

Let's not blame it on bigotry alone

BJMC being bled dry Save it from "influential quarters"

ALLEGATIONS have arisen about corruption at every level of management in the state-owned Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation that has 26 mills under its umbrella. Over the last decade, it saw profit only during 2010-11 fiscal year when it registered a mealy Tk 14 crore. Otherwise, losses ranged from Tk 66 – 700 crore per annum. This is appalling given that BJMC remains the largest manufacturer and exporter of jute goods in the world. Every government has come and created a coterie of businessmen who have colluded with unscrupulous mill officials to buy jute products at run-down prices, which were exported to end users after a mark up.

The situation with BJMC is somewhat akin to the state-owned banks which keep incurring losses but are propped up with cash infusion from the state coffers. Indeed, the BJMC has received government handouts to the tune of Tk 6,000 crore since 2009 and it owes external creditors Tk1,200 crore. That the management of the Corporation has always been deputed from the bureaucracy has hardly helped matters. As there is no question of transparency in its dealings, it is not surprising that graft has become institutionalised at BJMC.

Economics dictate that the government hand over management to professionals in the jute industry to turn things around. Without product development and diversification, the BJMC cannot hope to compete in world markets where jute has seen resurgence as a fully biodegradable product. We hope authorities will revamp the BJMC so that it becomes a cash cow instead of a drain on the national exchequer.

Violence against Rohingyas

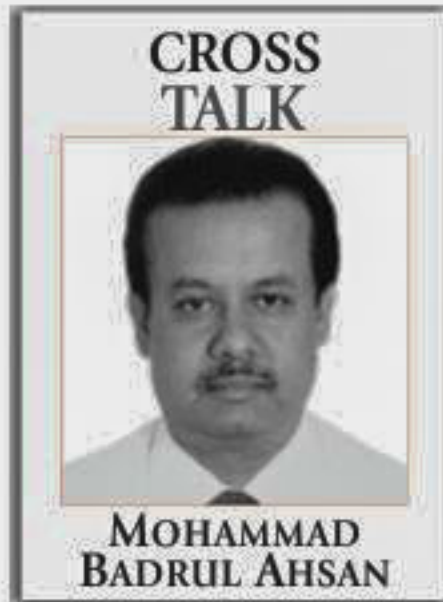
Int'l community must act

WE are alarmed by the recent reign of terror unleashed by the Myanmar security forces against the Rohingya population in the Rakhaine State—shooting unarmed civilians, raping women and torching homes since more than a dozen soldiers and police were killed last month by armed men whom the UN described as "ethnic armed organisations." The security agencies have a right to find out the identities of the attackers but that does not justify violence on a group of people made stateless by a controversial 1982 law. Laws discriminate against them, infringing on their freedom of movement, education and employment and land rights and ownership.

The recent surge in hostility has sent some of them fleeing to the border of Bangladesh which already hosts thousands of Rohingyas, putting a stress on the overpopulated country and raising concerns over its security.

Everyone expected conditions of the Rohingyas and other ethnic communities to improve after Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won a decisive majority in the November 2015 elections. That hasn't happened as the army still controls three key ministries—home affairs, defence and border affairs—allowing it to exercise power over the state's administrative apparatus, right down to the grassroots level.

The international community should put pressure on the Myanmar government to make lasting peace with the Rohingyas and other ethnic communities who comprise about 40 percent of the population of Myanmar. It is a humanitarian issue and all governments including ours should treat it as such.



CROSS TALK
 MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

If premeditated murders aren't accidental deaths, and if planned meetings aren't chance encounters, then the attacks on the minorities in Gobindaganj, Nasirnagar and Ramu aren't hate crimes. Minorities are irresistible targets because they don't have the organised strength to resist an attack. It's also because an attack on them creates greater impact just like small investments bring high returns. All three attacks allegedly were driven by calculated convenience instead of impulsive convictions.

The pace accelerated each time. The horror of Ramu repeated itself in Nasirnagar after four years, but resurfaced in Gobindaganj nine days after Nasirnagar. The targets of this horror have always been the houses of prayer, homes and people. The victims changed from Buddhists to Hindus to the indigenous Santals. The victimisation remained constant.

Everything, each time, went through the same old motion. The two leading political parties blamed each other. The same hackneyed clamour for judicial investigation and the same disturbing disappointment over the role of the local administration were heard. The police actions in all three cases have been the spitting image of each other, curiously searching for needles in the haystack of evidences.

History repeats itself, because human beings never learn from their mistakes. Ever since Ramu went up in flames, this nation has remained in the dark about who was responsible for that atrocious act. Discerning minds have drawn their own conclusions, convinced that the apparatus of major political parties had worked in cahoots. A brotherhood of crooks masterminded that madness to achieve their common goals. Instincts unite some men as readily as ideologies divide them.

Gobindaganj has been a sequel to Nasirnagar as much as Nasirnagar has been a sequel to Ramu, each tragedy having a longer run each time like radiation after a nuclear blast. The radiation of rage continued in the last two locations for several days despite the heightened attention of the entire nation. It continued despite the police presence meant to secure the victims and prevent further tension. In the criminal way,

The wounds heal except for the unfortunate some, who struggle with the pain longer than others.

But is it fair to blame this ever-repeating cycle of misfortune on bigotry alone? It may give us the comfort to think that every attack is a hate crime for the same reason placebos make patients feel better. Human minds seek closure on problems like one has to turn off the lights before going to bed.

calculations, wheeling and dealing, power posturing and overriding motives that should explain why the local administrations sat on their hands every time the goons unleashed terror.

If this is bigotry, then every rapist is a bigot because he is stubbornly intolerant of the sanctity of a female body. Then every loan defaulter is a bigot because he doesn't like the idea of banks recovering their money. Every thief or robber is also a bigot because of his contempt for rightful ownership.

The truth is that there are minority groups within the majority population who thrive on criminal propensities. These groups look for minorities for the same reason cowards pick easy targets. These groups don't have any conviction or conscience but their sick minds driven by impulses constantly seeking instant gratification.

Every day in this country people are being dispossessed from their lands and homes, women and children are being molested, and men are getting killed, abducted and intimidated. What happened in those three places is the concentrated expression of these pervasive crimes committed daily. This isn't bigotry by God, but spikes in the cruelty that the majority has been inflicting on itself.

The real reason, if anybody cares to know, is worse than bigotry. It's more than stubborn and complete intolerance of any creed, belief, or opinion that differs from one's own. It's utter contempt for humanity that at once combines depravity with delusion backed by double standard. It doesn't hesitate to burn the house to roast the pig.

The name of that game is hypocrisy, deadlier than hatred and crueler than criminals. It's bigotry wrapped in brutality inside pretension. Blaming only bigotry ignores the other two instigators. The horror persists due to our fixation on finding under the lamp post what's lost in the dark alley.

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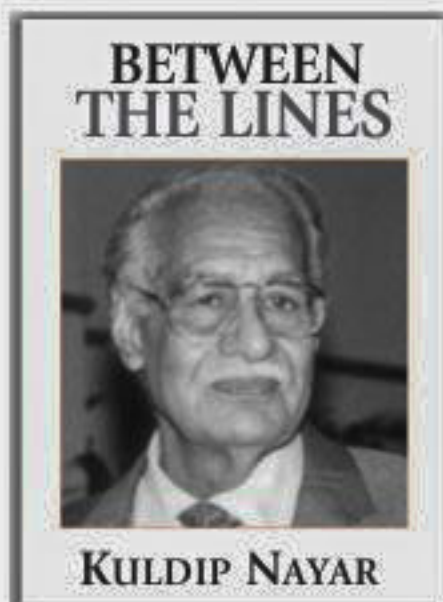
ILLUSTRATION: ZEIXS

Gobindaganj and Nasirnagar have been incremental improvements over Ramu as evil tested successively more resilient.

In a few days or weeks, every incident falls off the page. Money and help pour into the flashpoint to rebuild structures razed to the ground. Soon, anguished minds pick up their lives and move on.

There may have been a touch of bigotry in what happened in Gobindaganj, Nasirnagar and Ramu like certain experiences tap into primal instincts. The savage sentiments may have rallied the rogues in the same manner battle cry arouses aggression in warriors. But there were political

Make names public



BETWEEN THE LINES
 KULDIP NAYYAR

THE debate over demonetisation of currency reveals that real estate dealers have transacted business only to the extent of five percent cash and 9 percent promise. The gap is huge

but it reflects the honesty and understanding of both sides.

The Modi government fails, however, to convey the impression of integrity. The motive is being questioned and the purpose doubted. And the debate, unfortunately, has got derailed because of too much emphasis on the inconvenience, not on the step itself.

There is no doubt that the money stacked abroad or lying with the anti-national elements goes out of currency. But the baby has been thrown out with the bathtub. Many honest businessmen abroad will be put to hard and arduous task of converting the currency lying with them. Some may go out of business. But if it serves the overall purpose, the step is worth taking.

Why the opposition parties have got together is understandable. The unaccounted money with which they operate will simply not be there. BJP is also being blamed for having told its own people about the demonetisation before hand to enable them to send their money to the bank.

Karnataka is an example where some currency rupees were deposited on the eve of demonetisation. Good or bad, the step has been taken and it is in national interest to get together to make the step a success.

There are very few top civil servants or leading politicians without the blemish of having a foreign bank account. But the pressure in India to bring back the black money stashed abroad has been relentless and this demand has become part of a movement to eliminate corruption.

Instead of taking any concrete step, the government seems to be trying its best not to let the gamut of black money come to light. Which is why New Delhi is seeking clarifications on the Supreme Court's indictment: "The issue of unaccounted monies held by nationals and other legal entities in foreign banks is of primordial importance to the welfare of the citizens."

This is not the first time that the Supreme Court has taken the government to task for dragging its feet on corruption. Earlier, the Supreme Court expressed unhappiness over the way in which the government was investigating the cases

connected with black money. The Court had warned the government not to presume that the money hidden in Switzerland was from the tax evasion. It could be laundering of money earned through, drugs, terrorism or some other criminal act. The government is yet to give justification for preferring to enter into double taxation pacts with foreign countries for having access to the names of evaders.

Indian black money in Swiss banks, according to the Swiss Banking Association report in 2006, was the highest - as much as USD 1,456 billion. The amount is reportedly more than the

Expressing lack of faith in probe, the Supreme Court constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) headed by two retired Supreme Court judges to chase all black money related cases. The court itself is supervising the pace of investigation. While pronouncing the verdict, the Supreme Court observed: politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen are known to park their funds abroad and then try to get them into the country through foreign institutional investors' route.

Very pinching remarks, but every word is true. I wonder if there would be any effect on the government which has shown little agility to pursue the cases of

they are under an obligation not to disclose them, the fault lies with New Delhi. The Supreme Court has overruled the contention and has asked the government to make the names public. Still the government is not agreeable to this proposal.

The BJP and its allies in the National Democratic Alliance have said that they have no money abroad. This statement should act as a pressure on the Congress and its allies. Some of the allies may begin to keep distance from the government. It has no option except to make the 26 names public. Then the fat will be on fire.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Law enforcers should be more tech-savvy

Most crimes today are orchestrated with the help of modern technology, through social media and other internet and electronic devices. The recent attack on Hindu minorities also started from a controversial post on Facebook. Many suspected perpetrators have been detained, but the prime culprits are yet to be arrested. The police have to identify firstly the individuals who edited and posted the controversial picture, and others who instigated locals into demolishing the Hindu properties.

This suspension of criminal tracing highlights the deficiency or lack of control of the law enforcement agencies over modern information technology. Our law enforcers should be more proficient with modern IT, telecommunications and networking instruments in order to track down the perpetrators, and prevent repetition of such dangerous incidents in future.
 Md. Rashedul Islam
 On email

Hoping for the best from Trump

We did not think that Donald Trump would become the next US President, but the results have proved how unpredictable some outcomes can be. The whole world is now holding its breath, waiting to see how Donald Trump will proceed with his policies and actions as the new President Elect.

We can only hope that President Elect Donald Trump will act wisely, take actions that are beneficial for the US as well as the world population, and work to bring peace and stability in the world.

Nur Jahan
 Chittagong



People wait to withdraw and deposit their money at an ATM kiosk in Kolkata.

PHOTO: REUTERS

deposits by all other countries put together. Amount wise, the figure is about 13 times larger than the country's foreign debts. With this amount, it is estimated, some 45 crore people in India can get Rs 1 lakh each.

After clearing the entire foreign debts, it is calculated that we would be left with a surplus, almost 12 times larger than the total foreign debts. If this surplus is invested, the amount of interest will be more than the annual budget of the central government. So even if all the taxes are abolished, the central government will be able to abolish most of them and still have a cushion.

black money abroad. It is obvious that the Congress-headed government does not want certain names to come in the public domain because the disclosures would embarrass it.

Now the government has been caught on the wrong foot. It received, some time ago, as many as 26 names from Germany under the double taxation treaty. Berlin had got hold of names of hundreds of beneficiaries and had offered them to all the countries for their asking. New Delhi could not afford to say no. But why did the then Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee claim that the names of beneficiaries could not be disclosed? If

I have never seen India so deeply immersed in corruption as it is today. At the same time, I have not heard so much criticism of the government before. What I miss is the resistance and the ordinary people from the society getting up to call a spade a spade.

Scrutiny by due process is understandable, but the process is so slow and so manoeuvred through corruption itself that it is not possible to catch or punish the guilty for years. The government must devise a machinery whereby allegation of corruption is sifted for a prima facie case within days.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.