

PM's fresh appeal for unity

Let this be followed up by some confidence building measures

PRIME Minister Khaleda Zia's call for unity at the weekly holiday discussion meet on Saturday was impassioned. And it was distinctly so with a greater degree of urgency exuded than had been discerned in her earlier calls for 'consensus', a word which remains a wish patently unfulfilled for the last one decade of democracy. Speaking on the theme *Towards a Liberal Political, Economic and Cultural Order Perspective*, Begum Zia's choice of words was very significant. Her operative expressions were 'estrangement and hostile rivalry' that needed to be replaced by 'national unity and coordination', phrases that certainly are more expressive and vibrant than the 'consensus' cliché.

We could not agree more with Begum Zia's prescription against the ailment: political parties should not indulge in or promote activities that are likely to disunite the people and divide the nation. But the question is how the BNP as the ruling party, with an inherent responsibility to initiate things that help forge national unity, is going about its early tenor-setting role? None can question the prime minister's sincerity of intent or purpose behind the latest call for national unity but since it involves a degree of reconciliation the government has to cautiously avoid giving any mixed signals to the opposition. The opposition has had a sense of persecution, whether one likes it or not. And one can only be ostrich-like to pretend that this does not need to be allayed. Then, a serious, concrete and sustained approach will have to be made by the ruling party at the appropriate level for building some sort of a bridge with the opposition for parliamentary interactions to begin.

This is not to suggest, however, that the opposition must be coaxed into joining the parliament which the voters had actually voted them for, but to urge the government to be more pro-active in building a working relationship with the opposition before it is too late.

We have not yet come to any conclusion that the government is not trying; but frankly speaking, the early signs have not been quite confidence-generating, and that's where the government needs to shift its attention on.

Violence at Sutrapur and DMCH

An old culture in a new bottle

AS politics becomes violent and law and order structures fail to rein it in, it's leaving the internal partisan spaces and spilling into innocent civilian ones. After two people died in a shoot-out at Sutrapur they were brought to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital where the doctors declared them dead. As a reaction to that, the people who had accompanied the victims went on a hospital bashing spree and beat up the doctors. Each event seems to have been triggered by the one before and there is an air of inevitability in all this as the political system threatens to grind to a halt.

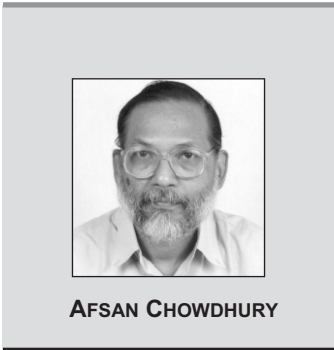
It is now BNP gangsters falling into groups that are fighting each other much the same way that AL mastans had done when the party was in power. The description of the Sutrapur violence would be as banal as the repetitions of such acts by different political groups across various regimes. No party in power, the present or the past -- have discouraged violence since emerging victorious to rule requires the strength of the muscle more than logic. Thus, violence has not only been established as the functional language of political transaction but as the most useful one as well. Only violence guarantees results. It's the legitimization of this concept that is worrying.

The casualty of gradient violence has been the democratic space. Governing is not the priority but ruling is. Which is why no political promise is sacrosanct and no activity is legitimate to remain in power or overthrow someone to reach there.

Unless the political culture changes to fit civilized democratic shoes the chances of decline of violence is low. It has little to do with incidents of violence or clashes. These are manifestations of a take over by a system of ruling, which has generated a culture of its own now on display.

However, there is hope if we decide to agree that the governing process will be under the umbrella of rule of law and order.

Will Bangladesh become another Nigeria ?



NIGERIA and more specifically Lagos are again in the news. There has been a major blow up at an arms depot located in the midst of the city killing hundreds. This has been followed by ethnic clashes. And of course the oil misery continues. The environment is pillaged, poverty leaps and dances there and the poor fill up the streets or migrate as the rich supported by their foreign friends -- be it oil or arms -- have a charmed life. Before Bangladesh became the most corrupt country in the world on the Transparency International List Nigeria occupied the honours for a long time. Everyday Dhaka seems to become a little like Nigeria or Lagos. Having lived in both the cities, I have that feeling in my bones.

I was standing for two hours in front of the airport baggage belt and saw an endless series of suitcases arrive, many intact, many opened. Except for British Airways, which had its own people to take care of the luggage, most passengers were hit. My two suitcases including one with training materials just never arrived. I had travelled a lot by then but this had never happened to me. I now confronted the feeling and explained my misery to the Ethiopian Air staff in charge of lost baggage.

"Now give me the money."
"Money for what?"
"For taking down your complaint."
" But I have no money. I have just arrived."

"Then you have no complaint."

I gave her 5 dollars to get the piece of paper with all the miswritten info. Since then I have rarely travelled with a suitcase. Even today I feel a twitch in my belly when I stand in front of the luggage belt.

So welcome to Nigeria with one pajama, one vest and one shirt. I paid 150 dollars advance to check into the hotel. No money no check-in. Next day I gave my clothes for washing and stayed in my room. I

Even in a distant part of Northern Nigeria, from where the ruling class, mostly Muslim army and bureaucracy came, a CSW sitting in a deserted hotel lobby sang the same song.

"Hello Sir."

LIKE in Dhaka and Bangladesh, violence is everywhere in Nigeria. It's nurtured by the political groups and the military but primarily by the

oil wealth yet the people are so poor. Shell is often blamed. Money has been pumped out but mostly have flowed to already wealthy pockets. The environment has been wrecked and when I was there they hanged activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and his friends. Some body pushed a leaflet into my hotel room the day he was hanged.

"This is it. They are going to arrest us all and execute us. All for Shell."

The Ogunis were hanged and although people right up to Nelson Mandela protested nothing happened. Everyone knows where power lies. The powerful certainly know.

I don't know whether Shell is guilty or not but the Nigerian elite certainly are. Greedy, corrupt, cruel and cynical, they have abandoned their people. In this desertion, the MNCs have assisted. Even by being there, they have helped for the people have suffered because of oil economics.

SHE sat eating lunch with me at the hotel. It was 5-star one with not too good service. She was my counterpart, a Nigerian with a Canadian PhD.

"When my husband was alive and the currency was 2 naira equal to 1 dollar we had such a time, we would come to this hotel every week. It was a good time. But then we listened to the IMF and floated our currency and martial law came and then everything began to change." She just trailed off and she never said anything more. It was 85 naira to a dollar when I was there.

Last year in London, we took a private taxi from Islington to reach Heathrow airport. The taxi driver spoke on the intricacies of IMF policies and currency management and so on. He was a Nigerian.

"I used to teach economics at the college but my salary took care of me for only a week. So now I am a cabbie in London."

I mostly have no answers. And I never got my luggage back.

STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART

IN Nigeria like in Bangladesh, the Shell Company is not just a company but also news that is bigger than most other news. People are perplexed that they have so much oil wealth yet the people are so poor. Shell is often blamed. Money has been pumped out but mostly have flowed to already wealthy pockets. The environment has been wrecked and when I was there they hanged activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and his friends.

desperation of a society which has no opportunities left for making a living. People become armed robbers because they have no option. There are no jobs, no business and no future. Oil has brought so much wealth and misery that it's impossible not to wish that God had spared Nigeria the mercy.

"We have many resources but our leaders have mismanaged everything. We have no hope."

This is the commonest statement made in that country. I wonder in which other country the same is said with such frequency?

But the armed robbers are of a desperate class. They kill and ask questions later. Literally. Everyday about five die at their hands in Lagos alone. About a hundred are hit. Just like in Dhaka, one remembers which road to avoid and which to take. In Lagos the robbers do another thing. They mount armed attacks on wealthy households.

And no one ever calls the police.

THE day I landed for the first time, Sunny Abacha gave a timetable for civilian rule. Soon a major conspiracy had also been found and all civil

As it happened in Nigeria.

I would stay in my hotel room almost every bloody day because life is terribly unsafe outside if not in a car and I am not interested in any social life anyway. I would stay in my room. Down there as the band played black music, I would watch reruns on the hotel TV. One could also see the commercial sex workers sitting in tables waiting to be picked up. When one day I went down to visit the poolside and drink pink Fanta and listen to the jazz, the plaintive come-ons were heard. I was approached by so many.

"Please sir. Hello sir. Excuse me sir." They are not calls for venerated sex, they are words of beggars looking for money.

My work was all about AIDS and I knew how many had been infected by the fire disease. But these young women were past caring. Sitting with a bottle of beer, barely more expensive than a coke, they smoked lonely cigarettes and waited for a client which meant a meal and maybe some more for another meal. Tanbazar CSWs ate much better.

Lessons from Enron's collapse: The way out in Dabhol

PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

IN Pakistan, the United States' ambassador is often called the "Viceroy", a figure far more powerful than "the natives". In India too, we may soon have to use that term half-jokingly to convey the imperious pronouncements of Ambassador Robert Blackwill.

On Jan 28, Mr Blackwill said that if India's reform "rabbit" is not to become a "turtle", and then "a rock", it must open up to foreign investment. The key, he said, lies in resolving Enron's dispute over Dabhol.

Mr Blackwill said the dispute over Dabhol--our super-controversial power project--feeds the perception "that India may not be ready yet for big-time international investment." Doubts over "the sanctity of contract... can spell death to potential investors..."

The message is: don't punish Enron, however crooked it might be; don't alter the power purchase agreement (PPA) between Dabhol Power Co (DPC) and the Maharashtra State Electricity Board (MSEB). Otherwise, you'll get no foreign investment, you'll become a Burma, you'll perish ...

It is incredible that Mr Blackwill should say this just when the Enron mega-scandal has engulfed the US, and bigwigs from President Bush and vice-president Cheney downwards are in the dock

Perhaps Mr Blackwill is only emulating his predecessor, Frank Wisner, who in the mid-1990s lobbied "patriotically" for Dabhol--only to join Enron's board of directors.

The other role-model is former US ambassador to Pakistan Robert Oakley, who in 1996-98 strongly pleaded Unocal's case to the Taliban, and vice versa.

Enron is history's worst case of self-inflicted corporate bankruptcy. It flourished on energy deregulation, bribed its way to dizzying heights, cooked its books, and failed disastrously.

Enron wasn't just No. 7 in the *Fortune-500* list. It became a "New Economy" icon; its managers were glorified as "magicians of the free-

(himself a former chairman of oil industry giant Halliburton). It made "donations" to 70 percent of all Congressional energy committee members.

Under Enron's pressure, the US National Security Council, says *The Washington Post*, was turned into a "concierge service" fixing Mr Lay's appointments with Mr Brajesh Mishra.

The PPA is bad in law, violative of sound economics, and steeped in fraud. It must be scrapped under Section 23 of the Indian Contracts Act 1872 because it violates "morality", civility and "public policy".

A contract is a "voluntary" transaction. But it can't be obnoxious. 'A' can't have a valid contract with 'B' for, say, being brutally beaten up periodically in return for money. National laws override commercial contracts.

The way out of the mess lies in evaluating DPC's assets accurately, and then transferring them to MSEB. Any compensation to Enron must exclude padded-up costs, rigged-up prices, and past losses.

We need a full-fledged Parliamentary inquiry into how the deal was made, who took the critical decisions, and when.

India abjectly capitulated to Union Carbide in the Bhopal gas disaster which killed 12,000 people. Carbide got away by paying a pittance. Its Indian subsidiary's ex-chairman Keshub Mahindra has now been honoured with a "Padma Bhushan".

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Mr Clinton's energy secretary in June 1995 too warned India: "Failure to honour [DPC] agreements... will jeopardise not only the Dabhol project but also most... other private power projects..."

The Bush campaign owes Enron a huge debt. Mr Kenneth Lay, earlier "Kenny Boy" in the White House, donated \$113,800 to it. Mr Lay was central to the evolution of the pro-corporate, anti-environment Bush-Cheney energy policy.

However, Mr Blackwill is mistaken in suggesting Enron is a normal company, dealings with which carry "sanctity". Enron exemplifies all that is sleazy, greedy and unethical in corporations and their unholy nexus with governments and the media.

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Four things happened: a mid-1995 meeting between Mr Bal Thackeray and Ms Rebecca Mark; Enron's self-confessed \$20 million (Rs. 95 crores) expenditure in "educating" Indians; an improper clearance to the project from finance secretary Montek Singh Ahluwalia, and a "sovereign" coun-

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A jute revolution in the offing?

A HUSNAIN

THE recently held international conference on jute might change the face of Bangladesh, and global trading in jute products, if it clicks in the near future.

It should, because Europe is interested with transfer of technology (overseas R&D), investment, and marketing [the far-away Americans perhaps are just not interested in the foul-smelling (during the rotting stage) golden fibre].

Why the industrialised countries are interested now? Energy content. Plastic materials take more energy to process, and high-tech chemical engineering processes have to be involved, as the raw materials are coming from deep inside the earth -- a non-renewable source of dwindling energy resources. The muscular power of the West is dwindling (imagine the vast amount of energy used in the two temperate zones merely to keep warm, century after century).

Once the potentiality of the vast jute market is confirmed (with its complex network of thousands of products and by-products), investment would not be a problem, local

or foreign. The jute industry died out in the LDCs (in hot and humid clime) as the Third World cannot manipulate and control the global market (as the US is interested in controlling the energy market everywhere). The petro-chemical industry is costly and high-tech, and very much dependent on the rich countries. "Come South" is the new message of this century. The natural, economical and political cycles are changing. How can jute remain out of the myriad forces of change?

Another weakness of the LDCs and DCs is the compulsion to export raw materials, due to lack of purchasing power of the local consumers of finished products, as more than half live below the poverty line, although the density of population (potential customers) is very high.

Jute is grown and processed by the marginal farmers' groups. Economically and socially, to be able to sustain this vast group of workers is a feat by itself. The basic quality of life will change.

The beauty of jute products is its wide base for diversification into finished and semi-finished products. Just imagine, if about a dozen jute-based components is acceptable to the automobile industry, then the annual turn-over would be in

billions of dollars (from millions of new and used cars). Today jute products can replace a large percentage of plastic products in the factories and homes. Forests need not be destroyed to get paper, newsprint, and other wood-based products. Packaging materials is a big sector (toys is another). It is possible to dress a person in jute products from head to foot -- including the glamorous fashion beauties. The golden fibre is a divine blessing, if only we could market it suitably.

Formerly the industrialised world was not interested in jute; now it cannot afford to do so. Thanks to EU, Dhaka hopes to establish a base for the revival of the local jute industry in new form, colour and variety. The other jute producing nations (India is one of the biggest) can get the advantage of the transfer of technology and control a sizable global market.

Philosophically, the point to note is the multiplier-effect of a simple action -- banning the use by the shoppers of plastic bags. The idea might change the fate and destiny of a poor nation. Can it come true? Let us try our best.

clearly identify and define those organisations, countries and qualify them for the worst possible form of Western military, political, social, cultural and propaganda actions to completely eradicate them. And, I think, that is why the US, Western countries or even UN is hesitating to clarify the definition of terrorism. Now, therefore the present prevalent, active and emerging definition of 'terrorism' can be drawn in the light of US and the West actions and policies as follows: 'Terrorists are those organizations, entities, state or individuals, who do not support or have potential of not supporting the Christian US and Western policies directed towards Islam or Muslims, due to differences in their religious ideology, values, culture, civilization and way of living, and which can prove a challenge and threat (or potential challenge and threat) to the fast degrading Western values, civilization, culture, and way of living.'

In other words the West visual-

izes 'terrorism' as Muslim revivalism and reaction on religious lines. The above-mentioned definition is from the Western perspective, and is not what it should be. The freedom struggles involving Muslims in Palestine, Kashmir, and Chechnya are mostly debated, whether they are freedom struggles or terrorist struggles. Muslims considers them as legitimate freedom struggles to achieve independence from oppressive regimes and illegal occupation, but the West deals these issues differently according to its own interests and agenda. The non-Muslim world (predominantly Christians), do not see them as legitimate struggles, they mostly consider these movements as terrorist and rather supports the aggressors. It is clear as Israel is overwhelmingly supported by the US and West on Palestine issue (where Hamas and Islamic Jihad are declared terrorists), India's atrocities are supported in Kashmir (where Lashkar-e-Tayba and Jaish-e-Mohammad have been

declared as terrorists) and Russia is presently supported by the US in its efforts to crush Chechnyan struggle. It is so, because all the non-Muslims are natural allies on religious basis, irrespective of their individual differences. The US and the West do not want to eradicate the root-causes of above-mentioned disputes to avoid a natural reaction from Muslims, but instead they want to eradicate those reacting Muslims. It does show their sincerity in solving these long standing disputes. It also shows that they will never solve these grave issues, except issuing occasional statements and lip servicing. Latest war on Afghanistan in which tens of thousands of innocent defenseless ordinary Muslims were massacred, their Islamic system was destroyed and Islamic value, culture, traditions and way of living tarnished is a clear example of above mentioned definition. It is also worth mentioning that, those pro-Western Muslim rulers, leaders, armies, politicians, bureaucrats and

media, who have adapted Western values, ideology and way of living and always blindly support and advocate the US policies, do not come under above mentioned definition. Some of the Muslim minority sects, who support the US and the Western policies of dividing and therefore weakening Muslims as a whole, also do not qualify for the above mentioned definition, and thus the possibility of their killing or any other action is negligible. Only those Muslims qualify for the above definition, who follow the teachings and orders of Islam (as prescribed in the Holy Quran and Sunnah) in their daily lives, and therefore they are conscious of their rights, duties, values, history, civilization and moral obligations as Muslims, and always raise their concerns and oppose the atrocities being committed on them in their own lands.

OPINION

Terrorism, an implied definition

ARSHAD ALAM

AMERICANS have defined different organisations, entities, states and individuals as terrorist form time to time. They take action against them according to their characteristics. And, according to different characteristics, types, origin and traits, they can be broadly divided into two categories or groups. One group of terrorist organisations are only for the name, and Americans or Christian West, hardly take any action against them, or if there is some action taken, it is a counterfeit and temporary, and some time they are even supported from backdoor to satisfy US interests (the extremist IRA and the Hizbullah are some of the examples).

The other group of terrorist organisations, states and individuals are the people, who are very dangerous, real and active terrorist organisations (for the US), and current implied definition of terrorism