

## Blasts in Sylhet -- again! *Shadow of previous investigation failures lengthening*

SYLHET seems to have become a happy hunting ground for extremist operators and their hirelings, whether it is officially admitted or not. With the twin blasts in separate cinema hall premises on Thursday night taking place closely on the heels of May 27 and January 12 bomb attacks, a sinister pattern emerges for all to see with shudders sent down their spines.

In the latest episode, the bombs blasted within five minutes of each other striking a note of premeditated orchestration. Although the plastic explosives planted in yet another cinema hall did not explode, the twin attacks pulled off were sufficiently telling both in terms of range and insidious messages. One lad got killed, and among the seven critically injured not all might survive.

There had been a series of cinema hall explosions earlier on -- in Mymensingh and Satkhira on December 7 and September 28 of the year 2002 respectively. The choice of cinema halls as targets lends itself to some plausible kind of surmising. First, cinema house as a place for public convergence is targeted because it affords opportunity for a maximum administration of shock therapy; and secondly, an orthodox antipathy towards show-bizz is betrayed by picking on cinema halls.

What, however, is essentially vital to realise is that none of the bomb blast cases which are well past the double-digit number, have been resolved, far less anyone convicted of public murders. Investigations have invariably been blighted by inhibitory partisan imputations even before those could take off. So long drawn they have been that forensic pieces that could help solve the puzzles were lost through disuse.

Range from hush-hush to sweeping under the carpet, the handling of cases has lacked professionalism; otherwise, we would have got to the bottom of at least some of the gruesome bombing incidents by now. Even the major bomb blast cases could not nudge the government.

It is high time we took international assistance in unearthing what remain mysteries for too long for any comfort.

## Trafficking in women and children

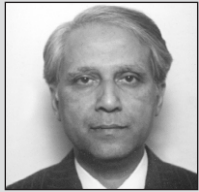
*We should tackle the problem collectively*

LIFE imprisonment given to three persons in two separate cases for trafficking in women and children by Special Tribunals for Prevention of Women and Children Repression should be a warning signal to those pursuing such criminal activities. The sentences are especially significant in the wake of a recent warning by the US government on the issue. Not so long ago, the US Department of State blacklisted ten nations of world including Bangladesh for their failure to curb the menace. It said that unless the governments did anything substantial soon to address the problem, sanctions might be imposed on those nations.

Human rights groups in the country had long been campaigning to bring an end to the harm caused to women and children. Adapting the Prevention of Women and Children Repression Act, 1995 was one of their major successes. The act clearly mentions strict, rigorous punishments, including capital punishment, for the violators. And it was assumed that violence or repression against women and children would be reduced considerably after the law was enacted. But the reality was telling us a different story. Violent acts against children and women continued to take place -- some were reported, some just faded in oblivion.

Trafficking in women and children, either forcibly or deceptively, was one of many repressive acts committed against them. The law did not seem to have any tangible effect on those who were involved in this crime. Hence Saleha Khatun's son and her brother ended up as camel jockeys in Dubai while the relatives of Anguri Begum still await for news about her and her two-year old son. The only respite, if it is at all any, is the life sentences ordered against the traffickers. But one thing is certain -- strict law or punishment is simply not enough. Awareness at the community level must be encouraged more vigorously. At the same time, vigilance both in the localities and border areas must be stepped up. It has to be a collective effort.

# Bangladesh and business process outsourcing



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

OUTSOURCING in broad terms is a transfer of some business functions or components of business processes to an outside contractor. This is done to enable companies to remain competitive. Outsourcing helps to reduce costs, increase efficiency and refocus critical resources. It also assists in organisational restructuring.

Outsourcing within the US market (particularly IT outsourcing) has reached the unprecedented figure of nearly US \$ 50 billion in 2003. Latest figures have indicated that the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) segment has led the way with a 29 per cent annual growth rate. It has jumped from US\$ 7.4 billion in 1998 to US \$ 26.5 billion in 2003. It is now anticipated that the Internet/Intranet management portion of this segment will increase at around 76 per cent annually 2003 onwards mostly due to e-business and e-commerce spending. Recent surveys have also suggested that though banking, manufacturing and insurance have traditionally led US IT outsourcing, the future growth lies in the telecom and utility industries sector.

Many countries in the world -- India, China, Thailand, Malaysia and several others from Eastern Europe, are trying to cash in on this economic activity. They are using their technically qualified human resources to gain a foothold in this market. Ban-

gladesh should also try to enter into this arena. It should be part of our non-traditional economic effort. It will not only help us to earn scarce foreign exchange but will also assist in generating thousands of jobs.

India is today a success story in this regard. We can learn a lot from them in this sector. It is one of the major providers in software outsourcing and other backend operations. Abundant skilled manpower has made that country a target destination for multinationals with regard to business process

theoretical knowledge and improve them in their documentation standards.

As a consequence, India's leading information technology companies have reported increased profits in 2003 -- WIRPO, 19% INFOSYS, 28% and SATYAM, 25%. Indian companies now earn annual revenues of about US\$3 billion.

Over 70 per cent of India's software export revenue comes from companies based in the US. Thousands of Indians are employed in

easy for Bangladesh. We have to compete not only with established outsourcing destinations but also with the rising impact of outsourcing within US domestic politics in terms of perceived and anticipated unemployment among the available labour force. This is beginning to be a cause of serious concern within the US political establishment.

This anxiety has already crept into the upcoming US Presidential Elections. US Democratic presidential frontrunner, Senator J.F.Kerry, a traditional supporter of free trade has

outsourcing initiatives to developing and least developed countries. It is this possibility that has to be guarded against by the developing countries, including Bangladesh and India. In this context, we will have to take preemptive measures and lobby to safeguard our inherent right of "movement of natural persons" in their role as service-providers.

I have written on this subject today because I believe that Bangladesh, like India has great potential in this sector of economic activity. We have several existing disadvantages -- poor

Special Session of the Council for Trade in Services in September, 2003. We should take advantage of these provisions.

Within this context, we should -- (a) aim at increasing the participation of Bangladesh and other LDCs in trade in services; (b) promote the development of our infrastructure and services exports through training technology transfer, enterprise level actions and schemes and intergovernmental cooperation programmes; (c) improve the access of LDC's services and service suppliers to distribution channels and information networks; (d) target and coordinate technical assistance and capacity building programmes to be provided to LDCs in order to strengthen their domestic services capacity and to build their institutional and human capacity; (e) seek temporary entry rules on the basis of skills, education and other factors into the US and (f) identify special service sectors and exploit such opportunities (e.g. nursing) as is being done by the Philippines. This will require improved administrative procedures related to obtaining visas and work permits, together with published criteria and defined need tests. Such support should be sought through technical assistance, and through transparency, non-discrimination and objectivity.

We should also encourage mutual recognition agreements of qualifications and certificates. Easier verification of professional competence will facilitate access into this sector. Standardisation of qualifications will also help Bangladesh to carefully plan in meeting US obligations pertaining to numerical limitation in the form of the annual quota of visas granted. It will also ensure wage parity and reduce the time required by visa applicants in gaining visa approval.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

## POST BREAKFAST

**Bangladesh, like India has great potential in this sector of economic activity. We have several existing disadvantages -- poor infrastructure and an insufficient pool of English educated computer trained software specialists, but this can and should be overcome. We are probably where India was five to six years ago. We can however catch up. We need to systematically, in an organised manner, identify the required steps for resolving the existing problems.**

outsourcing. A recent *Newsweek* survey has put India ahead of China, Thailand, Ireland, Malaysia, Canada and the Philippines in terms of qualifications, quality of work, linguistic capabilities and work ethics.

This dynamics is assisted by the fact that India not only has lower wages but also that Indian centres are recognised as having achieved higher productivity levels. This package is also being assisted by Indian State governments offering tempting incentives and requisite infrastructure for possible foreign investment and participation. It is this friendly approach that has persuaded companies like General Electric and Microsoft to expand their operations in India of everything from basic customer service to high-end research and development. This in turn has had a major spill-over beneficial effect. Their presence on the outsourcing end in India has led to India receiving free of cost up-to-date

customer call centres in Bangalore in the services sector, in long distance answering of phones for US firms and providing technical support for US firms selling credit cards for global banks. India's leadership feel that their software exports will eventually rise to US \$ 30 billion by 2008. Such a figure will outpace China.

The software outsourcing firms in India have been successful because they have developed the capability of providing total solutions and complete application systems. This has helped them to enter the North American market. In addition, they are also meeting the qualifications on management and maintenance capabilities as well as international business and legal practices. This includes a sound grounding in English. This assumes crucial importance because English is recognised today as the most common business language.

Entering this sector will not be

now outlined a plan to reduce outsourcing. The Chairman of the US President's Council of Economic Advisers, Mr. Gregory Mankiw has however counteracted this growing concern by pointing out that such offshore outsourcing is 'a new way of doing international trade' and has termed it as a 'good thing'. It is however anticipated that outsourcing will continue as an economic factor within the US whatever be the election result. The powerful private sector and its driven need for profit will ensure that outsourcing business for the sake of competition persists.

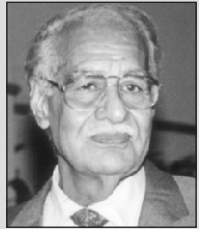
This internal dynamics in US politics will probably eventually boil down to the question of how far the US should be liberal with regard to visas for foreign workers and whether there should be a capping mechanism as to the number of visas for them (H-1B and L-1). This reactive process might lead to drastic legislative curbs. This could seriously affect

infrastructure and an insufficient pool of English educated computer trained software specialists, but this can and should be overcome. We are probably where India was five to six years ago. We can however catch up. We need to systematically, in an organised manner, identify the required steps for resolving the existing problems. There is no reason why we cannot share the outsourcing market.

Our Ministry of Commerce in coordination with our Ministry of Science and Technology should prepare a composite plan in this regard. This might require some deregulation, but that should not bar our greater participation. As in the case of the RMG Sector, the private sector should become the engine for growth and the Government Agencies the facilitators.

Modalities for special treatment for LDCs, with regard to trade in services were identified during the

# Pakistan and Indian Muslims



KULDEEP NAYAR  
*writes from New Delhi*

IN his introduction to a book on partition, leading historian Dr V.N. Datta has recalled how "the fundamental question was of the status of Muslims in India." Undoubtedly, that was in the mind of Qaid-e-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah when he realised that the British rule would not last long. The two-nation theory and the demand for Pakistan were the necessary corollary.

The partition is 57 years old this week. What the rulers of Pakistan have to ask themselves is how far their policies have contributed to the betterment of the "status" of Muslims in India. The main sacrifice was theirs and they suffered the most.

Any land when divided on the basis of religion has to face the fallout like estrangement between communities. The creators of Pakistan would have known this because it was they who initiated the appeal in the name of religion. But what did they do to attend to the "status" of Muslims in India is the question. It was in the scheme of partition that the number of minorities in both countries would be large. Some excesses against them were expected. But none anticipated the ethnic cleansing which took place in

both Punjab. Nor did anyone expect that the administration in both the countries would be mixed up in the killing and looting. For Indian Muslims, the nightmare is not over.

Jinnah probably realised what they would go through. He tried to retrieve the situation by announcing after the demand for Pakistan was conceded that the people on both sides were Pakistanis or Indians, not Muslims and Hindus in the eye of the state. Politics would not be mixed with religion. He even promised

hatred in the name of religion had seeped so deep that both Hindus and Muslims in many parts of India and Pakistan jumped at one another's throat as soon as the British left. More than one million were killed and 20 million were uprooted from their hearths and homes.

Muslims living in India, although assured of a secular polity, went through innumerable sufferings. They would have been still worse off but for the intervention of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and

doubly punished, both by the policies of Pakistan and the distrust of most Hindus. Once I told a Pakistani ruler that the more intractable attitude Islamabad adopted, the most pernicious effect was on the Indian Muslims. He shrugged his shoulders and said: "This was the price the Indian Muslims would have to pay for the integrity of Pakistan." It is a strange argument but the Pakistan rulers still believe that in the heart of heart the Indian Muslims supported Pakistan.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

**Muslims living in India, although assured of a secular polity, went through innumerable sufferings. They would have been still worse off but for the intervention of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the top Congress leaders. They tried to keep Hindu communal elements at bay. Gandhi even sacrificed his life while doing so. The Pakistan rulers should not have at least sabotaged the efforts to establish a secular polity in India. It guaranteed the future of Muslims.**

more. But the so-called custodians of Pakistan did not allow his words to be broadcast over the radio lest what they had in mind should get jeopardised. They wanted to play the role of an adversary to India and create further cleavage between Muslims and Hindus to justify the creation of Pakistan.

Jinnah had overestimated the power of his words. Fanatics did not want to give up religion as the basis of nationhood. In that they found their entity and the basis for propaganda. To them, progressive Islam was an anathema. The founder of Pakistan was thus reduced to an instrument just a means to an end, not the end itself. In any case, the

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the top Congress leaders. They tried to keep Hindu communal elements at bay. Gandhi even sacrificed his life while doing so.

The Pakistan rulers should not have at least sabotaged the efforts to establish a secular polity in India. It guaranteed the future of Muslims. Pakistan had, in fact, an obligation that the beleaguered Indian Muslims would not be harassed by its action. But what did the policies of their rulers sum up? Treating India as an enemy and trying to disintegrate it has made little sense. Whatever the Pakistan rulers did to hurt India affected nearly 120 million Muslims living in the country. They were

Muslims in India, on the other hand, are stepping out into light after decades of darkness. Gujarat halted the process but the manner in which the secular elements, the media and the judiciary tore the state machinery and its politics into pieces has encouraged them. The fact that even after losing power at the Centre, the BJP has not gone back to Hindutva indicates that communal parties also have developed vested interest in the joint electorate.

With the Congress in power and the left watching it, there is every possibility that the status of Muslims in India would improve. The community may begin to play as important a role in the polity as, for exam-

members can come true only when there is an equal participation of people -- Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians -- in the region. Recent signals from Islamabad are, however, not encouraging. The Indian delegation and the media parties have returned with the impression that the Pakistan government is beginning to drag its feet on improving relations with India. A timeframe for composite dialogue between New Delhi and Islamabad has been suggested.

Kashmir is brought in directly or indirectly at every forum. No doubt, President General Pervez Musharraf has said that he would wait for a "reasonable time" to see some "con-

crete outcome on Kashmir" to emerge. But he continues to hold the gun. The problem, which has eluded solution for the last 50 years, cannot have a timetable. It would very much depend on how soon people on both sides build trust in one another and how soon the Kashmiris accept a status short of independence.

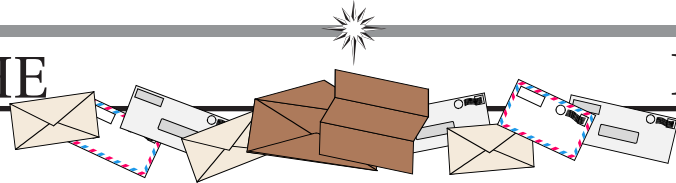
Strangely, Islamabad has not yet demolished the terrorists' training centers. Even America said the other day that the network of terrorists is more or less intact in Pakistan. Terrorists in Kashmir have still their supply line -- and the guidance structure -- in Pakistan. Even the resolution on terrorism passed at the SAARC foreign ministers' conference was at the behest of Washington. Musharraf had no choice. In Bangladesh, where there are many more Hindus than in Pakistan, fundamentalism is increasing day by day. It is taking the shape of terrorism which is as much terrifying the Bangladeshi Muslims as the Hindus.

Dhaka has reportedly promised to turn a new leaf in its relations with New Delhi. The Khaleda Zia government is reaching out to Hindus as well. If Islamabad also continues to push the confidence building measures, a new era of understanding may usher in the region.

This will, ultimately, help the minorities. Economic ties know no differences. Nor can bias stay when there is an easy access of people to one another's country. Both things when implemented may provide answer to the question that bothered Jinnah: the future of Muslims in India.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

## 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.

### Patronise, whom?

The time has come for the people to decide whether to continue to patronize bad politics. There are no regulation and control as the parliament has been maimed by the two major political parties, who cannot get out of the historical time-wrap, and look at the changing situation objectively.

Several factors have imprisoned the style of politics practised in Dhaka for 130m people. Vested groups have created vested circles, all of which are rotating in vicious circles. Internal forces cannot liberate these prisoners, who are happy, as it serves their own interests.

The very future of politics is at stake. It is nothing new: the pattern is familiar in the emerging nations. We have previous experience of nine plus seven years of autocracy,

suitably softened with cosmetic overtures. One conclusion is clear enough: we get the government we deserve! Second: the touted Western democracy does not work at the level of marginal living, with the majority illiterate.

There is no point in saying we have no options to replace politics. The two major parties are alternating in the gaddi, with the investment return going to a restricted coterie. In short: the people are being exploited right and left, and in the centre. Third groups are trying to find a third solution, but it looks like old water in new bottles. About 14 years have been lost, so there is no point in waiting longer. It is time to try a new chef, outside the polluted environment.

The solution is not simple, as the society is one, and screening and choosing are likely to be noisy, to

say the least. Let us hear others.

AZ  
Dhaka  
Global politics  
and farmers

What an irony of life: big powerful global politics is deeply related to our chasi-bhais (farmers)! For our politicians, Dhaka metro (pop 10m) is the end of the pilgrimage. Ultimately, it is the feeders of the dal-bhat, regardless of the anti-armament sanctions being hotly debated in the UN lobbies, and outside.

In the third world, the farmers constitute the highest percentage of voters, while their numbers in the industrialised countries are lower, but the per capita production output is much higher due to scientific inputs and infrastructure. The big question is the subsidies provided to the farmers

in the developed countries, against which the LDC's cannot compete. Question: Protect the strong point of science and technology, which is the weak point in international political debates? Similar is the equation with the energy resources of the world, grab it by hook or by crook, and damn the United Nations! Outcome; terrorism against the uniformed denizens.

These artificial pressure tactics won't last, regardless of the weapons displayed. Bangladesh is in the forefront of this fight; human resources vs scientific and technological resources. We have the highest density of population in the world, for nations with population above the 100m mark; hence this basic situation has to be considered at international forums for mere survival!

AHusnain  
Dhaka  
Mismanagement  
in flood relief

More than 45 districts have been inundated by this year's floods. The upsurge from India along with the torrential rain have brought the country under this deluge. When the whole country is affected, some self seekers are busy profit making, even they have shown the audacity to cut an embankment submerging a vast area in Bogra and Sirajganj.

The relief providers should ensure that relief goods are distributed evenly and efficiently.  
**ABM Shafiqul Islam**  
*Dept of English  
Jahangirnagar University*

**Self-assessment scheme**

By now, all the city dwellers might

have received Dhaka City Corporation's notice enclosing therewith Form 'A' and Form 'B' for self-assessment of holding tax. Form 'A' stipulates obligatory provision for payment of a fine up to an amount of Tk 2,000, and in the event of failure to submit form 'B' within 15 days of receipt of the notice, an additional fine of Tk. 100.00 for each day of delay over 15 days. What an arbitrary decision for imposition of fines! Do you think imposition of such a fine is lawful?

As for subsequent developments, the less said, the better.

In a complicated form like this one, it is most likely that some incorrect information may creep in inadvertently.

May I invite comments from your readers, particularly the house-owners of the city, on this issue.

MAAzim

**Uttara Model Town, Dhaka.**  
**Political aphorisms**

Our problems are multifaceted; therefore our politicians are also multifaceted. Sometimes a thorn is used to remove a thorn.

The politicians are omnipresent. Hence our problems are also omnipresent. We have no place to stand (or bury the dead in flooded Bangladesh). We can only stare at the grim realities, not unleashed by Nature. Who are more omnivorous?

Floods come and go, but our politicians are permanent fixtures. The sun never rises, but it is always setting. We are familiar with political moonshine, and political kabaishakis. Our politics is as dry as the Sahara desert.

Grey politics is the mother of all local inventions and interventions. Politics in the LDCs do not

come in Technicolor it is always black and grey; plus white lies.

The politicians believe in ghapla or snafu-situation normal all fumbled up. Necessity is the mother of dubious inventions.

Vicious cycles? Yes, we have more than that; vicious cycles of vicious circles. The effect is cyclonic, year after year.

Mystery, thy name is not woman, but politics.

An ounce of prevention is better than cure. In politics, an ounce of intervention brings in tons of money.

Money is flat and made to pile up, says the miser. No, money is round and made to roll. What the politicians say? Money is and made to, (fill in the blanks).

AlifZabar  
Dhaka