

ENIGMATTERS

International Women's Day

Live up to its spirit wholeheartedly

IT is exactly a hundred years to the month that the very first International Women's Day (IWD) was launched after Clara Zetkin, Leader of the 'Women's Office' for the Social Democratic Party in Germany, proposed the idea of an International Women's Day. At the International Conference of Working Women in Copenhagen in 1910 she suggested that the day, called Women's Day, be celebrated around the world on the same day to press for their demands for better salary, working conditions and other facilities.

Although we have come a long way since 1911, and the UN has been celebrating this day since 1975, one wonders whether the compulsions that had motivated the league of working women to set aside a day in the calendar to draw attention to their plight have been fully addressed, far less met in any fair degree.

We feel that this year's theme, which happens to be the centenary year of the IWD -- equal access to education, training, science and technology: pathway to decent work for women -- is extremely appropriate and we fully endorse the declaration with the hope that all concerned will do everything that is necessary to pursue the theme to its fullest extent. It is essential to note that bettering the condition of women requires the collective effort of the society and is not the concern of the women alone.

In the context of Bangladesh one cannot overemphasise the possible ill-consequences of continued discrimination against women, of their remaining marginalized in all spheres of their existence, of lack of empowerment that exerts a retrogressive influence on the progress of women. This, regrettably, is happening in a country where the political leadership role is dominated by women. Absence of across-the-board empowerment of women as well as their being deprived of direct participation in decision making and policy formulation cannot be put up with any longer.

As women in our country have a long way to go before taking their rightful place in society, an occasion like Woman's Day can ill-afford to be ritualistic.

Sunday's street violence

Let's find an answer

THE death of a Dhaka University student, allegedly at the hands of transport workers, and the violence which followed on and around the university campus, calls into question several factors. The looming question is, however, how did the situation deteriorate so? A disagreement between university students and transport workers should have ended right there. Instead, things spiralled into the killing of a 25-year-old university student which we condole and half a day's worth of violence which we condemn.

Such events are proving to be increasingly uncontrollable and we must ask why. Transport workers have often proven unruly and are becoming increasingly more so. They must be dealt with a firm hand and the owners and operators of the vehicles, too, should be held accountable. The role of the police, from whom the transport workers allegedly snatched some of the students embroiled in the violence before beating them -- one to his death -- was also questionable. Their failure to control the violence also calls for enhancing the capacity of the police force, especially in terms of mob control, as such events have become a recurring phenomenon. Finally, we must question the basic civic responsibility of the students who, following any untoward incident, go on an indiscriminate rampage, injuring people and damaging private and public property. While we sympathise with their frustrations, we also expect members of the most prestigious educational institutions in the country to realise that violence has never been the answer and to respect property and uphold self-image of the students as educated citizens.

We hope that the committee formed to investigate the incident on behalf of the university authorities will do so with utmost effectiveness and promptness. Cooperation from all parties and strict handling of the case may be the only way to prevent such unfortunate incidents from

A spitting nation, are we?



MOHAMMAD ALI SATTAR

THIS is serious. Weird as it might sound, the truth is we are caught in the mesh of this severe ailment. Spitting, that is. Have you

ever thought of the damage we have been causing to our health and environment and to our image as a nation by nurturing this habit?

I am talking about our habit of spitting. Think of our ceaseless and mindless spitting from one dawn to the next. Twenty-four seven that is. We enrich ourselves with new spitting knowledge everyday.

Our day starts with packed schedule and the strain of meeting deadlines. Very few of us enjoy the liberty of taking things lightly, loaded as we are with the complexities of nature of work that we attend to everyday.

If you have had a good night's sleep, fine. If not, you wake from half-sleep with a jumbled head. And then, when out in the streets with a hanging jaw you are greeted by the sounds of "quak" and "thoos." Get it? Try and get it. Make it pop in your mind. A friend of mine, who worked for Aljazeera as a stringer in Dhaka, called me up one Friday to spend the day with a few more friends who would gather at his place in Gulshan. We had a nice and long day. We discussed everything on this earth including the subject I am writing on. He told me that once during his visit to France a French friend remarked that Bangladeshis were good at spitting. That, I am sure, did nothing to lift our image a bit.

Thousands of people from different countries visit Bangladesh on various assignments or purposes. From dignitaries to a simple tourist, all go through this calamitous experience.

The saddest part is no one seems to notice this dirty and dangerous practice that we indulge ourselves in. I haven't met anyone anywhere who protested this offensive act.

You care to do some research? Your research isn't done online, it's done by walking. Why do we "spit" in the first place? I don't know the biological

In the bus stoppages, railway stations, launch terminals or any public place; anywhere in the open, on the pavements, in the market, in the malls or on staircases -- "little-minded" people would invariably make things difficult for the gullible by spitting. Either they spit on your sides or sometimes on your shoes. They will not hesitate to spit right in front of you even when you are on stride. Frustratingly, they will not stop for a while to say sorry or bother to look back. They go on troubling people at their will. If you catch Tom,

their stomach!

Come the holy month of Ramadan We take the license to slay anybody by way of spitting anywhere, anytime and on anybody. We indulge in the most unholy practice of spitting far more frequently. In the name of Almighty and in the name of Siam (fasting), we make life even more difficult for many than in normal times. Seldom do we realise the sanctity and the underlying connotation of this great month. How conveniently we forget that cleanliness is part of the conviction we practice. Ignorance is a curse that we don't realise.

I call upon my learned readers and the social pundits to come forward to raise awareness against this lethal inclination. Is this ignorance not enough to raise alarm in the society? Isn't it a disparaging practice? Aren't we all falling sick?

Sociologists will come up with some explanations may be, or a medical student with a biological reasoning. But it will be hard for them to justify the ceaseless and remorseless habit of the repulsive characters who continue to offend others.

In the process they spoil the environment, contributing greatly in germinating the air -- causing untold harm to the entire nation. It's an obstacle to creating a healthy generation. Think of the global impact! Little do we realise that we don't enjoy a favourable reputation worldwide for reasons galore.

It's time we should think hard if we want to be known as a "spitting nation." We should try and learn what "dignity" is all about.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

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Brett Lamb

reason for this. I learnt it from life. To me, unless you are unwell and down with some kind of illness you don't need to spit. And the other reason is; if you are expressing your spite for somebody or something, you spit, more symbolic than really throwing. But seldom do I find reason for people to go on spitting without rhyme or reason.

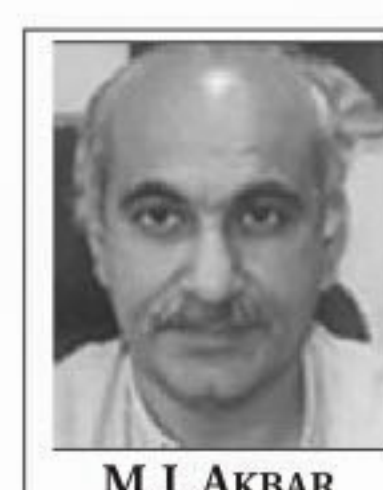
Out in the streets we are faced with the same kind of acts that people resort to without any sense of penitence. By now I am convinced that it's embedded in our trait.

Dick will do it. And Harry will not lag behind either.

Add to it the famous "red mouths." I mean the "pan chewers." How they spoil and infect the environment is anybody's guess. Look at them; they have turned the entire country into a nauseating land. Not one place you will find without those red stains, so willfully done by the mindless spoilers. On the one hand, they wear a repulsive look (black teeth, brown gums!) and by way of spitting the reds they kill your appetite and sour your mind. I wonder if this ever churns

BYLINE

I regret to inform you...



M.J. AKBAR

FRIDAY the Fourth of March should be declared the International Day of Regret by the United Nations. Regrets flooded

Saturday's newspapers, in stories from east to west; it came in many forms, from eyes-lowered-acknowledgment to muted-murmured-sorry to the antithetical no-regret accompanied by a brash to-hell-with-you.

The most creative instance was surely that of Bangladesh cricket fans: they did not quite rue stoning the West Indies team bus after their side was hammered into oblivion; they merely regretted the fact that they had got the wrong bus. What they wanted was to throw some accurately-aimed stones at their own players.

They atoned for their mistake by breaking window panes of their captain Shakib al Hasan's home. That should put Hasan in a good frame of mind for the next match. To be fair, Bengalis don't mind defeat; they just can't take humiliation, whether in Dhaka or at Kolkata's Eden Gardens.

The most ingenious example was from the London School of Economics, which had, in its infinite wisdom, awarded a doctorate to surely the most intellectual thug of the 21st century, Saif al-Islam, the second son of Muammar Gaddafi, in 2008. Saif's supervisors detected neither irony nor plagiarism in the Saif thesis on "The role of civil society

in the democratisation of global governance institutions: from 'soft power' to collective decision-making?" Don't miss the deliciously academic question mark at the end.

The director of LSE, Howard Davies, has resigned, but can probably expect to head the Saif Conglomerate of Universities for Economics and Mercenary Operations just as soon as Saif has reconquered Libya. It was, but naturally, a complete accident that LSE got a £1.5 million donation from Saif's dad soon after the doctorate, since British institutions can never be

who, famously, learnt nothing and forgot nothing.

But the real market for regrets has surely opened in India. There is explicit or implicit regret wherever you look. The disgraced Chief Vigilance Commissioner P.J. Thomas must be seething with them; if he had quit in the first week of December he would have lost his job but not his grace. That is not a bad trade-off.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh still has the quality to dignify regret, which is why his acknowledgement of responsibility for Thomas' appointment received such a civil response

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accused of corruption.

London must be full of people nostalgic for the old days: this was exactly how it happened during those good old days of the Raj, when the British gave a gong to natives and took the jewels in return. The natives, however, have got cleverer. Saif actually gave only £300,000 of the promised 1.5 million. He must have learnt something about economics at LSE. Regret, though, is not in his DNA; his father Muammar has at various times imagined himself as either the Queen of England or the Prime Minister of India, but is really a French Bourbon

from the BJP leader of the Lok Sabha Opposition, Ms. Sushma Swaraj. But Dr. Singh has not revealed what he truly regrets: that his leadership is under question today because he has been misled by his own side. He signed off on the decision, but the choice was not his. He would not have dismissed Ms. Swaraj's objections as politics if his own civil servants had briefed him better.

Two points arise. First, is regret sufficient? In the case of Thomas, yes, since the CVC has not done anything to besmirch the CVC's office. The real problem before the prime minister is

that the list of things he should regret during the tenure of the UPA2 government is slicing off its credibility, day by day, both in sequence and consequence.

What he should truly regret is that a man like Hasan Ali Khan, fingered by Indian police for stashing away \$8 billion in Swiss and other banks on behalf of an elite bunch of crooks, is still breathing free air.

Khan has the mysterious ability to fall ill whenever the police want to question him; and the police have the even more mysterious desire to accept Khan's word for it. Khan used this excuse again about an hour of his latest meeting with the Enforcement Directorate, and the very solicitous police officers agreed. There is something deeply rotten in the system.

The saddest non-regret is surely from those leaders of Pakistan who have chosen silence as their response to the assassination of Shahbaz Bhatti, the only Christian minister in the cabinet, killed for his views on the blasphemy laws. According to Ahmed Rashid, the doyen of Pakistani commentators, army chief Ashfaq Parvez Kayani refused to condemn the killing of Salmaan Taseer, former governor of Punjab, for similar reasons, because there were too many soldiers under his command who sympathised with the assassins.

That is the transition of regret to fear; how long before fear mutates into dread?

The columnist is editor of The Sunday Guardian, published from Delhi, India on Sunday, published from London and Editorial Director, India Today and Headlines Today.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March 8

1911 International Women's Day is launched in Copenhagen, Denmark, by Clara Zetkin, leader of the Women's Office for the Social Democratic Party in Germany.

1917 International Women's Day protests in St. Petersburg contributed to the February Revolution and led to the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II.

1942 World War II: The Dutch surrender to Japanese forces on Java.

1957 Egypt re-opens the Suez Canal after the Suez Crisis.

1963 The Ba'ath Party comes to power in Syria in a Coup d'état by a clique of quasi-leftist Syrian Army officers calling themselves the National Council of the Revolutionary Command.

1983 President Ronald Reagan calls the Soviet Union an "evil empire".

2004 A new constitution is signed by Iraq's Governing Council.