

Heinous attack on hills people

Culprits should be brought to exemplary justice

INDIGENOUS people of Naniarchar upazila of Rangamati whose houses and shops were ransacked and torched and temple looted allegedly by some Bengali settlers on Tuesday have refused to accept relief materials and cash provided by the administration. They rather demanded that before everything else, their houses and shops be rebuilt and given assurance against any further attack of this kind in the future.

The local indigenous population's sentiments and fears are not without grounds. The nature of the damage done to the dwellings and business outlets in three villages of Burighat union leaves no doubt about the intensity of the hatred the attackers bear against the victim indigenous inhabitants of the area. Reportedly, Bengali settlers carried out their attack in retaliation for what they alleged destruction of a large swathe of pineapple garden and teak saplings in the previous night by some members of the indigenous community. Denying the allegation, the indigenous people further claimed that the teak saplings were planted on the land belonging to them.

Whatever the merits of the mutually conflicting allegations, that can under no circumstances justify such vicious attack against the indigenous families. The culprits, who ever they are, have caused more damage than just burning and ransacking of some households of the indigenous people. In fact, they irreparably harmed the communal harmony between the two communities of the area -- Bengalis and the hills people.

While amply compensating the economic loss sustained by the affected families, we hope, the administration will take urgent steps to identify the culprits behind the attack and bring them to exemplary justice.

Field study without fund allocation?

Sundarbans left in the lurch

THE so-called study launched by the forest department in an attempt to ascertain what impact the oil spill has had on the environment is turning out ludicrous. Not only has there been no financial allocation made for a serious impact assessment study to be conducted, we are told that the forest department is yet to take any real steps to arrest the continued degradation of the ecology of the Sundarbans. Precious time is being lost due to inaction. It is ironic to see that authorities are still waiting for the UN team to arrive and assist in the cleanup operations. In the meanwhile animals keep dying and the oil seeps into the forest choking life out of the forest gradually.

We would like to know precisely why this drama is being played out by authorities who must be fully aware that every day wasted in indecision is costing more damage to the more than 334 species of plant life in the Sundarbans. Newspaper reports have already confirmed the death of at least one dolphin and smaller animals like birds are bearing the brunt of the oil slick. While the government has sought UN help, why are we not making emergency funds available to the departments entrusted with looking after this world heritage site? The answers to these questions remain a mystery and it would perhaps not be too farfetched to assume that the preservation of the mangrove forest is not truly a

A wake up call

EKHTEKHARUL ISLAM

THE recent oil spillage in the Sundarbans has already taken a hefty toll on the world's largest mangrove forest ecosystem. Animals have started to die and tree roots are under layers of oil. There is no denying that institutional incapacities and weak enforcement of laws in Bangladesh have aggravated the impact of this and many other accidents. The spill has drawn global attention at a time when world leaders at the Lima Climate Talks are specifically focusing on the role of mangrove forests in mitigating disaster risks.

The Sundarbans protects the densely populated Bay of Bengal from cyclones and other natural extremes, as it did when cyclone Sidr hit the area in 2007. Over 3.5 million people living around the Sundarbans are directly or indirectly dependent on natural resources from the forest. Sundarbans was declared as a World Heritage Site by Unesco in 1997 while the Department of Environment declared 10 kilometres around the Sundarbans Reserve Forest as 'Ecological Critical Area' (ECA) in 2010. Through this, certain development activities in and around ECA has been restricted according to the Environmental Conservation Rules 1997. The Rampal coal-based power plant, devoid of an integrated carbon sequestration method, is located just four kilometres away from the ECA boundary. According to experts, similar accidents may occur in the future if the proposed Rampal power plant is allowed to proceed. Some other proposed projects to be built nearby Sundarbans are the Khan Jahan Ali airport and the deep-sea port. All these will escalate the level of risks for the forest, making it susceptible to climate change.

James Krier, a professor of the University of Michigan Law School, asked in an article: "What can be more fundamental than Environment?" and "Why is environment not recognised constitutionally?" After the 15th Amendment was made in 2011, the Constitution of Bangladesh evidently reflects contemporary development through recognising the needs for environmental protection. Protecting the world's fast disappearing mangroves indeed has some social, environmental and economic benefits. This has also gained particular attention in the Lima Climate Talks this month. It has been reiterated that if mangroves are cleared at a higher rate than other forests, according to UNEP estimates, the losses will be felt particularly in developing countries, including Bangladesh. The tragic oil tanker accident has definitely escalated the level of threats to the mangrove forest in Bangladesh. It is high time to protect our resources for our own survival and to build pathways towards a balanced development.

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Going back to Bush and Saddam

CROSS TALK



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSEN

FYODOR Dostoevsky writes in Crime and Punishment that it takes something more than intelligence to act intelligently. Those words rang hollow in the report on the CIA torture recently released by the US Senate Intelligence Committee. It confirmed that this resplendent wisdom was sorely missing in the hostility between the living former US president George W. Bush and late Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Neither of them acted intelligently although both of them apparently used intelligence.

The CIA report isn't about invasion of Iraq or hanging of Saddam Hussein. It's more about the severity of the depraved American anger against Islamic militancy. It also comes as the latest peg in the coffin of American pride for being the fountainhead of freedom and justice. The Saddam episode comes into this picture as logically as menu flows from appetizer to main course.

That Saddam didn't act intelligently or have the right intelligence was a foregone conclusion from the very beginning. The swashbuckling Iraqi ruler confronted a superpower armed with nothing more than the power of his unbridled tongue. His army and firepower crumbled under the US attack like mud houses in mad torrents. Saddam's minister of information was a notch above the boss. Muhammad Saef Al-Sahaaf was still bellowing that the American soldiers were committing suicide "by the hundreds" when combat sounds of the nearing American troops could already be heard in the background of the broadcast.

What about Bush? How did he act? He was immensely more intelligent or had access to superior intelligence, which was how he was able to pull the wool over the eyes of the world. He justified the invasion of another country based on hogwash. The WMDs he invented existed nowhere but in his own scurrilous imagination, and those of his advisers.

It's now official that the CIA willfully provided inaccurate information and misrepresented the efficacy of torture. In plain English, America's premier intelligence body lied about the techniques it used to torture terrorism suspects, apparently keeping rest of the world in the dark. It's an insult to intelligent minds that the US Senators took so long to unearth what should have been common sense to

them. Lies beget lies, and cover-ups beget cover-ups. It was only expected for the CIA to bluff the government when it knew the government was bluffing the world to frame Saddam.

What we have here is a convoluted story of the solidarity of crooks. It's as redundant to ask if Bush knew about the torture as to ask if day comes after night. He must have gotten wind of the nature of torture as much as the CIA had gotten wind that the WMDs were bogus. It must have been that both sides saw it to their convenience to turn a blind eye on each other.

It's an irony that the victors always write history from their vantage point. Had it been Bush hanged by Saddam in the dawn of a Christmas day instead of Saddam hanged by Bush in the dawn of an Eid day, it would have been a different ballgame altogether. In that case, we could have a different set of conversations today, weighing crime and punishment under a different light.

In fact, that refraction of history needs to be corrected first. If the US Senate and the conscientious world mean business, then they should go back to the original sin when the Bush administration had decided to make its

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hunt for 9/11 perpetrators an excuse to go after the unrelated Saddam. It had the perverse pathology of our Rab members, who go after elusive criminals and then kill different targets in fake encounters.

The alleged charges

against Saddam Hussein ran

from 1974 to 1991 when he

had apparently killed tens of

thousands of people to

crush Kurdish insurgency, quell opposition to his regime

and invade Kuwait during the Gulf War. The dictator was

certainly deluded by his depravity whetted by his hunger

for power, solemnised by his misguided notion that he

was at once saving his regime and his country Iraq.

What Saddam did in that context is what Bush also did in the pretext of saving his country and the western world. He invaded another country, plundered its museum and killed tens of thousands of its people, all that time under the false pretense of going after a psychopath who was a menace to the civilised world.

But George Bush has done more harm to the civilised

world than Saddam could do even if the WMDs were real.

The high priest of mischief blatantly lied, the CIA torture

being merely a side-effect of its far-reaching fallout. Bush's

weapon of mass delusion shattered the moral universe

where criminals now feel encouraged to find a viable

excuse so that they can commit their crimes, and that without

out qualms.

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COMMENTARY

The massacred children are 'Ours'

For a "Moral Voice" of the Muslim World?

(continued from page 1)

MAHFUZ ANAM

universal as it should have been. It is slightly consoling that most governments of Muslim countries and their leaders have condemned the killing. It is a heartening departure from the past. However, there is a disturbing silence from the religious leaders -- the guardians, so to speak, of our religion -- of these countries.

Islam has a great tradition of religious scholarship. Our Ulema have over the centuries guided the followers with a correct interpretation of Islamic values and have defended the faith from misinterpretation by those who wanted to distort it.

In the current state of affairs, it is my view that the Islamic religious scholars must come into the open and take a far stronger position than they have so far done, against those who are using Islam for their own political and violent ends. This has become acutely necessary under the present circumstances. However, I am also aware that it is not quite as simple as that.

There is a lot of latent anger in the Muslim hearts and minds against the West, particularly against what they see as its duplicity. This anger is rooted in the injustice meted out to the Palestinians ever since 1948 and the unquestioned support extended to Israel to carry out all sorts of brutalities against the people of Palestine. Over the decades many other instances of double standard have added to the feeling of anger which transformed into hatred with the launching of the so-called "war on terror" resulting in the invasion of Afghanistan and then Iraq, the latter on the pretext of destroying the WMDs, which the Western powers knew did not exist.

However, an angry reaction to the duplicity of the Western power cannot be allowed to distort the values of the religion that we hold close to our heart.

It is my view many of us hesitate to condemn violence and atrocities from our co-religionists, including those indulging in terrorist acts, because we have a vague sense that somehow they are promoting the 'Muslim cause.' In fact they are doing the exact opposite.

When the twin towers were destroyed there was a vicarious pleasure in many of us that the US has finally been taught a lesson for the injustices it had committed against the Muslims, especially the Palestinians. We did not see the loss of more than three thousand innocent lives as something that our religion did not permit and our "Islamic values" should have unhesitatingly condemned.

From then on, each act of terrorism by Muslim extremist groups went either un-condemned or very mildly so by the Muslim world with the Muslim religious scholars generally remaining silent. Take the Madrid train bombing of 2004 killing 191 and wounding 1,800; multiple bombing in London underground killing 53, injuring 700; series of bombings in Delhi in 2008 that left 30 people dead and 130 injured; series of bombings in Mumbai the same year that killed 166 and wounded many more. In addition there have been smaller instances of terrorism in Pakistan, Afghanistan and in many other parts of the world.

Silence in the above instances was unconscionable, including when most of the Muslim governments, their leaders and the scholars kept mum when Boko Haram kidnapped 276 school girls of non-Islamic faith last April and forcibly converted them to Islam. Later, 57 escaped. Since then they have kidnapped about 500 women and children. In early November, in a video message, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau said: "The issue of the girls is long forgotten because I have long ago married them off." What did the Muslim world do to save these children? There were hardly any words of condemnation. Why? Just because it was done by those who profess to be Muslims? How can this be acceptable?

The recent beheadings by the so-called Islamic State have been among the most reprehensible of acts which we feel have not sufficiently been condemned. And now we have the massacre of school children in Peshawar.

It is true that many justifications of sorts can be put forward about US, Israeli and other Western powers' atrocities against the Muslims. The destruction of Gaza, not too long ago, at Israel's whims can definitely be cited as a mindless killing of civilians and destruction of their homes which were directed against Muslims. But can one wrong justify another? Didn't our Prophet say "Killing one innocent person is like killing a part of Humanity"?

The point we are trying to make here is that we need to protect the values of our religion from both our external enemies and from those within. Those who commit atrocities in the name of Islam must be as strongly condemned by us as those who are trying to physically annihilate us. We have to look into the fact that within some of us a tendency may be taking shape which is blindly critical of the West, and only of the West and not of those who are using our religion to justify violence and terrorism. In that blindness we are becoming willing spectators of atrocities just because they target the West.

This, knowingly or unknowingly, is shifting us from our own values and occasionally makes us acquiesce to the violence. We do not seem to realise that accepting violence in one instance brings violence to our own doorstep, leading to fratricidal terrorist acts. How else can we explain the Taliban killing children of fellow Muslims in Peshawar?

Time has come for the emergence of a strong "Moral Voice" within Islam that condemns violence and terrorism of all sorts and by everybody. This condemnation has to be unambiguous, universal and total and not one of convenience. We have to not only tell the world but also show through deeds that we Muslims are just as firm to protect our rights as we are in condemning the killing of innocent people under whatever guise or under whatever banner or cause. There is no 'acceptable' killing of the innocent. Such killing is against Islam, and those who are proud of our religion must protest against it in the loudest voice.

We extend our heartfelt sympathy to the parents whose heart is now empty and whose life has been rendered unbearable, and tell them that we share their sorrow and pledge to eliminate these elements from all our societies.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Dastardly attack on schoolchildren

At least 132 children were killed and several others injured in a horrific attack at a school in Peshawar, Pakistan on December 16. Gunmen entered the school premises and indiscriminately opened fire on innocent children who were attending classes and exams in the morning session. We have no word to condemn this dastardly act. It was an act of cowardice to attack defenseless children while they were learning.



PHOT: AFP

Schools should be a safe place. While extending our deep condolences to the parents and relatives who lost their children in the horrific attack, we expect that governments of the countries which have been experiencing terrorist attacks would take pragmatic measures to make schools a safe place for children.

Professor M Zahidul Haque

Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System, SAU, Dhaka

A crook's last trick to keep job

Wahidur Rahman, the chief engineer of Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), resorted to a novel way to extend his service period for the third time (although it was reported later that he failed to do so). What he did was very smart; he presented a Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV) worth Tk. 3.5 crore to the LGED minister using the funds of the Primary Education Development Programme-3 (PEDP-3). We have known from your report that he earlier extended his job tenure twice by submitting fake freedom fighter's certificate.

We have also learnt that the minister has been seen using the vehicle. Isn't it a big shame for him? We hope the minister will return the SUV and take action against this corrupt official.

Md. Nazmul Islam

Jalshuka Habibur Rahman College, Dhunat, Bogra

Kudos to Malala and Satyarthi

Malala Yousafzai remains an inspiration for the suppressed people all around the globe in their fight against all odds as she is boldly protesting all forms of torture by the vested interest groups. In a similar vein, Kailash Satyarthi should be our role model for his supreme sacrifice and selfless service for the innocent, vulnerable kids whose immense potential get ruthlessly nipped in the bud. Indeed no kudos is enough for the Nobel Peace Prize Committee for awarding due recognition to the two brave souls. If we get inspired by Malala and Satyarthi and work for the welfare of the tortured and vulnerable people, humanity will survive and the world will indeed be a much better place to live in.

Kajal Chatterjee, Kolkata, India

Comments on news report, "Gift didn't work," published on December 12, 2014

Saiekh Sohrauddin

Legal procedures should be followed to immediately sue this man.

Snr Citizen

Just the tip of the iceberg. Goodbye, Wahidur Rahman.

"CIA's odious torture tactics" (Dec. 12, 2014)

Md. Golam Mortoza

May the history be written with the facts and the leaders of the then-US government put in the right place. Hope eventually the people of the world will know what actually happened on 9/11 and onward and how the so called 'civilised' leaders came forward with their plan to save the nation with such cruelty.
