

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
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Students allegedly in DB custody

Parents deserve answers to their allegations

ON September 5, 38 students were picked up by people identifying themselves as members of the Detective Branch from different parts of the capital, according to the students' parents. While 26 of those picked up were eventually released, 12 were allegedly still in custody. In this time these students have not been produced before a court of law, and questions by concerned parents have been met with ambiguous answers.

Families of the 12 students held a press conference on September 9, but even then there has been no clear response from DB officials. What horrifies us more is the parents' claim that their wards have been tortured in custody, which has been confirmed by some of those who have been released. One student was beaten after his hands and legs were tied up and had to be hospitalised after release, said a parent.

And, what exactly is the crime these students are accused of? Reportedly, the students were questioned about their involvement in the quota reform and road safety movements. It has been pointed out that some of those still in custody were not even in Dhaka during the protests. But more importantly, since when is participating in protests and movements a crime in this country? Why should students be harassed and hounded if they exercise their basic rights? As reports continue to show, protesters for quota reform and road safety continue to be harassed, even those out on bail.

The fact that the brother of one of those still allegedly in custody was among those released gives sufficient credence to the claims of these parents. Why is law enforcement silent? It is their duty to justify the logic behind these arrests, investigate why there was a failure in producing them before the court in due time, ensure accountability and take responsibility for the torture these students underwent. If true, what justified the physical and mental trauma that these students were put through? The government should intervene to stop the criminalising of people for their supposed involvement in protests which the government itself publicly has declared to be logical.

Rise in traffic violations worrying

No. of bike riders without licence alarmingly high

YESTERDAY'S front-page report in this paper about the soaring number of motorbikes hitting the country's roads revealed some very problematic findings. Currently, there are 22.7 lakh registered motorbikes of which 15.11 lakh alone had been registered between 2011 and July of this year. But the number of valid licences stands at 11.32 lakh only. This is half the number of registered bikes in the country!

It is extremely concerning that there are hundreds of thousands of motorbike riders out there on the country's roads without a valid licence. This is the result of a combination of poor implementation of traffic laws and the utter lack of discipline of people on our roads. In fact much of the woes of the country's roads have to do with the people who use them—motorists, drivers, pedestrians, etc. We agree with transport experts who have cautioned that the rising number of motorbikes is not a good sign. Although it is understandable that more and more people are opting for motorbikes—due to it being a faster mode of transportation and because of the deteriorating traffic conditions—motorbikes are more accident-prone and motorbike users tend to violate traffic rules more than others.

An immediate measure would be the traffic police checking if motorbike users on the road possess a valid licence and taking action against violators. But this cannot be the only solution. BRTA should look into the possibility of capping the number of registered bikes and reevaluate its drivers' licence test process of motorbike users. But most importantly, the authorities must realise that without addressing the root causes—lack of an efficient public transport system, poor road infrastructure, and poor implementation of traffic rules, to name a few—the rise in motorbikes and lack of discipline on our roads will not go away.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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When survival is threatened

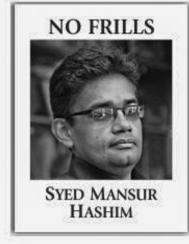
The article titled "How are we doing — as human beings?" published on Monday was an interesting piece. The first of the human instincts, survival, is in fact linked with power. And therein lies the problem.

All the evidence suggests we are heading for another world war. And the pattern of history is clear. Power (manifested as interest) has been present in every conflict throughout history—no exception. It is the underlying motivation for war. Other cultural factors might change, but not power.

It is the one thing we will destroy ourselves for, as well as everyone else. When core interests are threatened and existential threat looms, nations go to war. There can be no compromise on this. As a result, every nation eventually gets the war it is trying to avoid. This applies as much today as any other time in history. Deterrence doctrine, made for the 20th-century Cold War, is irrelevant in the 21st and will ultimately fail us. Deterrence can no longer prevent the scenarios where Mutual Assured Destruction will be resorted to.

Unfortunately, leaders and decision-makers delude themselves, thinking they can avoid this fate—they can't. If survival is threatened, there is no alternative to war, however destructive.
Peter McLoughlin by email

The allure of Europe



NO FRILLS
SYED MANSUR HASHIM

LAST year, the international media was awash with reports that a significant number of illegal migrants headed to Europe were Bangladeshis. That came as a surprise to many of us. But data coming out of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) shows that our citizens are coughing up an enormous amount of money, anywhere between USD 8,000 and 9,000, to get to Libya, and the passage across the Mediterranean to Italy, according to the *Washington Post*, takes another USD 700 per head! These people are economic migrants and the risks involved with taking illegal migration routes to Europe, fraught with danger, have done little to dissuade thousands of Bangladeshis from taking the journey.

So, why are Bangladeshis taking such enormous personal risks especially when there is absolutely no guarantee of a safe landing on mainland Europe? Bangladesh is not some failed state or a war-torn nation like Libya. We are not facing famine here. Bangladesh has, in fact, cut its poverty rates from around 44 percent in 1981 to about 18 percent in 2010. What we often overlook is that we are a very densely populated nation where about a third of the population is crammed up in the major urban centres (Dhaka alone accommodates 20 percent, and 40 percent of the formal jobs are concentrated here). When we couple that with climate-induced changes, a pattern begins to emerge—in which people are being driven inland from the coastal areas. Urban centres are already bursting at the seams. Dhaka, for one, was never designed to cater to so many millions of people. Its utility services are heavily taxed and there aren't enough economic opportunities to go around as well.

We already have millions working abroad. Legal expatriate workers number in the millions, especially in the Middle East. However, that region has all but dried up for our workers and now the push is being redirected to

Europe. There are a substantial number of Bangladeshi communities in many European countries already and this is acting as a catalyst for many of our people to brave seemingly insurmountable odds to reach Europe. Bangladesh has benefitted enormously from foreign remittance, but the human cost remains largely in the shadows. Finding work in the country is a daunting task for the average unskilled worker. The country suffers from weak regulatory mechanisms when it comes to ensuring safe working conditions in many of the emerging sectors in the economy, and when we take into account the fact that millions of people

are much better than the rest of the country. It is not uncommon to find elaborately ornate houses and mosques built with the money earned abroad. This extends to consumer electronics and motor vehicles and a stark contrast between the "haves" and "have-nots" is all too apparent.

The horrendous sums charged by recruiters have earned Bangladesh much infamy the world over. Still, millions have no hope of entering the job market as they lack the necessary knowledge and skills. There is growing frustration even amongst the educated youth because while enrolment and retention in the schooling system have

seven years till FY 2016-2017. On average, the sector created 42,857 jobs a year during the period. In the previous seven years till 2010, it created 8.71 lakh new jobs, the survey said. As a result of this reversal, the industrial sector's share of employment fell to 20.4 percent in 2016-17, down from the highest 23 percent recorded in 2013. The share of agriculture in the job market also dropped. On the other hand, the service sector created the highest number of jobs. Such a trend is unexpected in a country that has an abundant labour force.

These are unfortunate truths of Bangladesh, something the policymakers do not wish to talk about. It is imperative that we pay greater attention to the reasons that are breeding frustration and fuelling this almost uncontrollable urge to join the bandwagon of thousands leaving their homes to take the perilous journey to new lands.

Back in May 2017, the UK's *The Independent* newspaper covered the plight of refugees crossing the Mediterranean on flimsy boats, including rubber dinghies. It stated that "in the first three months of last year, just one Bangladeshi arrived in Italy, but the number for 2017 stands at more than 2,800, making the country the largest single origin of migrants currently arriving on European shores."

While Bangladesh undoubtedly has made great strides in disaster preparedness, extreme weather events will continue to adversely affect communities with cyclones, storm surges and other such climate-related extreme events. These incidents will continue to damage infrastructure, disrupt food supplies and crops and affect the communities' livelihoods. If Europe wants to see less people arriving on its shores, then the world must step up with necessary climate funds to help countries like Bangladesh to mitigate the effects of freak weather events. Only when we are able to protect our people can there be a hope for the thousands facing uncertainty, so they can stay back and not embark on these hopeless journeys across hostile territory and waters.

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The North Africa to Italy crossing is considered the deadliest sea passage in the world. PHOTO: REUTERS

face an uncertain future—living in the sprawling urban slums—migrating to the West for a "better future" becomes every prospective migrant's dream. In the 70s, it was the Middle East, now it is Europe.

The lure of emigration is a strong one for other reasons too. Districts and regions that have a history of communities going abroad tend to be richer than others. Most of the foreign earnings tend to be repatriated back home through informal channels and they get injected into the rural economy. Although there is little in the way of research on how the money is spent by families back home, the general standard of living in these areas

increased, the economy has been unable to generate enough jobs to cater to them.

Indeed, this was pointed out by the Centre for Policy Dialogue's (CPD) pre-2017-2018 budget brief by Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya that "job creation has also slowed down to about 4.7 lakh each year, same as the labour force, while unemployment rate remained almost unchanged at 4.2 percent in FY 2016." A survey by CPD in 2016 on the readymade garments sector found that the industrial sector, which had been a major employment generator between 2000 and 2010, employed a mere 300,000 people in the

SEVENTEEN YEARS AFTER 9/11

The world in a perpetual state of war



THE OVERTON WINDOW
ERESH OMAR JAMAL

AT 11am on September 11, 2001 the Bush administration had already declared that al-Qaeda was responsible for the attacks on the World Trade

Center and the Pentagon. At 9:30pm a War Cabinet was formed comprising of top intelligence and military advisers. And at 11pm, at the end of its historic meeting at the White House, the "War on Terror" was officially announced.

For those who have never read Orwell, his comment that, "The war is not meant to be won, it is meant to be continuous" may sound more real than fiction 17 years after 9/11 and the launching of the western world's War on Terror. And yet, the worldwide Orwellian surveillance state formed and justified by the threat of terrorism that has stripped everyone of their right to privacy, is not the only cost that has had to be borne because of it.

According to the Costs of War Project at Brown University's Watson Institute, America's War on Terror from September 12, 2001 through fiscal year 2018 cost its taxpayers a whopping USD 5.6 trillion. On average, that's at least USD 23,386 per taxpayer.

In terms of debt, the War on Terror added USD 2.1 trillion, or more than 10 percent to the US debt. And according to the US Department of Defence's "Cost of War" report in 2017, the US had spent USD 250 million per day for 16 years on "defence" since 9/11.

All this, however, is only America's dollar costs of the war. It does not consider the complete and total destruction of Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and so on and so forth. It does not account for the millions of homes destroyed, people displaced, and lives lost and ruined because of war. And it also does not include the cost of the continuing worldwide destabilisation caused as a result of the War on Terror itself.

Conflicts? According to legendary journalist Tom Engelhardt, in January 2018, "America's war on terror...[had] spread to 76 countries across the globe." That is roughly 39 percent of the planet, as identified by the Cost of War Project.

Fifteen years after the invasion of Iraq, which led to more than eight years of occupation of that country, it has been estimated that around 4,500 Americans have lost their lives in Iraq alone. While most western mainstream estimates put the number of Iraqi civilians killed at somewhere between 100,000 and 165,000, even they are forced to admit that the number may actually be closer to one million when those who died indirectly because of the war are factored in.

Now, keeping in mind that the number of casualties in the majority of the 76 countries that America's War on Terror has spread to is much lower, just

happened, they haven't learnt from the events of 9/11 either—to not intervene in other countries in order to avoid such terrible consequences later on. And while it is ordinary people that suffer from these consequences, arms manufacturers and war contractors continue to make windfall profits as poverty, inequality and starvation rage across our war-torn planet.

As even American military experts have had to concede, IS would most likely never have come into being if it wasn't for the Iraq invasion. Thus, all of these "costs" are simply a blowback for America's War on Terror.

Yet, what is often forgotten is that the rise of al-Qaeda and, therefore, the 9/11 attacks themselves were blowbacks for America's funding of the Mujahideen (that eventually turned into al-Qaeda) in Afghanistan to drive out the Soviet Union. And while some may see that as noble, what should also be remembered

Orwellian. As George Orwell wrote way back in 1949, in his book *1984*: "The war is not meant to be won, it is meant to be continuous. Hierarchical society is only possible on the basis of poverty and ignorance...In principle the war effort is always planned to keep society on the brink of starvation. The war is waged by the ruling group against its own subjects and its object is not the victory over either Eurasia or East Asia, but to keep the very structure of society intact."

Considering that, perhaps the only way to achieve what US President



Fire and rescue workers search through the rubble of the World Trade Center in New York on September 13, 2001. PHOTO: BETH A KEISER/AP

try to come up with an estimate of how many have died because of it. At best, it is a futile exercise, and at worst, it is equivalent to the gravest of crimes committed since the end of the Second World War.

Yet, for the most part, the so-called War on Terror is far from over as it continues to terrorise millions of people around the world even today. For example, 10 years after the initial

is that it was US President Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, who had lured the Soviet Union into Afghanistan in the first place, to overstretch itself, as he himself had later admitted in an interview with *Le Nouvel Observateur* in 1998.

What that shows is that just like US policymakers never learned from funding the Mujahideen when 9/11

Donald Trump says he wants to, which is to "Make America great again", is to "Make Orwell fiction again", rather than our everyday reality. And, with that in mind, to end the perpetual state of war that the world has been mired in for 17 long years, because of the War on Terror.

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