

# Travelling to the US in the Trump Era

## A welcome move by the HC

### Bring accountability to the banking sector

THE High Court's order to the governor of the Bangladesh Bank (BB), to submit a list of business entities and individuals whose loans were waived until December 31 last year, is welcome. The court also sought information on whether the same organisations and individuals were given any new loans and asked the secretaries to the ministries of finance and law and the BB governor to explain why the Bank Companies Act 1991 provision, which authorises the central bank to exempt anybody from loans, should not be declared unconstitutional.

The banking sector for long has suffered because of the issuance of questionable loans, leading to defaulted loans skyrocketing. Those responsible for approving the loans, however, were mostly not held accountable, perhaps because of the politicisation of the sector. Even the finance minister, for example, said in Parliament that some individuals responsible for approving dubious loans were, indeed, being backed by members of his own party.

Not only does the absence of accountability set bad examples, but it also creates an environment of impunity where people are increasingly encouraged to approve loans, even when chances of repayment are slim. On the flipside, defaulters too are encouraged and it is the taxpayers who are left holding the bill as the government continually provides banks with bailouts, instead of holding them accountable for failing to do their 'due diligence'.

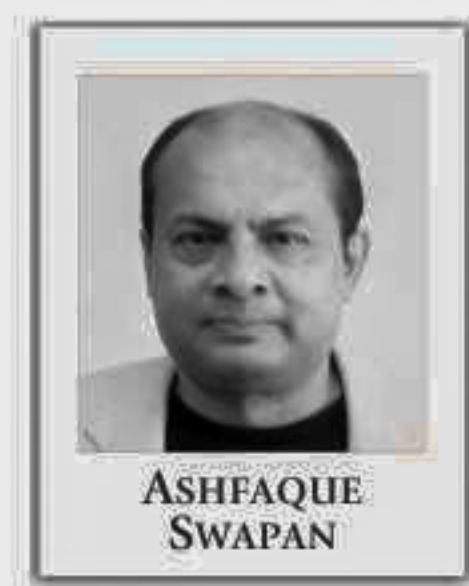
This politicisation of the banking sector must end. And the High Court's order, seeking some form of accountability from the regulators, is a good first step towards achieving that.

## Poultry industry needs support

### Unplanned culling a bane

AT the opening of the 10th International Poultry Show and Seminar in Dhaka, poultry entrepreneurs stated that Tk. 30,000 crore was needed to meet the increased demand for chicken meat and eggs by 2021. This is a major sector that has created millions of jobs and grown to cover some 150,000 poultry farms that produce about 57 crore tonnes of meat and 734 crore eggs per annum to provide much needed protein in our diet. This has been made possible thanks to tax benefits given by the government as well as the entrepreneurial spirit of businessmen. However, for capita consumption to continue to grow healthily to 2021 when the population is estimated to reach 172 million, the industry is asking for withdrawal of advance income tax and duty on essential raw materials to enable satisfactory expansion.

To what extent the government will entertain these demands is a policy decision. But the large-scale culling of poultry whenever a serious disease like bird flu hits is not helpful. While it is near impossible to counter an outbreak of the disease, much can be done to curtail unhealthy practices that exist in the wet markets of the country where slaughter of both poultry and cattle take place. Hygienic conditions, if maintained, can radically reduce contamination and outbreak of sickness among birds such as poultry. This requires the strict enforcement of slaughtering laws that already exist and we urge authorities to implement them. One cannot discount that the poultry industry is not merely a provider of jobs to millions, but has played a significant role in fighting malnutrition in the country. Its continued growth is something we should all strive for.



ASHFAQUE SWAPAN

I have to confess to some trepidation as I boarded my flight for Atlanta from Dhaka. This, despite the fact that I have never been in trouble with the law, whether in the United States or otherwise, apart from the odd speeding ticket. It's all rather strange, because after living in the US for over 25 years, I was practically going home.

The terrible stories are all well-known by now. US President Donald J. Trump's ill-fated executive order to ban entry for people from seven predominantly Muslim countries created pandemonium in US airports as friends and families were detained. The ban drew fierce protests within the US and abroad and court challenges. By the time I reached Atlanta, a federal US judge had slapped a stay on the order. That order is still in limbo.

I was returning after a longish stay in Dhaka with my octogenarian mother. Many expatriates who visit Bangladesh will recognise my feelings at the time of leaving Dhaka. It's an inexplicably bittersweet mixture of emotions. An anticipation of leaving for my adopted home in the US is compounded by a wrenching pain of leaving what was once my home in Bangladesh.

Thanks to Trump, the fear of immigration hassles was now an added worry.

The long flight via Doha was unremarkable. Well, about as unremarkable as it can be on a long-haul economy flight where people are herded like cattle into the aircraft and packed like sardines once inside it.

After I reached Atlanta, my mini ordeal began. US immigration has gone high-tech now. Immigrants and US passport holders now display their green cards/passports on a machine which spits out a piece of paper. If everything is in order, you are good to go. You just have a perfunctory word with an immigration officer, who takes your photo and passes you on to go through customs.

Alas, I was not so lucky. The slip I got had a cross mark, and I was sent to a secure waiting room. My green card and passport were taken away from me for further inspection. The immigration officer who interacted with me, I should add, was quite pleasant.

In the waiting room, I joined a diverse group of recent arrivals. Young women and men, apparently travelling alone, a young couple with children, an elderly Bangladeshi couple whom I had briefly chatted with.

The fear and tension on everyone's eyes was abundantly clear. Everyone here shared a deep feeling of insecurity, I felt, because at the end of the day - whether one can

enter the US depended entirely on the whim of a US immigration officer.

The wait was terrible. I suppose we all tried to brush away morbid thoughts of the many horror stories most of us might have heard. Just before leaving Dhaka, a friend had informed me that even people with green cards were being made to wait for long hours, some had even been sent back. (This became a huge legal issue, and it was one of the reasons a US federal court issued a stay on Trump's order.) I had heard of raids in Atlanta suburbs by immigration officers.

One by one, many of those waiting were

rushed to an airport café to grab a coffee and calm my nerves.

There have been a few occasions before when the same thing had happened to me. To this day, I don't know why I am detained on some occasions and allowed to enter the US on others. I've never asked. But I have always wondered: Don't the records show that I have been travelling from the US multiple times for years?

In the Trump era, according to news reports, US immigration authorities are acting more aggressively. There are heart-breaking stories of undocumented workers being held. Even legal immigrants can be



ILLUSTRATION: KAREN HALLION

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allowed to go. I saw the Bangladeshi elderly couple leave and go through customs. Their baggage was thoroughly searched. I watched in shock as their clothing and small gifts were all laid out and at the end of a day-long flight, they were obliged to put it all back in. But despite a wearying ordeal, they had a look of relief as they slowly, tiredly trudged towards the exit, pushing their trolley full of hastily repacked luggage.

After about 40 minutes, my name was called. I was given my passport and green card and told I could go. I picked up my documents, thanked the officer and went to get my luggage. Soon I was out and I

harassed for minor infractions of the law.

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For many of us who have come from far-flung parts of the world and made the US our home, America is beginning to feel a little different, a little strange.

The writer is an Atlanta (US) based freelance journalist.

# A law long overdue for Hindus

## Pakistan shows the way by expanding rights for its minority community in marriage

BISHAKHA DEVNATH

ON February 17 this year, much to the surprise of many Bangladeshis, especially those from the Hindu community, Pakistan's Senate passed the landmark Hindu Marriage Bill 2017, which will take care of the legal, familial issues of the minority community living there. The bill now awaits the signature of the president of Pakistan, a mere formality, to become a law as it has already received the approval of the majority in the senate.

Meanwhile in Bangladesh, the rights of Hindu women are being ignored by the state in absence of a family law to safeguard us from social injustices.

As a Bangladeshi Hindu woman, I can appreciate the move the Pakistan government has made after all these years to ensure proper regulation of marriages of the minorities who constitute 1.6 percent of its total population.

Hindus in Pakistan have obviously welcomed the move. The law would provide for Pakistani Hindus' marriage registration, judicial separation, divorce - all the civil rights of Hindus in Bangladesh are denied, since the country still preserves the age-old perception of Hinduism that the bond between a Hindu couple is eternal and so should not be dissolved even if the marriage has irrevocably broken down.

Centuries of patriarchy has made the situation even worse for Hindu women as they, once married, cannot break the shackles of marriage even if they are tied around their necks to choke them. Cruelty, torture for dowry, forced underage marriage, husbands abandoning wives and remarriage - nothing can be a justifiable reason for relief from an unwanted marriage.

Only one law that is applicable for aggrieved Hindu women in Bangladesh is the Hindu Married Women's Right to Separate Residence and Maintenance Act 1946. This means that women can seek separate maintenance by their husbands in court in certain situations.

But since Bangladeshi law doesn't require Hindu marriages to be

or frowning at it.

Women suffer silently when no one pays any heed to their misery, as if their lives don't matter, as if they were born as sub-humans to give services and comfort to men. So when men want to get rid of them, women should be okay with that in the name of 'marital obligation' or so-called religious vows.

Bangladesh still in a state of denial of the social menaces that are threatening lives of Hindu women?

Hindu hardliners here see any change to the British law as a threat to the existence of minorities. I wonder who they are - men, right? They would understandably oppose anything that would curtail their infinite dominance.



PHOTO: AFP

registered, a man has always the scope to deny having ever been married to the complainant without a marriage document and get away with the injustices he has been carrying out against his wife. He can even go on to marry as many times as he wishes.

It sounds bizarre, right? But that has been in practice in the 21st century without anyone in power even blinking

When the bill was approved, Senator Nasreen Jalil of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement announced, "This was unfair -- not only against the principles of Islam but also a human rights violation - that we have not been able to formulate a personal family law for the Hindus in Pakistan".

Questions arise, why did it take so long to realise this? Why is

And women who oppose any amendment to the fossilised law are surely enjoying the cocoon they are living in and a life without struggle.

My plea to them is: "Please try to put yourself in the shoes of those who are suffering in this society that is so unfair to women".

The writer is sub-editor, News desk, The Daily Star.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Demanding justice for the NSU student

I was shocked to hear that an NSU student was beaten up mercilessly by the Bashundhara guards on a very simple issue. It is understandable for such an incident to provoke students to protest it. However, under no circumstances is such an assault acceptable.

I strongly condemn the incident and demand justice for the victim. Only exemplary trial and punishment will lessen such unlawful acts. Dhaka Metropolitan Police should take stern actions and bring the perpetrators to justice immediately to avoid any more untoward incidents.

Syed Nazmul Alam  
 Gulshan 2

### Ensuring road safety

World Bank Statistics have reported an annual 85.6 fatalities from road accidents per 10,000 vehicles in Bangladesh, with 40 percent of the main roads in poor conditions. What are we doing to solve this?

We must raise public awareness by arranging social campaigns and programmes throughout the year. Mobile courts should be more active in detecting faulty vehicles and seizing fake driving licenses. We need more cautionary signs on roads. National highways should be constructed and carefully maintained, and roads in poor conditions need to be fixed immediately.

The traffic police department has a crucial role to play in penalising reckless driving, and unstable or overloaded vehicles. Owners of motor vehicles should ensure that employed drivers have authentic licenses, are properly trained, and drive responsibly. Road safety education to pedestrians, especially children, within the communities by community leaders is also a good way to promote road safety.

Rabeeya Ahmed  
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