

Another attack on Hindus

Dangerous escalation of bigotry

ONLY five days after the coordinated attack on Hindus in Brahmanbaria's Nasirnagar, five Hindu homes were again set on fire to the horror of the already frightened minority community. We strongly condemn what could possibly be another Ramu like incident that happened a few years ago, where a series of attacks on Buddhist monasteries took place following a planted Facebook post.

This time around, it was a post, allegedly by a member of the Hindu community, that sparked off the violence. The accused, a poor fisherman, however, said that he had nothing to do with the post indicating the possibility of sabotage. Such suspicions are strengthened further by the fact that the attacks seemed well organised and that the police, shockingly, did not come to the aid of the Hindus quick enough the first time and also, despite being present at Nasirnagar the second time, failed again to stop the violence.

Meanwhile, according to witness accounts, the attackers included affiliates of both the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. To rub salt into the wound, the Fisheries Minister, also a local Awami League MP, claimed that Sunday's attack was "not that serious" and that "only one or two incidents of looting took place". This attempt to downplay the violence against a minority community is totally unacceptable, as is the violence itself.

The entire episode, in fact, seems to have been purposefully perpetrated to disrupt communal harmony and attack Hindus. The authorities immediately need to prevent any further acts of aggression and ensure that the perpetrators and masterminds are severely punished. Political intervention in the dispensation of justice must also be avoided.

District hospital ICU non-functional

Appoint nurses immediately!

IT appears that planning for health services nationwide are in a state of disarray. Now why is that? Especially in a country where there is major unemployment amongst medically trained personnel. A report in this paper on November 5 highlights the plight of patients in Cox's Bazar district hospital that opened up an intensive care unit (ICU) only two months ago. The whole object of having an ICU is to cater to very serious patients. Yet we find that only one nurse has been appointed in a 6-bed ICU. This situation has caused patients of the district to travel 150km to Chittagong town in case of need. But the question is how many patients in need of dire and immediate care are able to make the journey?

The irony of the ICU is that Tk. 6 crore was earmarked for procurement of equipment as far back as 2008 but the lengthy decision making process delayed the opening for eight years. And now that it has opened, the people of the district must wait how long for the four nurses trained in ICU operations to be appointed, is anyone's guess. Is it really any wonder that the hospital authorities have effectively suspended operations?

According to the hospital superintendent, a team of physicians and nurses had been trained to operate the unit but were transferred elsewhere. There is serious dearth in our planning which makes it possible for such a situation to arise. We hope that the ministry will make provisions for requisite trained nurses to be appointed at the earliest to make the ICU functional.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Save the Hindu communities!

It is horrifying to see Hindu minorities being attacked in different parts of the country! Properties looted; places of worship destroyed. The percentage of Hindus in Bangladesh has gone down from 28 percent in 1947 to 8.5 percent today, according to a census. The Government must find out why these things are happening, before Hindus are altogether driven out from our community. We urge the Government to take immediate measures.
Sajib Mohanta, Sylhet

Bangladesh is better than this

I was born and brought up in Zakiganj, a part of the country best known for its conservative image. Of my friends, I am the only Hindu. But my friends have never made me feel like an outsider.

Not everyone in a community will be good or rational. Whenever I sense someone holding negative views against non-Muslims, I try to get to know them; in most cases we end up becoming good friends. In stray cases when someone is exceptionally insensitive, I just avoid them.

Incidents like Brahmanbaria make me worry for the victims first, and then for my friends – the good Muslims who I know will stress about my safety. That is the kind of respect I have always been accorded here. Unfortunately, the heinous acts of a few are smearing the whole community. I wish wholeheartedly that these incidents subside, so that we can feel proud of a peaceful Bangladesh where harmony and humanity prevails.
Mitun Roy
Researcher and Lecturer, Political Science

Tackling the shameful bigotry

STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

EVEN the greatest cynic would agree that the attacks on the minority Hindu population and their properties and places of worship, though intermittent, have been a blight on the democratic and secular credentials of Bangladeshi polity. The sad reality is that even after forty five years of republican and pluralistic existence, the Hindu religious minority of Bangladesh have not been able to save themselves from the bigoted attacks of mischievous rowdies, howsoever small they may be in number.

The recent attack on Hindu homes and temples in Brahmanbaria is reportedly under enquiry by different bodies. There are divergent views about the identity and motive of the perpetrators. While some quarters have portrayed the attack as planned with a view to grabbing property, others have played down the looting of Hindu houses. The unfortunate dimension of the incident is that enquiries and promises to ensure security will not be able to really comfort the badly bruised psyche of the victims for a considerable length of time. The dejected and forlorn look of a Hindu woman sitting in her vandalised home in Kashipara of

Upon scrutiny of the ground situation one might say that it is time to find out why the number of Hindus has decreased over the years, particularly since the creation of People's Republic of Bangladesh in 1971.

Brahmanbaria's Nasirnagar Upazila, as it appeared on the front page of this newspaper on November 3, is a poignant reminder of that state of affairs.

Upon scrutiny of the ground situation one might say that it is time to find out why the number of Hindus has decreased over the years, particularly since the creation of People's Republic of Bangladesh in 1971. Has our policy been the same as it was when we were part of

people to grab land owned by Hindus? The alleged but not yet conclusively established posting of derogatory materials on Facebook, as a pretext to vandalise Hindu homes and places of worship, quite clearly indicates the malafide intention of terrorising and dislocating the vulnerable minority. Simple common sense tells us that the ferocity of attack on Hindu communities is caused by the victims' weakness and

cultural power in the interest of the majority because that will result in non-Muslim minorities being defined explicitly or implicitly as second class citizens of Bangladesh. The flowering of a nation demands proactive action from the State.

Let us remember that the scripture of the Muslims, the Holy Qur'an, gives them a mission: to create a just and decent society in which all members are



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Islamic Republic of Pakistan? Has the mind of the majority community really changed for establishing the ethos of an equal rights society?

We in Bangladesh need to ask whether it is religion per se or the politicisation of religious identity and the mobilisation of this identity for community and state ends that have resulted in communal violence. We also need to find out whether the emphasis is on contests for power and resources. Have the recent incidents as mentioned occurred with the acquiescence of the administration?

Coming to specifics, in Bangladesh, why do we continue to witness attacks on Hindu properties? Is creation of hatred a ploy for some of the majority Muslim politicians and influential

the perpetrators' suspected immunity from the process of law. Are the patrons of the mischief-makers too powerful to be dislodged?

The immediate imperative, under the circumstances, is to effectively deactivate the vultures that are on the watch to grab the lands and properties of panicked Hindus. This requires political will and stern administrative measures for ensuring continued security. However, beyond that, the minorities need to politically organise themselves in such a manner that in course of time, issues of their honourable existence become a focus of mainstream politics. Such course of action is expected to provide substantial relief.

The politicians cannot be part of a deliberate effort to realign state and

to be treated with respect. To cultivate an inaccurate prejudice damages the tolerance, liberality, and compassion that are supposed to characterise Islamic culture. Quite clearly, we cannot defend a liberal principle by reviving a medieval prejudice.

The Prophet of Islam (PBUH), from the very beginning, was opposed to the jahili arrogance and egotism that not only fuelled the aggression of his time but is much in evidence in present-day world. The religion of the Muslims - "Islam" - signifies peace and reconciliation. Finally, let us bear in mind that the concept of "Ummah" in the historic Medina Charter included all faiths.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

Myanmar: One year after the Nov 8 election



DR THAN HTUT AUNG

ON November 8, the United States will host an intriguing election. As the date draws closer, the results of the election appear harder to forecast.

In previous weeks, the likelihood of a victory by US Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton appeared almost certain.

However, after the FBI revealed new (but incomplete) findings on Mrs. Clinton's emails, Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has closed the gap in many of the latest election polls.

American democracy has been a model of fairness for over two hundred years. Free and unbiased elections are the hallmarks of a democracy, giving citizens an opportunity to be heard.

On November 8, 2015, a historic election was held in Myanmar, which was of interest to many people around the world. This was an election in which the military dictatorship was willing to give power to the people of Myanmar for the first time since 1962.

The people of Myanmar had high hopes for this election because it was the first time that the National League for Democracy (NLD), the party that won a landslide in the 1990 elections, returned to the ballot box.

However, there were growing concerns that the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) - the ruling party that includes members of the military who rejected the 1990 election results - would not host free and fair elections. There was also a worry that the USDP would not authorise a smooth transition to power in case the NLD won.

More doubts were fuelled as Mr. U Tin Aye, the chairman of the election committee, had close ties to the then President Thein Sein. As such, in the lead-up to the elections, political analysts from both home and abroad had difficulty in predicting the electoral outcomes.

Most of the voters surveyed in the rural areas said that although they did not know much about politics, they did not like the ruling USDP government. Rather, they wanted to vote for the NLD because it was led by their mother figure, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

Consequently, because the ruling government did not rig the results of the election, the NLD won 82 percent of the four hundred seats in parliament, while the USDP won less than 10 percent. Worries over the smooth transition of power were also quelled after members of the NLD attended the first parliamentary session and consequently formed the executive in April 2016.

Although the Constitution could not be amended to allow Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to become president, she was given the title of State Counselor and became the de-facto leader of the government. Many people thought that the major hurdle would be the smooth transition to power but the real problems arose after the NLD formed the government.

A year after the historic elections in 2015, the public is disappointed by the NLD's policies and principles. Despite several peace talks, the conflicts within the country have escalated over the past few months and gunshots are now being heard in previously peaceful areas.

In northern Rakhine state, in the predominantly Muslim areas, violence and extremism have resurfaced. Across the country, commodity prices have increased at an alarming rate and inflation is in the double digits. The government has been largely unable to address the

minister was recently released from jail after serving time for his involvement in a drugs case. After the NLD came into power, this individual's project for building a new city received an approval.

Still, one year after the election, although the government has shown despicable behaviour, many of the Myanmar people are still hopeful that change will come. And they are optimistic that the government will delegate responsibility and power.

Elections are just one component of a democracy. The Myanmar people have still not tasted the full flavour of democracy, which includes the rule of law, fair judicial



Supporters react as Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi gives a speech at her campaign rally in the run up to the November 8 election. Photo: Reuters

problem of growing income inequality. Demonstrations and protests have occurred in numerous places and for a variety of reasons. The NLD has also failed to tackle corruption and crony capitalism that was prevalent in the previous government. Citizens have become disappointed with the close ties that some members of the NLD formed with crony capitalists.

The newly elected NLD officials' rosy relations with the corrupt officials from the previous bureaucracy are grave concerns for the Myanmar people. In social media, stories have circulated about a newly elected minister, making just USD 2,500 a month, being seen wearing a USD 100,000 Patek Philippe watch.

For many Myanmar people who make USD 2 a day, this is a source of great disbelief and resentment. The individual who allegedly gave this 'gift' to the elected

system, and clean governance. The relative quietness and acceptance by the Myanmar people to these pressing issues is a source of great astonishment.

There is great anticipation regarding the United States election on Nov 8.

In a similar vein, a year after the elections of Nov 8 last year, the people of Myanmar are still anxiously waiting for the reforms that the NLD government promised and the perceived celestial powers that they believe Ms Suu Kyi is capable of wielding.

We are still hoping.
We are still waiting.

The writer is CEO of Eleven Media Group, Myanmar and a Board member of the Asia News Network. This is a series of columns on global affairs written by top editors from ANN members and published in newspapers across the region.



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