

Ramna bomb blast charge sheet

Now the legal process must move fast

At long last, after seven and a half years of the Ramna Batamul incident, charges have been formally pressed against the alleged perpetrators. We feel, however, that it has come several years too late, but nevertheless take the news with a sigh of relief.

That said, we cannot but express our anguish at the fact that during the past regime no headway was made in the case whatsoever, perhaps at the behest of certain interested quarters. It was an example of providing political cover to extremists, with very little regard for the security of the country. The worrisome aspect is that, of the twenty-two accused and fourteen charge sheeted, all but six are at large.

It may be worthwhile to take note of the fact that of those charge sheeted in this case, the six under custody have all confessed to participating in the August 21, 2004 bomb attack on the AL meeting. Perhaps the mastermind in both the cases was the same person. Insofar as investigations have revealed, the supplier of the lethal weapons for the Batamul and August 21 grenade attacks happens to be one and the same person. And he also happens to be the brother of a BNP high up found complicit in the August 21 grenade attack. It is our belief that had the Batamul investigation been allowed to take its due course, the grenade attack on the AL leadership might never have taken place at all.

The nation has had to pay a heavy price for such acts of abetment, most of it in the form of enhanced militant activity, since then. Apart from being described as "hotbed of Islamic terrorism" to a "new Afghanistan," which did great damage to our image as a democratic and tolerant society, the country has seen a growth of an intolerant group that has resorted to misinterpreting religious teachings to perpetrate acts that aim at dividing the nation and fracturing our social integrity.

Let it be understood that extremists and terrorists belong to no religion or political party. These elements cannot be wished away and must be dealt with firmly. The only way to expose them and their sponsors, and bring them to book, is to complete the investigations of the bombings and other militant attacks since 1999, and allow the legal process to move in an unhindered manner.

Attack on 'Balaka'

Vandalism in the name of religion is doubly reprehensible

It is no doubt a worrying sign that obscurantism is threatening to undermine our cultural identity and heritage. The sculpture 'Balaka,' an object of innocuous beauty, has come under attack by the members of a religious outfit called Anjuman-e-Al-Bayinat.

The attack is not the first of its kind-- the memories of Lalan's statue being brought down are still fresh in our minds. And there is reason to believe that a concerted move is on to demonize whatever fails to meet the standards and norms set by the fanatics in the sacred domain of religion. It amounts to a perverted interpretation of Islam -- idolatry being mixed up with work of art having great aesthetic value and nothing to do with religion. Such attempts at exploitation people's religious sentiments with ulterior motives are manifestly sinister. Fanatics, under the highly erroneous notion that they are doing a great service to religion, let their zealotry take hold of them arousing them to violent action to the detriment of social equanimity. Yet, such acts give rise to chaos and confusion and people in general, who have great respect for religion and a soft corner for art and culture too, feel greatly offended. Obviously, cultural freedom is something that they want to retain as a matter of principle.

The police action that followed the damage to Balaka is a routine response to the activities of the organisations like Bayinat. Obviously, the law enforcers treated it as vandalism targeting a public property. But such incidents, now taking place more frequently than ever, need to be prevented through both enforcement of the law and assertion of the tenets of Islam. It is the second part of the job which has to be done properly to convince people that such assaults will be a patent disservice to Islam and could only send wrong signals about our great religion.

The cultural activists have been perfectly within their rights to be demanding punishment to the attackers. However, the best way to deal with the problem is to make sure that it is not repeated. The religious leaders can motivate people to engage in myriad activities that Islam recommends as a way of serving humanity, instead of concentrating on non-issues.

The attackers must not go unpunished. And using religion for attaining individual or organisational goals has to be stopped, once and for all.

Vote for the right, veto for the wrong

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

The voting vibe is beginning to build up to a crescendo with the election goal post not likely to be shifted any more. December 29 it is, and no hanky panky, brother. With a stupendous act of turnaround of the century the magic wand has gone to the possession of those who were once booed and then herded and thrown into dungeons to rot forever.

SHAHNOOR WAHID

THE voting vibe is beginning to build up to a crescendo with the election goal post not likely to be shifted any more. December 29 it is, and no hanky panky, brother. With a stupendous act of turnaround of the century the magic wand has gone to the possession of those who were once booed and then herded and thrown into dungeons to rot forever. They have come out and are now laughing the last laugh. This is the beauty of politics.

Before going deep into the game of politics and the sideshow of voting, let us look at some wise words of some wise men on the subject. The first one by Oliver Wendell Holmes is a rhyme and it goes like this:

"The freeman, casting with unpurchased hand

The vote that shakes the turrets of the land."

Uncanny. It surely reminds us of things back home, doesn't it? Oliver Wendell Holmes was an American writer by passion and a physician by profession. His best-known work is: The Poetical Works of

Oliver Wendell Holmes. In this rhyme, written in the mid 19th century, he talks about "unpurchased" hand. So, when was voting clean and honest? But in the same breath he says, "the vote that shakes the turrets of the land," meaning the vote of an honest man can be powerful enough to rend asunder the bastion of evil power. Ah! Something positive, at last.

Next, we have this wonderful one liner from John F. Kennedy. Here it goes: "The ignorance of one voter in a democracy impairs the security of all."

One voter only! Look what we do collectively! We, a bunch of ignorant voters, troop down to the centre to send crooks to power. I hope voters of a particular constituency in Netrokona will now look back and contemplate the full meaning of these words. Did they do the right thing by voting the "spiky" to power? Please, Netrokona voters, do it for the sake of all of us. Do it for the sake of the nation, brothers. I am sure there are better candidates in your area.

But, as always, wisest of them all, the great Irish humorist George Bernard Shaw gives the most profound observation on

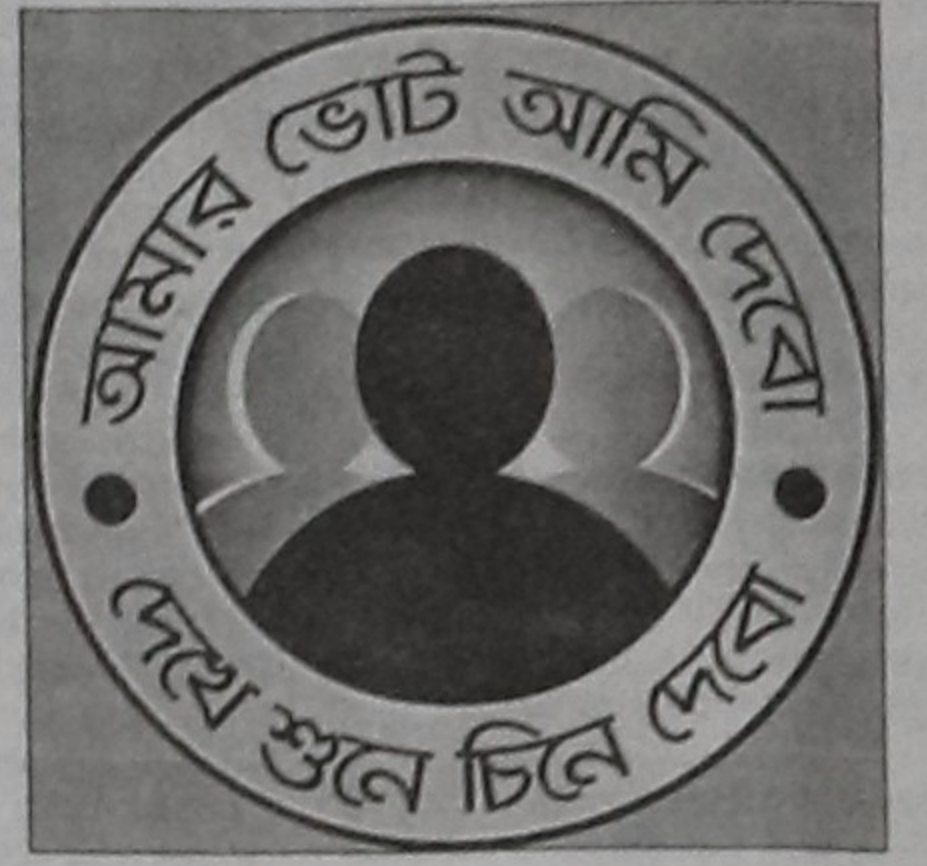
the subject of election and voting. He says:

"Unless the people can choose their leaders and rulers, and can revoke their choice at intervals long enough to test their measures by results, the government will be a tyranny exercised in the interests of whatever classes or castes or mobs or cliques have this choice." No comment.

Well, the tide of voting will soon turn into high tide to sweep us all into an unknown future. This is making many conscious citizens think deep and take initiatives to create awareness amongst the people about the imperatives of casting votes for the right person, rejecting the wrong one. These people are taking time out of their busy schedules to organise roundtables or create innovative communication materials to impart the messages.

I have had the opportunity of attending a small congregation of young and old that was organised by Future Leaders, a forum that talks about and works with young leaders. It was all about the expectations of the new generation from the political government that will come after the election. Some very negative vibes came from some young university students and executives about politics as a whole. For all the wrong things that happened in this country they blamed the politicians. But then again there were others who thought some politicians somewhere have done something good someday for the country.

In that roundtable, Professor Syed Munir Khasru of IBA department (DU) presented some interesting posters and slogans with the help of a projector (an image of one such poster cum slogan is printed with this article). Each slogan is about who to vote for, who not to vote for, how to vote, how to identify the right person to vote for, why we



shouldn't vote for certain people, and so on.

The rhymes, the design, graphics and overall presentation gave the impression that the posters would be powerful tools for making the changes in the mindset of the voters, especially the first-time voters. Everyone present in the roundtable appreciated the endeavour and thanked the professor for his efforts. It is an innovative and effective communication material that he had assisted the films and publication department of the government in developing against many odds. These would be shown through various media all across the country.

You know something, our hope for some good candidates coming to parliament depends largely on the first time voters. Nearly 30 percent of the total voters are young, literate and conscious. They have registered for the first time this year. So, don't let us down, young brothers and sisters. You will know when to vote and when to veto.

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Toothless leaders

BYLINE

Ineffectual leadership is turning a tough nation into a soft state. We should have been world leaders in the war against terrorists, for no nation has more experience. Instead, we are wallowing in the complacent despair of a continual victim.

M.J. AKBAR

DOES it need grief to unite us? Where was Raj Thackeray when anonymous heroes from across the nation saved Mumbai from rabid vultures? Why did he not issue a diktat that he did not want any Bihari or Haryanvi or Malayali commando to save Mumbai.

India belongs to Mumbai since Mumbai belongs to India. The Maharashtra government looked hopelessly helpless before an invasion propelled by Pakistanis and navigated by a local, subversive fifth column.

Perhaps the low moment came around 8.30 on Thursday morning. While flames, gunfire, and chaos mingled with shock, a spokesman for the state government told CNN: "The situation is under control." Yes, if you live in Somalia.

Hidden under grime and neglect, perhaps there is a little Somalia within Mumbai, waiting to burst out and infect the body politic. This neither world is nourished by the "black economy," and has contempt for authority since it feeds the grubby hand of a policeman. Organised crime requires both sophisticated management and corrupt law enforcement agencies.

The underworld does not live in isolation, smuggling is a multi-national enterprise. Once it was gold; today it's drugs. Only the naïve are aghast at the thought that ships from Karachi are landing in Mumbai. Everyday, ships are being loaded in Sindh with street-ready drugs from Afghanistan for the markets of India.

Do the stars of Bollywood, the money shifters of Dalal Street, the celebrities of Mumbai's many hills -- indeed, from the wealth bracket of many of the guests at Taj on Wednesday night -- never ask how their hallucinatory puff has reached them? The Mumbai mafia, with support from the police-politician partnership, has brought this puff to your party -- via Pakistan. And there is a strong Muslim element in the Mumbai mafia. Bereft of either loyalty or morality, it can be easily lured into fantasies of revenge by its contacts in Karachi.

The initial reaction of some Indian Muslims to Mumbai was denial, a manifestation of their fear of retribution by both the state and the people. Some theories coasting on the net were particularly stupid. The paradox of fear is evident in contradictory manifestations: at one level, an urgent desire to find evidence of conspiracy by either the Mossad or Hindutva elements; at another level, to retreat into the comfort zone of familiar folly, like hope for security from the party that has betrayed them most often. The

community will not be able to recognise necessary truths both within and without, unless it can rub fear out of its eyes.

The most significant part of the outrage should not be obscured by the drama of events Hypnotised by the attack, we should not become oblivious of defence. Incompetent governance, both in Mumbai and in Delhi, has defeated us. Facts will take more time to emerge, but perhaps up to 60 men hit nine targets in coordinated waves. This could not have happened without months of planning.

Resources, weapons, rations, money were mobilised; a small army trained across two countries; targets studied, routes finalised, transport organised, sleeper cells put in place. We learn that terrorists may have been living at the Taj for days, ferrying arms into what was surely turned into a war-room.

Men arrived by sea, linked up with compatriots on land and launched multiple attacks. This must have involved hundreds at the planning stage, and the massive infrastructure of government discovered nothing. Where was the police? Where was the Anti-Terrorist Squad? Complacency and politics gave the terrorists more protection than silence or deception could.

Indians are tough. We have fought off Muslim terrorists in Kashmir, Sikh terrorists in Punjab, Christian terrorists in Nagaland, and Hindu terrorists in Assam and across the country (the Naxalites). But ineffectual leadership is turning a tough nation into a soft state. We should have been world leaders in the war against terrorists, for no nation has more experience. Instead, we are wallowing in the complacent despair of a continual victim.

Some three years ago, Dr. Singh told Bush that there were no terrorists among Indian Muslims. Perhaps he was unaware of the 1993 Mumbai bombings. Perhaps he wanted to please two constituencies: Bush, who needed a certificate for his view that democracy was the cure for all evil; and local Muslims, who were not being given jobs but could always be offered the consolation prize of a pat on the back.

Dr. Singh certainly did not fool any terrorists. The Lashkar-e-Taiba might even have interpreted such self-congratulation as a challenge.

I am proud of being an Indian Muslim. Like any Indian, I am angry, frustrated and depressed. I am angry at the rabid dogs of war. I am frustrated by the tone-deaf impotence of government. I am depressed at the damage being done to my India.

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Tackling terror

BOTTOM LINE

There is a qualitative difference between terrorists of the '60s and those of the '90s. Modern terrorist groups have been recruiting members with expertise in fields such as communication, computer programming and engineering.

HARUN UR RASHID

AFTER 62 hours of shooting and carnage, the terror attack that brought Mumbai to a standstill ended as Indian commandos killed the last gunman on November 29. The attacks on November 26 surpassed all other attacks in their intensity, scale, coordination and execution. They occurred in ten places, including in three posh hotels.

26/11 is India's 9/11. Some say that they were attacking symbols of wealth and of India's global ties and power. Luxury hotels were transformed from calm travel destinations to places of terror and death.

Mumbai is the financial and film capital, and the largest seaport of India. Large industrial companies, such as, Reliance and Tata, and state-owned firms like Air India and State Bank of India have headquarters in the city.

Impact on Bangladesh

A sense of insecurity in the region has been created by the Mumbai attack because it may take place in any country, including Bangladesh.

The war on terrorism is a war of "hide and seek." Terrorists are elusive non-state actors, groups without countries or uniforms, and may lie low for years before they act. The principal problem is that terrorism has a global reach.

There is a qualitative difference between terrorists of the '60s and those of the '90s. Modern terrorist groups have been recruiting members with expertise in fields such as communication, computer programming and engineering. They also recruit biologists, chemists and physicists as well to make weapons. The Mumbai attacks demonstrate the operational capabilities of terrorists.

Bangladesh has a porous border with India and terrorists may sneak into Bangladesh to create havoc. Bangladesh has been a victim of terrorism in the past.

In Bangladesh, terrorists are ideological groups with political ambitions. They may include extreme leftwing members and Islamic militants, and have reportedly established connections with criminal gangs, foreign extremists, and smuggling network. They have easy access to lethal arms and weapons and sources of funds are difficult to trace.

According to a report, there are 1027 organised criminal gangs and 12 outlawed groups in Bangladesh -- some of them consisting of militants.

One of the first serious terrorist attacks in the country was on August 21, 2004 by extremist groups on an Awami League rally in Dhaka that was addressed by its chief Sheikh Hasina, who was wounded.

In August 2005, more than 300 explosions took place simultaneously in 50 cities and towns across the country,

including the capital Dhaka. An outlawed Islamic group, Jamatul Mujahideen Bangladesh, reportedly carried out the attacks. Six JMB kingpins, including its leader Shaikh Abdur Rahman, were put on trial and later hanged on March 29, 2007.

The militants suffered a jolt when the six top leaders of JMB were executed. Reports say this execution has not fully uprooted the terror outfit, which is now trying to regroup under the second rung leadership.

In May 2007, bombs went off at railway stations in Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong, causing panic but leaving just one person with minor injuries. Railway officials said leaflets and an inscribed metal plate likely to be linked to the bombings were found at two of the stations.

There are media reports that sleeping cells of terrorists are active in different shapes and forms in many places within Bangladesh. Reportedly some of these groups are also trying to send their volunteers to places like Afghanistan for training. This strategy of sleeping cells has made the job of law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh more difficult.

The deadly Mumbai attack has underscored the need for vigilance against the surreptitious nature of activities of extremists to prevent terrorist attacks. That includes close monitoring of the movement of people near the border, smuggling of illegal weapons, and unauthorised entry of people.

One of the most important aspects of counter-terrorism is the capacity of agencies to identify the infrastructure and network of extremist organisations. Mass awareness of terrorism, media participation, and a partnership between authorities and people need to be established to detect terrorist cells.

Strict vigilance seems to be the answer to counter-terrorism because terrorists live within the community. The best source of intelligence on terrorist cells has tended to come from localities and neighbourhoods.

More importantly, many analysts say that terror feeds on poverty. The president of the 56th General Assembly, Dr. Hang Seung Soo, in 2002 said that rich nations could no longer afford to be "islands of abundance in an ocean of poverty." The consequences, he said, would be the poorest nations becoming the "the breeding ground for violence."

Some may not agree with this, but the bottom line is that global security is inextricably linked with the health of the global economy. Many argue the root causes lie in deprivation, frustration, helplessness and endemic poverty. It is argued that right policies, good governance and participatory democracy may reduce the chance of terrorism in our country.

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