

Banning of Harkat

But more needs to be done

WE welcome the ban on the Harkat-ul Jihad (HUJI). It has come not a moment too soon; in fact one wonders why it did not come sooner when the government had specific account of its operation in the country in 2003?

We feel merely banning these organisations is not enough. We have seen how some such already outlawed outfits did succeed in spreading their tentacles and influence across under changed names in reincarnated forms. And we saw this reflected in the events of 17th August and afterwards. We will not be remiss in suggesting that there may be few more radical and extremist organisations in Bangladesh that the government must put out of action.

However, this is the necessary first step only. This must be relentlessly followed up by several more actions. First, all efforts must be undertaken to extirpate these organisations from their roots. Going after the brains behind these groups, netting not only the activists and grassroots level workers but also their leadership, particularly those that provide it with ideological and moral sustenance, is of urgent need. Their sponsors, both internal and external must also be identified, and their financial sources cut off for good. The government must understand that terrorism is like a hydra-headed monster, which cannot be exterminated if all its heads are not cut off at one go. Otherwise, the phenomenon will be subdued but only temporarily, to reappear later at some opportune moment.

Secondly, simultaneously, there is the need to launch a vigorous public awareness campaign to expose the hollowness of their philosophy, which, contrary to what they are trying to propagate, has nothing to do with the essence of Islam, nor is their movement a political agenda. The gullible must be made to understand that these extremists are merely exploiting religion only to gain political mileage. In fact they deserve no better treatment than what they are, wily conspirators using their guile to deceive people. They cannot be venerated only because they resort to religion as a vehicle for fulfilling their political aspirations.

Regrettably, some of these elements could germinate only because of the leeway they were provided by sponsorship from within the administration. One would like to think the latest ban is indicative of the government's resolve to stamp out ideological terrorism from our soil for good, which must be demonstrated by its action on ground.

Far too many rickshaws

The traffic snarl extremely debilitating

AT any given point in time, unlicensed rickshaws must be outstripping authorised ones by a ratio of at least 3 to 1. But now, well into the month of Ramadan, and with the Eid a fortnight or so away, rural drifters among the poorest of poor are filing into Dhaka city in quest of a job on the manual three wheeler. It is thus that the current ratio between legal and illegal rickshaws must easily be 4:1, if not more.

There are 79,616 legally licensed rickshaws in the city, whereas when challenged, any of the 3 to 4 lakh unauthorised rickshawpullers will be able to show some licence plates or papers on demand, all of which obviously are fake. The Daily Star a few years ago ran a series of investigative stories revealing that licence plates were being issued and auctioned out to any comer, not by a single authority but by multiple associations and quarters with a finger on the pie. The rackets are politically connected; and, it's only when things go too far that scores of illegally operating rickshaws will be hauled up by the police on to requisitioned trucks to be eventually dumped somewhere. There will be some deterrent effect on their unauthorised plying but as soon as the dusts settled the unlicensed rickshaws will reappear with vengeance and in an inflated strength, the police by and large turning a blind eye.

Making a mockery of any regulatory effort on the part of the traffic police authority, even the so-called rickshaw-free streets are swarming with the manual three-wheelers. Who must account for this?

The whole system of licensing is rotten to the core and unless it is thoroughly overhauled with a clear-cut stipulation about the allowable number of rickshaws, they will just proliferate like locusts bringing public mobility to a virtual halt. The big need is for a single oversight and enforcement authority to take the place of a non-governing entity.

Boasting about our leaders being women

DR. ABDULLAH A. DEWAN

IN the USA and elsewhere, there are some people who brag about of our two leaders being women. Facts, however, would turn such ostentatious boasting into a vanity -- a personification of vainglory. Sir Edmund Spenser in "The Faerie Queene", calls them braggadocios. The braggers contend that Bangladesh (an overwhelming Muslim and male dominated society) is planet earth's only democratic country where two women becoming the PM and the OL are no small a feat.

The PM and OL being women do not raise the country's image a bit. If that would be case then we might as well offer all ministerial and diplomatic positions to women and make the country a fairy land of "Women's Kingdom". Our women are as gifted as our men. Therefore, to brag about our leaders being women manifests some sexist overtones. We are certainly proud that they broke the seemingly impregnable oddities of religious hypocrites, social prejudices, and above all, male chauvinisms.

In 1960 Sirivamo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka became the world's first female Premier and in 1974 Isabel Perón of Argentina became the first woman President. In 1999, Sweden became the first country to have more female ministers than male (11 women and 9 men). Among the 191 UN member states and some outside ones, there are 5 female Presidents and six Prime Ministers.

The 5 female Presidents: Finland (Tarja Halonen, lawyer), Ireland (Mary McAleese, lawyer), Latvia (Vaira Vike-Freiberga, Ph.D. Psychologist), The Philippines (Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Ph.D. Economics) and Sri Lanka (Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, M.A. Pol. Science).

The six Prime Ministers: Bangladesh (Khaleda Zia, HSC), New Zealand (Helen Clark, M.A. Economics), Mozambique (Luisa Dias Diogo, M.A. Economics), Ukraine (Yuliya Tymoshenko, Ph.D in economics) and São Tomé e Príncipe (Maria do Carmo Silveira, advanced degree in economics). In October 2005, Angela Merkel (Ph.D in Physics) became the first woman Chancellor of Germany. All foreign leaders have served their country in cabinet or top policy making

positions for many years prior to being elevated to the highest seat of state power.

It was the political expediency of the respective party, not the indispensability of their leadership for the country, which dragged them into politics; one lost a famous father and other lost a husband -- both were Presidents when assassinated. Khaleda's high jump from being a housewife to country's Prime Minister is indeed a meteoric rise. In addition to father-daughter dynamics, Hasina has some early experience with

Blema Steinberg (Ref. :Political Psychology, Vol. 22, 2001) examined if birth order, sex of siblings, and parent-child dynamics have any pattern in accession to leadership positions. She found strong evidence that first-born male are overrepresented as compared with later-born siblings.

Two other hypotheses tested also confirm that first-born women, like first-born men, are overrepresented among political leaders; that first-born women are overrepresented among female political leaders as compared

impress too many people that she is politically a savor vivre and an astute leader. She had all the prerequisites for accession to the position of a great leader but her straight talking blunt manner and lack of confidence on close associates (although, for good reasons) became her Achilles' heel.

We have to believe that both ladies are smarter than the people who surround them. This observation is based on the notion that the "Shepard must be smarter than the sheep". Unfortunately, their pretensions of "not

concomitant inefficiency are the reasons why in an UN report presented at the UN meetings on September 14-16, 2005 (attended by the PM and other world leaders), Bangladesh has achieved fifth worst ranking (only next to Ethiopia, Rwanda, Niger and Madagascar) in failing to reduce poverty alleviation. The progression of poverty alleviation at 0.52 percent well below the target of 2.2 per cent may simply be a natural growth unrelated to any government initiatives.

Corruption germinates from

10 percent of landowners hold 50 percent of the land, and 40 percent of small farmers own just 2 percent of arableland.

Reflecting their frustrations about the country's degradations even the BNP's grassroots leaders in their October 15-16 meetings made very poignant accusations about the party's gaudy bosses. Some of the accusations are: "If the ministers and the lawmakers eat up everything, what will be left for the other leaders and workers?" "The ministers will leave the country if the party fails to win the next election, but we will have to stay and face the adverse situation." "Our ministers and senior leaders are too busy with their own affairs. They must rid themselves of such tendency." (DS, October 17).

The continued worsening of social, economic and rule of law coupled with BNP's flirting with religious extremists in a political alliance has transformed a moderate country into a menacing playground of fundamentalists' movements culminating in the August 17 nationwide synchronised bomb explosions of a surreal cinema vérité.

It is impossible to know whether the country would have been better off if the two leaders were both men instead. The irony is that since independence the party in power literally has put the government up for sale in a stretch of cronyism with sale and purchase of political favours. All the chief executives of the country have encircled themselves with squarely incompetent, utterly dishonest, and shallowly educated political appointees who paved personal interest ahead of country's interest whilst the leaders gave a deaf ear, a blind eye, and a tacit acquiescence.

A fair question to ask now, "Is the country and the people are better off to-day than 14 years ago when the two women became leaders". If the answer is yes, then you may join the braggadocios wherever they are. And for the rest of us, we are proud at all times to be the children of an ever-green landscape of ravines and rivers regardless of the ruptures and ravages our politicians have been inflicting on it.

Dr Abdullah A Dewan is Professor of economics, Eastern Michigan University, USA.

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student politics. Much to her credit, she served as parliamentary member prior to becoming the opposition leader in the House and then Prime Minister in 1996.

A country's leader does not need to have a university degree, although advanced education is an asset beyond measure. But the position of leadership requires impeccable mental capacity and an indomitable desire to acquire skills to synthesise why leaders --

Need the knowledge and understanding of the functions of political leaderships, major duties in public service, and limitations of a position of leadership in a democracy, and ethical dilemmas that routinely confront political leaders;

Must have respect for the rights of others, ability to work with others, reliability or dependability, courage, honesty, ability to be fair, willingness to acquire leadership knowledge and skills;

Must appreciate the role of "opposition", the role of media, and the voices of dissent. Should hold regular press conferences and make governance as transparent as possible.

Put the interests of the people ahead of personal and party interest;

Must not behave incoherently once their roles are switched from PM to OL and vice-versa;

Leadership attributes are genetically disposed but can be harnessed through education and experience.



The country wants them to engage in a dialogue, bridge the gap, and reconcile.



with their numbers in a larger sample population; and that fewer female political leaders have an older brother than would be expected to occur in a larger sample population.

Steinberg's study on parent-daughter dynamics suggests a possible explanation for the success of women who achieve senior-level positions of political power. These findings are consistent with Hasina's political background while Khaleda's (who is neither a first born, nor the daughter of a political leader) accession to leadership would not, in all likelihood, have happened, if her husband was not assassinated.

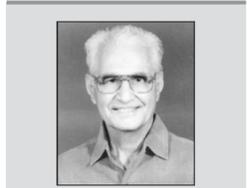
With a university degree, years of political grooming, and father-daughter dynamics, Hasina did not

seeing what every one else sees" and "not hearing what every one else hears" has caused a worldwide concern for Bangladesh becoming a "failed state".

Among the glaring statistics, Bangladesh has been ranked (in parenthesis) world's most corrupt country with Human Development Index (139) and Growth Competitiveness Index (110) among the lowest matching only the poorest African nations. Failed State Index ranking of 17 (Pakistan 28, Malaysia 74, India 76), is within the top 20 riskiest countries.

Sustained scoring of lowest Corruption Index alone is enough to divulge everything else inside out; all other indices and statistics simply reinforce where the country is heading. Economists view corruptions and the

Appearance and reality



M B NAQVI writes from Karachi

LOCAL government elections have been completed. The real victor is the Army Chief Pervez Musharraf, who also runs the country. Parties loyal to him have won. The MMA has put up a fairly good show in NWFP and so did Baloch and Pushtoon nationalists in Balochistan, Punjab, the heartland, is securely Musharraf's; opposition parties have been crushed. In Sindh PML(Q), PML(F), and MQM are victorious, though MMA has some presence in Karachi.

What conclusions flow? First, Musharraf's political architecture looks stronger. The PPP seemingly has been eliminated; it failed to win even Larkana. At face value, both PML(N) and Benazir's PPP have become irrelevant. But is this the final verdict?

These elections conform to the pattern of 2002. We can expect that the 2007 elections are likely to be similar. Indeed, the October 6 elections were a trial run for the 2007 event, which is why the question recurs: how credible were these polls? All the opposition, some in King's party and MMA have accused the establishment of wide-scale rigging. Official comment is tart: every loser in Pakistan always alleges rigging. There is some truth in it but, in this case, the allegations do ring a bell. While predisposition to make this

charge exists, charges traded and factional fights inside the PML(Q) and the knowledgeable's opinion, point to these elections being more 'managed' than the 2002 ones. Facts or details are scarce. But some techniques of rigging have been detailed by opposition leaders. The credibility of these elections is thus near zero.

A military dictator has his compulsions. He holds an election to gain credibility and hopes to prolong his rule. He cannot afford to lose. His own

elections. Citizens tend to give up on democracy. The cynicism makes people ask questions: What is the point of it all? Why waste one's time? It is always the General's nominees who win. Who can defeat them? Why not care about one's own security and interests. Actually politics as such becomes discredited. If this goes on long enough, and another process begins.

It does not operate in clear-cut stages. The stages overlap and often

the wasting disease of the state. To Pakistan's west, Afghanistan is engulfed in similar troubles. Let's be careful.

The alienated always intone that there is no hope. Pakistan cannot be an exception to nature's law. It will survive as it is -- no better and no worse. No political improvement is likely. But it can get a lot worse. This underlines the disconnect between the individual and state. Such persons would not die for the state, no matter what the government claims. But the state had better

PLAIN WORDS
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constituency will rebel. He has to 'manage' the elections to yield "positive results." Like a politician, he cannot safely go home after losing. He has to fear the Constitution's Article 6 once he goes home. Thus he cannot risk handing over power to winners. Once a General takes over, he has to stick it out, come what may. However, change is the law of nature.

Lack of legitimacy undermines credibility of all dictators. Gen. Musharraf too lacks legitimacy and credibility. Unfree elections are useless for him but not for the people. These help identify the politicians who support the military dictator, collaborating politicians need to be recognized by voters. That should guide them in future. For rulers unfree elections are dangerous. Why?

A miasma of cynicism follows unfree

dovetail. In some cases, cynicism quickly graduates into alienation. In others it takes time. But continuation of cynicism over time does lead to alienation with the state. It originates in disbelief in the possibility of improving things. People give up on the state that it will perpetually remain under Army control. This giving up on the state has terrible consequences. Such states where most people are alienated collapse.

Look around the region. There is Nepal. Obviously, unless the King hands over power, the whole state will melt down. A civil war is raging; nobody appears to be in control. The outlook is uncertain. Over many parts of India, the Naxalites constitute a negation of Indian state. In both cases it is alienation that produces insurgents. The scale of Naxalite rebellion underlines

survive. Collapse or disintegration of a state is a terrible upheaval. It is best avoided. But that can only be if it provides legitimate governance that inspires confidence.

Many in Pakistan are already becoming alienated. The process is decades old. There are incipient rebellions in distinctive parts and by identified groups. There are attacks in Waziristan and other Pushtoon areas in Punjab, Sindh (sabotage) and Balochistan. These are at an initial stage. They can still be stopped if the government wishes to deal politically with them and attend to their grievances. Insensitivity toward them makes people angry and they become ready to do the unthinkable. The instincts of this government are crudely militaristic and violent. Its knee-jerk reaction is to resort to military action or other hard suppress-

sion. This is not the way to solve deep-seated political grievances. But as many have noted, the government is unchangeable and its characteristics are likely to persist. Who will be surprised if things get worse in coming days?

In NWFP the danger comes from Islamic extremism and a new religious Pushtoon nationalism. Over time, Pakistan has become a huge terrorism-producing factory. Only, religious extremism has acquired a tinge of

These extremist groups believe that an Islamic Revolution is coming. Whether or not they want to conquer the world, they certainly want to overthrow pro-western regimes in Muslim countries to be replaced with Taliban-like governments. That spells regression and the death of the democratic progress. What is the Musharraf regime doing about it?

Islamabad increases security at places of worship, particularly those belonging to Shias and Ahmadis, after every outbreak of sectarian attack. Adding to the number of constables at various points is not fighting the menace. It is a feeble attempt to treat symptoms. The need is to politically attack the problem's roots. There is, of course, no cut and dried formula for it. But permitting genuinely free politics can gradually shrink the space terrorists occupy today. The parties that have supposedly been defeated but retain popular appeal hold the key: PPP and PML(N). Let them be allowed to contest politics freely. Let all subjects be raised and openly debated and discussed in a free atmosphere. It would require the end of the army's stranglehold over Pakistan politics. Instead it is continuing to tighten its grip over the country. The opponents are in disarray. The eventual price will be paid by the welfare and safety of an alienated populace.

An opportunity has been provided by reaction to the October 8 earthquake among Pakistanis. The sense of solidarity they have felt for sufferers and their readiness to help show what may still be possible; a resuscitation of hope and a consequent commitment to do what it takes to remake their political life.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

OPINION

BNP-JI entente: Signs of crack emerging?

ABMS ZAHUR

LIKE any other military dictator Ziaur Rahman established a political party to meet the challenge of the then most powerful political party the Awami League. At that time it was not political ideology but expediency which was more critical to face AL politically. Such development proved to be a boon for the most organised Islamists' party the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). Both BNP and the JI needed each other for their growth and development in Bangladesh. JI never believed in independence of Bangladesh with Indian help whereas Zia was a highly valued freedom fighter. JI fights for Islamic rule and Islamic brand of democracy. On the other hand, Zia, though a soldier, believed in multi-party democracy. He never thought of making Bangladesh anything beyond a

moderate Muslim country. Thus Jamaat remained a strange bed fellow of BNP from the beginning. Despite this anomaly it has to be accepted that systematically and gradually the Jamaat leaders could increase their influence over a substantial part of BNP and an appreciable part of bureaucracy. This was evident in repeated failures to control Islamist militants like Bangla Bhai or Sheikh Abdul Rahman till today.

It appears that some of the senior members of BNP overestimated the political strength of AL, though it is a highly accepted truth that an opponent must not be underestimated. It is not clear to our common people as to why AL became so successful in the then national election of 1970. How much the failure of the then federal government of Pakistan to manage the problem of relief and rehabilitation of

the cyclone (tidal bore) affected people of the then East Pakistan was responsible for development of hatred toward central government of Pakistan and how much the people of the then East Pakistan really wanted a separate independent state. The fact appears to be a successful exploitation of growing anti-Pakistan sentiment of the common people by AL.

One of the major blunders of the then AL was raising the expectation of the common people who were encouraged to dream about flow of milk and honey on attaining independence. Thus the common men were totally frustrated from the suffering caused by a war destroyed economy and the famine of 1974. Another serious mistake was to claim full credit for themselves on attaining independence. They should have thanked all the people of

Bangladesh. Without people's cooperation and sacrifice AL could never achieve anything. Failure to control the greed of some of the AL leaders and activists tarnished the image of the party. Somehow the AL gave impression to the knowledgeable public that the party was more interested in imposing their rule or its ideology than to redress the suffering of the people. In fact what was necessary was all out effort to consolidate the gain i.e. independence. Lack of foresight and overwhelming desire to control everything (press and politics particularly) resulted in almost total loss of sympathy or sense of cooperation among the commonmen. This in fact led to the tragedy of Aug 15, 1975 other way round.

The rise of Jamaat-e-Islami after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib is not

surprising because of the following factors:

(a) Majority of the commonmen in Bangladesh believe in separate identity of being Muslims. AL's attempt to narrow down the cultural difference between the Muslims and the Hindus might have been disliked by many. How can they totally forget that they fought for a separate homeland for Muslims in India between 1906 and 1946?

(b) Being much older in existence (since 1920) and broader in its area of activity Jamaat is more organised than any other political party (except ML, 1906) in Bangladesh;

(c) The policy of suppression of JI by the AL was perhaps not looked upon by many as desirable;

(d) Failure of AL regime to handle the problems arisen immediately after independence confused the people,

and

e) The then Pakistan government could convince the Muslim states of the Middle East that the people of Bangladesh were not true Muslims and were influenced by the Hindus. As such it was easy for JI to publicise them as the only true Muslims of Bangladesh. In fact JI is still closer to some Middle Eastern states than any other political party of Bangladesh.

In politics compromise and adjustment may not be considered as much unethical. There is absolutely no doubt about the philosophy of Ziaur Rahman. He firmly believed in the independence of Bangladesh. On the other hand JI never believe in independent and secular Bangladesh. Though JI preach about equality of men and encourage women even in war their definition of democratic order is different from the

western concept. He do not believe women as equal to men. Even their concept of development is different from western concept.

We do not suggest that those who believe in establishing Islamic rule may be barred from politics. That would be undemocratic. But they must not be allowed to conduct terrorism, intimidation, destruction etc to establish rule or capture power. It is time for BNP to take the misdeeds of Islamic militants very seriously ignoring their importance as BNP's vote bank. As they claim to be the largest party which believes in establishing Bangladesh as a moderate Muslim country, we hope that they do not make a grievous mistake to push the country to a 'failed state'. To improve the image of the country, to attract more foreign investment, to have women into the mainstream of development, to play

more important role in international arena and to realise the dream of Zia to make Bangladesh a multi-party democratic state BNP will have to be tough with the fundamentalists. Let BNP be dominated by the democratic forces and true freedom fighters.

Jamaat is trying hard to divert the attention of the investigating force through their repeated denial of involvement in bomb blasts in the country. The senior BNP leaders, we are sure, have taken due note of the warning from Jamaat chief. Without wasting much time in deliberation BNP should consider changing the election strategy if necessary. In the long run the BNP will certainly be benefited. They need not be unduly concerned at the emerging signs of crack in the entente with Jamaat.

ABMS Zahur is a retired Joint Secretary.