

# Terrorism was never in the DNA

## The Daily Star

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DHAKA FRIDAY MARCH 31, 2017, CHAITRA 17, 1423 BS

### Big Brother is watching

*Shun the idea of mass surveillance*

**T**K. 150 crore will be spent by the government to install internet monitoring equipment that it says will help combat militancy, clamp down on cyber threats and crimes. Experts fear, however, that the sweeping surveillance mechanism — handing enormous power to the government — will intrude on people's privacy, freedom of speech and other rights; as has been the case in almost every other nation across the world where similar such surveillance systems have been implemented, with or without the consent of their respective citizens.

It is true that cyberspace is playing an increasingly important role in terms of national security and has been used by all sorts of radicals to spread their destructive ideologies in the recent past. The cyber threats and crimes too, are very real. But as has been proven by now, increased surveillance — especially if it is sweeping — does not necessarily lead to better results in combating terrorism, cyber threats and crimes.

What it does, however, is change the power relation between the government and citizens greatly in favour of the former. Simultaneously, it increases chances of corruption and blackmail, encourages self-censorship and government imposed censorship of "unsuitable" material, which begs the question, what reason is there for the government to play the role of moral policing?

To successfully battle terrorism using technology, surveillance needs to be targeted, as opined by security experts worldwide. If it becomes sweeping, however, not only will it violate the constitutional rights of citizens, but also the many international conventions that Bangladesh is a signatory to.

### Extra-judicial killings

*Heed UN committee recommendations*

**I**N a report published on its website, the UN Human Rights Committee has expressed concerns about the "high rate of extra-judicial killings by police officers, soldiers and Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) force members and the reported enforced disappearances". Among other issues raised by the committee, including those of child marriage and freedom of speech, it cited that the state needs to revise national legislation to curb the power granted to security forces and contain its abuses.

The recent upsurge in militant activity means that the issue of the balance between counter-terrorism and human rights is now of utmost importance. We do not dispute that counter-terrorism measures, such as the recent drives on military dens, are crucial for the safety of the country and its citizens. But combating terrorism cannot mean in any way disregarding basic human rights. Take the example of Hanif Mridha who died in Rab custody after he was allegedly picked up after the suicide bomb blast in Ashkona. But family members have maintained that Hanif was picked up in February. Discrepancies between the official narrative and those of family members have become a common occurrence, as has disappearances and extra-judicial killings. And this ought to be investigated to get to the truth.

We agree with the UN that legislative and policy reform is needed to ensure that these cases are investigated, and if needed accountability ensured of the security force members. The UN's recommendation to broaden the scope of the National Human Rights Commission is timely, since much of the alleged cases of violations of human rights have gone uninvestigated till now.

The UN report has important points that the state must duly consider. As a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the state must take steps to prevent extra-judicial killings and other abuses of power. After all, it is the reputation of the country that is stake.

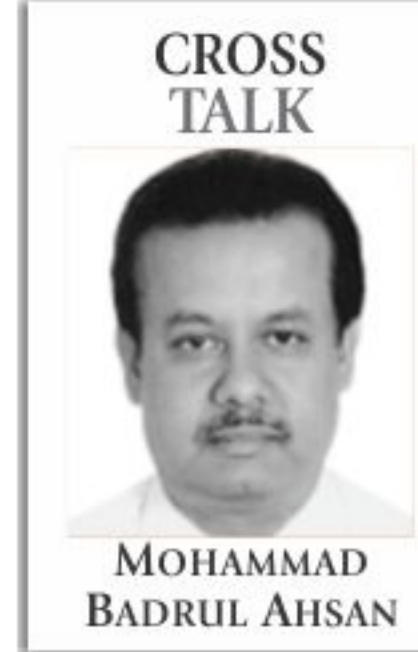
### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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#### Teesta treaty is a must

Of the indecisive issues between Bangladesh and India which have been discussed since the last couple of years, Teesta water sharing is one of them. Because of India's withdrawal of water from Teesta, the northern districts Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat, Rangpur, and Kurigram are facing its huge negative impact. As there is no water in the river, the biggest Teesta irrigation project has become inactive. Especially in the drought season the agriculture production is being disrupted in the region. Though the Teesta treaty was about to be active, because of Mamata Banerjee's objection the treaty didn't see the light of day. The northern districts have been facing this problem for 46 years. We want this problem no more. We want proper establishment of Teesta treaty.

Toufik Ahmed Noyon  
Pirganj, Rangpur



CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

**T**HE skein of yarn spun out of the Palestinian struggle, and then got twisted in the relentless Western maneuvering in the Middle East to defend Israel. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan knotted it further before culminating in the tangle of terrorism that got crazy since the invasion of Iraq. If Muslim militancy is a big deal today, it wasn't born in a day. We're watching a classic example of how indulgence in unscrupulous solutions has aggravated the problem.

Many attempts are being made to strike at the root of terrorism. Countries have been invaded, dictators have been executed, terrorist leaders have been eliminated, targets have

ways to stay ahead in the game. The shape-shifting beast continues to transform from Taliban to Al-Qaida to Islamic State to lone wolf terrorists like Khalid Masood, who attacked the British Parliament on March 22. The common thread running through all of them is deep-rooted outrage against the western powers, particularly the United States.

These western countries have been running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. If they're busying themselves with the immigrants cluttering their shores and borders, it's because civil wars sparked by their meddling are driving helpless people out of their homelands. While the cause remains ignored, the debate focuses on the effect.

Not to say terrorism is justified. Neither is the present form of the ongoing fight against it. The demonising of Muslims and their religion in the process is making scapegoats out of them for the sins

Terrorism is the reaction of certain Muslim minds living on the edge. The teeming majority of them have maintained calm despite the tyrannies inflicted on them.

Terrorism, historically, was never in the Muslim DNA. The only time a trace of extremism is found in Islam was when the Kharijites adopted a radical approach of Takfir in the 7th century. That too was an internequine struggle when some Muslims declared other Muslims unbelievers and worthy of death. There have been conquests, assassinations and intrigues, but Islam never had a history of terrorism. If anything, its spunk was manifested unto the enemies through direct confrontation in riots and wars.

The Islamic empire once spread from Iberia in the west to the Indus River in the east. The Muslim dynasties such as the Umayyads, Abbasids, Fatimids, and Mamluks

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PHOTO: AFP

been targeted, and many restrictions have been imposed on travel. Finger printing, body scanning, luggage swiping and extensive background checking proved subliminally effective. Now the new ban on electronic devices larger than phones on flights has come as the latest solution. This one, like previous ones, is likely to push the problem to the next level.

So far it appears that terrorism can neither be tamed nor terrorised, because the terrorists always find

of others. The insertion of Israel into the Arab territory is the original sin. Then the exploitation of the Mujahideen (which later became Taliban) to fight the Russians in Afghanistan gave birth to the spiteful Al-Qaada itching to settle a score with the United States.

The insidious invasion of Iraq made things worse. The worse worsened in Afghanistan, Libya and Syria, where much have been broken in the name of fixing.

were among the most influential powers in the world. In the Early Modern period, the Ottomans, the Safavids, and the Mughals were able to create new world powers.

But terrorism as a political strategy in the Muslim context didn't exist until the creation of PLO in 1964. The Muslim world had fallen into the grip of western powers, whose collective agenda roiled Arab sentiments. For the control of oil, security of Israel, and other strategic

goals, the West, under US leadership, used the Arab countries as pawns on the chessboard.

While terrorism dominates news, factors that dominate terrorism have been swept into the background. The western powers have killed many times more people in the Muslim countries than terrorists have killed in their countries. That calculus of cruelty rankles sensitive minds, which continues to ignite frustration and fury.

Meanwhile, terrorism has undergone changes to overcome resistance. No longer a Middle Eastern phenomenon, it's now looking for centres of gravity in Asia and Europe after the Middle East and Africa. The one-time cry of freedom of the Palestinian soul has amplified into a primal scream. It's a growing indictment of the western oppression against Muslims.

In its transformation, terrorism is going from wholesale to retail. Now one suicide bomber wreaks as much havoc as a band of warriors did in the past, not a single country being immune to this nightmare. Expanded in network and appeal, impressionable minds are being brainwashed faster than fire consumes dry leaves.

Terrorism in any form can never be defended. However it is in most cases a response to tyranny, and it cannot only be defeated by killing those who are ready to die. Every time a suicide bomber blows himself up, its loud bang scornfully yells that troublesome truth in our face.

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## Inverse to distance



HUMOROUSLY YOURS

NAVEED MAHBUB

**T**HERE will be so much winning that all will get tired of winning and beg, "Stop! We can't take this [the winning] anymore." The heads will spin.

And that is exactly what is happening. The heads ARE spinning with the circus in Washington DC. After waiting seven long years to shoot down Obamacare, the Republicans finally get the chance, only to bail out from voting at the last minute because they were not prepared after having seven years to prepare. Oh Paul Ryan, the new architect of healthcare in America — what will happen to you? Well, President Trump's official tweetdict (edict by way of Twitter) discreetly tells everyone to tune in to watch Justice *With Judge Jeanine* (no, not Judge Judy, though...) on Fox News (@FoxAndFrieds) where the show host Jeanine Pirro tears up House Speaker Paul Ryan to pieces. So, Trump is now tipping us off and letting Fox do the summary executions. And when the conservative Fox News rips up a Republican, one can imagine the mayhem behind closed doors.

Remember the saying, "Beware of what you want, because it is only a question of time that you WILL get it"? It's like you wait seven years for the love of your life, and when she finally says "Yes, I will marry you", you realise you didn't save enough to even buy a pair of shoes.

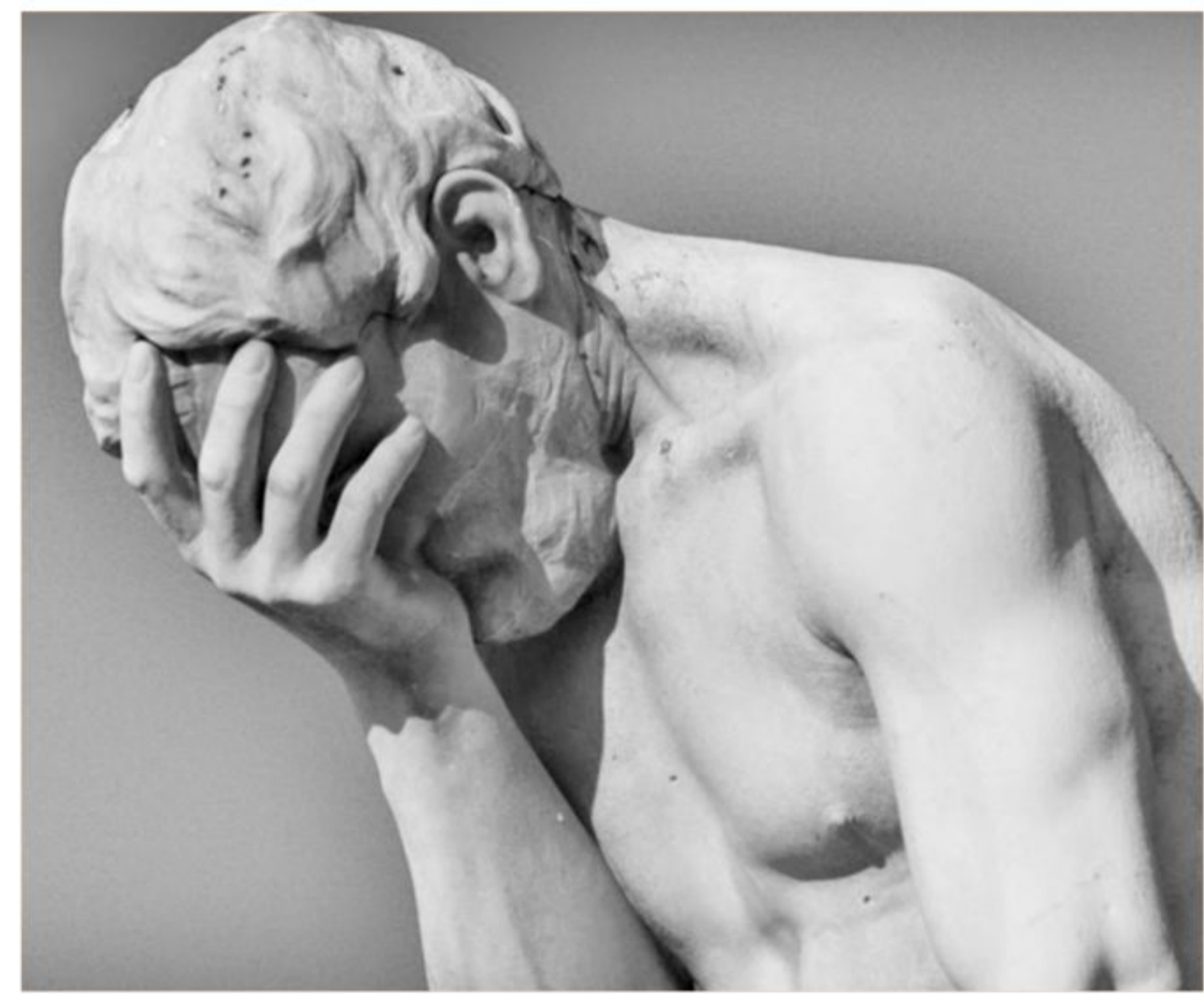
"Oh my goodness! What have we done?" Perhaps some Trump supporters/voters are silently saying this as they (still) sport red coloured *Make America Great Again* caps and flannel check shirts while chewing tobacco and driving pick-up trucks.

Meanwhile, across the pond,

Brexit is getting real. But why fret? It's not that this is the first Brexit. In fact, there were exactly 52 well-celebrated, well-accepted, but poorly carved out Brexits which are celebrated in 52 countries across the globe with 52 brand new national anthems. It's called the Commonwealth. It's just that the latest one happened AFTER so many Europeans, as part of the fraternal European Union, came to the shores of the UK. Fear not, beneath the polished Englishman sipping tea with biscuit, there is the Anglicised version of the hillbilly, quietly ignoring the fact that the reverse withdrawal may need to happen for the Brits scattered all over Europe.

The nationalism weighs into The Netherlands too, as Gert Wilders screams. Just curious, do Donald Trump, Boris Johnson and Geert Wilders share the same views due to their similar hairstyle? That explains Obama's crew cut. . .

*The Union Jack is at half mast. There are solemn gatherings in front of the exact locations where the victims were rammed over and police officer Keith Palmer fell. I couldn't help feel the pain, the sorrow.*



But why do we in Bangladesh care about all these? We don't — apart from the element of amusement that we are not alone. But that's because our emotions are inversely proportional to distance.

But why do I care? Well, I do for five days, because I am in London and the distance to tragedy is small. I'm at the Westminster less than 48 hours after the attack there. Had it not been for the chopper hovering above, I would never have known that it was not another tourist thronged, business as usual day in London.

The Union Jack is at half mast. There are solemn gatherings in front of the exact locations where the victims were rammed over and police officer Keith Palmer fell. I couldn't help feel the pain, the sorrow. Because I am there. I share my feelings, photos and a short video on social media, only to get flak for not doing the same for all that's happening at home, or Syria, or Iraq, or. . .

Again, feelings are inversely proportional to distance. On top of that, TV is sanitised and the horrors of Mosul or Aleppo or Chechnya or Paris or Istanbul or Brussels never quite reach the living room.

Hence, as all hell breaks loose in Sylhet, I am numb in the Sylhet of the West, because I am so far from the real Sylhet despite the magnitude of the tragedy. As I fly home, Azimpur, Sylhet, Sitakunda, the RAB HQ . . . are all starting to get very, very real. What is scarier is that there are dens getting discovered just about every few days.

We celebrate our independence, but I think we have a lot more that we need to be independent of. . .

The writer is an engineer at Ford & Qualcomm USA and CEO of IBM & Nokia Siemens Networks Bangladesh turned comedian (by choice), the host of ATN Bangla's *The Naveed Mahbub Show* and ABC Radio's *Good Morning Bangladesh*, the founder of *Naveed's Comedy Club*.  
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