

## Verdict against militancy

*Let no one doubt our resolve to fight it*

THE conviction of former minister Barrister Aminul Haque and 24 others to a long prison sentence is clearly a historic judgment. There are quite a few reasons why this verdict stands out as a judicial landmark. In the first place, it is a maiden conviction ever to be handed in a case of patronising militants.

The number of convicts -- 25 to be exact, including the former minister -- is indicative of the magnitude of the crime committed. The fact, however, that 17 of them, inclusive of the ex-minister, are absconding, means that they have to be ferreted out and made to face justice.

That they have been found guilty of promoting and supporting Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh in their acts of extortion and torture of people in a court of law puts across some strong signals. It lends a robust credence to the widely acknowledged fact that elements within the erstwhile BNP-led coalition government with Jamaat had harboured, sheltered and promoted the extremist elements of JMB spearheaded by so-called Bangla Bhai. The government going in a denial mode despite wide newspaper coverage of the rising extremist spectre only helped strengthen the militant causes. The interrogation of terror suspects had revealed names in the erstwhile government who allegedly nurtured armed extremism. They should be pursued now -- to the fullest.

With the conviction delivered, numerous people who were maimed and crippled by the JMB would feel that justice has been done.

This court verdict along with the execution of the six top extremists should deliver a strong message to those who harbour militant agenda. The ideology these people work on having been based on exploitation of religious sentiments of innocent people may still be rubbing with some; so the need for an all-out campaign against the protagonists of armed extremism.

That the rise of militancy is a potential threat to state security and social equilibrium is universally acknowledged today. We have to build on this basic realisation of our people.

The latest court verdict against patronisation of militancy should convey the message to the outside world as to our national commitment to combating terrorism.

## Flood worsens across country

*Let's roll up our sleeves to meet the challenge*

WE note with concern that the major rivers in the country continue to register a rise thereby threatening the adjacent lands with inundation. Already vast areas of arable land and homesteads have gone under water forcing the flood-stricken people to seek shelter on embankments, roads etc. The tragedy has taken a new dimension at some of the places with tornado and gusty winds having levelled households to the ground.

It is only obvious that if succour in the shape of shelter and security, food, drinking water and healthcare does not immediately reach the marooned people, it would be difficult for them to survive the onslaught.

We believe that the community at large, needs to be associated with the disaster preparedness and management programme of the government. Great caution has to be taken to ensure that no plan benefits only a small minority and inadvertently increases the woes of the majority. Along with undertaking long-term plans, immediate hands-on plan has to be taken to minimise the misery of the marooned people with relief materials. Agri-loan is one vital issue that has to be looked into immediately after the flood-waters subside and lands become available for sowing seeds.

It needs to be said at this point that some of the smaller rivers, canals and water-bodies in the country have heavy deposits of silt at the bottom and for this reason water quickly spills over the banks even after a small rain. But, according to experts, timely dredging of these rivers and canals would maintain the desired depth and thus help contain excess water. Construction of unplanned embankments, mostly done with the ulterior motive of benefiting a small group of politically influential people, is another factor that contributes to flooding of adjacent areas during the monsoon season.

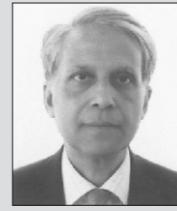
We feel, the political leadership that enjoyed power in last fifteen years needs to answer as to why no long-term measures worth the name have been taken to minimise the onslaught of flooding. We can cite numerous stories of how colossal amounts of money and resources have been wasted on worthless projects leaving aside more important ones. It is a pity that the lawmakers from the flood-prone areas never came up with a concrete proposal to make their areas flood free.

KAZI ALAUDDIN AHMED

OVER the past few days an intriguing question has been spinning in my head: What particular purpose shall be served for the people making allegations of extortion against the political leaders belonging to different parties after having themselves enjoyed massive material benefits from those literal benefactors? Both the parties to such underhand deals are equally guilty of immoral act. Any post-facts complaint of 'extortion' against the alleged 'extortionist' by the beneficiary cannot, by any means, absolve him of his own legal liability in the gamble. It was good to observe that such an approach was recently adhered to by a court passing judgment in the case involving two police officers sentenced to seven years rigorous imprisonment. They were caught red-handed with bribe. The two persons found guilty of bribing were also sentenced to one year imprisonment each.

The Awami League chief and former prime minister Sheikh Hasina was arrested on grounds of

## Nuclear energy and Bangladesh



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

It has recently been indicated by the present caretaker government that it is likely to invite international tenders for setting up three large independent power producer (IPP) plants each with 450 MW capacity. It has also been stated that the proposed plants will be in the form of 450 MW Meghnaghat Phase-III, 450 MW Sirajganj combined cycle and 450 MW Bibinba combined cycle and that it will be set up in the private sector on Build-Own-Operate (BOO) basis. It is anticipated that both the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank will be providing support for these projects. They will be doing so on the understanding that this will not only reduce the current power crisis (shortfall of 1500 to 2000 MW) but will also help to partially meet the expected emerging future demand of another 5000 MW by 2012.

These are good initiatives but can only be successful if many smaller power producers in the private sector supplement them. Unfortunately, till now, there has been a poor response from such small power producers. There has relatively been very little interest in the scheme of Captive Power Policy (CPP) that envisages sale of electricity to public distribution companies by smaller private sector entrepreneurs.

The present government's aim to generate 5,875 MW of additional

electricity by next five years is also facing another constraint -- state of poor gas supply. Our Power Division is apparently thinking of installing a total of 26 new power plants by 2012, of which 25 will be gas fired and one hydropower. This will however necessitate the Energy and Mineral Resources Division (EMRD) undertaking the almost impossible task of doubling the existing gas supply to feed these power plants. They have to raise the

reserves of around 14.4 TCF is taken into consideration, the country's gas stock will be exhausted by 2015.

In the meantime, experts have also pointed out that the equation of demand and supply regarding gas has worsened and will continue to deteriorate further due to the alarming decline in gas production in a number of gas fields -- Titas, Sangu and Fen. The supply shortfall scenario has also assumed greater

energy and we need to be self-reliant. Without this there will be no poverty eradication or economic development".

It was consequently heartening to know from our Power and Energy Adviser on 24 June 2007 that Bangladesh along with seven other countries have now received the approval of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to establish nuclear reactors for power generation.

much-awaited nuclear project has steadily grown over the decades -- from 70 MW in 1963 to 140 MW in 1966, to 200 MW in 1969, to 300 MW in 1979, to 330 MW in 1988 and eventually to 600 MW in 2001.

Such a power-generation capacity might have been considered as enough six years ago, but obviously should be considered as insufficient now. Our planners should really think in terms of 1,000 MW to make the effort worthwhile.

nuclear energy usage in South Korea for meeting its power needs.

It needs to be noted by our authorities that the process of urbanisation and industrialisation in Bangladesh will require uninterrupted production of electrical energy. Right now our per capita electricity generation is one of the lowest in Asia 140 kWh, compared to the Asian average of 650 kWh and the global average of nearly 2500 kWh. This needs to improve.

It is more than likely that our per capita consumption demand will rise to above 350 kWh by 2015. Consequently there has to be greater production of energy through renewable as well as non-renewable sources.

Nuclear energy is clean energy. Under proper safeguards, it could provide us with the satisfactory answer to our needs.

I know that the initial cost of such a nuclear plant will be quite high (USD 1.6 billion for a 1000 MW plant) and that it might take five years to implement it. However that should not dissuade us. We have to understand that after the huge initial investment, the subsequent sustained power generation cost will be cost effective.

## POST BREAKFAST

It is more than likely that our per capita consumption demand will rise to above 350 kWh by 2015. Consequently there has to be greater production of energy through renewable as well as non-renewable sources. Nuclear energy is clean energy. Under proper safeguards, it could provide us with the satisfactory answer to our needs. The initial cost of a nuclear plant will be quite high (USD 1.6 billion for a 1000 MW plant). However that should not dissuade us. We have to understand that after the huge initial investment, the subsequent sustained power generation cost will be cost effective.

supply of natural gas by at least 1,400 million cubic feet per day (mmcf/d) to 3,050 mmcf/d. Such a measure will require massive capital investment, but that does not appear to be in the planning cards of the EMRD. Reports published have suggested that the EMRD will try to raise supply of gas to a total of 2,400 mmcf/d by the end of 2012. Such an addition will however probably be just sufficient in meeting only the current needs of consumers, including existing power plants, fertilizer factories, commercial establishments and domestic users. This addition will not be able to meet the requirement of enhanced power generation.

It will be fitting to note here that the country's present proven reserve of natural gas is about 8.40 TCF. That is set to be exhausted by 2011 at current rates of consumption. If proven and probable

seriousness given the fact that (according to energy experts) we will need a further 24 TCF of gas and US dollar 7.7 billion over the next 18 years to achieve a moderate annual economic growth at seven percent.

It is such a possibility that persuaded me to write in this column under the title "Finding a solution to the power crisis" on 17 March 2007 that -- "we may also consider the financial and strategic implications of nuclear energy. We are a party to the NPT and should have no hesitation in agreeing to the compliance of required international safeguards of the IAEA. We need to discuss this with our development partners. At one time France was keen to help us in this regard. We could possibly activate such an idea again and convene a special committee of nuclear scientists and economists to scrutinise this idea with seriousness. We need

Details are not yet very clear. However, the very fact that the government has asked the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC) to consider all aspects of reviving the old proposal for setting up a clean energy nuclear power plant is significant. It is understood that studies have already been initiated in this regard. The proposed site is expected to be in Rooppur, Ishwardi in Pabna where approximately 250 acres of land have been acquired and set aside for this purpose since independence.

For many years, establishing a nuclear plant in Rooppur has been a collective dream for our nation. Conceived in 1961, it has, at various times, been the basis of discussion between Bangladesh and companies from the USA, the former Soviet Union, UK, France and Switzerland. The size of this

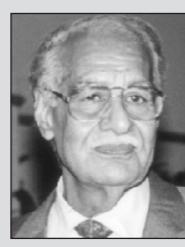
earlier, during the immediate past government, our authorities had sought soft loans from China to implement the Rooppur project. A framework agreement was also signed between the two governments in 2005. Nothing much has happened since then in terms of techno-economic viability assessment.

It is understood that there might now be a slight shift. Press reports have highlighted that a high-powered delegation from Bangladesh will try to ascertain from South Korea about alternatives pertaining to nuclear power generation.

Bangladesh has no other option. We have to be bold and firm. We could raise the requisite funds through the issue of shares in foreign exchange within our expatriate community. This would broaden the base. I am confident that if we are serious, we can raise the necessary resources.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador who can be reached at mzamir@dhaka.net.

## Pakistan's finest hour



KULDIP NAYAR  
writes from New Delhi

After a long time the judiciary in Pakistan has something to be proud about. Its past is replete with unsavoury examples of endorsing the hanging of former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and sanctifying military coups under the pernicious "doctrine of necessity" which the judges themselves invented to placate the army rulers. Yet, the judiciary has also the distinction of some judges quitting rather than taking fresh oath to avow loyalty to the perpetrators of the coup.

By reinstating Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry as Chief Justice, the judiciary has shown exemplary courage to take on the military-headed executive. It is the Pakistan's finest hour. Aitzaz Hasan, who argued brilliantly day after day for almost one and a half months, has hailed the judgment as a good omen. He has a point because the restoration of the judiciary's dignity may pave the way for the restoration of democracy. The judiciary from now onward would be the best protector of the constitution and the rule of law.

There was yet another difference. Lawyers in Pakistan agitated throughout the country for five

months to have Justice Chaudhry reinstated. Even serving judges were courageous enough to attend the receptions held to honour him. In India even the tallest among lawyers fell silent during the emergency. Three lawyers, V.M. Tarkunde, Soli Sorabjee and Shanti Bhushan were the only ones who defended the detainees.

I think that the lawyers of Pakistan have written a new chapter of courage and bravery. None in the

Pakistan, it is clear that he wants to have another 5-year term with uniform. This is where he may find the Supreme Court in the way. When the Chief Justice was suspended one of the reasons given was his equivocal answer to the question whether the President could wear the uniform. He reportedly said that it was a debatable question.

The re-election of Musharraf as President by the present National

Bhutto goes through. Musharraf's call of "moderates versus extremists," has come a bit too late in the day. Not many are sure whether he is saying so because he has been driven to the wall or because he has to divert attention from the troubles he is in. People have found him on both sides, first going soft on fundamentalists to frighten the civil society and then going hard on them to impress it. Yet, some in the civil society

## BETWEEN THE LINES

The civil society which was cynical and inactive is now a force to reckon with. It has realised after winning the battle for the Chief Justice that it can influence events in Pakistan. It is dead set against Musharraf and may exact the price. It is difficult to envisage that the military will altogether be out from the affairs of Pakistan. But the restoration of democracy to the maximum extent is very much on the cards.

upheld detentions without trial on the plea that the protective law which gave everyone security had to give way to the interests of the state. The judges were afraid of Mrs Gandhi's ire.

Khanna's dissenting judgment said the question was not whether there could be curtailment of personal liberty but whether the law, speaking through the authority of the courts, could be absolutely silenced and rendered mute because such a threat existed. He was suspended and his junior who sided with the government was appointed the Chief Justice of India.

There was yet another difference. Lawyers in Pakistan agitated throughout the country for five

future would dare to interfere in the functioning of the judiciary there. If the Army Chief-cum-President Pervez Musharraf could not get away with the unproven charges of misconduct and misuse of authority against the Chief Justice, none in the government would drag the judges to the court.

Normally, President Musharraf should have resigned because he framed the charges, pursued them and lost in the Supreme Court.

Resignations after losing take place in a democracy, not in an authoritarian system where the law ends when the military prerogative begins. Musharraf's uniform itself has little chance to get the religious parties on his side. The Pakistan People's Party may come to his rescue if his deal with Benazir

believe that he is their best bet. But the number is dwindling rapidly.

Many think-tanks in America have attacked him for riding two boats at the same time. A US official said that his country may even attack the Waziristan territory in the NWFP, to chastise Al-Qaida. Some

10 months ago, Musharraf had entered into an agreement with the Waziristan rebels to let them enjoy immunity from the Pakistan action on the condition that they would not attack his forces. This place has turned out to be a heaven for Al-Qaida.

However, the American government feels satisfied. It believes Musharraf, whatever his past, is now in. Richard Boucher, US assis-

tant secretary of state for South Asia, has said in praise: "It is pretty much crossing a line and there is no going back." Since the Taliban have themselves abrogated the Waziristan (NWFP) ceasefire accord and killed many Pakistani soldiers it is apparent that Musharraf has earned the wrath of terrorists. The fight in Waziristan area may be fierce. Musharraf has redeployed two divisions which he had withdrawn after the ceasefire.

Hedged from practically all sides, Musharraf has no option except to make up with Benazir Bhutto who is willing to do business with the army. She has confirmed her contacts. Probably, some agreement will come through in due course. But the question after the lawyers' victory has become a bigger one. The civil society which was cynical and inactive is now a force to reckon with. It has realised after winning the battle for the Chief Justice that it can influence events in Pakistan. It is dead set against Musharraf and may exact the price. It is difficult to envisage that the military will altogether be out from the affairs of Pakistan as it is a big business too. But the restoration of democracy to the maximum extent is very much on the cards. I only hope that Benazir Bhutto knows the strength which the civil society, including lawyers, bureaucrats and media men, have come to acquire. She cannot afford to ignore it while settling with Musharraf.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

## Reflections on extortion, big business and reform

KAZI ALAUDDIN AHMED

extortion. In this case also the complainants have been direct beneficiaries of the powerful patronage of the benefactor(s). In the same logical sequence the complainant beneficiaries must have derived huge financial/material benefits from the alleged underhand deal(s). Sheikh Hasina and the other imputed accomplices are now behind the bars. The investigation Officer(s) concerned is (are) looking introspectively into the allegations and is (are) expected to place his (their) reports/findings for due legal process to commence in the special court.

Although the complaint against Sheikh Hasina was reportedly lodged much earlier than the present emergency rule the case against her is likely to be tried in accordance with the provisions in the laws governing such rule. The Home Ministry was reported to have solicited the sanction of the court for transferring the case to the purview of emergency laws. Hasina's lawyers making comments on such a stance of the prosecution thought it untenable. They would prefer an appeal in the

country with the existing rule in Pakistan sounds preposterous. It somehow coincides with a similar remark by one responsible person favouring Pakistani type of governance. To me all these are mere wishful thinking having nothing to do with the arrests of the political leaders.

A literal ecstasy pervading the bases of the two major political parties viz, Awami League and BNP, over reforms is gradually dying down. In this, the level of enthusiasm in BNP has been quite hectic where a turmoil has also set in on the wry remarks of the Chairperson Khaleda Zia made in her teleconference with her supporters abroad. She was reported to have questioned the bona fide of the reformist part of the party led by the Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan.

In the present situation it cannot be ruled out that the slowly brewing up commotion over the incidence may consolidate into a crisis. That will be very unfortunate and undesirable to say the least. The remark alluded to a leader of the European Community finding a weird semblance of the present state of affairs

reform proposition. A leader like Moti Chowdhury contesting the approach of this trio came in an intellectual clash. However, Sheikh Hasina lost the desired pull because of her citing the bitter relationship over the past several years. Even though the acting chief of Awami League appreciated Khaleda's statement as befitting of a political leader of her stature, there have been many who took such stance for no better than a mere political stunt.

"Big business" has been an often quoted connotation in the Western world, chiefly the United States, Great Britain and some of the European countries having democratically elected government. The term has been in vogue for over one century now commencing its ominous advent in the last part of nineteenth century in America. It stands for the big and mighty role played by the business community towards the exchequer without much ado. Extortion is a term never heard of in these cases. The beneficiary-businessmen comprising the 'Big Businessmen' wouldn't normally ask for any undue favour from the government.</p