

## Lack of occupational safety

*Needless deaths can be avoided*

BAKING AND CONSTRUCTION Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE) revealed in a study conducted recently that at least 1,240 workers were killed and 544 others injured at workplaces nationwide due to lack of occupational safety. This is up from 2015 when there were 951 casualties. Indeed, the trend is upward as one looks at year-to-year data and the largest number of deaths occurred in the transport sector followed by construction. The garments sector posted far fewer deaths but then that is because workers' safety has been under massive scrutiny since the Rana Plaza collapse. The sad reality is that we have laws in place, but these are poorly enforced when it comes to workers' safety. When poor enforcement is coupled with the general apathy of employers on the issue of safety, we open the doors wide open for deaths that can be greatly reduced if health and safety issues were priority areas of concern at the workplace. Indeed, only two days ago, three construction workers were killed in Savar when the under-construction roof of a food processing factory collapsed on them. According to a report in this paper, the contractor who was responsible for the construction was nowhere to be found and those three workers, now deceased, join the long list of casualties that make up a growing number of people killed for no fault of their own. Unless authorities are willing to enforce existing laws on safety standards at the workplace, death and injury will continue to occur at hazardous work places.

## A rickshaw-puller's commendable initiative

*Working to create a cleaner city*

A photograph published by this newspaper on Saturday, showing a man sprinkling petals on the ground near Salimullah Muslim Hall of Dhaka University is truly a sight to behold. The man's name is Nissan and he is a rickshaw-puller by profession. He collects petals from flower shops in Shahbag and uses them to discourage people from urinating and defecating in the area.

Not only does the picture show the flower petals beautifully arranged by Nissan, but by the looks of it, it seems that he is also an educated man, as he even wrote a message using the arrangement of the petals. And through his inspiring initiative, it seems he is looking to educate many more, through his innovative method of dissuading people from open defecation.

Although Bangladesh has made remarkable strides over the years in addressing the problem of open defecation, it has not managed to completely eradicate it as of yet. As is well known, open defecation poses many health challenges for people in general. And what Nissan's bold initiative shows us is that there are many creative and economical ways of deterring people from contributing to that problem and, at the same time, to encourage them to be a part of the solution.

The authorities and society in general can learn a lot from this man. For one, if we want change, we must become the change ourselves. We hope that his bold initiative will give inspiration to many more and establish a way forward for our country to bloom into a clean, harmonious and beautiful one for us all to live in.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Bangladesh moving forward

Bangladesh is now recognised as one of the next 11 emerging economies in the world. In 1971, I don't believe many people would have guessed that Bangladesh, 45 years later, would perform this well. Its per capita income is now USD 1,466 and its foreign investment is nearly USD 2.23 billion. Women's participation rate in our labour force is 41 percent, the school dropout rate has been reduced to 20.4 percent and the literacy rate is about 63 percent. The child mortality rate for those aged under 5 has also been reduced to 36 per thousand.

There are now 143 schemes of social safety net programmes and the poverty rate has dropped to 22.4 percent. In short, Bangladesh has, indeed, overcome a myriad of problems and has made substantial progress during the past four decades. Presently, Bangladesh is aiming to become a middle-income country by 2021.

Despite our growing economy, we have quite a few significant challenges ahead of us. The widening discrepancy between the rich and the poor within the country is striking. The political milieu over the last few decades has been covered in bitterness, animosity and violent behaviour of our mainstream political parties. Confrontational politics has been the hallmark of our politics.

To move forward successfully, the political situation of our country needs changing. We look forward to our economy flourishing in the near future. But the political running of the country must be improved for that to happen.

Rafiq Alamgir  
Chittagong

# 2016-Annus horribilis

## STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



BRIG GEN  
SHAHEDDUL ANAM KHAN  
NDC, FSC (RETD)

THERE are good reasons to call 2016 a horrible year, and I am sure most of us will be glad to see the back of 2016. To say that it was a traumatic year for Bangladesh

would be an understatement. Seldom have we been visited by so much of misfortune, and seldom have events in Bangladesh taken up the space and time of the international electronic media as have some of the events in this country. And this despite our achievements in many other sectors.

It was a politically quiet year for us, primarily because there was hardly any politics to write home about except for the few local body elections that were held with predictable results. The wheels of development moved faster than before and we can take comfort in the country crossing the thousand dollar mark in per capita earning although that figure does not quite reflect the spread of the per head earning across the board, and a record foreign exchange reserve. But the ruling party's emphasis on development was noticeable particularly in its effort to project the primacy of development over democracy in deflecting all criticisms of the current political dispensation and all calls for an early election though greatly muted since 2015.

The agriculture sector continues to provide us great comfort, and in spite of many encumbrances at home, the RMG sector did not fail to live up to its potential to reach the 50 billion dollar mark by 2021, having secured more than USD 34.24 billion in export earnings in the 2015-16 fiscal year. However, we can be rightly dismayed by the fact that we have failed to receive a positive re-evaluation of our GSP designation even this year, despite the factories meeting most of the conditions set by the importers. However, thanks to the peaceful environment during the course of the last one year in this sector that has helped us to reach the target, of course except the brief flutter in a segment of RMG factories at the fag end of the year.

But all our achievements were

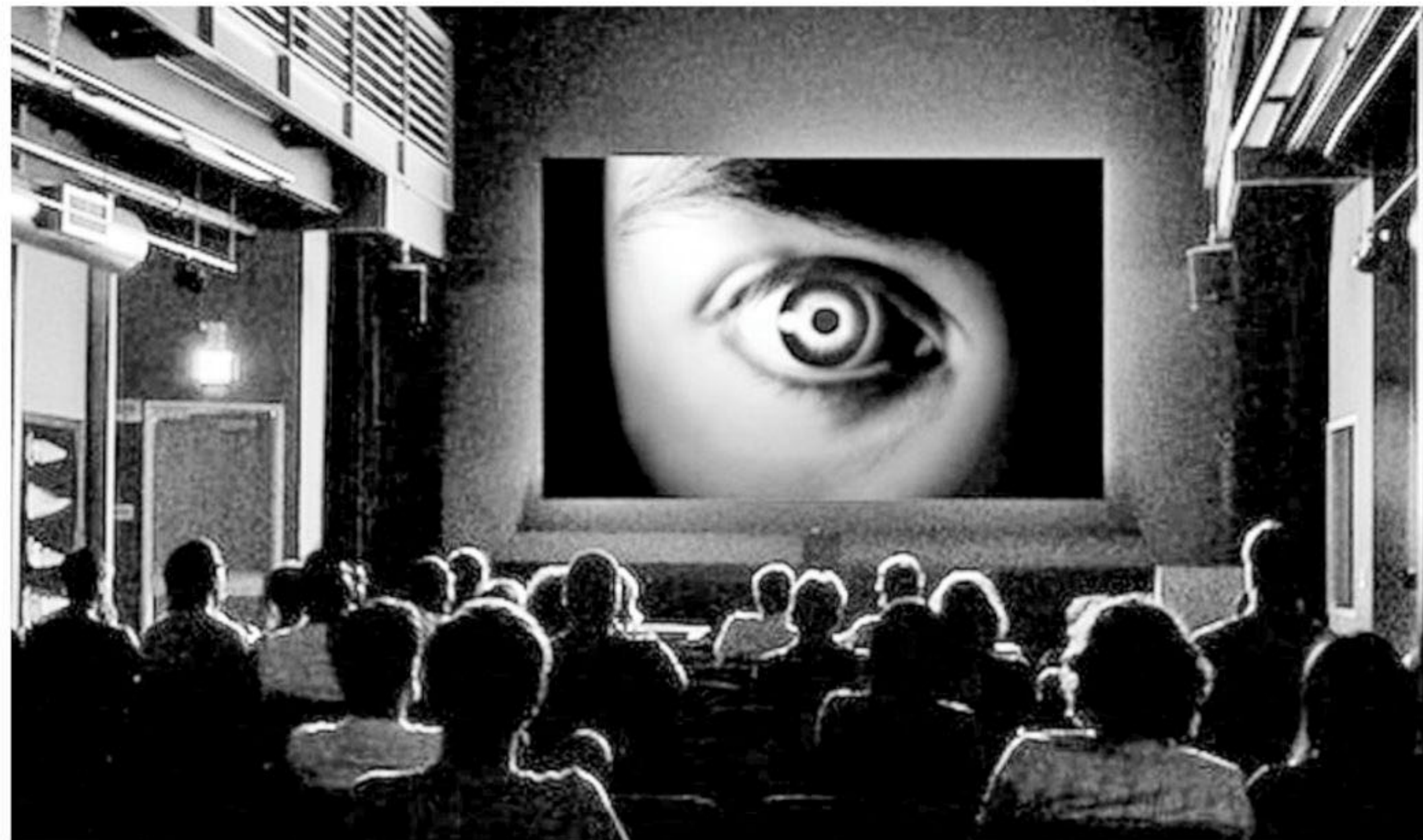
smearred and tainted by the most traumatic episode in the nation's life in many years. The painful event of July 1 in Holey Artisan was never anticipated; although the entire year was spattered with activities of the Islamic extremists, Holey Artisan was a nadir in the extremists' act of violence that resulted in the gruesome killings on a night of the month of Holy Ramzan. Nothing has been the same in this country ever since, and the consequences have been very widespread and felt in many areas, apart from the fact that it has left a deep scar in the collective psyche of the nation.

foreigners. Among those killed in 2016 are U.S. embassy employee and LGBT activist Xulhaz Mannan, secular English professor Rezaul Karim Siddique, and law student Nazimuddin Samad. While the agencies have been successful in preempting some of these groups, not many of them could be arrested alive, thus depriving the intelligence agencies valuable intelligence that would have helped them in better combating the menace.

Apart from that, several painful murders, some of them in broad daylight, have hogged the headlines too. The murder of a second-year history student

rior motives. But certainly the assaults on the Santals in Gaibandha had nothing to do with religion or ethnicity but pure lust for land, and reportedly there is involvement of politicians too.

Another blot in the traumatic year of 2016 was the Bangladesh Bank heist which to this day remains a mystery. The initial reaction of a former Bangladesh Bank Governor, who later headed the inquiry commission set up by the finance ministry, pointed towards an inside job or at least active collusion of some central bank insiders without whose help such a transfer would not have been possible. But the mystery has



But Holey Artisan in a very queer way has a redeeming aspect too. It threw up a hero in the form of a 20 year young man Faraz, whose exemplary courage and sacrifice will much outlive the sordid tale written by the senseless murderers. Since coming under the radar of the AQIS and the ISIS, a number of their affiliates have sprung up in the country and, reportedly, since 2013 a variety of local Islamist groups have carried out the murders of at least 40 pro-secular writers and activists, members of religious minorities and

of Comilla Victoria Government College and a cultural activist, Tonu who was found dead about 400 yards from her house inside Comilla Cantonment on the night of March 20, has remained unsolved and so has the killing of an SP's wife in Chittagong, although several persons have been arrested in this regard.

The year was also marred by attacks on religious and ethnic minorities in various parts of the country, the tenor of these attacks gives one the impression of a well-planned action with ulte-

become an enigma with the finance minister blowing hot and cold regarding making public the inquiry report. But the longer that is withheld the deeper will be the speculation and the suspicion of the common man that the government has perhaps something to hide.

While we bid adieu to 2016, let us begin the year 2017 with the confidence that, "Hope smiles from the threshold of the year to come, whispering, 'It will be happier.'" - Tennyson

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## In the name of academic research



SHAMSAD  
MORTUZA

FRIDAY'S Prothom Alo ran an article based on the research findings of a Bangladeshi PhD student at a Canadian University. The report, titled, "Bangladesh's 'rickshaw faculty': a nadir of academic exploitation" appeared in Times Higher Education (THE) in October. The 'knowledge of the researcher' Matt Hussain, we are told, is 'personal' as he 'went to school in Dhaka with the scions' of some of the businessmen who own private universities and banks and have created family dynasties that are instrumental behind the mushrooming growth of a system in which young teachers are exploited and 'zombie' like graduates are produced.

'Husain spent six weeks conducting an ethnographic

these 'rickshaw faculty' is to get on a plane and become a freshly off boat graduate students as part of their next career move. By Husain's estimate, a young lecturer makes GBP 150 a semester (roughly 13/14 weeks) per course. Even after teaching at four universities, a 'rickshaw faculty' does not have enough money to 'move out' and is forced to stay with his family. Meanwhile, while drifting from one place to another, these lecturers do not make any emotional connection with their students and are 'almost dehumanised.' And they fail on to pass on the excitement of knowledge or they are so indifferent that they allow their students to plagiarise and help the universities produce zombie graduates.

Husain says; 'They are exploited but they feel they can't do anything about it.'

Husain, we are told, worked at the World Bank for six years before becoming a doctoral student, and his web profile declares his lip synching of WB mantra of quality

THE, and in derogatory terms too?

In a country where not everyone has the privileges of riding BMWs that the researcher's cohorts are known for, riding rickshaws cannot be held against a class. I don't think I would ever call my professors in London 'Tube Faculty' or in the US 'bike profs'.

The other problem with the research involves a misrepresentation of facts. The researcher has managed enough citation to scaffold the conceptual frame against neo-liberalism, yet he fails to cite the number of faculty who are employed in the six universities and how many of them are rickshaw faculty. Just like the conclusion of the paper itself, the paper is a strange mix of the World Bank agenda of reducing opportunities for higher education by increasing student contributions and creating a habitus for cultural capital in Bourdieu's term. There is no mention of the actual figures of full-time part-time faculty ratio; teacher-student ratio; or percentage of courses taught by this so-called rickshaw faculty. He interviewed only four young teachers in six private universities to make a tall claim. There is no mention of the criteria for choosing adjunct faculties at a university, only certain focus groups are highlighted to slight the higher education system in Bangladesh.

In the actual research paper published by Sage, Matt's cultural bias is even more blatant. He criticises the food habit of the students of the private universities as 'they prefer to have a sandwich and Coca-Cola over bhat-sabji for lunch and while having lunch or snack, they prefer to check their Facebook updates on their expensive gadgets.' The ethnographic observation also concludes that the private university students who 'drink Coca-Cola and eat sandwiches are participating in Western practices because it serves to mark their elite and privileged status.' He criticises local banks for giving student loans as if it is unheard of in the West. The researcher is evidently perturbed by the wannabe westerners who want to join the bandwagon of higher education.

Matt's portrayal of Bangladesh is so condescending that it probably does not merit any serious response. But what worries me is how an academic paper has permeated into the mainstream and then trickled down to the social media. Why would THE promote a so-called academic piece based on ethnographic observation of a native informant? The answer my friend is blowing in the different admission camps that Western universities occasionally run here, and the different online courses that they are promoting via social media. Let us ask ourselves, who benefits from raising doubts over our system that is feeding the 'insatiable hunger' for higher education? (Hint: a parallel analogue is available in our health sector). Dear Matt, it is not only the local predatory business conglomerates who are after our students; their international cousins are even more lethal in alluring and abusing our students. As for the rickshaw riders, who are yet to earn further education before finding a tenure track, please do some research on the doctorate and graduate students who are abused in the western education system; they are the foot soldiers of a system that is fast looking for international revenue bases.

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PHOTO: FLICKR

study of faculty and students in his native Dhaka, in Bangladesh, and what he found makes even the worst cases of academic exploitation in the West look tame in comparison,' the THE report observed.

I guess by the academic exploitation in the West, Husain is referring to the graduate teaching assistantships and research assistantships that are subject to paltry pay. Given his web profile the researcher himself is one such exponent.

Husain mentions that 'some nine in 10 faculty are on short-term contracts and are typically young, recent MBA or bachelor's degree graduates looking to make some money before attempting to pursue a PhD in the West.'

Interestingly, if Matt is right, the final objective of

education. The photograph that comes with the story features a tricycle van that is not to be seen in Dhaka. The manufactured image, showing a man in suit and tie rushing off for a second year Stat class, can at best be an example of postmodern kitsch. And our researcher is riding on an ethnic ticket to offer a spectacle. In so doing, he makes the gross mistake of standing between the ethnographer and the reader.

If Matt's intention was to expose the impoverished state of our education system with an aim of improving its quality, I wouldn't have any objection. He violates the ethical standard demanded by any ethnographic study that his research claims to be. Did the participants of the ethnographic research know that they were going to be featured in a mainstream weekly magazine like