

# Reemergence of extremists

## Deal with them ideologically

WE compliment the law enforcing agencies for the arrest of two groups of potential terrorists from two different parts of the country. However, it should not surprise anyone with a very basic idea of terrorism to see them reemerge. We had in these very columns warned of any smugness in this regard. And we are happy to note that the agencies have so far in the last five years been able to successfully anticipate these groups. But it is their complete obliteration that we have not been able to ensure.

If we want to see the end of religious extremism and terrorism then we have to counter effectively the ideology professed by these people, who are driven by distorted motivation and convoluted and warped understanding of the scripture, to recruit new bodies in their ranks.

This is very fundamental to any counter-terror strategy, because without a dedicated rank and file no amount of money or other resources will allow the extremists to survive. Furthermore, combating religious extremism successfully depends on having a dynamic counter-terror strategy. Do we have one, and if at all, are we implementing it properly?

If anyone in our crop of policy planners and law enforcement agencies thinks that the hanging of a few of the extremist leaders belonging to HUIJI (B) or JMB was the death knell of the extremists will commit an elemental but cardinal judgmental error. These groups will cease to exist as an entity only when the rationale for their existence is defeated.

# Garment workers' grievance

## Their road blockades must be stopped

EID over, and a wage board formed for them, garment workers are still being sucked into the vortex of street agitation. The latest case in point is the workers' blockade for over two hours along the Airport Road on Sunday. In the spin-off effects, traffic movements along Kuril-Biswa Road and Banani, let alone a long stretch of Airport Road were disrupted.

This is highly debilitating and deplorable when original number of some agitating workers are joined in by their ilk from other factories induced by a buzz word -- denial of Tiffin allowance in some factory. After the agitation, the management granted the allowance. Why was it not given as a matter of course?

Resultantly, a wholly rowdy situation escalated in which wrath was taken out on public. Rather than receiving public sympathy, the agitators drew their outrage.

We agree that the workers have legitimate demands and that there is a recognised need for trade unionism to enable organised articulation of workers' grievances. For some time, world focus has been riveted on safe working condition and better compensation package for the garment industry workers in Bangladesh. Results are expected under international watch. BGMEA and garment factory owners must fulfill their part of the obligation which is basic to a betterment of the lot of workers, the second largest foreign exchange earners for the country.

# New trend: Online shopping

SHAHREEN NOOR and MARUFUR RAHMAN

DESPITE the many advantages of online shopping there may be problems also, like ordering the wrong item or receiving the wrong item. The need to return an item can often cause a shopper to reconsider the decision to shop online. Although these problems occur in online shopping they do not necessarily happen frequently. However, when they do occur they can cause a great deal of stress and frustration for the shopper. This article will discuss some of these common problems in an attempt to help the reader make a decision about whether or not to purchase an item online.

When shopping in traditional stores the wrong item cannot be accidentally purchased because the shopper carries the item to the sales counter when making the purchase. However, in online shopping, where the buyer never physically handles the item before it is delivered, it is certainly possible to purchase the wrong item. This can occur when the shopper uses the website to make the purchase and clicks on the wrong item, or gives the wrong product number. Even if the customer clicks on the correct product and gives the right product number he may still make a mistake in the ordering process if there are options such as size or colour associated with the item. This problem can be rather troubling because the buyer will be disappointed when the wrong item is received.

Even when online shoppers do not make any mistake during the ordering process it is still possible for them to receive the wrong item. This often occurs when the orders are filled by hand and a mistake is made in the warehouse. A warehouse worker may send the wrong item, or may send the correct item in the wrong size or colour. The customer will not know a mistake was made until the order arrives. The retailer will take responsibility for replacing the incorrect item, and ship the correct item as soon as possible.

If the shopper orders the wrong item or the retailer ships the wrong item, there may be a need to make returns. This may be troubling for shoppers who do their shopping online because they work odd hours and may have difficulty returning items, which may require the shopper to take time off from work.

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# Addressing the Syrian riddle



*It is no longer possible to let Syria play it out on its own, especially in context of the "spill over" effect in neighbouring countries and the enormous humanitarian cost.*

100,000 dead and with an average casualty rate of 6,000 per month, the never-ending Syrian saga continues to dominate international headlines as one of the bloodiest civil wars in recent memory. The UN dithers as permanent members remain determined to stick to their guns. The latest allegation of use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime has merely added more impetus to do something to end the conflict. Apart from the humanitarian disaster, the conflict is causing enormous problems for Syria's neighbours. Lebanon is at forefront of the tensions spilling over the border. Sunni and Shiite armed groups are at each other's throats at home and actively engaged in conflict in the Bekka valley. As the conflict ebbs and flows, the Syrian quagmire has become a beacon of hope for radical Islamic elements that are streaming in from places as far away as Chechnya.

Direct intervention is the last resort. With the US retreating from foreign adventures, first in Iraq and soon from Afghanistan, it is highly unlikely the Obama administration, in its second term, will put lives of American servicemen in the line of fire in a constantly shifting political landscape that is fast evolving into a Somalia-type scenario. With regional players ranging from Saudi Arabia to Iran supporting and arming a fractured Syrian opposition where radical religious groups are in the ascendance over moderate elements, the question of getting bogged down in a war of attrition drawn along sectarian lines (as has been witnessed in Iraq) is not particularly encouraging for the US.

So precisely what is to be done? It is no longer possible to let Syria play it out on its own, especially in context of the "spill over" effect in neighbouring countries and the enormous humanitarian cost. The regime remains propped up by aid from Iran and diplomatic and military aid from Russia and China. Fighting it out until one side prevails over the other could take years.

Limited military strikes are being viewed as one option. Such military action would amount to removing the regime's capacity to deliver toxic agents such as sarin gas. The Assad regime is in possession of one of the largest stockpiles of chemical agents in the region that must be contained or neutralised. Such assertive action would send a clear message to the regime that the international community means business. Establishing a "no-fly zone" would eliminate the threat posed by Syrian Air Force and considerably reduce the regime's offensive capability and help level the playing field for opposition forces. However, it remains to be seen if the US is willing to strain an already strained US-Russia relationship by sidetracking UN approval for such a course of action.

Looking beyond the regime's offensive capacity to wage



on its own people, the threat that is equally worrisome is the likelihood of the Syrian armed rebellion being hijacked by religiously-motivated elements. With continued US dithering, Gulf States have stepped in to fill the void. They have done so with the aim of promoting groups aligned to their own ideological beliefs that are not always secular or liberal in nature. Hence, a fundamental rethinking is required here. For Washington to retain its influence and promote a unified Syria in a post-civil war era, the US would have to engage with active opposition groups fighting the Assad regime under the umbrella of the Free Syrian Army in terms of training, arming and sharing intelligence. Until the opposition gains a significant upper hand in the conflict, there will no negotiated peaceful settlement.

The sticking point in finding a ceasefire that will hold, leading to a peaceful and negotiated settlement, has been the Kremlin's refusal to come to any arrangement that does not involve the Assads. For decades, Syria has been part of the Russian sphere of influence. With the loss of Iraq and later Libya, Russia has effectively been shut out of lucrative arms deals and strategic opportunities in the region.

The Assad regime cannot hold out indefinitely. The increasing diplomatic and economic isolation enforced through sanctions is eroding its capacity to wage war. Iran, its principal ally in the region, has its own sanctions to worry about and cannot continue to subsidise the regime's continued survival indefinitely. Sadly, the opposition will take months, if not years, to be in a position to tilt the scales to its favour. In the meantime, thousands will continue to die and millions made stateless.

Notwithstanding the enormous humanitarian disaster that is unfolding in the country, isn't it time to conclude that there can be no negotiated settlement minus the Assads? Since the ultimate goal revolves around a united Syria and not a fragmented one engaged in perpetual war set along ethnic lines, a peace process overseen by all the permanent representatives of UN's Security Council could possibly the only hope Syria has. A workable peace process would have to include all the communities inhabiting Syria including the Alawites since members of this community constitute the bulk of the Syrian regime and senior ranks of the Syrian army.

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# Bigotry continues in Myanmar

MAHMOOD HASAN

ETHNIC discrimination and violence against Muslims has not stopped in Myanmar, despite promises from President Thein Sein.

Tomas Ojea Quintana, UN Human Rights Council appointed Special Rapporteur, visited Myanmar from August 11 to 21 to see for himself the reconciliation efforts between Buddhists and Muslims.

Myanmar has been going through bouts of ethnic violence directed against the minority Muslim community. In June 2012, bloody riots broke out in Rakhine state, killing more than 250 Rohingya Muslims and displacing 200,000. In March 2013, similar riots in Meikhtila cost the lives of 43 Muslims. Thousands of Muslims have fled Myanmar to neighbouring countries fearing more violence. Frequent attacks by Buddhists on Muslims have become routine occurrence. Though the government of President Thein Sein has vowed to stop the violence there has been no improvement in the situation. The United Nations Human Rights Council and UNHCR have been monitoring the situation and providing succour.

What surprised and worried the United Nations was the confrontation Quintana had with an angry mob of Buddhists in Meikhtila, in central Myanmar. Quintana's vehicle was surrounded and pounded by more than 200 Buddhist monks chanting slogans that he leave Myanmar. The government, however, denied any such thing occurred.

Before leaving Yangon, Quintana told newsmen: "I felt totally unprotected during this incident ... It gave me an insight into the fear residents would have felt," when they (Muslims) were chased, beaten and killed by Buddhist mobs.

The Rohingya Muslims lost their citizenship in 1982, when Myanmar's xenophobic dictator General Ne Win promulgated the Citizenship Law. The majority Buddhist population calls the Muslims "Kala," a racist word containing deep hatred. Muslims constitute 5% of the population of 60 million.

What is most worrying is the rise of Ashin Wirathu (35), a Buddhist monk, who likes to call himself "the Burmese bin Laden." Wirathu is head of Mandalay's Masoeysin Monastery and started the anti-Muslim movement known as "969." He draws inspiration from fascism and Nazism and is bigoted to the core. Wirathu was jailed in 2003 for distributing anti-Muslim leaflets and preaching eviction of Muslims from Myanmar. He was released in 2010, when Thein Sein announced his reform and reconciliation process. In September 2012, Wirathu led a rally of monks to promote Thein Sein's controversial plan to send Muslims to a third country.

The weird three digit numerology "969" is a basis for religious violence. The first "9" stands for nine special attributes of Buddha, "6" for the six special attributes of "Dhamma" (Buddha teachings) and last "9" for the nine attributes of Buddhist "Sangha." Wirathu has been campaigning that Buddhists should boycott Muslim businesses and refrain from all kinds of contacts with Muslims. Buddhist-owned shops boldly display "969" to identify themselves. Muslim businesses in central Myanmar and elsewhere are facing closure because of fear of Buddhist frenzy.

The government can stop the violence against Muslims, if it wants to. Actually, Thein Sein is using Wirathu and his 'Sangha' of 2,500 followers to do what the government

cannot do officially. The government has not stopped these 969-supporting racist monks from traveling around the country and making hate speeches against Muslims.

There was a huge uproar in Myanmar when, on July 1, Time magazine did a cover story on Wirathu under the banner "Face of Buddhist Terror." Wirathu was quoted as saying that Muslims are "mad dogs" and called mosques "enemy bases." The government quickly banned the issue of the magazine after big demonstrations in Yangon chanted slogans demanding its ban. The Economist (July 27) described Wirathu as a "notorious chauvinist ... (who) has abandoned Buddhism's universal doctrine of compassion and non-violence. For them Buddhism equates with a narrow nationalism."

The political parties in Myanmar are absolutely quite on Muslim persecution. That is because the country does not have any democracy. It is not only the Rakhine Muslims who are faced with total elimination. Other ethnic minority groups -- Shans, Karens, Kachin, Mons, Kayins -- also are victims of systematic discrimination by the Burman majority. These groups have taken up arms to fight the Burman (known as Bamar). Bamar Buddhists actually control the government and have been fighting insurgencies since independence in 1948.

Democracy icon and Noble laureate Aung San Suu Kyi has strangely kept quite on this sad episode of human rights violation. She has asked the police to "act according to the law." When the government imposed a ban on Rakhine Muslim families on having more than two children, Suu Kyi said it was not correct. Suu Kyi has come

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under harsh criticism from most human rights activists for her silence on the issue. Her desire to become president of Myanmar and the 2015 election seem to be weighing on her. She does not want to take a moral stand against what the racist monks are doing. Critics say that she has become a stooge of the quasi-military government of Thein Sein. The Economist (June 15) described it as "the halo slips."

UN Special Rapporteur Quintana has expressed a fear that there is danger of spiraling violence between Buddhists and Muslims. The UN Human Rights Council had made several recommendations in April 2013. The most important of those is to "urgently amend the 1982 Citizenship Act to eliminate provisions that are discriminatory or have a discriminatory impact on determining citizenship for reasons of ethnicity, race, religion or other protected status," and to "ensure that Rohingya children have the right to acquire a nationality where otherwise they would be stateless."

That is the crux of the problem. As long as Muslims remain stateless in Myanmar they shall be victims of Buddhist violence, as no law protects them. The United Nations, Asean, Saarc, OIC and the international community have to take a firm stand against the Myanmar regime and demand immediate cessation of all kinds of discrimination against the Muslim community along with return of their citizenship. Bigotry must come to an end in Myanmar.

The writer is a former ambassador and secretary.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Primitive mindset of politicians

Recently Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said that her government will not move an inch from the constitution and the election will be held under the AL-led government as scores of elections have been held free and fair by her administration. This is nothing but repetition of the words uttered by the then Prime Minister Khaleda Zia exactly 17 years back. What an irony!

For the sake of argument, suppose the election takes place smoothly and BNP-led alliance win the race and rule the country another 5 years. Will the AL participate in the next election under BNP government? The answer will be obviously in the negative.

None of the two major political parties has confidence in the people and the country as a whole. We, the common masses, want non-party caretaker government system until the political parties change their parochial medieval mindset.

Nusrat Naznin  
Rajshahi University

## Feeling proud as a Bangladeshi

New York immigration chief, Mr. Daniel Dromm recently said, "I think someday a Bangladeshi American will be the president of United States of America." He also added, "Bangladeshi community needs to be involved more in the politics of the United States than the politics of their own country apart from increasing their involvement in the democratic process here." He made this comment while talking to banglanews24.com at his office in Jackson Heights. He appreciated the parents of Bangladeshi community for taking care of their children more at family level. While going through this piece of news, I was feeling very proud to be a Bangladeshi. Thanks, Mr. Dromm.

Khandaker Zia Hasan  
Special Correspondent Bangladesh  
Weekly Jagajog, Canada

## Can Bangladesh do it this time?

Bangladesh used to be a real powerhouse of South Asian football even 15 years ago. But now things have changed a lot. Football fans in Bangladesh seem more concerned about Neymar's performance in Barcelona than Bangladesh's performance in SAFF. But a couple of wins might change it, because Bangladeshi fans have shown what a football crazy nation we are, particularly during FIFA World Cups. The new coach of the team De Cruif seems a very good coach to me. This time we have got the veteran Emily and youngsters like Wahed and Rony in the attacking position. The midfield looks good too, and Zahid in the wings is a potent threat to any opponent. So we can hope for good performance from the team, unlike last time when they could not win a single match in the tournament.

Tauhidul Islam  
The Aga Khan School, Dhaka

## Comments on news report, "Stub-born as before," published on August 25, 2013

Monju Huq

Sheikh Hasina is now positioned at the most critical juncture of the national history, at a very dangerous crossroads. A wrong move would plunge the nation into a perpetual path of darkness and destruction. The challenge before her is to prove her statesmanship, political acumen and wisdom.

deep purple blue

You are talking of statesmanship, political acumen, wisdom but the prime minister does not possess any of these virtues at this point of time!

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Just goes to show that democracy is a joke in Bangladesh and the frivolous politicians couldn't care less for democratic norms and the people, and why should they? With unlimited terms and very little choice among the voters to choose only from the so-called two leading parties, they can expect to be voted no matter what.

Nantu

Ban Ki-moon should understand that these two ladies and their cohorts are not capable of resolving the issue.

Sheikh Monirul Islam, Opee

Right time for the people to act and reject both political parties without anymore delay.

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## "It's indeed a dark episode" (August 25, 2013)

Sara

What was the VC guilty of?

Snr Citizen

True, the reasons for the ouster of JU VC are not clear to the readers.

Ash C.

I'm in no way condoning the JU teachers' line of agitation, but all these fiascos could have been avoided if only the JU VC Anwar Hassan had resigned earlier out of his own self-respect. After all, it was him who went back on his promise to expel the BCL goon who publicly assaulted a senior teacher of JU in April. His naked partiality is not unknown.

Nds

I think these university teachers are devoid of any sense of embarrassment.