

## In pursuit of moral attainment

*Ramadan's teachings must not be forgotten*

THE holy month of Ramadan begins today, and it's important to remember what makes this month so special and what we can learn from it for our individual and collective wellbeing. The holy month can perhaps be best described as a time when the physical world and the thought world align. Believers seeking divine mercy and moral and spiritual enlightenment perform prayers and various acts of self-restraint: abstinence from food, drink and other activities. It's a journey from the outermost to the innermost. The physical acts and rituals are meant to take us closer to the innermost reaches of our soul, a fact that bears repeating given the general fixation on the rituals only, not their intended lessons. Fasting teaches us many things and also inspires us to forget our petty divisions for the common good.

These are lessons we need to remind ourselves of again and again as the world, and indeed our country, goes through a critical phase marked by hatred, bigotry and destruction. The seeds of division are being sown deliberately. The poor are getting poorer while the rich are getting richer; hatred and intolerance are taking over the finer aspects of humanity; and peace is getting increasingly illusive. At home, the manifestation of ribald consumerism matched equally by the vulgar greed for profiteering are everything that religion teaches us to shun.

The month-long pursuit of moral attainment that we embark on today should give us pause for a quiet introspection about our role in all of this and how we can change ourselves to change the world. Let the teachings of Ramadan be reflected in our actions not only for a month but for all times.

## Repatriation in limbo

*UNHCR should do the verification*

THAT the repatriation of Rohingya refugees has been immobilised is as depressing as unsurprising. The sincerity of Myanmar's authorities in implementing the task has been extremely inadequate from the start. Rather than speeding up the efforts to repatriate hundreds of thousands of refugees, they have stalled the process by pursuing deceptive delaying tactics.

According to an agreement between the two countries in November last year, Myanmar was supposed to take back its nationals within two months. Yet, after six months, not a single family has been repatriated, except for a staged one. Myanmar initially said it would take back some 1500 refugees a week. Even if it did so, it would take 10 years to send back all Rohingyas.

The major impediment to carrying out the repatriation has been the verification process. In the previous repatriation in 1992, the UNHCR accepted refugee cards issued by Bangladesh government as a valid proof of identity. Now, however, only Myanmar government takes the shot, and it requires only certain documents such as copies of expired citizenship cards or national registration cards, which most Rohingyas do not currently possess. In the process, only 878 Rohingyas out of 8,032, who were put on a list by Bangladesh, have been verified by Myanmar.

The existing repatriation deal has its faults. It sanctioned too much power to Myanmar government. Therefore, the deal should be renegotiated to empower the UN agencies in determining the residency of Rohingya refugees. Meanwhile, the international community should step up its efforts to pressurise Myanmar to create a conducive environment for repatriation.

# Yaba: The madness drug

THE OVERTON WINDOW



ERRESH OMAR JAMAL

OVER the last 10-15 years, increase in the use of methamphetamine, globally, has outpaced that of any other drug. In its World Drug Report 2016, the United Nations said that, "methamphetamine seizures have accounted for the largest share of global ATS [Amphetamine-Type Stimulants] seizures annually" in past years and that seizures have been "particularly dominant" in parts of Asia and North America.

The report also revealed these sub-regions to have accounted for most of the methamphetamine confiscation worldwide since 2009, and that between 2009 and 2014, seizures of methamphetamine in parts of Asia "almost quadrupled". In 2015, seizures in East Asia for the first time exceeded seizures in North America (which for years had the highest number of confiscation) and were highest among all sub-regions of the world. During the same time, as reported by *The Daily Star* this week, its explosion in Bangladesh too, in the form of yaba pills, was unprecedented.

According to data from the Department of Narcotics Control Bangladesh (DNC), total seizures of yaba pills went from being 36,543 in 2008 to 812,716 in 2010, 1,951,392 in 2012, 6,512,869 in 2014 to 29,450,178 in 2016! This "striking surge since 2009 and the distance from Bangladesh border from production centres in Shan State (NE Burma)," according to Jane's Intelligence Review (a monthly journal on global security and stability issues), "appear to reflect a well-organised export drive rather than a gradual increase."

Most worryingly, it is young people that have been its biggest victims. If we consider the harmful effects of the drug and the huge number of young people who are either abusing or are addicted to it, the threat of yaba should be seen as a crisis of national proportions. That is what top officials of police, Border Guard Bangladesh, Coast Guard and DNC told *The Daily Star* at a roundtable on Monday.

It is, in fact, almost reminiscent of the opium crisis in China following the Opium Wars that crushed the country and set it back decades by destroying, primarily, its young generation of that time through mass addiction. That is why, we, as a society, too, must recognise the widespread supply and consumption of yaba as a national crisis, if we are to ensure that it does not similarly destroy the future of our nation. And through that recognition, take steps as a society, as well as persuade the government to concentrate its forces on stopping this dangerous plague now, before it's too late.

So what more can the government do? Well, according to top law enforcement officials, the government should provide them with greater resources in terms of manpower and equipment. One of the main reasons for this is that the drug trade (particularly yaba) has become transnational in scope involving huge sums of money; it is impossible for law enforcers to deal with and effectively fight against the various challenges that so much money brings in with limited manpower. It is also very difficult for law enforcers to ensure that their

sources and the intelligence that they provide are good when there is always the possibility of them getting paid off by drug-lords; hence, the need for surveillance equipment for information collection.

Another danger that comes with the enormous amount of money is that it can also entice law enforcers themselves to get involved. And although the punishment for law enforcers who are found to be connected with the trade is often quite severe, loopholes in our legal and justice delivery system make prosecuting drug traders difficult at times, whether they be law enforcers or others. The government should help fix these problems.

Because the incentive for individuals to get involved is so high in terms of monetary gains, the deterrent, too, has to be substantial enough to demotivate people from becoming entangled in the drug business. Socio-economic conditions for people too must be improved as those struggling to earn a living can always be used



PHOTO: PROTHOM ALO

by drug-lords or even smaller drug dealers. As apprehending every single individual (and small) supplier is logically and literally impossible, in order to stop the supply, the only real option is to apprehend the major drug-lords and to punish them severely. Clearly, that is where the government's focus should be.

As drug kingpins always have sophisticated ways of hiding their involvement, the best way of going after them is through scrutinising their tax returns. Here, the Bangladesh Bank and the finance ministry must play a much more substantial role. They must work with law enforcement agencies to bring down the real masterminds behind the yaba trade which is the only way of addressing the immense crisis from the supply angle.

Finally, the BGB and other forces must do a better

job of preventing yaba from coming into the country from Myanmar and India in the first place, and the "most important" aspect of that is "good fencing" along the border as top BGB personnel told *The Daily Star*.

When it comes to demand, however, society itself must do more to ensure that people, and young people in particular, understand the grave dangers of taking yaba. But simply warning the young people of its dangers will never work as young people, by their very nature, have a tendency to do exactly what they are told not to. Instead, they must be encouraged to spend their time and energy in other ways.

Interestingly, parallel to the increase in drug consumption, what we have also seen is a reduction in open spaces for young people and opportunities for them to get involved in sporting, cultural and other activities. With a gradual decrease in community activities and cooperation also, young

people and individuals in general can feel increasingly isolated. One way of dealing with that feeling of isolation, and the depression that it may lead to, is to take drugs.

Hence, society must provide people better alternatives to prevent that from happening and try to reinvigorate the "feeling of belonging" to a community among people—one that cares for them and is willing to share and dedicate its time for them. Otherwise, yaba, literally called the "madness drug", will lead to our nation losing an entire generation and suffering the long-lasting consequences of that.

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# Karnataka's verdict loud and clear

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYAR

ACTUALLY, the Congress has won the day even though the party has been rejected outright by the people of Karnataka which went to polls for the state legislature. In the

process, the Congress has still managed to win 78 seats out of a possible 222 for which elections were conducted. The party high command went into a huddle and instantly decided to provide outside support to Janata Dal (Secular) which has secured mere 38 seats.

Eventually, the Congress avenged its defeat. At the same time, it also turned

instrumental in bringing together the two warring groups, one led by BS Yeddyurappa and the other by B Sriramulu, in the state. The RSS can also feel satisfied that it had its way in selecting the candidates.

This is the first time that the BJP, always associated with the north, crossed the Vindhyas to have a foothold in the south. This is bound to have an impact in Andhra Pradesh if and when it goes to polls, especially after Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu decided to take on the BJP when the Centre refused to give a special status to the state.

Kerala has traditionally been a Communist stronghold while Tamil Nadu is still caught up with the two Dravidian parties, DMK and the AIADMK. Making inroads into the two states will be a difficult proposition for

veterans—Ghulam Nabi Azad and Ashok Gehlot—to Bengaluru to offer the party's support to HD Kumaraswamy to form the government.

The only possible hurdle in the entire plan, the outgoing Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, was taken on board before the party offered the leadership position to Kumaraswamy. This was in contrast to what happened in Goa, Manipur and Meghalaya where BJP moved swiftly to form the governments with its quick planning. Perhaps, this was something even the BJP would not have dreamt.

True, the governor was supposed to ask the single largest party to form the government and prove its majority on the floor of the house, as he eventually did. But the recent experience suggests a deviation in the norm. For example, the

of a stable government than the post-poll alliance, like the one now between the JD(S) and the Congress. Indeed, this one is intended to stop the BJP from coming to power. Yet, the claims of the coalition over the number of MLAs, which will ultimately count, cannot be denied.

The SR Bommai judgment clearly enunciates that the strength of the parties must be decided on the floor of the house and not at Raj Bhavan. In the present context, the ideal way to go forward should have been to convene the assembly session as early as possible, appoint a pro-tem speaker, administer oath to all the elected members, before asking both the contenders to prove their majority on the floor of the house.

The Congress could have well averted a situation like this if only it had a tie-up with the JD(S) before the elections. Neither the Congress nor Siddaramaiah envisaged that the people of Karnataka did not return the incumbent to power in the last three decades. The anti-incumbency factor has caught up with the outgoing chief minister. His first four years of misgovernance came to be counted. That he could win in only one of the two constituencies he had contested speaks volumes about his popularity with the people.

As a result, the Congress has lost yet another state from its grasp. It's more than a coincidence that the party started losing ground ever since Rahul Gandhi has become the president. The Congress has no option except to have a new face at the top. But who will replace him remains the question. Ideally, Sonia Gandhi herself should re-occupy the office. The tag of being Italian is no longer there.

The other option is Priyanka Vadra—if the choice is to be confined to the dynasty. There are other leaders available but the party is so deeply linked with the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty that no other person qualifies. The tragedy is that the people of India have moved away from the dynasty, but it has not from its thinking.

The Karnataka election will certainly have repercussions for the future of Indian politics. Even though Prime Minister Modi has emerged as the country's most popular politician, he, or for that matter the BJP, cannot be absolutely sure of their prospects in 2019.

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BS Yeddyurappa, senior BJP leader, was sworn in as the 23rd chief minister of Karnataka yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

the tables against the BJP which emerged as the single largest party. In the bargain, it is JD(S) under the leadership of former Prime Minister Deve Gowda which has got an unexpected bonanza.

However, one cannot deny the BJP's success because of the popular verdict. Apparently, it is all because of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his party president Amit Shah, who were

BJP, but the party has already begun its spadework, keeping the future elections in mind. As for Telangana, Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao is fully entrenched now.

Yet, the overall scenario is not conducive to the belief of secular parties. The Congress has realised it more than anybody else. That also sums up the reason for the party's high command sending two

Congress had emerged as the single largest party both in Goa and Manipur, but it was not invited to form the government.

It is beyond any doubt that the JD(S) and the Congress coalition has a clear majority. But it is only a post-poll arrangement which has no sanction. Normally, the pre-poll alliances between political parties are the safer options for governors to trust and ensure formation

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Holding BPL 2018 in another country

I have read in TDS that BPL 2018 may have to be deferred to January 2019 due to the upcoming general elections in Bangladesh. If this tournament is deferred, it may affect other tours. I recall a few years ago the IPL was held in South Africa due to elections being held in India and it worked out perfectly. It also made IPL more popular. If the BCB decides to hold the tournament in another country like the UAE, or even Malaysia without changing the date, this would only make the tournament more popular. I hope the BCB will consider this option.

Aminur Rahim, New DOHS, Mohakhali, Dhaka

### Rural schools need qualified teachers

The pass rate of this year's SSC exams is 77.77 percent whereas last year it was 80.35 percent. It has been reported that poor performance of our students in English and Mathematics is to blame for this. Again, it is the students of rural areas who could not score good marks in these two subjects. The reason is that there is a dearth of skilled teachers in rural schools, particularly of English and Maths. The government must address the issue with urgency.

Zabed Wali, Chattogram