

Jamaat wrecks 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 QUAIM

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-day 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 development 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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STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN ndc, psc (Retd)

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.

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

apply the term out of context or with a political motive should be resisted.

As for terrorism, we have been told very recently of serious terrorist threats lurking in the wings, waiting for the ruling party to lose the general elections. We are informed by various reports and research works that there are 50 or so Islamist extremist organisations in Bangladesh. This is perhaps a record and a credit that no other country can wrest from us. This is an alarming figure if true, even if the number was half the figure given.

We have also heard of new accusations made regarding the involvement of the opposition leader in the August 21 grenade attack on the AL rally in 2004. This is a revelation that has neither got the attention of the media nor the public that it should have.

We have reasons to worry about religious terrorism, more so with the impending drawdown in Afghanistan

come 2014. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan has its ramifications on the overall security situation in the subcontinent, particularly given the estimated figure of extremist organisations in Bangladesh. Many of them are facing bans but what should worry one is whether the law enforcing agencies have a full task on them and have an assessment of the capacity of these elements to mutate from an extremist to a full fledged terrorist organisation with a political agenda to establish. As per South Asian Terrorism Portal list updated up to September 8, 2013, there are four terrorist organisations in Bangladesh and one extremist group. If it is true

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.

Fundamentalism, extremism, and terrorism alert!

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.

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Idea of India at peril

BETWEEN THE LINES

KULDIP NAYAR

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 cabi-

net, 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

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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</div