

Human rights violation scenario

Form HR commission, sign the UN Anti-corruption Convention

THE 57th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has just been observed in Bangladesh as elsewhere around the world the other day. It brought into sharp focus two phenomena that are telling upon the state of human rights in our country. While one is a very recent phenomenon for us, the other has been with us for a long time: to us terrorism and corruption are two major violators of human rights.

We consider terrorism, whatever be the source, as the worst form of violation of rights of man. While the terrorists target the state organs and its institutions, it is the harmless, unarmed persons that are subjected to their violent acts.

In Bangladesh human rights have been grossly violated by the violence adopted by the law enforcing agencies particularly the Rapid Action Battalion, whose modus operandi has come under severe scrutiny by various observers, insofar as the circumstances of deaths in 'crossfire' were concerned. Custodial deaths speak poorly of the concern of human rights by the law enforcing agencies, when it is they who should be the guardians of our rights. The suppression of the opposition in ventilating their genuine political grievances and curtailing their right of free speech and assembly has put the state of our human rights to test.

We also consider corruption a major source of threat to human rights and very few would disagree with our contention that in Bangladesh corruption is as much as violator of human rights as terrorism. Although its occurrence is not as vivid as a terror act, nor can its dangerous consequences be seen instantaneously, it nonetheless provides unmitigated ordeal for the common man that makes him as helpless in facing this as he is in facing terrorism.

While Bangladesh has acceded to various International Conventions on terrorism, it is yet to sign the one on corruption, which the UN has formulated. The Convention has certain in-built benefits that the signatories can make use of. Among other things we could use it to recover money laundered out of the country. We find the delay to accede to the Convention quite inexplicable.

Thus the government must form HR commission, and sign the UN Anti-corruption Convention without delay.

Montreal push to Kyoto Protocol

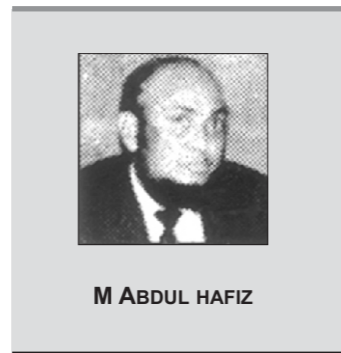
We have our concerns, too

FOR long the vital Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse emissions resulting in global warming and threatening our planet earth has been in somewhat of a quagmire with USA refusing to give its stamp of consent to the process. At a recent UN conference on the Protocol, sponsored by Canada, and which turned out to be the Montreal marathon, America was finally brought back into the fold and she agreed to "discuss" issues at stake. As the largest industrial nation responsible for highest degree of greenhouse emissions, US' participation in the Kyoto Protocol bears considerable significance. It will not only encourage the nations participating in the process but will also send the right signal to such emerging industrial giants as China (already second to the USA as a polluter), Central Asia and India.

In addition to cutting back on carbon-monoxide levels, emphasis should be laid on finding ways and means of alternative fuel and energy sources both for industrial and other uses other than coal or petroleum products. Development of alternative sources of energy will help reduce the demand for, and marketing of, the traditional sources of fuel and energy for industrial use thereby automatically bringing down gashouse emissions. In this again, the major industrial nations will have to take the lead.

In the meantime, we remain seriously concerned at the progressive degradation of our environment at home, although it is of a different dimension. Manmade depletion of forests has reached an alarming stage. The scourge of land grabbing and illegal raising of structures through reclaiming of lands by filling up vital water bodies including raising of unauthorised structures on the banks of our rivers have not only seriously affected the natural course of the rivers but also contributed to the degradation of our overall environment in more ways than one. No tokenism or lip-service on the part of our government can ameliorate the domestic environmental situation.

Thoughts on the eve of another Victory Day



M ABDUL HAFIZ

COMES December, the month of victory with an exciting memorabilia -- one that brings to life the pain and exhilaration of the millions. It comes making us relive some of the nation's finest hours. This is the month that witnessed the denouement of the epic that began with Bangabandhu's clarion call of freedom earlier in the year. It also brought to an end the 'festival of bloodshed' treacherously initiated on infamous 25th March of 1971. This is the celebration time for the Bengalis who saw their long nurtured dream coming true at long last.

Yet, this year it could not have come at a worse time when the achievements of our victory are all but in tatters. Never after 1971 our existence has so acutely been at stake with the rampart of our statehood almost crumbling before the onslaught of Islamist zealots. The ominous rise of militant Islam and its assaults on our existing system -- the administration, judiciary, public safety and so on -- have put to question if the ecstasy of victory on this day

in 1971 is any more reassuring. It seems after being deanchored from our moorings, with our values and ideals of liberation war consigned to oblivion and the nation's heroes ignored and trivialised we are now adrift groping for direction. As a result the nation is critically vulnerable to the machinations of those who opposed our independence and now want, under the spell of pseudo Islamic precepts, to throw

have set their gunsight on them. In a chilling development, highly motivated suicide squads have been fielded for the purpose presenting a spectacle of the final days of liberation war when their cohorts eliminated the best sons of the soil.

What are they up to? Apparently these militants together with their patrons want to perpetuate the political U-turn effected in the aftermath of the

That they can not do much is evident from their repeated failure in apprehending JMB's top leaders as well as in unraveling the mysteries behind so many terrorist attacks perpetrated in last few years.

In retrospect we were confronted with the politics of religions soon after the partition of the subcontinent and creation of Pakistan of which we had then been a part. We were in no time

Islamisation, Gen Ziaul Haq, the country's military dictator, in search of legitimacy, established federal sharia court and packed the 1972 constitution with the precepts of objective resolution with the US' anti-Soviet resistance war launched by Afghan Mujahiddin and introduced Jihadi culture of sorts in the country -- a legacy still plaguing Pakistan with the religious intolerance and

activities. Pushed to the wall they are also making moves to combat the menace. Unfortunately these are too little too late. In the meantime nothing less than national security is under threat of militants bomb terrorism.

Religion when mixed with politics becomes a heady brew with which some of our power hungry clerics are now drunken. They have baptised their followers with the mantras that run contrary to the founding principles of our country. A non-communal liberal democracy based on Bengali nationalism provided dynamics to our independence war right from the beginning in 1952 Language Movement and formed the raison d'etre of our statehood. Any departure from those principals will only weaken our national security. While the government's steps to combat the militants are indeed welcome, those are little more than fire-fighting measures. The virus of the religious militancy can be best fought with the resurrection of the ideals we up held in fighting for and creating our country. There are few signs that there will be a taker of the idea from the administration side as the country heads towards greater catastrophe.

Yet as the December comes and goes our mind is swamped with an insuppressible nostalgia for something great we were bestowed with and then we lost much of it with our default.

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BISS.

PERSPECTIVES

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the country back to medieval ethos.

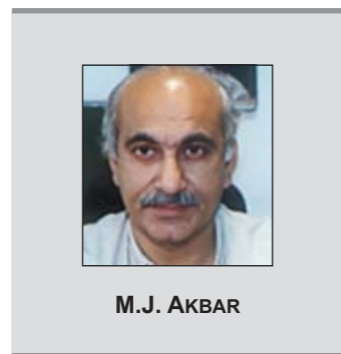
Worse still, the establishment itself is looked upon as suspect for complicity in the predicament. The militant squads of JMB (Jamatul Mujahidin, Bangladesh) allegedly sympathised by a component of the government are stalking the country with their killing mission. They have already wreaked havoc across the country taking their toll of innocent members of the public, judiciary and law enforcing agencies. They are learnt to have targeted the country's eminent citizens -- politicians, the high officials, intellectuals and so on -- presumably to paralyse our state machinery and

tragedies of 1975 which also saw the rehabilitation of the defeated forces of liberation war. By now they have been able to bare their fangs with vengeance. Now they are also able to call the shots in Bangladesh politics thanks to their electoral nexus with the ruling BNP, which has since slid towards the right -- a position held by the right wing religious parties including the Jamaat -- from their traditional centrist position. With BNP's future at stake for its links with religious right it is unlikely that the BNP led government can do much in decisively dealing with the militants, although its establishment is willy-nilly making good deal of anti-JMB noises of late.

embittered with the murky politics of the country where Islam became an instrument of power struggle and tool for exploitation and intimidation of the constituent units. In the dirty power game based on religion, dirtier roles were played by the clerics as the lackey and agent of the power centre. In our case it is they who prolonged any of our moves towards progress and opposed tooth and nail our liberation. When our brave sons were facing the occupation forces in the battle field most of the clerics sided with the occupation forces joining the ranks of 'Albadr, Al shams and Razakars.'

At the tremendous cost we came out of Pakistan's stranglehold of religious politics in 1971. For that three millions courted martyrdom, many more millions were driven out of their homesteads and umpleen number of our mothers and sisters were dishonoured. Yet in post-1975 milieu the traders in the name of Islam could raise their ugly heads -- thanks to the patronisation of various quarters with different motives, so much so that the militants turned Frankenstein even for their patrons. The concern has therefore been expressed even by those who once seemed sympathetic to the militants and their

Unbroken story



M.J. AKBAR

IT doesn't surprise me that George Bush had a plan to bomb the Doha headquarters of the pesky Arabic news channel Al Jazeera back into the desert age. What shocks me is that he hasn't sent Al Jazeera a thank you note after his re-election last year in November.

A victory that became comfortable after the results were in, obscures how close the contest was. For a couple of hours on polling day, the opinion pundits and television channels were preparing for a John Kerry presidency, and liberal gloating over the demise of Bush ended only around noon.

Democrats are now convinced that the critical factor that swung the election away from Kerry was the sudden and very mysterious appearance of an Osama bin Laden tape promising the usual death and destruction of America. It focused American minds wonderfully on all the potential horrors vital to the Bush cause; it was the kind of nightmare image that his most loyal ad gurus could not have paid enough money for.

Where did the tape materialise? The usual route. Address of origin: Officially unknown.

Address of destination: Al Jazeera. Impact: On all those little suburban homes in Ohio and Iowa that swung the vote away from war hero Kerry to war President Bush.

For many months before the election there was talk of a last-minute "October Surprise," possibly a quiet gift from President Pervez Musharraf to his friend and mentor Bush. Many thought that this would be either the arrest

what was discussed. During times of war stress, all manner of things are discussed. It is much more important to note what has been done rather than what has been discussed. The Bush White House has ensured more than one "accident" in Afghanistan and Iraq to bully and threaten Al Jazeera. To its credit, the channel has refused to let its brow be beaten.

Blair's response was a verbal

All the experience and evidence to the contrary fails to shake the conviction of governments that they can censor all the news all the time. News has this fascinating ability to slip around a corner and reach its target. There will always be one channel or newspaper or Internet avenue that refuses to close its eyes. The motives of media may not even be idealistic. It may do this for nothing more, or indeed less, impor-

just in time to influence the fate of George Bush last year. How did that tape travel from wherever Osama is holed up to the offices of Al Jazeera in Doha? On a flying carpet? Was it carried by invisible geni from the Arabian Nights? Did it travel hand to hand from the mountains of the western Himalayas to the waters of the Arabian Sea? Whose were those hands? Was it posted by ordinary mail? Did it come by DHL? Who

1998, Nawaz Sharif, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, told Bill Clinton that Osama bin Laden was on dialysis, and it was only a matter of time before he went the way of all flesh. It's been a long time, particularly for one with such weakened flesh. Dialysis can keep you going for decades, but what it does do is make you very vulnerable as well. I am not talking only about physical vulnerability. It is very difficult to be on dialysis and hide, when the world's eyes are trained on you. Dialysis reduces mobility. It demands constant attention to medical apparatus, and presumably competent doctors.

Does Osama run such a brilliant, foolproof operation that there are no leaks despite such huge vulnerabilities? Can he survive, with such basic needs, on a lonely mountaintop? Or is he ensconced in some urban jungle? Since there are no urban jungles in Afghanistan (Kabul is at best an urban copse), he must be in an urban jungle in Pakistan. Is Karachi a good place to look for him? We heard a few days ago one of his deputies saying that he was alive and leading the holy war. If he is alive, why hasn't he been arrested?

There is something going on that does not quite add up.

Al Jazeera has broken any number of stories. Why doesn't it break the biggest story of all: where is Osama bin Laden?

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BYLINE

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or the death of Osama. It turned out to be far more sophisticated: a tape that kept both of them in business. As the British tabloid, Sun, might have screamed if reporting such a story: "It was de Jaz wot did it!"

The White House did not quite deny the Daily Mirror story that the bombing of Al Jazeera was discussed between Bush and Tony Blair in Washington. It merely dismissed the thought as "outlandish." How far out of land do you have to go to be outlandish in a Bush conversation? Was the invasion of Iraq once outlandish? What is safe and credible and inlandish? That America doesn't do torture? All those Abu Ghraib pictures must have been from Al Qaeda torture cells.

Actually it doesn't much matter

grimace that said "Can we change the subject?" Fair enough. I dare say that while Blair did nothing to stop Bush from invading Iraq he may have laid a restraining hand when Bush prepared to invade Al Jazeera.

The British response to the Al Jazeera problem might be far more subtle, and therefore successful. Al Jazeera is launching an English channel next year and is, at the moment, busy hiring a clutch of ex-BBC types, including a few who have lost their credibility along with their teeth. This strategy of implosion seems infinitely superior to the tactics of explosion. Mumble and waffle, the staple menu of this crowd, inside the studio could damage the channel far more than crash and bang from the sky.

tant than commercial success. Better reporting means more viewers/readers; which means more revenue. Al Jazeera is in demand because it repeatedly brings you the stories that the Occupation forces in Iraq want to hide. The day this stops, Al Jazeera will wither. Audiences are far more loyal to content than to brand. Brand helps, but is no substitute for content. If the English Jazeera takes a different editorial line, it will become as forgettable as any establishment channel.

The subtext of this story is the remarkable ability of Osama bin Laden to pop up where he wants and return to hibernation in some remote, or not, corner of the world that shall forever be Al Qaeda.

As we noted, his tape turned up

was the cameraman who shot the interview and edited it in a studio? Or does Osama live in a palace with multi-media facilities? Does no one in the Pakistan government, or on the FBI staff in Pakistan and Afghanistan, know anything, or want to know anything? How come these questions never get asked, let alone get answered?

America went to war against Afghanistan four years ago to find Osama bin Laden because it was convinced that Osama had masterminded 9/11. If the Taliban had handed over Osama, who was in their protection, and which they admitted, the case for war against Taliban-Afghanistan would have weakened considerably if not disappeared altogether.

Three years before 9/11, in

Acknowledgement of the problem is a good start

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED
writes from Princeton

SOME time back, former US President Bill Clinton visited Princeton to address a gathering. After the meeting, as Mr. Clinton was exiting, he shook hands with several well-wishers. One in the audience shouted, "Mr. President, we are from Bangladesh!" The former President stopped in his tracks, paused, turned back and said firmly, "Get rid of the two ladies!" Funny, how foreigners can distill complicated ills that have plagued Bangladesh for so long, into a few words.

Of course, Mr. Clinton was alluding to the two ladies who have led Bangladesh for the last fifteen years, and who famously do not get along, to the detriment of the nation. What the former American President may not know is that what he is asking is an impossible task. People in America own homes, stocks, and bonds. In Bangladesh, politicians

own political parties.

Founded by her late husband, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) belongs to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and her family. Likewise, the Awami League is the property of the former Prime Minister and the current Leader of the Opposition, Sheikh Hasina, and her late father. As long as the two ladies are alive, it is inconceivable that anyone can challenge them for the leadership of their parties. Merit and competency do not matter here, only family lineage does.

All of these would have been inconsequential if the two ladies were doing, in Bush-speak, "a heck of a job." Non-partisan Bangladeshis would agree that they are not. Not by a long shot. Their lack of vision is compounded by their pathological dislike for each other. Discussion of matters crucial to the nation's well-being, quickly degenerate into mud slinging and personal

vitriol. Every average Bangladeshi knows that the recent spate of bombings in Bangladesh is not the work of either the BNP or the Awami League.

Yet, after every bombing, without offering any evidence whatsoever, the BNP has blamed the Awami League, and the Awami League has blamed the BNP. Until recently, neither of the two parties knew who the real bombers were. That they claimed to know for sure that the other party did it was a lie. The opposition has more leeway here, because as the government is in power, the burden of proof rests with the BNP government.

Thank God, though both parties continue to blame each other, we now know that it is the religious extremists who are behind the bombings. Is it too much to expect that the leaders of the two major parties will push aside each party's electoral ambitions and make common cause now for the good of the nation. It seems so.

Our two leaders were quick to relapse into debilitating old habits. Once again, the two ladies have disappointed the nation. There is no denying that the Awami League has borne the brunt of the militants' wrath, with the government adding insult to injury by blaming the victims most

LETTER FROM AMERICA

If the suicide bombers feel that they can scare the nation into surrendering to them, they are dead wrong. Sure, anyone willing to take his own life, can take some innocent lives with him. But Bangladesh will never surrender to these thugs.

of the time. One can also legitimately argue that the government is inviting the Awami League for talks only because it feels threatened itself and has no other choice.

Having said all that, the nation has a right to expect the opposition, the government in waiting, to act in the nation's interest and forgo party or personal interest. With the nation in peril and reeling from the advent of the suicide bombers, it was utter childishness on the part of the opposition to not only not attend the all party talks, but also not to even accept the letter of invitation! The nation deserves better.

The government must not, once again, look in the wrong places for terrorists. It is silly for the police in Netrokona to pursue leads that purport to show that a minority may have aided the suicide bombers. Minorities in Bangladesh have better sense than to aid people who would like to kill them anyway. This is a throwback to the days when the government was blaming the Awami League as the real terrorists were thriving, conniving, and making bombs undisturbed.

The good news is that the suicide bombers have absolutely no public support in Bangladesh.

Whatever their vision or mission is, it is not shared by 99.9 percent of the people of Bangladesh. If the suicide bombers want to reach heaven by blowing themselves up, they should be allowed to. They should all be gathered in one place, a remote field beyond civilization, and allowed to blow themselves up, thus sparing the nation further agony!

If the suicide bombers feel that they can scare the nation into surrendering to them, they are dead wrong. Sure, anyone willing to take his own life, can take some innocent lives with him. But Bangladesh will never surrender to these thugs.

Talking of the thugs, Bangladesh's most famous archeologist, Dr. Nazimuddin Ahmed, has written a fascinating book on how the British destroyed the Indian "Thugees." (Root word for "thugs.") The Thugee cult, with both Hindus and Muslims as

members, was devoted to Kall, the Hindu goddess of death and destruction. Members of the cult would befriend unsuspecting wayfarers and at an opportune moment strangle them with a handkerchief. The bodies would then be plundered and buried according an ancient ritual.

For over 300 years, the Thugees claimed tens of thousands of victims. Lord William Bentinck, the Governor General of India, ordered the infiltration of the Thugees. After successfully infiltrating the group, between 1831 and 1837, the British hanged over 4,000 Thugees and the cult was essentially eradicated. Surely, we can do something similar to eradicate our own thugs.