

GROUND REALITIES

Ramu massacre a blot on nation's conscience

Go all out to heal the victims' wound

THE facts coming out from our on-the-spot investigations into the Ramu desecration of sacred religious sites, a prized part of our heritage and the symbol of communal harmony are more disturbing and insidious than the first reports indicated on Monday. What was confined to the realm of speculation and came to be known in fragmentary and piecemeal manner have now fallen into a pattern. Thanks to information gathered firsthand and presented as a connective narrative, an unprecedented act of subversion has come to light. Penetrating the smokescreen around the circumstances, our findings reveal an entirely unprovoked, premeditated, well-orchestrated operation by a gang in a pillaging and burning orgy. What is however left to be unravelled is the identity of those who masterminded the worst subversive and unprecedented desecration since independence.

Particularly inexplicable and dubious appears to be the role of the police. Despite being tipped off with the news of the brewing storm, the lack of police initiative was utterly inexplicable. Indeed, as we are now aware, residents had appealed to Ramu police chief to take preventive measures as tension was building from September 29, but it was largely ignored. We are aghast at the failure of intelligence when the surrounding ambience had been tensed up already not to have taken adequate precautions to protect such important religious sites. That a piece of information planted in the social network facebook got displayed and yet the police had no inkling of the scheme being afoot is simply unacceptable. Had pre-emptive measures been taken in the early hours of the rapidly escalating situation, perhaps the unfolding disaster could have been contained.

Our heads hang in shame. We apologise to the community as our heart goes out in sympathy for the victims.

We believe the home minister has his job cut out. Even though initial signs were to the contrary, there should be no politicisation of the issue because it would not only derail investigation but also divert attention away from the culprits. As we must be earnest in our endeavours to heal the mental scars of the Buddhist community, in truth one cannot see any redemption without identifying the ringleaders and perpetrators and meting out severely deterrent punishment to them.

No negative vibes on Padma Bridge, please!

Some hands-on approach in sight

ONE cannot but be a little baffled by the prime minister's comment made in New York in reply to a journalist's query. She reportedly said that the Padma Bridge would be built regardless of whether or not the World Bank missions visit Dhaka to talk over bridge financing.

It appears the PM is not keeping tabs on the developments centring on Padma Bridge financing, nor apparently are people close to her duly keeping her informed about it.

For the fact is that the resident representative of the World Bank said yesterday that two of its missions are likely to visit Dhaka. They would discuss appointment of external panel of experts and assess probes being carried out by the ACC.

We are at a loss to understand why the PM is occasionally making comments pertaining to a very important project when the WB has in principle agreed to come back to it. Was such observation called-for?

In her meeting with the WB president earlier on, she had indicated that she would find out 'the real culprits' involved in blocking the WB funding to come through.

May be it was just a coincidence or may be not, but the WB sent a stern reminder almost immediately thereafter that high government functionaries were misrepresenting its position. They insisted on fulfilment of the conditions before releasing funds to which the Bangladesh government had agreed in the first place.

That being the case, we wonder, why the PM should be giving negative vibes occasionally about WB's participation and that too out of context.

Since the WB, for its part, is moving ahead and the government is steadfastly pursuing the matter with the WB, why we wonder she should be sending any confusing signal, even unwittingly?

Recently the prime minister warned against reckless talks on Padma Bridge. The circumspection should apply

The art of wrecking reputations



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

SOME people, with some help from a tabloid here in Bangladesh, have been busy trying to tarnish the

image of Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar. There is a whole world out there and no one who lives in it has any idea of how this tabloid, *Blitz* by name, came by information on what is supposed to be a torrid love affair between Khar and the son of Benazir Bhutto and Asif Ali Zardari. No Pakistani or Indian media have reported on it. In the West, no one knew that the married, mother-of-two glamorous minister and the handsome presidential son were involved in matters of the heart. But *Blitz* told us it was basing its report on intelligence sources.

And what were those sources? London's *Daily Telegraph* has given us a pointer: it was the Pakistan army's notorious inter-services intelligence (ISI) which had been behind this bad business of dragging Ms. Khar's name in the mud. The Pakistan army has been quick to react. It has not had any hand in the manufacturing of the report which appeared in a tabloid in distant Dhaka.

That is how it sought to clear its name. The truth, though, is not that the army has come forth with a denial. It is more likely that Hina Rabbani Khar's willingness to have the United Nations inquire into the disappearance of Pakistani citizens (and thousands have vanished over the past few years in such areas as Baluchistan) aroused the ire of the army. The problem with third world armies has been their self-professed claim on patriotism. It is thus quite possible that Pakistan's military has been behind this entire nonsense. It needed to destroy Khar and with the same stone blacken the image of the Bhuttos.

This business of wrecking reputations or causing deep gashes in them is not new. It has been there

for as long as memory has travelled back in time. In communist countries, good politicians have often been marked out for liquidation, politically if not physically, when they have dared to challenge the authority of those in power. China's Deng Xiao-ping was purged twice in Maoist times over his belief that it did not matter if a cat was white or black as long as it caught mice. Liu Shao-qi, in the 1950s and 1960s a ubiquitous presence beside Mao Zedong and Chou En-lai, died in prison, in disgrace, in 1969. In the former Soviet Union, reputations first began to be destroyed in the

lic, in the end pushing them to misery. It was not until a senior military officer finally hit back at McCarthy that the whole farce drew to an end. McCarthy experienced his comeuppance when, in a twist of fortune, he died in disgrace.

In Bangladesh, many were the people who after November 1975 were vociferous in their denunciations of the murdered General Khaled Musharraf and his associates as Indian agents who had tried to foist a pro-Delhi government on the country. It was a ploy by the very men who had, only hours before the four Mujibnagar leaders were assassinated in prison, spread the ugly word that the Indians were almost on the verge of springing Tajuddin Ahmed and his colleagues from jail and installing a puppet government under their leadership in Dhaka. It was even given out that a letter to that effect had been intercepted by Bangladesh intelligence. Ironically, no one ever saw the letter nor was any reference to it ever made after November 1975.

Over the decades, aspersions have been cast on the lineage of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. His mother was a Hindu before she converted to Islam. Bhutto's enemies ignored the conversion and only harped on the Hindu factor in their attacks on him. And then there have been the peo-

ple who, even to this day, go around insinuating that Bhutto was Indira Gandhi's half-sibling. And how do they draw that conclusion? Easy, they say. Observe closely the physical appearances of Nehru and Bhutto. Doesn't that demonstrate a huge likeness between the two men, of a father-son nature? Your answer comes in the form of disdain, a shrug. Which student of history wants to respond to nonsense?

All across the world, people have gone on vilifying the hapless Marie Antoinette. That she was an insensitive woman, say her detractors, is based on proof: as the hungry masses demanded bread, she asked her courtiers what the ruckus was all about. When they told her, she nonchalantly instructed them to give the protestors cake. The truth is that she never said that. There is no record of it and yet it was part of the "evidence" which was used to send her to the guillotine. By the way, much as Henry Kissinger might be a man of a dubious political character, he never said at any point in his career that Bangladesh was a bottomless basket. Someone else, on his staff, did.

It is thus that people who do well or are likely to do well or are simply foolish enough to lead quiet lives are waylaid by mischievous people. The stories of the fourteen year-old Rimsha Masih in Pakistan and twenty five year-old Uttam Kumar Barua in Bangladesh are two of the most recent instances of the innocent being put to shame, all in the name of God and faith. They have "blasphemed" and so their families and clans must have their homes burnt down by the "properly religious."

And Hina Rabbani Khar? She is smart, she is young, she has an abundance of diplomatic courage. She now has the army riled. The truth is always offensive to armies which have once conquered their own countries. And so they hit back. Khar could yet be a casualty.

One last point: how does *Blitz* explain its position now?

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

Controversy Kills

Stalinist purges, when good communists unable to see eye to eye with Lenin's successor were simply put through show trials and swiftly shot.

Destroying reputations through innuendos or downright public condemnation has regularly been the vehicle on which men with sinister, rightwing motives have operated. In 1950s' United States of America, Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy decided that there were scores of communists or communist sympathisers working secretly at the highest levels of the government. He went to work, through falsely accusing some of the best of people in the country, of engaging in leftwing conspiracy to undermine the repub-

lic, in the end pushing them to misery. It was not until a senior military officer finally hit back at McCarthy that the whole farce drew to an end. McCarthy experienced his comeuppance when, in a twist of fortune, he died in disgrace.

In Bangladesh, many were the people who after November 1975 were vociferous in their denunciations of the murdered General Khaled Musharraf and his associates as Indian agents who had tried to foist a pro-Delhi government on the country. It was a ploy by the very men who had, only hours before the four Mujibnagar leaders were assassinated in prison, spread the ugly word that the Indians were almost on the verge of springing Tajuddin Ahmed and his colleagues from jail and installing a puppet government under their leadership in Dhaka. It was even given out that a letter to that effect had been intercepted by Bangladesh intelligence. Ironically, no one ever saw the letter nor was any reference to it ever made after November 1975.

PADMA BRIDGE FINANCING

A tale of two statements

MIRZA AZIZUL ISLAM

IT is well known that on June 29, 2012, the World Bank announced cancellation of \$1.2 billion concessional credit for the construction of the Padma multipurpose bridge. The cancellation was based on the ground of the failure of Bangladesh government to implement several measures identified by the Bank in the backdrop of what the Bank considered to be "credible evidence of corruption related to financing of the bridge."

On September 20, 2012, a statement was issued to the effect that the Bank will engage anew in the Padma multipurpose bridge upon satisfactory implementation of the agreed measures by the government.

Two points emerge from this part of the statement:

- The Bank's engagement with financing is a future possibility; and
- The realisation of this possibility is conditional upon satisfactory implementation of the agreed measures.

The statement notes that a series of measures to which the government agreed as a pre-requisite included:

- New procurement arrangement with enhanced oversight to

- ensure transparency and clean construction of the bridge;
- Investigations proceeding in a full, fair and expeditious manner; and
- An independent External Panel to review the government's investigation and report their findings to the government and the World Bank.

It may be observed that the use of the term "include" implies that the list of measures specifically

The World Bank's statement on September 20, 2012, was misconstrued by many. The statement was no more than a declaration of intention for the Bank to re-engage in financing the Padma Bridge subject to fulfilment of certain preconditions.

mentioned in the statement itself may not be exhaustive. The statement also noted that "the World Bank understands that all government employees and officials alleged to have been involved in corrupt acts in connection with the project have been put on leave from government service until an investigation is completed, and a full and fair investigation is now underway."

The above statement was misconstrued by some quarters in

Bangladesh as if the World Bank had already agreed to renewal of financing. Presumably based on this understanding, a tentative timetable for starting the construction of the bridge was also announced. Such an understanding was obviously misplaced as a future possibility was confused with the present reality.

In this situation, the Bank issued another statement on September 25, 2012, reconfirming and, to an extent, elaborating the precondi-

tions. One element of elaboration deserves particular mention. A positive report from the External Panel of internationally recognised experts who will advise the Bank and co-financiers on the credibility of the government's investigations has been cited as a precondition for the Bank to go ahead with the financing of the project. In light of the two statements of the Bank, the government needs to take the following actions in order to translate the possibility of the

World Bank's re-engagement in the Padma bridge project into reality.

- The government must faithfully and transparently implement all the measures to which, as the World Bank states, it has already agreed;
- An early initiative to reach a consensus between the government and all the co-financiers on the composition as well as terms of reference of the External Panel of internationally recognised experts is an urgent imperative;
- It is usually stipulated in all projects financed by external assistance that procurement procedures of relevant donor agencies will be followed. Therefore, what additional arrangements are required to ensure enhanced oversight by the World Bank and co-financiers should be agreed upon expeditiously;
- All public comments, especially by those who are connected with the government in whatever capacity, which sometimes degenerate into diatribes against the World Bank should be meticulously avoided.

The writer, presently a visiting professor in Brac University, is a former adviser to a caretaker government of Bangladesh, Ministries of Finance and Planning.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

October 3

1908

The *Pravda* newspaper is founded by Leon Trotsky, Adolph Joffe, Matvey Skobelev and other Russian exiles in Vienna.

1929

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes is renamed to Kingdom of Yugoslavia, "Land of the South Slavs".

1932

Iraq gains independence from the United Kingdom.

1952

The United Kingdom successfully tests a nuclear weapon to become the world's third nuclear power.

1993

Battle of Mogadishu: In an attempt to capture officials of warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid's organisation in Mogadishu, Somalia, 18 US soldiers and about 1,000 Somalis are killed in heavy fighting.