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Leaders at it again

Ruling coalition should concentrate on governance and not on haranguing the

UR Foreign Minister's glib tongue is getting the better of him, again. On Friday he said the fact that the opposition leader could return to the country proves how free a State ours is. Can we remind him that Bangladesh was never a country in which the opposition leaders had any trouble returning to. Why should he compare us with any other Third World country which we are not, and which we never will be as far as democracy is concerned? Earlier he said that Sheikh Hasina went to Brussels and the European parliament passed a critical resolution on us. Then she goes to Delhi and India launches a propaganda campaign against Bangladesh. By saying all this isn't he admitting that our opposition leader appears to have more influence on foreign governments than the gigantic foreign office he runs? He was obviously trying to gain a political point by trying to show Sheikh Hasina's clout in India -- which as the FM he shouldn't -- but he shoots himself in the foot when he tries to do the same as regards the governments in the European parliament. So the European governments are also dancing to Sheikh Hasina's tune. Is this the impression our FM has of European governments?

To Sheikh Hasina's challenge of proving her anti-Bangladesh activities in Bangkok and New Delhi or face legal action our foreign minister hinted at his own legal action against her if the former should choose to go to court. We appeal to both to spare us this road show and urge them to concentrate on some more constructive engagement like working together to ensure that fundamentalism does not find any place in the country. Yes, we are proud to be a liberal democratic moderate Muslim country. But we are also aware of the fact that there are international terrorist networks that are out to penetrate other countries to carry out their destructive agenda as they did in Bali.

The Bali incident points out the dangers of the times we live in. At this point we must concentrate all our energies in strengthening our democracy and the governance process so that none can destabilise our country. We urge our leaders not to further fans the fires of conflict and animosity of which we had far more than we could tolerate. The ruling party appears more interested in haranquing the opposition than concentrating on governance, the failure to deliver which has harmed them far more than the opposition could have ever done.

Verdict on Bappi murder Another example of quick justice dispensation

special court for prevention of repression on women and children on Saturday found all the five accused in the Bappi murder case guilty and ruled that they be hanged by the neck until death, less than four months after they had perpetrated the gruesome killing. The verdict capped yet another example of quick dispensation of justice by the lower judiciary (the trial spanned over two months and five days). The lower courts this year has disposed of several criminal cases such as the Shihab murder case, the Mahima rape and murder case, the Simi Banu suicide abetment case and the Trisha murder case in the quickest possible time. In a country where the judiciary has often been criticised for huge logiam of cases, highlighted by some snail-paced trials that have continued for generations, these cases have certainly restored public confidence in the criminal justice

The low point in the Bappi murder case is perhaps the fact that one of the convicted is still absconding. Trial in absentia has also marked some recent murder and rape cases. While the judiciary and the prosecution have, in each case, done a splendid job, the police have not been quite up to its responsibility. Days, months and even years go by after a crime, still they somehow cannot put the criminals behind the bar and then in the dock.

Trials in absentia, in most cases, expose the complainants to reprisal from the convicted. After the sentence was pronounced in the Mahima rape and murder case, with one of the main accused absconding, the first thing that crossed the minds of Mahima's parents was concern for the safety of their younger daughter. Therefore, although the court has rounded off the Bappi murder case, justice will not be done until the police trace Shariful Islam Badal down.

Expeditious dispensation of justice in our country is still an exception not the rule. According to the law, justice and parliamentary affairs minister, nearly one million cases currently lie pending at different tiers of iudiciary. A strong case in point here would be the trial of Shazneen murder, which has gone on for more than four years now and still cross-examination of the prosecution witnesses is not over. One wonders how long Shazneen's family and so many others would have to wait before justice is dispensed with.

Fascination with force: The iron in our souls



PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

O recent incident of sexual assault has shocked the Indian public and Parliament as powerfully as the rape of a Delhi medical student.

The media has commendably highlighted the larger issue of sexual harassment and growing insecurity among women. The debate also underscores the gender-insensitivity of the police and the need to amend sexual harassment laws. This should provoke deep reflection.

However, a shrill note has crept into the discussion, with several women MPs demanding capital punishment for rapists. In the past, only *Hindutva* arch-conservatives like Mr L.K. Advani used to call for

The sentiment favouring tighter rape laws has spread. A recent Hindustan Times survey of 311 Delhi women finds that 29 percent want rape to be punished with life imprisonment, 43 percent with castration, and a frightful 71 percent

Growing numbers of people are indisputably losing confidence in the efficacy of the legal system as regards punishing sexual assault.

the smugness of Delhi's police commissioner who says, terrible as rapes are, "in a large city, they happen". The VHP-RSS line, advoThat's why the European Union

Capital punishment for rape violates the ethical principle of proportionality, accepted even in the conduct of war. Just punishment must not be disproportionate to the

individuals in their own right.

India is no exception to this. It remains one of the most malesupremacist and patriarchal societies anywhere

What's left of the argument for stronger, tougher, punishment for rape is the idea of deterrence -- the view that stiff penalties will deter people from committing crimes. Experience shows tough laws don't

Second, the status of the rape victim's statement must be significantly raised within the evidence law. She need not prove that the sexual act lacked her consent -- by, for instance, showing marks of physical resistance. Nor should her

antecedents be open to question. Questioning antecedents is a nasty way of casting suspicion on her character and humiliating her. The victim must be encouraged to

Today, going to a police station and facing hostile and wolfish glances or remarks from policemen is a soul-killing experience even for self-confident professional women.

victim to overcome the stigma of

All this must change. Such reforms will greatly improve the investigation, trial, and conviction for rape. They have far fewer pitfalls than drastic measures which prescribe extreme penalties. The changes are part of the general charter of reform of our crime control and justice delivery systems -themselves part of our larger democratic agenda

However, many people don't seem to believe in systemic reform, even the possibility of reform. They prefer harsh, draconian, coercive solutions, maximising the repressive power of the state while disempowering the ordinary

They are fundamentally mistaken in looking for military shortcuts, technical quick-fixes or draconian laws. This betrays a deeply cynical mindset fascinated or smitten by force.

Much human progress has been achieved through democratic engagement with different groups and institutions, not through brute force. We now rely excessively on coercion for everything -- from border security to domestic safety.

This is counterproductive. Ultimately, force-based approaches damage the very object they are meant to protect.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

has abolished the death penalty. And there is a strong movement for scrapping it in the otherwise punish-

ment-obsessed US Sixtyeight percent believe the police "aren't doing enough". Such sentiments contrast with

severity of the offence. Many of those who demand

They are fundamentally mistaken in looking for military shortcuts, technical quick-fixes or draconian laws. This betrays a deeply cynical mindset fascinated or smitten by force. Much human progress has been achieved through democratic engagement with different groups and institutions, not through brute force. We now rely excessively on coercion for everything -- from border security to domestic safety. This is counterproductive. Ultimately, force-based approaches damage the very object they are meant to protect.

cated from Jaipur, that only a conservative "dress code" can protect women, also stands discredited

However, capital punishment for rape may be a cure worse than the disease. Rape is a serious violation of a woman's body and her fundamental right to her person. But it is not as vile as murder

Murder involves the extinction of human life -- with a terrible finality. Yet, even murder should not be punished with death. For nobody has the right to take away what they didn't create. Human life is too precious to be snuffed out. Capital punishment doesn't deter murder. Executing an innocent person causes irreversible harm

capital punishment for rape draw not on ethics, but on mystical notions about the "sacred" feminine body -- like a mother-goddess' or sati's. Its "desecration" is equated with murder.

The same concept operated in Jhajjar, where VHP mahants put a cow's life higher than a man's.

This proposition reeks of hypocrisy, especially when advanced by Hindutva supporters who falsely claim that tradition treats women on a par with, if not higher than, men.

A cursory glance at the Manusmriti shows this is untrue. Women in ancient societies were typically treated as objects and adjuncts of men -- mothers, wives.

deter nearly enough. The Narcotics Act (minimum penalty, 10 years imprisonment) is a case in point. So

Rape, feminists rightly argue, is a "structural crime" originating in complex social phenomena. Hanging one or ten convicts will not end it. There is also another complication: the acquittal rate will sharply rise if penalties get extreme

The central issue is how to bring rapists to book and reduce the rates of acquittal (currently about 75 percent). Three reforms are vital First, the definition of "sexual intercourse" in Section 375 of IPC must be amended to include all forms of penetration as well as marital rape.

report the offence: after all, over 90 percent of rapists are not strangers. but known to the victim -- often, her relatives Third, as far as possible, women

judges should hear rape cases, and policewomen should investigate them. This will reduce the victim's trauma and help her speak up. The victim should be allowed to record her testimony in a judge's chamber, without having to appear in a full courtroom. Counselling should be mandatory.

These measures must be supplemented by gender-sensitisation programmes for the police. Women's groups and counsellors must be involved to encourage the

Foreign policy: A crisis of image

We have to put forth a clear message that Bangladesh is a parliamentary democracy, an attractive trade partner, an ally which contributed the first non-NATO troops towards the liberation of Kuwait in 1990, and a solid friend in the war against terror. The detractors of Bangladesh are not about to end their campaign. With the international situation as it is, they have a fertile ground to continue their efforts. The government of Bangladesh cannot simply sit idle and hope that the bad press will go away.

ESAM SOHAIL writes from Kansas, USA

few days ago, I was amongst the audience at a local Diwali function where the Indian Ambassador to the United States was present. While the function was a social event, Ambassador Lalit Mansingh made sure that some of his words were geared towards highlighting what he called the 'eternal' Indian friendship with the Americans. Far from the official rituals of Washington DC, the Indian envoy was engaging in something he has an enviable knack for: public diplomacy to bring India to the people in America's heartland.

About the same time that I was exchanging pleasantaries with the Ambassador later that evening, Bangladesh was feeling the acute lack of Mr. Mansingh's flair across the Atlantic. Catching hundreds of our well-paid iplomats with their proverbial 'pants down', the European Parliament passed a resolution that was highly critical of Bangladesh. That some parts of the resolution were not entirely inaccurate does not take away from the fact that it was a public relations disaster for the Republic, Much of the handiwork behind the resolution is to the credit of intolerant political culture that prompts out-of-power politicians to bash the government of the day at every airport stop abroad.

Foremost amongst the culprits, however, is a foreign policy establishment that has remained stuck in the 1950s when diplomacy consisted of rituals like presenting credentials, hosting national day parties, and having a perfunctory press conference once a year. This is a different century where, at least in the developed democracies of the West, the Washington- or London-based national executives are not the only actors in foreign policy formulation. Legislatures, trade groups, civil society organizations, mass media, and supra-national interest groups all play a role of varying magnitudes in the conduct of international affairs. For these groups to hear the case of his foreign country, specially one on the periphery of the conscious, a foreign ambassador must 'connect' to the people, not just the state, in a society. Those countries, like India, Turkey, Israel, and Ireland, that have retooled their foreign policy establishment to fit into this new reality reap benefits of a good image and consequent goodwill that result in concrete trade and strategic policy advantages. It is not for their sheer love of cross-country travel that ambassadors and counsellors of India, Israel, and Turkey regularly speak at public events in the far flung parts of Europe and North America. With the singular exception of the dynamic former ambassador A. Tariq Kareem, the gentlemen who have led the Bangladesh embassy in Washington DC. have contented themselves to be prisoners of the 1950s mentality during envoys in Europe are afflicted with the

That the government in Dhaka itself is less than well-versed in these matters of image-building is reiterated for the umpteenth time by the outrageous incident involving the two European journalists. On one hand, the foreign ministry begs developed countries to be nice to Bangladeshi expatriates. On the other hand, the home ministry picks up foreign journalists on charges of 'sedition'. Eventually those journalists will most likely be released and so will their local cohorts. Has the government ever stopped to think, however, what kind of coverage European journalists will be giving Bangladesh when they know of the ordeal of their coprofessionals? Heck, we do not need our neighbours or the opposition politicians to do harm to the country's standing abroad. We have the government to do the job masterfully.

There is still time to limit, if not reverse, the damage done. At home we ought to stop harassing foreign journalists and civil society organisations. Rather, if we have nothing to hide, we ought to open up the country to overseas reporters and investigative groups to see for themselves the real Bangladesh. If there are pockets of sympathy for evil-doers, such sympathisers must be dealt with harshly by ourselves, no matter how prominent or marginal they may be.

Overseas, instead of the painfully

regular visits to the Gulf, the prime

minister can help us better by taking a trip to the United States and Western Europe where the idea of a Muslim democracy with a woman premier is an exotically likeable one. Nothing could be a greater public relations harvest than her speaking to the joint sessions of Canadian, British, and American legislatures about the fact that she represents a friend which is one of the world's biggest democracies. Let her and her ministers make the case for Bangladesh on the Western mass media and to the trade bodies. Our ambassadors and high commission are well advised to connect to the societies they are accredited to. They should be taking crash courses in public diplomacy and fanning out to speak to, and interview with, provincial Rotary Clubs, local trade conferences. and rural editorial boards. We have to put forth a clear message that Bangladesh is a parliamentary democracy, an attractive trade partner, an ally which contributed the first non-NATO troops towards the liberation of Kuwait in 1990, and a solid friend in the war against terror. The detractors of Bangladesh are not about to end their campaign. With the international situation as it is, they have a fertile ground to continue their efforts. The government of Bangladesh cannot simply sit idle and hope that the bad press will go away. Instead, those whose constitutional duty it is to safeguard the Republic's interests should go on the public relations offensive themselves.

What is the government waiting for? A resolution of censure in the House of

The blessed night of honour

let us supplicate and glorify Benign Allah during this night for His forgiveness of our sins. Forgiving Allah is always ready and eager to forgive sins of His "bandas" (servants), but there are special occasions when He is more eager to consider supplications of His servants and forgive their sins, and this auspicious Shab-e-Qadr is one of such occasions.

KAZI AULAD HOSSAIN

HERE are historic and memorable occasions and events to which people give much importance and they gratefully observe these occasions and events in a befitting manner. A country celebrates the birthday of a national hero with fervour and solemnity because of his valuable contribution to the cause of his motherland and, to his countrymen it is undoubtedly a red letter day. In the same way, there are great and important occasions and events to which the Muslims all over world give much importance and they observe them with due solemnity and fervour. And one of such occasion is the Shab-e-Qadr or the Night of Honour.

Now, it is the holy month of Ramadan -- the most important month in the Islamic calendar -and during this month on the 27[™] night of Ramadan the Muslims all over the world celebrate the greatest and the noblest of all nights, that is, the (Shab-e-Qadr) and supplicate Merciful Allah for forgiveness of their sins. We may now see what Almighty Allah has said about the great Sura (Chapter) Qadr (Honour) of the Holy Qur-an. In its four Ayats (Verses). He says: "We have indeed revealed this (Message) in the Night of Honour. (Ayat 1) And what will explain to thee what the Night of Honour is? (Ayat 2) The Night of Honour is better than a thousand months. (Ayat 3) Therein come down the angels and the spirit by God's permission, on every errand: (Ayat 4) Peace! -- this until the rise of Morn (Ayat 5).

So, it is evident from Ayat 3 of the aforesaid Sura of the Holy Qur-an that Shab-e-Qadr or the Night of Honour is "better than a thousand months." According to commentation offered by Allama Abdoullah Yusuf Ali, a commentator of international repute, the term "a thousand months" referred to in the aforesaid Quranic Ayat should not be taken literally, "it must be taken in an indefinite sense, as denoting a very long period of time." It may be mentioned here that the term "Shab" is a Persian word and it means "Night" and thus the term "Shab-e-Qadr" means the Night of Honour or Power.

Again, in Ayat 3 of Sura Dukhan (Smoke or Mist) of the Holy Qur-an Almighty Allah says: "We sent it (the Holy Qur-an) down during a blessed night for We (ever) wish to warn (against Evil).' The blessed night is no other night than the Shabe-Qadr. Repeated mention of this Night of Honour in the Holy Qur-an clearly indicates the importance and unique position of this great Night.

As regards observance of the Shab-e-Qadr in

here that most of the commentators have opined that it should be observed on the 27th night of the lunar month whereas some commentators hold the view that it should be observed on the 23rd or 25t night of the month of Ramadan. In this connection, the same renowned commentator Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali has comprehensively observed like this" "But perhaps we need not fix it literally by the calendar. The night that a Message (Qur-an) descends from God is indeed a blessed night, like a day of rain for a parched land." What was the background ("Shan-e-Nazul") of

the holy month of Ramadan, it may be mentioned

revelation of the aforesaid Meccan Sura, that is, Sura Qadr (Honour of Power) of the Holy Qur-an to our holy Prophet (pbuh) in which the inimitable position of the Shab-e-Qadr has been marvellously described by Allah Rahman-ur-Rahim? According to Hazrat Ashraf Ali Thanavi (RA), a renowned translator of the Holy Qur-an and a noted commentator, one day the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) was discussing matters with his companions, when one of the companions told him with a heavy heart that a saint from among the children of Israel was able to gain physical and spiritual power by praying to Allah Rabbul Alameen and fighting in His way for 1,000 months, but they (the companions of the holy Prophet) were unable to serve Almighty Allah as they could not live for a long period of time like the aforesaid saint. Almighty heard it and revealed this Sura, that is, Sura Qadr of the Holy Qur-an in which He has clearly said that the 27th night of the holy month of Ramadan, that is, Shab-e-Qadr is better than 1000 months.

Since the blessed Night of Honour (Shab-e-Qadr) has come and the Muslims the world over will observe this glorious Night with due solemnity and fervour, the Muslims in Bangladesh will avail this opportunity also and celebrate this auspicious occasion in a befitting manner. So let us supplicate and glorify Benign Allah during this night for His forgiveness of our sins. Forgiving Allah is always ready and eager to forgive sins of His "bandas" (servants), but there are special occasions when He is more eager to consider supplications of His servants and forgive their sins, and this auspicious Shab-e-Qadr is one of such occasions. We should not, therefore, miss it.

Mombasa carnage: More misery for many

BRIG GEN (RETD) SAKHAWAT

HUSSAIN

T is Kenya again that came under terrorist attack. This time the targets were mainly Israeli interest, Paradise Hotel in Malindi, a favourite beach resort for holiday loving affluent Israelis. It was a twin attack in which a chartered Israeli passenger aircraft narrowly escaped from being hit by a rocket. Reportedly thirteen people have died mainly Kenyans including three Israeli tourists. Also the three suicide bombers were also killed in the hotel blast. The action is condemnable no doubt and it is a chilling reminder to the rest of the world how the network of terrorism has now spread all over after September 11 especially in the shadow of aggravated Middle East situation when yet another Gulf war is looming over the horizon. This was a typical suicidal attack that hardly has any prevention. Kenya

had seen gruesome act of terrorism in 1998 when US embassy in Nairobi was bombed. But this was the first ever Israeli target outside Israeli soil since September 11. Al-Qaida connections were quick presumption, and that was made by the Kenyan ambassador in Israel without second thought. Israel is yet to name the suspect officially though one unidentified group calling themselves "Army of Palestine" claimed the responsibility. Yet there could be no doubt this would not only be pointed towards Osama and his gang but may be connect up with Palestinian extremists. No doubt the incidence would affect Israel's coming election and escalate tension between Israelis and Palestinians. Meanwhile Sharon has succeeded in retaining Likud Party leadership that brightens his chances to be reelected as Israel's toughest prime

In coming weeks many ques-

now targeting Israelis other than US personnel when US troops are marshalling for a showdown in Iraq. Is it a provocation made for Israelis to exile Yasser Arafat if reactions would complicate the world scenario and bring more misery for those who wish to live in peace. the incidence is connected with Palestinian extremists? Or a

linkage would be established

between al-Qaida and the Pales-

tinian Authority? Experts on bin-

Laden and al-Qaida had earlier

summarised, bin-Laden had no

love for Palestinian Authority or

Yaser Arafat who is considered to

be yet another tyrant of Arab

rulers. Nor al-Qaida had targeted

tions would be coming up as to the consequences of such acts

Israelis so far for simple reason of not to provoke Israel any further to create more difficulties for Palestinians or deter them from their cause. But fact remains that al-Qaida has connection with Kenyan Muslim extremists who

also were part of Afghan Jihad in

1980s. As reported earlier that

Islamic Struggle Front (ISF) that

was formed to fight global Jihad

against "the Jews" (and allies) in

1998 though did not have Kenyan

representation but one Egyptian

exile Abu Naser Ahmed Taha

believed to have been in connec-

tion with Afghan Jihad veteran

Kenyan Muslim Mujahideens.

Kenya-Israel co-operation is a long-standing affair. One may recall Kenvan help to Israeli commandos at Entebbe in 1977. Since then Israeli intelligence Mossad and Shin Bet internal intelligence agency and Kenyan

reported that since simultaneous

US embassy bombing on August

7, 1998 in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar

es Salaam, Tanzania killing 247

including 12 Americans, both US

intelligence and Israeli Mossad

have large presence there to

protect from recurrence of likely

incidence. Local Kenyan Muslims

having Middle Eastern origin have been sympathisers of Palestinians in their fight for freedom but no report suggested any presence of militant Palestinians in Kenya.

Many analysts presume that

Mombasa carnage is condemnable without any shed of doubt but who soever is connected with this provocative incidence it only signals the

intensity of storm that is gathering over Arab desert. It is too early to predict any consequences but this senseless action and contemplated

intelligence agency had been in this act also has al-Qaida conco-operation in the region. It is nection as like that of Bali bomb-When bin-Laden announced the formation of the ISF in the beginning of 1998 and issued its first Fatwa (is bin Laden qualified to issue Fatwa?), it designated the United States and Israel (the crusaders and the Jewish people, as he put it) as the

called for attacks on them. In many of his subsequent statements, this characterisation of the US and Israel as the principal enemies of Islam has been a recurring theme" writes noted analyst Mr. B. Raman. However, if al-Qaida connections are established in due course of time, few questions then would come up as the situation in Middle East moves closer to explosion. First, does al-Qaida still remain a potent terrorist threat all over the globe in-spite of US' persistent war on terror? Second, how much then Mr. Bush has achieved in combating terror in last one year? Third, is US diverting from main issue of eliminating bin-Laden by switching aim to a regime change in Iraq? Second, this would mean that al-Qaida finds Palestinian struggle is stuck within the confine of Palestinian land and they would not mind stepping in to provoke Israel to go still tough coinciding US strike on principal enemies of Islam, and Iraq within coming couple of

exile of Yaser Arafat that would then give a new dimension to the ongoing Middle East imbroglio and would not go well with US plan in Iraq. US understood to have requested Israel to maintain a restraint as and when they deal with Iraq but whether that request would hold good in the wake of recent event or not would be seen in coming weeks. Mombasa carnage is condemnable without any shed of doubt but whosoever is connected with this provocative incidence it only signals the intensity of storm that is gathering over Arab desert. It is too early to predict any consequences but this senseless action and contemplated reactions would complicate the world scenario and bring more misery for those who wish to live in peace.

months. If Mombasa incidence

calls for Israeli retaliation in their

own way within Palestinian land or