

## Eid travel risky as ever

### Stop making hollow promises

THIS year, like so many previous years, promises have been made to countrymen that travel to home districts by road, rail and waterways will be nearly as smooth as silk. Yet, as luck would have it, highways heading out of the city have been patched up with bricks that have already started to crack, unfit passenger launches have received a fresh paint job that will inevitably ply the rivers grossly overloaded and chances of getting a train ticket in time will be akin to winning the lottery. Such is the lot for the 7million or so city residents who will be headed out of Dhaka around Eid-ul-Azha.

Concerned authorities have been routinely promising the impossible. Our question is, why bother making promises that are not kept? Given the state of accountability in the land, with accidents occurring on roads and waterways ten-a-penny and with little recourse to justice for the victims and their families, that many passengers will not reach their destinations unscathed has become the norm. Looking beyond the usual dangers that such journeys involve due to badly maintained communication links, there is the added annoyance of haphazard placement of cattle markets all over the city, contributing to an already existing chaotic traffic congestion in Dhaka. The woes of city dwellers trying to make it home to spend some quality time with their families during this holy festival are compounded each year but their trials and tribulations fall on deaf ears of authorities. Adding to hardships during festivities can only be a cruel joke.

## Suspension of bomb-throwing CU students

### They deserve stricter punishment

THE report that the Chittagong University (CU) authority has suspended five Shibir members for allegedly carrying out a bomb attack last month on a bus carrying CU teachers has drawn our notice. Given the gravity of the crime that caused physical injury to 15 CU teachers, the culprits who were behind it cannot deserve leniency from any punishment-awarding authority. It may be noted that two of the CU students so 'suspended,' who are now in jail, did already confess to a Chittagong court on September 22 that they along with the rest three had actually hurled crude bombs at a teachers' bus a week before. That leaves no doubt about their degree of culpability in the crime.

Seemingly, CU syndicate has chosen to be rather soft towards those dangerous elements involved in bomb-throwing during a violent strike on the CU campus enforced by Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami. One wonders, why those students have simply been suspended and not expelled or rusticated from the university? Since criminal procedure has already been instituted against them in the court of law, there should be no room for hesitancy in comprehending the dreadfulness of their crime and the punishment it warrants.

The CU authority, it is hoped, would take the matter with due seriousness and set an example in dealing with the errant CU students as an effective deterrent against any future act of violence of this kind by any student in the future.

## Please enforce traffic rules

RIDWAN QUAIUM

A photo of a woman with a school-going child crossing the rail tracks ignoring the oncoming train and one of a man jumping over the road divider to cross the road rather than using the foot-over bridge in the vicinity, were printed in a newspaper a few days ago. Such type of photos portraying irresponsible and reckless road behaviour are printed quite regularly.

The disturbing reality is that this type of road behaviour is not an isolated event. It is happening all over the country regularly, which is the main reason why the rate of road accidents is very high.

Road accidents can be drastically reduced if road users are aware of road safety and obey the traffic rules. Therefore, it is important to assess the reason for the lack of road safety awareness among most of us.

Unlike most developed countries, the topic of road safety is not integrated in the school curriculum in our country. In contrast to children in the developed countries, most children here do not learn the rules of traveling on the road safely from their parents as most parents sometimes move recklessly and irresponsibly while on the road with their children. Furthermore, road safety awareness programme is not conducted regularly, which is why people are less aware of road safety. However, this is not the main reason for which most people disrespect road safety and traffic laws.

Even though most of us disobey the traffic rules at home, we strictly adhere to the traffic rules when we go abroad.

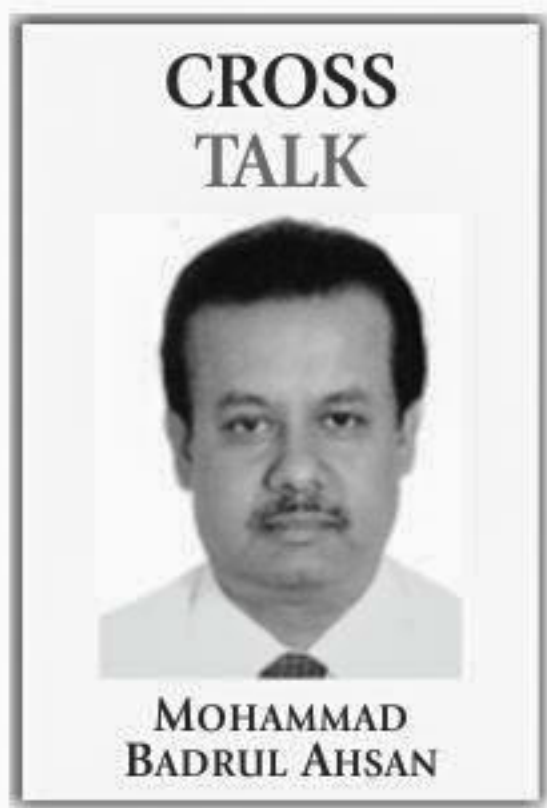
This change in our behaviour as road users occurs because we are aware that traffic rules are enforced very strictly in those countries. Road users including pedestrians violating the traffic rules are heavily penalised through fines, getting their driving license suspended and even getting jailed.

The situation is very different here. Traffic rules are hardly enforced. This prompts road users to travel recklessly and irresponsibly, risking their lives and also the lives of other road users. The road safety awareness campaigns that are conducted in the country are mostly in vain and will continue to be of no use unless traffic rules are strictly enforced.

As an op-ed writer in The Daily Star suggested, the traffic police should pick a day and then enforce the traffic laws on that day. With the revenue generated from the fines the city will be also able to fix the many potholes on the roads.

The writer is a Transportation Engineer working in Thailand.

# The meandering madness of a mindless minister



CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

the Prophet and dressing down talk show guests, it was evident that the man had lost his mind.

The soon-to-be-former minister was sharing his world view with an audience in faraway New York. He looked cheerful and confident as though he had the best seat in the house on everything in life. Now that he is supposedly going to have plenty of free time, he should make it a point to watch that video. He should observe his expressions and listen to his words to know how he appeared terribly ridiculous in his ridicule of others.

The future ex-minister has always showed his shocking talent for cruelty and rudeness. He has done it many times in the past, once even threatening to kill anyone who calls for hartal. Once he beat up a PDB engineer with a stick in his house in Tangail. He has been saucy and arrogant, forever ready to slice up people with his razor tongue. The viral video has also got synchronised to the images on the soundtrack of his gift for using swear words.

His exit, however, won't be the end of our problem. He has been merely a symptom of a more alarming disease, which is why we should be worried if there're others like him. The social welfare minister has showed signs of psychosis in him. The finance minister is erratic. The communication minister is caught in his pathological struggle for truth, found and lost in the potholes of our roads. God knows, the state minister for home believes that his job is a ride on cruise control.

In that sense, the video has been a revelation for us. It has exposed many men in one, a regression analysis for making quantitative predictions of one variable from the values of another. It's not unusual for someone to have radical views of the world. This world has no dearth of bigots who don't hide their disliking for others. Many straight faces hide dangerously troubled minds behind their deceptive and fortified facades.

Spanish philosopher George Santayana said that sanity is madness put to good use. What the minister has done on the video is sheer madness entirely misused. We don't know if there was a background to why he had chosen that particular forum to unleash his genius. He was amongst the expatriate crowd from his home district. It could be that he felt obliged to entertain them with his buffoonery since he wouldn't have an opportunity to

serve them back home.

In many countries, the government does background check on candidates before they're appointed to key positions. In the United States, the president and the Senate share the responsibility of populating top positions in the executive and judicial branches of the government. Candidates nominated by the US president are grilled by the Senate before confirmations are given on their appointments. Many organisations use psychometric tests for leadership roles.

How are such appointments made in Bangladesh? All key positions are filled on the basis of party loyalty, size of donations and personal connections. Merit being a secondary qualification, priority is given to loudness of mouth, audacity and arrogance. The first thing expected out of an appointee is that he or she should defend the party position even under the most ludicrous situation.

The luckless minister inadvertently or consciously broke with that tradition. The same caustic tone, the same sarcasm and the same mad ravings would have

*The luckless minister inadvertently or consciously broke with that tradition. The same caustic tone, the same sarcasm and the same mad ravings would have earned him brownie points only if he had targeted the opposition party or its leaders instead of areas where he had no business.*

earned him brownie points only if he had targeted the opposition party or its leaders instead of areas where he had no business. This is where he made an error of judgment. This is where he shot himself in the foot.

Like one swallow doesn't make a summer, firing one minister isn't going to give us the solution. We don't hire drivers, domestic helps and guards without checking their backgrounds. We aren't going to board a plane, launch or train if told that the person in the driver's seat is mentally unstable. Needless to say we shall never get out of the woods unless we first assess the mental condition of individuals with whom we're going to entrust our ministries and other key functions.

Throughout history rulers have suffered from mental and personality disorders, but my most favourite is Nabonidus of Babylon, who ate grass and believed he was a goat. While watching the obnoxious video, this streak of madness flashed before my eyes.

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## COMMENTARY

# Two PMs and their diaspora

## Hasina's UN foray marred by a "rotten apple"

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

MAHFUZ ANAM

Presidents and PMs (and why not), and what we can gather from footage and photos, and some personal accounts, she excels in them. She definitely is smarter than many of them; we would even venture to say, most of them. After all, her quick mind, ready wit and ability to think on her feet (which, at home, she exclusively uses to denigrate her opponents, the civil society and the media) is well known and definitely sets her apart in the global-leadership circle still largely dominated by men.

Coming back to her just concluded UN trip, Sheikh Hasina deserves praise for her robust speech at the Climate Summit hosted by the Secretary General. Her participation in the GEFI meeting on Global Education was appropriate, representing the country that has made significant advances in this sphere. As the largest contributor to the UN peacekeeping she legitimately co-chaired the US sponsored Summit on Peacekeeping and played a leadership role in it. All this testifies to her rising stature as a member of world-leader's club and she is increasingly being recognized for that.

As it happened a few times before, both the Indian PM and ours were in New York together. For Modi it was his maiden trip, made more satisfying by the fact that he was refused visa earlier and now the US was doing everything to make up for it. Sweet revenge indeed!

For Sheikh Hasina it was her first trip to the UN after "winning" the legally correct but politically controversial and, participation wise, highly questionable election.

Like PM Modi she had a skeptical world to convince and win, skeptical because of Modi's past and Hasina's dubious "victory." Both tried in their own ways.

Whereas Sheikh Hasina's performance within the UN is comparable to her Indian counterpart, if not a few notches better, it is in their interactions with their respective diaspora and the different messages that emanate from those interactions that the contrast becomes stark and something, we feel, to learn from.

Modi talked about the future and we indulged in self-praise. Modi gave a picture of united India and we thrashed the opposition. He spoke to all US-based Indians, we spoke to our chosen crowd. When speaking to his compatriots he never brought in the opposition and we hardly left them. He inspired, we bored; he presented himself as a servant of the people and we as its indisputable leader; youth sparkled in his speeches, we ignored them in ours. In him, humility was written all over (he never missed a chance to repeat his 'tea boy origin' story). In ours, it was 'opulence.' (The Indian PM took a 75 member entourage most of whom were self-financed business leaders. We took 185 of which only 75 paid for their trip and the rest 110 were paid from the public exchequer).

In all, ours was déjà vu and his was oven fresh.

Coming to the "rotten apple," whatever Sheikh Hasina achieved in her trip was totally, jarringly and unnecessarily marred by her ill-tempered, ill-mannered and totally uncouth minister. Not only the unbelievable nature of his comments, but also his choice of words, foul-mouthed expressions and overall body language -- evi-

dent from the widely circulating footage -- speak of an arrogant person totally given to self-indulgence, crudity and gangster-like behaviour.

The fact that he has been sacked from the cabinet, all party posts and even its primary membership is all well and good. It was largely unavoidable too, given the outrage all over and within his own party. But the crucial question to us is that how could such a person join the cabinet in the first place? What criteria, if any, are followed in choosing cabinet members? Even if Sheikh Hasina personally makes these choices, does she follow any rule of her own?

The reports of his abuse of power and corruption were in abundance in the media. Regrettably, they made no impact on the PM. As is well known, more the media exposed, more she becomes determined to do the opposite. (There is a joke prevalent in media circle that when a minister feels he may be dropped from the cabinet, he persuades an editor friend to write against him. That ensures his continuity. We don't know whether it is true but every time we exposed a minister's misdeeds his position got strengthened or at least he never got punished).

As more were written about Latif Siddiqui in the media and as nothing happened to his power or party stature, he became a law unto himself making it clear to all, especially his ministerial staff, that rules and procedures were only for the faint hearted and that he was of a different mettle. His favourite story was how he once beat up a senior civil servant who wanted to inform him about some procedure. "Throw your rules in the Bay of Bengal" were his oft quoted words.

We believe years before PMO completed its report on Siddiqui, Sheikh Hasina knew about his activities. So why did she allow him to continue and vitiate her own administration? How many more such ministers are still there in her cabinet? When will she take steps against them? Or do we have to wait for them to make a disastrous "faux pas" for her to act.

Dozens of cases pile up against opposition leaders within days if not hours on trivial issues of 'throwing stones' and 'obstructing police work' whereas nothing happens when stories of corruption against ministers and ruling party members are made public. This does not enhance public trust in the present administration. More the people lose faith in the governance process, more will they indulge in corruption leading to a time when it will become impossible to control the malaise.

Sheikh Hasina would do well to take the Latif Siddiqui instance as a starting point for a thorough purge within her cabinet and her party so that she can begin afresh. Coming from the media it may not be very palatable but the truth is when people hear talks of "Vision 2021" it is taken more as wish to continue in power; when mega projects are taken up it is seen as a chance to make "mega-bucks" for some people. A serious, thorough and merit based cleansing of the government and her party may add a new momentum and freshness to her tenure.

Since we are suggesting, dear readers, you may count it out from happening.

The writer is Editor and Publisher, *The Daily Star*.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### It's not expected of a friendly neighbour

I became wordless when I came to know from an article published in TDS (Sept. 28) that members of the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) have killed 577 Bangladeshi people during 2001-2006 and 300 during 2009-2013. I can not understand how a neighbouring country that provided shelter and fed approximately 1 crore people of Bangladesh during our Liberation War can allow such killing at the border now.

Most of the victims of border killing were unarmed cattle traders and farmers. India claims itself to be our friend; now it should behave like a friend and not like an enemy. Mobarak Hossain Bhairab

### US and the Muslim world

From the role of the United States and its allies, it appears that they are more interested in encouraging factional politics among the Muslims, instead of solving their problems. American presidents, from Eisenhower to Obama, have been responsible for the phenomenal rise of Islamist forces throughout the Muslim world. Hillary Clinton and some top American diplomats and politicians have publicly admitted that the Cold War exigencies had led their country to support Islamist forces, including the Afghan Mujahedeen and those who later founded al-Qaeda. The ISIS, which is widely believed to be a creation of the CIA even in the western media, has meanwhile appeared as a Frankenstein and one should not be surprised if in the near future the American politicians also admit that it was wrong for them to create ISIS.

But there is no scope to blame them singularly, for this has been possible only because of the rise of the so-called political Islam, which is antithetical to the basic tenets of Islam. Small wonder the United States, despite their anti-terrorist rhetoric, is eager to accommodate such entities as the Jamaat-e-Islami, in order to weaken the secular democracies in the Muslim world.

Hafejul Alam  
On e-mail

### Shocking DU admission test results

Only two students have passed in the admission test of Dhaka University to be enrolled in the English Department for the session 2014-15. Nearly seventy-two thousand students got GPA-5 in the HSC examination this year and most of them couldn't even pass in the competitive exams. Whither quality education? Mawduda Hasnin Rajshahi

### Comments on news report, "Nahid questions DU admission system," published on September 29, 2014

#### Anas, Sylhet

Only to show off their success in the education sector, this government has done enormous harm to the students and the nation will have to suffer the consequences for long.

#### S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

The minister should open his eyes to see the real picture of the country's education system where if a student is good at memorising, he/she gets a GPA 5, but struggles upon entering universities.

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### "Register as Bengalis or...." (September 29, 2014)

#### Enayet Mowla

Though the international community knows about the 'created' Rohingya problem in Arakan, it is surprising that neither the UN nor the HRW did anything about it.

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### "I'm very serious" (September 28, 2014)

#### S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

How can he be serious when their meeting lasted for only 20 minutes? Seems he was in a serious hurry!

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### "No early polls, no talks" (September 28, 2014)

#### S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

This is to be expected as her inflated ego is more important than what people truly desire, and she can console herself with the delusion that the government was mandated by the voters.