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The threat of released terrorists

Devise de-radicalisation strategy

ON the 12th anniversary of the 2005 countywide series bombings by Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh, we should remind ourselves why the terror attack happened and why such attacks—coordinated or not—keep happening. The lesson to be taken from the recurrence of such murderous activities is that we need to double down on our efforts to counter radicalism and extremist ideologies that encourage terrorism. There is the also threat of new recruitment by the militant outfits, which remains a key challenge for the security officials and calls for a long-term counterterrorism strategy involving multiple parties, but out-of-jail convicts reportedly coming back to doing what they once did have appeared as a major risk in recent years.

Which begs the question: what are prison sentences for? If incarceration is only about punishment and deterrence, we're basically overlooking the fact that a terrorist can be involved in crimes again once out of jail, but if the purpose is to rehabilitate, we may have a real shot at de-radicalising them although the most hardened of them may never really change. There is also the issue of monitoring bailed-out terror suspects. According to *The Daily Star*, officials at the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit have kept under surveillance around 50 militant suspects who secured bail, but the whereabouts of about 500 or so released suspects remain unknown.

In the developed countries, significant resources are used to monitor terror suspects, and surely we can spend more resources than we do now on surveillance which will prove worthwhile in the long run. We also need to undertake de-radicalisation programmes for the terrorists in prison so that they can change and successfully reintegrate back into society once they are released.

Barisal WTP

Example of shoddy planning

THIS paper recently reported that a surface water treatment plant (WTP) in Beltola area of Barisal is in shambles even before it could be inaugurated. Due to irregularities and mismanagement in the process, parts of the plant's infrastructure and machinery have broken down and washed away, since, without permits, it was built along the bank of the Kirtankhola river. The 25 crore project, to be built by the The Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) and handed over to the Barisal City Corporation (BCC), has not only been able to alleviate the 2 crore litres of supply shortage, it has been an wastage of a huge sum of money.

The plant was built in contravention to the rule that structures have to be at least 100 feet away from river banks. Yet, the foundation stone was laid in 2012, and only now we are hearing that no permission from the Water Development Board (WDB) was taken. The plant, which was to become operational in 2016, is yet to be handed over to BCC. Since there are outstanding electricity bills owed to the West Zone Power Distribution Company Ltd by BCC, the plant is currently without any supply. Lastly, it has been pointed out that running a plant at the location could worsen erosion of the river bank.

No effective steps were taken since 2012 to mitigate and solve these foreseeable and avoidable issues. And it is not only one person to blame: the allegations run across the DPHE, BCC and the ministry concerned. The patchwork solutions that are now being thought of to salvage the plant do not assure us, and the environmental threats will remain. We have seen these issues are symptomatic of these bodies across the country. Such unplanned and shoddy work, causing huge wastage of public money, are being done with impunity.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Hawkers should be rehabilitated before eviction

Recently, both the Dhaka city corporations have resumed their eviction drives to remove the hawkers from pavements. We are not against a hawker-free, clean Dhaka. But my concern is that if the hawkers are evicted from the city, where will they go? Will they go back to their village? Never. Will they leave their slums? No. Instead, they may get involved in criminal activities. As a result, the law and order situation of the city would further deteriorate.

If the government wants to reduce the number of hawkers, the task should be done gradually and by way of rehabilitating. Instead of completely evicting them, the hawkers should be given specific places in the city for doing their business. Efforts like 'Holiday Market' in Motijhil are a good step forward. Also, agro-based industries in villages may help reduce the number of people coming to the city from rural areas.
Md. Razu, BSMRMU

Bashabo-Tantibazar bus service required

The southeast part of Dhaka city, which includes Bashabo, Goran, Nandipara, Kadamtala, Sabujbag and Rajarbag, does not have an affordable and comfortable bus service. The inhabitants have been suffering a lot due to the lack of affordable means of transportation. Rickshaws have been barred on many busy roads. CNG-run auto-rickshaws are neither easily available nor affordable, while taxicab is an out-of-reach service for commoners.

BRTC would reportedly buy 600 new buses soon. If it introduces a bus service from Bashabo to Tantibazar via Bashabo-Shajahanpur flyover, Rajarbag Police Hospital, Purana Paltan, Zero Point, Gulistan and Bangsal, millions of people of the southeast part of Dhaka metropolis will be able to enjoy an affordable bus service.
Md Ashraf Hossain, Central Bashabo

Why citizens must demand fiscal transparency



ERESH OMAR JAMAL

AS 2021 approaches closer, economists and business-forecasters continue to cast doubt on whether Bangladesh could become a middle-income country by then, as the government predicts. Their doubts, however, rather than being based on Bangladesh's potential, focus more on the fact that under the current conditions and particularly in the absence of some much-needed reforms, it is highly unlikely for our GDP to grow at the rate necessary for Bangladesh to reach that milestone, within the remaining timeframe—four years only.

For Bangladesh to reach middle-income level by 2021, real gross domestic product (GDP) would have to reach an average annual rate of 7.4 percent during the 7th Five Year Plan. And although Bangladesh has the potential to register close to 8 percent GDP growth annually, experts suggest that the country, at present, is performing well below its potential. Consequently, such growth will require a considerable increase in both public and private investment from around 29 percent of GDP to 34.4 percent by 2020, with the latter in particular proving to be quite the challenge for the government as evident from the fact that it has, over the years, not increased by any significant margin.

While infrastructure bottlenecks have detracted growth for years, lack of policy reforms too remains an issue. Biru Paksha Paul, a former chief economist at the Bangladesh Bank, says that "Policy gaps should be addressed to fill out the growth gap," adding that "fiscal and monetary policies along with other long-term ones should consider potential growth before formulating strategies and policy stances."

To estimate correctly the level of potential output, what is needed first, however, is data on fiscal and monetary

policies. But as analysts have pointed out, "the government does not make public enough information related to fiscal policies and measures taken in budget every year" ("Ensure transparency in public spending," *The Daily Star*, August 11, 2017)—resulting in a lack of government transparency. Dr Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute (PRI), citing the fact that Bangladesh is classified under category C3 in the "Open Budget Index" prepared by the International Budget Partnership, said that "the government publishes some budget information but

measures, nor does it hold mid-term evaluation of budgetary measures or prepare adequate audit reports. Moreover, many quasi-fiscal activities that adversely affect the budget also exist, creating financial distortions that experts believe affect profitability of the central bank and other regulators. These activities, according to Dr Mansur, should be included in the government's financial statements.

And the same criticism can again be seen in the US State Department's 2015 Fiscal Transparency Report (USTR), which states that Bangladesh does not

USTR report, in a similar vein, concludes that the "Overlapping administrative procedures and lack of transparency in regulatory and administrative systems can frustrate investors seeking to undertake projects in the country."

Meanwhile, even the Supreme Court regretted in a recent verdict, that after 46 years of independence, we still "have not been able to institutionalise any public institutions," which, as economists and entrepreneurs often argue, is the best way to ensure good governance in society—a prerequisite for economic growth.

While failure to strengthen government institutions has remained an issue for decades, what has often been overlooked is the fact that one of the best ways of doing so is through greater transparency. Thus, through increased transparency, not only could the government instigate further public debate, review whether its policies are on the right track in regards to the targets being aimed at, but also improve the functionalities of its institutions, resulting, perhaps, in reduced corruption and more efficient use of available resources through greater accountability.

Lastly, what needs to be understood is that in a properly functioning democracy, even the regulators need to be regulated by those they are there to represent; that is, the citizens. And for that to happen, necessary information in regards to government policies should be made public so that the public, not only can, but does, incorporate the habit of being the final regulator of the functioning of the country, including its economic activities.

Moreover, in order to properly regulate our system of democracy through the concept of "checks and balances," citizens also have the complete right, and responsibility even, to demand from the government, transparency and accountability to the fullest. It is about time that the citizens of this country exercised that right, and took responsibility, for establishing the practice of good governance.

Eresh Omar Jamal is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*.



not enough to ensure an informed public debate."

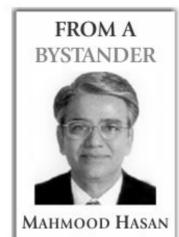
"Information on earnings from state-owned enterprises is included in the supplementary budget documents. However, information on allocation to the state-owned enterprises is not clearly presented and discussed in the budget," he said—despite the fact that more and more resources have been diverted by the government to state-owned banks that have performed woefully and, yet, show almost no signs of improvements.

The government also does not publish many of the statements on budgetary

meet the minimum requirements of fiscal transparency and has failed even to make much progress towards ensuring the transparency needed to improve its rating (internationally).

These "low ratings of the country in different international rankings," according to Dr Mirza Azizul Islam, former adviser to the caretaker government, were "an outcome of poor institutions" and are raising the cost of doing business. As Bangladesh remains one of the lowest-ranked countries in various global business rankings, investors, both foreign and domestic, are often discouraged from investing here. And the

Ratcheting up tension in Korean Peninsula



MAHMOOD HASAN

FROM A BYSTANDER

A lot has been reported over the past couple of weeks about the escalating tension in the Korean Peninsula. As the western media demonises North Korea, one gets the impression that it is led by a "crazy fat kid" (Kim Jong-Un, 33), who is ready to go to war with America.

Compared to the US superpower, even nuclear-armed DPRK is a piddling. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is basically an impoverished country with an oppressive, unstable political structure dominated by its military. Having 46,540 sq miles area, a population of 25 million people, USD 30 billion GDP (2015) and chronic shortage of food and medical supplies—it has been cornered by the Korean Armistice Agreement of July 1953. The Armistice ceased hostilities of the Korean War (1950-53), but no peace treaty has been agreed on so far. Technically it is still at war with the US.

The Kim Jong-Un regime is deeply insecure and under constant fear that the Republic of Korea (ROK), with American help, will invade the North and try to instigate a regime change. Pyongyang also feels unsafe after the recent political changes in ROK.

The latest bout of tensions stems from the North testing two ICBMs in July. Latest reports suggest that Pyongyang has developed a miniaturised nuclear device that can be mounted on its ICBMs and launched on targets as far as the US mainland. Nuclear-DPRK has changed the security equation in East Asia. To protect DPRK from enemies such as ROK, Japan and America, Kim has two priorities—autonomy over a modernised military and political independence. DPRK describes its nuclear weapons as a "nuclear deterrent for self-defence". It is a mystery as to how the poor country of DPRK funds its nuclear and missile programmes.

What is noteworthy is that tensions flare up every time American troops in South Korea play provocative war games. The next joint military exercise called "Ulchi-Freedom Guardian" is scheduled from August 21-31, 2017. These drills make Pyongyang jittery and it ratchets up war invectives against the Americans. The Americans also match the rhetoric with

equal vengeance.

Donald Trump personally came out with extremely crude, off-the-cuff threats to DPRK. He threatened Kim Jong-Un with "fire and fury" if DPRK tried to attack American targets. Pyongyang responded to this by preparing plans to launch an attack on the American military base in Guam. Interestingly, the threat did not come from Kim Jong-Un personally, but from his military command. Upping the ante, Trump warned that US military was "locked and loaded" should Kim Jong-Un "act unwisely".

While Trump has been making irresponsible threats, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson reiterated that the United States is not an enemy of DPRK and

and trading partner, has called upon Washington and Pyongyang to calm down, and has asked the Americans to cease its military exercises that escalate tension. Beijing-Pyongyang relation has suffered in recent times because of DPRK's repeated nuclear and missile tests. Beijing's frustration with Pyongyang was in evidence when it voted on August 6, 2017, at the UN Security Council Resolution to strengthen sanctions on DPRK.

What is most surprising is that Chinese leaders have not made any public statements on the ongoing tension between DPRK and the US. The China factor is most important in the current fracas. Chinese state-run newspaper Global Times on August 11,

Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria.

Sanctions have not stopped DPRK from developing its nuclear and missiles programmes. An American pre-emptive strike would lead to an apocalypse. So the only option worth considering is to find a diplomatic solution.

Understandably, Kim Jong-Un will continue to brandish his missiles and push for maximum concessions from America—recognition as nuclear-weapon-state (NWS), end diplomatic isolation, end the state of war with a peace treaty, withdrawal of sanctions and obtain economic concessions. Can Washington, which wants complete cap on DPRK's nuclear programme, agree to Kim's wish list without annoying ROK and Japan? Only Beijing can help bring

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North Korean leader Kim Jong-un (centre in white shirt) watches the test of a new anti-aircraft system. PHOTO: AFP

there will be no regime change or military operation against it. Defence Secretary James Mattis said that though the US was ready (militarily)—"diplomatic efforts" were underway to deal with the threat. Clearly, there is incoherence in Washington.

It appears Donald Trump has found an able sparring-partner in Kim Jong-Un. By making nasty threats Donald Trump has pinned himself to a corner—with no room for flexibility. World leaders have called upon Donald Trump to avoid further tension with DPRK. Kim Jong-Un, by not personally threatening attack on Guam, retained the option not to implement the threats of his military command.

China, DPRK's most important ally

said that China shall stay neutral if DPRK fires first. Donald Trump has been asking Beijing to restrain Kim Jong-Un and on August 12 spoke to Xi Jinping, who advised him to avoid "words and deeds" that would "exacerbate" the already tense situation. Chinese assertion to stay neutral is a clear warning to Pyongyang to stop being reckless. And the implied threat that China may be drawn into the fight, if US attempts pre-emptive strike on DPRK, is also a warning to Donald Trump. Beijing simply cannot allow US adventures on DPRK, a buffer ensconced under its belly. Kim Jong-Un knows well that had DPRK been geographically located away from China, Americans would have pulverised it militarily long ago, as it has done to

the two opposing parties together for a diplomatic solution and restore calm in the peninsula, as there is no contact between them.

Mike Pompeo, CIA director said on August 13 that there was no imminent threat of a nuclear war with DPRK. ROK President Moon Jae-In also declared there will be no war in the Peninsula. Japan's Shinzo Abe also called upon Beijing to stop Pyongyang launching missiles. The only way war can break out is through a miscalculation or by accident. Meanwhile, both sides should handle their military assets cautiously and refrain from making irresponsible threats.

Mahmood Hasan is former ambassador and secretary.