

The ominous threat remains

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MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

NATIONALLY significant events of the very recent past that included the apprehension of suspected religious extremists, both local and foreign, along with seizure of incriminating materials and hauling of arms and ammunitions by RAB are manifest indication of the terrorist threat with which we may have to live for a considerable length of time. To recall, initially, there was a denial mode about the threat and then there was the naïve belief that with the execution of six terrorists the problem has been taken care of, root and branch.

While some segment of the establishment may have entertained the above-mentioned belief, the discerning observers and practitioners held a different opinion. They were of the

considered view that the so-called religious extremists were laying low consequent upon the energized operations of the enforcement unit that led to a temporary incapacitation of the leadership ranks; and the premonition was that when circumstances in their view would demand action they would not remain inactive.

Developments of the preceding week would show that the aforementioned observers and practitioners had their antenna properly tuned. The question is, have we taken a long hard look at the objective conditions that are promoting and nurturing the extremist thoughts and actions? Further, as a corollary to the study of such conditions, have we adopted a pragmatic counter-terrorism strategy?

Since the ugly fangs of terrorists are

visible, the concerned citizens need to know if some parties have a vested interest in a soft state and a weak government. People should ask if foreign funds are flowing substantially to various groups and organizations that serve the long term objective of local, regional or international terror networks.

The Brussels-based 'International Crisis Group' has reported that members of banned terrorist outfit are reappearing under different banners in Bangladesh for subversive activities. It adds that such extremists who have international link may succeed in causing damage to diplomatic missions in Dhaka although they failed to execute a similar mischief last December. Those are, without doubt, worrisome eventualities for a democratic government, warranting tough preemptive actions.

Our constitutional objectives vis-a-vis the program of the extremists leave no room for any ambiguity. While at the macro-level it may be a matter of political direction to sort out disagreements through dialogue and persuasion, the field-level operatives, both in uniform and plain cloths must have clear directives and plan of action for preventing violent subversive actions. This is all the more significant now because the new

enemy has an emotional and religiously sensitive alignment with the common folks of the country. One must not be oblivious of the fact that the enemy combatants are entrenched in places and institutions that are traditionally respected and revered in our society.

As part of strategy, the enforcement apparatus should succeed in separating an act of violence from its so-called politico-social context and thus criminalize a certain mode of political expression. In Bangladesh's context this line of action is very appropriate because there is a greater need to reject the religious extremist's right to legitimize violence as part of a larger social movement.

The so-called Jihadists must not be bracketed with political dissenters, although such differentiation becomes difficult from an enforcement point of view. Laws to be made for dealing with religious extremist should be such as to distinguish them from constitutionally oriented political elements.

The above has been emphasized upon because the mission and strategy of our crime-fighting and intelligence organizations had not been stable at least in so far as the domestic threat scenario is concerned. Those have invariably substantially changed with the change of a political government. It

has been our unfortunate experience to witness the differing political agendas often clouding the pragmatic understanding of our real national interests.

Continued acts of terrorism have undoubtedly shocked the conscience of the nation. Spurred from the political dimensions of the debate on terrorism, the prime concern should be on the pernicious effects that such malevo-

lence has on the young generation. We cannot live with thoughtless violence.

Terrorism based on religious bigotry will not disappear overnight. Beyond police work we may have to depoliticize religion, revamp religion-based education and address vital issues of social and economic development.

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Apprehended suspected extremists.

How long will garments factories remain death traps?

While the long-term measure of relocating these industries to the outskirts of the city, as suggested by the minister for labour and overseas employment during his visit to Garib and Garib factory after the fire incident, is a long way off, short term measures like installation of fire fighting equipment and creation of emergency exit routes must be taken up without further delay.

MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

DEATH rarely comes by appointment. It arrives without warning, as it did at Garib and Garib sweater factory at Bhogra under Gazipur district on February 25. 21 workers, 15 of them female, died and several others were injured. When such death occurs due to human negligence and callousness, one has to feel scared.

With the country still reeling under the trauma and shock of the Japan Garden City fire, the worst ever in a residential building, people were jolted by another fire incident in a factory building near Dhaka. These two incidents of factory and building fire were terrible.

These tragic deaths seemed to have touched a chord in all of us because the garments industry, employing the largest labour force in the country, especially women, is a part of our national pride and existence. Systematic flouting of safety norms and regulations has turned the country's garments factories into veritable death traps.

A post-disaster sweep in some of these garments factories has revealed the sorry state of affairs. About 60 percent of the 4,500 garments factories in the country lack adequate fire fighting tools. Even after a fire in this very factory claimed a fire fighter's life last August, the management made no effort to keep water in the factory's own hydrant, as revealed by press reports.

The garments owners' association, along with a ministerial committee set up by the government immediately after

a series of fires in garments factories, identified ten causes for such mishaps. These include absence of alternative stairs or emergency exit routes, lack of fire fighting equipment and materials, faulty gas and electric lines in the factories, violation of building codes that prohibit installing a labour intensive and fire prone factory above the second floor, non-use of fire retardant materials in walls and the roof, use of low quality fittings, lack of proper warning and signal arrangement by a public address system, and lack of disaster drill and training of workers.

As for the Garib and Garib sweater factory, the recipe was ripe for a disaster. It was revealed through enquiries by the press that 11 guards were on duty on that fateful "black Thursday night," but none knew how to operate fire extinguishers and hydrants. To make matters worse, heavy grill windows with sealed glass panes did not let the smoke out.

The notices served on the owners to set up hydrant points, build underground reservoirs with a capacity of one lakh gallon of water, and set up a pump with a capacity of lifting 300 to 350 litre of water, were never followed. Nor were smoke and heat detectors installed. Factory operation rules make it mandatory for each factory to have two staircases, one for regular use and the other for emergency exit.

True, many factories now have an emergency exit, but the space is so narrow by piles of goods and materials -- as was revealed in the Garib and Garib sweater factory -- that it could not be

used in times of emergency. It was further revealed that almost none of the factories have battery operated emergency lights, which are essential to check stampede and chaos when darkness envelops the premises in the event of an electrical short circuit.

The probe committee formed by the government also said that poor ventilation in the stairs and construction of unauthorised C. I.-sheet structures on the roof of the building -- that were being used as storage site for highly inflammable materials -- did not let the smoke out and the workers suffocated to death for lack of oxygen. The workers could not come out of the building as the main gate was locked.

After making a tour of the garments factories in and around the city, one gets a somewhat unhappy impression. In most of them fire-safety checks are non-existent. The factory buildings are not built following proper safety standards, have a near absence of emergency exits and operate without a licence from the fire service and civil defence directorates. Often, fire safety certificates are not taken from the fire department but from the electrical inspectorate, which knows little about fire prevention mechanisms.

Most shockingly, an industry that employs about 20 lakh workers, mostly women, and ranks as the biggest foreign exchange earner and job provider, has given little attention towards ensuring the safety and security of its workers. No sensible citizen in the country can understand how such a vital industry could be allowed to operate with so little accountability and virtually no periodic inspection.

When there is a fire incident resulting in fatalities, both BGMEA and the administration talk about forming probe committees in a bid to bring about reforms and establish accountability, but the enthusiasm dies down in no time.

While the long-term measure of relocating these industries to the outskirts of the city, as suggested by the

minister for labour and overseas employment during his visit to this factory after the fire incident, is a long way off, short term measures like installation of fire fighting equipment and creation of emergency exit routes must be taken up without further delay. Sadly enough, with the main gate remaining locked and the security personnel having fled from the factory premises with keys after they had sensed danger, fire fighters had to cut grills of second floor to rescue four to five workers. People shudder to think what a colossal disaster it would have been if even half of the 3500 work force that the factory employs would have been present in that shift!

In most cases, building laws are violated with impunity. Most factories have

exit routes or stairs that are blocked by baskets full of waste. Most shockingly, in most cases the main entrance gate remains locked without the guard being available, as it happened in the case of Garib and Garib sweater factory. Most appallingly true, electrical lines in most of these factories are most fragile and a little spark or fluctuation of voltage causes a short-circuit that can spread the fire through the whole installation in the twinkling of an eye.

Despite the fact that a series of fire incidents had taken place in quick succession, the licensing authorities or the administration have never visited these factories to see if these units meet the safety regulations or norms. Most of the factories situated in the narrow by-lanes

or densely populated residential areas in high-rise buildings are inaccessible to fire tenders.

Starting in the '80s, this industry has made substantial impact on our economy, identifying itself as a vital foreign exchange earner as well as providing jobs to a vast number of unemployed youths, especially women. The absorption of a large number of female workers -- a big outflow of migrant unemployed and widowed and unwed women from the rural areas -- has added to the importance of sustaining this industry with care and caution.

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Fire service personnel had to break portion of Garib and Garib factory wall to rescue workers.

Strengthening industrial administration

The level of our industrial efficiency should be raised to enable our industries compete well with those of our neighbours'. We have to start our necessary preparation at the earliest. For successful execution of new industrial policy, strengthening of industrial administration will have conspicuous positive effect.

A.B.M.S ZAHUR

Implementing industrialization programs is a heavy and taxing responsibility. The industrial administrators are subject to variety of organizational, political and social constraints. The machinery for implementing industrial plans and for industrial services is often poorly designed.

The industrial administrators have been described as the bridge between a governmental or semi-governmental agency and the public and private indus-

trial sectors, both domestic and foreign. A programme is to be adopted to develop skills in negotiating on analyzing investment or technical assistance proposals and on working out a strategy.

The administration of an industrial service or job can be made effective in the following ways:

- establishing a simple and flexible structure;
- improving delegation through a clear statement of responsibilities, authorities and their relationship;
- improving leadership practices; and

- improving the co-effectiveness of the service.

The industrial administrator and the industrial manager are counterparts during the industrialization process. Practices and techniques of industrial management are more advanced than those of industrial administration. The following may be adopted to the latter:

- a new and flexible organizational form, known as matrix organization is built around specific projects. The project manager is given authority and responsibility for fulfilling the provision of the project contract;
 - among various management responses management by objectives (MBO) and organization development (OD) are widely appreciated. MBO has mainly two steps; management at the highest level sets objectives to be attained by the entire organization and top management communicates parts of total objectives to the responsible subordinate managers.
- The methods and techniques,

known as organization development (OD), have been evolved by the behavioral scientists to help plan and direct the process of change. The techniques require an impartial third party, which guides. It uses meetings of the group concerned as a principal means of effecting change.

The industrialised countries are concentrating more on detailed financial data than the summary figures appearing in income statements and balance sheets. The industrial administrators need to analyse the financial position of a potential foreign investor or to compare the degree of financial support available from the competing joint ventures.

It is important to know a company's ability to meet its current obligations. Another liquidity analysis is concerned with the relation of the company's terms of payment and average collection period of its accounts.

Many new management practices have been adopted in both public and

private sectors of industrialized countries to improve decision making. They have in common the systems approach of viewing work to be accomplished in terms of objectives to be achieved. System analysts provide decision makers with alternatives and means of achieving them. Following decision-making methods and techniques are considered important:

- planning, programming, budgeting system (PPBS). To adopt PPBS a government must go through a long and rigorous process of establishing output-oriented categories of work. PPBS is now in general use in developed countries and is at an early stage in developing countries;
- management information system (MIS) is to collect information pertinent to management decisions at various levels. A two-phase installation of an MIS could be considered. First phase concentrates on improvements in reporting of data, simplifying procedures and centralizing data processing.

Second phase is based on a long-range plan for automation.

Training is essential in economic development. It should be closely coordinated with research. Research programmes in industrial administration in developing countries like Bangladesh are a necessity. Research should be conducted primarily by personnel of developing countries. Setting up of own training goals may be considered.

No proper emphasis was given on the need of industrial administration to attain digital Bangladesh. The level of our industrial efficiency should be raised to enable our industries compete well with those of our neighbours'. We have to start our necessary preparation at the earliest. For successful execution of new industrial policy, strengthening of industrial administration will have conspicuous positive effect.

The writer is a former joint secretary.