

Putting a price to my support for 'democracy' Legacy of a terrorist

The military has put in a 5 point program to the caretaker government which include electoral reform, judicial and administrative depoliticization, fixing power sector, good governance and anti corruption drive. If the interim government moves on with these five point program with full public and army backing, the parties will realise that the days of publics choosing between the devils are over. It will be absolutely critical that this government now clearly states that they will be in power for 12 months and will push through some key reforms that we know these political parties will never implement.

ASIF SALEH

PERHAPS it's now time to debate whether we should go about our lives with a joke of a democracy or an efficient military backed interim government. You can start lining up the recent news conference by Dr Yunus where he practically called politicians thieves and the recent spate of reporting in the Daily Star and Prothom Alo against the dirty politics of AL and BNP and then add up the numbers. In April last year, I wrote a piece in this paper titled "Sushil Samaj fights back." I did not quite envisage this fight back. Sushil Samaj is now really fighting back with high stakes here and I am really happy about that.

In the policy exchange conference two months ago in London, I remember Hussain Haqqani from Hudson Institute looking at Mr Moudud Ahmed and saying that he might have won the argument showing technicalities of constitution but he should learn from the example of Pakistan where the fight over technicalities over constitution by Bhutto and Sharif led to General Musharraf's rule. None of the constitutional technicalities that they used held any water later on. Although the fierce enemies at one time have now joined forces against Musharraf, it is too late for them. The reality in Bangladesh's democracy is something similar. We call it democracy because we have good elections. But what follows the election is shameless plundering of wealth. As if democracy was defined by elections only winning which gave the leaders a free license to steal.

As if the stealing was not enough. After looting endlessly and crippling all our service sectors, they wanted to make sure that they are in power for a long time to come. So why not take down the institutions one by one. Administration, lower judiciary, caretaker government, election commission -- all went one by one. Finally the last bastion of hope --

Because conveniently the leaders made sure that the parties had no democracy inside. Only Netris wish was the party workers' command -- translating into command for rest of the country. Hence the results are the rise of BNP's Tarique Rahman and events like AL's deal with the Islamists without the knowledge of the most. The two leaders of the two parties were randomly decid-

the Supreme Court was gone too. We only had a free press to show for -- but did we really? The black money holders after bankrupting the country decided to have either the print media or the electronic media to cloud the news for their business interests. We did not know right from wrong because each news had two versions. Not only you had to read the news, you had to interpret who was the owner of the news source. Yes, we had free press on paper but could our reporters from outside Dhaka report everything they saw? Bangladesh became the most dangerous place for journalists in the world. One after another journalists were killed and the killers escaped punishment. Ask any journalist from the outside Dhaka and they will tell you how they would have to tow the line of the powerful. During Awami League it was Feni's Tipu Sultan beaten by AL MP Hajari, during BNP rule it was Faridpur's Mithu by BNP MP Shahid. Same cheap wine -- only in different bottle. I have met both of them. They did not look much different to me. The beating of one was no less than the other. And if you want to know the state of Dhaka journalists, ask Daily Star editor how many cases he has against him by the political parties. On the last count it was 20. Such is the state of free press in our country.

As if these violations of rights by these parties were not enough, the parties started playing with fire by engaging the Islamic extremists as their trump card. How did they get away with such murders?

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able to provide that leadership now. At the same time, it is also high time to pay a price to the corruption of last 15 years.

If the AL cries foul today, they won't find many friends in the secular circle because they decided to ditch them for the Islamists for convenience right before the election. If the BNP cries foul, they won't find many friends among the common mass either because they tried to ram in a farce election to be in power after a nightmarish 5 years.

So what does that leave us with? The choice is clear -- go through the motion of AL-BNP and their rotten leaders every five years and see them make a farce of democracy ie winner takes all (country) -- or try something new for a change and force the political parties to reform themselves. Yes, there is a risk -- risk of an ambitious general making a hasty move. But consider if this is a risk worth taking. At the end of the day, ask yourself how long do you want to keep our country hostage by Sheikh Hasina, Khaleda Zia and H M Ershad who took our country for a ride for the last 25 years? There has to be a price proportional to the crimes they have committed. In my last article in the Daily Star three weeks ago in a letter addressed to Mr Jalil, the AL secretary, I wrote the following,

<http://www.drishtipat.org/blog/2006/12/25/open-letter-to-abdul-jalil>, which now sounds prophetic:

"If you want to have any shred of political credibility for the future, you will want to scrap this deal. Otherwise, you will not find the friends with you when you need them and believe me you will need friends a lot sooner than you think. Deal or no deal, do know this, that from now on we will make it very, very expensive for you to take our support for granted."

Awami League of course went on to defend the deal leaving their core supporters bewildered. So there you have it... I just put a price to my support for these "democratic" parties. They have to prove that they and their definition of democracy are better than a military backed interim government (if that is what we have now) before they get my support again.

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WILLIAM O'MALLEY

THE US justice system has finally established a trial system for captives suspected of international terrorism. Among the first to be confronted will be the Indonesian Hambali, who was seized in 2003. As operations chief of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terrorist organization, Hambali plotted attacks that killed hundreds. More than that, he effectively linked Al Qaeda with diverse Islamic militant groups in Southeast Asia, thereby turning local Muslim fighters into global jihadists. And he did this globalizing task so well that, even should justice demand his death, the evil he created will live long after him.

Hambali shares telltale characteristics with many young Muslim men who turn toward violence in Southeast Asia. His education was religious rather than secular, focusing on Arabic, the Koran and the chanting of holy verses, instead of skills that might lead toward a career in government or industry. Raised in West Java as Riduan Isamuddin, he eagerly attached himself to prominent emirs such as the co-founders of JI, Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Bashir, and Al Qaeda's Osama bin Laden. And he was willing to travel to acquire the religious instruction and the military training he sought, from his home in small-town West Java to most countries in Southeast Asia, as far afield as Pakistan and Afghanistan.

But Hambali also has three traits rare among Southeast Asian militants: First, he is impressively persuasive. As a young man, he was a successful peddler, and the skills of a top salesman have served him well as a terrorist leader, readily attracting new people to his cause. He convinced his emirs that knew their will and could implement their designs. He gained the trust and cooperation of hardened fighters with much greater experience in jihad than he would never work.

Third, Hambali has vision and keen analytical skills. He has the ability to learn lessons from the past. His area of West Java was practically the heartland of Darul Islam -- an armed movement that was bitterly resentful when the anti-colonial war against the Dutch ended in 1949 with the establishment of a secular state. Darul Islam waged war for more than a decade against the new Indonesian government in an effort to create an Islamic state in that mainly-Muslim country. From the failure of that effort, he saw that challenging the might of a national army head-on would never work.

Hambali looks around and determines what might be done. He gazed with empathy at Al Qaeda, fixated on the so-called Great Satanic alliance between Washington and the House of Saud. He saw the need for the separate struggles waged by minority Moros in the southern Philippines, Malays in southern Thailand and Rohingya in western Burma against governments that oppressed them. He knew well his own JI, with its ultimate goal of establishing a single Caliphate ruling Muslims in Southeast Asia. And, crucially, he embraced and then sold the idea that all were involved in the same common struggle, in which they could and should act as one.

Second, Hambali thinks strategically. His ultimate goal: Muslims ruled only by Muslims, under Islamic law. Despite the solidity of the government's standing between present reality and that goal, he fixed on a strategy of violent confrontation to challenge them. In his mind, successful violence weakens the faith of citizens in the ability of their governments to protect them. Unsuccessful violence creates martyrs whose sacrifice catalyzes recruitment to the cause. Developing flexible tactics, Hambali proved willing to aim at



The scene of the 2002 Bali bombing and Indonesian terrorist leader Hambali (inset).

personal, institutional, even random targets; to use single or simultaneous attacks; to involve either short-term or long-term planning; to deploy large or small teams or simply single individuals as perpetrators.

Landmarks in the Southeast Asia terror campaign of Hambali, JI and jihadist colleagues include the near-simultaneous bombings of some 30 churches in Indonesia in late 2000, followed a week later by two blasts in Manila: 41 killed, almost 220 injured; the Bali bombings in October 2002, more than 200 killed and a similar number hurt; the August 2003 bombing of the Jakarta Marriott, 12 killed and 150 injured; the bombing of a ferry in Manila Bay in February 2004, more than 130 killed; more Bali bombings in October 2005, with 20 killed, perhaps 120 hurt, along with a sprinkling of lesser bombings of airports, embassies and police stations.

The setbacks are largely the after-effects of those triumphs. Forensic and detective work following attacks, boosted by information gleaned from subsequent interrogations, has seen a few hundred perpetrators, planners and their protectors taken into custody including Hambali himself in August 2003. Another setback has been the way in which attacks on civilians, including many Muslims, eroded support for full-scale jihad among Islamic communities and even caused moderates within JI to shrink back from full commitment to the cause. And the security agencies

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More striking is Hambali's ability to peer forward. Early on, he discerned that the war he had embarked upon was bound to last for generations. He saw the need to

institutionalize means to carry on that war through triumphs and setbacks.

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In a striking vote for the future, JI sent young and promising members to study together in Pakistan, where they learned to identify with Al Qaeda. They attended radical military training camps in Kashmir. And this JI Junior Varsity -- including Abu Bakar Bashir's son and Hambali's younger brother -- set about preparing themselves to lead the organization when its older personnel no longer could. Dispersed by Pakistan's security forces, these students are now mostly at large in Southeast Asia. Presumably, JI under Hambali learned how and where to recruit -- within radical Islamic schools and in regions where communal conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims festers. Learned how to build networks and cellular structures that would not crumble under pressure. Learned that Muslims in legal political parties, even those who disapproved of JI operations, would not help authorities move against it. And learned that action -- anywhere along the spectrum from minor local attack, through strikes on Western targets in Southeast Asia, to participation in global terrorist planning -- is the raison d'être of the organization.

Now, Hambali's set for an encounter with the evolving US anti-terror legal system. Should formal justice cost him his life, the alliance of terror he forged will endure -- purposeful, adaptable and forward-looking -- a legacy to make any globalizer proud.

So, three years after Hambali's incarceration, but still because of him, the next JI attack is on the way. And the one after that. And the one after that. A true globalizing legacy.

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Reforms first, reforms must

KAZI S.M. KHASRUL ALAM QUDDUSI

ARGUABLY, never before had calls for reforms gathered such a momentum. Admittedly, each and every conscious individual of the country appreciates the need for drastic reforms in our moth-eaten and selectively used electoral rules.

This is to provide semblance of significance to the elections, which have become a mock show of people's verdict due to black money, muscle power and mindless manipulations. Admittedly, civil society groups have long been campaigning for reforms to make our electoral process truly functional and productive.

However, repeated calls for crucial institutional reforms such as making the Election Commission (EC) truly strong -- complete recon-

stitution of the current moribund EC being the ideal beginning -- as well as the introduction of national identity card, making perfect and credible voters' roll, introduction of transparent ballot box, banning loan defaulters and ill-begotten money holders from taking part in the elections were constantly overshadowed previously.

Happily, however, the Fakhruddin government has started to take measures to implement the long-standing reform demands. Still, caution is essential so that the vested quarters cannot take the steam off the initiatives.

As it has been learnt, major political parties are now less interested in reforms and more interested in elections so that they can resume quickly to their habitual business of public-denial and self-aggrandizement. However one interprets the state of emergency, it

has served a blow to our political parties' designs for gaining or regaining state power by any means.

Thus, there is all likelihood that the political parties would like the interim period to be shortened and fewer reforms undertaken. This is not to vilify the political parties. In fact, genuine reforms hardly fit in their schemes of things.

However, I do believe that the stated institutional reforms are the basics and no election in the country could be truly free and fair unless the basics are put in place. Even dropping any one due to any factor is not tenable.

Interestingly, most politicians in Bangladesh cry hoarse for democracy but don't tell anything about accountability and many official incumbents cite constitutional parentage to legitimize their misdeeds but don't feel even responsible for this state of things, will be

able, let alone accountable.

I think a detailed code of conduct should be in place so that no one can become despotic on the strength of constitutional pedigree for which the nation had to pay through the nose in the recent past. Moreover, such people should be installed in the constitutional and other responsible positions who can justify their appointments through their deeds which has been lacking for years. The previous 4-party government's insatiable corruption in many sectors at the cost of national needs and interests cost the nation heavily.

Meanwhile, persistent failures of various constitutional and exalted offices and individuals have contributed to burgeoning crisis of governance in the country. Thus, many rated the country to be on the brink of being a failed state even a few days back. I think this is also the

opportunity moment to put hindrances in the way of reckless practices.

Truly, for many, formation of a non-party caretaker or interim government replacing a party-nominated president as the chief adviser has been a happy let-up in the march down the drain.

Few days back, Transparency International brought out a report on political parties' role in corruption. In their survey, they brought the politicians and their parties under review. According to the survey, those involved in politics over the decades have opted for providing service to the people in exchange of profitable deals.

Major parties in sixty-two countries are found working in the political arena for adding to their financial abilities with diversion of public resources to their own accounts. Is it too much to comment that political

parties of Bangladesh excel in the stated jobs? Dynasty syndrome is not altogether bad and it has its merits.

But, the despotism it gives birth to have already turned out to be difficult to contain and Bangladesh has by now become an ideal case in this regard. In fact, the phenomenon has turned into sort of a dictatorship in Bangladesh.

Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed very rightly pointed out that in the Citizens' Forum dialogue held in October 2006. He remarked that Bangladeshis were experiencing a "democratic dictatorship" which is more dangerous than a "military dictatorship" because it rules under the guise of legality and democracy.

Citizens' Forum's recommendations for restrictions on becoming chief of a political party for more than three consecutive terms as well as bar on a single person

becoming head of the government and chief of a political party deserve closer look to discourage the trend.

Steps should also be taken to revive the High Court directive put in abeyance by Supreme Court. Notably, the High Court on May 25 2005 in a significant verdict had issued an order following a writ filed by three lawyers asking the Election Commission to seek eight particulars from aspiring candidates for parliamentary elections and make them public in their respective constituencies.

It had also asked the Election Commission to hold joint projection meetings and to compel all the candidates to stand on a platform to answer to the queries of the people in their constituencies. The direction also said that the candidates should also report to the EC about the amount of loans taken from banks and financial institutions or

loans taken from bank by the company where a candidate holds the post of chairman or director. This requirement is likely to effectively check the unbridled loan-default culture.

The bottom line is that there is the deep-rooted apprehension that no political government is likely to put them into effect. The future elections will also become problematic as the 9th parliamentary elections if the reforms are not executed during this interim tenure. More importantly, people will continue to be tyrannized by our political parties which require sort of purgation. Thus, I strongly believe that the current interim government should prioritize the reform issues over the holding of elections hastily.

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Terrorism: Third opinion

FUAD AHMED

IT has been an extra ordinary development right across the world echoing a huge clash between western culture and Islamic values during the past several years. Nowadays it has become a political, cultural and government changing issue and creating an enormous propaganda war throughout the globe.

There are lot of confusions, lack of information and overall a huge breach of respects against common sense ignites this clash even more intensely causing wide spread cultural and religious gap between the western and Islamic media.

In the perspective of Australian values, there are a lot of issues that

need to be dealt with very cautiously. On of the Professors (Muslim) from NSW University in Sydney conducted a survey about Islam and its relevant values few months ago. Most Australians (Non-Muslim) branded Islam as violent, intolerant and in some extent ignite terrorism. And most disturbingly all surveyed people learned this information from the media.

So why is there a huge gap from the real information which is missing from the actual knowledge of Islamic study? Is this a lack of initiative from leaders and clerics from Islamic world or is it a total conspiracy package from massive hidden power?

But one of the very key point of the whole scenario in terms of

essence of brotherhood despite religious differences.

It is also true that some of the small Muslim communities in every part of the world adapt to radicalism by ignoring broader human bondage and eventually isolate themselves with ignited hatred towards western people.

True Muslims cannot hate other religious believers yet they embrace the real wideness of Islamic values and its simple way of life. It is also true that if somebody learns Islam in its real sense, he will be very polite, gentle and approachable to everyone.

But these days a small isolated group of people gathers up for a religious discussion on a weekly basis creating a potential arrogance in those particular Muslim

believers. These small groups are generally non-approachable in terms of their Islamic values and related religious beliefs. These are the small factors coincide with other global factors provoking the whole scenario to destabilise the world in some way.