

'Counterterrorism is a long and complex process'

Since the horrific Holey Artisan attack on July 1, 2016, Bangladesh has been carrying out intensive operations to destroy the capacities of militant groups operating in the country. To a large extent it has been successful, but much remains to be done in terms of combating the ideology that motivates these terrorists to carry out their heinous acts. So how can militancy be rooted out from society?

The Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has recently taken up some initiatives with funds from UNDP to sensitise stakeholders. The current chief of CTTC unit, Monirul Islam, shares his views on the state of militancy in Bangladesh and how to combat it in an exclusive interview with Shariful Islam and Mohammad Jamil Khan of The Daily Star.

What is the present status of militancy?
Militancy is a global problem. But it also has regional and country-specific ramifications. An incident in one country affects other countries as militancy is a shared ideology.

Due to continuous anti-militancy drives, the organisational strength of militant outfits has been considerably weakened. But after the New Zealand attack, we became concerned because such attacks can trigger revenge among militants. The Sri Lanka attack, which was inspired by those who believe in an extremist ideology, was also very concerning.

Militant activities are based on a toxic ideology and people who hold such beliefs exist in Bangladesh. For this reason, we have to remain alert to prevent any attack as the risk has increased after the New Zealand and Sri Lanka incidents.

What kind of measures is the CTTC unit taking to combat violent extremism in the country?

After the Holey Artisan attack in 2016, what we did is destroy terrorist organisations and their capabilities to carry out attacks. But no specific work has been done on countering extremist ideology or on the terror suspects.

It is not actually an issue of law enforcers. Different stakeholders have important roles to play. Educational institutions, religious scholars, imams, community people, politicians and media have their own roles.

People who are being radicalised need to be identified and families have the prime responsibility to intervene.

We have seen that the youth are the prime targets of terrorist outfits. Morality, social values, culture, sports, patriotism and the spirit of independence work as counter-narratives to terrorism. So, we are trying to inculcate these values in young people by engaging everyone concerned.

Terrorist acts are based on extremist doctrines and it takes time to eradicate militancy. Thus counterterrorism is a long and complex process.

Would you please elaborate on the steps of Preventive Violent Extremism (PVE)?

Before becoming a terrorist, an individual goes through a long process. He/she gets radicalised first and finally engages in acts of terror. If we can identify the vulnerable groups and effectively intervene, then it is possible to bring them back from the stage of radicalisation. Even a radicalised person is not a problem in the cognitive process.

We have so far found that the vulnerable group consists of young people aged between 15 and 30. And we have launched different awareness programmes targeting them so that they do not choose the path of terrorism.

We have also targeted educational institutions where we, along with teachers, are motivating students so that they can help create anti-militancy awareness among themselves.

We also talk to families of terror suspects,



Monirul Islam, the current chief of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

guardians, madrasa students, lawyers, religious leaders, political leaders and media people to involve them in anti-militancy activities and create awareness among the public.

We have set up boards at different points of the capital, where we mention the primary symptoms of being radicalised and what should be done if suspicious behaviour is observed. Besides, we are planning to make docudramas as part of our awareness-building initiative on anti-militancy education.

Do our law enforcers have the appropriate skills to combat militancy now?

The issue of capacity is relative. We think we have all sorts of capabilities to deal with militant outfits. We saw militants' capabilities before and after the July 1 attack and we are equipped to deal with them now.

We conducted a number of anti-militancy drives and were able to successfully conduct the operations without any casualties. They were not able to harm our operational team or cause any causality even after building resistance.

Our capacity of collecting intelligence has been strengthened. Alongside modern technology, hardware and software, officials' knowledge on militancy or terrorism has also increased through training and sharing information with other countries. Analysing all the facts, we think that we are capable to counter terrorism.

Cyberspace has become a haven for militant outfits. Why doesn't the CTTC conduct any sting operation on cyberspace?

Cyberspace has become a major platform for influencing people into adopting militancy. But it would not be wise to block cyberspace. We may not conduct any sting operation directly but we follow people who show an interest in extremist ideologies on cyberspace and then we try to intervene. We bring them out of cyberspace, provide them with counselling and finally

hand them over to their guardians after providing a detailed brief.

We have so far brought back at least 50 people, some of them below 18, to normal life in the last three years and have handed them over to their parents.

The IS has taken responsibility for a number of attacks in Bangladesh. Did you get proof of their direct involvement?

The CTTC is an operational unit. Apart from conducting operations, it also investigates incidents. During the course of an investigation, taking statements—verbal and documented—is a major part. During the investigation process in a number of cases so far, we did not find any IS-directed attacks. The attackers might have adopted the ideology of IS but we did not find any direct organisational link as of yet.

Has any country communicated with Bangladesh with regard to deporting Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs)?

From Bangladesh, only 30 to 40 people left the country to become Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs). We have come to know that some of them were killed. But we have to depend on open sources as it is very difficult to get direct information from there. We have taken necessary steps so that they can be traced at entry points. No one, however, has communicated with us yet regarding deportation of any Bangladeshi who joined as FTF.

Dhaka University's 'nervous nineties'

Reflecting on our aspirations for the historical university on its 98th founding anniversary



RUBAIYA MURSHED

THE University of Dhaka has achieved a lot in these 98 years, and it has played a pivotal role in structuring the country's economy, politics, society and development.

Through the many scholars it has given birth to, the university has made inspiring strides in different fields and has taken academics substantially further from the point it was at almost a century ago.

Yes, we have a lot of successes to celebrate, and I know the celebrations will commence with full power as we reach our 100-year mark soon. Yes, we are very proud. But at the same time, I want to be among the ones thinking ahead—wondering what our achievements should be in the next 98 years and what we have failed to achieve in this century.

While I know that it's important for Dhaka University to increase its quality through teachers engaging in more research, and try to improve its ranking, my first and foremost wish for my university is that it tries harder for its students. By trying harder for its students, I mean for this university to play a pioneering role in bringing back students' love for learning, their zeal for making a difference, their will of dreaming bigger dreams. I want my university to lead the revolution against our education system being a "one-size-fits-all" system. I want us teachers to be able to promote creativity and originality in class—to be able to teach our students to think and not just memorise, to learn and not just attain high CGPAs. And for that to be possible, we need a massive reform in our pedagogy, in our class sizes, in our question patterns, and mainly in our approaches. Getting a job—a "good" job, with a good salary and good social status—will always be a priority for students. But I want Dhaka University to be a platform that will help students find a purpose behind their chase—to help students actually want to chase their dreams, and to dare to dream in the first place. Just as Dhaka University has led monumental movements that have shaped this country's history, it is time for it to lead the revolution of putting an end to the "rat race" our students and teachers are running—a race they are somewhat forced to run.

What I want from Dhaka University in the upcoming decade is that it improves the living conditions for students who

stay in the halls on campus. Yes, there are resource and budget constraints, but our first priority should be allocating our resources for the betterment of our students. I want our university to become more inclusive, for it to be as comfortable for a disabled student as for the rest of us. I believe the glory of our university was built, in large part, on the backs of students in different hardships breaking through barriers to find their own place in the scheme of things: the son of a poverty-stricken rickshaw-puller spending night after night in the library to come first in his class, or the daughter of a farmer taking up three extra tuitions to afford costs of living and study in the

to question the norms and to thrive to challenge the existing standards. As a Dhaka University teacher, I want to be able to ask how we can tailor our education for every single student. I want to think about students' voices being heard and them being seen as human beings, not just CGPAs in Excel spreadsheets.

While I strongly believe that pedagogy is one area in which we need reform, the other area we need to rethink is whether politics—specifically party-based politics—is doing more harm than good and whether the quality of education in our institution is paying the price for it. Politics will probably always be a part

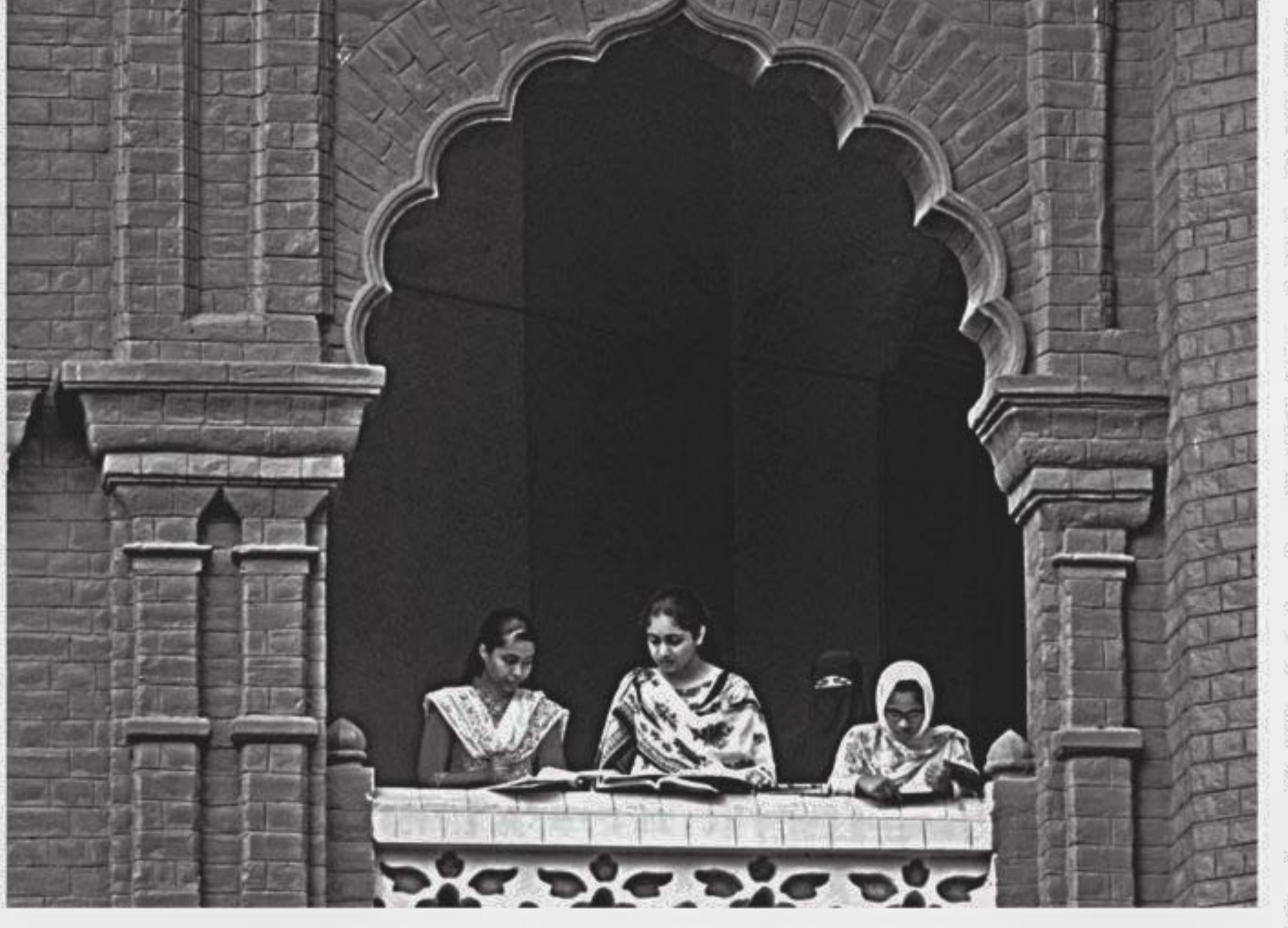
about the answers you would hear if you asked students and teachers what would come first in terms of priority: party or institution? Party or student welfare? Party or country? I do.

So, the question stands: do we need to rethink the role of politics in our academic institutions? When a hundred years go by again, and we are at the point of celebrating the university's 200th anniversary, will we regret not intervening for the sake of our students, their welfare and for the quality of the education we are giving them?

To me, university life, especially at the University of Dhaka, as a student and as a teacher revolves around the three Ps: *porashona*, *prem* and, of course, politics. We can each have our different interpretations of these: for some *prem* in university life has meant finding the person they ended up spending their life with, while for some it meant love for the campus, for an ideology, for sports, for teaching or for learning. Anyone who's been a part of this university has experienced at least one of the Ps in their life. While I believe that the *prem* part is something that will live on forever, it is high time we rethink the *porashona* and politics part of it all.

It all comes down to asking ourselves: what do we want from Dhaka University? As a teacher, an equally important question for me is: what does Dhaka University want from me? Does it want me to think outside the box, to be passionate in striving for change? Or is that more difficult than helpful?

There was a time when I used to think of the answer to this question and feel confused. But now, it takes me back to the memory of sitting in the common room of my department one afternoon with two of my teachers—both well-known for questioning the wrong and supporting the right despite the consequences for themselves. I remember, and will always cherish, one of them looking me in the eyes and telling me that he expects more from me than just accepting everything as it is. He told me to be wary of the chaos all around, but to not be afraid to set my own rules of what is right and what is wrong. He said, "Set your own standards" and till this day, it is that phrase of confidence that keeps my dreams alive that someday, the University of Dhaka will step into higher realms of achievement. All because there are still people who believe in it and fight for it despite the struggles they personally face for their choices.



Candidates taking last-minute preparations before their admission test at Dhaka University. The photo was taken at Curzon Hall. PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

capital. I want our university to retain this glory and to encourage students from all walks of life to shatter the barriers in their paths.

Education should not be a one-size-fits-all system; we should not expect every boy or girl to aim for BCS and excel. Somehow, we must figure out how to create, foster and sustain an education system that will once again create honest, kind-hearted, knowledgeable and wise dreamers and leaders. I want the University of Dhaka to take the lead on this. I would expect nothing less. We need to play a pivotal role in addressing mental health issues too—to make sure the student suicide rates decrease and do not keep increasing like they are.

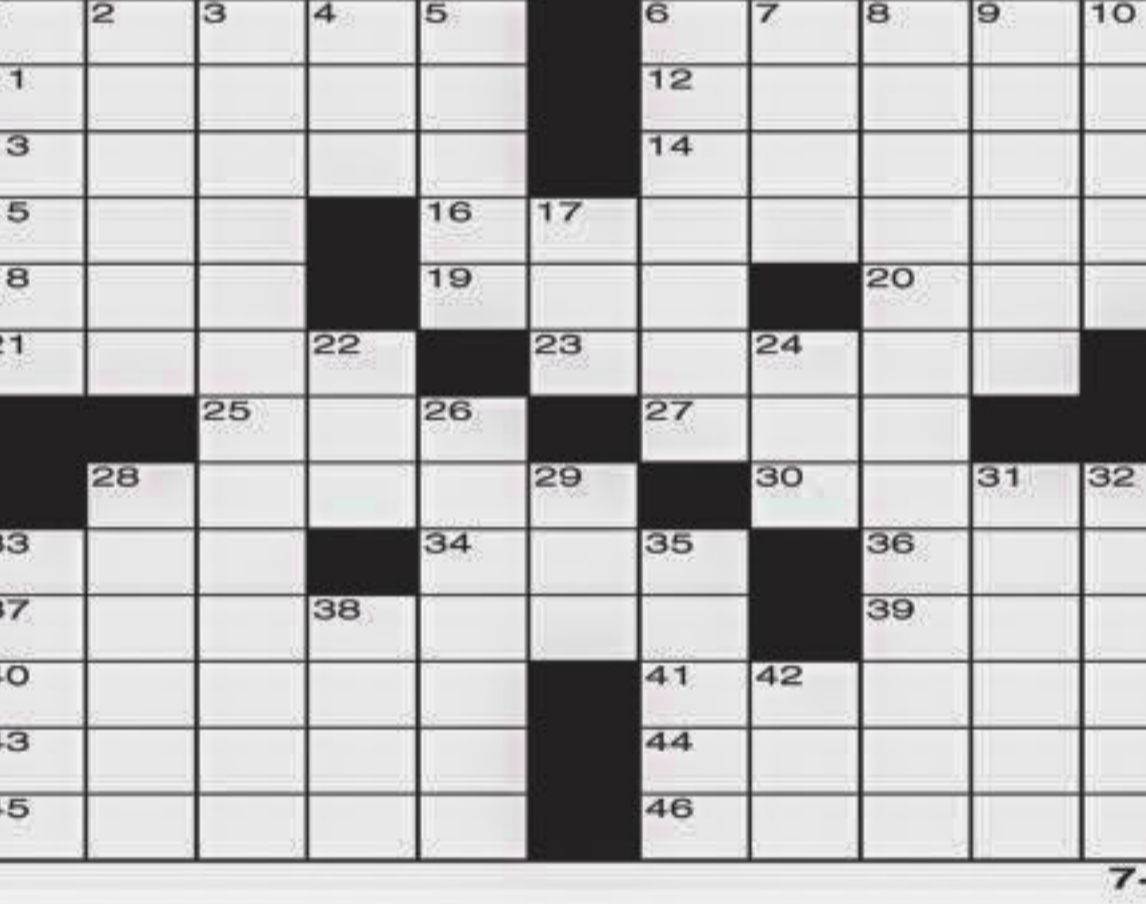
So, what do I want from Dhaka University in the next 98 years? I want it to give us the platform to ask questions—

of our system—whether we want it or not. That's well and fine. My trouble, especially as a new teacher, is with such politics playing the dominant role that it does in our academic institution.

Student politics and teacher politics have always been an intricate part of the framework of Dhaka University and politics is an essential tool of course, but only when it is used for the greater good. I wonder, and I invite anyone reading this to ponder, whether our university politics still upholds the glorifying status that it once did. For our students who are involved in party politics, how is it working out for them? Is party politics complementary to the ethics we try to instil in our students and the lessons we want to teach them? Or does it directly contradict our aspirations to build the dreamers of tomorrow? Do you worry

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| ACROSS | 30 Calendar row | 6 Dresses down |
| 1 Hayride need | 33 Lot sight | 7 Yale students |
| 6 Majestic | 34 Plopped down | 8 "Move it!" |
| 11 Concert setting | 36 Hoppy brew | 9 2015 Paul Rudd movie |
| 12 Kagan of the Supreme Court | 37 Long-standing | 10 Tier |
| 13 Lecturer's aid | 39 Calendar box | 17 Cheering cry |
| 14 Wee | 40 Like villains | 22 Buddy |
| 15 Chiding sound | 41 Take on | 24 Despondent |
| 16 "I'm not kidding" | 43 Way to go | 26 Lives |
| 18 Cigar remnant | 44 March great | 28 Bar |
| 19 Shaggy ox | 45 Pays to play | 29 Texas's Houston |
| 20 Laugh sound | 46 Door sign | 31 Pass |
| 21 Profound | | 32 Shoulder-slung synthesizer |
| 23 Daughter of Leda | DOWN | 33 Hooded snake |
| 25 Simple card game | 1 It's classified | 35 Make fun of |
| 27 Musical note | 2 Stir up | 38 Spot for un chapeau |
| 28 Foot parts | 3 Make known | 42 Oxford VIP |
| | 4 Unified | |
| | 5 Unpleasant | |



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



On this day, Sony offered a new way to listen to music. Although inventor Andreas Pavel came up with the idea for the personal stereo in 1972, Sony developed the Walkman TPS-L2 and began selling it in Japan in 1979.

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