

Murder in the name of politics

We condemn the wanton death of civilians

AT 4 am on Tuesday, a petrol bomb, hurled from a safe distance by unidentified attackers, at a bus on the highway in Comilla took the lives of seven unsuspecting civilians, including women and children, and injured another 20. It is feared that the death toll will increase as some of the wounded are in critical conditions. We condemn these murders in the name of waging a movement in no uncertain terms and demand that the perpetrators and masterminds of this violence be arrested and given exemplary punishment.

At least 50 people have been killed since Jan 5 to Feb 3, 27 of whom were killed in arson attacks. The despicable politics of killing citizens have gone on for too long, and despite repeated calls for denunciation of such vicious political programmes, we see no indication of abatement of wanton death and violence.

Let us not reduce the lives of people to mere statistics to fuel our rhetoric, or to collateral damage to further our movement; let us treat them, in death, with the dignity they deserved in life, and ensure that such deaths are not repeated again.

The current political situation is unhealthy, unsustainable and totally unacceptable. No people of a country should be made to suffer in such a way to serve the selfish political agendas of its political parties. We reiterate our call to the BNP-alliance to abandon violence in the name of politics, and urge the government to take steps that will address, rather than fuel, the underlying problem.

Sundarbans to suffer

Finds UN-BD report

THE joint investigation between Bangladesh and the United Nations (UN) in the aftermath of the tanker oil spill in the Sundarbans has revealed some damning findings. According to the 107- page report submitted to the environment and forestry ministry the fallout from the spill could not be assessed on a long term basis in a number of areas including healthcare risks. That's because of the limited time at the disposal of the team. The group comprising government, UN organisations and academics did however come up with a series of recommendations to both monitor and assess the situation in the mid and long term. Measures suggested include an improvement in preparedness and response times for the sake of tackling future spills.

The enactment of a national oil contingency plan and regulations that will govern which agencies will do what should there be a recurrence of Southern Star-7 situation in the mangrove forest is of utmost importance. This is so because for weeks after the incident occurred we witnessed a war of words between various government bodies as to which ministry or agency should take the lead for salvaging the sunken vessel. There was also much confusion about how to contain the oil that had seeped out of the vessel. Protecting a world heritage site like the Sundarbans must be a national priority. Measures need to be stepped up to find a viable alternative route so that oil-laden vessels do not use the Sundarbans on commercial basis.



STRATEGICALLY
SPEAKING

Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

only when the politicised social groups fail to manoeuvre, negotiate and bargain within the political space that they resort to violence.” And what is happening today is the result of a political group being pushed to the wall, and I say this not as a justification of the violence we are seeing today but as a mere explanation of why it is happening, trying to link the causal factors to the violence we have been witnessing from the start of 2015. And those who fail to see a causal link between the on-going violence and the denial of political space would only be encouraging a situation to mutate from what is in its seminal stage of a conflict situation to full blown hostility. Terrorism or militant acts do not occur in the abstract. There are objective reasons why individuals or groups resort to militancy, and unless that is addressed no solution can have permanence.

The PM, while addressing an evaluation meeting with senior police officials on January 28 marking the Police Week 2015, made some very significant statements that deserve deliberation. To start with, she ordered the police to

do whatever was needed to stop the violence perpetrated in the name of blockade. And equally significantly she stated, and one has no reason to differ with her: “What the BNP-Jamaat has been doing since January 5 in the name of *hartal* and blockade would never be recognised as a movement in the political history as these are terrorism and militant acts.” But what is most significant of all that she said was that she would take the responsibility for whatever happens (because of police actions to combat the violence).

These are significant statements in the sense that they are exhortations from the head of the executive branch to a force whose primary job it is to provide security to the people. And when does a prime minister need to take responsibility of the security forces for doing what their job is as defined by the book if they remain by the book? And this is where the fine distinguishing furrow separates the legal from the illegal, because, contrary to what some might say, enforcing law and order by the police does not mean taking law in their hands, which they have, particularly in the latter part of January when suddenly we noticed repetition of incidence of crossfire. Sometimes the victims had the bad luck of being run over by a truck while attempting to escape from police custody!

Surely the law-enforcement agencies are issued with arms not to play *ha-du-du* or *dangguli*. But a weapon that can kill must be used with extreme caution. The police are given arms not to kill people. These are given primarily to deter and for self defence.

It will serve no one's purpose to deny that a conflict situation prevails in the country. And what is going on the name of *hartal* and blockade are plain and simple terror acts. Given that the opposition is trying to coerce the govern-

ment by inflicting violence on the people, and the government veering more towards tougher law and order measures that might not remain within the rules of the game, how will things evolve in the next few weeks or months?

Unfortunately for the people, there is no easy way out from the morass. That would require the two implacably mutually hostile political parties to climb down from their respective positions. Sadly, both parties are driven by hardliners who would not allow any thoughts of compromise. As the situation now stands, for the BNP to withdraw from their position, and call off *hartal* and *oborodh* without a firm commitment from the government of a dialogue would be courting political death.

For the government to cede to the BNP demands for discussions, in the face of BNP coercion applied through violence, would amount to capitulating to violence and thus a political defeat. And the government will not allow that to happen fearing the risk of being seen as a failure to provide security to the people. But that is the step that a responsible government must take, and that would earn them more political mileage than anything else. Failing that, the situation is likely to linger with the cycle of violence self perpetuating—violence by BNP followed by hardline of the government followed by more violence and...

It would be a folly to address the situation as a law and order issue only. Because even if the violence is curbed through whatever measures the government employs the underlying political issues would still need to be resolved.

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Is India ready for a global role?

SMRUTI S. PATTANAİK

IN the recent past, no other visit of foreign heads of state to India caught the attention of media and people, both in India and its neighbouring countries, than the visit of President Barack Hussein Obama to New Delhi. His visit was watched closely for two reasons: to what extent the growing Indo-US bonhomie has implications for global power configuration and what influence it would have on the regional power dynamics.

President Obama's visit to India was significant on many counts. First, it symbolised a new phase in Indo-US relations as an understanding was reached on nuclear liability, paving the way for civil nuclear energy cooperation; second, the appearance of strategy synergy between the two countries on issues concerning the South China sea, terrorism and renewal of quadrilateral cooperation between India, US, Australia and Japan; and third, the reinvigoration of strategic dialogue that has been stagnating for years. US withdrawal from Afghanistan, its focus on Indo-Pacific and its emphasis on Asian rebalance would have significant bearing on the region.

Terrorism is another important issue that was emphasised and assumes significance in the context of the rise of ISIS and the implications it has for the region. This found a specific mention in his speech when he said: “Both our countries have known the anguish of terror and we stand committed to the defence of our people.”

Unlike the earlier United Progressive Alliance government; the National Democratic Alliance government led by Prime Minister Modi appears to be clearer on the foreign policy priorities that the government wants to chart, and a possible road map to achieve these objectives. The number of visits that the Prime

Minister Modi has undertaken and the visits of leaders from other important countries signals the reinvigoration of India's foreign policy and its global outreach. It also signaled that India is no more wary of its relations with the United States or calculating the Chinese reaction to its strategic engagement. Government's ability to engage Japan, China and United States without any strategic cost to the country is significant. Prime Minister Modi's successful visit to United States last year laid the foundation of a new synergy. Moreover, his personal rapport with the Chinese president and Japanese prime minister also gives him the advantage to deepen engagement without making anyone suspicious of India's intentions.

As a mark of confidence, India is going to upgrade the Malabar exercise designed for interoperability and enhance cooperation which was suspended. Japan was invited to participate in this year's exercise. India had kept the exercise bilateral after China raised objection to the 2007 exercise where Japan, Australia and Singapore participated. Prime Minister Modi's visit to Japan and India's deepened defence cooperation with Vietnam have not made China happy. The Indian prime minister clearly mentioned to President Xi Jinping that resolving border dispute would be one of the important priorities if China wants the bilateral relations to make progress. Given these developments in the past six months, President Obama's visit assumes significance for India's strategic outreach.

Among his numerous engagements, his address to the young and a crosssection of people in the Siri Fort auditorium in the heart of Delhi was extraordinary for its clarity and how he looked at US-India partnership and the challenges that lie for the future. While he underlined India's role in the world and reminded that such a role comes with a 'responsibil-

ity,' he had a word of caution for multi-religious and multi-linguistic country like India. He quoted Article 25 of the Indian constitution to remind the government and state to protect the right to preach, profess and practice religion. He said: “India will succeed so long as it is not splintered on religious lines. Every person has a right to practice the faith that they choose and to practice no faith at all and to do so free of persecution, fear or discrimination.” He made this statement in reference to both United States and India where such intolerance is having a corrosive effect on the societal harmony. For quite some time the right wing elements initiated programme on “GharWapsi” has caught the attention of liberal intelligentsia in India who thought that BJP would deliver good governance and check corruption but in the process they had not bargained for degeneration of the country's diversity and plurality. There has been no assurance from the prime minister that the fundamentals of constitution of India will remain intact. Rather, Shiv Sena, a political ally of the BJP, has gone ahead to demand that secularism and socialism need to be dropped from Preamble of the Indian constitution. This time only former BJP president Venkiah Naidu criticised the Shiv Sena statement. BJP's attempt to reign in the likes of Sakhi Maharaj has no bearing on the party and its affiliates.

In the past six months the NDA government has steered the country in the path of a definite vision as is evident in the successful engagement with important and diverse countries of the world which Congress could not envision; its failure to address internal cleavages that is being widened by fringe elements proudly displaying their party affiliation is going to be the greatest undoing of the positive story that the government has so far spawned.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net



Congratulations BD football team

The way our football team played against Sri Lanka in the Bangabandhu Gold Cup football tournament was really great. I hope they will do the same in the upcoming matches of the series. Hemanta Biswas deserves special thanks. Wishing good luck to BD team.

Amthal Rezia Puspita
BBIS, Sylhet

Teachers can teach online

Due to ongoing blockades and hartals which seem to be indefinite, children cannot attend school and are passing their time playing video games, watching TV or sleeping late. In that situation I would like to suggest the teachers to record their lectures on video and post them on YouTube. Once this is done, the website address details can be sent to the parents by SMS so the students can view the lectures on their computers at home. Homework can also be given online.

Many countries are practicing this. I believe this is also possible in Bangladesh, at least in the urban areas where internet facilities are available. Schools must think seriously on this.

Aminur Rahim
New DOHS, Mohakhali
Dhaka

COMMENTS

“RESTORE LINES OR FACE NON-STOP HARTAL” (FEBRUARY 2, 2015)

Mohammed Ibrahim

I left a newly born Bangladesh after achieving our independence in 1971. Now I'm a man of 69 and visit my country every year in January. I regret to say that I don't feel safe to visit my motherland anymore.

“SNAPPING UTILITIES TO KHALEDA” (FEBRUARY 2, 2015)

Taslima Islam

Such soft criticism of the ruling party is wastage of time. How did you conclude that all the violence are being committed by only BNP/Jamaat?

Kabdullah

I agree with you but under the present rule, I do not think media can go for harsh criticism of the ruling party. It is believed by many that half of this violence is committed by the ruling party gouns.

Akm Fazlul Bari

BNP should wait for the next election and win to capture power instead of destroying the country.

“PRO-GOVT RALLY AT THE COST OF PRODUCTION” (JAN. 30, 2015)

Rahul Ahmed

They claim that people are with them but had to force people to join a rally!

“CAUGHT RED-HANDED WERE SHIBIR MEN” (FEBRUARY 1, 2015)

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Despite their controversial acts and violent nature which is clearly witnessed by all, why BNP continues to support Jamaat is