

A test-case for ruling party sincerity

Strong-arm tactic at Araihaazar condemned

THE reports of vengeful rampage and plunder at 25 AL sympathising households in Araihaazar by armed ruling party elements have unfortunately tarred the government's image. But for those incidents, the government would have been spared the embarrassment of the adverse publicity it's having to face now. Inexplicably, the disease called vendetta exaction from political opponents lingers on like blood feud running through generations of tribal war-lords even after a little under four months have elapsed since the October 1 general election. Why must a winning party even unwittingly allow its enthusiasts to go overboard with any reprisal against who supported whom during the election when its chief mental satisfaction ought to come from the very convincing success it has achieved at the polls. Who has ever heard of a victor being 'reactionary', a reaction overkill that is normally attributed to the vanquished party?

There has been law enforcement failure at different stages centring around the developments in the Araihaazar case. To begin from the end-point, despite SOS calls sent to the Araihaazar police station, only 7-8 kms from the scene of occurrence, during the 5-hour-long mayhem on 25 households the police arrived on the spot half an hour after the raid had ended. Secondly, Mannan, the UP member (elected since 1964 without a break) and a strong sympathiser of AL had made a GD entry with the local thana as early as on December 11 seeking protection from a likely attack on him and members of his family.

The area was also rife with speculations of a coming danger. Yet the police or the local administration evidently failed to take precautionary measures to ward off the violence.

It is learnt, the local AL leader Mannan had carried out a vendetta mission against BNP activists following the AL victory in the 1996 polls. But to say that Mannan was being paid back in his coin is an argument we have to reject out of hand. It is because of the AL misrule and high-handedness that it has been forced out of power by a popular verdict. So, the BNP better take the cue from there and in accord with popular sentiments bring about the change that the people had voted them for. A new government was voted to power to run the country better and not to take revenge or settle old scores.

Araihaazar is a test-case they must pass in their own interest.

Khatib's unsolicited remarks

Appropriate action called for

ONCE again Bangladeshi culture is under the threatening scrutiny of obscurantism. The Khatib of the Baitul Muqarram mosque has questioned the validity of observing the Bengali new year, Pehela Baisakh. Such questions were also raised by the Pakistani in 1947 and thereafter. Bengalis were considered lesser Muslims, which the Khatib has also implied. Its obvious that in the last fifty years the situation hasn't changed in the eye of the bigoted.

Considering that the statement was made not only from the main -- read official -- Eid gathering in the country and was attended by the President of the republic himself, one wonders why his remarks were not called in question officially at the appropriate time. Although we understand it has stirred the hornet's nest some reprimand against the Khatib's unsolicited and irrelevant remarks would have somewhat made up for the lapse.

When the observance of the Bengali new year is put under a question mark in a country which is built around certain well-established cultural ethos, the matter is not just serious but fundamentally brings religion into a conflict with culture.

The Khatib of the Baitul Muqarram mosque isn't holding a personal job and nor is he a free lance *Mawlana* doing *Waz* on payment. He represents the government and the people and his pulpit belongs to the state. His statements carry the weight of the state and that these cannot be passed off as the remarks of an ignoramus cleric.

In the past, such belittling of the Bengali culture led to the political crisis, which still haunts the region. We must not allow religion to be pitted against culture when the two had co-existed nicely in our midst for centuries.

We condemn the Khatib's remarks and demand an effective deterrence against such irresponsible utterances in the future.

Afghan tragedy: A lesson for caution

C M MURSHED

YEARS of war has reduced a fiercely independent nation to a nation of refugees within and without their country. Rabindranath Tagore's short story (1892) poignantly described the Afghan character of childlike simplicity and a fierce sense of dignity and Islamic identity. Sadly the Afghanistan bag is now totally empty.

We may recall Tagore's Kabuliwala's reaction to being called an "infidel" as also the reaction of two Pathans who travelled to Calcutta from N.W.F.P. of the then British India and murdered the publisher of a book which printed a portrait of Prophet Mohammed (SM). More recently, an Afghan Culture Minister Mohammed Habibi was attacked in Parliament in Kabul because an Afghan newspaper the "Anees" criticized the Prophet.

Since the time of publication of Huntington's celebrated article in the summer 1993 issue of "Foreign Affairs," conflicts all over the world have been explained in terms of clashes of civilisation. Although the then government and the people of Afghanistan had very little prior knowledge of, or involvement in, the tragic events of September 11 (other than providing accommodation to an Arab guest who originally was inducted at the behest of the US to fight the Soviets), these hapless people have been drawn into a collision between Islam and the West.

However that may be, the conflict would now appear to be coming to an end, and the resultant focus of the world's attention to Afghanistan may provide an opportunity to rectify the wrongs done to this unfortunate country over the last several decades.

From the time King Zahir Shah's 40-year reign was ended in 1973 by his cousin and brother-in-law Mohammed Daud, this country has perpetually been in a state of tur-

social progress. Apart from the Soviets, the world passed by this 'non country' because this landlocked hostile territory had little known resources or strategic location to be of interest to the neo colonial powers.

The indigenous people now numbering anything between 20-25 million (no census has apparently ever been taken) are 100 per cent Muslim. The Afghan population remains relatively low in an other-

groups. Farsi and Pushtoo are the most widely used languages with Farsi being the second language of all other ethnic groups including the northern group who speak a form of Turkic language.

Historically Afghanistan was an isolated country sandwiched between the British Indian and the Russian empires and kept itself at arm's length from both the imperial powers. Amir (Ruler) Abdur Rahman (1880-1901) agreed to the

process of modernisation had an unfortunate set back not dissimilar to that of Reza Shah Pahlavi in later years in Iran. Afghanistan was not yet ready for the great leap forward into the modern world.

The UN who are now attempting to establish some form of order would do well to remember the point of history and social development at which Afghanistan and its people are presently at. They are still mostly nomadic pastoral tribes with

There is however a system of governance which is unique to Afghanistan, that of the Loya Jirga, the council of tribal elders. That used to advise the King as and when needed. Historically the decisions of the Loya Jirga were always upheld by all tribes. A government built around the Loya Jirga may be the only answer to the future of Afghanistan. Unfortunately, most members of the Loya Jirga are unlikely to be more enlightened than Mollah Omar.

Initial cracks have already emerged in the recent accord signed in Bonn and although the Pastoon leader Hamid Karzai appears to have the allegiance of a majority of the disparate tribes, care must be taken to prevent local war lords from emerging and creating their own spheres of influence. The process of unification must necessarily take place through the distribution of common economic benefits equitably distributed through a system of equality of opportunity, freedom of economic enterprise and social justice.

It must be remembered that the Afghans are a fiercely independent people. Any attempt to impose Western values and systems may meet with the same sad fate of the British Regiment who went to Kabul by road last century, but had to retreat leaving bodies of their soldiers killed by snipers scattered in the valleys and mountainsides of Afghanistan.

C M Murshed is a former Ambassador of Bangladesh to Afghanistan.

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moil. The relentless changes in government since 1973 involving assassinations and power struggles were brought about mainly on account of the fact that the Afghans were left to their own devices. Complete neglect by Western powers and the lack of understanding by peripheral neighbours of the point of history and social development (nomadic pastoral with little settled agriculture) at which the people of Afghanistan had arrived also contributed to the Afghan fiasco.

The Soviet misadventure (1979-89) also did nothing towards providing a stable political base and environment for enabling economic and

wise high birth rate country as periodic depopulation is brought about by frequent internecine wars, malnutrition and disease.

The ethnic divide among the Afghan population also remains a demographic reality, as there is very little internal migration or population movement. There has not been much intermixing of tribes and as such the country remains divided along the tribal lines. There are four main ethnic groups in Afghanistan -- the Pushtuns, the Tajiks, the Uzbeks and the Hazaras. The Pushtuns who number about 50 per cent of the total, populate the southern portion of the country and are by far the most advanced of the four ethnic

British supervision over foreign affairs in return for a subsidy and non-interference in local affairs.

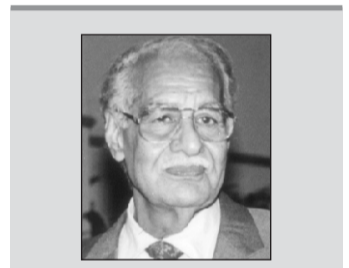
This Amir developed a doctrine of Royal Authority after defeating his rivals in Kandahar and Herat thus achieving nominal unification. Although the system of Jirgas, meeting of tribal elders, was maintained, the Amir rejected tribal elections as too restrictive of royal prerogatives. He claimed that he ruled by divine right and not as a leader of a confederacy of ethnic tribes.

The subsequent reigns of Habibullah and Amanullah also consolidated the monarchy but Amanullah's desire to "fast forward"

little settled agriculture. Religion, although a common denominator among the tribes, was never a base for national unity. The only unifying factor, the Divine Monarchy, was done away with when Zahir Shah was removed.

Experiments with democracy and socialism have ended in tragedies and in almost total destruction of whatever economic and social structures the poor impoverished country had built during the period under monarchy. A revolving presidency among the tribes also proved to be unsuccessful for the former President Burhanuddin Rabbani refused to hand over power after the completion of his term.

Things can fall apart



KULDIP NAYAR writes from New Delhi

INDIA and Pakistan are coming too close to confrontation for anyone's comfort. One chilling example is New Delhi's demarche to Islamabad after the attack by terrorists on the Parliament House and the latter's curt reply that it was a stage-managed show.

The two have traded similar accusations in the past whether it was an attempt to blow up the state assembly building at Srinagar, the intrusion into the Red Fort or the killing of Sikhs at Chitapura in Kashmir. What is alarming is the heightening of shrillness and exasperation in statement and counter-statement. The Pervez Musharraf government is probably not conscious of the wide support the Atal Behari Vajpayee government would have if it were to pursue the terrorists on the Pakistan territory. People in India find New Delhi "ineffective" and want it to act. Voices for restraint and caution are getting feeble. Pakistan gives an impression of turning over a new leaf after being an accomplice of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The government's fight against fundamentalists may also have a ring of authenticity because it has silenced the big guns of religious organisations by putting them behind bars. The action against the madrasas has some credibility. Yet there is no doubt that Pakistan is the

breeding place for terrorist organisations like the Laskar-e-Toiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Harkat-ul-Ansar and Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, particularly the first two, which have killed people in India and attacked different places.

They operate from Pakistan, their headquarters. America may have been able to put pressure on President Musharraf to close down training camps. But their operation is over in Afghanistan, not in other

unarmed watch and ward staff? The allegation is too ridiculous for words. Stories cannot be concocted to cover up their crime. Pakistan press secretary Rashid Qureshi, who was irresponsible in his immediate reaction, sounds better when he says that India should not jump to conclusions "without even a preliminary inquiry." New Delhi's report is that it was a joint operation by the Jaish-e-Mohammed and the

he should not be afraid of them. He should cultivate in his country the liberal lobby which would be strengthened if he denounced the terrorist groups. Even otherwise, how un-Islamic were those who planned and participated in the December 13 attack, which was during the Ramadan, a holy month? The fast of Ramadan is the most carefully observed of all religious duties by Muslims. Not

organised on the basis of Bonapartism and feudalism.

Pakistan must face the fact that things can go out of hand if it conives at the activities of such terrorists who are working against India and find a way out to deal with them in their own territory. The supply of arms, training or money in the name of religion is divisive. Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was the point during her recent visit to India and she said she would stop

said that all those who sheltered terrorists, supported them or even indirectly helped them would not be spared. America's or, for that matter, the West's fight was confined to Afghanistan the Taliban and their guide, Osama-bin Laden. The surrender of the Taliban has more or less ended the job of America and its allies.

They are now concentrating on locating Osama. That ends their war against terrorism, although they continue to go over the exercises and say that the war would go on. Washington has not lifted even a finger to follow up the attack on Parliament. What has happened to the resolve? Does terrorism have different connotation for Americans and Indians? It is a pity that Islamabad, which has been let down by Washington many a time, does not understand that the latter's support is for selfish reasons.

It is interested only in itself, how to ensure that the world stays unipolar. See how it has withdrawn unilaterally from the 1972 anti-ballistic missile treaty? Pakistan should have tried to span the distance with India. Instead, Islamabad is doing its best to stay close to Washington. It is a temporary gain because in the process America is extending itself in the region, much to the dislike of China and Russia. In the immediate future, Pakistan's attitude may spoil the possibility of talks between the two sides at the time of the SAARC summit in the first week of January. The bitterness between the two countries may not allow any leeway. Still a dialogue between the two may clear the dirt a bit. Even a bit is much needed in an atmosphere which is fraught with danger.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

USA is interested only in itself, how to ensure that the world stays unipolar. See how it has withdrawn unilaterally from the 1972 anti-ballistic missile treaty? Pakistan should have tried to span the distance with India. Instead, Islamabad is doing its best to stay close to Washington. It is a temporary gain because in the process America is extending itself in the region, much to the dislike of China and Russia... The bitterness between India and Pakistan may not allow any leeway. Still a dialogue between the two may clear the dirt a bit. Even a bit is much needed in an atmosphere which is fraught with danger.

countries. Some training camps are reportedly operating from new sites. And then there is the omnipresent ISI (Inter Services Intelligence). The five terrorists who attacked Parliament are not only Pakistani nationals but also belong to one of the organisations functioning from Pakistan. In fact, the general atmosphere in that country is so anti-India from schools to the highest institutions that the liberals have become a rare commodity there. Musharraf, if he is serious, has to change the very environment. But he looks like using the terrorists for one purpose and denouncing them for another. On top of it comes Islamabad's statement that New Delhi has stage-managed the attack.

Was the number of casualties pre-determined, both on the side of the armed terrorists and the

Lashkar-e-Toiba at the behest of the ISI. A detailed report, supported by evidence, must have been sent to Pakistan and other countries which are watching the situation with concern. One should wait for more on the subject.

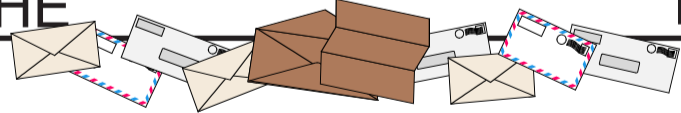
The unkindest remark by Musharraf is that India was out for a misadventure. As an unelected head of the state, he has to play to the gallery. But his warning of "dire consequences" sounds jingoistic. As a military man, he should know more than anyone else what war means, particularly for the countries which are so poor and so under-developed. His condemnation of the attack on Parliament is welcome but it makes little sense when he has not uttered a word against the Jaish-e-Mohammed and the Lashkar-e-Toiba. If he has really turned his back against them,

only must they refrain from all food and drink between dawn and dusk, but they must not commit any unworthy act. One lie can make a day's fast meaningless. How does the killing of nine innocent men of watch and ward and police fit into what the terrorists and their mentors did? Musharraf lacks popular support. He lacks the electoral backing which every ruler cherishes. The test may come next year when Pakistan has to return to democracy under the orders of the Supreme Court. Pakistan may not turn into a democratic polity. The army has too much stake in the policy Pakistan pursues. Even otherwise, the army in a third world country seldom returns to the barracks if it once tastes power. It is worse in Pakistan because there authoritarianism is woven deeply in the warp and woof of society as it is

cross-border terrorism if she were to return to power Washington's reaction to the attack on Parliament is obvious but it does not come as a surprise to those who have followed its political history in the last few decades.

It has always talked of democracy but has supported and sustained the most undemocratic regimes for its temporary gains. America has done more harm to democracy than all the undemocratic countries put together. As if it is a laid down rehearsal, it condemned the attack. But when it came to standing up and be counted, Secretary of State Collin Powell warned India against taking any action. Within hours of the carnage in New York and Washington on September 11, President Bush announced war against terrorism throughout the world. He

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



Please spend on emergencies first

On November 23, Foreign Minister M Murshed Khan declared in Chittagong that in near future the government will construct a memorial monument near the Kalurghat Radio Station in remembrance of the declaration of independence of Bangladesh by Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman and that would cost 100 crore Taka.

The historic declaration of independence in 1971 by Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman is still has an intense impact on people but in the current economic situation of our country, would it be wise to spend such a large amount of money to build a monument? There are many sectors, which are in dire need of money. The government must amend these problems first and when the economical condition becomes stable, the government may go ahead with such plans.

We believe that if it were possible for Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman to know about the memorial monument at Kalurghat, he would have definitely disapproved it. We want to bring it to the notice of the Prime Minister and hope that she will take the right decision.

Nur Jahan Chittagong

Lifting security: A right decision

The Jatiya Sangsad has scrapped the law providing lifelong state security for the former PM Sheikh Hasina and her sister Sheikh Rehana. Police will take the charge of the security of Hasina and I think it is sufficient.

Though, Special Security Forces always guard the VIPs, the whole act is a luxury for a poor country like Bangladesh.

Why should there be special security for Sheikh Rehana? I don't think bodyguards have saved anybody's life anywhere in the world. And Sheikh Rehana was never a member of the Jatiya Sangsad. Police and other security forces are enough to provide security for her. The JS has taken a proper decision.

Md Abdullah Chowdhury
Mirar Maidan, Sylhet

Trees and our environment

Gautam Buddha had told the mankind thousands of years ago that, "The tree is a peculiar organism of unlimited kindness. Kindness and benevolence that makes no demand, for its sustenance, and extends generously the products of

its life activity. It affords protection to all beings, offering shade even to the woodcutter who destroys it."

The carbon dioxide in the air, which is produced by the burning of petroleum and diesel, from the trucks, cars and baby-taxis are polluting the air. As of today the traffic police and also others have to wear gas masks. Our water bodies are poisoned, including the Buriganga. It is our friend the trees that absorb the carbon dioxide in the air.

The wake up calls of late Dr Mahiuddin Faroque, Prof Serajul Islam Chowdhury and others have failed to wake us up from our slumber.

Shahabuddin Mahtab
Dhaka

USA visa policy

Recently the USA has introduced a new rule for visa for the 25 Muslim countries. In this new rule, if any citizen from these countries between 16 years to 45 years seek visa for the USA, he/she has to enter his/her personal details for FBI scrutiny. FBI shall scrutinise the respective furnished information in their own checklist to see whether the applicant is a terrorist or a wanted accused.

Besides, the applicant shall have to fill-up a long questionnaire on

whether he/she had served in the armed forces or he/she had a training on arms operating, which country he/she visited/travelled etc. If, which is convinced/satisfied and approved his application then the candidate will get a visa. It requires more than 20 days.

It is no doubt that it is an extra bother and cause of annoyance for the visa seekers. Taking such stringent step for the Muslims particularly by the USA government is not consistent with the universal declaration of human rights and the USA's own policy. Rather it is disgraceful for the Muslims. Though it is not revealed publicly yet in real sense the USA has taken a parochial view against the Muslims by introducing this law. We strongly denounce this double standard policy of the US government and urge them to scrap this law.

M.H. Bari
Khulna

Unfair US administration

The US administration is shamelessly blaming Yasser Arafat for his failure to control terrorism committed by Hamas and in this way justifying the Israeli attack. During the Intefadddah the number of innocent Palestinian civilians killed by Israeli

forces is much higher than those of Israelis killed by the Hamas. I admit Hamas people should not kill the Israeli civilian but my point is that if killing by Hamas is considered as terrorism, why the US Administration is not considering killing of Palestinian civilians as terrorism?

In fact Palestine is being controlled by the Israeli army and if the US administration have honesty and common sense they should blame Israel instead of blaming Yasser Arafat for terrorism in the region. Should people of the world believe the definition of terrorism in written the Quran and in the Bible or the definition given by the US administration whose activities serves the interest of arms merchants?

Dr. Mahboob Hossain
The University of Asia Pacific, Dhaka

Naming culture

I find it quite amazing that Finance Minister Saifur Rahman finds it a valuable use of his time to go around changing the names of bridges. The sole intent of the renaming is to spite the Awami League.

The mature thing would be to leave the names as they are and

build more bridges and name those as he may wish.

MA, on e-mail

Student politics

As our politicians failed to rise to the occasion at the right moment when it needed most and also the people were not aware of their rights the student community came forward and played major and leading roles in the past, 1952 Language Movement, mass upsurge in 1969, movement for Independence in 1971 and anti-autocracy movement in 1990 are the perfect examples. Till 1990 the students lead politics for the betterment and welfare of the people and society.

After that the situation had considerably changed. Now in the name of student politics they indulge in terrorism, extortion, capturing residential halls, snatching tenders, etc.

Educational institutions turned into battlefields as well as places for the terrorists. Moreover, they become the lackeys of the major political parties. Once the political leaders played with the people, as they like now it's not to be. The people are more aware of what their rights are. So they cannot be fooled by the political leaders as they did before. The 1991, 1996 and 2001 elections showed the people are

politically more conscious than before. So we do not need to depend entirely on students community as we did before. The students will protest whenever they see wrongdoing in the society but it does not necessarily mean that they should do active politics shunning education.

If student politics mean might is right, becoming lackeys of the political parties doing anti-social activities and destroying educational atmosphere then it should be banned.

Iqbal Ahmed
Dhaka

Tax treaty with the US

Non-resident aliens from countries with which the United States has a tax treaty agreement can exclude some or all of their income from Federal Income Tax withholding under the terms of the tax treaty between their country of residence and the U.S. These tax treaties may provide to non-resident aliens exemptions from federal income tax payable on wages, scholarships/fellowship grants, and independent personal services. Student exemptions from withholding of income tax for personal services exist for several countries but are limited to specific dollar amounts per calendar year.

Unfortunately, unlike India, China and most other countries, Bangladesh don't have this treaty with the U.S. Students and other non-resident aliens from Bangladesh are paying more taxes. A tax treaty between Bangladesh and United States can save Bangladeshi expatriates a huge sum of money. This will not only help students live a better life in the U.S. but will also allow all expatriate Bangladeshis in the U.S. to spare more money for their relatives back home. This in turn will help boost our economy to some extent.

To my understanding, this is not a complicated job for our government. Only some paperwork has to be completed with the federal government. Also I came to know that some work in this context have already been done last January in Washington D.C.

I hail our newly elected government for creating a new ministry for the expatriate Bangladeshis. I hope that the honourable State Minister Kamrul Islam will take appropriate initiative to sign the tax treaty with the U.S.

ASF Wahed
North Carolina, USA