

Once again hartal

What have lacs of students done to deserve it?

THE BNP has again called for 72-hour hartal. We condemn it most strongly. We do so more because the fate of one and a half million students is being played foul with. An unthinking continuation of hartal imperils the plight of students which is already in dire straits having been caught up in two disruptive spells of exam rescheduling. Further uncertainty looms over their academic career with degenerate politics showing no signs of abating.

In a context where quality of education is being constantly debated, political uncertainty is upsetting the concentration of students in studies with a fall in the quality of performance.

Can a political party that claims to be fighting for people's rights be so unconcerned about the plight of the students? If the BNP has the right to call hartal, what about the rights of the students who are faced with uncertainties about their exams?

Why should the level of politics come to such a pass that students are made targets of political programmes? We wonder why it is the students who have to face the wrath of the BNP. Surely Khaleda Zia cannot be oblivious of the great harm done to the 'A' and 'O' level examinees who have not only have to re-register for the same subjects but sadly will have lost a year by the time their chance to retake the exam comes. And now the SSC examinees, likewise, will suffer trauma due to the disruptions and rescheduling of exam dates.

We reiterate strongly our call to BNP to call off the hartal.

Export target failure

Slack in foreign missions

ACCORDING to a report by UNB, we understand that more than half our missions abroad have failed to attain their export targets in the current fiscal (2014-15). It is sad to see that important embassies and high commissions abroad in cities like Washington, Berlin and London are among those on the list. Export earnings target for the July–December period fell short by more than \$700 million, which is approximately 4.42 percent lower than the target set.

The picture is not one of total gloom and doom. Though many other missions have achieved set targets, it is important to recognise flagging foreign missions that need corrective measures to arrest the trend.

What is worrying is that out of the 17 Bangladeshi missions abroad that have designated commercial wings, only 6 managed to reach their respective targets. Obviously, something is not going well in the other 11 missions. The whole point of having commercial wings in embassies and high commissions is to explore new markets and consolidate existing ones. It is imperative that the concerned ministry look into the matter to identify the dismal performance of these wings and do what needs to be done to meet the targets set in the next fiscal.

LETTERS
TO THE EDITOR


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Power is their ultimate goal

As an expatriate well-wisher of Bangladesh, I offer these observations. Within the past year both India and Sri Lanka conducted elections according to their respective constitutions which were administered by the incumbent party. In both cases the opposition party won and power was handed over peacefully by the incumbent to the winner. In Bangladesh however, the opposition party, which had strong momentum after winning five mayoral elections, chose not to participate in an election administered by the incumbent party according to the constitution. To those calling for "restraint", "dialogue," and "political space," I ask these questions. Restraint, yes obviously, the arsonists, vandals, and those conducting blockades, and those paying them and coordinating their efforts need to "restrain" themselves. To those calling for "dialogue," how is it possible to "dialogue" with arsonists, vandals, and blockaders who seem to seek nothing but power itself and that through violent means. To those calling for "political space," for what purpose; for more extensive arson, vandalism and blockades?

Scott Elliott, Uttara, Dhaka

SUNDAY
POUCH



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

rumblings in the Saudi Arabia desert kingdom. This is how transitions are meant to be in that part of the world. But questions remain about the nature and policies of the new monarch -- the custodian of Islam's two holiest places.

Friends of Saudi Arabia would like to know whether there will be changes now in the Saudi position in the world's geopolitical arena. Others are keen to understand whether there would be changes taking place in the Middle East and about its relations with the United States and Russia. Yet others are curious whether the fall in the price of oil will continue and what would be the Kingdom's policies on the 'Islamic State of the Levant' and its own domestic issues.

One of the noticeable things within a few hours of King Abdullah's passing was that the Sudairi clan, or what is clearly a powerful alliance of seven brothers from their mother Hassa Bint Ahmed Al Sudairi, took power away from King Abdullah's faction. The late king was a half brother of the seven Sudairi brothers. Thus, King Abdullah's plan to have Prince

Understanding the accession of King Salman in Saudi Arabia



Mutaib, the minister in charge of the Saudi National Guard, to be his successor to the Saudi throne was dashed. Not only did King Salman establish himself in power but he also brought his brothers who are in their thirties and fifties into prominence. Thus, the King seems to have brought a generational change in the future leadership of Saudi Arabia. The Sudairi clan is back in power and is likely to be the key driver in making both domestic and foreign policies.

The 'virtual takeover' by the Sudairi clan means several things. First, King Salman is likely to continue to keep the price of oil low in the international market for the next half a year at least. This will help to stabilise the international oil market. But it will be detrimental to the

interest of Iran and Russia as well as to some of the other important oil producing nations. King Salman's policy to keep oil prices low may mean that Saudi Arabia may not be keen to see Iran come to an understanding with the West on the nuclear issue. This may impact on the price of oil globally.


In the domestic front, the accession of King Salman may not augur well for the reform agenda inside Saudi Arabia. The late King Abdullah was known as an eager reformer putting emphasis on empowerment of women in Saudi Arabia. They had made great strides in business and education. Late King Abdullah also was progressing on curbing corruption in Saudi ministries. He had also taken steps in curbing the powers of the Ulema. King

Salman will also do the same but he may not be forthcoming in promoting women emancipation. But Saudi youth would be better placed under the rule of King Salman. Defense Minister Prince Mohammed bin Salman as well as the Deputy Crown Prince are keen to support the cause of youth and in guiding them in conservative values. Opportunities for youth are, therefore, likely to improve in the future.

With a group of young princes in positions of power now in Saudi Arabia the country is expected to run along conservative lines with appropriate changes in policies that would open new opportunities for the youth. Technology would get a boost with the young adopting to new methods of work.

Curious times are ahead for Saudi Arabia under King Salman. Incremental changes in style in governance are likely in certain areas, but major changes in policy are unlikely to take place. Saudi Arabia will move imperceptibly but in a determined manner towards progress and affluence. Nothing spectacular is likely to occur unless drastic changes take place in the international order. The youth of Saudi Arabia will be an important factor in determining how things turn out. The rise of militancy in the Middle East, especially the future activities of the 'Islamic State,' will determine what the politics within Saudi Arabia will be. No doubt King Salman will have much on his plate in the coming years.


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YOU SAID,

"We have repeatedly said our movement is completely peaceful and systematic."

-- Khaleda Zia
BNP Chairperson



WE SAY

Really!! If this is the example of your peaceful and systematic movement we wonder what a violent movement would look like! Madam, already more than 60 people have been killed of which nearly 30 persons lost their lives due to burns sustained from petrol bomb attacks. All these attacks have occurred after you had called obooroh from January 5, 2015. Can you imagine the mental torture that your so-called peaceful movement has caused to the SSC candidates and their parents? And several hundred victims of your peaceful movement are writhing in agony in hospitals.

The only thing systematic about your movement is the persistent refusal to acknowledge the plight and pleas of ordinary people!
Please, stop such movement; the country has had enough of your "completely peaceful and systematic movement."

OVERCOMING DENIAL

The real ISIS challenge

HASSAN MNEIMNEH

WITH the burning to death of its captive Jordanian pilot, the 'Islamic State in Iraq and Syria' (ISIS) yet again increased the level of depravity and assault on universal norms and values, while debasing the religion it claims to embody. Through a track record of sadistic mass murders, enslavement, rape, beheadings and graphic amputations, ISIS seeks to maintain a "shock and awe" reality against the effect of normalisation of horror and trivialisation of human life. The price it is imposing on Islam in the process is immense.

Many Muslims worldwide espouse an attitude of denial towards the actions of ISIS. For most, there is an abject incompatibility between their religion and the crimes committed in its name, and which they are called to witness. The faith in which they seek solace and abhorrent criminality cannot co-exist in one body, or be mentioned in one breath. Muslims seek protection behind successive lines of defense.

The first line of defense is that "it did not happen." ISIS is dismissed as a media product in the age of sensationalism. Its alleged crimes either did not take place or have been dramatically hyped for some commercial or political effect -- boosting ratings for media organisations, and justifying political moves for international actors. Anti-Muslim bias in Western culture and the public demand for news stories with a negative portrayal of Muslims and Islam are often identified as contributing reasons behind the inflated coverage. While the slick quality of ISIS releases is sometimes used as proof that

its videotaped reports are in fact Hollywood-style productions, the frequency and span of distribution of these releases have made the denial-of-the-fact claim untenable.

The second line is, therefore, "it did happen, it is abhorrent, but it was not perpetrated by Muslims. ISIS may thus be the enterprise of intelligence services, the creation of some nefarious power seeking to fulfill its own purposes, while masquerading as a Muslim group. The main potential instigators are the United States (may this be the "creative chaos" referenced to by a former US secretary of state after a war of invasion?) and Israel (recall the "Clean Break" memorandum prepared for the hard-line Israeli prime minister in the late 1990s, and which ostensibly details the need to collapse the regimes of hostile states and refashion the region along factional lines). Washington and Tel Aviv are the usual suspects. But others, too, are named, in the pursuit of a justification for denial. Moscow, in its reliance on oil revenues, may favour uncertainty to avoid a total collapse of oil prices, while both Tehran and Riyadh need potent tools, however destructive and homicidal, to bolster competing chances of regional domination.

The preponderance of evidence linking ISIS to Muslims has initiated a variant of this narrative as the third line of defense; "it did happen, it is abhorrent, it is perpetrated by some Muslims, but it does not represent Islam." The ISIS leadership may be at best sincere and misguided, but it certainly does not reflect the real essence of the faith. ISIS militants, alienated youth from across the globe, are the

object of manipulation for their deep sense of grievance, while suffering from an absence of true knowledge about the precepts of Islam.

Radical ideologues have, however, flooded the marketplace of ideas with arguments justifying much of what ISIS has committed as allegedly rooted in the religion, forcing many Muslims to retreat to the fourth line of defense: "it did happen, it is abhorrent, it may be condoned by Islam, but it is not different from behaviour sanctioned by internationally accepted norms." Even the burning alive of the Jordanian pilot is hence juxtaposed to some horrific collateral damage resulting from the use of lethal force by the international coalition. The brutal assassination of the pilot is thus rationalised as retaliation, based on the limited means available to ISIS, as this group seeks to establish life-saving deterrence against a superior enemy.

This seemingly Machiavellian justification ignores major accepted distinctions caused harm, as well as the right to dignity and established laws of warfare -- long championed by Islamic scholasticism. Furthermore, it creates a false moral advantage for ISIS, which is thus praised as shunning hypocrisy in openly claiming its harshness -- in contradistinction to its enemies who brandish an insincere adherence to human rights and other presumably universal values while ignoring and violating them as a matter of normal course.

Most dramatically, this line of thinking prepares the ground for the fifth and increasingly dangerous line of defense: "it

did happen, and as abhorrent as it is, it may be necessary." While rarely expressed openly, this argument has a certain level of acceptability in many Muslim circles, even supposedly moderate ones. Supporters of radical understanding of the religion cross the lines of denial into embrace: "it did happen, it is laudable, and it is sanctioned by Islam."

The fact is that the inhumanity committed by ISIS in the name of Islam is happening, it is abhorrent, and is deeply polluting the cultural well that Islam, as a religion and civilisation, has endowed to the many societies where the faith is lived. The other fact is that ISIS has the support -- however qualified, and often it is not -- of a precious number of Muslims, while it has yet to encounter a credible refutation of its claims and actions in the name of Islam. Evidently, Islam cannot be reduced to the evil that ISIS represents, but Muslims can no longer dissociate their faith and communities from the horror that is summoned by ISIS. Being ISIS's primary victim, it is not for the common Muslim to apologise or justify, as is demanded by some whose attacks on Muslims and Islam long predate ISIS and is rooted in their own reductionism and intolerance. It is, however, an obligation and the imperative for intellectuals, scholars, and spiritual leaders to overcome all denial and reclaim a heritage that has been long abandoned to stagnation, irrelevance, and usurpation. Here lies the real challenge that ISIS constitutes to Muslims worldwide.

The writer is Principal at Middle East Alternatives, Washington DC.

"Why will the government give compensation? Why don't you seek it from those carrying out sabotage ... giving orders sitting in Gulshan? Why don't you file cases against them? Hundreds of cases."

– IGP AKM Shahidul Hoque to transport ownersl

Shima
Though sounds bitter, I think this man is absolutely true. No one will pay others for someone else's mischief. Then why ask the government to pay for BNP-Jamaat's anarchy, vandalism, killing and arson? Do you think it's logical?

OpeeMonir
He has possibly no clue what he is talking about. He is so obsessed with huge amount of power. This is not a sensible statement from a person holding that position.

Anonymous
I think it's nothing but the sign of utter desperation from some government servants. They have done enough to ensure that BNP can't rise but now everything is out of control.

"Isn't it what we call terrorism?" (February 4, 2015)

Dev Saha
Miscreants who get caught red-handed while throwing firebombs should be apprehended and charged with first degree murder. We can't let thugs rule the streets. The government should either control the violence or resign with honour.

Deep
You are right. It seems like AL-Qaeda is operating in our country and we, this ill-fated nation, are supposed to be the latest victim of extremism.

Barkat
Totally biased and one-sided write-up. Due to the absolute corrupt and heavily politicised security services, is there any possibility of knowing the truth? How could you become so sure that it's all done by BNP or Jamaat and not by pro-government activists to tarnish the image of BNP to destroy it with flimsy and ridiculous cases? The root cause of all these is free and fair election and not shoot at sight.

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed
Jamaat is delusional and conceited if they think that people are unable to understand who they truly are. Similarly, BNP and AL are also responsible because one is patronising these terrorists who abuse religion while the other has failed miserably to do the basic job of protecting the lives of people and not taking steps to ban this fanatical organisation.