

# Playing the blame game

COMMODORE MD KHURSHED ALAM, ndc, psc BN (Retd)

**P**OLICY of blaming Bangladesh for every terrorist attack in India are doing more harm than good. At least 42 people have been killed and 50 injured in two explosions at a crowded park and a popular eatery in Hyderabad on 25th August '07, three months after the Mecca Masjid blasts. Soon after the incident, Union Minister of State for Home Sriprakash Jaiswal had said, "Some of our neighbours are jealous of India's progress and they keep hatching conspiracies to disrupt harmony in the country." Indian newspapers are blaming it on weak-kneed and bumbling response to terror attacks, both in preventing them and in bringing the merchants of death to book and the failure of the governments to deal more firmly with the scourge of terrorism. What we have observed is that a familiar drill follows every terror attack in India - visits to the spot by some high-level dignitaries and then announcement of compensation and finger pointing across the border towards Pakistan and Bangladesh.

We in Bangladesh have always condemned any forms of terror as our people are peace loving and strongly believe that peace can not co-exist with attacks on any community or class of people, whether they are communal, caste or ethnic killings. Everything we do to prevent and punish acts of terror must flow from the basic premise that not only do these take away innocent lives but also divide the country, society, create mistrust among the people and leave scars that can take decades to heal in any country. It is known that terrorism is worse than an act of war against any nation. Rather, it's worse than war, because terror acts are executed

stealthily against civil society targeting schools, suburban trains at peak hour, crowded markets as well as places of congregation.

Many Indians now feel, according to some newspapers that their anger as a whole should not only be directed towards those who commit such acts, but equally towards those who plan and finance them. Extreme views are arguing that India should take the war on terror even across the border, a very dangerous move and must be a cause of concern for the neighbours. We in South Asia should desperately pursue to achieve the economical sovereignty for our teeming millions putting aside our egos, turf wars and differences, and act as one. Security establishments including some politicians of the region have not yet felt the pang of conscience and looked beyond short-term gains before maligning others. Before we analyze the usual blame game on Bangladesh, let us just delve more into the continuous terrorist attacks happening within the borders of India. The long simmering Ayodhya crisis finally culminated in a terrorist attack on the site of the 16th century Babri Masjid - Ram Janmabhoomi Hindu temple in Ayodhya on July 5, 2005. Three explosions went off in the Indian capital of New Delhi on October 29, 2005 which killed more than 70 people and injured at least 200 others. A series of blasts occurred across the Hindu holy city of Varanasi on 7 March 2006. 21 people were reported to have been killed and as many as 101 others were injured.

In Sep 2006, at least 37 people were killed and 125 injured in a series of bomb blasts in the vicinity of a mosque in Malegaon, Maharashtra and in May 2007, 13 people were killed, including 4 killed by the Indian police in the

rioting that followed in the bombing of Mecca Masjid, Hyderabad. India has hundreds of thousands of miles of railway track, and over 14,000 trains crisscross the country every day. These are tempting targets for many of the terrorist groups operating within India and attack on trains, whether direct assaults, bombings or deliberate derailing through sabotage are common. Andhra Pradesh is one of the few southern states affected by terrorism and it stems from the People's War Group (PWG), popularly known as Naxalites which has been operating in India for over a few decades. The group is also active in Orissa and Bihar. PWG is a Maoist terrorist organization and labor rights are one of its primary goals. The group targets Indian Police, multinational companies, landlords and other influential institutions in the name of the rights of landless labor.

Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Hizbul Mujahideen, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, Farzand-e-Millat and United Jihad Council are also operating in Kashmir and carrying out attacks against the security forces since long. Perhaps the most significant insurgency started in Nagaland from the early 1950s. The National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) demanded an independent Nagaland and has carried out a number of attacks on soldiers, government targets and public property. Although a cease-fire agreement was signed between the Government of India and the NSCN-IM, yet Manipur, the neighbouring state, apprehended that the National Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K) would continue insurgent activities in the state of Manipur and demanded that the government in New Delhi scrap the ceasefire deal and renew military action.

Bodos in the state demanded for a separate Bodo land and the government in Delhi gave special administrative autonomy much to the chagrin of the Bodos and consequently led to clash between the Bengalis, the Bodos and the Indian military resulting in hundreds of deaths. Bodo Liberation Tigers and National Democratic Front of Bodoland were involved in number of fatal attacks. Then also the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) formed in 1971 demanded the independence of Assam and the establishment of a socialist government. The ULFA has carried out over hundred attacks in the region targeting the Indian military, political opponents, police, railroad tracks, and other infrastructure facilities.

Then suddenly it started blaming Bangladesh for every terrorist's activities in India knowing fully well that the root cause of most of them were social injustice and economic deprivation. This has also something to do with the BJP when it started all this as xenophobia against the Muslims in India and the so-called issue of large-scale migration from Bangladesh. Security establishments in India are finding an easy excuse for the blame game that some Bangladeshis are being used by the ISI for carrying out subversive activities in India. Although so far, no solid proof has yet been provided by India. Bangladesh failed to estimate the impact of such unfounded blame game and the power of the electronic and print media of India and now with every incident, Indian public as well have started believing that in addition to Pakistan, Bangladesh based militant outfits are also involved in these attacks. And the efforts of our diplomatic channel in denying any involvement in such incidents have not helped at all in removing



the blame game mindset. We are happy to see that India is the biggest democracy, already a regional power and has recorded rapid progress on the economic side but we strongly feel that such rhetoric of blame does incalculable harm by putting a premium on complacency and masks the feeble response to the challenge. We are, however, lucky that Indian security establishments have not blamed

Bangladesh for nearly three decades of reign of terror unleashed by the dreaded sandalwood smuggler, Veerappan, in the sprawling forests of Tamil Nadu and also for the loss of the Noble medal of Rabindranath Tagore from Shantiniketan, investigation about whom has recently been suspended by the Indian CBI. Bangladesh must understand that what has gone into the minds of

Indian security establishments can hardly be eliminated over night and we must initiate appropriate corrective actions to remove such accusation through establishing second track channel and people to people contact with the Indian political think tank and hierarchy so that such blame games are stopped and we can move ahead with our economic emancipation along with India. We feel that war

against terrorism is too important to be left to governments and their agencies only, rather every one of us must make concerted effort in removing the root causes and act as a combatant and committed to securing a safe future for our children and the nation and only then terrorists should know that we mean business.

The author is a freelancer.

# Tackling corruption

SHAMSHER CHOWDHURY

**T**o tackle corruption one has to have a clear understanding of the various dimensions of corruption. Corruption can be of various types with varying impacts on any given society. Material corruption like illegal acquisition of money and assets through the use of one's position and authority is perhaps easier to deal with than corruption having moral and ethical dimensions.

As much as I am against corruption and those who deal in corrupt practices, I am of the opinion that material corruption

spread like termites through the length and breadth of the society. Conversely, in neighboring India there is no dearth of highly corrupt politicians. From time to time its Government hauls up politicians with tons of illegal cash and gold kept hidden at their residences. But what makes the country move ahead is that these politicians knowingly or unknowingly did not allow its evil influence to spread through the various tiers of the society. On the other hand they indulge in corrupt practices not at the expense of national interests. More than most of them are

have not plunged into such obsession and euphoria in dealing with corruption and corrupt people. It is important to understand that corruption, particularly during previous regimes right from the day we gained independence, continued to increase in leaps and bounds perpetuated by a multitude of factors like poor political leadership, absence of proper governance, the ever increasing gap between the rich and the poor, lack of accountability on the part of successive governments for punishment should be rational. The process should follow the basic rules of procedures already

organized effort in the direction of social movement to date. From the primary levels stretching up to the undergraduate courses should be there with the primary focus being on the moral and ethical aspect of corruption as a whole.

As for the legal process it has to be totally fool proof. The process should not only be even-handed and at the same time seen and perceived as impersonal by the entire nation. On the other hand provisions for punishment should be rational. The process should follow the basic rules of procedures already

taged including people in the limited and fixed income groups should also come into focus in as far as their quest for day to day justice is concerned. Let us not forget that it is they who happen to be the majority of our population.

As much as I wish well the present government of the country it is my belief that time has come for it to focus and contemplate on some of the issues raised above.

Finally, I would like to conclude this short commentary with two invaluable quotes, the first one by the famous British



and other types cannot be eradicated no matter what measures are adopted. A certain level of corruption is not only universal but also has been there since the dawn of history.

On the other hand corruption is situation specific and its impact and relevance differs from country to country. Where as Bangladesh has been ranked as the most corrupt nation of the world it is also true that from a different premise the "corporate" corrupt practices in USA and other developed countries are of no less magnitude.

But what makes corruption in Bangladesh acute and unique and of serious concern, is its

"patriots". Here in Bangladesh corruption in varying degrees is rampant across the country. High profiled corrupt politicians and others indulge in illegal acquisition of money and assets as devils incarnated, taking it all without putting even 5 percent of the loot to the good of the country. Our high profiled corrupts are also inefficient, particularly in statecraft and state management.

Both moral and ethical erosion of values combined with material corruption of some of the developed countries of the world would perhaps exceed what is now prevailing in Bangladesh. Yet, those countries

is also important to understand that the level of corruption we see today is the cumulative effect of over 35 years and hence it would be too utopian a thinking to assume that by whatever method corruption in Bangladesh could be eliminated in the coming two years or for that matter in the coming twenty years.

Therefore our crusade against corruption and corrupt people has to be two-pronged, tackling through the process of law and at the same time turning it into a social movement across the country. Although there has been much talk about it from time to time, there has been no

established. Bringing about too many drastic changes in laid down procedures may prove to be counterproductive in the long run and has the possibility of being overturned in the future, making way for possible eluding of justice and return to the rot once again.

The passage of justice should ensure complete neutrality and should be free from any kind of bias on the part of the complainants, the accused and the judges alike. The entire process should be free from any form of hatred, religious bias, and anger.

One also has to remember that the poor and the disad-

Judge Charles Bowen (1723 - 1780) and the other by Alexander Pope (1688 - 1744). It is my strong belief that both the initiator and the dispenser of justice in dealing with or engaged in eradication of corruption and handing out justice to corrupt people would do well to remember these words of wisdom as they proceed with their crusade.

"It is better that ten guilty persons escape than one innocent suffer".

"The hungry judges soon Sentence sign, And wretches hang that jury-men may dine".

The author is a freelancer.

# The economic factors behind the Myanmar protests

**T**HE first sign of the current protests currently underway in Myanmar occurred in a rare display of public outrage over the economic conditions within the country in February 2007. A small group calling themselves the Myanmar Development Committee called on the military rulers to address consumer prices, lack of health care, education and the poor electricity infrastructure. Normally unseen in Myanmar, the protest was quickly broken up after only 30 minutes of activity. Likely in response to the protests, the ruling military junta appointed Brigadier-General Than Hau of the Myanmar police to the responsibility of handling civil unrest in Rangoon.

On August 15, 2007, the government made significant cuts to national fuel subsidies, which had an immediate effect of increasing the price of diesel fuel by a reported 100 percent, causing a five-fold increase in the price of compressed natural gas, and placing additional inflationary pressure on an economy already facing estimated inflation levels of 17.7 percent in 2005 and 21.4 percent in 2006.

Once again, similar to the event in February, people took to the street in a rare display of public anger. The current demonstrations have drawn a significant number of Buddhist monks into the streets and have led to national curfews. Violence finally broke out on September 26 as security forces and protesters clashed.

The end of fuel subsidies were likely part of a larger package of reforms that the junta has been planning in order to, among other things, reduce the pressure of global fuel prices in a country that is dependent on diesel imports for its entire economy. Myanmar has an insignificant domestic refinery capacity and a chronic need for foreign currency. The latest Indian proposal intended to regain access to the Shwe gas fields has reportedly included diesel fuel exports, while a deal with Petronas of Malaysia is seeking similar arrangements.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank made recommendations along the lines of the subsidy cut as part of a larger package of reforms as recently as last year; critically citing the trend toward extraordinarily high deficit budget deficits carried by the junta. The construction of a new capital, Naypyidaw, and the proposed construction of an information technology capital, Yadanabon, along with significant pay raises for civil servants and the military have placed serious pressure on government reserves. The government typically addresses such deficits by printing more money, producing the significant inflationary pressures seen today.

The involvement of private interests should not be overlooked. Leading businessman Tay Za and his holding company Htoo Trading Company may be set to profit from the privatization of the fuel distribution system within the country. In order for the move to be successful, the thriving black market in fuel needs to be eradicated, thus the necessary removal of fuel subsidies and the subsequent rise in prices throughout the country. While power plays between junta leaders and private business have been cited before as causal factors in economic policy changes, the international pattern of subsidy reduction in the face of rising global oil prices suggests that this was not the underlying motive in the move. However, it would be a fairly typical move for the junta to select reforms beneficial to its business partners rather than to the national interest.

The military has made a supreme effort to remove itself from contact with the population: barracks and bases are situated away from towns, and the new capital is a study in strategic withdrawal to the hinterland. It is the populace who has the most to lose from rampant inflation and evaporating savings, but faces an incredibly resilient and increasingly isolated military that has kept a stranglehold on power since 1962.

The last major uprising in Myanmar occurred in 1988. The underlying cause of the revolt was

economic and resulted in violent repression by the military. The outcome of the current protest could be similar. Regardless, due to the decades of military involvement in the economy, dependency on resource exports and a high rate of corruption that pervades the country, the necessary economic improvements will not come easily. Even with peaceful political change, without significant international oversight, the overwhelming pre-eminence of military intervention and control in the country will likely return Myanmar to state-sponsored economic mismanagement.

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