

# LONG ROAD TO DEMOCRACY

## Blasts at Hindu temple

**Condemnation no longer enough**  
 WE are horror-struck by the series of blasts in the historic Kantaji Temple in Kaharol upazila of Dinajpur early yesterday that has injured at least 10 people. The crude bombs, which reportedly were planted on the ground, went off during a *jatra* (open air drama) at Rash Mela, a traditional religious festival of the Hindu community dating back 500 years which draws as many as two lakh devotees each year, including people from neighbouring countries.

We wonder how these bombs could be planted at such a well-known location preceding a huge religious gathering, evading the watch of the law enforcement agencies. This is a serious breach of security for which relevant authorities must be held answerable.

These blasts are not only an attack on the Hindu community but also on the pluralistic fabric of Bangladeshi society. This act of violence comes just eight days after armed assailants attacked a Shia mosque in Shibganj upazila and 38 days into the bomb explosions at Hossaini Dalan in Dhaka. Two Christian priests were attacked and several others were threatened over the same period, highlighting the increasing vulnerability of minority communities in the country.

We condemn these systematic attacks in no uncertain terms, and urge the government to take immediate steps to bring the perpetrators to justice and tackle the growing intolerance and extremism in the country head-on.

The government, which professes to defend the ideals of secularism and pluralism, can no longer afford to remain unperturbed by these continued acts of terror, which are sustained by bigoted ideologies that are spreading their tentacles at an alarming rate. The time to act decisively is long past.

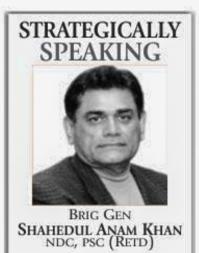
## Lawmaker breaking the rules

**No one is above the law**

THE alleged involvement of a local lawmaker from Chuadanga in the attack on a police station to free pro-ruling party activists is shocking, to say the least. How is it that the district police chief and a number of police officials can be assaulted within the premises of Chuadanga Sadar Police Station? What sort of message are we giving out to ordinary people when bombs are hurled at a police station and the attackers turn out to be not terrorists but men who claim to answer to an elected lawmaker and that too of the ruling party? Serving policemen were injured and vehicles belonging to the police were vandalised with complete impunity.

As per press reports, we understand that the policemen were abused both verbally and physically. There is something fundamentally wrong with this incident. We are dumbfounded by the notion that seems to be prevalent with some lawmakers in the land that holding a parliamentary chair gives them sweeping powers over their respective constituencies. Contrary to what these people think, there is such a thing as 'rule of law' and institutionalising that notion is the direct responsibility of 'public representatives'.

We applaud the police for doing their duty albeit under difficult circumstances. Actions by men claiming to belong to a coterie that answers to a particular lawman is reprehensible and condemnable. The incident that has occurred will do little to uplift our image as a society that embraces law and order; rather where might over peoples' will is the true law in the land.



BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN NDC, PSC (RETD)

**STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING**  
 TODAY the country is celebrating two historic events in one – Fall of Autocracy and Revival of Democracy. It was fall of autocracy alright but whether democracy has been resurrected in its true and pristine form is a matter for the people to tell.

The true character of democracy in the country was brought out very aptly in 2011 by a leader of the BNP when he ruefully remarked, "We have only 18 inches of democracy," while being hemmed in by the police, as were his colleagues, in front of his party office, unable to go out on the streets on a day of hartal they had called in September. It must be added that similar treatment had been also meted out to the opposition when the BNP was in power.

In the more than 44 years of its existence, democracy has been conspicuous in Bangladesh either by its long absence or its feeble attempt to survive in a quasi – and largely dysfunctional – state. And a greater part of the history of Bangladesh had been predominated by the involvement of its armed forces in the country's politics, beginning from August 15, 1975.

Unfortunately, democracy in Bangladesh had a very convoluted start; it faltered at the very seminal stages of the country's road to self-governance. The very democratic rights, for which the Bengalis fought the Pakistani establishment, were trampled on the formation of one-party rule in January 1975. Ironically it was a democratically elected Parliament that signed its own death warrant by voting into law the 4th Amendment in January 1975. That, unfortunately, was the start of a non-pluralistic political order with brief intermissions of quasi-democratic regimes, until 1991.

The brief BAKSAL period, that witnessed the abrogation of democratic institutions, including the guillotining of the media, ended on August 15, 1975 with the entry of the 'Khaki' on the scene and the brutal murder of the Father of the Nation along with many members of his family.

There is a large corpus of literature on the tragic event of August 15, on why and how it came about. The incident initiated a chain of events that were to shape the political developments in the country for the next two decades. It saw the imposition of martial law whose head, of all people, was the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The situation soon changed but not before another upheaval through the so-called "7th November Sepoy Revolution" when General Ziaur Rahman formally assumed power. The period between 1977 and May 1981, under General Zia, can best be described as a period of command politics that witnessed the politicisation of the military and also the distortion of the legacy and history of the liberation war by allowing razzakars and anti-liberation forces into power and politics.

But the pseudo-democratic period of Zia also saw changes in the four Basic Principles of the Constitution and incorporation in it of 'Bismillah' and "Faith in the Almighty Allah". That was when religion came into politics.

President Zia and his rule came to a violent end with his assassination on May 30, 1981. Although there was a peaceful handover of power to the Vice-President, and the army, with the then Chief of Army

Staff General Ershad, had expressed complete obedience to the elected government, the fealty was short lived and so was the Sattar interregnum.

General Ershad's views about the future role of the armed forces in running the affairs of the state adumbrated his takeover in March 1982. He lasted ten years during which time he floated a new party, held a general election that was participated by the AL, made Islam the state religion, politicised the military and militarised the civil administration as a continuation of President Zia's policy.

Ershad lasted that long mainly because of the state of animus between the two major political parties, a relationship that has influenced politics in the country, and which continues even today.

By the end of 1990, people's patience had run out, and for once the political parties managed to close ranks to bring Ershad down. Ershad realised the wisdom of choosing discretion to valour, particularly

the Parliament seats were uncontested and the opposition in the Parliament is also a part of the ruling coalition. The election was marred by violence on an unprecedented scale perpetrated by the BNP in its efforts to hinder the voting. The shenanigans that the AL employed in persuading, cajoling, enticing and coercing the participation of the JP is too well known to most of us to be recounted.

Unfortunately, the whiff of fresh air that swept over the country with the end of military rule in 1991 and resurrection of the democratic process was only a whiff. It was short lived primarily because of the way the two major parties, the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, that were alternately in power since 1991, chose to conduct politics and practice democracy.

The AL introduced a dangerous precedent of boycotting the Parliament followed most diligently by the BNP when it was in opposition. While the democratic



Police attacking a procession brought out against autocracy in 1990.

PHOTO: ABU TAHER KHOKAN

when he saw that his power base, the army, had deserted him and had expressed their loyalty to where they should, the people.

The general election, held under an interim arrangement, helped revive democracy in Bangladesh in January 1991 after a long 15 years. But regrettably, democracy was marked by a deficit of trust as exemplified in the formulation of a very unique arrangement – that of a caretaker system of government that would run the elections. The changing positions of the two parties at different times on the issue of caretaker system has exposed the fact that it is not democracy or serving the people that mattered to them but going to power and holding on to it at all costs. The events preceding the adoption of the 15th Amendment doing away with the caretaker system validate this point all the more.

The January 2014 election was unique and so is the present Parliament stemming from it. More than half

space has become more and more constrained due to government policy of not allowing the BNP any grounds, politics had also taken a violent form in the first three months of January 2015, again on an unprecedented scale. And a dangerous precedent is being set when the government chooses to brandish the flag of 'development' as if we must choose either it or democracy.

A good part of the second AL regime (2009-2014) was encumbered with the question of how the next parliamentary election was going to be held. We got the answer. However, the question still persists. We wait to see how things develop and whether the AL will opt to ride roughshod over the sentiments of a large number of voters and stage the same kind of election it did in 2014 and make our road to real democracy even longer.

The author is Associate Editor, *The Daily Star*.

### PROJECT SYNDICATE

## Why is Einstein famous?



ANDREW ROBINSON

**CULTURE AND SOCIETY**  
 ALBERT Einstein announced his greatest achievement, the general theory of relativity, in Berlin a century ago, on November 25, 1915. For many

years, hardly any physicist could understand it. But, since the 1960s, following decades of controversy, most cosmologists have regarded general relativity as the best available explanation, if not the complete description, of the observed structure of the universe, including black holes.

And yet, even today, hardly anyone apart from specialists understands general relativity – unlike, say, the theory of natural selection, the periodic table of the elements, and the wave/particle duality in quantum theory. So why is Einstein the world's most famous and most quoted (and misquoted) scientist – far ahead of Isaac Newton or Stephen Hawking – as well as a universal byword for genius?

Einstein's fame is indeed puzzling. When he gave lectures about general relativity at Oxford University in 1931, the academic audience packed the hall, only to ebb away, baffled by his mathe-

matics and his German, leaving only a small core of experts. Afterward, a cleaner rubbed the equations off the blackboard (though thankfully one blackboard was saved and is on display in Oxford's Museum of the History of Science).

Yet, when Einstein and his wife appeared as the personal guests of Charlie Chaplin at the 1931 premiere of Chaplin's film *City Lights* in Los Angeles, they had to battle their way through frantically pressing and cheering crowds (on whom the police had earlier threatened to use tear gas). The entire movie theater rose in their honour. A somewhat baffled Einstein asked his host what it all meant. "They cheer me because they all understand me, and they cheer you because no one understands you," quipped Chaplin.

In the 1940s, Einstein told a biographer: "I never understood why the theory of relativity with its concepts and problems so far removed from practical life should for so long have met with a lively, or indeed passionate, resonance among broad circles of the public... I have never yet heard a truly convincing answer to this question." To a New York Times interviewer, he disarmingly remarked: "Why is it that nobody understands me, yet everybody likes me?"

Part of the reason for Einstein's fame is surely that his earliest, and best

known, achievement – the 1905 special theory of relativity – seemed to have come out of the blue, without any prior achievement. Like Newton (but unlike Charles Darwin), he did not have any one of distinction in his family. He was not notably excellent at school and college (unlike Marie Curie); in fact, he failed to obtain a university position after graduation. He was not part of the scientific establishment, and worked mostly alone. In 1905, he was struggling as a mere patent clerk, with a newborn child. Regardless of whether we grasp relativity, his apparently sudden burst of genius inevitably intrigues everyone.

A further reason for Einstein's fame is that he was active in many areas far afield from physics, notably politics and religion, including Zionism. He is best known in this regard for his open opposition to Nazi Germany from 1933, his private support for building the atomic bomb in 1939, and his public criticism of the hydrogen bomb and McCarthyism in the 1950s (J. Edgar Hoover's FBI promptly launched a secret investigation of him). In 1952, he was offered the presidency of Israel.

Clearly, Einstein's turbulent later life and courageous stands fascinate many people who are bemused by general relativity. According to Bertrand Russell: "Einstein was not only a great scientist,

he was a great man." Jacob Bronowski proposed that "Newton is the Old Testament god; it is Einstein who is the New Testament figure...full of humanity, pity, a sense of enormous sympathy."

Arthur C. Clarke believed that it was "Einstein's unique combination of genius, humanist, pacifist, and eccentric" that "made him accessible – and even lovable – to tens of millions of people." Richard Dawkins calls himself "unworthy to lace Einstein's sockless shoes...I gladly share his magnificently godless spirituality."

Such a combination of solitary brilliance, personal integrity, and public activism is rare among intellectuals. When one adds Einstein's lifelong gift for witty aphorism when dealing with the press and the public, his unique and enduring fame no longer seems so puzzling.

After all, who could fail to be charmed by his popular summary of relativity: "An hour sitting with a pretty girl on a park bench passes like a minute, but a minute sitting on a hot stove seems like an hour." And then there is my own favorite: "To punish me for my contempt of authority, Fate has made me an authority myself."

The writer is the author of *Einstein: A Hundred Years of Relativity and Genius: A Very Short Introduction*. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2015. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to *The Daily Star*)

## COMMENTS

### "Govt using Facebook" (December 3, 2015)

Farzana

It is so hilarious!

Nasim Shikder

The government has banned Facebook but they themselves are using it through proxy servers! How funny!

Sourav

The criminals also know how to circumvent the ban.

Ahad Kabir

It's nothing but a farce.

### "The world in his hand" (December 3, 2015)

Fahima

Bravo Mustafiz! We wish you more success.

Ana Robin

This young man has proved his talent within a very short period of time.

### "Genocide Coolly planned, carried out" (December 3, 2015)

Raheek

Shame on Pakistan! They keep denying it while all the evidence

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Poor umpiring in BPL

Umpiring in the match between Chittagong Vikings and Sylhet Superstars on December 2 was not up to the standard. Dilshan was clearly caught behind by Rubel Hossain but the umpire denied the latter's appeal. BCB must take initiatives to improve the quality of umpiring so that these kinds of errors do not occur during the tournament. Md. Abdul Karim Bangladesh Bank



PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

### Change the exam date

The written examination date for the position of "Assistant Director" in the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has been announced on 11th December at 9 am. Unfortunately, most of the candidates who have been selected in the preliminary examination have another written examination for the position of "Assistant Revenue Officer" in NBR at the same time on the same date. Our humble request to Anti-Corruption Commission is to change the examination date so that we can participate in both the exams. K. M. Mazbah Uddin Dhaka