

Stop this canard against Bangladesh

Terrorism will never find a place in our society

FIRST the Indian deputy prime minister, then Joyti Basu, then the Indian foreign minister, all these leaders depicted Bangladesh as a hotbed of terrorists. This was followed by a story in the Hindustan Times (HT) claiming that Osama Bin Laden's second in command, Ayman Al Zawahiri, is hiding in Bangladesh since September. The HT story further claimed that we have served Al Qaida in two ways -- first by giving shelter to many of their members including the number two of the organisation, and second by allowing Bangladesh to be used as a transit point for about 300-400 of its members from South East Asia returning to Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. The story is based on information supplied by Indian intelligence sources. India will make all this information available to Bangladesh soon, the report says. The question is why hasn't the Indian intelligence shared this invaluable information with us if they really wanted to stop this movement of terrorists and catch Ayman Al Zawahiri especially if he has been here since September. Instead the information is leaked to the media to gain a propaganda edge, which in reality may prove to be counterproductive.

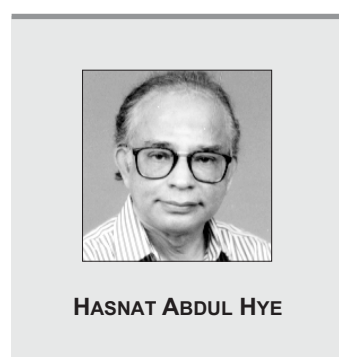
We quote the HT story at some length to show what canard are being spread by the Indian agencies and being picked up both by the media and the political leaders. It is our view that all the recent statements of the Indian leaders are the product of the feed from the intelligence sources and the sudden rise in such stories is nothing short of a concerted plan to pressure Bangladesh to follow certain policies which we have so far refused to. Recently when the Kolkata police arrested two well known mobsters and let go seven others who were accompanying them, the local press there termed them as ISI agents or Al Qaida activists.

What is interesting about the HT story is that it reproduces, almost to the very words, the same information carried in the earlier Time magazine story, which we have reasons to believe was also fed by Indian intelligence. Why a magazine like the Time should swallow such crude feed is a matter of curiosity. However, we have it from people who met the Time correspondent while he was investigating the story here that his mind was made up about what to write even before he arrived to look for 'facts'?

We express our strongest resentment at the concerted maligning effort that is being made by Indian leaders and a section of the Indian media. We would like to assure India that we are genuine partners in fighting terror and we should be treated as such. One simple question veteran leaders like L.K. Advani, Joyti Basu and Jashwant Singh and the concerned section of the media are not asking is what has Bangladesh to gain by harbouring Al Qaida terrorists? What possible interest could we have in nurturing these elements whose culture and world view are the furthest from what Bangladesh stands for? What sort of society did the Al Qaida establish in Afghanistan, and why on earth would we be attracted to that? Yes, we are a Muslim majority country and some among us may want to establish a society based on shariah law but that is not the view of vast majority. Then again that does not make us a fundamentalist country. The RSS, the group that murdered Mahatma and preaches Hindu supremacist rule is now a partner in the ruling coalition. If that does not make India a fundamentalist country then why should Jamaat sharing power in Bangladesh should make us so? However regrettable such power sharing is the outcome of coalition politics. It was our hope that the visiting leader of our opposition and former prime minister would have used her presence and influence to assuage the Indian fear and tried to dissuade them from carrying on the canard against us. Her comments, as carried by the Indian press, indicates that our hopes were in vain.

The recent Indian attitude has surprised us to say the least. We are unable to understand as to what India hopes to gain from this propaganda against us. We are of the view that there has to be genuine collaboration between our two countries in fighting terrorism. Bangladesh truly wants a peaceful solution to all Indian problems in the northeast and we are willing to extend all help in this matter. If there are areas of dissatisfaction then let us discuss them and solve them to the mutual benefit of both.

Trade winds



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

APPARENTLY, these are exciting times for world trade. Trade winds are blowing in all the hemispheres and across the continents. They, however, belie the doldrums or the state of suspended animation that is taking shape almost inexorably. Recent developments in the sphere of international trade are contradictory and baffling, to say the least. Taken together, they do not augur well for the future of free trade in particular and globalization in general. Caught up by the spectre of war in the Middle East and the continuing bloodbath in terrorism and counter-terrorism the spate of trade negotiations between and among countries have either escaped due notice or allowed to pass without critical scrutiny. The world community may be wittingly or unwittingly moving towards a trade regime that further will accentuate the divide between the rich and the poor.

The recent flurry of bilateral and multi-lateral trade negotiations run counter to the strategy and principles enunciated at Doha where at long last the WTO managed to hold trade talks unhindered by protesters. But the sponsors little realized that the nemesis of free trade was within the organization and would not hesitate to undermine rules of fairness and guidelines for liberalization. When the Doha round of talks was held a year ago it was optimistically billed to be a "development round". Hopes ran high that the Doha round of talks would liberalize trade and thus mark a great advance, particularly for the world's least developed countries. It was hoped that the bad deal meted out to the third world coun-

tries in the Uruguay Round would be somewhat compensated by the new round of trade talks initiated at Doha. Assurances were given that the system of farm support built by America and the European Union would be gradually dismantled to benefit the developing countries. Farm trade liberalization, which appeared intractable so long, suddenly seemed probable. The Bush administration made public commitments in favour of reduction of farm subsidy bringing it down from 60 to 15 per cent within

insistence on immediate reform of farm policies in return for a French promise that its cost would be capped from 2007 on, at the 2006 level. The deal between the two countries underwrites the generously funded common agricultural policy till 2013. Thus, from both sides of Atlantic, the farm trade initiative mooted at Doha has received a serious set back. In the absence of liberalization in farm trade the call for lowering tariffs and trade barriers on the part of developing countries will be unre-

party manifesto describes FTAA as not a free-trade agreement but a process of "economic annexation" of Latin America by the United States. Another obstacle to the integration of the trading bloc is the farm policy of America which may at best allow relatively greater market access to FTAA members than at present. Trade distorting farm subsidies in America will, therefore, remain in place even after FTAA becomes a reality.

In Asia Japan is warming up to the idea of a free trade area

week of November. The timetable set for completion of negotiation between the two is 10 years. The next ten years thus appear to be most crucial for world trade and may mark a watershed for the same. If anything, it will reverse the move towards globalization, particularly in trade. In the light of such a fragmented approach and action at cross-purposes not anything significant can be expected over farm-trade liberalization or over the issue of affordable medicine for the victims of HIV/AIDS, malaria and

wanted to combine bilateral talks with ASEAN-wide initiatives. Referring to ASEAN's negotiation with China for a free trade deal he made it clear that agreement with the United States is also an option, with America always wary of China gaining too much influence in the region. It is obvious from these flurry of activities that countries are now giving more attention to such initiatives than to efforts to make Doha round of talks successful. Such cross-cutting bilateral trade deals or regional agreement cannot but undermine WTO. Rather than promoting a global approach with multi-lateral agreements, the patchwork of bilateral deals will only harm or hinder the cause of expanding world trade.

The mini-ministerial meeting of trade ministers from 25 nations held in Sydney has cast further doubts on the future of Doha round of talks and on liberalization of trade in the world. The selection of 25 countries for the mini-summit has been orchestrated by the major trading countries to serve their purpose pre-empting possible objections from the developing countries. This has been a familiar tactic adopted by the rich developed countries against which the developing countries have registered their protest, but to no avail. The objective of the mini-summit is to prepare the agenda for the next WTO meeting and to reach so called consensus on crucial issues in greenroom conference. These will be presented as *fait accompli* in the general meeting of the world trading body for acceptance by all 190 members. This is not only blatantly undemocratic but highly conspiratorial. It is small wonder that the developing countries have resented these underhand dealings which put them at great disadvantage in world trade. Buffeted by these developments WTO will not need outside protesters to wreck the next meeting. Like a house divided, it is likely to collapse or become dysfunctional on its own. With member countries pitted against each other, the call for free trade will appear like a cry in the wilderness at best or a charade at worst.

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist and economist.

IN MY VIEW

The mini-ministerial meeting of trade ministers from 25 nations held in Sydney has cast further doubts on the future of Doha round of talks and on liberalization of trade in the world. The selection of 25 countries for the mini-summit has been orchestrated by the major trading countries to serve their purpose pre-empting possible objections from the developing countries. This has been a familiar tactic adopted by the rich developed countries against which the developing countries have registered their protest, but to no avail. The objective of the mini-summit is to prepare the agenda for the next WTO meeting and to reach so called consensus on crucial issues in greenroom conference... WTO will not need outside protesters to wreck the next meeting. Like a house divided, it is likely to collapse or become dysfunctional on its own.

five years. The European Union also appeared serious about substantially dismantling the common agricultural policy (CAP) because of the impending accession of new members.

Hopes about the major obstacles to free and liberalized trade have now been shattered by actions taken by the major players in world trade. The Bush administration has already passed a farm bill involving \$ 180 billion over the next ten years. Though America insists that this is consistent with its commitment to WTO under the Doha round, the argument lacks conviction. If America was serious about farm-trade liberalization, the farm bill would have undergone substantive modifications, which it has not. To complicate the farm-trade liberalization agenda a deal has been made by France and Germany regarding EU's farm policy (CAP). EU leaders meeting in Brussels at the end of October effectively put off reform of the agricultural subsidies. In the summit the Germans abandoned their

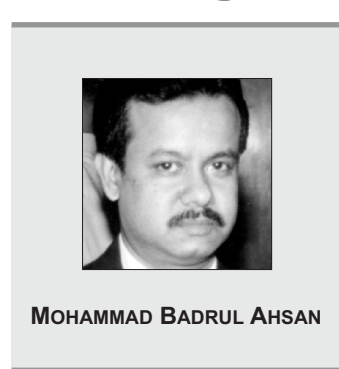
alistic and is most likely to be resented. Even the bilateral trade negotiation between America and Australia that had a belated start has now almost foundered on the rigid stand taken by America on its farm policy.

If the prospects of Doha round of talks to liberalize world trade have become uncertain because of the major trading countries working at cross-proposes with the commitments made earlier, the various alternative approaches to liberalize trade between countries and regional blocs are likely to undermine not only the Doha round but WTO itself. In the first week of November a meeting was held in Ecuador at the initiative of America to move ahead in negotiations on a Free Trade Area of the America (FTAA). The 34 FTAA member countries (all those in the hemisphere except Cuba) are expected to agree on a slew of decisions including specific timetables to complete the talks by 2005. One sticking point is the election of a socialist President in Brazil whose

between her and South-East Asia. If negotiations proceed as per schedule it could become a formal arrangement in less than ten years, involving annual trade worth over four billion dollars. Japan and Mexico have also held their first round of negotiations aimed at concluding a bi-lateral free trade pact, which could include the testy issue of farm products. The two countries aim to conclude the pact in time for the next summit of APEC in Thailand late next year. Meanwhile tangible progress has reportedly been made in the laboured negotiation between ASEAN and China for a trade pact. ASEAN is slated to link up with China to form the world's largest free trade market. The Free Trade Area between ASEAN and China is expected to be completed between 2010 and 2015 and will involve an annual trade volume worth \$1.2 billion. India has also moved closer to ASEAN with negotiations about to take place following the meeting between Indian Prime Minister and the ASEAN leaders in the first

tuberculosis. The US Trade Representative, during his recent visit to Australia, announced that United States will seek bilateral trade deals across South-East Asia in a move to link emerging economies vulnerable to extremism, to the world's largest economy. He also indicated that President Bush had given the green light to start formal talks for a free trade pact with Australia. At his next stop in Singapore he is expected to sign a bilateral free trade deal, the first between America and an Asian country. The US-Singapore Free Trade Agreement is slated to be a model for other potential US pacts in the region. America has already dangled the prospect of free trade deals with other South-East Asian nations including Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia. With the prospect of peace returning to Sri Lanka America has already started bi-lateral talks for expanded trade with the country. The US Trade Representative told audience in Australia that the Bush Administration

The gaping gap



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

HE was of the same age as his son when he was forced to crouch on a low wooden stool one afternoon, slipping his hands under the legs, his new lungi raised and folded like a loincloth around his waist. One of his cousins pulled his hands from behind, as if those were two ends of a drawstring, until his elbows were locked under his knees. His legs were drawn widely apart and he was postured in a tilted squat, while an emaciated old man wearing a goatee and soiled topi, sat in front of him, probing his crotch with his left hand. The man occasionally ran his right index across his mouth like a wiper on the windshield to wipe the residual cut of betel leaf into his right jawl and chewed it again and again.

As a small boy, he was in a state of shock and suddenly burst into a bitter wail asking the people who stood around him to let go of his hands and legs. He was hurt that none came to his rescue, his own blood they were, frowning and giggling as if they were having fun at the cost of his predicament. One of his uncles forced a sweetmeat into his mouth, its syrupy juice flowing down his chin, where two

streams of tears flowing down from his eyes had already converged. Somebody turned his sticky face to one side and asked him not to look down.

Meanwhile the leaf-chewing strange-looking man was pulling the foreskin of his male member as if stretching a gas balloon before fitting it to the cock of a gas cylinder. He then used a thin stick and turned it around inside the foreskin with the flourish of a chef stirring the soup in a pot. Held tightly in the

were woven into each other. An elderly man slapped him in the face and asked him to shut up, because the circumciser was ready to start his work.

The old man squeezed and pulled his male organ as if to temper his prey before the slaughter, humming a tune, which would lead anyone to believe that this man was preparing to dice an onion. The young boy felt a clench in his organ, its abruptness emptying the air in his lungs. It was as though

to his rescue when those men were treating him like a trapped animal.

Much later he realized that he was shivering with cold as the winter night had descended early on the village, bringing a chilling silence fractured only by barking dogs and drone of crickets. His mother spread a quilt over him, carefully stashing it under the pitchers so that it didn't hang down in the sensitive area between his legs.

At night a throbbing pain

had suffered in the previous night. They talked amongst themselves for a while, but each was saddened and weakened by the pain of lesion. After a while, each got up and straddled with a stoop like the monkeys, swinging their hips like ducks, and returned to their beds for a breakfast with crispy rice fried with molasses and ginger, and raw tea.

The rest of the morning was visiting hours as streams of neighbours and relatives came to see them lying in their beds like seven

the wound, and asked each boy to check if the sliced foreskin was still lying under his pillow. She said that the wound wasn't going to heal until rats had come to steal away those slices.

In the evening, once again a fire was lighted in the middle of the room and the boys were asked to sit around it. They rose from their beds like zombies and straddled and swung to the spot, where the flames were beginning to rise from crackling wood. It was repeated for seven days until they were given ritual shower, and the entire village was invited to a feast for them.

The son, who was listening to his father, reminded that it was time for him to have a painkiller. The father gave a tablet with a glass of water to his son and told him how fortunate he was to be circumcised in the operation theatre under anesthesia, with painkillers to quell even the slightest of pain.

He then said that it was a tradition even amongst the savages to initiate their sons into manhood through a test of hardship and endurance. Circumcision was the last rite of initiation for civilized men before a boy graduated to manhood, he added.

He told his son that a Russian writer named Nikolai Gogol cautioned that one must pass from the tender years of youth into harsh and embittered manhood, making sure that one took with one on one's journey all the human emotions. If one left them on the road, one will not have the chance to pick them up afterwards.

Modern man grew up with that gap in his manhood, the father concluded.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

CROSS TALK

He then said that it was a tradition even amongst the savages to initiate their sons into manhood through a test of hardship and endurance... He told his son that a Russian writer named Nikolai Gogol cautioned that one must pass from the tender years of youth into harsh and embittered manhood, making sure that one took with one on one's journey all the human emotions. If one left them on the road, one will not have the chance to pick them up afterwards. Modern man grew up with that gap in his manhood.

clasp of two men, the little boy that he was writhed in pain and guttural sounds of oops and ouch came out of his mouth. The old man pushed back the foreskin and said to the crowd that they were going to see the head of a sparrow, and made chirping noise with his mouth. Everybody in the room broke into laughter.

The young boy that he was, he felt terrified by the insensitivity of people in the room, while the half-chewed sweetmeat was suffocating him in the mouth. He bawled at the top of his voice, struggling to free himself from the clutches of those men, but he could hardly move as though his arms and legs

thousand bees had stung him in the groin; his moaning drowned by the excitement in the room that the job was done well. The circumciser said in a humorous tone that the battle was over and he only needed to bandage the bleeding soldier.

The strongest man in the family lifted him in his arms and laid him in a bed on the floor made with a bedspread on layers of straws. Two upturned pitchers were placed on his two sides to support his limp legs folded at the knees. His parents came and sat near his head, running their fingers through his hairs, but he felt very angry with them because they had not come

between his legs kept him awake and he drifted in and out of nightmares, while his mother dosed off sitting near his head. His throat was parched with thirst, and his mother gingerly gave him spoonful of water at a time lest it gave him the urge to urinate before the wound was dry. Once or twice he tried to shift on his side, but a mother's love kept watch over him even through her closed eyes.

In the morning, a fire was lighted in the middle of the room, where he joined six others to keep warm, their crotches bared to the heat for desiccation of the raw wounds. For the first time he noticed the fellow victims of the same ordeal that he

display windows in a museum. The visitors were cautioned that they were free to look but not to touch the objects of display. They stopped in front of each pair of spread legs, pored over the wounds and asked questions. Some had brought gifts, but everyone was nice to them. He still remembers one of the visitors tried to be funny and said that each of the trimmed members had in it the calibre of a sawed-off gun.

The afternoon weighed heavily on his sleepless eyes, while the air was filled with the moaning voices of seven agonized souls. Just before the sun went down, an old woman put turmeric paste around

OPINION

Attitude of western media

AFSAN CHOWDHURY

THIS is a typical example of the work of irresponsible Western media which has little regard for the media workers of the developing world unless it serves their specific purpose. To scream about Bangladesh media and its killer tendencies after all the trouble had been caused by this Channel 4 commissioned team is unfair, unethical and condemnable. Some of the you will know my friend Saleem Samad who is on the run and faces arrest immediately on apprehension as he has been charged with sedition.

Priscilla Raj, a young journalist who was working as a fixer has also been taken in and without any

social connections faces serious problems. Others with whom this group got in touch with will also face difficulties. I consider this foreign media team responsible for what has happened and mention their lack of concern for the safety of the locals they hire.

They were here on tourist visa which means their entire operation was illegal. If selling the story was not the only thing they wouldn't have gone ahead ignoring the consequences. That they would use the land route was known to almost all journalists here and Saleem Samad was being warned about possible repercussions. If Saleem -- who is also the representative of RSF -- did this for money, we have to know if this was

need or greed driven because as the RSF man he has responsibilities beyond doing fixing work. Now the task of protecting journalists is left hanging and all focus will be on the new crisis. Those who read Dhaka papers will know that its the media which has mounted the largest opposition to the Islamic fanatics and the violation of human rights by security agencies. But the recent spate of media reports of Islamic extremists in Bangladesh which are reports of questionable quality means there is a market for such stuff and that will be served. No connection between freedom and journalism has been established.

The Western journalists will be let off naturally after a few days'

stay but the letter writers in the media neglect to mention the locals who were /are with the team and are now in jail or on the run; this points to the emerging media culture that is being supported by international media networks. We have become fair game for a story. The people involved don't matter. The reports are almost as bad as the Taslima stories which hyped western media but even forgot to mention that local journalists were in jail for opposing the fundamentalists.

Considering how difficult it is to get stories on problems of poverty and trade imbalances including issues like impact of international global agencies on environment but the extreme interest in such

stories, most journalists including myself feel that we are being used to feed hunger for images of stereotypes in the western world.

This foreign team was aware of the consequences and when I heard about what they were doing I personally warned their friends by mail -- I too was approached -- that for doing what they are at, they will not suffer but the local journalists will. No Briton will stay in jail for long as the High Commission will intervene and they won't be tried either but who will protect Priscilla or Saleem after their purpose is served?

I had talked to Saleem a week back and told him about the danger. He was already under watch and feared arrest. He was also

unhappy about the operational activities of this team though what he said to the team I don't know but he was relieved that Ruchira had gone. When I asked about the foreign crew he seemed to feel that they wouldn't mind such hassles because they were confident nothing would happen in the end and the story would get a lot of publicity.

This was obviously based on experience. People actively involved even in armed activities but belonging to European countries or holding passports have been let go even after being sentenced to death by military courts.

This incident will provide a huge ballast to the fundamentalists and fanatics and the authorities to

stamp down on us. Many are exposed to all the dangers and live without protection and one would have expected some concern but the way this has been handled is professionally unacceptable. But then the outfits are not accountable to us or any other body.

People will suffer here because of the lack of sensitivity towards local situation. Almost everyone who was approached to work with this team refused because they were convinced that the team had already decided on the storyline and were looking for images to fill just that. A typical question which they asked was "Can we go to the border and see Hindus fleeing across the border?" People may be wrong but this is what local

journalists feel about international media.

Western media doesn't bother much about quality anymore. They are looking for markets for their stories and Taliban in Bangladesh makes a good sell this year or maybe part of a bigger strategy. This team lied to get their visa and put lives at risk for personal gain knowing they themselves were protected. Their concern shows they only care about their own as it neither mentions Saleem or Priscilla. It's this lack of quality and concern and that anyone from the West is always right and righteous that displays the attitude of the international media towards our problems and makes us angry.