

This ruthless extremism must be stopped!

Stronger govt action needed

NEVER before in the last thirty-five years of independent Bangladesh has the nation felt so insecure as it does at the present moment.

The bicycle ridden suicide bomber's bloody massacre of himself and his compatriots on a morbid ideological diet at Netrakona is a proof of how unrelenting militant missions can get. Given the ingenuity going into the methods of attack with surefire deadliness, the apprehension of more to come cannot be ruled out. More so, when all this is happening apparently despite unprecedented security precautions taken by the government, the media's reeling off of warning signals, the public being on self-alert, the arrested militants making tell-tale confessions, and the whole nation being vociferous in its expression of outrage.

What are we to conclude from this absurd suicidal free-for-all and the outwitting nature of their operations? The overarching fact is the Frankenstein syndrome that is erupting in various forms. On the one hand, within the BNP there have been ministers and MPs named by their detractors to have been indulgent to extremist elements and their mentors. As if that was not enough, Jamaat's links to JMB, the outlawed outfit, spoken of by various sources raised the Frankenstein from within the ruling coalition. It can only be excoriated by an impregnable political will of the government itself.

The second contributory factor is that while small fries have been hauled up, the big masterminds are at large calling the shots from behind with complete impunity topped off by an improvising flair. Some of them got let off as soon as they were tracked down. So long as the factors of masterminding, institutional backing and financial support base are not eliminated, the bombings will continue. After all this, we wonder how can there be the easy availability of explosive materials at the market-place as reported?

There is one view that a country's reputation for a low level surveillance has a way of inviting the misadventure of trying techniques inspired and imported by extremist think-tanks abroad. We have to delve deep into the hypothesis.

It is our firm belief that religious fanatics with dark agenda are getting a field-day, because the two major political forces -- BNP and Awami League -- are incorrigibly confrontational to each other. Nothing short of at least workable one-agenda unity between them can defeat militancy which is a threat to our very survival.

Rajuk shouldn't allow violation of codes

Court's order must be followed

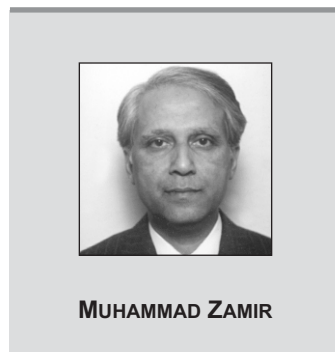
WE are concerned at a recent decision of Rajuk where it has given approval for eight-story flats in Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara against six-storey as provided under the existing law, defying a High Court stay order. We find it disturbing that Rajuk permitted construction of two additional floors beyond the authorised limit on ten different commercial buildings. Apparently the court injunction order was passed as early as July, 2005. The order was also made applicable to the concerned ministry. As such Rajuk's plea for its granting approval based on the excuse that it had not received the court order appears flimsy and untenable. Irrespective of the legal aspects of it all, one also has to take into consideration the concern that the additional constructions would also pose a threat to the already overburdened state of the existing civic amenities of the locality.

Rajuk has sadly been a factor in hastening the deterioration of our city's environment. It had on earlier occasions also allowed construction of residential and other structures on lands created through filling up the Gulshan/Badda Lake.

We also fail to understand as to how commercial buildings continue to be raised without due provision for parking of vehicles, an integral part of Rajuk's responsibility to ensure. This has caused parking of vehicles on roadsides and all conceivable places in and around busy commercial thoroughfares creating traffic jam. While we are struggling to control our traffic in the city, Rajuk through its negligence continues to contribute to further aggravation of the situation. There is also little post construction monitoring, which at times even results in virtual renting out of parking areas, if any, to outside sources by the owners.

We stand fully behind the court injunction and urge the Administration to ensure that no violation of the court order takes place. The independence and the authority of the Judiciary must be upheld at all costs whether it relates to Rajuk or any other institution or individual.

Lack of integration in Europe



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

THE world has watched with fascination the recent French riots. It was seen as a wake-up call for Europe. The orgy of incineration lasted for nearly three weeks. Night after night gangs ambushed firefighters and police in different administrative departments of Paris. Violence and vigilance tensely stared each other in the face.

The violence was sparked off on October 27 with the accidental deaths of two teenagers trying to flee the police in one of the suburbs of Paris. In the course of the next few days, this riot, the worst urban violence since the problems of May 1968, slowly fanned out into other cities like Toulouse, Toulon, Draguignan, Strasbourg in the east and Nantes in the west. Subsequently, tourist centres like Blois and Quimper also came under attack. Among the targets of the rioters were churches, nursery and primary schools, town halls and police stations as well as warehouses, car dealerships and even a film studio at Asnieres outside Paris.

In the beginning, most neo-conservative journalists and commentators saw only the superficial side of events. Some were even quick enough to label this riot and unrest as a 'broad clash of civilisations' between Islam and the West. Some columnists like Mark Steyn went to the extent of drawing parallels between the riots in different cities in France with the Muslim conquest of Europe in the eight century. The situation came to such a pass that one of France's Muslim organisation, the UOIF, reacting to official suggestions that Islamic militants might be orchestrating some of the rioting, issued a Fatwa against the unrest.

Fortunately, both inside France and outside Europe, the real causes started to slowly reveal themselves. Op-ed pieces and comments pointed out that it was not prudent to be hasty and to focus solely on the

Islam card. In this context, many observed that the incidents and pictures bore greater similarity to the race riots in the USA in the 1960s rather than what was happening in the Sunni enclaves of Iraq. These analysts commented that the rioting French youth refrained from waving green flags or signs with crescents. There was also no evidence of slogans supporting the Palestinian cause or rabble-rousing rhetoric about Islam. In fact, Fareed Zakaria writing in the 'Newsweek's magazine on 21 November, noted

'ceiling' that prevented vertical mobility.

People, for the past two years, have been raising questions about the shaky status quo prevailing in cities throughout Europe and the need for reform. Their anxiety was further heightened during the French riots because of minor incidents taking place also in Berlin, Brussels and Athens. Worried Europeans were also on the edge because it reminded them of the recent riots that took place in the Netherlands after an Islamic extremist murdered filmmaker Theo van Gogh

French, have always prided themselves about tolerance. Collective soul-searching have however started after this latest episode in France. Sociologists are trying to ascertain the reasons behind the failure in the integration of citizens of foreign ethnic origin. President Chirac, quite correctly has stressed that France will have to understand "the consequences of this crisis, and do so with a lot of courage and lucidity"

This riot has forcibly opened the eyes of the sophisticated Parisians

Minister of Arab descent 'French people who descend from elsewhere suffer because of their face, their name, their religious beliefs that are assigned to them'.

This complex European brew has been further muddled with suspicions that have evolved after 9/11. Prejudice has grown about people of Islamic origin. There is also now less patience sometimes not only within the host community but also among European or British born children of immigrants. Mr. David Lammy, British Minister of

to artificially high minimum wages that discourage companies from hiring young people. Concerns over labour structures, red tape and over-regulation have also not helped matters. There is also the slow pace of reform. It is against this scenario that the alarm bells have rung in France. The riots have presented Europe with both a choice and the impetus to make it.

It will not be enough to just talk of multi-culturalism and equality. Integration and better economic opportunities have to be seen to happen. Politicians also have to move towards social integration. The relatively poorer community of immigrant background will have to be given easier access to credit so that they can set up small and medium industries and create jobs.

The European Union institutions have already taken many steps towards integration within an expanded and diverse Europe. The European Commission should now take pro-active measures towards recognition of ethnic-cultural diversity and the avoiding of imposition of an artificial European uniformity upon society. The banning in schools of head scarves or any symbol of religious belief has not necessarily been a good thing. A multicultural identity only makes the society we live in, that much richer through diversity.

What is at stake today in Europe is the future of a pluralistic society with multi-religious identities and absence of parochialism. Invoking a 1955 law might stop rioting and restore calm on the streets of France, but this will be temporary and artificial unless more attention is given towards opening up avenues of employment and understanding within different immigrant communities and also in their interaction with the host community.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador any response to mzamir@dhaka.net

POST BREAKFAST

What is at stake today in Europe is the future of a pluralistic society with multi-religious identities and absence of parochialism. Invoking a 1955 law might stop rioting and restore calm on the streets of France, but this will be temporary and artificial unless more attention is given towards opening up avenues of employment and understanding within different immigrant communities and also in their interaction with the host community.

with interest that most of 'the young men' when interviewed by the media, 'were irreligious and talked about respect, jobs and discrimination not jihad.' In addition, contrary to extreme right-wing French media reports about external involvement, it was also revealed that more than 92 per cent of those arrested during the riots were French citizens.

The shock of the conflagrations has raised many questions about the scope and effective integration of people of foreign descent within Europe in general and France in particular. Having served as Ambassador in different European countries and also as Permanent Representative to the European Union, I have closely watched how Europe has been attempting to deal with its changing demography and the problem of integration of its large and varied immigrant community. I have had to deal first hand with the frustrations of first generation immigrants of Bangladeshi origin in various European countries and watched the difficulties being faced by them in their continuing process of assimilation. I have also observed the tension and distrust that exists within immigrants of North African origin towards the host community in the BENELUX areas, particularly with regard to socio-cultural issues (despite the fact that they are mostly fluent in French). All of them frequently complained about a 'glass

on an Amsterdam street. Across Europe, leaders and observers weighed up the state of race relations in their own run-down neighbourhoods and sought to assess whether the kind of social tensions fuelling the French protests could soon spill over into their streets.

Rome's Mayor Walter Veltroni, heading a city with a large immigrant population, immediately camp up with recommendations for 'putting in place integration policies that respect people's identity and at the same time help prevent exclusion and rejection'. Romano Prodi, Italian Opposition leader and former Prime Minister, also reacted with great apprehension and pointed out that Italy had some of 'the worst suburbs of Europe' and that 'it was only a matter of time' before something happened in his own country. European Commission President Barroso recognising the time-bomb within the body politic of Europe, also acknowledged the existing challenge. Consistent with general opinion that the rioting was a manifestation of prevailing frustration over unemployment, Barroso indicated that 'the best social politics is to create employment' and assured that one billion euros could eventually be made available by the European Commission for job creation and to help social cohesion. Europeans, particularly the

towards the poverty that continues to exist in places like Clichy-sous-Bois, just a 30 minute drive from the Eiffel tower. This was difficult to avoid given the steady stream of dreary images into drawing rooms reflecting deprivation and poverty.

Europe understands that their demographic demands she entry of immigrants. Spain for example, will require one million fresh immigrants workers entering her territory if it has to sustain its robust growth. The same is true of Italy and Germany.

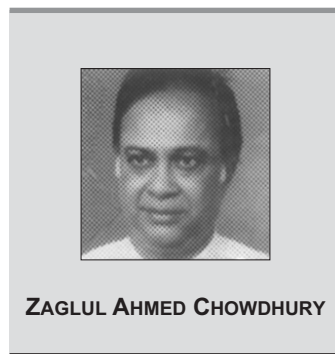
This economic angle has now persuaded many economists to observe that the problem is not being caused by new immigrants. They are pointing out that this recent bout of instability is due to anger welling up among the second and third generation descendants of previous immigrants who were born in European countries and have grown up thinking that they should have exactly the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. They agree that despite claims of equality of opportunity, these young people are finding out in many cases, that their 'religion, their culture, their colour or their surname' has not only 'walled them out of the European dream' but also transformed them into dissatisfied members of a minority and part of a large underclass. This view has also been reiterated by Azouz Begag, the Equal Opportunity French

Culture, of immigrant stock from Guyana, has commented after the French violence that 'tolerance for blatant forms of discrimination is no longer common'. Consequently, youth feel estranged and excluded from full participation in the land of their birth. This awareness, this sensitivity, is also increasing the vulnerability among such young people. Their anger makes them susceptible to extreme dogma. This is what must be tackled not only in France but elsewhere in Europe.

There is today in Europe a distressing nexus between race and poverty, between race and parliamentary representation and between race and economic opportunities at the higher end of the corporate scale. Any intellectual European will mention that Europe is colour-blind. Unfortunately, that is not so. The French National Assembly has no member from mainland France with African or Arab backgrounds. Similarly, there are only 15 members, with minority heritage in the British Parliament out of a total 646 MPs (less than truly representative). Unemployment is high in France as well as in many other countries in Europe. However, it is almost 40 per cent in the immigrant inhabited areas of France -- considerably higher than the national average.

Some of this unemployment, both in France and Germany, is due

SAFTA -- a shot in arms for SAARC



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

FINALLY, the much-awaited accord among the seven member nations of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) on the complex issue of South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA) has been reached setting at rest all speculations about the concept, which is to come in force from January, 2006. The 13th summit of the SAARC in Dhaka took clear decision that SAFTA be implemented from the new year, but doubts still persisted whether this would be really possible to put it into operation from the scheduled date because of the complex nature of the SAFTA and also for the reason that a number of thorny issues were still to be sorted out when the summit took place. But the meeting of the committee of experts that took place in Kathmandu recently lived upto the expectations as it successfully clinched the agreement despite the fact that the negotiations were contentious because of the complexities involved on a number of

issues before the year end. The Kathmandu meeting on November 29 and 30 was billed as a test case for the SAARC and it can now be said in a fitting tribute to the SAARC that the negotiators have not disappointed the well-wishers of the forum. The vexed matters were ironed out and the development is seen as a major step to promote regional trade. Finalising the modalities of the SAFTA, especially on such issues like the rule of origin and compensation to the revenue loss the weaker economies, were not very easy.

SAFTA, a phased tariff liberalisation from the date of its coming into force has been envisaged. In the first two years, the non least developed countries (non-LDCs) will bring down tariff to 20 percent while the LDCs will bring it down to 10 percent. The LDCs will then bring down tariffs from twenty percent to 0.5 percent in five years. Sri Lanka, which is a non-LDC will bring it down in six years and the LDCs from thirty percent to 0.5 percent in eight years. Moreover, the non-LDCs will reduce their tariffs for the LDCs products to

have been settled. The twice-postponed 13th SAARC summit held in the Bangladesh capital last month adopted a 53-point Dhaka Declaration that contains a number of areas where the seven member states agreed to cooperate on matters ranging from disaster management to combating terrorism. True, many of these pious and ambitious measures and programmes seldom see the light of the day. Nonetheless, the existence of the SAARC over the last twenty years has not been use-

against this background, that the Dhaka summit took place and many eyes were cast on its outcome since the collective venture was entering its third decade after it was born in the same Bangladesh capital in 1985. The results of the summit have been by and large considered productive and the eagerness of the members to carry forward the forum was visible, albeit some political and other problems among the regional countries. The SAFTA that was agreed in the 12th summit in Pakistan was definitely a major issue of discussion for the leaders in Dhaka. Much of SAARC's activities and more importantly, its image and ability to move ahead to an extent rested on this SAFTA issue.

Not only the summit took clear decision on the matter, but the members spared no efforts to honour their leaders by clinching the accord as exemplified by the Kathmandu meeting. Definitely, this is a shot in the arms for the SAARC that appeared somewhat fragile not very long ago. As the Dhaka summit provided the much needed fresh impetus to the forum, the SAFTA agreement will hopefully provide further stimulation and act as a catalyst towards furthering regional economic cooperation. Now it remains to be seen how smoothly and effectively this accord is put into operation for the benefit of the member states.

less as some critics would like to describe it. From the beginning, the integrated programme of actions (IPA) and different technical committees (TC) did some good work and results were visible even though nothing extraordinary. However, over the last few years, the progress of SAARC has undeniably been quite sluggish, prompting the critics to question about its efficacy. The unfavourable political climate in the South Asia, which in some ways worked as a deterrent to the expected growth of the forum, contributed to the impression in certain quarter that it was not delivering. It is

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is Foreign Editor of BSS

MATTERS AROUND US

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negotiations brings to the fore the commitment of the members to strengthen the economic cooperation, particularly in the field of trade and commerce. It is all the more noteworthy for the simple fact that it has come close on the heels of the largely successful 13th summit, where the leaders sought to inject fresh vigour to the SAARC as it stepped into the third decade.

Notwithstanding the decision of the summit to abide by earlier decision of the leaders that SAFTA would be implemented from the 2006, some degree of doubts did persist if an agreement would be possible on the

An earlier meeting again in Kathmandu before the Dhaka summit deliberated on these matters, but defied an accord although differences were narrowed down. The meeting that was originally scheduled in Islamabad was shifted to the capital of Nepal because Pakistan was struck by a devastating earthquake. Progress on SAFTA in the process suffered and consequently the expected advancement on the concept was not possible. Now SAFTA is a reality.

Without going into the brass tacks, some major points listed in the accord under article seven of the

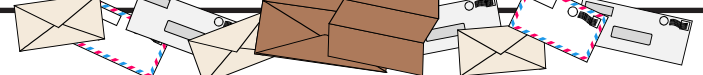
0-5 percent in three years.

This tariff liberalisation would not be applicable to the tariff lists included in the sensitive lists to be incorporated in this agreement as an integral part. Other issues which earlier defied a complete agreement have also been sorted out in the Kathmandu meeting of the experts. The SAFTA will definitely help largely enhance the inter-region trade, which is very low compared to other regional forums like the ASEAN. Now a timely and effective implementation of the accord is the necessity, which by all account, is not difficult after the vexed issues

opened at night. It also matches to an extent with the international working hours. In this way, one group of people work at night and sleep in day time and the other group attend usual daytime offices. We guess it will work. Evidently, we feel comfortable in going outside of our homes in the weekend (holiday) when there's almost zero traffic jam.

Mehadi Shameem
Free School Street, Dhaka

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



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

What is happening in Bangladesh?

I feel humbly asking our honourable prime minister what's going on under her leadership. Can I be able to go back to my beloved country? I always miss the polluted air, weird rickshaws, unceasing chaos, and every idiosyncrasy of Dhaka here in Edmonton. I've decided to go back to my country. But, will I be secured there? When would these horrible bombings be stopped? Will it ever? Would our administration really care about the mass people?
M. M. A. Sayeed Rushd
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Canada

Topsy-turvy!

We all are getting tired of the new theories and subsequent implementation of those postulated by our intelligent law and policy makers. How come they decide to give a go to a decision without adhering logi-

cally sound ground in favour of it? People of our country welcomed the decision of banning polythene bags in Bangladesh at the cost of their inconvenience! And the ministry concerned along with the esteemed minister boasted for the banning enactment.

Do we ever question ourselves why do we vote and elect people in power? Are they entrusted with the act of dragging us backward? No one in the modern world would believe that if you have headache you are left with no other alternative than severing your head! Banning polythene was perhaps not a solution to the phenomenal clotting and fertility problem rather it was a very subtle way of masking failure in good governance. We have colossal city corporations, municipalities and union parishes across the country for taking care to the mass people at the minute level for which people pay huge taxes. Why didn't we made proper arrangements for collecting

effluents from every house by in an integrated way so that people can't litter roads and sewerage system with polythene?

Local authorities could provide sufficient number of litterbins alongside the streets and enact the law of charging fine to the litter offenders. We can use polythene bags for keeping domestic dirt, which can be collected by local authorities and in a way, would save the environment from being contaminated with rotten filths. Once the system is implemented those collected polythene bags could be recycled and reused again with out causing any disturbance to the nature. Now if we expect this minimum governance from our elected authorities would that be too much an expectation? If we can't expect this basic service then why should we bother paying tax? I have tried to find this analogy of banning polythene from elsewhere in the world but I couldn't. May be our respective authority is more cognisable than any other

such in the world.
Md. Tariqul Islam
University Of Newcastle upon Tyne,
UK

Flexible time for office

Traffic jam is a common experience for every person who has to use the streets of Dhaka city everyday. Unfortunately, it is increasing tremendously. We know about some reasons that cause traffic congestion. These are huge population of over one crore, ever increasing number of motor vehicles, massive urbanisation, rickshaws and buses with different speeds plying in same road, lack of sufficient roads and highways etc. Undoubtedly, these are general causes that create the jam. But, we have to control the jam in a different way until we are able to solve the above mentioned problems.

We note that Manhattan with an area of 8.5 sq miles can accommodate millions of people. People live

and work in on average 80 storied buildings located all over this tiny place. Tokyo, Mumbai, New York, Beijing etc are mega cities. However, they don't have traffic jam like ours. We agree that half of the people in a mega city of a developed country travel using tube railway or metro, and the other half uses roads often with flyovers on the ground. Construction of underground railway (tube railway) is a dream we may never fulfill as a poor country. But, how about flexible time for office goers?

Each mega city has a flexible time for office goers besides the latest human transportation systems like tube railway, flyovers, one way roads, latest traffic signals, good number of highways and so on. We afford to allow flexible time for private office-goers specially working in our vital garments sectors. In fact, workers of some readymade garments industries now work in night shift. Banks and other associated offices can be

opened at night. It also matches to an extent with the international working hours. In this way, one group of people work at night and sleep in day time and the other group attend usual daytime offices. We guess it will work. Evidently, we feel comfortable in going outside of our homes in the weekend (holiday) when there's almost zero traffic jam.

Mehadi Shameem
Free School Street, Dhaka

Something has to be done

A few days back, I witnessed a dog being beaten to death. After spending many sleepless nights, I realised that I couldn't just sit and do nothing. I know that there are many animal lovers like me out there, but they don't know how to help. Well neither do I. But I can't stand this kind of abuse any longer. Something has to be done about this and I'm sure that if all of us want to, we can do anything. So anyone out there who is

willing to help, please do contact me at nayeema@hotmail.com and together all of us will figure out something.

Nayeema Reza
On-e-mail

Getting out of Iraq...

Just been through Mr Fareed Zakaria's article "panic is not the solution" in the 'point counter point' section of DC 30th November issue. Surely, like many others, I was quite amazed as well as confused to see whether it was written with any possible sense of 'value'...after all it's a sensitive issue to discuss.

The rise of century old idea of colonialism in this very 21st century of progression with America has already threatened the security of the world and it's well known to every individual of every single community in this world.

As Mr. Zakaria said in the last part of his article "the key is not the exit, but the strategy", here strategy

means, "stable set of US policies in Iraq". I don't understand why he seemingly compromised in the first place with the fact of "invading Iraq by America illegally" which already violated the existing "stable set of policies of UN".

If those policies were to be implemented the scenario would have been completely different than that what we see these days: "180 member states combinedly opposing US!" Unimaginable though but really would have been a brave stance by the world leaders. By saying "to get out of Iraq may be right or may be wrong" it seems Mr. Zakaria is in confusion. If we get confused about something we ask questions around and inquire to get rid of the bewilderment. In this case people would be fair enough to let him know whether 'getting out of Iraq is right or wrong'.

Ehsan Mallik
Uttara Model Town, Dhaka