

Dastardly attack on CU teachers

Student violence touches new low

WE condemn in the strongest possible terms the attack on 15 teachers of Chittagong University that left some in critical condition. Let there be no confusion that the attack on the buses were premeditated by Shibir activists. Although the university has a history of violence, this is the first time we are witnessing an attack on the faculty by a student wing of a political party. Again it has become a culture in our country for political parties and their student wings to create mayhem the day before a strike, how so ever charged may be the political climate, university teachers were shown deference they rightfully deserve by students. That appears to be no longer the case.

We are appalled that the incident has taken place at all. For a great many years violent student politics has been tolerated and even encouraged which gave them carte blanche to act with impunity. The incident of attacking two buses loaded with teachers has merely degenerated this culture to a new abyss of horrid behaviour that reflects to what a new low our so-called students have touched. Another recent event occurred in the same city where the Chittagong railway station came under attack by Bangladesh Chattrra League students. Not only did authorities fail to take any action against the perpetrators, the station master and five others were transferred in the process. It is high time that those students who are also party activists be brought to book. No laxity in this regard can be brooked.

The passing of an artiste

Feroza Begum lives on

FEROZA Begum now belongs to the ages. Her death on Tuesday was truly the end of an era in the world of our music. She brought before us, indeed before the world, the beauty encapsulated in Nazrul Geeti. It was her style and her rendition, evocative of the spirit of Nazrul's poetry, that gave a new dimension to Nazrul songs. If Manabendra brought that certain dash of the classical into Nazrul Geeti, Feroza Begum gave it that flavour of romanticism which made the songs part of everyday life in Bangladesh and West Bengal. In that particular sense, she was a pioneer in the dissemination of Nazrul music. In time, again, other artistes followed with their own, distinctive offerings of Nazrul to Bengali lovers of music. The inimitable Nilofar Yasmin, snatched by death eleven years ago, comes to mind.

The greatness of Feroza Begum lies in the many ways in which she popularized Nazrul songs in Bangladesh through unfettered and unending devotion to the genre. There was the sprightly in her voice in much the same way that there was pathos when it came to songs touched by the profundity of sadness. That hers was a background of aesthetics helped. That she came in touch with Kamal Dasgupta and married him enriched the life she lived in music.

Our tributes go to this nightingale who touched us, in the refinement of melody, across generations. She will live on and so will her songs.

A poor man's fruit: Now a miracle food!

ABDUL MATIN

JACKFRUIT is a very popular fruit in Bangladesh, though not appreciated by all alike. It is sweet, delicious, juicy and very tasty. Jackfruit with rice and milk is a great traditional delicacy in the summer. Because of its popularity, it has been named the national fruit of Bangladesh.

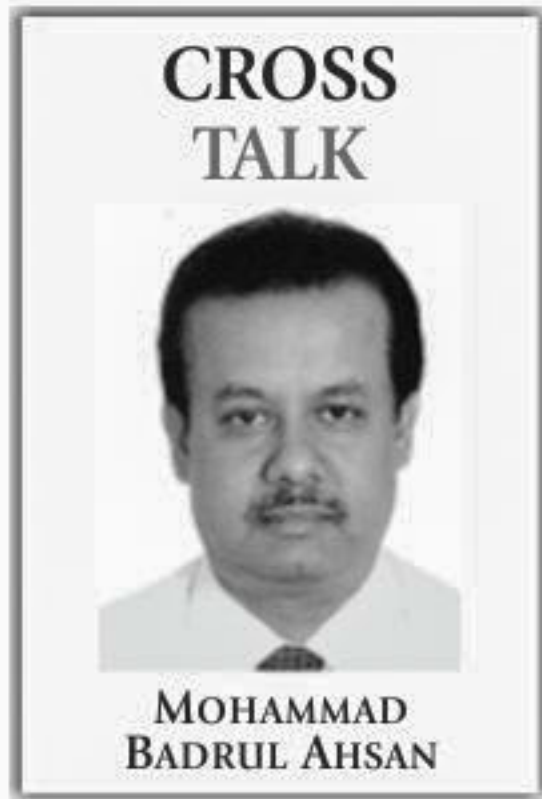
Known as the poor man's fruit, jackfruit is now considered as a miracle food of south and south-east Asia as it is likely to save millions of people from starvation when major staple crops like wheat, corn and rice would be under threat from climate change. According to the World Bank and the United Nations, rising temperatures and unpredictable rainfall have already reduced yields of major crops and could lead to food wars within decades. Now researchers say jackfruit could help provide a solution to the likely food crisis. Jackfruit is the largest tree-borne fruit, weighing from 10 lbs to over 100 lbs. "It's a miracle. It can provide so many nutrients and calories - everything," said Shyamala Reddy, a researcher at the University of Agricultural Sciences in Bangalore. "If you just eat 10 or 12 bulbs of this fruit, you don't need food for another half a day." The fruit is rich in energy, dietary fiber, minerals, and vitamins and free from saturated fats or cholesterol, making it a healthy summer fruit.

The versatility of the jackfruit and the tree is enormous. A jackfruit tree can live for 100 years and bear 100 to 250 pieces every year. Green jackfruits make delicious curries. The seeds of the fruit are extremely high in Vitamin B1 and B2 and have very high starch content though the iron and calcium contents are low. The seeds can be dried and preserved for later consumption. The timber of jackfruit is used for making excellent furniture, doors and windows. Goats relish the leaves of jackfruit trees while the leftover of the fruit is a treat for cows. The branches and dry leaves of the tree are used as firewood. As a matter of fact, no part of the fruit or the tree is wasted.

In view of the fruit's likely use as a supplement for staple crops, it is necessary to start large-scale cultivation of jackfruit, particularly on high grounds as the current varieties of the plant can't survive on wet soil. It is also necessary to conduct research to further improve its nutritional values, to increase the yield, to develop new varieties which can be resistant to flood and salinity and to find ways for preservation of the fruit for consumption throughout the year.

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

ACC's Archimedean principle of fantasy



CROSS TALK
MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE Anti-Corruption Commission recently reminded us of Dr. Seuss, the American writer, poet and cartoonist who said that fantasy is a way of looking at life through the wrong end of a telescope. After 20-month-long investigation, the corruption watchdog tells us it couldn't find any foul play in the Padma Bridge project. It also tells us it had no proof that the five top government officials had used their false freedom fighter certificates to take any financial advantage. ACC also cleared one lawmaker of charges brought against him for amassing illegal wealth, and it is supposedly on the way to do the same thing for a former minister as well. There must be some element of fantasy somewhere in these serial exonerations. Somebody is looking through the wrong end of his telescope.

Up until now, ACC has been working like a washing machine. Dirty laundries are going in and coming out squeaky clean. There's a twist of irony that exonerates the organization itself. How can it find dirt on people, if they're so immaculate! Thus, it must have been that someone inside the World Bank or the Canadian police pulled a fast one to embarrass Bangladesh. Jealous colleagues must have conspired to undermine the certificate-abusing bureaucrats. Lawmakers and ministers are like fruit-laden trees that are expected to get pelted by every frivolous Tom, Dick and Harry.

It shouldn't bother us that ACC is getting so many people off the hook. Instead, we must take it in the spirit of Blackstone's formulation that it's better for ten guilty people to walk free than for one innocent person to be convicted. But what should definitely bother us is the telescope. We should worry as to who's looking through that sophisticated instrument and how he's doing it.

Because, there's a parallax gap between the two sides looking through its two ends. What we think isn't how they think. What we see isn't how they also see. Why should the Canadian court insist on prosecuting some people if there has been no corruption in the bridge project? Why can't ACC file cases against those bureaucrats? The sheer fact of submitting fake certificates gives sufficient ground to yank those men straight to jail.

Nobel Prize winning Portuguese author José Saramago writes that blindness is a private matter between a person and the eyes with which he or she was born. Perhaps it wouldn't have been our concern if the ACC men were star gazing through their telescope or spying on a neighbor's window. But it matters to us because we don't know which between their views and our views are causing the distortions.

These distortions are critical because they're compounding the dilemma in the heart of this nation. It's the

dilemma of doublespeak, which uses euphemism to disguise truth. George Orwell mentions four ministries in "Animal Farm", which are the manufactories of doublespeak. For example, the Ministry of Love tortures people in Room 101 and the Ministry of Truth overwrites history and disseminates lies. Again, the Ministry of Peace creates war and the Ministry of Plenty concerns itself with rationing of goods.

Likewise, does ACC smack of doublespeak? Is it fighting corruption or fostering it? It occasionally finds people guilty and takes them to court. But why is it mostly the opposition politicians while the ruling coelacanths escape the net?

It's possible that ACC has the big picture and we're looking through the wrong end of the telescope. But somehow the public perception is gaining ground that ACC, like any other watchdog in the country, is behaving like a lapdog. Bangladesh Bank is struggling to control bank frauds, SEC doesn't have a grip on stock market manipulation, mobile courts can't stop food adulteration, BIWTA dithers on launch capsizes, BRTA falters over traffic condition, and courts clamber over corruption and politi-

It's possible that ACC has the big picture and we're looking through the wrong end of the telescope. But somehow the public perception is gaining ground that ACC, like any other watchdog in the country, is behaving like a lapdog.

cal interference to carry out justice. The list can go on, which in a nutshell tells us that all our levers of control are spinning out of control.

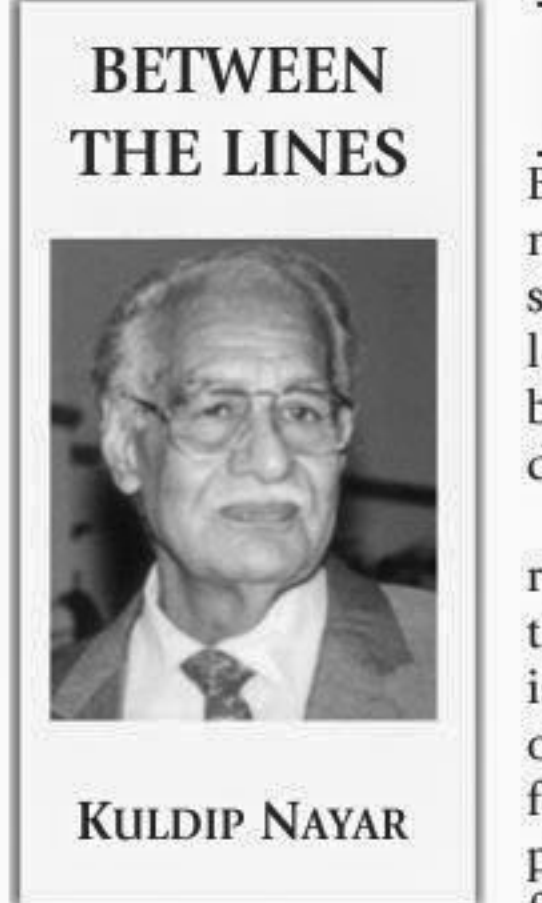
That explains why this country is divided into two distinct halves. The rulers like to see what they believe and the people like to believe what they see. In this bizarre republic of disturbing democracy, the government and the people don't complement but compete with each other.

In Saramago's novel "Blindness" an unexplained mass epidemic afflicts nearly everyone in an unnamed city and people start losing their vision. It causes widespread panic and the social breakdown swiftly follows. The government attempts to contain the apparent contagion and resorts to increasingly repressive and inept measures.

This is where the telescope is responsible for the turmoil. ACC made that connection more poignant last week when its decisions disappointed people. Akin to Archimedean principle, ACC is cultivating a fantasy that creates truth equal to the weight of truth displaced by it.

The writer is the Editor of weekly First News and an opinion writer for The Daily Star. Email: badrul151@yahoo.com

Politics over pandits



BETWEEN THE LINES
KULDIP NAYAR

KASHMIRI Pandits, like Punjabi Hindus, have no homeland to return. Both want to go back. But the militancy that ousted them is still strong. On the top it is the local population which has been contaminated by the fundamentalists.

Some Pandits who have returned are unhappy. They find that the atmosphere of secularism is, by and large, was a memory of the past. They have the feeling of being strangers at places where they and their forefathers lived happily.

Religious bias has built walls between the communities. The Pandits, who had to leave their homes when the militancy, which hit Kashmir in the mid-nineties has waned. But overall situation is not congenial.

True, most of Pandits live in Jammu and the places around the city. But these are refugee camps, not homes. Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Farooq Abdullah has been vainly trying to sort out the matter which is essentially human.

Home Minister Rajnath Singh, a BJP stalwart, has politicized the issue by asking Omar to give land to the Pandits. Who is Ranjath Singh to do so? He is not serving the cause of the Kashmiri Pandits who are not outsiders. They are part and parcel of the Kashmiri culture. Their protest against the sufferings is understandable. But that does not mean that the Home Minister should play politics while taking up their cause.

This is not a Hindu-Muslim question and should not be made into one. All political parties need to initiate steps which will enable the Pandits to go back. Most of their property is intact. The rest must be taken back from the people who have occupied it forcibly or otherwise.

I recall the Hurriyat leader, Syed Shah Gillani, vehemently denying that it was Hindu-Muslim question. At that time, the bug of fundamentalism had not bitten Gillani. He may not have changed his views. But he is conspicuous by his silence. He should have re-enunciated his earlier stance: the Kashmiri Pandits are part of our culture and should not be mixed with the general Hindu-Muslims question. Gillani, in fact, told me that he had wrongly stated earlier that the Kashmiri Pandits' question would be settled with the overall Kashmir dispute.

Rajnath Singh has unnecessarily given an opening to those who argue that Kashmir is a unfinished task of partition. They want the state to be divided on religious grounds. Somewhere they will also try in Pakistan to reemphasize their contention that the criterion of religion -- on the basis of which India was divided -- should be extended to Kashmir. Omar's response to allot the land to pandits only gives a communal colouring to the problem.

Some extremists have demanded a separate area and security for the Kashmiri Pandits. At present, 30,000 of them are reportedly in Kasmir while their total number is around four lakh. As long as Sheikh Abdullah was dominant in the affairs of Kashmir, he did not allow religion to play any role in politics. He would say that he opposed to the state's integration with Pakistan because Jammu and Kashmir was a secular state. He did not want to join an Islamic country because he preferred pluralism to communalism.

Even during the independence struggle, the Sheikh sided with the Congress instead of the Muslim League which demanded a separate homeland for the Muslims. He paid the price for being critical of New Delhi's policy of wanting a strong centre. After being detained for 12 years at Kodaikanal in the South, he stayed with the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to register that Nehru had realized his mistake of misjudging the Sheikh when he demanded that the centre should only administer three subjects -- Foreign Affairs, Defence and Communications -- as was offered at the time of partition.

The Sheikh's famous statement was that the Kashmiris would not eat the Indian wheat if it meant their compromising their autonomous status within the Indian Union. The Sheikh's faith in secularism was deep although he wondered whether India would stay pluralist in the long run.

Chief Minister Omar Farooq, too, is said to have the same apprehension. His perception is that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is anti-Muslim. It was however healthy to see Modi and Omar appearing at the same platform after the Prime Minister had made an aerial survey of the flood-ravaged state. Modi announced a special relief of Rs. 1,000 crore and said that it was a national disaster, thus transcending the special status under Article 370.

This may erase the charge that he was anti-Muslim. (Kashmir's population is 80 per cent Muslims). Modi's

Whether the Kashmiri realize it or not, they have highly lost the services of trained people. The Pandits have gone to other parts of India and have found jobs because of their high qualifications. They are not likely to go back even if the state offers them equivalent jobs.

gesture to Pakistan to help the victims in the occupied Kashmir is praiseworthy. This is a thaw of sorts in frozen relationship between the two countries. Pakistan has also made a similar gesture. Both Prime Ministers must have realized that misery knows no religion or politics.

Understandably, India does not want to talk to Pakistan because Islamabad is dragging its feet on the trial of the militants who attacked Mumbai in 2008. The trial is litmus tests of Pakistan's intention to punish the perpetrators who are now without any charge. Islamabad's plea is that New Delhi has not provided enough evidence to its courts to convict the guilty.

Whether the Kashmiri realize it or not, they have highly lost the services of trained people. The Pandits have gone to other parts of India and have found jobs because of their high qualifications. They are not likely to go back even if the state offers them equivalent jobs. In fact, Kashmir has lost the cream of youth which is technically well equipped to help the state develop economically.

Yet Srinagar should make efforts to get the pandits back because that will give them the secular image which they had enjoyed for decades. Lack of efforts on this front would only alienate the rest of the country where the Kashmiris are gainfully employed.

The writer is an eminent Indian journalist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Abolish curse of child labour

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), there are 4.9 million working children in Bangladesh which is 14.2 percent of the total 36 million children in the age group of 5-14 years. The total number of working children between 5 and 17 years is about 7.9 million. The proportion of boy and girl child is 73.5: 26.5.

In Chunarughat Municipality under Habigonj district, for example, there are about 500 working children. At this age they are supposed to go to school. But the cruel reality of life forces many to drop out from school and join work. Most of the children here work at tea stalls while some have engaged themselves in breaking bricks. A noticeable number of the working boys pull rickshaws and a few work as street hawkers. In some cases, these young children (both boys and girls) get involved in illegal activities including smuggling and trading arms and drugs.

Child labour is a disgrace to the nation. So the government and people should work together to root out this evil from our society.

Asrafur Islam Russel
Chunarughat, Habigonj

Harvard's Arnold Arboretum Library

Recently I was reading an interesting article on Arnold Arboretum Library under Harvard University, written by Alvin Powell which was published in the Harvard Gazette. The author has very nicely described the status of the Arnold Arboretum Library which was established in 1872. Its archives contain 40,000 volumes, covering topics on plant and garden history, plant disease, landscape design, soil science, and dendrology (Dendrology is a branch of science that deals with the study of trees and wooden plants). Another attraction of the Arnold Arboretum is its museum of living plants on 281 acres of land housing living collection of trees, shrubs, and woody vines, which is recognised as one of the most comprehensive and best documented of its kind in the world. The Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University discovers and disseminates knowledge of the plant and conduct research on plant science.

In these days, with the introduction of instruction system with courses based on internet, students seldom visit libraries and botanical gardens to gather detailed knowledge on their respective subjects. I think together with providing notes, teachers at all levels should encourage students to visit libraries to compile their term papers.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System, SAU, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Last straw also lost," published on September 7, 2014

Ismail

Fate sometimes seems so cruel. May the family rest in peace and may the daughter have a better life. Maybe police will not catch the culprits but I believe those who are responsible will never rest in peace.

Molla A. Latif

The government definitely has enough funds and powers to make this girl self-sufficient to survive with honour in Bangladesh. What are the human rights organisations doing? Only words cannot help the suffering people; they need food, cloth, shelter, healthcare and other means to live.

Sayed Rahman

Absolutely heart-breaking! I would like to request the government to help the girl by all means, as she has lost everyone. The media has great power to do something for her. The affluent people of our society can help her as well.

"22 back from Sudan with broken hearts" (September 7, 2014)

Sayed Rahman

Most of them went abroad by selling everything they had. Now their dreams are shattered.

"Khilgaon OC withdrawn" (September 6, 2014)

Sayed Rahman

We hope the authority will take drastic measures so that such mugging and killing do not happen again.

"15 hours of horror" (September 8, 2014)

Saint

Our society is polluted in every possible way. Shame on us!