

Defiant Israeli pogrom in Gaza

Assert global will, stop the genocide

AFTER 24 days of continually racheted up Israeli aggression against captive Palestinians in Gaza with massive fatalities and humanitarian fall-out we have a genocidal scenario in that narrow strip of a sealed land. Already, this has taken a toll of 1,435 out of whom two-thirds have been civilians with half of them being women and children. A greater humanitarian disaster is on the card as Netanyahu's war machine fed on western, particularly US, military assistance is being reinforced.

Sixteen thousand reservists are being mobilised to spike the number Israeli force deployed to around one lac. They are on a killing mission against a total of 17 lac Gazans, the ratio being one soldier to 17 Palestinians. As if that is not enough, Pentagon has granted a request for ammunition including some from a US stockpile kept in Israel for emergency use. Homes, schools, hospitals, market places -- nothing has been spared their onslaught. Not content with air offensive they are mercilessly ramping up ground operations.

In a muted and disunited world and amid a flurry of weak UN resolutions and empty rhetoric, a neo- Hitlerite Holocaust is being played out by Netanyahu with the West perhaps salving its 'conscience' at the expense of the Arabs.

While we put on record our strongest condemnation against such a deliberate policy of extermination of the Palestinians we demand that the world must unite to stop Netanyahu's disdainful defiance of international law and civility. In the process, let the Palestianians be saved from obliteration.

Tourism during Eid

Infrastructure back-up needed

WHILE domestic tourism industry enjoys brisk business during the national holidays, especially during the two Eids, one cannot say the same for the rest of the year. The domestic traveler must book hotel space months in advance to visit one of the several popular destinations like Cox's Bazaar and the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Yet the country is rich in archaeological sites which far from being restored lie in various stages of ruins. And while the private sector has taken the initiative to develop requisite infrastructure in new areas like tea estates in the Sylhet region, remote areas boasting natural unspoiled stretches of sand like the Kuakata and Kotka beaches in the south of Patuakhali and the Sundarbans, respectively, remain off-limits to the bulk of domestic and foreign tourists.

Besides the cycles of political violence that has cost industry dearly last year, lack of proper communication infrastructure, i.e. road and rail links had played their due share in contributing to stifling tourism in the country. This is hardly conducive to an industry that contributed over Tk22,000 crore or 2.1 per cent of the country's GDP. Although we are heartened to learn that in the current fiscal, business from this sector will increase nearly 8 per cent, one can only speculate the rate of growth could have been had communications between the capital city and rest of the country were better. And it is here where policymakers need to concentrate because the private sector will step up with requisite investments to develop the rest of the physical infrastructure should conditions be made favourable in terms of communication.

Change the drug law, please

A.B.M. NURUL ISLAM

A leading English daily and its staff deserve special appreciation for the dedication shown in digging out the toxic Paracetamol story and helping to bring to justice some of those responsible for the death of as many as 2,700 Bangladeshi children from 1982 to 1992.

But public opinion is almost unanimous that a sentence of 10 years imprisonment and nominal fines of the owner and two officials of a drug company for killing 76 children with toxic syrup are too light. The fact is that it was the maximum punishment that could be given under the existing drug law inherited from the British era.

There is a solution to this. When late Abdul Quader Mollah, upon being given life imprisonment, flashed his now infamous V sign, the youth of the country exploded in rage through what has come to be known as Gonojagoron Moncho. The law at that time did not have provision for appeal by the government to a higher court. That law was changed by the Parliament to make appeal possible. The rest is history.

Why should not the Parliament members, who are lawmakers, do the same in this regard so that punishment for such inhuman crime is proportional and just? I appeal to the government to take the initiative in this regard.

Also, the net should be cast wider to bring to justice all those responsible for this horrible crime. According to the report, one company was not investigated because of its close link with the then ruling party, BNP. This should be corrected.

The parents who lost their beloved children should at least have the satisfaction of seeing just punishment being finally given to these greedy so-called drug makers.

Our heads hang in shame to learn that Prof. Mohammad Hanif, then a young doctor, who had the sagacity to collect samples of the toxic syrup and had them analysed in the USA at his own cost, has not so far received any recognition from the State. This should be rectified at the earliest.

In our toxic political culture, politically-motivated cases are not uncommon and a Stay Order for such malicious cases is entirely justified. But Stay orders for the greedy drug companies that allow them to go scot free need an early review. I appeal to our highest court to take up the issue.

The writer is a former BAEC and IAEA official.

Those manipulative mandarins



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

investigating 300 government employees and about 5,000 people from different professions who allegedly managed the certificates by faking documents.

The above move has come amid widespread allegations that a large number of government officials fraudulently obtained freedom fighter certificates over the past few years to extend their service period by one year. Quite clearly, the government has been defrauded with an intent to derive pecuniary benefits and other perks and privileges by means of cheating through forgery. A former cabinet secretary has opined that providing false documents is a criminal offense. He could not be more forthright.

Legally speaking, the above malfeasance of public servants explicitly attracts the penal provision of Section 468 of the Bangladesh penal code that says: "Whoever commits forgery, intending that the document forged shall be used for the purpose of cheating, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to seven years, and shall also be liable to fine." The offense is both non-bailable and non-compoundable.

To illustrate, the points requiring proof of the above offense are: (I) that the document in question is a forgery (II) that the accused forged it, and (III) that in forging it he intended that it shall be used for the purpose of cheating

From the reports of the media it would appear that a large number public officials stand accused of committing a criminal offense and the revoking of 35 freedom

fighters certificates bears testimony to that. It remains to be seen if regular criminal proceedings will follow. However, the disturbingly worrisome facet of the shady transaction is that Anti-Corruption Commission is reportedly investigating the allegation that some other top government officials had obtained fake freedom fighters certificates at the fag end of their service life.

The point to note is that the said freedom fighters certificates which entitle the holder to certain benefits and privileges are, in most cases, supposed to be produced at the point of entry into public service. Therefore, in the instant cases the abnormally belated submission of such certificates smacks of criminal intent. The damaging scenario is that five secretaries and a joint secretary to the government, at least, are under the scanner of the Anti-Corruption Commission for allegedly obtaining fake freedom fighters certificates at the fag end of their service career.

How fast the delinquent officials in question will be taken to task by the establishment, both departmentally and legally, would be a test of the government's resolve to weed out the bad apples from public service.

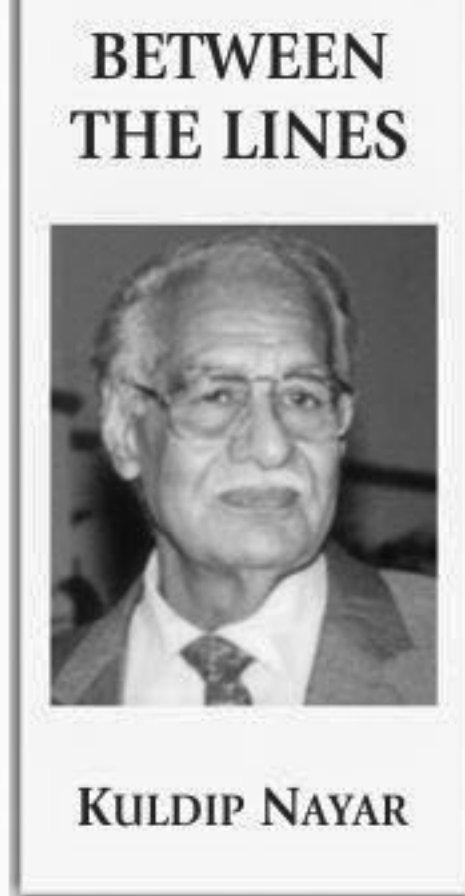
It is indeed sad to note that sworn officials of the republic in whom the nation reposes its confidence and trust have let the public down very badly. What is more frustrating is that some of the suspects of the forgery have acted in judicial capacity in their service stint.

On a broader canvas, are some of our public servants in a state of moral decay? Shall the immediate future belong to the doomsayers? Our public servants surely cannot suffer from a degeneration of conscience. Sadly, some black sheep in public service have proved that single-minded pursuit of money has impoverished the mind, shriveled the imagination and desiccated the heart.

Finally, we may have to admit that the freedom fighters certificate, a solemn and historic document, has been abused and misused. The forgery of such record trivialises a noble course of history and runs the risk of exposing the moral vacuity of a resilient nation whose brave sons displayed supreme courage and sacrifice in times of great adversity. The sooner we punish the forgers and their accomplices the better we stand in everybody's estimation.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

Importance of being an extremist



KULDIP NAYAR

THE SAME DIVISIVE IDEAS, the Hindutava, all over the country. One thing is clear from his appointment: resistance to extremists has worn out so much that even a fanatic Hindu like Shah can occupy the highest position in the Sangh parivar. He is openly trying to put RSS and Modi's government on the same page. For example, Kaptan Singh Solanki, appointed as governor of Haryana, is a hard-core RSS member. What it conveys is that the BJP is willing to be used as an instrument of RSS.

By stating that the Sangh would take part in politics Mohan Bhagwat, RSS chief, has only confirmed the perception that the parivar is dictated by RSS. This may be against the undertaking that RSS had given to Home Minister Sardar Patel that it would not participate in political activities. Then the Jan Sangh had to amend its constitution to re-enunciate that the organisation would remain "devoted purely to cultural work." The appointment of Solanki also sends out the message that there is no difference between BJP and RSS, the liberals and the extremists. Both are two sides of the same coin.

Modi may not have taken any step to accelerate the pace of Hindutava. Yet his prime ministership has emboldened the RSS elements. So much so that one BJP member called Sania Mirza, India's pride in tennis, a Pakistani. It must be tough for the Muslims who have to prove their loyalty to India all the time. Her husband is no doubt a Pakistani. She was naturally hurt for being questioned on her nationality.

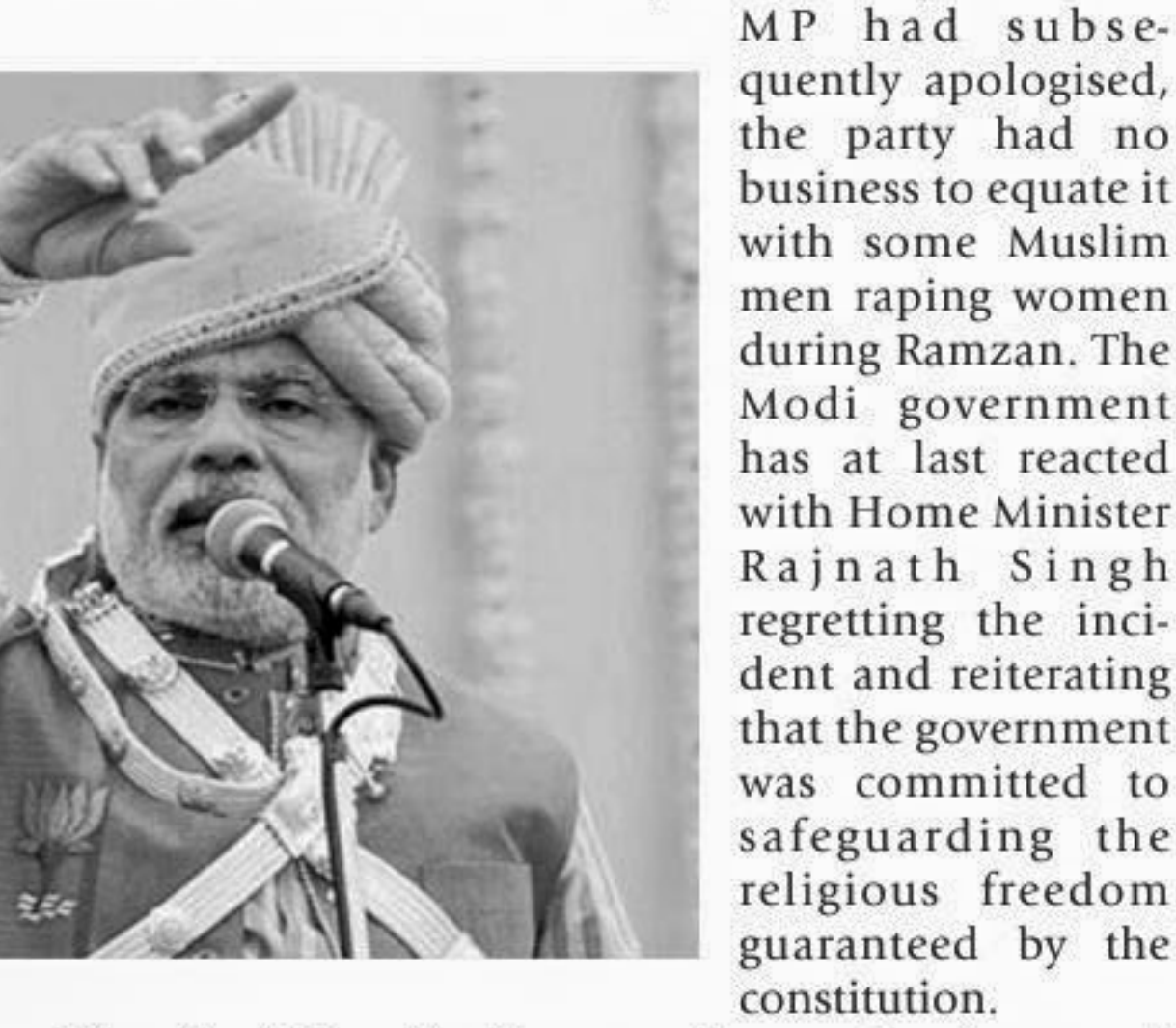
The Hindutava of sorts was seen in Haryana where a separate Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) will control by all the Gurudawaras in the state and their offerings. It is a serious matter which should have been pondered over seriously to find a formula to allay the fears of Sikhs in Punjab and Haryana. RSS considers the Sikhs as a part of the Hindu community. The Sikhs, on the other hand, are against the assumption. The violent reaction of Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal showed that the Punjab Sikhs, a majority in the community, will not tolerate any division in what he describes as *panth*, the Sikh order.

Another unfortunate deduction is that the liberal elements in the BJP have dwindled in numbers. They find no option to the RSS leadership. Maybe, the distance between the BJP and RSS was never a reality. It was part of the RSS tactics to make a dent in the general perception that the Indian society prefers the liberal

BJP to the obdurate RSS. The perception about tolerance in the Hindu religion is largely true. Had this not been the case, the constitution would not have said in the preamble that India would be a secular republic. The proof is provided by elections where 80% of Hindus, who constitute an overwhelming majority, vote for a liberal India. Another indication is that even the liberal Muslim leaders don't get elected even when their community constitutes 15% to 16% of population in the country.

The ominous side is that the bigoted are adopting a still harder line and getting acceptance. Otherwise, Shah's elevation makes little sense. After the BJP victory at the Centre, he has been polarising the society and ensuring that the party does not snap its ties with RSS or the extremist Shiv Sena in Maharashtra.

The recent episode of forcible-feeding of a fasting Muslim by a Sena MP is in a bad taste. What is more surprising is the explanation offered by the MP concerned and others. Several Sena members failed to condemn the MP and instead said it was done only to let the authorities know that the food supplied at the Maharashtra Sadan was awfully bad. Though the Sena



MP had subsequently apologised, the party had no business to equate it with some Muslim men raping women during Ramzan. The Modi government has at last reacted with Home Minister Rajnath Singh regretting the incident and reiterating that the government was committed to safeguarding the religious freedom guaranteed by the constitution.

Despite this, Modi's overall say in favour of Hindutva cannot be denied. He is associated with the anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat in 2002. He is also known for his strong anti-Pakistan and anti-Bangladesh stand, the two Muslims republics in India's neighbourhood. Amit Shah was part of Modi's ministry at Ahmedabad at that time.

Fortunately, Modi also realises that he should have good relations with both the nations. His invitation to the prime ministers of Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Maldives to his oath-taking ceremony says so. For Modi to have good relations with India's neighbours would strengthen the idea of pluralism, something that has helped the country to sustain a liberal atmosphere in the subcontinent.

Both New Delhi and Dhaka are fighting against fundamentalism, represented by the Taliban. Islamabad uses them for fighting 'a battle of independence' in Kashmir. There is also a strong influential lobby within Pakistan in support of fundamentalism, which is spreading in the entire Muslim world. I wish New Delhi could act against the Hindu Taliban which is emerging as a serious force. The liberal Muslims, whether living in Pakistan or Bangladesh, cannot afford to be complacent in their resolve to eliminate the Taliban, the fundamentalists who want Islam to abandon the efforts at reformation and go back to the type of Islam at the time of inception 1400 years ago. They too realise that it is not possible to do that. But then their approach is based on the strategy of elections which seem to return a candidate who supports pluralism. Rulers of Pakistan and Bangladesh seem to be realistic enough not to do anything which would scare away the non-Muslim electorate.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Is chromium scare scientific?

I would like to make some comments on the report, "Chickens, eggs made risky," carried by the July 5 issue of TDS. My comments would be limited to chromium part only, as I have no expertise in antibiotics, the other part.

The part on chromium toxicity has been prepared based on the research work carried out by Professor Abul Hossain of the University of Dhaka. Firstly, they analysed tanned skin-cut wastes (SCW) and leather shaving dust (LSD) and also deshi bone meat (DBM) and found substantial amounts of chromium. This is not surprising as a large amount of chromium is used in the tanning process. Interestingly, they found no chromium in the poultry feed obtained from the market. They mixed this poultry feed with SCW, LSD and DMB and chicks were fed on those for one or two months and then different body parts of these chickens were analysed for their chromium content. The question that naturally comes to one's mind is whether poultry farms use the same method of feeding. If the answer to this question is negative, such large amounts of chromium as have been found in their experiments are not likely to be present in the farmed chicken.

Secondly, Graphite Furnace Atomic Absorption Spectrophotometry has been used as an analytical technique that measures total chromium rather than any particular oxidation state of chromium. The chemistry of chromium tells us that of the different oxidation states in which chromium exists, trivalent and hexavalent forms are the most stable. The effects of these two states on human body are vastly different. According to WHO, the trivalent form is an essential nutrient for humans, the required amount being 50 - 200 microgram per day. Hexavalent chromium is far more toxic than trivalent chromium. It is the hexavalent form that is held responsible for causing mutation, cancer and cell damage. Thus the toxicity of chromium depends on how much of the total chromium is hexavalent chromium. It would be extremely difficult to assess the toxicity of chicken and eggs without measuring the amount of hexavalent chromium present in them. To my mind, this hue and cry about chromium toxicity and the panic created in the public mind about eating chicken and eggs are not founded on solid scientific evidence.

Professor M Lutfor Rahman
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Comments on news report, "UK to work with Bangladesh," published on July 23, 2014

Zman7
Cameron government's confidence on its counterpart is an honour for the incumbent government of Bangladesh and it also signifies the friendship between the two countries.

Hafeejul Alam
Obviously, unlike many others, British government would be more interested in a progressive Bangladesh which is free from fundamentalism and shows more prospect of development.

Deep Purple Blue
Strange that they did not mention holding of a credible election leading to an inclusive political process.

"New guidelines to limit fees" (July 23, 2014)

Concerned
Seems like a very poorly planned policy. How does this account for the different levels of quality and cost structures of the school? Are the schools expected to fire their highly paid teachers and hire cheap ones? Are they expected to not provide additional facilities for the children? This seems to be a policy designed to keep the standard of education low.

Ridwan Quaium
Do you think an admission fee of 120,000 taka for primary level is justified?

PlainSpeaker
And how much to be charged by, for example, the president of the school committee as bribe, for getting admission in school?

"Happy; yet feel sentence too soft" (July 23, 2014)

Fareed Wakil
10 years for murder is too light a punishment. Corruption and murder are now synonymous in Bangladesh.