LATE S. M. ALI **DHAKA FRIDAY FEBRUARY 1, 2002** 

#### Talk of a new local govt law

Centralising a decentralising system?

HIS is Tughlagi, which best translates into English as 'arbitrary'. Perhaps what's more to the point, it bears the stamp of an invasive mentality to take it all as a winner. At the risk of sounding caustic and abrasive we are having to say all this simply because it has to do with the much-prized local self-government system.

The cabinet subcommittee on local government in its fourth meeting chaired by LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan on Wednesday decided to have a new law seeking fundamental changes into the existing local government dispensation. This legal instrument when in place will enable the government to dissolve elected local bodies of different tiers on the expiry of their five-year terms and have appointed administrators of its choice to run these till the next elections are held. In other words, we are looking at a scenario where the administrators with a partisan label will be presiding over the local bodies till such time as the next elections take place.

Under the existing law, those elected to such bodies continue to hold office till the next elections are held and a new set of leaders replace them. The proponents of appointed administrators may like to argue that on the expiry of the elected office-bearers' terms they lose their mandate and hence couldn't claim having any difference with nominated officials. There can be a forceful rebuttal of this argument on several counts. In the first place there arises the question of motivation which reads like an open book, hardly requiring to be flipped through. Then it is a standard practice everywhere to have outgoing local government office-bearers act as transitional functionaries pending fresh elections. Even after expiry of terms, they remain potentially more representative than would be nominated officials who are but disguised agents of the government at best.

The over-arching fact is that since it is the Election Commission that holds local government polls there is a given safeguard for the neutral conduct of the electoral process. Appointed administrators can only dilate that advantage.

Our Constitution envisages a representative and participatory local government system as an integral part of the democratic edifice at the national level. But what we have seen successive governments do is to tamper with the system in the name of making it more participatory and self-governing. In the process, the system has progressively eroded and become truncated and disconnected with the mainstream of our democratic life, the exact opposite of what our constitution had envisioned. And the new law being reportedly contemplated can make matters worse; appointed administrators can only fuel the downhill

In our stereo-typical situation where local body elections had to be deferred owing to pending court cases, appointed administrators could get a lease of life easily erasing the line between nominated and elected local bodies. What a pity that will be both for democracy and local government system.

Moreover, some authority is likely to be vested in the government to enable it to sack chairmen, members and commissioners of elected local bodies. If that happens, the concept of decentralisation is cer-

Clearly, all these prospects are incompatible with the constitutional expectations and sensibilities of our people and as such cannot be acceptable to them. Our hope is that a popularly elected government will see the wisdom of not pressing ahead with the idea anymore. Instead of doing that the government will be well-advised to refashion the local bodies laws on a cast-iron basis to ward off chances of litigation.

# Parliament is not government



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

LECTION is just one manifestation of democracy. On a daily basis democracy is ensured through the functioning of the three organs of the state. Checks and balance exerted by these organs are both the outcome of this function and its goal. The constitution of a country provides for balanced relationship among the organs in details. In practice it is the executive branch i.e. the government which often exerts greater power and authority overwhelming the other

The organ of the state which suffers most from an assertive and overarching government is parliament. When the government controls everything in the parliament through the treasury bench from legislative to general discussion, the parliament becomes virtually its hand maiden. In great Britain, the mother of parliamentary democracy, the appropriation parliamentary authority

through the cabinet (the government) has given birth to the expression "Parliamentary dictatorship." Though it sounds like an oxymoron parliamentary dictatorship it is actually autocracy on the executive branch articulated through the parliament. When this becomes well-entrenched over a long period of time, the parliament-executive nexus may ence of judiciary.

Given the supreme role of

parliament in a democracy and

the built-in tendency of the gov-

ernment to co-opt this role, it is of

utmost importance that the rela-

enshrined in the constitution is

allowed to be established and

flourish. The achievement of this

important goal depends both on

the government and the opposi-

tion. Since the treasury bench

members are often obliged to

follow the government line and

polices in all matters within the

parliament the opposition has to

bear a heavy responsibility in

making parliament meaningful

tionship of cheeks and balance as

and effective. No political party having its faith in democracy and keen to see it work can, therefore. afford to boycott the parliament without being held accountable for erosion of parliament's authority.

The major opposition party in Bangladesh abstained from the first session of the Eighth Parliament alleging irregularities in the general election and repression against its supporters. Though it was a decision disproportionate and inappropriate to the occasion

the opposition may already have

driven home their grievances. To

continue to boycott the session of

the current parliament is both

unnecessary and harmful to the

greater cause of democracy. The

parliament represents the sover-

eign will of the people. By staying

away from it the opposition in

eignty of the people as a whole

irrespective of their party affilia-

tion. As pointed out by The Daily

Star in its editorial such boycott

also is a betrayal of the electorate

whom the opposition represents.

On both counts, their presence in

undermines the sover-

the parliament brooks no argument to the contrary

It is quite possible that even after venting their indignation,

assume the worst. The news report that the Speaker has gone out of his way in inviting a list of grievances from the opposition indicates that the government is keen to create a congenial atmosphere in the parliament for the functioning of a multi-party parliamentary democracy. The government should be given a chance of proving its good faith is making parliament work. In the final analysis, no omission or commission by the government will justify contin-

of the government. When the opposition attends the parliament this superior role of parliament is reaffirmed and strength-

The opposition may argue that inabstaining from the parliament they are merely repeating what their opponents did when in opposition. But the opposition parties in the past did not decide on abstention or boycott from the first session of the previous parliaments. All the opposition parties took that road only after certain developments took place which they thought provided justification for abstention or boycott. By the time those decision were taken the parliaments were already halfway through their term. Even in the dismal history of the past there is no precedent of opposition abstaining from the beginning of a parliament. The nation therefore expects the opposition to attend the current session of the parliament. If they are still against the government they should choose the parliamentary forum to criticise it. The parliament is not government. Abstaining from the parliament is tantamount to letting down the people. A political party can indulge in this only with disregard to popular sentiment. The opposition should not make that

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist

IN MY VIEW

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frustration and dissatisfaction through the initial abstention from parliament and other forms of protest the opposition is not vet happy with the conduct of the government in their respect. But with the initial phase of protest over they should choose the forum of the parliament now to ventilate their grievances. If their

criticisms of the government are

germane to public interest there

cannot be any better platform than

the parliament to make them

public. If the treasury bench and

the Speaker of the parliament do

not allow the opposition adequate

time and opportunity to speak

their minds then an excuse can be

found for rethinking participation

in the parliament. But it is prema-

ture and unwarranted to think

along that line now. The attitude

of the treasury bench and the

policy of the Speaker have not yet

been tasted by the opposition and

there is no reason for them to

their oath to be loyal to parliament as the sovereign body. The problem with the opposi-

uous and indefinite abstention by

the opposition. They are bound by

tion's strategy of abstaining from the parliamentary session is that it confuses the government with the parliament. The parliament is not government though it may degenerate into its hand maiden if the opposition allows the treasury bench a free run of the august body. The parliament is superior to the executive branch by virtue of its legislative power and the authority to oversee the activities

### From the suicide's grave



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

Y name is Simi Banu and am sending my greetings from the suicide grave. Does my name ring a bell to you? Remember one evening last December, a young girl took her life to put a stop to her harassment? Yes, it was me, who chose death over life, because it had become so unbearable. Those rogue youths, that policeman and the elderly men in my neighbourhood, all of them worked in cahoots to destroy my life. They harried me to my death like a pack of hounds harry a game into the hunter's aim.

It is not a big deal that I died or, for that matter, killed myself. Thousands die in this world every day in perish in shootouts, diseases and disasters. Recently, three innocent children were killed by their mother who drank their blood and chewed out the flesh of the youngest one with the atrocity of a ravenous jungle beast. To born is to die, this entire life being a process of slow death, a prolonged suicide stretching from cradle to

I once read that when the private papers of a certain Farl Haig of England was published, people said that he committed suicide 25 years after his death. "The same thing happened to me as well. I died before I committed suicide, not once but many times. I died every night smitten by shame after I had walked home in the evening wading through the obscenities that filled the air. They called me every unspeakable name on

How can I tell you that certainty of the end brings such comfort in

But then I could not take it many more. How the degraded me, and razed my honour to the ground! They catcalled, whistled, screamed, shrieked, cursed and threatened me; their sounds and words clawed my body with the ferocity of predacious animals. What did I do wrong? I was my own busybody, doing my own job and pursuing my own interests in ised what they did to me. They ruined my soul by ridiculing my body like spoiling a gift by rough handling the packet.

Although my parents and wellwishers must be thinking it was silly of me to commit suicide. I have no regrets. My soul was damaged by what they had done, and suicide was the only honourable way to escape that disgrace. Harakiri was a common practice in Japan amongst the members of warrior class when disgraced or

wives. May be I died because of my own cowardice, my inability to face the rude realities of life

It occurred to me while I was sinking under the influence of poison, when I realised that I should have been brave instead of giving in to their intimidation. But it was too late by then as my eyes became heavy and my body numb. My entire life raced before my eyes in a mad rush, including the future that never came. I saw the husband I never met, the ments. And these had made me a sensitive soul, one that flustered in the crudeness of men who salivated at the sight of women.

One American playwright named Arthur Miller writes that a suicide kills two people at the same time. I know I have killed many more people with my suicide, my parents in particular. I know my brother misses me and my friends think of me from time to time. There was someone else who wanted to walk in the park with me. It never happened, and I must have left him a very lonely

I have thought of life ever since I died. What is it but the aggregate of all the breathing moments people strut and fret in this world? Today I belong to this side of the grave where everybody would eventually come. Even those youth, the policeman and the elderly men, who persecuted me in my innocence! I hear that the policeman is in jail and those voung scoundrels are on the lam. What will happen to them? Will they ever be prosecuted? Will they be held responsible for death, for putting that poison in my

I leave it to you to wait and find what happens to them. Meanwhile, if you ever see a young man walking in a park by himself. please ask him if he remembers me. That is the only thing regret, which keeps me awake, even in this after death

applied to Kashmir in the last 50

hand, which I only swallo- wed?

# CROSS TALK

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earth, jeering and leering at me as if I was nothing but a moving object of sexual interest.

How I died night after night, turning in bed from side to side as dawn! And I though of this man, Friedrich Nietzche who wrote that suicide was a great source of comfort, because it smoothened the passage one had to make across many a bad night. Every night I contemplated suicide as the storm of anger ransacked my soul. It gave me strength to face another day because I could cut my ties with the world whenever I wanted.

life. I worked to support my family. and I came home after dark

I did not realise that being female and poor was a double jeopardy. They alluded to the the darkness of night faded into curves of my body, and mixed up its geometry with arithmetic of poverty to produce the algebra of lechery. It exponentially increased the lust in their hearts where they believed that privation was a sure sign of promiscuity in a young girl like me. And they invented that unholy nexus between my character and late working hours. I still don't understand what was their problem in life. They never real-

sentenced to death. Rulers and revolutionaries have committed suicide throughout history to avoid embarrassment and failure. Socrates chose to drink hemlock because he preferred to die in a world where he was not understood.

Yet. I would not deny the futility of suicide, especially in my case What did I die for in the end? No great cause, frankly speaking. died for the pathetic mentality of some profligate men who didn't know how to behave with someone made in the image of their own mothers, sisters, daughters and

family I never raised. My entire life. lived and unlived, condensed within those brief moments as if to give me one last view of what was soon to disappear for good. Let's face it that I got a bum rap

children I never gave birth, and the

in life, a raw deal that doesn't happen to everyone. Someone said that different people inhabit different worlds. There is a world inside each of us, which differs from person to person. I loved to paint, listen to music, and watch movies, my world done in colours and melodies where dreams and emotions were supreme ele-

cent of Palestine. The genesis of

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

#### The genesis of terrorism

say or do things to incite or unleash

public fury and hatred. The western

SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

WIN tower carnage has been a horrifying crime the world has seen in the recent times. The world led by America is hunting down a common enemy in terrorism. It has the threat of holding the world hostage. Terrorism must be met decisively. The merchants of terror, whether Osama or Milosevic should be brought to pay for their murders

A look at the scenario of terrorism shows that it is dominated by the Arabs and on a broader level by the Muslims. Tragedy has its aftermath of strong sentiments. Sentiments always do not follow the righteous path. It is the media that plays a vital role in guiding its course. The havoc of 11 September devastation brought on the western media the need for most exhaustive use of its analytical and electronic skill. Understandably, sentiments found its place in its coverage. To be fair, sentiments err and may stray into prejudice. Unfortunately, the indignation rubbed on to Islam. In many essays and reports, Islam has been and is being put on the dock. By that standard, Milosevic's crimes, Hindu zealots' destruction of Babri mosque would have put Christianity and Hinduism on the dock. Such generalizations are however the work of prejudiced and partisan mind.

Many of the essays, public commentaries, observations and interviews on the issue, are driven on by the wrong counsel of sentiments. They loose the correctness of their judgment in the process in vengefully going after Islam and Muslims. This is a miscarriage of justice. A rational mind, however genuine may be the subject, cannot

media is not without the blemishes in this regard. Even internationally recognized newsmagazines in their news reports picked up verses from the holy Quran, presenting Islam as outmoded in keeping women in enslavement and as an inveterate foe of the infidels. The quotes in their fragmented form are out of context and far from the underlying truths. This is not serving a world seeking an integrated community without borders through globalization. The Muslims of America in particular, are passing through a tense time where delving into the Islamic roots of terrorism looks on them as a people apart. A state of unease and insecurity is settling among them. America the melting pot may drift into being a country that does not accept Muslims. But the spirit of overkill can do the world more harm than good. It may again turn the world into a bipolar combat of distrust. America surely understands that arrogance in victory should not be given time. The best thing for America and the whole world is to return to pre 11 September times as gracefully as possible. Terrorism is the scourge of the

modern times. A clear and unprejudiced perspective would enable a better comprehension of the subject. Otherwise, the hunt would err in its target and method. This will further fill the ranks of the terrorists. The war on terrorism in order to succeed must have moral and rational underpinnings. It will then acquire worldwide acceptability based on proper and righteous understanding of its background and the instigating circumstances. In the absence of it, the war on

rorism would serve as the tool for

America's stewardship will rest on servile compliance of circumstances and of convenience, and on muted approval. Even on mumbling sermonizing

The world would be caught in muted resentment, sulking distrust, and circumstantial subordination. A world order of this kind will not see the end of terrorism. They would lie low for the time being, surfacing again in another theatre of instability and discord. Moreover, they may strike with even greater fury. The world has a moral responsibility to understand terrorism in its totality for it to decline of its own will

noble struggle for a homeland suffered from losing world sympathy and eventually playing in to the plans of those who would rather keep them in perpetual enslavement. The suicide bombers of Hamas and Al Jihad have further jeopardized the Palestinian cause by killing innocent civilians. National struggle of the Palestinians continues to carry the stigma of acts of terrorism, even after their active participation in the peace process. The battle of stone throwing Palestinian youths of (Intifadah) against the automatic gun firing Israeli soldiers is a spectacle of injustice and world indifference in Moorish Spain and under the Ottoman Caliphate. The terror tactics against the Jewish people that dispersed them through out the world was not Arab creation, and surely not a Muslim one.

Modern terrorism had its birth in

Jewish strong-arm tactics that ruthlessly pursued the creation of Israel. The first terrorist organization of the time is Irgun, an armed wing of Haganah, the Jewish front organization for the creation of Israel. Menahem Begin was the chief of Irgun indulging in the atrocities of murder, eviction, gun running etc. in terrorizing the Arabs and to a lesser extent the British force. The after the Turks have been defeated at World War I. Lawrence of Arabia was their dummy. Lot of innocent lives was lost, indescribable butchery took place after the demise of Ottoman rule. However, the Arabs did not get the promised independence. Instead, the League of Nations carved up the Arab territory among the western powers. Palestine was given to British trusteeship. It was followed by the creation of the state of Lebanon, and the state of Israel was planted in the land of Palestine. A territory which was 92 per cent Arab, was invaded by Jewish settlers. A whole generation of Palestinians was born, and

The track record of this injustice and deprivation follows a set pattern. Until recently. East Timor was the focus of the western media and their leaders. Its four hundred thousand people became a distressing concern for them. Indonesia took it over by virtue of its proximity to Irian Jaya, following the departure of the Portuguese colonials. Geographically and ethnically, it is part of greater Timor. Western Timor or Irian Jaya is quiet under Indonesian sovereignty. East Timor is Christian. Religion is its claim to sovereignty and statehood. Even Israel's basis of statehood is

state, the

as well have one. What about applying that standard to Kashmir? There are three Security Council resolutions on holding plebiscite in Kashmir. It is important that UN should be righteous in upholding its resolutions. UN resolutions have created the states of Israel and East Timor. The UN and the western powers have done very little in acting on Kashmir resolutions. Kashmir has over 6 million people. Israel has 2.5 million (of them 0.7 million are Arabs), East Timor only 0.4 million. Over 70 per cent of Kashmiris happen to be Muslim. The statistics for Kashmir valley is over 80 per cent Muslim. The urgency, the world has seen among the western powers in acting on the resolutions on Israel and East Timor, has not been

terrorism has this injustice and years. Three wars have taken deprivation in its core. History place, officially over seventy thourevisits. I am afraid the western sand people have died in Kashmir since 1989. Indeed incursions by world led by America is following the same practice in going for the Muslim militants are taking place across the line of control. Pakistan is to be faulted for the cross border incursions. They alone could not have kept up the struggle over the last 12 years without the support and participation of native Kashmirs of the valley. UN wisdom and the western powers' intelliaence is keen enough to understand it. In plain terms, it is a policy of allowing wounds to bleed in some parts of the world, while ferociously going for overkill in other parts. This kind of studied discrimination and indifference leads to erosion of faith and submission to counsel of desperation and hatred. and terrorism strikes. religion, Judaism. If the Christians The genesis of terrorism is of Lebanon can have a separate therefore neither the ills of a partic-East Timorese can

ular people nor that of the preaching of a particular religion. It is not the God of Islam who is wicked, as Billy Graham's son disdainfully preached, rather it is the ills of our perceived notion about other people and the discriminatory and indifferent nature of our policies which is wicked. A wicked leader spreads the wounds. A righteous leader and a righteous country persevere to understand, strive to uphold justice and seek to respect difference and diversity. The peace and reconciliation of the world looks to America for this kind of wisdom in its leadership.

The genesis of terrorism is neither the ills of a particular people nor that of the preaching of a particular religion... rather it is the ills of our perceived notion about other people and the discriminatory and indifferent nature of our policies... A righteous leader and a righteous country persevere to understand, strive to uphold justice and seek to respect difference and diversity.

Most of the terrorist organizations have their bases in the Middle East and to a lesser degree in Pakistan and in the Philippines. The perception of terrorism however varies. Often national strugales have different names in different places. depending on how much international weight they carry. A stamp of legality by the western world makes it a liberation war, and their opposition or indifference makes it a terrorist activity.

an armed struggle. This particular aspect can be trusted for a better comprehension of terrorism. It gained infamy with Al Fatah's plane hijacking and Munich Olympic killing. The world watched these things in horror. Palestinian's

There is a lack of fairness in judging

sitting in judgment over the Palestinians.

The scenario was completely different when Zionist League aided by Balfour declaration on creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine started sending shiploads of Jewish people, settling them in Arab land through force and forgery. This was being done with the connivance of British administrators of Palestine. The Jewish people have been wronged by the European countries and were earlier driven out of Palestine by Roman emperor Theodosius in 70 A.D, not by the Arabs and surely not by the Muslims, because Islam was not yet born. In fact, the Jewish people scattered throughout the

nor did ever act firmly against it. Taking innocent lives, be they Americans or Arabs, Christians, Jews or Muslims is a crime in a civilized society. By that standard, Osama is a criminal, so was Menahem Begin, and so is Ariel Sharon for 1982 Chatra and Shabila refugee camp massacres in Lebanon. The ways of the world, should we say is dominated by the western powers! Osama is being

western powers never censured it,

It is the British that instigated the Arab rulers of Nejd, Hashemite rulers of Palestine and the Arab population of Syria and Lebanon to revolt against the Turkish Ottomans, promising independence

lionized as the leader.

hunted down, where Begin was

Palestine was never a virgin territory like the Americas. Talking of historical rights, it is a doubleedged blade. Even the Red Indians have a historical claim to America. The state of Israel was crafted by

has grown older in the tents. The

the western powers. It is a historical fact and it took place at a cost of gross injustice to the Palestinians The two thirds majority at the UN general assembly meeting of November 29, 1947 was collected by the western powers by employing all conceivable practices of cajoling, compromise, entente and threat. The Palestinians were wronged and robbed. Six hundred thousand Jewish settlers of Palestine who constituted one third of the total population were given 57 per