

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

Pakistan reaping the whirlwind

Extortion hindering business

Urgent action needed

Despite government's claim that the law and order is now in a better shape, situation on the ground seems to be otherwise. The way hoodlums terrorised the Jatrabari area of the city in broad daylight on Monday by carrying out armed attack on a gas station and shooting an on-duty member of Ansar to death is an instance of where things have gone wrong.

The irony is the ansar personnel in hot pursuit of the hoodlums, who hurled cocktails and fired indiscriminately at the scene of crime, were hardly a match for the well-armed gangsters. Surprisingly, despite alerting police of the existing threats, only three ill-equipped ansars were deployed to ensure security of the gas station at such a busy intersection of the city.

In fact, the Jatrabari incident of Monday is not just an isolated one. Rather it is the tip of the iceberg insofar as criminality in the capital city is concerned. The criminal trade of extortion is now rampant especially in the older part of the city. The business people are so helpless against the tyranny of the extortionists that they dare not report to the police for fear reprisals. Shockingly, even cops allegedly advise the targeted business people to settle the matter with the criminals.

It cannot be gainsaid that extortion in such a wide scale is a serious impediment to smooth functioning of trade and commerce. And the business people who fall victim to such criminal extortion are forced to either count loss or resort to marking up the prices of their goods and services to offset the loss. Needless to say, the ubiquitous parasites find more pliant victims among the traders in the kitchen market.

The government should pay immediate attention to this particular form of crime that is causing business to suffer and consumers to pay through their noses. And it is not only business, it is also inextricably linked to social peace and citizens' security. Overall, it is a serious law and order issue.

The government's law-enforcement agencies must remain above corruption and act decisively to combat the menace.

Road digging woes

Why not in dry season?

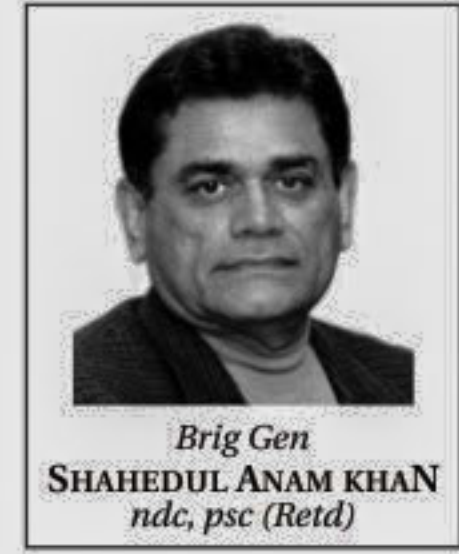
Digging of roads by Dhaka Wasa to lay underground pipes is nothing new, or for that matter any other utility organization doing it. Dhaka Wasa undertakes development projects for the benefit of the people. But the problem is with the timing of the excavation work and its tardy nature.

This paper carried an eye-opening report on laying of storm water drainage pipe in a locality of Mohammadpur in the city yesterday. The story is typical of the usual state of affairs with utility expansion activities in all major cities, contributing to untold sufferings of the people. The project in question was supposed to start in January this year but due to delay in issuing the work order it got underway in April and would continue for another three months.

Tender call, bidding process and issuance of work orders take at least four to five months, the work in the ground takes another five to six months to be completed, which however should not take more than three months. Development projects, such as these, meant for the benefit of the people are avoidable ordeals.

Dhaka Wasa ends up undertaking pipe laying works during the monsoon all due to man made factors. The dug out roads become huge drains where rain water accumulates causing hindrance to work and danger to the movement of pedestrians and vehicles. Heavy rains wash away earth at the site of the digging and affect the buildings. Safety measures like supporting earth by wooden plank is not enough. Moreover, after work is completed the earth remains heaped on the sides, for weeks and months, which were to have been put back to fill the drain.

Entire process of the work from tendering to appropriate finishing has to be managed by a unified single body. Paper work should be conducted in the most professional manner within a reasonable time and the project awarded to the best bidder. The road digging, pipe laying and filling up should be done preferably by the same party. Above all, development projects ought to be taken up only during



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IT is heart wrenching to see innocent people being killed by the dozen everyday in Pakistan in senseless terrorist attacks. Is

it really senseless? When we call terrorists senseless, that indirectly absolves them of the crime of murder and mayhem. The terrorists are in full control of their senses as well as of their operational outfits as is so clearly evident in the spate of attacks.

Of note is the choice of their targets. From a policy of attacking soft targets, over the last several years the militants have shifted focus on hard targets like military installations and security agency establishments. The first of such attacks on a major military establishment was on October 10, 2009 when ten terrorists dressed in army uniform attacked the Pakistan Army's General Headquarters in Rawalpindi, resulting in the death of six army personnel. The attack was claimed by the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Since then, a series of military targets in Pakistan have been attacked.

There has been a dramatic increase in the scale and number of militant attacks since Osama bin Laden was killed by US forces in Abbottabad on May 2. The latest major one being an attack led by a team of heavily armed insurgent groups who infiltrated inside a Pakistani navy base in Karachi, in which 10 military personnel were killed and two US-supplied surveillance aircraft destroyed. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. And it appears that all the attacks since May 2 are in response to the killing of bin Laden.

So, what both the US and Pakistan

wanted to avert, Pakistan suffering a terrorist backlash after Osama murder, by absolving Pakistan of complicity in the operation, as President Obama tried to do soon after the killing, and later as Hillary Clinton tried, by asserting that Pakistan had no prior knowledge of the operation, did not wash with the al-Qaeda.

Given the concatenation of events related to the war on terror concerning Pakistan what people are asking is can Pakistan end terrorism? It is a

also protecting some of the militants in the Quetta Shura to acquire strategic depth." Clearly, Pakistan should either choose the hare or the hound. And in the game of run and chase one is only too acutely aware of the fate of the hare.

The latest attack on the navy base in Karachi has raised several questions. Some call it an inside job, i.e. there is likelihood of some members of the navy outfit being al-Qaeda sympathisers if not members.



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double entendre that posits two important questions. One, whether Pakistan is actually capable of addressing the menace and two, whether it is willing to do so. And this has emerged from what Pakistan's major ally sees Pakistan to be doing, playing double game in its fight against terrorism. To quote a Pakistani scholar writing in *The Express Tribune* on April 16, the Pakistan government is taking "American money to fight the Taliban while

Reportedly, they infiltrated through the sewerage system and their actions bore the hallmarks of well trained persons quite familiar with the area. The manner of their approach to the targets and then disengaging, as reported in the media, suggest that it was a very well planned and well rehearsed attack. And that begs the question. Can the Pakistan government, having become embroiled in the war on terror, along with its so-called redeemer the US, which is

planning to make a clean break from Afghanistan under a false euphoria of having won the war against the Taliban, stand on its own against the Frankenstein that they both helped to create? It had sown the wind and it is reaping the whirlwind, unfortunately.

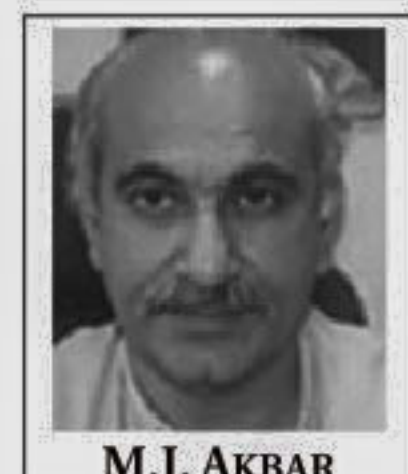
Clearly Pakistan's work is cut out. Its strategy to end terrorism has to be fully defined. It cannot have both ways, go after some terrorists while harbouring some others. It must act fast to shed the unofficial tag of state sponsor of terrorism. It can shout their displeasure at the Americans for creating the problem for Pakistan till the cows come home. The seed of the current problem was laid during the time of the Anti-Soviet campaign in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and by all the indications Pakistan is about to be dropped like hot potato as they were after the defeat of the Soviets till 9/11 and the US war in Afghanistan rescued them from the backwaters of US interest, to a frontline state. Since the start of the so called GWOT Pakistan has suffered heavily in terms of loss of lives fighting against the very forces that it harboured, and even used as proxy against its neighbour.

Let there be no doubt that end of Laden is not necessarily end of the problem, at least for Pakistan. With the exit of the US, not only will the dollar tap be turned off, the Taliban will have one less adversary to contend. And with the Taliban sway in the FATA and areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the erstwhile NWFP, one wonders how the Pakistan government plans to reestablish its writ in the region. But that is not all. How Pakistan moves to counter the Pakistan Taliban is also of immense interest to the region and to the world.

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BYLINE

Didi at heaven's door



M.J. AKBAR

THE door to heaven deserves a fresh coat of paint. There is only a smudge or two of contemporary colour in Siliguri, the last

town on the Bengal plains before the horizon slides up to the ethereal beauty of the Himalayas. Siliguri is an urban sprawl, unable even to achieve the breadth of a sprawl. A couple of malls have come up along the national highway before it curves away towards the exquisite turbulence of the Teesta river, tumbling through picturesque settlements like Kalijhora and Kalimpong before it heads into Gangtok or Darjeeling.

Perhaps a hundred yards from Siliguri's Spencers mall is a billboard from history, an advertisement for the CPI (M)'s daily newspaper *Ganashakti* (people's power). A once-strident typography has evaporated to the edge of invisibility. The faint masthead speaks of past glory. Askance of this billboard is a newly-minted office of a Bengali newspaper that has, over the last many years, fought the Left Front almost as ferociously as Mamata Banerjee. The building is on a wide, narrow strip, a house without proportional depth; its central feature a hall punctuated by open doors. The conjunction seems an appropriate metaphor for the seismic shift that has taken place in Bengal. The Left has faded away. But there is something empty and dysfunctional about the alternative

space.

This is understandable, given that Mamata's government has just begun to function. Her initial impetus has been on hard work. This too is explicable, since work was not the favourite occupation of a Leftist administration heavily influenced by trade unions. Mamata is surely aware of the ditty that Calcutta coined, with the resigned sense of humour that became its preferred weapon during the stagnant phase of Left rule, to describe the work culture of Writers' Buildings, seat of Bengal's government: "Aashi jaai, mainey paai, kaaj

What Mamata needs, immediately and in profusion, is mint-new ideas. She understands the intensity of the challenge required in such a massive resurrection, but she should also worry that her ministers could undermine her government by searching for solutions within a vacuum.

korley beshi chaai (I come, I go, I get my salary; if you want me to work, give me more)." The new chief minister will not find it easy to propel the sedentary *babu*, but she has set her ministers an unprecedented pace. The strain has sent one to hospital already, albeit briefly.

Mamata might be missing the point. It is of course always better to work hard rather than work soft, but efficiency is a secondary rather than primary priority. Surprisingly, given the national clamour on the subject, corruption is not a dramatic problem in Bengal. The give and take in Bengal

has been of the petty cash variety, nothing that would disturb the summer siesta of an Anna Hazare or Baba Ramdev. The Bengali voter did not demolish the Left Front because it was lazy or corrupt. Its sin was far more venal: it had become barren.

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The most conclusive evidence for

the view that the Left Front government knew it was heading towards an iceberg is the simple fact that the Marxists had a fabulous pre-crash party on the Titanic. They left the treasury bankrupt. Bengal has a per capita debt of

Rs.21,697, the highest in the country, according to the new finance minister, Amit Mitra, who believes that he will have to borrow Rs.3,000 crore from the market just to honour unpaid bills. While Uncle Pranab Mukherjee in Delhi might be a wonderful mentor, he does not have the wherewithal for nepotism. Bengal

needs the private sector. More important, private capital must deliver a high return in terms of employment for every rupee invested; which means, broadly, geometric expansion in the service industry.

Alas, the private sector is not equally in need of Bengal. The Left Front, clinging to attitudes that had exhausted its utility two decades ago, thought it could tax its way to survival. Mamata will need a different compass. She may need to look at the Himalayas for inspiration.

Her neighbour up north is Sikkim. Sikkim has no income tax. The state has a population of 600,000 and seven universities, only one of which is a state institution. A number of medical companies have started manufacturing units there. There is a building boom, messy and noxious, but there. Sikkim is a thin puff of steam compared to Bengal's potential as an engine that can drive the revival of eastern India. Necessity forced Sikkim towards invention. Bengal obviously cannot replicate such flexibility, but if Mamata does not incentivise local entrepreneurs with irresistible sweeteners and bait national businesses that can change, visibly and quickly, ordinary lives in Bengal, she will fall prey to that most fatal of diseases in public life, frustration and its first cousin, cynicism.

The biggest box in Bengal is called Writers' Buildings. Mamata must think out of it.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

June 9

1885
A peace treaty is signed to end the Sino-French War, with China eventually giving up Tonkin and Annam - most of present-day Vietnam - to France.

1934
Donald Duck makes his debut in *The Wise Little Hen*.

1944
World War II: the Soviet Union invades East Karelia and the previously Finnish part of Karelia, occupied by Finland since 1941.

1946
King Bhumibol Adulyadej ascends to the throne of Thailand. He is currently the world's longest reigning monarch.

1965
Civilian Prime Minister of South Vietnam Phan Huy Quat resigned after being unable to work with a junta led by Nguyen Cao Ky.

1967
Six-Day War: Israel captures the Golan Heights from Syria

1974
Portugal and the Soviet Union establish diplomatic relations.

1999
Kosovo War: the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and NATO sign a peace treaty.