

## Successfully through the fire ball

### Still a long way to go

**T**HE blitzkrieg raid in Comilla is a sort of baptism in fire that the Rab went through launching itself into what appears to be the most daunting phase of the anti-terrorism offensive.

Rab should have the kudos for the tenacity, bravado and thoroughness with which Shaikh Rahman's son Nabil was captured, explosives expert Shakil alias Mollah Omar (so named in aberrant hero worship of Bin Laden's second-in-command!) got smoked out, and bomb-making equipment and materials were seized from three JMB dens. Much as we are opposed to the crossfire killing phenomenon that has tainted the human rights reputation of the country, we find the effectiveness of Rab's Comilla operation highly laudable, particularly in the loaded sequel to the arrest of kingpins Sheik Abdur Rahman and Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai.

The stiff resistance put up by the terrorists coupled with their suicide bomber-like throwaway attitude to life that had Shakil, his wife Shahida and their two children commit hara-kiri was a statement of morbid but predictable reaction of fugitives pushed to the wall and preferring self-killing to surrender or capture. Rab would be facing more of the same violent brutal incident as they work their way into the terrorist strongholds, hideouts and clandestine retreats. The kingpins were under limelight and considerable public focus implying thereby a limit to how long they could have kept hiding without being noticed, especially given our demographic density. But the lesser figures, the hardened second or third rung cadres could possibly try to melt with the population for a lucky span unspotted. But when cornered, they would turn extremely violent in their 'kill-or-be-killed' mental frame as happened on Monday.

As the law enforcement agencies unearth more and more militant hideouts, we come to realise how deep their tentacles have reached. While the media has been persistent in baring the truth, our security forces are now discovering the vicious stranglehold of ideological militancy and the true magnitude of the horrific and threatening phenomenon is emerging, the government has the stupendous responsibility of ensuring neutral and politics-free investigation so that we could get to the bottom of the terrorist phenomenon.

### Proposed anti-terror act

#### Approval process should also involve the people

**T**HIS has all the sights and sounds of something likely to touch the lives of people being seriously ventured without taking the constituency into confidence. The proposed draft of an anti-terror law when presented at the cabinet met with opposition from some ministers who didn't approve of some of its provisions. It was, therefore, decided to place the draft before a cabinet committee for further scrutiny and necessary recommendations within a month.

A law like this has far-reaching implications, both for the government and the public at large. Nearly three decades ago the Special Powers Act was introduced and we all are aware of its consequences. Then followed the infamous Public Safety Act which thankfully was not renewed after the expiry of its original two-year validity, but it had a controversial run anyway. And now an anti terror law is in prospect, whose justifiability has not been fully gone into, far less its contents debated in the public domain.

It is, therefore, imperative that prior to the approval of the draft law it be made available for public discourse in various fora. Apart from a parliamentary committee going into it, there was a need for circulating the draft bill for eliciting public opinion. After all, it is directly linked to public interest and concern, to say nothing of its possible bearing on the judicial system.

One aspect of the scrutiny should be to find out any ambiguous provision having a potential of being used or abused to meet partisan political interest. There are yet two other aspects we would urge the government to most carefully note while finalising the proposed act: any provision that may lead to violation of basic human rights or define what constitutes sedition.

We must simply do a comprehensive and well-thought-out job and formulate a terror act that is fully designed to ensure security and safety of the people.

### AR SHAMSUL ISLAM

**A**WAY in Boston, USA, on a visit, Begum Asma Kibria, widow of slain Shah AMS Kibria, resented that while the infamous militant Bangla Bhai was provided with a helicopter from Mymensingh to Dhaka for rendering him medical aid, her husband, a sitting MP and former Finance Minister, was denied an airlift from Sylhet to Dhaka following grenade attacks on him in an open gathering at Baiderbazar in Habiganj.

Her son Dr Reza Kibria repeated this resentment in Dhaka while routinely performing the peaceful protest demonstration by forming human chains under the programme 'Blue for Peace' demanding trial and punishment of the masterminds of his father's killing.

The mystery surrounding the issue of denial of a helicopter to airlift Kibria that many of us practically let go into oblivion has now come to the surface by the above grievances of the victim's and son alike.

As we freshen up our memory we could well remember that how very terribly the entire nation got bruised at the killing of Shah AMS Kibria with four others by the grenade attack at Baiderbazar in Habiganj on 27 January 2005 in an well publicised

## What issues should Bangladesh raise with India?



HARUN UR RASHID



## BOTTOM LINE

The visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister must be purposeful and result-oriented. The opportunity must not be missed. The agenda may be kept short but may contain priority items of cooperation. It is of no use to discuss all range of issues that have no focus and the joint communiqué after the visit must not contain "motherhood" or rhetorical statements as were found in the contents in many of the 53 paragraphs of the Dhaka Saarc Declaration.

processes are being undertaken quietly and without any hindrance or impediments. These are success stories in bilateral relations.

**B**ANGLADESH Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia is scheduled to visit New Delhi for three days from March 20. The 3-day visit is significant for both countries at a time when the relations may be not at their best. At this point of time, Bangladesh is perceived by India as uncooperative and insular, while India is perceived in Bangladesh as uninterested and insensitive.

There is a saying that one may choose one's friends but not neighbours. India surrounds Bangladesh on three sides with the opening to the Bay of Bengal on the fourth side, where the Indian Navy has a dominating presence. The geo-political-economic compulsions within and outside the region necessitate cooperative and mutually supporting relationship between the two neighbours.

Bangladesh's relations with India have gone through an up and down curve during the 34 years. This uneven relationship appears to be due to misperception of one country against the other at different times.

One fact is that the ties of history are so enduring and pervasive that relationship between the two exists independently of governments and their policies. Bangladesh's relations with India do not rest on normal tests in measuring the content and depth of relations. For example, half a million of Bangladeshi reportedly visit India per year. Similarly, the Bangladeshi missions in India are overwhelmed in issuing visas to Indian nationals for their trips to Bangladesh. These

floods or droughts are controlled and well-managed. The Joint Rivers Commission should be given the responsibility of management of water resources of common rivers.

#### Land borders

The 1974 Indira-Mujib Land Boundary Delimitation Agreement is yet to be implemented. Not only 6.5 kms of unmarked land border need to be demarcated, but also the exchange of enclaves under the terms of the agreement is required. There are 11 Indian enclaves with a population of 200,000 in the territory of Bangladesh while there are 51 Bangladeshi enclaves with more than 100,000 people in India's territory. Under the 1974 agreement all enclaves are to be exchanged and merged with Bangladesh or India as the case may be.

It is noted that Dashiar Chara is one of the biggest Indian enclaves with an area of 12 square kms and 1,750 acres of cultivable land within Bangladesh (Kurigram district). Its present population within the Indian enclave is estimated to be more than 7,000. The sufferings of the people know no bounds as they have no medical facilities, schools, sanitation, safe water, legal access and relief facilities. It is reported in 2003 in a newspaper that one of the inhabitants of the enclaves said: "We want to be Bangladeshi as early as possible. We cannot express in words about the sufferings we tolerate from the Indian Border Security Forces." The

issue of common rivers is not enough, joint management of water resources of common rivers is imperative so that

#### Common rivers

Article 9 of the 1996 Ganges Water Treaty makes it clear that both countries "guided by the principles of equity, fairness and no harm to either party ... agree to conclude water sharing Treaties/Agreements with regard to other common rivers."

Furthermore mere sharing of waters of common rivers is not enough, joint

management of water resources of common rivers is imperative so that

#### Immigration

Labour movement between the two countries cannot be avoided. The migration takes place because of demands in private sectors. Often it is said that the migration of some Bangladeshi labour is due to a combination of active cooperation and support of employers in India and the connivance of government agencies responsible for controlling the illegal migrant labour. As empirical evidence elsewhere suggests that this problem does not lend itself to an easy solution. Bangladeshi and India have to resolve the problem through pragmatic workable methods.

#### Regional energy grid

Both Bangladesh and India are hungry for energy. A common energy policy needs to be undertaken. Bangladesh and India may take initiative with Nepal and Bhutan to obtain regional energy program. Nepal is rich in hydro-power and so also is Bhutan. A regional power grid may be in place as Nepal and Bhutan are believed to have untapped hydro-potential estimated to be between 96,000 to 120,000MW.

It is noted that at the Dhaka Saarc Summit in November, the heads of states/governments underlined the need in promoting development of regional powergrid. They also agreed to establish a Saarc Energy Centre in Islamabad and provide inputs to the Working Group on Energy (paragraph 20 of the Summit Declaration).

#### Joint fertilizer plant

Bangladesh is in dire need of fertilizer. During 1974 the feasibility study of the joint venture of a fertilizer plant was undertaken. The government of

Bangladesh was to hold 100 per cent of the equity with a credit from India. This project may be revived given the change of the situation with regard to scarcity of fertilizer in Bangladesh. If there are surplus fertilizer Bangladesh may export to India and China as they need fertilizers for their farmers.

#### Conclusion

The visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister must be purposeful and result-oriented. The opportunity may be kept short but may contain priority items of cooperation. It is of no use to discuss all range of issues that have no focus and the joint communiqué after the visit must not contain "motherhood" or rhetorical statements as were found in the contents in many of the 53 paragraphs of the Dhaka Saarc Declaration.

#### Joint sponge iron or cement project

Bangladesh and India may initiate either a joint sponge or cement plant in Bangladesh. India has the raw materials and Bangladesh has the natural gas. The proposed project will benefit India and Bangladesh. A joint working group may be set up for feasibility study.

#### Cooperation in jute industry

Another area of cooperation appears to be in jute and jute products. The idea is to make joint efforts to diversify the use of jute products and expand the market for jute manufacturers in the face of competition from synthetic substitutes. A reduction in the cost of manufactures is linked to an assured and stable supply of jute at a reasonable price. Further India and Bangladesh may explore the possibilities of establishing jute industries abroad in the large consuming countries, based on raw jute from Bangladesh and jute manufacturing machinery from India.

The Jute International is intended to promote overall world market demand for jute and jute goods and to undertake efforts in technological research and sales promotion.

#### Trade deficit

The trade deficit for Bangladesh is nearly \$2 billion with India. Bangladesh has also a trade deficit with China and Japan. However the deficit with India has become a political issue for many reasons. India exports Bangladesh many range of products – more than 60 per cent are in the area of manufacturing and infrastructure goods, and 20 per cent food and others. The requirement of 40 per cent value addition in export items of Bangladesh to India free of

duty is difficult to meet for Bangladeshi traders. India needs to consider seriously 20 or 30 items duty free to India. It seems that the Joint Working Group on Trade set up in 2003 is yet to come up with a realistic program for Bangladesh.

#### Barrister Harun Ur Rashid

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## Bush's visit to Pakistan: Disappointments galore



DILARA CHOWDHURY



## PANORAMA

Despite Musharraf's recommitment in US's War on Terror and recent drive by his government against the militants in the Frontier areas of Pakistan that has reportedly killed many militants, he will find it increasingly difficult to do away with them without people's support.

watershed event of 9/11, an evidenced by US recognition of Pakistan as a non-NATO ally (which is a reminiscent of its special relationship with Washington as its 'most trusted ally in Asia' during the cold war). It takes pride that it was prompt in coming forward in joining US War on Terror and now its critical partner and feels without its active and total support Operation Enduring Freedom would have faced enormous difficulties (not that Pakistan had much options but to join the US after Bush's infamous 'either you are with us or against us' doctrine propagated in the UN). Nonetheless, truth is, the Pakistani establishment, whether military or the civilian, has always remained a staunch ally of the United States over the past fifty years or so.

First, Islamabad visualised that unlike President Clinton in 2000, who for the first time, in more than fifty years, 'tilted' US South Asian policy towards India and perceived delinking US-India and US-Pakistan relations from those of India and Pakistan, and whose policy towards Pakistan was only to remain engaged with the country. Bush was visiting the country in a changed international environment. It feels it has now enormous strategic value to US following the

agenda in his mind i.e. to assess and evaluate Islamabad's

endeavour to control or put a

damper on Islamic groups, especially the al-Qaeda and Taliban

militants who have organised and regrouped and are allegedly operating from their bases in Pakistan

in Afghanistan. This is due to the

fact although US Administration

has been praising Pakistan for its

help in the US-led War on Terror

there are reports by counter-

terrorism experts that Musharraf

has not done enough to clamp

down on militant organizations

and allege that his government

may have been soft on the Taliban as a

strategic option in case

Afghanistan dissolves into chaos

once US-led coalition forces leave

the country. And now, increasingly

it is being suspected that the

suicide bombers are being trained in

the militants' training camps in

Pakistan and being sent to

Afghanistan for attacks.

According to Afghan President

Hamid Karzai, in last year alone,

about 30 attacks were launched,

which killed at least 100 people.

About two dozens suicide attacks,

during the last two months, have

further reinforced the suspicion that

al-Qaeda and Taliban militants may

be using Pakistan as a base for

launching terror attacks in

Qaeda operatives into US custody, employed 70,000 Pakistani troops along the tribal belt in Afghanistan-Pakistan border and launched numerous attacks against the militants that has cost Pakistan nearly 230 officers and men.

Third, it takes credit that, in order to strike at the roots of extremism, the government has undertaken Madrasa Reforms Programme (MRP) to modernize the religious seminaries, which by itself is not an easy task. Moreover, Musharraf feels that he has kept his words with his US friends by introducing democratic order in the country in phases by holding national and local level elections. All these along with Islamabad's cooperation in resolving Kashmir issue and preventing proliferation of nuclear weapons and technology, according to Pakistan, were much to suffice US admiration and expectations have been that President Bush would visit Pakistan with multifarious agenda commiserating with those of Islamabad, especially it counted on US support in its endeavour to reach an honourable agreement with India and US tacit acceptance of its nuclear capability.

Second, there is an understanding in Islamabad that Musharraf government is doing its best in tackling the terrorists – first, with regard to cross-border terrorism in Kashmir by declaring in 2002 that it would not export jihad in the name of al-Qaeda and Taliban

and second, in dealing with al-Qaeda and Taliban militants who have taken shelter along Afghanistan-Pakistan border. It has already handed over as many as 700 al-

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