

Unity is the need of the hour

Had both the leaders appeared together, or at least issued a statement together, in their appeal for calm and restraint in the early hours of the conflict, imagine the positive and strong impact it would have had on the affected parties. The beauty of smart politics lies in knowing when to converge and when to diverge.



SYED MUNIR KHASNU



MUNIR UZ ZAMAN/DRINK NEWS

THE whole nation passed through a period of anxiety on February 25 and 26 because of the BDR mutiny. People running for shelter, movement of army, defiance of the BDR jawans -- all captured our minds and attention for 48 hours. Educational institutions were closed, shops and business were mostly closed as well, and normal activities came almost a halt. In other words, the magnitude of the crisis was such that it undoubtedly can be classified as a national crisis demanding a national response based on national unity.

Unfortunately, for the first 36 hours, neither the government nor the opposition felt the need to approach the other to discuss possible ways to solve the problem. The leader of the opposition finally made the laudable offer of assistance to the government in this hour of national crisis. Although by that time the crisis, which the government handled reasonably well, was almost over. However, if the PM could send leaders from the grand alliance to talk to the mutineers, it would not have hurt to invite someone from the opposition to be part of that team.

There are a lot of positive examples. When the Mumbai attack happened,

Congress invited BJP to discuss possible responses to the terrorist attack. The same happened during the attack on the Indian Parliament, when BJP (in power then) invited the Congress, and they took a common position on issues that were too important to be left to partisanship.

If they can act unitedly against external threats, why can't we expect our politicians do the same against internal threats? A bloody mutiny by a paramilitary force and restlessness and anger in another important constituency, i.e. the army, should be important enough to bring the two leaders together to decide how the nation should make its way forward from this crisis.

Had both the leaders appeared together, or at least issued a statement together, in their appeal for calm and restraint in the early hours of the conflict, imagine the positive and strong impact it would have had on the affected parties. The beauty of smart politics lies in knowing when to converge and when to diverge, a beauty from which this beautiful country and its warm-hearted people have been long deprived of.

This tragic incident gives us yet another opportunity for soul-searching as the nation comes into terms with the irreparable loss. BDR and the army are the protectors of our territorial integrity and continuance as an independent and sovereign nation. Given the tragedy that has happened, we will need political acumen and administrative dexterity to ensure that both these institutions continue to function with the same professionalism as before.

It is one of those occasions when we expect both the leaders to come together and collectively lead the nation to the best of their abilities. May Almighty rest all the departed souls in peace and grant strength and patience to their loved ones left behind.

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Obama should talk to Syria now

It may be difficult to make peace with Syria, but it will be all but impossible to make peace in the region without it. President Obama correctly views dialogue as a tool, not a reward. It is time to put the tool to use, and to see what can be built.

RICHARD N. HAASS

OPPORTUNITY and Middle East are rarely mentioned in the same breath, and for good reason. The Middle East is a part of the world in which history is often defined by conflict. A sense of despair grips the region for other reasons, too: it trails Europe, Asia, Latin America and much of Africa by many measures of social progress, including the quality of education, the presence of democratic institutions and the treatment of girls and women.

All the same, there may be an opportunity now -- to make peace between Israel and Syria, two countries that have been in a state of war for more than six decades.

The opportunity exists even though Syria has been a principal supporter of both Hamas and Hizbullah, the two groups that have waged recent conflicts with Israel, and despite the fact that only 18 months ago Israel attacked a Syrian site suspected of being part of a fledgling program to produce nuclear fuel.

This opportunity should not come as a total surprise. Syria and Israel have negotiated partial agreements in the past and have come close to concluding a full peace several times. The basic contours of a deal -- with Israel returning all of the Golan Heights in exchange for diplomatic recognition and formal peace -- are well known and acceptable to both sides, including many conservatives in Israel.

After nearly a decade in power, Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad looks to be strong enough to overcome domestic resistance to making peace with Israel. He may be able to accomplish what his father could not: make the country

whole.

During a recent visit to Damascus, I was told by a senior official that Syria is prepared to forge a separate peace -- a bilateral agreement that would not include a resolution of the Palestinian issue.

Syria also seems prepared to distance itself from Iran. The people I met in Damascus seemed far more interested in building relations with Iraq, a multiethnic Arab country on Syria's border, than in remaining close to the theocratic Shia regime in Tehran.

Israel has long sought peace with Syria. With treaties already in place with both Egypt and Jordan, a peace with Syria would leave Lebanon as the only "confrontation state" among Israel's immediate neighbours.

This would allow Israel to focus on other security challenges -- radical armed groups such as Hamas and Hizbullah, and an Iranian government that sponsors terror and is hard at work producing enriched uranium, the critical component of a nuclear weapon.

Moreover, Israelis are more open to peace with Syria than with the Palestinians. Tens of thousands of Israelis live in the Golan Heights, not hundreds of thousands. The land is far smaller in size than the West Bank and Gaza and is of strategic -- not theological -- value.

Domestic political resistance to giving up the Golan Heights, while considerable, does not begin to compare to the opposition to giving up the Palestinian lands also captured in 1967.

Israel's security could be further buttressed by demilitarising the territory returned to Syria. Technology could provide early-warning systems.

Peacekeepers (possibly American) could be stationed there, much as they are in the Sinai to buttress the peace between Israel and Egypt.

And the Syrian leadership is sufficiently strong that it could live up to security commitments, something the weak and divided Palestinian leadership could not.

There is one other incentive for Israel to compromise: Syria is in a unique position to influence Palestinian politics. Damascus is a base for Hamas, and the Syrians provide the group with support.

It is possible that Syria's desire to normalise relations with the United States and the moderate Arab states -- to enter the World Trade Organization, get out from under US sanctions and gain Arab economic aid -- could lead it to rein in its support for Hamas.

Any accord between Israel and Syria would require a push from the outside. Turkey has been hosting talks between the two countries, but it cannot succeed on its own. The US needs to become a participant.

For much of the administration of George W. Bush, Syria was treated as a defacto member of the Axis of Evil. It was heavily sanctioned. But not talking to Syria has weakened US influence, not the standing of the government in Damascus.

Last week Syria's ambassador to Washington, Imad Moustapha, met with Acting Assistant Secretary of State Jeffrey Feltman. This is a step in the right direction.

It may be difficult to make peace with Syria, but it will be all but impossible to make peace in the region without it. President Obama correctly views dialogue as a tool, not a reward. It is time to put the tool to use, and to see what can be built.

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Modernising criminal justice

The commission should include members of the academia, law enforcement professionals, legal experts, justice communities, and civil society groups. The nation urgently needs a system of law enforcement and justice that will be respectful to due process and human rights, and also highly efficient and effective for the governance of law and order.

SHAHID M. SHAHIDULLAH and HABIBUL HAQUE KHONDKER

ARRESTING rising crime is one of the formidable governance challenges in Bangladesh today. If the present trend of growing violent crimes continues and a generalised fear of crime spreads, governance will be weakened and the economy will be hurt -- eroding the legitimacy of the popularly elected government.

The minister of home affairs recently acknowledged the deterioration of the law and order situation since the upazila elections. Such a candid and honest recognition of the trend suggests that the government is ready to address the problem. The state minister for home affairs too also stated the sociological truism that no society is free of crimes. We will have to live with some crime all the time.

The issue that is vitally important, however, is not just the occurrence of crime but also the nature of the system of crime control and prevention. It is

very likely that different types of violent crimes -- drug, sex, trafficking of women and children, cyber crimes, and terrorism -- will increase in Bangladesh in the coming years because of a growing urban underclass, the increasing pauperisation of the rural poor, and the impact of various global organised criminal groups highly visible in South Asia.

In Bangladesh, we have the institutions of police and courts, but we still lack a modern criminal justice system competent and capable of facing the challenges of the twenty-first century. Our law enforcement agencies are over-worked and overstretched. Our judicial system is overburdened, and our prisons are overcrowded.

It is surprising that a country of 150 million people does not have a single academic institution to educate and train a modern cadre of criminal justice professionals. The police training academies are only for in-service training for law enforcement. Bangladesh does not have a single professional



Moving into the 21st Century.

criminal justice association dedicated to advancing criminal justice research and mobilising criminal justice professionals.

The country lacks a major institution responsible for collecting and analysing crime and criminal justice data to

assess the nature of crime and its trends. The present methods of collection of crime data by different regional metropolitan police departments need to be improved, extended and strengthened.

The recent Executive Committee of

the National Economic Council's (Ecne) decision to set up a National Crime Control and Operation Monitoring Center is definitely a step in the right direction, but it needs to be able to mobilise many of the existing institutions of crime control and prevention -- an effort that needs a cadre of criminal justice professionals to work with law enforcement.

UNDP and other development partners have given grants for modernising our law enforcement. But, because of the non-availability of criminal justice research and criminal justice professionals to work with the policy-makers on the broader issue of criminal justice, many of those initiatives could not bear fruits.

In the area of criminal law, confusions are endemic about where legitimate political protests end and the process of criminal justice begins. Sometimes collective violence and vandalism are overlooked by law enforcement agencies on the pretext of political struggles by different groups. Law does not clearly define, or is not properly applied, to draw the boundaries between criminal violence and legitimate expressions of political rights and grievances.

The recent statement of the prime minister, made in BCL's reunion rally, that students engaging in violence would be punished is highly commendable, but it needs to be translated into law. New laws are needed also in the areas of human trafficking, illegal drug use and posses-

sion, drug trafficking, manufacturing and trafficking of conventional weapons, terrorism and militancy, use of DNA in crime investigation, cyber crimes, hate crimes, and destruction of cultural and historical artefacts.

One of the important tasks before the government today, we believe, is building a modern criminal justice system as a vital component of governance improvement. The government is taking a number of reform initiatives, but they all need to be addressed in the context of reforming the system of criminal justice as a whole.

As a first step, what is urgently needed is the formation of a national commission for reforms in crime control and prevention for the study of the critical issues in crime and justice from a more scientific and systemic perspective. The commission, to be mandated by the Parliament, should include members of the academia, law enforcement professionals, legal experts, justice communities, and civil society groups from across the nation.

The nation urgently needs a system of law enforcement and justice that will be respectful to due process and human rights, and also highly efficient and effective for the governance of law and order.

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The true story of the drop-dead goat



WHICH animal are you? A butterfly, light and free? A lion, strong and majestic? A slug, slimy and repulsive? (Yes, I have someone in mind for that last example, and he knows who he is.) We played this game over dinner at the night market last night. I chose a drop-dead goat as my mascot.

What? You don't know what a drop-dead goat is? It's the world's coolest animal. Order one today. Why not get a flock? Once these catch on, everyone will want one. (If you want to get rich, export these to Japan.)

A drop-dead goat is a small, boney, skinny farm animal. It looks and behaves like any normal goat except for one thing. If you scare it, even mildly, it dies. With the flair of a TV soap actor, it dramatically falls over, its eyes protruding and its four legs stiff, often sticking up into the air in classic rigor mortis position.

(If you do a search for "fainting goat" on www.YouTube.com, you can see videos of them leaping onto their backs after hearing a noise.)

Now a pet that dies at the slightest disturbance may seem to be a bit of a downer. What do you tell your kid when her birthday present theatrically expires? But this creature should really be called the auto-resurrecting goat. Count to ten and it comes right back to life. It gets up and resumes one or other of its two main activities:

Standing in a field eating grass, and, standing in a field. The goats can be

scared to death any number of times and always recover. They are the ultimate reusable product, and they are entirely biodegradable.

A particularly enjoyable pastime is to get a flock together and then run into the field making terrifying threats, such as: "Let's have a Bollywood film festival right here." The whole group will collapse, legs sticking up, eyes lifeless and tongues lolling out of their mouths. It's a bit like France or Italy during World War II. And just like politicians in those countries, the goats clamber back to their feet and energetically start standing around doing nothing again.

A "fainting goat festival" is held every October in Tennessee in the US, where the beasts are known as Scare Goats, Nervous Goats, Fainting Goats and Wooden-Leg Goats.

I chose a drop-dead goat as my inspiration because life hits us all with seemingly mortal blows at regular intervals. You gotta love a creature that just gets up again and gets on with life.

Farmers like them, because when wolves attack, the goats fall over. The wolves miss out on the expensive and succulent sheep / pigs / farmhands nearby because they are busy eating the goats (who are probably reviewing their strategic goals at that moment).

But I do feel a bit sorry for the goats, which farmers have been breeding to be eaten alive. The poor critters appear to have an evolutionary adaption which has not been thought through. (I'm talking about the goats, not the farmers-- actually, maybe I'm talking about the farmers too.)

Regular readers may be reminded of a column I did on the Malaysian Exploding

Ant, an insect that protects itself from harm by detonating itself into tiny fragments.

The wisdom or otherwise of this all really depends on your defini-

tion of harm. You may now fall over.

For more information on the drop dead goat visit our columnist at www.vittachi.com.

