

## JS committee's good counsel

*A commendable stance*

THE parliamentary standing committee on home ministry has asked the government to refrain from political intervention in matters of police administration. Some JS committees had earlier set examples of dealing with important issues in a forthright manner without pandering to the government. This helps the cause of increasing answerability within the government.

There is no presence of the opposition in the JS committees. So their activism is self-driven which deserves appreciation. But findings of the committee are far from surprising as it is well known that political influence often makes it difficult for the law enforcers to function independently. In fact, political meddling by successive governments has had an extremely debilitating effect on the law enforcement agency and has considerably lowered its level of efficiency.

The problem stems, by and large, from the culture of not treating crime as crime but smelling politics in it. This has been seriously impairing police functioning.

The JS committee's activism has already attained one important goal. The government has to acknowledge the truth that its own lawmakers have identified the malady and suggested a remedy.

The talk of police reform is getting louder, with law and order worsening and the academics hammering on the need for recasting the police force. But we believe, and there are many who will share our views, that even a total overhauling of police will fall far short of achieving the target of increasing their efficiency if political influence continues to cripple the police administration. One has to admit that when a particular officer is sent to a certain station on the basis of a political decision, the move can by no means be well-intentioned.

Since the ruling alliance MPs have raised the issue, the government should take note of it without being suspicious of any 'evil design' to bruise its image. It must act on the good counsel that has come from the committee. Politicisation of the police is something that is highly incompatible with democratic governance. The sooner those in power realise the plain truth, the better.

## Save the lakes

*Punish grabbers or court a disaster*

INDEED, so intense has the fervour for land-grabbing become, that much of the land that is now being grabbed isn't even land -- it is water.

The dredging of the Buriganga river that got underway in January unearthed scores of individuals claiming to be the legitimate owners of the banks of the river and even the river channel itself. Now, it seems that it is the surface of the Gulshan-Baridhara-Banani lake that is under threat.

Four years ago Rajuk initiated a project to end encroachment of the lake. The idea was to build a walkway around it, thus putting an end to the illegal occupation of the lake for residential purposes, and to permanently demarcate the area of the lake. Rajuk filled up a sizeable portion of the lake and earmarked some land on the banks of the lake to this end.

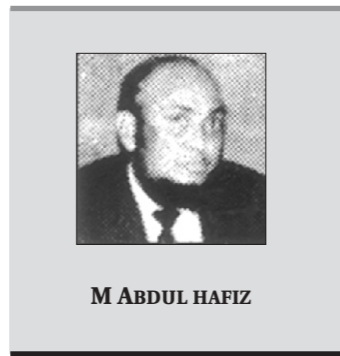
Mysterious plots have now surfaced on the filled up land and been converted into sprawling and squalid residential slums that house hundreds if not thousands of the capital's otherwise homeless population.

The neglect of the lakes and rivers that run through Dhaka city has gone on long enough. If we are not dumping untreated sewage into these bodies of water, turning them into vast septic tanks that breed disease, we are busy filling them in and building on them, precipitating an environmental disaster.

The problem with the encroachment on the lake is not the impoverished communities that have sprouted there and pay extortionate rent to the ostensible owners of the property on which they are squatting. The real problem is these "owners" who have unlawfully laid claim to the filled in land and are using it to turn a profit.

Let us make no mistake, land is grabbed, occupied and rented out because it is profitable to do so. If we wish to put an end to this kind of grabbing of public land (or water) the government needs to move against those who are making money out of the situation and not focus its wrath on the slum-dwellers occupying the land.

## A Disquieting time



M ABDUL HAFIZ

SINCE the early years of 1950s we seem to have come a full circle with the return of the syndromes reminiscent of those times when a repressive Muslim League government of the day chose to take the country into a fascist mould. Dissent was discouraged if not totally disallowed. The fundamental rights had to be fought for. Even the existence of a constitutional opposition was questioned. When allowed, its functioning was grossly interfered with.

As the first opposition party, the Awami League came up, it was subjected to widespread vandalism -- beating up its activists, stifling their voices and smashing down their assembly. The perception of governance seemed only that of presiding over doling out a limited national pie among its favourites. Intolerance and high handedness marked the conduct of the government.

In its roller-coaster treatment of the opposition its members were incessantly driven from the

pillar to post. The forces of reaction reigned supreme pushing the country to a point of obscurantism.

But then Bengal had been an exceptional place throughout its chequered history and true to the tradition of Titumir and Surya Sen its people seldom took things lying down. Through a relentless struggle spanning decades they brought back the country at least to the shape it was given under 1935 India Act, of course, with the

liberalism and progress which were supposed to advance further towards a state of their perfection. What are we witnessing today in our benighted land!

In a violent throw back we are catapulted to the square one from where once we thought we embarked on our democratic odyssey. We are once again confronting the basic questions, issues and problems. We are caught up in a time warp when the people at the helm seem to have

bystander. The country, in the meantime, unmistakably and inexorably sliding towards despotism.

A time of infamy has already ensued when our establishment is not only incapable of giving basic security to the citizens and addressing their hard issues it also does not have clue to where is Jamaluddin, now forgotten abducted businessman of Chittagong; who carried out midnight orgy at Banskhal; who god-

opposition in the country is equally deplorable. A measure of patience and tolerance as well as a political savvy expected out of them are miserably lacking. Mere agitational impulses can not be talisman for success in an exercise like that of the transfer of power. Instead, it would do better in expanding its lost support base. It is a pity that the AL which once only turned to the people to co-opt their support behind issues it is fighting for is now pitched

country's former Prime Minister is barred from paying respect to the martyrs of the peace mission, for example. When the nations frantically try to stitch their people together we are only unravelling the binds that are already there.

The most dangerous is, however, the trend that is fast setting in -- giving political opponents an adversary image. Pakistanis tried it but only divided the nation. For this country Sheikh Hasina as well as her Awami League is as indispensable as the ruling formation is. This home truth, if adopted, will do the government enormous benefit. The country is admittedly passing through grave crisis -- the intellectuals are vulnerable, ordinary people are insecure and the poor are fast turning destitute. All we look around are travesties of governance and democracy. It is a heady brew to combine authoritarianism with democracy.

This is one of our worst times. This is also our best time. The decade of fifties produced language martyrs, a dedicated leadership central to which was Sheikh Mujib and an awakened people determined to remove the yoke of servility. Even if the repression may stiffen in the wake of growing despotism, historically it proved conducive to a new opening that leads to freedom, democracy and egalitarianism.

Big (red) Hafiz is former DG of BISS.

## PERSPECTIVES

**The most dangerous is, however, the trend that is fast setting in -- giving political opponents an adversary image. Pakistanis tried it but only divided the nation. For this country Sheikh Hasina as well as her Awami League is as indispensable as the ruling formation is. This home truth, if adopted, will do the government enormous benefit. The country is admittedly passing through grave crisis -- the intellectuals are vulnerable, ordinary people are insecure and the poor are fast turning destitute.**

Act's own limitations. A parliamentary democracy, fundamental rights and impartial judiciary thrived till the partition of the subcontinent.

A remarkable generation of the people of erstwhile East Pakistan spearheaded a movement that could reestablish some of the norms of a democratic polity in our clime. Consequently, 1954 provincial assembly election was indeed a milestone in our political development.

Alas! only after half a century of those heady days for democracy,

gone berserk in their reactions, utterances and the steps. A ludicrous combination of power, arrogance and a chronic inability the government of the four-party alliance has brought the country to a miserable pass.

While the authority is apparently in tantrum with its critics over unabated price hike, uninterrupted terror, uncontrolled violence and nagging extortion the country has been sinking deep in an abyss of despair. Worse, in the prevailing catastrophe the establishment is little more than

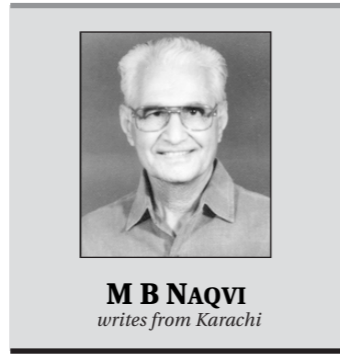
fathered the slain dacoits of Noakhali charrs; who killed Manjurul Imam or Manik Shaha at Khulna and who swooped on Humayun Azad in the heart of the capital or Dr Kamal in the hills. But it has 'clues' enough to know that at least the assault on Azad is the handiwork of a ragtag Awami League as a part of its pre-hartal provocation. A catalogue of such dichotomies will however be too long to be presented in this column.

True, the role of the Awami League, the only worthwhile

against the members of the law enforcing agencies in the street.

Nevertheless, it must be borne in the mind of the people that belittling the leader of the opposition and for that matter any genuine politician is a disgrace for the nation. When Sheikh Hasina is barred from entering a hospital to enquire about a fatally wounded Humayun Azad doesn't it also insult the office of the PM which she once held? It is not understood how the nation's image is brightened when the

## Extremism: Heart of crisis



M B NAQVI  
writes from Karachi

THE murder and mayhem on the Ashura day in Karbala, Baghdad and Quetta and the earlier suicide attack on an Imbarra in Islamabad do seem to be the work of al-Qaeda. The linkage among those widely separated events is the sectarian identity of the victims and the use of suicide bombers. Here al-Qaeda is rather a generic name of Islamic fanaticism than a specific organisation; the latter can be many and perhaps are. But their presence points to one of the main crises in Pakistan that have kept its body politic polarised. It has occasioned American pressure on Pakistan, and forced the latter to change tack and join the US in its War on Terror, with far-reaching implications.

One is not concerned here with al-Qaeda in the context of 9/11 or the current ME (Iraq) Crisis. One is focusing more narrowly on Pakistan. This country happens to be self-sufficient in Islamic extremism; indeed it has exported some of it to the ME. Here it arose from day one: Pakistan idea had not been thought through and intensively discussed between the years 1940 when it was mooted and 1947 when it came into being. In the short stormy days of Pakistan movement, Pakistan was a vague but highly emotive slogan that worked. Once Pakistan came into being, the question of what should be the nature of the new state in the achievement of which the name of Islam certainly played a role.

Debate continues on what Quaid-i-Azam wanted and what his and Muslim League leaders' ideas were. Some of it is pointless and misconceived. It is quite true that Mr. Jinnah was a secular per-

son and he could only have wanted Pakistan to be an ordinary democratic state, as he repeatedly denied that Pakistan will be a theocratic state. The troubling point is not what one man thought. But what do the people of Pakistan want it to be. Let us face it: there was a certain cogency in Maulana Abul Ala Maududi's arguments, who led the debate on Pakistan being a pure Islamic State. He was factually right in that the name of Islam was massively used during Pakistan Movement, though I do not recall any ML leader ever hav-

ing uttered the famous Jamaat-i-Islami's slogan: Pakistan Ka Matlab Kya, La Ilah Illallah. If the name of Islam played a part in the achievement of Pakistan, then it makes the demand for giving it an important place in its body politic becomes plausible.

Thus far there is some ostensibility in the argument of Islamicists. But from this point on they are on shaky ground. What does Islam demand of Muslims? This religion of peace asks its people to live in peace, do not commit sins that virtually every religion or even Godless ethics proscribe. Islam's idea of piety, Taqwa, is not much different from what the 10 Commandments lay down.

The contribution of Islamicists like Maududi is the claim that Islam prescribes a distinctive system of political thought, a unique economy and its own recognisable culture. This idea has played havoc and is also responsible for the profound confusion that obtains.

This is a new phenomenon, not to be found in the corpus of Islamic thought and tradition. One traces it back to two distinguished Indian journalists: Maulanas Mohammad Ali and Abul Kalam Azad. That 'Islam covers every contingency

from cradle to grave' was the rhetorical flourish of the former. It did find some expression in latter's journal also in the 1910s. Factually all statecraft Islam was experimental (pragmatic); no shape or form was intrinsically Islamic. In the earlier days it was dictatorship of the pious by the ruled's rough and ready consent and later hereditary kingship was accepted as being adequately Islamic. No Islamic scholar ever found that the tyranny or debauchery of any Caliph in Baghdad or elsewhere made his rule any the less Islamic or his

will result in endless conflict and the warp and woof of society would come apart. It has not merely to be rejected but fought against -- though not by violent means.

To repeat, it has to be recognised with an unjaudiced eye that Islam allows a pragmatic search for what suits a society or state. Pakistanis want to be citizens of a state that serves them (and does not run after airy-fairy notions) and is accountable to them. It must give them all the human rights that the two UN Charters envision and should not discriminate in favour, or against,

rule.

Why is this idyllic situation not a reality in Pakistan today? Two or three basic causes must be looked at -- and this exercise is necessary if the Pakistani state is rescued from its present state of near-failure. Actually, in the initial years, the landlord-ridden Muslim League leadership in West Pakistan looked askance at East Bengal legislators who were sons of peasants, clerks, postmen and the like. action in East Bengal. West Pakistani landlords, heavily represented in the Parliament,

nal civilian governments over key policy matters.

It is necessary to repeat history's two conclusions: first Islam does not impose any definite principle or methodology of selecting a ruler -- there being no concept of a parliament or election. Nor does it lay down any principle of peaceful succession. Secondly, and as a corollary, there is no definite political dispensation that can be called typically Islamic for which there are no parallels in the history of Christianity or elsewhere. People are free to live in any dispensation they desire or is imposed on them.

Secondly, in Pakistan, the demand for a unique Islamic State now called Nizam-i-Mustafa by some and Nizam-i-Islam by the more orthodox has always been made by a political party, the main leader of which obviously wanted power by becoming Amir-al-Momineen (the leader of the virtuous people) without any agreed method of consultation. What we can thus expect from their demand being accepted is the absolute dictatorship of men like Gen. Ziaul Haq, Qazi Hussain Ahmad, Maulanas Fazlur Rahman, Sami ul Haq, Anas Noorani, et al. Well, no reasonable Pakistani agrees to that.

The whole point is that most of the Islamic extremists owe their allegiance, in the final analysis, to one of these parties that are demanding Nizam-i-Islam through one or more front organisations. The suicide bomber who killed so many 'deviant' Muslims in the Islamabad Imbarra was actually striking a blow for Nizam-i-Islam so that we can have a certain Amir-ul-Momineen. Now, no one can doubt the personal sincerity of the suicide bomber. But the implications of this phenomenon are explosive for Pakistan. Leave aside human values, the present state structures cannot survive the chaos and confusion when more and more people begin to strive for their respective objective with violence. There may soon be no Pakistan if its citizens do not become law-abiding in a dispensation that establishes the rule of law.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

## PLAIN WORDS

**All manner of minorities need protection. This too is not a plea for more police constables outside temples, churches or Imambaras. It is by endeavouring to make the society tolerant that establishes the rule of law, punishing only the guilty. No special privileges are against and let merit be the general rule.**

Kingdom Dar ul Harb (area of violence). Indeed an accepted Islamic doctrine was what newspapers in Saudi Arabia and Iran used to print every day in 1980s: 'obeying the ruler is the duty of all citizens' no matter if he is Fasiq (rake) or Fajir (wicked). If that is authentically Islamic, and I think it is, then there is no debate: Islam, in the interest of peace and order, permits all manner of rules and states. Factually Islam permitted wide experimentation and was de facto tolerant.

However, the world faces the new phenomenon of Islamic extremism. Contrary to the history of tolerance of all beliefs, especially under Muslim rulers of India, we now have political movements against minorities, whether religious or sectarian. Today's Islamic fanatics are ready to kill themselves in order to kill a few infidels or what they think are apostates. Suicide bombing is the ultimate in fanaticism. It has surfaced in the service of Sunni Orthodoxy or formalism in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in ME and also for the sake of Arab Nationalism (Palestinian state) in Palestine. No debate is necessary to show that such intolerance in Pakistan is sure to lead to the self-destruction of the whole society: it

any recognisable group of citizens. It has necessarily to be a democratic state that is tolerant, pluralistic and devoted primarily to the welfare and progress of all its citizens and decides matters rationally after widest feasible consultations.

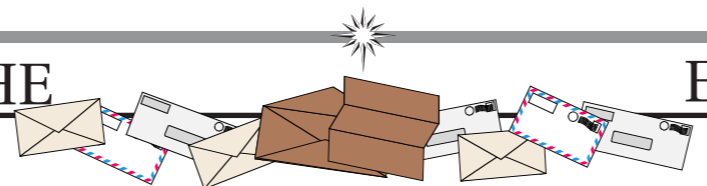
One opposes all Islamic fanaticisms and wants this one to be countered by cultivation of rational and scientific mode of thought. It is not a recommendation for the state to run amuck, arresting or oppressing either individuals wholesale or parties. What is recommended is providing rationalists, democrats and all secular-minded persons a level playing field. One is farthest from being a revivalist of any kind. But one does assert that Islam, with a 1500 years long history, needs a renaissance: positive thoughts of its savants should be separated from the chaff and preserved (and utilised to promote the quest for more knowledge).

All manner of minorities need protection. This too is not a plea for more police constables outside temples, churches or Imambaras. It is by endeavouring to make the society tolerant that establishes the rule of law, punishing only the guilty. No special privileges are against and let merit be the general

rallied behind ambitious bureaucrats and asked them to help prevent the Bengali-majority from taking power at the Centre. That is how democracy was killed and there was no political stability from the word go. The Constitution-making was actually hindered by West Pakistan deputies by endless arguments against the permanent majority of Bengalis. Ulema felt encouraged to raise as much political dust as they could. Power thus slipped into bureaucrats' hands.

Bureaucracy needed Army's help which was easily available from Gen Ayub Khan. Without Army's help the Bengalis could not be kept out of power. A charade of democratic procedures, including several palace coups and an abrogation of virtually two constitutions (1954's and 1956's), was played out in the first 11 years. After which the Army took over lock, stock and barrel. Landlord-dominated ruling Muslim League offered no resistance and bureaucracy quickly adjusted itself as the junior partner of the ruling generals. Bengalis were left outside in the cold. The military has functioned as a suzerain ever since 1958 either directly providing a dictator or dictating to the nomi-

## 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.

### Naked aggression

It is really painful to see a sovereign and independent country like Iraq becoming a victim of a naked aggression. This attack was conducted by none of its neighbours but by the only superpower located thousands of miles away. The reason behind this aggression was simple. Mr. Bush could not tolerate Iraqi president Saddam Hussein because he had once insulted his father. No country not even the UN came forward to condemn or even protest this aggression. If the destruction of a nation is so easy, the same will be done to Syria, Libya, Pakistan or North Korea and the whole world will be a spectator only. This "Might is Right" theory is successful because the world is now passing through a unipolar

phase. The destruction of Soviet Russia came as a blessing to the Americans. However, I feel that we have not yet seen the end of it. The thrashing received by the Americans in Vietnam, and for that matter by the Russians in Afghanistan, is still fresh in our memories. The Iraqi freedom fighters are becoming active day by day which is manifested by the coffins of the Yankees arriving at American bases every day.

What I am surprised to see is that the OIC members or Muslim Ummah are keeping a questionable silence over this tragedy. I don't know why they have adopted such a passive stance.

**Mohammed Alauddin**  
Dhaka  
**Mosquito menace**  
Amid the dearth of various civic

amenities, the mosquito menace prevailing in the city of Khulna has crossed the limits of tolerance. The mosquito population has grown sharply in the city and its outskirts. They come whirring in immediately after sunset. Of late, the disgusting tiny beings have made lives of citizens difficult with their round-the-clock presence. Children and students appearing in SSC exams are the worst sufferers. How can they concentrate on their studies as they remain busy driving away hundreds of mosquitoes all around them. Mosquito coils cannot be used for a long time at a stretch because of the hazardous smoke it creates. Other expensive insecticide sprays are not affordable always.

We wonder why Khulna City Corporation is not doing anything about the problem. How can we

combat diseases like dengue and malaria when there is such a proliferation of mosquitoes?  
**Dr Md Zahid Hussain**  
86, Gazon Babu Road, Khulna.

### Bachelor, a pleasant surprise

Bachelor is a welcome movie to the conscious and educated spectators. As it is not a typical commercial film, the scripting and the story narration were different and witty. In the movie, only one side of the life of a bachelor has been highlighted, that is love. All actors and actresses were caught up in an unequal love. Ferdous (a character in the film) was shown as a Casanova sort of guy. Even after getting married, he continues his coxing and makes extramarital relations. So it has not been illustrated what love deserves and

what's the morality of love. Love has been depicted as a matter of entertainment only.

As we know a movie is not only an instrument of entertainment but it should also have some commitment to society, because every film has its impact. I believe this film will create misconception about love among the young viewers. After watching this film, they will treat love only as a matter of fun which it is surely not. All told, I still thank the makers of the movie for presenting us something different. But they should not be oblivious of the social repercussions of a film when they go for their next production.

**Rashed**  
Dhaka  
**To the opposition and the government...**

It has started all over again, hartal, police action and then more hartals; it is like a vicious cycle. In the past, the Awami League observed 173 days of hartal, now in a span of five days they have observed three hartals, may be they are trying to break their own record.

We are feeling betrayed by the action of the Awami League because their leader Sheikh Hasina promised to the nation as prime minister that her party would never call a hartal even from the opposition. We trusted her and never thought that a leader of her stature would not honour her commitment to the nation.

We do not know what are those 15-point demands of the opposition, if those are reason-

able and beneficial for the people then the government should accept them. For attaining their goal, the opposition should go to parliament and plead their case but it seems that they prefer the streets.

Now the Awami League is concentrating on its one-point demand, asking the prime minister to step down. This is ridiculous! What sort of a demand is this? The four-party alliance won the elections with an overwhelming majority, if they fail to run the country efficiently then people will reject them in the next general elections. The Awami League should wait for that; they will not achieve anything by making people's lives miserable with agitation, hartal, siege etc.

**Nur Jahan**

Chittagong

### Barbaric attack

We condemn the attack on Dr. Humayun Azad by some miscreants in front of Bangla Academy during the month-long Book Fair. This kind of barbarism is shameful for any citizen of this country.

The attack violated the fundamental rights of a writer given to him by his only judge -- the people of the country. We are shocked by this gruesome attack on a famous linguist and hope that the law enforcing agencies will bring the culprits to book. A crime of such kind must not go unpunished.

**Nazim Mahmud**  
Kalibari Food Office  
Thakurgaon