

Horrific terrorist strike in Assam

We need to up our guard

THE carnage unleashed in Assam on Thursday through 12 synchronised blasts in the space of an hour has horrified and outraged us beyond measure. Such an act of cowardice snuffing out and maiming scores of innocent people in thickly crowded public places is utterly despicable. We have no words strong enough to condemn it. We, as the next door neighbour of Assam, express our heartfelt condolences for the dead and profound sympathies to the injured and the bereaved families.

This is terrorism at our doorsteps. Naturally, that is a matter of concern for us. Besides, we have had to deal with militant threats of our own. Bangladesh is fully committed to fighting terrorism in all forms. We ardently believe in the efficacy of interstate cooperation within the umbrella of Saarc to wage effective battles against overt and covert militancy that has increasingly taken on cross-border, international dimensions.

Unfortunately, whenever a bomb blast took place in India, more often than not, an Indian state government, even the central government, had not hesitated to point finger to one Bangladeshi outfit or the other. Such comments were not substantiated later, or were not found to be true. They are neither helpful to good neighbourly relations nor to any effort to track down the real culprits. If India could come out with any concrete evidence of a cross-border linkage, it should by all means have come forward and shared it with Bangladesh government rather than foisting unsubstantiated blame. If however there are fresh and substantive new evidence of any cross-border link between terrorists, such evidence should be presented to our government for appropriate action. We would like to reaffirm our commitment to fight terrorism at the intra-country and inter-country levels.

Bangladesh, for its part, should mount vigil and take guard against various ways whereby militancy is raising its head in different countries. Given the eruption of violent methods spearheaded by suicide bombers of all kinds -- strapped with human body, bicycle or laden in vehicle -- we cannot be complacent over any relative lull in violent occurrences. We have been through a sinister experience already in the simultaneous cracking of bombs in all district towns of the country but one. The proliferation of small arms through cross-border smuggling is a common concern for the region that remains to be effectively addressed. We all must collaborate to fight the rise of terrorism.

Sanitation for all by 2010

Goal being more sloganised than fulfilled

PERHAPS the least addressed among the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Bangladesh is the one that aims at 100 percent sanitation for all by 2010. There are evident voids in the sanitation coverage -- vast empty spaces on the ground -- that must be rapidly filled in if we are to achieve the goal in the two years left of the deadline.

The dialogue that was held on Tuesday last between the grassroots people and the representatives of various organisations involved in throwing sanitary lifelines to our citizens could not have come a day later. We felicitate the whole set of stakeholders involved in the interactive session that has proved both eye-opening, and we hope, useful, too.

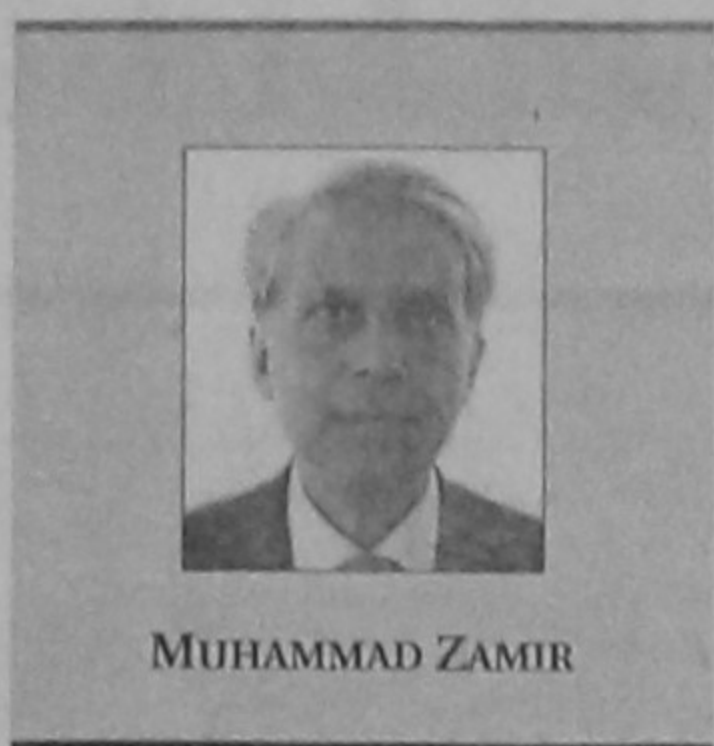
The identification of the core issues in terms of where the gaps exist and what need to be done to bridge these should help the planners and implementers to stay the course towards an expeditious fulfillment of the sanitation related MDG. The attention ought to be focused on the vast swathes of city slums and the rural outbacks.

The urban slum dwellers live in constant fear of eviction, so that they are neither expected nor able to have sanitary toilets of their own. These slums will have to be relocated in specifically designated places to bring them under sanitary coverage. Primarily, it is the responsibility of the government to provide them with minimum housing complete with rudimentary amenities of life. We need to have community toilets with a realistic ratio between the number of such units and that of the users. In the interim, however, the slum owners should be directed to put in place basic sanitation measures.

Not a few clusters of high-rise buildings with open sewer lines are situated in close proximity to the slums. Consequently, the sewage from the former pour on to the vicinity of the ghettos and vice-versa. This makes for the most dangerous brew in many places. The high-rise building owners should live by examples and keep from open sewer lines.

The government, local bodies and activist organisations should move in a concert to put in place a strong monitoring system. The associations of slum dwellers and poor people in rural areas need to be part of the system. Actually, we wonder where has the entire array of sanitary inspectors we got accustomed to seeing in our midst gone? The municipalities, city corporations and union parishads should strengthen sanitary inspectors' cadre with adequate government assistance thrown in.

International economic tumult and Bangladesh



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

FEAR is now in the driving seat not only in the Asia Pacific Stock Markets but also in the western hemisphere. The deteriorating scenario includes Europe, the USA and also several important countries in Latin America. The wide coverage in the media has also added fuel to the fire. Rescue packages are being funneled into financial institutions of different categories to save them from a possible melt down. In the meantime there have also been attempts directed towards coordinated action between the bigger ball players.

The massive shocks generated within the financial systems have affected credit extension, real estate prices as well as varied sectors in trade and commerce. The United States, led by a worried lame duck President initiated the largest ever bail-out prospect but that does not appear to have helped very much. This has now forced its policy makers to return to their drawing boards to examine how re-structuring can be achieved within the financial matrix. The economic tumult and the debate over 'Main Street' being affected by the shenanigans of 'Wall Street' have now taken centre stage and is directly affecting the electoral map in the forthcoming US presidential election and other associated elections in the US Congress. It is directly influencing the tight margins in key states.

Several analysts have commented in the international print and electronic media about the storm that is presently raging all over the world and how it might affect the world financial future. John Monks, General Secretary of

the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has revised the interesting term 'casino capitalism' (first used in the ETUC Congress in Seville in 2007). It is also being felt that 'short-termism' needs to be decisively dealt with through taxation, regulations and greater worker involvement at the grassroots level. Many are pointing out that the absence of this course of action led to the mishandling of the sub-prime crisis and jumpstarted the catastrophic slide. I agree that

market-fundamentalist argument against stronger regulation, based on the idea that market discipline along can most efficiently monitor banks' behaviour has clearly been discredited by this crisis.

I believe that time has come for - (a) re-assessing the role of credit rating agencies which have made the market more opaque instead of increasing transparency. We should start in this regard within Bangladesh itself. Our own bourses have many in-built deficiencies and

interesting to see how Ireland and Iceland have tackled their problems in this regard.

Comparative studies initiated since the beginning of October have indicated surprisingly that Asian banks are better positioned than most others in being able to withstand the current pressure because of the high savings rates of the region. Asian banks have in fact been net lenders in the international monetary market. Europe's big cross-border banks are also

large amount in US asset-backed securities, and (b) that China is ready to be included within an expanded G-8 Club. This subtle hint appears to have borne fruit. Australia's centre-left Labour Party Prime Minister has already stressed that western nations, in view of the changed situation, need to demonstrate visible support for a more responsible stakeholder position for China.

India's corporate optimism is already showing signs of decline

import costs having increased by 34 percent in the month of July, we still, as a result, have a healthy foreign exchange reserve. So far so good. This has helped our Taka to maintain a more or less stable exchange rate against the US dollar. From that point of view we have done better than Pakistan.

However, I am worried about the longer term picture. I do not discount the possibility of an eventual chain reaction where because of a prolonged economic depression in the developed countries in North America, Europe and the Far East, we suffer an erosion in our export value on the one hand and also have to face a larger import bill due to increase in the price of commodities and energy. There could also be retrenching of our workers abroad. There may also be decrease in terms of aid flow. It could be a multiple of factors. We have to be prepared.

The sensitivity of the scenario is further heightened by the fact that we may ourselves lapse into political instability due to difficulties arising within the political process in the coming months. I am not being a Cassandra. I am just being realistic.

It is this anxiety that persuades me to suggest to the responsible authorities that they should immediately convene a Committee of Experts consisting of economists, bankers, important stakeholders in our Stock Market and the relevant officials from the government, not only to carefully monitor the evolving crisis but also to ascertain and identify solutions for emerging problems. This Committee could be headed by the Governor of Bangladesh Bank and be charged with the responsibility of preparing a Report for the Cabinet every two weeks. Political parties should try to refrain from politicizing of its activities. Such a Committee is fundamentally required right away to guard our national interests. A proviso might also exist whereby the party which forms our next political government could change its structure and composition.

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POST BREAKFAST

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there is great connectivity but one finds it difficult to totally exclude the role of consumer confidence from this equation. This last factor seems to have played a critical role in Europe.

The emerging markets have taken a severe battering in the past few days as bourses around the world have repeatedly touched new lows. Fear has gripped the scene and it is being widely speculated that the collapse in the banking system, as we know it, might eventually trigger a global recession that will cast a long shadow for a few years to come.

Quite understandably, this scenario has resulted in the United Nations also calling for tougher regulations of financial markets to deal with the 'crisis of the century'. It has also warned that the global policy response risked creating a prolonged deflationary downturn. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has also blamed the free-market model of the United States and Britain for the debacle. I agree with the surmise of UNCTAD that the

weaknesses, and they need to be addressed before we stumble into our own Wall-Gate; (b) creating incentives for simpler financial instruments and ending the regulatory stance that creates a bias in favour of sophisticated but poorly understood financial products. The authorities responsible for managing our systems need to carefully examine how the financial process that guides and operates our systems can be made more accountable. I recall in this regard the calamity that many faced in 1996-97 in Bangladesh over the then trading of stocks and shares. That should not happen again; and (c) dealing with maturity mismatches in non-bank financial institutions that leave firms and funding long-term liabilities in volatile short-term markets (a common feature within our country).

Within the selling spree that has been sweeping international markets, Europe has shown great resilience. Various governments have pledged that they will not allow a single bank to fail. It has also been

trying to conserve capital by cutting lending to local business. They, as well as their partners in the United States, are looking at the possibility of moving toward the creation of a central counterpart for credit default swaps. I am sure that such an effort will be watched very closely by the important Security Exchange Commissions all over the world. I hope that our SEC will not lag behind in monitoring such a sensitive attempt (if it does eventually take place).

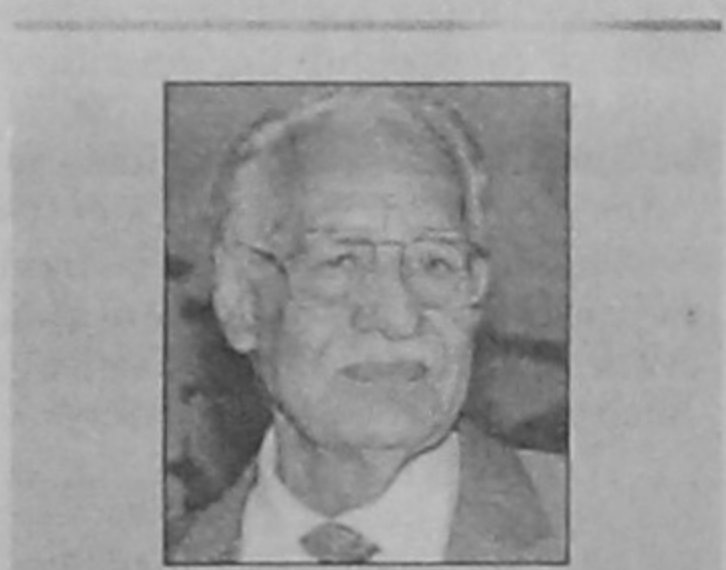
In the meantime Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao has stated that China's financial institutions have gained in 'strength, profitability and risk-taking ability'. He has claimed that this has been possible because China has taken necessary steps towards improving predictability and flexibility in macro-economic control policies. He has also suggested that China will try its best to restore global stability. This latest comment is being seen against two perspectives - (a) that China holds some 500 billion US dollars worth of US treasury bonds and also another

and a cross-sector survey indicates that India's economy has grown 'moderately to substantially worse' in the latest April-June period. The Indian BSE benchmark 30-share Sensex index has also been performing adversely.

We in Bangladesh have been reasonably lucky till now. However, we have to understand that in this globalized world, the ripples of this convulsion will be felt throughout the world and is bound to also hit our shores. The upheaval is bound to affect the potential of foreign direct investment.

Bangladesh has witnessed an increase in both its imports as well as exports. However, its mainstay for balance has come from its steady growth in the remittance sector. It has been reported that we have had 44 percent growth in remittance earnings during the first quarter of the 2008-09 financial year. Bangladeshis living abroad remitted to Bangladesh US dollar 802.58 million in September alone. Historically, this was the third highest for any given month. Despite

Common mechanism for South Asia



KULDIP NAYYAR writes from New Delhi

THESE are no terror, Cassius, in your threats," Julius Caesar tells him. Pakistan could have told India the same thing at the meeting of joint anti-terror mechanism: recent bomb blasts at Malegaon and Modasa were not the doing of "Muslims from across the border." Nor did the Pak delegation point it out that India had its own Hindu terrorists, led by a woman and trained by some ex-army men belonging to an old sainik school. The meeting, fourth in the series, was "positive," although quiet.

The earlier ones would generally end up with New Delhi demanding for the custody of criminals who had taken shelter in Pakistan and Islamabad asking for more evidence. New Delhi has given "more evidence" on the "involvement of the ISI" in the attack on India's embassy at Kabul. Yet, the purpose was not to put Pakistan on the mat because it was conceded at that very meeting that there could have been "some other elements" involved in the incident. The matter was left at that pleasant note. It was a new beginning of sorts.

On the day the representatives of India and Pakistan met at Delhi

Prime Ministers of the two countries discussed terrorism at Beijing. Both reiterated that they were committed to work together to clamp down on terrorist forces. "Terror is a common enemy of both India and Pakistan," said Manmohan Singh and Yusuf Raza Gilani concurred with him. The equation between the two holds promise for the future.

What creates doubts in the mind is that a similar exercise was gone over more than a year ago. But it never got translated into joint anti-

terror mechanism. The army dragged its feet. General Pervez Musharraf was then the army chief. However, his successor General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani has put the end of terrorism on top of his agenda, an essential pre-requisite for any development. This may mean the end of infiltrators into India.

But if the policy has changed the reasons are not difficult to comprehend. One, the terrorists have become a menace for Pakistan itself. But the most important development is the change in the attitude of the rulers. President Asif Ali Zardari is at the helm of affairs. His approach to Pakistan's problems with India is different from that of the earlier regimes. He wants to befriend India.

I saw this happening from close quarters when I heard the National Security Advisors of the two countries. At a small dinner given by the Pakistan High Commissioner at Delhi, they said certain things which were unbelievable. India's National Security Advisor M.K. Nayaranan

terrorism in the two countries when they met at New York. Both Narayanan and Durrani were asked to prepare the ground which they did at Delhi. The joint mechanism will be built on it in the days to come. It is obvious that the different agencies operating in the two countries will have to fall in line, stopping what they are doing within and without. In the next few days, the Pakistani training camps which are a sore point with India may be dismantled.

All these measures are laudable. But they are only the means, not the end by itself. The end is normal relations between the two countries. This is not possible until both curb radicals, Hindus and Muslims, in their own territory and stop efforts at mixing religion with politics.

India, a secular polity, is under pressure. Hindutva is gaining ground. Despite their anti-national activities, New Delhi is reluctant to take action against the Sangh parivar which has spread all over, opening Hindu Jagran Manch in

every state. The members recruited are getting training and weapons. With their eyes on the forthcoming assembly elections and later to the Lok Sabha, the Congress is found too timid, too faltering. It is already a bit too late because the politics of hate is spreading as has been seen in Bihar and Maharashtra where the lumpen are fighting on the streets. Hindu terrorists want an ethnic purity in the areas they live. A new avatar of the Shiv Sena, Raj Thackeray, has created his counter-

against the growth of disruptive tendencies. India had kept them in check with some courage and determination. But lately it looks as if politics has taken over because of the impending elections. India cannot fail South Asia when liberal, democratic values are beginning to matter in the region. For that reason, Islamabad cannot afford to talk to the Taliban in the North-Western Frontier Province and the federally administered tribal area. This would look like buying peace.

It is a pity that Nawaz Sharif, former Prime Minister, who is all for a strong viable Pakistan, favours a settlement with the Taliban. He should have drawn a lesson from what has happened to Asfandiyar Wali Khan, the NWFP leader. He, along with his family, has taken refuge at London because the Taliban tried to kill him and threatened to eliminate the entire family. They are against any liberal thought. Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League should stand by Pakistan People's Party to eliminate the Taliban who have a dream to rule both Pakistan and Afghanistan. The region's dream is different.

The entire South Asia requires a common mechanism to fight parts in Bihar. One of their leaders came to Mumbai this week and killed four persons while looking for Raj Thackeray to wreak vengeance.

This trend is reminiscent of MQM's violence in Karachi and it is tearing apart the society in both countries and creating fear in the minds of ordinary people. How will the joint mechanism check those who have communalized terrorism in India and politicized it in Pakistan? Both are contaminating liberal and democratic atmosphere.

Notwithstanding anything it does, the constitutional standing of the President of the Republic still remains supreme from the point of view of power at least because of CTG's official accountability to him which is just not thinkable during the operation of a Parliamentary form of government.

It is my understanding that

because of his unique simplicity, generosity and non-pugnacious nature that he earned and practiced as a teacher as well as professional over the past forty years, President Professor Dr. Iajuddin Ahmed himself is also responsible, more or less, for giving birth to and continuation of the perception that he has nothing to do but to comply with the decisions of non-party, neutral CTG as he did during the previous party-run democratic government. From an orderly to top brasses in the office of the President all seem to have become habituated to treat the office as a non-active in its entirety. The sooner the true realization comes the better it is not only for the office of the president but also for us all.

Sinha M A Sayeed is Executive Director, Bangladesh Institute of Leadership and Security Studies and former International, Publicity and Publications Secretary of Jatiya Party (1986-1990).

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OPINION

President is not as symbolic as being perceived

SINHA MA SAYEED

A sense of perception prevails in the minds of all class of people: politicians, businessmen, media persons, bureaucrats, intelligentsia and working class of various nature and also foreigners in the country about the office of the President of the Republic that he even during a non-party neutral caretaker government pursuant to the thirteenth amendment to the constitution has nothing much to do but to attend to formal functions/receptions, etc.

But such perception is not only wrong but also misleading in full sense of the term. The Constitution (Thirteenth Amendment) Act, 1996 contains an unambiguous allocation of power while dealing with the President, head of state, and the Chief Adviser, head of government, to the non-party, neutral caretaker government. Article 58C (11) states: "The Chief

Adviser shall have the status, and shall be entitled to the remuneration and privileges, of a Prime Minister, and an adviser shall have the status, and shall be entitled to the remuneration and privileges, of a Minister". This is a confirmation to the proposition that the non-party, neutral CTG was modeled on the spirit of parliamentary system of government.

But power and functions of the non-party, neutral caretaker government are well defined and demarcated in Article 58B (3) that reads: "The executive power of the Republic shall during the period mentioned in clause (1) be exercised, subject to the provisions of article 58 D(1) in accordance with the constitution, by or on the authority of the Chief Adviser, in accordance with the advice of the non-party caretaker government".

On the question of the range and limit of such power and functions, article 58D (1) goes on stating: The non-party caretaker government

shall discharge its functions as an interim government and shall carry on the routine functions of such government with the aid and assistance of persons in the services of the Republic; and, except in the case of necessity for the discharge of such functions it shall not make any policy decisions.

Therefore, non-party, neutral CTG cannot go beyond the 'routine functions', which specifies the day to day routine functions of the government. It can deal with a policy matter only if it is a necessity. Hence, the possibility of clash between Chief Adviser and the President on the interpretation of routine functions may not be a marginal one for all the time, although the decision of the president shall prevail over that of the chief adviser in almost all the cases indeed.

Article 58E reads: "Notwithstanding anything contained in articles 48 (3), 141A (1) and 141C (1) of the constitution, during the period the

non-party caretaker government is functioning, provision in the constitution requiring the President to act on the advice of the Prime Minister or upon his prior counter signature shall be ineffective".

More important is that the article 58B (2) contains: The non-party caretaker government shall be collectively responsible to the President". A careful attention must be given to the fact that in the absence of a Parliament, the President is the only elected personality who has been elected by the majority members of the immediate past Parliament and to whom CTG's remaining responsibility collectively means keeping the supremacy of electoral politics and process alive and ongoing. It is also very much logical that President should constitutionally enjoy such an 'implied power' so that he may even dismiss a CTG and appoint a new one, if he feels/thinks it a necessity to do so. Ground(s) may be a single one or

many, which shall be decided by the President.

This power is not unfettered at all anyhow. Only a definite, particular circumstance may be the determining factor(s) with a due respect to the public opinion also. This acts as a kind of check and balance between President and Chief Adviser.

In case of a necessity, CTG is also authorized to touch upon a policy matter. Therefore, a simple question may arise: who is the authority to determine "such necessity"? Because determination of such necessity by the Chief Adviser has a risk of being set aside by the President with a different interpretation that ultimately may generate a deadlock in the administration.

Here President's role is very important as a guardian of the Constitution and the decision of the President shall also be overriding.

Article 58E as read above, makes the President more powerful than the Chief Adviser, which cannot be

thought of during the operation of article 48 (3) with a Prime Minister as head of government in a parliamentary system of government.

Under the amended Article 61, 'the supreme command of the defense services shall vest in the President and the exercise thereof shall be regulated by law (and such law shall, during the period in which there is a non-party CTG under article 58B, be administered by the President)'. It is also found that President has been given, "an exclusive jurisdiction" to deal with the matters related to defense and it was seen how President Abdur Rahman Biswas in 1996 without having a consultation with the Chief Adviser Justice Habibur Rahman exclusively handled the military crisis in his own way by applying this very article during the functioning of the first non-party, neutral CTG after the 13th amendment came into being.

One may argue, logically and pragmatically, that the present

government is not a mere non-party, neutral caretaker government, rather it is a crisis government barked by the defense forces of the land. This type of government has no reference and relevance to political science and political studies any where in the world. It is a new form within the range of the support of the people. It is neither set on the constitutional provisions of the thirteenth amendment to the Constitution nor is it resting on the parliamentary model introduced by the twelfth amendment to the Constitution. It is what it is, no more no less.

Notwithstanding anything it does, the constitutional standing of the President of the Republic still remains supreme from the point of view of power at least because of CTG's official accountability to him which is just not thinkable during the operation of a Parliamentary form of government.

It is my understanding that