

## Jewellery industry and smuggled gold

Where are the authorities?

THE jewellery business in Bangladesh has reportedly been thriving despite there being no import of gold into the country through legal channels, in the last three decades. How is this possible? Are we to believe that the relevant authorities and tax officials did not know about this?

This recent revelation has only come under the public purview because of a high profile case involving the son of the owner of a jewellery store. Had that not been the case, things would have likely to have continued as they were. What this shows is that law enforcers are reactive rather than proactive in busting criminals. Consequently, it also further confirms what industry insiders and various government officials have been saying: that powerful individuals and syndicates are mostly responsible for the large scale gold smuggling. These powerful individuals are reportedly quite influential.

In spite of the hauls made at various entry points into Bangladesh, huge quantities of gold are smuggled in every year. And alarmingly, gold smuggling is often closely associated with drugs smuggling, human trafficking, money laundering and other serious crimes.

Law enforcers must stop shying away from bringing to justice people who are involved and yet get away with it simply because of their political clout or influential connections. It is time the authorities went after the criminals without fear or favour.

## Passing away of an exemplary diplomat

May his legacy live on

IT is with deep sadness that we bid farewell to former foreign secretary and ambassador Faruq Ahmed Chowdhury who breathed his last in the early hours yesterday. While we commiserate with his family, friends, former colleagues and a legion of well-wishers in their grief, we recall with great admiration and respect the significant role Ambassador Chowdhury has played in representing Bangladesh to the world.

Entering the Pakistan foreign office in 1956 he had more than a decade of experience in foreign affairs and diplomatic service before he was made Chief of Protocol of Bangladesh in 1972. As a deputy high commissioner of Bangladesh in the United Kingdom from 1972-76 he was instrumental in the negotiations to get Bangladesh into the Commonwealth.

Erudite and with a charming personality he was an outstanding diplomat serving in several important countries such as the UAE, Bahrain and India. He was the chief coordinator of the 13th OIC Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in Dhaka in 1983.

His vast experience in several missions abroad, extensive travel and innate thirst for knowledge made him a distinguished and much admired figure in the foreign ministry where he served, first as additional foreign secretary and then as foreign secretary. His dream of seeing his country reach its potential led to his joining BRAC in different capacities.

What is remarkable about Faruq Chowdhury was that despite debilitating illnesses constantly haunting him, his zest for life never waned. Even after retirement he continued with his passion for writing and travelling, authoring several books and innumerable opinion pieces in newspapers. His patriotism, sharp wit, generous spirit and extraordinary intellect will be cherished and should be a source of inspiration to the younger members of the Foreign Service.

# The mendacious US presidents

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN NDC, PSC (RETD)

ONE are the days of "honest Abe" or of the president who as a boy refused to lie, after chopping down a cherry tree, a favourite of his father, knowing fully

well the consequences of admitting the truth. But Mr. Trump is in good company when it comes to US presidents not coming clean with the people of America. And the practice has ranged from straight faced deceptions to withholding the truth, either for personal or political gains or for precipitating an international situation to gain strategic dividends, some of which have had the most devastating consequences for the world. But perhaps the 45th US president has outdone them all in the way untruths have been dispensed by him, his acolytes and the poor members of his staff struggling to give a meaning to presidential mendacities, to make whatever he says "resemble the truth".

The current White House press staff is finding it so very difficult in front of the media to give a shape to the untruths that the President gives to a subject, that Mr. Trump is contemplating doing away with the daily media briefing altogether; he is even contemplating doing the briefing himself, and less frequently, if so. But all this mess need not have occurred had he been sure of himself. This particular state of his mind, we hear some commentators attribute to the fact that Mr. Trump suffers from a feeling of uncertainty about the nature of his win.

Extraneous influences far removed from politics had much to do with the outcome of the November elections, attributed by most political pundits to the "Comey-Russia Effects." Many of the President's action have underlined these two factors.

But today we withhold our urge to recount the current US president's articulations that are "without evidence," or "falsely said," or "wrongly asserted" or are "unsubstantiated claims" or "alternative facts", all euphemisms for lies. Instead, a look into

opinions that suggest that to be effective leaders, "sometimes lies are necessary evils if we want to get something accomplished." Actually, it is averred that Obamacare would not have been possible had President Obama been completely transparent about some aspects of his healthcare policy. In fact there is acknowledgement of this reality among the Americans, demonstrated very explicitly by the rejection of the idealist Jimmy Carter (he promised never to lie to the public) because he was not effective and the choice of what some

JFK, FDR, the inimitable RMN, WJC and GWB to name a few.

Distorting and withholding the truth and keeping facts deliberately from friends and allies to compel certain action and reaction of friends and allies have been as much a part of US presidential disposition as telling flat lies.

LBJ misled the American people about the Gulf of Tonkin affair to create grounds for direct US intervention in Vietnam. And while US naval base of Pearl Harbor might have been caught



SOURCE: BLOGGRANTHAM.EDU.COM

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history may offer a good insight of some US presidents' predilection for spewing fibs while holding the highest public office of the most powerful country in the world. And the compulsion to lie has been well narrated in the writings of various American authors.

Surprisingly, browsing through the literature on American history, and the US history is less than three hundred years only, it is surprising that so many famous persons that have occupied the White House had resorted to this expedient, some had made an art of it while some were known to be 'pathological liars'.

It is also interesting to come across

commentators describe as the Machiavellian prince, Ronald Reagan, whose presidency was spattered with small lies but the Contra affair takes the cake. Having earlier stated that his administration had not traded arms for the release of US hostages in Iran, Reagan was forced to admit he had lied when he said, "A few months ago, I told the American people I did not trade arms for hostages. My heart and my best intentions still tell me that's true, but the facts and evidence tell me it is not." The mismatch between the heart and the hard evidence has been very pronounced in the case of certain US presidents. And the list has been adorned by the likes of

unawares on 7 Dec 1941, it has come to light many years after the infamy, that the knowledge of an impending Japanese attack on the US base was not unknown to the American leadership. The attack helped Roosevelt convince the American people and the Congress, who were both overwhelmingly against entering the War in Europe, of the need for a direct US involvement in the War.

And the shameless fabrications that George Bush resorted to, by contriving as many as one hundred and fifty excuses for attacking Iraq and toppling Saddam is too recent to merit recounting.

The writer is Associate Editor, The Daily Star.

## Preventing another haor tragedy

Corruption can no longer be an excuse



MD. SHAMSUL AREFIN

POORER countries tend to be measurably more corrupt than richer countries. But the debate about this is still open. Is corruption the single most important reason

why many sensible reforms essential for economic development fail in developing economies, or does economic development raise demands for fighting corruption?

At a given level of development, what are the costs of corruption and the most

they assume that corruption is taking place in a work under or above water level? What would be the role of contractors or engineers in encouraging citizen's complaints?

Complain management when it comes to construction work related to water cannot be the same as that relating to work on ground. If some corrupt practices happen relating to construction on ground, it can be challenged or audited by taking measurement. But that is not easy when complain come with construction or repair work under water or above water.

Therefore, it is important to engage citizens, stakeholders, users and beneficiaries before starting or during the construction work relating to water-bodies.

Again, after completion of the projects relating to water, a project management team comprising of local dedicated volunteers is needed to be constituted to supervise the project continuously. Otherwise a person may damage the embankment for his selfish interest. Because the implementation of these kinds of projects may not ensure the benefit of all, a few people may be affected by these projects. Their interest may be hampered. A public counterpart can act as a catalyst in this situation.

In the recent complaints regarding the haor embankments in Sunamganj, some people relating to implementation of the project claimed that the regions have been submerged due to heavy rains, and not due to damaged dams. Some

gered by torrential rainfall and onrush of water from the upstream. Others claimed that rats, that damaged embankment by making holes in the dams, were the real culprits. The general people, however, blamed it on the corrupt practices of vested groups and poor monitoring or absence of monitoring mechanisms after the construction work. Now, the regular livelihood of tens of thousands of people is at stake.

To get rid of these kinds of unjustifiable excuses and to earn the confidence of people during implementing the Ziga dam in West Africa, the authorities engaged local people as much as possible at different stages of the work. The Ziga dam is now regarded as an example of good practice in construction work relating to water bodies of this scale in West Africa.

The Anti-corruption experts of the world prescribe that the key principles of effective engagement for embankment projects are to provide meaningful information in their local language that is readily understandable and tailored to the needs of the targeted stakeholders groups, and providing the information in advance of construction activities.

It is imperative to say that information needs to be provided in ways that make it easy for stakeholders to access it. People engaged in the project need to be respectful of the local people's voice, their languages, their comments and their complaints. Before starting the project, dialogue needs to be ensured to give both sides the opportunity to exchange views and information, to listen, and to have these issues heard and addressed.

We need to understand without any delay that clear mechanisms for responding to people's concerns, suggestions and grievances and incorporating their views where appropriate and feasible, feedback into project design, reporting back to stakeholders, and finally a good monitoring mechanism after construction work of this kind, are cornerstones of an embankment project.

Locals need to know the costs of construction, time of implementation and the monitoring mechanism after the construction. This engagement during construction would create a dynamic of public debate which can lead to less corruption in water related projects.

The writer is Director General, Anti-Corruption Commission.



SOURCE: GREANVILLEPOST.COM

promising means of removing corruption from the construction business, especially water-related construction work? Does encouraging whistle-blowing produce desired outcomes? How can an effective citizen's engagement mechanism be provided for engineers and contractors of embankment repair or construction work, especially when it relates to under deep water construction? How can citizens make complaints when

Their trust and confidence have to be incorporated in a way, so that after completion of the work, nobody will raise any questions of corrupt practices.

A holistic approach to fighting corruption requires not only criminal sanctions but other elements such as citizens' engagement. The most effective elements of a concrete citizen or beneficiary engagement will have to be tailored. No prior dictation or prescription will work.

claimed that local farmers damaged the dams at different points to create paths for ferrying paddy to serve their narrow short-term interests. In this situation, some people underscored the need for tackling heavy rains for protecting crops in the haor areas by increasing navigability of the narrow rivers through dredging for a natural solution to flooding. Some claimed a number of embankments were damaged amid huge flow of water trig-

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Stop the victim-blaming

It is shameful that when a rape victim, after facing unimaginable agony and pain, works up the courage to stand up for herself, the society goes on to shame her and bombard her with inane personal questions targeted specifically to assault her character.

Understand that a woman does not lose her honour or her respect when she is sexually abused. Instead of asking women to be careful and dress in a "proper" manner, ask men to stop acting like unleashed wild animals. Instead of humiliating the victim, shame the person who had the audacity to make her life a nightmare. It is our duty to stand strong for people who have been tortured and not give in to the lies and flimsy arguments that people, at par with the culprits, pose against them.

Sharifa Ahmed, By email

### Rice imports - A laudable initiative by the government

The recent decision of importing rice from Thailand, Vietnam and India to curb the soaring local prices is a commendable move by the government.

The flashfloods and the fungi attack have damaged almost 10 lakh tones of Boro crop in northeastern Bangladesh. Moreover, some unscrupulous millers and middlemen are hoarding rice deliberately to gain more money. Prices have gone up to 3-5 Tk per kg. Importing sufficient rice from abroad will relieve the masses who are bearing the brunt of this price hike. But the government should also provide funding for agriculturists to do more research on developing rice varieties resistant to blast, so that we are better prepared for such disasters in the future.

Rupesh Chandra Das, University of Dhaka