

# Crocodile tears won't stop the killings

MAHFUZUR RAHMAN

THESE aren't many things that greatly surprise me nowadays. But the expression of grief on the part of General Hussain Muhammad Ershad, former President of the country and leader of the Jatiya Party, over the murder of publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan did amaze me. That was because only a few months ago Mr. Ershad called for the hanging of an ex-minister of government for some of his public remarks that appeared to hurt 'religious sentiments'. The killers of Dipan too condemned him for exactly the same crime. Why, then, is Mr. Ershad shedding tears for the latest victim of the jihadist rampage? And, looking just a couple of years back, he called for the annihilation of atheists, the term he used to describe participants of the burgeoning Gonojagoron Moncho.

Perhaps one should not read too much into the remarks of a practically defunct politician, except as a reminder that his responsibility for Islamisation of politics in the country is perhaps greater than anybody else's. But his stance here tells us much about the dismal state of our society and polity that allows murderers to stanch the right of expression of heterodoxy.

First, the former president is not alone in shedding fake tears. He is in good company. Every time a free thinker is murdered, voices are raised to condemn it. But this is quickly followed by silence. And then comes the inevitable oblivion.

Second, it is important to remind ourselves that jihadist Islamists do not grow out of thin air. They emerge from our society. This sounds like a platitude. But look

around and into the past and an overwhelming fact presents itself: intolerance of free thinking has been growing in our society for decades now and perhaps has now reached dangerous proportions. And this has not come about on its own. It is the harvest from seeds of intolerance that had been sown a long time ago and continues to

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be sown in the present day. None of these seeds have been inadvertently sown; it was all policy-driven. The number of intolerant people today exceeds that of the recent past. It must be noted though that many of those who shed crocodile tears are among those who helped sow the insidious seeds. But there is no hard empirical gauge of the

extent of intolerance in society today.

A great despondency now prevails among liberals in the country in the wake of the killings, of which we have seen more than half a dozen in the past year alone. Despair comes from the utter failure of law enforcers to bring the perpetrators to book. The police seem clueless. We hear from police spokesmen themselves that the police are ill-equipped to deal with these murders. We hear that a special anti-terrorist unit is needed to deal with this kind of crime. Then what is holding the government back from creating such an outfit? No amount of resources should be too much to create an efficient machinery to deal with the present dire situation.

More importantly, policymakers seem to be taken up with the task of protecting the 'religious sentiment' of the people. The question of the fear of hurting religious sentiment is, on the other hand, crucial. On reflection, it may appear that the plea for protecting religious sentiment is basically a demand for conformity. It is not so much that your smoking in the holy month of Ramadan in my presence 'hurts' my 'religious sentiment', as that I feel I am the righteous one and you should do as I do. The analogies for the quest for religious conformity can be stretched to the actual setting of a fully-fledged Islamic state which enforces conformity over all aspects of an individual's life. Such issues, the crux of the problem, are not discussed in our society. We see occasional crocodile tears instead, with predictable results.

The writer is an economist who has written extensively on the Islamist threat.



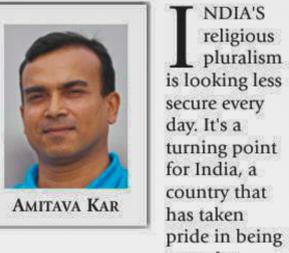
## DON'T GIVE HATE A CHANCE

BJP's 'mad cow disease' has far-reaching implications



Sajida Saifi, daughter of Akhalaq Saifi, who was killed by a mob, mourns his death in Uttar Pradesh, India, October 2, 2015.

PHOTO: REUTERS



AMITAVA KAR

INDIA'S religious pluralism is looking less secure every day. It's a turning point for India, a country that has taken pride in being a secular democracy where citizens, throughout history, regardless of religion and ethnicity, have held high offices including that of the President of the Republic, Chief Justice, Foreign Minister, Foreign Secretary and Chief of Army Staff, a standard even many developed nations fall short of. There is, however, a difference between this respectable view and the reality on the ground. "The problem with the present government is that it lacks inclusiveness, which is necessary for the construction of a nation," said Irfan Habib, the renowned historian from Aligarh Muslim University. "So they may shout they are nationalists, but they are in fact undermining the nation." Last week's raid of Delhi Police on the Kerala House in Delhi "in search of beef" raises many such issues including that of the State deciding what citizens can eat, the violation of federal jurisdiction, the imposition of homogeneity on a pluralistic society, the assault on freedom to choose, and an onslaught on democratic rights in general. At least three Indian states have adopted or tightened bans on the slaughter and consumption of beef. But when India decided that it would be "secular," what it probably meant, without spelling it out, was that Hindus would have to accommodate themselves to the ways of all

faiths. People in the government are doing everything but that. India's culture and tourism minister recently pledged to "cleanse every area of public discourse that had been westernised." The foreign minister has said that Bhagwad Gita must be declared a "national scripture" while the education minister suggested that schools should stay open on Christmas Day. Modi has said nothing offensive himself but his silence before the growing intolerance is interpreted by many as tacit approval. He did give one notable speech on religious tolerance back in February, but only after his party lost badly in Delhi and the US president, who had just visited, had cautioned against society "splintering" on religious lines. The BJP has forgotten that India is not a "Hindu country". India has deep Islamic roots going back to centuries and is home to one of the largest Muslim populations in the world. Islam plays an important role in the cultural life of India, whether the bigots like it or not. Christians form the country's third largest religious group, the religion having taken root in the subcontinent before reaching some parts of Europe. Buddhism, another major religion of the world, arose in and around Magadha, modern-day Bihar. Sikhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism and even Judaism found a fertile land in India, the last two having a long history of being persecuted in many places around the world. In a stark departure from this glorious tradition, various Hindu nationalist groups, collectively known as the Sangh Parivar, are throwing their weight around. And liberals who oppose the rise of political Hinduism are being attacked or

silenced. Last month, a leader of the Sri Ram Sene, a Hindu extremist group warned that writers who insulted Hindu gods were in danger of having their tongues sliced off. In August, 77-year-old scholar M M Kalburgi, an outspoken critic of idol worship, was gunned down on his own doorstep. Do these maniacs know that Hindus can choose to be monotheistic? During the past few months, the government has ousted liberal voices from many institutions like the National Book Trust and ICCR. In February, Amartya Sen, an outspoken critic of Modi, withdrew his candidature for a second term as the chancellor of Nalanda University. One of the main targets of the government is the legacy of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who laid the foundation for a secular nation. They have announced plans to rename the Nehru Museum and change its focus to highlight the achievements of Modi. A BJP Member of Parliament has described Nathuram Godse, the man who assassinated Mahatma Gandhi, as a "patriot." His opinion is shared by many of his colleagues. When the BJP came to power last year, it was understood that Hindu fundamentalists would be emboldened. But no one expected them to cause so much damage to the moral fabric of the country in just over a year. They have four more years left. The time has come for Indians to inquire why secular democratic movements that led to independence have been unable to reproduce their spirit beyond one or two generations. How is the genie going to be put back into the bottle? And that's hardly a question the Indians alone are facing. The writer is an engineer-turned-journalist.

### A WORD A DAY

**SERAC**  
[sɛˈræk]

a pinnacle or ridge of ice on the surface of a glacier

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS  
1 Bolivian city  
6 Crop killer  
11 Fill with joy  
12 "Kiss of the Dragon" star  
13 Eastern Canadian  
15 Golf peg  
16 Black goo  
17 007, for one  
18 Fixes  
20 Toil  
23 Play, as a banjo  
27 On the summit of  
28 Yard tool  
29 Started  
31 Jacket flap  
32 Appear unexpectedly  
34 Neptune's domain

DOWN  
1 Spring period  
2 Lotion additive  
3 Cover with asphalt  
4 - stand - still  
5 Peel-scraping tool  
6 Norse inlets  
7 No longer active: Abbr.  
8 Singer Redding  
9 Open-handed hit  
10 Wee  
14 Paint buy

37 Mattress attachment  
38 Question of identity  
41 Eastern Canadian  
44 Film award  
45 Like potato chips  
46 Irritable  
47 Almanac section

18 Remove, as a spill  
19 Backpack part  
20 Chemist's place  
21 Had dinner  
22 Marsh  
24 Kanye's music  
25 Luau instrument  
26 Singer Torme  
30 Official witness  
31 "Dracula" star Bela  
33 Jotting spot  
34 Mailbox feature  
35 Simplicity  
36 Basics  
38 Untamed  
39 Despise  
40 Cameo stone  
42 Mouse's cousin  
43 Sprinted

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER  
NECK AVON  
SOLO LINER  
ADORE EMCÉE  
RIPPED ADD  
ACES RIFLES  
HER RIBALD  
TIPIN  
SCAMPS LAM  
SPARSE SUMO  
WIN DIPPED  
AGAPE DRONE  
POPIN LANDS  
TEND EYES

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