

Security at shopping malls

A durable mechanism has to be set up

THAT shop owners are seeking round-the-year deployment of police at the city markets does prove that extortionists are even more active these days.

They have such a strong presence that they are held responsible for the price spiral and all such ills plaguing the economy. Traders and businessmen have long been complaining that they are facing insurmountable problems, but the law enforcers have not succeeded in responding to their helplessness.

The home ministry, in its meeting with the representatives of shop owners, suggested that the owners develop their own security mechanism, including installation of close-circuit television at the shopping malls. The owners have asked for duty exemption on import of such television, which, we believe, is a reasonable demand that the government should not hesitate to meet.

As for private security arrangements, the only thing that can be said is that such arrangements already exist in most of the shopping complexes, but they do not preclude the law enforcers' primary responsibility of keeping vigil over those places. One must also not overlook the fact that it is not easy for shop owners to face armed extortionists on their own.

That said, shopping complex owners have to go by the rules to beef up security in and around the markets. Most of the markets do not have parking lots and the result is crowding of the places and obstruction of the movement of vehicles. Such problems do have a bearing on law and order.

The decision to deploy extra teams of police during the days before Eid was a laudable one. And, as shops owners themselves have acknowledged, it worked well. But then security at markets cannot be a seasonal affair.

Finally, whatever might have been achieved so far, the consultation process initiated by the government to keep abreast of shop owners' predicament is a welcome move that should help the two sides find a durable solution to the problems being created by extortionists.

Indian state polls

BJP snaps losing streak

NOT even the BJP expected such a resounding victory in the December 1 state elections. But its landslide victories in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and solid majority in Chhattisgarh snapped its string of losses in state polls that had given Congress a solid edge in state assemblies in recent years.

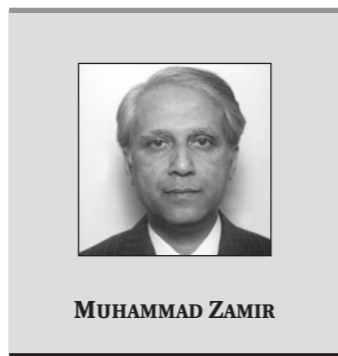
The only bright spot for Congress was the reelection of Shiela Dikshit as chief minister of Delhi. Interestingly, the election of Uma Bharati in MP and Vasundhara Raje in Rajasthan brings to five the number of female chief ministers in India. This emergence of a solid bloc of influential female leaders must be considered an encouraging development whatever one's political inclinations.

The BJP's impressive performance can be expected to strengthen its hand at the centre by showing it is capable of gaining in areas that had previously been considered Congress strongholds, though one does not wish to read too much into the results of an anti-incumbency sentiment that could work against the BJP in national polls that are presently scheduled for next September.

The real significance of yesterday's results was its demonstration of how badly Congress has slipped in public support. It is clear that Congress has a lot of work to do if it credibly wishes to challenge the BJP in national elections next year. The defeat of three incumbent chief ministers was more of an expression of lack of confidence in the their governance record than an endorsement of the BJP, and if Congress cannot perform better in its strongholds, how can it be expected to make inroads elsewhere.

Fortunately for Congress, the BJP is still in disarray in UP and Bihar, the two states with the most national assembly seats, and is in no hurry to call snap polls to capitalise on its current popularity. But the real lesson from yesterday's results is that voters cannot be taken for granted, and that power is very much up for grabs in next year's national elections.

Iraq: The continuing imbroglio



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

RECENT events in Iraq have forced the United States to declare that it will henceforth follow a more aggressive policy in dealing with 'terrorist acts' and armed insurgents. One does not know whether such steps with probable immediate gains will really be useful in the longer run. It might in fact be counter-productive in the efforts of the coalition to 'win the hearts and minds' of the people of Iraq.

Insurgency has gained a momentum of sorts in Iraq. It has clearly transcended the so-called Sunni triangle. It also reflects more sophisticated planning and coordination. There are also hints that the armed struggle in that country is no longer restricted to Iraqis but now include the possible participation of foreign elements who have entered Iraq from different countries.

Fareed Zakaria, editor of Newsweek noted in November that 'it has become increasingly clear that the resistance in Iraq is not the work of a small band of dead-enders, but is in fact a more widespread movement.' He then goes on to comment that 'we can tell this, because still, months after the attacks began, we know very little about them.' Recent press agency reports have indicated that there is difference of opinion between the US command in Iraq and the CIA about the actual number of such 'insurgents.' Gen. John Abizaid believes the number to be around 5000 and the CIA puts it at 50,000. That is a huge difference. It also great incapacity in terms of gathering military intelligence.

To this is added variance of opinion in interpreting the nature

and background of the 'insurgents.' Some in the coalition are claiming that they are essentially Baathists, others say they are foreign fighters or just mere common criminals. Such disagreement in 'appreciation of the situation' (as the military puts it) can only hamper the planned process of reaction to such 'unconventional' incidents. It will also slowly sap the morale of the coalition forces, facing an adversary who are more familiar with ground conditions.

I believe that a stronger military response, by itself, is not the best

Shi'ite majority in the echelons of power and to marginalize the Sunni influence have raised suspicions. It has left the Sunnis worried. It would therefore be wise for the coalition authority to strike a balance between Sunni demands for power and Shi'ite demand for direct democracy instead of an indirect election.

There have also been two other elements that have affected the public psyche within Iraq. The Coalition's reliance on Iraqi expatriates as 'favoured sons' in the reformulation of power bases and

donors meeting in Madrid where a large sum of \$37.5 billion was pledged in aid and loans to help rebuild the war-ravaged country. Many pious expressions of support were heard but the notable fact is that till now India, Pakistan, Germany, France, Russia and Japan have not sent any of their troops for peace-keeping or for restoring conditions of stability and security. The potential Turkish presence was also stopped at the last moment.

In the months prior to the Coalition attack on Iraq, the world

unfolding and implementation of legal measures required for the future forming of a legal Iraqi Administration.

Chris Patten, European Union's Commissioner for External Relations, writing recently in the reputable publication Foreign Policy has correctly pointed out that 'freedom is a human aspiration, democracy is not inimical to development, and the case for open society applies just as much to the Islamic world as to the Christian and the Confucian.' Islam, it must be understood is not

Given the continued support that the West has extended to many oppressive Arab regimes, it is quite understandable if talks of democratization arouse suspicion today in the souks of Baghdad, Basra and Tikrit. The immediate reaction is that the Coalition Forces are seeking expediency again and trying to prop up pro-Western figureheads.

The Governing Council has announced their medium term plans in Baghdad. This quasi-Afghan model involves selection of delegates for a National Assembly. This body in turn would form a provisional government of 'elites' by next June. This will be followed by a constitutional convention, a referendum and then national elections, but not till 2005-06. The US Administration has also indicated some of the measures they hope will take place over the next year.

Time is of the essence for President Bush. The US presidential elections will be held in November, 2004. President Bush's approval rating has dropped to 50 per cent in the recent USA Today/CNN/Gallup Poll. These figures are still very much within the traditional threshold for success for an incumbent President's re-election bid. Bush knows that. However, his supporters also know that unless the Iraqi imbroglio is sorted out soon, his support base might dwindle fast. This factor has gained particular significance as recent days have seen death and casualty of more Coalition personnel from the use of high tech weapons by those opposed to the occupying forces.

Democracy is desirable but the path to democracy is not always predictable. One can only hope that in Iraq, the process of returning the country to an elected Iraqi leadership will take place sooner than later.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador

POST BREAKFAST

I believe that a stronger military response, by itself, is not the best answer. Unconventional warfare depends on the sympathy of the people. The more a conventional army manifests itself through bombing, visible presence of tanks and armed personnel carriers, the more it proves the absence of growing normalcy. Such measures will only alienate the local population

answer. Unconventional warfare depends on the sympathy of the people. The more a conventional army manifests itself through bombing, visible presence of tanks and armed personnel carriers, the more it proves the absence of growing normalcy. Such measures will only alienate the local population and their ordinary ways of life. Video footage of young children whimpering in their bedrooms, clinging to their mothers as soldiers check their wardrobes, will not create support for the coalition in the Arab world.

The other aspect that threatens constructive engagement in Iraq is the radical readjustment in the balance of governance. The coalition seems to have overlooked the fact that the Sunni population in Iraq have been central in the intelligentsia component of the country. This section of the community produced many politicians, professionals, engineers, teachers, merchants, and leaders of the armed forces. The Shi'ite population on the other hand were more involved in theocratic disciplines and minor areas of governance. Current efforts to create a formal

the so-called perceived tilt towards the Kurdish elements have both created their own dynamics.

On October 16, the United States, after considerable lobbying was able to score a diplomatic victory of sorts in the United Nations Security Council. On that date, that body, unanimously adopted a resolution on the political and economic reconstruction of Iraq. It reaffirmed many previous Resolutions including Resolution 1483 of 22 May, 2003, Resolution 1500 of 14 August, 2003, and resolutions pertaining to threats to peace and security caused by terrorist acts such as Resolution 1373 of 28 September, 2001. It also underscored that the sovereignty of Iraq resides in the State of Iraq and reaffirmed the right of the Iraqi people to determine freely their own political future and also control their own natural resources. It also recognised the need for international political support for not only the reconstruction of Iraq but also for restoration of conditions of stability and security that is essential to the well being of the Iraqis.

Since then, we have had a

witnessed the opposition of France, Germany and Russia to any force being used in Iraq without the sanction of the Security Council. This European mantra upset the Coalition. Their action indicated that for them the Security Council was not the sole, primary source of legitimate authorization for the use of military force. The United States in particular articulated a policy of strategic 'pre-emption' firmly rooted in the traditional jus ad bellum principle. On the other hand, proponents of the European position cited the United Nations Charter as an instrument that does bind the United States and limits its rights of self-defense.

The legal debate about armed engagement in Iraq has now become more complex with the decision of the US Command to pursue a more aggressive policy. The 1977 Protocol 1 Additional to the 1949 Geneva Conventions are being referred to by civil society groups with regard to the growing incidence of 'collateral damage' being sustained by civilian populations. These are not helpful signs. Deteriorating conditions will definitely affect and influence the

coterminous with the countries of the Arab League. More Muslims live outside the Middle East and most of them live in democratic countries.

Democracy in the truest sense of the term will also be possible in Iraq and Afghanistan. It will take time and lots of patience. However, this process of change, both political and economic is unlikely to be achieved through the barrel of a gun.

It is important that confidence building measures are seen to be what they are sincere steps for bringing back normalcy. Credibility has to be restored for the process to succeed. There must be understanding within Iraq that democracy and the fostering of democratic principles are not part of a western geostrategic option. The importance of President Bush's secret Thanksgiving visit to the American base in Iraq should not be over-emphasized. Yes, it will be significant for the US domestic electorate, but one does not know if it will in the long run influence events on the ground in that conflict-ridden country.

Is outrage dead?

DR. SYED SAAD ANDALEEB

AS the pace of murder, rape, violence and brutality committed by human beings on fellow human beings continues to escalate in a frenzy of gruesome depravity, the civic-minded of Bangladesh society has made feeble attempts to raise national consciousness and to seek redress. The media has certainly played an important role as its journalists have plastered the front-pages with lurid tales and shocking pictures of slaughter and mayhem. We have also seen expressions of outrage in other forms: in art, in drama, in street protests, in talk shows, and so on.

But no matter how trenchant this voice of a small minority, as they vehemently protest each episode, the assault continues every single day. Even in the holy month of Ramadan, when Islam enjoins every Muslim to be more fraternal, more pious, more compassionate, and more generous, the trend seemed to be quite the opposite, as the animal passions of a group of heinous individuals continued with fervent brutality: eleven burnt to ashes, five with their throats slit, a repeat brutality where the eleven were burnt and so on. It seems as if a veil has been lifted, a stone slab removed, a Pandora's Box opened to obliterate social restraints as the perpetrators dance a grisly dance while shame takes a back seat. In that dance they seem to be taunting society, as if saying, "Come and get us if you

can." And despite the protestations of those who stand for decency, for justice, and for a moral high ground, the spate of violence continues unabated as it seems to have claimed yet another victim: outrage. It behooves us to seriously ponder whether outrage is dead!

Why do I suggest this introspection? In the old days public expressions of outrage seemed to get

detached from all that is decent, has begun to cast a dark shadow of mistrust on society, while vile elements in its shadow, oblivious to societal outrage, gather strength from quarters murky and unknown. And under this shadow, while the general public seems to be carrying on with life, deep down there is a scarring of the psyche, a shredding of the soul, that is born of a sense of mistrust, a sense of

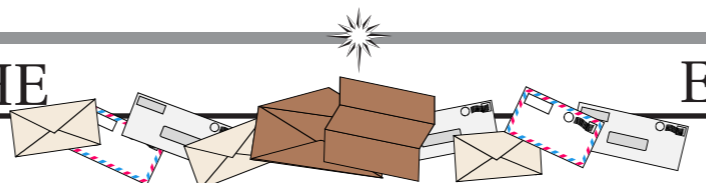
affairs and how long must it be endured? Two theories may explain our being in this brutish state of nature. One points to the growing population and its needs for survival that generates vile conduct. It is as if the proverbial experiment with rats is coming true of humans. The gist of the experiment is if we place a few rats in an enclosed space, they will live in harmony; increase their numbers

able violence let loose on society today, while dehumanizing it, the nexus and the machinery seem to have mastered a strategic skill. Their response to outrage is astonishingly simple: Overwhelm and ignore; as if the purpose is to injure society and make it benign to horrific acts so that more of it can cut deep into society's vital organs while outrage remains bound and gagged. And relying on this strat-

private space in mute disbelief. Sooner or later it will react. The perpetrators forget that outrage has a life-form of its own. Pushed to the limit, it gathers together its own elemental forces, as if reincarnating Newton's Third Law in the behavioral domain. Out of this dynamic is likely to emerge a new momentum to recharge the nation, while forces of order restore societal harmony and justice. And as history has shown, good triumphs over evil while the corrupt of society are eventually brought to justice or punished in some way as social memory is rekindled. This is the story of mankind since history was recorded (e.g., the French Revolution, the liberation of Bangladesh, Saddam, Ceausescu, Hitler, and, futuristically, probably some of the current leaders of the western powers and their allies and coteries causing global outrage) lest we forget. Can the much talked about "third force" rekindle and harness this subterranean outrage that typifies society today? That is unlikely, because social memory could catch up with their past failures as well. But, in the esoteric world of cognitive calculus, choosing the least of the evils could offer them a slim chance. We shall just have to wait and see!

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TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



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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.

Doctor or butcher?

This is about my younger sister, Abida, who is now a grade-2 student. Some kind of rashes occurred on her feet, so we took her to a skin specialist. He asked his assistant to cut the rashes on the feet and then use a medicine, which was made by the doctor himself. It was easy for the doctor to say "cut" but it was so painful for my little sister that she was shouting like never before. I couldn't keep my eyes open to see her suffering. But it wasn't finished on that day. She had to visit the doctor after every 15 days. But still her situation was deteriorating. Standing on her feet was a far cryshe couldn't even sleep for the pain.

We showed the previous prescription and asked this new doctor that if it was necessary to cut the rashes. He replied, "Don't even touch her feet. It may affect her brain." Then he prescribed some medicines. Surprisingly enough, she was able to walk within a week. Now the question is why the previous doctor couldn't identify the disease? How on earth did he get a certificate as a skin specialist? Whenever I remember my little sister's sufferings, I ask myself, "Was he a doctor or a butcher?"

Shahida Islam
IUBC, Dhaka

Conversion to CNG but...

Here is a piece of information for persons like me who are planning to convert their vehicle's fuel system to CNG:

A major component of the kit used for CNG conversion is

a device called Mixer which ensures correct air/fuel mixing in a car both in stationary and dynamic condition. There are two types of mixers. One is called Variable Ventury Mixer. It is an advanced and technically sophisticated type of mixer which dramatically improves drivability of the vehicle, reduces vehicle maintenance by eliminating need for constant engine adjustment, and saves fuel cost by applying improved mixing process.

The other type is called Fixed Ventury Mixer. It is a conventional and outdated technology. Due to uncontrolled mixing of air and fuel (gas) it results in poor vehicle performance, comparatively less fuel economy, and power loss.

Those who want to learn more about CNG conversion may visit <http://66.40.166.139/ad.htm#0>

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A car enthusiast
Bara Magbazar, Dhaka

PM's responsibility

It has come to our attention through your editorial on December 1 and other news items published in other national dailies that the speaker and his deputy have fallen into a power struggle that has tarnished the image of the parliament. While meeting with the PM, Speaker Sircar was straightforward and briefed all about the deputy and his unruly power exercises in the name of the PMO.

Considering the above conflict, Mr. Sircar has requested the PM to keep him away from the post of the Speaker, giving the reason that he has become old and is no more interested to occupy the post of the Speaker of the current parliament.

We think that Mr. Sircar's

appeal to the PM is quite alright. Some people like Sircar's deputy and many more have been using the name of PMO and Hawa Bhaban and misleading our democratic and administrative processes since the inception of BNP and its allies in the government. Mr. Sircar does not like to go back to the pavilion like Dr B.

Now it is the prime responsibility of the PM to check all of her staff, advisors and official and personal aides as well as Hawa Bhaban as another alternative power structure already grown and demonstrated its hold.

Would the PM take care of the above issue at her earliest convenience?

Gopal Sengupta and Shyamali Sengupta
Montreal, Canada

Shabash Dr. B, shabash Bangladesh

I wonder why Dr. B the physician

turned politician turned physician turned 'civil society member' decided to address the audience in Sheraton Hotel in English? For whom was his message? For those diplomats? Or is it that he wanted to show that, unlike other 'illiterate' politicians, he is an 'educated' man.

The new 'civil society member' Dr. Chowdhury analysed that "we need large number of educated, honest, sincere, broadminded and efficient people to take up the leadership in politics and society." But what he forgot to mention was that we also need a man with guts and courage and not a coward and a timid personality like him who escaped from the post of the presidency at the behest of the BNP parliamentary party. As a president, whose obligation was to uphold the constitution, didn't he know that the decree of BNP parliamentary party had no constitu-

tional base? According to him, "If I am resisted, I will tackle it when it comes." But how come he didn't have the nerve to tackle when he was kicked out of Banga Bhaban?

Furthermore Dr. Chowdhury says, he "resigned from the presidency of the republic on account of disagreement on principle." Disagreement with whom? As president, he was not supposed to have any affinity with political party. How can a president the symbol of sovereignty - flee from his responsibilities to the nation because of 'disagreement on principle'? Whom is he trying to fool?

He begged to be excused for he 'curtailed the menu of the Iftar in view of the monga situation' but not for the party at the lavish winter garden of Sheraton hotel? What a level of hypocrisy! **Shabash** Dr. Chowdhury, **shabash** Bangladesh.
Nazmul Karim
Dhaka

EPZs in dilemma

Under US pressure, the government is going to permit trade unions in the EPZs. Ultimately, the government is going to satisfy the US to avail GSP incentive from the USA. If Bangladesh allows trade unionism in EPZs, many Far Eastern investors such as Hong Kong, China, South Korea and Japan will say goodbye to us, but Bangladesh may perpetuate its GSP facility. GSP may boost export volume, but foreign direct investment is better than GSP. The authorities should scrutinise the pros and cons of the new EPZ policy. We have to be more expert in arithmetic to energise our fragile economy. I hope the government will think anew before trade unions are authorised in the EPZs.

Molla Mohammad Shaheen
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