

Victims' families living in fear

State should provide protection

IT is with dismay we witness that the families of the seven-murder victims in Narayanganj still live in fear of their lives. This is so because they have been openly intimidated by associates allegedly close to Nur Hossain, the main accused, who was repatriated to Bangladesh less than a year ago. What is alarming to note is that he, allegedly, has had his goons openly parading the streets outside the homes of these families in an act of coercion. One could easily be misled into thinking that Nur Hossain's power and influence remain despite incarceration.

Certainly, the State and law enforcers have a moral duty to protect witnesses from harm. Time has come for a full-fledged witness protection programme, which would allow for some level of security to witnesses in sensitive cases such as this. Because we know that some 12 of the 35 accused in the case are still absconding, and this represents a real danger to witnesses for the prosecution in the case.

The Narayanganj seven-murder case involves influential personalities, and the principal accused has a long reach. That some of his associates have resurfaced should be sending signals to the authorities. Failure to provide protection to the witnesses is simply unacceptable from a moral point of view. Should any untoward incident occur, it will have wider ramifications for future trials where people will simply refuse to come forward to offer testimony. That would be a step backward in ensuring the rule of law.

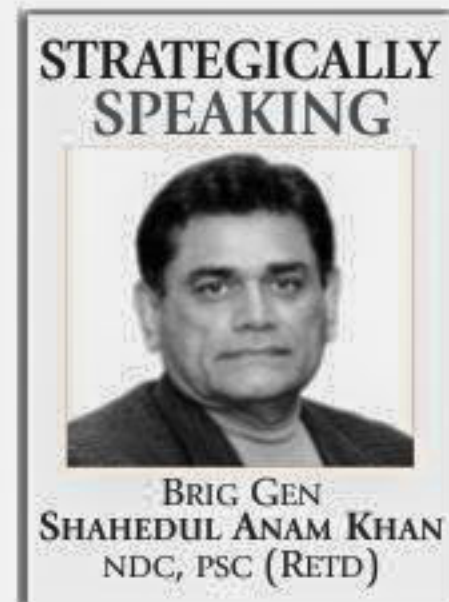
Water, water, nowhere!

Handle the crisis seriously

AS the sweltering heat makes life intolerable for Dhaka dwellers, a severe water crisis has made things go from bad to worse for residents of Dhanmondi, Indira Road, Senpara Parbata and Old Dhaka. In other parts of town, such as Bashabo, Madartek, Mugda, Tantibazar and West Rajabazar, residents have to make do with dirty and smelly water. If the water shortage was a one-off occurrence, the residents might have found a temporary solution, but in many areas, the water supply has been in a state of suspension for two weeks straight.

Moreover residents are also having to put up with frequent load shedding in this unbearable heat. The power cuts are aggravating the water shortage even further. It is frustrating for city dwellers that rather than confront the water shortage that is paralysing large parts of the city head on, the authorities seem to be downplaying its severity by stating that only some "pocket" areas in the city are experiencing the crisis. What is even more aggravating is that, come every summer, residents encounter the same problem of inadequate supply, and receive trite responses from the authorities as to why they could not generate adequate supply. And yet, they do little to decrease their dependence on groundwater for years on end.

We reiterate that the authorities must take this issue seriously, providing both short-term relief to city-dwellers and undertaking a long-term plan to resolve the water crisis so that next summer this insufferable situation is not repeated. Meanwhile, the authorities should ensure that the power cuts come to an end which, in addition to providing relief to residents in this heat, will also ease the water supply.



BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN NDC, PSC (RETD)

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING
THERE is no doubt that a deep sense of insecurity pervades the mind of the people in the country. And this I say risking being labeled a fear-monger and alarmist. But the reality is that people are being killed in broad daylight and not even homes are adequate protection against the clandestine groups; and there is nothing clandestine about their actions, they are deterred neither by people nor by daylight. Thus the statement of the home minister that there is nothing to worry is little comfort to the common person who is not sure when it will be his or her turn to get hit.

These incidents are not isolated, much as the administration would have us believe, and we will be completely amiss were we to go only by the number of people killed in these attacks. These killings are not a matter of law and order either, although that aspect leaves much to be desired, given that as per report in one newspaper, more than a thousand people have been killed in the last three months alone. The extremists are targeting individuals. From foreigners to clerics, both Muslim and non-Muslim, to teachers and bloggers to activists, it is the persona of the victims that should give a fairly good idea about the psyche of the killers.

Anybody doing anything that is anath-

ema to these bigoted groups has met with the inevitable fate. The state has been unable to prevent recurrence of the attacks. Therefore it is not enough to say, as the home minister does, that the militants who were active in the past are now either in jail, or facing trials or under surveillance, and that the government did not let the militants raise their heads in any parts of the country. Apparently there are many militants that have not been

have been perpetrated by the same group or groups that hold similar ideologies as the major international terrorist groups, quite apparent from the selection of targets. And the motivation behind the recent killings, we believe, is the same as those that have provoked the killings in the recent past. And at this point several statements emanating from very senior personalities of the government and the administration engage our thoughts.

not bring down a government, let alone destabilise it.

The undue preoccupation of the administration in trying to disprove the presence of IS in the country is noticeable. One feels that the home ministry is taking the word 'presence' too literally. Of course we have no report of IS entering Bangladesh through the borders and we can vouch that IS soldiers have not parachuted into our territory to set up a base. To that extent certainly there is no IS 'presence' here. However, we cannot overlook the fact that there are a number of Islamic militant groups in the country, and at least 12 of those have been outlawed by the government. Can we guarantee that some of those do not have ideological moorings in the IS philosophy even if not organically linked to the group? We should be worried about the fact that the people are being killed by extremists and the motive is religious. But whatever may be their label they must be stopped immediately.

It is by netting the masterminds that the state can bring relief to the people. We understand very well that it is not possible to provide individual security, but an individual can be made to feel safe when he or she will know that such killers have been neutralised and those not will be prevented before they can act. And safe individuals mean a safe society. It is not individual protection we ask for but a sense of collective safety. And this bounden duty the police cannot absolve itself of.

The writer is Associate Editor, The Daily Star.

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netted, and it seems those under surveillance have managed to give their watchers the slip and carry out their killing missions, which, by the way, were well planned and conducted in a professional manner, one hates to admit. Going by the way that these groups are operating it is not they who have been cowed down.

The urgent need is to track them down and bust the gangs. There is little doubt that the killings, since 2013 in particular,

Finger has been pointed at the main opposition and its partner accusing them of fomenting trouble to destabilise the government. This is not an improbable proposition and therefore it devolves on the government to take appropriate measures. But one wonders whether at this point in time the party is capable of or prepared to risk their future by targeting individuals. If it is to destabilise it should have realised that this sort of killings do

Democracy under construction



AMITAVA KAR

where clothed men—uniformed to be more precise—have had all the influence for more than 50 years.

That's changing with Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy winning a decisive majority in the November 2015 elections. She is sending a clear message to the generals: civilians are going to call the shots from now on and she will be in charge.

Barred from becoming president by the military-drafted 2008 constitution "for the good of the mother country", she assumed three key positions in the government to fortify her leadership—"State Counsellor", foreign minister and minister in the president's office. The combination of jobs will allow her to oversee the president's office, shape foreign policy and coordinate decision-making between the executive branch and the parliament.

Things have started moving. As "State Counsellor", she bypassed the military-controlled Ministry of Home Affairs and used legal processes to release students who had been jailed last year for protesting the new education reform law. In her first meeting as foreign minister with her Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, she made it clear that Beijing would have to pursue its interests in Myanmar with her rather than through the Army, as had been the case in the past.

Military members of the parliament denounced the moves as "democratic bullying". At a parade last month, Min Aung Hlaing, commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, reminded citizens that "the Army ensures the stability of the country" and "has to be present in a leading role in national politics". The four-star general, despite reaching the retirement age of 60, will see his term extended for another five years, according to Wall Street Journal. He is in no hurry for the Army to step back from politics.

Suu Kyi cannot send the generals, who kept her under house arrest for 15 years, back to the barracks overnight. They still control three important ministries—home affairs, defence and border affairs. The first allows them to

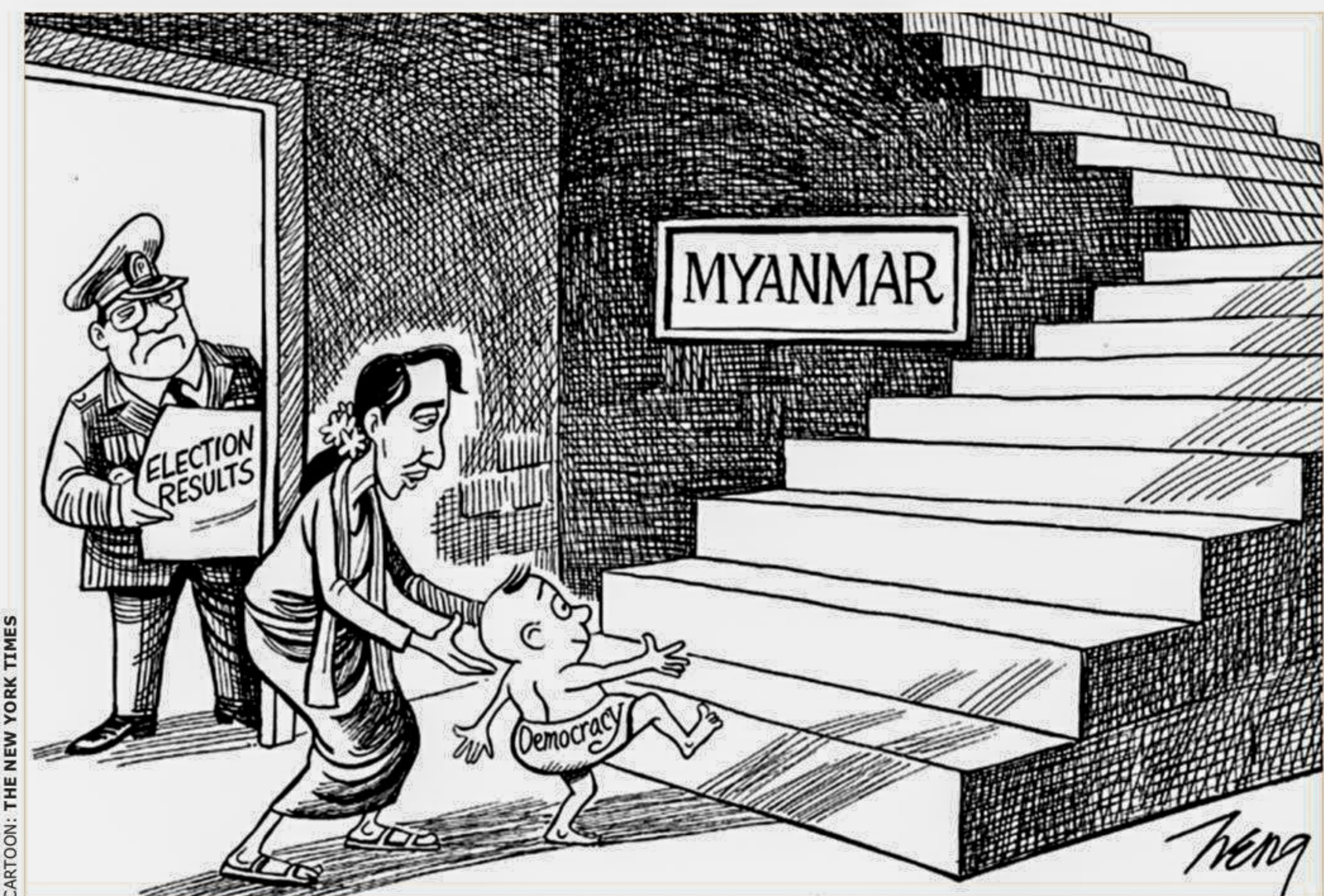
control the state's administrative apparatus, right down to the grassroots level. Through these centres of power, it dominates the National Defence and Security Council which can dissolve parliament and impose martial law. Amending the constitution remains impossible as it requires a majority exceeding 75 percent in the parliament. Since the army has 25 percent seats reserved by law, it holds a perpetual veto.

The task ahead is daunting. In most key human development indicators, her country sits at the bottom of the pit in

segregated live in extreme poverty, without basic physical or financial infrastructure.

Other priorities include reaching lasting peace with ethnic minorities along the country's borders some of whom have been fighting the central government for decades and put an end to laws that have been used to stifle dissent. Most important of all is to redress the vicious persecution of hundreds of thousands of Muslim Rohingyas who have been made stateless by a 1982 law and have been languishing in squalid camps or confined

Army on the matter. As of right now, Myanmar has the world's goodwill and potential abounds. Washington wants to seize the opportunity to pull the Army away from China's ambit and towards itself at a time when it is looking for new partners in the Indo-Pacific region to bolster its "pivot" strategy. The country has abundant natural resources and is wedged between the massive markets of China, India and Southeast Asia. A lot of expatriate Burmese are returning home, bringing in ideas, enthusiasm and skills with them.



Southeast Asia. The new government inherits high inflation, large budget and current-account deficits, an unstable exchange rate and institutions ossified by decades of corruption and authoritarian rule. FDI rose to over USD 8 billion during the last fiscal year, but much of that money remains concentrated in the country's jade, oil and gas industries—tied to former generals. And as the country opens up further, it is the urban "elites" and big corporations under the control of armed forces that are likely to benefit most from increased liquidity while people in rural and ethnically

to their villages while thousands more have fled the country, many into the hands of human traffickers. Suu Kyi has to find a way to quash the Anti-Islamic sentiment violently stirred-up among the near 70 percent Bamar population in part by the 969 movement initiated by radical Buddhist monk Wirathu.

Myanmar's new government will also have to tackle land rights: confusing and poorly enforced laws leave rural farmers vulnerable to confiscation. The NLD's election manifesto promised land reform, but it is easier promised than delivered as it will have to confront the still-powerful

Foreign investment, especially in telecoms and energy, is pouring in. Many believe it can reclaim its title as the world's leading rice exporter.

The low-hanging fruits of Suu Kyi's victory have been picked. Further change will rest on deeper, structural changes that will take much longer. "People expect that the NLD will solve all their problems," said Bo Bo Oo, an MP who spent 20 years in jail for supplying medicine to students. "But it will take at least ten years before we see real change."

The writer is a member of the editorial team of The Daily Star.

COMMENTS

"Fuel oil prices cut by Tk 3-10"
(April 25, 2016)

Umme Habiba

Finally, the government has cut down fuel prices. Hope the bus owners will reduce the fare now.

"RU teacher murdered, then wrongly labelled" (April 25, 2016)

Ibn Hasib

Prof Rezaul Karim was neither an atheist nor did he disrespect any religion in his lifetime; but still he was labelled wrongly and murdered brutally. It's so sad and unfortunate.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Empower the mayors

The sincere efforts of the two mayors of Dhaka, who have been trying to reduce some of the problems of the city, have caught the attention of the citizens. They are receiving accolades from different quarters for their willingness to work. We want them to serve people in an even more capable manner, and to do this, they both need more authority and power. They have expressed their helplessness to media outlets various times, regarding their limitations in this regard. The city mayors are invested in change and

have unending responsibilities, but plainly speaking they are almost powerless, even though the city is gasping for life and city dwellers look forward to the city corporation for amelioration of their sufferings. The fact is that 18 ministries and a host of utility organisations hold sway and have the last word in solving Dhaka city's problems. Without proper empowerment of the mayors, we shouldn't expect something magical from them. They must be given proper authority and power to discharge their duties.



Sakib Muktasid, Azimpur Govt. Colony

Build utility tunnels

A few days ago, we helplessly witnessed a six storied building catching fire in Banani due to leakage in gas pipelines. The police and local residents said that the incident occurred due to negligence of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited that had not paid heed to the complaints of local residents.

Over a few decades, Dhaka has developed into an unplanned mega city. The cities in developed and many developing countries have well-built under-ground tunnels for gas, electricity, water and telephone lines. Dhaka city also needs such tunnels for the utility lines. They may be constructed underneath the pavements. We urge the relevant authorities to consider the matter seriously. Dr. SN Mamoon, Dhaka