

Phensidyl Haul

A clandestine wholesale centre for phensidyl trade, hitherto operated from underground tunnels by an organised gang, has been uncovered near the city-centre at Gopibagh. No less than 17,000 bottles of the addictive cough syrup, banned quite sometime ago because of the endemic manner in which our youngsters were getting hooked to it, were recovered on Saturday from well-bunkered cells right under the nose of the Railway Nirapatta Bahini. The demolition of the slum situated on the railway police barrack premises doubtlessly removed the first veil of secrecy around the place; but the more important thing to bear in mind by way of a clincher is the crucial tip-off which the Motijheel police got and acted so effectively on. But for that piece of finger-printing information the den would have remained unexposed. Going by The Daily Star report on the subject, the police dog squads and the narcotics department officials had in fact raided the place several times during the last six months, but they consistently drew a blank. So, while we give a big hand to the police for hauling up such a large stock-pile of phensidyl and shedding light on the likely operational methods of the drug dealers we are obliged nonetheless to tell them this: please note that the weakness of your normal surveillance has been exposed by the fact that you only succeeded on a tip-off.

The discovery of the drugs hide-out within the railway compound, that too near the Railway Nirapatta Bahini barracks, smacks of a possible nexus between a section of the RNB and the phensidyl gangsters and dealers. Some other railway personnel (non-GRP people) might have been involved in the clandestine business, because the wider suspicion is that the phensidyl bottles "were smuggled through Akhaura-Cosba area and brought here by train." Then, presumably, these would have been sent to other parts of the country by train as always. It will be worthwhile to examine how phensidyl syrup which used to be a cough reliever at one time has become such a lethal brew now.

All of this calls for follow-up investigations because it is our belief that what has been revealed just now is but the tip of an iceberg.

Trouble at Dighinala

IT appears from the chain events since the signing of the peace accord between the government and PCJSS in 1997 that trouble-mongers are out to disturb peace in an otherwise peaceful area — the latest incident being the tense situation created at Dighinala in Khagrachhari district.

It is the minority of anti-accord elements who are up to fomenting trouble in the CHT. The latest trouble erupted when, according to press reports, three intelligence people along with eight others were beaten up on Friday following eviction of a dozen repatriated tribal families from a primary school they were using as a temporary transit camp. The eviction triggered a series of backlash including the torching of a farmhouse belonging to the Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Minister Kalparanjan Chakma. This angering the non-tribals they went on a rampage.

The fallout from such skirmishes among the tribals and between tribals and non-tribals can have far reaching effects. Why were the repatriated families housed in the school for such a long time? When the Regional Council and its head Shantu Larma and the minister for CHT affairs are firmly saddled, these problems should not have arisen at all. A long rope is being given to the trouble mongers by some interested quarters. Situation in the Dighinala area is volatile and the local administration must be careful in dealing with it so that it does not escalate.

The CHT peace accord cannot be left to the whims and caprices of any quarters. There must be an all-out effort to implement it.

Lessons from Izmit

WITH 76,000-plus buildings damaged in the Izmit quake, rescue operators, in their round-the-clock excavations, have experienced miracles as far as some survival stories went. To cite a few instances, a 95-year-old lady who spent 100 hours under the debris has been found alive, so also an 11-year-old girl who remained under a seven-storey building for 98 hours and a 15-day-old baby girl who was dug out after eight hours of intensive work. This human endurance lends poignance to the tragedy, because rescuers had estimated that those trapped under the rubble could at best survive about 72 hours without water.

Century's worst earthquake in Turkey on Tuesday last has raised a global concern for safety against severe earthquake. As the human scale of the tragedy unfolds and before we are struck by another such disaster we should have a better preparedness level to meet such a challenge.

Since Turkish nightmare is partly the result of faulty building constructions, a specialised body should be formed under the auspices of the United Nations to plan, suggest and monitor the "concretisation" activities in all its quake-prone member-countries. It's worthwhile to note that Bangladesh is also one of the high-risk countries. The recent earthquake centred "underneath" Maheshkhali bore testimony to the fact. We urge our government to conduct a review of building designs.

The Air Laden with Bin Laden's Ire

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NEARLY two decades ago when he made a common cause with the Americans in fighting the Soviet invaders in Afghanistan, Moscow put a price on the head of Osama bin Laden, the Saudi millionaire turned fugitive war hero. Ironically today he is on the FBI's most wanted list with \$5 million reward for his capture after a federal indictment in New York last November charged him with the bombing of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania a year before. Only two weeks after the bombings in East Africa 80 cruise missiles hit his suspected sanctuary in Afghanistan where he was supposed to be hiding in a terrorist training camp run by himself. Never before, an individual was targeted by a state authority with so much of lethality. Osama escaped unhurt but since then his exact whereabouts is shrouded in mystery although evidences abound that he is still in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan under the protection of a special commission.

After a year of those ghastly embassy killings and Tomahawk strikes in retaliation the phantom shadow of bin Laden continues to haunt American psyche. Particularly after the release of Laden's video interview recently telecast from Qatar television network in which bin Laden denies his involvement in embassy attacks last year but exhorts his followers across the world to strike at American interests, the US seems to have gone jitter. She fears that Laden would launch new series of attacks on American targets to observe the first anniversary of his great feat last year. The US intelligence is worried that in spite of constant vigil as well as arrest of many of Laden's followers his worldwide network appears to have regenerated itself fed by renewed supply of cash from

the US.

Notwithstanding these efforts the US State Department, throughout the year, preferred to keep up a dialogue with the Taliban in its fond hope of eventually extraditing bin Laden whose exact whereabouts was known only to a few Taliban leaders. But a flurry of diplomacy as well as record \$5 million reward has so far failed to get his clue — let alone the question of a possible extradition. The information emanating from Taliban sources have been inadequate and at times confusing. So, at long last an exasperated US administration has chosen to freeze Taliban finances and property assets in the US and banned the US trade with the Taliban militia to bring it to its heels. Last month,

the US slapped sweeping sanctions on Afghanistan and took steps just short of declaring Taliban a terrorist movement.

There are however few signs that the Taliban would yield to the pressure and abandon their valuable guest.

While bin Laden might have

held up in a remote hideout in Hindukush mountains and have been nourishing his zeal for a global Islamic revolution he is however not one of those traditional clerics unaware of the ignorance of his pursuing a religious fantasy and not the spirit. On the other hand he is

hundreds of thousands of young men disaffected equally by arrogant and unjust nations of the west and their own weak corrupt rulers he is the hero to whom they would turn for deliverance. They want to restore their honour, pride and interests. They know that it is the American backing that keeps in power the anti-Islamic regimes which in turn safeguard western interests across the Islamic world. By turning against those Americans whom he found desecrating his own land with two of the holiest places of Islam during the Gulf war he was ban-

ished after he was on the run in Arab countries including Saudi Arabia for years. In 1996 he was for the first time introduced to Taliban who by now came to control major parts of the country. This time Laden, however, pulled his fellow Arab volunteers together to form a force with much larger agenda to support fundamentalist Islamic uprisings across the region.

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Before bin Laden's return

to Afghanistan in 1996 the

blanket accusation against bin

Laden was already drawn.

In spite of his opposition to

Saudi Arabia's alliance with the

US

bin Laden had not so long

challenged the United States.

Even when Saudi Arabia re-

voked his citizenship in 1994

under American pressure, bin

Laden's focus still been on

reform and renewal in Islamic

world. But in a Declaration of

Jihad in August 1996 bin Laden

finally threw in his gauntlet.

After convening a meeting with

various terrorist groups in the

Arab world, bin Laden called

for attacks on American inter-

ests anywhere in the world.

Only after months the African

embassies were bombed.

The Americans squarely

blamed bin Laden to have mas-

terminded the massacre — a

glowing compliment to bin

Laden's ability. The compli-

ments were copiously bestowed

on him when the US pointed its

accusing fingers to bin Laden

also for all other recent atroc-

ities against American inter-

ests. It thought that Laden who had a

hand in World Trade Centre

bombing in 1993 could have in-

fluenced the killing of 18 Ameri-

can soldiers in Mogadishu in

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planted the bomb in Ryadh that killed five US servicemen in 1996. The same year another 18 soldiers were killed when their barracks in Dhahran were bombed by presumably by one of the same terrorist groups. It was only helped improve bin Laden's image before his followers who could not but be impressed with the international reach of their revered supreme.

The Americans have more reasons to worry over bin Laden who is not just another Islamic militant challenging the US might. This is bin Laden, a member of a family with extraordinarily close links to Saudi royalty. When 1998 indictment brought in blanket accusation against bin Laden for all anti-US terrorism including two bombing incidents in Saudi Arabia in 1996, Prince Nayef, the Saudi Interior Minister protested saying that bin Laden could not be responsible for those bombings. There are those who say that some influential members of the royal family — men who would like the kingdom to return to purer Islamic ways — also recognise that bin Laden is an authentic hero to many young Saudis and can imagine a day in which he would return home — duly crowned with the success of his mission. In any case bin Laden does have powerful friends in the palace who would not like him to be tormented by any quarter.

With all of their wraths against bin Laden — the man of whom they think is at the root of all evils — the Americans have miserably failed to turn him into the Don Corleone of terror. The more they tried, the more became bin Laden a man of myth given to the resistance of oppression and justice to his community. He could not be demolished, instead his appeal has grown irresistible.

Punjab for I. K. Gujral. Similarly, in our own country too, present-day leaders prime minister Sheikh Hasina from "Gopalganj", leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia from "Feni", Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury from "Chandpur", Abus Samad Azad from "Sunaniganj", Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury from Sylhet, Saiful Rahman from Maulavibazar, Prof Muzaffar Ahmed of NAP from "Devidwar" of Comilla, etc. seem so favourite. Some seek election from more than one seat.

Anyway, for Sonia Gandhi, the traditional "Amethi" cannot be a favourable area since the Congress lost there in the last election despite hectic electioneering by Sonia for party candidate Satish Sharma.

PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

What Prospect Does Sonia Gandhi Hold?

By Zaglul A Chowdhury

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for Sonia is not assured. And as such, she would look for a "safe seat" where the party has strong following. But which is the constituency that will guarantee a victory for the Congress chief, who is contesting an election for parliament for the first time?

Many thought it would be south or Orissa where some seats are "sure" for Congress and former prime minister P. V. Narasimha Rao had gone for one of these seats in Orissa when his election from own state Andhra Pradesh had appeared uncertain. Mr Rao had not been a popular figure in his own state where the party, however, had always been well-entrenched either as the number one or main opposition party.

Contrary to widely held expectations that Sonia may opt for a seat from Andhra Pradesh, she

finally filed nomination from "Bellary" in Karnataka amidst suspense and dramatic circumstances. The Congress leadership wanted to keep this "safe constituency" for Sonia, a closely guarded secret and only after the filing of the nominations it known that she is seeking election from there.

To divert attention and confuse the scene, Sonia flew to Andhra Pradesh from New Delhi a day before filing the nominations to give the impression that she would be a candidate from there. But she spent the night there and reached adjacent Karnataka to file the nomination raising eyebrows in many quarters.

The seat that she will contest has always been held by the Congress and largely seen as a "safe" one.

Interestingly, Congress's

principal political foe — the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) — kept a close watch on the developments and Congress failed to take it by surprise as BJP leadership had already secretly despatched one of its women stalwarts Mrs Sushma Swaraj to "Bellary" to submit her own nomination papers should Mrs Gandhi become a candidate from there. Moments after Sonia filed the nomination, Mrs Swaraj emerged there and filed her nomination which took the Congress "off-guard". It's not that BJP will win the seat but certainly the candidature of Sushma will carry more weight for the party than of anybody else since she is a top ranking leader of the party with fairly good record in addition to being a woman. She was the information minister in Vajpayee government and later chief min-

ister of Delhi not long ago. The "Bellary" constituency has suddenly become cynosure of all eyes and a good contest seems on the card despite the fact that the seat has been a stronghold for the Congress and Sonia is relatively better placed. Much of the interest of the election scenario in India will now concentrate on this constituency.

Certain "constituencies" in parliamentary democracy become well-known because leaders and stalwarts are associated with them. In India, such seats are "Phulpur" for Jawaharlal Nehru, "Rai Bareli" for Indira Gandhi, "Amethi" for her sons Sanjay and Rajiv — all in the Uttar Pradesh. Earlier were "Satara" in Maharashtra for Y. B. Chavan, "Sassaram" in Bihar for Jagdish Ram, "Maldah" in West Bengal for Ghani Khan Chowdhury and "Jalandhar" in

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ries 80 per cent score. Sum of these two is the primary determinant of a successful bidder.

All these stipulations seemed not enough to secure the position of WorldTel. On January 7, 1999 — MOPT amended this criterion and demanded unconditional equity participation in the BOP venture! Qualifying scores were revised as licence acquisition fee 30 per cent, sharing gross revenue 40 per cent and equity share 30 per cent. MOPT's lust for free lunch was the death knell to competition.

World Bank conducted a study "Bangladesh: Competition and Regulation in Telecommunications" in 1996. Article 3.6 of the study says, "New operators should be licensed to utilise digital wireless technologies for the rapid expansion of basic services. Internationally investors/operators have demonstrated interest in the cellular licences; therefore, GOB should pursue this option expeditiously." Whereas in this BOP bidding, the government drifted from regulatory role and demanded equity from the bidder.