

Armed and dangerous

Curb their capacity

A report published in this paper on August 18 exposed the history of the growth of jihadi groups over the years. Today, the threat posed by militancy brooks no repetition. They are armed and dangerous and have no qualms about spilling innocent blood. The militants are part of a transnational movement and have access to finance, arms and expertise – both local and foreign. Anti-militancy drives by law enforcers under successive governments have unearthed sophisticated small arms caches and ammunition, bomb-making equipment and militants, both national and foreign, have been nabbed. These were warning signs which were treated as normal criminal cases and those nabbed used loopholes in the legal system to get out on bail.

In the post Gulshan bakery attack, the complacency is no longer there. However, we have our work cut out. The areas that need greater attention are where these militants are buying their arms from? What is the source of their financing – are they using normal banking channels or is it *hundi*? How are foreign terrorists turning up on Bangladeshi soil and do we have requisite information on their background; if not, why not? Who are the local sympathisers of these extremist outfits that are plotting to turn Bangladesh into a safe haven for jihadists?

All these are valid questions. And all must be addressed simultaneously. No piecemeal approach will do. This requires greater investments to enhance the all-round capacities of the security agencies. There is need for greater human intelligence and seamless exchange of information among all government agencies. We face a threat that is elusive and which has access to the means to wage war on the State.

Recover govt land

Why is public property not being cared for?

THE alleged grabbing of several hundred crore worth of government land in Cox's Bazar by influential quarters is unacceptable. What is also unacceptable is that the administration has taken no steps to recover the state property. Investigations revealed that at least 49 acres of government land in total have been grabbed in different areas of the tourist town which, ironically, includes 10 acres of land situated right next to the deputy commissioner's bungalow. Allegations are there that drug peddling and other illicit activities are taking place there with large scale private structures also constructed on the land without permission.

How did the authorities fail to notice the seizure of so much government land and the construction of private buildings on them? If the constructions were not approved by the authorities and are, indeed, illegal, then why did the authorities not take any action against those responsible for them? The fact that the administration has failed on so many fronts only represent the general condition of illegal land occupation that is taking place unabatedly across the country with the authorities largely turning a blind eye. Thus, the deputy commissioner's comment that the situation cannot be changed overnight does not wash and exposes the civil administration's failure to care for public property.

The public land must be immediately recovered and those responsible for land grabbing, regardless of their societal influence, be held to account. Dishonest people within the administration alleged to be collaborating with occupiers should also be brought to book.

COMMENTS

"Fundraising concert for Lucky Akhand at DU ends" (August 18, 2016)

Toufiqur Rahman

It is very sad to know that a music legend is struggling with medical expenses. It is a shame for us. I hope our government will come forward to help him.

Boolbool

My heart goes for the music maestro. We pray for your quick recovery.



CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

SCIENCE was born out of the human necessity to investigate nature, but now it's also growing on the necessity to investigate human nature. Cosmetic surgery, starting with the face, has travelled to abdomens, thighs, buttocks, necks and backs of arms. In the United States, an increasing number of men and women are going under the knife to change the shape and look of their genitals. If human beings once desired to change the nature, the desire for change is now their second nature.

In the beginning, scientific inventions enhanced human talents. Tools were invented for survival, and machines multiplied productive power. Automation is when mankind started to disengage itself from its talents. It started to look for machines and tools to do its work.

Thus robots are coming to make workers redundant. They can drive, sweep, mop and serve food in restaurants. Japan has robots, which can interact with humans, read news and tweets in several different voices. Ingestible robots are almost ready to patch stomach wounds.

In future, humans will be able to

form romantic relationships with robots. But it has its inherent risk. Sofia, the world's most advanced A.I. humanoid robot had an embarrassing glitch during an interview with CNBC. "She" admitted she wanted to destroy humans.

Driverless cars, drones and unmanned ships are either on the way or have arrived already. Scientists are working to create artificial limbs and organs that can replace the originals. If your heart or kidney fails or an arm or a leg is lost, 3D-printed spares will be available in the nearest shop. Smart clothes are coming to outsmart humans. Forgotten items in the wardrobe will text owners before automatically contacting charity shops asking to be recycled.

Scientists reported on May 4 they had grown human embryos in the lab, which might lead to advances in assisted reproduction, stem-cell therapies and basic understanding of how human beings form. Test tube babies are no longer a dream. Just like distance learning gets you a diploma without sitting in a classroom, artificial insemination makes it possible to conceive a child without lovemaking.

But the lab-grown human embryos raise the spectre of the ultimate tragedy. Manmade machines are now poised to produce machine-made man. There will be a time when we are going to talk about organic and inorganic human beings like vegetables. Or, cultured or

natural human beings like fish.

Maybe that will be good news for the European countries and Japan where population is declining due to diminishing fertility. It might give busybody entrepreneurs a new business idea to produce readymade humans like readymade garments. Maybe the developing countries, with their low-cost labour, will manufacture human beings for developed countries.

The Wall Street Journal reported in 2013 that scientists were puzzled over decreasing sperm quality. They had gathered in London in July that year for the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology annual conference where they debated the issue for an entire day. Most studies from several European nations had found that over the past 15 years or so, the sperm count of healthy men aged 18 to 25 had significantly gone down. A prominent study from the 1990s suggested the count had decreased by half over the last half-century.

The scientists claimed that exposure to pesticides, endocrine-disrupting chemicals, and lifestyle habits like sitting for too long were some of the factors responsible for the sperm crisis. Some of them even said there was increasing evidence that sperm count, like other health conditions, might be influenced by what happens to people early in life, even in the mother's womb. The upshot is that the world humans

have created has turned against them.

The explorers in their curious exuberance are discovering the universe from end to end. Man landed on the moon many years ago. Settling down on the Mars is currently under serious consideration. A number of initiatives are underway to find alien life. Two weeks ago, NASA's Kepler mission verified 1,284 new planets.

The inventors, driven by that same impulse, are scouring nature to control its power. And in that frenzy, they remain oblivious to the obvious peril that nature is also striking back. It's doing so in the most natural way: getting humans to dehumanise themselves.

Human life is an absurd phenomenon, an infinite quest within a finite journey. Science expanded on the promise that the quest was going to improve the journey. But the desire to overcome human condition has reversed that promise, and the journey is overtaken by the quest.

The origin of mankind has been traced back to the Prosimians 65 million years ago. Who knows where the evolution train is going next? Meanwhile, science has created the illusion that mankind is rowing the boat, which is actually dragged by the strong current.

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Asia's chase for gold at the Olympics is on



JUNE H.L. WONG

SHOCK and awe just about sums up the stunning achievement of young Singaporean swimmer Joseph Schooling at the Rio Olympics.

His victory is classic David beating Goliath; he was the underdog from a tiny country that had never won an Olympic gold.

What made it all the sweeter and remarkable is Schooling beat the mightiest, most decorated Olympian in history – American Michael Phelps who has won 23 gold medals – and set an impressive new record of 50.39 secs for the 100m butterfly event.

When news of Singapore's first gold medal broke, it quickly overtook other stories emanating from Rio and became the talk of the world.

It eclipsed its Asean neighbours' own Olympic gold successes: Vietnam's shooter Hoang Xuan Vinh in the 10m air pistol competition and Thailand's weightlifters Sopita Tanasan and Sukanya Srisurat in their individual weight classes and certainly overshadowed Malaysian diving duo Pandeleda Rinong and Cheong Jun Hoong's silver in the women's synchronised 10m platform diving.

All are no small feats but there is a total of 28 sports in the Games, not counting those with multiple disciplines, and the most popular ones for a global audience are gymnastics, track & field and swimming, according to topendsports.com.

Among Asian nations competing in the Games, China and Japan are traditionally strong contenders in gymnastics and swimming although the Chinese gymnasts seem to be doing poorly this time around.

For most other Asian competitors, the sports they excel in tend to be the ones with less mass appeal like archery, shooting, judo, badminton and for some strange reason, women's weightlifting.

Apart from the Thais, Taiwanese, Filipina and Indonesian female weightlifters have also won medals for their countries.

China remains the sporting powerhouse of Asia, sending its largest delegation of 416 athletes to Rio this year, but they have failed to defend their gold medals in sports they used to dominate like badminton and diving.

As for the glamorous track and field events, there doesn't seem to be any Asian athlete who can challenge the likes of Usain Bolt.

Meanwhile, the other Asian powerhouse, India, with the second largest population in the world, has never done well at the Olympics, which has been the subject of intense debate among Indian and foreign sports pundits.

India also sent its biggest ever contingent of 118 sportsmen and women, but so far, has not netted a

receive US\$100,000, a figure, according to AFP, that is nearly 50 times greater than the country's average national income, of around US\$2,100.

Malaysia, which is seeing its best ever performance in Rio, thanks to its badminton players and divers, rewards its successful athletes handsomely under its National Sports Council incentive scheme.

An Olympic gold medal winner will receive RM 1mil and a monthly pension of RM 5,000; a silver medallist, RM 600,000, a RM 3,000 pension, while a bronze winner gets RM 100,000 and a RM 2,000 pension.

Taiwan, India, Indonesia, Philippines, South Korea and Thailand have similar monetary reward schemes.



Joseph Schooling

PHOTO: AFP

single medal and as Indian media decry, the prospects are looking bleaker by the day.

Winning an Olympic gold medal is the Holy Grail of sports. The pomp that surrounds the Games give the gold medallists unparalleled honour and prestige. And the nations they represent go into collective convulsions of ecstasy and nationalistic joy, which make their governments equally happy.

That's why many nations pour millions into sports programmes to nurture and train promising talents and offer great financial rewards to successful Olympians.

Schooling will get S\$1mil from the Singapore Government for his gold medal. Vietnam's Hoang reportedly will

North Korea uses a carrot and stick scheme: huge rewards for medal winners and hard labour for the failed ones.

Several western countries have the same financial bait, including the United States, France, Russia and Germany but at a lower rate.

Does it work?

The Technology Policy Institute looked for a co-relation and was mindful of variables like country size and income, "since those are surely the biggest predictor of how many medals a country will win: more populous countries are more likely to have that rare human who is physically built and mentally able to become an Olympic athlete, while richer countries are more likely to be able to

invest in training those people."

The researchers found no correlation between monetary payments and medals, and said it was not surprising in some countries. In the United States, for example, a US\$25,000 cash award would be dwarfed by million-dollar endorsements the sportsperson could get.

The researcher also set out to see if the results be different for countries with lower opportunities for endorsements. Their conclusion: "Overall the evidence suggests that these payments don't increase the medal count" either. Rather, countries that do well are those with a longstanding sporting culture that values and nurtures their athletes long before they qualify for the Olympics.

That is evident in Western societies where sportsmen, even at the college level, are feted and idolised. In Asia, however, the emphasis is more on book-learning and earning prestigious degrees.

The BBC quotes Indian Olympic Association head Narayana Ramachandran as saying India's sorry performance is more than just a shortage of cash or organisation.

"Sport has always taken a back seat vis-a-vis education. Most Indian families would prefer their children became dentists or accountants than Olympians," he says.

But that attitude is surely changing as more Asian sportsmen and women go professional and are able to make a good living.

In Malaysia, its most popular sportsman, badminton star Lee Chong Wei who is expected to net a Rio gold, is highly successful with a number of endorsements under his belt.

For now, it is still the Western countries that dominate the Olympic medal tally table. But it's only a matter of time before more Asian nations, once no-hopers at the Games, rise up the charts.

It's already started. The Rio Games will go down in history as a watershed for Asean, with two member states – Singapore and Vietnam – winning their first gold medals. May it be so for Malaysia, too.

The writer was the former group chief editor of *The Star Media Group Malaysia* and its current Chief Operating Officer for Content Development.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Controversy regarding national savings certificates

I would like to draw attention to a report published in this newspaper on August 18, 2016 titled "Call money rate falls to record low amid tepid demand". The report cites a top banker who argues that high yield on national savings certificate (NSC) is one of the major reasons for excess liquidity. In this regard it is worth asking why banks should rely on government borrowing to remove their excess funds. Is that the job of a financial intermediary? If hypothetically, the government removes these instruments or links them to treasury bills, the public would simply

reallocate their savings to banks. How would removing NSC reduce excess liquidity then?

If banks had lower NPL (Non-performing loan), they could bring down their spreads and lending rates and better compete with foreign lenders. Banks need to improve asset quality and the government needs to find ways to improve infrastructure and trade barriers to raise private investment – only then will excess liquidity come down in a sustainable manner.

Sharjil Haque
On email

A good move by RAJUK

Recently, RAJUK has demolished several shops constructed on illegally occupied parking areas. We appreciate the move by RAJUK to free land from illegal occupation. We hope they will continue their drive all year round to make Dhaka livable again. Also, many small parks in Dhaka have been made off-limits to children by powerful quarters that are using these spaces for storing construction materials or other purposes. We urge RAJUK to make list of all the parks in the capital and make them accessible to city dwellers again.

Ashek Mahmud
Dhaka

The woes of CNG passengers

A lot of people use CNG-run auto rickshaws as a means of transport. The drivers often ask for at least a 100 Taka for a short distance, no matter what the meter says. If the meter reads Taka 70, for example, they say it's not worth the trouble and refuse to accept the money. Also some of them simply refuse to go by the meter and try to charge a "verbally agreed upon" extravagant amount. The relevant authorities should look into the matter to reduce the suffering of passengers at the hands of unscrupulous drivers.

Zabed Wali
Chittagong