

Terror strikes again

The nation must unite against the scourge

THE terrorists have struck again in Chittagong and Gazipur, killing nine people. And the target once again is the country's judiciary and their members. The graduation of the scale of attacks, that involved suicide bombers should not surprise us, given that the extremists have been threatening dire consequences since the August 17 bombings. What gives rise to our concern is the fact that such fanatics have germinated in our land, motivated enough to indulge in self-destruction.

One can question the inability of the administration to provide adequate security to the judiciary; the fact is that a determined suicide bomber is very difficult to stop. But that the alertness of the law enforcing agencies can prevent bigger carnage by anticipating a suicide bomber has been demonstrated at Chittagong.

We have been unable to get to the masterminds of these acts and that is what is worrying us. The government has its work cut out. There is a need to sensitise the people to the need to remain alert because these terrorists are living amongst us. The necessity to gear up human intelligence is of utmost importance, without which, neither can we seek out the roots, nor prevent repetition of these attacks

The obligation for cutting across party line to tackle the emergency is now. We have made several calls before and we do so once again. Putting their heads together is what the people demand of our political leaders. Differences must be set aside and the most vital questions of national security must be addressed urgently.

It's little comfort for those who have lost dear ones, but we repeat that we must not cave in to these perfidious monsters who want us to believe that they are Muslims trying to further the cause of Islam. Far from being either they are a slur on the Muslims.

There is also the requirement for the government to seek expertise, if needed, from abroad to fight the scourge, the vortex of which we are unfortunately thrust into. Failure to do so may see the country destined for the eventuality that some of our neighbours had been forced into.

Attuning to the changing times

C'wealth summitry leaves a positive impression

BY far the most significant resolve made at the lately-concluded Commonwealth Summit of 53 heads of government and state is to push for a global trade agreement at the mid-December WTO talks in Hong Kong as a vehicle for lifting millions out of poverty. In a strongly-worded statement, the leaders have urged the key players and negotiators for the Hong Kong round to secure a 'time bound commitment for substantial reduction in trade-distorting domestic support and significant improvements in the market access' for LDCs.

While looking up to a bigger event for resolution of long-standing differences in the trade approaches between the rich and the poorer countries impelled by unfinished trade negotiations over time, we believe, nevertheless, that charity begins at home; the relatively more powerful members of the Commonwealth will have to open up their markets even more to the less developed within the fold. The Commonwealth boasts G-8 members like Britain and Canada, let alone some major players in the economic groupings straddling the five continents where C'wealth is spread out.

Britain and Canada have stated that they could identify gaps in their economies where they can accept temporary migrants. Quite a few C'wealth countries with higher educational traditions have had the problem of brain drain depleting their human resource in the premium category, while the employment of unskilled and semiskilled people overseas is hugely benefiting the manpower exporting countries. In-between is the issue of illegal migration which can be avoided if the natural flow of labour is accepted in the same way that natural flow of capital is welcomed by the richer countries.

The decision to work for the elimination of all forms of export subsidy by 2010 commends itself for the huge potential it has to provide a level playing field to trade operators.

Last but not least, the leaders have committed themselves to tackling terrorism by addressing its 'subtle undercurrents' and concentrating on fostering inter-faith understanding among the member countries.

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

UNPRECEDENTED violent actions resorted to by the so-called religious extremists belonging to at least two outfits have now engaged the attention of every section of our society. Of all concerned that was and is affected by the mindless violence of the zealots, the government of the day does not appear as alert and proactive as desired in a democratic polity. A sudden spurt of activities by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the alleged gearing up of the agencies under its control has been made possible only after the mainstream judiciary has been the pathetic target of the perverse bigots.

It is unfortunate that doubts are still being nursed by many knowledgeable quarters that the government is not serious about fighting the so-called religious extremists because that might adversely affect its electoral prospects in the not too-distant election.

Resolve and appreciation

Whether in fighting or controlling or even containing the so-called religious extremism, the first step is to understand and appreciate the very prevalence of such elements in a given society and its pernicious effects on the way of life of the citizens. Unfortunately, in Bangladesh, we have been perilously late in awakening to the realities on ground. This is not to discredit anybody or apportion blame to any particular political party because the growth and muscle flexing of the obscurantist elements has not been limited to the tenure of one regime. Cumulative inaction of the regulatory authority resulting from a lack of appreciation by policy-

makers about the mindset and modus-operandi of the extremists has brought us to the present state of affairs.

We need to be clear and definite about the threat perception. This is crucial because one cannot possibly treat a disease by denying its very existence. So from vague generalities if one has to venture into meaningful specifics, one can not but make a pointed reference to our constitution. This is obvious because our constitution is still the way of life the citizens of

bulletin was spread throughout Bangladesh during the countrywide bombing of 17th August last.

The strategy

The constitutional position vis-a-vis the programme of the extremists leave no room for any ambiguity. While at the macro-level it may be a matter of political direction to sort out disagreements through dialogue and persuasion, the field-level operatives, both in uniform and plainclothes must have clear directives and plan of action for

There is a challenge to our way of life. This must be realised by the mainstream political parties who are pledge-bound to uphold, protect and preserve our constitution. Therefore, the visible enemy must be caught by the forelock and be dealt with under the law. A sovereign Republic born out of a historic struggle entailing epic human sacrifices demands that. We must not fail.

Bangladesh have chosen for themselves and the constitution remains the solemn expression of the will of the people and the supreme law of the Republic. Article 11 of the said constitution says "The Republic shall be a democracy in which fundamental rights and freedoms and respect for the dignity and worth of the human person shall be guaranteed."

However, as against the above position, one of the extremist outfit's bulletin of August 22, 2005 says that "In a Muslim land there can be no other law except the law of Allah ... The constitution is composed by some wilful sinner ... The ruler of our country is an opponent of Allah because the procedure of selection of all organs of the government is made by a completely non-Islamic system ... The activists of Jamatul Mujahideen Bangladesh are soldiers of Almighty Allah. They have taken up arms to establish the rule of Islam." The

preventing violent subversive actions. This is all the more significant now because the new enemy has an emotional and religiously sensitive alignment with the common folks of the country. One must not be oblivious of the fact that the enemy combatants are entrenched in places and institutions that are traditionally respected and revered in our society.

As part of strategy, the enforcement apparatus should succeed in separating an act of violence from its so-called politico-social context and thus criminalise a certain mode of political expression. In Bangladesh's context this line of action would be very appropriate because there is a greater need to reject the religious extremists' right to legitimise violence as part of a larger social movement.

The so-called Jihadists must not be bracketed with political dissenters, although such differentiation becomes difficult from an enforce-

ment point of view. Laws to be made for dealing with religious extremists should be such as to distinguish them from constitutionally oriented political elements.

The above has been emphasised upon because the mission and strategy of our crime-fighting and intelligence organisations had not been stable at least insofar as the domestic threat scenario is concerned. Those have invariably substantially changed with the change of a political government. It has been our unfortunate

The concept of the above noted proscription should be such as to make it applicable across the broadest spectrum. It should be precise and unambiguous. In addition, there must be clear measurement and list of acts that would constitute support to a 'banned organisation'. The effort should be to broaden the applicability but narrow down the definition of extremism or terrorism itself.

The process of identifying an extremist should be discreet and transparent and enforcement efforts

relentlessly pursuing the bigoted mischief-makers. Religious institutions or places of prayer should not be allowed to be used as sanctuaries. In order to do that quite a number of such entities should be subjected to well-planned surveillance.

Voluntary or charitable work or even religious teachings which are suspected to be used as cover by some organisations should be shadowed so that bonafide welfare work can be separated from malafide subversive ventures.

Foreign donations whether by individuals or organisations must pass through government scrutiny. This must be made mandatory. Along with this there must be a complete account of all educational institutions and the areas covered in the instruction should be known to competent authority.

Democracy has to allow the interaction of different shades of opinion or divergent views to ensure the vibrance of a pluralist society. However, that does not mean that there will be freedom to convert the entire country into a theocratic dispensation by application of force and intimidation and the litigant public has to approach the clerics and Muhaddes for resolution of disputes and judgement, as demanded. There is a challenge to our way of life. This must be realised by the mainstream political parties who are pledge-bound to uphold, protect and preserve our constitution. Therefore, the visible enemy must be caught by the forelock and be dealt with under the law. A sovereign Republic born out of a historic struggle entailing epic human sacrifices demand that. We must not fail.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is a former Secretary and IGP.

Political earthquake in Israel



HARUN UR RASHID

Party was unfit to run the country. Opinion polls suggest that the once dominant party will likely to be in the margins of the Israeli politics because of its opposition about removal of Jewish settlers from the Gaza Strip and infighting within the party.

Sharon has said that it was "painful" for him to leave the party but he did it for the sake of Israel's national interest. It is believed fourteen of Likud's forty lawmakers including five cabinet ministers have agreed to join him. It is speculated that Shimon

unique in his personality and his perception of the world, his approach to the rules of political game with Palestinians, his view of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and his ability to survive politically has been extraordinary.

He has been the most decorated General in the Israeli army and fought every war since 1948 to 1973 with the Arabs. As a military personnel, he has shown himself to be both brilliant and reckless on the battle field. As a Defence Minister in 1982, he master-

(his father Samuel and mother Vera migrated from Russia to British mandated Palestinian land in 1922).

How does the political climate change?

Yaron Eitzrahi, a Political Science Professor at Hebrew University said: "What it brings to the Israeli voter is unprecedented clarity of choice between an ideological right-wing party, a left-wing Labour party and a centrist party led by Sharon."

Sharon, the most popular politician

BOTTOM LINE

By opting to abandon his right-wing Likud party and set up a centrist party of his own, Sharon hopes to confound his political enemies and reinvent Israeli politics. Sharon, the master gambler in politics and battlefield has taken a bold and risky decision. Furthermore, the precedent for starting breakaway party in Israel is not encouraging. Founding Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion failed miserably when he tried, before slipping from the political scene. Much depends on the coming months, when it will become clear how much of the Likud's centre chooses to go with Sharon and which way his ministers will jump.

Peres of Labour Party may join the new centrist party, New Responsibility.

His dramatic decision to leave the Likud Party triggered when the new left-wing Labour leader, Amir Peretz (53), wanted to leave the coalition government with Sharon.

On November 10, Peretz defeated Shimon Peres, Deputy Prime Minister, as a Labour Party leader. The new Labour leader did not wish to continue to be part of the right-wing government, led by Likud leader, Sharon. Peretz is a Jew with roots in the Arab world, used to be called as "Second Israel," the first Israel being the white European Jews.

Sharon's personality

Sharon is known as an "Israeli Caesar." There has never in Israel's history been a man such as Ariel Sharon. He is

minded invasion of Lebanon, during which Israel's Lebanese Christian allies massacred Palestinians men, women and children in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps. Yet he survived politically.

Defence Minister late General Moshe Dayan and Sharon had striking similarities. Both were born in Israel and came from the farming villages. Both were audacious, imaginative, and original.

History has it that the founding Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and Defence Minister Moshe Dayan were happy that they finally had Sharon as a real fighter as an officer. Prime Minister Ben-Gurion saw in Sharon the realization of Israel and selected a Hebrew name, Ariel Sharon, replacing his original name Arik Scheinerman

in the country, repeatedly stressed "peace with security" for Israel. Israelis know that he had fought always for security of the new state and they trust him so far security is concerned. He has strong security credentials and that is why his centrist party is likely to redraw the political map.

Israel's *Haaretz* newspaper reported that in a third term as the Prime Minister after March, he would seek to evacuate isolated Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank, while retaining bigger enclaves in a new peace deal with Palestinians.

Sharon's departure would weaken Likud party and so also the West Bank Jewish settlers because they harnessed Likud's strength over the past three decades to exert a power over Israeli policies far in excess of their numbers.

plans to end conflict with the Palestinians, without having to battle Likud hardliners.

Recent polls suggest that a new party, bringing in some Labour members, would leave Sharon neck and neck with Peretz, with Likud pushed into third place.

Palestinians fear Sharon's aims to set a border unilaterally along the lines of the 720-kilometre wall being built deep inside the West Bank (the World Court in July, 2004 declared that the wall is illegal and should be dismantled) and which Israel says stops suicide bombers. Palestinians call it a land grab and argues that unilateral boundary between Israel and Palestinian territory is against the "roadmap for peace," envisaged by the US, Russia, Europe, and UN.

The election is likely to be held on March 28, 2006. No political party is likely to emerge from the election with an outright majority because of system of proportional representation in the outcome of election, not the system of first past the post, as in Britain or in Bangladesh. This means that possibly weeks of horse-trading will follow in an effort to put together a government.

Two facts may, however, go against Sharon. First, the aggressive new Labour Party leader, the left-winger Amir Peretz, could yet prove a better campaigner than his tired predecessor, the ousted Shimon Peres, and is publicly rejecting a coalition government. Second, the Likud party could also retain its key asset, the loyalty of Israel's Sephardic Jews, leaving Sharon in the cold.

Conclusion

By opting to abandon his right-wing Likud party and set up a centrist party of his own, Sharon hopes to confound his political enemies and reinvent Israeli politics. Sharon, the master gambler in politics and battlefield has taken a bold and risky decision.

Furthermore, the precedent for starting breakaway party in Israel is not encouraging. Founding Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion failed miserably when he tried, before slipping from the political scene.

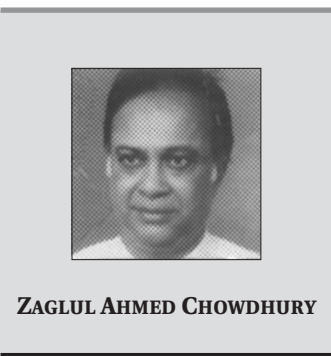
Much depends on the coming months, when it will become clear how much of the Likud's centre chooses to go with Sharon and which way his ministers will jump.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* in an editorial recently summed up aptly when it wrote:

"What is at stake for Mr. Sharon is a place in history. For the stateless Palestinians, however, it is a place of their own."

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

Bihar polls a setback for Congress and allies



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

THE result of the state assembly elections in the important Indian state of Bihar has come as a setback for the ruling Indian National Congress and its allies. However the outcome has delighted the opposition National Democratic Alliance (NDA). The polls in Bihar, population wise the second largest state of India only after the Uttar Pradesh, were a matter of interest and curiosity since the voting was largely seen as a test of popularity for the centre-ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and the opposition

NDA. The BJP and its ally Janata Dal (U) have romped home and already formed a government in the state, but the extent of their victory has surprised even the winners.

The Rastriya Janata Dal of the heavyweight of Bihar politics for last fifteen years, Laloo Prasad Yadav, and its partner Congress headed by Sonia Gandhi not only tasted the defeat in the crucial state after many years, but the loss was somewhat beyond comprehension as their alliance could not mount any stiff resistance to the BJP-Jatana Dal (U) combine, which easily secured an absolute majority in the 243-member legislature. The development sent jubilation in the opposition camp in New Delhi and was greeted with dismay in the UPA circles. What is more important is that the outcome of the elections has brought an end to the fifteen years uninterrupted ascendancy of Laloo Prasad Yadav in Bihar and the curtain was rung down in "Laloo era" in the state at least for the time being.

Laloo is probably considered as the second most influential leader in the

ruling UPA only after chairperson Sonia Gandhi and he is also a senior minister in charge of the important railway ministry. Although his party is confined mainly in the Bihar state, Laloo has been playing an important role in the national politics as much as Sharad Pawar of Maharashtra, Jayaram Jayalalitha of Tamil Nadu, Chandrababu Naidu of Andhra Pradesh even though their parties are basically regional and have not national following. In fact, barring the Congress and the BJP and to an extent the leftist CPM and the CPI, India had hardly other political organisations with some strength to reckon with at the national level.

As a logical corollary to this condition, the supremos of the regional parties often call shots in shaping the national politics and Laloo Prasad Yadav appears to be most important of them. His RJD is a key ally of the Sonia Gandhi's Congress and both as partners of the UPA along with several other regional parties unseated the BJP-led NDA from power in India in polls early last year. Bihar was considered as a bastion for the UPA because of onetime near unassailable dominance by Laloo's RJD but now the scenario is just the opposite since the RJD and Congress cut a sorry figure in the polls.

Laloo's rise in politics has been

meteoric in Bihar where his appeal to the common people was almost unmatched. His simple life, non-communal politics and populist approach brought him very close to the people as the erstwhile Janata Dal leader. But as chief minister he was embroiled in a scam and had to quit the official position. However, his popularity was such that he managed to bring his essentially housewife spouse Rabri Devi as his successor while he moved to federal politics and later set up the RJD breaking away from the mainstream Janata Dal. His wife remained the chief minister till February this year, when the polls gave fractured verdict warranting

direct rule from New Delhi, and when the new voting took place their party along with the Congress have been beaten decisively. The wish of RJD and the Congress to remain in power in the state turned misnomer and thereby the UPA suffered its biggest setback since coming to power. Nitish Kumar of the Janata Dal(U) has become the new chief minister ending the long Laloo-Rabri Devi chapter.

The election results will have ramifications in all India politics as well since the NDA finds it a shot in its arms. The development is particularly disturbing for the UPA since it has come close on the heels of the controversy surrounding K. Natwar Singh

over the Volcker Commission report that forced him to step down as external affairs minister. Both houses of the Indian parliament recently witnessed pandemonium over Mr. Singh, who remains a minister without portfolio, and also the Congress party itself, as the Volcker Commission had found both as beneficiary of the "food for oil" project in Iraq during Saddam Hussain regime. Indian government has constituted two high powered commission to find out the truth, but the opposition is demanding resignation of the Congress-led government and also actions against Mr. Singh in the wake of the controversy. Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh has said that his government would not spare anybody if found guilty but stressed that only the report of the two commissions will reveal the truth. The NDA is obviously happy that the Bihar elections win has come at a time when the UPA government is already facing trouble.

The victory of the BJP and its partner has also raised fears of revival of the domination of communal

forces, and the leftist and other secular parties have already expressed their anxiety. They said the outcome of the Bihar assembly polls in no way reflected the mood of the people at the national level since it is fundamentally an anti-incumbency verdict as the RJD was in power there for many years. True, anti-incumbency factor played a key role in the polls but it is also correct to some extent to say that the result will encourage the communal forces to flex muscles in a bigger manner in the national politics. The BJP-led NDA had suffered unexpected shock defeat in the last Lokshaba polls. The UPA government is otherwise faring well. And the results of Bihar polls will have no direct bearing on the rule by the UPA, which relies on the support of the leftists. But certainly the reversal in Bihar has put pressure on the federal government which is now on the weak ground.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is Foreign Editor of BSS.