

Bush's South Asia trip

Outcome could be far-reaching

CONSISTENT with the US establishment's thinking that India is an emerging global power, the Bush administration has viewed its relationship with India through a strategic prism. This US policy direction has found a concrete expression through the outcome of the just-concluded Bush visit to New Delhi. The free market dimension to the fast growing Indian economy, second to China's, its vibrant outsourcing potential, an established democracy that India is, and her geo-strategic importance in Asia have obviously been the pull factors for the US tying up with India at different levels.

The most significant stage reached in the evolution of Indo-US relationship is represented by the strategic partnership in nuclear cooperation lately forged between the two countries. India is a non-signatory to the NPT, but has agreed to IAEA inspection of some nuclear installations while keeping the rest out of its purview. India would receive cooperation from the USA, in terms of the treaty to generate nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. The idea seems to be that her critical dependence on conventional energy sources will be reduced, so that her quest for pipeline supplies could be largely obviated.

The question that inevitably crops up is whether the rules and terms of US South Asian engagement are changing, or the pattern of emphases is? Perhaps, both. It seems that the US has been treating her relationship with India and that with Pakistan on two different levels. Pakistan's longing for similar nuclear cooperation with the US has not met with success. The only concession given to Islamabad appears to be the withdrawal of US complaint against a gas pipeline from Iran going through Pakistan to India. Besides, Bush has given to understand that Washington is not standing in the way of Beijing-Islamabad nuclear talks.

While Pakistan has received a pat on the back for her supportive role in the coalition against terrorism, the praise sounded somewhat qualified when Bush says much remains to be done to eliminate the al-Qaeda.

The chief concern for the smaller South Asian states is whether there would be a tendency towards an intensified arms race between India and Pakistan. If that is how it is going to work out for the smaller states in SAARC, then who is a gainer, or a loser, only the future turn of events can tell.

Arms haul again

A deeper security concern

A joint team of Army and BDR seized a huge cache of, mostly sophisticated, fire arms at the hilly Naikkhongchhari upazila near the Myanmar border. This is apparently the biggest haul from the same locality in three years. Incidentally, a large cache of arms, explosives and military equipment was discovered during the last week of February from the same upazila.

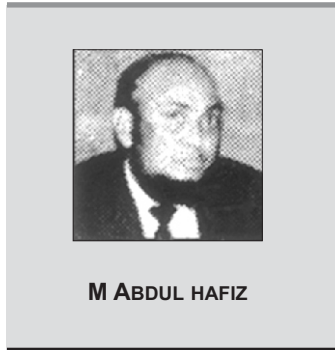
The efforts of our intelligence and security forces are indeed laudable. However, concern remains due to the appearance of such large quantities of sophisticated weapons in the same locality time and again. This is an insurgency-prone locality and hence every effort should be made to haul up the kingpins and the masterminds behind the procurement and trafficking drives. Are they treating the area as a safer location for hiding weapons? Sustained vigilance seems to be the answer.

Furthermore, the smugglers of such weapons must have preferred routes for trafficking these firearms into the country. Given the experience gathered by our intelligence and security forces over the last few years it should not be too difficult for them to seal the routes.

The continued presence of such firearms bodes extremely ill for the volatile hilly region of the country. Moreover, these also have the potential of falling into the hands of organisations and networks with extremist agenda bearing a further possibility of causing an yet greater massacre in the country.

It is, therefore, imperative that those who are involved in smuggling and use of arms be nabbed along with the weapons; for, a mere discovery of the caches without catching the operators is no effective antidote to the trafficking.

The myth of *unnnayan*



PERHAPS no one believes what the government leaders and their functionaries say in this country. Because they seem to be living in a world of many delusions even as they almost surreally insist that the people trust them unequivocally. They have locked themselves up into a world of make believe where fantasies freely unfold. As a result, even if they demand that the country is afloat on a surge of *unnnayan* (development), we see around us a travesty of truth in which the institutions and infrastructures are indeed disintegrating. Even as the *unnnayan* is trumpeted by our leaders -- right at the same

PERSPECTIVES

The crisis of credibility of our leadership deepens as they sink deeper and deeper in their myopia, illusion and obsession grown out of mediocrity. By now, by all appearances, the 'unnnayan' is already a devalued currency in the backdrop of a country gripped by multi faceted problems. Unless these problems are addressed and eradicated the crisis of credibility is bound to persist even if myths after myths are built up by them.

moment we see the visible signs of such phenomenon in ruins.

It would be a matter of great satisfaction to be able to believe our leaders claiming a surge of development in the country. But the ground realities straight away belie those claims. What we see around us are the ugly signs of decay and decrepitude, not the glimmer of a society in the throes of development. Our century old railway, the country's biggest real estate owner, was stopped because of its bankruptcy. Our ailing airlines went aground rather unceremoniously and even now it is on the verge of collapse. Our power generation plummets to all time low throwing entire agriculture sector in doldrum. There is countrywide outcry for water, elec-

tricity and fertiliser. Is it what our leaders want us to believe as a country afloat on developmental surge?

Our leaders have done little to move beyond the fantasies and address the prevailing realities. Instead they continue to indulge in weaving out the fantasia and parroting ad infinitum the myth of *unnnayan*. Our power wielders have, if at all, a very myopic view of development thinking, perhaps, an odd culvert repairing or making a stretch of road to be a great feat of development in this country. They do constitute developmental work of sorts but development itself in its wider context has a civilisational connotation subsuming in it not only the developments of the means of

material wellbeing but also the developments of human qualities and values.

What kind of polity or society are we indeed living in? Isn't it one that is corrupt to its hilt and rotten to its core? Such an entity seldom develops for corruption and development do not go together. Here is, however, a pretension for its development -- thanks to the efforts under the auspices of international monetary agencies, the world body itself and, of late the NGOs. But here too the graft culture persists resulting in, at the best, a trickle down effect meant, in general, for the world's poor. Our leaders are fond of making a ballyhoo only around this phenomenon.

Our delinquent leaders must

search their soul to find out if only the very basic needs of the hapless public have really been attended -- let alone the question of making available to it the true benefits of a developed society; uninterrupted utility services, fresh drinking water and essential healthcare.

In this country of abysmal poverty, inequality and moral degradation the myth of *unnnayan* has since been exploded, notwithstanding a Goeblian tirade over it. Things seem to be withering away with no central power to hold them together -- a familiar characteristic of a self-serving consumption-oriented society. Things are falling apart, there are visible signs of economy collapsing, politics heading for a head-on clash, militancy and vio-

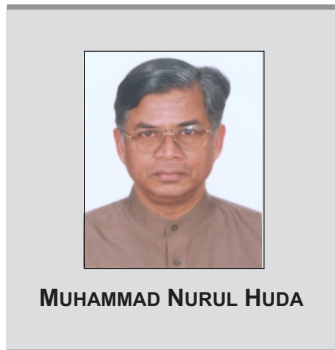
The Daily Star

lence devouring the society. Yet here is no sign of going back from the precipice of impending danger.

The crisis of credibility of our leadership deepens as they sink deeper and deeper in their myopia, illusion and obsession grown out of mediocrity. This is not surprising in a country having more number of jewellery emporiums than book stalls. By now, by all appearances, the *unnnayan* is already a devalued currency in the backdrop of a country gripped by multifaceted problems. The government must either turn these problems into possibilities or find another buzzword still enjoying currency. But then a new buzzword also is likely to be a devalued currency unless the burning issues of the country are addressed in their proper perspective. The issues topping the list are terrorism, militancy, corruption and consumerism of a few in one of the world's poorest countries. Unless these problems are addressed and eradicated the crisis of credibility is bound to persist even if myths after myths are built up by them.

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The terror supremo's meekly surrender and thereafter



TO the relief of anguished Bangladeshis, the alleged terror mastermind Shaikh Abdur Rahman has at last surrendered to the law-enforcing agencies in an unexpectedly submissive manner. Some reports have compared his physical appearance at the time of surrender to that of a cornered mouse. While the cynics, skeptics and political opponents of the establishment may read many things into the surrender episode and its timing, the striking behaviour and life style of the terrorist at the apex and those of the young desperadoes on the front lines that have reportedly sacrificed their precious lives in suicidal attack to enjoy heavenly bliss in the hereafter, cannot escape the attention of the discerning observer of our socio-political scenario.

Propaganda and deception

Readers may perhaps recollect that on at least two earlier occasions, the law enforcing agencies narrowly failed to apprehend the fugitive who stayed at the hideouts with a large number of relations including wife, sons, daughters and grandchildren. The mode of living and life style of the mastermind of the so-called religious terrorism do not fit in with the Spartan and secretive living pattern and habits of underground guerilla leaders/operational commanders/ideologues with which many of us are familiar. At least Shaikh Abdur Rahman did not appear to be very careful in hiding his whereabouts and certainly there was no element of cloak and dagger in his dealings.

In fact one would not be far from truth to say that the now netted terrorist leader was nearly casual in matters of choosing the hideouts and going about the business of daily life. It would also appear that he was fond of living with near and dear ones and perhaps could not

STRAIGHT LINE

Now that we know who is the self-declared adversary, there must not be any hesitation in the battle against the frontal attack on our constitution. There must not be any ambivalence in relentlessly pursuing the bigoted mischief-makers. Religious institutions or places of prayer should not be allowed to be used as sanctuaries. In order to do that quite a number of such entities should be subjected to well-planned surveillance.

The myopia

We may have to ask ourselves if a perception has developed among the terrorist group that the Bangladeshi State is inherently incapable of meeting their challenge and that it has become soft and indolent. We may have to ascertain if quite a few parties have developed a vested interest in a soft state, a weak government and ineffective implementation of the laws. Simultaneously, are foreign funds flowing substantially to various organisations and groups which serve, willingly or unwillingly, the long term objective of some political parties suspected to be aligned or sympathetic to the regional or international terror network?

Since terrorism of the so-called Islamic extremists has increased in its very nature thereby demanding changes in the strategy to counter it, are we ready to seriously study the problem, one may ponder. This is natural because we do not witness credible attempts being made to examine links between terrorist groups, the conditions in which they had spawned, the politician-militant nexus and other forms of patronage these groups receive, the proliferation of small arms leading to the growth of private armies, etc. The question is, are we trying to appreciate all the factors that contribute to the 'quality and extent' of internal security threats? Another specific question could be whether our failure to deal with the terrorist crimes is largely attributable to the inefficiency and corruption of the law enforcing machinery.

We have to know if the establishment has shown a great degree of indulgence to terrorist groups and if any covert sympathy has allowed the terrorists to cloak their methods in a garb of 'Jehad'.

The strategy

Our constitutional objectives vis-a-vis the programme of the extremists leave no room for any ambiguity. While at the macro-level it may be a matter of political direction to sort

out disagreements through dialogue and persuasion, the field-level operatives, both in uniform and plain clothes must have clear directives and plan of action for preventing violent subversive actions. This is all the more significant now because the new enemy has an emotional and religiously sensitive alignment with the common folks of the county. One must not be oblivious of the fact that the enemy combatants are entrenched in places and institutions that are traditionally respected and revered in our society.

As part of strategy, the enforcement apparatus should succeed in separating an act of violence from its so-called politico-social context and thus criminalise a certain mode of political expression. In Bangladesh's context this line of action is very appropriate because there is a greater need to reject the religious extremist's right to legitimise violence as part of a larger social movement.

The so-called Jihadists must not be bracketed with political dissenters, although such differentiation becomes difficult from an enforcement point of view. Laws to be made for dealing with religious extremists should be such as to distinguish them from constitutionally oriented political elements.

The above has been emphasised upon because the mission and strategy of our crime-fighting and intelligence organisations had not been stable at least in so far as the domestic threat scenario is concerned. Those have invariably substantially changed with the change of a political government. It has been our unfortunate experience to witness the differing political agenda often clouding the pragmatic understanding of our real national interests.

The patrons and harbourers and the proscription

In order to apprehend and to effectively punish the extremists, the definition of extremism or terrorism should be expanded to an act of association with an extremist group. The objective should be to include patrons and harbourers of the extremists and fringe supporters within the ambit of law. The regulatory authorities should be quickly able to draw up a list of 'proscribed organisations' to which membership, funding or open support within the territory of Bangladesh shall be banned. This list should be periodically reviewed with an intention of making the fight against extremism in line with threats to internal security.

The concept of the above noted proscription should be such as to make it applicable across the broadest spectrum. It should be precise and unambiguous. In addition, there must be clear measurement and list of acts that would constitute support to a 'banned organisation'. The effort should be to broaden the applicability but narrow down the definition of extremism or terrorism itself.

The process of identifying an extremist should be discreet and transparent and enforcement efforts should be geared towards that. However, the extremists who use violence and the threat of violence as an instrument to propagate their view and ideology cannot be treated as political dissidents even though the roots are socio-political and governed by distinct and conflicting ideologies.

The government should attach greater importance to proscription and should be empowered to designate the extremist organisation. The objective should be to sap the extremist organisation of its material base, stopping routes of material replenishment and seizing its existing assets. In other words, the proscription could be a central feature in our attempt at fighting religious militancy.

The imperatives

Now that we know who is the self-declared adversary, there must not be any hesitation in the battle against the frontal attack on our constitution. There must not be any ambivalence in relentlessly pursuing the bigoted mischief-makers. Religious institutions or places of prayer should not be allowed to be used as sanctuaries. In order to do that quite a number of such entities should be subjected to well-planned surveillance.

Voluntary or charitable work or even religious teachings which are suspected to be used as cover by some organisations should be shadowed so that bonafide welfare work can be separated from malafide subversive ventures.

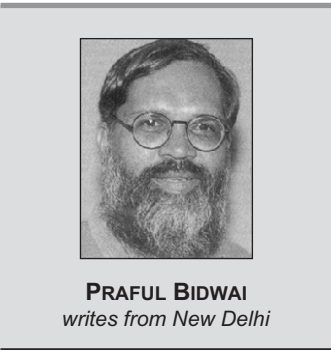
Foreign donations whether by individuals or organisations must pass through government scrutiny. This must be made mandatory. Along with this there must be a complete account of all educational institutions and the areas covered in the instruction should be known to competent authority.

Democracy has to allow the interaction of different shades of opinion of divergent views to ensure the vibrancy of a pluralist society. However, that does not mean that there will be freedom to convert the entire country into a theocratic dispensation by application of force and intimidation and the litigant public has to approach the clerics for resolution of disputes and judgment, as demanded. There is a challenge to our way of life. This must be realised by the mainstream political parties who are pledge-bound to uphold, protect and preserve our constitution. Therefore, the visible enemy must be caught by the forelock in large numbers and be dealt with under the law. A sovereign Republic born out of a historic struggle entailing epic human sacrifices demand that. We must not fail.

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A global bully as a friend?

India-US ties after Bush's visit



an even higher 55 percent still believe that "India can trust the US" when she's in need!

Seventy two percent think the US is "a bully." Fifty nine percent even think India has "compromised on its foreign policy" by getting too close to it. And yet, 46 percent "love the US." (Only 14 percent "hate" it.)

A June 2005 survey by the Pew Research Centre in the US says 71 percent of urban Indians have a favourable opinion of the US -- the highest such proportion among 16 countries surveyed. Only 41 to 45 percent in most Western European countries have such an opinion. Only 42 percent of people in China and a miserable 23 percent in Pakistan do.

Other surveys show that poor people, who constitute a majority of India's population, are far more critical of Washington, but that

We must pause and ask if the cost involved -- complete betrayal of the Gandhi-Nehru legacy of peace, and abandonment of the promise to return to the global nuclear disarmament agenda and fight for a multipolar world order -- is worth the price. The question might be irrelevant for the worshippers of nuclear weapons and defenders of the "right" to visit mass-destruction upon unarmed civilians. But for us citizens, it matters.

India's upper crust is much more pro-US than the middle class. This elite is now severely re-aligning India's foreign policy in Washington's favour with evangelical zeal.

Indian policy-makers seem to suffer from amnesia about the character of the US as a power in search of a global Empire, and Washington's role in spreading insecurity everywhere, including the volatile West Asia-North Africa region.

This assessment isn't based on knee-jerk anti-Americanism or nostalgia for non-alignment. It derives from an analysis of the driving forces behind US policies and actions.

The US is engaged in an aggressive project to reshape the world. The project's contours are revealed in documents like the "National Security Strategy" and

the "Nuclear Posture Review" of 2002, 44 National Security Presidential Directives signed by Mr Bush, the "Doctrine for Joint Nuclear Operations," and reports of the National Intelligence Council, including "Mapping the Global Future" (December 2004).

The US wants to establish "full-spectrum" global dominance and prevent the emergence of a potential rival anywhere, including most importantly, Eurasia. It wants unfettered neo-liberal globalisation. To achieve this, the US must control resources like oil and gas and reject any limits on consumption.

Washington will beat back any challenge to its hegemony by waging preventive or pre-emptive wars.

The most articulate formulation of these ambitions is in the Neo-conservative "Project for a New

American Century" (website: www.newamericancentury.org). The Project seeks to indefinitely prolong the "unipolar moment" which arose with the Cold War's end. The primary means to achieve this are military -- in keeping with Washington's armed clout.

US defence spending, now \$450 billion-plus, exceeds the military expenditure of the next 14 nations put together.

Under Mr Bush, the neo-cons have become the most powerful group in command of US policy. Their influence is visible everywhere: in the terrible mess in Iraq, the rush to further develop mass-destruction weapons, the atrocities in Abu Ghraib, and in refusal to ratify the Kyoto Protocol and the International Criminal Court. It's impossible to understand these actions without reference to

Washington's strategic goals.

To achieve these goals, the US needs a system of alliances which co-opt numerous states and counter possible challenges.

That's where formerly non-aligned India comes in. The US has recruited India into a "strategic partnership" -- among other things, to counter China. India's location and her emergence as an economic power make it special. That's why the US offered last year to "help India become a great power in the 21st century."

India has dutifully reciprocated US overtures. Indian actions include support for Mr Bush's Ballistic Missile Defence ("Star Wars") plans in advance of his closest strategic allies; silence over the abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty; offer of military bases for the war in Afghanistan after 9/11 (something India never offered to the USSR).

India endorsed the US position on climate change, including its latest "Asia-Pacific Partnership. And of course, it voted twice votes against Iran at the IAEA.

To these must be added the 30 India-US military exercises; high-

level military conferences; and \$990 million worth of American arms imports since 2002.

India maintained a deafening silence on the 2002-03 US campaign for war against Iraq --right until the day before the invasion, when the Opposition forced a Parliament resolution. India came close to sending a division for Iraq's post-war "stabilisation."

Bush's visit consolidates this partnership. Its overall thrust is strategic and comprehensive, covering economics, agriculture, space, scientific research, energy, the Container Security Initiative (intrusive checks on shipments for supposedly "anti-terrorist" purposes), and medical trials (using Indians as guinea-pigs).

Some agreements will undermine multilateral arrangements like the Climate Change Convention. They're not in India's "enlightened national interest." In a greatly asymmetrical relationship, the stronger partner always calls the shots, the weaker partner follows.

All that India will gain if the now-somewhat-fleshed-out nuclear deal goes through and is

ratified by the US Congress -- a far-from-certain prospect -- is legitimisation of its mass-destruction weapons and second- or third-rate status as a US ally.

We must pause and ask if the cost involved -- complete betrayal of the Gandhi-Nehru legacy of peace, and abandonment of the promise to return to the global nuclear disarmament agenda and fight for a multipolar world order -- is worth the price.

The question might be irrelevant for the worshippers of nuclear weapons and defenders of the "right" to visit mass-destruction upon unarmed civilians. But for us citizens, it matters. A worthy foreign policy cannot be divorced from moral clarity and universal humane values.

The India-US partnership runs against such values. Soon, we'll find that we cut off our nose to spite our face.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.