

A moving martyrdom on a trail track

Welcome Mr. President

We are with you

WE warmly welcome Palestinian President Mamoud Abbas who is on a three-day official visit to Bangladesh. As a nation that earned its liberation through a bloody war, we stand by the people of Palestine and voice solidarity with them in their demand for full statehood. The cause of Palestine is a moral issue and we believe that no conversation on "sustainable peace" can be meaningful without addressing the ongoing humiliation and repression of the Palestinian people.

Emboldened by the election of Donald Trump as US president there has been a dramatic escalation in Israeli aggression and the establishment of an increasing number of new Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, displacing thousands of more Palestinians which is in violation of world opinion and the "UN resolution condemning Israel for violating international law." Trump's campaign declaration to shift the capital of Israel to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv is an ominous sign that doesn't augur well for peace in the region.

The perpetual denial of the rights of the Palestinians, many believe, is one of the main factors in fuelling radicalisation in the West and elsewhere. There is no alternative to solving the Palestinian issue than implementing the two-state solution. Israel and its defenders must realise that an offensive every two or three years or an expansion in settlement, is untenable for an indefinite period of time. We extend our full support to the people of Palestine in their quest for their homeland.

Human bridge!

Disgusting indeed

THERE is only one way to have described the picture that appeared in page two of this paper on yesterday and in almost all newspaper in the country - Disgusting! We fully understand why a guardian may feel outraged enough to sue five people including the Haimchar upazila chairman whose gleeful picture has swamped social and other media outlets as he walked like a king over a human bridge made of school children. Horrified we are at the explanation given by the said chairman who has the audacity to say that this practice has been in place for some time now and that the children enjoy being walked upon! This barbaric act could not take place without the connivance of the school authorities and it is no surprise that the school's managing body president and principal are the other accused in the case.

While we leave the police to investigate the matter, what sort of behaviour is this, we would like to ask? Not the actions of individuals who have a modicum of respect for children. Their behaviour simply goes to show the manner in which some people in authority believe it is their God-given right to do as they please, to demean anyone and everyone in their area of influence.

We hope the investigating authority will get to the bottom of this incident and take necessary measures to hold these arrogant individuals accountable. Such behaviour cannot be condoned under any circumstances and those who organised the despicable spectacle and participated in it should be made to realise that school children are not their slaves who can be literally trampled upon.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Woeful traffic: Some questions

We blame the traffic police for their failure to manage Dhaka's worsening traffic situation, yet we overlook how much civic sense has deteriorated among our drivers and car owners. The people's blatant violation of traffic rules is behavioural dysfunction at its worst.

Our policies and implementation must also share the blame. Why are we allowing so many cars on our streets? Why is there no paid public parking facility in each area? Why are some people still driving on the wrong side of the street? Why do motorbikes defy the traffic sergeant and scoot at the slightest opportunity? Why don't buses have designated places to stop? Why aren't there any lines at the intersections behind which the traffic ought to stop? Why are there so many beggars and why are they flooding the traffic lanes? Why are street vendors occupying the footpaths? Why are pedestrians crossing the streets wherever and whenever they feel like?

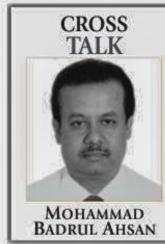
Will someone answer? Those in key positions must step up and take the bull by the horns, because this nightmare is costing the nation horrendously - in time, money, and not to mention health, civility, and related externalities. Left to their own devices, the traffic woes will continue to be traumatic.

Syed Saad Andaleeb
 Vice Chancellor, BRAC University

Help the Kunderpara Gana Unnayan Academy

Miscreants set the Kunderpara Gana Unnayan Academy on fire last week, leaving the students with no option but to study in the open field now. The government should construct a building for the academy besides bringing the culprits to justice immediately.

Md. Ashraf Hossain
 By email



CROSS TALK
 MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

AN assistant technician of Bangladesh Railway did last Friday what nobody does these days. Not since those fateful days of 1971 and some of the political movements in this country when our martyrs laid down their lives for their countrymen. Dying for others has long been a dying art until this one man reminded us that giving one's life for another individual still holds its charm. His has been a unitary act of martyrdom, when one life was sacrificed to save another.

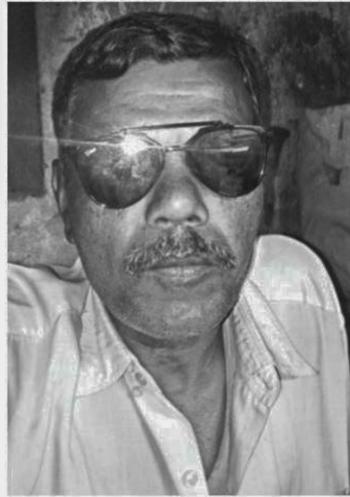
Believe it or not, Badal Mia died to save a little girl who was going to come under a speeding train. He pushed her out of the track before the locomotive ran him over. It sounds more absurd when you learn that the girl wasn't his own blood or related to him in any manner. He basically gave up his precious life for the sake of a complete stranger! The girl and her mother reportedly left the scene right after the accident. They may have done it out of confusion or fright or both.

Those of us, who believe in life after death, also believes that he is going to be rewarded in the next life. But no appreciation or reward seems to be in the making for him on this side of the grave. In a country littered with award recipients and reward winners, Badal may have died in vain. There hasn't been a single initiative taken, not even by his employer Bangladesh Railway, to recognise his uncommon valour and self-abnegation.

Late US president Ronald Reagan said that heroes may not be braver than anyone else, but they are just braver five minutes longer. And those five minutes make a helluva difference between life and death. In those five minutes, they may take bullet hits, get stabbed by knives, fall from heights, fiercely fight with ferocious animals, or stand

in front of a running train. A small-time railway staffer has done something larger than life. He showed the courage to resist the temptation of life just a little longer than others.

In many countries of the world, Badal Mia would have been given a hero's treatment. Stories would have been written about him, and streets would have been named after him. There would have been monuments dedicated to his memory. His story might have gone in textbooks as a shining example of selflessness. None of that



A braveheart called Badal Mia

is going to happen in this unfortunate land where heroism, like many other things, is just another entitlement of the privileged class. Those who can afford to desires, regularly clobber those who qualify to deserve.

Not to speak of the government, none of the private organisations or social bodies have come forward either. Yes, some newspapers including this one have repeatedly tried to hold up the story. But a nation living on the mother's milk of

acquisitive impulses has grown unaccustomed to giving up for others.

It's said that an extraordinary salesman can sell refrigerators to Eskimos. Badal certainly didn't have a business plan for his daredevil act. He surely didn't have much time to do a cost-benefit analysis before he fell into the jaws of an awful death. Better dead than alive, he has escaped the embarrassment that his slice of martyrdom has long gone out of style. He has tried to sell self-sacrifice in a selfish land.

That rude awakening is too late for him. We don't know how much time one gets to think in the process of being cut up by a train. Maybe he died before assimilating his action in his own mind. Maybe he died without realising if the girl was safe. He couldn't have ascertained in his precarious mind if what he had done was stout-hearted or stupid.

Mark Twain believed that if everybody was satisfied with himself, there would be no heroes. Badal had a marginal job, and must have had his share of complaints in life. In spite of being condemned to a life of drudgery, he was clearheaded enough to have human considerations. He is a double-deal hero, who at once lived and died as one.

Whatever we decide to do, it doesn't matter to Badal anymore. But he matters to us as the living example of a dead man whose heroic act can inspire generations from the other side of his grave. If we don't give him his due, it'll be like that proverbial spit in the air that's going to land in our face. Our failure to honour him doesn't diminish his sacrifice. It undermines our capacity to accommodate heroes in our ever-shrinking minds.

Badal Mia recreated martyrdom after many years. It was a chastening glimpse of heroism within the narrow space of a rail track. We shouldn't miss this rare opportunity to reconnect with our heroes.

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When you have to start with a 'no'



CHINITO SINCE 1995
 NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

was dominated by one topic. As every columnist worth his lines and reporter true to his beat as well as radio and TV commentators from all shades and light chose to highlight or heckle him, and the social network too was rising in full throttle to the occasion, I was compelled to mental hibernation in wonderment, perplexity, shock and sorrow.

No 'apprentice' in such public gaze defied practically the entire media and

NO apology when one is due would reflect my insensitivity. The excuse for my unusually long voluntary hiatus is that the media the world over, over the past couple of months or more,

No president of the United States or in fact any other elected head of state anywhere has had to take office under such a grim blanket of uncertainty regarding allies (NATO) and neighbours (Mexico), promises (a Muslim ban) and rhetoric (IS cleansing). Under normal circumstances, we accuse elected leaders of not keeping their election pledges, and here they are on the street across states protesting against a man going by his word.

No experience of public office is required for one of the most important offices that can impact every nook and corner of the world, as well as the outer space. Bizarrely though, senate clearance on qualification, experience and morality is necessary for all senior appointees to the federal government, who are proposed by the political greenhorn. After such rigorous tooth-picking and

Despite barricades, there have been numerous affairs, acrimonious as well as harmonious, some resulting in lasting wedlock. No wall can keep away a determined people who have centuries of experience of scaling one to reach their destination for love and labour.

there have been numerous affairs, acrimonious as well as harmonious, some resulting in lasting wedlock. No

based on faith (albeit on seven Muslim-dominant countries) was one pledge badly misjudged. A vast majority of the American people from both sides of the political divide have been protesting vigorously online and in person for singling out Muslims. Much of the world community has reacted negatively to such religious discrimination.

No US president has had the discomfiture of nearly two million UK citizens backing the petition 'Prevent Donald Trump from making State Visit to the United Kingdom' on the UK Parliament website. This protest has the connotation of leading to a severe breakdown in relationships, considering that the countries are the two most avowed allies. And, yes, over a million have also signed in favour of the visit to go ahead. People of the world within their political boundaries are becoming increasingly divided on issues which are not necessarily about good and bad, or wrong and right, rather between them and us.

No president in the history of democracy with such a huge margin of electorate college votes has ever had to confront protests of the magnitude seen nationally and globally so early in office. We must reflect on the fact that in a free and fair election, one gets elected because he is the most popular, and things don't have to change in the first week or fortnight.

No chief executive of a western democratic state has had to fire a senior office-bearer within the first ten days of his oath. Not the president's fault really. The Acting Attorney General, a holdover from the Obama Administration, was sacked for ordering government attorneys not to defend the president's executive order of banning refugees and immigrants from the seven listed Muslim countries. She made her point bravely, breaking the rules one may argue too, but that sort of rebellious demeanour was evidently not taken well by the administration.

No one perhaps ever imagined, least of all me, that one day I would succumb to admit that "politics is best left to the politicians". It still feels weird to eat one's hat. "Imagine no possessions. I wonder if you can. No need for greed or hunger, a brotherhood of man. Imagine all the people sharing all the world... You... You may say I'm a dreamer. But I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will live as one". From John Lennon's 1971 ballad, we have come a long way, and yes, some have lost their way.

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A woman holds a poster during a rally against then US president-elect Donald Trump in November 2016.

a multitude of now-proven erroneous opinion polls to wade across a sea of strewn tomatoes, riding on a wave of populist undercurrent to get himself (and some say his family) the job he most coveted. That is because the businessman in the tycoon knew where his votes lay in waiting, and which chord to pull to strum the perfect melody for a listening mass that remained unheard in an apparently rosy system.

despite the prolific faculty of the chosen officers, his word is the final say. It does appear strange, but then who said democracy was without its frivolous follies? For the sake of planet earth, I hope they each advise him in the background.

No wall has ever been built by one and paid for by another. Even in Kochukhet, in Dhaka, two neighbours equally share the cost of a common boundary wall. Despite such barricades,

wall can keep away a determined people who have centuries of experience of scaling one to reach their destination for love and labour. By the way, I am a big fan of the Mexican football team.

No ban or persecution based on religion is acceptable in today's world. Whilst there are various ongoing efforts to integrate different religious groups through dialogue, interfaith seminars and peace programmes, the travel ban