

## Businessmen's security in dire strait

*Their SOS shouldn't go unheeded*

THE desperation of businessmen over the growing risk to their physical safety is making itself felt. Little wonder, they are ruefully planning to demonstrate against it so as to ensure that their security concerns are met by the government at once.

They have been writhing under crimes like, extortion, abduction, and even killing, for a pretty long time. But the situation has turned critical with some owners of business establishments having been murdered in the last two weeks or so. The businessmen cannot do anything against the well organised criminals on their own, as any attempt to seek legal aid invites further threats and intimidation. What are these beleaguered men supposed to do?

The home minister assured them, in a more or less routine manner, of security, but the inspector general of police did not sound that optimistic. He cited the limitations of the law enforcers which include the hardened criminals getting released on bail after being arrested. That brings us to the intricacies of the law, but there is no doubt that the crime situation has become bad enough for the police and the lower judiciary to respond rather vigorously to the challenge. Handing out of conviction to the criminals has become a dire need of the hour.

Another point, a very important one at that, is the way the businessmen are sending SOS signals to the government. By threatening to stop paying taxes if the government fails to rein in the criminals, they have, in fact, expressed their no confidence in the law enforcement system. They have also appealed to the mobile operators to track down the criminals who are using the device to maintain links between themselves. Clearly, collective efforts are needed to combat this sort crime.

Finally, political will, particularly of ruling party is bound to prove crucial in bringing about the desired change in the situation. The government must be determined to weed out the criminals now posing a grave threat to trade and commerce. It must by deeds disprove the allegation, often brought by its own law enforcers, that political connections are keeping the criminals afloat. The administration has to make sure that the nexus factor, if any, is eliminated to rid society of a menace that is growing in size and strength -- much to the chagrin of productive and peace-loving people.

## Continuing arson in Natore

*Where was the local administration to protect the villagers?*

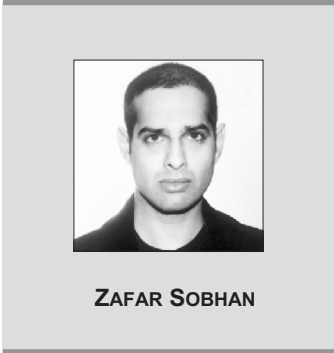
THE situation in Natore is getting complicated by the day. Now the paramilitary BDR has been deployed in the town after two back-to-back arson attacks. The most alarming facet of the scenario is that the targets of such vicious assaults have been supporters of opposition Awami League.

After the murder of a local ruling party leader who also happened to be a close relative of a deputy minister all that the people expected was that there will be an investigation and that the law would take its own course.

But that was not to be. At first, houses of several Awami League leaders and activists were torched, allegedly by ruling BNP activists. But they didn't stop there -- 31 more houses and 12 shops in a village became the next targets of arson. This even triggered an exodus of folks from the attacked village, and terrorised families of those houses. Hundreds of people spent sleepless nights under the sky with no protection extended to them. We want to know what had the local administration, both civil and police, been doing when tension was brewing between the two groups. It seems that that there had been no steps to protect those who were at the risk of being targeted from the beginning. Or maybe they thought it was a natural reaction by the aggrieved supporters of the murdered leader.

If one were to get such an impression from a comment by Deputy Minister, Ruhul Kuddus Talukder who was quoted by a leading Bangla daily on Wednesday as suggesting what else could have happened since a life has been snuffed out prematurely, could one be blamed. What was initially seen as a simple fallout of law and order situation, has become more tangled. Now, not just an inquiry in to the murder, we demand a thorough and impartial investigation into these attacks as well. The culprits should be punished with an iron hand, no matter which party or group they belong to. And lastly, we hope the local administration would immediately inform the higher authorities about the plight of the victims of arson and arrange relief for them on an urgent basis.

# Is John Kerry the man to beat Bush?



ZAFAR SOBHAN

THE big news in US politics over the last month has been the implosion of Howard Dean's candidacy for the Democratic nomination for president and the corresponding ascendance of Massachusetts Senator John Kerry.

Up until about a week before the first primaries were held in Iowa and New Hampshire near the end of January, political commentators and pundits (myself included) were confidently predicting that Dean would romp to victory and would likely have the nomination sewn up within a matter of weeks. Almost no one anticipated the groundswell of support away from Dean and towards Kerry in the final week before the two primaries that catapulted Kerry to commanding victories in both states.

So what happened to Howard Dean? Perhaps the best explanation is that the Democratic primary voters took one long last look at him and simply got cold feet. The knock on Howard Dean has always been that he wasn't electable. I have never bought into the theory that Dean would be unelectable against Bush in November and still believe that he would be a far more formidable candidate than he is given credit for. On the other hand, if enough voters feel that he is unelectable, this turns into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Regardless of

whether they support you or think you are the best candidate, if enough voters think you are unelectable, they won't vote for you -- and then you are unelectable!

Dean's candidacy is now in free-fall. He has yet to win a primary, polled in single digits in Tuesday's primaries in Tennessee and Virginia, and is currently running fourth in Wisconsin, the primary he has staked his candidacy on winning. It would take a heroic turnaround for Dean to haul himself back into contention at this stage.

clearly the man to beat.

Kerry's ascendancy is bad news for Bush on a number of counts. The first is that it shows just how committed to defeating Bush in November the Democratic voters are. Typically in primaries, voters use their vote to send a message, voting with their hearts and not with their heads. Fringe candidates typically do well in primaries. This is the time of year people vote for the Jessie Jacksons and the Pat Buchanans of the world. The fact that so early on in the process the

he seemed to be running an overly cautious and defensive campaign and looked over-coached by his handlers who were the same team that had managed Al Gore's feckless campaign in 2000.

Perhaps the turning point came when Kerry fired his campaign manager Jim Jordan in November and communications director Chris Lehane in December, and embarking on a bolder and more daring strategy than he had been pursuing. It is unclear to me why anyone would hire Lehane and

Correctly calculating that a good showing in Iowa would give him momentum going into New Hampshire, Kerry pulled all of his resources out of that state and poured them into Iowa. It worked. He won Iowa handily and rode the momentum to victory in New Hampshire a few days later even though he hadn't campaigned there and had pulled out his entire organisation the previous week.

He hasn't looked back since, romping to victory in 13 of the 15 races contested so far -- most by

## STRAIGHT TALK

**Kerry has plenty going for him as a candidate. In a recent poll he defeated Bush by a margin of 52 per cent to 46 per cent in a head-to-head match up. He is a decorated Vietnam veteran and long-standing member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, both of which should go a long way to reassuring the electorate that he has the foreign policy and national security credentials they are looking for in a president.**

Democratic voters have eschewed sending a message and seem to have rallied behind a solid, mainstream candidate shows just how angry with Bush and focused on defeating him they are.

So the question now is whether Kerry is the man to beat Bush in November. I was one of innumerable commentators who more or less wrote off Kerry's candidacy long ago. Up until his stunning turn-around in Iowa that kicked of the race, Kerry seemed to running a tremendously poor campaign. In public he looked stiff and unconvincing. He was failing to get traction with either voters (according to the polls) or donors. His policy proposals were vague and incoherent and he did an extremely poor job explaining his position on the Iraq war. Most worrying of all,

Jordan (who are well-known in Washington for their disastrous handling of the 2000 presidential campaign) in the first place, and their key roles in the Kerry campaign, were a big reason that I and many others believed that Kerry was on the wrong path, however, there can be no doubt that firing them was the best thing Kerry could have done to resurrect his ailing campaign.

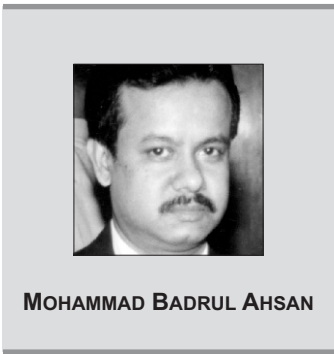
Perhaps their firing and the turnaround in Kerry's campaign strategy and subsequent success are coincidences, but there is no denying that entering the new year Kerry's campaign seemed refocused and rejuvenated.

Kerry's strategy for Iowa and New Hampshire that was the springboard for his resurgence was a political master-stroke.

overwhelming margins. Tuesday's crushing victories in the southern states of Tennessee and Virginia were especially significant as they showed that he could be competitive in southern states which were supposed to favour the southerners in the field, Clark and Edward.

Kerry's swift and stunning reversal of fortune has demonstrated that he has the political deftness that will be needed if he wishes to dislodge Bush in November. I am a firm believer in the primary system. Not that I believe it necessarily produces the candidate best suited for the presidency or the one I admire the most. But the rough and tumble of the primary season ensures that the eventual nominee is the candidate who is best able to withstand the rigours of a tough campaign. If Kerry has the

# The collapsible history



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

NATIONS have history like people have memory, both being a function of what is remembered. Memories make history like persons make a generation and national history is collective memory stitched on a timeline. What is recorded is not reliable unless it reconciles with what is remembered.

In Mohammad Nurul Qadir's *"Dusho Chcheshotti Diney Swadhinota"* (Independence in Two Hundred and Sixty-six Days), that reconciliation stumbles on an honest mistake. In simple terms, he confesses that he didn't know how to count in English. He writes that until his grandson, who studied in Singapore, told him 25 years after the liberation war, he didn't know that the word "million" stood for ten hundred thousand, not one hundred thousand.

By that time Nurul Qadir was pushing history with both hands. As a Roving Ambassador of the Mujibnagar Government, he had mentioned in numerous interviews and press briefings in 1971 that four million people were killed in East Pakistan by the Pakistan army. In the historic letter, which he typed sitting in the office of the Indian Ambassador in Tehran,

addressed to Shah of Iran and handed over to the Iranian Prime Minister on 5th September 1971, Nurul Qadir stated that four million people had died in the crackdown since 25th March 1971.

Then he writes that all that time he was saying four million, he was actually thinking four hundred thousand, not forty hundred thousand (page 346). Unless one would question his credentials, one has to take it as coming from the horse's mouth. The mistake, however, had served us well.

displace Persian, the language of the Muslim upper class of India. Yet political manipulation sublimated truth and turned it into a history of religious tension between Hindus and Muslims.

I, like many in my generation, grew up in the glory of Pakistani heroism in the 1965 war between India and Pakistan. We memorised the names of heroes who had fought valiantly in that war. Squadron Leader Alam downed 11 enemy warplanes. Aziz Bhatti fought till his end. And there were

instead of four hundred thousand, it was at the time of war, and he admitted his mistake as soon as he found it. When I met him, I asked why that mistake was never addressed. He said that by then the mistake was repeated so many times that it turned into a sacred cow nobody wanted to slaughter.

He must be right. Sometimes history takes an elusive turn on the memory lane, and truth is made to look stranger than fiction. But it also leaves the witnessing genera-

## CROSS TALK

**For us as a nation, the concern lies elsewhere. We are remembering to forget and forgetting to remember as we keep changing history from one version to another. It is creating stress on us no doubt, but it is also creating stress on history, which is being erased and etched at our pleasure... History will get distorted in that stress and that is the minimum we can expect to happen.**

According to Nurul Qadir, it helped us sway the world opinion in our favour during the liberation war.

Let us face the fact that history is often goosed up with propaganda. The Gulf of Tonkin incident was hyped up by the Americans to go to war in Vietnam like the WMD was hyped up to go to war in Iraq. There are many incidents in history when truth was tweaked to win a situation. Hamza Alavi, a noted historian of Pakistan, tells us that the creation of Pakistan was rooted in a 19th century crisis, which had nothing to do with religion. It started when the new Anglo-vernacular language policy of the colonial regime was adopted to

many others, who had done us proud as Pakistani citizens by defeating the Indian forces.

But I learned something shocking while writing a paper on the Cold War in the 1980s. The Tashkent Agreement between Field Marshal Ayub Khan, President of Pakistan and Lal Bahadur Shastri, Prime Minister of India, was indeed an international bid to save Pakistan's face and integrity. It was news to me that Pakistan was losing, not winning the 1965 war.

Nations, like people, must defend their honour and fabrication of truth is fair game in love and war. If Nurul Qadir said four million

tion in confusion, as some of them cannot cope with the defalcation in their account of history by the account of others. It is opposite of repressed memory syndrome. Suddenly, people are under the compulsion to erase what was etched in memory. Suddenly, they must realise that they ought to forget what was remembered.

Professor Salahuddin Ahmed, a leading historian of Bangladesh, observes that our history is fraught with aposiopesis, which has caused many distortions. It is mainly because facts have been disfigured to change context, misleading memories to organised

the future but over the past. We are still dying to perpetuate what can be forgotten instead of what can be remembered. It has been more than thirty years, and the end of this fray is not in sight.

Truth will always be the first victim in war, but we are in peacetime. Yet we are unable to reconcile history with memory, the gap being widened with the passing of time. Every new generation that comes of age adds to the crisis, because they must take sides with those who are already divided. Memory gets diluted with new blood, because bad blood has diluted history.

That dilution gives us a strange

strength and the skill to outmanoeuvre and outsmart Dean and all the other candidates for the nomination -- as it seems he does - - then it means that he is the best candidate to challenge Bush in November.

Kerry has plenty going for him as a candidate. In a recent poll he defeated Bush by a margin of 52 per cent to 46 per cent in a head-to-head match up. He is a decorated Vietnam veteran and long-standing member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, both of which should go a long way to reassuring the electorate that he has the foreign policy and national security credentials they are looking for in a president. In the final analysis, it was this background that tipped the scales towards him and away from Dean. Democratic voters were looking for someone who would not be perceived as vulnerable on these grounds and felt that Kerry provided the best combination of experience and toughness.

An interesting side-note is that in the past Kerry has proved himself a deft campaigner, which indicates that his current success is more than just a flash in the pan and suggests that he might be more formidable in November than previously acknowledged.

In 1996, Kerry faced a tight race for re-election against the popular liberal Republican governor of Massachusetts, Bill Weld. Weld was everything Kerry wasn't -- charismatic, dynamic, folksy, beloved by the press -- and the general consensus was that he would clean Kerry's clock. But Kerry ran a smart, tough campaign and ended up being reelected by a substantial margin.

It's a story worth recalling as the US heads towards its presidential election in November.

Zafar Sobhan is an Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

history, a history that is collapsible, meaning it can be folded and opened at convenience. And that folding and opening varies with change of power, people and parties switching history like shifting gear. We are going back and forth with what we can forget and what we can remember, treating history like a scratch book that will never be final.

In Jorge Luis Borges' novel *Funes, the Memorious*, the eponymous character never forgets anything. Every bit of information he apprehended remained etched forever in memory until one day all his knowledge began to jumble in his head. Funes felt congested, and he was no longer accessible to either information or impetus. Too much remembering proves fatal in the end and he died young.

For us as a nation, the concern lies elsewhere. We are remembering to forget and forgetting to remember as we keep changing history from one version to another. It is creating stress on us no doubt, but it is also creating stress on history, which is being erased and etched at our pleasure.

History will get distorted in that stress and that is the minimum we can expect to happen. But here is a warning shot for all of us. If distorted memory makes dysfunctional mind, what will be the impact of distorted history? Think of Funes to know the answer. Having too much to remember and too much to forget might prove fatal in the end, unless we start cleaning up the mess right now.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

# Nuclear non-proliferation regimen should be even handed

ERSHAD KHANDKER

M R. Abdul Qadeer Khan, father of Pakistan's nuclear bomb has acknowledged that nuclear secrets have been revealed to other countries like Iran, Libya or Syria. He has also apologised and western sources have indicated that more information is being sought with details of the entire leakage operation. Media reports regarding unease in the west of Pakistan's nuclear ambition has been doing the rounds for ages. Mr. Khan, former head of the Khan Laboratory and some other scientists were being probed as suspects for some time now.

According to details available, in 2002, South Korean intelligence sources pointed finger at Pakistan as a source for centrifuge technology for North Korea. Last October, Iran gave the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) a paper

trail of sources for its nuclear programme, and some names involve Pakistan based contacts. The centrifuge Iran has shown to IAEA resembles Pakistani design. It is believed that Pakistan's Ghauri long range missile is a knock off from the Nondong missile of North Korea. The nexus is tied into a mutually beneficial barter, Pakistan getting missile and delivery know-how for its warheads while North Korea receiving blueprint for uranium enrichment capability. The *Economist* magazine has reported this.

The crackdown against the Pakistani scientists comes in the wake of Libyan declaration to open its facilities for full-fledged scrutiny and verification and Iran's landmark agreement to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to inspect its nuclear facilities. It is widely believed that extremist factions operate within Pakistan army. This

element was responsible for the creation of the Taliban group that went on to capture power and gave shelter to Al-Qaeda forces. It is a palpable risk factor that renegade elements or Al-Qaeda sympathisers within the Pakistan army may be willing to hand over nuclear secrets to terrorists. In the wake of this revelation that scientists have given nuclear secrets to other countries, effort would be intensified to get the full story.

The issue from the standpoint of Pakistan is clear. It has long faced pressure and even sanctions from the western powers over its nuclear ambitions. Pakistan needs to show that its nuclear establishment is secure and that Pakistani authorities are doing everything to make sure that the nuclear technology does not end up being in the hands of undesirable elements. It is extremely important for Pakistan to keep that issue out of prying eyes. Any

allegation that Pakistan's nuclear establishment has been involved in "destabilising" activities by exporting nuclear technology would damage credibility to the claims of Pakistan that its nuclear capability is not pernicious to the interests of the western democracies. Any proof to the contrary and Pakistan would be forced open up its installations to assuage the western intelligence agencies. The threat perception of a terrorist "dirty bomb" is worst-case scenario in the western intelligence book of crisis that needs to be prevented and averted. Pakistan is in the middle of this theatre and needs to come clean.

The proposition and the instrument to act against nuclear proliferation, it seems, are steeped in realpolitik. You have Israel, strongly nuclear and hardly even censured by the west, and on the other hand, there is Pakistan, Iran and Libya castigated for nuclear

ambition and singled out for "liquidation" of their nuclear programme. Nuclear proliferation is dangerous, so one can make an issue to try and stop countries acquiring nuclear weapons. But if the effort to track the flow of nuclear related technology were to be effective, it would need to be even handed. Israel purportedly has 200 warheads. Libya and Iran are in the nascent stage of nuclear ambition, allegedly planning to acquire technology to manufacture plutonium or enriched uranium, both of which can form the fissile core of a bomb. The reaction from the west on this is vociferous, while Israel does not figure at all in any press release. As if Israel deserves to have nuclear weapons. The rationale for this unevenness is a little weak. Western government sources maintain that, Israel is a democracy firmly anchored to the western way of living. The system of government

in Israel is secured and the nuclear apparatus is firmly controlled by a chain of command. While, the Arab governments are unstable, ruled by governments that are unpopular and there is widespread disenchantment that can be destabilising to any nuclear establishment.

The crux of the western policy approach is based on the twin principle of "war on terrorism" and "homeland security". Nuclear technology in the hands of a foe like committed Al-Qaeda elements is a fearful prospect for America. This behind the scene game may not be fully apparent to most people. The microscopic scrutiny and high handed interrogation of Arab countries is bound to add to the very well established and apparently justified unevenness that characterises American approach to Israel and the Arab block, in this and other issues. Israel has to come out and declare

itself as a nuclear power. That is far from overdue. It is not wholly outside the realms of possibility that Jewish extremists may decide to use nuclear threat against the Arabs. Therefore, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) should be privy to detail of Israel's nuclear stockpile. Convincing the world that nuclear proliferation should be stopped is going to be successful if and when the non-proliferation regimen is honest and evenhanded.

The spectre of Islamic Bomb is a serious matter for the west, in the post 9/11 scenarios. The chance of nuclear campaign by the Muslim states to oppose that of Israel was always there. The threat perception is supposedly at an all time high in the post 9/11 world, with the west worried about a "dirty bomb", in the hands of extremists opposed to the west's unilateral and often one sided punitive measures against Islamic block

countries. Why the Islamic world has not been successful in creating a credible nuclear deterrent or equivalent vis-a-vis Israel is a natural extension of our thought process regarding the Middle Eastern theatre. After all, Pakistan has a bomb and a determined effort by the Middle Eastern countries friendly to the west could have created a credible nuclear arms race, forcing the west to tin a situation where Israel itself would have been asked to release details of nuclear arms and perhaps agree to a kind of threat reduction regime.

ErsHAD Khandker is a senior journalist.