

## Escalation of tension between the US and Iran undesirable

**US must show maximum restraint in its approach towards Iran**

THE narratives that have emerged from the United States in the aftermath of the recent attacks on Saudi Aramco, Saudi Arabia's state petroleum and natural gas company, are alarming. While US President Donald Trump has said on Twitter that they are "locked and loaded" and awaiting confirmation of who had exactly attacked the Saudi Aramco, the Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has explicitly blamed Iran for carrying out the drone strikes, saying Iran "has now launched an unprecedented attack on the world's energy supply"; this despite Yemen's Houthi rebels officially claiming the attacks. Although Pompeo claimed that "there is no evidence the attacks came from Yemen," he could not substantiate it with any evidence.

Tensions escalated between Iran and the US after the latter unilaterally and arbitrarily pulled out of the Iran Nuclear Deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which the country had signed with the P5+1 countries after years of careful negotiations to limit Iran's nuclear activities. Following the pull-out, the US adopted the "maximum pressure" strategy to force Iran's hands to negotiate a new deal with the US by slapping crippling economic sanctions on the country. And the US pressure did not just end there. The US has blamed Iran for the attacks on two oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman and was against the release of the Iranian oil tanker Grace 1 (renamed to Adrian Darya 1) that was seized by British Royal Marine commandos off Gibraltar on July 4.

The repeated escalation of tensions between the US and Iran is a matter of concern for the world community due to its potential ramifications for everyone. A conflict between the two can destabilise the Middle East and plunge the already disturbed region into chaos, with the effects echoing around the globe. The US should be more measured with its words and must substantiate any claims it makes against Iran with concrete evidence. Both sides must exercise restraint and work together to address the issues between them through peaceful and diplomatic means.

## A landfill without environmental clearance

**Dhaka needs a sustainable waste management system**

IT is unfortunate that a landfill in Aminbazar on the outskirts of Dhaka, run by Dhaka North City Corporation, does not have any environmental clearance. A photo published in *The Daily Star* on September 16 showed how indiscriminate dumping of all types of waste, including plastic materials and polythene, in the 50-acre waste station has been polluting the environment and the two nearby rivers—Buriganga and Turag. It is simply not understandable why the Dhaka North City Corporation would run a waste station without the permission of the relevant authorities.

Over the years, heaps of garbage have been piled up in the landfill, spilling over into the adjacent areas and the waterbodies, eventually polluting Turag and Buriganga. Needless to say, the situation will worsen further if a proper waste management system is not put in place. What is most alarming is the amount of plastic materials and polythene that have been dumped there. Although Bangladesh was the first country in the world to impose a ban on using polythene in 2002, the ban was never enforced, resulting in its indiscriminate use. Degradation of the environment due to the increasing amount of plastic waste and polythene has been a major issue in the country since most of these plastic materials are not biodegradable.

According to the Earth Day Network of USA (2018), Bangladesh is the 10th most plastic polluting country in the world. Bangladesh generates around 381.36 tonnes of plastic waste every day while around 249.86 tonnes go to landfills. Reportedly, around three lakh tonnes of plastic waste are dumped into water bodies and open places each year. Such plastic debris has serious negative impacts on our marine resources, particularly fisheries. The death of a sperm whale in Indonesia last year, which had nearly six kilograms of plastic wastes in its stomach, is a case we should take note of.

While we commend the parliamentary committee for taking note of the situation in the Aminbazar landfill and directing the authorities to take action against the DNCC, we also think it is time the government put a sustainable waste management system in place. Initiatives should be taken by the government and non-government institutions to promote environment-friendly alternatives of plastics and for proper recycling of plastic goods.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### No Bangladeshi universities among world's top 1,000

It is unfortunate that not a single Bangladeshi university could make it to the 1,000 universities in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2020. Surprisingly, even Dhaka University, the country's premier educational institution, was not among the best 1,000, which included 36 Indian universities. Seven universities from Pakistan were among the best 1,000, which also included one from Sri Lanka.

This sheds light on the miserable state of our education sector, which needs immediate attention of the concerned authorities. UGC must take immediate steps to improve the quality of our tertiary education sector. The future of our country depends on the kind of education we impart to our students; we cannot take it lightly.

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TASNEEM TAYEB

THE recent surge in teen gang violence has become a major concern for the citizens. The murder of 17-year-old Mohsin Ali in the capital's Mohammadpur area on September

4, 2019 had haunting echoes of the gruesome killing of Adnan Kabir (14) in 2017—which brought into limelight the recent rise in Dhaka's teen gang violence—and was far too menacing to pass quietly below the radar. The Dhaka police soon got down to work and reported arresting hundreds of teen gang members from various parts of the capital, in a bid to clamp down on the juvenile delinquents. The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Asaduzzaman Miah has also vowed to uproot teen gang culture from the capital. But the question remains, how much can the law enforcement do to eliminate this problem by arresting teenagers involved in criminal activities?

The problem of teen gang violence is as much a social issue as it is a personal one. According to child psychologist Tarana Anis, there are many facets to the problem of juvenile delinquency. One of the root causes of this problem is our evolution as a society. With time we have evolved as a society that stresses on privacy and independence; in the process, our family structures have transformed into nuclear units that allow individuals more privacy and space. With both parents working, the children are often left alone at home with very little adult supervision.

Moreover, with economic growth and improved standard of living, the parents can afford to buy their children gadgets that keep them preoccupied for hours. And with the unrestrained access to the internet, these children are exposed to a variety of contents, so much so that they are left confused as to what to consume and to what extent, often leaving them to choose unsuitable content.

The working parents, on the other hand, are not able to spend much quality time with their children, as a result of which they are often left in the dark about what the children are doing in their spare time. In addition, the lack of quality time with parents often prompts these children to seek love, attention and recognition outside the house. This in part explains their proclivity to be involved with teen gangs.

DWIJEN MALICK and ZAKIR HOSSAIN

A UN report (2018) has suggested that hunger is rising globally with unruly climate: over 821 million people in the world were undernourished in 2017. In Bangladesh, the government with many development partners, NGOs and the communities are making relentless efforts to reduce extreme poverty. There has been much progress in poverty reduction in the country in the recent years, but the impacts of climate change are aggravating poverty in some regions. However, it has been observed that many people in the Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions are being threatened by extreme poverty as a result of climatic events, like flooding and river erosion in the north-western region of Bangladesh. A recent survey of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) has identified Kurigram as the most poverty stricken district in the country, with the highest poverty ratio lingering as an outcome of the negative effects of climatic events.

*The farmers have informed that climate hazards are causing huge loss and damage to agriculture. The farmers in Rajshahi and Dinajpur cannot plant crops in time due to drought.*

The German NETZ and Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) have undertaken a participatory and multi-disciplinary research to understand and document the climate change trends in the region and the associated impacts of climate change on livelihoods and food security of the poor and indigenous

# Juvenile delinquency: No child's play

Tarana Anis further suggested that youth crime or behaviour is the result of subconscious mental instability and turmoil. Children who have been abused or maltreated may experience subconscious feelings of resentment, fear and hatred. If this internal conflict is not addressed, it can result in deviant behaviour. The children may regress to a state in which they become "id dominant", where they lose self-control and resort to any means to satisfy their impulses.

According to Tarana Anis, the predators—in this case, "boro bhai's" or gang leaders—manipulate the psychological vulnerability of these children and lure them into the world of drugs and crime with the promise of power and recognition. The negative motivations by the predators fill up the void created by lack of family bonding and cultural values, and the children, in the absence of role models in their

children.

According to former Inspector General of Police, AKM Shahidul Haque, the lack of effective youth clubs is also a key reason why the teen gang culture is on the rise. In the light of his experience with law enforcement over the last few decades, the former IGP said that violent crimes committed by the juveniles are often driven by impulse, where these children do not consider the consequences before committing a crime.

AKM Shahidul Haque views the ongoing drive by the law enforcement agencies to arrest these teen gang members as a stop-gap measure; he suggested reviving the youth club culture by forming such clubs in every locality with registration from the Ministry of Social Welfare, where the community, the parents and the local administration would jointly take the responsibility of running the clubs and encourage the youth to participate in sports, cultural

person who has a family, a stable job and is proactively involved with the society is less likely to commit a crime, and vice versa.

According to Dr Ziaur Rahman, this might explain the alarming increase in teen gang violence. This also echoes the thoughts of child psychologist Tarana Anis and former IGP AKM Shahidul Haque, both of whom expressed their concern about the thinning family and social bonds as contributing factors to the rise in juvenile delinquency.

Dr Ziaur Rahman suggests that in order to address the surging problem of juvenile delinquency, we need to strengthen our juvenile centres. According to Dr Rahman, the handful of Child Development Centres (CDC) that we have in the country are not equipped to create a conducive environment for the development of these lost children. The lack of sufficient facilities in the existing CDCs have also been reported in the media in the past. Dr Rahman further suggested that the authorities should modernise the existing CDCs in order to make them more effective.

The children taken to a CDC should not be labelled "criminals" since, according to the labelling theory, "labelling and treating someone as criminally deviant can foster deviant behaviour." Instead, these children should be encouraged to leave their past behind and start anew; these children should be given new hope. According to Tarana Anis, the parents of these children must create a friendly environment at home and encourage them to unburden their hearts. The families, especially parents, should listen to their children and allow them to express their innermost thoughts, in order to help them process their fears and insecurities.

Juvenile delinquency is everyone's problem; it's the society's problem, and the society as a unit must now come forward to address this. These young victims of circumstances, if not motivated to shun their past and return to mainstream social life, risk becoming dangerous criminals in the future.

All things considered, I think the root of the problem lies somewhere in the middle of all these arguments. But this much is certain: ostracising them, excluding them, labelling them or treating them as "others" cannot be a part of the solution. We all need to fix our broken windows; and although this alone is not the only way to fix the social problem we are experiencing, we can let this be the spark it takes to light the fire.

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parents, often conform to the roles they are encouraged to play by the gang leaders, especially since the roles are strongly stereotyped as power yielding.

These children often fall victim to deindividuation, where they lose their individual identity and become immersed in the norms of the gangs they become part of. Negative social forces, peer pressure and the negative environmental factors discussed above combine to encourage these kids to internalise the roles they have been assigned to by their gang leaders.

In addition to these factors, financial hardships, lack of access to education and social services, exposure to violence, and problems related to assimilation—especially for those who have migrated to Dhaka from rural areas—with the locals also play a major role in encouraging delinquency among the juveniles and

pursuits and volunteer activities. Reviving the youth club can be our way of fixing the broken windows—visible signs of small crimes and anti-social behaviour that can contribute to the prevention of bigger crimes—to reduce and, if possible, eliminate juvenile crimes.

While discussing the problem of juvenile delinquency, Dr Md Ziaur Rahman, professor and chairperson of the Department of Criminology, University of Dhaka, referred to the American sociologist Travis Hirschi's idea of the "Bonds of Attachment" that suggests a person gets involved in criminal activities when their attachment to society is weakened. According to Hirschi, there are four types of social bonds that bind us together: Attachment, Involvement, Commitment and Belief. Whenever this bond is weakened, people become more prone to committing crimes, meaning a

# Climate change, food security and our vulnerability



Climate hazards are causing huge damage to agriculture in the char areas.

communities.

### Long term trends and impacts of climate change

The northwestern region is suffering from both climate variability (temperature rise, change in precipitation and changes in seasonal patterns) as well as climatic extremes including frequent flood and river bank erosion, heat stress and drought, erratic rainfall, thunderstorm, cold wave and fog. The study conducted a long-term trend analysis of climate data and has suggested that the average rise of temperature in the northwestern region would be 1.3°C and 2.6°C for the years 2030 and 2070, respectively. Winter precipitation is projected to decrease at a higher rate in 2030, while in 2075 there would not be any appreciable rainfall in winter.

On the other hand, monsoon precipitation would increase at a rate of 12 percent and 27 percent for the two projection years, respectively. This means there would be severe drought in summer and more devastating floods in monsoon in the region. Recent floods in quick succession make the onset of climate induced shocks visible. The increasing

trends of floods and river bank erosion in northern Bangladesh are affecting agriculture, food security and livelihood of the millions living in the region.

The participatory research has identified several kinds of climate change stresses and natural disasters in the region. The community people are already experiencing increasing drought and heat stresses, flood and river bank erosion, drawdown of under-ground water, cold wave and fog, Nor'wester and thunderstorm and pest attack.

The participants in the Rajshahi region have identified drought and heat stress as the most harmful effects of climate change followed by falling ground water levels and cold waves. The participants in Dinajpur also identified drought, heat stress and declining ground water levels as major climate disasters, along with cold wave, Nor'wester and flood; while the participants in Rangpur, Kurigram and Gaibandha have identified flood and erosion as the most devastating natural disasters, which have been intensified by climate change in the recent years.

**Climate change, livelihood and our growing problems**

Temperature rise, drought, frequent floods and river bank erosion are affecting resources, infrastructures and livelihoods of the people every year. Subsistence agriculture, share cropping, home garden and vegetable growing were identified as the most affected and vulnerable sectors, which are critically important for nutrition and income of the poor, indigenous communities and women. Crop cultivation, vegetable and home gardening have been highly affected by drought in Rajshahi and Dinajpur.

Frequent floods and river erosion have a more significant impact on key livelihood sectors including agriculture, livestock, poultry, food security, water, sanitation and health in the Rangpur region, compared to Rajshahi and Dinajpur. Flood also affects the livelihoods of the poor and the regional infrastructures including roads and communication systems, which again limit the livelihood activities of the poor, women and marginalised people.

The farmers have informed that climate hazards are causing huge loss and damage to agriculture. The farmers in Rajshahi and Dinajpur, cannot plant crops in time due to drought conditions and low soil moisture in dry season and have to wait for rain for months. In the villages studied under the survey, the growth and yield of wheat, maize, vegetable and fruits have been affected by drought and low rainfall. Pest attack has been reported as common in the region. Flood damaged standing crops including paddy and vegetables in the charland and flood plains of Rangpur and Dinajpur.

The community also informed that wage earning is another problem in the region. The working potential of the poor is reduced due to heat stress, severe cold and fog. The poor do not get much work in charland in Rangpur region and the male members of the poor families have to migrate to the cities and other districts to earn wages. The women, children and the elderly suffer the most due to food and social insecurity in charland during and after flood. These people desperately need social safety net and disaster risk reduction support from the government and development partners.

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