

Nizami brought to justice

Another step forward in redeeming a long-awaited pledge

WITH the International Crimes Tribunal-1 sentencing Jamaat-e-Islami chief Motiur Rahman Nizami to death, another top leader of the party gets his comeuppance. He adds to the list of five other infamously high-profile convicts marking an advanced stage in the long-awaited trial process as a whole.

Nizami has been found guilty in 8 of the 16 charges leveled against him after 22-month-long trial proceedings marked by hurdles and the flexibility shown to the defence reflect due deliberation and diligence in the pursuit of the legal process. It is worthwhile to mention that Nizami had already been given death penalty in 10-truck arms haul case in January this year.

It must be remembered that Nizami like his ilk not only conspired and collaborated with the Pakistan occupation army to abort our freedom struggle heralded by the stirrings of the soul of our people but also perpetrated heinous war crimes and crimes against humanity either as auxiliary force or participants in genocide.

The government's resolute pursuit of the task it had set itself to fulfill and the persistent efforts of the War Crimes Tribunal despite occasional odds have been, on the whole, praiseworthy. Here, the determination of the Prime Minister himself deserves to be highlighted.

City unsafe for women

Demonstrative action needed

A recent nationwide survey carried out by ActionAid has unveiled some disturbing facts. Nearly half the respondents are of the opinion that women face harassment in public places and 9 out of 10 women experience one form of sexual harassment or another in crowded places such as public transportation hubs. With most women preferring to avoid making a formal complaint to law enforcement agencies due to cumbersome procedures that are perceived to be stacked against the complainant, the practice of picking on women has become somewhat of a national pastime for a large number in our society.

That disregard for women run high was underscored once again when muggers felt no compunction in dragging a woman 50 yards over Mirpur road on October 28 in a bid to snatch her handbag. We have become so desensitized to the gentler gender that we may stoop so low as to drag a woman to her death for her purse. As this is hardly a problem that can be tackled by formulation of new laws or enforcement of old ones, what has come to light is that there is need for collective action by State and non-State actors. There is heightened need for gender-sensitive information to be incorporated in regular curricula in primary and secondary education levels. Existing perceptions about the situation may only change when proactive measures are taken to change mindset of people that such despicable behaviour is morally reprehensible and demeaning to half the population.

Fly while you have wings

ABDUL MATIN

RENOWNED scientist and former Indian President Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam quoted the following poem of the great Persian poet Jalal ad-Din Rumi while addressing a gathering of youth in Dhaka recently: "I am born with potential. I am born with goodness and trust. I am born with ideas and dreams. I am born with greatness. I am born with wings. I am not meant for crawling because I have wings. I will learn to use them and fly." This prompted me to reconstruct a short story partly based on a theme I borrowed from one of my professors:

A young man serving an old but wealthy Arab Sheikh once complained to his master: "Sir, why are you so rich while I am so poor?"

"Why should you be poor? You too are very rich," the Sheikh replied smilingly.

"You must be joking, Sir," the young man said.

The Sheikh said: "No, I am not. You are really very rich. If you don't believe me, I am ready to give you all of my wealth, provided you give me something in return." The young man was puzzled and began to wonder what he had that he could exchange with his master's wealth! He thought for a while and said: "I have nothing worthy of exchange, Sir."

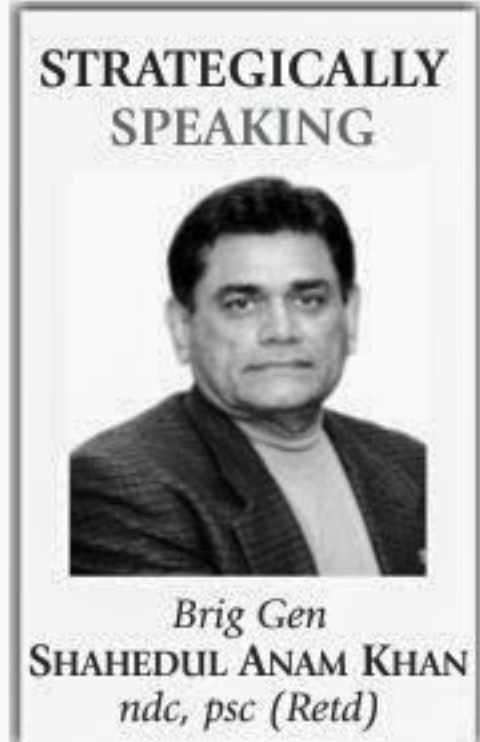
The old man said confidently: "Surely you have but you don't know." The young man was still confused. He asked impatiently: "Sir, please tell me what it is." "It is your youth," the Sheikh said calmly and continued: "If you give me your youth, I shall give you all my wealth plus my age. Would you like to exchange?"

The young man put his head down without uttering a word. The old man continued: "I know why you want my wealth but not my age. It proves your youth is more valuable than my wealth. If I could be young like you, I could re-build my career. Perhaps I could double or triple my wealth. To tell you the truth, I was not rich at your age. I made my fortune through hard work during my youth. If I could do it, why shouldn't you? A person's best asset is his/her youth. Remember, it comes but once in life. If you can make the best use of it, you can achieve anything in life -- perhaps more than I did." The young man felt ashamed and said: "Please forgive me, Sir. I must have said something very silly."

The old man said: "No, you didn't. We appreciate the worth of youth only after we lose it. So, fly, my boy, while you have wings."

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

JMB changing base!



STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

AMA'ATUL Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) is in the news again after almost nine years. Not since March 2005 has the extremist group hogged the headlines in two countries. Their reemergence, though not entirely unexpected, is not happy tidings for us. After they were badly mauled in 2007 and with a truncated organisation and little capacity to pose a substantive threat some might have thought that they had seen the end of the extremist group.

However, for anyone who is conversant with the modus operandi of extremist and terrorist groups it was perhaps a matter of time before the JMB remerged, given the deep-rooted ideology that drives the extremist cadres and more importantly their likely links with trans-boundary extremist organisations or even with state agencies of a third country using these groups to exert indirect pressure on another country by conducting terrorist acts.

That the JMB was not sitting idle is clearly evident from the fact that between 2007 and now the security agencies have anticipated a large number of their cadres. And their operation to free their members from police custody by ambushing a police van on an inter-district highway in February of this year shows that their operational capability had not been completely blunted. If anything, JMB continued to be well-funded and retained a good planning capability. However, their reemergence in a very different context, that they should choose Indian soil to conduct their operations against Bangladesh and also against Indian targets, throws a different light on the extremist group.

The Indian NIA has identified the victims of the October 2 bomb blast incident in Khagragar, Burdwan, as belonging to the JMB. One of the killed is reported to have been living there for the last six or seven years and even married there. Some 50 modules of JMB have been identified by the NIA but what is surprising is that the Indian intelligence agencies had been aware of their presence on their soil since 2005 according to two WikiLeaks leaked cables. The reported plan of the JMB, to kill our two leaders, as revealed by NIA, is a matter that Bangladesh cannot but take seriously. However, some aspects of the reports throw up some puzzling questions that we ought to seek rational explanations to.

There were compelling reasons for the JMB to seek

There were compelling reasons for the JMB to seek sanctuary outside the country given that they were under pressure from the law enforcing agencies since the time they announced their intention and demonstrated their capability through the simultaneous blasts that they carried out in the country in 2005.

sanctuary outside the country given that they were under pressure from the law enforcing agencies since the time they announced their intention and demonstrated their capability through the simultaneous blasts that they carried out in the country in 2005. But shifting base is generally resorted to when the current base becomes too hot to handle, which was perhaps true, but not without guaranteed safe sanctuary across the border.

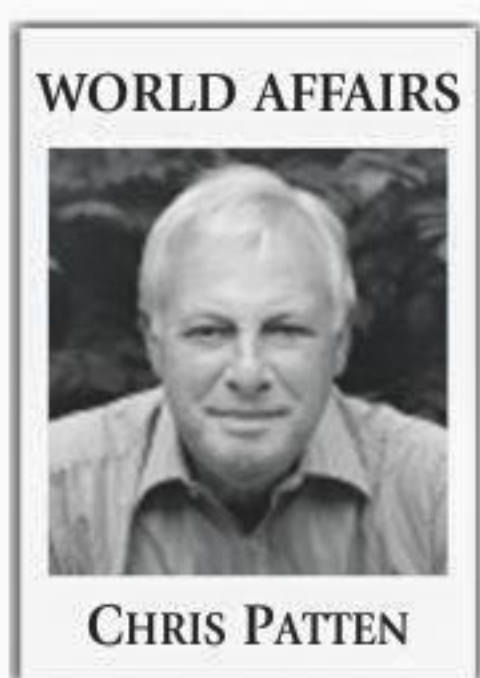
One wonders why the JMB has considered the soil of India safer than Bangladesh given that the Indian agencies had been getting increasingly concerned with the spate of radicalisation in Paschimbanga, particularly in the bordering districts. That they had till now existed on the Indian soil without being apprehended by the agencies till recently, and given that there were, according to Indian sources, large scale influx of extremists elements in the last three or four years in particular, show that they had been enjoying indemnity of sorts and, perhaps, with the acquiescence from powerful quarters in Paschimbanga.

But it is their shifting of base across the border and plans to make IEDs on Indian soil and then transfer those to Bangladesh through what we know as heavily fenced border on the Indian side, to carryout terror acts, is beyond comprehension. No sensible terrorist organisation would take the risk. Notwithstanding the security operations inside the country, it would still be a relatively safer proposition to operate from within Bangladesh. And one wonders what might be the aim of the JMB to attack targets inside Paschimbanga. And what benefit would it derive in the context of their overall aim, which is to establish Sharia law in the country. Unlike HUIJI (B), whose aim is more international and concerned with a Muslim Caliphate, the JMB is Bangladesh specific, unless of course it is working at the behest of another country, and that is a distinct possibility.

Some people see politics in the whole affair, the purpose being to discredit the Trinamool Congress in Paschimbanga for not being serious enough in tackling the issue of extremism and pandering to minority groups for votes. But be that as it may, politics or not, Bangladesh and our leaders are targets (this is not a new information), and that may coincide with aims of international terrorist organisation/s. It should seek more specific information from India in order to move effectively against the threat.

The writer is Editor, Op-Ed and Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

Hope for Hong Kong



WORLD AFFAIRS

HONG KONG's democracy movement has gained admiration worldwide. The principles, decency, and behaviour of its youthful vanguard inspire confidence in the qualities of the generation that one day will run the great city. That said, it is time to move on to a sensible endgame.

The longer the standoff between Hong Kong's Chief Executive and the demonstrators continues, the more likely it is that individual citizens—and Hong Kong itself—will be hurt. The Hong Kong government should demonstrate some statesmanship, which the so-called "Umbrella Movement"—occupying the moral high ground and not wishing to risk losing public support—would surely reciprocate. A substantive and successful dialogue with the government would not require the protesters to call off their campaign for democracy; it would simply end the current phase of a campaign that eventually will succeed.

Despite their protestations to the contrary, Hong Kong Chief Executive C. Y. Leung and his government have considerable room for maneuver. As many Hong Kong citizens have argued, the Chinese government's current position is based on a report, submitted by Leung's officials, which purported to reflect accurately the outcome of local consultations on constitutional development.

But the report plainly understated the degree of public support for change. Given what has happened in the last few weeks, Leung could quite properly give a new report to the authorities in Beijing focusing on two issues not proscribed by Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the Basic Law.

The first issue concerns not just the immediate question of the terms on which the chief executive will be elected in 2017, but also how the Legislative Council should be elected in 2016 and after. The procedure is largely a matter for the Hong Kong government to decide.

It is surprising that 17 years after the handover of sovereignty from the United Kingdom to China, Hong Kong still does not have a directly elected legislature. In December 1992, Margaret Thatcher suggested in a speech in the House of Lords that, if all went well, Hong Kong could have universal suffrage by 2007.

Unfortunately, all has not gone well. The legislature today comprises a mix of directly elected members and those representing functional constituencies: corporate interests and groups of employees. Some civic groups have advocated increasing the number of directly elected legislators and opening up the functional constituencies to broader electorates. Moreover, the brake that the functional constituencies



can put on legislation should be scrapped, leaving decisions to a simple majority. This could be accompanied by a pledge to create a legislature composed entirely of directly elected members in 2020.

The second issue concerns the composition and the voting rules of the handpicked 1,200-member election committee that will choose the chief executive in the future. The current proposed arrangements would permit the Chinese government to veto any candidate that it did not like, prompting criticism that what is on offer is an Iranian-style election: "You can vote for anyone we choose."

The Hong Kong government could call for changes to increase the openness and fairness by which the chief executive is chosen, without abandoning its current method in favour of universal suffrage. According to the Basic Law, the election committee should be "broadly representative"—a provision that the committee's current composition violates. Its membership is chosen by only 7% of the total Hong Kong electorate, and its voting procedures seek to prevent the nomination of any candidates who may harbour democratic sympathies.

Since 1997, 55-61% of voters have voted for democratic candidates in Legislative Council elections. The last time a slightly smaller election committee met (to choose Leung), less restrictive constraints on candidate selection were in place, and the leader of the Democratic Party was able to be nominated (though he still received less than 7% of the vote).

So Leung and his team should put forward proposals to broaden the electoral base of the election committee and open up the nominating process for candidates. There are plenty of recommendations from civil-society groups about how to accomplish these objectives. Both sides will need to give a little to prevent the confrontation in the streets from escalating, with the police forced to provide a substitute for a sensible policy.

The British government has said that it is important that "the people of Hong Kong have a genuine choice." Leung and his colleagues can give them one. This would not be all that the Umbrella Movement has demanded, but it should encourage the protesters to reach a compromise without departing from their longer-term goal.

That is why Leung should embrace dialogue and compromise. Even a ruler whose mandate comes from heaven should heed the words of the Confucian sage Mencius: "Heaven sees with the eyes of its people. Heaven hears with the ears of its people."

The writer, the last British Governor of Hong Kong, is currently Chancellor of the University of Oxford.

Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2014. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

World's worst airport!

Recently I was reading a survey report carried out by a website 'Sleeping at Airports' which classified 10 worst airports of the world having dirty bathrooms, large crowds, bad food, etc. The site's annual ranking was based on tourist surveys that asked about comfort and crowds at terminals, Wi-Fi, food options, and overall cleanliness.

Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto International Airport has been rated as the world's worst airport while New York's LaGuardia Airport ranked at number 10. Thanks heavens, our airport's name is not in the list of worst 10!

In my view, an international airport of a country is a reflection of how developed and civilised a country is. I wonder why Pakistan is lagging behind even 67 years after its independence.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System, SAU, Dhaka

Mysterious space plane

This refers to the report, "Mysterious US secret plane lands after 2-yr mission" (Oct.19). The space plane flew over Pakistan, North Korea, Iran and China. Was it spying over terrorists and nuclear facilities of these nations? Is it a space fighter from which missiles can be launched at the desired nation on the earth? This possibility is strong, as nations like Russia and the US are reported to be developing space missiles. Is this US answer to Russia developing space missiles? Can it be used to capture space stations of other nations or block the movement of other nations' satellites?

Whatever may be the case, in future, satellites of other nations may not have smooth sailing in space and they can be monitored, tailed, or not allowed to move forward. Inter-continental nuclear-capable ballistic missiles will become outdated, if space weapons are developed as inter-planetary missiles.

Deendayal M. Lulla
On e-mail

Are we to suffer forever?

The brave people of this nation have fought hard and made great sacrifices in earning the country's independence. We were oppressed by the British, then the Pakistanis, and we are still being repressed by our own rulers. How sad and tormenting it is for a nation! The atrocities committed by the cadres of political parties, lawlessness of law enforcing agencies and the tyranny of the administration are simply unbearable. When will we get rid of this vicious evil cycle?

One
On e-mail

Comments on news report, "All 7 acquitted, thanks to ACC," published on October 27, 2014

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed
The word 'anti' from the Anti-Corruption Commission needs to be removed.

Nazmul Haq
Congratulations to the cartoonist. An excellent and very appropriate cartoon.

"It's equivalent to Tk 675,398cr" (Oct. 26, 2014)

Mahboob Hossain
At last their contribution has been recognised.

OpeeMonir
Thank you for informing us. We need to salute our women in every aspect of our life.

"Bangladesh joins AIIB: Implications" (Oct. 26, 2014)

Uddin
It is a very wise decision to join AIIB. Bangladesh is likely to be immensely benefited from it in the mid and long term.

Moshiur Rahman
There is nothing to exult in the formation of AIIB. China will use it as its political weapon like US did with World Bank. At best, Bangladesh will have an additional option to meet its financial needs. Let's see what changes World Bank and IMF might bring to remain competitive.

"Asia leads the global growth" (Oct. 26, 2014)

Rahman Mostafiz
Will the West ever allow it to happen? It requires concerted intellectual efforts to make it happen.