

PM's appeal to the Ulema

Keep religion above politics

It was the right move to make. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called a meeting of the Ulema-e-Keram and asked them to distance themselves from those who are using religion for political purposes. She said that those who are killing people and indulging in all sorts of terrorist activities are not, and cannot be, the true followers of Islam, which is a religion of peace and brotherhood.

There is considerable merit in the PM's appeal to the Ulemas. We think that the leaders of our religious community must make a distinction between the true religious leaders and those who use religion for vested interest. Far too often the deep religiosity of our ordinary people have been exploited by unscrupulous and ambitious individuals in religious garb. Our history is replete with examples of pro-people initiatives being destroyed by vested groups using religion as their weapon.

There are two issues here. One is that of fatwa and the other is the role of NGOs. Neither of these have anything to do with the government of the day. The first was a judgement of the honourable High Court and the other is a part of the development process that has been going on for almost as long as Bangladesh has existed. The judgement on fatwa has been stayed and is in the appeal stage. Those who feel against the verdict of the High Court have their chance of making their points of view known during the appeal. No political force believing in the rule of law can take to the streets an issue that is pending before the court of law. As for the NGOs it is our view that they have done more good than bad for our people. If there are NGOs whose activities are against our religion then let us hear about them. We cannot accept a blanket condemnation of all NGOs for the activities of a few, just as we cannot condemn all the religious leaders because of the terrorist activities of a few. Most importantly, why should it suddenly become an object of social unrest? Nothing has happened lately for this disturbance to occur.

We appeal to the Ulema community to shun those so-called leaders who are using religion for their political ends.

Sharon's landslide victory

Crucial test for ME peace

Israeli right wing Likud Party leader Ariel Sharon's landslide win over Labour Party contender Ehud Barak has sharply diminished chances of peace in the Middle East. Sharon has quickly made clear that peace negotiations with the Palestinians will not be immediately resumed and even when they are, concessions made by his predecessor would be off the table. Barak had shown willingness to give Palestinians substantial control in the West Bank and also share sovereignty over some portions of Jerusalem, the two major stumbling blocks in a Palestinian-Israeli negotiated settlement.

That Sharon has chosen not to break from his well-known extremist and belligerent past is unfortunate. Palestinians, already bracing for this eventuality, would now be further pushed with their backs against the wall.

There are two significant factors that would influence future developments. First, Sharon must form a government within 45 days. The Knesset is still the same factious body, with many right-wing, centrist and religious parties that gave Barak such a headache. Should Sharon succeed in forming a coalition with the Barak's left-of-centre Labour Party, the Israeli posture could become relatively less extremist. If he fails, as many predict that he may well do, the Israeli leadership would once again undergo a change.

The second factor is the role of the United States. So far, Bush officials have steered clear of the Middle East, but with Sharon's entry, the distance must be closed. It is imperative for the Bush administration to exact tangible reassurances that Israel will return to the peace table and desist from using its military muscle against the Palestinians. Sharon's win, followed immediately by a hard-line posture, is an ominous development that has further eroded Palestinian confidence. We urge the US to play a positive role as a broker of peace, protecting the commitments made to the Palestinians and ensuring that the region would not be consumed by another escalation in violence.

The cycle of violence



**ALMAS
ZAKIUDDIN**

VIOLENCE breeds. It does not give birth to kinder, gentler acts. Call this a macabre thought, (and it is not, by any stretch of the imagination, an original one), but it keeps coming back to me, like an ugly refrain. It is somewhat like the images one watches, casually, on the Discovery Channel, of lions feeding on a kill, for instance, not appreciating their portend till later. So, too, this week's ugliness hits home in playback mode.

We've come a long way, suddenly. One moment there was a relative absence of extremism, and the next moment there were images of a home-bred taliban. Call me politically naïve if you will, but I find it impossible to embrace the sanctimonious calls around me, and one must admit of these we have had no shortage.

Leaders racing to claim high moral ground and declaiming about matters that are self-evident, even to the most ordinary person, is an image one could choose to ignore. But what about the sights and sounds of violence that sit up and demand attention? How does one process those?

There is, for instance, the image of a policeman killed allegedly with wooden shoeboxes inside a mosque. Another one of youths with handcuffs, being hauled off by uniformed men. NGO workers and ordinary folk standing tall in a mass rally. A train lying mangled in a ditch. Hartal pickets versus anti-hartal pickets. A rickshaw being trampled under by young hooligans.

My own scooter darts across largely deserted streets on the second day of the hartal. Bumping along, I am sad that battle lines have been drawn on a subject that is patently explosive, not merely for the respective political parties, but also and most significantly, for ordinary people.

Religion pitted against secularism (or vice versa) is an old story, thankfully not played out in as much violent measure, and certainly not for any sustained period of time, in this land, as it has been in others. Bangladesh has been endowed with a rich and unique legacy of syncretism often envied by others less fortunate. For a largely benign society, now building on what has

unbridled passion cannot but raise hackles, all round.

The problem becomes unpalatable, of course, when passions raise more than hackles. I was talking to a group of teenaged students who had come to our newspaper last week for information on acid violence. They were preparing for a debate on the subject.

I found it a little daunting, I must admit, to share my views with them. I kept holding back from expressing myself spontaneously because at the back of my mind was this nagging thought: why are these youthful minds being forced to grapple with a subject like acid violence?

It seemed to be such a waste of

conscious energies, not to mention, a terrible indictment of our value system.

Still, I proceeded to share my experiences covering acid violence stories, with the students. They did not know, for instance, that acid violence has not been invented in Bangladesh. It existed long before acid was commonly available here, nearly 150 years ago, in Europe. The term 'vitrilic' took root from the frequent acid attacks by spumed suitors on female objects of their affection, in the western world.

At this point in the discussion, a teacher who accompanied the students interjected with a question: "So how come acid throwing has

explained that economic prosperity had gone side by side with the growth of democracy which, in turn, meant that people's interests had been made paramount, especially by political parties desirable of winning their mandate. I should also have explained that education, freedom of expression, protection and security of human rights, enshrined and upheld by an independent judiciary, were key factors that had ended this form of violence.

But the moment was lost, the teacher and her students went away in pursuit of more information on acid violence and soon, events of the hartal-stricken week had virtually subsumed intellectual argu-

ments. Reality stared us all in the face, in the form of images of violence all round.

The problem is, one cannot keep reality at bay, even if one tries. The young aside, even adults are having problems coping with the pictures of conflict that have emerged in front of us. Worse, many ordinary people, perhaps naïve or apolitical like myself, are reacting with mixed feelings.

After all, some acts are wrong and must be punished and hopefully, prevented. But where a government in power apparently has allowed law and order to become a country-wide issue, and in the process, has eroded a great deal of its credibility, does the ordinary person now place blind faith in this so-called fight against fundamentalism and dogmatism? Is everything really all that simple, good against evil, and secularism against bigotry?

One does not expect to find perfect answers, especially not in

IF YOU ASK ME

It doesn't matter how or where one is placed in the political spectrum, there are very few answers and a host of difficult questions. And I am no judge of politics, and only a moderately informed student of history. Both schools of learning would respond that meting out more violence, to combat violence, does not stop it in its tracks.

been an undoubtedly successful transition to democracy, a slide towards reactionary thinking would be a very sad and costly mistake. Society cannot grapple with the monster of radicalism without paying a price.

Even under the relatively firm and fair hand of law and order, as exists in the United States for instance, the battle for and against religion has claimed lives. There, the often baffling drama of abortion rights, (to South Asians, it is a non-issue, still) has been and still is, in many places, deeply violent and divisive.

Even here, in Dhaka, I recall how some years ago, an American diplomat stormed off in a huff when someone ticked him off rather rudely because his Republican government had slashed funding for abortion. It was probably not a wise move on the part of the Bangladeshi activist to have offended the diplomat, for obvious we-need-funding reasons, but points of view that rest

their time, and their bounding enthusiasm. Why should it be necessary or desirable even, for teenagers to debate this subject? I do not mean to imply that the students would not grasp the principles or even the finer points of gender-based acid violence. Indeed, by exposing them to the topic in a controlled and structured environment, one would probably enable them to come to grips with it, intellectually at any rate. Eventually, they would be better prepared to confront the ugliness inherent in this form of violence. Some of them could even, eventually, grow up and do good works to arrest its existence, help victims and punish perpetrators. Certainly, acid violence against women and children is a social reality that one cannot and should not ignore.

But that the subject has become commonplace, and a debate on it might be considered intellectually edifying, seemed to me to be a squandering of the students' pre-

been stopped in the west?"

Her question caught me by surprise. One assumed the answer was self-evident. I stared at her for a split second before blurting out something about education, rule of law and an acceptance that women are people, too. One does not mutilate people just because they don't agree with you, I said finally.

This week, as one heard the human rights activist Asma Jehangir from Pakistan talk about the horror of violence in the name of religion in her own country, and as one watched political confrontation take on an ugly twist, in this country, I could not stop thinking about the teacher's question, and the young students preparing for their debate on acid violence.

What bothered me was that I ought to have explained in more detail to the young students that acid violence probably ran aground in the western world because people made great strides in economic prosperity. I should also have

attempts to re-exert its authority over Central Asia and re-define its place in the world while China moves ahead with modernising its military and the rest of Asia may have to cope with the effects of a slowing down of US economy on their export industries. It is argued whether in such political climate Powell doctrine could keep its allies together that could further the interests of all.

The national security team of defence and foreign policy chiefs under the Bush administration is rich in experience but many people are wary that the team may see all things in black and white. As is the case with most human endeavours, the events in the world do not conform to black and white. Powell doctrine may be found inadequate to meet a situation that is unconventional.

Powell doctrine appears to have unsettled allies in Europe. They hope that once the new US administration gets into business, the fallacy of Powell doctrine may be perceived and the US is likely to adjust the doctrine so as to enable the US to play its role fully in global affairs together with its allies.

Barister Hanur ur Rashid is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

Powell doctrine and its relevance in international relations

HARUN UR RASHID

GENERAL Colin Powell (63), the new US Secretary of State, is the first Afro-American to hold the post. He is known to be soldiers' soldier. He directed the military operations during the Gulf War as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from Pentagon. He is noted for his direct and crisp views. He is believed to be a cautious person. In his Pentagon office it was said that he kept an epigram from the Greek historian and politician Thucydides (460-395 B.C.) which said: "Of all manifestations of power, restraint impresses most."

It is reported that restraint in him is rooted in his background as a soldier who knows the human costs of war. In his autobiography he enunciated his views on war. He said that "many of my generation of Vietnam-era officers vowed that when our turn came to call the shots, we would not quietly acquiesce in half-hearted warfare for half-baked reasons that the American people could not understand." The gist of Powell doctrine seems to contain in this sentence.

If one analyses the meaning of his views as stated above, three elements come out very strongly.

First, the military leaders should not "quietly acquiesce" to the decisions about waging war by the civilian superiors. Second, the refusal to embark on a "half-hearted warfare" and the insistence that every war requires overwhelming force to defeat the enemy. Third, war should be fought for vital interests and not

include humanitarianism in the eyes of General Powell. That implies that he would not have involved the US forces in Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo and even against Iraqi aggression in Kuwait. The essence of the doctrine, it is argued, is its hostility to limited war. As Powell argued during the Bosnia debate indicating that as

The 'limited' war has a limited purpose. It means exactly what it says. The limited war has a moral dimension to it. In 1991, the purpose of the Gulf war was to eject the Iraqi forces from Kuwait but not to topple the Iraqi leader. Kosovo war was aimed to remove the Serbian forces from Kosovo and not to remove

former President Slobodan Milosevic of Yugoslavia.. It is argued that Powell doctrine, if implemented, would be ineffective to contain the wickedness of a regime.

Critics to the doctrine argue that in the post-cold war era, unconventional wars may emerge and Powell doctrine is inadequate. The "all-or-nothing approach" appears to be flawed. Appeasement to the inhuman policies of the dictators may engulf a global war in the long run instead of a limited war to check human rights abuses by a dictator. Hitler's inhumanity, as historians argue, was the result of the policy of appeasement by the West. Had

the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights is the core document of the UN. To protect and preserve the principles of the Declaration appear to be the legal and moral obligation of every UN member-state. The responsibility lies more on a State which is a permanent member of the Security Council (Britain, China, France, Russia and the US).

General Powell is likely to face a volatile international environment during his term of office. The European Union seems to be gearing towards establishing an independent defence and security framework outside the NATO led by the US. The nuclear-armed Russia

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Powell doctrine has to be viewed in the light of President Bush's foreign policy pronouncements. It is suggested that President Bush has two primary interests: one is the need to increase free trade as a way of building democracy and security and the other is for the US to send fewer troops to world's trouble spots and only where there is clear national interests at the same time urging allies to do more. Powell doctrine appears to fit in with President Bush's broad framework of foreign policy.

Political analysts suggest that the term "vital interests" do not

mean that they do not care whether you achieve a result or not."

Many suggest that the 'limited war' has a relevance in the context of containing tyrants and for global justice. In the absence of world war and the polarisation of world opinion, most tyrants got away from punishment for their cruel treatment to their citizens in the 70s and 80s. The 90s have witnessed the resurgence of the fight for human rights. Human rights law has always been an area of high ideals and the global community has come to a view that human rights violations must be stopped.

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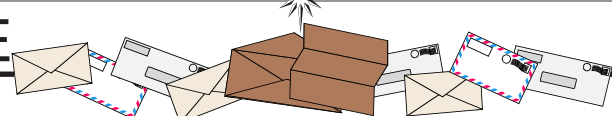
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TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

PHOTORIAL

Banish gaiety!

Unless The Daily Star is fascinated by the 17th century metaphysical poet John Donne's violent juxtaposition of the sublime and the trivial imageries to produce romantic effect, it cannot provide space for light-hearted gaiety, the flippant and the frivolous in its post editorial page. This page is for serious debate and discourse on current important national and international political, economic, social and cultural issues which agitate the mind of readers and certainly is no place for writing personal experiences of how one quit smoking or how one raised one's children (If You Ask Me by Almas Zakiuddin, January 13 and February 3). Her English is crisp and scintillating and these pieces would provide for pleasant and relaxed reading in the Weekend Magazine.

Affirmative action to remedy gender discrimination is one thing, but reverse discrimination at the expense of merit, quality and excellence is another. The Daily Star is a premier English newspaper in the country and can brook no complacency in upholding its tradition by high standard of journalism. This is the expectation of readers of the esteemed daily.

Abdul Hannan

Dhanmandi, Dhaka From Nuri Masjid to Nur Masjid

It has been only a matter of 30 years and we are seeing history being repeated in our country. Dateline 1971: The Pakistan army along with their collaborators Razzakar, Al-Badr and Al-Shams swept this land with a vengeance to cause havoc, terrorize, kill and plunder the defenseless unarmed Bengalees. They used holy places like mosques to slaughter the Bengalees. One such killing field in Mirpur was the Nuri Mosque excavated in 1999.

Dateline 2001: Dhaka, Bangladesh. Fanatic religious zealots mercilessly kill an on-duty policeman in a mosque called Nur (the light) in Mohammedpur, Dhaka. The unfortunate policeman was patrolling the area after many went on a rampage to disrupt the procession on its way to participate in a grand rally against the religious fundamentalists.

It's an irony the same tactics and such holy places are being used for such unholy activities. A few evil men are using the ignorance of the majority to destroy, distort and manipulate religion for their own gain. Islam is a great religion and it has no place for such inhumanity. We plead for the true scholars of Islam to come forward and save the religion from such brute forces.

Akku Chowdhury
Banani, Dhaka

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.

Neglected and negligent



STAR PHOTO: A K M MOHSIN

The authorities filled up the Dholaikhal passageway some years ago. At the time, they had given assurances that a proper road would be built eventually. But they have done nothing of the kind. The road surface is pock-marked and unfinished. Residents of the area, especially those who travel by rickshaw, are suffering daily. We call upon the authorities to stop neglecting this important route and stop being so blatantly negligent.

"Modernising the mindset"

The Daily Star interview of Dr M Yunus published in the 100-page Anniversary Supplement (January 30) was revealing. It was easy to grasp what he was saying, in contrast to the oratory of the netas.

For "modernising the mindset" (the theme of the Supplement) our nefarious political culture has to be changed. A point not coming into public focus is the revival of input from the intelligent middle-class. Our intellectuals have to be neutralised politically, and made independent of power bases. The students have been spoiled by the vile political culture, and the quality and the quantity of their future contribution to society has become questionable, as the education sector is in a mess, thanks to our so-called leadership. It is a moral crime to spoil the students during the academic years.

Today most of the illnesses in the society are due to lack of proper leadership. Politicians expend their energy rehabilitating themselves and their parties, extracting from society instead of contributing to its development.

General elections will have no meaning unless the basic weaknesses are addressed by the new leaders. We have the human resources at all levels, waiting for the right opportunities and openings through the proper catalysts.

Abul M Ahmad

Dhaka "Without fear or favour"

I was glad to see your declaration to remain above fear or favour. But often, after you have been critical of the Awami League you find something with which to attack the BNP. Let me remind you of Rubel, Sazal, Moni Begum, Jewel, Ribel, Rintu, the

incidents at the Jahangirnagar University and many in which the government was involved. By backing her, the media has given Sheikh Hasina the perception of being strong.

Hazy Romel
Dhaka

Spiral of violence

While being shocked at the behaviour of the so-called Islamists this week, many citizens feel that the middle-ground between extreme views must not be lost. One way to keep things in check is to restrain the hand of the law. Repression will only create a backlash of violence. The administration is clearly motivated by the fact that the Islamic parties have been embraced by the BNP. But let them not sacrifice the national interest in the interests of furthering their party interests. They will have to pay the price, if they choose to take this path.

Anxious citizen
Dhaka