

Suspected militants arrested

There should be a thorough probe into their international links

THE arrest of a suspected leader of an Islamic militant group, along with 17 others in Faridpur, has led to some sensational findings on how such groups were operating and, more important, maintaining links in other countries.

Police have succeeded in arresting the leader and members of yet another group which looks like having an agenda not compatible with true religious values. The police vigil and activism in this area of national concern are laudable. But obviously they have a long way to go.

Maulana Abdur Rouf, leader of 'Al Jama'iatul Islamia', has reportedly admitted that he was trained in Pakistan before going to Afghanistan to fight the then Soviet occupation forces. It is suspected he has had links with two Islamic militant groups in Myanmar as well.

The information that Rouf has divulged to the police regarding himself and his organisation could give the law enforcers vital clues as to the motives and *modus operandi* of such groups. They have been arrested after quite a few incidents had taken place in quick succession pointing to the likely presence of some militant organisations in the country. The names of suspected militants came up following big ammo hauls, discovery of bomb-making plants and training and education centres. So, the incidents are following a pattern which indicates that the whole thing is being conducted in an orchestrated fashion.

International links add a new dimension to the issue which is that the militants might have been working on a broader plan. So, the law enforcers should carry forward the process of investigation to find out what they have been up to. The point is relevant because Bangladesh is firmly committed to opposing terrorism of any kind.

It is imperative that religious education centres like madrassahs, which could be used for training and ideologically transforming youngsters, are kept a tab on, and identified. The activities having little to do with education or religion have to be contained at any cost. There is no way anyone can turn a blinkered eye to what has been happening. The decision-makers should put the right strategy in place to combat it.

How such activities are financed will have to be gone into. Even if such militancy is still confined to a handful of zealots and their followers, it has to be nipped before it poses a greater threat to society.

Small enterprise on the rise

Let's take the quiet revolution forward

A survey on the country's micro-type, small and medium enterprises has revealed their coming of age and playing a significant role in the uplift of the national economy. Slowly but steadily their contribution to the Gross Domestic Product has risen to 25 per cent outstripping the contribution of the larger private and public sector industries. That 40 per cent of the population aged 15 years and above are employed in 60 lakh such enterprises speaks of a silent industrialisation process that hardly ever hogs news headlines. This is an achievement by entrepreneurs about whom we either know very little or who very rarely get invited to formal functions to be heard as mentioned by the commerce minister.

Credit goes to the Department for International Development, USAID, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) for sponsoring the survey that unveiled such a huge but so far largely obscured success story.

Since we are labour-intensive, there can be no question about the suitability of micro, small and medium units which require modest investment to be set up. They represent a major avenue for private sector association and participation from the grassroots upwards.

The government must play an enabling and facilitating role here. According to the survey, the enterprises received credit in an equal proportion at 35 per cent from both informal and formal sources. A huge chunk came from non-government organisations. There is scope for expanded lending to the small enterprises sector, especially from the NCBs and specialised banks.

There is room for improving women's representation in the area, both in terms of entrepreneurship and employment. The women entrepreneurs and job-seekers must be given a much greater access to the opportunities on offer for setting up micro, small and medium industries. They should be given special incentives as the most vulnerable segment of the population to come right up.

Maoists' withdrawal from peace talks

Nepal's nascent democracy faces a new crisis?

A M M SHAHABUDDIN

THE recent announcement by the Maoists, Nepal's most powerful rebel group, that the seven-month long cease-fire truce agreed upon by two parties, the Nepalese government and the Maoists, on January 29 last was now "effectively over" after the government's refusal to agree to their "key" demand of a constituent Assembly. The Maoists had earlier served the government with a three-day ultimatum to accept their demand of holding general elections for a Constituent Assembly that would redraft the country's constitution ending monarchy. A prominent Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai had also cautioned that government's refusal to accept Maoists' demand "unconditionally" for a Constituent Assembly would be viewed by the Maoists as "a one-way declaration of breaking away from further peace-talks". This latest development undoubtedly rings a new alarm-bell for another phase of political unrest in the country, which was conspicuous by its absence since the signing of the cease-fire agreement in January last. Instances of violence by the Maoists are already in the air where one Nepalese army colonel was killed, another colonel wounded by the Maoist rebels almost immediately after its withdrawal from cease-fire and further peace-talks. In fact, Nepal has been witnessing a bitter power struggle between the political parties and the new king Gyanendra, younger brother of King Birendra since the killing of Birendra at a Royal Massacre on June 1, 2001. The situation seems to have taken a turn for the worst when a well-known pro-monarchist leader, Surya Bahadur Thapa was appointed Prime Minister by the new king, replacing Lokendra Bahadur Chand who ran the country as PM for only eight months since October last year. This definitely indicates which way the Royal Palace wants the wind to blow.

Situation turns for the worse

But the newly appointed Prime Minister Thapa seems to be already in

deep water after the major political parties of Nepal, which are already agitating against Thapa's appointment by the king as "unconstitutional", had now outright rejected his appeal to join hands with Mr. Thapa to put a united front against the Maoist rebels who had broken the cease-fire agreement with the government of Mr. Thapa. Many analysts think that Thapa, appointed by the king just three months ago, could face the fate of his two predecessors, namely, Sher Bahadur Deuda and Lokendra Bahadur Chand, after failing to make peace with both the Maoists and the political parties.

Moreover, the new volatile situation had arisen when the political atmosphere had already been made cloudy and stormy, as the five out of six political parties, which were most

building up a strong pro-democracy movement from the grass-roots, which ultimately led to the fall of century-old Rana Dynesty (1846-1951) whose hereditary Prime Ministers were no less ruthless than absolute monarchy, thus ending perhaps the blackest chapter of Nepal's history of feudalistic rule. Thus NC ushered in a new democratic regime in Nepal for the first time after over a century in 1951. But NC committed the greatest blunder, wittingly or unwittingly, by inviting king Tribhuban from India who was living there in self-exile since the 1940s, for which the NC had to pay a very high price.

King Tribhuban's 'Road Map'

After the general election held for the

United-Marxist-Leninist-Nepal Communist Party (UML-NCP), which led to the establishment of democracy under a constitution that made the king a constitutional head, rather an ornamental head. But it was again flawed, making the hazardous journey for Nepal's nascent democracy a bit longer, because the notorious 'rat' was smelling somewhere waiting for its opportunity. Perhaps it was looming larger without being noticed by others.

Royal Massacre: A Bolt from the Blue

And the looming disaster came like another bolt from the blue, on June 1, 2001, with the tragic Royal Massacre at a Royal Dinner party, killing King Birendra, Queen Aishwarya, and seven other Royal family members, the massacre was allegedly committed

Ministers one after the other, the latest appointment of Mr. Thapa being the third in the series, perhaps to show his sincere efforts to bring back stability and peace in Nepal. But the political parties have rejected as "unconstitutional" the appointment of Mr. Thapa and vowed to continue their agitation till their demands, including abolition of monarchy, are fulfilled.

CIA and RAW behind Royal Massacre?

Meanwhile, the most powerful political organisation in Nepal, the Maoists who have been waging a so-called 'people's war' to put an end to monarchy and establish a communist government there, had confounded the already confused situation, by alleging that the US Intelligence CIA and Indian Intelligence RAW

To avoid a national catastrophe, the best way out would be to formally end monarchy or maintain a shadow of it, hold country-wide general elections, and allow the victorious party or parties including the Maoists, to form a national government, with a common economic and political front to put back Nepal's nascent, and now sinking, democracy on the right track. For this a clear understanding is necessary for a common goal among all democratic parties and the Maoists who literally control two-thirds of the rural areas of Nepal.

vocal and powerful in the now-dissolved elected parliament of 205 Members, had been agitating against the dissolution of the parliament and take-over all power by the new king, whose entry into the Royal Palace after the killing of his brother King Birendra, still remains a mystery.

Rule of Rana Dynasty

In this context, let us have a glance at the political history of the century-old rule of Rana Dynasty from 1846, preceding the absolute monarchy established by King Tribhuban (1960-1990). During the absolute authority during Rana Dynasty as well as the absolute monarchy period, it was an one-man show which ruled supreme and had played a key-role with the fate of the poorest of poor people of Nepal who were more like 'dumb-driven-cattle', living a sub-human wretched life under a serfdom.

It must be admitted here that the Nepal Congress (NC), the oldest political party of Nepal, had played a very vital and constructive role in

first time in 1951, NC was voted to power, under the new monarchy of King Tribhuban. But King Tribhuban had prepared his own 'road-map' to entrench himself as the absolute state authority and a centre of power in all socio-political affairs. In fact, he unhesitatingly bit the hand that had fed him, when he staged a 'coup' in 1960, dismissing the elected parliament, leaning political parties and arresting all political leaders, including the NC Chief Koirala. Thus the king imposed his personal rule, showing his ungratefulness to the political party that brought him back to the throne. And what happened to the people? They were now like out of the 'frying pan' (Rana Dynesty) into the 'fire' (the absolute monarchy)!

But there is no such thing as last word in politics. It took about 30 years for Nepal's oldest party, the National Congress.

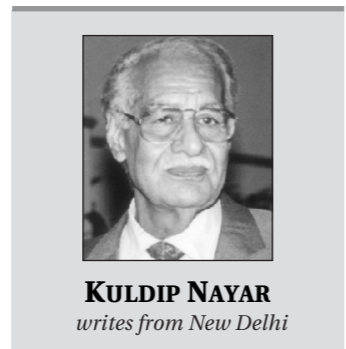
to rally against the rule of King Tribhuban to bring it down, through a pro-democracy movement. This time the NC collaborated with its rival,

by the heir-to-the-throne, Prince Dipendra who later shot himself dead, as if to wipe out all traces of evidence for the massacre. No *raison-d'etre* of this horrid massacre was left behind. But the massacre opened a new chapter with the entry into the Royal Palace of the late Slain King's younger brother, Gyanendra, which the people of Nepal accepted with much hesitation and suspicion. And as ill luck would have it, the new king started his journey on a wrong foot when, immediately on assumption of Royal responsibilities, he officially claimed that the killing was due to the "accidental" automatic weapons power, thus creating more suspicion among the people who rejected the king's statement as "unacceptable" and took to the street agitation against the new king which forced him to appoint an enquiry commission. The king, however, continues his rule over the country. The remarkable feature of his running the country is the dissolution of the Parliament and changing of *ad-interim* Prime

conspired to kill King Birendra as he was 'soft' towards China and the Maoists and subsequently "installed their stooges" is the Royal Palace. Maoist leader Babu Ram Bhattarai, in an article published in Nepal's most popular daily *Kantipur Daily*, alleged that King Birendra was like 'dust' in the eyes of the "American imperialist and Indian colonialists."

Perhaps to create a suspense about the mystery behind the Royal Massacre, a leading Nepal Congress leader and a former Prime Minister of Nepal, Girija Prasad Koirala had recently "threatened to expose", what he said was "a grand design" behind the killing of King Birendra. He, however, promised "to expose everything at an opportune time," as he had told the *Kathmandu Post* is a recent interview, adding that he had been "keeping quiet over the issue fearing that it would trigger fresh unrest." Only time will show what disclosure Mr. Koirala makes "at an opportune time" and what repercussion it would have on the on-going

BJP back to its destructive track



KULDIP NAYYAR
writes from New Delhi

WHETHER history repeats itself or not but it comes back full circle to memories long familiar to people. Some 12 years ago, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) started a rath yatra to polarise the society in northern India. It generated passion which ultimately made the crowd to pull down the Babri masjid. Never since partition there had been so many killings as were in the wake of the yatra.

Blessed by the RSS, the BJP is back to its destructive best. It has renewed its old agenda: an agitation to build temple without awaiting the court's decision on ownership. This may be yet another exercise in whipping up religious sentiments and stir Hindus and Muslims with all pernicious results.

When L K Advani led the yatra he was the BJP president. Today even when he is India's deputy prime minister, he has attended the RSS-BJP meeting to finalise the campaign to build the temple. The first brick is the booklet which the BJP has printed on Ram temple. Advani has contributed two articles to the booklet on his thoughts while under house arrest after the

demolition of the Babri masjid in 1992. Whether the two articles would incite communal passion or not is debatable. But the pertinent question is: Why should the No 2 person in the government be associating himself with extremists and fundamentalists, who look like re-igniting the mandir-

ruling party does not observe even a modicum of decorum. How should one point a finger at rowdy parties? The latter will quote chapter and verse from the statements of the BJP leaders to justify their behaviour. Advani is already involved in the demolition case which the CBI has brought against him.

BSP to get its votes, averaging 15 to 20 per cent, in the Lok Sabha polls and before that in the state assembly elections in Delhi, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan scheduled for this November. With political calculations going awry, the fall back on the tried temple issue was a natural

Fernandes, who is the blue-eyed boy of the RSS, has naturally said that Modi was not obliged to resign legally. This is true. But there is something called morality which George forgot long ago. What else is *raj dharma* (calls of governance), the words used by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee after the

When it says that the mandir issue can be settled either by the court's verdict or through negotiations between Hindus and Muslims, then why threaten with an agitation?

What the BJP leaders or their think-tank do not realise is that neither Modi nor mandir sells any more. People are tired of their projection again and again. As UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav has said at a press conference, the people are worried about poverty and unemployment and have little time for the temple.

The problem with the BJP is that it has no issue other than the communal divide it wants to pursue. Some in the party probably realise the lessening returns. Still their mind does not go beyond Hindutva. In fact, this is the sum total of the BJP's achievements during its five-year rule at the centre. Apart from communalism, it has distinguished itself in two other fields -- corruption and nepotism. There have never been so many scams as are during the Vajpayee's rule. And anyone who had anything to do with the RSS has been well rewarded.

One does not know what the BJP can do to retrieve the situation in Gujarat. But it can possibly solve the mandir problem. The Muslim community may well be inclined to offer the site of the Babri masjid to the government provided there is a constitutional amendment to let religious places remain as they were when India won freedom on August 15, 1947. It means that the RSS must honour the mosques at Mathura and Varanasi. But then what happens to its Hindutva agenda?

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BETWEEN THE LINES

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masjid controversy that may throw northern India into a communal cauldron?

It is clear that the BJP wants to bring the temple issue on to the centre stage for its Hindutva agenda which it believes sells. But should the country's deputy prime minister be a part of it? He has sworn loyalty to the constitution which is based on the country's ethos of secularism. Is he not violating legal obligations even if he does not bother about the morality aspect? The deputy prime minister also behaves in an irresponsible manner when he says that the Archaeological Survey of India report on excavations at Ayodhya has "strengthened" the case for a temple on the disputed land. The court, which ordered the excavations, is yet to give its judgment. His observation could tantamount to influencing the verdict.

One feels disappointed when the

Even otherwise, his comment before the judgment does not add to his stature nor to the democratic system which he, as the home minister, is supposed to protect.

It is obvious that the BJP has felt it necessary to bring the temple issue to the fore even before the end of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) rule. The BJP had given an undertaking to the constituents that the party would keep the temple question aside until the NDA was in power. The alliance still has one year to go. There is seemingly no danger to the government. It comfortably sailed through the no-confidence motion only last month. What it indicates is that the BJP is worried over the Lok Sabha election, which is one year hence. Maybe, the split with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) of dalits has hastened the thinking. The BJP was depending on the

option. Even otherwise, the BJP had little choice when the RSS, its mentor, told it to make up with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), a Sangh parivar member, which was hell bent on duplicating Gujarat by polluting the atmosphere in the name of the temple.

The party does not seem to realise that Narendra Modi has become a milestone around its neck. In fact, the observation by the Chief Justice of India that he had no faith in the Modi government or its prosecuting machinery to get justice for the victims has sent shock waves throughout the country. Some of the Hindu intelligentsia, which was with the BJP on building the temple, has felt so horrified over Chief Justice's remarks that it is distancing itself from the BJP. The party would have served its cause better if it had asked Modi to resign. Defence Minister George

carnage in Gujarat? The Chief Justice used the same words while chiding Modi.

Vajpayee, who used the words *raj dharma*, is conspicuous by his silence. His assurance at Chennai that India will not go communal is correct because the country may not stay united in the absence of pluralism. But shouldn't the prime minister do something to strengthen the ethos of secularism? He should assert himself to stop at least the BJP from reopening such issues which may rip the society apart. Sticking to Modi on the one hand and reopening the mandir issue on the other may create fire and fury. But such a scenario does not help the nation. At a time when fundamentalists and terrorists want to destabilise the country, the BJP's approach should have been to create an atmosphere of consensus.

OPINION

Bangladesh must improve its energy situation

DR. M. S. HAQ *writes from New York*

IN Bangladesh, the per capita energy consumption is relatively low. It is one of the country's formidable development challenges. The present rate of consumption has been constraining Bangladesh's efforts towards attracting sizeable FDI, accelerating rural development and improving the quality of life of Bangladeshis, to mention a few. Further, the country needs what I would call a 'power driven predominantly privatized economy' for its meaningful participation in the globalization process and in the free market. The term 'power' refers to steam power, water power, wind power, gas power and other power agencies (= used in an engineering sense and not in an organizational sense or otherwise).

The factors involved in the country's energy equation have both intra and inter-generational implications. Bangladesh, in one hand, is required to create and meet energy demand at the level that could facilitate a speedier economic growth and human development, among others. It is required, on the other hand, to establish initial conditions for the future generation to meet their energy requirement on a continuing basis.

Energy has the power to empower Bangladeshis economically, politically, socially and intellectually. It can help build the future of Bangladesh on a solid foundation. A higher rate of per capita energy consumption could assist Bangladeshis in their fight against poverty, law and order situation, corruption, distribution-related disparities and other developmental

deficiencies. But the bad news is: it can de-accelerate the country's progress, if not managed properly. An energy based approach to national development, if poorly managed, can help promote, among other things, a culture of easy-money making.

Interesting though, there exists a relationship between energy centred development and good governance. A wide gap between the two or a short-fall on both counts can, among other things, affect a country's developmental effort. It is one of the reasons why a number of energy rich world countries are still struggling to cope with their developmental challenges at the basic level.

Bangladesh would need, among other things, a sound strategy, a more productive management system, a bunch of good management practices

and above all, cooperation, as well as commitments of all concerned to deal with its energy related challenges and opportunities. The strategy mentioned should inter alia be holistic, futuristic, pragmatic, result-oriented, and conducive to power driven economic developments.

A productive management of the country's - energy future, energy requirement, energy reserve, energy utilization, energy re-cycling, energy politics, energy diplomacy, energy trade, energy security, energy-environment nexus and energy potential for development - could ensure a quicker and optimal return on its energy related investments.

It is expected that the people of Bangladesh and the political parties (both within and outside of the government) would jointly take appro-

priate measures for ensuring a better management of the country's energy resources, including gas. The decision on whether or not to export gas (unprocessed or processed?) to India should, among other things, be time sensitive, opportunity driven, forward looking, optimal return-oriented and satisfying to Bangladeshis. The decision should be taken on hard realities and not on emotional premises, and in a non partisan manner. In this connection, I would like to re-emphasize here my earlier suggestion on holding a national referendum on gas export (it was published in a number of English dailies of Bangladesh in the recent past). If the suggestion is acceptable to all concerned, it is hoped the government, the political parties, the donors and civil society would, prior to the referendum, explain to the

people of Bangladesh in more concrete terms about the comparative advantages of say, exportation of gas to India. It would then help them to take a more informed decision in pertinent areas in the event of referendum mentioned.

Bangladesh would need to consider inter alia various renewable and non renewable energy options and pertinent technology alternatives in its effort to improve the energy situation. In this respect, wind, solar and wave could, among others, be potential candidates for consideration, relative to time, space, resource level, comparative advantage, affordability and return on investment.

Present day wind turbines are less noisy, more reliable and capable of generating more power at a lower

cost. They can be monitored even from remote locations. It has been made possible by connecting a set of sensors (outfitted with the turbines) with a network that enables the remote monitoring of turbines say, from a lap top. For the wind direction and force, the turbines now-a-days depend on an electronic system which can predict that approximately a day in advance. The adjustment of the orientation of the rotor, as well as the pitch of individual blades can be made on the basis of the above prediction for maximum efficiency and output. For practical reasons, wind turbines should be supported by a back up system because they can not be fully relied upon for a continuous supply of power to consumers. Further, the turbines generally need supply power to operate.

Wind is an environment friendly energy source. Bangladesh should explore the feasibility of harnessing wind power especially for empowering rural Bangladeshis and Bangladeshis. It can seek technical or non-technical (or both) advices from local experts, countries that are currently using wind power with success and world renowned companies that are involved in the turbine business, such as: the General Electric (GE), the biggest domestic turbine manufacturer in the US. The bottom line is: Bangladesh can no longer afford a 'wait and see' strategy for bringing about drastic improvements in its energy sector; the time is overdue for the country to act more aggressively and decisively in the pursuit of a higher level energy outcome.