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Make investigations into all such incidents public

At a time when the major concern amongst Bangladesh's citizens was focused on the suddenly discovered financial and moral turpitude of the leading lights of our ruling Party's mass organisations, a sudden resurgence of the old use of Facebook posts to instigate mob violence has all of us wondering whether we have become myopic in our reactions and in our perceptions of what the total picture is. We tend to get heated and worked up about the issue of the day, at the cost of the larger picture.

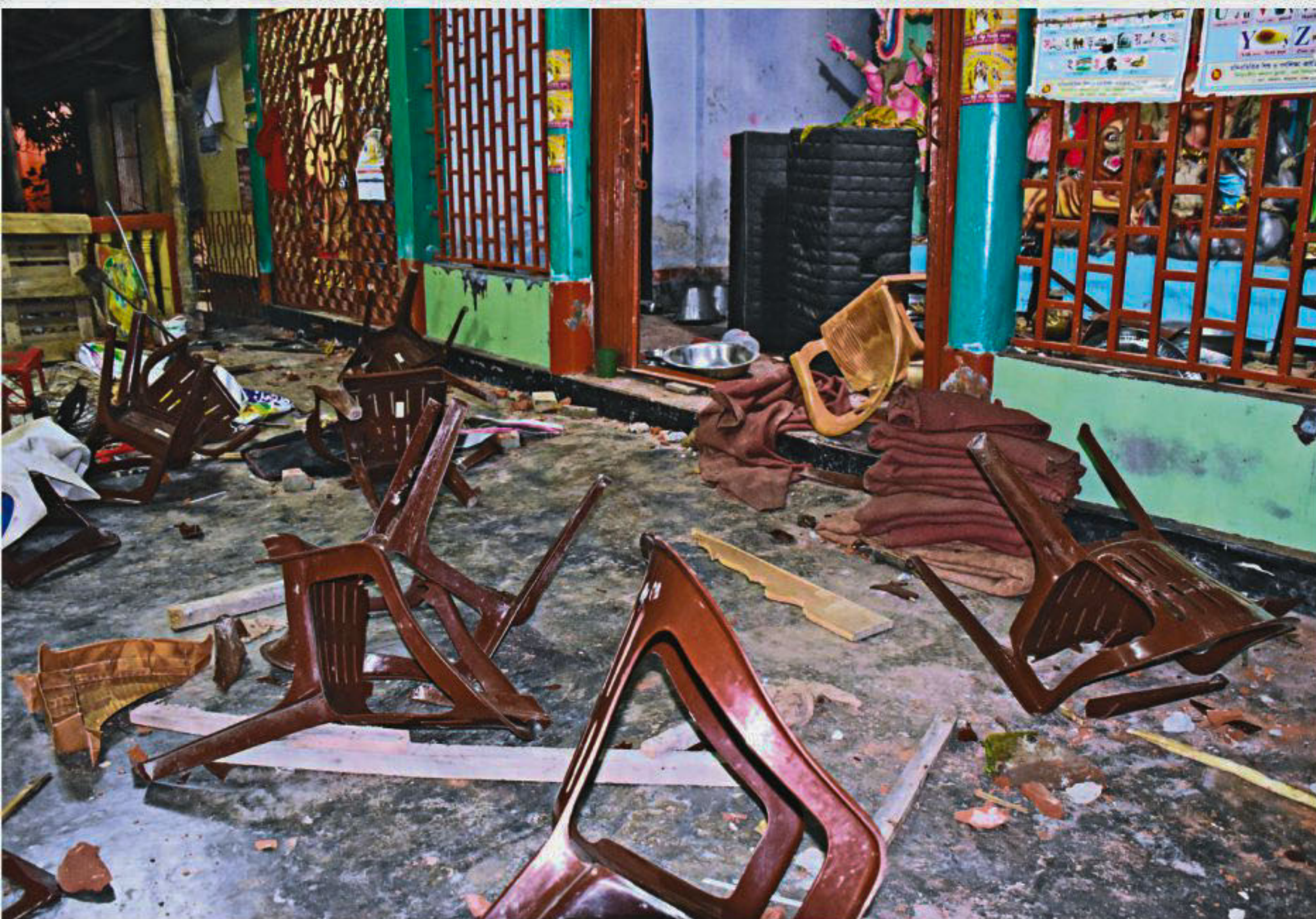
I will not venture or put forth an analysis of why mobs and people who, even a few hours earlier were quite civil and peaceful, suddenly react so violently and brutally. The usual rhetoric that

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'othering' takes over.

These instigating factors are just that and nothing more. We all remember the Ramu case, or the case in Nasirnagar, Brahmanbaria. Both had similar beginnings to the recent case in Bhola. In all these situations, people were convinced that the Facebook message or post was by those very people who wanted to create such a situation, who wanted to gain control. The causes may vary—whether for control of property, or to gain a political space over a rival, or to create unrest or as a diversionary tactic, I do not have an answer. I do not think there is anyone answer.

It is important that all the various investigations be made public—let us, the citizens, decide whether the reports are credible. But let us all learn to act responsibly. Let us not forget where we stand, while looking at the full picture. It is only when democracy is practiced in its truest sense, when accountability, transparency, responsiveness to the people is given precedence, when the rule of law is established, when the servants of the State, those employed by the State, act and behave like employees of the State and not the Party in power, will people's respect for maintaining law and order be realised. The Government has to find mechanisms to ensure that they are able to listen to people's aspirations and concerns. Bhola has sent us a strong warning—that it is still easy to whip up irrational emotions that threaten the very core of what Bangladesh stands for. Religious bigotry can whip up violent sentiments. It is no longer the time to try to appease these sentiments. It is time for us to come together and work to see that such incidents no longer have a place in this land.



Pieces of broken furniture lie scattered on the floor of Gournitai Ashram after the temple was attacked by the protesters.

PHOTO: COURTESY

religious feelings and sentiments have been severely attacked is not enough of an excuse for me. I do not for a moment think that any person who has a solid and strong base in their beliefs can feel threatened if someone attacks that belief. On the other hand, the same group that gets so riled up are often doing the same to those with other beliefs as well.

Pointing a finger at events happening in our neighbouring countries would not be irrelevant as use of Facebook posts as a means of whipping up mob violence is not just a Bangladeshi phenomenon. The mass violence on the Rohingyas in Myanmar recently originated from a Facebook post, the lynching of a Muslim man in his home in India on the pretext of a wild rumour that he had kept beef in his refrigerator was as well. The persecution, the attacks in these countries still continue, and the initial igniting factor is long forgotten as communalism, xenophobia, obscurantism and the process of fostering the concept of

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Ensure justice for the victims of the previous attacks to prevent repetition

Did we learn anything new from the Bhola incident? Some innocent lives were lost, the homes of some innocent people were destroyed, and the trust between two communities coexisting for so long were lost forever. The same thing happened at Ramu, Sathiya, Comilla, Brahmanbaria, Rangpur, Jessore, Malopara. No one worked on the root causes of these incidents. In different parts of Bangladesh, a large segment of its people are now agitated enough to commit large scale communal violence. They have been so intoxicated by hatred that just a tiny spark can cause the great fire of communal violence.

The madrasa students had been used in many other previous communal attacks and in this way the othering of Madrasa students continues. We have taken every step to condemn those who

were killed during that incident; however, we are forgetting that they were provoked by some vested quarter. Generalised analysis will reinforce division and separation in our society. If insulting religion was the only reason behind this agitation, Bangladesh would have been rocked by many revolutions in its history. The whole incident at Bhola seemed pre-planned and the demands by the mobs and subsequent agreement to meet those demands sends a completely wrong signal for the future. An unlawful assembly should not have been allowed to bargain on their terms. This clearly goes against the principle of law.

Law enforcing agencies and the head of the state also stated that Biplob is innocent, then under what capacity is he being held in jail until now? Which law authorises that? That has been the case

anyway. Rasraj Das, a fisherman who was arrested over an attack on the Hindu community in Brahmanbaria, was in jail. Last time I tried to contact him, he said he doesn't want bail! Uttom Barua, implicated in the incident in Ramu, could not be found since September 2012. No effort was made to find him as it was too dangerous in this "secular" country.

The protection of minorities has been undermined until now and unless the perpetrators are punished for their criminal actions, the state of fear among the minorities in the country will drive internal and external displacement. The incident needs to be thoroughly investigated and the perpetrators punished to set an example to others, but this seems to be a far cry in the present context for the alleged involvement of political and other powerful elites.

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We should act wisely as said in the Quran

The unfortunate incident in Bhola is a stark evidence of growing unrest and severe lack of Quranic knowledge in our society. In Surah Al Hujurat verse six, Allah clearly said, "O ye who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth lest ye harm people unwittingly and afterwards become full of repentance for what ye have done." It means when we get a piece of information from an unreliable source, the first thing to do is to verify the information before sharing it with

others. Unfortunately, we have forgotten these words and we are now acting on our whim. We have to remember that every soul will be held accountable for his/her own wrongdoings. If somebody spreads hatred against our faith, we should protest it intellectually and intelligently. Those who are committing violence and vandalising temples of other religions do not know anything about Islam. They are trying to provoke further violence. I hope the government will detect them and stop

them from doing such dangerous activities. After the tragedy in Bhola, we are observing communal tension in many parts of our country. I think the government should also sit with the influential Islamic scholars who can play a significant role in controlling the situation. If the government and Islamic scholars work wisely and cooperate with each other, I believe we shall be able to prevent such undesired situation in future.

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