

## B Chy-Kamal meeting attacked

*Intolerance of dissent condemnable*

ON Tuesday, by all accounts, some JCD-Jubadal activists of the ruling party broke up a meeting jointly held by Jatiya Oikya Mancha and Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh at Rangpur Town Hall, throwing shoes and rotten eggs at the eminent personages and attacking the crowd with sticks and iron rods, injuring at least thirty people.

This is not the first time that ruling party elements have violently attacked meetings held by these two organisations, and it is clear that the government can no longer be bothered to even make a pretence of tolerating any kind of opposition.

To make things worse, senior government functionaries have even gone to the length of denying that the attack was the work of ruling party activists, despite the fact that the identity of the attackers couldn't be in any doubt given the witness accounts. This kind of bare-faced mendacity shows nothing more clearly than the contempt for the intelligence of the general public.

It is bad enough that the ruling party has such little regard for democratic norms and that it acquiesces in such disgraceful conduct of its cadres, but to then try to deny the reality of what happened is to add serious insult to injury.

The government is often critical of opposition activity that it deems to be disruptive or unlawful, but what can the government say now when it is the front bodies of the ruling party themselves that acted in a lawless and undemocratic manner? We in the media have never ceased to criticise the opposition when it called hartals or erred in any other way, but what happened in Rangpur with the police as a mute spectator is a wholesale denial of the right of assembly and dissent which is patently repugnant to any democratic sensibility.

The government has a responsibility to protect the right to assembly of its opponents. The government seems no longer inclined to even pay lip service to democracy and no longer apparently even considers itself accountable for its actions.

It seems as though the government has lost faith in democracy.

## AL in JS committees

*Better late than never*

THE Awami League's decision to join the parliamentary standing committees, belated though, is a welcome development. The lack of a fully fledged committee system until Monday meant that we made do with an apology for it so far at cost to parliamentary system of government.

Formation of the standing committees, believed to be the lynchpin of the parliamentary system, was delayed for some inexplicable reasons and they came into being in July last year and the AL members were included in the committees in September, 2004. So, valuable time has been lost and the ultimate loser is the system of governance.

We applaud the AL decision and hope that the party's lawmakers will not only take part in the JS committees but also contribute significantly to their strengthening and smooth functioning. They have already wasted an opportunity to serve the nation in general, and their constituencies in particular. Their absence from the committees made the JS ineffective. All in all, one of the vital responsibilities to the electorate was not carried out. Needless to say, the committees cannot function to their full potential without the participation of the opposition MPs.

Whatever time is left for the committees to achieve their goals should be utilised properly. The opposition MPs can play a crucial role as members of the standing committees in exposing misdeeds, corruption and instances of mis-governance.

The JS committees will hopefully come to life with the participation of the opposition MPs and serve the purpose for which they were created. What cannot be overlooked is that formation and functioning of the standing committees is a constitutional obligation that should not be neglected on any pretext.

The AL decision to make its presence felt in the standing committees is quite in keeping with the popular expectation that the JS will be turned into the nucleus of all political activities, however belatedly. The government, for its part, should allow the opposition the space it needs to contribute to lawmaking and have a say in the parliamentary standing committees.

# How safe is the world today?



THREE statements from three international personalities of three completely different callings following the last BushKerry debate have made news. Although the subject matter that stimulated the comments is one and the same, the tone and tenor of the comments are similar in the case of two that disprove President Bush's view of the current state of global security. The third, by the very nature of its substance, accords a very different character to the subject that it relates to. None of the comments, however, were intended as a direct response to Mr. Bush's hackneyed cliché of how safe the world was after Saddam.

The first two comments, those of the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and ex-chief UN weapons inspector in Iraq Hans Blix, made very recently at different places while responding to the question as to whether the war on terrorism has rendered the globe safer, echoed

one another. The replies were an unequivocal no.

The UN Secretary General was quite clear when he told the Dimbleby programme on ITV television: "The Iraq war has done little to increase security across the world or halt the activities of international terrorists. I cannot say the world is safer when you consider the violence around us ... and see the terrorist attacks around the world and you see what is going on in Iraq." The UN Secretary General did

tional coalition forces but at President Bush personally. International terrorism has given itself the goal of causing maximum damage to Bush in the election battle, the goal of blocking the re-election of Bush for a second presidential term."

While no one can question the Russian president's predilection for a particular candidate in the US election, the motives he ascribes to the insurgents in Iraq are rather extraordinary, and many would find it hard to agree with him.

instance, according to Adam Curtis (who has been called by media critics the most acclaimed maker of serious television programmes in Britain): "The group [Al-Qaeda] didn't even have a name until early 2001 when the US government decided to prosecute the small group and needed to give it a name in order to use anti-Mafia style laws against it."

Also, think tanks, experts and watchers of global terrorism are all in accord that, instead of stemming

tered all over the world.

The Afghan war, according to the same report, has helped rather than hurt the Al-Qaeda, and the US tactics in Iraq has engendered a sort of violence that the country was not hitherto exposed to. Allawi's recent statement that his country is faced with three different types of terrorism testifies to this fact. A secular country, which Iraq once was, has come to face a prospect of either being truncated into three, or a civil war with unimaginable conse-

quencies.

Interestingly, some commentators are now coming out with the fact that the threat of Al-Qaeda was greatly overblown, particularly by politicians who, again according to Curtis "in a post-ideological age, increasingly use fear, rather than vision, to bolster their positions." Curtis is highly critical of the British visual media for helping to reinforce the myth by its unseemly obsession with "Islamic terrorism."

The myth of WMD in Iraq has been fully exposed. The obvious question that comes up is whether there are fewer WMDs today than before "Operations Iraqi Freedom" was launched. There are reasons to believe that certain countries are

As for Mr. Bush, he will continue to exploit terrorism to ride the crest of American sentiments to win the election. The "war on terror" will continue to be pursued, and the world will "continue to remain safe." If what we are experiencing today is a "safe world" one shudders to think what an "unsafe world" would be like.

to not mince words when he stressed the need for a proactive role of the international community to improve security around the world.

Hans Blix in an interview with Reuters said: "The acknowledged gain of the war was that a treacherous and murderous dictator was removed, but the rest has been tragedy and failure ... It has stimulated terrorism."

Without going into the motivations behind Mr. Putin's remarks, it would be worthwhile to relate all three comments to the current world security situation.

The obvious question that one is faced with is, are we as global inhabitants safer now than we were before the start of the so-called war on terror? Let's take the issue of global terrorism first.

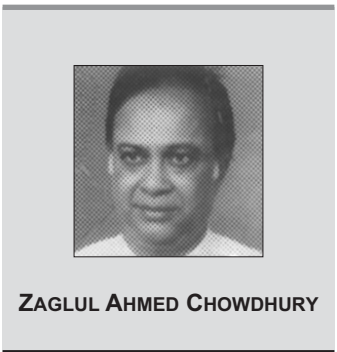
Many would claim that the insurgents and indeed the Muslim militants that the US is faced with have much to thank Bush for by projecting them to the position that they are in today. It is because of Mr. Bush and not in spite of him that the views of the terrorists find resonance in many parts of the world. For

the escalation of terrorism, the war on terror has helped to spawn the phenomenon further. Even, going by the State Department report, there have been more incidents of terrorist attacks all over the world, with the primary targets being the US interests and that of its allies in the said war, since the "war on terror" was launched.

As for crippling Al-Qaeda, the Institute of International and Strategic Studies (IISS), a British think tank, in its report on terrorism published in May 2004 reveals the startling fact that since the US war on terror commenced the Al-Qaeda ranks have been invigorated rather than stunted, and as many as 18,000 potential terrorist are scat-

power. However, the leftists do not see eye to eye with the UPA in all matters and their ties often come under strain. The communists are also mindful that they do not lose public support by always endorsing the UPA and its policies and they give vent to their feelings of differences on certain issues particularly in the economic matters. A loss for the Congress and the NCP, which is also a key partner of the Congress in the UPA, would have brought colossal burden for the UPA both in main-

# Maharashtra : A boost for UPA and Sonia Gandhi



THE outcome of the state assembly elections in the key western Indian state of Maharashtra has come as a big morale boosting for the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in India and more importantly its leader Sonia Gandhi, who is the chairperson of both the UPA and its main constituent Congress. A combination of the Congress and its regional ally Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) retained power in the Maharashtra state beating off a determined opposition combine of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its rabidly Hindu nationalist party Shiv Sena in a close contest. The elections were crucial in many sense and the results will have tremendous impact on national politics in different ways.

The Maharashtra polls are always a matter of great interest and significance not only for India but also outside for the simple reason that the state is second most populous in India only after the vast Uttar Pradesh and its capital Mumbai is well known being both commercial capital of the country as well as the

hub of India's huge film industry. But this time the elections assumed far greater interest because it was seen as the first test of popularity for the federal UPA government, which rather unexpectedly won national elections in April/May, this year defeating the BJP-led rainbow coalition of many political parties including the Shiv Sena. The Maharashtra polls were a kind of acid test for the five months old UPA government on one hand and how people now view the BJP and its

had to be satisfied with 120 seats. It is very easy for the Congress to garner the support of only a few more members from other fold since as many as 31 including a host of independents have found place in the legislature. In the last national elections, the Congress-led alliance fared well in the 48-seat stake for the Lokshaba (lower house of parliament). They have maintained the winning spree and the victory has come close on the heels of comfortable

power. However, the leftists do not see eye to eye with the UPA in all matters and their ties often come under strain. The communists are also mindful that they do not lose public support by always endorsing the UPA and its policies and they give vent to their feelings of differences on certain issues particularly in the economic matters. A loss for the Congress and the NCP, which is also a key partner of the Congress in the UPA, would have brought colossal burden for the UPA both in main-

origin" and the Mahaastra polls, like the national elections, have once again shown that Indian electorate are not bothered by this campaign against the Italian-born widow of slain former premier Rajiv Gandhi. This enhances her credentials as the tallest leader of India now while the results are an embarrassment for former prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, considered as the most charismatic and popular among the present Indian politicians. It appears that Sonia's leadership is progress-

normal situation for an opportunity to regain power in the state is not anything that he will relish. Pawar has increased his political influence and may this time ask for the chief ministership of the state for himself or his party leader rather than a Congress person since this time NCP has won two seats more than its alliance partner Congress. The issue may cause some rupture in the Congress-NCP amity but top leaders are expected to hammer it out since none of the two parties would like to waste the opportunity to rule for another term having won the polls together. The Congress-NCP government has completed full five year term in the office.

The results of Maharashtra, bastion of the Shiv Sena, have come as a big setback for the Hindu communal forces, who had pinned victory here -- albeit stiff competition. But that has not happened. This will further intensify the introspection and differences within the "Sangh Parivar" -- an euphemism for the communal forces. BJP president V.Naidu has reportedly resigned the party position owing responsibility of Maharashtra debacle. On the other hand, the outcome will bolster the secular forces and strengthen their position in national politics even though the results have not been very decisive. Complacency must not grip the UPA since the BJP and allies will spare no efforts to recover the lost influence and clout in both national and state level as more states polls are in the offing.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist.

### MATTERS AROUND US

The results of Maharashtra, bastion of the Shiv Sena, have come as a big setback for the Hindu communal forces, who had pinned victory here -- albeit stiff competition. But that has not happened. This will further intensify the introspection and differences within the "Sangh Parivar" -- an euphemism for the communal forces. On the other hand, the outcome will bolster the secular forces and strengthen their position in national politics even though the results have not been very decisive.

allies, on the other. The outcome is not an outright win for the Congress-NCP alliance since it narrowly missed having an absolute majority in the 288-member legislature but certainly it has done exceedingly well when judged against scepticism in certain quarters.

For the BJP, which lost power at the centre, it was also a electoral fight of dignity since a victory in Maharashtra would have given its flagging confidence a much-needed stimulation as the party is still reeling under the shock of defeat in the national polls. The Congress-NCP combine secured 141 -- only four short of an absolute majority while the BJP-Shiv Sena

Congress win in northeastern Arunachal Pradesh. The results of Maharashtra polls have sent shock waves in the BJP circles and jubilation in the Congress and UPA camps.

The Congress and its allies will be benefited by this outcome since the UPA government at the centre does not have a majority in parliament and this minority government's survival is crucially contingent upon the outside support of the leftists, who have a record 60 members this time in the 545-member Lokshaba. The leftists are supporting the UPA as both believe in secularism and are keen to prevent the BJP, widely seen as communal, from coming to

taining cohesion among the alliance partners and guarantee of continued support from the leftists. Maharashtra polls results have come as a shot in the arms of the UPA government on both the counts.

The outcome is also a measure of popularity for Sonia Gandhi, the supreme leader of the Congress, who declined prime ministership following victory in national polls and instead favoured Dr. Manmohan Singh for the job. Both campaigned hard in the polls knowing well that their stakes were high in the Maharashtra voting. The BJP and its allies always come down heavily on Sonia Gandhi for her "foreign

ing by leaps and bounds. Even Shusma Swaraj, staunch critic of Sonia on the "foreigner issue" admitted that Maharashtra success for the UPA was mainly for Sonia Gandhi. She did not involve son Rahul and daughter Priyanka in Maharashtra campaign.

The polls were also critically important for two aging Maharashtra political leaders -- Sharad Pawar of the NCP, who is now the federal agriculture minister, and Shiv Sena supreme Bal Thackeray since both are heavyweights in the state politics -- one determined to retain power and other wrest it. For the Shiv Sena chief, who is now 78, waiting for another five years under

## OPINION

# Three years of alliance govt: More blemish than bliss

RASHID ASKARI

THREE years have passed since the present alliance government came to power. Although the henchmen are tirelessly chanting the glory of the government, there is perhaps no denying the fact that the government's credibility is declining. If we believe in the half of what is reported in the press and on television (excluding BTV) and three-fourths of what we see with our own eyes, we can hardly disagree with the fact that after these three years we are left with a sloppily run country. Law and order has proved to be a total failure as a result of which corruption, terrorism, hoodliganism, extortion, kidnapping, rape, murder, acid throwing and the like

have grown rampant. Hardly a day passes when we do not see the reports of the above incidents appearing in the local and national papers.

We have been dubbed as the people of the corrupt most country on earth. Our country has been described as dysfunctional by many. This defamation is so grounded on facts that we cannot erase the blame. In fact, almost all sectors of the government have more or less plunged into corruption.

The trend of terrorism is so dreadfully rising that we have had to experience a new tragedy in August. The investigation measure like in many others is perhaps going to be futile. This breakdown in law and order may

lead to more atrocious acts of brutality in future. The existence of so-called 'Bangla Bhai' bore the testimony to the fact.

Who is to blame? Quite arguably, the party or the alliance in power cannot escape the charge of failure in keeping a tight rein on terrorism. Even the order of the Prime Minister went unheeded. It is they who can naturally be held responsible for the wrongs done in the country during their regime. The present alliance government is, of course, doubly blame worthy. In the first instance, it is denying space the opposition to bring up the misdeeds of the government. Secondly it seems not being able to do away with those elements. Terrorism begets terrorism and the terrorists need to

be supported by extortion. So terrorism and extortion are geometrically increasing on the vantage of the government's opposition policy.

The most embarrassing of all that the peace-loving and law-abiding people are facing is the highhandedness of the ruling parties and their student wings. The unruly cadres are taking control of the highest seats of learning by muscle power even at the cost of their closure sine die. There is discontent even among the supporters of the major ruling party BNP at its present gesture of reactionary stream conversely turning away the quasi-progressive one. This has become a big cause of concern for the true lovers of our hard earned

independence.

What I, as a member of the civil society, am more concerned about is the dismay caused by the rise of the fundamentalist elements by which our most coveted liberalism and secularism may be threatened with extinction.

The defenceless women, the vulnerable widows and even the minor girls fall prey to rapists. If we turn the pages of the newspapers, we cannot but see the horrendous report of atrocious homicide by diabolic means. After such ghastly occurrences, when we naturally fall back upon the law enforcement agencies, we feel utterly frustrated. The police cannot take any appropriate measures to stop these atrocities. Extremely disappointed with the

law enforcers, the general people at times are turning into irresistible mob and beating allegedly potential criminals to death.

At this juncture, I beg to remind the ruling parties of their high sounding electoral pledges, which now seem preposterous. Things they promised to do have reduced to mere lip service and things they vowed to do away with have ironically been multiplied. Sorry, we could not outright congratulate them on the occasion.

Rashid Askari is associate professor and Chairman of the Department of English, Islamic University, Kushtia.

## 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.

### Fair price for farmers

BTV in one of its economy related programmes presented a comparative chart showing the prices of certain vegetables in the wholesale market and in retail and footpath shops. It is evident from the chart that the retailers in different parts of the city charge 3 to 5 times higher prices than the wholesalers at Karwan Bazar. It is revealed that the wholesalers purchase vegetables from the actual growers at a very cheap price. It means the real growers (farmers) are not getting genuine prices of their hard-grown agricultural produce

and the ordinary consumers are being compelled to buy the same commodity at a much higher price.

Due to the poor and faulty agricultural marketing system, the farmers are getting poorer and poorer day by day and they are losing their interest in farming.

Perhaps for this reason the oldest industry of the human civilisation, that is, agriculture is often branded as the 'Sunset Industry'. Even the people at the policy-making level often show an unsympathetic attitude to recognise the importance and contributions of the farmers and those

who are working relentlessly (KRISHIBIDS) for raising farm production. In fact, through the dedicated efforts of both farmers and Krishibids, agricultural production in Bangladesh has increased significantly.

Meanwhile, it is sincerely hoped that the authorities concerned would take drastic measures to improve the agricultural marketing system so that farmers get fair price of their labour and they can make some profit out of their investment. At the same time it is to be ensured that consumers get agri-products at reasonable prices. Agricultural marketing infrastructure

may be developed by the government at the growers' level as a potential non-farm employment sector.

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### Balance of terror?

After the rape and grievous wounds inflicted upon Iraq, which country is going to become the next victim? Iran or North Korea? Why not Israel?

Why don't UN arms inspectors,

NATO experts and IAEA team members visit Israel, make investigation and take necessary action against Israeli nuclear weapons? Many reports say that Israel has produced and stockpiled over two hundred nuclear weapons under the umbrella protection of the US.

In 1981 Israel with US logistic support bombarded and destroyed an Iraqi nuclear reactor.

In 2002 the US invaded and occupied Iraq on the pretext that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. But thousands of US, UK troops and their allies,

OIA and FBI agents deployed in Iraq have miserably failed to find any WMD during the last two years. The US is now trying to divert world opinion accusing Iran and North Korea of carrying out nuclear programmes.

What chicanery and buffoonery! The US itself is the mother of atomic bomb. It produced the first atom bombs in 1945, and dropped them in Japan, killing and maiming over half a million people.

Subsequently, the former USSR (now Russia) developed atom bomb in 1949, the UK in 1952, France in 1960, Israel (secretly and not declared) in

1972.

Tit for tat, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Due to fear of atom bombs of the USSR and China, the US did not dare to use her atom bomb during the Korean War (1950-53) and the Vietnam War.

Many people are of the opinion that US President George Bush knew it positively and definitely that Iraq did not possess weapons of mass destruction. If the US and her allies had the slightest doubt that Iraq had in her possession nuclear weapons, they could never take the risk of a war with Iraq.

Might is right. Has it not become necessary for a sovereign and independent state to have an atomic bomb for its own defence and survival from foreign aggression?

The IAEA Chief Mohammad El Baradi says that now at least 40 countries have the know-how to produce nuclear arms.

Is the world moving towards a great man-made calamity, catastrophe? Annihilation of mankind?

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