

Karachi mayhem

We condemn the cowardly act of violence

W e strongly condemn the suicide bomb attack on a procession of supporters of Pakistan's former prime minister Benazir Bhutto in Karachi that left at least 133 people dead and nearly 400 injured. It was a dastardly act orchestrated by some extremist elements who apparently wanted to display their crude strength at the very outset of her reaching home after spending over eight years in exile. In an instant reaction Ms Bhutto has pointed her finger at the failure of the intelligence agencies.

In the violence-ridden and apparently conspiracy-prone political environment of Pakistan one might treat the mindless carnage as the calling card of the opponents telling Benazir Bhutto that her present round in politics would be frequently punctuated by murder and mayhem. The ferocity with which they struck on Thursday only belittles whatever security measures the Pakistani government had taken to ensure her safe return home.

In the chequered history of Pakistan we have observed how the extremist elements proliferated in the country and how these groups had gotten armed to the teeth over the years. Gunfight on a protest rally of lawyers had taken many lives some months back. And the incident of deaths and destruction in Red Mosque in Islamabad further reinforced our belief that democracy will not be safe in Pakistan as long as armed extremist groups will continue to exist in that society.

It was correct for the Bangladesh government along with the world community to condemn in strong words the tragic incident in Karachi. Most world leaders termed the attack as a move to strangle freedom in Pakistan. We, on our part, also think that it is freedom and democratic aspirations of the people that suffer most in such cowardly and covert acts of violence.

We believe Bangladesh has a patent lesson to learn from the tragic incident in Pakistan. We have had our quota of political violence and we have also seen proliferation of obscurantist elements in our society who would strike at the very base of our society, including the free press, at the first opportunity. The good part of the story is we as a nation have the innate endowments to welcome and the strength to practice democracy and create a just society. But democracy can only flourish in an environment free of violence of any kind. Therefore, we shall have to be on guard so that no fringe group can propagate violence, and spread militancy and extremism.

Aiming high for exports

Challenge is to transform the downturn into an upturn

T HE government's export earning target for fiscal 2007-08 at US\$ 14.5 billion envisages a 19.07 percent increase over last fiscal year's earning of US\$ 12.17 billion. What is growth about unless every year we notch up higher earnings than the preceding year's level? True, but the point to note about this year's higher export target is the backdrop against which it is set: perceptible downturn in export earning was observed during the last three months of fiscal 2006-07. As a matter of fact, the new export year opens on a rather critical note with earnings in July plummeting by 21.08 percent. The downturn in RMG sector, the mainstay of our export earnings, reflected far fewer orders received between December and March of last fiscal, the time-period marked by effects of political instability followed by massive labour unrest. As ill-luck would have it, warmer winter in the west led to a deficit in orders, too. There was underperformance in some other areas than garment such as frozen foods, leather, ceramics, jute goods and engineering products.

We would like to believe in the optimism expressed by BGMEA and BKMEA leaders based on increasing placement of orders since September that things will even out at the end of the year. We must be prepared to seize the opportunity of larger export orders with the onset of winter in November. As for frozen foods, the compliance status has improved so has also that of the garments sector. We should have by now seen the end of labour unrest in the garment sector. Whatever gaps remain in the compliance area need to be energetically filled in. So far as timely delivery on orders is concerned, we are pinning hopes on increased port efficiency that is in evidence. Adequate credit and fiscal support including lower interest rate could work wonders.

Finally, we have to diversify both in terms of exportable products and market accesses. It is noteworthy that in the last fiscal year, export earnings from vegetables, agro-processed foods and flower, stood out in comparison with other products pointing to where the emphasis should be placed.

Terrorism rearing its head

KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

BETWEEN THE LINES

New Delhi's problem is that it has no well-thought out, long-term strategy to tackle terrorism. There are ad-hoc efforts, with little coordination between the centre and the states. America, a larger country than ours, has not experienced any terrorist act after 9/11. The reason is that the intelligence agencies work hard, not like India's which do not follow up even a prior warning. We are a soft state which requires a change in attitude, not another special police force or a harsher law.

I t must be a coincidence. Otherwise, why would the terrorists choose October 11, the birthday of Gandhian Jaya Prakash Narayan, to strike when people have forgotten him? Even at Patna where his protégé, Nitish Kumar, is the Bihar chief minister, there was no official function, much less a public holiday. The terrorists who attacked the dargah at Ajmer are hardly concerned with Narayan's message of peace and non-violence. They have their own cult of bomb and their own dogma of fundamentalism. Their purpose was to instill fear. More than that, it was meant to convey hostility to the composite culture which the dargah represented. A study done a few

years ago showed that the number of non-Muslims visiting the place was more than that of Muslims. Over the years, the shrine of Sufi Saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti has become a meeting point of different religious beliefs. This fusion, Sufism, is gaining recognition for liberalism. It has brought the faithful and the fakir together. How can extremists brook something which upholds the spirit of accommodation and sense of tolerance? The terrorists' action is understandable, but the dargah's is not. The drums which have been beaten since the days of Emperor Akbar, who gave them to the dargah, fell silent in protest on the Id. Old clothes were worn with black badges. Terrorists would have

wanted no better response. Silence is needed when there is nothing to articulate. The dargah's drums should have been beaten longer and louder to make the terrorists realise that the dargah's age-old traditions were not so brittle that a blast could break them.

Still, the question that every Indian must ask himself is why terrorism is rearing its head. The government's readymade answer is that it is a handiwork of terrorists from across the border. There may be some truth in it, particularly when the training camps are still in operation in Pakistan. National Security Advisor M.K.Narayanan has accused ISI. Yet, the fact remains that if the terrorists were from out-

side, who were the locals helping them select the site, hauling the explosives, and providing shelter to them after they had finished their heinous task?

It was not so bad a few years ago. Something has gone wrong to annoy a few segments of the society. It has little to do with poverty or lack of education, but has much to do with fundamentalism. But that something is the sense of unfairness, the feeling that the government does not attend to their grievances. The oft-repeated charge that Muslims get the wrong end of the stick is not without foundation. They are the most secular community. So much so, they have never

claimed to represent Muslims or appealing in the name of Islam. They have tended to put their faith in the leadership of non-Muslims.

Yet, when they find justice eluding them, as happened in the wake of the Babri masjid's demolition and the Gujarat killings, a few among them can go wild. The guilty in the bomb blasts at Mumbai are punished even after 14 years. But the killers of Muslims three months later are not touched, even though the Justice Sri Krishna report named them: top police officials and Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray. Again, it may be an individual case but it shows the administration's partisanship. Rizwanur Rahman, who married a Hindu girl from a rich

family, was found dead after one month on the railway tracks near Kolkata. The administration is mixed up, but no action has been taken despite an uproar by the public and the media. The High Court has ordered a CBI probe, much to the embarrassment of the CPI(M) state government.

The blast at Ludhiana is an isolated case, probably by Sikh militants. Yet it indicates a sense of alienation. The Sikh community nourishes the grouse that none has been hanged for the murder of 3000 Sikhs in Delhi in 1984. Again, a number of Sikhs missing since Operation Blue Star have not been traced. And some who had indulged in the excesses against the community have been treated generously.

I may be wrong to infer that what happened at Ajmer and Ludhiana were an emotional outbursts for pending cases of injustice. The persons involved may well be outsiders. But the point I want to make is that the Hindu community, 80 percent in the country, has to wake up to the excesses committed against the minorities including the Christians. Instances like not getting a house or a job because of

enforcing agencies inside their strongholds.

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I want to tell those who believe that armed struggle would free this country from the "hold" of capitalists. We should do everything to release the 70 percent of people caught in poverty even after the 9-10 percent of economic growth. But violence is no option, just as war is not, in today's world. There are so many fissiparous tendencies in the country that can come into play. One does not know what will come out from the violence. Our democracy is firm, but our sense of justice is not.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

International concern over Myanmar

POST BREAKFAST

All of us -- the international community as a whole -- must do our part. The development in Myanmar are complex but solutions have to be found through flexibility. The present Myanmar administration needs to avail of the window of opportunity that has been opened for them. They need to move forward through reconciliation and release of political detainees. This will assist in the peaceful transition to democracy that will meet the aspirations of the people of Myanmar.

THE Special Representative of the UN Secretary General Mr. Ibrahim Gambari has briefed the United Nations Security Council after his return from Myanmar. Mr. Gambari has stated that during his visit, he had conveyed the anxiety of the international community to the senior Generals of the Myanmar army led government and also to the detained Nobel laureate Opposition Leader Aung San Suu Kyi. In this context he particularly singled out the United Nations' concern over reports of night-time raids, arbitrary arrests, mass relocations and beatings being committed by security and non-uniformed elements.

The economic situation in Myanmar has continued to deteriorate over the last three decades. Myanmar has toyed with the idea of opening up the economy to market forces and foreign investment but this has not worked because the military has been unwilling to release its grip on crucial areas like imports and exports, issuing of licenses, trading in rice and creation of infrastructure. This drawback and prevailing corruption have resulted in a near economic collapse with the official exchange rate of the Kyat, the local currency, being nearly 200 times lower than the black market rate.

The United Nations for the last two decades has been reporting that Myanmar is not only suffering from deepening poverty (with a per capita income about 30 percent less than Bangladesh) but also that there is a growing humanitarian crisis. This is indeed disappointing given the fact that Myanmar, in more ways than one, is comparatively better

endowed in terms of resources as compared to Bangladesh. According to the World Health Organisation, diseases like Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS are also increasing at a frightening rate in that country.

In this charged atmosphere of grinding poverty, the last straw appears to have been the decision to raise fuel prices on 15 August. This was done at the recommendation of the IMF. Gas prices rose by nearly 500 percent and that of diesel (which runs most of Myanmar) nearly doubled. The impact was immediate. Within days, activists were on the streets. Monks -- who can generally accurately measure economic distress by the food put into their begging bowls every morning -- decided to join in. The monks according to the published reports started participating in the protests in large numbers. This happened after government troops broke up a peaceful rally in the central town of Pakokku on 5 September. Three monks were hurt in the ensuing melee. Unfortunately, the traditional gesture of apology from the government (for any attack on monks, who are revered) was not forthcoming this time round.

Such a response on the part of the authorities was seen as an act of provocation and led to the Buddhist clergy forming a group termed as 'Alliance of All Burmese Buddhist Monks'. This newly constituted group declared that they would coordinate all protests against the government.

On 21 September, the Alliance

military government of Myanmar as 'the enemy of the people'. They also pledged to continue their protests until they were able to 'wipe out the military dictatorship in Burma'. They also took two significant steps -- firstly, the reference became Burma instead of Myanmar (as favoured by USA, the vocal critic of the current military regime) and secondly, they tried to link up their movement with that of detained pro-democracy leader Suu Kyi. These measures were interpreted as waving of a red flag in front of the proverbial bull.

We subsequently witnessed in the electronic media the steady intensification of the scale of the demonstrations. This process culminated on 24 September when tens of thousands of demonstrators took to the streets of Rangoon. Key members of the Opposition party, the National League for Democracy also joined in, after initially distancing themselves from the action.

The deteriorating situation was however more or less contained through harsh measures implemented by the government from 27 September. There was a crackdown on the demonstrators. Several people were killed, including monks and thousands arrested for interrogation. The military government also made it clear that it believed that this unrest had been encouraged and supported by external forces not friendly to the regime.

One can understand the anxiety on the part of the international community about Myanmar. It is located in a strategic area where instability could have serious con-

sequences. It is presently being wooed by Thailand, Japan, China and India for its enormous gas reserves -- by China for the possibility of gaining direct access through its territory to the Indian Ocean, by India not only for accessing to Myanmar gas for supplementing its energy needs but also for the agricultural potential that exists in that country. It is also of great interest to other western countries that are desperately trying to contain the outflow of drugs from the golden triangle that also includes Myanmar. They particularly believed that such containment would be possible if there was a regime change in Myanmar.

Nevertheless, there are certain realities that we have to acknowledge.

We should avoid falling into the trap of over-simplification. The situation in Myanmar is complicated. Creating a better situation in Myanmar will have to be carefully pursued and be a continuous process.

Mr. Gambari has succeeded in beginning a process that can bring change to Myanmar. The fact that Myanmar allowed him to visit times. Most recently in the midst of the present crisis, is encouraging. It shows that the reclusive Myanmar authorities want to maintain contacts with the UN.

Myanmar Senior General Than Shwe has announced that he is willing to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi. Despite his "pre-conditions," one should see this gesture as half-full rather than half-empty. It opens up the possibility of discussion, a process that might be long and arduous.

important question is whether high levels of individual accountability can be achieved in a police structure which combines command and hierarchical discipline. Equally important is the public belief in the individual accountability of police officers.

In the west, particularly in the police structures of England, the concept of quasi-commercial management, as distinct from commonly known military structures, has been attempted. This approach seeks to make policing policy-driven. However, the question remains if this approach, adopted from business management, can be validly applied to the police organisation.

Policing is, of necessity, reactive and "crisis management;" that is, managing other people's crises. This has profound consequences for police management, for the activity that must be managed is indefinite. A crisis can occur at any time and must be reacted to there and then; not when it is organisationally convenient. Moreover, crises can

routinely make decisions -- such as to arrest -- that are not only fatal for the citizen but also for the organisation. Arrests made on insufficient or fabricated evidence can plunge an entire police service into scandal and public disrepute.

The uncomfortable experience of policing in most places, specially in third world situations like ours, is that authority is exercised predominantly over the marginal and excluded sections of the population who tend to be powerless. Therefore, if the exercise of that authority is incompetent or illegal, the consequences for the organisation are unlikely to be serious.

We have to appreciate that the transformation of confrontational and often confusing reality of streets into the demanding world of evidence is a daunting task. This is so because such evidence will be publicly examined in a court. It is only natural that the effort for garnering the evidence are fraught with danger for the police organization, if it is done incompetently. One should also take note that senior police officers do not often deal with

the marginalised and dispossessed but with those who have power, such as politicians and the mass media.

There are quarters that argue that the strictly bureaucratic model, that is, the hierarchical structure of command and control, is ill-suited to a discretionary activity like policing, that is largely conducted in isolation and beyond the sight of the organisation. Some say that policing is a craft that involves substantial "dirty work."

Everyday experience indicates that the police patrol the boundaries of respectability, keep the disreputable in their place, which becomes visible only when things go wrong, and rarely lends dignity to any of those involved. Therefore, when policing moves on a path so dangerously close to illegality and oppression, the necessity of strong central control has progressively increased after each major law and order incident.

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The other dimension of police management



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

ALTHOUGH a police organisation appears as an archetypal legal-rational bureaucracy in the Weberian mould, in practice policy is formulated and implemented with a characteristic lack of attention to the precepts of rationality. As such, it is not unusual to see that police organisations of different societies, Bangladesh inclusive, find themselves committed to achieving the impossible.

On a practical level, senior enforcement officials have little information about or control over their principal resource -- the subordinate ranks. There is an absence of strategic planning and little attempt to identify and disseminate good practices. Usually, most attention is paid to the avoidance of negative consequences. Therefore, in conditions of managerial drift the operatives react differently for reasons that are often difficult to understand.

Some may take exception to the aforementioned hard comment. However, the reality, sociologically speaking, is that while we must develop for our survival, social dislocation and disorganisation,

wanton disregard for the existing values by the deviants are some of the inevitable concomitant price that the country has to pay in the process. The rising crescendo of crime and the ever-surfing juvenile delinquency are uncomfortable, destabilising phenomena we have to put up with.

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In the case of police management the above has particular significance, since those at the base of the hierarchy have tremendous power. The curious part of policing is that discretion increases as one descends the rank structure.

In Bangladesh, where policing is

not considered an investment, and is, in fact, principally treated as a non-development expenditure, there is still a need to inject greater managerial discipline into the service.

For good governance in tune with the aspirations of a democratic polity, the police have to be subjected to the doctrines of "new public management." As an organization, it needs to be introduced to a performance culture through the application of performance indicators and other managerial devices.

Whatever be the imperatives of modern police management, the often unappreciated fact is that the most important person in the organisation is the officer who deals with the public on the street. The irony is that this person operating at the bottom of the hierarchy suffers the worst pay and conditions.

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