

KALEIDOSCOPE

Repair ideological faultlines



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THE nation is passing through the worst of the times in terms of confrontation between the government and the political parties in the opposition. On Friday, some UN Human Rights experts called upon all the parties involved to end violence and urged the demonstrators to opt for more peaceful protests.

But neither side seems willing to heed the UN experts' plea. What is at stake that has made either side so stubborn and increasingly intolerant towards each other? The UN human rights experts in their plea have linked the opposition's protest demonstrations to "the decisions of the international crimes tribunals."

The UN experts have simply stated what appears on the face of it about the recent spate of violence since the International War Crimes Tribunal (ICT) started pronouncing verdicts against the senior Jamaate-e-Islami (JI) leaders facing trial for crimes against humanity beginning in the third week of January this year.

But the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) along with JI and its other partners under 18-party alliance had long been carrying out their anti-government demonstrations demanding reinstatement of the caretaker system of government to hold next general elections and other issues. Those, too, were often violent. JI's role in those movements was not as pronounced and as violent as it has become after the ICT verdicts. In fact, the street violence launched by JI suddenly took an extremely violent and bloodier turn after Delwar Hossain Sayedee was awarded death penalty on February 28.

JI being an alliance partner of the main opposition, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the latter is sharing the blame for JI-sponsored violence of recent weeks by default. The irony is BNP's own protest programmes so far did not have connection with the verdicts of the ICT. It has not even opposed the trial of war criminals in principle except that it has questioned impartiality and transparency of the trial. Even so, it has

been bearing the consequences of JI's street agitations which had never been as militant as those are now.

It is worthwhile to mention that, so far, the AL-led government had been carrying out what looks like an ideological war against JI and the main opposition BNP centring the trial of war criminals. It has been mobilising quarters sympathetic to it in this propaganda war against the opposition. And in doing so, it took full advantage of the BNP's delicate position due to its alliance partnership with JI.

Interestingly, the JI's becoming a political pariah is of recent origin, particularly after AL's coming to power in 2009. Before that, during the pre-1991 anti-Ershad movements, and then again in the agitations for caretaker system of government till 1996, JI was rather a welcome partner in AL's struggles.

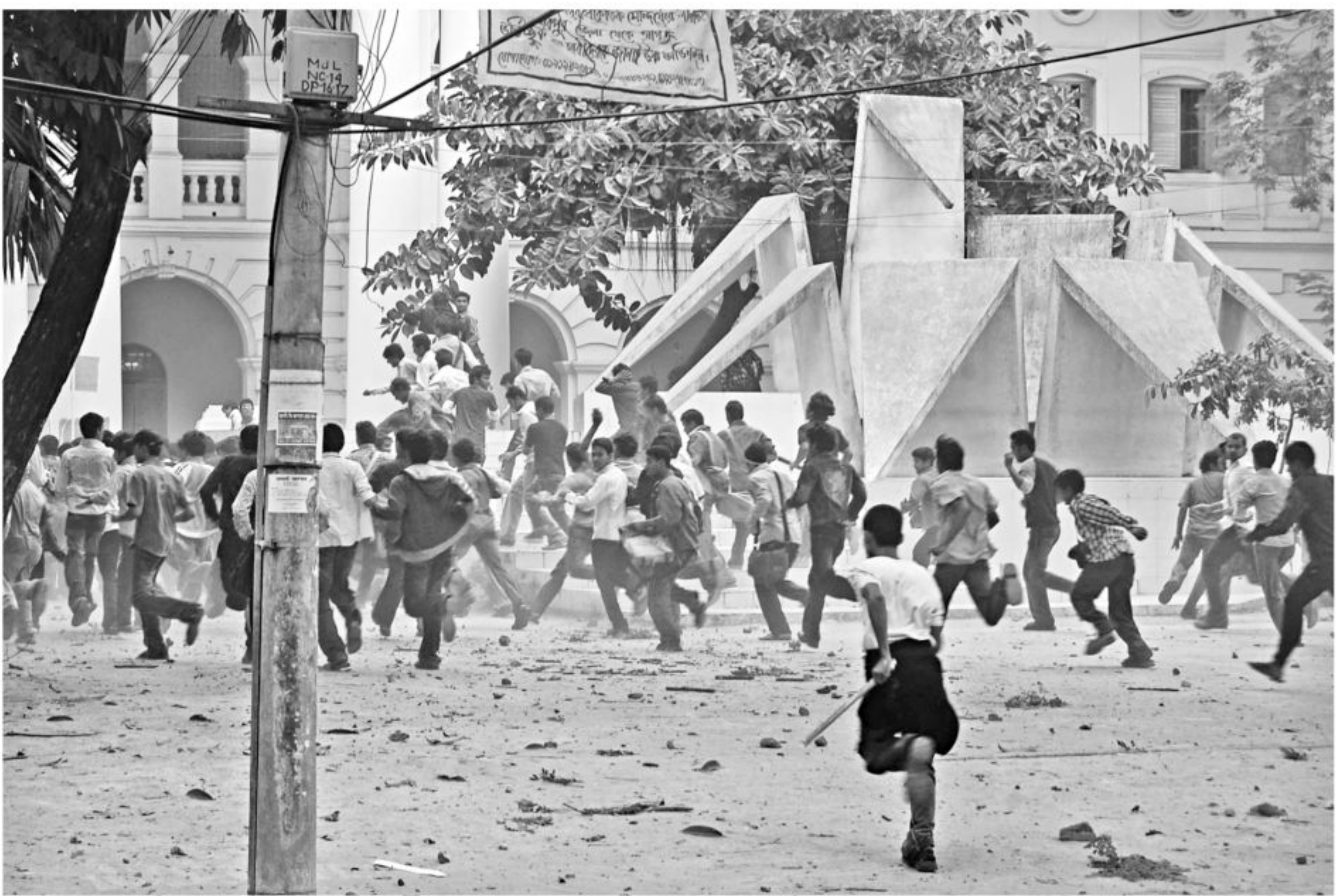
Now in the changed political equation when JI is a partner of BNP, its anti-liberation dossiers have been opened. In this way, BNP was severely cornered on moral grounds by the ruling AL along the pro and anti liberation discourse.

And not to be outmanoeuvred, the opposition BNP was desperately looking for a convenient ploy to put AL in a tight spot when the social network activists, dubbed bloggers, at Shahbagh, provided an unexpected opportunity. It is well-known that the social network activists at Shahbagh have been pressing for capital punishment to all JI leaders facing war crimes trial.

However, following some infantile remarks about Islam made by some of the social network activist in their personal blogs, the opposition's anti-government movement took a strange new twist. Things were blown out of proportion creating a huge confusion over whatever were the actual contents of those said anti-Islam remarks. But the damage had already been done.

The radical pro-Islami forces took it as a sacrilege to Islam and its prophet and declared a crusade against the 'bloggers.' The Islamist group called Hefazat-e-Islam meaning 'protector of Islam' has meanwhile declared a long march on April 6 towards Dhaka demanding capital punishment to the said bloggers.

The Shahbagh activists, to whom the government extended its moral support for understandable reasons,



SHAFIQUK ISLAM KAJOL / DRIK NEWS

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have by now lost much of their sting. The opposition BNP has sided with the Islamists' so-called crusade against what they say apostate bloggers at Shahbagh. So it is now a political war between 'Islam' and 'anti-Islam' forces in which the government is taking the blame for protecting 'enemies of Islam'. So things are now back to square one. The fallout of this mock war on seemingly ideological grounds between the two major political camps has started to bear its poisonous fruits. Society is now dangerously polarised. Never before, since independence, has the nation been forced into

such an artificially created crisis. And all this is the product of chicanery and Machiavellianism in order to get a political mileage out of them against the adversary. This is political brinkmanship at its worst. The government and the opposition must stop this dangerous game and settle their differences through dialogue. Otherwise they will be liable for the chaos society is gradually getting sucked into.

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ARIF IQBAL KHAN

SECURITY is its real religion and its supreme ideology. Israel believes anything is legal which can somehow provide security to the Jewish state. Towards that end, Israeli forces are trained and equipped to adopt any means necessary to protect the country. There is nothing wrong in this strategy, in fact every country in the world trains its military to defend its international borders and its sovereignty from any external attack by any means necessary. Why should it be something special for Israel?

The hunter is the hunted in the western media portrayal of Israel. The world is made to believe that it is the Palestinians who are trying to break up Israel and planning to take away its land to carve a free state for Muslims. The picture painted by the western media is that of Israel being forced to look mercifully on poor, homeless, fiery Palestinian Muslims who occasionally throw rockets at them. It is the image of a tolerant Israel against extremist, fundamentalist, terrorist and inherently violent Palestinian Muslims. It is as if the Palestinian Arabs were out to steal Israeli land with the help of terror groups. It shows the usurper as the good guy and the oppressed as the bad guy.

The problem is that Israel itself is a result of usurpation and occupation. It was not Palestinians who came and settled in Israel, it was the other way round. European Jews, having gone through hell in Germany, Poland, France, Russia and other parts of Europe, founded the policy of Zionism by taking away Palestinian lands and creating a Jewish state out of it. Palestinian Muslims were driven out of their homes by Jewish immigrants.

Imagine, if Asian immigrants took over Canada, evicted its citizens from their homes, turned natives into refugees in their own country and then branded Canadians as terrorists for wanting freedom and for wanting their land back. It would be an outrageous proposition to say the least. But that's exactly what happened in Palestine. Israel is the one occupying lands that belong to Palestinians. Naturally, Palestinians have a cause to protest against occupation and to demand their freedom.

Looking at the problem closely, one will see the issue as an international one. Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands (by force) is an international crime. Not only Palestinians but all conscious citizens of the world will have something to say against such crime. The US can be proud of such a humanitarian rights activist as Rachel Corrie, who should be remembered more as a saint than as a rights activist.

Rachel stood up for what was right. She correctly diagnosed the Palestinian issue as an international problem and took bold steps to do what some Palestinians would not dare. Rachel Corrie challenged the mighty authorities in occupied territories with her only weapon, her speech. She threatened to expose the cruelty of Israel through her activism. She dared to stand in the way of the authorities with a mike in hand shouting they were in the wrong, they

had no right to do what they were doing and the world would not forgive them for their acts. That was her way of resisting a wrong.

Corrie was crushed to death by an Israeli bulldozer on March 16, 2003, in Gaza as she stood in front of it trying to stop the systematic destruction of Palestinian homes. According to information released last year "the Israeli government destroyed 22 homes in East Jerusalem and 222 homes in West Bank in 2011, leaving nearly 1,200 people homeless. During the war on Gaza (December 2008 - January 2009), it destroyed 4,455 homes, leaving 20,000 Palestinians displaced and unable to rebuild due to the restrictions imposed by the siege. (Other reports give much higher estimates.) Since 1967, the Israeli government destroyed 25,000 homes in the occupied territories, rendered 160,000 Palestinians homeless. Numbers can be even grimmer if one is to take into account those who were killed and wounded during clashes linked to the destruction of these homes."

Rachel Corrie's murder by Israel ten years ago once again underscores the fact that the Israeli crimes against Palestinians or any other nationality will get little, if any at all, attention from western mainstream media. It also shows

that Muslims, and indeed all justice seekers worldwide, have much work to do to improve their informational outreach strategy.

Rachel Corrie's valiant stand confronting an Israeli bulldozer did not turn into the same iconic image in the mainstream media as that of a Chinese student in Tiananmen Square in June 1989. The reason is simple: despite Corrie being a US citizen, it was Israel that was committing the murder of a peace activist. Nor did Rachel's heroism receive even a fraction of attention to what the mainstream media allocated to Malala

Yousafzai, the 15-year-old Pakistani girl who was shot and wounded by the Taliban last October.

Rachel's case not only highlights yet again the extreme bias in the mainstream western media, it also exposes the Muslims' weakness in this vital field. The inability to create global awareness about Rachel Corrie's case and the cause she defended should serve as a wake-up call to the Muslim Ummah. If Rachel Corrie had been killed by Palestinians, her case would have turned to a well-documented poster item of how a young, educated, independent and determined Western woman died defending the supposed democratic values. Rachel's legacy should remind Muslims about the words of Imam Hussein on the parched sands of Karbala when he addressed the murderous army of Yazid. Imam Hussein said to them: "O people, if you do not believe in Judgment Day and disregard the laws of God, at least be free in this world and do not become the tools of oppression."

Rachel Corrie proved through her actions that she was indeed a free spirit, one that was not intimidated or subdued by the hedonistic forces exploiting and subjugating others.

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ALAMGIR KHAN

NOBEL Laureate Amartya Sen once found it difficult to make students of Peking University, Beijing, understand as simple a thing as private tuition at the level of basic education. If he had tried to make them understand home tasks given in schools, he would have put them at their wit's end. These things are unthinkable to people in Europe, America and also in many developing countries. What even a grown-up person in those countries finds mysterious and incomprehensible is as easy as ABC to a 5-year-old child in India, Bangladesh and other South Asian countries. But there is nothing to be glad about this 'intelligence' from our children. It is a sort of curse for the nation.

The direct consequence of home tasks is private tuition, which strengthens and perpetuates class division in society. Amartya Sen writes: "The need for home tasks is particularly difficult to meet for parents from disadvantaged classes -- these children may be the first generation to receive school

education. Parents with the disadvantage of having received little education find it especially difficult to do anything for their children in helping them with their assigned home tasks. It is not surprising that they long for the ability to engage private tutors for their children, but of course very often they cannot, in fact, afford to help their kids in this way. The result is not only frustration and despair, but also continued transmission of education backwardness from one generation to the next." (*Primary Schooling: Private tuition, home tasks and class boundaries*, by Amartya Sen. *The Telegraph*, December 20, 2009).

Pratichi Trust, India, led by Amartya Sen, has been campaigning to abolish home tasks and private tuition from the education system. The organisation's 2009 report discussed the curricular load for school children. Children are heavily loaded with too many things to learn, whereas the skills of "reading, writing and arithmetic" are ignored. The main objective of basic education is to make children skilled in these 3 R's. There is no place for home task in this.

The heavy load of curriculum makes the way for teachers to give home tasks, forces parents to engage private tutors for their children and thus makes education accessible to only those who can afford it and deprive those who cannot. Amartya

Sen writes: "The necessity of home tasks for early primary education has to be comprehensively challenged" and "... the case becomes even stronger when the impact of the divisiveness of class is taken into account" (*The Telegraph*).

The ill effects of home tasks and private tuition are elaborately discussed in Amartya Sen's book *Sishusiksher Bhumika*. The education ministry of Bangladesh is aware of the ill effects of private tuition and has imposed some restrictions over it, though ineffectively. There are also ineffective restrictions against publishing of note/guide books, which also sprouts from the above-mentioned root. The education authorities have not looked deep into the root cause of the problem. They have been grappling with the branches that grow as quickly as they are cut down, whereas what is needed is to uproot the whole poison tree from our education system.

To pull out the roots of the problems, we have to go through an extensive revision of our curriculum by focusing on the 3 R's in basic education. The

government does not need to make a 10-year-old child a scholar specialised in a lot of modern things. We just need to equip them with knowledge of the 3 R's for further learning. Much of the energy that is now spent in making "little scholars" will not be wasted, and can be used for providing basic education to each and every child irrespective of family background, which the constitutional pledge to the people.

This does not deny the well-off parents their right to give extra education to their kids if they like. But the kids of the well-off parents must be deprived of the unfair competitive advantage that they now have due to the injustice of home tasks and private tuition, which only they can afford.

Education for all is more necessary than education for a few. The poison tree of education for a few can be uprooted by cutting down the curriculum load to the amount needed for achieving proficiency in the 3 R's, making home tasks, private tuition, guidebooks, etc. unnecessary. Only through this and other positive initiatives can education be made free from the clutches of class interest and only then can education be a right, not a privilege.

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