

## Government's commendable action

Let the matter be pursued to the end

**I**n a major change of emphasis, the BNP leadership has clamped down on a very important party figure Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu. He combined in himself the diabolic image of a president of JCD central committee and the recently-earned honours of an elected MP to have reached a high water mark of invincibility. Hardly was he apprehensive that he could be dashed from that high ground yet he has been by one fell stroke. He was arrested day before yesterday on charges of attempted snatching of documents of a bankrupt company's property which had been put on auction.

An intrepid operator and a charmer of sorts with an endless faith in his ability to wriggle through dead-ends, Nasiruddin's appetite for power and money grew all the time astride his mounting ego. Given the dependency relationship between our national political parties and their student wings, in good times and bad, student leaders would be blue-eyed boys of their mentors once their promise and talent have been in evidence. With an exaggerated sense of self-importance in no time would they be seen to wield power over the head of senior leaders of the principal political party. Still cultivated, pampered and accosted to be on this or that side of the party fences, student leaders have been seen to metamorphose into law unto themselves, a power within power in the atomic sense of the term.

Nasiruddin Pintu had been the epitome of unalloyed student power when the axe came falling on him for the first time as Prime Minister and BNP chief Khaleda Zia ordered the central committee of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), which Pintu headed, temporarily dissolved. But he was to be soon taken onboard to participate in the national election as a BNP candidate presumably on a promise of good conduct. He defeated a formidable Awami League candidate like Haji Selim hands down and his image within the BNP grew as his self-esteem increased manifold.

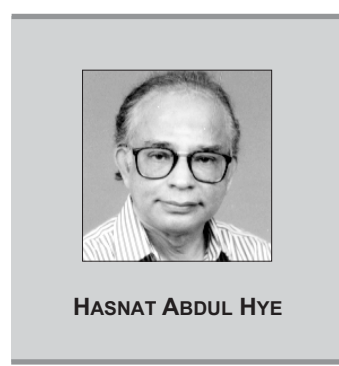
At that point who would have thought that he would be up to his old antics -- lead the scandalous MP hostel occupation drive, and as has happened to be his unmaking latterly, snatch the auction papers that brought him a month's detention under the Special Powers Act?

By moving against one of the most powerful elements of the party's youthful segment, the ruling BNP has sent strong signals to several quarters, all at the same time. Those who have been waiting in the sidescrines to follow Pintu's footsteps must abandon the plan now. The police should now feel sure-footed in dealing with criminals claiming immunity linkages to the party in power. A message must also go out to the opposition Awami League that since the ruling party has begun a house-cleaning operation, the AL could not afford to lag behind in this.

But all of those things would only be ensured provided the government go through with the Pintu case and see to it that the legal process is completed against him. There could be lobbying against any firm handling of the case on the pretext that Pintu's weeding out could mark a demoralisation within the JCD ranks. Our counsel to the government will be that under no circumstances should it be dissuaded from the course it has embarked on.

This is the single most important public enthusing action the government has taken by way of upholding the rule of law. Begum Zia needs to go the whole hog with it to complete the internal clean-up operation. Pintu is not alone; far from it, there are several more of his ilk to be proceeded against for any good to BNP and national politics to happen. Let's get on with that longish business.

## The year that was



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

**V**ERY soon it will be a year lost to eternity. But it will not be a year that simply was because of the calendar. Year 2001 is not like any other year. It is the first year of the century and the beginning of the millennium. But even these distinctions would not have been sufficient to etch it deep in memory and make it historic. It is what happened during the year with cataclysmic effects and what was ushered in incrementally thereafter that will confer the emblem of the extra-ordinary.

Even before the bubbles were cleared and the dust settled on the devastated sites of twin towers in New York and the ravaged Pentagon building few had any doubt that the suicide attacks would go down in history as the defining events of the century. The consequences of the horrendous carnage were both predictable and unforeseen. Utter shock, outrage and condemnation from all walks of life in almost all countries were instantaneous. The world united in sharing the grief and loss of America. But while condemnation against the heinous crime was pouring forth some people, both in America and outside, ventured to figure out the underlying causes of the diabolical attacks. Explanations ranged from hatred and deep-set grievances against some aspects of American foreign policy to the grand theory of 'clash of civilizations'. While both of these analyses were more or less underplayed in policy making in the West their relevance were not totally brushed aside. After initial outbursts of anger on both sides of Atlantic retaliatory action zeroed in on wanton terrorism. Since the suicide

attacks deprived innocent civilians of life and freedom these came to be seen as crime against humanity, an interpretation that steered clear of racial and religious divide. Even before evidence of complicity were made widely available a powerful coalition of countries was forged together on the basis of prima facie facts. Terrorism was seen as a common enemy and countries felt morally compelled to join the coalition. Some countries resented the either or choice presented in the

turn grudgingly accepted the fact that America's security concerns may indeed require a 'Star war' type missile shield in supercession of the ABM treaty. Post-Eleven September saw other changes in the equations underlying the international balance of power. Pakistan, which was almost treated as an outcast, was suddenly vigorously wooed as a valued ally by America reviving memories of the earlier anti-Russian Afghan campaign. Its strategic importance as a frontline

proved once again the cardinal truth there being no permanent friend or foe. In an unipolar world this truth may come to prevail at various stages in course of time making it the long-term legacy of the terrorist attack.

The terrorist attack of 11th September saw in its aftermath a feeble and marginalized role of the UN in maintaining peace and preventing conflict. Its General Assembly failed to come up with a universally acceptable definition of terrorism.

The immediate change in geopolitics after the terror attacks has been the routing of the terror network in Afghanistan. The fall of the undemocratic regime there is undoubtedly a victory for those who had lost these fundamental rights, particularly women. But the legality of the war against Taliban regime and the ethics of using cluster bombs ruthlessly as 'means' will be debated by some irrespective of the higher moral ground of the 'end'. Among other beneficial fall outs of

where in the world will also call for international attention with greater urgency. Willy nilly the big powers will be sucked into these emergencies ignoring the objection of the concerned countries about their being internal issues making the massacre of 11th September a watershed in conflict resolution. If such peace initiatives are conducted outside the UN as they are likely to be the role of the world body will be further reduced.

Before 11th September America was receding further and further into isolationism contradicting its role as the sole superpower. It withdrew from the coalition of countries committed to implement the Kyoto Protocol on global warming. Its stand on the Convention on Biological weapons was in conformity with this go-alone policy. The terror attacks on 11th September was a rude wake up call for inward looking America. It lost no time in mobilizing world opinion and building a global coalition to combat terrorism. If this opening up of American foreign policy spreads over other areas of global concerns the death and destruction wreaked on its land by terrorists will be seen in a different light.

In waging war against terrorism America has resorted to extraordinary legal measures that militate against rule of law and equality of rights cherished by her. Detention and interrogation of people without citing reasons and trial by tribunals bypassing due process of law may be justified only as emergency measures, if at all. But when these are backed up by permanent laws America will cease to be a country of equal rights and liberty for all. If the greatest democracy of the world is humbled and compelled to renounce its vaunted ideals and reduced to behave like a third world 'police state' this may fulfil one of the intended goals of the terrorists. It will be even more invidious if the draconian laws are meant for specially targeted groups of her citizens. The defining event of 2001 has thrown up challenges to the terrorists and the peace loving world in equal measure.

HasnatAbdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist and economist.

## IN MY VIEW

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rhetoric of the western leaders and asserted independence taking a natural stance. These countries did not like to be browbeaten and blackmailed and said so publicly. Even countries most sympathetic and morally indignant over the attacks felt that the utterances of the American public figures could be more mature, tactful and statesman like.

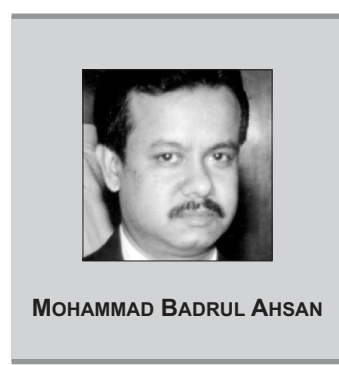
The coalition across the globe saw some strange bedfellows. Russia and China who had not been bickering with America on various issues of security closed ranks and allied with the sole superpower in the campaign against terror. Both the countries having internal uprising and guerilla war by minority ethnic groups found it expedient to join the coalition in the hope of broadening the definition of terrorism. In the short run both were rewarded by tacit approval of their on going mini civil wars even when such actions involved violation of human rights. The West ceased taking up issues with Russia for its excesses in Chechnia. Russia in

state upstaged the sanctions imposed earlier for its Prometheus like audacity in unlocking the key to nuclear power. In exchange for wholehearted support and permission to use land and air spaces for military operation Pakistan was given economic rewards that included rescheduling and writing-off of bilateral loans and bail out measures by IMF. To assuage the hurt feelings of India benefit of withdrawal of sanctions were extended to both the arch-rivals. Never before was influence peddling and pressurizing backed by monetary incentives pursued so brazenly. But neither the flurry of diplomatic visits nor the ostensible even handed economic incentives could keep America's relation with the two sub-continental neighbours on an even keel. While Pakistan lurched forward with hope and trepidation about the continuation of American support India muttered in grievance. All these changes in bilateral and multilateral relations

Armed attacks by dissidents and subjugated people have been considered as justified by quite a few countries which have sought to introduce the element of moral relativism in defining terrorism. On this score even the attitude of some of the big powers appears ambivalent. As a result, the international coalition against terror is not likely to be used to put down 'terrorism' in its widest manifestation. Being decided by the arbiters of right and wrong in international affairs such labeling will be selective. This discretionary role by big powers is going to be the underside of the campaign against terror in the long run. In their aftermath the terror attacks of 11th September have thus seen both the high points of moral rectitude and prevarication. The heinous crime committed by the suicide terrorists may have thrown the world into greater uncertainty and may have paved the way for more arbitrariness in tackling acts of terror.

the terror attack is the unfolding international commitment to help Afghanistan develop economically within the framework of democratic institutions. It remains to be seen to what extent the interest of the western world lies in the political economy of oil and gas from central Asia and whether this is a mere concomitant of the orderly progress of the nation state of Afghanistan. Under other positive developments in the wake of the terror attacks in America Palestine may become an independent state sooner than would have been the case, otherwise. But the wide indulgence being given to Israel in the name of self defence against suicide attacks has started to take the shine off from this prospect raising doubts about whether the West mean what they said earlier about the creation of Palestine State. If Palestine continues to bleed and burn the 'clash of civilization' theory will continue to haunt the nervous and agitated minds alike. As in Palestine, struggle for self-determination and freedom else-

## One big void



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

**M**Y senior friend is pushing sixty, but he feels more lonely than old. He has been a bachelor all his life but he no longer wishes to confirm it. He wants to marry because he needs company, someone who will fill the air around him with the fragrance of perfume and scented oil. One day he went to do groceries with me, and bought fresh fish with the excitement of a great discovery. But then his face slumped because the maid was not going to come until next morning. The greatest tragedy of bachelors like him, he said, was that they seldom get to eat their fresh fish cooked freshly.

So he agreed that bachelors lived like kings, and died like dogs. In his sunset age, life is at the mercy of a maid, who cooks and cleans for him half a day. He eats his breakfast alone, seldom takes his lunch at home, and dinner is mostly refrigerated food heated in oven. The clothes are washed in laundries, except wet clothes from morning bath, which he scours, rinses and

hangs out to dry with his own hands. For most of his life he could not decide which of the two he needed more between a maid and a wife.

At the age of sixty, he feels like a farmer's produce past its shelf life. He desperately wants to marry, but nobody wants to know. He talks to friends, who listen to him with indifferent ears, and then smile as if they know they don't have to believe everything he says. Others joke that he wants to add a new position to

blows in his heart like the howling winds in desolate streets, the silence of graveyard resounding in the deep recess of his mind as loneliness echoes within loneliness. An old man who never marries is an emblem of double jeopardy. He at once represents life's fragility -- the brittleness of breath, and its futility -- the barrenness of body. The first streaks of gray hair, the first bag under the eyes, the wrinkles on the skin, the attack of presbyopia, blood pressure, bodyache, toothache,

may be old at few other places. He struggles against incontinence of the bladder, trembling hands, insomnia, dyslexia, depression and doubts. There are stains on his clothes, bed sheets, table clothes and upholstery, the stains, which are loud screams in the silence of the house that its occupant has been clumsily facing his daily chores.

My friend wants to get married because he wants to bring order in the chaos of his life. He wants to

more than the contact or anything else. Nights are long sufferings in the desolate bed where insomnia, loneliness and a miserable sense of wretchedness abuse him with terrible rudeness. And memories make it worse as he tosses and turns in bed under the impact of the past trying to unwind itself. The life of an old bachelor has all the elements of horror that frightens his soul between preparation for death and torments of deprivation. How he expects to fulfil his foregone expect-

living through a contradiction, he has all the time in the world at a time of his life when time is the most precious thing.

There is a time for everything in life, time for the flowers and time for the fruits. At sixty, it is the time for the fruits, but my friend wants to talk about the flowers. He wants to find cosmetics on his dressing table, female clothes in his wardrobe, female undergarments in the bathroom, strands of long hair on the bed and floors and in the sleeves of his shirts. He wants to watch someone taking off her earrings and necklace at night and then rubbing dollops of cream on her face and body lotion on hands and feet while marinating her lips in petroleum jelly before going to bed. My friend misses the other half of life at the end of his life, because he realizes that a man's heart is a haunted place if it is not inhabited by woman's love.

He insists that his friends introduced him to marriageable women, be they spinsters, widows or divorcees. They laugh at him and tell him that he is suffering from delusions that a man of his age ought to be thinking of God and life after death instead of woman and marriage. My friend is unfazed by the criticism, because if he has learned one thing in his long life that is not to believe that the critic is always the best judge of a situation.

What is the difference? He would retort. Life is one big void without one or the other.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

## CROSS TALK

**My friend misses the other half of life at the end of his life, because he realizes that a man's heart is a haunted place if it is not inhabited by woman's love. He insists that his friends introduced him to marriageable women, be they spinsters, widows or divorcees. They laugh at him and tell him that he is suffering from delusions that a man of his age ought to be thinking of God and life after death instead of woman and marriage. My friend is unfazed by the criticism, because if he has learned one thing in his long life that is not to believe that the critic is always the best judge of a situation.**

*Kamasutra*, that he wants to do it with one leg in the grave. Marriage is a ceremony of beginning which suits one in youth. Old age is the finality of life, sort of a curtain call for the show. It is the time of life when the end of the beginning and the beginning of the end come together in the twilight of destiny and death.

Alone one comes into this world and alone one goes away but now he realizes that marriage brings special effects to this lonesome experience. There is a void that

and prostrate gland, age corrodes into the existence of man step by step.

It is painful to grow old, but dreadful to grow old alone. My friend is worried at sixty not because he is old, but because he is lonely, his mind weakened before his body. American writer Helen Rowland writes in just that a bachelor somehow does not get over the idea that he is a thing of beauty and a boy forever. My friend would say that he is still young at heart although he

change it with the touch of a woman. He wants to come home to the smell of scented oil and perfume, and wake up in the morning to find a long-haired breathing body lying next to his. He pines to hear the jingle of glass bangles, the melody of female voice ringing in the house. It is not that he did not meet with women before or did not consort with them. But it was like an electric plug in a dead socket. All touch but no contact and no light.

In his old age he needs the light

tations in the face of the approaching end! My friend feels like someone who got hungry after the kitchen was closed.

"When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married", says a character in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. My friend never planned to die a bachelor or live till he was married. It just so happened that while he hesitated to take a decision time didn't wait for him. But now he is

## Russia and America: new partners in post-cold war era!

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

**D**RIVEN by its own national interests President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation has established a good personal rapport with the President of America George W Bush in the wake of September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington. This has been reflected in three-day summit meetings between the two Presidents in Washington and at President Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas. This was the first such visit by a European leader. Speaking at a joint press conference on 13 November both the Presidents emphasised on evolving dynamic nature of Russian-American relations transforming one of the hostility and suspicion to one based on cooperation and trust, which will enhance opportunities for peace and progress.

Ironically, it was the "war on terrorism" that brought the two sides closer, with President Putin

being the first world leader to call President Bush on 11 September, immediately after the attacks in New York and Washington. The bilateral relations between Russia and America in fact entered a new phase when President Putin signed on the international anti-terrorism coalition now waging war in Afghanistan. Historically, it turned out to be an interesting episode in international politics. In 1980's America piloted operation in getting recruited people from Islamic jihad and other groups of similar nature to go to Afghanistan to fight a war against the former Soviet Union and the present leaderships in Taliban groups are the product of that recruitment. Now the Russian Federation joined hands with America in fighting a war in Afghanistan. By delivering Central Asian Republics to anti-terrorism coalition, closing down an electronic spying centre in Cuba and a naval base in Vietnam and making strong overtures to NATO, President Putin practically demonstrated much

more cooperation than many traditional American allies.

Initially, Russia sought to stop America from using Central Asian bases for retaliatory attacks against terrorists in Afghanistan. But ultimately President Putin dropped his opposition to using the bases. This positive posture has resulted in the shift of the policy so far followed by America with regard to the problem of Chechens. With a view to improving relations with Russian Federation in exchange of intelligence information and logistics support to use Russian air and sea ports and airspace to conduct war in Afghanistan, America stopped criticising Russia for its violation of human rights in Chechnya. On the other hand, American leaders urged upon the leaders of the breakaway Republic to start dialogue with the leaders in Kremlin and cut off relations with international terrorist groups. Instead of stopping violation of human rights in Chechnya, authorities in Russian Federation accused Chechen freedom fight-

ers as terrorists, who are allegedly trained and financed by Osama bin Laden. It may be noted that America and many western countries loudly criticised what they said was Moscow's excessive use of force in the conflict. Human rights groups in recent weeks, however, criticised the West for softening their stance on Chechnya in exchange for support to an America-led bombing campaign in Afghanistan.

Here lies the diplomatic success for President Putin. As a result of these manoeuvres, a representative of breakaway Chechnya had face-to-face meeting on 18 November with Kremlin representative in Moscow for the first time in more than two years of war to bring peace in Chechnya. Since the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington, Russia has worked hard to present Chechnya as a key front in the global battle against terrorism, according to a report published in *The Wall Street Journal* of 5-6 October, 2001. The meeting

between representatives of Chechnya and Kremlin took place because President Putin wants to remove an obstacle to have closer ties with the West. On the other hand, the landing of American troops, war planes and other logistic paraphernalia in Central Asia indicates geopolitical revolution of global nature. Apart from using their huge oil and gas resources, the Central Asia will be useful platform for America to contain influence of Iran and Pakistan. These countries also feel insecure because of Russia and seek to avoid dependence on Russia. Only Tajikistan in the region maintains alliance with Moscow, and Russian troops are based there. Another country, Turkmenistan, however, adheres to its official status of neutrality.

America, meanwhile, has initiated action with a view to improving relations dramatically with the countries of Central Asia. The State Department has already moved to set aside the ban on

providing military aid to Azerbaijan, which is providing overflight rights, airbases and critical intelligence information in combatting terrorism. Despite a bad record of human rights the State Department recommended aid to Uzbekistan. In this connection, it may be noted that Unocal, a giant oil company from California had established contact in mid 90's with Taliban government in Afghanistan to construct a massive pipeline system across Afghanistan connecting the vast oil and natural gas reserves of Turkmenistan to a plant and Karachi port in Pakistan and Taliban government was assured of \$100 million a year for offering the transit facility, but because of strong opposition from different quarters including women community undergoing humiliating treatment in Afghanistan the project was abandoned. Now this project will be implemented.

There are simmering campaigns in Moscow against President Putin for allowing the

stationing of American troops in Central Asia. The Head of Parliament's defence committee, who was a former Deputy Chief of General Staff, Andrei Nikolayev, voiced criticism of Putin's decisions and said "if [American troops] they're there for the short term, then we can accept that. But if they've gone there for good, then that's bad. What would the US think if we moved into Mexico?"

President Putin and President Bush strengthened the relations between the two countries since their first meeting in Slovenia in June, but sticking points remain. These are: [1] Russia is still resisting the NATO expansion into eastern Europe; [2] There has been no compromise on America's missile defence shield. However, there have been positive developments on arms control. President Bush announced that America would cut the number of its operationally deployed nuclear weapons over the next ten years by two thirds, to between 1,700 and

2,200. America, on the other hand, offered certain positive gestures towards Russia in exchange of what she did for America. The Congress would be requested by Bush administration to scrap the Jackson-Vanik amendments, which were imposed in 1974 to punish the Soviet Union for curbing Jewish emigration. Russia was also assured of its bid to join the World Trade Organisation in spite of Russia's protectionism. As reported in the media, Russia's shopping list is quite big, which includes debilitating reform of NATO, massive debt write-offs, return of Russian hegemony over parts of the former Soviet Union, inclusion of Russia into some of the West's top decision making bodies, and acceptance of Moscow's continuing special relations with certain countries, which are branded as rogue countries by America.

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