

## Government-opposition dialogue

The current crisis demands it

ONE does not need to labour the point that the terrorist bombing crisis has thrown a serious challenge to the prevailing perception of threat to our national security or social stability. Since it has added a new facet to -- and hopefully created a new realisation of -- how vulnerable we remain to the forces of terrorism, our failure to measure up to it can only spell disaster for us. The serial bombing experience of Saturday, with all the blasts taking place in unrelenting succession, has taken us yet another notch closer to the latest techniques of terrorist assaults.

In another way it must also force a rethink on the conventional political culture given to mutual recriminations. The threat to the nation is far too grave now for the political parties to continue indulging in conspiratorial theorisation and trading of blame against one another. This is a national crisis which has to be faced without deceiving ourselves into thinking that the old ways of politics can work anymore.

Whether we like it or not, strange suspicions have been put on the roll against us and we have to allay these at any cost. The best way to do this would be for the political parties to present a unified face to the world as a proof of their joint commitment to fighting international terrorism. Minus that expression of solidarity in their ranks on this particular question they can neither combat terrorism effectively nor entirely shut off rumour-mongering and occasional attempts at stereo-typing our image.

That our conventional political culture refuses to reform itself even under such dire circumstances is a sad commentary on the vision of our political leaders. The prime minister has set up a judicial committee to institute a professedly independent inquiry into the bombing episode. That is all very good. But in the same breath has she not levelled an accusation against the opposition on this score, virtually giving an ex-parte judgement there? To accuse an elected opposition party of AL's stature of such a heinous crime without any proof to make public is untenable. At the ruling party rally to condemn the bombings, the AL was more directly blamed. This is not to condone Sheikh Hasina's pointer to four-party alliance's alleged involvement either. Yet, how does the ruling party institute a judicial inquiry and see the AL 'as culprit' in advance, both at the same time, except to reflect lack of conviction in the matter?

Then the opposition's right to condemn the terrorist act through demonstrations was stifled by the use of force. Given the highhanded manner in which the government dealt with the opposition programme, is it not a natural question to ask: when will the government give the AL the space it needs to operate as opposition? The opposition AL went for the demonstrations after it had decided to cancel the hartal. Though it was withdrawn for the Biswa Jtama, it nonetheless helped reflect the party's maturity especially when it has not given any fresh date for the strike.

We urge the ruling party to seize the opportunity being presented by the AL's withdrawal of the hartal and respond in kind for an early dialogue to take place on the current security issues. This expectation is reinforced by the fact that for the first time the AL in its disturbed rally on Tuesday demanded of the government to consult with the opposition in handling the current situation.

Investigations are crucial. Since the origins and networking behind the bomb blasts will have to be unearthed, the government will be well-advised to seek international assistance to make sure that we get to the bottom of things. This time the probe should not draw a blank. Why not ask for US or European assistance in this matter?

## What a bad show!

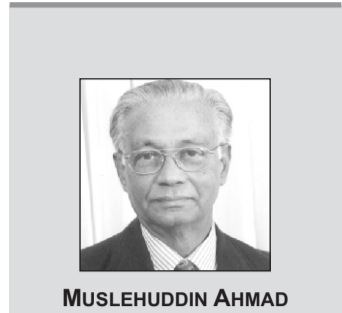
Something is wrong in the whole management and selection of the team

ANOTHER game, another defeat -- we have lost count of how many matches Bangladesh cricket team has lost in succession over the years. The latest defeat only shows what irresponsible playing really means. Scoring the lowest total in all the 16 Tests played by Bangladesh so far probably implies that either the team has lost interest or they are simply not capable. Though it got off to a brisk start in the second innings with an improbable total to chase, rash playing by the batsmen had the team crumble to a historical low. There were some bright and encouraging moments in bowling during the one day matches, but they remained exactly that -- a flash in the pan. And less said about the batting, the better. It was non-existent throughout.

But who is to be blamed for bringing such a big shame to the nation? Well, definitely, the players who have not only shown a complete lack of responsibility while representing their country in an international game but also a total lack of determination. We have to bring accountability to their profession; otherwise such irresponsible behaviour in the field would be difficult to curtail. We could blame the Cricket Board as well because may be the team should have been refrained from playing in the international arena for a while and concentrated more on training to build a stronger team. It's high time the authorities did some serious thinking about what should be done next.

Earlier new players were inducted in the team paving the way for fresh blood to prove themselves, but even that could not bring the desired success, the flashes notwithstanding. We agree that Bangladeshi players are novices in the international field, but how long should they be allowed to behave in such an irresponsible manner? All the hypes, the euphoria, the expectations after it got international recognition seem to have been gone down the drain. Should our cricketers prospects be allowed to go the way of many of our failed sectors?

## Who are the terrorists?



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

PALESTINIANS say that they are fighting for independence -- for a State of their own. They are obliged to fight those who occupy their homes and properties; it is an internationally accepted principle of human rights. So according to them, they are not the terrorists; indeed the occupiers and their supporters are. Similar wars have been going on in some other places in the world. Those fighters also argue -- they are the freedom fighters. We, the Bangladeshis were also branded as terrorists when we fought against Pakistani military junta for our independence. But undoubtedly we proved that we were not terrorists -- we were indeed the freedom fighters.

However, the questions are raised on the methods involved in such fights. The governments have large sophisticated military arsenals, but the freedom fighters have none. So they resort to indigenous methods and in the process civilians get killed. This is termed as terrorism. But in any war, the civilians get killed. Therefore, any war is terrorism whether it is done by F-16 or by suicide belts. Both should be condemned by the civilized world. This is indeed being done by the civilized people of the countries around the world despite the belligerent attitude displayed by some of their governments. The voices of opposition are distinct and loud -- no more war, no spilling of innocent blood for oil and for political hegemony.

If the civilized world really believe in freedom and love freedom for

themselves then how can they deny it to others? Here is the conflict -- conflict of political interest which is often termed as conflict of civilization. The conflict of civilization has, however, been there for ages. This has taken a serious turn once again. Unfortunately, the most powerful man on earth did not even hesitate to use the term "Crusade". The implication of this term is very far-reaching and indeed loaded with unending danger.

September 11 attack on NY Twin

couldn't the most sophisticated and well-trained intelligence agencies of the US locate them? The question was rightly raised -- what did the Administration do? Did the Administration know before hand? If not -- why not? All these question are to be looked into seriously by recently announced Kissinging Commission -- an independent commission for investigating into the 9/11 episode. The commission is expected to interrogate even President Bush

power in Israel. One may clearly see the positive role of Israeli Labour Party in its decision to elect Amram Mitzna as its leader who said that he would, if elected as the Prime Minister, withdraw Israeli troops from Gaza and West Bank and dismantle all Israeli settlements. These actions will immediately stop all forms of violence and establish peace in the Mid-East. Therefore, it depends on which party is running a government and who heads such a

pre-emptive strikes against the suspected terrorists. Now American disease of pre-emptive strikes has started gradually spreading over to other areas of the world. Apparently, the U.S. has already extended support to John Howard though Australian opposition leader heavily criticised the Prime Minister and said his rash statement has seriously damaged Australia's relations with the neighboring countries. John Howard's statement has really

Iraq has lost a generation. It's a terribly unjust world. Now even the US says that sanction did nothing to Saddam though the US was one country which was insisting on heavy sanction regime against Iraq.

Now there is a new American-British move -- 'remove Saddam' -- and for that war is necessary. If US had worked with Iraqi people instead of total hostility and sanctions, Saddam probably would have been out long ago. Again war can do nothing to Saddam. He would survive as Bin Laden and Molla Omar did. In the process innocent Iraqis will be killed by American and British bombs. The other day a leader (BBC report) of striking British Fire Services said that Blair has no funds for the Fire Service's employees, but 'he has funds to make bombs to kill innocent Iraqis.'

Though for the time being Bush Administration is listening to the advice of Secretary Powell and his associates in the State Department, who apparently do not favour any war, there are, however, signs that ultimate military attack may not await the final report of the inspection team now at work in Iraq. There is already a war of words between the US and Iraqi officials on whether Iraq has weapons of mass destruction. Iraq said it had none, but the US insists Iraq has and it must prove that it does not have weapons of mass destruction. Iraq says "how could we prove the existence of something that does not exist"? The world now has to deal with the impossible. Any way, who is really telling the truth -- Bush or Saddam? The world would obviously expect the Weapons Inspectors who are already in Iraq as per wishes of the UNSC to deal with it and find out the truth. But unfortunately Bush seems to be in a hurry. Though the greater part of the world is against US attack on Iraq, Bush Administration, as it seems, will find an excuse to start a war and the excuse is likely to spring out of deliberately created skirmishes in the no-fly zone.

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary and Ambassador and founder president of North South University

## SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

Who is really telling the truth -- Bush or Saddam? The world would obviously expect the Weapons Inspectors who are already in Iraq as per wishes of the UNSC to deal with it and find out the truth. But unfortunately Bush seems to be in a hurry. Though the greater part of the world is against US attack on Iraq, Bush Administration, as it seems, will find an excuse to start a war and the excuse is likely to spring out of deliberately created skirmishes in the no-fly zone.

Towers was the most unfortunate episode and this apparently has divided the world into two camps. It was, however, not necessary to make it so as every civilized people on earth condemned 9/11 attack. But who organized it and why? Al-Qaida? Some people say no organization in the name of Al-Qaida exists; it is an American invention. As it seems, after 9/11, a particular religion -- Islam came under attack. Unfortunately, some of the fights have been going on in the name of Islam, which is wrong. They fight against occupation and suppression of political and human rights. Hizbullah means Party of God. God never formed any party to carry on such fights though such fights appear to be completely within the political rights of those people. Similar names are being used by other fighting groups in different parts of the world. Thus the name of Islam has been dragged directly into their political fight. This needs to be corrected immediately and Islam be spared of the blame it has been subjected to unnecessarily.

Those who allegedly executed the plan of 9/11 attack lived in the US for a considerable period. Why himself.

The gossip goes round saying that none of over 2000 Jewish employees who used to work in New York Twin Towers died in the attack as they did not turn up there on that day. Ariel Sharon, Prime Minister of Israel, who was supposed to be in New York on that fateful day also stayed back home. How did these things happen? Kissinging Commission should look into these stories or gossips, fairly widespread in the USA and elsewhere.

The story went even to the extent of saying that this was planned to create a serious conflict between Christianity and Islam. (The conflict between Islam and Judaism exists already). One may detect such vicious ideas in the statements of Israeli ultra rightist politician -- Benjamin Netanyahu -- who said very clearly a couple of weeks ago that Arafat should be thrown out of Palestinian territories after Saddam is toppled. Ariel Sharon said, Iran should be the next country after Iraq. All these lead many to question the role of rightist government of Israel in the present conflict.

However, things would have been different if Labour Party was in

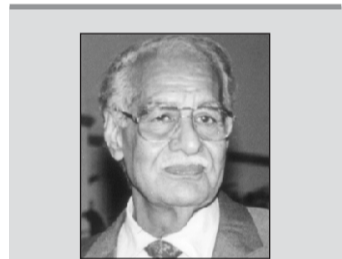
power. Similar thing happened in the U.S. too. Saddam existed during eight years' of Clinton Administration too, but there was hardly any talk of war against Iraq. Now President Bush talks of war wherever he goes. He says, he has to go to war for the sake of peace. What a brilliant idea!

Terrorism cannot be stopped by state terrorism. It only disperses the terrorists and violence gets widespread. The series of attacks in Israel, Yemen, Kuwait, Bali, Mombasa and many more such threats do prove that terrorists' attack can take place anytime, anywhere. The root causes of violence have to be addressed in order to curb violence. Only a country like Israel can indulge in violence, but the U.S. being the super-power should set better standard in the international relations. The ego and appetite for revenge should be inversely proportional to the military strength. But this does not seem to be the case now and hence the present tensions all over the world. The tension has already moved on to the eastern sector of the globe. The Australian Prime Minister John Howard has started talking about

created tension in the region and will seriously undermine the efforts of the neighbouring states to fight terrorism. Now the neighbouring states will probably have to change priorities and make preparation to fight another form of terrorism i.e. pre-emptive strikes.

Blair government has come out now with another dossier, the first one so far failed to establish anything, showing Saddam's cruelty to his own people. Even Amnesty International reportedly said that Blair government brought these old stories (unconfirmed) up now with a view to creating an excuse for the war. Any way, the people know that Saddam is a cruel dictator, but British colonial government delivered even bigger cruelties on the people of the Indian sub-continent only about half a century ago. So it's no use harping on such old issues. But any fresh war will inflict worst atrocities on Iraqi people who have been suffering immensely for the last 12 years because of Saddam's adventure into Kuwait and the consequent UNSC's sanctions. The sanction did nothing to Saddam; it only killed men, women and children and particularly children. Indeed

## What Gujarat means to India



KULDIP NAYAR  
writes from New Delhi

SOME fairly authentic reports are now available to indicate that the Election Commission would have suspended the polls in Gujarat if the state government had not stopped the Vijay Yatra. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) had planned to lead it nearly three weeks ago with a replica of the charred coach of the Sabarmati Express at Godhra. Whether or not the Supreme Court's directive not to stall the polls on the ground of law and order would have come in the way of the Election Commission is difficult to say. After making it the sole arbiter of deciding when to hold the election, the Supreme Court's order would have been at best a subject for interpretation. But that eventually never arose. Protection of the constitution does not relate to the law and order problem. In any case, the Gujarat

government considered it prudent to arrest some VHP leaders to stall the yatra.

The manner in which the VHP was ticked off and the precautionary measures taken by the state, however reluctant, should have chastened chief minister Narendra Modi. But the Gujarat election campaign showed that he went to the farthest limit to break every rule,

written or unwritten, legal or moral. His speeches reflected disdain for the Election Commission or, for that matter, any institution. He is a law unto himself.

The sum total of Modi's efforts has been to turn the election in the state into an exercise in obscurantism so as to consolidate the Hindu vote. The word *man*, which he has affixed to the name of President Pervez Musharraf, is meant to deride the Indian Muslims and

governance and economic development would be the poll issues, not Godhra. But apparently he could not make the Sangh parivar accept the plank. Otherwise, how do you explain the election propaganda material -- calendars, handbills, posters, stickers, CDs and almanacs -- all replete with images of the burning Sabarmati Express bogie? Vajpayee has used the Congress reference to the publication of a White Paper on Godhra and the

promise to punish the guilty to break his pre-poll assurance not to bring in Godhra. Assuming the Congress is a violator, there is no justification for unleashing the most pernicious propaganda against the Muslims and even offering justification for the Gujarat carnage. At one time it was said that the Prime Minister was so disgusted with the VHP campaign that he had decided not to go to Gujarat. But this frame of mind did not last long because he openly said later that he would go to Gujarat if anybody called him (*agar koyi bulayaga*). The RSS, which now controls all the elections from behind the scenes, has obliged him. The Congress 'crime' cannot be the ground for the prime minister joining the divisive and parochial forces. LK Advani has thrown every

caution to the wind. He should know that he is India's home minister, not the Gujarat chief minister's drumbeater. How can he give Modi a clean chit when the government appointed Nanavati Commission is sitting and recording evidence on what happened in Gujarat and who were guilty? When the home minister declares Modi not guilty, the entire purpose of the Commission is defeated. If the commission does

women and children, in a travesty of justice, were burnt alive. The chief minister, oath-bound to defend law and order, vicariously connived at the inhuman violence and some of his ministers even commanded the macabre acts of horror." Still the home minister praised Modi for the "exemplary handling" of the riots!

Unfortunately, the Congress too is using sadhus and saints lest it should be seen without the support of religious leaders. Congress president Sonia Gandhi started the campaign after invoking the blessings in temples. These acts too are reprehensible.

I do not know how the Gujaratis will ultimately vote. But the election campaign has been a warning to the nation: there is no compunction in mixing religion with politics. The entire structure of the polity is in danger if this trend is not ruthlessly stopped. The adherents of theocracy will devour democracy. In no part of the world are one nationality and one religion synonymous terms; nor has it ever been so in India.

Since 10 more state elections are due in the next 12 to 15 months, there should be ground rules on their conduct. The Election Commission alone cannot check the prejudices and passions which are sought to be raised during the poll campaign. Gujarat is an example where even Mahatma Gandhi's name was dragged in to abuse India's pluralistic ethos. Political parties have to adhere to certain discipline. Can they mix religion with politics, something which endangers the very basic structure of the constitution? The ruling BJP has a lot to answer in this regard.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Since 10 more state elections are due in the next 12 to 15 months, there should be ground rules on their conduct. The Election Commission alone cannot check the prejudices and passions which are sought to be raised during the poll campaign. Gujarat is an example where even Mahatma Gandhi's name was dragged in to abuse India's pluralistic ethos. Political parties have to adhere to certain discipline. Can they mix religion with politics, something which endangers the very basic structure of the constitution? The ruling BJP has a lot to answer in this regard.

placate the Hindu elements for whom it is a word of contempt. Muslims are hardly a political force in the state. They are not more than 11 per cent of the electorate. But Modi believes that by inculcating anti-Muslim feeling he can ride a pro-Hindu wave.

The Election Commission has stepped in at times to ensure that the polls are free and fair. It has stopped the use of home guards for election duties because most of them are RSS camp followers. The Commission has also taken adverse note of the wide distribution of computer discs and T-shirts depicting the Godhra train burning for propaganda. In Ahmedabad, the Commission had parts of hoardings pulled down because the text read: "Be it Godhra or Akshardham (tem-

pled), we will wipe out terrorism." Still, the Election Commission has limitations. Its major source of information is the state. It cannot run the administration that is under Modi. By the time the reports reached Delhi, the damage had already been done. Even otherwise, the Commission can do little when the ruling party in the state and at the centre is bent upon communalising the atmosphere. The Sangh parivar has

staked all in the Gujarat election to make it a referendum on Hindutva. If it fails it may take the parivar many years to recover. But if it succeeds, it may be emboldened to take on the pluralistic society in other parts of the country. It is a disturbing scenario for the future. To some, it may seem farfetched. But that's what emerges when one does a reality check.

The VHP, the Taliban arm of the RSS, is calling all the shots. The BJP is toeing the line. The VHP shows the crude and militant side of Hindutva while the BJP, its camouflage. They are two sides of the same coin. The other members of the Sangh parivar are in no way less fanatic and fundamentalist than the *deeni* (religious) parties in Pakistan. The Prime Minister had said that

not clear Modi, he can proclaim the chief minister's innocence on the basis of the home minister's certificate.

In fact, the Concerned Citizens Tribunal, with retired Supreme Court and High Court judges as its members, has already indicted Modi. Its two-volume report, entitled *Crime Against Humanity*, tells how the misuse of religion for political ends resulted in the Gujarat carnage. The tribunal says: "Hindutva barbarians came out on the streets in different parts of Gujarat and, in all flaming fury, targeted innocent and helpless Muslims who had nothing to do with the antecedent Godhra event. They were brutalised by miscreants uninhibited by the police: their women were unblushingly molested; and Muslim men,

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

### Mymensingh blast

The news of bombing at cinema halls in Mymensingh is heart breaking. Even though we have come to expect different form of violence everyday, such an attack is still shocking to most of us. My heart goes out to the victims and their families - what a disaster while people were still rejoicing the Eid holidays!

I read about the arrests by the government and allegations by the opposition. It is hard to believe that our police got so advanced all of a sudden that they found enough evidence to warrant arrests of so many people within hours of the incident - one cannot help but wonder if it is a simple case of political exploitation of a tragedy. I do hope I am wrong, and that the police really does have proof to prosecute the offenders of this crime because we demand justice.

It is also beyond my comprehension why the Opposition Leader is claim-

ing that a part of the Government is sponsoring this sort of activities. Doesn't an incident like this make the people in power look bad? Isn't it only natural for the government and its supporters to try to keep the law and order situation under control, so that they can retain their popularity and get re-elected? The Leader of the Opposition has been bringing similar allegations for months - it is about time she produced proof of what she claims she "knows" or stopped uttering these lies for once and for all.

**A Concerned Citizen**  
Dallas, USA

### Arrests that raise a lot of questions

My attention has been drawn to your Editorial of December 9. The almost simultaneous arrests of some columnists and opposition leaders following the deadly attacks and the carnage that followed the series of bomb blasts in four cinema halls in

Mymensingh cannot but raise suspicion and doubts in the minds of any sensible citizen of the country. Other things being as they are our government if anything by these arrests are not serving the cause of our already poor and controversial image of the country. It appears that the ruling party is acting only per dictates of anger and vengeance. It may work on a personal level once in a while but at national level such deep-set manifestations only serve the interests of the "enemies".

It is also my observation that the ruling party has no concept whatsoever about the modern-day media. The government must realise that pursuing or "digging into truth and historical legal aspects" of an issue and an incident per say may not often be the business of the media, as they report a "story". It is more of an obligation on the part of the law-enforcing agencies. The media reaches out to the people more than most of the time on the basis of the

things as they are and on their newsworthiness including the need to inform people and related extent of their interest. The ruling party must realise that a statement made by a minister or an Inspector General of Police may often carry a far lesser meaning for the members of the public than what has been stated by a regular news-reporter of the media. Right or wrong these are hard and bitter truths.

In the end I would like to endorse your views in particular and wish to reiterate, as you have so aptly put it "We want to see some proofs as to why these people have been arrested. Vague justifications are not acceptable..."

**Shamsher Chowdhury**  
Dhaka

### Parking space and RAJUK

This is in response to Nihan Amin's letter (November 13). Almost every one will come up with similar com-

plaints of disturbances, inconveniences, annoyance, etc in Dhaka due to incompetence of RAJUK. BY a "RAJUK WARNING" published in your esteemed daily on June 23 issue, RAJUK recognised the fact that some plot owners in Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara are causing hazards by not keeping enough parking space at the ground floor and using the residential buildings as hotels, restaurants, shops, clubs, resthouses, office, etc.

Commercialisation of Gulshan Main Avenue was unnecessary and wrong when shopping areas like circle 1 and circle 2 were adequate. All that was needed was to remodel the shopping areas with underground car parking facility. Shops at the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors and commercial offices in the floors up to 20, or whatever the rules permit. This is possible even today and people would gladly come forward to advance money which will enable RAJUK to rebuild the two shopping

complexes perhaps without any investment of its own.

I think such arrangement will prevent using of residential houses for commercial purpose. Clause-8 of Standard Lease Agreement gave authority to RAJUK to permit use of residential houses for trade and business, provided that it does not cause any disturbance or annoyance to the occupants of adjacent property and destroy the residential character of the locality. And commercialisation is bound to cause hazard which is already apparent in many areas.

**Altaf Ahmed Choudhury**  
Gulshan, Dhaka

### Autocrat at heart

It is evident by now that our immature political leadership is still autocrat at heart, although the parties are compelled to propagate democracy to people. The politicians always pose as superior, suffering from a false sense of superiority

complex.

The way politics is looked at in our society is distorted, putting the politicians on a false pedestal, and spoiling them through excessive hero-worshipping. It is the misuse of power which attract the files.

The middle-class have to become more critical and more of them have to join politics and displace those with black money, to maintain the correct balance. The situation will not change so long politics is looked upon as a profitable business investment.

Another drawback is the lack of principle by the political leaders and workers, who change floors in a flash, being detestable opportunists, who are not willing to suffer for principle.

Hypocrisy is the number one weakness and enemy of the politicians. To improve the politicians, the political system and the network has to be improved.

**Arman**

Dhaka

### Dhaka University bus service

The Dhaka University bus service is pathetic to say the least. A large number of DU buses ply on different routes. But most of the time these buses are full of unknown faces. These passengers are not students but outsiders.

The bus staff hardly pay any attention to the students. They use these buses as if these were their own property. Some unknown people, who are not supposed to be in these buses often occupy the seats. It is also apprehended that many of these people get into these buses in exchange of money in collaboration with the staff. The DU authorities should take some punitive actions in this regard to stop the bus-staff from misusing the bus service.

**Anika Huq**  
Dhaka University