

## Fire fighting gear in high-rise buildings

Ensure compliance of building code

A fire broke out at a residential multi-storied building in the city on June 29 and we are relieved that the fire brigade personnel were able to put it out in six hours and there were no casualties. On June 24, there was a deadly fire in a shopping mall in Uttara that left 5 dead and over 100 injured. In both cases we find similarities, i.e. a lack of fire fighting equipment (FFE) in such buildings, which have mushroomed in the capital, to initially tackle the outbreak of fire before the fire brigade arrives. While the latest incident was tackled without any death, the shopping mall accident highlights the perils that people face when living in or frequenting high rise buildings.

We always hear about investigative committees being formed to unearth the reasons for fires like this, which is usually followed by submission of a report. But why there is no follow up action by authorities remains a mystery. That there is something fundamentally wrong with building design is not news. And although we have, on paper, a national building code that makes it mandatory for construction companies to follow set parameters for fire safety, we find to our horror that buildings are constructed without following guidelines and fire safety takes a backseat.

RAJUK cannot absolve itself of responsibility when buildings are constructed bypassing the national building code. It is time to conduct an audit of high rise buildings in the city and make the code effective through hefty fines for errant builders and owners for the sake of ensuring public safety.

## Poor condition of Bogra women's college

Why are local colleges neglected?

THE Mujibur Rahman Women's College of Bogra, afflicted with shortage of teachers and education facilities, is another proof of the dismal state of the local colleges in Bangladesh. The college with 12,000 students has only 46 serving teachers and 16 class rooms while it requires over 100 teachers and at least 32 class rooms. In addition to this overcrowded situation, scarcity of buses, lack of exam hall and auditorium, and shortage of accommodation in the hostels are seriously hampering academic activities of the government college.

In Bangladesh, though the local colleges accommodate most of the students of the country they do not get adequate attention from the education authority. While the colleges in the capital have surplus teaching staff, most of the local colleges suffer from shortage of teachers as the teachers do not want to stay in the rural areas. According to data, in 329 local college-level institutions, 3,474 out of 15,000 posts of college teachers are vacant.

To address this dismal situation, the government should allocate more funds for local colleges. More teachers should be recruited and education resources should be evenly distributed. In the case of the Bogra women's college, the education authority should take immediate measures to relieve the woes of the suffering students.

## COMMENTS

**"Uttara-Motijheel: In 37 minutes"**  
(June 26, 2016)

Fahad Hossain

It's a good start; we just hope the project would be completed in time.

**"Bangladeshi shot by BSF near Satkhira border"**  
(June 26, 2016)

Robi Rahman

How can the BSF continue to shoot Bangladeshis despite all the hue and cry? This is unacceptable.

# Extremism and the bamboo brigade

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



BRIG. GEN. SHAHEEDUL ANAM KHAN, NDC, PSC (RETD)

OF late we have seen pictures of the police handing over bamboo sticks to groups of people in various districts ostensibly for the purpose of combating militancy and extremism in the country. The unique step was motivated by the spate of targeted killings. The most recent of the bamboo distribution ceremony happened in Jessore where the comments of the senior most police officer present there are very interesting and merits quoting and scrutiny.

He excoriated some "intellectually dishonest persons" for criticising the so called "Lathi-Bashi Defence Party," initiative to create resistance in the wards and villages and fell back on history to extol the virtues of the *bambusa* and its efficacy in driving the British and the Pakistanis out of the country. Before going any further it is well for the sake of history to remind ourselves that it was not bamboo that drove the Brits or the Pakistanis out of this country but much more than that.

The reaction from any person with the slightest comprehension of extremism, terrorism or militancy to any such move as a means of counteraction would be of dismay if not trepidation. One may be forgiven for conjuring up in one's mind the spectre of vigilante groups that were formed in various countries to stave off political or ideological opponents. The JMB is perhaps a close comparison when a religious group was sponsored to go after the leftists in some parts of the country with the connivance of the administration. Of course that was done rather clandestinely with a partisan political objective in mind. In this particular case the intention of the police is pious, the object appropriate, but the means appears to be rather mislaid. Everyone has the right to self defense and this may provide some comfort individually but one is doubtful whether that will effectively combat the killers.

The current initiative, apart from exposing the inability of the system to cope with a particular situation, leaves many unanswered questions. How will those armed with sticks operate, as a group or an individual? Who is in charge of the group? Will the sticks be carried on person at all times? Will they be working singly or in groups, and if both in day and night? Remember all the killings in 2016 were carried out in broad daylight, many of them in a public place.

Regrettably, the police has made the cardinal misjudgment of looking at the phenomenon that

the country is facing as merely a law and order issue. The "Lathi-Bashi Defence Party," as the initiative has been described, may protect against criminals but will that be able to effectively combat the violent radicals whose acts may appear criminal but who, unlike the criminals, are driven by religious-political motives. This is where a deeper understanding of the threat is required by the security agencies, particularly the police who remain at the forefront of the country's fight against extremism and terrorism.

There is need to understand the reasons why the phenomenon has appeared and what the ultimate motive of this group is. And are the killings a tactic

expression of differing views of religion through fear and intimidation if not compelling the detractors to fall in line with them. But if that is the case then how does one explain the fact that none of the Hindu, Christian or Buddhist victims of the recent attacks is known to have ever expressed anything derogatory of other religions, leave alone Islam.

Another view is that the killings are spurred by the current state of politics where the political space for the opposition has shrunk. Thus these acts are motivated entirely by political considerations. The purpose is to embarrass and destabilise the government by showing it up as being



Can bamboos fight terror?

PHOTO: STAR

only or that is the broad strategy, given that terrorism and violence can both be a tactic and strategy of a non-state actor in its bid to attain a political objective. Not all violence constitutes terrorism though all terror groups resort to violence. Without a rational analysis of the situation the counter actions will be flawed and ineffective.

What kind of template should one put the current killings into. Are these the acts of extremist group(s) with the ideological motivation to go after those, particularly their coreligionists, who they believe do not conform to their way of thinking, without any illusion to power? The only aim is to curb

incapable of providing security to the common man, and by targeting the minority communities elicit international attention as has been so palpable in the comments of our friends. The objective is to precipitate a situation that would compel a change in the country's political dispensation that may prove favourable to the interest of this group.

But whatever may be the motivations, organising people armed with bamboo sticks is not a response that alone would be able to combat the perpetrators effectively.

The writer is Associate Editor, The Daily Star.

## PROJECT SYNDICATE

# Which thinkers will define our future?

J. BRADFORD DELONG

SEVERAL years ago, it occurred to me that social scientists today are all standing on the shoulders of giants like Niccolo Machiavelli, John Locke, Adam Smith, Alexis de Tocqueville, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim. One thing they all have in common is that their primary focus was on the social, political, and economic makeup of the Western European world between 1450 and 1900. Which is to say, they provide an intellectual toolkit for looking at, say, the Western world of 1840, but not necessarily the Western world of 2016.

What will be taught in the social theory courses of, say, 2070? What canon – written today or still forthcoming – will those who end their careers in the 2070s wish that they had used when they started them in the late 2010s?

After mulling this question for the past few years, I've narrowed down my choice to the writings of three people: Tocqueville, who wrote in the 1830s and 1840s; John Maynard Keynes, who wrote in the 1920s and 1930s; and Karl Polanyi, who wrote in the 1930s and 1940s.

Keynes's central concerns for his own time ring true today. He was worried about the fragility of our collective prosperity, and the grave tensions between nationalism and the rootless cosmopolitan attitudes underpinning a peaceful and flourishing global society. He focused on how to organise our activities and use our prosperity to create a world fit for the good life. He sought to expose the bankruptcy of ascendant ideological nostrums: laissez-faire, spontaneous order, collective cooperation, central planning. And he thought deeply about the technocratic problems of economic management – and about the social, moral, and

political disasters that would follow from failing to address them.

After World War II, the problems that concerned Keynes faded into the background, as renewed prosperity in the West led many to believe that they had been permanently solved. Even during the stagflation (slow growth and rising prices) in the 1970s, the problem was said to be social-democratic overreach, not any fundamental flaw in the political economy of the West.

That argument cleared the way for British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and US President Ronald Reagan to scale back the state's economic role and

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untether market forces. The Thatcher-Reagan connection was an unquestioned success among the moneyed classes that prospered thereafter. It created an ideological consensus that would dominate the public sphere from 1980 to 2010.

Post-war prosperity also overshadowed the central problems with which Polanyi grappled in the 1930s and 1940s. Polanyi accepted that a market society could indeed produce a great deal of material prosperity, but he was concerned that it could only do so by turning people into puppets and playthings of mindless market forces, and that people did not take well to this

new role. The goal, for Polanyi, was to achieve the prosperity that a market economy generates, without suffering the risks of poverty, creative destruction, and community erosion implied by the operation of market forces.

Crucially, Polanyi warned that if the modern bourgeois order failed at this task, authoritarian and totalitarian political movements would benefit. During the post-war period, the fair-weather argument that market-driven prosperity justifies any collateral social pain was taken as a given; it also came to define the consensus view among the moneyed class and its ideological backers.

This brings us to Tocqueville, who wrote almost two centuries ago, but whose central concerns never went away. Tocqueville focused on the consequences of the destruction of caste as a principle of social and political order. The big castes – from the supposedly Frankish Nobles of the Sword and Nobles of the Robe to proto-bourgeois merchants and Gallo-Roman villeins – all conferred upon their members small liberties and a measure of personal autonomy in exchange for obligations to the state. (And, of course, the lower one's social status, the greater one's obligations.) Tocqueville saw this strictly ordered

world being replaced by democracy and formal social equality, in which everyone would be equally free, but would also be equally at the mercy of society. In this new setting, no privileges or liberties would protect you if you failed to find a counterparty in the market, or ran afoul of the tyranny of the majority, or simply sought some form of direction as you tried to decide who you were supposed to be.

In Tocqueville's world, the destruction of caste was only partial. He wrote for white men who knew their nationality, knew what caste membership meant, and knew the privileges such membership brought.

In our own time, the destruction of caste and caste privilege is taking another step forward. The period of white males' political dominion in Western democracies is coming to an end. And it is coming to an end at a time when economic populism is replacing technocratic management, often with white males turning to nativism in response to the destruction of their jobs and livelihoods by the impersonal forces of globalisation.

As we can see in one country after another, the old order won't give up without a fight. No old order does. But the caste-like privilege of white males is doomed. The challenge now before us is how best to realise newly available opportunities for human betterment, for the benefit of all. I can think of few more useful guides to that challenge than Keynes, Polanyi, and Tocqueville.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### An unpleasant fact about expats

Many expatriate Bangladeshis including doctors, engineers, IT professionals and businessmen seem to have a very negative attitude towards this country. Comparing Bangladesh with their adopted countries, they always complain about the condition of roads, transportation, quality of food and other things. What they don't understand is that it has taken hundreds of years for developed countries to come to where they are now. The expats fail to recognise and appreciate how the hardworking and resilient

people of Bangladesh, despite facing many challenges, are taking the country ahead.

These people are far removed from the ground realities of Bangladesh. They should be more respectful to the land where many of them were born, raised and educated at least to the Higher Secondary level. They have a responsibility to contribute to the development of the country.

Dr. SN Mamoon  
Dhaka

### Increase VAT and tax on tobacco

The consumption of tobacco can be reduced by drastically increasing duties at all stages, starting from farming to final consumption. Only such a stringent step can gradually decrease the consumption of tobacco and tobacco products which are extremely harmful for health.

Engr. S. A. Mansoor  
Dhaka

### Mockery in the name of news

Nowadays, some online news portals have a tendency to post cheap, baseless news just to attract more likes, comments and shares. In many cases, they also post news which contains huge discrepancies between the headlines and the contents. Many of the Facebook users might have come through such news headings: "Mahia Mahi committed suicide" or

"Aishwarya divorced Abhishek". As we read the news, we come to know that it is either in a film or just a rumour.

This practice is indeed very disgusting and needs to be stopped. And those of us come through such items should avoid reading, commenting, giving likes or sharing those fake news.

Abu Sayem  
Mohakhali, Dhaka