

Regional resolve needed to banish terrorism

ANM NURUL HAQUE

THE terrorists have struck again and this time in the heart of New Delhi. A series of powerful blasts rocked the Indian capital on October 29, killing at least 65 people and leaving more than two hundred injured. Most of those killed or injured in the blasts were common people out shopping in the biggest Hindu and Muslim festivals Diwali and Eid-ul-Fitr. Three nearly simultaneous blasts tore through a bus and two crowded markets. The previously little known Islamic Revolutionary Group, believed to have ties to a hard-line militant group fighting Indian rule in Kashmir, claimed responsibility for the blasts. This was a continuing manifestation of a continued program chalked out by Islamist ideologists who believe they must establish Islamic dominance where large Muslim population live, includes South Asia. The blasts came a little more than two weeks after the US embassy in New Delhi issued a public warning about possible terrorist attacks in the Indian capital and other cities including suicide bombings.

Some 500 bombs exploded nearly simultaneously in 63 districts of Bangladesh on August 17, killing two persons and injuring more than 300 people. Bombs exploded at 28 well secured points in the capital city including Prime Minister's office, Secretariat, Supreme Court and Judge Court. The Islamist militants again hit on the courts stoking further fear that has already engulfed the nation. Five serial bomb blasts at the courts in Chandpur, Laxmipur and Chittagong occurred on October 3, leaving two people dead and 38 others, including a district judge and a police injured. Two perpetrators held from the Chandpur blast site and one from Laxmipur said Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh

(JMB), which has been blamed for the August 17 serial bomb blasts, assigned them to carry out the attacks. Having patronage from the powerful, both from inside and outside of the country, a new breed of religious extremists have gradually emerged in Bangladesh and made their existence strong enough to pose threat to state security.

The Daily Star in its investigation reports entitled Inside the Militant Groups published profiles of as many as seven militant groups.

Islamist outfits have thrived a strong network with other terrorist groups in South Asia to carry out their nefarious designs.

Whatever may be the definition of terrorism, it is no doubt a setback for all the Saarc countries toward peace and prosperity, and regional resolve is needed to banish terrorism. The Saarc Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism was signed in Kathmandu in November 1987 during the third Saarc summit and came into force on August 22 fol-

lowing ratification by all member countries. The convention provides a regional focus to many established principles of international law in this respect. Under its provisions, member countries are committed to extradite or prosecute alleged terrorists thus preventing them from enjoying safe heavens. The Saarc Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD) was established in Colombo to compare, analyse, and disseminate information about the terrorists, their tactics, strategies and methods. Efforts must be taken for further strengthening STOMD to banish terrorism in South Asia.

The government of Bangladesh for making foolproof security during the forthcoming Saarc summit has ordered the law enforcing agencies to stay on high alert in the border areas in a bid to resist the entry of most wanted 128 terrorists of six Saarc countries into Bangladesh. The intelligence agencies of Bangladesh have already identified some extremist groups of the Saarc countries. These are United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), Self Defence United Front of South East Himalaya, Tehrik-e-Pakistan, Millat-I-Islam, Jamaat-ud-Dawa, Laskar-e-Taiyeba, Muttahida, Majlis-e-Amal, Maoist guerilla and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE). A decision of sending photographs and bio-data of the top listed 128 terrorists of these extremist groups in the Saarc countries has also been taken.

national scrutiny over the Delhi bomb blasts, with the UN Security Council passed a strongly worded statement asking member states to cooperate with India in bringing terrorists to justice. New Delhi has publicly accused Islamabad of not acting against terrorism directed at India. The madrassas in Pakistan have been accused of being breeding grounds for Islamist militants and came under the spotlight after it emerged that at least two of the bombers may have visited a madrasa in Pakistan before the July

again demonstrated its resolve to fight terrorism and root out this menace from Pakistan and the region." The Additional Protocol to the Saarc Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism was signed by the member states in the 12th Saarc summit held in Islamabad in January 2004. All the member countries have so far ratified the additional protocol, except Nepal. This ratification came amidst assertions from India pointing involvement of militant outfits from Pakistan in the serial blasts of October 29 in New Delhi.

Terrorism is growing apace across the world. Many countries including US, UK, Indonesia, Spain, Libya, Egypt, Sri-Lanka, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh have had to witness the ugliest face of terrorism, and the list goes on and on. The brutal killing of innocent people in New York, Madrid, Karachi, Colombo, Kathmandu, Dhaka, Bali Island, London, Egypt, and most recently in New Delhi, has revealed that terrorism is a common enemy to all human beings. More than 27,000 people including 9,000 innocent civilians have been killed in India by the terrorists in the last five years. But the irony is that a handful of people under the guise of being Muslims are engaged in terrorism that only serves to defame the Islamic faith. Only depraved individuals with perverted beliefs could commit crimes of such enormity. As terrorism is growing apace, the millions of people in the South Asian region will obviously wait to see the kind of strategies to contain regional terrorism is adopted at the Dhaka Saarc summit.

ANM Nurul Haque is a banker.

A bright face of Bangladesh Shamima's success one of many awaiting recognitions

SHAMIMA, once a poor woman from a remote village in Satkhira district, has done her bit to brighten the image of the country. She has been adjudged the most creative small entrepreneur in a world-wide competition organised by the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF). Shamima is now attending a special ceremony organised for the small entrepreneurs at the UN headquarters in New York.

The success story of the enterprising woman should convince us that poverty is not an irreversible phenomenon, and also that the right kind of ventures can change the lots of the poor in a very perceptible way. Shamima had started with a paltry amount of money, but is now a proud owner of an establishment where 20 people are employed.

The achievements of Shamima are significant for a number of reasons. It is an example of what a rural woman can achieve if she gets the necessary financial support. Integration of women in the development process is a goal that economists attach great importance to, and nothing can be more effective in this respect than creation of self employment opportunities for the rural women. In Shamima's case, it worked wonders and for others it will at least ensure a reasonably decent life.

It is welcome news that at least 50 per cent of the rural poor have been brought under the micro-credit programmes in the country. If this trend continues, poverty alleviation will not remain an elusive goal for us in the coming years.

Shamima has demonstrated commendable innovativeness and the ability to diversify her businesses. This could be an object lesson for the small entrepreneurs looking for a breakthrough in their respective fields.

The recognition that Shamima has won from the UNCDF is also a recognition of the tremendous contribution that women are making to our national economy. There is no doubt that the target of economic emancipation of the masses cannot be achieved until things change for the better at the grassroots level. Shamima is a symbol of hope for the millions of poor struggling to ward off the challenge of poverty. She has shown the path.

Raped schoolgirl takes own life

No protection for the most vulnerable

EID celebrations in the village of Sreepur in Durgapur upazila were marred by the suicide of class ten student, Nazma Khatun. Nazma felt that she had no recourse but to take her own life following her rape by a local man and subsequent inability to receive justice either through the police, the courts, or local arbitration.

This tragedy, which is only the latest in a steady string of such incidents, underlines the difficulty that rape victims have in bringing their violators to justice and receiving their day in court.

It has been reported that Nazma's family repeatedly attempted to file a complaint with the local police station, but were denied. Subsequently, her father filed a case under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, but no one has been arrested pursuant to this.

The local villagers have held four arbitrations since the rape in August, but none have delivered justice. An arbitration held on September 3 ordered the rapist to pay a fine of Tk 40,000, but the money, though handed over to the local OC on October 1, was never passed on to Nazma's family.

Compounding Nazma's misery was the fact that she in addition to being raped, over the past few months she has had to suffer beatings, threats, and humiliation from the hands of other villagers.

This terrible story serves as a textbook case for what is wrong with our legal system and society, and shows how to this day neither the law nor society is sufficiently attentive to the needs of those who are most vulnerable.

The fact is that Nazma was failed by both the formal and informal legal systems, both of which are utterly insensitive and corrupted to deal with such cases. Even worse is the fact that, as a rape victim, she was forced to suffer ostracisation and humiliation in her community, and that shame and stigma were attached to her when she fell victim to another's lust.

This is a challenge the authorities and the society as a whole must take up. Police officials and courts need to be responsive and functional so that people can receive justice, and the guilty are not able to buy their way out of trouble due to their wealth or their connections. The very first duty of the government is to provide security and justice for its people. The law, in practice as well as on paper, must put more value on protecting women, their rights, and their dignity.

Kashmir needs help, not politics



KULDEEP NAYYAR
writes from New Delhi

I was in Parliament House when the terrorists struck last time at Delhi, some four years ago. Not familiar with the building, they could not find the entrance. Still they killed three security guards till they were shot dead.

We, the MPs of different political parties as well as independent members, felt so angry against Pakistan, which allegedly trained and harboured the militants, that both the houses, the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, insisted on the government taking some action. The then BJP-headed government rushed the armed forces to the border where they stayed put for nearly two years, confronting the Pakistan army, eyeball to eyeball.

This time, after the blasts in Delhi, India's response made more sense. No soldier was moved to the border. No protest was lodged with Islamabad. The fallout was taken in its stride. The Indian team which was at Islamabad during the blasts to finalise the points of entry at the Line of Control (LoC) was instructed to accept Pakistan's demand for five and not to persist with India's stand of three.

The Manmohan Singh govern-

ment appreciated the fact that more entry points would facilitate relief and rehabilitation of the earthquake victims on both sides of Kashmir. Many in Pakistan feared that the Indian team would go back. President General Musharraf himself thought that New Delhi would "haggle" over the number of entry points. So much so, he told Khaled Almeena, Editor-in-Chief

est relations with Pakistan and jointly pursue efforts for the economic development of the region.

Indeed, it was a bold decision by the Indian Prime Minister to agree to five entry points when the dead bodies were piling up in Delhi following the bomb blasts and when public opinion in India felt outraged after it had responded generously to the loss

Pakistan, if not from Pakistan itself. This is the reason why Manmohan Singh was at pains to tell Musharraf on the phone that there were "external linkages" of terrorist groups, clearly telling Pakistan to put its house in order. The same point has been emphasised by the UN and the US. The response by the Pakistan foreign office was cliché-ridden. The spokesman said: "Unless

get it. India would be embarrassed if it did not cooperate.

Islamabad cannot just dismiss the religious aspect, "the jihad spirit," which seems to animate militant Islamic groups and even al-Qaeda. Kabul has complained about it and New Delhi has pointed its finger at it. There is no doubt about the terrorists operating from the Pakistani soil despite its claim that it has banned such

tries are in the midst of relief and rehabilitation, Musharraf's observation in his interview that there was an opportunity to move on the political front makes little sense. Where is the time? Where is the congenial atmosphere? Where is the focused attention it requires? Both governments are busy finding shelter for thousands of people who are still living under the open sky. However necessary the talks on Kashmir may be, this is not an opportune time. Politics, quarrelsome by nature, may spoil whatever goodwill has been built so far between the two countries.

All our attention should be focused on the rehabilitation at this stage and I wish it could be done jointly, not only at the official level but also at the NGO level. The Delhi blasts have already lessened the enthusiasm among the ordinary Indians who have been sending material and money directly or through the Pakistan High Commission. Pakistan has to take into consideration India's sensitivities. Blasts on the one hand and the revival of violence in Kashmir on the other have poured cold water over India's eagerness to participate.

Even if the two countries were to join hands wholeheartedly, their efforts may fall short of the daunting task that they are facing. Finding shelter, food, clothes and medicines for lakhs of people is not an easy job. According to the UN estimate, tens of thousands of people might die. How odd sounds the voice for a political discussion on Kashmir amidst the cries for help and succour?

Kuldeep Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

All our attention should be focused on the rehabilitation at this stage and I wish it could be done jointly, not only at the official level but also at the NGO level. The Delhi blasts have already lessened the enthusiasm among the ordinary Indians who have been sending material and money directly or through the Pakistan High Commission. Pakistan has to take into consideration India's sensitivities. Blasts on the one hand and the revival of violence in Kashmir on the other have poured cold water over India's eagerness to participate.

of Arab News, published from Saudi Arabia, one day before the agreement that:

"Tomorrow you will see for yourself what is happening -- whether we are haggling or they are haggling." Musharraf turned out to be wrong because he did not anticipate Manmohan Singh's anxiety not to disturb in any way the growing cooperation that was developing between the two countries after the natural calamity. Even otherwise, Islamabad has failed to appreciate the depth of India's feelings to befriend Pakistan. People to people contact has helped change the mood and the usual tension has disappeared. Manmohan Singh has reportedly told Musharraf more than once that India wants to have the clos-

est relations with Pakistan and jointly pursue efforts for the economic development of the region.

in Pakistan. (New Delhi has allocated \$25 million for the quake victims). Manmohan Singh stood by his words that the process of conciliation with Pakistan was "irreversible."

they (India) share the evidence with us, it remains a mere claim which we cannot accept."

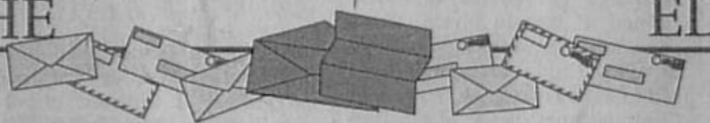
Musharraf was more forthcoming in an earlier statement: Pakistan was ready to join India in the probe into the attack and offered total and unequivocal support. Why couldn't the spokesman repeat what Musharraf had said? Even if India's allegation was a "claim," it should not have been rejected straightaway. It would have been better if Pakistan had announced the constitution of a commission headed by its Supreme Court judge to go into the charge of cross-border terrorism which India has alleged continuously. The proposed commission can invite New Delhi to provide evidence or even travel to Delhi to

organisations and taken strong action against them. Islamabad will have to come out with something in the form of a visible action to prove its innocence.

The pressure of religious parties, on which Musharraf depends, is understandable. But he cannot ride two horses at the same time. Whatever internal compulsions, he will have to close down militant camps, the addresses of which New Delhi has given. Their number may have come down. But even the operation of one camp arouses the suspicion that Islamabad wants to keep the option of such an alternative open if and when it wants to rebuild pressure on India.

At this time, when both coun-

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



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Price spiral and dwindling hopes

After spending four years at the citadel of power, the four party alliance government has forgotten the sufferings of the people who voted them to power. Inflation and high prices of essentials have made life of the general people truly miserable. A survey conducted recently shows that the price of essential commodities has increased by about 75%. The price of coarse rice has increased by 72%, flour 75%, Soya bean oil 71.09% green chili 90% etc. The government has no control over the market and it is because of thinking little for the people who actually shape their political destiny. It is noteworthy that the inflation rate was 1.66% during the fiscal year 2000-01, which now has become 7.35% in the fiscal year 2004-05.

The finance minister has failed to control the price hike of essentials. He boasts of remittances and foreign currency reserves but the general well being of people is a badly neglected area. In this critical juncture of price spiral and volatile economic situation our finance minister sometimes make mockery with the people, advising them take cabbage and cauliflower instead of rice, and at times he has been bitterly critical of our food habits.

Recently, the Bangladesh Bank has changed its policy in SLR & CRR to sooth the money market, that is, through these instruments the Bank will withdraw Tk 2,400 crore from the market which may help to decrease the inflation rate.

It is one side of the mirror. On the other side the government has decreased import duty on 3,000 items after the budget announce-

ment, which will expand the volume of money in the market through disbursement of loan for import. Obviously, it is a contradictory policy of the government. Finally, we want to say that if the government does not take any serious decision to control the market it will face a dire consequence in the next general election.

Siraj-Ud-Daulah
Sylhet

Might is not right!

The Sophists, much to the satisfaction of their supporters, held that justice was the interest of the stronger to which Plato objected and put up his classic arguments in the Republic. I recall the master thinker in reference to recent border conflicts between the two neighbours, India and

Bangladesh. Killing of Bangladeshi citizens by the BSF personnel all along the 4002kms of the borders has become such a routine sort of cruel mayhem that the propensity has to be finally checked without wasting any more time. This type of atrocity is unknown in the civilised world. In addition to the company and battalion level meetings, even the heads of the two forces met each other a number of times, but the net result turned out to be a zero.

Whenever the shooting and killing incidents take place, the Indians come up with some conventional explanations--some Bangladeshis tried to cut open the fence, some intruded into Indian territory with 'lethal' weapons like stones and 'da' (a small sharp instrument used to chop bamboo etc), some were smugglers or dacoits, some stepped beyond the

zero point and so forth. Besides killing, there are umpteen instances of dragging bodies inside the Indian territory and kidnapping. Whatever might be their version, it is permissible in the interest of humanity, international law and good neighbourliness to start shooting citizens of another country with the intention to kill? Off and on they are amassing troops, digging bunkers, rolling in heavy armaments. All these in the name of maintaining peace and stability in the region when India aspires to become a reckonable power in Asia?

Bangladesh is a small overcrowded country beset with problems on multiple fronts. It does not have the energy or desire to play border games with a mighty neighbour. India and Bangladesh are taking up joint ventures in many fields and even

some giant Indian enterprises are going to invest billions in this country. The people share a common heritage and culture and no sign of enmity ever existed between them. But the motive of the BSF is shrouded in foggy intentions. Do they find it more convenient to go on creating trouble on the fronts for their own interests? Do they act independently of the directives from the top? It is clear that the DG, BSF and the union government have till now failed to rein the BSF in and whack them back to the right track. It is time the Indian leaders had taken stern measures to stop the killing of innocent people in a neighbouring state.

The issue can perhaps be settled in three ways. A ministerial level joint enquiry committee may immediately be set up to go deep into the roots of the inci-

dents and put up recommendations; introduction of joint patrolling by troops from both sides; no order to shoot should ever be given by an officer below the rank of a Captain or his equivalent. This does not debar the patrol from arresting the offenders and handing them over to police.

I began with the Sophists and now end with Rousseau who said, since Might can produce no Right, the only foundation left for legitimate authority in human societies is Agreement. Consent and agreement are two basic conditions for peaceful living. I find no escape from the present situation except a firm workable agreement between the two countries at the top level, strictly prohibiting border mishaps and misunderstandings for the greater benefit of both the coun-

tries.
Md. Nawazish
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Shortage of teachers

There are 187 primary schools and community primary schools at Mouvibazar Sadar upazila. The upazila education officer and respective assistant upazila education officers are trying their best to ensure quality primary education. With their efforts, students' enrolment rate has increased and the rate of dropout has gone down. But the number of teachers in the schools is not adequate considering the number of students.

The education authorities should look into the matter and take necessary steps for the local schools to function smoothly.
Md. Fazlul Quader
Head Teacher
Kadirpur Govt. Primary School
Mouvibazar