

# Minorities under attack

## Time for the political parties to act

BA NGLADESH is a country of time-tested religious harmony and we shall not allow that to be tarnished at any cost. Regrettably, we are witnessing yet again violence against minorities. This time a Hindu community of Bonogram Bazaar of Santhia upazila in Pabna, was the target. The alarming aspect of the incident is that like Ramu, the perpetrators resorted to rumor-mongering on a religiously sensitive matter to generate public passion.

This area had never seen communal violence after liberation. Thus, while the intelligence agencies should go into the why and wherefores of the matter, we need to remind ourselves of the obligation of the society and the state towards the minorities.

Moreover, election is round the corner, and, needless to say, often it is the minorities that bear the brunt of any backlash during and after election. The ruling coalition has consistently expressed their commitment to the security of the minorities. And only recently, Khaleda Zia went so far as to stress that there were no 'minority' in the country and has affirmed her obligation to ensure the safety and security of all segments of the society.

Therefore, given the commitment of the political parties, we feel that it is essential that the AL and BNP come together and implement measures in order to remove fear from the minds of the minorities and restore confidence in the system, particularly by prevailing upon party rank and file to refrain from politically exploiting the minorities. They must also help to build awareness against the motivated and dishonest use of the social media.

# Congratulations Tigers

## Make winning a habit

WE congratulate Tigers for their 3-0 series win over the Kiwis. They have repeated the result of 2010 by winning all the three one-day matches. We are happy to note that our cricket has matured in the last several years and this has shown in the marked improvements in all the departments of the game. The team management too deserves credit for the team's creditable performance.

What impressed us in particular is the overall performance in all the areas of the game, in bowling, batting and fielding observed both during the test and one day series. The team have gelled as a good playing outfit, and, unlike before, have stopped relying upon individual performances of a few players only.

The visiting New Zealand team came here to salvage some pride after the 4-0 one-day series loss in 2010, but the Tigers were determined to win. We have seen Bangladesh emerging as a giant-killer for quite some years but the team never seemed to perform in all the three formats of the game consistently. What now matters the most is to continue in the same spirit and better their performance against other teams.

As we laud the guests for their sporting acknowledgment of a fired-up Bangladeshi side, it needs to be admitted that as a cricket team we have begun to perform with a purpose in mind and with confidence.

The Tigers are no longer the minnows of international

# From Ramu to Bonogram

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

THE recent attack on Hindu community at Bonogram, Pabna is a repeat of the Ramu. First time it was tragic but now pure farce. Government's inability to take action against the culprits of Ramu has invited more such acts: a group of people distributed photocopies of a facebook page claiming a Hindu boy, Rajib Saha, had maligned Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) in the page, and soon dozens of people stormed Rajib Saha's house and assaulted his family members. The rage subsides but not before 25 homesteads and 2 Hindu Temples were vandalised.

It is a horrific betrayal of memory. No one took a little pause to ask whether or nor it was fake. How did they forget the incident of Ramu where the whole destruction had been plotted on a fake facebook post?

The trend is alarming. It is also an organised anarchy in the line of Ramu, and, unfortunately, it is gaining ground in public. If we look into the incident carefully, we will find people from nearby villages believed in the rumour, joined the frenzy and blocked the highway for five hours. Why? To keep the police refrained from taking action against the culprits.

The monster of communalism is back. It is gaining strength exploiting the broils between the two political parties.

The first victim of communalism is truth. Here, truth is what people like to believe.

In the name of communal interest, all sorts of violation of norms are permitted, well accepted even hailed! Killing becomes religiosity, killer becomes martyr! In Bonogram's case, extortionists became defender of faith!

In case of any attack against minority, there is always a hidden agenda that has nothing do with upholding religion or faith. In Bonogram, it is extortion. In Hill Tracts, it is land grabbing. In Ramu, it is political mileage. Use of religion in politics creates fertile ground for such communal adventures.

Now come to the present situation of Bonogram. Police said the situation is under control. So then why Poritosh Kumar, a resident of Bonogram Sahapara, would say in anguish, "We know who attacked and vandalised our houses"? He did not to mention any name.

The government should conduct a thorough investigation and find out the real culprits. Do not play with the investigation process like Ramu where 364 people were included in the charge sheet except the identified criminals. Incarceration of innocent people only worsens the situation.

It is regrettable, why does not any progressive force stand out against such barbarity. Has the atrociousness of the incident taken our breath away?

The writer is Editorial Assistant, The Daily Star.

ABU AFSARUL HAIDER

OUR two leading leaders claim that their politics is for the well-being of the people and country but in reality both are practicing politics of hate and attrition which is based on personal grievances. They are least concerned about the sufferings of the people, the nation and the economy. Had they been at all concerned about the people of this country and the economy, they would have come out of the hartal culture a long time back. Hartal or shutdown is, to a person of conscience and proper learning, is an obsolete tool of protest in the modern world. Our politicians claim that hartal is their democratic right, but nowhere in the world it is practiced the way they are in Bangladesh. A 2005 study, Beyond Hartals, of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) shows the adverse impact of hartal on Bangladesh economy. During 1947-58, the average number of hartals per year was 1.5 days, which reached a whopping 173 days during 2001-2006. This year we already had more than 41 days of hartal, injuring 3400-plus people and killing 250. Majority of the picketers are student and youth wings of major political parties and most of them are reportedly engaged in illegal money making projects and in exchange they are used as musclemen to subdue their opponents. Politicians are taking advantage of the poverty and emotions of our people to serve their own interests and exploiting our youths, who are fighting with each other, engaging themselves in fierce feuds on behalf of their mentors in politics.

One may wonder, do such politicians have any idea about the present Bangladesh economy and its prospects? Despite a challenging global environment, particularly the global financial crisis in the recent years, Bangladesh has posted a solid economic performance. The Bangladesh Economic Update had forecast that the country's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) will grow at around 6.0 per cent in the fiscal year 2013. This was to place Bangladesh among the top 35 out of 150 countries, as pointed out by International Monetary Fund (IMF). Our economy of US\$ 158.58 billion is driven by three major sectors: Agriculture, Remittance and Export. The garment industry exports US\$ 20 billion's worth of apparel, creating a job opportunity for four million people. Around seven million people are working abroad contributing 35 per cent to our total foreign earnings, which have already crossed the US\$ 17-billion mark. Pharmaceuticals, ceramics, plastic industries, and ship building are looking brighter. The entire world is looking to us as a resilient and attractive investment destination. This positive view is one echoed by some of the leading international investment banks. Goldman Sachs names Bangladesh in its list of 'Next 11' countries (those most likely to become the world's largest economies after the BRIC nations -- Brazil, Russia, India and China) and it is one of JP Morgan's 'Frontier Five' economies. Citigroup has identified Bangladesh as one of the 11 countries it terms Global Growth Generators (or 3G countries). Bangladesh also possesses an enthusiastic, hardworking, and low-cost workforce; 57.3% of the population is under 25, providing a youthful group for recruitment. A market of around 160 million people is very hard to ignore: Bangladesh's middle class is larger than the total population of Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, and a growing middle class means a large section of the



ANURUP KANTI DAS

The world is watching our bloody street battles, violent and destructive politics where people are fighting with each other and getting killed everyday. In the name of andolon, hartals are called, public transports, private vehicles, trains, shops and business houses are being burned. The whole country is shut down day after day; business and factories are disrupted because of hartals. By seeing all these on television, they think all Bangladeshis are trouble-makers. It is so unfortunate for us that the image of the nation of 160 million people, living in 56,977 square miles, is being tarnished by a few so-called politicians who are wreaking havoc in the name of betterment of our country.

Bangladesh is a leader in promoting global peace -- in terms of sending troops on peacekeeping missions. But the irony is we don't have peace at home. According to our constitution, all powers in the Republic belong to the 'people' but it seems we 'people' have become powerless and helpless and therefore we deserve better. We are in the middle of a crossroads. Our prospects are bright, we want to become a middle-income country by 2021 raising the per capita income to US\$ 2,000 and it is the responsibility of our politicians to take us to that destination. Therefore, it is high time our politicians changed their behavioural pattern to ensure the survival of democracy. It is expected that the political leadership would listen to and take cognisance of people's voices, which so far they have failed to do. Unless the political parties come to a minimum consensus the non state actors would appropriate the

# How credible is the Election Commission?

FARID HOSSAIN

CREDIBILITY is a key element in any election. It's even more important in a national election in a country like Bangladesh where political parties are known for harbouring deep mutual mistrust.

Hope for a negotiated end to the deadlock is fading fast as the country is inching toward holding the balloting to elect the 10<sup>th</sup> parliament with the five-year term of the current legislature expiring on January 24, 2014.

With this uncertainty in the background the Election Commission is getting prepared to conduct the voting, which is already proving to be a high-voltage event.

The commission has recently published on its website the draft of the amended electoral code of conduct that bars the prime minister, the leader of the opposition, ministers and members of parliament from using any sort of government facilities during the election campaign.

As we go through the details of the proposed code of conduct we find little to complain about except that this time, unlike the previous elections held under the non-partisan caretaker government, is likely to be held under a partisan government. The incumbent government will be in charge in the form of an interim administration until the election is held and power is handed to a government that will be chosen by the voters.

This reality has raised questions about how the EC is going to ensure a real level-playing field for all the candidates. The electoral code of conduct might look attractive on its face, but it will be of no use if the EC fails to execute it properly. What happens if the VVIPs like the PM and Leader of the opposition do not completely adhere to the code of conduct? Will the EC be able to penalize such VVIPs should they violate the rules.

Another big source of worry is the Representation of the People Order (RPO) that has recently been amended by the parliament. As we all know that RPO is the legal framework applied to hold the election. It deals with many issues ranging from campaign financing to law enforcement to penalties to candidates. RPO also contains provisions on the circumstances to cancel the nomination of a candidate or making valid a cancelled nomination.

The amended RPO has dropped a significant provision that a person must spend at least three years as a member of a political party to qualify to contest in the national election. This provision was incorporated by the military-backed caretaker government that had overseen the 2008 parliamentary election. It was supposed to be fully effective from the upcoming parliamentary polls.

The provision had sought to protect the career politicians from the outsiders who, by dint of their wealth,

population is becoming more inclined to embrace more sophisticated business solutions.

Besides our economic growth, we have also made significant progresses in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly relating to eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, promoting gender equality and empowering women, ensuring universal primary education and reducing child mortality.

When the international arena has started recognising and appreciating our work, changing their negative perception and thinking of us as the "basket case" of the bygone days, poised to be grouped among the today's "Emerging Tigers of Asia", our political leadership has of late started acting in a weird manner by engaging themselves in self-destructive politics. Despite repeated attempts made by the civil society, business, trade and other sections, they have not stopped hostilities. According to reports of the International Chambers of Commerce Bangladesh, hartals cost the country an estimated \$200 million a day, with \$6 billion lost since last December -- a sum that could finance the construction of two Padma Bridges. Violent and destructive politics is sending negative signals to the foreign buyers and investors, thus causing a greater dent to our economy than the recent Savar disaster. Investments, businesses are deserting us, and as a result the exports of garment products from Vietnam and Cambodia rose recently by 22 and 15 per cent respectively. They are destroying our education sector. Schools, colleges and universities remain closed during repeated shutdowns. Examinations at different levels are

delayed and some were held at midnight, but nothing seems to be moving the politicians. It is we, the common ordinary people, who suffer the most -- about 30 million retail and small-scale businesses in the country have been pushed to the margin.

This is an era of media and Internet and one cannot hide the country's internal affairs from others.

# LETTERS

## TO THE EDITOR

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## Why should patients suffer during hartal?

Patients suffer most during a hartal. They face tremendous problems to reach the hospital. Doctors fail to attend their patients in time. During the last hartal I also had much trouble to rush my younger sister to hospital, who suddenly got sick.

Calling hartal or strike is a democratic right of political parties. But hartal often violates human rights of the common people who need to go to their workplaces. Leaders of both ruling and opposition parties are escorted by their public or private security forces but common people face great difficulties to travel to their destinations. I think government has a sacred responsibility to take appropriate measures to avoid hartal. The opposition should not harm the common people through violence.

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

## Country's main obstacles to progress

I support a secular, democratic Bangladesh. Institutions need to be depoliticised and the rot at the top of political parties removed. More effective oversight would be required this time to reduce abuses.

Dire warnings in the party leaders' speeches against a "minus-two" solution are about threats to their own positions, not the country's interests. These two women are the biggest obstacles to progress. Elections have returned, but they have been unable to advance democracy further due to their poisonous personal relationship. As long as they or members of their families remain in power, the same issues will recur.

Arguing at length whether a particular phone works or not during this serious crisis is simply the latest proof that they are not the leaders Bangladesh needs.

Neil Taylor  
On e-mail

## Halloween: Paganism in a new package

The true name of Halloween is "Samhain." This was the Celtic Lord of the Dead. For 3 days from Oct 29-31, the Celtic people, along with their priestly class called Druids, hold an ancient rite which marks the beginning and the end of the year. A druid was a member of the priestly class in Britain, Ireland, and Gaul, and possibly other parts of Celtic Western Europe, during the Iron Age.

Very little is currently known about the ancient druids because they left no written accounts about themselves. The druids then also appear in some of the medieval tales from Christianised Ireland like the Táin Bó Cúailnge, where they are largely portrayed as sorcerers who opposed the coming of Christianity.

Usually a week before the rites of Samhain began, the Druid had ordered the people of the Celtic tribe to disperse throughout the countryside and gather thousands of wicker reeds. They would then construct a giant human effigy as the wicker man. A wicker man was a large wicker statue of a human used by the ancient Druids (priests of Celtic paganism) for human sacrifice by burning it in effigy. Many cages had been built. Each prisoner would be tied to one of the cages. Then the Druids began their idea of fun and games.

Yet, I have seen many Christian churches throughout this nation hold Halloween parties within the church building. Every single one of these things is directly from the celebration of Samhain. You are simply trying to turn something evil into something good!

Ted Rudow III, MA  
Encina Ave  
Palo Alto, CA

## Comments on news report, "Education in peril," published on October 31, 2013

### Nds

Exactly that is what the politicians want to see because education constitutes the biggest threat to their survival.

### Snr Citizen

Student politics has always been promoted and we are 'expert' in such matters and know how to loot, steal, tell lies, ignore the weak, grab land, take active part in all corruption, etc, etc.

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## "Stop attacks on journos" (October 31, 2013)

### Jafar Iqbal

If all journalists of Bangladesh get together in a single platform, they can easily wipe out evil politicians from this country to save the nation. Pen is mightier than the sword.

### Zman7

Stop attacks on journos? Why only journos? Why not all the people to be saved from cruel attacks of the anti-government goons who are imposing hartal-violence by cocktail and arson attacks?

The writer is former Bangladesh Bureau Chief, AP