

Opportunity for a new beginning

Nation looks forward to a free and fair election

PRESIDENT Iajuddin Ahmed has declared a state of emergency in the country and at the same time resigned from the post of the chief adviser of the caretaker government in a last minute attempt to stem the political and administrative rot that was pulling the nation to an abyss of despondency. The ongoing violence on the roads, the compounding political impasse and the conspicuous failure of the caretaker government to find acceptable solutions overwhelmingly threatened national economy and social order with disintegration. A way out was being desperately sought and it finally came in the form of emergency.

In his speech to the nation, President Iajuddin Ahmed talked about the damaging role of the political parties on both sides of the divide, wide ranging corruption, anomalies existing in the electoral system and flaws in the voter list, all of which have been the common complaints of the citizens for nearly one year now. But despite all of us crying hoarse for reforms his government insisted on meeting the deadline.

Though emergency is undesirable in a democratic country, we cannot but say that perhaps this step of the president should be viewed as a second chance, to set things right. Now we may expect that once the imbroglio is cleared and order restored, all the relevant government agencies, the Election Commission and all the major political parties would extend full cooperation to the upcoming caretaker government so that it may create the environment for the EC to hold the next general elections in a free, fair and credible manner.

We, at the same time, would like to express our optimism on the appointment of former Bangladesh Bank Governor Mr Fakhrudin Ahmed as the chief adviser of the forthcoming caretaker government. We are aware of his illustrious career and personal integrity as an honest officer who served the country well. His appointment should generate confidence in the minds of the people and it is up to him now to prove his mettle in the face of the daunting challenges that the job entails.

Understandably, Mr Fakhrudin will have to open channels of discussion with the political parties to reach a common ground of consensus on the question of holding the elections in an absolutely neutral manner. We believe he will remain steadfast in withstanding pressure and deliver what is expected of him.

We note with regret that the 4-party alliance leaders did not attend the oath taking ceremony of the chief adviser. But we hope they would come forward to welcome him and fully participate in the task of strengthening the democratic institutions of the country.

Disturbance in garment factories again?

Root cause needs to be addressed

ANSACKING of the Poly Cotton Knitting Factories Limited was carried out on Wednesday after its workers were allegedly beaten by some goons on the preceding day. What also triggered off the violent reaction was a notice hung on the main gate of the factory announcing its indefinite closure. The agitated workers rushed to a number of factories in order to persuade their workers to join hands with them amidst protest by respective owners of the factories. However, the angry workers finally ended up vandalising as many as ten factories in the vicinity. One of the main causes for the heightened violence in the so-called protest march was, allegedly, the missing of one of the workers of the Padma factory.

The problems with our RMG sector have been persisting for several months, if not years. At the root of it all lies the deteriorating relationship between the factory workers and their owners. Needless to say, that confidence building is needed between both sides, a task in which the owners have to take the lead and be the principal actor in the entire process. In dealing with this growing state of violence amongst the workers it will do us well to bear in mind that the current volatile state of the country's politics might as well have affected the workers' psyche. In the meantime on a more immediate basis the management and the leaders of the workers' associations must prevail on the general workers that it is against their vital interests to vandalise their work places that provide them with their livelihood.

This resurgence of violence and instability also brings up the question of settling the long outstanding dispute over fixing of wages of the workers of the RMG sector and improvement in the working conditions.

We have had too many ominous signs for the RMG sector. We simply can no longer afford to either ignore or deal with them halfheartedly.

Linkages between security and peace



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

UNFORTUNATELY, far from being eradicated, terrorism today has morphed and evolved into a hydra-headed monster that continues to create instability. It has become a complex phenomenon with a multi-tiered outreach that affects lives all over the world. Violence from terrorism and extremism continues to cast its shadow on the global social paradigm and on peace. It threatens civilians; maims innocent women and children and continues to scar freedom of action and thought.

The prevailing situation has led to the awareness that the suitable global response to this threat to peace and security has to be on a two-track basis -- at the international and the national levels.

It is generally agreed that at the international level, the world community has to proactively engage itself in fostering increased strategic communication through multilateral frameworks to prevent terrorist activity. It is also clear that we have to rely on international cooperation rather than just a patchwork of unilateralism. It is also felt that this integration of nations has to be built on a relationship of trust, swift and transparent exchange of information, improved public communication and the shared use of next-generation technologies. It is also understood that in the interest of peace and security there has to be capacity

building of existing institutional facilities.

In the international context, South Asia in general and Bangladesh in particular, can also take a leaf out of the successful collaboration that is taking place between Europe, Japan and the USA to ensure container shipping and aviation safety and to put in place the greater use of biometrics. Unfortunately, we are lagging behind in this regard due to absence of appropriate institutions

root causes. We have to ascertain and agree on the factors that are providing the necessary oxygen in these conflicts and then stamp them out.

Developing countries like Bangladesh would like to see an even-handed approach with regard to States conforming to international law and in the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions. If this happens, it will take the wind out of the sails of terrorism. The only way to do this is

differ in terms of priority, but public welfare and domestic peace will include democracy, economic and social justice and the ability to realise through the democratic process a society free from exploitation -- a society in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality and justice, political, economic and social, will be secured for all citizens. These factors are important. I feel that repression and absence of fundamental rights coerce various free-

friends, but ultimately every State has to stand by itself. We have to remember that international respect for a country and decision to include it as a strategic partner will only emerge from its own strength as a moderate, democratic country that believes in international law, in the maintenance of international peace and security and in international trade, based on accepted international regulatory mechanisms. In the case of Bangladesh, this has been

a more active role in this regard along with the European Commission. Availability of resources will encourage political will on the part of the politicians. I agree that this is a complex situation. However, given accountability and transparency, good governance can and should emerge. This in turn will create residual power and facilitate the evolution of requisite public security and functional peace within the country.

In South Asia, we are witnessing today several conflict situations -- in Sri Lanka, in India in its North East and in Kashmir, in parts of Nepal, in Baluchistan in Pakistan and also in South Eastern hill districts of Bangladesh. The Maoist insurgency is hopefully settling down in Nepal thanks to external intervention from the United Nations. One hopes that other soft conflict situations can also be removed through peace building and addressing State attention towards redressing of the perceived grievances.

POST BREAKFAST

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and necessary tools. These are areas where international partnerships can enhance installed capacity. That is required in the interest of regional security and peace.

I believe there is also a paramount need for international and regional cooperation (despite disagreements on interpretations) on the judicial process to be followed with regard to terrorist acts.

There is need for the developed countries to sit down with developing nations and agree on a common international definition of terrorism. Without this, the war against terrorism will continue to suffer. Military force, use of controversial armaments and detailed security checks at airports will not stop terrorist acts. It might reduce the number of incidents but will not contain insurgency and the disaffected homebred terrorists in general. What is required is meeting of minds and addressing the

to follow the path of multilateralism and forsake the unilateral agenda. The United Nations has to be strengthened and common confidence building measures identified.

I will now turn to the linkages that impact on the creation of security, so vital for domestic stability and peace within a developing country like Bangladesh. I consider that there is an important connection between national security, human rights and sustainable peace. This has become particularly significant given the deliberate decision by terrorist groups to cross the line through their asymmetrical efforts aimed at disturbing public peace, creating fear and generating confusion.

We have to remember that security for the nation at the national level is the sine qua non for achieving public good for its citizens. In principle, we may probably

doms, lead to extremism, instability and sometimes to political groups giving up the overt political process and seeking clandestine methods in the underground. This has acquired special significance in the contemporary world where globalisation and de-regulation have made inroads into every sphere of national life.

It has to be clearly understood in this regard that non-traditional factors, can, and do, impinge on the well-being of a State. Corruption, smuggling, dishonesty, adulteration of food and medicines, nexus between the politicians and the criminals, politicisation of State institutions and failure in maintenance of law and order enhance the vulnerability of a State. It can create a situation where the State (as witnessed in several countries in Africa) might be confronted with an implosion.

It is good to have strategic

greatly re-inforced through its participation in UN sponsored international peacekeeping and in its abiding by important multilateral Conventions and Treaties. There is however scope for further improvement.

Our politicians have an important role to play in this regard. So does civil society.

We have to guarantee the upholding of human rights through the establishment of a National Human Rights Commission and the Office of an Ombudsman. These can ensure availability of human rights and fundamental freedoms for the citizens of our country, Bangladesh, a developing country must do so. Otherwise, denial of human rights and fundamental freedoms will create conditions of social and political unrest and sow the seeds of violence and conflict within and between societies. The United Nations has to take

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Boosting US-Bangladesh relations

KHAN FERDOUSOUR RAHMAN

BANGLADESH is the second largest Muslim democratic country in the world after Indonesia. Although the US' relationship with Bangladesh was initially troubled because of strong US-Pakistan ties, the friendship and support developed quickly afterwards. Mr. Archer Kent Blood, who was the US Consul General in Dhaka in the then East Pakistan in 1971 reported the truth and supported rights of people of this country even at the expense of his own career.

Bangladesh was founded as a secular state, on a regional identity -- Bengali, both Muslim and Hindu -- and not on a religious identity. The US recognised Bangladesh in April 1972.

US-Bangladesh relations today can be described as a special relationship. Bangladesh always desires to strengthen relations with US. Her bilateral relations with the US are clearly a matter of highest priority. It is equally highly important to US also that democracy, Islam and moderation can co-exist, as it does in Bangladesh today.

Bangladesh could serve as a model of Muslim majority country. The US considers Bangladesh as a very important partner in the region. In recent years, the bilateral relations have made significant strides in all spheres of cooperation.

At the same time, Bangladesh also considers the US as close and trusted friend and there is continued efforts to strengthen the existing bilateral relations and cooperation. Bangladesh is an ally of US in the fight against terrorism, and this

has further strengthened Bangladesh-US relations.

The US considers Bangladesh as a 'traditionally moderate and tolerant' country that has made progress in establishing democracy since gaining independence in 1971. After years of military rule, Bangladesh has carried out a series of democratic elections since 1991.

She pursues a moderate foreign policy that places heavy reliance on

with the coalition forces along with a few Muslim countries and afterwards participated in multinational forces to restore democracy in Haiti. She, frequently at the urging of the US, has been regularly contributing to UN peace keeping missions all over the world.

Gulf War was basically the turning point in the US-Bangladesh relations, since then the relationship has taken a new dimension. Presently, military relationship

USAID with startup cost of US \$ 50 million, total initial endowment of US \$ 30 million and annual operating cost of US \$ 25 million. The University will teach democratic essentials such as moderation and reconciliation -- key weapons against extremism and intolerance.

Bangladesh also received assistance from Peace Corps with their presence from 1998 until it suspended Bangladesh operation in

national curriculum, the volunteers used to initiate less formal teaching activities such as designing and teaching after-school conversational classes, forming English clubs and book clubs, teaching art, and working with NGOs to build their fluency in English.

Bangladesh is a country that is not well understood by the majority of Americans including Congress members. Many of them still remember the tumultuous founding of Bangladesh in the war of independence or visions of the dire floods and famines that Bangladesh experienced in its early years of nationhood.

A concerted effort will have to be made in Washington to enlist the continuous support of the President, the National Security Council (NSC), the US Trade Representative, the State Department and the Congress. It is expected that US will do everything possible to support the

multinational diplomacy. She is and has been for many years now a tested ally of the US.

As an active member of SAARC, Bangladesh has emerged as a key player in South Asian geo-politics due to its human resources and changing economic status. The US is having vital strategic interests in Bangladesh due to her location that is very close to the Indian Ocean between two regional powers India and China.

US had been providing lot of military aid to South Asian countries, particularly to Pakistan of which Bangladesh was a part until 1971. Just after independence, Bangladesh did not receive any military aid from US. In 1983, Bangladesh received US \$.4 million from the US for buying defence hardware. The defence relations between Bangladesh and the US was strengthened during Gulf War in 1991, when some 2500 troops of Bangladesh Army served

between them is very healthy. They are regularly participating in joint military exercises, which obviously serve as the bridge of friendship between both the countries. The US military assistance to Bangladesh has been fairly steady since the 1980s.

Cooperation between the US and Bangladesh forces was visible during 'Operation Sea Angels' -- a search and rescue operation carried out by US Army in 1991 after the devastating cyclone, which is credited with having saved as many as 2,00,000 lives. This also helped the Armed Forces of both the countries come closer of each other.

Both countries have a long and successful bilateral partnership in many areas, from economic and social development to peacekeeping and counterterrorism, because they share common values and aspirations for freedom and a better life for future generation.

Bangladesh has benefited from

2006, USAID has provided over US \$ 5 billion in development assistance, with over half of that amount in food aid. In 2006, USAID provided US \$ 75 million in development assistance to Bangladesh.

The relations were boosted in March 2000 with the visit of then President Clinton, a first visit ever by a sitting US President.

Following the tragic event of 9/11, Bangladesh extended its full support to the US in its war against international terrorism. The 9/11 attacks altered the way of perceiving terrorism that is not limited to the battlefield. Instead, terrorism needs to be fought in the classroom as well. As part of global fight against terrorism, US arranged to establish the Asian University for Women in Bangladesh, which will be a world class liberal arts college to educate intelligent and talented young women from diverse backgrounds across Asia and the Middle East.

The funding will likely be through

March 2006 to avoid the possible attack from the militants.

Peace Corps volunteers used to work with government youth development centres, where the demand for English teaching was at the forefront of community needs. In addition to that, the volunteers used to work with communities to develop other programmes at the youth centres to meet their needs by organising youth clubs to facilitate life skills development, conducting computer and IT training, gardening, tube well sinking, dye block printing and batik, small animal husbandry, development of village information books, working with women's groups to organise girls' esteem and empowerment workshops, and mobilising and teaching women and girls micro-business skills in order to market their handicraft products.

Using communicative and participatory methodologies and following a

separation of the judiciary from the executive division of the government can stall the current process of degeneration of our legal system before it is too late.

The judgement in this regard was given in the case of Mazdar Hossain on December 02, 1999. The 4-party alliance government was due to implement it during its term but in spite of taking time more than thrice it couldn't fulfil its commitment. One wonders if there was any intention that worked behind such delay. It is feared that a caretaker government may not be interested either. We will have to wait till new government takes over after election, though there is no guarantee that it shall be honestly interested for implementation. Still then we shall keep on expecting that this job will be accomplished within 2007 to establish the long cherished rule of law.

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OPINION

Separation of judiciary from executive brooks no delay

KAZI ALAUDDIN AHMED

WHEN you tell a lie, be prepared with twenty more lies to defend it! -- thus goes a great saying, a perceptual one in the negative sense. Twisted truth can turn out worse than fiction.

The same truth from two different lips, and unmatched mental dispositions, can present an utterly perverted picture. Such distortion of the actual truth hued by a pretentious contour can be far more abhorrent and devilish. All these uncouth efforts on the part of the person desperately contriving to befool the beholders can very soon prove to be an exercise in futility.

Lies, thus presented as truths, cannot hold ground for long to the introspective on-lookers. It happens because the raw truth, or absolute truth, has already established itself without being subjected to any queer twist. More so when such truthful news comes from the

to be pending with the lower court. His elder brother, too, was reported to have been implicated on different charges. It is alleged that when he was in power between 2001 and October 2006 those cases were withdrawn at the instance of the Home Ministry.

Going back to the late night shooting episode, the first-hand press report quoting eye-witness account of a minor school-girl, and the subsequent so-called "human entreaties" of the alleged shooter, his fleeing home said to be with a bullet wound on one finger, admitting the wife of the shooter is his younger brother. Most surprisingly, till that time, he was yet to see his brother's wound on a finger. He couldn't as the latter had already fled home for 'obvious' reason. And when the ground was prepared in a hectic manner for retrieval a press conference was held at the Reporters' Unity auditorium by the elder. The journalists present asked him a number of questions on the incident much to his embarrassment. He had to retract from his own initial statement to the

press with a half hearted plea that it could be due to his becoming totally upset. At one stage he was visibly enraged with one press man shouting, "I don't ever tell lies" and "I am not afraid of telling the truth as I am now doing in front of the camera."

His relatives representing in-laws of his brother, were seen seated beside him in gloomy faces. It looked like swallowing bitter pills under threat.

Police intervention in the case was perhaps purposefully delayed at the personal instance of the powerful elder. Their whole proceeding was conducted in a perfunctory manner allegedly to gratify their benefactors. The statement of the woman, almost fatally wounded and lying in the Apollo Hospital was reportedly taken later when she regained consciousness, but it was not made public for obvious reasons. Who knows that the statement and the report of the investigating officer would not be suitably tailored to match the eventual final report. A

number of days have elapsed in the meantime and as usual the whole matter seems to have been consigned to the backyard for an indefinite period.

This example cited as more recent one only to portray, though in outline, the pitiable state of our administrative and legal system. Barring those examples of the so-called political victimisation, there have been indeed many instances where the real and die-hard criminals have till now escaped legal punishment or not brought to book by the police. Most of such cases have been deliberately mishandled with active connivance of the 'godfathers' of the criminals having direct or indirect patronage of the power that be.</