

Deaths at shrine

Saboteurs baring their teeth at will

THE bomb that went off at the holy shrine of Hazrat Shahjalal on Monday, killing two people and injuring at least 40 others, has sent shock waves across the country. It is the latest proof of the presence of subversive elements ready to commit ghoulish crimes to further their highly obscure, yet starkly ominous, agenda.

The place known for its religious serenity and spiritual ambience has been attracting countless devotees over many centuries. It is an oasis of peace and tranquility that has brought solace to men and women seeking blessings of the saint. But the peace has been subverted in a way that has rocked the nation.

The exact motive behind such wanton and mindless violence is not easy to ascertain, but the law enforcers should press relentlessly on to get at the bottom of it. Killers and saboteurs are showing their fangs from time to time, taking advantage of the fact that none of the bombing cases has yet been resolved. Suspects were arrested, but police could not go beyond that.

The possibility of local rivalry leading to the bloodletting cannot be ruled out, particularly when we consider the December 3 poisoning of some big fish in a pond near the shrine which surprised many.

But the killers have used some sophisticated device to detonate the bomb, which is a clear indication of the terrorists' access to lethal weapons. The discovery and seizure of a huge quantity of such weapons in recent times hit headlines. But hauling up of arms wouldn't mean much unless the supply routes can be sealed. So, the task of the law enforcers does not end with the seizure of caches.

The question uppermost in the minds of people is, who are these elements and what are they after?

The law enforcers must set themselves the task of resolving the mystery behind the bomb explosion at the shrine -- a very unlikely place for subversive activities. The ghostly loss of lives must not suffer the fate that all such incidents did in the past; that is, investigation into it should not end inconclusively.

Public parks to private hands

A good decision

THE prime minister has positively responded to a request by the business community that they be allowed to run some public parks in the capital to mark the MCCCI's centenary celebrations. This is a welcome gesture by the PM. It was also commendable on the part of the businessmen for coming up with such an idea. As it is the city suffers acutely from lack of open spaces with greenery around. Even the ones we have are occupied by drug pushers, small-time crooks and anti-social elements who make them almost into pariah zones. It wouldn't be an overstatement to say that the city dwellers are panting for fresh air.

But before the government decides to lease the parks out to private sector, a set of clear-cut guidelines must be formulated and handed to the lessees. First, the parks should be accessible to all with no restrictions on anyone seeking to enter them and enjoy the better, cleaner environment. Secondly, they should provide all the necessary facilities to the public. Majority of the public parks in the capital lack adequate walkways, shades, flora and entertainment spaces. We hope the new management would employ qualified planners in order to make these parks truly useful for the visitors. And, of course, most importantly, security must be given top priority.

Lastly, the authorities may provide angling facilities where lakes occur in park areas, but commercial fishing must be prohibited.

It is obvious that turning the existing public parks into worthwhile recreation outlets requires modern management. Let's hope the business community will make a good job of it. Overall, we would like to see more well-managed public parks in a city with increasingly diminishing breathing spaces.

BILOU GAHARAPUR

MR Mahfuzur Rahman touched upon an interesting subject: 'Khoda Hafez' vs. 'Allah Hafez' (DS 18-11-2003). I have been intrigued as much as he has been by this inconsequential tug-of-war.

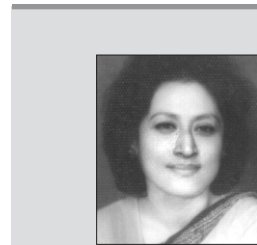
It is but a parting wish between two departing souls. The Germans say **au wiedersehen**, the French, **au revoir**, the Russians, **do svidaniya** -- all of them meaning, literally, "until we meet again," with a fond desire for a happy reunion. The neighbourly 'namaskar' or 'namaste' shows mutual respect, although there is no promise or indication of a desire for a pleasant meeting again in the future.

So far, fairly secular. Enter the Englishman with his **good-bye**. Like most things British, the expression is inscrutable, as to the meaning or intent. Some inventive genius, however, lately gave it a meaning, christening it as a short form or derivative of 'God be with you'. You don't get it? O yes, you do. Don't you mean 'all is well' when you say '**O.K.**'? That's the English way! But with 'good-bye' meaning as above, it is good-bye to secularism.

The Arabs with their **dishdashah**, **abayeh** and **ghotra** are rather elaborate in their dresses, as they are in leave taking. For this purpose, set aside at least half-an-hour in which time your host will embrace you umpteenth times, kiss you times without

Winds of change in South Asia

Is Kashmir solution in the offing?



DILARA CHOUDHURY

OF late the people of South Asia are feeling euphoric. And there is a good reason for them to feel that way. Recently, there has been a historic meeting between Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee and Pakistani President Musharraf on the sidelines of 12th SAARC summit in Islamabad January 4-6, 2004. Both have pledged to open the stalled peace dialogue from next month and declared their confidence in settling the vexed Kashmir dispute. So every segment of the society in India and Pakistan barring the zealots from both sides, who thrive on conflictual politics, is thrilled at the prospect of the potential normalisation of Indo-Pak relations thereby removing half-a-century's mistrust, suspicion and hostility between the two. Obviously, normalisation means potential solution of Kashmir.

Now that the top leadership of India and Pakistan are confident in settling the Kashmir imbroglio people naturally feel relieved and joyous. For more than half a century Kashmir dispute stood in the way of normalisation between the two. It brought as many as three wars, dreadful Kargil conflict in the backdrop of a potential nuclear war, and untold miseries to millions, who have been deprived of their basic rights due to the diversion of scarce resources to military expenditure. Decades went by without any possible solution in sight. This was because both sides remained adamant in pursuing a military solution to the problem although neither side could establish their respective viewpoints despite huge military spending and military presence in their respective administered portion of Kashmir. Recent changes in international and domestic dynamics including Kashmir brought forth before India and Pakistan that military solution to the problem was not feasible and there was a need for a negotiated settlement.

Kashmir issue is extremely complex pertaining to the ideological riddle of Indian and Pakistani nationalism. The policies pursued by India and Pakistan since 1947 have created a seemingly intractable situation, which needs concerted efforts of all. Naturally, advent of peace process in late 1990s has not been easy. Vajpayee's famous bus trip to Lahore in 1999 and the Lahore Accord with its accompanying euphoria went up in smokes in the Kargil intrusion. Subsequent

and Pakistan. No decision was hurriedly taken not even the decision to have the meeting although Pakistan floated the idea immediately following Vajpayee's declaration in April. But India waited for the right kind of gestures and development before agreeing for it. What happened was that the usual development like renewing the diplomatic and other communication links took place with a lot of humdrum coverage but behind the formal activities there

to the present state by carefully watching the progress made in Pakistan under the US "tutelage." True, US is playing a very significant role in bringing these countries face to face so that they can resort to a meaningful dialogue. The fact is that Washington needs both India and Pakistan for various reasons. It wants to have a closer link with India for economic and strategic reasons whereas it must have Pakistan on its side in its war on terrorism. None of these are possible if Indo-

factor alone. He realises the ground realities in Kashmir and their *jihadi* implications, and how volatile they can be if Pakistan does not move away from its present path. A situation which Pakistan also comprehends. After years of dancing with the *Jihadies* in Kashmir and *Talibans* in Afghanistan Islamabad is now almost caught in its own trap, especially in the context of its decision to join the war against terrorism. As many as three assassination attempts on Musharraf's life is enough to

with Maulana Abbas Ansari's majority faction Hurriyat Conference, and have neutralised it.

Majority Kashmiris are also wary of violence. They want peace and do not want to get entangled in Pakistan's endeavour to 'liberate' them. Third, the people of South Asia also are wary of continued hostility between the two that has hampered the integration of the region. For years the civil society through Track II diplomacy have propagated peace and better relations between the two. Now through Track III -- the people to people contacts have enhanced. They all are in favour of peace and normalisation of relations through the resolution of Kashmir problem.

Their genuine desire for peace has been discerned by their positive and joyous reactions at recent Vajpayee-Musharraf meeting. They have been thrilled at the prospects of peace in the region. And lastly, the segment of Indian and Pakistani leadership, which could pose threats to any impending peace between the two, are themselves in its favour. The BJP in India, which accused Congress of giving Kashmir a special status in the Constitution and making compromise on Indian nationalism by making it a disputed area, now recognises it as disputed and is in the forefront of settling the Kashmir dispute through negotiation. But it has such impeccable nationalist credentials, especially following the nuclear detonation of 1998, that nobody not even a nationalistic Indian can accuse BJP of going against India's interest at the cost of pleasing Pakistan. Consequently, by taking the peace initiative and going for it BJP has taken the sail out of Congress's secular front.

Along the Pakistani front the hard liner Pakistan Army, which has been all along in favour of a military solution of Kashmir dispute, at present, is pushing for a negotiated settlement of the issue as well. Even the oppositionist Islamic groups are less belligerent this time. A meeting between Vajpayee and a delegation from the Islamist groups in January 2004 is significant in this respect. With these leadership on broad, the wishes and desire of the people for a lasting peace in South Asia, and Uncle Sam watching over the region, it seems Kashmir resolution is, indeed, in the offing.

Dilara Choudhury is Professor, Govt and Politics, Jahangirnagar University.

gestures shown by each side that culminated into Vajpayee-Musharraf Summit of 2002 in Agra also slid back to square one when it ended without a joint communiqué.

Each time it was Kashmir. Each time it was the divergent positions taken by New Delhi and Islamabad on Kashmir that spoiled the broth. The path has been so rocky that even after exchange of goodwill gestures and visits by top leadership, South Asia witnessed India and Pakistan amassing millions of troops along LoC following alleged Pakistani terrorists' attack on Indian Parliament on December 13, 2002. However, belying all apprehensions these two South Asian adversaries have been back on track when Vajpayee suddenly declared in April 2003 that India was ready to resume dialogue and that it was his last attempt for peace in his lifetime.

This (the declaration) was indeed surprising as it came from the same person, who, in December 2002, irately snapped all means of communication with Pakistan and thought Pakistan fit for a "pre-emptive" attack following the American model of Iraq invasion. Surprise or not he did make the offer that was enthusiastically responded by Pakistan raising renewed hopes for peace in the region. And the January meeting of Vajpayee and Musharraf has been the culmination of a well thought out and cautious steps taken by both India

have been series of significant gestures by Islamabad like declaration of cease-fire along the LoC that was reciprocated by India and former's assurance to the latter to take steps to choke "cross-border" infiltration -- something New Delhi has been demanding for a long time particularly after April of 2003 as a precondition for a meaningful dialogue. The real breakthrough came when the Pakistani President broke a long-held taboo by declaring that Pakistan has "left aside" the United Nations Security Council resolution for a solution to Kashmir. New Delhi was thrilled. All these paved the way for the Summit. Although the detail discussion of the Summit has not been divulged but the fact that both feel confident in settling the Kashmir dispute signify that New Delhi also has shown flexibility by allowing Kashmir as an issue that needs to be discussed in a declared statement.

These developments are indeed encouraging. Will Kashmir dispute be really solved? This million dollar question is being asked again and again as if it is too good to believe that winds of change are really blowing in South Asia and these adversaries would cast aside their old prejudices and move towards a lasting peace by solving the core issue of Kashmir. Critics, however, point-out that all these have come about due to American pressure and its involvement in Indo-Pak dispute over Kashmir. And India has come

Pak impasse continues. Resolution of Indo-Pak conflict is, then, in the interest of Washington (also the interest of South Asia). It is, thus, putting tremendous pressure on both, especially on Pakistan to take concrete steps so that a conducive environment is created for holding the peace talks. Pakistan did take concrete steps. Cease-fire declaration along LoC in November 2003, assurance to New Delhi to choke "cross-border" infiltration and moving away from Pakistan's insistence on holding a plebiscite to resolve Kashmir dispute are significant in this respect. New Delhi agreeing to include Kashmir in upcoming talks in February is also perhaps the result of Washington's gentle cajoling of India.

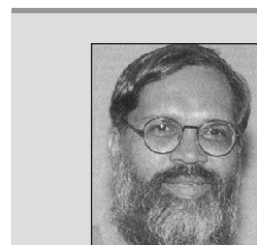
But will it be fair to conclude that all the positive development that have taken place, including initiation of the peace process, have been due to American pressuring? Sure there is pressure from Washington on both India and Pakistan but there are several factors independent of American pressure that indicate that genuine change are in the offing. First, there seems to be a genuine desire for peace by both India and Pakistan. Prime Minister Vajpayee has several things in mind. At the age end of his career more than anything he wants is a place in history. Achieving peace with Pakistan while keeping India's national interest in tact surely can get him that long cherished dream. But he is not motivated by this

demonstrate these terror groups' capacity to destabilise the country. *Jihadies* and *terrorists* are now notorious words in the political lexicon of the country.

War against terror is now a common agenda for both India and Pakistan. Second, it is doubtful whether Islamabad's decision to rethink plebiscite in Kashmir, which indeed broke the ice paving the way for Vajpayee-Musharraf meeting, has been the doing of the Americans despite US's noteworthy leverage and influence in Pakistan. Islamabad's gestures may have come forth somewhat due to American pressure but mostly they have emanated from its failed Kashmir policy and a realisation that continuation of the old policy in the long run would hurt Pakistan more than India. Islamabad knows that given the ground realities plebiscite is no longer possible as a major section of Kashmiris would not opt for either independence or for Pakistan. Moreover, such a move may ignite serious communal frenzy in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan, over the years, has also lost international support for its position on Kashmir and most notably from its brotherly Muslim countries of the Middle East. Its influence within Kashmiri leadership is also on decline as evidenced by the split in Hurriyat Conference, which left Pakistan having the support of small Geelani faction whereas Indian leadership after stubbornly resisting to talk to Kashmiri leaders, opened dialogue

Mumbai World Social Forum

Fighting for global justice



PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

WOULD you like to meet this year's Nobel Peace Prize winner, Shirin Ebadi, the new face of liberated Iranian womanhood? Or does last year's Economics Nobel winner Joseph Stiglitz, catch your fancy because you'd like to know why this former World Bank chief opposes the dogma of the "free market" in his *Globalisation and Its Discontents*?

If you are interested in Palestine/Israel, you might want to hear Mustafa Berghouti, one of the most dynamic Palestinian politicians who is remarkably unburdened by the legacy of the PLO leadership. You might want to listen to the words of wisdom of our own former President K.R. Narayanan.

Or would you care to hear Asma Jehangir, the human rights defender from Pakistan? Not to be missed are some of the world's greatest social activists like Medha Patkar and writers like Arundhati Roy.

You can meet all these people in Mumbai this coming Friday, at the World Social Forum (WSF). This will be a gigantic event, only slightly smaller in magnitude than the *Kumbh Mela*.

To be held in suburban Goregaon between January 16 and 21, the WSF will host nearly 80,000 participants from more than 150 countries, including citizens and scholars, environmentalists and trade unionists, feminists and creative jurors, Adivasi and Dalit rights campaigners, musicians and theatre-people, film-makers and

Since then, the WSF has acquired an *independent* identity. Participation in it has increased five-fold from the original 20,000 people. Last January, one lakh people attended the WSF in Porto Alegre.

The WSF is a festival of ideas, debates, conferences, seminars, workshops, music, theatre and film.

2004 is the first time the WSF is being held outside Brazil. It will be huge. Over 52,000 participants have already registered.

painters.

The World Social Forum was conceived as an international forum against neo-liberal policies and capitalist-led globalisation built around the slogan: "*Another World is Possible*". It is the citizen's answer to the World Economic Forum, based in Davos, Switzerland, set up in 1971 by the world's 1,000 biggest and most influential corporations.

The first WSF was held in January 2001, in Porto Alegre, Brazil. It was timed to coincide with the WEF's meeting and was seen as a "counterweight" to the Right-wing policies it proposed.

What explains WSF's tremendous attraction, especially for young people? For decades, corporations and hegemonic states have ruled the world, making it a worse place. In the name of the "free market" and liberalisation, terrible policies have been thrust upon the world's peoples, robbing them of rights, resources and democratic instruments.

Whole nations have been bankrupted through ugly programmes framed by the World Bank and the IMF. The World Trade Organisation has made matters worse.

At the same time, hegemonic powers like the United States have unilaterally launched wars in 'pre-emptive' defence of self-interests - in defiance of world public opinion. The US has bypassed and undermined the multilateral world order.

Besides misery, this imperialist hegemony has produced "blowback" in the form of religion-driven terrorism and other forms of extremism. This has made the world unsafe *forall*.

The decision to hold the Forum

Now they are about 85:1. But the majority of Northerners haven't prospered. They have suffered stagnation or a fall in incomes and economic security.

Millions of citizens feel "Another World is Possible". The WSF provides their grassroots organisations, NGOs, political parties, trade unions a unique opportunity to interact.

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first in Brazil was significant. Brazil has been greatly affected by neo-liberal policies. But different sectors of Brazilian society resist these policies, in villages, *bustees*, factories, political parties and schools. Brazilian grassroots organisations greatly inspired the WSF's development.

Porto Alegre itself is a province ruled by a government led by the Workers' Party. Luiz Inacio 'Lula' da Silva is now Brazil's President.

The WSF's premise is that world is more skewed than it was 20 or 50 years ago. In 1950, average North-South income disparities were 30:1. By 1980, they had doubled.

Importantly, the agenda will feature cultural events such as theatre, music, living display of crafts, folk dances, poetry recitations, and films. Witnesses will present 6 to 8 testimonials every day.

WSF-Mumbai has been in preparation for two years. An Indian precursor to it was the Asian Social Forum in Hyderabad last January, attended by 16,000 people. The immediate run-up has involved a number of state-, city- and district-level conferences.

WSF is a huge, energetic, people-centred answer to the cynics who never tire of repeating that there's no alternative to capitalist globalisation: better put up with it; even better, join it. The message ring out from Mumbai: "Another World is Possible"! We must fight for it.

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Casteism and Racism.

The six-day event will have 2 huge plenaries, 5 panel discussions and round-tables, 4 public meetings and 4 conferences (each attended by 15-20,000 people); and 200 spaces for seminars and workshops. The emphasis will be on participation and dialogue, with question-and-answer sessions, etc.

The organisers have cleared conferences, workshops, etc. on 1,600 subjects. They are trying to compress them into 1,200 sessions! The speakers will reflect diversity: with an emphasis on representation of women and the underprivileged.

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Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

OPINION

It's the policies, *bhaiya*

number, shower you with well-meaning advice about anything from humped camel to the rarefied atmosphere and will reluctantly leave you with **ma'a as-salamah** (literally, go in peace and safely). You, the itinerant will leave him with **fi amanillah** (literally, in the care and safety of Allah). No Arab, true to his tradition will say 'Allah Hafez' while leave-taking.

But the Persian (or Iranian, if you insist) will wish you simply but meaningfully 'Khoda Hafez', consigning you to the protection of the Almighty Who is self-generating. Adoption of this parting wish was good enough for us for ages, there being no such pithy words of parting in Bangla. For us' parting is such sweet sorrow' that we go speechless. Try '**dekha hobey**'? I

did and was whipped with glances that assigned me with a one-way ticket to the Sunderbans.

Why this sudden shift from 'Khoda Hafez' to 'Allah Hafez'? What is the compulsion that we have to Arabise a perfectly acceptable term of endearment which happened to be rooted in Persian? Is there any insinuation that those Persian-speaking Iranians are any lesser Muslims? Did any oil Sheikh put in a proviso that unless we switch, the cash inflow of '**Zakaat**' will come to a glitch? Do we have to call the Persian Gulf the Arabian Gulf next?

How come Persian has turned into a dark horse all of a sudden? Hazzaj-bin-Yousuf started from Iran. We are more familiar with **namaj** and **roza**, rather than **salaat**

and **siam**. From Baburnama to Ram Mohan Roy's **Tohfa-tul-Muhaideen** (the Offering of the Monotheist) -- the entire gamut of subcontinental life was directly nourished and nurtured by Persian. Even the British Raj was happy with Persian as the court language for some 80 years until Macaulay came along with his sea-change recommendations and opinion: 'A single shelf of a good European library is worth the whole native literature.'

Far be it from me to enter into a comparison of the two very robust cultures of the Middle East. But it is only a matter of history that while the Arab bandits were robbing the hapless caravans and burying their female children live, the Persians were founding cities like Persepolis

and building boat bridges across the Bosphorus. When the Arab warriors arrived in Persia, they were pleasantly surprised to stumble upon a civilization much more advanced than their own.

But our conflict in question has nothing to do with the Arab-Persian divide. It is nothing more than the ridiculously mundane. It is just another bone of contention between AL and BNP. Like every word in Urdu grammar is either **mujakkar** or **muannas**, everything in Bangladesh is either AL or BNP. Black or white -- no gray in my Shonar Bangla.

Did you hear a BNP person say 'Bangladesh Zindabad'? What does the AL person say? 'Bangladesh Dirghojibi Hoke'. Did you observe that the song '**Banglar Hindu,**

Banglar Boudhdha, Banglar Khristan, Banglar Mussalman -- Amra Shobai Bangalee' is tainted the AL way? And '**Prothom Bangladesh, Amar Shesh Bangladesh**' is labelled BNP? Did you not observe how Zia Uddan and IPGMR change nomenclatures? Then why do you wonder that if some partisans say 'Khoda Hafez', the others must say 'Allah Hafez'?

The fault is not in the stars, it is in us that periodically we put up the country for lease. And the winners grab it all -- university halls to bus terminals, parliament to pavements. The winning party writes the national history and doctors the text books. They can make or break anything and anybody -- culvert and culture, journalist and

President. So what of changing some signs, slogans and salutation here and there?

I would not lose much sleep on these matters, and let things slide as they would. With the change of guard whenever that may be, things will change automatically. So let us not grieve, and live with the fire of hope burning eternal that good sense will eventually prevail.

In the meantime, if you aspire ascendancy, moo with herd of buffaloes, crow in the company of cocks, gagger with a school of geese and bleat in a flock of goats. But if you are not a kin of Julius Caesar and stand no risk of being charged with the allegation of ambition by the clan of Brutus just do your own thing.