

A milestone in cancer treatment

Time to build up on the success

IT is heartening to see that the country's first ever Bone Marrow Transplantation (BMT) Unit has successfully restored all its twelve blood cancer patients to health in the last one year. In a developing country like Bangladesh, achieving zero mortality rate in the first year of such a programme is indeed a rare achievement. We thank the US expatriate Dr Bimalangshu Ranjan Dey for his trailblazing role in setting up the BMT Unit. The government also deserves credit for facilitating Dr Dey's effort.

In Bangladesh every year many people die of blood cancer and Thalassemia simply because they do not have access to proper treatment, both in terms of facility and cost. Under a joint venture of the health ministry and Massachusetts General Hospital, the BMT Unit was established in the DMCH with the capacity to provide state-of-the-art treatment on blood cancer and Thalassemia at a much lower cost. Now the challenge is to replicate this effort to cover a large section of the population. Another challenge is to make the transplantation process more sophisticated so that critical cases can be dealt with success. General people also have to be made aware of the importance of donating bone marrow.

We have made the right beginning. Now we have to follow up on this outstanding achievement so that every cancer patient in Bangladesh can get proper treatment at an affordable price. Both the government and private sectors need to work together in this endeavour. We hope more expatriate Bangladeshis will be encouraged by Dr Dey's example to contribute more to their motherland. We believe, if we work in concert we will triumph over all cancers.

Bangladeshi workers taken hostage

Make all-out efforts to secure release

ANOWAR Hossain and Helal Uddin are two Bangladeshis among other foreign nationals who have been taken hostage by the Islamic State or some other militia group in Libya. In a case of mistaken identity, Anowar who was thought to be Sudanese ended up in this militant outfit's grasp. Whatever may be the circumstances of their kidnapping, the question is what steps authorities are taking to obtain their release from this murderous group which only recently decapitated more than 20 captured Egyptian Coptic Christians.

It is the first time that Bangladeshi workers have been taken hostage by militants. This should alert our missions abroad as to the risks involved in areas where they have made inroads. Why are Bangladeshi workers ending up in conflict zones like Libya that has become a hotbed for militias and radical Islamists fighting over land and oil? At the recruitment stage, we have to ensure that as far as practicable our workers are not put in harm's way. Now that some have been, it has become imperative that the Bangladeshi mission makes coordinated energetic efforts to secure release of our captive workers.

The authorities can launch a public relations campaign to warn our nationals about the risks of working in conflict regions like Libya. Efforts should be made by authorities to get the employing companies involved in negotiations with kidnapers to arrange for the release of the captive men.

COMMENTS

"Tigers Terrific"

(March 10, 2015)

Salim Khan

Well done TIGERS. You made us proud!

Matthew

It was a great game to watch and I really liked the variety of howling from Ruhel

"Bangladesh eyes 2,000MW

more by 2018"

(March 7, 2015)

Shabbir A. Bashar

In order to reach one of the Millennium Development Goals jointly declared with the UN of becoming a middle income country by 2021, Bangladesh needs to generate 20,000MW or 120Whr/person. That's only 5 years to double the current capacity which seems highly unlikely. Hence the promise to quadruple capacity to 40,000MW in 15 years based on suppositions and without a tangible clear time-line sounds far fetched.

PlainSpeaker

I suppose a middle income country should be a country with a minimum income of US\$15,000-US\$20,000 per person per annum and where every household has running water and adequate sanitation facilities. I don't think that even India can be a middle income country by 2035. Actually income and distribution of income is important when one calculates the per capita income. Why is there the idea of importing electricity from India

This is not cricket

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

THE country was rather pleasantly surprised by the BNP, whose so-called political programme has crossed the sixty day mark a week ago, announcing temporary relaxing of hartal (for 12 hours, though there was no such dispensation accorded to

blockade) that it had been calling for the entire week except for the two weekend days, for March 10 to celebrate our historic victory in the world cup, a victory that saw us through to the quarter finals, a feat not achieved heretofore, by beating the English in literally their own game.

Cricket is a word associated with honesty, fair play and dignity. And that is what most of my generation grew up believing in. But certainly, what BNP has done so far, and now linking its political programme to celebrate a cricket victory, is not cricket at all. It has not only further defiled politics and sullied the value that the word cricket conjures up in our mind, and the perception of fair play, it has also betrayed the party's lack of innovation in formulating a sane and effective political strategy. What we have suffered from is an insane and ineffective political move. As an aside, it would not be misplaced to suggest that insofar as political ploy and gamesmanship is concerned, BNP has come a poor second to AL, but that should be the subject of another article.

The temporary relaxation was sort of a "layoff" from hartal which, in Dhaka at least, nobody has cared to observe. It was reminiscent of relaxation of curfew, to give us 12 hours to celebrate the victory. It is quite appropriate that in view of what BNP has brought upon us since January 5, and in which the AL and the government has not a little part, hartal has become the norm, and anything other than that is now the exception.

Our latest achievement in cricket is worth all the celebrations that we can think of. And that there can be nothing better than this is it is celebrated cutting across party line forgetting the political differences. However, what is most infuriating is the gross lack of proportion of the BNP in announcing political programmes. One would not like to believe that the BNP leadership would feel that a cricket victory, without for a moment detracting its significance, is worth calling a temporary halt to hartal just so that the BNP can participate in celebrating it. To weigh cricket over the plight of 1.5 million SSC examinees, to be oblivious of the agony of the victims of petrol bombs, to think nothing of the irredeemable harm to the country's economy, is something possible on the part of only those with a cerebrum disorder. While we hope that such genus are very few in the BNP, but fear that those are calling the shots and making decisions in the BNP. It would have been more welcome if the 12 hour respite in hartal would have been for twelve months and more and the senseless blockade had been called off permanently.

However, it is encouraging to see that the saner elements in the BNP are seeing things

for what they are—that the so-called BNP programmes are getting nowhere. BNP's irresponsible and harmful policies have been able to elicit a response only possible from an insensate government—inexplicable indifference to the nation's plight. And during this time the extremists and violence mongers have exploited the flux. We had said before that the so-called programmes have gone out of BNP hands. And it is good to see that being acknowledged by some BNP leaders now. The so-called movement has been hijacked by those whose motives may not be in accord with the BNP's, and unless its leaders revisit their policy soon the situation may be completely irretrievable. We notice with fear the newer innovations by the violence mongers such as 'bicycle bombs' which, if employed, can cause severe damage to humans.

In war no general is worth his salt if the aim is achieved and the objectives attained with 50% casualties. I for one cannot take issue with the BNP's aim of having an inclusive participatory and free election. But in politics too the attainment of the aim cannot be at the cost of the country and the people. But that is what is going to happen exactly. By the time BNP succeeds, if at all, in 'salvaging democracy,' the country will have suffered irredeemable losses. BNP should understand that programmes which it claims are being pursued for the people cannot be directed at the people and the country. And at the end of the day, and it might be a very very long day, the best the BNP can gloat over is a Pyrrhic victory.

The writer is Editor, Oped and Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

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Alienation breeds intolerance

'You need to invest in Islamic scholarship.'

Dr. Imtiaz Ahmed, Professor of International Relations of Dhaka University and Director of Centre for Genocide Studies, speaks about religious extremism with Nahela Nowshin of The Daily Star.

The Daily Star (TDS): What do you have to say about the state of religious extremism in Bangladesh?

Dr. Imtiaz Ahmed (IA): All countries have some form of extremism, even developed Western countries—on both the left and the right wings. They have a kind of governance which allows them to handle extremism in a manner that sends the message that no one can get away with militant activities. The problem in Bangladesh is that we have a weak system of governance. Especially with the current political crisis, extremists have an open space to operate which otherwise would easily have been contained.

TDS: It is argued that mainstream political parties help legitimise certain groups by giving them a voice in the political arena that is disproportionate to said groups' electoral support. What's your take on that?

IA: Because of polarised politics, the idea that one must win the election by hook or by crook and the winner-takes-all attitude, parties are ready to form an alliance with any group that will help them win. The system of electoral democracy creates a situation where such groups have a voice disproportionate to their electoral support.

Let's consider the example of Jamaat-e-Islami and look at the voting pattern in the last twenty years or so. Interestingly, the vote bank of Jamaat has declined; it used to be as high as 50% and got down to 12%, then 8%. Here's a party whose vote bank is decreasing, but both the major parties are using this party; they are empowering this party despite it not carrying that much weight when it comes to vote bank.

Even Hitler and Mussolini were elected under the structure of an electoral democracy; Narendra Modi too was elected after the Gujarat riots. Electoral democracy and polarised politics have created this kind of a structure.

TDS: It has been observed that strands of intolerance in the form of strict, puritanical interpretations of Islam

have infiltrated our society. How can we tackle this?

IA: Firstly, there has been a serious decline in Islamic scholarship and in the understanding of tolerant Islam. All religions are complicated but investment in their scholarship is important. Those who interpret these religions are often in doubt. You will hardly find students entering Islamic schools; they're becoming engineers, doctors, economists, etc. Islam, a multifaceted religion, is being interpreted by those with a mediocre understanding of it.

Secondly, petrodollars play a big role



Dr. Imtiaz Ahmed

in the age of globalisation. Bangladeshi migrant workers, bringing in large sums of remittance, live in the Middle East where there is a huge democratic deficit and rigid madhhab's. These workers, most of whom are semi-skilled and unskilled, hardly have any knowledge of Islam. When they go to the Middle East, they are influenced into taking the interpretation of Islam there to be authentic, and they try to export it back to Bangladesh. There is no counter-discourse in Bangladesh reinforcing our understanding of Islam.

Finally, there is the role of polarised politics, which means parties trying to win by whatever means possible. They don't counter the hardliners or the dis-

torted understanding of things. So you have problems on three levels: the decline in Islamic scholarship, petrodollars and migrant workers, and polarised politics.

TDS: Madrassas are widely believed to be a breeding ground for militants. Nowadays, however, we see many youngsters from affluent families being recruited as well. Could you elaborate on that?

IA: We cannot label madrassas as the "breeding ground." University of Chicago has carried out a survey on

ship. Otherwise, you are going to breed intolerant minds both in madrassas and secular schools. Magnifying madrassas as the core problem is not the way to go about this.

TDS: Then what would you say is luring these youngsters from wealthy families into militancy?

IA: You are not going to find a marginalised and impoverished person readily joining militancy. It's often those from wealthy families who have the luxury of an ideological commitment.

In the western countries, it's largely because these individuals feel alienated; these "mono-societies" have a monocultural element. Alienation breeds intolerance. Whether it's Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, or the Arab Spring failing right before your eyes, you are returning to the old structure, creating that "space" for militants to thrive.

TDS: Laws like the Anti-Terrorism Act and Money Laundering Prevention Act have been enacted. What other measures should be taken to tackle terrorism efficiently?

IA: You need four i's to counter terrorism. The first "i" is incarceration which means you need to police these activities and oversee rules and regulations.

The second "i" is intelligence. The 19th and 20th century intelligence is not going to help you because this is a non-state threat. Before, it was "Big Brother is watching you," in the Orwellian sense. Now it is, "The Little People are watching you," as Haruki Murakami said in his book 1Q84. We need to restructure our intelligence in a much more creative way.

The third "i" is intellectual investment; because of the serious decline in scholarship of religious studies, we need to incorporate them at all levels of education.

Finally, the fourth "i" is institutional investment. We need national institutions that monitor such activities, involve all stakeholders and carry out independent research to detect threats. These four i's combined will surely help curb militant activities.

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suicide bombers. They found that most of the suicide bombers around the world are engineers. Is anyone talking about changing the curriculum of engineering universities? Osama bin Laden was also an engineer who hailed from an affluent family. You have people from the US, UK and Canada joining IS. These people weren't educated in madrassas.

Even in secular schools, the curriculum can produce intolerant minds. The heroes in one version of history become villains across the border in another version. You need to look at the bigger picture that is knowledge production. You need to invest in Islamic scholar-

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Save the farmers

The ongoing political unrest has been a cruel blow to the farmers. The wholesalers and traders offer very low prices for fruits and vegetables citing transport fare escalation owing to heightened arson risks.

A recent news report of this daily says that farmers have to suffer the burden of increased transport cost. Opportunistic traders are transferring the extra costs on their shoulders. Common people in big cities, for example Dhaka and Chittagong, now have to pay exorbitant prices for fruits and vegetables due to higher transportation costs and reduced supply.

It may also be noted that even under the normal political situation, it is tough for the farmers to make profit after deducting the labour and transport costs. We hope the government would take initiatives immediately to save the farmers from their plight.

Mobarak Ali
Gopibagh, Dhaka

We are proud of our cricketers

When the people were passing their days in a suffocating atmosphere, the success of Bangladesh Cricket Team came as a breath of fresh air. They forgot for a while all the miseries they were going through and became suffused with joy. The whole country prayed for them and their prayers were answered. We felicitate our boys and hope that they will be able to keep the winning trend to continue, will not become over confident, remain humble and always remember to thank Almighty Allah.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

