

# The Daily Star

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## Are they the real masterminds?

Perpetrators of Pirganj attacks arrested

THERE is no denying the fact that, had the law enforcement officials been more alert and proactive, most of the attacks on Hindu houses, temples, and business establishments that occurred in various parts of Bangladesh since October 13 might have been prevented. However, the news of several alleged perpetrators of the attacks being arrested is indeed good news. We have always held the view that the attacks were planned, done deliberately with ulterior motives, whatever they might be. No sane person, whether Muslim or Hindu, would desecrate a holy book, unless it is to inflame passion and generate hostile reaction from the public.

We compliment the law enforcement agencies for the relatively quick arrests, but we must admit that it is difficult to accept that these well-planned attacks were the brainchild of those arrested. We believe that there might be others who have pulled the strings behind the scenes, and Saikat and his accomplice, who were arrested over the Pirganj violence, are but puppets who were acting on the instructions of the architects of those pernicious acts. According to a Rab spokesperson, the Pirganj incident was the result of personal animosity between Saikat and two others—Uzzal Hossen and Paritosh Sarkar. The latter two have also been arrested.

The account provided by Rab is hard to comprehend. We believe the incident was not the result of mutual hostility—it goes much beyond that. What, for example, was the intention of Paritosh to upload a picture that was highly incendiary? Was it beyond his comprehension that such a picture would invite backlash against his own community? It is important to find out why Iqbal, the alleged perpetrator of the Cumilla desecration incident, put a copy of the Quran at the foot of a Hindu deity. Was he acting alone or was he instigated? It is hard to believe the first would be the case.

There have been several arrests made in other places as well. These attacks should not be dismissed as sporadic incidents, or knock-on effects. We believe that a sinister plan is afoot to impair the integrity of Bangladesh, and soil its reputation as a country of communal harmony. It is, therefore, imperative that the responsible agencies identify the main protagonists of the attacks. This is a serious national security issue, and the sooner the facts are unearthed, the better we can be prepared to prevent such assaults on our nation in the future.

## Concentrate on producing vaccines locally

It could be a game-changer for us in containing future outbreaks

ACCORDING to Dr Firdausi Qadri, winner of this year's Ramon Magsaysay Award, Bangladesh needs to attain self-sufficiency in vaccine supply as soon as possible to combat the Covid-19 pandemic and any future public health emergencies. In an exclusive interview with *The Daily Star*, the renowned scientist has said that as Bangladesh becomes a middle-income country, it will be increasingly difficult for it to acquire vaccines at a lower price. We have already seen how difficult it has been to acquire vaccines for a country like ours within a reasonable timeframe during the Covid-19 outbreak—with suppliers breaching contracts and developed countries hoarding vaccine doses. Once further effects of climate change and rapid urbanisation kick in, outbreaks of new and old infections may become more prevalent globally.

Despite Bangladesh making significant progress in the last six months in terms of building the necessary infrastructure to produce vaccines locally, the government has a lot more to do to promote existing vaccine production infrastructures as well as build new ones. Unfortunately, there was very little done in that regard until the last six months, which is the reason why we are still lagging when it comes to having the infrastructure to develop vaccines domestically. Private companies also have a huge role to play here, according to the noted scientist. But to entice them to come forward, it is imperative for Bangladesh to get WHO's prequalification, which will enable local pharmaceutical products—especially the vaccines—to enter the international market.

Having the capacity to produce vaccines locally is crucial. While medicines can cure diseases, preventing people from getting those diseases in the first place through vaccination is always a better alternative. Moreover, due to the overuse of antibiotics worldwide, we are seeing new and more powerful antibiotic-resistant superbugs emerging, which could pose a huge threat to public health in future. In addition, the increasing threat of future outbreaks of other diseases means that having the capacity to produce vaccines domestically has now become essential for our public health safety and national interest.

We hope the authorities heed the warnings of Dr Qadri and other medical experts and scientists, all of whom have stressed the importance of taking quick and effective initiatives to develop Bangladesh's vaccine production capabilities. Not only will it add an important new item to Bangladesh's export basket, but it could also make the biggest difference when it comes to containing future outbreaks and saving thousands of lives.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Child marriage must end

Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world. Studies have shown that the more a girl is educated, the lower the chances of her being married off at an early age. To end child marriage, the government should focus more on educating our girls, so they can raise their voices against this social evil.

Ummei Amena Poly, Feni Government College

# What is eclipsing our communal harmony?

To understand communal violence, we must dig deeper

### A CLOSER LOOK



TASNEEM TAYEB

COMMUNAL tensions in Bangladesh have recently escalated to an alarming level. During this year's Durga Puja, one of the biggest religious festivals in "secular" Bangladesh, some criminal elements unleashed unfettered violence on the minority communities. Over a period of four days, a group of radicalised individuals, including youths, torched and looted homes of Hindu families in various districts across the country. The festivities turned into a shameful episode for the nation. A country that is known as a land of communal harmony came under scathing criticism from the world community as they condemned the attacks.

However, amid all these narratives in this discourse, what we are missing is a conversation on what enabled the perpetrators to carry out such well-synchronised attacks. If the attacks were premeditated, how did our intelligence agency radars fail to pick up the signals? How could such a series of attacks be carried out in broad daylight, for so many days, under the very noses of the law enforcement agencies?

An even more alarming question is: Why did so many youths—video footage and press photos show that a lot of the zealots were in their 20s and 30s—take part in such mindless violence? What motivated the locals to turn against their own neighbours, with whom they have coexisted for so many decades?

One may recall the 2012 Ramu incident, one biggest attacks on a religious minority community in this country in recent years. Since then, over the last nine years, many attacks have taken place across Bangladesh.

context as well as a subtext. The current discourse centring around the recent spate of communal violence is more focused on the subtext, rather than the context. And the context here is multifaceted.

Rather than asking questions only about who Iqbal Hossain is and who are his accomplices, or why the police failed to disperse the mob or stabilise the situation, the authorities should also be assessing why this happened in the first place, or how this spread from Cumilla to other regions, including Kurigram, Bogura, Chapainawabganj, Sylhet, Rangpur, Cox's Bazar, Bandarban, among many other locations spanning the length and breadth of the country. What would perhaps be more productive to ask is what made Iqbal Hossain who he has metamorphosed into: a radicalised man. What led to the creation of such a strong network of religious zealots, or who are the puppeteers?

The government now needs to look at the intel lapses that have resulted in the

heinous assassination of the father of the nation.

In 1975, General Ziaur Rahman paved the way for Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh to re-enter mainstream politics by lifting the ban on them that had been imposed after the independence of the nation in 1971. Then in 1979, the Zia-led government removed secularism as a pillar of our nation's constitution. Later in 1988, former president Hussain Muhammad Ershad made Islam the state religion. Then, Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh became a part of the Khaleda Zia-led BNP government and wielded significant power during their tenure. Even the Awami League government has had to adopt a compromising attitude under pressure from various religious quarters, not least the Chattogram-based Hefazat-e-Islam, which has staged multiple protests against many decisions of the current government.

Even school textbooks were not spared. These books have been "purged" of content written by non-Muslim writers and poets. For instance, in 2017, excerpts from Ramayana were removed from the National Curriculum and Textbook Board's (NCTB) books, meant for study by government school students. Poems by Gyandas, Bharatchandra Ray, Rangalal Bandopadhyay, and Sunil Gangopadhyay were replaced by other poems written by Muslim poets. Why were these changes made? What message did it send to the people? What are we trying to teach our children?

These decisions by various governments over the decades—resulting in gradual deviation from the core pillars of our nation's constitution and its values, secularism being one of them—have sent wrong signals to the fundamentalist quarters and the people in general: one that suggests that the political actors are religiously conservative in their outlook and could be coerced by radical religious groups into giving them leeway for their actions.

This, however, is not how the founders of this nation had envisioned the future. Whatever past mistakes were made need to be corrected. The radical elements and the radicalised people—be it from any religious community—should be given the message that there is no place for communal disharmony or hatred in this country.

While identifying the perpetrators of these brutal attacks, the government should not lose sight of the root of the problems that need to be thoroughly scrutinised and sensitively addressed. The government should also not give the radical groups of other religious communities the chance to exploit this situation to their advantage. And to do this, they need to thwart any future attempts to destabilise its religious harmony.

I like to think of Bangladesh as a land of communal cohesion, a land that cherishes all its people, that is secular and where all of its citizens are equals. This is how it has been since the beginning, this has been the philosophy behind its independence, and this is how it should be in the future.

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Communal harmony lies in the very foundation of Bangladesh, and it is up to all of us to ensure that nothing disrupts it. PHOTO: UNB

The government is now saying that the attacks on the Hindu community were premeditated. Various quarters are trying to tarnish the image of the government and the country through these well-orchestrated attacks. There are conspiracy theories brewing in the neighbouring countries as well. For instance, a report published by *Khabar 365 Din*, a Kolkata-based daily, reported that in the context of the Tripura election, the attacks could have been carried out through a joint plan between Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh and the Indian Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), in order to trigger pro-Hindu sentiments in Tripura by stoking communal tension in neighbouring Bangladesh. Gobinda Chandra Pramanik, secretary general of Bangladesh Jatio Hindu Mohajote, has also been accused of being a provocateur. And there are many more speculations floating in various quarters regarding the origin of the attacks.

These attacks have not only shaken the confidence of the minority communities, but have also dented the secular spirit of the nation. Even in the 90s or early 2000s, such an attack on the minority communities would have been unfathomable to the average Bangalee citizen. Let us forget, Bangladesh was born of the spirit of Bangalee nationalism, above creed, cast or religion.

Things have not been well in recent years. One would remember the incidents of violence in Nasiragar, Rangpur and Bhola in 2016, 2017 and 2019, respectively. Such attacks have only grown in intensity. So how come a nation that was built on the spirit of secularism and Bangalee nationalism has morphed into a country where the minorities cannot even celebrate their religious festivals in a safe environment?

In any situational analysis, there is a

execution of these well-planned attacks on the Hindu community. There are multiple intelligence agencies in the country who are well-equipped with resources to gather intel, especially those of significance to national security. These agencies, along with the government, need to scrutinise where they went wrong. Were their priorities not right? Did they not have adequate resources to monitor the situation? Could they not anticipate the situation? Did they underestimate the capabilities of the radical elements in the country? Or were they just complacent? These are questions that need immediate answers.

At the same time, the government also needs to assess and understand why the nation is losing its secular spirit, and why its people are turning on each other. Where does the foundation of this destructive rage lie? The answers to these questions perhaps lie in the history of Bangladesh after the

# Is Bangladesh's apparel sector ready for industry 4.0?

### RMG NOTES



MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

THE footprint of Bangladesh in the global apparel industry can be traced back to the early 1980s, and by now the industry has achieved phenomenal growth in exports. Until recently, the global apparel sourcing trajectory has been following a cost-based model and has always found its way to cheaper destinations. But as the evolution of fashion continues, global trade is increasingly affected by factors like fast fashion, social and environmental compliance, and responsible business.

Fortunately enough, the strategies adopted by Bangladesh over the years have mostly been in favour of the industry, which is why we could position ourselves as the second largest apparel exporting country in the world.

Today, fast fashion brands are selling new collections to their customers every week. On the other hand, seasonal collections would take six to eight months from the stage of design concept to the stage of the item being ready for production, combined with another two to three months before the product would reach the shopping outlets. We are talking about a lead time of almost a year from concept to customer—this is no longer sustainable to serve today's customers. In this digital era, technology is now enabling customers to even ask Alexa, the digital assistant by Amazon, to search for that "trending" dress they saw the other day. AI-enabled Alexa

can not only provide you with the most relevant choices, but can also give you some style tips and place the order for you without even needing you to key in your credit card number. This is happening now.

How will Bangladeshi apparel makers continue to stay relevant in this digital era? Can we continue to operate on the old model, and be the dinosaurs in the digital world?

The world is progressing faster in information technology and connectivity through smart devices than ever. Only in 1985 did we start to learn how to connect our files in the computer storage through a network system. The world now is virtually connected with almost zero lag in time.

We are now preparing to enter an advanced stage where the Internet of Things (IoT) will connect every object to Big Data, and IoT compatibility will be a requirement—be it an industrial good or a personal belonging. Big Data and Artificial Intelligence (AI) have transformed from being mere buzzwords to truly state-of-the-art, leading-edge technology enablers, which are now helping many tech-savvy apparel brands enhance customer experience.

According to the International Data Corporation, as many as 102 million wearable devices were shipped in 2016 to be stitched into our clothing. Smart wearables are seen as a great addition of value to life, and this has marked a new era in fashion evolution.

Digitisation is pervading every aspect of business and leading to higher productivity, reduced costs, reduced man-to-machine ratios, efficient use of resources, and so on. Nowadays, digital technology enables virtual photo-realistic simulation of

garments that makes physical samples and proto-typing redundant. Though automation in apparel manufacturing is not expected to go to the same extent as other developed industries, significant progress has already been made in terms of introducing robots and cobots on the apparel production floor. Among other future technologies, 3D printing or additive manufacturing could absolutely revolutionise the fashion business through downloadable clothing. With continuous pressure on fashion brands to speed up marketing products and make turn-around time faster for product development, the only way forward is digital.

Changing customer expectations are forcing the traditional fashion business models to rethink and change their business—especially when they feel the threat from tech-savvy heavyweights like Amazon and young start-ups like Shoes of Prey, Unmade, Farfetch, etc.—with innovative ways to serve customers and provide newer and elevated levels of customer experiences, giving the customers what they want, when they want it, and where they want it. The focus now is on business-to-customer (B2C) throughout the value chain, and no longer on B2B2C.

**A smart way to pursue the SDGs**

The world is increasingly leaning toward environmentally sustainable products and services. Bangladesh was an outstanding achiever of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and is committed to pursuing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Our next generations also care about the environment as they make their purchase decisions based on their deepest value systems. Brands are now paying heed to sustainability and the

environmental impact of their products, and the whole apparel eco-system is buzzing with innovations.

Bangladesh has already made a robust start in the area of green industrialisation within the apparel sector. The latest technologies and innovations are bringing major solutions to saving water, energy, and resources, which are of great value to the planet. Biofibres, waterless dyeing, and converting waste to brand new fibres—it's all happening these days.

Now, it is time to take a more aggressive step to enhance competitiveness and get compatible with industry 4.0. For us, the big questions are: Are we prepared to cope with industry 4.0? Do we have the strategy and required policies to create an enabling environment? Do we have the knowledge, resources, and motivation to go for smart factories? As we pursue the vision of taking our industry to the next level, technology and innovation are the only way to get there.

In order to accelerate technological progress, we must invest more in human capital. We need to keep track of the future state of technologies to be used by the fashion industry, what type of skills would be required to operate them, and of what quantity and quality. We need to equip workers with the right skill-sets, with tech in mind. Technology will be a game-changer for us in terms of sustaining competitiveness, product innovation, and sustainability.

"Manufacturing as usual" will be obsolete in a decade. Are we ready to embrace the change?

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