

GROUND REALITIES

Six young men and a mob

Take swift action against the killers

THE death of six young men at the hands of a mob in Aminbazar on Monday reflects an increasingly deeper malaise eating away at the fundamentals of our society. With more than seventy people lynched by mobs in the past six months, one does not need much wisdom to understand the extent to which the rule of law is surely and steadily being pushed to the fringes and replaced by a disturbing tendency on the part of individuals and groups to take the law in their own hands. In clear terms, where there must be an effective application of the law, we note with dismay the rise of lynch mobs ready to strike further at the roots of civilised behaviour.

Obviously, one cannot quite dismiss the public perception that people by and large have been losing confidence in the ability of the police or, more specifically, the administration to ensure law and order through handling crime efficiently. There is the inescapable feeling that corruption in the form of a nexus between the police and criminals has undermined the rule of law. And yet there can be no justification for what has happened in Aminbazar. Both the police and local residents have loudly proclaimed that the murdered men were robbers. That is absurdity taken to extremes. In the first place, the mob paid no heed to the young men's protestations about their identities. In the second, whether or not they were robbers or innocent youths out to seek pleasure in the nocturnal hours, it was criminality itself to have them lynched and then seek to justify the act. Why in the first place those young men who were students not taken into custody instead of being allowed to be beaten to death? Investigations that have been ordered must not be perfunctory but should mean business.

We are in full agreement with those who believe that a failure to prosecute earlier perpetrators of mob violence has encouraged others to commit similar criminal acts. Such indifference must stop here and now. Swift, harsh action must now be taken against those responsible for the killings in Aminbazar. Unless that is done, there is the danger that the outrage will be replicated elsewhere. The state will then be in free fall and citizens will feel increasingly insecure. That must not come to pass under any circumstances.

The step in St. Martin's welcome

Protect tourist sites, hills and shores

IT is heartening to learn that the Department of Environment (DoE) has penalised number of organizations for illegally occupying the shores of St. Martin's Island. The organizations were involved in construction of high-rise structures affecting the environment.

St. Martin's, a coral island, is indeed an attractive tourist site that deserves to be protected from the claws of poachers. Not only this islet, but we ought to guard all tourist spots and natural forests and shores across the country to save them from grabbers.

Occupation of banks of water bodies and encroachment on historical and tourist locations have become rather common-place. If authorities stop such activities in one place, there are reports of similar acts from another area. The illegal acts go on until these would be spotted by DoE authorities or individuals from the locality who bring it up to the former.

Even the beach in Cox's Bazar, which happens to be the longest natural sea shore in the world, has been the target of grabbing. Several buildings have come up in the last few years close to the beach that ruined the beauty of the place to a great extent.

Illegal occupation of parks and hills are also reported. The occupiers chop down trees and cut hills for construction of buildings mostly for commercial uses.

We have been continually reporting on such misdeeds of errant organisations and individuals who are always on the look out for loopholes in existing rules and regulations. They, in connivance with a few cronies in the locality, officials and some members of forest department and law enforcing authorities seize the first opportunity to get into the act.

Once again we stress the need for stern action against such illegal acts so as to hold to account all those respon-



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

HEADS have been rolling in Britain. The News Of The World, from beyond its dark grave, has been prowling the corridors of

power in London and laying lives low. Now that prominent policemen have begun to become casualties of the phone hacking scandal, you have that suspicion of more dramatic things on the way. Somewhere a little voice asks you, in meaningfully naïve fashion: if the chief metropolitan police commissioner has to fall on his sword because his department had brought a journalist of NoW on board, what reason is there for David Cameron to stick around when his links with Rupert Murdoch's people have been more frequent and more comrade-like?

Let your feverish imagination get to work. And while it does, you just might want to look, slightly askance, at what sections of the media run by the nouveau riche have been up to here at home in Bangladesh.

The resignation of an editor from his organisation a couple of weeks ago did not really come as a surprise to us.

What did cause surprise was his original decision to join the newspaper he has now abandoned in the first place. But then many of his friends and well wishers then had this pious thought -- that perhaps he would have his newspaper speak up for everything decent and fair in our part of the world? That of course did not happen. And we watched, surprised and then shocked and then outraged, as the newspaper he led went on a crude, falsehood-laden offensive against the reputed editor of an equally reputed Bengali language newspaper and yet the editor of the offending newspaper did not resign.

When posters demanding "punishment" for Motiur Rahman and Latifur Rahman appeared in the city, thanks to the management of the new newspaper; and when "reports" of Motiur Rahman's "involvement" in sinister "anti-state" activities were disseminated by the newspaper in question as well as another run by the same organisation, our respected editor

should have resigned.

Now, to be sure, he has resigned because he could not accept his newspaper management coming forth with yet another scurrilous report on Motiur Rahman. We are not surprised, but, yes, we are happy. Which brings us to the very crucial question of why newspapers are a necessary aspect of civilised culture.

A newspaper, through its considered, well laid-out policy, seeks to

action was taken against the newspaper, ostensibly because the individuals tarred by the reports thought it a waste of time hauling the newspaper to court and giving it a prominence it did not deserve. That was a mistake. And it was because the newspaper went scot-free.

When the corruption and criminality of journalists are not exposed, it sends out a bad message to society: that these men, rather than upholding public concerns, are pulling the media

mat and pelt him with questions on his opinion of Bangladesh's politics, they are clearly disgracing their own country. Yes, we protest loudly at foreign ambassadors' interference in our internal national affairs. But should our editors, both at newspapers and on the ubiquitous television channels, not be briefing their reporters on what to say and how to say it to those diplomats? Patriotism may be an overused expression, but let us uphold it, for God's sake! Let us speak to those foreign diplomats on bilateral matters. Why must our reporters try to elicit condescending remarks from them on our politics, even though our politics happens to be in enervated health?

A journalist humiliates not just himself but his community as a whole when he lies or quietly condones a lie. A senior journalist at the BBC's Bengali Service once told a Bangladesh diplomat, in brazen manner, that he had penned Bangabandhu's opening remarks at the news conference the Father of the Nation addressed in London hours after his arrival from Pakistan in January 1972.

And recently this same journalist, now superannuated, dished out a new lie -- that he had been the first Bengali to meet Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on that January day in London and that he had briefed the Bengali leader on Bangladesh's emergence as a sovereign nation. He is not the only one who has made a career of misinformation. There are plenty of others like him, at home and abroad.

The most precious quality in a journalist, for all his political principles, is the objectivity he can bring into his evaluation of men and matters. That quality is in horridly short supply in Bangladesh. And naturally too. When you have journalists' unions patently identifying with major political parties, you do not expect responsible, healthy journalism. You get more of partisan politics.

But, enough of this nitpicking. One last word, though. If good journalists can bring down Rupert Murdoch in Britain, perhaps equally good journalists in Bangladesh can go chasing their own pretentious little Murdochs out of the lives of morally driven men and women?

The writer is Editor, Current Affairs, The Daily Star. E-mail: bahsantareq@yahoo.co.uk



IMAGEZOO

A newspaper, through its considered, well laid-out policy, seeks to enlighten the masses. But when a newspaper makes its appearance at the newsstands only because it means to destroy the reputations of good men, it does not remain a newspaper any more.

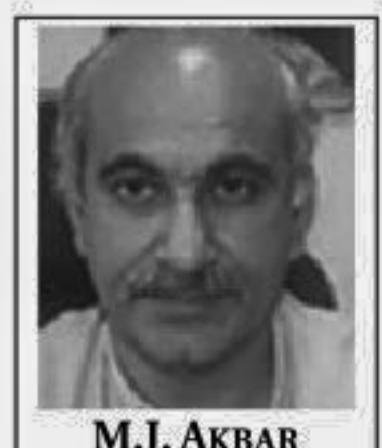
enlighten the masses. But when a newspaper makes its appearance at the newsstands only because it means to destroy the reputations of good men, it does not remain a newspaper any more. Back in the mid 1990s, a virulently right-wing newspaper in this country published a list of well-known Bengalis who, it said in its reports, had been at the receiving end of regular financial benefits from the Indian High Commission in Dhaka. Tellingly, no

into a gutter and then a sewer. That was what Gordon Brown said about NoW last week. You could borrow his phrase; and you would be terribly surprised by the number of media people and organisations you could apply that phrase to in Bangladesh.

Criminality apart, there are certain behavioural patterns our journalists must discard if they mean to do justice to their profession. When Bengali journalists crowd around a western diplo-

BYLINE

It's time to eliminate callousness



M.J. AKBAR

THERE is no category of criminals as brutish and barbaric as terrorists. The depravity of their intention is matched only by the perversity of their actions. Their target is the innocent citizen, the non-partisan, the individual, the nameless child who might have been drawn to death by the accident of circumstance, or the misfortune of destiny.

The terrorists who attacked Mumbai on July 13 were cowards, hiding maliciously behind anonymity. Since we live in an age increasingly stripped of values, whether in war, peace or the indeterminate grey in between, a brave city like Mumbai has adjusted to the fact that terrorism is part of the price of urban density. But Mumbai will not reconcile itself to either the inefficiency or the alibi that politicians trot out to protect themselves from the whiplash of accountability.

The Chief Minister of Maharashtra Prithviraj Chavan can think of nothing more original than passing the buck. It was his Home Minister R.R. Patil's fault, he said, before he did the next thing that politicians are brilliant at: the somersault. Acrobatics cannot explain why the entire police wireless network that evening was jammed, among other things.

There is, in fact, nothing more to be said on Mumbai's security after the Times of India's brilliant page one photograph on Saturday morning. It showed a beached high-speed boat,

one of the seven with bulletproof cabins and deep sea radio reception that had been purchased after the attack by Pak-trained terrorists on November 26, 2008 to protect Mumbai's coastline. The dead boat was lying face down on Versova beach; the other six were anchored, and idle, behind it because of a lack of trained policemen. More astonishingly, the government did not provide enough fuel. Each boat got just enough petrol to function for an hour a week. Who is responsible for this colossal inefficiency? The Maharashtra government? Delhi's home ministry, which is astute at seizing credit if any is

go, he was ruling no one out, and ruling no one in either. That probably explains why the Maharashtra police immediately picked up two members of the Indian Mujahideen and seven Naxalites from Mumbai, and 10 Maoists from Pune. They have clearly expanded their circle of the usual suspects.

Just in case this has not confused you sufficiently, Chidambaram added: "When there is no intelligence on a particular incident, it does not mean failure of intelligence agencies... There was no intelligence of an imminent attack in Mumbai." So that's all right,

There is a rational collective consciousness which understands that you cannot eliminate terrorism in these troubled times, but if government cannot eliminate a callous response, then it will be eliminated in the next election.

due, and transferring blame when anything goes wrong?

Will any minister be held answerable within the Congress-NCP governments in Mumbai and Delhi? No. You can be sure of that.

Politicians often run out of excuses. That constitutes a mere problem. When they run out of words you know that they are entangled in a full-blown crisis. The man designated to keep Indians safe from terrorists, Home Minister P. Chidambaram, who is usually good with words, lost track and traction when he asserted after the Mumbai blasts that as far as suspects

then. If you were merely ignorant, you haven't failed. Terrorists really should be more considerate towards Chidambaram and telephone him first. How long must we live with gobbledygook?

One retired police officer who has spent most of his career in intelligence, and retired at the head of his service, told me a simple truth: that the only reason we are not attacked more often is either luck, or that there was no threat.

Rahul Gandhi repeated -- in fact, read out from a piece of paper -- the rather facile argument that this attack

represented the "1%" that had succeeded rather than the "99%" who had failed. This is the sort of excuse that cannot survive marginal scrutiny. Where is the evidence of attacks being thwarted? If the police had succeeded in preventing an attack, then they should have a suspect and a story of what had been planned by the suspect. There has been none from the Mumbai police.

The Mumbai citizen has a simple query: is Mumbai protected as securely as Rahul Gandhi, or any other political VIP, is? If not, why not?

In fact, if the Mumbai police looked after the citizen even with as much concern as they bestow on the welfare of the brother of Dawood Ibrahim, our most wanted accused on the terror list, Mumbai would be grateful. Ibrahim the Younger continues to thrive in Mumbai. Mumbai police do not play favourites. They are also very kind to his underworld rival Chhota Rajan, without any noticeable harm coming to either don. Rajan is so comfortable that he happily gives interviews to newspapers from his lair; his hideout is not very hidden.

There is a rational collective consciousness which understands that you cannot eliminate terrorism in these troubled times, but if government cannot eliminate a callous response, then it will be eliminated in the next election.

The writer is Editor, The Sunday Guardian, published from Delhi, India on Sunday, published from London and Editorial Director, India Today and Headlines Today.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

July 20

1917 World War I: The Corfu Declaration, which leads to the creation of the post-war Kingdom of Yugoslavia, is signed by the Yugoslav Committee and Kingdom of Serbia.

1947 The Viceroy of India says the people of the North-West Frontier Province overwhelmingly voted the previous day to join Pakistan rather than India.

1949 Israel and Syria sign a truce to end their nineteen-month war.

1969 Apollo Program: Apollo 11 successfully makes the first human-crewed landing on the Moon in the Sea of Tranquility. The first Moonwalk EVA follows almost 7 hours later.

2000 In Zimbabwe, Parliament opens its new session and seats opposition members for the first time in a decade.