

PM's visit to Delhi

Emphasis has rightly been put on more interaction

WE would like to see the outcome of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's trip to India in the light of what has been transpired from the joint communiqué issued at New Delhi at the end of the trip.

It has emphasised the need for maintaining the high-level political contacts between New Delhi and Dhaka. It has also stressed the need for timely meetings of the joint bodies existing between the two countries. In fact, such meetings are crucial to resolution of all the outstanding issues. The prevailing situation is far from encouraging as the Joint Economic Commission (JEC) has not met in the last three years. The issue of lowering tariff or non-tariff barriers for Bangladeshi commodities by India is to be addressed by the JEC. But it has lapsed into an unduly long period of inaction. However, India has recognised for the first time in the trade agreement that was renewed at New Delhi that there is a huge trade imbalance against Bangladesh.

As for the Joint Rivers Commission (JRC), it will have to take up the issue of common river water sharing, focusing on Teesta water in particular. On the Tipaimukh Dam, our foreign secretary has said, following his return from Delhi, that the project won't require any water withdrawal. These are issues that the JRC has to address. We hope that the periodic meetings of the JRC will prepare the grounds for the two governments to work on and find mutually acceptable solutions to the problem of water sharing.

Finally, we attach great value to the meetings of the Joint Boundary Working Groups. The Groups have to work towards finding a durable solution to the problem of border firing and the resultant loss of lives. The bigger issue of adverse possession and unfinished delimitation of areas will also have to be addressed.

The secretary-level talks between the two countries must be held regularly in order to keep the two sides well informed regarding the latest developments. The emphasis is clearly on greater communication and interaction and we believe that will help resolve the tricky issues.

Foreign workers in the country

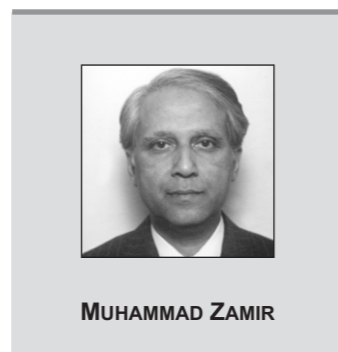
Ensure their contribution to economy

FOLLOWING a directive from the Prime Minister's Office to the Board of Investment (BOI) a comprehensive list of foreign workers is being prepared along with a list of for-foreign owned or joint venture department stores, shopping malls, restaurants, liaison offices where a large number of foreign workers are employed. The primary objective of the exercise is to assess as to whether these investments and the services are actually contributing to the country's economy. On the other hand, already our intelligence agency (Special Branch) has reported that around 50 thousand workers are working in the country without proper work permits and due approvals. It is also interesting to note in an earlier report (2005) of a committee headed by none other than the Chairman of BOI, where it was stated that as many as 100 thousand foreign nationals were working in the country without valid work permits, with specific emphasis on workers coming from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

We are generally in agreement with the government's move. However as we proceed with the preparation of the list we must also remember that in today's world of globalisation this is but a natural trend and nothing should be done to either scare investments or harass the community of workers. On the other hand it should also be remembered that inflow of such workers will not only meet the shortfall of skilled workers particularly in the ser-vice industries but also work as incentive for the locals to build their own expertise.

To this purpose we also need to empower our Immigration and visa services both at home and our Missions abroad. We have often had complaints from many foreign workers in various outfits that the process of obtaining fully authentic documents is not only complicated but highly cumbersome. The whole exercise, to our mind, should be aimed at achieving, among others, two specific objectives: stop any undue flight of capital or prof-its/benefits abroad hurting our interests and ensure that these foreign workers, each one of them, are working and staying in the country with valid documents.

To contain militancy cut off its roots



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

THE month of March will continue to be a beacon for all of us, and a reminder of what this country can achieve through sacrifice, through courage, through patience, through belief in ourselves and through dedication. It also stands for liberation, for secularism and for respect for the rights of others.

We have witnessed singular events this year in March. Ghosts ostensibly created by the media and the Opposition finally materialised. Within a few days, their whereabouts were confirmed and they were apprehended. This was indeed a great victory for civil society. The administration also deserves credit for finally understanding the precept -- better late than never.

Both Shaekh Abdul Rahman and Siddiqui Islam Bangla Bhai, in spite of armed bodyguards, were rounded up along with their family members. Despite being firm believers in the establishing of an Islamic state and supporters of suicide bombing to further their cause, both of these criminals surrendered rather meekly to the authorities. It was of course a fortunate coincidence that US President George Bush was in the neighbourhood. Through such action our government signalled that they were suitable partners in the global fight against terror and had the resolve, if necessary, to find 'phantoms' created by the media and the Opposition.

I strongly believe that subsequence sociologists will refer to the last two years of our history, as a period, when greed for power and misconceived version of Islam were used to nurture the emergence of Islamic activism and militancy. We

have seen the materialisation of the biggest threat since our country gained independence thirty-five years ago.

We have watched with growing concern the reign of terror that has been unleashed on the innocent civilian population in Bangladesh. This has involved serial blasts and attacks on the institutional structure of the state. RAB officials have already indicated that Abdur Rahman has taken responsibility for the killing of judges, politicians, government officials, lawyers and common citizens (in entertainment venues). All this, in the name of Islam -- a religion, that believes in

financial institutions with connections to the Jamaat have also been facilitating transfer of resources to these controversial NGOs. I can only hope this is not correct, but then I can be naive at times.

Madrasas and orphanages are expected to have an ideological basis. That is acceptable. One had hoped however that the Ministry of Education would carefully monitor the manner in which such institutions were being run and funds spent. This has apparently not happened.

Arrests of hundreds of Islamic activists and militants over the last five months have revealed that

to English and scientific subjects that might have opened windows for them to the outside world.

The rise of militancy in Bangladesh has now become a matter of serious concern for many countries in the world. They have quite justifiably expressed their concern about religious extremism in Bangladesh. They have also questioned the manner in which our government has been dealing with the situation. Quite correctly, they have pointed out that arresting two important individuals within the militant hierarchy will not solve the problem. Contrary to government claims, security analysts have been

close coordinated relationship with some representatives belonging to Islamic parties associated with the BNP in the ruling alliance structure;

(d) a section of government officials, belonging to law and order agencies, particularly in the rural areas, have indirectly condoned the rise of such militancy, extra-judicial killings and other forms of vigilante activities associated with these groups;

(e) there has been weak political will on the part of the government in tackling this menace. Such an assumption has also been underlined by several BNP political activists; and that

officials. It should not end with just the prosecution of low-level figures. We still have some important issues that will need to be addressed:

(a) The arrested militants should not only be tried on the basis of charges filed against them in past cases, but also within the framework of sedition and waging of war against the state. While doing so, care should be taken to ensure that speedy trial does not compromise the discovery of further facts related to the background of the rise in militancy and their existing network;

(b) Ensuring transparency within the judicial process to prevent controversy;

(c) Seeking the assistance of the FBI, the Interpol, the Scotland Yard and the relevant agencies in India to determine how such massive quantities of arms and explosive substances have found their way into the hands of these militants. They should also be able to help in pinpointing whether Shaekh Abdur Rahman is withholding information about foreigners training local militants;

(d) Making pertinent inquiries with regard to their sources of funding. US Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) is apparently assisting the government in this regard. This Washington-Dhaka cooperation needs to be intensified; and

(e) There should be a full review of the manner in which religious training and education is being imparted in the Madrasas.

Such an approach is vital. The government must understand that there is no easy way to succeed in their fight against militancy. It needs to listen to what others are saying -- not just the sycophants that have surrounded its leadership. I have mentioned this earlier and am doing so again. Cut off the roots of this poisonous tree.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador who can be reached at mzamir@dhaka.net

POST BREAKFAST

It is no use having an ostrich syndrome effect. The government has to be responsive and responsible. They will need to respect civil society and the media. It must be understood that this country belongs to all of us and that no one is hatching any conspiracy to turn Bangladesh into a client state. Criticism, when it is constructive must be seen to be so.

peace, which condemns suicide and urges its believers to afford protection to civilians.

The disappointing aspect about the situation has been the continuous reluctance of the government to accept that this militancy might have been encouraged through their spirit of co-habitation with extreme rightist religious political parties within the alliance administration. Fingers have also been pointed to the fact that there has been a surge in the growth of Madrasa education during the tenure of the present government. It has been suggested time and again that this has been due to the Islamic card in the sphere of governance. Most importantly, the government has refrained from exercising any appropriate control over the manner in which the Islamic NGOs have used foreign funds in the expansion of religious education and the establishment of Islamic institutions in this country. It has been also alleged in this context in the media that a number of Islamist NGOs have secured government registration with the support of Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Mujahid who is running the Social Welfare Ministry and that some

some of them have not only been taking lessons on the Quran but also on how to make explosives and even indigenous grenades. Several arms caches have been discovered and lists found of intending suicide bombers. These are serious matters that not only threaten our own security but also that of our neighbouring region. The most unacceptable feature within this scenario has been the gradual branding of Bangladesh as a terrorist prone country. This has already impacted on the country's economic future and the freedom of movement of its citizens.

Islam has never condoned unnecessary violence in the name of Jihad. Terrorism and militancy has no place in this region. Islam as a faith has forbidden extremism and also urged its believers to exercise self-control and patience. In this context, it has also suggested that Allah is the final Judge in matters of religious disputes. This spirit of tolerance seems to have somehow been lost in the process by which Madrasa students are being imparted their religious education. Added to this has been the absence of vocational training and exposure

skeptical as to whether recent arrests will deal a final blow to the JMB. I agree. It can only be a temporary setback, with the middle leadership eventually re-grouping and filling the vacuum. Terrorism can never be defeated in one single stroke.

This is a complex situation that requires less of mud slinging at the Opposition, the civil society and the media. The government will have to understand that a number of questions have emerged. A public debate is on. Accountability and transparency also demand that this issue be dealt with impartially and not in a partisan manner.

The following factors are clearly evident --

(a) events of August 17 of last year and other subsequent explosions have established that militancy in the name of Islam is more of a fact than fiction;

(b) there is a widespread network of militants throughout Bangladesh and that they have links with other militant outfits in the neighbouring region;

(c) the existing militant leadership among the outlawed Islamic groups have had and continue to have

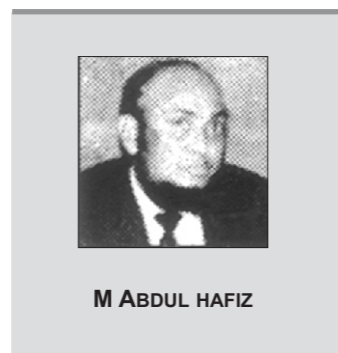
(f) political criticism of the Opposition and labeling them as being responsible for such growth in militancy is absurd.

It is no use having an ostrich syndrome effect. The government has to be responsive and responsible. They will need to respect civil society and the media. It must be understood that this country belongs to all of us and that no one is hatching any conspiracy to turn Bangladesh into a client state. Criticism, when it is constructive must be seen to be so.

We have arrested a few hundred activists belonging to militant outfits. We have also taken into custody important elements of their leadership. So far so good. However, this is not enough. I have previously welcomed the arrests of the JMB activists and the seizure of the arms and explosive caches. Nevertheless, worries remain about whether there will be serious impact of such seizures on the JMB's operational capabilities.

For once, politics will have to be forgotten and investigations of incidents allowed running their full course, including the investigation of politicians and government

25 March '71 when all hell was let loose!



M ABDUL HAFIZ

Saje to kaisa saje qatl-i-aam ka mela (How does one celebrate a festival of slaughter?)

— Faiz Ahmed Faiz

THAT'S how Pakistan's best known poet after Iqbal described the carnage of 25 March. The poet, it is told, was found under the blankets in darkened room at Rawalpindi's Flashman's Hotel refusing to get out of the bed or turn on the light. The behaviour was not without a precedent. Poet Ezra Pound went berserk at the horror of Second World War and Pablo Neruda couldn't withstand the shock of Allende's violent overthrow in Chile in 1973 and the two died the same year. Poets do have a prophetic vision that penetrates through the fog of time to see the impending disaster.

March 25 was a disaster of its kind and had few parallel. Faiz called it a festival of slaughter. How could it otherwise be pursued at all? The bestiality inherent in it must have been mixed with a machoism of sorts. And the infamous 'operation searchlight' was executed with a surgical precision on unarmed or sleeping people selectively targeted earlier in Dhaka

matic fires filled the air. It was ruthless but cowardly! In their jitters they were out to ensure an overkill.

Thirty-five years on, the 25 March keeps coming back with ghastly accounts of the atrocities, melancholy and bitterness on the part of too many to be recounted. And the saga is nourished with the tears of millions. In that process the day still refuges to be

on the part of a power hungry junta headed by a moral wreck could have induced it to tread the treacherous course undertaken on the fateful night of 25 March -- killing three million Bengalis, displacing ten million others and dishonouring many of our woman folk. Just to deny freedom they clamoured for, the occupation forces earned an ignominy that can never be publicly washed off.

session and turn their homestead into fortress. The people responded spontaneously to every inflexion in his tone. The impact of his call on a volatile audience was electrifying. Only the fools could face those people with force.

Even if Bangabandhu gave enough indication of a likely armed conflict with the occupation forces he was fundamentally

his full confidence in them and went into captivity. As expected, on arrival back in Karachi General Yahya Khan immediately outlawed Awami League and branded Mujib a traitor, but to no avail. Yahya could do precious little against Mujib although he was later tried for treason and sentenced to death in August 1971.

Pakistan authority never gathered courage to authenticate the verdict. So towering was Mujib's personality and formidable was his international image! His detractors may note that it was not for nothing that he could volunteer to court arrest. In the meantime the war of independence suffered no loss of momentum in his absence and went on simply in his name. It was exclusively a Mujib magic!

An indulgence for a bit of nostalgia may be in order while recalling what an exalted height were we catapulted to and the heady days of war, victory, brinkmanship and a measure of international prestige that were we steered through! The nostalgia is however at its gripping best when today both Bangabandhu and his legacies are all but consigned to oblivion.

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BISS.

PERSPECTIVES

Only weeks before the black night the Bangabandhu gave his people a clarion call for independence. In historic Race Course ground it roared like an ocean in the baritone voice of the 'greatest Bengali of all times' who in a powerful speech on 7 March called upon his people to rise against the alien forces with whatever they had in their possession and turn their homestead into fortress. The people responded spontaneously to every inflexion in his tone. The impact of his call on a volatile audience was electrifying. Only the fools could face those people with force.

University campus, Rajarbagh Police Line and Peelkhana -- the places from where the resistances were likely to come.

The crackdown began at 1 am on the night between 25th and 26th March 1971 unleashing an unprecedented barbarism of the history apparently to intimidate the rebellious Bengalis impassioned for independence. The armour rolled on the deserted street and artillery boomed from a distance. The noise of the auto-

obliterated from our collective consciousness. Ironically the perpetrators of the crime which was rated as genocide -- the worst after the Holocaust during the Second World War -- advise us to forget the past meaning wisdom in the acceptance of the reality of the past as a matter only of the past. But the history is only what endures while all else can indeed be buried.

The lust for continuing power and an uninterrupted exploitation

Neither can they get rid of the ever continuing prick of the conscience.

Only weeks before the black night the Bangabandhu gave his people a clarion call for independence. In historic Race Course ground it roared like an ocean in the baritone voice of the 'greatest Bengali of all times' who in a powerful speech on 7 March called upon his people to rise against the alien forces with whatever they had in their pos-

a political animal and had to walk a razor's edge to vindicate his commitment of political dynamics at work during the crisis. Yet he skilfully combined a people's war with the constitutional obligation.

At the wee hour of the crackdown he decided to court arrest lest the occupation forces chose to tear apart the city in searching out the fugitive rebel. Bangabandhu with the thorough grasp of his people's psyche as well as their potentials reposed

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.

Bureaucracy: Points to ponder

Many thanks to Kazi S M Khasrul Alam Kuddusi for writing bureaucracy (DS). I like to add something. He suggested that before recruiting in public sector candidates' family background, track record of behaviour pattern, moral character and inner propensities must be given priority along with academic excellence. True, but there are some other vital factors also. These include office surroundings and social conditions. A fresh graduate does not have a clear idea about the existing corruption and amount of corruption, and even does not have the intention to practice it. When he is recruited, trained and posted somewhere he wants to be morally good. But soon he finds that the situation around him is beyond his control. In all activities he is cornered or pushed to a place where he has nothing to do other

than passing idle time. He finds most corrupted persons lavishly holding good positions. So he finds a way out and compromises to be indulged in corruption. But three-four decades earlier a person in corruption was disliked and hated by people in the society. So he then felt cornered. But now the situation is quiet opposite. A corrupted moneyed man is welcome in the society!

Another thing is moral education without which total education become incomplete. Proper religious education giving orientation to morality be a must for an employee. It must be given in university or in job training programme (in accordance with his/her religion) so that s/he thinks hundred times before indulging in any corruption. Mr. Kuddusi rightly noted that there was a happy compromise between the politicians and bureaucrats for mutual gains. This happens due to

politicisation of bureaucracy. In our country politicians exert tremendous pressure upon officers illegally for their personal gain. After holding first position in corruption five times consecutively time has come to contain the malaise for safeguarding the honour of the nation and the ill-fated people of Bangladesh.

Zahangir
On e-mail

Electricity: Overcoming deficit

Canada produces hydro electricity and exports it to USA to the mutual benefit of both. A good number of nuclear and non-nuclear power plants can be viewed through the borders of central and east European countries, producing electricity and catering to the needs of neighbouring countries. The economy is both supplementary and complementary.

Why can't we emulate the above-mentioned models? Nepal, Bhutan etc. are rich in hydroelectric resources. They can generate electricity and we can import from them.

Why can't we be good friends and neighbours?
SN Mamoon
Dhaka

Performance of Ministries

During the last four years of BNP rule almost all the ministries have got some success stories except three. These are Ministry of Power, Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Civil Aviation. The load shedding issue, price spiral of essential commodities and innumerable miseries of Biman passengers have caused a lot of discontent amongst the electorate and may cause an upset for BNP in the next general election. The electricity

issues should have been taken with utmost priority but unfortunately there has been no serious move by the people at the helm of affairs. The commerce ministry could have made special arrangement to ensure that some very basic necessities like rice, pulse and edible oil are within the poor man's reach -- if necessary by providing subsidies. The lack of foresightedness of those at the helm has cost Biman very dearly. Our honourable prime minister must have been assessing their overall performance. They must be taken to task.
N.Z. Khan
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

An appeal

I am an old man aged 66 yrs. passing my hard days on only earning of my wife. But the D.C. Taxes, Survey Circle-1, Dhaka has accused me of accumulating huge wealth by collecting a TIN No. 280-

102-5741 Dt. 25.4.99 and running Land Purchase/Flat Purchase/Car Registration business since then. They have imposed Tk. 2,500/- as fine and Tk. 250/- as daily fine if I fail to submit tax return on above trade.

I have never collected nor applied on any such TIN and never ran such business. This appears as a kind of harassment and a means of extortion -- from a peace-loving citizen like me. Otherwise how can it be and why it should be?
In view of the above, I like to publicly draw the kind attention of Hon'ble Finance Minister, Chairman, NBR & BSEHR, and BLAST to please investigate and save me from such wanton harassment.
A.Z. Mahmood
Ahmmadnagar, Mirpur, Dhaka

Separate ministry for apparel industry

We know there was an election

pledged by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party in the last election campaign that if they came to power, they would open a new ministry for the garments sector. The BNP government has claimed that they have fulfilled all the election pledges. But we do not find a separate ministry for apparel sector. It is evident that this industry earns 76 percent of the foreign currency and employs highest number of workers specially the marginal class of women-folk estimated at more than two million. The industry expanded in such a way from its unplanned infrastructure that it accumulated so many problems now to be solved by the government not possible by the association and factory units only.

The stakeholders in this field of business usually blame that the present government is always reluctant to do something for the betterment of this sector. They have denied the demands of CBW,

Garment-Pally, etc. Export Performance benefit and have not given technical and financial support for duty free access to USA. Sometimes it appears that the higher authority in the government had shown interest to solve the problems of sick industry and provide CBW facilities but it did not take shape due to different ministerial abstruse arguments.

We do not understand why the government is not showing enough interest to boost this sector for earning huge amount of foreign currency. However, the acting president of BGMEA has rightly and in right time given the arguments for a separate ministry for apparel industry. May I have the opportunity to draw the attention of the government to this demand.
Shaffuddin Ahmed Sharif
Chairman
Standing Committee on UD & Small and Medium Entrepreneurs