

Mumbai attack: A new dimension in urban terrorism

Now the time has come for the Indian and Pakistani governments to co-operate with each other for facing the same enemy of global terrorism. If they continue the old political tactics of playing the blame game, the umbrella of al-Qaida will be strengthened. It is well to remember that al-Qaida desires increased tension between Pakistan and India.

MAHMUDUR RAHMAN

WHILE it is too early to know exactly what happened in Mumbai as the fog of war still blankets the city, multiple press reports from India allow for a general picture to be painted. An estimated 12 to 25 terrorists are believed to have entered Mumbai by sea on November 26 at around 9:30 p.m. (local time). After landing, the terrorists initiated attacks at a police station, then fanned across the city to attack the soft underbelly of hotels, cafes, cinemas, and hospitals. Civilians were gunned down and taken as hostage, while terrorists shouted out for people carrying US and British passports.

India's cities are no strangers to indiscriminate terror attacks. Such attacks have occurred at regular interval with steadily increasing frequency in the recent years. Mumbai alone witnessed several terrorist activities in recent past. It started with the series of thirteen explosions resulted in 257 deaths and over 700 injured on the March 12, 1993. Then on March 13, 2003, a bomb attack on a commuter train killed 11 persons. In another incident, twin car bombings killed at least 52 people and injured 150 persons. Again, seven bomb blasts occurred at various places on the Mumbai suburban railway, killing 200, on July 11, 2006.

In the current year alone, India suffered a high number of terrorist bomb attacks including in New Delhi, Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Jaipur, Hyderabad, Guwati, and Manipur.

Now the burning question is: what is

new about the Mumbai attack? What is new is that this is the first time that Westerners, in particular the Americans and the British, and Jews, were targeted on Indian soil. As a result, this attack has received the highest global media coverage since 9/11.

The obvious novelty and uniqueness of the attack is the use of "frontal built up area assault" tactics combining "amphibious operation" and instead of timed explosive devices one or more bombings at distinct sites, that is going to be a new chapter in the history of terrorism. But it is not a fully new symptom in India.

This may be new in the urban Indian context. However, there was one similar incident -- an attack by a five-man squad armed with rifles and grenades on India's parliament in New Delhi in December 2001.

The attackers were narrowly prevented by alert staff from gaining access to the building, where hundreds of parliamentarians and ministers were attending a session. This Delhi attack led on almost to a war between India and Pakistan.

This "frontal built up area assault" that took place in Mumbai is also known as "Fidayeen technique" in the terrorism history of Indian sub-continent. The Fidayeen technique -- a rudimentary form of "shock and awe" warfare -- was introduced into Kashmir by Pakistani radical organisations that entered the Kashmir insurgency from the mid-1990s onwards.

The large majority of Fidayeen attacks in Kashmir were perpetrated by one such organisation, the Lashkar-e-Toiba, headquartered in Pakistan and founded and led

by Pakistani religious radicals.

But the deployment of exactly the same tactic in central Mumbai shows that this technique has now found a new and even more dangerous theatre in which to operate.

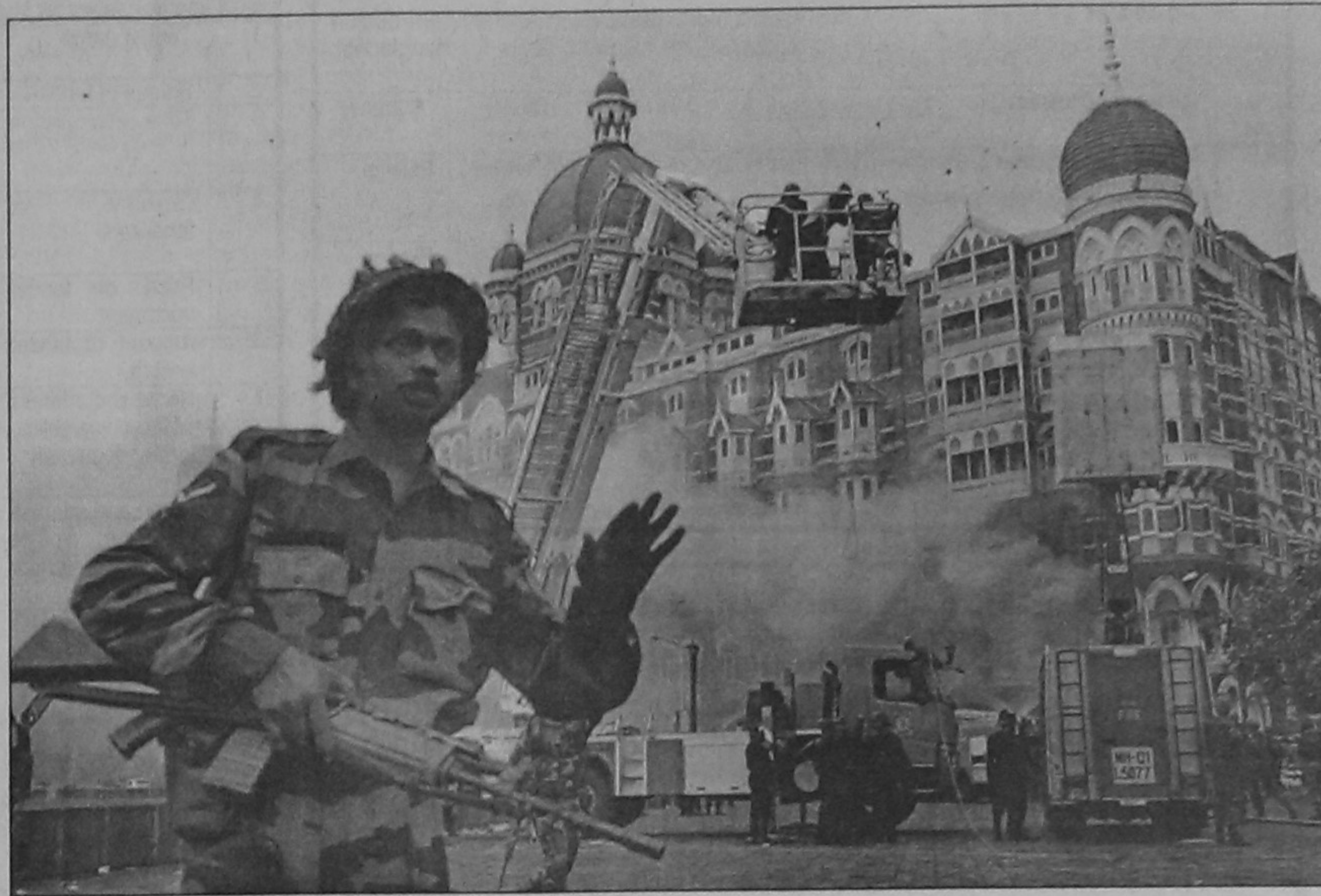
The tactic is thus not without precedent, but the havoc in Mumbai may nonetheless mark a new chapter in the evolution of urban terrorism in India. The gunmen who attacked two luxury hotels, and a fashionable cafe frequently visited by Westerners, have brought the "war" -- as they see it -- to India's elite class, and to affluent Westerners living in or visiting India's most cosmopolitan city.

An attack of this nature cannot be launched together overnight. It requires planning, scouting, financing, training, and a supporting network to aid the terrorists. It is more than likely that the masterminds are seasoned operatives and that the foot-soldiers, young as they may have been, had undergone rigorous training for months and perhaps years. It is reported that the terrorists were so prepared and organised that they established an operational control room inside the Taj Mahal hotel. The attacks also show every sign of having been designed to maximise the media attention on a global scale.

The Mumbai incident clearly brought India to a massive intelligence and security failure. In the first several hours after the incidents began, the response of the Indian authorities was very inefficient, slow, and confused.

The first forces sent to the scene were inexperienced local police officers equipped with poor arms and ammunition (whereas the terrorists were well equipped with modern AK-47 rifles, grenades and other modern explosives), who sustained heavy casualties as a result.

It took a long time before Indian military and police authorities realised the magnitude of the attack and deployed skilled forces including army and navy commando units to the ten affected sites. These units, in particular the National Security Guard's Black Cats commando



The siege is over, but now come the questions.

force, have an impressive operational record, especially in Kashmir and against the Pakistani army. It is hard to believe even these the commandos also faced problems due to not having the knowledge of the layouts of such key installations.

The global intelligence and spy agencies had been reporting that this attack on India's financial capital Mumbai, bears all the trademarks of al-Qaida -- simultaneous assaults meant to kill scores of Westerners in iconic buildings -- but clues so far point to homegrown Indian terrorists supported by external forces like Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad based in neighbouring countries. However, let me reiterate that at this moment in time it is premature to draw any conclusions as to the provenance of

the terrorists.

In some ways, the attack illustrated just how fluid the terror tactics have become since 9/11 and how the threat has become more global in character. Al-Qaida's leaders on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border still provide inspiration but groups are becoming increasingly local. And one thing is clear -- they all work under the same umbrella of ideology that al-Qaida had been trying to spread all over the world.

The group that claimed responsibility, Deccan Mujahideen, was unknown to global security officials. The name suggests the group is from the Indian state of Hyderabad. One of the suspects reportedly called an Indian television station, speaking Urdu, to demand the return of Muslim lands. That most likely was a reference to

Kashmir, territory claimed by both India and Pakistan.

Now the time has come for the Indian and Pakistani governments to co-operate with each other for facing the same enemy of global terrorism. If they continue the old political tactics of playing the blame game, the umbrella of al-Qaida will be strengthened. It is well to remember that al-Qaida desires increased tension between Pakistan and India.

Finally, India itself should look into its own short-comings in security apparatus to modernise the policing system and organise a national level intelligence to deal with terrorism effectively.

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Dear incoming government: It's the economy!

Our politicians already know the importance of job creation for their own constituents. Some are used to creating jobs for party workers through phone calls to the their industrialist friends. You can create ten jobs using that model but not 10 million. For that you need labour-intensive export-led manufacturing growth and sound macroeconomic policies.

FAISAL SALAHUDDIN

WHAT would be a good translation of Bill Clinton's famous campaign slogan: "It's the economy, stupid?" A poor half-translation is: "It's the economy, *bekup*." It is difficult to choose between "*bekup*" and "*boka*." Unlike "*bekup*," the word "*boka*" embeds too much unintended affection and too little grudge.

Some grudge is appropriate since glaringly missing from our parties' campaign menu so far has been an intelligent and informed discussion about the economy. Parties so far have offered only some vaguely soothing but impotent headline promises like: "Bangladesh without poverty." With no details whatsoever.

Perhaps a good part of it is due to the uncertainty regarding election and the backstage drama. Perhaps some of it is due to the parties' either overly optimistic or pessimistic forecast of their own chances of electoral victory. Hence their conclusion is that issues don't matter anyway at this late in the game.

But I fear a large part of it comes from our bi-partisan culture of rear-view politics where insincere rhetoric is often passed as intelligent agenda. This strategy

combined with our strong anti-incumbency bias generally worked well in the past. But will it in the coming years as times are changing (as is our electoral landscape)?

Changing electoral landscape

Let's get an aerial view of our electoral landscape. In this election, over one in three is a swing voter; one in four is still undecided. Blind party loyalty is thinning -- in some places as many as half the voters are open to voting for a different party (The Daily Star-Nielson Survey).

If you think the size of the swing (37%) or undecided (23%) voters don't matter much, think again: In 1996 AL won by increasing its vote by slightly over 4%; in 2001 BNP by about 7% (sure, coalition arithmetic played its part too).

If you are still not convinced, note this: more than half (108) of the total BNP seats in 2001 were decided by a vote swing of 8% (Nazim Kamran Chowdhury, *Prothom Alo*, October 2006).

So swing voters matter. Since swing voters like swing dancing, economy will increasingly matter even more. The Daily Star survey also tells us the single agenda voters now care most about is economic: inflation. Then corruption, law and order -- also related to the economy. See, it's

mostly the economy, *buddhiman*!

Puzzlingly enough, as we stand a month before the election, why does the topic of economy still resemble that of sex? Everybody knows its importance but no party is talking about it.

Unless we openly and responsibly talk about it with our candidates (or the other way around?), take electoral precautions and then vote accordingly, we might end up with some unpleasant economic STDs (stealthily transmitted diseases).

Let's talk about jobs, baby!

The next government will face enormous economic challenges. Let me point out a big and obvious one: Labour force under its tenure will grow by over 10 million. Let me restate: total new jobs needed over the next 5 years is more than our total workers



What will the incoming government do for him?

in the garments industry and in the Middle East put together (Figure 1).

That's daunting when you consider history. It took us 30 years to build the garments industry. At an average pace witnessed during 1997-2007 (about 300 thousand per year), it will take over 30 years to create 10 million jobs through only manpower export to the Middle East.

What is even scarier is that with the ongoing global slowdown, these two previously reliable valves -- garments and labour export -- to release job pressure may not be as reliable anymore.

It's not just that only voters should care about jobs and the economy. Parties themselves need to care about the economy out of self-interest. If you think inflation is unbearable, wait till voters feel inflation when they are unemployed.

If parties want a recipe for political suicide, there is one: take rapid urbanisation, mix it with unemployment and then sauté with the high or even low heat of inflation over the next five years, and add some social salt of crime and poor law and order. Then serve in any portions on any plate. Suicide guaranteed.

Our politicians already know the importance of job creation for their own constituents. Some are used to creating jobs for party workers through phone calls to the their industrialist friends. You can create ten jobs using that model but not 10 million. For that you need labour-intensive export-led manufacturing growth and sound macroeconomic policies.

Needless to say that job creation does not mean jobs in the public sector. It has to be through private sector-led industrialisation. But that can happen only if government provides an enabling environment through appropriate policies. In other words, after providing a smooth dance floor and the right music, government should get out of the private sector's way.

I argued in July 2008 Forum piece "The Tentative Tiger" that the Bangladesh economy is showing many early signs of take-off. The next elected government will get a chance to shape the quality and the trajectory of that take-off. Don't we as voters have the right to ask our politicians if they are good pilots?

That is why parties now need to spell out their economic agenda. It will help voters. It also help parties think through their own challenges of being either a responsible ruling party or an effective but constructive opposition. Yes, I am assuming they want to be so. It takes two -- ruling and opposition parties -- to tango and to grow in a democracy.

We have many questions. What economic vision do the parties have for Bangladesh over the next 5-10 years? How would they implement that vision? What would their signature macroeconomic policies be? What are their plans to improve business environment? What would the social safety nets be and how would they be financed?

Some of these are complex and medium-term questions -- some with no quick answers. But we need to know how our politicians are thinking about them. And how thoroughly?

Is it too much to ask?

Only a month away from the election is it too much to ask:

- That both the party leaders give us their economic vision of the country for the next ten years? Some specific proposals please -- not just headlines.
- That we have a series of televised debate about their promises regarding issues like *hartal*, power sector, ports, inflation? Perhaps common citizens and business leaders could be in the audience and ask questions.
- That, last but not least, both the print -- and the tele-media along with the bloggers and netizens give a more prominent and thoughtfully thorough coverage of parties' economic agenda or lack thereof?

A simple equation captures the economic urgency of the next government: 5 years and 10 million jobs equals to 2 million jobs a year.

Only a month away from the election is it too early for our parties and the MP candidates to tell us: how?

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National election and beyond

It would be unfair to reject all the good deeds of the CTG and the EC in the last 22 months. Their good intentions could not be successfully implemented due to their inept handling of our politicians. This has resulted in great uncertainty. Our hope for a better future under an elected government depends on completion of a successful election.

A.B.M.S. ZAHUR

BETTER late than never. At last BNP has agreed to participate in the national election. Moreover, after a lapse of 16 years, the two former premiers have shown clear indication for a peaceful, fair, free and credible election, for which both the CTG and the EC are working with sincerity and determination.

No doubt the miscalculation and lack of experience of the CTG had resulted in some mistakes in the past. If they succeed in bringing all the parties to participate in the election the people may accept their

omissions with good grace. The two eminent ladies in our politics have proved convincingly that parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh cannot operate without their sincere and active cooperation. In fact, establishing a truly democratic Bangladesh depends much on them.

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Our hope for a better future under an elected government depends on comple-

tion of a successful election. The confrontational politics of BNP and AL had brought the country close to a disaster. Now we expect to see the beginning of a new era of peace and progress under a new politics of cooperation, which is essential for healthy growth of democracy, economy and prosperity of the nation.

We do not see any problems in agreeing to the demands of the BNP-led alliance. Though no serious danger of deterioration of law and order is envisaged, it would be advisable for the CTG to be careful about the movements of Islamic militants groups and the safety of minority communities.

Some interesting events may happen in the selection of candidates for the election. The detainees whose charges could not be framed by ACC will have to be allowed to contest. However, there may not be any scope for allowing the convicted the same privilege.

The attempt of some major parties to support their known devils rather than their unknown angels should not be entertained. In the case of loan defaulters, it appears to be wrong to allow them to

contest because that would not only encourage delay in repayments of their loans but would also encourage other defaulters to delay repayments. This will defeat the government's efforts for recovering loans from the defaulters.

Clause 91(e) of RPO 2008, empowering the EC to take measures against the candidates for violating the code of conduct, should not be cancelled. If it is cancelled, there will be no official procedure to make the candidates comply with the code of conduct. It will also weaken the EC. After all we are striving to strengthen the EC so that it can deliver better service to democracy by ensuring free, fair and credible elections.

It is understood that immediately after transfer of power to the newly elected government the CTG advisers will go back to their old jobs. We are not yet sure as to what may happen to the reformative steps taken during the last 22 months. We hope that none of our political parties will oppose continuation of these measures because they promote public interest.

Our business community, which seems

to be assisting the government in its hour of need, has come up with some good suggestions for smooth and peaceful economic development. These may be examined carefully by the next government, which may try to accept them as far as possible.

Needless to say, the government cannot ignore the suggestions, which will ultimately help the nation in generating new employment that is needed for reducing poverty, political and social tension. Street demonstrations, confinements and hartals tarnish the image of the country in addition to creating serious impediments to economic growth.

Apart from adopting the suggestions from the business community, the new government may have to begin work immediately on the following:

- Balancing power between the offices of the president and the prime minister.
- Undertaking administrative reform.
- Appointing of Ombudsman as per Article 77 of the Constitution.
- Completing the separation of the judi-

ciary from the executive.

- Arranging devolution of power to local governments to enable them to contribute toward strengthening the base of democracy in the country.
- Strengthening the ACC to prevent and control corruption.
- Arranging trial of war criminals.
- Adopting measures to empower women in all sectors.

It will be outlandish to conclude that imposition of reformative measures from above will be able to establish democracy. For establishing a true democratic government we shall have to develop democratic culture in our life. The government may remain alert against any attempt at exploiting religious sentiment.

If Bangladesh has to reach the mid-level country status within a decade or so its women-folk must be developed quickly. Bangladesh must remain a moderate Muslim country where democratic order, principles and practices will dominate.

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