

Why have rawhide prices plummeted suddenly?

Manipulators must be punished

WE know from previous years that about 1 crore animals would be sacrificed during Eid-ul-Azha. So, the collapse of prices came as a big surprise, as the market had anticipated, or should have anticipated, this huge supply of rawhides. The supply chain of rawhides starts with seasonal traders purchasing individual hides. These are then bought by merchants (wholesalers) who in turn supply to the tanners.

According to tanners, they paid merchants between Tk 30 and Tk 35 crore. Tanners pay merchants in phases and we have been told by a representative of the Bangladesh Hide and Skin Merchants' Association that it is owed about Tk 400 crore in arrears as of August 14. This claim has been refuted by the tanners' association which has stated that a total of Tk 150 crore has been paid to merchants. Even if we were to take the tanners' claim to be true, that still leaves a few hundred crores in unpaid dues.

Another reason for tanners' lack of interest in purchasing rawhides this year comes from the fact that the tanneries already had some stock of hide in their inventories. The sudden lack of interest in purchasing hides left seasonal traders at the short end of the stick. It is hardly surprising that Tk 100 crore worth of rawhides has been dumped on the roads because there is no demand for these skins at the fixed rates.

The government should have anticipated all these factors and taken measures prior to Eid. The commerce minister's response about syndicates is nothing more than a vain attempt to avoid responsibility for this debacle. Our question is: how could authorities fix prices at a level which was not followed by any party? The concerned ministry should have sat down with all the stakeholders to ensure smooth operation of the entire supply chain. We blame both tanners and merchants for the sudden collapse of demand and this is where authorities should focus on in their investigation and bring the guilty parties to face the full force of the law. We simply cannot afford a repetition of this situation next year because there is too much at stake.

No lesson was learned

More lives lost in Eid road accidents

WE are deeply saddened to learn that at least 26 people died in road accidents across the country during the three-day Eid vacation. Four more died on Wednesday. Estimates from some other news outlets put the overall number at 35, with the number of the injured running into dozens. Road casualties during Eid festivals are perhaps no longer a surprise. In the past years, we have been consistently bombarded with reminders of the dangers of Eid-time journey, each year mirroring the previous year in terms of deaths and injuries for which a familiar litany of reasons is cited: reckless driving, lack of monitoring on highways that draw a high number of travellers during this time of the year, overcrowding, underage and/or unlicensed drivers, unfit vehicles, etc. But the problem persists like an insoluble puzzle.

According to an estimate by *The Daily Star*, 31 people died during the Eid-ul-Azha holiday in 2018, 29 in 2017, 32 in 2016, 30 in 2015, 26 in 2014, 10 in 2013, and 40 in 2012. Clearly, we have failed to learn from the past. However, the road transport and bridges minister claimed that the numbers of accidents and casualties were comparatively lower this year, but admitted that "there were some mistakes and we will take lessons from those." We find that hardly assuring given the unconvincing track record of the transport authorities. The government has failed to introduce tougher legislation to control the chaotic road transport sector and taken little effective action to ensure road safety.

It is high time the government took serious steps to curb road accidents, not just during Eid vacations but at all times. The government should ensure that all vehicles pass the fitness test, that all drivers are qualified to drive and have valid licenses, and that they respect traffic rules. This Eid, the increasing number of motorcycles and three-wheelers on the highways was cited as an emerging problem. These things should be factored into road safety plans moving forward. In any case, the highways must be monitored and patrolled by the police so that accidents can be prevented more effectively.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Plight of rawhide traders

The price of rawhide has fallen sharply causing immense loss to small and seasonal traders during this Eid-ul-Azha. On average, cowhides were sold at Tk 350 to Tk 400 and those of goats were sold at only Tk 25 to Tk 30. Last year, the prices were around Tk 1,000 and Tk 50 respectively. Many small traders alleged that they were not even able to break even.

Rawhide syndicates were responsible for causing the prices to be lower than the margin set by the government, according to the commerce ministry. Seasonal traders are having to bury or leave the rawhides unsold on the streets due to the sharp fall in prices, the valuation of which has amounted to Tk 100 crore.

Hide merchants and tannery owners are at loggerheads, trading blame for the plunge in prices. Presently, considering the plight of the seasonal businessmen, the government has decided to export the rawhides but this move is facing strong opposition from tannery owners.

Whatever the causes are behind the decline in prices, it is quite unexpected and unfortunate for traders at the grassroots level, and the authorities concerned should delve deep into the matter to find out the reasons behind this and address them.

Md Zillur Rahaman, by email

REVOKING ARTICLE 370

Why now?

BLACK, WHITE AND GREY



ALI RIAZ

MORE than a week has passed since Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian constitution have been scrapped by the Narendra Modi-led BJP government. The complete communication lockdown in Kashmir, imposed in the wake of the abrogation, is still in place; curfew is yet to be lifted in some places; leaders are still under house arrest or detained; and thousands of soldiers are deployed on the streets of an already highly militarised zone. Kashmiris are protesting and expressed their dismay at the "betrayal of trust". Article 370 granted special status and limited autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir since 1949, and Article 35A provided the state the authority to define "permanent residents" and grant special rights to permanent residents of J&K, including employment and acquisition of immovable property in the State. The J&K is now bifurcated into two states and has been brought under the control of New Delhi. While Prime Minister Narendra Modi has described the revocation as "unshackling of Kashmiris", Kashmiris are witnessing shackles all around them. The "psychological attachment" of the Kashmiris with India has been severely damaged, perhaps shattered for the foreseeable future. The impact of this will be felt throughout the country and region, and in the years to come.

The legality of the abrogation, especially the process of it, is questionable. It will be tested in the Supreme Court, sooner or later. Changing the requirement of concurrence of the "constituent" assembly to "legislative" assembly, and in the absence of the legislative assembly, using the governor as the proxy, may not be considered legal. Since 1959, at least four times, the courts have said that Article 370 is permanent. The unilateral decision of scrapping the Articles is symptomatic of the authoritarian bent of the Modi government.

The economic rationale for the revocation, that Article 370 was a roadblock to development, does not stand the test of the facts, for there are many other states which perform worse than J&K. In terms of the Human Development Index, 18 states are worse than J&K; in terms of the poverty rate (10.35 percent), it is well below the national average (21.92 percent) and 21 states fare worse. The logic behind singling out restrictions

on land ownership for outsiders in J&K as a reason for "underdevelopment" falls flat if one looks at Himachal Pradesh and Bihar—the former has outperformed the other states in economic and social indicators, despite being hostile to outsiders wanting to acquire land there, while Bihar stands exactly on the opposite end of the continuum.

The BJP has never concealed its plan to scrap Articles 370 and 35A. It promised the abolition in its 2014 election manifesto, with a caveat—that it will "discuss this with all stakeholders." In 2019, the caveat disappeared; it was a plain and simple promise of getting rid of Article 370. Modi and his righthand man Amit Shah have made good on their promise. As reported in the *Hindustan*

never been restricted to only rhetoric when it came to the issue of J&K. After the Pulwama attack, in the name of patriotism, the BJP and its fountainhead Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh have drawn the line in the sand. The bifurcation between the "patriot Indians" and the "enemy within" was done by the Sangh Parivar a long time ago, the physical bifurcation of J&K is only the latest addition. Homogenisation of India, which once took credit in its diversity, and changing the demographic makeup of J&K are not hidden agendas of the BJP. Removal of Article 35A will help achieve both, at once. This is a classic case of "settler-colonial project", akin to Israel's long-term approach towards Palestine. This will send a message to the rest of

comes to an end. A five-judge constitution bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi began the hearing on August 6.

The second factor is that the J&K legislative election is expected to be held in October. Except securing a BJP majority in the legislative assembly, there is no way that the J&K Assembly will consent to the removal of Article 370. Therefore, it became a priority for the Modi government.

The disarray of the opposition, particularly the leaderless and rudderless state of Congress even three months after their defeat, has indeed helped the BJP to take the risk with some confidence. It wanted, and succeeded too, in further fragmenting the opposition. Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Biju Janata Dal (BJD), Telegu Desam Party (TDP), AIADMK and YSR-CP extended their support. Congress itself has faced some dissension within as Jyotiraditya Scindia extended his support to the Centre.

In addition to these domestic factors, external factors, particularly the ongoing negotiations between the Taliban and the United States, being held in Doha, have played a key role in determining the timing. As reported by the *Hindustan Times* on August 6, the potential success of the negotiations and the consequent withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan have made India concerned. It is argued that if the Taliban receive a share of power in Kabul, it will be able to redirect its resources towards other places in the vicinity, particularly in J&K. Indian analysts insist that "the free mujahideen of Afghanistan after the end of the war can be directed to Kashmir with the active help of Pakistan." US President Donald Trump's recent comment that Modi has asked him to mediate on the Kashmir issue, which the Indian government unequivocally denied, is considered by some analysts as a trigger for immediate action. Trump's comment, particularly coming after his meeting with Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, caused concerns among Indian policymakers; most importantly, it was viewed as a step towards internationalisation of the Kashmir issue, contrary to the Indian government's position, irrespective of which party is in power.

Despite these proximate factors, it would do well to bear in mind that the Hindutva ideology and exclusionary hyper-nationalism blended with authoritarianism is at work here. Therefore, J&K is not the last stop in Modi's journey towards implementing the RSS' vision of "new India".

Ali Riaz is a professor at the Department of Politics and Government at Illinois State University (ISU), USA.



PHOTO: AFP

The economic rationale for the revocation of Article 370—that it was a roadblock to development in Jammu and Kashmir—does not stand the test of the facts.

Times on August 6, "preparations for scrapping Article 370 began simultaneously with the drafting of the manifesto for the 2019 general elections." That explains the absence of the consultation provision in the manifesto.

Anyone familiar with the ideological position of the BJP will be able to understand that it is about creating a homogenous Hindu India, the mainstay of the Hindutva creed. The Muslim majority state of J&K with special status is a barrier to this agenda. The attacks on Muslims in the name of cow protection over the past years, promotion of the "Jai Sri Ram" chant, exclusionary citizenship in the garb of NRC, and the revocation of Article 370 are not separate events; instead they are intrinsically connected.

The belligerent-exclusionary ultra-nationalist agenda of the BJP has

India too.

There is no denying that the ideology of Hindutva is the principal driver, but what remains to be asked is: why now? What prompted the timing?

There are both domestic and external factors that are likely to have played roles in determining the timing. The dramatic victory in May has given the BJP and Modi the audacity to make a drastic move before their support among Indian citizens begins to decline. The BJP felt that it should make use of the energy of its base supporters to confront the criticisms, and cash in on the saffron patriotism which came to the fore in the wake of the Pulwama attack and Balakot air strike. The move will further galvanise the support base, which may well be needed as soon as the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid land dispute case in the Supreme Court

A clarion call for education in Rohingya refugee camps



TOMOO HOZUMI

TWO years after hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees started arriving in the Cox's Bazar district of south-eastern Bangladesh, the need for services remains dire. In spite of

huge efforts by humanitarian agencies under the leadership of the government of Bangladesh, substantial gaps exist in health, nutrition, child protection and water, sanitation and hygiene services.

Amid all these pressing needs, one above all others has become a clarion call for action: quality education and skills development.

In any encounter with a refugee—child or adult—conversation quickly turns to the absence of a formal learning system, and the deeply troubling implications for the children and adolescents in the refugee camps.

It is not hard to see why: as things stand, a generation of Rohingya refugees is not being given the chance to develop the essential skills they need to guarantee their long-term future, wherever they eventually settle.

When the huge influx of Rohingya refugees into Cox's Bazar took place in 2017, finding a safe space for children to learn was one of the top priorities for the international agencies leading the response.

In the early months of the crisis, numerous learning centres were quickly constructed. Local Bangladeshis were hired to teach alongside Rohingya volunteers.

Given the enormous constraints, this was a considerable achievement. For many children in the camps, the learning centres were their first experience in a classroom. The reassurance of being in a caring, secure environment helped many on the path to recovery from the traumatic experiences that drove them from Myanmar. It also contributed to high rates of school attendance.

But even in this initial phase, the shortcomings of the informal classes were soon obvious.

Without proper teaching and study materials, teachers had to improvise. Children gained basic numeracy and reading skills in English and Burmese, but not much else. For children and adolescents older than 14, there were no education opportunities available at all.

Fortunately, the situation is changing. The Learning Competency Framework

contribution to this undertaking of our various partners—especially the national NGOs—has been immense.

The feedback has been positive from students, teachers and parents. But there is still much to improve. We now have the task of refining and expanding the learning process, while making it available to all children and adolescents in the refugee camps.

It is an enormous undertaking for sure. While strengthening the quality

This task can only be achieved and taken to scale with the full backing of a wide range of partners including, most critically, the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Having access to local resources such as teachers with the required language skills, learning materials and student assessment tools will be vital to success.

The international community must also play its part, making available the resources needed for such a large



The reassurance of being in a caring, secure environment helped many Rohingya children on the path to recovery from the traumatic experiences that made them flee Myanmar.

PHOTO: INDRANIL MUKHERJEE/AFP

and Approach (LCFA), a structured set of teaching and learning materials, is being progressively introduced with lessons designed for children aged 4 to 14 in English, Mathematics, and Burmese as well as Life Skills (for Levels 1 and 2) and Science (for Levels 3 and 4). The

of learning for younger children, an entire adolescent curriculum needs to be established, offering foundational skills in literacy and numeracy alongside more practical vocational skills that can translate into opportunities in entrepreneurship.

humanitarian undertaking.

The stakes are high, and time is against us. A generation of children is growing older day by day, and we must make sure they do not lose hope in their futures. We cannot afford to fail them.

Tomoo Hozumi is UNICEF Representative, Bangladesh.