

Extortionists' stranglehold

Desperation of businessmen far too manifest

THE businessmen of old Dhaka have decided to address their security concerns through convening a rally of 50 organisations of traders and businessmen. The rally is an expression of their dismay over the way the law enforcers are handling the issue of their security.

The sharp reaction has been prompted by the murder of a businessman which followed at least three other killings in recent times. Only some decapitated limbs of the murdered man could be recovered by police as far-out as in Munshiganj.

The businessmen are desperately trying to bring their utter helplessness to focus. The allegations about police inaction are serious enough to draw the attention of the law enforcement high-ups. Though an official of the DMP has tried to refute the charges, questions regarding the efficiency and sincerity of police have not been answered fully.

The families of victims have usually been scared of naming the criminals or lodging any FIR. In such cases, the police need to volunteer to provide security cover for the hesitant relatives to come forward. Unless they do so, they cannot earn the confidence of citizens. People would like to know what are they doing to allay the threatened businessmen's fears? The home ministry's decision to deploy 50 undercover teams of police is welcome, but nothing will change the situation as long as police cannot ensure that people will not be exposed to the wrath of the criminals for complaining against them.

There is considerable difference of opinion about the crime situation in the ruling alliance itself. While a senior minister has stated that law and order in Dhaka has worsened further, the home ministry holds an opposite view. It is evident from the recent incidents of crime that the minister's position is closer to the truth.

The government must take a firm stand on the issue. The criminals have been brought under the purview of speedy trial -- it must be a clear and quick process of investigation, prosecution and handing out of conviction to the culprits. At times suspected criminals are arrested and we would be told by police that no more information could be divulged in the interest of fair investigation. Fair enough, but we would like to point out that stock responses to sensational crimes do not help the cause of justice, nor do they restore people's confidence in the existing law enforcement system. People are interested in results.

The businessmen of old Dhaka have raised an issue that surely has relevance to other parts of the city, or other places in the country in varying degrees. The law enforcers have to ensure the security of business community in order to keep the wheels of trade and commerce moving.

EU anti-terror summit

Time to rethink approach

THE EU has announced an emergency meeting of interior ministers to forge a common response to the terror strikes in Madrid and a common platform for combating terror in the future. This recognition that the existing approach to fighting terror that has been dictated by the US has not proved effective, and that a new approach is needed, is to be applauded.

The atrocity in Madrid signals the need for the community of nations to go back to the drawing board to determine what works in the war on terror and what does not. The first thing to note is that the invasion of Iraq in no way advanced the cause of the global war against terrorism. The war did nothing to weaken al Qaeda -- it appears to have given it time to regroup, get back on its feet, and reapply itself to its deadly mission.

In addition, the contempt for world opinion shown by the US-led alliance and its apparent indifference to international law and the loss of innocent Iraqi lives were a propaganda coup for the terrorist cause. It is counterproductive to attack terror by fomenting terror of one's own.

Let us call a spade a spade. The main problem with the world's response to the threat of global terror has been that it has largely been dictated by the Bush administration. But it is not the latter alone that has suffered as a consequence.

The decision of the EU to convene in this manner signals that they have understood the limitations of the ongoing anti-terrorist approach. The summit's focus on a coordinated and cooperative approach, inclusive of a UN role, to addressing the terrorist threat appears to be a step in the right direction. After Madrid, who can blame them? It is Europe that has paid the price for Bush's misadventure.

A parallel government up to 25 March 1971



NURURDIN MAHMUD KAMAL

Sheikh Mujib's announcement on 7 March of a civil disobedience movement apparently disappointed the common Bangalee. They had appeared at the Ramna Race Course (Suhrawardi Udyan) with bamboo-poles, flags, iron-rods etc. The police or army were nowhere in sight. Some say nothing could have daunted their pace not even Tikka Khan's tanks, guns or aeroplanes. The non-martial Bangalees had grown restless to pounce upon their seducers -- the military-bureaucratic-comprador elite of Pakistan to disprove the libel in the field of action. President Yahya Khan's indication for convening the assembly session helped Mujib into avoiding a headlong plunge with an unpredictable outcome. With the historic declaration of 7 March 1971, the *modus operandi* had been changed, viz., through a non-violent means a more effective parallel government continued to operate, that started on 1 March 1971.

On 8 March, barring army garrisons, in East Bengal, people's rule led by Sheikh Mujib became the order of the day. Mujib's directives, popularly known as *Bangabandhu's ten commandments*, influenced every sphere of activity with defiance to the military regime. This movement alarmed the people of

West Pakistan in general and military authorities in particular. The non-Bangla speaking business community (the majority were West Pakistanis) even in East Bengal had been pestering the military government for salvaging their sinking business. This proved two things: first, the Bangalee movement led by Sheikh Mujib was becoming really efficacious and second, the military was losing control over the administration of the government. However, in a bid to lift the declining economy and

obeying the orders of Sheikh Mujib, by 5 March it had successfully covered the entire civil administration in East Bengal. This again exhibited the presence of a parallel government, which was virtually functional in the eastern wing. The crucial question for President Yahya did bear on the *loyalty* of the Bangalee elements in the Bengal Regiments (2nd Bengal Regiment located in Joydevpur, left over of 8th Bengal, in Chittagong, 1st Bengal in Jessore, 3rd in Rangpur, 4th at Mainamati, Comilla, East Bengal

that the power, at the centre, be transferred to the majority parties of both the wings, while in the provinces, it should be handed over to the parties there. The same day, Gen. Yahya Khan, in a publicised attempt to find a political solution to the crisis, in East Bengal, flew to Dhaka; but his actual purpose was to buy more time to be able to prepare for a military crackdown. The eluding clique (of Pakistan) was getting alarmed at the legitimacy, which the Awami League's administra-

friend: "Yahya has brought his monsters. Does he expect me to talk to them?" Sheikh Mujib in order to maintain his dignity deputed three lieutenants including Tajuddin Ahmed and Dr Kamal Hossain to negotiate with the official Pakistani team and reserved himself for the apex meeting with the President.

Mujib and Yahya Khan had a round of talks on 19 March, the day Brigadier Jahzeb Arbab made a futile attempt to capture arms and

central figures of Pakistan suddenly left Dhaka on the morning of 20 March.

The journalists, many of them foreign nationals, covering the negotiations, had been reporting optimistically upto 24 March. For instance, AFP reported on 24 March, quoting an 'impeccable source' that Yahya Khan was to proclaim virtual autonomy for Bangladesh within 24 hours (*Washington Post* 25 March 1971). Yahya Khan also surreptitiously flew back to Pakistan on 25 March even without Bhutto's knowledge. Prior to his departure, Yahya Khan gave a green signal to the army 'to sort them out.' On Yahya's safe arrival at Karachi, the Pak army beg a slaughter in Dhaka, Chittagong and throughout the eastern wing of Pakistan. This turned into genocide by Pak army.

On 26 March Gen. Yahya Khan, publicly announced the crackdown in a radio broadcast, twenty-four hours after it had been effected. He charged Sheikh Mujib for 'treason' and banned his party. The White Paper published by Pakistan, in August 1971, "On the crisis of East Pakistan," termed the army's action, of the night of 25-26 March as pre-emptive in nature; because, "reports had become available of Awami League plans to launch an armed rebellion in the early hours of 26 March, 1971. This was a cruel joke. The paper further read that in the opinion of President Yahya Khan: "It became quite evident that the intention of the Sheikh and his advisers was not to come to an understanding on the basis of one Pakistan , create complete chaos in the country. Through this plan they expected to establish a separate state of Bangladesh."

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Columnist Nuruddin Mahmud Kamal is a Muktiyoddha

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mitigate hardships of the common Bangalee, in East Bengal, Tajuddin Ahmed, Awami League's general secretary, issued "clarifications" and "exemptions" in banking hours, in the operation of road and sanitary services. The treasury in East Bengal began to make payments. Posts and Telegraph department delivered letters and telegrams within the limits of East Bengal. These clarifications and exemptions bore ample testimony to the fact that Sheikh Mujib and Awami League was running a parallel government in East Bengal, which was not even dreamt of in West Pakistan.

On 9 March, Sheikh Mujib reassured people of a sincere implementation of his six-point programme (DAWN, Karachi, Pakistan, 10 March, 1971). Since the civil administration was already cooperating with the disobedience movement by

Regiment Centre in Chittagong etc) and the East Pakistan Rifles (EPR -- now BDR).

The effect of the control over administration by Sheikh Mujib had begun to tell upon the Pakistani elites (living in the East Bengal and West Pakistan). All on a sudden they started feeling stranded and became panic stricken. This reached a new high on 8 March, when Lt General Tikka Khan had to swallow his pride. Mr Justice BA Siddiqi, the Chief Justice of Dhaka High Court, refused to administer him the oath of office as Governor and the General could find no other judge to oblige him. Tikka Khan had to be content with his military hat only. This was a successful *guerilla* political operation, which directly advanced the course of the movement with the use of non-violent measures.

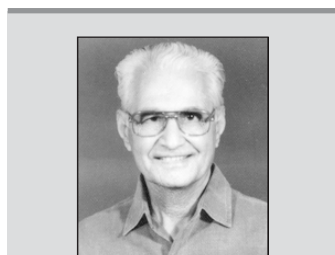
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that the power, at the centre, be transferred to the majority parties of both the wings, while in the provinces, it should be handed over to the parties there. The same day, Gen. Yahya Khan, in a publicised attempt to find a political solution to the crisis, in East Bengal, flew to Dhaka; but his actual purpose was to buy more time to be able to prepare for a military crackdown. The eluding clique (of Pakistan) was getting alarmed at the legitimacy, which the Awami League's administra-

tion was fast acquiring in the eyes of the world. Tikka Khan warned every government employee to report for duty within 24 hours, failing which their dismissal would be combined with their prosecution by special tribunals. The outcome was fairly predictable -- Bangalees defied *en masse*. But, Mujib fell into a booby trap set by President Yahya. Negotiations between Sheikh Mujib and Yahya Khan, covering all aspects of administration and the economy of East Bengal, continued between 15 and 25 March, 1971. Yet, it is interesting to note that the negotiation did not break down though the complexion of the President's negotiating team was bitterly provocative to the Bangalee leaders. Indeed, the negotiation team provided more undulations than a smooth surface to the delicate political discussions. Mujib privately remarked to

ammunition of the 2nd East Bengal Regiment stationed at Joydevpur. This was the first confrontation between the Pakistan army and the Bangalee population (an event that deserves separate treatment). Frustrated Brigadier Arbab returned to Dhaka garrison on the same day, killing several innocent people near Joydevpur Chowrasta. Later, Bhutto joined the talks of Mujib-Yahya. On 22 March Bhutto announced to the press, that a tripartite understanding regarding the transfer of power, between the two major political parties on the one hand and the army, on the other (DAWN, 23 March, 1971), had been reached! This was a bluff, an usual political maneuvering by Bhutto, following the final meeting between the advisors of Gen. Yahya Khan and the Awami League on 24 March, an announcement was expected which never came. Rather, it was learnt that some

You reap what you sow



M B NAQVI writes from Karachi

THE signing of the interim Constitution by Iraq's Interim Governing Council is thought to reflect an American victory that would extricate the US out of the Iraqi quagmire. It will do so to the extent that America is no longer caught up in the Afghan fastnesses. How great are these victories?

Try as powerful unseen forces may to set one group of Iraqis, the Shias, against another Iraqi group, the Sunnis - the 10th of Muharram suicide bombing and other attacks on Shia targets in Karbala and Baghdad - the main battle lines in Iraq remain Iraqi Arabs versus Americans and their collaborators: other Coalition troops or Iraqis employed by American-nominated Interim Governing Council. Arabs and their friends remain skeptical about who masterminded the March 2 attacks on Karbala and the Kazimia shrine in Baghdad. Iraqis in general continue to look at Americans, civilians or uniformed, as interlopers who must leave.

What precisely has been achieved by Paul Bremer the US consul? Can the Interim Council go on safely governing Iraq as an authentic, sovereign government after June 30 next? Can the Council stay safe behind the (new) walls around their compound in Baghdad even for one day, if the US and Coalition forces were to go home? Does any intelligent reader expect the US to reduce its deployment in Iraq in, say two, five or even 10 years? Which gives courage to the

Council. Indeed questions regarding possible changes in US policies in and about ME resulting from the upcoming Nov 2 US elections can be answered. First both Bush and Kerry support the broad thrust of American policies vis-à-vis ME - and indeed the rest of Asia. Secondly, US foreign policy is not an election issue; bipartisanship has ruled for long. Can anyone see any difference in the US policy vis-à-vis Israel or about the Arabs since

the culprit responsible for 9/11? How many disagree that a previously-planned US entry into Afghanistan had a lot to do with (a) making a 'necessary' geo-strategic advance into Central; (b) that the scent of oil in Central Asia was strong; (c) that US bases (that could be suitably expanded in crises) close to Russia's soft underbelly would be a helpful circumstance; (d) getting closer to Chinese heardland can enable US diplomacy to counter Chinese influence and of the Shanghai Six; and (e)

background of Balfour Declaration. All have noted the demographic plurality of newly created state of Iraq: its northern part is largely Kurdish, central parts are Sunni-dominated and the south is mainly Shia that amount 60 per cent in all of Iraq.

Thanks to the quirks of Arab-Islamic history, few realised the extent of Shia numbers in ME; most new Arab regimes were Sunni-dominated, and one, Lebanon, was Christian-dominated. The only

Shia majority did come elections and a representative government. Shias remember their own massacres first by the British in 1920s and later by Saddam Hussain after the 1991 War in addition to the political strait jacket in which they were kept by the Baathists.

How explosive is the meltdown of this demographic mixture was shown by what happened on the Ashura Day in Karbala and Baghdad - no matter who inspired it. One is not sure who instigated it. Like all

presence will ensure that. Secondly, the Americans are not simpletons who did not know Iraq's complexities: A radical anti-Israeli regime in Baghdad needed to be destroyed - no matter if the country falls apart. US troops can ensure the security of its nominees who appear to rule Iraq, in whole or its parts: Kurds, Sunnis or Shias as new states. These can suitably intrigue, quarrel, fight or merely remain wary neighbours. So much the better if Iraq does split up in a few months or years so long as US troops stay on and new regimes are chosen mainly by the US. Absence of a strong Iraqi state will work wonders for Israel's security; Palestinians morale can be expected to crumble. Then there are profits to be made in the reconstruction works, in the rearing of new armies and of course in rebuilding the infrastructure of the oil business.

Holistic thinking of what the US is engaged in is necessary. It has, more or less, secured South Asia, with both India and Pakistan vying for closer US friendship. Pakistan has given at least four military bases to the US and is fighting shoulder to shoulder with it against Taliban and al-Qaeda remnants. The US has, in addition to its armadas in the Persian Gulf, two bases in Afghanistan and so many in Central Asian Republics. It can now play a stronger hand in Central Asia - not to mention its overpowering presence in Asia-Pacific regions, complete with suitable alliances.

It is not political abuse to say that the US has already built an Empire that does not go to the length of old-style colonialisation. European colonialisms were frank: they openly exploited the resources of their colonies through special trade regimes. But they also accepted responsibility of running them and helped build modernist structures to ensure growth and more profits in trade. A measure of development, political and economic, did result. Inside the new US Imperium, there is no acknowledgement of any responsibility; you take what you can for as long as you can and move on. Some progress, that!

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

PLAIN WORDS

It is not political abuse to say that the US has already built an Empire that does not go to the length of old-style colonialisation. European colonialisms were frank: they openly exploited the resources of their colonies through special trade regimes. But they also accepted responsibility of running them and helped build modernist structures to ensure growth and more profits in trade... Inside the new US Imperium, there is no acknowledgement of any responsibility: you take what you can for as long as you can and move on.

1970s - right down to 2004? If John Kerry gets elected come November, he will act in Iraq and the rest of the ME in exactly the same way as the Powells and Henry Kissingers have advised their Presidents to do; nuances may be different. Disagreements over foreign affairs before elections are not significant.

Look closely at the 'new' American policy under President Bush. Why did the US come to occupy Afghanistan? They say they came to punish Osama bin Laden. Now three questions arise. Suppose Gen. Musharraf's boys manage to catch OBL and hand him (and his acolytes) over to the GIs. What happens to the US presence? Would the GIs and their coalition partners go home, glowing in triumph? Secondly, can anyone actually guess when will the White House decide to leave Afghanistan to its devices, now that a supposedly democratic dispensation has been created for it?

Thirdly, how many outsiders regard the Bush decision to invade Afghanistan to be due to OBL being

along the way, the US can consolidate its position in South Asia with many bases bolstering strategic partnership with India and keeping Pakistan Army usefully employed in catching al-Qaeda and Taliban fugitives at a trifling price. So, are the Americans really anxious to withdraw from Afghanistan?

It has been noted that the Americans are unlikely to leave Iraq anytime soon. The question arises as to what will their military presence do to Iraq and the region? The main achievement of the US war on Iraq may be the final liquidation of the Iraqi state. It is not yet definitive. But who can forget how Iraq came to be a state? It was created in the aftermath of WWI under Picot-Sykes

agreements over the disposal of the defeated Ottoman Empire, along with Trans-Jordan. Earlier it was just a part of the Ottoman Empire, like all the Arabs. British chose to occupy these areas because of their strategic location, centre of Arab world, their fertility and the expectation of oil; their own plans for Palestine against the

known Shia-dominated country was Iran, a non-Arab Empire. But few realised, until the British had had to put down a Shia revolt in southern Iraq in early 1920s, that a majority of Iraqis were Shias. It is only now known that Shias constitute a majority in Bahrain or that there is a Shia minority living in Saudi Arabia's oil-bearing region. As a result of modernist and crypto-democratic ideas pulsating in the ME after WWI and WWII, the British stooges in Iraq were overthrown in later 1950s.

Americans, by finishing off the Baathist regime, have also destroyed the social and political order in Iraq. The question now is: can the Iraq's Humpty Dumpty be put together again? One fears that the old order has gone for good. The effort to recreate the old state of Iraq can easily fail. The Kurdish areas are actually demanding independence from the Arabs, though they talk of only autonomy for fear of Turkish invasion. Turks are determined to prevent the emergence

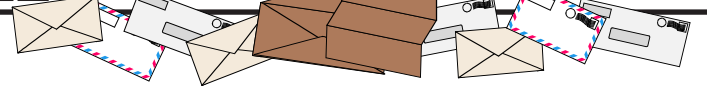
of a Kurd state anywhere. Sunnis who had ruled the roost in Iraq are gravely apprehensive of what the

colonial powers with no intention of relaxing control over the levers of power and wanting to determine the persons who nominally exercise power, the Americans too fear people's unity. They are thus suspected to have resorted to the familiar divide and rule tactics, as Robert Fisk has noted.

Anyhow, the position is that the transfer of power on June 30 will largely be a hoax. So long as the America's occupation Army is in Iraq, sovereignty will stay with the GIs' Commander or his boss. No civilian set up can now function for an hour in Baghdad until it has the blessings of the US. All constitutions that Paul Bremer may flout will be pieces of paper insofar as realities of power are concerned. Anyhow the question is: what is the US Army doing in Iraq and what were the American interests for which Iraq has been conquered.

Inevitably that two obvious connections are being made: one is of course oil, the second largest reservoir. The US means to control its production, transportation, who refines it and who buys it. US Army's

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.

Blocking the alternative force

Former President Dr. Badruddoza Chowdhury--the man initiating the alternative political force in Bangladesh-- was harassed on the way to the scheduled meeting at Muktangan on March 11. His son Mahi B Chowdhury and defuncting BNP-MP Major (Rtd.) Abdul Mannan suffered the same fate at Farm Gate. A hoodlum was about to run over them with his motorbike. The hoodlum is believed to be a pro-BNP man and other JCD activists were around, helped even by the police of the state!

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan was quick to

claim that the desertion would hurt neither the government nor the party. If that is so, why so much hurt-burning that the police is instructed to dismantle the stage erected for launching of the former president's political forum?

Furthermore, several bombs were hurled on B Chowdhury's office and KC Memorial Clinic on the night before he was supposed to launch his political platform. Mercifully, no one was killed or injured. The police also pulled down the stage from where the former president was supposed to launch his forum. This is one measure of how LOW politics here can stoop. We do not know if the former president obtained a prior permission for his political gathering or he was denied

permission for the purpose. Whatever it is, the fact remains that there is hardly any difference between the thugs who carried out the bomb attacks on his office and clinic and the policemen who dismantled the stage. The thugs could not be identified because they came at dead of night and made good their escape immediately after throwing the bombs. The police who pulled down the stage, however, could be identified but that is of no help. Had it been a civilised enough society, the police would have been accountable for what they did. Clearly, they did not do what they did on their own accord.

Even before the formal launching of Badruddoza Chowdhury's alternative political

stream (Bikalpa Dhara), the move has come under attack. So you can bet, the attackers will never be caught or if ever caught, it will be not without some ulterior motive. Most likely, a scapegoat will be presented to fit in the stereotyped conspiracy theory. Why should politics get so low that a former president would be denied his right to assembly? His cards are in the open. He has every right to differ with the opinions of the party (that he founded with late President Ziaur Rahman) hierarchy and part with it.

As I understand from my shallow knowledge of politics, the more they attack, the larger will be the processions of the new political forum in future. On the other hand, if the force is allowed to work freely,

it may or may not gather much support to launch a party or gain many votes in the next election.

As an advocate of free-thinking and doing, I expect democratic and lawful behaviour from the ruling party.

MAS Molla
BAAS, Dhaka

Attacks on peaceful demonstrations

The recent police-aided attacks of BNP activists on supporters of Dr. Humayun Azad and Dr. Badruddoza Chowdhury were simply outrageous. The right to peaceful demonstration and protest is an important part of democracy. During the US/UK

invasion of Iraq, street demonstrations were the main avenue by which the public in those countries could voice their legitimate disagreement with their governments. But the recent behaviour of the police and ruling party activists indicates that the government is not interested in upholding the people's right to peaceful protest.

This is an irresponsible and dangerous course to take. If demonstrations and other peaceful avenues of protest are closed, the culture of hartal will just be further legitimated as the only option for the political parties. The government should reconsider the implications of the recent violence. Instead of attacking demonstrations, the police should be concerned with protecting all

peaceful demonstrators. Otherwise, we will see more and more hartals.

Zeeshan Hasan
London School of Economics,
London, UK

Wake up!

It is sad and pathetic to see how Dr. B Chowdhury and his people were assaulted while the law enforcers stood by like spectators in a circus. Bangladesh has become a violent for fair journalism?

It is the people of Bangladesh that can change its fate. I really feel sorry for my motherland.

Wake up Bangladesh! How long do you want to be treated as a third grade country by the international

community?
A Bangladesh
Santa Clara, California, USA

Biased journalism?

It saddens me to see the popular daily newspapers carrying biased reports.

It is a matter of grave concern that while our political parties show no respect for democracy, our newspapers show no respect for fair journalism.

Giving an impression like "the BNP is known to be intolerant to opposition" is not an example of objective journalism.

Actizen
Dhaka