

Why the delay in deradicalisation programmes?

There’s no room for complacency when it comes to militancy

SIX years after the gruesome terror attack on Holy Artisan Bakery in Dhaka, the Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of police says it will finally start the process of deradicalising militants inside prisons from this month. While it is no doubt a laudable initiative that experts have been suggesting for over a decade, we cannot help but ask why there has been such a long delay in implementing the project to begin with, and whether the delay is emblematic of a lack of political will among the stakeholders involved to ensure its effectiveness.

Security experts have long suggested that the authorities adopt a seamless “hard and soft” approach towards tackling militancy. While we have noted the success of hard-line approaches to militancy, deradicalisation programmes and sociopolitical campaigns against militancy have never been treated with the same urgency, despite repeated warnings from experts that without the latter, the success of the former may, in fact, be short-lived and unsustainable. With the mass arrests of militants after the Holy Artisan attack, it was all the more urgent that the deradicalisation programme be fast-tracked to ensure that the overcrowded jails – where it is next to impossible to isolate the militants from the general inmates or from each other – did not become hotbeds of radicalisation. We have seen disturbing examples of less militant arrestees becoming more militant in jail, with the premises being used for recruitment and planning. The prospect of this happening across prisons in Bangladesh is distressing, to say the least.

It is imperative that extremists, particularly those who are only in the initial phases of militancy, are engaged in a sensitive manner to ensure their subsequent rehabilitation. In that vein, the CTTC unit is expected to work alongside social, clinical and educational psychologists, religious clerics and counterterrorism experts to start deradicalising jailed militants. According to reports, the preparation of an action plan to appoint experts is at the final stage.

A deradicalisation programme for prisons has been in the talks for over a decade. What we fail to understand is why it has taken so long for the authorities to initiate and implement this much-needed project. Even now, the initiative seems to be progressing at a debilitatingly slow rate, risking the hard-earned gains made over the past few years in checking militancy.

We urge the authorities not to let their seeming success in addressing extremism make them complacent. Mass political campaigns, promised after each terrorist attack, have unfortunately fallen by the wayside. The militants, we fear, have not been so complacent. The government must revisit its deradicalisation programmes and initiate a comprehensive anti-militancy sociopolitical campaign across Bangladesh that addresses the root causes that drive people, especially the vulnerable, to extremism and militancy.

BRTC shouldn’t bow down to Shariatpur

transport owners

Conditions imposed on state-run agency are unreasonable, unacceptable

WE are surprised to learn about the conditions being imposed on government buses under Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) to ply the Dhaka-Shariatpur route via Padma Bridge. Reportedly, a syndicate of bus owners and workers in Shariatpur prevented BRTC buses from plying the route after the bridge opened to traffic on June 26, claiming that BRTC did not coordinate with them. Later, at a meeting of the regional transport committee, it was decided that the state-run agency can run a maximum of six buses and that those cannot stop for passengers in the district town. Needless to say, such unreasonable conditions go against the interest of passengers. This is also an example of how the transport owners’ associations rule the sector while the BRTC almost always gives in to their pressures.

While Shariatpur’s private bus owners succeeded in getting nearly all BRTC buses off the streets, they have not yet done all the necessary work to run their own on the route. Reportedly, among the three private bus companies that have started operations, one does not have any route permit. Currently, some 15 such buses are plying the route via Padma Bridge despite having no legal permits. This is yet another example of the indifference of transport owners to rules and regulations.

The logic that private bus owners have used is that they counted losses for years and now that the newly opened route have created opportunities for them, all bus companies, including the BRTC, should coordinate with them. While we do not have anything against anyone trying to make profits, we just hope it will be done legitimately and that they will not use their influence to control the sector. We have seen how these companies and associations have opposed the many important sections of the Road Transport Act, 2018. It is because of their opposition and constant lobbying that the law has still not been fully implemented. But like any business company, they are bound to follow rules and thus should stop creating anarchy in the sector.

We also think that the BRTC should not bow down to pressures from such companies, however powerful. As a state-run agency, it is liable to the people only. It has the power to decide how many buses it would run on this new route and from where they will take passengers. More BRTC buses mean more people having safe and reasonably low-cost options to commute from Shariatpur to Dhaka and vice versa. People should not be deprived of that service.

In search of respect



BLOWIN’ IN THE WIND

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IN a popular TV ad, a jet set businessman yells at an airport steward, “Do you know who I am?” The steward takes a sip of her tea and announces, “Ladies and gentlemen, here’s someone who doesn’t know who he is. Can anyone help?” The hot-air balloon of authority with which the passenger wanted to garner respect gets deflated by the steward’s sharp wit. The crowd laughs; the man soon loses his face and disappears. The message is simple: respect is not a one-way street. If one expects respect to pay dividends, then one must invest in a social relational calculus.

The man in suit demanded preferential treatment. In a bygone era, a branded suit, watch or a peg of whiskey would have conjured respect and made him “special.” In a bygone era, professional markers like the chalk and duster of a teacher, the wig of a judge, the apron of a doctor or the pen of a journalist would have garnered respect. The respect dynamics is changing in tandem with the ever-evolving society.

Is it good or bad? Rather, the question is: What is good? Being respectful is good, while the absence of respect for others is bad. A man cannot simply approach someone in a threatening voice to demand service. There are norms and etiquettes. Respect is a means to an end. For instance, teachers earn their respect through years of dedication to their studies and students and after fulfilment of other social concerns related to their profession. Then again, a novice teacher earns respect as an end in itself by joining the legacy of moral underpinnings associated with his profession.

The recent spate of attacks on teachers by individual students or certain groups made many of us revisit the very notion of respect for teachers. True to its Latin root, *respicere*, the word “respect” literally wants us “to look back at.” While reflecting on the attacks, most think that we have regressed from this idealist state where a teacher was once revered. A teacher beaten to death with a cricket stamp by an aggrieved student in front of his students and colleagues is the nadir of morality. A teacher being forced to wear a garland of shoes allegedly for disciplining his students is a sign of decadence. A teacher assaulted before being thrown into jail for discussing evolution in class is

VISUAL: STAR

The attack on teachers is a criminal act, and it should be treated as such. But I do not see why we should make it profession-specific. I do insist on introducing mutual respect as an institutional norm not only in education, but also in other sectors. Respect needs to be cultured as a desired and valued principle. It needs to be promoted as something that entails a relational appreciation from those ‘others.’

a sign of regression.

Most opinion pieces and vlogs share a view that teaching is a “respectable” profession. As an educator, it pampers my ego to see many even quoting Kader Newaz’s poem, in which the Emperor of Delhi Alamgir chided his son for not scrubbing the feet of his teacher with his own hand. Some even cited the anecdotal references to show the importance

student pool to behave like “Emperor Alamgir’s son” will not yield any result, especially if we keep on superimposing our values on theirs. We need to remember that we are dealing with the first generation of students who have not known a world without the internet. They know that Google knows a lot more than their human teachers. They do not need to rely on a teacher or ascribe her or him



Bangabandhu and his daughter had given to their respective teachers. The sad reality is that, when it comes to career choices, teaching does not top the list. I think explaining the attack on teachers as a sign of moral degradation involves a false premise that paints a rosy picture of teaching and learning. The myth of teaching as a noble profession needs to be dispelled if we are to diagnose the social ills responsible for the attack on teachers.

By a strange coincidence, the victims in most of these recent cases belong to the minority sect. This gives rise to further speculations and suspicions. Some focus on the religious identities of the victims to detect a systematic pattern to distrust the moralist position that pits the teachers against their students. The general sentiment of the commentators includes the waning respect towards teachers and elders in general, the lack of “proper” and ethical education in our young adults. The list skateboards to touch cultural anthropology on one rim and political economy on the other.

Since the perpetrators are all young adults, it will perhaps be useful to focus more on the intragroup dynamics. The tendency to explain the problem from our worldview in which we expect our current

with a power position like their previous generation.

A recent survey by Stanford University discerns the major traits of the current generation. This is the generation that believes in instant gratification and expects praise for everything. They are not interested in following the footsteps of their predecessors as they believe that they alone understand the complexity of their own lives and situation. They are not interested in criticism or being disciplined for their wrongs. They believe that nobody is special. As a father of a millennial, I know how we do a disservice to the young ones by comparing the world in which we grew up to remind them of the way they should behave.

The attack on teachers is a criminal act, and it should be treated as such. But I do not see why we should make it profession-specific. I do insist on introducing mutual respect as an institutional norm not only in education, but also in other sectors. Respect needs to be cultured as a desired and valued principle. It needs to be promoted as something that entails a relational appreciation from those “others.” Instead of pitting teachers against students, we need to work on intragroup dynamics, if we really want to see changes and earn mutual respect.

Do we need wider roads in Dhaka?

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AIMAN ELAHI

WE are accustomed to having fully developed roads in Dhaka only after all the buildings in an area have been constructed – whereas in developed nations, the roads are built first. In the unplanned areas of our capital city, roads are barely available, and most are branching out in haphazard directions. Some private residential areas leave road construction for last, to prevent damage to them by heavy trucks hauling construction materials. The roads in these areas see diminished widths once they are fully constructed, either due to the placement of footpaths or due to the lack of walkways for pedestrians. Even then, these residential areas are planned with the approval of the Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk), according to the private housing rule. These areas usually pose fewer risks in terms of fire rescue, which requires a mandatory 20-foot width for fire rescue vehicles to pass through and conduct their operations smoothly and efficiently.

Authorities and planners often overlook fire rescue while constructing roads. They assume that smaller vehicles and modern equipment by the Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence (BFSCD) could be used to ply roads which are less than 20 feet in width. But firefighters on the ground say that such small vehicles and hose pumps are only efficient for small fires. In addition, the recommendation of using hose pumps for roads that are inaccessible to fire trucks is not an option firefighters favour. It is extremely difficult to carry these hoses and is often very difficult to find a water source for them, too.

Although firefighting is difficult under narrow road conditions, it is not impossible. But reaching the point of accident on time is the greatest challenge. There are mainly two reasons why firefighting becomes challenging in areas



Repair work on a Dhaka road has hardly left any space for people to walk. This is a common scenario in the capital city.

FILE PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

According to the GIS mapping presented in the Detailed Area Plan (2016-2035) for Dhaka metropolitan region, about 50 percent of the roads in Dhaka are less than 20 feet wide. The other half of the capital, which has roads wider than 20 feet or more, faces capacity loss due to factors such as traffic congestion, road construction work, parking on the streets, waste disposal, etc. Even during the monsoon months, clogged drains or inadequate drainage lead to urban flooding, which sinks roads.

These factors, when addressed individually, could be solved through coordinated planning and project implementations. Bringing together all government entities related to road planning and infrastructure, such as Dhaka Wasa, Rajuk and the city corporations, all under the same roof would provide more integrated output. Nowadays, we witness Wasa operating on roads for the repair work of their lines while Titas Gas, instead of coordinating with the former, cuts open the same road again for their own repair work. This

results in narrow and unusable roads due to the endless train of in-progress construction work.

Although approvals are required from the city corporations to conduct construction work on the roads, the process takes time and often cannot meet the demand for the amount of repair work that is needed. Even in terms of installation of traffic signals and control of traffic, there seems to be a lack of coordination between the city corporations and the Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP).

In case of on-street parking, planners hardly seem to consider the importance of having dedicated parking spaces in the capital. Buildings dedicated to parking could be a solution. In addition, Dhaka’s solid waste management needs planning so that neighbourhoods do not have to turn into dumping grounds. Often, large garbage disposal bins are placed on street junctions, as leachate contaminates the area surrounding the containers, reducing vital road space. But while parking and garbage disposal areas need land, the Dhaka city authorities seem to be only coming up with proposals that ensure that no land is left for use by the public. A few playgrounds and open spaces do exist in the capital, but they can hardly serve the city’s massive population adequately. Worse, this incapacity of roads is being addressed by planning vertical road expansions, instead of horizontal road widening.

The government’s current transport-oriented development includes MRT lines and subway systems. These could reduce the density of people using roads, but given the size of the population and the increasing number of private car users, it would not be surprising if these alternate means of transportation increase the number of people travelling into Dhaka every day, let alone free up existing roads. But with large decentralisation projects underway, we can expect the central business district of the capital to shift. But will that happen soon enough?

Emergency travel for ambulances and Fire Service needs to be accommodated while planning the urban development of the capital, under the jurisdiction of Dhaka’s two city corporations.