DHAKA SUNDAY AUGUST 29, 2004

Police thwart anti-Ahmadiyya plan

Government can be effective if it so chooses

job well done. There can be no other words to describe the performance of the law enforcement authorities who, together with civil society members, foiled plans by religious extremists to capture the Ahmadiyya headquarters in Bakshibazar on Friday. The police and state minister for home affairs had pledged to ensure the security of the Ahmadiyyas in the face of the extremist threat, and through diligent work and firm action, they kept their word. We felicitate them.

It goes to show that when the government is determined to maintain law and order, and to protect the security of a community under threat, that it can do so. Previous agitations against the Ahmadiyyas have often been successful, with the police claiming that they were helpless to intervene or virtually taking the side of the extremists, all in the name of keeping the peace.

We hope that the government has now learned that to take steps to appease and accommodate extremists is no way to keep the peace. The government's primary responsibility is to uphold the law and to protect its citizens, and to permit lawlessness and violence is to invite disorder and chaos.

In addition to their repeated attempts to capture Ahmadiyya mosques and to harass members of the community, the anti-Ahmadiyya agitators have also often threatened dire consequences for the government and the country if their demands to have the Ahmadiyyas declared non-Muslim are not met. The government cannot tolerate this kind of anti-democratic dissent.

One of the reasons the government has been so slow to reign in the anti-Ahmadiyya extremists is their connection with parties aligned with the government. Indeed, astonishingly, some of the threats to law and order have come from those who are part of the ruling alliance.

The government can no longer brook this kind of rabblerousing on the part of its coalition partners. The use of religion to foment trouble has gone on long enough. The government must deal with this kind of extremism with an iron fist -- we can no longer afford to tolerate either bigotry or

We hope that Friday's welcome police action is a sign that the government has come to the same conclusion.

Bush's "miscalculation"

It has certainly been a costly one

S President Bush, who has always defended his decision to attack Iraq and summarily dismissed the critics of his handling of the post-war situation, seems to have realised that things have not shaped up exactly the way he had expected. He wants to call it a "miscalculation." However, the question is how the US president will make amends for the decision that has virtually ruined a country and has achieved none of the targets set by him.

That said, the realisation that has dawned upon Bush is significant for some obvious reasons. First, it should convince the warmongers -- who still have faith in injudicious application of force as a possible way of solving the issue of terrorism -- that destroying a whole country merely on the basis of suspicion and guesswork is indefensible. Second, the situation in Iraq has also removed any doubts that the US might have had about how its forces would be treated. Third, the direct military intervention has stoked up some internal conflicts that have made it virtually impossible to bring back normalcy to the country, let alone the democracy which Bush was talking about only a few months ago.

President Bush could have avoided walking into the unfamiliar terrain by not going to war against a much smaller and weaker nation, in the first place. It's not known whether he will ever realise this simple point, but what he should be able to discern without any difficulty is that his war on terrorism has been far from successful. He may have diagnosed the disease, or even rightly worked out the remedy, but he applied it on the wrong target. Honestly speaking, he miscalculated everything right from the impact of the war on terrorism to the prolonged and stubborn resistance that his troops are facing. The war has done very little to dampen the enthusiasm of terrorists. Rather, it has worked as a stimulant to the elements that are vehemently opposed to the US presence in the Middle East and its rather one-sided drubbing of a nation that was never known as a breeding ground for

Human rights and the assassination attempt

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

HE heinous act of terrorism perpetrated on the Awami League meeting on Saturday, August 21 is a repeat of what the Pakistani occupation army did during the midnight of its reign of terror in Bangladesh. At that time the Pakistani blueprint contained the elimination of the Bengali intellectuals to cripple the chances of quick reconstruction of the country after liberation that was only a matter of time. The terrorism of the other day was aimed at the physical elimination of the most powerful and popular opposition political party's leadership including its president so that the basic foundation of Bangladesh's pluralistic society could be irreparably fractured.

Bangladesh has not suddenly arrived at this critical juncture of its perilous existence. This point was coming for quite some time. Societal tolerance of terrorism in different forms, moral degeneration in almost all aspects of society, pervasive lawlessness and governmental inability to take effective counter measures, indifference to foreign criticism, and other factors have led to the present state of affairs in Bangladesh

If one were to chronicle the assassination attempts on the life of Sheikh Hasina one would be amazed at the number of times providentially she escaped with her life including the carnage of August 15, 1975. One can safely assume that the self-confessed murderers who assassinated the entire family of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman including his youngest son who was only a child would not have spared his two daughters had they not been out of the country on that fateful day. Sheikh Hasina's exile ended with her election as president of Awami League in 1981. Since then she has been living a life of constant danger. In 1988 she came under intense police fire in Chittagong that claimed the life of more than two dozen people. In August next year a group of gunmen fired at her Dhanmondi residence. Earlier on several occasions in 1983, 1984, and 1986 she was targeted for assassination. Attempts on her life continued even after she was elected Prime Minister of the country. A big bomb was planted at her meeting venue at Kotalipara in

July 2000. In February, April, July, and August of this year terrorists attacked

her and/or her party leaders. Public worry centres not only on violent attacks on the opposition political parties but also on a a series of terrorist activities including serial bombings in Sylhet, bombings at Jessore Udichi and Ramna Batamul cultural functions, cases of unsolved arms smuggling, attack on a Dhaka University Ladies Hostel at the dead of night by law enforcing agents, constant dread and fear that people live in their everyday life, com21 as a violation of the right of freedom of assembly which is guaranteed in Bangladesh Constitution in, as much as, it is protected in, inter alia, the First amendment to the US Constitution, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This right stems directly from the possibility of a democratic government turning itself into a tyranny by refusing the right of freedom of assembly to a disenchanted populace who may wish to voice their angst against the government. This right is inextricably

Magna Carta (1215) which checked the power of the English King and laid down the principle that the ruler was subject to law rather than above the law; the English Bill of Rights (1689) which guaranteed constitutional government; the French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789); and the US Bill of Rights (1791) directed against absolutist rulers; the UNGA Declaration of Human Rights (1948) further expanded by International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights(1966) reiterated the inalienable rights to peaceful assembly and

henceforth the US would not look the other way relating to countries suffering from democracy deficit, have to be taken note of.

If the tragic events of September 11 was a threat to international peace and security inviting decimation of two countries and regime change therein; then the terrorist attack of August 21 is a body blow to the democratic construct of Bangladesh. Though it may be presumptuous to ascribe guilt to any particular party while investigation is still in its infancy, the nature of Awami League

being a progressive and secular

minded political party which has

constantly thwarted the rise of

Islamic extremism in Bangladesh, the

likelihood of it becoming a target of

terrorist outfits having transnational

connections cannot be discounted.

Governmental inability to arrest

Bangla Bhai, a religious fanatic,

despite order from the Prime Minis-

ter for his arrest is allegedly due to

diarchic or multi-centric influence

wielded over politico-administrative

machinery. It is also being alleged

that the self-proclaimed killers of

Bangabandhu and the national

leaders at Dhaka Central Jail could

If Amartya Sen's description of development as being synonymous to freedom because the right to development is a basic human right is to be taken as a premise then the impact of August 21 events on the economic development of Bangladesh is bound to be disastrous. As it is, the ever growing political instability and confrontational politics are held responsible for the vicious cycle of poverty entrapping Bangladesh. The latest attempt on the life of Sheikh Hasina is likely to exacerbate the existing political tension.

Bangladesh has reason to be concerned if the Islamic extremists nave brought their war of religion to our doorstep. Indifference to this emerging threat would be fatal. Jsing these deviants for selfish purposes would be giving life to a Frankenstein. It was only last July that Indian leaders expressed to US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage their concern "about rising fundamentalist forces (in Bangladesh) and their support for terrorism." Canadians expressed their fear of incipient Islamic extremism quite some time back. The Bush administration has been chiding Bangladesh for her ill treatment of the minority community. Bangladesh authorities issued routine disclaimers to all these

Under the present context Bangladesh authorities would be well advised to seek international assistance to unearth conspiracy, if any, to destroy the secular and tolerant fabric of our society, and nstall an Islamic theocracy which would be unwelcome to both Bangladeshis and the international community. Seeking foreign expertise is neither uncommon nor should it impinge upon the good name of our investigators. In any case, our constant endeavour should be implacable opposition to any war of religion gaining ground on our soil. Conventional wisdom dictates that religions have too often been used to justify violation of human rights through the postponement of temporal justice to divine judgement. This should not hapen in the case of Bangladesh.

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pounded by custodial deaths -- all these are slowly pushing the country to the brink of an abyss. People are now demanding guarantee of natural death. It is ironic that a country that gained independence sacrificing millions of lives and reclaimed democratic order after untold sacrifices now has to demand guarantee of natural death from a democratically elected government. How long should people continue to suffer at the hands of this hydra-headed terrorist who dons various identities at different times? How long should people tolerate a government who are incapable of containing intoler-

What the Awami League was doing on August 21 was exercising their civil liberty that, inter alia, guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. If Bangladesh is to consider itself as a democratic country, then liberty, as Thomas Hobbes wrote in Leviathan, is to be supposed because no man is free in any other form of government. If democracy is to flourish it must have criticism and f government is to function then it must have dissent. Where the government appears to have failed is in the insurance of the civil rights of Awami League by failing to provide equal protection under law and equal opportunity to exercise the privileges of citizenship and otherwise to participate fully in national life.

One can see the events of August

linked with the right of freedom of association, one of the most fundamental of human rights, to enable the creation of political parties and social

to divine judgement. This should not happen in the case of Bangladesh.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted and proclaimed by the UNGA in 1948 guarantees the right to freedom to peaceful assembly and association. This right has an umbilical connection with the articles that declare that all human beings are born free and are equal in dignity and right; and that everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person. Closely related is the right of freedom of speech that is one of the core civil liberties. The quest for this right is as old as the Greek philosopher Socrates who chose to die rather than renounce the right to speak his mind. The First Amendment to the US Constitution puts freedom of speech second only to religious freedom. Beyond its role in the political arena freedom of expression also plays a key role in the development of personality that is one of the ultimate goals in the complete embodiment of societal values.

If we put aside for the time being the micro analysis of the various rights enshrined in all most all the constitutional provisions and covenants of human rights it can be said that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) gave human rights a new international legal status. Building on the precedents of $freedom\, of\, association\, with\, others.$

It would be pertinent to mention that the UN operates a Commission on Human Rights that monitors human rights abuses in member countries and handles complaints about human rights violations. In 1993 UNGA created the position of High Commissioner for Human Rights who oversees all human rights programmes, works to prevent human rights violations, and investigates human rights abuses. The point made here is that human rights abuses even in relatively underdeveloped parts of the world gain immediate contextual relevance in this age of rapid globalisation. The instantaneous condemnation

of Saturday's terrorist attack by President Bush, Kofi Annan, Colin Powell, Jack Straw, the European Union, and the Indian government reflect: (a) news from one corner of the globe to another corner travels very fast, (b) the global community's threshold of tolerance relating to human rights abuses is getting lower by the day and is not necessarily linked with safeguarding the selfish interests of the societies of states, (c) Tony Blair's Doctrine of International Community containing explicit recognition of mutual dependence and national interest of states being significantly governed by international collaboration and Richard Hass' (till recently senior US State Department official) warning that

also be behind the Saturday massa-The Bangladesh economy, being significantly dependent on foreign assistance, has to be sensitive to the concept of good governance that the donors are increasingly making an essential condition for giving assistance. Donors' definition of good governance include multi-party democracy; respect for human rights and the rule of law; election of the government with the consent of the governed; its accountability; and its capacity to formulate policy, make, and implement decisions, and deliver services. International criticism relating to corruption, lawless-

ness, human rights violations, reli-

gious extremism, among others, of

Bangladesh do not present a picture

of good governance.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and

A pluralistic scripture



writes from New Deini

IKE Muslims and Christians, Sikhs are ahle kitah, possessing the book. Theirs is Guru Granth Sahib which celebrates its 400th anniversary on September 1. Unfortunately, Shiromani Akali Dal, the organisers, does not have good credentials. Guru Granth Sahib is a pluralistic scripture while the Akali Dal is primarily communal and fundamentalist. For it to monopolise the celebrations is a travesty of justice because its leadership oozes parochialism. Not only that, it has not allowed the universal message of the book to reach the four corners of the earth because it has bottled it up in gurudwaras, where they feel secure against any liberal chal-

Guru Granth Sahib transcends creed and caste, cant, and convention. It does not belong to the Sikhs alone. It consecrates the sayings of 11 Hindu bhakats and as many bard poets and seven Muslims, along with the teachings of six Sikh gurus. No other religion has included in its holy book the sayings of others, however revered.

Although it is a sacred book of the Sikhs, it belongs to the entire humanity and carries a message of brotherhood and sani (togetherness). The Akali Dal has exploited the book for their political gains and not let the world know the reservoir of spiritualism it contains. Its message of peace is all the more needed today when violence dominates the society

Every man should command respect in the moment when he bows before his god. We may believe that his view of the divine lacks valuable, even essential, elements. His forms of rship may appear strange sometimes offensive. But in the

The Sikhs have kept traditions intact but the politics of Akali Dal to their exasperation has endeavoured to distance the religion from the teachings of the founder, Guru Nanak Dev, and the last preceptor, Guru Gobind Singh. Efforts have been made to argue that the Lord Rama mentioned in the Guru Granth Sahib is different from the one whom the Hindus worship. The intention is to draw a cleavage between the Hindus and the Sikhs for political

The present Akali leadership is most

minorities. Incidentally, Sikh representatives in

the constituent assembly did not sign the constitution when all members of different religions did. That lacuna still stares the nation in the face. The community's signature should be obtained despite the Akali's negative role. It looks odd when the country's prime minister is a Sikh.

When the purpose of the Akali Dal is to polarise the society, it is difficult to hatchet on the constitution. The fact is

great religions, Sikhism is described as 'a militant faith." But this is an overreaction to what happened in Punjab when politics went haywire. Still, this impression has given a bad name to the community. Some of its members have been killed in America for being mistaken for the followers of Osama bin Laden. Religious tradition necessitates the Sikhs to wear beard and turban. But America does not appreciate this. The Sikhs also face problems in France

But for the Akalis' parochial

the Congress government has done no The basic thing that the Akalis do not appreciate is that democracy presupposes the separation of religion from politics. The idea behind it

anything for them when it was in

power, Corruption and communalism

became its hallmark. Unfortunately,

is that pluralism suffers if particularism is fed. The Akali Dal, like the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, continues to Punjabiyat.

The Akali leadership does not seem to understand the letter and the spirit of the scripture. This is the time to tell the world the catholicity of the Guru Granth Sahib's teachings. Instead, the top Akali leaders have made the occasion a party affair. At one time, it did not want to invite the prime minister to the celebrations because he belonged to the Congress party. The only way out is for the community to assert itself to separate the celebrations from the Akali Dal, Guru Granth Sahib's message is for all. The Akalis are coming in the way of spreading it, thanks to their politics.

Guru Granth Sahib explores the spirit of different religions, how they mould men's lives in various parts of the world and how they try to impress their image on the history of our times. The religion is a living element in today's culture, not a museum piece. The youthfulness of Sikhism, its vigour and vitality, should help the community disseminate the message of peace and unity. The Akalis fail to understand even the basic truth.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Guru Granth Sahib explores the spirit of different religions, how they mould men's lives in various parts of the world and how they try to impress their image on the history of our times. The religion is a living element in today's culture, not a museum piece. The youthfulness of Sikhism, its vigour and vitality, should help the community disseminate the message of peace and unity.

moment of prayer, every man is at his best. The Guru Granth Sahib is an approach to such understanding. The book answers great questions raised in every human mind by the mystery of life. It helps us bear our sorrows. It tells man how to live and give assurance in the presence of death. It gives us strength in suffering.

Another aspect of this problem is the wide gap which can open between the original teaching of a religion's founder and what that faith has become after centuries of being worked over and interpreted by the founder's followers. Within each religion, there gradually grows up a widespread of variations.

to blame for polarising the Punjabis. It brings in the panth even in elections to panchayats because it believes it can bamboozle the Sikh masses in the name of religion. In this way, the Akalis act against the letter and spirit of Guru Granth Sahib which breathes secularism and which knows no difference between the low and the high, the rich and the poor.

Good old Akali leaders like Master Tara Singh and Giani Kartar Singh preferred India to Pakistan at the time of partition in August 1947. In contrast, the present lot of Akali leadership has the distinction of burning the Indian constitution which includes special provisions for the protection of the

that the Akali leadership does not stop thinking beyond controlling the gurudwaras which give them patronage and funds.

The Akali Dal did not condemn the terrorists in the 1980s, nor did it do anything to stall them. Except for Sant Harcharan Singh Longowal and a few like him, the Akalis connived at the lawlessness. The government unthinkingly attacked the Vatican of the Sikhs, the Golden Temple, to stop terrorism. It should have gone into what led to the situation. New Delhi is still too immersed in political conveniences to assuage the hurt of Sikhs.

In a leading book on the world's

approach, Punjab would not have been divided and re-divided. At one stage the demand for Punjabi suba (state) was a linguistic one. But the Akalis came out in their true colours when all that they wanted was a state which would have Sikhs in a majority. In the process, the *suba* was reduced to subi. Even the reduced state of Punjab does not have Sikhs in a majority because the migration of labour from other states has reduced the Punjabi speaking population to 47 per cent.

The Akali party has learnt no lesson from the mistakes it has committed in Punjab. It still plays with the sentiments of the Sikh masses. It hardly did

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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.

Amayhem

The whole nation is dumbfounded at the assassination attempt on Sheikh Hasina, the president of the AL and Opposition Leader in the House. The gory sight of ripped corpses and that of blood-soaked leaders as carried on the front pages of Dhaka dailies (August 22) including the DS saddened us greatly and our words failed to condemn the heinous acts of mayhem. Our deep sorrow and prayer go with

the members of the bereaved families. As the reports unveil, a second attempt was also made to kill Sk. Hasina when she hurried into her bullet-proof sports vehicle which was shot at seven times. How come grenades were hurled from the roof-tops, but that all escaped the notice of hundreds of police and intelligence men present there! And the perpetrators manage to move away. Then what they (police) were there for? To let such a gruesome incident take place? The government, and for that matter its law enforcers, cannot evade the responsibility of loss of so many lives. Sk Hasina, while in Istanbul, received death threat over telephone, and she let the government know of that so that proper security was commissioned for her. But that was not seriously heeded and she was targeted in full force. Since the BNP led alliance took over, the police have been on the run after the AL to foil its meetings, processions. The AL central office remains hemmed by large contingents of police forces, always ready to foil any attempt by Awami League adherents to gather and speak about the omissions and

commissions of the alliance government. This is Bangladesh style of democracy under the alliance government, where the main opposition AL's right to gather, demonstrate and criticise the government either in the streets or in the House is muzzled by brute force and brute majority.

We must get out of this cycle of absolute domination by the majority. **AH Dewan**

South Kafrul, Dhaka Cantt.

Psychological crisis Mahfuzul Haque wrote on an interesting subject which was headlined "Cultural dilemma." He questioned the need for celebrating the occasions like Valentine's Day and all such days. I think we don't celebrate these days in the real sense. What works in our mentality is imitating the West. The West gives the theme and the East follows it that is the truth.

We adopt their ideas. This kind of adoption and copying is the sign of a psychological crisis. We are not confident about our culture.

Dept. of International Relations University of Dhaka.

AL and BNP: Two sides of the same coin

The article under the above caption, published in the DS on July 28, was most appropriate and very timely. The writer has vividly described the current situation of our politics and I think he has nicely echoed the feelings of many of your readers. We are really

very helplessly watching the ignominious display of party politics by the two major players. They care little about the people or the country. They do not see anything beyond their party interest. Once in power, they want to perpetuate it and when in opposition they try to regain it by any means, even at the cost of national interest. But how long should we so helplessly watch such irresponsible behaviour of successive governments?

In fact, we really enjoy the benefit of a neutral administration during the three months of caretaker government. Terrorists disappear, a quiet political atmosphere prevails and people live in peace and tranquility. The basic reason for such peaceful atmosphere can undoubtedly be attributed to the selection of neutral,

highly educated and eminent personalities in different professions to run the caretaker administration. Where do these people come from? They are very much with us but not in the political arena. So if we could elect people like them to run the country, then possibly we could attain real progress and prosperity in a reasonable time frame. But in the present context it will be a daydream to expect that these people could be elected to the parliament, because it needs huge money and muscle to successfully contest an election and these gentlemen are nowhere near it. Besides, these people are not grouped in a political platform from where any nation-wide campaigning can be conducted. There are many other problems which may stand on the way

of bringing them to contest the national election. Taking all these negative aspects into account, it is pretty difficult to expect any change in the existing system. The crucial question is now how to bring about a change? Well, there may not be any easy way to achieve it but then I would like to believe that the civil society can come up to help the nation recover from the present crisis

In my humble opinion a campaign should be started right now to organise the civil society to select some 300 people from every nook and cranny of the country for the equal number of parliamentary seats. They should be absolutely honest, educated, strictly committed to the welfare of the nation and its people, permanent inhabitants of the respective constituencies and

major political party. The procedure for selection of such personalities may be worked out by elucidating public

should not be loan defaulters to any

The campaign for the people so selected may be carried forward by the newspapers, members of the civil society, non-partisan student bodies, professionals of various disciplines teachers, writers, artists and a cross section of people. What is actually needed is a sincere and unbiased call from the respected people.

I would request the readers to express

their opinions on the issue. A. Sahir

Mirpur, Dhaka