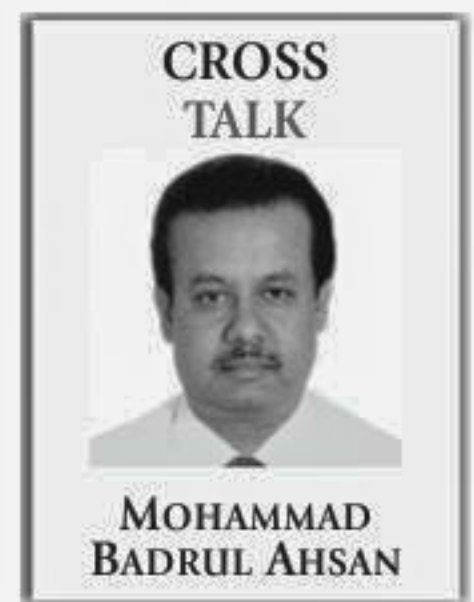


Isolation of Pakistan will not isolate terror



CROSS TALK
 INDIAN Prime Minister Narendra Modi has labelled Pakistan as a "mother ship of terrorism" at a summit of the BRIC nations held in the Indian state of Goa last Sunday. He scathed the inveterate foe of his country for "nurturing a mindset that terrorism is justified." The premier was within his rights when he spoke those words, because he was fishing for support against a sworn enemy, which has been a thorn in India's side. He, however, left much unsaid in his verbal "surgical strike" against Pakistan, addressing the symptom and ignoring the cause.

Pakistan, no doubt, has unwittingly turned itself into a breeding ground for terrorism. Some terrorists are of Pakistani origin, and many have been brainwashed and trained in Pakistan. The Pakistani politicians, like kids heady with money and easy life, allowed their country to be used as pantry for the American manoeuvres. When the Russians invaded Afghanistan, Pakistan was made to think it was an important ally of the United States at a crucial juncture of the Cold War. Not to speak of the billions of dollars the US gave, some of that money lining up the pockets of many Pakistani leaders.

We don't know if these leaders are feeling sorry now that the US lawmakers introduced a bill in the Congress to designate Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism. These days, India and the USA are so tight that when one sneezes another catches a cold. The campaign in the US was followed by an Indian lawmaker submitting a resolution in the Rajya Sabha to declare Pakistan a terror state.

Although the moral high ground no longer looks high! It's a longstanding practice in global politics that powerful nations interfering in weaker countries want to cuddle the baby to get to the mother. For nearly half a century, the war on communism was used as an excuse to tinker with the affairs of other countries. The WMDS were invented to create ground for invading Iraq. The false hope of the Arab Spring was ignited to unsettle the Arab nations culminating in the nightmare that's drawing Syria into an ever-escalating civil war.

By definition, terrorism is the human tendency to use violence to affect politics. That being so, who created the Mujahedeen, the Taliban, the al-Qaeda and, now, the ISIS? And, how were these militant outfits created to serve what interests?

This is by no means intended to exonerate Pakistan. The country has been stewing in its own juice since the Russians left Afghanistan and the American interest dried up. What about the fighters who fought, the mines that still lay buried, arms and ammunitions in thousands of trigger-happy hands, and the sudden vacuum in the minds of people, who were fired up to fight for a cause?

The Pakistani leadership must take blame for failing to plan how to clean up the mess after the Russian withdrawal and American desertion. They surely have a track record of failed vision and characteristic arrogance that led to the bifurcation of the country in 1971. It's unfortunate for the ordinary people of Pakistan that they have been crushed like chillies between an overbearing aristocracy and an ambitious military-industrial complex.

India today is forging a strong alliance with the same superpower whose ties with Pakistan it resented for many decades. Maybe, its leaders have more wisdom not to fall prey to sinister designs like Pakistan did. Maybe, they know when to pull out before the relationship turns abusive and hurts national interests. But India shouldn't

forget that it's romancing with a cunning suitor, who has cheated its neighbour.

Pakistan suffers the irony of a bomb-maker whose bomb has exploded in his hand. The terrorism Pakistan once pushed to terrorise the Russians is now terrorising Pakistan. The frequent attacks carried out on its schools, mosques, politicians and celebrities depict the horror of an autophagous nation that has turned on itself. If Pakistan has been sending death squads and suicide bombers to other countries, it's also getting high on its own supply.

India must learn from the mistakes of its newfound ally, which, after 9/11, mixed the pleasure of opportunism with the business of fighting terrorism. The end result has been a disaster. The United States invaded Iraq on false pretences and frantically hunted for an elusive Osama bin Laden in the mountains of Afghanistan. While these two countries are struggling to recover from the ravages of wars imposed on them, terrorism has spawned worldwide wanton like blight.

India might succeed in isolating Pakistan, but it will not isolate terror. Distancing from the fuse has never defused the bomb.

The writer is Editor of the weekly *First News* and an opinion writer for *The Daily Star*. Email: badrul151@yahoo.com

Putting newborn lives at risk

Bordering on criminality

It is astonishing to learn that some hospital staff of the Bangladesher National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases actively stopped a firm from installing oxygen pipelines in the hospital's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) because they allegedly wanted a bribe which was not entertained by the contractor. This sort of unethical practice is unheard of because a number of newborns had been moved to the general ward so that the renovation work could be completed within the stipulated timeframe. However, as it turned out the renovation, which should have been completed within a few hours, could not be completed and the work only got started after the director of the institute got involved.

It seems that organised syndicates have taken over a lot of the medical institutes in the country. We have seen vested quarters play havoc with patients' lives in some other hospitals where ambulance services have been disrupted. There have been instances where non-doctors have performed surgery and now children's lives are put at stake because some vested quarters are more interested in lining their pockets than giving patients the critical care they need.

It is miraculous that none of the six children who had been moved out to the general ward suffered any major complications. But what if they did have an emergency? Who would take responsibility for that? Intensive care units exist to give specialised care to special cases and this act that was perpetrated by hospital staff needs to be investigated and charges need to be pressed against them for putting lives in danger.

Innovate to save lives

SYED SAAD ANDALEEB

I recently went to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of a city hospital. One of my students at BRAC University suffered a serious brain injury while travelling in a tempo that overturned. The boy eventually succumbed to his fatal injury. Deep within, I felt a sense of loss not only on account of the student and his family, but also for the university, as well as for the nation which lost a fine human asset. Three things occurred to me as I made my pensive way back home.

First, when the accident occurred, some good Samaritans stepped forward and tried to save the student. But they were turned away from several hospitals, while his life was ebbing. For one thing, the Samaritans had no information regarding which hospital had ICU facilities and which one had an available bed to offer. As a result, when they reached a hospital, they either learnt that it did not have an ICU or were told that the ICUs were full. In one case, the hospital was reluctant to admit the student based on the seriousness of his condition. A staff member apparently remarked in cavalier fashion, "Take him away; you will only spend lakhs, but not take him back alive." From what I learnt, there was no effort to admit the patient for a comprehensive evaluation and make any attempt to save the life. The frantic rush from one hospital to another may have been ultimately responsible for the loss of a precious life.

Given that the student was from the Computer Science and Engineering department, it dawned on me that an app could be developed (perhaps by his friends in remembrance) that would immediately show which hospitals have ICUs and available beds. This idea can later be expanded to other hospital services. To save precious time, one must be able to reserve a bed immediately via the app and regardless of the condition of the patient, the ICU must give a professional opinion after admitting the patient. This should be a law! Admittedly, the details of the app need to be worked out; for example, against false bookings, pranks, etc. Perhaps a substantive fee may be charged upon booking the space, although this may make the good Samaritans balk from making the reservation. Surely, these matters are not insoluble and will have to be addressed in a comprehensive manner.

The second issue is that of costs. Who is to pay for the exorbitant cost of intensive care? As things stand, the

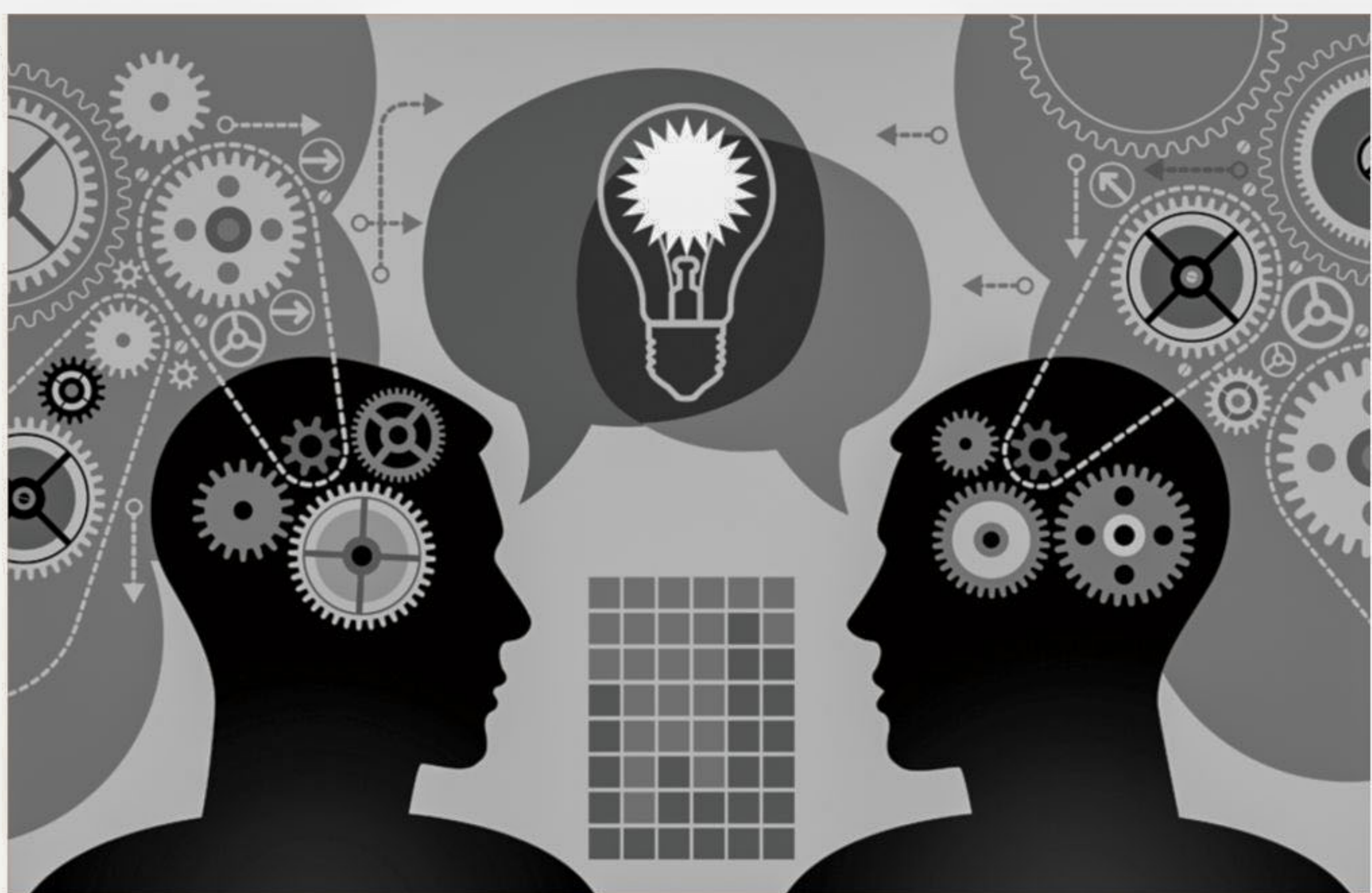


IMAGE: PEACHINFOMATICS

family of the student will now be responsible for bearing the huge costs – a bolt from the blue – for the fault of someone else, namely the tempo driver. As reported, the haste, belligerence and carelessness of the tempo driver should make it his responsibility to pay. Perhaps the owner of the vehicle also bears some responsibility for hiring a reckless and unduly aggressive driver. But this idea is likely to go nowhere: too many ifs and buts, including the financial status of the tempo driver and the raw power of the owner's groups that likely includes members from powerful coteries.

This particular student had a very high CGPA and was a promising star – in fact, a national asset. Students who come so far to study at the university level are decidedly national assets. They will be contributing to the nation's growth and need to be supported to the extent possible. Suppose the student had survived, the burden of medical expenses could have cost him his education.

A suggestion, therefore, is to contemplate a nation-wide insurance plan for students in higher education (or even at lower tiers or all students). For their protection, as well as the protection of their families, a three-way insurance scheme may be envisaged where the

student and his family pays a part, the university pays another, while the nation pays a third part. This proposal could be the starting point of a conversation on how to protect the most vital of our country's assets: human assets. Insurance companies also ought to look at how best to craft policies that protect these assets. While these companies are entitled to make profits, their policies often keep out a significant proportion of the population, especially those in need, even from basic coverage. There are universal health coverage schemes in other nations that could be studied for adaptation and adoption.

Finally, the tempo (and other public vehicle) drivers really need to be reined in. They are far too aggressive, far too callous, and often hostile when let loose on our streets. In their rush to get to places, they are pushy, change lanes on a whim, and are utterly callous of where they pick up or drop off passengers, oblivious to the risks to which the passengers are exposed. Can a national programme be developed to train and certify the drivers of public (and even private) transportation vehicles? In addition, can a database be developed to track those drivers who have a record of bad driving to be able to keep them off the streets? An app could be developed

for this as well. For example, each vehicle would have a highly visible code to which the driver of the vehicle is connected. Suffering passengers could report the driver using the code on a set of violations using the app that would automatically go into a database, resulting in accumulation of negative points. Using the database as a tracking mechanism about the driver and the owner, disciplinary penalties could be imposed on both driver and owner to bring about much needed behavioural changes in those who run riot on our streets.

Catastrophic events deliver many families into the clutches of poverty from which there may be no coming back. As the nation continues to make steady economic progress, its social innovations must keep pace. Social protection via innovative apps and a national insurance policy, crafted properly, can protect many families faced with a life-changing event. Anticipating the challenges driven by development and designing innovative provisions are the need of the day. Academia, especially, can and must join hands with other stakeholders to lead the way.

The writer is the Vice-Chancellor of BRAC University.

Unbridled urbanisation

How long is it sustainable?

An unprecedented number of people are migrating to Dhaka and a few other eastern cities while western cities and towns are witnessing a low or negative population growth due to an inequitable distribution of the benefits of economic development, according to a study by the UNFPA. Dhaka is the worst hit by this unplanned and continuous urbanisation with more than 10 percent of the entire population living in the capital city although it only makes up for 1 percent of the total land area. An additional 4 to 5 lakh people—roughly the population of Maldives—come to Dhaka each year to stay.

About 40 percent of the GDP is generated by the city. The per capita GDP of Dhaka is more than USD 10,000 while the national average is USD 1,200 to 1,400, according to some estimates. Everyone wants a slice of the pie. The other factor behind such a massive influx of people to Dhaka is the simple fact that we have yet to develop planned cities with modern facilities across the country.

Dhaka is expanding and the rate of expansion is increasing. But what are the opportunity costs? It has over the years become a city where every element of life—earth, water and air—has been severely polluted. Can the city host 17 million people providing them with adequate infrastructure and utility services?

Urbanisation is inevitable and entails the ways in which a society adapts to the population shift from rural to urban areas. The adaptation is what is missing. The status quo is untenable for much longer without political, economic and administrative decentralisation.

A WORD A DAY



TRUMPERY
 Noun [Truhm-puh-ree]
 Something showy but worthless; nonsense or rubbish; deceit; fraud; trickery.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Havoc by bikers

While most people in our country are law abiding citizens, the callousness of some influences others to follow suit, creating a chaotic situation. I am referring to the breach of traffic rules by some bikers. Many of them drive over the footpaths in order to avoid traffic, which not only crowds the walkways but also panics pedestrians and causes accidents. This in turn prevents pedestrians from using the

walkways.

The number of bikes driven around Dhaka city is increasing by the day, and these breaches of law often occur in front of the traffic police. We appeal to the city authorities to take punitive action against such law-flouting bikers and ensure safety for pedestrians on footpaths.

Md. Zona Emran
 On email

The nightmare of Dhaka traffic

Our beloved, beautiful Dhaka city has become a nightmare for commuters. Reaching any destination involves hours of sweating and inhaling of toxic emissions from the countless vehicles baking in the sun. Journeys of 15 minutes extend to an hour or more. Yet no development work is being done to relieve us of these inconveniences.

A lot of funding is being channeled towards other sectors. Our foreign guests come and leave with the impression of empty Dhaka streets, so they don't donate to the development of this sector. We urgently need solutions to this nightmare.

Dr. Sabrina Rashid
 Bangladesh Specialized Hospital, Dhaka