

What did AL gain out of this hartal?

Opposition should return to the parliament

THE Awami League (AL) must make an assessment as to what it got out of its hartal programme last Saturday. In our view nothing. If fact the party lost some credibility as people recalled Sheikh Hasina's promise, while in power, never to subject the nation to a hartal again. Saturday's hartal was a cruel reminder that promises made by our political leaders mean nothing. How sad.

AL should know that hartal as a political programme has long lost its appeal. People abhor it and feel angry at those who impose it on them. The closed shops and the empty streets of last Saturday were more an attempt to stay out of the harm's way than to extend support for the opposition. We want to remind the AL that further hartal calls will subject our economy to greater strains with extreme consequences for our people. It would be far better politics to keep the promise that was made while in power.

However, on the contrary, there is a lot to protest against which the opposition must take a stand for the sake of democracy. We agree with the AL when it complains of not being given any political space to carry out its activities. We also echo their views in protesting against the treatment that is being meted out to some of its leaders, especially those who are under arrest.

It is our view that given the ruling party's harsh and undemocratic attitude towards the opposition, it has become imperative that the latter use the forum of the parliament to tell the people what is going on. We were appalled when the AL collected resignation letters from their MPs and gave to the party to chief to be used as and when she feels like. As we have written elsewhere MPs are "servants" of the people and not of the party, and as such people must be consulted before they decide to resign. It cannot be a simple party decision as any other matter. AL must understand that its policy of shunning the 8th Parliament from day one has not gone well with the general public who expect responsible behaviour from such a old and grassroots based party.

If nothing else the AL can give a dramatic positive turn to our otherwise disappointing political scene by joining the parliament. It is our view that such a move will earn them significant goodwill with the public and definitely increase its standing both nationally and internationally.

Musharraf's referendum initiative

Can it be a substitute for democracy?

PERVEZ'S Musharraf's decision to hold a referendum to prolong his rule for another five years couldn't have met with universal approval but nor has it been trashed equally as his opponents had hoped for.

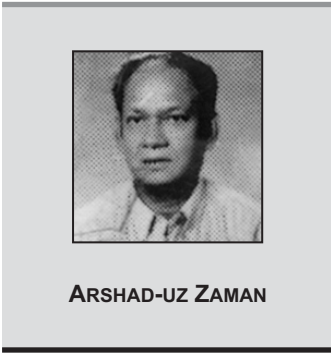
Obviously, this isn't about democracy but extension of the contract to hold on to power. He has read the international situation very well and has played his cards accordingly. Meanwhile, it has become clear that neither the PPP which was in the woods when he took over nor the Muslim League which was in its last innings drew any applause for their democratic behaviour. In fact, the declaration by the PPP and the ML that they will not be a part of it all and reject the referendum is now academic. Musharraf's acceptance is in the theatre of international politics where Benazir and Nawaz Sharif have little space.

A more chilling reality lies in Musharraf's declaration that as a last resort he may use nuclear weapons when it comes to a fight with India. This is a reminder of the facts that govern decisions relating to who rules Pakistan.

As long as Musharraf can deliver the goods to the international community against the "global fight against terror" he will have a safe ride because he is tested, has good connections with the military who matter in such issues. Even in a religious party-loaded Pakistan, Musharraf's government took decisions to curb them which perhaps would not have been possible for a civilian elected leader.

But whatever may be Musharraf's stabilising and modernising influences on Pakistan, he must know that there is no half-way house to democracy. It has to be firmly anchored in the sovereignty of popular will that is expressed freely and not on dotted lines. The people of Pakistan have been betrayed many times since country's birth and Musharraf at least can not claim to be anything more than a usurper with a cause. And the best cause he can espouse now is to work for the return of real democracy in Pakistan.

President Bush should recognise the state of Palestine now



THE time for the recognition of the state of Palestine by the government of the United States is now. The US must take this historical step. Anything short of this is unlikely to yield the desired result.

In the beginning of the last century a British diplomat, Lord Balfour, proposed a dispensation for the Jews in Palestine. This came to be known as the Balfour Declaration. Through this doctrine a homeland for the "Wandering Jew" was projected and the Jews, who did not have a homeland were offered to be settled in Palestine. Those were the day's when the sun never set on the British Empire and the world atlas was painted appropriately red. Jews started arriving in Palestine from various parts of the world and through their money-power managed to purchase Arab land. Thus began the creation of the state of Israel. There was a war in 1948 and the Jews, who throughout their history have believed in money-power, managed to strongly finance their coreligionists in Palestine. The strongest Jewish base in the world was New York, which to this day, too, has more Jews than in the state of Israel. New York is the financial capital of the world, besides being the capital of world media. The Jew has no peer as far as media control is concerned.

The war of 1948 saw the birth of Israel with powerful US blessing while the Arabs were in a state of

disarray. The Security Council of the UN admitted Israel as a member of the world body with all the permanent members of the Security Council voting for her admission.

Thus began the half a century conflict that continues to plague the region to this day. The important dates to remember are 1956, 1967 and 1973. In 1956 Israel in alliance with Great Britain and France attacked Egypt on the pretext that

entire Sinai desert. The Israeli army taken by total surprise was in full flight. It was the military intervention of the US that saved Israel from utter ruination. The Israeli debacle of 1973 did not get the media attention that it deserved thanks to the Jewish monopoly of the print and electronic media. 1973 was followed quickly by the Arab oil embargo. This was the most severe crisis that the West faced as they

the White House. Those were barren years as far as

attempting to find a solution to the Middle East conflict is concerned. The arrival of young and dynamic Democrat President Bill Clinton to the White House meant a dramatic change in US involvement in the Middle East conflict. Clinton succeeded in establishing an even handed approach to the conflict -- an essential aspect for fair media-

platform is security for the citizens of Israel. Since he believes in strong arm tactics (massacre of Shabra and Shatila in the early eighties, encirclement of Beirut and conquest of South Lebanon are some of his feats), using the pretext of terrorist attacks, he has reconquered the entire West Bank, which until very recently was under Palestinian control, has kept in virtual prison Yasser Arafat in Ramallah. Sharon

2001 stands as a monument of what desperate men are capable of doing although the act in itself is reprehensible in the extreme and cannot be condoned. Such a powerful body as the European Union (EU) had to face the humiliation of their representative Javier Solana unceremoniously sent back from Ramallah, because Israel guards its prize prisoner Arafat. War monger Sharon appears bent upon taking the world to the brink.

A grave responsibility lies on the shoulders of President George W Bush. In spite of his pro-Israeli tilt, he had the guts to declare the need for two states -- Palestine and Israel living side by side. The State of Palestine is recognised by more than 100 states and Palestine maintains embassies in all those capitals. Palestine has roughly twice as many embassies around the world than Israel. The reason Israel is a member of the UN and Palestine is not is because the US has so far refused to recognise Palestine.

President Bill Clinton since the Oslo Peace Accord tried the step by step method to find a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. It foundered on the rock of Jerusalem. By pronouncing in favour of the two state approach (this incidentally is the solution projected by the Security Council resolution 242 and 337) George Bush has attempted to find a dramatic solution to the problem. It is crystal clear that the parties to the conflict are incapable of arriving at a solution. Thus the US alone is in a position to impose a solution from the top.

By granting recognition to the State of Palestine, President George W Bush will cut the gordian knot and lift a huge burden from not only the suffering people of the Middle East but probably save humanity from an impending catastrophe.

Arshad-uz Zaman is a former Ambassador

The Gujarat onus shifts from Modi to Vajpayee

PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

AFTER the National Human Rights Commission's "preliminary" report on Gujarat, Mr Narendra Milesevic Modi's continuation has become completely untenable.

The report confirms what civil society activists have said about the organised post-Godhra violence, and the state's demonic complicity in it. It also demolishes Mr Modi's claims about having brought the situation under "control" within "72 hours".

Even five weeks on, as Mr Vajpayee discovered during his April 4 visit, Gujarat bristles with insecurity and fear. This "broke his heart", but it didn't ersuade him to sack Mr Modi.

The NHRC report is the most scathing indictment of Mr Modi's government yet by a semi-official agency. It is *not* a political document and does not recommend his dismissal.

The report's conclusions are clear: the government failed to discharge its "primary and inescapable responsibility ... to protect rights and to be responsible for the acts ... of its own agents", and "non-State players within its jurisdiction". It says: "The burden" is on Mr Modi to rebut this "adverse inference".

The NHRC takes the government to task for "serious failure of intelligence and action" and "failure to

protect life." It says "grave questions" arise about Mr Modi's "fidelity to the Constitution".

It says it cannot repose faith in his ability or will to prosecute the guilty.

So poor is the NHRC's opinion of the state police that it wants the CBI to investigate incidents such as Godhra and Naroda-Patiya in which

says (Gujarati weekly *Chitralekha*, March 25) that the Hindus are "finally" behaving the way they should like *Mahmood of Ghazni*.

These fanatics see nothing wrong in Hindus imitating the "barbaric" conduct which they attribute to Muslim "conquerors" to claim Hindu "victimhood".

222 persons were burned alive.

The Commission's recommendations on "rehabilitation" and "police reforms" reflect lack of confidence in Mr Modi.

The NHRC report, and media coverage documenting the state government's culpability, confronts Mr Vajpayee with a stark choice: shield Mr Modi for South Asia's worst pogrom in half a century; or defend the Constitution.

Mr Vajpayee's choice is between people like Mr Praveen Togadia, who reject peaceful Hindu-Muslim co-existence, and the political-legal obligation to defend secularism and protect citizens' rights, *irrespective* of religion.

Gujarat has further polarised the two options. Mr Togadia now openly

They equate justice with bestial revenge and retribution, thus practising Mr Arun Shourie's odious appeal to claim "both eyes for an eye and the whole jaw for a tooth".

Against them are ranged secular democrats, who regard the Gujarat pogrom as a grave threat to pluralism. Democracy ceases to mean anything in the absence of the citizen's right to life.

This large group comprises the liberal intelligentsia, working people, and progressive movements. Butressing them is world public opinion, and now, sentiment within the business community. This has become important since Mr Deepak Parekh demanded Mr Modi be sacked. Other figures like former London School of Economics

(*mukhauta*).

Mr Vajpayee can only invite ridicule by contrasting the Vivekananda's and the VHP's *Hindutva*, and then *not* opposing the latter. The longer he delays dismissing Mr Modi, the more he contributes to the Constitution's subversion, breach of law, and his own *political irrelevance*.

Mr Vajpayee has got isolated with the BJP's ignominious defeat in election after state election. (The latest is Delhi where it sank from absolute majority to a miserable 17 seats out of 134).

The shine went off the Vajpayee leadership months ago. Now its survival itself is in jeopardy. Its "inside" opponents now falsely claim that Indian secularism is

"dead" the title of a rotten magazine cover story.

This is nonsense. In reality, Gujarat is an *exceptionally* communal state. Some 95 percent of India's population has not been "riot-prone". Eighty-two percent of the urban population has never experienced riots. And villages only

account for four percent of all deaths in communal violence.

The vast majority of Indians, including Hindus, regard secularism and pluralism as the core of democracy. Or else, one can't explain the shame they feel at the Gujarat pogrom, the response of the journalistic and artistic communities in rallying to the victims' cause, or citizens' campaigns everywhere.

These campaigns have compelled disparate leaders to share platforms, including Ms Sonia Gandhi, Messrs V.P. Singh, H.S. Surjeet, Amar Singh, and A.B. Bardhan.

Citizens need to do more: collect evidence of the culpability of individuals, file FIRs, record victims' testimony, and shame the police.

Political parties must steadfastly demand that the guilty be punished. They must take to the streets.

We also need to explore all possible forums for prosecuting the guilty, including the International Criminal Court, due to come into being in July. It can hear cases involving crimes against humanity. India must become its member.

Only public pressure, combined with expression of international concern, could impel Mr Vajpayee to control the damage. So far, he hasn't even promised to punish the guilty in an exemplary way.

Mr Vajpayee's response has been bland, tokenistic and gutless. He lacks the courage of a decent politician. Within the NDA, the dice are loaded against him. The BJP's brief dominance in Indian politics is unravelling.

Most of us won't mourn the NDA's demise, the BJP's eclipse, even Mr Vajpayee's fading. Mr Vajpayee has himself caused this decline by hunting with the hounds and running with the hare. He is now uneasy with *Hindutva* hardliners. But the *swayamsevak* himself has encouraged them time and again.

What must concern us is the damage that the NDA is likely to inflict upon the nation before it retreats into ignominy. This must be limited, rolled back and reversed before it consumes us all.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

OPINION

Terrorism in the Middle East!

KHANDAKAR QUDRAT-I ELAHI

THAT a controversy has been long kept on foot and remains still undecided, we may presume that the disputants affix different ideas to the terms employed in the controversy. For as the faculties of the mind are supposed to be naturally alike in every individual -- otherwise nothing could be more fruitless than to reason or dispute together -- it were impossible if men affix the same ideas to their terms, that they could so long form different opinions of the same subject especially when they communicate their views and each party turn themselves on all sides in search of arguments which may give them the victory over their antagonists "David Hume".

Hume's wisdom seems extremely important to judge the controversy concerning terrorism that has destabilized the world order and is currently causing havoc to the peoples of Israel and Palestine. The controversy also has the potential to explode the whole Middle East, which will have serious repercussions throughout the world.

Three words -- terror, terrorize

and terrorism -- refer to the same mental phenomenon, fear. In ordinary usage, terror means overpowering or intense fear; terrorize means subjecting someone in overpowering fear; and finally, terrorism means terrorizing or using terror. Academically, the term terrorism is used to 'describe the method or the theory behind the method whereby an organized group or party seeks to achieve its avowed aims chiefly through systematic use of violence. Terrorist acts are directed against persons who as individuals, agent or representatives of authority interfere with the consummation of the objectives of such group'. An adjective is normally added before the term to distinguish its different contexts. For example, international terrorism signifies events in which terrorists of one country attack citizens or properties of another. Political terrorism involves sub-national groups which terrorize to achieve some political or social objectives.

The US Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) uses the political definition: "Terrorism is the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or

coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives."

The fundamental point in the definition is 'the unlawful use of force'. Here law is understood in its most classic and conventional sense -- a body of rules and regulations that government formulates and executes to establish justice in the state. Thus, the ultimate objective of law is justice or, in other words, law and justice are synonymous. Without law, there can be no justice in society, but law cannot be justified if it does not achieve its objective.

It, therefore, follows that 'unlawful use of force' can be perpetrated by any group of people, including those who are charged with the responsibility of running the government. This, in turn, suggests that terrorism is NOT a feature of any kind of group. It is an unquestionable attribute of individuals, which they might get naturally (inborn) and/or acquire through association. If good people are selected for government leadership, they will formulate good laws and apply them justly. Bad people will do just the opposite.

The terrorism controversy in the Middle East should be analyzed from this perspective. The original source of this controversy seems to lie in its definition -- terrorism is identified with group activities. This is the reason government is excluded from the definition. Government being the legitimate authority to exercise the state power, can never be identified with terrorism. This also gives impeccable reasons for describing terrorism as an undesirable and unacceptable quality of individuals, not any organization. These individuals use their organizational power to achieve their 'evil' designs.

The current terrorism definition may be interpreted as suggesting that an act is terrorist if a private organization perpetrates it through 'unlawful use of force'. However, the same act will not be terrorist if it is perpetrated by using public force, such as government. For example, private properties destroyed, or civilians killed, by the military are not considered as terrorist acts!

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Why not a moral rearmament movement?

IZZY

THERE is no sign of the leaders announcing the start of a combined moral rearmament movement to save the disintegrating society of this new nation hardly one generation old. The new generation is bewildered by the way the society is behaving today. The elders have never seen days like these, when all norms have disappeared, and it appears there is no government in control. The morals have disintegrated, and the governance seems out of control. The old political parties are fighting one other in the same old-fashioned way (subjectively), and the country is going to the dogs. Coming to power by new regimes is not proving to be the solution. The situation today is worse than it was during the last ten years.

The intolerance factor has run so high that one's life and property are in danger. Long standing disputes at personal, private or domestic levels are solved' with violence, killing, or damage. This sadistic approach to daily living has to be analysed by the experts. Now nobody is safe.

Even the security of the leaders cannot be guaranteed. Even one's own party workers might back-track. The politicians appear to be most affected, led by the political activists or workers, who do not listen to any one, not even their own leaders. This way the leadership will change hands frequently, to fill up the vacuum due to cold blooded killings.

Whether the origin of this type of barbaric mindset is due to political corrupt practices has to be investigated. The situation level could be one of the factors. The culprit could be the moral level or governance. The guilty must be punished for deterrence. Today there is absolutely no respect for law and order. From the top to the bottom people and vested groups are engaged in immoral practices where monetary gain is possible (land-grabbing, unauthorised construction, tender manipulations, etc). Litigations have become a safe refuge.

If a hand of a daughter is declined to a marriage proposal, the house is set on fire, or the girl raped or publicly molested. Although rape cases are kept quiet

in poor, under-developed countries, now rape news are printed almost daily in the papers. Is it public awareness, or political motives?

Those who control the goondas or miscreants and terrorists are getting away. This climate is not possible without abetment from the top. These godfathers operate openly. The new regime's track record in controlling crimes is dismal in these few months since October last. Good governance is not possible when the crime rate goes up so high. The backlash can also be attributed to the nature of governance by the preceding regime. The accumulated outcome is now spilling over.

Moral re-armament will not be successful if the politicians cannot get together in a cooperative drive, because in this society the politicians are playing the most prominent role, good or bad. Also the political influence s a party to most crimes. It means non-politicians have to run the show for some time, till the cleansing process becomes stable. It appears a huge upheaval is in the offing. The bubble has to burst the pressure s too high for

tolerance.

This is the pattern in most of the emerging countries in Asia and elsewhere, and Bangladesh may not be an exception. The calibre of leadership must be very high with such a background (what is happening in Pakistan is also a lesson, as after all, Bangladesh was previously East Pakistan).

If the political leaders cannot lead, who will? Since 1975 the parliamentary system has gone into limbo, even after the general elections in 1990 when the politicians came back to power. This return is not doing the country any good. I write as a mere citizen. I do not know how to solve these deep-rooted nations problems, but there are millions of citizens who are worried.

The politicians have to get out of the groove, to make their new presence felt, with public support for the nation, not for any party. The political leaders have to rise above the party interest. This vacuum in leadership cannot remain indefinitely. The main problem is lousy leadership, and then bad politics, as the latter follows the former.