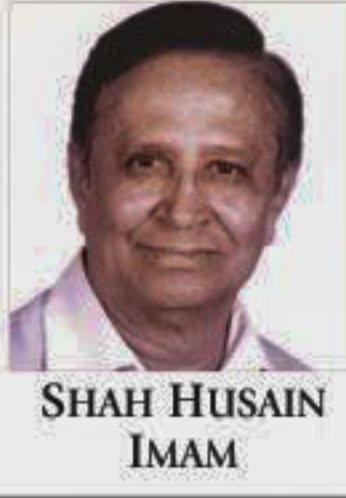


Can't we outsmart the corrupt?

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

WE need to outwit the graft-taker, outsmart him. In fact, we should try to be one step ahead of him so we can beat him in his own game! The reason why I am suggesting such an unconventional, even a little surrealistic method is simple and easy to understand.

A little realised rule of thumb is making a cake-walk into our society: "If you can't resist or overpower the corrupt, join him." In other words, give in to his pressure for bribe, otherwise your file will not move from his desk.

We have somehow developed a trait, a part of sub-culture, if you like, of treating ourselves more as consumers than citizens. We have a two-fold attitude of resignation to "fate." First, as hinted above, if you cannot stop something submit to it if you are not asking for trouble or courting denial. The second attitude of resignation is expressed by throwing up your arms in frustration and exclaiming, "Look and behold! others are greasing palms of people in authority as 'speed money' to get a favourable decision what then prevents you from following suit?" In a simulated market-place, the rules of demand and supply dictate just not unholy competition but unholy alliance as well.

A retired real estate business man confided to a friend that not only would graft be asked for, even an audacity could be shown to offer the name and phone number of his boss! That may reflect a certain in-cahoots factor or maybe a couldn't care less swagger.

Let me cite some reported instances where forceful pre-emptive steps could have stopped financial crimes from being full blown with a sure-fire evidence to punish the offender.

In the case of a police officer allegedly



depositing money in small tranches over a period of time that in the end ran into two crores plus, the bank manager could have drawn a reference to his account holder on the source of his swelling deposits. Because there is anti-money laundering act to be invoked in case of unearned incomes.

E-tickets are the norm today, so that foreign airlines tend to inform the revenue of cash purchase of tickets, especially if this is done frequently.

When, however, the finance minister says to the effect that banks are rife with corruption and bad loans in cahoots with incompetent managements with political influence, he leaves little to imagination!

Let us separate positive signals from the negative ones that one can read from the

corruption perception index (CPI) of the Transparency International (TI) released on February 22, 2018.

There are basically two pieces of good news: Our bettering by two steps from 15th position in 2016 to 17th in 2017 among the bottom pile of countries; the second positive news is about the consistent pattern of improvement.

After five consecutive years of ranking at the bottom of the list of the most corrupt countries between 2001 and 2005, we had no room to slide further down. The prospect of adding to an already overwhelming embarrassment to our image thankfully sank in. We went on to rank 3rd, 7th, 10th, 13th, 12th, 13th, 16th, 14th, 13th and 15th before notching up 17th on the latest index. Barring some ups and downs, the pattern has been

steady and rising.

I reckon we can modestly be pleased with having broken the jinx and found ourselves improving in terms of corruption perception. But rather than resting on our oars from any false sense of complacency, we must diligently apply the message that "the only way you can go now is up."

It is frustrating to note though, that we have taken 12 years to attain a score of 28 on a scale of 0-100. This is not even two-thirds of the desired bare minimum of 43. So, we have to fast-track implementation of a well-formulated graft containment strategy. To say that "the positive perception of the country's legal, institutional and policy structures" have been reflected on Bangladesh's improved ranking is a generalisation. Unpacking the statement, we find digitalisation, e-governance, e-tendering and purchase in public sector having made a difference in the situation. So, e-governance and digitalisation with their inherent features of averting cumbersome procedures which breed corruption cries out for implementation across sectors, public and private.

Another potential instrument for ensuring transparency and accountability in public services is the Right to Information (RTI) Act. Implementation of the Act is dependent on user-friendliness and spontaneous creation of demands for information. Awareness building can help in both areas with necessary fine-tuning in consultation with all stakeholders.

Two imperatives stare us in the face; ridding recruitment to vacant post of graft and bringing the big corruption cases to conclusion with conviction handed to the guilty.

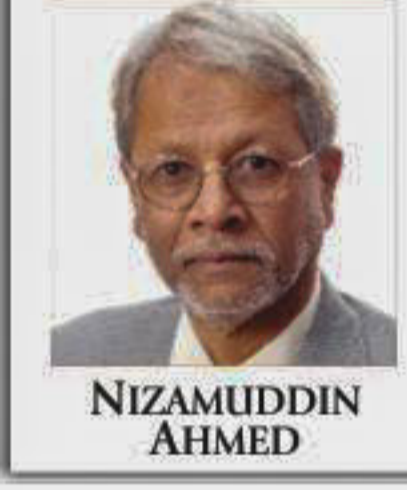
This is an election year with new projects being put on the anvil. The highest-level committee formed to handle 80 percent of the purchases has its job cut out.

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FAREWELL TO ARMS

CHINTITO SINCE 1995



NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

THIS could be the start of a gory serial.

In response to 17 hale and hearty lives lost, and 15 serious injuries from a white shooter (predictably mentally ill) at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, on February 14, the best the

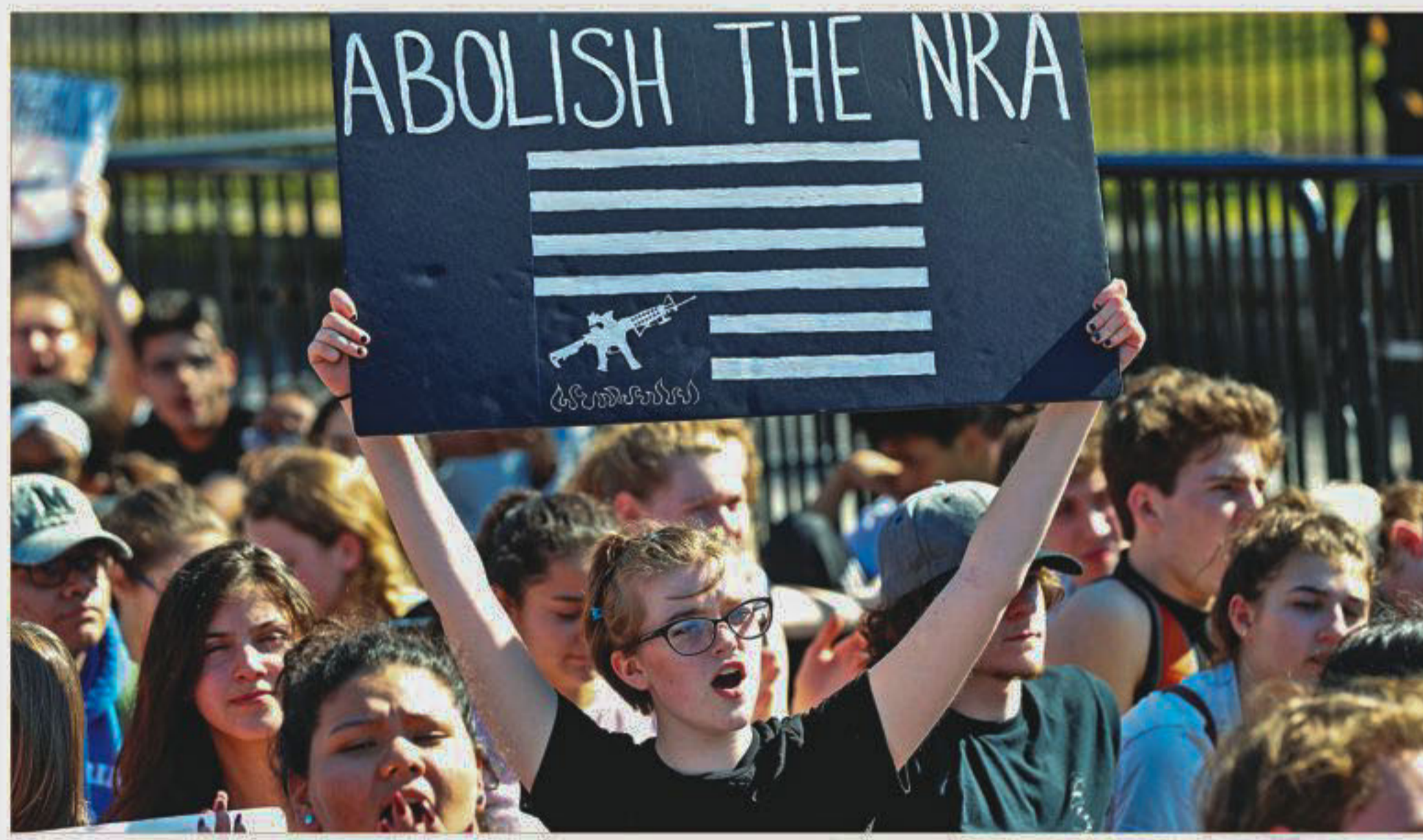
country's beleaguered president could do after seven days was to suggest arming school lunch staff with concealed weapons, and this was during his meeting with angry and emotional friends and relatives of the victims of the mass shooting. Under intense criticism, at the partisan Conservative Political Action Conference two days later (February 22), Donald Trump switched to arming "gun-adept teachers, talented with weaponry."

While we are all acquainted with the ill tempers of some teachers, the proposal if implemented could pose several other problems: Where on earth would the teacher conceal the gun? They could cut a hole in a pile of books, or shoot from the forehead by twitching the eyebrow as in a Rajinikanth South Indian film. Will the teacher's handgun be effective against the attacker's rapid-fire assault rifle? Or will the academic also be boosted with an AR for an eye-for-an-eye battle?

Following an attack, as in the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting, 2012 Sandy Hook (Connecticut) or 2007 Virginia Tech (Virginia), if indeed a first responder rescue team finds people (students and their teacher) holed up in a room, and the armed rescuer pops up the preordained question, "Does anyone here have a gun?" who fires first when a teacher replies, "I do"?

Despite the vote-winning propagandist hullabaloo about making America "great again," if truth be told, President Trump is not referring to the whole country because some states (California, New Jersey, Massachusetts...) are already great with strict gun laws. Gun control also works in Australia, UK, Japan, Germany, Scotland, Finland, Bangladesh, and the list goes on. No other developed nation comes close to the rate of US gun violence. So, is the rest of the world seeking compliance before they can import American goods?

By one estimation, 80,000 Americans have been killed by guns in over 1,600 mass



Students from several schools in Montgomery County, Maryland, protest against gun violence in front of the White House. PHOTO: REUTERS

shootings in the last five years. That's more than 15,000 dead every year. And not a single legislation towards gun control. The US has already seen 19 school shootings in 2018. According to the Gun Violence Archive, in the US, there is a mass shooting—defined as four or more people shot in one incident, not including the shooter—nine out of every 10 days on average.

On the 12th day of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas massacre, in criticising the on-duty armed officer who did not enter the premises during the shooting, President Trump vowed he would have "rushed in" even if unarmed to presumably confront the shooter. That may soon be a possibility for even teachers because the president stipulates arming one-fifth of them. The selected teachers, Trump says, would be from among trained gun enthusiasts.

Let us assume that one or more teachers respond to an attack by a terrorist or a mentally ill person, depending on subjectivity. There would obviously be many more casualties in the crossfire, because in the initial stage it would be impossible to know who shot first, or which source of firing was from an attacker and which from the victims. President Trump did not elaborate whether the armed teachers would be uniformed too.

Would their arms be hidden under their desk? Under a potato sack in the kitchen? A

locker? In which case, how long would it take to retrieve a gun to respond to an attack? What if one of those teachers goes berserk? Or if an unarmed teacher snatches/steals a trained teacher's weapon? The angry principal may call a student and announce, "You are expelled!" Bang! Bang! Bang!

On the other hand, if none were armed—terrorist, mentally ill, teacher—there'd be no shooting and no casualty from gunfire. That argument would bring up the most important question in this debate to control the gun or not. How many people with licensed, legally owned guns have had the occasion to be attacked and thereby the opportunity to defend? Research reveals that the possibility of a gun being misused including for suicides increases four to five times in residences which have licensed, legally bought guns.

About legality in the land of dreamers and pathetic migrant deserters, it is more difficult to adopt a pet than to buy a gun. To adopt a cat, there is paperwork to be completed, including three references, and the applicant would have to allow home visits if suspected of cat abuse. A lunatic, someone under 16, or one reported to the police/FBI could buy an automatic weapon, but he would not be able to purchase cigarettes, alcohol or pornographic material. No surprise then that Americans own an estimated 265 million guns, more than one gun for every adult.

Why anyone other than law enforcement and military personnel should have the need to own an assault rifle is another burning issue. Assault rifles are hardly useful in hunting and domestic self-defence. Except for the fanciful, egotist psyche, no private citizen in any country should possess an automatic weapon. One enraged American queried on social media: "What will it take? Will it take one of YOUR (NRA) children to be shot and killed? How many more senseless shootings will it take? How many more parents will have to bury their kids?"

The NRA or the National Rifle Association, it appears, is the most powerful lobby in the States. Its president takes home a salary of almost one million dollars per year. They reportedly contributed almost USD 6 million to the Republicans, including Donald Trump's 2016 campaign. With almost five million members, the organisation fights for the right to gun ownership, and is against Democrats politically and hates left-wing adherents, or literally anyone with a socialist agenda. They are against laws that prevent people

with mental illnesses to own guns. They might just have a change of heart this time because of a new voice emerging.

The youth in the US after the recent Florida massacre have taken cue from Bangladesh. Following the dismal failure of adults to control weapons of mass destruction in most states, it rested on the students to take up "arms," and they did so with aplomb. Their protests have united a country lacerated by tweets, compelling an NRA-biased president to meet victims' representatives, and an unprecedented town hall of legislators and the preyed-upon public. They have kept the fuel burning to speak out for those murdered.

I would urge the students not to relent under pressure, nor be cowed down by any red eye, and I know from our experience that united angry youth can neither be bought nor defeated. Their peaceful movement is one big ray of hope that there will be a transformation in the US towards sensible gun control legislation so that it can be said to the 17: "Yours going down was not in vain."

Dr Nizamuddin Ahmed is a practising architect, a Commonwealth Scholar and a Fellow, a Baden-Powell Fellow Scout Leader, and a Major Donor Rotarian.



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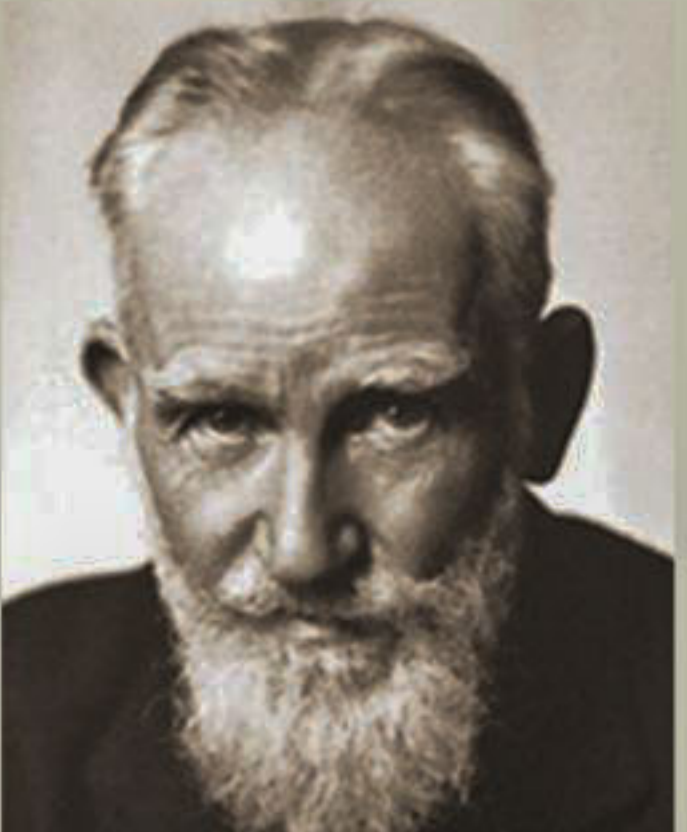


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ACROSS

- 1 Yakked it up
- 6 Island south of Sicily
- 11 Tequila source
- 12 Wise saying
- 13 Tedious folks
- 14 A bit cold
- 15 Indivisible numbers
- 17 Neon or helium
- 19 Relieve
- 20 Much of N. Amer.
- 23 Orchard crop
- 25 Oil cartel
- 26 Winter Games athlete
- 28 Argued
- 29 Chant
- 30 Barrett of Pink Floyd
- 31 Gardener's tool
- 32 Urgent call
- 33 Police station event
- 35 Like some eclipses
- 38 Fissure
- 41 Knock for a loop
- 42 Lend- (hear out)
- 43 Called to the phone
- 44 San Diego player
- 9 Summit
- 10 One of the March sisters
- 16 Calling
- 17 Shocked sounds
- 18 Put in for a job
- 20 Fully informed
- 21 "evil"
- 22 Field units
- 24 Went ahead
- 25 Cereal grain
- 27 Patella
- 31 Engaged
- 33 Take it easy
- 34 Arm bone
- 35 Drink like a dog
- 36 Ethan's "Gattaca" co-star
- 37 Decrepit horse
- 39 Remote
- 40 Uno, due,-

DOWN

- 1 Quick punch
- 2 In the past
- 3 Enterprise rate
- 4 Continually
- 5 Coveted
- 6 Like lions
- 7 Line of symmetry
- 8 Sassiness



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

