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# Concern over Islamic insurgency in C. Asia

By Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW, AUGUST 25.** Russia's defence chief voiced concern over continuing rebel incursions in Central Asia and urged closer anti-terrorist cooperation with the countries of the region.

Following weeks of rebel incursions into Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the Defence Minister, Marshal Igor Sergeyev, said the situation in the Central Asian region "remains difficult and calls for additional measures to improve operation controls of the unified anti-terrorist command" of Russia and the Central Asian states set up earlier this year.

The army and security forces in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have been battling Islamic insurgents for three weeks now amid reports that more rebels are planning to join the fray from Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

The authorities in Kyrgyzstan said a border post on the border with Tajikistan had been attacked on Thursday and in Uzbekistan government commandos were trying to track down a group of Islamic rebels hiding in the

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mountains just 100 km from the capital, Tashkent.

"The latest flareup of terrorism in the region of the Tajik-Kyrgyz and Tajik-Uzbek borders betrays far-reaching plans of Islamic extremists to assert their control in the region and destroy by military and other means the foundations of statehood in the Central Asian republics," the Russian defence chief told Interfax news agency on Friday.

Kazakhstan has put its army and security forces on alert, the *Izvestia* daily reported Friday.

"Authorities in Astana [capital of Kazakhstan] do not rule out that Islamic rebels who are terrorising Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan may push into Kazakh territory," it said.

The rebels are led by the notorious Uzbek warlord Djuma Namangani, leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which last year invaded southern Kyrgyzstan, taking hostage four Japanese geologists. His stated aim is to overthrow the Uzbek President, Mr. Islam Karimov, and replace him with a fundamentalist regime. The rebels are said to have been trained in Afghanistan and financed by Osama bin Laden, who seeks to destabilise the

secular governments in Central Asia and weaken their ties with Russia.

The Government in Uzbekistan on Friday issued calls for increased vigilance by the population, urging people to report anything suspicious. The calls followed clashes with a rebel group 110 km east of the capital Tashkent in which two Uzbek border guards had been killed, according to the country's Defence Ministry announcement.

Mr. Karimov said on national television that the military had underestimated the enemy and had suffered "unjustifiable losses." "The liquidation of bandits is not going to be a lightning operation," he admitted. "It is a most challenging task."

Last weekend, the leaders of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan met in an emergency summit in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek to discuss stepped-up cooperation to repulse the attacks. They called on the world community to pay closer attention to the situation in Central Asia which could undermine stability not only in the region but also far beyond its borders.

26 AUG 2000

# Bin Laden sends more fighters to Chechnya

HIZARAK (Afghanistan): Suspected terrorist Osama Bin Laden sent 400 Arab fighters to the Russian breakaway republic of Chechnya with explosives and weapons to help the war against Russian forces, a military instructor in his organisation says.



Osama Bin Laden

Western intelligence sources confirmed that fighters went to Chechnya from Afghanistan, but could not say whether they were Arabs or Afghans.

The disclosure comes at a time when Central Asian governments are sounding increasingly worried about Islamic militancy in their countries, and are blaming the Taliban. Bin Laden's Al-Qaida organisation is based in Afghanistan.

The military instructor in Al-Qaida, who goes by the *nom de guerre* of Abu Daoud, also reported that Bin Laden was under pressure from the Taliban to curtail his activities, and that Bin Laden had indicated he would rather

quit Afghanistan than give up his war against the West. Abu Daoud, a Yemeni national whose real name is unknown, spoke in an interview this month in a remote village in Nangarhar province, north-eastern Afghanistan. The meeting was arranged by a Taliban commander.

Abu Daoud said hundreds of Arab and Afghan fighters went to Chechnya about 18 months ago, and many returned. The latest 400 went there some three months ago, according to Abu Daoud's account. The Kremlin claimed this spring to have evidence that Bin Laden and the Taliban had a deal to aid Chechen units.

Vladimir Putin, then Russia's prime minister, said September that Bin Laden had been in Chechnya several times. Moscow also tried to link Bin Laden to apartment bombings that killed 300 people. The bombings were part of the reason Russian troops re-entered Chechnya.

The Russians gave no evidence, and the statements were seen as aimed to win Western support for a military campaign against Chechen rebels. However, according to Abu

Daoud, Bin Laden's welcome in Afghanistan seems to be wearing thin. He said a new order was issued at the beginning of July by the Taliban's supreme leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, flatly banning Bin Laden's operations. He said Omar told Bin Laden "in very tough words that there could be no activity. He should be like a simple refugee and all his communications were shut down. Then Bin Laden said, 'I want to leave Afghanistan for another country, but you must agree to not tell where I am going.'" A U.S. state department official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Washington has urged the Taliban—directly in talks with Taliban officials and through Pakistan—to crack down on Bin Laden and prevent him from committing terrorist acts.

Bin Laden keeps his whereabouts secret, and there was no indication to which country he might try to move. The Taliban deputy interior minister, Mohammed Khaqzar, said in an interview that Bin Laden's communications were cut off more than two years ago, and he denied any new curbs have been imposed. (AP)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

30 AUG 2001

Strong Opp. could keep Premier on his toes

# Mori back in hot seat with economy team

FROM ELAINE LIES *Japan*

Tokyo, July 4 (Reuters): Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori was re-elected by parliament today and quickly announced a new Cabinet charged with ensuring Japan's economic recovery stays on track.

But even before the Cabinet line-up featuring familiar faces in key posts was announced, speculation bubbled that Mori himself may have trouble hanging onto his post.

Analysts said it was too soon to predict the Prime Minister would lose his job in coming months. But he is fresh from an election setback and faces a more confident Opposition, criticism over a new scandal and a controversial corporate bailout.

The pitfalls ahead are many, and the unpopular Mori could face tough going once a July 21-23 Group of Eight (G8) summit of rich nations and Russia has



Mori: Smile while it lasts

passed. He kept finance minister Kiichi Miyazawa, economic planning minister Taichi Sakaiya and foreign minister Yohei Kono on board, as expected, to handle the summit.

Opposition parties kept up a drum beat of criticism. "Despite the fact that Japan is confronting the major challenge of structural reform, it is unclear what the new Cabinet is trying to accomplish," said Tsutomu Hata, secretary-general of the main opposition Democratic Party. "The second Mori Cabinet is a 'Cabinet adrift'."

The current Cabinet is expected to last only until January, when the number of ministries will be cut to 12 from 22 as part of a sweeping government reorganisation. Mori himself got some good news and some bad today.

The Bank of Japan's (BOJ) key "tankan" survey showed that

*57*  
business sentiment improved sharply in the three months to June, with an index measuring confidence at large manufacturers rising to plus three, the first positive reading since September 1997.

Potentially more troubling for Mori was a public opinion poll showing the popularity of the main Opposition Democratic Party has more than doubled, while support for his dominant Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) sagged.

The opinion poll in the conservative daily *Yomiuri Shimbun* said support for the Democrats jumped to 20.6 per cent from 9.6 per cent while that for the LDP — the dominant party in the three-way ruling camp — fell to 29.9 per cent from 34.2 per cent in May, when the paper's last survey was conducted.

A June 25 election for parliament's Lower House returned the three-way ruling coalition to power, but slashed its presence in the chamber and deprived the LDP of its outright majority. The Democrats, who attacked Mori's performance and the LDP's free-spending policies in the campaign, made substantial gains.

Analysts have said LDP elders and Mori's rivals may be loathe to fight an Upper House election in July 2001 with the unpopular Premier leading the fight.

THE TELEGRAPH

- 5 JUL 2000

## TRYING TIME FOR MORI

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THE RULING COALITION in Japan, led by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), has managed to hold on to power in last month's general election and Mr. Yoshiro Mori has been sworn in the Prime Minister a second time. Despite being in office for hardly three months, Mr. Mori's popularity has been at an all-time low. Though the urban electorate rejected the LDP-led front, the coalition was able to secure an absolute majority thanks to the backing of the rural voters and the business community. In the previous House, the LDP commanded a majority on its own, but the coalition has together managed to win just 271 out of the 480 seats this time. Given his low popularity ratings and the increased dependence on the allies, it is doubtful if Mr. Mori's Government can deliver on its promises. The challenges appear formidable and unless the allies can work together on a concrete action plan, the slow economic revival now taking shape can come to naught. Because of the month-end G-8 summit in Japan, Mr. Mori has stuck to the old faces to run the key Ministries such as Finance, Trade and Industry and Foreign Affairs. An overhaul and downsizing of Government, including the Cabinet, has been slated for January.

In view of that major pruning in Government, doubts have already arisen about the prospects of the Mori administration. The question is whether Mr. Mori can survive the January reshuffle? There could be pressure within the LDP and from the allies to change the leadership at that time, unless there is a significant economic revival by then. A feature of the latest Japanese verdict is that the LDP and its two allies lost quite a few seats, while the main opposition Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan), gained 32 seats to take its tally to 127 in the Diet. Mr. Mori's partners cannot escape the feeling that it is the poor personal rating of the Prime Minister that brought down their combined strength by

119-12  
as many as 64 seats. If Mr. Mori is unable to improve his rating among the people or put the economy back on track in the next six months, the expectation is that the allies and the other factions in the LDP will prefer to change the leadership. And the people, particularly in Tokyo and other urban centres, will welcome such a move. So, it is entirely up to Mr. Mori and his veteran Finance Minister, Mr. Kiichi Miyazawa, to act now and save the present administration.

5 am  
This mandate from the voters is apparently for both continuity and change. It could be seen as a vote to continue with the LDP front, under a new leader. It was certainly a warning to the Government. Successive Governments from Mr. Hashimoto's, when the East Asian economic crisis erupted, have tended to depend on Government spending to propel economic recovery. Though the Bank of Japan has said business sentiment has risen and economists believe that a partial recovery is taking place, the Government's borrowings have increased substantially, causing serious concern. Consumers' confidence has not returned to the markets and the Japanese are just refusing to spend, prolonging depression in the retail market. Unless that sentiment changes, the process of recovery will not be complete. For that to happen, Mr. Mori and Mr. Miyazawa must push ahead with key reforms in the financial sector. The upcoming G-8 summit will impress upon Tokyo the urgency of those reforms. The year 2001 will be critical. In January, a sweeping Government reorganisation has been promised, with a reduction in Ministries from 22 to 12. In July, elections to the Upper House are due. That is why the next six months will be critical for Mr. Mori's survival. Instead of talking himself into trouble, he must get his team into action. It is high time Japan joins and leads East Asia's economic resurgence, for which it needs a dynamic leadership.

THE HINDU

8 JUL 2000

AS a religion, Islam stands for peace and submission to God. Islam, after all, is derived from the root word *salam* or peace. From a historical standpoint, however, Islam is nothing short of a political-cum-religious phenomenon.

The early growth of Islam was not only fragile but uncertain. Under the leadership of the Prophet Mohammad, who received his first Quranic revelation in AD 612, Islam overcame adversity to reign supreme — first in Mecca and Medina, before expanding beyond the outer reaches of the desert. From a coterie of tribal groups, Islam grew into a vibrant civilisational force within a short time. Although the Quran disproves forced conversion — a verifiable fact — jihad was modified into one of the key strategies with which the faith could be expanded.

The Muslim military would march to the border or gate of the enemy and demand *jizyah*, a form of poll tax. Barring their compliance, the residents were urged to accept Islam. If this option was rejected, combat was declared between soldiers on both sides. How the battles were played out was not uniquely Islamic — any more than they were un-Islamic. Like many things in ancient history, battles often served as an attempt at “drawing the line in the sand”. Even then, the use and application of jihad has always evolved according to circumstances.

During a time of war and civil strife, for example, the mere invocation of jihad suggests immediately a readiness to fight. In times of peace, however, jihad means a moral or spiritual struggle to overcome one's desires and depravities. Both interpretations are valid because jihad comes from the verbal noun *jahada*, meaning to struggle or to exert.

Within the context of Islamic religious and political discourse, jihad is not a problematic concept. There is nothing wrong about Islam's emphasis on physical or other forms of exertion. This is because all moral, ideological and religious systems sanction the importance of sacrifice and struggle.

What is disputed is the status of jihad within the pecking order of Islamic obligations in the contemporary setting.

(To a religiously-inspired political party such as Parti Se-Islam (PAS) in Malaysia, bringing about the establishment of an Islamic state is a duty — albeit one that has to be executed peacefully, legally and with patience.) Without it they risk staying in an impure environment where the laws of men, rather than the laws of God, reign supreme.

From the viewpoint of PAS, creating an Islamic state amounts to a cardinal Islamic obligation. Something not

# What jihad really means

Al-Ma'unah's militant attempt to create an Islamic state in Malaysia is nothing short of a travesty of what Islam stands for, writes PHAR KIM BENG

unlike alms-giving, daily prayers and fasting. There are, however, groups in Malaysia which are even more extreme than PAS, as recent events have demonstrated. Al-Ma'unah, for one, is a fringe group which exploded into the limelight by attempting the arms heist in Perak last week.

(Since creating an Islamic state is a compulsory duty) — a line of thinking which has been influenced by the works of Maulana Maududi of Pakistan and Sayyid Al Qutub of Egypt — (it is the erroneous belief of Al-Ma'unah that the end justifies the means.) Al-Ma'unah's torture and slaying of two non-Muslim hostages during the crisis, for instance, clearly amplifies this perverted logic.

Although Al-Ma'unah is labelled a deviant cult in the Malaysian press, a standard government policy since the group's interpretation of Islam diverges from the mainstream, the group does understand Islam in some recognisable form. But it suffers from moral deficit. As with many extreme Muslim groups, Al-Ma'unah sees violent struggle in parallel terms with the basic tenets of Islamic politics. One of the reasons why jihad is so misunderstood today is due not so much to Western ignorance as it is caused by over-zealous Muslim elements which constantly imbue Islam with militant zeal. It is they who blandly qualify their actions as blessed by God to the detriment of society at large. Given the dejected state of the contemporary Muslim world, with close to 47 Islamic states under a repressive regime, Islamic discourse cannot avoid radical and subversive references. This is because Islam has always commanded its followers to fight against oppression. (In fact, Karen Armstrong, a renowned religious scholar, wrote that “the reason why violence predominates in Muslim societies is not because Islam is inherently violent but because Islam cannot tolerate any form of injustices.”)

For better or for worse, Muslims tend to react, too quickly, against perceived or putative oppression. This also explains many Muslim societies' explosive streak and cava-

lier attitude towards the use of violence for political ends. Due to the sense of siege which Muslims experience under Western hegemony, current

Islamic discourse tends to revolve on jihad's martial, rather than spiritual and moral, quality. To have a hard-core group like Al-Ma'unah tak-

ing up an armed rebellion in Malaysia, allegedly in the name of creating an Islamic state, reeks of irony and inconsistency. It is nothing less than a travesty to what Islam stands for in the first place — peace and unity.

— The Straits Times/Asia News Network.

THE STATESMAN

17 JUL 2000

# Kandahar II: Players' heads shaved for wearing shorts

Mubashir Zaidi/AFP  
Islamabad/Kabul, July 18

**I**T WAS JUST not football. After having their heads forcibly shaved and spending a night in jail for just playing the game, a Pakistani team of Balochistan province returned home today from a nightmare in Afghanistan last Saturday.

Their crime: wearing shorts on the football field, which violates the stringent Taliban dress code. The venue: Kandahar, which gained notoriety after a hijacked Indian Airlines plane was taken there last year.

The incident occurred during the last outing of a three-match tour with the Kandahar soccer team on Sunday. Bearded Taliban policemen raided the field, arrested team members and later shaved their heads for daring to wear shorts on Afghan soil. Reports in the Pakistani press said spectators panicked and several were injured in the subsequent stampede.

Afghan Sports Minister Shokour Mutmaen has since apologised for

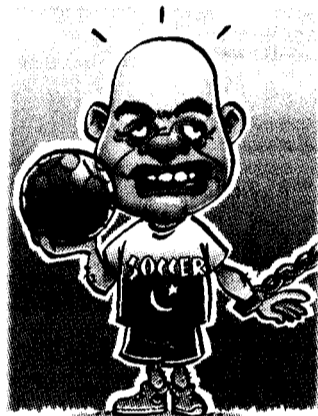


Illustration: Arya Prahara

the incident. The Taliban asked the footballers to replay the match. But the players refused and just wanted to head home.

Reports today said the officer in charge of the police who were involved has been sacked.

Foreign Office sources in Islamabad today said that Pakistan has taken serious notice of the incident and asked the Taliban to take action against the local police.

19/7 HFI  
Under the Taliban's ultra-conservative version of Islamic law, men cannot trim their beards, wear shorts or roll up their sleeves in public.

Afghan players play in baggy trousers and long-sleeved jerseys. Spectators at Saturday's game were allowed to clap, but applause and cheering is normally outlawed at the few sports events allowed in Afghanistan.

There was a major outcry in religious and sports circles in Pakistan. "It's against Islamic traditions to treat your guest like this and we hold the right to protest to the Afghan government," said Pakistan Football Federation secretary Agha Liaquat Ali.

Pakistani religious leaders said the Taliban's action was un-Islamic and damaging to the religion. "By taking such actions, the Taliban are not doing any service to Islam," said Jamaat-e-Islami party leader Ghafoor Ahmed.

However, some pro-Taliban religious leaders felt rules were rules and the Pakistanis should not have broken them.

THE HINDU

19 JUL 2000

# Islam's Relevance In Today's World

11-12 By ISSA REZAZADEH 10/5

ISLAM highlights spiritual realities that are important to human understanding, ethical values, and commandments pertaining to every area of human individual and social life. It urges us to put them into practice. It consists of a set of critical concerns and ethical and practical rules that assures man's happiness in this world and the next if he carries them out. Islam's values are so composed that any individual or society carrying out these commandments will achieve quality living conditions and progress towards perfection. Islam has founded its culture and rules on the nature of creation and has deeply considered and provided for human needs.

Today, some people, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, tend to have a narrow, closed-in view of the culture and religion of Islam. This is unhealthy and dangerous, particularly in a country where all the major religions of the world are present and where, in the past, a meaningful dialogue has often been carried on amongst them.

An English author in his book entitled *Everlasting Man* published in 1925 said: "There are two ways of getting home, and one of them is to stay there". No doubt, that is the safest option; for some it is the only option. We are taking shelter in the house of Islam where we unfortunately feel relaxed, calm and cool with stagnancy. Let's leave it temporarily and look at ourselves from outside. We may come to different conclusions.

In the *Qur'an*, there are two words for humankind—*Bashar* and *Insaan*. In some places the *Qur'an* states, "I am *bashar* like you" (sura 18, verse 110) and at other times it states, "*Insaan* was created impatient". (Sura 17, verse 11).

So, there are two kinds of humans; one who is the subject matter of poets, philosophers, and religion, and another who is the subject matter of biology. The first kind, *bashar*, has physiological, biological, and psychological characteristics which are shared by all humans, regardless of whether they are black, white, western, religious or non-religious; it is based upon the physical laws that medicine, physiology, psy-

chology, and so on have discovered. Meanwhile, humankind in its second connotation consists of the truth of being *insaan*, possessing exceptional characteristics which cause each member of the human race to attain a certain degree of *insaniyat* or humanity.

Accordingly, we are all *bashar* but not necessarily *insaan*. Thus, from among all humans, every one is as much *bashar* as the rest, but there are some who have attained *insaniyat*, and there are others who are in the process of becoming an *insaan*; either a little or to an exalted degree. *Bashar* is physical whereas *insaan* is what you make of yourself.

We have two worlds; one is the world of 'being alive' as a *bashar* in the physical sense and another is the world of 'living' which belongs to becoming *insaan*. How much of our identity can be shaped according to the Islamic criteria? To what extent is our living world Islamic? With all these elements in play, all are not Muslim in the same degree.

Lastly, does religion help us to deal justly and generously with the complex and manifold problems of our everyday life or does religion defend the status quo? Religion will never gain a hold over the minds of contemporary man, unless it can help him to deal intelligently with the powerful forces which dominate contemporary life, and Islam is not an exception.

Islam must face the realities of the contemporary situation and demonstrate that it can make its influence felt in the day-to-day life of man, eradicating its cruelties, injustices and exploitations, and filling it with grace, meaning and compassion.

Religion has a vital role to play in our life. It inspires us to render what is due to our fellow beings. Since helping us achieve salvation is the primary goal of religion, a religious person will have to traverse through the valley of compassionate service. He who is not prepared to do this, can never embark upon the path of God-realisation, a path which has been described as being "sharper than a sword and narrower than the breadth of a human hair".



THE  
SPEAKING TREE

THE TIMES OF INDIA

10 MAY 2000

# Dhaka on alert against Taliban activities

By Haroon Habib

**DHAKA, JUNE 15.** The intelligence and security agencies of Bangladesh are reportedly on high alert after reports that the Taliban or followers of the international terrorist, Osama bin Laden, are active in the country and conducting bank transactions from here.

The United Nations Security Council has reportedly requested the Government of Bangladesh to ascertain if Taliban-related funds are being maintained in the country. This has again brought to the fore the issue of Taliban activities in Bangladesh.

A number of persons and organisations are allegedly maintaining accounts in Bangladesh on behalf of the Taliban. Reports also maintain that millions of dollars are changing hands through several bank accounts which the Bangladesh authorities are now investigating.

The Home Minister, Mr. Mohammad Nasim, told *The Independent*, "Our intelligence agencies are keeping a constant watch in this regard." He said the law-enforcing agencies had always been active against the Taliban and other forces engaging themselves in activities in this country. He, however, said no evidence of such involvement had so far been found.

Meanwhile, an official in the Bangladesh

Bank, the central bank of the country, said the ongoing verification of accounts and assets held in different banks of the country was part of a routine exercise following the recent U.N. embargo on the Taliban Government. Bangladesh had received similar requests from the Security Council in the past after the U.N. imposed sanctions on Iraq, Libya and Yugoslavia.

At that time, the event passed unnoticed though the central bank had asked all banks to check whether there were any accounts or assets owing their origin to those Governments or their nationals.

The official said that since the imposition of U.N. embargo on Afghanistan several months ago, the Security Council had started looking for bin Laden's huge wealth which is allegedly being used for funding the Taliban Government and terrorist activities world-wide.

He said, "If they (banks) find anything, they will report to us", adding that a committee appointed by the Security Council was coordinating the matter. "But we are not guided by any time-frame".

The bin Laden issue came to the fore during the visit of the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, to Bangladesh earlier this year. Mr. Clinton had to cancel his scheduled trips to Joypura village and the national memorial at Savan mainly due to threats from bin Laden's men.

THE HINDU

76 JUN 20



# Muslim rebels agree for talks with Philippine negotiators

JOLO (Philippines) Philippine negotiators on Wednesday moved to fix the latest snag in efforts to start formal talks with Islamic extremists holding 21 hostages from seven nations aimed at ending the month-long kidnapping crisis.

Mr Abdusakur Tan, governor of the province of Sulu, which covers Jolo island, 1,000 km south of Manila, met with leaders of the Abu Sayyaf extremists after the guerillas aborted on Monday's meeting with chief negotiator Roberto Aventajado.

Mr Tan, escorted by more than 100 policemen, met Abu Sayyaf Commanders Mujib Susukan and Ghalib Andang at the municipal hall of Patikul town, some eight kilometres away from where the 21 hostages are be-

ing held in a jungle hideout.

Susukan and Andang arrived with some 50 heavily armed and hooded Abu Sayyaf fighters. They were accompanied by said Asppi, the head of the group's liquidation squad in Jolo, and two other commanders who organised the kidnapping on April 23 in a raid in the Malaysian diving island of Sipadan.

Abu Sayyaf rebels armed with AK-47s and grenade launchers guarded the closed-door meeting, also attended by Patikul town mayor Hashier Hayudimi.

Asked what was being discussed in the meeting, one rebel said, "if there is an agreement, then we'll see a release right away." The guerrilla did not elaborate.

A German television crew at the meeting

handed baskets of goods to the extremists for the hostages. The supplies included books, shirts, game boards and cigarettes "for the boys," the journalists said.

Mr Tan, a member of the government's five-man negotiating team, earlier sent an emissary to the Abu Sayyaf "to clear up all things" with the commanders after the setback on Monday.

The Philippines' largest Muslim separatist group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), has said it has accepted a government offer to resume peace talks in a gesture welcomed by President Joseph Estrada.

The MILF agreed "to sit down with the government on May 30 without preconditions," chief MILF negotiator Aleem Abdu-

laziz Mimbantas said in a letter on Tuesday to his government counterpart Edgardo Batanga. Mr Estrada, reacting to the letter, said: "Of course, we want peace talks with the Muslim separatist rebels to more or less resume on May 30. Our negotiators are already preparing for the resumption of such talks."

"We believe the peace process can still be saved if the MILF is just as sincere and committed as the government in pursuing a peaceful settlement of the insurgency."

But Mr Estrada warned that the government remained on guard for any new MILF attacks, saying "every inch of our country's territory" would be defended and protected.

Mr Estrada has used 60 per cent of the armed forces during the MILF conflict. (AFP)

# IS ISLAM ALIEN TO DEMOCRACY?

There is no simple answer to this question, says **AZIZ SIDDIQUI**

**K**arachi: Are Islam and democracy compatible? asks the *Economist*, London, among others before it. The question really is whether the two aren't actually incompatible. The paper goes on to cite examples some of which, like Pakistan's, suggest that they are: some that perhaps not necessarily so. No instances of compatibility were apparently at hand. So it isn't ready yet to rejoice at a phenomenon like the reformists' win in Iran.

That question does keep coming back. Muslim countries somehow appear either to have been willfully resistant to popular rule or unable to work it for any length of time. The syllogism that comes out of this may thus seem compelling. It is nevertheless rather simple-minded.

Failures of elective government, or shifts to one-party rule, have abounded in Africa. But nobody has argued from there that Africa and democracy were incompatible. The Latin Americans were until recently notorious for falling a victim to uniformed dictators. Few surmised from it that there was a fundamental flaw in that continent. Rightly so. Such failures are not a function of geographical factors.

No more do they spring from religion as such. They do that only when politics is made subject to religious doctrinarism. But that is true not just of Islam. It applies to almost all religions and creeds. Doctrinarism ordains; it claims immutability and presses immediacy. It rejects gradualism, is averse to compromises and accommodation. It works more by imposition than persuasion, demands adoption rather than adaptation. It views things in black and white, actions in term of command and obedience.

Politics, on the other hand, is, as they say, the art of the possible. It cannot operate except by recognition of and offering a response to existing conditions, to the mix of circumstances and attitudes. It succeeds in the measure that it can judge what will work in the given situation, in the given milieu of both the practitioners of politics and the object of all politics: the people.

It is doctrinarism and politics that do not mix whether the first flows from religion or a non-divine ideology. It did not mix when the church rivalled the kings in mediaeval Christendom. It did not when, later, Wycliffe and Huss and Luther were setting up their revolt

Common people, Muslim or other, equally like the taste of freedom, and they all wish to be left to have their own relationship with their God. Whenever the doctrinaire parties have had the occasion to face this reality, they have tended to come out chastened. The Roman Catholic Church's change of attitude since the Sixties was critical in the success of democratisation in Catholic countries like Spain and Portugal. In Pakistan, there have been this additional factor: some of the secular category of leaders have exploited religion about as much as the religious kind could have done had they had the opportunity in power

## Islamic state

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER  
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

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5710

MANILA, March 14. — Even as the Philippines military is cracking down on suspected international terrorists aiding Moro secessionist rebels in the South, Muslim leaders are planning to launch in Manila this week a movement promoting the cause of an independent Islamic state in Mindanao. According to a military intelligence report obtained by the Philippine Daily Inquirer, prominent Muslim personalities have firmed up plans to inaugurate a pro-independence group called the Free Bangsamoro Islamic Movement. "Authorities should pay attention to this alarming development and give it their highest priority," a veteran agent of the National Intelligence and Coordinating Agency said.

THE STATESMAN  
15 MAR 2000

# Militancy cuts little ice

HD 17  
19/3

**Most Governments of the Muslim world clearly have the upper hand in the struggle against Islamic militant movements. More importantly, these movements also appear to have realised that their agenda will be better advanced through peaceful propagation, reports**

**KESAVA MENON.**

**R**IGHT NOW most Governments of the Muslim world clearly have the upper hand in the struggle against Islamic militant movements in their countries. More importantly, most of these militant movements also appear to have realised that their agenda, for societies moulded on Islamic principles, will be better advanced through peaceful propagation and social service.

In these respects, the Muslim world as a whole falsifies the current Pakistan regime's claim that the "jihad", as it call it, is some sort of a sacrosanct phenomenon that they neither can nor would wish to control.

In Algeria and Turkey, the Governments have opted for a policy of tough repression against the Islamist movements. After granting amnesty to one movement, the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), Algeria's President, Mr. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, ordered an all-out offensive against the remaining Islamist forces.

This campaign which kicked off in the middle of January has gone on for longer than originally envisaged but it appears unlikely that its direction will be reversed. The remaining groups, such as the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), are renowned for their brutality and it does not appear that the Government will show any mercy.

Turkey's Government has similarly come down hard on a group which calls itself the Hezbollah but which apparently does not have any linkages to groups in other countries which bear the same name. The bodies of persons kidnapped by Hezbollah were discovered on the grounds of a number of Hezbollah safe houses in several cities. Most bore marks of torture. There were some complaints that the Turkish army or intelligence services were the very organisations that had

nurtured the Hezbollah and given it such a long rope in enlisting its assistance for the struggle against the secular Kurd rebels. But this criticism has since been muted and the crackdown continues apace.

Jordan regularly unearths Islamist militant groups that are either plotting against the security of Jordan itself or threaten regional stability. A few months ago, four leaders of the Palestinian-based militant group, Hamas, were packed off into exile in Qatar. The Jordanian Government allows Islamic political movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood to function but keeps a very vigilant eye on any proclivities they might have towards armed

militancy. Hamas, and the other militant group, Islamic Jihad, are under somewhat less pressure in the territories controlled by the Palestinian Authority. In the context of the Palestinians' unresolved problems with Israel, it is understandable that the Authority's officials are not totally bereft of sympathy for the Islamists.

But even the Israelis appear to now acknowledge that the Authority is keeping the militants under tight rein and that several recent operations in which militants were nabbed would not have been possible without the cooperation of the Authority's security and intelligence services.

Syria has traditionally taken a very hard line against armed Islamist groups. While such groups have no scope for operating within Syria they seem to have a bit more leeway in Lebanon. Earlier this year they ambushed soldiers in one of the northern Lebanon towns but were then ruthlessly crushed. Syria's attitude towards these Sunni militant groups which threaten its interests are of course in sharp contrast to its attitude to the Lebanese Shia militia, Hezbollah, which it is believed to sustain and support.

Currently, the Lebanese Hezbollah is known to possess the capability to strike at civilians within Israel, but though it has not specifically decried such operations it has not undertaken such attacks for quite some time either. Hezbollah attacks in recent time have almost exclusively targeted Israeli and pro-Israel militia in the zone they occupy in southern Lebanon. However, the Hezbollah had resorted to kidnappings and attacks on non-military targets in the past. This has ensured that it remains stuck on the US State Department's list of terrorist organisations.

The Hezbollah makes for an interesting case study since Pakistan is clearly trying to align the militant groups which it sponsors on the same track. Despite the occasional massacre of civilians in Jammu and Kashmir, the various Pakistan-backed 'jihadi' groups are now

striking largely at security targets. Along with the attendant Pakistani rhetoric that these groups are fighting for the self-determination of Kashmiris there is clearly an attempt to re-cast them as "freedom fighters" and not terrorists.

This Pakistani effort at "Hezbollahising" the jihadi outfits must be addressed while taking note of the fact that the U.S. State Department has neither removed the Lebanese Hezbollah from its list of terrorist organisations nor Syria from its list of states that sponsor terrorism.

While the Hezbollah's current campaign is directed at ejecting an occupying Israeli force from Lebanese soil, the jihadi groups in Kashmir are, even in terms of their best argument, fighting in disputed territory. This territory is in dispute because the country which sponsors the jihadi groups has never bothered to take the first step necessary for the resolution of the dispute by withdrawing its army from a part of that territory.

The Hezbollah has a legitimate claim to the label of "freedom fighters" since it is seeking to free its own territory. Can this claim by any stretch of the imagination be extended to people from all over Pakistan who attack Indian soldiers and civilians on part of a "disputed" territory while ignoring their own army's illegal occupation of another part of that territory?

**THE HINDU**  
**19 MAR 2000**

## Islamic 'dress code' for Malaysian women soon

KUALA LUMPUR: The ruling fundamentalist Islamist party of Malaysia's Terengganu state has ordered Muslim women to veil their heads and dress according to Islamic rules, an official said.

The Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), which was elected to power in Terengganu in last November's general election, will soon introduce the Islamic "dress code" on the proper attire for all working women in the state.

Women civil servants and those in the business sector will be the first to be ordered to cover up when going out in public, said Awang Jusoh, a state official in charge of women and non-Islamic issues.

The ruling, he said, would only apply to women in Terengganu and would not be applicable to tourists and visitors to the northeastern state, which is famous for its beaches and diving spots.

"We will be meeting with operators and owners of business premis-

es in every district from Tuesday to get their cooperation regarding this requirement," Mr Awang was quoted as saying in Terengganu by the Bernama.

He did not say when the ruling would be enforced. Terengganu is the second of Malaysia's 14 states to order Muslim women to conform to the Islamic-style dress code after Kelantan state, which is also ruled by the PAS.

Mr Awang said the PAS-led Terengganu government would also start holding weekly lectures for civil servants to raise awareness on the importance of donning unrevealing outfits. The PAS, which is Malaysia's biggest opposition party at federal level, bans liquor, gambling and entertainment outlets such as discos and fun fairs in the two states.

Kelantan, which PAS has governed over the decade, also has sex-segregated checkout lanes at supermarkets, while cinemas keep the lights on during screenings. (DPA)

THE TIMES OF INDIA  
22 MAR 2000

# Chechnya seeks support of Muslim world

REUTERS  
KARACHI, FEB 11

A top Chechen official said on a visit to Pakistan that he wants the Muslim world to recognise the breakaway Russian republic of Chechnya, but added he was not recruiting fighters or trying to form a government in exile.

Zalimkhan Yandarbiyev, a representative of Chechen leader Aslan Maskhadov, said in an interview with *Reuters* that he had visited six Islamic countries seeking support. "We have also presented the issue of our recognition before the Pakistani leadership. The talks are continuing with Pakistan and they are reviewing it," he said on Thursday night.

"It is our demand to the rest of the Islamic world that they should politically help us and recognise

our independent government," he said. So far, only Afghanistan, itself recognised by just three countries, has recognised Chechnya.

Yandarbiyev dismissed suggestions he wanted to form a government-in-exile and that he was in Pakistan and Afghanistan to recruit volunteers to fight against the Russian forces.

"We have no plans to form a government in exile... As far as volunteers are concerned, we do not require them at the moment but if somebody wants to go and fight in Chechnya, it's up to them," he said.

Russia on Wednesday criticised Pakistan for allowing Yandarbiyev to visit. Moscow had earlier accused Pakistan of allowing extremist Islamic groups to operate from its territory. Pakistan rejected the accusations and accused Moscow of "gross interference" in its inter-

nal affairs.

Yandarbiyev, acting Chechen President between the death of separatist leader Dzhokhar Dudayev in April 1996 and an election in January 1997 won by Maskhadov, was in the Afghan capital Kabul last month to open an embassy. Speaking through an Urdu translator, Yandarbiyev said Afghan's Taliban government, which controls 90 per cent of the country, had recognised Chechnya as a country.

"Mullah Mohammad Omar (the Taliban's supreme leader) assured us that recognition (of Chechnya) was their responsibility and if we need anything in Afghanistan, it will be given..." he said. Yandarbiyev said the recent withdrawal of Chechen fighters from Grozny was part of a "military strategy", adding the capital

would be retaken.

"They have not been able to dampen the spirits and motivation of our Mujahideen ... We can fight all our lives." Fresh from taking the Chechen capital Grozny, Russian troops are preparing for what they expect to be the final battle against remaining rebels.

But rebels have warned the Russians they will face an all-out guerrilla war of the kind that forced Moscow to abandon its previous attempt to bring the unruly region to heel in 1994-96.

Yandarbiyev, who earlier spoke at a reception hosted by Pakistan's main Islamic Jamaat-e-Islami party, criticised the West for not stopping what he called Russian genocide of the Chechen people, although Russia had accepted the Chechen government under a 1997 agreement.

INDIAN EXPRESS

12 FEB 2000

# Iran renews death threat to Rushdie

ST- 15/2  
INDIA ABROAD NEWS SERVICE

LONDON, Feb. 14. — Security around Salman Rushdie has been tightened after Iran's Revolutionary Guards and other hardline Islamic groups yesterday renewed the death threat against the writer.

The restrictions on Rushdie's movements had been eased considerably recently.

But the author of *Midnight's Children* will now be back under tight security and may only make surprise appearances, British officials said.

The RG has reaffirmed the 1989 fatwa (decree) issued by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and broadcast it on the government-owned radio.

The original fatwa was issued on Valentine's Day, 14 February 1989, against Rushdie's "anti-Islamic statements" in *The Satanic Verses*.

The radio statement said: "Based on divine principles, ... the ruling against the apostate Salman Rushdie is still valid and nothing can change this." An Iranian group has offered a \$2.5 million to anyone who kills the novelist.

The renewed threat comes as a blow to the UK foreign secretary, Mr Robin Cook, who had claimed a diplomatic success for a deal with Iran that, he claimed, would lift the threat on Rushdie.

The threat was earlier renewed by Iranian groups just after the British-Iran agreement in 1998. But its renewal on Sunday is seen as more menacing.

Translators and others associated with the publication of Rushdie's books have been killed.

Police in Britain believe many moves have been made to kill Rushdie too.

**THE STATESMAN**

**15 FEB 2000**

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## Iran plays it cool as Rushdie hype rises

TEHERAN: An Iranian foundation has pledged to add interest to its \$2.8 million bounty on the head of Salman Rushdie on the 11th anniversary of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's 'fatwa' to kill the British novelist.

Foreign minister Kamal Kharrazi, who negotiated a deal with Britain in 1998 to end the dispute between the two countries, reaffirmed at a press conference on Monday that the

Iranian government would not seek to carry out the 'fatwa', or religious ruling, but stressed that private organisations were free to express their views.

He was speaking after the hardline-led Revolutionary Guards, a state military force, the state-affiliated Islamic Propagation Organisation and the Martyrs' Foundation all issued statements on Sunday reaffirming that Rushdie must be killed.

"I declare clearly that the prize set for Rushdie's killer is still valid. It will also include accumulated profits," Ayatollah Hassan Sanei, hardline head of the 15th Khordad Foundation, told the daily *Jomhuri-Ye Eslami*. "If persons carrying out the ruling suffer any injuries or damage, we will do our utmost to compensate them," Sanei said.

The newspaper marked the anniversary by publishing a 16-page supplement featuring two cartoons of a decapitated Rushdie and a

string of quotations from senior conservative clerics, including Iran's current supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, backing the death order.

Khomeini, founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, issued the 'fatwa' shortly before his death in 1989, accusing Rushdie of blasphemy against Islam in his novel *The Satanic Verses*.

Sanei, whose Islamic charity firm offered a bounty soon after the 'fatwa' was issued, said the ruling was a religious matter separate from diplomatic considerations. "Iran Britain relations are a political matter linked to the two countries' interests. But the ruling by the honourable Imam (Khomeini) is a religious matter which has nothing to do with ties between Iran and Britain," Sanei said.

In London, the Foreign Office said it was not aware of the Guards statement, but what remained important was the Iranian government's position that it would not implement the 'fatwa'.

Kharrazi gave the undertaking to British foreign secretary Robin Cook at a meeting in New York in September 1998 which led to a warming in relations. Indian-born Rushdie, who has lived in hiding for most of the past 11 years, said last week he refused to change his identity to escape the death edict because that would have been worse than dying. (Reuters)

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# Democracy is not alien to Islam

BY PHILIP BOWRING

**H**ong Kong: Friday's elections in Iran are not just a milestone in that nation's slow evolution from revolution to normalcy. They may prove an example to those parts of the Islamic world with immobile as well as oppressive systems, and further undermine the Western canard that Islam and democracy are incompatible.

It should also be an influence on countries, such as China, looking for paths to more plural politics which do not immediately undermine the existing power structure. For a wider world bored of being lectured about democracy by the West, the Iran experience demonstrates that elections are compatible with a fervently anti-Western regime.

This is not to pretend that the Iranian elections are free and fair. The candidates have been carefully vetted by the religious establishment, and all must accept the theocratic nature of the state. The Parliament, like the directly elected President, remains ultimately subservient to the unelected, self-perpetuating clerical power structure headed by Supreme Leader Sayed Ali Khamenei.

But within these confines, political factions are well delineated

and debate is vigorous, especially through the press.

The existence of elections which are not a rubber stamp illustrates that even in post-revolutionary Iran there are many in the clergy who believe that the spiritual elite has no divine right to rule, any more than the shah did. Power must be rooted in the people, and holders submit themselves to popular judgment.

The widespread assumption in the West is that the Muslim world is still awaiting the fruits of a post-Gorbachev global surge of democracy. This appears to be primarily a product either of Christian prejudices or of the post-Holocaust guilt complex that has underpinned a knee-jerk anti-Islamism now more widespread than anti-Semitism.

Events in Iran are a reminder of the diversity of political forms throughout the Islamic world, which deserves to be judged by its larger nations rather than by the likes of secular thugs such as Saddam Hussein and Hafez Assad or the feudal states of the Arabian Peninsula.

In Indonesia, Islam is diverse and has a tradition of tolerance and democratic tendencies, both now represented by President



An Iranian woman distributes parliamentary election leaflets in front of a painting of President Khatami (AFP)

Abdurrahman Wahid. In Pakistan, despite its origins as a state specifically for Muslims, the challenges to democracy are from feudalism and the military rather than from mainstream Islam.

Bangladesh's democracy may be seriously flawed, but Islam is a matter of fact, like Catholicism in Mexico, and politics are largely secular. In Egypt, which is not exactly democratic, religious extremism remains on the fringe of a tolerant society sceptical of ideology.

Conceivably, the Iranian electoral process will lead gradually to the replacement of an intolerant

version of political Islam with a regime closer to the secular bourgeois democracy envisioned by many of those who overthrew the shah.

But more immediately, it should set an example for those, especially in the Arab world, who want a transition to systems that are at least partly accountable and give Islam sufficient stake to keep fundamentalists in check.

Circumstances vary widely, but Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia all face transitions from personal or feudal rule. It is to be hoped that their future will be neither more of the same despotism nor two decades of the revolutionary Islam that Iran has endured.

The significance for China is that a popularly elected president and Parliament can dilute the power of the Communist Party, China's equivalent of the Iranian clerical establishment, and promote the interests of the state against those of an increasingly corrupt, self-perpetuating party elite.

If China had the Iranian system, Jiang Zemin would still head the party but Zhu Rongji would have been elected executive president and the National People's Congress would witness real policy debates.

By arrangement with the International Herald Tribune

# U.S. probes 30 Islamic charity groups for Osama Laden's links

WASHINGTON: U.S. counter terrorism officers are probing 30 Islamic charities worldwide, including two based in the U.S., for possible links to Osama bin Laden and other terrorists, media reports said here on Saturday.



Osama bin Laden

Most of these 6,000 Islamic charity groups operating worldwide, the *New York Times* said, are considered legitimate and provide emergency relief in dangerous and desperate places with the support of friendly states. Moreover, they are often unaware that terrorists have used them as cover.

"Most of these groups do some good works in some places," an official said. "And often, only a few officials of a single chapter involving a small part of the charity leadership or resources is being used" (for terrorist activity).

Last month, a team of U.S. officials led by the treasury department visited Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and other Arab states to discuss specific charities with their Middle-eastern counterparts.

In Canada, officials said they plan to seek new legal authority to confiscate assets of charities that act as fronts for terrorism. Canada cut off government financing in 1997 to a Canadian-based charity called Human Concern International because of its alleged "terrorist connections".

U.S. officials said that charities could provide excellent cover for terrorist groups, because relief workers are welcomed almost everywhere and their shipment of supplies are rarely checked by border guards or the police.

One instance in which investigators said they believe that the role of charities was crucial were the bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, in which more than 200 people were killed

and thousands wounded.

Prosecutors said material seized from the Nairobi office of Mercy International Relief Agency includes records of calls to the cellular phone of Osama bin Laden. Another document found in the office, dated two weeks before the bombings, refers to "getting weapons from Somalia."

Mercy, based in Ireland, was one of five private associations that Kenya closed weeks after the bombing. The government said those groups had "deviated from development objectives" and posed a serious threat to Kenya's security.

In recent days, officials disclosed that a room-mate of one of the men charged with plotting to bomb targets in the U.S. had worked for Mercy in Dublin.

The state department stepped up its efforts to probe the charities last year, after officials involved in counter terrorism found that the U.S. had inadvertently helped support questionable charities. (PTI)

# Id passes off peacefully in Spice Islands

By P. S. Suryanarayana

**SINGAPORE, JAN. 8.** The celebration of "Hari Raya Idul Fitri" (the term for the Ramadan festival in local parlance) today passed off peacefully in the riot-ravaged Ambon and other parts of the Spice Isles. There were no reports of any significant clashes there, as South East Asians heaved a sigh of relief that there was no repetition of last year's rioting in Ambon, a Christian-majority enclave in the predominantly Islamic Indonesia.

The year-long communal clashes and the related security operations in the Maluku provinces, originally named as Spice Islands in the Dutch colonial period, have claimed between 1,000 and 1,500 lives, according to various estimates, some of which place the figure at around 2,000.

Today's peaceful celebrations in the Ambon sector was generally attributed to the spirit of the Islamic festival. It pleased the Indonesian authorities, who had only yesterday watched a mammoth Islamist rally in Jakarta pledge a "jihad" against the Christians of Maluku provinces. The President, Mr. Abdurrahman Wahid, was greeted by a large number of people in Jakarta in line with the traditions.

In neighbouring Malaysia, another key member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference, the Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's customary Id time "open house" today attracted 50,000 persons, an unprecedented number. This reflected a return of good times for the Malaysian economy, Dr. Mahathir said, even while referring to the criticism that the turnout could also be ascribed to popular curiosity about the Prime Minister's official residence at Putra Jaya, the new seat of Government, where the "open house" session was held.

The numbers game acquired importance for two reasons. The "open house" last year was not as well attended as this year, fuelling speculation at the time that Dr. Mahathir might be losing touch with the masses.

# Indonesia Muslims threaten *halo* jihad *GA*

**Ambon, Jan. 12 (AP):** Muslim protesters in Jakarta today threatened to launch a holy war over Muslim-Christian violence in Indonesia's eastern islands that has killed at least 21 in a flare-up over the past two days.

Aside from the renewed sectarian clashes in the Malukus, 12 people were found dead in the province of Aceh, which has been torn by separatist violence and a security crackdown. One of the dead had reportedly been arrested by police.

In the Maluku provinces, the worst of the violence was on Seram island, some 1,600 miles east of Jakarta, where Muslim-Christian clashes in Masohi town left nine dead and scores injured yesterday, said military spokesman Lt. Col. Iwa Budiman.

He said the warring factions clashed throughout the day, burning buildings and forcing thousands of people to flee their homes.

On Halmahera island in North Maluku, seven people were killed on Monday and five on Tuesday, witnesses and newspapers said.

The military managed to separate the two sides after fighting yesterday, but thousands of people are fleeing the island fearing an increase in the bloodshed, said Achmad Ali, a noncommissioned officer stationed in the south of the island.

On Buru island near the Maluku provincial capital Ambon, the military are using helicopters to search for thousands of people who have fled into the jungle in fear of a resurgence of violence, the region's military commander Gen. Max Tamaela said.

"There is a serious lack of food on the island and we want to evacuate them to Ambon," he said.

In Jakarta, several hundred Muslims gathered outside parliament today, threatening to wage a *jihad*, or holy war, against the country's Christians unless the government put an immediate end to the bloodshed in the Malukus. The protest was far smaller than a similar demonstration by some 80,000 Muslims on Friday.

President Abdurrahman Wahid has warned he would use force to prevent Muslim radicals from travelling to the region to take part in the fighting.

# Algerian Islamic group lays down arms

By Kesava Menon

**MANAMA (BAHRAIN) JAN. 12.** With the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) having dissolved itself, there is scope for great optimism that Algeria's cycle of violence can come to an end. Some members of the AIS are to help the security forces and this raises the possibility that the militants remaining in the field can be brought to brook. Perhaps more importantly, the Algerian Government's success in persuading the AIS and its political arm the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) to give up militancy demonstrates that the President, Mr. Abdelaziz Bouteflika's policy of "peace and civic concord" is working.

Yesterday, the AIS announced that it was dissolving itself following a blanket pardon granted to all its members by Mr. Bouteflika. The Algerian President, who took office in April last year, had won endorsement for his policy of "peace and civic concord" in a referendum held a few months later. Under this policy, a partial or complete amnesty was promised to all Islamic militants who gave up the armed struggle by Jan. 13 this year. The AIS had declared a unilateral ceasefire in 1997 and was known to have by and large wound down its operations. But its members had not surrendered to the Government in large numbers till the declaration of the new policy by Mr. Bouteflika.

Following the referendum, AIS members had surrendered in droves but the ambiguity about the full and partial amnesty had apparently caused some vacillation later on and the AIS had declared a freeze on the implementation of the earlier accord. In the hiatus following the AIS decision to hold back its members from handing over their arms, fresh talks were held between them and the Government for the past several weeks. Yesterday's announcement of a blanket pardon has apparently cleared the confusion about the partial and full amnesty and the AIS has consequently decided to dissolve itself. According to a communique from the AIS, the organisation is to "voluntarily hand in all their arms and military means in their possession to the authorities."

The dissolution of the AIS substantially means that the main Islamic political movement in Algeria, the FIS, has decided to give up the armed struggle which they launched in 1992. The FIS had resorted to militancy after the secular authorities cancelled elections which they were poised to win. In is actually in reference back to that election that the FIS can be called the main Islamic force because the Islamic movement in Algeria had subsequent-

ly splintered. More moderate elements among the Islamists had stayed loyal to FIS and its armed wing, the AIS, while the hard-core broke off to form the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). Further on, yet another extremist group, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), had also emerged on the scene.

In the shadowy world in which the eight-year cycle of violence has been played out in Algeria, it has generally not been very clear as to which groups, including security forces, were more responsible for the nearly 100,000 deaths that have been caused. However, the GIA which had earned a special reputation for brutality, was often identified as the force which massacred innocents, including women and children, in the most brutal manner imaginable. There has also been much speculation that the AIS and GIA have been fighting each other for the past few years.

Some of the surrendered AIS men are expected to co-operate with the security forces in the continuing fight against the GIA and GSPC. There was a report last week that Antar Zoubari, the leader of the GIA who was otherwise believed to have fled to Afghanistan, was spotted during an encounter between his group and the security forces. In hunting people like Zoubari, the Algerian Government could derive some assistance from the erstwhile AIS men though the degree and value of such assistance is far from clear.

While the overall picture of Algerian militancy in the 1990's remains murky, it would appear that most militants belonged to local groups which then affiliated to either of the armed wings. Therefore, a person who belonged to a group affiliated to the broad umbrella of the AIS might not necessarily know the hide-outs, *modus operandi* of groups loyal to the GIA.

Though the AIS dissolving itself represents a turning point, it does not mean that the violence in Algeria will come to an end very soon.

# Taliban Islamic movement recognises Chechen Republic

KABUL: Afghanistan's ruling Taliban Islamic movement has become the first government to recognise the breakaway Russian Republic of Chechnya, but said it could hardly help the Chechens in their conflict with Moscow.

The formal recognition was agreed to by Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar in a meeting with a Chechen delegation on Sunday at his headquarters in the southern Afghan town of Kandahar, Taliban foreign minister Abdul Wakil Muttawakil told a Pakistan-based Afghan news service.

Mullah Omar agreed that the Chechen government "can open its diplomatic mission in Kabul from today", a Taliban spokesman said.

It was the first time any government had recognised rebel Chechnya and comes at a time when a bloody four-month-old

Russian military campaign against the rebels is facing strong resistance in the regional capital Grozny and in the south.

"The delegation requested the Taliban leader to recognise the Chechen government, and the Taliban leader accepted this request on the basis of Islamic brotherhood and recognised the Chechen government," the private Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) quoted Mr Muttawakil as saying over telephone from Kandahar.

He said the Taliban, itself struggling for international recognition, had intended to recognise Chechnya anyway, but that the urgency of such a move had increased because of the Russian assault.

Asked if the Taliban would help the Chechens fight the Russian offensive, a Taliban spokesman, Tayeb Agha, said Mullah Omar

had told the Chechen delegation that his movement had "limited ability in terms of giving such help".

The Taliban government, accused by the West of helping international terrorism is fighting a northern-based opposition alliance and is recognised by only three countries — Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Moscow has repeatedly accused the Taliban and some Pakistan-based militant groups, of training warriors to fight Russia in Chechnya.

The Taliban and Pakistan deny charges. The Taliban government, which controls about 90 per cent of Afghanistan, in turn accuses Russia of helping the opposition alliance which holds the remainder of the country occupied by Moscow in the 1980s under the former Soviet Union. (Reuters)

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18 JAN 2000

119-13

# Rein in militant groups, Russian envoy tells Pak.

28/9

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

**ISLAMABAD, SEPT. 27.** Russia has urged Pakistan to play a substantive role in preventing expansion of radical and extremist Islamic groups in the region and prevail upon the Taliban regime in Afghanistan to close camps to train militants to fight in Chechnya.

The Russian President's Special Envoy, Mr. Sergey Vladimirovich Yasterzhembsky, here on a two-day visit, called on the Pakistan Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, and conveyed Moscow's concerns at the policies of Taliban and the growth of fundamentalist Islamic groups in the region.

He met the Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdul Sattar, the Interior Minister, Lt. Gen. (retd.) Moinuddin Haider and the ISI chief, Lt. Gen. Mahmood Ahmed, and discussed how the two countries could join hands to fight terrorism, arms smuggling, narcotics trafficking and illegal immigration.

However, Mr. Yasterzhembsky, was not prepared to be overly optimistic. "We would have reason to be fully satisfied when our (Russia and Pakistan) joint declarations are translated into actions.

"In diplomacy some times actions speak louder than words,"

## Putin to visit Pak.

By Our Special Correspondent

**ISLAMABAD, SEPT. 27.** The Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, would make an official visit to Pakistan and the dates of the visit would be finalised after mutual consultations.

Announcing this at a news conference here today, the Russian President's Special Envoy, Mr. Sergey Vladimirovich Yasterzhembsky, said the Pakistan Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, had extended an invitation to Mr.

Putin and it had been accepted. Asked whether Moscow extended a similar invitation to Gen. Musharraf, he said, "the invitation first came from Gen. Musharraf. Let that visit take place".

He was all praise for Gen. Musharraf's knowledge about Russia, particularly its military, and said it was a pleasure to "deal" with some one like him. Unlike the previous governments, the present regime in Pakistan had a better appreciation of Russia's concerns and hopes in the region.

he said at a press conference.

Mr. Yasterzhembsky's visit and Pakistan's desire to explore the possibility of a new relationship with Moscow are significant.

The Special Emissary said his visit was a follow-up to the meeting between Gen. Musharraf and Mr. Putin in New York on the sidelines of the United Nations millennium summit. The ISI chief had journeyed to Moscow before the U.N. summit and met his counterpart to allay fears on Pakistan's role in fanning Islamic ex-

tremism in Chechnya and other Central Asian Republics.

To a question, he said the Pakistani side raised the Kashmir issue and wanted Russia to play a mediatory role in resolving the dispute. "It was mentioned in passing. Our position is clear. India and Pakistan are capable of solving this protracted problem. There is Lahore Declaration and Shimla Agreement. Russia could play a more active role only if both sides express definite interest".