

## Another militant den busted

### Catch their leaders

THE regularity with which the law enforcing agencies have been discovering dens of the extremist groups along with large quantity of weapons, incendiary and explosive materials is worrying. But one must give plaudits to the police for their successes in this regard.

We hope the competence with which law enforcers are unearthing the dens of the extremists will eventually deter spread of their tentacles.

The fact that extremists groups continue to remain active in the country cannot be lost on the administration and the policy makers in the government. In spite of the fact that the law enforcing agencies have been very successful in preempting these elements over the last several years, the extremists seem to be surviving, and this must be effectively deterred. Alongside the manpower, they are also apparently quite well funded to be able to survive, and one could say with certain degree of accuracy that a good deal of violence that we witnessed in the nearly two months of the so called blockade and hartal has been perpetrated by these groups.

Along with the successes on the ground the two things that the government must place priority on are to find out the masterminds that run these groups, because those that have been arrested in connection with these cases are only ground operatives, and the sources of their funds. These require to be done quickly to stem the extremist recruitment and activities in a fuller measure.

## Where their real power lies

### More women in decision making is the key

WE may feel encouraged by the upward trend in social indicators that give credence that women are much better off than they ever were in terms of maternal mortality, health, nutrition and even as far as job opportunities are concerned. But there is a glaring absence of women in decision making roles across all professions. This is where the challenge of gender equity really lies.

A roundtable organized by Prothom Alo and UNFPA recently, has highlighted the need for a significant increase in women's participation in politics without which empowerment is severely compromised. We may have women at the topmost tiers of the political scene – in both the government and opposition, no doubt admirable, especially when compared to many other countries, but in the middle tiers of governance, women are grossly missing. Selina Hayat Ivy, the only woman mayor in the country and representing Narayanganj City Corporation, has pointed out that even though women are ready to work hard they do not get the cooperation they need from their male colleagues. She may well be echoing the sentiments of other women representatives.

The unabated wave of violence against women perpetuated by the almost mandatory practice of giving dowry, child marriage and the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of violence, has brutally disempowered women. Parochial attitudes at the policy level as well as in social interaction serve only to weaken the nation by disempowering half of its population. They must be discarded if we are sincere about taking the country forward.

## COMMENTS

### "Blogger Avijit Roy hacked to death" (February 27, 2015)

Dev Saha

I am condemning this heinous act. No matter what, the pen will always be mightier than the sword.

Enlightenedview

These fundamentalists are not only murderers but also criminals committing crimes against humanity. They must get severe punishment.

### "Fix the error, not the mirror" (February 25, 2015)

New Generation

We could have been a good nation if our leaders would give proper attention to the writings. Thanks for this timely writing.

### "Info ministry bins editors' statement" (February 26, 2015)

Aasfisarwar

It's very unfortunate that info ministry is spreading misinformation. No amount of denial will be able to erase the blame from the forehead of AL.

### "24-hr ultimatum to arrest Avijit killers" (February 27, 2015)

# Can Mamata really deliver?

## STRANGER THAN FICTION



TAJ HASHMI

THE brouhaha in Bangladesh about Mamata Banerjee's recent visit is astounding. The widest possible media coverage of what Ms. Banerjee "assured" Bangladesh about its due share of the Teesta water -- in the most condescending manner -- is unbelievable. Seemingly, many politicians and media outlets in Bangladesh believe that -- thanks to the assurances from the chief minister of Paschimbanga -- issues dogging

Indo-Bangladesh relationship will be over soon. One wonders, why Bangladeshis who are deluding themselves into believing something unreal are not asking the question: Who is Mamata Banerjee, anyway?

They should also be asking themselves the questions: (a) can she influence India's foreign policy toward Bangladesh, only because she is a Bangali? (a) Why will she go all the way to help Bangladesh unlike what she did in the recent past? (c) Will she be able to modify India's policy toward Bangladesh, which even Prime Minister Modi won't be able to change overnight? And we know the answers to the questions, which are all in the negative.

One can't agree more with Ziauddin Choudhury that some people and sections of the media in Bangladesh gave people a wrong impression that Ms. Banerjee had the power to resolve all bilateral problems between India and Bangladesh ("Hype over Mamata Banerjee visit", D.S. Feb 25, 2015): "The visit was all sweet, warm and full of bonhomie on both sides, but it yielded precious little because of misplaced reliance by Bangladeshis on a single person who has little control over settling issues between the two sovereign countries.... She has as much authority to seal an international deal with Bangladesh as, say, the Governor of California signing a nuclear agreement on behalf of USA with India" [emphasis added].

It's time that Bangladeshis learn that a chief minister from an Indian province -- even if she/he is a Bangali from West Bengal -- doesn't decide what the government of India should or shouldn't do with regard to

India's foreign policy, including India's relations with Bangladesh

Visits by Bangla-speaking dignitaries from India -- politicians, writers, actors and artists -- over-enthusiasm and overcharge some Bangladeshis. So much so that some Indian visitors get away with emotionally charged wishful thinking of re-uniting the two Bengals, dissected in 1947. This is what a Paschimbanga film actor -- who accompanied Ms. Banerjee to Bangladesh -- stated in Dhaka, to the surprise of this writer.

The average Bangladeshis tend to believe in whatever Ms. Banerjee promised to Bangladesh with regard to



the free flow of the Teesta waters and settlement of other problems between the two neighbours. Most Bangladeshis seem to have reposed enough trust in her promises, without even questioning (a) as to what was her "technical problem" in the first place to resolve the Teesta water sharing dispute between India and Bangladesh on the eve of Manmohan Singh's trip to Bangladesh in 2011; (b) if she can play the decisive role in changing India's traditional foreign policy towards its smaller neighbours, which has been not-so-benign.

Mamata's "technical problem," as this writer understands, is defending Paschimbanga's (undue) interests

to the detriment of Bangladesh vis-à-vis the Teesta waters. So, we have no reasons to believe that all of a sudden her "technical problem" will disappear, and that after all these years -- only because of Mamata Banerjee's presumed "mamata" (compassion) for fellow Bangla-speaking people in Bangladesh -- India is going to become a gentle giant to its smaller neighbour, Bangladesh. Fat hope!

The people and politicians in Bangladesh must have some understanding of realpolitik. They must realise, due to the Farakka Barrage, the desertification of north-western Bangladesh is no longer a distant possibility; the Gazaldoba Barrage across the Teesta, and the Tipaimukh Dam across the Barak will eventually pose similar threat to greater Rangpur and greater Sylhet, respectively. Conceding transit rights to India by Bangladesh on "humanitarian grounds" (without any discussion in the Bangladesh Parliament), and taking no action against thousands of Indian nationals who work in Bangladesh without work permits and remit more than \$2 billion to India every year, are not signs of good diplomacy. Last but not least, leaning backward to please India won't do any good to Bangladesh in the long run.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh must learn what self-confident, bold and independent diplomacy is all about from the examples of Sri Lanka, Singapore, New Zealand and Cuba, for example, who have developed the art of living independently beside bigger neighbours, and even a super power like United States. What Fidel Castro, Lee Kuan Yew and David Lange could achieve for their countries can be replicated by Bangladesh too. One may mention New Zealand's former Prime Minister David Lange, known as the "roaring mouse," in this regard. In 1985, his government refused to allow nuclear-armed US ships into New Zealand waters, a policy the tiny country continues to this day, to the dislike of America and Australia.

In sum, it's time not to waste time in paying heed to what an Indian chief minister, or even the prime minister promises to Bangladesh, as we know the proof of the pudding is in the eating!

The writer teaches security studies at Austin Peay State University. Sage has recently published his latest book, *Global Jihad and America: The Hundred-Year War Beyond Iraq and Afghanistan*.

# What will Indian foreign secretary bring?

## BOTTOM LINE



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

INDIA'S Foreign Secretary Subrahmaniam Jaishankar will visit Bangladesh from today on his tour of Saarc members aimed at "getting to know Saarc countries" as part of active Indian diplomacy. He started his trip on March 1 with Bhutan. From Bangladesh, he is expected to travel to

Pakistan on March 3

and Afghanistan on March 4

Visits by India's foreign secretary to Bangladesh have always been important as the neighbours ordinarily have many unresolved issues which need to be settled peacefully. It is reported that the following issues may be raised during the talks with his Bangladeshi counterpart Md. Shahidul Haque:

- Intended visit of the Indian prime minister as the guest of honour in Dhaka on the Independence and National Day, March 26;
- Sharing of the waters of Teesta and other trans-boundary rivers;
- Time-frame for implementation of the Land Boundary agreement;
- Killing of Bangladeshi nationals along the border with India;
- Huge deficit of Bangladesh trade with India;
- Combating terrorism.

Apart from the unresolved Teesta water sharing agreement, both countries had agreed, through the Joint Communiqué in January 2010 following the Bangladesh prime minister's landmark visit to India, to discuss issues relating to Feni, Manu, Muhuri, Khowai, Gumti, Dharla and Dudkumar rivers at the Indo-Bangladesh Joint River Commission, but no concrete progress has been made until today.

Although it is reported that the Modi

government has taken initiative for adoption of the Land Boundary Agreement by both houses of the Indian parliament, no timeframe is known for its implementation. In many ways, Modi's visit largely depends on its successful completion as he is not likely to pay his first visit to Dhaka with "empty hands."

The border killing of Bangladeshi citizens by the BSF soldiers is outrageous, and is contrary to the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Communiqué of January 2010 (paragraph 18). Continued abduction, torture and killing of Bangladeshi by BSF at the border have led an overwhelming section of people in Bangladesh to believe that India does not care about the loss of Bangladeshi lives. Such killing needs to be stopped immediately.

Furthermore, the border killing is linked with the illegal cattle trade between the two countries. There has been a growing realisation among many Indian think-tanks, including Observer Research Foundation, that legal cattle trade may be examined to stop the killing of Bangladeshi civilians when smugglers of both sides are involved in a trade of about \$1 billion annually. It is reported that one former director general of the Indian Border Security Force had made similar suggestions about legalising the cattle trade so that the border guards could concentrate on checking the inflow of more dangerous contraband like drugs and weapons.

Trade deficit for Bangladesh with India is huge. It is no more an economic issue but has turned into a political one in the country. It is common knowledge that apart from inadequate border infrastructure on facilitation of trade, tariff, para-tariff and non-tariff barriers impede growth of trade from Bangladesh to India. Paragraph 33 of the Joint Communiqué states clearly, "With a view to encouraging imports from Bangladesh, both countries agreed to address removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers and port restrictions, and to facilitate movement of containerised cargo by rail and water."

Researchers in both countries have found that Bangladesh has a potential export market of \$2 billion in India and have suggested some

steps such as, (a) India should recognise the principle of asymmetry and non-reciprocity in trade with Bangladesh, (b) there should be guaranteed market access (with liberal rules of origin) of Bangladeshi products to India and (d) export quality Bangladeshi products should not be in India's negative list. These measures will hardly dent India's \$2 trillion economy or market.

Bangladesh-India relations are complex, sensitive and multi-dimensional. The relationship is not restricted to only between governments but exists between the people of the two countries independently of the policies of the governments.

India's core interest in keeping friendly relations with Bangladesh is dictated primarily by two factors -- connectivity to the north eastern states by road, rail and ship through Bangladesh and maintaining security in the restive north eastern region.

The Hasina government moved quickly to address Delhi's concerns on cross-border terrorism and connectivity to the north-east on an ad-hoc basis.

Bangladesh provided transit facility through Ashuganj port for transportation of heavy duty equipment for ONGC Tripura Power Company's (OTPC) 727 MW gas-based project, located at Palatana in Tripura. Bangladesh agreed to transport 10,000 tonnes of food grains for Tripura through its territory. It is reported that Bangladesh has agreed to allow 100026 MW electricity generated from 429 dams in northeastern states though Bangladesh to West Bengal and to other places in India. So long as Bangladesh government is able to meet these basic Indian needs, India's interaction with Bangladesh government will be cooperative and will not change.

Hopefully, the foreign secretary's visit will make the Modi government realise that India has to move quickly on issues such as stoppage of border killings, agreement on water sharing of Teesta River, implementation of LBA and reduction of trade deficit.

The writer is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

*Hopefully, the foreign secretary's visit will make the Modi government realise that India has to move quickly on issues such as stoppage of border killings, agreement on water sharing of Teesta River, implementation of LBA and reduction of trade deficit.*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Open KSA job market for male workers too

After a long time Saudi Arabia has reopened its manpower market to Bangladesh. But the agreement was only for recruiting female workers who will work in households. The government should have made this clear to the public because it was seen that a large number of male job seekers rushed to the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment to register their names.

We hope the KSA will soon reopen its market for our men as well. At the same time, Bangladesh government should set up special centres to provide emergency legal support to the female workers in the KSA who might fall victim of exploitation.

Mobarak Ali  
Gopibagh, Dhaka

### A killer's punishment

Abdul Jabbar, the 1971 wartime killer and criminal seems to have got away lightly. Looking at the five charges and corresponding punishments tabulated in your daily on 25th February 2015, he deserved the harshest punishment. But the ICT-1 sentenced him to imprisonment until death considering his old age. Makes one wonder, how he could get a 'Jatiyo Party' leadership berth!

P.I.B  
On e-mail

### Shops closed not for hartal, but for...

Hartals have become a regular phenomenon nowadays, thanks to BNP-Jamaat! But the general people rarely observe hartal as those calling hartals are not present on the streets. Dhaka shopkeepers are enjoying almost a normal life, keeping their shops wide open and selling their commodities as usual. However, one morning this week I went to the local bazaar and was surprised to see that all the shops were closed. I thought that some BNP-Jamaat activists might get active suddenly and the shopkeepers were worried about that. I found a shop slightly open. I approached that shop and came to know from the shopkeeper that they kept their shops closed because they feared that some pro-ruling party activists would come and force them to join the anti hartal procession! What an irony!

Sarker Javed Iqbal  
Mirpur, Dhaka