

Drive against outlaws

Let it end with results

THE day after the wide media coverage of the killing of eleven outlaws in police encounter, the report on fresh anti-crime drive in ten districts by the relevant authorities came as welcome relief to the citizens. Against the backdrop of deteriorating law and order in the northern region of the country, the drive of joint forces comprising Police, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), Armed Police Battalion and Ansars against extremist and militant elements in ten districts under Khulna division is expected to result in the apprehension of the leaders of the groups and hopefully put an end to the violence and death in the area.

A number of outlawed factions, including Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) and JMB have been creating serious law and order situation in the northern region in recent times. It has been reported by the intelligence bodies that some JMB operatives had held a meeting in the forests under Satkhira district with the intent to carry out another round of murder and mayhem. Some of the activists of these factions have been engaged in extortion and kidnapping as easy means of earning money, and they killed anyone who protested their unlawful activities. The members of various groups also fought battles amongst each other for control of territory in the remote areas.

We have noted that occasional police actions in the past have led to the arrest of some operatives of these groups but the main leaders always stayed outside the police dragnet. There have been strong allegations that some vested quarters kept patronising the outlawed elements for their own selfish interest. The allegations also pointed fingers at some political leaders of the locality for maintaining connections with the groups in order to maintain a hold on the people through terrorising them.

We hope the drive would not vaporise half way through, as it is the common trend in Bangladesh. What is required is the support of the local people to ensure a sustained operation that would lead to attaining the desired objectives.

Innovation in adult education

It's worthy of replication

WE take great hope from the example set of a non-traditional approach to adult education called the community-learning programme which the Dhaka Ahsania Mission has introduced lately. The system has empowered the womenfolk, and made them self-reliant through the use of the expertise gained from the programme, by helping them generate income for them.

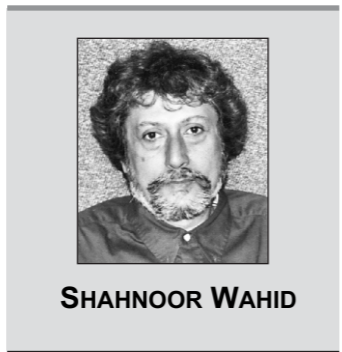
If the country has to develop in an inclusive manner it will have to begin by improving the lot of the family, and that too by educating the fulcrum of the family i.e. the womenfolk. An educated mother is an educated nation in the long run, that is what we have to keep in mind. And the nation will become self-reliant only when each of the families in Bangladesh becomes self-reliant with the eventual ripple effect positively impacting on the entire nation.

The example of a group of women in a remote village in Jessore having surpassed their husbands as the main bread earner for their family, as a result of the training imparted by the adult education centers, so aptly named Hashimukh Ganokendra, highlights the need for innovation in our approach to adult education. This would not only teach a person the ways of the three 'R's but also, more importantly, impart them the necessary know-how through their teachings that would allow them to use the knowledge to generate income for them.

An important feature of the approach, we feel, is taking up subjects, the knowledge on which not only helps add to the family income, more importantly, by imparting necessary skills and awareness on various issues like social forestry, sewerage, use of fuel efficient ovens, it also helps improve the quality of life by improving the living environment of every home in the village.

The innovative approach taken that has helped transform the lives of the women folk of the country, needs to be replicated everywhere else in Bangladesh too. After all, if the adult education system cannot prepare the trainees to augment their income and improve the condition of their lives, one wonders whether it is worth the money or the time?

Making politics difficult, birthdays and ...



SHAHNOOR WAHID

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

Henceforth, the process of making politics difficult began in full swing. People were being picked up from total obscurity and given the opportunity to fly the blood-soaked national flag in their limousines. It was being done in total defiance of the ideals on the basis of which Bangladesh was created. People's hearts began to bleed anew. They watched the defilement of the parliament house in utter disbelief. It indeed became difficult for the true leaders of the people to do politics.

SOME of our national leaders once wanted to make politics difficult for others. It beats reason what made these leaders think in the first place that politics was easy, that too in Bangladesh! Maybe, to them the Language Movement was a game of football. Maybe the freedom struggle for long 23 years was merely a game of carom. And the Liberation War? Huh! Nothing more than a gondogol (trouble), as many preferred to term it. It was darn easy!

Therefore, they hollered: "Politics must not remain an easy undertaking in this country anymore." It has to be made difficult. And so they did. They made politics difficult for some all right, but made it rather too easy for others. These "others" are the people who are on record for having taken up arms to foil the creation

of Bangladesh. But the great leaders loved them immensely as they had useful connections in countries in the west.

So, at the clarion call these blessed others crawled out of their dens, wore their rumpled choga and chupkan, and sat beside the great leaders exposing their full set of dental blemishes before the camera. They got a new lease of life. They found ground under their feet -- the same feet that kicked lifeless bodies of freedom fighters with demonic elation.

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Well, that was about making politics difficult. But, one thing that we are not informed of is whether the great leaders had also hollered at the same time: "We shall make birthday celebrations difficult."

Our curiosity stems from the fact that during the lifetime of the great leaders we never heard of any gala birthday parties thrown for their near and dear ones. No, not even a small birthday party with family and friends! Not even a small cake to celebrate the day that so miraculously coincides with the date of assassination of another great leader of the country!

Why didn't the great leaders

order their men to fetch a cake that weighed one hundred pounds for the occasion? How come? Is it possible that some qualm, some compunction, was left in the great leaders in spite of everything? Intriguing, isn't it? Isn't it worth delving deeper into the labyrinthine mystery? Intrigue, thy name is politics!

The semi-finals are ahead. The game of politics is heading fast towards the semi-finals after the successful and eventful quarter-finals, played in Gulshan, at night under floodlights. The games have been tough and fraught with fouls but no one dared to show red cards to the players breaking the rules. After all, the players are big names in the game. They are the most highly rated players in Bangladesh, and therefore they cannot be touched.

There are accusations from

the spectators that most of the games have been fixed, where huge sums of money have exchanged hands. Therefore, no one can predict at the moment which parties would win at the semi-finals. In the meantime, the suspension order on the oldest player in the tournament has been lifted and he came out of the courthouse smiling. His unruly followers raised slogans inside the courtroom despite a ban on such activity. One wonders what would happen when these elements would become a part of some future government.

According to the gossip mongers, the youngest player in the game of politics, the prince of the Windy Castle fame, is planning to buy the oldest player of the country before the semi-finals for his team. Why not go for Beckham? No, the gossip mongers say the prince is not interested in Beckham. He is ready to pay a huge sum for this old player who has a mind-boggling career record. And it is said that the oldest player is overwhelmed by the offer. He is polishing his boots and ironing his jersey to go to the center field once again.

It appears to some game watchers that though the prince is young, yet he is playing the game with great skill and plan. He has speed and an unpredictable strategy of attack. He care-

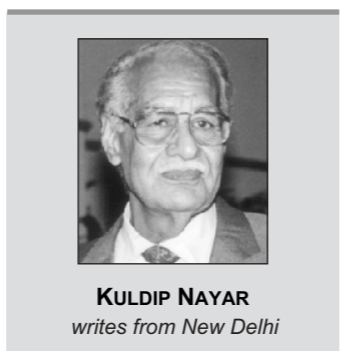
fully plans his game and suddenly charges forward to score points. Some people feel he is aiming to become the Maradona in the game of politics in Bangladesh. Only, one has to watch out for the "Hand of God" while he goes on scoring points in the game of politics.

On the other hand, the opposition team that is also vying for the Election Cup 2007, is likely to play the same elderly lot of players who seem to be a bit out of steam at the moment. Though they are doing a lot of huffing and puffing to get back to shape, they will have to do much more than that to look intimidating enough to play the finals with the team of the prince.

Granted that the opposition team has many superstars and skilled players, who have vast experience and commendable track record, yet they will have to learn some new tricks of the game to score against the team of the prince. They will have to learn to do fouls once in a while, and feign injury before the goalpost to outwit the referees. Without such tricks up their sleeves, the opposition team will find it tough to win the Cup. So readers, wait for the semi-finals.

Shahnoor Wahid is a Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

Life is for a cause



KULDIP NAYYAR
writes from New Delhi

BETWEEN THE LINES

True, Islamabad is impossible at times. But people in Pakistan can judge when a sincere India approaches them for contact. In fact, they have felt uneasy and disturbed because of the halt in the peace process. Some 11 MPs and 20 others who crossed the border to take part in the celebrations on the night of August 14-15 show defiance to the hate-India campaign that the mullah and the military have blessed. It was an inspiring scene at the Wagah border when half a million people went in frenzy to find the Pakistani friends in their midst.

I do not know why Pakistan has overreacted to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's reiteration that if cross-border terrorism remains unabated the supporters of the peace process would be weakened. I got frantic calls from TV stations in Karachi to react. What the Prime Minister has said makes sense. How can people in India be convinced of Pakistan's intention if it allows its territory to be used for violence in Kashmir and elsewhere?

Islamabad may not admit the charge. But this is the perception at this end and it is not confined to one area or one set of people. It is all over. When Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee also says that infiltration from Pakistan has increased and that the training camps for terrorists have expanded, it becomes a matter beyond accusations and counter-accusations. The government at Islamabad has to take the allegation seriously and not just brush it aside as its foreign office tends to do.

Although its demand to produce evidence has weight, yet those who indulge in such activi-

ties do not leave any trace behind. Even then, New Delhi has reportedly given proof which may not be 100 per cent perfect if it is passed through a fine comb. But it is there. America too has made some satellite pictures available to show the existence of training camps. India's persistent allegation is that even when the two sides are having the best of equation at peace talks, the training camps are not dismantled.

New Delhi's surmise is that President General Pervez Musharraf keeps them as a trump card he wants to use when the detente process falters. India's experience, in fact, is that the terrorists coming from across the border are in proportion to the pace of the peace progress. Mumbai blasts are said to be part of that strategy. The talks were not making any headway. What is new in this is the role of home-grown terrorists. New Delhi has reluctantly conceded that a few Indian terrorists participated in the blasts.

Maybe, their complicity is being underplayed but it is not being ruled out. Islamabad only plays up that admission and tries to absolve its terrorists or those who come through Pakistan from West Asia in the name of jihad.

Terrorism is not a football which should be kicked from one side to another to register advantage. Both countries are prey to it. They should have jointly thought of steps to deal with it. Since India puts all the blame on Pakistan, Islamabad must offer some credible explanation to disprove the charge. A team of eminent people from both countries can do the job because the jingo nationalism has not yet contaminated all.

Still better would be to have an independent team of foreign countries, possibly through the UN or the Commonwealth, to go into allegations as well as the evidence which America or other countries may provide. This does involve foreign powers in the bilateral problem of India and Pakistan something New Delhi

abhors but it is one way of putting India's doubts to rest.

The present situation of New Delhi believing something and Islamabad not conceding even a bit of it about cross-border terrorism has put the skids on everything. Contacts are still there but only superficially. And things like sending out lower-level diplomats from both sides will only increase. In the tit-for-tat climate, governments can do nothing else. Still New Delhi should not have retaliated immediately to the expulsion of Kaul and waited to see what else was up the Pakistani sleeve. Immediate counteraction shows alacrity, not maturity.

Maturity is what India has to show when dealing with Islamabad which is intractable and wallows in its nasty attitude towards New Delhi. If nothing else, it can unilaterally take measures to increase people-to-people contact. Today most steps it has taken are sloppy and lack in spirit. Take for example, the bus from Amritsar to

Lahore. The fare works out to be Rs 11 per kilometre and it does not include the money spent to travel to Delhi to get a visa. Knowing the Pakistan government does not want people-to-people contacts to come good there are several examples to prove that at least India should unilaterally do something to make travel easy.

Low fare and relaxation in visa restrictions are the two measures which can go home in Pakistan. People there want to visit India and their number is in the thousands. They cannot do so because Islamabad is the only place from where visa is available and that too for three cities only. Reciprocity is not a virtue; it is aping others to cut one's throat. Why can't a visa office be opened at Karachi? If this depends on how soon Pakistan office will come up in Mumbai, India's foreign office should say so.

The fear that relaxation of visa restrictions will result in more terrorists coming into India is exaggerated. They do not come through border posts. They have their own routes. The long border with Pakistan cannot be sealed. Nepal is one country which terrorists have used to walk into India. Better and judicious facilities to issue a visa may pour cold water on the terrorists' surreptitious ways of entry.

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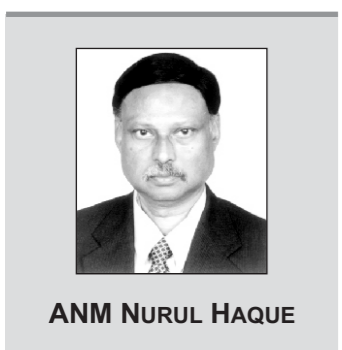
disturbed because of the halt in the peace process. Some 11 MPs and 20 others who crossed the border to take part in the celebrations on the night of August 14-15 show defiance to the hate-India campaign that the mullah and the military have blessed. It was an inspiring scene at the Wagah border when half a million people went in frenzy to find the Pakistani friends in their midst.

What was annoying at the retreat at sunset on August 14 was Pakistan's tactics to disturb the usual rhythm of cooperation at the border. The Pakistani authorities introduced this time the recitation of holy Koran so that the slogan for India-Pakistan Dosti would not be raised. I do not like the ever-new ways devised to keep the peoples of the two countries distant. Already 59 years have been wasted since independence. People of peace and goodwill must assert themselves on both sides. We owe it to the region and to its bright future.

"Man's dearest possession is life, and since it is given to him to live but once, he must so live as not to be seared with the shame of a cowardly and trivial past, so live as not to be tortured for years without purpose, so live that dying he can say: All my life and my strength were given to the first cause of the world's liberation of mankind."

Kuldip Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

Need for donor accountability



ANM NURUL HAQUE

BY THE NUMBERS

The finance minister claims that Bangladesh has now almost achieved the position to implement its development programs without financial assistance from donors. If it is a fact, then the government must not capitulate to any external pressure, rather should administer a befitting reply to the donors dictating policy formulation. The government should not be subservient to the donors for a paltry amount of \$1 billion while the expatriate Bangladeshis remit more than \$5 billion a year.

SENIOR economists including a minister recently blasted the donors for imposing separate conditions under different aid programs after formulation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) for the country. Dhaka-based Economic Research Group and Commonwealth Secretariat jointly organized the seminar titled Monitoring Donor Support to Bangladesh's Poverty Reduction Strategy: Rethinking the Rules of Engagement at a city hotel on August 5, which was attended by the leading economists of the country and the country directors of the World

Bank (WB) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) and country representative of DFID.

The economists observed that the donors neither prioritise the country's own necessities nor move in the direction of mutual accountability of utilization of aid funds. They suggested exploring a mechanism to monitor and evaluate donor assistance to ensure transparency and accountability at the donor end. They also urged the donors to follow the guidelines adopted in the Paris Declaration for implementing the PRSP. According to the Paris Declaration of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

(OECD), the aid recipient countries reserve the right to monitor the donor's aid programs.

The WB had made it mandatory for all its aid recipient countries to prepare a PRSP to become eligible to receive donor funds. Professor Rehman Sobhan, the eminent economist of the country, observed that 50 different countries with different economic and social conditions are implementing almost similar PRSP which revealed that the PRSPs have been imposed on those countries from outside. But India was a glaring exception who had had talks with WB on PRSP and finally did not prepare the PRSP, as they found their

five-year plan was competent enough to advance their country. Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman strongly criticized the WB and IMF saying that the two donors "treat the finance minister as a clerk" in adopting policy prescriptions, particularly raising the fuel prices. He told this in a workshop on Action Plan for Public Financial Management held recently in the city. He also blasted the donors for their meddling in the domestic affairs of the country and said: "Donors must understand that the development programs of our country are owned by us, not by them and we will decide how we will implement them." He also said that the

government would not be interested in any sort of aid relationship that would allow donor dictation.

There was a time when it seemed as if the whole economic affairs of Bangladesh were run by the WB and the IMF. The government was then compelled to go for many reforms under the pressure from the WB and IMF that did not suit the needs of the country. But the donors dictating policy formulation has increased significantly during the regime of the BNP-led alliance government compared to any previous regime since independence.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia while winding up her speech in parliament on March 15, 2005 categorically said that Bangladesh shall not be run by any dictation or order by any foreign force. The claim about the obstinacy of her government to donor pressure would be more credible if the government could be defiant against donor dictation veiled under advice and prescription.

But the government has been agreed to accommodate direct

involvement of the donors in formulating its policies. According to a latest decision, the government had agreed to include representatives of the donors in eight sub-groups formed recently along with the government officials, to formulate policies and monitor their implementation. The major areas of their involvement include the financial sector, civil service and women's affairs and empowerment. The representatives will be from the WB, ADB, USAID, DFID, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, and Japan.

The Anti-Corruption Commission was compelled to pay Tk 25 million to have an organogram according to donor prescription from the consultants appointed by the donor. The Daily Star reported a few months back that Tk 108 crore was spent for the foreign consultants appointed in four nationalized commercial banks for their reforms under donor pressure which could be done by the local experts. These are only a few instances and such spree of appointing foreign consultants will surely weaken what-

ever institutional base we have in the financial sector.

The finance minister claims that Bangladesh has now almost achieved the position to implement its development programs without financial assistance from donors. If it is a fact, then the government must not capitulate to any external pressure, rather should administer a befitting reply to the donors dictating policy formulation. The government should not be subservient to the donors for a paltry amount of \$1 billion while the expatriate Bangladeshis remit more than \$5 billion a year.

Though the pressure and prescriptions from the donors were not a new phenomenon for a country like Bangladesh, their dictation and direct involvement in government policy formulation has added a new dimension to the government's submissive attitude. Donors have also become more demanding despite the fact that their aid flow to Bangladesh has reduced by a half in recent years.

The donors' direct involvement in the government's policy formu-

lation is indeed a factor that has humiliated the nation's prestige. Everyone will agree that no sovereign government should be interfered in or dictated to by the foreign donors formulating its policies. So the issue of donor dictation in formulating policies needs to be discussed between the government and the donors on the basis of equals rather than yielding to the unwholesome pressure.

Time has come for monitoring donors in their aid apportion and directives for utilization by the recipients, as it is now being done by the donors themselves. The need for exploring a mechanism to make the donors transparent and accountable is also an emphatic opinion. Public agencies, professionals and stake holder's representatives may be entrusted to formulate the mechanism for monitoring donor aid to ensure transparency and accountability at the donor end. The donors also need to be better aware of taking an introspective look at their own selves.

ANM Nurul Haque is a columnist of The Daily Star.