

Nattering Narendra Modi makes us nervous

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Narayanganj killings Complicit persons must not be let off the hook

THE case of the seven killing has taken a dramatic character with the revelation of alleged complicity of some Rab officials including the commanding officer of the local battalion.

The fact is that the government has taken cognizance of the allegation first by reverting the officers to their parent service and then by termination their service, wherein the two army officers have been given premature retirement while the navy officer has been sent on compulsory retirement.

That action of the services is a clear indication that there is a prima-facie case against the three officers. That being so, and while we do not want to dwell on technicalities, it would seem incongruous that those carrying allegation of murder would be sent on retirement, perhaps with all benefits, while the case is yet to be resolved.

We would hope that these officers would be made to face the due process of law and answer the charges should the inquiry definitively establish their role in the said killings. We believe that the actions of the government and the respective services thus far are but administrative and by no means a punishment for their alleged complicity.

The matter is far too serious to admit of any ploy to let the culprits off the hook. And we would hope that the probe body set up as per the directive of the High Court would be able to not only establish the identity of the killers but also pinpoint all those that are behind the gruesome killings.

Schooling gets costly for the poor

Corruption is to blame

THOUGH in theory education at primary level is free, in practice it is not so, especially for children from poorer households in rural Bangladesh. And the poor parents have to pay bribe at every step of their children's schooling, from admission to getting books to being awarded stipends to collecting the stipend money. And in the process, they may end up spending up to 61 per cent of their savings just to pay bribes to a section of corrupt officials in the school administration.

Paradoxically though, the richer parents may not have to pay such bribe simply because they are less vulnerable to the bribe culture, if only due to their social clout. This picture about the state of the so-called free primary education came out from a paper based on a survey conducted among a large number of poor households in the rural areas by Brac. It has been further revealed through the paper that this corrupt practice of extorting the poorer parents of schoolchildren prevails among about half of the government primary schools in the country.

This is no doubt a stunning revelation about how corruption in the education sector is making education discriminatory and forbidding for children from poorer social backgrounds. There is no question of any government official's being surprised at this revelation, since all this could not have happened without the knowledge of the administration, especially the education ministry.

The authorities concerned must accept fact and take urgent steps to root out corruption in the primary education sector, if only to prevent children from poorer social backgrounds from being dropped out of schools.



A DOLF Hitler writes in his autobiographical manifesto *Mein Kampf* that the living shape of the Jew personifies the devil as the symbol of all evil. The prejudice may not have gone that far when BJP frontrunner Narendra Modi, in his rousing stump speeches, first in Sreerampore and then in Asanol of West Bengal, threatened to deport Bangladeshis from India. But it had the undertone of warmed-over Hitlerism that made us shudder. Modi's speeches were reminiscent of his ugly past, the specter of the Gujarat riot looming large in our minds.

Why should the Bangladeshis allegedly living on Indian soil suddenly become the focus of an Indian prime minister hopeful's election campaign? It's hard to ignore the threat as political ruse, because the man Modi is today the same man who incited the communal riots known as Gujarat pogrom in 2002. It left 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus dead. Thousands were injured.

If we look at the total casualty figure, it's 90 deaths short of the number of workers who perished under the Rana Plaza rubble. Statistically, the horror imprecated inside one building in the blink of an eye undermines what had happened in one Indian state for three frightful days. Yet what happened in Gujarat was retail death compared to Rana Plaza's wholesale. For days, Hindu extremists systematically hunted down Muslims and the Muslims also instinctively killed in retaliation and self-defense. The killing fields of Gujarat were motivated and methodical, Narendra Modi being the mastermind.

That such a deranged mind rose through the safety filters of the world's largest democracy itself is painful. Now that he is aspiring to become India's next prime minister it is frightening. It has been made more poignant lately when he repeatedly blurted out his venom in two public meetings. A word to the wise is sufficient. Should Narendra Modi be the Indian voters' choice for next five years, Bangladesh has got tough days ahead.

British author Simon O. Sinek argues that great leaders are willing to sacrifice the numbers to save the people while the poor leaders sacrifice the people to save the numbers. Narendra Modi sounded like a hissing pit of hatred when he showed his penchant for the latter. His

stature terribly shriveled from a national figure into a local firebrand, our hopes in his leadership trashed to the core. It wasn't sheer coincidence that one week before Modi's first menacing speech on April 27, his senior party colleague Subramaniam Swamy had vented similar rancor. He was more innovative in his solution. He claimed that Bangladesh should compensate with land, since one-third of its people were living in India.

After Modi re-iterated his threat again on May 4, one needs to connect the dots. Two BJP leaders saying the same thing back-to-back means they have been singing from the same hymn sheet. Modi's repetition also means this issue is high on their agenda.

Pitifully, it has the absurdity of a drunk losing something elsewhere and looking for it under the street lamp. Even worse, Modi and his ilk are looking for a needle in a haystack. It's not to deny that some Bangladeshis are living in India as some Indians are also living in Bangladesh. That's true for any two countries sharing porous borders unless Modi's head is buried in the sand. How many millions of Bangladeshis are living in India having a population of 1.27 billion? Even if we take Swamy's hyperbolic estimate, it hovers below 4% of the total Indian population.

But the actual number is much lower and it varies from estimate to estimate. The Indian census in 2001 put that figure at 3.1 million. In 2007, the Indian government stated that as many as 20 million illegal Bangladeshis were residing in India. In 2012, the Indian state minister for home, Mullappally Ramachandran, claimed that nearly 1.4 million Bangladeshis had entered India in the last decade alone.

Given the problem of catching a moving target, how does Modi's threat give any solution? It's not about getting a few squatters off the land and sending them home by a couple of bus loads. On May 5, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, in her riposte at Ranaghat, threw down the gauntlet to him. She warned that if anybody is deported from West Bengal, she is going to storm Delhi. Enough to tell us that Modi will fall flat on his face.

Mark Twain writes: "The very ink with which history is written is merely fluid prejudice". Hitler is proof that history is prejudiced against anyone who treats history with prejudice. Instead of taking the solution to people, the German Führer took people to the solution, and called it the Final Solution. Narendra Modi also has a fancy name for his madness. He is calling it deportation.

The writer is Editor, *First News* and an opinion writer for *The Daily Star*. Email: badrul155@yahoo.com

The shadows of uncertainty

MIZANUR RAHMAN SHELLEY

WHAT Professor Harold Laski wrote about a none too distant era seems to square fit our time. This is an epoch in which uncertainty seems to be the only certitude. This is as true of the world as of our region and country. Things are moving in bewildering restlessness. The impact of events is destabilising the entire country and regions. The west has been fighting its own new war against fundamentalist terrorism spearheaded by non-state extremist groups and organisations such as al-Qaeda and Taliban, who know no frontiers. A war like this one against an ever-elusive enemy is rare in the history of the world. It has been described by many scholars in the West as expression of "the Clash of Civilizations." Others, fewer in number, disagree and find in the present confrontation between the West and some extremist sections of Muslims as features of a temporary phenomenon. They say like ever optimistic analysts, "this too shall pass."

Notwithstanding their hopeful outlook the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan do not seem to be ending in favour of the West and their Western educated Muslim allies. Uncertainty and instability still haunt both Iraq and Afghanistan despite the fact that these countries are having apparently democratic elections amidst virtual warlike situations. In Iraq, relentless clashes between majority 'Shias' and minority 'Sunnis' Muslims are assuming the form of a civil war. This does not bode well for a country where deep divides trisect the people: Shias, Sunnis and Kurds. On the other hand in Afghanistan, despite some progress of liberalism and elective democracy, the orthodox and backward looking Taliban seem to be haunting the country like a spectre. Moreover, extremist and violent Talibanism has spread into neighbouring Pakistan, which also is predominantly Muslim. There, the Taliban threat to civil political stability and law and order has constrained the elected government of the country to attempt a dialogue with the extremists. Despite strong and consistent military campaigns by Pakistani authority and attacks by US drones to contain the Taliban, the situation does not appear to improve.

Add to this the possible uncertainty and destabilisation that may issue after the publication of results of the ongoing Indian elections. Some 810 million voters of the virtual sub-continental sized country are in the process of electing their future government. The process that started in March is still continuing in its usual staggered manner. This is quite natural and expected in a country containing people of many ethnicities, languages and religions. The results will not be declared until May 16.

Although contradictory speculations are rife nobody is sure as to which of the two main and apparently contradictory streams will dominate. On one side is the Congress-led avowedly liberal, secular and progressive coalition. On the other is the evidently communal BJP led by Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister of Gujarat known for his capitalist success in the so-called 'Gujarat model' and for his notorious role in the 2002 Gujarat communal riots in which more than a thousand Muslims were killed. He is riding high on the surging wave of Hindutva.

This idea that India is a Hindu land, not predominantly but entirely a Hindu land, is not new in the history of BJP's philosophy of politics. What Modi, a former RSS activist, has done is add a new militant dimension to it. He has trained his guns on the Muslims, especially those whom he alleges to have infiltrated illegally from Bangladesh. He promised in assertive tone in his pre-election addressees in Assam and West Bengal that on coming to power he would take steps to push Muslim Bangladeshis back into Bangladesh. Such dreadful threats are things that Bangladesh with its pres-

ent uncertainty and basket-full of politico-economics problems can ill-afford.

Politics and economy in Bangladesh have been dominated by an uneasy calm since the controversial parliamentary elections of January 5. The subsequent local government (upazila) elections held between February and end of March seemed to go well till the 3rd round. The last two rounds were, however, vitiated by the alleged use of state machinery and ruling party musclemen to produce results highly favourable to the party in power. Thus it dashed the hope of re-building mutual political confidence between the feuding ruling and opposition parties. Following this, the law and order situation registered a deterioration which obtained high profile.

Abductions, killings and disappearance of hundreds of people a year featured in Bangladesh for a decade or more. What is new, however, is the prominence -- even if local or regional -- of the victims and the apparent inaction or failure of the concerned administrative and coercive machinery of the state. The recent abduction and murder of seven persons in Narayanganj are a fresh illustration of this phenomenon. Allegations against members of the security forces, especially some members of the elite Rab, have further worsened the confusing situation. People's confidence in the political government, the administration and the law and order organisation of the state seems to have been badly shaken.

The fear that stalks the entire country has made the economic situation more discouraging. It was hoped that the staging of a successful, if not credible, national election would encourage the damaged economy to pick up normal speed. The three months prior to the polls were marked by strikes, blockades and violent incidents resulting from clashes between the government and the opposition parties on the issue of poll-time government. The elections were held as scheduled by the ruling party despite boycott and resistance by the opposition. But lack of participation made the elections hollow and less than credible.

The nation suffered greatly, not only politically but also economically. It is estimated that the national loss on account of pre-polls political turmoil was more than Tk. 1 lac crore. As already noted, the post-polls times are not free of uncertainty and fear, both political and social. The result is the continuing doldrums in investment in particular and economy in general.

Idle funds with banks and financial institutions have risen from Tk. 84 thousand crores to Tk. 100 thousand crores within months!

Now, the internal uncertainties are seemingly being compounded by regional ones. India, an avowed friend of Bangladesh, especially of the current government and the ruling party, is itself on the portals of a change of guards. Nobody knows what will happen, who will ascend the throne of Delhi. If the present speculations are proved correct, BJP's hero Narendra Modi may secure something of a plurality. Nevertheless, it may not be enough to form a government without coalition.

If, as forecast, the regional parties of Jayalalitha, Shushma and Mamata show strong regional strength, they may not be willing to join the Modi bandwagon. In that case, a kind of stable continuity may be expected in our neighbour. The ruling party, challenged as it is by many and varied domestic problems, will at least have less worries regarding happenings in the neighbourhood. There is no question, however, that whether he wins or loses the battle for the throne of Delhi, Modi will remain a big factor, and a worrisome one for both secular India and non-communal Bangladesh.

The author, founder Chairman of Centre for Development Research, Bangladesh (CDRB) and Editor quarterly "Asian Affairs" was a former teacher of political science of Dhaka University and former member of the erstwhile Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) and former non-partisan technocrat cabinet minister of Bangladesh.

What people think



Thursday: May 1, 2014
Do you think that the police department is active enough to rescue the victims of abduction and arrest the abductors?



Saturday: May 3, 2014
Do you agree with the Human Rights Watch that Bangladesh should prosecute members of law enforcement agencies found responsible for unlawful killings, torture, and other human rights abuses?



Sunday: May 4, 2014
Do you think the law enforcers would be able to arrest the people behind the recent abductions and killings in Narayanganj?



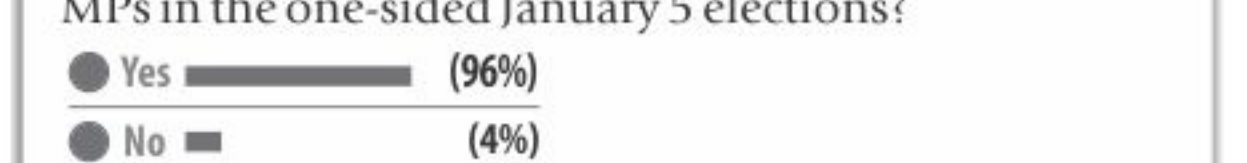
Monday: May 5, 2014
Do you think State Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal's allegation that the BNP might have links with the recent abductions and murders is justified?



Tuesday: May 6, 2014
Do you think authorities concerned are doing enough to find out the culprits behind the recent abductions and killings?



Wednesday: May 7, 2014
Do you agree with Narayanganj city Mayor Selina Hayat Ivy that law and order situation in the town has sharply deteriorated after the Osman brothers became MPs in the one-sided January 5 elections?



Thursday: May 8, 2014
Do you think there will be a neutral probe into Rab men's alleged involvement in the Narayanganj abduction and murder case?



Police our masters?

I recently went to stay at a resort at Bogra with my family. The main attraction of this resort, for my two sons, was the swimming pool. With summer in its full fury, we thought all day about how good it would be to splash about in the pool. But to our dismay, we were informed by a policeman that the swimming pool was closed to the public because the SP of Bogra was swimming there with his family. The whole pool area was surrounded by at least a dozen police officers. It seemed quite unacceptable to us. Are we still living in a colonial era?

Anonymous
On e-mail

Bangladeshi student gets US national award

Rinat Shangeeta, a Bangladeshi student, first received her degree in computer and electrical engineering from Rutgers University (State University of New Jersey) in the USA. After working in the engineering field for 5-6 years, she decided to go to law school to get a JD (Juris Doctor) degree.

In US, not many Bangladeshis are going for the JD degree, which is difficult to get and complete. She recently received two very prestigious scholarships in the field of law. One of the scholarships is a national award and she is the only recipient. It is a great honour for a Bangladeshi student to get huge national recognition in USA. If you want to know more about this, you can check the following link: <http://law.newark.rutgers.edu>
Iftekar M. Rahat
On e-mail

Correcting centre or torture cell?

The plight and ordeal a convict puts up with in Tongi Juvenile Development Center is beyond description. Officially, there are lots of enlisted procedures which are not followed in the process of getting the spoiled brats corrected. The juvenile center is labelled as hell in the eyes of the convicted adolescents. The mistreatment they are getting there is deteriorating their mental condition further rather than improving it.

According to news reports, these 14 to 18 years old children are constantly tortured and seriously abused by the management. Even some children have resorted to commit suicide. The five-storied building has kind of turned into a torture cell. Nobody is allowed to enter its premises. The convicts keep crying all day and engage in vicious fighting with other inmates. I would like to request the authorities concerned to look into the matter seriously and take pragmatic steps as to how this problem can be solved.

Samiul Raijul
School of Business
North South University

Comments on news report, "Finger pointed at Rab men," published on May 5, 2014

Abbasuddin
Inactivity of PM clearly tells us the story behind the abduction and killings by RAB.

Shahin Huq
Car drama to protect the government bigwigs.

Aasfisarwar
Fingers had been pointed at RAB so many times before, but at those times it was not an issue because the victims belonged to BNP, Jamaat or were ordinary citizens.

"N'ganj enraged" (May 3, 2014)

Aasfisarwar
The fate of the investigation is well known now. After her Excellency the honourable PM pointed finger at her rival BNP, the outcome of the investigation is sealed.

Abbasuddin
New DC, SP, OCs of police stations and RAB are already sold out to the godfather family of Narayanganj. So, no improvement of law and order situation can be expected in the city.

"209 primary schools shut" (May 4, 2014)

Shahin Huq
We are being forced to show 'respect' to our oppressors.

Taufiq
209 schools had been closed for a day for the reception of a minister. It hampered children's education, still it did not bother that minister, rather he felt it was an honour. Little kids had to go through physical and emotional suffering, but it did not prick that minister's conscience, though those kids had nothing to do with politics or his popularity.