

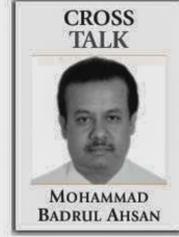
Great ideals are ghost lights at night

No paediatric ICU at govt hospitals! It is unacceptable

It is shocking that only one public hospital in our country is equipped with an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) for children. All the rest, including the largest government hospital in our country — Dhaka Medical College Hospital — lack this most crucial service. People are thus forced to either go to private hospitals and pay astronomically high amounts to get such services for their children or — for those who cannot afford such high fees — simply hope that their child can survive without them. It goes without saying that the fees charged by private hospitals, especially for ICU facilities, is beyond the means of most people. What this also implies is that most children in our country must do without such services, even when their life is on the line. The situation is actually much grimmer when one considers the fact that for patients needing the ICU facilities, even a few minutes can be fatal. And, of course, it already has — for how many children we do not know. Only recently, however, a one-and-a-half-year-old boy who had suffered severe head injuries in a road accident on February 12, died because of the delay in giving him the necessary treatment in an ICU at the hospital that he was initially taken to, did not have one for children. Although it is essential to have ICUs for children at every government hospital, experts say that requests to the authorities for setting them up have continually fallen on deaf ears. This attitude on part of the authorities is totally unacceptable. The authorities should take this up seriously and setup ICUs for children at every government hospital.

Total disregard for pedestrians Enforcement of safety code needed

PLACEMENT of all sorts of construction materials on a side of Road 17 (Block D) in the capital's Banani Model Town is merely another example of blatant encroachment of public spaces in the city. We have been covering this issue over the years about how roads and pavements have been taken over illicitly by both small businesses and construction companies, but to no avail. It is quite pathetic to see this city of more than 16 million, which already suffers from adequate footpaths to begin with, is now having to contend with encroachment such as this for weeks and months on end. Where are the authorities in all this? Last time we checked, there exists such a thing called the Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC), formulated as early as in 1993, which was ultimately passed into law in November 2006. The code is supposed to be mandatory for all concerned to be followed and enforced by authorities. Yet, as we see by the picture published in this paper on March 22, the incident on Road 17 is just one example of total disregard for pedestrian safety and obstruction of traffic. While the code lays down safety precautions both for construction and demolition of buildings, there must be, and we quote, "protective scaffolding is a must at any building construction site for safety of the pedestrians, passers-by and neighbouring houses." What about safety of pedestrians who may come into contact with the sharp end of rods and other building materials that are left haphazardly on the road in the evenings? And who takes the blame should an unaware passerby fall into the dug up earth at the place of construction, particularly in hours of darkness when the area is not properly lit? We hope that the Public Works ministry will take heed of the law, and enforce it in public interest.



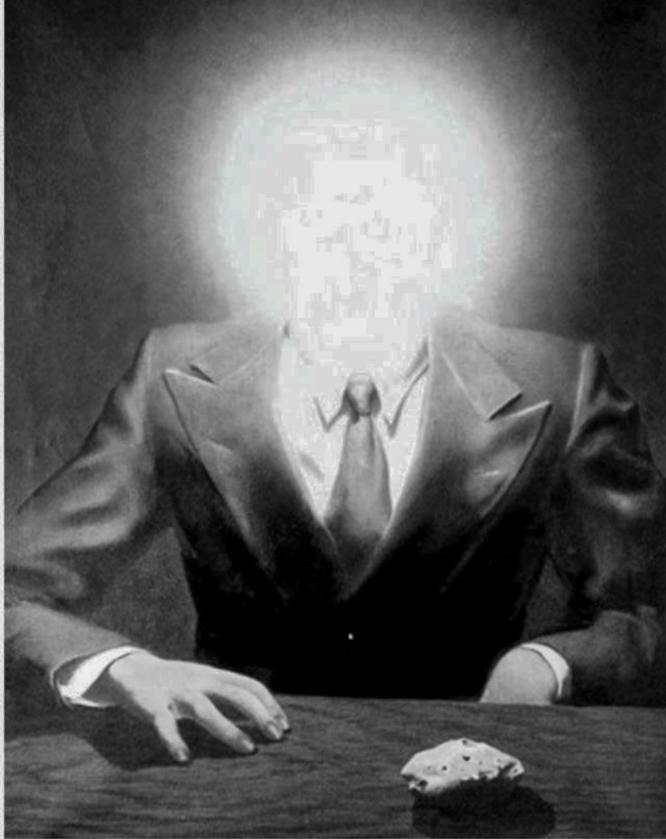
CROSS TALK
 MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

AN increase in elevation lowers air pressure, which makes breathing difficult for a climber. The underwater world becomes increasingly blue and eventually black as a diver goes deeper. Great ideals in their height or depth similarly vary, conception changing when it approaches perfection, and perfection changing when it approaches conception. In the end, neither is like how either appears to be. The ideals are archetypes associated with the human condition. Beauty is the ideal of sensory state; duty is the ideal of action. Likewise, freedom is the ideal of movement, and happiness is the ideal of emotional state. Justice is the ideal of interaction, and virtue is the ideal of personality. But the ideal exists in the real world in the same manner a dew drop wobbles on the tip of a leaf. The difference between God and His creatures perhaps draws the closest parallel to the difference between the highest forms of values and their actual manifestations. Humans have set lofty but unattainable moral goals for themselves. Not an overreach to say that the measures of existing human values are made of non-existing scales. In that sense, we all worship virtues that are invisible like deities, and forever live in the twilight zone between the actual and the imaginary. And, that dichotomy is prevalent in the disappointing duplicity that we don't practice what we preach. Hypocrisy is lodged in human nature as naturally as oxygen in the air we breathe. This is the reason why every human civilisation collapsed at its peak. According to German philosopher Oswald Spengler, "civilisations" are decadent phases of highly developed cultures. He characterised the social and intellectual patterns of a great people or empire in its prime as a "culture". When that culture passed its

prime and became ossified or fixed, he called it a "civilisation". Decadence setting in the culmination of a culture is proof that ideals ultimately don't stand it in good stead. And every civilisation has this truth buried in its ruins. Even worse, most civilisations were destroyed by the barbarians, which started with the earliest known civilisation of Sumer, in Mesopotamia. It collapsed under the strain of recurring invasions in the second millennium B.C. Which amounts to the nightmare of a manicured lawn trampled by depraved beasts. The finest human emotions and beliefs stand helplessly before dishonesty, incompetence,

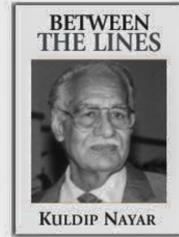
hatred and violence. Rape during wars, persecution of citizens under dictatorships, ruthless killing in civil wars, and all of those happening ensemble during an invasion more than exemplify that the human condition is a contradiction in terms. All humans are made of two instincts: animal and rational. Their condition in itself is a struggle between these two instincts that goes back and forth with more of one or the other. Thus the human condition is a struggle inside a struggle, as the physical constantly seeks alignment with the spiritual. It works like a weight-driven clock where the canon pinion drives a minute wheel and pinion. The

latter drives an hour wheel, which carries the hour hand. God may have made man in His own image, but the wheels and pinions that drive man are certainly not of the same industrial grade. Man's life is short, his means are scarce and his capacity to ingest eternity is immensely limited. Ideals are clumsy adventures of man to fit his mortal feet into God's shoes. It's not surprising, therefore, that human beings are uncomfortable and sloppy in their walk through life. The cycles of crime and punishment, truth and falsehood, virtue and vice, hope and despondency, sympathy and vengeance, guile and gumption, compassion and aggression, so on and so forth keep repeating as the ideal falters through the realspewing imperfections. This dynamics is comparable to energy passing through water and creating waves. Since the dawn of mankind, the quest for perfection has changed the style not the substance. The hunters and gatherers are still the hunters and gatherers, their tools and clothing transformed by the paroxysm of inventions and discoveries. But their primitive instincts have been honed even further either by rationalising animality or animalising rationality. Today's humans are devoid of humanity. They cling to their virtues to hide their vices like pre-historic men used fig leaves to cover modesty. Idealism is thus a double jeopardy, at once misleading humans in their confused journey. This undertaking is difficult because wrong assumptions are incessantly driving wrong conclusions. What happens between womb and tomb is an ever-repeating experiment in which the finite is inexorably tested against the infinite. In that process, an idealistic individual is merely a parody of his destiny. Great ideals are the ghost lights in the dark nights, and some travellers take them seriously. Those who sacrifice their lives for great causes remain unaware that dying for a cause is just another cause of death. The writer is Editor of the weekly *First News* and an opinion writer for *The Daily Star*. Email: badrul151@yahoo.com



SOURCE: NATURE

Back to square one



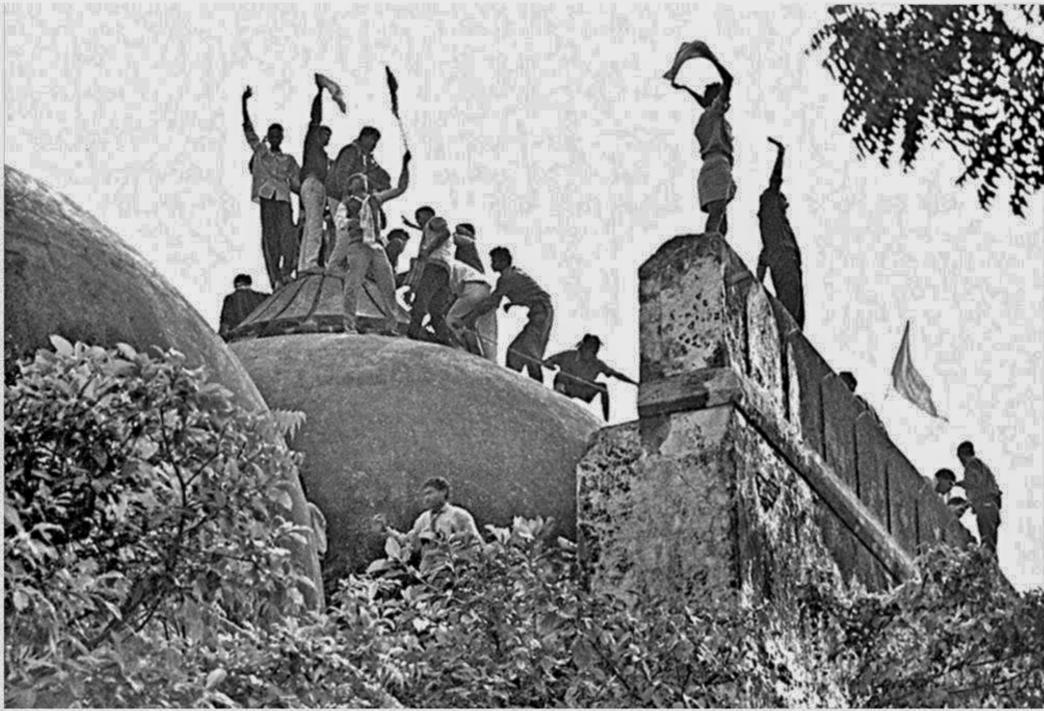
BETWEEN THE LINES
 KULDIP NAYYAR

WE are back to square one. The Supreme Court has offered advice to the two parties, those who want the Babri Masjid to be reconstructed and those who claim that the site is that of Lord Rama's. In its judgment, the court has advised the different parties to sit together and sort out the problems through negotiations. One surprising part of the advice is that the Chief Justice of India is willing to mediate for an out-of-court settlement. He has said "give a bit and take a bit. Make an effort to sort it out." He points out that these are issues of sentiments and he can even step aside and let his co-judges decide. How can the chief justice or, for that matter, the other judges mediate because their very office is supposed to be above controversies? Yogi Adityanath, a right-wing Hindu icon, has been elected as the leader of the Uttar Pradesh legislative party with a huge margin and installed as the state's chief minister. Whether the credit for securing this majority in UP goes to Prime Minister Narendra Modi or to Yogi, who has the reputation of being a hardcore Hindu leader, it shows that the philosophy of Hindutva is sweeping the country. Obviously, the RSS is behind the move. In the past, the RSS always stayed distant from such national discourses, although it was the final arbiter. But now it is so confident of the Hindu majority, particularly after the BJP swept the elections in UP, that it doesn't mind coming out in the open. It is already preparing for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Its chief Mohan Bhagwat minces no words when he tells the swayam sewaks (party workers) to be prepared to meet the increasing attacks on the RSS and get ready for the next Lok Sabha polls. In the face of what has happened in recent assembly elections, the RSS fears that the opposition parties might join hands together to fight it out. In such a scenario, the BJP-led NDA may lose ground. The RSS, or for that matter, the BJP, knows that despite getting 42 percent of the vote share in UP, the combined efforts of the other parties fetched 55 percent of the vote share. It means that the non-BJP parties would have to come together. This doesn't seem possible at present.

The bigger danger may force them to sink their differences and fight the saffron brigade. As Nani Palkhiwala, the late eminent jurist said, when the house is on fire, you don't not think whether to save the drawing room or the dining room. You want to save the entire house. He was referring to the looming threat of the erstwhile Jan Sangh getting a majority in Parliament. It is another matter that the Janata Party, comprising mostly of Jan Sanghs, came to power at the centre in 1977. But the sticking point was to sever relations with the RSS. However, the Jan Sangh elements which are now a part of the ruling BJP,

in the preamble of the Constitution, seems to have gone awry. The Hindutva elements, slowly and gradually, swept the country. Today, you can see that soft-Hindutva has spread even in Kerala where the BJP, for the first time, has made inroads. As it is, the party has captured the imagination of the people and was brought to power in over a dozen states. This also means that a secular party like the Congress has been losing its grip in the states which it ruled once. Even the regional parties are losing their relevance as could be seen in the UP elections. Obviously, the BJP has been able to

words, he will have to follow the RSS and the BJP agenda of the Ram temple at Ayodhya, sooner or later. If the all-powerful Yogi has been installed as chief minister by the BJP high command, it must be with a clear intention. Whatever may be the outcome, the court cannot decide on what is apparently a matter of faith. That is perhaps why the Chief Justice has offered to mediate for an out-of-court settlement. But then there have been several attempts to address this issue since 1986, involving five governments of different colours. It was mainly because both parties seem to be adamant since they don't want to



SOURCE: AFP

refused to snap ties with the RSS. Subsequently, L.K. Advani walked out and founded a separate party, the BJP. Liberal elements in the party like Atal Behari Vajpayee, too, left the Janata Party. It turned out to be a blessing in disguise that his sobering influence did not allow the hardcore elements to take over when the party came to power. It, however, shows that secularism has not taken roots in the country. It is unfortunate that the independent struggle, aimed at a secular democratic country that included this noble thought

influence the minds of most people. The assembly elections in the states of Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh will really show whether the Lok Sabha would be captured by the BJP or not. However, the future is ominous. The revival of the Ram Mandir issue could shape the future of the country and would polarise the nation further. Yogi Adityanath has repeated Modi's words of 'Sabka saath, sabka vikas.' But the content of the party cannot change overnight. Though the UP chief minister may not be saying it in as many

make any compromises. Under the circumstances, another attempt by the CJI may not help. Except for the BJP, none of the other parties is enthused over the offer by the Supreme Court bench. It looks as if the apex court also is not clear in its mind how to settle the dispute. This long-ranging issue needs a quick solution for the comforts of all parties concerned. But, unfortunately, it doesn't seem to be coming, at least in the near future. The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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WASA water distribution requires intervention

WASA water distribution has been facing heavy mismanagement for the past few years, caused by a few corrupt staff members as well as the interference of political leaders. Through their influence, water distribution gets skewed towards areas of their choice. Innocent people are therefore deprived of water supply. These problems were solved to some extent through army intervention during a dry spell five to six years ago. It is my suggestion that similar interventions be deployed once again to ease public sufferings. S.M. Khaleque Zaman, Mirpur

Creation of Senior Teacher posts – a laudable proposal

A national English daily recently reported the government's decision to facilitate promotion of government school teachers by creating more Senior Teacher posts in government secondary schools. At present there are three tiers of teaching posts - Assistant Teacher, Assistant Head Master and Head Master. The creation of the Senior Teacher post will allow recruitment of new teachers in over two thousand vacant posts in government secondary schools. It will also allow the promotion of Assistant Head Master and Head Master post vacancies. We thank the government and the concerned officials for making such a progressive proposal. I would further like to suggest that the concerned authorities to re-name the post of Assistant Teacher to Teacher, which will enable the four tiers of teaching posts more clearly as follows - Teacher, Senior Teacher, Assistant Head Master and Head Master. Md Ashraf Hossain, Central Bashabo