

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

Impunity: No end in sight



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

with time, and lack of a reversal in the world economic meltdown are nibbling into Bangladesh's potential for growth.

If the economy is "enigmatic," politics is vexatious. The world is confused, perhaps more than we are, over the direction the country is headed for.

A long march from Chittagong after the Juma prayers with a caravan of thousand buses headed for Dhaka is round the corner. It is being organised by Hefajat-e-Islam. The opposition 18-party alliance led by BNP has expressed solidarity with it. Pitted against the move, are 27 organisations under the banner of Ghatak-Dalal Nirmul Committee and Sammilito Sangskritik Jote. They have called a 24-hour long shutdown beginning this evening in protest against the long march.

The armless long march with "rosary and prayer mat" in the hands of the participants is supposed to be a peaceable venture. As we understand it, the Sammilito Sangskritik Jote has called the hartal to protest, and not to resist the long march. So, there needn't be any confrontation. Actually, all concerned citizens are looking to the government to ensure an incident-free exercise of the democratic right to hold peaceful programmes under its watch.

But Hefajat-e-Islam has threatened continuous shutdown from tomorrow should the hartal called by the progressive platform be not withdrawn or it long march thwarted.

The bellicose rhetoric is a measure of the simulated religious divide along the line of believers and non-believers, expressions remindful of pre-Islamic days. We have come a long way in pursuit of Islam for all these centuries. How can a handful of bloggers make a difference to the long narrative of piety?

Internationally, Bangladesh is looked upon as a moderate Islamic country. Such a characterisation is, however, at some risk of being rethought if the tide of new zealotry is not stemmed.

We are in a cusp of flux, a highly fluid situation we find ourselves in. When a country is disunited and in turmoil, a predictable conspiracy of circumstances is at play -- thanks to external sources coming in aid of some ideology at the

expense of the secular liberal ethos. The vulnerability was exposed when some foreign citizens were recently caught with bombs and fake Indian currency suspected to be used in an extremist ploy were they not frozen in their tracks.

The primary issue remains the lip-service to rule of law. Nobody seems to be in charge when you see criminality in politics and in the financial sector has a field day. Except for political detention, arrests are hardly made with any specificity of purpose as the culpable roam around gleefully knowing nothing will happen to them.

The biggest puzzle is how acts of heinous crime including attacks on police, brutalisation of society



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and destruction of public property are the order of the day. Despite the availability of hard evidence on TV footage, newspaper photos and CCTV to identify the wrongdoers no headway has been made in any criminal case of any consequence whatsoever.

The tale of extraordinary courage of 25-year-old Jharna Begum in the face of macabre violence in Rajshahi has strengthened our belief in humanity. To be precise, she has shown the moral strength and compassionate nature of women. The mother in them often dazzles.

She came from out of nowhere to rescue a police officer immobilised and flailing under the impact of a severe head injury. As she was struggling to lift the motionless body, two young men joined in to save

Sub Inspector Jahangir Alam from succumbing to his critical condition. Taken to hospital in time, he is recuperating.

Rajshahi police administration as a token of recognition for her valour gave some money to her with assurances of a regular job. Much as that has been a good gesture from the police, it cannot be lost on anyone that the policemen who had been with Jahangir Alam in Upashahar police camp left him alone -- to the wolves, as it were, swooping down on the isolated police officer.

Such a tendency of leaving a colleague under attack in the hyenas' den, and not fending off the offensive against him wherever spearheaded sets a dangerous precedent.

The sight of police as a state agency being outmaneuvered by the diabolic tactic of the desperados is reflection of a lack of police strategy attuned to the changing circumstances. Given that such a state of affairs can only demoralise law enforcement agencies, this needs to be addressed urgently.

The police's role as virtual bystanders in some critical circumstances is the product of alternating doses of partisanship they have been subjected to. In such a context, even training, reorientation, remotivation and reequipment cannot transform it into an effective force, friendly to and protective of the citizenry.

A young woman has led the way; now, it is for ordinary men and women to uphold the value of human lives which has hit an all-time low. The best way to do it would be through a mounting of public resistance against acts of brutalisation.

After all these years of world's march through democracy, secularism, capitalism, state capitalism and separation of religion from state affairs, we now find ourselves caught up in a basic debate about a social compact. This is revisiting the hoary past of the immediate sequel to the French Revolution.

Rousseau's social contract theory remains our reference point whereas it should have been an established fact of our life. The theory signified "an agreement among the members of an organised society or between the governed and the government defining and limiting the rights and duties of each." That has since been embellished with the concepts of governing with the consent of the people, their sovereignty and equality before the eye of law.

Our belief is that the whole mess can be cleared by the government very quickly if it so wills.

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A thousand days to keep the Millennium promise



Ban Ki-Moon

A JOURNEY of a thousand miles begins with a single step, but starting this week we can march a thousand days forward into a new future.

On April 5, the world will reach a vital moment in history's largest and most successful anti-poverty push -- the 1,000-day mark before the target date to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

These eight concrete goals were

set in the year 2000, when more leaders than ever before gathered at the United Nations and agreed to cut global poverty and hunger by half, fight climate change and disease, tackle unsafe water and sanitation, expand education and open doors of opportunity for girls and women.

It was not the first time leaders had made lofty promises. Cynics expected the MDGs to be abandoned as too ambitious. Instead, the Goals have helped set global and national priorities, mobilise action, and achieve remarkable results.

In the last dozen years, 600 million people have risen from extreme poverty -- a 50% reduction. A record number of children are in primary school -- with an equal number of girls and boys for the first time. Maternal and child mortality have dropped. Targeted investments in fighting malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis have saved millions of lives. Africa has cut AIDS-related deaths by one-third in just the past six years.

There are also Goals and targets where we need far more progress. Too many women still die in childbirth, when we have the means to save them. Too many communities still lack basic sanitation, making unsafe water a deadly threat. In many parts of the world, rich and poor alike, inequalities are growing. Too many are still being left behind.

To accelerate action, the international community should take four steps now.

First, scale up success through strategic and targeted investments that have a multiplier effect, boosting results in all other areas: one million community health workers in Africa to serve hard-to-reach areas and keep mothers and children from dying of easily preventable or treatable conditions; scaled-up



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investments in sanitation; universal access to primary health services, including emergency obstetrical care; and adequate supplies to address HIV and malaria.

Ensuring equal access by women and girls to education, health care, nutrition and economic opportunities is one of the most powerful drivers of progress across all the Goals.

Second, let us focus on the poorest and most vulnerable countries, home to some 1.5 billion people. Often dogged by famine, conflict, poor governance and large-scale organised criminal violence, these countries are finding it most difficult to make progress despite their best efforts. Many have not yet achieved a single MDG. By investing in regions such as the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and Central Asia, we can promote a virtuous circle of economic development, human security, and peace building.

Third, we must keep financial promises. Budgets cannot be balanced on the backs of the poorest and most vulnerable. It is ethically unacceptable and it will help neither donor nor recipient. Despite austere times, many countries have been exemplary in honouring pledges. New donors among the emerging economies are also stepping forward. We should applaud these efforts and encourage more.

Fourth, the 1,000-day mark should be a call to action to a global movement from governments to the grassroots who have been so critical to success. We should also harness the full power of technology and social media -- opportunities that were not available when the Goals were formulated at the turn of the century.

The MDGs have proven that focused global development objectives can make a profound difference. They can mobilise, unite and inspire. They can spark innovation and change the world.

Success in the next 1,000 days will not only improve the lives of millions, it will add momentum as we plan for beyond 2015 and the challenges of sustainable development.

There will be much unfinished business. But, as we look to the next generation of sustainable development goals, we can find deep inspiration knowing that the MDGs have shown that, with political will, ending extreme poverty is achievable and within our grasp.

Let us make the most of the next 1,000 days and make good on our Millennium promise.

The writer is Secretary-General of the United Nations.

ABDUL HANNAN

PERHAPS poet T.S. Eliot was right when he wrote "April is the cruellest month."

It seems the month-long violence, grisly terror and blood-letting, death and destruction unleashed by intermittent *hartals* have now gathered full steam to explode into a dark spectre of full-blown cataclysmic Armageddon with Hefajat e Islam threatening to enforce nonstop hartal from April 7 if their programme of long march to Dhaka on April 6 to press for demands of enacting a blasphemy law and punishing "atheist bloggers" is thwarted. BNP and Jamaat-Shibir have extended their support to them. Jatiya Party Chairman H.M. Ershad has also joined the fray.

By all indications, the country is teetering on the brink of potential danger of a long- running and bloody civil strife, like that of Afghanistan, Somalia, Sierra Leone and Darfur, under what many describe as the burden of two predominant political parties, the ruling Awami league and the main opposition party BNP, fighting at loggerheads for power. God forbid that it should happen.

Already the *hartals* have turned the country into a cauldron of Dante's inferno with a heap of broken images." The blood curdling horror of private cars, buses, trucks and trains being set ablaze, and homes and temples of minority Hindus burning; trains being derailed and unsuspecting innocent pedestrians and passengers suffering cocktail burn injuries; police being mercilessly beaten and killed and young picketers shot and killed by police; national flag being trampled upon and martyrs memorial vandalised; is not a picture of the Bangladesh we know. Every loss of life and property is a tragedy and is regrettable. It does not matter who the victim is. He has one identity. He is either a son or a husband or a father.

Yet, in this dreadful tragic drama of internecine conflict neither of the contending protagonists will be the winner. There will be no spoils of victory for them. The losers will be the country, its people. Women's empowerment and dignity will suffer. Above all, there is no glory in presiding over the

liquidation of one's own country.

The winners will be the forces of evil darkness and decadence over good light and progress. The winners will be falsehood, prejudice and bigotry over truth, freedom, creativity, art and culture, poetry, music and beauty, everything for which life is worth living.

People raise their accusing fingers to the two political parties for bringing the country to such a sorry pass. They are the cause and answer to the deepening crisis. Nonetheless, by all indications, victory of BNP candidates in some local government elections and Supreme Court Bar Association and some other Bar Association elections, BNP was clearly enjoying a popularity edge over the ruling Awami League which has a long litany of performance deficit. Besides, there was general support and sympathy for BNP which suffered

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arrest, detention and repressions of its leaders and workers by the government. It is not understood why BNP, which had its own strength, suddenly decided to support whole hog the Jamaat-Shibir agitation.

Perhaps BNP changed its policy out of desperation in view of the government's intransigence and obduracy not to yield to the demand for a caretaker government. However, the shift has certainly left a backlash of public reaction as the intensified joint agitation and unrest has exacerbated people's suffering and hardships. Perhaps BNP is mistaken in its belief that the intensified joint agitation will further its one- point goal to topple the government. But BNP should know more than anybody else that *hartal* without popular support is no popular upsurge like the ones which forced Ayub Khan and General Ershad to

abdicate power.

Besides, Ganajagoran mancha by youths in Shahabagh enjoys the support and sympathy of a vast number of people across the age and gender divide and perhaps it was not necessary to alienate their sympathy and support by branding them with sweeping comments as "atheists and spoil children" merely to please Jamaat-Shibir. Youth voters were the determining factor in deciding the fate of the election last time. Politicians can ill-afford to lose sight of this fact.

Security, law and order in the country are deteriorating fast and spiraling out of control. The country is perilously descending headlong into a disaster. People are suffering from deep anxiety, apprehension and grave uncertainty about the future. The onus of resolving the crisis lies on the government. Only the government can avert the lurking danger. Only the government can defuse and troubleshoot the crisis politically and not by force. What is at stake is the interest of the country and the people. Party politics is not above national interest. This is no time for vainglory, pride, ego, rancour and animosity. It is time for reconciliation with the adversary in a spirit of magnanimity in the larger interest of the country.

Awami League is rooted in democracy and should opt for a flexible

position of consensus about holding the forthcoming election under a caretaker government, the 15th Amendment of the Constitution abolishing the caretaker government notwithstanding. The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, in a directive on May 10, 2011, provided for holding the next two parliamentary elections under non-party caretaker government.

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