

The Friday massacre at shrine

Impunity syndrome playing out

THE bomb blast at the Hazrat Shahjalal shrine in Sylhet, which most probably had the new British High Commissioner in Bangladesh as its target, is another grim reminder of the ever lengthening spectre of terrorism casting a shadow on the image of our society. The British envoy who was hurt, is out of danger; needless to say, to the relief of the host country. Let's put on record our deepest condolences for the lives lost and the tremendous agony and trauma suffered by more than a hundred people wounded in the incident. Indeed, our heart goes out in sympathy for the victims.

It is not yet known why Anwar Choudhury, the first British High Commissioner of Bangladeshi origin to this country, was targeted by terrorists who have had blood-letting as their broader agenda. The enormity of the crime is hard to describe. We are dumbfounded. This senseless, barbaric attack will only serve the purpose of the enemies of the country.

Now, it is highly imperative that the motivation behind the rising incidence of such attacks is determined and their operatives and mentors are ferreted out and given deterrent punishment. It is precisely here that our track-record has been uninspiring, to say the least. There were several bomb attacks in the recent years which took a heavy toll of human lives. But not a single case has been resolved so far; investigations into the attacks remained inconclusive with political recriminations serving only to deflect them off-course. Police could not even submit their report on the blast that took place at the same shrine last January. The law enforcers' failure must have emboldened the terrorists to strike the way they have at the time and place of their choice. As we have said before, so we say now, the government should not hesitate in seeking cooperation of appropriate international agencies which specialise in countering terrorism of different forms and shapes.

The attack on the High Commissioner has made it clear that extremists are very much active, partly because of a sense of impunity and in part due to the lack of counter-offensives. As an appropriate beginning, we hope the political blame game will not derail the investigation and the culprits will be brought to justice as a matter of utmost priority.

Corruption in project implementation

A massive road-block to national development

THE beans have been spilled about utilisation of project funds under Annual Development Programmes. None other than by an internal watchdog: the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) of the planning ministry. In a report analysing its findings from spot inspections of 289 projects out of 1345 implemented in fiscal 2002 and 2003, the monitoring cell has literally blown the whistle.

It has uncovered strings of mal-practices including corruption, misuse of funds and a whole lot of cleverly crafted irregularities. Obviously, this is just a tip of the iceberg, because less than one-fourth of the total number of projects undertaken in the two fiscal years were scrutinised; the remainder 1056 having been left out where saints could not have been in charge.

Let's sample the measly-minded and shrewdly, yet brazenly, contrived devices to line individual or group pockets at the expense of national development: project costs were inflated taking undue advantage of a 10 percent allowable limit; contracts were doled out through lotteries to handpicked contractors, 80 percent of whom failed to meet deadlines for construction works in primary and mass education sectors; 40 percent of contractors -- heaven knows, who and why -- didn't get paid; and project designs were drastically modified to obtain bigger funds. The list is endless: projects spinning more money, like for instance, flood protection projects were preferred to irrigation projects (the preference ratio being 61.34 percent to 8.77 percent!); rehabilitation, renovation and augmentation of grid system were made a short shrift of, while high tension transmission lines passed through residential areas spelling danger; and DESA showed a tendency towards spending unauthorised funds. Furthermore, there were instances detected of drawing tender money without implementation, procurement of low quality materials and misuse of vehicles purchased for projects.

The conventional critique on poor ADP performances has been focused on four factors: our poor implementation capacity, snapped aid disbursement, faulty project designs, and political considerations behind project selection superseding economic rationale. Of course, these negative elements have had a cumulative stifling effect on the progress of ADPs on a year-to-year basis. But the overriding roadblock to ADP implementation has been playing foul with resources, both domestic and external, placed at the disposal of the annual development programmes.

Our kudos to the IMED for what they have done hoping they would redouble their efforts to unearth more tales behind ADP debacles. But without corrective actions their findings will be of little avail. So, we are keenly awaiting proceedings against the corrupt who forage on the ADP funds to make a killing at home and perhaps abroad, and rob the poor of their dreams for a better day.

Sonia Gandhi's finest hour

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

DESPITE emotional appeals from all the members of the newly elected Congress Parliamentary Party, the resignation by All India Congress Working Committee members, street agitation by Congress party workers in front of 10 Janapath (Mrs. Gandhi's Delhi residence) and throughout India, written support to her by her allies, the Left Front and Samajbadi Party, Sonia Gandhi refused to become the Prime Minister of India. One cannot readily cite another example of a politician refusing to accept the ultimate prize he/she can aspire for. Along with the abdication of King Edward VIII of England who did that for personal reasons Sonia Gandhi's refusal to be Prime Minister of the largest democracy in the world will remain a unique historical event.

BJP's insistence of continuing with the "foreign origin" issue and its refusal to attend the swearing in ceremony if she were to become the Prime Minister, despite NDA's definitive defeat at the polls, smack of reverse racism. Sushma Swaraj's threat to resign from the Rajya Sabha along with her husband and Uma Bharti's resignation from the post of Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh (the resignation letter was sent to BJP President Venkiah Naidu instead of the Governor of MP) were acts of worst possible undemocratic practice in a country which can pride itself for its unbroken (except for Indira Gandhi's emergency period) history of democratic rule. The xenophobes of RSS, VHP and the extremist elements of BJP only had to look up the history books of both India and Europe to discover their folly.

Perhaps they were mired in the "lessons" given by Chanakya who for strategic reasons arranged the marriage of Chandra Gupta with the daughter of defeated Greek general Seleucus Nikator on the condition that no progeny from that marriage would be able to inherit the throne of Magadh. But they forget that Sita and Lord Buddha were of Nepalese origin and Gandhari (wife of Dhritrashtra) belonged to Gandhara now in Afghanistan. But the logic of they being treated as natural citizens of the land could be found in the definition of the political

geography of Vedic India, Bharat-Khand, Aryavart or Bhara Varsh. Collectively the boundary of Bara Varsh or Aryavart was between the mountain range from the eastern sea (Bay of Bengal) to western sea (Arabian Sea). Territories beyond Aryavart were called land of Mlechchas (barbarians) and the Turks, Greeks, Mongols, Mughals and others who invaded the Vedic land were called

given by then Prime Minister Vajpayee addressing the Parliamentarians in 1999 when he spoke of people of Indian origin holding elected offices in 19 countries, 200 MPs, 68 Ministers and three Prime Ministers who have done India proud. If place of birth is to be taken as determinant for holding high offices then IK Gujral, Jyoti Basu and LK Advani could be disqualified from holding "high offices" of the

ment that in the US only a native born can be the President of the country. This argument has been made grotesque by BJP President Venkiah Naidu's claim that the framers of the Indian Constitution could never have imagined after liberating the country from foreign rule that fifty years later a foreign born naturalised Indian could vie for the post of Prime Minister of the country which was added by another

of secularism which advocates separation of religion from politics. In his characteristic way Pandit Nehru saw organised religion as being "very largely an empty form devoid of real content" and condemned the unyielding religious orthodoxy and communalism in all communities. One would hope that Sonia led Congress alliance's victory at the polls would at least give billion odd Indians

universal praise. Indian Express paid her tribute for assuming high moral ground and for neatly disarming her political opponents of the one weapon they had hoped to use against her. The Hindu praised her for a well deserved victory earned through a decent issue-based campaign that refused to respond in kind to highly personalised attacks on her "foreign origin and antecedents". The paper's political editor Harsh Khare paid glowing tribute to Sonia Gandhi for identifying herself "firmly with the land's ancient tradition of renunciation". Hindustan Times said "Rare is the Indian politician who turns away from power when it is offered to him or her on a platter. Sonia Gandhi is now the only person in Indian history to have turned down the post of Prime Minister not once but twice".

Sonia Gandhi's refusal to be Prime Minister not only stunned India and the world but at the same time earned her universal praise. Indian Express paid her tribute for assuming high moral ground and for neatly disarming her political opponents of the one weapon they had hoped to use against her. The Hindu praised her for a well deserved victory earned through a decent issue-based campaign that refused to respond in kind to highly personalised attacks on her "foreign origin and antecedents".

Yavanas.

After the defeat of Selucus Chadra Gupta Maurya could have easily annexed the territories occupied by the Greeks in India. But he was advised against it by Kautilya because the territories beyond Hindukush were beyond the pale of Vedic religion and laws. Kautilya believed in pristine Indianism which would not tolerate any association with the Mlechchas and the Yavanas. Fuelled by RSS/VHP concept of Hindutva, regardless of its disastrous effects on multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-linguistic, multi-cultural and almost multi-civilisational India, BJP did not "consider Sonia Gandhi ethnically Indian as she does not fit into the frame of their definition of patriotism and nationalism" (The BJP and RSS on Foreigner Issue South Asia Analysis Group). The foundation of the ideological philosophy of the BJP is the cultural and traditional heritage of India which the party feels Sonia Gandhi cannot inspire among the people.

BJP has forgotten that the first head of the Indian National Congress (albeit during the British Raj) was Allan Octavian Hume who was followed by Irish Annie Besant. The process of Indianisation of the party gained momentum with the entry of Mahatma Gandhi and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. BJP's self-contradiction becomes apparent if one looks at the speech

President, Vice President and Prime Minister. This argument was however nullified by Arun Jetley in his assertion that article 6 of the Indian Constitution provides that a person who has migrated to the territory of India from the country now included in Pakistan shall be deemed to be a citizen of India at the commencement of this Constitution.

There is no legal bar on a foreign born Indian citizen from occupying high offices. There was a time when former Prime Ministers VP Singh and Chandra Shekhar and political leaders like Sharad Pawar, Mulayam Singh Yadav and PA Sanghama felt very strongly on Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin. But the 2004 elections have proved that ordinary Indians just do not care about the issue. That is why Govinda Acharya and Sushma Swaraj's communal attitude is so difficult to comprehend. Except perhaps in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh Hindutva, a weapon used by upper caste Hindus to divert the attention of the under-privileged from the failure of the BJP government to give them a share of India shining prosperity, could have had some effect but elsewhere the "foreigner" issue proved to be a total non-issue. In those areas Bijli, Sadak, and Paani proved to be the main determinants of victory or defeat of the candidates.

Some have advanced the argument by Harvard educated Subramaniam Swamy that since in Italy an Indian cannot become Prime Minister so according to the principle of reciprocity an Italian could not become Prime Minister of India. That these arguments are facile are to say the least. The framers of the American Constitution Jefferson, Madison, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton and others possessing unmatched brilliance were genuinely afraid of foreign subversion. Among their nightmare scenarios was the prospect of a European noble using his money and influence to sway the Electoral College. Such a situation is inconceivable in India today.

BJP's "foreigner" issue also falls flat on the ground of Hindu marriage and tradition according to which a woman married to a Hindu man leaves her caste (gotra) and joins that of her husband's (gotranat). Sonia Gandhi became an Indian "bahu" when she married Rajiv Gandhi. Therefore BJP's snide remarks of Ram Rajya vs. Rome Rajya and ideologue S. Gurumurthy's observation that it is now India and not East India (Company) smack of reverse racism and narrow communal out look. If BJP's criticism is aimed at Sonia Gandhi being raised as a catholic is a threat to Hindutva then it only helped to insult not only Indian Christians but the entire minority community. Indians, by and large, are wedded to Nehruvian notion

some respite from the onslaught of Hindutva and BJP would take some time out to look up the pages of world history.

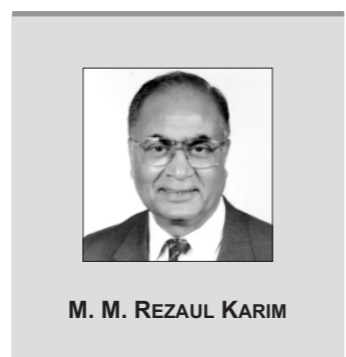
The founder President of the Irish Republic Eamon de Valera was born in New York (1882) of a Spanish father and an Irish mother. Richard Butler, British Chancellor of Exchequer and Chairman of the Conservative Party was born at Attock Sarai in Punjab. Catherine the Great of Russia was born in the Prussian town of Stetin and spoke little Russian at the time of her marriage to Peter III. George II of England was born at Hanover (Germany) and grew up as a German prince and was more interested in Hanover than in England. From George I (1714-27) to Queen Victoria (1837- 1901) the British royal family was known as the House of Hanover. The next King of Holland and the Queen of Sweden would be half German because late Prince Klaus and the present Queen of Sweden are of German origin and upbringing. Today the citizens of the European Union feel proud to be known as Europeans as opposed to their national identity (not that the two are mutually exclusive). This was evident during the recent inclusion of the ten new members of the EU.

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India is lucky to get Dr. Man Mohan Singh as the next Prime Minister. His nomination has brought back stability to the Mumbai stock market which had crashed due to recent political uncertainty. Dr. Singh has promised growth with a human face. In other words he would adopt pro-growth strategy but would abandon unbridled disinvestment and privatisation. One may recall that he was the initiator of liberalisation of Indian economy and is credited both at home and abroad for his encyclopedic depth of knowledge of Indian economy. His Lal Bahadur Shastri like integrity, his soft yet firm style of handling of complex issues, and his simple life style are endearing qualities. His greatest challenge would be to meet the expectations of the electorate, assure foreign investors and NRIs that there would not be sudden change of course in economic policy, and at the same time to convince the Left that the common minimum programme would be implemented. Dr Singh also has to make India a global player where India's voice would be heard loud and clear. These are early days to talk about foreign and defence policies of the new government which are expected to unfold as time goes by.

The author is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

What does the Congress victory mean for Pakistan and Bangladesh?



M. M. REZAUL KARIM

THE unexpected landslide victory of the Congress-led coalition in India brought in its trail a cautious apprehension or some measure of expectation on India's neighbours. Most political observers had thought that the two major coalitions would have neck-to-neck fight, with the BJP-led NDA coalition gaining a marginal edge. But the result belied the speculation. The Congress and its allies secured an overwhelming victory, a striking contrast to its failings in the past.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee immediately conceded defeat, tendered resignation and pledged all co-operation to the future government. He said his party had lost but India won, signifying Indian democratic process continued unabated. He also said that he had lost the election but not determination. Amplifying the phrase, he spoke of his continued will to do well for the people at home and to promote peace in the region.

Vajpayee's ambition found expression in his efforts, representing almost the last wish of his life, to establish peace with Pakistan. He thought he would make a mark in history by promoting a solution of the Kashmir issue, which caused wars between the two neighbours and deprived their peoples of their legitimate rights to a better life. The huge resources diverted by these two powers to wasteful war efforts were also criminal to the overwhelmingly poor and needy people of the two most populous countries of the sub-continent.

One need not recount the complexity of the Kashmir issue, which stands at the pivot of all major problems facing

the two nations. Notwithstanding the stand-off at Kargil and the terrorist attack in the parliament, Vajpayee waved an olive branch to Pakistan. The resumption of bus service between the two countries was a clear manifestation of his will to reconcile. He said he would make one last effort and set out for Pakistan to attend the SAARC Summit. He went there not so much for his commitment to SAARC than to promote understanding with President General Musharraf.

Despite the stamp of communalism

saries. But the claim of the diehard rightists of the BJP that the NDA had lost election and with it also lost the people's mandate for Vajpayee's overture for making peace with Pakistan, rendered the situation even more complex and difficult.

The challenge faced by the new Prime Minister of India, therefore, lies in his determination and ability to match with Vajpayee's initiative and efforts. He may even have to take a step forward in the process of reconciliation, not only to do better than the

between Bangladesh and India, both on water sharing, took place during the tenure of non-Congress governments. The Interim Agreement was signed during the regime of Janata Party-led coalition of Prime Minister Morarji Desai and the Long Term Agreement was concluded during the Prime Ministership of Dev Goda. The rulers of Bangladesh then were President Ziaur Rahman and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina respectively.

What will then be the attitude of the new government towards Bangla-

the BNP rule, the expressed will of the two governments have not yielded the desired result. Why was it so?

One must admit that the importance of Bangladesh in the geo-political strategy of India is evidently much less than what India is for Bangladesh. Yet, India's relation with Bangladesh is unique for more than one reason. The geographical location of Bangladesh, surrounded by India on all sides, is a factor that may be regarded both in positive and negative dimensions. Secondly, the

Bangladesh include massive trade imbalance for Bangladesh, transit and transshipment controversy, delimitation of land and maritime boundaries, alleged camps and presence of terrorists in each other's country, border skirmishes, and the recent disclosure of the ambitious plan for linking the river network of northern India. Trade talks, especially on Free Trade, SAFTA and WTO, are going on, hopefully, in a positive manner. Transit and transshipment appear to have lost their urgency following the Indian decision to build an alternative route outside the northern boundary of Bangladesh. The delimitation of land boundary can be taken in hand immediately and be satisfactorily completed. There are, indeed, differences on the question of existence of rebel camps and terrorists, but these call for continued dialogue in a spirit of tolerance and respect for each other's views. Border skirmishes can be avoided with greater vigour, communication and guidance on the part of both. The river link project, it appears, is likely to be opposed by some partners of the new Indian government itself and will, to that extent, help remove the deep concern of Bangladesh.

What is left then? What is left is the priority to be assigned and determination shown by the two countries to resolve their problems. They must work in all earnest for this purpose. Bangladesh has no reason whatsoever to denigrate importance and urgency to solve the bilateral issues with India. But such a postulate may not hold good for India, for various reasons, including existence of other issues deserving greater and immediate attention. But India would still be well advised to enhance its priority towards Bangladesh which will be happily reciprocated. Positive outcome of such efforts will evidently constitute a precursor to the establishment of a congenial atmosphere for the promotion of peace and co-operation in South Asia. And this will, no doubt, earn a welcome laurel for the new government of India.

M.M.Rezaul Karim, a former Ambassador, is a member of BNP's Advisory Council.

CURRENTS AND CROSSCURRENTS

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on his party and colleagues. Vajpayee's personal attitude towards establishment of peace with Pakistan was recognised much earlier. He was also Foreign Minister in the coalition government of Prime Minister Morarji Desai in 1977 when the Interim Agreement on the Sharing of Waters of the Ganges was concluded between Bangladesh and India. Being posted in Delhi, I had the opportunity of observing his role closely. His ambition to improve relations with the neighboring countries found expression even then. However, the Indian electorate this time cut short his ambition prematurely.

What will then be the attitude and approach of the Congress-led coalition government to Pakistan in the context of the complex issues and the perennial distrust characterising relations between the two neighbours? Recently, the sports diplomacy was conducted through the highly successful visit of the Indian cricket team to Pakistan. People to people contacts have worked marvels and hold greater prospect to ease the uneasy situation facing the two adver-

saries. But the claim of the diehard rightists of the BJP that the NDA had lost election and with it also lost the people's mandate for Vajpayee's overture for making peace with Pakistan, rendered the situation even more complex and difficult.

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It may be otherwise, the BJP's soft Hindutva, appealing Muslims, may have caused the party dearly this time.

Finally, in the last election no party got the mandate to rule the country. The magic figure of 273 will be a distant dream for any particular party in Indian politics for years to come. The real king-maker in Indian politics will be those who can play with the minds of Dalits, Muslims and the poor. **Malay Barua**
On e-mail

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.

Violation of human rights in Iraq

The barbarous and heinous atrocities and brutalities committed on the Iraqi prisoners by the US army have surpassed all records of Saddam Hussain's excesses. Aren't these the acts of the civilised army of a superpower which claims to be the most civilised nation in the world and champion of human rights and democracy? The atrocities committed by the US army in Iraqi prisons remind us of the tortures and brutalities committed in Nazi concentra-

tion camps during the World War II. Saddam did not destroy the cities and properties of Iraq. But Mr Bush has destroyed the cities of Iraq. Bush has killed the civilians, women and children in Iraq ruthlessly, apart from the ten lakh children who died in eight years due to the sanctions imposed on Iraq at the initiative of America. Now Bush wants to impose democracy on Iraqi people by force, whether they want it or not. The Muslim countries of the Arab world are not accustomed to the western type of democracy. They are familiar with Islamic democracy

which is such a thing that cannot be imposed from outside by force. It has to come from within.

Now it is clear, when the pretext of WMD has failed, the pretext of democratising Iraq is the issue to justify the US occupation of Iraq. Bush wants to grab the resources of Iraq permanently and bestow a "beggar's democracy" upon the Iraqi people. He is not worried about other countries around the world including the Arab countries where democracy is absent. So Bush is no better than Saddam Hussain. It is the thinking of all Iraqis

now and also of all Muslims all over the world. Am I right?
Sk. A Wadud
Lake Circus, Kalabagan, Dhaka

Indian election

I have read your editorial 'The majesty of democracy' on 14 May with interest. It is customary for any leading newspaper to write editorials on any important issue of a neighbouring country which it considers important. It is very vital for the all round effect Bangladesh can perceive in her stability, growth and development due to change of

government in New Delhi. (Border issue, trade deficit, water sharing, river linking project etc.)

Moreover, it is also sort of a routine exercise for the neighbouring country to welcome any change of government in its neighbourhood. Though your editorial more or less follows an expected line, but you could not suppress your undertone of happiness at the exit of the Hindu nationalist party, BJP and allies.

As per your analysis, the exit of the BJP is because of:
1. The BJP's "slightly saffronised"

electoral campaign strategy didn't pay the desired dividend, because it didn't match with its playing of the Hindutva card during its actual incumbency (That is BJP shifted its Hindutva ideology during the campaign) 2. The unsettling effect of the Gujarat carnage on Hindu-Muslim equation, the BJP's position on the highly sensitive Ayodhya mosque-temple tangle, the party's failure to distance itself from the extremist philosophy of the RSS, Bajrang Dal and Shiv Sena, and the changes made in the history text books impacted negatively on the

BJP's fortunes beyond its hard core vote banks. (That is BJP has been ousted for its strong, extremist Hindutva ideology by non-hard-core, non-Hindutava voters)

What you have failed to realise is that in 1996, 1998 and 1999 the BJP had won 162, 182 & 180 seats against the Congress' 139, 139 & 140 seats. In those years, the BJP had entirely focused her Hindutava agenda/Ram Temple in Ayodhya in the election campaign. So it is baseless that the party's connections with the fundamentalists caused its downfall.