LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA MONDAY SEPTEMBER 15, 2003

Disturbances in Kushtia

Religious fantacism must be countered vigourously

HE incident in Kushtia in which local people clashed with the members of the Hizbut Towhid is an indication of religious fanaticism trying to rear its head. It is also a pointer to the resistance being put up

It appears from the reports that members of the Hizbut Towhid were trying to distribute leaflets containing its own interpretation of Islam. The locals tried to resist the move and the clashes that ensued left at least one person dead and many others injured. This was clearly a case of excesses committed in the name of religion.

Bangladesh is known as a moderate Muslim country having a long tradition of religious tolerance. This tradition is something that we can duly be proud of. Hence, we cannot allow the fanatic forces to subvert it. The equanimity that we have in regard to all other religions is part of our fundamental ethos.

The ethos are rooted in history and primarily oriented towards maintaining inter-communal harmony. So the fanatic forces which are trying to disrupt this balance through means violent are actually showing an utter disrespect for the values and norms that form the very basis of our society. Besides, they are also threatening to upset social equilibrium.

The question is: how should we deal with the problem. Have we taken the right stance to counter it? The government stand on the issue should be clear and unequivocal-- religious fanaticism cannot be entertained. We should learn from the experience of other countries and avoid underestimating the extremists who may have the strategy of transforming society according to their own agenda. The Kushtia incident could well be the tip of an iceberg.

The BNP and the Awami League, which could have been a force in countering the threat, are busy playing their favourite blame-game. The fanatic forces are actually capitalising on the major parties' failure to address this common threat to society and polity.

People in general are showing due sensitivity to the problem. Now, the government must adopt a vigorous strategy to prevent religion being exploited for obscurantist political purposes.

Core LDC concerns articulated

Lukewarm response unfortunate

ANGLADESH'S proposals as the coordinator of the Least Developed Countries for allowing dutyand quota- free access to all LDC products and short-term movement of semi-skilled personnel to the developed world received a setback at Cancun on the penultimate day. Our commerce minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Choudhury told reporters that the LDCs would be firm on their stand and fight till the end. How far they can clinch the issue with an economic giant like the USA remains to be seen. However, it would be unprecedented if the points that had already been included in the draft proposal got deleted at the insistence of big economic

The frustrations of the developing countries were only natural. They were not asking for aid. They wanted to do business under a fair trading system in the belief that trade is key to self-reliant, sustainable growth. The developed countries have been advising us on poverty alleviation and structural reforms, so that economic development can be accelerated. But if the trade deal is fair to the developing countries, their industrial growth will be guaranteed and infrastructure strengthened leading to their all-round development.

If the advanced industrial economies insist on reciprocation from unequal partners, where do we go then? The trade negotiations have not been making any headway, although brains and minds worked over time. Actually, the division between the rich and the poor countries over the core issues has proven debilitating.

Despite the trade negotiations, or shall we say because of them, the share of developing countries in world trade has declined over the years. We have witnessed that when the chips are down and the times are testing, negotiations reach a dead-end. The pattern must be broken if we are to formulate a new set of WTO guidelines for the sake of an equitable international economic

Real politics or realpolitik? A strange anniversary



M ABDUL HAFIZ

Turning and turning in the widening the falcon cannot hear the falconer things fall apart and centre cannot

the blood-dimmed tide is loosed: and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is lost.

-- WB Yeats HE spectre bears similarity to the situation lately obtaining in this country. Indeed. the things are falling apart whether it's the country's internal order, the economy, the value system or its nation-building as a whole with the centre of authority increasingly proving unable to hold them together. The lawlessness has spiralled out of control and risen its all time high showing no sign of abatement even amidst countrywide alert. The ensuing anarchy has taken its heavy toll by putting at stake the people's individual and corporate safety, bringing the economic life to a grinding halt and driving the investors away -- albeit holding the whole nation hostage to the ravages caused by a bunch of diabolical criminals. A concerned citizenry, the civil society as well as the business community, repeatedly sent SOS for rescue only to fall on the deaf ear of the establishment. Ironically, all of their anxieties were followed by fresh spate of bloodcurdling crimes resulting in more killings, kidnappings, terrorism and extortion. The criminals seem determined to stop at nothing. Never before was the outlook of the polity so bleak and the spirit of the

people so blighted. Yet, two years ago making its pledge to wipe out terrorism and corruption the electoral plank the four-party alliance led by the incumbent prime minister returned to power. An electorate already tired of terrorism and its concomitant ills gave the alliance a land-slide victory only to be disillusioned months later. The popularity of the prime minister

PERSPECTIVES

The issues at hand are not to be tackled through just patchworks here and there. What is involved is the reconstruction of the decrepit society through a social engineering. It has to be a balanced society based on equity and social justice.

was not matched by her performance in the office. Second time the head of the government she is still wobbly in her steps and baffled by the challenges of governance when it comes to the hard issues of the polity. Her only asset -- a calibrated reticence with certain political savvy carried her through the crises of

With that asset and other aces in its hand the alliance may well survive politically and win elections in future but its empowerment even for umpteen years will not make any difference either for the country's law and order or changing the fate of the people. The alliance's performance in this regard for last two years is a pointer. It is, indeed, disgustingly naive and cynic and the alliance's achievement on law and order front rested only on passing the buck. The government's sound and fury in bringing back order signified little and yielded even less and the official assurances of improvement in the situation now ring increasingly hollow. Yet in a developing country like Bangladesh where everything revolves round the establishment, the government cannot wash off its hand by just placing the blame on others. The public is interested in the end-result which must ensure the prevalence of order in the society. This goal is far from achieved in last two years and there are few signs that it will be achieved during the remaining years of the government's tenure.

Another of the 'twin evils' the BNPled alliance wanted to fight -- the corruption -- has since raised its ugly head and occupied a wider space in our culture. The cost for the rescue, say of a business magnet, must have gone up because the rescuers are also likely to stake their share in The corruption has thus compounded the law and order situation and they together form a vicious circle which is closing around us

The public woes do not end here

In today's society, none of these

problems can be viewed in isolation from one another. The economic disparity and price hike of the essentials have, for example, profound effect both on law and order and corruption. The law and order will certainly register yet another dip as many people driven by the sheer urge for survival under harsh economic conditions would join the ranks of criminals. The corruption will have a boost when many under similar conditions would resort to it with a view to making their both ends meet. The alliance government did put up a few fire-fighting demonstration to douse the flame of lawlessness by launching special operations from time to time without going whole hog to address the problem's socio-economic dynamics. The same trend is at work in initiating a hyped-up Independent Anti Corruption Commission, In a recent meeting the country's intelligentsia has aptly unveiled the skullduggery and hollowness of the

The issues at hand are not to be tackled through just patchworks here and there. What is involved is the reconstruction of the decrepit society through a social engineering. It has to be a balanced society based on equity and social justice. The wastes and surpluses will have to flow to the lower ground of deprivation and deficiency. They cannot be achieved through anything but fire-fighting' efforts. Unless the government can enforce an affordable price in the market, the survival dynamics will put in place an alternative which is often unsavoury.

The alliance government has proved unequal to the task so far. It is to be seen how and when can it make a difference in its approach and thus portend a period of real politics and not just realpolitik in the country's body politic

Brig (retd) Hafiz is former DG of BIISS.



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

EPTEMBER 11is a strange anniversary. Two years ago on this day the world witnessed an event the like of which is hard to imagine. It has changed the world for good or for worse it is hard to tell.

On that fateful day when the bells were about to strike nine, three human bombs in the shape of commercial jetliners hit the US in New York and Washington DC. The targets were well selected, in New York the two tallest buildings known as Twin Towers were hit whereas in Washington DC, the sprawling heart of the military power of the US, the Pentagon, was hit. Another aircraft presumably heading for the White House finally crashed in Pennsvlvania.

This high drama was watched live on TV throughout the world in bated breath. The proud Twin Tower was turned into rubble and was instantly turned into wasteland. The loss of ives and property was colossal.

The entire US administration led by President George W. Bush was



attack on the soil of US in her entire history of

stunned. As immediate response countries. To make matters worse the internationally ostracised regime called Taleban of Afghanistan was picked up and

fierce US bombardment was aunched forcing the regime of Mollah Omar to flee For President Bush this was not satisfying enough. He picked on Saddam Hussein of Iraq. Like his former President George Bush, he attempted to build a coalition and immediately ran into a

snag. Minus the enthusiastic sup-

port of Tony Blair, the Prime Minister

of Britain, there has not been any

nearly three centuries.

significant partner in the coalition. Indeed the crisis has deepened The matter has been fiercely debated within the Security

Council of the UN and a huge crack has appeared within the Western Alliance. Thus three Permanent members of the Security Council, France, Russia and China have split from the Anglo-American plans of invasion of Iraq. The argument of existence of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) in Iraq have been proved false. Tony Blair and to a lesser extent George Bush continue to be arilled within their

both the leaders are due to face their electorate in the near future. The battleground of Iraq pres-

ents less than a rosy picture for President Bush. He declared the end of the war on 1 May last. Almost immediately Saddam's forces have mounted a successful querilla campaign against the US forces The body count is that, more US troops have lost their lives in querilla action than during the war in March. As news of death of US soldiers reach home, anxiety grows. The US does not appear to get out of the rut created by her.

There is talk of a new US resolution to be presented to the Security Council. Naturally a great deal of horse trading can be expected. The sticking point appears to be that whereas the US as the 'victor' in Iraq wants a special position in the future of Iraq, the other members of the Security Council like France and Russia, would want to give the UN a arger role, through which they would operate. In this scheme of things the question of sending troops to Iraq to join the Anglo-American forces has receded in the background

By his misadventure in Iraq President George W. Bush has unleashed a full blown crisis in the world. The most powerful country of the world finds herself stuck in Iraq and there are no sign of her extricating from the deepening crisis. She is suffering daily casualties and the price may become impossible to

The attack on the Twin Tower was the first ever attack on the soil of US in her entire history of nearly three centuries. This single event has made her lose the superpower status which she enjoyed following the collapse of the Soviet Union a little over a decade ago. It is perhaps sensing this reality that the Western partners have decided to take their distance from the United States of

Arshad-uz-Zaman is a former Ambassador.



Attack on WTC Twin Towers, September 11, 2001: The event that

never severed ties. Her secular

Mamta Banerjee's political wilderness ends, but how far can she go?

ZAGLUL A.CHOWDHURY

AMTA Banerjee is known to many as the stormy petrel of Indian politics for the reason that she at times takes the national political scene by storm despite the fact that her political organisation is confined to West Bengal state and is not reckoned with a force in the country's over all context. Mamta, known for her simple living but also rabidly anti-left stance, is definitely a factor in the political map of the West Bengal where her rivals consider her as over-ambitious as they see her political base as disproportionate to what Mamta wants to gain. For, critics say, the chief of the "Trinamul Congress", a breakaway faction of the Indian national Congress spared no efforts to become chief minister of the West Bengal state by dislodging the ruling Left front in the subsequent state assembly elections but her relentless endeavour bore no fruits. Then again, she was aspiring to emerge as a national figure by adorning key ministerial position, which once she accomplished but could not retain for too long. The loss in the fight to become chief minister of West Bengal on one hand and her departure from the ministerial berth of the federal government on the other, had made the political future of the often called "fire brand" politician somewhat

Many had almost written her off for the debacle at both national and

state levels. Some had even written the political epitaph of Mamta Baneriee, But rather paradoxically, she has largely weathered the storm and finally staged a comeback at the power base of the Indian government. She has been inducted as a central minister again much to the dismay of her critics. This marks the end of a kind of political wilderness and is being seen as shot in the arms of the lady politician who was fighting for existence after defeat of her party in the last state assembly

Mamta is familiar in Bangladesh

because the political map of neighbour India and more particularly adjacent West Bengal is a matter of interest in this country for obvious reasons. In that context, Mamta's phenomenal rise in Indian political scene from relative obscurity a few years ago took many by surprise. She was not much a factor in the Congress but shot into prominence when parted ways with the mainstream party in the West Bengal the process it was Mamta's small party and not the Congress that dreamt to capture power in the state from the leftists at one stage

But it was not to be, as the leftists maintained a strong grip in the state despite allegations of sorts on governance during their 23-year uninterrupted rule. The now nonagenarian CPM leader Jyoti Basu remained at the helm for long in ruling West Bengal and his voluntary retirement from power but not

much-talked defence purchase scam unearthed by "tehelka dot.com". Later her distance with the ruling NDA widened as she differed sharply with railway minister Nitish Kumar, who succeeded her in railway ministry, over shifting of some key railway offices in West Bengal. She had also protested the increase of the diesel prices by the federal government even though her party is a partner of the ruling NDA. There was a talk of her quitpolitics brought another able CPM ting the NDA but she did not go for

credentials were also in tatters because of alignment with the BJP, widely seen as a communal force despite existence of liberals like prime minister Vajpayee. Mamta also faced mini revolt within the 'Trinamul" as her absolute ascendancy in the organisation was no longer intact and she also returned to her earlier hostility with the main Congress following failure of their alliance in the state assembly polls. Mamta's electoral success in West Bengal remained largely in the urban areas. Nevertheless, Mamta

Baneriee's induction to the fed-

eral government is a success for the lady politician whose party is not much a force because its eight MPs in the Lokshaba bear little critical importance for the ruling NDA. But Mamta as a person and leader cannot possibly be ignored as she still enjoys considerable clout and Vajpayee had to take note of this. However, she was not given important portfolios which she preferred ike the railway. So Mamta Banerjee is back in power but with reduced importance. This marks an end of her bad patch but has not restored her to earlier enviable position in the government. However, she seems content with this as it appears difficult that Mamta can proceed

Zaglul A Chowdhury is a senior journalist.

MATTERS AROUND US

Mamta as a person and leader cannot possibly be ignored as she still enjoys considerable clout and Vajpayee had to take note of this. However, she was not given important portfolios which she preferred, like the railway. So Mamta Banerjee is back in power but with reduced importance.

polls to arch-rival leftists. This has cheered her supporters and admirers but has also raised a question whether the mercurial politician from West Bengal has been restored by prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee with the same importance that she enjoyed earlier in the federal government. Many see her elevation more as a kind of consolation than the real significance as she carried more clout and weight in the multi-party rainbow coalition government of NDA before as a railway minister than her induction this time again as a federal

leading a faction that relegated the main Congress to third position in the state politics after the Left front and Mamta's newly emerged "Trinamul Congress" meaning a grassroots level Congress. Many veterans of the Congress like former chief minister S.S. Ray. former senior central ministers A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhurv and Pranab Kumar Mukherjee or for that matter relatively younger and onetime important youth Congress leader Priya Ranjan Das Munshi lost importance in the West Bengal's Congress politics and in leader Bhuddadev Bhattacharya as his successor as chief minister. The leftist gave a relatively honest governance. Mamta could make little dent in the leftist bastion even by forging alliance with her previous nemesis Congress. Her party fell much short of expectation in the last assembly polls and cut a sorry figure that put her future at great risk in the West Bengal politics.

Mamta had earlier burned her boat by quitting the Vajpayee ministry over a number of issues including defence minister George Fernandes alleged links with the

this, understandably for the reason that would further alienate her from the political mainstream. Mamta remained patient despite her occasional out burst against NDA while there was no let up in her anti-left tirade. May be her patience paid dividends and she has finally been taken back as a federal minister.

Despite her staging a come back to power. Mamta Baneriee's credibility seems to have suffered in recent times. Her uncompromising image suffered as she was apparently angry with the NDA but too far now.

OPINION

No guns for civilian citizens!

ABDULLAH RAKEEB

OVEMBER 2001. America's First Freedom magazine published a report titled 'Another case of Registration equals Confiscation' which says, "Recent developments in Bangladesh have proven once again that gun registration leads to gun confiscation.

"Bangladesh's caretaker government has cancelled all gun licences issued since January and ordered the owners to surrender their weapons to authorities immediately. according to Reuters. Reports indicate that the move followed allegation made by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) that most of the licences had been issued to activists from its main rival, the Awami League, led by former Prime Minister

"Proof positive that when a registry of gun owners is created, governments know exactly who has the guns and where to go to confiscate

What we found at the time of

'caretaker government' that ordered (certainly influenced by BNP's aforementioned accusation against Awami League) to surrender arms. later only handguns, to authorities for the sake of peaceful and trouble-free general election? However, there ere about 250,000 illegal firearms (in the hands of criminals) according to Justice Latifur Rahman (the then) Chief Adviser of the Care-taker Government. Attempts made by security forces to recover them but a very few were recovered.

According to the above order, all law-abiding gun-owners surrendered their handguns. Later, gun owners got back their guns, only to lose them afterwards in the hands of BNF politicians and bureaucrats who proved to be intelligent enough in curbing and axing civilian citizens'

BNP led government terribly failed to curb the ever-increasing crime, which exceeded all previous records in murder, rape and extortion cases, then ordered for a so-called 'join' forces operation' codenamed 'Operation Clean Heart' to curb the crime

and confiscate illegal arms. During its operation. BNP issued an order to surrender all firearms held legally by the civilian citizens.

Remember the same BNP who alleged during the time of 'caretaker government' that Awami League sued licences to its activists... This time government's allegation is some licence holder gun-owners' are active miscreants or criminals or terrorists' and government ordered to form 'committees' to identify those licence holders and confiscate their

More than 100 committees formed according to the order of the BNP led government throughout the country to investigate the above allegations. The result is yet unknown to public after about a year of their formation investigation?). However, criminal incidents

continue to increase. Murder cases exceeded all previous records and use of illegal weapons especially modern small arms are overwhelmingly sighted. Everyday at least a person is killed but there is no way for citizens to defend themselves. Their

Nevertheless, the BNP is anti-gun party when it comes to civilian gun rights. In 1991, the same very party was sworn in to run the country. The government stopped issuing gunicences to civilians for its whole five years tenure. Not even a professional shooter could get a license to buy weapons to practice who might well be a champion in his or her discipline However, the only exception or lax of law could be found in cases of partisan applicants.

weapons could be deterrent as well.

Here I am emphasising about only one of many fundamental rights of a citizen, the right to keep and bear arms to defend himself or herself, to defend property and loved ones. Self-defence is a right recognised by all communities and religions. A weapon is a tool for self-defence (and sport) that might be invaluable in a certain situation and the only means of saving one's life. Taking away weapons from civilians is a dangerous idea and is rather helping crimi-

Disabling civilians from having

nals conquer our society without any

guns or firearms or weapons is not a good or wise decision. Moreover, such a shortsighted decision can ieopardize the safety and security of all members of a given society. Crime rate will rise due to one-sided firepower -- the arms in the hands of terrorists only. This view supported by evidence from around the world, as we can see in an article published in NRA H.Q. Bulletin (May 2001) ILA Report:

. that anti-gun schemes have reduced crime and brought about a better quality of life in countries such as England and Australia.

"A new international crime victimi sation survey of 34,000 people in 17 industrialised countries puts the lie to such claims. The results of the 2000 International Crime Victim Survey (ICVS) were recently published by the Dutch Ministry of Justice, and anti-gun politicians, including those in Great Britain, are diving for cover.

. The ICVS reveals that the dubious distinction of leading the world in violent crime belongs to Australia -- not the United States. ... Countries like England, Scot-

uccess" story." Do our government have any such

land, France and Netherlands (where government bureaucrats are demanding that people turn their baseball bats and anything that can be used as weapon!) have placed severe restrictions on the right to keep and bear arms. The result is obvious: Criminals have become emboldened by the knowledge that their victims can't defend themselves, and the result is a more dangerous society.

"Experts have analyzed the data have suggested numerous reasons why certain countries have higher levels of victimisation, but one conclusion remains clear: guns do not cause crime. A case in point is Australia where the percentage victimised by crime has risen since 1988 when politicians began enacting the draconian gun control laws that have resulted in the confiscation and destruction of thousands of personally owned firearms.

"Today Australia leads the world in overall victimisation, burglary and violent crime. This is a gun control

"success" story to tell? Even exaggerated or false one like some developed countries published? Even though it would be shameful but there is none. Nobody can say that after taking forcibly civilian guns, the crime rate has dropped. Rather, it has been increasing in an alarming rate.

The authorities are blaming each other -- police talking about political interference and political party in power accusing police for corruption as well as blaming opposition party. However, by the time they are busy in such a tug of war (talk-of-war!), we want freedom to exercise our rights, right to keep and bear arms is the one we need most to fight back outlaws and another is a corruption free magistracy.

I am not talking anything about our Laws regarding guns. I would rather ask our lawmakers why do they fear law-abiding armed civilians! I would mention few words from British political leader Mr. Peter Luff MP article published in the Shooting Times: 10 July 03). My question to our Home and Law Ministers: Is there 'a pack of ill-informed and highly

prejudiced' people behind the government's decision to take away civilian citizens' arms? 'The implication of shooting are serious. But why have ignorance and prejudice come so close to defeating reason and

A few last words from a letter by Mr. Scott Whitmore published in the America's First Freedom magazine: "If we don't have freedom of speech, religion, press, assembly and redress of grievances, freedom from search and seizure and cruel and unusual punishments, and the right to due process and a fair trial...then merely owning firearms is not going to do us much good." Can our political leaders start

believing (and act) as people's leader? Can they give us back rights that we (the citizens) are entitled to, as mentioned above? At least, for now, give our guns

Abdullah Rakeeb is an IT Consultant.