

‘Modern-day lynching’ must stop

Floyd’s brother tells US Congress

REUTERS, Washington

George Floyd’s younger brother took his grief to the US Congress on Wednesday with an impassioned plea that lawmakers not let his brother’s death be in vain, lamenting that he “didn’t deserve to die over \$20” in a what he called a lynching.

The House of Representatives Judiciary Committee held the first congressional hearing to examine racial injustice and police brutality following George Floyd’s May 25 death after a Minneapolis policeman knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes.

“They lynched my brother. That was a modern-day lynching in broad daylight,” Philonise Floyd, 42, of Missouri City, Texas, near Houston, told the committee, his voice breaking with emotion.

The Democratic-led House is moving forward with sweeping reform legislation that could come to a vote by July 4, while Senate Republicans are crafting a rival plan.

George Floyd, 46, was unarmed when taken into custody outside a market where an employee had reported that a man matching his description tried to pay for cigarettes with a counterfeit bill.

“George wasn’t hurting anyone that day. He didn’t deserve to die over \$20. I’m asking you, is that what a black man’s worth? \$20? This is 2020. Enough is enough,” his brother said. “It is on you to make sure his death is not in vain.”

“I’m here to ask you to make it stop. Stop the pain,” Philonise Floyd testified. “George called for help and he was ignored. Please listen to the call I’m making to you now, to the calls of our family and the calls ringing on the streets of all the world.”



The statue of Edward Colston, a colonial-era slave trader, being retrieved from the harbour in Bristol, southwest England yesterday after it was toppled by anti-racism protesters last weekend; a beheaded statue of Christopher Columbus is seen in Boston, Massachusetts; and a statue of Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of the Scout movement and who supported slavery, is pictured on the promenade in Bournemouth, southern England, yesterday, after the council said it would remove the statue.



PHOTO: AFP

They have ‘blood on their hands’

Colonizers’, slavers’ statues toppled, vandalised in US, UK amid anti-racism protests

AGENCIES

Statues of Christopher Columbus from Boston to Miami have been beheaded and vandalized as calls to remove sculptures commemorating colonizers and slavers sweep America on the back of anti-racism protests sparked by the death of George Floyd.

Italian explorer Columbus, long hailed by school textbooks as the so-called discoverer of “The New World,” is considered by many to have spurred years of genocide against indigenous groups.

A statue of the navigator standing on a prominent plinth in central Boston was beheaded overnight, police said Wednesday.

Almost 2,400 kilometers away in Florida, another memorial at a waterfront park in downtown Miami was defaced, with red paint sprayed on its hands alongside messages that read “Our streets,” “Black Lives Matter” and “George Floyd.”

“That man literally has blood on his hands. Us putting the fist on his chest and the blood on his hands is symbolic,” one protester told the Miami Herald.

And in Minnesota -- where Floyd died in police custody on May 25 -- protesters on Wednesday tied ropes around the neck of a Columbus statue outside the state Capitol and hauled it down to cheers and applause, images from CBS affiliate WCCO showed.

Earlier in the week in Virginia, demonstrators used ropes to pull down the eight-foot (2.44-meter) statue

Columbus statues vandalized from Boston to Miami

Statue of scout founder Baden-Powell to be taken down in Britain

Trump nixes idea of renaming US bases honoring Confederate heroes

Australian PM calls for racism protesters to be charged



and then dumped it in a nearby lake, the Richmond Times-Dispatch said.

The wave of attacks comes as pressure builds in the United States to rid the country of monuments associated with racism following massive demonstrations over the killing of Floyd by a white police officer in Minneapolis last month.

Statues of Columbus -- regularly denounced in a similar way to Civil War generals of the pro-slavery south -- have been controversial for years in parts of the US, and many have been vandalized in the past.

A jogger running past the fallen Boston statue Wednesday said she approved of the decapitation.

“Just like black people in this country, indigenous people have also been wronged. I think this movement

is pretty powerful and this is very symbolic,” she said. Dozens of American cities have over the years replaced “Columbus Day” in October -- which became a federal holiday in 1937 -- with a day of tribute to indigenous peoples.

The attacks on Columbus and Confederate memorials follow a similar incident in Bristol, England, on Sunday when demonstrators toppled a statue of a 17th Century slave trader Edward Colston and dumped it in a harbor during anti-racism protests.

Yesterday, a local authority in southern England said it would remove a statue of Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the worldwide scouting movement.

Baden-Powell is widely hailed for setting up the scout movement which boasts 54 million members worldwide. In a poll in 2007, he was voted the 13th most influential person in the United Kingdom in the 20th century. But critics say he held racist views and was a supporter of Adolf Hitler and fascism.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump said Wednesday that US military bases honoring Civil War Confederate leaders will not be renamed, pushing back on pressure to rid public places of monuments glorifying the once pro-slavery South.

Ten bases honoring generals from the secessionist South, which lost the Civil War and its struggle to preserve slavery, are in the spotlight.

Man makes

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Since then, he continued posting credible articles on the Facebook page.

In a report published on Monday, The Straits Times lauded Shipon’s inspiring act.

Shipon is one of the several migrant workers who have managed to help his fellows virtually, at a time when their movement has been restricted to limit virus transmission, the report read.

A father of two, Shipon went to Singapore after his honours final-year exams under the National University in 2009.

He said at his workplace, migrant workers like him get lunch breaks for an hour.

“At that time when everyone takes rest, I spend time sorting out main news articles which I could post on my page. After the day’s work, I start translating those from 7:00pm to 10:00pm,” he added.

Shipon said sometimes he also posts his own articles and awareness video messages.

He said after the “second wave” of coronavirus outbreak hit Singapore in late March, he and many other migrants, who are involved in essential services, were shifted to the government-arranged accommodation

from their dormitories.

As a safety coordinator, Shipon has to deal with many workers each day, which gives him the opportunity to know their sufferings.

This prompted him to create the Facebook page. He has been running the page for the last five to six years.

Initially, he would share and post articles that he thought might inspire migrants.

Shipon said as the page got several thousand followers, he started posting articles on migrant workers’ successes.

He ended up posting over 140 such articles, many published on national dailies in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, The Straits Times report also has an interview of another Bangladeshi, Fazley Elahi Rubel, 30, who has been in Singapore for 11 years.

According to the report, Rubel started the annual “Migrant Cultural Show” in 2018 in Singapore, bringing together migrant workers from India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

This year, he will organise the show virtually on June 21 due to the coronavirus pandemic, it said.

India denies visas to US panel on religious freedom

AGENCIES

India has turned down a travel request for members of a US government panel seeking to review its religious

freedom, saying foreign agencies had no standing to assess the constitutional rights of citizens.

The visa snub to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) on Wednesday came as the US Congress released its own religious freedom report while a top Trump administration official said he was “very concerned” about the South Asian country’s situation.

India’s Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said the government firmly repudiated the surveys of the USCIRF, which had little knowledge of the rights of Indian citizens, describing it as biased and prejudiced.



Jaishankar

‘Don’t call me Kalar’

BLM-inspired message reaches Myanmar

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar activists inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement have launched their own anti-racism campaign in a country where many Muslims and people of Indian heritage are made to feel like outsiders.

Buddhist-majority Myanmar officially boasts a patchwork of 135 ethnic groups, but many have felt subjugated by the dominant Bamar.

The “Don’t Call Me Kalar” campaign launched on Facebook aims to stymie the use of a term that historically refers to people from the Indian subcontinent, but today is often intended as a slur.

It has helped whip-up hatred against the Rohingya, a long-persecuted Muslim minority barred from citizenship and forced out in droves by the military.

But the term is also employed against supposedly accepted minorities, particularly those with darker skin.

Zay Linn Mon and his friends started the campaign on Facebook after seeing the Black Lives Matter protests reverberate globally following the killing of an unarmed black man in the US.



The 24-year-old turban-wearing Sikh describes how online trolls have used the word -- synonymous with “interlopers” or “invaders” -- against him, saying he does not belong in Myanmar.

“The problem is privileged people don’t see this as an issue,” he explains, adding that parents often threaten misbehaving children saying that “big kalar” will come for them.

Some supporters have posted “I don’t call someone Kalar” across their profile pictures.

The campaign has also attracted a wave of largely indignant reaction, with thousands of comments, many laden with obscenities against the activists.

“What should we call the Kalar if we don’t use the word Kalar?” challenged Nay Lin, while another Facebook user asked if they want “what is happening in the US” to happen in Myanmar.

Activist Zay Linn Mon knows the word will not disappear overnight, but says the awareness campaign is a start.

“When we say we don’t like it, respect that and don’t use it.”

NEWSIN

brief

Malaysia pulls out of hajj pilgrimage

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia yesterday pulled out of the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Makkah over coronavirus fears days after neighbouring Indonesia, the world’s biggest Muslim-majority nation, also withdrew. Millions travel from around the world to Saudi Arabia every year to perform the hajj, a ritual that every Muslim must do once in their lives if able. Saudi Arabia is yet to announce a decision on whether the pilgrimage will be held this year.

OIC slams Israeli on annexation plan

AFP, Riyadh

Israel’s plans to annex parts of the occupied West Bank mark a “serious escalation” that threatens the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation has said. Following a virtual meeting of OIC foreign ministers, the pan-Islamic body said it “warns against the dangerous intention of Israel”. Israel intends to annex West Bank settlements and the Jordan Valley, as proposed by US President Donald Trump, with initial steps slated to begin from July 1.

Turkey snubs Egypt’s Libya peace initiative

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey yesterday rejected an Egyptian peace initiative in Libya after a series of military victories by forces loyal to Tripoli against strongman Khalifa Haftar and said it favoured a binding ceasefire under UN auspices. Egypt and United Arab Emirates support Haftar against the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) which is backed by Turkey.

Extraordinary times

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effectiveness of various useful policy initiatives of the government.

The convention of preparing government’s income-expenditure balance based on numbers provided by the Revised Budget has given us a set of inflated benchmarks (2019-20) and unusual target figures for 2020-21. This particularly true for the revenue collection amount which has to be one and a half times more than the actual collection in 2019-20. This suggests that the revealed budget deficit may very well be much more than the projected 6 percent of the GDP, if the full public expenditure outlay has to hold.

The proposed sources of financing of the fiscal deficit is also worrying. About 45 per cent of this deficit will be financed through borrowing from a fragile banking sector and may crowd out the ailing private sector.

The budget needs to be read along with the (incomplete) closing assessment of the Seventh Five Year Plan (2015-20), which shows that tax-GDP ratio is stuck at 2010 level and the public expenditure ratio has improved marginally. But the most miserable situation had been in the area of private investment.

The issue of private investment becomes quite vexing when we note that

the medium-term macro-framework mentions that the estimated share of domestic private investment in GDP in the outgoing year is only 12.7 per cent, which will be more than double (25.3 per cent of GDP) in 2020-21! One wonders whether there is an estimation error or this exposes the dire state of private investment. Same concern may be raised regarding the GDP growth projection of 8.2 per cent for the next year.

The pandemic related measures mentioned in the budget speech are essentially an extension of the already existing schemes of the government and have locked-in the stimulus packages announced earlier. Given the existing rigidities in revenue and development expenditure structures, the allocative priorities changed only at the margin. The reform measures reiterated are run of the mill.

I am afraid that the budget has shied away from doing a hard introspection and scoping of the evolving landscape. This has deprived it from identifying innovative sources of finance, imaginative spending programme and taking a “whole of society” approach in dealing with the scourge of COVID19. Regrettably, it ended up being an ordinary budget in an extraordinary time.

Some are more equal to govt

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Kamal deserved big kudos for protecting public employees financially four months into the crisis. Proper medicare is understood to be off the list under this circumstance and with this sorry health system; but he certainly did more than he could have to ensure financial security for 14 lakh government employees (Tk 5,125cr in salaries and benefits a month) and over 6.5 lakh pensioners (Tk 1,917cr a month).

No austerity was called into practice. Rather, he was found to be ever obliging to the government’s additional financial response to contagion compensation for public employees: up to Tk 50 lakh for death and up to Tk 10 lakh for infection. The police, the other frontline heroes beside medicare staff in our fight against the contagion, would get an additional compensation up to Tk 15 lakh from the fund of IGP (Inspector General of Police).

We all are grateful to the services of our frontline warriors-- the doctors, nurses and police; and the highest possible compensation is what a good government must make available to them. Our government is doing it, but only for those who serve the government.

25 doctors are among over 1,000 dead in coronavirus disease so far. Of

the 25, eight doctors got themselves infected and met the death while treating patients at private hospitals. Yet, they weren’t considered for compensation, just because they served the people from the other side of the line of divide.

There are another group of front-liners who remained in the background of all the news they generated for the nation, exposing themselves daily to pandemic risks. They kept the people and the government informed, but went on to leave their families in an uncertain future. Seven journalists, four due to coronavirus disease and three with symptoms, died so far and 281 ended up with infection. No government compensation reached their families; and payment of overdue salaries wasn’t made by some of their employers even after their deaths. Some respite, however, came from an unexpected source, with the chief of police offering Tk one lakh for each of the families from his personal fund.

The economy is reeling from the shockwaves of the pandemic, which is going to change the landscape of businesses and job opportunities for good. How the businesses would restart and recover from the loss is a billion-dollar question. So, bonus-cut, salary-cut, privilege-cut and job-cut are expected to be the issues in

Bangladesh, at least for a year or two.

But the worries and uncertainties to grapple with are only for the 75 lakh people who are serving on the other side of the divide, in the private sector. It should have been a huge obligation for the government, the finance minister to be precise, to take extra care of the 22 lakh tax-payers, of whom 86 percent is from the private sector.

Isn’t it very unfair of the government to shield the financial security of only the public employees, of whom only 3 lakh are tax-payers. But those who pay tax, working in the private sector or running private businesses, are left in a quagmire. They’re the ones who would face the job-cut, salary-cut or go out of the businesses.

No clear outline could be made of the budget speech and documents about Kamal’s tab on the employment protection or creation, incentive or support for private sector employers to retain jobs and unemployment benefits. Would not these tax-payers get any COVID-19 respite from the government? If the tax-payers don’t get protection in their crisis, why would they pay the tax at the first place?

A crisis like this demanded an out-of-the-box, holistic policy from Kamal. And, it wasn’t delivered, at least not yet.