

Pastor targeted

Arrest the assailants promptly

AN attempted murder in Pabna, within days of the killing of two foreign nationals, has added to the ongoing sense of unease amongst us. In an incident on Monday in Pabna, a Christian pastor, Father Luke Sarkar, barely escaped death when three young men pretending to be interested in Christianity, entered his home and then tried to kill him with a knife. The pastor was saved when his family heard his cry for help and rushed to the scene prompting the assailants to escape.

Though no link between the two previous incidents and this has so far been established, coming on the heels of the killing of the two foreigners, one cannot rule out the possibility that this attack has been carried out as part of a plan to destabilise the country and portray it as a den of extremism. On the other hand, it might well be the work of extremist groups with a particular agenda in mind. Whatever may be the motives and whichever group may be involved, the security agencies must intensify their investigations of these cases and identify the assailants and those working as masterminds behind the gruesome incidents.

The series of murders point to an obvious deterioration in law and order, something that the government must address on a priority basis. The need to unravel the mystery behind the killing of the two foreigners and attack on the pastor cannot be overemphasised, given the impact they have had on our security situation. The government must take these threats to security very seriously and arrest the perpetrators quickly.

TPP signed

How do we offset the negative impact?

THE Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement was signed on October 5. As Bangladesh is not a signatory, the country's garments sector (RMG) is likely to suffer as it will not get preferential treatment for RMG export to the TPP member countries. Some of our closest competitors like Vietnam used to pay 8.38 percent duty for RMG exports, but after TPP comes into effect, it will not have to pay any duty. This is bad news for our largest export earning sector. As pointed out by local economists, Bangladesh's competitive edge to the US, which is our single largest garment export destination, will erode gradually.

There is no way to underestimate the importance of TPP, and our failure to get on board will have serious ramifications for the apparels industry. As there is no prospect of reducing the duty charged on our products, it is imperative that Bangladesh reduces the cost of doing business to remain competitive and on the cutting edge of the global RMG trade.

Although a major blow to the country, perhaps it will provide the impetus our RMG sector needs to diversify into other non-traditional markets where the country enjoys duty-free access. The government needs to work with the RMG industry to seriously address the issue of reducing the cost of doing business, in particular, bringing down loan interest rates. The industry for its part must look into ways to boost productivity and diversify its product range. This is now a matter of highest national priority.

Creating disorder in Bangladesh

STRANGER THAN FICTION



TAJ HASHMI

WHILE attempts are being made to create disorder and insecurity in Bangladesh by killing foreign nationals – politicians are busy playing a no-holds-barred blame game

against each other. The latest vitriol against certain political parties and leaders is a highlight of the game. A prominent ruling party leader publicly asserted Khaleda Zia might have a link with the recent killing of an Italian citizen in the capital. Some other leaders are pointing fingers at their political rivals in a similar manner.

What is shocking is not only the impunity for gross defamatory assertions in Bangladesh, but people's indifference to such acts too. This, however, hasn't happened for the first time. Does one read too much into the episode to overreact? I don't think so. As vicious name-calling at each other is a symptom of dysfunctional relationship – verbal abuse often leads to physical violence – so is the lack of mutual trust and respect counterproductive to good governance and democracy.

Bangladeshis and the world at large worry about the mindless killings of bloggers, criminals, suspects and innocent people by law enforcers, and the latest killings of foreign nationals – one Italian and one Japanese – by unknown assailants in the country. While further unresolved murders of foreign nationals in Bangladesh would cause serious damage to the country politically and economically in the long run, one wonders as to how politicians can still indulge in playing the blame game!

It's not the time to adopt the ostrich policy to deny the reality, i.e. something has gone grossly wrong in the realm of law and order in the country. The proverbial wolf seems to have finally shown up, and nobody seems to know how to kill or drive the predator away. The country is going through a crucial time tread-

ing into uncertainty. Interestingly, on the one hand, some leaders have been telling the world, for more than two decades now, that thanks to the BNP-Jamaat manoeuvring, Bangladesh is infested with al-Qaeda and its ilk; on the other hand, of late the same leaders are assuring everyone about the non-existence of any al-Qaeda or ISIS in the country. Very puzzling indeed!

We know ambiguity does neither identify nor resolve any problem. You can't go in two different directions at the same time. Although unfortunate, the ambivalence about the existence and

political rivals is definitely not a sign of strength, rather of weakness. It's also an efficacious way of legitimising what is not so legitimate in the eyes of people, at home and abroad. Fortunately, offensive rhetoric has a short shelf-life.

In the backdrop of the recent killings of two foreign nationals, it's too early to surmise, let alone conclude, if Islamist terrorists or criminals/political thugs have been behind these reprehensible attacks. Political violence and/or terrorist attacks don't ensure good governance. Both legitimate governments and administrations depend on some semblance of

rule of law in many instances. In the backdrop of violent attacks and killing of innocent unarmed people by sections of law-enforcers (a la "crossfire"), influential people, and criminals, Bangladesh doesn't need external bodies or organisations to destabilise itself. Lack of rule of law is a potential breeding ground of violence.

While "unknown criminals" kidnap and kill opposition politicians, journalists, and academics with impunity, law enforcers allegedly kidnap and make people disappear through some "black magic"; and ruling elites engaged themselves in desperate cry wolf and vitriolic blame game.

Our leaders must realise economic growth alone, without the fundamental freedoms and overall development of the country in the true sense does not work as antidote to terror and anarchy. The harsh reality of Bangladesh is that many people are poor and marginalised, despite the rise in per capita income, and despite all the flyovers and bypasses in Dhaka. According to BBS Household Survey, 2010 more than 75 percent of the population earn less than \$2 per day and 31 percent, earn less than \$1 a day, i.e. they live below the poverty line. This is, however, a contentious issue in Bangladesh.

As corruption is a taboo in Bangladesh (most corrupt people would assert: "Others do it, we don't"), so is the myth of development. The beneficiaries of "growth and development" aren't going to agree publicly that the majority of Bangladeshis are still quite poor and marginalised.

Last but not least, it's time to address the real issues in Bangladesh. Unless the sharply polarised people stop questioning each other's patriotism, and stop their leaders from playing the blame game against their political opponents, the threat of terrorism would haunt the polity for decades. We know, mutual hatred, fear and mistrust take a country nowhere.

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absence of terrorists in the country is understandable. Then again, people in power can get some political leverage and short-lived legitimacy, even for their authoritarian mode of governance, by demonising their political rivals, but as the old saying goes, "... you cannot fool all the people all the time". This is especially true in this age of information; now the remotest corner in Bangladesh is connected to the whole world.

I personally don't consider offence as the best defence, or as a sign of strength in the context of present Bangladesh. The vilification-cum-demonisation of

law and order or overall security of people.

Here in Bangladesh, some people seem to be above the law, while others are subject to its rigour, or even to the whims of law enforcers, and outlaws in league with those supposed to enforce the law. While order brings security, disorder promotes insecurity among people. Sections of insecure/aggrieved people resort to violent crimes and even terrorism. Post-Saddam Iraq and war-torn Afghanistan and Syria are glaring examples in this regard.

Bangladesh today doesn't ensure the

ANGELS WITHOUT WINGS

KNOT SO TRUE



RUBANA HUQ

SHE is 11. She was found crying on a street in the capital. A minor, burnt with a hot cooking paddle with other injury marks found on her body, Mahfuza Akhter Happy had told police and the media that she had been beaten and tortured by a couple. No proof was needed. Happy looked frail, had swollen black eyes and a broken leg.

He is 29. He is a fast-bowler with the national side, a paceman who has played 37 Tests and has taken 70 wickets. His name is on the Lord's honours board for taking 5-98 against England in May 2010. Shahadat Hossain, Bangladesh's high profile cricketer, handed himself over to the police amid allegations that he and his wife tortured a housemaid, who was a minor.

Happy will soon be forgotten. While most of us will use Happy as a reference to highlight an issue, or to provide an exciting coverage in media, she will soon become history. Shahadat's wife Nitro will probably have to carry the stigma of being abusive for some time. But eventually, that abused little girl of eleven will only be remembered as an incidental reference. That's what's wrong with what most of us do. We write and we cover. We forget, move on and make more space for more bad news. As a result, issues continue to sit on our table without any humane follow-up at the end.

How do these little kids end up in our houses? Most of them are seen acting as "playmates" to our children and grandchildren, with daily chores to run. In the last four years, the number of child workers has gone up by a million. Almost 7.9 million children in Bangladesh are engaged in different occupations. 1.5 million of them live in cities while 6.4 million are spotted in rural areas. Almost 1.3 million children work more than 90 hours a week. 94 percent of them work for over 10 hours a day; only 16 percent receive health services; 51 percent of them earn between Tk 100-400 a week; 36 percent receive Tk 401-800, and 12 percent get around Tk 801-2000.

There are 45 types of occupational classifications which may be listed as hazardous. Out of this list, children work in 41 of them. 73.5 percent of the child workers are male while 26.5 percent are female. According to BBS, 1.3 million child labourers are engaged in extremely hazardous occupations.

Laws are formed and then consequently are either broken or ignored. Right after independence, Bangladesh enacted the Children Act 1974 (Act XXXIX of 1974) for the protection of children and their rights. Furthermore, the National Children Policy 1994 pledged to undertake many development projects in

this regard, including the National Action Plan for Children 2005-2010. Labour Law 2013 prohibits labour engagement for all under 14 years of age. Yet, in spite of so many laws, acts and plans, we routinely choose to ignore Article 34 of our own Constitution, which clearly talks about forced labour. No one has ever been punished so far, for violating the laws pertaining to the employment of child labour. The Child Labour Index and map, produced by global risks advisory firm Maplecroft, rates 68 countries as 'extreme risk' with Bangladesh, China, India, Nigeria and Pakistan amongst those with the most extreme abuse cases of child workers. In our country, there are many children, even those under ten, who end up catering to our domestic requirements.

It's time to steer our children back to school. If India could pass the Right to Education Act in 2009, whereby almost 2 million children were targeted for rehabilitation through education with scholarships, stipends, regular health checkups and nutrition, why can't we?

Internationally, and quite ironically, Bangladesh is also a signatory to the ILO Convention 182 adopted in 1999, which defines the worst forms of child labour and includes "all types of slavery", including child trafficking, "all activities which sexually exploit children", "any involvement in illegal activities" and any work which could "damage the health, safety or well-being of children" as completely forbidden. In spite of so many laws, conventions and pledges, kids like Happy live and serve many of us under inhumane conditions.

Now, why would a child end up being a labourer? In this regard, the connection between child labour and economic vulnerability becomes a critical consideration. 31.6 percent of children living under the poverty

line earn less than Tk 80 a day. Though officially, 99 percent of children have access to primary education in our country, Bangladesh faces a real challenge in terms of bringing primary-age children to school, as around 600,000 children are out of school and 48 percent of them are involved in child labour, according to a recent UNESCO survey. Apparently, one in five children drop out of school by the time they reach class 5. Many of them become child labourers because they need to earn for their families. At the same time, the National Children Policy formulated in 2011, insists on the prohibition of child labour from hazardous and risky occupations and has also set a goal to eradicate child labour by 2015. Yet, contrary to all these noble goals, 6.7 percent of the child labourers work in the formal sector, while 93.7 percent are engaged in the informal sector.

It's time to steer our children back to school. If India could pass the Right to Education Act in 2009, whereby almost 2 million children were targeted for rehabilitation through education with scholarships, stipends, regular health checkups and nutrition, why can't we? According to World Bank data, in Bangladesh where education is one of the fundamental rights, only 2.18 percent (2014-15) of GDP is allocated for the education sector, whereas in 2009, around 3.8 percent and in 2010, around 4.72 percent of the GDP was allocated for education in India and Nepal, respectively. Private-public partnerships could be initiated to bridge the gap between the need and reality of the hour. Opportunities of partnering in the RMG sector are huge. Since crèche is a basic requirement, RMG factory owners could perhaps begin by setting up primary schools in every factory that they set up, while other sectors could follow suit.

Not so long ago, I saw a young child working at a close relative's home. I had politely asked the hostess if the kid was going to school. Her negative response included a defence. She said, "But she learns Arabic at home when the huzur comes to teach our kids." Eventually, our relationship soured as I stayed away from her for the longest time possible. Given that ideologically all of us suffer from multiple differences at multiple levels, there should at least be one plane where we should all be able to speak a common language. All of us should be able to pledge for the right to education for all children. All our kids must go to school. No child should ever be hit, tortured, burnt or suffer indignities at our homes. Kids who are forced to work at home fulfil our whims and fancy without ever being part of our privileged lives.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.

COMMENTS

"Japanese man shot dead in Rangpur"

(October 4, 2015)

Shahrukh Parvez Shourav

I don't believe that the recent murders of two foreign nationals were committed by IS. A proper investigation is needed to reveal the truth.

Md Rafiqul Islam

What's going on in Bangladesh? What are the law enforcement agencies doing?

Saiful Alam Shelly

If foreign missions had prior information on imminent security threats in Bangladesh, they should have shared it with our government.

"Hospital sealed in city"

(October 4, 2015)

Abu Naim Sakib

How can a hospital operate without the approval of the government? Are officials of the concerned ministry blind?

"Tortured or not?"

(October 3, 2015)

Yasin Wahid Rabby

Even the picture with the news suggests injury marks on her face!

Zubayer Imran Khan

He was killed to protect the real culprit.

Shah Alam

His involvement with the question leak is now clear and he was killed so that the identity of the masterminds wouldn't get revealed.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Security measures in diplomatic zones

It's really sad that an Italian citizen has been shot dead by some unidentified miscreants in the diplomatic zone of Dhaka, prompting some foreign missions to issue security alerts to their citizens living in Bangladesh. The security measures in that area have been

reported to be tripled after the incident. We wonder why it was not done earlier.

Though Bangladesh has been successful in checking the rise of militancy to a great extent, the government must do everything in their capacity to stop these mindless killings which do great harm to the image of the country.

Ashek Sarker
Comilla

'Passes' to enter and exit Gulshan?

The news titled "Ensure security for foreigners" published in *The Daily Star* on October 5 revealed something interesting: the DMP assistant commissioner of Gulshan zone said that people who are not permanent residents of the zone would require passes to enter and exit the area. We

wonder how this plan will be implemented when rampant commercialisation of Gulshan has been allowed without taking the consequences into consideration. Because of poor planning, Gulshan is now a chaotic area where criminals thrive. So will the authorities kindly elaborate how this plan is going to work?
Anonymous
On e-mail