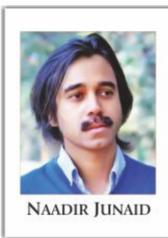


# They gave their today, for our tomorrow

On August 29, the Pakistani army raided houses of several freedom fighters and their well-wishers in Dhaka. Members of the Crack Platoon, their families and well-wishers were taken prisoner. Many of them never returned.



NAADIR JUNAID

**J**OSTLING crowds, lots of offices, apartments, superstores, restaurants, boutiques, billboards, pharmacies, and very many vehicles typify the landscape of certain areas of contemporary Dhaka such as Mirpur Road, Green Road, Dhanmondi and Farmgate. The bustle and excitement of the big city serve to exhaust as well as attract people, and make them much too preoccupied with the present. I wonder if present-day inhabitants of Dhaka city sometimes tend to think about certain incidents that took place in these particular areas exactly 46 years ago. Or, if they are at all aware of the important and daring events of 1971?

Forty-six years ago, the Pakistani military occupied Dhaka through Operation Searchlight, the monstrous military attack mounted by the Pakistan army on March 25. Bengalis witnessed a reign of terror. The occupying troops were seen patrolling various parts of the city and their ominous presence instilled a great fear in the Bengali population. However, from June 1971, the Mukti Bahini's guerrilla units started entering Dhaka with the aim of unsettling the Pakistani junta by launching attacks on different establishments in the city using hit and run methods. These guerrilla attacks provided a much-needed boost for the morale of the Bengalis and made the Pakistani troops experience fright and anxiety in Dhaka for the first time.

The Crack Platoon was one of the guerrilla units created in Sector 2 under the direct supervision of Major ATM Hyder. Hyder was a member of Special Services Group (SSG), the

elite commando unit of the Pakistan army. In March 1971, he defected from his unit stationed in Comilla Cantonment and joined the Sector 2 forces of Mukti Bahini led by then Lieutenant-Colonel Khaled Mosharrar. Khaled felt the importance of forming a guerrilla unit composed mainly of young people who knew the city well. He assigned Major Hyder to train the Dhaka youths who congregated in Sector 2. Using his specialised knowledge of commando tactics, Major Hyder trained these young freedom fighters, desperate and determined to liberate their motherland, to become daring guerrillas. Habibul Alam, *Bir Pratik*; Kazi Kamaluddin, *Bir Bikram*; Abdul Halim Chowdhury (Jewel), *Bir Bikram*; Shahadat Chowdhury; Fateh Ali Chowdhury; Shafi Imam (Rumi) *Bir Bikram*; Bodiul Alam (Bodi), *Bir Bikram*; Mofazzal Hosen Chowdhury (Maya), *Bir Bikram*; Golam Dastagir Gazi, *Bir Pratik*; Ali Ahmed Ziauddin, *Bir Pratik*; Qamrul Huq (Shawpon), *Bir Bikram*; Azad; Masud Sadique (Chullu); AFM Harris; Pulu among many others were the members of the Crack Platoon.

The very first guerrilla operation was carried out in Dhaka on June 9, 1971. Alam, Zia, Maya and Shawpon hurled hand grenades into the porch of the Hotel Inter-Continental and made the visiting World Bank and UNHCR team members realise that the situation in Bangladesh was far from normal. On July 18, the guerrillas attacked five power sub-stations with a view to disrupting the electricity supply in the city. Of the five targets, Ullan and Gulbagh sub-stations were blown up by two guerrilla teams led by Golam Dastagir Gazi and Abu Sayeed Khan respectively. Pakistani soldiers had set up a checkpoint in a triangular road-island in Farmgate. It enabled them to keep a close eye on a number of roads. After reconnoitring the place a few times, the



The guerrillas of Crack Platoon (Sector 2), Dhaka, Bangladesh (1971).

guerrillas attacked the checkpoint on August 8. Alam, Bodi, Maya, Shawpon and Pulu opened fire on Pakistani soldiers from the direction of Holy Cross College. Soldiers' tents were riddled with bullets, leaving several dead.

The guerrillas planned to stun the Pakistani authority by organising multiple attacks on August 25, because Operation Searchlight had started exactly five months before that date. On that day, a guerrilla team comprising Alam, Bodi, Kazi, Shawpon and Rumi fired from a moving car on the army sentries guarding a high-ranking army officer's house in Dhanmondi 18 (currently 9A). When their car arrived at Mirpur Road, they saw that the soldiers were checking all vehicles. The guerrillas could not turn the car back, so they decided to confront the Pakistani soldiers head

on. Alam turned left to enter Dhanmondi 5 and Shawpon, Bodi and Kazi fired their automatic weapons continuously through the car windows. A military jeep soon started chasing them. But Rumi broke the rear windshield using his Sten gun and fired at the jeep. The bullets hit the driver and the jeep crashed into a lamp-post. Alam, turning on the left indicator, quickly took a right turn and returned to Mirpur Road from Dhanmondi 5. But the Pakistani soldiers turned left and rushed towards Green Road, thinking that the guerrillas had gone that way.

The young guerrillas conducted these extremely dangerous operations flawlessly. They remained unhurt during their attacks inside Dhaka. They successfully accomplished their mission of unnerving the Pakistani soldiers,

giving the Bengalis a feeling of hope. But on August 29, on the basis of information provided by local collaborators, the Pakistani army managed to capture a few guerrillas. After torturing them inhumanly, they came to know about others, their hideouts, and hidden arms and ammunition. On the night of August 29, the Pakistani army raided several houses of freedom fighters and their well-wishers. Bodi, Jewel, Azad, Rumi, Chullu, eminent musician Altaf Mahmud and many of their relatives were taken prisoner. Kazi and Shawpon managed a narrow escape. Three and a half months later, the Pakistani army was defeated and Bangladesh became independent. But Rumi, Bodi, Jewel, Azad and Altaf Mahmud never returned to their near and dear ones.

Today, on another August 29, how many people remember that dark night when these patriotic and fearless young men had been captured? Do the members of our new generation have any interest in reading about the young Bengali guerrillas who were murdered by the Pakistani army in 1971? Are they familiar with the names of the other guerrillas who are still alive? Like many other freedom fighters, Rumi, Bodi, Jewel, Azad and Altaf Mahmud sacrificed their lives so that their countrymen could live in a liberated country. The documentary titled *Muktir Gaan* (1995) by Tareque and Catherine Masud ended by asking similar questions—Can we fulfil the expectations of the freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for us? Can we uphold their noble aims?

I do not wish to sound cynical, but sadly, I am really not sure if the majority of the people in our present-day society tend to ponder such questions seriously.

Dr Naadir Junaid is Professor, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka.

# Challenging times ahead for Pakistan



JAMES M DORSEY

**T**HE most immediate uncomfortable truth is that it is virtually impossible to separate Pakistan's domestic security concerns from its external ones. Not because they can be dismissed as the result of foreign interference but because they are often the legacy of past policies.

Pakistanis with good reason point to US and Saudi policies dating back to the war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, if not earlier. That is beyond doubt. It however is also an argument that conveniently allows its proponents to distract from the fact that Pakistan was and is a full partner in the execution of those policies, not simply either the victim or the poorly acknowledged facilitator. Pakistan is and was the ultimate arbitrator of its history and shares equal responsibility for the consequences of its decisions.

Similarly, there is no doubt that Pakistan is located in a volatile part of the world. It shares borders with Afghanistan that has been in the throes of war and insurgency for decades, Iran, and an increasingly nationalist India. It is a stone's throw from the Gulf and is one of two regional nuclear powers. Having said that, Pakistan's legitimate security concerns are as much a function of its geography as they are problems of its own making.

There is equally no doubt that Pakistan has suffered significantly and continues to suffer from political violence. And indeed, Pakistan has done much to crackdown on militant groups. The political divide emerges over the question whether the Pakistani crackdown is comprehensive, targeting without qualification all militant groups, irrespective of who they are and what their goals are. It

doesn't. Pakistan, to its credit as well as to its detriment, makes no bones about this. In fact, this approach has become so deeply engrained that it is difficult to reverse, will not be changed by US sanctions, and ultimately will come to haunt Pakistan.

Decades of Pakistani support for various groups in support of its approach to Kashmir, its filtering of much of its threat perception through the prism of challenges posed by India, concern about vulnerabilities that arise from ethnic unrest and neglect in Balochistan, and abetting and aiding of Saudi policies, has created demons that lead their own life. To be sure, US policy, including the prescriptions recently laid out by President Trump do little to help Pakistan work through issues, take a step back, and look at alternative ways of enhancing domestic and external security. In fact, Trump's policies threaten to harden existing differences and exacerbate regional tensions.

One such approach is evident in the case of Jamaat ud-Dawa, a group that is widely viewed as a front for Lashkar e-Taiba, a globally proscribed organisation, and led by Hafez Saeed, who has been designated a terrorist under international law by the United Nations. For much of the past year, Saeed has been under house arrest rather than in prison. Treating Jamaat-ud-Dawa with kid gloves is but one issue that has raised questions about the sincerity and comprehensiveness of the Pakistani crackdown. Yet, a decision by the group to create a political party has sparked debate about how to deal with militancy in Pakistan. Indeed, a successful transition towards pluralistic, political engagement that involves an absolute rejection of violence would significantly contribute to enhancing domestic security and could serve as a model for others.

The chances of Jamaat-ud-Dawa becoming a model case, however, are



Pakistan has done much to crackdown on militant groups. The political divide emerges over the question whether the Pakistani crackdown is comprehensive.

undermined by the fact that there is little indication that its transition is embedded in broader policies. There is also little indication that Pakistan has the political will to reshape the environment in which, at least tacitly, militancy is allowed to flourish. Decades of Pakistani and Saudi support of various strands of Sunni Muslim ultra-conservatism has woven that worldview into the fabric of significant segments of government, the military and society. It is a worldview that does not encourage pluralism, tolerance and competitive, political engagement.

Doubts about the comprehensiveness of the Pakistani approach are fed by multiple factors, ranging from the lack of political will to seriously tackle educational reform to failing to even project an image of a state that at the very least goes through the motions of confronting all

militancy, to turning a blind eye when it suits the state's purpose. The risks are huge and could threaten what Pakistan sees as a lifeline, its all-weather friendship with China and China's multi-billion-dollar investment in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Reports that Saudi Arabia and Iran are about to exchange diplomatic visits justify a degree of optimism that the kingdom may, at least for now, shelve plans to use Balochistan as a spring plank for efforts to destabilise Iran. The reports are bolstered by leaked emails that quote Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman as saying that he would favour US engagement with Iran. Time will tell.

Nonetheless, Pakistani policy in dealing with the potential threat of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry playing out in part in a crucial, but already troubled province raises similar doubts. For much of the past year, Pakistan has

turned a blind eye to the flow of Saudi funds to militants, some of whom are associated with outlawed groups such as the successors of Sipah-e-Sabaha and madrassas in Balochistan that nurture, violent anti-Iranian, anti-Shiite groups. The funds are often channelled through Saudis of Baloch descent.

Pakistan's response to the US Treasury's designation in May of Maulana Ali Muhammad Abu Turab as a specially designated terrorist is a case in point. The response highlighted the murky world of Pakistani militancy in which the lines between various groups are fluid, links to government are evident, and battles in Pakistan and Afghanistan and potentially Iran are inter-linked.

The Treasury described Abu Turab as a "facilitator... (who) helped... raise money in the Gulf and supported the movement of tens of thousands of dollars from the Gulf to Pakistan." The

### QUOTABLE Quote

**FREDÉRIC BASTIAT**  
FRENCH ECONOMIST AND AUTHOR

*When plunder becomes a way of life for a group of men in a society, over the course of time they create for themselves a legal system that authorises it and a moral code that glorifies it.*

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS**

- 1 Hindu god of destruction
- 6 Block-heads
- 11 Long sandwiches
- 12 Deeply impressed
- 13 Precise
- 14 Become prevalent
- 15 Mecca resident
- 17 Conclusion
- 18 Idyllic
- 22 Jai --
- 23 Mason's tool
- 27 Type a password, perhaps
- 29 Frighten
- 30 Use for support
- 32 Like the Sahara
- 33 Flowering herb
- 35 Lamb's father

**DOWN**

- 1 That lady
- 2 Spell
- 3 Writer Levin
- 4 Careers
- 5 Houston player
- 6 Expels from legal practice
- 7 Count start
- 8 Past due
- 9 Castor or Pollux
- 10 Transmit
- 16 Museum subject
- 18 Become tiresome
- 19 Lotion additive
- 20 Long story
- 21 Sites
- 24 Bend out of shape
- 25 Pennsylvania port
- 26 Mother of Castor and Pollux
- 28 "Moving right along..."
- 31 Role for Keanu
- 34 Follow
- 35 Mob revolt
- 36 River of Italy
- 37 Rocker Jagger
- 40 Take to court
- 42 Slight, in slang
- 43 Feasted
- 44 Gender

### BEETLE BAILEY

WANT TO HEAR MY NEW LOVE SONG? SURE

I THINK YOUR GUITAR NEEDS TUNING

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

GOT ME BARN'S  
ATRIA IDEAL  
SOILS NOTRE  
COVETS ONE  
ALE SEETOIT  
NET IIVANKA  
IDEST  
BAKERY RAH  
CATERER EMO  
ASH DIMSUM  
SKEIN DOUSE  
TENSE ELMER  
STARE REEDS

### BABY BLUES

MOM, CAN YOU CALL TODD'S MOM AND HAVE HER ASK HIM IF HE WANTS TO HAVE A PLAN DATE WITH ME?

IF HE DOES, THEN LOOK FOR AN OPENING IN OUR SCHEDULES AND EITHER ARRANGE TO HAVE HIM DROPPED OFF HERE, OR BLOCK OUT SOME TIME TO DRIVE ME TO HIS HOUSE.

OKAY.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO KNOCKING ON DOORS UNTIL YOU FOUND ANOTHER BORED KID TO PLAY WITH?

SIMPLER TIMES.