

Sand-truck Democracy



AHMEDE HUSSAIN

IN a decision that has surprised us, the police have allowed the ruling Awami League to hold a rally in downtown Dhaka, temporarily lifting an eight-day ban on such activities. The police's new stance, quite sagacious towards the ruling party, stands diametrically opposite to its handling of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party and its leader. Khaleda Zia has been virtually imprisoned for the last nine days in the name of protecting her from unknown and undisclosed threats. To make matters even more grievous, lorries filled with sand have been kept at the entrance to her house to prevent her from participating in any open political activities.

It is true that the police's bias, unashamed that it is, towards the ruling party has undoubtedly reached its peak in the last few years. This is especially so when we see the law enforcers use live bullets against unarmed opposition activists, who have taken to the streets to realise a demand, which, according to some opinion polls run by this paper, an overwhelming number of ordinary Bangladeshis support.

While we cannot but condemn setting fire to private and public properties or vandalising them in the name of street agitation, in the same breath we deplore the police's partisan attitude towards the ruling party. There is no

denying that the AL has every right to hold a rally in the capital, a privilege that it should share with other political parties. For any such group, holding rallies is one of basic ways to reach people and make its voice heard, but bestowing one political party with that and obstructing the other's path with sand-filled trucks undoubtedly smacks of undemocratic behaviour.

There is no denying that the police have blocked the entrance to Khaleda's house following some government order, and the same is true about the ban on rallies in the capital that was slapped immediately before Khaleda's 'arrest'. The AL should keep it in mind that in any democratic society, the party in power has to work as the vanguard for freedom of speech and expression; it has to make sure that it is amply criticised, and its actions scrutinised. It is even more necessary in a dysfunctional democracy like ours, where, as history suggests, the absence of a dissenting voice always paves the way for tyranny.

In the last few weeks, the ruling party MPs have been talking about the possible arrest of Khaleda Zia on alleged charges that range from 'patronising terrorists' to 'stealing the money of orphans'. Given that she's been kept under virtual house-arrest, sand-filled truck and all, all the AL leadership needs is a warrant to make the matter more official. The implication of Khaleda's 'real' arrest is going to be huge. Not that we believe, after her

arrest, the BNP stalwarts will risk their lives and will throng the streets of the capital in their millions. If they do, it will be a different ballgame altogether.

But the balance of probability runs dangerously high against the BNP. After Khaleda's 'arrest', the BNP-led agitation, thanks to a leadership crisis, might fizzle out. The erosion of people's trust in the BNP to become a force to be reckoned with will surely create a vacuum, which Bangladesh's politics might want to fill with elements that many of us might feel uncomfortable to deal with. The weaker the BNP gets the more right wing its supporters might become. And that does not bode well for the country.

Be that as it may, the country is in the hands of a set of intolerant power-hungry politicians who do not even bat an eyelid while trying to find ways to deny the opposition's right to speak or, in the case of the BNP, to vandalise public property, the very ordinary people they so vociferously claim to represent.

Presently Bangladesh stands at a crucial crossroads in its history. Every decision that is taken now will make an impact on the country's immediate future and will shape the nature of its polity. But our politicians, it seems, are not aware of it at all.

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TERRORISM in the name of religion

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

TERRORISTS struck again, this time in Paris, France, killing ten journalists and three policemen. (The two suspected terrorists were killed two days later by French Police in an armed resistance). Ostensibly, this latest terror attack was to take revenge against the editor and publishers of a cartoon magazine who allegedly spoofed Prophet Mohammad. In their own words, the two perpetrators snuffed out the lives of eleven people because they were enraged by what they considered to be an insult to the Prophet of Islam.

Protests by Muslims against any purported ridicule of their religion or prophet have been staged before in Europe and elsewhere. People have been outraged and some demonstrations had taken violent forms as in Denmark, Netherlands, and a few other places against satirical comments, offensive videos or cartoons making fun of Islam. Such demonstrations are understandable because they hurt people's religious feelings. As is understandable the rights of free speech and expression of those who publish these items.

There is a lot to be said about freedom of speech and journalistic freedom, on one hand, and for respect for all religions and people's feelings, on the other. But there is nothing to be said about barbaric response to rights of expression in the name of defending religion. This type of response befits only medieval societies where honour killing is a badge of honour. But no true Muslim can in any way identify with the Paris killing whether it is to defend the Prophet or his/her religion. It is the act of demented people who take shelter of religion to justify their violence.

The most regrettable part of such tragic events is Muslim reaction to these occurrences. In the last twenty years, out of ten terrorist attacks in Europe, eight were perpetrated by Muslims. In all cases, as in this most recent case, indignation has been expressed by Muslim leaders in Europe and elsewhere denouncing such brazen attacks and the taking of innocent lives. In all cases attempts have been made to distance so-called mainstream Muslims from such heinous acts. Their message has been that such heinous conduct and taking of lives is not condoned by their religion. Islam is a religion of peace and its practitioners, by and large, are peaceful people.

Unfortunately, this message does not bear any credibility any more, not only to people who follow different faiths, but also to people who do not believe in any religion. Even many Muslims who watch somewhat helplessly these wanton acts of terror ask themselves why people of their faith are turning to violence. Is it really carried out by only people who have been marginalised in a predominantly non-Muslim society? Does it really grow from a sense of alienation in a society or country that a minority cannot adapt to? Is it a sense of deprivation of the privileges that are accorded to the majority in the country of their adoption?

Unfortunately none of these can properly explain the mindset of a people who continually resort to violence in the name of religion. The minority psyche and marginalisation syndrome can partly explain the behaviour of these people in a non-Muslim society. But how do you explain the mayhems that are daily conducted in many Muslim countries such as Pakistan, Iraq or Syria? Targets in foreign countries are usually non-Muslims, but the targets in Muslim countries are fellow Muslims. If the so-called radicals are conducting their violent acts to defend their purported insult to religion, who are they taking revenge against when they kill innocent children in schools or bomb mosques in their own countries? Surely these are not acts of a few misguided people. These are acts of a determined group of people who have their own interpretation of religion and they are committed to implement it by any means, terror, horror, or dread.

The hour of examination for Muslim countries and Muslim leaders globally is now. They cannot sidestep the issue by attributing these acts to aberrant behaviour of marginalised youth. They have to see what it is that draws these elements to their religion and propel them to undertake such heinous acts. Why are thousands of youth attracted to militancy and suicide squads and embark on missions that any rational mind would shirk from?

An answer may lie in the preaching and training that many of them receive from religious institutions and their so-called religious trainers in mosques and madrassas. In Pakistan and some other Muslim countries such training is imparted by religious institutions that survive any monitoring, and may even receive state patronage. In other communities, particularly non-Muslim countries, it is benign negligence.

It is time that Muslim communities all over wake up to stem this tide of hate and violence and spreading of terror strikes from their own people. The first place to start is their homes and tutoring their children in human values of respect for life, tolerance, and love—the values their religion teaches. Next, one should engage in the broader community, participating in all the community does instead of confining oneself to one's own. Last but not the least, one should stand up against the threat of the zealots who are poised to hijack their religion through their own brand of Islam.

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FAILURES OF MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN EGYPT

Lessons for Muslim majority countries

QUAZI SAJJAD ALI ZAHIR BIR PROTIK

THE Brotherhood is a Sunni political and social movement with 2.5 million supporters, founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna. After the Egyptian revolution of 2011, the Brotherhood launched a political party named 'Freedom and Justice Party' to contest the election with the same mission and goal but under a different role. In 2011, they won half of the seats of the parliament. Its candidate Mohammed Morsi in June 2012 won the presidential election but was overthrown on 13 July 2013. In the presidential election of 26 and 28 May 2014, General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi received 23.78 million votes (96.91%) and his opponent Hamdeen Sabahi received 751,511 (3.09%) of the casting votes.

Egypt Court banned Muslim Brotherhood (MB), its associates and seized its assets. In December 2013, the military government declared the Brotherhood as a terrorist group.

The analysis of failure of the Brotherhood can be a reference for other emerging democracies of the world. Only three years ago, with a powerful ideological organisation, the Brotherhood appeared to be the strongest political power in the country and inheritor of former military ruler Hosni Mubarak. Under changed circumstances, this organisation is now discredited by a large segment of the Egyptian population, many of whom voted them to power.

The popular uprising of Egypt gave an opportunity to the Brotherhood to come to power by democratic means, but they misread the popular demand for democracy and socio-economic reform. During the election, the Brotherhood gave a projection of democratisation and moderation to the voters but on assuming power they failed to interpret the realities of society correctly. They failed to understand post-Mubarak political realities. They also failed to reach out to institutional power bases of the old government and the forces conducting movements against Mubarak. The hollowness of their rhetoric on meritocracy, inclusiveness and transparency in running the government was evident. They were failing to engage the forward-looking Egyptian youth who played the most vital role in the 2011 uprising. The diversity of Egyptian society was ignored. They ignored the need of the hour in the form of democracy, pluralism, individual freedom and equality before law.

The Brotherhood failed to communicate with other political forces and engage with them as the party became overconfident about their electoral success, forgetting that popular mandates are reversible. Their ideological zeal failed to study and assess the political environment of society and politics. People by and large were apprehensive about the ideology of the Brotherhood, which they considered was being usurped by anti-democratic components of the organisation. It had its leadership and ideology

which was rigid and could not adapt to social changes. The party was considered by social forces an introvert, unable to build commonality of network of social support.

After coming to power, the Brotherhood could have restrained its power, moderate political objectives, engage with other political and ideological groups with an aim to establish political freedom, democracy, improving civil-military relationship, administrative checks and balances, calculated power sharing etc. This would not have led to their alienation from the forces of the movement, reforming groups and secular forces. Their leaders were in a hurry to seize the golden opportunity and assume power, maximise political gains and dominate the political arena but they disregarded Egyptians' desire for democracy. The Brotherhood was largely trying to follow the footsteps of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of AKP but failed to follow their steps on flexible combination of Islamic ideology, engagement of social forces, economic liberalism and a centre right coalition. In Egypt, the military, police, bureaucracy, public sector organisations and judiciary are in the process of rule-making. The Brotherhood developed a confrontational relationship with these old actors, unable to understand that the real power was resting on the old state with military at its core.

The Brotherhood failed to evaluate the social resentments for its leaders' hate

speeches, threats against freedom and secular life style. They were also unsuccessful in addressing economic problems and improving living standard, public services etc.

While Morsi was in power, the Brotherhood engaged with radical Salafists and Jihadists to build a solid base of support. This resulted in their further alienation from possible allies at home and abroad, including Egypt's longtime allies, the Gulf States.

A parallel centre of power in the rural areas was being formed by inflexible leaders who focused only on religion-based education and established youth camps and learning centers where they demanded blind obedience and criticised other religions. The youngsters were fed with ideological propaganda. The regime discouraged independent thinking and intellectual diversity.

Interesting to note is that, in Egypt, like many other Muslim majority countries, Islamist movement will remain a key political actor and a popular ideology. In the next elections, if allowed to participate, they may again gain a sizeable core constituency. However, with renewed programmes, the Brotherhood may try to utilise the narrative of victimised political group and appeal to people if the present leadership does not deliver well to the people. Egyptians like many others have also a short historical memory.

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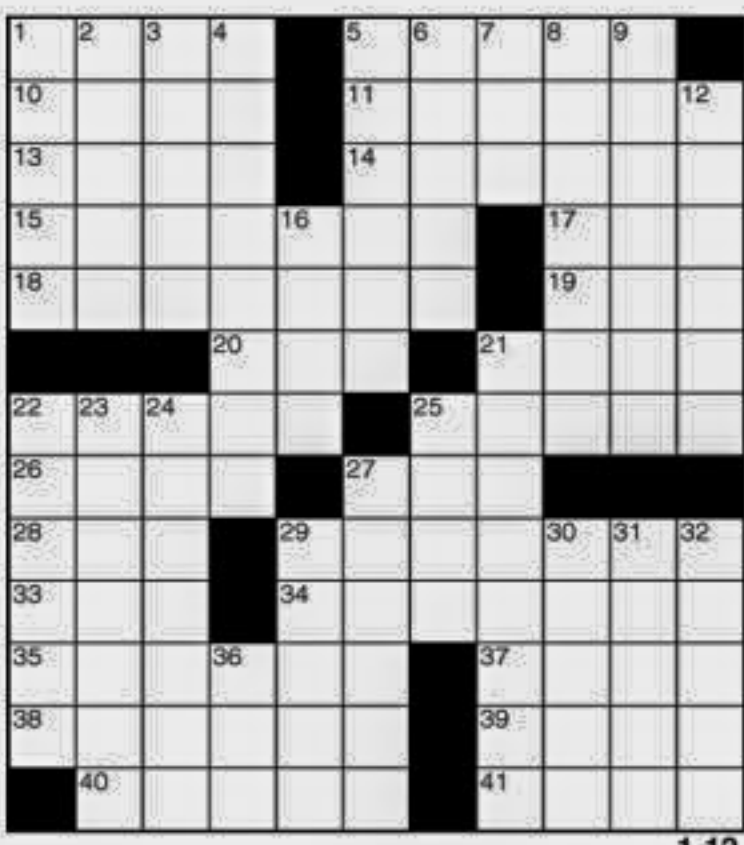
QUOTABLE Quote

Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds!

Bob Marley

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS**
- Forest growth
 - Finals, for example
 - Fresh
 - Newscast part
 - Jazz talk
 - Holed up
 - Of the deep
 - Keats poem
 - Lease signers
 - Diner dessert
 - Boater or bowler
 - Shoe part
 - "Skedaddle!"
 - Crazing groups
 - Zesty flavor
 - Feeling down
 - Mine rock
 - Cincinnati team
 - Kanye's music
 - Perfectly behaved
 - Contacts by computer
 - Walk in the woods
 - Grad's reward
 - Roasting spot
 - Is ahead
 - Hereditry unit
- DOWN**
- Significant
 - Chilled
 - Common dice roll
 - One of Kotter's class
 - Casual top
 - Long stories
 - Lawn makeup
 - Highway cop
 - Prepared for finals
 - Fills with resolution
 - Orderly
 - Spiny mammal
 - Laid away
 - Chewy candy
 - Like most resumes
 - Put on the wall
 - Detects
 - Made hay
 - Full of energy
 - Compare
 - Play part
 - George Gershwin's brother



Yesterday's answer

W	H	A	T	I	F	G	A	R	B
H	O	R	A	C	E	I	S	E	E
A	W	O	K	E	N	V	A	T	S
R	I	S	E	S	M	E	R	I	T
F	E	E	T	T	E	N	U	R	E
C	A	N	O	P	Y	B	E	D	
H	A	G	A	T	I	L	E		
A	B	I	D	E	Y	O	D	A	
G	A	T	E	S	T	O	N	I	C
G	R	A	M	H	I	N	T	A	T
L	E	T	O	A	R	C	A	N	E
E	T	O	N	S	E	E	P	E	D

CRYPTOQUOTE
LC JMD UGS MOFGZ STZGG STHWUC
TLNNGW. STG QHZCS HC JMDZ PGMZJ
UMGC, LWF H ALW'S ZGPGPKGZ STG MSTGZ
SVM. -- WMZPLW VHC FMP

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE: OUR ULTIMATE FREEDOM IS THE RIGHT AND POWER TO DECIDE HOW ANYBODY OR ANYTHING OUTSIDE OURSELVES WILL AFFECT US. -- SPEGHEN COVEY

BEETLE BAILEY



by Mort Walker



HENRY

