

LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA WEDNES NOVEMBER 16, 2005

Only a BNP-AL united stand can stem the extremist tide

The message is loud and clear

VER the last several years the nation has seen bomb blasts at political and cultural functions resulting in many deaths; attempt on the life of the leader of the opposition in which 20 people were killed and more than 200 injured; an exforeign minister killed in a bomb blast; more than five hundred incidents of near-simultaneous bombings; and most recently, two senior assistant judges falling victim to bomb attack by religious extremists.

We urge upon the political parties to recognise the character of the more than 20 incidents of bombings since the Udichi blasts. Except for two or three, which could be attributed to political motivations, the rest indicate the religious and extremist orientation of the perpetrators.

The activities of the religious extremists have graduated to such a scale where the state institutions are now their targets. And the only way that this phenomenon can be tackled is thorough the unified action by the two major political parties of the country. We call upon the BNP and the AL to come together to meet the challenge, unitedly and steadfastly.

The BNP and the AL are both disposed towards a centrist policy with hardly any discernible difference in their social or economic philosophy at the macro level. They have demonstrated immensely their commitment to democracy, their inclination towards free market economy and foreign investment.

The two parties have also displayed their ability to move away from long held political positions; as we have seen of the AL, moving away from state control of the economy to private enterprises and of the BNP changing to a parliamentary, from the presidential form, of government

Regrettably, it is for the first time in our history that a religious party has been allowed to gain firm roots in national politics and hold their sway in the administration through a political alliance, thanks to the BNP. The grip of the religious party on our politics has been made even easier by the rivalry between the two major parties. The Jamaat has reaped political mileage because of the political space the BNP-AL conflict afforded it.

The important question is how can a united stand come about? It can happen only if the two realise the negative potential of the recent developments and rise above petty party interest for the sake of larger national interest. The understanding between the SDP and the CDU in Germany should be an example of how to forge understanding on vital national issues.

We are aware that in making such a call we run the risk of being misunderstood. The AL may think it a ploy to salvage the sinking BNP while the BNP may accuse us of trying to drive a wedge in the ruling coalition

This is a crucial moment in our national history, and the consequence of being misunderstood, and which we are willing to endure, is less than the failure to point out the grave crisis facing the nation, and the need for the political parties to sink their differences at this time of grave national crisis.

The two parties must rise to the need of the time. However, the first step in the direction must surely be taken by the BNP, being the party in power. The onus is on Begum Zia.

The nation waits with bated breath and great expectation to be delivered from the abyss that it might find itself in if our political leadership and politicians fail to act.

Dealing with Monga

Coordinated approach sorely missing

OW that the Saarc summit is over, the government must turn its attention squarely to the Monga affected people in the northern parts of the country. More so, when we did not address the crisis in time. Monga, the near famine situation that exists in as many as nine districts in the northern region of the country, is not a local problem, rather it is a national concern today. A comprehensive plan of action is needed instead of token seasonal distribution of food items and other kinds of handouts.

Dhaka SAARC Summit: An Assessment

realising the futility of animosity between them.

Second. in the Dhaka Declaration all heads of state/government have underscored the importance of cooperation in areas of economic, terrorism and poverty alleviation. There is a sense that the leaders have realised that they have not used SAARC's enormous potential to keep pace with a rapidly globalising world where speed and cooperative interactions within the region have become

the driving forces

observers.

partner.

Third, this is the first time that the

Summit leaders have welcomed

Afghanistan for membership and

agreed "in principle" with the desire of

Iapan and China to be associated as

The interest indicated by these

countries in SAARC demonstrates that

SAARC has been perceived as a

regional political architecture that has

passed the "teething period" and

would in time be instrumental as an

It is not often realised that China's

borders are only 100 kilometres from

Bangladesh across the Himalavas and

both Japan and China have an interest

in the stability and progress of South

Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz of

Pakistan welcomed "Afghanistan to

the SAARC family" and noted the

interest of China, "our friend and

neighbour" to be associated with

SAARC as an observer or dialogue

engine of growth for the region.

HARUN UR RASHID

Although some of the contents of the

Dhaka Declaration are motherhood

statements, like any other Summits, it

is considered a forward-looking and

ambitious statement, especially

underscoring realisation of the South

Asian economic union in a "phased

and planned manner" and for a

comprehensive review and reform of

all SAARC institutions and mecha-

The 13th Dhaka Summit was no

less momentous than the first Summit

in Dhaka in 1985, when SAARC was

founded. There was unusually

intense expectation by people at large

The question was: Would the

heads of state/government have the

courage and vision to impart a

"coramine" injection to the ailing

By all accounts, it appears the

Dhaka Summit on 12-13 November

will be remembered in SAARC's

history for three principal reasons,

First, the summit was held at a time

when relations between the two key

players -- India and Pakistan -- con-

tinue to be at their best terms with a

commitment to resolve all bilateral

issues including the Kashmir dispute.

The recent devastating earthquake

has consolidated their cooperation

of the outcome of the Dhaka Summit.

nisms.

SAARC?

amongothers

HE two-day SAARC Summit

ended on 13 November with

a 53-point Declaration.

if China is accorded an observer status, South Korea may also be considered as an observer as well

Realisation of challenges of the 21st century

Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, the new chairperson of SAARC, stated that the constraints of regional cooperation were due to the old mindsets and perceptions of the past and urged fellow leaders to take simultaneous actions in both political and economic fronts.

The statement makes a point that

close economic relationship is pro-

pelled by the prevailing close political

relations or by a desire to strengthen

political relations by resolving prickly

the SAARC leaders have recognised

that SAARC member-countries have

to face the challenge of globalisation

The process of globalisation is now

It is noted that the word

"globalisation" is used, rather than

the term "internationalisation". This

is because the term "international" is

founded on the old order based on

'nation-states', conceived by the 1648

The system has worn well for four

centuries but now it is wearing out.

Instead we are witnessing the erosion

the most important factor in world

to be relevant in world politics.

affairs and is not reversible

Westphalian Treaty

It seems that at the Dhaka Summit,

bilateral issues.

Lanka echoed the sentiment when she stated that the SAARC leaders should "move beyond the confines of conventional differences and be proactive and creative to maximise economic opportunities." She argued that SAFTA might pave the way for common market in the region.

Three themes dominated

Poverty alleviation was one of the themes that ran like a "golden thread" of all statements made by the leaders at the inaugural session of the SAARC

Summit. The Dhaka Declaration

makes the point of announcing 2006-

2015 as the SAARC Decade of Poverty

availability is that there is enough

food for every one in South Asia but a

shortage of money to pay for it.

The traditional statement of food

King Gyanendra of Nepal said : "As

trade has direct consequences for

poverty reduction efforts, we must

take adequate measures to ensure

that poverty reduction becomes the

renewed efforts for combating terror-

ism in the region. In the Dhaka Decla-

ration, the leaders have agreed that

terrorism "violates the fundamental

Singh of India in his inaugural address

urged all leaders for "zero tolerance"

on terrorism. That means govern-

Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan

On terrorism, the leaders have

outcome of a free trade regime."

values of the SAARC Charter".

killed more Muslims around the world than any other identifiable religious group

The difficulty is that, so long one government's terrorist is considered as another's freedom fighter, terrorism cannot be effectively fought. The lack of generally accepted definition helps explain the inconsistent pattern of government practice regarding terrorism.

Some political observers believe that poverty is the breeding ground of

terrorism because religious funda-

mentalists offer their twisted ideology

as a panacea for their suffering. Once

poverty is eliminated, much of ground

roots of terrorism will disappear.

Therefore there seems be a nexus

Another important dimension of

terrorism is that not all terrorist acts

are carried out by non-state actors.

There is state-terrorism as well. Stalin.

Hitler and Pol Pot ran terrorism with

has been carrying out state-terrorism

against them. If genuine political or

economic grievances are not

addressed, riots break out and gov-

ernments are bound to take harsh

actions against the rioters. That erupts

On economic integration of the

region, SAFTA (South Asia Free Trade

Agreement) could be the first step of

economic integration or economic

Although there remain three

union down the lane

a cycle of violence and leads to terror-

Palestinians may argue that Israel

between poverty and terrorism.

opponents of their regime.

such as, rules of origin, sensitive items list and revenue compensation mechanism for Least Developed Countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal), the leaders in the Declaration "stressed the importance of entry into force of the SAFTA Agreement" on 1st January, 2006

unresolved issues related to SAFTA

The Baily Star

In this context Prime Minister Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup of Bhutan termed SAFTA as a bright milestone in the history of SAARC. He further stated: " It is an opportune time to consolidate gains and make it more relevant for the common man."

Conclusion The momentum generated by the Summit has to be kept at a pace so that all ideas and actions enumerated in the Dhaka

The momentum generated by the Summit has to be kept at a pace so that all ideas and actions enumerated in the Dhaka Declaration are translated into reality. The Daily Star SAARC Special Supplement rightly titled it " From Words to Deeds" as pious statements are not enough but deeds must follow the words.

President Kumaratunga brought home the truth to the leaders that ' There is a public perception that our many achievements appear small against SARRC's enormous potential.

At present ASEAN, not SAARC, attracts all notice from big powers. It is not known whether any good will message has come from any of the world leaders for the success of the Dhaka Summit.

We all hope that the Dhaka Summit will provide a fillip to the muscle of SAARC so that the world leaders do take notice of the Summits of seven nations, representing onefifth of the world's population.

. Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh

Ambassador to the UN. Geneva

ments of all SAARC nations must be of national boundaries and the consistent in how they deal with reduced significance of national terrorism

BOTTOM LINE

Declaration are translated into reality. We all hope that the Dhaka Summit will provide a fillip to the muscle of SAARC so

Alleviation.

that the world leaders do take notice of the Summits of seven nations, representing one-fifth of the world's population.

The sad part is that terrorists have

Greasy deal and Natwar's stigma

governments.

seek an answer is whether Natwar Singh and the Congress profited from Iraq's Oil-for-Food programme allowed on humanitarian grounds. Saddam Hussein selected individuals and firms which purchased oil at less than the market price even though he added his commission to what the UN had fixed. Saddam reportedly earned \$1.6 billion. The Volcker Committee that looked into the deals has mentioned both Natwar Singh and the Congress as the beneficiaries in the

report. Whether or not it sent notices

to the two is irrelevant. All that is

required to be known is if Natwar

Singh and the Congress received the

The Manmohan Singh government

has done well in appointing a fact

finder in Varinder Daval, a former

bureaucrat, and a former Chief Justice

of India R.S. Pathak, one-man judicial

commission, to look into the entire

matter. Dayal will collect documents

and the related information, while

Pathak will give his verdict on the

involvement of Natwar Singh and the

known to Natwar Singh intimately. ers relevant. The ex-chief justice gives his verdict only on the basis of the

tarnished Natwar Singh continue in the government till then? He will be attending the meetings of the cabinet and its sub-committees. He will be participating in the discussion on highly secret subjects and may at times tilt the decision one way or the

Is this fair to the country which is above Natwar Singh and the Congress Party? If Natwar Singh's position as foreign minister was untenable, how material sifted by Dayal. There are no can it be tenable as a minister without BETWEEN THE LINES

amounts to pronouncing a verdict before the judicial commission has come to any conclusion. The Volcker report was not meant to substantiate the money which the beneficiaries received in the oil deal. The substantiating part begins now. Already there is smoke. The Enforcement Directorate has questioned Andaleeb Sehgal, a close friend of Natwar Singh's son, Jagat Singh, and proposes to question the latter. Sehgal is the owner of Hamdan Exports, the firm that is said

to have paid \$748,540 on behalf of

another firm Masefield AG which

lifted Iraqi oil allotted to Natwar Singh

Saddam's oil deals have always

been suspect in the eyes of the West. I

recall when I was India's High Com-

missioner to the UK in 1990 the then

foreign secretary Douglas Hurd called

me to his office. Britain suspected our

motives, as if by sending ships for

dispatch of food and medicine, we

were trying to help Saddam indirectly.

I found him unhappy over the then

foreign minister I.K. Gujral's state-

ment asking for "a negotiated settle-

ment" on Iraq and warning that the

and the Congress

"continuing tension in the Gulf region i s likelv to lead to further alienation of South

Asians. Although the subsequent pronouncement by India cleared the air, Hurd wanted me to explain our stand. I told him that our policy was to support the UN resolutions but at the same time we favoured a peaceful solution to the Kuwait problem.

Referring to our shipments, Hurd said there was enough food available in Kuwait and India's initiative might encourage Saddam Hussein. "I do not think that the supplies of food and medicines are anything but a humanitarian act," I said. "Medicine yes, but not food," was his reply. Everything depends on the UN



Daval may have been a good officer but he does not make the grade of eminent citizen who was supposed to be collecting the relevant facts. This task is subjective in nature. It will other. depend on the fact finder which document or information he consid-

Besides, the problem with food distribution through VGD and other avenues is the allegation that it has had political overtones, with the distribution often missing out on the needy.

Basically, the administration will have to make sure that the programmes of aid and other short-term benefits reach the actually affected. In order to achieve a compartively more sustainable solution, comprehensive crop-diversification programmes should be undertaken covering the areas known to have been most vulnerable to Monga. This will create off-season work opportunities.

Over the years our rural poor have also grown weary of unplanned crisis management; what they are looking for is not a dole but viable work opportunities. Programmes involving both the NGO community and the various relevant government agencies should be undertaken to keep people engaged in gainful activities round the year.

What is needed is not just a long-term strategic plan of action but one that is actually implemented within a compressed time-frame of a year or so.

Party, they are living in a fool's paradise. That America is imperialistic in its policies or that it is responsible for the Iraq war and its fallout may well be true

KULDIP NAYAR

writes from New Delhi

F by hurling abuses on America --

as some are doing -- and

believing that they can rub off the

stigma of Volcker Committee's

indictment of former Foreign Minister

K. Natwar Singh and his Congress

But how does the US come into the picture except that Paul Volcker who chaired the committee is an American? There were also other members on the committee. I hope the charge is not that President Bush told Volcker to indict Natwar Singh whose existence the latter did not know

Natwar Singh too before leaving his portfolio said to placate the Left that if a resolution was placed at the International Atomic Energy Commission (IAEC), his recommendation to the government would be to revise the vote. (India voted with America against Iran.) Because of such an irrelevant discussion, we are missing

Congress. Where the government has gone

money

The question to which we have to

the main point.

substantiating part begins now. Already there is smoke. The Enforcement Directorate has guestioned Andaleeb Sehgal, a close friend of Natwar Singh's son, Jagat Singh, and proposes to question the latter. Sehgal is the owner of Hamdan Exports, the firm that is said to have paid \$748,540 on behalf of another firm Masefield AG which lifted Iraqi oil allotted to Natwar Singh and the Congress.

The Volcker report was not meant to substantiate the money which the beneficiaries received in the oil deal. The

sanctions committee and I believe you are in touch with them," he said as a closing remark.

I took the opportunity to discuss the post-war scenario in the Gulf "Intertwined with the situation is the lack of democracy in the region," I said, "Arab leaders have to be acceptable to their people and there is no running away from free, fair elections.

In principle, Hurd did not disagree with me but wanted the matter to be left to the region itself. "Nothing should be imposed from outside," he said. "They have their own traditions." A few days later, I asked a senior British official whether some thing would be done to ensure the people's say in the area. He said: "You can't be serious. We have gone to safeguard oil, not democracy.'

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

Hirok Rajar Deshey: Ray's allegory comes true

RUBAIYAT HOSSAIN

HAKA had gone crazy over hosting the thirteenth annual Saarc Summit. Bangladesh's accomplishment in

hosting this summit seems to function as a vardstick to the current regime's success, given our late president Ziaur Rahman's pioneering role in initiating this regional cooperation. As a child, Saarc meant nothing more to me than watching a bunch of TV programs, extravagant parades, and big paintings of state officials going up all over the streets.

As a grown up adult the summit seemed to bring alive nothing short of Satyajit Ray's allegory of Hirok Rajar Deshey (In the Land of the Diamond King).

For those who have not seen the film, I shall summarize the story.

Hirok was a land blessed by the abundance of natural resources such as coal and diamonds. Hirok remained prosperous until the King became morally corrupt. Hiroker Raja

or the King of Hirok appointed a wizard to run experiments in the Jantar Mantar room until he discovered an unique machinery capable of

Mogoj Dholai or Brain Wash. The King composed different mantras, and installed them in the machine for different segments of the population.

For the students the King wrote: Jaanar Kono Shesh Nai, Jaanar Cheshta Breetha Tai (There is no end to learning, thus learning is pointless) or Lekha Pora Kore Jei, Oonahaar-e More Shei (Those who educate themselves will perish in hunger).

For the peasants he wrote: Bhor Pet Nao Khai, Raaj Kor Deeya Chai (Though you may go with an empty stomach, you must pay tax). Finally, for the entire population the King wrote a common mantra: Jai

Jaabe Jaak Praan, Hiroker Raja Bhogobaan! (We hail the King of Hirok even if we lose our lives!). Statecraft became that much easier in *Hirok* due to the clever usage of the

Mogoj Dholai machine, and the King decided to hold a conference with all

The four-party alliance is very similar to the happy engagement between the Jantar Mantar wizard and the egoistic King from Hirok Rajaar Deshey. However, the day seems far off when the mass people of Bangladesh will be able to brainwash the King back in joining hands with them to raise the slogan of Dori Dhore Maro Taan, Raja Hobey Khan Khan (Pull down the leash and the King will be in pieces) and in bringing down the ivory tower of power and greed that has been mounting up in our land.

the neighbouring heads of states to of their success story.

show off his success in reforming the country. So the preparations went on in *Hirok* for the conference, and it looked very similar to Dhaka preparing for the Saarc summit. Hiroker Raja or the King of Dia-

mond Land appointed his armed forces to push out of the city all the poor and hungry in ragged clothes into an area out of sight from the conference guests. Roads were cleared, schools dismissed, those not brain washed hunted down and killed or chased out of the city. *Hirok*, just like Dhaka, was being carefully constructed to depict exactly what the King wanted to hold up as the placard

Restricting the beggars from

certain zones, abruptly demanding people to stay confined in their homes, putting a curfew on people traveling into Dhaka city, pushing rickshawallahs to the margin, sealing off busy market places like Kawran Bazar, and closing down of major roads no doubt create a hindrance for our already struggling economy, especially for the working class, and small traders. Thousands of poor people had to go days without earning, especially as everyone rushes back into the city after the Eid holiday. The hunger and suffering of our people rendered invisible by the

flashy cars of our state officials, and the few glimmering roof tops of Dhaka city. The Saarc guests did not see the real Dhaka, but one that was carefully constructed. Moments like this, we are forced to notice the widening gap between the mass, and the elite in the already problematic landscape of

Nationalist politics during the British period, and the post 1947 development schemes of sovereign South Asian nations have been criticized by the contemporary historians of South Asia, especially those in West Bengal organizing under the banner of the Subaltern Studies Collective

South Asian nationalism.

with the philosophy of unraveling the active involvement in the nationalist politics of peasants, workers, women, and other marginalized groups.

As the Subaltern Studies Collective points out, nationalist politics is inherently problematic in South Asia, since it fails to acknowledge the contribution of the masses. The historians argue that the result of such elitist interpretation and operation of the nationalist movement ends in a historic failure of excluding the masses from the centre of nationalist politics, and subsequently from the contemporary development agendas. Recent historiography of South Asia, therefore, attempts to mitigate

the gap between the mass and the elite in intellectual terms, as the ideological gap between the mass and the elite is identified as one of the most prominent stumbling blocks in our current development process. However, in present day Bangladesh there is no noticeable effort, either in the intellectual arena or in the government programmes to bridge the gap between the elite and the masses. Moreover, our status quo is limiting the sky, and the preparation for the Saarc Summit stood as a monument of the ocean-wide gap growing between those in power and those

without it. If the Subaltern Studies Collective is to question the elitist involvement of leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, and Jinnah who literally traveled the length and breadth of South Asia, then what has to say about our recent leaders, who are in power just for the monetary gain of remaining in poli-

Partha Chatterjee wrote, in the case of South Asian nationalism, the

intellectuals led and the masses followed, but unfortunately in today's Bangladesh, not even the intellectuals like Gandhi, Jinnah, or Nehru are leading, but it is a group of emotionally and philosophically barren power-hungry, aggressive, and violent men and women who are leading, and some of us who are brainwashed are following, and others fleeing the country.

The four-party alliance is very similar to the happy engagement between the Jantar Mantar wizard and the egoistic King from Hirok Rajaar Deshey. However, the day seems far off when the mass people of Bangladesh will be able to brainwash the King back in joining hands with them to raise the slogan of Dori Dhore Maro Taan, Raja Hobey Khan Khan (Pull down the leash and the King will be in pieces) and in bringing down the ivory tower of power and greed that has been mounting up in our land.

Rubaiyat Hossain is a freelance contributor.

colourful portraits and flags, the

witnesses and none to be crossexamined. Even an iota of suspicion about the material collected can reduce the entire exercise to futility. The opposition is already voicing its doubts. An eminent person in place of Dayal would have shut the waging tongues

The Volcker Committee took 16 months to write a 620-page report. Even if the fact finder and the judicial inquiry take half that time -- both Dayal and Pathak have to go through the Saddam government's files on which the Vocker Committee based its report -- it means eight months. Let us say, at least six months. How can the

a minister who has been named in the report to be a cabinet member is, indeed, a compromise with high standards and values that a nation seeks to uphold. A statement here or an observation there does not absolve

Natwar Singh of his involvement. The Congress is unnecessarily exaggerating bits of information which some UN aide is dishing out. The Prime Minister should at least not say anything till Pathak's findings are available. By announcing that the allegation against Natwar Singh and the Congress is "unsubstantiated'

portfolio? The Congress has given it out as a compromise formula. Letting