

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

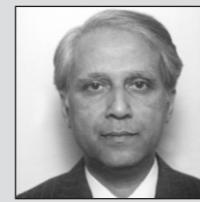
CIVIL society environmentalists, some activist groups and the media have, in an unwritten advocacy partnership bonding, been articulating environmental concerns of the people from time to time. They have spoken with a strident voice whenever and wherever public health and welfare came to be threatened 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



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

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-

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

Our friends -- the USA, Canada, Japan, the EU and the Commonwealth Secretariat -- have been suggesting for quite some time that the Opposition highlight their concerns within the Parliament. This has been done. Nothing, as yet, has, however, come out of it. I guess, the Opposition will now be advised to be patient by our development partners.

This latest parliamentary session has come and gone. It appears that the ruling Alliance has forgotten that the Members of Parliament are present in the House to consider, debate, discuss, modify, amend, accept and vote on proposals submitted by either side. That is the essence of democracy. It is this process which needs to be strengthened.

The government must understand that, consistent with the vision of democracy, comes the responsibility of making the Parliament an effective tool -- a suitable institution for this process.

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 an 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.

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 an 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.

Elections 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 Sangsads. 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-

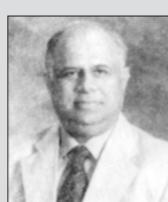
the person concerned should be brought to trial. If not, then such accusations should not be made. It will be wise on the part of the government not to create credibility gaps through such superficial assertions.

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

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?



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

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 insisted 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

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 challenging 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. Demonizing 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 and 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

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.

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 the same 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. 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 incorrigible 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

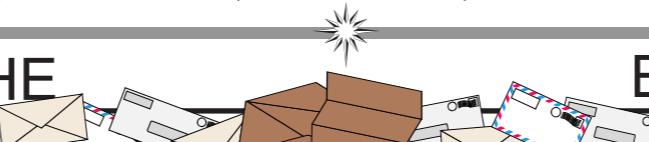
reluctance to do so.

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 alongwith 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

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.

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

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

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 sense 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

On 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 maneuver. 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 besides 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

On e-mail