

Baby stealing from DMCH

Security lapse inexcusable

A newborn baby, one of a pair of twins, was stolen from the maternity ward of the Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) on Thursday. As the mother was suckling the other twin, the suspected thief, who had befriended her at the hospital, ran away with the child, so runs the report. This patently speaks of abject lack of security, especially at such a sensitive section of the hospital where maternity wards are situated. We cannot simply accept such security lapse in a premier state-run hospital of the country. Evidently, it is none other than the hospital authority that must take responsibility for the unfortunate incident and be answerable to the parents who lost their baby.

The porous security system of the DMCH is manifestly evident from the fact that there is hardly any control over the visitors' entry into and exit from the hospital. Given the unhindered access of the fourth class employees of the hospital to its every nook and cranny, it is not improbable that some of them may be amenable to inducements from dishonest and motivated quarters from outside. From the manner in which the baby was abducted from the DMCH, one can hardly dismiss the possibility of a nexus between the general employees and outside criminal gangs.

There is no room for taking the incident lightly as this is not the first case of child abduction from a hospital in the country. The DMCH authority must take every possible measure so that the abductor is arrested and the baby is rescued and returned to its parents.

Global Livelihood Index

Dhaka second worst city to live in

FOR three years in a row Dhaka has ranked 2nd from bottom in the Economist Intelligence Unit's survey of 140 cities under the Global Liveability Index. The scores are based on five major criteria -- health care, culture, environment, education and infrastructure. That Dhaka tops only Damascus, the capital of a war-torn country, is no comfort for the 15 million residents of Dhaka. However, we are not altogether surprised by the results; we have downgraded our environment by its systematic destruction, there is lack of proper public transportation, and the horrendous traffic system and poor management is costing the GDP 1-2 per cent in annual growth according to Asian Development Bank's latest estimate.

Our score of 29.2 on a scale of 100 is identical with Damascus and we are aghast to learn that Dhaka is lagging behind it by nearly 5 full points in infrastructure though Damascus has experienced siege and bombardment over the last four years whereas Dhaka has been at peace for over four decades since independence.

Evidently, we have made no great strides in improving the lives of Dhaka residents. The government's decision to bifurcate the city corporation has yielded no benefits to the citizens. Similarly, the allocation of money on useless beautification of the city could be better spent on upgrading city utility services. Without a healthy population and infrastructure development, improvement in the liveable worth of the capital city will not happen. Let us hope we do not find ourselves at the bottom of the list next year.

Guessing game

EDITORIAL: DAWN (PAKISTAN)

EVEN in the best-case scenario, finding some kind of middle ground between the PTI and Tahirul Qadri on one side and the PML-N federal government on the other would have been difficult. But the skittishness both sides have showed on engaging each other at all has made the possibility of a negotiated political settlement that much more difficult. After finally accepting that talks could provide a way out of the impasse and proposing a raft of ideas, the PTI quickly re-escalated matters yesterday by rejecting talks altogether.

Meanwhile, after overnight speculation that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif would at long last use parliament as the forum to address the country and his opponents, Mr. Sharif proved true to form and declined to take centre stage in that most democratic of forums, the floor of the National Assembly.

One side of the problem here is clearly the PTI supremo Imran Khan's flip-flop approach to talks, sometimes seemingly wanting an exit from the corner he has painted himself and his party into, while at other times seemingly indulging in rabble-rousing in front of the crowd that has assembled at his demand. At times, it is difficult to know who is in charge—the PTI chief or the crowd he has assembled—given that the PTI switches back and forth between providing a glimmer of hope and returning to its maximalist position with breathtaking speed.

For a country that has seen much political turmoil over its seven decades of existence, it would not be out of place to suggest that never before has Pakistan seen a political party and its leader demonstrate such whimsicalness on the national stage as it has with the PTI in recent days. Even so, efforts at talks must not be abandoned, and despite inflexible demands the government must push on, while the PTI must refrain from imposing preconditions.

If Mr. Khan and his PTI's strategy is difficult to comprehend, the other side of the protest movement against the PML-N government—Tahirul Qadri and his supporters—are virtually impossible to fathom. Mr. Qadri, a religious preacher with a small but fervid support base, is truly seeking to hijack the country and impose his will upon it. To the extent that he has made demands calling for improvements in governance and public service delivery, Mr. Qadri makes some sense. But anything more and he will need to prove he has genuine political support by participating in the electoral process. Surely, the political process is open enough to allow Mr. Qadri to prove his legitimate support base.

At the other end, regrettably, Prime Minister Sharif failed to capitalise on the mood in parliament yesterday. The parliamentary resolution reiterating that democracy is the only way ahead for Pakistan would have been that much more meaningful had the prime minister himself added his voice to the consensus.

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The regrouping of extremists

STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

RECENT arrests of a large number of extremist cadres and the snatching away of three high profile extremists from police custody a few months back are taken to be clear indicators of the activity and agility of the so-called religiously motivated extremist elements. Media reports confirm that extremists are not only regrouping but have also embarked upon fresh recruitment. Quite clearly, these are disturbing news as the extremist elements in question pose a direct threat to our democratic pluralist existence.

The importance of countering extremist strategy has once again been emphasised and so also the imperative of comprehensive action plan to foil the efforts of motivating and recruiting new members for extremist action. It has also been highlighted that actions to counter-motivate the detained extremists have not been taken up. There are complaints that the government's flagging socio-political campaign against militancy and slackness in monitoring extremist activity since 2012 has given the outfits space to regroup.

This writer has in the past has stressed that the extremism in question that we are confronted with is not like any routine law and order phenomenon and as such demands multi-pronged action.

The above observations becomes relevant when one recalls the arrest of quite a number of so-called religious terrorists in the recent past, along with arms and ammunitions, and the consequent sense of relief felt by some quarters in the regulatory set-up.

One could also recollect the executions of six dreaded terrorists in the not-too-distant past and the naive thoughts of some in the corridors of power that the irritant of religious terrorism has been taken care of once and for all.

Undoubtedly, the events of the immediate past lend credence to the apprehension that we have not yet been able to adequately appreciate the threats that exist and have a bearing on our democratic existence.

One may ponder whether we are late in awakening to the reality that we are fighting against a state of mind that does not share the pluralist values of an open society. One has to bear in mind that the religious extremists, despite being a minuscule proportion of the population, have the potential of destabilising the polity. The question is, do we see a process that creates cognitive preconditions to generate terrorist acts on account of ideological motivations?

Don't we realise that the grievances of Islamic extremists, perceived or real, are both local and international in nature? There is no doubt that such grievances acquire significance in a conducive environment for radical actions. It is thus not surprising that there has been a noticeable expansion of the so-called Islamic extremists and their transnational activities.

As against the above apprehensions and well-grounded fears, is there a lack of political consensus and less than adequate institutional capacity, particularly of the regulatory outfits, in combating the extremist threats? It is not uncommon now for extremist groups in one country to train and coordinate activities and assist groups in another country.

Overt intelligence sources indicate that religiously motivated extremist groups are increasingly relying on each other in different countries for assistance, financing and training.

In fact, domestic groups with local grievances are now forming international alliances in pursuit of their extremist goals and also the furtherance of those objectives. The

worry is, are we providing space to dreaded extremist groups whose hitherto secure bases elsewhere have been weakened?

The reasonable fear in our situation, as elsewhere, is whether religion has not only been utilised as an ideology but also as an insurrectionary strategy that can draw people of varying political convictions.

The so-called Islamist terrorist groups have been found to organise themselves around the rhetoric of a radical interpretation of Islam and seek to impose religion in the politics of Bangladesh. Such terrorism, in terms of growth, benefits from the unhealthy competition to retain or gain power at any cost.

Though unfortunate, the reality is that in garnering political support some political parties have been perilously oblivious of the cost and repercussions of encouraging extremist ideas and actions. The fact of the matter is that religiously motivated extremists have from time to time attacked government officials and institutions to further their religious and political objectives.

There is an overriding and overarching need to take a long and deep look into the threat of religious extremism as we have to fight a prolonged battle against an aberration that has taken a firm root. Shortcomings of state law enforcement agencies, though not alarming, are matters that need urgent attention for attaining professional efficiency.

Political parties, civil society and policy-makers have to engage actively to plug the well-known deficits that account for the thriving of extremist thoughts and beliefs. The inadequately regulated network of charities and banks, and inconsequential anti-money laundering activities, are causes for concern.

Do we have one educational stream wherein pupils leave schools with only a rudimentary knowledge of the world but nurse a fanatical belief in the supremacy of their religion and their responsibility to fight and ensure its spread?

Has the quality of our liberal secular educational institutions and the service delivery of our criminal and civil justice system declined over the years, thus making room for intolerant ideas to grow and spread their tentacles?

Surely, we in Bangladesh cannot allow the prejudiced minds to act as arbitrators of individual and community disputes and financiers of education and livelihood.

The counter-narrative needs to recognise that politics had been the theatre of religious quest of Muslims. Salvation for them does not mean redemption from sin, but the creation of a just society in which the individual could more easily make that existential surrender of his or her whole being that would bring him or her fulfillment. The polity for the Muslims was, therefore, an aspiration that required a jihad, a struggle that could find no simple outcome.

The counter-terrorism strategy's narrative should be able to effectively dispel the misgivings about fundamentalism that gives the impression of its being a violent form of Islamic religiosity. It needs to be stressed that fundamentalism is a global fact and has surfaced in every major faith in response to the problems of modernity. In fact, of the three monolithic religions Islam was the last to develop a fundamentalist strain, when modern culture began to take root in late 1960s and 1970s.

The struggle to enshrine the Islamic ideal in State structures and to find the right leader has preoccupied Muslims throughout their history. The notion of true Islamic state is difficult to perfectly express in human form and perhaps will elude the grasp of flawed human beings. Secular rationalism of modern culture poses special problems for people in all the major traditions. Therefore, it must not willy-nilly appear determined to wipe religion out. The vast mass of the people want to be modern and religious.

The writer is a columnist of *The Daily Star*.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Where's the country heading?

Nowadays I have lost all interest in reading newspapers or watching television knowing that depressing and outrageous news are waiting there. The government headed by Sheikh Hasina is acting in a bizarre way and it is a sign of desperation. Recently they have framed a broadcasting policy, and have been drafting an online media policy.

Ignoring the opinions of many eminent jurists, the cabinet on August 18 approved a proposal for amending the constitution to restore parliament's authority to impeach Supreme Court judges on grounds of misconduct or incapacity.

It seems that after January 5, everything has been falling apart. Day by day the country is heading towards an ominous future. May the Almighty help us.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Bangladesh on the peace index

This is positive news. We can go forward. We shouldn't lose hope. As the editor said, we should not be "complacent" about it, because that may take us backwards.

Nusrat Gulzar
Khilgaon, Dhaka

Accountability of the judiciary

This refers to the front page article, "SC judges were disloyal to charter" (TDS, Aug. 16). The problem begins when one organ of the state does not respect the constitution and mires in an avoidable controversy. We often blame politicians for subverting the laws of the land, but even the judiciary is not free from the blame.

Recently, the Cambodian National Assembly passed new laws making the judiciary subservient to the government. It is in contrast to the Cambodian constitution which stands for separation of the powers of the different organs of the state and an independent judiciary. In Pakistan, the judiciary is keeping quiet on corruption allegations against the son of the retired chief justice. Is this the true meaning of judicial independence? Even in a nation like UK, the judiciary is not blameless. The UK has Judicial Conduct Investigations Office. Judges falling asleep during trial is not a surprise. Judges have to be accountable.

Deendayal M. Lulla
On e-Mail

Comments on news report,
"Hospital releases body thru deal of bill payment," published on August 18, 2014

Steele
Shame, shame!

MH Khan

There should be regulations to monitor the functioning and practices of private hospitals to safeguard the interests of patients.

Molla A. Latif

What about the Human Rights Commission, TIB and other human rights organizations? They are vocal on political issues but silent on this. Why did the hospital not inform the family about this huge bill earlier?

Iftekhar Amin

And you are sure that the family had not been advised about the bill amount on a regular basis? There are too many unknown factors here to make that assumption.

"Malaysia to hire 12,000 more" (August 19, 2014)

Humayun Hyder

As stated by the visiting Malaysian Human Resources Minister, Malaysia is going to recruit 12,000 Bangladeshi workers. This is indeed a good piece of news. In the past, Malaysia halted the recruitment of Bangladeshi workers because of widespread corruption among the recruiting agencies. However, we hope that this time Bangladesh government will be able to send workers. Also, it would be wise of our government to send the workers without the help of our questionable recruiting agencies who are not in good books of the Malaysian government.

"Mobile talk to become costlier" (August 19, 2014)

Vikram Khan

Bangladesh has the most expensive, but the slowest internet and mobile connectivity in the Asian region (and the customer care is 100% bad). Maybe this increase in price will allow us another place in the Guinness Book of World Records!

The Great War's forgotten soldiers

AWAKENING INDIA



SHASHI THAROOR

ONE hundred years after the start of World War I, the world has been commemorating that seminal event. Described as "a war to end all wars," the Great War, as it was called at the time, failed to live up to its billing. Those who fought and died in it would not have expected its sequel just 25 years later.

But while the war took the flower of Europe's youth to premature graves, snuffing out the lives of a generation of talented poets, artists, cricketers, and others whose genius bled into the trenches, it also involved soldiers from faraway lands that had little to do with Europe's bitter traditional hatreds.

The role and sacrifice of Australians, New Zealanders, Canadians, and South Africans have long been celebrated in history books, novels, and award-winning films like "Gallipoli." But the world hears very little about the 1.3 million Indian troops who served in the conflict, which claimed the lives of 74,187, with another 67,000 wounded. Their stories, and their heroism, have long been omitted from popular histories of the war, or relegated to the footnotes.

India contributed divisions and brigades to the European, Mediterranean, West Asian, North African, and East African theatres. In Europe, Indian soldiers were among the first to suffer the horrors of the trenches. They were killed in droves before the war entered its second year, and they bore the brunt of many German offensives.

It was Indian jawans who stopped the German advance at Ypres in the autumn of 1914, soon after the war broke out, while the British were still recruiting and training their own forces. More than a thousand of them died at Gallipoli, thanks to Churchill's folly. Nearly 700,000 Indian sepoys fought in Mesopotamia against the Ottoman Empire, Germany's ally. Letters from Indian soldiers in Europe to their families back home bespeak cultural dislocation and tragedy. "The shells are pouring like rain in the monsoon," declared one. "The corpses cover the country like sheaves of harvested corn," wrote another.

These men were undoubtedly heroes. They were pitchforked into battle in unfamiliar lands, in climatic conditions to which they were neither accustomed nor prepared, fighting an enemy of whom they had no knowledge, risking their lives every day for little more than pride. Yet they were destined to remain largely unknown once the war was over -- neglected by the British, for whom they

fought, and ignored by their compatriots. Part of the reason is that they were not fighting for India. The soldiers were all volunteers; soldiering was their profession, and they served the very British Empire that was oppressing their own people back home.

While raising men and money from the subcontinent, the British promised to deliver self-rule to India at the end of the war. Had they kept that pledge, the sacrifices of India's WWI soldiers might have been seen in their homeland as a contribution to India's freedom. But the British broke their word, and nationalists had nothing for which to thank India's soldiers. They had merely gone abroad to serve their foreign masters. Losing one's life in a foreign war fought at the behest of colonial rulers was an occupational hazard; it did not qualify as a form of praiseworthy national service.

Thus, Indian nationalists allowed the soldiers' heroism to be forgotten. When the world commemorated the 50th anniversary of WWI in 1964, there was scarcely a mention of India's contribution anywhere, least of all in India. The India Gate in New Delhi, built in 1931, is visited by hundreds daily who have no idea that it commemorates the Indian soldiers who lost their lives fighting in WWI.

But, though historical amnesia about the Great War is pervasive across India, the centenary is finally forcing a rethink. The British have been flocking to an exhibition showcasing Indian troops' role; the French are making a film about the brown-skinned and turbaned men who fought to save their land from the Germans; and, in India, curiosity has overcome the fading colonial-era resentment of British exploitation.

Indians are beginning to see the soldiers of WWI as human beings who took the spirit of their country to battlefields abroad. The Center for Armed Forces Historical Research in Delhi is painstakingly working to retrieve memorabilia of that era and reconstruct their forgotten story. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission maintains war cemeteries in India, mostly commemorating WWII rather than WWI soldiers. The most famous epitaph is inscribed at the Kohima War Cemetery: "When you go home, tell them of us and say/For your tomorrow, we gave our today."

The Indian soldiers who died in WWI could make no such claim. They gave their "today" for someone else's "yesterdays." They left behind orphans, and history orphaned them as well. It is a matter of quiet satisfaction that their long-overdue rehabilitation has now begun