

CROSS TALK

Explosions in Delhi and Quetta

Terrorism must be defeated

WE are deeply distressed at the explosions which have once again claimed innocent lives in India and Pakistan. We find hardly any words strong enough to condemn these mindless acts, barbarity which reduces lives to chaos and disfigures the fabric of society. On Wednesday, even as Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh was on a visit to Bangladesh, a bomb explosion outside the High Court in New Delhi left 11 people dead and as many as 76 injured. The figures could go higher, as they usually do in such circumstances. On the same day, suicide attacks by the Taliban in Quetta left 24 people dead and no fewer than 86 others receiving injuries. In the case of the attack in Delhi, the notorious Huji outfit has reportedly claimed responsibility by e-mail. The explosions in Quetta were obviously a retaliatory step by the Taliban over the recent arrest of one of its operatives by the Frontier Corps paramilitary force and indeed occurred at the residence of the deputy chief of the force.

The irony here is that just as the world prepares to remember the victims of the September 2001 attacks on New York's twin towers, these forces of destruction have struck in both India and Pakistan. The explosions only show that terrorism is yet to be fully neutralized and that nations in the South Asian region need to beef up their security through more focused coordination, particularly through intelligence gathering and follow-up action against militants of all definitions. In Bangladesh, we may rest easy in the thought that organizations such as Huji have been weakened by concerted action by the state in recent years. Even so, the blasts in Delhi and Quetta show amply the continued ability of terrorist outfits to launch attacks at unlikely places and, worst, on innocent men and women. That terrorist elements are yet free to wreck lives is a truth which must never be lost sight of.

As the Indian prime minister noted in Dhaka on Wednesday, both his country and Bangladesh remain vulnerable to the forces of extremism and terrorism. He has only echoed the sentiments of the people of the region. The response to such elements must be without ambiguity: there must not be any laxity in flushing them out.

Khaleda's bizarre remark

Does she have the proof?

KHALEDA Zia has recently observed that the former chief justice Khairul Haque had invalidated the caretaker system of government incorporated in the 13th amendment to the constitution in exchange for money.

This is a very serious allegation against the person of a former chief justice and consequently a slur on the institution of the judiciary.

If she has any proof to back up her accusation, she is only expected to come out with it to substantiate her statement.

She has basically questioned the integrity of an individual and thereby desecrated the institution of the judiciary. She could not have been oblivious of the fact that highest court of justice should not even be remotely denigrated.

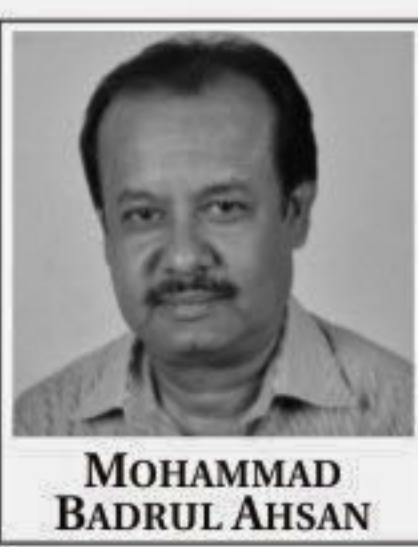
We are shocked to hear such an irresponsible remark from a person who led the country as its prime minister twice and is now leading the opposition in parliament. It was not in sync with her stature.

It is not for the first time that she had made such outlandish and atrocious remarks. The High Court, through the 15th amendment to the constitution, annulled the caretaker system of government among other things, but she said she would throw away the amended Constitution.

To make such an observation about a sacrosanct document as the constitution was certainly irresponsible on her part.

In all, she has been occasionally making statements

The embarrassment of a visit



MOHAMMAD
BADRUL AHSAN

MANy people I know are upset because the Indian prime minister's visit has been a big let down for

them. It was high on promise but low on delivery or something else that's hard to explain. Or, may be they are making too much fuss about it. May be it was meant to be like this. A humble host got carried away because a prominent guest was coming.

Did India ever promise to give what we took for granted? What were agreed between the two prime ministers in January 2010, then between two foreign ministers and afterwards two foreign secretaries? Was everything put in black and white, or was it one of those things better left unspoken?

I am not upset, but I am confused. How could we be so far off the mark that so little happened when so much was expected? And how could our foreign minister still insist that she hoped the Teesta agreement was going to be signed after the Indian foreign secretary had told the press in New Delhi that nothing would be done without a nod from West Bengal. By then it was clear that Mamata Banerjee had thrown a monkey wrench into the Manmohan visit.

Upon what did our foreign minister base her vain optimism? Why did she think that after the Indian announcement she could still pull it off by a stroke of her wishful thinking? Was it her inexperience that she failed to read between the lines? Or, was it something she knew about the Indians that the Indians didn't know about themselves?

Come to think of it, water sharing had already hit the rocks when Indian Water Resources Minister Salman Khurshid never showed up for his meeting. He was supposed to arrive in Bangladesh in August, which he never did. Did anybody



JORG GREBEL

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from our side ever bother to find out what had happened? Did anybody put on the thinking cap that it spelt trouble for the water deal(s)?

Joe Valachi was the first Mafia member who had publicly acknowledged the existence of the Mafia in the United States. This same Joe had also confessed, "You can imagine my embarrassment when I killed the wrong guy." In so much as the Indian prime minister is always welcome in this country, whose embarrassment is it that he came on a wrong visit because it was for the wrong reason?

I say it because may be all along

India was thinking of this visit as a goodwill gesture whereas Bangladesh was thinking of something more. It has been as embarrassing as bringing in a birthday cake to a wedding anniversary. But how did it happen is the question that has been bugging people. Did the two sides talk about these things? Who failed to understand whom? How could two sides go away with two different notes from the same meetings?

It is Machiavelli who explains to his would-be prince that the very notion of men being basically virtuous is the falsehood that the unscrupulous tell to exploit the gullible.

Who was unscrupulous here and who was gullible between the two countries? Was it us the unscrupulous who lied to us the gullible?

There are already whispers that bygones are bygones and both countries should move on. Some of our high-placed officials are busy scavenger hunting, looking for treasure in trash. In their desperate bid to save their faces, they refuse to accept the Indian premier's visit has been anything less than a success.

The fact remains that the visit has been badly managed both in preparation and perception. It has been a success that an Indian prime minister came to Bangladesh on a state visit after 12 years. It has been a success that border protocol was signed and the Tin Bigha corridor will remain open round the clock from now on. Discerning eyes might pick up a few more brownie points missed out by crude minds.

But, on the whole, the visit has left Bangladesh-India relations badly chewed in public imagination. People on this side of the border were excited. The goodwill for India in the country was at its highest point in many years.

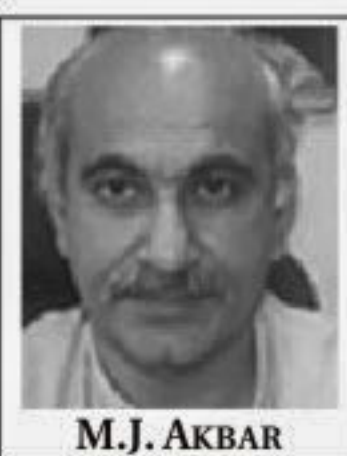
A friendly government is sitting in power. Indian Congress President Sonia Gandhi came to accept an award in belated recognition of Indira Gandhi's contribution to the independence of Bangladesh. Two countries jointly celebrated the 150th anniversary of Tagore. Indian cultural teams have been regular phenomena in Bangladesh since this government took office.

This visit was expected to be icing on the cake, sort of a climax of an enduring era of good feelings between two nations. All said and done that momentum has been disturbed. India has left a friendly government hung out to dry. Its ego bruised, this government surely knows that it hurts.

The writer is the editor of weekly First News and a columnist of The Daily Star.
E-mail: badrul151@yahoo.com

BYLINE

Be a sport, let go of sports



M.J. AKBAR

PRAFUL Patel had a good point to make. "If such a Bill is passed," the former Union minister for civil aviation and present

Union minister for some portfolio which escapes my memory, said "bureaucrats like a joint secretary will be running the sports federation. What is their competence in sports administration?"

Absolutely right, Praful-ji, with one minor caveat, if commoners are permitted the indulgence of raising their eyes before the majesty of cabinet ministers. Why did you appoint a series of joint secretaries as chief executives of Air India for all these years? Were they competent to run an airline? They were terribly proficient at awarding lifelong travel privileges for themselves, of course; but between joint secretaries and politicians they managed to devastate an airline that was once the pride of India. Make those two airlines, even if Indian Airlines was more often a source of hypertension than national joy. Still, it worked. It could buy its own fuel and pay its salaries. Its merger with Air India turned a sick man of the skies into a terminal patient. It is now sustained by massive drip feeds from a treasury that treats thousands of crores with the insouciant indifference that Ali Baba would accord to a bit of brass in his cave of endless wealth.

Praful Patel would probably respond by blaming the System. Yes.

In the last two decades the Indian bureaucracy, trained to maintain the now heavily rusted iron framework of public administration, has expanded its remit and seized direct control of public sector companies that were once run by professionals, but this has happened with the willing consent of politicians who are far more comfortable with bureaucrats than professionals.

Praful Patel may, in fact, be the least guilty in a group that stretches across political parties and spans two

generations. This bloat began as bearable adipose during Mrs. Indira Gandhi's second term as prime minister, in the 1980s; under her successors it has become a life-threatening disease. The bureaucracy acquired the public sector as its private realm. Today, it does not even pretend to look outside its own corridors for management even when it has run vital institutions to the ground -- a very apt metaphor for what happened to Air India.

The one exception is all the more notable given the disaster that followed. When the late Madhavrao Scindia was given charge of aviation, he brought Yogi Deveshwar from ITC to head the airline. Deveshwar

served his contracted period, handed the government a large cheque as profit, and returned to ITC. Since then, more or less, it is the government which has been handing out cheques to Air India.

So perhaps the powers that be will permit a sardonic smile at the angry determination with which cabinet ministers are protecting their control of sports bodies from intervention by the same joint secretaries. Ajay Maken, the sports minister, is only

trying to do unto the cash-rich BCCI what other ministers have done to an assortment of industries: grab perfectly healthy organisations in the name of the public good.

I agree fully with Praful Patel and Farooq Abdullah, who can still deliver (as he puts it) at the age of 74, and Rajiv Shukla, who wants to run IPL when he has time to spare from running

Parliament, and Sharad Pawar, the new father of Indian cricket, that vermin-like joint secretaries should be prohibited from entering their domain. There are, of course, a few of you who wonder why politicians who have never held a bat, or scored a goal, should control cricket or hockey, but we will leave that argu-

If the English Premier League has become indispensable to international football, or BCCI turned into a fabulous success story, it is precisely because they were never burdened with unwelcome help from government.

ment for another day. Pawar and company have, at least, been elected to their posts by committees who have the right to choose who they will.

But this is the perfect moment to raise a supplementary. The cabinet has asked Ajay Maken to re-draft the proposed National Sports Bill. Why should there be a sports ministry in government? If the English Premier League has become indispensable to international football, or BCCI turned into a fabulous success story, it is precisely because they were never burdened with unwelcome help from government. At best, a sports department could be a minor wing somewhere to channel the odd bit of help to a limping sport, a job the finance ministry could do in a few minutes every year.

Why should, by the same token, there be an information and broadcasting ministry, particularly when Doordarshan is meant, theoretically, to be autonomous? The only temptation an I&B minister has is to wave an increasingly impotent stick at private sector media. The very existence of a ministry, and a minister, is an invitation to control. A ministry never diets. Its culture demands obesity. It treats putting on weight as part of its moral responsibility.

Praful Patel has asked a brilliant question. He knows the answer as well. It is time to take the answer to its logical conclusion.

The writer is Editor, The Sunday Guardian, published from Delhi, India on Sunday, published from London and Editorial Director, India Today and Headlines Today.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

September 9

1776
The Continental Congress officially names its new union of sovereign states the United States.

1791
Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States, is named after President George Washington.

1922
Greco-Turkish War of 1919-1922 ends with Turkish victory over the Greeks.

1923
Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey, founds the Republican People's Party.

1991
Tajikistan gains independence from the Soviet Union.

1976
Chairman Mao Zedong dies. The leader of the Chinese revolution Chairman Mao Zedong dies at the age of 82.

1993
The Palestine Liberation Organization officially recognizes Israel as a legitimate state.

2001
Ahmed Shah Massoud, leader of the Northern Alliance, is assassinated in Afghanistan.