

## UN plan for Afghanistan

As search for home-grown solution begins, administrative vacuum should be filled at once

A special session of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on Tuesday adopted a blueprint for handling the post-Taliban situation which is getting increasingly fluid by the day. The purpose is to provide the country with the much-needed peace, normality, humanitarian assistance, reconstruction funding and the springboard for a better political future.

The plan prepared by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi and endorsed by the UNSC members has two elements. First of all, the UN is to convene a conference of delegates from the Northern Alliance, ethnic groups supported by Pakistan and Iran and other stake-holders to arrive at a formula for the installation of a multi-ethnic provisional government in Afghanistan. The host country is likely to be UAE, not far from the borders of Afghanistan. Secondly, a multinational security force will be attached to the provisional government to help it discharge its functions.

With a UN plan put in place, one could argue that the predicament of military advance outpacing political and diplomatic preparedness to meet the fast unfolding post-Taliban situation has been somewhat alleviated. There might even be a whiff of satisfaction drawn from the thought that a broad-based international initiative is getting underway in place of what has hitherto been a US-Britain affair as far as the military campaign went. Furthermore, there is reason to feel upbeat for the fact that a home-grown solution is aimed at instead of an imposed variety of a quick-fix. This would be a recipe for disaster in a country ethnically so riven but otherwise imbued with a fierce sense of national honour.

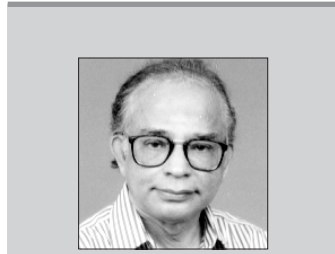
The field situation in Afghanistan has become highly volatile and self-complicated. Whilst the world heaves a sigh of relief at the cessation of US-led bombing missions to the territory it now takes fright of the indigent warlords left to their devices and proclaiming fiefdoms in areas they have taken control of.

Over the capital city Kabul the Northern Alliance holds sway but for fear of factional fights it has had to form a united front. During 1992-94 period, following the vacation of the Soviet occupation of the land, factional fights killed as many as 50,000 Afghans. Dostum who was in exile in Turkey during the Taliban rule has returned to Mazar-i-Sharif. Ismail Khan, the former governor of Herat, has returned from exile in Iran to reclaim his governorship of the province. He is formally a part of the Northern Alliance but is a power unto himself. The legendary Yunus Khalesh is back in control of Jalalabad. Old guard Burhanuddin Rabbani is trying to emerge as a factor, too.

The big variable in the overall situation that we have to contend with is that Northern Alliance does not hold sway over most of the territory; in fact, in the eastern part of Afghanistan, viz. Jalalabad province, both an anti-Taliban and anti-Northern Alliance alternative has emerged.

What is basically blurring the vision of a broad-based multi-ethnic provisional government in Afghanistan is the confusion over who would represent the majority Pastun, most of whom are Taliban, in a future set-up. To begin with, who among the Pastuns will take part in the UN international conference that is on the cards to pave the formation of the much-vaunted interim government? Significantly, the Afghan Pastuns have a natural affinity with the Pastuns on the Pakistani side. So, the prospect for a headway in the proposed UN conference on Afghanistan critically hinges on identifying the element that will be truly representative of the Pastun community. Pakistan can help a lot in that direction.

## Temptations of NGOs



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

THE news is disconcerting, though not entirely surprising. The workers belonging to a political party attacked the office of an NGO in Ulipur at dead of night and after ransacking it threatened the staff. The immediate cause of their ire was immoral activities allegedly indulged in by the NGO while giving training to women clientele. The long-standing anger behind the nocturnal assault is the support given by the NGO to another political party in the last general election. Both the allegations, or even perceptions, undermine the neutrality, objectivity and moral leadership of the NGO. The news is disconcerting because similar allegations and others equally egregious have been leveled at quite a few other NGOs in the country.

When NGOs appeared on the development scene in Bangladesh in the early 1970s, they were few in number. More significantly, they proved to be a viable alternative to the government efforts and initiative in certain sectors that required dedication, innovation and social engineering skills. Due to the ethos and compulsions of the institutional environment in which they work government employees often lack these attributes and skills. Exceptions at individual levels do not change the general tenor in public administration. But in spite of endemic inefficiency and other glaring shortcomings government cannot withdraw from development activities, particularly for the welfare of the poor and the disadvantaged. The involvement of NGOs in these areas beginning from the 1970s was

seen as complimenting and supplementing the government efforts. This was a momentous development with far-reaching consequences. After a decade of activities many NGOs in Bangladesh emerged as major players in socio-economic development, particularly in rural areas involving the poor and the disadvantaged. A few among them became internationally known and won many laurels for their outstanding achievements. While the socially and economically

agencies. Little more modesty and tact would have ensured greater degree of GO-NGO collaboration and much sooner than has been the case. In the absence of spontaneously growing bilateral relationships, the donor stepped in as interlocutors which to some extent exacerbated the tense feeling and reservations from the government side.

If asserting their independence and superiority over government was a tactical mistake giving the

add a dimension to their activities that may be subtle but costly in terms of time and attention given. There are opportunity costs which are not insignificant for the volume of activities and the quality of performance of concerned NGOs. A higher cost is exacted by political affiliation and support as NGOs concerned become the target of attack by supporters of opposing political parties. There is an inevitable change of fortune for the politically inclined NGOs when the party

confusion lashed back. Having the support of their growing clientele and their new-found organisational strength the NGOs were tempted to be confrontational. Politicisation of some NGOs added further momentum to this trend. This was a wrong and unnecessary strategy. If the poor and the disadvantaged are helped to overcome their socio-economic malaise through literacy, health programme and micro credit the resultant improved social status should enable them to be gradually

that such a stage has been reached. When NGOs doing so well in these hitherto neglected areas start diversifying their activities with commercial and other undertakings there is reason to mull over. It is argued that NGOs need to diversify with commercial projects in order to be financially self-reliant which alone can ensure sustainability of their non-profit programmes like poverty alleviation, gender development, primary health care, adult education etc. Even after accepting this line of strategy it can be suggested that such diversification should be accompanied by an organisational restructuring that ensure that the original and the most crucial role of NGOs in social engineering is not lost or marginalised. One way of doing this can be transforming the NGO into a kind of conglomerate or holding company with different programmes having their reports and independent corporate entity. These separate corporate bodies can be staffed by experienced and skilled persons. But the original programmes (poverty alleviation, gender development etc.) needs more than management skill and experience. They can be sustained and flourished only under the original charismatic leadership which unfortunately is not transferable. It cannot and should not be diffused through the vast conglomerate. The charismatic leader should continue to head and guide the original programme which may be one of the many small corporate bodies within the conglomerate. He should be the CEO of the "flagship" programme (e.g. poverty alleviation) and the chairman of the conglomerate.

Among the reasons for decline and fall of organisations are the many temptations thrown up by success. All organisations sooner or later arrive at the crossroads. Taking the appropriate and correct turn can make the difference between continuing success and lacklustre performance. Some of the NGOs in Bangladesh may have come to that watershed. It is hoped that they will make the right choice overpowering all temptations.

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist and economist.

## IN MY VIEW

Among the reasons for decline and fall of organisations are the many temptations thrown up by success. All organisations sooner or later arrive at the crossroads. Taking the appropriate and correct turn can make the difference between continuing success and lacklustre performance. Some of the NGOs in Bangladesh may have come to that watershed. It is hoped that they will make the right choice overpowering all temptations.

"disenfranchised" found a good Samaritan in the NGOs, for the donors they presented an alternative or additional channel to allocate their development funds. The government at first balked at the shift, then accepted the change grudgingly.

The first temptation of the NGOs was to let success go into their head and brag about being superior to government in delivering certain services and implementing specific development projects. They had solid credentials and impeccable record to be proud of. But to compare themselves with government was both erroneous and insidious. A government department and NGO as development agencies operate in totally different environments where NGOs have built-in advantages to be superior. They are not hobbled by bureaucratic red-tapism and stunted by lack of innovation. Unlike government agencies they do not suffer from organizational atrophy. Being dissimilar in important respects, comparison was misleading and invidious. It was also an injudicious tactic costing them spontaneous support and wholesome cooperation of govern-

ment agencies. Little more modesty and tact would have ensured greater degree of GO-NGO collaboration and much sooner than has been the case. In the absence of spontaneously growing bilateral relationships, the donor stepped in as interlocutors which to some extent exacerbated the tense feeling and reservations from the government side. If asserting their independence and superiority over government was a tactical mistake giving the impression of being sympathiser, even supporter of particular parties has been more harmful to the cause of concerned NGOs and NGOs in general. These overtures, sometimes subtle, at others very overt, are recent developments beginning from the general election in 1995. By then the NGOs working in rural areas had established a well-defined and stable constituency represented by their clientele. Their beneficiaries had grown steadily in number and more importantly, their members were highly disciplined, almost verging on regimentation. They were looked upon by political parties as potential vote banks. This realisation marked the beginning of a relationship that has placed some NGOs under the spotlight and made them controversial. Cultivating relationship and gaining allegiance of NGOs with 'vote banks' by political parties was motivated purely by election strategy. Given their short-term goals and need for 'captive constituencies' the political parties' eagerness to harness the support of NGOs is understandable. But in this bargain the benefits enjoyed by NGOs are fraught with many risks. Identification with political parties

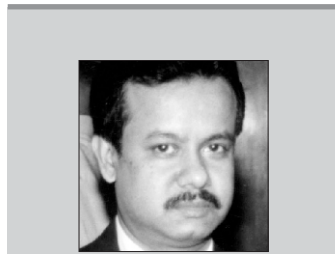
of their support is defeated in election. Being partisan they become controversial and subject to all kinds of attacks which can undermine their organisational capability and deprive their clientele of expected services. Criticisms against some NGOs by political parties before the last general election indicate that this apprehension is neither far-fetched nor exaggerated. The NGOs, therefore, stand to serve their cause better if they do not succumb to the temptation of politicisation.

As part of the strategy of helping the poor and the disadvantaged to overcome their socio-economic handicaps the NGOs stressed on awareness creation. Analysis of factors that cause poverty and deprivation often led to identification of individuals and classes having vested interests. People and groups whose interests lie in maintaining status quo were seen to belong to power elite and religious establishments, particularly in rural areas. Heightened level of awareness creation on for a long period by NGOs on behalf of their clientele often led to confrontation with vested interests who after initial

free from the stranglehold of tradition and class-based exploitation. Empowerment is of the essence because it ushers in freedom through self-help. NGOs who goad their clientele to directly challenge adversaries may be well intentioned but their actions turn out to be reckless and therefore, become counterproductive.

Some of the NGOs in Bangladesh have become highly successful, earning reputation both at home and abroad because they are endowed with growing organisational capabilities and guided by charismatic leadership. Over the years these have grown in size expanding their original activities and also adding new ones. In most of these activities they have comparative advantages over both government and the private sector. These are the areas where empathy, dedication and innovativeness enjoy high premium. There is no risk of earning diminishing returns if activities in these areas of proven superiority are expanded. The saturation point can be said to have been reached only when all the clientele for a service have been covered and attended. Neither for poverty alleviation nor for other social development it can be said

## The night of the lost nose-pins



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

IN one night, nearly two hundred women were raped in Char Fashion of Bhola, and amongst them were an eight-year-old girl, a middle-aged amputee and a seventy-year-old woman. They were raped in the paddy field, in the bush, on the riverbank, in the house, and in the open field by gangs of men, who had come to spare nothing in the village. It was an open house for debauch men who were roused by the aphrodisiac of extreme prejudice.

So the loathsome thing happened, and Muslim men raped Hindu women. The village was sprinkled with the bodies of molested women, numb with pain and shock in the aftermath of night-long abuse. They were beaten, bitten, scratched, pummelled, dragged and ravished; the jewels of their honour despoiled like the sanctity of an abandoned house.

Rape is to love what war is to peace. John Webster, an English playwright, writes in *The White Devil*, "A rape! a rape!... Yes, you have ravished justice; forced her to

do your pleasure." Maybe those men who attacked that night had a predisposition. Maybe they had watched and coveted those women for many days already. And their repressed desire erupted one night after the elections, when they assessed that those women were vulnerable. The coalition of carnal men then went ahead and forced those women to do their pleasure.

But it is not rape that was so shocking about that night in Char

which afflicts only a certain kind of men. But above all it is a storm that brews in the groin of man and lashes out in his head, when the dust of lust blinds his soul, and he stoops lower than a beast. It is the most intimate exploitation of pain for pleasure, the rapture of the strong drawn on the rupture of the weak. It is the violation of the unwilling by the unwieldy, the art of lovemaking reduced to a savage showdown between predator and its prey. Rape ransacks the

mix so that a shift in people's mandate should make them horny?

Then one has to wonder at the cruelty of the whole thing. The number of men who attacked was almost equal to the number of women they raped. One of the women was gang-raped by eleven men. Try to work out the permutation and combination of victims and aggressors and you will be amazed at the correlation between libido and hatred. It took so much flow of

How did they feel being pinned to the ground when man after man took turns on them? Did they feel sad for being molested twice by each of those men: once as a Hindu and again as a woman?

Some of the rape victims have compared their experience to the loss of their nose-pins, while narrating their harrowing tales. They must have said so because what they lost was an ornament of womanhood. And it was a loss that may never be

in 1896 that the ancient Greeks didn't attach ideas of lewdness and immodesty to sex. Sensuality, he wrote, was a precondition of intellectual growth, mysterious but necessary and creative. If a man doesn't feel profoundly the demands of the flesh, he is not capable of encompassing the demands of the spirit.

Neither holds true for the sleazy men who had turned into monsters for that one night, because the demand of their flesh had demeaned their spirit. They raped in the profane brotherhood of atrocious sensuality, and they chose victims not on the basis of their appeal but on the basis of their faith. Child, old woman and the crippled, they spared none from the brunt of their attack, which was driven together by libido and hatred into the body and soul of their victims, who have been shedding their tears ever since. Maybe that is the only way they are going to have to deal with the scar of their wounds, which might heal in the body but never in the soul.

What about the men who inflicted those wounds? They have gone back to their mothers, wives, daughters and sisters with the calm of a storm that has spent its force. What will they do? Will they ever feel guilty for what they did? How will they cope with the love for their own women if the contorted face of their victims flash in their minds? Perhaps the rapists have a way to deal with it because they are different men. For the rest of us, it is hard to believe that they were men at all.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

## CROSS TALK

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Fashion. Rape is when the biological force field between a man and a woman is abruptly disrupted, and the sexual tension turns into a sudden confrontation. According to Greek mythology, even the gods in heaven could not avoid that confrontation. Zeus violated Leda while camouflaged as a swan and Europa in the guise of a bull. Poseidon raped Kainis of the horse-taming tribe.

Thus rape is unequal sex between two individuals when the ecstasy of one becomes injury to another. It is a crime, and it is a sin. It is also a kind of mental sickness,

body of its victim and turns it into a wasteland.

True, the atrocities of that night left behind two hundred wastelands, where shame and grief will stagnate for the rest of life. But ultimately that is the problem of those two hundred women and their few hundred relatives. For us, the rest of the society, the problem is the wanton liberty with which reckless men destroyed the last relics of decency. What made them think that Hindu women could be mass-raped because there was a change of government? Since when politics and profligacy came to this deadly

seminal fluid before those men could release their terrible rage!

Did those men come to rape because they wanted to hate, or did they come to hate because they wanted to rape? Libido and hatred are two of man's primal passions, and when they come together in the force of violating a woman, sex hurts with the impact of a catastrophe. It is difficult to tell whether those men discharged libido to dispense hatred, or it was the other way around. Did they go back lighter and relieved? One would probably think so. But what about those women who were hunted and dishonoured?

compensated with the gains of life, because it singled some very special in the hearts of those women. After all, in case the rapists of the world didn't realise, their victims are all made of flesh and blood and are no different from their own mothers, wives and sisters irrespective of caste, creed, race or religion.

To think of it, our society has lost something even more precious. It has lost its ability to stand on the high moral ground of civilisation where both gender and religion ought to get equal protection. Pierre Louys wrote in his novel *Aphrodite*

## OPINION

## At least say 'yes' for the minority

SANJOY BANERJEE

IT is indeed a matter of great regret and pain that all over the country tortures on minorities, especially Hindus, have been perpetrated more than any time before after the just-concluded eighth national parliamentary election. Minorities in the remote areas of the country are still being victimized by the opportunity seekers and local pressure groups, so to say, in the absence of any effective action by the administration.

It is sad that the present Bangladesh which was once, a land of peace and harmony has been metamorphosed now-a-days into a region of disharmony, and anxiety for the minority people. The seed of communalism and religious intolerance was perhaps first sowed in the subcontinent by Mr Mohammed Ali Zinnah. His two-nation theory which preached that Hindus and Muslims cannot live together helped so many opportunity seekers to embark on communal riots and numerous Hindus and Muslims who had lived together for centuries were killed. This part of the subcontinent was stained more by Hindu blood in the riots. It is known that about 37 per

cent of the total population of the then East-Bengal, when India was divided, was Hindu. But for being the members of 'minority community' and timid as such they only received dishonour, torture, rape and death; or left the country.

Days changed, time made Bangladesh an independent, sovereign state in 1971 by way of a war of liberation when a good number of Hindus and Muslims together embraced death for the liberty of the people with a view to establishing a democratic secular state. But the hard fact is that Bangladesh has moved away from the ideology on which it was founded. It is said every now and then that Bangladesh is a land of communal harmony; but, what is in speeches and papers, is just different from reality. Minorities are repressed almost everywhere in their day-to-day life. To escape teasing and disrespect, many married Hindu women do not wear vermilion and conch-bangles on their head and hands as is their ritual. In the BCS viva voce, once a Hindu candidate was asked how many houses he had in India, how many relatives there, etc. Are these the questions to be asked in a public service commission examination?

Not only this, there are other cases of embarrasment, too.

Unfortunately, often it is found that in Waz-Mahfils and Khutbahs at Juma prayers divisions between Hindus and Muslims are preached. If a man cannot think another person of different ideology as a friend and a man like him, how can he be a seeker of welfare for the greater humanity? One of the significant causes that works behind minority torture at present is the use of religion and religious sentiment in politics and election. Of course there are many who believe in equal rights and honour for all but there are also a considerable number of others who are apparently anti-Hindu or think Hindus as lesser beings. This mind set must change for a harmonious society.

There are several kinds of tortures which the minorities had to experience after the Jatitya Sangsad election. In Barisal, Bhola, Bagerhat, Satkhira, Natore, Naogaon, Gazipur, Magura, Faridpur, Chittagong and in many remote areas of the countries, the terrorists with the silent support of the local administration created panic in the minority areas and are still doing what they can. At

Daulatkhana Upazilla of Bhola district, it was reported in many daily newspapers that the minorities hang white papers on their windows writing "Do whatever you wish, we have lost the language of protest". In many business places where Hindus deal with good amount of money transactions, they are asked to give "demanded money" to the newly formed extortionist groups.

How touchy are the scenes! The most pitiful it seems when we find the Home Minister himself terming even the partial newspaper reports on minority repression as 'exaggerated', 'planned' and 'politically motivated'.

There are reports that hundreds of minority families have fled to India, and many are getting themselves prepared to leave the land of their forefathers only to escape torture. Actually Bangladesh is a land of communal harmony as the Hindus and other minority groups never utter a single word to protest the unlawful actions taken against them for fear of further torture. It seems that they have been made habituated to tolerate everything repressive with their mouths shut. The other disheartening thing is that the tortured minority often do not

find many from the society and virtually none from the government to their help, as it happened this time. Rather, many local pressure groups with tacit help of the administration are compelling the afraid Hindus to say 'everything is OK' to the media hiding their tear in their aching breast.

When one of tortured youth says they are being shown '71 as they did not see it, it is felt that the motherland itself is crying. When another says that there are only three options before them first, to protect themselves by their own efforts, second, to leave the country and third, to be converted as Muslims, it is felt that they are usurped of the real option, the right to live in own country. They ask what should they do? The answer lies with the government. It must take immediate measures to save the minority community, especially the Hindus, from torture and fear. And to do it, first the government say 'yes' i.e. should admit the facts of torture, repression, arson, rape and also killing of minority citizens of the country.

The writer is a college teacher.

## Our hope and expectation

MOHAMMED IDRIS

THE Cabinet has been formed, the portfolios distributed and the eighth parliament went into session, thereby concluding all the trapping of the ceremony. While the people do not expect the wonder of a magic wand from the new government, they certainly look forward to seeing it gets cracking not in a slow-coach fashion.

As it regularly features in the local dailies that the activists of the party in power have resorted to grabbing markets, bus stands, toll collection from traders and business houses, kidnapping, raping, terrorising minorities, subjecting houses of worship to sacrilege and attacking even police stations for the release of other activists arrested on charge of criminal offences, it appears that we are going back to square one, to say the least.

I am sure, these incidents as reported in the newspapers have not escaped the eye of the government which according to my personal conjecture should take swifter action before it goes out of control, because those so called activists of the party in power would then

become emboldened as they would begin to feel that they are beyond the reach of the long arms of law.

The eighth parliament election would have driven home a clear point to all the political parties that the people are not gullible to media propaganda because they judge facts by what is happening on the ground. Therefore, I should like to say in all humility that what is very much expected of the newly elected government is to deliver goods and not any more rhetoric which we have had enough over the period.

The plan and programme of the government is expected to be people oriented and may not be aimed at harping on what the previous government did or did not, because the new government has been voted to do what the previous government failed to do.

We feel happy to note that the present government has identified the gray areas of the national issues which, if earnestly and readily addressed, can pull the nation out of the quagmire. The finance minister and the home minister seem to have correctly identified that until and unless the economy and the law and order situation are addressed, little development can be brought about

for the development of our country.

Whatever we might talk about foreign investment, remittance from Bangladeshis abroad, nothing will make them come forward unless they find stability and security in the country. Some of the loud thinking of the government with regard to revitalizing the economic, social, industrial, health, housing and employment sectors sounds encouraging though. Therefore, the prime task of the government should be to translate it into action at all cost.

Needless to say that ours is one of the poorest countries in the world and is plagued with problems which should be attended to with devotion, duty, setting order of priority free from any prejudice. It is therefore, urged that above all Prime Minister Khaleida Zia should bare in mind that she will have to burn the midnight oil to solve the myriad problems confronting the nation and she should not be daunted by any obstacles.

It is expected that, she should be above self and would not allow herself to come under the influence of anyone or sentiment or emotion which should not find place in handling the state craft.