

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

Long handle of prejudice



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

THE outrage is absolute in its origin, manifestation and backlash. The cause and effect relationship has already proven dire. With perhaps more to come, the reservoir of sanity has to overpower the sleazy video of insanity. The Vatican's condemnation of "provocations" against the Muslims and the resulting "unacceptable violence" articulates the responsible majoritarian voice across the world. A minority caused the provocation and again it's a minority that avenged the provocation -- with a cowardly act of terror. But an overwhelming majority suffers at both ends of the spectrum. The greater tragedy is not in learning the right lesson every time that religion is abused.

The provocative American film Innocence of Muslims portrayed the Prophet (SM) of Islam in the crudest unprintable terms and called Islam "a cancer." This being released through YouTube spread the venom across a wide swathe of unsuspecting world audience. Following eruption of reactive objections, Google has lately opted out of showing the video to Egypt and Libya, but rest of the world is rolling its eyes at the audacity of offering it for viewing touting right to freedom of expression.

German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer has said: "Man is the only animal who causes pain to others with no other object than wanting to do so." The shock is in the fact that of all the animals man is credited with rationality, and yet he has given the world the word sadism.

The release of the film's video and the terror killing of the US envoy with his other colleagues in Benghazi hardly leaves one in a mood to philosophise. Yet, Schopenhauer's nineteenth century maxim sounds prophetic to this day.

A recital of instances where Prophet Muhammad (SM) of Islam and Islam as such has been deliberately denigrated reads like a chronicle of ungoverned spaces of prejudices nurtured by extreme right fringes since 9/11:

- Danish newspaper reprints of one of several caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad drawn by Kurt Westergaard which sparked violent protests across the Muslim world in 2005;



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- An anti-Islam film posted online by a far-right Dutch deputy drew fire from Muslims and European officials, and a call for calm from Muslims in The Netherlands fearing a violent response (APF, The Hague, March 29, 2008);
- A US artist whose satirical cartoon inspired an internet campaign inviting people to draw images of

the Prophet Muhammad has disappeared into hiding on FBI advice, the Seattle Weekly said (BBC Online September 17, 2010);

- The offices of the French satirical magazine

mentary good sense is far outweighed by an irresponsible campaign for freedom of expression from quarters out to push bars to be openly disrespectful of the sensibilities of 1.5 billion followers of the Faith called Islam. Where one's freedom begin, other's right ends.

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No extremist group has yet claimed responsibility for the Benghazi massacre. Fingers have been pointed in the western media to militia group Ansar al-Sharia brigade, anti-Sufi group, pro-Gaddafi elements and al-Qaeda Maghrib. Islamic brotherhood has roundly condemned the attack. Whether it is a faceless group or one with a label would hopefully come to light, but let the manhunt be focused.

Following a dastardly act of terrorism the shock of it is translated into reeling barrages of condemnations. The expression of sentiments is natural but stretching it to a cliché sounds more of a ritual than a gritty commitment to combating terrorism.

Even the pitch of condemnation is weighed on a scale of soft, medium and strong as though that's all there is to be done in the sequel (Romney has criticised Obama's reaction of being "dishonourable"). This unidirectional focus obscures what is really at issue: the highly irresponsible act of provocation and intimidation to followers of a major religion. This is not condoning the act of carnage in Benghazi but to underline that symbolism is very important in terms of interfaith trust and bridge building that every government needs to be seized of today.

The paramount issue is banishing the scourge of both demeaning a religion on the plea of freedom of expression and dastardly killing of citizens of a country (some Libyan security staff also died) only because a few crooks churned out a devilish story craving for perverse world attention.

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Having a disaster management law!

M ASLAM ALAM and SHANTANA R. HALDER

GLOBALLY, Bangladesh is equally acknowledged as a country with high poverty and disaster vulnerability and as a good performer in disaster management. Bangladesh started its disaster management policy and institutional reform in mid-nineties but unfortunately did not gain much success in the policy front except the Standing Orders on Disaster (SOD) first issued in 1997. By 2010, SOD -- the only government approved policy document the country had -- did not carry much legal value in absence of an Act.

The passing of the Disaster Management Bill 2012 by the Parliament on September 12 brought to a successful end the almost twenty years' efforts of the government and civil society actors. Through this enactment, citizens need to become self-accountable to the disaster stricken people and the community. It has created a window of opportunities for people to become more empathetic to the disaster affected communities.

The objectives of the Act are to: reduce overall risks of disasters with appropriate risk reduction interventions; effectively implement response and recovery measures; provide emergency humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable; strengthen institutional capacity for better coordination and targeting; and to establish a disaster management system capable of handling all hazards. The seventeen page Act is comprised of six chapters, 60 sections and one schedule.

Approach: The document promotes the all-hazard all-risk and all-sector approach and endorses the comprehensive disaster management model developed through a long trial and error basis that has earned global recognition. It puts equal emphasis on disaster risk reduction and emergency response management with greater focus on equitable and sustainable development.

Institutional arrangement: Disaster management is guided by the National Disaster Management Council headed by the Hon'ble Prime Minister. The existing Directorate of Relief and Rehabilitation will be transformed into the Department of Disaster Management with a more robust and wider role focusing comprehensive disaster management, and will be responsible for implementation of the National Disaster Management related policies and plans at all levels. The Disaster Management Bureau will get functionally merged with the Department and perform both the disaster risk reduction and emergency response management functions. A National Disaster Management Research and Training Institute will be created while a National Volunteer Corps will be established with the existing volunteers of Cyclone Preparedness Programme and urban volunteers by the

Department of Fire Service and Civil Defence. The structure and defined roles and responsibilities of all the actors, including the disaster management committees and response coordination groups at all levels as defined in the revised SOD, have been further endorsed in the Act and will remain functional. Here the disaster management functions are divided into risk reduction and emergency response management categories. The proposed back and forth mechanism in resource allocation and decision making, once implemented, will ensure transparency and accountability in the system.

Disaster area declaration: In the Act, the president has been entrusted to use his own judgment and declare a disaster area upon receiving a proposal from the deputy commissioner and recommended by the National Disaster Response Coordination Group through an official gazette notification, which may remain valid up to 2 months without further notification. It kept provision for the government to task any government,



semi-government organisation and the committees created under the Act, and can engage any private organisation or individual if situation demands. The local authority can also use the private facilities and their services and pay as per the government rate. The president may give special authority to the deputy commissioner, including requisition of required private properties and services and to seek priority assistance from the law enforcing agencies. In acute emergencies the government may also deploy the armed forces.

Priority group: In the Act, priority has been given to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged disaster affected people including women and children, the elderly and people with disabilities to protect them with required safety net and risk reduction related assistance.

Information management and role of media: It has specific directives to use all possible information sources and check those with the concerned authorities before

dissemination to the community. The government also can issue directives to any electronic and print media, telecommunication and cable network for dissemination of disaster management related information.

Funding: The government will establish two -- one national and another district level -- disaster management funds, with open contribution from government, donors and any other legal sources including personal contribution from the elites and rich people.

Offences and trials: The Bill provides for trial of any specified offences, such as, false accusation; baseless statements and claims; misuse of position; misappropriation of resources; creation of obstacles in delivering emergency services, creation of obstacles in water flow for personal gains -- like making illegal holes in the embankments; intentional price hike of essential items in the disaster stricken area; violation of government directives relevant to media and other groups, and failure of the government officers and staff to implement their mandated roles. The written petition of complaints has to go through deputy commissioner or his assignee to the court and the trial will apply the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898 and the Mobile Court Act, 2009. Depending on the nature and gravity of offences the court may impose 6 months to 3 years of rigorous imprisonment and Tk.50,000 to Tk.5 lac fine. Claim resolution will follow the Code of Civil Procedure 1908.

Rewards and others: The Act has provision for rewarding individuals and organisations for their invaluable contribution and for paying special allowance to persons appointed full-time in post-disaster emergency management. The government may also sign agreements with foreign countries and international and regional bodies on disaster management related research, for exchange of information and use of space-based technologies.

Way forward: The Act will have a long lasting impact on disaster risk reduction and emergency response management. However, the following steps are necessary: firstly, reorganising the Department of Disaster Management on an urgent basis; secondly, formulating national disaster management policy; thirdly, establishing National Disaster Management Research and Training Institute; fourthly, establishing National Disaster Volunteers, etc.

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An obituary for Moslehuddin Ahmed

KHORSHED ALAM

IT is occasionally a peculiar coincidence that a very close friend of mine leaves this mortal world while my wife and I are away from the country.

To my utter dismay, I read the news item in The Daily Star's internet edition that Moslehuddin Ahmed has passed away after suffering a stroke about two months back and that he was in a coma for about two weeks at Square hospital (Inna lillahe wa inna ilaihe rajeun). My wife and I felt extremely sad and offered our silent prayers.

Moslehuddin was only one year senior to me in the central superior service. We were from two branches of the civil service, but at the senior level we came to similar positions. He was the first managing director of Bangladesh Biman and in fact organised it from scratch. I did not keep track of all his subsequent postings, but I know that he had stints of ambassadorial responsibilities. When he returned from his duty as ambassador of Bangladesh to Romania, he was posted as secretary of the Ministry of Industries which I was heading at that time.

On arriving in Dhaka, Moslehuddin was naturally keen to join in the industries ministry as soon as possible. I told him that I was also very eager to move out to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but I was under presidential orders to complete an assignment, which he appreciated. I made over charge to him at the earliest possible time. Later, he was appointed chairman of Tariff Commission. On the whole he had a very chequered service career.

He was not to be deterred from giving service to the nation after retirement. When the Private University Act was enacted by the government, allowing setting up of private universities, he became a pioneer in this field. Assembling some like-minded friends like Nurul Hussain Khan and business leaders such as Mr. M.A. Kashem, he set up the first university in the private sector -- North South University -- and became its vice-chancellor. Thus he will be remembered as the promoter of higher education in the private sector. I take my hat off to him.

He was a kind and amiable gentleman of the first order. All his friends and well-wishers will miss him. My wife and I offer our deep condolences to bhabi and their children. We pray to Allah to grant him a place in the Jannatul firdaus and peace in his eternal abode. May Allah give bhabi and their children mental strength to bear this irreparable loss. Ameen, summa ameen.

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