

## Why have the evicted Santals not been rehabilitated yet?

*They should get back their ancestral land*

It is shocking that even after two years, around 1,200 Santal families evicted from their homes in Gaibandha are still living a life of destitution, uncertainty and fear. An eviction drive led by local influentials resulted in the death of three Santal men with many others injured, some with life-long physical impairment. Some Santals are still missing.

According to yesterday's report in this paper, these people are living in tents in nearby villages. Their survival is a challenge as many of them continue to bear the injuries from the day they were evicted, making it hard for them to find work. The women are still afraid to go out to work as they fear they will be attacked.

So what has been done to rehabilitate them and why do they still feel so insecure? Nothing has really been done to allay their apprehensions. Although a case has been filed on behalf of the Santals, and 25 people have been arrested, this does not include the prime accused. The rehabilitation process, moreover, seems to be an eyewash for the public. As the report has said, so far only two or three of the evicted families have been rehabilitated in other villages.

During the Pakistan period, the government acquired the land from the Santals for a sugarcane farm. It was agreed that the land would be returned to the original owners if it were used for farming any other. However, the agreement was violated and the mill authority leased out the land for farming other crops. According to the local upazila land office, only 92-97 acres of 1,842.3 acres of the land were being used for farming sugarcane in 2014-15 fiscal year. The local Santals had complained about this infringement of the contract but in vain.

The lack of compassion for these helpless people is unacceptable. We expect the administration to ensure that the letter and spirit of the agreement made at the time of the acquisition be respected and that these families are returned to their ancestral land. Furthermore, those who are responsible for the eviction that led to the deaths and injuries of the Santals must be held accountable.

## Kurigram's general hospital in a mess!

*Complete construction, allocate operational funds*

THE Kurigram General Hospital was upgraded to 250 beds in 2010. Eight years down the line there is a crisis in service delivery because physicians and staff have accommodation problems; there is a huge dearth of beds which means many patients are sleeping on the floor; there is a massive shortage of doctors and nurses; and the eight-storey building that was constructed to house the hospital is yet to be completed and handed over to the hospital. All in all, a mess! We would like to know from the authorities why they have not put the contractor on notice to finish the building and hand it over as soon as possible.

Why have steps not been taken to fill up the doctors' positions that have remained vacant (there are only 18 doctors against the posts of 42), over the years, and why are there only 70 nurses on duty (although the hospital is supposed to have 165)? The situation in Kurigram General Hospital is representative of a problem on a grander scale all over Bangladesh where it would appear that policymakers put a lot of emphasis on building infrastructure but not on operational expenditure. That the concerned department in charge of supervising the contractor constructing the building is least bothered with project completion speaks volumes of the lack of accountability in our system of governance.

In the meantime, patients are left to fend for themselves and hospital staff and doctors must make do with what little resources they have at their disposal. We hope that in the interest of public health, all the concerned parties involved in this process will do everything to resolve the crisis of hospital operation, staffing and accommodation.

### KNOT SO TRUE



RUBANA HUQ

THE wars that we wage within and beyond our own borders kill us. Yet, we seem to be perpetually living in a state of war where hate speeches flood the internet, trade

wars cause the economy to slow down, borders cause tension and perception becomes the truth. To put it simply, the current world is one of doubt and disaster, where nothing real is real anymore, where ultimately disruptions decide the course of human destiny, where lines divide identities that were meant to be one.

As for myself, I have valid reasons to despise borders. We are living in a time when artificial intelligence is almost ready to question me and decide if I can get into a country or not. In the European Union, border control checkpoints are testing AI-based lie-detector technology called the iBorderCtrl to identify those trying to cross the border illegally. Very soon, an animated guard will be quizzing me via the webcam. Apparently, this is to prevent terrorism and mass influx of illegal immigrants. What do I care? I come from a country that has just given shelter to a million Rohingya refugees who landed on our shores, driven away by aggressors of their own land. For us, in Bangladesh, the call of humanity is far greater than the call of self-preservation. So whenever I see an opportunity of borderless travel, I indulge...

Driving down from Belfast to Dublin is a seamless experience. Apart from a casual warning on Uber voice reminding the driver and the passenger that an international border is being crossed, there's nothing else there. No border guards, no flags...nothing. I intentionally opt for this route as it sets me free for once. With Brexit in March 2019, one doesn't know if the scenario will alter for the worse. In reality, Northern Ireland has a long history of war. For most of the 20th century, the 30-year conflict commonly known as "the Troubles" killed some 3,600 people. The conflict, which was primarily political and nationalist in nature, focused on the key issue of the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. While Protestant loyalists wanted Northern Ireland to remain within the United Kingdom, the Irish Catholic nationalists wanted to



A six-metre-high sculpture created from scrap metal depicting a soldier returning from war was unveiled on Sunday in Dublin to commemorate the centenary of the ending of WWI.

leave the United Kingdom and join a united Ireland. Peace was finally negotiated in 1998. Like the Indian sub-continental partition lines, the lines of Northern Ireland also go through farmland, schoolyards and even homes, indicating that the border is still definitely porous.

However, the new possibility of friction looms large between the United Kingdom and the Northern Ireland as the last vote of the United Kingdom opted to leave the European Union while in the Northern Ireland, 56 percent voted to remain. By March 2019, Britain leaves the bloc, but for now, Ireland and the EU remain unhappy with Britain's proposals to keep the dividing line as is. Now the talks are souring with EU

demanding progress on border issues by December 4 or else, apparently, trade will have to suffer.

In this world of disruptive gains and departure, Trump just imposed sanctions against the "rogue" state of Iran, which will clearly affect the poor and the middle class, while the aggressor incurs no cost to drag on the conflict, targeting Iran's oil sales, its wider energy industry, shipping, banking, insurance sectors, and so on. These "secondary sanctions" apply pressure on other countries to stop them from trading with Tehran. It was only last week when IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde took a position against trade disputes, with a warning that a departure from the regular corporate supply chains could lead to a

"shipwreck." She warned that this fiscal and financial turbulence would only make the poor poorer and would only be feeding the top one percent, with the global public and private debt record now having reached a new high at USD 182 trillion, 60 percent up from 2007.

Meanwhile, truth is being redefined everywhere. With an emphasis on "fake news", one doesn't know what to believe or trash. Yesterday, the whole of America voted in the midterm elections which will shape their future for the next couple of decades. Whether the man who tweets with his own picture with the caption reading "Sanctions are Coming," in almost a satirical adaptation of "Winter is Coming," is going to lead America with his own mantra is best left to the judgment of the Americans. But at our end, one cannot help but wonder about the placement of truth in international politics and media, where the new truth is now being laced with partisan news coverage affecting the voters' cognitive bias. As an alternative, people have taken to social media where they directly hear from the president. Today, if the cliché "a lie gets halfway around the world before the truth can get its pants on" is to be taken seriously, then is the world really heading for a Trexit (exit from truth)?

At a time like this, perhaps taking a walk at 4am is the best. It lends a perspective that tends to get lost in traffic. Yesterday morning, your columnist, at dawn, stared at a six-metre-tall soldier made of scrap metal in Dublin, marking 100 years since the end of World War One. The statue "Haunting Soldier" at the entrance to St Stephen's Green park in Dublin has been unveiled ahead of the centenary of the end of the war on Sunday. The soldier made of scrap metal, including horseshoes, spanners and car jacks, tells a different tale of suffering and fragility of the survivors of the war. The monument is a reminder of the 36,000 Irish soldiers who never came home. Before returning to its original home in Dorset, it will continue to overlook St Stephen's Green in Dublin for the next four weeks, reminding us all about a simple truth: In war, human life is all too disposable, just like the scrap metal the monument is built with. Since life is too short to be untrue, let us not fool ourselves by accusing truth of being a philosophical hoax. Let us all remember that divisions are precursors of death and a deconstructed version of truth is deadly.

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# Will the Iran sanctions work?

### NO FRILLS



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

LAST month, a flotilla of ships carrying more than 20 million barrels of Iranian oil headed off to China's north-eastern Dalian port in a bid to stave off the impending US sanctions that just came into effect on November 4. According to Russian media, the Iranians were quite confident that the country would be able to sell its oil bypassing the latest round of sanctions. Obviously, a deal has

been reached with China because the port of Dalian typically saw shipments of oil between 3 and 4 million barrels a day. So, a jump of this magnitude can only mean one thing.

Despite much bluster, things have not gone exactly the way the US had envisaged. Increasingly, more and more nations have called US's bluff on its threat that individuals and institutions in foreign countries would be penalised if they broke the Iran oil sanctions. This is reflected in the dampening of international prices of crude oil when the US stance was softened by waivers that allow for major players like China, India, Japan and some other countries to buy Iranian crude. We now know that the US administration has stated that it will "temporarily" allow eight importers to keep on buying Iranian oil. The top importers for Iranian oil have been China, India, South Korea, Turkey, Italy, the United Arab Emirates and Japan. India has already stated that its policy on oil import is not going to change. The fact that the US has already softened its stance is hardly a major "success" for that country's foreign policy.

Senior members of the US administration have been stung by fellow party members for the lacklustre nature of sanctions against Iran. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has been under pressure from some Republican senators to take a harder line against Iran. Indeed, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin has apparently hinted that institutions and individuals that use SWIFT, the financial messaging service to do

business with Iranian entities, could face repercussions. This could perhaps explain why India and Iran are finalising steps that would allow New Delhi to pay for oil imports in Indian rupees (INR). From what has been reported in *The Times of India*, India is taking steps to make payments via an account in UCO bank (in India), which has no international exposure and is not connected to SWIFT. According to that report, 45 percent of Indian oil payments were made in INR from the UCO account and 55 percent paid in euros. Given the threat of US sanctions that have just taken hold, the new arrangement could mean that the entire payment

Mr Pompeo has released a list of 12 demands that Iran must comply with if it wants the sanctions lifted. These are: stopping "support for terrorism," withdrawing from the Syrian conflict, halting all nuclear and ballistic missile development, etc. There is zero possibility of Iran withdrawing from the Syrian conflict without a comprehensive peace treaty coming into effect (that will be overseen by the big powers). Iran has invested much in the Syrian conflict and this goes far beyond man and material. This conflict is what propelled Iran into a rising regional power and it will take more than sanctions to change Iranian



Iran's President Hassan Rouhani remained defiant after the US re-imposed sanctions on Iran. In a nationally televised address, the president said the Islamic republic will "proudly bypass the sanctions."

PHOTO: AFP

*Things are not going to change because of the latest round of sanctions because today, Iran has a lot more friends than it did yesterday. Friends who are going to circumvent policies that are meant to limit the presence of Iranian oil in the international market.*

will now be made in INR.

Now, where does that leave US foreign policy? Beyond statements by the Secretary of State like "we strongly encourage those nations to ensure that Iran spends that money on humanitarian purchases to benefit the Iranian people," what can the administration do to stop other nations from doing business with Iran? Some of its staunchest allies, like South Korea, have received waivers (according to Bloomberg and Reuters) to continue to import Iranian oil, which means it is pretty much business-as-usual because with China, Japan and India exempted, these sanctions are not all that serious but in an election year, it makes the administration look good that it's doing something to contain the so-called Iranian threat.

foreign policy.

In fact, Iran has been living with one form of sanction or another for decades now and the only thing these sanctions have achieved is driving millions of people into poverty. Iranians are a proud people. The country fought a bitter war with Iraq for about a decade, suffered a great deal and continued to suffer under sanctions brought against it over the years. Things are not going to change because of the latest round of sanctions because today, Iran has a lot more friends than it did yesterday. Friends who are going to circumvent policies that are meant to limit the presence of Iranian oil in the international market.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Will the dialogue bear fruit?

The entire nation earnestly hopes that the planned dialogue between the ruling and opposition alliances, slated to be held on Wednesday, will be successful in minimising their differences. If the dialogue succeeds, and both sides reach some sort of an agreement over the kind of governing structure that would supervise the polling process, it will be a significant step forward. If the dialogue fails, however, the country risks getting plunged into chaos and violence.

While both sides need to decide on a compromise, the government's mere assurance that it would hold fair elections isn't enough. The ruling party is asking other political parties to "trust" it with organising the polls. But if past records are any indication, such promises turn out to be false. The governing party must agree to a constructive formula so that it can't interfere with the polling process even if it wants to. We cannot rely on mere assurances. The opposition alliance, on the other hand, should not be insistent on unreasonable demands. Its demands must be realistic, practical and reasonable.

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