Tainted Identities

ZAHIR HASSAN NABIL

Since the ICT verdicts stirred unrest in the country, the war crimes tribunal, the government, the opposition, the Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing, the police and the Shahbag crowd - all were criticised by different national and international communities. Some of those criticisms may not entirely be applicable. Nevertheless, it is true that following the unbridled attacks unleashed on the Hindu communities, we are not in a position to say with conviction we have been able to maintain a harmonious co-existence.

In a statement on March 6, Amnesty International's (AI) Bangladesh researcher Abbas Faiz notes, "It is shocking that they [Hindu people] appear to be targeted simply for their religion." Many have found the recent violence against the Hindu communities even more appalling than the plight of the Buddhist people in Cox's Bazar and the exile of Rohingyas from Myanmar and the whole situation in the region indicative of a growing tendency of violence against minorities.

In theory, the despicable acts of violence against the Hindu communities should bear no relevance to the politics of war crimes, the war crimes tribunal and its verdicts or the government, opposition or Islam. But the persecution of innocents in the name of religion shows that in reality things were different. The hope of upholding the country's image is a distant dream when one of its minorities is subject to violence and the government being advised by international human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International to put more effort to handle the situation.



Media often term attackers as 'religious bigots, fanatics' whereas such devastation at Dhopapara, Bashkhali couldn't be possibly propelled by anyone remotely 'religious'.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Indeed the battle is challenging. Only a few days ago, while the government was advised to harness its law enforcers from using lethal weapons, a police constable, on pursuit of Jamaat-Shibir men on charges of violence against the Hindu communities, was shot in Khulna. This also begs the questions as to who are in need of real protection. Amid criticism, the government along with the opposition proposed to form committees using their grassroots-level members to "protect the minority", which has also been frowned upon by two advisors to previous caretaker government as it may pave way to outright confrontation.

It should be noted that leading British and American media including the BBC and the CNN had been terming the war-crime accused as 'Islamists' rather than 'convicted war criminals'. At such a time, media reports on attacks initiated by 'Islamists', connoted as terrorists, should be embarrassing for Bangladeshis.

Awareness-raising campaigns by political and Islamic parties and scholars have already been initiated to battle propaganda fuelling violence. Although most Islamist parties in Bangladesh had dissociated themselves from such abuse of religion, this had not quite pacified the eyebrows raised. When the Hindu communities are victims of vandalism, arson, destruction of places of worship and homes and the attackers are termed as 'Islamist', it may be perceived as an outbreak of a communal riot and oppression.

"This is not a communal riot but something completely unprecedented," says Mohammad Akhtaruzzaman, a professor of Islamic History and Culture at Dhaka University. "Examples are extremely rare for such pre-planned injustice in grand scale towards minorities who are com-