

Militancy is creeping in ominously

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BITTER TRUTH



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

distress. We have got to be worried and perturbed after witnessing the scale of tragedies, lives lost by burning, destruction and losses inflicted on the economy in a free Bangladesh that we liberated at the cost 3 million lives. Since January 6, the country, from Teknaf to Tetulia, has turned into a theatre of unabated violence and destruction.

My heart bleeds as I learn about the increasing number of poor people, most of them vital earning members in their families, falling victims to petrol bomb attacks and ultimately dying after suffering excruciating pain for days. This is a chilling situation and must arouse sensibility and realisation in both the blocs that, in our social set up, in most families, only one person works and 5 or 6 members depend on his income. Mohammad Hossain of Feni, a small trader, was burnt on his way to Chittagong when his covered van was attacked by petrol bombs. With 60% of his body burnt, doctors are not very hopeful about his survival. The tragic part of the story is that Mohammad Hossain has four minor daughters, two sons and his wife who are dependent on him.

What is most shocking is that neither Mohammad Hossain nor most of the 90 persons so far falling victims to petrol bomb attacks were linked with politics. After the liberation of the country, we longed for good days -- days free from poverty, repression, exploitation, and religious bigotry. Buses are burning, people are dying in the street for no fault of

theirs, trains are being torched and derailed by frenzied goons, then where do the people go for security of life and livelihood? Democracy negates *laissez-faire* and brings stability. Can we find that stability and peace in the country?

What political analysts feel is that BNP's *hartal* and *oborodh* affect the poor and innocent people like rickshaw pullers, bus drivers, helpers and daily wage earners and does not augur well for the party. The party, it seems, has lost its appeal among the general masses. True, calling *hartal* against unfair deal of any government must be an inalienable and democratic right of a political party, but to resort to brutalities on toiling masses who are neither their enemies nor adversaries is an evil action and can never be accepted. Paradoxically, as the blockade and *hartal* have reached horrific levels, BNP-led alliance calls these a political movement while the ruling party, refusing to accept its political genesis, wants to wish it away as a law and order problem. If it is the avowed intention of BNP to restore democracy in the country then it must sever its ties with Jamaat and launch agitation on the street with its own strength.

The government should investigate how and for what purpose crores of taka in foreign currency (a sizable amount reportedly being fake) and gold seized at the Shahjalal International airport are being smuggled into Bangladesh? The government must go deep inside this racket and expose the mischief mongers to the world.

Even if the government employs every instrument to bust terrorist dens, there is no guarantee that even a massive use of conventional force to destroy their political, civil, and military infrastructure will break the terrorist networks unless people have enough education and awareness as to what is good or bad for them. These terrorists could quite easily remain unaffected and move to another location.

There is, however, a consistency in the

pattern that is beginning to evolve. To begin with, the attacks in different places in the country have brought home the point that it takes only a handful of ill-motivated people to destroy the world we live in. Today's terror groups are most likely to target multi-cultural pluralist democracies. Furthermore, despite their dislike for such societies, these terrorists can live and train within them until the day comes when they are ordered to destroy the very people they have lived and dined with. As we see these days, the regular terrorist is a mercenary soldier, ready to die for a price. It is more important to nail his sponsors who are funding him but are unwilling to die. These terrorists trained in Taliban-based countries are followers of an extremist fascist ideology and use religion to justify the slaughter of both Muslims and non-Muslims.

The country's slide into extremism began with the BNP-led alliance rule in 2001. It started with a perception that was only challenged in the wake of serial bomb blasts in 63 districts simultaneously. Khaleda Zia government's pro-Jamaat policies were an attempt to win support from the radicals at a time when her popularity was waning and the development rhetoric was convincing fewer and fewer people. The country's fresh wave of reforms should have started from the madrasas where some of these institutions offer religious education almost free to the poorest children, and they are now at the core of support for the religious parties. In a sense, these madrasas work where the country's education system has failed, but with it some of them have brought in the dangerous culture of extremism. At the same time, we can't fail to notice that large amounts of foreign money poured into Bangladesh both legally and illegally to establish and repair mosques and madrasas, and to support orphanages.

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SERVICES WAIVER

Will it benefit Bangladesh?

MAHFUZ KABIR

AFTER returning from negotiation in Geneva, the commerce minister and his team expressed confidence about access to services market in developed countries by Bangladesh as an LDC. It is clearly vital for the country as the value of service export is \$3.7 billion, or more than 10% of total exports as of 2013, and it experienced 92% growth in the last five years.

The government's points of discussion in Geneva were broadly supported by a technical committee on waiver and Unctad's country study on services policy review. However, the solution to any problem in WTO has been quite difficult and complicated as far as LDCs are concerned. This matter is, therefore, not expected to get exempted from the tradition in such a multilateral forum that is claimed to overly serve the purpose of dominating members, mostly from global North.

The eighth WTO ministerial meeting in December 2011 was a landmark for evolving LDC services waiver as one of the key deliverables. It was indeed a significant achievement due to a last-minute compromise after years of negotiations, in which the WTO members have been allowed to grant preferences to services and service providers of all LDCs. The most crucial part of services for Bangladesh is waiver in movement of natural persons, including professional services, which is popularly known as "GATS Mode 4."

Originally, a range of LDC modalities were established in 2003 to guide members in accessing developed country markets. These direct members to make specific commitments, attach special priority to providing "effective market access" in sectors and modes of supply of export interest to LDCs through development of "appropriate mechanisms" by them towards achieving full implementation of GATS Article IV:3. Furthermore, the set of LDC modalities requires members to make commitments providing access in Mode 4, keeping in mind all categories of natural persons identified by LDCs in their requests.

The 8th Ministerial Conference adopted waiver allowing the WTO members to deviate from most favoured nation (MFN) obligation of non-discrimination in order to grant preferential treatment to service suppliers under Mode 4. Subsequently in Bangladesh, the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment formed a national committee comprising members from this ministry, Ministry of Commerce, BMET and scholars from research organisations to prepare ways and means for negotiating the movement of skilled and semi-skilled persons mainly to the developed countries by preparing a 'catalogue.' The US, the most influential WTO member and the most lucrative market in Mode-4 for LDCs, was quite diplomatic and kept silent during the services negotiations in early-February 2015.

Even though this scheme sounds lucrative and is a truly special treatment for LDCs, there are many practical predicaments. It expires after 15 years of notification under which Members may provide temporary preferential treatment to LDC services and service suppliers on annual basis. However, the countries granting waiver 'must' notify the Council for Trade in Services, which will conduct an annual review and assess whether the exceptional circumstances that justify the waiver still exist or not.

To understand the matter, let us suppose that Bangladesh applies to the US for an LDC waiver for its manpower exports in order to secure preferential treatment in which the other competitors are India or Sri Lanka for the same category. In that case, the US is compelled to notify the Council for Trade in Services, which will review annually to see whether Bangladesh is supposed to be provided the waiver. As the US has already shown its 'golden face' by remaining silent in the negotiation meeting, it is unlikely to notify this Council as it may cause more burden and obligation to grant a similar waiver to other LDCs, which would increase its workload. The same can happen for other developed countries like UK, Germany, Italy, France and Canada, where the LDC governments are quite eager to facilitate movement of natural persons. Therefore, fruitful implementation of the waiver is unlikely.

Nevertheless, Bangladesh needs to conceive the opportunities under Mode-4 as skill-driven, which currently includes the manpower in semi- and less-skilled categories also. It would give the country a better dividend to access the developed country market in the medium and long terms. The manpower in the latter categories would find it extremely difficult to get temporary jobs in the developed country market as the education and training are far below standard and do not meet the requirement. Therefore, it would be wise to take those workers out of the list of request in the catalogue.

In the professional category, architects and engineers and nurses and midwives would not find short-term job through only physical presence like the semi-skilled manpower. This is mainly because the curricula and training do not necessarily meet the requirement of the host countries and lack global accreditation.

Conversely, Chartered and Cost and Management Accountants would easily be able to export services or even travel worldwide for short-term physical presence due to their accreditation. Besides ICAB and ICMAB, some leading global accountants and auditing institutions, ACCA and CIMA, are now operating in Bangladesh, which has opened up opportunity for Bangladeshi professionals to export quality accounting and auditing services in Mode-4 due to global recognition as professional manpower.

Despite lack of international accreditation, the architecture and engineering services could be exported through attracting international investment in Bangladesh. If international firms are allowed to open offices in Bangladesh and recruit manpower from the country, they can export services by staying in the country and paying short visits abroad once or twice a year, based on demand of the international clients. In that case, easing the financial rules of Bangladesh is imperative so that they are not exposed to difficulties in financial transactions, both inward and outward. It will be beneficial for Bangladesh in the long run.

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Politics of violence: Probable remedy

GHULAM MUHAMMED QUADER

THE number one priority for any human being is safety of life and property. People live in a society and even form a state basically from that desire. Formation of government and financing of the same are borne by the people with the expectation that they would receive protection.

Citizens have become prey to the violence that has engulfed Bangladesh. It is causing loss of lives and damage to property. There is a prevailing sense of insecurity. The government has so far failed to carry out its prime responsibility of providing safety to the people, who feel that political parties are irresponsible and ineffective, and insensitive to the calamity inflicted on them.

The government is blaming the alliance of political parties opposed to it of masterminding and conducting the hostility. The ruling party and even some government officials are calling those political parties terrorist organisations. The government has been categorically rejecting calls for dialogue.

On the other hand, the opposition alliance has been denying all the allegations. They claim that the violence is being created by government agents to discredit the opposition movement. They are accusing the government of providing the law enforcing agencies a free hand (authority to act beyond their legal jurisdiction) with the task of eliminating their political opponents on false charges. There are media reports hinting at excessive use of force and harassment; arrest and torture in

custody; extrajudicial killings, etc., which are being accepted as true by many people.

The root of the conflict lies in the 15th Amendment to the constitution made by the government during its last tenure. The amendment overturned the system of holding of national election, which was previously held under a nonparty caretaker administration, and stated that it would be conducted under the incumbent government. The opposition alliance waged a vigorous move-



ment for undoing of the said amendment as they apprehended manipulation of election results by the party in power. In spite of that, the national election was conducted by the government on January 5, 2014 -- which was boycotted by most of the opposing parties.

That election was considered flawed both inside the country and also by most countries outside. Candidates were declared elected unopposed in

more than half of the constituencies. Even where there were election activities, the voter turnout, as reported by locals and independent observers, was negligible. Allegations of irregularities, including rigging and declaring of results on the basis of a prepared list, were heard from candidates and voters.

The opposition parties claim that their concern has been found to be true. They demand restoration of the previous system of nonparty caretaker system and holding of a midterm election.

The government has so far refused to accept the demands or go for any negotiated settlement. It has been resorting to use of force to suppress the movement. It may go up to eliminating the opposition alliance if need be, as stated by some party leaders. The conflict is lingering, resulting in loss of lives and damage to properties. It also has long term adverse consequences for businesses.

It is felt that the government should not underestimate the opposition alliance and its apex party with respect to their organisational capacity and public following. They have alternated with the present government to hold state power during the last 25 years. They never received less than one third of the total votes cast in any election during that period. Restoration of law and order by annihilation of the alliance may not be a viable option. Suppressing the opinion of a considerable section of the population by use of force does not fall under civility or within democratic culture.

The only option left to the government now is to start a dialogue in order to resolve the issues and reach a negotiated agreement. In addition to the above election-related issues other subjects like reform of political culture and government; balancing absolute power of the head of government and party chief; non-use of violence in politics; avoidance of boycott of parliament by opposition, etc. could also be discussed and a consensus could be worked out among all political parties.

There remains a suspicion that political parties, specially the two major ones, may not be able to come to an agreed consensus. In that case, different proposals can be put up to the public for obtaining their opinion through voting. The proposal receiving majority support will have to be accepted by all. Nobody should forget that this country of ours is called "People's Republic of Bangladesh," where all power belongs to the people as per our constitution.

The write is a former minister.

QUOTABLE Quote

Accept the challenges so that you can feel the exhilaration of victory.

George S. Patton

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- Elbows on the table
- Scenic outlook
- Hawke of Hollywood
- Grill waste
- Show gratitude to
- Highland groups
- Neither follower
- Swiss city
- Band blaster
- Roof ornament
- Peach center
- Mosquito or gnat
- Disparaging
- That girl
- Lobed organ
- Like some messages
- Citi Field team
- Scary shout
- Motorist's need
- Squid's home
- Contest hopeful
- Utter
- Herd member
- Past plump
- Made missteps
- Less common
- Chores

DOWN

- Take Tabby or Fido
- Relaxed
- Marksmen
- Shoe shade
- Sock site
- Salk discovery
- Map dot
- Dapper ones
- Court shoe
- Useful skill
- Good times
- TV's Danson
- Descartes' conclusion
- Looks at
- Nicaraguan fighter
- Writer Brown
- Social service
- Lord Peter
- Wimsey's creator
- Trouble
- Squall
- Smell awful
- Flock sound

46 Ship poles

CRYPTOQUOTE

JD'R SQQ ZJABD DM QMMP MO DBN VZJABD RJEN, VTD JD'R CJRNZ DM QMMP MO VMDB RJENR. -- MQE LZMUNZV

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:
AN AMBASSADOR IS AN HONEST MAN SENT ABROAD TO LIE FOR HIS COUNTRY. -- HENRY WOTTON

Yesterday's answer

A	T	M	S		P	R	A	D	O			
N	E	A	L		L	A	U	R	E	N		
E	R	I	E		O	R	S	I	N	O		
W	I	L	D		O	A	T	S				
					G	U	N	B	O	A	T	S
U	N	L	E	S	S		B	I	O			
R	O	O	S	T		R	I	L	E	D		
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D	E	P	O	S	E		L	I	R	A		
A	L	I	B	I	S		E	D	E	N		
M	I	N	E	S		S	E	E	D			

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

TODAY I HEARD WORDS LIKE "DIGITIZED," "TWEET" AND "TWITTER"...

...WORDS I WOULDN'T HAVE UNDERSTOOD 20 YEARS AGO

GREG: NOT WALKER

AND HE STILL DOESN'T

HENRY by Don Trachte

HENRY!

PLEASE HOLD MY DOLL WHILE I SHOP?