LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA SATURDAY OCTOBER 8, 2005

What they are up to is crystal-clear

Counteraction should be equally unambiguous

UITE clearly, the Islamic extremists have not hung their gloves after the August 17 bombings and Monday's repeat act. Nor have they shriveled into hibernation following arrests of their cadres and the exposure of their suspected linkage and networking which ought to have made them feel vulnerable and jittery. On the contrary, they seem determined to have their way as evidenced by the threats they are putting out to judges and lawyers to conduct their affairs in accordance with Islamic Shariat or face dire consequences.

Why are the Islamic militants targeting the judiciary, the district courts to be precise? And, this is no verbal abuse, mind you, that they are hurling at the judiciary; it's very much physical targeting of adalats. Mufassil courts are where human affairs are dealt with, at the mundane but broad spectrum social level. So, the offensive they have launched is not all that symbolic, rather it is shrewdly calculated and roundly focused. Their intent is to cash in on the religious sentiments of people, especially of the potentially gullible -- on the assumption perhaps that the ground lay prepared by their peers for receiving their message.

Operationally, the extremists thought that the judiciary, rather the lower stratum, was a soft target for them and that's why it has been chosen for attack. The home ministry has rightly beefed up personal security of the judges in response to their call. While the judges and lawyers need protection in view of the threats being issued to them, the government must not forget that the entire country is under threat from these people who are up to demolishing the very principles on which free Bangladesh was founded. Today, they are attacking the judiciary, tomorrow it may be another institution, because their sworn aim is to impose an extremist, orthodox rule on our people.

They have made no bones about their intentions and we should be equally unambiguous in our counter offensive. All of us, wherever we are, must uphold the constitution of the country. The religiosity of our people and the natural respect they have for Islam should not be confused with the sinister agenda of those diabolic elements who are out to push us into the dark ages.

Bangladesh in UN peacekeeping

We are proud of the soldiers

T is heartening to learn that Bangladesh's contribution to United Nation's peacekeeping operation is going to be the largest surpassing Pakistan which had been in the top slot till now. There will be as many as 10,203 Bangladeshi troops in total stationed abroad on 12 peacekeeping missions in countries like Ivory Coast, Liberia, Congo, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia-Eritrea, East Timor, among others. Since their first inception in the UN peacekeeping mission in 1988, a gigantic number of 42,000 soldiers have participated in 31 peacekeeping missions around the world to date earning a huge amount in foreign currency.

But it probably was not the only motivation. Their skill, training, orientation have been put to best possible use. This is an international exposure at the highest level of peacekeeping that involves not only just routine duties but also serious situations like counter insurgency operation. Recently Bangladesh has, most deservedly, been given the commanding position in peacekeeping mission in Sudan, known as one of the most challenging operations. So they have gained a lot in terms of knowledge, experience and expertise. Many of them have even lost their lives in risky, hazardous engagements. It is without any doubt a matter of pride that these soldiers have been a part of fulfilling the noble and lofty ideals of the UN.

They can easily be termed as the positive image builders of Bangladesh, especially at a time when it has taken a serious beating. Bangladesh has had a lot of negative publicity abroad due to confrontational politics, misgovernance and widespread corruption. The valour and courage shown by these soldiers has earned name for the country. The whole nation is behind them in their courageous endeavour.

Bangladesh-India water talks identify problems



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

ISCUSSION is knowledge in the making. Both Bangladesh and India are beginning to discover the wisdom of this

In the recent past we have had a series of high level ministerial visits to Dhaka from India. This reflected the understanding that neighbours need to resolve their outstanding issues through dialogue. This is the only way out India, as the senior member of the South Asian club only enhances her image through such a process. Such steps also encourage other confidence building measures.

Last month's visit by Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi, the Indian Water Resources Minister, was the third ministerial visit from India in a matter of weeks. It followed the visit of the Indian ministers Natwar Singh and Mani Shankar Aiyer. The visits not only reopened much needed channels of communication between Dhaka and Delhi but also built up trust that had eroded in the recent past. What was important was the constructive

The 36th ministerial meeting of the Joint Rivers Commission quite expectedly had a long agenda. This was a consequence of the long delay between meetings. There had been a series of meetings over Teesta water sharing at the level of Joint Committee of Experts and the Joint Technical Group but the last session of the JRC was held almost two years ago. Such a situation was contrary to Chapter V of the 1972 India-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission Statute that stipulates

be held generally four times a year. The scenario had also turned more

complex with media reporting that the Indian government, as opposed to assurances given to Bangladesh, was initiating projects towards comprehensive River Linkages. The signing of the MOU (for connecting Ken and Betwa rivers) between the Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh in the presence of the Indian Prime Minister on August 25 created more concern in Dhaka. There was apprehension that this was another step towards eventual transfer of Himalayan waters to the peninsular

management of the environment, poverty reduction and reduction of flooding would be impossible without proper and equitable water manage-

Mr. Dasmunshi, to his credit took his visit seriously. His past association with Bangladesh and its war of liberation persuaded him to forsake the usual bureaucratic approach and seek a broader policy of engagement. He prepared himself for his visit through meetings with the political leadership of the Indian states neighbouring Bangladesh -- Mr. Buddhadev

Gazaldoba, disrupting severely Bangladesh's Teesta barrage irrigation scheme. Teesta also came in for special attention because the Ganges Water Treaty notes that the Teesta water sharing model could be followed for finalising the water sharing formula of other common rivers.

Reference was also made by Bangladesh to the importance of identifying midstream points of rivers where they to tackle the question of unwanted erosion resulting out of the construction of groynes and other river training

note of contentious issues. There was movement forward in certain areas but no major breakthroughs. Political will also took the backseat on the important proposal of water management and South Asian unity

The important points agreed upon included -- the willingness to convene Joint River Commission meetings regularly without inordinate delay, the resolve to review the 'operational implementation' of the 1996 Ganges Water Sharing Treaty and agreement by India to provide to Bangladesh the detailed plan of the Tipaimukh Hydro-

defence. Clarity, transparency and sharing of information about this project would be a much better means of doing away with unnecessary anxiety and concern and building credibility. A statement by the Indian Prime Minister in the Indian Parliament that there will be no river-linking of Himalayan rivers would also be particularly reassuring. We must not forget that in both countries there are groups of people who are not always interested in amity.

The meeting also decided that both countries will work together on the arsenic contamination problem. India will provide technical support and training to Bangladeshi scientists in arsenic prevention strategy. This was indeed a positive step.

India has shown great maturity in the manner it has approached the various items included in the agenda of the meeting. There has been movement forward

However, it still needs to muster necessary political will to view water management and utilisation issues in the broader context of integrated water resources management in South Asia. It was as such a disappointment to be informed that India thinks that SAARC should only deal with economic cooperation and not have anything to do with sharing of water resources. How can you have sustainable development, protection of the environment and reduction of poverty without proper management on a regional basis of the most important ingredient -- water? There has to be a change in the mind-set. Water as a commodity needs to be viewed as a shared regional source and not in terms of closed bilateral compartments.

India and the rest of the South Asian countries must not forget that prosperity in this age of globalisation can only thrive and grow in the regional context. The countries of Europe have shown to the rest of the world how common goals, $sharing\, of\, resources\, and\, cooperation\, can$ create peace and prevent conflict. In the regional context, because of its technological superiority, India can be the first among equals. All it needs is more confidence in itself and less insecurity.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and

POST BREAKFAST

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south through the Ganges-Subarnarekha-Mahanada-Godavori axis. This was also interpreted as being opposed to Article 9 of the Ganges Water Treaty that suggests that both countries shall avoid unilateralism and enter into water sharing agreements with regard to all common rivers on the basis of the principles of equity and fairness as expected between co-

All these factors -- the lack of progress since the 25th JRC meet, held in July 1983, the difficulties that had surfaced during the 31st IRC meeting in early 1990 and inability to finalise decisions after the 33rd JRC meeting in 1999 had contributed to miscommunication and misunderstanding. Consequently the visit of the Indian Water Resources Minister was eagerly awaited.

It was anticipated that the talks would take note not only of outstanding issues but also try to find ways and means on how to make the process more effective and efficient. This, it was felt, would be consistent with existing views that measures pertaining to Bhattacharva, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mr. Manik Sarkar, the Chief Minister of Tripura and also the Chief Minister of Assam. This showed seriousness and an open mind.

The Bangladesh side had a wish-list that reflected the domestic anxiety of and its economists. It was also more or less bi-partisan in nature The Bangladesh Water Resources

Minister Hafizuddin Ahmed quite understandably, in the meetings spanning two days, highlighted several issues that needed resolution

The foremost was the water sharing of seven transboundary rivers --Teesta, Dharla, Dudhkumar, Monu Khowai, Gumti and Muhuri.

Teesta received special attention. Experts from the two sides considered in greater detail the points of water release, site for measurement of flows and the periods of sharing. In this context it was also underlined that Bangladesh receives extremely low water flow in Teesta during the lean period (January-May) and that India withdraws unilatattachments in the upstream near river

Two other problems were also placed on the table -- construction of the Tipaimukh Hydrological Dam on the river Barak, feeder for the Meghna river system within Bangladesh and the need for making available more advanced flood forecasting data.

The Bangladesh delegation recognising the increasing need for water and energy in South Asia also proposed that availability of water and energy could be facilitated through regional cooperation. It was suggested that the matrix could include Nepal and Bhutan and the construction of reservoirs in the upper reaches of Himalayan rivers. Such additional storage facility could then provide extra water to both India and Bangladesh in the lean months and also extra electricity to be generated through hydropower facilities. Such a measure would also be an example of South Asian unity.

Both sides stressed on the need to consider all issues on the basis of ground realities.

irrigation scheme. It was however not clarified as to whether India would be willing to amend its designs if Bangladesh considered some elements to be controversial. It was also decided to undertake a joint inspection by both Water Resources Ministers of the erosion affected areas related to the Teesta and Feni rivers after Eid-ul Fitr. It was also agreed that Bangladesh would receive flood forecasting data 61 hours beforehand for the Ganges river and 67 hours before for the Brahmaputra river. This last aspect was The Indian Water Resources Minister

logical Dam to reaffirm that it was a

ower generating venture and not an

also assured his counterpart and the media that India had no intention to initiate linking of Himalayan rivers as it would be unacceptable not only to Bangladesh but also to the Indian States of West Bengal and Bihar. One would have to monitor the future situation very carefully in this regard. We have the highest regard for the minister's views but the logic that it will be opposed by some Indian states is hardly the best

One hates to say this, but here is a

sense of complacency in India and

Think South Asian



writes from Karachi

OREIGN Minister Natwar an important milestone on the road to a full and lasting peace in South Asia. While the two agreements signed were not substantial in nature and the expected agreement on Siachen did not materialise, the body language was very positive and boded well for the future. While we are still skirting on the core issue of Kashmir, there is need to instill confidence in the ongoing process by showing actual progress in Siachen, Sir Creek, Baghlihar Dam, etc. Natwar Singh is no ordinary diplomat, he has firsthand knowledge of Pakistan, indeed all of South Asia. With his own considerable skills as a negotiator and inherent knowledge of the problems between Pakistan and India, his has been a very positive role in overcoming the obstacles to peace.

People in Pakistan were apprehensive about the BIP's fall from people's grace in the last elections, while they did not expect change they did appre

hend lack of emphasis and commitment. Natwar Singh has been Congress Coalition's pointman in keeping up the peace momentum. In fact he said it very well at a recent briefing hosted by the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Karachi, to quote "I know the roadmap, what I have to watch out for is accidents" Pakistan is fortunate to have been blessed with an astute top-rank diplomat in Mr Aziz Khan in Delhi, for its part India has the brilliant and suave

another is interested in water coolers. some want pharmaceuticals to be registered, and why not? For each and everyone, his and her own! The businessmen's vision of foreign policy is that it should be conducted through commerce, and everything flows through the "pipeline" of commerce, and that is a pun. Always the consummate diplomat, His Excellency the Foreign Minister of India was only too happy to oblige, he stayed far away from the realm of exter-

India, if not vet to Pakistan Pakistan-India dialogue is necessary

for a lasting peace in South Asia. Without these two countries coming to terms, there will be only tension in the region. However if both Pakistan and India think that settling the problems between them will usher in an era of development and progress they are only partially right. No doubt both the countries have tremendous resources by themselves but there is need for the

are important, and particularly for India which has border with at least four of the South Asian countries and dominates the sea lanes of the two others, when we talk in terms of regional harmony, major countries must assume their responsibility towards the relatively less developed ones. "Economic emancipation of the masses" is the slogan that we must proclaim, and not in rhetoric only but in fact and deed, and all over South Asia. At the moment percentage-wise

Pakistan, an ostrich-like attitude that the problems of the other countries of South Asia is not their business, and if they keep their heads down, the problem will simply go away. My fear is that this policy of benign dismissal will harden perceptions in countries like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, albeit in varying degrees. This will be counter-productive in fostering regional unity, as time passes by this may develop from envy to absolute hatred.

SAARC is given more than lip-service by all the leaders of South Asia, no doubt some real progress has been made in many sectors. However far more is required. After China, South Asia is population-wise the biggest possible economic (and possibly political) unit in the world. It is true that it has many diverse cultures, however South Asians are far more alike than European (or the races in ASEAN) countries. If concerted efforts are made now, it is quite possible that before the mid of the 21st century we may be an extremely vibrant economic entity. For that we will not only have to live and domain South Asia but think South Asian in everything that we do. And that is not important only for economic reasons but the most important need of all, a lasting peace for one of the most needy peoples in the world.

nal affairs altogether. He must have been $\protect\$ region to be fully integrated so that the

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AS I SEE IT

Shivshankar Menon as its High Commissioner in Pakistan. Very well liked in Pakistan, he has been surfing with confidence through a remarkable and extraordinary period in Indo-Pak

When businessmen host any function for visiting delegations the composition of the guest-list does not matter, the agenda does. In their case the primary concern is, always business and economic reasons supercedes everything else, foreign policy taking a backseat. Somebody is interested in caustic soda. another talks about denim cloth, yet

happy to get away from the politics of Islamabad, and its ramifications. When this scribe ventured into foreign policy realm by commenting that there is a strong perception within South Asia, particularly Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, that the Pakistan-India dialogue will be confined to a bi-lateral relationship within South Asia in exclusion to everything else, and asked what the two governments would be doing to address this perception, the reply was stock-indiplomat trade, "I will make a note of it" And that was the end of that, a sharp, swift dismissal for a subject that is anothema to

economic and political benefits are distributed in some fair equitable ratio and there is social harmony in all South Asian countries. By leaving populationheavy countries like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka out of the economic loop, we are only creating a poverty gap that will inculcate conditions of social anarchy, this cannot be contained within artificial borders; the search for economic means will certainly cross international boundaries. Will Pakistan and India build fences a la Israel to keep out the resultant upheaval?

While solving bi-lateral problems

both India and Pakistan have less people below the poverty line than the others, even then these run into hundreds of millions. Moreover the gap between the haves and the have-nots in these two countries is widening. There is a need to pool all resources and skills, harmonise the infrastructure, dovetailing them wherever for possible reasons of economy so that maximum of the masses can benefit from the pooled availability. This includes food and water, communications, electricity, gas, medical facilities,

political analyst and columnist

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

weeks to carry out a study over the

On e-mail which I think are worthy to share with religion is the thing -- what else can both the teacher and student commu

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.

Why local mastans?

If you look at the society now-a-days you will come to see that the uneducated, Dhandabaj people are in charge of the society. Particularly annoying are the local ward commissioners of both the BNP and the Awami League. What is their role? Who are they? The honest answer is that they are surely not the envisaged ones. They have local mastans working under them and often they allegedly grasp other's property. A ward commissioner who is not as much educated or skilled has crores of taka and power. How can people like you who are educated not see that this system of having ward commissioners who are often trouble some needs to be changed?

Moazzem Hossain On e-mail

Micro finance It has been my experience to go to the

northern region of Bangladesh and see the ongoing plight of the poor people there. I was at Hatibandha of Lalmonirhat district for couple of

imnact of 'micro finance' -- the very familiar term in the world of NGOs. From September to November people's mobility in this region becomes paralysed because of the lack of any income generating sources. Here people's economy are agriculture based, which is fluctuated with seasonal options. Harvesting season can only minimise the poor people's sufferings for the time being. Before harvesting poor people, specially women and children, and single headed aged people's households become vulnerable and sometimes, their lives surrendered to poverty. It is all about the poor people's misery and fate in the northern part of this country. So what can our civil society, rich people, NGOs and government do? They do not show any lack of sympathy Members of the civil society do

from their respective positions. prescribe to the government and NGOs to do something for helpless people. As per the suggestion, government carries out VGF programme and

NGOs provide help like micro finance. micro credit to the 'hardcore poor', 'ultra poor', 'extreme poor' and so on as they label it. Joint efforts from government and NGOs to eradicate poverty in that region should have been no doubt a permanent solution for the ill-fated people. But the fact of the matter is, this effort till date couldn't yield any positive result so that the poor people can say goodbye to pov-We all know government's VGF

project is not any permanent solution but NGOs' mission, vision and target are completely different there. They speak about the income generation process of the poor people and try to make them well off from the existing situation. But from the grassroots level what does the poor people say about the NGOs' activities? Who are the extreme, hardcore or ultra poor, how do they define that? Do the actual poor people get help from the micro finance business organisations? There are so

I had few observations out there,

the readers. The local poor people there complain about the NGOs that they provide loan at high interest rate which is not much helpful for overcoming their economic hardship rather it often makes things worse. Poor people say that they had to be pay their loan with even 36%-40% interest rate over tune but they did get little interest from their savings. In this process the poor people's capital invested and the interest goes to the

Awami League and secu-

I appreciate Mr. Hanif's proposal to amend one of the mottos (secularism) of Awami League (AL). As a proud Bangladeshi Hindu, I welcome this change. Mr. Hanif's proposal will change the word only and not the principle as long as it will be practiced fairly and squarely. The freedom of

one ask? He also mentioned the word secular often twisted in the villages where almost all of them are illiterate or under educated. This costs AL valuable votes. Well, 50 years from now when the citizens of our country will be truly educated, AL will get a chance to amend the motto again and start using the word Secular. Until then, freedom of religion will do the job. **Bidyut Sarkar**

Los Angeles, USA

Ban on smoking In response to Mr. Shaikh A. Askar's

letter (DS 3/0/05) about ban on smoking, I would like to share my experience with him.

While I walk to and from my destinations, I find that smokers have become mobile. I wonder as to who will venture/volunteer to become unsmart for abiding by the laws since violation in each year. many aspects of our life has become a

Thomas Gomes Bhura

Some benefits for senior

Whilst convalescing in a Bangkok hospital following a major operation, I have been reading interesting news about Thai Prime Minister's policy decisions about his countrymen. I am simply amazed and impressed especially with Tax Break for the elderly. The cabinet on 27th September approved a tax measure that would exempt more elderly folks from paying income tax. The threshold for income tax payments by people aged 65 and over had been raised to Bht 379,000 pe

Elderly earning less than that will not have to pay income tax. The measure is retroactive to January 1st. To be eligible for the waiver, people must live in the Kingdom for at least 180 days

The Cabinet resolution means that elderly with a monthly income of Bht 31.600 or less will no longer have to pay

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

The Tax Break was one of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's elec-

tion campaign promises.

May I appeal to our Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to seriously consider a similar move in respect of our elderly citizens, who have worked all their life for the country in various capacities and paid their income tax honestly? I feel the elderly members of the population deserve this special consideration from our Prime Minis-

Rasul Nizam

Indecent behaviour by teacher

I am following with distress the news items on above subject (DS: 3/10/05).

A teacher's indecent behaviour with his female student in JU is reflective of his sick mind and unless dealt with seriously may do more harm to pointed out (DS: 2/10/05) that a teacher should be an ideal person at least in dealing with his students; any deviation in this respect must not be A similar case of sexual harassment

nity. The guardians have correctly

of a student by a teacher was reported in BUET a couple of years back. The convicted teacher was barred from taking classes for five years. Though the punishment of the teacher was just a token considering the nature of offence, still it helped restore the academic environment of BUET. If the JU authority wants to save the culprit teacher they should at least consider a similar line of action (as that of BUET) after careful investigation

However, the authorities must also

remember that these types of teachers are nuisance for an institution.

Manipuripara, Dhaka