

Clamp down on BCL warring factions

Make campuses safe for students

WHAT sort of message is the ruling party giving out when two factions of the Chhatra League (BCL) battle it out for supremacy on Chittagong University (CU) campus during admission tests on November 2? Apart from the fact that the incident has left fifty people injured including policemen and that the admission test could not take place, many have been dissuaded from sitting for future admission tests.

From what has been printed in this paper, an altercation between activists belonging to rival factions of BCL over who will get the privilege of greeting admission seekers apparently is the cause of the violent clash. We are left flabbergasted at the immature behaviour displayed by these so-called student factions.

That these activists have no respect either for their fellow students or the law is clearly evident from the mayhem that ensued. Where is the strong hand of the university administration which is entrusted to maintain peace and tranquillity on the campus? This is unacceptable behaviour and the university authorities must be held to account for such recurring incidents.

Are public universities a playground for BCL? This is not the first incident this year that saw BCL violence at CU. In fact the latest incident is merely an addition to the litany of BCL's rowdy and violent behaviour in many institutions all over the country. And we are shocked to see that despite assurances from senior AL leaders from time to time of actions against errant members, the BCL is being allowed to carry on with its violent and self-destructive activities with impunity.

Mandatory use of fare meters ignored

Ensure implementation

A recent report published in this daily revealed that some auto-rickshaw drivers are not adhering to the new fare chart and the mandatory use of fare meters that came into effect from November 1. Many auto-rickshaw drivers continue to carry passengers on a contract basis in blatant violation of the newly introduced rule of compulsory use of fare meters.

Despite the upward revised fare chart, passengers continue to be overcharged since auto-rickshaw drivers, although required by the government to pay a daily deposit of Tk 900, are forced to pay even more by the owners. The latter's lack of rationale with regard to charging auto-rickshaw drivers inevitably results in the ultimate burden of higher fare falling on passengers.

Although the use of fare meters has been made mandatory, which is a commendable move, the stumbling blocks in the way of its effective implementation need to be identified. For one, there is an obvious need to address the absence of any binding agreement between the auto-rickshaw drivers and owners of three-wheelers. A formal contract which requires owners to rely on a reasonable, structured method will not only empower auto-rickshaw drivers but also discourage the owners from overcharging passengers. The traffic police must also play their due role in ensuring that auto-rickshaw drivers obey the fare meter rules.

It must be noted though that the aforementioned points are mere short-term measures. The public transportation system remains the main challenge and long-term, sustainable solutions lie in overhauling it.

Hiding head in the sands

Our inept pursuit of the killing hands



ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

HERE we go again. Every time a heinous murder takes place in broad daylight, our people at the helm blast their favourite targets – the political opposition for either directly committing these offenses or having a hand in them. It made good sense to blame the opposition when loots and murders were committed in the name of political agitation, because these acts of anarchy suited politics of the country. But to resuscitate the same accusation when writers, activists, and foreign nationals are killed execution style and when the law enforcement agencies are helpless watchers is not only giving cover to the ineptness of our forces but also aiding the real killers. We do not seem to know nor care what is hurting us most – our inability to catch the killers or our attempts to put a blanket charge on the political opposition for the killing?

The first step to handle a crisis responsibly is to accept its existence or occurrence, understand what is causing it and then take measures to remove it. Since incidents that resembled organised acts of a militant nature surfaced in the country, our political leaders have been in a state of denial, irrespective of which party was in power. They always tried to dismiss these as handiwork of their political opponents who were only out to harass and destabilise the government. They either did not have the capability or were unwilling to think out of the box.

A typical response of the political leaders then and now has been to term such crimes as either lone wolf activities or the opposition party's attempt to mar the country's image. There has never been a serious and earnest endeavour by our leaders to go deep into the causes for such murders; this clearly shows a pattern that goes beyond the standard acts of a political opposition. One simple fact seems to elude our leaders: that the victims of these crimes are neither political supporters of the party in power, nor of any single platform. Two of them were foreign nationals, and that too, from two different parts of the world. Four died apparently because of their writings and publications, but why

the foreign nationals? Does it never strike our leaders that these acts could be connected, and this nexus is of people and organisations that may not believe in a democratic opposition? Does it not strike us that despite all our rhetoric to promote a country of religious tolerance and peace, we might have cracks in society that have allowed pockets of intolerance and growth of ideologies that are not exactly driven by democratic principles of free speech and equality?

Cracks in societal structure do not occur suddenly; these occur over a period of time from weak political leadership, burgeoning corruption, ineffectual, faulty education and weakening of law and order. Weeds grow when a garden is not tended, and

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that is why we have amongst us elements that have risen to the surface that eventually may eat up the whole garden. In our 45 years of history, we have never been able to establish a clear platform of governance structure that upholds rule of law, transparency in governance, or equality before law for all. Massive corruption has sullied the image of the country while crimes of all nature remained unsolved or unattended. We have watched helplessly as our institutions collapsed. Educational institutions turned out into commercial enterprises, health establishments into profit-making ventures, and law enforcement into feckless agencies.

Parallel to these developments has been regrowth of a political ideology arising from manipulation of religion that was the bane of our existence in pre-liberation days. An alliance of some of our political elements with such insidious forces allowed clandestine growth of religious extremists in the country that were often overlooked or tolerated for short term political goals. Added to this was the global phenomenon of militant Islam that has attracted disenchanted and misled youths with a distorted version of the religion and an ideology of nihilism.

There have been signs all along in last two decades of the existence of such extremism in our midst, but we have chosen to deny this for fear that our country as a whole might be branded as a safe harbour of militants. Fortunately for us, these elements have not been able to scale up their terrorism to a level that Pakistan or even India has witnessed in the last decade. But that should be no cause for elation or celebration. In today's world, the Islamic State that Syria and Iraq are battling with need not be a geographic entity; it is a concept and a state of mind that can exist in any part of a community in any part of the world.

The heinous crimes in the past six months in Dhaka and elsewhere in Bangladesh have one big similarity -- these were perpetrated to suppress voices that advocated secular thoughts and put more emphasis on humanity over religion. Such thoughts are an anathema to the mindset that wants an end to secularism and democratic principles of free speech, freedom of thought and equality of all religions.

Crimes and criminals are never deterred by rhetoric and blame games. We cannot escape the reality that these occurred because of the slip up of our law enforcement agencies, and will continue to happen if our leaders look for scapegoats instead of tasking the law enforcement agencies to apprehend the criminals and their mastermind, and bring them to justice. Until that happens I am afraid we will continue to be haunted by the elements of the dark and their shadowy designs on the country.

The writer is a political analyst and commentator.

CLIMATE CHANGE ACTIONS

Can't we do at least this much?

RT HON BARONESS ANELAY OF ST JOHNS DBE & ANNICK GIRARDIN

EVERYONE knows that some small island states, such as the Maldives in the Indian Ocean or Tuvalu in the Pacific, face serious risks to their survival if we do not take effective action to address climate change and curb rising sea levels. At a dinner convened jointly between France and the UK in London last week, a group of representatives from such small island states described the severity of the threat they face. They are understandably pushing hard for all nations to do more to cut emissions and help prevent the worst impacts of climate change.

The threats facing the rest of the world are no less grave. To preserve a climate that can support a healthy, prosperous population, we must limit global warming to no more than 1.5°C or 2°C.

The shape of the international climate deal set for agreement in Paris is becoming clearer. More than 150 countries have announced their commitments to reduce emissions. Many have also pledged increased finance to help the poorest and most vulnerable countries adapt to the effects of climate change.

The UK and France are leading by example. By 2030, the UK will have halved its emissions compared to 1990 and is on track to meet the target, set out in law, of an 80 percent reduction by 2050. France will cut its emissions by 40 percent by 2030, compared to 1990, and the new Energy Transition Act provides

mechanisms to finance renewable energies.

We are also committed to supporting developing countries to strengthen their resilience and manage the risks of a changing climate. The British Prime Minister, David Cameron, recently announced that the UK will provide £5.8 billion between April 2016 and March 2021. At the same time, President Francois Hollande announced that

These commitments take us 15 years into the future, and so reflect a huge range of economic, social, and technological uncertainty. The future can be promising. And the Paris COP21 needs to build even greater ambition.

A change in direction is already visible. Evidence released by PWC shows that the global economy grew by 3.3 percent in 2014, while emissions only grew by 0.5 percent. This suggests that

and more investment is being ploughed into clean energy technologies all the time.

China added 9.9GW of new solar electricity capacity in the first three quarters of 2015 alone – equivalent to more than a tenth of the UK's entire domestic power generation. Many small island states have also adopted ambitious renewable energy targets in the past year.

This transition has economic benefits beyond reducing climate risks. For example, the low carbon economy and its supply chain now employ around half a million people in both the UK and France. In the case of the UK, this sector contributes more to GDP than the automotive industry. These opportunities will only become clearer over time, and the incentives to take advantage of them will be greater.

The threat facing us all is very real, even if it is not as apparent to all of us as it is to the inhabitants of the small island states. There is a role for everyone in confronting it.

The Paris conference must be a watershed moment, leading us into an era of green economic development and opportunity. We are confident we will find an effective response – through human ingenuity, innovation and determination – to the greatest challenge our civilisation has ever faced.

The writers are Minister of State at the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Minister of State for Development and Francophony at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development respectively.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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A shameful statement

Thanks to The Daily Star for publishing the senseless remark of AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif about the slain publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan's father. It has shown us again how insensitive our politicians are.

Very often ruling party men make controversial statements. We don't expect this from our political leaders. We hope their statements will be based on facts.

Anami
Dhaka

Containing extremism

I am deeply worried to see the rise of extremists in our country. The way they carried out attacks on bloggers and publishers is gruesome. The government must bring the perpetrators to book and make all-out efforts to contain extremism in the country.

Imrul Hoque
Sirajganj Govt. College

COMMENTS

"Attacks on Avijit's publishers are isolated incidents: Kamal"
(November 1, 2015)

Saleh Chowdury

This kind of irresponsible remark from a man of his stature is unexpected. We rather expect him to speed up the legal procedures and catch the criminals before they hack anymore people to death. Islam never permits such heinous and cowardly slaughter of innocents. Who are those so-called defenders of Islam to kill the bloggers?

Mark Chubb

The politicisation of this crisis erodes international confidence in this government's ability to secure public safety.

Saad Z Hossain

Isolated incidents? Then when are they going to be non-isolated?

Shuvo Saha

And this shouldn't be taken seriously, right minister?

"New CNG auto-rickshaw fare from today"
(November 1, 2015)

Actually

Old wine in a new bottle! This will not reduce the public suffering and the drivers won't go by meter as usual.

"The professor who has lost his son perhaps believes in the political ideology of those who carried out the killing. He's made such remarks because he doesn't want the people of his party to stand trial."

--AL Joint General Secretary MAHBUBUL ALAM HANIF

Saidur Rahman

What a brilliant assessment, Mr. Hanif! You should be awarded with a Nobel Prize for this!

Mark Chubb

Society has an interest in bringing the culprits to book whether the father seeks justice or not. And justice is best served by finding those who are responsible.

Reaz AU

I think it is the most idiotic statement he has ever made.