

No witness protection

Fast track deposition of cases

FOUR years down the line since the violence at Ramu, we find that only 1 out of 18 cases has seen some progress. The problem lies in the fact that many witnesses fear to give deposition in a court of law out of fear of retribution by guilty parties, as there is no set system for providing security to witnesses. With 17 cases yet to start proceedings, the fear amongst the Buddhist community is that the communal violence around Ramu in 2012 is unwittingly being relegated to history. That is not the only problem; there is also contention that some principal suspects in the violence have been left out of the cases altogether.

When people find that there is no progress on probe reports submitted to the High Court by a judiciary body, the police and home ministry, it is natural for the members of the minority Buddhist community to be apprehensive about whether the cases are being sidelined. But why is this so? The initial probe conducted squarely found dereliction of duty by the officer in charge of Ramu station and the involvement of more than 200 people who had pre-planned the mayhem. All in all, it is not the most conducive of situations and the prosecution is having a tough time convincing witnesses to come forward. Yet, it is imperative that the Ramu incident be investigated and those responsible be brought to justice in the interest of communal harmony. Failure to do so would be giving entirely the wrong signal to communal forces and undermining the secular character of the State.

Night schools of Imdadul

An inspiring endeavour

WE commend Imdadul Haque of Jhenidah for setting up several night schools for the farmers of his locality where more than half the men are illiterate. The battle he launched against illiteracy in 2008 was faced with many challenges but has inculcated in the elderly an attitude of learning. Upon reaching the goal of teaching them literacy and numeracy, he now educates them on sanitation, hygiene and morality. And the pupils, some of them in their sixties, are happy and excited to have the opportunity to learn.

Imdadul's initiative bears special significance because farmers constitute about 47 percent of the labour force of the country, making a significant contribution to the GDP. But they are often bypassed by ambitious government programmes and projects. It is important to understand that the performance of farmers has an overwhelming impact on major macroeconomic objectives such as employment generation and poverty alleviation.

An educated farmer is a better farmer. He or she has a better shot at not being exploited by the proverbial middleman who often eats away at their hard toil. Literacy gives them a certain sense of empowerment to these farmers as evident from the Jhenidah example. Moreover, in order to take advantage of the digital transformation the country is going through, one has to be literate first.

Imdadul alone cannot accomplish this task. He needs all the support from the public and private sectors and the NGOs that can launch similar programmes across the country.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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ICC needs to introduce weighted average rankings

Bangladesh narrowly escaped defeat in the 1st ODI international against Afghanistan, yet, our nation and the media were reporting a great victory without mentioning that Afghanistan played a relatively more mature game. Lack of international exposure and experience turned a sure victory into a defeat for them.

Yesterday, the Afghans beat Bangladesh and silenced all spectators. But the media's coverage hides the fact that our team played miserably for the defeat.

It has become necessary to make the ICC rankings based on weighted average and not on simple average. For example: If an Australian bowler gets an English/Indian/South African batsman out, the bowler will earn, say 2 points. But if he gets a wicket against Zimbabwe, he will earn 1 point. If a Bangladeshi bowler gets a wicket against Zimbabwe/Afghanistan, he will earn 1 point. This will reflect the real strength of bowlers and batsmen.

We need to be impartial and honest in our reporting. Otherwise, Bangladesh will never be able to improve in relation to the real international standard, although it has been a cricket playing nation for a long time.

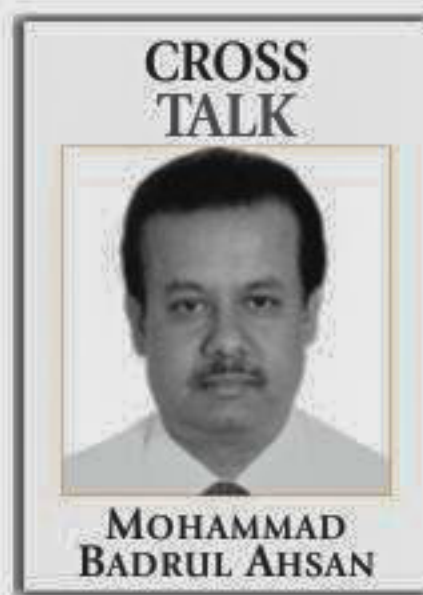
Luthfe Ali
On email

Take initiatives, lessen traffic

We all know of the horrible traffic condition of our country. Recently, it took me eight hours to complete a two hour commute to Comilla. There are many traffic police personnel in the capital, but none can be seen in the outskirts of Dhaka city. As a result, citizens travelling to their hometowns suffer a lot. This must be resolved.

Nazmu Hassan Sharif
University of Dhaka

The critical connection between love and marriage



CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD
BADRUL AHSAN

FIRE leaves behind ashes, rain leaves behind stains, and wind leaves behind fallen leaves, but what does love leave in its wake? Some love affairs culminate in marriage, some marriages culminate in love. Heartbreak leaves behind bruised souls forever licking their wounds. Many marriages survive loss of love, when conjugal life is merely driven by inertia not

emotions. Love outside wedlock is scandalous, but infidelity has been as old as marriage.

Most marriages today are bereft of emotions. Married couples wake up in the morning like lodgers sharing the same bed. Then husbands head for work and most wives go to kitchen, or take children to school. In many cases both go to work; in fewer cases husbands stay home. Between rapidly dwindling number of housewives and slowly rising number of househusbands, the institution of marriage is losing its steam.

If truth is the first casualty of war, love is the first casualty of almost all marriages. Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt lived together for almost a decade but their love withered within two years of marriage. Many other star couples have announced divorces from their respective partners in the first nine months of this year. It's said that in 2016 love has been dead in Hollywood.

If love doesn't guarantee marriage, marriage doesn't guarantee love either. Tom Mullen says that a happy marriage begins when one marries the person one loves, and it blossoms when one loves the person one marries. If love is a flower that turns into fruit at good marriage, it wilts when the heat turns up in bad marriage.

The *New York Times* reported in 2014 that the divorce rate in the United States was declining, one reason being that fewer people were getting married. Fewer marriages are going wrong because fewer people are making that choice. It's certain by now that marriage rates are sinking globally.

Only about half of Americans are married now, down from 72 percent in 1960. In northern Europe, marriage rates are even lower and cohabitation rates are even higher than they are in the US; South Asia and China are exceptions. Having near-universal marriage with 98 percent of men and women tying the knot, these countries have little or no co-habitation.

Elsewhere the numbers are falling despite more choices. Matrimony was once confined to a legal contract between men and women. Now same-sex marriages in a

growing number of countries allow man to accept man, or woman to accept woman as spouse. But knocking down the walls has narrowed down the space. It seems too many choices have been bad for the business of marriage.

Japan has been in the news lately for having an astonishing number of single people. According to the *Japan Times*, a new survey of Japanese people aged 18 to 34 found that 70 percent of unmarried men and 60 percent of unmarried women are not in a relationship. It gets worse: Around 42 percent of men and 44.2 percent of women admitted that they were virgins.

spanning from a few days to a few years.

The stigma of divorce or remarriage gone, marriage is now a supermarket selling refundable vows. Getting a new partner is more desirable than living with the flawed one, hoping he or she will get fixed soon. Suchitra Sen has no patience today to nurse Uttam Kumar until he gets his sight back (*Sagarika*). Uttam Kumar is in no mood to wait until Suchitra Sen regains her memory (*Alo Amar Alo*).

Lost in that compression of passion is love, which is the grease that turns the wheels. It's also the analgesic that relieves the pain. In earlier days, women miserably



The end of Brangelina - a casualty of marriage.

PHOTO: AFP

A booming industry surrounds Japan's growing condition of loneliness, which includes child-rearing course for men called *ikumen*. Desperate Japanese bachelors looking for love can now learn child-rearing skills to boost their chances of finding a partner. In various parts of the developed world, economic uncertainty is reshaping the way millennials and other young people conceive of their sex lives and marital choices.

For a number of reasons, marriage is now a boulder jarred loose from its rock solid foundation. Wedlock is no longer a compulsory but a subsidiary business of life. A couple doesn't have to stay married till death do them part. The nuptial bliss can be short-lived, its duration

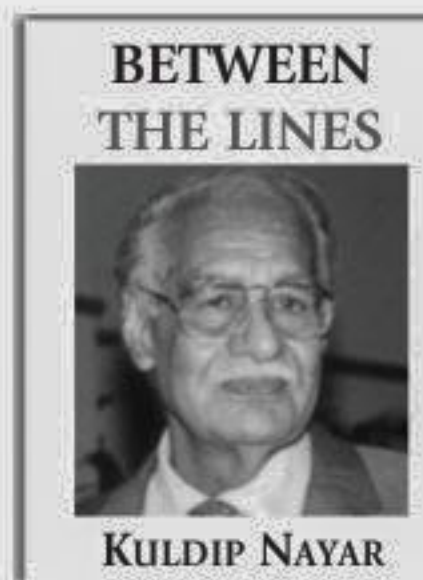
suffered in the hands of abusive men to save their marriages. Parents are now free to exercise options, but victims are mostly children.

People still find partners, and they still get married. Marriages don't last, because any relationship without love is a conflict zone. Fulfilled love leaves behind happiness, unrequited love or infatuation leaves behind resentment. But neglected love is the worst, which strikes back with vengeance. It leaves behind hatred, when erstwhile lovers are aggressively consumed by isolation and loneliness.

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No SAARC Summit this year

Is war imminent?



BETWEEN THE LINES

KULDIP NAYAR

INDIA'S Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj may have appeared belligerent in her speech at the United Nations. But she represented India's

exasperation over Pakistan's interference in Kashmir and elsewhere. After the killing of 14 soldiers in Uri, one widely supported demand is: retaliation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has promised counter action at the time and the place that the armed forces chose. What would India's next step be is not yet known but the desire for retaliation is very much there. It is a sad option and to exercise it without action requires patience, which is getting exhausted. War cannot be considered as an option. Yet what is the way out?

Pakistan had admitted that some non-state actors have indulged in the killing of soldiers in Uri. But now after the whole world has expressed horror over the Uri incident, Islamabad claims that India had 'staged' the Uri incident, and Islamabad had no hand in it. But how does it explain that its soil was used by the forces who attacked Uri?

Pakistan has raised the Kashmir issue to divert attention from everything else. It expects New Delhi to participate in the talks which it would initiate.

Its eyes were probably on the SAARC summit that was to be held in Islamabad. India's formal 'no' to participate has ended the meeting, because both Nepal and Bangladesh have expressed their inability to attend the Summit at Islamabad.

The question is where do we go from here? War is no option but talks also have not fructified. Sushma's speech is another warning to Pakistan that India is tired of Pakistan's actions and may be driven to take some measures. All eyes are on New Delhi, because it has to decide what steps should be taken, as it is becoming increasingly clear that talks are no solution.

India has considered the revision of the Indus Water Treaty which was signed by Jawaharlal Nehru and Pakistan military chief Mohammad Ayub Khan in 1960. Sartaj Aziz, who represents Pakistan's foreign affairs, has said that anything done to revise the treaty without Pakistan's participation would be 'an act of war'. This has further complicated matters.

In view of this deadlock, no progress has been made. This should be told to the people of both sides. They have been

urging their respective governments to sort out the matter through dialogues. Pakistan says again and again that some settlement over Kashmir is necessary for substantive peace in the subcontinent.

Thus, we come back to square one. By all means, concerned members should sit across the table to find a solution. But India and Pakistan cannot do this by themselves. The Kashmiris, after all, deserve to have their say.

Recently, when I went to Srinagar at the invitation of students, I found that the young Kashmiris wanted a country of their own - sovereign and independent. They do not realise that India does not favour another Islamic nation on its

depend on one.

With Muslims in majority in Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan expected its accession. When it did not take place, Pakistan sent its irregulars, backed by the regular troops. The Maharaja sought the help of India which insisted on the accession before sending its troops. He had to sign the Instrument of Accession Act.

The two parts of the states are against *azaadi*. Jammu, the Hindu majority part, would like to join India. The Buddhist majority Ladakh, the other part, want to be a union territory of India. Therefore the demand for *azaadi* is essentially that of the valley which has nearly 98 percent

partition, however genuine and strong the sentiments of the Kashmiris? If partition takes place again on the basis of religion, the secular state may not survive as it is. True, the 25 crore Muslims in India are equal citizens and they cannot be treated as hostages. But the valley's secession may have repercussions that are too dreadful to imagine. The Constitution, guaranteeing equality to all Indian citizens, may be of no avail.

India and Pakistan have fought two regular wars on Kashmir, apart from a mini misadventure in Kargil. Several thousand Kashmiris have died for the cause of *azaadi*. For India, they were



An Indian Border Security Force soldier is on duty in Srinagar, Kashmir.

PHOTO: AFP

border, when it is exasperated by the one it has - Pakistan.

But the mood of the youth of Kashmir is that of anger, and they seem unwilling to compromise on their demand for *azaadi*. They do not realise that *azaadi* is an ideal, not a feasible proposition. When the British left India in August 1947, they gave the princely states an option to stay independent if they did not want to join either India or Pakistan. Maharaja Hari Singh, then ruler of Jammu and Kashmir, declared that he would stay independent. The landlocked state had to have the support of both India and Pakistan for access to the outside world. He did not want to

of Muslims.

With India in the midst of an endeavour for polarisation and with the ruling political party playing the Hindu card, it is difficult to imagine that Congress or any other political party, including the Communists, would support the *azaadi* demand. Even otherwise, all political parties are opposed to the demand for Kashmir's independence, although some may go to great lengths to give powers to the state.

After 70 years of Partition, the wounds inflicted because of the division have not healed yet. How does anyone expect the people in India to reconcile to another

insurgents. They were crushed by the security forces, which too lost thousands. Even now, some militants from across the border attack certain vulnerable areas but are rebuffed. For example, the day a Zubin Mehta concert was to be held, a post of Central Reserve Police Force in southern Kashmir was targeted with rockets. There was a hartal in Srinagar. But this exercise has taken place many a times in the past.

Sushma's warning may also go unanswered. But hers is yet only a warning, because the next step can lead to a war between the two countries.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.