

## Dealing with extremist threats

*Focused action against them is a necessity*

**N**EWs of the discovery of secret JMB training camps deep in the hills as also elsewhere has the nation properly and justifiably concerned. It is one more powerful indication of the persisting menace that threatens to keep the country on tenterhooks as long as the outfit and others like it are not neutralised. The good bit here, however, is that the law enforcing and security forces, namely, the police and the Rapid Action Battalion, have remained busy identifying the camps and flushing out the elements busy trying to undermine the state. We appreciate the skill and confidence with which they have been going after these extremist elements and so persuading the nation that things are well in hand. There is, of course, yet a long road that must be travelled before such elements can fully be put out of existence. We cannot pretend that the menace is gone. It is yet there.

The problem, for the government as well as the country, is that it is not just the JMB or religious extremists who are a threat to security these days. Of late, the frequency with which outlaws professing adherence to an extreme brand of politics have been operating in the southwestern region of the country demonstrates the dual nature of the threat we are up against. To be sure, there is as yet little reason or grounds for panic. In fact, there is nothing that can be regarded as alarmist in our understanding of these realities. That said, though, there is also the truth that there can be no room for complacency here. Indeed, when outlaws threaten to shoot police officers (and that is precisely what has been done in the past couple of days), it becomes an imperative for the authorities to go for tough, focused action against such destabilising elements. Secret armed groups such as Lal Pataka have telephonically hurled threats of death against the superintendent of police in Bagerhat and the officer-in-charge of Fakirhat police station. They have also demanded the freeing of four extremists arrested recently. Meanwhile, there also appears to be outside pressure on the police, who have just registered a general diary against a former lawmaker who reportedly compelled them to release a detained outlaw. It hardly needs to be said that a thorough investigation into the question of who are helping these elements and in what ways is a necessity if peace and order in the south and southwest are to be ensured.

The priorities ought to be made clear. A concerted, well-planned and focused drive against the forces ranged against the state and society is called for. Such an approach should take into account not merely a gearing up of activity by the law enforcers and security personnel but also the contributions of the larger community. Creating awareness among citizens and imbuing in them thoughts of how best to deal with such a menace will go a long way in curbing and finally extinguishing the threats we face today from extremists of both the rightwing and ultra-left brands.

## Fire at public buildings

*Its frequency warrants internal precautions*

**T**HE explosion and blaze at the massive BCIC Sadan at Motijheel mostly housing commercial organisations is another eye-opener to how vulnerable public buildings have become to accidental, callous and, sometimes, suspiciously deliberate, fire incidents. But for the day being a holiday, the number of casualties, would have been much higher. Still, it is considerable: one killed and ten injured, eight of them critically. Some of the office space reportedly had chemicals or other inflammable material in it.

Only day before yesterday, two fire incidents occurred at the BNP central office at Naya Paltan and a residential building at Baridhara respectively. These may have been in a different category, but the propensity to fire seems to be on the increase, generally. We often hear of close brushes with fire or other hazards at public places, shopping malls and other commercial houses. The alarming fires at Banga Bazar and the Basundhara city shopping mall are still fresh in public memory. But with what lessons learned?

It is not unsurprising, given the sweeping under the carpet that goes on about the real causes of fire which seldom get established -- thanks to saving skin and shirking responsibility. In the BCIC building fire, one is at a loss to understand what might have triggered the explosion and fire. First, there was a huge bang with an air-conditioner and other electronic equipment blowing up and hitting glass walls on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd floors of Alico building which is but opposite to BCIC building. Some say the fire might have originated in a gas pipe line or an air-conditioner blast. The other conjecture is that the shut-out Padma Fabric had in store different chemicals which could have set off the explosion. There is a contrary view also.

All in all, it is a smoke screen after fire and smoke -- as usual. For once at least, the investigation team should get to the bottom of the incident and fix responsibility. The authorities of commercial houses and public buildings should be alerted by the government as to the fire hazards they carry and the dire need for mounting safety precautions in their respective establishments.

## It was this way in the early 1970s

It is all falling into a pattern. The tragedy here, the real and not the feigned one, is that the government does not appear to be taking serious note of it. Yes, it is perfectly all right to dismiss Jalil's comments as the rant of a disgruntled politician.

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

**W**E will not speak of conspiracy theories today. And we will not because of all the portents around us of conspiracy, in that collective and overall sense of the meaning, beginning to take form and substance. It was this way back in the early 1970s, when every stone and every mudball was brought together to undermine Bangabandhu's government. The Nixon-Kissinger team would not help us with food because we had the gall to try to do trade with Cuba. The Pakistanis and their 1971 Bengali collaborators were fanning out all over the Middle East telling kings and sheikhs and dictators there of the "anti-Islamic" nature of our secularism.

At home, pathologically anti-Mujib editors created deliberate confusion through writing of "65 million collaborators" and the need for a "Muslim Bangla," someone tried setting the Adamjee jute mills on fire; extreme leftists like Abdul Haq went on waging war against the newborn country; and military officers like Ziauddin went underground, in order to foment a revolution. And, of course, there were the seeds of chaos and unconstitutional government Khondokar Moshtaq and his civilian-military cohorts had already begun to plant.

It is this remembrance of the old con-

spiracies actually coming to pass that worries us now that Abdul Jalil has spoken. Or you could sit back and ask yourself if indeed it was Jalil who said those words or someone or some others who had spoken through him. Observe the glee with which rightwing politicians and all those ubiquitous talk show hosts have now begun to emerge with the thought that something must have gone wrong or some insidious hand must have been at play at the elections in December 2008.

Khondokar Delwar Hossain is inclined to leap for joy, for Jalil has vindicated him and his party on the matter of the "truth" about the elections. An army officer, unwilling or not possessing the moral courage to identify himself, calls up a talk show and proffers "eye witness evidence" of how Bangladesh Nationalist Party supporters were prevented from casting their votes in his locality.

It is all falling into a pattern. The tragedy here, the real and not the feigned one, is that the government does not appear to be taking serious note of it. Yes, it is perfectly all right to dismiss Jalil's comments as the rant of a disgruntled politician. But shouldn't the government look beyond that loud mouthing of charges and go deep into an inquiry of them?

There are reasons why Sheikh Hasina and her colleagues must now suspend their periodic forays into putative global

diplomacy, must put their travel plans on hold, must speak less and do more. Indeed, it is time for them to take stock of reality. They should be properly worried about some of the charges Jalil has flung at them. Think here of the purported shadow Sheikh Rehana has been casting on the government. The prime minister needs to get her priorities right here. Having her sibling in tow every time she travels overseas or conducts government business at home, and being seen speaking to prospective foreign investors with her son beside her, sends out not just wrong but very bad signals to the country. If people have been whispering about a kitchen cabinet involving her clan, about the decisions that such a circle may have been making about who should be going where and why, Sheikh Hasina must pay attention before things get out of hand.

When you look around yourself, when you are incessantly being told of all the JMB hideouts being discovered, you have a fair enough idea of the people ready and willing to run this government into the ground. And do not ignore that other, rising menace: in the southwest of the country, the old leftwing extremists have re-commenced their old job of hunting down "class enemies" and disposing of them. Remember the 1970s?

It is not merely the men who see national sovereignty slipping away with the withdrawal of soldiers from the Chittagong Hill Tracts who must be watched. It is not just elements who, as is their forte, have consistently seen the Awami League "selling out" Bangladesh to India and who therefore pose the biggest threat to the government and to this nation. There are too the malcontents and the positively disgraceful ones within the

circles of the ruling dispensation -- the marauding factions of the Chhatra League, the tender-seizing elements of the Jubo League, et al -- that need ruthless handling. But ruthless, meaningful governance happens when the government of the day steps back, observes what has been going wrong and then resumes its walk with new perspectives in mind.

Those new perspectives must now come to Sheikh Hasina and her government. There are a few corrective measures she needs to take. The first is to move, seriously, out of the one-woman show government has become. More delegation of responsibility is what the prime minister needs to bring about. But before that can happen, let her politely show her advisors, all seven of them, the door. They are an encumbrance and an imposition. The second step will be for her to jettison a good number of ministers and ministers of state who have simply done a bad job or no job at all. The third move should be a rethink about the veterans emasculated at the last party council. Tofail Ahmed, Abdur Razzaq and Suranjit Sengupta should be called back and given berths in the cabinet. The difficulty with new faces is that they are unabashedly loyal and therefore beholden to the prime minister. The beauty about old faces is their experience and their willingness to say no to the head of government.

In simple terms, the government is in need of an autumnal spring-cleaning. That is because the threats to it are very real. Bangabandhu's government was destroyed by conspiracy. There is no earthly reason why Sheikh Hasina's government should not learn from that tragedy.

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## Dialogue with Iran

What is the alternative other than a dialogue? Bombing Iran would entail unimaginable consequences. The history of diplomacy makes it amply clear that long-standing disputes require engagement, not isolation.

HARUN UR RASHID

**I**RAN always wanted bilateral talks with the US but the Bush administration never agreed to it. At one stage Iran's President Ahmadinejad even wanted to hold a debate with former president Bush.

In fact, since the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, the US and Iran never held any dialogue face-to-face. The two countries severed diplomatic relations in 1980.

On January 27, President Obama, in his first interview with Dubai-based Arab TV Al-Arabiya, said to the Muslim world: "The Americans are not your enemy." He offered a dialogue with Iran and expressed readiness to listen rather than dictate.

President Barack Obama retold US foreign policy along three Ds: diplomacy, development and defence. The president's new vision revealed on September 23 at the UN General Assembly is considered even by his critics, such as the Venezuelan president, as message of "new hope" for the world. Obama wields American power through the prism of cooperation, and received a rapturous

welcome at the UN from many developing countries that would have previously stayed aloof.

In recent days, Iran has become defiant and, on September 27, started testing missiles with a range of 1300-2000km (capable of hitting Israel). It revealed the existence of a pilot plant in a letter to the UN watchdog IAEA. The publication of this news was made public as the world leaders met in Pittsburgh for the G-20 meeting on September 24.

The revelation raised the stakes as Iranian officials are due to meet in Geneva on October 1 with officials from six nations -- the US, Russia, China, France, Britain and Germany.

US officials voiced frustration that Iran has ignored Washington's demand to cease enriching uranium and allow inspectors from the IAEA, the UN's nuclear watchdog, greater access to its nuclear installations.

The deeper worry for the US and allies is that the new facility at Qom could be just one of a number of secret sites. President Obama, at the meeting of G-20, urged Iran to come clean on nuclear facilities,

although he stated that Iran had the right to peaceful nuclear energy. The worry is whether Iran is developing nuclear weapons.

On September 27, in his weekly radio address, Obama criticised Iran's behaviour, which he linked to planned development of nuclear weapons and said: "This is a serious challenge to the global non-proliferation regime and continues a disturbing pattern of Iranian evasion. That is why the forthcoming negotiations take on added urgency."

In case Iran does not fully cooperate and demonstrate its peaceful intentions, tougher sanctions are likely to be imposed. It is noted that Western officials recently indicated that the diplomatic track was all but exhausted and the groundwork was being prepared for new sanctions.

Russia's president, at a meeting with President Obama in the US, said that sanctions did not work but were often inevitable. This comment shows that Russia is willing to go along with the US on the Iran issue in the backdrop of President Obama's decision to scrap the missile shield defence policy in Poland and Czech Republic, which was annoying Russia.

It is not known how China, a veto-carrying member of the UN Security Council, will respond to the new sanctions on Iran. Ordinarily, China does not like to be the only member to exercise its veto in the Security Council.

There are other factors for a dialogue with Iran, and some of them are as follows:

First, Washington is deeply concerned with the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The US realises that unless Iran is brought on board, there is little hope of stability in those countries. Washington needs cooperation from Iran in stabilising Afghanistan and Iraq.

Second, Washington is now very serious in peace talks with Israeli-Palestinians. It hopes Iran can support the Palestinian-Israeli peace progress by cutting off support for militant groups fighting Israel, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza.

What is the alternative other than a dialogue? Bombing Iran would entail unimaginable consequences. The history of diplomacy makes it amply clear that long-standing disputes require engagement, not isolation. The talks are positive signs because dialogue is the only answer to such inter-state disputes within the framework of Article 33 of the UN Charter, which enunciates peaceful settlement of disputes.

Furthermore, even when talks initially fail, both sides have a better understanding of each other's views on the matter, and that is very helpful in eventually resolving the dispute.

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## Building check post in the air

I am not sure how blocking of 84 websites is going to make any dent? On top of that, these sites can always come back under new addresses. It will become full-time job for a division of cyber cops to monitor them. Even that may not be an adequate way to manage the problem.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

**I**F no news is good news, then this news is already bad. The police have identified 84 websites, which carry sexually explicit contents involving Bangladeshi citizens. Since the police are friends of the people, they didn't rest on their laurels. They took it up with the next level and requested the home ministry to block those sites. You must be thinking the police have done a commendable job. I am thinking something else. Don Quixote has found his windmill.

Good news for everyone! If you aren't safe on the street, you will be safe on the Internet. You may lose the shirt on your back to muggers in an open space. But sit back and relax. Your modesty will be guarded in cyberspace.

So, don't worry if you don't have adequate protection in this country. You can get robbed. You can get raped. But hey, nobody will be allowed to touch your clothes on the Net.

For those who know, it's a comedy of errors. If anything, it shows lack of under-

standing of the network of networks. When websites are blocked, it doesn't work like a police cordon. Instead it works, as believers often say, a lot like fate. If one door is shut, ten fling open. This is why, when I read the news it struck me as strange.

First of all, how could the police find the slack to worry about the least of our problems, when they should be swamped with law and order nightmares? People regularly take off their clothes in their bedrooms and bathrooms. What's the big deal if few others do the same thing on the Internet? Nudity doesn't kill anyone.

Yes, there is always the possibility of abuse. It's happening on the porn sites of other nationalities. Faces are cut and pasted on nude bodies to create fake imageries of respectable women. Indian sites are regularly awash with doctored pictures of Bollywood stars. Recently, a website in Sri Lanka showed unpleasant images of the president's son.

But like I said, if one door closes, ten new ones are pushed. A simple search brings up 800,000 pages on the Internet. I

am not sure how blocking of 84 websites is going to make any dent? On top of that, these sites can always come back under new addresses. It will become full-time job for a division of cyber cops to monitor them. Even that may not be an adequate way to manage the problem.

More bad news, if you wish to know. Most of the 84 websites are maintained from overseas locations. It means if they are blocked, then we won't see them from this country. But rest of the world will have access. The risk of abuse doesn't change.

What Bengal thinks today, Sri Lanka thought yesterday. Sri Lanka's Inspector General of Police recommended a similar clamp down last July, which met with protests. He wanted the Telecommunication Regulatory Commission to suspend licenses of 12 websites, which were operating from inside the country and exhibiting nude photographs of Sri Lankan citizens.

May be this meeting of minds is just a coincidence. May be small countries are all alike. They are big on their vanity for matters of less importance. If you look at large countries, their perspective is altogether different. India isn't bothered about it. Neither is China, USA or the European nations.

By no means I am in favour of cyber nudity. But porn sites are but an extension of our lustful minds, a grazing ground for the peeping toms hiding inside us. It

started with rock paintings of coitus drawn by the earliest men, and then moved to bas-reliefs of figurines having sex. Then came the frescoes, followed by painting on paper and culminated in photographs. Internet is but the latest form of that transformation in mind's relentless struggle to deny the gap between image and imagination.

Should we think of blocking anything, we should start with our minds. This is where it originates. This is where the little voyeur in each of us learns to become adventurous. And this is where exists the grievous twilight between passion and crime.

The switchover between them has been forever contentious. Rafaels' apprentice Julio Romano quarreled with Pope Clemens VII. In revenge, the artist painted an entire hall in the Vatican with porn frescoes. When removing the scandalous frescoes, some crafty painters made gravures of them. Gravures allowed making of as many copies as needed, and that was how pornography is believed to have spread in Europe.

The urge for sex behaves like the oppressed mass. Faced with repression it agitates. Happy when left alone. The time would have been well spent if the police had identified 84 notorious spots on our streets instead of going on wild goose chase for as many websites.

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