

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
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DHAKA SATURDAY APRIL 11, 2015

Yet another deadly accident

How long will we ignore it?

25 individuals killed and a further 23 injured in a single bus accident as it swerved off the road and hit a tree on the Dhaka-Barisal highway on April 9. After colliding with the tree, the bus plunged into a ditch. Going by what data has been compiled by this newspaper since January, 2015 based on reports, there have been 396 confirmed deaths and the number of injured stands at three short of the 700 mark. These are not mere samples on a database, rather they are or were people who have either been killed or maimed in various ways. They were unfortunate enough to be passengers on vehicles that ply in their thousands on our unsafe highways.

The response to this incident as has been the standard response to the dozens of incidents in the recent past is the promise for action. This usually constitutes the formation of a "high level committee" that will make a probe of the incident and submit its findings to relevant authorities for further action. That bus drivers routinely drive recklessly often without licenses where the buses themselves often lack fitness certificates has become a common affair. It is also "usual" for many of our highways have neither divider nor speed breakers at crucial, accident-prone locations. Are we to assume then that human life is cheap in Bangladesh? We do not think so. Our hearts go out to those who are no longer with us because of manmade errors, errors that are rectifiable but those who have the power to do something choose to look the other way.

1500 MW more electricity by July

Remove all hurdles before implementation of power projects

It is indeed heartening to see 1500 MW of electricity being added in the next three months to the country's power-starved national grid, as we hope that the newest addition will give the much-needed impetus to the country's economic growth. This is especially true for the mass electrification of the country's rural heartland, which will certainly contribute to the creation of the infrastructural backbone of the nation, paving the way for rural development and a boost in industry.

Power had been one of the thrust sectors rightly identified by the previous Awami League government after riding an electoral landslide in 2008. To quickly mitigate the ever-worsening power crisis, the government resorted to the building of some Quick Rental Power Plants that were supposed to work as a stopgap measure before the base power projects take off; as a result, power outage has been reduced to a large extent. But we are a little dismayed that the zeal with which the projects were initially pursued are now dogged by a lack of visionary leadership, interdepartmental coordination and the presence of the perennial red tape in decision making, resulting in the slowed down progress of some of the important power projects.

It is time we remind the government of its pledge of generating 18,000 MW of electricity by 2017, which now wobbles at a mere 10,000 MW. We earnestly hope that the government will remove all hurdles before the speedy implementation of the power projects that are in the pipeline.

COMMENTS

"Work takes a back seat at secretariat"
(April 8, 2015)

Snr Citizen

This money could have gone to primary education and healthcare where it is gravely needed.

"Bangladesh's Intractable Political Woes" (April 8, 2015)

Mortuza Huq

"What the country needs is a new generation of leaders that are young, energetic, original, visionary and truly patriotic, and most importantly, without opportunistic ties and contentious baggage." This sounds like a good dream to the people of Bangladesh. The reference from the 'Babar Nama' is brilliant and overly appropriate in the current context. We can only hope for the best; people of Bangladesh can choose their representatives through free, fair and democratic elections.

Bloggers and the bigoted

STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE brutal murders of two bloggers by extremists, one in full public view and the other in broad daylight, in a residential area of the city in disturbingly quick succession have

understandably created a wave of fear amongst the people. Activists as well as academics have wondered as to why the menace of so-called religious extremism continues to raise its ugly head. Some have lamented the absence of a holistic counter-terrorism strategy.

But such lamentations would be of no avail if we don't take a hard look at the factors behind religious extremism and prepare for pervasive counter preparations. We need to look beneath the incidents and beyond it.

Extremist activities are always invariably secretive and protected, and often flourish under the guise of various charity organisations and trusts. A distinguishing characteristic of the so-called religiously motivated activities is that they are not driven by any domestic agenda or grievance but a broader supra-national agenda or ideology. The initial recruits for extremist cause may have been petty criminals and students from religious schools, but with time, a significant portion of the new recruits seem to be better educated; some of them even hold professional degrees in medicine, engineering and computer science.

Upon scrutiny, one would find that a large number of the country's imams belong to the Deoband school that promotes an uncompromising, puritanical and exclusive fundamentalism. It is relevant to note that the Deoband Madrasa, founded in 1866, denounced music and dancing and distanced itself from things considered progressive in the Indian society. It shunned the British Law Courts and retained jihad as a central

pillar of faith. The focus of this jihad was "on the promotion of Islamic revival and identity through the principle of the immutability of Shariah, the oneness of God and the overarching, guiding authority of the Ulema."

Deobandism waged a ceaseless war of words against Shias, Hindus and Christian missionaries. It also issued fatwas on almost all subjects. The Deoband Madrasa condemned the activities of Syed Ahmed Khan of Aligarh as 'un-Islamic' and banned Muslims from joining his Patriotic Association. This writer suspects that our imams, largely influenced by the doctrinal claims of Deoband School, tend to believe that anti-militancy sermons are actually the handiwork of anti-Islam schemers of the

then the extremist movement would neither be represented in mainstream politics nor would it be able to carry out terrorist activities in various localities. We would not be subjected to hate politics along sectarian lines with its attendant human cost.

An important issue is whether the authorities have been able to agree to the contents of a historically credible and religiously correct counter-narrative to confront the extremists. Should we not project Islam as being just as rational as any western system? We should be able to demonstrate that Islam was and is the most rational and advanced of all the confessional faiths; that strict monotheism of Islam had liberated humanity from mythology. Our narrative

more easily make that existential surrender of his or her whole being that would bring them fulfillment. The polity for the Muslims was, therefore, an aspiration that required a jihad, a struggle that could find no simple outcome.

The counter-terrorism strategy's narrative should be able to effectively dispel the misgivings about fundamentalism that gives the impression of its being a violent form of Islamic religiosity. It needs to be stressed that fundamentalism is a global fact and has surfaced in every major faith in response to the problems of modernity. In fact, of the three monolithic religions, Islam was the last to develop a fundamentalist strain when modern culture began to take root in the late 1960s and 1970s.

While eradicating or controlling militancy, it should occur to us that in Bangladesh the advocates of extreme path are more determined than liberals. Liberal forces hardly work with intense dedication, much less with a sense of mission. One has to remember that in Bangladesh secularism as state ideology finds it difficult to compete with a language of being saturated with religion.

One has to recognise the socio-economic reality of Bangladesh where gross poverty co-exists with democracy, a liberal constitution and disorder with functioning polity; the religious and traditional beliefs are far more tenacious than the liberals imagine. The state has, at times, been involved in the business of defining religion. Significantly, the compulsions of the traditional obligations of the ruler to protect state religion have to be kept in view.

The area of action to counter militancy is a battle of ideas, challenging the ideological motivations that extremists believe justify the use of violence. Successful prosecution in the courts, based on gathering of necessary evidence and apprehending those involved in planning acts of terrorism before committing of mischief should be one of the principal approaches of countering militant activity.

The writer is a columnist of the *The Daily Star*.



West. Such presumption, does not, however, preclude the suspected inertia of people in authority to properly arrange a communication session.

Sub-continental experience indicates that the more the establishment provides space for politicisation of Islam due to its own strategic compulsions in both foreign policy and domestic contexts, the more the disparate Islamic elements seek to shape the country's ideological discourse according to their own priorities and preferences. Religious groups have sought to define the State through street agitation, lobbying, networking and vote politics.

We have to understand that if we have a relatively mature institutional base

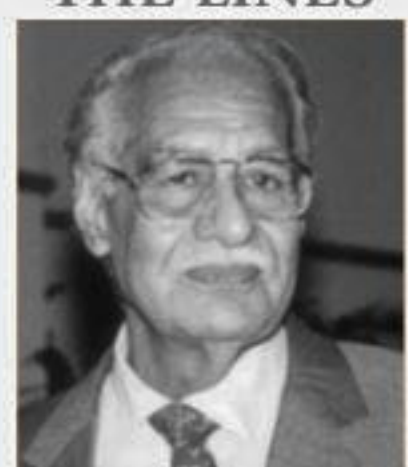
could also emphasise that the empirical spirit that had given birth to modernity had in fact originated in Islam.

We need to project that Muslims have a vital mission to witness the divine dimension of life, not by retiring from the world to engage in contemplation or indulging in suicide-bombing, but by an activism that implements the social ideals of Shariah. We also need to realise that politics had never been a secondary issue for Muslims.

The counter-narrative needs to recognise that politics had been the theatre of religious quest of Muslims. Salvation for them does not mean redemption from sin, but the creation of a just society in which the individual could

Children of democracy

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYYAR

RELIGIOUS sensitivity has deepened since the advent of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's regime. Even though he has underlined the principle of sarva dharma sambhava (an

Indian concept embodying the equality of all religions), parochialism has shown its ugly face in one field or the other. The judiciary is the only institution that has been above the taint. Nonetheless, the outburst of Supreme Court judge Kurian Joseph shows the pent up feelings of a justice belonging to the minority community.

There can be no exception to what he has said: "Our religious and cultural festivals and hues, irrespective of caste and creed, have contributed to the vibrancy of our rich pluralistic culture and ethos. The whole world jealously looks at the beauty of the secular image, communal harmony and cultural integrity of our great nation. India must in these trying times, safeguard her credentials and be a model that other nations must follow."

However, I think that he over-reacted to the scheduling of annual chief justices' conference on Good Friday. Chief Justice of India H.L. Dattu honestly believed that the working of the court would be disturbed because of stretched holidays. He, therefore, decided to utilise the large weekend, which included Good Friday, to hold the conference of state high court chief justices. Where he went wrong was that he did not fathom the sensitivity of Christian judges or the community.

This is not the first time that such a

conference has been held on Good Friday. But those days the feeling of discrimination was not suspected by members of the minorities. Now the blatant expression of Hindutva ideology, which the BJP represents and implements, has changed the climate of pluralism that the nation has inhaled since independence.

True, the country has given the BJP an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha. This does reflect a change in the thinking of the people, who have been voting for a secular plank until a few years ago.

However, it must be remembered that the basic structure of the constitution, defined by the Supreme Court, cannot be changed. One part of that structure is secularism that animates the constitution.

What must be disconcerting for the judiciary is the relentless effort by the extremists to change the very basics of our nationhood. The new terminology like ghar wapsi (reconversion to Hinduism) has been coined to the detriment of pluralism. The Gita has been introduced in the curriculum of Haryana schools.

Churches have been attacked in Delhi, Nawai Mumbai and Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh. There is a ban on beef in Haryana and Maharashtra. After a lot of cajoling, Prime Minister Modi deprecated the attack on the Churches. Yet the general perception is that he is not against the soft Hindutva that is spreading in the country.

The BJP-run states are worse because they are not on the national radar and evoke limited attention. In any case, they are already islands of Hindu chauvinism. The fear among the minorities is, therefore, understandable. I have heard several Muslims saying that they are afraid of their jaan aur maal (life and wealth).

The RSS leaders are sitting pretty. Even the liberals in the BJP are mum. They may want the domination of Hindutva

ideology. But it is difficult to imagine that they could be in favour of a second class status for Muslims, a flagrant violation of the constitution which enunciates equality before the law and underlines the principle of one man, one vote.

It is incumbent on the Modi government, which represents the majority that the institutions remain without the taint of communalism. Particularly, the judiciary cannot afford to have a finger pointed towards it. The allegation by the Prime Minister that the 'five-star activists' are driving the courts

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has only aggravated the situation.

The Chief Justice of India has rightly contradicted the statement, adding that the judiciary and parliament are like 'siblings' and must work together "towards a truly and effective administration of justice." Both the judiciary and parliament are children of democracy. They have to work hand in hand for a just and egalitarian society. One has to correct the other whenever one of them goes wrong.

Still the impression that the activists influence the court's judgment has to be removed. The National Judicial

Appointments Commission is expected to replace the collegium system of appointing judges, giving a greater say to the executive in the process. Yet there was a time when the executive had its say. But it was found that the government's interference in appointments and transfers of judges was politically motivated. And hence the matter was left to the judges themselves.

Still, both the collegiums and the executive have failed to ensure impartiality in appointments. Therefore, the Law Commission should seriously consider how to insulate the judiciary against any influence and constitute some mechanism to take into consideration what the executive says. This way the sensitivity of both the judiciary and the executive which represents the people are taken care of.

For example, the Right to Information (RTI) has proved to be useful to know the reason behind a particular decision. This has helped to bring in transparency in the official decisions. It has deepened democracy. The government may feel embarrassed over the disclosure of the truth. But there can be no compromise with the demands of an open society.

To that extent, the Prime Minister's statement comes in the way of scrutiny. This cannot be the purpose of his warning against the activists. He should realize that they are doing their job. Many scams would not have seen the light of the day if they had not questioned the official decisions.

The Modi government has to ensure the executive does not in any way interfere in the working of the judiciary. At the same time, the judiciary has to be sensitive enough to the executive's right to frame policies from time to time. Ultimately, both have to adhere to the limits of boundary delineated by the constitution.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Rehabilitation for the hermaphrodites needed

The other day I was waiting for a friend of mine near Malibagh intersection. I saw some hermaphrodites there who were seeking money from the pedestrians. A couple of minutes later my friend arrived there by rickshaw. She realised she had left her wallet at home and requested the rickshaw puller to take her back. Suddenly one of the hermaphrodites came to her and paid her rickshaw fair. My friend refused it but she said, "I had a

sister like you but she is no more. Please let me do it for her sake."

We both were very surprised because usually these people are treated so negatively in our society; they are considered as a group who only harass people on the street and take money from them forcefully. But the above mentioned incident proved that they can also be compassionate and giving. People should change their attitude towards them and the government must take measures to ensure employment and acceptance of them in society.

Bipul K Debnath
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Couldn't we expect a new beginning?

Pahela Baishakh is here but it is a matter of great regret that I am not feeling enthusiastic to say Shubho Naboborsho to anyone. In the last fifteen months we have seen enough unrest and it could be predicted that it will continue in some form or other.

The sun will rise in a bright red colour, but we do not know what the red colour will signify, happiness or danger. Gone are the days when people did not have to be always on guard and used to pass their days in carefree manner.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Thanks to BMT Unit of DMCH

The Bone Marrow Transplantation Unit of DMCH has saved the lives of all its blood cancer patients in the last one year. In fact, a zero mortality rate in the first year of such programme is rare in any developing country. The key role player behind the success is Bimalangshu Ranjan Dey. The treatment of this disease at DMCH is at par with international standards but at a much lower cost.

We urge the government to come forward to support Mr. Dey so that he can expand his noble initiative to establish a laboratory where cancer patients and bone marrow donors could get registered.

Mobarak Ali
Gopibagh, Dhaka