

Ration for the poor and disabled

A good initiative

THE Prime Minister, in an inauguration programme, revealed that the government will soon launch village rationing for the extreme poor and people with disabilities. The government will distribute ration cards, using which, those in dire need will be able to buy rice at Tk 10 per kilo. This is a commendable initiative and we hope that it will ameliorate their condition by simply lending the poor and the disabled the helping hand that they are entitled to.

Through this food subsidy, a most basic need of those who are struggling can be secured, laying the foundation towards ensuring their welfare. With assistance, the ultra poor and those with disabilities will hopefully have some ease and an opportunity to concentrate more on other aspects of life to better their overall living conditions. Needless to say, it is, thus, a massive step towards making development more inclusive by reducing the marginalisation of these elements of our society.

It is, however, imperative to ensure that the rations do end up in the hands of those that they are intended for. Government programmes earmarked to provide relief to the poor have, in the past, failed to achieve their targeted objectives specifically because of corruption by powerful quarters, particularly at the local level.

We urge the authorities to remain vigilant and actively resist corruption by ensuring that the delivery mechanism is full-proof and the initiative a success. Guaranteeing the basic needs of the poor and the disabled is our moral obligation.

Mobile toilets are viable

Kudos to NGO-led initiative

FIFTY-ONE mobile toilets have been set up in different parts of the city under a joint project led by Association for Realisation of Basic Needs (ARBAN) and WaterAid Bangladesh, two non-government organisations. Lack of public toilets in this city of more than 15 million has been an acute problem for decades. So, it is a much welcome move that a non-traditional approach has been adopted that is not only viable but costs the municipal authorities nothing to maintain in upkeep. The toilets, separate for men and women are equipped with necessary sanitary equipment where cleanliness is maintained. The charge is nominal. The alternative to these mobile toilet facilities of course is what we have become used to – the stench of stale urine or worse emanating from footpaths all over the city.

Open defecation is not something people do willingly, but do so out of necessity in the absence of toilets. It poses health hazards for people who call Dhaka their home, and, since these facilities are mobile in nature, they can be set up anywhere. A report in this paper found that with maintenance costing Tk. 220 for water and Tk. 60 for electricity, the individual in charge of upkeep of these facilities can still earn up to Tk. 300 to Tk. 400 per day. It has met with success because people are willing to pay Tk. 5 to Tk. 10 to use a clean facility which offers relief, hygiene and privacy. We believe that such innovative solutions to basic problems such as hygiene have a lot of potential. The project should be scaled up to cover all major parts of Dhaka city for better service to the public.

The ISIS factor and our youth



STRAIGHT LINE
MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE mode of operation and determination of the terrorist executors coupled with the savagery that surfaced during the recent Gulshan Holy Artisan Bakery incident should

prompt serious thinking about the thought processes of a vital segment of our population. From a historical perspective, the pre-1947 generations, one could suppose, were principally preoccupied with the mission of driving out the British imperialists from the subcontinent. Thereafter, the post-1947 generations became greatly disillusioned by the colonial actions of the Pakistani establishment. The repressive and genocidal attacks of that entity expedited the creation of a free and sovereign Bangladesh in 1971.

Under the circumstances, one might wonder about the aspirations and frustrations of the young Bangladeshis that constitute nearly 70 percent of the population. This is so because a part of this young population has resorted to unprecedented violent actions to allegedly realise political and perhaps divine goals.

The unsettling dimension of the gory incident at Gulshan is that the attackers and their guides and the masterminds reportedly have had the benefit of better education to enable them to grasp the realities of power equations and the compulsions of international geopolitics. It is thus puzzling as to why should Bangladeshi Muslims, howsoever small in number, commit themselves so completely to carry out the ISIS agenda. Does it not occur to them that the birth of ISIS originated in the internal clashes of Islamic groups in Iraq and also Syria?

In fact, one would not be far from reality to say that ISIS is not the result of clash of Islam with the West. This is not to say that the foreign policy of the United States had not significantly contributed to the advent of ISIS. The US invasion of 2003 devastated the already fragile and fractious Iraqi society, and institutions like the army and the ruling BAATH party disintegrated, giving rise to violent sectarian clashes. It was in such circumstances that the so-called jihadi groups sprouted in Iraqi society. Initially, it was Al-Qaeda in Iraq and currently, it is



ILLUSTRATION: JAYANTO/HINDUSTAN TIMES

ISIS which actually is an extension of Al-Qaeda led by former Iraqi army officers.

The Sunni population of Syria, being emboldened by the so-called Arab Spring, took to the streets for greater freedom and Sunni representation. The Assad Regime, with active support of Shia Iran, brutally suppressed the revolt and consequently, we now have the Syrian civil war with the resultant destruction of institutions.

In an intensely sectarian conflict scenario, the Shia-Sunni polarisation took on a violent dimension. The ISIS has taken advantage of this polarisation and ventures to project itself as the defender of the faith fighting the religious and ideological enemy of Islam, the West inclusive. Majority of the Muslims worldwide do not, however, subscribe to their belief, strategy and tactics.

The attackers at Gulshan Holy Artisan Bakery and their companions do not know that by their actions they are unwittingly serving the causes of their professed adversary. Don't they realise as to which quarters are financing the ISIS and who are trying to malign Islam by projecting the faith as a religion of violence? And who are keeping Muslims engaged in internecine and fratricidal

clashes by stoking the Shia-Sunni divide?

The Bangladeshi youth need to know that our Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) never ventured to impose religious orthodoxy and his mission was to change the hearts and minds. The Messenger of Allah called the prevailing spirit of his time *Jahiliyyah* and used the term to refer not to an historical era but to a state of mind that caused violence and terror. That state of mind is also much in evidence in the West today as well as in the Muslim world.

Our youth need to know that the Holy Qur'an condemns aggression and sees all rightly guided religions as deriving from the one God. One has to appreciate the extraordinary pluralism of the Holy Qur'an. The impressionable minds should be made to understand that cultivating an inaccurate prejudice damages the tolerance, liberality, and compassion that are supposed to characterise the Islamic faith. The fact is that Islam's liberal principle cannot be defended by reviving a medieval prejudice.

Our youth need to know that 'jihad' does not mean "holy war", it means "struggle". Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) sweated with the effort to bring peace to strife-torn Arabia and we need to follow

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him today. His life was a tireless campaign against greed, injustice and arrogance. Our Prophet (PBUH), in fact, wore himself out in the creative effort to evolve an entirely new solution.

The imperative is to suitably connect with the younger generation for the true message of Islam to internalise culturally, without lamenting for the deviations caused thus far. Therefore, peace is the priority.

Let us remember that "God summons humankind to the abode of peace (dar as-salam), both in this life and in the next." (10:25)

So closely is the concept of peace (*salam*) related to surrender (Islam) that the two become interchangeable, from the first revelation till the final Day of Judgement.

It is angelic intermediaries who mark the first revelation of the Qur'an, and they mark it with the greetings of peace. During the Night of Power, when the Qur'an is said to have been revealed in its entirety to the Prophet Muhammad: "Angels and the spirit alight,

On every errand by God made right
Peace reigns until dawn's early light.
(97:4-5)"

The writer is a columnist of *The Daily Star*.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Playing defense in Europe



MARK LEONARD

THE most frightening periods in history have often been interregnums – moments between the death of one king and the rise of the next. Disorder, war, and even disease can flood

into the vacuum when, as Antonio Gramsci put it in his Prison Notebooks, "the old is dying and the new cannot be born." The dislocation and confusion of 2016 do not rival the turmoil of the inter-war period, when Gramsci wrote, but they are certainly symptoms of a new interregnum.

After the end of the Cold War, the world was held together by an American-policed security order and a European-inspired legal order. Now, however, both are fraying, and no candidates to replace them have yet emerged. Indeed, unlike in 1989, this is not a crisis of a single type of system. Countries as different as Brazil, China, Russia, and Turkey are coming under heightened political and economic pressure.

Even if the nightmare of a President Donald Trump is avoided, as appears increasingly likely, the United States can no longer be the world's policeman. Powers such as Russia, Iran, and China are probing US reactions in Ukraine, Syria, and the South China Sea. And US allies like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Poland, and Japan are forging independent and assertive foreign policies to make up for a US that cannot and will not carry its previous burdens.

Meanwhile, the European Union's declining cohesion is undermining its moral authority on the world stage. Many of the global institutions that reflect European values and norms – from the World Trade Organization and the International Criminal Court to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change – are gridlocked.

Regionally, the three strands of the European order are unraveling: the US is seeking to reduce its investment in NATO, the EU is de-emphasising enlargement, and the chaos in the Middle East and Ukraine is making a mockery of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The rise – and rapprochement – of illiberal forces in Russia and Turkey mean that the EU is no longer the only pole of attraction in the region.

Worse, EU integration has gone into reverse, with member states seeking to insulate themselves from the outside world, rather than trying to export their shared values. As a result, the biggest threats to free trade and the open society stem from domestic sources, not external enemies. Even in Germany, which had long seemed immune to such pressures, the interior minister talks of banning *burkas* (a policy that would affect 300 people), while the vice-chancellor has declared the death of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the EU and the US even before the body is cold.

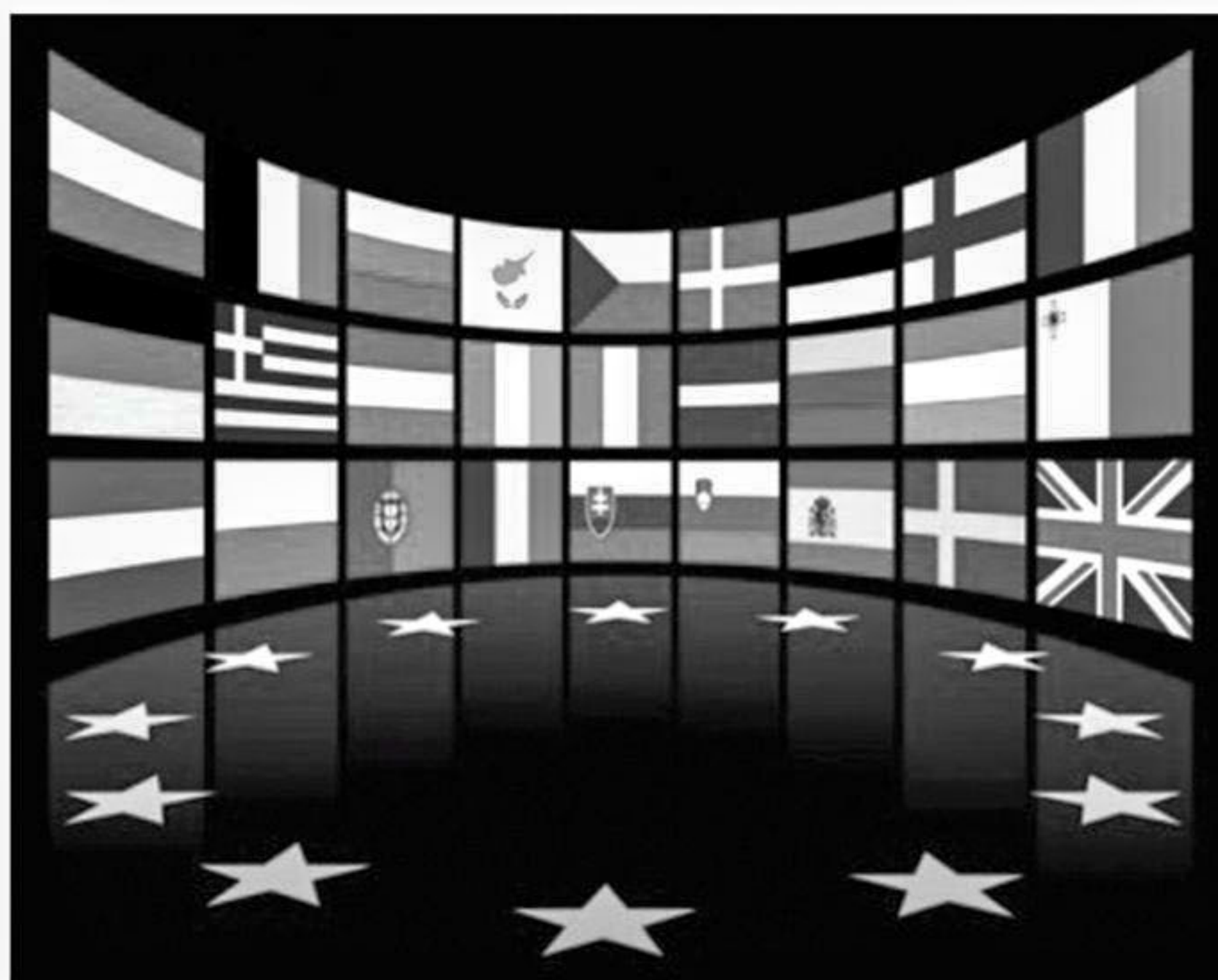
The EU proved over the last few decades that it could be a force for globalisation – tearing down barriers between peoples and nations. But today its survival depends on showing that it can protect citizens from the very forces it has promoted.

Maintaining the four freedoms at the heart of the European project – the free movement of people, goods, capital, and services within Europe – will be possible only if EU governments have credible policies to protect the most vulnerable in their societies. That will mean improving protection of the EU's

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external borders, compensating domestic losers from migration and free trade, and soothing public fears about terrorism.

The danger is that much of what the EU rightly pushed for during the good times could hasten its unravelling now, during the current interregnum. For example, given so much uncertainty about the future state of Europe and the world,



debating enlargement or the TTIP seems pointless – or worse, because even opening such discussions is certain to play into the hands of Eurosceptics.

The EU needs to distinguish between core and peripheral priorities. For issues such as EU relations with Russia and Turkey (and these two countries' relations with each other), member states need to agree on a policy that recognises the interests of all. But much greater flexibility is advisable in other areas, including commitments to refugee re-allocation and eurozone rules, where excessive rigidity could cause European unity to buckle and snap.

In addition to preventing an alliance between Russia and Ankara, the EU should rethink its goals in its neighbourhood. Although the Balkan countries that are outside the EU will remain there for many years, they are in the European security space already, and Europeans should be prepared to intervene militarily if outbreaks of violence recur. Moreover, EU leaders should pursue a broader definition of peace than the absence of war, including political and social stability and preventing radicalisation in Bosnia and Kosovo.

For Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, the goal should be to promote stable and predictable governments. For the next few years, the EU should view them as independent buffer states rather than as member-states-in-waiting. It will be

particularly important not to set red lines that the EU is not willing to defend.

In the troubled Middle East, the EU cannot hope to be the central actor. But EU countries cannot protect their populations from instability if they are only spectators. Particularly in Syria and Libya, the EU needs to be playing a more concerted role with regional powers – as well as with the US and Russia – to advance political processes that could help reduce violence, provide humanitarian aid, and stem the flow of refugees.

One of the EU's main challenges is to define success in a defensive era. During the heyday of enlargement, the goal was to deepen integration and broaden its reach across Europe. Now, however, success means preventing countries from leaving the EU or hollowing out its institutions.

History moves in cycles. The interregnum will eventually end and a new order will be born. What is certain is that the survivors and inheritors of the old order will write the rules of the new one. The EU's goal, achievable only with flexibility and courage, must be to remain a viable project – and thus be one of the authors.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Risky jaywalking

The photo was taken at Chairmanbari signal of Banani, Dhaka just a few days ago. Just when the cars were given clearance to proceed after waiting at a signal, these two pedestrians decided to jaywalk while abruptly stopping the cars in front of them almost causing an accident. Their behaviour was irresponsible and in total disregard for their own safety and that of others. We all should behave responsibly while crossing the road or driving a vehicle.

Mahmudur Rahman
On e-mail

An engineer does us proud

Recently I have come across a fascinating news report about a young woman engineer from BUET who is breaking into the rapidly expanding world of computer programming and its various applications. Engineer Rizwana Rizia has become successful at the international level by winning a job in computer programming and coding at Amazon in USA. I offer my heartiest congratulation to this highly talented young lady from Bangladesh and wish her all the best.
Engr. S. A. Mansoor, Dhaka