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FOUNDER EDITOR
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Recognising migrant workers' contribution

They need more govt. support

A national dialogue titled 'Migrant's Budget' has revealed the suffering of many migrant workers who are treated with neglect especially when they come back home. It is extremely disappointing that despite their enormous contribution to the country's economy with their remittances, migrant workers do not get the help they need from the concerned ministry.

There are workers who come back sick due to overwork or torture but they cannot afford the medical treatment they need. Others come back penniless and in deep debt because they could not earn enough and are not able to get jobs. According to the roundtable, the government has not taken adequate measures for their protection or to help them start income generating ventures when they return.

Concerted efforts from the government to help vulnerable migrants while they are abroad and when they return, are more than overdue. As suggested at the roundtable, the budgetary allocation for the Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Ministry should be increased from 0.17 percent to at least 2 percent to provide migrants with the help they need, financial and otherwise.

Apart from ensuring more assistance by the missions abroad especially in terms of protecting migrant workers from torture, fraud and other human rights violations, the government must have a good reintegration programme when they return. Access to health through special health insurance schemes should also be thought of.

It is about time we recognised the contributions of migrant workers by providing them with basic benefits and protection. It is the least we can do for them.

Justice delayed is justice denied

It is a violation of human rights

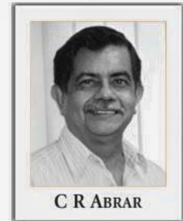
WE welcome the High Court's directive asking the government to explain why four prisoners, who have been imprisoned for more than nine years without trial, should not be granted bail in the cases against them. This delay is denying both the prisoners and their alleged victims the justice they deserve and is yet another example of how delay in justice dispensation has reached a point where it has become a factor of injustice.

Only in February, the High Court had issued a similar directive in regards to eight prisoners detained without trial for more than a decade, which is just one such example out of numerous others. 462 people are currently languishing in jail with minimum progress made in the trial proceedings of the cases against them; 58 of them have, reportedly, been in custody for five to ten years.

Given such high figures, one can only imagine just how many people over the years have had to languish in prison longer than what they should have, for no other reason other than case backlogs. From where are they supposed to receive compensation for this? And an even better question is: can they even ever be compensated for having to serve undeserved jail time?

These are questions that the authorities must address. And most importantly, the authorities should devise a way to solve the problem of case backlogs which has clearly become one of the main obstructions to justice in our country.

Taking down the "Symbol of Justice"



C R ABRAR

FINALLY, the Goddess of Themis had to step down. And she had to do so unceremoniously, under duress. Earlier, the elders of the Supreme Court opined that Themis had to

vacate her position "to avert any untoward situation".

Earlier, on February 24, 2017 supporters of Hefazat-e-Islam marched from the national mosque and submitted a petition to the Supreme Court (SC) to demolish it. They were supported by the Awami League affiliate Bangladesh Awami Olema League. They called the work of art as conspiracy to undermine Islam in Bangladesh. On April 11 at a meeting with the leadership of various factions of the Qwami madrasas at Ganabhaban the Prime Minister observed that she personally did not like the statue on the SC premises either. The premier promised to discuss the matter with the chief justice and urged the Alem-Ulema to have patience. Subsequently she informed her cabinet colleagues that she had asked the chief justice either to remove the statue or reinstall it at another place so that it cannot be seen from the National Eidgah. On April 21, Islami Andolan Bangladesh gave an ultimatum to the government for removal of the statue before Ramadan.

The removal of the statue is a victory for the religious right. Stoking extremist views Hefazat, Awami Ulema League, Islamic Andolon and their cohorts claimed that Dhaka the 'city of mosques' has now been turned into a 'city of idols'. For them the statue of Themis (holding a sword and scales that is almost universally acknowledged as dispensation of fair justice) amounts to idolatry. "Statues or any kind of idols are completely banned in Islam", they reckon. "There is no place for a statue in our religion. So "Muslims can't allow a statue in the Supreme Court premises".

Liberals are appalled that the authorities have caved in to the pressure. They acknowledge that the SC could do little as the executive arm had already committed itself to its removal. Keeping the sculpture at the present site in all likelihood might have triggered violence and mayhem.

Discerning observers view this episode as a logical corollary to the government's all out effort to placate the religious right. The action is consistent with the government's earlier decisions to sanitise the textbooks of

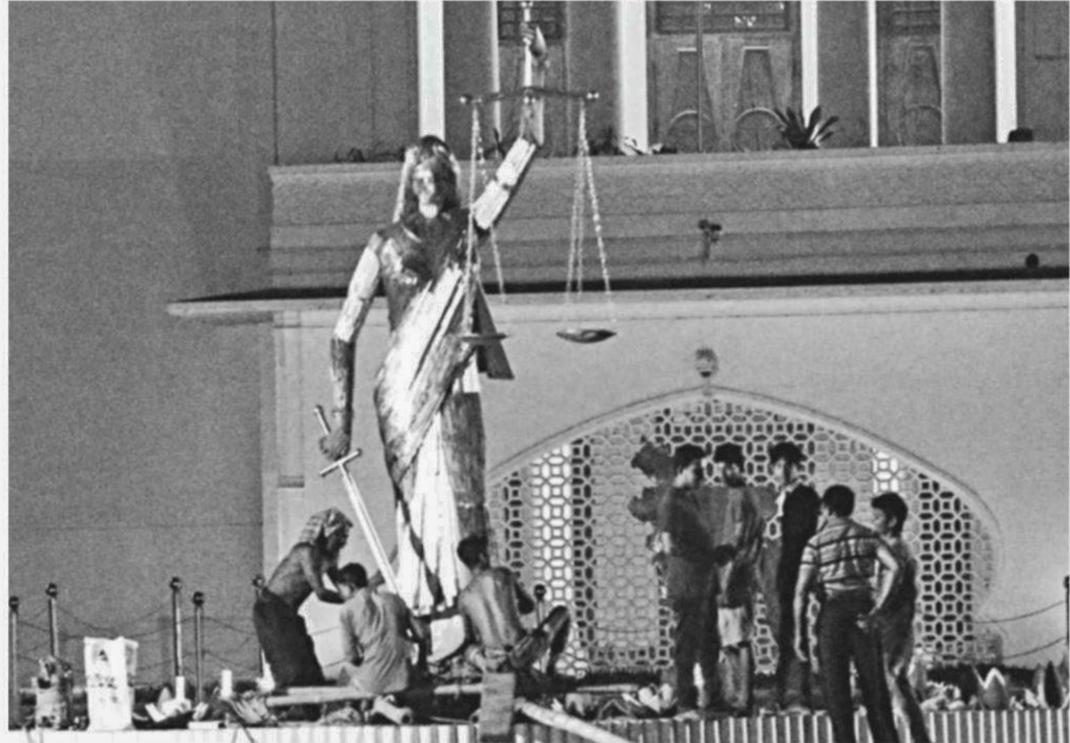
what the Hefazat and its partners viewed as unwarranted pieces, mostly of non-Muslim authors, and by legislating the Child Marriage Restraint Act in February 2017 allowing exceptions to the minimum age for the marriage of women under 'special circumstances'. Perhaps in the same sequence of placating the religious right in late April the ECNEC had approved plans to build some 560 mosque-cum-Islamic Cultural Centres by December 2019. Press was informed that the government had already mapped out 20 acres of land for this purpose.

Observers are not surprised that the rival Bangladesh Nationalist Party

In television talk shows some even went an extra length and justified the government's move as "only a move to bring BNP pawns to our own fold". Instead of challenging the government plan to remove the sculpture from the Supreme Court site on grounds of cultural freedom and pluralism, the platform of the pro-government the Shommilito Sangskritik Jote concurred with the government move. There is little doubt how diametrically opposed the response of the Jote would have been had BNP been in power now.

With the 2019 election at sight the Awami League's veering to the right

enforcement agencies (extrajudicial killings, disappearance and torture with impunity); overindulgence of those associated with the ruling party and its affiliate organisations, particularly in securing undue advantages; overt politicisation and parochialisation of the civil administration and law enforcement agencies; framing of freedom curtailing laws and regulations, and shrinking space for liberal thinking and dissent - have all contributed to the alienation of the regime to the extent that it now has to look for new allies. The traditional liberal Awami supporters now find little difference in the ideological mooring of



Some workers taking down the statue of "Greek Goddess Themis" on the Supreme Court premises.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

mounted little opposition to these policies. In fact, it blamed the ruling party of hijacking its own incomplete agenda of recognising the Dawra degree. The left parties and intellectuals associated with that stream forthrightly condemned the government moves as blatant political opportunism, undermining the core spirit of the War of Liberation. Interestingly though, the traditional champions of the spirit of the War of Liberation and the much coveted and decorated 'guardians of national conscience' remained disturbingly

and its hobnobbing with conservative elements betrays the fact that the party can no longer depend on the constituency that brought it to power eight years ago through a massive mandate. With the thriving economy and the decimated opposition why isn't the top leadership sure of counting the support of the youth and the liberals? Why is the party risking its traditional support base that resolutely disapproved BNP's stance on Jamaat?

One explanation may be: the rampant and institutionalised corruption; excesses of the law

the BNP and their own party. While watching his own creation being dismantled from its original site, the sculptor, Mrinal Huq observed, "We have conceded defeat. It's a slap on the face of the pro-liberation, cultural and freedom-loving people of the country," he noted. His frustration resonated among millions of Bangladeshis proud of their liberal, pluralist and tolerant heritage; perhaps less among those who tread along the corridors of power.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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America should follow its own advice

During his recent trip to the Arab-Islamic-American summit in Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, President Trump urged the leaders of 55 nations to drive terrorists out of our communities and our places of worship.

In a candid interview with CNN on October 25, 2015, Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair said that the Iraq war helped give rise to ISIS. Meanwhile Hillary Clinton, in a debate with Bernie Sanders during the US presidential campaign of 2016, said that it had been the wrong decision for her country to go to war with Iraq. The then Bush administration ignored the resolutions proposed by the UN; the resulting war killed hundreds of thousands of people, and forced millions of Iraqis to add to the staggering number of refugees fleeing to Europe and other neighbouring countries.

Similarly, recently, US-led air strikes on Syria from September 2014 to May 23, 2017, have killed 1,481 innocent people, among whom 319 were children. More than 10,000 civilians were killed by Saudi-led airstrikes supported by the USA and Britain. The recent arms deal between USA and Saudi Arabia worth USD 110 billion is going to take effect immediately, and God knows how many innocent people are going to be killed in Yemen in the coming days. Instead of blaming Muslim countries for their lack of initiative in weeding out terrorism, USA should first refrain from invading Middle Eastern countries and arming rebel groups.

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HUMOROUSLY YOURS

NAVEED MAHBUB

A man in Bronx, New York, gets into his Honda just like another man in London who gets into his Hyundai. The Bronx man drives down to Times Square just

like the London man drives down to Westminster. Bronx man mows down people at Time Square. London man mows down people at Westminster. Bronx man is apprehended. London man is shot to prevent further mayhem. Bronx man tells cops that he had expected the cops to shoot him. London man had expected to get killed for 'eternal peace'. Bronx man is imbibed in (high on) PCP (PeaCe Pill, aka, Phencyclidine, aka dope). London man is imbibed in warped teachings instilled through demagogues. Bronx man says God made him do it. London man believed that God 'thought' his action was the 'right' thing to do. Bronx man was arrested twice before for drunk driving. London man had prior records of violence. Bronx man is named Richard Rojas. Phew! Though I'm still worried the West may find out that 'Roja' in

Bangla refers to Ramadan...London man is named Khalid Masood. Another nail in the coffin of the religion taken hostage by thugs. Bronx man is identified as a man with mental problems. London man is rightfully called a terrorist. The Bronx man incident prompts New York Mayor Bill de Blasio and other officials to say, "There is no indication the incident was an act of terrorism." The London man incident prompts authorities to rightfully label this as an act of terrorism.

The only conclusion one can deduce here is that as long as there are drugs or alcohol involved, it is NOT an act of terrorism.

Maybe that is why the Banani rape case took a long time to get registered. But that fact is registering less and less in our minds, thanks to the current heat wave that is melting our brains housing the memory of a goldfish. Besides, all accused have confessed to their crimes committed in the 'heat of the moment'. Along with rush money and flush money (laundering), there is also hush money I guess.

Let's now just worry about the real heat where even the Celsius scale is

competing with the Fahrenheit scale. I can surely tell why people are happily working overtime - for the free air conditioning at offices. The sweltering heat shows no respite. To make things worse, there's more load shedding. I mean, load 'sharing'. Hey, is there anyone interesting in the excess 15 kgs of fat I'm carrying in me now that I know that instead 'shedding' this load of flab, I can 'share' it?

Speaking of heat, someone else is also in a lot of heat. *Our Man Trump*. To escape the political heat of Washington, he goes to the desert heat of Riyadh. And when you carry 110 billion dollars worth of weapons vouchers in your caravan (Air Force One) as part of a 'tremendous deal', you can surely sport your trophy wife without an abaya and let her hands be touched by the smiling Saudi (male) royalty.

And the Saudi religion police are nowhere in sight. It's ok - they don't cane Vogue models for indecent exposure. Besides, the religion police did once exhibit liberalism as one was found with porn in his cell phone. And I'm sure it was Saudi porn which is nothing but a woman driving.

Hey, there's even a Jewish person (Ivanka's husband Jared Kushner) on Saudi soil to watch his father-in-law lay his hand on a glowing crystal ball with fellow harbingers of democracy - Egypt's Sisi and Saudi Arabia's king Salman as well as watch Trump's speech to the 50 Arab leaders belonging to the faith that Trump claims 'hates America'.

Another history made. The first ever direct flight from Riyadh to Tel Aviv. Sorry, tickets to the flight are not available on Kayak.com.

Trump's first overseas trip didn't come without adequate preparation.

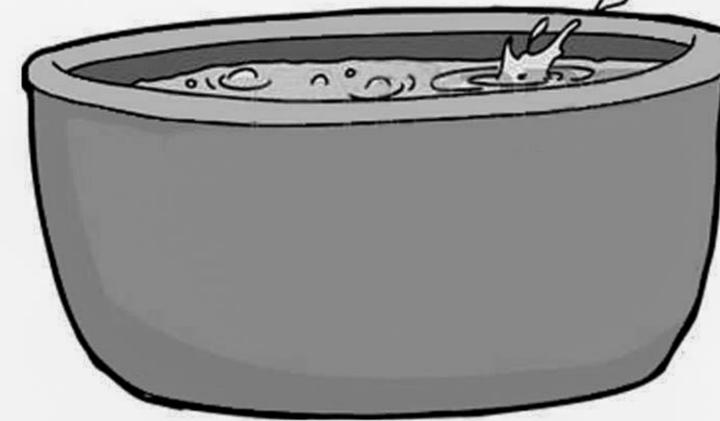
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USS Trump, running low on fuel with still a LONG way to travel, had to jettison some load - Michael Flynn, Preet Bharara, Sally Yates, Angella Reid...and the latest, James Comey for his refusing to be Trump's homie.

But a trip abroad is nevertheless a breather from the heat. As Bill Maher puts it, POTUS is visiting the Vatican, Israel and Saudi Arabia, the cradles of the three major religions of the US: Christianity, Judaism and Oil. Let's just hope that Trump isn't impeached while abroad. After all, his edict is that no criminals shall be allowed into the US. The heat continues. Another tragedy. This time in Manchester. IS has it easy - it gets closer to its pre-Ramadan kill target simply by claiming responsibility of the action of any madman.

What a *semana caliente* - hot week! Sir Roger Moore could take it no more. So long Simon Templar, Lord Brett Sinclair and James Bond. And I really think that a saint, a persuader and a 007 is really what we need to straighten out all the heated issues, including the highest priority one on Lady Justice - no wait, that's done.

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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