

Attacks on minorities in Bangladesh: No longer a "communal issue"



TAJ HASHMI

STRANGER THAN FICTION
RECENTLY, Muslim mob attacks on Hindu houses and temples in Nasirnagar (Brahmanbaria) and elsewhere in Gopalganj, Chittagong, and Sunamganj districts in

around 800,000 hectares of land in the locality was the main reason why local Muslim villagers – with support from a ruling party MP and police – initiated the premeditated attacks on Santals. Muslim villagers set ablaze hundreds of makeshift homes of the Santals after ransacking and looting their valuables and driving them out of their homes. Sultana Kamal, a leading human rights activist in

British India, the post-colonial ethno-religious conflicts in South Asia are anything but "communal". Historically, communal riots in colonial Bengal were between rival communities who hated, maimed, plundered, raped, and killed each other; there was hardly any one-sided victimization of minorities by members of majority communities as has become normative in Bangladesh

army support, even certain minority communities retaliated against the majority. Politically, economically, and numerically dominant Bengali Muslims haven't put an end to the process of victimisation of disempowered members of the population in general, and especially of the Hindu, Chakma, Larma, Mogh, aboriginal Garo, Santal, and other communities, after the Liberation.

racial or linguistic riots. Bangladesh is no exception in this regard. Thanks to the bitter history of Hindu domination of Bengali Muslims in British India, and the manipulative communal historiography and policy promoted by the Pakistani authorities during 1947 and 1971, many Bangladeshi Muslims nurture a deep suspicion of anything Hindu and Indian. However, it's too trite an assumption that attacks on Hindus, Santals, and other minorities in Bangladesh by majority Muslims are "communally motivated".

after the Nasirnagar incidents! Firstly, there are extremists among Bangladeshi Muslims who justify discriminatory treatments against Hindus – including expropriation, expulsion and even rape and killing of Hindus – only because intolerant Hindus do so to the minority Muslim community in India. Secondly, criminal elements among Bengali Muslims take advantage of the troubled waters to loot and extort hapless Hindus and other marginalised people, in the name of glorifying Islam.

Bangladesh have drawn wide media attention, within and outside the country. I can't agree more with *Daily Star's* editorial (Nov 2) that Government inaction would only embolden the bigots; and that: "any mix of politics and faith cannot work a democracy.... Whoever plays with fire should know that fire would ultimately play him."

The attacks on dozens of Hindu temples and destruction of hundreds of Hindu houses in Nasirnagar alone were based on wild rumours about one local Hindu youth's offensive Facebook posting against Islam. However, these are false flag operations to justify the attacks on local Hindus. The main motive of the attacks, as the National Human Rights Commission observes, was "to grab Hindu property".

While Hindu victims were licking their wounds in Brahmanbaria, Chittagong, Gopalganj, and Sunamganj villages, on November 6 some rowdy Bangladeshi Muslims – allegedly with police and local ruling party MP's support – attacked and killed two "tribal" Santal Christians at Gobindapur in Gaibandha district in northern Bangladesh. Thousands of Santals lost movables, forced to flee the villages, and local police had arrest warrants for 300 Santals (who fled to avoid arrest) for resorting to violence.

We believe the expropriation of thousands of Santal peasants from



A woman sitting in her vandalised home in Kashipara of Brahmanbaria's Nasirnagar upazila. Religious zealots attacked her house and destroyed all the belongings during the mayhem on October 30. PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh, blames ruling party supporters for the "communal attacks" on minorities across the country. I have strong reservations about using the expression, "communal attacks" in this regard. While colonial divide-and-rule policy, conflicting economic and political aspirations, and religious fanaticism of people were mainly responsible for the communal riots in

since 1947. Kishoreganj (1930), Dhaka (1941), Noakhali (1946) and parts of Comilla and Jamalpur witnessed one-sided attacks by majority Muslims on minority Hindus during the British rule. While expropriation, rape, and killing of minorities weren't uncommon in Bangladesh up to early 1970s, they reached their climax in 1971, when with Pakistani occupation

It's not a religious problem. The popular culture based on age-old tradition of hatred for people professing different religions from the religion of the main stream of the population – albeit in the name of religious superiority – nurtures communal hatred. Hate and mistrust for minorities who speak different languages or belong to different ethno-linguistic groups also promotes

Prime Minister Hasina's statement is heartening. She promised foolproof security to the minorities; didn't blame the major opposition parties for the attacks on Hindus at Nasirnagar; and admitted internal feuds within her party had been the main factors behind the problem. One wonders as to how one would explain attacks on Hindu minorities elsewhere in the country, before and

The way some Bangladeshis desecrate Hindu-Buddhist temples, burn down minority properties, expropriate, rape, and kill members of minority communities are primarily greed-induced, economically motivated political violence by a tiny minority of Muslim hoodlums. Being too weak to resist the criminals, non-Muslim, and non-Bengali (Hill Tribes, Garos, and Santals) victims simply suffer, flee, or die without any redress. Many of them sell their properties (at nominal price) and migrate. Similarly, the killing of thousands of Muslims following the destruction of the Babri mosque by Hindu mobs in India in 1992, and the Gujarat killings organised by the Hindu extremists and those in power in 2002 – around 3,000 Muslims got killed – were not communal riots but state-sponsored pogroms of Muslims.

In the backdrop of the growing intolerance towards Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh, politicians, intellectuals, and people from every walk of life should resist the manifestation of intolerance and racism in any form. They eventually lead to totalitarian governance or fascism. Educated Bangladeshis' aversion to politics, and their insatiable greed, and proclivity to plunder to become rich overnight are big obstacles to good governance. There's no point blaming the leaders while the followers are equally bad. "A people that elect corrupt politicians ... are not victims ... but accomplices", said George Orwell.

It's time to make using pejoratives like *kafir* and *mala'un* against ethno-religious minorities a felony, a hate-crime. It would be a bold step toward ending persecution of religious and ethno-national minorities, because any society that allows hate-crime against minorities, eventually witnesses large scale religious or racial riots, and even pogroms. We know the history of unimpeded hate-crime against Jews in Germany, and African Americans in the US.

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The blame-game over climate change

ENAYETULLAH KHAN

THE Industrial Revolution is largely blamed for climate change that is almost self-evident in today's world. However, it is revealed that pre-industrial deforestation caused about 9 percent of today's global warming. Humans started this change long before the Industrial Revolution, when machines changed our ancestors' way of life, in the beginning of the fossil fuel era. A study shows that these emissions are still present in the atmosphere.

Deforestation started as the world's population grew. Today the world is coming to a consensus on a "polluter pays" model, which means the biggest emitters take on the biggest role to mitigate the effects of climate change. Some people want to put the burden on China for developments that date as far back as the ninth century. Some point fingers at some other Asian countries too.

In Bangladesh, we lost our best rainforests either for tea or for timber. Our northeastern part, greater Sylhet area, is well known as the humid tropics. The best part of these humid tropics has been cleared for tea plantation. Our southeastern part, greater Chittagong and the Chittagong Hill Tracts area, has 'rain' forests, which were cleared mainly for teak plantation. These two valuable commodities were mainly used by non-natives!

Once I was told that a 12-year-old British boy, Durrel, wrote to Mahathir Muhammad, the then premier of Malaysia, requesting him not to clear the rainforests, so that he

(Durrel) could enjoy greater biodiversity and wildlife once he grew up. I understand that Mahathir reacted sharply and wrote: "The people, who asked you to write this letter - request them to pay more for our timber so that we don't cut more trees and grow more palms!"

If we need to deal with responsibility, we have to keep per capita emissions in mind. The 'rich' have to pay for their oversized contributions to global warming. If we consider the data from 1900-2004: the US has contributed by far the lion's share, in the form of 314,772 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide. That is well over four times the top European contributor, Germany (73,625mt). Some other countries that may be of interest to us include the UK on 55,163mt, India 25,054mt, Brazil 9,136mt, Indonesia 6,167mt and China 89,243mt. Bangladesh's historical contribution stands at an almost negligible 562mt. One has to bear in mind that emissions started before this data was calculated. The UK, having spawned the Industrial Revolution, may be held chiefly responsible for the emissions in the 19th century.

As 2015 drew to a close, the international family of nations gathered in Paris, and against the odds, managed to finally agree to a deal to combat greenhouse gases emissions, through a programme of mitigation and adaptation. The finance will start to flow in 2020. The Paris deal, as it came to be known, is regarded as the world's first comprehensive climate agreement. The following are its principal aims:



ILLUSTRATION: LISK FENG, CORPORATE KNIGHTS

1. Hold the increase in the global average temperature down to well below 2 degree C above pre-industrial levels, while pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degree

C above pre-industrial levels, recognising that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change;
2. Increase the ability to adapt to

the adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development, in a manner that does not threaten food production; and

3. Make finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina attended the Conference of Parties (COP22) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), held in Marrakech, Morocco this year. There she rightly mentioned that the Paris Agreement created a solid ground for meaningful cooperation in combating climate change impacts. She felt that this is the time to move forward and implement the decisions with action. She called upon all the countries of the world to throw in their lot, in order "to share equitably the burden to fulfill our promises of making the world a safe and better place for our future generations."

Under the prime minister's able leadership, Bangladesh has already taken a few initiatives by spending our own resources through the Bangladesh Climate Change Resilience Fund (BCCRF). She communicated this to the world leaders during her stay at the summit, and it would have acted as a powerful message to world leaders that the country most affected by climate change can no longer wait around for their issues to play out. The time to act is now.

The writer is the Editor-in-Chief of UNB and Dhaka Courier, and the Chairman of WildTeam.

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QUOTABLE Quote

E.E. CUMMINGS
It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH
ACROSS
1 Blockhead
5 Ship's wheel
9 Clarifying words
11 Provinces
13 Stylishly quaint
14 Explosive stuff
15 City trains
16 Hires
18 Stays
20 Wk. start
21 Chewy candy
22 Minute
23 Arthur's foster brother
24 Do cafe work
25 Woodland resident
27 Outfits
29 MPG-rating org.
30 Sells
32 Modern media offering
34 Bowler, e.g.
35 Shark's home
36 Brighten
38 Scottish lord
39 Black bird
40 Iditarod need
41 Cuban coin
DOWN
1 more dreadful
2 Eggy dish
3 Old TV game show
4 Road goo
5 "Sully" star
6 Pennsylvania port
7 Cole Porter song
8 Red shade
10 Inform
12 Boxer Liston
17 Some amount of
19 Miles off
22 Ankara native
24 Trade
25 Train stop
26 Long Stretches
27 Motorist's buy
28 Declares
30 Like lions
31 Dictation pro
33 Sugar source
37 Pool unit

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER
APPS SLIMS
THROB TENET
BOON ANGLE
ATA EGGDROP
TOMATO ADO
FROG TIN
MATE ALEC
PET DAZE
ATT LENTIL
SHECRAB IDA
SASHA OFTEN
ONTAP ALTAD
NESTS TESS

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

YOU CAN'T HIDE FROM ME, BEETLE!!
NO FAIR!
YOUR BREATH MADE MY CAMOUFLAGE MELT
GREG! NO! WALKER!
BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

MY OFFICE IS ORGANIZING A "BRING YOUR KIDS TO WORK" DAY THIS SUMMER.
REALLY?
GOSH, I WONDER WHAT THAT'S LIKE?

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