

Help is around the corner, court it and benefit

Ambiguities regarding Saudi Coalition

Revisit Bangladesh's decision to join

WE are quite taken aback by the news that Bangladesh has joined Saudi Arabia's new Islamic Coalition against terrorism. Ambiguities surrounding the nature of the coalition calls for greater scrutiny. Former diplomats, academicians and military experts have expressed their surprise at this decision which has been made rather suddenly, without any notice or discussion in any public forum.

There are reasons for such skepticism. What was initially thought to be a sharing of counter-terrorism expertise and intelligence appears to be a military alliance of sorts, which is a major commitment for Bangladesh requiring considerable thinking before becoming a part of it. Indonesia, a country with the largest Muslim population and which has been a target of religious terrorism, has decided not to join the coalition which raises questions regarding the objective of this alliance. Even Pakistan whose name has been included in the list of 34 countries of the coalition, has said it had no prior knowledge of this inclusion. The conspicuous absence of other Muslim countries like Iran and Iraq seems to be reinforcing the Shia-Sunni divide which has wreaked havoc in the region and which we should not be a part of.

It seems that Bangladesh has rushed into this decision without properly understanding its implications and working out the details of what it entails. The comment of the minister for expatriates' welfare and overseas employment that expatriates living in the Middle East will not be affected by Islamic State (IS) because of Bangladesh's joining this coalition is quite baffling, illogical, if not deliberately misleading. Why should he comment when it is the concern of our foreign ministry?

We urge our government to revisit this decision and assess Bangladesh's role after thorough analysis and understanding of what we are getting into.

Shortage of skilled workforce

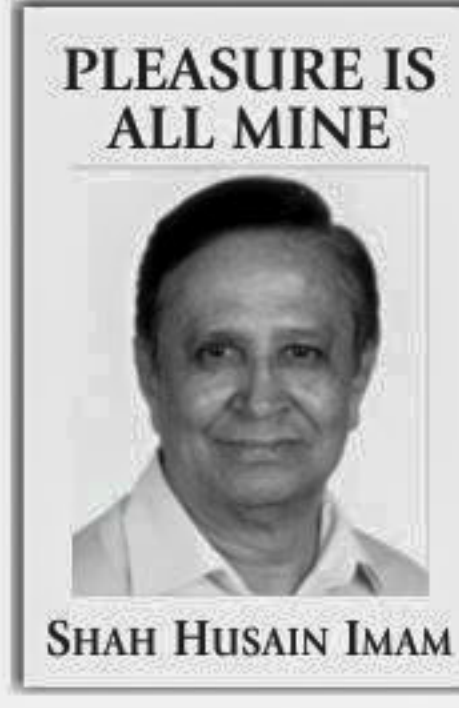
A roadblock to digital growth

AS an integral part of the government's Vision 2021, the concept of Digital Bangladesh reinforces Bangladesh's aspirations of becoming a prosperous, middle-income country by its 50th year of independence. However, as Bangladesh continues to grow in various sectors of the economy, a shortage of skilled workforce remains one of the biggest challenges facing the country today.

One of the key points behind Digital Bangladesh is the development of human resources apt for the 21st century. But lack of infrastructure for grooming skilled workers and glaring gaps between what students learn at educational and vocational institutions and the skills required by modern industries has resulted in a significant portion of the workforce devoid of the skills needed to survive in the job market.

A representative of one of the world's largest mobile telecommunications companies has pointed out that a conducive regulatory environment in Bangladesh is also vital to drive digital growth. Bangladesh's burgeoning population makes it a lucrative market for mobile services by international companies. A rising population also means an increasing workforce projected to be at 120 million two decades from now. Without a robust skilled workforce and an open environment for free, affordable internet, Bangladesh will fall far behind in the digitalised global atmosphere of cut-throat competition.

The government must work towards incentivising private companies in order to provide employees with in-house and external training. Educational institutions must also adopt competency-based training programmes to arm graduates with the necessary skills. The acute shortage of skilled workers in the country must be prioritised in the formation of national policies for Vision 2021 to materialise.



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE
THERE'S a sigh of relief breezing through the country's 18 million internet users over the unblocking of the social media sites the government had clamped down on, for more than three weeks, on security grounds. Clearly, the shut-down overstayed justification, if any, of a perceived fallout of the sentencing to death of two top criminals against humanity. To most people's disgust, it was continued beyond the anxiety and tolerance thresholds they were used to.

While negotiations were going on with Facebook, Google and Twitter to delete hate speech from the cyber contents within 24 hours of its appearance. The complaints would be assessed by 'specialist teams' at the three companies using the benchmark of German law. Some contextual differences between

Germany and Bangladesh apart, State Minister for Posts and Telecommunications Tarana Halim's bid to get an accord with social media for distilled news and views may find a resonance in the German breakthrough. What triggered the German deal was a Facebook posting from the country on bomb threats leading to the shutting down of all schools in Los Angeles. But a deeper analysis went behind the step initiated by the German govern-

ment: 'Germany's official welcome for hundreds of thousands of refugees - mainly from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan - has triggered a backlash from nationalists, including neo-Nazis.'

To quote German Justice Minister Heiko Maas: "When the limits of free speech are trespassed, when it is about criminal expressions, sedition, incitement to carry out criminal offences that threaten people, such content has to be deleted from the net."

We have sought remedy against

their own levels in floods or blazes, so do the popular cyber sites expand seamlessly. You can only recall the incidence of circumventing the ban underlining the inevitability of the surge.

The good news is the German deal with Facebook, Google and Twitter to delete hate speech from the cyber contents within 24 hours of its appearance. The complaints would be assessed by 'specialist teams' at the three companies using the benchmark of German law.

Some contextual differences between



messages hurting religious sentiments of people, fomenting violence against women and seditious remarks. These are broad non-specific concerns and subject to value judgments. Need we emphasise the obvious? We have to pinpoint the areas of vulnerabilities to invoke a workable response, a process we understand should be propelled by a well thought-out strategy and best practice methods followed by other countries.

Facebook, Google and Twitter are

Germany and Bangladesh apart, State Minister for Posts and Telecommunications Tarana Halim's bid to get an accord with social media for distilled news and views may find a resonance in the German breakthrough.

What triggered the German deal was a Facebook posting from the country on bomb threats leading to the shutting down of all schools in Los Angeles. But a deeper analysis went behind the step initiated by the German govern-

ment: 'Germany's official welcome for hundreds of thousands of refugees - mainly from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan - has triggered a backlash from nationalists, including neo-Nazis.'

To quote German Justice Minister Heiko Maas: "When the limits of free speech are trespassed, when it is about criminal expressions, sedition, incitement to carry out criminal offences that threaten people, such content has to be deleted from the net."

We have sought remedy against

messages hurting religious sentiments of people, fomenting violence against women and seditious remarks. These are broad non-specific concerns and subject to value judgments. Need we emphasise the obvious? We have to pinpoint the areas of vulnerabilities to invoke a workable response, a process we understand should be propelled by a well thought-out strategy and best practice methods followed by other countries.

Facebook, Google and Twitter are

Facebook, Google and Twitter are

volotaries of civil liberties, free speech and right to information. But increasingly they are realising the importance of implanting responsibility and commitment in the social media. For, there are no traditional layers of monitoring and editing in social media platforms like in the cases of print and electronic media. The social media platforms are in business which cannot afford to be devoid of normative ethical standards.

It is crucially important that we build and enhance our internal capacity backed up by clear strategic planning in consultation with experts at home and abroad to combat multi-dimensional cyber crimes. If we bring the friends closer we must mind the enemies even more up close to neutralise them.

In the essence, we face the challenge of creating expertise in this new field. For this, we can bank on international cooperation as iconic figures including high profile NRBs stand ready to shell out money for the purpose.

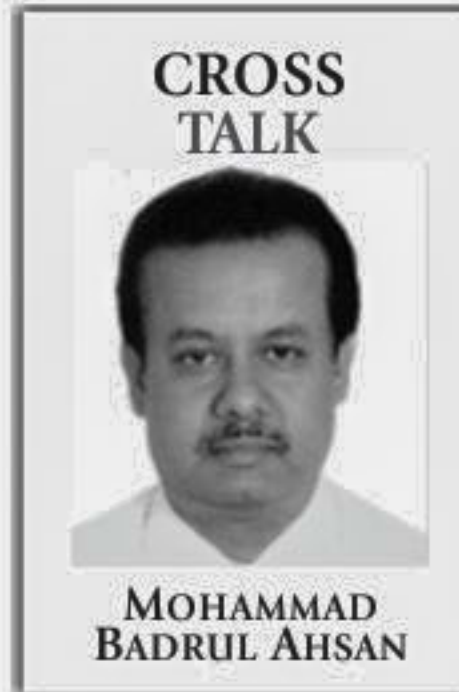
In Britain, there is the Government Communication Head Quarters (GCHQ) which monitors the cyber space and buttress the defense mechanism lest their computer-based systems are hacked into inoperability. This has been set up on a very vital assumption that most of our lives are these days conducted on the Internet.

We are looking at shared responsibility for an adequate response to the social media phenomena - BTRC, Internet service providers and cyber cafes -- all have to be involved in the undertaking. Lest you forget, some cyber cafes may have been vulnerable to abuse by irresponsible people who converge there.

Finally, blanket shutdowns of social media platforms are like using broad spectrum antibiotics for diseases about which the doctor has no clue.

The writer is Associate Editor, The Daily Star.

A renaissance man with a beautiful mind



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

CROSS TALK
LEOPOLD Sulerzhitsky, one of Leo Tolstoy's friends and followers, claimed in a letter that there were two Tolstoys. He mentioned that while the great Tolstoy remained for-

ever, the real Tolstoy - kind, friendly, tender and patient, full of humility - was gone. That bifurcation works for those, who combine substantial success with sufficient recognition to become significantly famous. Most other people live a laminated life, rolled into one thin layer of tin foil.

Ever since I met Syed Ali Kabir in 1987, I have tried to figure out exactly how many layers was that man. The real him could be compared to the real Tolstoy, because he too was kind, friendly, tender, patient and full of humility. The greatness issue, however, is a different story. He was no Tolstoy, but had the persistent craving for becoming one.

Mr. Kabir struck me as a phenomenon waiting to happen. He read voraciously and wrote copiously, his mind endlessly fermenting ideas to bring order in chaos. He was also a consistent contradiction unto himself, a highborn man who cherished the ideals of egalitarian dreams with the devotion of a believer upholding his faith. His family swarmed with politicians, lawyers, diplomats, writers, actors, high officials, teachers and businessmen, having perhaps the highest per capita concentration of national prominence compared to any other family in this nation.

He also had many powerful friends including chief justices, ministers, intellectuals, bankers, and diplomats. In the six years that I worked with him, he mentioned his connections not even half as many times. He had the aura of an exclusive collections store about him, not that of a departmental store. He wanted people to judge him not by labels but by worth.

My understanding of this man was gradual, much like a film in the developer where the image slowly emerges from a blank piece of paper. He was a former deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank, heading a philanthropic organisation where I worked. He was also a noted columnist of the country, quirky forever if interrupted when absorbed in writing. He was notorious for his explosive temper. His daughter Bula assures me it was nothing compared to his outbursts at home.

As mentioned earlier, he was a man riddled with contradictions. He had a plebeian mind with patrician manners. He wrote in Bangla but his conversations were heavily spiked with English words. He was a tall and handsome man, but dressed inattentively except for a few occasions when he donned perhaps his one and only pinstripe suit.

But his contradictions were like fog rolling through a mountain. And that mountain was a large landform of conscience stretching above others around him. Not a devout man, his conscience was his God, truthfulness, honesty, simplicity and compassion being the rituals of his religion. Syed Ali Kabir treated this life like double entry accounting, inexorably balancing the debits and credits entry by entry leaving nothing for the next.

He was comparable to an ocean, living in his deepest layer below the thermocline and above the seabed. In

He was a man riddled with contradictions. He had a plebeian mind with patrician manners. He wrote in Bangla but his conversations were heavily spiked with English words. He was a tall and handsome man, but dressed inattentively except for a few occasions when he donned perhaps his one and only pinstripe suit.

that layer the clock had stopped for him many years ago, where his happy abode with his first wife Nurunnahar was submerged intact. This is where there were two Syed Ali Kabirs. One loved his life on the surface. Another lived for the love of his life with the tenacity of salvage divers looking for sunken shipwrecks. He shuffled between his two lives until his last breath.

Nurunnahar had done two Masters degrees from Dhaka University, a fiery woman who led female students to write posters during the Language Movement. She was also the first of five women to publicly act on stage in one of Munier Chowdhury's plays. Mr. Kabir started courting her in 1948, until they eloped in 1952. After marriage, they waited 12

years to have a child so that they could have the means, as their only child Bula writes from Sweden, "to afford an ice cream for a third person."

Two days after Bula's birth in 1964, Nurunnahar passed away. Mr. Kabir never recovered from the shock, blaming his wife's untimely death on himself. In his own mind, he was convinced that Nurunnahar would have lived if she hadn't married him. And that was the epicentre of an earthquake that had shattered him, and its aftershocks continued to roil him forever. He spent many hours of his life pacing up and down the balcony, his hands, clasped on his back, dangling like a loosely shaped quotation box waiting to be filled with an eloquent answer.

Mr. Kabir died on this day fifteen years ago. His second wife Siddiqua Kabir, who was the foremost culinary expert in the country, told me he had asked for a copy of the Constitution of Israel before his death, and muttered the word "Hebron" in his deathbed in a trance-like state. The body was giving up, but the mind was engaged. He must have wanted to solve one last problem of this world before he left.

In the Oscar-winning movie, *A Beautiful Mind*, based on the life of Nobel laureate John Nash, Nash tells his future wife Alicia his most important discovery was the realisation that any logic or reason could be found only in the mysterious equation of love. Syed Ali Kabir had found and lost that logic, spending the rest of his life haunted by the ghost of that loss. Those who met him saw a renaissance man with a beautiful mind, but not everybody could tell this haunted life was also a powerful exercise to tap into greatness.

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

COMMENTS

'Bangladesh wasn't born to live off others or on the mercy of others and be dependent on them.'
 - Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

Samul Islam Sam
 Then why are we taking the World Bank's funding for other development projects? If I take loans from a bank to build my house, it does not imply that I am living at the mercy of that bank. Banks give me money and I give them interest. Simple math.

Shuyel Kamali
 Bangladesh has been relying and will always rely on foreign aid and borrow money from other multilateral bodies. PM Sheikh Hasina's government has borrowed tremendous amount of money from foreign countries.

Siddharth Chowdhury
 Good thinking, but it would have been better if the govt had realised this before the World Bank denied the loan to build the Padma Bridge.

"No wrong in taking World Cup fund from Islami Bank: Planning Minister"
 (December 15, 2015)
Mahmud Hossain
 At the end of the day everything comes down to money.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Law against the edible oil companies

The government's recent move to strictly enforce a law against the edible oil companies who do not fortify their oil with vitamin A is admirable. It is a commendable step taken by the industries minister as there are lots of branded and non-branded edible oils in the market that lack vitamin A. This vitamin is crucial for the immune system and vision, and ensuring that this vitamin is incorporated in edible oils will prevent many diseases.
 Samiul Raijul
 School of Business and Economics, NSU

The answer to cancer

TDS's backpage report on December 7, 2015 indicated an interesting and positive way to tackle and cure cancer. I wish the researchers good luck in their endeavour to contain and cure this terrible disease. And we also hope that the mentioned drug with its surprising capacity to transform itself into a direct and effective organic component will be successful in destroying cancer cells in the human body.
 Engr. S. A. Mansoor
 Dhaka

