

The 'Phantom' again!

High time to act

THE way the Jagrato Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMB) cadres went about demonstrating in public, armed to the teeth and in open daylight, only shows their brazen-faced defiance of law. Their recent hostile act was in response to the public lynching of three of their cadres following their attempt on the life of a political leader of Rajshahi.

The JMB and its leader, the so-called Bangla Bhai, have reappeared after lying low for some time. Its nefarious activities, including taking up the law into their own hands and administering their own justice, and even putting some of their rivals to death, had been highlighted by the press, not least of all in these very columns. Regrettably, all suggestions to act against this cadre and rein them in have fallen on deaf ears. In fact, the government has displayed a very ostrich-like attitude in respect of Bangla Bhai and his men.

It is not that this group has appeared out of the blue, unbeknownst to the law enforcing and intelligence agencies. Their misdeeds, carried out with complete impunity, force us to one unpleasant conclusion, which we hope is wrong, and that is that so-called Bangla Bhai has political linkage.

We are at a loss to comprehend the reluctance of the authority to acknowledge the reality of the existence of the JMB, about which even the law enforcing agencies have offered different explanations at different times. Prevarication, when explanations were sought of the authority, has reinforced the impression that this cadre will be a hard nut to crack, for very obvious reasons.

The government high-ups need to take note of the fact, if they have not already done so, that the beat of this cadre is increasing by the day, as evident from their declared intention of taking on the law enforcing agencies, while the authorities' inaction has allowed the leader of the group to acquire almost a cult image amongst his supporters. This does not augur well at all for us.

We feel, the government cannot but take into account the strong public sentiments against this group and put Bangla Bhai and his cohorts behind the bar.

On the Eid heels

Some thoughts to share

THERE has been a tidings galore emanating from Eid holidays that provide food for introspection. The festival was observed with a zest that had more to do with recreation than feasting. All the entertainment and educational preserves of the city parks, Fantasy Kingdom at Ashulia, Wanderland at Gulshan, Mirpur Zoo, National Museum and historical or heritage sites were abuzz with trotting feet of children chaperoned by adults. And, the bigger retreat-seekers in Cox's Bazar, Bandarban, Rangamati, the Sundarbans, to name the obvious few tourist attractions, made a vibrant point about the potential for internal tourism.

On the hygienic concern post-sacrifice, things passed off generally cleaner as the municipal disposal services were better organised than on similar occasions before. The credit in part must also go to a higher level of public consciousness against environmental pollution. Taking a cue from this, let's suggest something by way of wider civic involvement in keeping the city hazard-free after the sacrificial rituals; we should, in fact, have abattoirs at the community level.

Stepped up surveillance by law and order forces kept mugging and extortionist activities at markedly low levels. In the improved situation, the tanners did a brisk business of hide collection at this peak season at reasonable prices which is likely to reflect well on our export earnings from hides and skins and the local footwear sectors, provided, of course, the tanners made a good use of bank loans.

Let's not be oblivious of the share of bad news, some of which happened in spite of the vigilance, and what have you! Nine people were killed during the Eid holidays, 'cross-fire' took a toll of five and, above all, 26 people were killed and 118 sustained injuries through road accidents in the past four days until Monday all over the country.

Those who are commuting back to the city, the rail, bus and launch operators, and the government's law enforcement and transport regulatory agencies have their respective responsibilities in ensuring that accident-related casualties are kept at the minimum.

Indo-Pak composite dialogue



M. ABDUL HAFIZ

THE renewed composite dialogue between India and Pakistan is now one year old. It all began on January 6, 2004 with Musharraf-Vajpayee joint statement from Islamabad where the latter came to attend the SAARC summit -- and ended with foreign secretaries' joint statement of December 29, on Kashmir, peace and security. There were at least 16 joint statements by India and Pakistan preceded by the exchange of unpeppered words and argument. Neither side felt reassured because they were hardly substantiated by any concrete action. It was rather the regularity, the monotony and repeated use of hackneyed phrases like "joint pledge to carry the process forward" that characterised diplomacy also during the previous years. It is gratifying however that neither of the neighbours scuttled the process either by releasing contradictory state-

ment or blaming the other for failure as were sometimes done previously. This shows the desire on both sides to exercise restraint and keep the dialogue going and achieve something out of it.

But how? One notion was reflected in what Indian foreign minister Natwar Singh expressed while referring to the prevailing situation that 'the dialogue provides hope, not salvation'. Indeed

controversial Siachen issue, Wullar navigation project, Sir Creek, drug trafficking as well as economic and commercial cooperation and promotion of friendly exchanges in various fields. The talks of CBMs (confidence building measures) with regard to both nuclear and conventional arms also ended without achieving any breakthrough. Negotiation for a Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus ser-

vice was stuck over issue of documentation. There is however an understanding on opening up Khokrapar-Monabao rail link. But there too no date has been announced for the start of rail operation.

For any bilateral dialogue between India and Pakistan the most difficult issue is that of Kashmir. Few however understand that no less difficult for such dialogue is the issue of nuclear relationship. If a nuclearised India and Pakistan

want to be accepted by the rest of the world as part of the official nuclear club they have to first demonstrate their ability to manage their nuclear relationship in the most responsible manner. This has become all the more crucial because President Bush seems bent upon recasting the rules of the global nuclear game.

In keeping with the fate of negotiations on other bilateral issues because they often snowball into nuclear threat.

The initial round of renewed composite dialogue began on a promising note and a great deal of enthusiasm. Yet it failed to have a breakthrough in any direction. The whole process became like going and going round the mulberry bush achieving nothing. As its progress has been dampening last year will 2005 witness better

essential ingredient of diplomatic negotiation.

As regards Kashmir, however complicated the issue has become over the years it can be resolved if the parties concerned do have a will to resolve it. Since the Kashmir dispute has the potential to cause possible nuclear holocaust the dispute must be surgically removed and should not be left to poison relations between India and Pakistan. It will be sad indeed if the Indo-Pak rapprochement that started with the Musharraf-Vajpayee statement of January 6, 2004 ends in futility. An enlightened generation of both the countries must be able to seize the opportunity after 50 years of wasted opportunities and two full-fledged wars.

As the composite dialogue moves on it will be soon clear whether India wants to consolidate status quo which perhaps go in her favour or will be able to look beyond entrenched attitude and established policies during 2005. Pakistan will be wise to shed its policy of using Kashmir anymore as one of the media of its domestic politics. The composite dialogue is not a matter of every day or year. It comes in a while and only people with some greatness make its optimum use.

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

PERSPECTIVES

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the diplomacy of dialogue is full of shenanigans to prolong a process indefinitely with a view to availing some advantage at an opportune time by one of the parties. But all remain hopeful of availing the advantage by outwitting the other.

Let alone Kashmir, Pakistan's core agenda in the dialogue, there was no tangible progress even on the less complicated subjects under the composite dialogue. There was no progress, for example, with regard to non-

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the Indo-Pak talks on nuclear and conventional CBMs held in mid-December last in Islamabad did not come to a fruition. India wanted to keep any agreement on CBMs confined only to surface to surface missile. But Pakistan was for extending it to all categories of missile. While there seems to be no disagreement on nuclear CBMs it is equally urgent to consider mechanisms for reducing the conventional military tensions between the two countries

results of composite dialogue between India and Pakistan? The South Asia watchers are of the view that there can be breakthrough in negotiations on almost all issues of dialogue provided New Delhi and Islamabad are prepared to match their words with visible gestures, concrete actions and due seriousness. While both India and Pakistan are entitled to try to achieve as much of their original goals as possible they have also to recognise that 'give and take' is an

Four more years of Bush



M. B. NAQVI
writes from Karachi

GEORGE W Bush will remain US President for four more years. Majority of Americans -- for whom God and freedom are crucially important -- chose him over a liberal. Bush claims hearing voices "from beyond the stars" that have dictated his policies: he is to bring the twin blessings of freedom (democracy) and globalisation to the rest of us, with globalisation being a near permanent American policy.

'Globalisation' encapsulates the economic policies that Bush Administration has been implementing. The US is leading the capitalist world with the help of IFIs (international financial institutions), World Trade Organisation (WTO) and many other subsidiary bodies like UNCTAD and UN agencies to execute neo-classical economic doctrines: the paradigm involving privatisation, deregulation, free imports at low or no rates of duties, no subsidies and no restrictions on free movement of international capital, especially on capital account.

'Freedom' or democracy is a tricky concept. It is inherently good. But consider: world's number one capitalist power is proclaiming its divine mission to spread democracy -- to areas of its interest. What does Bush mean by democracy or freedom? It certainly has the kernel of civil liber-

ties. But that is packaged in a raw capitalist paradigm. On closer examination, and considering the recent US conduct, it is clear that America can and does overlook lapses in civil liberties and democratic norms so long as its friends remain loyal to it and stay faithful to the US-recommended economic paradigm, so have US officials reassured.

There is little obscurity in 'globalisation'. The world has seen it, implemented it and has either

have experienced the few partial successes and seen many failures, all resulting from free trade.

Poor countries' indebtedness reflects their being inefficient producers. Today's western scholars ignore what was written in 19th and 20th Centuries: how colonial masters manipulated terms of trade between metropolitan areas and colonies, despite free trade. Now crocodile tears are being shed by creditor nations over the plight of the debt-ridden. Noble

cent of world economy. When it proclaims it has a mission from on very high, it means business.

But we need to translate it. After all, Bush has been at spreading freedom since 2001, beginning with Afghanistan. Having succeeded there, he turned to Iraq. By next week, he will have succeeded in showering the blessings of democracy on rather ungrateful Iraqis who continue blowing themselves up at an uncomfortable rate. As January 30 draws

interest is confined to ME. Neither God nor Mr. Bush can be so contained. As a global power, the US has interests all over Asia -- where most of the action is.

God and Bush are not limited to even the Asian landmass. Except for 'old Europe', US faces no cognisable challenge from any Continent. The 'old Europe', is not a military challenge. The latter is already diluting its opposition and is looking for ways and areas to cooperate with America. Eco-

Turkey -- frequently demand attention. While Israel, Turkey and Pakistan are perpetual friends of America, India is supposedly emerging as a rival of China. India too is a strategic partner of America like Pakistan, Turkey or Israel. The question is, how the US has to manage this motley crowd of friends.

The US economy also makes prior demands on its foreign policy. It does not need markets for consumer goods; it exports, mainly, capital and high technology, for both civilian and military use. It imports consumption goods mainly from Japan and China, running roughly over \$ 634 billion as trade deficit. US is world's largest debtor; its current account deficit is expected at \$ 603 billion or 6.3 per cent of GDP. The dollar, the reserve currency, has been losing its value. This can be catastrophic for both US and those who keep their monetary reserves in dollars. If too many people discard dollars too soon, the dollar will crash; world will be left holding worthless dollar bills. Meantime for stemming the tide out of dollar, Washington will have to go on raising interest rates. That can cause recession-cum-depression in the US -- and later worldwide.

The US needs devastated economies to rebuild -- like Afghanistan and Iraq. That can keep its cutting-edge technology in use; the US needs to modernise armies and air forces of many countries to keep up its war industries' profits. It wants to control oil business everywhere -- from extraction, transportation, refining to marketing. It needs markets for its surplus capital and high technology. Its foreign policy is required to provide these. Freedom everywhere thus has an imperial ring.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

PLAIN WORDS

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been greatly benefited -- if the country had undergone enlightenment, has widespread education and sciences are being applied to economic tasks -- or greatly impoverished. That happens within each society and among trading nations. Free enterprise produces some brilliant successes and many more failures. This is an iron law of capitalism within a nation as much as among nations.

Capitalism is resurgent after Communism collapsed. It will benefit a few new countries like China, India or a few S.E. Asian states but mainly OECD countries. A large number of underdeveloped economies will go belly up -- a result already witnessed in Sub-Saharan Africa. Many more are sure to join them. Americans regard this as natural. Former colonies of Europe have known what this paradigm implies; they

speeches are made. But the debt mountain goes on becoming higher and higher. The rich creditor nations are reducing the poor man's debt burden for decades; they have underlined the affirmative action's need. But the poor man's situation never improves. Nor can it. After all, in capitalism the purpose of economic effort is to enrich oneself. But that can only be at the expense of widespread poverty. Who can get rich if he does not exploit the ignorance and economic weakness of many? Globalisation can only produce more negative, and a few positive, results; no qualitative change is likely.

Let's turn to Bush's chief cliché 'freedom'. His mission is spreading 'freedom'. But there are sure to be slips between the cup and the lip. True, the US is militarily matchless. It is also a powerhouse of economic strength; it is 27 per

cent of world economy. When it proclaims it has a mission from on very high, it means business.

But we need to translate it. After all, Bush has been at spreading freedom since 2001, beginning with Afghanistan. Having succeeded there, he turned to Iraq. By next week, he will have succeeded in showering the blessings of democracy on rather ungrateful Iraqis who continue blowing themselves up at an uncomfortable rate. As January 30 draws

closer, suicide bombings are increasing. It is doubtful whether Bush has an exit strategy from Iraq or even wants one. As far as one can divine the future, he will need American soldiers in Iraq for the permanent military bases that America desires. Bush is not really anxious to get out of Iraq. He merely wants an ostensibly democratic Iraqi invitation to stay on permanently; Pax Americana requires some casualties every year. Moreover, he has still to bring in the benefits of freedom to Syria, Iran, North Korea and perhaps -- why not -- Egypt and Saudi Arabia though it is rather unlikely.

Bush's assertions about God's mandate for spreading freedom signifies that he stays the ME course. More regime changes are likely to be planned. That's all. No one should think that Bush's

nomically, the situation is different. Competition over trade matters can be expected from it.

Asia contains Russia with its bewildering uncertainties; it has the wherewithal of being a superpower. But its economy is still largely disorganised because it became a capitalist power from being communist one in a jiffy. It is a federation of 100 nationalities with no strong ideological glue. Will the Russian centre hold? Who knows? If only, it can get its economic act together, it can survive - otherwise it will qualify for American ministrations for 'freedom'.

Among possible Asian challenges there are Japan, South Korea, Australia, Formosa; but these are close allies. China is emerging as a giant economy, with considerable military might. A large number of secondary powers -- Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan, Israel,

OPINION

Make postal service efficient

MD MASUM BILLAH

BANGLADESH Postal Department has started experiencing shrunken income. The Director General of postal service released this fact recently. He also made the widespread use of e-mail responsible for it. But I think he has never seen the long queue of customers in local post offices let alone sub post offices and GPOs and how efficient his colleagues are! To make a money order of two hundred taka one customer is to wait minimum thirty minutes besides another twenty minutes or more time to obtain the form from one place and ticket from another place. After waiting in a long queue when his/her turn comes he/she must be tired to see the extreme disgusting face of the clerk doing the work. He never bothers about the customer service or postal income. He just does his duty for the sake of duty.

Let me cite several practical examples which I myself experienced in different post offices. Some of these experiences found

their place in several dailies in the letters columns which exerted no effort on the part of the authority on general people. One such incident I experienced at Gulshan 1 post office on October 15, 2004 in the month of Ramadan. Since then I have decided not to go to any post office. I must get my postal related works done through courier service. Though I can get my postal related works done by different channels without going to any post offices myself, I go to see for myself how it goes on. I try to observe closely what things are going on in different sectors of our poor nation and compare how things go on in other countries of the world. On October 15, 2004 I queued for more than half an hour in the said post office. When it was 12:50 I approached the counter and the clerk doing the job. He just looked at me and other customers numbering seven with very angry eyes but told nothing. When we requested to take our money order form he just told NO. We politely wanted to know the reason he just told "I am not ready to explain the reason." Then I put my money

order form before him and told to write his inability to take my money order form at 12:50. He more angrily told me "who are you, I am not bound to give any written comment to you". I just told politely, "I am a citizen of this country, I have every right to receive my due postal service from my country". All the other seven customers also politely requested and then exchanged words but to no avail. Really he is a government employee! Who will take action against him! However, I went to the in-charge of the post office and told him the matter. Oh, how beautiful his answer was, "It is one p.m. now, why he will take your money."

Now the reasonable questions arise. Why didn't the authority hang a signboard that after 1pm no money order would be taken. If it really happens then what the people would do upto 3 pm at the office which in the month of Ramadan remains open upto 3 pm? What would happen to the customers who are unable to complete their work within this period? Don't the postal authority

think about earning more giving more opportunity to the customers? Why aren't they giving training to the staff to make them more efficient? Why post office follow the same time table like other offices?

If the post office had been in the private sector what would have happened here? The person entrusted with the duty of taking money order could do ten times more work than the existing government clerk does there just at a snail's pace. His behaviour must have been very polite and gentle. He knew how to behave with gentlemen and with his customers to expand his business. He must have been trained that way. He would take the money order form till the end of the office, even after office hours, as he would be given incentive to make more money order. The more money order he can process, the more his organisation will be benefited. Whereas the government employee thinks if he does more work, what is his personal benefit? This is why he is doing the work very reluctantly.

Rather he was not trained in that way. He does not know how to behave with a gentleman. He is not encouraged to increase government income. He is not motivated how to attract people to the post office. But he perhaps knows if he violates any rules, nothing will happen to him. So the case is as usual.

After the incident I decided to let the matter be known to the higher authorities of postal department. Later on, I ceased to do so thinking they don't have any effective or fruitful mechanism to give punishment to the wrong doers and improve the service. Had it been the case, things must have got changed. Rather I can take the help of newspapers to give my message to the courier service to make it more available to the general public. As people now prefer to go to private bank instead of going to nationalised bank. Nationalised bank takes two hours to make a bank draft of taka fifty. The same work is performed in a private bank in minutes. Had the people not been

bound to go to the nationalised bank, nobody would go there. The same thing is happening to postal department also.

During my stay at Monipirpara near Farmgate I used to receive/enjoy the postal service of Khamarbari post office. Once I went to the said post office to send some parcel of degree examination scripts. As soon as I entered the post office, the on duty post master in his shrill voice said to me, "These things are not done here, go to another post office." I told that I did the same thing last year from that post office. He seemed not ready to listen to me. He just repeated "we don't do this thing here". Still I don't know what was the cause of not doing it. I printed a letter in the letter columns in different English dailies reflecting the matter just to draw the attention of the higher authorities of postal department. I don't know whether it caught the attention of any people of postal department.

I used to frequently visit Uttara sub-post office where I was

denied to have ten envelopes together several times. Causes are still unknown to me. At the money order counter there you will see everyday a long queue. I fail to understand why the postal authority has kept a lazy person there. People are to keep standing in front of the counter hour after hour and even some customers come out of the post office being disgusted and frustrated with the slow service. But nobody of postal department seems to be bothered about it.

Another day I went to Santinagar post office. I happened to see a queue in front of the money order counter. A richshawpuller occurred to be there to make a money order but he was behind in the line. He was requesting the other customers to give him the turn as he kept his rickshaw outside. However, the kind people in line made room for him but the government employee of the desk was tenacious. He was to find out fault with the rickshawpuller. However, he found a fault with the money

order form and gave it back to the rickshawpuller. He made it correct and waited for several minutes. Again he requested the new people in line to give him turn. Again the kind people did it. But the efficient postman counted the money several times and returned it to the customer saying it was difficult for him to count the money as it was in small bills (ten taka or twenty taka notes). Was it a fault? This is the service our postal men render to the countrymen. So how do they expect to have enhanced revenue?

More and more examples can be given. But that is not necessary. What is necessary is to make the postal service easily and quickly available to the customers. Stop time consuming service. Give training to the employees and staff to make them more efficient, service oriented, and public welfare oriented. Give them incentives and motivation to be realistic in the greater interest of the nation.

MD. Masum Billah is an NGO activist.