

Jamaat wreaks havoc

They must be reined in

THE Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing have again unleashed a reign of terror across the country by enforcing a 48-hour hartal from Wednesday. We condemn the scale of violence they have been committing since February when the International War Crimes Tribunal started to pronounce judgements on their senior leaders. The violence triggered by Jamaat protests, took the lives of 70 people including eight policemen, in one week's violence, after Sayedee's verdict was announced on 28 February 2013.

Called to protest the death sentence awarded to Abdul Quader Mollah, they have again wreaked unprecedented havoc on public life destroying vehicles, attacking police and unsuspecting pedestrians and commuters.

Again, the bad memory have come back to haunt us, thanks to Jamaat's unrepentant view about its role in 1971 and its policy of continued defiance and contempt towards law and the judicial system of the country. Would their leaders stand back for a moment, put their hand on their heart, and ask themselves whether their leaders under trial had not stained their hand with the blood of innocent Bengalis in 1971?

But what do those who run Jamaat hope to achieve by their senseless and violent methods? And did they gain anything so far except subjecting people to limitless suffering? If anything, they have earned only hatred of the public.

Jamaat must shun the path of violence and learn to respect law. The law enforcers, on the other hand, must act firmly to rein in the violence-mongers and ensure safety of common people.

BGMEA proposed pay hike

It is just not good enough

THE discrepancy between demanded pay hike by workers' unions and what has been put on offer by BGMEA could not be greater. While BGMEA believes the 20 per cent hike in minimum wage is "logical", it has been trashed by workers' representative bodies and indeed, deemed unreasonable by some members of the Wage Board.

Though BGMEA representatives have stated that it is an initial offer and there is room for bargaining on finalisation of salary, the claim that Bangladesh is losing its competitive advantage in global garment trade is simply not correct. According to a recent study by McKinley & Co., Bangladesh retains the silver medal in the global RMG sector when it comes to big production volume. While Bangladesh occupies the No. 2 position after China, that pattern appears to be changing as global retailers move more production to Bangladesh in the near term. But that success comes at a cost—in the form of low minimum wage. But there are other ways to cut production cost than paying the workers poorly.

Though it has become a national pastime to sing praise at how important the RMG sector is to the national economy in earning precious foreign exchange, the latest pay hike offer goes to show just how little workers' welfare matters to BGMEA. With inflation hovering around 19%, the new hike turns meaningless. We certainly hope the Wage Board will take into consideration the fate of millions of workers who help churn the wheels of production

Integrating 'Road Safety Awareness' in school curriculum

RIDWAN QAUIUM

THE rate of traffic related accidents in our country is quite high when compared with developed or most neighbouring countries. Majority of the traffic accidents here are mainly due to a lack of road safety awareness.

Just like learning to brush their teeth, children in the developed countries learn about road safety from elementary or primary school level. It is integrated in the core curriculum. Children are practically taught how to follow traffic signals, how to safely cross a road, how to behave on the road and other necessary things that would make them and also others safe on the road. Not only from the schools but children learn about the importance of road safety from their parents as well. As a result, from a young age, just like any other day-to-activity, the children develop the habit of following traffic rules.

According to a World Bank report, just speeches on road safety at schools by individuals and organisations are not that effective because children may only remember the message in the short term. For effective, long term development of positive attitudes towards road safety, road safety has to be integrated in the core school curriculum, 'either as a compulsory subject in its own right or as a cross-curricular theme.'

The topic of road safety does not exist in the school curriculum in our country. Furthermore, many parents also have a tendency to break traffic rules, ignore traffic signals, jaywalk, etc. even when they are with their children. This is why, compared to children in developed countries, children in our country are less aware of road safety, traffic rules, and the implications of aggressive, arrogant and reckless behaviour on the road. Even after growing up many of them do not become aware of road safety until they or someone close to them gets involved in an accident.

Experience from many countries confirms that the high rate of road accidents can be controlled by integrating road safety awareness in the school curriculum. In addition, parents should realise that they play a vital role in the developmental of a child. Therefore, they should also teach their children about road safety and when traveling with their children they should always comply with the traffic rules and behave tolerantly and patiently rather than aggressively, arrogantly and recklessly.

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Fundamentalism, extremism, and terrorism alert!



STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN ndc, psc (Retd)

THE words fundamentalism, terrorism and extremism continue to be subjects of intense public discourse. These three words have been bandied about so very often that they are likely to lose importance, as happens so often with issues that are both overplayed and underplayed, unless we stopped using it out of context or exploiting these for political purpose. Unfortunately, these, as well as the religious sentiment of the people, are being exploited by all the political parties in equal measure.

The tendency to use the three terms as fungible expressions, distorts their very basic and essential meaning. The ordinary person can be forgiven for the mix up, but coming from the better informed in the society, some of whom hog the TV talk-shows, this can only be taken as an exercise to mislead or to provide simplistic explanations as rationale for the incidence of violence occurring in the country. It not only dilutes the significance of the issues these words subtend but also influences the mechanism of dealing with their outward manifestations.

Tomes have been written on fundamentalism. Somehow the term has come to be used pejoratively, particularly in Bangladesh. Not necessarily does all the violence a society experiences stem from fundamentalist mindset nor are all incidents of violence acts of terrorism, nor are all fundamentalists terrorists or extremists. It is essential, as one author avers, to "understand the difference between the religious fundamentalist who, in essence, simply holds an absolute truth and value-perspective, on the one hand, and the so-called fundamentalist who engages in the extremist and violent behaviour of terrorism, on the other." Extremists are willing to kill to protect or enforce their beliefs, while the terrorists have a political agenda to fulfill.

Unfortunately, fundamentalism, whether Christian or Muslim, is accused by some of distorting the very religion it seeks to defend. And by the same token, and equally unfortunately, the word secularism has been cast as anti-religion. I neither have the authority nor the scholarly credentials to either explicate or offer my own opinion on the issue except to say that inclination to

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that there are many terrorist groups waiting to pounce, and one should not take issue with the figures since they come from people close to the centre of power, we wonder what actions have been taken to identify, anticipate and neutralise them. Or is it just alarmist rhetoric to garner votes? That would make light of an issue that we should take seriously.

If the BNP and its alliance are blamed for exploiting religion of political gains, which they have done quite effectively in recent times, the AL led government cannot avoid the same criticism. Reportedly, the government has decided to launch a political offensive against Hefajat-e-Islam and Dr. Yunus. And that will be done through the Islamic Foundation and the Imams of nearly 5 lakh mosques in the country. One wonders whether that is not exploitation of religion for political mileage.

The writer is Editor, Oped & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.



Idea of India at peril



BETWEEN THE LINES

KULDIP NAYAR

GUJARAT Chief Minister Narendra Modi, the prime ministerial candidate of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has asked the Jamaat-Ulma Hind, representing the Muslims, to list four or five steps he should announce to win their confidence. The Jamaat has rightly pointed out that it was for Modi to think how to win the trust of Muslims. One thing Modi could do straightaway is to apologise for the 2002 riots in the state, reportedly blessed by him after the burning of some Hindu pilgrims in a train compartment at Godhara, not far from Ahmedabad.

There is enough evidence to confirm that he convened a meeting of top officials to plan and execute an exercise to kill the Muslims. Hiren Pandey, a minister in Modi's cabinet, had admitted after having participated in the riots that they were preplanned and that the police were asked not to interfere. He was murdered and till today the murderer has not been brought to book. And only recently has a top police officer confessed in a letter to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) that Modi used him to stage the false encounter.

In his first speech after the nomination, Modi talked about a range of issues -- ties with neighbouring countries, terrorism and defence. But he did not utter a word about Muzzafarnagar's communal riots. The city, only two hours' drive from Delhi, witnessed the killing of 50 persons and the exodus of nearly 40,000 people -- Hindus and Muslims, who have lived together for centuries.

Indeed, this is the result of Modi-type of politics of polarisation which has challenged India's credentials of secularism. Modi is a poster-boy Hindutava, as the media describes him. After 66 years of independence, the two communities tend to jump at each other's throat on the call of religious leaders or politicians in that garb. The nation has to introspect why the people play into their hands and why it has failed to establish a secular polity.

Modi does not care about India's ethos of pluralism. He has played the Hindu card because he believes that secularism does not sit well in a Hindu-majority country. If he has learned the lesson after the Gujarat riots, as he claims, there is no indication of that. He compared the other day the victims in the Gujarat riots as the puppies which get crushed under a speeding car.

The RSS, which has nurtured Modi, believes that it wants the next election to be fought on the plank of "minority aggressiveness." It is misinterpreting the minorities' articulation for their identity. Even if there is aggressiveness, it can be tackled. But the majority's aggressiveness can turn into fascism. This is what happened in Germany where the Nazis took over and Hitler emerged on the scene.

It is unfortunate that the BJP has selected Modi, knowing too well that the party was defeated in 2004 and 2009 elections because of its communal agenda. Even Atal Behari Vajpayee's liberal image could not wear off the

stigma of parochialism the party has.

By and large, India is a tolerant society. The people do not mix religion with politics. The BJP has neither understood them, nor their aspirations. The idea of India is based on the country's diversity. What has happened at Muzzafarnagar is a challenge to the very idea. Once again the BJP has poured oil on the fuel through a fake video.

Refugees from the villages of Muzaffarnagar riots between the Hindu Jats and Muslims say that they were attacked by the outsiders. I am reminded that after the partition we too were forced to quit our homes by the outsiders. Our Muslim friends gave us shelter and provided us with rations for a month before we left Sialkot.

The victims of Muzzafarnagar complain bitterly that neighbours watched the mayhem but did not come to their rescue to stop the killing and destruction. The kinship dries up when rioting takes place. The Muzzafarnagar happenings are disconcerting because the communal virus has spread to the rural areas. The administration always fails because it has got politicised and awaits word from the ruling party. Officials did not take action fearing repercussions. The police are contaminated and tilt towards the Hindus. That is 15% of the Muslims all over the country.

What happened in Muzaffarnagar, according to the reports in the media, was an instigated riot, suggesting a conspiracy on the part of the BJP. A Muslim youth was killed for eve-teasing. In retaliation, two Hindu Jat boys were lynched. And then all the hell broke. Leaders, both from the Hindu and Muslim communities, delivered inflammatory speeches.

The BJP further fanned the fire by releasing a fake video, showing the use of violence somewhere else to 'prove' the atrocities against the Hindus. A Muslim cleric led a mob after the prayers on Friday. And, as the state governor has said in a report to the Centre, the administration has become more effete than the ruling Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi Party wanted to exploit the situation. But it was confused.

The BJP played a major role in polluting the atmosphere through yatras for building a Ram temple at the site where the Babri Masjid stood before its destruction. The RSS sees its chance in the next elections. It is doing everything possible to destroy the ethos of national struggle to establish a democratic, secular state. Modi's projection, once the RSS pracharak and an authoritarian by nature, fits into the agenda for a Hindu Rashtra.

I sympathise with L.K. Advani. I have seen how defeated he was towards end of 1979 when the Janata Party ousted him for refusing to sever links with the RSS. Instead, he founded in 1980 the BJP and made Atal Behari Vajpayee, who too had been thrown out, as president. Today once again, Advani is forlorn and lonely. Again, the RSS is responsible for his isolation. It has fielded Modi for the prime minister's office. Advani has not liked the manner in which the RSS has imposed Modi on the BJP. Apparently, the RSS feels that if somebody who meets the ideological stance of Hindu Rashtra, it will be Modi, not Advani who over the years has shed bigotry and regards Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, founder of Pakistan, as secular.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Do justice to Felani

Bangladeshi girl Felani's killing by BSF soldier is a gross violation of human rights and moral codes of civilised societies. The right to life guaranteed by the Indian constitution has been violated through the recent verdict since Felani was shot dead within the Indian territory. It is sincerely expected that the Indian authorities would dispense justice to ill-fated Felani and her family.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Dean, Faculty of Agriculture
SAU, Dhaka

Advantages of solar power

An interesting and informative write-up on the above mentioned subject was published in a local English daily on 28th August. It is good that our villagers are getting electricity from alternative sources rather than from the national power grid. It greatly helps to irrigate agricultural lands when there is sufficient sunlight.

According to an estimate, around 80,000 solar panels are installed per month. With 100 watt per solar panel, we are adding around 100 X 80,000 = 8MW of alternative power source every month! This works out to 2400 MW of power increase annually (assuming 300 days a year)! The figures are impressive. Moreover, it is free of pollution, no systems loss and no power theft.

Engr. S. A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Don't tell us to vote for you

Democracy in Bangladesh is passing through a crucial time. But most of our political leaders do not feel it. It is really shameful how Sheikh Hasina urged people to elect them to power again. How could she tell us to vote for the AL-backed candidates blindly?

People know how AL and BNP have tried shamelessly to hold on to power. It is high time we rejected them. Honourable Premier, please never tell us to vote for your candidates blindly.

Dr. Hossain FMA
Assistant Professor
Dept. of Dairy and Poultry Science
Sylhet Agricultural University

Army to wipe out drug trade

From the August 27, 2013 issue of TDS, we learned that JP Chairman Ershad demanded that the government should give magistracy power to army personnel and appoint them to root out illegal drug trades including Yaba and Phensidyl from the country. This is to save the youths. We heartily thank him for this wise and timely advice. We also believe that only army can remove this evil from society.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Comments on news report, "Khaleda to resist 'one-sided polls'," published on September 16, 2013

Abbasuddin

BNP's naked relation with war criminals looks really dirty. How come Khaleda being a widow of a freedom fighter support the war criminals of 1971? Isn't she dishonouring her dead husband?

MH Khan

It was her husband who rehabilitated the war criminals and enemies of Bangladesh. She has no reason to be shameful.

Abul Kashem

Naked relation with war criminals is not new in our history. Some others also had such "relations" with war criminals in the past.

However, a few years back we saw similar situation when logi-boitha culture was introduced to kill opposition members in broad daylight in front of thousands of people to press home the CG demand. Now the opposition has started agitating in the same way. An irony of fate, indeed!

Sheikh Monirul Islam, Opee

Khaleda Zia sided with Jamaat-Shibir so openly. It is only a matter of time that there will be some serious showdown, and bloodshed is also imminent. What she is doing is declaring an open war against her opponent.

progressiveBG

I am not a supporter of Awami League or PM Sheikh Hasina but I think Sheikh Hasina is more qualified than Khaleda Zia.

Vikram Khan

Wake me up when both ladies are finished kicking around Bangladesh...

Fazlul Bari

Remember the old story of a saint and a thief? They met in the morning in front of a mosque with red eyes. The saint was praying all night and the thief was stealing all night. The saint thought how saintly that person was, and the thief thought what a bigger thief the other person was.

Shahin Huq

When PM goes to speak at a public gathering, all schools, colleges and madrasas are forced to send their students there. However, being the opposition leader, Kheleda Zia does not have the power to do that. Despite that, Kheleda's gatherings are almost two times bigger than Hasina's. I think people of Bangladesh have already given their verdict against Awami League.