

Everyone is all set for voting

Political parties must play their part to ensure proper elections

ELECTION campaigning is over after what has been one of more violent run-ups to any polls in Bangladesh. One must breathe a sigh of political and personal relief that the days of discord are behind and one now may welcome the day we all will vote.

It is undesirable that run up to the polls has been violent. We had more political deaths than ever before, as many as 131 people being killed in the last 75 days.

The neutral caretaker government on assuming office declared that confiscation of illegal weapons and arrest of terrorists would be its priority. In pursuance of that it initiated a major law and order campaign but the haul of weapons were few and criminals interned even fewer. It didn't inspire confidence in peace and order.

The upshot of all this has been the unprecedented deployment of law enforcement personnel to hold violence free polls. Nearly 5.1 lakh uniformed people will be on duty to make sure that elections are held safely and the people's right to elect their leaders are upheld.

But the real responsibility of ensuring that the democratic right of the people is upheld lies with the political parties. Political parties will have to recognize their own stake in the elections and act in a manner that will reflect that perception. A violent vote will hurt them as much as it will hurt the people. A total of 7.50 crore voters will cast their ballot on Monday for a total of 1,933 candidates. Of them 1,444 belong to political parties and 489 are independent. There will be nearly 30,000 polling centres where votes will be cast. We present the above figures for the single reason that no amount of soldiers, BDRs and police will be able to ensure peaceful polls unless the political parties commit themselves to playing by the rules of the game.

The basic message is clear. Unless political will is exerted by the contesting political parties to make sure that we have an acceptable election, all the law enforcement agencies put together will not be able to make democracy work. The task belongs to the political space and that is under the joint custody of the politicians and the people. The people have done their bit. The rest is up to the politicians.

Minority voting

A priority concern for the nation

THE Election Commission has asked the home ministry to take precautionary measures in 134 parliamentary constituencies to stave off possible acts of intimidation against minority community voters. Constituents as they do 10 to 12 per cent of the electorate, they are a sought-after vote-bank, something to be won over with good approaches and convincing arguments by the candidates rather than through strong-arm tactics. But it is a shame that the opposite has been happening in certain areas necessitating what we would call the extraordinary directive to be issued by the EC to the home ministry.

Recently, there have been sporadic incidents of arson, vandalism of statues, and even oppression on women perpetrated against members of the minority community. Untoward happenings, of one kind or the other, were reported from Pabna, Bagerhat, Bhola, Manikganj, Sirajganj, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Tangail, Pirojpur, Brahmanbaria, Feni and Chandpur. According to a government spokesman, just as the government has had reports of oppression it has also received those that seemingly smacked of a communal touch being given to certain incidents. But to our understanding, if the incidents had not taken place at all, there would be no reason for the minority community to complain of the insecurity they sense towards exercising their right to franchise.

Let's note that if they do not turn up at the polling centres in sufficient numbers the credibility of the national election could be put in jeopardy, not to speak of the impression being created that a raw deal has been given to the minority community in Bangladesh.

It is the local administrations which will have to make sure that people of every religion, caste and creed are able to exercise their voting right without any hindrance from any quarter whatsoever. With the army coming in aid of the civil authorities we are hopeful of trouble-free voting taking place in the 134 constituencies earmarked for special attention.

PHOTORIAL

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.



STAR PHOTO AKM MOHSIN

Nowhere to go

There's hardly anything that the underprivileged children of Dhaka city can call as their "leisure". What they do during that period is sometimes very hazardous for them. Living for too long in this situation may obstructs their healthy growing up. But we the elders render a blind eye to the problems of our children. We, along with the people at the helm, should be more considerate by creating opportunities for the

Now or never again



ASMA JAHANGIR

transparent in their moves. It will require greater resolve to uphold the norms of justice particularly in the face of an adversary who spurns at the universal values of freedom.

The issue of terrorism is one of the most controversial in contemporary international law and politics. Acts of terrorism have been glorified as "freedom fighting" and genuine freedom fighters often been dubbed as terrorists. The United Nations too failed to define "terrorism" because

business houses of the West will be selective. The growing flow of refugees will bring multiple problems. Despite foreign aid our resources will suffer and our governance deteriorate. Many freedom fighters will be unfairly painted as terrorists and oppressive regimes will take advantage of this new wave against "terrorism". In the wake of a new world of security, Pakistan must, strive to acquire a new image. It must be seen as being independent.

THE horror and terror of September 11 has now turned into moments of suspense and worry. Pakistanis are familiar with acts of terrorism and its consequences. They have therefore, almost unanimously, condemned the killing of innocent lives in New York and Washington. There can be no justification or rationale behind such acts. It does, however, call for reflection by the entire world leadership. The West needs to change its policies towards the South, just as much as the Muslim world needs to correct its rhetoric against "infidels" and promote a culture of democracy within their own countries. The solution to terrorism does not lie in "waging wars" but to bring those responsible to justice and to ensure that governments do not tolerate, or promote terrorist gangs. A measured response is essential but an all-out war may polarise the world further, playing into the hands of the very forces which encourage terrorism. Since the Alliance against terrorism claims to fight this battle to protect freedoms they will be expected to be

the term is emotive and highly loaded politically. The League of Nations failed in 1937 to determine the parameters of "terrorism" and since then there was no serious attempt to define the term, which continues to be used selectively and vaguely. But whatever form of definition one accepts, the tragedy of September 11, will cover it all particularly as none has so far claimed responsibility for it. It has violated the right to live free from fear and the right to life, liberty and security. The world changed after September 11. Freedoms will now be compromised in favour of the pressing needs for security.

Despite the assurances of the West, that their campaign will not discriminate against any religion or nationality, Muslims, Pakistanis and Arab nationals will experience more prejudice and bias. Airport terminals, employers, buyers and busi-

nesses of the West but no friend of terrorist regimes or gangs. Above all, we must make a sincere effort at cleaning up the skeletons in our own cupboards. Let there be no myths about our present position. It was not courage but good sense that compelled us to side with the international community. The people of Pakistan are paying for the sins of their leaders. It ought to be made apply clear so that we are not led into another fiction by our leaders.

Pakistanis take crisis well. This has been no exception. There is no panic and the common person has not taken to the streets in support of the Taliban regime. Their lack of

support for Taliban is not because they respect the government of USA - whom they closely associate with the Israeli atrocities on the Palestinians - but because there is a growing resentment against domestic *jehadi* groups and disrespect for the

with religious extremism. Tension between the army and the *Jehadi* groups can only bode well for the country but there will be a price to pay for the legacy of the past.

No one can predict the turn of events to follow. It is difficult to grasp the full impact of the future shape of globalisation, in the wake of the terrorist attack in USA. So far the emerging signs are not helpful for Pakistan. We have a tendency to jump to conclusions. The signals given by the West and reinforced by our government is that we will be flushed with dollars for our support to the Alliance. Such expectations are unreal as the West will carefully watch a nuclear power with a military government and a tendency to promote Islamist ideology. The orientation of the State with a separate electorate system, Islamisation of laws and periodic calls for Jihad are breeding grounds for extrem-

ism. It strengthens the worst form of conservative elements which will bring us back to being hostage to Ziaism. If we wish to turn the present crisis into an opportunity for ourselves then we will have to find the political will to radically change our domestic and foreign policies. It will require a sustained process towards democratisation of Pakistan in a pragmatic manner. As a first step the military government has to change its orientation and

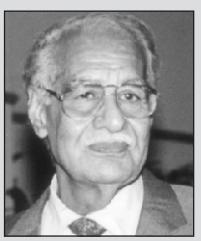
to be taken to task because of the demands of the West and without visible support of people of Pakistan. Any such backlash will only strengthen militant groups and marginalise the people, silencing their voices infinitely.

The campaign against terrorism, as it is being called, will last a while. Its first target being Osama bin Laden and the Taliban authorities. This puts Pakistan's foreign policy in a dilemma. The Northern Alliance, an avowed enemy of Pakistan, will be on board to squeeze the Taliban southwards. As a reward, the Northern Alliance will ask for their piece of cake when the booty in Afghanistan is being distributed. Pakistan will need better political and diplomatic skills along with some vision to play a positive role in such a development. It is therefore critical that the democratic process begins immediately so that a broader based government represents the people of Pakistan.

Generally, politicians rather than General have a better feel for political events and will be more willing to take a regional approach in the days to follow. Pakistan must acquire an image of a serious player with a fresh approach in building peace in the region. We are being led to the final crossroad with an opportunity to choose between being menacing or being counted as a mature player, who recognises when their time is up.

Asma Jahangir is former chair of Pakistan Human Rights Commission.

Government goes to sleep



KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

NEW Delhi once again gives you the feeling of disarray. The war has come closer to India. It should be more cohesive and keyed up. But the confusion within the government has not abated. The thinking of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee does not coincide with that of Home Minister LK Advani. Nor does the ruling National Democratic Alliance reach out to the Congress or other political parties to develop a systematic, united approach.

This has become all the more necessary when the BJP, leading the coalition, is slowly losing popular support. It is evident that the party has been defeated in its bastion, Gujarat, in the two bye-elections to the Lok Sabha. The government should at least take the Congress into its confidence because it is emerging as an alternative. One meeting of National Development Council (NDC) will not do. The Centre should have a standing committee to be in constant touch with important states and parties. What the nation needs at this juncture is a nail it can hang its worries on. The Prime Minister is that nail,

Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh is too much in love with his voice to instill confidence. Most of the other ministers, except Advani, have stayed in the shadows. The public is scared about how the war will affect India. After offering full support to the US, the government seems to have gone to sleep. It should be in constant dialogue with the people. They want to be assured all the time that they are not threatened, nor their way of life.

Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha has said that his ministry has prepared a contingency plan. What is it? After the stock market and the Unit Trust scandals, people have little faith in him and his ministry. They do not evoke enthusiasm. The plan they have prepared cannot be

require all the attention. Soft country like ours will be found wanting. They do not seem to have any plan or strategy.

National security may turn out to be our biggest problem. Our own preferences and interests will not prevail. Circumstances will be judging us. To confront such an unpredictable situation, public involvement will be necessary. In India we have an unhealthy obsession with secrecy. Keeping all national security matters secret from the people may spell disaster because their full support is required. Unfortunately, the ministers concerned and security agencies have not developed the culture of sharing anxiety, much less information with people.

the case of the Lok Sabha. Needless to say that the report is nearly one year old and remains unimplemented. There was a simple suggestion like the border along with China, particularly the middle sector, be patrolled by the army instead of the Indo-Tibetan force (ITBP) has not been followed up. The force has come under the supervision of the army. The home ministry is so busy with peripheral matters that it has no time for the ministers' report. The only step it has taken is to create a post of secretary for internal security. Even this is now a few months old.

While the case of the 1993 bomb blasts at Mumbai still meanders through long legal procedures, criminals have got emboldened. cases are pending and despite the increase in the number of judges throughout the country, there is no dent in the arrears. How does the internal security scenario square up with the situation where criminals know that they can stay on bail for years and supervise their underworld operation confidently. The government should at least make use of the Supreme Court's judgment on former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha to try to clean Indian politics. The court has held that a person disqualified from being an MLA cannot be a minister for six months, the period during which he or she must get elected. The judgment should begin an exercise for the removal of history-sheets in our parliament and assemblies.

Jayalalitha should have been dismissed the night she sent the police to arrest Union Ministers Murasoli Maran and TR Balu. It was illegal and challenged the centre's authority in the federal polity we have. It was sheer arrogance of power. I believe that the President of India was in favour of dismissing Jayalalitha. Earlier, the Vajpayee cabinet was of the same viewpoint.

New Delhi could have dismissed her on the charges of illegally arresting the Central ministers. The position is far from satisfactory. Any chief minister, who is tempted to arrest a visiting central minister if he is not to his or her liking, can follow Jayalalitha's example. Once Jayalalitha was off the hook, she turned down the centre's request to relieve the three IPS officers, reportedly responsible for the beating of Karunandhi. Constitutionally, she is on a strong wicket. No IAS or IPS officer can be transferred from his cadre without that state's permission.

Now the question is: Where does the authority of New Delhi end and the states' begin? There can be no doubt that the centre's authority. No polity, federal or unitary, can exist without the centre being the focal point. This is what New Delhi has failed to put across. By leaving the situation where it is, the ministry has only confounded the issue. It is not good for the country in the long run.

Kuldip Nayar is a leading Indian columnist.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE

The agony of USA and Palestine

The world is stunned by the brutality of the terrorist attack on the various installations in USA unleashing deaths, untold miseries and sufferings to innocent people and destruction of valuable properties. Our heartfelt sympathies go to the bereaved families who lost their dear and near ones. We strongly condemn such heinous act which is an act of crime against humanity. We assure our American brethren at this hour of their distress, we are on their side. May Allah give them strength to overcome the ordeal and pray that good sense will prevail.

However, the most distressing part of such episode is the attitude of some vested quarters in pointing fingers at Muslims and/or Islam for such acts of terrorism. This is very unkind. In the bombing instance in Oklahoma city in USA few years back also similar accusations were made which subsequently proved absolutely false and actually an American was found as the culprit.

Terrorists do not belong to any religion, country or culture. Islam particularly is a religion of peace. Prophet Mohammad (SM) throughout his auspicious life always preached for peace which he methodically practised as an example for his followers and to the world at large. In the Holy Quran also creating anarchy and killing innocent people are prohibited. Only in case of threat to Islam or if attacked only, the Muslims are permitted to defend

now coming back. People have a feeling that this government can and will do anything without any fear or favour. Under this government everything has changed. Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) whose activity was static has now become active. The Secretariat which became "tadbeerolay" (place of request) is now a real working place. The Buriganga has been saved from the clutches of encroachers. Soon we may see judiciary becoming independent.

No doubt people are behind this government. They believe if this government stays for some more time, the condition of this country will definitely improve. So political parties should sit together and reach a consensus in giving this government some more time! People who have very little choice in selecting candidates, will see the work of educated, honest, sincere and dedicated people and when their turn will come they also choose candidates with the same qualities.

As a result good people will join politics and the whole country will get the fruit of democracy.

Mohammad Ataul Hoque
6/1 Eskaton Garden Road
Dhaka.

Caretaker government

What previous governments could not do, this three-month government has done that. The faith which had been lost among the people is

his or her ideas to combat violence. Recently the Israeli prime minister was so arrogant that he refused to meet the British foreign secretary who went to talk to him. Furthermore the Israeli Army scuffled with the bodyguards of the French foreign minister who was talking to the Palestinians on their problems. May I ask the "civilized" world where from the Israeli prime minister gets such a power as to humiliate both the foreign ministers of UK and France? To me it is America. Any doubt? Is not it terrorism?

Badruddin
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

international outrage? Do the statesmen of the Western world not recognize that this is terrorism, too, all the worse for being committed in cold blood by a government?

MA Choudhury
Uttara Sector 5
Dhaka

War against whom?
We vehemently denounce the heinous attacks on some valuable American establishments perpetrated by some unknown miscreants that caused a colossal loss on innocent lives. But America is yet to ascertain the 'whys' and the 'wherefores' behind these sudden attacks. What America is doing now instead of finding out the real culprits is holing Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden responsible for the attacks and forcing Afghanistan's Taliban government to surrender Laden to them. But Taliban are strict in their decision not to hand over Laden without any concrete evidence. America has already declared war against Afghanistan because of their reluctance to hand over Laden to the American authority and warned Afghanistan to face any kind of terrible result. We want to ask Mr Bush against whom he wants to wage a war? Who gave him the right to kill many innocent people in the name of defeating terrorism by declaring war against a distressed country?

Al-Amin Mahmud
133, M Hall
Dhaka University.

The dictionary meaning of terrorism is "Use of violence and threats of violence especially for political purposes".

This violence can be used in any way be it arms, words or by obstructing someone not to express

their views.