

Jamaat's terror tactics

Needs stern handling

IN their unabated acts of violence targeting law-enforcers and the unsuspecting public, the Jamaat-Shibir activists on Monday again struck terror in the capital city as elsewhere in the country.

As before, their violence seems to be aiming at freeing their arrested senior leaders now facing trial for crimes against humanity in 1971.

And they are never short of excuses to engage in such criminal acts of violence, especially against law-enforcers before or after court verdicts or at any other times they choose. But by their outrageous tactics of surprise attacks on law-enforcers, pedestrians and commuters, they simply cannot hope to achieve any end whatsoever.

Jamaat must keep within the bounds of civility and due process of law since it is a legal matter but they are taking law into their own hands and killing people. Once the fabric between law and lawlessness is snapped by vandalism and violence, then those behind such crimes are liable for severe punishment.

Regrettably, Jamaat-Shibir, by their destructive acts are not only alienating themselves from the people as a political entity, but are also courting a pariah image before the people.

As we did more than once before in this column, we would again warn them against adopting such destructive path to achieve a political agenda. They must take resort to due course of law to convince the government and the people of their point if any.

They should rather be respectful of fundamental norms of democracy if they want to function as a political party.

Remittances facing a challenge

Explore new manpower destinations

THE latest data coming out of Bangladesh Bank paints none-too-happy a picture on foreign remittances. Inflow of foreign exchange earned by Bangladeshi expatriate workers is down from the six largest destinations where our workers are employed. The combined remittance from Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, United States, United Kingdom and Malaysia constituted more than 80 per cent of the total remittance basket for the last three years.

Over reliance on traditional markets has left the overseas manpower industry in disarray. That things have not been going right in the Mid-East is hardly any news. Last October, the UAE dramatically stopped issuing entry permits for Bangladeshi workers over identification and fake documents. By September, 2012 a mere 2,000 Bangladeshi workers found work in the country. While efforts have been made to keep the unscrupulous private recruiting agencies at bay by means of concluding government-to-government deals, they have not panned out satisfactorily. The snail's pace with which recruitment is being done with Malaysia is hardly encouraging.

The fact that over a six-month period (January -- June) of the current fiscal, our manpower exports have gone down significantly over the same period of the preceding year shows just how much we need to strive to regain some of the lost market. At the same time, exploring new markets must be treated as a priority by policymakers. We can hardly afford to remain nonchalant in exploring non-traditional markets since the annual US\$15billion flowing into the country is crucial for economic development of the country.

THE BRUNEL TIMES

Myanmar thaws

EDITORIAL

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THERE seems to be glad tidings and a perceptible change in the public mood over communal flare-ups and ethnic strife in the former pariah state of Myanmar, if the recent developments are anything to go by. On Saturday, activists from nearly 60 civil society groups participated in the International Day of Peace rally in Yangon, demanding an end to communal unrest and other regional conflicts.

There seems to be an increasing realisation and awareness among people, cutting across social, ethnic and religious divides, on the need for calm and peace for the nation's growth and well-being, especially after the reform and democratic path it has chosen to tread. And an ample evidence of this came from a call, last week, from a section of senior monks in a Yangon monastery, led by leading Buddhist leader Sandar Siri, which said that: "The path to democracy has just appeared. In order not to ruin it, we urge you to avoid ethnic and religious violence."

Not just this, the opposition leader and democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, accused by critics of remaining tongue-tied over the violence against the minority Rohingya Muslims, is increasingly seen, of late, as being more vocal on the issue. Addressing a business conference in Singapore on Saturday, Suu Kyi minced no words emphasising the resolve to end communal conflicts and inter-ethnic skirmishes and expressed fear that this malaise and weak "rule of law" could scare off investors from the country.


The onus now lies on the government to take up inclusive remedial measures and on the fringe groups -- who subscribe to the erroneous notion that imposing a two-child norm on Rohingya Muslims would solve things -- to realise the futility of their vision. Probably, the prevailing prejudices have compelled a person like Dalai Lama to urge Myanmar monks to act according to Buddhist tenets, ending violence against their Muslim brothers and sisters. Let's hope in the coming days Myanmar will see a metamorphosis in peoples' attitude and outlook, which would pave way for pluralism and peaceful co-existence.

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Our history and its ironies

GROUND REALITIES



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

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BANGLADESH'S history is replete with ironies. If you have lately heard or read of Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu's invitation to General Ershad to broker a dialogue between the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, you will get a fairly good idea of how irony has been an integral part of politics here. The idea that twenty two years after the AL and the BNP together forced Ershad out of office, they might seek his mediation in a resolution of the crisis that dogs them comes across as rather disturbing.

Indeed, that General Ershad has not only survived his fall but has returned to politics with a vengeance is one more instance of how irony goes on underscoring Bangladesh's politics.

There are other ironies. In the 1960s, we were not too happy that Field Marshal Ayub Khan had engineered the formation of the Convention Muslim League as his political vehicle. A lot of political turncoats flocked to him and made it possible for him to rule Pakistan for a decade. In 1971, we thought all of that was a thing of the past. Not so, for in the late 1970s and 1980s, our indigenous dictators, General Zia and General Ershad, used their military clout to cobble the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Jatiyo Party into shape. A whole country has paid the price, for these two parties have quite turned the noble calling of politics on its head.

And then comes that other irony of Bangabandhu's government, based as it was on the parliamentary political system, moving to change things through the fourth amendment to the constitution. The irony was clear: where earlier the Awami League had for decades struggled for a restoration of the parliamentary system, only three years into liberation it saw nothing wrong with making a switch to a one-party presidential form of government. Again, a price was paid. The ramifications were too visible to be ignored.

One of the more terrible of ironies for us was the sudden, swift exit of the dedicated politician Tajuddin Ahmed from the government and the retention of the conspiratorial Khondokar Moshtaque Ahmed in Bangabandhu's administration. It was a mistake that we would all pay for dearly. August and November 1975 would happen; and the country would pass into darkness. Another irony: the brave General Osmany gave up his seat in parliament as a mark of protest at the introduction of Baksal one-party rule. He did not show similar bravery when Moshtaque asked him to be his defence advisor.

There is then the caretaker irony. Years ago, it was Sheikh Hasina who defended it vigorously. Equally vigorously, Khaleda Zia dismissed the idea as unrealistic. Today it is the reverse. Let us go on. Dr. Kamal Hossain's politics has been at a vast remove from that of Badruddoza Chowdhury, who in the pre-election period in 2001 denigrated the Awami League night after night through a mali-

cious television campaign. Kamal Hossain and B. Chowdhury are today in alliance. There is irony for you again. Once Sheikh Hasina and Kamal Hossain were the leading lights of the Awami League. Observe where they are today.

An unmitigated irony in our history is certainly the rehabilitation of the local collaborators of the Pakistan occupation army of 1971. No collaborators in any other country have returned to positions of power or influence after they have been tried for their criminality. In Bangladesh, the old quislings came back with a bang, thanks again to our two periods of dictatorial rule. Even as these traitors returned in glory, many of our brave and prominent freedom fighters lost their lives in the darkness engendered by the retreat of secularism and the re-emergence of communal politics.

And that is not all. In late 1971, we had thought that the ugly legacy of military intervention, through coups d'etat, as practised in Pakistan, had come to an end. It did not, as we were to learn the bitter lesson between 1975 and 1982. But where not a single officer or soldier has died in Pakistan's four coups, hundreds of men and officers were murdered in the coups and counter-coups in Bangladesh. Again, an instance of irony.

The truth about the 1971 war is that Bangabandhu led the nation to freedom. Ironically, forty two years after liberation, certain individuals, ignorant of history or determined to confuse the country, loudly proclaim that no one person provided leadership to us in the war. Another irony comes through the nation's near veneration of the late Colonel Abu Taher even as fingers point to the possibility of his having played a role in the murder of General Khaled Musharraf and two of his fellow officers on November 7, 1975.

Move on to another irony. In early March 1971, Justice B.A. Siddiky refused to swear in General Tikka Khan as governor of East Pakistan. In independent Bangladesh, he became president of a faction of the Muslim League but soon ditched the party to accept General Ershad's offer of the position of Bangladesh's permanent representative to the United Nations. In 1971, Justice Nurul Islam served as chairman of the East Pakistan Red Cross and travelled abroad to lobby support for the Yahya Khan junta then engaged in genocide in occupied Bangladesh. In free Bangladesh, General Ershad made him vice president of the country.

The silence of the BNP over the war crimes trials issue remains a deafening irony. Many of its leaders have seen 1971, have been active in the struggle for liberation. Today they look away from the truth, for at one point in time they shared power and broke bread with the very criminals who had helped kill Bengalis at the behest of Pakistan's soldiers.

A dead Moulana Bhashani came as a blessing for many of his putatively leftist followers. They lost little time in making their way to the BNP and the Jatiyo Party, in that order. And Bhashani had his own problems. Having practiced secular politics all his life, he switched gears in the early 1970s, to fan the flames of a so-called 'Muslim Bangla.'


Let us call it a day.

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RSS anoints Modi as PM candidate

PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN



PRAFUL BIDWAI

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THE Bharatiya Janata Party has committed a historic blunder by allowing the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh -- a conspiratorial, unelected body with a deeply sectarian, anti-democratic agenda -- to dictate the choice of its prime ministerial candidate for the next election.

The candidate, unsurprisingly, is India's most hated political figure, with blood on his hands, aggression in his veins, and a slavishly pro-corporate agenda in his heart.

What is surprising is the exuberance of media stories which reported Narendra Modi's nomination as if he had already won the election, vindicating the Hindu-communal BJP's claim to rule India simply because it's a Hindu-majority country.

The BJP has fond hopes of making the contest quasi-"presidential" and exploit Mr. Modi's cultivated "strong-leader" image. Mr. Modi can bring it limited gains -- not because he has a positive agenda, but by exploiting its opponents' mistakes, as in Uttar Pradesh.

The BJP isn't in the same league as the Congress in regional or class/group composition. The Congress, with all its faults, policy elitism and deplorable dependence on the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, has a significant to strong presence in every province, including the Gangetic belt.

The BJP is mainly confined to Western-Central India, and has an uncertain relationship with the Gangetic delta, which it penetrated only briefly in the 1990s with the Ayodhya movement. In 2009, the BJP won only 116 Lok Sabha seats against the Congress' 206, and fell behind it by 10 percentage-points in votes.

The Congress has ruled India for more than 50 years under different systems. The BJP was in power for only six years since 1947 -- never on its own.

Traditionally (barring 1977), the Congress got 40 percent-plus votes, and won two-thirds of Lok Sabha seats. But the Jana Sangh-BJP's traditional vote was 7-to-10 percent until 1991.

The BJP's highest-ever vote-share (25.6%) still doesn't match the Congress's lowest-ever (25.8%). Unless the BJP can gain 7-to-10 percentage-points more than its current 18.8% vote, it'd be difficult for it to win the critical mass of seats to form a coalition government.

This critical mass would be about 200 BJP seats, unlike 180-odd in 1998-99 when many more parties willingly joined its National Democratic Alliance. The NDA once comprised 23 formations. It's now essentially become the BJP+Akali Dal+Shiv Sena.

To win power, the NDA needs to attract more regional parties. Just 6 regional parties will decide government formation in 2014: Trinamool Congress, Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party, Biju Janata Dal, Janata Dal(United) and AIADMK.

Of these, only the AIADMK, led by J. Jayalalithaa, could possibly join the NDA. She is a Modi friend, and India's only non-Hindutva politician to have welcomed the Babri demolition, and justified the Gujarat pogrom. Modi's authoritarianism, megalomania, abrasiveness, and above all, his communal image, will repel other potential allies -- as shown by the JD(U)'s expulsion of the BJP from Bihar's ruling alliance.

Regional parties have steadily gained importance and

command close to 30% of the national vote, compared to just 11% in 1984. Their rise has pushed the Congress-BJP's combined vote below 50 percent -- decisively bursting the "two-party system" myth.

The myth is crucial to "presidentialising" the election. This is unlikely to happen. Given the parliamentary system, the fate of all PM-aspirants will largely hinge on stitching up coalitions.

India's political system has become increasingly multi-polar, with a rising number of parties and sharper competition. The number of parties contesting elections has spurted almost sevenfold from since 1952 to 370. The average number represented in the Lok Sabha has risen from 19 in 1952-84, to 39.

If different parties' vote-shares are factored in to produce what political scientists call their "effective number," it has risen even more sharply, from 1.7 to 6.5.

Mr. Modi is thus called upon not just to win more seats, but to break the multipolar mould, no less. But winning the 200-plus (perhaps 220-230) seats needed to do this is a tall order given the BJP's primarily upper-caste and geographically narrow base.

That mould can be broken if Mr. Modi polarises Uttar Pradesh and Bihar politics along communal lines -- as the Sangh Parivar did in the late 1980s-early 1990s through the Ram temple movement, which mobilised millions, including sections of the *mofussil* middle classes and castes.

But there is no temple movement today, and the Parivar's recent attempts to instigate one have failed. Yet, Mr Modi, a viciously divisive figure, it might be argued, could polarise politics -- by repelling Muslims, who form 16-17% of the UP-Bihar population, and creating a newly aggressive Hindutva identity.

Under today's circumstances, the second can only happen if communal violence is generated and systematically harnessed to further Hindutva politics. The recent Muzaffarnagar-Shamli violence in Western UP, occurring in the state's broader context of low-intensity communal clashes in nearly 80 places this year, is a case in point.

A minor incident -- in which a youth allegedly made lewd remarks to a girl of another community -- was converted by RSS-VHP-BJP rumour-campaigns about "love jihad" (seduction-abduction of Hindu women) into a Jat-Muslim conflict, in which 40 people were killed and 50,000 displaced.

This wouldn't have happened if the Akhilesh Yadav government had acted promptly, and enforced bans on incendiary caste/community conferences. But it was perceived as inept, partisan, and indulgent towards violence, which some Samajwadi Party leaders calculated, might consolidate their Muslims support-base.

The long-term cause for the violence was the breakdown of the Jat-Muslim coalition which Charan Singh built. But perception of Samajwadi partisanship and Parivar rumour-mongering mediated the Jats' gravitation towards the BJP.

Whether all this was planned by Amit Shah, Mr. Modi's UP election strategist -- sent there not because of his (non-existent) expertise on the state, but his experience in instigating violence -- isn't established. The point is, the Parivar will cynically foment violence because it gains from it.

After Muzaffarnagar, the secular parties must be on their guard and act with scrupulous fairness and impartiality against communal violence. That, with effective broad-based alliances, holds the key to defeating Mr. Modi.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Post-Rana plaza shocks exposed

In an investigative report BBC's reporter for Panorama programme secretly filmed some shocking scenes still prevailing within our RMG sector. This time the situation is even much worse. A factory producing products for a cut-price retailer by the name Lidl was appallingly making its workers to work a 19-hour day.

The programme also showed how the security guard of the said factory had locked the front gates from the outside during operating hours. The factory later admitted to Panorama that it had two sets of books but complied fully with the Law.

The question here is simple: why did we have to learn of such shameful practices from a foreign media agency in spite of having a spree of private TV channels, online and print media agencies within the country? Where are our reporters and journalists?

Shahriar Feroze
Elephant Road, Dhaka

Need for child-friendly textbooks

We thank the daily *Prothom Alo* for doing a wonderful job for the nation by finding and publishing the mistakes in the new textbooks. The daily revealed that there are a lot of mistakes in the math as well as other textbooks. Particularly math textbooks are not suitable for children's use. Inductive method is suitable for the kids. Jean Piaget, a Swiss developmental psychologist and philosopher, came to the conclusion after conducting a research that kids' learning depends on their age and kids could not understand the abstract things before the age of 12.

Our kids should be taught real life math with child-friendly textbooks.

Mawduda Hasnin
Rajshahi

Bracu's residential semester

The huge green field and the wide blue sky is where I find peace. I am mesmerised by being a part of the residential semester of Bracu. I never realised the beauty and charm of this place until I landed here. The morning assembly, crowded lunch and dinners, seminars, special activities -- all this literally makes one forget the daily hectic life of Dhaka. It's only a week I have been in this place but it feels amazing. On behalf of all the Brac-ers, I would like to say that the residential semester in Savar is an amazing experience. Long live RS 34!

Mahbuba Sharmeen
Brac Business School

Comments on news report, "PM off to New York,takes along biggest ever entourage," published on September 23, 2013

Alekanda

How can AL government spend this huge amount of taxpayers' money just to attend the UN's General Assembly? Is the premier throwing a lavish party for her party members and others before the election, so that they work hard for her election campaign? Please don't waste our hard-earned money like this.

Ash C.

The entire cabinet could have been taken along for the 'last ride'!

Nds

Does it need any analysis of such length about the delegation in question? Who in this country does not know or believe that almost all foreign visits of this nature particularly for attending the events sponsored by Internationale or multinational bodies are nothing but a sort of picnic or pleasure trip. The governments of poor countries are traditionally pleasure-loving at the cost of people, and Bangladesh is ranked number one in this category of nations.

Abul Kashem

134 members? We are curious to know the sizes of other countries' entourages.

Dr. Ahsan Habib

Our PM has always compared our election system with other democracies like UK. It would be nice to know how many delegates the British PM is taking?

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

Shopping spree and excursion will be the core agenda of this tour.

Spiderman

Only an unpatriotic leader can do such thing. Shame on all these worthless delegation members.

Sum 1

Wonder if all will return home...

Saleh Tanveer

With the PM and company thinking of taxpayers' money as their personal piggy bank, they see no harm in spending it freely. It looks also like a calculated move to endear prominent media personality on their side before election time.

Deep purple blue

Hope and pray that the eminent personalities -- leaders of various leagues -- will behave and not try to bully the UN secretary general. What will the upazila and pourashava chairmen do there? We hear that only 10 people will be allowed into the general assembly out of these 140!

Akhtar Shah

Feel good jolly for the boys and girls to remember and work hard at the National Polls. Come on be fair, the country owes this to the ruling party. It's always a pleasure to be generous with other people's money.