

Not excuse but action

Protecting minorities is everyone's moral duty

As media continue to report on attacks on minorities, the government continues to play down the situation. The home minister while talking to ETV again restated that it was part conspiracy, part rumours and only part facts. This was again almost a denial. One hopes that actions to counter the attacks will begin before time runs out altogether.

The political significance of a beleaguered minority population is enormous. It means that the majority is unable to protect them or worse not that keen to do so. If the government keeps harping on "conspiracies and rumours," the signals will certainly not be read as pro-minority. It will paint the BNP government as an insensitive and an anti-minority construct.

The majority population is often unaware of the minority psychology. What may seem like an isolated incident to the majority will be perceived as an attack on the entire vulnerable minority. The minority, usually powerless, becomes a bigger victim because the majorities, in power, as rulers and ultimately as the demographically superior force can always afford to ignore them. That's why our concern for the state of the minorities is so high.

It's all the more intense because we can't deny our history of violence and discrimination against the minorities. Since previous attacks ended only when public pressure was put on the authorities, we believe that civil society should get involved in demanding end to such a situation.

The minister has gone on record saying that he has issued orders to the district-level authorities to take mitigating measures. He has also promised to visit the areas where the minorities were attacked. The home secretary has stated that there may have been a gap in the period when one government was departing and another stepping in but now actions would be taken swiftly.

We hope such assurances translate into action. We have a moral obligation to protect the minorities, an obligation that defines the nature of Bangladesh. We also certainly don't want the politicisation of the issue and the matter falling through the cracks of controversy.

Unless actions are taken, we are about to go down in history as a nation unable to protect its minorities. The government has no right to give us that label. And that's why it's immediate action that is required. Not excuses, not verbalisations but action.

Looming humanitarian catastrophe

Global efforts to help the Afghans should be stepped up

THE Bush administration has repeatedly rejected the Taliban claim that hundreds of civilians have been killed in the US-led air strikes on Afghanistan. Save a few exceptions, it claims, the fighter planes and the long-range missiles have consistently hit the target, the Taliban training camps and other defence installation. However, it is a fact that thousands of Afghans - the common people of the war-ravaged country, not the members of the Taliban militia - are fleeing their homes every day in search of refuge, mainly to Pakistan. They face a bleak future, without food, home and, in a few weeks' time, enough cloth to fight the notorious winter of the hilly terrain. The US-led war on terrorism, in all likelihood, is on course to sparking off a humanitarian catastrophe of unprecedented magnitude. Regardless of how US President George W Bush might want to portray it, the ongoing military offensive has pushed civilians to death.

Is it any less condemnable than the death of nearly seven thousand people in the September 11 terror strikes? As the US administration vehemently pursues its prime objective to "smoke out" Osama bin Laden and its Al-Qaeda network, and their Afghan hosts, the Taliban, this humanitarian aspect of the war on terrorism appears totally ignored. Why make the innocent Afghans suffer for something that their government is or is not doing? The Taliban regime, the US and its allies must remember, has not been democratically elected. The US administration must not also take refuge in the moral platitude that by dropping in relief materials along with bombs and cruise missiles, it is doing enough for the distressed Afghans. All reports suggest food drops are entirely ineffective.

If the war on terrorism continues the way it has so far, it will only compound the miseries of millions of Afghans, who have no relations whatsoever with either Bin Laden or his Taliban hosts. The air strikes, despite its strategic significance, must not be an open-ended proposition. The sooner it ends the better it is for the people of Afghanistan. In the interregnum, however, there should be global effort to step up aid to see the hungry and homeless millions through the most poignant episode of humanitarian crisis.

'We wish to live in peace, not under the daily threat of terrorism'



TONY BLAIR

The US has been seeking Osama Bin Laden's extradition for years for the other terrorist attacks. As part of the diplomatic and political effort I myself have traveled to Russia, Pakistan, India, the United States, Switzerland, Oman and Egypt. Jack Straw, the British Foreign Secretary, has traveled to the Middle East including Iran. There is an unprecedented global consensus against terrorism. And yet despite all this diplomatic pressure, Kabul still

to install Taliban-type regimes in other countries. Let nobody believe this is about religious faith, when in the pursuit of his goals he has been willing to murder innocent women and children, including Muslims. Osama Bin Laden's real objective is to undermine Muslim Governments who seek world peace and order and replace them with militant regimes who seek chaos. He has already succeeded all too well in Afghanistan. He has claimed to have direct influence

do you want to live under the sort of regime we see today in Kabul? Because that is what Bin Laden and Al Qaida want for you. We in the West realise the Kabul regime emerged out of the chaos that ravaged Afghanistan after the Soviet army withdrew. Initially many Afghans believed the new regime could restore order to the country. But let us make no mistake about the short of people they are. Public administration is chaotic and getting worse. The country is desperately

which bear scant relationship to the teachings of Islam. But they are ruthlessly imposed. Most Government resources go on the war effort and internal security. Corruption has returned. To raise further funds, they have now turned to growing and trafficking heroin. The regime has become increasingly extreme. The decision to destroy ancient Buddhist monuments earlier this year was symbolic of their increasing intolerance. Yet historically, Islam has been very

who live and work in the West as traitors; supporting of the most extreme interpretation of Islamic Law imaginable. Let us be clear. If we don't take a stand against Osama Bin Laden and his puppet regime in Kabul, he will seek to overthrow other Muslim states and put in place regimes of fear, terror and intolerance. It is always possible for the TV cameras to get pictures of people protesting at military action. But I do not believe the majority of Muslims in any country on earth want a Kabul-type regime in their country. Whatever sympathy they may feel for the people of Afghanistan, and we feel it too, they are the victims of Osama Bin Laden and the Taliban. Whatever the cultural and historical links, when the people look at their incompetence as a Government, when they look at the way that even their most basic rights are denied, when they look at the basic cruelty and viciousness of the regime, it is that really something that they would want to their own country? I do not believe that it is.

I believe we all, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, wish to live in peace, not under the daily threat of terrorism. That is what we are now working so hard to achieve.

Tony Blair is the British Prime Minister. This article is national exclusive to The Daily Star.

It is always possible for the TV cameras to get pictures of people protesting at military action. But I do not believe the majority of Muslims in any country on earth want a Kabul-type regime in their country. Whatever sympathy they may feel for the people of Afghanistan, and we feel it too, they are the victims of Osama Bin Laden and the Taliban.

refused to hand over Osama Bin Laden to face justice.

We also have to ask ourselves: what will the world look like if we don't stop Osama Bin Laden and people like him?

Osama Bin Laden likes to pretend that he speaks for the Palestinian cause. He likes to pretend that he is driven by faith. Neither of those claims, it seems to me, are true. They are a cover for his real motivation, which is power; power that he wields through terror. The power game that he is playing is

over the Taliban Government and there is no reason to dispute that. All reports suggest that he is a real power behind the scenes; and that it was he who organised the assassination of Ahmed Shah Masood, a Muslim hero of the anti-Soviet resistance and the main opposition to Kabul. This was part of his payment to the Taliban for harbouring and supporting him. Osama Bin Laden and the Taliban regime are two sides of the same coin.

The question Muslims around the world have to ask themselves is:

poor and getting poorer because of the regime's policies. Teachers, doctors and other educated Afghans have been forced to flee or live in terror. Because the Kabul regime has so badly mismanaged the economy, the Afghan people are starving.

Virtually the only arm of civil government that functions effectively is the Ministry of Enforcement of Virtue and the Suppression of Vice. This Ministry enforces strict observance of all Taliban decrees on social and moral behaviour

tolerant of other religions. The Muslim world was a beacon of civilisation and tolerance when Europe was in the dark ages.

Along with terror, this is the kind of intolerant, backward-looking regime Osama Bin Laden wants to export throughout the Muslim world; in permanent conflict with the world and with anyone who disagrees; against any form of modernisation and economic progress; ruthless in suppressing any opposition and other ways of life; women treated abominably; denouncing Muslims

During my visit to Oman and Egypt I have been struck by the force of the condemnations that I heard there of the September 11 attacks on America.

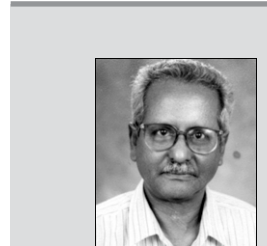
Everyone I have met has told me that these attacks were contrary to all the tenets of Islam and the teachings of the Koran.

Everyone wants to see those who carried out the wholesale murder of innocent men, women and children, brought to justice.

Of course, nobody wants military conflict. Of course, we would all prefer a diplomatic solution. But we have to ask ourselves: was one ever possible?

We gave the regime in Kabul four weeks to hand over the chief suspect in the September 11 attacks.

General Musharraf has to remain extra-cautious



M. J. ZAHEDI

Last week the local newspapers were full of news of and comments on America's attack on Afghanistan. Naturally, the event has created mixed feelings here, some justifying it but some likening it to 'using a sledgehammer to kill a fly'.

A writer in *The News* has questioned the declared American aim of waging a prolonged war against terrorism throughout the world for which, he says, the gathering of a huge armada and the scale of international support being sought towards that end can hardly be justified. The writer, described as a retired Colonel, has said that there is a lurking fear among the Muslim countries that Afghanistan is just 'the beginning of the big game America has planned to play'. "There are justifiable apprehensions that other Muslim countries would soon be made targets of American wrath under one excuse or another". To substantiate his fear

he has referred to the recent US statement in the Security Council that it may strike other countries as well.

Over the years a number of Muslim countries have proved themselves to be major sores in the side of the USA because they have been persistently refusing to toe the American line. They include Libya, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Sudan, in addition to Afghanistan. It would like to settle scores with all of them. But

strategy against the Muslim world. According to US perception, the two main zones of anxiety for it are the Middle East and the block of Central Asian Republics extending down to Afghanistan and the eastern borders of Pakistan. As far as the Middle East is concerned, most of American fears have been alleviated as a result of the Gulf War that has given it two distinct advantages in the region. Firstly, it has acquired a permanent foothold that provides

first step in this direction. By dislodging the pro-Pakistan Taliban government in Kabul and manipulating a new political dispensation in its place, America wants to ensure that Afghanistan is ruled by an anti-Pakistan regime. The hostile attitude of ex-king Zahir Shah and the Northern Alliance to Pakistan is no secret. This attitude is going to further harden after the elimination of Taliban from the political scene and the jumping in of India to play its

role. By siding with America rather than the Taliban, General Musharraf has been able to play both President Bush and Prime Minister Vajpayee who is afraid of Pakistan's proven nuclear capability that the US would like to neutralize at the first available opportunity in order to rid of its fears on that account. One such opportunity did arise recently when America, inspired most probably by India, had plans to deal with Pakistan

should also avoid trusting America or Britain as arbitrators in the Kashmir dispute because their own interests demand favouring India at the expense of Pakistan. "Now that America is girding its loins to take on some other Muslim country as its next target under the same pretext of terrorism, we must be fully prepared to face a situation in which America starts zeroing in on Pakistan". This is not a farfetched idea, he says, "if we remember that the US has been desperately trying to convince the world that the war in Kashmir is not a war of liberation but Pakistan inspired terrorism." And scared on account of the growing bugbear of China, America is quite capable of swallowing any pill forced down its throat by India.

To counter Indian machination aimed at misleading world opinion on Kashmir's liberation struggle, the writer in *The Nation* strongly feels that the Pakistani media must adopt an aggressive stance to convince America and its Western allies that the massive revolt in India-held Kashmir is the direct result of state terrorism being perpetrated in Jammu and Kashmir by the 700,000 strong occupation army of India. Pakistan must also stick to the historical demand that the Kashmir dispute must be resolved in accordance with the wishes of the people of the state through a UN-supervised plebiscite adopted by the world body over fifty years ago.

M. J. Zahedi is an eminent columnist in Pakistan and formerly the Editor of the *Khaleez Times*.

it is prudent enough not to take all of these future challenges to its status as the sole super power. It has looked first at the American

it a valuable launching pad against any of the 'misbehaving' Muslim countries in the vast area. Secondly, it has gained ready access to the rich oil reserves of the Middle East that it can easily deny to any hostile Muslim country. With Turkey and Saudi Arabia already with it, and with Israel, a known stock of America, hanging like a Damocles sword right in the middle of the Arab world, the USA should have nothing much to fear in this area.

American strategy to prevent the emergence of a solid block of Islamic states hinges on Afghanistan and Pakistan. According to its writer, its present military operation against Afghanistan constitutes the

traditional role of exploiting Afghan rulers as tools against Pakistan.

Americans also know that after its engineered regime takes over the reins of power in Afghanistan, an unending internecine war and anarchy will take hold of the country. And that is what America wants because its interests will be best served by continued instability and chaotic condition in Afghanistan. So long as conditions in Afghanistan remain unstable, it would be impossible for the central Asian republics to link up with Pakistan. Thus the emergence of a prosperous, powerful Islamic bloc would be effectively prevented and America would feel secure as the sole superpower of

before targeting Afghanistan. However, the writer feels that, that is not the end of the game as far as American fears about the Sino-Pak combine are concerned. General Musharraf has to remain extra cautious to avoid falling into some other trap laid for Pakistan by America in collusion with India. The writer of the article says that soon after the current anti-Afghanistan operations are over, Pakistan is liable to be thrown aside as a spent cartridge. "That is what our friends in the White House have been doing to us in the past". To counter such a move on the part of America, we have to be particularly wary about the security of our nuclear installations. We

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: ANISUR RAHMAN

Desperate measure

The local police and businessmen of Farmgate area have erected bamboo fencing to separate the footpath from the main road so that the pedestrians don't spill over the road from the sidewalk. Still the pedestrians tend to ignore the demarcation and occupy the main road disrupting smooth traffic. We have a weird tendency to ignore rules and regulations and act unruly. We need to change this habit and act like civilized citizens.

OPINION

Father of the nation

RUHUL AMIN MAZUMDAR

I have carefully read the commentary of Mr Mahfuz Anam, "Appeal to Khaleeda Zia", published in the first page of The Daily Star of October 7, 2001. Mr Anam's commentaries on burning issues of national importance have always been very well written. Through these commentaries, the Editor expressed his genuine concern on certain vital problems that our people faced from time to time.

My personal opinion about Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is that he was the greatest of all great Bengalee political leaders of all times. He had, and will have, no parallel ever. I am sure Bangladesh would never have come into being if a man named Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was not born. Mr Anam has rightfully said Bangabandhu would continue to remain in the hearts of future generations whether Khaleeda Zia wants it or not. As long as there is a history of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu will be there inevitably.

Having said this I still fail to understand why at this moment Khaleeda Zia's highest priority as appealed by Mr Anam should be to "recognise Bangabandhu as Father of the Nation and retain August 15 as the National Mourning Day". In the opinion of Mr Anam if Khaleeda Zia fails to do it immediately after she takes oath as the Prime Minister she "will be missing a magnificent and historic opportunity to bring about a dramatic and all encompassing change in our politics". In short, heavens will fall on the soil of Bangladesh if Khaleeda fails to act!

Generally Mr Mahfuz Anam's commentaries are objective and balanced. In this particular instance, I feel he got a little carried away. He was emotional, as a result of which his commentary was devoid of reasoning. This may be due to his active participation in the War of Liberation and his personal association with Bangabandhu who inspired him before and during the War. Bangabandhu is the Father of the Nation. Everybody is aware of this fact. Then what is the need for Khaleeda Zia to recognise him so after 30 years? It seems Mr Anam

has doubts that if Khaleeda Zia does not officially make a declaration, Bangabandhu ceases to be what he is. What an unfounded fear!

Bangabandhu is not of an age but for all time. He does not belong to Awami League or the Sheikh family. He belongs to the whole nation. It is a shame that the short-sighted and parochial Sheikh Hasina could not rightly measure the size of her father. In her obsession she did the greatest disservice that a son or a daughter can do to an illustrious father.

Without going into the history of the last five years when Sheikh Hasina did everything possible to reduce the stature of Bangabandhu and turn him into a name plaque, I would like to point out that there would have been no need for Mr Anam to raise the issue in question if Hasina left Bangabandhu to himself. He would have survived with the greatest laurels, on his own right and on his own merits. The greatest Bengalee of all times needed no Hasina or Khaleeda to support him to stand out. I recall here that Khaleeda Zia visited the

mazaar of Bangabandhu when she became the Prime Minister first time. This was a wonderful gesture. Hasina returned this gesture by removing the bailey bridge that facilitated thousands to pay their respects to late President Ziaur Rahman! Just a few days back in one of her initial election speeches Khaleeda Zia recalled the contributions made by great Bangladeshi leaders. She had the good taste to mention Bangabandhu's name in the speech. This was surely laudable and sensible beginning. I think she should continue this trend.

If I were to write a commentary on the same subject, I would have possibly appealed to Khaleeda to keep in place the photograph of Bangabandhu, I think that is a more effective and meaningful way to show respect to the Father of the Nation. The photograph will remind the present and future generations who Bangabandhu was. Hasina made herself a laughing stock by enacting a law which provided for punishment to those who made derogatory remarks about Bangabandhu. You cannot get

respect by force. You have to earn respect which Bangabandhu certainly did.

I support Mr Anam's contention that 15th of August should be retained as the Day of National Mourning. I am strongly opposed to declaring the day as a national holiday. I think we have too many national holiday already!

Khaleeda's election pledge to have one weekly holiday (Friday) has obviously been endorsed by the majority of voters. The sooner weekly holiday is reduced to one day the better. The way Hasina went about holidays, she would have done well to declare holidays round the year. That would have saved her from opposition rallies and hartals and also from holding elections in the long run. We all love our parents. As good Muslims, we hold Milad Mahfil, Kangali Bhoj etc on the days our parents died. We also go for Ziarat and pray for the departed souls. But do we stop working on these days or refrain from our day routine works? There is no need for ceremoniously mourning a death that was no doubt

unnatural. If Khaleeda has to go by the advice of Mr Anam, she may go one step further and take similar decisions in respect of her assassinated husband. The idea of one more unproductive day does not really carry any sense. If we love Bangabandhu we will pray for him; for that we do not need a holiday.

I do not find anything wrong in Mahfuz Anam's writing a commentary on a subject that is dear to our heart. However it would have been most appropriate if it were followed by another commentary, viz. "An Appeal to Sheikh Hasina". Although not yet written, we can guess what the contents would have been like.

By now Mr Mahfuz Anam should have learnt that advising Hasina and Khaleeda about what they should do and what they should not do is like reciting the verses of the Holy Quran in a blacksmith's shop where nobody, even the blacksmith himself, can hear anything due to loud and droning sounds. Hasina and Khaleeda are born to preach, they are not born to learn. Then there are the Yesmen all around!

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Recognition controversy

Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani dreamt of a greater Bengal or Bangladesh. At the historic Kagmari Conference in 1956 he said "Wa-laikum salaam" to West Pakistan.

During the Pakistani period Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman relentlessly struggled for the autonomy and emancipation for the Bengalees of East Pakistan. After the 1970 general election he became the undisputed leader of the 75 million people. When the Pakistani army cracked down on the innocent Bengalees on the night of 25th March 1971 at that critical moment, the then major Ziaur Rahman on behalf of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared the independence of Bangladesh.

Again after the liberation when the war-ravaged country was on the verge of ruin due to the misrule of the Awami League government,

Ziaur Rahman took over after 1975 and tried his best to re-build the country.

So it would be better for the government to declare Maulana Bhasani as the dreamer of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the founder of Bangladesh and Ziaur Rahman as the builder of Bangladesh.

Iqbal Ahmed, on e-mail

Let the issue of recognising Bangabandhu as the Father of the Nation be passed on to history and good sense of our future generation. We have enough of controversies to handle. At the moment it is better to live as a nation without a Father of the Nation.

There are many countries in the world without a Father of the Nation. So it is better to let Bangabandhu's memory remain in the heart of people. The Awami League also should not lower its position and drag him down to the party level.

Zoha, on e-mail

I commend Dr Omar Farook (October 12) for his letter. His statement that before making the appeal to recognise Bangabandhu as the Father of the Nation, *The Daily Star* Editor should realise that everyone does not have to agree with the title of "Father of the nation". And that in a democracy, such a difference of opinion is acceptable.

I completely agree with his view when he says why is it "so irreconcilable to live together in the same country or in the same family under the same roof with differences of opinion especially regarding a human being?"

I also agree with A. F. M. Obaidur Rahman (October 12) that the concept of the Father of the Nation is quite outdated and should be replaced by a group of founding fathers, like that is in America.

I am saddened that Mahfuz Anam, a strong advocate of democ-

racy, has suddenly taken this approach which is a very pointless and divisive argument in the country. People like him should guide Bangladeshis to understand that in a democracy, people can have totally opposing views - about a leader, even the founding leader, without being condemned or silenced. This is what is meant by democracy.

Z. Khan, USA, on e-mail

What a shame!

Our newly elected MPs have taken position in the MP Hostel without frittering away much time. Like university dormitories, markets, terminals, they have captured MP Hostel even though these hostels would be allotted to them sooner or later. But they did it before taking oath. If such is the mindset of our new MPs, how can we pin our hopes on them?

Aminul Islam

Surya Sen Hall, DU

BNP's first folly

I couldn't agree more with Omar Khasru (*A whole slew of ministers*, October 13). The poorest country of the world has 60 ministers and God knows how many more will be joining. I'm not a supporter of any particular party but like the silent majority, I wanted to get rid of the Awami League. But if this is what we get in return, I'm afraid we are in for a big trouble.

After the 60 ministers have had their share, what will be left for this poor country? Khaleeda Zia has indeed set a very bad precedent and I for one am totally disillusioned with the BNP. If she has to dish out favours like this, imagine what will be coming in the days ahead.

I fervently hope good sense will prevail upon the party that everyone would be as the saviour of the nation.

Mahboob ul Malik, Abu Dhabi, UAE, on e-mail