

Turf war at RU

Show zero tolerance to violence on campus

AFTER a period of relative lull at Rajshahi University, there has been a fresh eruption of violence on the campus. A turf war between the ruling party-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and Jamaat's student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir has left some 25 people injured, three of them with bullet wounds. Newspapers have published photographs of the student party activists shooting guns and brandishing large knives and sticks.

One published photograph depicts a BCL activist reloading his firearm right next to the police, leading us to question the role of the law enforcing agencies during the clashes. Not only were they ill-prepared in terms of preventing the violence, but they seem to have actually taken sides by chasing down only Shibir activists. If such violence is to be contained in future, those responsible -- regardless of their political affiliation -- must be identified and brought to book.

It is also interesting to note that, among those who were arrested after the clashes, were not only students belonging to the university but also those seeking admission there. Why these prospective students were engaging in violence on the campus, and what sort of a future awaits them if they do succeed in enrolling there, is something that needs to be considered. Such an initiation into higher education can hardly bode well for their academic future.

With the recent political unrest in the country and the government besotted with numerous problems, the so-called student groups seem to be gathering steam, motivation and opportunity to engage in violence. This cannot be allowed to continue and to spread to other campuses as such violence often does. The government must deal with the incident with a strong hand by punishing those responsible, regardless of which party line they may claim to tow. Under the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act 2009, student parties should have no affiliation or association with political parties and this is an opportunity for the political parties to show that this is in fact true. Only a zero tolerance policy towards violent student politics can help avert such incidents in future.

Building collapse

Gross negligence of all concerned

THE collapse of a six-storey building while being demolished in old Dhaka, on two other adjacent buildings, is a glaring instance of utter negligence and callousness. Of those to blame for Tuesday's mishap, first comes the contractor and then the owner, Rajuk and DCC.

The incident is another instance of how unsafe the buildings of the city have become, while those entrusted to ensure their safety appear to be indifferent. A number of questions arise in this connection. Who is the contractor? Why did he employ unskilled workers to knock down a huge building that is in itself a risky, technical task?

Reports further have it that no permission was sought from Rajuk before starting the demolition work. Worse yet, the building being demolished had sprung up without approval of Rajuk. One is appalled at the level of recklessness and folly of all those involved in the incident. It is good luck that no one got killed, but given the circumstances things could be worse.

There are umpteen other incidents of building collapse with severe casualty reports. And it is not also in the remote past that a five-storey building had collapsed at Begunbari in the city in June 2010 killing 20 people. The collapse of two dilapidated public buildings in Narail in December 2011 is yet another example.

The latest incident should be yet another wake-up call for Rajuk, the city corporation and the district administration. Rajuk, in particular, will have to ensure that the builders make necessary plans before construction of a new structure and strictly observe building codes, and no building is demolished without due permission and involvement. In the case of Tuesday's mishap in old Dhaka, the law-enforcement authorities should bring the owner and contractor of the collapsed building to

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

October 4

- 610** Heraclius arrives by ship from Africa at Constantinople, overthrows Byzantine Emperor Phocas and becomes Emperor.
- 1227** Assassination of Caliph al-Adil.
- 1636** The Swedish Army defeats the armies of Saxony and the Holy Roman Empire at the Battle of Wittstock.
- 1853** Crimean War: The Ottoman Empire declares war on Russia.
- 1957** Space Race: Launch of Sputnik I, the first artificial satellite to orbit the Earth.
- 1967** Omar Ali Saifuddin III of Brunei abdicates in favour of his son, His Majesty Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah.
- 2001** NATO confirms invocation of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
nec, psc (Retd)

W E saw insanity run amok in Ramu. But were these people really insane or was there method in the madness that they displayed in the burning down of Buddhist temples, houses in Ramu and a few other areas of the greater district of Chittagong on Monday?

While this is not the first time we have witnessed communal violence in the country what happened in Ramu is, by all accounts, entirely contrived. Ramu is a shame and the manner in which the issue has been used by the two political rivals has rubbed salt into the wounds of the victims of the Monday carnage. While, hopefully, the burnt down temples would be rebuilt and the destroyed houses restored, can we restore the deep wounds inflicted on the victims' soul? Hurt sentiments are difficult to heal.

The reactions of the AL and BNP have not only revealed the insensitive psyche of our politicians, our propensity to make political capital out of every incident has once again been attested by the shamefaced way the two political parties have gone about using a human tragedy to gain political mileage. Reportedly, the mob that carried out the rampage comprised of people belonging to all the major political parties. And the redeeming feature of the matter is that there were many who had tried to restrain the mob, unsuccessfully though, many of whom belonged to various political parties. Blame game will only help in distorting the process of inquiry.

This is the most vicious attack on any minority community after Liberation in Bangladesh, certainly on the Buddhist community. And a community that has constantly lived by what it has preached has been brutal-

ised by some errant members of another whose underlying philosophy and article of faith is peace, is totally unforgivable, even more so when protection of "minorities" is enjoined upon every Muslim.

I have deliberately put the word minority within inverted commas because that word is quite inconsistent with the teachings of Islam. According to scholars, "the term

came to be used with the formation of nation states when smaller components of the state were characterised as such to denote a "sub-nation." And even if we were to accept the notion of "minority" we are enjoined upon by instances of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) to ensure their rights which are in no way less than that of the "majority." Not only was he alive to their rights, his policies, as those of

upholding those.

Therefore, those that perpetrated the Monday violence in the greater Chittagong area had very little to do with Islam or its teachings. I feel there is more to what happened in Ramu than merely religion, and focusing on a narrow angle will more likely than not lead us in the wrong direction. While we need to identify those behind the Ramu violence we need to enlarge our attention to put the matter in the right perspective.

That the violence was not a spontaneous outburst is clear from the fact that some of the people were collected and transported to Ramu in transports within less than two hours after the Facebook discovery. And if it was preplanned the obvious question is what was the motive. The moot issue is who gains the most from the very well orchestrated and stage-managed violence?

The contrived violence might be an attempt to subvert the harmonious atmosphere in the country and paint the government in a negative light. Or, this could well be an attempt to show that extremism and religious fanaticism are still rife in the country which is not safe for the minorities. It could very well be linked to the recent anti-Rohingya riots in Arakan, who in turn are taking it out on the Buddhists in Bangladesh.

These are speculations that merit the attention of the government and the political parties across the board. This is a matter of national importance, it being directly linked to the national security of the state. It requires that we remain conscious of international dynamics in the matter, and surely there is need to involve Myanmar for resolution of the Rohingya question. And this would require the political parties to sink differences and rise to the occasion.

The writer is Editor, Oped & Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.



FOCUS BANGLA

minority is not acceptable to Islamic jurisprudence because the Muslim jurists never used this term or the concept. The term came into use with the advent of nationalism, in which the people were classified on the basis of ethnicity, namely language, race and culture, and the smaller groups were given the status of minority. Even religion was included in this classification."

Admittedly, the word minority is a relative term and, as experts aver,

the Caliphs who followed him, reflect this philosophy as well, as we see in the Madinah Charter, a compact between the Prophet and Jews, the Pact of Najran, signed by Prophet with the Christian community of Najran in 631, and the Pact of Jerusalem, signed by Caliph Umar with the people of Jerusalem after its conquest in 638. And a greater part of all these agreements dealt with the rights and interests of the "minorities" and the responsibilities of the majority in

PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN



PRAFUL BIDWAI

Fukushima, it's natural for people everywhere to be deeply sceptical of the claimed safety of nuclear power, and for governments to phase out atomic programmes, as is happening in Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and now Japan.

Second, nuclear power, like all projects, should only be promoted with the consent of local people, and with scrupulous regard for civil liberties. And third, safety must be paramount in reactor construction and operation, with strict compliance with rules laid down by an independent safety authority.

The way the Indian government has dealt with the opponents of the Koodankulam nuclear reactors being built in Tamil Nadu violates all three red lines. The Department of Atomic Energy and its subsidiary Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. see the opposition as a pathology to be cured by psychiatrists from the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences.

The government has all along demonised the opposition. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, no less, vilified it as "foreign-funded" without an iota of evidence. The government deported a German tourist living in a Rs. 200-a-day room for "masterminding" and financing the agitation. Last week, it summarily deported three Japanese activists who were planning to visit Koodankulam.

All this shows official disconnect with reality. Globally, nuclear power has long been in retreat. The number of operating reactors peaked 10 years ago, and their installed capacity has been falling since 2010. Nuclear's share of global power generation has

declined from its peak (17%) to about 11%. Fukushima precipitated the global nuclear industry's worst-ever credibility crisis. With increasingly adverse public opinion, and rising reactor costs (which have tripled over a decade), it'll probably go into terminal decline. Jeff Immelt of General Electric, one of the world's largest atomic suppliers, says nuclear power is "really hard to justify." However, in pursuing its Nuclear

of citizens. This itself is good reason to oppose the Koodankulam reactors. Dr. Singh last year suspended Koodankulam construction until people's apprehensions regarding safety are allayed. But his *sarkari* experts didn't even meet the people's representatives or answer queries about the site's vulnerability to tsunamis, volcanism and earthquakes. NPCIL refuses to disclose relevant information, including the Site

In pursuing its Nuclear March of Folly, India has unleashed savage repression against protesters. FIRs have been lodged against several thousand people in Koodankulam, with many charged with sedition and waging war against the state -- read, protests without one violent incident.

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It's hard to think of another occasion, including the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, or the 1992 Babri demolition, where the state has behaved so irresponsibly.

On September 10, the police attacked Koodankulam protesters with batons and tear-gas although they were obstructing nobody's movement. The police literally drove many agitators into the sea, molested women, looted homes and killed a fisherman.

A fact-finding team led by Justice B.G. Kolse-Patil journalist Kalpana Sharma describes the "reign of terror" in Koodankulam, with "totally unjustified" use of force, physical abuse, vindictive detention of 56 people including juveniles, and sexual harassment. Such police behaviour "has no place in a country that calls itself democratic."

Yet, repression of movements against destructive projects is becoming routine in India. No socially desirable project can be built on the ashes

Evaluation and the Safety Analysis Reports, and the text of an Indo-Russian intergovernmental agreement, which reportedly absolves the reactors' supplier of liability for an accident.

This puts a question-mark over the official claim that the reactors are safe, and accidents are all but impossible. If so, why is the supplier evading liability?

That brings us to the third factor: NPCIL's non-compliance with safety norms, and the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board's approval for fuel-loading in breach of its own norms. Last year, following Fukushima, an AERB Task Force suggested 17 safety improvements pertaining to freshwater and power backup, improved sensors, instrumentation, etc.

The Koodankulam plant isn't compliant with as many as 11 of the 17. The AERB first told the Madras High Court that it wouldn't permit fuel-loading without full compliance. But within four days, it made an about-turn -- under government pressure.

As the Comptroller and Accountant General has recently established, the AERB is totally subservient to the government. On August 10, it permitted

NPCIL to start fuel loading. This is wrong, dangerous, and shows reckless disregard for safety.

The AERB is guilty of more safety violations. Its own rules say there must be absolutely no population in the 1.6-km-radius "exclusion zone" from the plant, and that the population in the 5-km radius must be under 20,000.

But as anyone who has been to Koodankulam will testify, a tsunami rehabilitation colony, with 450 tenements, stands less than 1 km from the plant. At least 40,000 people live within a 5-km radius.

The AERB has turned a blind eye to this. Equally disgraceful is its failure to enforce the stipulation that no fuel-loading be permitted until an emergency preparedness drill is completed within a 16-km radius jointly by NPCIL, the district administration, state government and National Disaster Management Authority.

This involves full evacuation, with prior warning, identification of routes and vehicles, and public mobilisation. No such drill was conducted. The AERB's fuel-loading clearance amounts to playing with people's lives.

A victim of domestic and international atomic lobbies, India is loath to abandon nuclear power although the world is rapidly doing so. The process is fastest in the OECD countries, which account for 70% of the world's reactors. Only two reactors are under construction in the West -- mired in safety problems, long delays and 130 percent-plus cost overruns.

Even France, which gets 80% of its electricity from atomic reactors -- a fact the nuclear industry repeats as if that were clinching proof of atomic safety -- will reduce that dependence to 50% by 2025.

As nuclear power declines, clean renewable sources like wind and solar are rapidly expanding and their costs are dramatically falling. Renewables are the future.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist. E-mail: bidwai@bol.net.in