

## The government's credibility is on trial



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

**T**RAGEDY has been stalking Bangladesh for the past few weeks. Most of the news coming out of our country have indeed been bad. Mismanagement of post-flood rehabilitation activities, deaths from bombs, allegations of human trafficking, charges of corruption and steep slide in the maintenance of law and order do not make pleasant reading.

For the last two weeks I was in Stockholm and London attending several meetings related to environment and water management. During this time, I was repeatedly confronted with critical questions from friends and well-wishers about the serious decline in governance in our country. They also expressed their mortification about the unresolved terrorist bombing attacks. I must admit that I had to agree with most of their observations.

The last straw came with the electronic media report of 21 August when BBC TV, London, telecast Bangladesh Channel 1 footage of the assassination attempt on Sheikh Hasina, the Leader of the Opposition and on other supporters of the Awami League Party. Sitting in London, I could not believe my eyes. The carnage on that afternoon not only left many dead and hundreds

injured but raised many significant questions. It was indeed a 'black Saturday.'

The incident happened in clear daylight, with hundreds of law and order personnel presumably guarding a peaceful rally confined in an enclosed space. It was also not the first time that an Awami League meeting had been attacked with consequent casualties. Gazipur-10 and Sylhet had already paid their distressing dues.

The reaction of the government

position and expressed sincerity. It now seems that these commitments were made merely to keep us silent.'

The bell is ringing and the government needs to wake up. Repeatedly, it is being reminded not only of its inability to govern and maintain law and order, but also that it is open season as far as Awami League and its high functionaries are concerned.

On recently, Sheikh Hasina received death threats while on a visit to Turkey and most of the

to exercise and undertake a meaningful investigative enquiry to determine who or which group is responsible for triggering such violence, and threatening the media and other political and social forces for being vocal against them.

All responsible parties within the current Administration must understand that the events of 21 August have indelibly affected the threshold and mental barriers of the political matrix in Bangladesh. Have we not had enough of

welcome the formation of the Special Investigation Committee set up by the Supreme Court Bar Association composed of eminent lawyers. One presumes that they will be given the necessary access by all concerned in the government. One hopes that they can prepare their report swiftly, based on investigation and interviews with senior law and order officials. Report delayed is justice delayed.

For example, this Commission or any other Commission

-- why the unexploded grenades that were discovered in the meeting area were not carefully safeguarded as evidence, for possible fingerprints, instead of being exploded, -- armed policemen in that area could not capture even one single perpetrator of the bombing and shooting, and

-- why some of these law and order personnel have not been suspended for dereliction of duty?

The important thing that must be understood is that any report on this unfortunate incident should be completed the fastest possible without any political interference. There is also specific need for transparency and subsequent implementation of findings and recommendations with regard to how security agencies can be better resourced both in terms of manpower, training and physical infrastructure.

The government must understand that the country is being slowly pushed towards an abyss. We are now needlessly playing with fate. The saner elements need to reflect that the current format of governance must be dreadfully wrong if a child carries a poster saying that she has only one demand -- not a better life, but an assurance from the government that she will be able to eventually die of natural causes.

Thank God that she has not raised the point of burial, for even that is in short supply, and only available through 'suparish.'

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

## 'Verdict' before unearthing of facts

PM's finger pointing is injudicious

**W**E are constrained to express our reservations on the prime minister's remarks made on Thursday not so indirectly pointing fingers of accusation at the main opposition party, for having carried out the 21 August grenade attack on the Awami League rally.

Coming as it does from the highest executive of the country, it is most regrettable. The PM seems to have all the answers that the investigators have so far no clue about. Given the tendency of our investigating agencies, once they know the mind of the head of the government they will direct all their energies to prove her claims and NOT to find the truth. This fact makes her remarks all the more unfortunate. It not only indicates a lack of sensitivity of the matter but also a lack of interest in getting to the bottom of the tragedy. Once the PM tells the world that she knows as to who and why the incident occurred then what incentive is there for the continuation of the investigation?

There is a pattern, unfortunate though it is, in such utterances, which pass judgments on cases such as this. No sooner does an incident of bomb blast occur than we have the political parties trading charges, even before the investigators can roll into action. It seems to us a fixation of our political leaders with a type of politics in which facts do not matter, only prejudice and partisan politics do.

It hardly needs mention that the latest situation is the most serious attack on our democracy. The government by its actions and utterances had acknowledged the gravity of the situation and the severity of its negative potentials. We had earlier commended the government for seeking international assistance in the investigation of the incident, which displayed its sincerity and seriousness in solving the issue. But Thursday's comments of the PM revive public doubt as to how authentic the official investigation will be?

We had pointed through this column many times in the past the harmful consequences of random, indiscreet, irrational and ill-advised judgmental utterances. We point out once again, that the prime minister's statement, apart from affecting the investigations of our local agencies, may also influence the work of the international investigators, to whom their efforts may well appear to be an exercise in futility.

## Terrorists siege ends

We condemn playing politics with children

**A**T last the nightmare of several hundred innocent children of a school in Beslan, a small town in North Ossetia in Russia, taken hostage along with their mothers, has come to an end, but under painful circumstances.

We are shocked at the death of more than 150 hostages and more than 600 wounded in the hostage crisis in an apparent attempt of siege.

Till writing of the comment, we were not sure how it all happened. Whether it was the Russian forces assaulting hostage takers that triggered the tragedy or it was something else, we don't know yet.

Any hostage taking is abhorrent, more so when the victims are innocent school children and mothers. Nothing can justify the action of these militants, whatever be their cause and the ends that had compelled them to seek this despicable recourse.

We condemn this action in the strongest of terms. The perpetrators have our deepest contempt. For the Putin government this is the third terrorist action that it has had to put up with in the past seven days. Coming on the heels of the simultaneous aerial destruction of two Russian passenger aircraft and a bomb attack outside a Moscow metro station last Tuesday, Putin has some very serious situations to contend with. Given the fact that he has so long tried to give the Russians the impression that his uncompromising tactic in dealing with the Chechen separatists has borne fruit, the recent incidents belie his claims.

Apparently, the Russian government was not willing to precipitate any action this time since many children's lives were at stake, and rightly so since its record of handling previous hostage situations has been rather dismal. The Moscow theatre hostage crisis in Oct 2002 provoked such reaction of the Russian government that, at the end of the day, cost the lives of more than a hundred civilians.

Coming in the wake of the recently held Chechen presidential elections these two events are perhaps meant to send a message to the rulers in Moscow. But one's resentment and demands can never acquire even a patina of legitimacy by putting innocent lives in danger or making women and children objects of barter. But at the same time we express our deep concern for how the Chechen people have been, and are being treated by Moscow.

The Chechens have genuine grievances and demands but such insensate acts will only cause them to lose international public opinion.

to this tragedy was bizarre. It was an excellent example of the 'ostrich syndrome' -- hide your head under the sand and pretend that nothing is wrong. The BTV, as expected, displayed its true colours, and their news coverage was an insult.

Senior ministers of the government immediately termed the attack as 'barbaric and regrettable' and promised that those who are responsible for the carnage will be captured and given 'exemplary punishment.' The government must think that the entire country is suffering from collective amnesia. They seem to have forgotten that the credibility of this present Administration has reached new lows. An European diplomat quite correctly stated that 'after each incident, the government functionaries' have 'briefed us on the government's

Administration refused to give it due attention. Recent events on 21 August, have demonstrated once again the failure of the relevant Agencies of the government in the performance of their responsibilities. How could security be compromised in such a poor manner?

The government has to understand that setting up a judicial probe and calling in the Interpol is not enough. We have seen several such judicial commissions associated with past bomb attacks and not found any results.

Instead, it might have helped if the Commission was headed by a retired Chief Justice and not a relatively junior judge. That might have lent more credibility and seriousness to the process. A retired Chief Justice could have used his past position and stature

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**POST BREAKFAST**

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## Is it mere rhetoric?



KULDEEP NAYAR  
writes from New Delhi

**T**HERE is a saying on our side that after hearing the discourse on the Ramayana the whole night, one of the listeners asked who was Sita? Justice Afrasiab Khan from Pakistan reacts in the same manner when he says in one of his articles: "The state of Jammu and Kashmir shall be partitioned on the basis of two-nation theory as has already been done in the case of Punjab, Bengal and Assam."

Justice Khan is 57 years late in his observation. The two-nation theory he is talking about held good then, not now. Religion as the basis of nationality was buried during the lifetime of Pakistan's founder Quaide-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah. True, he propounded the theory that Muslims and Hindus constituted two separate nations. But he also gave a different interpretation after the formation of Pakistan. He said that India and Pakistan were two nations. Therefore, those living in Pakistan, whether Hindus or Muslims, were Pakistanis and those in India constituted the Indian nation. Religion was a private affair.

There is a strong lobby in Pakistan which still plugs Justice Khan's line. But that tantamount to

reopening partition, the repercussions of which should not be lost on those who are trying to do so. One million people were killed during the divide and 20 million ousted from their homes.

Division of Jammu and Kashmir on the basis of religion, which the two-nation theory adumbrated before Jinnah reinterpreted it, will spell disaster for not only the state but also India and Pakistan. Justice Khan does not realise that

basis of religion is not an option. It will only complicate matters. We have already paid a heavy price for mixing religion with politics. India is still not out of the woods because the BJP is not reconciled to the pluralistic society. Former chief minister of Madhya Pradesh Uma Bharti mixed religion with politics only a few days ago to the detriment of the nation. She exploited the Congress' ill-advised move to reopen the 10-year-old

mindset of bureaucrats on both sides. They are the ones who formulate policies to humiliate one another and still worse they have their own agenda -- and their own methods -- when it comes to relations with India and Pakistan.

Whether the Pakistan bureaucracy or the military junta thought of introducing terrorism in Kashmir to put pressure on India is a matter of debate. But the fact is that Islamabad did set up camps

Such rhetoric does not help in the midst of confidence building measures. After all, the violence in Kashmir is essentially by them who have their base camp in Pakistan. Belatedly, Islamabad has realised how the ghost of terrorism has become Frankenstein. President General Pervez Musharraf has escaped two attempts on his life. Even mosques have been attacked to show that terrorists can hit

unlike his predecessor's, is dragging his feet. Some dismiss this as nothing more than a few hiccups. But there are many who suspect that New Delhi has changed its policy. The Congress-led government's emphasis on cross-border terrorism is seen as evidence. Even Pakistan Foreign Minister Kurshed Mehmood Kasuri has said that the Indian government's concerns were not in keeping with the spirit of the dialogue.

This means that Islamabad suspects New Delhi focusing all its attention on terrorism. This may be somewhat true because India's home secretary reportedly gave to his counterpart the facts and figures of training camps in Pakistan and the number of terrorists trying to infiltrate into India.

I hope we are not receding to square one. National Security Advisor JN Dixit has said that Kashmir is an important issue but its resolution should not hold the people of India and Pakistan hostage. On the other hand, Musharraf has made it clear that there will be no progress in other fields until Kashmir is solved. The latter has even wanted a timeframe to be fixed. New Delhi does not have to follow Musharraf's wishes. But it must give proof of its anxiety to settle Kashmir. To begin with, it should withdraw unilaterally some of its forces in the valley. Another step that will mollify even the Kashmiris is the withdrawal of 'repressive laws' in the state.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

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what he is preaching is no more relevant after the subcontinent was divided in August 1947.

Some Pakistanis still do not face the fact that the 1947 thesis cannot be repeated. I do not know what the deposed West Punjab chief minister Shahbaz Sharif thinks now. But when I met him during former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee visit to Lahore, Shahbaz held the same views which Justice Khan has expressed now. Shahbaz proposed that the Hindu-majority Jammu and the Buddhist-majority Ladakh should be integrated with India and the Muslim-majority Kashmir with Pakistan. I warned Shahbaz against the danger of resurrecting the ghost of partition. He was not convinced. Whatever else we may do to settle the Kashmir problem, the division of the state on the

case of her "hooliganism" at the Hubli Idgah where she tried to hoist the national flag.

Jinnah himself opposed mixing religion with politics. He highlighted the pernicious results of such a policy in his opening speech to the Pakistan constituent assembly. He made the world understand that his country, for one, would never do so. This does not mean that Pakistan has to accept the status quo in Jammu and Kashmir. It has conveyed in many ways -- and through many channels -- that it does not want the LoC as the international border. If India were opposed to making religion as the criterion to settle Kashmir, it would have to offer Pakistan something that satisfies it to a large extent. The reason why no such formula has been worked out so far is the

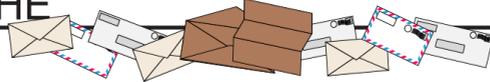
for terrorists. They are still there. It also introduced the "jihad" to evoke religious frenzy both in Kashmir and Pakistan. Thousands of people have died in the valley. The worst is that an indigenous movement in Kashmir has been communalised and external elements have taken it over.

A delegation of Pakistan MPs to India a few days ago admitted that they were worried over terrorism gaining ground in their country. Still Islamabad took exception to New Delhi's statement to emphasise the point. The ruling Congress was correct in saying at its sammelan (convention) that the Pakistan government had failed to stop cross-border terrorism in Kashmir. But Pakistan's official spokesman only pooh-poohed the statement and complained that it created "road blocks."

anywhere.

It is time that some non-officials -- not the Track II type -- from both sides should meet and try to prepare a common ground. It is a tragedy that the liberals on both sides take a rigid type or jingoistic approach when it comes to Kashmir. If they cannot agree on anything among themselves, how can they expect the rulers, who have their compulsions, to do so? The first round of composite dialogue is more or less over. Though it has not yielded any result, the atmosphere between the two countries is more amiable. Whenever the secretaries of the two governments have met, they have ended up saying that the talks were "positive." Obviously, there has been no breakthrough. Islamabad has a feeling that the Manmohan Singh government,

## 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.

### Rise above rivalry

December, 04 will mark 33 years of independence of Bangladesh. The age old post independence political rivalry between various parties are the principal cause behind halting the progress of the country. But the country has made some progress in the private sector.

The religious and socio-cultural organizations should mind their own respective business and not bother to interfere in matters which have nothing to do with them. The religious minded should carry and march forward with the divine responsibilities but should not impose anything on others. On the other hand, the progressive or the cultural activists should be sensitive to the religious belief of others. We should be tolerant as a nation.

Moinuddin  
Purana Paltan, Dhaka

### Role of Western Media in Iraq

A falsehood can never be hidden. Bush, Blair, John Howard and their allies are accused of upholding lies. They not only cheat their countrymen but also all the people throughout the world. Now it is apparent from the 9/11 commission report, US senate inquiry committee report and the pre war IAEA report that the invasion in Iraq was fully based on a false statement about weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). It is said that the western media i.e., BBC, CNN, VOA, DW, New York Times, Washington Post, Newsweek, Times etc exaggerate all news of the Muslim world. During the Iraq invasion, it is believed by many media experts that the role of the western media was fully negative, delusive and deceitful. They exaggerated Bush's false claim in various ways, sometimes

they exacerbated the battle field in Iraq by broadcasting propaganda against the Muslim world and their so-called WMD. Due to this fraudulent role of the western media, it was easy for Bush and his allies to invade Iraq. Now I think the western media should acknowledge the flaws in their news coverage of Iraq invasion and should also apologize to their readers for their exaggeration of the false statements about WMD.

Md Zillur Rahman  
Gandaria, Dhaka.

### Death of Azad and some questions

We the students of DU were greatly shocked by the sudden death of Humayun Azad. He was found dead in his apartment in Germany after two days of his arrival there, but it raises some questions. Was it a natural or unnatural death? He was

a poet, novelist as well as an intellectual. He was a fearless critic and believed in secularism. He had more than 60 published books. Recently, with the publication of one of his books some extremists threatened to kill him. But fortunately he survived. After that incident the attackers also threatened him to kill while he was in Germany. So, this is the clear evidence that he might have been killed by extremists. Although the German authorities termed it as a natural death, we demand a fresh investigation to find the real causes of his death.

Abdul Malek Shikder  
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### National Conference in Iraq

The national Conference in Iraq has got a rocky start as more than one

hundred representatives walked out in protest of the continuous bombardment on the holy city of Najaf.

It seems the crisis is not going to be over. Clearly, the only way to solve it is to return full sovereignty to the nation by withdrawing the foreign troops.

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### The flight of industry to India

The flight to India was a recent headline in a British daily, outlining a great wave of layoffs facing the British population as payday for their colonial past catches up with them. Two hundred years after British industrialization had pretty much destroyed Indians manufacturing potential by banning the import of cotton products, history is

completing a full circle. As a result of British colonialism English grew to become India's primary language.

Today it has with great historic irony become one of its major assets. It is English that the Indians have by now mastered, that is bringing about this reversal, as technology allows customer service over the telephone to be remote; in this case as remote as halfway across the world.

Large public sector companies like British Railways, HSBC Bank, British Telecom, Standard Chartered, Reuters, to name a few, are moving their customer Call Centers to India. What started as a trickle could develop into and deluge as over 30,000 executive jobs in the financial and insurance sector could move to India in the next five years, according to Evening Standard. The prediction from the US is even bigger. The majority of the 3.3 million jobs they

expect to lose by 2015 will come to India.

The now famous Toxic Fleet heading across the Atlantic to a small port in the UK called Hartlepool, Teesside, started earlier this summer and is now competing with the Royal Scandal for coverage. What is shocking is that the usual plot of Toxic waste dumping from the industrialized countries into poor underdeveloped ones was changed this time. Shipbreaker Able, UK was unable to resist the temptation of big bucks and signed a deal with the Americans on July 28" for 13 rusty, derelict US Navy ships carrying highly toxic material such as PCB and Asbestos to be dismantled in England. The deal was done in secrecy even though it contravenes International regulations on transporting dangerous goods. It has now emerged that the Americans even offered baksheesh

to the British company shape of two new 'oilier' vessels that can be sold on an incentive not available to US companies. Eighty similar ticking bombs would follow if this deal went through smoothly.

Thanks to the Environment Agency (EA) and others like the Friends of the Earth, the deal is now on hold as per the High Court's ruling even as the first couple of ships approach English shores. On the other side of the Atlantic five years ago Bill Clinton had ruled it illegal to scrap such ships in the poor countries after some accidents and deaths. As you might have guessed by now, George Bush pushed the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to lift the ban for this contract. How could Blair refuse permission?

A. Mayaz  
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