

Badrudoza's Iftar*Hints at leading a civil society initiative*

BADRUDOZA Chowdhury has come out of the shell he had drifted into following his resignation from the Presidency within seven months of assuming that highest office of the state. What's more, he has announced an intent to explore possibilities of galvanising a front or a platform. According to the outlines he laid bare at Saturday's Iftar party, he wishes to do this through consultations with civil society representatives followed by a dialogue with politicians.

The observations the former president made, the concerns he voiced and the fears he expressed about pervasive corruption, lack of rule of law, inefficiency, and overall governmental under-performance are shared by most people. There is, however, nothing new in what he said: all this has been in the newspapers and very much a matter of common knowledge and under constant public discourse. Even his move to mobilise civil society opinion has a ring of familiarity when viewed with a hindsight of Dr. Kamal Hossain or Gen. Osmani's initiatives. The former president has only urged civil society representatives to respond to the situation by advancing their suggestions. He himself has not given any road map.

Yet, Prof. Badrudoza Chowdhury's observations have considerable import. For, these are not only timely, but coming from a veteran politician whose contributions to the BNP in its initial stages have been second to only that of President Ziaur Rahman, they also have a relevance, credibility and force of their own.

What merits special mention is his pointer to an additional power centre whose 'rise people are also questioning'. This is the first articulation of the aberration by any major figure in the country. As such, this matter of public concern should be addressed by the government with all the seriousness it deserves.

We don't want to pre-judge what Prof. Badrudoza's political move is likely to be. In fact, we don't like to be seen as being judgmental at all on the issue. At this stage, we have very little to comment on as to its future impact. But what we would certainly like to assert is that there has been a tremendous amount of disappointment with the major political parties of the country. There is hardly any doubt people want to see political alternatives emerge to the two tested political parties - the BNP and Awami League. Isn't democracy about freedom of choice?

Murder in a hospital*Wasn't it waiting to happen?*

AJUBO League leader, hospitalised with bullet wounds, was finally shot to death in the hospital bed where he was lying following an operation. The killers did not hesitate to enter the hospital and murder the man in front of his relatives and, of course, the doctors and nurses.

The appalling crime has to be taken note of for a number of reasons. There had been an attempt on the life of the victim, but there was nobody to ensure his security. People can very legitimately question the security perception of the law enforcers who could do virtually nothing to save the man, despite his surviving the first attempt on his life. On the same day, the owner of a roadside restaurant was murdered in the city. In this case also, the killers committed the crime in front of the employees of the hotel.

Now, the killing of a man undergoing treatment in a hospital cannot be treated as an ordinary crime. It is a clear indication of the fact that professional killers and extortionists have a free hand and they bother little about the presence of law enforcers. It is also reflection on the government's claim that extra police squads have been deployed in the city to combat crimes in the days before Eid.

One very noticeable aspect of the crimes is that most of them are related to extortionism in some form or the other. So, it becomes obvious that police vigilance during the month of Ramadan, which aims to curb the activities of extortionists, has chinks in the armoury.

The psychological impact of such crimes can be enormous, as people will begin to feel unsafe even in a hospital.

Police must swing into action and arrest the killers before people's confidence in their integrity and ability is further eroded.

'For whom the bell tolls'

M ABDUL HAFIZ

THE flavour of Eid is already in the air. The mood of the folk is that for the celebration. And the time is ready indeed. The dress-rehearsal of the celebration is underway in a series of Iftar extravaganza and brisk Eid shopping -- of course, open only to a fortunate few. Strangely, the charmed circle also includes the clerics of particular hue -- now aligned with ruling alliance -- who in blatant hypocrisy attend at least the fiestas in VIP pandals and posh hotels in defiance of their professed values of siam. Only the well-fed people are fed over and again on these occasions. Because they are the ones to celebrate.

The shopping malls of the city have worn a festive look and are frequented by trendy young men and chic women for their classy collection of brand names. They will once more

get a chance for the brazen display of their profligate lifestyle. Undaunted by prohibitive price tag of over one hundred thousand takas they will not stop short of now-fabled 'Lehenga.' Never ask where the money comes from for the fortunate few and who are they, after all. We, the lesser mortals should only be interested in their being there -- nothing more, nothing less. Why unnecessarily stepping into a forbidden zone where

dory in the country except whatever slur has been smeared on its face by a nagging opposition. But even if the opposition has played its part of "cheap politics on human misery," the ground reality does not conceal the hollowness of the government claims of alleviating people's suffering whether it is with regard to their safety and security or a constitutional right to get the essentials of life at affordable price,

hike which is still rising even the city dwellers find the situation a nightmare. In *monga*-hit northern area a mother lashed by hunger is reported to have sold her own child. People have succumbed to death or disease by filling in stomach with inedible things. Driven by hunger, disease and unemployment the hard-hit people of the area have been herded off towards relatively solvent urban centres to swell the number of

a kind of social equilibrium cutting down the number of super rich and dirt poor is an overwhelming imperative for a much needed balance in the society and the survival of the polity. Unfortunately the thrust of the politics in our country has always been to create distinct classes: patronised and deprived.

Unless universal, the happiness

and merriment. Let the authority gather courage to call spade a spade. Let it unburden its conscience by laying bare the facts. There is no disgrace in admitting that the people are indeed experiencing silent famine in the country and there is still dugger with regards to relief materials. The government's insistence or self-proclaimed 'achievements' and its ability to prolong its rule will not take them anywhere. It will only smear them with ignominy.

Only an honest admission of how the country's teeming millions are today faring in their struggle for bare existence may perhaps open a window of salvation with the people's collective wisdom... It's certainly not the time for claims and counter-claims and for blames and counter-blames. It is solemnly a time for introspection ...

PERSPECTIVES

Only an honest admission of how the country's teeming millions are today faring in their struggle for bare existence may perhaps open a window of salvation with the people's collective wisdom... It's certainly not the time for claims and counter-claims and for blames and counter-blames. It is solemnly a time for introspection ...

things beyond our comprehension can happen? The sky is the only limit where unfettered hedonism is the way of life.

However, at the other end of the spectrum an ever-growing underclass of our society gasps for mere survival and is considered spoiler for the celebration ahead with their ugly appearance. The policy of the establishment also seems to be to sweep all the sleazes and ugliness under the rugs. It does not even recognise the existence of any blackspot in the society. For the establishment, everything is hunky-

The coming celebration has only sharpened their sense of deprivation.

For the teeming millions in the country battered by grinding prices of the essentials of life, the celebration only compounds their problem -- the problem of kindling smiles on the face of their near and dear ones while confronting the most basic problem of getting their both ends meet. Any celebration is but a cruel joke in a country steeped in thousand miseries and particularly at a time when near-famine condition stalks the northern districts of the country. Lashed by an unprecedented price

destitutes there. In the meantime, terror, extortion and lawlessness rule the roost in this country. What's left with the people to really celebrate?

The socio-economic disparity is nothing new in this country. In an inherited socio-economic system from our colonial rulers we lived with such disparities for ages. Although all political movements in this country were launched, among other things, to bridge up the gap between rich and poor as much possible, the gap only widened. Yet we seldom yearned for a doctrinaire equality; neither was that possible even in socialist system. But

on Eid or any other occasion can hardly get in itself. It is something to be shared with as many as possible. Or else even the fortunate will not be spared of the compunction that results from monopolised happiness. They will be haunted in their sub-conscious by the human beings reduced to a bundle of bones by hunger, those sunken eyes and jaundiced face they see around them. With those images haunting one it is difficult to go merry-making even during the Eid without certain qualm.

It is pointless to cover festering wounds of our society with sophistry

They even became more attractive with their relatively less formal structure, easier access, and cost-free education. Their call to serve the cause of religion would make inroads into the heart and minds of rural millions. There is no need for further analysis to draw a parallel of the Pakistan experience to Bangladesh. Situations are similar in many respects. We must have the will to recognise the potentiality of exploitation of these institutions by politically motivated organisations for lethal purposes. In Pakistan, they have recognised it.

Most Madrassas in Bangladesh are still way removed from becoming launching pads of religious militants. But Pakistan experience presents a unique example of how things can go wrong if the religious education system is not monitored properly. There have to be effective ways to regulate flow of funds, monitor syllabus, and to control spread of hatred and deleterious politics from these institutions. To prevent Pakistan experience, several actions are needed. One, recognition at all levels, particularly at the top, that an unmonitored and unregulated religious education system has the potential of breeding radicals. Two, institutions and organisations that promote terrorism or militancy need to be identified, and isolated. Three, strong deterrent measures need to be taken against any sign of militancy or bigotry in the name of religion. It is never too late to take actions.

Ziauddin M. Choudhury, a former Civil Servant in Bangladesh, works for an international organisation in the US.

Tackling religious militancy: Pakistan experience

ZIAUDDIN M. CHOUDHURY

THE Government of Pakistan has recently come down with a heavy hand on several of the country's religious organisations on charges of breeding terrorism in the name of religion. The offices and several hundred educational institutions or Madrassas, run by these organisations have been sealed, banned and the organisations themselves outlawed. The Pakistani agency in charge of the operation claimed that the organisations were extremist outfits; in the name of religious education the seminaries run by them were busy producing militants. It is ironic that a decade ago a different government agency of the same country was itself helping some of these organisations to produce the very elements that the government is now trying to snuff. But that is a different story. Important thing is that the government of Pakistan has awakened to combat the breeding grounds of religious militancy and the threat it poses to the country's political stability.

Not too long ago in Bangladesh police had discovered explosives and other items unconnected to "religion" in several Madrassas in the country. I have also seen news reports very recently associating Madrassas run by some religious organisations with training of militants. I am not aware if these reports are getting the attention of the quarters that need to be mindful of these activities, and be wary of their consequences to the government, and the country at large -- not to speak of the government's nowacting.

I do not know if actions would be taken in our country to identify and isolate religious organisations that

also possible that we are still at denial and are continuing to delude ourselves that a "moderate" country such as ours does not have any extremist groups among us. May be we do not want to find out if there is a tumor in our body politic for fear that it will tarnish our image of good health; for fear of the surgery that we may need to remove the tumor.

subscribe to the principles of the types in Pakistan. The sole objectives of these institutions are to enlist and train impressionable youths for religious militancy with a long-term view of destabilising the country and ushering in government of their choice -- one run by religious bigots that we saw in Afghanistan. If we think that we are nowhere near Pakistan was or is now,

Madrassas were set up in the Abbasid period (Golden Age of Islam) for pursuit of rational sciences, and that *Ijtihad* or independent reasoning was a special feature of these institutions. With demise of Muslim ascendancy in science and literature, and rise of orthodox Islam the road of *Ijtihad* was closed. The radical trends gave birth to religious schools founded on

these institutions are called Quomi Madrassas. Modern sciences are not taught. The preferred languages are Arabic, Persian and Urdu. In addition, many of these Madrassas teach Islamic behaviour as the only accepted form of conduct for a Muslim. This finally led to indoctrination of the students, particularly in Pakistan, against western culture, and western

teachings exclusively focused on Koranic teachings. In the subcontinent, the impact was different. The Madrassa system here took upon itself opposing the western culture and education imposed by the British. The British tried and imposed some changes in the curricula through government sponsored Madrassas; but the vast majority of the seminaries were guided by the syllabus created in the seminary at Deoband, India, an institution started in 1867 that continues to influence most Madrassas in the subcontinent even today.

The syllabus promoted by Deoband made Koran and Hadith the focal points of learning, with emphasis on proper understanding of the tenets of Islam including Shariah laws. Majority of the private Madrassas in Pakistan and Bangladesh today follow the Deoband syllabus (in Bangladesh

in where the secular system failed.

According to analysts the main reason why there was enormous growth of religious schools or Madrassas in Pakistan was the failure of the government to provide enough secular schools to accommodate a fast

growing population. Madrassas filled

in the

teachings exclusively focused on

Koranic teachings. In the subcontinent, the impact was different. The Madrassa system here took upon itself opposing the western culture and education imposed by the British. The British tried and imposed some changes in the curricula through government sponsored Madrassas; but the vast majority of the seminaries were guided by the syllabus created in the seminary at Deoband, India, an institution started in 1867 that continues to influence most Madrassas in the subcontinent even today.

The syllabus promoted by Deoband made Koran and Hadith the focal points of learning, with emphasis on proper understanding of the tenets of Islam including Shariah laws. Majority of the private Madrassas in Pakistan and Bangladesh today follow the Deoband syllabus (in Bangladesh

in where the secular system failed.

According to analysts the main

reason why there was enormous

growth of religious schools or

Madrassas in Pakistan was the failure

of the government to provide enough

secular schools to accommodate a fast

growing population. Madrassas filled

in the

teachings exclusively focused on

Koranic teachings. In the subcontinent, the impact was different. The Madrassa system here took upon itself opposing the western culture and education imposed by the British. The British tried and imposed some changes in the curricula through government sponsored Madrassas; but the vast majority of the seminaries were guided by the syllabus created in the seminary at Deoband, India, an institution started in 1867 that continues to influence most Madrassas in the subcontinent even today.

The syllabus promoted by Deoband made Koran and Hadith the focal points of learning, with emphasis on proper understanding of the tenets of Islam including Shariah laws. Majority of the private Madrassas in Pakistan and Bangladesh today follow the Deoband syllabus (in Bangladesh

in where the secular system failed.

According to analysts the main

reason why there was enormous

growth of religious schools or

Madrassas in Pakistan was the failure

of the government to provide enough

secular schools to accommodate a fast

growing population. Madrassas filled

in the

teachings exclusively focused on

Koranic teachings. In the subcontinent, the impact was different. The Madrassa system here took upon itself opposing the western culture and education imposed by the British. The British tried and imposed some changes in the curricula through government sponsored Madrassas; but the vast majority of the seminaries were guided by the syllabus created in the seminary at Deoband, India, an institution started in 1867 that continues to influence most Madrassas in the subcontinent even today.

The syllabus promoted by Deoband made Koran and Hadith the focal points of learning, with emphasis on proper understanding of the tenets of Islam including Shariah laws. Majority of the private Madrassas in Pakistan and Bangladesh today follow the Deoband syllabus (in Bangladesh

in where the secular system failed.

According to analysts the main

reason why there was enormous

growth of religious schools or

Madrassas in Pakistan was the failure

of the government to provide enough

secular schools to accommodate a fast

growing population. Madrassas filled

in the

teachings exclusively focused on

Koranic teachings. In the subcontinent, the impact was different. The Madrassa system here took upon itself opposing the western culture and education imposed by the British. The British tried and imposed some changes in the curricula through government sponsored Madrassas; but the vast majority of the seminaries were guided by the syllabus created in the seminary at Deoband, India, an institution started in 1867 that continues to influence most Madrassas in the subcontinent even today.

The syllabus promoted by Deoband made Koran and Hadith the focal points of learning, with emphasis on proper understanding of the tenets of Islam including Shariah laws. Majority of the private Madrassas in Pakistan and Bangladesh today follow the Deoband syllabus (in Bangladesh

in where the secular system failed.

According to analysts the main

reason why there was enormous

growth of religious schools or

Madrassas in Pakistan was the failure

of the government to provide enough

secular schools to accommodate a fast

growing population. Madrassas filled

in the

teachings exclusively focused on

Koranic teachings