

# Another mysterious abduction case

## High time govt took cognisance

YESTERDAY we reported that a businessman who was picked up from his residence in Dhaka by people identifying as law enforcers was freed after eight days of captivity. He was beaten up by the abductors and forced into a microbus and then, on Sunday, dropped off by them in Comilla. This is not the first case of its kind where people identifying as law enforcers have entered houses and abducted individuals, who were then bizarrely freed after a period. Within the past year, there has been a plethora of cases which follow this pattern.

The victim said that in confinement, he was pressured to lift a case he had filed against his business partner and was asked for ransom. But strangely, this demand was not communicated to the family members, and he was released without the demand being met. If these abductions are to intimidate or for some other reason remains a mystery. In most cases, after being freed, people have been wary to describe the details of their period of confinement.

Law enforcement has consistently denied any involvement. If that is the case, then the matter is more worrying since people are carrying out crimes in their name with impunity. This is eroding the faith of the public in law enforcers. The government must take cognisance and act decisively to determine who is behind these abductions. Law enforcement too, if they are to effectively carry out their responsibilities, must deal seriously with these allegations. We are yet to see any significant action from the law enforcers to pursue and curb these crimes and determine who is actually behind the abductions.

# So near yet so far

## A close finish at Premadasa

IT was indeed a heartbreak of a loss. After displaying a magnificent performance against the host to reach the final of the Nidahas Trophy, the much-hoped-for first win in a T20 final has once again evaded our men in green and red. But there is no ignominy in a loss where the match decider comes in the last ball of the game, and that too against the topmost team in the world. It was satisfying to see the Tigers defending a total which, given India's record of chasing big totals, was not very large. But it was well defended.

One could rue many things like what if Mahmudullah was not run out but had stayed on till the last and added a few more runs to the total. Or what if Rubel had not conceded 22, but only 20 runs, in that over. We might have won by two runs. But who could predict that our most successful bowler would be taken to the cleaners in the last over? And that only justifies the appellation that the followers of the game have given to cricket—it being a game of glorious uncertainty.

But we can feel proud of the overall display of our men on the field. Their performance has even elicited praise from the Indians who have conceded that they were made to fight all the way. There are lessons in every adversity as there are many things to learn from a loss like this. We have a talented team and we are confident that it will mature into an all-round outfit in due course of time, hopefully in very near future.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Govt should listen to quota protesters

There is a reason for the quota system to be in place. When we speak of the quota system, naturally the question that comes is: Who should be entitled to quota? I think only those groups of people who are disadvantaged due to their socio-economic situation should enjoy the quota privilege.

As the population of our country increases, more and more students are lining up to study in public universities and acquire a government job. In this context, the unreasonably high quota privilege reserved for those who do not necessarily fall into the category of underprivileged groups is causing those deprived of it great distress. Hence, thousands of students are protesting in different areas and demanding that the quota system be repealed or reformed. The government should listen to the protesters. Md Saeed Hasan, Dhaka University

### Well done, Bangladesh!

The final match between Bangladesh and India in the tri-nation T-20 tournament was even more exciting than the previous Bangladesh vs Sri Lanka match. Even though Bangladesh has lost the match, it has carried it until the last ball. Not to mention, I enjoyed it immensely.

What I found particularly encouraging was the maturity of Bangladesh's cricketers. We lost a match that we could have won easily, yet, in the end, Bangladeshi players did not shed tears. I think our players have passed that stage. They are more mature and professional now.

I am confident that the day is not far away when Bangladesh will regularly win trophies in the international cricket. Good luck, Bangladesh!

Shanewaj Khan, By email

# LDC GRADUATION

## What it means for Bangladesh



**MACRO MIRROR**  
FAHMIDA KHATUN

ON March 16, 2018, for the second time in the history of independent Bangladesh, the country was adorned with a crown for its achievements in development. The first time was in 2015 when it upgraded itself to the World Bank's "lower middle income" category by increasing its Gross National Income. By becoming eligible for graduation from LDC, Bangladesh has taken its status to a new height. The LDC category was introduced by the United Nations in 1971 when there were 25 LDCs. In 2018, the number has increased to 47. So far, only five countries were able to graduate from the LDC group, including Botswana, Cape Verde, Maldives, Samoa and Equatorial Guinea. Bangladesh is the only country that met all three criteria for graduation including GNI per capita, Human Assets Index, and Economic Vulnerability Index.

This graduation will bring a lot of opportunities for Bangladesh and quite a few challenges as well. There will be benefits but there will be costs to pay also. Overcoming these challenges is critical for a smooth graduation process.

The new status will help in branding Bangladesh. Investors will be interested to invest in the country given its strength in certain areas such as the size of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), exports and population compared to other LDCs. These will help Bangladesh's credit worthiness which is reflected through better credit rating. Bangladesh will have more opportunities for taking commercial loans from the international market at a competitive interest rate. Such branding will help it to mobilise resources from the global market through sovereign bond. The private sector will also have the opportunity to generate capital from the global financial market.

The other impact will be reflected through the cost of development finance and higher debt servicing liabilities due to the cessation of access to concessional finance for LDCs. Over the years, Bangladesh has transformed itself from an aid-dependent country into a trade-dependent one. However, for poverty alleviation, social sector activities and infrastructural development, the role of official development assistance cannot be undermined. As a lower-middle-income country, Bangladesh is no more eligible



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for low interest loans. After graduation, Bangladesh has to go for blended finance that includes loans from the development institutions and other sources with a high interest rate and shorter repayment period. However, Bangladesh should also explore more resources from institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), New Development Bank (NDB) and other commercial sources.

Bangladesh's major challenge will be to face "preference erosion" due to the LDC graduation. Bangladesh is entitled to have duty-free access to the European market under the "Everything But Arms" initiative. This is a huge opportunity for the country as more than 60 percent of its export goes to the European market. Except for the apparel exports to the USA, Bangladesh receives duty-free market access for all products in all developed countries. Even some developing countries such as India provide duty-free market access for all products, and China for more than a thousand tariff lines. Due to the graduation, Bangladesh will lose about 8 percent of its total exports because of the imposition of additional tariff on its exports by 6.7 percent without a preferential treatment. A Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) study reveals that the loss will be equivalent to USD 2.7 billion.

After graduation in 2024, there will be

a grace period of another 3 years when Bangladesh can enjoy all LDC-specific benefits. So there are approximately 10 years for the country to prepare itself to start the new journey. Bangladesh needs to prepare for a smooth graduation by taking into account a few issues.

First, the overall capability of the economy has to be improved. This should be achieved through diversification of the economy, technological upgradation, training and skill development of human resources, and institutional strengthening. In order to attract foreign investment, the economy has to go through structural changes, achieve resource efficiency, and improve productivity. This is the age of artificial intelligence and robotics. Bangladesh has to gear up to face the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The labour force displaced due to technological upgradation should be able to find themselves engaged in self-employment through micro, small and medium enterprises.

Second, in order to make up for the loss to be incurred by the preference erosion and end of various international support measures, Bangladesh must improve its export competitiveness and diversify both markets and products for export. Besides, Bangladesh has to play a proactive role at the regional and sub-regional initiatives, such as Bangladesh,

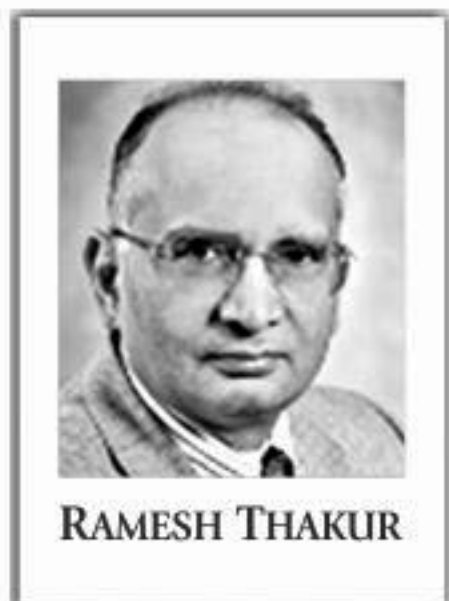
Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN), Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar (BCIM), and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), for more meaningful partnerships. At the same time, it should remain active at the World Trade Organization to realise any potential benefit. In the post-graduation period, the country will still be eligible for Generalised System of Preferences or "GSP Plus" benefits for market access. In order to access this, countries usually have to comply with stringent conditions such as improved work conditions, higher poverty alleviation efforts, women's empowerment and reduction of carbon emission.

While celebrating Bangladesh's latest achievement, we have to recognise that we are facing a world full of challenges and crises. We have to be prepared for a world increasingly battling with conservatism, protectionism, extremism, refugee crises and confrontations. At the same time, the world has also set ambitious plans such as SDGs to be fulfilled by 2030. Bangladesh is committed to these goals. It is expected that implementation of these goals will also help its smooth graduation from the LDC group.

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## PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

# Could the Kim-Trump summit succeed?



said Trump of Kim; "mentally deranged US dotard," Kim retorted—while threatening to reduce East Asia to a post-atomic wasteland. Now, in a stunning and dramatic development, the two are to meet by May. Kim reportedly is willing to denuclearise and eager to talk directly to Trump, who has agreed.

But optimism about this turn of events must be tempered with cautious realism. North Korea is the nuclear problem from hell. Neither South Korea nor the United States can control the narrative; definitions of success or failure are highly relative; and Trump must enter the talks with no exit strategy. The six decades since the Korean War ended in 1953—with a ceasefire but no peace agreement—have hardened an increasingly dangerous stalemate. Although neither side is likely to launch a premeditated nuclear attack, the risk of war from miscommunication, misperception, or miscalculation is real.

All key announcements so far have come from Seoul, not Pyongyang or Washington. President Moon Jae-in, a son of refugees from North Korea, was elected on the promise of a two-track approach to the North: sanctions and diplomacy. This led to the Olympic initiative whereby Kim's sister, Kim Yo-jong, attended the Winter Games in Pyeongchang, and the two countries competed as one team. Afterwards, Moon's national security adviser, Chung Eui-yong, and intelligence chief Suh Hoon travelled to Pyongyang and Washington, where, standing on the White House lawn with Cho Yoon-je, South Korea's ambassador to the US—but with no US officials present—they announced the summit.

North Korea conducted the first of six nuclear tests in 2006. The regime's nuclear programme has many components, and discussions could

founder on what is to be proscribed, permitted, and reversed, and in exchange for what concessions by the US. Will the deal require freezing North Korea's capability at current levels, or complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearisation? The answer will depend on North Korea's motives in getting the bomb and agreeing to talk.

For the Kim regime, the main lesson from the fates of Slobodan Milošević, Saddam Hussein, and Muammar al-Qaddafi was that only nuclear weapons can neutralise US efforts at regime

North Korea also has formidable conventional military capabilities, and estimates of human casualties could total as many as 25 million, depending on the types of weapons used, the geographical theatre of the conflict, and the countries sucked into it.

In February, Moon said: "The United States needs to lower its bar for dialogue and the North, too, must show its willingness to denuclearise" as critical first steps. The summit became possible because the US acceded to that counsel, turning its demand for



The Kim-Trump summit is an opportunity that will be difficult to seize and easy to squander.



change. But the US never attacked North Korea in the decades after 1953, when it clearly did not have the bomb. Conversely, the North's growing nuclear capability provoked the US into quietly preparing for war while hoping to avert one. Sanctions are an ineffective tool to force North Korea's compliance with the UN's demand that it give up nuclear weapons, and it could prove dangerous to conclude that their pain brought Kim to the talks.

Similarly, the threat of US military strikes did little to concentrate Kim's mind: even Western analysts do not find that threat credible. The US lacks the ability to identify, locate, and destroy all three categories of nuclear targets: warheads, bomb production infrastructure, and delivery vehicles.

denuclearisation, which had previously been a precondition for talks, into a goal of negotiations.

But Kim will not trust unilateral US guarantees. Therefore, any deal would require the support of China and Russia, economic and energy assistance from Japan and others, and endorsement by the UN Security Council. China and Russia have welcomed news of the direct talks, but Japan is uneasy.

All parties will explore six elements of a deal that North Korea is seeking: a peace treaty to replace the 1953 armistice, comprehensive sanctions relief, an end to US-South Korea military exercises, diplomatic recognition, acceptance of North Korean space activities, and nuclear energy assistance.

The North must halt all nuclear and missile tests until the summit, and sanctions will remain in place. But will the US and South Korea suspend military exercises? To North Korea, complete denuclearisation means the withdrawal of US extended nuclear deterrence from the peninsula.

The Kim-Trump summit is an opportunity that will be difficult to seize and easy to squander. For example, if Trump decertifies the Iran nuclear deal in May, ahead of the summit, the move would almost certainly call into question America's good faith and ability to honour negotiated international agreements.

Moreover, there is the general matter of Trump's ignorance, lack of foreign-policy experience, and the many unfilled posts in the US State Department. There is still no US ambassador in Seoul, and Joseph Yun, US Special Representative for North Korea Policy, retired this month. Without extensive diplomatic groundwork, the wily Kim could outsmart Trump. Participation in the Winter Olympics and willingness to sit down with Trump have already given the North a propaganda boost, and a summit with the US president will confer legitimacy on Kim.

Yet Trump has proven to be pragmatic, not ideological. His transactional approach could prove the key. Whether genuine or tactical, Moon has constantly praised Trump's tough stance of maximum pressure as helpful to gaining Kim's interest in a possible diplomatic solution.

Moreover, Trump carries no historical baggage, and his decisiveness, even if rooted in impulsiveness, could provide the necessary breakthrough to overcome decades of accumulated inertia. Trump's ability to reverse himself and deny having done so could be equally advantageous. If a good deal is on the table, nothing the US has done, or that Trump has said in the past, will stop him from seizing the moment. On such slender threads of hope hang nuclear peace.

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