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FOUNDER EDITOR
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Hajj uncertainties

Why should problems recur every year?

WHEN the first flight of Hajj pilgrims left Dhaka for Saudi Arabia on August 4, we were happy hoping that Bangladeshi pilgrims would have a smooth sailing this year in performing their Hajj. Our delight has been very short-lived and our hopes, it seems, were unfounded.

Regrettably, hardly has there been a year in recent times when the Hajjis had not faced difficulties in performing Hajj, starting from their outward-bound flight from Bangladesh. Either it was inadequate number of aircrafts or excessive cost of fare, or delay in arranging accommodation in Saudi Arabia. These worries and avoidable hassles spoil the environment that pilgrims need to prepare for, what for some is, a once-in-a-lifetime journey and an experience they would like to cherish all their life.

Since August 4 we have been getting disturbing reports almost every day of more and more Hajjis facing uncertainty about performing Hajj. The most recent report suggests that the fate of around 15,000 Hajj pilgrims of 143 private hajj agencies is hanging in the balance as the agencies are yet to arrange their visas and plane tickets, and so far Biman had to cancel 14 flights owing to inadequate number of passengers.

As usual, there is the mutual blame game between the Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The pilgrims are not really interested in who is responsible for the situation. All they want is to get to Saudi Arabia in time, and it is for the ministry to ensure that.

It was time the government took measures to resolve the recurring problems once and for all. We would hope too that those responsible for creating this situation be hauled up and dealt with severely.

Demand for dorms

Make life easier for InU students

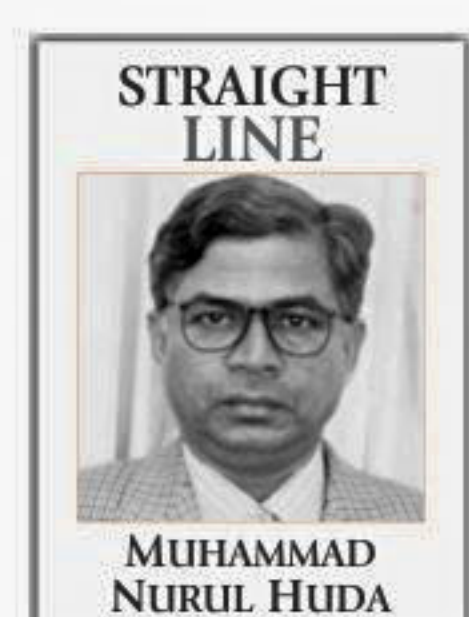
WE sympathise with the demand for dormitories by Jagannath University students who are suffering from severe residential problems. And more so because of the on-going militancy issue following the Gulshan attack that is making it particularly difficult for students to rent houses and make arrangements for their accommodation. Although we do not believe it to be rational to turn the land of the central jail into residential halls to solve the crisis as the students are demanding, there are alternatives.

Most of the university's original dormitories have, over the years, been occupied by influential quarters, leading to the creation of such problems. So far the university only managed to regain control of 3 of the 11 occupied dormitories, one of which, despite being in rickety condition, now houses 25-30 students. And because there is a heavy demand for residential accommodation, it is no way adequate. In that regard, the university authorities had requested the Land Ministry to get back the halls in 2010. The ministry, however, is yet to take any action.

Given the lack of action by the authorities, it is understandable that the students have taken to protest. It is important, however, for them to protest for a just cause in a just manner and not block roads to create problems for citizens and not turn to violence.

The authorities should also try to understand the sufferings that the students are going through and immediately seek to ease them, either by returning the occupied dormitories to the university, or making alternative arrangements.

The tragedy of 21st August



STRAIGHT LINE

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

AS the nation observes the 12th anniversary of the ghastly grenade assault that was carried out at an Awami League rally in Dhaka city on August 21, 2004, discerning observers have to agree that the horrendous crimes committed on that day has left an indelible impact on the course and character of constitutional politics of

Bangla des h. Dismal thoughts would surely occupy the minds of sane Bangladeshis when they venture to think of the deadly destruction and carnage of August 21, 2004. It was on that day the nation witnessed an unprecedented diabolic attempt to wipe out the major leaders of a political party. Our double jeopardy was that a most unfortunate and condemnable criminal incident was followed by a callous and slipshod investigation that only enraged the public.

The criminal case in question has been further investigated and important points need to be clarified. There is allegation of establishment complicity in the gory killing and maiming. Top enforcement officials who have been booked in the case have to prove that they did not have any criminal intention in their alleged failings. The important question, however, is that whether the dastardly offence was politically designed and executed through foot soldiers. We will have to wait for the investigation and the conclusion of the trial to find answers of many unresolved queries.

To recollect, the multiple grenade assault of that day, was clearly a manifest attempt to wipe out the entire leadership of the mainstream political party. The damage already caused with its far-reaching ramifications cannot be brushed aside. The double figure deaths and crippling injuries of hundreds should make us wonder if the state organs investigating the incident and the

then political authority realised the enormity of the dastardly attack.

We may also recollect that the investigation of the above incident was not taken in right earnest that it deserved and the first indication of that was the unpardonable failure to protect and preserve the scene of occurrence. There was allegation that physical evidence was tampered with and destroyed. The field units did not act with desired speed and circumspection. The question is, did this happen because of a so-called instruction from above? The culpability of all con-

often obstructed accountability of the culpable individuals. There is good reason to doubt that a considerable number of officials abnegated their responsibility to protect all citizens regardless of their identity.

Quite often, the disconcerting socio-political reality is that the source of deterioration in crime and order situations originated in the continuing patronage of criminals and bullies. Practically, what the people see is the end result of a cumulative process of patronised crime.

The premonition is that if criminals continue to enjoy immunity from law enforcement then we have a



PHOTO: STAR

The investigation of the above incident was not taken in right earnest that it deserved and the first indication of that was the unpardonable failure to protect and preserve the scene of occurrence.

cerned, high and low, needs to be established.

While extreme views advocating annihilation of the political opponent has been a sad socio-political reality of our society, there is a paramount need to stop it once and for all. Many political murders have not been investigated properly, while some cases are still under investigation and some have been perfunctorily looked into. Such a state of affairs point to the supreme necessity of a comprehensive investigation of the incident of attempted assassination of Sheikh Hasina, because that is expected to be an example-setter in the criminal justice system.

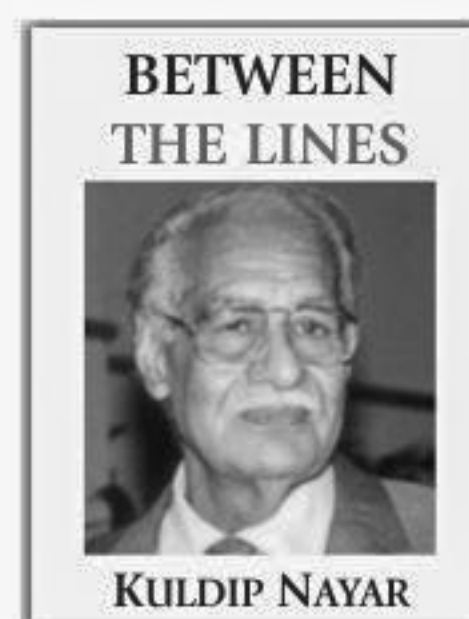
In Bangladesh we need to seriously acknowledge the significance of authoritative approval or condoning of violence because such action is construed as social approval. The so-called political circumstances have

systemic crisis at hand, and a serious one at that. The manifestation of that crisis relates to the allegation of selective law enforcement scenario wherein state functionaries hesitate to enforce the law, suo moto.

The suspicion is that the systemic deficiency is located within the political parties and machinery of law enforcement. The desired corrective actions cannot be unilaterally taken and quite distinctly calls for a politically bipartisan approach with active involvement of the civil society. At the same time, demobilisation of criminal elements has to be agreed on by all political stakeholders. The remedy lies in cleaning our politics through decriminalisation, supported by apolitical and impartial law enforcement.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

It is a real shame



BETWEEN THE LINES

KULDEEP NAYYAR

THERE were great hopes from the largest ever Indian contingent at the Rio Olympics, but when it came to performance, it fell well short of

expectations. India has won only a bronze medal in women's wrestling and a silver in women's badminton. Hockey, which we taught to the West, is nowhere in the subcontinent. With change of rules, in the name of making the sport more attractive, the West has come to monopolise hockey. But it would be unfair to blame it on the rule changes alone. The bane of the problem with our players is lack of stamina and scientific approach.

Women seem to do better than men but that is in spite of the hard work demanded. In the next few years, our dismal performance will be in sharp contrast to even smaller nations that are mere dots on the world map. Counting by population, India ranks the last in Olympic medal number. There are more reasons for this.

We, in India, have a budget of roughly Rs. 250 crore per state apart from the central budget of Rs. 1,500-odd crore. There is sports infrastructure in a few states but they lack maintenance and regular use. The states and the centre have no holistic approach to sports. The result is that sports are just an item in the budget but nothing from the point of view of excellence in any particular discipline.

Cricket has come up because the public is crazy about it, just as it was about hockey some years ago. This only underlines the fact that there is no proper planning or scientific approach to sports. Hockey was the iconic sport for

India until the Moscow Games in 1980 when the country won their last gold medal, for the eighth time. Subsequent to that there was a great decline in the sport as India never reached even the semifinals in any Olympics to this date. In contrast, India won the first World Cup in 1983 in cricket and since then, the sport has started looking up. Today, cricket has thrown up several opportunities and icons which make the game even more lucrative. That explains why cricket is only next to religion in India in terms of frenzy. With the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) making a lot of money, there was never any need for government support.

is a win-win situation for both.

The recent Supreme Court ruling in the aftermath of the Justice Lodha panel report on BCCI and its functioning is an eye-opener. The recommendations of the panel, to be implemented, put restrictions on politicians and bureaucrats occupying any top positions in BCCI or, for that matter, in federations. It is an open secret that people like Sharad Pawar, Arun Jaitley, Farooq Abdullah, Rajiv Shukla and many others have been an integral part of whatever the setup has been. They are primarily there because they have been able to get funds from official and other sources.

Once they vacate, what machinery

Looking at the future, India should think of ways and means to achieving glory in the Olympic arena by choosing young talent in fewer disciplines and concentrating fully, rather than frittering away precious little funds, on all 28 Olympic disciplines.

But at the same, too much politics has seeped into sport, including cricket. Leaders of different political parties are holding one post or another in every national federation and cricket is no exception. This has had an adverse effect on sports as such, because of politicians using them for their name and fame.

Unfortunately, the situation prevailing is that some ministers or top bureaucrats' associations are sought by every sport federation in the country for bringing in money to them. In return, these politicians also attain stature and importance by clinging to the posts offered by federations. In other words, it

will federations have to generate funds in the face of very little financial assistance provided by the state? Corporate funding is too little and too meagre, cricket being the only exception. But the biggest drawback is the absence of sports development in rural India. This is the place where there is raw talent galore but there is no proper way to tap it.

Unfortunately again, India does not have any sports culture. The government has only added to the woes of federations as it has withdrawn whatever little funding they provided for hosting international events in junior sections. How does the government expect

excellence without proper support to nurture young talent? Just by allocating Rs. 300 odd crore for the Olympians that qualified for the Games under TOPS will not help and that too three months prior to Rio.

Only a sustained effort and consistent funding, spread over years, will help get us medals. Take the case of China. It picks up talent at a very young age and nurtures them to the point of seeing the boys and girls winning medals at Olympics. The moment they are inducted in national centres, they become the state subject and they have to worry about nothing, not even education. But in India, we stress on academics at the expense of sports.

In a country starved of medals — we won six medals at London — there are some silver lining performances like that of silver medallist badminton player P.V. Sindhu, bronze medallist wrestler Sakshi Malik, and Dipa Karmakar, the first ever Indian gymnast to make it to the Olympics and also the finals of the vault event. Her fourth position is no less than winning a medal because she had been training with little facilities back home in Tripura.

Looking at the future, India should think of ways and means to achieving glory in the Olympic arena by choosing young talent in fewer disciplines and concentrating fully, rather than frittering away precious little funds, on all 28 Olympic disciplines. Additionally, the government can make a sport policy — not the one they are insisting on now — that will guarantee a career option to sportspersons. Just giving away piecemeal incentives will not fetch medals. And we should not wait until six months prior to the next Olympics to realise that the preparation we started is again late, like it has been the case so far. Let's forget Rio, think about Tokyo and start preparing from today.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

COMMENTS

"Saudi jobs now free of cost"
(August 12, 2016)

Prosanjit Das

Thanks to the Saudi government. It's good news for Bangladesh.

"Exclusive bus, rickshaw for Gulshan area"
(August 12, 2016)

Toufiqur Rahman

I hope the government will ensure security in other places as well. All lives matter.

Omar Ahmed

500 rickshaws and 20 buses can transport only a fraction of the commuters. Their numbers have to be increased.

Imam Hossen Manik

It's a good and timely decision from the authorities.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Rising number of drug addicts

The number of drug addicts in the country is increasing day by day. Drug addicts tend to resort to all kinds of misdeeds to get the money for buying drugs. The government should take strict measures against drug dealers to save our future generation.

Anonymous, On e-mail



The barbaric practice of honour killing

The recent murder of Qandeel Baloch, a Pakistani social-media star, by her own brother is another example of the shameful practice of killing women in the name of 'honour'. Every year almost 500 women are killed in the hands of their relatives in Pakistan in the name of 'honour killing'. The killers often manage to escape punish-

ment because of their influences in society. Human rights organisations around the world have been vocal about this social malpractice but to little avail. The disgraceful practice of honour killing should be banned and the perpetrators punished according to law.

Zeeshan Ali, On e-mail