

Iron grip of persecution, hunger and discrimination

Law minister's assurance?

Threat to free speech still persists

THE law minister on Wednesday assured of removing the controversial Section 57 of the amended Information Communication Technology Act, considered draconian by legal experts, free speech advocates and others. The fact, however, remains that the same draconian provisions of Section 57 of the ICT Act have already been inserted in the proposed Digital Security Act which experts and activists have unequivocally said too endangers the right of citizens to free speech.

In light of this, we wonder how the law minister is giving us such assurances, when the existing law in place is simply going to be replaced by another one which is equally, if not more so, considered a threat to the basic rights of citizens as enshrined in our constitution.

The proposed law, in fact, goes a step further and actually empowers the police to make arrests without warrants based on suspicion alone of an offence being committed. Such far reaching power to the police which allows the law enforcing agency to simply ignore the concept of 'presumption of innocence' — Article 11 under the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights — added with the controversial stipulations of Section 57 is an even greater threat, to citizen's right to dissent.

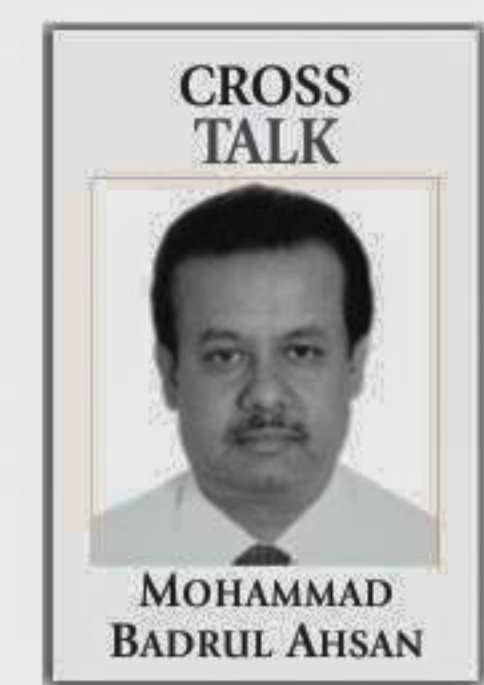
With that in mind, the law minister should explain why exactly it is that citizens should not be concerned about their right to free speech and democracy itself, given that their right to dissent is a basic tenet of our democracy.

A horror of a hospital

Lack of hygiene unbelievable!

THE lead news in this paper on May 4 highlighted the pathetic state of hygiene in the city's Infectious Disease Hospital. Dark and damp walls, human faeces in overflowing common toilets used by patients and attendants alike, garbage littered around the hospital — who would have guessed that a government hospital dedicated to the treatment of infectious diseases like chickenpox, rabies, hepatitis, viral fever, tetanus and HIV/AIDS would itself be in such a filthy state where no decent treatment is possible? Even getting to the hospital requires a strong stomach as one must wade through ankle-deep garbage-strewn mud!

Given the nature of diseases the hospital is supposed to treat, why health and hygiene are not prioritised is the only question we have in mind. The case of this hospital highlights a general trend that exists in our public healthcare system, and according to health practitioners, a hospital should be cleaned twice a day to prevent the spread of diseases, and four times in case of a hospital dealing solely with patients with communicable diseases. Although the superintendent of the hospital acknowledged these anomalies back in February, this is the month of May and no qualitative changes have been made. Citing lack of adequate manpower is hardly an excuse anymore and we expect authorities to allocate resources to make it possible for the hospital to hire adequate cleaners, who actually clean the premises. Until we make it a point to make the management accountable for the state of public hospitals, citizens will continue to suffer and public expenditure dedicated to hospital maintenance squandered.



CROSS TALK
EXPERTS tell us that it should take another 150 to 170 years to close the gender pay gap around the world. Bad news for the mothers, sisters, wives and daughters! They have to wait that long for an equal footing with their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons. Especially so, when it comes to salaries and jobs. Living together for centuries, the two genders have been living centuries apart.

The same thing is true between the rich and the poor. Microsoft founder Bill Gates gave us hope in his annual newsletter in 2014 that by 2035 there would be almost no poor country left in the world. But poverty being as old as mankind, its eradication might never soak up every last drop. When just eight men own the same wealth as half the world, poverty, you know, isn't going in the blink of an eye.

Neither is it different between the strong and the weak. Conquests and subjugations go back to the dawn of mankind, but slavery originated about 11,000 years ago. Historians believe that mass slavery must have proliferated after the invention of agriculture because it required economic surpluses and high economic density to become viable. We're hearing about the resurgence of slavery in this century amongst the refugee population, who are fleeing their countries to seek shelter elsewhere.

These are but three abiding examples of how history enters the equation of eternity as a function of time. Human beings started to exhibit evidence of behavioural modernity around 50,000 years ago. In so many years though, the flow of history has been negotiated between the surging tide and its indomitable undertow. In many instances, the change altered the constant. In many respects, the constant arrested the change.

Religious intolerance still simmers in many countries, resulting in frequent outbreaks of violence. Racial hatred is quietly seething under the surface of organised harmony. Sexual discrimination persists despite the most intimate relationships between men and women. Many loose ends are still dangling out there since the anatomically modern homo sapiens rose in Africa 200,000 years ago.

If you've ever dropped a stone into a well, you would know there's a time lag between releasing the stone and hearing the splash. Everything in history has been going back and forth, one generation throwing the stone and another hearing the fall. In between, history has been

punctuated by the eerie silence of truths held in abeyance. These are the times of insidious interregnums when the sublime turned into the ridiculous.

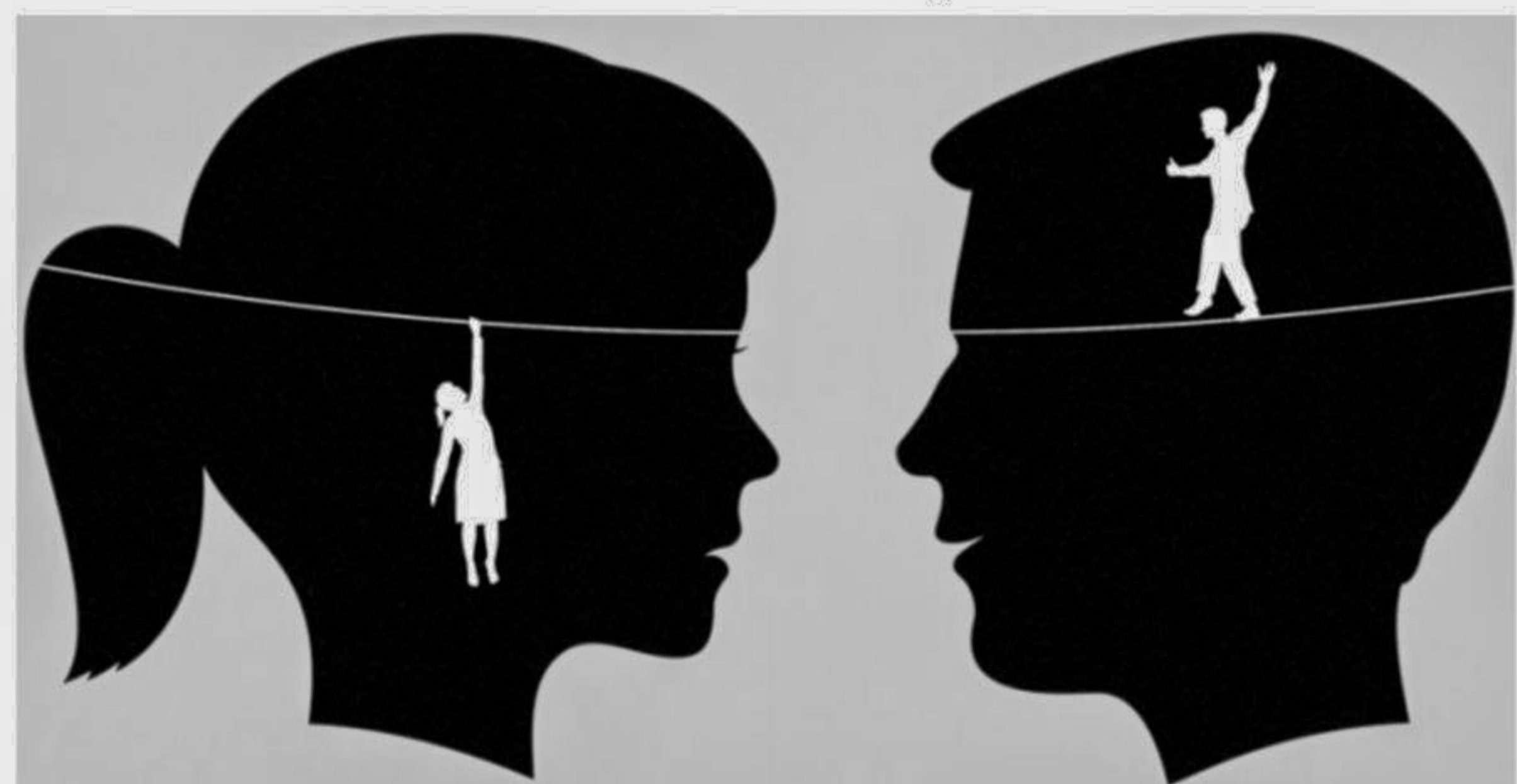
And that's the underlying secret of human existence, talkative beings relentlessly mocking the terrible silence sitting inside them. Even the most outwardly popular person is inwardly lonely, emptiness swirling inside like howling gales. Driven by fear, uncertainty and hopelessness, every exhausted human soul feels like a deep tube well drawing water from exhausted aquifers.

Modern minds are even more miserable. Fickle and flimsy, their challenge is to stay focused on the fundamentals. The moral life for them is a trip to the museum, which houses the exhibits from a bygone era.

180 AD, explained this ever-repeating loop in his famous saying that all things from eternity are like forms and come round in a circle.

The circular motion of history reinforces itself through a feedback loop. When human endeavours run their course, they trigger the feedback of hitting the wall, and it throws a monkey wrench in the works. Word eludes action. Crime evades punishment. Convenience takes over conviction. The Yeatsian Apocalypse sets in when things fall apart and the centre cannot hold.

Individuals, ideologies and institutions are the three levers of every civilisation, history mapping the terrains of their shifting coordinates. Power, wealth and gender haven't changed much in the incessant flux of time.



SOURCE: THEJERSEYTOMATOPRESS.COM

It's more like an excursion than an immersion. They believe to live, not live to believe. The physical is forever at odds with the spiritual.

That discrepancy creates hypocrisy mirrored in human character. Opportunism is hypocrisy exploited for convenience. Cowardice is hypocrisy used in self-defense. Greed is hypocrisy applied for self-gratification. Courage is hypocrisy leveraged for admiration.

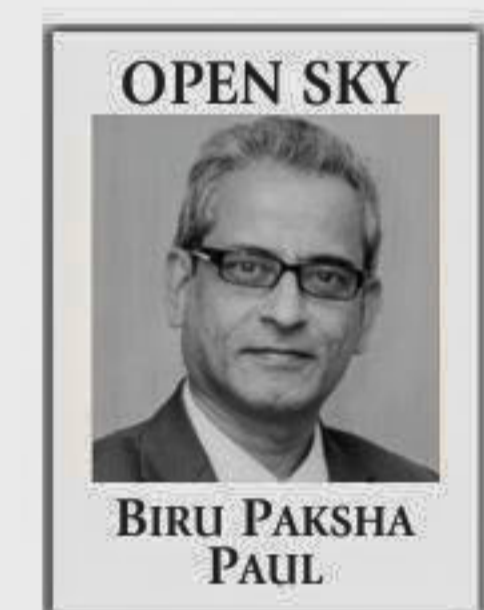
These are the four walls that enclose the human condition. If populism is rising, religious tension is growing, racial hatred is spreading, and gender equality is lagging behind, it's because that dismal condition runs in a loop. Marcus Aurelius, emperor of Rome from 161 to

Persecution, hunger and discrimination still maintain their iron grip on the world.

Tears of the oppressed, cries of the hungry, and sighs of the deprived are markers that show the locations of human engagement in its purported evolution. Material acquisition and mindless ostentation are roadblocks, which divert the journey from time to time. And, when men and women can't close their gap despite the fatal attraction between them, the fate of mankind must be a wild goose chase.

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Fighting the financial hemorrhage



OPEN SKY
WE live in a notorious polluted city of the world, and still we choose to live here because we have a dream. We live in a system where justice is badly delayed for

generations, and still we choose to live with the hope of having a prosperous Bangladesh one day. How will that dream come true when a big segment of the affluent turns viciously ungrateful to their motherland that provides high returns to businesses and collects the lowest tax in exchange? The Global Financial Integrity Report revealed that Bangladesh lost almost USD 75 billion over a decade (2005-2014) and USD 6-9 billion in 2014 alone. This is a growing cancer for the economy of a country whose journey towards becoming a developed nation will definitely be delayed if the hemorrhage continues. Devising preventive measures is a national emergency.

lived through political agitation, particularly during late-2013 and early 2014, and again in the first three months of 2015. But the pattern of money trafficking maintains its course stubbornly, suggesting an in-depth research into the matter.

Even a continuing trend in the subsequent years will not surprise us, because we are convinced that the reason lies somewhere else. A systemic vulnerability prevails. If the system is leaky in itself, investigation is weak, financial intelligence is weaker, and the culture of punishing the criminals is the weakest, illicit outflows will enjoy their spring every year. The typical apparatus for the surveillance of money laundering is ineffective. Despite having macro stability and commendable economic growth, we notice two things happening together: a burgeoning default culture and money laundering. Are they interlinked? Highly possible. A rigorous inquiry is needed.

Whenever an inquiry committee is created, we know for sure it will be headed by government officials, and eventually the report will not see the light of day based on various 'public

without changing this mindset.

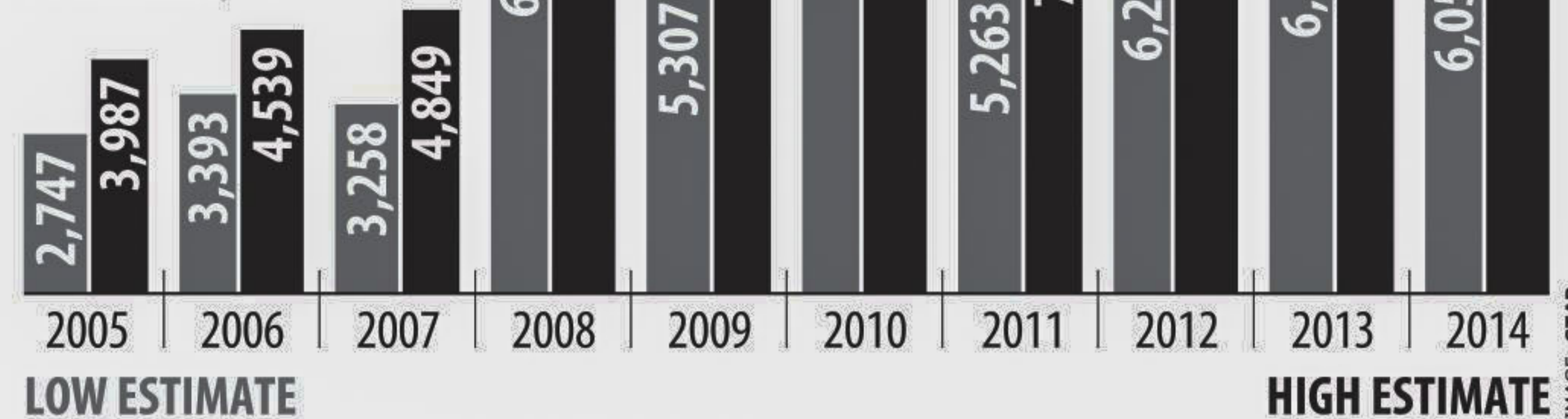
How much money do we need to spend on a multi-body investigation? Eight million dollars, which is equivalent to Tk 64 crore, is enough to run such studies engaging authorities and researchers of different spectrums. The proposed study cost is less than 0.1 percent of the money we lost in 2014 — the money we are likely to lose every year since. Herein lies the cost-benefit analysis of research. We hope we will be lucky enough to see the timely release of the inquiry reports.

Money is siphoned off mainly through misinvoicing. Say, an importer buys a good worth USD 60 from the US. He will request the US counterpart to make an invoice for USD 100 — an act of overinvoicing. Here, the importer will arrange to send USD 100 to the US party who will keep USD 60 for his own product and park the surplus USD 40 in a designated account favouring the Bangladeshi importer. In contrast, a Bangladeshi exporter will resort to underinvoicing for capital outflow. Say, he has shipped a container worth USD 110 to the US but sent an invoice of USD 80. The US party will send USD 80

The best way to deal with money laundering is to form at least three totally separate, independent investigative bodies: one from the government, one private, and the rest from international experts. Not only will they investigate the loopholes, but suggest feasible solutions to prevent the fund-drain.

ILLICIT FINANCIAL FLOWS FROM BANGLADESH

In million \$



The spike in illicit outflow first happened in 2008, rising from USD 4 billion to 8 billion. We understood the reason; it originated mainly from the military-backed caretaker government and the ensuing uncertainty that clouded the investment sky. It was slightly low in 2009, in the wake of the newly elected regime, and we thought illicit outflows will decrease. But that did not happen, belying the myth that political stability is an antidote to money laundering. From 2009 to 2014, we experienced a hemorrhage from USD 5 to as high as USD 10 billion every year, without any sign of abating. Of course, the country

interest' excuses. Let us break the format. The best way to deal with money laundering is to form at least three totally separate, independent investigative bodies: one from the government, one private, and the rest from international experts. Not only will they investigate the loopholes, but suggest feasible solutions to prevent the fund-drain. We are sure that three bodies, if they really can work independently, will come up with multiple findings to stem the resource flight. Spending on quality intelligence and research is the last thing our governments want to do. Money laundering will never be stopped

to Bangladesh, and keep the other USD 30 in an account as advised by the Bangladeshi exporter. Thus, a total of USD 70 becomes the amount of money laundered from this country. Remittances when operated under *hundis* give another conduit for illicit financial outflows. A high amount under the heading of 'errors and omissions' in the balance of payment seems to also have indulged illicit money flows.

Let us not undermine the gravity of Bangladesh's capital loss by defining it as a common phenomenon for developing countries. This is true, but the magnitude matters emphatically. India's economy is more than ten times

larger than ours, but India's fund outflow is only three times larger than Bangladesh's. We feel embarrassed when Pakistan's example stands out. Their economy is bigger than ours, but their laundered money in 2014 was less than one percent of Bangladesh's. Is it not a shame when Pakistani money launderers prove to be more patriotic than their counterparts in Bangladesh?

The amount we lost in 2014 alone can build two Padma Bridges. The amount we lost only in 2015 is good enough to build a basic Patalrail for Dhaka. But the issue is, if we could have somehow prevented that money from flowing out, could more mega bridges or a Patalrail be built? Probably not. We already have USD 35 billion in the aid pipeline, and a government machinery cannot solely use the money.

That is another reason why money laundering continues. Public investments behind infrastructure, energy, and institutions must be accelerated to revert the premature fatigue of growth trend. An attractive market economy will discourage money laundering. An investment blitz definitely needs decentralisation and competitive outsourcing of construction works. Then the same money launderers might turn into 'patriotic' domestic investors overnight. A series of brainstorming sessions after the budget should kick off to rip up the wings of illicit financial flows and to make a vibrant Bangladesh.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Salute to Unsung Heroes!

Seven underrepresented women who have contributed to nation building were awarded by *The Daily Star* and IPDC Finance Ltd on May 2, 2017. I would like to salute these women, as well as the two organisations for taking the initiative to bring their work to the limelight. This recognition has allowed the nation to come to know about their outstanding contributions to the society. We hope that it has also inspired them to move onward with their efforts more intensively, and encouraged others to follow suit. As an agriculturist who works with grassroots level workers, I have come across many women who are directly involved in crop production activities. They are not famous or highly educated, but are full of drive and dedication nonetheless. I wish they could also be given due recognition with the help of well-known corporate organisations.
Md. Refatul Hossain
Deputy Director
Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE),
Dinajpur Region

Politics in cadre recruitment

On May 2, 2017 cadres recommended by the PSC joined their workplaces after passing through the stages of the 35th BCS exam. Unfortunately, among the 88 cadres who couldn't make it through the police verification procedure, at least 65 cadres have allegedly been blocked due to political considerations. After completing higher education and waiting for more than two years, these meritorious candidates have failed to realise their professional aspirations due to direct or indirect involvement with opposing political groups.
We strongly oppose this politicisation and corruption at the the highest level of the government recruitment process.
Shaker Riaz
University of Dhaka