matter. Because, the design of the

religious extremists is not merely to

tarnish the image of the country,

they plan to convert the political

structure of the country, something

a lot more difficult to put right than

LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA THURSDAY OCTOBER 13, 2005

# Judicial independence and HRC still elusive

Failure to set these up has proved costly

T is now admitted on all hands that in its four years of tenure the BNP-led coalition government has failed to separate the judiciary from the executive and form the Human Rights Commission (HRC). In both cases, we stand out in the region, albeit in the negative sense, for not having taken the two fundamental steps, believed to be logical corollaries to any democratic set-up.

The absence of these two fundamental elements in our system is a palpable fact, whether the law minister admits it or not. It has been claimed that the process of freeing the judiciary from executive control and establishing a HRC is on. And the law minister has committed himself to completing the process in one year's time.

Insofar as the separation of the judiciary is concerned, the government sought and received more than 20 timeextensions to implement the 12-point directive of the High Court. The number itself suggests that the element of procrastination in accomplishing the crucially important task has always been there.

Where is it stuck up now? A judicial service commission has been set up and it has appointed 25 assistant judges with 140 others being under the process of recruitment, as against the requirement of at least 600 judicial officials to replace the traditional magistracy. Draft rules made for the judicial service are now before the Supreme Court, it is understood. The law minister contends that separation of the judiciary from the executive entails radical changes in the Code of Criminal Procedure. Well, the question is, why the step couldn't be taken beforehand to save the day for the judiciary? Clearly, the dilatory process still continues. And, could one be faulted for doubting that the task might well not be completed during the present government's

The job of setting up the Human Rights Commission has not made any headway either. A committee was constituted in 2003 to report on its formation; but now, at the fag-end of the government's tenure, we learn that a draft bill for enacting the necessary law is under consideration of the cabinet committee.

The two lapses on the part of the government have proved to be rather costly. Had the HRC been formed even at the beginning of the second half of the government's tenure, there would have been a check-and-balance on the tendencies towards infringement of fundamental rights such as the extra-judicial  $killings, euphemistically \, called\, 'cross-fire'\, deaths, epitomised.$ 

### Option before BNP

Beware of the extremist malcontent

ELIGION has always been an important factor in the social and political culture of the entire sub-continent. Bangladesh, too, has had its share of religion in its politics and political management. But now it makes one sit up and take note with some undisguised trepidation.

Regrettably, both the Awami League and BNP, to the detriment of their own parties have toyed with Jamaat. But, the AL, to its credit, de-linked itself from the party early in the day whereas the BNP brought it to the government and opened up avenues for the latter to cash in on it and promote its party agenda. This has reverberated as something of a shift on the part of BNP from its original centrist policy as laid down by President Ziaur Rahman, to a farright orientation.

A review of events relating to the series of bombing incidents particularly during the past several months do point a finger at BNP's main coalition partner having links with perpetrators as evidenced by confessional statements made by some of those arrested in connection with the blasts. However, one sees an attempt on the part of BNP leadership not to recognise the growing evidence of Jamaat's links to terrorism, come what may. We thus believe and are of the conviction that the time has come for BNP to take a clear and firm stand on the issue both for the sake of the party and the nation at large.

Our concern has been further heightened by the statement made by one of the top JMB leaders, Hannan regarding the tacit assurances he received from some key BNP leaders of his full protection. Rightly or wrongly, this has also raised some serious questions in the minds of the people about BNP's sincerity in dealing with rising incidences of religious extremism.

If Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia meant what she said in her address to the nation, then her options are clear: she has to punish those in her coalition involved in terrorist acts

Any further loss of time will jeopardise not only the future of BNP, but also the future of the entire nation.

# It is time to declare Jihad



SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN ndc, psc (Retd)

ES, It is time to declare Jihad. And while saying this I am fully aware of the position of my tongue in relation to my cheek.

And this must be declared immediately, against those that go about endangering the lives of the innocents in the name of establishing Islam in the country, calling their activities Jihad. It is against these people, a tiny minority whom the majority does not see eye to eye with, that we must declare Jihad against. I see no reason why these people should be allowed to go about both misinterpreting the teachings of Islam and making the rest of us suffer by their acts that are neither sanctioned by Islam nor compelled by any political or religious compulsions in Bangladesh.

There can be no disagreement that this is the time and these are the people that we as a nation must stand up to and thwart. It is the only natural thing to do in the face of the so-called Jihad that this minuscule minority has indulged in. And it is disheartening to see the abject inaction of the majority of Muslims

scholars and Ulemas in this respect. Are what these so-called Jihadists

saying, in conformity with the teachings of Islam? How does one justify their threat: "You will be executed if you do not stop arresting our men and celebration of puja. You are our Muslim brothers, so do not arrest our men to protect the non-Muslims," contained in a letter sent to journalist by post by these groups? Can a true Muslim spread communal hatred? This is bigotry in the

more important respect. There was very little that the seminar came out with that has not been a part of the current Islamic and international discourse on the above mentioned subjects. While most of the informed Muslims are aware of the position of the religion on this issue, what one expects of these seminars and of the religious scholars are suggestions for concrete actions that would be able to counter the extremists. Merely condemning them cannot absolve

consideration and deserves our support. Warped ideas must be  $countered\ with\ enlightened\ exeges is$ of the scriptures, but first of all, people and institutions that are exploited to disseminate convoluted ideas, and persons exploiting the same, must be identified and sapped of their potential to create chaos and wreak havoc on the nation.

Happily at last, the issue has caught the imagination of our political leaders. The Prime Minister's (PM) reference to terrorism in her

Bangladesh. The reasons that the PM offers for its growth is perhaps a gross generalisation of the reason for escalation of terrorism in the world, but are they applicable to what we witness in Bangladesh today?

Almost all of the several hundred arrested so far are anything but indigents. There is no cultural or religious repression that they can offer as an excuse for their actions. Poverty is a hobbyhorse that we hear being tendered as a cause for the growth of terrorism worldwide.

the country's image. Moreover, to suggest that the extremists' acts are designed to scare people off is looking at it in a narrow and simplistic manner. Their plan is to gradually create conditions that will compel the public to lose faith in the government's ability to provide them with security, and make it appear helpless.

It must also be understood that it is not only the party in power that the extremists are after; their objective is to dislodge the political system through violent means, misusing the name of Islam. And addressing "bomb-terrorism" only will narrow the focus of the law enforcing agencies. Bombs are merely an expedient, which might graduate into more violent and destructive forms should we fail to arrest these extremists now.

However, we can take some comfort in the PM's assertion that the government has been able to get to the bottom of the matter and that the masterminds behind the extremists have been identified. It our hope that their identities will be made public and they would be arrested sooner rather than later.

To that end there is no alternative

However, we can take some comfort in the PM's assertion that the government has been able to get to the bottom of the matter and that the masterminds behind the extremist's have been identified. It our hope that their identities will be made public and they would be arrested sooner rather than later. To that end there is no alternative but to move on a war footing.

vilest form, which has no place in Islam. And those who countenance it are equally as guilty as those who

There has been much dilation and explanation on the position of Islam on this. Considerable time has been spent around the world and in Bangladesh too, in organising seminars on extremism and Islam, and in efforts to highlight the 'the true face' of Islam to the rest of the world, an effort that gives the impression of the majority of the Muslims avoiding the issue rather than facing it headon, if not altogether being apologists for the extremists

In this regard one recalls such an international seminar held recently in Dhaka. While it brought out eminently the teachings of Islam and its position on terrorism and jihad, it us of our responsibility to address the matter that has had the most profound effect on the Muslims in particular. Absence of specifics and lack of direction is disappointing, as rhetoric and little substance are.

While it is not the intention to dilate on the various aspects of Jihad as ordained in the Quran and expounded by the Prophet of Islam, it is indeed sanctioned under certain ronment. Does such an environment exist in our country? After all, what is the religious and political ideology of these so-called Jihadists? Who is their enemy? The government, the state, the man on the street?

That is why the government's intention to counter these radicals through motivation programs merits that the government has acknowledged the threat, apart from accepting the failures of the relevant agencies in anticipating the perpetrators of the recent bombings, although the existence of religious extremists has not been directly admitted. However, the government's resolve, as expressed by the PM, to root out "bomb-terrorism" is very welcome. But the tendency to gloss over the matter of religious extremism and underestimate its harmful potential is very evident in her remarks.

broadcast to the nation is signifi-

cant. It is perhaps for the first time

One is not certain whether her reference to the proliferation of terrorist acts worldwide, notwithstanding US claims, is designed to placate the home audience or merely to justify its germination in

ills, but whether that alone is responsible for expansion of the terrorists' fold demands more detailed study. We must therefore consider the reasons that are germane to Bangladesh to root out extremism of any form from our soil. One cannot also help but notice, in what the PM said regarding the recent bombings, a subtle attempt to fall back on the conspiracy theory. And, more surprisingly, it appears

that the government is going at a

tangent in analysing the aims and

may, one suspects, stunt the current

efforts to get to the bottom of the

Studies indicate quite to the con-

trary. None of the suicide-bombers

of 9/11 came from poor background;

in fact they were well placed in life.

Lack of education is a cause of many

but to move on a war footing.

The author is Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, The

# Disaster time



IKRAM SEHGAL writes from Karachi

AST Saturday catastrophe came to Pakistan, the country was not prepared for it! Calamities always come as an unpleasant surprise. At 8.55 am on Saturday October 8

the region from Kabul in the west to New Delhi in the east was severely rocked. Cities as far away as Dhaka felt some tremors, the shocks went on until 9:05 am. Epicentred 95 kms northeast of Islamabad, the most powerful earthquake to hit this region in a 100 years was recorded at 7.6 on the Richter Scale, the main focus of death and destruction targeting northern Pakistan in a wide swath from Peshawar to Azad Kashmir. Media attention riveted the first morning on rescue efforts directed at the two collapsed blocks of "Margalla Towers" in Islamabad's posh F-10 sector, diverting attention from the massive human and material devastation in Azad Kashmir, Kaghan and Kohistan valleys till hours later. With electricity and telephone lines down, reports about a greater disaster in the mountains came in patches, eg 30 percent houses collapsed in Mansehra, 60 percent in Muzaffarabad, 80 percent in Rawalakot and Balakot, etc. entire villages perched on the hillsides disappearing in mudslides. In the next 24 hours, 40 aftershocks (of

which only 17-18 were perceptible) added to the panic.

Beginning Saturday afternoon, bad news starting coming in droves from all over and kept coming, from Peshawar, Mansehra, Garhi Habibullah, Abbottabad and even Lahore, etc. Widespread devastation was reported from Kaghan, Shinkiari, Shangla, Batal, Gul Mera, Ughi, Naran, and other places not commonplace for the public. Give the government (or rather the Pakisupplies is almost totally dependant upon helicopters. Limited by numbers in coping with the magnitude of the devastation, army aviation helicopters did magnificent work, keeping the relief momentum going. Our MI-8s and MI-17s are not enough to cope with such a catastrophe. As a former helicopter pilot (Alouette-3) with extensive mountain area casualty evacuation and forward dumping experience in personnel) from Azad Kashmir, Azad Kashmir, Northern Areas and Kashan and Kohistan valleys lost

Relations (ISPR) initially confirmed 18.000 dead and over 41,000 injured. on sides of the mountains, and the timing (about 9 am) during Ramazan, one fears that this will be revised upwards many times over, it could well be beyond 60,000 dead, a mind-boggling 90,000 to 100,000, even more. Almost all my company employees (security and courier

disaster areas and many hospitals. The "Disaster Relief Cell" in the PM's house will certainly do good, but will it be enough? The challenge is to create organisation from haphazard, disjointed effort, to create clean orderly flow-lines from chaos. The tough mountain terrain means the best cannot be good enough

The need is to set up a permanent Disaster Management Organisation. the US has its FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency). Call it

must be earmarked, carrying only vitally necessary equipment to avoid being over-burdened. Civilian personnel to supervise and administer relief efforts, medical staff, communications personnel, engineers with heavy earth-moving equipment and cranes, as well as containerised communication units must be clearly earmarked. "Disaster Mobilisation Plans" as well as "Disaster Relief Plans" for each area have to be coordinated and dovetailed with Provincial and Federal Plans. Sufficient Reserve Funds, activated only during an emergency, must be kept aside." This is not nuclear science, it is simple commonsense!

The disaster relief must be kept

disaster relief and law and order

apolitical, to quote: "The command structure should flow directly from the President, a permanent Crisis Management Agency being established under the Chairman Joint Services Committee (CJSC) for effective coordination of ground, air and naval resources in support of the effort of the civil administration. The Ministry of Finance must devise an Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to address post-disaster issues. People will be without jobs. without food and shelter, their children will be without schools. continuing medical care will be needed and rehabilitation thereof, etc, etc. The short, medium and long-term economic consequences and remedial measures thereof have to be worked out, each disaster will

Are we in Pakistan up to it or will

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a

# AS I SEE IT

Let's provide disaster relief and restore basic services of electricity, water, etc, we can discuss shortcomings later. No government can really plan for the worst. The first few days are always chaotic and haphazard. Give the government credit at least for mobilising relief swiftly. Pervez Musharraf led from the front, showing the way by visiting nearly all disaster areas and many hospitals.

stan army) credit. From a standing helicopter fleet to carry out extensive reconnaissance of the area for damage estimation, providing quick relief wherever possible. The silver lining was the presence of the army, itself losing over 200 dead and 400 injured, all over the mountains and valleys of Kashmir, engaged in intensive relief work within hours, providing helicopters, engineers, doctors, manpower, etc. For many of those trapped under the debris of collapsing houses it may have been The critical Karokoram Highway

(KKH) remains blocked due to landslides in many places along its entire 600 kms length. So is the main road to Muzaffarabad. However some alternate roads have been cleared, evacuating casualties to nearest hospitals and providing

Sinkiang Province of China, my start, the army provided the core of heart goes out for the helicopter rushing home to Muzaffarabad on with it. Quoting my article "Coping the relief mechanism. Supported by crews. Chopper flying in such condihearing about the sad demise of his With Disaster" written only a month PAF, the army mobilised its entire — tions takes its toll. The wear and tear on the helicopter and crews must be monitored closely, they will push themselves beyond normal endurance limits, they should not write cheques neither their body nor their equipment can cash. But I say this with pride that in the face of this catastrophe our "eagles" will not listen and I salute them for it! During cyclone relief operations in East Pakistan in 1970 (when only two MI-8s and two Alouette-3s took the load), then Col (later Maj Gen) Nasirullah Khan Babar pushed us (and himself) to extreme limits. He and Maj (later Brig) Tirmizi put in as many flying hours as any of us during the day, then attended daily "Relief Coordination Conferences' till late at night!

Maj Gen Shaukat Sultan, Director General (DG) Inter Services Public

some loved ones, my driver Ashraf anything else here but let's get on mother. Col (Retd) Qayyum, our ago to the day on September 8 after with whom I could only get through on October 11 lost 9 in his immediate vicinity, 3 of his children were buried under the debris but survived. Throughout the mountains, this human tragedy will be played out from town to town, entire villages have disappeared. A blinding thunderstorm the same night made the roads impossible and turned the rubble into mudslides Let's provide disaster relief and

restore basic services of electricity, ings later. No government can really plan for the worst. The first few days are always chaotic and haphazard. Give the government credit at least for mobilising relief swiftly. Pervez Musharraf led from the front, showing the way by visiting nearly all

EDITOR TO

Hurricane "Katrina" had hit the US: "Whether it comes with a warning or is a surprise, coping with any kind of disaster, whether natural or manmade, does not differ in essentials. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are common for both. First and foremost we must pre-position supplies, particularly potable water. meals ready to eat (MRE), medical requisites, blankets, tents, etc. One may include containerised field ambulance units ready to match up with earmarked doctors. For mass evacuation, vehicles must be earmarked as well as possible destinations. Flooding being commonplace in most disasters, collapsible flatbottom boats with outboard motors and submersible generators and pumps should also be stored. Lightly armed troops trained to handle both

the politics of exploiting tragedy?

have different dynamics.'

TO THE EDITOR

#### TO THE EDITOR TO TO THE

# 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.

#### **Earthquake in** send out funds and relief material to **Pakistan** I was still in Bangkok waiting to go

greatly shocked to hear that on Saturday, 8th October 2005, Pakistan was badly battered by an earthquake of a great magnitude, unprecedented in the history of the country. This earthquake has done colossal damage to life and property. I understand over 40,000 people have died so far. The government sources indicate Remember, we are not quite free that the casualties may rise further.

home after my treatment, when I was

Kashmir have been devastated. President Musharraf has mobilised the army to cope with the situation but the General is badly handicapped as they do not have enough military helicopters to go and collect victims in the mountainous area, where heavy damage has taken place as a result of the earthquake. President Musharraf has made an appeal to all his countrymen overseas to

Places like Balakot, Mansera, Paki-

stani side of Kashmir and Indian

help him in facing the situation at this grave hour of crisis. He has also appealed to all friendly countries, and I understand, Turkey, Japan, Saudi Arabia, UK and India have already sent some relief teams.

Finally, I also make an appeal to all Bangladeshis, and organisations like Rotary, Lion, Inner Wheel, and Zonta to arrange quick help in cash and kind and send the same to President Musharraf's relief fund.

from this menace as Bangladesh is also situated in the earthquake zone. So let us not forget our brothers and sisters who are in distress in Pakistan Rasul Nizam

On e-mail

#### Drive against unscrupulous business The recent drive to check adultera-

tion of food has been hailed by all and sundry. Such practices are tantamount to mass murder and should be dealt with new, stricter laws and tough enforcement. More importantly, similar drives should be in place for other products and businesses which have a direct impact on health.

For example, pharmaceutical products, other healthcare products and cosmetics should also come within the purview of the drive. We don't know the extent of hazardous chemicals or carcinogens used in these socalled healthcare products and toiletries manufactured locally, and particularly in medicines where accurate dosage and shelf life are very critical for effective action.

There should be adequate and proper monitoring of manufacturing standards by recognised and independent groups of experts from time to time. Such surveillance would definitely help reveal the unethical practices, who knows, even among the most reputed companies. Shawkat Haider

On e-mail

## Ban Jamaat

The remarks made by our politicians are very annoying. Our country's security was in jeopardy following the Aug. 17 attacks and the most recent bombings in Laxmipur and Chittagong. The government has been denying the presence of any Islamic extremist group in the country for the last four years. Still, threats from that particular group of people prompted the government to ban the IMB and arrest Dr. Galib. However, the government is certainly not giving its 100% as it failed to nab Bangla Bhai and Abdur Rahman. The intelligence agencies fear that more bombs will hit our country, and isn't it the right time for the government to handle the matter with some seriousness? The arrest of Mufti Hannan came to spotlight as he disclosed the names of some highups. Every other day we read in the newspapers that the Jamaat is somehow involved with these criminals.

Wit the election coming close, I think it is the right time for the BNP to

get out of the Jamaat trap. It is time to ban the Jamaat from politics. **Arafat Islam** 

## **Earthquake** preparedness

After the devastating earthquake in Pakistan on 08-Oct, one of the DS readers have rightly said about our country, "... Every time following an earthquake there are seminars where expert opinions are expressed but after that everything goes silent ..." So, what will it really take for us to quickly start and keep building up on precautionary, rescue and recovery plans/measures? Or will we just resign ourselves to fate and chance?

# "Hindu extremism"

Bangladeshi Hindus is another example of bigotry that still persists in the minds of some Bangladeshis. Bangladeshi Hindus have to show

Mr. Mujib's blanket statement about

total loyalty to their country and government even though they are marginalised and discriminated in all spheres of Bangladeshi life. Now these marginalised citizens have to protest against BSF and Indian Hindu parties to show that they are truly Bangladeshi. Apparently, some Hindus did protest (according to Mr. S Nath, Daily Star, 10/12/05) during Babri Mosque demolition but that was not enough and that did not change their situation.

I must say I am deeply troubled by this kind of lecture from people who do not have any idea how difficult it is to be a Bangladeshi minority. If we could get the real scoop of

BDR-BSF fighting along the border, we should be able to take a stand. But, as of now, only information

that we have is the BDR version of the events with no independent agency verifying the facts. We can't question BDR version because that would be unpatriotic. Mr. Mujib should know that border tensions are intentionally created and used by both countries to score political points.

These border guards are merely pawns of the governments and they serve their masters. Mr. Mujib can think what he pleases but as a responsible citizen, I would not give a free pass to any government or authority with non-verifiable facts.

With regard to Hindu fundamentalists of India, Indian democratic institutions are strong enough to withstand their activities. Pluralism and secularism are in work whether Mr. Mujib wants see it or not. It may not be perfect but Indians are at least trying to keep religion out of politics. Needless to say there is a Sikh and a Muslim right at the top of that democracy!

It is sad that we have not made much progress after all these years of independence. We are still treated as foreigners in our own country. The idea of crossing the border to become a refugee in a foreign land is not very attractive and not a good option for minorities!

Dev Boston University, US

## Recreation allowance

At present all government employees

get a recreation allowance equivalent to one month's salary after every three years but a few officers on contract service are not allowed this allowance even after three years of contract service, which is totally unfair, unjust and illogical. If regular employees are entitled to this privilege what is the logic of depriving the officers on contract after completion of three years. Obviously, the number of such officers is very few. Hence the financial involvement is very

I appeal to the Ministry of Finance to look into the matter and allow officers who are on contract service for at least three years to draw recreation allowance.

Momtaz Jahan Fulbari, Sylhet

we resort to what we normally do,