

GROUND REALITIES

The sins of November

We condemn political violence and vandalism

Jamaat precipitated clashes

WE are aghast at the intensity and extent of clashes between Jamaat-Shibir and law-enforcers engulfing the entire areas of Motijee, Dilkusha and Paltan in the city on Monday afternoon. There were also violent encounters between Jamaat-Shibir elements and police in eleven district towns.

We consider such outburst of violence thoroughly reprehensible as this not only caused physical injuries on a large scale but also led to disruption of public life extensively.

The way the agitators fought pitched battles with the police and burned down a police van and damaged other vehicles and roadside shops demonstrated the ugly side of political vengeance on their part.

Jamat and Shibir supporters holding their programme to demand release of their leaders facing war crimes trial brought out a procession a day earlier than scheduled. This caught the police unawares. In that particular sense it was a premeditated move by Jamaat, who were prepared to swoop on the police, and they did so.

However, neither the meeting nor taking out of procession was banned under prohibitive orders. That brings the police role in focus.

As long as a legitimate political party runs its programme peacefully without disrupting public order, they should be allowed to do so. Our experience, however, has been that the police are given to pre-emptive strikes precipitating breakdown of law and order, although in this particular case Jamaat may have been the first to provoke.

In a democracy any legitimate political party has every right to assemble, hold rallies and take out processions to voice their grievances or express their dissent.

We are strongly in favour of the right to democratic expression by a political party. If Jamaat wants to enjoy the benefits of democracy then it will have to go by the basic rules of political conduct.

The government should look into this and ensure that all recognised political parties are free to conduct their legitimate political activities without any undue interference from the law-enforcement authorities. At the same time, Jamaat should behave responsibly.

Where has all the money gone?

Precious time being lost over siphoned off cash

WHILE a discussion involving all major stakeholders on the merits and demerits of whether the finance ministry needs a banking division is undoubtedly a laudable initiative, little effort appears to be directed at tracking down the thousands of crores of Taka that have been swindled out of Sonali Bank. Precious time has been squandered on which institution, i.e. the Sonali Bank, the central bank or the government itself would lodge a criminal case against the Hall-Mark management. On top of that, the endless blame game on which authority or regulator is at fault becomes meaningless when confronted with the fact that most of the loan money taken by the group remains traceless.

Sonali Bank is a government bank and this is public money we are talking about. Taking a cue from the data presented in a seminar on November 5, it is now known that the amount disbursed to Hall-Mark is 320 per cent of the bank's paid up capital or to put it in another manner, 15 per cent of the finance requirement of the Padma Bridge; a colossal amount of money which needs to be tracked down and recovered. It has become imperative that authorities concentrate their attention on what the money has been used for how much of it repatriated to foreign destinations and what percentage converted into assets, both liquid and fixed. The investigation that is presently underway needs to focus on these matters and also on identifying the bigwigs who profited most from the scam. Identifying the big fish can provide vital clues that can open up the paper trail to the ultimate destinations where the money ended up.

It may be pointed out that when the first caretaker government was formed in 1990, President Shahabuddin engaged an internationally reputed firm to track down the billions of dollars that had been siphoned off over the preceding decade and to that end the investigation was successful. As time is of the essence, authorities need to explore all avenues of detection, even if that means engaging an international agency to find the missing



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

NOVEMBER 7 is a reminder of justice not done, of law and morality thrown to the winds, of the state all too easily

becoming hostage to organised criminality. On this day in 1975, three of the bravest of our soldiers in the War of Liberation were put to death by men whose vaulting ambition was to take the free Bangladesh republic back to a medieval scheme of things. There was, already, the dark phenomenon of "zindabad" having replaced the soul-stirring *Joi Bangla* in the darkness that followed the murders of August 15, 1975. On the morning of November 7, 1975, "zindabad" was linked to "naraye takbir," to inform the nation that a new order, communal in form and crude in application, had taken over. But, of course, the darkness was not to last, even if it was sustained by its beneficiaries for decades on end. That darkness has lifted, up to a point. Bangabandhu's killers have been tried and sentenced (five of them have justifiably walked to the gallows). The process is underway, we are happy to note, for a reopening of legal proceedings into the murder of the four imprisoned national leaders on November 3, 1975. That holds out the possibility of bringing to justice all those elements, political and military, whose connivance in crime put paid to the lives of the men whose astute leadership of the nation in 1971 set us on the road to freedom. Until their assassins are identified and brought

before the law, our shame at our collective condoning of the crimes of 1975 will stay, to remind us of our ingratitude to those who showed us the path to light.

In 1971, Khaled Musharraf, Najmul Huda and A.T.M. Haider were among the patriots who not only informed us that we needed to break free of Pakistan but followed through on their belief by helping to shape a definitive, concerted battlefield response to the brutalities of the state of Pakistan. They went to war; and with their intellectual comprehension of the twilight struggle they enlightened us with their conviction that a just war always rested

If Bangabandhu's killers can be made to face justice, if fresh legalities can go into a trial of the assassins of November 3, it is only proper, ethically and historically, for the gun-toting soldiers who murdered Musharraf, Huda and Haider to be wrenched out of their hideouts and made to pay for their crime.

on idealism. There was poetry in these men, lyrics that shone through amidst death and defiance across the bleak landscape of war. For Musharraf, the task was one of shaping a guerrilla strategy, the better to shoot holes in the Pakistani war machine. For Huda, seared by pain through the Agartala trial, the war of 1971 was a catharsis, for himself and for his nation. And that grainy image of Haider, bearded guerrilla, striding triumphantly beside a beaten A.A.K. Niazi on December 16 has endured. And these were the men who, like Mujibnagar leaders before them, fell

to foul conspiracy on a November dawn of ugly intent. In all these long years, not a single man, military officer or plain soldier involved in their gory end, has been brought to trial over the unnatural, sudden deaths of these three heroic men. No public inquiry has gone into the circumstances of their murder. And that is where shame overtakes us once again, for these three men, together with their compatriot Shafaat Jamil, sought to restore the links between the country and its historical legacy when they moved against the Moshtaque usurper regime. The good that these men did between November 3 and November

6 has not been remembered by those of us who lived through that brief renaissance of the spirit. The young do not know who these men were, what they lived for and in what dark moment their lives were snuffed out. These were men who threw Bangabandhu's assassins out of Bangabhaban, put Khondokar Moshtaque out to pasture, carted off a good number of suspects in the crimes of August and November to prison and placed Chief Justice A.S.M. Sayem in the nation's presidency as a first step toward the restoration of a secular Bangladesh. Thirty seven years on, it becomes the moral and political responsibility

of the state to go into a search for the army officers and soldiers who murdered Khaled Musharraf, Najmul Huda and A.T.M. Haider. Most of the men behind the criminality, if not all, are yet alive. They grow old in ugly manner. Many have prospered in life through means foul and many others have receded into insignificance. These elements of darkness need to be tracked down, in the interest of decency and collective national self-esteem. And they must be located and brought to trial not merely because they murdered these heroes but also because on November 7, 1975 they pushed the country into political retreat. On November 7, our beautiful world, frayed by the trauma of August 15 and November 3, was put to the torch. These murderers of our heroes committed the misdeed and got away with it.

They must not be permitted to get away with their past. If Bangabandhu's killers can be made to face justice, if fresh legalities can go into a trial of the assassins of November 3, it is only proper, ethically and historically, for the gun-toting soldiers who murdered Musharraf, Huda and Haider to be wrenched out of their hideouts and made to pay for their crime. For the nation's army, the task today is one of restoring the three men to dignity through their full, unqualified rehabilitation. For the government, the responsibility is obvious: the tales of these three brave Bengalis must be told, and then retold, in the hamlets and villages and towns of this land. Until all of this is done, our sin will not be expiated.

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The fallacy of protectionism

PASCAL LAMY

PROTECTIONISM has been described as "the dog that didn't bark" in the long, troubled night of the financial crisis; remarkable precisely because of its absence.

In the years since the crisis erupted, the world economy has borne witness to spiking unemployment levels, to Europe's debt woes, rising food prices, sluggish growth in the United States and now a slow-down in emerging countries. But one feared scenario has not materialised: a big wave of 1930s-style trade protectionism.

To be sure, there have been worrying signs of the traditional propensity of nation-states to turn inwards when the global economic outlook is bad. Some major economies introduced a raft of restrictive measures, such as trade remedies, new licensing requirements for imports and state aid to industry. The aggregate scope of these measures, however, has been limited.

Why was this? First, governments understood that fiscal and monetary policies can stimulate domestic demand, and used both to considerable effect. In the early 1930s, as many economists have noted, most governments were still trapped in fiscal and monetary orthodoxy. Tariffs were one of few policy levers visible to them -- a lever that many pulled, in desperation to show that they were doing something about mass unemployment.

Second, two decades of rapid international integration -- and, crucially, awareness of growing interdependence -- meant that policymakers appreciated the merits of keeping economies open.

This interdependence is linked to the final important factor that contained protectionism in the midst of the crisis: the rules, norms, and transparency offered by the World Trade Organization.

Trade tensions have increased, but trade wars have been absent. Governments introducing import

barriers have, in the main, cited the WTO rulebook to justify the moves. Countries feeling wronged by the measures have responded not with unilateral retaliation, but by using the WTO's well-tested litigation procedures. The WTO has proved its worth as a collective insurance policy against the disorder of unilateral action.

Yet we cannot be complacent. Dark clouds loom on the horizon for trade. Gloomy growth forecasts suggest that export demand may fall short of governments' hopes. The WTO recently had to revise downward projections for trade volume growth in 2012 to 2.5%, down from 3.7% in spring. So long as unemployment remains stubbornly high -- the International Labour Organization forecasts that in 2013 an additional 7 million people will join the 200-million-strong ranks of the unemployed -- pressure to curb imports will persist. In addition, many major economies are already testing the political limits on the use of fiscal and monetary stimulus. If policymakers feel that these policy options have run their course, protectionism may regain its allure.

Already there is growing cause for concern. Our monitoring work indicates that governments continue to introduce new trade restrictions without stepping up the removal of older measures. The trade restricting measures introduced by G-20 governments since October 2008 now cover almost 3% of total world merchandise commerce -- an amount roughly double Brazil's share in global trade. Trade restrictions have a

tendency to shift from temporary crisis-fighting measures to industrial policies that are more difficult to unwind. Procedural and administrative roadblocks at borders are making traders' costs unpredictable. Perhaps more ominously, protectionist rhetoric favouring import substitution as a growth strategy is enjoying a revival even in some G-20 member countries.

The visible danger today is of a gradual but steady erosion of the benefits of trade openness.

The irony is that in the modern global economy, creeping protectionism is not a successful recipe for achieving its main goal, that is, to boost exports. Thanks to the dramatic rise in the fragmentation of production across countries, the import content of exported goods has doubled in the past 20 years to 40%. Intermediate goods, not final products, now account for more than half of global trade. We no longer trade in products, but in tasks. In a world of global value chains and "Made in the World" products, impeding imports amounts to shooting your own exporters in the foot. Consumers struggling with stagnant wages would see their purchasing power weakened further. Developing countries could see hard-won gains rolled back.

If governments are to maximise the contribution of trade to better jobs and improved living standards, they must reframe the narrative surrounding it. The traditional "imports bad/exports good" framework needs to give way to "export success depends also on easy access to

imports." The focus must be on adding value, not crude bilateral trade balances. To support such efforts, the WTO has been working with partners such as the OECD to develop statistics that reflect trade in value added; the first batch of numbers is due in December.

In the shorter term, there are concrete steps governments could take to keep international trade flowing. Unwinding recent restrictions is an obvious starting point. Although the broader Doha Round negotiations are currently at an impasse, countries could move forward towards a WTO agreement on trade facilitation which would lower trading costs by slashing customs-related red tape and simplifying border procedures for traded merchandise. They could cooperate on how to minimise the trade costs or distortions arising from divergence in non-tariff measures without compromising the pursuit of health, safety or environmental objectives. Governments could also work together with the Basel regulators to ensure that much-needed banking sector regulations do not unintentionally make trade finance less available and affordable, especially for poor countries.

Over the long run, domestic social policy will be central to resisting protectionist backlashes and keeping trade open. Trade will always be vulnerable if the efficiencies it creates are perceived to benefit only a fortunate minority. Government action can help equip people to profit from the global marketplace, cushion the blows of creative destruction and curb inequality.

A crisis is an opportunity to learn. In a world where protectionism does not protect governments must take more sophisticated approaches to supporting domestic growth and social protection. It is important that this be one of the fundamental lessons that we collectively learn from this crisis.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

November 7

- 1917**
World War I: Third Battle of Gaza ends: British forces capture Gaza from the Ottoman Empire.
- 1931**
The Chinese Soviet Republic is proclaimed on the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution.
- 1944**
Franklin D. Roosevelt elected for a record fourth term as President of the United States of America.
- 1956**
Suez Crisis: The United Nations General Assembly adopts a resolution calling for the United Kingdom, France and Israel to immediately withdraw their troops from Egypt.