

## What do we teach our children?

Religiosity should not be confused with bigotry

THE World Federation of Teachers' Unions meet in Dhaka on Wednesday revealed some stunning facts that should concern us deeply. A study shows that since Independence while our primary schools have doubled, the religious schools known as Madrasas have grown eight times. In terms of enrolment the growth of the latter has been 13 times. The sheer magnitude of growth of religious schools clearly indicate the volume of students getting a certain type of education that does not make them competitive for jobs in the modern world, especially for a country that aspires toward fast industrialisation. In addition, there are unknown number of religious schools that are set up, funded and managed privately. These schools are not registered and do not give out any recognised certificate by any established authority. Yet they exist and operate because often they are the only so-called educational institutions in a particular remote area.

Religious education can have a very positive impact on the growth of a child. They can add, and often do, an ethical dimension to education as a whole if imparted in the right spirit. However, serious questions can and needs to be raised as to what is being taught in our Madrasas. In the recent times many of the science subjects have been added to the curriculum of the more established and government supervised Madrasas. But this cannot be said of the vast number of them outside the official ambit. Here the main emphasis is not on education as much as it is on indoctrination. There is a vast difference between gathering knowledge about our religion, learning the true meaning of our faith, developing skills to interpret and understand the numerous facets of the Divine message on the one hand and becoming a bigot on the other. The crucial difference being openness to knowledge and learning and being told that we already know everything there is to know and all that is left is to 'parrot' the available texts.

There is an urgent need to seriously examine what is being taught in our Madrasas, not to stop them or curtail their operation but to help them become the source of a competitive labour force in today's world.

## Win over Sri Lanka

Congratulations to our cricketers

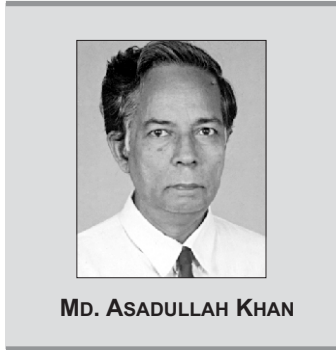
THE victory of the Bangladesh cricket team over one time world champion Sri Lanka is a matter of pride for all of us. In the modern day list of international sporting events cricket occupies a special place. This is the most significant victory in Bangladesh's cricketing history after it defeated Australia, the world's number one team. However, as we celebrate the victory it is also important to remember that, since Bangladesh's entry into international cricket it has to its record a total of 11 victories out of a total of 117 games. Therefore as much as this is an occasion for rejoicing it is also time for stocktaking and reviewing our overall performance. Let this victory be the guiding spirit for future victories, after all nothing succeeds better than success. It is also time to reflect on our losses so that the weaknesses could be identified and removed.

Cricket is a game that requires inputs not only from the players but also proactive support from the relevant authorities. If we are to become a cricketing nation of some consequence this is the time that we should revamp the entire management aspects of the game. We should further streamline the team selection process including overall transparency of operations of the Board responsible for administering and the management of our national team.

In today's world, in order for a game or a sport event to reach a level capable of competing with other teams of the world professionally, it must have adequate support of the State and that support should be free from any bureaucratic or partisan influence. At the same time sufficient authority should be vested with the Manager and the Coach including the selectors to freely and impartially perform their respective duties with utmost sincerity. Arrangements should be made for adequate and intensive training facilities both within the country and abroad, to acquire both physical and mental sturdiness. Sufficient inputs should be provided so that our players have more exposure playing international games overseas.

Bangladesh has but few windows of excellence, cricket certainly has a high potential of being an addition to that list.

Wish our boys and all others involved the best of luck.



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

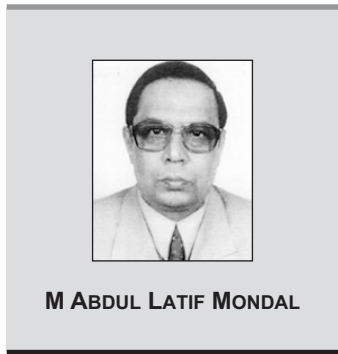
WHEN in the morning of February 4 last, newspapers in the city ran the news of the gruesome killing of Dr. S. Taher Ahmed, a professor in the Geology and Mining department of the Rajshahi University, people in the country went numb with horror and shock. Even in a country where disasters strike so frequently and life is so easily extinguished, there was a feeling of revulsion about the murder of a senior professor killed in his own house in the university campus. To kill a defenseless teacher by persons seemingly belonging to his noble profession of teaching, more so as affectionate colleagues a moment before, is simply barbaric.

Professor S. Taher Ahmed a progressive and liberal minded teacher left behind a chequered career of fighting against illegal activities in the university administration including recently recruitment of 544 employees on political consideration.

Dr. Taher Ahmed, 59, an advisory council member of the Jatiyatabadi Teachers' Forum was to retire next year and, as sources indicated, of late he had dissociated himself from teachers politics in disgust at its present-day deteriorating standard. Rajshahi University sources indicated that as one of the two expert level members, Dr. Taher was to attend a planning committee meeting on Thursday, the day after he returned to Rajshahi to select teachers for promotion or recruitment. Paradoxically, the case of Dr. Mia Mohiuddin, an Associate Professor of the geology department, rejected twice earlier on grounds of incompetence and low-level international publications was to be considered again in this meeting. The bizarre connection of the motive behind this killing, as sources in the Rajshahi University indicate, starts from here.

The grisly killing apparently carried out by some so-called educated persons, greedy for status in the highest citadel of learning, symbol-

# What else shall be discussed in parliament?



M ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

IN the meeting of the treasury bench-dominated Business Advisory Committee (BAC) held on February 16 under the chairmanship of the speaker Jamiruddin Sircar, none of the AL's proposals on matters of urgent public importance was included in the agenda for discussion in parliament due to the stiff resistance from the ruling BNP members. The media reports suggest that the opposition proposals related to issues like serial bomb blasts, price spiral of essentials, fuel, power and fertiliser crises, mass arrest, the Kansat carnage, corruption, law and order situation and murder of a Rajshahi University professor.

The main opposition AL members disagreed with the ruling BNP members' contention that "usually no general discussion is held in parliament during discussion on the thanks-giving motion on the president's speech." The AL members said that they had demanded discussion on these issues of urgent public importance under rules 62, 68 and 147 of the rules of procedure (ROP) of parliament and the ruling party members rejected their proposals violating the ROP. Following the rejection of the AL proposals by the ruling BNP members in the committee, the Speaker would dispose notices of the opposition on those issues in the house.

Now, let us see what do the rules 62, 68 and 147 of the ROP say? Rule 62 read with rule 61 says that a motion for an adjournment of the business of the house for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of recent and urgent public importance may be made with the consent of the speaker. Such a motion shall be preceded by a notice submitted by the member concerned to the secretary to parliament who shall bring the notice to the knowledge of the speaker and the minister concerned. Rule 63 imposes certain restrictions on the right to make an adjournment motion, which, among others, include: (i) no adjournment motion shall be moved on any

day fixed for general discussion of the budget; (ii) the motion shall be restricted to a specific matter of recent occurrence; (iii) the motion shall not relate to matters which can only be remedied by legislation; (iv) the motion shall not raise a discussion on a matter pending before any statutory tribunal or statutory authority performing any judicial or quasi-judicial functions or any commission or court of inquiry appointed to enquire into, or investigate any matter; (v) the motion shall not deal with any matter which is under adjudication by a court of law; (vi) the motion shall not contain a reflection on the conduct of the presi-

dent or of a judge of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh.

The ROP empower the speaker to decide the admissibility of the motion.

Rule 68 says that any member desirous of raising discussion on matter of urgent public importance may submit notice to the secretary to parliament. The speaker, under rule 69 of the ROP, can decide admissibility of such a notice.

Rule 147 read with rule 146 and 148 of ROP provides that a member desirous of raising discussion on a matter of public interest may submit notice to the secretary to parliament subject to certain conditions which, among others, are: (i) the motion shall raise one definite issue; (ii) it shall be restricted to a matter of recent occurrence; (iii) it shall not relate to any matter which is under adjudication by a court of law.

The speaker is empowered by the ROP to decide the admissibility of such a motion.

Rule 35 of the ROP provides that other business of a formal character may be transacted on a day before the house commences or continues discussion on the president's address.

The proposals submitted by the AL are of urgent public importance and in consonance with the ROP. If not all, the following proposals should be cleared for discussion in the house following the prescribed procedure in the on-going session even if the tenure of the session is required to be extended.

### Power crisis

There are certain sectors of the economy that are known as "engines of growth." Power is such a sector. But there is a big gap between the demand and supply of electricity. The Daily Star carried a front-page report on February 20 which showed a gap of 825 MW between generation and demand in the evening of February 19. According to Power Development Board (PDB) source, the country will experience the highest-ever amount of power shortages in the coming summer and the extent of load shedding may cross the limit of 1,500 MW. Power crisis has

country, particularly in the northern and southern districts, have posed a very serious threat to achieve the target of boro cultivation. Available information suggests that in the northern districts, the main boro growing area, boro crops are wilting fast while thousands of hectares of land remain uncultivated due to lack of irrigation caused by the on-going fuel and power crises. Farmers are putting barricades on the roads and laying siege to the offices of the deputy commissioners (DCs) and different local government offices for fertiliser and diesel. The officials of the department of agricultural extension

affairs, the transportation problem created "the artificial crisis" of fertiliser. The government can explain what measures it has taken to ensure availability of fertiliser and diesel in sufficient quantity at the farmers' level. Mere formation of a central committee under a deputy minister to monitor the marketing of fertiliser and fuel will hardly have any impact unless availability of enough fertiliser and diesel is ensured and the distribution system is freed from political bias. A motion in the house will further give the government an opportunity to tell the people through the house why it cannot keep the oil prices down. The

burning issues. Further, it is not fair to discuss these urgent matters of public importance in the thanks-giving motion on president's speech.

### Corruption

Corruption is pervasive in every sphere of our national life. It has badly affected the rate of our economic growth and increased the gap of distribution of wealth in the society making rich people richer and poor people poorer. Bangladesh's ranking as the most corrupt country in the corruption perception index (CPI) of Transparency International for five consecutive years beginning from 2001 has tarnished the nation's image.

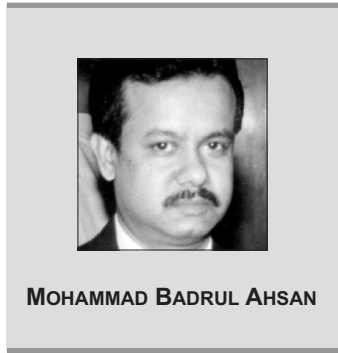
Professor Muhammad Yunus in his speech on January 4 at the 15th anniversary of The Daily Star diagnosed that politics was killing the spirit of the nation. In his words: "It has led to our major national crises: 1) limitless corruption, 2) rise of unprecedented terrorism, and 3) fast deterioration of the public service structure. They are all inter-connected and linked to politics."

By bringing a motion on the issue, the lawmakers belonging to treasury and opposition benches can discuss the ways as to how to combat this hydra-headed monster. They will render a great service to the nation if they can make a meaningful contribution to this end.

To conclude, in a country like Bangladesh where democracy has made a fresh start, the ruling party or leadership must do everything towards developing a political culture that would contribute to the successful functioning of democracy. To attain this objective, the ruling leadership must, among other things, respect the opinion of the public and opposition, resolve all political disputes with the spirit of democracy and take steps to make parliament effective. The leaders of the two major parties, the BNP and the AL, have already promised to make parliament the right place for discussing and resolving the major national issues. Bringing motions on burning issues like power, fertiliser and diesel crises, price spiral of essentials, corruption, etc. and their discussion in the house will be a big step forward to make parliament the centre for decision-making on all major national issues.

M. Abdul Latif Mondal is a former Secretary to the Government.

# The dead river



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE rolling grass abruptly ended where the land sloped into the dead river, whose low water invited storks, herons, kingfishers, lapwings, titlarks and yellow-beaked blackbirds to cool off their feet in the heat of summer. In the winter, the river looked even more spent and dry, its bed rising like the back of hippopotamus soaking in shallow waters, where flights of birds descended in the powdered light of winter, charging their beaks into the stew of mud. It was on the bank of this river that he was born under the banyan tree, which sat on the bend before the river took an elusive turn. He had entered the world in the midst of tall reeds, black ants, cow dung, bird drops, foxholes, crabgrass, and wild creepers.

He was scuriously brought to this world, mid-wifed by his grandmother who was so tense and nervous that she couldn't remember years later if there was a moon in the sky. Her daughter was lying on a tattered rag spread out on the grass, her body

convulsing in labour pain, while the hard tinder of summer wind lashed on their faces as both mother and daughter sweated in pain, fear, shame, and outrage. They were hiding in the darkness of night to bring a child into the world.

His grandmother said she did not hear the cry of the newborn because it was drowned by yelping foxes, barking dogs, hooting owls, and the uproar of people chasing a thief across the village. She struggled to save the fluttering lamp from the

her misery in the dingy quarters of a notorious brothel. He came to know of it much later, when his grandmother said to him that a woman's body was the most vulnerable of all assets in the world.

Ever since then he felt that his body was marinated in the shame of his mother, its cells overflowing with the despair of a woman who was used by men to do their pleasure. He grew up without knowing his father, his mind foraging in the womb where the lust of an unidentified suitor had

landfilling, and, just a few steps from where he was born, a textile plant droned day and night as if to mock the river which had once stood silent over the anguish of a disgraced woman.

After the death of his grandmother, he came to the banyan tree many times with the yearnings of a nostalgic traveller, who wished to return where he started. This is where he was born, not in a proper home, not in a proper bed, not a father waiting for him, no relatives, neighbours and well-wishers waiting outside the

the evening along the riverside in the midst of turned earth of cultivated land as if smelling his past in the awakened and renovated aroma of fresh vegetation. It amused him that he was able to walk in the broad daylight on the same bank of the river where a woman he never saw had come to shed her burden of shame in the middle of the night.

On the second anniversary of his grandmother's death, he realized he was of the same as his mother when she died. He lived all these years like

throat or dropping the mucus after blowing his nose. Why God gave him a life that was conceived in the summer of lust, not in the spring of love?

Two years later, an old man died of electrocution while working in the paddy field. At night he put electricity in the field to keep rodents and other nocturnal animals from coming to ruin his crops. In the morning he turned off the switch and went to remove the weeds in the field, which was under ankle-deep water. His ninth wife didn't realize that her husband had gone to the field so early in the day and flipped the switch thinking he had forgotten to turn it on at night. The old man shook like a springing toy and dropped dead within minutes before anybody could know what happened and come to his rescue.

For the next few days the entire village buzzed with conversations which revolved around this tragic death. People asked what sin a man must commit in life to deserve such a pitiful death. Some joked that the young wife had done it out of desperation to pump some electricity into her sagging husband.

Then the rumour started to spread that the old man had got his comeuppance. For the first time in many years the villagers flocked towards the dead river. They must find the sad young man who should know that the stream of life is a lot like the river, that what is thrown into it washes up somewhere. He listened to them and looked at the sky. Has it worked for the dead river? Everything thrown in it accumulated and choked its water.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

# A blot on the image of the country

ises the desperation of some humans with innately beastly manners. The gruesome act done, the perpetrators, most of them outwardly cultured and educated melted away in the human melee with no remorse and shock in mind..

Such spurt of violence and vengeance killing in the highest seat of learning is more than alarming. Bangladesh is a resilient country, no doubt. We have weathered many crisis situations, but the most danger-

ence of opinion, ideology and even rivalry in service, but civilized societies do not allow dissent and anger to descend into barbarism. In the aftermath of the arrest of teacher Mohiuddin, caretaker Jahangir, his brother Salam and Nazmul and their confessions, the question of whether the law enforcement agency has connived in the Home Minister's order has acquired importance.

Unhappily, Professor Taher Ahmed went the way of his colleague Professor

ment of 544 employees on political consideration is now taking its toll.

There is a growing nexus between the Islamic fundamentalists and the criminal fringe elements in many countries. Bangladesh since post Taliban days in Afghanistan has not proved to be an exception. Prof. Mia Mohiuddin, seems to have now arrested and suspected by the police to be a mastermind, utilized this opportunity to settle scores with his perceived enemy. Pathetically true,

slowly and steadily the majestic name of 'university' that once evoked a sense of respect and admiration is now a name that strikes one with horror and panic. Rajshahi University campus is now a political tinderbox with student wings especially the radical student groups and teachers with extremist ideologies jostling to hold sway, often by trying to establish their influence and ideology through violent means. One is therefore forced to conclude that universities so long considered nurseries of talent and centre of excellence have now turned into killing fields.

With blows coming one after another in the academic arena, the fate of 140 million people in the country has become hostage to terrible uncertainty. The teachers who fell victim to terrorist attacks for their crusade against evil norms that go against democratic spirit and liberal views did their best to regain faith in liberal education, values and freedom of thought. Their death sickened the country with shame and impotent rage. What has this country come to? We were an example to the

have angered Mia Mohiuddin so much so that he thought of eliminating Prof. Taher.

Not that violence may strike the country without any surprise nowadays. On the contrary the bloody ideologies of extremism, departmental conflict and service rivalry also have been threatening to eclipse all norms of liberal thinking and values in the society. This, as people think, alone can thwart march of the nation towards progress, development and economic emancipation. Universities live by enshrining values, establishing moral and ethical standards and free flow of ideas and learning without favour or discrimination. But when extremist ideas and hatred to the extent of killing perceived enemies becomes a major issue and politicians or a section of motivated teachers gain by fanning such discord, educational standard and promotion of knowledge come to a grinding halt. Evidently as for Dr. S. Taher Ahmed maintaining ethical standard was his role as a committed teacher, a liberal educationist that contributed to his grisly end.

Overwhelmed by poverty and deeply sucked in fanatic ideology, North Bengal is low on general expectation and high on extremist fervour and demagoguery and evidently R.U. campus since last one decade has become the battleground involving liberal minded academics and radical groups. Appallingly militancy has won over liberalism.

world. Now we are a warning", said a distinguished academician.

Police sources say that geology department teacher Mia Mohiuddin planned the murder in frustration and to take revenge on Professor Taher as his promotion got blocked because of Prof. Taher's objection. Rajshahi University sources say the international publications 'Mia Mohiuddin enclosed seemed to be of questionable quality and the two-member planning committee headed by Prof. Taher as one of the expert members didn't consider his case for promotion. Presumably this might

campus since last one decade has become the battleground involving liberal minded academics and radical groups. Appallingly militancy has won over liberalism. The reported link of a radical student group, nurtured by a radical Islamic party, in the murder terrifies us once more. The Jamaat-e-Islam has always claimed to be a party with a difference. But the party now looks adrift, confused and seemingly having lost its moorings in Islamic values. It is unthinkable that any Muslim having schooling in Islamic values could have thought about eliminating his rivals or adversaries to rope his way to status, position and eminence.

As the country waits for the harsh truth to emerge, to enshrine human values and educational goals it can only rue the fact that promotion to higher academic position in the university or settling political differences can be resolved by killing a person adhering to values and ethical standard.

MD Asadullah Khan is a former teacher of physics and Controller of Examinations, BUET.