

Lift ban on social media

It is counterproductive

AS the social media ban reaches its third week, perhaps it is high time the government re-evaluated the prohibition which has all but cut off Bangladesh from the rest of the world. The ban, supposedly imposed to ensure national security, has been defended by the government – in the face of widespread criticism by experts and users alike – as instrumental in “saving lives”. While we applaud the government’s intentions to protect the populace, we are left wondering the extent to which the ban has been successful in achieving its desired goal.

Despite repeated government warnings that those accessing the banned sites and apps through other means will be held to account, social media users have continued to use proxy sites to communicate with the outside world. What is the point of a rule, we wonder, that is not enforceable? Besides, should miscreants wish to misuse these platforms, would they also not find ways to circumvent the ban, including using services that cannot be so easily tracked? In the end it is the ordinary and not so tech-savvy citizens who are losing out. This may give a feeling of self satisfaction to the government but it is ultimately self defeating.

The ban is hurting e-commerce, particularly small businesses that rely exclusively on Facebook. At the same time, it is sending a wrong signal about the country.

Technology has long outgrown restrictive measures, and it is well-recognised that outright bans are not effective in countering terrorism. In today’s digitised world, we, as proponents of Digital Bangladesh, simply cannot afford to adopt such a myopic outlook. We urge the government to lift the ban immediately and take more suitable steps to regulate abuse of social media.

Teachers' strike at JU

Resolve the matter immediately

THE ongoing boycott of classes by teachers at the department of Geography and Environment of Jahangirnagar University, resulting in the suspension of all classes and exams, defies logic. The faculty members had been staying away from the department for more than two weeks now—reportedly for the failure of the university administration to take legal action against a colleague who allegedly threatened them, bringing in outsiders. The students, worried about an ensuing session jam and, ultimately, their future, staged a sit-in demanding resumption of the department’s academic activities.

We alarmingly note that, in the recent years, the institution, considered one of the best public universities in the country, has frequently been in the news for reasons other than academic, such as campus violence and prolonged teachers’ strikes.

Teachers may have their fair share of grievances which must be addressed properly and adequately. What gives them the right to refuse to teach, a task they are paid to do with taxpayers’ money? Why should the students suffer for a dispute among teachers? Who takes responsibility if the ongoing boycott leads to a session jam in the department? How much worse can governance get in this country?

We are not impressed with the half-hearted response of the university authority which has formed a committee to probe into the matter. The vice chancellor should do everything to make sure that academic activities resume without delay.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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A note of thanks and a suggestion

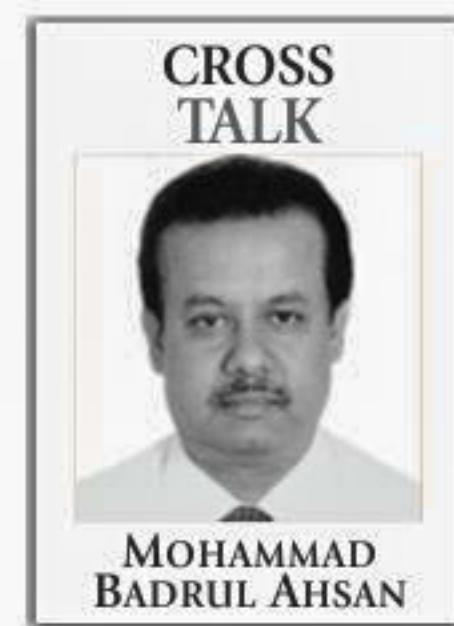
I want to send a note of thanks to honourable mayor (north) Annisul Huq for what he has done to clear the Tejgaon Truck Terminal. It was indeed a job overdue. Some years ago, the caretaker government led by Fakhruddin Ahmed took similar steps. During that time, I can remember that there were no illegal bus and truck stands anywhere; let alone in the middle of the roads obstructing the normal flow of vehicles. People say there is a special reason for police overlooking this. The much needed flyover-flyway from Bijoy Sarani was constructed during that time but unfortunately it was not done crossing over the flyover, over Airport Road or VIP road as it is commonly called. Therefore, at that junction, there is often a traffic jam on the main road (the Airport Road commonly called by drivers the VIP road). During the caretaker government’s tenure, we also didn’t see traffic jams caused by buses stopping in the middle of the road or anywhere they wanted other than the designated bus stops with the traffic police looking the other way. During the caretaker government’s time, there was also no traffic jam due to buses parked in the road from Tejgaon to the junction with the Airport Road just below the flyover.

There is a very old long standing specialised hospital (for neurosurgery and cardiac surgery very well known). This hospital I believe was established there when the bus station was not there. Very acutely ill patients needing urgent neuro and cardiac care go there with lot of difficulty for obstructions on that road. Also staff and doctors suffer a lot especially when they have to go to the hospital for emergencies.

I also remember there was once a move to relocate this bus station- but apparently for strong objections by the bus owners, that decision was blocked. May I request Mayor Annisul Huq and the relevant government department to kindly look into this matter?

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Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University

When higher minds serve baser instincts



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

CROSS TALK

HUMAN civilisation is a contradiction in terms, because humans may not always be “civilised” and the “civilised” may not always be humans. What we have hanging in

the balance is an intermediate race full of pretensions. Humans pretend to be civilised and the civilised pretend to be human. While the rational is merely a front for the animal, virtue for vice, truth for lie, and humanity for cold-heartedness, civilisation is just a cover for the clever to exploit the credulous.

The hallmarks of this civilisation are knowledge, information, inventions and etiquettes, which process human beings cooked on the outside but raw on the inside. The concoction of speeches, attires, manners, cosmetics and eruditions create the aura. Behind it, individuals remain as eclipsed by their instincts as ever.

Thus, the civilisation is a critical balance that can be tipped by the slightest turmoil. Once the cradle of civilisation, Greece is clobbered by economic meltdown. Greek women are reportedly selling sex for the price of a sandwich, the going rate for a 30-minute session falling from 50 euros to as low as two euros. The pride of this civilisation is as delicate as a soap bubble.

French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau’s fundamental assumption is that the corrupting influence of society is responsible for the misconduct of individuals. An irony is inherent to this seminal postulation when the rules are broken in the name of the game.

Politicians usurp power to rule in the name of people. Banks swindle customers and then indulge in corporate social responsibility. Businessmen steal and then give in charity. Bribe takers go on pilgrimage with their dirty money.

On a macro scale, the Bollywood film industry is financed by the underworld. The mafia runs governments in Italy. War lords rule Afghanistan and Somalia. Drug cartels dominate life in Mexico and Colombia. Fundamentalists are dictating the terms of religion worldwide.

This concourse of contradictions isn’t only confined to our daily existence, but pervades history. The wealthy and

powerful have patronised art, culture, music and literature for centuries. The Medici family made money first as merchants and then as the de facto rulers and bankers of Florence. They bankrolled the cultural movement that dragged Europe out of the Dark Ages into modernity. The revival of learning, rationality and the arts patronised by them spread throughout Europe, and sped along by the invention of the printing press, these developments forever transformed the Western world. This one family made household names of da Vinci, Michelangelo and Galileo.

Democracy came as a great relief for the creative minds as public funding rescued many of them from the indignity of currying favours with kings, queens, feudal lords and business magnates. Not that this practice has altogether disappeared. There are still many private pockets supporting philanthropic work. But the creative minds have more options now to pick favours on more favourable terms.

That explains why intellectuals and artists often rally behind governments like flies swarm over sweets, partly driven by fear and persecution. The

indentured labour.

Plato writes that the ability to hold two opposite ideas is a sign of the civilised mind. Most humans are incapable of doing it except for the hypocrites fashioning themselves as archetypes of cultural sensitivity. In that sense, what’s human may not be civilised and what’s civilised may not be human. Higher minds serving baser instincts, this civilisation is a ludicrous phenomenon comparable to keeping clean water in filthy buckets.

Thinkers, writers, actors, inventors, singers and musicians, the upholders of



King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain sponsored the voyage of Christopher Columbus, who discovered the new world. Likewise, countless explorers, voyagers, musicians, writers, painters, scientists and scholars sought and enjoyed the support of noble or ecclesiastical patrons. The European culture moved away from its patronage system with the rise of bourgeois and capitalist social forms in the mid-19th century. The more publicly supported system of museums, theatres, mass audiences and mass consumption emerged, which continues till today.

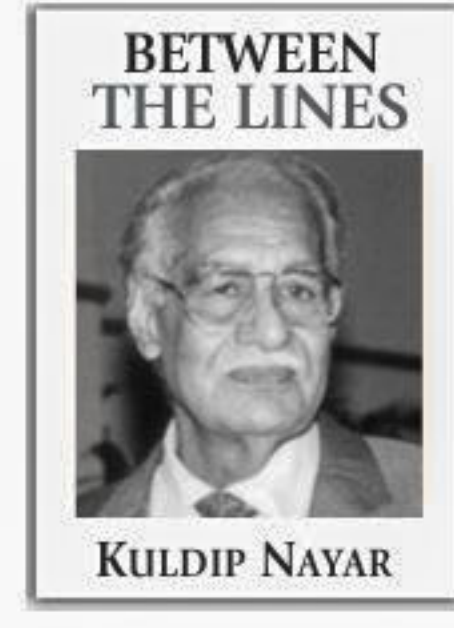
patronage system still persists to a large extent. It’s increasingly geared towards political leverage than creative indulgence, more so in underdeveloped than developed societies.

When unscrupulous politics and ill-gotten money take over, intellectual ability, creativity and originality live at the mercy of dubious benefactors. These benefactors set up universities, build mosques, fund charities, promote cultural events and bankroll ideas to promote their vested interests instead of common causes. Gifted minds work for them, submitting to the rigors of

the finest human qualities, are seeking support and recognition from murderers, smugglers, swindlers, bank defaulters and land grabbers, who control economies. British historian Arnold Toynbee claims that civilisations arose when “creative minorities” devised solutions that reoriented their entire society. Buried in the deep pockets of wealthy patrons, those minorities are now paid to reorient themselves, devising solutions at the expense of their societies.

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IS THE ICE MELTING?



KULDEEP NAYYAR

BETWEEN THE LINES

SUDDENLY there was summer. A chance 160-second meeting between Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Nawaz Sharif has melted the ice, which seemed frozen beyond change. The about-turn indicates that the differences have been exaggerated. The ego, which is probably the real reason, needs to be tackled.

India was stuck on the stand that it would not talk anything else, except terrorism, as was the crux of the joint statement issued after their meeting at Ufa, Russia. Pakistan saw no purpose in talking if the “core issue of Kashmir” was not on top of the agenda. That had led to the discontinuation of talks apart from Pakistan’s insistence on meeting the Hurriyat leaders from Kashmir. On similar grounds, the talks had broken after Agra. Then Union Minister Sushma Swaraj had voiced protest.

Apparently, these stances had acquired a crust which had to be broken as the two countries stood distant. Once their Prime Ministers met, the confrontational attitude disappeared, paving the way for a meaningful dialogue between India and Pakistan.

Those who underline the need for a structured dialogue do not seem to realise that such innumerable reasons are adumbrated when there is no will to talk. Once the desire crops up for constructive talks, everything else recedes into the background. The prime ministers shed their ego and behaved like normal human beings. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif went on to say that there would be further developments. That means the earlier stand not to talk until certain conditions were met has undergone a change.

I have followed the events in the subcontinent for more than four decades. My reading is that distrust remains the main reason for the absence of rapprochement. India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, felt that the distrust was a symptom of the disease, not the disease itself. The disease was the anti-

India feeling.

Pakistan can say the same thing. Still there is no going away from the fact that until there is trust between the two countries, no talks can fructify. That is the reason why so many agreements have remained only on paper.

Whether it was an agreement at Tashkent or at Shimla, the pious words of friendship never came true. Both did not trust one another. Even today, the story is no different. We are practically at the same stage we were at the time of partition, during which period a separate homeland for the Muslims in the shape of Pakistan was established.

In fact, the distrust has got institutionalised in the shape of India and Pakistan. The distrust between the two communities, the Hindus and the Muslims, has not lessened in any way. As a result, we often hear stories of atrocities committed against the minorities in both the countries.

No doubt, there will be talks between the two countries, although India may be reluctant to begin them because the latent enmity will come to the fore. Both sides will have to close the old chapters of hostility and begin afresh.

However, it looks difficult. Yet, if Pakistan were to follow Qaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah’s words, after the creation of Pakistan things could become easy. He said that you were either Pakistanis or Indians and that you ceased to be Muslims or Hindus, not in the religious sense but otherwise.

Pakistan is far from Jinnah’s wishes. It has become a purely Islamic state, with religious elements having their say. Hindus are less than two percent of the population, and many of them have migrated to India while others have succumbed to getting converted to lead their life. When the Babri Masjid was demolished, many Hindu temples and gurdwaras in Pakistan were destroyed as well.

Against this background, the dispute over Kashmir is understandable. Former Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah is correct when he says that Kashmir under Pakistan would remain part of Pakistan and the territory under India with New Delhi. Yet, the other

part of his speech that both India and Pakistan should vacate Kashmir is neither practical nor realistic.

Good or bad, the ceasefire converted into the Line of Control, becoming a line, which is recognised as the international border. Any unilateral attempt to redraw the line has resulted in hostilities as has been the experience in the past. This is unfair to the Kashmiris who remain divided. But they are not agitating for the integration of the two portions, however strong they may be feeling. The ceasefire line seems to keep them satisfied.

Lt. Gen. Kulwant Singh, who had led the operation at that time, was once asked the reason for his stopping at a point when the war was practically favouring India. He said that he was asked not to advance further by the government. Nehru, then heading India, explained that he did not want the forces to take that part of Kashmir which was Punjabi speaking.

Farooq Abdullah should know that the Kashmiri-speaking territory is with India. Beyond the valley, the Punjabi-speaking Muslims live and they do not harbour any sentiment for the Kashmiriyat. True, the entire Kashmir should be under Srinagar. But the events which have unfolded after the state’s accession to India have divided the state unrestrictedly.

Undoing the arrangement now will cost both India and Pakistan dearly. They have had experiences of two wars. It may not be fair to the Kashmiris but they have to live with it, realising the state of affairs between India and Pakistan. Another war between the two could be a nuclear one, which cannot be contemplated because it would destroy all above the Vindhya.

There is no go other than a meeting between India and Pakistan to sort out all their problems across the table. Only normalcy can bring prosperity to the region. The example of Europe is before us. They fought among themselves for hundreds of years and today there is an economic union which is helping even the sick Greece to recover. India and Pakistan should see the example and learn from it.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

COMMENTS

“A chance to fight back?” (December 2, 2015)

Momtaz Begum

We want peaceful, free and fair municipality polls; we don’t want any atrocities in the name of election.

Jahan Ara Begum

The municipality polls provide an opportunity for the BNP to turn around from their sorry present state.

“Outrage all around” (December 2, 2015)

Amina Begum

Pakistan should express its “deep concern and anguish” over its domestic affairs rather than our internal issues. Each and every day, countless people are killed in that country by terrorist attacks and bomb blasts.

Hashem Mia

Pakistan has no business in our dealings with the war criminals.

Ismael

Pakistan’s statement on the trial of war criminals is a blatant interference in our domestic affairs.

“Hasina among 100 leading global thinkers” (December 3, 2015)

Shimul Ahsan

Congratulations to the PM on being one of the leading global