

Messing up websites

A poor start to digital Bangladesh

WHILE the government is committed to making Bangladesh a digital country by 2021, one preliminary step has gone wrong as most of its 250 official websites contain outdated information, or are still under construction. Some of these contain data or information dating one and a half years back. Nobody has bothered to update the same, so that people have to visit offices to obtain information they need or get their queries met thus making the websites meaningless. The departments seemingly have washed their hands of the websites once they were opened. Who is in charge, who is the supervising authority, how many hits they get -- are necessary ingredients of a modern, functional and efficacious websites.

It is evident that the plan to digitalise Bangladesh, which has everything that development planners would endorse, suffers from some basic flaws. It seems the government websites have been constructed just to go through the motions or meet certain targets. But when it comes to information dissemination, the task is approached perfunctorily. We wonder when the next projected step is to supply forms and have them filled in or, indeed popularise payment of utility bills online what might be the level of efficiency or lack of it!

The ministries concerned, or those in charge of designing and maintaining the websites, appear to be oblivious of the fact that the whole purpose of computerisation is to ensure efficient, corruption-free and timely delivery of services. The website and other governmental online operators have to be both dynamic and aware of people's need. It is, of course, sheer wastage of time and money to have a system which does not serve its purpose.

The rather deplorable state of affairs does prove that the digital vision alone won't carry us far in this particularly demanding sector. People at both the planning and implementation levels have to fully comprehend that IT technology will be useful only when the system is made up-to-date. It is not enough to buy and install hardware and leave the system to function on its own.

Regrettably, the situation is not far better as far as other leading organisations, universities etc are concerned. The websites of public universities have to be developed to the level where the students and all others seeking information can be benefited. Again, the emphasis should be on updating and enriching information on a regular basis. The practice of having an IT department, which exists only in paper, must be shunned.

There are of course limitations like poor infrastructure and inadequate supply of electricity, but the planners are expected to formulate everything in light of what is available. If the government wants to make any headway in its grand scheme of making Bangladesh digital by 2021, as it has promised, it has to progressively improve the energy supply situation, expand internet use and train up IT operators on a larger scale.

River commuters' hardship growing

Have mercy on them, arrive at a negotiated settlement

IT needs hardly be said that a great portion of the country is served by rivers and waterways and a large number of people use it for travel and trade. And it is in this important sector we see frequent disruption of operation due to strike by workers, leading to great hardships to the commuters, as we have seen in the last four days. And with every passing day not only do the sufferings of passengers multiply; it also affects the country's trade and commerce very seriously.

It is not as if the workers have struck work all of a sudden. There was a three-day strike in March that should have given enough warning to the owners to address the issue of the pay and other problems associated with the job of the river transport workers in earnest. Although a new pay structure was announced by the shipping minister last Friday it was not accepted by a section of the water transport workers represented by a group under the banner of Bangladesh Noujan Shramik Federation. What has followed has neither been helpful nor provided the ground for accommodation.

The attempt by the government to compel acceptance of the deal and ensure the operation of the river crafts with the help of pro-government section of the workers, and the effort by the pro-strike group to impose the strike on the other hand, have compounded the problem. That both the parties should have resorted to force in support of their position, and assumed inflexible positions, is entirely unacceptable.

We understand that a substantive increase, between 50 and 100 percent, has been made in the pay structure and the minimum pay has gone up to Tk. 2850. If the striking workers had reservations about the new pay scale the reaction should not have been calling off work and taking wrath out on the passengers but sitting down across the table with the other stakeholders to come to an amicable solution.

What people are interested in is not claims and counterclaims of successful strike or partial operation of the passenger and cargo vessels but a quick end to the existing impasse. In either case it is the passengers and poor people that suffer most. We urge upon all the parties to negotiate a solution with the government being a facilitator rather than a party to the issue.

Opposition's debilitating delusion



MINIR UZ ZAMAN/DPA NEWS

Please ask any young blood in your own party whether he or she would like to see the rapists and looters and killers of 1971 get the punishment they deserved. A big "yes" would be the obvious answer. Why only BNP? Ask young recruits in Jamaat and they would say the same thing.

SHAHNOOR WAHID

IT was a frantic attempt to return to the center stage...to regain some of the lost tricks.... to flare up passion....to instigate...to insinuate...to denigrate...to intimidate. But it did not work. The skill is lost...the magic is gone.... The timing was bad...words were bad....issues were wrongly picked.

While the present government is frantically trying to pick up the threads left scattered by the BNP government during its horrendous "rule" of five years, BNP suddenly thought that the

country's political furnace needed fuel. Accordingly, to bolster the anti-Awami League instincts of BNP supporters, begum Khaleda Zia came up with a vision that the war criminal trial was being organised by the government to divide the country. Fantastic. Mark the words "divide the country."

Dear Netri, the country is already divided into two unequal halves. You know it. We know it. Therefore, how can the trial for which the nation has risen as one divide the country any further? We believe it would work to the contrary. The trial and dispensation of justice

would unite the country.

Please ask any young blood in your own party whether he or she would like to see the rapists and looters and killers of 1971 get the punishment they deserved. A big "yes" would be the obvious answer. Why only BNP? Ask young recruits in Jamaat and they would say the same thing. But you shall have to ensure them that their names would not be revealed to the Jamaat leaders. Surely, no one would like to have methodical killers as leaders.

Dear Netri, since you claim BNP to be a democratic party that believes in parliamentary democracy, shouldn't you come out openly and announce BNP's full support to the trial by providing information. We have this uncomfortable feeling that you should be able to help a lot as you have worked so closely with most of them as alliance member. Therefore, when you talked about war criminals in the AL, it was clearly interpreted as a ploy to divert attention from the real topic. Nevertheless, it was a serious accusation so you needed to substantiate your claim by offering some names.

In the same meeting, you gave the message, "people want change of government." You said that the people have had enough and a movement has to be launched to topple the Hasina-led government since "people now want a change of government. This government has done nothing good in the last 16 months. So, a countrywide movement will be started to remove it."

Mark the words: "This government has done nothing good in the last 16 months." Now, now, dear Netri, our memory has not been wiped off totally. We still remember, quite vividly, what your government had done in five painfully long years to the economy, to electricity, to judiciary, to market price, to education, to health, to agriculture, to rationality, to logic, to rhyme and reason, to morals, to values, and finally to law and order (Oh spiky Babar!).

You have also said: "I believe the evils of 1/11 are still there. And we have to change the government through move-

ment as the evil elements exist in this government." How ironic! Political leaders, including yourself, always give reference to 1/11, but you people never publicly take the blame on yourself for creating the situation that paved the way for the army or the caretaker government to come to power.

Why don't you do it? Do you think the people have forgotten the goondas unleashed in the name of politics by the workers of the political parties that took lives of many humans on the streets of the city? How awful those days were.... lawlessness at its worst.... everyone in a killing spree...but do you ever look back...do you ever see those gruesome photos and feel repentant? We know you people don't do so because deaths of workers take you nearer to power. The more the merrier.

Today you speak on behalf of the people! The question is, what people...which people...where people...? Who did you mean by "people"? Did you mean BNP supporters? But then 16 crore people of the country are not BNP supporters! BNP must not suffer from such a debilitating dilemma...such destructive dementia.... such diabolic delusion. It is not healthy, really.

All the big talks of BNP leader were to boost the fragile collective psyche of the supporters who are now drifting in an ocean like a rudder-less ship. Top-level leaders do not trust one another and they fight with broken tooth and nail to climb the fence to go nearer to the chairperson. But there is hardly any space at the top to accommodate anyone other than the chairperson herself. She would not want anyone standing close to her. They must sit one level below. So much for a democratic party.

So, all the talks about change of government boil down to the fact that BNP people want the taste of power once again (ah, "power," what a sweet-sounding word!). They would now connive with alliance members to stir up social unrest and then press for election. Bad days are ahead folks.

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The infrastructure of jihad

It would be naïve, certainly premature, to assume that the infrastructure of jihad in urban Pakistan is the sole, or even main, reason Shahzad turned to radical Islam. But surely the fact that it is so easily accessible contributes to people like Shahzad, or future Shahzads, acting on their newly discovered hate.

CYRIL ALMEIDA

FROM the moment the world saw footage of the SUV belching smoke in Times Square, you just knew that it was going to be a Pakistani.

And Faisal Shahzad didn't disappoint. Never mind that the plot seems to be have been ridiculously amateurish, that the "bomb" seems to have been assembled by a third-grade chemistry student, that Shahzad was more bungling idiot than mass murderer.

But now the world has yet more proof. Pakistan. Muslim. Terrorist.

Conspiracy theorists here, though, are hard at work spinning the facts in the opposite direction. The 9/11-was-an-inside-job brigade has gone into overdrive. Isn't it odd that Hakeemullah rose from the dead only a few days ago, they ask? How convenient that Shahzad names Waziristan, the place the Americans are fixated with, they thunder.

And on it will go. Over in America, Fox News and the like will trot out headlines like "The Pakistan connection" and add redundant question marks in statements such as "hub of terror" and "global menace?"

And here in Pakistan you'll have news reports about the "anti-Pakistan" Indian-born prosecutor linking the Shahzad case, with not-so-veiled references to Preet Bharara's "Jewish relatives." (I wish I was making this up; a local TV channel, best left unnamed, carried a breathless report on Bharara's alleged biases and ancestry earlier this week.)

But away from the cacophony and largely outside the media, hard, and meaningful, questions are already being asked.

That Shahzad is apparently an idiot proved to be a stroke of good luck. He could easily have been smarter, something you don't want your wannabe mass murderers to be. But he epitomises a vulnerability, one that the militants have figured out and appear to be working feverishly to exploit and which the West still seems at a loss to understand. What exactly is driving people like

Shahzad to embrace this madness? Here's a seemingly normal 30-year-old Pakistani man who has made it good, entering the West through the front door in search of educational and employment opportunities. He's got two kids, a pretty, happy wife and has a vain streak (if his Orkut pictures are anything to go by). What set him off on the path of madness?

To ask this question isn't to embrace the self-serving theories about "legitimate" Muslim grievances and the oppression of Palestinians and the war in Iraq feeding a murderous rage among Muslim youth.

It's to identify a potentially catastrophic security threat and deal with it adequately. Frankly, it is impossible to ensure that there will never be another Shahzad. No response to any threat can ever guarantee a zero failure rate.

But as the global jihadists have realised that penetrating the western defences from outside, post-9/11, has become more difficult, they appear to be working on potential threats from within.

It took eight years between Ramzi Yousef's bombing of the World Trade Centre and 9/11. That the jihadis have failed to launch a serious attack inside the US may only be a matter of time or finding a smarter Shahzad or a smarter bunch of five disaffected boys from Virginia.

Yet, that's a problem for America, the UK and other western countries to figure out. Here in Pakistan, the Shahzad case ought to have the alarms bells ringing even more furiously.

Why is it so easy for all these wannabe jihadists form the West to travel to Pakistan and plug into the world of religious extremism here?

Fata may be a tribal backwater, an anachronism in the 21st century. But there are no direct flights to Mir Ali or Miranshah. The first port of call for the wannabe western jihadis is Karachi, Lahore or Islamabad.

It's in the cities and towns that the wannabe jihadists begin their search, usually by looking for a local mosque or madrasa or religious centre of some



Breeding ground for jihadis?

sort run by some guy with connections to the world of militancy.

If some idiot with a murderous agenda from Connecticut or Virginia can find these linkages, then why can't the state here? The short answer is, it can. Your local cop or crime reporter is, it can. Your local cop or crime reporter can identify the suspicious neighbourhoods, mosques and madrasas. It's not exactly a great mystery.

Surely, 10 years since 9/11 and three since Lal Masjid, the state ought to have done more to dismantle the urban links to the hotbeds of militancy in Fata. Why are the CDs glorifying suicide bombers still so easily available outside certain mosques? Why is the sectarian hate literature disseminated so widely? Why are the audiotapes urging people to take up arms against "infidels" so readily accessible?

It would be naïve, certainly premature, to assume that the infrastructure of jihad in urban Pakistan is the sole, or even main, reason Shahzad turned to radical Islam. But surely the fact that it is so easily accessible contributes to people like Shahzad, or future Shahzads, acting on their newly discovered hate.

Yes, just like American anti-gun control activists argue that it isn't guns that kill people, it's people who kill people,

the jihad infrastructure here isn't setting off bombs, it's people who are setting off bombs. But why is Pakistan being an enabler of this stuff?

True, all of the hateful material is easily available online, but you don't become a would-be bomber by sitting behind a computer screen. That's why these guys travel abroad. But why are they travelling to Pakistan and not, say, Egypt or Syria or even Sudan or Somalia?

It's possible to read too much into the Pakistan connection, each case being unique and having its own set of circumstances. But it's also possible to read too little into it. If you remove the conspiracy blinkers, the dots only connect in so many ways.

For sure, going in guns blazing isn't the answer either, as the extraordinary blowback from the bungled Lal Masjid operation has proved. You don't want to create another mess while trying to clean up an existing mess.

But so long as you or I or some idiot like Shahzad can all too easily find jihadi inspiration and worse in Pakistan proper, we aren't really doing much to clean up the original mess, are we?