

# We cannot succumb to the extremists

## Khaleda blames violence on the AL

*Her 'evidence' should be made public*

ON Tuesday, foreign diplomats, including the US and EU ambassadors in Dhaka, met with BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at her Gulshan office. Reiterating their urgent concerns about violence against innocent citizens of Bangladesh, the diplomats urged Khaleda to ensure that the violence resulting from her movement comes to an end.

Khaleda, however, accused the ruling party men of carrying out the petrol bomb attacks against the common people. She reportedly provided newspaper and video clippings to the diplomats to support her claim.

If there is, indeed, substantive evidence of AL complicity in the violence, we would urge the BNP to share the details with the media and public. If the allegations are verifiable and found generally accurate, then surely the government should be held accountable. If that is not the case, the BNP must answer to the people why it based its narratives on partisan grounds, thereby misleading not only the ambassadors and the world, but the people of her own country.

It needs to be stressed that there are also numerous media reports and video footages that demonstrate the involvement of activists of her own alliance, which appear to have been conveniently left out of her narrative.

It is of vital national interest that we address this issue of political violence in earnest, instead of providing a one-sided picture, at best, and a distorted one, at worst. We cannot forget that since January 5, 2015 at least 81 people, an overwhelming majority of whom have no political affiliation, have lost their lives, their families destroyed, in political violence. Unsubstantiated blame-games under the circumstances do nothing except make a mockery of human lives.

## Protesting Avijit murder

*Every student body has a right to it*

THE explanation offered by a senior police officer in disallowing rally of leaders of progressive student alliance to protest Avijit murder in Rajshahi University is unacceptable. They were told that only Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) is allowed to take out processions on campus to protest the killing of secular writer Avijit Roy.

All political activities on campus were outlawed by university authorities over a year ago. It appears that taking advantage of the ban all other student bodies except the BCL were not given a go-ahead. Obviously, the rules do not apply for the BCL. Are we also then to assume that the university authorities deem that BCL is the only legitimate student body and all others are not?

According to the disappointed left-wing student activists, student bodies other than BCL are never allowed to hold processions on any issue. This claim cannot be independently verified, but the attitude of the police officer in question is not only inexplicable but also unprofessional. Given that no student body except the BCL has been seen on campus of late lends credence to some of the claims of bias towards a particular student body. Holding processions is a democratic right. And unless these turn violent, no moral grounds can be shown to reject a rally. What we do not understand is why rules are applied selectively even in respect of a cause that stirred the conscience of the nation.

### STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN  
ndc, psc (Retd)

THE brutal killing of Avijit brings into sharp relief the question posed in the heading of this article. He is the latest in a long list of victims who had to forfeit his life to an extremist

group who found his views to be in discord with theirs. And the killers claim to belong to a faith that considers killing of even one innocent person as killing of entire humanity.

Could his life have been saved? It is a painful question that one hesitates to answer, but I shall make so bold as to suggest that if the agencies had taken cognisance of relevant Facebook postings, particularly one that appeared on February 9, 2015 of Farabi, in which he had threatened to kill Avijit once he was in Bangladesh, Avijit's fate might have been different. But that is a question of 'what if'? We are now interested in, 'what now'? The killing of Avijit once again forces us to ask if the extremists are having it their way at their will.

Evidently, the killers belong to a jihadists group whose interpretation of Islam is as convoluted as their psyche. And it seems that call for jihad in various parts of the Muslim world is being called not by the majority but by the minorities. And in Bangladesh if one glances through the narratives of these extremists pub-

lished from time to time, the calls have not only been misplaced but those have been made for all the wrong reasons. How does one justify their threat, "You will be executed if you do not stop arresting our men and celebration of Puja. You are our Muslim brothers, so do not arrest our men to protect the non-Muslims," contained in a letter sent to journalist by post by these groups in 2005? Can a true Muslim spread communal hatred? We have stated this many times before and say again that this is bigotry of the vilest form which has no place in Islam, and those who countenance it are as guilty as those who preach it.

Admittedly, this phenomenon exposed itself literally with a bang, but that was not entirely unexpected, given the corpus of news and reports that had appeared in the print media, since the late 1990s in particular, narrating their rise. At first, the government of the day was not prepared to accept that the religious extremists did indeed have roots in the country and were capable of posing threats to the very structure of the nation. The extremists ranks have since been strengthened as have their international links. And their reach has become painfully apparent since August 21, 2004

Regrettably, in Bangladesh it is disheartening to see the voices of those—the religious scholars and clergies, which can play an important role in countering those of the radicals and extremists—muted at best. Is it because they do not want to raise their voice or they are not being able to? And that begs the moot question, are we going about our job of combating the extremists in a

planned manner, and do we really have a dynamic strategy to address the threat of religious extremism which happens to be the most serious threat the country is facing at the moment? Are we harmonising our efforts in formulating a counter narrative that would effectively reduce the 'appeal' of the jihadists?

It must be said to the credit of this

*Not only should a counter terrorist / extremist strategy be formulated without further delay, the government must recognise the very important fact that such a strategy cannot be put into effect without the active participation of all the stakeholders.*

government that its anti-extremism measures have been effective. The law enforcing agencies have been able to successfully arrest a large number of their cadres and preempt their potential to create violence. To the credit of the government too, there have been no instance of bomb attacks by the extremist groups during the tenure of this gov-

ernment. But that is a part of the hard options open to the government. Reducing their operational capability and their numbers physically is one option. But we are not aware if the government is doing anything by way of a counter extremism strategy.

There is the need to counter these radicals through appropriate programmes. Twisted ideas must be countered with enlightened explication of the scriptures, but first of all, people and institutions that are exploited to disseminate distorted ideas, and persons doing the same, must be identified and sapped of their potential to create chaos and wreak havoc on the nation. And in this regard there is need to recast our attention to other educational institutions than madrasas only. Reportedly, the banned Hizbut-Tehrir has been concentrating on the private universities to recruit workers for their cause, and with some success, one must admit with consternation.

We feel that the pace of building up state capacity, absence of specifics and lack of direction is not as fast as they might be. And this is where the role of the government assumes greater significance. Not only should a counter terrorist / extremist strategy be formulated without further delay, the government must recognise the very important fact that such a strategy cannot be put into effect without the active participation of all the stakeholders as much as an effective strategy cannot be formulated without their active involvement.

The writer is Editor, Oped and Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

# Towards emotional integration

### BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDEEP NAYAR

POWER makes strange bedfellows. Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, who heads the Jammu and Kashmir government, has joined hands with the Bhartiya Janata

Party (BJP). Yet his victory in the state assembly elections primarily has been on the plank that he will not allow the BJP to enter the valley. That he has gone back on the electoral promise is not any different from what leaders of other political parties do.

Former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah sounds churlish when he says that the two had a prior understanding. Yet his surprise over their coalition is shared by the naïve who do not know how the political deals take place. This is, however, the first time that the BJP has entered the valley as a ruler, without winning any seat there.

The presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the oath-taking ceremony only underlines the jubilation of the BJP over getting a niche. This may turn out to be only wishful thinking. A party with Hindutva on its agenda has little chance of any showing at a place where the population of Muslims is more than 95%.

Mufti can claim that he has won the support of the BJP despite his anti-BJP electoral plank. But in the process he has furrowed deep the differences between the valley, predominantly populated by the Muslims, and Jammu, having a substantially large Hindu population. His desperation to form the government may have aggravated the divide.

It is not understandable why he stated that the separatists, militants and Pakistan have helped him in letting the elections to be held in the state. Left to them they would not have done so. The separatists boycotted the polls, not to help Mufti, but to underline their stance

that the polls under the supervision of Indian Election Commission were a farce. New Delhi had deployed the security forces in such a number that the elements trying to disturb the scene would have been crushed. Probably, the militants, depleting in strength, did not want to risk getting crushed.

Pakistan is playing a long-term game. It realises that it cannot take Kashmir from India by force. The two wars have shown this. After the defeat in 1965, then prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto told me in an interview that they have "learned the lesson from history" and would not challenge India on Kashmir

Islamabad line on the plea that Pakistan is essentially a Muslim country.

Mufti's own election campaign was not bereft of Islamic streak or the identity politics. Over the years, the Kashmiris' alienation from India on the one hand and the feeling of helplessness of its population in becoming an independent country on the other has left the field open for the Islamic propagandists. The liberals are depleting in strength literally every day.

The main reason is that the Kashmiris have not yet realised that India would never accept another division in the name of religion since the Hindu majority



on the battle field.

In 1971, the war was confined to Bangladesh. Islamabad did nothing to disturb the Kashmir side although it would have meant opening a second front to divert India's attention. In any case, war between the two countries is now ruled out because both are nuclear powers.

However, by mentioning separatists and elements from across the border, Mufti has tried to placate the valley where pro-Pakistani elements thrive. Similarly, his demand for the return of Afzal Guru's remains is aimed at placating the Muslims in the valley. Radicals among them are pushing even the pro-

Jammu would like to either integrate with India or become a union territory. But New Delhi would never allow yet another Muslim country on India's border.

The Kashmiris' demand for independence is suspect since the general perception is that it is another ploy to join Pakistan ultimately. The separatists' proximity to Islamabad has deepened the suspicion. India's cancellation of a meeting between its foreign secretary and that of Pakistan may have been an overreaction. Yet it was meant to convey that the nearer Islamabad goes to the separatists, the farther it will be from New Delhi.

There was a time when Yasin Malik was acceptable. But his conduct—hostility instead of opposition—has wound up his lobby in India. He has not only hardened himself but definitely changed the complexion of India-Pakistan friendship which he appeared to champion. Mufti has rightly described the PDP-BJP coalition as historic. But if the coalition remains only a method to share power, the long-term perceptible will be lost.

The end is how the state once again becomes secular as was the case at the time of Sheikh Abdullah. The Hurriyat has disfigured its own image by going too close to the state's Jamiat Islami. Unfortunately, the Hurriyat is not yet realising the mistakes and persisting in taking a stance which mixes religion with politics. Unless it corrects its course it would not count much in the reconciliation process between India and Pakistan.

The visit of Indian Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar to Pakistan was one way of conveying that the cancellation of talks between the foreign secretaries was a reaction to the situation prevailing at that time, not a long-term policy. This has become amply clear from the talks that Jaishankar had with his counterpart Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry at Islamabad. The two sides must shed pride and prejudice and sit across the table to take up the long neglected agenda: Jihad against poverty. There are, in fact, no other more pressing issues for the two countries than ameliorating the living conditions of the people on both sides.

It is a pity that even after seven decades of independence both are bent on wasting the limited resources at their disposal on buying weapons than spending them usefully welfare measures. Mufti should associate New Delhi with this cause because he occupies such a position that where Modi would pay heed to him. Emotional integration of people in Jammu and Kashmir is essential not only for development but also for the secular ideology.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

## COMMENTS

### "Are militants stronger than law enforcers?" (March 2, 2015)

#### New Generation

It appears that our law enforcers have become totally busy chasing the opposition political leaders and activists. Therefore, they have little time to spare for other responsibilities. This may be one of the other reasons why these sensitive incidents are not properly handled by them.

#### Shah Deeldar

A very legitimate question! It is strange that while a woman was crying for help, law enforcers in the vicinity stayed aloof. How odd and callous! Do criminals have the upper hand?

### "Dhaka to engage FBI in Avijit murder probe" (March 2, 2015)

#### Aasfisarwar

It's a welcome move. We want the government to also allow UN or other international bodies to investigate all other human rights abuses by government agencies.

### "8 vehicles torched in Dhaka, Narayanganj" (February 28, 2015)

#### Deep Purple Blue

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Mamata's visit

On two consecutive days, February 24 and 25, both The Statesman of Kolkata and The Daily Star of Bangladesh have published two writings on Mamata Banerjee's visit to Bangladesh. The two dailies have painted contrasting pictures and have different perspectives. The two articles in the editorial page of The Daily Star debated the purpose and outcome of the visit. In fact, TDS has taken a holistic view of the relationship between the two countries and it seems Bangladesh views the future relationship with optimism.

On the other hand, the editorial in The Statesman, Kolkata of 24th February and the special article in the editorial page of 25th by Salman Haider were only confined to the issues of Teesta water and the Land Boundary Agreement. They raised issues which were irrelevant to this visit and did much political bashing. The Daily Star has risen above the political bickering and displayed journalistic chivalry. Kudos to The Daily Star.

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### The brutal killing of Avijit Roy

We strongly condemn the heinous killing of Avijit Roy. It is reminiscent of the attack on Humayun Azad on the February of 2004. He drew the ire of the fundamentalists for his writings. Similarly Avijit also came under the wrath of the fanatics for his writings in blogs and also for his published works. It seems the forces of darkness are still active. We hope that the law enforcers will apprehend and punish Avijit's killers  
Zabed Wali  
Chittagong

### Server glitch

I got a birth certificate for my daughter from the Gulshan office of DCC with the headline reading: "People's Republic of Bangladesh." Looking further down, I found that there are four such strange characters associated with apostrophe (father's and mother's name and nationality). Upon enquiry, I was told that this was going on for the last 15 days as the "nirmanadhin" server of the ministry has not yet been able to fix the glitch. Tells a lot about the status of Digital Bangladesh and our dream of joining the information highway, doesn't it?  
I asked, "How am I going to present this to the embassies?" I was told, "Embassies know about it."  
Good Lord!  
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