

Families seeking justice under threat

Authorities must ensure safety, justice

We note with concern that the family of two school girls, murdered earlier this month in Madaripur, is being threatened and harassed by powerful quarters because the former is seeking justice for their daughters' deaths. On August 13, the two class eight students of Mostafapur Bahumukhi High School – Sumaiya Akhtar, 15, and Happy Akhtar, 14 – were allegedly killed after they were raped by their stalkers. A case was filed by Sumaiya's father against 14 people – seven named and seven unnamed persons – only three of whom have been arrested so far.

If the untimely deaths of these two girls, in the prime of their lives, were not enough of a blow to their families, must they now live in fear and uncertainty in the face of continuous threats of eviction and physical harm from the suspects' patrons? According to a report by Bangla daily, Prothom Alo, Abdur Rob, president of the Awami League Madaripur sadar upazila committee as well as of the school's management committee, is apparently pressuring the families to refrain from pursuing the matter. Reportedly, he even discouraged the teachers of the school from holding demonstration on the school premises to demand justice for the girls' murders.

It is an unfortunate reality in Bangladesh that perpetrators of horrendous crimes often get away because they have people in powerful positions backing them, while victims and their families have no choice but to either drop the cases or accept distorted police reports.

We urge the authorities in Madaripur to take stern action against those carrying out the threats, and ensure that the investigation is completed in an impartial and independent manner, such that, ultimately, justice is served.

Unity government in Sri Lanka

On a path to much-needed reconciliation

In a surprise but welcome move, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) which conceded defeat in the election to Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP) on August 17 has announced that it will join a unity government with the winning incumbent. This marks a significant turnaround as the SLFP which had earlier opposed making any concessions to Tamils, is now set to address Tamil rights in an effort to ensure what is being termed as "ethnic and religious reconciliation" with that community. Tamils had waged a long and bloody civil war for nearly three decades from 1972 to 2009 that resulted in more than 100,000 deaths in the country.

The recently held polls in Sri Lanka gave the UNP seats that fell slightly short of a majority in the 225-member parliament. Mr. Wickremesinghe's overture has been welcomed by the UN chief who has called on the new government to set the course for reconciliation with the Tamils in an effort to strengthen democracy overall. The new government has its task cut out. There will be opposition from hardliners on both sides, but a chance to return to normality and peace will undoubtedly be supported by the majority of Sri Lankans.

We rejoice with the people of Sri Lanka in the demonstration of pragmatism by its leaders to forge common grounds and propel the nation on to the path of prosperity. As a co-traveller in SAARC, we wish Godspeed to Sri Lanka.

COMMENTS

"Free speech under attack as never before: HRW"
(August 20, 2015)

Hasan Mahmud

Although I do not support the killing of bloggers, I also don't want them to be termed as free thinkers. Writing against Islam has become a fashion now. Government should take stern action against those bloggers who hurt religious sentiment.

Ahmed Farhad Salim

Did Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohammad (peace be upon them all) ever kill or order killing of someone who mocked god or their faith? No. That is not how religions work. All religions are harmless and peaceful. But at the end it depends on the person who interprets them. If you want to fight those who make a mockery of religion, then first fight those who kill human beings in the name of religion.

"Dhaka 2nd least liveable city in the world"
(August 20, 2015)

Siddhartha Chowdhury

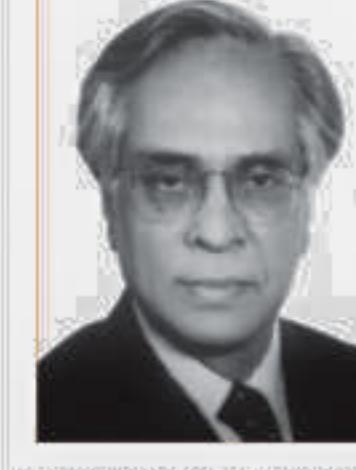
Surprised we didn't win the first place!

Nafis Awraf

Look at the good side: at least you have your own city. There are ethnic minority groups around the globe who are denied their rights, land and identity. Look at the people of Gaza losing their land to tyrants and terrorists and the people of Kurdistan, who don't have their own state but only their identity; they're scattered around Iraq, Syria, Iran and Turkey.

Hello mayors, we are still waiting

SUNDAY POUCH



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

Do you know the five triggers for happiness? Research shows that exercise, good sleep, shorter commutes, positive relationships with family and friends and connection with nature are essential ingredients that can produce a happy person. The side effects: the more connected we are to family and community, the less likely we are to experience heartbreaks, strokes, cancer and depression. Well-connected people are said to get better sleep, live longer and are happier persons. Happiness gives rise to economic, social and individual benefits. The happiest cities in the world are those that have outdoor attractions, shopping centres, amusement opportunities and cultural locations.

But our beloved city Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, has remained the second liveable city in the world as per *Economist's* Intelligence unit liveability survey of 148 cities around the world. Our city came second from the bottom of the index in 2014 and 2013 as well. It was rated as the least liveable city in 2012 and the second worst in 2011. Dhaka scored 38.7 out of 100 in critical areas such as healthcare, education, stability, culture and environment as well as infrastructure as per Global Liveability Index 2015.

What a shame for all of us. But was Dhaka like this in the past? Not really.

For about 400 years Dhaka was a manageable entity. A complex yet definite grid of river and lakes supplied sweet water to its inhabitants which not only promoted easy trade but also communication. It was a clean, seamless city. It was then called the 'Venice of the East'. During the Mughal times it was a pride of the Empire. It welcomed people from Europe and other parts of the world. In fact like other big metropolis in India, Dhaka accommodated traders and booty

hunters from the Netherlands, France and England in large numbers.

Yet Dhaka has a chequered history. From being the capital of Bengal it became a backwater of the British Raj. It was later pronounced as the capital of East Bengal and during the Pakistan days it was the provincial capital of East Pakistan. Then in 1971 it became the capital of independent Bangladesh. And then the dam burst.

Hordes of people from all over Bangladesh swept in the hopes of better fortunes. Crime gangs also perched here

rethink the major parameters. It is time to introduce planning and build much of the infrastructure anew. Firstly Dhaka needs better governance; both the city halls need well-financed, manageable governments. They should be equipped with skilled labour and modern machinery. The government should give each of the city halls adequate funds at low interest rates to do their work diligently. The city government cannot stop work under any circumstances and excuse. Cleaning the streets, maintaining parks and collecting garbage should be tasks to be done round the clock. All municipal services

into the city coffers. Flourishing remittance flow, piling of foreign currency reserves and a booming garment sector as well as growth of international investors in FDI will make the availability of funds easier. Dhaka's proximity to the three major powerhouses in the world – China, India and the ASEAN countries – will further push Dhaka to expand. Many state of the art industries are locating in Dhaka. In another ten years, Dhaka would be able to transform itself into a modern city.

Our two mayors need to be visionaries and not just common players. They



for easy pickings. The once serene Dhaka turned into a bustle of markets, schools and universities. The people built shanty towns, large slums and swanking residential areas to accommodate themselves. Dhaka became a gargantuan blot in the world. Since one mayor was unable to control and manage this huge city, two separate mayors were elected to serve the city. Yet neither of the city halls had enough money or staff to manage their areas. Dhaka is now an Armageddon in the making.

But Dhaka needs to resurrect. It is time to

should be available at all times. No special interest groups or powerful groups of any hue or colour should be allowed to flout any rule. The people must be given equal access to all municipal laws through the internet and public notices. An independent municipal ombudsman needs to be appointed to see that no injustice is done to anyone. The ombudsman must be swift in dispensing justice and advice.

Dhaka is now the capital of a lower middle income country. As the country's economy grows more money will pour

not only need plans but also money to implement their vision. The upside is that both mayors are young, educated and energetic. To be a city father of a complex and difficult place like Dhaka the mayors cannot afford to be bureaucratic. They need to be super thinkers, planners, go-getters and fixers. Time is not on their side. The people of Dhaka can be patient. But the people are on a short fuse.

The writer is a former Ambassador and a commentator of current affairs.
E-Mail: ashfaque303@gmail.com

THE EVOLVING THREAT of religious extremism

ISHFAQ ILAHI CHOUDHURY

THE month of August is particularly poignant and tragic in the Bangali psyche. On August 15 1975, the nation witnessed the gruesome murder of Bangabandhu, the Father of the Nation, along with most of his family members. It was a terrorist attack that was cowardly enacted, but meticulously planned. Since then, this nation saw a revival of forces that had opposed the birth of Bangladesh and fought to return to a religious state quite in contravention to the provisions of the constitution and spirit of our Liberation War. The Constitution of Bangladesh as adopted in 1972 was amended to pave the way for the rebirth of religion-based parties. For the next two decades the military rulers, devoid of mass support, used the religious card to seek political legitimacy. The aim of the military dictators was to deter progressive forces by mustering the support of Islamic religious forces. When the military autocracy was ousted in the face of popular uprising in 1990, the religious forces had by then made deep inroads in domestic politics. By the turn of the century, the Islamist forces started a violent campaign of bombing and killing across the country. The political power at that time nurtured the extremist forces with an aim to crush the liberals and the left. Despite a series of violent acts of terror, the government was in denial mode. Even on August 21 2004, when a deadly grenade attack was carried out targeting the then opposition leader Sheikh Hasina, government agencies termed it as an insider job. Finally, on August 17 2005, when nearly 100 bomb blasts went off across the country, the government under intense international pressure, acknowledged the existence of terrorist organisations in the country.

A new anti-terrorist force called Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) was formed primarily to tackle the terrorist outfits. The terrorist organisations that had sprung up in Bangladesh by that time, such as Jamaatul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami (HuJI) and an extension of Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), were strongly dealt with. Although these organisations lost most of their leader-

ship by 2006, new leadership continued to evolve and all indicators suggest that they are in the process of regrouping and rearming. A decade has passed since then, but the government is still grappling with militant ideologies. The society, meanwhile, is witnessing a gradual erosion of liberal, progressive values in the face of the radical onslaught; what in popular parlance is called 'Saudisation'.

We have witnessed a gradual evolution of extremist outfits. While the first generation of militants were either uneducated or *madrasa* educated youths hailing from poor households, in recent years there have been new recruits who hail from urban middle and high income families and are educated in the mainstream or English-medium educational institutions. Although the present AL-led government repeatedly declared zero tolerance to all kinds of religious extremism and terrorism, new terrorist groups have, meanwhile, appeared that have international and global links and are working with a long-range view. Al-Qaeda Chief Ayman Al Zawahiri declared in September 2014, his new affiliate for South Asia, including Bangladesh. The spate of blogger killings and government's failure to track down the perpetrators in most cases have left people terrified and frustrated. Most of the blogger killings have been claimed by a domestic terror organisation called Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT). It has been reported in the press that the ABT Chief Mufti Rahmani, now in jail, continues to direct the activities of the organisation through his sympathisers in the administration. Recent arrests of the suspected killers of bloggers Avijit and Ananta showed that ABT and its Chief Mufti Jasim Uddin Rahmani had been actively directing the killing operations from behind bars. While the arrests of the suspects raise new hope, questions have been raised about prison security. The ease with which extremists from outside were able to establish contact with their leaders inside the prison shows the weaknesses of our prison system. Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT), another urban-based Islamist organisation that calls for the establishment of a global Khilafat, continues to remain active in Bangladesh, despite the official ban. HuT views Muslim majority countries such as Bangladesh or Pakistan as *Daar-ul Kuffar* or the land of the infidel. According to

their ideology, all *Daar-ul Kuffars* will have to be turned into *Daar-ul Islam* (Land of Islam), by violent means, if necessary. Finally, countries with non-Muslim majority which they term as *Daar-ul Harb* (Land of War) will be converted to *Daar-ul Islam* through a global Jihad. Thus, according to them, the world will come under one God, one nation as promised in the Holy Scriptures.

The recent arrests of three lawyers of the Supreme Court have stunned the nation. Nearly Tk 120 million is reported to have been transferred by the lawyers to a terrorist organisation called Shaheed Hamza Brigade. Despite speculations, I believe that investigative agencies must have had solid evidence to support their charges. If the charges of terrorist financing by the lawyers are proved to be true, it would force us to look harder into every stratum of the society to seek out and destroy the roots of terrorism.

Recent arrests of terror suspects show that by and large youths who got mixed up with religious extremism and violence are ill-educated, jobless, frustrated and often disassociated from their families. It is, therefore, important that we develop a healthy, educated youth force who looks forward to a fulfilling life here in this world, rather than get involved in militant activities. The government along with academics, researchers, and civil-military leaders, should prepare a comprehensive counter terrorism strategy. The objectives of the strategy would be to pursue all measures to stop the terrorist attacks in the first place. It should prevent our people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism in any form. The strategy should lay down detailed measures to protect people from terrorist threats. Finally, it should guide us to prepare so as to mitigate the impact should a terrorist attack take place. Once the strategy is in place, the government must take all possible measures to ensure that the ugly head of terrorism never raises its head and the peaceful lives of millions are not disturbed. Terrorism is a global threat and we, in Bangladesh, need to face it together with the rest of the world.

The writer is Registrar, East West University.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedadlystar.net



PHOTO: STAR

Chaotic Dhaka

Two days ago, I watched two very worrying news in the TV. These are as follows:

a. Dhaka is the second least liveable city in the world after Damascus.

b. There are too many people

living in the city and all systems have been exhausted to prevent traffic jams, which means no usable system in the world would be able to prevent this severe and unbearable traffic jam in Dhaka.

So what is the future of this city and its inhabitants?

Anami, Dhaka

Education equals to opportunity

Recently I came across a text in which Queen Rania of Jordan referred to 'education' as being equal to 'opportunity' because education creates the opportunity to work, to escape poverty, to live healthily, to live confidently. But a question arises, what type of education would help a person achieve the opportunity to work and escape poverty? Of course elementary basic education is indispensable for children. But doubts shadow our thoughts when comes the issue of higher education, particularly for the people of those countries where unemployment,

poverty, economic insufficiency is widespread. Take Bangladesh for example which has a high population with limited land and resources. Is it appropriate for this nation to produce general graduates with advanced university degrees? I think we need profession-based skill development and technical education. We have a huge workforce working in garment industries but in most cases, they are not very skilled. In fact, our manpower has the potential to access the opportunity to earn, to get rid of poverty if they could be provided with appropriate technical education just after SSC.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System, SAU, Dhaka