

End attacks on minorities Instead of excuses, government should act immediately

VIOLENT attacks on the minorities has become a matter of great concern. It has almost reached an alarming state now. These attacks, which began before the elections have continued unabated. Reaching beyond the national media, it's now being reported by the regional and international media with great concern. Yet the national authorities here are barely paying attention, except for giving directives and statements.

One could argue that because a full-fledged government wasn't in place between the voting and the swearing-in, the situation wasn't brought under control. But the government is fully in office now and stopping these attacks should have been its priority. Strangely enough, the remarks made by the home minister to the BBC radio that the minority bashing is part conspiracy, part rumours and part facts is a disdainful display of failing to recognise reality. It's obvious that the present government isn't keen to take responsibility for a very sensitive situation unfolding during its own period of rule. They should act at once instead of providing bad excuses.

The national media including this paper has been reporting everyday on the situation but the response by the powers that be has been lukewarm at best. To still hang on to a conspiracy theory is a forced attempt to dilute the obvious fact and is unacceptable to all. The reaction of the home minister seems to say that the crisis is not being taken seriously. And yet nothing could be more serious.

It doesn't matter who is doing it and why but the government of the day is always responsible for ending what may easily go out of hand. There is a feeling within ruling circles that this could be cooked up by the other party to embarrass the rulers but that hardly excuses the lack of action by the party in power. Our view is that such elements could, at the maximum be, 25-30 per cent. The rest 70 per cent is partisan self-seekers. They must be hit hard immediately. Whoever is responsible must be brought to book and providing safety to all is what matters. If the AL is behind the attacks they should be exposed but please do it. Don't just talk about it. But if the truth is otherwise then have the courage to face it, and fight it.

What is happening is also a slur on democracy, the voters and Bangladesh as a whole. The BNP must realise more quickly than it thinks necessary that public feelings are apt to swing quickly against ruling governments when such things happen. And attacking minorities is the safest route to lose popularity and create the ground for a political counter-attack.

The attacks are condemned, the statement of the home minister is rejected and the lack of actions to protect the minorities is protested in the severest language possible. Not excuses but action.

Let the UN play its role The Nobel prize is a demand for its right to lead

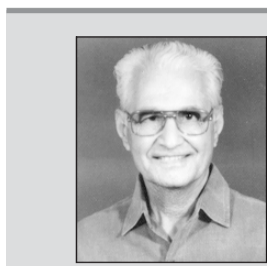
WE applaud the awarding of the Nobel peace prize to the United Nations and its Secretary General Kofi Annan at a time when the world is increasingly becoming hungry for calm amidst exploding bombs and lost lives. It comes at a time as anxiety about civilian casualty as a result of a global conflict is rising and the people in general feel more helpless than ever before. In a world now increasingly ruled by voices of violence and unquestionable power, the UN appears more than ever as the institution that can satisfy the ordinary peoples' hunger for peace, stability, justice and reason.

The UN is passing through its most critical time even as Mr Annan is being praised for bringing direction and new life to an organisation threatened with irrelevance in the new world of super power politics. As the voices of the smaller nations have been silenced or stifled by the might of the awesome, the UN has tried desperately to be representational of the world's view as a whole. It hasn't been easy and the UN has mostly not been successful but the award shows that hope of a world ruled by collective conscience still lies with the UN.

This feeling is particularly more acute because many think, which includes the UN Office for Human Rights that the priority should now be on saving lives and respecting the rights of the ordinary people as the conflict escalates. Acts like dropping some food along with the bombs in Afghanistan will be of little use according to almost all aid agencies. And we are staring at a human tragedy far greater in scale than what we have seen in many years. Unfortunately, the global voice has developed a trend towards unilateralism and the cheering of the carpet-bombing has drowned the voices of the marginalised. The West is not a moderating force in this case and as we have always argued, the UN must be allowed to take the centre stage and play its role mandated by all peoples of the world without holding on to any political baggage.

The award to the UN and Mr. Annan is a sign of global confidence in that body despite its reduced power. The UN must be allowed to play its role. Denial of that is denying the rights of the people of the world.

The emerging difference



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

THE emerging differences between Pakistan and the US over the conduct of the war with Taliban are real enough, though of not much consequence. The way President Bush contradicted with his characteristic finesse, the Pakistan President's claim that he had been assured that the war, or rather the bombing campaign, will be short in duration, well targeted and maximum care will be taken to minimise collateral damage to the innocent Afghans, is illuminating.

The US will not share its actual war plans, virtually said Bush, with President Musharraf. The US will do what it has already planned or what it may find expedient in the light of experience. The allies will have little influence, he implied. It will certainly be mortifying for the Musharraf government to be publicly ticked off, reiterated more politely by Secretary of State Colin

Powell. But that can change nothing on the ground. Pakistan having promised full co-operation to the US authorities can only watch how do the Americans make use of its air space and its logistics support. Stationing of ground troops or their operating out of Pakistani bases is certainly not out of the question. Indeed it is likely and may have begun by the time these lines see the light of the day.

The differences between the two unequal allies are over the accept-

Pakistan says that that will mean anarchy and mayhem - a not unreasonable prognostication considering what the same set of warlords did in early 1990s in Kabul. Ask Robert Fisk. But just as the US President says his generals are not in the habit of showing their war plans to "others" - this being the status of America's allies - events have certainly overtaken both Pakistan and Taliban. Taliban will have to be replaced now. Whatever Pakistan's remonstrations about

theory but the practice is sure to be dictated by the exigencies of war - and the ultimate purposes of the US.

People of the subcontinent, by being bitterly divided, have more or less written themselves off. Others' wishes will count more - also by default of certain others. However three general points emerge from the war in Afghanistan. First, the US is only too conscious of having extracted full co-operation from a reluctant Pakistani regime by threatening to bomb it into the Stone Age.

To both sides, the mutual animosity comes before objectively examining as to how is Asia going to be transformed by the Anglo-American moves, especially with a view to assess the prospects for India, Pakistan and the rest of South Asia from a longer-range viewpoint. Would the stature and weight of India or Pakistan, be higher or greater at the end of this Operation Infinite Justice, whenever it comes to an end?

Secondly Mr. Colin Powell, US

PLAIN WORDS

The war replicates the lessons of Indian history of how conflicting purposes of Indian princes paved the way for foreigners to dictate the course and direction of events in the subcontinent. In the brave new Asia to emerge after this war, we will see the stature of at least Pakistan and India lowered even further than it was before the war had started.

ability of Taliban regime. While the US still has no hard position on Taliban, it is incensed with their politics, particularly over their refusal to make over Osama bin Laden. If they had done that early enough, there might not have been this war, or at least its shape might have been materially different. Pakistan is quite upset about the mounting evidence that the US plans to help the Northern Alliance to capture Kabul and more or less replace Taliban regime, with the icing at the top of ex-king Zahir Shah.

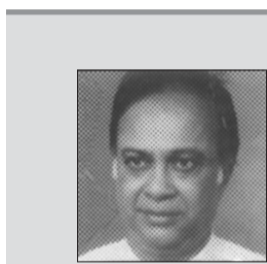
Pushtuns being 60 per cent of all Afghans and Taliban being Pushtuns are the best ruling material for the Afghans, it is likely to be heard.

Islamabad's case may be reinforced by America's earlier assurances to Pakistan regarding its 'valid concerns' in the government-making - which was conceded by the British Prime Minister Tony Blair just the other day. That might not avail it. In the rush of events during wartime, it is clear that Taliban are going and that Pakistan's 'valid concerns' might remain valid in

India had already offered all its military facilities to the US in the fond hope that Pakistan would refuse and that India will have the opportunities of a life time to join the US to destroy Pakistan's military facilities and 'strategic assets'. This hope was however dashed quite soon as Musharraf did not take long to decide that climbing the American bandwagon in time was the only feasible option for him. Like India's motivation of doing down Pakistan, the latter's motive too was to frustrate Indian designs.

Secretary of State, will soon be in India. He will talk, among other things, about Kashmir. And what is he likely to say? To be sure, he would fully agree with India that 'cross-border-terrorism' should speedily end and is sure to promise that he would turn the screws on the military government in Islamabad for the purpose. Is that all? He is also likely to urge resolving the core problem of Kashmir - the definition of which being what he has in mind. He is sure to desist from offering American mediation. But he would urge resumption of dialogue with

Elections, results and the anti-incumbency factor



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

IT is difficult for any government in democracies in the third world countries - more so in the South Asian region - to withstand the anti-incumbency factor while seeking a mandate to continue in power after one or two terms. The feeling that creeps into the mind of the electorate about a government for being in power for four, five or six-year term is often so deep in many ways that it is really a Herculean task to obviate this during the polls since the performance often falls not only short but much short of expectations. The problems generally faced by a ruling party stemming from being in power are quite sensitive in nature since the voters tend to weigh pros and cons of almost each important action of the government during the term. Bangladesh was no exception and there are few instances in the democracies in our region that a ruling party these days returned to power comfortably for consecutive term. It happened before against the backdrop of a country gaining fresh nationhood. It was possible because any political party at the vanguard of freedom movement enjoyed the benefits of the historic role for a quite long time and the Indian national Congress is an example in this regard. The organisation remained at the helm for many years with a charismatic

leader while a weak opposition also contributed to this factor. But situation began to change in world's largest democracy India since late seventies and the same pattern continues as a government in power finds it difficult to stage a comeback.

True, the ruling coalition led by the BJP has returned to power through the last elections but analysts agree that it was possible because of unexpected eruption of an issue that helped the government garner extra support. It was

credited with good governance in certain areas like the law and order situation or corruption. Most newspapers of the neighbouring as well as some other countries while commenting on the election results of Bangladesh observed that some domestic matters weighed heavily in the balloting of which "terrorism and allegation of corruption in the high echelons" were definitely at the top. Needless to say, the unbridled power enjoyed by some people in position of strength and unleashing

in the form of attacks on rivals and forcible occupation of bus terminals or the student dormitories. The election results should make those who are indulging in this kind of activities sit-up because most people consider the outcome of the eight parliamentary elections as a verdict mainly against terrorism by those who happened to be in power. It is possible to tackle the anti-incumbency feelings by a government if it is not accused of failure in minimum needs of the people even

Assam and Tamil Nadu were sub-merged in anti-establishment feelings while the opponents cruised to easy win capturing more than two-thirds of the seats.

In the third world democracies, Malaysia is a unique example where Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's party has returned to power in last several elections. The government has taken many welfare-oriented programmes that made people satisfied with a feeling that the government was concerned about their well-being. Besides, the prime minister's own charisma as an international leader always helped him at the polls. He or the government apparatus need no publicity by themselves to catapult the leader or the government to high position as the deeds and performance spoke for quality. Dr Mahathir also kept the sycophancy and color of beneficiaries as far as under control while leaders in South Asia often turn a blind eye to this menace and, shockingly, at times patronise the tendency.

Leaders of the new government must keep in mind the factors that were responsible for electoral debacle of their opponents so that they do not repeat the same mistakes. People in general in our country are not much bothered by big theories or high principles but remain content with the minimum requirements so that they can sleep without a feeling of insecurity, satiate their hunger with plain food, see a corruption-free society where the rule of law really prevails without any discrimination. Apathy towards rule of law creates scepticism about civility and modern concept of a state. This ought to be remembered by the new administration which is supposed to govern the nation for next five years.

Zaglul Chowdhury is a senior special correspondent of BSS.

MATTERS AROUND US

Leaders of the new government must keep in mind the factors that were responsible for electoral debacle of their opponents so that they do not repeat the same mistakes. People in general in our country are not much bothered by big theories or high principles but remain content with the minimum requirements so that they can sleep without a feeling of insecurity, satiate their hunger with plain food, see a corruption-free society where the rule of law really prevails without any discrimination.

the "Kargil" conflict in which India was largely seen as the victor and the ruling alliance was immensely benefited despite commotion against performance of the government on domestic issues including prices of essential commodities.

In Pakistan, in recent years till democracy was trampled in 1999, the immediate past government had to face tough times and even popular parties bagged unbelievably small number of seats in the parliament. Benazir Bhutto's PPP was able to win only 18 seats in the national assembly in one of these elections that had left the organisation stunned. It was the result of massive corruption by the family members - mainly her husband Asif Zardari, known as her Achilles heels. The voters gave verdict against state-patronised corruption. PPP's rival Muslim League also

planned. In Nepal too, the experience is not very happy after the Himalayan kingdom switched over to parliamentary democracy a decade ago.

The just-concluded elections in Bangladesh was not much different even though there are allegations about rigging and malpractice in the balloting. In the last elections in 1996, the party in power was swept away in the voting and this time too the immediate past government failed to win the mandate of the people. Prestigious Indian daily the "Times of India" in an editorial on the outcome of Bangladesh polls has concluded that the rigours of incumbency in the developing nations is so tough that it clearly makes the return of a government to power very complex task. It also said that the job becomes even more difficult if the party in power cannot be

reign of terror by these people and their dear and near ones was a matter of discussion in different circles and this must have influenced the elections. The accusations of corruption also seem to have played a role here and these went against the government that was at the helm. Good achievements by the government in some fields like self-sufficiency in the food is laudable but irony is that people appeared to be more concerned with the hard realities on the ground like individual security and their anger was inflated manifold by the tendency to protect the persons who were seen as responsible for terrorism rather than taking stern actions against them. People gave vent to their feelings through the ballot.

It is also noticed that people disapproved many incidents that followed immediately after the polls

if there are shortcomings on expected achievements. The Left Front government in West Bengal state of India, adjacent to Bangladesh, has seen a few months ago return of the government which is in power for several terms. Admittedly, the CPM-led state government could not fulfil all the expectations of the people but what made their return to power possible successively is the apparent honesty and a relatively corruption-free administration. Main leaders maintained probity and transparency in public life even being chief minister or ministers, which is mostly lacking when a party is in power. But in the same Indian state assembly elections, another leftist-ruled state Kerala could not withstand the anti-incumbency wave because some allies of the coalition were accused of inefficiency and corruption.

Zaglul Chowdhury is a senior special correspondent of BSS.

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: AKMI MOHSIN

Food for thought

Every day thousands of reasonably priced, 'tiffin' meals are supplied to working people all over Dhaka City. Like this little boy many youngsters are engaged in delivering the meals to earn a quick buck. At this young age these boys learn to struggle, as there's no one to support them. Speaking of children's rights and welfare only in seminars rings hollow when a large section of our young generation has to fend for themselves in a cruel world.

OCC at DMCH

Attention of the project authority has been drawn to the DS report "One-stop crisis centre at DMCH yet to take off" published on 18 September 2001. The report merits some clarifications.

The One-Stop Crisis Centre (OCC) at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) is a component of the "Multi-Sectoral Programme on Violence Against Women (MSP-VAW)" project under the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Government of Bangladesh supported by the Government of Denmark. The 2-year Pilot Phase of the MSP-VAW project consists of a number of components to be implemented by the Ministries of Health and Family Welfare, Social Welfare, Home Affairs, Information and of course Women and Children Affairs. The setting up of an OCC at DMCH and another at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH) is one such component.

The OCC at DMCH is on a trial run since 19 August 2001. A Working Group set up in DMCH under the Director, DMCH has been meeting since early July to develop the inter-departmental coordination necessary for the functioning of the OCC. Out of a total of three doctors to be deputed to the OCC the first one joined on 17 July, the second one on 16 September and the third one is yet to join. The referral services to be provided by NGOs are not yet in place.

However, contractual arrangements with qualified NGOs are under process. The first training workshop on operationalisation of the OCC was held at DMCH during 17-19 September 2001 with resource persons from Malaysia and participants from DMCH and RMCH Critical Pathways/Protocols for the handling of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and VAW related burns were finalised.

These protocols will enable the OCC to function within an inter-departmental coordination mechanism for the handling of VAW victims/survivors. At present, the OCC will admit all cases with minor injuries referred by Emergency, Out Patient or Gynecology. In other words, these will be typical short-stay patients who will receive necessary treatment, nursing care, police support and psychological and legal counseling. For all other VAW cases having major or critical injuries and admitted under Casualty or any other department, the OCC will extend police support and NGO referral services.

The OCC services will be publicised only after satisfactory testing of the protocols and completion of the trial run.

In the meantime, MSP-VAW project has constructed and partially equipped a minor operation theatre and dressing room in the Burns Ward of DMCH to facilitate regular surgery and dressing for burns patients and renovated and partially

equipped two operation theatres under Casualty. These facilities are already in regular use. The construction of the OCC at RMCH is near completion. The project has also fielded a preparatory mission for the establishment of DNA facilities under the Pathology Department of Dhaka Medical College in order to upgrade forensic services.

The 2-year pilot phase of the MSP-VAW project is expected to be followed by two five-year phases during which some of the components will be replicated at district level and new components related to education and law will be incorporated. All components planned under the project will be integrated into the work of the respective departments during the duration of the project.

In other words, the project has a long-term planning span with the goal of full integration and sustainability of the services being introduced. The pilot phase is the first investment in experimenting with new concepts and new methodologies. No one involved in either the design or the implementation of the project has any illusion of immediate results or a quick fix. The impatience of the press to see immediate results is understandable. However, a better understanding of the project and its approach and objectives could contribute to more meaningful reporting.

Md. Nurul Abedin
Project Director

Multi-Sectoral Programme on VAW Project

Be reasonable

On Wednesday, October 10, the Awami League chief, Sheikh Hasina alleged, "The magnitude of such atrocities (post 2001 election) have already surpassed the level of tortures on our people on March 25, 1971."

Comparison of post polls feuds amongst the activists of the Awami League and the BNP with that of the atrocities committed by the Pakistani forces in 1971 is a direct insult to the spirit of the war of liberation in Bangladesh.

Awami League spokes-people have by and large been always overly outspoken, but these days, many of these comments are aimed against democracy and the very existence of Bangladesh. This is of grave concern! People of Bangladesh do not wish to hear such comments from anyone, be they political or not, in the future.

AA
California, USA, on e-mail

Our bureaucrats

The mythical bird Phoenix will be ashamed to see the eternal life enjoyed by our senior bureaucrats. I am referring to their ability of changing sides like chameleons just to serve their petty personal interests at our expense.

Our political parties are to be

blamed for encouraging this trend by rewarding these civil servants (retired) coveted position as ambassadors, even as technocrat ministers who are not even People's Representatives. Our current Chief Advisor understood the grave implication of this trend, and took quick actions through reshuffles in order to facilitate the recently held fair election.

It is very important that technocrat ministers must be a "technical person" with certain knowledge of a discipline, but I wonder how come a senior bureaucrat fits in that description! Their great knowledge of "the system" may help the political party, but will not benefit the country because they were bred all through their career to be "exceptionally vivid of vision".

CSP/BCS is not a diploma that carries certain academic credential, as it is perceived/imposed on our national psyche. It is a mere title of a servant of the people, which they usually fail to uphold. Case in point, look at our two former finance ministers. My general hypothesis holds the ground if you compare the achievements and the attitudes of Mr. Saifur Rahman and Mr. Kibria.

I strongly believe that Mr. Rahman had better success in formulating visionary policies due to his background in the private sector (public accountancy), which nurtured him to "think out the box".

On the other hand, Mr. Kibria, a career bureaucrat/diplomat failed miserably to comprehend the basic stock market environment. It is to be noted that vision is "strategic thinking", which is completely absent in any bureaucratic environment. BNP is about to appoint ministers within a couple days who will be formulating policies for the next five years. There are three ministries that must not be filled by any former bureaucrats: Finance, Oil & Gas, and IT. These three ministries must be "off limits" to our civil servants, because they lack the basic understanding of the dynamics of these sectors. BNP must appoint visionary people with proper backgrounds, experiences, and proven track records for these positions. If needed, BNP must get experienced expatriates for Oil & Gas and IT ministries and appoint them as technocrats on a contract basis.

These three sectors (economic implications wise) will determine the future of this country by setting the strategy, the tone, and the direction towards a viable economy. It is high time for BNP to set a precedence by pulling the plug on the practice of "Bureaucrat Rehabilitation Program (BRP)", and by appointing pragmatic, patriotic, young, and visionary people for the concerned ministries. People have high expectation from this government, and that's why BNP has been given the second lease of life to back their promises with actions.

N.Karim, on e-mail