

Ershad in, Oli out?

We see that some eminent leaders of BNP have already left the party. Among them are Messrs Budruddoza, Mahi Chowdhury, Abu Hena, and Abdul Mannan. Some others, it is reported, such as Col (retd) Oli Ahmed, Ashraf Hossain, and SK Abdur Razzak, may also leave the party soon. Final decision about Saifur Rahman is awaiting. It is at this juncture of the party that JP decided to join the alliance. BNP's eagerness to invite Ershad (at high cost) appears to be due to dwindling of confidence in JI. We hope that the present haziness about it will disappear soon.

ABMS ZAHUR

NEEDLESS to say that lots of political activities are going on in the BNP and JP camps. While we have been able to decipher some reactions to Ershad's declaration of joining the four party alliance in the near future, we hear not much from the BNP high command. However, it is clear that while Ershad is busy freeing himself from criminal cases against him, BNP is pressuring him to finalise his decision by the end of this month despite Ershad's repeated assurances for joining the alliance by September 2006.

The leaders of the BNP, it is reported, have been advised to refrain from making any adverse comments on Ershad's activities. On the other hand, Jamaat-e-Islami consider that joining of the alliance by Ershad will not make much of a difference and in fact the alliance partners feel that the alliance does not need support from JP to win the election.

But, BNP, as it appears, cannot depend on such assurance. It is apparent BNP may have some considerations to go for absorption of attacks of JI and a part of BNP such as: (a) awareness of disadvantage of incumbency factor, (b) tarnished image of the party due to terrorist activities by the Islami militants (mainly), (c) bad handling of minority affairs, (d) current image of pro-fundamentalist parties, (e) unprecedented price hike of essential commodities, (f) high inflationary condition, (g) failure in curbing

corruption, (h) growing dissension in the party because of inequitable distribution of benefits, and (i) failure in producing enough of power.

High politicisation of administration may backfire in some critical areas. It is common knowledge that a politicised bureaucracy tends to go sometime against the interest of the concerned party or the concerned government. The majority of a politicised bureaucracy show leaning toward a particular political party because of their self interest not for any other considerations such as loyalty to party or respect for political ideology. The moment they sense any form of danger of jeopardising their interest they do not hesitate to betray. It may be pointed out in this regard that the history of Bangladesh is replete with incidences of betrayal and hypocrisy.

Thus, much benefit may not be expected from a politicised bureaucracy. In regard to ordinary party activists, we may say that they will make sacrifice (if necessary) as long as their own interests are served. Because many of these activists change their leaning towards other parties, they know well how to swim with the current. They, however, lose interest in this exciting job once they can make enough of fortune because majority of them basically prefer enjoying their ill-gotten gains to the humdrum of political life with lots of risks and hazards.

Those activists who firmly believe in the ideology of the party

do not change their colours, but they expect that the party high command will give them their due i.e offer them important positions. If the high command of the party fail to offer them their due to various reasons, these people may not hesitate to involve themselves in actions prejudicial to the interest of the party.

The parties must be aware of the change in the attitude of the political leaders at the grass-roots level. We see that more and more educated and knowledgeable people are showing interest in politics at the grass-roots level. This may further improve with the strengthening of local government and devolution of more power to the local bodies. The major parties will commit a serious blunder if the local heroes or popular local leaders are ignored during finalisation of the nomination of candidates. If the front-line leaders lose contact with the grass-roots level leaders, they may commit mistakes in political judgement.

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will disappear soon.

The experience of BNP to handle a coalition government is not considered adequate. In the allocation of seats for the next election it is to be seen how far the advisors of Hawa Bhaban are capable of distribution of seats to the satisfaction of their alliance partners and the party itself. Tackling of Ershad appears to be tougher than handling JI because of Ershad's shrewdness, experience, and intimate knowledge about politics and administration of Bangladesh. Though Ershad will be gaining from the deal, it is not clear whether JP as a party will be gainer or loser.

The present political situation is tense. The main causes may be identified as: (i) ruling party's indifference to any reform in EC or caretaker government, (ii) unacceptability of voters list prepared under an arrogant and enigmatic CEC and ECs, and (iii) AL-led 14-party alliance's refusal to participate in the election without proper discussions on reforms in EC and the CTG. It is extremely doubtful whether reforms can be completed under the CTG through ordinance. Thus the fate of the next election is uncertain.

A few months back the Bikalpa Dhara chairman stated that a large number of existing BNP MPs may resign from the party -- signs of dissension in the party are becoming clearer. It may be premature to draw any firm conclusion about the situation. It is, however, comprehensible that the present relationship between BNP and JI (Jamaat-e-Islami) may lose some warmth if BNP-JP deal is successful. We may also see another interesting political development -- resurgence of the Pir of Atrosi, a close ally of Ershad. Within a couple of months we may see more discards and more inclusions or increase in number of independent candidates.

ABMS Zahur is a former Joint Secretary.

How London's terror scare looks from Beirut

With their usual sensitivity, the pilots who bombed the bridge -- no terrorists they, mark you -- chose to destroy the bridge when ordinary cars were crossing. So they massacred the 12 civilians who happened to be on the bridge. In the real world, we call that a war crime. Personally, I'm all for arresting criminals, be they of the "Islamic fascist" variety or the Bin Laden variety or the Israeli variety -- their warriors of the air really should be arrested next time they drop into Heathrow -- or the American variety (Abu Ghraib cum laude) and indeed of the kind that blow out the brains of Tube train passengers.

ROBERT FISK writes from Beirut

WHEN my electricity returned at around 3am yesterday, I turned on the BBC World Service television. There were a series of powerful explosions which shook the house -- just as they vibrated across all of Beirut -- as the latest Israeli air raids blasted over the city. And then up came the World Service headline: "Terror Plot."

Terror what, I asked myself? And there was my favorite cop, Paul Stephenson, explaining how my favorite police force -- the ones who bravely executed an innocent young Brazilian on the Tube, taking 30 seconds to fire six bullets into him -- had saved the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians from suicide bombers on airliners.

I'm sure our readers will join me in watching how many of the suspects -- or "British-born Muslims" as the BBC defined them in its special form of "soft" racism (they are surely Muslim Britons or British Muslims, are they not?) -- are still in custody in a couple of weeks' time.

And I'm sure it's quite by chance that the lads in blue chose yesterday -- with anger at Lord Blair of Kut al-Amara's shameful failure over Lebanon at its peak -- to save the world. After all, it's scarcely three years since the other great Terror Plot had British armoured vehicles surrounding Heathrow on the very day -- again quite by chance, of course -- that hundreds of thousands of Britons were demonstrating against Lord Blair's intended invasion of Iraq.

So I sat on the carpet in my living room and watched all these heavily

armed chips at Heathrow protecting the British people from annihilation and then on came President George Bush to tell us that we were all fighting "Islamic fascism." There were more thumps in the darkness across Beirut where an awful lot of people are suffering from terror -- although I can assure George W that while the pilots of the aircraft dropping bombs across the city in which I have lived for 30 years may or may not be fascists, they are definitely not Islamic.

And there, of course, was the same old problem. To protect the British people -- and the American people -- from "Islamic terror", we must have lots and lots of heavily armed policemen and soldiers and plainclothes police and endless departments of anti-terrorism, homeland security and other more sordid folk like the American torturers at Abu Ghraib and Baghram and Guantanamo. Yet the only way to protect ourselves from the real violence which may -- and probably will -- be visited upon us, is to deal, morally, with courage and with justice, with the tragedy of Lebanon and "Palestine" and Iraq and Afghanistan. And this we will not do.

I would, frankly, love to have Paul Stephenson out in Beirut to counter a little terror in my part of the world -- Hizbollah terror and Israeli terror. But this, of course, is something that Paul and his lads don't have the spittle for. It's one thing to sound off about the alleged iniquities of alleged suspects of an alleged plot to create alleged terror -- quite another to deal with the causes of that terror and to do so in the face of great danger.

I was amused to see that Bush --

just before my electricity was cut off again -- still mendaciously tells us that the "terrorists" hate us because of "our freedoms." Not because we support the Israelis who have massacred refugee columns, fired into Red Cross ambulances and slaughtered more than 1,000 Lebanese civilians -- here indeed are crimes for Paul Stephenson to investigate -- but because they hate our "freedoms."

And I notice with despair that our journalists again suck up to authority, quoting endless (and anonymous) "security sources" without once challenging their information or the timing of Paul's "terror plot" discoveries or the nature of the details -- somehow, "fizzy drinks bottles" doesn't quite work for me -- nor the reasons why, if this whole panjandrum is correct, anyone would want to carry out such atrocities. We are told that the arrested men are Muslims. Now isn't that interesting? Muslims. This means that many of them -- or their families -- originally come from south-west Asia and the Middle East, from the area that encompasses Afghanistan, Iraq, "Palestine" and Lebanon.

In the old days, chaps like Paul Stephenson used to pull out a map when faced with folk of different origins or religion or indeed different names. Indeed, if Paul Stephenson takes a school atlas, he'll notice that there are an awful lot of violent problems and injustice and suffering and -- a speciality, it seems, of the Metropolitan Police -- of death in the area from which the families of these "Muslims" come.

Could there be a connection, I wonder? Dare we look for a motive

for the crime, or rather the "alleged crime"? The Met used to be pretty good at looking for motives. But not, of course, in the "war on terror", where -- if he really searched for real motives -- my favourite policeman would swiftly be back on the beat as Constable Paul Stephenson.

Take the other day. On day 31 of the Israeli version of the "war on terror" -- a conflict to which Paul and the lads in blue apparently subscribe by proxy -- an Israeli aircraft blew up the only remaining bridge to the Syrian frontier in northern Lebanon, in the mountainous and beautiful Akka district above the Mediterranean.

With their usual sensitivity, the pilots who bombed the bridge -- no terrorists they, mark you -- chose to destroy the bridge when ordinary cars were crossing. So they massacred the 12 civilians who happened to be on the bridge. In the real world, we call that a war crime. Indeed, it's a crime worthy of the attention of Paul and his lads. But alas, Stephenson's job is to frighten the British people, not to stop the crimes that are the real reason for the British to be frightened.

Personally, I'm all for arresting criminals, be they of the "Islamic fascist" variety or the Bin Laden variety or the Israeli variety -- their warriors of the air really should be arrested next time they drop into Heathrow -- or the American variety (Abu Ghraib cum laude) and indeed of the kind that blow out the brains of Tube train passengers.

But I don't think Paul Stephenson is. I think he huffs and he puffs but I do not think he stands for law and order. He works for the Ministry of Fear which, by its very nature, is not interested in motives or injustice. And I have to say, watching his performance before the next power cut last night, I thought he was doing a pretty good job for his masters.

Is the Red Sun setting in Cuba at last?

In 1959, a young, and almost unknown, bearded man named Fidel Castro appeared on the Latin American soil of Cuba. He later proved to be a powerful personality, taking control of Cuba, and giving the biggest shock of the century to America by forming a new revolutionary regime under his leadership. It was the first Latin American regime to take a stance against the US government and free itself from the political influence of America. And Cuba happens to be one of the 51 "original members" that established the United Nations. I am praising Fidel Castro, not because he is a communist leader, but because of his guts and boldness in defying the orders of the most powerful nation of the world -- America.

AMM SHAHABUDDIN

AFTER some 48 years of shining in full glare the red sun is, at last, setting in the West (Cuba). After running his country for about five decades as a communist dictator, the legendary figure, Fidel Castro, an eye-sore for America, has, at least temporarily, handed over power to his younger brother, Raul Castro, defence minister of the country, after intestinal surgery. His condition is said to be improving steadily.

But the government of Cuba has not been scared by the US "threats" of a "possible" US attack. It has even justified the "death" of news about Castro's health condition, arguing that the country "faces a

clear and imminent threat from America." So the prowling wolves have already started howling to celebrate a grand feast in the near future!

It may be mentioned here that in 1959, a young, and almost unknown, bearded man named Fidel Castro appeared on the Latin American soil of Cuba. He later proved to be a powerful personality, taking control of Cuba, and giving the biggest shock of the century to America by forming a new revolutionary regime under his leadership. It was the first Latin American regime to take a stance against the US government and free itself from the political influence of America. And Cuba happens to be one of the 51 "original members" that estab-

lished the United Nations

I am praising Fidel Castro, not because he is a communist leader, but because of his guts and boldness in defying the orders of the most powerful nation of the world -- America. If some of our Asian and Arab leaders could show a fraction of Castro's bold leadership in the face of US hegemony, then the world could have been saved from many cruel and inhuman trials and tribulations.

Cuba under threat

At first Fidel Castro used to call himself a democrat, even after he became an iron-handed dictator. But later he changed his tune and declared that he was Marxist-Leninist, and Cuba was put on the

road to communism. This change came when America was directly involved in a sinister move, in the sixties, to remove Castro from power and put in a candidate of its own choice, with the help of the so-called Cuban exiles. But Castro parried the attack, dealing a fatal blow to US plans. This was perhaps the first US adventure in Cuba, since Castro came to power, that misfired. But Castro kept marching on to his goal, defying all US-laid plans. Even the demise of the mighty Soviet Union due to the machinations of US intelligence service in the eighties could not slow down Castro, although he lost Moscow as a powerful ally. Castro followed his own anti-US strategy declaring openly that Cuba, and he, were always under threat from the United States.

CIA failure

But the most striking feature in CIA's history is that when it could so successfully penetrate the iron-curtain, built by Stalin, to bring down the most powerful US rival, brick-by brick, and razing it to the ground, it could not touch a single hair of Castro, who escaped every attempt made on his life by the CIA agents.

It may be mentioned here that

during the last 47 years of his rule as the undisputed leader of Cuba, Fidel Castro had narrowly escaped hundreds of attempts on his life, the official figure being 640 attempts. It is a mystery that he could escape every such murderous attempt. As they say, "threatened men live long." Castro has proved that to be true. It is, therefore, quiet natural on the part of the Cuban exiles to celebrate Castro's exit from power, though temporarily, on health grounds. To them, the curtain has fallen on Castro's regime.

President Bush is tightening his belt to enter the arena to exploit the vacuum created by Castro's absence. He had already offered support and help to the Cuban people to usher in a democratic government in the country. He had directly called upon the Cuban people, as if he was their only well-wisher in this hour of crisis, "to push for democracy" in the absence of the dictator, Castro, declaring that America was "ready to help Cuba's transition to democracy." He also strongly criticised "imposition" of Raul Castro on the Cuban people by the out-going dictator. Perhaps America would prefer a "democratically imposed" person who would follow the path shown by US democracy, of course, through a

democratic election. But will Bush succeed in Cuba?

Bush's tin-pot rhetoric

However Bush's call has already been dismissed by a cross-section of the Cuban people, including prominent legislators and newspapers. The editor of Youth Rebel newspaper labeled Bush's call as "tin pot rhetoric," while a legislator had called it an "epitome of delirium."

Anyway, whether Bush is in "delirium," uttering his "tin-pot rhetoric," or not, the US Republican representative, Jaff Flake, a long-time critic of the Bush administration's Cuba policy, asserted that America "is in no position to help" Cubans, adding "we are more distant now than we ever have been from the Cubans." Flake warned that there is a "widespread misconception that as soon as Castro is gone, US will be able aid and assist a transition."

But, certainly, such words of wisdom will fall on deaf years, and Bush will go ahead with his plan of action to put Cuba on the right track, as he had done earlier in Iraq and Afghanistan. Only a couple of weeks back the Bush administration released a report on US's Cuba policy, the main theme of which

was to tighten the embargo on Cuba and secondly to establish a link to bank-roll Castro opponents.

The question of tightening the embargo on Cuba may be shelved given to the establishment of a fund to bank-roll Castro opponents. The creation of the fund for the golden hand-shakes with the Castro opponents is likely to bring better harvests for America this time, provided it is not marred by any sudden flood or typhoon.

While America follows a hard and fast policy towards illegal immigrants from other countries, it keeps its doors wide open all the time to welcome the Cuban exiles as honoured guests, mainly on political grounds. Perhaps America cherishes the hidden hope that one day they would act as weapons to put an end to the Castro regime for good. But this has not succeeded so far.

In 1961, there was an abortive attempt by the Cuban exiles, nurtured in America, to attack Cuba with US assistance. But it totally failed, ending in a fiasco. It is known as the Bay of Pigs debacle. But the worst came in 1962 when the relations between the two countries reached their lowest point. In October that year Kennedy

announced that Russia had installed inter-continental missiles, and Ilyushin bombers, on the soil of Cuba. For some days the world seemed to be on the verge of nuclear war. Then Kennedy threatened Khrushchev that the US would use force unless those were removed immediately and a deal was reached. The world heaved a sigh of great relief, no doubt.

Bush must be musing about his future plan of action to build a democratic state of Cuba as a progressive country. It all depends on what measures he adopts in near future. He, however, should keep in mind what hot kick-backs he had received, and is still receiving, in Iraq.

He also shouldn't forget what humiliation America had to swallow in Somalia when the US forces were literally driven out of Somalia and a dead US soldier was lynched by anti-US demonstrators on the streets of Mogadishu, the ghastly scene of which was telecast all over the world. Therefore Bush should think twice before he leaps into the black hole.

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Private security service rules

If the PSC owners, with their half-read but dedicated guards, can successfully protect so many key installations, commercial and residential buildings, cash transportation, VIPs, then why can't they be allowed to have 10 to 15 fire-arms in their arsenal? Should a misuse or accident occur, then they can easily be taken to task. If our political cadres and mastans can keep illegal or unlicensed arms then why can't the PSC have its own licensed arms for justified cause? Certainly the law-makers do not want the armed cadres and mastans to carry on extortion, loot, robbery, and murder, and have the weaponless PSC guards watch helplessly?

MAJOR (RETD) M FERDAUS KHAN

My attention is drawn to the enactment of Private Security Service Rules (PSSR) for Private Security Company (PSC) reported in various newspapers on August 16.

I wonder if the government policy makers are aware where this tailor-made PSSR (it seems to have been framed for some vested quarter) will take the nation to. They perhaps do not know that where Sardah-trained police have failed, the makeshift-trained, illiterate or half-read private guards have stood up boldly to provide security in return for a salary and facility which is almost one quarter of the

police's.

I as a humble citizen and a proprietor of a PSC would like to present the following information for our law-makers to decide where this PSSR will lead. Although I am taking the time to write this paper, I wonder if our respected policy makers will have the time to kindly read it, give a sympathetic consideration, and accordingly take the necessary action.

Trade license: According to the new PSSR, each PSC has to obtain a license from the DC office, paying Tk 200,000 as license fee, deposit Tk 500,000 as security (refundable, though only Almighty Allah knows how much time and other things it would take to be refunded), and

renew the said license every two years by paying Tk 50,000.

Now, my question is: why should one pay such a huge amount? What does the government think of a PSC operator? Black money wallah? Human trafficker? Gun runner? Mafia don or mastan? Political don harbouring armed cadres? Manpower entrepreneur sending workers abroad and minting money?

The PSCs have obtained trade license by paying the government prescribed yearly fees like any other businessman or company. They also have obtained TIN number and VAT registration certificate and accordingly many of them are religiously paying the IT and

VAT. Does the government have the slightest idea how much profit a local PSC can earn by deploying a single guard?

Training: I appreciate the idea of providing 28 days training to a guard as mandatory. But before that, let's find out the jobs a PSC guard needs to do. His primary responsibility is to provide protection to man and material against theft, pilferage, trespasser, extortionist, mugger, unwanted visitor, fire, and sabotage. The half-read village men and women require training in basic drill, discipline, manners and etiquettes, observation, surveillance, fire-fighting, first aid, visitor/guest reception and monitoring, telephone handling, material movement management, unarmed combat, bomb detection, vehicle parking, traffic control, etc.

But let me make an honest confession. There are instances where half-way through the training, many of the PSCs have to deploy guards on clients' urgent requirement or insistence. But it can be compensated by arranging "on the job training." However, I strongly recommend that strict disciplinary action should be taken against those PSCs who just pick up a person and deploy him as a

guard.

Education: The PSSR says a PSC guard has to have passed class nine and as evidence he has to produce an SSC registration certificate.

Does the honourable home minister know that the major portion of the guards come from villages, almost 20 percent from workers of closed down jute mills of Adamjee and Khulna, 10 percent from defence and para-military force (my statistics are an estimate)?

70 percent of PSC guards have hardly studied up to class eight. Yet they are doing excellent jobs and our clients have personally requested us not to remove them from their house or factory.

If a villager could afford to register his name in the Education Board, then instead of joining a PSC he would have appeared in the SSC exam and tried to make his living in the army, BDR, or police. There are probably more than 25,000 guards serving in various PSCs throughout the country. If this law is implemented then almost 20,000 will go jobless! And think of their family members!

Pay: Announcement of Tk 2,700 as minimum pay is excellent. But

for how many hours? If it is for 8 hours per day with a weekly day off (as desired by many foreign garment buyers), then are the clients willing to pay for the same? I wonder. Anyway, I feel Eid bonus and insurance should have also been spelled out.

One information our policy makers are not aware of: this profession and market is very competitive and difficult like any other product. And it is equally difficult to get a good stock for guarding service. To retain a good or efficient guard, the PSC has to ensure provision for adequate training, motivation, good pay, accommodation, Eid bonus and allowances, education, height, medical, conveyance, etc.

Uniform: Debarring PSCs from using defence and para-military organizations' uniforms deserves appreciation. But allow us please to design our own uniforms. And I hope we don't have to pay bakshish to any government agency to get our uniform approved.

Issuance of fire arms: Home minister has doubts about the credibility of the PSC guards for which he has reservations regarding issuance of arms.

Well, it does carry weight. But

imagine a DG of a para-military force who is tied down every day to investigate and issue 60 to 75 permissions to provide armed Ansars to almost 15 PSCs for carrying cash or protecting VIP. Forget about the operational and administrative procedures involved in detailing of armed Ansar personnel, preparing requisition papers, drawing and depositing arms and ammunition to and from the kote.

If the PSC owners, with their half-read but dedicated guards, can successfully protect so many key installations, commercial and residential buildings, cash transportation, VIPs, then why can't they be allowed to have 10 to 15 fire-arms in their arsenal? Should a misuse or accident occur, then they can easily be taken to task.

If our political cadres and mastans can keep illegal or unlicensed arms then why can't the PSC have its own licensed arms for justified cause? Certainly the law-makers do not want the armed cadres and mastans to carry on extortion, loot, robbery, and murder, and have the weaponless PSC guards watch helplessly?

I am confident that PSCs are quite capable of safeguarding their weapons.

Verification: Surprisingly nothing has been mentioned about police verification of the newly recruited guards of PSC which, needless to mention, is of utmost importance.

Many PSCs maintain bio-data including reference of their guards. But I have my doubts as to how many of the guards have been verified by the police. One of the reasons could be that many a PSC do not bother about it or many of them have not received a positive response from police end. I myself cannot guarantee that I do not have a Sharbohra or JMB or convict hiding in my organisation. I think this is one area where police can train us how to go about it.

Laws are always made for the betterment of the society and to relieve the people from constraints and make a system simple or accessible. But PSSR seem to have been created to ruin the small scale entrepreneurs who have been relentlessly working hard risking their money, image, honour, and dignity to build a PSC.

I have a feeling that PSSR has been adopted to accommodate some vested quarter. Already enough damage has been done to various sectors including RMG. Please don't damage us further.