

Take action against the unruly BCL activists at NSTU

Shutting down the hall will not solve the problem

IT is disquieting to learn that at least 15 people, including a hall provost, were injured in the clashes between the two factions of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) in the Shaheed Abdus Salam Hall of Noakhali Science and Technology University (NSTU). As the infighting between the two factions had continued for several days, the university authorities closed down the hall for an indefinite period. Unsurprisingly, when the law enforcers raided the hall, they recovered a large amount of sharp weapons from several rooms of the dorm. The hall is now in a deplorable condition as the furniture and other things of most of the rooms were destroyed by the BCL activists.

Rivalry and clashes between different factions of BCL in our public universities have become so common that the university authorities hardly seem to take the matter seriously. Although such armed fights hamper the regular academic activities of the universities and create panic among the general students, we have not yet heard of any measures taken by the BCL central committee to reign in the rogue elements of their student organisations across the public universities. Needless to say, the university authorities generally play the role of silent spectators in such situations.

The number of sharp weapons recovered from the Abdus Salam Hall of NSTU only proves that the hall has become a den of all kinds of criminal activities. This also indicates that no administrative action had been taken against those possessing the weapons. The NSTU authorities should take action against the BCL activists involved in the clashes. They should hold the students accountable for possessing sharp weapons on campus and should also consider filing cases against them. We also hope that the BCL central committee would take the matter seriously and do the needful in order to prevent the recurrence of clashes among their activists at the university.

More weighbridges won't save damaged roads

Adhering to international global standards will

THE government is set to procure a further 21 weighbridges on key highways to check overloading. The practice of overloading transport-laden lorries is causing a lot of damage to roads and bridges. Experts tell us that the authorities buckled under pressure from transport associations to raise the maximum weight limit on vehicles, over and above global standards, and this is why roads and highways are wearing off much faster than usual. Then of course there is the issue of alleged corruption taking place, where truckers are apparently paying off law enforcers to look the other way when their vehicles are caught to be carrying more weight than what is allowed. The authorities had first tried to enforce the issue of fining overweight trucks in 2016, but backtracked when transport owners and workers damaged the weighbridges in Manikganj and Chattogram.

Instead of taking the marauders to task, authorities caved in and raised the weight limit. Going against internationally-accepted weight limits, we now have the following: two-axle vehicles (six wheels) can carry maximum 22 tons, three-axle vehicles (10 wheels) can carry maximum 30 tons and four-axle vehicles (14 wheels), maximum 40 tons. Global standards set the limits for the three types of vehicles at 15.5, 22 and 32 tons respectively. Is it any wonder then that our roads and highways are wearing off much faster than they are supposed to? According to a survey by roads and highways department (RHD) on 17,452km of roads, 25 percent of the country's roads are in "poor, bad or very bad shape". Precisely what good will so many new weighbridges do except cost the national exchequer Tk 1,630.28 crore? As pointed out by an RHD official, carrying 40 percent more than the approved limit could reduce the lifespan of a road by five years. We are not willing to address the problems of overweight vehicles, nor are we serious about taking to task those officials who are allegedly taking bribes. Authorities would be saving a lot of money and headache over damaged roads if these issues were tackled instead of wasting public money which, given present circumstances, will not deliver desired results.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Road needs immediate repair!

The road connecting the Chattogram Port with Dhaka is in poor shape. Hundreds of cargo vehicles take great risk every day while using this road.

Over the last few years, the condition of the road has deteriorated even further and the road right now is in desperate need of repair.

Because of potholes on some sections of it, vehicles have to use only one side of the road. This is extremely dangerous and the authorities should take steps to repair the road without any further delay.

Zabed Wali, Chattogram



The search for excellence

Why does it elude us?

CYBERNAUTIC RUMINATIONS



HABIBULLAH N KARIM

MORE than two millennia ago, Aristotle, the great thinker and philosopher of the Socratic tradition prophesied, "we are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit." In light of this hypothesis if we ask ourselves, "are we putting in the best we can in everything we do," the answer most of the time is a mediocre "meh". What then has happened to the habit of seeking excellence? Are we tired of living, are we too settled in our comfort zone, are we resigned to the inevitable? Shall we do some Socratic soul searching?

Excellence in the mundane is epitomised by the Japanese "tea

that even if you are a boorish foreigner experiencing it for the first time, you automatically get drawn into the spirit of the ceremony and spontaneously respond deferentially as you pick up a simple tea cup and drink a bitter, unsweetened black tea, believing it's manna from heaven.

The Shakers Christian community of the 19th century in New York State, USA, designed their furniture with care, believing that making something well was in itself, "an act of prayer", and this slavish attention to perfection gave the world some of the most beautiful furniture and artefacts. A simple rocking chair made by the Shakers combined form and function in such captivating manner as to evoke a feeling of "excellence" in any beholder. Some Shakers antique furniture pieces today command prices in tens of thousands of dollars. Such excellent craftsmanship

organising a relief run through some of the worst hit areas of Patuakhali. As we were gathering survival food packs, I was tasked with getting cakes of "gur"—unrefined natural molasses made from sugarcane juice or date tree syrup—from the market. It was late in the afternoon, almost dusk and as I ran up and down the length of the whole bazaar, I couldn't find any store that sold gur cakes in the kind of quantity I was looking for. As I was about to give up and opt for factory-produced refined sugar instead, I caught the glimpse of a white dhuti-clad middle-aged man with naked torso, carrying on a pole two large containers of sweet-smelling "akhai gur" over his shoulders, who stopped in front of his store. I shall never forget the punctuated ritual he performed with the "full devotion of a spirit possessed" as he put his wares down and sat on the matted-fibre floor of the shop in a lotus

Excellence requires "painstaking attention to detail", "unrelenting dedication" and "full devotion of a spirit possessed"—qualities that defy easy description and are even harder to inculcate.



ceremony" where even a simple stroke of the tea stirrer is choreographed. For someone not familiar with this epic cultural ritual from the land of the rising sun, the whole thing may appear too contrived and even absurd. But watch it a few times on YouTube if you are not lucky enough to see this up close in person. And soon you begin to relish the "painstaking attention to detail" in each move, each gesture, so much so

was the result of Shakers artisans giving their heart and soul into making chairs that were "fit for an angel to sit on". Such "unrelenting dedication" is the hard-to-find ingredient that begets excellence as an outcome in any human endeavour.

After cyclone Sidr left a trail of devastation in the southern districts of Bangladesh in 2007, I was part of a group of volunteers from our family—cousins, nephews and nieces—

position. Finally, he opened his eyes and looked at me with his hands held close together in the Hindu welcome sign, while I looked on in amazement at his perfectly symmetrical posture and arrangement of the containers on either side. The spartan beauty of the shopkeepers opening ritual was as close to perfection as the hemispheric cakes of gur I picked up.

Thus excellence requires "painstaking

attention to detail", "unrelenting dedication" and "full devotion of a spirit possessed"—qualities that defy easy description and are even harder to inculcate. How are we then to attain excellence in everything we do? Do we become rule-obeying monotonous worker ants in the bigger scheme of things? If not then, how do we find the energy and motivation to work with spiritual devotion?

To answer these questions, one must sincerely probe his or her purpose in life. If a clear-cut purpose eludes some of us, then we must continue to try to find perfection in the form and substance of our work. Oftentimes we discover ourselves in our work and it helps build our character in the process. A couple of months back, the founder chairman of India's mega IT services firm, Infosys, was in Dhaka as the keynote speaker at *The Daily Star Business Awards*. On a side meeting with a handful of ICT entrepreneurs and executives, the legendary IT entrepreneur emphasised on "competency, character and commitment" in achieving excellence as a professional. These three C's have to be imbued with the three D's (details, dedication and devotion) expounded earlier to attain the singular E for Excellence. Therefore, in an Einsteinian mathematical elegance I declare that E=3C(3D)! Q.E.D.

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GLOBAL CLIMATE WEEK

A clarion call to address climate emergency

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

THIS month, from September 20 to 27, the world will observe a Global Climate Week with events taking place all over the world. The key events will take place in New York, USA around the Global Climate Action Summit called by the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

A major focus of this year's climate week is to change the narrative from simply talking about the "climate change problem" to talking about "actions to tackle the climate emergency." The other change is the emphasis on the role of youth in tackling this emergency.

Hence, the week will start on Friday, September 20 with schoolchildren from the FridaysforFuture movement holding climate action strikes all around the world, including in Bangladesh. The 16-year-old Swedish teenager, Greta Thunberg, who started this global movement of schoolchildren, has travelled by sailboat (as she refuses to fly) from Sweden to New York and will lead the march there on September 20. I am also planning to join her along with many colleagues from Bangladesh.

Then on September 21, following an invitation by the UN secretary-general, Greta and other youths will hold a day-long Youth Action Day at the UN in New York, which will be again mirrored around the world, including

in Bangladesh, with similar youth-led actions.

Then on September 23, there will be the Climate Action Summit at the UN which will be attended by world leaders including Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina from Bangladesh as well as others, mayors from different cities, NGOs and private-sector organisations. The

climate action week is to enhance resilience of all countries, especially the most vulnerable developing countries such as Bangladesh. So, on September 22, there will be a day-long "Resilience Day" event in which the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) will be organising a session on capacity building

induced climate change. Hence, the need to tackle these impacts has become an emergency which requires global action by everyone, not just leaders of governments.

Another major change we are seeing is that certain groups are actively trying to undermine the efforts of those who wish to take actions. Such groups, including



PHOTO: AFP/PATRIK STOLLARZ

The overall purpose of this major series of global events is to highlight the fact that climate change has already moved from being primarily about what will happen in the future to what is already happening now.

UN secretary-general has invited those taking action only and he has asked everyone to come up with a "plan, not a speech". This will be the major event of the week and is aimed to redirect attention to taking climate action and not just talking about it.

On September 24, the secretary-general will receive the flagship report of the Global Commission on Adaptation (GCA), which is co-chaired by Ban Ki-moon, Bill Gates and Kristalina Georgieva (from World Bank). The GCA has been supported by the prime minister of Bangladesh who hosted a meeting of the commissioners in Dhaka in July. One of the commissioners is Dr Musa from BRAC who will attend this meeting.

One of the themes of the global

for resilience in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

Finally, on September 27, there will be another march led by Greta Thunberg to reflect and highlight the outcomes of the entire week. Newspapers as well as TV and radio stations around the world have signed up to cover these events both from New York and their own countries during the entire week.

The overall purpose of this major series of global events is to highlight the fact that climate change has already moved from being primarily about what will happen in the future to what is already happening now, from fires in the Amazon rainforest to hurricane Dorian in the Atlantic Ocean to floods in Bangladesh—all are becoming much more severe than normal due to human-

the fossil fuel companies, are no longer just climate-change deniers but have now become climate criminals, who are committing crimes against humanity and will need to be confronted and no longer simply talked to.

This is the logic of the Extinction Rebellion groups in many countries who have been taking direct actions on the streets of towns in the UK and other countries around the world.

It is, therefore, time for Bangladesh to call for treating the climate change issue as a climate emergency. The British parliament has done so recently; perhaps the parliament in Bangladesh could follow their lead?

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