

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI

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## Another hate crime

Motives are clear but who are the killers?

**W**E note with trepidation, that the spate of killings of individuals that fit a certain profile has not seen its end – this time a Hindu tailor has been hacked to death. Nikhil Joardar was murdered in broad daylight at his tailoring shop in Tangail on April 30. The term 'unidentified assailants' is jarring to us, the ordinary citizens, who must helplessly watch as our fellow citizens are being slain one by one. What is worse is that even though a significant number of arrests have been made related to these killings, there has been little sign of progress in terms of putting the suspects on trial, let alone any convictions that would warrant exemplary punishment.

It is a useless exercise to ruminate over whether these heinous acts have been carried out by IS or home-grown terrorists. The reality is that no one really knows who are behind these murders. Only a rigorous investigation with the help of our intelligence agencies and a robust and quick trial process can unravel the masterminds of these targeted killings. The government can no longer look at these murders as a law and order situation but as a socio religious phenomenon sprung from radicalisation.

The profiles of the victims are a clear indication that they have been targeted for what the assailants perceive as their anti-Islamic view points. Which makes it all the more immediate for all security agencies to work together to bring these terrorists to justice.

It is also crucial for the government and the public to join hands to combat the curse of religious extremism by promoting tolerance of differences in faith, ideologies and opinions. Without tolerance there is only hate and hate can only bring destruction to our nation.

## CU Medical Centre

Effect a major overhaul

**T**HE shabby state of affairs and the lack of proper facilities at the Chittagong University Medical Centre (CUMC) have shocked us. We find it unbelievable that there are only seven doctors to cater to the medical needs of over 22,000 students. Even more egregious perhaps is the absence of equipment for tests and other diagnostic procedures. It is indeed bereft of any logic that the medical centre of a residential university will only be armed with a few thermometers, a blood pressure measuring device and two oxygen support machines.

The problem is all the more pronounced for Chittagong University, which is in a rural area and is one and a half hours drive away from the Chittagong Medical College Hospital, the nearest medical facility. The Chittagong University (CU) is sprawled over an area of 7.10 miles. Two operational ambulances are certainly not adequate for the evacuation of sick students from their dormitories to the centre, let alone taking them to the CMCH.

We strongly believe that it is incumbent upon the CU authorities to oversee the wellbeing of its students. In this regard, we urge them to take immediate steps to set up a properly equipped and functional medical centre at the university. It is also necessary to strengthen the operational ability of the institution by hiring more full time doctors and nurses. Presently the centre is a one-room facility. It should have a ward and a few cabins to prepare for any medical emergency and other contingencies.

## Democracy flourishes where the press works freely

MARCIA BERNICAT

**T**ODAY, we celebrate World Press Freedom Day. Established by the United Nations, it offers us an opportunity to celebrate the essential role that press freedom plays in democracy. As President Obama said, World Press Freedom Day is "a time for us to reflect and honor all those journalists who are languishing in jail as we speak right now, are being harassed, are in danger, and, of course, journalists whose lives were lost." Around the world, we pay tribute to journalists, who defend democratic ideals because of their commitment to discovering and sharing the truth, despite the enormous dangers they face.

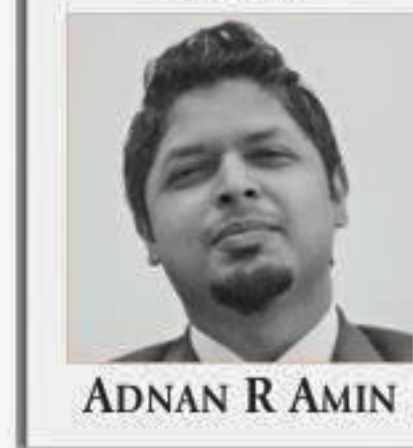
Journalists play an essential role in a democracy. They hold our leaders, and us – the citizens – accountable; they provide an unvarnished portrait of our society and of ourselves; they help ensure good governance. Because of their role, journalists are often targeted by those who feel threatened. Too many have been jailed, intimidated, or even killed as they have endeavoured to report on the challenges facing their communities, their countries, and our world.

Democracy can only flourish where the press can work freely. As journalists defend our democracy, we must defend them. We must protect press freedom as a fundamental human right to the benefit of citizens everywhere. The great poet and Nobel Prize winner Rabindranath Tagore dreamed of a country: "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; where knowledge is free." I believe he was dreaming of a Bangladesh where writers or all types, thinkers, and journalists could share the truth as they understand it, without fear of reprisal. We honour that vision together.

The writer is US Ambassador to Bangladesh.

# Can climate gather steam?

THE MIDDLE PATH



ADNAN R AMIN

**W**HEN a car spontaneously caught fire in Dhaka last week, allegedly from a heated engine, social media comments invoked the ongoing heat-spell. What was interesting to see is how many instantly made the connection. Bangladesh and South Asia in general has been experiencing a prolonged heat-wave for nearly four weeks. The sweltering Loo Wind that blows out of the North-Western deserts of India typically causes a hot spell during May. But this year, all three countries in the subcontinent have set all-time national heat records.

Urban centres have had it rough. A quick look at Dhaka provides telling signs: trees are few and far between, lakes have shrunk and ponds have disappeared. Grey concrete structures and heat-radiating vehicles have taken their place. Birds no longer have places to perch and have long taken to electric cables. The smell of CO2 and asphalt fills the air. Mirages appear silvery on dusty roads and the air ripples from heat-waves. Little shade is to be found on city-streets. The city's natural, green coolers and cleansers have been replaced by Freon-fuelled air-conditioners, which cool no one but their masters. Thus nature's innate balancing mechanism has been compromised by unmitigated industrial growth and urbanisation.

For those living in cities for some time, it is easy to see how we got here: government reforestation initiatives often lag behind; there is no social incentive to plant or nurture trees either: every piece of greenery is viewed as wasted real estate, i.e. foregone income. Households have surrendered trees when relegating 1-unit residences to developers. Civic works have bulldozed trees or buried their trunks and roots deep in concrete. Why bother with trees and such if you can build a rent-yielding coop? In the so-called 'tri-state area' (Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara), only the graveyard has a few trees left. It seems only the dead do not object to trees as much as Dhakaites do!

There are very few, if any, urban forests in Dhaka and more trees are constantly being cleared for new construction. Notable green resources in Dhaka – Ramna Park (1610), Suhrawardy Udyan (1660), Bahadur Shah Park (late 1800s), Baldha Garden (1909), Botanical Gardens (1961) – were all developed before independence. The capital has seen no other major reforestation attempt since then. It is important to note that Dhaka had an estimated forest cover of 8 percent in 2002 (Nasiruddin/FAO, 2006). Urban forests in Dhaka were estimated to be 0.02 percent. Admittedly, this is dated data; but considering that 14 years of rapid construction and development has followed since, we would be lucky if Dhaka still has half of that (4 percent) intact. An ideal city needs 20 percent forest cover.

We are lagging behind in conservation too. Forget the power-plants beside mangroves, utterly preventable oil-spills and deliberate burning of forests, social attitudes towards conservation are dismaying. The common attitude is either one of apathy or as follows: 'If I am paying for it, I have every right to waste it'. This is proven again and again through wasteful use of energy, public utilities and resources. A clear example is that groundwater abstraction for industrial purposes has reached an all-time high, causing the table to drop

lower and lower. But there's little accountability in how such abstraction affects a locality. Today, tubewells don't cut it anymore; one needs a submersible pump to reach hundreds of feet into the ground. Coupled with river erosion, saltwater intrusion and other environmental factors, this is driving 7.5 lakh people into Dhaka city every year. International Organisation of Migration estimates 70 percent of all domestic migrants are moving to Dhaka due to environmental shocks. Yet they find themselves unable to escape the wrath of climate change.

How do people remain so nonchalant? Do urban Bangladeshis not care for the environment at all? I will argue that there are four key factors that make this possible: firstly, it is human nature to not respond to slow-burning threats. People want to cross the climate

environmental protection. In turn, inaction by the educated elite prevents a trickle-down effect of green activism.

Complicating this nexus is a fifth factor: denial. It is difficult for educated urbanites to accept that they are not environment-conscious. So, they remain torn between 'the need to profess faith in climate change' and the 'real costs incurred to protect the environment' (examples of real costs could include sparing real estate for forestry, paying premiums for environment-friendly technology, limiting the use of air-conditioners, etc). Now, with the developed world rallying around climate change, caring about the environment is a self-worth and social-image imperative; i.e. it is in vogue. A slick way to act on this ambiguity is through online posts about Greenpeace and by vigorously defending COP21



PHOTO: STAR

bridge when they get to it. Secondly, an optimism bias is always at work, assuring us all that we will be spared. It is this very bias that assures a smoker that whatever happens, (s)he will not get cancer. Thirdly, Bangladeshi culture is largely fatalistic, supposing that natural disasters are 'Acts of God' and cannot be mitigated. This renders people and communities unable to view climate change as a gradual outcome of their irresponsible actions.

Fourthly, our economy is constructed around an imperfect model that doesn't account for natural resource depletion. For example, the GDP measure – the mainstay of the modern capitalist economy – has no regard for how much coal or gas or wood is used in economic production. Neither does it account for pollution or emissions caused by such production. Our economies operate as though they are beyond the (infinite) natural environment. Thus human, social, cultural and economic factors lie deep in the heart of our inability to take meaningful action on

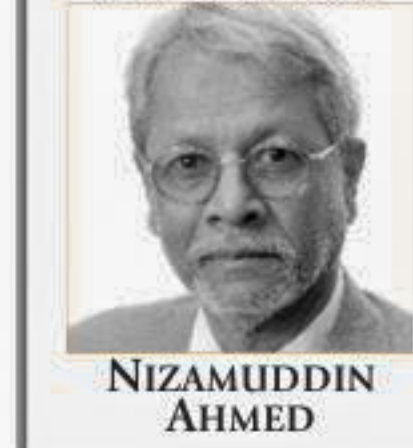
outcomes. Thus one's image and worth is bolstered without involving economic costs or environmental benefits.

If it's true that people's intentions are truly defined through their actions, then most care very little about the environment. Environmental investments in manufacturing have come from impositions by foreign buyers. Green technologies (e.g. the improved cook stove) have had little commercial success. There has been little activism for climate-related funding, strategies or regulations beyond the development/NGO sector. In Bangladesh, environment is a distant concern. A 2012 donor-funded study in industrial areas showed that respondents felt powerless to take action. When asked who should act, they all pointed to 'the government'. Such social resignation and inaction must be addressed through awareness raising, behaviour change and action-oriented mobilisation.

The writer is a strategy and communications consultant.

# May Day! May Day! And Mayday!

CHINTITO SINCE 1995



NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

**M**AY Day 1: Our most common understanding of May 1 being a holiday is that it represents a movement for the establishment of the rights of workers. Very few

of us may know that the turmoil during the first few days of May in 1886 took place in far away Chicago, and that more police officers were killed than civilians in the culminating incident that came to be known as the Haymarket Affair. And most of us would be dumbfounded to learn that the killings took place on May 3 and 4 (huh?) and not on May 1.

The significance of Pehela May is that in October 1884, socialist and communist trade union federations of the USA and Canada, against the backdrop of economic slowdown, declared that from May 1, 1886, the eight-hour work day would be effective, and a general strike by workers was on the card. On the other hand, the powerful employers were not ready to give up the practice of longer hours.

The planned general strike had remained largely non-violent. However, on May 3, a clash between strikers and strike-breakers of the Chicago's McCormick Harvesting Machine factory (the latter protected by 400 policemen - typical) led to police firing (also typical under repressed conditions) and the death of two McCormick workers; the

workers claimed several more deaths.

The following day, demonstrations were planned against the killings. A rally was also proceeding peacefully at Haymarket Square until some unidentified person threw an explosive at the police, who retaliated with gunfire. In the ensuing conflict, seven policemen and at least four civilians were left dead, and several others were injured.

Union leaders continued to hold their movement by staging demonstrations every 1st May, and in 1904, the International Socialist Conference in Amsterdam urged "all Social Democratic Party organisations and trade unions of all countries to demonstrate energetically on the First of May for the legal establishment of the 8-hour day, for the class demands of the proletariat, and for universal peace" as well as for "the proletarian organisations of all countries to stop work on 1 May, wherever it is possible without injury to the workers." So here we are joining much of the rest of the world in celebrating International Workers' Day, also known as Labour Day in some countries.

One hundred and thirty years on, not all but millions of workers across the world, including Bangladesh are toiling for over eight hours a day.

May Day 2: May Day is also the spring festival in Europe and North America, marked by revelry and merrymaking, not necessarily only around the maypole or by crowning of the May Queen. Once upon a time, May baskets of sweets and flowers were left anonymously at the doorstep of neighbours, but with rising price and anonymity turning to be a

social hazard, the tradition went out of vogue. Some opine, however, that souring neighbourly relations during the rest of the year was the cause of its demise.

The Spring May Day festivities have their roots in the Roman era in European pagan cultures. Considered the first day of summer, a delight in cold countries, the celebrations were in the earliest days based on cult religious rituals. The occasion became more of a secular and social carnival as Christianity took over Europe.

Germany, for one, celebrates May Day as one among several days of merriment with religious connotation to commemorate St. Walburga, considered to be the saint who ushered Christianity to Deutschland.

Religion did re-emerge among 18th century Roman Catholics, who celebrated May Day, in fact the entire month of May, by consecrating their Blessed Virgin Mary, whose crowned image featured in 'works of art and school skits'. The Catholics also dedicate a feast on the first day of May to St. Joseph the Worker, a carpenter and their patron saint of workers. First of May gained import when in 1955 Pope Pius XII chose the day to replace another feast to St. Joseph "as a counterpoint to the communist International Workers Day celebrations". 'Religion' continued to make grounds when neo-pagans returned in the late 20th century to recreate traditions and observe May Day as a pagan religious festival.

Mayday 3: While Spring festivals are occasions of joy, political issues centring

May Day can still signal trouble (the controversy of joy vs. sorrow remains), which brings us to Mayday, a radio telephone distress signal used by ships and aircrafts across the language barrier.

With multilingual international air traffic increasing, there arose the need for pilots to voice-communicate with ground staff during any emergency by using a single word that was easily understood. The task of finding that golden SOS-substitute fell on Croydon Airport's Frederick Stanley Mockford. The London airport's senior radio officer came up with "m'aider" which in French means "help me". This was 1923, when the traffic Mockford was dealing with at Croydon was mainly to and from Le Bourget Airport in Paris. Mayday became the official voice distress call four years later when it was adopted by the International Radiotelegraph Convention of Washington "to communicate the most serious level of distress, such as with life-threatening emergencies."

May Day rallies can go wrong because of non-achievement by workers generally around the world or due to the controversy of joy vs. sorrow. May Day celebrations can turn sour if an overzealous reveller breaks a maypole while trying to scale it. Aviation people need to repeat the word three times in a row, 'Mayday, Mayday, Mayday' lest their call is mistaken as just another day in the year.

The writer is a practising Architect at BashaBari Ltd., a Commonwealth Scholar and a Fellow, a Baden-Powell Fellow Scout Leader, and a Major Donor Rotarian.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Sue the white collar criminals

In the last six sessions, Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSEX) lost 163 points. After the announcement of recent confusing statements by Bangladesh Bank authorities (announcement on a new mechanism for adjusting the banks' capital market exposure which made the investors confused), the fall was the highest—43.25 points or 1.02 percent.

measures and irresponsible statements and activities brought down the stock market, causing millions to lose their capital and earnings. We demand that the responsible BB officials be brought to book and sentenced for their financial crimes in order to set an example of impartiality and justice.  
Dr. SN Mamoon  
Dhaka

### Security of private data

This refers to the report, "US drops fight with Apple in New York" (April 24). The US government with the help of hackers managed to crack the code of an iPhone. The Silicon Valley was divided over the issue; some companies were in favour of the government while others favoured privacy. This episode has created more awareness on the security of

private data held by the government or the private entities like mobile phone service providers and banks, among others.  
How many nations have data protection laws? There is an urgent need for data protection laws in a nation like Bangladesh.  
Deendayal M. Lulla  
On e-mail