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FOUNDER EDITOR
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Terrorists' desperate move

Pakistan must strengthen its resolve to fight militants

THE frequent orgies of terrorist killing in Karachi point to the virulence of the backlash that Musharraf's tightening of the noose around Islamic militant groups has sparked off. These are acts of vengeance and desperation by beleaguered elements in Pakistan out to notify their sinister and cowardly presence whenever feeling subdued by turn of events; what if it keeps drawing the blood of innocents.

The series of dastardly reprisals ranged from the murder of journalist Daniel Pearl in January through the grenade attack on a church in March to car bombing mayhem at the Sheraton Hotel in May. Each incident was set against a crunch time for the terrorists. The suicide truck bomb attack on Friday near the US consulate in Karachi snuffing out 11 Pakistani lives and injuring 40 persons was no exception. For, it followed US Defence Secretary Rumsfeld's successful trouble-shooting mission in South Asia. Due to his persuasive efforts, the eye-balling between India and Pakistan, germane to New Delhi's distrust of Pakistan's assertions that she did not sponsor cross-border infiltration, has transformed into an atmosphere marked by lessening of tensions along their borders. The war clouds overhanging the region are clearing out as a precursor to a stable order along the LOC. The crackdown on armed militants that Musharraf had kicked off with his much-acclaimed January speech is being lived up to -- that's the message the Pakistani military ruler has been able to convey to the rest of the world lately.

Musharraf has thrown his lot with the west, which is the other way of saying that he has taken the militants head on. He has set in motion some irreversible changes in the outlook of things that deserve to be called a revolution by Pakistan's standards. His predecessors, both of the military and civilian kinds, pandered to the theocratic constituency with a compulsive obsession. But Musharraf has proved to be an exception to the rule. There he stands out in the long line of Pakistani leaders, mostly thrust upon the people and scarcely elected by them to last full term.

He has cried a halt to the abuse of power in the name of Islam or that of religion for the furtherance of militant cults. He may have usurped power giving rise to a justified question or two about his legitimacy, but there cannot be any doubt about his modernist flair befitting a 21st century context.

Musharraf should get all the support he needs in his efforts to carry forward the new millennium agenda for Pakistan.

Gold smugglers at ZIA

Home ministry and CAAB should work together to punish the smugglers

TWENTY-THREE crore taka worth of smuggled gold was caught at ZIA over the last three years and yet none were punished, even those caught red-handed on the spot with the illegal goods in possession. This could happen because of a nexus of officials from Civil Aviation Authority, Biman, Customs and the police working together to allow the smugglers to go free. A report published in this newspaper yesterday gives a detailed picture on how the network functions. Obviously the first task they perform is to carry on smuggling. But as and when someone of their gang is caught they manipulate to remove the evidence so that the culprits are released due to lack of proof. This is the state of our principal international airport where smuggling has been going on for decades without the government-both BNP and AL- being able to curb it.

Incredible but true, a total of 19 law enforcing agencies work at ZIA. In fact there is perhaps no other spot in the whole of Bangladesh --save a few of course -- that is supposedly better guarded and supervised than ZIA. Can anybody please explain to the public what these 19 agencies do, and how after so many people being physically present at this one, relatively small place like ZIA, smuggling cannot be stopped? We think ZIA is a very typical example of 'too many cooks spoiling the broth'.

It was well known that the son of a powerful State Minister of the AL era was controlling crimes at ZIA and that was why it could not be curbed, let alone stopped. Why has it not been possible to stop crimes now that the political protection has gone? Or is it that old protection has been replaced by new protection for new relatives of powerful people under the new dispensation. The gold smuggling case is a good illustration of how governance is being made to fail in Bangladesh and how and why public confidence in the law enforcing agencies is eroding. Is it not possible for the government, especially the Home Ministry along with CAAB to take the gold smuggling instances as test cases and make a determined effort to see them through to the end with the culprits paying for their crimes. Such a small step would go a long way in curbing smuggling at ZIA and raising public confidence in the process. We suggest immediate steps by the government in this direction.

Role of big powers in current Indo-Pak tension

M. M. REZAUL KARIM

THE perpetual tension that has existed between the two neighbouring countries, India and Pakistan, from the very inception of their statehood in 1947 on the issue over which they went to war three times already is well-known to all and needs no recounting. The current tension developed in the backdrop of the events of September 11 in America in the context of these two countries' deep involvement in and commitment to George Bush's international efforts in war against terrorism.

But the impact of this war was not confined merely to the designated actions of combating, containing and capturing Bin Laden, his Al-Qaida colleagues and other terrorist leaders. It went far beyond and strangely escalated to evolve an explosive situation in the region that witnessed hundreds of thousands of troops on both sides of the border between India and Pakistan. What is worse is the deep apprehension of the possible use of atomic weapons by these long-standing adversaries, either by accident or design, with consequent catastrophic effects both upon themselves and their neighbours. Yet, it is interesting to view perceptions of the principal actors of this tragic unfolding drama and these are far from being identical. A brief but simplistic description is attempted below.

The first and the strongest pressure exerted by the United States in the war against Al-Qaida and international terrorism, being the country closest and most accessible to the war zone, was naturally on Pakistan. Geographically, historically and strategically USA found Pakistan to be the most valuable ally and used it as the principal springboard to wage this war. Pakistan's military ruler did not or could not resist and went whole hog with it. Taliban regime was de-recognised by Pakistan, who put up armed barriers against Afghanistan to prevent Al-Qaida men from fleeing and getting nestled or melted in Pakistan. In the process, Pakistan was rewarded by substantial economic and financial benefits from USA. Pakistan's main concern has since been shifted to its eastern front, as it seriously apprehends armed action from India. President Musharraf declared that Pakistan does not want war but would defend its territory with all its "might," if attacked. President Musharraf has gainfully used this to successfully exploit the internal political situation and consolidate his power base in the country.

India readily responded to President Bush's proposal to combat international terrorism. She could ill-afford not to do so once Pakistan had gone on US side. USA, who tends to regard India as the sheet anchor of democracy in the region, had to deal with India on equitable terms. India's definition of terrorism included what was termed as armed infiltration from Pakistan into Kashmir and she viewed it to be an opportunity to secure American and world support to deal with this issue. However, India also was granted some economic benefits from USA. The sustained build-up of tensions and skirmishes on the borders in Kashmir coupled with the dangerous terrorist attack on Indian Parliament made India decide to teach Pakistan a lesson. India contemplates localised armed actions on the borders. But dispatch of Indian warships towards Karachi adds a different dimension to the situation. Will Pakistan hesitate to play with the nuclear toys once it is badly cornered as a sequel to an all-out attack on land, sea and air? Would India then sit idle and not retaliate? As a result, conflagration will not only cause grievous harm and irreparable loss to the two belligerent states but will engulf the whole of South Asia with the fall-out of a war. Of course, BJP government's political compulsions constitute an important element in shaping and guiding India's policy and actions.

USA: The role of the USA in the present scenario is, indeed, pivotal. America's principal interest has no doubt been to mobilise effective international support to its war against terrorism. Bush's sustained overtures to Pakistan as the most effective ally in this war supplemented by his wooing India to participate in the game plan have yielded positive results. He has sought and obtained support of the states of the erstwhile Soviet Union bordering Afghanistan on the north. India's support is valuable both in the substantive context and also in recognition of her position as the leading nation of the region. USA has spared no efforts, time and resources to help achieve its primary goal. The present Indo-Pakistan tension is viewed by the Bush administration as a veritable hindrance to America's war on terrorism. This was clearly manifested when President Mosharraf had to revise his plan of transferring troops from the western border with Afghanistan to the threatened eastern front. However, USA has not spared any efforts and emissary in helping diffuse the current tension and many people believe the real key, if any, to restore peace between the two feuding nations is possessed by America.

Russia: The Indo-Russian friendship and cooperation dates back to the era of very emergence of India as an independent state. It was forged from the national days of anti-British independence movement and encompassed all sectors and fields of national life. It has stood the test of time, with further intensification of the depth and dimension of cooperation between the two nations. Both of them, particularly India, have derived great benefits out of collaboration in the political, diplomatic, technological, financial, military and other fields. Russia has been a great and trustworthy development partner and sincere friend of India from the very beginning. This was manifested by the then Soviet Union's highly commendable role as a successful peace-broker between India and Pakistan at Tashkent to end the 1965 war. Russia, as successor to the Soviet Union, still retains this welcome potentiality. This was highlighted at the recent Asian Security Summit held in Almaty, capital of Kazakstan, where Indian Prime Minister and Pakistan President met Russian and other leaders. The event, though failed to restore peace in South Asia, still recognises Russia's potentiality as a nation, which may hopefully be able to contribute substantially to diffuse the current Indo-Pakistan tension, even though temporarily.

China : China's policy toward South Asia has been by and large unchanged. During my presentation of credentials in January 1980 President Li Xinian categorically stated that China wanted peace and harmony to prevail in South Asia and that countries in the region should forge friendship and cooperation among themselves. In my meeting with the former president of Chinese Institute of Foreign Affairs as well as other Chinese leaders in Beijing a couple of weeks ago, they reiterated their oft-repeated policy towards South Asia. Despite China's earlier demonstration of extension of staunch multi-faceted support to Pakistan vis-a-vis India, moderation has characterised her policy at least during the past two decades. India cooperation has been on the wane and, in the present situation, China's ability to influence Pakistan has diminished substantially.

United Kingdom and United Nations: Britain's past imperialist legacy in the region and special relations with America made Prime Minister Tony Blair assume a prominent role in this war against terrorism. Earliest dispatch of troops to the rugged but relatively better known complex terrains of Afghanistan by Britain was highly appreciated by President Bush. But various measures like dispatch of envoys like Jack Straw as facilitators of peace in the region met the same sad fate of Colin Powell and others. UN Secretary General, as expected, urged both Pakistan and India to exercise maximum restraint and establish a dialogue. But again, as expected, the advice fell on deaf ears owing to UN's perennial deficiency of possessing no teeth to bite. The long established UN Observer's Team to monitor ceasefire violations on the Line of Control in Kashmir may be allowed expanded mandate to deal with cross border terrorism and to include other responsibilities in promoting peace.

Bangladesh and neighbours: The role that Bangladesh, and for that matter any other country in South Asia, can play in averting a military catastrophe in the region is even less than minimal. The overture of mediation made by the last Awami League government following explosion of nuclear device by India and Pakistan went totally flat, mainly on account of India's oft-repeated contention not to allow third party mediation in a bilateral dispute. Peace-loving people, however, have been utterly disappointed on India's insistence, as this stance had failed to solve the dispute over the last half a century. Many contend, a bilateral dispute loses its bilateral character and draws international concern when its fall-out spills over and engulfs countries beyond. History is replete with instances of successful mediations in bilateral disputes and maybe a change of India's attitude will earn for her much praise and commendation from all quarters. After all, like in love and war, no policy is sacrosanct and is liable to change to achieve the desired goal.

As of now, it seems any mediatory or even conciliatory efforts by Bangladesh and its neighbours are also likely to meet an unfortunate end. Exercise of restraint, establishment of dialogue, fervent appeal -- all have been tried by Bangladesh and others too, without success. Yet, apprehension of failure must not impede other South Asian nations to bring home to the two mighty nations possessing dangerous nuclear weapons and missiles of the calamity they can bring about upon themselves as well as their neighbours. They must not be oblivious of the outcome of their actions and must sincerely devise methods for a just and equitable solution and avert going over the precipice of total disaster and catastrophe.

N.B. The Indian decision on 10 June to resume Pakistani air flights over Indian territory and her admission of a reduction of armed infiltrators across the borders into Kashmir produced a glimmer of hopes for a reduced tension. One feels reassured that good sense is prevailing on both sides thanks to the visits of the US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and the Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld to the region.

M.M.Rezaul Karim, a former Ambassador, is a member of BNP's Advisory Council.

CURRENTS AND CROSSCURRENTS

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Dissection for a murder

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

ONCE again for no fault of the dead one more life has been lost. This daily occurrence of death visiting the innocent coupled with societal charity of silence portends the decay of a society we had promised to build from the ravages of war more than three decades ago. Laws appear to be imprisoned in the pages of the statute book. Increasingly pursuit of criminality is being based on sectarian loyalty. Law enforcement authorities have become puppets and frighteningly, albeit allegedly, have to an extent become part of the segment of society they are supposed to prosecute. Perhaps the idea is: if you cannot beat them join them.

Greek philosopher Cicero wrote" safety of the people shall be the highest law". Unfortunately in Bangladesh "safety" has become a rare commodity and often it has to be bought piece by piece as if Portia is being forced to sell pieces of her body to Shylock to save Antonio. Indeed that is what appears to be happening in this soulless society. Engulfed by icy darkness of malevolence "safety" is a flickering flame holding out neither light nor warmth. Not that 'attempts' are not being made to control the reign of terror. Occasionally forays to net criminals has caused human rights violations and extra-judicial killings. Results of these exercises, gleaned from newspaper reports, appear to be much ado about nothing. Crimes of most heinous nature continue unabated. International scrutiny, notably by Amnesty International, has focused attention on Bangladesh. However, some positive developments have taken place. Majority community in Bangladesh was not provoked by the carnage in Gujarat. Albeit, incidents involving attacks on minority community by the so-called supporters of the ruling party immediately after the October elections because of the minority community's perceived support of the rival political party(which was dislodged from power) were reported. But the unabated savagery continuing in Bangladesh is not directed at any particular community. It is a reflection that the social fabric is tearing apart at the seams. Side effects of such unbridled criminal activities can be manifold. In the case of Sony's murder the root cause was apparently the capture of a tender for the construction of part of a building in the Engineering University. Capture or denial of submission of tender documents naturally causes distortion in the tendering process and possibly their award at inflated price. Such practice of snatching tender documents are neither new nor few. Approximate number of such incidents would be available in the files of the law enforcement authorities. Contamination of the tender awarding process, be it with or without the connivance of the awarding authorities, naturally encourages malpractice in the supply of inputs, in this case, cement, rods, sand, bricks etc and their mixture there of. Distortion is furthered because toll has to be paid in the transportation of the inputs. One of the most miserable part of this whole saga is the direct involvement of some students who themselves in a few years time would graduate as Civil, Mechanical, Electrical, or Computer Engineers, academically enriched but morally bereft of finer qualities of a civilized person painting a nihilistic version of our society.

Student politics is not new to this part of the subcontinent dating back to the forties. Indeed in all great movements -- political, cultural or economic -- students were in the vanguard. But students of the olden days did not carry arms. They did not cut tendons in the body of their rivals. Intra-party rivalry did not claim lives of innocent students. Money was not the main attraction -- academic excellence was. Politics was not vicious nor was it an essential tool for making friendship or for survival. Can we not legislate banning student politics in our academic institutions till we have regained our sanity? Instead of blaming rival political wings our leaders would do well to join hands in catching these murderers regardless of political affiliation and bring these culprits to justice. Making the right noises is not enough any more. We have seen too many photo-opportunities. Moving the wheels of justice is what required if public confidence in our political leaders is to be maintained.

Could there be external forces behind the increase in criminal activities? Informal trade i.e. smuggling amounts to billions of dollars and hence by definition is very lucrative. Such trade being illegal has to be operated through armed gangs and greased through bribes. There is, however, no reason to believe that arms used for protection of informal trade has a political agenda of de stabilization as well. On the contrary, a stable environment with only known nuts and bolts to grease would be far better than doing business in uncharted territory. There is no denying the fact that sabotage by both internal and external forces have been happening since time immemorial. In our case one has to analyse as to who would be the direct and indirect beneficiaries. Obviously one would point one's finger at the political rivals. But seemingly these direct beneficiaries -- the political rivals -- could be upstaged by dark forces who may appear to the general public as the great deliverer from the daily chronicle of vicious crimes which have started to benumb our senses. In the case of external forces one has to acknowledge that in the present volatile situation in South Asia it would be prudent for these forces to prefer continuity in the neighborhood rather than invite elements who may be unpredictable in behaviour and unwelcome by the people. Besides in the twenty-first century in the western world extra-constitutional regimes would not find favour unless overriding self-interest of these donors. With the cold war gone the West does not have to prop up regime like Mobutu's in Zaire(Democratic Republic of Congo).Also the donors have concluded that development assistance is better utilized in a people's participatory environment than if money is spent through dictates of the few who represent none but themselves..

In cash strapped Bangladesh incentive prescription will not work unless law and order situation improves considerably. Our political leaders of all description have been told so by donors many times in the past. Our ports should not be among the most expensive in the world. It is not cheap labour but high productivity which would attract investment. Then of course the infrastructural developments have to go hand in hand. These are not pearls of wisdom. These things have been reiterated time and again in the past as any practioner of Bangladesh diplomacy would readily testify. But above all crimes have to be controlled and managed. If poverty is the mother of crime, then it has also been said that society prepares the crime, the criminal commits it. Great minds abound in the country. Multiple strategies to combat crime should already be ready or on the drawing board. Well-intentioned men of experience and expertise in this field are innumerable. Perhaps what is lacking is sagacious political direction to bring about fusion of these elements. Let us hope it is still not too late.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a retired secretary to the Bangladesh government and former ambassador

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TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Unnecessary hartal

The hartal called by AL is absolutely unnecessary. First of all, the AL showed their ignorance on the educational system because they don't even know that A-Levels exams are also being held in June. Secondly, if they have already decided to join the parliament, what is the 'real' motive behind this dawn-to-dusk hartal?

This is nothing but a display of the mere fact that they are the Opposition. And how on earth are they going to get people to stay in rallies in this rain, let alone the World Cup? Beats me!

Isam
Dhaka

Vulgarity on Sports Page

I'm a reader of your paper from about last eight years and I consider your daily as a neutral one.

But I've noticed that your paper often publish vulgar pictures especially in the Sports Page. I feel very uneasy when I open the paper with my family members. We don't expect this kind of picture from a newspaper like yours.

Mahmud, *Dhaka*

"What is transhipment?"

The writer of the opinion piece ("What is transhipment", June 15) tries to give a different interpretation to my writing. He seems to attach particular definitions to transit, transhipment, re-export, schemes and terms them as giving 'corridor' if it involves two nations, in this case Bangladesh and India. He seems to be too engrossed with the terms and in stressing on his knowledge of the same. But that has been only secondary to the central topic of my article. I talked of isolation in this age of globalisation.

When I have spoken of coming out of isolation, it does not mean doing it on unequal terms but at a price, which is honourable and acceptable in our national interest. I spoke of knowing the Indian terms for any type of access so that it could be understood by the public and the Parliament before a decision was arrived at after weighing the benefits and consequences.

And a rose is a rose call it by whatever name. So if and when it, at all, occurs calling it transit, transhipment, corridor will make little difference in public perception who would know it as commodities transported from one part of India to another through Bangladesh.

M Anwarul Haq
Diplomatic and Defence Correspondent
The Daily Star

Hats off for the Commentary

Commentary on 11th June was explicit and timely. The government should take note. If not for the country, but for their own good.

I would also love to see that often Editors come up with same kind of articles and not just publish the news of incidents.

I do have my resentment against our media who are not up to our expectations. They do exert pressure over political parties and government machinery for national interest. But in terms of governance or politics they only express scepticism.

Eight persons are killed daily on average since this alliance came to power. The opposition is making it an issue to malign the rulers and certainly not solve the problem. We cannot even imagine that majority of the media establishment would come together and voiced their clear resentment against the misrule

My sincere thanks to you Mr. Mahfuz Anam.

M M Haque
Jeddah, K.S.A

BARVIDA vs BADA

I am really enjoying this spat between the used car dealer's samity and the new car dealers group. I have been cheated several times by second hand car dealers; within three months even 50 lakh taka cars develop problems with the Mobil filters, carburettors, batteries and what not.

I know that this ban on second hand cars, misleadingly called reconditioned cars, will hurt some middle-class buyers. But if the government heeds the advice of the used car dealers and reverses its decision to help middle-class buyers then there should be an upper limit on the engine size of reconditioned cars. The used car dealers keep harping on about 800cc and 1300 cc cars, well fine let them import these but maintain the ban on Pajeros, Lexus' and all the other luxury cars these dealers fob off to unsuspecting people.

I find the continued examples of Indian cars doubly amusing. Doesn't the used car dealer's samity know that all the Indian cars are either joint ventures or wholly owned or controlled subsidiaries of European and Japanese companies? The argument about pollution is a joke since all new cars in India have to comply to the highest emissions standards.

Pan
Dhaka

"David fights Goliath"--a repercussion

In response to the letter by M. Ahmed (June 8) I would like to reflect upon the fact that it's the spiritual sentiment of unity among the people and their mental determination that can defend their motherland from an aggressor. Numerical strength is not the strength of a nation. During the World War II, the British Air Force was numerically very poor in comparison with the Nazi Germany. The German Airforce couldn't inflict a heavy damage on Britain and the British Air Force fought valiantly to drive them out. I quote the great Briton, Sir Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few".

If India could wipe out Pakistan from the world map through its nuclear weapons, then three-fourth of India will vanish by the nuclear devices of Pakistan and one-fourth of the country will remain as a disabled nation.

It is not justified to pass irresponsible comments like "wiping out of a nation from the world map" without thoughtful judgement.

M. Iqbal
Boro Moghbazar, Dhaka

Arms dealers

On occasion of the National Day of the Russian Federation there is the usual supplement going on about the fraternal brotherhood of nations or what not. Frankly I didn't read it.

What did catch my attention was the advertisement from a company called Avia Trade Int., their motto "We care for your satisfaction". On a whim I visited their website. It would appear that Avia does business with the Directorate General of Defence Purchase (DGDP) under the Ministry of Defence and Bangladesh Police and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) under the Ministry of Home Affairs representing several Russian defence concerns.

Among the equipment they have supplied are radar, shotguns, ammunitions, bullet-proof vests, helicopters and transports. All in all a very active company in the arms dealing business it would appear and certainly a company entrusted with a huge amount of our money to be spent on our defence.

Which makes the following quote from their web site both amusing and scary "Moreover Avia Trade Limited is very much keen to win the tender from various govt. organisation by developing their good connection with the high officials of the different Govt. Organization."

I hope these good connections they write about are not like the ones their principals are famous for in Russia.

Peter, *Dhaka*

Not enough Compensation

The Gujarat government has finally started compensating the Muslim victims of recent riot to start their life anew, with a measly Rs. 200 per family. With this paltry amount these victims of ethnic cleansing by Hindu fanatics are supposed to vacate their makeshift camps and go back to their homes which are nothing but charred debris. Not only that, they are expected to move forward leaving behind the memories of raped-and-consequently-burnt-alive loved ones along with many other things.

I strongly believe that the Gujarat government deserves some 'award' for coming up with this innovative *'goru meray juta daan'* style ("kill a cow and bring a pair of slippers as a gift for its owner") compensation.

And at the same time the Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee should get some 'applause' too, for successfully diverting world attention from ethnic cleansing of Gujrat by starting a fake nuclear war hysteria.

Shukla Mirza
On e-mail