

GROUND REALITIES

Take Jamaat to task for mayhem

Lack of security preparedness obvious

WE condemn in the strongest possible terms the deliberate act of vandalism in which some 200 vehicles across many districts including Dhaka were damaged or destroyed by cadres belonging to Jamaat-e-Islami and its student body, Shibir. This was a planned act to create havoc and anarchy. In that, the police was caught completely unawares. How violence can be a programme of a political party defies logic.

The Jamaat has made one grave miscalculation. The public will not put up with this sort of orchestrated violence. Whatever little public sympathy Jamaat may have had is bound to evaporate due to this wanton act of destruction of public and private property. We fully support what the finance minister has stated on intelligence failure of the law enforcement agencies. The fact that Shibir activists were able to coordinate their attacks simultaneously in a number of districts across the country speaks of the level of planning that went into it.

Live footage of the scenes shows that police were indeed caught off guard and on the defensive, particularly in Dhaka. How could this happen and that too in close proximity of the Secretariat where the prime minister was present then? And the Indian home minister was in town too at that time. It exposes serious lacunae in intelligence gathering capability of the agencies. And lack of intelligence leads to lack of preparedness to take appropriate measures to pre-empt violence, as was so obvious on Monday.

We find the home minister's perfunctory dismissal of the finance minister's statements untenable. There was an unprecedented breach of security on Monday, and the home minister should answer as to how violence could be perpetrated in a high security zone. Such explanation is now needed more than ever as the Inspector General of Police has reportedly indicated that they had prior information that a situation like this may be in the offing. The police should explain why they were so grossly unprepared to meet the challenge posed by Jamaat-Shibir cadres.

Politicking doctors

They must focus on their profession

AGHAst at public health sector doctors' excessive involvement in partisan politics, the parliamentary standing committee on public assurance at a meeting on Monday came down heavily on them. The doctors, so busy doing politics, are thus seriously defaulting on their duties.

This is a very important issue concerning the state of public health in the country. The JS body deserves commendations for its timely step to bring the matter to the fore.

Doctors so engaged in politics are also adopting unfair means like running their private practice in their chambers set up within the government clinic.

This is very unfortunate that the government doctors could stoop so low as to forget their noble calling for partisan end and keep themselves absent from their duty stations!

Is it then any surprise that the rural public hospitals are in such a sorry state? While deprived of service from government community clinics, the poor patients in the rural areas are going to village quacks and faith healers for treatment? As a result, they are being pushed into double jeopardy--they are being cheated by these fake healers, on the one hand, while their medical condition is getting worse, on the other. In desperation, many of them are selling their properties and rushing to the private hospitals in the cities. And the blame for all this goes to the government sector doctors themselves.

This state of affairs cannot continue indefinitely. While these doctors may conveniently forget the cost the common people had to bear from the public exchequer to train each of them, the state cannot and should not afford to do so.

The government must go to the bottom of this problem. The fact that the doctors are overactive in politics implies that they are getting some encouragement from the major political parties in power and the opposition. So, the onus lies both on the ruling and opposition parties to prevail upon the government doctors to refrain from politics and return to their jobs.

The errant doctors should be made to see reason. The

Looking back at the Mahatma



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

SIXTY five years after his assassination, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi remains a pivotal figure in the history of the world.

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, for all the differences he had with the Mahatma, called him the "father of our nation." Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, even when he took to giving shape to the Swarajya Party in the 1920s, knew that he could not afford to sever his links with the apostle of non-violence as India prepared itself for freedom.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, despite a youth characterised by active involvement in the idea of Pakistan in the 1940s, was by the late 1960s ready to borrow the idea of non-violent non-cooperation from Gandhi. It was an instrument he used to good effect in March 1971. Martin Luther King Jr, in his struggle for civil rights in the United States, made it clear that Gandhi was his inspiration.

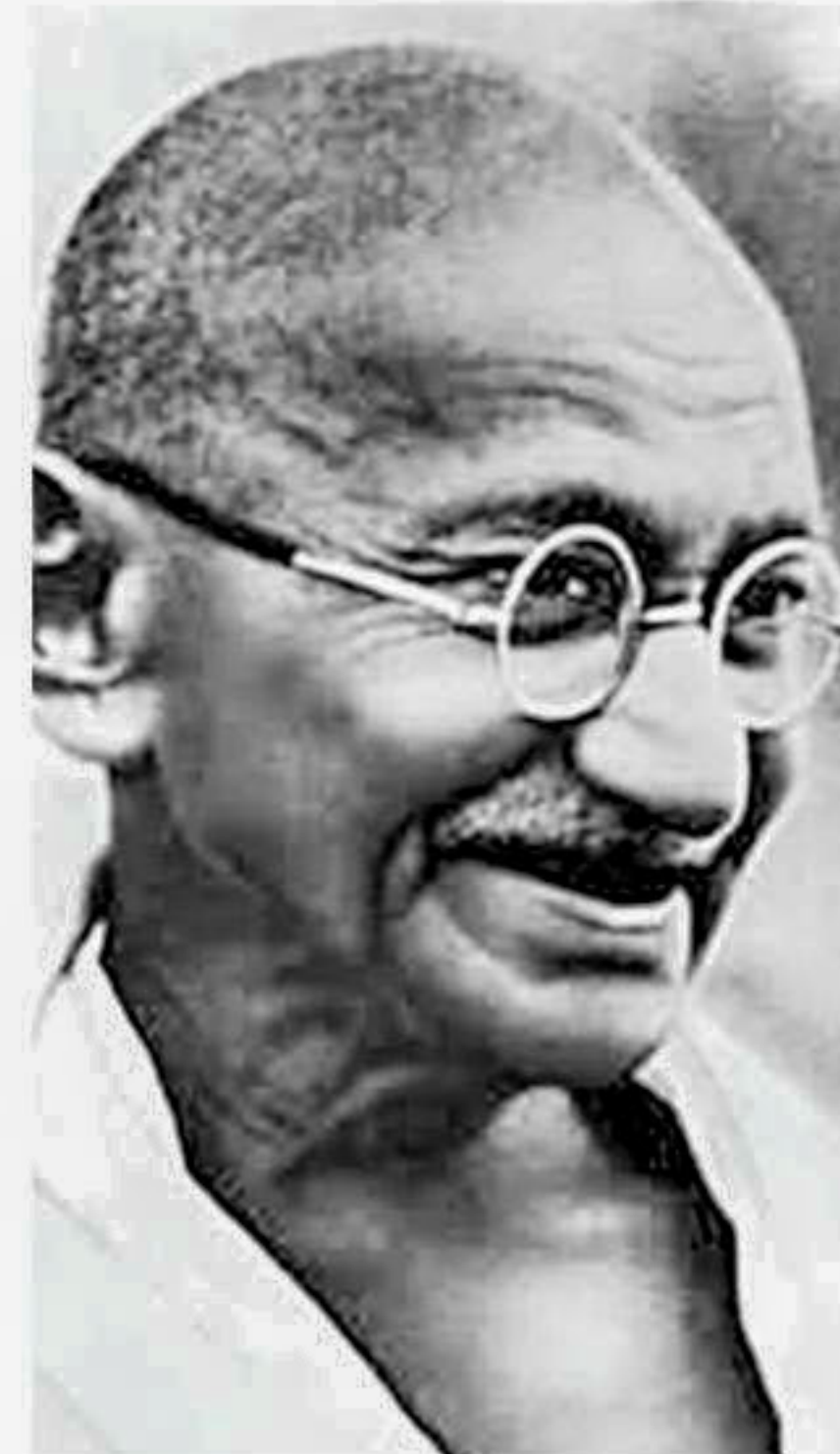
And Nelson Mandela had this to say of India's paramount symbol of freedom: "He dared to exhort non-violence in a time when the violence of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had exploded on us; he exhorted morality when science, technology and the capitalist order had made it redundant; he replaced self-interest with group interest without minimising the importance of self."

It becomes important, all these years after the tragedy of January 1948, to re-examine the historical role Gandhi played during his lifetime, the ceaseless struggle he put up against British colonial rule. It was a role which in a number of instances has been criticised by those who have watched him in action, for the particular reason that some of his actions did not go down well with his fellow travelers on freedom road.

Note may be made here of his suspension of the non-cooperation movement in the early 1920s follow-

ing the deaths of twenty two policemen in Chauri Chaura at the hands of a mob carried away by the urge for freedom. His inability to prevent the partition of India in 1947 and deliberate staying away from all celebrations of freedom have been painted by his detractors as escapism of a costly kind. And yet, in retrospective historical analysis, it becomes hard to see how Gandhi could have enthused over freedom that had dawned through death and destruction and the abandonment of ancestral homes in Bengal and the Punjab.

There were those who disagreed with Gandhi's methods, for they spotted mistakes in his strategy towards self-rule and eventual independence for India. Rabindranath Tagore, the man who had conferred on Gandhi the honorific of Mahatma, was under no illusion that the latter's call for a boycott of foreign goods would only hurt India's masses. And this was how he made his views



Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

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known: "It is an outrage upon human nature to force it through a mill and reduce it to some standardised commodity of uniform size and shape and purpose."

For Gandhi, liberal enough to concede the thought that freedom was not worth having if it did not include the freedom to make mistakes, Tagore's argument nevertheless did not make him change course. His response to the Bard was simple: "It was our love of foreign cloth that ousted the wheel from its position of dignity... In burning my foreign clothes I burn my shame. I must refuse to insult the naked by giving them clothes they do not need instead of giving them work they sorely need." That was a principled

stand. Or was it an ill-conceived sidelining of some far graver realities in British-ruled India?

In 1939, the reality in the Congress was that Subhas Chandra Bose had beaten Pattabhi Sitaramayya, the man Gandhi had hoped would defeat Bose in his bid for re-election. Gandhi, in one of those rare strange moments in his life, dropped his moral compass and publicly expressed his sadness at Bose's triumph. He did nothing to prevent the senior leaders of the party from deserting Bose, thereby compelling Bose to resign and eventually carve a new, necessarily radical path in his campaign for India's freedom. Earlier, in 1934, Bose had made it known in his work, *The Indian*

Struggle, that Gandhi ought to have been more assertive at the Round Table conference in London. This is how he put it: "If the Mahatma had spoken in the language of dictator Stalin, Duce Mussolini or Fuhrer Hitler, John Bull would have understood and bowed his head in respect."

But, of course, Bose was wrong to think that men whose idea of leadership was a suppression of individual liberty could be an inspiration for Gandhi or India. Besides, Mussolini and Hitler were in the end put to flight by the likes of John Bull. Gandhi was aware of the risks with which passive resistance to the British were fraught. That bones would be broken and skulls would be cracked -- and they were -- was a possibility he acknowledged. But could India have taken any other road to freedom? It was the human will that mattered. Strength, Gandhi noted, did not come from physical capacity but from an indomitable will. It was just as well, for passive resistance, the strength to absorb the blow of the truncheon, could in time weaken the resolve of the arrogant coloniser. And it did, in the end.

Gandhi had his failings, but they were far outweighed by the qualities that have conferred greatness on him. He endured humiliation in South Africa. He found spiritual strength in incarceration. The result was satyagraha. He respected Mohammad Ali Jinnah, was the first person to call him Quaid-e-Azam. His presence restored confidence among Muslims in riot-torn Calcutta. He it was who waded into distant Noakhali to save Hindus from Muslim mobs.

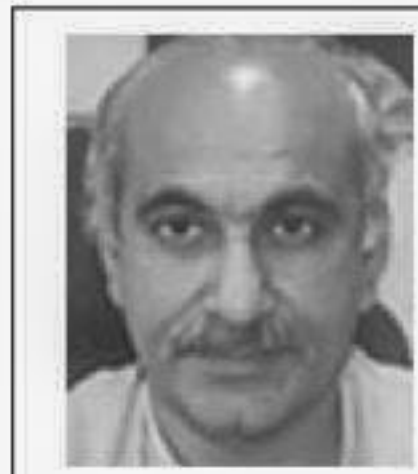
The last word on Gandhi comes from Netaji. In a broadcast on Azad Hind Radio on July 6, 1944, the doomed Subhas Bose appealed to the Mahatma: "Father of our Nation, in this holy war of India's liberation, we ask you for your blessings and good wishes."

(Mahatma Gandhi, apostle of non-violence, was assassinated on January 30, 1948).

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BYLINE

Low expectations an advantage for Rahul



M.J. AKBAR

THE destiny of the Nehru-Indira family seems to move in twenty-year cycles. Its journey in power began on June 15, 1945 when

Jawaharlal Nehru was released from his last spell in a British jail and Mahatma Gandhi immediately began to manoeuvre his heir towards centre stage. It ended on May 27, 1964 when India's first Prime Minister shut his eyes for the last time.

Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi joined government in 1964 and was assassinated in 1984, but there was a more significant political parallel. Her domination did not begin in 1966, when she became prime minister, but in 1969, when she split Congress and took control of both party and government. Her grip over Congress survived the hiccup of defeat in 1977, and she was back in power by January 1980. The family lost control, first of government and then of party, after Rajiv Gandhi's defeat in 1989, and his tragic assassination in 1991.

The family was unable to occupy the prime minister's office, despite electoral success in 1991, 2004 and 2009. After two decades, the Congress met at Jaipur to declare that this quasi-barren spell is over. There will be only one fountainhead of power, Rahul Gandhi, for the foreseeable

future. Manmohan Singh is the last non-family Congress PM for as long as Rahul Gandhi chooses to remain in politics. Pranab Mukherjee was prescient. He shifted residence to Rashtrapati Bhavan at the right time. Some ambitious hearts in the higher echelons of the present Cabinet have probably suffered a silent attack, but they must reconcile their dreams to reality: there is space for eminence in Congress, but none for pre-eminence.

Rahul Gandhi has always had as much power as he wanted to exercise. The difference after Jaipur is that the

an obligatory requirement.

If there is a law of averages then Rahul Gandhi is possibly headed for better things. He has had such a miserable record so far, the nadir reached in Uttar Pradesh, that his fortunes surely must improve at some point. He could, in the short term, also become beneficiary of a fine paradox. So far the wrap of glamour has raised expectations that were clearly beyond his ability. But once expectations are lowered, even ordinary statements begin to sound above par. That is a distinct advantage when you need to

So far the wrap of glamour has raised expectations that were clearly beyond Rahul Gandhi's ability. But once expectations are lowered, even ordinary statements begin to sound above par. That is a distinct advantage when you need to reinvent yourself.

Regent, Sonia Gandhi, will start to fade from decision-making. Sonia has not withdrawn fully only because she is still uncertain about her son's ability, as if it was a puberty transition rather than an adult transfer of power. Rahul Gandhi may have stepped into only one of the two shoes his mother wears, but there is no confusion over who will be Congress candidate for prime minister in the next general elections, and indeed in the elections after that, irrespective of victory or defeat. Merit, or its absence, is never an issue when you have been anointed with a divine right to rule. The chorus of hallelujahs at Jaipur is

reinvent yourself. The old avatar, in which Rahul Gandhi could disappear for weeks on holiday while rage against rape swept the streets, will obviously no longer do. He will be obliged to answer awkward questions on Telengana, or why Akbaruddin Owaisi can get bail but not Jagan Reddy.

There are solutions; Congress is not devoid of talent. Rahul Gandhi should take tuition from Ghulam Nabi Azad, party general secretary in charge of Andhra Pradesh. Azad had a superb explanation when asked why the Congress had backtracked on home minister Sushil Shinde's promise to

announce a final decision by January 28. "When one says tomorrow," said Azad, "it does not mean tomorrow morning. When one says one week, sometimes it is two weeks." Or possibly months.

Brilliant. A politician must treat words as slaves, not as masters. Azad should also open classes for Digvijay Singh, who addresses Osama bin Laden and Hafiz Saeed with all the respect due to owners of vote banks, and Shinde, who believes that India has become victim of "Hindu terrorism." If the BJP gets elected, the party will doubtless send formal thank you letters to Singh and Shinde.

Every succeeding cycle offers diminishing returns. Jawaharlal led the Congress in three general elections and never lost any. Indira Gandhi lived on a roller coaster. She swept to a delirious victory in 1971, collapsed dramatically in 1977 and fashioned an amazing resurrection in 1980. Rajiv Gandhi had a steamroller triumph in 1984, and then ebbed to defeat in 1989. 3-0; 2-1; 1-1: the scores tell the story. It is unwise to predict results of any election that is still a year away, but Rahul Gandhi just might have to begin life at the top with an electoral setback. His choice in 2014 will be between a ramshackle coalition, or a period in opposition. That is when the Congress will know whether the heir is also a leader.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

January 30

- 1649** King Charles I of England is beheaded.
- 1835** In the first assassination attempt against a President of the United States, Richard Lawrence attempts to shoot president Andrew Jackson, but fails and is subdued by a crowd, including several congressmen.
- 1933** Adolf Hitler is sworn in as Chancellor of Germany.
- 1948** Indian pacifist and leader Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi known for his non-violent freedom struggle is assassinated by Pandit Nathuram Godse, a Hindu extremist.
- 1960** The African National Party is founded in Chad, through the merger of traditionalist parties.
- 1972** Pakistan withdraws from the Commonwealth of Nations.
- 1989** The American embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan closes.