

Common front against militancy

A welcome move

GIVEN the recent spike in extremist attacks on both the religious minorities and various Muslim sects, the government has decided to float a platform that will bring together religious leaders from all communities in an effort to counter the rise of religious militancy in the country. The effort is laudable.

Bangladesh has always been a land of tolerance and there has been no record of serious religious-based violence. Regrettably, in recent times we have seen a rise in attacks and brutal murders of several members of minority groups, in what may be termed as an attack on the secular outlook of the land where people of all faiths have lived in relative harmony since long.

That scenario is being challenged today. With local militant outfits widely suspected to be carrying out such vicious and deadly attacks, the time has come for leaders of different faiths to come together and voice their opposition to extremists who commit such cowardly acts of terror in the name of religion.

We would hope that the leaders of different faiths and sects who had congregated in the event organised by the police yesterday in a bid to hammer out the way forward, would realise the urgency of the matter. Such meetings should be organised outside the capital also.

Scholars and clerics of various religions giving out sermons to the faithful in the villages and towns will be far more effective in ensuring that bigots are not able to recruit the unwary and gullible amongst our populace to join the ranks of the extremists.

A bizarre theft!

Catch the criminals, set an example

THE levers of about two hundred insecticide sprayers to destroy sand flies that cause kala-azar have gone missing from the Bhaluka Trauma Centre in Mymensingh and no one seems to know how. The bizarre theft has left the devices unusable, delaying the spraying programme aimed at containing the deadly disease in the area.

How this could happen in a government-run hospital is beyond comprehension. And the observation of the OC of the local police station that it could very well be an inside job offers reasons to worry and a number of questions. Were the parts stolen in one day? Who was in charge of safeguarding the devices procured from the World Health Organization? How difficult is it to hold someone responsible for this matter that a probe committee consisting of three physicians has to be formed to investigate the matter? Do doctors not have more important things to do, like looking after patients? Why not let the local police deal with the issue?

Stealing of medicine and other valuable materials from hospitals is, as shocking as it may sound, not uncommon in our country. But stealing parts of devices that are meant for preventing a disease the fatality rate of which can be as high as 100 percent takes the menace to a whole new level.

The hospital administration should stop with the nonsensical procrastination, identify the culprits and award them exemplary punishment under law.

COMMENTS

"Kalabagan killings isolated: Nothing to panic, says DMP chief" (April 28, 2016)

▼
Joy Amin

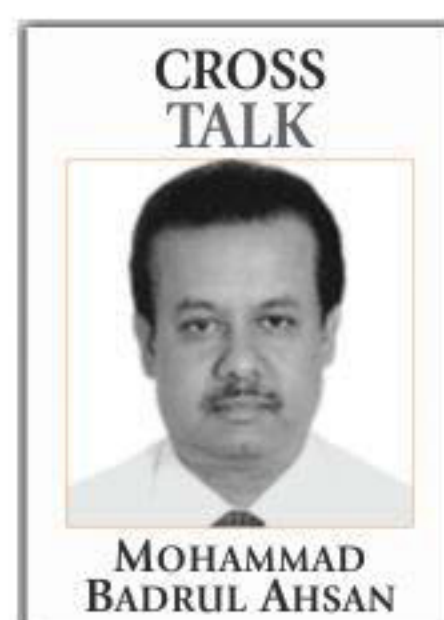
Oh, yes, every crime is an "isolated incident". Everything is ok in this country. We have nothing to worry at all.

"Olama League not affiliated with Awami League" (April 27, 2016)

▼
Jonab Kornell

Then how come we keep seeing AL men in Olama League's human chains? How can they deny pictures?

Obama's Libya admission and the clockwork world



CROSS
TALK

MOHAMMAD
BADRUL AHSAN

LESS than five years after the Libyan strongman Muammar Gaddafi was ousted from power, US president Barack Obama has made a frank admission. He told Fox News on April 10 that the intervention in Libya was the worst mistake of his presidency. He also insisted that the intervention was the right thing to do, but there wasn't enough planning once the dictator was toppled in 2011. The American president sounded like a confused doctor telling a deceased's family that his diagnosis was right, but the prognosis was wrong.

The doctor would have been sued for the very shirt off his back. But Obama being Obama is enjoying the glory of God, his bolder side rising in the sunset of his presidency. If he had only asked, any of the many smart alecks from our villages would have offered this advice: Don't start something you can't finish.

For Libya though it hasn't been as simple as that. The blunder Obama described in a few words has left Libyans stewing in their own juice. Their lives are shattered, the economy is in tatters, and politics looks explosive like a spark thrown into a gunpowder keg.

Throw in the Iraq fiasco, a crowning example of how the American paranoia wrecked a foreign country for nothing. Afghanistan is another example of brinksmanship when a selfish and arrogant superpower pushed a country to the brink. Syria is an ongoing tragedy; its miseries drag on while the Americans sit on the fence.

History works like clockwork. The mainspring unwinds, and its energy turns gears which cause the hands to move. Likewise, ideas spark actions that unleash events releasing energy leading to confrontations culminating in consequences. In that process, every country arrives at the end of its own flawed political system that can be called its breaking point. And each of these systems breaks under its own pressure, their cumulative effect radiating into the global system to bring about a pervasive and universal change.

More often than not, a breaking point sets off

changes that lead to a turning point. And that spectrum of change often starts with an individual, which may be why Obama has eventually admitted his mistake. An individual breaking point is occasionally violent and unfortunate. Saddam Hussein of Iraq was a broken man at the end of a hangman's rope. Gaddafi was stabbed, beaten, stripped and shot, the one-time big daddy hunted down like a pesky rodent.

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Thus, if an individual doesn't know his own limit, history sets it for him. Again, history isn't ready to change until an individual is willing to take charge of events. Messiahs have changed the world, conquerors have reconfigured maps, revolutionaries have remodeled countries and inventors have revised the way we lived. At the same time, the Big Bang, earthquakes, floods, asteroid impacts, plagues and pestilences have shaped human destiny since the dawn

of mankind.

Thus, breaking points in history are both manmade and natural. It could be that both complement each other in unfolding a design that's already there. It also could be that one leads to another or both jointly drive history like a carriage drawn by two horses.

A paper presented by Carmen M. Reinhart of Harvard University and Christoph Trebesch of the University of Munich in September 2015 argued that Greece defaulted four times in its modern history and each time it followed a period of increased dependence on external financing. It suggests that mistakes or failures have far-reaching consequences, compounding into a crisis if neglected too long. Bad decisions destroy a country just like bad habits ruin health!

Hence, a breaking point is the moment of greatest strain at which someone or something gives way. The British India split into two countries in 1947 under that same strain. Twenty four years later, Pakistan succumbed to it in 1971. The Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, creating 15 splinter republics.

Nations often misread the early signs of that strain. They squander their wealth. They also waste opportunities that eventually cost them. Nigeria squandered its oil riches. The one-child policy has upset China's gender balance. Zero population growth in some countries threatens to create labour shortage and desolation.

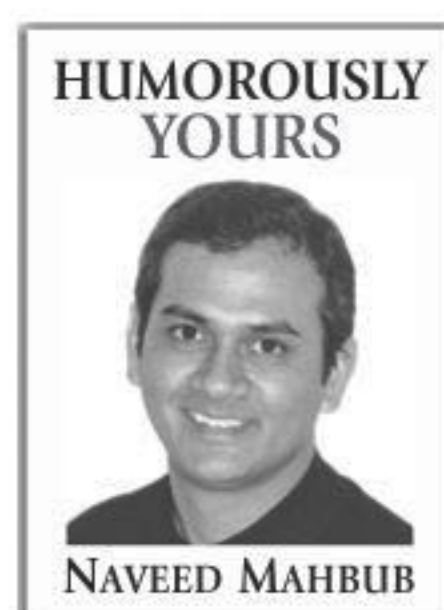
Obama's confession reconfirms that today's lapses are tomorrow's regrets. But there's something more important that he hasn't said: It's wrong to poke your nose in another country's business. Maybe, by breaking other countries the United States is destined to head for its own breaking point.

Liberators and subjugators have a thin line between them. Freedom imposed on people or denied to them is comparable to flood and drought. Surplus at times hurts more than shortage.

Last week, Obama asked the young Brits to reject cynicism. But he surely didn't sound convincing to them. Because they wonder, like the rest of us, if the Iraqis, Afghans, Libyans and Syrians are better off than before!

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Running Out of Gas



HUMOROUSLY
YOURS

NAVEED MAHBUB

I approach the immigration point at Kuala Lumpur Airport. There are the usual signs – 'Malaysians' and 'Foreigners'. What catch my eyes are the separate counters for 'Foreign Workers' and 'Expats'. Hmmm – what really is the difference between the last two? I find the answer as a middle-aged, blazer clad, freshly business-class-disgorged Western gentleman lines up at the latter while an army of my fellow compatriots, many with petrified eyes, at the former. But please do not take this as a clever ploy to distinguish between the colors of passports, let alone those of the skin – it's merely to separate the colors of the collar.

But my two shows at KL's upscale LOL Comedy Club are a far cry from any stereotypes as I, the 'Foreigner', open up with the line to the all 'Malaysian' and 'Expat' crowd: "Now, you have another reason to have Bangladeshis here – to make you laugh."

Thunderous applause as I direct the claps to the staff, majority of them 'Foreign Workers': "Give them a huge round of applause. Oh, and tip them well, you cheap bast**ds!"

All said in jest, with the carte blanche of a comedian. The same crowd turns sideways and applauds the young kids from Comilla, Tangail and Khulna.

After the show, a Malaysian business owner shakes my hand and goes on to say how great his Bangladeshi employees are – well behaved, professional and most of all, loyal. I can vouch for the last two – it's called 'visa'. The love is also from the fact that the boy from Chapai will happily work longer hours for a fraction of what a *Bhumiputra* demands without jumping ship.

The picture is not too different in Singapore. While thousands of Bangladeshis are there to build that nation with their blood and sweat, I am there to help build an already budding comedy scene in this perfect country.



Well, almost perfect, minus the weather for which Singapore should offer a 'sunshine tax break' (just as the high cost of living in California is attributed to the 'sunshine tax').

I go to the Mustafa area in Singapore on Sunday. Gulistan looks like a barren Sahara Desert compared to the sea of Bangladeshi workers on their only day off (if at all). I strike up a conversation with a group only to be greeted with suspicion. One finally blurts out, "Are you an undercover agent spying on us?" For a moment I picture myself getting off of an Aston Martin to be flanked by a Malaysian and a Singaporean beauty on either side.

Back to reality. "I'm a comedian." Of course, the immediate question, "Tell us a joke." Just like I tell a doctor, "Do a vasectomy operation right now."

Convinced, they treat me to *jhaal moori*. I give them two thanks – for the

treat and for the remittance. Oh and a silent apology – for losing \$81 million, part of which I'm sure they earned...

A pure coincidence that my mom's email account is hacked (the low tech kind) as I get her SOS email from being "stuck in the Philippines and needing money urgently". I email back to her (real) account: "Fret not. Go to Rizal Commercial Banking Company."

Wonder if I will get another hate mail from a disgruntled reader of *Humorously Yours* who tells me I'm running out of gas. True that. Better than my life cylinders running out of gas. After all, we are rapidly running out of safe topics. Besides, it's not only my email, but my photo accompanies my column too.

The writer is an engineer at Ford & Qualcomm USA and CEO of IBM & Nokia Siemens Networks Bangladesh turned comedian (by choice), the host of ABC Radio's *Good Morning Bangladesh* and the founder of *Naveed's Comedy Club*. E-mail: naveed@naveedmahbub.com

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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"GDP or Happiness?"

This has reference to an interesting article under the above mentioned title published on April 26, 2016. The writer rightly mentioned "The country with a high level of governance, less corruption and a sustainable development are happier than countries that are found lacking in these areas. Our GDP 'speedometer' indicates that we are running

fast. But the question remains whether we are running in the right direction." GDP growth alone cannot give us a good life. The least corrupt nations are the happiest nations. I find little indication that our rising GDP has made any improvement in the quality of life. Footpaths remain occupied by vendors, many roads are in a dilapidated condi-

tion, inflation is on the rise, manipulation in the stock markets continues unabated and corruption is rampant (now even bamboo is being used instead of specified MS rods in the construction of public buildings!). The rising GDP has no value unless good governance is ensured. **Luthfe Ali, On e-mail**

We want actions, not just words

We have lost all hopes for a peaceful life. Not a single day passes without the news of someone being hacked, killed or raped. On April 25, 2016 unidentified assailants hacked USAID official Xulhaz Mannan and his friend to death in a flat in the capital's Kalabagan. In another incident the same day, bike-riding criminals shot dead a jail guard at the gate of the high security prison in Gazipur.

Who are behind all these crimes? Of course people who are trying to destabilise the country. The law enforcement agencies have not been able to catch them in most cases. That's why criminals are becoming more and more daring. The government must stop the blame game and ensure safety of the citizens. **Nur Jahan Chittagong**