

Powell's visit

India, Pakistan should cool it off on Kashmir at this juncture

US Secretary of State Collin Powell's trip to Islamabad and New Delhi, the South Asian capitals lying on the edge of the war in Afghanistan was set against India attacking ten outposts along the Line of Control in the disputed Kashmir region. On his first leg of tour to Islamabad Collin Powell apparently enraged his next-stop host New Delhi by saying Kashmir was the 'core dispute' between India and Pakistan, words that Islamabad is wont to using when referring to the issue.

India thinks everything that is happening in Kashmir is terrorism sponsored from the Pakistan side of Kashmir. The reason being cited for overrunning the ten outposts along the LoC is dismantling of the points through which Pakistan-trained militants infiltrated into the Indian side of Kashmir. So, New Delhi wanted to signal that message to Collin Powell about cross-border terrorism being the heart of Kashmir problem before he arrived at the Indian capital. Diplomatic circles have also pointed to the growing concerns of India at the importance being attached by the US to the frontline role Pakistan is playing in relation to the US-British war in Afghanistan. It is crystal-clear that India and Pakistan have their own motives in supporting the war against terrorism spearheaded by Washington, which basically revolve around securing greater recognition of their respective stances on Kashmir.

From the Indian point of view the Kashmir question is inextricable from terrorism being transported by Pakistan while Islamabad says it is an indigenous war, a freedom struggle, which she feels morally obligated to support. Both these view points being mutually exclusive have not evidently helped solve the problem for the last five decades. But, if taking advantage of the current highly volatile situation in the region, the Kashmir problem is sought to be resolved by aggression then we are looking at another major disaster in prospect. Firstly, it will close off the avenues for any negotiated settlement of the Kashmir question; secondly, other actors and tensions could come into play; and last but not least, it portends dangerous consequences of two nuclear powers in the region locking their horns in a no-holds-barred fashion. So, our entreaties with India and Pakistan, in that order, would be: for God's sake, don't open a new front in Kashmir at this juncture when the Afghan imbroglio threatens to spread over the region in some form or shape. You are already stoking the fire of destabilisation in the region, do step back from igniting it into conflagration, a prospect that is most dreaded by the smaller countries of South Asia for obvious reasons.

Khaleda assures minorities of protection

But people will wait to see how serious BNP is

PRIME Minister Khaleda Zia's directive to the law enforcement officials and the administrative machinery that all actions should be taken to ensure a proper environment for observing the Durga Puja in a celebratory manner is very welcomed. This is all the more welcomed because some ministers had created an impression that the government wasn't particularly serious about arresting the problem which minorities are facing in the wake of the elections. The National Puja Committee has declared that they would observe the holy day for the Hindus in a very muted manner as a mark of their protest against the repression. One now hopes that some of the anxieties will be laid to rest and the Bangladeshi Hindus will be able to practice their faith with greater ease than they had expected.

Concern had arisen because of the "helicopter view" approach of the Home Minister who dented the BNP-led government's image with remarkable efficiency through his inter-action with the press. Fortunately for the BNP, the PM herself appears to have understood the gravity of the situation and stepped in to give orders to deal with the crisis after consulting the senior bureaucracy.

However, one has to wait and see if actions follow words. After the efforts put in by the Home Ministry to downplay the crisis, one has to observe if the government really means what it says. Had the signals about intent been clear from the beginning, this wouldn't have become an issue. Now everyone waits to see what actions are taken to generate confidence in the Hindu community that they will be protected from violence.

One really hopes that the present administration under the new PM will be able to bring matters under control. The government will have to prove that they are serious about protecting the vulnerable population groups. The minorities have a special right to be protected and this has to be recognized by all. This has to be reflected in words and deeds both.

Attack on the minorities: Victims of communalism or political intolerance?

AFSAN CHOWDHURY

THE attack on the minorities has been a rude wake up call to many. Some have seen it as the revival of extreme communalism. Those who equated the BNP led 4-party alliance with an anti-minority position felt it confirmed the idea. Others have seen it through the lenses of escalating violence. The BNP government's delay in taking swift action and pussyfooting on the issue didn't dilute the anxieties either. AL has also turned it into a political commodity. The issue may get fudged amidst denials and petty politicking.

The minority or precisely the Hindu problem began before the first vote was even cast. Conventional wisdom is that the minorities always vote for the Awami League. And some anti-AL politicians are not above bullying the Hindus to stay away from the voting booths. It has happened more than once before.

It's curious that Hindus have been stereotyped as an AL vote bank, often a deciding one. Of course they have a right to vote anyone they like. But it seems that voting as per will is a lesser sin only when one is a member of the majority community.

The minority is looked upon as a vote bank of Awami League but this party has used insecurity to win elections rather than improve the lot of this voters group. Research shows that Hindu property grabbing is common to both AL and BNP leaders. This party has done little to institute changes in the democratic structure that ultimately protects a

way that happened. However, as some of the field reports begin to come in we can try to piece together an emerging jigsaw puzzle.

Only Hindus are Awami Leaguers? It seems that the Hindus are being attacked not as Hindu but as AL voters. These are certainly revenge attacks. Since Hindus have an unshakable AL tag they are also

Every report that we get from the field and our own experience shows that in the last decade, the democratic space has in fact shrunk. Autocracy and intolerance is more pervasive than ever before. Nazim Kamran Chowdhury, the political analyst who has become oft quoted for his logical approach in dissecting the 2001 election results has in a

political space left to occupy is the autocratic space. Any space that is immediately occupied is therefore that of intolerance.

As there is no democratic culture or space, the BNP simply stepped into Awami League's political shoes. It didn't wish to be democratic but wished to take control. Politics is limited to or controlled by the auto-

cratic psyche. A good example is the Dhaka University where AL led Chhatra League prevented the BNP led JCD to even enter the campus. Having had their chance after elections, the JCD did exactly the same. And since there is no political culture of tolerance, the question of 'violating' democratic norms doesn't exist. In its absence, we don't know how to be democratic. The Hindus aren't victims of communalism; they are victims of political autocracy. Religious intolerance didn't hurt them, political intolerance did.

But whatever be the reason, the AL will naturally use this issue to make life for the BNP uncomfortable. But it will be up to the latter to decide if it will opt for democratic or autocratic spaces. Given that the parliament is also a tool for the fulfillment of the autocratic imagination, one will have to wait and see if the BNP decides to change that or not. It's too early to make a judgement but the party's culture is more or less the same as that of Awami League.

Can the BNP handle this crisis? One mustn't speculate but before any actions take place, the space has to be created which accepts tolerance and reason. That doesn't yet exist. But one can always begin.

Afsan Chowdhury is Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

The Hindus aren't victims of communalism; they are victims of political autocracy. Religious intolerance didn't hurt them, political intolerance did.

People from social repression. By treating them as a personal property of sorts of the party, AL actually denied them any independent identity. Meanwhile the anti-AL forces did the same by equating Hindus with AL only. Clearly, the minorities had or have little space except as party adjuncts or political stereotypes in the dominant political imagination.

But the high intensity of violence, intimidation and downright marginalization, which the Hindus had to face, was a very disturbing scene in the post election scenario. It wasn't very easy to explain either

easy targets. Many Muslim AL activists are being attacked as well but all Hindus are thought of as AL supporters and attacked. Hindus therefore can't be voters only like most others. Simply by voting, they become activists in the semantics of political intolerance.

It's interesting that Christians or the Indigenous people are not being targeted. Revenge attack on Hindus are possible without the problem of counter attack. Hindus don't fight back. But why did the violent elements of BNP respond so quickly and in the process risk unpopularity?

"Prothom Alo" interview doubted if AL lost votes due to their "terrorism". In fact AL has got more votes than they ever got after the 1973 elections and gained much since 1996. Fact is, intolerance has become more established in our political mind than we would care to admit.

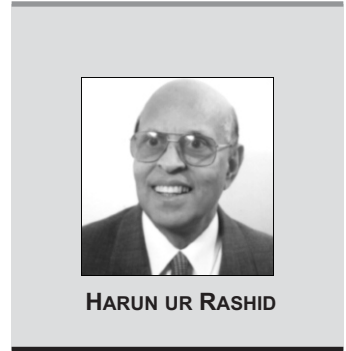
Can tolerance exist? The AL didn't allow the BNP or other Opposition to hold meetings or carry out normal political activities during their rule in most places where violence has been reported. That means they created only autocratic spaces and expanded it by excluding democratic ones. The only

cratic psyche.

A good example is the Dhaka University where AL led Chhatra League prevented the BNP led JCD to even enter the campus. Having had their chance after elections, the JCD did exactly the same. And since there is no political culture of tolerance, the question of 'violating' democratic norms doesn't exist. In its absence, we don't know how to be democratic. The Hindus aren't victims of communalism; they are victims of political autocracy. Religious intolerance didn't hurt them, political intolerance did.

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The battle plan against terrorism is outmoded



HARUN UR RASHID

THE last century was the era of mass mobilisation, where armies attempted to ensure that they could bring the largest force to overwhelm the enemy. Many military experts believe that the Gulf War in 1990 represented the high water mark of the military tradition of the decisive battle confronting the enemy face to face. Although the war was won against Iraq, the international coalition led by the US was unable to overthrow President Saddam Hussein because the successes in the Gulf War were not matched with clear political objectives.

The war on terrorism by the US in Afghanistan began with a war of words. President Bush said that "the battle is now joined on many fronts and the carefully targeted actions are designed to disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base". On the other hand Osama bin Laden, the prime suspect in the terrorist attack in the US, gave a chilling message in a video footage released by Al-Jazeera TV station in Qatar, that "neither the US nor who lives in the US will enjoy security before we see it as a reality in Palestine and all infidel armies leave the land of Mohammad".

It appears that the war in Afghanistan will not be fought on classical lines. Experts believe that the concept of a decisive battle in the war on terrorism is not possible. This was confirmed by the US Secretary (Minister) of Defence Donald Rumsfeld when he said that there would not be any D-Day.

Interestingly the US is pitted against one individual who is a prime suspect of masterminding the terrorist acts in the US. He has hijacked Islam to satisfy his twisted mind. He does not speak on behalf of a country and his followers are scattered around the world. He has plenty of money and exploits many frustrated and unemployed youths for his deadly game. He took refuge in a mountainous country Afghanistan, the size of France and three times of Britain. He is being protected by the extremist Taliban

BOTTOM LINE

The US has entered in an uncharted area. There is an overwhelming opinion that the military operations alone may not be able to act as a deterrent to the terrorists. It involves continuous identification and pressure on terrorists for a long period of time. Cooperation by a host of nations in many fronts is required to eliminate terrorism. It is vital to maintain a decent perspective of time frame of the war on terrorism. There is no quick-fix solution to eliminate it.

regime. Many strategists maintain that Afghanistan would not have been in a mess if the West had been involved in ensuring a stable regime in the country once the Soviet Union left in 1989. The West including the US forgot about Afghanistan at the end of the Cold War and left it in a drift where the Taliban could emerge with the alleged support of Pakistan and Osama was able to take refuge from Sudan to establish his Al-Qaeda organisation.

Unlike any other conventional war, the war on terrorism is completely a different ball game. First, it is directed against a non-actor (Osama) who operates from a sheltered country. Second, many of his operators are shadowy figures and not readily identifiable. They lie low for many years and move from country to country. Osama has been able to build a network in around 60 countries with sophisticated planning and technology to create terror. Third, apart from the hijacking of the planes and planting bombs with remote control device, biological and chemical terrorism can be carried out without difficulty. The recent anthrax scare in the US leaves many questions unanswered as to why, how and who has let loose the deadly anthrax that killed a Florida man.

In the light of new scenario, it appears that the conventional linear battlefield is becoming a thing of the past and many military analysts believe that there are two distinct levels at which the war against terrorism has to be fought. Although the military strikes in Afghanistan may cause the overthrow of the Taliban regime, this would not by itself eradicate global terrorism. On the second front, the need to win psychological warfare is imperative. It appears that strategy of simultaneous dropping of "bomb and bread" was adopted by the US in Afghanistan to win over the minds of the ordinary Afghans.

Some military experts believe that the conventional tri-force structure (army, navy and air force) may not be able to effectively eradicate terrorism. Instead special units capable of instant operation, inte-

grating air, land and sea forces are needed. Focusing on winning at the battle-fields could constitute a minor part. Military forces must now destroy the hidden infrastructure of terrorism through high degree of human intelligence. Although technology plays its critical part, human involvement in gathering information from various sources has become vitally important. In future the role of the armed forces is expected to carry out both covert and overt military operations including guerrilla warfare.

Many commentators say that today's enemy is not a nation-state so much as an "ideology", just as it was in the Cold War back then it was communism; today it is fanatical terrorism. Back then the US came up with a policy of "containment". This time it may be called "extermination". Curiously the objective is the same fight it with a mix of military, diplomatic and financial fronts so that it must die from within. US Defence Secretary Mr. Rumsfeld was the first to make the historical comparison and hosed down the media expectations that this war on terrorism might be a quick little war. He said to the media: "If you think about it, in the Cold War it took 50 years, plus or minus".

Many suggest that the US top military brass might have realised that technology was of no advantage in guerrilla warfare in difficult terrain of Afghanistan and on 12 October, President Bush made an extraordinary offer to halt his bombing campaign in Afghanistan if the ruling Taliban agreed to hand over Osama and his close associates. He admitted publicly that the US did not know whether Osama was alive or dead after the sustained attacks in Afghanistan.

The showing of olive branch at this stage of war to the Taliban has been interpreted in many circles that the US may not be confident in degrading or destroying the Taliban forces quickly in Afghanistan as it has expected with its short, sharp and targeted attacks on them. It could be another "Vietnam" for the US forces at the dawn of this cen-

tury. Furthermore this offer also confused every one because it appears to be at odds with the evolving US strategy in Afghanistan which aims to use Afghan tribes and Northern Alliance forces to get rid of the Taliban so that it can be replaced by a consensus government initially headed by the former King Zahir Shah (86), now living in Rome since 1973.

A propaganda warfare is also being fought together with the military operations in Afghanistan. Many believe that Osama has a malign gift of public relations. He can stage a dismaying series of

catch-me-if-you-can for the cameras. Furthermore he wants to give impression that the war on terrorism is a war against Muslims. Already the use of military force against the Taliban led many extremist Muslims and pacifists to protest around the world. This is partly because there are reports of deaths of innocent civilians including women and children in Afghanistan.

In the given circumstances one may reasonably conclude that the US has entered in an uncharted area. There is an overwhelming opinion that the military operations alone may not be able to act as a

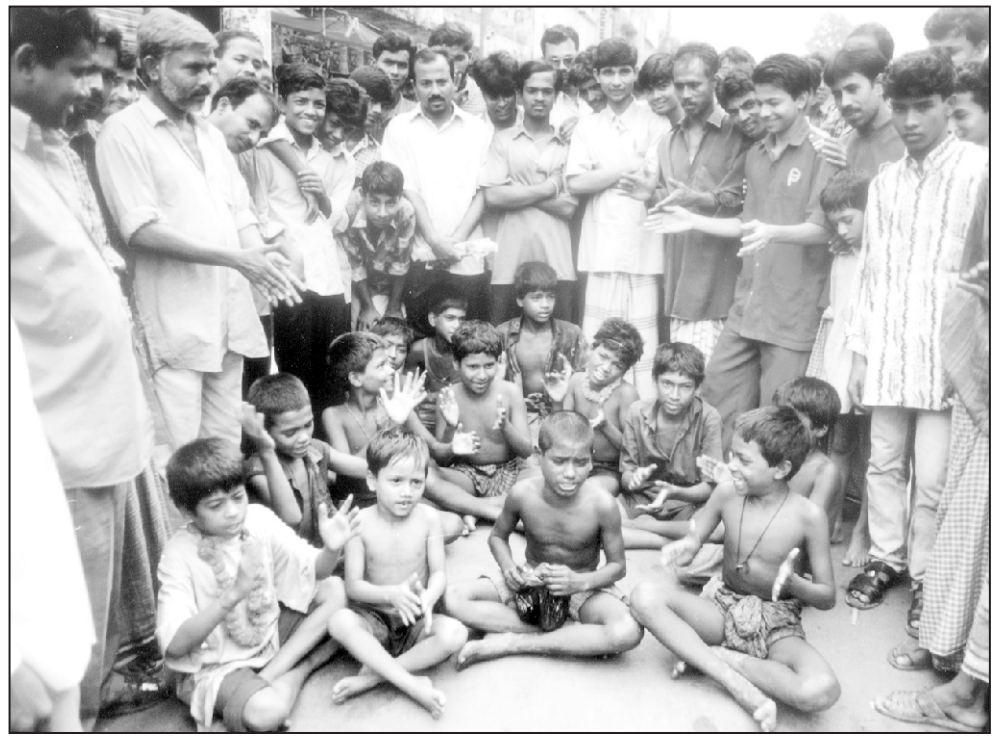
deterrent to the terrorists. It involves continuous identification and pressure on terrorists for a long period of time. Cooperation by a host of nations in many fronts is required to eliminate terrorism. It is vital to maintain a decent perspective of time frame of the war on terrorism. There is no quick-fix solution to eliminate it.

At a recent meeting with the British Prime Minister, the Egyptian President supported the attack on terrorism but reportedly stressed the point that the US "bomb and bread" exercise might not work unless the sources of terrorism were addressed as well. The meeting on 15 October between Chairman Arafat and British Prime Minister Tony Blair in London is a welcome development. It is not known at what point of time the US President is to meet with Chairman Arafat while Israel's Prime Minister Sharon had already met twice with the US President.

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

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

Lost generation

It is a sad testimony to our country that instead of being in school or playing, homeless children are available for any 'cause' that can use their services, be it taking part in procession or picketing during hartal. These deprived young members of society have to face all kinds of hardship and exploitation, yet they continue their battle to survive in this cruel world. When will children be allowed to enjoy the innocence of a real childhood?

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

Recognising Bangabandhu

Shameran Abed's (October 10) letter against Yasmeen Murshed's (October 8) blunt letter is a typical knee-jerk reaction.

I resent Mr Abed's self-righteous tone, echoing the tone of The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam. How could he or anyone else for that matter, sneer at the feelings of Bangladeshis towards Sheikh Mujibur Rahman?

If Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is really the Father of the Nation, let the nation judge him. He should not be used by the Awami League as their sole property. It is interesting that neither Mahfuz Anam nor Mr Abed have acknowledged the grave harm done to Bangabandhu by his daughter Sheikh Hasina.

Mr Abed wonders how Mrs Murshed has gained an insight into the minds of "those who opposed the creation of Bangladesh". Will people like Mr Abed wake up and

see the real world around them? We are now in the third millennium. No one is against the creation of Bangladesh! If people opposed it 30 years ago, most of them are now in their graves!

The young generation is fed up by the polarisation of the country. I think that most people don't want Bangabandhu to be forced down our throat, but we also don't want him to be disrespected. We should be proud of him but he should not be idolised.

In the USA, there is no need to declare that George Washington founded the state. Why do we need a "declaration" to state the obvious?

Shahadat Khan
USA, on e-mail

I have been closely following up the appeal from the DS editor to the BNP chief along with the letters in response to the appeal.

Already too much time has been wasted dwelling on matters con-

cerning the past. I do not see how the existence of "The Father of the Nation" in anyway helps the economic situation or social environment of the country. In fact there are many countries which don't have any Father of the Nation.

I do agree that we should respect and be grateful to those people who have struggled to liberate our country and have given us an independent state. Nevertheless, I believe it to be extremism, when bills are passed to have Bangabandhu's pictures hung in every institution or to have a mazar dedicated to him.

However, my question is how much passion and undying gratitude do you feel when you discuss our Prophet Mohammed (SW). How often do you remember the Prophet and how often do you think about his deeds and his contribution to Islam, (the way of life). I do not see why so much emphasis and debate should be put on the Father of the Nation when people do not bother to remember all the Prophets in such a

way.
S.Khan, on e-mail

"Moyeen's Heartening Comment"

Your above editorial of October 13 was heartening for the readers as well. We hope the Information Minister would be on his guard not to repeat the mistakes of his predecessors.

But I think you have overlooked one thing. Don't you think the minister has allowed himself a bit more projection on his initial appearance on the small screen?

A Concerned
DOHS (Old), Dhaka, on e-mail

Problem-prone party

The Awami League is a problem-prone party, whether in power or out of it.

These problems are created by the peculiar brand of leadership rehired by the party. For posterity AL

would need a huge reshuffle to reserve the party.

Abd
Dhaka

To the elected Government

On the October 1 election, people have given their verdict through the ballot against terrorism, injustice, deterioration of law and order and nepotism.

But we are outraged that the AL chief outright rejected the election result and declared that she will not take oath and resort to agitation programmes.

People of Bangladesh have suffered enough and now they want peace and security. Now that the new government has taken over their first step should be to restore law and order in society. A major change is needed in our ill-reputed police department. Pollution control should be one of their main priorities. Overhauling of traffic system is

a must.

We hope the elected government will show magnanimity by showing respect to the portrait of Bangabandhu and will not remove it from the place where it should remain. People were deeply disgusted when the Awami League after coming to power in 1996 removed the bridge from crescent lake connecting the mazar of the late president Ziaur Rahman.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

The pendulum effect

After a general election, with the shifting of the load from one regime to another, the pendulum effect becomes noticeable during the initial period. While the cabinet grapples with the teething troubles and tries to settle down to a new routine procedure, the peripheries generate surges, which are more noticeable.

The party supporters, who

worked hard electioneering, expect their commissions. Godfatherism changes hands, as pointed out in the DS reports. There cannot be any vacuum, and a new clean system takes time to start operating at an acceptable level.

The political pendulum has been swinging too much too long, in fact, since liberation. The cycles are recycled.

Abul M Ahmad
Dhaka

US air raids

More than two weeks have passed since the initiation of the US-British air raids on Afghanistan. They claim that this is the only way of uprooting terrorism.

We have always been taught that fighting and violence does not solve any problem. Shouldn't the US try to root out national terrorism before trying to destroy international terrorism?

How many times have we heard

of high school bombing or bank robberies where civilians were killed ruthlessly. Didn't one of their own people, Timothy McVeigh bomb the World trade center in 1993? Then can the US claim that they have no internal terrorism?

The US should first look into their own country and then try to root out international terrorism. If every country tries to root out national terrorism, then eventually international terrorism would not exist.

Saima Khan, on e-mail

Save the nation

Please mobilise opinions before the first session of the parliament to pass the following bills and save the nation from further ruin.

1. Ban on politics (please don't call it student politics) in the arena of education from university down to primary school.
2. Ban on Hartals.

MA Huq
Dhaka, on e-mail