

Electoral violence

Political parties should show more respect for electoral laws

THIS could be the best of times and the worst of times. That elections are being held participated by all the major parties including the two eternally contending ones is a reason for relief and pride in the political process that exists in Bangladesh. But the manner in which electioneering is being conducted does induce anxiety about the objectives of the candidate parties. Is something in the way of political democracy being lost in the pursuit for votes that lead to political power?

Some of these issues have been noted by the European Union Election Observation Mission in Bangladesh (EU-EOMB) who have presented a set of concerns regarding the increasing violence and manifest lack of tolerance by the political parties during this election. Their report says that the political parties bear a responsibility to ensure long term safety of political life in the country.

What begins at the top percolates to the bottom in every political culture. The best example of that trickle down effect in Bangladesh is the inflammatory language of the leaders, which translates into physical violence at lesser levels. In certain pockets, the level of violence is very high while in other zones, they remain within tolerable limits but the environment is being defined by such negative propensities.

This attitude means the decline of the value and sometimes denial of the electoral Code of Conduct. This isn't just about playing by the book but the more serious one of accepting certain parameters for managing the electoral and ultimately political culture construction. It's one of accepting responsibility for actions that in the long term build the State.

The concern is obvious. If the level of disregard for consensual norms of conduct is denied so early in the day, one is afraid that once the elections are over the situation will mean more discord. Elections are part of the bigger task of constructing the State. By denying tolerance and accepting violence as a norm, the State is weakened. And a weak state dilutes and then obliterates the politicians.

Salute to excellence

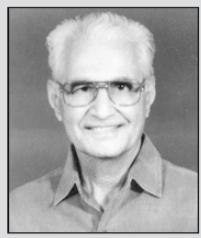
Let's give their patriotism the right niche

THIS paper on Friday honoured 202 students of the country for their outstanding results in the O- and A-level examinations of June 2000 and June 2001 sessions, held under the Cambridge University and the University of London. At the Shaheed Suhrawardy National Indoor Stadium in the city's Mirpur area, it was a parade of stars, of brilliant aspiring minds, of boys and girls who have made their presence felt in examination systems that are of both international standard and extremely competitive. The 202 awardees and more than 4,000 cheering students, parents, teachers and guests from different English-medium schools of the capital underscored one simple but strong message - this country has never had, and nor will it ever have, a dearth of talents. Yet, amidst passionate calls for and pronouncements of commitment to a betterment of Bangladesh, there was a tinge of sadness stemming from the realisation that a bulk of these brilliant minds would go abroad in pursuit of knowledge and stay back in return for a safe and secured life.

Regardless of what our political leaders say and would have us believe the profound and poignant reality is that the country can neither hone nor retain talents any more. While the majority of them fall victim to an inept education system, a few lucky ones manage to hold firm on the knowledge trail and eventually end up settling abroad. True, rich and developed western countries provide the lure of unlimited opportunities to them. It is also true that a least developed country like ours does not have the resources and logistics to sufficiently cater for the intellectual needs of these minds. Even so, we can put in place a policy package to attract them to their homeland, say for three months in a year; that way we benefit from the knowledge and experience of the expatriate Bangladeshi community.

In one aspect, this country has an upper hand and that is the allegiance of these minds to her. Patriotism is an intellectual and emotional impulse that can override any compulsion. The people in power have never taken that into consideration; it's time they made amends for it. Let's give their patriotic urges the right niches.

Attack terrorism's roots



M B NAQVI

writes from Karachi

Pakistan would have lost the 'carrot' that seems to be a part of the US offer. How much is this 'carrot' worth? Initially it might actually be no more than \$2.5 to 3.0 billion PRGF loan and some rescheduling of debts. But deft action in facilitating the 'war' can possibly make it include the cancellation of outstanding loans of up to about \$10 billion. That is one's own assessment. But sacrificing the 'carrot' could not have altered the denouement.

Irrespective of Islamabad gener-

where the terrorists congregate again and plan a 'suitable' retaliation of their own. Remaining caught up in a cycle of avenging violence will solve no problem. Thinking minds in the West must look at the roots of the main problem and attack it there. Politically, terrorism is primarily a blight for the country where they have seized power and control the state. Ask the ordinary citizens of Afghanistan about how much do their rulers care about their rights and freedoms and their economic

democratic its demise will not be mourned by the populace. Whoever removes it must however not be perceived by the Afghans and the rest of the world as a predator or an imperialist nation acting in its selfish interests. All operations must be in the name, and under the charge, of the UN. The UN Secretary General must employ persons of highest integrity for administering conquered areas and not the diplomats of big powers. The UN should apply the solution it imposed on Cambo-

odia: run Afghanistan for about five years under a UN trusteeship; world community must help in reconstructing the Afghan economy so that the people can find jobs and feed themselves; the neutral administration should disarm all the militants and people of weapons, especially defanging the Taliban activists and troops; allow freedom to media, individuals, groups and parties, to express political opinions and engage in politics; and finally hold a free election so as to hand back power to representative Afghans.

But what about terrorism? This is certainly the fairest solution of the Taliban problem. But it does not look like an absolutely certain way of finally getting rid of all extremists; some will certainly remain and might reappear. But this is the surest way of cutting the roots that sustain extremisms of all kinds. Freedom and democracy radically

discourage all extremisms; free scope for political agitation and electioneering radically abridge the scope and appeal of terrorism. Pakistan is directly involved in the problem of terrorism; it is actually the headquarters of the world Islamic Revolution. This is as red hot as they come. But the country has had six general elections. In none of which fundamentalists could gain, all told, more than 8 per cent of national vote. Free election and political liberty are the best has sketched here. There are far too many Afghan experts who propound a mythology of the Afghans having a uniquely different political methodology. It is supposedly consensus seeking through elders, tribal sardars and religious divines. It climaxes over grand national affairs into the Loya Jirga. The latter is nothing but a collection of notables usually the well-to-do tribal leaders owing allegiance to the person or group convening it. Scores of them have been held so far without any consensus emerging. One more may add one more group with a militia to so many former Afghan governments. Ordinary poor Afghans are routinely ignored in the process. Loya Jirgas are now factually a dishonest politics of collecting a particular kind of persons (notables) for ratifying the proposals of an interested party convening them. Afghans are not all that unique or different from the rest of mankind. Let ordinary human rights be given them and they will behave normally and predictably in evolving a temporary political consensus in each situation.

One more point. A fair resolution of the Afghan problem will greatly ease the nagging fear of the Talibanisation of Pakistan, though it may not finally remove the threat. That can happen only when democracy without any adjective or vested interest demanding prior guarantees returns. A few free elections, without any gerrymandering by the administration, will effectively eliminate the threat of religious extremism.

There is little of significance that any non-official Pakistani can do. The initiative is in mainly official American hands and they are great believers in the doctrine of deterrence: in their view the threat or reality of massive retaliation holds the key to all problems. That is a discouraging factor. But, one hopes, there are keen and realistic minds in that vast rich land of America. May be they can moderate their rulers' overwhelming reliance on violent means to make people change their political or other opinions.

There is a footnote to be added to the bare bones of the idea one

Naqvi is a noted columnist in Pakistan.

PLAIN WORDS

A fair resolution of the Afghan problem will greatly ease the nagging fear of the Talibanisation of Pakistan, though it may not finally remove the threat. That can happen only when democracy without any adjective or vested interest demanding prior guarantees returns. A few free elections, without any gerrymandering by the administration, will effectively eliminate the threat of religious extremism.

THE situation regarding the expected American action against Osama bin Laden and the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan remains fluid. After the Pakistan President's initial promise and later Pakistan NSC's and Cabinet's approval, only the extent and particulars of the 'full cooperation' remain uncertain. The question about its extent is actually irrelevant. Americans have to finally decide on precise objectives and means to be employed determining the logistics of which requires time. They may also be giving finishing touches to the international coalition required which might include Russia, Tajikistan, India and others like NATO and the UN, despite Pakistan's objections. Pakistani response is likely to be only a cog in this big wheel. At a pinch, the US juggernaut could have ignored it. It could have carried on regardless of what Islamabad would say or do.

As is shown by the unconditional acceptance of the US demands, Pakistan is a country without options. Its refusal to cooperate in letting the US ground forces use its territory for mounting an offensive action against Taliban, in case the US is actually planning it, could not have halted the US-led invasion; it would use other means like airborne troops and a larger number of Russian and central Asian forces.

als' decision, liberal opinion in Pakistan needs to engage the Americans and the rest of the West about the commonly agreed goal of fighting terrorism a shorter word for Islamic Fundamentalism. Merely killing or capturing Osama or even forcibly overthrowing the Taliban regime is an option said to be under active consideration of the Pentagon. The US is attacked for perceived injustice and not for their own sake or for Islam.

Insofar as the people and government of Pakistan are concerned, their wishes could not be a factor in the likely outcome of the coming venture. But it is not hard to foresee what shape may the US action now take: it can, and probably will, be an international (UN) invasion. But here a radical solution of the Afghan problem suggests itself if a change of government in Kabul is contemplated that is said to be under active consideration, and which may go a long way toward radically weakening the whole phenomenon of religious extremism and terrorism. The idea is worth examining. But first a word about its prerequisites.

Since Taliban government is not well-being. Ask their women and minorities. Terrorism in practice is a nightmare for the common people in the country where they seize power. The US is attacked for perceived injustice and not for their own sake or for Islam.

dia: run Afghanistan for about five years under a UN trusteeship; world community must help in reconstructing the Afghan economy so that the people can find jobs and feed themselves; the neutral administration should disarm all the militants and people of weapons, especially defanging the Taliban activists and troops; allow freedom to media, individuals, groups and parties, to express political opinions and engage in politics; and finally hold a free election so as to hand back power to representative Afghans.

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America and terrorism

The loss of innocence and the prevalence of ignorance

NEEMAN A. SOBHAN

We are all reeling under the shock of the devastating attacks on innocent lives in the US on September 11. Today, the US is home to a wide-ranging, multi-cultural population. When America mourns the deaths of its innocent civilians, the horrifying numbers consist not just of non-Muslim citizens of Anglo-Saxon and European origins, but a large number of sub-continentals, including Muslim Bangladeshi as well. An attack on any part of American society affects not some anonymous people labelled 'American' or 'the West' but people from many far flung parts of the East as well!

The World Trade Centre housed on its top floor the famous restaurant 'Windows to the World' run by Bangladeshis. Also, many of the employees in the financial offices housed in the unfortunate towers were first generation Bangladeshi-American kids or bright children of Bangladeshi parents, dreaming of a brighter future. Today, as America mourns its dead, many people from all over the world including Bengalis join in the mourning too. Even when ones' immediate families are not affected, each of us has lost some friend or neighbour. And when much of the world condemns the heinous attacks on the innocent, no human being with reason and compassion can remain silent.

However, along with the condemnation there must be an understanding of the nature and purpose of the attack. The opinions expressed here come from a deep involvement and sympathy for the American public and must not be

seen as a mere critique of its government's policies.

The casualty of last week's horrifying attacks included not just the loss of innocent lives, but a general loss of innocence among the American public. The breaching of the fortress of American society, the taste of vulnerability was a first painful stage in a rite of passage towards the growing up of the politically adolescent Americans who

paths unleashing murder and mayhem in public places and convulsing the nation, forcing it into a collective soul searching on the failures of a society which breeds such violence.

But, somewhere deep in the dazed sub-conscious of the American public there must now be a glimmering that the perpetrators of the organized suicidal attacks on New York and Washington were

direct experience of being attacked. The American people have remained largely ignorant of what the world undergoes when American bombs and weapons of destruction are unleashed on cities. Today, this painful knowledge of what it is like to have your world collapse around you has been brought home to its doorstep. It's a bitter lesson, and one that could have been avoided had a myopic and egocentric

have lived a cushioned existence far from the realities of the world outside their country. They took for granted the invulnerability and unshakeable might and pre-eminence of the USA.

When I say 'they', may I add that I could easily say 'we' because half my family, my sisters, my nieces and nephews, my uncles and cousins are Americans too. This article addresses them, as well as the many faceless Americans who have suffered from the terrorist attacks and who have now been forever changed by the life shattering experience of Tuesday's horrendous attacks.

Even as a wave of pain, anger and militant patriotism sweeps over the United States, and even while we reach out to grieve with the families of the innocent victims who were our friends and families too, we must not lose sight of some of the broader realities behind the atrocities. Americans are not unfamiliar with sporadic acts of senseless violence that sweeps across this country. We cannot forget the shootings in schools, or psycho-

neither dysfunctional psychopaths nor mercenary criminals. This attack was different.

The terrorists were a fanatically committed bunch of young men, making a statement, and though they chose a wrong language, the language of senseless mayhem and unforgivable brutality, some essential message that they were trying to transmit through their desperate act cannot be ignored by Americans if future acts of a similar nature are to be thwarted. The leaders of the American society, who hold their naive and ignorant public completely in their sway, owe it their citizens to protect them by taking a close look at their policies and principles which may have brought disgruntled and frustrated groups to vent their rage in such an unprecedented manner onto the civilian world.

In the past, Americans have undergone two World Wars and a few national military engagements but always beyond their horizons. Except for the soldiers at the war front, the American public has little

tric government heeded rumblings coming from the Islamic world where extremists have been straining at the leash for too long. The moderate voices have gone unheard and terrorism has been unleashed as a counter culture.

Once the dust and debris settle, it is time for Americans to dry their tears and clear their eyes to what the real world is really about and what it is saying. The monstrous terrorists did fall from the sky, but they lived with roots deep in a world, which we all share. They could not have been born monsters! They too existed in a world, which contains family, a love of life, a sense of patriotism and hearts that must have grieved till they hardened to stone. It is essential now to turn a good look at what makes a whole generation of youth to turn suicidal, what drives them to join some cause which they believe with such conviction that death becomes meaningless and the destruction of the enemy becomes paramount!

One begins to wonder, what

caused the enemy to be so hated? Shouldn't we who purport to wipe out this malaise of terrorism, look into and treat the cause of the disease and not just the symptom? As a journalist from the third world, perhaps it is not my place to say too much. But I would like to share the thoughts of a journalist from the first world, Seamus Milne who wrote this article for *The Guardian*. Here are some excerpts:

".....It was the Americans, after all, who pored resources into the 1980s war against the soviet-backed regime in Kabul, at a time when girls could go to school and women to work. Bin Laden and his mujahedin were armed and trained by CIA and M16, as Afghanistan was turned into a wasteland... But by then Bin Laden had turned against his American sponsors, while US-sponsored Pakistani intelligence had spawned the grotesque Taliban now protecting him. To punish its wayward Afghan offspring, the US subsequently forced through a sanctions regime which has helped push 4 million to the brink of starvation....while Afghan refugees fan out across the world.

"All this must seem remote to Americans desperately searching the debris of what is expected to be the largest-ever massacre on American soil as must the killings of yet more Palestinians...or even the 2 million estimated to have died in US-backed Mogadishu's wars since the overthrow of the US-backed war regime.

"Already, the Bush administration is assembling an international coalition for an Israel-style war against terrorism, as if such counter-productive acts of outrage had an existence separate from the social conditions out of which they arise. But for every terror network that is rooted out, another will emerge until the injustices and inequalities that produce them are addressed."

TO THE EDITOR TO THE

Stories from the US

Like millions across the world I have been in contact with family, friends and relatives to see how they were faring in their daily lives in the United States. Their accounts are quite sad as Mr Shabbir Ali of Houston wrote:

"Scary times here.... In Houston a Goodyear store owned by a Pakistani was burnt to the ground, after three men threatened him and ransacked his store. A Sikh was shot down in Arizona yesterday, and the same man went to three different businesses shooting from his truck, luckily it was only one fatality. A 75-year old man tried to run down and kill a Pakistani woman on the East Coast...mosques have been threatened and Dallas and Chicago mosques were attacked. Lot of misinformation combined with a general lack of knowledge about geography amongst the masses here; it is a dangerous combination. I was really upset to see the video of Palestinians celebrating on the streets and that started a major backlash. I was upset that the media kept playing it over and over again. Now we hear that it is two years old. If that is true I think it is appalling that the media would play it at all. I have had no bad experiences and life is normal."

Mr Selim Barkat of Citicorp in New York wrote: "My office is not more than 5-7 mins walk, at the end

of Wall Street. This was a close one for me, as I was switching trains at the WTC exactly at 8:55, that is between the two hits. We were told to take the nearest exit. I took a connecting train to get out fast. The way I see it, with the timing a bit off, things could have been different. Anyway, thanks to the many good wishes from family and friends, my destiny got carved out for the better. We are doing well, the family is fine. Kids have resumed school, and life seems to be returning to normal. Keep us in your prayers."

These are but a few of the stories reaching us and there will be more in the days to come. Let us hope that normalcy returns quickly.

Farhan Quddus
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Illegal arms

Banibazar is a boarder upazila in Sylhet district. Almost every day a good deal of illegal arms are allegedly being brought in smuggler. The smugglers have reportedly become very active of late. They can understand that during the National Poll these firearms and ammunitions will have a great demand. And, perhaps, they have formed their network throughout the whole country. Indeed, it is a threat to the electoral environment and even to our social security. The smugglers reportedly choose night coach and coal truck

for the safe transportation of these illegal arms.

But it's regrettable that during the last combat operations the police could not recover any such arms. Now-a-days during even a simple brawl the rival groups show up their arms in the Beanibazar upazila proper. Very recently two groups of JCD started a terrible gun-fighting. All conscious and peace loving people hope the law enforcers would take necessary steps for stopping the violence and arms dealing in this rural area.

Muklesur Rahman Khan Sohrab Sylhet

Caretaker govt

The steps the caretaker government have taken so far after its takeover in July are undoubtedly praiseworthy. But, unfortunately all the major political parties are trying to keep the govt under pressure to do or not to do something for their own interest, which is just disgusting. The major reshuffles the govt has made in administration are also right from different perspectives. In order to create a polls-friendly atmosphere, the caretaker govt may still make more changes if necessary. As the main task of this govt is to hold a fair, free and neutral election, the general masses want that the neutrality of the caretaker govt remains beyond question. So, we hope this govt will do everything

within its power without showing any favour to any one.

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Violation of laws by lawmakers

Members of parliament (MPs) are the lawmakers. They make laws in the parliament so that the people of the country can live in peace and happiness. But nowadays we see that the MPs are not obeying the laws themselves though they should have obeyed the laws passed in the parliament at first. In real sense, they themselves should initiate the implementation. Now there are a number of MPs who are loan defaulters. A number of MPs are not paying telephone bills regularly. Many of them are alleged to be corrupt trying to influence illegally wherever they can. Now most of the candidates are violating the election rules. Seemingly, they are not caring for the rules at all. If they violate rules now, what will they do on becoming MPs? Will they obey the laws? Will they be able to pass laws which will be good for common people? Will they be able to change our fate? If not, will they not tarnish the image of the country? It is