

## Yet another bomb blast!

Result of too many wake-up calls ignored

THE bomb explosion at Dirai in Sunamganj spilling blood at a political party meeting is a pointer to a freer rein being enjoyed with each passing day by professional killers and saboteurs of public peace.

We have written *ad nauseum* about the need to address the cases of explosions in a forthright and earnest manner. Only the other day in this column, we expressed our concern that, failure to bring to a positive conclusion the investigations regarding sensational cases, would provide a fillip to the perpetrators, to continue with their anti-state and anti-people activities.

Unfortunately investigations of none of the bomb blast cases have been concluded as yet. More often, these have been mired in political blame game and attempted slant to implicate the opposition. Yet again we see the usual blame game. A political party has already blamed another for perpetrating the incident in Dirai. This is another factor that creates impediments to proper, objective investigations of important cases, such as this.

For over a decade now we have been pre-occupied with the problem of proliferation of small arms in Bangladesh. In the process, we have overlooked the very serious issue of indigenous explosive devices (IED) that have been so frequently used over several years, with devastating effects. The casualty statistics at a glance shows us that more lives have been lost due to this device than to the conventional small arms and light weapons.

Admittedly, IEDs are easy to put together and transported without difficulty from place to place. They can also be moved about in a knocked down condition and assembled at short notice. Some crude devices can also be put together without much technical know-how. All these beg the question of professional investigation of previous cases, constant surveillance over suspected groups as well as maintaining a data base to conduct productive investigations.

It is time the government addressed the issue of IEDs seriously. It is imperative to bring the culprits and perpetrators of these abhorrent acts to book. We are sure that professionalism in investigations is bound to lead to arrests.

But above all, to bear any fruit, investigations must steer clear of any political interference.

## Residences of Speaker, Dy Speaker in JS complex

HC order upholds public interest, sanctity of heritage

THIS is what we would call a benign manifestation of judicial activism. A High Court bench has responded robustly to a public interest writ lodged by architects and environmentalists seeking preservation of the sanctity of an architectural heritage masterpiece built on Louis Kahn's design. The HC has declared illegal the nearly completed construction work on the residences of Speaker and Dy Speaker inside the Jatiya Sangsad complex.

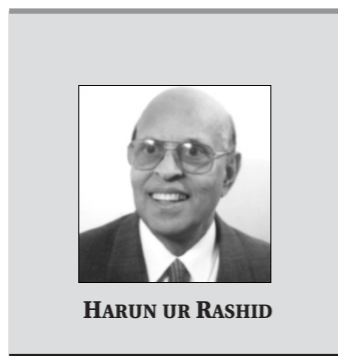
Now, the buildings face the prospect of demolition with an enormous cost to the exchequer -- thanks to the incurable stubbornness with which the plans were pursued by the works ministry despite the dissuading efforts by Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (BPA) in tandem with the Institute of Architects, Bangladesh (IAB).

The chronology of events is a study in total insensitivity to public and civil society demands for abandoning the project since its very inception. At the planning stages, back in 1997, the architects and environmentalists had vehemently opposed the idea with the result that it got dropped at that time. That should have been the end of the matter, but it was not to be -- the appetite for land grabbing under any garb being a national pastime and the other trait being to present something as a *fait accompli* from which there will be no going back.

In October 2002, the construction work began in the open swathe left as a breathing space for the public in Louis Kahn's original design. Seven months later, HC in an order in May stayed the construction work, but three months on, the then Chamber Judge Justice Syed J R Mudassar Hossain stayed the HC order. Now, with the latest HC verdict, the defendant could go to the Supreme Court Appellate Division.

The latest High Court judgement is a fairly comprehensive one in that the government has been asked to declare the parliament building as part of national heritage. Kahn's masterpiece has already had a pride of place as a monument of world architecture. Let's preserve it in its entirety without further ado.

# Why did Bangladesh lose the OIC race?



HARUN UR RASHID

BDANGLADESH joined the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1974. It is the second largest inter-governmental organisation after the United Nations. It consists of 56 member-states with 4 observer countries, spread over Asia, and Africa. OIC headquarters are located in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

The Secretary General, who is the chief executive of the organisation, is elected for four years and cannot be elected for more than two consecutive terms. The Secretary General puts into practice the decisions that are taken during the OIC summits and foreign ministers meetings. The Secretary General also guides and assists activities of secondary organs and committees of the OIC. The Secretary General is assisted by four Assistant Secretaries General (ASG) and in the past, Bangladesh was able to secure one of these ASG posts twice.

Since its membership, Bangladesh has nominated its candidates four times to secure the top job of the organisation. As the consensus of the 56 members could not be arrived at for its proposed nominations, three times Bangladesh had to withdraw its candidates.

For the first time, in 1979, Bangladesh proposed its candidate

former President Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury. Pakistan, at the same time, put up its own candidate Ghulam Ishaq Khan (ater served as President of Pakistan). Since two South Asian countries could not arrive at an agreement, the post went to a Tunisian, Habib Chatti. The second time, Bangladesh nominated its former Foreign Minister A.R.S Doha, and the third time it put up its former Foreign Secretary and Speaker Humayun Rasheed Choudhury. Both the candidates were later

each. It is noted that Malaysia is the current chairperson of the OIC.

Turkish successful candidate is Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu (61 years). In the past, he was involved in the activities of the OIC. He served as the Director General of Islamic Conference Organisation Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA), Istanbul, Turkey in 1980. He also served as the Secretary of the Islamic Conference Organisation International Commission for the Preservation of Islamic Cultural

It is not that Bangladesh candidates are not competent, but when voting takes place, it is the overall country's standing and the regional or global environment that play an important role during voting. It is in some ways comparable to domestic politics in the country. It is not the strength of the candidate who contests the election from a constituency, but from which party he or she contests that is important to voters.

Bangladesh could not secure the top position of the OIC three times

diplomatic world.

Third, geographical rotation of an international post plays a significant part in election. In the past, candidates from Africa, Arab countries, South Asia, and South East Asia occupied the post. In the OIC, Malaysia (South East Asia), Egypt, Senegal, Tunisia, Pakistan (South Asia), Niger, and Morocco (Africa) held the post of the Secretary General from 1970 until this date. Turkey was left out. Turkey probably canvassed that its candidate was well placed in the context of

Israeli-Palestinians and in stabilising the volatile situation in Iraq.

Finally, commitment to a candidate by a country is often illusory in diplomacy. A country's stand changes with the changing situation in the regional and global world. Secret ballot often offers an escape to alter a country's position at the last minute. Diplomatic experience demonstrates that a commitment, even written, cannot be fully relied upon. In the polite but wily diplomatic world, it is not uncommon that a country may change its position at the time of its voting, despite its previous commitment.

### Conclusion

Bangladesh has had its share of failures in securing top positions in international organisations irrespective of the government of political persuasion in Dhaka. Bangladesh cannot ignore its inherent limitations. It is neither an economic nor a military power. It is a small-sized country and its current political instability appears to be a negative asset to its standing. Unless major political parties get their act together, foreign policy of the country may not be as effective as could be.

Since the country's strength is involved, it is not the candidate who is totally counted in international arena. Bangladesh may put forward very good candidates, yet they may fail to secure the position. The bottom line is not what Bangladesh thinks of itself, but how other countries perceive the strength and standing of Bangladesh. It is what others think of Bangladesh that counts in the diplomatic world.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

## BOTTOM LINE

**Bangladesh has had its share of failures in securing top positions in international organisations irrespective of the government of political persuasion in Dhaka. Bangladesh cannot ignore its inherent limitations. It is neither an economic nor a military power. It is a small-sized country and its current political instability appears to be a negative asset to its standing... The bottom line is not what Bangladesh thinks of itself, but how other countries perceive the strength and standing of Bangladesh.**

withdrawn as sufficient support was not obtained for them.

This time Bangladesh came first on the scene proposing its candidate. Subsequently, Malaysia and Turkey proposed their candidates and the dynamics of the strength of the contestants changed. Although the Secretary General has been appointed through consensus in previous occasions, this time no one was willing to withdraw its candidates.

Ultimately Turkey proposed that a secret ballot might be the way in selecting the Secretary General to resolve the impasse and a vote was taken for the first time since its inception in 1969. Turkey won handsomely with 32 votes, while candidates of Bangladesh and Malaysia received 12 votes

Heritage (ICPICH), Istanbul, for seven years (1983-2000). He received many honours including medals from Egypt, Jordan, Senegal, and Iran for his contribution to Islamic history and heritage. He speaks four foreign languages: Arabic, Persian, French, and English.

### Why did Bangladesh lose the race?

First, in the past, Bangladesh candidates failed to get elected to the top position in the international organisations. For example, Bangladesh put up its candidates for the top job of the UN Common Fund, FAO (Food & Agriculture Organisation) and the Commonwealth, but the candidates were unsuccessful.

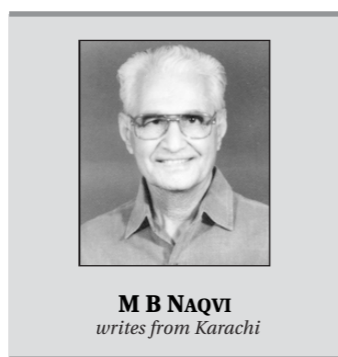
earlier, although it was keen to obtain the position. This being the case, Bangladesh naturally knew that it was placed in a difficult position to secure the post given the contestants from Turkey and Malaysia.

Second, ordinarily in the international top job, the winning candidate tends to be either widely known for his or her contribution to the organisation, or the candidate is publicly supported by influential members of the organisation. It has been seen that a candidate must represent the country repeatedly in the organisation so that the candidate is known and is widely respected. Lobbying helps, but if the candidate is not widely known among its members, it does not ultimately cut ice in the

geographical rotation.

Fourth, Turkey's strategic location helped it to win votes. Turkey is a bridge between the Middle East and Europe. It is an active member of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation). Given the prevailing turmoil in the Middle East, many members of the OIC imagine that Turkey, a neighbour of Iraq, Syria, and Iran, will be able to play a meaningful role for the OIC with respect to Middle East issues. Furthermore, Turkey has maintained good diplomatic and strategic relations with Israel (Egypt and Jordan also have diplomatic relations with Israel). Given the geopolitical advantage of Turkey, it was perceived that the role of the Turkish Secretary General might be a useful "go-between" between

# FATA: Conundrums galore



M B NAQVI  
writes from Karachi

THE administration is facing difficulties in making a dissident South Waziristan tribe which feels that compliance with Islamabad's demand will compromise its honour by forcing the foreign fugitives to surrender and get themselves registered with authorities. Islamabad had earlier used the traditional method of influencing tribesmen through the Political Department and by employing MMA legislators of tribal origin to persuade them. It again faced a tough choice later: restarting the military operations to take out these foreign Mujahideen or somehow to restarting the political processes through the objective can be achieved. Army has been forced to restart military operations and has so far killed Nek Muhammad and five other militants.

It is a highly disturbing situation. The April 24 Shakai agreement with Nek Muhammad, the young former Taliban commander, broke down; Nek Muhammad claimed to the last the still secret agreement between him and the military did not require him to force the foreigners to register, and he was on a war path. There were indications that the usual ploys of Political Department do not work. Nek Muhammad, it turned out, had the assistance of many tough fighters whose numbers could not be accurately known. But the politically savvy people believe them to

be enough to cause serious trouble to the security forces.

All in all it is an ugly situation. The American pressure on Pakistan to take out these former supporters of Taliban, some of whom might be linked to al-Qaeda, can only be implemented by traversing a political minefield. Times have changed. There is a new motivating force in FATA areas that the British colonialists never encountered or certainly not this kind of Islamic fanaticism. It is the feelings gener-

ture has grown up. Until 2001, Pakistan Army took pride over these large lobbies claiming adherence of many simple religious folks who also became Jihadis. The Army however was interested in its own geo-strategic illusions of greatness. Time has come to pay for those delusions.

Islamic extremism is not a simple phenomenon. These are not simply pious folks trying to live a pure life. They are highly charged fanatics ready to kill or get killed in

Egypt. Pakistan's military rulers have made free use of this emerging mentality and helped heighten its emotional content. It was a monster they created, though the US had encouraged the same process for many decades for its own reasons.

It is now revisiting Pakistan, destroying its law and order, reinforcing and getting reinforced by the rising crimes that are sustained by poverty and loss of hope. This witches' brew, this ugly ferment, is

administering other elements.

The solution is in fact simple in concept, though difficult to execute by the present set of rulers whose vested interests may stand in the way. It is this administration -- and the real government behind it that spawned the MMA. Did anyone tell Mr. Musharraf that by employing MMA's FATA MNAs as mediators after the military campaign had been stopped long before it could succeed, what was the message to FATA people? The

minds.

There are other conundrums. FATA area has been kept deliberately backward -- a continuation of the British colonial policy. It has never been brought under Pakistan's laws and normal administration. The Army kept it as its own backyard in which what it did was not known to civilians. It has functional control over the Political Department. What advantages the Army finds in this policy is hard to say. But from around Gen. Zia's time, the Army has used this area as a staging post to meddle into Afghanistan affairs. It has also been used as an area of joint play by western intelligence agencies. Time was when Peshawar used to be the largest M16 centre in the Subcontinent and now one supposes it is CIA's, with our own outlets hosting all of them cordially.

So far it has been an area where a witches' brew was being cooked, all related to Afghanistan, revisiting the Great Game and other cold war activities. The needs of the poor people of FATA area were neglected. The fact is they actually want normal social services and would gladly accept the few privileges and many liabilities of Pakistan's citizenship. But no one has ever seriously thought of incorporating the area into the rest of Pakistan. The FATA area has been used against foreign powers by foreign powers. Now the foreign powers, in their present orientation, are hurting Pakistan. But Pakistanis have no one else to blame except themselves. Whatever uses have been made of the FATA so far, the time seems to have come when the practice has to be stopped. The poor people of FATA are more sinned against than sinning.

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## PLAIN WORDS

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ated by Islamic extremism in the current phase that is threatening to link up the FATA troubles with the general law and order situation in Pakistan, on the one hand, and the al-Qaeda activities throughout the Middle East and Gulf regions, on the other.

Pakistan actually faces a number of conundrums, the first of which is how to deal with Islamic extremism. It is largely the wages of the Army's sins of commission. It promoted, supported and helped generate successive waves of Islamic fanatics, beginning with 1980s batch of Jihadists. It may have involved up to 300,000 people until the end of Dr. Najibullah's regime -- and then successively in Indian-held Kashmir and again in Afghanistan in the shape of Taliban. Quite large numbers of gun-toting Jihadis are now on the loose. They have their backers, organisations that funded and trained them. A whole Jihadi cul-

promoting a certain militant version of Islam that has some new elements, though it remains anchored in the Subcontinent's main version of Islamic orthodoxy -- the Deobandi *Maslak* of Hanafi Sunnis. Elsewhere in the Middle East the orthodoxy is not necessarily the same *Maslak* or Deobandi. But what is common to all Jihadists of today, whether al-Qaeda members or of other origins, is the political aim of establishing a pristinely pure Islamic State in all the Muslim countries where the governments are seen to comprise the bootlickers of America. They want to get rid of the lot and insofar as the American overlordship of the Islamic world is concerned, it has to be ejected from the Islamic world. The political motivation is instinct with Islamic fanaticism based on any of many orthodoxies. It is a new phenomenon. It is also a further development of the ideas that originated in Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami and Muslim Brotherhood of

still in its earlier stages. Everything points to its intensification as the three part military and one part civilian administration of today is at sea about how to tackle it. The head of the system, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, is himself a target of an Islamic militant's bullet or bomb. All he feels is he needs more security.

The point being made is that the government consciously realises the threat it is under but knows not how to fend it off. Its origins having been largely military; it can only think of more force, better coordinated and better equipped force. No one tells it that all this is fire-fighting equipment -- after the fire has risen to a big flame. It is of no use in preventing the fire. In order to put out the fire, you have to douse the inflaming elements first, no doubt. Even this cannot be done in a day or two. The monster has to be asphyxiated by denying it its version of oxygen, probably by

MMA is the most influential set of people to whom Mr. Musharraf looks up to. Was it not adding to the MMA's prestige and power? Why did it have to adopt this method which did not even succeed -- except in promoting MMA's influence?

This government has also chosen a JUI leader, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, as the Leader of the Opposition in a question-raising way. The message is the same: there is an inefable link between the MMA and the supreme authority that explains MMA's other political behaviour. Until there is a policy in place that allows more enlightened and moderate Islamic forces, such as PPP and PML(N) are, the Islamic extremism will continue to spread. If these parties were to be given free play, the political space they will take up will be so much territory taken away from the extremists. But who can put this simple idea into the firmly closed military

## OPINION

# Tragic episodes denigrating values

KAZI ALAUDDIN AHMED

WHEN a subordinate makes a mistake, it is a mistake. And when boss makes a mistake it is a policy -- so goes a funny yet a very true and significant statement often quoted in the field of management. And when mistake of either type has correlation with matters of national importance and magnitude having great impact on the majority people's life and sustenance, it is a catastrophe.

The prices of essential consumer items have, it seems, little or no chance of going down. The spiraling of prices commenced with rice, wheat, edible oil and very soon it engulfed every item including vegetables and fish. Among onion, garlic, ginger etc the last item has been till now very gingerly, true to its herbal feature.

Many meetings were held with the businessmen to arrest the upward trend of prices of all the commodities. One commerce

minister lost his job or rather, had to step down reportedly. His successor, having achieved hardly any success in his previous portfolio, has been busy with the business community to get the prices down. Between the period the versatile Finance Minister, expressing his natural sympathies with the rice cultivators, publicly opined that the price of rice could be higher to compensate the hard labour of the farmers in the field. He did even hint that the benefit of price hike was not reaching the actual producers. He stopped here, perhaps not to have any confrontation with the middle men, brokers etc. Nevertheless, his sympathetic opinion on the price of rice was enough to grant additional fillip to these middle men, hoarders etc for its being positive thrust upwards.

In a couple of days later the honourable Prime Minister appeared equally sympathetic with the 'poor' farmers and repeated that it was a pity the farmers didn't get the prices of their hard labour.

Here too, her sympathies didn't reach the farmers but it was intercepted by the middle men, again. The Prime Minister's public statement provided yet another upward thrust to the already insidiously erratic price index of the essential commodities. It is not to suggest that there was no realisation of the hurdles standing in the way to reach the benefits of the physical investments made by the farmers. The ultimate beneficiary of such genuine words of sympathies has been the notorious middle men.

Only very recently the Consumers' Association of Bangladesh (CAB) gave a statistical account of the hideous role being played by the aforementioned middle men. On the face of the allegations about the mischiefs being perpetrated by these literal gangsters it is natural that they shall be condemned. Yet, some of their representatives would counter the allegations stating that the bandits like extortionists on the highways take away much of their anticipated profit

margin from the merchandise they carry to Dhaka city from different parts of the country. So, if those hoodlums could be beaten back their price index would be less to benefit the general consumers. Even though the policy makers are aware of such intriguing interceptions on the highways and the water ways they are yet to evolve remedial and preventive measures to contain such devils.

From the consumers' point of view it is often argued on the other hand that the traders are in fact interested to enjoy the better of both the ends. They are exploiting the farmers at the grassroots level, share the initial booties under the compelling circumstances, some times at gun point, with the extortionists having patronage of the so-called god father and crude politicians. And in order not to sustain loss in business they manipulate prices at their sweet will. On imported items they take the advantage of recess in duty but they do never fulfil the expectation

of the government or of the consumers at large. They have many pretexts to put up but wouldn't say anything about the deliberate hoarding of the imported goods. Sugar can be cited as an example, so also edible oil.

Against such stark realities the government will have to moot out some effective measures to solve the problem once for all. All such measures will have to be for the greater interest of the general consumers where the tiers of middle men will have to be reduced to a minimum. In this some stringent control mechanism will also have to be worked out and implemented. It must be realised by the policy makers that sitting in meetings with the representatives of the traders have been proved to be pitifully ineffectual. So, in its place direct, methodical intervention of the government will have to come immediately.

Now, lets have a look at some other episodes occurring in the national scenario over the past

months. The massive arms haul in Chittagong kept the administration literally at bay for quite some time. Prior to it the haul of arms at Kuril had been considered as the mischief of the political opponents of the government. Sooner upon investigation it was proved otherwise. Likewise, big haul of arms and ammunitions in the port city was considered to have been a vicious play of the main opposition party to unseat the present government through armed insurrection. Such wishful allegation was also eventually found baseline. The CID has recently submitted its chargesheet against 39 persons apparently having no political connections. More particularly the initial observations of some of the high ups have not been corroborated at this stage which could implicate Awami League.

The brutal murder of Ahsanullah Master, MP, Tongi-Gazipur came on the heels. Some of the over-enthusiastic party men dismissed the assassination

of such a popular personality like Ahsanullah Master as a mere sequel to internal rift of Awami League. Here too, the CID was about to tell an altogether different story. Someone having linkage with the party in power was reportedly the mastermind behind the hideous act of brutality. The process of investigation was slowed down after the investigating officer -- a superintendent of police and known as a brilliant officer of the department -- was withdrawn on some mysterious grounds and put behind bars at the personal initiative of the State Minister of Home Affairs. Mr M A Beaten, SP is now awaiting his turn to fight out his case in the court of law and till then he languishes behind the bar in utter uncertainty. The investigation of the killing of Ahsanullah Master, some newspaper report suggests, has been consigned to 'deep freeze'. The actual culprits are yet to be arrested and brought under legal proceedings.

Further addition to aforesaid abhorring incidents has been the tragedy at Sakharibazar in Old Dhaka. About two dozens human being were buried alive under the debris of a heavily dilapidated building collapsing past midnight when all were asleep. Most of the buildings at Sakharibazar and adjacent areas are totally unfit for human habitation. They are to be demolished in no time and the inhabitants there will have to be suitably rehabilitated at the initiative of the government or of Dhaka City Corporation. This must be done on top-most priority basis before another disaster of even a bigger magnitude befalls on the hapless people there. Hopefully, the efforts on the part of the government shall not be abortive or end half way leaving the crisis unresolved.

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