and less defensible elements of our

What does this mean in practice?

t means taking the transshipment

issue seriously and not being

merely obstructionist. It means

cracking down on insurgents who

might be receiving shelter and

support on our side of the border. To

say nothing of pursuing our own



LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA FRIDAY FEBRUARY 18, 2005

It's an attack on progress

The ugly face of extremism again HE bombs attacks on Brac and Grameen Bank

offices were tell-tale attempts at destroying anything that stood for progress, modernity, empowerment of women and the like. The way bombs and grenades are being hurled right, left and centre suggests that the attackers were emboldened by the culture of impunity feeding on lack of results in the previous investigations into high profile bombing cases. Society is passing through a grave crisis with the slide in law and order.

The most worrying aspect of the recent incidents is that the terrorists are targeting people at the time and place of their choice least bothered about where the police might be. This is somewhat surprising since all the suspected arrestees have confessed to having mentors and blueprints for the extremist exploits. So the connections should not be particularly difficult to detect. The ideological slant of the assaults on select individuals and institutions is far too obvious to be overlooked.

Unfortunately, the elite anti-crime outfits have not proved themselves effective in countering this particular sort of violent crime against society. Obviously, here they have to go beyond catching 'listed criminals'. The modus operandi of the fanatic groups is different and so is the nature of the crimes perpetrated by them. All these are now known facts

The overall picture is grim, to say the least. News of vicious eruptions is pouring in from different directions. It seems certain groups have made inroads into the heart of important academic institutions and other organisations, calling for thorough investigations into the violence-prone situations for necessary corrective actions.

Strange things are happening. It is not without reason that some people believe that the criminals and killers are getting support from some invisible guarters who might not be that faceless after all. This is a vital question which needs to addressed if we really want the force of extremism to be checkmated. The government should be tough on the issue, for it cannot maintain law and order if killers enjoy a freehand and forward-looking institutions are targeted by the dark forces.

Passage between Kashmirs

Beginning of a new chapter

HE agreement to begin the long-awaited bus link across the line of control between India- and Paki-

stan-administered Kashmir is undoubtedly a significant development. This would be the first-ever road link between the two parts of Kashmir since after the partition of the sub-continent more than fifty years ago. More importantly, it shows the thawing of relations between the two nuclear rivals that fought two wars over the territory since independence. Though the Delhi-Lahore bus service had inspired big hopes among the Kashmiris, till day before yesterday it seemed like an almost impossible task. We congratulate both the countries on taking the pulse of the people into account and making a breakthrough.

Because movement along the line of control (LOC) separating the two sides of Kashmir was so difficult and restricted that it only escalated enmities and hostilities among the people. It also created separated families whose members longed for reunion with their near and dear ones. Relatives gathering on either side of the divide to exchange greetings and catch a glimpse of friends and families was a remarkable spectacle. In other words, the LOC which is like the de facto border in the

Message from New Delhi sooner rather than later, or be prepared for the consequences.

ZAFAR SOBHAN

ary 14 was a message aimed princi-

pally at Bangladesh. Indeed, one

could scarcely ask for a more lucid

or straightforward enunciation of

priorities and policies from the

This is not to say that the entire

message was a coded communica-

tion with Dhaka, but there can be

little doubt that large chunks of the

policy address were intended

squarely for the ears of the Bangla-

desh government. One merely

needs to read between the lines of

Mr Saran's statement to under-

stand what the real message was

Pakistan has long been a prob-

lem for India, (though, ironically, as

and who it was primarily meant for.

Indian side

uncertain.

AKE no mistake about it.

The recent policy address

given by Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran on Febru-

Let us look at some of the language used in the speech.

The reference to "some members of Saarc actively seek[ing] association with countries outside the region . . . in a barely disguised effort to counterbalance India" is clearly a reference to the Bangladesh government's recent overtures to China, Japan, the EU and Asean. among others. Mr. Saran made a number of

pointed references to India's irritation with member countries who

ments signed with Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan. The crux of the speech comes in

the final few paragraphs where Mr. Saran reiterates India's longstanding complaint about "use of their territories for cross-border terrorism and hostile activity against Indian" and states that "we need to create a positive and constructive environment by avoiding hostile propaganda and intemperate statements" ending with the final admonition that "India wishes to reassure its neighbours that it respects their independence and

to a pretty good explication of India's thinking with respect to its relations within the region, and specifically with respect to its relations with Bangladesh

One thing we can't say any more is that we are being ignored. We have always complained in the past that India was much more important to us than we were to them, but the bilateral relationship with Bangladesh is clearly now at the top on the Indian foreign policy agenda.

agitated with respect to the relationthe argument. But the point is that it doesn't really matter who is right and ship

wishes to be accommodated.

So the question for us is what

should our response be now that

India is now clearly extremely is right and wrong on both sides of

The counter-argument to Mr. Saran is that his speech is in fact a perfect illustration of what is wrong with the bilateral relationship, in that it demonstrates how India is utterly indifferent to the needs of any other country, refuses to see that other countries may also have cause for complaint, and forthrightly sets out India's "my way or the highway'

who is wrong -- the question is how

Now we can continue to take a

hard line in negotiations, but I think

that it is fairly apparent now that this

will get us precisely nowhere. India

needs us far less than we need

India, has far greater leverage than

us, and has now indicated that it is

running out of patience and is pre-

pared to use its leverage to get its

that we bend over backwards to

accommodate all of India's

demands. That would be neither

prudent nor politic -- we have our

own interests that we must also pay

attention to and it is imperative that

any Bangladeshi government stand

be to continue to defend our own

But surely the best solution would

firm in the national interest.

Nor am I suggesting, however,

best to respond.

approach to diplomacy.

insurgents and terrorists. The thing is that much of this So who is right? I think that there would not only not be detrimental to our own national interest but would actually be to our benefit as well.

India policy.

It must go both ways, however There are all kinds of issues from trade to water-sharing to border demarcation where we would like a better deal from the Indians. But we have to be prepared to deal -- not to merely obstruct -- and of late it often seems that we are more interested in simple obstruction than with striking a deal. Such an approach ultimately hurts us far more than it

does India. There are many who say the problem lies with India and its Big Brotherly attitude, and there is much truth to this. India is far from blameess when it comes to the deterioration of the bilateral relationship with Bangladesh, and must be willing to sit down at the table and sincerely address Bangladesh's legitimate concerns. It is not enough to take pot-shots at us -- India must look

into its own house as well But so must we. Let's for once in our life get serious. Indian intransigence is not the only problem and we have not been blameless in our dealings with India either. There can be no doubt that we have legitimate concerns on issues such as trade and water and that in negotiation India has often been the intractable one. But the time has come for a smarter India policy than the policy of confrontation and obstruction that we have been pursuing for the past few vears.

refused to marry him, he has strug-

gled with the question of how he

should remember his life should he

Today he is going to have a

national self-interest strongly, but to temper the more confrontational Zafar Sobhan is Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

ever need to recount it.

perceive Saarc "as a vehicle primarily to countervail India or to seek to limit its room for manoeuvre" and who are "seen to be patently hostile to India or motivated by a desire to contain India."

its own house as well.

He means Dhaka -- and it is clear that these efforts are not appreciated by New Delhi.

relations between India and Bangla-Specifically who Mr. Saran was desh have soured, relations referring to (not that there was much between India and Pakistan have doubt) becomes clear in the next been on the mend in recent years). paragraph, when he refers directly But at least India and Pakistan both to the severed transportation arterknow where the other stands. The es in the region

relationship between Dhaka and The speech became more New Delhi is far more complex and closely tailored to its intended audience in Dhaka when Mr. Saran Mr. Saran's pointed statement mentions that "some neighbours indicates that New Delhi is conhave taken advantage of India's cerned that Bangladesh might be strengths and are reaping both heading down the path of direct economic and political benefits as a diplomatic confrontation with India, result. Others are not." To ram this and that the Bangladesh governpoint home, in the next paragraph ment had better correct its course he refers to the free trade agree-

sovereignty. What it regards as unhelpful is the display of narrow nationalism based on hostility towards India.

loud and clear. Indeed, the tenor of the speech

was such that it made me wonder whether India's withdrawal from the 13th Saarc summit that was scheduled to be held in Dhaka on February 6-7 was part of the message. Perhaps the withdrawal from the

summit was a straight left intended to set us up and Mr. Saran's policy address was a thunderbolt right cross to the jaw of the Bangladesh government Perhaps the thinking in New

Delhi is that if this doesn't make them sit up and take notice, then nothing will

Taken together with India's summit snub -- I cannot help but suspect that we have been treated

India has drawn a line in the sand and laid down its marker. The message has been delivered The other unsubtle message to be found in the body of Mr. Saran's speech was that from now on we do things India's way or not at all. The postponement of the summit has

STRAIGHT TALK

There are many who say the problem lies with India and its Big Brotherly attitude, and there is

much truth to this. India is far from blameless when it comes to the deterioration of the bilateral

relationship with Bangladesh, and must be willing to sit down at the table and sincerely address Bangladesh's legitimate concerns. It is not enough to take pot-shots at us -- India must look into

already shown us where the balance of power lies. The message is that we continue to be confrontational with India at our peril.

Much depends on to what extent one accepts India's characterization of the Bangladeshi mind-set and intransigence as the reason for the cooling of relations.

Notably absent from Mr. Saran's address was any concession that India itself may be in any way to blame for the problems in the relationship or that India is willing to accommodate the needs of other countries in the same way as it

Life sentence for death

a compelling sense of loneliness and a gripping horror of unfulfilled companionship. His mind churned like a stormy sea, awake even when he was sleeping, a sense of loss draining his strength although he was resting.

She lived in his memories year after year like an ember in the smoldering fire. She pushed and pulled his heart like a rope in the tug of war. When she got married to another man, he walked ten miles everyday just to catch a glimpse of her face. He was warned many times to stay

anything, saying what he said, doing what he did. Her husband soon married another woman, and abandoned her. When he sent the proposal to marry her, she turned it down and refused so much as to spit on his grave. She blamed him for wrecking her marriage and ruining her life, by planting the seed of doubt in her husband's mind.

breeze blew in his face as he stood in front of the window, thinking how

away into darkness. Human lives were nothing but the reverberating heat produced in the friction sighs and tears of human beings, light chasing darkness in the concentric circles of purported destiny.

never came together. It was destiny that he lived alone and she lived

not be complete without her, that he longed for her like a journey longed for its destination. He remembered everything last night, when all the pains he had

suffered over the years concenchance to recount his life to a person trated in his heart and hurt him like who has been at the centre of it. He the aching bruises from earlier has to tell her everything, every blows. A dry burning wind came into flash of pain, every spark of hope, every shot of desire that burned in the room as he was going to remember how her husband and his men his flesh, boiled in his blood and confronted him one day and left him crushed in his bones. He has to tell bloodied and unconscious in a her how he lived inside a lifeless paddy field. They broke his legs as body, his soul helplessly tormented her husband kept repeating that

by love like a piece of iron sitting in the furnace. Last night he looked for a single sentence to summarize his life. She wants to see him at last, her life critically hanging in the balance between life and death in a hospital bed. What will she say to him and what will he say to her? How will two

Today he is going to have a chance to recount his life to a person who has been at the centre of it. discrepant accounts get reconciled He has to tell her everything, every flash of pain, every spark of hope, every shot of desire that burned in his flesh, boiled in his blood and crushed in his bones. He has to tell her how he lived at long last? Is she going to say she was sorry for scornfully ignoring his inside a lifeless body, his soul helplessly tormented by love like a piece of iron sitting in the love for her? Is she going to ask for his forgiveness so that she could die with a clean conscience? The gust of hot wind filled the

thing, get his clothes ironed, and

shoes polished, and rehearse his

thoughts once again so that he can

for sure that he has been dead for

long many years, serving a life

sentence for death. But is she going

to be mentally alert to understand

what it means? It is destiny again

that the book of his love has to be

He is going to tell her one thing

Outside the window, the grassy

road rolled out like the tortuous body of a slumbering snake. The morning

It was destiny that they met but

between night and day, renewed in the rotation of the sun and the moon, the comely shining angel of hope fighting alone against the dark beasts of agonies, broken hearts, betrayed love, shattered dreams,

region has gained a rather symbolic acceptance through this new development. The bus-link carries significance for not just two Kashmirs, but also for both India and Pakistan.

Such confidence-building measures between the two governments have laid a bridge for people-to-people relationship in what was supposed to be a disputed territory. We commend the Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh and his Pakistani counterpart Khursheed Kasuri for having taken this landmark decision. We can see small olive branch being put across by both sides in the midst of many contentious issues that still need to be discussed and solved. There might be some reservations that the real basic dispute is yet to be addressed but at least this is a start. And it definitely augurs well for the now-hot, now-cold relations between the two neighbours.

ws with the force of and the morning air, scented with the fresh breath of angels, hit him in the face

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

start

HE night was long and

restless until it faded at

dawn, and he woke up with a

when the cry of a rooster

seared the earth, like a shriek of

pain speaking of a new day being

born. He felt his way through the

gloom of the dawn, which filled the

room like stagnated smoke, thinking

that life was nothing but an illusion in

the magic lantern show. He opened

hahit

He felt blank in his head, which was spinning from lack of sleep. Like someone gasping for breath when released from a stranglehold, his head was looking for thoughts to overcome the lightness of not knowing what to think. He wanted to think, think about the years of his life, which went by like a speeding train, not knowing where to begin, not knowing where to end.

He could not sleep at night, his mind floating in incoherent dreams like scattered clouds drifting in the sky. He fluttered in bed between waking up and falling asleep, torn between opposite feelings, between

furnace. He is going to tell her one thing for sure that he has been dead for long many years, serving a life sentence for death.

CROSS TALK

away from her, but as soon as the night dissolved into the day, he felt the urge to see her again.

This morning, like many mornings before, he felt the urge to see her again, to hear the music of her giggles, ringing like the clinking sound of a thousand bangles, her thin lips parting like a peeling fruit, her eyes shining like new marbles. But last night he thought of it, thought of it frame by frame, turning the pages of his life to remember how it all began, and how it all ended

He lived a life he never wished to live. because he could not change

life was such a waste of time, how all things came and went in the endless repetition of the same futility, his father and his friends, his relatives, the madman, the medicine seller, the snake charmer, the magician whose trick was to swallow razor blades, how all of them came to this world and how all of them were gone, most people in the village looking like strangers as if it was a field raising altogether new crops.

of the morning, the morning that was going to fetch him the night again. working like spasms that throw a man into light and then take him

alone, that the vagaries of fate kept them apart. It was destiny that love burned in his heart like a votive candle in a forlorn temple. It was destiny that she passed her life like a ripe fruit, which dropped from the tree in a deep forest, and he could not pick it up because the distance between them was infested with misfortunes.

He did everything to reach out to her, to speak to her, to tell her how his heart pounded with the grief of not being able to connect with her. He went to her house called her on the phone, wrote to her, sent friends and relatives to tell that his life could

room with intense heat before he realised that the sun had climbed to Majnu should never be able to walk the mid-sky since he came to stand and see his Laila again. It took him in front of the window. He has to get almost one year to recover from the ready, take a shower, eat somedeadly wounds inflicted by those wrathful men, who threatened to kill him if he was ever seen in their village again. go to her with an organised mind.

It was a terrible way to live, to suffer the pain long after the wounds were healed. He once read it in a newspaper article that some Spanish writer had said that life was not what one lived, but what one remembered and how one remembered it in order to recount it. For all these years since he was attacked. since her husband left her, since she

balanced at a time like this. Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker

Inducting honest men in Parliament is a far cry

AR SHAMSUL ISLAM

HOUGH not a foolproof system democracy is held as the best available form of governance. The incumbents are chosen by the people which is a democratic process. But in Bangladesh how faithfully they are disposed to adhere to the democratic culture in their activities is a big question. Rather they are alleged to have tended to be dictatorial exhibiting no will to serve the people and wholly concentrating on personal and parochial aggrandisement.

Rousseau abhorred the concept of democracy knowing it to be a cult of incompetence. He advocated enlightened despotism. He said, "I would rather be ruled by one lion than hundred rats." However this is a debate of yore. Standing on the corridor of 21st century to rehearse those ideas is a monstrous folly.

Nobody can deny that election is a vital process to institutionalise democracy. In elections of our country the general tendency of a great bulk of electors is to vote the party symbol without considering the quality of the candidate nominated by the party. The game being so two or three major political par ties are seen to overwhelmingly dominate the show. In reality the two

chief political parties have led the government in tandem

Of late the question that is getting louder from the electors is what kinds of men are voted to the Parliament? Are they tested patriots? More importantly, are they honest enough to serve the people? And all these questions have come rebounded on the electors counter questioning that while exercising franchise have the electors anyway examined that patriotic and honest candidates are returned? There was a time when honest,

dedicated souls were involved in politics and nomination to an election was given by the political parties after duly sifting out the most appropriate ones of the lot. Businessmen, industrialists were not generally among the contend-They knew that they were not that enlightened and competent to hanker for that office. They remained confined in supporting this party or that hoping at best that if the party they had supported sometimes helping its fund were returned their business interests were likely to be safeguarded, if possible, of course without sacrificing fair course. Electioneering was at that

time largely modest and ethical. But things began to deteriorate rapidly since the seventies. Morality politics dropped steeply that

made an opening for the business

class to enter in large number into politics and reach out to the higher rungs of the party organisation. Money became a strong leverage in politics. With it came the power of muscle hand in hand. The shrewd businessmen began to appear as candidates themselves for the polls. They felt political powers could as well be theirs too. They calculated becoming legislators was a far more strong guarantee to protect and further their commercial ends.

In the process elections became a game of black money, hooliganism, intimidating voters, cramming ballot box with fake votes, snatching ballot box, bulldozing vote counting and even fabricating election results by media coup etc.

And winning election in legislative assembly means like wresting a licence for plundering public and private money, liquidating the dissenters, flouting the laws of the land at whims etc. with absolute immunity. It was just next to getting Aladdin's magic lamp. That is why political parties move heaven and earth, fair or foul, to snatch state power.

Amusingly watchdogs of the constitution stand silent and submissive. There is an Election Commission to conduct elections fairly and constitutionally. But it

proves helpless to obstruct those infringements because in fact it is neither independent, nor has full control over the staff it gets in its office nor is empowered to meet its required expenditures without the arace of the aovernment. Even it cannot move a single force without government help to ensure security of a person or place. It lacks some most fundamental requirements to stand bold. As for example, the political parties do not have any compulsion to get registered with it, the ceiling of election expenditures fixed for candidate is crossed manifold openly, routinely, defiantly for which violation it has dismally failed to take any action so far owing to cumbrous, ineffectual legal modes. It cannot dispose of election disputes in an expeditious way, cannot make the candidates produce statements of assets and liabilities. declare if they have any criminal records and specify their being loan defaulters or not etc, to make these documents publicly displayed to help the voters to choose out right

What has become open to all is that now-a-days election has become a kind of investment returnable with manifold profits. This has slimmed the chance of honest, dedicated candidates to get party tickets in an election. Regrettably,

persons for the office.

the political leadership feels no gualms to sell out a large number of party tickets to robust bidders on this plea or that.

OPINION

Time has come for the electors to think how to get off from the burden of electing dishonest, corrupt persons in the Parliament. The question of electing honest persons in the Assembly is all the more important because it is they who can deliver good to the people and country. Mahathir Mohamad, erstwhile Prime Minister and builder of modern Malaysia has said that for development of a country (like ours) honest persons with sincerity of purpose though lacking in specialised education are most needed. The political parties will routinely nominate dishonest criminalised, moneyed men and the voters will keep on voting them elected to fleece this poor country of the last remnant of its resources is a philosophy that cannot hold good for good. Time is high for the electors to tear apart this evil.

Hence a slogan needs to be voiced among the electors to vote for persons of integrity. For airing this new slogan the motivational and campaigning works may be done by bodies like NGOs, social, political, economic organisations, the civil society etc. The electors will obviously play it by ear from Teknaf to

Tetulia Our vast number of voters may not be academically educated. But

> they cannot be blamed on lacking in practical wisdom. They cannot be charged with faltering to choose out the right political parties to vote in the national polls. This is proved by solid facts. To mention it. in 1991 polls the electors lifted the BNP to power to the bewilderment of many political pundits. BNP was then not that organised and AL prided itself on sweeping the polls ahead. How could this apparent miracle happen? The answer is that the voters, particularly the aged ones, had in their mind the rule of the AL government following 1971. So they (electors) tried with the BNP pushing it to form the government. Again in the next election of 1996 the voters, distraught with BNP government. swung back to the AL also considering that the party chief had apologised for the past mistakes and appealed to the voters to give it a chance to come to power after a long eclipse of 21 years. Again when national election was held in 2001 the electors set their face against the AL primarily for the top leadership allegedly giving indulgence to the godfathers of terrorists in Feni, Narayanganj etc.

Imagine how many ears can catch the new battle cry -- vote for

men of integrity. Firstly, we have a considerable chunk of floating voters who may be convinced of the cause. In fact they are the first targets. Secondly, there are traditional voters giving votes to party symbols age by age. They are die hard supporters of particular parties difficult to be swaved otherwise. Still if the core of their heart is silently knocked deep resentments at the corrupt and criminal activities of their party stalwarts come pouring down. They may be tuned to the new slogan promising an end to corrupt, criminalised governance. Painfully we find how better the

caretaker government, compared to a regular government, has performed. The caretaker government is a non-political, neutral government composed of men of different occupations of outstanding merit. It governs the country for six months, one-tenth period of a full-term government. Has a caretaker government failed to govern the country? The answer is an emphatic NO. Rather during its tenure the country breathes a fresh air, law and order improves a lot, the terrorists take to heels, the police and administration get free from the menace of telephonic political diktat. One may argue that a caretaker government is not put to a test to prove its capability of performing long term administration doing useful reforms. This can be dismissed remembering that it was the last caretaker government that finalised the bill for enactment of long-awaited 'separation of the Judiciary from the Executive' and iust when final assent to it was to be given the Prime Minister designate interfered. as reported, urging to leave out the matter for the incoming regular government led by the BNF to perform this responsibility by way of fulfilling an election pledge.

Meanwhile long three years of the coalition government have passed out but nothing in this matter has been done despite repeated blasting directives from the Supreme Court

It does not appear plausible that the top leadership of the chief two political parties would give due weight to the sentiments of the electors. Probably it is not that caring and farsighted as well. Moreover it may have got handicapped by obligations and commitments, direct or tacit, to the coactivists, kith and kin, business tycoons thickly encircling it. So the prospect of choosing honest, patriotic incumbents in the crucial national election coming next in less than two years is nothing but sombre.

Ar Shamsul Islam is Retd Principal Govt Mahila College, Pabna

He was restless at night thinking