

Holy Ashura

Let the teachings of Karbala rekindle us

THE 10th of Muharram, the first month of the Muslim lunar calendar, is significant in different ways for all the revealed religions. For Muslims it is both a day of deep pain and a day of regeneration of oneself as a Muslim. Muslims all over the world remember this day in different ways recalling the supreme sacrifice of Hazrat Imam Hussain (R) and his band of unyielding Muslims on the plains of Karbala.

The day comes to the Muslims, irrespective of the sectarian predilection, as a painful reminder of the brutal massacre of the grandson of the Holy Prophet and his family (SA) in the hands of the soldiers of a cruel ruler. At the same time the sacrifices of Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA) and his family in the battle of Karbala invokes in us the cardinal teaching of Islam of never to capitulate to oppression and unjust and illegal demands. It teaches us that not even one's life is more important than one's principles.

While we mourn the dead of Karbala we should transform the grief into strength to defeat evil, both in us as individuals and in the society. If the day is a reminder of triumph of good over evil then, unfortunately, it seems that it is evil that seems to be triumphing. Let us resolve as a nation to internalise the teachings that the sacrifice at Karbala has left for us. Let us resolve not to sacrifice principles and values for self aggrandisement. Let us not compromise our morality for temporary gains.

No more delays, please!

Take advantage of incentive package

THE tannery relocation to Savar saga may finally be witnessing a positive outcome with the central bank's declaration of an incentives package offered to the industry. It would allow for polluting factories to take loans with an 8-year repayment period where no interest will be charged for the first year. Given that the government has made substantial investments in acquiring land to make the industrial park at Savar viable, it is high time the industry reciprocated with good intent to fulfil their end of the bargain. One of the prime demands of the industry had been to get easy bank credit for relocation purposes and that demand is now in the offing.

Although the initial reaction from the Bangladesh Tanners' Association has been positive, we must reiterate our stand that authorities need to stick to relocation timeline, which is six months from now. And if this involves a government stance to cancel registration of tanners by March next year on failure to relocate, then that is something that has to be done in the interests of protecting public health.

The industry should relocate to guard its own interests which face a backlash from the European Union that unless the industry goes "green" in the foreseeable future, the leather industry could face ban on its products. Given that the leather exports have crossed the US\$1 billion a year and posting double digit growth rates in recent years, it is high time the tannery industry lived up to expectations on being a responsible sector that cared for the environment.

Wagah attack

EDITORIAL: DAWN (PAKISTAN)

IT was an attack that was waiting to happen. While few would have thought that the Wagah border, where an aggressive closing ceremony each evening is meant to whip up nationalist fervour, would be the target of the biggest attack yet by militants since the start of the military's Operation Zarb-i-Azb, it is also true that it is the security forces and installations that are usually singled out by the militants.

However, while ordinary civilians often end up as victims because they happen to be near the venue, yesterday's suicide attack raises the possibility of those who had come to watch the ceremony being deliberately targeted because of their perceived support for the security forces.

The attack has claimed dozens of lives, and the focus at the moment should be on ensuring the injured survive and that the families of the dead are taken care of. After that though the hard questions will have to be taken up once more -- if the state's security and foreign policy apparatus is willing to reflect on what the Wagah incident could mean for the country going forward.

The country clearly continues to be stalked by a complex, overlapping and dizzyingly varied militant threat. If internal security -- peace, stability and the conditions for economic and social progress -- is elusive it is because the state -- the sum total of the civilian government and army-led security establishment -- has an inadequate approach.

Even with the best policies in the world, Pakistan will not overnight become internally stable and secure. Operation Zarb-i-Azb has been treated as some kind of panacea in certain quarters, when, without a supporting anti-militancy narrative, it can only amount to surgery on a limb of a body with many afflictions.

Whoever it is that sent a bomber to kill Pakistani civilians (in these early hours the separate claims of Jundullah and Jamaatul Ahrar cannot be independently verified) the fact of the matter is that Pakistan has far too many groups with options when it comes to killing Pakistanis.

Until those groups are eliminated and until the steady, seemingly endless supply of suicide bombers, fidayeen fighters and sundry other militants is shut down, Pakistanis will not be safe. Unfortunately, there is little to suggest that the state knows how to rid Pakistan of the religious extremism, militancy and terrorism that has blighted this country for decades now.

Finally, insecure, often defenceless, as Pakistanis are inside their own country, the site of yesterday's attack is also a reminder that Pakistan's borders -- east, west and southwest -- are major flashpoints. Peace externally and security internally is the only recipe for a stable Pakistan.

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Why did Islamic party lose election in Tunisia?

BOTTOM LINE



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

A breakthrough in the political crisis last January brought the country back from the brink, as intensive negotiations finally produced an unlikely compromise: Ennahda, the Islamist party in power at the time, agreed to step down once a new constitution had been adopted and the deal paved the way for parliamentary poll on October 26 under the caretaker government, to be followed by a presidential election in November.

Against this backdrop, a secular party, Nidaa Tounes, that had presented itself as an alternative to their Islamist

The ideology canvassed by Islamic parties does not appeal to the majority of voters in the Muslim majority countries.

rivals won the largest number of seats in the Tunisian parliament. More than 60% Tunisians queued up to take part in their first elections under a new constitution. The victory sent out a strong message of hope. And so began a new chapter in the remarkable story of a small country that has kept the aspirations of the Arab uprisings alive.

The Tunisian Islamic party, Ennahda, is widely regarded as moderate, and made concessions in order to keep Tunisia's political transition on track -- in striking contrast to the Muslim Brotherhood, its Egyptian counterpart, which paid a heavy price for clinging to power as the situation in Egypt deteriorated.

Rached Ghannouchi, the founder and leader of Ennahda who spent 20 years exiled in London during deposed President Ben Ali's reign, has been a fervent advocate of moderate Islam as an effective way of defeating jihadist ideology.

There are several reasons why the Islamic party lost the election. First, Islamist parties currently carry a bad image

because of Muslim militancy in Libya and the beheading of a French tourist in Algeria, to Islamic State's atrocities and self-proclaimed caliphate in large in the war-ravaged swaths of Syria and Iraq. In Egypt, an Islamist insurgency is causing havoc in the Sinai Peninsula.

Second, the assassination of two leftist politicians last year, by Islamist gunmen, came close to derailing Tunisia's democratic transition. Fears grew that radical Islamist groups around the country were being linked to al-Qaeda. Somehow the Ennahda could not escape from the accusation of failure to protect the leftist politicians.

Third, Ennahda was not able to manage a dialogue with the influential and capable Tunisian media establishment, something that can be attributed to the absence of a clear media policy for the party; hence, it was not able to direct compelling messages to this sector of the Tunisians in the face of the policy of fear used by the secular party, Nidaa.

Fourth, other analysts believe that some leftists in some constituencies voted for Nidaa with the aim of changing the balance of power, which made the party get the highest percentage of seats in the parliamentary elections.

Fifth, according to some observers, Ennahda's failure in managing some economic issues and attending to social demands during its tenure remained a reason for their loss in the elections.

The outcome of vote is a huge setback for the Islamist Ennahda; and a triumph for their sworn rivals Nidaa Tounes, the secular party led by 87-year-old Beji Caid Essebsi.

However, since the secular party could not secure absolute majority of seats in the 217-member parliament, it may have to form a coalition with another party to constitute the government.

Anthony Dworkin, a Tunisia expert at the European Council on Foreign Relations, argues that unless the politicians form an inclusive coalition government that can address the country's pressing problems and restore stability, they risk losing the confidence of ordinary citizens.

The ideology canvassed by Islamic parties does not appeal to the majority of voters in the Muslim majority countries. It is noted that last April, Islamic parties also did poorly in the general elections in Indonesia, the largest Muslim-majority in the world with about 240 million people, of which 88% are Muslims. Voters in Indonesia have reaffirmed the appeal of broad-based secular parties over Islamic-oriented rivals.

The writer is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

ISIS: The useful enemy

ISMAEL HOSSEIN-ZADEH

THE dark force of ISIS is apparently an invincible and unstoppable war juggernaut that is mercilessly killing and conquering in pursuit of establishing an Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. In reality, however, it is not as out of control as it appears. It is, indeed, carefully controlled and managed by its creators and supporters, that is, by the United States and its allies in the regions -- those who now pretend to have established a coalition to fight it! The US, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and other allies in the region do not really need to fight ISIS to (allegedly) destroy it; all they need to do to extinguish its hellish flames is stop supplying fuel for its fire, that is, stop supplying it with funds, mercenaries, military training and armaments.

There are many ways to show the fact that, in subtle ways, ISIS benefactors control its operations and direct its activities in accordance with their own geopolitical interests. One way is to pay attention to its purported mission: to dismantle the corrupt and illegitimate regimes in Iraq and Syria and replace them with a "pure" Islamic state under the rule of a "pious caliphate." Despite this professed mission to fight the dictatorial regimes that have tarnished Islam, however, ISIS does not question the most corrupt, dictatorial and illegitimate regimes in the region -- such as the Saudi, Qatari, Kuwaiti and Jordanian regimes that fund and arm its operations.



Another way is to compare ISIS's attack (in early August) on the Iraqi Kurds in Irbil with its current attack on the Syrian Kurds in Kobani. When Irbil came under attack by ISIS, the US unleashed the full force of its air power in concert with the Kurdish *peshmerga* fighters to repel the attack.

By contrast, while the Kurdish city of Kobani in Northern Syria is being attacked by the disproportionately better armed forces of ISIS, and thousands of its besieged residents face certain mass killings if it falls, the forces of the "coalition to fight ISIS" are watching -- in effect, playing a game of hide-and-seek, or perhaps trick-or-treat, with ISIS -- as the outgunned and outmanned Kurdish forces are valiantly fighting to death against the attackers. Only occasionally the coalition forces carry out bombing missions that seem to be essentially theatrical, or just for the record.

So, why are the Kurds in Kobani treated differently than those in Irbil? I find Ajamu Baraka's answer to this question quite insightful: "The reason why the Kurds of Kobani are to be sacrificed stems from the fact that they are the wrong kind of Kurds. Masoud Barzani and the bourgeois Kurds of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) are the 'good Kurds' and the predominant force among the Kurds of Iraq. Their control of almost 45% of Iraqi oil reserves and the booming business that they have been involved in with US oil companies and Israel since their 'liberation' with the US invasion makes them a valued asset for the US. The same goes for Turkey where despite the historic oppression of Kurds in Turkey, the government does a robust business with the Kurds of Iraq."

While the US, Turkey and their allies in the region do not view KDP as a threat to their geopolitical plans (at least for now), they do so when it comes to the "bad" Kurds in the self-governing area in Northern Syria, led by the Kurdish People's Protection Unit (YPG). Contrary to KDP that tends to shun the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in Turkey in order not to antagonise the Turks, the US and their allies in the region, YPG welcomes support from PKK in its fight against ISIS.

Turkey's overriding interest in Syria is not so much against ISIS as it is against the Syrian Kurds, as well as the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad; because the rabidly anti-Kurd regime in Ankara fears that the weakened regime of Assad may not be able to do away with the self-governing Kurds in Kobani and the surrounding Kurdish areas. The Turkish regime is concerned that if the Kobani Kurds succeed in fending off the ISIS forces, their success and their experience of self-government in the Kobani region may serve as a tempting model of self-rule for the 15-million Kurds in Turkey. The Turks are also concerned that the success of the Syrian Kurds against ISIS would thwart their long-harboured ambitions to occupy and/or annex the oil-rich Kurdish region in Northern Syria -- hence their insistence on a buffer or no-fly zone in that region.

This helps explain why the Turkish regime insists that the overthrow of the Assad regime must take precedence over the fight against ISIS. It also explains why it is feverishly trying to prevent the Kurdish volunteers to cross its border with Syria to help the besieged Kobani defenders against the brutal ISIS attack -- in effect, helping ISIS against the Kurds. The inaction or half-hearted action of the US in the face of the preventable slaughter of the Syrian Kurds, which makes it complicit in the carnage, can be explained by its political horse-trading with Turkey in exchange for the Turks' collaboration with the pursuit of its imperialistic interests in the region.

The US approach to ISIS would be better understood when it is viewed in the context of its overall objectives in the region -- and beyond. That overriding objective, shared and reinforced by its client states, is to undermine or eliminate "the axis of resistance," consisting of Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, Hamas and, to a lesser extent, Shia forces in Iraq, Yemen, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. Achievement of this goal would also be achievement of another, even broader, goal: undermining Russia's influence and alliances in the region and, by extension, in other parts of the world -- for example, its critically important role within both the Shanghai Cooperation Council (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) and the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa).

To intervene in order to achieve these goals, the US and its allies need pretexts and/or enemies -- even if it means inventing or manufacturing such enemies. Without ISIS, resumption of US military operations in Iraq and extension of those operations into Syria would have been difficult to justify to the American people. A year or so ago, the Obama administration's drive to attack Syria was thwarted by the opposition from the American people and, therefore, the US congress. The rise of ISIS quickly turned that opposition to support.

Viewed in this light, ISIS can be seen as essentially another (newly manufactured) instrument in the tool-box of US foreign policy, which includes "global terrorism," the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, weapons of mass destruction, Iran's nuclear technology, al-Qaeda, and many other radical Islamic groupings -- all by-products of, or blowbacks to, imperialistic US foreign policies.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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NU's initiative to end session jam

We have come to know from the print media that the National University of Bangladesh is implementing a crash programme to bring an end to session jam. The programme includes launching of new network for distributing examination materials and manpower re-organisation scheme in checking answer scripts. The vice-chancellor of NU expressed his hope that the students who were enlisted in the session 2013-14 will not face severe session jam. He also added that from this year six regional centres would distribute exam materials, including answer scripts and number sheets, among the examiners. This new system will end the procrastination in distributing exam materials through the postal department. From now on it will also be possible to publish results in time. We are eagerly waiting for a change in the scene.

Bipul K Debnath
On behalf of the students of English Literature
Dhaka College, Dhaka

Of snakes, worms and...

The buses which swerve to the right and left with the potential to kill passengers in other vehicles and their own, and which rather than using the designated cut-out areas drop off and



PHOTO: STAR

pick up passengers from the centre of the road, who have no tail-lights, whose drivers do not use mirrors but rely on the guy slapping the side of the bus, are the snakes. Those annoying delivery trucks usually coloured yellow or white who try to fit through the tiniest of traffic cracks, and who push back your side mirrors by driving too close to you, are the worms. Those awful Mahindra human haulers who turn right from the far left lane and left from the far right lane are a hybrid between the snake and worm.

And there are the bikers who drive as if they don't care about the law and believe that it is their right to never have to wait like others. Ah yes, I nearly forgot the VIPS whom you can't see behind their illegal tinted car glasses. They believe they are above the law and it is their God given right to drive on the wrong side of the road. They will get policeman fired if they (police) dare try to enforce the law.

Scott Elliott
Uttara, Dhaka

Comments on news analysis, "A saga of disgrace," published on November 1, 2014

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Politicians do not hesitate to stoop low to make personal gains, even if it is at the expense of the people.

"Sweden recognises Palestinian state" (Oct. 31, 2014)

Snr Citizen

Kudos to the Swedish Parliament for officially recognising the need for peace and the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. There should be no more politics with this issue.

SirPsycho

"We're choosing the side of the peace process." I'm glad to hear that some nations are taking steps to support their right to self-determination.

Mohammed Anowar Azim

This is a smart decision taken by the Swedish authority as they always take the side of peaceful solution. Likewise, if other countries also come forward and recognise the independent state of Palestine, then there will be no war, conflict and bloodshed.

"Top leader's certificate found fake" (Oct. 31, 2014)

Saiekh Sohruddin

Thanks to The Daily Star for publishing his photograph.

Redgreen

Holding 'freedom fighter' title has become common practice under AL's rule. Feeling sad for the real freedom fighters.