

“People here don’t combine to build up anything bit by bit but they flock together to enjoy the unholy glee of pulling down what has already been built. Even this might have been condoned if it had not been inspired by hideous self-interest... For this long life of mine I often curse myself. I do not even entertain the hope that out of this orgy of destruction, life will emerge somehow or other... This will not happen here. The seed of truth cannot germinate in the rubbish-heap of untruth.” [Rabindranath Tagore: The myriad-minded man, Rupa & Co, 2000]

Democracy at Stake?

POLITICAL PERSECUTION IN POST-ELECTION BANGLADESH

*K M Subhan **

*Taufur Rahman ***

“What’s wrong with it if a particular community supports a particular party? One can exercise his/her franchise in favor of anyone. It is his/her democratic right. Why would one be oppressed and tortured for it? If another party wants to gain confidence of the minority people, it should strive to earn confidence of them, not oppress them.” This was the opinion of one of the readers of a leading English Daily¹ of Bangladesh shortly after holding of the national election 2001 in the country. And this no doubt must be the way most of the people of Bangladesh feel? Unfortunately, there are a few who don’t. These are the ones who try to destroy the communal harmony practiced in this country for ages. These are the ones who do not want to tolerate any sort of opposition. These are those people who did not, and perhaps do not even now, want the independent Bangladesh. Neither they are in favor of giving any space for freedom to flourish.

The unfortunate experiences that the people of Bangladesh have been going through since the parliamentary election 2001 are indeed unprecedented. Never in its history, Bangladesh faced such a tragedy. This is even worse than that of 1971. The enemies of democracy and freedom were a few and identified at that time. But the enemies are now so smart that people fail to point their fingers at them readily. Indeed untruth has rid truth. The level of post-election violence and terrorism let loose against the ‘losers’ and particularly Hindus is beyond any comprehension. ‘The winners take all’ and the losers must run away from their own places constitute the content of today’s sham democracy in Bangladesh. Minorities are being tortured with unlimited terrorism just because there is a prevailing perception that they only vote Awami League. Add to them ordinary supporters of the same party. More than forty percent of the voters ‘voted’ for AL despite credible allegations of rigging of the election. It is so unfortunate that nearly all of these people feel insecure and excluded in today’s Bangladesh. But never before we felt so helpless and excluded. The ordinary people never had to share the burden of political crises at the top. Let’s have a look at the historical perspectives which created such a chasm in our national psyche.

* Former Judge, Bangladesh Supreme Court, Appellate Division

** Free Lance Economist and Consultant

Historical Perspectives

The area that now constitutes Bangladesh has been an example of cordial co-existence of various religious and ethnic groups. Not only the peoples within, whoever reached the land from outside lived with harmony with the natives. "It seems, for a long time, the region was a melting pot. The original inhabitants in the food-gathering and early farming stages might have been joined by some of the native people from further West driven out by the Aryan invaders from Central Asia. There was a wave of tribal settlers from the mountainous regions in the East including perhaps tracts of Burma, Cambodia, Laos, etc. Orthodox Hinduism ran its sway for a long time. Later on persecuted by Brahminism, the bulk of the population converted themselves to Buddhism. The Arab traders had been coming in for some time. Islamic sages in the train of the Turkish conquest of the sub-continent came and set up hermitages across the country. Gradually, and with the help of the Muslim Pathan conquerors who ousted the Sen dynasty, these saints converted Buddhists and lower-caste Hindus into Islam; the upper-caste Hindus largely migrated to Western Bengal. Some of those converted Hindus established royal dynasties and "Pathanized" themselves thereby."²

Thus the population of this area became bit by bit a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious society with members of all the races, cultures and religions living happily together. And the strength of such togetherness was such that even the invaders "got themselves Bengalicized rather than remaining aloof conquerors."³

How did a nation of such communal harmony become polluted with elements like fundamentalism and communalism? And that too when the country became independent after a war of liberation. The origin of the pollution goes "far back to 1905 when Bengal was first divided by the British colonial state."⁴ The division was annulled in 1911, and that marked the germination of anti-Hindu feelings among the Muslims of Bangladesh. The brief interlude of Pakistani rule further cemented this feeling among a section of the elites. Despite a thorough going war of liberation this communal feeling pervades many of our people. The military rule further amplified this feeling. The so-called democratic rules of Khaleda Zia fueled more fire into this tendency of division of the society in communal lines. The feelings still remain to some extent, and a quarter is ready to take that opportunity to destroy the communal harmony of the country, which we are so proud of. At times the opportunists were even able to challenge the pride of ours through some unfortunate incidences of communal riots. But even then, it can be claimed that until very recently communal harmony of the

¹ The Daily Star, 19 October 2001

² W. Haque, *Bangladesh: Problematics of Transition*; Dhaka, 1978.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Atiur Rahman, "Roots of identity crisis and problems of underdevelopment", Key-note at the First Nordic Conference for South Asian Studies.

country did not come under great threats. Despite attempts by ruling elites to divide the nation, the civil society at large have come out boldly in favor of preserving amity. Ordinary people have always supported this struggle for amity, pluralism and secularism. At an international convention of United Nations, it has been rightly noted that "Bangladesh's geographic location and history have made it a home to people of diverse origins, races, colors and descent. The assimilative character of Bengal civilization combined with the intermingling of inhabitants with occasional waves of immigration have resulted in a composite society which has racially and culturally turned into a melting pot over the millennia. A variety of races including the Dravidians, the Mongoloids, the Negroids and the Aryans and their continuous intermingling have, therefore, contributed to a composite racial "mix" in such a way that categorical distinction of "race" or "ethnic origin" per se have ceased to exist for the Bangladeshi people. Race itself as an issue does not impinge on the consciousness or outlook of the Bangladeshi people in their intrasocial relations as they seek to find homogeneity in their identity through common language, tradition, culture, norms and harmony in tolerance and coexistence. The quintessence of Bangladeshi society is therefore the intermingling of races and any consideration of Bangladesh's overall approach and policy towards the elimination of racial discrimination must begin with an understanding of the racial homogeneity of the Bangladeshis."⁵

Recent activities of terrorism targeted to the political, religious and ethnic minorities are clear threats to the quintessence of the Bengali society as mentioned above.

Post Election Violence in Bangladesh: The Published Facts

The terrorist activities that have been taking place all over the country since the parliamentary election held on 1 October 2001 are multi-faceted. Although it should not be expected that all the acts of terrorism since then have been published through newspapers of the country, the reports and news that have already been published (may be only about only 10% of the whole truth) are disturbing enough for someone who still believes in democratic values.

This paper attempts at bringing together the incidences of violence published over the last three months of 2001 in a number of selected newspapers and review those incidences from several points of views. The newspapers from which the news have been collected are: the Daily Ittefaq, Janakantha, Pratham Alo, Jugantor, Sangbad, Bhorer Kagoj and the Daily Star. While compiling the news, particular attention has been given to avoid any sort of overlapping that might cause to double counting of any news. Also, in considering the figures of casualties, the minimum number mentioned in the respective news have been taken. Therefore, the figures presented in the tables may rather underestimate the realities rather than overestimating those in any way.

⁵ United Nations, International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, Bangladesh Report, March 2000.

Not all the news published in every newspaper of the country during this period could have been collected. We were able to scan only a total of 299 reports and news. We have chosen these reports selectively only to highlight the nature of the wounds which the society had to bear with during this short period of time. This has been done with an objective of raising the conscience of serious researchers and experts on human rights so that they probe further in-depth. Table 1 shows the breakdown of those with respect to the nature of terrorist activities. There have been terrorisms of all types. The largest victims of terrorist attacks by the ruling party terrorists were the political minorities, i.e., those who were defeated in the election (Awami League). Of the total of 299 reports/news, those regarding attacks on AL activists and supporters number 92 (more than 30%). These are the attacks that are purely political in nature. Attacks on political opposition have also been tied with attacks on religious minorities. Such reports/news counted for 46 among the total. Attacks purely on religious minorities have been reported in 47 reports/news. A total of 6 reports/news have described attacks on ethnic minorities as well. Attacks that have been directed simultaneously to political, religious and ethnic minorities have been reported in 12 news. A total of 96 reports/news have been about other types of terrorist activities. These include illegal toll collection, forceful occupation of other's or public properties, attacks on ordinary people not falling in the above categories and other related attacks. It is important to note that violent activities perpetrated by the ruling party terrorists have only been considered here. This has been done purposefully to see the impact of election results on the losers and minorities. Terrorist activities done by those who have no political backing have not been considered for this analysis.

Table 1: Nature and Extent of Violence as Published in the Newspapers

Nature of violence	No. of news (Oct – Dec 2001)
Political violence	92
Attack on religious minorities	47
Attack on both political and religious minorities	46
Attack on ethnic minorities	5
Attack on ethnic minorities for political reasons	1
Attack on political, religious and ethnic minorities simultaneously	12
Other types of violence by ruling party terrorists	96
Total number of news on violence	299

Source: Calculated from newspaper clippings.

These incidences of violence have cost a lot in terms of damage they have caused in the forms of deaths, injuries, rapes, economic loss etc. This excludes the cost which they have incurred in terms of loss of image of the country. Table 3 presents only glimpses of those losses. It shows only the numbers of deaths, injuries and rapes

476 murdered during October-November

According to a count of Research and Documentation Department of Human Rights Implementation Organization, in the last October and November, a total of 476 killings took place all over the country. Another report by *Adhikar* says that only in November 50 people were killed and 1743 wounded by political violence.

[*Daily Janakantha*, 1 December 2001]

that have been reported only in the scanned newspapers during the three months: October to December 2001. There were, of course, a lot more deaths, injuries and rapes reported during that time. But these figures refer to only those which were done by the politically backed terrorists. The figures are horrible, no doubt: a total of 80 deaths, 2811 injuries and 228 rapes! There must have been many more which remained beyond the coverage of newspapers. Really, these figure seem to be severe underestimation of what really happened. This is realized when we consider a report published in the daily *Janakantha* on 1 December 2001 saying that a total of 476 murders took place during only the two months of October and November 2001.

Table 2: Casualties of Post-election violence

Nature of violence	Deaths	Injuries	Rapes
Political violence	32	1097	1
Attack on religious minorities	4	45	224
Attack on both political and religious minorities	27	1265	1
Attack on ethnic minorities	0	7	0
Attack on ethnic minorities for political reasons	0	50	0
Attack on political, religious and ethnic minorities simultaneously	0	50	1
Other types of violence by ruling party terrorists	17	297	1
Total	80	2811	228

Source: Calculated from newspaper clippings.

In October, the casualties were maximum. Table 3 presents the trends that show the number of casualties over the three months. As the month immediately following the election, October was the one with maximum casualties.

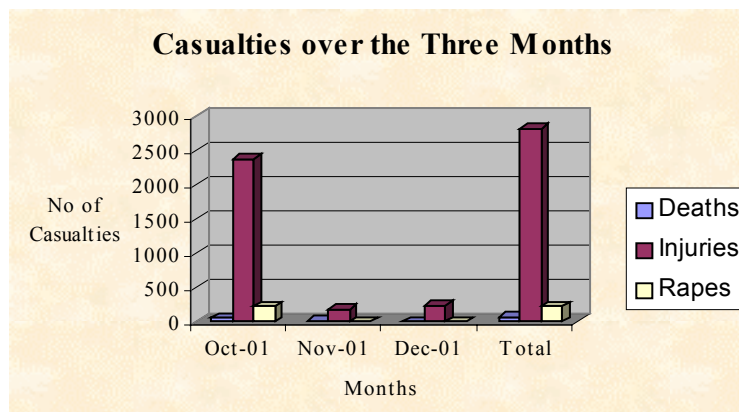


Table 3: Trend in Casualties over the Three Months

	October 2001	November 2001	December 2001	Total
Deaths	56	19	5	80
Injuries	2376	187	248	2811
Rapes	222	6	0	228

Source: Calculated from newspaper clippings.

305 People Murdered during Caretaker Government

During the 3 months of Caretaker Government political crimes and killings increased though social crimes occurred in less numbers. According to a survey report Democracywatch, 305 people were murdered and 16,531 people were wounded during the 3 months of Caretaker Government in political violence. A total of 265 occurrences during those 3 months killed on an average 4 persons a day, and injured 802 daily on average. [Source: Daily *Janakantha*, 19 October 2001]

It Originated a Bit Earlier

It seems that the terrorists got their licenses for misdeeds since the Caretaker Government took charge. Law and order situation deteriorated fast since then. A report of the daily *Sangbad* says that during the 87 days of the Caretaker Government a total of 203 people were killed in political violence. Over 10,000 people were wounded during the period. The report also says that during those 87 days, 2 thousand incidences took place that can be labeled as political violence. Find out the daily averages. The figures tell everything.

87 Days of the Caretaker Government

Month	Dead	Wounded	No. of incidences
July 16 days	19	500	200
August 31 days	62	1500	350
September 30 days	82	3000	500
October 10 days	40	3600	1000

Source: *Daily Sangbad*, 11 October 2001.

Winners' Attacks on Losers

One party wins and the another loses. This is the practice in democracy. But this time the losers in the election are about to lose everything they have. Since the election results the terrorists backed by the winning alliance have been launching all types of attacks on their opposition. AL leaders,

Brutal!

The terrorists separated the wrist from the right hand of an activist of Chatra League. They also fired on his legs and stabbed with sharp knife. This happened on 13 December 2001 in Munshiganj. Two days later, on 15 December, another person named Kabir, son of an AL leader Quadir Member, was tortured brutally. The terrorists cut veins of his legs. His family tried to save him. But they couldn't, instead they were wounded seriously.

[Source: *Daily Janakantha*, 21 December 2001.

activists and supporters have been the victims of unlimited terrorism. Tables 1 to 3 presented above must have understated the extent of political attacks. This is because the tables have been calculated with the incidences published in some selected newspapers. It is likely that many

more such incidents remained unpublished. Yet deaths of 32, injuries to more than thousand only for political reasons have been reported. Do we need more?

There have been attacks of all sorts: Killings, physical torture, illegal occupation of the properties, rapes and what not? Here are some of the minor examples.

Ugly Face of Terrorism

The brutality occurred at Meerpara of Mirkadim *upazila* under Munshiganj district. Fatema Begum (50), a local AL leader was the victim of the brutal act. The terrorists led by Mobarak and Lal Mia dragged her out

Burned even the Holy Quran!

Activists of the so-called Islamic political party, Jamat-Shibir did not fear to burn even the holy Quran. In course of burning a freedom fighter's homesteads using petrol, they burnt to ashes 5 copies of the holy Quran, 600 bags of paddy, furniture and motorcycle. Ducks, Hens and two dozens of Pigeons were burnt to death. The Shibir activists looted ornaments, cash, television, VCR, cassette player, motorcycle and other valuable belongings. This horrible act of crime took place at the homestead of freedom fight Commander Motiur Rahman in the village of Protapnagar of Ashashuni *upazial* under Satkhira district.

[Source: *Daily Pratham Alo*, 6 October

of her house, and beat her mercilessly in front of people. In medieval fashion they cut her hair in front of Meerpara mosque. People got speechless at this brutality. They had nothing to do but observing this ugly face of terrorism.

AL Identification Check Post!

To identify the fleeing Awami League activists, check post has been set at Gournadi and Agailjhara of Barisal by the local BNP activists. This complaint came from the people who went to Bakai, Bhulsi and Ghosher Hat areas from outside. They said that to enter into those areas one had to provide his bio-data to the BNP activists. A group of 10/15 persons are always on watch. The AL people could not even get out of their houses out of fear. Many left their homesteads earlier. They were lucky perhaps. [Source: Daily *Jugantor*, 6 October 2001].

Banquet with the Looted Cow!

BNP activists at Munshiganj enjoyed their banquet with a looted cow. The armed cadres took the Australian cow from the house of an AL activist named Jahangir and slaughtered it for the big event. The banquet was celebrated at Noagaon area. [Source: Daily *Prathom Alo*, 13 October 2001]

Tortured even in the Jail!

Even into the Jail, the BNP activists have been reported to have been torturing the AL activists. Some of the victims coming out of the jail to attend the court complained that the BNP activists, apart from assaulting them physically, were torturing them brutally. They were compelling them to do whatever they wish. One of the jail guards has admitted the fact. [Source: *Bhorer Kagoj*, 8 October 2001]

These glimpses can give only a very little of what have actually happened in the near past and what are still going on.

We want justice

RAPE VICTIM'S MOTHER DEMANDS

“A gang of about 30 hoodlums swooped on the house of Anil Kumar Shil of the Purbo Delua in Sirajganj, beat the family members and then gangraped his daughter on October 8, before driving them out of their house, the victims alleged at a press conference in the city Saturday.”

Anil Kumar Shill said the hoodlums attacked their house at the dead of night and first beat the family members mercilessly. The hoodlums then confined everyone but the girl in a room and brutally raped her for over two hours.

The ordeal did not end there. Fearing that the Shil family might lodge a case against them, the gang kept them confined in their house till October 9.”

“The victim's mother told the newsmen she seeks justice, not money.”

[The Daily Star, 22 October 2001]

Violated Humanity

The greatest shame for the nation has been brought by the attacks on the minorities, particularly on the religious one. We have histories of communal attacks on minorities. But never has it been so blatant and huge as of this time. Crimes against minorities this time might have even surpassed those of 1971 by the Pakistanis. Stories like the one of Shefali can fill our hearts only with shame and anger.

Tolls or Girls!

Oppression on the Christians

Members of 50 Christian families of Baraigram upazila of Natore cannot sleep at night in fear of attacks on their girls. The terrorists already cut away crops from their fields. Now they want their girls. Their demand is simple: give money or girls. [Daily Janakantha, 8 December 2001]

Our newspaper scanning revealed news of 228 rapes since the election. Almost all of the victims were minorities. But these are the ones reported only in some of the newspapers. Many others are now being gradually revealed. But many more remain unreported. Never will many see the daylight.

The extent of repression in Char Fashion is being gradually revealed

“Attack on the houses, looting, hitting, raising tolls were just ordinary incidents. No one knows how many women have been raped. The women do not want to share this information sheer out of shame. Zafar and Tomal, two cadres of BNP of Char Manika Union have led the violence. They first attacked one Molla and forced him out of the area. They then violated his daughters. A daughter of a hindu Teacher in South Nazimuddin of Char Madras Union was lifted by the BNP cadres and returned after 3 days. She was raped several times. Incident of rapes was also spotted in the village Hamidpur. Fifty two goats of Gani Mia, Jabbar Howlader and Jamal Dewan were looted by these criminals. The fishes of fishermen Sultan Ahmed and Belayet Hossain of villages Mohammadpur were looted. Women of a Hindu family at Chairman Bazar in Hajariganj union were violated too. The hair of Hossain, a fisherman, were cut and then attacked. Many women in Char Kalam Union have been raped. One of the eyes of Ruhul Khalifa, an Awami League Worker at Baburhat was destroyed. A little girl of 13 at Nilkamal Union was raped as well. A women polling agent of Awami League in Rasulpur Union was raped too. The oppressed have at last started opening their mouths. Some of them are preparing to lodge cases as well.” [Daily Ittefaq, 24 January 2002]

Story of Shefali

About 10 years ago, mother of two Shefali Rani Das, about 36 now, of Annada Prashad village in Lord Hardinge Union of Lalmohon upazila under Bhola district, slipped and broke her left leg while fetching water from the village pond. Five months later, her entire leg was amputated. Since then, Shefali's world was confined to a set of homemade wooden crutches. Her husband Shuvash Chandra Das, a landless peasant of the village, struggled hard to run the family. On October 2, Shefali found her neighbours fleeing their homes as scores of hoodlums started attacking the Hindu community of the area. She immediately decided to send her 15-year-old daughter to another village. Her husband and 21-year-old son had already fled the village.

In the afternoon on the day, Shefali knew she had to move out of her home. Her neighborhood was almost deserted. She feared for her safety. It was raining and she struggled on the muddy path to reach the main road near Bentor Bari, a cluster of houses in the middle of paddy fields, where many of her friends had already taken refuge. She gave up hope of reaching Bentor Bari through waist deep water. Helpless, Shefali went to Ganga's house by the road nearby.

At night, she heard screams and saw that most of the inmates were running away from the house. Shefali grabbed her crutches and struggled out of the house. By then, all others in Ganga's house had disappeared in the paddy fields. Shefali could not go far. She limped along Ganga's family pond and reached the small area where turmeric (holud) is cultivated. A gang of about 15 men was returning the same way with bundles of looted goods. They caught her. All Shefali remembered was that after two men took her nakphool (nose ring) away (this is how the village women describe being raped), she walked on her crutches.

Shefali was then unconscious for four days. On October 31, when this correspondent arrived at Annada Prashad, womenfolk there talked about a comatose Shefali and said she was admitted to Char Fasson State Hospital.

Next day at Char Fasson, this correspondent learnt that Shefali was released from the hospital after nine days and was staying with a relative somewhere in the vicinity of Char Fasson.

A source in Char Fasson agreed to help us find Shefali's whereabouts, but on condition of anonymity. In the evening, the source returned with the news that Shefali was under the care of a relative at village Dashkandi in Jinnaghar Union of Char Fasson, about 10 kilometres away.

At around 8 PM, the source agreed to show us the way to Dashkandi, but he insisted that in no way his identity could be revealed. From a safe distance, he led The Daily Star team of four on two motorbikes to a small place by the metalled road. The team then had to take an earthen road on its own amid paddy fields and thick vegetation towards Dashkandi. The source had then vanished.

After about five kilometres on the treacherous road, the team arrived at Dashkandi. Half a dozen young men equipped with battery operated torches kept vigil in the village. They said there was tension in the area but the local BNP leader had been very sympathetic to the Hindu community there.

A shy Shefali appeared on her crutches amid a small crowd of men, women and children. Nearby, a maulana (Islamic scholar) was delivering a speech on a loud speaker on the occasion of Shab-e-Barat. "I do not remember what happened to me later, I remember all my body ached terribly, I could not move my hands after those men grabbed me in the turmeric field, I remember two men taking away my nakphool (nose ring)," she said, looking down. Shefali did not know where to go from her relative's house in Dashkandi. She said she would wait for her husband to decide about that.

The following morning, the night guard of the Dak Bungalow, where The Daily Star team was staying, said that about 15 masked men had come looking for members of the Star team. They left the place warning that the team should not look for any other victims belonging to the minority community.

Dr Shahidul Islam at Char Fasson Hospital said that the country's existing laws help rapists rather than victims. The victim of rape has to prove that she was raped. This is difficult without any eyewitness. This helps the rapists, in most cases, go free.

"Shefali was hospitalised with multiple injuries, including human bites, over various parts of her body, unable to move her right hand. She could not talk or eat for about a week and she was traumatised," Islam said looking at the official report of the hospital.

When asked if she was tested for rape, Islam cited the law. He said as per the law of the land, the attending doctor cannot test a patient till there was a specific complaint, lodged through proper channels of the administrative set up. "In Shefali's case, she was unconscious when she was brought to the hospital by a villager," he said.

"We need a demand from either the police or the court of justice or a formal complaint from the victim or her relative to carry out a test to determine if the person was raped or not. Then just before the test, she must be identified by a police official of the respective thana," Islam continued. "Then the test must be carried out in daylight and in the presence of a responsible female member of the society or a female nurse."

So Shefali was never tested for rape, and as such there is, till date, no charge of rape against her assailants. In fact there is no charge of any sort against the perpetrators, he said. [The Daily Star, 10 November 2001]

Other Acts of Terrorism

Deaths, injuries and rapes have only been stated so far. What about others? Those have been uncountable. Nobody actually can be certain about the extent of terrorist activities that have taken

place all over the country over the last few months. There have been all sorts of crimes. Innumerable ordinary people having no political connection or not being minorities, have been victims of terrorism as well. Our selected newspapers reported 96 of such occurrences as shown in table 1. A wide range of crimes are included in these 96 cases. There must have been many others remaining beyond the coverage of those newspapers. And perhaps lot more are yet to come to the surface. Although political violence might have lessened a bit, fear among ordinary people is rising.

How Long Will It Continue?

There seems to be no end of these political oppressions and attacks on minorities as well as ordinary people. What will happen to the people suffering

if the situation does not improve? The government does not seem to be taking these reports seriously. The Home Minister thinks these are all exaggerated reports. The weird Finance Minister thinks that these might have been done by the Awami League activists! The minorities have not still got their confidence back in administration and low and order situation. Ordinary do not feel that they are secured and safe. But how long will these feelings remain? Is there no end to it?

Journalists under Attack

Terrorists backed by the ruling parties are torturing even the journalists. The complain against the victims is that they publish the truth. In the 47 days after the now government took oath, a total of 7 journalists have been wounded. Another 9 have been threatened of murder. Besides, office of a newspaper has been damaged. [*Bhorer Kagoj*, 10 December 2001]. Earlier a report of the Daily Star on 4 December 2001, said that the first 40 days of the BNP-led coalition government have seen 40 incidents of attacks on journalists.

Occupied Public Toilet!

The BNP cadres have been occupying everything. They have left not even public toilets. The public toilet situated at Fulbaria, one of the busiest areas of the capital, has been illegally occupied a BNP terrorist on 5 October 2001. He of course has done it virtually without any resistance. [Source: *Bhorer Kagoj*, 6 October 2001]

Refugees on the Native Land

Ramsheel of Kotalipara stands at the bank of the River Paisa. The place is crowded with the people who have become refugees in the native country. These people took shelter here away from their own villages. Most of these people came from Gournadi and Agailjhara of Barisal. The dreamt that they would describe the tales of their sufferings to the Home Minister. They gathered at the college ground on 15 October. They were waiting for the Minister coming. At last, they were disappointed. The Minister did not come. [Source: *Daily Sandbad*, 21 October 2001]

Festival of Occupation

Festival of illegal occupation continues all over the country. Terrorists are occupying almost everything. Here's an account of what are being occupied.

- 12 residential halls of Dhaka University.
- Maximum rooms of MP Hostel.
- Bus terminals at Sayedabad and Fulbaria.
- Siddheswari College and Habibullah Bahar College.
- Taxi Stand at the Airpot.
- A market at old Dhaka and another beside near New Market.
- Tempo Stand at Gulistan.
- Taxi Stand at Uttara.
- Public toilet at Gulistan.

[Source: *Bhorer Kagoj*, 7 October 2001]

Impact on the Economy

The terrorisms that have been engulfing Bangladesh since the parliamentary election have already had immediate and direct impact on the economy of Bangladesh. The loss of image has been directly affecting foreign investment environment in the country. In no way the current environment is creating any sort of confidence among the foreign investors. The disaster in the export sector has only been deepened by the terrorisms. The results are already obvious. In about a quarter of a year the GDP growth rate has come down from well above 6 to 4 percent. And it is feared that even this rate cannot be sustained till the end of the year if the situation does not improve. Inflation which was only 1.5% before June 2001, has already crossed 5 percent plus. Prices of daily necessities have been rising sharply since the start of the new regime. The prices of oil, electricity and gas have already gone up at an instruction of the government. Agriculture will be badly affected due to price hikes of fertilizer and water. It's the ordinary people who will be the worst sufferers.

People's Reaction

People have been reacting to these acts of terrorism and inhumanity right from the beginning. A lot of letters have been published in the dailies since the crimes started to surface in their pages. Let us share the gut feeling of an expatriate Bengali who hates herself from the bottom of her heart.

"Harrowing tales of depravity"

JUST ANOTHER WOMAN, ON E-MAIL

Until today I was very excited about coming back home and starting a new job, new family and new life in Bangladesh. But I just read your "Harrowing tales of depravity" and I am almost in tears.

I do not know if I am angry, sad, scared or just plain confused. I just don't know how to react to this. I am not too sure about coming back either. I am a Muslim but my heart cries out for all those Hindu women who had their 'nakful' taken away from them.

And it is not about being a Hindu or a Muslim, because none of those religions justify the violation of innocent women and children. What assurance do I have that the Hindus would not retaliate in the same way against me or other fellow Muslims? How will I protect myself or my family from that?

How will I protect my roots, which are still in the rural areas? How will I explain such atrocious behavior to my children? It does not make sense.

But you know what, I will probably just write this letter and do nothing more about it. But you on the other hand have taken a stand. You have made the effort to create a roving team. Rather you and your paper have made the effort to unearth the truth.

I hope the way the article has moved me, it will move some other people too and together we will make a difference. Keep up the good work.

My own research has led me to believe that the greatest mistake the Pakistanis made was that they violated our women. You have done the same mistake and will earn the wrath of it in due time. You have no idea how powerful women can be when they want to.

Conclusion

This paper, though incomplete, sheds deeper light into what has been happening in Bangladesh. We are now witnessing the worst form of crisis in governance. The government which has come to power by hook or crook believes only in the facade of democracy. They hardly care about the substance. The cost of this has been indeed very high which is being paid by the ordinary people of Bangladesh. And the price which the poor minorities are now paying simply cannot be fathomed. The terror which has been let loose on the vanquished by the “victors” is perhaps unparalleled in the history of electoral politics. Unless good senses prevail on the victors and their mentors, both local and foreign, the very fabric of democracy and hence pluralism could be the victim. Time is indeed running out too fast. The ultimate price will, of course, have to be borne by the people of this country as the very potential of Bangladesh for sustainable development could be at stake.