

## Cut off political and financial links to militancy

*As speedy trial of the arrested is held*

GOVERNMENT in the past had ordered its law-enforcing agencies to investigate and find out the sources of finance of the JMB and other forms of support being provided to them. Apparently, despite some clear commitment at the highest level of the administration we are yet to see some real action on the ground. Needless to say that any sustainable success in uprooting terrorism will largely depend on cutting off all forms of political and financial patronage for it..

Time and again fingers have been pointed out at some elements of the ruling coalition by some former and present lawmakers from within the administration for their patronage and shielding of extremists. In the allegations made names of a deputy minister and a state minister also came up. It is our belief which is widely shared by many that extremist agenda could not have spread or gained such a momentum but for some form of political patronisation, covert or overt. Now that the top most leader of the JMB has been taken into custody, the information that are expected to come out of the interrogations are likely to prove useful in terms of taking a definitive approach to dealing with the factors of networking, patronisation and all the rest behind the phenomenon. In handling terrorism of the nature what is most needed, besides police action, is a high degree of transparency on the part of the government backed by a strong political will.

It is high time for the administration also to audit and closely investigate workings of some NGOs in order to plumb the depths of their involvement in financing ideological terrorism. We understand that some such NGOs may have been already identified by our intelligence agencies. The administration should move quickly to further probe the matter, and if necessary, shut down those found guilty of complicity in such acts without being entangled in bureaucratic red tape.

With all the support now being readily available there is no reason why we should not be able to deal with terrorism and terrorists with a firm hand sending a clear message to their sponsors and patrons whosoever they may be.

## Tannery relocation stuttering

*Still living with a lethal hazard*

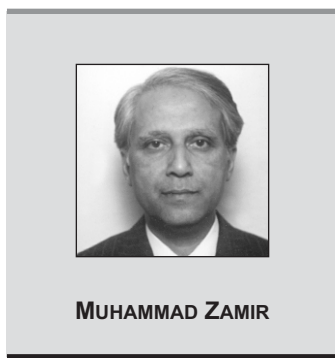
CIVIL society environmentalists, some activist groups and the media have, in an unwritten advocacy partnership bonding, been articulating environmental concerns of the people from time to time. They have spoken with a strident voice whenever and wherever public health and welfare came to be threatened in the face of encroachment on rivers, canals, parklands topped off by free dumping of waste and effluent into the habitats.

It is heartening to note that university students are coming forward in a meaningful way to join their hands with those of the civil society and the media in ensuring good natural environment for the people at large.

The case in point is the seminar jointly organised by Save the Environment Movement and Department of International Relations (IR), Dhaka University on pollution and waste management: Tannery relocation to Savar. There four students of the IR department presented research findings on Hazaribag tannery relocation project by virtue of which we now have got a clear idea as to where the matter rests. Fifty percent of the relocation work appears to have been completed while the whole project was targeted to be implemented by 2005. We fully endorse the suggestion that a central effluent treatment plant for the tannery industry be set up in Savar to check pollution of water and degradation of environment in the proposed new industrial estate. One wouldn't expect a repeat of the same hazards in any form or shape in Savar. Furthermore, the potential opportunity of modernising the tannery industry from its totally archaic equipment status through the relocation scheme must be fully utilised.

The unfinished part of the relocation to Savar must be expeditiously implemented; for, if we are to spend another decade in finishing the remainder fifty percent of the job then severe damage would be done to environment within the city including perhaps pollution of the ground water.

# Reforms within the democratic process



THE national scene has been lively over the last few weeks. February has witnessed the emotional upsurge of Shaheed Dibosh, the Bangla Academy Boi Mela and the return of Opposition Members of parliament to the Jatiyo Sangsad. We have not only seen political drama but also experienced the annual cultural pilgrimage so closely associated with our ethos.

Citizens from all walks of life had been watching with mounting concern the prolonged absence of Opposition MPs from the Parliament. They have had to face a series of hartals and different types of demonstrations throughout the country. This eventually culminated in the long march to Dhaka. The Opposition organised these steps ostensibly to secure the mandate of the people for their demands.

Consequently, it was a matter of great relief when the Leader of the Opposition and others belonging to Awami League returned to the Sangsad. This discussion was welcomed both within the country and abroad. This was reflected in the many statements issued by diplomatic representatives and government functionaries.

Some skeptics however used this opportunity to point out that the 58 MPs had returned to the Parliament not so much out of their belief in a functioning Parliament, but more to protect their membership and all the privileges which accrue on them as an MP. The BNP Secre-

tary General was particularly harsh and claimed that the Opposition had returned to the Parliament 'to fool the people.'

Nevertheless, we have seen the Leader of the Opposition presenting in her statement, a series of reform proposals pertaining to the Election Commission, the scope and extent of the activities associated with the caretaker government and also ways and means on how to improve governance in general. A very thoughtful speech, it covered significant elements that can make the

the daily business of assisting the Election Commission (i.e., will be unable to take any major policy initiative); (e) the appointment of the CEC and other Election Commissioners will be after consultation with all parties (again, Presumably the major ones in the Parliament); (f) the Election Commission will have an independent Secretariat. It will also have full financial independence and be free of control of the Executive (i.e. the Secretary of the EC Secretariat will be accountable only to the CEC and not the Estab-

issues -- the August 21 grenade attack, the Kibria killing case, the serial bomb blasts, extra-ordinary price hike of essentials, crisis of diesel, fertiliser and power, corruption, law and order situation, mass arrest and the recent Kansat carnage. A meeting of the Treasury Bench dominated Business Advisory Committee (BAC), chaired by the Speaker, after heated debate, decided that no discussion will be held on any specific issue as demanded by the Opposition MPs. The BAC meeting however agreed

the person concerned should be brought to trial. If not, then such accusations should not be made. It will be wise on the part of the government not to create credibility gaps through such superficial assertions.

Unfortunately, we have not witnessed any identification of least common denominators within the parliamentary process over the last few weeks of the session. Instead of serious examination and consideration of the proposals presented in the Parliament by the Leader of the

POST BREAKFAST

The ball, figuratively, is now in the court of the Leader of the House. The administration must appreciate that total indifference on their part can only exacerbate an already tense situation. It might even lead to en masse resignation of Opposition MPs. That will make things even more complex. The need of the hour is flexibility and not rigidity. Let the majority display wisdom in the treatment of these issues. They have a historical opportunity.

Election Commission more effective and the Caretaker concept less controversial. This proposal of Sheikh Hasina was presented on 12 February without any direct TV coverage. This was also done in the absence of the Prime Minister, as she was on a good-will visit to Pakistan in her capacity as Chairperson of SAARC.

The reforms proposed by Sheikh Hasina deserve special mention: (a) the President will appoint the Chief Adviser and other Advisers of the caretaker government on the basis of consensus and in consultation with all parties (I presume the major parties represented within the current parliament); (b) during the Caretaker regime, the President will act in all matters of State on the advice of the Chief Adviser; (c) the Defence Ministry will remain under the Caretaker Administration (as opposed to being under the President, as is the practice under the current Caretaker system); (d) jurisdiction of the caretaker government will be confined to conducting

lishment Division, from where he has been posted on deputation); (g) the voter list will be prepared maintaining complete transparency; (h) transparent ballot boxes will have to be arranged with serial numbers; (i) there will have to be careful monitoring of electoral expenses and submission of an expenditure statement by candidates to ensure that existing rules have not been flouted; (j) there will be a ban on 'religion based' politics and (k) there will have to be an increase in the number of women's reserved seats in Parliament on the basis of direct elections.

Since then, we have watched in dismay the lack of any serious response to the Opposition's proposals. Instead of understanding there has been attrition.

The dearth of cooperation across the divide became apparent immediately afterwards on 16 February. The ruling BNP rejected all the demands placed by the Awami League MPs for holding discussion in Parliament of various serious

to extend the tenure of the Jatiya Sangsad session by five workdays till February 28.

Here was a classic case of give and take -- mostly taking away rights of the Opposition through brutal majority.

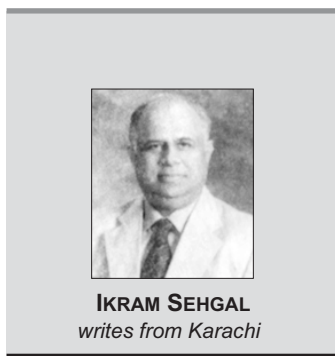
Subsequently, evaporation of amity continued. On 19 February after her return from Pakistan, the Prime Minister, during her address in Bhola suggested that the Opposition did not believe in democracy. It was also mentioned that the Opposition, through conspiratorial methods, was trying to undermine the democratic process and the continuity of economic development. There were also hints that if the Opposition came to power, then the country might become a 'client state'.

Coming from the Leader of the House, this was indeed a very serious charge. One does not know whether such allegations can be substantiated. If the government has any proof of such activity, then

Opposition, we have had heated debates which at times bordered on indecency. On 23 February, unparliamentary language was used and that did not enhance the image of the parliamentarians.

On 28 February, during the concluding session, the Prime Minister ultimately responded to the Leader of the Opposition. She refused to examine the proposals in detail. Instead, after a long statement, she perfunctorily proposed the formation of a Parliamentary Committee, composed of representatives from both sides of the House to examine the suggestions made by the Opposition. She conveniently avoided explaining how the Committee would function, the procedural nature of its mandate or the time frame within which it was expected to submit its recommendations -- all important elements, given the few months that are left before this government has to hand over its powers to the Caretaker Administration.

# Geo-political security meltdown?



ALL movements that start with religious connotations tend to end up far removed from their original aims and objectives. While religious activism is quite deep-rooted in religion, it can be manipulated by motivated interest. Through the ages charlatan-ism is endemic among the leadership cadre of such movements, pure unadulterated motives are easily overwhelmed by those who do not share the same altruism. Muslim protest, which started in sincere earnest against the publishing of the Danish outrage, now seems to be provoked by motivated interests to become an outrage by itself because of the violence it has given birth to. To add to this, the desecration of a most holy muslim shrine in Samarra in Iraq, has started another strife, in this time sectarian between the Sunni and Shia communities. It has portents of spilling over the borders of Iraq to all the territories inhabited by the Muslim Ummah, crossing an already fragile fail-safe line that holds the balance between peace and strife.

The Indian War of Independence (or the 1857 Indian Mutiny if you are British) did not start as a War of Independence by the Indians against their British masters. The great British war machine in India was primarily native troops officered by the British, pure British regiments were literally a handful in numbers compared to the vast Indian rank and file manning the East India Company war machine. The trouble started with the induction of new rifles that had a cartridge whose end had to be bitten off before the cartridge was loaded into the rifle. The muslims feared that the grease at the end being bitten off was made from pig fat, conversely the Hindus thought it was of cow fat. Entire regiments mutinied or were disarmed wherever they could be.

Musharraf from power. Except for the President, the PM, etc few others in the Government must be relishing the impending visit of US President Bush in the first week of March (thankfully not on the Ides of March) as much as the religious parties, his arrival in Pakistan is an heaven-sent opportunity for them to bring things to a head. Even if the visit passes relatively peacefully, things will hardly simmer down in the near future. With Pakistan in some turmoil, with Iraq teetering on the verge of civil war, with the Taliban resurgent in some areas of

For the moment US troops are being replaced by NATO forces but what happens when NATO countries begin taking casualties in some number? The US may keep a token presence in Afghanistan to ensure Hamid Karzai, who is probably more fearful from his friends than his enemies, doesn't take off into the blue yonder.

The Hamas victory is both challenge and an opportunity, provided Israel and Hamas are both ready to bite the bullet. The world mostly gets to see the suicide bomber-side of

Gaza pullout. If Sharon can win his last Hurrah from his bed-ridden coma state for his Kadima party in the coming elections, peace will have a chance. Demoningizing Hamas for its known violence would be a bad option in the face of their very human initiatives for the Palestinian people. If Israelis elect Benjamin Netanyahu in the coming elections or put his Likud Party in position to make a coalition Government, there will be a peace meltdown in no time, it could possibly set off a regional conflagration as others are drawn into the confrontation despite their

suggested by Col TE Lawrence (even before World War I) could be the only situation.

The good news is that Iran and Russia have reached a nuclear deal in which Tehran may give up uranium enrichment at home, details are not yet known (or maybe not even thrashed out). If this prevents the UN sanctions against Iran, and even a US and/or Israeli attack on Iran's known nuclear facilities, it will certainly prevent a regional security meltdown. While US would probably never commit ground troops in Iran, it would have to maintain a strong presence in UAE and other Gulf States to deter possible Iranian retaliations. While the GCC countries are now relatively stable, Iran could try and hit US troops and bases there. A few stray bombs could encourage an expatriate exodus, destroying the economies of these booming countries. While Armageddon may not engulf the Gulf yet, an economic meltdown to follow a security collapse could force-multiply a presently wonderful situation into disaster.

AS I SEE IT

The good news is that Iran and Russia have reached a nuclear deal in which Tehran may give up uranium enrichment at home. One doesn't like mouthing fears of Doom and Gloom, but many wars have been fought for substantially less than what is at stake presently in the region. One can only hope that the principal players will act with maturity and responsibility to prevent a possible security meltdown.

Anyone with a grouse against the British joined the revolt, even those without a grouse but only intent on pillage and rape did so. New leaders appeared everywhere, some with pure motives and some without. The old relic of a Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, with his authority confined to the parameters of the old Delhi Fort, was made almost unwillingly the symbol of the upheaval against the British. Religious sentiment coalesced into a national movement for freedom. This is just one example of someone turning a religious reason into a political statement of revolt.

The equation is easy to decipher in Pakistan, the Opposition led by the religious alliance, is using the opportunity to do what they have been trying for the past several years without success, unseat

Afghanistan, with Iran expecting some hostile initiative from the US, and with Israel-Palestine relationship at a low-ebb because of the Hamas electoral victory, etc what can one expect in the region? With the US military already extended in Iraq, a ground war against Iran with the US going it alone, is out of the question. What happens if civil disorder punctured by terrorist acts become the norm in the Middle East?

Anyone with even scant knowledge of the 'Principles of War', and it is applicable in terrorism as much as in modern warfare, will appreciate that Afghanistan is not 'vital ground', the Persian Gulf is. Despite all the rhetoric about going the distance it is most likely US troops will pull out of Afghanistan in the near future, rather than out of Iraq.

Hamas and is repelled by it. There is the other side that provides free soup kitchens, medical clinics, schools, etc and has an incorruptible reputation as compared to the very corrupt image of Fatah. History is replete with instances of violent parties changing personality once they come into government and starting to behave responsibly as they begin to bear responsibility. Hamas is now faced with that acid test, providing not only good governance but providing a State to a stateless people. That can only happen if they deal with Israel. While one can understand Israel's reluctance to deal with leaders who have sent suicide bombers into their midst, to isolate Hamas would be tantamount to getting more of the same, to go back to the blood-strewn streets that preceded Israel's

reluctance to do so.

The linchpin to the possible domino effect is what happens in Iraq. Iraq is presently balanced on a very precarious fail-safe line. With the discovery of possibly large oil reserves in the Western Desert (primarily Sunni areas), Shia, Kurd and Sunni areas all having oil could even out the equation to national unity. Conversely a Shia-Sunni strife alongside assertions of Kurdish independence could bring the Iraqi house of cards down. It could also embroil Turkey in a general conflagration to prevent Kurdish independence. In any case neither Syria nor Iran would allow their Kurds to secede either. If the violence within Iraq doesn't abate soon, Iraq's division and re-drawing of Middle East boundary along lines

## 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.

### Vehicle luxury

We are aware of thousands of missing vehicles, which till now remain mostly unaccounted for in spite of media reports and ACC investigation. Now government wants to cut down the use of vehicles and eventually their maintenance and fuel cost.

My question is why the government spends millions in procuring high gasoline consuming four-wheel drive vehicles, which are otherwise known as fuel guzzlers. The tax payers' money gets drained out twice, first, in paying exorbitant prices for four-wheel drives and its equally expensive spares and maintenance and second, in paying for the extra-ordinary fuel consumption particularly while the global energy price is increasing by the day. Not taken into account is the damage it does to the environment, say, in the form of global warming.

It is a crime for our politicians and bureaucrats to drive luxury four-wheels in a country where more than 60 percent people live below poverty line. It seems that no public servant or politician can do without a four-wheel drive. I get amazed when I see that an officer as junior as an

Assistant Commissioner gets a fuel guzzler while in our neighbouring country, the top civil servants including the chiefs of forces are happy to be moving in typical home made Ambassadors.

It is about time that good senses prevailed and public expenditure laws were enacted to restrict procurement of vehicles in public sector above 1500 cc. It will save our foreign exchange significantly and contribute towards keeping Bangladesh green.

Khandaker R Zaman  
One e-mail

### Wanton acts

As I started for my workplace early in the morning the other day I, to my utter helplessness, came to learn that a transport strike by the owners was called for. I don't know the reasons or the demands nor do I feel inclined to know them. What bothered me along with the thousands on the road, most of them women working at distant places from the main town, was the utter helplessness that crippled the people. There are indeed quite good number of people in the society living on daily

work and wage. Garment workers, working hard to earn a living are the worst victims of this sort of stagnancy.

Educational institutions get closed with the curtain pulled down by the opportunists. Now transport strikes to cripple public life are there.

It is indeed strange how some of us make the nation hostage because of our ignorance, indifference and sheer maneuvers. It is the ignorance on the part of the mass people that places the country to shame; the indifference of the people of privileges that make the mockery of the state and the inexplicable design by the people with Machiavellian maneuvers (as they think so) that take the nation back to the deep woods. Now the very pertinent question is that who are there beside us?

Observations of the incidents across the nation by the people themselves over the years show the helplessness of this torn and sad country. It was liberated from the oppressors through a valiant freedom fight and its basic principles were the liberal secular platform, equality for all and the very spirits of democracy but unfortunately or otherwise all these basic principles are so badly violated by almost all

who matter most in this regard. For a general people's action, mistakes or deliberate wrongs will not destabilize the balance in the national scale but those by a man of responsibility, power and trust do cause a huge stir.

Vis-a-vis this line of reality, people at the helm of power must perform their duty with all sincerity, conviction and precision for the welfare of the nation. Politicians, social thinkers and the people of privileges have the same duty to the country. And any failure on the part of the people in question will severely pull the nation down -- hence none will find any respite here on the sacred soil of the land.

Rafiqul Islam Rime  
Agrabad, Chittagong

### 'Why the US is hesitant to take on Iran?'

Meaning US is slow and indecisive in taking action? To my mind and corroborated by your op/ed analytical writing in 'Perspective' on 27 February 2006 US is taking time to make the move and in the mean

time, adopt a more coercive disposition to make Iran come down on its knees perhaps!

It is obvious that the lessons learnt from the recent past do not provide for US the much needed directions, and as the writer has already pointed out, that Iraq is not Iran. Iran unlike Iraq will retaliate if an attack is made on its nuclear sites. What possibly Iran can or will do to counter the much feared retaliation is being seriously calculated by CIA experts. The answers are vague or not there at all, so more time is needed for the move. Moreover the calculation which is at hand is the requirement of 150,000 US troops now in Iraq for action in Iran. To tackle the declaration of global war against terrorism US is already confronted with the high escalating cost of men and material, as well over fifty percent of the federal budget is allocated for defence from terrorism. Should the defence spending be further geared up so as to meet the requirement of men and material to invade Iran? The answer to that question needs more time, of course.

Sheikh Farida  
On-e mail

### Double standard of Israel and the West

It is strange that Israel is refusing to accept the government led by Hamas which won the majority seats in the last parliamentary election. Israel has not only expressed its displeasure but even imposed economic sanction against the new Palestinian regime. As close ally the US has also toed the Israeli line. Such sanctions are seriously going to affect the people and the government there. But as said there is always a silver lining behind the cloud, the Hamas led government is not cowed by such sanctions. It is going to seek the assistance from brotherly Muslim countries. It is high time that the Muslims should come forward to help them very generously. There are more than 50 countries under the OIC banner. And the majority of the Muslim countries are rich in oil and other resources. If each more contributes according to its capability, then it won't be difficult for the Palestinians to overcome the pres-

ent economic crisis caused by the double standard of Israel and the West.

Even a government fully mandated by the people is not acceptable to the West if it is not of their choice. This is a historical fact. This happened in Algeria, Turkey and lately happening in Palestine. If other countries go nuke, they won't mind, but when Iran goes so, they call it axis of evil and stronghold of terrorists.

To counter the double standard of the West, it is now very much necessary that the Muslim countries forge a rock solid unity among themselves -- share, care and prosper without looking to the West. They have enough resources both in wealth and manpower. They invest in the West. They now can do so among themselves. If need be, they must say good bye to the West -- this is the way Muslim nations could survive.

Abu Imran  
Dhaka

### US Presidential visit

Many thanks for the online publica-

tions of The Daily Star. For those without access to the print-edition such online material is an important source of information published in Bangladesh.

On that note, I want to refer to an article that I came across yesterday at the US Department of State web page, <http://usembassy.state.gov/p/osts/in/1/www/psfjanfeb067.pdf> about US Presidential visits to India. According to it, and other independent sources, the current visit is the fourth by a US President to India. The first US President to visit India was Dwight D. Eisenhower (1959). I wanted to point out the minor factual data, contrary to what is noted in your Op-Ed section by Ambassador Harun ur Rashid, "Bottom Line: Why is President Bush Visiting India?" published on March 1, 2006.

Kursheedul Anam Khan  
on e-mail