

Into the holy month

Let's introspect, rise above self

THE month of Ramadan has begun with Muslims all over the world preparing themselves for self-abstinence, a kind of self-denial that has them feel the pinch of poverty and hunger of millions. It teaches them to be inclusionary rather than exclusionary.

Muslims observe this holy month in order to rise above crass materialism in a bid to get self-purified, and become more humane and warm to fellow beings. It is a month of peace and meditation.

Ramadan teaches us to refrain from doing anything that might cause sufferings to fellow humans in any manner. But its teachings are not always observed with due solemnity. For example, we are already watching a price spiral that would make the lives of millions miserable. The businessmen and traders try to exploit the high demand for certain commodities during this month. They are also selling substandard things at exorbitant prices. These are a clear deviation from the spirit of Ramadan. Hoarders and manipulators responsible for the erratic market behaviour should show a socio-religious commitment to shunning the path they are following now.

The month unfortunately witnesses a high degree of extortionist tendencies in society even from unexpected quarters, including those that are supposed to play a gate keeping role along the supply lines and in market-places. The increased presence of law and order personnel at various points should help curb mugging, snatching and the vicious forms of 'toll' collection. In maintaining law and order at this time the police need to be extremely careful so as to avert any rough handling.

Away from home, the situation in Palestine and Iraq is now a global concern. However, humanity would have been spared the bloodbath had the people responsible for it were imbued with the spirit of brotherliness and fellow-feeling.

Ramadan is the greatest gift of Allah as well as the toughest test for the believers. It is in this month that the holy Quran was revealed.

The message of Ramadan should not be narrowly understood as having relevance to a single month. Its spirit of tolerance, self-sacrifice and dedication to fellow beings must be reflected in the lives of people throughout the year.

House committees remain ineffective

Time is running out for the parliament to produce

AS the fourth year of the current parliament gets under way, unfortunately it seems as though the parliament, and the parliamentary standing committees in particular, remain more or less ineffective. The current term of this parliament is more than half over, and if the house is to be at all productive or to perform its duty-bound function to the public, then the standing committees must begin to carry out their constitutional obligations.

The opposition's return to parliament last month was an encouraging sign for those of us who are keen to see the house function in the manner envisaged by the constitution. However, the presence of the opposition has neither prompted intelligent and illuminating debate on crucial issues on the house floor, nor has it seen the resurgence of the standing committees or enhanced the committees' ability to perform their oversight role.

Many of the committees have neglected to hold their mandatory monthly meetings, and these have often lacked a quorum due to the absence of a sufficient number of lawmakers. Many subcommittees have been formed in the past year to look into allegations of corruption at certain ministries, but no reports have been issued yet. Even more troubling is that the committees that have been meeting with some regularity have failed to perform any kind of oversight function, mostly echoing the positions of the ministries over which they are supposed to extend oversight.

Already three unproductive years have passed, but there is still time for the parliament, and the standing committees in particular, which, by all accounts, the opposition is going to join soon, to achieve something of substance in the two years left before the next elections. To do so, however, the standing committees must take their responsibilities seriously. They must meet, they must raise the difficult questions, and above all, they must retain their independence to criticise the ministries if such criticism is warranted with the opposition taking a lead there. We know the ruling party lawmakers are in a majority on these bodies and the chairmanships have gone to them; yet the opposition can and should make their presence felt through a powerful articulation of their viewpoint. The last two years of the 8th parliament should see some life in the committee system.

Human security in Bangladesh



ZAFAR SOBHAN

are not military. The acknowledgement of non-traditional security thus expanded the scope of security concerns to encompass concepts such as food security or energy security or environmental security -- the idea being that insecurity in any of these arenas could be as much of a threat to a nation's security as a traditional military threat. But the focus -- or referent -- of such security threats remained the state. The concept of human security was developed alongside a recognition of the fact that it is the security of

suffers the most.

So what do we mean by human security? There have been many definitions coined over the years -- some more expansive than others -- but most have concentrated on freedom from fear and freedom from want. There has often been some tension between the West -- which has focused more on freedom from fear -- and Asia -- which has focused more on freedom from want -- but it seems to me that human security must encompass both these freedoms, and that for many human

violence then this diminishes or negates his or her ability to earn a living. Freedom from violence and state oppression is meaningless in the absence of means of livelihood, and if one's security is threatened by the state then one's freedom from violence or freedom to earn a living cannot be secured with any certainty.

Human security threats can also evolve into threats to the state due to their suddenness, scale, or severity. A good example of this is HIV/Aids in sub-Saharan Africa,

such as floods are a good example of this. Floods can cause massive hardship for people in flood-hit communities or countries -- as happened recently in Bangladesh -- and this can lead to large scale migration that in turn creates a whole host of difficulties in the area to which the flood-affected people converge.

Human security threats cannot typically be localised or contained and this is why, left unchecked, they almost always metastasize into threats to national security.

sibility for human security must fall to the state.

When we shift the focus from traditional security to human security, we are shifting the answer to the question "whose security?" but not to the question "whose responsibility?" The focus may now be on the security of the individual, but the responsibility must remain the state's.

If Bangladesh were more developed -- economically and politically -- and if we had a better developed sense of civil society -- then perhaps the state could take a back-seat role and leave it to the people to safeguard their own security. But this is not the case in Bangladesh. In addition, when the state -- through its action and inaction -- is either directly or indirectly the cause of much of the human insecurity in the country, then it stands to reason that no human security solution which does not contemplate a leading role for the state will be effective.

This is not to say that civil society has no role or that civil society in Bangladesh has not been astonishingly productive when it comes to safeguarding our human security and performing functions which should be the state's responsibility. It is civil society which must hold the state accountable for its failures, it is civil society which must organise, mobilise, and educate the public, and influence, pressure, and educate policy-makers. It is civil society that must expend its energies to reform the state because left to itself the state will never do so. But ultimately the responsibility for safeguarding human security must lie with the state, and in Bangladesh, this responsibility remains unfulfilled.

STRAIGHT TALK

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the individual more than that of the state that should be of pre-eminent concern to policy-makers and the administration.

The policy focus is now more on the security and safety of the individual and not on either traditional or non-traditional security threats to the state -- and it is in this light that I believe Bangladesh's security concerns must be addressed. It is important to keep in mind that shifting the emphasis from the state to the individual in no way diminishes the importance of traditional concepts of security -- traditional security threats to the state also count as threats to human security as ultimately it is the individual who

security threats it is neither possible nor helpful to deconstruct them into either one or the other.

Human security is perhaps best defined as freedom from violence (either man-made or natural), a state that does not oppress its own people, and conditions within which the means of livelihood can be earned. This is what we mean when we speak of human security and these are the indexes according to which we need to measure human security in Bangladesh.

Human insecurity is indivisible. It is not possible to be secure in one of the three ways outlined above if you are not safe in the other two ways. If a person is not safe from threats of

which began as a public health problem, but has reached such a scale that it constitutes a legitimate security threat to the entire region. The destitution and parentlessness caused by the disease have devastated local populations, and apart from the massive strain put on health-care resources and facilities, the shrinking of the work-force and near collapse of institutions and law and order have threatened the continued functioning of the affected states.

One human security threat can also evolve into another due to linkages between the two, which can eventually threaten the state as a whole. Environmental threats

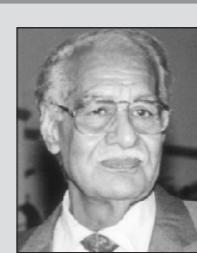
Who among us would argue that floods do not have the potential to threaten national security every bit as much as bombs and grenades do?

The question is, of course, who bears responsibility for securing us from these threats to human security and what we, as individuals, can do to secure ourselves.

Bangladesh is a relatively young country that is still developing both economically and politically. Many if not most of our democratic institutions have not been fully developed and concepts such as citizenship or civil society are still in their infancy. It is for these reasons that I believe the lion's share of respon-

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Crisis of confidence

KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

NDIA faces a different kind of crisis. It is not economic, not even political. It is the crisis of confidence. The two main political parties in the country do not trust each other. This has led to a running battle between the Congress and the BJP. It cannot be wished away because one leads the ruling combination, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and the other, heading the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), sits in the opposition.

There used to be a third force, that of regional parties, acting as a pressure group or an option. But that force has been gobbled up partly by the Congress and partly by the BJP. Leaving the Left apart, the Congress feels that those who are not with it are against it. The same thinking prevails in the BJP. How do you arrive at some meeting point when the confrontation has taken ideological turn?

Things were not so bad until the BJP's defeat at the Lok Sabha polls. True, the Congress did not reconcile itself to the Atal Behari Vajpayee's rule so long as it lasted, and disrupted parliament many a time. But the party faced

the fact of not being in power. The BJP is still not willing to accept this. Every act of it reflects hostility. It is nothing new. But the distance between the two has widened in the past decade, especially during the last six years when the BJP was in power at the centre.

The NDA still believes that it is only a matter of time before it will be in power. The BJP even gave currency to an astrology prediction that the Manmohan Singh

the Left is with the Congress, there is no danger to the government. However, some differences can crop up in 2006 when there will be a straight contest between the Congress and the Left during the assembly elections in Kerala and West Bengal.

At present the problem is about the functioning of parliament. Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee has called a meeting of all political parties on November 7 to discuss the smooth working of

were present. The second time the issue raised was about the removal of Vir Savarkar's plaque from the Andaman jail where he was under life imprisonment before independence. Central minister Mani Shankar Aiyar had ordered the plaque's removal.

This plaque was not that of the British days but the one put up during the BJP's rule. Both the BJP and the Congress have differed on the role of Vir Savarkar in the eyes of the BJP he is a

wound up. Instead, the CBI has been entrusted with the job. This is, indeed, odd and the BJP has a point.

One can criticise the commission for not finishing the job even in three years. But the government is wrong in converting a judicial inquiry into a departmental one. After all, the CBI is under the Home Ministry. Former Samata Party president Jayajit is right in voicing her doubts. The government's reasoning that

its horror that the BJP, with its parochial approach, has penetrated the Central Secretariat and other offices of the Government of India. Senior officials are saffronised and the rules of conduct have been flouted to accommodate even the whole time RSS workers. How does the Congress cleanse the stable is the problem. Human Resources Development Minister Arjun Singh says openly that there is no segment of education which is above the taint of communalism. He has already joined issue with the Sangh Parivar.

What is provoking the clash is the Congress plan to get rid of parivar's sympathisers, wherever they are. The first casualty was the removal of three state governors for their "ideological leanings." What really haunts the BJP is not the removal of some of its men but the fear that it may not come to power even after the next election. The parivar's Vishwa Hindu Parishad has tested the water and found that even the Ram temple issue does not evoke emotional response. Some Muslim hotheads are foolishly trying to resurrect Hindu fundamentalism by talking about the 25 per cent reservations in jobs. Any reservation on the basis of religion is bound to give another lease of life to Hindutva. Otherwise, the BJP has nothing else to project

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Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

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government would not last beyond September 26. Even the tall party leaders indulged in such wishful thinking. Various permutations and combinations were vainly tried out. An emissary reportedly sounded DMK leader M Karunanidhi whether he would accept to be the prime minister with the support of the BJP.

Even if he were to cross over to the NDA, he cannot dislodge the government. Manmohan Singh was not bragging in Mumbai when he was saying that his ministry would last its full term of five years despite "tantrik tricks." So long as

parliament. He has even asked vice-president Bhairon Singh Shekawat, a BJP prodigy, to preside over the meeting. But the vibes are not favourable. Many BJP members say that unless the Congress gives them "space" they would not allow parliament to function. They may well be right.

The BJP has practically not allowed parliament to transact any business since its formation in May. Once, the party created a rumpus on the ground that its members did not want to sit in the same house where the "tainted ministers" in the UPA government

the commission had been given too many extensions does not cut not cut even after the next election.

Another controversy has arisen which may affect the next session of parliament in November. The BJP, egged on by former Defence Minister George Fernandes, may make the Tehelka tape inquiry an issue to stall the two houses. The party has already expressed its anger over the new twist the Congress government has given to the probe into irregularities in the country's defence deals after the Tehelka disclosures. Why treat the commission probing the Tehelka tapes differently?

It really boils down to mistrust. The Congress views with suspicion anything that the BJP does and vice-versa. The real battleground is going to be the administration. After forming the government, The Congress has found to

by providing bridges (where there is absolutely no reason to) making community centres, political party offices, universities and what not. There are at least 3/4 shopping centres adjacent to these two roads and I believe they are trying to facilitate them. I am pleading to the concerned authorities to probe the necessity of building the bridge and if you do not probe please come and see where it is going to be built; then you will surely understand what an wastage of money it would be. You should consult the inhabitants before bringing about any changes. Being democratic citizens, we do have the right to speak about the most undemocratic decision. Please come and survey before taking the decision.

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to Mr. Arshad Khan's letter on hijab. Yes, cross is banned too. But the point is that hijab is mandatory according to Islam (as far as I know) and it's one's basic right to obey the rules of his/her own religion. If Islam had not mentioned anything strictly about hijab, then Muslims might not have overreacted. And (as far as I know) there is no strict rule of wearing cross in Christianity. However, people should enjoy the freedom of choice. No one should be forced to do anything. Every one should have the right of dressing as he/she wants to. At least, here in Asian countries we are having that right.

Now, let us come to the fanaticism issue. Definitely, I'm not biased and I'll unravel the whole thing if you give me a chance. Let us be unanimous in the issue that fanatics deserve no mercy and they should be punished, no matter which religion they belong to. In that case, each of the al-Qaeda members should have been punished. But what we see? Three years have gone after 9/11. Pretty long time, isn't that? But the US could not catch Mr. OBL. Who knows what is he doing right now ... because an idle brain is the devil's workshop (I've heard there were extremist Arabs among the Belsan hostage takers, matter of concern) If it is proved that OBL was related to 9/11, was not it wiser to pay heed to Afghanistan and complete that mission thoroughly? When Mr. OBL is not in custody, then how can the world be safe?

What we should bear in mind is that individuals might cause casualties, but no one should add the name of Islam to terrorism for that.

Cantara Wali Ruhu
Dhaka, Bangladesh

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Violation of procedures

I would refer to Mr. Nazmul Ahsan's letter (DS: Oct 8) regarding the unauthorised presence of a passenger in the cockpit, and an ex Biman MD to boot.

As far as I am aware, FAA regulations that govern most of the air traffic and safety procedure prohibit the presence of any person in the cockpit particularly during take off and landing. I wonder if the ex MD of Biman was not aware of this! Or may be CAB flight safety regulations probably adopted from FAA, ignores this aspect of flight safety. Could some knowledgeable source clarify this matter?

Another point is related to the runway. As the runway and surroundings were covered under rain water, was there any marker on both sides of the runway visible from the control tower showing the runway path? Also was the mini-

mum touchdown marks on the runway visible from the control tower? If the answer is negative, then permission to land should have been denied by the control tower. If the answer is affirmative, and visibility also confirmed by the flight commander, then it is the commander's responsibility.

Undercarriage malfunction, locked brakes, wheel malfunction or error of judgement could possibly be one of the reasons for the accident. However, all this will come out during the enquiry which should reinforce cockpit discipline particularly during take off and landing. I believe on a number of occasions, this discipline has