

Discovery of militant camps

The alertness must continue

THE law enforcing agencies deserve credit for the detection of a militant training camp in a remote forest area of Banshkhali in Chittagong on Saturday. The raid resulted from information provided by some of the nabbed extremists from a madrasa in Hathazari the previous day.

This is for the first time that such a well organised setup for training extremists and storing weapons and ammunitions has been discovered. We are sure that this will to a large extent preempt any destructive activity that these militants may have been planning. But what should be of major concern for the agencies is the source of recruitment for this camp as well the source of finance and their weaponry, which, from the picture of the recovered weapon and ammo that we have seen, are high caliber weapons.

We also wonder where the trainees might have disappeared since the Rab was able to arrest only five of the operators from the training camp. It would not be misplaced to suggest that their may be more such outfits elsewhere in the country's remote areas which must be neutralised at the earliest. And this will require beefing up the human intelligence capacity of the law enforcing agencies and involving the public more meaningfully in counter extremist exercise.

What also need to be extracted from those apprehended are their internal and external links and their financier if the extremists and terrorists are to be successfully countered.

Launch capsizes taking a heavy toll

Top priority is prevention

WE are distressed at the untimely deaths of at least 70 people in a launch capsized in the Padma river in Manikganj on Sunday after it was hit by a cargo vessel. With 36 people still missing, it is feared that the death toll would only go up as the rescue efforts continue.

No words of consolation and even monetary compensation can make up for the wanton loss of lives and the agony of family and friends who have lost their loved ones. What makes these deaths even more unacceptable is that such launch accidents have now become a norm, rather than an exception, in the country. Hardly six months ago, the double-decker launch, Pinak-6, also sank in the same river, leaving at least a hundred people dead. Reports state that the launch was overloaded and that there was insufficient safety equipment on board, which can only have augmented the death toll. Concerned authorities must be held accountable for this lack of oversight.

We appreciate that two committees have been formed by the shipping minister to probe the incident. In the past, however, we have noticed that most of the reports weren't made public, and no lasting reforms were made in the sector to address the underlying structural problems.

In order to prevent such future accidents, we must not only take the people responsible for the accidents to task, but also undertake corrective measures at multiple levels, guarantee the most efficient rescue operations and ensure that faulty vessels and reckless sarengs are not allowed on the waters.

COMMENTS

“Grameen Bank comes under state oversight” (February 17, 2015)

Barkat

Grameen Bank got world recognition and Nobel Prize under Dr. Yunus's leadership. And under Mr. Muhiith, many government banks are almost bankrupt with systematic loot and plunder. Pathetic is too mild a word to describe Finance Minister's such unrealistic opinion on Prof. Yunus.

“This is mindless” (February 15, 2015)

JamJam

Both AL and BNP have degraded the nation with their corrupt practices. They are impediments to our hopes and aspirations. Just look around and see what's going on around us. All the East Asian countries are progressing with double march and now India also joined them. We are left behind only because of our politics.

M. Ashraf

It's not about BNP, the party that cannot pull out a decent crowd. It's about the government's dismal failure to protect the people. We have not seen a single case of severe punishment of someone carrying a cocktail, petrol bomb or arms.

Sayeduzzaman Chapal

Neither of the parties has got any sense. They care only for power, not our lives. It is our ill luck that we have such parties and we will continue to suffer if sense does not grow in them, and until we do not have sensible parties to work for us.

Salim Ullah

Who cares? Both the respectable ladies, unfortunately, have failed to display their political acumen at this crucial juncture. How long they will remain in their slumber in such irresponsible way remains to be seen.

“Democracy for the dead?” (February 18, 2015)

Long awaited visit

ABDUL MATIN

FINALLY, Mamata Banerjee, who is popularly known as Didi in India, paid us a visit. We only wonder why she didn't come much earlier! She won a landslide victory in the West Bengal legislative assembly election in 2011. I happened to be in Kolkata during the election. I saw the exuberance of the people of Kolkata when the election results were announced. I saw how she was greeted by her fans and supporters after her victory. In her victory speech, she graciously announced that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called to greet her. She assumed the office of the chief minister in May, by ending the 34-year rule of the Left Front government led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

The people of Bangladesh were expecting Mamata to visit us at the earliest opportunity. It was announced that she would accompany Dr. Manmohan Singh, former prime minister of India, during his visit to Dhaka in September, 2011. Several bilateral agreements were due to be signed between the two countries during the high-profile visit. At the last moment, Mamata decided not to come due to disagreement on the sharing of the water of the Teesta River with Bangladesh. It was also reported that she had reservations on the implementation of the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA).

It was a great setback for both Dr. Manmohan Singh and Sheikh Hasina. Although several agreements, including the implementation of the LBA, were signed during the visit of Dr. Singh, two agreements, one on sharing the water of the Teesta River and the other on the transit of goods from West Bengal to the north-eastern provinces of India through Bangladesh, could not be signed. Without getting any cooperation from Mamata Banerjee, Dr. Singh was unable to



bring about necessary changes in the constitution of India to implement of the LBA.

Why did Mamata oppose the Teesta agreement and the LBA? She always claimed that she had acted in the interest of West Bengal. As chief minister, it is, of course, her prime responsibility. Was it the only reason or could it be an expression of her anger against the central government? Whatever be the reason, there has been a significant change of heart in Mamata, after the sweeping victory of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014. Unlike the weak coalition government of Dr. Singh, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP has an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha. Modi is not dependent on Mamata like Dr. Singh

was.

Several recent incidents further weakened Mamata's position. The blasts in Burdwan exposed her failure in tracking the activities of terrorist groups in West Bengal. The alleged association of some leaders of her Trinamool Congress (TMC) with the Saradha scandal tarnished her clean image. Moreover, the vast majority of the Bangalee population of West Bengal, particularly those with roots in Bangladesh, did not appreciate her stand on the Teesta deal and the LBA agreement. She must have taken all the factors into consideration in order to improve her position, particularly when the next election of the West Bengal legislative assembly is due in 2016. She realised that good relation with

Bangladesh would undoubtedly be a plus point for her. So, long before her visit to Dhaka, she gave her approval to the passage of a bill in the Lok Sabha to pave the way for the implementation of the LBA.

In spite of what happened in the past, the people of Bangladesh welcomed Mamata with an open heart. She reciprocated by saying on arrival in Dhaka that she felt like she was at home! She led a 40-member delegation comprising ministers, cultural personalities and businessmen. She met the president and the prime minister of Bangladesh, placed wreaths at the Shaheed Minar on the International Mother Language Day, visited the Bangabandhu Museum and met cultural personalities and businessmen of Bangladesh. She repeatedly asked the Bangladeshis to repose faith in her to deliver a settlement on the Teesta issue. "It's a new beginning," she said and added that the Padma, Meghna, Ganga and Jamuna belonged to "all of us" and none can be deprived of the benefits the common rivers offer. She also promised to be "a bridge" between Bangladesh and India!

Surely, Mamata also knows that besides the rivers we share a very rich language, an age-old culture and a long history. We share Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam and many other litterateurs, singers, artists, actors and actresses belonging to both West Bengal and Bangladesh. We share the Hilsha and many traditional foods of the Bangalees. She rightly described the relationship of the two Bengals (Bangladesh and West Bengal) as 'deep and durable' as perennial rivers Ganga and Jamuna.

How sweet, Mamata! She came, she saw, she conquered the hearts of millions. As she said, let this be a new beginning.

The writer is a senior nuclear engineer.

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The “Arab Spring” that is no more

HASSAN MNEIMNEH

FOUR years after the abdication of long-time Egyptian autocrat, President Hosni Mubarak, in what seemed a watershed moment in recent history, the “Arab Spring” -- a succession of popular uprisings in Arab countries -- seems depleted, defeated, and reset to zero.

In Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, who the Revolution had convicted with crimes against the people, has seen his sentence overturned, while his successor, Muhammad Mursi, duly elected in the nation's first democratic exercise, lingers in prison, accused of treason. Since the January 25, 2011 revolution, Egypt has witnessed another transformative event, termed a coup and a counter-revolution by many, deemed by others a motion of national salvation led by the army. The “new new-Egypt” meanwhile is facing persistent riots at home, while fighting, to its East and West, two full scale wars against the “Islamic State” in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which has found footholds in Egypt's own Sinai province and in neighbouring Libya. With the nation's security in question, its deeply rooted economic woes, believed to be a primary cause of the initial unrest, have not diminished, but have been demoted from being a foremost priority.

Libya, long ruled by the eccentric dictator Muammar al-Qadhafi, was able, with Nato's concerted air campaign, to see the despotic regime vanish. No effective assistance was however provided to erect an alternative. Libya has thus disintegrated into domains controlled by warlords, and the ample supplies of military hardware -- accumulated by the defunct regime -- now

fuel Libya's own internal wars as well as others across its borders. In the persistent chaos, calls for secession, as well as declaration of religious rule by many factions have proliferated. ISIS has selected and franchised those factions that have displayed the most depravity. Libya, whole and prosperous, is certainly not a prospect for the foreseeable future.

Contrary to Qadhafi's intransigence built on delusions of personal grandeur, Yemen's dictator Ali Abdullah Salih attempted to engage the international community in a process of presumed reforms to avoid demise, and was in fact able to delay his departure. His maneuvers succeeded long enough to activate the country's dormant fault lines, summoning in the process multiple undeclared foreign interventions. Salih's influence has not vanished in post-uprising Yemen. The viability of the nation, now torn by sectarian and regional movements, in addition to a well rooted radical insurgency, with an open coup d'état to crown it all, is no longer a certainty.

Syria's dictatorship, aided and abetted by Russia and Iran, sought to avoid the fate of its siblings by launching an all-out war on a civil protest movement that was ostensibly containable by reasonable reform. The result was the liquidation of Syria through the concerted destruction delivered by the regime, and through the largely induced militarisation, radicalisation, and fragmentation of the opposition. In a bid to recast its troubles as a combat against radicalism and to further divide its opponents, the regime enabled the expansion of the renegade Iraqi franchise of al-Qaeda into Syrian territory. Its maneuver succeeded, transforming the battle in Syria into a tri-partite confrontation between

itself, the national opposition, and the newly concocted ISIS. Nearly four years later, the regime survives, albeit on life support; Syria, however, is in a state of irrevocable disarray.

The severe plight suffered by activists and society at large in Syria offers no sobering consolation to the civil protest movement in Bahrain. While it had maintained its non-violent approach, the Bahrain movement has so far been contained through calculated repression and abuse through which the government has succeeded in denying demands that ought to have already been met on the basis of past agreements, while avoiding the diplomatically costly blatant oppressive measures of other states in the region. The Bahrain government has thus achieved the illusion of stability, while tensions continue to mount, causing attrition at all levels in the country and threatening to usher a new, less non-violent, phase of the civil struggle.

Only Tunisia, where the first spark of the “Arab Spring” started, does not get a failing grade on the fourth anniversary of the event. Tunisia has been exposed comparatively to less violence and has successfully transferred power from the transitional government to the new constitutional order, and can thus claim success. However, the actual definition of this success is yet to be formulated. The Tunisian electorate re-instated the political forces associated with the removed pre-uprising autocrat. In their new incarnation, these forces have rephrased the national priority from dismantling the structures of autocracy, as was the demand in the early days of the revolution, to dealing with the chaos witnessed by the country since the uprising. Success may therefore be avoiding the slippage suffered by other

Arab countries and restoring state authority.

With such a dismal scorecard, the question why such an outcome, arises naturally. The “Arab Spring” experience has in fact uncovered the extent of the damage suffered by societies under dictatorship -- individuals and communities were reduced to debilitating subservience and untenable dependence, conditions from which it is far harder to emerge than by the simple will power. In addition, it demonstrated that dictatorships create resilient institutions, willing to sacrifice nations for their own survival. It also revealed the sad, albeit not surprising, fact that the world community, the West in particular, and its leader the United States first and foremost, are available to provide eloquent lectures on the virtue of liberty and democracy, but are willing to offer precious little, and are capable of even less, in the form of tangible support for those yearning for freedom and justice.

Yet, the “Arab Spring” ought not be viewed as a failure. The dictatorships were custodian of a deeply corroded order that was bound to collapse. It is them, not the “Arab Spring”, who created the current mayhem. Given the realities, it would have been unrealistic to accept the early enthusiastic Spring optimism as heralding actual success. The wall of fear has fallen, and while much of the region descends into the unknown, many progressive, liberal, and democratic forces -- secular and/or religious -- across the Arab world persist in their belief that human dignity will ultimately prevail. It is a tough and uneven battle, and it has barely started.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

l e t t e r s @ t h e d a i l y s t a r . n e t

BNP committing political hara-kiri

Five consecutive victories in mayoral elections (including Gazipur, an AL stronghold) just prior to the January 5, 2014 election indicated to BNP which way the wind was blowing. But they insisted on having everything their way as a condition to join the election. They forgot that saying no all the time is no good.

From the current course of events, it appears that BNP is bent on committing hara-kiri. From the milkman in Pabna to the

banana growers in the hills, from the irate parents of 15 lakh SSC candidates to the burn victims in DMCH, people are seething in anger.

For a stable democracy we need two strong parties seeking people's approval. That approval cannot be obtained by hurting the people. The civil society has called for an end to the violence through meaningful talks; it is high time both BNP and AL paid heed to their call.

Engr. ABM Nurul Islam
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Protect dignity of Bangla

- Bangla is the only language for which valuable lives were sacrificed. For this, UNESCO honoured 21st February as Int'l Mother Language Day. But do we honour our beloved mother tongue enough? Most of the parents nowadays want their children to be well conversant in English rather than Bangla. They prefer English medium schools. English gets more priority than Bangla in many kindergartens and schools. Mixing English words with Bangla is a common fashion among youngsters. It's up to us to protect the dignity of our own language.
- Bipul K Debnath
- Dhaka College
- Dhaka