

AL and terrorism in Bangladesh

How does Sheikh Hasina want our country understood abroad?

WE must say that we are shocked at the content and tone of Sheikh Hasina's latest speech abroad. If UNB report published last Thursday is correct then the former prime minister in a lecture on "Democracy, Human Rights and Security Threats" held last Tuesday in Brussels said that the last general "election results were manipulated through planned fraud, vote rigging and unfair practices". "If the election process is betrayed, if a fundamentalist alliance assumes power through conspiracy the country might become a hotbed of terrorism, it can become a safe haven for terrorist network as the government of fundamentalist alliance will morally and physically help so-called fundamentalist terrorists through under cover" she said.

Referring to the recent reports in the Time Magazine, Far Eastern Economic Review and the (Asian) Wall Street Journal she said BNP, Jamaat and IOJ, partners of the alliance government, "are open about their support for the religious fanatics."

First of all we question the factual basis of her statements. One of the regrettable aspects of our political culture is that losing parties are never graceful about election outcomes. We saw the AL and the BNP being bad losers in the '91 and '96 elections respectively. But to condemn Bangladesh to be a country that possibly harbours terrorists just because she was thrown out of power goes far beyond the usual "bad loser" syndrome.

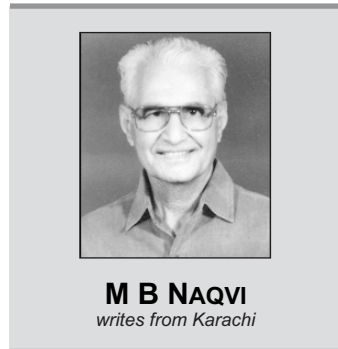
There is no credible evidence about electoral fraud. The fact that the AL never went to any Election Tribunal or to any court of law or used any of the Constitutional mechanisms of challenging the election outcome proves to us that theirs is mere propaganda. This can perhaps be overlooked as part of our flawed competitive politics as long as it confined to national politics. However, it must be condemned in the strongest of terms when taken to foreign audience who have no way of ascertaining the veracity of the former PM's statements.

Election fraud aside, the more sad, dangerous and vehemently condemnable aspect of her Brussels speech is the near endorsement by her of depiction of Bangladesh as a possible host of terrorist network. Does she realise the implication of her statements in view of the anti-terrorism campaign being waged globally? If she doesn't then her ability to understand current international politics comes under question. If she does then her intention in deliberately trying to destroy our global acceptability as a democratic country needs to be looked into. After the Bali bombing, even to hint that terrorist network may exist in our country is to virtually condemn us to become a pariah nation in the world. Her thinking seems to be totally blinded by the impact of her defeat, for otherwise how can we explain the fact that she, instead of contesting those malicious and unproven reports of Time, FEER and WSJ indirectly endorses them, when no less a person than the US Ambassador in Bangladesh outright rejected the Time magazine story?

India is ruled by a Hindu nationalist party led coalition but does Sonia Gandhi or any other opposition leader goes round the world condemning the Indian government? All the criticism, and there are plenty especially after Gujarat, is done inside the country, to the national electorate so that Indian people can judge the Indian government. If Sheikh Hasina has evidence about possible terrorist network in our country then she should make such proof available to our government and to the people of Bangladesh and not to an outside audience who are totally unaware of the internal situation. If her audience were only Bangladeshis living abroad we could have found some political and propaganda logic of her actions.

What we find extremely regrettable is that Sheikh Hasina seems to want to use the present global concern, Western anxiety and US hysteria about terrorism, and especially its link with Muslim fanatics in some countries to discredit her political opponent in Bangladesh. What she is not realising is that in attempting to do that she is harming the country much more, of which she is a leader, than her political rivals.

Post poll uncertainty and confusion in Pakistan



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

MORE than three weeks after the polls, National and Provincial Assemblies have not met. Although government-inspired stories say that the NA -- and Provincial Assemblies -- may meet on November 5 or 6, the fears of the election of October 10 being rejected altogether as infructuous are growing. The ostensible ground, it is widely feared, could be that no viable government seems likely to emerge from it.

It is therefore natural that all the three major conglomerates of legislators -- the King's party or the Q League, PPP-P and MMA -- have demanded an early convening of Assemblies. A certain definition of issues is inevitably emerging. Indeed, more basic issues about the transfer of power (from Army to the Parliament) and the proper role of Army and the intelligence agencies have cropped up. The press is now agitating these issues rather giv-

erly because a certain pessimism grips commentators that there exists no way of forcing the Army to give up the levers of power and go back to its subordinate status.

This pessimism, shared by all aware opinion, creates a fertile ground for rumours to be floated and believed. Strongest rumour today is that the either or decision to be made by the CE-President: either

under a rather malleable Makhdoom Amin Faheem, supposedly the favoured PM. Faheem initially had invited the MMA to also join in. It sounded nice for starters. If it refuses, so much the better for Faheem and PPP members.

Behind all the manoeuvres is the determination of Mr. Musharraf that he and the Army are here to stay. More so because these seem-

ing two are backed by the US government. MMA's inclusion -- in non-important ministries -- rather than being left out, is an American preference. The Mullahs should be given opportunities to fatten themselves, to be later dealt with politically. Insofar as PPP-P is concerned its cooperation can only be had if Musharraf agrees to a mutually profitable deal with Benazir Bhutto in exile. She is so desperate to return and have her husband released even on bail that she would

allow her party to coexist not only with Musharraf but also with its traditional rivals in a government in which real power will continue to reside through Musharraf in the Army. For the Army, the immediate priority seems to be to have an obedient government either comprising all three blocs of MPs or at least two larger ones: PML(Q) and

PPP-P. The master alternative of doing a Yahya Khan is the instrument of last resort. Meantime, Benazir's deal includes a tiresome condition: fearing to be double-crossed, she insists on international guarantors before the deal goes through. Mr. Musharraf was in Saudi Arabia (as this was being written) in quest of such a guarantee. It may be recalled that Musharraf's quarrel with Nawaz Sharif was resolved through a deal brokered by Saudi government. The

them in. This is not true of PMLs of most shapes and colours, except the rump of Nawaz loyalists -- just 14 in the NA -- and secondly the most authentic conservatives: the derisory term used for MMA is the Bearded Brigade. They have won on an anti-Musharraf and anti-American wave in NWFP, Balochistan and even parts of Punjab and Karachi. They find it hard to sit with either PPP wallahs whom they have long accused of being socialists, or outright turncoats or not talk at all about the transfer of power, legitimacy of Musharraf Presidency or his constitutional skulduggery, though there are people who insist that Mullahs ought not to be allowed to stay outside government to make trouble. Mullahs too affect to be moderates and modernists. US experts are said to support the view that Mullahs be taken in the government.

Would the Assemblies meet on November 5 or 6? Probably they will. The other course is risky by far. But even in the attempt to form a desired government, difficult concessions are being required from the powers that be which they are unwilling to make. Which is where most Pakistanis are: uncertain and confused.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

PLAIN WORDS

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he gets a so-called national government, with a puppet PM or he would sack the National Assembly before it meets or shortly thereafter (for failure to produce a viable government). It is claimed that although readiness to transfer power, this is not intended to be more than technical. He is trying to create a government subservient to himself under the title of national government comprising the Q League -- which in reality comprises turncoats from Nawaz Sharif's PML -- and PPP-P

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opportunities to make money. But they may not interfere in economic and financial decision-making or in national security and foreign policy issues, including relations with major powers and of course the India policy. There is no question of any real transfer of power. Parties know these limitations. The conservative parties normally comprising time servers and traditional toadies, are ready to get into whichever government will take

The coveted ICS

MEGASTHENES

THE old Indian Civil Service is largely seen today as a relic and symbol of the British Raj. There was a time though when collectively the 1000-1100 members of this elite institution virtually ruled the vast sub-continent. There is more than an element of truth in the witticism that the ICS was neither Indian, nor particularly civil and ruled rather than served. And yet it did attract to its fold some of the ablest and brightest minds in Britain and British India, provided reasonably efficient and fair administration -- consisting, in the main, of law and order and revenue collection -- and afforded the steel frame which underpinned the Raj. Some ICS officers wrote about their stay and experiences, a few produced scholarly works and the District Gazetteers, prepared in those times almost as a matter of routine, are even today an invaluable work of reference.

Swami Vivekananda's father had thought of a career in the ICS for his son who, however, had different ideas. Pandit Dwaraka Prasad Mishra's father likewise had hoped that his son would qualify for the ICS. D P Mishra opted instead for a career in politics -- a vocation in which he excelled. His son Rajesh, after a distinguished career in diplomacy, joined politics but not his father's old party. Even Motilal Nehru had at one time no higher aspiration for his son than that he should serve in the ICS and one day become the first Indian Governor of

the United Provinces. Jawaharlal, of course, went on to much bigger and higher achievements.

The redoubtable Mrs Thatcher's ambition in her early and formative years, it is said, was to serve in the ICS and though she attained the highest political office in her country, it is a paradox that she would never

responsibility and authority were open to the ICS -- Secretary to the Government, Commissioner, gubernatorial assignments, Member of the Viceroy's and the Governors' Executive Councils, and also the Council of the Secretary of State for India. Members of the judicial branch of the service were

continued to play an important, if also a somewhat different but more appropriate role. A fair number of them after retirement went on to serve with distinction in gubernatorial assignments. Dharm Vir, Vishwanathan, the brothers Sahay, L P Singh, B D Pande, B K Nehru and L K Jha, among others,

Centre, Alexander had appointed a highly respected and competent civil servant of Bangladesh to a senior position in the organization.

Alexander's career speaks for itself. That a protégé of successive Congress Prime Ministers could also win the confidence and endorsement of Bal Thackeray

speaks, in particular, of his mastery of the science of human relationship. There may be any number of reasons for an octogenarian and former bureaucrat, after more than half a century of dedicated public service, to call it a day. It would be disappointing though if there is truth to media speculation that he resigned in a fit of pique on being overlooked for the office of President. Election to the highest -- albeit titular and almost apolitical -- office in the country cannot be entirely unlinked to political expediency and accommodation. Not being nominated for that highest position cannot be construed, by any stretch of imagination, as supersession or any sort of reflection. To resign on this account would be inconsistent with the high traditions of service, of which Alexander is better aware than most people. As stated earlier none from even the elite and covenanted ICS ever held the position of Viceroy -- although collectively they virtually ruled the country at one time.

have qualified for the ICS -- the service was closed to women! R A Butler's father and uncle both served with high distinction in the ICS. Sir Montague Butler, the father, retiring as Governor of the Central Provinces and Sir Harcourt Butler, the uncle, a personal friend of Motilal Nehru, as Governor of the United Provinces. Hugh Gaitskell's father, I believe, also served.

The position of Viceroy was never, to my knowledge, held by an ICS. The governorships of the three Presidency States of Bengal, Bombay and Madras likewise were generally filled by eminent personalities from Britain or even the Dominions. Other than these, virtually all high positions of

appointed judges of the High Courts but usually not Chief Justice. The two most coveted appointments were said to be Home Member in the Viceroy's Executive Council and Governor of the UP.

It is an irony, but also fitting in the historical perspective, that the limited few, who either declined to serve after appointment or left the service prematurely, are better remembered and held in higher esteem than those who attained high positions in the service. Surendranath Banerjee, Subhas Chandra Bose, Gurushodh Dutt of Borthochari fame, Annada Shankar Roy, and Akhtar Hamid Khan would fall in this category.

In independent India, the ICS

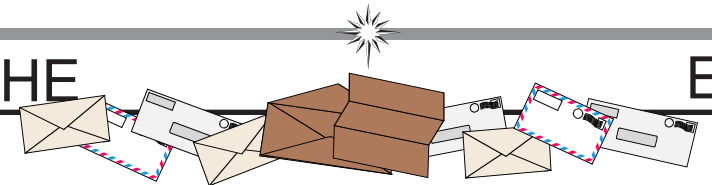
are outstanding such examples. C D Deshmukh and H M Patel even served in the Cabinet.

In 1979 Nirmal Mukharji, who was appointed Cabinet Secretary by the Janata Government in 1977, retired from active service. He belonged to the last batch of the ICS and was the last ICS officer to retire. Later during the V P Singh regime, he served briefly as Governor of the Punjab -- at that time a politically charged responsibility. He had topped the list of candidates in his batch -- Agha Shahi of Pakistan was third in the same batch. A more unassuming, urbane, and learned gentleman -- who wears his learning lightly -- than Nirmal Mukharji would be difficult to imagine let alone find.

nomenclature or letters after their names.

In the post ICS era also a good number of civil servants have gone on to outstanding careers in government even after retirement. Among them P C Alexander's in particular has been an extraordinarily long, successful, and varied career. He has been Secretary to the Government, head of the ITC, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, High Commissioner in London and until recently Governor of Maharashtra. He resigned a year ahead of the end of his second term. I do not know if anyone has served in that position longer. Incidentally, as Executive Director of the International Trade

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



"Will our elected government tell us what is happening?"

I could not agree with Akku Chowdhury more. Deployment of army would not be a preference but common intelligence will understand it to be the only plausible solution.

Yes there will be certain undesirable incidences. But let us not speak of "human rights" etc in a city where hijacking, rape and body chopping had become a daily headline.

Kashef Mahboob Chowdhury Dhaka

Thanks to Mr Mahfuz Anam for giving us a glance of the current silence of military deployment by the government.

It is really a mystery as has been expressed in the commentary and I think the panic is justified for common people.

Unfortunately, this is the crust of our culture and more specifically the 'political culture'. Time and again the same thing has fallen back on people; armed forces deployed to control crime and a multitude of social problem. One can easily understand that the army being a force more concerned to protect the country from outside/ external threats do not have any magic or magical skills to solve social problems.

Does it then mean that our politicians are not skilled at democratising the society and do not possess the very skill to manage a country which should be their primary area of expertise and not of armed forces?

Our society at its core is still very autocratic and undemocratic. Starting from a family level, which is the basic unit of society, we see the male member in the role of military administrator forcing orders to the female partner and the children. We don't tend to look at problems with an eye to find the logic or cause of any problem but force to resolve the issue superficially and then end up getting the same problem coming back like boomerang. So though we criticise military style running of the country, in reality this is exactly the way all families are run in Bangladesh.

I believe in liberty and freedom. And to achieve Freedom, one has to change the culture from the source and take it further like the developed countries. We have examples in front of us. All we need is to open our eyes to see and feel the difference.

Wasim Mahmud On e-mail

Thanks to Mr. Mahfuz Anam for the brilliant commentary (October 29). It is in fact the voice and opinion of millions of Bangladeshi people like me who are in no way related to politics but are gravely concerned about the recent happenings in Bangladesh.

We voted BNP to power and started paying the price right from the beginning when it started off with a huge cabinet of 60 ministers. Law and order situation went on deteriorating as well.

At such a time army was deployed and again non-partisan people like me thought may be this would bring some good. But to our utter dismay, just the day one of the 'big ministers' announced that crime

in the country has come to zero level, a teacher of Government Laboratory High School was shot dead brutally in broad daylight a few yards away from his house. The only thought that comes to my mind is, tomorrow it could be you, me or anyone else. Yes, people are dying in the custody of the army. The army has the liberty to search anyone anywhere, they cannot be questioned. It seems that there is some sort of state of emergency in the country.

So I would in fact like to echo the editor and say, "Will our elected govt. tell us what is happening?" It seems that we have become hostages in the hands of this government. Common people really don't care who is in power, all they want is peace and security of life whether it is provided by the police, BDR or army.

Anjali Akbar Azimpur Road, Dhaka

I must congratulate Mr. Mahfuz Anam for his rather late but significant commentary. The deployment of the army to crack down on criminals was welcomed by the common people as they were very helpless at the criminal activities. Now the people are being deprived of their fundamental rights in name of crackdown on criminals. That the behaviour of the army not any less merciless than that of the police. That is why the death toll under army custody is increasing everyday.

Undoubtedly our elected government has no satisfactory answer to the question what you have raised in the commentary. The ongoing merciless behaviour of the army in

the name of interrogation is a dire violation of human rights and is a dent in the country's image abroad. But I am a bit surprised as to why a responsible daily like yours has taken such a long time to ask such urgent questions to the government. Rather the editorial of October 19 issue praises the government in all possible ways terming it "a necessary move" and says, "Khaleda Zia needs to be commended for deploying the army" but the same issue reports the death of two people during army interrogation. Thus the commentary and the editorial seem contradictory to me. Many top-listed criminals are still in their hideouts and undoubtedly will come out as soon as the army is withdrawn and the people will be subjected to their tyrannous activities again. So the deployment of the army is not a permanent solution of this social malady. Most of the arrested people/ criminals have the allegiance to the BNP. This reflects that the BNP government has failed to control its own people. So what sort of peace and security will the people enjoy when the army will be taken off the streets?

Islam Tangail

"A Powell Doctrine?" Secretary of State Colin Powell insists threats of "consequences" if Iraq is judged non-compliant with UN Security Council Resolution on disarming Iraq. A courageously upright stance indeed.

Secretary Powell, however, never warned Israel of consequences of non-compliance, and Israel has been in breach of UN resolutions on more than a score

times. And that State is rewarded not merely with inaction and lack of consequences but by reward and encouragement. No wonder, Israel grossly violates human rights by shooting farmers, destroying olive groves, denying livelihood, imposing curfews and preventing ambulance services right in the middle of that region. How does Secretary Powell explain his reticence (read c o w a r d i c e) ? And then again, Secretary chooses a diplomatic and negotiating route with North Korea, which admitted of having few nuclear weapons, a route, which he resolutely denies Iraq even though that country does not even possess a nuclear bomb. And Iraq is sitting close to Israel and should legitimately feel threatened. Dose it then not make possession of nuclear bomb an insurance against being treated with disrespect and threats?

A case of triple standards? A brave new Powell Doctrine by an Army General turned diplomat? Even hypocrisy in international affairs used to have limits, and those limits have been crossed crassly and coarsely.

It is not the "inaction" by the UN (to take dictated action) that is a threat to the credibility of that world body and to international peace and security (for all and not only for the few); it is the attempt to render the world body into a compliant tool to serve the perceived national interest of the few that is the real threat. What kind of courage is the UN being warned to show, what kind of "backbone" will the UN show if it submitted to the pressure by one of its members howsoever powerful and militant might it be? Ironically,

this kind of gross arm-twisting is precisely what will surely destroy what is left of the UN.

Dr. Zakir Husain Dhaka

Lawlessness-- who is to blame?

I don't blame the police department exclusively for total failure of this lawlessness that persists in Bangladesh. It's the corrupt public officials like the local ward commissioners, student leaders and MPs who are behind the scene. And if we move up the ladder, well one may realise that our PM herself is somewhat responsible for this situation. Because if she were serious about this matter, she should have got rid off her corrupt surroundings a long time ago.

So, no matter how many criminals the army catch a day, the somewhat positive result from this current drive will only be short lived once army gets back to their barracks and one can be rest assured that another batch of criminals will emerge again to rule the street. So, what do we do then? Call army again? This cycle can't go on forever. If our PM is sincere with her goal-to make the country a safe and liveable place - instead of defending her corrupt surroundings for any wrong doing, she should ask the proper authority to take proper actions against them. It takes a lot of courage to do that. But only that courage will produce the outcome our PM sincerely wishes to see. Only then we can be assured that she means what she says. As long as the corrupt politicians get immunity from criminal

wrong doings, we all will only have to daydream about long gone peace and security in our society. Hope this message gets to our PM.

A Ahmed Dhaka

The first year of governance

If we are talking about the alliance's achievement in the first year of power, government's reluctant manner in running the country is probably the most noticeable among all. The nation's attention was entirely captured by the strong indications of law and order deterioration. Murder, kidnapping, extortion, bribery and embezzlement dominated the whole socio-political scenario. But precise statistical records of the criminal activities are not available. Whatever available is only the tip of an iceberg.

A symbiotic relationship between those wielding power and the kings of the criminal world seemed to have been formed. But the election manifesto did sound quite the opposite. We have not noticed any progress in fighting poverty, income inequality, industrial sluggishness, environmental degradation and looming threats of globalisation. Only signs of party politics are evident.

Maruf DU, Dhaka

Majority of the population voted the BNP in the October 1 election and that finally led the party and its allies to be sworn in power. The previous Awami government failed to curb terrorism. Their supportive role to some of the notorious party lawmak-

ers and leaders ensured BNP's landslide victory over the Awami League. One year of BNP government has passed and it is time to look at their success, and failure as well. Some epoch making decision has been taken. Such as: the banning of production, marketing and use of polythene shopping bags that undoubtedly was a major cause of environmental pollution. Ban on two-stroke-three-wheelers and the shut down of Adamjee Jute Mills that incurred a huge loss are also praise-worthy. But all these successes went in vain as they failed to restore the rule of law in the country, which was one of their major election pledges. People want to live in peace and wish to get the assurance of a natural, normal death. Terrorists and criminals are given political shelter, completely ignoring their crime. Government's voice, though always sounds quite tough against corruption, became rather silent when its own MP's and party men got involved in the wheat scam. In every sector there are evidences of political appointments. And a President was forced to quit the office presumably on charge of impartiality.

So, can we say that the first year of the alliance government was a success? **Noushad Shahrior Dhaka**