

September 11

It keeps changing the world, even to this day

It has been a different world since September 11, 2001. Terrorism has emerged as an intractable, evil force, the fury of which continues to be witnessed in various forms and shapes.

Terrorism is spreading its tentacles and a sizeable chunk of world resources has to be spent to minimise its impact. It is a threat to mankind as a whole. At no point in history has the need for finding a stable and secure world order been felt so acutely as it is today.

The USA is the country, which assigned itself the crucially important task of reining in the terrorists. But the primarily unilateralist approach to eliminating the threat created new problems instead of solving the old ones. The UN was sidetracked as the US led the charge against the militant elements in Afghanistan and the Saddam regime in Iraq.

In fact, the world has become doubly poorer: on one level, we have seen terrorism evolving into a monstrous evil; on the other it's a divided rather than a united world that is facing the challenge.

The US-led anti-terror campaign has yet to address the root causes behind the scourge. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have only served to feed terrorism. What has compounded the situation is the continuing irresolution of the Palestine issue. Anti-terrorism campaign unfortunately has been reactive to events rather than being responsive to causes.

Terrorism is universally reprehensible because it causes death and destruction on an ever increasing scale; obstructs economic progress; and nullifies the benefits of technological advancement. The anti-terrorism agenda must be brought to the fore of regional and international commitments. But to be effective, the approach has to be based on a correct analysis and assessment of the root causes responsible for its malignant growth. Only then can there be a breakthrough in the fight against the dark forces.

The draft bill for anti-graft commission

How to ensure its independence?

A bill to form an independent anti-corruption commission having been okayed by the cabinet, is currently undergoing scrutiny of the relevant parliamentary standing committee. Experts at a roundtable held by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) recommended some changes to the proposed bill with a view to making the commission truly independent. It is good that a long-felt need is being addressed by the government after all. Especially heartening is the fact that the civil society leaders are making no bones about how they would like the anti-graft commission to be. Merely labelling the body as 'independent' on the draft bill, doesn't make it so; rather autonomy has to be built into it.

How do we ensure that? The first safeguard of its independence lies in making the commission a constitutional or statutory body. The head of the state is to choose the chairman and two members of the commission from a panel of six prepared by a selection committee. The President is required to consult the Prime Minister before any appointment is made, except in the case of Chief Justice. Since the whole point about constituting such a body is to keep all kinds of executive levers at bay, the prerogative of a 'free' choice may vest in the President.

The key to the formation of the commission will be held by a selection committee comprising six members including finance and law ministers and representative from the Cabinet Division. We endorse the view of roundtable participants that 'the two ministers' should be dropped from the proposed body. For, there had been and could be allegations of corruption against government ministers. In theory, no functionary of the government, elected or not, should be outside the commission's writ. The draft bill has no provision for bipartisan representation in the selection committee. There must be an adequate slot for the opposition to strike a balance in the selection process.

Former chief justice Mostafa Kamal's view that chief justice should not be included in the selection committee resonates with us. He suggests that the judiciary has already been drawn into controversy due to the provision for outgoing chief justice to head the caretaker government. So, 'enough is enough', he added.

Let's reiterate in the end what we wrote in an earlier editorial on anti-graft commission: "Not merely structurally, it has to be also functionally independent and self-contained with delegated financial authority and the powers to investigate and grant sanction of trial".

M. SHAHIDUL ISLAM

An ugly sense of fear and foreboding is tightly embracing us from all directions. We feel acute insecurity despite being a nation of 130 million strong. Whatever explanation might be on offer to help us excavate the roots of the prevailing socio-political ailments, the political landscape has adorned itself with an evident polarisation into two major streams.

On the left of this spectrum lay the major left-leaning parties and the main opposition, the Awami League (AL). On the right, the BNP-led four party coalition is apparently being befooled up by the Ershad faction of the Jatio Party (JP). Although the battle line is yet to be drawn clearly, it will be perhaps sooner.

The precise timing of this alignment is important and its ramifications could be ominous. Of the three major scenarios that one can foresee, all seem to lead the nation toward more confrontations. The two major political streams have taken diametrically opposing stands at a time when lawlessness, price hike and a tense geopolitical situation has taken the global economy into a spin.

Backdrop to a fractured polity

The homogeneity of our nation didn't ensure the growth of a home-grown consensus politics. This prevents us from standing in unison while facing challenges from within and without. Geo-politically, the CHT is tense again. In the South-West, the Sorbohars have shown their grit to the joint forces and rendered 'operation spider wave' inconsequential. Islamic extremists stalk the north while the center of the country has witnessed extreme lawlessness and anarchy in recent days.

None of the above would have mattered much if the foundation of our parliamentary democracy had rooted itself firmly. The parliament hardly saw the faces of opposition lawmakers since the early 1990s

and various parliamentary committees remained dis-functional due to an ongoing 'melodrama' centering such committee's composition.

The 1996-2001 (7th parliament) parliament had 23 sessions and 382 working days. Of the 189 bills passed in that parliament, none were opposition-mooted. As well, a 12 day long parliament (6th parliament), which was the shortest in the nation's history, had no opposition participation. The BNP walked out of the parliament on 14 July 1996, which was the very first day of the

diplomats from the USA and the EU have been urging for the same an uptime of times.

This conflict-ridden scenario would have obviated us had the polarisation aimed at electoral dividends. But this is not the case now. The elections being years off, and the BNP-led coalition's two-third parliamentary majority having made the regime less amenable to the demand of a mid-term poll, the politics is heading toward a showdown if things don't improve in many fronts simultaneously, and sooner.

In creating, nor our limited influence in global politics has any bearing over.

For instance, under the changed ambience of international political currents, most of the Muslim dominated nations feel the trauma of the US-led global war on terror. The US also looks for Islamic activists seeking to align with the Al-Qaeda to subscribe to a global Islamic creed that seeks to turn every Muslim state an Islamic one. Reports claim the number of Islamic extremists' outfit as 15 in our country.

nance is in short supply and the economy languishes amid lawlessness and stymied growth, all our efforts will fail to uplift our standard of living. We can ill afford to lag behind and stagger while in the race.

As well, public opinion is something that we must learn to respect. In the 1991 election, the AL got 33.67 per cent of popular votes, which increased to 37.9 per cent in 1996 and further to 40.24 per cent in 2001. But this increase in the popular support stands in sharp contrast

one. We would have little to worry about had the polarisation of the past been harmless and non-violent. Our recent history tells us that the bureaucracy and the military too can partake in conducts unbecoming of such public institutions, as they did during the 1996 instability.

One also must not fail to factor in the economic condition of the nation with the prevailing socio-political instability. The economic snapshots clearly indicate that this is not the way an open economy must operate. The Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has plummeted to an alarming level recently (over 50 percent less than previous year) while the corporate climate is becoming increasingly hostile to the mores of a market economy.

Of the 127 registered companies at the DSE, share of 70 companies run below the face value. Another 25 companies have failed to hold AGM and declare profit. The CSE has little better to report about. In the bureaucracy, political considerations had served in deciding the fates of many in the last two promotions, creating further instability. The two leading foreign investors, US and Japan, have had serious concerns about the way we handle foreign investment matters, administratively and in principle.

Thus, given the choices we have before us, the nation is hard pressed not to cling onto this unpalatable status quo. If we allow the status quo to take its natural course, we face political extinction. If we don't, we have much more sacrifices to make. The only middle course is for the elected representatives of the people to decide what shall we choose and for what good reasons.

Author and columnist M. Shahidul Islam is a Senior Assistant Editor of this paper.

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Scenario two: constitutionalism at stake

The absence of rules of law tends to devour the efficacy of all legal instruments. Of all the issues that had bedeviled our political atmosphere, law and order situations rank prominently. Then comes the partisan stand of the bureaucracy that had lost its neutral credibility over the last 12 years amid intense pressure from successive political regimes.

The police force too has been blotted with a partisan clout, resulting in their reluctance to treat the criminals with the treatment they deserve. The criminalisation of politics has ultimately given birth to the politicisation of all the criminals who find cool comfort under the patronage of local stalwarts. The police force is resource-starved and politically handicapped.

Scenario one: A show-down in the making

The leader of the opposition had already called for a movement to ouster what she said a 'corrupt and incompetent government' while the newly elected president of the FBCCI urged major political parties to settle their disputes through negotiation to ensure a healthy environment for economic prosperity. Among the foreign observers,

Scenario three: a violent outcome

The nation banks on (a) good governance, (b) sound economic growth, and (c) rules of law. If good govern-

Recently, an extreme manifestation of this ongoing polarisation was witnessed in the vicinity of Dhaka's court-house as pro and anti regime lawyers brick-battled to prove their points. The CHT situation meanwhile warranted the visit of the parliamentary committee of the CHT ministry to seek causes of, and remedies to, the ongoing skirmishes between hill and non-hill people. Does one think these incidents are isolated, piecemeal and transitory? Think again.

Terrorism in Khulna and Chittagong has two distinct characteristics. The targets of terror in the commercial capital are business magnets. In Khulna, another port city, politicians of the AL are targeted. These killings are related to political agendas of local stalwarts, which is hardly what we're interested about. The facts that the criminals seem to have a sound strategy to destroy the country's commercial atmosphere, as well as the growth of a constitutional polity, are dangerous enough.

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with the number of seats it won in the parliament. The AL's winning candidates were 101 in 1996, increased to 146 in 1996, only to nosedive to 62 in 2001.

The BNP too gradually increased its popular votes from 30.81 per cent in 1991 to 33.61 per cent in 1996 and further to 41.14 per cent in 2001. But, unlike the AL, the BNP's number of winning seats reduced from 144 in 1991 to 116 in 1996. During the 2001 elections, it skyrocketed to 196.

The evident disparity in the numbers of popular votes and the seats won shows that there are broader national issues for which people chose to put a particular political party to power at a given time. A study of the voting behaviour of our people also reveals that both the major parties do enjoy support at the grassroots level and have the capacity to stir the political pot when required. This 'balance of nuisance' is what they consider as their potent weapon while being irreconcilable and stubborn in reaching a consensus on major issues.

Another observable phenomenon is that, aside from the mass uprising in 1990 to stop the Ershad regime, the 1996 instability had a distinct dichotomy like the present

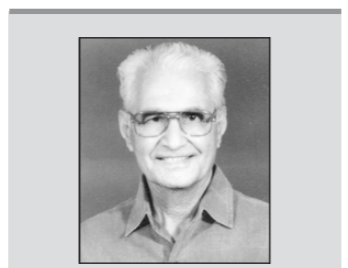
other is unrealistic. The fact is that real nuclear doctrines on both sides now can only be to rush to be the first: cripple the other at the very start by preemption, if possible. It is a terrifying prospect.

What of the future? Can India and Pakistan remain at peace, with their two nuclear deterrents being continually modernised (updated)? This is another name for a non-stop nuclear arms race. Atomic weapons on both sides are being actually increased and kept ready to destroy the other. Both sides remain afraid that the other might leapfrog to a higher level of preparedness. Hence the race. If so, where is the basis for peace? No government can trust its rival where such weapons are concerned. Being morally abhorrent, these weapons are inherently destabilising because they are conceived, brought into being and become a deterrent in secrecy, deceit and lies. Just look at the statements in 1980s and 1990s of both sides. Misuse of language apart, both are busy getting the better of the other's designs. These weapons begin by destroying trust and lead to continuous instability next.

So long as there are so many atomic weapons and missiles around -- with both sides updating (proliferating) them upward -- there can be no peace or cooperation between India and Pakistan. Left alone, human error, cupidity, communal politics or accidents will some day cause a war that neither side really wanted. If peace and people's material progress is desired, the two peoples have to get rid of these weapons somehow and regain each other's trust to become friends.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

Mushroom clouds still hover



M B Naqvi writes from Karachi

MUSHROOM clouds over Pakistan and India have not gone away with the return of the Indian and Pakistani soldiers from the borders. These clouds lower and lift and sometime move toward the horizon. There is as yet no agreed basis for peace and far too much of mistrust of each other characterises the two government's thinking and conduct. No responsible Pakistani or Indian can remain unmindful of the possibilities. It is agreed that the use of atomic weapons by either or both would be utter madness. But both sides, as the 2002 military stand-off showed, were, and one asserts are, ready to use these weapons. We had better re-examine the problem.

Last week (Sept 3) both India and Pakistan reviewed each other's military plans and capabilities and evolved the strategy to meet the threat from the other. Here, Indian confabulations merely provide the context. One is really concerned with the decisions of Pakistan's National Command Authority. Fortunately, these are available in non-quantitative general terms. These are: (i) 'the nuclear programme has matured over the years and would continue to receive top national priority'; (ii) 'Pakistan will continue to consolidate its minimum deterrence needs'; (iii) 'there is going to be no let up in qualitative upgradation of the nuclear deterrent which would fortify national security'; (iv) 'therefore there can be no freeze or rollback of the nuclear programme and all talk of it has been termed by President Gen. Musharraf as "irrelevant, outdated and totally false"'; and (v) NCA reviewed progress of the strategic

programme and 'expressed complete satisfaction with the "operational readiness of Strategic Forces and the pace of development work"'. There is no reason to doubt that Indian Army's ISPR -- whatever it's called -- would say quite similar things with regard to India's triad of nuclear deterrent and in much the same terms. Indians too would say that they have no intention of running an arms race. They would also echo the Pakistani statement, virtually in these very words, about their 'strong non-proliferation record and would reaffirm their commitment to univer-

sally all updating or consolidating. That is what the NCA has said. Pakistan is not overawed by numerical superiority of India's atomic arsenals and is going ahead with its Kashmir policy with suitable changes. These will arguably absolve it (in American eyes) of the charge that Pakistan is sending insurgents into Kashmir, even if the Indians continue to cry foul.

Generally, India's gaze is fixed on National Greatness (conceived primarily in military terms) and a role that goes with it. Pakistan also aims at power to lead Islamic World.

By the middle of that year the Indians made as if they are ready to let Pakistan use its atomic weapons in reply to their invasion. Should Pakistan actually do so, the Indians said they would give a riposte that will send Pakistan back to the stone age; all its industrial-urban centres would suffer a nuclear death for God knows how long. None of it was empty rhetoric. At this point the US strongly intervened. Two things happened as a result: Indians did not mount the invasion. Secondly, Gen. Musharraf blinked in June and promised to stop the infiltration of insurgents into Indian-controlled

their nuclear deterrent, that will mean a defeat in human and moral terms for both. Secondly, the only case of victory with atomic weapons in South Asia can be (i) a surprise (pre-emptive) one; and (ii) it should be so massive as to totally cripple the victim so that it cannot retaliate in kind. One's assessment of current conditions is that neither side is as yet able to mount such a massive preemptive attack that by its massiveness will end the war. One's basis is not a fact that happened but it is a subjective judgement of what seems likely. For, if either side is able

to absorb the first strike and remains capable of a second or even third strike through dispersal, all the proceedings become idiotic and both sides will suffer utterly unacceptable destruction. As of now neither side seems capable of such a massive strike. How true this statement is? It is at least as true as the one about peace being kept by the presence of nuclear weapons.

There is another conclusion. All this talk of India abstaining from starting an atomic war while being ready to make a terrible riposte is fanciful. No military commander, or his government, with nuclear capability, can wait patiently for the enemy to make the first strike -- which is a defeat by virtue of the nature and scale of destruction -- and then he will bestir and order a counter-strike. War fighting is all about avoiding horrible losses on one's side and inflicting them on the enemy. Just as 1960s Flexible Response idea of Robert McNamara was nonsense, this sequence of first stoically waiting for the other to start atomic destruction and later to cause much more of that destruction on the

other is unrealistic. The fact is that real nuclear doctrines on both sides now can only be to rush to be the first: cripple the other at the very start by preemption, if possible. It is a terrifying prospect.

PLAIN WORDS

So long as there are so many atomic weapons and missiles around -- with both sides updating (proliferating) them upward -- there can be no peace or cooperation between India and Pakistan. Left alone, human error, cupidity, communal politics or accidents will some day cause a war that neither side really wanted. If peace and people's material progress is desired, the two peoples have to get rid of these weapons somehow and regain each other's trust to become friends.

sal non-proliferation goals'. And yet it is all about fighting a possible nuclear war on both sides.

No point in blaming the designated authorities for preparing for war. After all India and Pakistan are still in a state when a hot war begins, not to mention 56 years of cold war. No peace has been made in the current 13 years old phase of relationship. The two are not talking. Driven by arrogance of power India demands -- and gets Americans to support their demand -- that Pakistan should give up its trump card (stoppage of Jihad) before it will talk. For the rest, it has been ready to fight it out and remains prepared. Pakistanis propose to give better than they get: their doctrine for atomic weapons is First Use. The assessment one has made of the results of 10 months long military stand-off (2002) is that Indians were during Pakistan to use its atomic weapons first -- so that they can, after absorbing Pakistan's first strike, unleash a massive nuclear strike that will reduce it to stone age conditions. Both are still improving (increasing really) their nuclear deterrent and

Although living in two different worlds, they collide every day over Kashmir's violent insurgency. Indians have concluded that this insurgency could not have been sustained except with Pakistan's help. And hence it is the casus belli for India. Both continue preparing for the inevitable war. Hence those mushroom clouds may lower again.

The two have either not learnt any lesson from the military deadlock of 2002 or have learnt the wrong ones. Let's spell out the lessons as objectively as possible. But a few of one's assumptions need being made plain: suffering an attack by atomic weapons equals defeat: for, that means one or more cities destroyed with horrible human and material losses. Secondly, if both sides are hit with such weapons -- almost a certainty -- it is defeat for both. Now, let us assess the experience of 2002. India was credibly threatening to invade Pakistan. The latter was threatening, from day one, that it will use its nuclear weapons first so that Indians do not overrun a Pakistan that is weaker in conventional armaments.

Kashmir, if it was (still) taking place. By October Indians recalled their troops from the borders and the threat of war receded. By April next, Indian PM again extended a hand of friendship to Pakistan. This was grabbed with pleasure by Pakistan.

The two governments appear to have been greatly impressed by the fact that no war took place. As Gen. Musharraf claimed, and Indian President Abdul Kalam conceded, that the war did not take place because of the presence of nuclear weapons on both sides. It is impossible to deny a kernel of truth in the statement. But it is not the whole truth. India surely knew Pakistan possessed a nuclear deterrent when it mobilised for war and was on the brink of starting the war by about May, June; it was touch and go for all the world. India was, as noted, daring Pakistan to use its atomic weapons first. That would provide excuse for India to wipe it out altogether by a massive atomic counter strike.

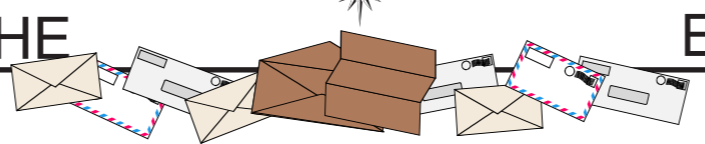
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Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Israeli Prime Minister's visit to India

It is evident that the US-Israel-India nexus is at work. Muslims in general, and Arab and Indian Muslims in particular have to watch out. The Arabs could do a lot to protect Muslim interest.

The economy of India is greatly dependent on Arabs and North African Muslim countries. The Indian companies have billion dollars contract there. Cancellation of these contracts will bring jitters to Indian economy. It is sad that the Muslim world lack unity. A Rahmam One-mail

Misinformation

This is in reference to the letter of Mr. Esam Sohail "Muslim Nobel

laureates meet tragic ends" published DS in 8th September 2003. Mr. Esam Sohail mentioned "The first Muslim to win a Nobel Prize, the late Dr. Abdus Salam of Pakistan, was promptly declared a non-Muslim by his government and denied the right to say simple things like 'asslam o alaikum' and the kalima under Pakistani law". Mr. Esam, I don't know where you found that late Dr. Abdus Salam was a Muslim.

For your kind information I am clear from hearing a recent broadcast of "Mitali" programme of VOA, Bangla Service, that late Dr. Abdus Salam was a 'self-proclaimed Kadiyani'.

To be a Muslim, two vital things are fundamental for every Muslim to confess, trust and follow the Al Quaran and Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM). However, unfor-

tunately the Kadiyani confess, believe and follow the Al Quaran but they confess Gulam Ahmad Kadiyani instead of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM). Every Ulema and Muslims don't consider the Kadiyanis as a part of Muslims. In Pakistan, the government officially announced that all Kadiyanis are non-Muslims. Since the late Dr. Abdus Salam was a self-proclaimed Kadiyani, so according to Pakistani law, he was non-Muslim.

Md.Zillur Rahmanan MSS Economics, BB Hall, DU

Timing of Sundarban Express

It can be said without any doubt that the train service through the Jamuna bridge on the Dhaka-Joydebpur-Khulna route is a milestone in the history of railway com-

munication. Now it will be easy to travel from Dhaka to Khulna. The general people always considered the Bangladesh Railway as an economic, comfortable and a secured mode of transport. But the railway authority has failed to understand the public mind regarding fixing of fare. On the other hand timing of the train remains elusive to many of us because the train leaves Dhaka (Kamlapur Station) at 5:00 a.m. A passenger willing to travel by the train has to leave his house at least one hour before the scheduled time i.e. at 4:00 o'clock. Is it possible to manage a transport at such deadly hours? Is it safe for a passenger to travel at that time when the law and order situation of the country is deteriorating everyday.

Khulna has to be considered as an industrial city. Many small and big industries are located here. All

the bank head offices and other business related offices are situated in the capital city Dhaka. So a businessman living outside Dhaka needs to visit the city quite frequently. So, the following proposals may be taken into consideration by the railway authority in respect of Sundarban Express:

1. Timing of Sundarban Express should be fixed like the Dhaka/Chittagong Mail for this will enable a businessman to complete his work in the capital city without wasting extra time for the transit.

2. The railway authority has to provide a considerable number of sleeping berths for the general people at an affordable fare.

3. The train timing should be inter-linked so that Chittagong, Sylhet and Noakhali passengers could get their respective trains. M.H.Bari

General Manager, National Seafood Industries Ltd, Haji Mohsin Road, Khulna

Why Mongla Port is dyeing?

It was 23rd of August when my cousin, my father and I went to visit Mongla Port. As we arrived there we found miles of fields with green grasses and cows were just walking on the road and on those green fields. To us Mongla seemed like Newzealand. We stopped for a while at the chief port administrator's office and from there an engineer named (Ruhul Amin) came with us to show us the Jetty. I and my cousin Urbi were very excited to see the ships. But as we reached the port, we didn't find any ships except for some small boats and launches. Then we were told that

Mongla Port was dyeing!! The reason what Ruhul uncle have told us was really upsetting!! It seems that for some years there have been incidents of stealing on the jetty. So, the foreign ships felt insecure there. The port also doesn't have its own thana. The OC (Officer in charge) of the town thana comes to the port after crossing the Rupsha river and it takes about one and half hours to reach there. The port also doesn't have the facilities for the officers living there. Most of the officers live in Khulna town and travel four hours everyday from town to the Port.

The transport system from Dhaka to Mongla is also not good for the businessmen out there. You have to go through Khulna to go to Mongla that takes about eight and a half or even about nine hours. For

that reason all the people who are in business prefer Chittagong to Mongla.

If the government builds a short cut from Dhaka to Mongla then it will be cheaper for the businessmen. The port also does need a thana for its own security.

The financial and economical condition of Bangladesh depends very much on foreign trade. So the government should pay attention to the Mongla Port and try to save it from dyeing. Faiza Nabita Dhaka.