

Violence cannot redress grievances

Put a stop to it immediately

THE series of incidents that have shaken the garment sector in the last two days have been most unfortunate, regrettable, shocking and highly deplorable, to say the least. The arson, loot and ransacking of a number of factories in Savar and Dhaka, outrageous as these were also left us dumbfounded as to how the pressing of long-felt demands of the workers could take on such violent and desperate forms.

We have been the unfortunate witness to most unprecedented destruction where some garment factories were set ablaze by the workers themselves, something that had not happened before.

We, therefore, condemn in the most unequivocal terms the wanton destruction, vandalism and mayhem that were wreaked on a large number of garment factories over the last two days.

We are deeply perturbed over the disquieting development that has come from the blue, as it were, so we urge that satisfactory answers must be found to the sudden tumbling down of discipline in the garment sector. What are the deeper causes behind the sudden eruption of violence? The mystery must be solved.

We cannot allow a sector that fetches 75 per cent of our foreign exchange earnings, employs 40 per cent of our total industrial workforce, and has achieved an almost 20 per cent growth despite the post-MFA doomsayers' predictions, to be caught up in a state of turmoil.

There are questions that we cannot help but ask. First, insofar as the workers' demands are concerned, those were longstanding and may be genuine also, but these cannot justify discarding peaceful modes of ventilating their grievances. Secondly, the garment factory owners need to also ponder the sudden change of psyche among the workers in letting off their emotions through violent means.

All heads must be put together to bring about an immediate stoppage of the unrest in the garment sector. The genuine demands of the workers should be addressed and those who led and perpetrated the acts of violence must not also escape justice and punishment. Who caused the wanton destruction and vandalism and how the troubles fanned out in and around the Savar EPZ are questions that must be probed in-depth, truth unravelled and made public.

Strengthening the police

Motivation and training will be crucial

OUR police have been at the centre of considerable criticism for their role in society, so much so that when they do some good pieces of work these are likely to be obscured in an otherwise negative image.

It's good to see that some pragmatic steps are underway aimed at revamping and increasing their policing and law enforcement capacities in order that they are turned into an effective force. There is no doubt that an increase in their strength of officers and constables has been long overdue. But mere quantity without a commensurate emphasis being laid on quality and equipment cannot radically improve the existing levels of police performances.

Moreover, it is of the essence that the police force is not politically used by the power that be.

The first step in the process is the recruitment procedure that should be absolutely transparent. In the case of officials, particularly at thana and district levels, special care should be taken both in regard to new recruits as well as the existing ones for instilling the right kind of motivation so that they are capable of effectively dealing with both routine and emerging issues of law and order. At the same time, officers should be able to carry out investigations of all FIRs in a free and fair manner within the purview of law and laid down rules. Regular monitoring and supervision at all levels will have to be geared up, especially the activities of those operating in the police stations.

While we are dealing with this vital issue of revamping and strengthening our police force we must not forget the need for giving them suitable remuneration so as to keep them from indulging in corruption.

We have for long neglected this vital sector of our administration entrusted with maintaining law and order and safeguarding the lives and properties of all citizens.

Who failed in Bangladesh -- the people or the leadership?

Bangladesh has not failed. Our farmers, through their hard work, have kept pace with our population growth from 75 million in 1971 to 140 million today. The rice production has doubled in last three decades. Is it not fascinating that Bangladesh, roughly with the size of Wisconsin, sustains half of America's population? Our illiterate women have come out of their homes, and are the main labour force in our burgeoning garments industry. They are also the engine of growth behind our innovative poverty alleviation and micro-credit programmes.

SYED MUAZZEM ALI

THE Foreign Policy, a prestigious monthly of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and the Fund for Peace, an independent research organisation, both based in Washington DC, have once again ranked countries on a Failed-State Index (FSI). This time, they have expanded their base from last year's 60 to 146 countries. Each country has been given a score based on 11,000 publicly available sources collected from July to December 2005.

The "failing state" score was computed under twelve indicators: demographic pressure, movement of refugees and internally displaced persons, group grievances, human flight, economic divide, general economy, criminalisation or de-legitimation of state, deterioration of public services, violation of human rights, police and security apparatus, rise of factionalised elites, and intervention of other

states. Like all other gradation of states, the FSI is neither perfect nor infallible; nevertheless it gives an overview of the state of affairs of a country.

Judged according to these criteria, states range from the Most Failed, Sudan (ranked 1) to the Least Failed, Norway (146). Expectedly, top 60 positions in the list were occupied almost exclusively by African, Middle Eastern and Asian countries. The top 12 Least Failed states are Nordic and other West European countries, Japan, Canada and Australia. Interestingly, big five economic powers e.g. Germany (124), Italy (127), US (128), France (129) and UK (130) are not in the top group.

Bangladesh has been ranked at 19 this year, as compared to 17 last year, and we still remain at the red zone of 25 Most Failed states. We made minor gains this year as some states have tumbled. However, we have again fared poorly in the areas of group grievance, uneven development, criminalisation of the State

authority, deteriorating public service and rise of factionalised elites. These are our well-known vulnerabilities. Other international bodies have also pointed them out to us in the indexes they had prepared in their respective areas of operation.

Are they all ganging up against us? Not really. We cannot hide the facts from the outside world in this era of information technology. As the Bangla proverb says, "Shak diye mach dhaka jay na" (you cannot hide the fish under the spinach). We have far too many fishes on our plate and too little spinach. Paid government publicity campaigns in the popular western dailies or weeklies do not improve the image of any country; image can be improved only through hard work and wise leadership.

Bangladesh has been rated as the most corrupt country by the Transparency International for four years in row. We have protested against such grading but have done precious little to rectify the situation.

Likewise, we have gone down in the Human Development Index (HDI), compiled by the UNDP, on the basis of a nation's achievements in three key areas e.g. education, health and quality of life. Our rate of progress has gone down since 2003 while other South Asian countries have overtaken us. Yet we continue to overlook them as if the problem will solve by itself.

How did we fare at the Growth Competitiveness Index (GCI), compiled by the World Economic Forum, and based on the country's macro economic stability, general condition of public institutions and level of technological readiness? Well, we were ranked at 110 out of 117 at the last GCI. This means that our overall situation continues to be grim.

How have our neighbours fared at the latest FSI? It is a matter of concern that South Asian countries, other than India (93), have been placed high on the failing list: Pakistan (9), Afghanistan (10), Myanmar (18), Nepal (20), Sri Lanka (25), and Bhutan (39). Maldives was not included in the list.

Pakistan has moved from 34 last year to 9 in the new report -- one of the dramatic changes in the overall score of any country. Islamabad's inability to police the tribal areas near the Afghan border, failure to cope with recent earthquake disaster, the rising sectarian violence and the overall security situation were the principal factors that caused the tumble.

China has also lost ground and moved to 57 from last year's 75 on account of "inequality and corruption" which, the authors allege, led to widespread discontent, especially among peasants. India, on the other hand, has moved from 76 to 93 as it has "greater social mobility" and is "less centralised" than China.

One could argue that the whole exercise has some political connotations and that vulnerable third world countries have been targeted while more critical situation in other countries with friendlier ties with Washington have been overlooked. Well, such allegations may not be true. The FSI frankly acknowledges that over all situations in Iraq (4) and Afghanistan (10), the two countries of primary interest to the US, have deteriorated since last year's survey.

Why do States fail? Does it have anything to do with their geographical location or economic strength? The authors of the report have pointed out that ranking has nothing to do with these factors as two next door neighbours have often fared differently in the evaluation. While Zimbabwe fell, neighbouring South Africa remained strong; oil-rich Nigeria is failing, while its relatively less resourceful neighbour Ghana is stable. Myanmar has tumbled but Thailand, despite ethnic unrest, is stable. The authors point out that in the final analysis, "it is leadership, not location that matters most".

Bangladesh has not failed. Our

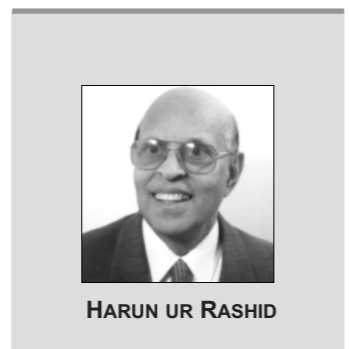
farmers, through their hard work, have kept pace with our population growth from 75 million in 1971 to 140 million today. The rice production has doubled in last three decades. Is it not fascinating that Bangladesh, roughly, with the size of Wisconsin, sustains half of America's population?

Our illiterate women have come out of their homes, and are the main labour force in our burgeoning garments industry. They are also the engine of growth behind our innovative poverty alleviation and micro-credit programmes. Millions of our unskilled and semi-skilled people are working abroad and sending their hard earned remittances back home. Manpower export and garments are our principal exports.

We have a reservoir of highly intelligent, hard working and remarkably homogenised population living in a compact area. Unlike others, we do not have any ethnic, racial, tribal, linguistic or communal problem. Our population is our main strength. It is a pity our leadership has failed the people and the country. But all is not lost. We can still turn around and build our cherished "Shonar Bangla." I have infinite faith in our people and I am sure we will.

Syed Muazzem Ali is a former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh

America is losing its influence on Latin America



HARUN UR RASHID

BOTTOM LINE

Political observers believe that against the background of rise of gas prices, the US will try to woo President Lula of Brazil to counter the three left-wing Presidents' effort to undermine influence of the US in Latin America. The question is whether Brazil, the largest country with the biggest economy in Latin America with centre-left President, will dance to the tune of the US.

WHILE the Bush administration focuses its policy on Iraq and war on terror, it has not been able to pay adequate attention to its backyard, Latin America. Many of the countries are getting out of its sphere of influence as they had experienced in the past its "big brother" attitude towards them. Instead China has been getting closer to them and its presence has been increasingly felt in providing funds for their infrastructure.

Latin America has always been America's backyard. In 1823, America's President Monroe cautioned European powers to keep Latin America alone and Latin America would not be in future European colonies. This policy of "hands-off to Europe" of Latin America was known as "Monroe doctrine".

This means politics in Latin America would be the responsibility of the United States. At that stage the US pursued an "isolationist" policy in world affairs and

its sphere of influence was confined to Western hemisphere.

Its supremacy was acknowledged by Europe after the end of the Second World War. The UN was located not in Europe but in New York, while after the First World War, the headquarters of the League of Nations was established in Geneva.

Since then the US remains the world's strongest military power, biggest economy (GDP US\$10.1 trillion compared to EU's US\$9.7 trillion), and continues to demonstrate its might over land, sea and space.

Since the Bush administration came to power in 2001, many of the countries of Latin America have been gradually turning away from the US. Some say there is a steady and quiet revolution taking place in Latin America, while the US is heavily engaged in war in Iraq and in Afghanistan.

It appears that hallmark of foreign policy of the Bush administration is unilateralism. For example, Washington's abrogation of the anti-ballistic missile

treaty with Russia, its failure to join the International Criminal Court, and its withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol on global warming reflect its reluctance to abide by the rules of multi-lateral institutions. The invasion of the US-led forces in 2003 without the approval of the UN manifested its arrogance and disrespect for the rule-based international order. The unilateralist policy of the Bush administration has disregarded multilateral institutions in resolving inter-state disputes, within the environment of the post-Cold War world. The world, free of sharp ideological conflicts and large-scale military competition, is one that provides an opportunity for consensus, dialogue and negotiation as ways of settling inter-state disputes.

The majority of Latin American countries argue that if the US does not respect rule-based international order, how can they trust the US?

All the countries in Latin America are democratic and either centre-left or left-wing

governments are running the show. The days of right-wing dictatorship with US leanings are gone. After 9/11 when most Latin American countries refused to endorse the US invasion of Iraq, President Bush turned his back on the region, but not before the Bush administration was widely accused of backing a failed coup in 2002 against the left-wing President Hugo Chavez.

No wonder Venezuela's Chavez (a former military officer) has manifestly shown his anti-US stance. Venezuela resists any influence of the US in Latin America either in trade or in any other cooperative efforts. Furthermore Venezuela has signed an oil deal with China and Chavez's growing ties with Iran led the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to label him "a threat to hemisphere stability." In reply Chavez in a weekly address reportedly said: "So don't mess with me, Condoleezza."

President Hugo Chavez has also been a close friend of Cuba's Fidel Castro. This friendship has

been an eye sore for the Bush administration. The mercurial Chavez has withdrawn from Andean Community's multi-lateral trade regime because it is aligned with the US.

Recently a newcomer has joined with Chavez. An indigenous left-wing President, Evo Morales, was elected as President of Bolivia in last December. He represented poor people and comes of a poor background. It is the first time that a native of indigenous community (rather than a Spanish settler-family) assumed the office of the President. President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela has found an ideal companion in Bolivia to pursue leftwing policies in Latin America, eroding US influence.

On 29th April, three Presidents, Evo Morales of Bolivia, Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Cuba's Castro met in Havana and signed a unique tripartite pact aimed at countering US influence. Fidel Castro after the signing reportedly stated: "Now for the first time, we are three of us. I believe one day all Latin American countries can be here."

Although the pact is known as trade pact but its contents are much broader. It deals with (a) reduction of tariff for imported goods, (b) eradication of poverty, and illiteracy and (c) expansion of employment. In terms of the pact, Venezuela provides oil at a concessional rate to Cuba, and Cuba will provide free eye treatment to poor Bolivians. Oil-rich Venezuela and Bolivia will give

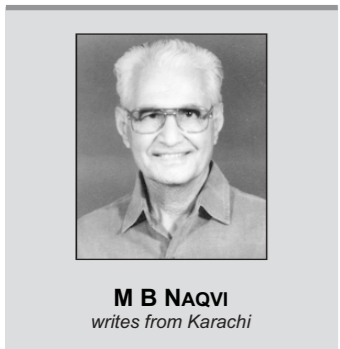
the pact a greater weight.

On May 1st, President Morales of gas-rich Bolivia issued a decree asserting state control of the gas industry and re-negotiate contracts for royalty payment. He gave foreign gas companies six months time to complete the job and put army on all gas plants. It is noted that Bolivian gas is primarily exported to Brazil and Argentina and not to outside of Latin America.

The other members of the Andean Community, namely, Colombia, Peru and Ecuador are watching closely the development of tripartite pact. It is reported that Bolivia's royalty on gas will rise from 50 to 82 percent under re-negotiating terms and Brazil will be hardest hit. Political observers believe that against the background of rise of gas prices, the US will try to woo President Lula of Brazil to counter the three left-wing Presidents' effort to undermine influence of the US in Latin America. The question is whether Brazil, the largest country with the biggest economy in Latin America with centre-left President, will dance to the tune of the US. Future can only tell us the position of Latin America vs the US.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

Hold on and pause: Where are we headed?



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

NATIONAL polls are scheduled for 2007 -- err 2008. Many would approach them with hope and some with trepidation. Let's remember there are good uses and misuses of elections. Elections generally solidify states and strengthen the body politic. But there are severe penalties for rejecting their results -- remember 1971 -- or tampering with them. Pakistan's five general elections were not seen as transparently free; they have created a credibility problem for the ruling establishment: nothing it does or says is accepted at face value.

Pakistan has had a roller coaster history of elections. Powerful interests initially prevented and distorted constitution-making with

PLAIN WORDS

The polls will have to be managed as hitherto. As for the longer-term consequences, well, one who rides a tiger has no time for philosophising. As for the detail about the caretakers, one notices the lobbying efforts of some technocrats already. A caretaker government is no safeguard at all. Will the caretakers be free to ignore the General's preferences? Those who appoint them will call their tune for them. Let's not talk about caretakers.

a view to preventing a free election being held. The first national election did take place a quarter of a century after Pakistan's independence. Dictator Gen. Yahya Khan wanted to achieve a certain objective through those elections. Since the desired results could not be achieved, the foolish dictator rejected them. The price of that folly was terrible: Islamabad achieved a decisive military defeat at India's hand, political defeat at the hands of a rebellious East Bengal and the country was dismembered; there were other humiliations.

Three immediate lessons are obvious: First, allowing special groups to become vested interests, with the ability to take over the state, created strong political resentments in wide sections of

deprived citizenry. Not holding elections for long to prevent free expression of popular resentments made passions run high. And when the first free elections were held in 1970, all hell broke loose. East Pakistan voted solidly for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League that was being carried along the crest of a popular tsunami. Yahya Khan's bad faith and use of mindless force led to the emergence of Bangladesh that demonstrates to this day that Islamic rhetoric alone cannot be the salvation of any Muslim nation. Experience in western wing was slightly different.

The second is that democracy is the only road to a nation's unity and a state's survival. Allowing military dictators to stage repeated coups d'etat is inviting disaster. The third

is more profound: dictators either don't hold elections as Ayub Khan carefully stage-managed peculiar polls several times or he is forced to disown his own election -- the way Yahya Khan acted after a gross miscalculation. A dictator can only "manage" elections to obtain "positive" results for his own survival. He has no other option.

A free election has not been repeated in Pakistan since 1970. Z.A. Bhutto held the March 1977 election and needlessly rigged it. Its blow back effect was Ziaul Haq's military takeover and Bhutto's own judicial murder. Zia chose to nominate a Majlis-i-Shoorah and later exercised the Article 58-2-b powers to dismiss his own chosen Premier, Mohammad Khan Junejo. But after his 11 long years of dictatorship, his

successors in the Army chose to be more sophisticated.

They did not openly take over. But conscious of their power -- that by then had become the expected order of things -- they kept the elected "democratic" system firmly under the COAS' thumb. They evolved a neat way of 'managing' elections through intelligence agencies to produce the desired results. They could boast to unwary foreign journalists and American Administration: Look, they have all the paraphernalia of a parliamentary democracy -- all the institutions that India or Britain has. They held as many as five general elections during the last 18 years and each under a caretaker government they nominated.

And yet all the five elected PMs were prematurely dismissed by two Presidents (each of whom was, more or less, a political nobody). It was claimed that all elected PMs committed crimes of corruption and mis-governance. One PM was briefly restored by the Apex Court. But he had to go when the COAS of the day insisted he should go, with his service revolver showing on his person. That incident gave away the game. Presidents, with hardly any constituency of their own, could fire five elected PMs in a row.

How, could they do it to a PM who and his party had managed to garner millions of recorded votes? The COAS, in each case, stood behind the President. The military was in control of ultimate power by making the President to use the axe when COAS desires. That power to dismiss the PM and the whole Parliament under Article 58 (b)(2) was written into the organic law at a dictator's behest for just the purpose of ensuring that nothing should stand in the way of COAS' desires.

Pakistan today has had seven general elections behind it. It saw the military keep the country's nukes programme safe from the untrusted eyes of at least Benazir. Each of the last five elections has had its results conform to what the Army desired. How that was achieved can be inferred from a range of steps the agencies took at different stages of an election that later found their way into newspapers. Isn't there a price to be paid for this tamasha? It would be odd if there isn't any.

People of Pakistan, after 1972, have had a variant of the experiences the East Bengalis had made before 1971: earlier there was the spectacle of a bogus Basic Democracy of and for the military

establishment by a bunch of elected marionettes. Later, a form of democracy sans its spirit or power, was observed. The common citizen has continued to be cheated. Look closely: what has this resulted in?

All the faultlines -- ethnic, linguistic, religious (sectarian) and ideological -- are not only active but have become explosive. Politics in each province is distinctive. A Taliban takeover of FATA and even NWFP is now a possibility. Balochistan is exploding; let's not forget the tragedies often have small beginnings. Sindh is polarised and extremely unhappy. Punjab of course has yet to make up its mind about where to go. President Pervez Musharraf's admission that building the Kalabagh Dam is his aim in life can only inflame Sindh and NWFP opinion. Pakistan may have to pay dearly for this tawdry piece of electioneering to court Punjabi opinion.

After Pakistan has provided all the data, why does it squirm at being told that it is 9th in the list of failed states? Well may Islamabad value the certificates of good health from those who say Pakistan has to do (much) more? But few citizens pay much attention to such certifi-

icates while the credibility of negative assessments is high.

The occasion for these pessimistic thoughts is the approaching election in January 2008. Would it be a repeat of 2002 one? Commonsense says they will have to achieve what the 2002 one did: confirming the power of Gen. Musharraf and to carry on his 'good work'. Just think: what would happen if the new election ushers in the enemies of Musharraf. It will be too messy a situation; President may have to reject the election results. The generals cannot but want 'positive' results. The 'good work' has to be carried on. The polls will have to be managed as hitherto. As for the longer-term consequences, well, one who rides a tiger has no time for philosophising.

As for the detail about the caretakers, one notices the lobbying efforts of some technocrats already. A caretaker government is no safeguard at all. Will the caretakers be free to ignore the General's preferences? Those who appoint them will call their tune for them. Let's not talk about caretakers. Pakistanis have been here before.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.