

Phulbari flare-up

Improper government handling

THE very sad incident at Phulbari has raised a question mark on the competency of the government to handle a situation such as we witnessed there recently. Questions must be asked about the ability of the government and its agencies to get a wind of such a situation brewing, to preempt it, and about the way the situation was handled on the first and the subsequent day of the incident, and about its ability to provide security to life and property.

We ask why did the situation come to such a pass at all when the programme of agitation was announced well in advance? Could we ask what precautions were taken on the first day of the agitation by the administration, the police and other agencies to ensure that the situation did not get out of hand?

Firing is a means of last resort, therefore why was the situation allowed to precipitate that required resorting to firing by the law enforcing agencies that caused the death of seven people? And who ordered the firing in the first place? And why was BDR inducted for crowd control that is basically the job of the police? The statement of the state minister for home, that his forces were short-handed to prevent what occurred in Phulbari, is the most cynical one that demonstrates disregard for life and property of the citizens, as is the inanity of the energy advisor's statement. And why must the law enforcing agencies shoot to kill, if at all?

It was equally shocking to see the absence on the spot of the administration on the second day of the agitation as the agitators were left to themselves to carry on with their destructive activities. It was a shameful example of abdication of duty on the part of the administration, which admits of no excuse.

Whatever may be the pros and cons of the Phulbari coal-mine contract, people are within their rights to ventilate their grievances, but that must be done within legal bounds, and it is for the government to remove any misgivings from the public mind on the issue. But first and foremost, it was the duty of the government to protect life and property of the expatriate company and its staff by ensuring adequate security.

What happened in Phulbari and the way it happened might send wrong signals to foreign investors.

ADP implementation hiccups

Cat out of the bag!

FINANCE and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman who has been the most articulate critic of recurrent pitfalls in the implementation of the Annual Development Programme (ADP) is apparently faced with a problem within: four departments under the ministries of finance and planning have been the lowest performer amongst ten ministries in terms of utilising ADP allocations. A meeting held to review the status of ADP implementation has lately revealed what must go down as a predicament for the finance minister.

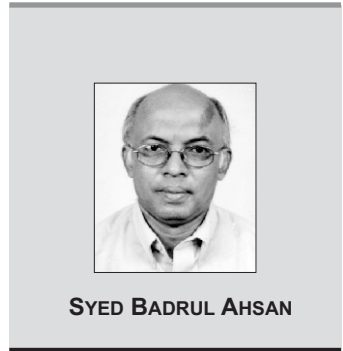
To us it appears that there is no real urgency on the part of the administration to streamline the entire process other than periodically indulging in blame game between the implementing agencies and those involved in release of funds. It is our impression that all this is the result of lack of commitment and sincerity on the part of all those involved and bureaucratic red tape including lack of effective monitoring.

Broadly speaking, approval of additional projects at the far-end of the administration is also not understandable except in terms of the election fever. Given the time left for this government, it is most likely that far from the ongoing projects there is but little chance for advancing on the new ones. While this is the prevailing scenario in the case of projects under local currency funding, there is altogether a different dimension in respect of foreign-aided projects.

Donor agencies are getting restive about the slow progress of implementation of projects funded by them. The failure to timely implement a project has long-term ramifications. First, it raises questions in their minds about the administration's overall management and absorption capacities; and secondly, it is bound to cast a shadow over funding of projects in the future.

Most of us are, however, aware of the problems of fund utilisation; what we now expect of the key and the senior most minister in the cabinet is to devise mechanisms to solve them and be part of the solution.

Of severed tongues and sliced human flesh



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

GROUND REALITIES

So there really ought to be no surprise when the Shibir thinks Hasan Azizul Haq and Muhammad Zafar Iqbal should be turned into dead meat and fed to the wolves. The generation of young fanatics that preceded the Shibir in the Jamaat really showed it the way once. Which is why, when some people tell you that these young Jamaatis are a different breed because they came of age in free Bangladesh, that therefore they cannot be held to account for the sins of their fathers, you do not have to believe them.

PICTURE the scene. Let your imagination come into play. The young standard-bearers of the Islami Chhatra Shibir have just made it known to Hasan Azizul Haq that they will get hold of him, slice his body into little pieces and dump those pieces in the river.

No, they have not mentioned the name of the river where they mean the immersion of the writer's flesh to take place. But that is a minor thing, considering that in this country of big and small rivers it could be any place where Haq's remains might be scattered.

You may now be pretty concerned at the entire matter. You do not have to be, for there are people in this country who are beginning to talk a whole lot of horrible nonsense. And most of these people happen to be in the camp of people who tend to think that saving a religion through killing a society, indeed a nation, is truly a God-ordained task.

And what was Hasan Azizul Haq's fault? Well, he had the temerity to defend secularism, to argue that religion could not be permitted to be a factor in national politics. And those of us who know what the Jamaat-e-Islami is all about and what the Islami Chhatra Shibir is all about, remain pretty much aware of the dangers Haq has invited on himself.

After all, didn't people of his kind

commit the same blunder back in 1971 and then pay with their lives? Those men and women saw their eyes glaze over with sudden death. And those who led them to their unseemly fields of death have lived on, to cast their long shadows on politics in a country they so fervently wished to nip in the bud.

That is an interesting reality in this country. Those who have upheld the cause of the people have been pushed aside or pushed into silence engendered by mortality. And the bad ones have survived, have lived to inflict more of the old atrocities on us.

Note with how much clarity the fundamentalists have served notice on Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, the academic and writer we all know and respect so avidly. He is a brave man every inch of the way. But even bravery sometimes finds itself in a straitjacket.

Zafar Iqbal has been warned, in no uncertain terms and in manner reminiscent of all those wonderfully scripted murder thrillers produced in Hollywood, that unless he stops spouting secular notions of life, he will have his tongue cut out. What will then happen to that severed tongue has not been spelt out.

So much for democracy, for the right of a person to disagree with another. But whoever said people who have been playing communal

politics and have found their niche in organizations like the Jamaat and the Muslim League believe in democratic pluralism?

Way back in 1953, the Jamaat-e-Islami under Abul A'la Maudoodi created mayhem in Lahore, so much so that blood flowed along the streets of the city. And it would not stop until General Azam Khan came along. In those days of Jamaat initiation into the politics of violence, the targets were men of unimpeachable integrity like Sir Zafarullah Khan. No, no one wanted to have his tongue cut out or have his body turned into mince-meat. But he had to be pushed out of Islam because he swore by the Ahmadiyya version of faith.

In the years since then, Maudoodi's followers have come a long way. Some of the best moments of their lives came in 1971 when Golam Azam swiftly made it a point, per courtesy of the Pakistani genocide, to offer assistance to Tikka Khan in the matter of doing away with the miscreants out to destroy Islam and Pakistan in these parts. The miscreants, of course, were seventy-five million Bengalis whose very simple wish was to assert themselves in the politics of their own land.

The Jamaat, and of course all those other organizations quite unable to comprehend life after Pakistan, quickly bought the idea,

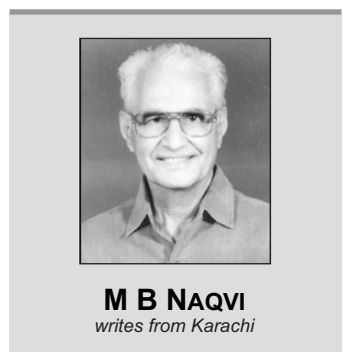
cooked in the kitchens of the Yahya Khan junta, that forces called al-Badr and al-Shams could speedily "re-convert" Bengalis into good, meaning Pakistan-loving Muslims.

You see, in those gory days of 1971, being a good Muslim meant being a good Pakistani. And those of us who wished to be free Bengalis in a Pakistan-free Bangladesh were infidels, agents of Indian, and therefore Hindu expansionism. The kafirs in us needed to be excoriated. Al-Badr and al-Shams were there to do the job. They thought Allah was on their side. In His name they killed.

There was a certain novelty about the killings. These collaborators, or Razakars as we have since called them (the writer Humayun Ahmed reinforced our sentiments here with the coinage of that "Tui Razakar" epithet), masked themselves and then, in the gathering darkness of the day, went picking their victims. Fearful men and women were thus led, blindfolded, to torture and death by beings themselves afraid of being recognized.

Moulana Mannan would not open the door to save Alim Chowdhury when the al-Badr came looking for the doctor. He was afraid even as he and others like him pretended to be brave in the defence of Islamic Pakistan. There was a pattern, there will always be a pattern, in the way these self-proclaimed defenders of

Killing Bugti was a mistake



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

THE government claims that Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti was killed by mistake. Even so it was a big political mistake. There were persistent reports earlier that Bugti was going to be either killed or arrested "shortly." Few will buy the statement that it was a mistaken killing in view of all those published reports during the last fortnight or more.

It was an operation, on a fair scale, that lasted several days. The government case is simple. Two helicopters were fired at, and that required a riposte. No doubt the authorities had some intelligence about the Bugti Sardar. This is what is suggested by so many published reports.

For one thing, the official response was disproportionate. That is why one says it was a big mistake. The government position of establishing order -- there is no law involved -- is incomprehensible, but not necessarily correct.

Balochistan's state of law and order has been deplorable for some years now; an insurgency of sorts has been going on. Who is responsible? Well, there are two sides, and both can be faulted for their methods. The government's responsibility

is even greater. It should have prevented the emergence of insurgency by political methods. The main Baloch grievance is political in nature that, except for the short duration of Ataullah Mengal's government in the early 1970s, the Balochistan governments have comprised simple and crude nominees of the Islamabad rulers; governments in Quetta have served the interests and the purposes of Islamabad. Islamabad has not given as much to Balochistan as it has taken out of Balochistan. This is exploitation, properly so called.

The Baloch have the obvious grievance that so much of natural gas is taken out from Balochistan and consumed in other provinces. What does Balochistan get for it? The royalties are meagre and have no relationship with the value of the goods shipped out. Then there is the fact that no central government has ever cared for the development of this vast and arid province; it is still the most underdeveloped area of Pakistan.

Why is it a big political mistake? Sardar Bugti was not an ordinary individual; he symbolized Baloch nationalism. The quibbling about

PLAIN WORDS

What the government is required to do is to let the Baloch people to order, and reorder, their own affairs without let or hindrance from others. They have to be empowered to shape their own destiny. In addition, the Islamabad rulers ought to create conditions in which the Baloch people regard themselves as stakeholders, not only in Balochistan but also in Pakistan. If Pakistan is dear to the rulers, they should do what it takes to create that awareness and affection among the Baloch people. It is for Islamabad to adjust, and not the other way around.

nationality, sub-nationalism, and nationalism is foolish. The essence of the thing has to be focused on. It is the consciousness of an identity that one possesses on the basis of race, language, history, religion, or culture. Should anyone oppose that identity with any ethnic factor it can cause strong reaction.

It is not a law and order matter at all. The reaction will of course be proportionate to the offence caused. While maintaining law and order is the duty of all governments, it is not necessary to be stupid, or ignorant, to do so. The government should know how to solve basic political problems by political means.

Insofar as Balochistan is concerned, Islamabad governments have been far too trigger-happy. The current operations, serially, must be the fifth or the sixth in the short history of this country. It is not that the Baloch people are unreasonable, or that they are far too demanding. One remembers any number of conversations with the elder Mengal, Bugti, and a few Marris. Their demands were quite reasonable, and in fact modest, amounting to no more than being patiently and sympathetically heard

by Islamabad's high ups.

Military action against them in the 1970s was totally unjustified, no matter what the intelligence agencies had fed the government with. Doubtless there were indications of foreigners' interest in this province. Islamabad was angry with most others than the one proves that actually affirmed national interest in Balochistan on the record: I mean the Shah of Iran. Islamabad was in cohorts with him then. The action was taken against a democratic as well as moderate government, which had not done anything wrong.

Again, there is so much talk of foreign incitement. The ones mainly complained against are Afghanistan and India. Non-officials of a particular school mention the US as a scheming overlord; it is said to be behind the whole trouble in Pakistan.

While problems exist with Afghanistan, they are of a historical nature: the concern is with the validity of the Durand line. The Afghan treaty with the British (that ceded Quetta as well as the surrounding hinterland) specified that 100 years later, the status of the area was to change.

There are other historical strands

Islam go into the business of propagating their faith. In the name of faith and in the service of Pakistan, they and their friends ended up taking the lives of three million Bengalis.

The Pakistan armed forces cheerfully raped Bengali women and then sought to explain away their animal lust through speaking of a need for a new breed of Pakistanis in the land of the infidel Bengalis. Remember the final days before the rise of Bangladesh? Khan Abdus Sabur Khan (such men always had that extra "Khan" tagged to their names in mindless imitation of their gurus in West Pakistan) let it be known that if East Pakistan became Bangladesh, it would actually be an illegitimate child of India. But he was a clever man. In this "illegitimate" country, he took full advantage of the Zia dictatorship to return to politics and return the Muslim League to politics.

So there really ought to be no surprise when the Shibir thinks Hasan Azizul Haq and Muhammad Zafar Iqbal should be turned into dead meat and fed to the wolves. The generation of young fanatics that preceded the Shibir in the Jamaat really showed it the way once. Which is why, when some people tell you that these young Jamaatis are a different breed because they came of age in free Bangladesh, that therefore they cannot be held to account for the sins of their fathers, you do not have to believe them. If anything, these Shibirites could be a whole lot more dangerous than those who once worked for the Islami Chhatra Sangha with relish.

You can go even further back in time, to the 1940s, when Jinnah and his friends (and among them were some of our very own Bengalis, AK Fazlul Huq for instance) thought the poor Muslims of India needed their own country to breathe freely in.

And what a way they adopted to

have that dream translated into reality! Queer, harmless slogans like: "Sar pe topi mun mein paan larhke lenge Pakistan" rent the air. The harmless soon gave way to the murderous when in 1946, Bengal's Muslim League-affiliated Prime Minister Husseyin Shaheed Suhrawardy called a holiday on August 16, 1946 to observe his party's "Direct Action Day." Action against whom or what? In the end, tens of thousands of Muslims and Hindus lay sprawled on the streets of Calcutta, dead and bleeding. A year later, India went, like choice red meat, through the Mountbatten knife.

Twenty-four years later, it was irony that took over our lives. The state that was born in blood-letting collapsed in a lot of blood, Bengali blood. And now these fanatics demand our blood again because they think we have strayed from our faith. Men like Hasan Azizul Haq and Muhammad Zafar Iqbal have the courage in them to speak of all people and all faiths. That does not satisfy these obscurantists now creeping up our alleys and lanes. Today they need severed tongues and pieces of good men's flesh. Tomorrow they might demand the entrails in their bodies. Their wants, wrapped in immorality, are unlimited.

And, pray, what is faith? You find it in the stirring of a leaf, in the ripples of a village pond. It thrives in the quiet prayer of the poor peasant in a hamlet. It comes alive in dreams of a gold-dappled dawn forged in the mind of one who thinks, who understands the lessons of history.

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Can the UN force hold peace in the Middle East?



HARUN UR RASHID

THE UN resolution 1701 of August 11 envisages the deployment of about 15,000 UN troops (UNIFIL) as peacekeepers between south Lebanon and Israel. The UN troops will join 15,000 Lebanese soldiers to hold the cease-fire. The very fact that 30,000 soldiers would be placed on the border demonstrates how difficult the task is to keep peace between the two warring nations.

Against the background, the deployment of UN troops has not been easy. The European Union appears to be leading the UNIFIL.

BOTTOM LINE

Israel's renewed commitment not to violate the ceasefire is the first step, and then only can the UNIFIL hold peace. It seems that the Bush administration has abdicated its responsibility and leadership in this crisis, partly because of its low esteem in the region and partly because of its blind support for Israel. Given the complexity of the issues, it appears that a new UN resolution, that could make the role of the UNIFIL clear, may be necessary so that they can hold the fragile peace between Lebanon and Israel.

However the UN will decide whether France or Italy will lead the peace-keeping mission.

On August 22, the UN envoy, Terje Roed-Larsen, on a visit to Israel warned that the ceasefire would remain "fragile" for the next two or three months, although the cease-fire holds tenuously despite being challenged by a number of violations by Israel.

Why should peacekeeping be difficult?

There are many reasons but some of the following deserve mention:

First, the Lebanese-Israeli conflict is a part of the bigger discord that involves the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This is one of the world's most intractable conflicts running since the creation of Israel in 1948. Israel has been a rogue nation in the region, illegally occupying Palestinian land, Syria's Golan Heights, and Lebanon's Shebaa farms for several decades.

Second, The UN seeks troops from Muslim majority nations. But Israel has refused to accept troops from countries that do not recognize Israel. This is an unreasonable

stance, but Israel can get away with it with the support of the US. The offer from Muslim countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, to provide troops to the UN peacekeeping team hangs in the air.

The issue of non-recognition of Israel by states willing to allow their troops to join the UN force has nothing to do with the implementation of the UN Security Council resolution of 1701. The resolution does not impose such conditions.

Third, there is a confusion about the rules of engagement of UN

troops as to whether they are to implement the role of peacekeeping or of peacemaking. There is a vast difference between the two. The first one is to hold peace already made and the second one is to make peace where peace has not been achieved. In the first case there is no use of force by UN troops, while in the second there is the likelihood of use of force to make peace between the warring parties.

Fourth, if the mandate is to disarm Hezbollah, then peacekeeping will be difficult. Unless this aspect of the mandate for the UNIFIL is made abundantly clear, UN troops cannot exactly know the rules of engagement. Another issue is the organization of the chain of command within the UN troops including clarification of who should report to whom, and what is the safety zone for the UNIFIL.

Fifth, the initial hesitancy of France to provide troops was prompted by the fact they had suffered substantial losses (58) in a Hezbollah suicide attack in 1983 in Beirut.

Sixth, Israel, stung by the defeat in the Lebanese war, wants to show its military might and violated the cease-fire by sending commandos into Lebanon. The UN declared it to be a gross violation of the UN resolution. No one can prevent Israel from carrying out such violations except the US, but the US administration has kept mum about such violations. It is only Italy that has warned Israel not to violate the ceasefire.

Seventh, the Israeli demand that UNIFIL be deployed on the Lebanese-Syrian border was rejected by Syria. Syria's President, Bashar al-Assad, told Dubai TV that deployment of UN troops on the border would be "a negation of Lebanese sovereignty and a hostile act."

In the light of Syria's rejection, it would be difficult for the UN to follow the resolution concerning the transfer of weapons from Syria to Lebanon.

Israel must recognize that Syria is a major player in the region and shares a long border with Lebanon.

Israel should sit at the negotiating table to discuss its withdrawal from Syria's Golan Heights.

Pathetic response from Britain and US

It is sad to witness that the role of Britain, which ruled half of the Middle East for years, has been marginalized under Prime Minister Tony Blair. He has a bigger problem to handle at home.

His botched foreign policy in the Middle East has cut down support for his Labour Party to 31 per cent, the lowest since 1987, while the main opposition, the Conservative Party, has gained support, rising to 40 per cent, its strongest since 1992. Only one percent of voters, in a survey by the Guardian/ICM poll, thought Blair's actions in the Middle East had made Britain safer.

As regards the US, President Bush on August 21 urged rapid deployment of an international force to protect the fragile ceasefire. He reportedly said: "The need is urgent. The first thing is to get the rules of engagement clear so that the force

will be able to help the Lebanese."

But the fact is that the Bush administration can help the UN to hold the cease-fire if it restrains the Israeli government from violating the cease-fire by its military actions on Lebanon. It is pointless underscoring the urgency of the deployment of the UNIFIL if Israel acts contrary to the UN resolution.

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Given the complexity of the issues, it appears that a new UN resolution, that could make the role of the UNIFIL clear, may be necessary so that they can hold the fragile peace between Lebanon and Israel.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.