

Paris attacks

We must hone our efforts

WE repeat our condemnation for the attacks and offer once again our deep condolences for the deaths in both the Paris and Beirut bombings. It is encouraging to note that many Muslim countries have condemned the Paris attacks, but we would hope that more Muslim countries and organisations would do the same.

The attack is very symbolic, both in terms of the target and the date; it is an attack on the very concept of liberty. And at the risk of sounding apocalyptic, let us state that this is not the last of such attacks against targets which IS considers opposed to its beliefs and policies. What France suffered on Friday can befall any country that stands up to the extremist group, both physically and ideologically.

The message of the IS should not be lost on us. It is thus essential to formulate a common strategy against a threat that cannot be combated singly. And we say this in spite of the many reservations we have about the misplaced policies of the West, regarding the Middle East in particular.

For one thing, to avoid the government intelligence net and conduct operations in a country which was already in a state of high alert after January 2015 is something that must be worrisome for all security agencies. And also, that an entire nation can be psychologically pulverised by a handful of men is a lesson for those who are number crunching on the size of the IS' ranks.

In light of what happened in Paris, we need to shed our sentiments and look dispassionately at the implications and the lessons that can be drawn from the tragedy, particularly for Bangladesh, and work towards a common strategy.

Occupying playground for 'Bijoy Fair'

Is this the best way to demonstrate patriotism?

THE construction of structures for a "Bijoy Fair" on a playground shared by two schools in Chandpur does justice neither to the spirit of our glorious Liberation War nor to the students who need a playground for their overall development. According to a photo in this newspaper, construction has already begun — meaning the playground will be off-limits to the children of these two schools for over a month. We feel that in attempting to commemorate our hard-earned liberty, the organisers of the fair are in fact stealing the children's freedom to play, which, ample research shows, is necessary for their physical growth, behaviour, achievement in test scores and more importantly, their social, cognitive and creative development.

Couldn't there be a better way to celebrate our victory? Is there no other ground in that area where the fair could be organised? If no, could it not be limited to a week instead of being allowed to go on for more than a month? And if the idea is to uphold and promote the ethos of 1971, could it not be done by other means such as educating students on the history of the War and engaging the public through cultural programmes and activities that do not warrant occupying a playground for a month?

The local administration should reach out to the local community for a consensus on how to better observe one of the most important days in our nation's history.

COMMENTS

"All fugitives to be brought back home: Home Minister"
(November 14, 2015)

Mohammad Minul Hossain
Then start the process soon.

"When will we have such polls again?"
(November 13, 2015)

Nondini Monwar
A very pertinent question.

Kamrul Manir
The editor has penned the desire and dream of the democracy loving people of this country. I too wonder when we will have such elections in our country.

Naim Chowdhury
When people want change and political parties stop their blame games.

"It's all because of war trial, says intel"
(November 13, 2015)

Md Nuruzzaman Habib
A very easy excuse to hide their inefficiency and failures.

"His sufferings may end soon"
(November 13, 2015)

Kamrun Nahar
Pleased to learn that. So humanity does exist in some places.

Hope is hollow on its own



#ResearchMesearch
NADINE SHAANTA MURSHID

I have been silent for a while. Because I refuse to react to the brutality of the world around us, I prefer to respond. And I wanted to wait till things passed. And they did. But only to be replaced by new atrocities, new acts of terror.

And suddenly I realised that I can no longer respond either. Because it no longer matters. Mine is just another voice, an addition to the chatter that follows every "outrageous" event that we are privy to on a regular basis. But then perusing the articles that quickly populate social media after such events, I couldn't help but have a few scattered thoughts surrounding certain narratives that emerged after the most recent killing of the publisher, Faisal Arefin Dipan. In no particular order:

I
The New York Times published a report on Farzana Mithila, a TV personality, who lives in fear of being killed. She is portrayed as a victim who has no choice but to seek help from her husband who drives her to work (and patriarchy wins, again). When my friend Kathy Ward sent me that article, I read it, waiting for the meat in the story, and found none. I told her that that article panders to Western stereotypes of the working woman in the Global South, forever in fear of something or the other — the current fear being the extermination of bloggers. And I have issues with fear too, because fear is like fire. Once instilled, it's hard to kill. Fear is the weapon of choice of so many — Bush Jr to Osama bin Laden — but we still seek refuge in it. And I have a problem with that too, because it is a way to not do anything. We use it to self-censor, to silence ourselves.

And then there's the politics of victimhood and the associated saviours. Once we become "victims," a saviour (or two) will emerge. And we may not like that. (Sidebar: There was a Facebook post going around guilting people to post a cancer awareness post that identified cancer survivors as "victims." To all those people who shared that: please think twice before you call someone a victim. My grandmother had cancer and she was a fighter, like all others who have or had cancer. None of them are victims, not for a second.)

II
What is a "free thinker"? I've seen many posts, national and international, saying "free thinkers are being killed in Bangladesh" — as if all the people who are being killed are the same. That's what *some people* want us to think — they want us to ascribe certain attributes to a "free thinker," creating false identities for all those who have been murdered in the name of "free thinking."

But is Avijit Roy the same as Dipan? Did they have

the same politics? The same ideology? No. Not that I can see. But what happens if we think they are the same? We think we are different and therefore protected from the machete wielding pawns of a higher power. And worse, we think, *they had it coming*. Or maybe even worse, we think, *they perhaps deserved it*. Everyone in Bangladesh knows this, but others don't — by free thinking individuals we mean atheists. But



Activists marched with mock coffins to protest the recent murder of a publisher and attempted murder of writers and bloggers.

when this is reported internationally, that context is lost. And when they kill Dipan, that context is made murky because he was no atheist. But it's enough to confuse people. This confusion, I'm sure, is not an accident.

III
The increase in the number of madrasas in an FT report was touted as the reason behind "increased militancy" — and I don't completely refute that — but having that conversation without talking about the reasons for which these madrasas exist in the first place is a disservice to the discourse on madrasas. Madrasas meet a certain need — a need for education in a country that has failed its poorest people by not making education accessible to them — a need that madrasas have emerged to fill. Sure, money from the Middle East flew into create these madrasas, but had there been no need for educa-

tion, this would not have happened.

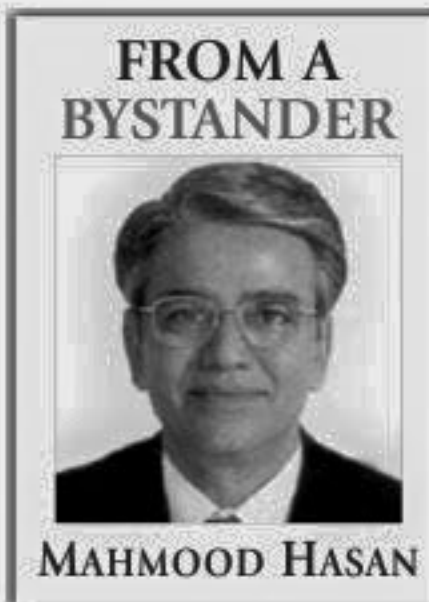
IV
The word intolerance has been thrown around as the reason behind atrocities against minorities and individuals with differing opinions, the idea being that we need to breed tolerance. But tolerance, as a student pointed out in my class, has a negative

connotation that suggests that there is no respect, you *tolerate* the other because you should. On the other hand, mere *intolerance* does not describe the brutal killings and systematic oppression that we see around us, suggests Arundhati Roy — we need to understand who and what is at the root of the violence that has become so pervasive — it is bigotry, parochialism, and any and all forms of hyphenated chauvinism.

V
We should stop talking about hope. About being hopeful. Hope has to *die*. It's hope that makes us complacent. It makes us think that things will get better. Hope is irrational. Because things are not going to get better on its own. It just won't.

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BJP THRASHED IN BIHAR



FROM A BYSTANDER
MAHMOOD HASAN

THE Grand Alliance called Mahagatbandhan of three parties led by Nitish Kumar and Lalu Prasad Yadav humiliated the BJP-led NDA in the Bihar Legislative Assembly Elections. The 5-phase election began on October 12 and concluded on November 5, 2015. The results for the 243-member Assembly announced on November 8 have shocked BJP stalwarts, but did not surprise secular Indians.

Bihar is important for the Union Government (i.e. BJP) for a number of reasons. It is the third most populous state of India (over 100 million) and it borders Nepal where constitution related instability is still smoldering. Muslims constitute the second largest community (18 percent) after Hindus. It also has a very large segment (over 25 percent) of "other backward class" (OBC) and "extreme backward class" (EBC) of Hindus. No wonder Modi addressed nearly 30 rallies, while BJP chief Amit Shah camped in Bihar for 8 months to lead the campaign.

The Grand Alliance (GA) is a "secular" grouping of three disparate parties formed in May 2014. It includes Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United) or JD(U); Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) of wily Lalu Prasad Yadav; and the dysfunctional Indian National Congress.

The Alliance secured 178 seats — 71 for JD(U), 80 for RJD and 27 for Congress. National Democratic Alliance (NDA) got only 58 seats — 53 went to BJP and 5 went to NDA partners. The remaining 7 seats went to other political

parties and independents.

Nitish Kumar's JD(U) broke out of NDA led by Narendra Modi way back in 2013. Nitish realised that tagging along with upper caste Hindu dominated NDA would alienate him from his backward class constituencies. In a way Nitish Kumar, a former Union Minister, took the election as a personal challenge against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Nitish had no love lost for the charismatic former CM Lalu Yadav, who is debarred from elections because of his conviction in the infamous fodder scam. But to challenge BJP these two former foes got together to stall Modi's juggernaut. Lalu during his tenure as CM had promoted and encouraged caste-based politics. He comes from the Yadav community (i.e. OBC) and has a strong Muslim-Yadav vote bank in Bihar.

Apart from caste issues, the other reason why Nitish did well is good governance in otherwise "lawless Bihar". Nitish, portrayed as a "Vikas Purush", has persistently pushed for "development" of the state. As CM of Bihar since 2000, he has gone tough on law and order and pushed Bihar's GDP growth above the national average. People have opted for popular Nitish who has delivered, rather than Modi who has made tall promises but failed to deliver so far.

Given Bihar's complex demography, an analysis on how Biharis voted shows that it was an electoral battle between the polarised backward castes of Bihar against BJP's upper caste Hindus. Nitish Kumar, a Kurmi (i.e. OBC), played the caste card effectively. Among the 242 candidates fielded by the Alliance, 133 candidates were from backward communities. All the 24 Muslim candidates who won Assembly seats were from the

Alliance except for one from the CPI. BJP contested from 160 constituencies where 65 upper caste candidates were its backbone. The three other NDA partners fought for 83 seats.

It was an election about caste and identity. The lower caste Hindus plus the Muslims firmly rejected communal intolerance. The "secular" Mahagatbandhan was thus a formidable alliance that had thwarted BJP's Hindutva ideology. Hindutva is understood as ultra-nationalism highlighted by communalism and intolerance, and mixed with high doses of Hinduism.

During the campaign BJP made some serious mistakes according to the Indian news media. Among the notable blunders were — playing majoritarianism, "Hindutva" politics of communalism and intolerance, caste reservation and beef politics. Also Modi playing big brother to Nepal, which adjoins Bihar, appears to have spurned voters from BJP.

There has been a beef controversy in India for ages. The cow is regarded as sacred by Hindus. But lower income groups of backward Hindu communities consume it nevertheless. BJP's intolerance towards Muslims had provoked the killing of three Muslims in the past two months on suspicion of them eating or carrying beef. Prime Minister Modi, BJP President Amit Shah and RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat used insensitive and foul language during the campaign, particularly regarding the killings of two Dalit children by upper caste Hindus and caste reservations.

BJP's communal hatred and intolerance has already produced backlash. Dozens of writers and poets have returned their prestigious Sahitya

Akademi awards to protest the silence of the Modi government following the killings of three intellectuals allegedly by Hindu zealots. Booker prize winner and activist Arundhati Roy also returned her National Award because she was "shocked" at the "growing intolerance" fostered by the present government. Meanwhile, secular Indians have raised a storm against BJP's intolerant politics.

On November 11, senior leaders led by L.K. Advani revolted against Modi-Shah combine for the disastrous defeat in Bihar. In a written statement veteran leaders Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Yashwant Sinha and Shanta Kumar accused Modi and Shah saying that the party has been "emasculated" in the last one year and was being "forced to kowtow to a handful". After winning the Lok Sabha elections last year, Modi cleverly sidelined these old veterans and took firm control of the party. These angry leaders have now taken out their daggers to challenge Modi and Shah. How this revolt plays out in Indian politics will be interesting to follow.

Nitish Kumar will be sworn in as Chief Minister on November 20 in Patna. The ceremony will be attended by anti-BJP leaders like Sonia Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee (CM of WB), Arvind Kejriwal (CM Delhi), Akhilesh Yadav (CM of UP) and others. It is being described as a "new beginning of opposition unity in the country".

After BJP's rout at the hands of Aam Admi Party at the Delhi Assembly elections in February 2015, the Bihar humiliation is a terrible setback for BJP's intolerant politics. Looks like India's honeymoon with Hindutva is waning.

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Flag-bearers of Hinduism are on the wrong path

It is very sad that recently three innocent men were killed in India over the issue of beef. A Muslim man was beaten to death by a mob in Bishara village in response to rumours that he had eaten beef. Another man died after being attacked by villagers who believed he was involved in cattle smuggling. And a trucker was killed in Udhampur, in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, over rumours that he had been involved in cow killings. Three deaths in just three weeks. I, myself being Hindu, strongly

protest these killings.

Unfortunately, some people are out to make beef-consumption a controversial political issue. But the fact is, a huge number of Hindus themselves also eat beef. Moreover, last year India was ranked as the second largest beef exporter in the world after Brazil. Don't these bigots know this? Why are they targeting people of other faith? A man of any religion has the absolute freedom to select his food choices. My suggestion to these people is, please go and fight the ugly caste system instead — a system that continues to exist in a very crude form.

Pradip Das, On e-mail

Judiciary and disciplinary action

This refers to the report, "Action against District Judge" (Nov 8). It is uncommon to see a judge being subjected to disciplinary action. Not many nations have a separate body for judicial accountability. But nations like the UK and the US have such bodies.

Whatever faith people have in the judiciary should not be shaken due to some black sheep. The professional and personal yardsticks for judges should inspire public confidence.

Deendayal M. Lulla
On e-mail