

# Tonu murder trial and the fate of hurricanes

## Not much improvement on graft

*A lot remains to be done*

BAHANGLADESH'S performance in the Global Graft Index has improved but only a measly two points on a year to year basis. In 2015, our position was 13th from the bottom (out of 176 countries surveyed) and last year it was 15th. We bettered only Afghanistan in South Asia, in terms of corruption and that has been a war-torn country for decades. These findings were shared by Transparency International Bangladesh on January 25. Our dismal performance continues primarily due to institutional and legal inadequacies and the policy structures in place to combat graft remain woefully inadequate and underpowered. Statutory bodies that are meant to watch over accountability have been made ineffective which has not helped in discouraging graftand unless something is done to reverse this trend, Bangladesh will continue to perform poorly.

We have over the last few years borne witness to corruption in the financial sector. Committees have been formed and findings furnished in reports, many of which have not been made public. Recommendations have been ignored and the endless cycle of graft allowed over the years. We have recently been hit by cyber crime that rocked the central bank and again been kept in the dark about probe committee findings.

As pointed out in the report, unless changes are made that allow for stronger legal provisions and empower anti-corruption watchdog bodies to fight graft, little progress can be expected, and the media reports on corruption should be given due credence and acted upon promptly. There will have to be political will for any meaningful change to materialise in the fight against corruption.

## Sunken vessel yet to be salvaged

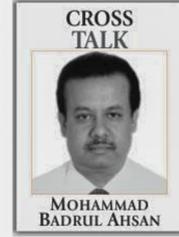
*Why are the authorities so apathetic?*

DAYS after a ship sank near the Sundarbans with 1,000 tonnes of coal, any attempt to salvage the sunken ship is still lacking on part of the authorities and its owner. Meanwhile, experts have already expressed deep concerns regarding the damaging impact it would have on the Sundarbans, particularly if the seepage is allowed to continue. Another worrying aspect is that the longer the delay in salvaging the ship, the more there is chance of silt accumulating over the vessel which could result in the blockage of the channel.

With all these concerns near at hand, how is it that the authorities have been so lethargic in handling the situation? The authorities claim to have instructed the owner to recover the ship within a specified time, but more than 10 days have passed with nothing being done.

Moreover, if the owner fails, the authorities themselves are supposed to recover it. Yet, the Mongla Port Authorities have no rescue ship and will have to depend on the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority. With that in mind, shouldn't the authorities have started to make preparations?

Over the last few years, we have seen similar such incidents repeating itself quite frequently. And yet, the authorities seem to care little at best about the negative impact all of these toxic materials are having on the Sundarbans. Such a lackadaisical attitude is not only harmful to the wellbeing of the Sundarbans, but does little to instil any confidence in their ability to look after the environment in general.



**CROSS TALK**  
**MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN**

THE Observer Effect in science has it that the act of observing will influence the phenomenon being observed. If we're looking for an answer ten months after the

brutal killing of a young girl named Sohagi Jahan Tonu, this effect comes closest to explaining what has happened since then. Human chains, rallies, protests and condemnations erupted immediately after the tragedy. Then something changed, which has weakened our outrage.

It happens all the time with hurricanes. When these tropical cyclones move over land, they weaken because they no longer have their source of fuel: warm moist air above the sea. The anger in our heart has likewise dissipated. The horror has died down. The indignation has faded. The howling has subsided. Our resilient minds picked up the pieces and went back to business.

But it's not the same thing for the victim's family. They are the ones living every day with the burden of memories. They have to fight back flashbacks on a daily basis. They have to deal with the disappointments every moment. They have to wake up and go to bed drowned in their sighs and tears. The daughter still lives in their hearts like an apparition inside a haunted house.

Those who raped and killed the girl must be having an antithetic experience. They must be celebrating the numerous reruns of their crime, reinforcing their cruelty. Nobody can touch them after they insulted the modesty of a girl. Nobody can touch them after they killed her afterwards with more vengeance than invaders overrunning enemies.

Those who let loose those animals are also the same people who are allegedly protecting them now. They are powerful people playing gods, moral rightness being no more than a juggler's impulse

to toss and catch yet another ball. It doesn't matter that a life has been cut in its prime. It doesn't matter she was ruthlessly killed, her broken body dumped in a bush like a discarded doll.

These people understand us all too well. They know we pour our shock into initial reactions and then decelerate to a dismal stop. They know we are like a storm that given enough time loses its force. They are waiting for us to disengage from our rage. They have

by compromise. Those who are hiding the criminals are also hiding themselves. And this business of hiding has the tendency to hide inside the hidden. The reason why we are afraid of exposing others is that we are afraid of being exposed to others.

Tonu's murder is déjà vu all over again. She isn't the first girl to bear such brutality. She isn't the first girl to be sadistically slain. She is merely the last bead of the rosary counted, where the

locked in a vicious circle.

Those who took Tonu's life and those who are now blocking justice for her are apparently unaware that those who dig a pit to trap others fall into it themselves. Today it's their victims. Tomorrow it may be their sons and daughters, even them.

It's not mere coincidence that the trials of the most controversial crimes in this country suffer delays and diversions. Be it rape, murder, abduction or disappearance, something changes in the



IMAGE: PINTEREST

figured out when and how quickly this rage runs out of steam.

So the answer to the question lies in our hearts. The investigation is dragging because the killers are hiding in the dark shadows of our own cowardly minds. Not those powerful people but the powerless ones like us have given shelter to those rapists and killers in the dubious sheds between our courage and conviction.

In this country, courage has been usurped by convenience and conviction

next count starts. She is merely another headcount in the horror that life and honour of the weak are forever subordinate to the pleasure of the strong.

One of the ultimate failures of human society is that in the incessant struggle to protect our families, we make them more vulnerable. This is where money and power play a major role. The criminals hide in their big daddies' pockets, while the victims run for justice from pillar to post. Meanwhile, this tension perpetuates the tragedy in which victimisation is

glare of excessive attention. The cases drawing the quickest outrage either gets the slowest disposal or are forgotten.

Tonu, like Sagar and Runi, is receding in the background. It's working like tides, ebbs and flows formed by the gravitational attractions of our insincere minds. Every time the withdrawal starts, it starts when we feel withdrawn first.

The writer is Editor of the weekly *First News* and an opinion writer for *The Daily Star*. Email: badrul151@yahoo.com

# New thinking needed to retain talent



**CHONG LIP TECK**

RAIN drain seems to be an obstacle in Malaysia's development. Moves by Malaysians leaving home to seek greener pasture have never been stopped.

I have a relative. A young man in his early 30s. He joined an e-commerce company after his graduation holding a master's degree. As an information technology engineer, the office is located in Petaling Jaya, Selangor. In 2015, his e-commerce company, despite achieving outstanding results, announced relocation of its (IT) engineering department to Singapore, leaving the operations of marketing and sales department in Malaysia.

It is learned that after some careful considerations, the company, in sourcing for greater scale for development and better prospect, decided to relocate to

ready to pack up and work overseas any time.

Malaysian talents are found throughout the world. Right from members of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to Singapore, you can find Malaysians. Malaysians are almost found in every sector in Singapore from information technology, medicine, research to business. Singapore has never stopped attracting the best expertise from various countries including Malaysia.

Such scenario is a norm in globalisation. But comparing the number of Malaysians working and settling down overseas and the population in the country, the figure can be huge. World Bank's 2014 report on Malaysia said that 308,834 of Malaysians with high technology skills migrated overseas in 2013, while Malaysia's population is more than 30 million.

The figure of those migrating overseas when compared with the number of low technology skill foreign workers brought in to cater for various

Malaysians, including the rich ones, are leaving the country. There is hope that the economic growth in Malaysia will recover this year. Ringgit may also rebound from its poor performance in 2016. However, all these are merely speculations. Without feeling the practical change, Malaysians would still opt to work overseas.

Social and cultural factors are factors leading young people to opt for working overseas. Many young people settle overseas after their graduation. They enjoy the freedom and openness. Returning home to confront the declining freedom in society and religious and racial issues being politicised prompts them not to return.

The government takes a serious view on the severity of brain drain and set up Talent Corp to attract talent and encourage them to return home. In the past four years, the agency successfully attracted 3,600 Malaysians to return home through its Returning Experts Programme.

However, comparing this with the figure of Malaysians leaving the country, those returning home are just "a drop in the ocean". Under the current economic and political environment, Talent Corp needs to have a more convincing and attractive package for Malaysians overseas to return home.

However, instead of convincing them to return from overseas, how about changing the approach by retaining Malaysians who are still studying and working in the country?

Some experts have said that as many universities in the United Kingdom, Australia and even China have set up branch campuses in Malaysia, such education opportunities could play a significant role in reversing the trend of brain drain. Talent Corp should work on students in such branch campuses of foreign universities to retain them with sincerity. They should also include those foreigners who are currently studying or working in such universities.

It is time for the Malaysian government to pay more attention to university students in the country who are graduating soon. By assisting them to experience fairness in job seeking opportunities and remuneration package, it would show that the government is genuine in its concern for their future.

This would be more effective and spot on compared to various incentives offered by Talent Corp to attract those who have left the country due to disappointments.

Starting this year, the Najib administration has launched the 2050 Transformation Plan TN50 to encourage youth of all races in the country to shape Malaysia with their outstanding thinking in the next 30 years. The prospect of employment opportunities is included in the plan. It is believed that with the launch of the transformation plan, more young people would participate in nation building actively. This would also help to attract more talent based overseas to return home while retaining bright locals and encourage them to contribute to the country.

This is a series of columns on global affairs written by top editors and senior writers from members of the Asia News Network and published in newspapers across the region.



Singapore as the island is more suitable for expansion of digital business while the network environment in Malaysia is insufficient to support the company's expansion plan. As the company's plan matched with his intention to seek greener pastures in Singapore, my relative decided to join the company's relocation by overriding his earlier plan.

Moves by such companies to relocate their core departments to Singapore bringing with them the Malaysian talents indicate two types of brain drain scenario in Malaysia:

1. Corporate leaders opt to relocate capitals, technology and experts to other countries after comparing the business environment, economic situation and infrastructure with Singapore. The criteria in Malaysia are relatively unfavourable to business development.

2. People look for greener pastures. Malaysians used to think that there are better opportunities in overseas. For the sake of better income and future, Malaysians are

industries, reflects the fact that capable and skilled Malaysians are leaving the country.

Foreign workers are relied on to complete the 3D tasks – the ones that are dirty, dangerous and difficult.

Another issue is that when large scale foreign funds are brought into Malaysia, they do not offer technology transfer or change the working culture in Malaysia. And hence, this is not commensurate in terms of contribution and reward. The inflow of foreign funds does not help Malaysia depart from the middle income trap or achieve the target of becoming a developed country.

Malaysians who leave the country are opportunists looking for better salary package, fair promotion chances and stable living environment. They retain their Malaysian citizenship. But after settling down overseas, the number of Malaysians giving up their citizenship seems on the rise.

Depreciation of ringgit and slide in crude oil price have tumbled the Malaysian economy. Many

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Why won't the government relent?

As a student of Development Studies, I am proud of our government's initiatives to protect the environment through the establishment of the Climate Investment Fund and their achievement of the "Champion of the Earth" title. 'Article 18 A: Protection and Improvement of Environment and Biodiversity', of our Constitution proclaims that, "The state shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to preserve and safeguard the natural resources, biodiversity, wetlands, forest and wildlife for the present and future citizens". They have even claimed not to allow the implementation of any projects likely to cause damage, recently in Switzerland.

In the light of these events, it is confusing and disheartening to watch the government repeatedly overlook our collective protests of the Rampal Power Plant project. We are left wondering about their reasons behind such intransigence.

Md. Ashfikur Rahman  
 Khulna University

### Provide trash cans on launch-steamers

Around 40-50 thousand passengers travel to and from Dhaka on a regular basis using river routes, with the number increasing to three to four million during Eid holidays. Most of them use the Buriganga and Sadarghat routes. These passengers, travelling by launch-steamers, have developed a habit of littering the river with water bottles, and other forms of waste.

I would therefore like to request the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authorities (BIWTA) to provide enough trash cans on launch-steamers in order to prevent further pollution of our rivers.

Abdul Mannan  
 Jahangirnagar University