

Instigators of violence should be brought to justice

The government has to ensure protection of all minority communities

WE condemn, in the strongest possible terms, the most recent attack on the Hindu community in Boro Karimpur, a fishing village in Pirganj upazila, Rangpur. Since October 13, religious zealots have launched a series of attacks targeting Hindu communities in at least 10 districts. We join our voice with university professors, students, and other professionals and people across the country who have denounced these attacks and demanded answers from the government for failing to protect the Hindu community, as well as demand justice for the victims of these heinous and senseless attacks.

The attack on the fishing village was allegedly prompted, again, by a Facebook post "hurting religious sentiments." However, as this newspaper reported on Tuesday, a handful of law enforcers and the chairman of the local union parishad had temporarily managed to subdue tensions in its immediate aftermath. That is, until loudspeakers from at least three mosques were used to instigate people to attack the Hindu community. First of all, given the recent series of attacks on the minority community, we fail to understand why only a handful of law enforcers were deployed in the area. The administration should have sent many more police officials to ensure that no more unsavoury incidents took place. In any case, the instigators who used the loudspeakers to urge people to vandalise and loot Hindu houses and other properties must be identified and brought to justice.

The amount of damage that was done in the attack was reportedly enormous. Everything that the fishermen and other members of this community owned was either destroyed or looted. Therefore, these people need urgent support from the government which, we hope, will be up to the task.

What is most disappointing, however, is that we have been seeing this same story repeating itself, time and time again. According to Ain o Salish Kendra, as many as 3,710 attacks on the Hindu community took place between January 2013 and September 2021. These attacks included vandalism of and setting fire to Hindu homes, shops and businesses, as well as vandalism of and arson attacks on Hindu temples, and incidents of grabbing land and properties belonging to Hindu people.

Unfortunately, not only is this a result of increased societal intolerance—which has been propagated over the years by certain groups for political gains and/or personal benefits—but also an outcome of the failure of successive governments to protect minority communities and hold the attackers and instigators—including members of various bodies that were somehow affiliated with the ruling party of the day—to account. That is why these attacks should also serve as a reminder for the administration to reflect on its own actions and inactions of the past—and perhaps also the present—that have, at the very least, failed to prevent them.

The government must remain vigilant, especially in the coming days. Law enforcement personnel should be deployed at the slightest hint of disturbances or instigation of violence against minority communities. Hindu community members, who have been hurt or harmed during these attacks, need to be supported by the government in order to get back on their feet. Additionally, those responsible for the attacks—and particularly the instigators—must be brought to justice.

We must tackle learning loss head-on

Address the 'educational emergency' on an emergency basis

ONE of the areas most severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic is our education sector. It is one where the consequences may not be apparent immediately, but the nation would feel its effects in the long run. The closure of educational institutions since early 2020 was unavoidable, yet unendurable when stretched over a long period of time. According to a new study, about 7.86 million primary and secondary students were at risk of learning loss in August-September due to school closure, up from 5.92 million in March.

Although the online classes have tried to make up for the shortfall during the 18 months of shutdown, online teaching was, regrettably, a facility that a good number of the students did not have access to. According to the study, which was jointly conducted by Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), 40 percent of the households surveyed have no device for remote learning, including online classes.

But it is not only the learning loss that has impacted the students; equally debilitating has been the impact of mental stress they are suffering from. The effect, unfortunately, has been incrementally high, the number of such students rising significantly in August-September as compared to March. In August, over 15 percent of the surveyed households reported that their school- or college-going children had been suffering from mental stress since the beginning of the pandemic. It was 13 percent in March.

The statistics quoted above illustrate the various effects of the pandemic on the education sector.

We believe that alongside the NGOs, the government should also conduct its own survey in this regard—and do so more extensively—so that appropriate measures could be put in place without delay. Opening schools is not enough. One couldn't agree more with the experts who say that this is indeed an educational emergency and must be treated as such. We suggest that the education ministry heed the recommendations made by the two aforementioned NGOs, which include designing well-rounded supplementary remedial programmes to recover learning loss, ensuring psychosocial support for students, expanding the secondary stipend programmes, and enhancing the free distribution of digital devices among poorer students.

Tribute to a true admirer of Bangladesh

Mary Frances Dunham held the Bangla language and culture in her heart



ADNAN ZILLUR MORSHED

city. This is how she described her first impression: "As much of the town as I have been able to see so far is most charming. Very pictorial. I think we are in the garden district and I have not explored far enough to find the squalor that is supposed to exist abundantly, but as far as the business district is from here and as far as the university in the other direction there are meadows, fine

Engineering and Technology a few years later. Daniel was one of the designers of Kamalapur Railway Station, an icon of "tropical modernism" in South Asia.

Upon arrival in Dhaka, MFD thought her first task in this unfamiliar country was to learn the language of the land. While staying at Hotel Shahbagh—in walking distance from Dhaka University—she was fortunate to have found a great teacher, who inspired her interest in the Bangla language. A scholar of medieval Bangla literature, Prof Ahmed Sharif introduced her to several Bangla classics, including a few by Tagore. This interest would eventually lead her to learn Bangla with the devotion of an ethnologist and develop a focused research interest in Muslim *jarigan* (the term *jarig* comes from the Persian word "zari," meaning lamentation) with the prodding of renowned poet Jasimuddin. More than three decades later, in 1997,

Earlier in 1971, her effort to raise awareness of the East Pakistan genocide in the US Congress reflected her deep commitment to the people of Bangladesh and their right to self-rule.



Mary Frances Dunham (1932-2021)

PHOTO: DANIEL DUNHAM

modern buildings, wide avenues lined with tall green trees, small cows and goats grazing everywhere. The land is very flat, and from the hotel we can see far in all directions, but it looks like mostly trees and meadows."

That first impression was the beginning of an enduring relationship with Bangladesh: a country she took great interest in, studied extensively, and wrote about. MFD came to East Pakistan with her husband, architect Daniel Dunham, who was hired by Louis Berger and Consulting Engineers, a US-based consultancy firm that specialised in infrastructure building all over the world. Daniel served as the head of Berger's Dhaka office's architecture division before joining the Department of Architecture at the East Pakistan University of

she transformed her Master's thesis at Columbia University into a book titled "*Jarigan: Muslim Epic Songs of Bangladesh*." It was the exploration of a genre of Bangla folkloric music that mourns the tragic events in the battle of Karbala near the Euphrates River in 680 CE. Two years later, she worked with renowned litterateur Ahmed Sofa to translate his "*Tales of Flowers, Trees, and Birds*" into English. Earlier in 1971, her effort to raise awareness of the East Pakistan genocide in the US Congress reflected her deep commitment to the people of Bangladesh and their right to self-rule.

While in Dhaka, she was never afraid to venture beyond the perceived safety circle for expats, shunning the typical orientalisising tendencies of Westerners. She refused to settle into the comfortable

life of a "foreigner" in Dhaka's prestigious residential neighbourhood called Dhanmondi, which one of her friends called a "hopeless suburbia." Instead, she and her husband walked around Ramna and found a "quaint" house—Hafiz Villa—on Siddheswari Road that became their little Bangladesh for over seven years. Even though their house felt like "an untidy ruin swarming with women, babies, and tattered animals," it is from there that MFD unleashed her fierce discovery of Bangladesh.

When I first met her and her husband in the architecture building at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology in 1992, they were on a trip to Bangladesh. As a newly hired lecturer in the Department of Architecture, I was fascinated by their story of work, travel, and cultural encounters. I gave them a tour of the building, discussed Dhaka's evolution, and their time in pre-independence Bangladesh. Afterwards, they invited me to have dinner with them at the posh Sonargaon Hotel. Our animated conversation continued over a sumptuous meal. But I must confess: little did I understand then the extraordinary power of MFD, a diminutive woman with a towering zest for life and its extraordinary range of possibilities.

It was decades later, in 2017, when I met her architect-planner daughter, Katherine, in Chattogram, where she taught briefly at the Asian University for Women, that I reconnected with MFD. I had visited her and Katherine in their Upper East Side Manhattan flat, and I was overwhelmed to see MFD's vast collection of Bangla books and memorabilia. With artefacts ranging from rickshaw art to rare Bangla books to musical instruments of East Bengal, the apartment was no less than a museum!

Alas, by then, she had already been suffering from Parkinson's disease for over a decade and had become very fragile. Yet, a conversation about Bangladesh would brighten up her face. When I would say a few sentences in Bangla, she would nod and reminisce about her days in Bangladesh both in English and Bangla. At times it seemed as though she was a dual citizen of the US and Bangladesh!

Mary Frances Dunham passed away on Monday, October 11. When Katherine texted me Monday night that her mother had breathed her last, I missed both her and my own mother, who died after contracting Covid-19 last year. While my mother was laid to rest in our family graveyard on a melancholic rainy day, MFD's final destination was a tad startling.

In many ways, MFD was a force of nature. She was committed to a humanist view of the world, empathy for the downtrodden, and belief in the sustainability of a carbon-neutral world (she was an impassioned advocate of the bicycle as a carbon-free mode of transportation). She was born in 1932 in New Jersey, US, and spent her childhood years in France, becoming fluent in French. She graduated from Radcliffe College in Massachusetts in 1954, and four years later, obtained a Master's degree in education from Harvard.

She was no second fiddle to her architect husband during her stay in Bangladesh. She was proactive in the patronage of local culture with the spirit of an enlightened native. Instrumental in establishing the first Alliance Française in Dhaka during the 1960s, she brought her love of languages to Bangladesh. She taught Bangla to foreign doctors from the Cholera Lab (later icddr), so that they could communicate directly with their patients and undertake surveys in rural Bangladesh. This was who MFD naturally was—no pretension, no pursuit of fame. All this emanated from her profound sense of service to society.

Even in death, she didn't abandon that sense of serving humanity. She had instructed Katherine to donate her body to medical research on Parkinson's disease. There will be a public bench in her honour in Manhattan's Riverside Park on 111 St. This way, her name will be a part of the city's public realm. MFD once wrote that she had never forgotten the lyrics of a Tagore song: *Ontor momo bikashito koro, Ontorotor he, Nirmol koro, Ujwal koro, Shundor koro he ...* (O' innermost one, help flourish my soul, make it pure, make it bright, and make it beautiful...)

MFD, you will be missed. Rest in peace.

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What are we doing when there is a code red out there?

Now is the time for climate action at an individual level



MUHAMMAD MUSTAFA MONOWAR

THIS year, a report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on human-induced climate change was termed a "code red for humanity" by UN Secretary-General António Guterres. It is an undisputed fact that Earth's climate has been changing, and that human activities are contributing to it. There are bodies of scientific evidence behind such claims. For years, climate scientists have warned us of the global temperature rising due to heat trapped by the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by human activities worldwide. The outcome of those activities is now slowly becoming acute. The series of heatwaves in the US, Japan, Spain, and Pakistan, floods in Germany and China, the wildfires of Canada, California, and Greece are just small reminders of what could be coming in the next few years because course correction has not been taken seriously enough. Even Dhaka is experiencing a hot October in 2021, with temperature ranging from 31-36 degrees Celsius on an average, which is far from the usual. In 2020, the range was 26-33 degrees Celsius.

Yet, most of us are busy just carrying on. It hints at our climate denial. Climate change is a practical example of the prisoner's dilemma: everyone waits for someone else to fix the boat and ends up drowning together. It seems we would rather push ourselves to the brink of destruction than acknowledge the mess we are making in the name of luxury, status quo and lifestyle.

The important and most obvious question in this case is: Who starts first? Is it the government? Or is it the

people? Where and how do all of us come together? If I am not ready to start changing my lifestyle, who would? And if everyone waits for the others to change their lifestyles, is it ever going to happen?

There are many ways to respond to this, but my preferred way is to start with learning about what we are doing to this planet. How much do we really waste energy? How much unnecessary waste are we generating every day? How often do we buy luxury products, and

in the coming years. Here is my rationale for thinking so.

At the University of Birmingham, I had coursework on climate ethics as part of my studies in global ethics. The lectures, evidence and scenarios that I discussed with my academic mentor, Dr Merten Reglitz, left a lasting impact on me. I am also an alumnus of Brac University and a current student of the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB). I am making an open request to the leaders



Residents are silhouetted as they watch the Blue Ridge Fire burning in Yorba Linda, California, US, on October 26, 2020.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

imported and processed goods that come at the cost of wildlife and forestlands? Becoming aware of the problem is often a starting place; the rest takes its own form.

In the age of the internet, it is not hard to find information. What is rare, though, is deciding to open our eyes, despite the daily burden of responsibilities on us.

I personally believe the academia in Bangladesh should come forward with more efforts to respond to climate change

at these institutions to invest more resources to inspire the youth to become front-liners, activists, ethicists, teachers, researchers, and entrepreneurs who care more about the future of humanity and the well-being of the planet, rather than senseless profiteering. Most of all, we need citizens who are aware of the grave situation ahead of us, and develop a sense of responsibility in their personal lives and career paths.

It is not unlikely that there will be a shift in the nature of jobs because of the emergency ahead. Covid-19 has taught us that we have to adapt to survive—the sooner we do that, the better. Many people have lost their traditional jobs due to Covid-19; the climate crisis may not be so different.

A fundamental shift will be necessary in the major sources of GHG emissions, and we cannot continue to wait for others to hold their sides of the bargain anymore. It is too late, and we have to start doing our part. This starts with two major areas: tracking environmental footprint, and changes in lifestyle. It starts with initiatives and incentives to build green businesses, and recruiting more people in green roles.

On top of it all, every citizen needs to become actively involved in keeping pressure on their local representative as well as the government for climate decisions, and tracking the actions being taken to mitigate the impacts of and adapt to climate change.

There is plenty of scientific evidence that suggests that the heatwaves, the floods and the crop crisis may occur more frequently in the coming days, and more people are projected to lose their homes and become climate refugees. Denial means remaining oblivious to these evident facts and possibilities. Yet, the sense of urgency does not mean giving in to climate anxiety. Climate anxiety is paralysing and it only leads to further denial.

Each of us is responsible for what we do to this planet. Waiting for others to start their action has led us to this point. To let this planet die from our careless activities would be the greatest and most shameful defeat of humankind. The time is now for every individual to actively get involved in combating the climate crisis.

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