

Zawahiri's call

Don't brush the matter aside

IN a taped message, purported to be that of the al-Qaeda leader, Zawahiri has called upon the people of Bangladesh to fight, according to him, the crusaders against Islam. We are quite sure the people of Bangladesh will treat it with the disdain it deserves. But, notwithstanding the many incongruities of the tape, and many questions about the authenticity of the message, it would be unwise to treat it lightly. It is necessary to unearth the actual source and authenticity, but till then it will be appropriate to consider it with due diligence and proceed therefrom.

Although we have never had to face religious extremism of the intensity that some Muslim countries in the world, particularly Afghanistan and Pakistan, have faced and are still facing, there has been existence of this phenomenon in the country for sometime, the manifestation of which we saw in the activities of the JMB and HUIZI, who reportedly, drew their ideological motivation and sustenance from al-Qaeda.

And although these two indigenous extremist groups have been decapitated, there are remnants who may well be lying in wait to pounce at the appropriate time. And that is what our strategy to combat religious terrorism should focus on --- defeating their ideology. It is important to do so in order to close the source of recruitment. Although we have heard of a counter terror strategy for Bangladesh we are not privy to how it is being implemented. This is national problem that requires consensus cutting across party line to combat effectively.

Child deaths on the road

This accident was avoidable

AS we mourn the deaths of seven school children, who died as the bus carrying them skidded off a road in to a canal at Jessore, we feel outraged. Our children, while travelling on the roads never seemed as vulnerable as now. In a way, this accident was waiting to happen. In the case of this accident some points need to be noted. First, the students travelled a good distance away from their school; and second, the return journey could have been made earlier during the daylight hours.

On March 16, 2013, seven eight-year old children were killed and four were injured when a truck crashed into their school van in Comilla. In another mishap truck-laden 60 school children met with an accident at Mirsarai in Chittagong, killing 44 including an adult. Children are dying by droves through road mishaps in recent times. It seems the special precautions that ought to be taken when children are travelling are going by default.

Risk factors need to be assessed while guidelines given to halt the epidemic of deaths on the road. Clearly there are numerous other measures that need to be implemented in order to reduce traffic fatalities. Moreover, conducting of highway patrolling should be adopted to keep our roads and highways under a scanner for minimizing all types of road accidents.

A response to

"The caravan must move on"

IFTIKHARUL KARIM

I would like to make some observations on Badrul Ahsan's op-ed of Feb 12, 2013 under the above title.

Sheikh Hasina's AL caravan is of course moving on and they are taking Bangladesh down the same path her illustrious father did nearly forty years ago -- the road of a one party state where the only opinion that counts or matters is one that is theirs. That is what The Dhaka Forum (TDF) roundtable discussants and millions of Bangladeshis, who were denied their constitutional right to freely choose their representatives in parliament, are demanding. The so called "all party" election-time government that Sheikh Hasina cobbled together through coercion, intimidation and just plain chicanery, not to mention incarceration of political opposition, has delivered to our people a parliament that is anything but representative. Of course you would have the caravan move on because the further it goes away from the events that created it the safer it would feel about not having to answer for its misdeeds.

Here is a brief reminder of the events of 1975 that is referred to in the write up. Khondokar Moshtaque was one of the five in the innermost circle of AL leadership and a minister of Bangabandhu's cabinet right up to the day when he and his co-conspirators perpetrated the assassinations. There was no BNP and there were no other participants in those events. It was an intra-party conspiracy that killed Bangabandhu and his family members. And that is the unvarnished truth. What you choose not to remember is that many of the present day AL leaders chose to continue in office under Moshtaque until he was deposed by an uprising that brought General Zia into power. The protection that was provided to the assassins for the next twenty years (as the author put it), was for the greater part by General Ershad who is now a partner in Sheikh Hasina's government and parliament. So the writer should not pontificate and try to blame others for looking "the other way".

The constitution is a living document and that is why there are provisions for amendments to address the needs and aspirations of the people as they see fit. If there is justification for the fifteenth amendment then there is equal justification for a sixteenth amendment that reflects the democratic aspirations of the people whose constitution it claims to be.

Finally, there is nothing "puerile" about Bangladeshi nationalism. We are Bangladeshis and Bengalis at the same time. One is our national identity and the other is our linguistic ethnicity and they are not the same. There are several hundred million linguistically and ethnic Bengalis who are not Bangladeshis and that is a distinction that neither the writer nor his intellectual friends can deny or alter.

The author is founding member of TDF.

Bangladesh in al-Qaeda radar?

STRATEGICALLY
SPEAKING



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

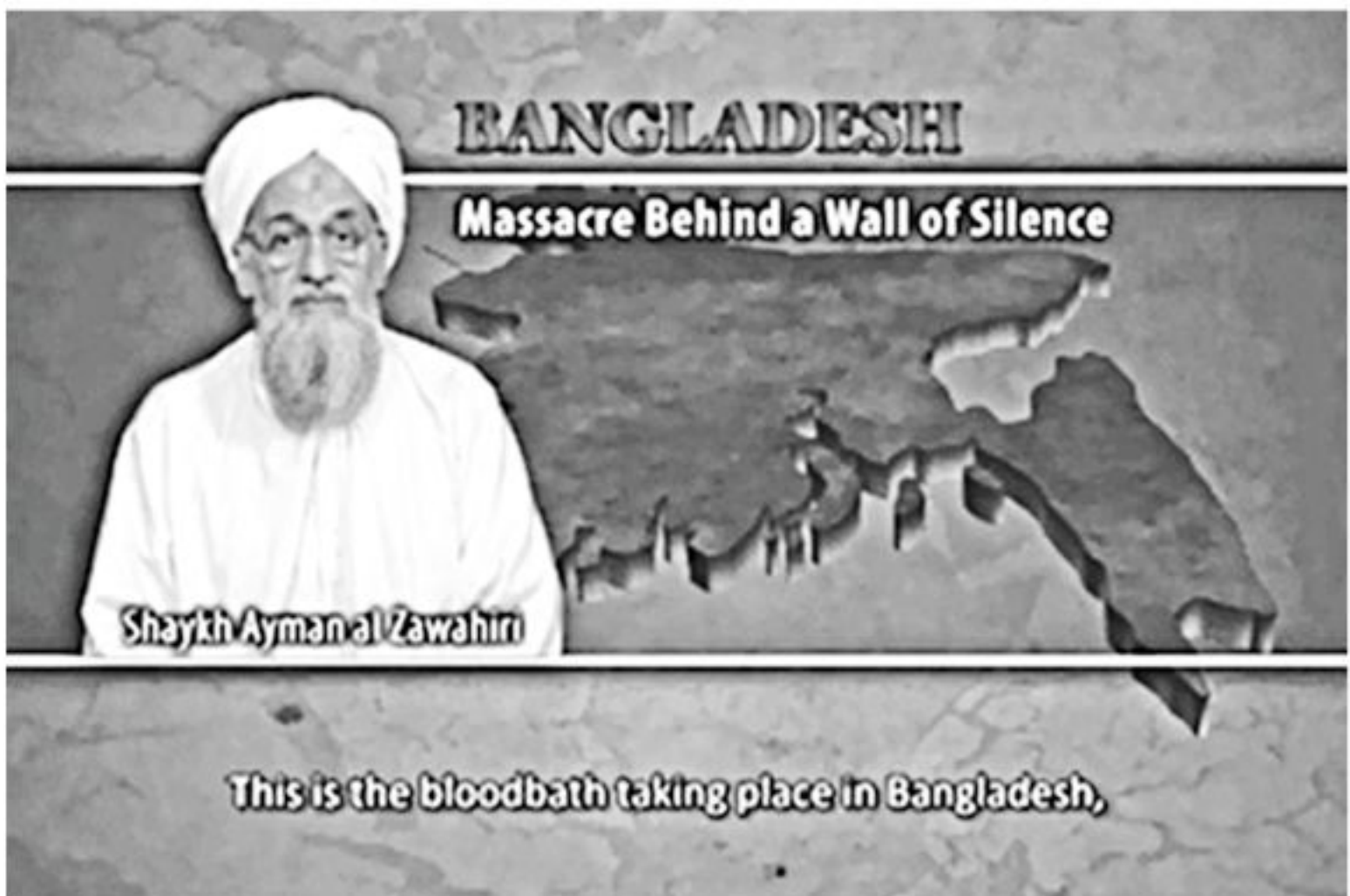
Not very long ago, in the eighties, when the western world led by the US was engaged in preventing the modern Great Game coming to a head with the likely completion

of complete Soviet control of Afghanistan, the bulwark of that opposition was offered by al Qaeda led by bin Laden. A large number of fighters from many Muslim countries had participated in that war including Bangladesh. And when the Russians were ejected, the foreign fighters went home, with very clear directives from bin Laden to replicate Afghanistan in their own countries. The Bangladesh fighters were also similarly indoctrinated. But their efforts to create an Afghanistan in Bangladesh failed as we see in the aborted attempt of HUIJI (B) and JMJB. What, however, we should be concerned about is whether there are extant groups organically linked to al Qaeda, or there are sleepers cell of the terror organisation waiting for an opportune moment.

Coming to the VDO, or more specifically the audio with a Zawahiri picture and 5 May Hefajat footage back projected, several questions can be asked, and one is sure the agencies will be seeking answers to those too. Firstly, the authenticity of the video, or, particularly, whether it originated from al Qaeda. The fact that it was not posted by As-Sahab, the media house of the organisation, creates the scope to question the veracity of it. The projection of the tape has not followed the normal method adopted by the terror group. It has not owned up the message either which it normally does. The fact that there was a three weeks gap between the time it was posted and the time it surfaced to us is also a matter for cogitation. And if one goes by the title of the video, "A Massacre behind a Wall of Silence" it was certainly referring to the Shapla Chattar incident. One wonders what took them nine months to react.

The timing of the message, which was more than 4200 words, is also interesting coming very soon after the second round of the AL rule was formally launched with the holding of the first session of the parliament on 29

THIS is perhaps a daft question to ask. As if this the first time, through the video massage, purported to be the comments of the terror organisation's chief Zawahiri, that Bangladesh has come into the reckoning of al Qaeda. There has been a link, albeit indirectly, with the group. But to say that we are in the cross-hair of the terror group is perhaps crediting it with more capability than it deserves, or we should accord it, given that it there are questions about the central leadership's ability to extend its tentacles farther.



other hand is that this is the product of the government who was exploiting the al Qaeda issue to 'win US favour'. Some critics aver that this has been done to divert the attention of the public from important political issues.

The two major political parties must realise that the issue of religious extremism cuts across party line, and unless the matter is addressed basing on a national consensus the political flux and the hiatus therefrom will surely be exploited by these elements. Although Bangladesh has not faced challenges in this front like Pakistan or Afghanistan, one cannot vouch that we do not have in our midst al Qaeda sympathizers who may not have organic links with the al Qaeda but are either busy in a very inobtrusive manner to indoctrinate credulous people or lying low but waiting for an opportune moment to act. And that is where our counter terrorism strategy, if there is one, must be honed in order to defeat al Qaeda propaganda.

MISPLACED HUBRIS OVER MICROSOFT CEO

Bringing Nadella down to earth

PRAFUL BIDWAI
COLUMN



PRAFUL BIDWAI

pastries and comic-book heroes. Corporate analysts declared: "India has clearly emerged as the talent machine that is consistently churning out global CEOs".

They cited Indra Nooyi (PepsiCo), Anshu Jain (Deutsche Bank), and Laxmi Mittal (Arcelor Mittal). Some attributed their success to high technical skills and capacity to work "in difficult situations". Another commentator exhorted Indians to learn from Nadella, "put their differences aside and start helping one another."

This breathless self-congratulation exposes the middle-class Indian's willingness to read the success of a handful of non-resident Indians (NRIs) as proof of the Indian nation's collective virtue and merit. Worse, it betrays a pathological urge to win the West's approval on terms unrelated to Indian society's well-being.

Several points arise. First, the NRIs in question are undoubtedly clever, talented, shrewd people who compete in the Western world. But they are Indians only in biological origin; most are foreign nationals. Their success has no positive consequences for India, and shouldn't be celebrated.

Nadella's appointment was reported very differently in the US. *The New York Times* mentioned India in just one line in a long article—solely with reference to his educational background.

Second, many business-oriented NRIs decided to migrate to the US—and thus secede from India—for a materially better life after having gained disproportionately from their privileged Indian background and highly subsidised quality education. Nadella, an Indian Administrative Service officer's son, went to a privileged school.

Third, lionising people like Nadella legitimises the US's "star system", which generously rewards CEOs but severely underpays workers. America's CEO-worker differential has risen from 195:1 to 354:1 over 20 years despite the CEOs' recent under-performance (see www.ips-dc.org/reports/executive-excess-2013).

Fourth, some Indian-CEO-led US companies are downright unethical or engage in questionable practices. PepsiCo has greatly harmed people's health globally by promoting junk food. Deutsche Bank indulged in rampant financial speculation, and helped trigger the global Great Recession. Microsoft is an ugly monopoly. Their CEOs should be punished, not lionised.

However, so blinded is the Indian middle-class by Indian-Americans' success in business and politics that it ignores the downright reactionary role of people like Louisiana governor Bobby Jindal, who changed his name and religion to conform to the US Right's expectations.

It also ignores success-stories gone sour, like those of Rajat Gupta and Mathew Marthoma, convicted for securities fraud and insider trading.

This is not to condemn all US-based NRIs. Many play a worthy role in the academic world and the professions and contribute richly to the social and natural sciences. Many, like Amartya Sen—not to speak of other social scientists—have retained their Indian citizenship and are an important part of India's intellectual conversation.

By contrast, NRI businessmen no worthwhile contribution to Indian society despite their great wealth. Indian-Americans, our Diaspora's wealthiest group, and the US' richest ethnic community, only have a minuscule share in remittances from migrants, estimated at \$71 billion, the highest for any developing country, including China.

Two factors impel middle-class Indians to lionise Indian-origin CEOs. One is the "merit" fallacy: true merit is only rewarded in the West. The second is a deeply ingrained sense of inferiority vis-à-vis the developed countries and White people.

Here, privilege is confused with "merit". A person born in a highly educated upper-caste family will have a totally different universe of knowledge, social contacts and elite acceptability compared to underprivileged people—and access to information about the availability of study courses, tutorial institutions, career options, professional advice, etc, which most Indians cannot even dream of.

Privilege has a cascading effect and overpowers talent. There is no universal, omnipresent entity called merit which is a hold-all for such disparate things as mental agility, depth of comprehension, mathematical talent, analytical abilities, or flair for noticing connections between apparently dissimilar things.

This notion of merit is as driven by prejudice as the discredited, unscientific, even racist "Intelligence Quotient" idea.

Real merit cannot be measured by competitive examinations, however fair. What these grade is speed, ability to anticipate limited kinds of questions, and familiarity with the techniques of answering them, besides doing rapid calculations.

A majority of India's successful candidates in IIT and medical entrance tests and civil service examinations pay lakhs of rupees to learn these techniques—because they have the money. So much for "merit"!

Acquiring such skills is not the same thing as comprehension of principles, or ability to engage in non-linear thinking, to innovate, or be original. Some of these qualities are desirable in varying ways in different professions. It is a pity that India has allowed its higher education institutions and civil services to be filled by relatively rich upper-caste people who possess such manufactured merit.

The second phenomenon, of hankering for recognition from the West is even more pernicious, but deeply rooted in our colonial past. It originates in racist prejudice against people of colour and the assumption that White people are inherently superior and more talented or gifted. This is a load of nonsense and speaks of the Indian elite's low self-esteem.

It is in such self-esteem and lack of confidence in the Indian leadership's own ability to launch a collective social project of equal citizenship, equal rights and equal access to basic services for all that the hero-worship of the Nadellas is rooted.

To imagine that such "achievements" can hide or excuse India's failures to root out widespread poverty or female foeticide, reduce gang rapes and punish communal atrocities, is to indulge in dangerous self-delusion. Like nuclear weapons, Nadella cannot provide a shortcut to the Great Power status that India's elite craves.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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What about holding umpiring mistake in check?

It is very evident that umpires are still biased against Bangladesh. Whenever there is a benefit of doubt, the benefit favours the more established side. Umpiring mistakes against established sides like Australia are taken very seriously but brushed aside when it is against Bangladesh. The DRS is a



very effective system and can easily find umpiring mistakes. It is very expensive though. In Australia, when DRS system is used, you can always see the name of a company written at the corner of the screen which sponsors the DRS system. I'm sure there are many companies in Bangladesh willing to sponsor the DRS system. People criticise Bangladesh team for their poor performance, but no one ever talks about the poor umpiring.

Aminur Rahim

New DOHS, Mohakhali, Dhaka

Dhaka buses need some face-lift

The buses which are plying the Dhaka city streets are very dirty with broken window glasses. They look like vehicles from the prehistoric era. Even the newly imported BRTC double-decker buses have accumulated a thick layer of dust on them. The private company buses like Falgun, Bengal and many others are also decrepit and due for dumping at the junkyard. Most of these buses do not have backlights which make driving in Dhaka dangerous after the sunset. The owners of these buses can easily manage the road fitness certificate from the generous and kind-hearted BRTA officials. I would like to request the authorities concerned to order BRTC and the private bus owners to wash and clean their vehicles as well as mend the windows of those vehicles before the T20 World Cup Cricket 2014 matches take place in Dhaka. A city with dirty and dilapidated vehicles plying across its streets does not look attractive no matter how much the streets are decorated with colourful banners, festoons and flowers.

Faruque Hasan

Uttara, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Qaeda for intifada in Bangladesh?" published on February 16, 2014

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

The people of Bangladesh are not so naive and will hopefully ignore the message of a terrorist organisation that goes against the basic principle of Islam: not doing any harm to innocents, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Shahin Huq

This al-Qaeda hoax is circulated only to make an excuse for the undemocratic government of Sheikh Hasina to remain in power.

Truthprevails53

Jamaat should be gotten rid of ASAP.

Johnny

What is interesting is that both Mozena and Zawahiri are on the same side when it comes to their role in Bangladesh.

Nawaz

What an achievement by Awami League. They have turned Mujib's 'Shonar Bangla' into a 'death valley'. The only people benefiting are the Indians.

"BCL decides who to stay in DU hall" (February 12, 2014)

Shahin Huq

Very soon all of us may have to give rent to the ruling party thugs because they have kindly let us live in Bangladesh. God forbid!

Barkat

The BCL is nothing but a gang of terrorists destabilising universities, DU and RU are no exceptions.

Titu Sultan

Student politics should be banned considering the present situation. It's the root cause of violence on campuses.

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

This is why all political activities should be banned from public universities. No wonder private universities are surging ahead, despite their negative portrayal.