

Govt to frame guideline for gold business

Better late than never

IT is heartening to note that the leaders of the Bangladesh Jewellers Samity (BJS) have called off their proposed indefinite strike at the back of the government's assurance to formulate a new guideline for gold businesses. What we cannot understand, however, is why the situation got to this point to begin with. The gold business has been running in the country since time immemorial. Why is it that neither the jewellers, nor the government, made an issue out of the absence of a guideline for all these years?

Records kept by the customs authorities surprisingly show almost no legal import of gold into the country since its independence, despite the jewellery industry booming over the last few decades. What this means is that businesses were operating almost wholly using gold traded under the table. What it also means is that those who were running their businesses using legally imported gold, actually lost out to those who did not pay taxes on gold imports.

We would like to point out that our concerns come from the inherent flaws of the industry in general and not because of any particular event. And in line with those concerns, the Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate's recent seizures of ornaments for which no valid documents could be presented were justified.

This lack of professionalism in the industry should change. To that end, the government should implement a comprehensive policy and legal guideline to ensure the proper running and oversight of the industry.

Party men take law into their own hands

Who will rein them in?

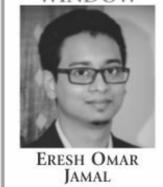
WE are extremely concerned by a report in this paper, from Rajshahi, of a police official being confined inside a shoe store by AL activists who allege that the law enforcers of Godagari Police station had beaten up their leader, the vice president of Godagari municipality unit AL who had gone to the police station to see why one of his men had been taken into custody. The police, on the other hand, say that the man they picked up had been trying to extort money from a contractor. Whatever the real story may be the idea of the ruling party men having the gumption to hold a police official hostage and getting away with it is very disturbing, to say the least.

The Godagari incident is an example of how untouchable some members of the politically powerful think themselves to be. The highhandedness demonstrated by these party men is symptomatic of the general indiscipline among the ruling party members. Infighting between factions within the affiliated organisations, for instance, of the ruling party has increased, sometimes causing casualties. A report in yesterday's paper informs us that a young man was shot dead and three others injured, in Munshiganj, in a clash between two factions of the AL over supremacy in an area. Highhandedness, often leading to violence, has become the norm among these belligerent factions which gives little comfort to ordinary citizens who are often caught in the crossfire.

We urge the authorities and the ruling Awami League to thoroughly investigate this incident and find out exactly what happened. Under no circumstances can political party members take law into their own hands and resort to bully tactics, that too to discipline law enforcers. Political leaders must rein in unruly party members.

Widening gulf between Gulf countries

THE OVERTON WINDOW



ERESH OMAR JAMAL

TENSION is again rising in the Middle East after Saudi Arabia and its allies (mainly other Gulf countries) abruptly cut ties with Qatar, accusing it of supporting terrorism in the region. Although there was a similar conflict between Qatar and its neighbours three years ago, the current confrontation seems much more serious than anything we have seen in recent years, if not in decades.

Flights to Qatar from the state airlines of these countries have already been stopped and people are being forced into various uncertainties. The fate of individuals, families and migrant workers from all over the world, including from Bangladesh, hangs on a knife-edge as the threat of obstruction, expulsion, or worse, heightens.

Saudi Arabia and the other countries have also cut diplomatic and economic ties with Qatar and have threatened further actions should it fail to address their concerns. While the 'official' reason given for severing ties by the Saudi-led coalition and for what is essentially a blockade of the country is that "Qatar is funding terrorism", reports from the world media tend to suggest otherwise.

The *Independent* (UK) reported that the Saudi-led coalition is "demanding that Qatar end its independent foreign policy and tame or close down its television station, Al Jazeera". Other news outlets have speculated that the immediate cause of the dispute are the deleted tweets from Qatar's state-run news agency where its supreme ruler Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani had some warm words to say about Iran. Qatar has insisted that the tweets were a product of hacking. But the Saudis and its other Gulf neighbours are not buying it.

Saudi Arabia has time and again made it clear, in no uncertain terms, that it sees Iran as a hostile nation and, as a result, is vehemently set against other Gulf countries trying to cosy up to the Shiite majority country. In the eyes of many political commentators, Qatar has, in the last few years, shown some inclination towards wanting to do exactly that, and by doing so, has clearly upset the appellation, at least as far as the traditional foreign policy pursued towards Iran by Gulf countries is concerned. That is the only thing which explains why it is suddenly facing such wrath.

Another interesting point that is making the rounds is the fact that Qatar, which is the world's largest global exporter of liquefied gas, yields some of its gas wealth from its massive offshore North Field shared with Iran (who controls what it calls South Pars). For that reason, Qatar realistically has no other option *but* to cooperate with Iran, even though that could again potentially drive a wedge between itself and the Saudis.

Simultaneously, however, Qatar clearly did not want to alienate the Saudis. After all, 40 percent of all food

supplies imported into Qatar previous to the recent developments came from Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia also can (and reportedly has) block the only land border of Qatar dealing the country a major blow.

While Qatar may have failed to balance between the Saudi Arabian and Iranian ruling elite, following Donald Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia and call for the "isolation" of Iran "until the regime is willing to be a partner for peace", some in the media have indicated that the Saudi regime now feels emboldened to pursue its ambitions more aggressively. This, however, has yielded quite the unexpected result given that during his visit two weeks ago, President Trump had also greatly publicised the unity of Gulf countries (presenting a united front), which by all indications was to be led by Saudi Arabia.

Despite the quick disintegration of Trump's

Moreover, we see diplomats from numerous countries scrambling back and forth trying to figure out what to expect and what their next move should be. In an interview with *Al Jazeera*, Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said Kuwait's ruler, Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, had asked Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Qatar's ruling emir, to postpone giving a speech about the crisis on Tuesday night. Since then, there have been many more indications of the fact that Kuwait could potentially play a key mediating role between the two countries.

What, however, is needed now is for both sides to welcome the mediation no matter who the mediator may be. The Middle East has already been in flames for more than a decade. At a time like this, when unity among all Muslim nations is the need of the hour to



PHOTO: REUTERS

proclaimed unity amongst Gulf countries, the US President seems to have again backed Saudi Arabia over Qatar. After the Saudi led condemnation of Qatar, Trump tweeted, "So good to see the Saudi Arabia visit with the King and 50 countries already paying off. They said they would take a hard line on funding... extremism, and all reference was pointing to Qatar".

Meanwhile, Turkey on the other hand dropped some very interesting hints. It has, for example, hurriedly passed new laws that will permit Turkey to provide greater military support to Qatar and allow the Turkish Army to conduct joint military exercises with the Arab country. The Turkish President too had a strong message to convey to all the parties involved when he said, "I want to clearly say that we disapprove of the sanctions on Qatar".

address the numerous crises that already exists, and also when there is so much chaos in general in the region as a whole, the last thing the Middle East needs is another conflagration.

The world community too should immediately call for de-escalation of tensions and look to sort out the root causes of the existing problems; for an explosion in either of these two countries will have grave consequences for the world as a whole - especially in regards to the world economy given the quintessential role both these country play in the world energy market, notwithstanding the unimaginable and dire humanitarian crisis that any serious escalation may quickly give birth to.

The writer is a member of the Editorial team at *The Daily Star*.

Health security should be our first priority

MD. SHARIFUL ISLAM

IN 1988, being extremely poor and thanks to the poor state of the health sector in the country, my mother died due to maternal health related complication. Till date, I am pained by this loss every waking moment of the day. However, my mother's story is not a unique one. Over the years, thousands of women have died in Bangladesh due to maternal health related causes because of a lack of medical facilities. In fact according to a report published in *The Daily Star* on May 17, 2012, around "20 mothers die each day" in the country while giving birth.

Estimates based on these figures suggest that each year, 7,300 mothers die while giving birth, which translates into

that another editorial published in this daily (March 8, 2017) contends pollution, and its many manifestations, is responsible for the death of around 280,000 children in Bangladesh annually, which could be avoided or the number drastically reduced if we had only chosen to act decisively at the right time. This picture, in fact, shows us the poor state of health security in the country which merits serious attention.

The state of the health of Bangladesh merits serious attention because it can change everything, including the country's prosperity, security and development as well as Vision 2021. However, we need to note that while the standard per capita health expenditure for a country specified by World Health Organization is USD 34, Bangladesh

sector in the country.

Health security is not all about the 'absence of disease'. One also needs to include the psychological dimension of health which also matters. In this context, World Health Organization reveals that about 64 lakh people suffer from depressive disorder while 69 lakh people of the country suffer from anxiety disorders (*The Daily Star*, February 27, 2017). This results in suicide and other unexpected cases. According to the Bangladesh Health and Injury Survey (BHIS) 2016, sixty-six people commit suicide every day in the country. Of them, 40 are adults and the rest are young adults. This needs to be seen as an issue of grave concern for the country. Although there have been improvements in the health sector in Bangladesh - particularly in life expectancy which is now 70 (WHO 2013), nearly double compared to those born 50-60 years ago (Bhuiya 2012) - the above statistics certainly presents a sorry picture of health security in the country.

Another thing that poses a challenge to the access to healthcare by poor people in Bangladesh is the spiralling costs of common over-the-counter medicines, which are often not regulated or monitored. Moreover, many government-employed doctors in the country are involved with private clinics and thus, are not able to offer proper care to the patients they serve in public hospitals or clinics, thereby leading to negligence and malpractice. The recent death of a Dhaka University student due to wrong treatment by her doctors is an example of this negligence and nonchalance of doctors and hospitals.

Another major concern is that "the government and opposition parties seem to be busy involving doctors of the country in various political activities" (Kabir 2013). When these doctors are involved in politics, they seek to gain personal profits by exploiting their political power. Thus they establish private clinics or pathology labs, which ultimately negatively impacts the health security of the overwhelming poor population in the country. In addition, such unscrupulous doctors also seek frequent transfer from rural to urban areas, thereby hampering the already deteriorating state of the health sector in the rural areas, and resulting in further healthcare inequalities in the country.

Bangladesh also needs to be prepared against epidemic challenges arising in other countries as diseases do not respect international borders. As argued by Ranu

S. Dhillon, Devabhaktuni Srikrishna and David Beierwrite in the *Harvard Business Review*, "China is currently battling a bird flu that kills nearly half of the people infected. If Ebola, which transmits through fluids, were spread by air, or if Zika, which has reached over 50 countries, were as deadly as Ebola, we would be facing an unprecedented catastrophe. An uncontrolled outbreak or bioterror attack could result in a contagion that kills over 30 million people." (March 15, 2017).

In fact, State Minister for Health Zahid Malik had claimed that the Zika virus was found in Bangladesh in 2014. And the most concerning issue for Bangladesh is the recurrence of the Bird Flu virus in the country after three years. According to media reports, a recent outbreak of the particular strain of avian influenza resulted in the deaths of 3,000 birds at a poultry farm in Dhamrai, Dhaka. In addition, 40 countries have reported the new outbreak, according to WHO, a grave concern not only for the country but for the world. Chikungunya is another alarming outbreak in the country that could have been prevented with prior initiatives by the government and state actors.

It is quite encouraging that Bangladesh is embarking on the largest health sector programme ever taken in the country worth BDT 1,15,486 crore to be spent over the next five years, with special emphasis on non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and health governance (*The Daily Star*, March 22, 2017). It is in fact, 126 percent higher than the earlier (third) programme, which amounted to BDT 51,082 crore, implemented in the period of 2011-2016. Notably, NCDs accounted for 59 percent of total deaths in Bangladesh according to the World Health Organization's NCD country profile in 2014 (cited in *The Daily Star*, March 22, 2017).

Health security matters for Bangladesh since health insecurity is a major impediment to human potential as it prevents an individual's ability to grow, develop and learn. Alongside the government, all of us, especially the privileged class, business organisations, NGOs and other authorities concerned, need to come forward to ensure the good state of our health sector. And above all, health security governance, and regional and international cooperation is imperative to address health challenges that will arise in the days to come.

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A health forum draws attendance from rural women in Shapaisree village of Kapsasia.

SOURCE: BDCHRONICLE.COM

roughly 3,06,600 maternal deaths from 1971-2013. Actual figures are probably higher because maternal mortality rates were higher in the early years but often went unreported.

With regard to child death rate, according to a report published by Save the Children titled "Ending New Born Deaths" (2014), 90,000 babies die during childbirth or within 24 hours of their birth every year in Bangladesh due to the absence of trained midwives. Moreover, as an editorial published in daily on April 16, 2017, suggests diarrhoea kills 45,000 children annually in Bangladesh. It is also worth noting

spends only USD 5 in this regard.

Health security has long remained a neglected area in Bangladesh compared to military or state security, both in policy as well as in theory, though the referent object of security in Bangladesh needs to be the individuals rather than state. This is most evident by the shortage of medical staff in hospital as evidenced in a report published in *Dhaka Tribune* (November 21, 2013) which states, "the poorly-equipped public health sector which, although free to the poor, faces an estimated shortage of 800,000 doctors and nurses". This is clearly linked to the negligence of health

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Proud of our Tigers!

We are euphoric and immensely proud of the Bangladesh cricket team for their victory on foreign soil against a strong New Zealand side, and that too in their do or die ICC match. This is also Bangladesh's best fifth wicket partnership against any side. Amazing! Unbelievable! The fifth wicket partnership of 224 runs between the left-right combinations was extraordinary - the highest partnership for any wicket in Bangladesh's ODI history and the second highest in the Champions Trophy.

We hope Bangladesh will continue in this positive performance for the ensuing matches. We are now a formidable force to reckon with, but we must also not get disheartened when and if the tigers get defeated. Lastly, our heartiest congratulations to Shakib Al Hasan for being selected as the Man of the Match and Mahmudullah Riyad for being such a wonderful partner.

Zubair Khaled Huq, By email

Not enough cyclone shelters

The recent cyclones from the Bay of Bengal highlight how Bangladesh is indeed one of the strongly disaster-prone countries of the world. The people living in the coastal areas like Cox's Bazar, St Martin's, Patuakhali and Maheshkhali are most adversely affected by cyclones. Statistics show that there are in total 3,500 cyclone shelters all over the country against approximately two crore people living in 13,000 km of coastal areas. As a result, thousands of people find no shelter in these areas when crisis strikes. It is high time that we build enough cyclone shelters to accommodate all coastal residents, and save their lives. We don't want to see a repetition of the disaster that occurred in 1991.

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