

JMB's seditious mission

Wipe out the remnants of the banned outfit

WE note with satisfaction the consistency with which the police and the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) have been chasing the remnants of outlawed militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and of similar groups in Bangladesh. Only two days after the successful recovery of five grenades from two JMB men in Comilla last week, the combined force again caught eight senior level members of JMB in Gaibandha on Thursday and recovered a large cache of explosives, casings of grenades, grenade-making materials, and some *jihadi* books. The Rab and police authorities suspect the militants have been regrouping to commit subversive activities ahead of the national election.

Members of JMB seem to be bent on carrying out anti-state activities to jeopardise holding of the national election on 29 December and the process of transition to democracy thereafter. They have become aware of the fact that the people of Bangladesh have rejected their distorted interpretation of our religion of peace and opted to select democracy as the suitable means of governance. Failing to win over their hearts, JMB leaders have gone on the path of murder and mayhem to materialise their dreams. Their mindless killing of innocent people by detonating explosives in public places and judges' offices are still fresh in the minds of the people. It is this outfit that has also introduced "suicide killing squads," going totally against the Islamic edicts. It is therefore most pertinent that the people in general cooperate with the law enforcing agencies in tracking down the militants and their hosts in this country.

We have been writing relentlessly about the nefarious motives of the militant outfits urging the government of the day to take strong measures against the operatives of all such outfits. This however needs to be said that the execution of some of the masterminds of JMB and arrests of a number of operatives in last two years have proved to be successful in driving them deep into the earth. But the recent recovery of a large cache of explosives only reinforces our concern that the outfit will not abandon its crooked mission unless and until law enforcers wipe them out totally going deep into their hideouts. The most important task before our intelligence agencies is to track down the people and organisations at home and abroad that are lending support to these militant groups with the evil intent of destabilising the state.

JMB has declared war against the state and its constitution, therefore, any mercy shown to them will be considered weakness and they would not hesitate to strike with renewed vengeance.

ADP implementation deficit

A challenge for elected government

IN view of the fast approaching parliamentary election, a mid-term review of ADP implementation may be somewhat remote from the public mind. But that needn't be so. Given the whole lot of implications that a poor implementation rate will have for the economy, let alone the newly elected government, the matter of where we are in terms of ADP utilisation is important at this cross-roads of transition to an elected government.

A report of the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) of the Planning Ministry reveals what has been common knowledge so far about ADP implementation patterns over the yearly cycles. Only 18 percent of Tk 25600 crore ADP, 2008-09 stands implemented between July and November 2008. The first half of financial years invariably sees less than 25 percent ADP implemented with around 75 percent being hurried through at a breakneck speed or the total size of the ADP slashed to show a reasonable level of achievement. The result is either poor quality development work or physical targets going unmet even though allocations would have been spent. In other words, it's development agenda that becomes a casualty.

Deeper down, the implications sound more disquieting. The underutilisation of ADP allocations with its internal and external components reduces public spending which is pivotal to employment creation, poverty alleviation and domestic demand expansion, the three major pillars of sustainable economic growth. It's a pity that 10 ministries and divisions which received 80 percent of the allocations have badly underperformed in terms of project implementation during July-November, 2008.

Experts had pinned hopes on this technocratic government to better succeed in ADP implementation with no political considerations weighing in with economic matters. But some observers have ascribed the sluggish rate of implementation during the interim government to lack of political nudges and pushes that one had seen otherwise applied by political governments. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the caretaker government's preoccupation with election may have proved to be a distraction. Whatever may be the truth, what basically comes through the comparative study is the absence of any effective implementation machinery in the ministries.

Our hope is that the next elected government will not take too much time to settle down and would get quickly into the mode of implementing development plans with a political mandate and enhanced project execution capabilities.

Cooperation and tolerance

POST BREAKFAST

In the book of democracy it is just the first chapter. For all the political parties, the challenge will only start after the polling day. A smooth transition to a functioning democracy will require resisting the "winner-take-all" mentality and cooperating in the tackling of serious national issues within the Parliament and its Standing Committees by identifying least common denominators.

MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

MOST consider a free, fair and credible election to be the first step towards the achievement of the eventual goal of democratic governance. Special emphasis is also laid on arranging a "level playing field" so that controversy does not surface after the polls.

Elections in Bangladesh are volatile to say the least. We have seen how the previous administration tried to "load the dice" so that the election planned for January 2007 would prolong their tenure in office. It included efforts to affect the existing rules of engagement even in selecting the possible head of the next caretaker government. The retirement age of judges was changed to facilitate the appointment of a particular individual. The voter list was diluted with spurious entries.

Since then almost two years have passed. Within this period, efforts have been made to establish a credible paradigm. Full credit goes to the armed forces for helping the Election Commission in revising the electoral rolls, and starting an ID base with photographs.

Despite these positive movements, the

political situation, as has been pointed out by the International Crisis Group from Brussels, continues to be "complex and fragile." The next government and the opposition parties will face "the challenges of making parliament work and contending with an army that wants a greater say in politics." The new Parliament will also have to finish the task of ensuring greater transparency and accountability. It will require bi-partisanship and political will. I trust that these principles will not be in short supply.

We have watched with dismay how returning to democratic governance was made unnecessarily difficult through lack of coordination between the Election Commission and the Returning Officers, the opaque nature of decision making by the Election Commission, the introduction of controversial rules within the polls process and the continuation of the emergency provisions. Principles related to being a defaulter, the providing of documentary evidence in support of a candidate's educational or wealth status or written support of one percent of that constituency's electorate similarly became stumbling blocks.

The ideas had merit, but the methods of implementation caused disagreement and, in many cases, led to judicial appeals. This left a bitter taste that could have been avoided if the entire process was handled with greater care. Hopefully, the next time round, the lessons would have been learnt.

It needs to be noted that just having an election should not be considered as enough. In the book of democracy it is just the first chapter. For all the political parties, the challenge will only start after the polling day. A smooth transition to a functioning democracy will require resisting the "winner-take-all" mentality and cooperating in the tackling of serious national issues within the Parliament and its Standing Committees by identifying least common denominators.

It has been heartening to note that the larger political parties, in their respective manifestos, have laid emphasis on some common issues. The want to successfully tackle the problem of spiralling prices, graft control (the Awami League suggesting capacity building within the ACC), the power and energy crisis (with Awami League suggesting the exploitation of renewable resources), disaster management, food self-sufficiency, gender empowerment, water management and the providing of proper sanitation. Special attention may also be given to the creation of a comprehensive employment policy and skill development training.

The Awami League has also stated that, if elected, it will initiate necessary steps to try war criminals, and to complete the trial of those involved with the August 15 massacre, the 1975 jail killings and the grenade attack carried out on August 21. I believe that if these trials are completed, it will strengthen the rule of law and the factors associated with accountability. Steps should also be taken to uphold human dignity through the effective implementation of human rights, to cease extra-judicial killings

and deaths in custody, and to carry out a careful parliamentary review of all the Ordinances issued during the Emergency.

Most political parties want to make the Parliament more effective. The Awami League and the BNP have already proposed that their parties will offer one post of deputy speaker and also chairmanship of important parliamentary committees to the opposition. This is a good initiative. It would, however, also be useful for arriving at a consensus in dealing with the controversial provisions of Article 70 (crossing the floor) of the Constitution. This is vital for democratic norms within the process of parliamentary democracy and also within the political party itself.

The members of Parliament will also have to find common paths on how to become more business friendly and agree on measures pertaining to e-governance, foreign direct investment, business process outsourcing and economic zones. They will also need to continue the ongoing drive against institutional corruption and "systems loss," ensure effective decentralisation in local government and set in place a community and village-based marketing system and strategy. Whoever wins will also need to introduce more effective management in the rural areas of the educational and health sectors.

Achieving these objectives might be difficult, but they are definitely not impossible. Political parties can accomplish their tough objectives if they discard the cronyism of the past and dysfunctional government and adopt consensus-driven politics based on vision. We have resource constraints, but we must now stand up and demonstrate that democratic political governance, intolerant of corruption, can turn us into the middle-income country that we dreamt of during our War of Liberation in 1971.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador and advisor, Awami League.
E-mail: mzamir@dhaka.net

Bracing for change

STRAIGHT LINE

While confusion and muddle-headedness may be the hallmark of our ruling and chattering classes, the ordinary people are clear on many issues. The common man is deeply religious but wants an improvement in life, and for that, whenever given a chance, he has chosen the progressive, forward-looking secular leaders and parties.

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

IN addition to the cynics and hard-boiled critics many citizens are, of late, expressing the view that nothing has changed for the better during the last two years, when expectations for a healthy polity were high.

In fact, some would go to the extreme of saying that we are not only back to square one, we are also in a precarious situation wherein very few would dare to think of change due to the fear and stigma of being branded as misplaced adventurers and consequently abandoned as lone rangers.

While the above views may not be a faithful description of our present socio-political existence, many of us do not realise that, like in all other societies, changes have taken place in Bangladesh. Some of them are noticeable, others are not. There are currents

and cross-currents. In the midst of decay and demoralisation new realities have emerged.

If we care to take a deeper look, we find that there is a sizable chunk of our population living in backward times. There is not much education or civic amenities for them, and subjugation of the weak is manifest without much protest.

There is a middle class with a different set of values. The colonial modernisation gave them a modern ethos and a sound administrative framework, which, unfortunately, have not been updated and improved upon. There is still another segment of the population that is at ease with the western world. This group is vibrant, dynamic and forward-looking.

There is no denying that, at a very micro-level, we have the trappings of a fast-emerging global outlook: modern gadgetry, computers, faxes, e-mail, internet, informa-

tion technology, etc. However, the fact remains that we have contrasts and contradictions. There is near-primitiveness existing alongside state-of-the-art technology and revolutionised communication.

The question is, are we going through a process of retrogression or will the forces of progress overcome and win?

Critical analysts of Bangladeshi society tend to forget that, in spite of an atmosphere of gloom and doom, the level of awareness among the masses and the intelligentsia is remarkably high.

There is a strong desire for change at all levels. Those caring to understand and appreciate can see that people are ready to share responsibilities. The all-important question is, what route should we take to free ourselves from the stranglehold of the insensitive elite political and bureaucratic?

One has to admit that some positive changes have taken place in Bangladesh in the last two years. The apparently untouchable high and mighty have been touched, though matters could not be settled as per perceived public expectation. However, some fear of authority and accountability has, hopefully, been instilled in those hearts that wish to enjoy the perks and privileges of public office.

There is, perhaps, reason to believe that the upcoming political masters will not tinker with the functions of a watchdog body like ACC and blunt its edge in their own self-interest.

There is cause for hope when one hears mainstream politicians at the apex telling us that the government of the future will not be

overbearing and shall ensure that the private sector shoulders a large part of the onerous responsibilities of building the economic infrastructure; and that the government shall invest heavily in social sectors like education and health for greater good of the greatest numbers.

It is also heartening to hear them speaking about pragmatic issues like food security with a view to building a self-respecting nation.

One may not be far from reality to observe that our educated class is caught in between the cross-currents of modernisation and obscurantism. On one side they see the old values, traditions and social system being eroded by the universal phenomenon of change, and on the other, they hear the slogan of "back to fundamentals" by the reactionary forces.

While confusion and muddle-headedness may be the hallmark of our ruling and chattering classes, the ordinary people are clear on many issues. The common man is deeply religious but wants an improvement in life, and for that, whenever given a chance, he has chosen the progressive, forward-looking secular leaders and parties.

Looking back into the history of the sub-continent, we find that in the 1940s the leadership was in the hands of individuals that believed in liberal democracy. In the historic election of 1970 people voted for the secularists in both parts of Pakistan.

The common man is perhaps wise enough to place religion and politics in different spaces, and believes that worldly affairs are too important to be left in the hands of one group.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is a columnist for The Daily Star.

Not his own master

BETWEEN THE LINES

Top brass in Pakistan might have realised that New Delhi preferred to do business with the democratically elected government, even though the real power was in the hands of the army. The suo moto statement by General Kiyani, that Pakistan would retaliate within minutes, was meant to underline the point.

KULDIP NAYAR

TENSIONS, if prolonged, burst into, consequences which are hard to handle. A warlike atmosphere develops. Nations are sucked into jingoism because they feel insecure. New Delhi has enacted a new, harsher law on detention. And all know who calls the shots in Pakistan.

Still, for Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee to ask with whom India should deal is meant only to score a point. It is the army which has been operating for more than 50 years, often overtly and sometimes behind the democratic façade. If New Delhi has done business with governments guided by the army, then why ask President Zardari to prove his credentials? However weak and wanting, his is a democratically elected setup.

New Delhi never questioned General Musharraf's legitimacy. Why do so in the case of Zardari? True, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto enjoyed all powers as prime minister, but he came in the wake of Bangladesh's formation. Then, the army was blamed for having lost half of Pakistan. The circumstances are different now.

Zardari too assumed that, like Bhutto, he had all the power. But he found that it was not so when he wanted to send the ISI chief to

Delhi. What should he have done: Admit his helplessness in public? No ruler does so. He blamed the media for misquoting him. He could have resigned, but that is not the tradition in Pakistan.

Knowing all this, Mukherjee should have refrained from asking who rules in Pakistan. This has further exposed the Zardari government. But then New Delhi's problem is that it is under a lot of pressure to act after the terrorist attack on Mumbai. Yet, India might have strengthened Zardari if it had not posed the question that Mukherjee did.

Top brass in Pakistan might have realised that New Delhi preferred to do business with the democratically elected government, even though the real power was in the hands of the army. The suo moto statement by General Kiyani, that Pakistan would retaliate within minutes, was meant to underline the point.

The question to ask is not who governs Pakistan, but how can it be helped to get back to democracy? Yet, the Zardari government should understand and appreciate the extent of anger, which is sweeping India. However helpless, Pakistan has to deliver.

Why should Prime Minister Gillani and Foreign Minister Qureshi go on saying that the terrorists who attacked Mumbai were not

Pakistanis? Ajmal Amar Kasab, the terrorist arrested, has sought legal assistance from the Zardari government. Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif was quite right when he said that Kasab's case gave the impression that Pakistan was a failed state. Why should Islamabad go on repeating that India had not given any credible proof on the terrorists being Pakistanis?

Zardari's embarrassment is understandable. It is apparent that he came to know about the attack on Mumbai only after it had taken place. After all, Nawaz Sharif did not know about Musharraf sending troops to Kargil till the operation began.

However, once he became aware of it he made clean breast of it before the world through President Clinton. It cost Nawaz Sharif his prime ministership because, when he tried to take action against army chief Musharraf, the latter took over the government.

A respected Pakistani expert, Ahmed Rashid, has said that the attack on Mumbai was the handiwork of the Pakistani Taliban, who are said to have become part of the al-Qaida Taliban. It is possible that the Taliban and the jihadi straddling over Pakistan and Afghanistan had jointly conducted the Mumbai carnage. This development is as much disturbing for Pakistan as it is for India.

Yet, Zardari cannot run away from the fact that the Pakistan territory was "used" for planning the attack. He should have taken measures not only to expose but also to curb the terrorists and those behind them. Had he done so, he would have sustained the goodwill he evoked in India within the first few weeks of his taking over. Even now it is not too late.

The parliament session in India has shown that Zardari will have to come down really hard on terrorists in Pakistan. Lashkar-e-Toiba chief Azar Massud should have been tried by this time. He is behind what happened in Mumbai.

Surely, Zardari and his colleagues do not entertain the thesis, which even some Indian Muslims and Urdu newspapers adumbrate, that the entire operation was that of certain elements in the Indian government, helped by the BJP extremists.

The very idea is preposterous: India killing nearly 200 people of its own, causing a loss of at least \$2 billion and exposing its ineptness before the world.

The thesis was built after the killing of Anti-Terrorists Squad chief Hemant Karkare, who found the Vishwa Hindu Parishad hand in the Malegaon blasts. It was assumed that he was silenced because he had a lot more to say. A high-level police inquiry has proved that the terrorists killed Karkare.

Doubts had unnecessary arisen when A.R. Antulay, Union Minister for Minority Affairs, posed the question: On whose direction did Karkare go towards the Cama Hospital when the operation was at the Taj and the Oberoi? Antulay did not realise that the terrorists first went to the Cama Hospital.

Ultimately, he did when Home Minister P. Chidambaram made a detailed statement in Parliament. But his remark, untimely as it was, created a furore. Muslim clerics also came on the side of Antulay, giving the happening a communal colour.

What is disconcerting is the attitude of Islamabad, which believes that it has no explanation to offer. It has not even dismantled the training camps, a worldwide demand. The whole thing is getting messier and messier.

True, the two countries have to sit across the table to reconstruct the whole attack, from the beginning to the end and see where the blame lies. Weak as the Zardari government is, it looks weaker and gives the impression of not being its own master. Rhetoric can make it worse.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.