

Pull-back from Kansat

Use of force never helps

KANSAT is quiet at last and one hopes that the turn of events is for the better. If peace prevails now in the area it is only because sanity has dawned on the government at last that not force but a civilised and rational approach is the only way to solve a collective public grievance. However, one is compelled to ask why it took 20 precious lives and a lengthy police siege of a locality that not only caused untold sufferings to its inhabitants but disrupted normal lives for many more and temporarily hampered border trade, for the government to react in the only way appropriate.

Kansat epitomises dismal failure of governance where the government action has been more reactive than proactive and where it repeated the cardinal mistake of believing in the efficacy of the 'stick' in solving a problem that needed a very patient and thoughtful consideration rather than harsh measures that were adopted. This is a matter of dismay because, such a policy of pitting the law enforcing agencies against the people whose demands were both genuine and legitimate, reveals a typical mindset of the government that force can subdue people. This is counterproductive, as events have eventually proved.

What was equally disconcerting was the apparent lack of concern for the sad turn of events and the absence of initiatives on the part of the local administration to devise ways to quell the situation. That was glaringly demonstrated by the statement of a high government functionary of Rajshahi Division expressing his ignorance of the police action and the deaths by police firing.

This leaves us with two pertinent questions that the government must answer. First, who will account for the innocent lives lost? Second, who was responsible for initiating police action? A thorough probe must be instituted to identify those who adopted the strategy of use of force that turned into a full-fledged action against the locals of Kansat, leaving no room at all for negotiation. One hopes that the right lessons will be learnt from the Kansat tragedy.

We demand that genuine grievances of the locals be addressed quickly, an inquiry be made into the series of incidents, culprits punished and, above all, families of those killed in police firing be compensated adequately.

Polio campaign

Couldn't have come a day later

A nationwide special polio immunisation programme began yesterday covering two crore children all over the country. This is the second campaign after Bangladesh was declared polio-free after a similar drive with the last case having been detected in August 2000. The global specialised polio laboratory in Mumbai confirmed detection of the disease in a nine-year old Bangladeshi girl. Apparently, the particular strain was initially found in the girl in January 2005 and was referred to the specialised laboratory. The virus found is said to be close to a strain of the particular virus prevalent in Uttar Pradesh in India.

Much as we are concerned at the reappearance of the disease -- not so uncommon given that 22 countries once declared polio-free have had to face its recurrence -- the administration's timely move to combat the malady is commendable. Bangladesh is a model in the region insofar as child health care is concerned -- thanks to its many successfully implemented immunisation programmes.

It is our strong belief that collaborative efforts between the two neighbouring countries with WHO assistance to go with it, can be nothing but mutually beneficial to both.

While we are on the subject of immunisation, we also recommend a review of the status of all preventable communicable diseases with a view to effectively preempting reemergence of any deadly virus we have gotten rid of. In recent times we have heard of recurrence of Malaria. Some of these diseases may not be life-threatening as such but they can certainly impair normal living of an individual including shortening his or her life span.

We urge the government to seriously consider setting up of specialised laboratories not for detection of polio alone, but also some other diseases having similar consequences. Simultaneously, a proactive campaign involving the masses with special emphasis on the rural populace must be organised to combat life threatening diseases.

The aftermath of Bush's South Asian jaunt



M ABDUL HAFIZ

PAKISTAN'S addiction to an American connection is almost proverbial. Not only has she been fond of the bonanza it accompanies, the Pakistanis' narcotic dependence on the US' goodwill and largesse for their security and wellbeing has also been well-known. It started receiving enviably superior military hardware ever since it pitched its tent in American camp as early as in the fifties and joined most of the US-sponsored pacts and alliances. Although Pakistan's equation with the US has seldom been smooth the congruity of interests kept it alive with Pakistan earning the distinction of being 'America's most allied ally yet after the US' conquest of the cold war -- with Pakistan playing a vital role in organising Afghan resistance war against the Soviet invaders. Pakistan was virtually abandoned by the US which rather 'rewarded'

the former by censuring henceforth its nuclear programme.

However when their lost link was revived in the wake of 9/11, much to the delight of the Pakistanis, their constant worry was about its longevity. They knew to their discomfort that the restored relationship between the two was based mainly on Pakistan's supporting role in the war against terrorism. The fact that it was not part of the US' grand strategic design for Asia it may abruptly come to an end once its usefulness

manifold by its acceptance as a de facto nuclear weapon state. It is because the US has a hidden agenda of containing China's growing power although Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh dismissed the idea of India playing any such role ever.

Corporate America does not have significant investment in Pakistan and consequently no interest in the country other than putting a lid on Islamic terrorism which threatens economic activity in

to 'do more' while India has been embraced into the US' strategic partnership providing it the potentials of making at least 40 bombs a year in addition to its stockpiling of approximately 100 bombs. But the sensible Pakistanis do admit -- even if grudgingly -- that India has already moved into a different league. It was already a much larger entity and now with its economy growing at over 8 per cent has become a magnet for global capital. The buying power of 300 million Indian middle

The new power question in South Asia has indeed thrown a spanner in the ongoing peace process between the region's two arch-rivals. The growing Indian might naturally undermines Pakistan's prospect of bargaining a suitable negotiated solution to Kashmir issue. India is obviously at a vantage point from where it can dictate terms to Pakistan with regard to all outstanding disputes. The more assistance it gets from two giants in the area of military technology i.e.

marginalising its role in the region while advancing his South Asia diplomacy. Pakistanis bitterly observe that instead India was showered with blessing despite the fact that it did not 'serve' the US to the extent any where near to Pakistan's all out allegiance.

In the aftermath of Bush's visit the general feelings sweeping Pakistan are whether or not to continue with the US appeasing campaign which has high price tag domestically and internationally. It's a lose-lose situation for Pakistan till date. Even Karzai's Afghanistan bares its fangs at Pakistan, Iran remains suspicious of Pakistan's stand on its nuclear deadlock and even China is wary of Pakistan's complete faithfulness to the US. While these are a few international repercussions of Pakistan's unequivocal support to the Uncle Sam, at home there is a general perception that Pakistan is treated as a US colony where the citizens don't have the right to challenge their rulers -- let alone the question of challenging the masters of their rulers.

There are however few signs of things changing within Pakistan!

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

PERSPECTIVES

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was over.

Their worst fear came true with President Bush's recent jaunt through South Asia which for the first time dehyphenated India and Pakistan. In essence India has emerged from the Bush visit a strategic partner and Pakistan a technical ally despite whatever way Washington may explain it. The notion of equal treatment hitherto held or a semblance of parity has evaporated. The March 3 Indo-US treaty has enhanced India's stature

an important Middle East region and South Asia. With this as background it should be easy to understand why president Bush took blatantly different positions in India and Pakistan during the visit.

Even if the Pakistanis are well aware of what stuff the US-Pakistan relations were so long made of -- sheer expediency -- the common feelings are those of being poorly compared to India. Pakistan which did so much to wage the anti-terror war on America's side was advised

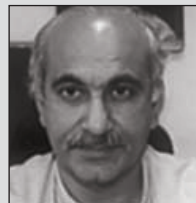
class has become a strong attraction for multi-nationals seeking new avenues for investment.

Yet the nagging question remains as to how can Pakistan trust President Bush vis-a-vis the sensitive Kashmir dispute when the man himself is determined to sway the subcontinent's power equation in India's favour. The Indo-US nexus coupled with Israeli alacrity in the India's defence-oriented projects has been causing serious concern for the policy makers in Pakistan.

the US and Israel, the more difficult it becomes for Pakistan to achieve a decent and respectable breakthrough with regard to her problems with India. It is an irony that Pakistan, the US' major non-NATO ally, becomes the first victim of Indo-US matrimony.

As for Pakistan, it needs to review how much more room can it give to the US keeping in view its dubious track record in the past. Mr Bush apparently did not care much about the Pakistani concerns in

The prophet motive



M.J. AKBAR

THE RSS chief, Mr KS Sudarshan, has made the very interesting suggestion that Muslims should accept Lord Krishna "as one of the prophets" sent by Allah. If this is all it takes to unravel the complexities and ease the tensions of the Hindu-Muslim relationship in India, then consider the problem solved. This is the easy part, particularly since the RSS chief, very wisely, did not ask Muslims to accept the divinity of Lord Krishna.

Muslims believe that Allah is the creator of the entire universe, and it is axiomatic that he sent His messengers to all the people since Creation, and not only to Muslims.

The 47th verse of the Surah Yunus in the Quran says: "To every people (was sent) a messenger: when their messenger comes (before them), the matter will be judged between them with justice, and they will not be wronged." Since transliteration into English is never completely adequate, Abdullah Yusuf Ali explains this verse: "Every people or generation or nation had its message or messenger: Allah revealed Himself to it in some way or another. If that messenger was ignored or rejected, or his message was twisted or misused, the Day of Reckoning will come, when perfect

justice will be done and the whole truth revealed."

The 36th verse of the Surah Al Nahl (The Bees) says: "For we assuredly sent amongst every people a messenger (with the command), 'Serve Allah and eschew evil.'" Yusuf Ali adds a footnote: "Even though Allah's signs are everywhere in nature and in men's own conscience, yet in addition Allah has sent human messengers to every people to call their attention to the good and turn them from evil."

them." Yusuf Ali explains: "If the object of a message is to make things clear, it must be delivered in the language current among the people to whom the messenger is sent. Through them it can reach all mankind."

There is repeated affirmation in the holy book that Allah sent prophets before the last of His messengers, Muhammad, across generations and nations, and to "every people." India has always been a great cradle, nursery, school and university of human civilisation, and

languages spoken by prophets, is particularly relevant since it clarifies that prophets did not speak only Arabic or Aramaic; they spoke the language of the people they were sent to. They were enjoined to take the message to all mankind, and mankind, untied in ancestry, is divided by language. This verse extends the ambit and specifies it as well. There is no reason why a prophet could not have spoken Sanskrit.

Take another look at this verse: "We did aforetime send messen-

BYLINE

One of the more remarkable facts of India is that while Hindus and Muslims may have been derogatory about one another, they have never insulted each other's faith in a thousand years of literature. They have vilified or glorified kings and heroes, but there has been no slander against the deeply revered symbols of faith. Secularism does not mean that we abandon religion. Secularism is the right of every faith to co-exist as an equal, on its own terms. Secularism is the ability to leave space for the other.

The 78th verse of Surah 40, known as both Ghafir (Forgiver) and Al Mumin (The Believer), says: "We did aforetime send messengers before thee: of them there are some whose story we have related to thee, and some whose story we have not related to thee." Yusuf Ali elaborates: "Allah sent messengers of His Truth to every people. There are some whose names are known to us through the Holy Quran, but there are a large number whose names are not made known to us through that medium. We must recognise the truth wherever we find it."

The fourth verse of Surah 14, Ibrahim, says: "We sent not a messenger except (to teach) in the language of his (own) people, in order to make (things) clear to

it is therefore inevitable that messengers must have come to this land and its people as well.

Some Islamic scholars believe that there is a direct reference to Gautam Buddha in the Quran. Verse 85 of Surah 21 speaks of "Ismael and Idris and Dhu al-Kifl; all were the patient ones." Verse 48 of Surah 38 lauds the last-named further: "And make mention of Ismail and Al Yasaa and Dhu al-Kifl, for they were among the best." Dr Zohurul Hoque, who has translated the Quran, believes that Dhu al-Kifl is the Dweller (Dhu) of Kapil, or Kapil Vastu and refers to the Buddha, who was of course born in Kapilavastu. There are other interpretations, but at least Buddha is included among the options.

The verse from Surah 14, on the

gers before thee: of them there are some whose story we have related to thee, and some whose story we have not related to thee." In other words, while the narrative of some prophets (Moses or David or Solomon) is told in detail in the Quran, the story of other prophets has not been told. In other words, there are prophets of Allah who have not been included in the narrative of the Quran. It is entirely plausible that a prophet sent to India has not been mentioned in the holy book, but that does not diminish either his role or his prophecy.

Krishna lived at least two millennia earlier than the Prophet Muhammad. This is important, because if he had come after the prophet of Islam, then Muslims would never have found Mr

inferior to the Almighty.

However, Mr Sudarshan has not demanded that Muslims consider Lord Krishna a god. So once again, there is no argument.

But I wonder if such happy agreement, always very welcome, is sufficient. Muslims revere Jesus as one of the greatest prophets of Islam; the Quran (Surah 6:47) reaffirms the immaculate conception of Mary, and says Allah created him as He did Adam. But this has not been prevented hostility between Muslims and Christians.

While religious identity is an important and often vital component of mass mobilisation, faith and its nuances have rarely been a source of continued conflict between men. Occasional war, yes; but continuous war is fought over material posses-

sions, like land and natural resources and tax revenues.

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The true problem is not what happens in the after-life, but what happens in this life. There are two key words. One is security: Muslims have every right, as equal citizens of a proud nation, to physical and economic security. An Indian economic boom must be equally their economic boom. The second is violence. No Indian, irrespective of creed or caste, whether Muslim or Hindu, has a right to seek answers through communal violence. No Indian politician, Hindu or Muslim, must be allowed to wash his hands in the blood of innocent victims to lubricate his passage upwards on the career ladder. These are the problems that need the attention of not just Mr Sudarshan but every leader who claims to have the concern of the country in his mind. The merits of Mr Sudarshan's idea are psychological, but that does not make them a negative. He is at least attempting to place one stone of a difficult bridge over an unhappy divide.

To judge where this thought might come, look at where it has come from.

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OPINION

Euphoria but not without blame

A H DEWAN

THE nation heaved a long sigh of relief at the surrender/capture of Shaekh Abdur Rahman and Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai, the two kinglyms of the Islamist terrorism in Bangladesh thanks to the super sleuth busting operation of the RAB and other law enforcers. It was beyond anybody's imagination that the nation that sacrificed three million of its people for creation of this homeland with lofty and envious ideals of secularism would, within only 35 years of its birth, meet with the resurrection of the bigots resorting to religious militancy to turn this land into what their fathers failed in 1971 (Shaekh Abdur Rahman's father was a Rajakar) and what Osama Bin Laden, their devil of a mentor, wanted to accomplish in Afghanistan.

People though are well under the spell of state sponsorship of vigorous Islam since August 1975 with secularism renounced, they would never think of the advent of demons like Shaekh Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai in the soil of Bangladesh. At least people are relieved of the terror and horror many of their kith and kin fell prey to and witnessed. The bigots proved them to be the maelstroms against the currents of calm, composed and naive people of this plain land, but exemplary action against these known criminals was pitifully too protracted; nevertheless it was better than never.

The coalition government since

the capture of the 'big fish' have been in three cheers as if they have done what the US have not been able to do in respect of Bin Laden and Molla Omar. Our PM's complacency was observed in her prompt address to the nation following arrest of Shaekh Abdur Rahman. Without any delay thereafter was captured 'Bangla Bhai'. The student wing of BNP also observed field day over their arrest. But the opposition combined as also the members of public not aligning with them or with the powers that be could not join the chorus and termed the arrests as "staged drama". That, naturally, made our Prime Minister and her cabinet colleagues exasperated and dismayed, and therefore, in every of her meetings and other public gatherings, she goes on swearing at and swiping against the opposition consistently telling the audiences "the opposition AL did/does not want arrests of the Bangla Bhais". But it is not that our PM does not comprehend why the whole nation though quite happy over the arrests could not join in giving sweeping plaudits for this achievement of theirs which could be otherwise described 'great'.

Actually, what did the government do when time and again the people and the opposition demanded of the government to apprehend them from the very day the Bangla Bhais took law into their hands and in the name of elimination of outlawed PBCB members unleashed reign of terror with decimation of people not subscribing to

their views? The opposition AL lawmakers took the issue to the Parliament/or sent notices for deliberation, but every time the treasury bench scotched their attempts. The government did not only brush off the demand, it went on to accuse the opposition of conspiracy against the government. The PM's current AL bashing is very much unlikely to make the people forget and forgive the government's indictment of letting the minions of law connive with the growth of Shaekh Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai into monsters, of flat denial of the existence of Bangla Bhais (even her Home Minister was reported to have ejaculated they do not know anybody as Bangla Bhai or English Bhai; another Minister felt no scruple to call it creation of the media, the finance minister too scathed the media).

Besides our print media's relentless coverage of the Islamist militants' mischief and misdeeds especially in some places of Rajshahi and Bogra including the interview telecast by some electronic media of the two 'kingpins' delineating their organizational outfit, JMJB/JMB and their vow to turn this into a land of Shariah, the Wall Street journal of USA wrote about their rise and growth to a threatening proportion. The government banned that issue. Prior to that the government banned one issue of Far Eastern Economic Review because that reviewed the situation of Bangladesh following takeover by BNP with the defeated forces of 1971, the Jamat-e-Islami

and other fundamentalist Islamist parties. There was also a report in the Time Magazine that, among other things, dwelt upon the insurgency of Islamist militants. Then a journalist of New York Times contributed an exclusive article on Bangladesh, titled "Next Islamic Revolution in Bangladesh?" on the basis of her/his personal itinerary in the places of Rajshahi Division in particular and spot interview of the leaders and members of JMJB and also of the tyrannized people there.

Many veteran columnists of all hues ceaselessly contributed write-ups in all major national dailies including the Editor of the DS who apart from editorials also wrote commentaries, all to draw the attention of the government and advise it to take measures before time ran out. But nothing could mould the coalition government from turning its blind eye to the issue.

So the people of Bangladesh to their utter bewilderment witnessed on August 17, 2005 the countrywide synchronized bomb blasts steered by the members of JMJB/JMB with their leaflets left on the blast sites. The leaflets gave clear messages of their design and vow to establish of Islamic Hukumat in Bangladesh. Though that made the government unnerved, its few members of the cabinet instead of advising the government to swoop on them, as is customary with them, did point their fingers at AL and tried to put blame on others. Moulana Matuir Rahman Nizami promptly termed it the conspiracy of RAW of India and

Mosad of Israel to cripple Bangladesh (But he kept his tongue chocked from uttering the name of ISI, Pakistani Intelligence which is alleged to be very much active in the regions of Chittagong Hill Tracts and Bangladesh-Myanmar border). The IQJ leader Amini's and other Islamic clerics' vociferous utterances that arrest of religious people will not be tolerated' emboldened the militants further and the government seemed to acquiesce in. Please note that the nation was reminded on many occasions of the Aminis and likes calling for establishing law of Allah instead of democracy on this soil. So the elite force was not ordered to hunt down the men responsible for the countrywide bomb blast that struck at the very base of our national security. How come that such an organized bomb blast occurred and the government's raft of intelligence agencies could fail to smack it was the question in every mouth.

The nation was again beguiled by the PM while she made her valedictory speech in the Parliament session ending in the first week of September 2005. She did not utter the name of JMJB or JMB, the perpetrators of country-wide bomb blasts, but still made no bones about accusing AL, though obliquely, for conspiracy and for creating anarchy in the country. She however cautioned no one would be allowed to destroy peace and prosperity of the country by using the name of Islam. One more thing seems to be worth mentioning here.

There were also leaflets found in different places few days later threatening the Hindus either to court Islam or get out of this country and also making it a point that before the next election all Hindus living in Bangladesh would be made Muslims. What hatred do the Islamists (of religion of peace) nurse in their hearts against the community of another religion? Yet the government was not heard to probe the matter or take a hard line against the religious extremists!

We can guess had not the JMJB/JMB supremo(s) killed (or made a blunder by killing) two judges of Jhalakhati and other people at court premises of Gazipur, Chittagong, Netrakona and elsewhere by their suicide squad, they could continue their hidden agenda with the 'blessings' of indifference of the government and reach towards their goals. Though their August indictment proved Bangladesh to be a terrorist country before the world, the government with ghosts within then dithered to go for action against the enemies of the nation. The killing of judges and others by suicide squad put the government in delicate predicament and brought for the nation an indelible blot. Now with mounting pressure from the US and EU and also World Bank the government was finally obliged to ban the outfits, and let the elite force RAB to hunt down the terrorists.

But by this time, few scores of people felt victim to the torture and scheme of the banned outfits and many families were ruined at

Bagmara, Atrai of Rajshahi and elsewhere. The outfits earlier caused mayhem by bomb explosions in cinema halls in Mymensingh and other places and Jatra function in Bogra and that too took many lives. But none of the perpetrators were brought to justice. Who is to blame? Why were not the elite forces ordered to dog the elements in the wake of countrywide bomb blasts?

At this juncture of the nation's jeopardy, the government in order to hide its dereliction called a national dialogue of all parties, which also turned out to be a farce. Because, first and foremost, it is the onus of the government (which has all the paraphernalia) to smite any anti-state elements. AL and other like minded parties (leftists, Bikalpa Dhara and Dr. Kamal's Gonoforum) shrugged off the government's proposal as a mere claptrap and accused the government of indictment, for it glossed over or gloated over the activities of the JMJB/JMB by not allowing its forces to go into operation in the wake of country-wide bomb blasts.

When RAB and other law enforcers swung into action hundreds of violent elements of JMB were hounded up (there are many hundreds yet to be hunted) and tons of explosive materials with detonators were seized. It gave a clear credence that the network the outfits have established could not be possible without connivance of the law enforcers and blessings of some men at the helm. There was

reportedly a police high official having said, "What we could not accomplish, Bangla Bhai and his men are doing that." This was no less than granting impunity to the terrorists. Many of the arrested are reported to have confirmed Jamat connections. But that is being religiously hushed up. And it was clear why PM's so called arrest order was not complied with. The nation never found the government having tailed the Madrasha students and teachers while many of the reports revealed that the larger section of them (students) grew into militants or joined the bandwagon of JMB to establish Sharia rule in the country.

The print media was effortlessly tried to be mauled for disclosure of the misdeeds and hidden agenda of the Islamic outfits. Few of the government lawmakers were hell bent to make provision for punishment to the journalists as they divulge all their weaknesses. The print media, without fear or favour, did and are doing what the nation demands of them as fourth estate while the State was miserably failing in its constitutional obligations to protect the lives and property of its citizens and save the nation from the clutches of the evil doors vowing to dismantle democratic polity and establish, instead, a theocratic state. The nation wants the government to prove its sincerity by keeping the witch-hunt on to wipe out JMB elements once for all. Only then will the euphoria will be worth observing and comforting.