

Relocation of educational institutions in DRA

Give them adequate time

A large number of educational institutions in Dhanmondi Residential Area (DRA) have been given notice to shift elsewhere by the Dhaka South City Corporation. And they had been given seven days time to do so. And the concern this has caused to the parents, students and the respective schools and college administration therein is not unjustified. The order is of course in conformity with the High Court ruling of 2012 which directed that the residential area of Dhanmondi should not be commercialized. And the Ruling has been upheld by the Supreme Court very recently.

However, all the institutions served notice have been there, in the unauthorised areas, for a long time and we believe that they could not have been there without permission of the relevant authorities. And they did not come up in a day. Would we be remiss to ask why permission was given in the first place knowing that it was violating the rules? The argument proffered by DSCC that licenses were given due to a "fault in the system" is absurd.

It is true that the pristine character of a residential area should not be marred and no commercial ventures should be allowed except in locations specified within the residential area. And the move by the authorities to ensure that is justified. However, it is not merely the question of relocation of a school or a college, which in itself is a time consuming process, it also involves the interest of a large number of students. Given that, we hope the city corporations would allow a reasonable time to these institutions to react.

Travails of a freedom fighter

It is our shame

Had it not been for his becoming a witness in the trials of the war criminals we might not have come to know of Miron Sheik. For his part in the Liberation War -- providing intelligence to his compatriots, he was shot, mercilessly tortured and left for dead by the Razakars. Regrettably, in the country he helped to liberate from the clutches of the most rapacious occupation forces, he has been living all these years in the most pitiable condition, barely eking out his existence.

And the society was oblivious to his plight all these years when he was going from door to door seeking alms to provide for his family, living hand to mouth and only coming to notice, ironically, during his recent testimony in a trial for war criminals to the International Crimes Tribunal. His travails show us once again the failure on part of the nation to realise the dream for which he and other freedom fighters had fought and given their lives, and our failure to turn that dream into reality.

How can we as a nation fulfil the lofty goals of our War of Liberation if we cannot even take care of our freedom fighters? In fact, such treatment of people who have given us a country to call our own where we can live a life of our choosing should bring us shame. It was time the authorities gave this freedom fighter, and others like him, their due benefits and for society to grant them their deserved recognition.

COMMENTS

"A book lover's reward"

(August 8, 2016)

Shireen Huq

Congratulations to Mahmudul Hoque Moni. I have spent a lot of time in that library. If I have another opportunity to visit that university, I will definitely go to the library and look for the "Moni Corner."

Mohammad Jashim Uddin

Moni is a member of Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS Administration Cadre). He has made us proud. Congratulations to him.

Avoiding the supposedly unavoidable

MUHAMMAD MUSA

THE resilience of Bangladeshis is again being tested. Over 685,000 families across 16 districts have been affected by the recent flooding. Government sources say that 60 people have died, over 1,000 schools have been affected and 15,000 people have lost their homes due to river erosion. Women have to carry drinking water from miles away, despite having water all around them.

Flooding is not a new phenomenon, and yet it continues to be treated with surprise. Almost one fifth of our country goes underwater every year. The geography and topography of Bangladesh means that we will always be prone to flooding, and the situation will only worsen with climate change.

This year's devastation was avoidable. The reason why so many homes were destroyed was not only because there was more water than usual, but also because of the collapse of flood infrastructure, including over 53 kilometres of embankments in locations such as Sunamganj, Fulchhari of Gaibandha and Dimla of Nilphamari.

The infrastructure collapsed because it was not properly maintained. New infrastructure is being built in many places across the country, but we do not have an effective system for repairs or maintenance. The current system does not include scheduled maintenance. Repairs are done on an individual basis. Local government officials make requests to the central government and repairs are often not done until years later because of bureaucratic entanglements.

Communities are very rarely involved in repairing or maintaining infrastructure.

The impact of any natural disaster, and even an increase in rainfall, is exponentially compounded by the fact that our flood infrastructure is permanently in disrepair. This year, the

relatively minor Cyclone Roanu destroyed the embankments of Kutubdia of Cox's Bazar district and Bashkhali and Anwara of Chittagong district.

Before this problem becomes insurmountable, we must change our approach to maintaining flood infrastructure – from the current centralised approach to a more decentralised, community-driven strategy that emphasises community control over decision-making.

embankment, in southern Bangladesh, began in 1960. In the early 1980s, the Water Development Board, for the first time, allowed the community to participate in repairs and maintenance. The embankment was handed over entirely to the local community upon completion, and residents continue to maintain it without any resources from government. The embankment covers nine wards and three villages, and provides permanent safe housing for over

key success factor in many of BRAC's programmes in Bangladesh and globally. We are willing to work with government and non-government organisations to support the creation of a sustainable, community-based approach to the management of flood infrastructure.

The current flooding is a wake-up call. Much of our flood infrastructure has crossed its expected lifespan and our government remains resource constrained. The millions of people



PHOTO: STAR

A 2014 World Economic Forum Strategic Infrastructure Initiative report indicated that the current management of infrastructure assets is a cause for concern globally, and that publicly owned infrastructure assets are often managed inadequately. Maintenance often becomes the victim of pressured public budgets and political priorities.

To develop our own strategy, we need not look beyond our own backyard. The construction of Bhola's first

13,500 households. Three major cyclones have devastated the area, but the embankment is still effective. During times of natural disaster, the embankment serves as a temporary shelter and during normal times, it acts as a means of communication from one area to another, provides a safe space for children to play games on and is a cultivation area for multiple varieties of paddy and pulses.

Community-based approaches are a

displaced annually by flooding are the ones who have the most at stake when it comes to improving their conditions. We need to start putting them in control of their own situations. As we brace ourselves for climate change induced weather atrocities in the coming years, can we start making some bold changes in the way we build resilience before it is too late?

The writer is the Executive Director of BRAC.

Transnational terrorism and the IS brand

QASIM A. MOINI

ISLAMIC State unleashes terror in regions beyond the Middle Eastern sphere.

While the Middle Eastern battlefields of Iraq and Syria may have seen the worst atrocities committed by the self-styled Islamic State (IS) militant group, also known by its Arabic acronym Daesh, countries far beyond this region have felt the shockwaves of terrorist violence.

The spillover of the Iraqi/Syrian conflict has been felt in Europe, as the recent atrocity in Nice; the March Brussels attacks; and last November's incidents in Paris show. Here, many home-grown European extremist Muslims have dedicated the violence they have perpetrated to IS.

However the broader Asian region - beyond the Middle East proper - is also not immune to mass-casualty terrorism carried out in the name of IS. For example, July's bombing targeting Afghan Shia Hazaras in Kabul; the Dhaka cafe attack, also carried out in July; as well as the attacks in Jakarta in January of this year have all been carried out by fighters pledging allegiance to IS.

This begs the question: how is a militant organisation based in the Syrian town of Raqqa - being attacked by a number of powerful opponents, including the Syrian state, the US and Russia - able to coordinate violence on such a spectacular global scale?

Perhaps the answer to this query lies in the fact that Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi, the self-proclaimed IS 'caliph', does not have to spend time, money or resources in physically activating cells in lands far and wide.

Instead, technology and social media are largely doing the job for him, as extremist groups and individuals already present in various states provide willing recruits for the IS cause, abandoning or altering their previous affiliations to accommodate the IS 'brand'.

Take the example of Pakistan. Since the 1980s, militant Islamist groups have grown exponentially - due to the initial

benign or otherwise patronage of military dictator Gen Ziaul Haq, and the unfolding of the anti-Soviet, Saudi- and US-backed Afghan 'Jihad' in the region.

Many of the militias that were formed in Pakistan during this period, which drew recruits from Afghanistan itself as well as from Pakistan and across the Muslim world, spawned 'jihadi' successors after the Afghan campaign itself was over. Some of these were anti-India and Kashmiri-centric, while others were virulently sectarian, taking aim at Pakistan's sizeable Shia Muslim minority. The vast majority of the groups adhered to the Salafi/Wahabi or Deobandi creeds.

During the 1990s and beyond, these militant groups proliferated as the state chose not to act, indulging in horrific acts of violence. Post-September 11 the Pakistani establishment did act, shutting down some (but not all) militant groups. In the aftermath of 2007's Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) operation in the heart of Islamabad, the country witnessed an explosion of militant Islamist violence. This violence was only significantly controlled when the military went into the north-western tribal regions in June 2014 to flush out the militants based there.

The reason for giving this lengthy background is to explain that now, with the rise of IS - a militant group that has grand territorial ambitions - there are many willing recruits for the IS cause in Pakistan, thanks to over three decades of active militancy.

Unfortunately, many in the top tiers of government have dismissed the possibility that IS may be making inroads in Pakistan through these militant actors. For example, Pakistan's federal Interior Minister Nisar Ali Khan has said IS has no presence in the country. Yet there are frequent news reports stating that militants have been arrested from various Pakistani cities whom police claim are linked to IS/Daesh.

In fact in the aftermath of the recent Kabul Hazara bombing, a top US general

stated that most IS fighters in Afghanistan were formerly associated with the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan militant group before switching sides. Some Afghan Taliban fighters were also reportedly aligning with IS.

The Pakistani interior minister has said other 'terrorist groups' use the Daesh name.

This, it seems, is merely a matter of semantics, as the local militants are self-identifying as IS fighters. Then why should the government insist on denials? Yet despite the wavering at the top, some officials are willing to call a spade a spade. For example the head of Pakistan's Intelligence Bureau, a top civilian intelligence agency, has said on record that IS is an emerging threat in Pakistan; he named Lashkar-i-Jhangvi and Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan, two anti-Shia sectarian militant groups, as likely to be allied with IS.

The Pakistani example - home-grown militants and extremists pledging allegiance to the IS cause - can be applied to other Asian states as well.

Like Pakistan, the Bangladeshi government had also initially denied the presence of IS in the country, despite several claims made by the outfit. But as some observers noted, those involved in the violence in Bangladesh and claiming to fight for IS were linked to the Jamaatul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, a long-active militant group.

According to the UN over 30 groups worldwide have pledged allegiance to IS. Southeast Asia (SEA) is amongst the regions on the militant group's radar, and in this region too established militant networks are being used to further the IS cause, as the report "Radicalisation in Southeast Asia", focusing on Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, published by the Malaysian government and supported by the EU and UNODC, points out in great detail.

In fact fighters from SEA have been active in the Middle East, and many have returned home. Moreover, in May 2015 the Singapore prime minister had

said SEA had turned into a key "recruitment centre" for IS; experts said Mindanao in the Philippines was particularly vulnerable where the establishment of a possible province of IS was concerned.

Groups such as Ansar al-Shariah, Abu Sayyaf, Jamaat Islamiyah and others that have long been active in the region have been linked to IS. The Syrian conflict has played a key role in raising IS' profile in Indonesia and Malaysia. Groups and individuals attracted to IS' Takfir and sectarian creed form the base of Asian support for Daesh. Actual transfer of funds has been reported from Raqqa and Australia to Indonesia.

Over 100 Indonesian fighters have been reported to be in Syria and Iraq as per official figures; unofficial figures say the number may be as high as 800. Also, in 2014, Katiba Nusantara, the Daesh 'unit' fighting in the Middle East and consisting of Malay-speaking militants, was formed.

In the Philippines the official position is also that IS has no real presence in the country, even though members of Abu Sayyaf have pledged allegiance and there has been IS recruitment in Mindanao. Some officials have made a difference between 'Daesh-directed' and 'Daesh-inspired'; again, this difference may be purely academic.

The fact is that denying the presence of IS in their countries will not help governments deal with the problem. While it is true that fighters may not be hopping on planes out of Syria and Iraq to form cells or 'provinces' abroad - though the return home of fighters from these countries is a problem - all militants need a good internet connection and enough propaganda material to 'inspire' would-be jihadis sitting in far-off lands. Hence, perhaps Asian governments need to take a long, hard look within at the militant and extremist movements that already exist to stem further acts of terrorist violence.

The writer is a senior editor at Dawn and a scholar of religious militancy. This is the sixth article in a series of columns on global affairs written by top editors from members of the Asia News Network and published in newspapers across the region.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Lives in mental hospital

A couple of years ago, I went to visit the Pabna Mental Hospital for the first time. There, I met a strange man who was a guitarist and has been staying there willingly for a long time. More than 3 years later, a few days ago, I went to Pabna again and visited the Mental Hospital with a view to seeing that strange man. But I didn't see him as

he had left the hospital and gone home. When I was coming back, a boy called me and asked if I had a phone. Then he requested me to call his brother and inform him that he was in a good condition and wanted to go back home. I called his brother but unfortunately, the number was not available.

My experience raised some thoughts in

my mind; many of us send our mentally ill kith and kin to mental hospitals, but bother very little to take them back home or take care of them properly. We should be more considerate about them and do our duties to them properly.

Sayek Ahmed Sajib

University of Rajshahi

Every work is important

The most important thing that we need to acknowledge is that no work is smaller or bigger than the other. The honesty of the work executed by the dedicated CEO of a big company and a porter working in a small railway station are equally important for the development of a nation. Those who

could work in their dream jobs are extremely fortunate, but not everyone has that luck. So it is important for everyone to try and join the profession in which he/she is best trained and has gained necessary experiences.

Saikat Kumar Basu

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