

Initiating enquiry into RU incident

Government should act fast to form probe body as directed by HC

THE Thursday's High Court (HC) rule on the government asking it why it should not form a high-powered enquiry body within eight days to probe the shocking incident of murder and mayhem on the Rajshahi University (RU) campus on Tuesday last is a timely and hands-on move on the part of the judiciary.

While commending and supporting the move, we hope the government will not waste any time to form the enquiry commission in order to get to the root of the chilling incident that left one talented student of the university dead, four maimed in a most barbaric manner and inflicted injuries to 100 others.

The last few days' media reports on the RU incident, its circumstances and genesis are not just revealing. They also imply something very sinister brewing for long, all unbeknown to the public and the government.

Going by the reports, the Tuesday's incident was far from just another sporadic clash between students of two rival groups. To all appearances, it was part of a heinous scheme to occupy the student dormitories using premeditated methods of terrorism and liquidation by a particular student group notorious for its anti-people role during the War of Liberation. The reports went further to show that the particular student front behind the RU violence has been growing under the care and indulgence of a section of the university administration itself. The cadres of the student group and its political patron, the party that opposed the Liberation War, has meanwhile been able to make deep inroads into the teachers' community and the university administration. To cap it all, the role of the topmost administration of RU, including that of its Vice-Chancellor and his close colleagues in the Tuesday's incident has come under serious scrutiny. Worse still, a particular intelligence wing of the government is reported to have a questionable role in recruiting members of the top university administration suspected of shady political connections.

The gravity of the issue, therefore, calls for a thoroughgoing and dispassionate enquiry into the history and circumstances of the gruesome incident. For if immediate steps are not taken to identify the kingpins behind the occasional outbursts of violence and chaos on the campus, effective measures to bring about order and peace there would not be possible.

It is, therefore, imperative that the government needs to strike at the root cause of campus violence. On this score, it should take immediate steps to form a high-powered enquiry commission in earnest in the spirit of the HC directive.

Overseas workers should obey the law

But host countries must also ensure their welfare

THE prime minister's admonition to Bangladeshi workers in Kuwait that they must follow the laws of the country in which they are working and assurance that overseas law breakers could not seek safe haven at home must have gone some way towards reassuring her hosts that she is intent on a mutually advantageous relationship between Bangladesh and Kuwait.

Bangladesh certainly does not want its overseas workers to get a reputation for law breaking, and to the extent that the law breakers are a small minority, they shouldn't threaten to harm the interest of the vast majority of law abiding Bangladeshis working in Kuwait and elsewhere.

Taking steps to ensure that only those with good reputation will be sent abroad and that there will be zero tolerance and no safe haven for illegal activities will in fact ultimately work to the benefit of all Bangladeshi workers, and is to be commended.

However, there is another side to the equation. If Bangladesh agrees to take steps to try to ensure that Bangladeshis in Kuwait do not break the law, then the Kuwaiti government needs to take similar steps to ensure that the rights of Bangladeshi workers remain protected.

Too many Bangladeshi workers are cheated and abused overseas, and it is the duty of the host government to ensure that their rights are respected, that they are treated in a decent and humane manner, and that their living and working conditions are acceptable.

One hopes that it was this understanding that informed the prime minister's admonitions, and that the quid pro quo expected has been communicated clearly to the Kuwaiti government.

Abiding by the law is a two-way street. Of course, Bangladeshis in Kuwait should abide by the law of the land. But, by the same token, the land in which they work and live must also ensure that their rights are respected and their interests protected.

Of disaster preparedness for Dhaka

We have an election coming up for our Dhaka City Corporation. One can only hope that those elected will identify and then address on a priority basis the various needs. An honest internal regulatory body, a bi-partisan approach and non-politicized perspective planning will assist the dynamics.

MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

Exactly to Dhaka in February, 1950, exactly sixty years ago. At that time, Dhaka, as it was then known, was a small town of about one hundred and seventy thousand people. Limited to a large extent to the southern tract bordering the river Buriganga, its outer limit included the Dhaka University campus and the lush green Ramna Park. There was very little motorized vehicular traffic and negligible pollution. There were also designated public toilets in different parts of the city -- Narinda, Wari, Gopibagh, Ganderia, Shamibagh, Islampur, Chawk Bazar and Nawabpur and other facilities that included an effective emergency fire service. There was also steady supply of water in the pipelines and road side hydrants.

The urban situation has not improved over the years. It has deteriorated markedly in terms of facilities available for Dhaka's population of over 16 million. Poor urban planning, flouting of zonal regulations, excessive density in terms of inhabitants and presence of a floating population of over four million have exacerbated conditions for the worse. This has led to water-logging, poor sanitation arrangements and absence of conveniences in most areas. The healthcare matrix has also suffered. Public sector provisions for the poor and the lower middle class are practically below par. Corruption, to a great extent, has encouraged this malaise.

Over the past few decades I have had the good fortune to visit more than forty-five capitals in all the six continents. In every city I have noted the efforts undertaken by those associated with city governance in trying to provide not only a pollution free environment but also an effective utilities network for the inhabitants. It has been interesting to see the manner in which the city administrators carefully monitor and effectively take care of the needs of the citizens. This is achieved through short and long term plans and also through contingency planning. The latter is meant for emergency situations arising out of a possible natural disaster.

In the case of Dhaka, our city fathers, during different regimes, appear to have decided that the people of this city can be taken for granted and treated with lack of respect and that there will be, at the end of

the day, little need for redress of grievances. There is also very little coordination between this civic body and other related branches of government responsible for utility management, sanitation, communication and transportation networking and urban planning. The net result is an abysmal infrastructural paradigm.

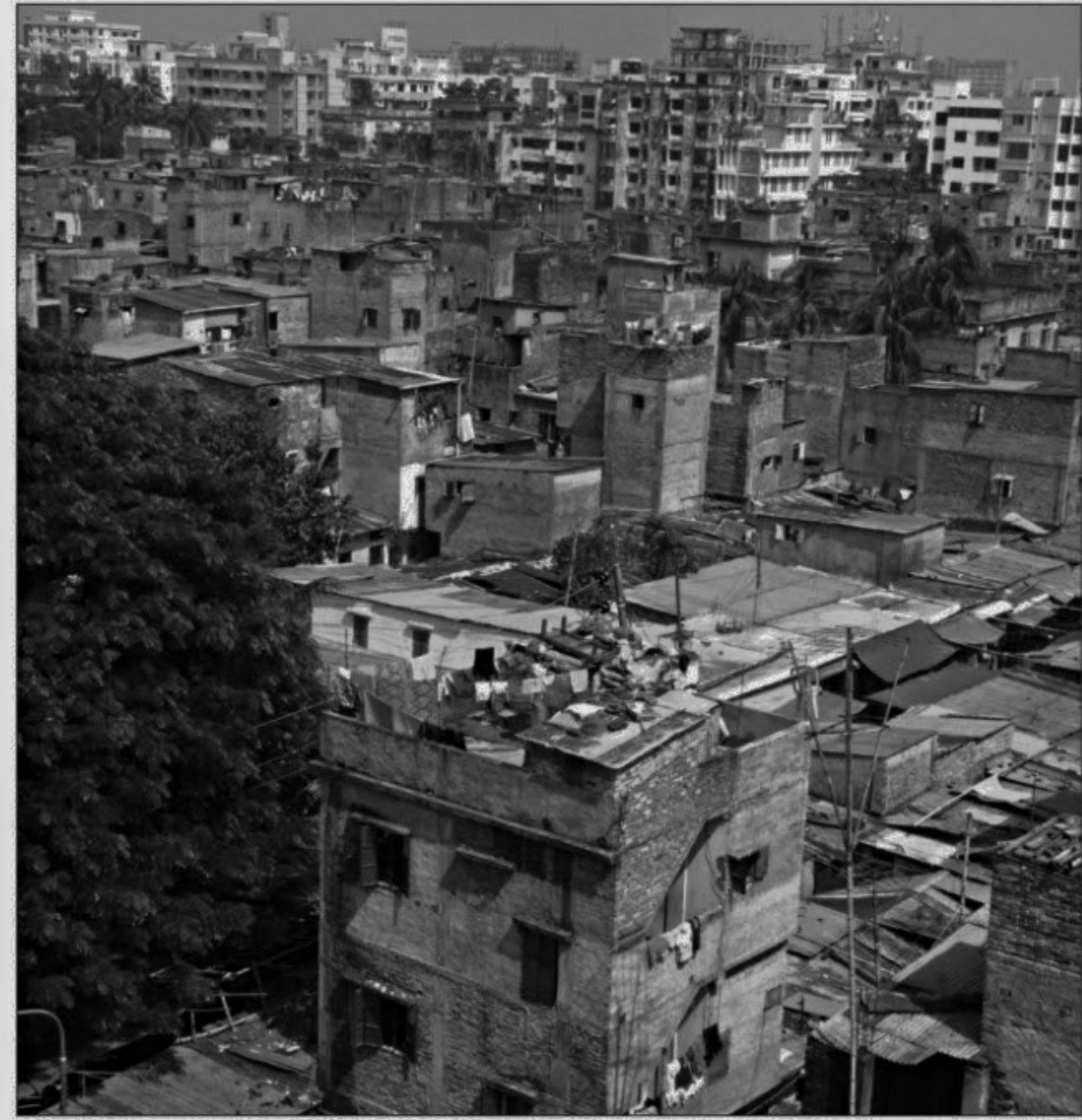
I had expressed my concern about lack of proper city planning after the disastrous fire that had engulfed the upper portions of Bashundhara Complex on Panthapath. The emergency services and the firefighting equipment available with us at that time proved to be seriously limited. This constraint caused great harm for all concerned.

I am drawing the attention of the relevant departments once again to the potential danger prevailing in Dhaka after what has recently happened as a result of the earthquake in Haiti. Nearly 200,000 people have perished in that unfortunate country as a consequence of this urban natural disaster. Lack of preparedness in handling such a catastrophe made things more difficult for survivors.

The question that has arisen amongst many of us is whether our authorities, particularly the City authorities are prepared to handle any similar eventuality. Experts from the Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme under the Food and Disaster Management Ministry have concluded after an in-depth study that there is fair chance of such a major earthquake hitting Dhaka and its adjacent areas in the not too distant future because of the Madhupur Fault. It has also been pointed out that more than 100,000 people could perish in such an eventuality and that the medical infrastructure would be severely affected.

I do not want to be seen as an alarmist. However, it is equally true that we have had several mild tremors over the past year in the adjoining regions.

We need to realize that an earthquake in a densely populated urban area like Dhaka would leave millions vulnerable to lack of drinking water, gas, medical care and power. We have thousands of high rise residential buildings of five floors and at least one hundred with more than eight floors, some rising to over twenty-five. In many cases the access to these buildings are limited to narrow lanes which are unsuitable for large fire trucks. There are



How secured is unplanned growth?

also no public hydrants and suitable water supply points. Heavy concrete lifting equipment, so necessary for recovery of trapped individuals and also for removing rubble is also mostly absent.

Bangladesh is respected the world over for its ability to manage natural disasters. However such experience relates mostly to cyclones or floods and open rural areas. That unfortunately would not apply in the case of an earthquake hitting a major urban city like Dhaka or Chittagong.

In other large cities of the world, there are, as a matter of routine fire exit drills in schools. There are also contingency plans for emergency medical teams and shelters with medical provisions. We do not have such potential networking in place in Dhaka.

Time has now come for us to take the hazards pertaining to Dhaka more seriously. We have many significant and serious problems that need urgent attention. This includes the alarming recession of our ground water table (the main source for our drinking water), the growing rate of pollution and environmental degradation, absence of proper sanitation that affects healthcare, collection of trash and household waste and their disposal, the terrible traffic problem, unplanned and unregulated construction. We also have inadequate public

facilities in the form of parks, play grounds (so necessary especially for children), water bodies and public toilets. We have rivers all around the city. However they are notorious for their lack of cleanliness and pollution (thanks to toxic effluents being dumped into them by irresponsible industries).

We have an election coming up for our Dhaka City Corporation. One can only hope that those elected will identify and then address on a priority basis the various points outlined above. An honest internal regulatory body, a bi-partisan approach and non-politicized perspective planning will assist the dynamics. Transfer of technology from our development partners will also help in finding solutions.

The Dhaka City Corporation might find that it needs more resources for capacity building. That could be obtained by this institution issuing term deposit bonds backed by the Bangladesh Bank. We have a problem in our hands but it is not intractable. What we need is necessary commitment whereby measures can be undertaken through the process of transparency and accountability.

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Spirit of accommodation required

The anti-Pakistan feeling in India or the anti-India feeling in Pakistan is an old phenomenon, which, unfortunately, has persisted despite several people-to-people contacts. Any demagogue can exploit it. Bal Thackeray in India and Lashkar-e-Toiba chief Hafiz Sayeed are there to stoke fires of hatred. They do not change because they earn dividends from the hostility they peddle.

KULDIP NAYAR

THE developing countries have in parochialism a menace which disrupts normal life. A small number of people take law into their hands and whip up frenzy by an appeal to divisive and communal sentiments. They not only mar the rhythm of development but also weaken the nation's cohesion.

The Shiv Sena in Mumbai is one such organization which feels proud in sowing the seeds of separation. Its followers are like the Taliban who are less violent but equally fanatic. They have adopted Marathi, one of India's 14 main languages, to push their agenda for a distinct identity. They openly preach Hindutva.

Therefore, it was not surprising when it picked up a Muslim for their attack which till then was confined to north Indians. The Shiv Sena asked the leading-most star, Shah Rukh Khan, to apologise for his support to Pakistan cricket players. He had regretted their absence from the Indian Premier League T20 games and wished if they had participated.

Shah Rukh stood his ground and rebuffed the Shiv Sena by not offering any regret over his observation. He had the support of the entire nation. A TV survey showed that the 94 per cent people backed him. Of course, the depressing part was the silence of most actors who were expected to speak in favour of Shah Rukh. I was not surprised by the silence of Amitabh Bachchan. He travelled all the way to Ahmedabad to show his movie to Chief Minister Narendra Modi of the Gujarat carnage fame.

Why the Maharashtra and the Central governments, both led by the Congress, tarried behind in taking action against the Shiv Sena was a sad commentary on the party's secular credentials. But the electoral politics made the Congress play soft Hindutva in Gujarat as well. What woke up the Maharashtra administration was the visit by Rahul Gandhi to Mumbai. The

country applauded his observation that every part of India belonged to every Indian. He literally bearded Shiv Sena in its den, much to the humiliation of its chief Bal Thackeray. It is having its revenge on hapless theatres and viewers for Shah Rukh Khan's movie.

Arousing anti-Pakistan sentiments is a hobby-horse of the Shiv Sena. Yet it is only lunatic Indian fringe, which has not reconciled to Pakistan, primarily an Islamic country. That is the reason why Shah Rukh was called "a traitor" while he repeatedly said that he was an Indian and stood for good relations with the people of Pakistan.

The anti-Pakistan feeling in India or the anti-India feeling in Pakistan is an old phenomenon, which, unfortunately, has persisted despite several people-to-people contacts. Any demagogue can exploit it. Bal Thackeray in India and Lashkar-e-Toiba chief Hafiz Sayeed, who organized this week a jihad meeting at Islamabad to "liberate India," are there to stoke fires of hatred. They do not change because they earn dividends from the hostility they peddle. This means that they still find response to their hate-policies.

But I am more concerned over the attitude of young generation on both sides. I happened to watch on TV chat between youngsters of the two countries. The cricket match was between India and South Africa. But the manner in which they were using filthy language in describing leading cricket players belonging to other side was shocking. The new generation has mastered the technique of computers but not the use of civilized language.

They are worse than the street urchins who have had no schooling. Yet, those who were hurling abuses on each other belonged to decent families which, I imagine, had not brought them up as goondas. May be, my presumption is wrong. Maybe, even the best of families do not mind their children using abusive language.

Partition is 62 years old. Both the Congress, representing the majority of



Shiv Sena becoming formidable!

Hindus, and the Muslim League, representing the majority of Muslims, agreed to a proposal to divide the Indian subcontinent on the basis of religion. But, at the same time, the founders of the two countries, Mahatma Gandhi and Quaid Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, told their people not to mix religion with politics. Mahatma Gandhi said he would live at Karachi and the Quaid Azam retained his Mumbai house for occasional visits. Both said that the two countries would be the best of friends. Then why are the youngsters on both sides denouncing by their action those who won them freedom?

After killing one million of each other and fighting four wars, people on both sides should have realized that hostilities cannot be an answer to their differences. The option of war was extinguished once the two countries went nuclear. There is no alternative to peace. The youngsters should appreciate this fact all the more because the challenge before them is to construct the country, not to destroy what has been built.

Hindus and Muslims have lived together for 800 years. Together they have moulded a life which has breathed a sense of accommodation and spirit of tolerance. They have developed a composite culture which retains the separate identity of Hinduism and Islam. It was the British rulers who created disharmony and distance. We should have spanned it long ago.

The other question that the Shiv Sena has posed is the linguistic identity. India reorganized the states on linguistic consid-

erations 50 years ago. Even at that time, the danger of linguistic chauvinism was underlined by the Fazl Ali Commission on Reorganisation of States. Movements in other parts of India in the name of language have risen and fallen. The Shiv Sena phenomenon, a decade old, has not died because it has found a fertile ground in Maharashtra.

The 26/11 terrorists' attack on Mumbai has come in handy to the Shiv Sena to raise the pitch of anti-Pakistan rhetoric. The larger question is how to fight against the anti-Muslim feeling and anti-Pakistan sentiment, both of which at times look like the two sides of the same coin. Friendly relations with Pakistan has the only answer. Unfortunately, the BJP has opposed even the talks at foreign secretaries' level.

Pakistan Foreign Minister Qureshi is not helping the matters when he plays to the gallery. His body language and words don't help the situation. It is true that India has made the proposal to Pakistan to resume talks. But this is what the people on both sides have been urging. It does not help if false prestige takes precedence. The priority is how to make the talks successful, not to dwell on who bowed before whom. It is too early to say which country has succeeded in its strategy. There is still a long haul to cover that will demand patience and willingness to accommodate each other's point of view.

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