

STRAIGHT LINE

Eid Mubarak!

Spirit of Ramadan adds to our happiness

WITH the end of Ramadan, Muslims all over the world prepare to celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr in all the religious fervour it calls for. Eid is certainly a happy occasion, justified by the devotion with which Muslims observe a month of fasting prior to it. It is essentially on how much people are able to observe the dictates of faith, in this case uphold the spirit of Ramadan through staying true to all its concomitant injunctions, that the spirit of Eid-ul-Fitr is to be determined. In plain terms, therefore, the Muslim who has steadfastly observed, in that very deep sense of understanding, the month of fasting has not only understood better the transitory nature of life but also his calling in the world of the living.

On Eid-ul-Fitr, therefore, it is an acknowledgement of the practicality of life that must come with a remembrance of the world beyond this one which must guide the Muslim community. In fasting come the ideas of self-abnegation, of resistance to temptation. At the same time, Ramadan teaches us anew the thought that those less privileged than we are, those at a remove from what constitutes happiness, the neighbour who goes hungry, the relative weighed down by gloom, are realities we must not ignore. The joy of Eid-ul-Fitr is not to be sliced away through a selfish focus on oneself, for faith teaches us to look out at the wider world and do our bit to improve it in our individual as well as collective life. Eid is a matter of sharing happiness.

As we prepare to ring in Eid-ul-Fitr, it is the nobility ingrained in the month of Ramadan that must sustain us in the times ahead. Those who have fasted and prayed, have partaken of food in all the austerity that religion demands, are those who will have cheered the Almighty. In a larger sense, Ramadan cheers all Muslims --- because it comes as a fresh reminder of the good and the commonsensical that we must do in order to enrich the quality of our lives.

We wish all our readers, patrons and well-wishers Eid Mubarak.

Lack of oversight by parliamentary bodies

Standing committees fail to exercise authority

PARLIAMENTARIANS need to review laws already enacted, particularly those that deal with fundamental rights, such as civil liberties. These need to be monitored on how they are being implemented in the field. Parliamentary Standing Committees (PSCs) are empowered by Article 76 (2) (b) of the constitution to review both enforcement of laws and propose measures for the better enforcement of laws should they see fit. Such review is needed particularly in light of the fact that several laws like The Speedy Trials Act or indeed Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure continue to be misused to settle political scores and violate human rights, as highlighted in the recent case of Limon.

In addition, the constitution empowers PSCs to determine whether a particular law is needed or not under Article 76 (2) (a). The common practice in Bangladesh has been to draft new laws by respective ministries that are sent to parliamentary bodies with limited timeframes for a review prior to their passage through parliament for enactment. It is imperative that all laws are scrutinised with due diligence by these bodies. Given the import of new laws, we urge the PSC to review these thoroughly and should more time be required, parliamentarians must make it a point to tell respective ministries that such time is granted for them to do a thorough job.

PSCs need to assert their authority to ensure proper enforcement of laws and we would like to bring the matter to the attention of the speaker of the House. Were this to become a regular practice, misuse of laws could be prevented to a large degree and a system of check-and-balance institutionalised. Opposition lawmakers are members of several such committees. Hence there is an obligation from their side to be part of the process to look



MUHAMMAD
NURUL HUDA

DISMAL thoughts would surely occupy the minds of sane Bangladeshis when they venture to think of the deadly destruction

and carnage of August 21, 2004. It was on that day the nation witnessed an unprecedented diabolic attempt to wipe out the leaders of a political party. Our double jeopardy was that a most unfortunate and condemnable criminal incident was followed by a callous and slipshod investigation that only enraged the discerning public.

The criminal case in question has been further investigated and important points need to be clarified. There is allegation of establishment complicity in the gory killing and maiming. Top enforcement officials who have been booked in the case have to prove that they did not have any criminal intention in their alleged failings. The important question, however, is that whether the dastardly offence was politically designed and executed through foot soldiers. We will have to wait for the conclusion of the trial to find answers to many unanswered queries.

What, however, should cause concern is the deadly contour of our confrontational politics. We may have to admit extreme actions leading to the annihilation of the political adversary, though reprehensible, continues to be a sad reality in our society. The brutal murder in broad daylight of an elected local body chief in the recent past has shocked citizens who would like to see an effective end to the deadly confrontational politics. The question is, how and why have we reached a stage when criminal elements become sufficiently emboldened to indulge in dastardly attacks in full view of the public?

To recollect, the multiple grenade assault of August 21, 2004 was clearly a manifest attempt to wipe out the

entire leadership of the mainstream political party. The damage already caused with its far-reaching ramifications cannot be brushed aside. The double figure deaths and crippling injuries of hundreds should make us wonder if the state organs investigating the incident and the then political authority realised the enormity of the dastardly attack.

We may also recollect that the investigation of the above incident was not taken in right earnest that it deserved and the first indication of that was the unpardonable failure to protect and preserve the scene of occurrence. There was allegation that physical evidence was tampered with

Violent incidents that include murder of politicians are outcomes in a society marked by deep polarisation, weak institutions and chronic poverty. The quantity and quality of violence characterising Bangladeshi society at all levels today has an irreducibly political context.

and destroyed. The field units did not act with desired speed and circumspection. The question is, did this happen because of a so-called instruction from above? The culpability of all concerned, high and low, needs to be established.

Violent incidents that include murder of politicians are outcomes in a society marked by deep polarisation, weak institutions and chronic poverty. The quantity and quality of violence characterising Bangladeshi society at all levels today has an irreducibly political context. Overt and visible violence co-exists with invisible violence that destroys the identity of human beings. The visible violence, being situational and physical, can be dealt with through law and order solutions. The invisible violence being structural and requiring radical solutions, however, flows into and determines physical violence in a bipolar

interaction.

Bangladesh today is witnessing the politics of violence, which means resorting to physical violence to promote a political objective, as well as the violence of politics built into the institutionalised structure of politics.

Unfortunately, there has been no serious policy discussion on the phenomenon of violence in Bangladeshi society, though there has been plenty of retail discussion in media.

Politics did enter into a situation in which hired thugs who perpetrated violence were assured of protection from prosecution. Very few felt ashamed as politics in our parlance acquired a pejorative connotation by

Violent incidents that include murder of politicians are outcomes in a society marked by deep polarisation, weak institutions and chronic poverty. The quantity and quality of violence characterising Bangladeshi society at all levels today has an irreducibly political context.

the fact of its manifest association with conflict and violence. The civil society has been undermined by the stimulation of politics based on division and acrimony.

Cynical observers of our social scene are of the distressing view that there is a functional utility of violence for politicians. Such opinions point an accusing finger towards the suspected state complicity in the perpetration of organised acts of violence and the inordinate delays in securing justice for the victims. This delay is alarming as it sends a clear message to potential delinquents that no harm will come to them in the event of repeated performances of criminal activities.

In Bangladesh we need to seriously acknowledge the significance of authoritative approval or condoning of violence because such action is construed as social approval. The so-

called political circumstances have often obstructed accountability of the culpable individuals. There is good reason to doubt that considerable number of officials abnegated their responsibility to protect all citizens regardless of their identity.

The disturbing reality in Bangladesh is that with the change of political regime the faces of the criminals and their sources of patronage change. At times the same criminals who had terrorised the community under the patronage of the outgoing ruling party continued their depredations with a renewed mandate from the incumbent ruling party.

Quite often, the disconcerting socio-political reality is that the source of deterioration in crime and order situations originated in the continuing patronage of criminals and bullies by the incumbent ruling party. Practically, what the people see is the end result of cumulative process of patronised crime, practiced over successive regimes.

The premonition is that if criminals continue to enjoy immunity from law enforcement over successive administrations then we have a systemic crisis at hand, and a serious one at that. The manifestation of that crisis relates to the allegation of selective law enforcement scenario wherein state functionaries hesitate to enforce the law, suo moto.

The suspicion is that the systemic deficiency is located within the political parties and machinery of law enforcement. The desired corrective actions cannot be unilaterally taken by the ruling party and quite distinctly calls for a bipartisan approach with active involvement of the civil society. Demobilisation of criminal elements by the ruling party demands a reciprocal response from the political opponents. The remedy lies in cleaning our politics through its decriminalisation, backed by the de-politicisation of law enforcement as well as the administration.

The writer is a columnist of *The Daily Star*.

The invisible enemy

SHIBA NANDA BASU

THE future belongs to cyber criminals," was how a senior officer of Kolkata Police expressed his dismay after nabbing a Nigerian national who had cheated a city-based businessman by sending him fraudulent e-mails.

Ahead of the Olympics, London's Metropolitan Police received a number of complaints from people who had been inundated with emails informing them that they had won an "Olympic Lottery." The letters were fraudulently signed off by "Reverend Green" who is in fact a Games official. In all cases, the recipients were asked to ring a certain telephone number to stake their claim.

But Metropolitan Police acted quickly and established it was a cyber scam. It soon posted a warning on its website that reads: "This is a scam. If you have received such a letter or e-mail do not respond in any way. You may wish to report the matter to Action Fraud via the internet by visiting actionfraud.org.uk."

Quick response and investigation are all that is needed to crack such cases. The Cyber Crime Investigation Cell of Mumbai Police that was inaugurated on December 2000 likes to remind itself and the people its serves: "The invisible criminal is more dangerous than the visible one. He uses technology as his weapon."

The assertion makes it clear how the cloak-and-dagger game is going to be reinvented in future. It seems the virtual enemy is set to obliterate stereotypes and flummox conventional crime experts. With the cyber crime graph climbing steadily, next-level policing is needed badly.

What makes the challenge enormous is that while crime tends to be nationally defined and policing locally delivered, the canvas for Internet-related offence is globalised and

transnational.

A discussion draft of the National Cyber Security Policy prepared by the government of India's department of information technology reads: "The security of cyber space is not an optional issue but an imperative need in view of its impact on national security, public safety and economic well-being." But information technology (IT) experts have always complained that India's National Cyber Security Policy was never considered integral to national security despite increasing cyber attacks on India, especially on government sites.

Militant groups have sent loud and clear messages with repeated hacking but the government is yet to pay enough attention to either cyber law or cyber security-related issues. The IT sector feels that the country still

What makes the challenge enormous is that while crime tends to be nationally defined and policing locally delivered, the canvas for Internet-related offence is globalised and transnational.

lacks a defined cyber security policy.

While Kolkata Police is still governed by colonial sensibilities when it comes to crime fighting, its London counterpart has not only modernised and reformed itself, but has also kept itself abreast of changing cyber crime patterns. The website of London's Metropolitan Police has all safeguards incorporated in the site itself to tackle cyber crime.

Also, the website not only invites citizens to register their complaints but also has a mechanism in place to focus on the unique dimension of each case. London's Met website also provides links to citizens so that they can share their experiences, register grievances and read up on the modern trends in cyber crime Online. The

website also lists the kind of cases probed by MP with detailed suggestions on taking appropriate, exemplary protection.

In the USA, the Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section (CCIPS) is "responsible for implementing the Department's national strategies in combating computer and intellectual property crimes worldwide." It prevents, investigates, and prosecutes computer crimes by working with other government agencies, the private sector, academic institutions, and foreign counterparts. It relies extensively on Infra-Gard which at its most basic level is a partnership between the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the American private sector.

It is an association of businesses, academic institutions, state and local

What makes the challenge enormous is that while crime tends to be nationally defined and policing locally delivered, the canvas for Internet-related offence is globalised and transnational.

law enforcement agencies, and other participants dedicated to sharing information and Intelligence to prevent hostile acts against the USA. Such extensive collaboration and effort are the need of the hour to rein in a burgeoning crime that is "invisible" in the true sense of the word.

The recent spate of cyber attacks on Indian government sites underscores the need to pay more attention to cyber security in India. Cyber crime can prove as dangerous as any terrorist attack. Sensitive information stored in computers of strategic Indian departments and ministries can easily be obtained by hackers.

A report prepared by the Indian audit and accounts department has recently revealed that many govern-

ment establishments in West Bengal are using pirated software that pose great threat to internal security. The software giant, Microsoft, has been consistently warning against the use of pirated software, saying such a practice jeopardises sensitive information.

Since pirated software needs no code, it is vulnerable to third party interference. But as government officials are not aware of such cyber threats, the practice continues unabated.

In India, not only critical infrastructure protection is needed but in order to combat cyber crime effectively, it is necessary to adopt a critical information and communications technology infrastructure protection (CIIP) protocol as European countries have. Our policymakers must do this at the earliest. Such a protocol helps in cyberspace and information and communications technology crises management and management of cyber terrorism.

Unlike Western countries, there is no collaborative effort to tackle cyber crime in India. The Indian government is yet to crawl out of the paper-work stage and frame a definitive cyber policy. A small example will illustrate to what extent India still remains behind the times. A look at the New Crime Trends section of the Kolkata Police website reveals that some conventional transgressions continue to enjoy the distinction while cyber crime variants are conspicuous by their absence from the roster.

If police organisations of the 21st century are unable to reinvent themselves with the changing times, cyber criminals are only waiting to have the last laugh.

© The Statesman (India). All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement with Asia News Network.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

August 18

1920
The Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution is ratified, guaranteeing women's suffrage.

1942
A group of freedom fighter of Sherpur hoisted the Tricoloure at Mohammadabad Tehsil, Ghazipur, India

1958
Vladimir Nabokov's controversial novel *Lolita* is published in the United States.

1958
Brojen Das from Bangladesh swims across the English Channel in a competition, as the first Bangali as well as the first Asian to ever do it. He became first among 39 competitors.

1965
Vietnam War: Operation Starlite begins United States Marines destroy a Viet Cong stronghold on the Van Tuong peninsula in the first major American ground battle of the war.

1971
Vietnam War: Australia and New Zealand decide to withdraw their troops from Vietnam.

2008
President of Pakistan Pervez Musharraf resigns due to the threat of impeachment.