

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA THURSDAY JULY 21, 2016, SHRABAN 6, 1423 BS

Hazaribagh relocation a farce

Infrastructure at Savar yet to be completed!

WHILE we have been hearing about the relocation of tanneries from Hazaribagh area to Savar for more than a decade, nothing major has happened on either side. Neither tanneries have moved in bulk to the new site, nor has the government put in serious efforts to complete work on infrastructure to make it possible for tanners to move in significant numbers. While 154 tannery owners are being fined Tk 10,000 per day for damaging the environment, the essential infrastructure like roads and central effluent treatment plant (CETP) are far from complete. Putting the onus on a largely export-oriented industry to move to Savar without making sure that all construction work is complete is not a feasible work plan.

We are stunned to learn that the authorities have announced that work on CETP will be completed within a month, especially when the project consultant says the last consignment of machineries for CETP has not arrived yet. While there has been progress on two CETP(s), the other two will take more time. So why are the public being given the run around year after year? It is in the best interest of both public health and the tannery sector that the industry relocates to the new location quickly. And it is not merely a question of setting up the CETPs. These treatment plants need a minimum 48 tannery plants to be operating at the optimum. Poor performance of the authorities to build requisite infrastructure within a specified time, results only in continued health hazards for Dhaka citizens, as untreated effluents keep getting dumped into the water supply. In this regard, the project authorities should also be made to account for the time overrun in construction.

Bringing light to the visually impaired

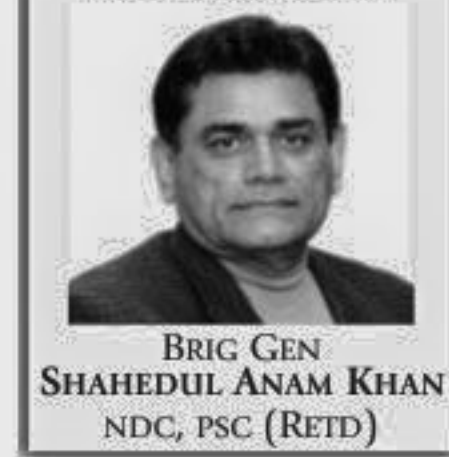
All government documents should have Braille version

IN our society, people with disabilities stumble in every sphere of their life, due to lack of equal opportunities and poor access to social services. The visually impaired are the worst sufferers as they do not even have access to government policies since these documents are not available in a suitable format for them. Against this background, we want to laud the effort of Manusher Jonno Foundation who has prepared the Braille version of 13 laws and policies of government. These books were handed over at a distribution ceremony held recently in Dhaka to five organisations that work for the visually impaired. This initiative will certainly contribute to empower the disenfranchised people.

This well-timed endeavour should be carried forward and all the laws and policies of the government should be printed in Braille. The government and non-government organisations should join hands in this effort. They should also emphasise on spreading and improving Braille literacy among the visually impaired people so that they can access the Braille documents. There should be innovative solutions to make the ICT related instruction easily accessible to the visually impaired people. Finally, we need to change the public mindset that the visually impaired as also the other categories of physically impaired persons, are a burden to the society, rather if they get equal opportunity they can contribute to the betterment of their family as well as of the country.

Get the bearing right

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN NDC, PSC (RETD)

THE reactive measures of the law enforcing agencies are very distinctly visible after the shocking experience that the nation went through on the black Friday, July 1. And one hopes that the planners, advisors and the security agencies are drawing lessons from the situation we encountered that day. I feel that it is also a matter of keeping one's mind open in handling such grave matters as extremism and terrorism. But one cannot proceed further without dwelling, even most briefly, on the comments of the home minister regarding prior information of the Gulshan attack, because there is a lesson too in those comments.

The minister had said that the government had intelligence about the terror attacks in Gulshan cafe and Sholakia beforehand and necessary preparations were taken to meet the contingencies. Certainly no one can claim to have absolute and most specific intelligence i.e. time, place and nature of attack, in which case it would be the most inefficient police force that would be unable to thwart or preempt that. From the minister's statement -- which he has redacted a day after that was made but the substance and the meaning remains the same though -- we understand there was perhaps an inkling of something to come. That the nation would be faced with such a tragedy, was not foreseen.

I believe the first lesson for all to take from the tragedy is that we must expect and plan for the worst case scenario and hope that it would never eventuate. But to do that

the reality of the danger has to be comprehended. Merely being in a denial mode doesn't make the problem go away. And at the risk of being seen as a panic monger I say that we have not seen the last of these fanatics and should be prepared for even more severe and innovative ways for them to inflict violence on us. And it is not how many of them are there in this country; recall what one man did on Orlando or Nice, and how they did it.

I believe that the police had taken measures that they deemed necessary after getting the wind of something impending, but the point illustrated by the course of events of July 1 is that no contingency plan is ever adequate enough or completely foolproof unless put to test. Ours, unfortunately, did not survive the first bullet fired by the killers. There is always a first for everybody. For our police this was a painful 'First.'

We should also have by now realised that a predetermined notion or a particular mindset regarding the recruitment base of the extremists and terrorists hampers a state's effort to counter the extremist effectively. If we cannot see the red line, albeit very thin, between fundamentalists, radicals, and terrorists our approach in combating the menace will go awry. The fact that all Muslim terrorists are not incubated in religious seminaries has been established through the findings of research papers written by western, not Muslims, scholars. However, one cannot dismiss the fact that these seminaries do produce fundamentalists and some of these seminaries do also inculcate very radical views. And many of the Jihadists in Afghanistan and elsewhere had been supplied by these seminaries. While one can disagree with fundamentalists we can

also involve them in intellectual discourse, it is the radicals, who seek to implement their views through force, violence and coercion that should be our worry. And it is the transition from discourse to resorting to violence that the agencies must attempt to prevent. As recent developments have revealed, most of the terrorists killed in the Gulshan incident were products of 'modern' education, and it was not economic privation that compelled them to choose the path of violence that they did, which is the next lesson that should not be lost on our policy makers and security planners. Unfortunately, these are the two mindsets that have guided the thoughts of the establishment, most of our academics and opinion-makers.

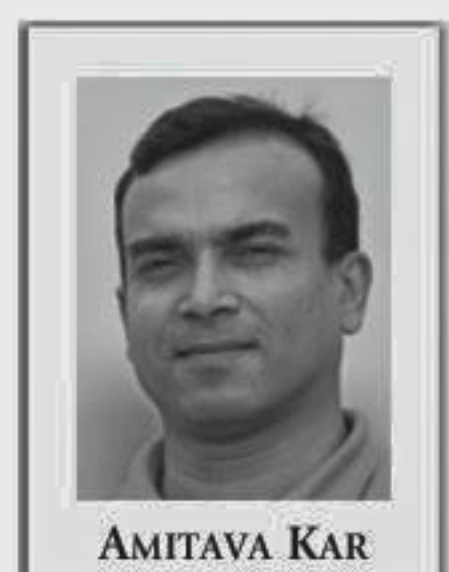
Having said all these we are still plagued by the question as to what motivates these youngsters from affluent families, schooled in secular institutions at home and abroad, chose to join the ranks of a so-called Islamist groups who peddle violence for their 'cause'. As of today we have a list of more than 250 youths gone 'missing'. Entire families have chosen to leave their own country for a distant land. What has motivated them to take the precipitous step? Have they really been brainwashed? And is it really the current political condition, where the opposition has had less and less of space to manoeuvre, both literally and metaphorically, that has engendered the kind of force that we have seen unleashed on us, and whose severity has been ratcheting up with every incident of extremist violence? These are some of the thoughts that we will dwell on next week.

The writer is Associate Editor, The Daily Star

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Thought Control

The United States should have its own version of the Chilcot Inquiry



AMITAVA KAR

THIRTEEN years after George W Bush, Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, unquestionably supported by Tony Blair, invaded Iraq by lying to the world,

the American people and the Congress with a sardonic smile on their face, it is Blair who is facing the music. And nobody thinks the former British Prime Minister is in a mood to dance.

The British conscience seems to be trying to make an effort to mend the past. The Chilcot report's 2.6 million words - four times the length of *War and Peace* - have forced Blair to defend why he chose to throw his full support behind Bush and Co. despite so much evidence and advice against joining in the incursion into a country that had nothing to do with 9/11.

But it is the United States, far more than Britain that needs to look within. When will there be a similar, official inquiry in Washington to understand how national policy can be hijacked by deceit? It didn't happen overnight. The run-up to the war took place in slow motion for nine months or more.

And the big media played the role as a cheerleader. Fundamental assumptions about the "Global War on Terror" and the promulgation of the so-called Bush Doctrine of Preventive War were rarely debated or even discussed. Vital historical context was almost never provided. "Patriotism" and "national unity" trumped truth. The line between propaganda and journalism was forgotten. Fox was the worst, but the rest of the mainstream media wasn't much effective either. There seemed to be a perceived need to be "Americans first and journalists second." The result was a perfect storm.

Anyone who had the courage to challenge the "centres of power" was silenced, one by one. Susan Sontag, writer and activist, was vilified for saying that President Bush's tough-talking response was "robotic," and that America needed to rethink its Middle East policies. Bill Maher lost his TV show "Politically Incorrect" after refusing "the conventional wisdom." Noam Chomsky



Donald Rumsfeld, George W. Bush and Dick Cheney

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was virtually declared a traitor for calling the US a terrorist state and warning that a violent response to 9/11 would backfire. Isn't it an irony of history that President Obama, in an interview with *Vice News* last year said, "ISIS is a direct outgrowth of Al Qaeda in Iraq that grew out of our invasion, which is an example of unintended consequences"?

Not all was lost, though. Thousands marched in cities across the US and

Europe to protest. Washington Post's Walter Pincus questioned the administration's claims about WMD. His pre-war report on the subject, after almost being killed, was relegated to page 17. The New Yorker's Seymour Hersh and Mark Danner distinguished themselves with outstanding coverage of Abu Gharib following the threat that led directly from the blood-spattered rooms outside Baghdad to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in Pentagon. But such journalists were few and far between. And network television was almost never interested in hearing their voice.

The mainstream media kept 'buying' the lies - before they were sold. There are several reasons for that. One is economic. The decline of newspapers, the rise of infotainment, and Media Company owners' insistence on delivering high returns to their shareholders have diminished resources and led to a bottom-line *idée fixe* not conducive to objective journalism.

Has the media learned its lesson? In many ways, it has. After the non-existent WMD was not to be found and the war turned south, most news organisations

began to get tough with the Bush administration. The problem, of course, is that the press only really turned on Bush when his ratings began to fall - another sign that the Fourth Estate has become more of a windsock than a truth teller. How many opinion pieces or editorials have been written in US newspapers demanding a Chilcot Report-like enquiry?

The structural problems of the media have not gone away. If the media has learned that a bugle blast can be sounded by a fool, that God is not on America's side every time it launches a war, that there is nothing in the preamble to the US Constitution which defines the purpose of the United States of America as remaking the world in its image and that self-righteousness is not reason, maybe something can be redeemed from this black chapter of history after all.

History, if not journalism, will record that the greatest tragedy of our time is not the loud clamour of a few, but the appalling silence of the many.

The writer is a member of the editorial team at The Daily Star.

COMMENTS

"Husband's brutality lands her in hospital"

(July 14, 2016)

Sayedur Rahman

When will the time come when we see headlines like "Brutality lands him in jail"?

Soniya Rahman

Domestic violence is increasing day by day in our country. This is not expected and must be contained at any cost.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Surveillance state

Israeli officials have blamed social media for inciting a wave of violent attacks by Palestinians that began in October 2015. Since then, Israeli security forces have arrested about 400 Palestinians for social media activity, according to Palestinian rights groups Addameer and Adalah. Most of the arrests have been for postings on Facebook, a popular network among Palestinians. The arrests of Palestinians

for social media posts open a window into the practices of Israel's surveillance state and reveal social media's darker side. What was once seen as a weapon of the weak has turned into the perfect place to ferret out potential resistance.

Lat year alone, the Israeli attorney general opened 155 investigations into alleged social media incitement, a marked

increase from previous years. The vast majority of cases have been directed at Arabs in Israel. Fear is a favourite weapon, and it works as well with governments as it does with individual people. Nations and people are terrified of terrorism, and many are quite willing to give up all sorts of freedoms for the sake of security.

Ted Rudow III, MA
CA, USA

A clear message to all

On July 12, 2016, I came across the news of the Sholakia attacker Abir Rahman's burial (along with a picture) which took place on July 11, after five days of his death. The picture says it all. The Janaza of that terrorist (Abir) was attended by none other than the Imam of the local graveyard. As his family members refused to accept his dead body, he was buried by the local police's initiative at a

Kishorganj graveyard. This says a lot about the socio-cultural dynamics of Bangladesh. This clearly shows that as a state, we abhor terrorism and other atrocities to its core. This also sends an unequivocal message to the derailed youth who are waging this war against their own family, society and country.
Arafat A Islam, Gulshan, Dhaka