

Blast at a Chittagong madrasa

A warning signal

An accidental explosion at the dormitory of a Hefajat-e-Islami leader-owned Qawmi madrasa in Chittagong on Monday has exposed what a diabolical plot of death and destruction was being hatched by Islamist militants behind the scene. The window grills, ceiling fan and furniture at the scene of incident bore the marks of its deadly force. It claimed one life and critically injured another.

Police found huge amount of bomb-making materials and 30 crude grenades in the hostel room that had exploded into flames. A question arises. Had the explosion not occurred, would the den have been discovered? This is an added reason for greater vigil to be brought to bear on the pursuit of extremist forces.

This is not to preclude, however, the fact that the law-enforcement agencies have also to their credit occasional discoveries of extremists' dens.

Seeing the sheer size of the arsenal, one may well assume the intensity of the Jihadi spirit that was being instilled in the minds of its adherents. This is a cause for renewed concern.

This fortuitous discovery of the militants' den at the Chittagong madrasa is a pointer to what might actually be going on in the name of education behind an apparently innocuous exterior.

What members of the law-enforcement agencies are faced with here are fanatics driven by a self-arranged ideology. They are merely using religion as a façade. This calls for handling extremists in a manner that is different from the methods applied against common criminals. In this fight against extremism, there is no room for complacency or resting on one's laurels.

IMF comes calling
Potential for growth underscored

RODRIGO Cuberto, chief of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission to Dhaka has conveyed both good and bad tidings to Bangladesh. The RMG sector was singled out as providing the best opportunity in the near term for the country to earn foreign exchange. Yet, incidents like building collapses and fires in the sector merely help point out the dire need for better infrastructure - a key ingredient that policymakers need to pay attention to, along with power and transport sectors to propel Bangladesh's future growth.

One point made by the visiting team is that workers' productivity in the garments sector still lags behind competitors in the region. Whereas the global standard is at 80 on a scale of 100 minutes, Bangladesh trails at 35 minutes. Such underperformance in productivity has been linked to lower wages, a contentious issue that has yet to be resolved; but it is hoped that the wage board formed to look into the issue will bring better tidings in November.

In its macroeconomic assessment of Bangladesh, the IMF believes that a higher productive level could help unleash higher industrial growth. Despite having strong potentials for further development, the continued political stalemate could derail the growth potential Bangladesh has. A reduction in acrimony between the two major political blocs coupled with peaceful national elections would ensure the economy rebounding in the short-term and its eventual recovery in the mid-term. The opposite would bring economic turbulence and erode business confidence, something the country can ill afford.

Plight of
Rohingyas

A.M. KHAIRUL BASHER

In the backdrop of recent violence in Rakhine province, the incessant persecution of Rohingyas has made news again. Unfortunately, it is becoming all-to-familiar a tale. This time, majority Buddhist community showed their rage over a news item that a Muslim shopkeeper had verbally abused a Buddhist taxi driver as he was trying to park outside his shop. These political analysts say, indicates how deeply-rooted communal tensions are and the increasing likelihood of small scuffles turning into bloody riots.

Bangladesh, having sea and land border with Myanmar, needs to draw due attention of the international community to this issue through diplomatic channels. The Bangladeshi government must have means to identify Rohingyas for security reasons, and deal with the issue considering national interest and the human rights charter.

On the diplomatic front, the UN and OIC along with leading countries like China and USA have to take a diplomatic approach to the Myanmarese government with the help of Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel peace laureate, to ensure the citizenship of Rohingyas in Myanmar.

It is hoped that the Myanmarese government will amend the 2008 constitution to remove the inherent role of military in politics and bad laws like Citizenship Law of 1982. One expects that some positive outcome of the constitution review committee will be forthcoming to solve the problems. Hopefully, the election in 2015 will be fair and free for the people of Myanmar to get a real democracy. As long as the military plays a role in the politics of Myanmar, it may be difficult for ethnic groups to live in peace and for Rohingyas to get citizenship in their homeland.

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The death of Che Guevara

GROUND
REALITIES

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

ERNESTO Che Guevara was murdered in the Bolivian village of La Higuera on October 9, 1967. Caught a day earlier by Bolivian soldiers in the jungles near the village, 13 days into the siege he and his fellow guerrillas had been trapped in, Che was bound hand and foot and made to lie down on the floor of a classroom in a school. Near him lay the bodies of two of his murdered comrades. Tired and worn out and obviously in a state of humiliation, Che was subjected to systematic questioning by

Bolivian officers as well as Felix Rodriguez, an agent of the United States Central Intelligence Agency. His self-esteem intact, the man who had with Fidel Castro caused the revolution in Cuba on New Year's Day in 1959 would not give anything away, save only to murmur, sadly, that he had failed.

The CIA agent Rodriguez, for all his antipathy to Che, seemed to empathise with him in his moment of defeat. At one point, he took Che outside and put his arms around the bedraggled guerrilla as a photographer recorded the scene on his camera. It was to be the last image of Che Guevara alive. Soon afterward, a ruffian named Teran, instructed to shoot Che below the face, fired at his leg. Che bit his wrist in order not to scream out in pain. Teran fired again and again. The last bullet, the ninth, hit Che in the throat. The blood filled his lungs. He was dead.

What followed once Che was killed remains a story that was to turn into a modern legend, almost of an epic sort. His body, with its eyes open (giving onlookers the eerie feeling that he was alive) was placed on display for the public. Once the display was done, it was washed by a nurse who was later to tell people she felt she was giving Jesus Christ his last rites. There were reports that some of those present at that final ritual of a bath surreptitiously clipped off bits of Che's hair to keep them as mementoes.

The Bolivian government of then military ruler Rene Barrientos was inclined to decapitate the dead Che and keep the head as a sign of its triumph in tracking down the 'most dangerous' individual in the world. The thought was, however, quickly discarded. What followed was something simpler, though no less revolting. Che's hands were sawn off and were later sent to Havana, to convince the Cuban authorities that their hero had indeed died in the jungles of Bolivia. It was a somber Castro who informed his people of the tragic end of the man who, having left his native Argentina, had identified with the Cuban revolution and then set out to revolutionise the world.

The murder of Che Guevara was in several ways the end of idealism for people across vast tracts of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Che believed, and millions believed with him, that socialism offered a way out of the woods for the world's underprivileged and disenfranchised. Cuba, Che had convinced himself, could be a powerful symbol of revolution, of the socialism that could act as a catalyst for change. In his final moments, when a Bolivian army officer

asked him why he had come to Bolivia with his revolution, Che answered: "I am a Cuban, an Argentine, a Peruvian, a Bolivian, a Chilean, an Ecuadorian."

Those final words defined him. In a career that would not rest on laurels, Che would reach out to every segment of society that suffered at the hands of exploitative forces. He was in the Congo when he thought men like Laurent Kabila needed to offer a clear vision about emancipation to a nation wracked by conflict since the murder of the patriot Patrice Lumumba in 1961. It was Che's belief, like that of any other Marxist, that revolution was not to be confined to geography but move beyond and across frontiers if it was to be purposeful. Revolution is an inclusive affair. Socialism is always about internationalism and because it is, Che persuaded himself into thinking that he could be among those who needed to play a leading role in disseminating the socialistic message across the globe.

Che served as a minister in Castro's government and in that capacity he went out into the wider world informing global leaders of what it meant to be a Cuban revolution-

ary and what it would mean once the Cuban revolution was replicated around the world. Che was eminently equipped to carry out this responsibility. He was, besides being a guerrilla, a doctor and an intellectual. There was no ambiguity in him about the modalities in which revolution was to come to the dirt poor homes of the world's impoverished. He exchanged ideas with

Mao Zedong on the nature of revolution; he was at home with Ahmed Ben Bella in a free Algeria; and he marvelled at the way Gamal Abdel Nasser went about constructing the edifice of Arab nationalism in Egypt. At the United Nations in 1964, he was clear in his conviction that the world, including its capitalist regions, needed to be enlightened on the utilitarian aspects of socialism. His words were a robust defence of the beauty inherent in leftwing thinking. He minced no words in his excoriation of imperialism.

And then Ernesto Che Guevara went out into the night. Divesting himself of all the perks and perquisites of power, he went into disguise as a middle-aged western businessman before walking away into what he believed would soon become a wider, more substantive world of truly Marxist dimensions.

And then he died. He was only 39. In that brief span of a fullness of life, Che Guevara reflected on the poetry of Pablo Neruda, Federico Garcia Lorca and John Keats. In the writings of Jawaharlal Nehru and Franz Kafka and Albert Camus he sought the meaning of existence. He was, as Jean-Paul Sartre was to say of him, "the most complete human being of our time."

Ernesto Che Guevara's remains were discovered, along with those of his comrades, thirty years after his assassination in a secluded spot near an airstrip in Vallegrande. In a changed world, they were dispatched to Havana. On October 17, 1997, they were buried in Santa Clara with full military honours.

(Ernesto Che Guevara was born on May 14, 1928 and killed on October 9, 1967).

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Little option but to go for coal-fired power

MUSHFIQUR RAHMAN

THE prime ministers of Bangladesh and India unveiled the plaque of the foundation stone of the 1,320 MW Friendship Super Thermal Power Project, popularly known as Rampal coal-fired power plant, on October 4. Sheikh Hasina and Dr. Manmohan Singh officially inaugurated the grid connectivity for transmission of electric power between Bangladesh and India at Bheramara in Kushthia through video conferencing. The official inauguration of the projects is the logical continuation of the historic joint communiqué signed between Bangladesh and India in January 2010.

Left leaning activists, opposition political parties and groups along with a section of environmental activists have been agitating against the Rampal power plant project. Leader of the opposition Khaleda Zia, reacting to the news of unveiling of the Rampal power plant project on the same day at a public rally in Sylhet, said that "the power project would be scrapped once my party comes to power, because the plant would destroy all animals, and environment of the Sundarbans." She further added: "We are not against power plants. We need them, but not at Rampal. The plant may be set up somewhere else in the country."

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina asserted that the Rampal power plant would not cause any harm to the Sundarbans or the livelihood of the people in the surrounding areas. As reported, Indian PM Manmohan Singh said: "I extend my best wishes to the project and call upon those implementing it to observe the highest environmental standards, given that the Sundarbans is our common heritage."

The government plans to set up several more coal-based mega power plants in Moheshkhali of Cox's Bazaar, Banskhali of Chittagong, Barguna, Munshiganj and Ashuganj. There are plans to set up three more coal-fired power plants with 1,320 MW capacity each after signing of government-to-government contracts with Malaysia, China and Korea. On September 29, the cabinet committee on purchase of the government approved five coal-based power plants to be built, owned and operated (BOO) by local private companies. As approved, Orion Power and Associates will set up three coal-based plants in Dhaka and Chittagong with a generation capacity of 1,400 MW. Two other coal-based plants will be set up by a joint venture of S. Alam Group and HTG Development Group in Chittagong and Barisal. Generation capacity of the two plants will be a maximum of 1,100 MW. As reported, tariff rates approved for the Orion power plants will vary



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Finance Minister A.M.A. Muhith recently said to the media that the companies that got the job for power plant development would decide from where they would procure coal. The agreements will stipulate punishment to the companies if they fail to go for power production within the stipulated time.

The government has little option but to go ahead with coal-fired power generation as 78% of the existing power plants are gas-based and have been facing serious problems with increasing gas supply shortages. Unless there is a major breakthrough in gas discovery in the near future, there is a genuine fear that the remaining gas resources will be depleted within one decade. Also, to attain the government's vision for making electricity available for all Bangladeshis within 2021, approximately 24,000 MW of electricity generation target has been met within that period. The government also has set the target for 50% of the power generation using coal within 2030.

If Bangladesh truly wants to attain a balanced mix of primary fuel diversity it needs to immediately address the issues of mining domestic coal and build infrastructure for large-scale coal imports. Also, coal-based power plants should be developed with environmentally sustainable and economically affordable technologies.

The writer is a mining engineer writes on energy and environment issues.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Unethical student politics

When PM Sheikh Hasina was asked whether she would take any step to ban student politics in Bangladesh, she categorically said that she and her government didn't have any plan to do so because she thinks student politics is the way of producing new political leaders. If student politics is stopped, there would be leadership vacuum in the country.

But the question is, is ethical politics being practiced in Bangladesh by the student wings of the political parties? Especially the pro-ruling party student organisations become violent and behave condescendingly for maintaining their dominance on the campus. Vandals, fighting, and even killing are mere child's play to them. Samiul Raijul
Bangladesh University of Textiles, Dhaka

Raise retired govt. employees' festival allowance

The government has decided to provide 20% D.A. for government employees. Thanks for this timely move. We, the retired government employees, particularly those who depend on pension, are getting only festival allowances at the rate of half of the pension. This amount is too meagre and is not consistent with present day market price. So we urge the government to mitigate our sufferings by enhancing festival allowance and medical allowance at least by 60%. Retired government employees will be indebted to the government if it implements this measure.

Prof. Md. Anwar Hossain

Dhaka College (retd.)

A.F. Badiur Rahman

Retd. D.G.

Department of Public Libraries

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Comments on news report, "Go all out to resist polls," published on October 6, 2013

Nds

Yes, polling has become a threat to democracy in this country! We need to go all out against it. Because free and fair election is a convenient plea to instigate the people to create all sorts of chaos to muddle the process of peaceful transfer of power!

Pasha

Compare her speech with that of PM and you will find the answer as to who is better suited to run the country.

Abbasuddin

Nobody is suitable.

truthprevails53

BNP is shamelessly supporting Jamaat-Shibir. This will be the reason of this party's downfall.

* * * *

"None can resist execution of verdicts: PM" (October 6, 2013)

Abbasuddin

We didn't see a single execution during the last four and half years and politicians of our country are infamous for being bluffers.

Spiderman

If the trial is independent of political pressure, then it's sure that there is no need that AL should win next election to execute the convicts. But if political pressure is required, then questions definitely arise.

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"Govt employees to get 20pc DA" (October 7, 2013)

Nds

This is nothing but a sort of bribe given to the government employees on consideration of quid pro quo. At the fag end of this government's tenure, such action has no other explanation. The government employees are not the sole victims of price hike.

Spiderman

With election ahead, this is nothing but a package to buy loyalty of the government servants.

Tanvir

Too little, too late. I will accept it but will never vote for this fascist party again. People learned their lesson in the last 5 years. You fool me once, shame on you; you fool me twice, shame on me.

Deep purple blue

Bribing the bureaucracy as the government makes attempt to come back by any means... The bureaucrats must not forget that they serve the republic, not the ruling party. This government is not the last government in the country, mind it, bureaucrats!