

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 inquisition 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

An 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

the former by censoring 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

manifest 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 potential 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.

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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 dehydrated India and Pakistan. In essence India has emerged from the Bush visit a strategic partner and Pakistan a technical ally despite whatever 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-Pakistani 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

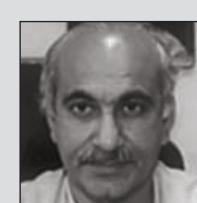
class has become a strong attraction for multi-nationals seeking new avenues for investment.

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.

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The prophet motive



M.J. AKBAR

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."

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

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."

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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, united 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-

sions, like land and natural resources and tax revenues. 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.

Sudarshan's idea acceptable. In Surah 33, Al Azhab, verse 40, Muhammad is described as "the messenger of Allah, and the seal of the prophets." The metaphor of a seal is self-evident. The seal marks the completion of a document; there can be no further additions. Islam is also very clear that no man can be considered divine, and this is one of its principal arguments against the Church, which made Jesus a part of the Trinity. Allah is indivisible, and His creation must be ipso facto

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-

BYLINE

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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 Shaikh Abdur Rahman and Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai, the two kingpins 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 (Shaikh 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 Shaikh 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 Shaikh 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/did 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/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 Shaikh 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, JMB/JMB and their leaflets left on the blast sites. The leaflets gave clear messages of their design and vow to establish Islam 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 Matur Rahman Nizami promptly termed it as 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 IOJ leader Aminis 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 smother 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 JMB or JMB, the perpetrators of countrywide 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 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 JMB/JMB supremo(s) killed (or made a blunder by killing) two judges of Jhalakati 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 incident 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 terrible 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 fell 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 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 Gonoform) shrugged off the government's proposal as a mere claptrap and accused the government of indictment, for it glossed over or glorified over the activities of the JMB/JMB. 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 doers vowing to dismantle, 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.