LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA TUESDAY MARCH 7, 2006

Bangla Bhai captured Time to extinguish extremist threat

once and for all

HE capture of JMB operations commander Siddigul Islam Bangla Bhai, coming as it did hard on the heels of the capture of JMB chief Shaekh Abdur Rahman, is an unqualified triumph for the law enforcement authorities and the best news that the nation could possibly have

The capture of so called Bangla Bhai brings to five (out of seven) the number of JMB majlis-e-shura or executive council members now in custody, including the two seniormost ones. It is to be hoped that with their top two figures in custody, the entire organisation and its deadly operations can be wound up shortly, and that the threat to the country from the extremists can now be brought to an end.

The recent captures show what the law enforcement authorities are capable of when they are freed to do their jobs without undue interference and when the political will exists. All units who were involved in the recent captures as well as all who have been involved in counter-terrorism operations that have disrupted the extremists and kept them from being able to strike for the last few months deserve commendation.

We would also like to laud the key role played by the public's cooperation and sharing of information with the authorities, which demonstrates that the extremists have little hold over the common people.

Let us also take a moment here to extend the best wishes and prayers of a grateful nation to Rab Sergeant Rafi who was critically injured in the operation.

But, of course, capture of the top JMB leaders is not enough. They must be brought to justice and exemplary punishment must be meted out by the state. There is no doubt in our mind that sedition charges are appropriate and that the arrested must face the full brunt of the law for their crimes against the nation.

No less important is interrogation of the two top leaders in custody so that the nation can find out just who is behind the group in terms of financing and weapons. Already crucial and fascinating information are coming to light as to the maze of contacts that stand behind the JMB and we expect and demand much more information so that we can get to the roots of this crisis that has been plaguing Bangladesh.

The fact that the extremists have been gone unapprehended for so long raises serious questions in the public mind as to issues of collusion, sponsorship, and support. The extremists' sources of sponsorship and shelter must be rooted out, regardless of where the investigation leads us, and the entire JMB terrorist organisation must be completely destroyed. Anything less than this would create suspicion in the public mind and would also run the risk of a recurrence of the extremist threat at some later point in time.

Asghar's demand for trial

A Pakistani speaks his mind

IR Marshal (retired) M Asghar Khan, a veteran Pakistani politician, has said that the Pakistan government should try the perpetrators of the genocide in Bangladesh in 1971. No moral indictment on the genocide by any Pakistani has ever been more forceful and candid.

An eminent Pakistani has echoed the voice of conscience that demands that the perpetrators of the heinous act do not go unpunished. And, bringing them to justice cannot have a time-bar.

As one who witnessed firsthand the unfolding events of 971, Asghar has spoken his mind at the launching ceremony of his book in Dhaka that must find a responsive chord in contemporary Pakistan. It is imperative that the witnesses to 1971 gave a true account of what happened during that time. We believe though that a growing segment of the intelligentsia in Pakistan subscribes to the views expressed by Asghar. And his comments should help those fed on a diet of disinformation campaign some three decades ago to have a fresh look at the events of 1971 and demand justice. The true picture of atrocities committed on the people of erstwhile East Pakistan was shut out to the common man in the then western wing.

As a moderate and rational political leader, Asghar has a reputation of his own. He has also been critical of the use of religion in politics, which is a burning issue today.

We welcome his view that facts are facts and these must be faced. Are the contemporary leaders in Pakistan listening?

Civil war in Iraq



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

IVIL war started in Iraq on February 22. Those of us who study the Middle East situation and Iraq in particular predicted it long ago. It was bound to happen. Saddam kept it under control. His downfall which was, of course, necessary under any definition, but that unfortunately came in the hands of the US and not by the people of Iraq, has paved the way

The attackers, presumably Sunni rebels dressed as paramilitary forces went to the Askariya Shrine known as the Golden Mosque in Samara, some 60 miles from Baghdad, handcuffed four Shia guards and put bombs under the dome of the mosque and detonated them. The dome of the shrine which was built some 1,200 years ago and seen by the Shia community of Iraq as one of their holiest ones, was reduced to rubble in no time. As it seems, there was no human casualty within the mosque; the casualty was only the structure of the mosque, but that came as a mortal blow to all Shias in Iraq.

The Sunnis' problem was mainly their political grievances against Shia domination, as they were left out of the government because of virtual election boycott by the Sunnis even in the last general election which was an American sponsored one. The Shias, being in majority, and as a mark of revenge after Saddam's downfall, partici-

pated in large numbers in the general election and captured most of the seats in the Iraqi parliament.

Thereafter, in collaboration with the Kurds, the Shiites wanted to form the government, which was opposed by the Sunnis. The American administration also wanted an inclusive government, as without Sunnis there was no chance of a successful government in Iraq and the insurgency was bound to continue. This was fully reflected in

virtual control many areas of Iraq including Basra. They openly violated curfew and controlled the streets of Basra and Sadr City near Baghdad. Younger clerics took control of the situation.

During the first three days the religious clerics of the sects encouraged their para-military forces to go for revenge attacks. But later the political leaders of all three sects called on the religious leaders to come forward and work together to

and Sunni leaders immediately after the initial understandings), full scale civil war is likely to be averted. The danger of civil war should be known to all leaders of Iraq and of the region. This was indeed the idea behind all that happened with Iraq. So, all political and religious leaders of the region should lend their support to the immediate end to religious strife in Iraq. Shia-Sunni strife can benefit only those who want to see the downfall of Muslims

This three dimensional development would be ruinous for the region as a whole, but benefit only Israel. It has been reported that President Bush personally telephoned several leaders of all sects and emphasized on working together to form an inclusive government. Indeed, this is the only option the Iraqi leadership has if they want to keep the country together. It seems to be in the US interest, too, to keep Iraq together as otherwise the Bush

Sunnis. In case the religious violence continues, the insurgents would also turn their guns and bombs against the Shia community and that would be terribly dangerous; the sheer number of Shia population who are not really involved in open insurgency, would not be able to withstand Sunni insurgents attacks against them. The Sunnis are also likely to get support from other Sunnis in the region

Civil war in any form is dangerous and terribly destructive. This must be avoided at all costs and only then both political and religious leaders would be able to work on the common agenda of having American military occupation vacated. This seems to be the American agenda, too, as both Congress and the people of America want to take their troops back home as quickly as possible as they cannot continue to bear the human losses any more.

But occupation of some sort would continue, it's a disease that once it afflicts a country does not go away that easily. Iraqis are very unlucky. They had Saddam's political occupation -- his dictatorial rule -- for nearly 30 years; now it's foreign occupation - occupation of another kind, probably not deadly in terms of human lives once the war is over, but certainly deadly in terms of Iraq's sover-

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Ambassador

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

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various statements made by US Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad. There is a view that Khalilzad, being an Afghan Sunni, insisted on inclusive government and some Shia leaders made Khalilzad partly responsible for the sectarian strife. Anyway, the inclusive government was also the formal American position and the ambassador was simply following his government's official position. In the present context of Iraqi politics, the inclusive government seems to be the only Whatever may be the reason, the

sectarian strife emerged in deadly form. The sectarian killing and destruction of mosques of each sect gave the full picture of an imminent civil war. Even repeated day curfews had to be imposed to stop people coming out in the street for revenge killings. In five days more than 1,300 people were killed, and the Sunnis suffered the most. Several dozens of Sunni mosques were also demolished and three Sunni clerics were killed. Moqtada al Sadr's Mahdi army had under

interest. Mogtada al Sadr also ioined the other leaders and called for calm. They apparently went for an understanding that they all should work for a national government and seek early withdrawal of American forces. Moqtada al- Sadr said: "We got rid of the accursed Saddam only to replace him by another dictatorship of Britain, America and Israel." The Sunni leaders who were initially opposed to any form of negotiation with Shiites later agreed to go for a national government. Sunni leader Mashhadany said: "We should hurry up and form a national government, to change this hopeless government. In the new government, everyone will handle responsibility. He gave some strict conditions for negotiations including compensation for the demolished mosques and recognition of those who died in

stop violence which was in nobody's

If this trend of political sagacity and behaviour continue (unfortunately, there again appeared some all over the region. Indeed, America and Europe should also do everything to stop the present religious violence as it would facilitate their working with people in the region. They have their own political and strategic interest in the region. After all, they are dealing with Iran on a major issue of possible nuclear If the religious violence continues and takes the shape of a civil war, Iraq would be divided into three pieces and this will have serious

political and strategic effect on the region as a whole. The Shias would obviously align with Iran and thus strengthen Iran's hand which will be bad not only for the west but also for the Arabs as Arabs would not like the emergence of Iran -- the old Persian empire. The emergence of a Kurdish state would be opposed, if necessary militarily, by Turkey. The Sunnis would have a good number of friends in the Arab world as most of the other Arab countries have overwhelmingly large Sunni populations. Thus the Sunnis' hands are

will also create serious political and strategic problems for the US and It is also generally believed that the Iragis -- whether Shias, Sunnis,

the break up of a UN member. This

or Kurds -- are first Iraqi nationalists and their differences in terms of religious sects take the second position. This is probably due to their ethnic ties coming through generations. Saddam was probably depending on that tie too and this is why he could fight the Iranians with only small opposition from the Shia community in Iraq. Now everything depends on how Iraqi leaders -both political and religious -- deal with the present situation. The political and religious

should sit together and go for an understanding on sharing of the governance responsibilities. Shia leaders should understand the gravity of the situation. They have to take into account the problem of insurgency which is so far mainly against American occupation -something Shias share with

The land of man-made disasters



ANM NURUL HAQUE

HE two tragic accidents that occurred within a short span of three days, and the resultant death of at least 75 workers. have once again sent a clear and loud message to the world that Bangladesh is not only a country of natural disasters but also a land of man-made disasters. Natural disasters like storm, cyclone, tornado, flood, tidal bore, etc are more or less well known to the people of this country. As these are inevitable. we can console ourselves that we are the victims of nature's fury. But we have no consolation for the helpless victims of man-made disasters, the number of which is increasing tremendously in recent

The devastating fire at a garment factory killed over 50 workers and 150 others were badly burnt in the inferno that engulfed the four-storey factory building in Chittagong on February 23. A six-storey building

housing a number of factories collapsed in the city's Tejgoan industrial area on February 25, just a day after the fatal fire incident of Chittagong, leaving 21 people killed and over 100 others injured, many of whom are likely to be crippled for

Fire at garment factories or collapse of factory building with tragic death of helpless workers is nothing new in the country. The first which is still reeling from one crisis to another in the quota-free regime is likely to face another serious threat following the recent accidents. The leading global buyers of Bandladeshi garments expressed their deep concern about factory compliance after the Savar tragedy and categorically said that Bangladesh would face problems in exporting garments if such type of incident happens again. The recent

are no accidents of fire or collapse of factory buildings, then there will be launch disasters or fatal road accioccurred in a single week in May 2005, killing over 300 people. We can blame nature's fury for the victims of the natural disasters, but whom should we blame for the victims of the man-made disasters? We should bring into cognizance the

workers and injured more than 100 others in December 2000. A devastating fire at a garment factory in Siddhirganj killed 22 workers and 50 others were injured in January 2005. The nine-storied building that collapsed like a house of cards at Savar not long ago, killing at least 100 hundred workers, was the worst industrial catastrophe in the country's history. But ironically the safety of the garment workers is not high

ference of those who exercise power without the semblance of responsibility The concern of the owners of the

garment factories is confined only to counting profit while the government's is for earning foreign currency. But nobody cares much for the poor workers -- the most important component for running the industry. They are being treated as slaves virtually without any human rights. The global buyers might be more sensitive to the safety and welfare of the garment workers in Bangladesh, but their pressure has not been enough to improve factory conditions to a desirable level.

The parliament on February 26 passed the Building Construction (Amendment) Bill 2006 providing new rules for construction of buildings. Any violation of the new rules is punishable by maximum seven years in prison and fine of not less than Tk 50,000. But this is not enough for providing security to the garment workers. The government should enact proper laws stipulating safety and security of the garment workers and severely punishing the owners failing to provide adequate security measures in their factories.

ANM Nurul Haque is a banker

BY THE NUMBERS

The parliament on February 26 passed the Building Construction (Amendment) Bill 2006 providing new rules for construction of buildings. Any violation of the new rules is punishable by maximum seven years in prison and fine of not less than Tk 50,000. But this is not enough for providing security to the garment workers. The government should enact proper laws stipulating safety and security of the garment workers

incident of fire in a garment factory occurred on December 27, 1990 in the city's Mirpur area that left at least 32 workers dead and more than a hundred injured. Over 450 garment workers, mostly women and children, have died in some 25 firerelated incidents in garment factories since 1990. In fact, the people of this country have witnessed a devastating and increasing number of man-made disasters in the garment factories over the last decade

The country's garment industry

two accidents are sure to bring to the fore again the issue of factory compliance and would strengthen the hands of those who desire Bangladesh's garment sector to comply with international standards including safety of workers. Such a development is full of the worst economic implications for the country as this sector has a pivotal role in the economy, employing a record number of people and earning the highest amount of foreign currency. Unnatural deaths have become a part of life in Bangladesh. If there

garment factories, roads, and rivers are not the consequence of mere accidents. The owners of the garment factories, launches, and buses should be made to realize that such type of killing is tantamount to mur-

A good number of garment factories have experienced fatal accidents varying from incidents of fire to collapse of buildings in the last few years. Apart from the recent fire incident in Chittagong, another major fire incident in a garment factory at Narshingdi burnt alive 53 on the agenda either of the two garment associations or the government, let alone the factory owners.

Most of the garment factories lack emergency exits with collapsible gates kept under lock and key, making it impossible to flee from danger. The helpless garment workers have little option other than falling victims to the inferno or remain trapped among the debris. The tremendous increase in the number of deaths of the garment workers in recent days is no doubt the consequence of colossal indif-

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan

Singh said that India would do

nothing to hurt the interests of

Bangladesh. If he really means it

then he should support solution of

all outstanding problems with

Bangladesh. Piecemeal solution of

problems is not working for

Bangladesh. Currently, India only

wants solution of matters that bene-

fit it. This will not bring lasting

peace because some problems will

always remain outstanding and

Bangladesh will be in a more difficult

regarding boundary demarcation,

push-in of Bengali-speaking

people. transit to Nepal and China

through India, share of water of

common rivers, restriction on sale

of Bangladeshi products in India

etc.-- all these problems should be

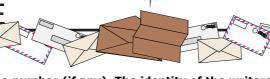
friendship is a two way street and

India should understand that

situation in future.

sorted once and for all.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Biman

Biman Bangladesh Airlines is not just a burden, it is also a humiliation, inconvenience, misery and stigma for Bangladeshi people. ponder and wonder why our government would not consider privatising the Bangladesh flag carrier.

Despite the persistent failures of Biman to maintain its schedules, services and. of course, incurring heavy losses year after year, the government is still firm in supporting and favouring the existence of Biman. There must be a financially beneficial reason for the government for unanimously and fervently supporting the existence of Biman.

I live in Britain, British Airways is the flag carrier of this country, but it is not in any way funded or owned by the British government. It is exclusively independent from the government and completely privatised. Thus the Airways strive to improve its services and promote its business to attract more customers, so that it can gain more profits.

Similarly, if Biman is privatised, it too would go further and work harder to promote and improve its

Finally, I would urge you to lead

Manchester, UK

a vigorous campaign to privatise Mohammed Ali

Skyline of Dhaka city

The skyline of Dhaka city is fast changing due to the booming construction business. A section of bright ambitious entrepreneurs who call them real estate developers are constructing different types of buildings including mega structures with all modern amenities, caring very little about the adverse impact that these super structures may cause in the long run. Without taking into consideration many serious and important criteria that are needed to build the mega structures, most developers who do not have the slightest knowledge of construction, employ novice, incompetent engineers, architects, consultants etc. and by bribing some corrupt officials they get their faulty designs passed. It is also alleged that some influential people (by the way in this country if you do politics or have money,

you become influential automatically) do not even bother to pass their building designs from the proper authorities. One more thing which needs serious attention is that if there is any co-ordination among the developers and our state run utility service providers. Unabated constructions are going on in full swing. However, I wonder whether with the booming construction our utility service providers are also developing their infrastructure. I am sure they are not. Because they have their limitations. And who are the sufferers? The general public. It is also imperative to mention that the government must act strictly with organisations such as City Corporation, Rajuk, PWD etc. not to issue permission to already worn out, dilapidated buildings to go for further expansion. The government should also come up with strict laws to ensure that all garment factories have their factory buildings checked by the proper authorities at least every six months and a certificate to this effect must be on display at each factory office. Furthermore, any addition of manpower, machin-

ery etc. must be duly notified to the

proper authorities by the factory owners and an evaluation team from the government must visit and assess the situation and then issue a certificate of fitness. Spot check must be made mandatory by the government on the fitness of the factories, well-being of the labourers, their wages and environment of the factory etc. If any irregularity is found it should be notified to the authorities immediately We hope that the government

will formulate a policy as soon as possible in order to safeguard the lives of innocent workers from the clutches of some dishonest and money hungry business people Humayun Hyder Zigatola, Dhaka

Cartoon controversy

Freedom of expression doesn't allow idiotic exposure of mind. Wrong perception of freedom of expression leads to misquided thoughts. The recent publication of cartoons of Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh) in Danish newspaper--Jellands-Poster and reprints of the same cartoons in other European

newspapers are a case in point. In the name of freedom of expression. they defamed our prophet (pbuh), portraving him in an objectionable manner. This was a great insult to our religious belief and hurt the feelings of every single Muslim in the world. As a result, there is a firestorm of anger among Muslims and angry protests were held in different Muslim countries in the world. They termed this heinous act as blasphemy.

Even innocent children brought out processions to express their condemnation of the cartoons. I don't know whether the western societies don't understand Islam.

They deliberately published the cartoons in their newspapers and had a provocative intention behind

I would not forget to mention here that Muslims never insult the founders of others religions. On the other hand, they hold them in high esteem. But it is a pity that people of other faiths have not always followed suit. As a result, the world faces unwanted confrontations among the nations.

Is it wrong to apprehend that a

clash of civilisation is knocking at the door? Who knows? Md. Shahidul Islam Khilgaon Taltola, Dhaka

Unbridled corruption Corruption is leading Bangladesh to

ultimate destruction. Corruption is the main barrier to development of the country. To get anything done, we have to pay bribe to these corrupt people, as if it is a mandatory rule of government. They hold general people hostage. So the people of the country always look forward to the government to take rigorous actions against the culprits. Although the government has the Anti-Corruption Commission with a view to eliminating corruption from the country, it is yet to start its activities in full swing. However, people are getting frustrated day by day.

Md. Mizanur Rahman Baraipara, Bahaddarhat, Chittagong

Solving problems with India

both parties benefit from it -- particularly if they are neighbours. Without peace both Bangladesh and India

will remain permanently poor, permanently dependent on foreign If conflicts with her neighbours

Microcredit

it rightfully deserves.

M. Talukdar

Bangladesh is the birthplace of microcredit but if we want full utilisation of microcredit we need greater participation of the lower and midevel people of our country in the

continue, India will never be a

great prosperous countrya position

PRSP is another talked about issue at present. The government should commit itself in a big way to its fulfilment--only NGOs are not

Dhaka University

Kohinur Akter