

The battle against terrorism

Vigilance is key

WE congratulate law enforcing agencies and counterterrorism units on another good effort, busting two militant dens in Chittagong with maximum proficiency and minimum casualties. At the same time, however, we hope that these agencies and others continue to remain vigilant throughout the year as complacency has no place in the battle against militancy and terrorism, which are completely abhorrent to any civilised society and to our aspirations and culture.

Following the successes of our counterterrorism units and law enforcing agencies, it seems that militants are now trying to change their strategies and are establishing bases in more remote areas. While our security forces must take this into consideration to successfully counter the physical threats of militancy, the authorities and society in general must also do their part to confute its other threats.

Already it has been made clear that militancy cannot be neutralised through physical force alone as recruiters are always on the prowl, constantly looking to convert more and more people towards their radicalised beliefs. As such, the overall society must try to provide better alternatives to all its members so that recruiters of terrorism are doomed to fail from the outset.

Moreover, with increased mobility of people across national boundaries and the advent of international terrorism, the government must also look to work with other nations that are equally trying to eradicate such threats to peace. With that in mind, we hope that the authorities realise that the only way to defeat terrorism is to continually fight against this malignancy across all fronts.

Violence against women in 2016

Nearly three-fold increase in two years

A recent Brac study has found that at least 7,489 women and girls became victims of violence in 2016. The study gets more worrying: 20 percent of the victims of violence against women are children, and that each day, on average, 1.7 children were victims of rape last year. The figures are shameful and disturbing, and paint a dismal combined picture of the numerous individual instances of rape, violence and sexual harassment that we see reported almost every day.

It has also been stated that many cases go unreported; therefore the figure of 7489 does not even show the full extent of the problem. That there has been a sharp increase in violence against women is evident; the total number of cases in 2014 was 2,873. It also seems our efforts to curb domestic violence have failed; eighty-two percent of the violence occurred in the domestic sphere according to the study.

Why this disturbing trend despite government and non-government efforts? Clearly there is a lack of implementation of law. We need gender sensitive institutions and quick disposal of these cases. Impunity is another factor which not only hinders justice, but also makes victims and their families fear filing cases. The debate and activism has been there; what is lacking is a concerted sincere effort on the part of administration and the law enforcement agencies. On top of speedy implementation of the laws, policy reforms towards gender sensitivity and education to instill respect towards women from the school level is needed. Implementation and proper knowledge of the law is crucial. We can only ask that the authorities take the Brac study seriously and work towards a country where women need not fear violence in every step of their lives.

LETTERS
TO THE EDITOR

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Lax safety measures in construction sites

It was painful to hear of us the death and injuries caused by the collapse of the flyover on March 13. Similar incidents have been noted before – a textile manager died on the spot due to a falling girder from a foot overbridge near the Science Laboratory in 2000; in the same year, three people died from accidents near the Notun Bazaar; twelve people died due to a collapse flyover girder in Chittagong in 2012. All these deaths are a result of sheer negligence of the construction companies. It appears as if no strict regulations or contracts are in place under the Construction Code to compensate the victims and their families for such incidents.

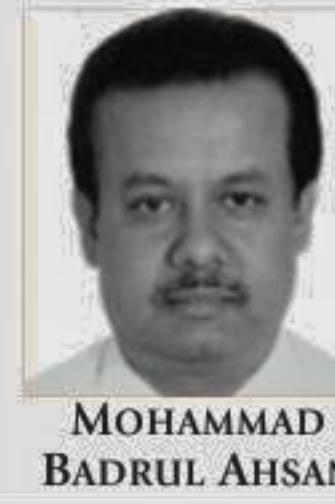
Meanwhile, we have noticed that many roads are built with Bitumen carpeting, which costs large sums of money. But basic technology isn't employed to have provisions for rain water drainage, which tends to wash away the Bitumen, resulting in significant national losses. It's high time for the government to engage an "Inspection Authority Team" which will ensure that contractors follow basic safety measures in construction sites. They must also ensure that clauses in the construction agreements include a binding obligation for contractors to provide monetary compensation for victims, both as medical treatment fees and sustenance for the victims' dependents.

Sirajul Islam

Paribagh

Presidential humour and the irony of education

CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD
BADRUL AHSEN

THE President of the Republic went public with his academic records, while addressing the 50th convocation of Dhaka University on March 4. It was quiet disbelief laced with

subliminal bragging when he blurted out that he was the chancellor of the same university which had once rejected his application for admission. The President also made a clean breast of it when he revealed that he had passed the Matriculation examination in the third division and got referred in Logic in his

time ago that life isn't fair, but the government absolutely must be. In case of our honourable President, the government has more than compensated for the glory that education denied him in his early days.

While the President indulged in humour, some of the graduates who gathered must have been crestfallen. The chief guest of the event in his penchant for irony signified the insignificance of what they had come to celebrate. It was as if the principal of a driving school was downplaying the importance of having a license before an assembly of graduating students.

Not to say that the President meant it in that exact sense. We know he is a light-hearted man who likes to sprinkle his speeches with amusing anecdotes from his own life. In 2015, he even sang a

song that life isn't fair, but the government absolutely must be. In case of our honourable President, the government has more than compensated for the glory that education denied him in his early days.

doesn't make any sense. French playwright and actor Molière said that life is a tragedy to those who feel and a comedy to those who think. May be, deep down inside, our president is a thinking man, who is titillated by the quirkiness of life as much as a tickle makes us giggle.

Eleven US presidents never went to college, including such stalwarts as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. British Prime Minister John Major joined Standard Chartered Bank after he finished high school, and his annual evaluation said "improvement needed." After completing his studies at Harrow, Winston Churchill failed the entrance test for the Royal Military College at Sandhurst three times before finally passing and being



Students at a private university.

PHOTO: STAR

Intermediate examination. The audience almost split their sides with laughter as the head of the state narrated how his academic luck was in a tailspin.

It's an altogether different story today. This man has risen to an enviable position in life, occupying the highest office in the country. God works in mysterious ways, often giving much to those who desire and often taking much from those who deserve. Late US president John F Kennedy said a long

snatch of a popular song during his speech at the convocation of a private university. He was well-liked for his sense of humour that animated many Parliament sessions when he was the Speaker.

By all means, the president of a country is entitled to a few jokes, but everything in life has its place and its reason. The connection between one's poor grades and a milestone academic occasion for others

allowed to attend the school.

Our very own Rabindranath Tagore never went to school. Rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam studied up to the tenth grade. American Poet Laureate Robert Frost, the richest man of the world Bill Gates, Apple founder Steve Jobs and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg dropped out of college.

The connection between education and success in life has never been guaranteed. Many highly educated

people flopped in real life, while the unschooled ones flourished. If we count the number of schools, colleges, universities, hospitals and mosques in this country, a large number, if not most of them, have been established by moneyed men and women with little or no schooling.

Education was once themed by highly exhortatory nature of recruitment posters. It was assured that those who sought education were going to "ride" cars, which has now proved to be a hoax. A neighbourhood goon can buy a car faster than a university professor, because purchasing power is a function of cash flow not of knowledge. The pen may be mightier than the sword, and the ink of the scholar may be holier than the blood of a martyr. But those who have power or guns are laughing all the way to the bank.

The President's zingers only reinforced that disconnect. Education has been reduced to a mere formality, something everyone likes to wear like a badge. It has the futility of divers excited to get down knee-deep in the muddy stream instead of exploring deep waters. The road to enlightenment has turned into a thoroughfare to despair.

An academic degree is no longer a measure of qualification awarded. A piece of paper, it hides ignorance more than it shows knowledge. This instrument of illusion marks every educated individual as a certified suspect.

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The Lateral Samaritans

HUMOROUSLY
YOURS

NAVEED MAHBUB

BING a compassionate husband, I give my wife company during all her cravings throughout her pregnancy. As a result, both of us are competing when it comes to the size of our bellies. We almost get a buy-one-get-one-free ultra sonogram deal.

This time around, we are a little short of luck. The baby is headstrong, literally, as he refuses to give up his breach position. They say that the third time is a 'charm', at least for the delivery crew. After two normal deliveries and my endless boasting of my superwoman wife's tolerance towards pain, I guess I have jinxed her. This time she's up for a C-section.

We arrive at the emergency entrance of the hospital. As it happened five years ago with a screaming wife in excruciating labour pain, we are once again accosted by the security guard in no hurry: "Where will you be going to?"

I answer: "We have come here to have hot daal puri and masala tea."

Here's a baffled security guard while the wife is seething – both at the bovine question and the asinine answer.

I can't resist, having had gone through a short anger management session recently where I'm told that we can't control how one acts, but can surely control how one reacts. And I am at peace, accepting the fact that we are simply incapable of lateral thinking.

As such, I smile, knowing that a distant colleague of this security guard on duty at a particular House 12 answers "I don't know" when you ask him if he knows where House 13 is. It is another buddy of his in the same profession who patiently waits and watches you park your car, get out, lock the door and start walking before he approaches you saying "Sorry! You can't park here." And it is another cohort who gives you suspicious looks as you arrive and the same guard who smilingly rushes to open the door for you as you leave and then give you a smart salute in the hope for some *bakshish*. Oh he leaves your accompanying female companion to open her own door because the tips come from 'sir'.

Anyway, the wife is in the delivery room. I am relegated to merely holding

her hand and not seeing anything as this is a C-section case. The baby is born and eventually taken to the nursery to be with a whole bunch of his friends, just hours older.

The family pours in to see the baby through the glass window of the nursery. "Looks like the father!" They exclaim as they look guiltily at the mother with a silent "Hope you don't mind us saying so." That's fine, as long as the baby doesn't look like the mother, don't worry. The newborn changes his looks by the minute, beating even a chameleon.

These are not just Good Samaritans, they are Good Samaritans fully capable of lateral thinking.

It breaks my heart when this newborn girl is left in a plastic bag in Ashulia. But it also fills my heart with hope when a non-descript passer-by takes her to the hospital where the doctors get her back on track while twenty families and numerous couples come forward to take her in.

best creation. And it breaks my heart when this newborn girl is left in a plastic bag in Ashulia. But it also fills my heart with hope when a non-descript passer-by takes her to the hospital where the doctors get her back on track while twenty families and numerous couples come forward to take her in. And it is also heartening when this carpenter and his wife are out in the dead of night and on a desolate street with their six month old baby girl in seizures, where a cop stops, picks them up, takes them to the hospital where he stays put till the baby is out of danger.

These are not just Good Samaritans, they are Good Samaritans fully capable of lateral thinking.



Here is a skill (of being able to think laterally), life-saving in these two particular cases, that is neither taught nor tested in our education system. We hope for the 'common' question or the chance to regurgitate the note book. We forget that real life comes with no manuals...

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