism that we are witnessing in the country that we hadn't witnessed heretofore. What we saw on that day was merely the enactment of similar script that has played out in many parts of the world, where Islamic extremists are perpetrating violence in the name of the scripture.

Female members in a terror outfit have not been merely couriers but, if one delves into the history of terrorism or into the re-emergence of it from the early sixties and seventies, women had led the

main action as well, apart from the fact that most terrorist organisations have had a female wing to supplement the main effort. Leila Khaled, the first woman to hijack a plane and blow it up eventually, captured public imagination and so did Thenmozhi Rajaratnam, the LTTE suicide bomber who blew up Rajiv Gandhi in a suicide attack in 1991.

The "Black Widows" of Chechnya still induce fear among many Russians, being

whether there indeed is a female cadre of these extremist groups in Bangladesh. At this point in time any comment on these two matters would be at best an educated guess. Is this a one off case, are they being motivated by their husbands to act the way they did, as reports in some newspapers have portrayed? We should not rule out the possibility of involvement of women, albeit in a very nuclear form, in extremist activities. If

And this brings me to the despondency expressed by some talk-show commentators who think that killing off all the terrorists in the Holey Artisan incident would have seen the end of the phenomenon. The terrorists do not work on a single-group basis. There are many cells that work without having knowledge of any other cell that might be in existence, except when it comes to the coordination at the final stages of pre-



An ambulance is seen carrying the injured to hospital after law enforcers carried out an anti-militant drive at Ashkona in Dhaka's Dakkhin Khan on December 24, 2016.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

responsible for several terrorist acts, including blowing up two passenger planes in 2004 that took off from Moscow airport, bombed the Moscow metro twice, and took part in the siege of a school in Beslan, where hundreds of innocent civilians, including children, lost their lives, and bombing in March 2010 of Moscow metro, killing at least thirty five people. Their cause is the creation of an Islamist caliphate in the predominantly Muslim North Caucasus region that includes Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan. And all these statistics are encapsulated in various reports over several years and which have been so exquisitely described by Dr. Ali Reaz in a very recent article in the *Prothom Alo*.

What, however, we need to focus on is the motivation of these women, and

that be the case how are these women being recruited? And views stem from the fact that the international extremist group that these elements draw inspiration from have a dedicated group of female terrorists working in various forms. Just recall the Black Widows. They are called so because they had lost their husbands, brothers or close relatives in the Chechen wars waged between the Russians and the Islamist rebels since 1994. They wanted to avenge the loss of their loved ones and were thus targeted for recruitment and training by the Chechen rebels quite easily. Can we entirely overlook the possibility of such psychological compulsion in our context? The IS recruits women in various ways but the internet is a very handy expedient for brainwashing and recruitment of female cadres.

paring for an operation.

I firmly believe that apart from the several extremists groups that the security agencies have neutralised in the last several months, there are many sleeper cells that are likely to be activated at an opportune time from their state of suspended animation on the orders of the brain controlling this group. Neutralising one group will not neutralise the operational capabilities of the extremists as a whole. The crux of the issue is finding out the brain and the source of funding. It is a tall order. But once that is done the capabilities of the cells will be blunted both due to lack of directive and orders as well as funds. And that is what the focus of the agencies must be on.

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INDIA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

Indus Water Treaty: Can it be updated?

BETWEEN THE LINES

KULDIP NAYAR

ISLAMABAD has asked the World Bank to honour the Indus Water Treaty executed between India and Pakistan in 1960. This is in response to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remark that India is free to use the water which flows into the sea. This is not correct because according to the treaty India cannot use more than 20 percent of the Indus water.

The World Bank spent many years trying to persuade New Delhi and Islamabad to reach an agreement. I recall that after Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Martial Law Administrator General Mohammad Ayub travelled in the same car, Mian Iftakharuddin suggested if they could sign an agreement on Kashmir in the same spirit; both remained silent. Iftakharuddin was then the top Muslim League leader who had joined it after being a congressman for many years.

According to the treaty, India could draw water from the Ravi, the Beas and the Sutlej, while Pakistan from the Indus, the Chenab and Jehlum. Even though both countries felt that they could utilise the water which was flowing through their country, they refrained from doing so because of the treaty. In fact, the Indus Water Treaty is an example before the world that held ground even when the two countries went to war.

Modi's off-the-cuff remark has created consternation in Pakistan, forcing it to appeal to the World Bank to "fulfil its obligation" relating to the treaty. In a letter to World Bank President Jim Yong Kim, Pakistan Finance Minister Ishaq Dar has said that the treaty did not provide for a situation wherein a party can 'pause' performance of its obligations and this attitude of the World Bank would prejudice Pakistan's interests and rights under the treaty.

I think that the fear of Pakistan is exaggerated. The country does not want any alteration in the treaty. In its reaction, the World Bank has said that it has paused its arbitration in the water dispute between India and Pakistan, saying it is doing so to protect the Indus Water Treaty. India would take no unilateral step to stop the water going unused into the Arabian Sea. However, there is a case where the two countries should sit and hammer out another treaty because the old one is outdated. At the time it was thought that the water given to Rajasthan would be utilised by the rest of the country because part of the desert would not be able to do so. But this has turned out to be wrong. The state has utilised the water allotted to it and wants more.

When Prime Minister Modi wants to have good relations with Pakistan and has wished his counterpart Nawaz Sharif on his birthday last week, Modi would not take any step which would harm Pakistan. There were enough provocations from Islamabad like the attacks on Pathankot and Uri that killed many civilians to act unilaterally. Even otherwise, it is in the interest of both countries that peace should prevail in the region. Both would benefit.

Kashmir is the problem which divides the two countries. Representatives of both countries should sit across the table and sort it out. Nawaz Sharif unnecessarily harangued Kashmir on Pakistan television

networks that Kashmir belonged to Pakistan and there would be no peace in the region until it became part of his country.

This irresponsible statement, coming as it does from a country's Prime Minister, has affected the tourist season in the valley still further. So much so that even Syed Shah Geelani, the pro-Pakistan Hurriyat leader, joined a procession to appeal to the tourists to return to the valley. Both he and Yasin Malik, who wants the valley to be independent, were part of the procession. They were particular that the message should reach New Delhi so that it takes steps to see that the tourists return to Kashmir.

The separatists in the valley do not realise that the tourists flocked to the valley as if they were visiting part of India. The demand of independence or the threat of

signed an agreement with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, until news had leaked, that India's then Information Minister Sushma Swaraj changed the draft agreement omitting Kashmir from the text. Since then the two countries have stayed distant. Mushraff's misadventure at Kargil only aggravated the matter further.

It must be said to the credit of Vajpayee that he took a bus to Lahore. I was sitting behind him when he showed me New Delhi's telegram which said that several Hindus had been killed near Jammu. He said he did not know how the country would react about his trip to Lahore but he was determined to pick up the thread with Nawaz Sharif. The rest is history.

The Indus Water Treaty can be replaced with another treaty but the consent of Pakistan is necessary. When it



Narendra Modi and Nawaz Sharif at SAARC 2014.

PHOTO: AFP

disturbance has scared them. They have picked up some other hill resorts in India which may not be as beautiful as the valley but compares favourably with it. They would wait and see whether the peace had really returned before drawing up their itinerary for the next year.

It is in the interest of Kashmiris not to disturb the status quo until they can have something better. This is possible if the three parties, India, Pakistan and the people in Kashmir, come together for a dialogue. New Delhi is not prepared for that because Islamabad has gone back on its promise not to allow its territory to be used by terrorists.

This was also agreed upon when Pakistan was under General Musharraf's rule. He went to Agra and almost

has not been willing to allow getting electricity from the run of the river, it is difficult to imagine that it would agree to the use of rivers in the Indus system, even though water from them is pouring into the Arabian Sea without being used for either irrigation or hydroelectric projects.

There is a tendency in Pakistan to link everything with Kashmir, which is a complicated problem and it would take many years to solve. The revision of Indus Water Treaty, which can satisfy both the countries, would add to the peace prospects. Let the treaty be discussed separately. The rest can follow. The only point to be taken into account is how the two countries can come closer to each other.

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The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.