

Afghan group rejects U.N. move to deploy monitors

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

APD 17
29/8

ISLAMABAD, AUG. 28. The Council for Defence of Afghanistan, an umbrella outfit of religious and militant outfits in Pakistan, has rejected the United Nations plan to deploy monitors in Pakistan to oversee the implementation of the Security Council resolutions against Afghanistan.

A conference organised by the Council, created just before the second round of sanctions imposed by the U.N. in January this year, has described the plan as "an act of discrimination and aggression" against Afghanistan and vowed to resist it. The conference, organised and presided over by its convener, Maulana Samiul Haq, was attended by prominent political leaders. They included Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, chief of the Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD), Mr. Raja Zafarul Haq and Mr. Javed Hashmi of PML-N, Mr. Ijazul Haq of PML (Like Minded), Mr. Liaqat Baloch of Jamaat-e-Islam and Mr. Afaq Ahmed of MQM (H).

Besides the former chief of ISI, Gen. Hameed Gul, Maulana Masood Azhar of Jaish-e-Mohammad, Malik Faridullah of Millat Party, Haji Mohammad Adeel of Awami National Party, the Afghan Ambassador in Pakistan, Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef and representatives of several other organisations took part in the deliberations. The impressive turnout of political and religious leaders and the stand against the United

Nations and the West at the conference is an indication of the growing sympathy for the Taliban regime within Pakistan.

A declaration adopted at the conference criticised the U.N. attitude. It said the U.N. vigorously pursued the resolutions against Afghanistan but ignored the issues of Palestine and Kashmir. The meeting alleged that the real objective of the deployment plan was to assign the monitors the duty of watching sensitive nuclear installations in Pakistan. It urged the Musharraf Government to reject the U.N. decision even though the military regime has already declared that as a responsible member of the U.N. it would abide by its directives.

The conference urged the U.N. to shun "arbitrary actions" and recognise the Taliban Government. It also urged the OIC to recognise the Taliban Government and assist in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. It appealed to Russia and China to take a realistic view of the Taliban Government and to play their role in "foiling the international conspiracies" in the region. Describing the defence of Afghanistan and Pakistan as a joint responsibility, the meeting declared that the people of Pakistan would stand shoulder to shoulder with their tribal brethren in resisting the U.N. move.

In a related development various religious and political parties have assured Jehadi outfits that if the Government imposed a ban against them, they would extend full support to these outfits.

THE HINDU

29 AUG 2001

Putin's move surprises West

RICHARD OWEN
THE TIMES, LONDON

MOSCOW, Nov. 27. — Russia re-established a foothold in Afghanistan yesterday by landing 12 transport aircraft at Bagram airport near Kabul. The move and the speed and scale in which it was taken took the Western countries by surprise.

More than 200 Russian personnel, including support and security staff, were deployed to establish an "humanitarian centre".

President Vladimir Putin told his Cabinet after the arrival of the Ilyushin 76 aircraft that the Russian presence would be built up swiftly with transport helicopters, mine-clearing specialists, construction crews and a mobile hospital.

The deputy minister for emergencies, Mr Yuri Vorobyov, said that the teams deployed yesterday were part of a £350million humanitarian programme to help feed and house

Afghans as winter sets in. They will ensure a safe route from Bagram airport to Kabul before establishing a base in the capital. "The humanitarian presence will be increased", he said.

The Russian mission, the largest in Afghanistan since the humiliating Soviet withdrawal



Mr Vladimir Putin

in 1989 is not a military one. But the tactics drew comparisons with Russian actions in Kosovo. In June 1999, to the surprise of Nato commanders, 200 Russian troops took control of Pristina airport after sweeping in from Bosnia.

On this occasion, Russia said it had acted with the full knowledge of the USA, which controls Afghan airspace and owes a diplomatic favour to Moscow for ensuring regional support for the coalition's actions.

Mr Putin said the move was "at the request of President Rabbani and the Islamic State of Afghanistan" and in "close co-ordination with US representatives".

THE STATESMAN

28 NOV 2001

11 Alliance says it will not grab power

Bonn, November 27

YUNUS QANOONI, head of the Northern Alliance delegation at the UN-sponsored talks on Afghanistan's future, today said his movement did not intend take Government power on its own.

Under strong international pressure to end over two decades of war, four Afghan factions met at a luxury hotel in Bonn today to discuss how to share power once the Taliban are defeated. The four delegations represent the Northern Alliance, exiles backing former King Zahir Shah and two smaller exile groups.

German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer opened the conference with an appeal to deliver peace and stability to the Afghan people. "I urge you all to forge a truly historic compromise that holds out a better future for your torn country and its people," Fischer said. "The international community is prepared to make this great effort," but only if its expectations are met.

The Alliance comes to the talks in a position of strength after ousting the Taliban from much of Afghanistan. But its delegation here said it would not use its battlefield victories to seek advantage.

"It is not our intent to monopolise power. It will be our pride to work for a broad-based Government based on the will of the people of Afghanistan," Qanooni said at the inaugural session of the conference.

He said the Alliance was ready to



Participants of the UN-sponsored conference on Afghanistan sit at the round table at the Petersberg conference centre near Bonn on Tuesday.

hand over power to a grand assembly of Afghan tribal leaders.

"We sincerely support the endeavors for peace and are decided on reconstruction of the country and establishment of national unity," Qanooni said.

The Alliance's titular head, Burha-

nuddin Rabbani, said the Germany talks were unlikely to yield substantial results. Rabbani has insisted that the real decision-making would have to take place in meetings in Afghanistan.

"The International Conference on Afghanistan held in Bonn should be

the last meeting held outside Afghanistan. I don't expect decisive results from the meeting," he said in Dubai.

With the US, Russia and neighbours such as Pakistan and Iran exerting influence from the corridors, the delegates must decide how long a transitional administration would

run Afghanistan before convening a national assembly and the makeup of a peacekeeping force under a UN mandate. Regional stability and billions in development aid are at stake.

Fischer said the delegates must agree on binding rules for a future

PAK SENDS FEELERS TO RABBANI IN DUBAI

KEEN ON improving relations with the Northern Alliance, keeping in view the post-Taliban dispensation in Afghanistan, Pakistan is sending a high-level delegation to Dubai for talks with its President Burhanuddin Rabbani, media reports in Dubai said. The delegation comprises diplomats and senior security officials, the reports said without elaborating when it will come to Dubai to meet the Northern Alliance leader. The Pakistan consulate in Dubai is also in touch with Rabbani, who arrived in Dubai on Sunday night.

PTI, Dubai

political system and respect for human rights, particularly for women. "Their active participation in the social and political life of the nation is essential for the country's peaceful future."

At the foot of Petersberg hill where the delegates met, about 30 Afghan women protested for greater women's rights in their country. About 300 supporters of the exiled king also demonstrated, many carrying photos of a younger Zahir Shah in military uniform.

The UN spokesman for Afghanistan, Ahmad Fawzi, said the Afghan groups must wrap up the talks in less than a week.

The UN had previously said it would allow the talks to continue as long as necessary.

AFP PHOTO

29 NOV 20

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Rabbani says he is ready to hand over power to interim govt.

KABUL: Burhanuddin Rabbani, the former president whose party is effectively running Kabul, on Sunday said he was prepared to hand over power as soon as the leading Afghan factions agree on an interim government.

However, Mr Rabbani sees himself as the leading candidate to head the interim administration, and his Northern Alliance will hold a majority of the seats when Afghan factions open a conference on Tuesday in Germany to set up a government to replace the ousted Taliban.

Addressing a press conference, Mr Rabbani said he was in agreement with the United Nations and major powers which are insisting on a multi-party government as the best protection against the disastrous factional fighting that marked Mr Rabbani's presidency from 1992 until the Taliban ousted him in 1996.

"As far as the efforts of the UN is concerned, we are on the same line, we have the same commitments," Mr

Rabbani said. He also said the Northern Alliance would not seek retribution against the Taliban or their foreign allies as long as they surrendered and handed over their weapons.

In a related development, Mr Rabbani has guaranteed the security and safety of foreign fighters surrendering with Taliban troops in Kunduz. He said his troops would not "injure or harass" foreigners such as Arabs, Pakistanis and Chechens who had been fighting alongside the Afghan Taliban troops.

"Although they have committed some war crimes in Afghanistan, they come under the general

amnesty that we have declared and they are pardoned if they put their guns down," he said.

Alliance commanders around Kunduz, near the border with Tajikistan, have said the 600 foreigners who surrendered on Saturday would be jailed and tried on unspecified charges.

Mr Rabbani said members of the Taliban militia could participate in a transitional Afghan government "as individuals".

"Taliban authorities and officials can participate in the interim government as individuals, not as the Taliban party if they are selected through the... Loya Jirga," he said, referring to a tra-



Truckloads of Taliban fighters cross over to the Northern Alliance side outside Kunduz to surrender on Saturday.

power to interim govt.

ditional meeting of tribal chiefs.

Northern Alliance commander Abdul Rashid Dostum's troops took control of the Taliban's northern bastion of Kunduz on Sunday, ending a two-week siege, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said.

Quoting unnamed sources, AIP said ethnic Uzbek commander Dostum had sent one of his top officers into the city and had begun dismantling the surrendering Taliban's defences. It said 2,500 Dostum troops had moved into the city overnight and this morning, captured Taliban fighters were being shipped west to Dostum's main headquarters in Mazar-e-Sharif. Dostum now controls 70 per cent of Kunduz, the Taliban's last stronghold in the north of Afghanistan.

According to an official with the new self-proclaimed government quoted in the *New York Times*, Osama bin Laden has been spotted at a large and well-fortified encampment, 56 km southwest of Jalalabad. (Agencies)

Taliban allow diplomats ^{Afghan} visas to see detainees

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE ⁵¹⁻⁹

ISLAMABAD, Aug. 27. -- The Taliban militia today issued visas to allow Western diplomats to visit eight foreign aid workers detained for allegedly preaching Christianity, embassy sources said.

"We have received our visas and we hope to see our nationals soon," the German consul, Mr Helmut Landes, said.

Taliban's ambassador to Pakistan, Mr Abdul Salam Zaeef, said consular visits had been approved for the first time since the two Americans, two Australians and four Germans were arrested more than three weeks ago.

"We confirm that we will allow them to see the detained foreigners," he said, adding that the foreigners would face trial in an Islamic court once investigations are over.

Taliban embassy officials said they would also issue visas to parents of the two detained American women. The mother of one of the Americans and the father of another were seen arriving at the embassy to pick

^{28/8}
up their passports.

The aid workers, staff of German-based group Shelter Now, have been in custody along with 16 Afghan co-workers since early August without charge.

Pakistan-based Australian, German and US diplomats left Kabul empty-handed last Tuesday after spending a week in fruitless talks with the Taliban without gaining permission to see the prisoners. "The last time when we issued the visas they were meant only for talks with the Taliban, but this time we have put no conditions on their visas," Mr Zaeef said.

THE STATESMAN

25 AUG 2001

Red Cross team meets detainees

Amman 9-9 2718

Kabul, Aug. 26 (Reuters): The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said today it had seen eight foreign aid workers held incommunicado by Afghanistan's ruling Taliban since early August on charges of spreading Christianity.

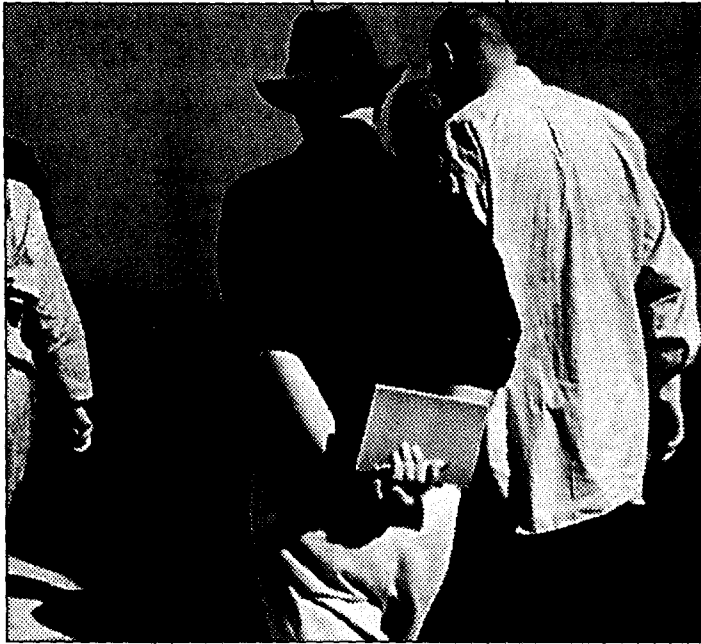
Robert Dominin, head of the ICRC delegation in Kabul, said he could not reveal the condition of the six women and two men — four Germans, two Americans and two Australians — who were given medical examinations.

"I will not disclose to you the condition of the detainees because this is a confidential thing between the ICRC and the authorities," Dominin said.

The ICRC visit was the first contact for the eight members of Shelter Now International (SNI) with anyone outside the Taliban since they were detained. The Taliban had blocked efforts by the US, German and Australian governments to see them.

"They were very relieved to see us," ICRC spokesman in Kabul Mario Musa said. He confirmed that the ICRC had seen all the detainees without the presence of Taliban guards.

The Taliban, saying their investigation into alleged proselytising was nearing completion,



A delegation from the International Committee of the Red Cross walks to the detention centre in Kabul. (AFP)

said yesterday it would now allow visits by the ICRC, relatives and representatives of the prisoners' governments. The relatives and diplomats must still get their visas, expected to be issued tomorrow, and could then fly aboard a UN flight to Kabul on Tuesday.

Dominin said all eight foreigners were held at the same detention centre, with the six women in one room and the two men in another. "We had the green light to see the expatriate staff of the SNI. We had all the facilities to carry out our work which is quite posi-

tive," he said. The ICRC team was composed of five expatriate staff: two medical doctors, a nurse and two ICRC delegates.

"It is the first visit... They will allow us a follow-up visit," Dominin said. He said the second visit was likely to take place in a few days. Tomorrow ICRC would pick up messages from the detainees for their relatives.

Dominin said ICRC had no access to the 16 local staff of the aid agency who were detained at the same time, but were told by the Taliban that it would be possible.

All those arrested worked for the German-based Christian relief agency SNI. The Taliban later said they had widened the investigation into alleged links with other groups, including the UN World Food Programme.

The Taliban say their supreme leader Mullah Mohammed Omar will decide what punishment will be meted out to the foreigners and local staff. Under their strict interpretation of Islam it could include death sentences.

In Australia, a foreign office spokesman said today that diplomats from Australia, the US and Germany expected to receive visas from the Taliban embassy in Pakistan tomorrow and to fly to Kabul the next day.

THE TELEGRAPH

27 AUG 2001

Taliban uprising scars N Alliance successes

Riot breaks out in Dostum HQ, hundreds dead

AGENCIES

5r 26/8
TALOQAN (Afghanistan), Nov. 25. — An uprising by imprisoned Taliban soldiers in the headquarters of the Opposition warlord, Abdul Rashid Dostum, near Mazar-e-Sharief, scarred the Northern Alliance's string of successes on Sunday.

Hundreds of the foreign Taliban fighters were reported dead at the end of the bloody, daylong riot put down by American airstrikes and Alliance guards. The uprising began around 11 a.m. local time, witnesses said. The Alliance claimed most prisoners were killed in what the US Central Command spokesman, Lt. Cmdr Dave Culler, called "an apparent suicide mission." The fighters, about 300 Chechens, Pakistanis and Arabs had smuggled weapons under their tunics into the Qalai Janghi fortress and tried to fight their way out, said a Pentagon spokesman in Washington.

After thousands of the estimated 15,000 Taliban soldiers in Kunduz had surrendered in the last few days agreeing to give up Kunduz to the Opposition, one of the prisoners detonated a grenade in a fort-cum-jail of Dostum, as he was being searched by his captors. Two other Taliban fighters died along with him, said Britain's *Independent Television News*, whose reporter was wounded in the blast.

A fierce gunbattle erupted as scores of imprisoned non-Afghan Al Qaida fighters seized weapons and began firing. Witnesses said many were killed and wounded in at least four hours of fighting between Alliance fighters and the Taliban prisoners.

A Reuters correspondent saw US fighter jets swoop down and drop at least four bombs on the southern part of the fort where the insurgent prisoners were concentrated. Scores of prisoners were believed to have fought their way out with Kalashnikovs, assault rifles and rocket-

'NON-AFGHAN LEADERS MAY BE IN PAK'

QUETTA, Nov. 25. — The leaders of Arab and other non-Afghan Taliban fighters defending the Taliban supremo, Mullah Mohammad Omar, in his Kandahar headquarters, may have fled to Pakistan.

Muhammad Akbar Khan Khakrazi, a former warlord, who went into exile in Pakistan three years ago but still visits Kandahar often, today said he saw Mullah Omar driving through the city around nine days ago but had heard that the Taliban chief was now trying to leave.

"The non-Afghan Taliban commanders there have fled. They came here to Pakistan," Khakrazi said here.

Khakrazi said the flight of the commanders of the Taliban's foreign forces, the Al Qaida network of Osama bin Laden, had been a tactical decision to save their lives for future battles. "They did that for future planning, so that they can retake Afghanistan again," he remarked, adding that up to 5,000 non-Afghan and 12,000 loyal Afghan Taliban troops were still defending Kandahar, though his information couldn't be verified.

He said he had since received reports from the city that Mullah Omar had been trying to leave Kandahar for the past three days but had been advised by his aides to stay.

Khakrazi estimated that the number of Arab, Chechen, Pakistani and other foreign radicals linked to Osama bin Laden, Washington's chief suspect behind the 11 September attacks on New York and Washington, amounted to 4,000 to 5,000 in Kandahar. Regular Taliban troops in the city numbered 10,000-12,000, he said. — Reuters

propelled grenades, after attacking their captors.

Two US observers, two Reuters' journalists and Red Cross officials were trapped inside the fort for several hours. Most escaped by climbing down the fort's 65-ft outer wall as bullets seared the air around them.

Pentagon denial: The Pentagon today denied reports that a US soldier was killed in the prison uprising near Mazar-e-Sharief.

CNN, citing unconfirmed reports, first said a US soldier had been killed at the prison, but later said it could have been a civilian US national.

Non-Afghan Taliban fighters fled towards Kandahar from another pocket of Taliban resistance, Maidan Shahr, west of Kabul, even as their Afghan counterparts in the area defected to the Alliance.

Underlining the ethnic divisions while building a post-Taliban

government, around 80 Pashtun chiefs said in Quetta that the Taliban should transfer authority to tribal leaders.

Mr Burhanuddin Rabbani, the head of the Alliance, however, softened his stand on accommodating the 'moderate' Taliban in a post-Taliban set-up today, as he emphasised that the Taliban won't be included in any talks, but "as individuals they will not be held guilty.

"Those who don't have very obvious guilt and are elected by a Loya Jirga are acceptable".

N Alliance claims capture of Kunduz: The Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press, quoted sources in Kunduz, to say that 2,500 of Dostum's troops were already inside the city and that the Taliban had handed over military installations and positions to them.

■ Editorial: Full circle, page 6

THE STATESMAN

20 A. 101

Pushed from east & west, militia on brink in north



A Taliban foreign soldier with a Kalashnikov sports sun glasses. (AFP)

Taloqan, Nov. 25 (Reuters): Northern Alliance forces advancing from the east and west had begun entering the besieged city of Kunduz today and the last redoubt of the Taliban in the north could fall in a day, officials said.

Tajik commander Mohammad Daoud said the town of Khanabad, the eastern gateway to Kunduz, had fallen to the alliance and forces under his command who were racing to the city 20 km away.

Daoud said he hoped his forces would enter Kunduz en masse tomorrow.

"We plan to enter Kunduz city tomorrow," the commander said at his mud-walled bunker east of Khanabad. "We want to avoid fighting and we are still negotiating with the Taliban in Kunduz

and hope to capture it without a fight." Ethnic Uzbek warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostum had agreed to halt his advance on the town from the west, leaving fighters of his allies in the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance to occupy the town, Daoud said.

Witnesses saw reinforcements of tanks, armoured personnel carriers and infantry heading towards Kunduz from the east.

In the other direction, streams of pickups loaded with hundreds of black-turbaned Taliban fighters — Afghans who have agreed to give up to fellow countrymen in the Northern Alliance — arrived in alliance territory to surrender.

An advance party led by commander Mir Alam Khan had already entered Kunduz, an an-

cient city that commands trade routes to Tajikistan after meeting some minor Taliban resistance. But foreign fighters loyal to wanted Saudi-born fugitive Osama bin Laden have vowed to fight to the death rather than take their chances with enemies who loathe them.

Dostum's forces and Northern Alliance troops loyal to Tajik commanders have been laying siege to Kunduz for more than 10 days. Confusion over the surrender of Kunduz has been attributed to rivalry between the Uzbek and Tajik factions, which both want to win control of the city.

The fall of Kunduz would allow Northern Alliance forces and US warplanes to concentrate on prising the radical militia out of its last strongholds in and

around the southern city of Kandahar. Abdul Nasir, a Northern Alliance foreign ministry official in Taloqan, said another 350 Taliban surrendered late yesterday and fresh batches of fighters were giving themselves up today — both to Daoud's forces and to Dostum's.

Some 800 Afghan Taliban fighters, who have been promised a free passage home once they have been disarmed, surrendered to Daoud's forces yesterday, bringing with them eight tanks, five anti-aircraft guns, seven rocket launchers and 40 vehicles. Foreign volunteers were among 600 Taliban who

gave themselves up to Dostum yesterday but fears lingered that many others would go down fighting and turn Kunduz into a bloodbath.

THE TELEGRAPH

26 NOV 2001

Alshamir
5/9

Red Cross can meet detainees: Taliban

vs/8

REUTERS

KABUL, Aug. 24. — The Taliban will allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to meet eight foreign aid workers accused of spreading Christianity, the Afghanistan foreign minister, Mr Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil, said.

"We've no problem. They (ICRC representatives) can see them any time," Mr Muttawakil said yesterday over phone from the southern Afghan city of Kandahar. The Taliban, however, haven't informed the ICRC of the decision.

The foreigners — two Australians, four Germans and two Americans — together with 16 Afghan employees of the Germany-based Shelter Now International have been held since early August. The Taliban have refused to allow any contact, consular or legal, with the aid workers.

Even after Mr Muttawakil's statement, the religious police minister, Mohammad Wali, said he was unaware of any decision to allow an ICRC visit to the Western prisoners.

On Wednesday, the Taliban chief spokesman, Mr Abdul Hai Mutmaen, had said there would be no access to the prisoners by anyone till a Taliban probe into the charges was complete.

The UN had warned the Taliban that they're

violating international norms by refusing to let the detainees see representatives of their governments or lawyers.

In Washington, the state department spokesman, Mr Philip Reeker, said a visit by the ICRC would be welcome but wouldn't be a substitute for a visit by a US consular official.

In Islamabad, diplomats from Australia, Germany and the USA applied to the Taliban embassy for fresh visas to visit Afghanistan. They had returned empty-handed on Tuesday after spending a frustrating week in Kabul.

An embassy spokesman had said visa applications from the three diplomats and two other Americans — the mother of one of those detained and the father of another — would be forwarded to Kabul on Thursday.

The two Americans spent more than an hour at the embassy on Thursday seeking information about their children, the embassy said.

The Taliban say a large haul of Christian material was seized from the arrested foreigners, showing they were propagating Christianity. The aid agency has said its staff are told not to proselytise. Seeking converts or converting people from Islam can carry the death penalty in Afghanistan.

THE STATESMAN

THE STATESMAN OF
THE STATESMAN

25 AUG 2001

ICRC CAN MEET DETAINEES

BY SAYED SALAHUDDIN

Kabul, Aug. 23: Afghanistan's ruling Taliban will allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to meet eight foreign aid workers accused of spreading Christianity, Taliban foreign minister Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil said on Thursday.

"We have no problem. They (ICRC representatives) can see them any time," Mr Muttawakil said in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar. He said the Taliban had not informed the ICRC of the decision yet and gave no other details.

It was not clear when such a meeting could take place and ICRC officials in Pakistan said they had not been informed of any developments by the Taliban.

The foreigners, two Australians, four Germans and two from the United States, and 16 Afghan employees of a Christian aid agency, have been held since early August.

The Taliban have consistently refused to allow any contact, either consular or legal, with the aid workers of German-based Shelter Now International, who have been detained for more than two weeks. The Taliban's chief spokesman Abdul Hai Mutmaen had repeated on Wednesday there would be no access to the prisoners by anyone until a Taliban investigation into the charges was completed.

"Our stance regarding the visit has not changed, which is that until the investigation is completed no one will be allowed to see the detainees," Mr Mutmaen had said from Kandahar. In the Pakistani capital Islamabad diplomats from Australia, Germany, and the United States applied for fresh visas at the Taliban embassy to visit Afghanistan. (Reuters)



PREFERRED MODE OF TRANSPORT: Unidentified American diplomats, based in Islamabad, leave the Afghan embassy in Islamabad on Wednesday. (AP)

Pakistan fears fallout from UN Afghanistan sanctions

Islamabad, Aug. 23: Pakistan is coming under increasing pressure over its support for Afghanistan's Taliban militia as the United Nations tightens sanctions against the radical Islamic regime, analysts said.

Pakistani foreign secretary Inamul Haq held a private meeting with UN Security Council president Alfonso Valdivieso in New York on Tuesday and later revealed some of Islamabad's concerns to reporters.

"We conveyed the view that sanctions have had an adverse impact on the people of Afghanistan and also indirectly on Pakistan, because almost 200,000 Afghani people over the past few months have moved into Pakistan," he said. "Most of them are economic refugees who left Afghanistan partly as a result of the drought and partly because of the imposition of sanctions." But UN officials and said Mr Haq forgot to mention the ongoing civil war in Afghanistan, which Pakistan is accused of encouraging. (Reuters)

THE ASIAN AGE

24 AUG 2001

Envoys return from Kabul

REUTERS

ISLAMABAD, Aug. 21. - Three western diplomats arrived in Pakistan today after a week-long effort to see their eight citizens detained in Afghanistan on charges of promoting Christianity.

The US, German and Australian diplomats had been refused an extension to their visas, and told they could not see the detained aid workers until the ruling Taliban's investigation was concluded.

The three diplomats landed in Islamabad, where they are based, aboard a regular UN flight from the Afghan capital.

"We return to Islamabad to continue our efforts to obtain consular access and to work for the speedy release of our citizens," the US diplomat, Mr David Donahue said, reading a statement from the three countries' governments just before their departure.

The only concrete accomplishment of the mission was the handing over of personal items to the Taliban for delivery to the prisoners.

The Australian diplomat, Mr Alistair Adams, said after arriving in Islamabad that the



From right: Australian diplomat, Mr Alistair Adams, the US consul-general in Islamabad, Mr David Donahue, and German diplomat Mr Helmut Landies come out of Islamabad airport on Tuesday. - API/PTI

Taliban had agreed to deliver personal items for the detainees, and the diplomats had receipts showing the eight had signed for the packages.

"We are very pleased with that, we have signatures of the eight detainees, which is an encouraging sign. We were not able to visit them but that was the next best thing," he added.

The UN had warned the Taliban they were violating interna-

tional norms of behaviour by refusing to let the detained foreign aid workers see representatives of their governments or lawyers.

The Taliban said the German-based Shelter Now International (SNI), had been attempting to convert Afghan Muslims to Christianity. The charge could carry a death penalty.

Their 16 Afghan colleagues have also been detained.

THE STATESMAN

22 AUG 2001

Taliban flouting norms by visa denial: Diplomats

Afghanistan
H-T-11

Kabul, August 20

WESTERN DIPLOMATS, refused visa extensions and blocked from seeing their jailed citizens, accused Afghanistan's ruling Taliban on Monday of violating international standards of behaviour.

Although the diplomats from the United States, Germany and Australia said they were making a final request to stay in Afghanistan, the ruling Taliban made clear they expected the diplomats to return to neighboring Pakistan on Tuesday when their current visas expire.

"Now there is no possibility of extending their visas and we will return the passports of the three today (Monday)," the Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) quoted a Taliban foreign ministry spokesman as saying.

The diplomats have spent a frustrating week in Kabul trying to see the eight foreign aid workers who have been held without access to their government representatives or lawyers as the

Taliban investigate charges that they were promoting Christianity. "We are disappointed that we have not been able to see the detainees. That was the primary purpose of our coming here to check on their welfare and well-being," said Australian diplomat Alistair Adams, speaking at a U.N. guest house where the diplomats have been staying.

"The serious problem with this is that it is a denial of international practice. When a foreign national is detained, they should get access to their national consular representative," he said.

The four Germans, two Australians and two Americans were arrested along with 16 Afghan colleagues — all from the German-based Christian relief agency Shelter Now International (SNI) — more than two weeks ago. The Taliban say none of the Afghans has admitted converting to Christianity.

Converting from Islam or encouraging conversion could carry a death sentence but the Taliban, who enforce an uncom-

promising interpretation of Islam, have refused to spell out details of a possible sentence.

With the Taliban's repeated statements that they would not extend the visas, the diplomats sounded increasingly resigned to leaving.

The diplomats remained at the U.N. guest house without any sign a meeting or their requested visa extension would materialize. "We want to get somebody, a representative at the ministry, to go and check on the detainees in the event that if we don't get the extension of visas we have to leave tomorrow," Adams said.

"We like to be assured that their condition is good, their health is fine," he said. "And this would be the last opportunity while we are here to press upon the ministry the importance to us of the welfare of the detainees."

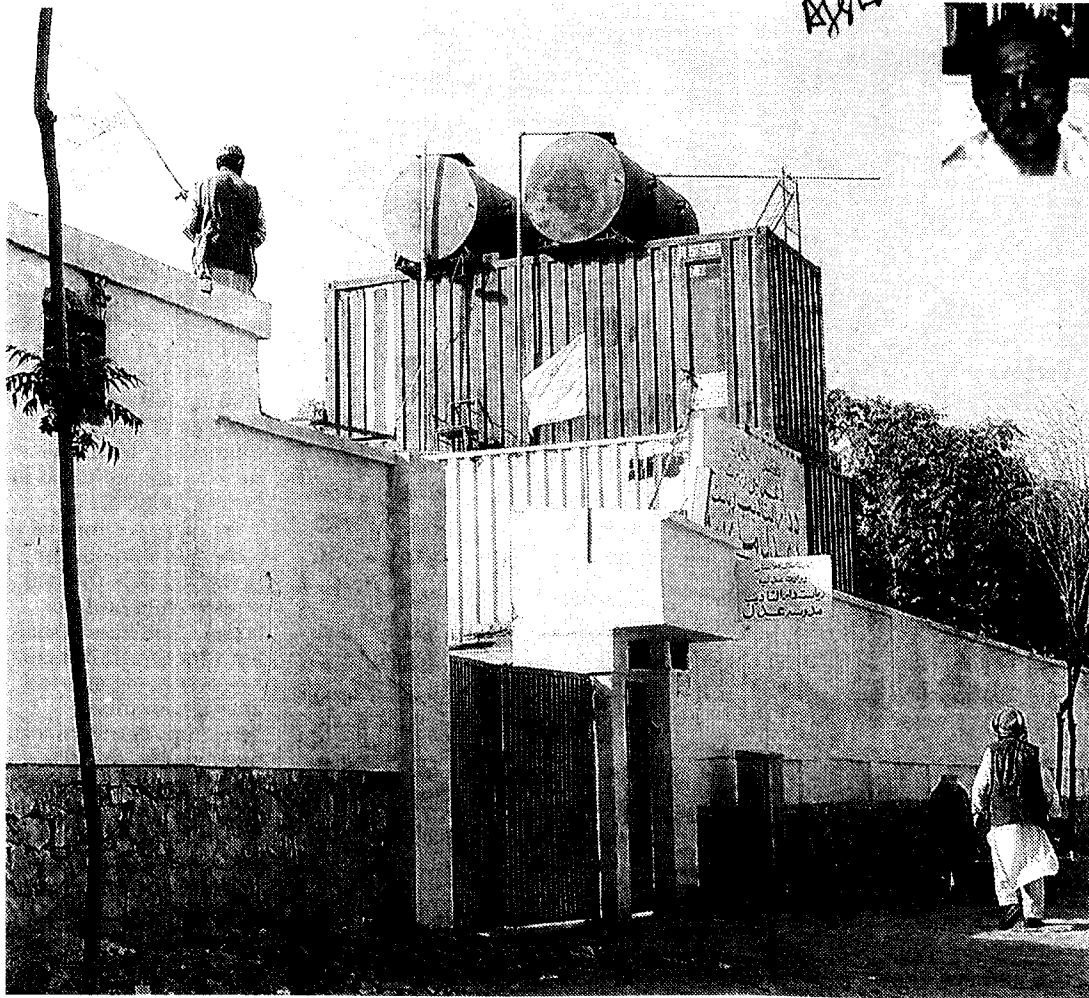
Adams said if forced to leave they would be seeking information on the prisoners from the Taliban embassy in Pakistan, where all the diplomats are based.

Reuters

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

AUG 20 1996

49-16 Taliban... terror tactics 19/8



The detention centre in Kabul where the aid workers are. (Inset) George Taubmann, one of the foreigners held.

AFTER THE Bamiyan Buddhas, it is now the turn of eight international aid workers to face the Taliban's ire. Its religious police, which monitors any "anti-Islamic" activity in the country, under the Ministry for the Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue, recently nabbed eight foreign aid workers and 16 Afghans working for a charity, Shelter Now International (SNI), on charges of spreading Christianity in Afghanistan.

The Taliban accuses the SNI workers, including four Germans, two Australians and two Americans, of trying to convert the street children they were working with from Islam to Christianity. Under the Sharia that the Taliban follows in its strictest form, the penalty is death for both the convert and the instigator. However, a latest decree that includes a ban on trying to convert Afghans also reportedly says foreigners will not face death for missionary activity.

Earlier, the Taliban had also arrested 65 children with whom the charity worked, but later

After the Bamiyan Buddhas, it is the turn of eight international workers to face the Taliban's ire.
B. Muralidhar Reddy reports.

released them and arrested their fathers instead for allowing the young ones to be influenced by the foreigners.

The Taliban says it has recovered thousands of Christian video and audio tapes, besides Bibles translated into local languages, from the 24 aid workers and that investigations were still on. Mr. Joachin Jaeger, spokesman for the German-based aid organisation, says SNI is not a Christian organisation and that it is not its goal to proselytise. SNI describes itself as a non-governmental organisation involved in food distribution, water supply and in helping street children learn crafts such as making paper flowers.

On the other hand, Mr. Mohammad Salim Haqqani, Taliban's Deputy Minister for Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue, says "the probing is becoming interesting and all these new findings are indicative of the fact once again that they were deviating Afghans. Why would SNI need to print Bibles and have all these videos and audiotapes in local languages? They (foreign staff) cannot say they were kept for their own use as they can only speak English and other foreign languages".

The BBC's Ms. Kate Clark, who was expelled by the Taliban for 'biased reporting' and now functions from Peshawar in Pakistan, says no one has yet seen the evidence. The Taliban displayed the so-called seized items last Tuesday and these could be used to re-inforce its case against the group.

While the arrested Afghans face execution if proven guilty, the eight foreigners may be deported after a short while, upto a month, in jail. German, Australian and U.S. diplomats have since flown to Kabul in the hope of meeting the detenus.

However, their visas expire on August 21 and they have been asked to return to Pakistan and wait there.

The Taliban's chief, Mullah Mohammad Omar, had decreed in January that anyone convicted of trying to persuade an Afghan Muslim to convert would face death. Though there are reports of leniency towards foreigners, the Taliban's known style of cocking a snook at international pressure and its ever-hardening attitude towards minorities in Afghanistan offer little hope.

The international community is simply not prepared to take any chances particularly after the Bamiyan episode — the militia ignored passionate pleas from all over the world, including from its closest ally, Pakistan, and destroyed the Buddha statues. This was followed by a decree that Hindus should wear yellow badges! Later it was explained away as a step for their safety.

The arrest of the foreign aid workers on charges of spreading Christianity is not an isolated incident. The United Nations and other international aid agencies operating in Afghanistan have been engaged in a tug of war with the Taliban's moral police for months. Exasperated by repeated arrests and humiliation of local and international aid workers by foreign Islamic militants allied to the Taliban, the U.N. a few weeks ago threatened to pull out of Afghanistan if the Taliban was not prepared to discipline its ranks.

What could be the motives behind the Taliban's latest move? Is it a case of religious bigotry or is there a larger design? The arrest of the foreign workers came soon after two significant developments — the latest resolution of the U.N. Security Council setting up a mechanism to monitor the implementation of the January sanctions against the Taliban, and the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, Ms. Christina Rocca's meeting in Islamabad with the Taliban Ambassador in Pakistan, Mullah Zaef. She had pressed him to pay heed to the international concerns on Osama Bin Laden and the export of jihad.

The reaction is typical of the Taliban. It matters little to the militia that in the process it is cutting off sources of aid for the millions in Afghanistan on the verge of starvation. But the international community should also ponder whether the policy of isolation has actually helped in dealing with the situation created by the militia.

THE HINDU

13 AUG 2001

Taliban hides detainees from world

Islamabad, August 16

Afghanistan
42-11 1978

THE CABINET of Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia has decided to deny diplomatic access to eight detained foreigners accused of preaching Christianity, a report said today.

The ministers met yesterday as three Western diplomats spent a second frustrating day in the Afghan capital trying to gain consular access to the two American, two Australian and four German aid workers.

"It has been finalised that no one should be allowed to meet with these detainees," a foreign ministry spokesman was quoted as saying by the Afghan Islamic press.

"We have told them in clear words that they will not be allowed to meet with the detainees. "It is our principal stand that no one will be allowed to meet them while the investigations are still in progress." The foreigners and 16 Afghans, staff of a German-based aid group, were rounded up between August 3-5 for allegedly preaching Christianity and they have not been seen since.

The foreigners are being held in two detention centres in Kabul under tight guard by the fundamentalist Islamic militia's religious police. Taliban officials have not explained what charges will be laid against them or what punishment they might face, and the religious police have refused to rule out the death penalty.

The US, Australian and German envoys flew from Pakistan to Kabul on Tuesday to press for consular visits but the Taliban have allowed them to meet only low-ranking officials. The US has warned the Taliban, which it accuses of supporting terrorism and drug trafficking, that it would be held responsible for the well-being of the detainees.

AFP



AFP PHOTO

Australian diplomat Alaister Adams (left) hands over food items and letters from the families of the eight detained foreign aid workers to an unidentified Taliban official outside the foreign ministry in Kabul on Thursday.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 AUG 2001

Envoys not allowed to meet detainees

REUTERS

KABUL, Aug. 14. - Three Western diplomats, who are in Kabul to see eight foreign aid workers detained for promoting Christianity, today came up empty handed when Taliban again denied permission. Soon after arriving on a UN flight from Islamabad the diplomats from Australia, Germany and USA met the Taliban's foreign ministry protocol chief, Mr Abdul Ghafour Afghani.

"We have asked for contacts to the detainees. We are waiting for a response," said Mr David Donahue, consul general of the US embassy in Islamabad.

Mr Afghani said he told the diplomats they could not visit the detainees - two Australians, four Germans, two Americans and 16 Afghans - all of

whom worked for German-based NGO Shelter Now International and are in their second week of captivity.

"Surely they want to pay a visit to the detainees and I conveyed the latest position to them that up to now it has been denied. I will convey their demand to the higher authorities," he said.

"They demanded that they wanted to know about what the exact allegations were. We also showed the papers in which the detainees had confessed that they were showing these CDs in an Afghan home," Mr Afghani added.

None of the arrested Afghans has, however, admitted becoming an apostate.

Mr Afghani said discussions also included the health of the eight foreign detainees and



Mr Helmut Landes (third from right), the press attache at the German Embassy in Pakistan, with other unidentified Western diplomats at Kabul airport on Tuesday. - AP/PTI

their well-being.

The Taliban foreign minister, Mr Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil, said that there had been no

change in the Taliban stance and the diplomats would not be able to meet their detained nationals.

The Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press quoted Mr Muttawakil as saying an Islamic Sharia court would decide the fate of all those arrested, including the foreigners.

A June decree provides for foreigners guilty of proselytising to be expelled but Taliban officials say the movement's supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar has the final say.

The Taliban's minister for the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice, Mr Mawlawi Mohammad Wali, has said all foreign institutions and NGOs in Afghanistan would now be put under surveillance to ensure that they would not spread other religions.

That announcement sent alarm bells ringing at the main Afghan donors comprising 15 nations, including European

Union countries, Japan, USA and Switzerland.

Their envoys met in Islamabad yesterday under the banner of the Afghan Support Group (ASG) to discuss the latest Taliban move.

They said they were concerned about the situation and stressed the safety of aid workers was a vital prerequisite for humanitarian work.

"ASG members therefore call in the strongest possible terms on the Taliban authorities to grant the requested consular access and to resolve expeditiously the case of the detained aid workers," the group said in a statement.

Mr Francesc Vendrell, UN special envoy to Afghanistan, who met Taliban leaders over the weekend, also warned of an international outcry if the case was not quickly resolved.

'No visa for diplomats to see detainees' ✓

Taliban jails aid workers

REUTERS & AP

KABUL, Aug. 12. - The Taliban's supreme ruler today sentenced eight foreign aid workers, charged with propagating Christianity, to three to 10 days in jail, while its foreign minister said foreign diplomats won't be allowed to see them.

"If the purpose of issue of the visas is to visit the detainees then that's not suitable," the foreign minister, Mr Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil said about the diplomats awaiting visas.

"But if they want to come and meet the authorities for talks, that's not impossible," he said.

Authorities last weekend arrested 24 Shelter Now International workers, including 16 Afghan staff, for promoting Christianity in the country. Shelter Now International is part of a Germany-based Christian humanitarian group called Vision for Asia.

The punished eight workers - two Americans, four Germans



A file photo of the Shelter Now International office in Peshawar, Pakistan, - AP/PTI

and two Australians - will be expelled from Afghanistan within 48 hours of serving their sentence, ruled Mullah Mohammed Omar, Taliban's Radio Shariat reported. A spokesman for the group said the Bibles and other Chris-

51-5 1878
Islamabad
tian literature, confiscated by the Taliban, were for the personal use of the workers.

Earlier last week, the Taliban displayed several Bibles translated into the local Dari language, as well as Christian films about the coming of Jesus Christ, also translated into Dari language.

Mr Salim Haqqani, deputy minister of the Taliban's ministry for the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice, said the material was translated into local languages so that it could be used to convert Afghan Muslims to Christianity.

Pakistan on Osama: Pakistan has said that USA should deal directly with Kabul on the issue of Osama bin Laden, and not involve Islamabad in it.

"We have told USA that Afghanistan is an independent and sovereign state, and Washington should directly contact Kabul on the issue of bin Laden," Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider said.

THE STATESMAN

13 AUG 2001

Taliban sends back diplomats sans visas

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ISLAMABAD, Aug. 11. — US, Australian and German diplomats returned today from the Taliban embassy here empty-handed, without the expected visas to visit the eight detained aid workers in Kabul, embassy sources said.

Taliban spokesman in Pakistan Mr Suhail Shaheen said, visas for consular officials hadn't been issued yet. Taliban ambassador Mr Abdul Salam Zaef said he had no idea when the travel documents would be issued to the diplomats to visit the two Americans, two Australians and four Germans arrested in Kabul last weekend.

US and Australian embassy spokesmen said expectations were high earlier that the visas would be issued today. Senior consul officials were ready to fly to Kabul with a United Nations flight tomorrow, they said.

The foreigners were among the 24, mostly Afghan, staff of the German-based NGO, Shelter Now arrested for allegedly preaching Christianity, breaking the fundamentalist Islamic militia's laws.

"The arrest of the aid workers is a cause of concern for the international community," said Mr Francesc Vendrell, the UN Secretary-General's special envoy on Afghanistan, upon his arrival in Kabul, adds AP from Kabul. He would press for the eight jailed foreigners' release, he added.

US move: The USA has ordered its aid workers to move out of Indonesia, apprehending extremist attacks on US interests, including American tourists in the country. "The US embassy has information that extremists may target US interests in Indonesia, mainly US government facilities, and this may extend to US tourist groups," the state department's new warning said.

THE STATE

12 AUG 2001

Diplomats can meet detained foreigners, says Taliban

By B. Muraidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, AUG. 9. The Taliban has agreed to allow diplomats to visit Kabul and meet eight foreigners detained in Kabul on charges of promoting Christianity even as Pakistani religious parties issued a warning to the United Nations that monitors sent to Pakistan to tighten sanctions against the Afghan Taliban regime would be treated as enemies.

The decision of the Taliban authorities to detain eight foreigners associated with various aid agencies on charges of promoting Christianity threatens to become a major issue between the Afghan Government and the various international aid agencies engaged in humanitarian help in

different parts of Afghanistan.

A few months ago the United Nations had threatened to withdraw all its aid workers from Afghanistan if the Taliban did not stop harassment of the aid workers by 'guests' of the Taliban. The obvious reference was to volunteers from the Arab world who are in Afghanistan to fight against the enemies of the Taliban.

In another development, the Council for the Defence of Afghanistan (CDA), a conglomerate of various religious outfits in Pakistan, have asked Pakistan to resist moves by the Security Council to deploy monitors in six countries surrounding Afghanistan.

The United Nations through a resolution recently had decided on a mechanism of monitors to

oversee the implementation of the sanctions imposed on the Afghanistan Government in January this year.

"We are determined to foil this. We demand that the Government of Pakistan rejects this and if they fail to do so we will take every action to disrupt it," the CDA chief, Maulana Samiul Haq, said.

U.S. cautious

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, AUG. 9. The United States, even while paying very close attention to the goings on in Afghanistan, is being careful in its criticism of the Taliban for the latest developments. At least two Americans who were working for the Germany-based Shelter Now International, have been arrested

in Afghanistan and the group charged with promoting Christianity.

At the State Department, the spokesman was asked to comment on the interactions with the aid group including their response to the Taliban charges of proselytizing.

The German organisation has denied the charges and has maintained that the Christian literature that had been seized by authorities were strictly for private use. The Taliban does not buy this line of argument.

"I really don't want to offer any comment on these charges of proselytizing. I think it's important for us to be careful in this matter", the spokesman, Mr. Richard Boucher, said on Wednesday during a press briefing.

Taliban says foreigners can meet

The U.S. has asked the Taliban authorities permission to visit the detained American citizens. So have Australia and Germany; and according to reports here, diplomats of the three countries are planning to travel together by a U.N. plane once the necessary travel documents have been issued.

The State Department has also said that the U.S. is working with officials in Pakistan who have been helping with communications with the Taliban.

"The Taliban charge in Islamabad has told our charge that the detained employees of Shelter Now are in good condition and are being treated well", Mr. Boucher said during a regular press briefing.

Envoys to seek release of Taliban's prisoners

57-5
1078
Afghanistan

ROGER BOYES & ZAHID HUSSAIN
THE TIMES, LONDON

BERLIN/ KARACHI, Aug. 9. — A western diplomatic team will fly to Kabul tomorrow to seek the release of eight foreign aid workers held by the Taliban religious police for trying to preach Christianity in strictly Islamic Afghanistan.

(The Taliban is ready to grant visas to US, Australian and German diplomats, based in Pakistan, to see the evidence against the eight detained foreigners, the deputy foreign minister, Mr Abdul Rehman Zahid, told Afghan Islamic Pressan, adds AFP from Islamabad.

But an US embassy spokesman said there had been no official indication from the Taliban that the visas were being prepared. "We're ready to go but we still don't have our visas," he said.

The Taliban hasn't ruled out the death penalty, although a code of conduct for foreigners released in June allows for imprisonment of up to one month or expulsion.)

The diplomats are expected to hold talks with the Taliban administration. But there is no sign that they will be allowed to see the imprisoned aid workers waiting for trial by an Islamic court.

The eight — two Americans, two Australians and four Germans — were among the mostly Afghan Shelter Now staff arrested at the weekend for allegedly breaking the Taliban's strict laws against proselytising.

"We were given to understand that a review of the case against the foreigners and Afghan na-



Two of the four Afghans, involved in a series of bombings last year, were hanged in public. In Kabul on Thursday. — AP/PTI

tionals arrested is under way and is expected to be completed in a few days," said Ms Ellian Duthoit, the UN regional co-ordinator in Kabul, who met Taliban officials today.

The foreigners were "being well fed and well looked after," the deputy minister for preservation of virtue and prevention of vice, Mullah Muhammed Salim Haqqani, said.

While some diplomats were hopeful that the foreigners could be quickly expelled, there was no such optimism about the 16 Afghans arrested at the same time, who could face the death sentence for challenging Islamic teachings.

"I assume that the foreign pris-

oners will be released through diplomatic channels, but it looks much worse for the Afghan citizens," said Mr Abed Nadjib, a Berlin-based diplomatic counsellor representing the Afghan government, which controls only the north of the country.

A spokesman for the aid organisation Shelter Germany, Mr Estebon Witzmann, admitted that the aid workers were carrying Christian materials, but said they were only for personal use. "The Taliban regime is simply trying to discredit us and stop help reaching the people who need it," Mr Witzmann said.

But Mr Haqqani denied Mr Witzmann's suggestion and said police had seized Bibles

and up to 7,000 Christian video tapes and cassettes in the local languages of Dari and Pashtu.

Mr Haqqani said there was sufficient evidence to put the foreigners on trial under Islamic law, after an investigation was completed.

The Taliban will close all offices of Shelter Now, according to a report today.

(Taliban soldiers took control of several provincial offices of the Christian aid group late yesterday as the hardline militia widened its crackdown on the German-based relief agency, adds AFP. Diplomats confirmed that Shelter Now's offices throughout Afghanistan had been closed).

THE STATESMAN

10 100 201

Three-nation Afghan trip initiative

Karachi, Aug. 8 (Reuters): Officials from Australia, Germany and the United States were hoping to get approval to travel to Afghanistan to visit eight foreign aid workers accused of trying to convert Muslims to Christianity.

Twenty-four staff of the German-based relief agency Shelter Now International — including four Germans, two Americans and two Australians — were arrested on August 5 in Kabul on charges punishable by death under the hardline Islamic Taliban regime.

"All three nations have agreed that we'll try and travel up together to get access to the detainees," said a spokesman for the Australian High Commission in Pakistan. "We would (like to) leave tomorrow on the UN flight but I don't know if we'll get the visa in time," he added.

None of the aid workers have been sighted since their arrest three days ago with friends, colleagues, diplomats and journalists denied visits.

But Shelter Now's director Esteban Witzemann, based in the

northwestern Pakistani city of Peshawar, told Bavarian Radio in Germany that although those arrested did have Christian material, it was for personal use only.

"The Taliban regime wants to bring what we do into disrepute so that help for the people does not get to them," a statement from the radio station quoted Witzemann as saying.

The Taliban has said it sees no need for any foreign aid agency to visit the detainees or for any foreign lawyers or prosecutors to get involved.

"We just don't know whether they've been charged or whatever," the Australian spokesman said. "That is one of the things we'll be seeking to find out. Have they been charged? What are the penalties?"

No contact

A spokesman for the US embassy in Islamabad said the Taliban had not been in contact.

"We applied for our visas yesterday... we're still waiting to hear back," he said. "We have yet to receive any official information

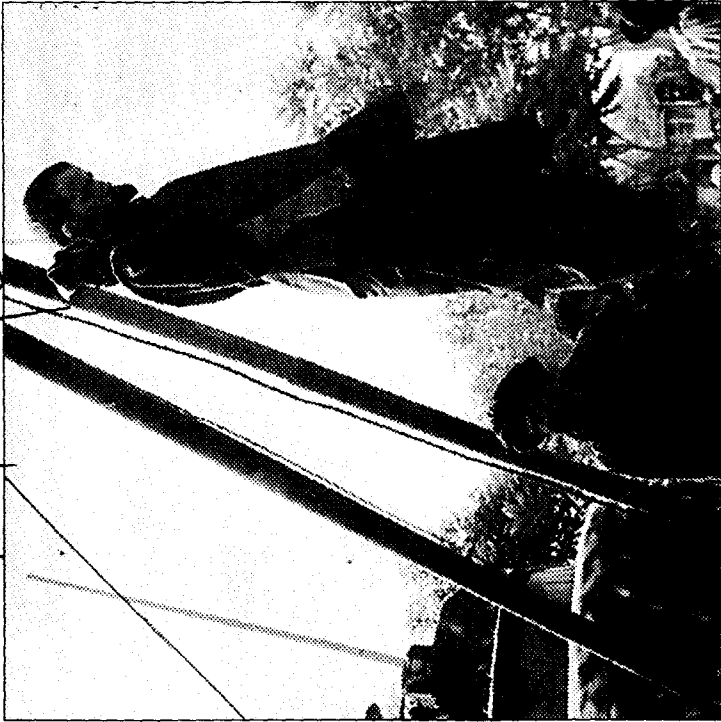
from the Taliban, we're just watching and waiting at this point."

A senior Taliban official said authorities had strong evidence to prove the workers had been involved in trying to convert Muslims to Christianity, including Bibles and computer disks with the story of Christ in the local Dari language.

Anyone found trying to convert Afghan Muslims to Christianity — or anyone who converts — faces the death penalty under the strict interpretation of Islam. It Sharia law imposed by the Taliban, which means "student".

Earlier this year the Taliban issued an edict ordering non-Muslim Afghans to wear a distinguishing yellow badge — a move that prompted international outrage because of its similarity to laws that marked out Jews for persecution in Nazi Germany.

Today, Taliban authorities publicly hanged four men it said were responsible for a series of bombs in the capital, and strung up their corpses from cranes in the centre of the capital.



One of the four men executed by the Taliban is left hanging in the centre of Kabul on Wednesday. (AFP)

'Detained aid agency staff were promoting Christianity'

Taliban reject global pleas

FROM SYED SALAHUDDIN

Kabul, Aug. 7 (Reuters): Afghanistan's Taliban rulers today brushed aside international criticism over the arrest of 24 foreign and local staff of an aid agency, saying they had strong evidence the detainees were promoting Christianity.

A UN coordinator's office for the war-torn country said it thought the Taliban were reviewing the case against the eight foreign staff and 16 Afghan workers of the German-based relief agency Shelter Now International (SNI).

The review against the American, German, Australian and Afghan workers was expected to be completed within days.

A senior Taliban official told a news conference in Kabul that authorities had strong evidence to prove the workers were involved in trying to convert Afghan Muslims to Christianity, a charge punishable by death under the strict interpretation of Islamic Sharia law imposed by the Taliban.

Mohammad Salim Haqqani, Taliban's deputy minister for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, showed reporters computer discs containing the story of the life of Christ in Dari language as part of evidence he said had been collected from SNI.

He also displayed a copy of the *Bible* in English and another in Dari as well as a book on Christianity, a timeable for an SNI radio broadcast and what he called a written confession of a foreign female staffer of the agency.

"Are these not valid and strong evidence?" Haqqani asked.

The Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) quoted Taliban deputy foreign minister Abdur Rehman Zahid as saying investigations were continuing.

"These people are all right, they get good food and drinks and they are still under the custody of the ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice," Zahid said.

The UN Coordinator's Office for Afghanistan said in a state-

ment it had expressed its serious concern over the arrests during a meeting today with high-level Taliban officials.

"We were given to understand that a review of the case against the foreigners and the Afghan nationals arrested is under way and is expected to be completed within a few days," it quoted Eliance Duthoit, UN Regional Coordinator based in Kabul, as saying.

"The UN did not meet the aid workers imprisoned," it said. But added: "Assurances were, however, received about their well-being."

The US, Australia and Germany all said they were concerned for their nationals, four Germans, two Australians and two Americans, and were seeking access to them through their diplomatic missions in Pakistan.

Haqqani said the Taliban's

message for other foreigners operating in Afghanistan was that they should avoid trying to persuade Afghans to become apostates. He said there was no need for any foreign aid agency to visit the detainees or for any foreign lawyers and prosecutors to get involved in the matter.

A spokesman at the Australian High Commission in Islamabad, said envoys were trying to get some answers from Afghanistan. "We may have to get up there," he said. Haqqani said Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar would make the final decision on how to proceed.

There has been no indication from Omar whether he will show flexibility and bow to international pressure. One Kabul-based aid worker said she was more concerned for the fate of the 16 Afghans than for the foreigners.

THE TELEGRAPH

8 AUG 2001

AGE CELLIES IIUMI A YELY EALTY PATION. 12.1.11

TALIBAN, DEMOCRACY ON ROCCA AGENDA

Sattar to discuss Laden, sanctions, nuclear plans

BY SYED TALAT HUSSAIN
Dawn

Islamabad, July 31: Afghanistan, regional security and democracy will dominate discussions between Pakistan officials and US assistant secretary of state for South Asian affairs Christina Rocca.

She started her official engagements in Pakistan on Tuesday, said diplomatic sources.

At her morning meeting with foreign minister Abdul Sattar, she was to focus attention on Afghanistan and reiterate Washington's stand that Islamabad has to use its influence with the Taliban to close down training camps of alleged terrorists working against US interests.

The issue of extradition of men, wanted by the US in connection with Osama bin Laden, the international terrorist wanted by the United States will also come upon the talks, the sources said.

The issue of proliferation of nuclear and missile technology and the "custodial safety of nuclear controls" will also be raised.

For Pakistan, lifting of sanctions in an evenhanded and non-discriminatory fashion is the key issue, Pakistan officials said.

Islamabad has been telling Washington that the sanctions have undermined its economy, defence and democracy. Officials from the US embassy would assist Ms Rocca in these talks, the sources said.

Ms Rocca, who arrived in Islamabad on Monday, had a string of unofficial and private meetings in Lahore since her arrival from India. She is also to meet interior minister Moimuddin Haider and finance minister Shaukat Aziz. But her most important meeting will be with President Gen. Pervez Musharraf.



WARM WELCOME: US assistant secretary of state for South Asian affairs Christina Rocca (left) is greeted by Pakistan foreign minister Abdul Sattar in Islamabad on Tuesday. (AP)

Meet with Taliban not unusual: US

Washington: July 31: There is nothing "particularly unusual" about US assistant secretary of state for South Asia Christina Rocca's scheduled meeting with Taliban ambassador Mullah Zaeef on Thursday, the state department said on Tuesday.

"As you know, we meet regularly with Taliban representatives, as well as representatives of all Afghan factions," department's acting spokesman Charles Hurter said.

Pointing out that Ms Rocca had met the Northern Alliance foreign minister here several weeks ago, he said "so there is nothing particularly unusual with her contact with Mr Zaeef, when that happens."

He declined to comment further saying, "obviously we will have to let that meeting happen first."

Asked if this would be the Bush administration's first senior level contact with the Taliban, Mr Hunter said, that to his knowledge it was certainly Ms Rocca's first meeting with a Taliban representative, but he was unsure of any past high level meetings. (UNI)

THE ASIAN AGE

U.N. to enforce curbs on Taliban

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

UNITED NATIONS, JULY 31. The United Nations Security Council has adopted a two-track mechanism to help further enforce the sanctions regime against the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Security Council has called on all countries to take immediate steps to prevent sanctions violations and to punish individuals and organisations flouting the sanctions regime.

The Council on Monday unanimously adopted a resolution calling for the setting up two monitoring groups — a 15-member team that will be sent to countries neighbouring Afghanistan and a five-member group that will stay back in the headquarters here for supervision.

The United States and Russia were leading the efforts to tighten the screws against the Taliban. While the U.S. has been pressuring the extremist outfit in Kabul to hand over the exiled Saudi national, Osama bin Laden, Russia has for a long time been paying close attention to the role of Islamic extremists in the ongoing troubles in Chechenya. And China too has been quite wary of the spread of Islamic fundamentalism via the Taliban.

The Security Council has given the Secretary General 30 days to establish the two monitoring groups. The first group will be sent to the six bordering countries of Afghanistan namely, China, Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan which are seen as lacking in facilities to monitor the existing sanctions regime that includes an arms embargo.

The U.S. and Russia will be the two major suppliers of equipment and technical expertise, it is said.

THE
200 200

Taliban bans neckties, lipstick and chess

Islamabad, July 20

AFGHANISTAN'S RULING Taliban movement on Wednesday banned the import of 30 items it said were "un-Islamic," including playing cards, neckties, lipsticks, nail polish and chessboards.

The radical Islamic movement's Voice of Shariat radio, monitored in Islamabad, said the ban was ordered by the Taliban's supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar. Other items listed as banned for being "against the Sharia," or Islamic law, include fireworks, statues, fashion catalogs and greeting cards featuring pictures of people, musical instruments and cassettes. Also banned were computer discs, movies, satellite TV dishes, pig fat products and anything made of human hair.

The radio quoted the leader's order as telling border guards and security agencies to seize the banned items and hand them over to the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, which acts as the Taliban's religious police. Wednesday's order follows one last month banning the printing of pictures of animals or verses from the Koran on any products.

The Taliban, which swept to power in 1996 and controls about 95 percent of the war-ravaged country, has already banned television, the playing of music and photographs of people and animals. It has also barred women from education, most types of work, and from going out without wearing the all-enveloping "burqa" veil. Men are ordered to grow long beards and not wear Western dress.

The movement provoked international protests earlier this year by ordering the destruction of ancient Buddhist statues and asking the country's small non-Muslim community to wear distinguishing badges. The statues, including the world's largest two Buddhas carved in a cliff near the central Afghan town of Bamiyan, were destroyed, but no decree has yet come from Omar about the badges to be worn by non-Muslims.

Reuters

AFGHANISTAN

AFGHANISTAN

Pak, Iran, Russia fuelling Afghan war: Report

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

New York, July 12: The United Nations Security Council should impose a comprehensive embargo on all military assistance against all warring factions in Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch urged on Thursday.

In a new report released on Thursday, Human Rights Watch accused Pakistan, Iran, and Russia of providing military support to Afghan factions with a long record of committing gross abuses of human rights. Other states in the region have also contributed to the ongoing war.

"The civil war in Afghanistan has been absolutely disastrous for civilians," said

Joost R. Hilteermann, executive director of the arms division of human rights watch. "An arms embargo is the only way to stop the human rights violations they have suffered."

The 55-page report, *Crisis of Impunity: The Role of Pakistan, Russia, and Iran in Fuelling the Civil War in Afghanistan*, details the nature of military support provided to the warring parties, the major transit routes used to move arms and other equipment, the suppliers, the role of state and nonstate actors, and the response of the international community.

The Human Rights Watch conducted research on military assistance to the Tal-

iban and the United Front over a two-year period, travelling to both Kabul and areas of Afghanistan under United Front control, as well as Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Pakistan, and interviewing government officials, members of the diplomatic community, military officers, civil servants, journalists, academics, and others.

In calling for an embargo on military assistance, Human Rights Watch said that enforcement measures should be carefully structured to ensure a two-sided embargo would not benefit one side, the Taliban, at the expense of the other, the United Front.

For reasons of geography and other factors, an embargo is more easily enforced

against the United Front than the Taliban. Lifting the embargo should be made contingent on concrete steps by the factions to end gross violations of human rights and bring perpetrators to justice, Human Rights Watch said.

In the war, all major factions have repeatedly committed serious violations of international law, including killings, indiscriminate aerial bombardment and shelling, direct attacks on civilians, summary executions, rape, persecution on the basis of religion, and the use of antipersonnel landmines. Most of the recent violations have been by the Taliban, while the United Front has failed to hold its commanders.

THE ASIAN

UN forms experts panel to monitor Afghan sanctions

ASIA NEWS INTERNATIONAL
ISLAMABAD, JULY 3

THE United Nations Security Council will adopt a mechanism in a couple of weeks to monitor implementation of sanctions on Afghanistan, sources said.

The Security Council has been discussing the monitoring mechanism in the wake of United Nations sanctions against Taliban in December 2000.

Experts nominated by the Security Council have prepared the outlines of the mechanism after visiting the region and holding talks with officials of the regional country.

The mechanism will primarily deal with imposing unilateral arms embargo on Taliban in accordance with the United Nations Resolution 1333 that asks the neighbouring countries and all the member states not to supply weapons or military advisors to Afghanistan's ruling militia.

Team of experts, which visited Afghanistan's neighbouring countries including Pakistan have submitted its report on the shape this mechanism could take in order to impose an effective

mechanism. The report doesn't contain any accusation against Pakistan but it says that Pakistan could contribute to enforce effective arms embargo against Taliban. The experts visited Pak-Afghan border and held talks with Pakistani officials on the subject.

Pakistan, it appears, has raised no objection to the enforcement of monitoring mechanism as it says it is not extending military support to Taliban.

Pakistan, however, has on more than one occasion objected to the unilateral nature of the arms embargo on Afghanistan as the United Nations Resolution 1333 doesn't include Northern Alliance in the ambit of provisions relating to arms embargo.

Its position has been reiterated time and again that unilateral arms embargo will fuel rather than put an end to the fighting going on in Afghanistan.

There are indications that the shape of monitoring mechanism will be somewhat similar to the one adopted by the Security Council some months back for Angola.

India, Iran and Russia plan anti-Taliban bloc

SRINJOY CHOWDHURY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 1. — A strategic relationship between India, Iran and Russia is being established to fight the Taliban.

Although it's strategically in India's interest, the government is yet undecided on the kind of help that should be extended to the Afghan rebel leader, Mr Ahmed Shah Massood, to keep the Taliban-sponsored terrorism away.

A defence ministry official confirmed it and said: "The

strategic relationship between Iran, Russia and India was worked out recently, but the government was yet to decide on the kind of help to be granted."

Mr Masood, who is seen as a progressive figure, is hoping to raise a strong army of several thousand men to fight the Taliban with the support of the 'Northern Alliance' comprising Iran, Russia and India.

The Panjshir Valley in Afghanistan is Mr Masood's stronghold but his force, much smaller than the Tali-

ban, hasn't been able to make much headway in recent times.

There is a realisation of this among the Northern Allies, who have discussed the matter of support to Mr Masood.

The alliance is also disappointed with the limited success of the Afghan rebel troops.

There is a realisation that the Afghan rebel leader's men were constantly at war while the Taliban was able to bring up fresh soldiers to the front.

With his men worn out, the chances of success appear less bright.

It was learnt that the alliance will continue to support Mr Masood as it is in India's strategic interest. Mr Masood's troops can keep the Taliban government busy for a while. Otherwise, the Taliban government, not recognised by India, could funnel a large number of fighters into Jammu and Kashmir.

There are already a large number of battle-hardened and fanatical Afghan troops in the state, pressuring the Indian troops.

Russia and Iran also have problems with the Taliban.

Russia is concerned as the Taliban could stir up trouble in the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan (and perhaps, even in faraway Azerbaijan). Indian government officials said. Iran is the greatest supporter of the alliance against the Taliban and Indo-Iranian talks on the issue have been held recently.

Meanwhile, the Centre hasn't issued a statement regarding the support to be extended to the Afghan rebel leader.

A senior defence ministry official said: "A strategic rela-

tionship between Iran, Russia and India has been worked out in principle during the defence minister, Mr Jaswant Singh's visit. What kind of help would have to be provided in terms of military and equipment would be worked out."

He said: "There is also the question of ground-level coordination with USA against the Taliban." It was also "desirable" as USA is clearly opposed to the Taliban and there should be no "ground-level misunderstandings," he added.

THE STATESMAN

Taliban, UN still at loggerheads over women volunteers

REUTERS
KABUL, MAY 29

98-8
20/5

THE United Nations said on Tuesday that the Taliban still refused to allow women to be hired for a survey needed to continue bread supplies for nearly 3,000,000 people in the Afghan capital.

The UN World Food Programme had given the Taliban until June 15 to agree to a survey to ensure food aid was reaching the neediest people in the city of some 1.6 million, but the hardline Islamic movement has so far refused to reconsider.

"The most important issue is the issue of the possibility of the UN to hire women...and there is no breakthrough," Erick de Mul, head of UN Humanitarian Aid to Afghanistan, said after two days of negotiations.

"There is no real movement on that score." The Taliban movement, which is trying impose an extreme interpretation

of Islam on the 90 per cent of Afghanistan it controls, said on Saturday it would block the poverty survey because it required hiring women and would violate Islamic principles.

The Taliban refusal to allow the Kabul survey is the latest in a growing number of confrontations with the UN and private organisations that provide most of

the social services in the war-ravaged country.

The Taliban triggered world-wide outrage last week with a decree ordering

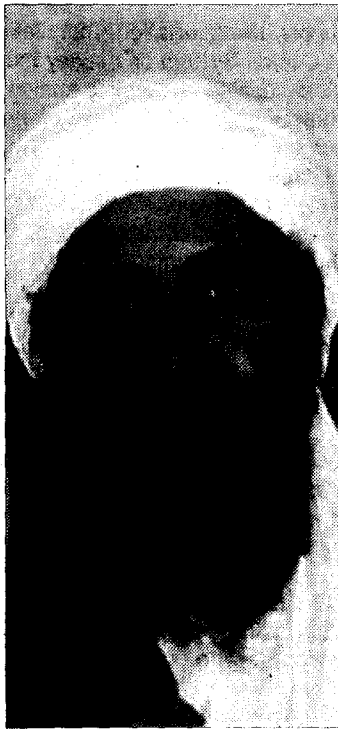
Hindus in the overwhelmingly Muslim country to wear yellow badges, evoking memories of the Nazi order that Jews in Germany wear yellow Stars of David.

The UN World Food Programme has warned the Taliban for more than a year that a survey was vital to ensure bread — distributed to 2,82,000 people at 12 per cent of the retail price — was reaching those most in need.

The tussle between the Taliban and the UN has affected food supplies to about 3,00,000 people in Kabul

INDIAN EXPRESS

Osama can't use Afghan soil against USA: Taliban



Osama bin Laden

519 25/6
AFP & REUTERS

KABUL, June 24. — The Taliban regime today said it was watching the activities of Osama bin Laden and that he wouldn't be allowed to launch attacks on foreign targets from Afghanistan.

"All Osama activities are under control. He has no facilities to use Afghan territory against any country,"

foreign ministry spokesman Mohammad Usman Sheryar said.

The statement came a day after the Arabic satellite television channel MBC reported that followers of bin Laden, who is based in Afghanistan, were planning a major attack on US and Israeli interests in the next two weeks.

The station, monitored by the BBC, broadcast a report yesterday from a correspondent in the Pakistani town of Quetta, who said he had met bin Laden two days ago in Afgha-

nistan.

"There is a major state of mobilisation among the Osama bin Laden forces. It seems that there is a race for who will strike first. Will it be the United States or Osama bin Laden?" the correspondent said.

"I met with Bin Laden near Kandahar (Afghanistan) over the last few days, and his main supporters said in front of him that there will be a big surprise over the next two weeks," a correspondent for the Arab television station said.

"It will be a hard hit against US and Israeli targets across the world," the reporter said.

Mr Sheryar dismissed the television report saying he doubted its credibility.

"Osama has got no facilities to give interviews or chat with somebody," the spokesman said. "The film shown could have been skills of the camera man. This film could be a forged one."

He said bin Laden was a "guest" and would never be allowed to use Afghan soil against any country.

Asked about the possibility of a US attack against Taliban-held areas similar to 1998 missile strikes against suspected bin Laden bases in eastern Afghanistan Mr Sheryar said, "Afghanistan has no worry and never had one as God helps Afghanistan."

"Osama's activities are under control...therefore I don't think America will repeat its previous mistake."

US officials said on Friday forces in the Gulf had been put on alert based on a non-specific but credible threat linked to bin Laden.

US embassies in the Gulf were open for business as usual today, although witnesses said security was tight after Washington's warning of an increased threat of "terrorist" action by Islamic militant groups.

THE STATESMAN

Taliban Decree is Contrary to Shari'a

By ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

11-10 19/6
THE Taliban, after demolishing the statues of Buddha have now issued a decree that all Hindus in Afghanistan should wear a yellow badge so that they can be recognised. They have done so in the name of Islam. Justifying this act they have pointed out that Muslims have to observe a dress code, keep beards and offer prayers at appointed times, and those who do not do so are punished. Since Hindus are not bound by these regulations they should be recognised as Hindus or non-Muslims and hence the necessity to wear the yellow badge.

They have also said that it is required by Islamic Shari'a that non-Muslims should wear a distinct dress, and Mulla Umar has only asked the Department of Enforcement of Good and Eradication of Evil to enforce this dress code. Needless to say most of the people in the world have condemned this discriminatory decree.

First it needs to be made clear that there is no Shari'a requirement that non-Muslims be compelled to wear a distinct dress or a badge. In the fourteen hundred years of various Islamic regimes one can hardly cite any such example of a specific dress code for non-Muslims. Neither is it found in the Qur'an nor in hadith. There is only one instance during the Fatimid regime in Egypt in early 11th century when Imam Hakim bi Amrillah, the then Fatimid Caliph required the Christians to wear a cross of particular weight (so that it is not very small) so that they could be recognised as Christians. This decree was also an administrative decree and had nothing to do with Shari'a.

It is important to note that even the first four rightly guided caliphs had issued a number of decrees for administrative reasons and in view of the situation prevailing then. These do not automatically become part of Shari'a unless they are based on some Shari'a principle. One has to distinguish between administrative decrees and principles of Shari'a, in the same way as in a democracy we have to distinguish between an ordinance and a law passed by parliament based on principle of justice. An ordinance is generally issued to take care of an emergency situation and a

law is passed to fulfil a principle of justice.

Non-muslims have been described in Islamic Shari'a as zimmi i.e. those people the responsibility for whose welfare falls on the Islamic regime. A number of Holy Prophet's sayings can be cited that those who neglect zimmi will not be from his ummah (i.e. community) and they will not be able to join him and his band of followers on the Day of Judgment. Thus to look after the welfare of non-Muslims is a fundamental responsibility of an Islamic regime. No Islamic government worth its salt and aspiring for the Mercy of Allah and His Prophet can neglect, let alone oppress, the non-Muslim people of an Islamic regime.

If the Shari'a has to be a living and dynamic source of guidance for people today it has to be creatively and thoughtfully applied in today's circumstances. Any law is a complex statement of principle and context. In any legislation the underlying principle is most important, more important than the problem which motivates the legislator to undertake legislation. Legislation can change but not the principle. In Shari'a too principles (usul) are more important than the law itself. The Taliban just refuse to understand this.

No regime can work smoothly and justly if its entire approach is based on a rule book compiled centuries ago and it does not take into account the present requirements of people today.

Moreover in a democratic set-up in today's world there is no question of Zimmi. All are equal citizens and there should not be any discrimination on the basis of religion at all. Democratic and human rights should be enjoyed by all whether one is in a majority or minority from the religious point of view. But the problem with the Taliban is that they do not believe in democracy. They believe in medieval theocracy. Leaders like Mulla Umar who have no understanding of the modern democratic world (they have no interaction with the outside world at all) are at the helm of affairs of Afghanistan. The entire people of Afghanistan are suffering at their hands. Others can only sympathise with their plight.



**THE
SPEAKING TREE**

<http://spirituality.indiatimes.com>

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Most Afghans tired of war, want Shah to return

Washington, June 16: The US state department on Friday released a poll that found most Afghans were tired of war, regard former King Zahir Shah as the leader most likely to address the country's problems and support convening a council of traditional leaders to resolve the crisis there.

Because of security issues inside Afghanistan, most of which is controlled by Taliban fundamentalists who tolerate little dissent, the state department said it could not reveal who conducted the recent poll or give other operational details. However, the United States,

which is reviewing its policy toward Afghanistan, considers the poll of 4,995 people in 27 provinces to be "relatively scientific," a state department official said. The men polled came from urban and rural areas, while the women were only from urban areas. The poll results are generally consistent with the US position, which is extremely critical of the Taliban and supportive of an Afghan-crafted political solution to the nation's problems. Afghanistan has been devastated by 21 years of war and a three-year drought. The state department official said over

half of those Afghans questioned — 58 per cent of the men and 51 per cent of the women — thought that ending the war and reviving national unity were the most important priorities. Some 50 per cent of the women polled and 46 per cent of the

was ranked second in the leadership stakes, with the backing of 11 per cent of males and 6 per cent of women.

Twenty per cent of those polled responded "don't know" to the leadership question, the official said. The results also

showed that 79 per cent of Afghan men and 87 per cent of women support convening a "loya jirga" to resolve the country's conflict. "Loya jirga" is a meeting called at times of national crisis or other looming national issues and involves traditional leaders from across the country.

In Kabul, the capital, the num-

bers were even higher: 95 per cent for men and 90 per cent for women. The US official asserted that the poll showed the Afghan public "does not support the Taliban and their policies and is widely supportive of subordinating differences in order to attain stability, peace and unity in Afghanistan."

The United Nations's World Food Program is threatening to close down the UN subsidised food program in Kabul because the Taliban will not allow the UN agency hire women to carry out a survey to ensure that its bread is reaching those in need. (Reuters)

US SECURITY STUDY

men named Zahir Shah as the leader "who can most successfully address the problems facing Afghanistan today." The 84-year-old former king has lived in exile for nearly three decades. Taliban leader Mullah Omar

THE ASIAN AGE

THE ASIAN AGE

250,000 face starvation as Kabul bakeries close

STEPHEN FARRELL AND ZAHID HUSSAIN
THE TIMES, LONDON

ISLAMABAD/KABUL, June 16. — More than 250,000 people in Kabul will be pushed closer to starvation from today when the United Nations closes down 130 bakeries authorities over hiring female workers.

The subsidised bread programme was the single-largest UN project in Afghanistan, feeding almost 300,000 people in Kabul every day.

The closure came after Taliban refused to allow hiring of women for a new poverty survey, saying female employment was against Islamic law. In a nation hit by war and drought thousands more destitute Afghans, whose survival depended solely on five loaves of bread from the bakeries, now face starvation.

"For the moment, the clo-

sure of the bakeries is final," Mr Gerard Van Dijk, the WFP representative in Afghanistan, said. UN officials said reopening will depend on whether Taliban leaders change their mind. UN officials said Taliban were hindering the survey because they were misusing the cards allotted the bearer to bread, buying, selling, renting and confiscating them for redistribution among the militia members.

Relations between Taliban and the UN have hit a new low following the recent crackdown on aid workers. "It is becoming more and more difficult for the UN to work with the Taliban authorities," said the UN coordinator for Afghanistan, Mr Erick de Mul.

The bakeries' closure will only make worse the crisis facing Afghanistan, with more than one million people facing starvation and another millio-



WILL THE UN GIVE THEM CAKES? Outside a bakery in Kabul on Saturday. — AP/PTI

In the remote northern areas, Afghans are now surviving on what they call "Air Soup", a scattering of flour poured into

water and served to children by parents trying to fool them into thinking they have had a proper meal. This is just one measure of the desperation witnessed by aid workers in remote areas hit by the severest drought in three decades and fighting between Taliban and its opponents.

In isolated mountain villages of the northern Faryab province, accessible only on foot or by donkey, people crowd around visitors, showing the wild grasses and boiled roots that have become their main diet. They are often baked with chaff, dried leaves and a few grains of flour to bind them together.

Here, Abagul, who married five years ago at the age of 11 but has been too sick to produce a child, spends hours uncontrollably vomiting bright green liquid as she is carried on a makeshift wooden stretcher through the vast dun-colored hills.

"She hasn't eaten anything for four days," says her father, throwing away yet another plastic bag of vomit. "Her husband has gone to Iran to find work and we have nothing to eat but grass."

All around her home province, fields which were once part of Afghanistan's breadbasket now lie unsown and scorched. The picture is similar across the north and centre. Save the Children recently surveyed Faryab's remote Kohistan region and found that at least 108 children had died in 378 families in the past four months, most from malnutrition and infectious diseases. Some villages are lucky, and have received wheat or medical help from the International Committee of the Red Cross, World Food Programme or ACTED.

Others rely on women walking for hours to forage for roots or bring water from springs and rivers lying ever further

from their homes. Many have fled into neighbouring countries, where their plight within huge, insanitary camps has been highlighted by Mr Kofi Annan and Mrs Jemima Khan, Imran Khan's wife.

If people could eat acronyms, there would be few starving in a region whose main towns are festooned with the initials of international aid agencies. But these groups are working in near-impossible conditions. There is severe donor fatigue in neighbouring Pakistan and Iran. Despite UN pleas for £ 180 million, the world is bored with a war that has gone on too long.

Meanwhile, the rural hungry drift day by day into larger settlements, and there is little prospect of improvement with a hot dry summer ahead and then the freezing winter.

"Things are bad here," they say. "But let us take you to the next hill. There it is even worse."

U.S. Congress condemns Taliban edict on Hindus

By Chidanand Rajghatta
The Times of India News Service

WASHINGTON: Wearing yellow badges saying "I am a Hindu", several American lawmakers on Wednesday piloted a Congressional resolution condemning the anti-Hindu edicts of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

Originally authored by Democratic Congressman Eliot Engel, the bipartisan "Sense of the Congress" was co-sponsored by over 80 legislators and was approved by a 420-0 vote. Lawmakers urged the Taliban to revoke the edict and abide by civil and human rights standards laid out in the UN Covenant on Human Rights and other international accords regarding protection of religious minorities. The resolution is non-binding and more symbolic in nature.

Lately, Taliban officials have said the edict has still to be cleared by their "supreme leader" Mullah Omar, but American legislators are nevertheless exercised over what they see as a throwback to the Nazi persecution of Jews. Some like Congressman Tom Lantos, who is originally from Hungary, is himself a holocaust survivor. "We cannot allow the Taliban to systematically repress its Hindus in such an eerily similar manner," Mr Lantos said on Wednesday.

The move to get lawmakers to wear yellow badges to show solidarity with Afghanistan's Hindus was led by Congressman Gary Ackerman who comes from New York, which has the heaviest concentration of Jews outside Israel. During the course of his remarks, Mr Ackerman held up a copy of the

yellow Star of David that Hitler's Nazi regime had ordered the Jews in Denmark to wear in 1943, which said "I am a Jew" in Hebrew.

Mr Ackerman said he was hopeful that on the day the Taliban's edict came into force, all members of Congress would once again don the yellow badge "so that the minuscule minority Hindus in Afghanistan will know we are with them and have a source of strength".

Judging by the mood of the lawmakers, it appears that Pakistan's foreign minister Abdul Sattar, who is scheduled to meet them next week during his visit to Washington, will face some tough questioning.

Pakistan says it has little leverage on the Taliban, but the general impression in Congressional circles is Islamabad has now begun to play the Taliban card at its convenience — as it does with its nuclear card — to extract concessions from the West. The intelligence community here also suspects that the Pakistani services are still very much in cahoots with the Taliban despite Islamabad's denials. Mr Sattar is scheduled to arrive here on Monday on a three-day visit during which he will also meet national security adviser Condoleeza Rice and secretary of state Colin Powell.

In the time-honoured tradition of one-upmanship that Islamabad has practised for years — including conducting six nuclear tests to India's five — Pakistani mandarins have announced that Mr Sattar was also carrying a letter from Chief Executive Musharraf to President Bush. The gambit is presumably aimed at securing an audience with the president.

Taliban may issue I-cards to Hindus

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

ISLAMABAD, June 14. - The Taliban militia is likely to modify its decree ordering the minority Hindus to wear yellow badges by issuing special identity cards, newspapers said here today.

"There is a likelihood that instead of making the Hindus in Afghanistan wear cloth badges, the Taliban would issue them special identity cards, which they would carry all the time and show on demand to the law enforcement agencies," Pakistani newspaper the *Dawn* reported quoting diplomatic sources.

The Taliban decision of making it mandatory for the Hindus to wear yellow cloth stickers had created an international uproar.

But the Taliban defended its decision claiming that it was meant to save Hindus from harassment at the hands of the moral squads formed to impose Islamic Shariah law. The Taliban argued that the step was necessary as some Afghan Muslims pretended to be Hindus in order to escape punishments for not observing the Islamic code of conduct.

However, India as well as the international community flayed the Taliban explanation saying it was a concoction by the militia to carry out its persecution policies against minorities.

THE STATESMAN

59-12
1096

UN-Taliban rift aggravates hunger

ASSOCIATED PRESS

KABUL, June 9. — Standing outside a bakery catering to the poor, Sima Gul shatters the anonymity of her head-to-toe veil by lifting it up and revealing a baby girl whose eyes are forced shut by infection.

"My daughter is sick and must get to a hospital. I've eight children, no income and no bread card," she says, referring to cards distributed by the UN World Food Programme that enable poor Afghans to buy subsidised bread at special bakeries in Kabul.

The bread programme — feeding 282,000 people daily — is in immediate danger of closing because of a disagreement between the UN and the Taliban militia. The impasse is the largest sticking point in rapidly deteriorating ties between the Taliban and the international aid community, and threatens to worsen the humanitarian crisis gripping Afghanistan.

The World Food Programme has given the Taliban till 15 June to let it hire women to conduct a new survey assessing hunger needs in Kabul. The UN programme says it'll close 130 bakeries if the Taliban, which has resisted hiring women on religious grounds, doesn't change its mind before the deadline.

The bread cards were issued five years ago based on hunger needs at the time, and the programme has since been corrupted by a black market in both the cards and the subsidised bread, which some people buy and sell for profit.

The result: People like Sima Gul, who need the cards, often don't have them.

"Too many people who're vulnerable don't have cards. And too many people who've cards shouldn't," said Peter Goossens, the World Food Programme's deputy country director for Afghanistan.

The bread impasse has un-

derscored growing obstacles to relief work in Afghanistan, where a civil war and the worst drought in 30 years have displaced 800,000 people in the past year alone, according to UN figures.

The UN has complained of increased harassment of its staff by Taliban police. The militia recently ordered female foreign aid workers not to drive cars.

This week it announced new restrictions on foreigners in the country, saying they must honour Islamic bans on alcohol, pork, loud music and gender mixing.

Taliban leaders have said they are willing to allow a new bread survey, but not on the WFP's terms.

All agree that women must conduct the survey because it requires going into people's homes to assess poverty — something men could never do in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.

Opposition ^{6/6} captures key Afghan district

Kabul, June 5 ^{HR 11}

A NORTHERN-BASED alliance fighting a civil war against Taliban rulers said on Tuesday it captured a key district in central Afghanistan in a fierce battle that killed at least 60 soldiers.

The Taliban also claimed victory in fighting in northern Afghanistan, but details of the clash were sketchy.

About 700 men armed with rocket launchers and automatic rifles ambushed Taliban soldiers in the Yakawlang district of Bamiyan province late Monday, capturing the area, killing 60 Taliban soldiers and arresting 20 more, said Mohammed Mujafer, an opposition leader. He had no information on Opposition casualties.

"The Taliban have been feeling too powerful. We are forcing them back," he said by telephone from his base in northern Afghanistan.

A Taliban official who asked that his name not be used confirmed that his militia had lost Yakawlang. He added that the Taliban captured the Chal district in the northern province of Takhar on Monday, but did not give further details.

Taliban fighter planes flew over Kabul, the capital, on Tuesday morning, a sign of renewed fighting.

AP

Taliban plan offensive

London, May 31

DESPITE THE UN arms embargo, Afghanistan's Taliban regime is now poised to launch one of its biggest offensives in recent years, aimed at breaking the back of Opposition northern alliance led by Ahmadshah Massoud, a defence weekly said today.

The hardline militia is completing its build-up of a task force estimated at about 25,000 troops in North-Eastern Takhar and Konduz provinces opposite Badakhshan, the last province to be held entirely by Opposition forces, Jane's Defence weekly said quoting Pakistan-based military and intelligence sources.

Despite delays in May caused by fighting in the central and northern regions, hundreds of fresh troops have been airlifted from Kabul to Konduz, adjacent to the front-line province of

Takhar.

Several refitted main battle tanks (MBTS) and other armoured fighting vehicles have moved north through the town of Pul-i-Khumri to Takhar in recent weeks, the weekly said.

Unconfirmed reports indicate that some MBTS may have been moved north on tank transporters. If true, this would be the first time tank transporters have been seen in Afghanistan since the end of the Soviet occupation in 1989, it said.

Quoting intelligence sources, it said Pakistan has continued to provide logistic and advisory support for the build-up despite Islamabad's earlier assurances that it would abide by UN Security Council resolution 1333 that has since January prohibited provision of material or advisory support to the Taliban.

The report said UN had no

MUSHARRAF URGES RUSSIA TO RECOGNISE TALIBAN

GENERAL PERVEZ Musharraf has urged Russia to recognise Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia as means of restoring stability in the war-torn country. Musharraf, in an interview published on Thursday, also refused to rule out that Pakistan could in the future conduct new nuclear tests in response to India's own accumulation of atomic weaponry. Musharraf told the *Izvestiya* that he recognised that relations between Pakistan and Russia had failed to improve significantly in recent years.

AFP

mechanism in place that might monitor the implementation of the sanctions regime by Pakistan, which has backed the Taliban since the movement's inception in 1994.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

JUN 01

BY HIMMAT SINGH GILL

KORASAN of the Middle Ages and 'Aryana' in the antiquity. Afghanistan has

seen them all pass by. The Aryans who left their Vedic and Avesta songs behind for posterity. Zoroaster the philosopher from Balkh who preached his religion a thousand years before Christ and Alexander the Greek have at some time or the other all left their footprints in this land of the hospitable Afghan people. Kanishka, Babar and the Buddhists have in earlier times lived here peacefully and never permitted a majority to rub out a minority to extinction.

But that was long long ago. Today, the Hindus and Sikhs who had made Afghanistan their home more than 170 years ago (when Maharaja Ranjit Singh's influence extended all the way to Herat, and when business beckoned traders to Persia), have to face the ire of the fanatical Taliban who have decreed, Nazi style, that all human beings are not equal and must be quarantined in ghettos of humiliation and shame.

Like the Jews, who were identified with yellow stars, the Hindus in present day Afghanistan (incidentally, in that country the Sikhs were also called Hindus as late as 1982, when this writer was a Military Attache at Kabul), have been ordered to hang a yellow cloth piece outside their homes. Their womenfolk too must always be attired in yellow. Press reports also speak of the Sikhs not being permitted to wear their turbans in that country. The few thousand-odd Hindu-Sikhs who re-

Taliban and the colour yellow

could also sooner than one can imagine, turn their religious fury and unwelcome attention, towards their overlords and masters.

The Ministry of External Affairs has rightly deplored this totalitarian and medieval attitude of the Taliban, but much more needs to be done if those who are now stuck in Afghanistan are to be saved. The United Nations and the community of world democracies must unite to make an uproar and protest that will be heard across the Khyber Pass.

What is of some concern is the fact that so far, little in terms of concrete action has emerged from the Indian side. Either from government, any political party or organisation like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad or the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabhak Committee (SGPC). If so much could be done for Kashmiri Pandits fleeing the Valley, are these Hindus and Sikhs any less important?

The Shiromani Akali Dal and SGPC, both of whom maintain that they are the custodians of Sikh ethos and future, have not said a word about these poor Sikhs now being virtually hounded out of their homes. Citizen states can only last as long as the rights and dignity of its subjects is safeguarded at all times.

Today India has a powerful ally in this matter on its side, and which is also not happy with such acts



Hindu women and children in Afghanistan. Reuters file photo

for a decade till 1989, when not a single minority community member was ever harmed or harassed.

It is not difficult to see why these Afghan Hindus and Sikhs are being targeted. The December 2000 UN Security Council resolution no 1333 clamping sanctions against the Taliban, has India as one of its co-sponsors. Yet what can the free world ex-

pect from a religious brotherhood that even destroys the rock sentinels of the Buddha at Bamyan and makes their own women live like petty vassals in modern times.

Today it is the Afghan Hindus and the Sikhs, tomorrow it could be the minority Shias and Hazara Muslims from central Afghanistan. The Taliban, a branchchild of Pakistan,

against mankind in the name of religion, namely America. China too, must beware the spread of the Taliban to its Ugher Muslim dominated province of Sinkiang. If the fundamentalist streak is not averted in Kabul, there is danger that many of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs there could be converted out of their faith. The backlash of such a contingency could be felt severely in India.

If and when General Musharraf comes visiting, Mr Vajpayee, this issue should be discussed threadbare with him to impose some regulation on the Taliban. On its part, the government should open up alternative channels to well meaning intermediaries, who could deal with the Taliban government on the diplomatic front.

How one wishes that some sort of an Indian diplomatic mission had today existed in Kabul to convince the Taliban not to go on this route. We have an Afghan government in exile in New Delhi, and their services could also be utilised. Though legally these Hindus and Sikhs are Afghan nationals, necessary temporary landing papers and visas could be arranged through other friendly missions to get these people out if they so desire. Let us act before it is too late, and the last of the temple and gurudwara doors in Afghanistan are closed forever.

UN team to discuss aid with Taliban

By SAYED SALAHUDDIN

Kabul, May 27: A UN delegation arrived in the Afghan capital Kabul on Sunday to talk to the ruling Taliban movement about impediments the world body says it faces in carrying out relief work in the war-torn country.

The delegation representing various United Nations agencies and headed by its humanitarian co-ordinator for Afghanistan, Erick de Mul, is expected to meet Taliban authorities including its foreign and planning ministers.

The visit follows Mr de Mul's meeting with Taliban officials at its main stronghold in the southern city of Kandahar last week and comes against the backdrop of his complaints that some Taliban were harassing UN staff trying to give humanitarian aid to impoverished Afghans. "We are going to discuss a number of issues that we have been talking about in Kandahar. It is basically about the operational environment," Mr de Mul told reporters on arrival at Kabul airport.

The UN says its workers have been repeatedly blocked from giving aid to communities in the area of Hazarajat, where fighting between the Taliban and its rivals, the Opposition Northern Alliance, has displaced more than 60,000

people. "There are no unexpected problems. There are always some problems and the idea is to try to get rid of them," Mr de Mul said but gave no other details.

His visit to Kabul follows a warning from the World Food Programme that it will be forced to close down a subsidised bread project because the Taliban refuse to allow it to hire local women to carry out a survey to identify the genuinely needy. The UN co-ordinator said his delegation would raise the issue of the WFP survey. The Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press reported on Saturday that the Taliban insist that they will not compromise their Islamic principles by allowing women to work for the WFP.

The WFP has been warning the Taliban for more than a year that a survey is important to be sure that the bread, distributed to 282,000 people at 12 per cent of the retail price, is reaching those who need it most. The WFP also says that women are necessary for the survey because men cannot enter homes to interview women under the strict Taliban rules. Taliban have had conflicts with foreign-funded organisations, the UN and several private aid groups that provide most of the social services in Afghanistan over the question of women workers. (Reuters)

THE ASIAN AGE

AA to Neo-Nazis

In their continued drive against multiculturalism, the Taliban in Afghanistan have now ordained that the Hindus and other ethnic minorities living in that country will have to abide by a dress code which makes their "difference" from the majority loud and clear. The idea to impose dress codes as a means to polarise people is neither particularly novel nor new. We do not have to go very far. A section of Sikh extremists tried to do so during the height of the Punjab crisis a few years ago, and the various offshoots of the Sangh Parivar have also been rather proactive sporadically when they run out of other kinds of "ammunition". The Taliban *firman* comes barely weeks after the Buddhist statues at Bamiyan, which have been silent witnesses to history for years on end, were practically denuded of their content. A section of the international community cried foul, and decried the organised attack on the statues. But beyond that, they could do nothing. Trying to seek legitimacy with terror as their chief weapon, the next step in the Taliban strategy would automatically be to ensure the utter and total submission of the "others" so that they can, howsoever crudely, justify their claim to be the predominant reality in today's Afghanistan. History and culture are often particularly troublesome to those who want to emphasise their ascendancy in circumstances where there do exist several Afghan groups within that country itself who are strongly arrayed against such brutalisations. Not only the terms of the polarisation sought by the Taliban are unacceptable; the very attempt puts the Taliban into the category of neo-Nazis who are trying to justify the unjustifiable through brutal means. The Taliban diktat states that the Hindus in the country carry yellow stickers so that their different identity from the country at large can be distinguished. It is of course not for the Taliban to understand what profound damage they are doing to their own image, leave aside to the image of Islam. Coming as the dress-code identification drive does when attempts are being made worldwide (not excluding the zealots in this country) to paint Islam as essentially backward and primitive in nature and content, the Taliban are unwittingly providing help to these very Islam-baiters. The Taliban are of course both peeved and unhappy over the fact that the rest of the world continues to question their legitimacy, and periodic reminders such as the latest one are part of the same frustration. It exemplifies a mindset which is certainly not in tune with the tenor of the age. It is high time that responsible countries of the Islamic world exposed such perfidies and prevented the Taliban from doing more of what they are doing: The Taliban themselves must look into their own rich and varied history to know and comprehend that dogmatism of the variety they represent is repugnant to the Islamic idea per se, and has never worked in multicultural Afghanistan. There is of course the other question — if this intended imposition and its likes are supposed to consolidate on whatever hold they may have over their country, even those who may have fallen prey to their ways for various reasons will soon start questioning and deserting them. The Taliban leadership has been forced to issue a clarification of sorts in which they have suggested that the edict merely followed specific complaints by Muslim students against non-Muslim students to blur religious lines. The clarification does not allay the fears that the original move evoked, nor does it categorically speak in terms of its withdrawal. In the event, the Taliban will have to do much more than they have to win some credibility of sorts for themselves. On the face of it, achieving that task seems impossible for the moment.

THE ASIAN AGE

28 MAY 2001

Taliban bar women from UN survey

Islamabad, May 27

THE TALIBAN said on Saturday it would block a poverty survey by the United Nations because it involved hiring women, forcing an end to bread supplies for nearly 300,000 people in the Afghan capital.

"We are not ready to compromise on our Islamic principles," Taliban Foreign Ministry spokesman Maulvi Abdul Rahman Zahid told the Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press.

Zahid spoke after the UN World Food Programme had given the Taliban until June 15 to agree to a survey to ensure food aid was reaching the neediest people in the city of some 1.6 million.

"All the Government's authorities are ready to cooperate but WFP wants to use some 700 Afghan women in this survey," Zahid said. "We do not have any objection to the recruitment of foreign women, but it is based on our principles that we do not want Afghan women recruited

for this programme."

The Taliban refusal to allow the Kabul survey is the latest in a growing number of confrontations over the movement's efforts to impose its hardline interpretation of Islam.

The Taliban triggered worldwide outrage this week with a decree that Hindus in the overwhelmingly Muslim country would have to wear yellow badges, a plan that evoked memories of the Nazi order that Jews in Germany wear yellow Stars of David.

The UN World Food Programme has been warning the Taliban for more than a year that a survey was vital to be sure that the bread, distributed to 282,000 people from bakeries at 12 per cent of the retail price, was reaching those most in need.

But the Taliban have consistently objected to the hiring of women, which is necessary because men cannot enter homes to interview women under Taliban rules. Women are barred from almost all work outside the home.

"WFP informed the Taliban authorities today that the general bakeries will be closed down on 15 June if WFP surveyors remain unable to conduct their work," the WFP said in a statement.

The distribution of subsidized bread through 157 bakeries has been under way since 1995, the year before the Taliban swept into Kabul. They now claim control over 90 per cent of the country.

The WFP said it will continue to operate 21 bakeries in the city run by women — also a constant source of tension with the Taliban — that serve 40,000 widows and their children.

International aid organisations provide almost all basic services in Afghanistan in the absence of normal Government functions by the Taliban and their opponents.

But Taliban religious police raided a new Taliban-run hospital 10 days ago, beating staff and arresting three employees on grounds that men and women had been eating in the same room.

The United Nations a week ago com-

plained of widespread and increasing Taliban harassment of foreign and Afghan aid workers.

The WFP said its existing bread distribution lists no longer identified those in most need, especially with poverty deepening after 21 years of war and the worst drought in three decades.

"The population of the capital city has swollen over the past five years as Afghans fled conflict and severe economic hardships in other parts of the country," said WFP head for Afghanistan, Gerard van Dijk. "Moreover, beneficiary cards are being rented, sold and often forcibly appropriated and redistributed."

A WFP official told Reuters in March the Taliban had been warned the program could not continue without a survey. But, in the brinkmanship that has been a feature of the controversy, WFP sources said this month the Taliban had relented.

The WFP said that optimism had now proved unfounded.

Reuters

OUTRAGEOUS AFFRONT TO HUMANITY

THE TALIBAN'S FIAT on ways to segregate Afghanistan's tiny religious minorities, consisting mostly of Hindus and Sikhs, is not only inhumane but also disingenuously naive. In a 'fatwa' or purported Islamic religious decree, the Taliban's 'spiritual-statesman', Mullah Mohammed Omar, is said to have ordained that the country's non-Muslim minorities should sport a badge of identification. This act of cruelty is only the latest in a long list of atrocities by the 'ruling' regime in Kabul. Controlling nearly 90 per cent of Afghanistan's rugged terrain with a rich ethnic diversity, the Taliban has already acquired utter notoriety for unspeakable barbarity in regard to Afghanistan's Muslim majority as well. Yet, a truly indignant international community has not so far been able to stop the Taliban in its dirty tracks. Now, the ostensible argument in support of the latest savage diktat is that the Afghan 'authorities' can easily spot the minorities in good faith. The stated aim is to spare them from the rigours of a code of 'Islamic' ethics and etiquette that the Taliban applies in regard to the majority population. It is, of course, a different matter that most Islamic schools and Muslim-run governments around the world are not convinced of the authenticity of such an overall code as is being imposed on Afghanistan in the name of religious purity. The followers of Mullah Omar do not obviously care about such mainstream Islamic opinion. More ominously, they seem impervious to the sheer absurdity of this new order that is reminiscent of Nazi Germany's eternal shame of isolating and annihilating the Jewish people.

The Taliban's neo-apartheid intentions cannot be concealed by the stray reports that a few Hindus have really found nothing amiss about being asked to identify themselves and their homes by displaying an yellow badge or cloth as the case might be. An innocent reasoning in this connection is that the Taliban's Islamic police

has so far allowed the Hindus and Sikhs a free hand in regard to their private religious practices. However, Afghanistan's minorities are by and large aware of the sinister motives of the Taliban. The minuscule size of these communities has not also lulled the wider international society into ignoring their potential plight. India, whose connections with Afghanistan date back to a hoary past, is trying to galvanise global opinion against the Taliban's cultural excesses, while the U.S., whose geopolitical interest in Kabul is historically more recent, is also in the vanguard of this campaign. It was only two months ago that the Taliban blatantly defied universal opinion and upheld its own bizarre sense of self-esteem as the most regressive 'Islamic' fundamentalist group across the globe. It simply obliterated the famous statues of Lord Buddha in Afghanistan's Bamiyan province by disregarding their symbolism as the country's cherished pre-Islamic heritage.

The litany of the Taliban's intolerance extends to the do's and don'ts slapped on the Afghan Muslims too. These injunctions range from gender-specific costume codes to beard norms for the men, not to mention the uncivilised ban on girls' education as also a taboo on the employment of women. No less unsavoury has been the anti-modern streak inherent in the sundry prohibitions of photography, television and the like. An overwhelming indictment of the Taliban will be incomplete without its perceived abetment of international terrorists and the narcotics traders. The U.S. and Russia have taken the lead to try and meet the Taliban menace on the wider international stage. Yet, the world community's options inside Afghanistan are quite limited. Given today's political cross-currents in Afghanistan's neighbourhood, the native anti-Taliban groups have not so far been able to reassert themselves despite the continuing alienation of the Kabul 'regime' from the United Nations.

THE HINDU

26 MAY 2001

US, Russia to discuss Taliban edict on dress code for Hindus



Sikh shop-owners wait for customers in downtown Kabul on Wednesday — AP/PTI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MOSCOW, MAY 24

THE US and Russia will discuss the Taliban edict clamping a special dress code on Hindus and other religious minorities at a meeting of a joint working group beginning today, Russian state television reported.

The issue will figure in the discussions of the US-Russia Working Group on Afghanistan which meets in Washington. The Group is co-chaired by US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and First Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia Vyacheslav Trubnikov.

The Russian Foreign Ministry yesterday issued a strongly-worded

statement condemning the Taliban move.

"Russia deplores these acts violating common human values, including Islamic values, and demand unconditional respect of the rights of all religious minorities by the Taliban militia," it said in a statement.

"Yet another ugly act has been added to an already long list of violations of fundamental human rights by the militia, including the mass ethnic cleansing of minorities, curbing rights of women and destruction of Bamian Buddhas," it said.

Russian private and state-run media have criticised the Taliban act saying it "harks of the darkest

pages of the history of mankind when in Nazi Germany Jews driven in to Ghettos were bound to wear the Yellow Star of David."

Leading business and political daily *Kommersant* said every step of the Taliban to come closer to the international community throws them further away from the rest of humanity.

"Dress codes for the minorities were a normal thing in the dark medieval ages, this is where the Taliban are leading Afghanistan at the beginning of the new millennium," pro-Kremlin *Vremya Novostey* said.

Meanwhile in Jerusalem, Holocaust survivors, lawmakers

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

THE HINDU PRESS

INDIAN EXPRESS

15 MAY 2001

25 MAY 2001

World condemns Taliban decree for Hindus, Sikhs

Paris, May 24

HUMAN RIGHTS groups, the United Nations and governments around the globe today blasted an order by Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia forcing Hindus to wear yellow stickers to differentiate themselves from the Muslim majority.

"Similar practices in the past — from Nazi Germany in the 1930s to Rwanda in the early 1990s — have led to the most horrible crimes," the UN High Commission on Human Rights and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) said in a joint statement. "The decree harks back to the darkest periods of human history," the UN said, urging the Taliban to "urgently reconsider their position."

In a move reminiscent of the detested yellow stars of David Jews were forced to wear in Hitler's Germany, the Taliban's secret religious police yesterday ordered Hindus in Afghanistan to carry a thumb-sized yellow marker inside their pockets.



A Sikh kneels in prayer before a shrine in Afghanistan's Kabul Kart-e-Parwan area on Thursday, the day the Taliban started enforcing their decree for Hindus and Sikhs.

AFP PHOTO

Officials for the Islamic Taliban militia said the yellow badge would save Hindus from harassment during regular spot-checks, during which police herd Muslims into mosques to ensure their beards meet strict requirements.

But the order by the fundamentalist Islamic regime

against the tiny Hindu community has sparked international outrage.

The US State department spokesman said forcing social groups to wear distinctive clothing or identifying marks stigmatised and isolated them and could "never, be justified".

AFP

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

2 MAY 2001

HINDUSTAN TIMES

Nazis in Afghanistan

✓
HF-8
29/5

ALL CIVILISED people will be shocked and horrified by the barbaric Taliban regime's latest edict requiring Hindus to carry yellow stickers to distinguish them from the rest of Afghanistan's largely Muslim population. Most dismayed, however, will be liberal and secular Muslims who will recognise how much the global image of Islam suffers each time the madmen of the Taliban commit some crime or atrocity in its name. At a time when much of the West — led by an influential section of American opinion — is trying to portray Islam as a threat to world peace because of its allegedly fanatical and intolerant nature, the barbarism of the Taliban only serves to reinforce this caricature.

Three things must now be done in the aftermath of this latest atrocity. The United States and the Allies ignored evidence, throughout the Thirties, that Nazi Germany's treatment of Jews was leading to a holocaust. The only parallel for the Taliban's barbarism is with the Nazis. This time around, the world must not wait till it is too late. The US frequently gives the impression that it has no interest in being a global policeman unless American interests are, however obliquely, threatened or the President needs a *Wag The Dog*-style military strike to divert attention from a sex scandal. It must move to correct that impression. The

whole world should act to remove the savages and murderers of the Taliban and to restore to Afghanistan a semblance of civilised governance. Given that the US caused this problem by arming and training the mujahideen in the Eighties, it has a greater responsibility than most other countries.

Secondly, action must be taken against Pakistan. The Taliban were trained by the ISI. The Pakistani regime keeps attempting to trade its influence with the Taliban for favours from Washington. The world should make it clear to Pakistan that any state which deals with the thugs of the Taliban is itself a rogue state. As long as Islamabad remains the Taliban's window to the world, it must be treated as an accessory to murder, terrorism, discrimination and mayhem.

And finally, India's Muslims must recognise the opportunities that the Taliban's behaviour offers to Hindu communalists. During the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, Indian Muslims behaved in an exemplary fashion, rushing to condemn the destruction. They must do the same thing again to ensure that the secular outrage is not hijacked by communalists. And when those in their number — such as the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid — brag about their links with the Taliban, they must condemn the communalists within their own community.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

24 MAY 2001

WFP supplies food to Afghan refugees

By Our Special Correspondent

ISLAMABAD, MAY 21. The World Food Programme (WFP) today began distributing food supplies to over 70,000 poor Afghans, who have been living in a squalid camp near Peshawar for the past five months.

The camp has been the bone of contention between the Government here and the United Nations. The U.N. agencies have been asking the military government to allow screening of the inmates of the camp at Jalozai to enable the aid workers reach the migrants. The Musharraf Government turned down the request saying the screening of the refugees would only encourage further migration from across the border.

On Saturday, the North West Frontier Province Governor announced that the Government had decided to send away all the illegal migrants. His argument was that given its economic situation, Pakistan could not afford to accommodate any more refugees. Islamabad has been urging the U.N. to open relief camps in Afghanistan so that the drought-hit and war-affected people were not forced to migrate in search of livelihood. The U.N. has said it cannot be expected to improve conditions in that country unless the two warring factions there are willing to cooperate and halt the war.

THE HINDU

Taliban order Afghan Hindus to wear yellow

BY RAMESH BHAN

New Delhi, May 20: In a move strongly reminiscent of the Nazis' treatment of the Jews, all Hindus in Afghanistan have been ordered by the fundamentalist Taliban regime to wear a yellow cloth to identify themselves and also to follow the Islamic Shariat code or face prosecution.

In a recent decree, separate dress codes have been made mandatory for Muslims and non-Muslims (Hindus), and the head of a Hindu household is also required to put a two-metre yellow cloth on his house so that it stands apart.

According to the decree, a copy of which was made available to UNI, Hindus and Muslims cannot live in the

same house. Hindus living in a Muslim household have been ordered to leave within three days, and vice versa. Any violation would invite prosecution. Heads of Hindu places of worship have been asked to prepare a list of such places/houses where Hindus and Muslims are living together.

Hindus have been barred from constructing new prayer houses or places of worship, and have been told to conduct prayers in existing ones. Places of worship once destroyed cannot be rebuilt.

Hindu men have been prohibited from wearing turbans, while Hindu women have been told to wrap their body with a big yellow *chaddar* with two small holes near

■ Turn to Page 2

THE ASIAN AGE

11 MAY 2001

New threat from the Taliban

By T. Sreedhar

40-12
19/5

THE TALIBAN destroyed the Bamiyan Buddhas and is now showing the world the rubble. It managed to capture the attention of the international community for a fortnight, like it had at the time of the hijacking of the Indian Airlines aircraft to Kandahar in December, 1999. On both occasions, except for verbal condemnation, the international community did nothing.

Before examining the Taliban's next move to get international attention, three factors need to be noted. First, how the Taliban came into existence. The Islamic Revolution in Iran in February 1979 produced a towering personality, Ayatollah Khomeini, who acquired a certain aura and moral authority over the other leaders in the Islamic world, including the Custodian of the Holy Shrines of the Islamic world, Saudi Arabia. In the traditional Shia-Sunni differences of the Islamic world, the Shia domination started ringing alarm bells. That prompted the Saudis to step in in a big way in the Afghan resistance movement against the Soviets. After a bloody nine years, the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan. The Saudis who participated in the war through their surrogate, Pakistan, tried to project it as a victory of Islam against "infidels", the Red Army.

A friendly pro-Pakistani Government in Kabul would have enabled the Saudis to acquire a pressure point vis-a-vis Iran. Unfortunately, that did not happen. The Afghan warlords who defeated the Soviet Red Army started quarrelling among themselves. While this power struggle was on, the Soviet Union disintegrated. This resulted in the emergence of five land locked countries, like Afghanistan, in Iran's neighbourhood, the Central Asian Republics (CARs). While the CARs were getting their bearings as independent nation-states, the Pakistan-Saudi combine saw an opportunity to pressure Iran. That was the time the Taliban, consisting of mainly Sunni Pashtoons, came into existence. That was in August/ September 1994. Saudi benevolence coupled with Pakistan's military minds and men enabled the Taliban to make rapid strides in neutralising Afghan warlords; and in September 1996, it managed to capture Kabul.

The dissident Saudi billionaire-turned-radical Islamist, Osama bin Laden, came to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan in May/

June 1996. He struck an immediate rapport with Taliban leadership, especially Mullah Umar. After his arrival in Kandahar, the pace of the Taliban's advances increased.

Suddenly, the world witnessed Mullah Umar becoming ambitious. His effort was to establish a Caliphate. He started acquiring pressure points on the entire neighbourhood and on the major countries of the Islamic world. Dissidents from all over the neighbourhood and even from Egypt started getting refuge in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

professional army and was forced to retreat. The Taliban-trained militia also suffered serious reverses in Chechnya.

The Taliban must have realised that building a professional army is going to be time consuming. It can humble their opponents only by acquiring weapons of mass destruction — nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Stray reports from the region indicate that there is a distinct possibility of this happening. For instance, in mid-2000 there were reports in the British Press about British undercover agents striking a deal with a tribal chief some-

the unconfirmed reports of a meeting between higher echelons of Pakistan's nuclear establishment and a section of the Taliban leadership.

Equally important is the abrupt removal of Dr. A. Q. Khan, the man responsible for making Pakistani nuclear weapons, as head of the Pakistani nuclear programme around mid-March this year. Though officially he was offered the job of special emissary of the President, Dr. Khan declined the offer. The Pakistani media reported that he was removed from his special position in the Pakistani nuclear programme to clear the decks for Pakistan to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. The media also reported that Dr. Khan had got a number of offers from other Islamic countries. Again few days later there were reports that he was persuaded by the Pakistan President to accept the special assignment and he obliged. This started speculation in sections of the nuclear establishment all over the world whether Dr. Khan was joining the Islamic radicals. In the past, he has expressed his sympathies for the jihadis.

Regarding nuclear weapons, till now no nuclear weapons power has transferred ready-made weapons to any second party. It is unlikely the Pakistani armed forces will do it, despite their ideological leaning towards the Taliban. Alternately, easy availability of enriched uranium would enable the Taliban to acquire radiation weapons, knows as dirty weapons in strategic parleys. This can create the needed psychological terror among the Taliban's adversaries. It can threaten to deliver such weapons with the aircraft (six to eight MIG-19s and three Boeing 727s) it has, at least on the immediate neighbourhood.

In December 1999 and January 2000, some of the Taliban followers had talked in terms of raising an Islamic army with nuclear weapons. It had publicly said the Pakistani armed forces should be converted into that type of force. If the Taliban is working in this direction, the coming months are going to be critical. One need not rule out the possibility of the Taliban acquiring weapons of mass destruction. The way developments are unfolding, it is within the realm of possibility.

(The writer is Senior Research Associate, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.)

The Taliban can humble its opponents only by acquiring weapons of mass destruction. Stray reports from the region indicate there is a distinct possibility of this happening.

Lastly, the Taliban in all its military campaigns generally succeeded, except on a few occasions. In May 1997 it managed to occupy Mazar-e-Sharif for a few days. The local population regrouped and turned against it on the fourth day. In the process, Taliban suffered around 3000 to 4000 casualties. In the Taliban's perception, Iranian military assistance to anti-Taliban forces played a decisive role in its defeat. In its second assault on Mazar-e-Sharif, in August 1998, the Taliban ensured that the entire anti-Taliban groups there were eliminated. In addition, Taliban militia killed nine diplomats and one journalist in the Iranian Consulate in Mazar-e-Sharif. Iran reacted sharply by mobilising more than 50,000 troops, on the border threatening to take punitive action against the Taliban.

The Taliban suddenly realised that its objective of achieving *Ummah* could be defeated by this development. Subsequently, the Taliban made a tactical apology to Iran and handed over the bodies of its diplomats. Incidentally, this is the only occasion on which Taliban apologised for their actions since its birth in 1994.

In the summer 1999 Kargil war, the Taliban-trained militia beat a hasty retreat, once it realised that the going was not good. This was the second occasion on which the Taliban militia confronted a

where in NWFP to buy enriched uranium from him. Though this was denied by the Pakistan Government, there is a lurking suspicion that this is possible.

There were also reports about retired Pakistani nuclear scientists subscribing to radical jihadi ideology and joining the Taliban. For instance, Sultan Bashiruddin Mehmood, who worked with the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission from 1963 to 1998 in various capacities including as a Director of the Kahuta Enrichment Project, took premature retirement in 1998 and floated an organisation called Ummat Tameer-e-Nau (Reconstruction of Muslim Ummah) to promote science and technology in Islamic countries. In addition the UTN also launched an Ummat Bank for Development last year. According to media reports, the UTN received substantial amounts from several Muslim countries. This was followed by reports that Congolese rebel groups were trading in uranium isotope 235 through their conduits in Tanzania and Kenya. These conduits are reported to be locals of Asian origin. In addition there were also reports that Pakistan alone bought eight to nine canisters of Uranium 235 last year. Tanzania and Nigeria are significant in the Taliban context because Mullah Umar and Osama bin Laden have an excellent network in these two countries. Then came

THE HINDU

19 MAY 2001

Hard bargaining to keep delegate in New York

Taliban threat to close UN's Kabul mission

Kabul, May 10 (Reuters): Afghanistan's ruling Taliban today threatened to close the UN's main political mission in the capital Kabul if they are not allowed to keep a delegate in New York.

"If they close our representative's office and expel him, we will shut the UNSMA (UN Special Mission to Afghanistan) office in Kabul and dismiss its personnel," Taliban foreign minister Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil said.

The threat came two days after the UN said it intended to close its political offices in four Afghan cities — Herat, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Mazar-i-Sharif — as demanded by the Taliban but leave open its bureau in the capital Kabul. The closure of the four UN offices is to take place by May 20 in retaliation for the shutdown of the Taliban's New York office by the US in line with UN sanctions against the radical Islamic movement.

Muttawakil said the UN would be allowed to continue its normal activities in Afghanistan if it convinced the US to reverse its decision to close the Taliban's New York office headed by Taliban envoy Abdul Hakim Mujahid.

He said Mujahid's operations

were limited to New York and he was only allowed to work in his residence or from a guest house.

The UN Security Council ordered a new set of sanctions against the Taliban for the movement's refusal to hand over Saudi-born terrorism-suspect Osama bin Laden for a US trial.

The sanctions, which followed anti-Taliban financial and aviation sanctions ordered last year, include a closure of Taliban offices abroad, restricting its officials' foreign trips, and an arms embargo, which does not apply to the Taliban's opponents.

Bin Laden is wanted by the US

to face charges of masterminding a 1998 bombing of two US embassies in East Africa that killed more than 200 people. The dissident denies the charges and the Taliban, which has sheltered him as a "guest", has refused to expel him. Muttawakil expressed hope for a normalisation of the radical Islamic movement's uneasy relations with neighbouring Iran, which he said would soon send a delegation to Afghanistan.

He said an Iranian team would soon travel to the western Afghan city of Herat where an Iranian exile and nine local people were killed in a bomb blast.

THE TELEGRAPH

31 MAY 2001

Afghans have lost hope in peace efforts: UN envoy

KABUL: Afghans have lost hope that peace will come or that UN endeavours to end the protracted war will bear fruit, UN secretary-general's special envoy for Afghanistan

Francesc Vendrell said on Tuesday. The United Nations failed to prevent a new round of clashes, which erupted over the weekend between the ruling Taliban and the northern-based opposition alliance headed by commander Ahmad Shah Masood.

Both sides, locked in a fierce fighting in the country's northern regions, blame each other for the new clashes.

He said he was depressed at the Taliban's decision to boycott UN peace efforts after the security council slapped tough sanctions on Afghanistan in January for the ruling militia's alleged support for international terrorism.

He acknowledged that Afghanistan's neighbours were backing the Afghan warring factions, but refused to give specific details. Mr Vendrell said he raised the issue of Saudi dissident Osama Bin Laden in every discussion he had with the Taliban.

Bin Laden, wanted by Washington for allegedly masterminding the 1998 bombings of two U.S. embassies in East Africa, is harboured by the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Mr Vendrell said Bin Laden's continued presence in Afghanistan was the main reason for the UN curbs and isolation of the Taliban regime. (AFP)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

5 MAY 2001

AS/10-17

Heavy fighting in Bamiyan

1/5

KABUL, MAY 3. Heavy fighting erupted in the central Afghan province of Bamiyan on Thursday after the ruling Taliban launched a pre-dawn offensive against opposition positions, opposition officials said.

Fighting was going on between the Taliban troops and forces of the Shiite Muslim faction Hezb-e-Wahdat near Dara-e-Shahidan Pass, 25 km west of Bamiyan city, they said.

The fighting was intense in the Surkh Dara area close to the city, they said, adding that the frontlines remained unchanged. "We are in our positions. The Taliban have mounted the attack from Bamiyan city," an opposition official said, requesting anonymity.

Speaking from the opposition-controlled Yakawlang district further west of Bamiyan, he said reports of casualties were not immediately available.

The Afghan Islamic Press said Taliban troops overran Dara-e-Shahidan and seized a nearby airstrip of Shibber after capturing 15 opposition soldiers. Independent confirmation of the report was not available.

The Pakistan-based news service said Taliban jets also participated in the attack, pounding opposition positions, but it gave no details.

— AFP

THE HINDU

- 4 MAY 2001

Afghans yearning for peace: U.N. envoy

KABUL, MAY 1. The U.N. peace envoy to Afghanistan, Mr. Francesc Vendrell, said he was pessimistic about the chances for negotiations to end the decades-long conflict, blaming both outside interference and the warring factions.

"I can easily believe that ordinary Afghans have lost hope and heart in peace negotiations and particularly in the ability to find a political settlement," Mr. Vendrell told reporters yesterday.

Mr. Vendrell said he had spoken with civilians about the ruling Taliban movement and its opponents led by Mr. Ahmad Shah Masood, who have just resumed heavy fighting in northern Afghanistan.

"They want peace, they want access to health and education," he said of the ordinary people, referring to restrictions imposed by the Taliban. "They are tired of the fighting and want the rebuilding of Afghanistan."

"They will support anyone who is willing to come forward to improve their lives," said the former professor from Spain who is the personal envoy of the U.N. Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. He compared the wreckage in Afghanistan with Germany at the end of the World War II, but said survivors then were hopeful for a better future.

"The situation is horrendous. People have lost hope for a better future and this is very tragic," Mr. Vendrell was disappointed that U.N. appeals for a halt to the yearly resumption of heavy fighting had failed despite fears of famine from drought and war: "I am pessimistic about chances of preventing what I would call a hot summer." The U.N. envoy said the Taliban had boycotted every U.N. peace effort since new Security Council sanctions were imposed in January for their alleged backing of international "terrorism".

Mediation efforts stalled

"Of course I am depressed. I have been concerned deeply in the last few months," he said, conceding his mediation efforts had stalled.

He said foreign intervention had fuelled Afghan fighting, but said naming the countries would only complicate efforts to start peace talks. Mr. Vendrell said the Security Council knew precisely which countries backed factions in Afghanistan.

"It is true that the peaceful settlement would be much easier if the countries who play a role decide to put an end to that, and



An old Afghan refugee woman narrates the ordeal she is going through, in Masiakh camp near Herat, western Afghanistan, on Monday. More than 110,000 people who fled from drought and fighting have taken refuge at the overcrowded Masiakh camp. — AP

this is what I am trying to do now," he said at the U.N. headquarters in Kabul.

The Taliban accused other countries, especially Russia, of backing their opponents.

The Afghan opposition, which the U.N. still recognises as the Government, accuses Pakistan of training, advising and arming the Taliban. Pakistan denies any involvement.

"But it is also true that in the battlefield Afghans are fighting Afghans. And no matter how the weapons are provided, at the end of the day, it's their own decision to fight or not," he said.

Mr. Vendrell said only elections, through the traditional tribal gathering and supervised by the U.N., would provide a way out of the civil war.

"Otherwise you will see the continuation of the hostility and you will have constant denial of the legitimacy of whatever government emerges," Mr. Vendrell said he presses the Taliban continually to satisfy the Security Council demand for the surrender of Osama bin Laden, the Saudi-born dissident accused of bombing U.S. embassies in Africa.

"The presence of this gentleman is the basic reason for the sanctions," Mr. Vendrell said.

But he said Osama's departure from Afghanistan would not lead to peace unless the Taliban "bring about a situation whereby Afghans choose their own destiny".

"They need to let the Afghan people choose a constitution and a government that they wish. Without that neither side has legitimacy," he said. — Reuters

THE HINDU

2005

Afghan Opp agrees to ceasefire

Kabul, May 2

HT-11
3/5

THE AFGHAN Opposition alliance said on Wednesday it would accept a UN appeal for a ceasefire to prevent a humanitarian disaster if the ruling Taliban also agreed.

The chief of the UN refugee agency, Ruud Lubbers, had carried his appeal for a cease-fire lasting six months to a year to Burhanuddin Rabbani, head of the anti-Taliban alliance fighting for its existence in northeastern Afghanistan. "We believe that not only for six months that the war should be over forever," Rabbani said after the men met in the alliance's current capital Faizabad.

"Yes, we are in agreement but we want that the Taliban should also agree," said Rabbani, still recognised as Afghan president by most of the world including the United Nations despite being driven from the capital Kabul by the Taliban five years ago.

Rabbani said he agreed with UN High Commissioner for Refugees Lubbers that peace was necessary for the welfare of the Afghan people, suffering the twin calamities of two decades of war and the worst drought in 30 years. Lubbers had expected to also meet Ahmad Shah Masood, commander of the anti-Taliban forces. But Masood, who had been directing fighting with the Taliban last week to the west of Faizabad, did not appear.

Lubbers had carried the same plea for a ceasefire to the Taliban in Kandahar a day earlier but did not get a clear reply.

Reuters

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 2 MAY 2001

Afghan hell: The devil came from west

All roads led to Kabul, it seemed, and all in the vain attempts to rescue stone idols whose survival for all these years was a tribute to Islam's respect for more primitive religions which rely on idol worship.

Not that I approve of the Taliban's blasting to smithereens of ancient heritage in a country with precious little else going for it, it is just that there appears to be more concern for these stone representations of human forms than for the mass of suffering humanity slowly starving to death in that benighted land.

I, and others, have been warning for many months that a major international catastrophe was looming in Afghanistan, on the scale of the Orwellian nightmare of Ethiopia and the Sudan in 1984. Few anywhere wanted to know and, some BBC news crews apart, the mass media merely yawned. Ennui and the fact that the sufferers lived in the country with the worst international reputation in the world, was enough to place the story 10 places behind the fate of the Spice Girls in the news agenda.

But then everyone from Kofi Annan to the Sheikh of Al-Azhar — a sort of grand Mufti from Cairo — was busy trying to save statues in Afghanistan with an energy which mocks the thousands of dead famine victims in the country. Incidentally, this is the same Sheikh who, after a torrid and bitter argument with me in his Cairo office 18 months ago, finally promised that he would travel to Baghdad to see the suffering of his co-religionists there — a promise which he has broken. Clearly, the fate of giant Buddhas energised him more.

My run-ins with the zealots now running things beyond the Khyber Pass go back a long way. The admirable Professor Mohammed Arif of the British-Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee held a meeting in Parliament the night before the final collapse of the old regime in Kabul and the sweeping victory of the so-called Mujahideen, whose passage to power had been heralded that day by the clearly meditated withdrawal of the

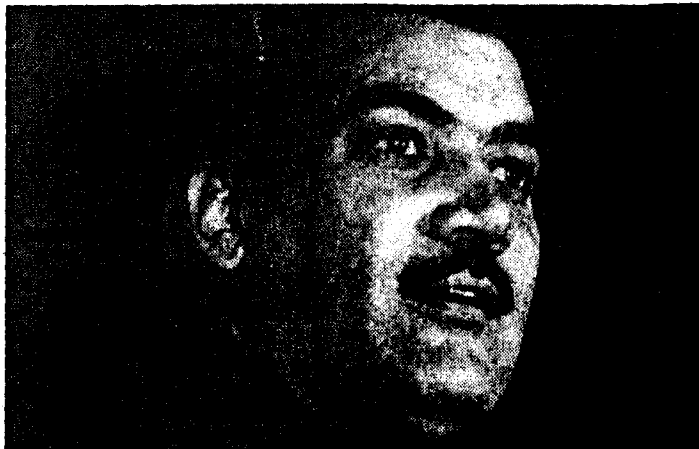
British embassy from the city. This was an act of diplomatic treachery, or so it appeared at the time.

At that meeting, I said, "Although I might be the last man standing in the British Parliament prepared to say this, I believe that the Najibullah era, now closing, will come to be looked back on as a golden age in the history of Afghanistan — an age when the country began a modernisation a century overdue, when women were freed from obscurantist servitude and were educated and able to work for the first time, and when the country ceased to be an imperialist plaything of the colonialists."

"I believe that the barbarians who are about to sweep into Kabul will bring with them a long, dark night of backwardness and savagery. History will judge harshly those who made it possible for them to break down the gates."

On few issues, have my words been more prophetic. The Taliban are the "sons" of the original "holy warriors", having killed their "fathers" for not being rigorous enough in their "transformation" of the country. The barbarians who came through the gates of Kabul fell upon the society like wolverines. Television sets were hanged from high buildings, condemned as agents of the devil. Footballers were beaten for the immodesty of their kits, men were set upon for having trimmed their beards and women were hunted out of all aspects of public life. Even shopping had to be done by male relatives — condemning even the widows of their comrades-in-arms to the deepest purdah. Women workers were first restricted then banned from all employment. Then came education. The fake mullahs said girls should be educated in domesticity at home. Finally, women were forbidden even to attend hospitals and doctors' surgeries. By then, no women doctors were allowed to practice. Even Dante could not have pictured the hell on earth which Afghanistan became, and when the religious students, the word Taliban translates merely as students, launched the second wave of terror, the country simply

BY GEORGE GALLOWAY



By precipitating the fall of the Najib government and by allowing the Taliban a free run of Afghanistan, Britain and the US thrust tragedy upon the world

collapsed under the weight of reaction, war, devastation and hunger.

Najibullah, who had been under United Nations' "protection" in the compound of the Indian embassy, was dragged like a dog and hanged from a lamp-post. His penis was cut off and placed in his mouth and bank notes stuffed up his nostrils.

Members of the international community, basically Britain and the United States, had little or nothing to say. And how could they? They were the states which had opened the gates. During the bloody war against the government of Najib, viewers of British television — an agent of the devil, remember — were treated almost nightly to eulogies of the austere manly fighting qualities of the Mujahid — holy warriors. Sandy



Gall, in particular, on *News at Ten* from ITN on patrol with the Afghan "noble savage" became a staple of Eighties journalism.

Only with the publication of John K. Cooley's magnificent *Unholy Wars* was revealed the full extent of Western perfidy in Afghanistan. I had a prelude of this some years before when visiting the regimental headquarters of the Khyber Rifles, the crack Pakistani troops who controlled the Pass through which the holy warriors passed to the front. There in a rogues' gallery of memorabilia — signed pictures of Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger and Margaret Thatcher — was a piece of the Berlin Wall. It had been sent by Ronald Reagan and its inscription hailed the part played by the Pakistani military

The Taliban are the 'sons' of the original 'holy warriors', having killed their 'fathers' for not being rigorous enough in their 'transformation' of the country

dictator Zia ul Haq, the Rifles and the Afghan rebels in "breaking down this wall". It chilled the blood.

But Cooley showed the vast operation — designed by Zbigniew Brezhinski, Jimmy Carter's national security advisor — which brought the fake mullahs to power. The cash trail, paid mainly by Saudi Arabia on behalf of the CIA, and the arms and training funnelled mainly through Anwar Sadat's Egypt to begin with and then General Zia's Pakistan is revealed beyond contradiction.

All the stops were pulled out, first to suck the Soviet Union into a quagmire and then to slowly bleed it white. And here the laws of unintended consequences come into play. Sadat fell to a hail of assassins' bullets fired by conspirators who had cut their teeth, as have so many subsequent "Afghan Arabs" since in the Western-sponsored war.

Saudi Arabia braces itself for more Al-Khobar style outrages, exploded by a terror — internationally controlled from the mountains of the same Afghanistan its own Riyals "liberated".

The Western tourists slaughtered by the Nile at the "Valley of the Kings" were murdered by Afghan Arabs, as were the poor Africans in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam who had the misfortune to be beside the US embassies there when the "Mujahideen" sent them skyward.

The USS Cole was holed by the same groups and 17 US sailors went to a watery grave. CIA officers were killed outside their headquarters in Langley, Virginia and the Empire State building in New York. Hijackings, assassinations and murders by the score have all been perpetrated by the groups hardened in the US proxy war fought in Afghanistan.

Pakistan now struggles to feed millions of Afghan refugees who shiver in tents in Peshawar, the people who put them there utterly uninterested in their fate. Pakistan is now awash with guns and drugs spilled over from the Afghan imbroglio to the extent that the very existence of the Pakistani state is in question.

Much of the junk killing and

damaging youngsters in Britain is being produced and exported by the Afghan Mujahideen. And the world's most wanted man — Osama Bin Laden — was just a Saudi businessman before he discovered the CIA dollar. Not many know that the Afghan base hit by a hail of cruise missiles fired by Bill Clinton on the eve of Monica Lewinsky's appearance before a grand jury had actually been built for Bin Laden by the CIA. The US and Britain created Osama Bin Laden and sowed him with the rest of the dragon's teeth now savaging them in different parts of the world.

We now know that the announcement of the withdrawal of the British embassy from Kabul was just a small part of a massive co-ordination effort between the Afghan terrorists, Thatcher's government, British intelligence and even the British armed forces. It has now emerged in the memoirs of one of the officers involved that Britain's special forces, the SAS, not only trained Afghan terrorists in Herefordshire but actually had officers on secondment in Afghanistan.

Recently, a BBC report, filmed in front of the peak of Mount Herat, showed a gigantic refugee camp in which hundreds of thousands waited to die of hunger and cold. The war, pestilence, famine and disease, the reporter said, was being disastrously compounded by UN sanctions. These were imposed, yet again, by Britain and the US to punish the people of Afghanistan because of the crimes of the country's government, the Taliban.

This is a government armed, paid for and helped to power by the same British and US governments now imposing sanctions and starvation on top of the catastrophe already there. Blowing up Buddhas is certainly a crime. But it is a petty offence compared to the satanic savagery Western policy inflicted on one of the poorest, most God-forsaken countries in the world.

■ GEORGE GALLOWAY is Labour MP for Glasgow Hillhead, UK. This article which appeared in the *Tribune* was reprinted with his permission

THE ASIAN AGE

27 APR 2001

27 APR 2001

Afghanistan fight set to intensify: UN

New York, April 24: With no lack of weapons and war equipment coming from foreign suppliers, Afghan parties are preparing for "heavy fighting" in the coming months, the United Nations has said.

A report from UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on Monday predicted the situation would be "bleak" on the battleground as well as in the humanitarian arena. "Worst of all, conditions are liable to deteriorate further in the coming months as a result of the likely increase in the fighting and the continuing effects of drought," said the report, which was sent to the UN security council.

The Islamic fundamentalist Taliban has been fighting an alliance of warring parties in the north for years.

Mr Annan said the international community failed to help Afghanistan after the departure of Soviet troops in the late 1980s and it "bears a large share of responsibility for the country's current plight."

He said the 12-month trade embargo imposed by the council can not be blame for Afghanistan's deteriorating humanitarian situation. (DPA)

Truce or no truce, Lanka ready to talk

THE ASIAN AGE

25 APR 2001

Taliban deputy commander dead

Kabul, April 16

THE SECOND most powerful man in Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia, Mullah Mohammed Rabbani, died of cancer Monday, officials said. He was 45.

Rabbani, who headed the Taliban's governing ministers' council, died in neighbouring Pakistan, where he was under treatment. A U N aircraft took his body to his native Kandahar in southern Afghanistan, where the Taliban are headquartered.

Rabbani was among the first wave of Taliban who swept into Kabul in September 1996, dri-

ving warring Islamic factions led by former defence chief Ahmed Shah Massood and President Burhanuddin Rabbani from the capital.

Rabbani is believed to have ordered the execution of Afghanistan's communist President Najibullah, who had been living in a U N compound in Kabul since 1992.

Najibullah was dragged from the compound, tortured and hanged. His body was left hanging in the city for two days before it was taken down.

Since the execution, the United Nations has struggled with its

relationship with the Taliban, imposing sanctions and withdrawing its staff. Most U N staff who deal with Afghanistan are based in Pakistan and travel occasionally to the war-ravaged country.

The Taliban, who rule in 95 per cent of Afghanistan, are waging a bitter battle with their northern opponents for control of the entire nation. The opposition is led by Massood.

Rabbani had been ill for several months and had not been seen in public for much of this year. But he was considered a powerful man in the Taliban move-

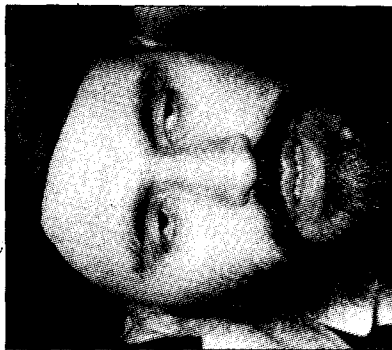
ment, second only to the reclusive leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar.

Rabbani was a strong advocate of the hard-line Islamic rule practiced by the Taliban. His death is not expected to result in any major policy changes.

The details of Rabbani's illness have never been released, though he did travel to neighbouring Pakistan several times for treatment.

His aides said he suffered from stomach cancer, but that was not confirmed by the Taliban.

AP



RABBANI

China sees role for India in Afghanistan affairs

140-14
1974
BEIJING, APRIL 16. China today said it welcomed all international efforts, including that of India, towards bringing peace and stability in the civil war-torn Afghanistan.

"China welcomes all the efforts that are conducive to peaceful resolution of the Afghanistan issue," the Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Ms. Zhang Qiyue, said when asked to comment whether China saw a role for India in the affairs of Afghanistan.

Pakistan had reacted strongly to Iran's suggestion during the visit of the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, to the Gulf last week that Islamabad should work with New Delhi and Teheran to resolve the Afghan issue.

The Pakistani Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdul Sattar, on Saturday

ruled out any role for India in Afghanistan.

"The world community has identified eight countries which have a role to play in bringing peace to Afghanistan and India is not among them," Mr. Sattar, who is scheduled to arrive here later today, had commented in Rawalpindi.

The United Nations has established a 'six-plus-two group' to try to broker an end to the bitter war in Afghanistan. The six countries are Afghanistan's neighbours — Pakistan, Iran, China, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The two are the United States and Russia.

With Pakistan being one of the three countries to support Afghanistan's Taliban rulers, Mr. Sattar is expected to be asked by

his Chinese counterpart, Mr. Tang Jiaxuan on the developments in Kabul, diplomatic sources here said.

China has expressed its concern about Islamic militancy in Afghanistan and its suspected links with an Islamic separatist movement in its north-western Xinjiang province.

Ms. Zhang pointed out that the civil war in Afghanistan, going on for more than 20 years, not only made the people suffer a lot but also brought a "negative influence" to the peace and stability in the region.

Taliban, which controls 90 per cent of Afghanistan, has criticised Vajpayee's statement and accused him of "hatching conspiracies" to destabilise the region. — PTI

THE HINDU

17 APR 2001

Anti-Taliban Dostum returns to Afghanistan

Kabul, April 7: General Abdul Rashid Dostum, a top anti-Taliban warlord, returned to war-ravaged Afghanistan on Friday after more than two-and-a-half years of exile and called for an end to fighting. "I am going to announce my position regarding the situation of Afghanistan within a couple of days," Mr Dostum said on Saturday.

He returned after the main opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood said he was raising an Army of 20,000 to fight the Taliban. There have also been reports of fresh ammunition arriving from Iran and Russia for the opposition groups. On Saturday, at least three civilians were killed when Taliban jets bombed an opposition enclave in northern Afghanistan, an anti-Taliban opposition spokesman said.

The attack was a prelude to a massive offensive to wipe out targets in the Khoram district, he added. Meanwhile in the capital Kabul, city residents said the Taliban had sacked thousands of government officials in the last week.

They said all those with any past affiliation to the former Communist regimes were dismissed. The Taliban played down the dismissals and said workers'

backgrounds were irrelevant. Former Communist General Dostum, an ethnic Uzbek, was forced to flee the country when the Taliban captured strategic bases of his Junbishi-i-Millie faction in northern Afghanistan in August 1998.

His departure, which took him to Uzbekistan, Turkey and Iran, led to the fall of other opposition bastions in the north. Mr Dostum said he still had a large number of fighters inside Afghanistan and was capable of bringing change in the military situation of the country. He said a crucial meeting of the opposition leaders would be held after the return of Masood, who is visiting Europe to seek support for the opposition.

Mr Dostum said he had brought a message for the Taliban and that was to cease fighting. "I will clear my policy after the meeting. My message to the Taliban is to give up the fighting and let people choose their destiny. War is not a solution so let us work for peace and the rebuilding of our country." Taliban termed his return as a "plot by Russia and other infidel countries to prevent the Taliban from establishing a pure Islamic state" in Afghanistan, more than 90 per cent of which they already control. (Reuters)



WELCOME: Ahmad Shah Masood (left), the veteran commander leading the armed struggle against Afghanistan's ruling Taliban, is welcomed, by European Union foreign and security policy chief Javier Solana (right) prior to talks in Brussels on Friday. (Reuters)

40-12 Taliban a threat to region: Masood

BRUSSELS, APRIL 7. The Belgian Foreign Minister, Mr. Louis Michel, pledged today to send more humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and put pressure on Pakistan to stop supporting the country's radical Taliban ruling movement.

"Pakistan has to be shown that some of its views are wrong," Mr. Michel told a news conference after talks with Mr. Ahmad Shah Masood, commander of the armed resistance to the ruling Taliban.

Mr. Masood accused Pakistan of giving military aid to the Taliban during a news conference in Paris on Wednesday. Islamabad has rejected the allegation.

Masood, who has spent the past week meeting European leaders to garner support for his fight against the Taliban, reiterated his warning that Afghanistan was only a point of departure for the Taliban. "If we don't stop this group, not only will the people of Afghanistan suffer, but also the entire region," he said.

Mr. Masood, whose visit to Europe has angered the Taliban, renewed his call for a ceasefire and the start of peace talks. He reiterated his vow to bring democra-

cy to Afghanistan, grant women the right to vote, respect human rights, and fight drug trafficking.

The Taliban have drawn international condemnation for their destruction of ancient Buddhist

statues and for other policies such as banning women from most areas of public life.

Mr. Michel said he would start a dialogue with Pakistan to try to get it to stop giving military sup-



The Belgian Foreign Minister, Mr. Louis Michel (left), with the Afghanistan leader, Mr. Ahmed Sha Masood, in Brussels on Saturday. — AP

port to the Taliban and said Belgium would send aid for health, education, agriculture, and women's rights.

A foreign ministry spokesman said Belgium, which already gives Afghanistan aid through international organisations such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, would decide on the size and timing of the aid in coming weeks.

The European Commission, the executive arm of the European Union, is preparing 13 million euros (\$11.71 million) in new aid for the country ravaged by war and drought.

Dostum returns

A report from Kabul said General Abdur Rashid Dostum, a top anti-Taliban warlord, returned to Afghanistan on Friday after more than two-and-a-half years of exile and called for an end to fighting.

"I am going to announce my position regarding the situation of Afghanistan within a couple of days," Mr. Dostum told Reuters by phone from Badakhshan, the political heartland of the opposition forces. — Reuters

THE HINDU

8 APR 2001

Masood urges West to win back Afghanistan

Strasbourg, April 5

AFGHAN OPPOSITION leader Ahmad Shah Masood, on a series of high-level meetings with European officials, arrived at the European Parliament on Thursday in what analysts see as a get-tough signal in Europe's diplomatic struggle with the Taliban.

Masood was accorded a head-of-state welcome by Parliament President Nicole Fontaine, who had invited him here and with whom he was to hold a joint news conference.

Arriving from Paris, he headed immediately for a series of meetings with Euro MPs on the situation in his troubled country.

On his first visit to Europe, the famed guerrilla leader and sole remaining military hurdle for

the hardline Taliban, was expected to be seeking more than just sympathy in confronting the ruling Islamic fundamentalist group.

In Paris, he met with National Assembly President Raymond Forni and Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine, calling on Europe and the United States for "any help you can give us to win back our country."

Masood's invitation here comes just weeks after the Taliban's widely condemned destruction of the ancient Bamiyan Buddhist statues, and at a time when Afghanistan has found its way back into western headlines.

With anti-Taliban sentiment running high in the West, Masood, who rose to prominence

in the fight against the Soviet occupation in the 1980s when he became known as the "Lion of Panjshir," is the sole leader of importance holding out against the Taliban.

The militia ousted his conflict-ridden government from Kabul in 1996 and his army has been forced back into northeastern Badakhshan province and the Panjshir valley north of Kabul.

Masood's UN-recognised "Islamic State of Afghanistan" officially headed by veteran scholar and President Burhanuddin Rabbani covers just 10 per cent of Afghanistan.

The rest is under the Taliban's "Islamic Emirate" led by the reclusive Mullah Mohammad Omar.

AFP

Vietnam lightning claims 5

Hanoi, April 5

FIVE FARMERS, including two sisters, were killed by lightning in southern Vietnam, an official said on Thursday.

Truong Thi Thu, 20, Tuong Thi Truc, 18, and three others were killed when the monsoon lightning struck their thatched shelter on Tuesday, said Le Thanh Loi, party chief of Binh Giang village in the Hon Dat district of Kien Giang province, about 250 km southwest of Ho Chi Minh city. Only a brother of Thu and Truc survived.

All six farmers were hired by the owners of a private farm to harvest the rice crop, the official said. The local Government has granted 500,000 dong (\$34) and 60 kilograms of rice to the families of each victim, he said.

AP

119-17

Restrain Islamabad, Masood urges West

PARIS, APRIL 4. The military leader of the Opposition to Afghanistan's Taliban Government, Mr. Ahmad Shah Masood, urged the international community today to bring pressure on Pakistan to stop interfering in his country's political affairs.

On his first-ever visit to an European country, Mr. Masood told a press conference in Paris that he wanted "the international community and (individual) nations to apply strong pressure on Pakistan".

Mr. Masood specifically called upon the U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush, to "apply the same pressure on Pakistan to put an end to the war in Afghanistan as the Americans applied on Pakistan to end the war in Kashmir".

He said he had discussed the issue with the French Foreign Minister, Mr. Hubert Vedrine, on Wednesday, adding, "this is a topic I will continue to bring up in all my discussions." In the face of Pakistani interference, he was prepared to accept aid from the West, he said.

Asked what form of aid he expected, he replied, "in the face of Pakistani interference,



The French Foreign Minister, Mr. Hubert Vedrine (right), gestures to the Afghan Opposition leader, Mr. Ahmed Shah Masood, prior to their meeting at the Foreign Ministry in Paris on Wednesday. The French Cooperation Minister, Mr. Charles Josselin, looks on. — AP

clear and obvious, I reserve the right to accept aid everywhere, for the defence and dignity of my people, for the defence and independence of my country." — DPA

THE HINDU

5 APR 2001

A Tajik specialist examines a statue of Buddha in a Dushanbe museum. (Reuters)

Tajik Buddha lesson to Taliban

FROM SERGEI YAKOVLEV

Dushanbe (Tajikistan), April 3 (Reuters): Left it too late to see the world's largest Buddha statues, blown up by Afghanistan's radical Islamic Taliban militia last month?

Then head across the border to former Soviet Tajikistan, where the world's largest ceramic reclining Buddha goes on display this month, 37 years after its discovery. The colossal "Buddha in Nirvana", 45 foot long and nearly nine feet high, will be shown to the public for the first time after decades of restoration, Viktor Dubovitsky, deputy head of the Tajik institute of history, archaeology and ethnography, said. "There are many standing and sitting Buddha statues, but of all the reclining Buddhas in the world, this one, found in Tajikistan, is the largest," he said. "We finished restoring this unique historical monument last autumn and we plan to put it on general exhibition at the end of the month."

Soviet archaeologists discovered the Buddha in Nirvana, dating from the seventh century AD, buried in the ruins of the Adzhinatepe Buddhist monastery in the south of this mountainous Central Asian republic in 1964. It took until 1968 to excavate the partly destroyed statue. It was then cut into several pieces and transferred to Dushanbe, where, says Dubovitsky, restoration work has continued "more or less intensively" from that day to this. Apart from its sheer size, Dubovitsky said the Tajik figure is important in that it proves Buddhism reached China and Japan from India not by sea but through this part of Central Asia.

The ruling Taliban vowed today to punish anyone caught smuggling remains of two giant Buddha statues, demolished last month in the face of international protests and a global outcry. Taliban officials dismissed media reports that truckloads of rubble from the historic Bamiyan Buddhas had been driven across the border into neighbouring Pakistan and was for sale in the city of Peshawar.

THE TELEGRAPH

. 4 APR 2001

Ag. 60
H.D. - 12

Bamiyan Buddha rubble not for sale: Taliban

4/4

KABUL, APRIL 3. Afghanistan's ruling Taliban today vowed to punish anyone caught smuggling remains of the two giant Buddha statues, demolished last month.

Taliban officials dismissed media reports that truckloads of rubble from the historic Bamiyan Buddhas, which once towered 53 metres (175 feet) and 38 metres (120 feet), had been driven across the border into Pakistan and was for sale in Peshawar. "We will severely punish anybody trying to smuggle or excavate relics from Bamiyan and other parts of the country," the Information Minister, Mr. Qudratullah Jamal, told reporters. The Foreign Minister, Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil,

told Reuters that there had been no smuggling. "The reports of the debris smuggling and sale are totally wrong. No one is allowed to take a single piece out and nothing has been sold," he said. Antique dealers and smugglers in Peshawar said they were not aware of any new Afghan artefacts - including pieces of the destroyed Buddhas - being available on the market.

Mr. Muttawakil said rubble from the wrecked Bamiyan statues was still piled up next to the sandstone cliffs where the massive idols were hewn out around 1,500 years ago.

The Taliban's supreme leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, in

February decreed that statues were un-Islamic and ordered every figure, including the Bamiyan Buddhas and priceless relics in Kabul's national museum, be destroyed. "All statues have been smashed and the final decision about the destiny of the debris will be taken by the information ministry," Mr. Muttawakil said.

Mr. Jamal said the movement was mixing Bamiyan rubble with soil and that the remains could no longer be distinguished. "The debris has been thrown and mixed up with other soils. We have proved that we are iconoclast. The statues have no value for us and nor have we sold any piece of them," he said. — Reuters

THE HINDU

9 APR 2001

Afghan govt. rules out handing over Laden

ISLAMABAD: The Taliban ruled out any possibility of handing over suspected terrorist Osama Bin Laden to a third country, according to an Urdu-language newspaper report on Monday.



Osama Bin Laden

"Delivering Osama to a third country would just pave the way for the U.S. to arrest him and no one should expect the Afghan government to do this," the newspaper quoted the Taliban's foreign ministry spokesman Faiz Ahmed Faiz as saying.

There has been considerable speculation in recent months that the Taliban may be willing to hand over Bin Laden to a third country if he could be guaranteed a trial under Islamic law. But according to the *Nawa-e-Waqt* newspaper, there is no chance of that happening. "Osama is a *Mujahid* who fought against the Communists to help the Afghan nation," Mr Faiz was quot-

ed as saying, referring to the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan by the former Soviet Union.

"Today Osama is in difficulty and we have provided him with protection. He is our guest," said Mr Faiz. The Taliban spokesman also accused the western media of sensationalising Bin Laden and creating a monster of him.

"Osama is not such an important person as he has been portrayed by the West. He could not hurt anybody," said Mr Faiz. The UN sanctions have limited travel by Taliban officials, frozen their assets overseas as well as those of Bin Laden.

Sanctions also have seriously restricted the national airline, Ariana. It cannot make international flights and the UN sanctions committee has not allowed the airline to service those aircraft used for its domestic routes.

The Taliban have warned that refusal to allow Afghanistan maintain its aircraft endangers the lives of thousands of civilians, who travel within the country on Ariana Airlines. (AP)

Bamiyan Buddha fragments for sale

LONDON, APRIL 1. Relics of the 2000-year old Bamiyan Buddhas, blown up by Afghanistan's Taliban rulers last month, are now on sale in Pakistan's frontier town of Peshawar.

At least ten truck loads of pieces were driven into the tribal areas between Pakistan and Afghanistan last week and dealers were being approached, the *Sunday Telegraph* said. One of those contacted was Mr. George Bristow, a leading British dealer in artefacts.

"They tell me that there are many recognisable pieces and that some can be put back together," he told the paper.

"Some pieces are very much smashed but there are many still complete. The Taliban blew up the biggest statues to show the world it meant business but there were other pieces and they are selling off the rest."

Among the complete artefacts offered to Mr. Bristow was a Gandhara Buddha of almost human height in black schist (crystalline rock) and parts of friezes. Describing the Buddhas as "phenomenal," Mr. Bristow said he had contacted the Victoria and Albert museum.

Dealing in this manner was like handling "a double-edged sword... If you buy, you're supporting an organisation which behaves in the most extreme fashion. But, on the other hand we should save these archaeological treasures," he said.

According to reports, traders

^{Afghanistan} in Peshawar are eager to acquire bits of the Buddhas to sell to tourists, believing that they would be prized in the same way as pieces of the Berlin Wall.

UNESCO sore

A UNESCO spokesman reacted to the report saying the organisation would frown on any museum paying the Taliban for a relic of something it had deliberately destroyed.

"The Taliban has committed a crime against culture," he said.

Sri Lankan medic to buy relics

A Colombo report said Medicina Alternativa, an organisation that promotes and develops alternative medicine, is making an attempt to bring some of the pieces of the destroyed Buddhas to Sri Lanka.

Its head and noted acupuncturist, Prof. Anton Jayasuriya, was quoted by the *Sunday Observer* as saying that he was greatly disturbed by the destruction and would try to convince the Taliban to allow his organisation to collect some of the pieces.

He had been informed by the Afghanistan Medicina Alternativa group of an appointment with the Taliban to discuss the matter.

The Sri Lankan Government had already expressed its willingness to buy the statues.

— PTI, UNI

THE HINDU

- 2 APR 2001

Afghan leader blames Pak. for Taliban ills

By George Chakko

VIENNA, APRIL 1. The Afghanistan Foreign Minister, Dr. Abdullah, concluded his Vienna visit this week rallying support from the Austrian government and the U.N. (UNDCP & INCB) for the Afghan cause against the barbaric acts of the Taliban which controls over 60 per cent of the Afghan territory.

Addressing a press conference, he squarely blamed Pakistan for being the source of all organised barbarism meted out by the Taliban, including the recent destruction of the Buddha statues. He appealed to the world to wake up from the post-Cold War nap and actively seek a solution by putting pressure on Pakistan, which is the key to Taliban terrorism.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan, under President Rabbani, has launched a diplomatic offensive to rally support from the E.U. countries. After his stops in Paris and Geneva (Human Rights session), Dr. Abdullah made a third stop here to plead for the Afghan cause before proceeding to Turkey.

The Austrian Foreign Minister, Ms. Benita Ferrero-Waldner,

spoke out for continuation of humanitarian assistance. Without the betterment of the humanitarian situation, political progress is hardly possible, she said. The U.N. Under-Secretary General, Dr. Pino Arlacchi, promised the Afghan Foreign Minister UNDCP support for alternative crops to root out illicit opium production (over 97 per cent of Afghan illicit opium production lies in the Taliban-held region).

Dr. Abdullah criticised the Pakistan military government for its involvement in Afghanistan's internal affairs. He told *The Hindu* that Pakistan was the key and played a double-faceted game, showing to the world the face of helplessness, but simultaneously engaging, designing and promoting active military solutions for the Taliban in order to profit militarily. "What the Taliban are doing has nothing to do with Islam, it is just a manifestation of their barbaric nature".

The danger of the Taliban fundamentalism spreading to Central Asia and Russia lies in the growing involvement of other terrorist organisations, Arabs, North Africans, Pakistanis, dissidents from Uzbekistan and China.

"We have prisoners from Sinkiang province of China, recruited through the ISI, trained in Pakistan to fight against us," the Afghan Foreign Minister said.

"Pressure on Pakistan could be key to any solution, without Pakistan's support they cannot sustain this campaign. If Pakistan is not stopped, the situation could aggravate. Even in Pakistan, the terrorists fighting against us are asking for the same changes in the Pakistan society.

He said "Pakistan first supported us against Russian intervention. But now they use Afghanistan as a backyard for regional adventures, in Kashmir or Central Asian Republics, what they call to gain "strategic depth". By training people from there, Pakistan is using terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy. He pooh-poohed Gen. Musharraf's statement that he cannot influence the Taliban.

The Foreign Minister was appreciative of India's support for the Afghan cause.

He reiterated that Afghanistan wanted a peaceful solution and was willing to negotiate with the moderate elements of the Taliban regime.

THE HINDU

2 APR 2001

HP-12

Mullah Omar's game plan

By T. Sreedhar

The process of polarisation of anti-Taliban sentiment is now on in the international community. Everyone accepts that there is an urgent need to stop the cultural vandalism by people like Mullah Omar.

3073

THE SUSPENSE over the future of Lord Buddha's statues in Bamiyan is all over now. On March 11, the Taliban leadership informed the rest of the world that its cadres had completed the job. A Taliban sympathiser even told me that Lord Buddha was against idol worship; and the statues of the Buddha first appeared some 500 years after his death. The Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, had in no way shown any disrespect to the Buddha by having the Bamiyan statues destroyed, he said. These arguments apart, now the question that arises is: what are the gains and losses of the Taliban, especially of Mullah Omar, by this action.

It is widely believed that Mullah Omar issued his extraordinary *fatwa* on February 26 to destroy the statues more to silence his critics in the higher echelons of the Taliban. After the announcement of the U.N. sanctions, life had become difficult in the Taliban-ruled Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan. The moderates among the Taliban wanted to overcome this isolation by opening up a dialogue with the West. This came into direct conflict with Mullah Omar's and his brother-in-law, Osama bin Laden's vision of the Islamic world.

By this action, Mullah Omar silenced opponents by reasserting his authority. For the time being he appears to have gained an edge over his rivals.

Whether Mullah Omar's loyalists extend his *fatwa* to the neighbouring countries or not to consolidate this advantage is to be seen. For now, at the popular level, he emerges as a towering personality in the Islamic world — a true Muslim who would do anything to protect Islam.

Interestingly, a section of the intelligentsia has started talking in terms of the need to engage the Taliban rather than isolate it. Comparisons have started of how the Chinese destruction of Buddhist monasteries in Tibet in the 1960s stopped once they were engaged by the international community. The world will not achieve anything by imposing sanctions because Afghanistan has already gone be-

low the subsistence level economies. In the next few weeks, one can expect this argument coming more into focus.

This clearly indicates that Mullah Omar did succeed in making a dent in international public opinion. If he makes his moves cleverly, one can be reasonably certain, the rationale of the U.N. sanctions will come under some pressure. One can expect Taliban sympathisers in Pakistan taking a lead in this direction.

The Taliban's neighbours, especially the small Central Asian Republics, must be getting frightened by the developments in Bamiyan. They are small and cannot defend themselves independently against any assault, with this new-found confidence, by the Taliban. They may not like to antagonise the fundamentalist outfit by joining the Western chorus of condemning it. Some of them may even start a constructive engagement with the Taliban.

These gains apart, the Taliban has also lost substantially. Governments the world over look upon its actions as against all civilised behaviour. The contempt for the Taliban now is much higher than at any time in the past. Even if the outfit hands over Osama bin Laden to the U.S. it may not facilitate any rapprochement between the two in the immediate future.

This attitude by the West means less flow of economic aid to tide over the immediate crisis of food for the people of Afghanistan. Taliban sympathisers such as Pakistan are in no economic position to meet the aid requirements of Afghanistan.

The West's approach to the Taliban could also pressure the Islamic world to stop donations from faithfuls to the Taliban's cause. One can visualise remittances to the Taliban via Pakistan and the

UAE dwindling in the coming months. Can Mullah Omar's regime withstand these pressures? One is not sure. The local population may rise in revolt against his leadership.

To accelerate Mullah Omar's downfall, if the West decides to take punitive action directly or through Pakistan, like the bombing of Kandahar, one may be witnessing a repeat of the action against Mr. Saddam Hussein, in Afghanistan. In such a situation, Taliban sympathisers can do little more than burn some flags and destroy some property of the nation that participated in such action.

One need not go that far to bring down a regime in a land-locked country like Afghanistan. If the Saudis are asked to stop supplying petroleum and its by-products at subsidised rates to Afghanistan, by adding petroleum oil and lubricants to the U.N. sanctions list, the Taliban will be immobilised. In fact, at the time of passing of the U.N. Security Council Resolution 1333 in December 2000, POL was excluded more on humanitarian considerations because of winter. Now if it is added, the result of the forthcoming spring/ summer battles between the Taliban and Ahmed Shah Masood will go to the latter's advantage.

Thus, the process of polarisation of anti-Taliban sentiment is now on in the international community. What shape it will take in the coming months is to be seen. Everyone accepts that there is an urgent need to stop this cultural vandalism by people like Mullah Omar.

The balance sheet of Mullah Omar, therefore, after the destruction of Lord Buddha's statues by his *fatwa* is not good. Can he cope with any punishment from the international community and still continue in power? It seems highly un-

likely. His mentors in the Pakistan armed forces are themselves feeling embarrassed by his actions. The total silence from the UAE, another country that recognised the Taliban regime and plays an important role in life in the Islamic Emirates, is also not encouraging for the Taliban leader. Till now it operated through the Organisation of Islamic Conference. If these supporters of Afghanistan get into action, either a revolt by the people or a quiet replacement of Mullah Omar can be expected.

At the same time Mullah Omar's recent announcement that the demolition of the statues is a tribute to Islam made many wonder.

From the way things are unfolding in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, he seems to have succeeded in outsmarting his critics. The Pakistanis have already started arguing that it is due to the sanctions imposed by the U.N. that the Taliban has resorted to this drastic action. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a constructive engagement with the outfit by the international community. Similar sentiments have been expressed privately by the UAE.

In these circumstances, the adding of new items to the sanctions list seems unlikely. In fact, it is being debated whether the next adventure of the Taliban would be more drastic than what it did in Bamiyan. Does it mean the outfit would demonstrate its acquisition of weapons of mass destruction in the coming months to fight U.N. sanctions? Such an acquisition of WMDs would deter its opponents from taking any further drastic action like in August 1998 when the United States bombed the coast. The entire neighbourhood of Afghanistan, with the exception of Pakistan, would be at a loss on how to react to such an eventuality. Sensing such a development some of the countries in Central Asia have already opened lines of communication with the Taliban.

(The writer is Senior Research Associate, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.)

THE HINDU

30 MAR 2001

Taliban shows off Buddha ruins to world

Bamiyan (Afghanistan), March 26: Ignoring worldwide criticism by Muslims, Buddhists and art lovers, Taliban officials showed off their destruction of two ancient statues on Monday by taking foreigners to the Bamiyan mountainside where the relics were blasted apart. All that remained of the two towering sandstone statues of Buddha that had been carved in the mountainside in the third and fifth centuries was chunks of rubble.

Taliban's interpretation of Islam recently caused their reclusive leader, Aullah Mohammed Omar, to order them and many other religious statues in Afghanistan destroyed. He said they were idolatrous and against the tenets of Islam, which forbids idol worship. Soar-

AP-A 27/3
ing 51 meters, the largest of the two statues, was believed to have been the world's tallest standing Buddha. Local residents of Bamiyan, who considered the mountain monuments neighbours, called the lofty sandstone Buddha, "sol-sol," meaning year after year.

The statue measuring 36 metres was thought by the residents to be a woman, although no body parts were visible when it stood. They called her "shakama," or kingmother. On Monday, Taliban flew about 20 foreign journalists aboard an old, government-owned Ariana airline prop plane from Kabul, the capital, to Bamiyan province in central Afghanistan, where the statues had been carved into the sandstone mountain about 150 metres apart.

Four trucks of Taliban soldiers armed with rocket launchers and heavy machine guns took the reporters — the first foreigners known to have visited the area recently — to the area. There, the journalists saw that holes had been cut into the two gigantic artefacts, explosives inserted and set off, reducing both to piles of ruin.

Also lost to history were ancient frescoes in the niches above the largest Buddha. "First, we destroyed the small statue. It was a woman. Then we blew up her husband, the big statue," Abdul Haidi, the Taliban commander who oversaw the operation, said. "We used explosive material to blow them up" this month.

"Step by step, we blew them up. ... The

big one took us four days," said Abdul Arouf, a Taliban soldier who participated in the destruction. Taliban soldiers who have been waging a see-saw battle for Bamiyan against their northern-based opponents initially captured the area in 1997. Since then, international organisations, including the Italian-funded society for the preservation of Afghanistan's cultural heritage, have been worried about the fate of the Buddhas.

As early as 1998, Taliban troops attacked the smaller statue, believing it was a woman. With mortars they blasted its groin and one of its arms. Giant chunks of the stucco folds in the sleeve of the Buddha's garment were gouged out. (AP)

THE ASIAN AGE
THE ASIAN AGE

27 MAR 2001

MS/12/2001
RD-9

Taliban puts off journalists' visit to Bamiyan

MS/3

KABUL, MARCH 24. Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia today postponed a planned visit by foreign media representatives to the central Bamiyan province to see the debris of blasted Buddhist statues.

Taliban officials said the postponement was due to the "unsafe" condition of the runway at Bamiyan airport.

The militia has scheduled and

postponed the visit several times. Today's postponement came after details had been given by the Taliban foreign ministry officials for a trip by a chartered Ariana airline plane.

The officials, however, kept the hopes alive by saying they could try to rent military helicopters or arrange an overland trip, although members of the media were skeptical. — AFP

THE HINDU

MAR 25 1999

Taliban destroys Kanishka statue

TOKYO, MARCH 22. Afghanistan's Taliban rulers have smashed one of a pair of world-renowned statues of King Kanishka, a Taliban Minister said in an interview with a Japanese daily published today.

The Taliban Minister of Information and Culture, Mawlawi Qudratullah Jamal, told *Mainichi Shimbun* that the statue of the King of the I century Kushan dynasty had been completely smashed.

The destruction began the day after Taliban's supreme leader, Mulla Mohammad Omar, issued a decree on February 26, ordering destruction of all statues in Afghanistan including ancient pre-Islamic figures.

Stones and hammers were

used to smash the statue, Jamal said. The statue was found in the country's Surkh Kotal ruins. The man-sized piece is thought to form a pair with another Kanishka statue discovered near Mathura in India.

Mr. Haruki Yasuda, a curator at Tokyo's Nezu Museum specialising in Afghan art history said, "it is a very precious piece symbolising the portrait art of the Kushan dynasty era."

Kabul museum opened

Meanwhile, the Taliban authorities threw open the doors to the National Museum in Kabul to show they had destroyed all the statues that once formed the heart of the collection.

Museum staff said about 40 statues had been destroyed following an order last month by the Taliban leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar. All had been smashed inside the closed museum.

An hour-long opening of the museum to reporters revealed an empty space where a life-size statue from the country's Buddhist period of 1,500 years ago had stood when the museum was opened for 24 hours last August.

A screen in another room showed small birds — the nearest thing to a violation of the Taliban's ban on portrayal of animate objects — but the head of each bird had been carefully chiselled away. — AFP, Reuters

THE HINDU

23 MAR 2001

Taliban to open Kabul museum

Kabul, March 22

THE BULLET-SCARRED doors to the Kabul museum are to be opened today for the first time since the reclusive leader of Afghanistan's hardline Taliban rulers ordered priceless pre-Islamic relics destroyed as offensive to Islam.

"We will let you see inside the museum to show that we have destroyed all the statues that were there," said Mohammed Naim Safi, a senior official in the Information And Culture Ministry.

If it occurs, the opening of the museum will be the first glimpse of the destruction of statues that paid tribute to Afghanistan's pre-Islamic past since the Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar ordered their demolition last month.

While two giant statues of Buddha, carved from a mountain in the 3rd and 5th Centuries were

the focus of world outrage, the war-ruined Kabul museum housed an estimated 6,000 fragments of Buddhist art catalogued and stored in basement.

The giant mountain carvings of Buddha were destroyed using explosives that ruptured the mountainside reducing the ancient relics to a heap of rubble.

Thousands of other smaller statues in the Kabul museum and elsewhere also were destroyed by Taliban troops using pickaxes, hammers and artillery.

The repository for thousands of artifacts that commemorate Afghanistan's 50,000-year history, the domed Mughal style building that is the Kabul museum was badly damaged during a bitter four-year feud between rival Islamic groups who ruled the country until 1996 when the Taliban took control of most areas, including the capital.

The museum collection spanned Afghanistan's history and included relics from the country's pre-historic, classical, Buddhist, Hindu And Islamic periods.

According to the Italian-funded society for the preservation of Afghanistan's cultural heritage, a large portion of the museum's collection — 250 trunks and 25 unpacked statues — were moved to the four-story information And Culture Ministry building in 1996. Historians and museum workers say the worst ravaging of the Kabul museum was done between 1992 and 1996 by rival Islamic groups, who were at war in Kabul during the deposed President Burhanuddin Rabbani's rule.

During those four years, 80 percent of the artworks were stolen and sold in the open market, bought by art dealers from around the world and are now scattered in museums and pri-

vate collections in several countries, they say.

At that time the most priceless of the artifacts, a 2,000-year-old seated Bodhisattva, made of baked clay, enraged several Taliban clerics.

Naked except for an earring, armband and necklace, the Bodhisattva enraged the Taliban leaders, said several people who had attended the opening. The Taliban apparently slapped the statue around the head and shoulders, causing the museum workers to buy a glass case to protect it.

At other sites, like Ghazni, 200 kilometers southeast of Kabul, a reclining Buddha was destroyed by troops using pickaxes.

Taliban soldiers in pickup trucks roared up the mountain side to a 2nd to 7th Century Buddhist monastery and stupa and demolished the unbaked clay statues.

AFP

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 MAR 2001

CELEBRATIONS AT ZIARAT-I-SAKHI SHRINE

Afghans brave Taliban whips to mark New Year

Kabul, March 21

THOUSANDS OF residents of Kabul marked the Afghan New Year in an ancient ceremony on Wednesday, undeterred by the whips of Taliban militiamen who have tried to discourage what they consider an un-Islamic practice.

The focus of celebration — and security — was the raising of a religious standard at the Ziarat-I-Sakhi shrine at the foot of a rugged hill in southwest Kabul. The shrine's religious traditions stretch back to Islam's early days, but the Taliban, determined to create what they see as the world's purest Islamic state, want to stamp out the new year custom. This year they relaxed their opposition slightly.

Taliban militiamen armed with weapons ranging from whips to anti-aircraft guns sealed off the shrine's walled

compound, letting in only a few hundred men. But people crowded the slopes above to catch a glimpse of the ceremony. A 15-metre (50 ft) metal pole, topped with a silver spire and wrapped in green cloth, was carried out of the blue-domed shrine, inserted into a marble stand and raised into the clear sky, to the accompaniment of shouts from the hillside.

"The ease with which it was erected means this will be a very good year," said one pleased onlooker, reciting the tradition that the difficulty experienced in raising the standard indicates the outlook for the next 12 months. The ceremony is especially significant to Shi'ite Muslims, while the Taliban who captured the capital in 1996 are predominantly adherents of the religion's Sunni branch.

The Taliban are the first Afghan rulers to try to suppress the New Year celebration, a pre-

Islamic practice called Naw Rouz. Although organisations like the United Nations gave employees the day off, Taliban government offices were open. Taliban security forces beat people back from the door to the shrine compound and whipped those who tried to jump from walls on the hillside to get closer.

But restrictions were not so tight as in the Taliban's first years in power, since they allowed the raising of the standard for the second straight year and permitted frenzied worshippers to kiss the pole, which last year attracted beatings.

The Taliban last month destroyed two colossal Buddha statues that date back nearly 2,000 years, on orders from their leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, who wants all the country's statues reduced to rubble as part of a drive to eliminate non-Islamic objects or customs.

Reuters

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

22 MAR 2001

Contact no recognition, Taliban told

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, MARCH 20. The Bush administration has made it clear that contacts between the Taliban and "working level" officials of the State Department did not mean recognition of that outfit.

"The meetings don't imply any recognition of the Taliban. We don't recognise any government in Afghanistan," said the spokesman, Mr. Richard Boucher. He was commenting on the meeting between an Envoy of the Taliban, Mr. Ramatullah Hashemi, and officials at the State Department on Monday.

Mr. Ramatullah who met officials at the Pakistan-Afghanistan-Bangladesh and Counter Terrorism desk had apparently brought a letter addressed to the President, Mr. George W Bush, calling

for improved relations and continued dialogue. "...but it did not contain any specific proposals for addressing the international concerns about terrorism and other issues with Afghanistan — with Taliban," Mr. Boucher remarked.

The State Department again told the Taliban on where the U.S. stood on different issues such as terrorism, narcotics and human rights; and stressed that Osama bin Laden who is under indictment must be brought to justice and that the terrorist camps should be shut down.

Mr. Boucher said Mr. Ramatullah did not bring with him any fresh proposal of the Taliban on the trial of Osama bin Laden, or any idea that would meet the requirements of the United Nations Resolutions.

The U.S. along with the rest of

the international community had expressed its outrage at the destruction of the cultural heritage of Afghanistan by the Taliban; and on Monday Washington said that it did not buy the explanation of the Taliban that the blowing up of the Buddha statues was done in a pique of anger that a UNESCO delegation would offer money to preserve statues but by and large the international community was ignoring the plight of Afghan people.

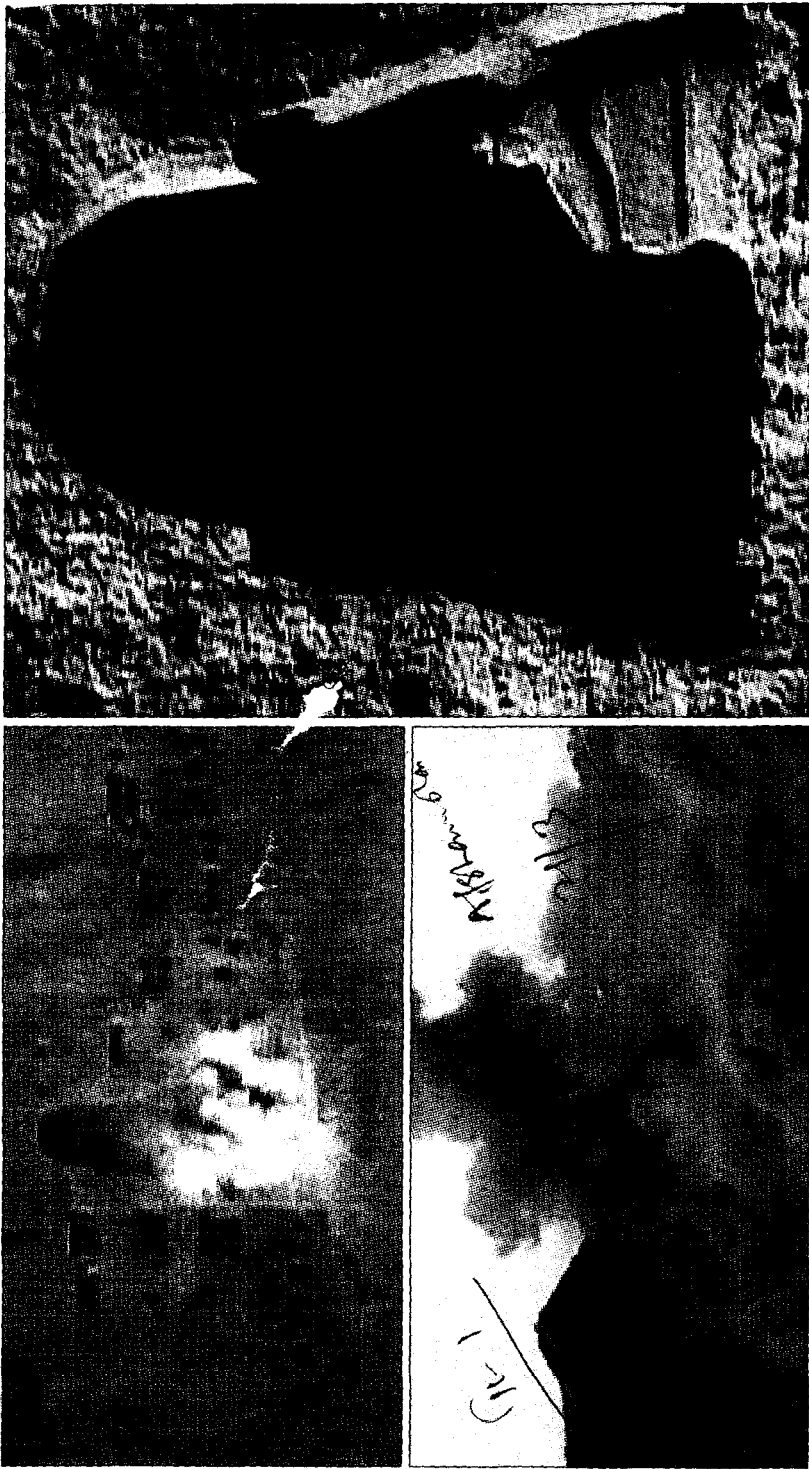
"We definitely don't buy this explanation. We and others have provided significant assistance..."

The international community has been quite ready and quite willing and quite active in supporting the needs of the Afghan people," said Mr. Boucher.

THE HINDU

21 MAR 2001

THE WASTELAND ON HOLLOWED GROUND



The Bamiyan Buddha cavern stands empty after explosives, detonated by the Taliban, destroyed the centuries-old statue in Afghanistan in this series of images from a recent but undated video. The statue withstood many attempts to bring it down with rockets and anti-tank gpus, but was finally destroyed by explosives. (Credit: AP)

Taliban edict bans Persian New Year celebrations

KABUL: Afghanistan's Taliban militia have banned Iranian New Year celebrations and warned that those who mark the occasion will be branded infidels, the official radio said on Tuesday.

Afghans should "hate" the Persian New Year (Nowroz), said Mohammad Salim Haqqani, the acting minister for fostering virtue and suppressing vice.

"The celebration of Nowroz is linked to non-believers and the great Prophet has forbidden us from being similar to the non-believers," Radio Shariat quoted him as saying.

"If during this day or in this respect somebody buys something which he normally would not buy... in fact he becomes a *kafir* (non-believer). Celebration of Nowroz is a vice. The public should stop marking it and should hate it," said Mr Haqqani, from the religious police department. Afghans could only celebrate Islamic Eid festivals, he added. Nowroz, which is celebrated in Iran with the spring equinox on Wednesday, was part of neighbouring Afghanistan's official calendar before the Taliban took Kabul in 1996. The celebrations in Iran have their roots in Zoroastrian tradition, from the monotheistic religion of old Persia, which has survived in Iran despite the coming of Islam in the seventh century.

In Afghanistan, which has a large Persian-speaking minority, the Taliban have also banned music, television, cinema, Western clothing and hair styles to create their concept of a pure Islamic state. (AFP)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

21 APR 2001

Something savage about man

BY KHALED A. AL MAEENA

While I was in London recently, two news items caught my eye which made me think really hard.

The first was about the death of several penguins in a zoo. Apparently some drunks climbed over the wall of a zoo and went to the penguins' cage and grabbed some and clubbed them to death. They also took a couple of penguins and threw them in the lions' cage. Zoo-keepers on arrival next morning discovered the scene of the carnage and were shocked. They discovered the dead penguins in the lions' cage. Apparently the lions did not eat the penguins. They were found frozen and died apparently from fright and a heart attack.

I don't know what emotions the poor penguins went through. Even their fellow animals, the lions did not, for whatever reason, attack their beautiful animal companions. For as we all know penguins are lovely, kind animals and harmless. To rip and tear them apart and throw them in a lion's cage is a beastly act. Perhaps the animal instincts in these men who caused their destruction reveal the savage nature of man. I asked myself: are there such humans who have reached this level of degradation? Even caged and harmless animals are not spared by them.

The second news item, and which is now becoming a daily feature in the British press and as I gathered in all the Western press, is the decision by the Tal-



iban government of Afghanistan to destroy all ancient Buddhist statues and archaeological sites. Most are 5,000 years old. Some are monuments carved high in the mountains which precede the reign of Chengiz Khan.

It is reported that the Taliban have fired heavy guns and cannons at them. Already the media there has expressed shock and

Penguins are lovely and harmless. To rip and tear them apart and throw them in a lion's cage is a beastly act. Perhaps the animal instincts in these men who caused their destruction reveal the savage nature of man

These monuments were similar to those of monuments in Petra, Jordan, Abu Simbel in Egypt, the Roman ruins in Carthage, Mohenjo Daro ruins in Pakistan. What if these relics of the past were systematically destroyed? The world would have been culturally poorer. The monuments which the Taliban are destroying wilfully are classified as world heritage sites

horror at the destruction of these historical sites which the UNESCO considers a part of world heritage.

From Paris to Tokyo officials and governments are now meeting. The Japanese government which is a friendly one to the Muslims is uneasy. This government has paid for the upkeep and maintenance of Islamic sites in several

parts of South East Asia. Writers with anti-Muslim tendencies are now sharpening their pens. The ordinary person in the street will now get their message of venom. There will be protests, programs and speeches about intolerance. No differentiation will be made between Taliban action and that of other Muslims who practice and preach peace and tolerance. There will be widespread protests in South East Asia and many innocent people will be killed.

I saw pictures of these monuments on television. They were similar to those of monuments in Petra, Jordan, Abu Simbel in Egypt, the Roman ruins in Carthage, Mohenjo Daro ruins in Pakistan. What if these relics of the past were systematically destroyed? The world would have been culturally poorer.

The monuments which the Taliban are destroying wilfully are classified as world heritage sites and used to be visited by a large number of tourists in times of peace. They were a source of revenue for the then Afghan government. They were not places of worship. What kind of thinking has provoked their destruction? I really don't know. My sincere advice to Taliban is that, instead of committing such acts of a destructive nature, they should first destroy the poppy fields and other drug-making facilities.

KHALED A. AL MAEENA is the editor-in-chief of Arab News

THE ASIAN AGE

20 MAR 2001

Taliban ask Pak to vacate border posts

Islamabad, March 17 (PTI): The Taliban has given an ultimatum to Pakistan asking it to vacate two border posts after Islamabad criticised the Afghan regime for destroying Buddha statues.

Commander of the Taliban Border Force Qari Muhammad Ismail sent a letter to Pakistan's Khyber agency and Khyber Rifles asking them to provide legal proof that the border posts at Bara and Ayub belonged to Pakistan, military officials in Peshawar said last night.

The Khyber Rifles patrols the 2000 km border between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Ismail warned of "dire consequences" if the two posts were not vacated. His letter followed bomb explosions near the Pakistan consulate in Afghanistan's Jalalabad city yesterday.

Reports from Peshawar said the blast took place at a madarsa

close to the Pakistani consulate. However, it failed to cause any damage, Taliban officials said.

Ismail's letter followed sudden border clashes two days ago. The situation became tense when Taliban soldiers obstructed Pakistan border officials from removing Taliban flags hoisted in what Pakistan officials claimed as their territory.

During scuffles, Taliban soldiers tried to abduct some Pakistani border guards, but they were overpowered and beaten back.

Taliban flags were hoisted in the hills at the Torkkam border checkpoint within few days after Pakistan distanced itself from Taliban's decision to destroy the Buddha statues.

As the pressure mounted on Pakistan to intervene and stop it's ally from destroying the heritage monuments, Pakistan's military

regime hurriedly dispatched interior minister Moinuddin Haider to urge Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammed Omar not to destroy the statues.

As a result of the border clashes, the Torkkam post, through which thousands of Afghan refugees flowed into Pakistan, was sealed. It was, however, opened a day later after Taliban officials apologised with an assurance that such incidents would not recur. However, Ismail's letter blamed the Khyber Rifles for the tension at the border and warned that the Taliban would again hoist flags at the same places.

"The occupation by Pakistan border guards of Bara Frontier and Ayub Post is illegal," the local media quoted Ismail as saying in his letter. He warned that Pakistani forces should produce legal documents to substantiate their claim on these posts.

18 MAR 2001

Taliban statue demolition leaves ally Pak vulnerable

FROM JACK REDDEN

Islamabad, March 16 (Reuters): The Taliban's systematic destruction of Afghanistan's pre-Islamic treasures has drawn unwelcome attention to Pakistan, the hard-line religious movement's main ally in an increasingly hostile world.

Pakistan, which provides the Taliban's only access to the outside world and has the only embassy in Kabul dealing with them, tried to distance itself by joining in the futile appeals to halt the smashing of all statues.

But the way several countries — Sri Lanka's Prime Minister was in Pakistan this week — directed their anger via Pakistan underlined how closely the Taliban-Pakistan links are perceived.

"Vulnerable is the word," Shaukat Qadir, vice-president of the Islamabad Policy Research In-

stitute, said when asked where the Taliban's iconoclasm had left Pakistan. For a country alarmed by warming Indian-US ties and deeply dependent on foreign aid, backing an Afghan group that has been condemned by most of the world is potentially very dangerous.

Diplomats noted that many of the sanctions imposed on the Taliban in January — restrictions on their travel, closing of their foreign offices, a ban on arms supplies — targeted Pakistan-Taliban cooperation.

Pakistan had already angered Washington by failing to press the Taliban to turn over Osama bin Laden, the Saudi militant accused of blowing up two US embassies. The sanctions were a new attempt to get hold of bin Laden.

Regardless, there is no sign Pakistan has shifted its policy on the Taliban. While it joined in

opposing destruction of the statues, Pakistan took days to make a comment and sent its interior minister to hold talks with Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar only on the day UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan arrived in Islamabad to discuss the issue.

"They are still not quite sure they want to withdraw their support to the Taliban," said Qadir, whose institute is under an independent board but is staffed with former army officers like himself and is given government funding.

The extent of Pakistan's involvement in the creation of the Taliban in 1994 and their subsequent capture of more than 90 per cent of Afghanistan is not documented. Islamabad continues to deny the assumption, heard in and outside Pakistan, that its army's Inter-Services Intelligence agency was and remains the Taliban's guiding force.

Bamiyan destruction pains Afghans

ZAHID HUSSAIN
THE TIMES, LONDON

KABUL, March 16. — The dilapidated two-storey grey building of Kabul Museum in Darul Aman district, once famous for its rare collection of ancient relics, is now a hollow ruin, its crumbling walls and roof blasted away by the civil war in Afghanistan. The heads of the two ancient lion statues outside the locked entrance hall were smashed long ago. The few remaining artefacts, which had survived the plundering of Mujahideen soldiers from various warring factions, were wrecked last week by Taliban zealots on the order of their supreme leader, who declared that all images reviled Islam.

The magnificent, 2,000-year-old clay statue of Bodhi Sattva (sitting Buddha), once a showpiece of the museum, has been reduced to rubble. "Islam does not allow sculptures and being Muslims we oppose idolatry," a Taliban official said.

The majority of Afghans do not agree with the edict of Mullah Omar, the

one-eyed reclusive Islamic fundamentalist leader. Their anger is palpable as residents of Kabul openly display their anger over the destruction of their history, describing it as madness.

"They were part of our heritage and their destruction makes us sad," Mr Abdul Mannan, a taxi driver who comes from Bamiyan, the province that had the world's two tallest statues of standing Buddha, said yesterday.

The sculptures, which had been hewn from mountain cliff faces, were blown up last week. Witnesses said the Taliban soldiers drilled holes in the rocks and filled them with explosives. "It was a professional job," an aid agency official said. "There are only heaps of rock on the site of one of the most magnificent works of art". The area is still out of bounds for foreign journalists who have descended on the city. The fundamentalist Islamic move-

ment that swept the Afghan capital five years ago has enraged the international community with its extremism. Women have been barred from working, girls' schools have been closed, men are forced to grow long beards, and all forms of entertainment, including singing and dancing, have been banned.

The latest vandalism of historical relics has shaken the Afghans more than any other fanatical act of the past. An aid worker said, "The destruction of Buddha was an expression of rage by the extremists against the international community."

The decision to destroy the ancient artefacts was apparently taken by a coterie of hardline mullahs who have pushed aside the moderate elements in the Taliban movement. Many Taliban officials privately express their disapproval of the destruction, which has widened division within the ranks of the ruling Islamic force.

'AN EXPRESSION OF RAGE AGAINST WORLD COMMUNITY'

The controversy could not have come at a worse time for a country in which millions are facing starvation because of war and severe drought. Almost a quarter of Kabul's population survives on a daily supply of bread from international agencies. It is a city where more than 40,000 street children compete with dogs to forage food from rubbish dumps.

While more than 170,000 Afghans have fled to neighbouring Pakistan in the past four months, another half a million refugees live in desperate conditions in scores of camps set up across Afghanistan.

The plight of Afghans has drawn little attention and help from the rest of the world. According to one UN official they have received only 10 per cent of the 158 million pounds they appealed for to deal with the drought and food shortages in Afghanistan.

Most observers agree that the destruction of historical relics will only further isolate the Taliban authorities and worsen the misery of their trymen.

Weep for Afghanistan — she is dying!

By Lolita Nehru

110-12
1613

Those who have the power keep silent. Buddha statues are not relevant to the big powers, or lucrative, in the way oil and natural gas are.

SEVERAL THOUSAND years of human history and artistic achievements, 80 years of archaeological excavations by European and Afghan teams, are being destroyed in a matter of days. While the world looks on. It was the same, not so long ago, when thousands of Tibetan monasteries, repositories of 1,300 years of a unique human civilisation, were destroyed. Protests are voiced, but those who voice them do not have the power to stop the destruction. While those who have the power keep silent. Because Buddha statues are not relevant to the big powers, or lucrative, in the way oil and natural gas are. Where oil and natural gas are threatened, reactions are different.

The thundering silence of America at the ongoing destruction in Afghanistan is deafening, as the self-appointed keeper of world morality. Maybe because, in this instance, to be vocal would be a threat to the piping of Central Asian gas through Afghanistan? Pakistan is no problem, a long standing American satellite, and if there are pacific relations with Afghanistan (Osama bin Laden notwithstanding), the piping of Central Asian gas via Afghanistan and Pakistan to the 'warm waters' for transport westward, becomes practicable. Quite simple really.

The nexus between America, sources for oil/gas, and the ambivalent attitudes of America to Islamic countries (as major suppliers of oil and gas), are the only realities which have any relevance. Mr. Saddam Hussein has to move one toe towards Kuwait and America bombs Iraq out of existence. Korea or Libya need take one step towards making bombs and they are threatened with bombardment.

Bombs, oil, gas, lucre — these are what 'makes the world go round'. Not Buddha images. Who cares for Buddha images except for a minute population of Buddhists (without clout, except Japan), a handful of archaeologists, historians, art historians around the world and the very few who have a love and wonderment for the artistic creations of mankind over the centuries. This is hardly a powerful group. In the world today, the only country with power is America, which has both bombs and money. It needs supplies of

oil and gas, so it keeps pacific relations with all who can cater to this need. Even when they destroy Buddha images. If it were not a symbol of western civilisation, America could stand by and watch the Acropolis burn in Athens. Greece has no oil or gas to offer.

Why is America silent? Offers made by the Metropolitan Museum to buy the Buddha images are not the same thing. Why does America not threaten to bomb Afghanistan, as it did Korea and Libya? Why are no U.N. forces, surrogates of America, being ordered into Afghanistan? Why not even a limp, pious statement of protest? The answers are simple and cynical. Buddha images are not important to America. The cultural history of a people matters little, and can be trashed without a tear. To destroy the history and culture of a people is to destroy the people themselves. It is tantamount to genocide. But it will not be seen in these terms, because what are being destroyed are supposed to be mere inanimate idols. But are they inanimate? I weep for Afghanistan, for the sterile barrenness to which the country is being reduced, its past uprooted, mutilated, ground down to rubble, killed. I weep with impotent frustration at the cynical reality which governs the world, the finest outpouring of man in art and cultural expressions invariably sacrificed at the golden altar of human greed and thirst for power. They do not stand a chance. Any more than mute animals or the natural environment.

What is being destroyed in Afghanistan is much more than Buddha images. For millennia, because of its geographical situation, this region has been a major historical and cultural crossroads. In successive periods, people from all parts of the ancient world passed through or settled in Afghanistan — Achaemenid Persians, Parthians and Sassanians from western Iran, Hellenistic Greeks and Romans from the eastern Mediterranean, nomadic tribes from the Eurasian

steppes, merchants and Buddhist monks from India and China. The intermixtures of cultures gave birth to new ideas and forms, which in turn were transmitted outward. Afghanistan, or ancient Bactria, was a cultural melting pot which holds many vital keys for understanding the history and art not just of Afghanistan, but also of neighbouring regions — Iran, the five Central Asian Republics, Chinese Central Asia (Xinjiang) and India. The destruction of Afghanistan's heritage does not affect Afghanistan alone.

The discovery of the Hellenistic Greek city of Ai Khanum, in northeastern Afghanistan, established in the last quarter of the 4th century BC, provided a key for understanding the seminal role played by the Greek kingdom of Bactria in the diffusion of Hellenism in the east. Ai Khanum opened up a new perspective on the Hellenism of Buddhist sculptures from ancient Gandhara (northwestern Pakistan, 1st to 5th century AD), and by extension the impact of Gandhara on contemporary Buddhist art in Mathura and Andhra.

Equally invaluable historical evidence existed in the 20,000 gold objects from Tillya Tepe, in northwestern Afghanistan, 1st century BC/1st century AD, probably the gravesite of the early Kushanas before they came to India.

Ai Khanum and Tillya Tepe are but two random examples. Systematic excavations in Afghanistan commenced with the establishment of a French archaeological mission in Kabul in 1922, followed by missions from other European countries. The wealth of excavated material over the years was housed in the Kabul Museum, the principal treasure house of Afghanistan's history and culture. The wonderful objects from Ai Khanum were displayed in a large hall on the first floor of the Kabul Museum, the gold from Tillya Tepe stored in six safes in the basement. The Kabul Museum, ever since the Taliban came into power, is no more than a shell, its precious objects destroyed, vandalised

or sold into markets in Pakistan. Nothing is known about the fate of the finds from Ai Khanum or Tillya Tepe.

Nor is anything known about the exquisite coloured glass from the eastern Mediterranean or fragments of Chinese lacquerware. Superbly carved ivories, probably from India, have surfaced in Peshawar bazaars. The rich testimony for the important role of Afghanistan in the mercantile traffic in luxury goods between Rome, India and China, between 1st to 5th century AD, lie scattered or destroyed. The list is endless. Buddhist sculptures of this period, from numerous sites in Afghanistan, in stone, terracotta, stucco and clay, filled many large rooms in the Kabul Museum. This was because of the expansion of Buddhism outside India into Central Asia and China, from 1st century AD onward. Afghanistan was a major centre of Buddhism from 1st to 6th-7th century AD, where new sects of Buddhism emerged, to be transmitted to Xinjiang. The Buddha images at Bamiyan are (were?) the most dramatic examples of the Buddhist past of Afghanistan, the inspiration behind the colossal images in Xinjiang and China.

The invaluable key which Afghanistan holds for understanding Buddhism and Buddhist art in India, Central Asia and China is being systematically destroyed by the Taliban. This is not the first time in history that Buddhism, ironically the most pacific of world religions, is being viciously targeted. This does not make the present mad and senseless action of the Taliban any less abominable and heart-rending. The pious statements of India and Pakistan have little meaning. It is common knowledge that the Taliban is the creation of Pakistan, while the RSS, to which the Indian Prime Minister belongs, has a list, Babri Masjid apart, of 2000 mosques in India awaiting destruction because there are supposed to be temples beneath. The RSS/BJP/Sangh Parivar are the flip side of the same coin as the Taliban. Their statements count for nothing. They share the same unholy madness in the name of religion.

(The writer is Professor of History of Art, National Museum Institute, New Delhi.)

SEE 111111

An open letter to Mullah Omar

By Shamsul Islam

HD-12
17/3

RESPECTED MULLAH Saheb! *Assalamo Alaikum*. I know you will not like this Islamic greeting which means peace and security for everyone. You as Head of the Taliban of Afghanistan and a great Mullah are out to teach a lesson to all infidels. How could one talk of peace and security in such an age of all kinds of infidels roaming around in Afghanistan! You must be pained by the kind of world reactions or over-reactions to your latest *fatwa* to obliterate a few idols in Afghanistan where you have already razed more than 600 mosques and turned into rubble more than 20 cities (perhaps all belonging to infidels!). You must also be perturbed by the hue and cry over the destruction of a few hill-tops and stones when you and your committed Taliban did not hesitate to finish off more than three million Afghans, men, women and children, and maim another two million (of course, all infidels again!) in less than a decade.

Great Chief, you must also be feeling bad that some commentators are targeting you and your holy crusaders for indulging in medieval vandalism, when, in fact, you are committed to a kind of civilisational cleansing which has no parallels in the known history of humankind. In ancient, medieval and modern times we had barbarians who brought death and destruction to people and objects which belonged to the realm of aliens. However, Exalted Mullah, the Taliban under your leadership represent an exceptional case in history, destroying its own civilisation that too *in toto*. No one should accuse you of being sectarian or narrow-minded. You are not blasting only what the world believes to be a magnificent cultural heritage of Buddhist civilisation; you have also turned the great land of Afghanistan into rubble and converted the energetic, beautiful and sturdy Afghans into beggars and orphans. Thus equating your kind of religious/cultural cleansing to medieval vandalism does not do justice to your kind of heroics.

Great Defender of the Faith, you must also prove the pseudo-Muslims wrong when they talk of the medieval age as a

period of great resurgence of Islamic arts, architecture, literature and other creative activities. You must come out with more religious decrees to censure all references of tolerance in the life of Prophet Mohammed. The tribe of pseudo-Muslims keeps telling us stories like the one in which the Prophet was invited to a non-Muslim's house and when time for *namaaz* came, he came out of the house to say prayers. This pained the host as he thought that the Prophet did not find the place good enough to say prayers. The Prophet explained that he did not pray in the house so that some day some fanatic Muslim might not claim it as a holy place of Islam arguing that he had prayed there. Another story is that the Kaaba, the holiest place of Islam, existed as a holy place before the arrival of Islam too. All such information and incidents of co-existence must be kept under wraps. The Muslim

Respected Mullah Sir, you should rest assured that at present you are the leaders in this great task of demolition of civilisations. We have always been grateful to the greatest democracy of the world, the U.S., and its intelligence agency, the CIA, which leave no stone unturned in making this world secure for democracy and their small-time fixers such as Pakistan (not in their good books at present) for making you appear on the world scene. Their concoction of narcotics and religion, in your case Islam, has done wonders, first, to fill the coffers of the western arms suppliers and, second, secure Afghanistan for you. You should not get too agitated over criticism that the acts of destroying statues of great historical and artistic importance are, "barbaric and anti-civilisational". Thanks to our above godfathers every country and every corner of the world has its own Taliban.

With one master stroke you have changed the whole agenda. Now no one is talking about jobs, food, health and shelter in Afghanistan.

Ummah or community should not be weakened by the circulation of such stories. Muslims must be forced to learn that any kind of tolerance or co-existence is sheer weakness.

Your Highness, we feel that only the destruction of statues of the Buddha (like the ones at Bamiyan) will not erase evil history. You have rightly declared that, "Afghan history was secondary to the history of Islam". In order to accomplish this task fully, you may please also ban all languages of Afghanistan as pre-Islamic people might have been speaking some or all of these. Moreover, we beg you to immediately issue a *fatwa* asking all Afghans to disown their forefathers who lived in the pre-Islamic period.

Sir, once the idols have been turned into sand you must also order the blasting of the Hindukush range of mountains in Afghanistan as the infidels had used these mountains too.

Moreover, we want to stress that our country requires your urgent help to boost this industry here. Despite demolition of the Babri mosque and burning of missionaries such as Graham Staines and support of the state to organisations like your own, our Taliban have little public support. But we hope, with a little help from you, they too can reap the harvest. In this regard, we welcome the statement of your spokesperson in the U.S. that the statues in Afghanistan were being destroyed in retaliation for the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992. It is a great development to be welcomed. The cultural demolition squads of our two countries must work in tandem and help each other to grow. In fact, the demolition plans of the Taliban of Afghanistan vis-à-vis the Buddhist heritage, Sir, have rejuvenated different outfits of the RSS here. They have already declared their intentions of destroying a few more religious

places of Muslims. This is a healthy development. Please keep it up. Congratulations for the news that Sri Lanka which has no history of Muslim-Buddhist clashes is soon going to have these. Thus Sri Lanka becomes the newest beneficiary of your wisdom. Amen!

Great Crusader of the Faith, we want to congratulate you for being a great politician with a perfect sense of time. It has generally been believed that mullahs know nothing of worldly affairs. The enemies of the Taliban regime of Afghanistan had been criticising your leadership (which was unfortunately believed by a substantial section of the Afghan population) for destroying the whole of Afghanistan and turning the population into beggars. With one master stroke (your *fatwa* for immediate destruction of the Buddhist heritage), your Exalted Self has changed the whole agenda. Now no one is talking of small and mean things such as jobs, food, health and shelter in Afghanistan. (Great Mullah, please do tell us whether you run some coaching classes for imparting this kind of strategy. In our country, we find dedicated followers of your wisdom resurrecting the Ram Temple agenda whenever elections are due.) Islam must be saved and that can be done only by destroying a few evil objects of the remote past. You should not fall into the trap of the enemies of Islam by entering into any kind of debate on why suddenly these statues have become dangerous. Such debate is bound to divert your holy attention from the real task of destroying the idols in order to save the Faith.

Mullah Omar, we do not want to take more of your time as we know that you are absolutely busy in dictating more *fatwas* for cleansing Afghanistan of its dirt and dust. We envy you as you have to take care of the non-living only as the living have already gone to Paradise courtesy the Taliban regime. Keep this up. *Khuda Hafiz!*

(The writer is Reader, Department of Political Science, Delhi University)

THE HINDU

16 MAR 2001

The Bamiyan Buddhas – much like the Mayan or Indus Valley ruins – have no relevance in Afghanistan's contemporary religious feuds. Why, then, is the Taliban afraid of two harmless carvings on a cliffside? KUSHANAVA CHOUDHURY explains why

ROCKETS, tanks, anti-aircraft-guns – in the last week, the ruling junta in Afghanistan expended an astonishing amount of effort and fire power to destroy two ancient statues carved on a cliff. All of which begs the question: what is it about the Buddhas at Bamiyan that scares the Taliban so?

From the Mongols to the Soviets, over the past 1,500 years the sandstone Buddhas have borne witness to countless marauders and tyrants. But even Chenghiz Khan and Aurangzeb, both of whom damaged portions of the relics, didn't deem the statues threatening enough to warrant their annihilation. Buddhism as an ideology disappeared from Afghanistan nearly a millennium ago. Unlike the Babar/Masjid, which has become a pawn for Indian communalism, inter-religious conflict in Afghanistan is moot. The Bamiyan Buddhas – much like the Mayan or Indus Valley ruins – have no relevance in Afghanistan's contemporary religious feuds. Why, then, are those fearsome gun-toting thugs-in-black – who invaded Indian television screens as they strutted the tarmac at Kandahar airport a year back – those same men who defied the UN, the USA and much of the international system, afraid of two harmless carvings on a cliffside?

The Taliban's action has been attributed by many, including some in India, to a host of economic, social and religious factors. After all, the argument goes, the Taliban are a product of a backward, tribal, Islamic society. What else can one expect from a country brimming with semi-literate, mountain-mullahs?

The curious thing is that Afghan society has been backward, feudal and Islamic for a millennium, and yet the statues have generally been left alone. Far from being remote or ominously exotic, the Taliban are very much a product of our world – of modernity, imperialism and the West. What distinguishes the outfit is not its roots but rather its reaction, for the Taliban's ideology is nothing but reaction – against modernity, against the West, against everything it confronts but does not wish to understand. Within their cocoon of supposed ethnic and religious authenticity, the Taliban have developed a worldview based solely on negation. From this ideological black hole, they have passed decrees ranging from the brutal to the bizarre.

Now, having negated their women's right to work (in a society where nearly a third of women were once employed); having negated technologies like television sets and VCRs (though AK-47s are ubiquitous); having even negated their men's right to shave their beards, what more was there left to negate but a couple of unobtrusive relics on a Hindu-Kush cliffside? Suffocated by its own insularity, the Taliban world-view has simply run out of ideas and sunk into sheer idiocy.

Historically, Afghanistan has been a conservative, tribal, Muslim society where Shariat law, as interpreted by local tribal customs, has governed for centuries. Yet, its society was also immensely tolerant of various Muslim sects, as well as other religions. BBC journalist Ahmed Rashid has covered the region for two decades and recently wrote an authoritative account on the Taliban. According to Rashid, as late as the early 1990s, before the region came under Taliban control, Hindus, Sikhs and Jews all played an important part in the country's trade. The nihilism that has taken root since, under

Idiocy armed with a loaded gun



A Taliban guard sitting outside the complex which once housed ancient clay Buddha statues in Ghazni, on Tuesday. Afghan Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil said on Sunday that all the statues had been destroyed. – AP/PTI

the guise of "true" Islam, denies both the indigenous diversity of Islam across sects and evolutions, and the space for debate and interpretation of the Koran and the Hadith. It is a parsimonious re-imagination of religion that comes at the expense of the varied constitution of Islam as it is "lived" in Afghan society.

Ironically, for all its claims of authenticity, the Taliban's roots are entirely foreign. Spawned in the 1980s to fight the Soviet invasion, the Taliban is a product of CIA weaponry, Saudi funds, Pakistani training, and most peculiar of all, Indian ideology. In

the guise of "true" Islam, denies both the indigenous diversity of Islam across sects and evolutions, and the space for debate and interpretation of the Koran and the Hadith. It is a parsimonious re-imagination of religion that comes at the expense of the varied constitution of Islam as it is "lived" in Afghan society.

Ironically, for all its claims of authenticity, the Taliban's roots are entirely foreign. Spawned in the 1980s to fight the Soviet invasion, the Taliban is a product of CIA weaponry, Saudi funds, Pakistani training, and most peculiar of all, Indian ideology. In

turn inward to orthodoxy, couched in the language of negation. Then, as in the 19th century, it was based on a blanket dismissal of the West (then Britain, now America), imperialism, and modernity at large. Only now, there were weapons to enforce the agenda.

There is nothing objectionable about the anti-modern, anti-imperialist stance, per se. The 19th century Deobandis aside, many of India's leading thinkers and activists have been of this mould. For instance, both Gandhi and Tagore were defiantly anti-modern and anti-imperialist. Yet both arrived at their positions through a cosmopolitan route. Gandhi's opinions were as influenced by Theosophy and Tolstoy, as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Maulana Azad, too, who had Deobandi ties, was of this position. Yet Azad was well-versed in Eastern and Western philosophy, knew five languages and had travelled the world before the age of 25.

Like Tagore or Gandhi, his critiques of modernity and the West were informed by a steady infusion of new and varied ideas from his own society as well as the outside world. In contrast, in the madrasas that trained today's Taliban, one spends a decade memorising one book. These are not men who lack schooling. Many have spent 10-20 years in these madrasas. What they lack is the worldly wisdom – the influx of varied ideas – which lie beyond their ideological cave. Driven by a fairly legitimate grievance against the modern and the Western, in the battle of ideas they are woefully unarmed.

Thinkers like Azad, Gandhi or Tagore were ingenious and nuanced in their opposition to modernity precisely because of their intellectual worldliness. Through the sheer force of their ideas, they unsettled the world's mightiest empire and helped liberate a nation. Today's critics of modernity, be they in Kandahar or New Delhi, are driven by paranoia. Unnerved by a world which forces designer jeans onto their buttocks and navel-wiggling nymphets onto their television screens, they protest with their fists instead of their heads. In India, up to now, the typical casualties have been the odd MNC food chain or greeting card stores on Valentine's Day. In Afghanistan, we have since discovered that idiocy armed with a loaded gun is capable of destroying a piece of civilisation itself.

(The author is a freelance writer.)

the ISI-run training camps in the North-West Frontier Province (once Badshah Khan country), the fighters who later formed the Taliban were indoctrinated in the original South Asian variety of right-wing Islam: Deobandism. The Deobandi ideology originated in Deoband, India, in the 19th century as a reaction to the modernising influence of British imperialism.

Deobandi conservatism was born as a reaction; it served to provide Indian Muslims with a counterweight to the reformist Aligarh movement championed by Syed Ahmed Khan. The Aligarh movement was pro-British, pro-modernisation and in favour of reopening South Asian Islam to the influence of the outside world. The Deobandis negated all of the above.

Instead, in an attempt to "protect" Islam, Deobandi ideology turned inward, towards rigidity, fundamentalism and intellectual atrophy. Transported across the border during the Partition, the leaner, meaner Deobandi ideology which emerged from the ISI-backed madrasas in the 1980s was constructed with the same insular mindset – a

And now, Taliban expels BBC

REUTERS
KABUL, MARCH 14

THE ruling Taliban expelled the British Broadcasting Corporation from Afghanistan on Wednesday for transmitting criticism of the group's destruction of all ancient statues, including two of the Bamiyan Buddhas. While much of the country's pre-Islamic heritage has been destroyed, Taliban officials continued to offer conflicting versions on the Buddhas, Afghanistan's most famous archaeological treasure.

A Pakistan-based Afghan news service quoted Information Minister Qudratullah Jamal as saying no trace of the Buddhas remained while Foreign Minister Wakil Ah-

mad Muttawakil told reporters in Kabul the demolition continued.

"The destruction of the two statues has been completed. The work was completed last evening and now there is no trace of the two statues there," the Afghan Islamic Press quoted the Taliban information minister as saying.

But shortly afterwards Muttawakil told a news conference in the capital that work was continuing on Wednesday to eradicate the Buddhas, which towered 53 metres and 38 metres and were hewn into a cliff about 1,500 years ago.

The Taliban, which has vowed to eliminate all Afghanistan's historic statues on the grounds they are heathen idols, were angered by an interview with a US professor broadcast on Tuesday evening by the BBC.

After the broadcast which described the destruction as barbaric, the Taliban issued an order on Wednesday for the BBC to close its Kabul office and withdraw its correspondent, Kate Clark, within 24 hours.

Clark was packing and planned to leave for Islamabad on Thursday morning.

In Paris, Director General of the United Nations Cultural Agency, UNESCO, shocked by the recent destruction of statues in Afghanistan, on Tuesday demanded new international laws to punish cultural vandalism. Koichiro Matsuura told reporters that UNESCO had been powerless to stop Afghanistan's Taliban rulers from obliterating two giant statues of Buddha and bemoaned the fact there was no way of striking back at those responsible.

INDIAN EXPRESS

15 MAR 2001

Taliban spare Hindu, Sikh statues

Kabul, March 14 (Reuters): The foreign minister of the ruling Taliban movement said today they would not smash idols of the minority Hindu population in their campaign to eliminate statues from Afghanistan.

"There are a limited number of Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan with their temples," Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil said. "Their statues will not be smashed as they are worshipping them as part of their religious rituals. Hindus and Sikhs can fulfil their religious worshipping without any concern," he added.

But Muttawakil reiterated the Taliban's stance that all other statues in the country would be

razed to the ground. "Destruction of the statues is a matter of happiness for us... and may not be for non-Muslims," Muttawakil replied when asked if the Taliban move was good or bad for relations with other religions.

The exception allowed for statues now being worshipped was a relief for several hundred Hindus and Sikhs still in Afghanistan, which had hosted tens of thousands before the Taliban swept to power in 1996. Fearing the Taliban would destroy their statues, the religious groups had erected walls to hide them, witnesses reported.

Muttawakil said the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, which began 10 days ago, was con-

tinuing. And he drew a distinction between the largely Buddhist heritage being eradicated and the Hindu statues. "There are no followers of Buddhism in Afghanistan and because of our national and Islamic duty we destroy them as they are not being worshipped".

BBC scribe expelled

The Taliban expelled the BBC from Afghanistan today for transmitting criticism of the group's destruction of all ancient statues, including two large Buddhas in Bamiyan. They were angered by an interview with a US professor broadcast last evening by the BBC.



A heap of rubble lies where an ancient clay statue of Buddha used to be in Ghazni, 200 km southwest of Kabul. (AP/PTI)

THE TELEGRAPH

15 MAR 2001

The Taliban expected the world to do nothing after the Bamiyan destruction. They were right

Stone deaf

BY J.N. DIXIT

HT 8
19/3

THE TALIBAN authorities of Afghanistan decided some time around February 9 to destroy the cave statues of Lord Buddha at Bamiyan dating back to the third and fifth century AD. It was also decided simultaneously by the Taliban to destroy all statues and Buddhist relics at Bamiyan and elsewhere in Afghanistan.

Mullah Mohammad Omar, self-styled 'Amir-ul-Momineen' (chief of the faithful) of Afghanistan, issued a *fatwa* saying that the destruction of these Buddhist relics is imperative to uphold the purity of Islam and the Islamic character of the Talibanist State of Afghanistan.

The statues of Lord Buddha which are in a standing posture rise to a height of nearly 200 feet each. They have been carved in stone on the mountain site at Bamiyan by Buddhist monks and artisans during the Kushan and Saka empires. These statues were the culminating manifestation of the perfection of Gandhara art. Their destruction commenced around February 25. This act of barbaric vandalism can be compared with the burning and destruction of icons of militant Christians in the Middle Ages, the burning down of the library in Alexandria, and the destruction of Byzantine Constantinople.

The world took immediate critical notice of the Taliban *fatwa* in mid-February. I represented India at a Unesco-sponsored conference in Paris on March 2, in which representatives of member-countries jointly appealed to the Taliban to repeal the decision. The Director General of Unesco appointed a former French ambassador to Pakistan, Pierre LaFrance, as a special envoy to proceed to Pakistan — and if possible to Afghanistan — to persuade the Taliban leadership to desist from the vandalism.

The Unesco conference at Paris unanimously declared that the Bamiyan statues of Buddha were a part of humanity's civilisational heritage and that there should be concerted international action to prevent their destruction. The German foreign minister suggested that the UN Security Council should take note of this development and decide on preventive action. Practically all governments, except that of Pakistan, were critical of the decision taken by the Taliban.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee strongly condemned the decision; the Indian Parliament passed a resolution in the same tone; Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh, while describing the decision as a barbaric act, offered to transport the statues and all other artefacts to India and to preserve them for their ultimate return to Afghanistan when that country has a stable and civilised government. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York made an offer to the Taliban to buy the statues and other artefacts.

A group of eminent Indian Muslim intellectuals signed a joint appeal criti-



IDOL TALK: Taliban militiamen at Bamiyan before the destruction of the Buddha statues

cising the destruction of the statues and asking the Taliban to desist from carrying out their operational decision. Iran, Turkey and the central Asian countries (all of them Islamic nations) have been critical of the development.

International outcry and appeals, however, have not made any impact on the Taliban. Mullah Omar and his Information Minister Jamil have been categorical in asserting that the decision will not only be implemented in relation to the Bamiyan Buddhas, but will extend to all statues and artefacts of the pre-Islamic period of Afghan history.

Sculptures, artefacts and carvings of the Gandhara period had survived the more than 1,000-year Muslim rule in Afghanistan — till now. The museums at Bamiyan, Kabul and Hadda near Jalalabad contained the largest collection of exquisite sculptures and carvings of the Gandhara School, a result of the aesthetic synergy of Greek and Indian civilisations dating back to the times of Alexander, Selukas and Chandragupta Maurya.

Their systematic destruction commenced as the Taliban gained ascendancy in Afghanistan from 1996 onwards. The open air museum of Gandhara art forms at Hadda near Jalalabad was destroyed by gunfire of the Taliban.

One speculates why the Taliban has adopted this approach and, more importantly, given such wide publicity to their decision. There are many reasons: First, the Taliban's narrow, irrational and wrong interpretation of Islam and their

fascist fervour about their interpretation of the Muslim faith. The decision signals that Afghanistan under them would be an authoritarian and bigotedly orthodox Islamic country.

Second, this is the Taliban's response to the Security Council resolution imposing sanctions on them for supporting international terrorism. The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas is a calculated gesture of defiance against the international community.

Third, there is a pernicious economic objective. Broken parts of the statues are still valuable historical artefacts. These can be smuggled and sold to interested purchasers which will augment the income of the Taliban (which is already dependent for its finances on the production of opium and its conversion to hard drugs). The refusal of the Taliban leadership to accept offers for these statues and sculptures is simply an eyewash.

Mullah Omar's assessment that the international community will not do anything more than cosmetic punitive action seems to be correct. The Unesco has passed resolutions and its director general has sent a critical communication to the Taliban. Various governments have condemned the destruction at Bamiyan, but not one has suggested any concrete punitive action against the Taliban so far.

The Organisation of Islamic Countries has not even made a collective statement against the destruction of the statues. This is even after the director general of

Unesco requested OIC countries to exercise pressure on the Taliban. A speculative comparison of the Bamiyan destruction would be if the Egyptian government starts destroying the monuments at Luxor, or if the Israeli government begins destroying the Al Aqsa mosque.

One wonders why the Security Council could not meet in an emergency session between February 14 and 28 and decide on restrictive military action in the Bamiyan area. If a no-flight zone can be declared in Iraq, and if Sudan and southern Afghanistan can be suggested for missile strikes after the bombing of American embassies, and if Libya could be bombed earlier, why didn't the Council take any action against the Taliban?

The answer is simple. No tangible strategic or economic interests of any of the important powers are threatened by the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas. One also discerned a cynical undercurrent in the discussion at Unesco. There were speakers at the conference who said that the Taliban after all was acting in conformity with their declared policies and their religious faith. They are going to control Afghanistan. So, practical wisdom lies in engaging them constructively.

There was not much anxiety, but a desire to get these artefacts to the West. One could not but conclude that what the colonial powers did in taking away all the treasures from Asian and African countries at gunpoint during the 18th and 19th centuries was sought to be repeated under the camouflage of an international humanitarian rescue operation.

While offering to purchase them, there was no suggestion that these would be returned to Afghanistan when it came back to normalcy. Also, 90 per cent of the available sculptures and artefacts of Afghanistan have already been smuggled away from the country during the 22-year long violent civil war engineered by foreign powers. It should also have occurred to the Taliban that they have deprived Afghanistan of being an attractive place for tourism by destroying these most valuable and ancient assets.

There was an argument among some Indian commentators that India could not take a strong stand on the issue because India was guilty of destroying the Babri mosque. Two points have to be made in response to this: One, that two wrongs do not make a right; two, that Indian public opinion was self-critical of that act of wanton religious violence. The latter is not the case with the Taliban.

The people of Afghanistan are mute witnesses to the rampage against humanity's and Afghanistan's historical heritage. A senior Buddhist monk whom I met in Paris speculated that destroying the Bamiyan Buddhas will bring upon them divine retribution. The destruction may ensure the ultimate defeat of the Taliban. One hopes that this speculation would become a reality.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 11 2001

The Buddha smiles in Afghanistan

By Kancha Ilaiah

10-12
1373

The Taliban and the RSS/VHP have proved to be operating from the same ground of ignorance of the difference between faith and history, between a historical monument and a mosque or a statue.

THE BRUTAL attack by the Taliban on the historic statues of Gautama Buddha in Afghanistan is condemnable. The Buddha established a great liberative philosophy as far back as the 6th century BC and he himself was never for worshiping idols. The Buddha, who stood for non-violence, simply smiles at such acts. The attacks on his statues, hopefully, would bring back the teachings of the Buddha into a fresh global discourse. The first major anti-idol worship preacher in the world was Isaiah of Israel (around 850 BC) and the second was the Buddha himself. The third was Jesus and the fourth was Muhammad, with whose preachings Islam came to be established.

All over Asia, Buddha statues were carved out in caves and viharas not for worship but as historical symbols around which his preachings were carried to the illiterate masses. When Buddhism began to spread during the regime of Ashoka, there was no book-based spiritual worship. This became popular only after the Bible was constructed as a spiritual text. The Bible was woven into one book putting together several historical events that occurred in and around Israel over a period of centuries before and after the birth of Christ. Unlike the Bible, the Koran is a text narrated by Muhammad as the word of Allah. The Muslims became more book-centered than even Christians who have a tradition of installing statues of Christ and Mary in the churches. The ignorance of the Taliban about history is amazing. They think that all statues in the world were made only to be used as idols for worship. That is not at all true.

The statues of the Buddha are respected in all parts of the world going beyond the boundaries of religion. He has become the most respectable historical symbol of classical civilisation and culture. In the spiritual realm he is a precursor of Christ and Muhammad and in the philosophical realm he is the precursor of Socrates, Plato and Confucius. In the spiritual realm he is the ancient bridge between tribal totemism and organised religion and in the political realm a bridge between tribal republicanism and Aristotelian polity. He is the builder of egalitarian (Sangha) society. The Taliban should know that his image and preachings do not confine to the pre-

sent Buddhist religion nor to Indian or Asian boundaries. His is the great legacy of non-violence.

Statues such as those in the Bamiyan region of Afghanistan have acquired the status of historical monuments as they were carved out about 2,000 years ago. Islam has a tradition of establishing monuments by constructing mosques and palaces or structures such as the Taj Mahal or the Charminar. When the RSS pulled down the Babri Masjid, which had acquired the status of a historical monument, the whole world condemned it. Now a similar vandalism is being indulged in by the Taliban. Religious bigots, whether Islamic or Hindu, should know the value of historical monuments? A historical monument is a symbol of civilisation but not a representative of a particular religion.

It appears that all religious fundamentalists do not have any concept of history. They do not seem to understand the fact that history is different from belief. Assuming that Babar did not know history and destroyed a Ram temple (if one existed there), we must understand him because there was no notion of monument at that time. But Mr. L. K. Advani is supposed to know the difference between a monument and a mosque, as he is a modern man. If Mohammed Ghazni did not know history and destroyed Somnath we should understand it, but Mullah Mohammed Omar not knowing history is inexcusable. Medievalism and modernity get differentiated primarily with the knowledge of history. In history, a written document or text after 30 years acquires the status of public document and hence it becomes archival material. Similarly a structure that survives a hundred years and more acquires the status of a monument. The Taliban and the RSS/VHP have proved to be operating from the same ground of ignorance of the difference between faith and history, between a historical monument and a mosque or a statue.

The attack on the statues of such a great

historical (not mythological) figure such as the Buddha would have two implications for the world. One, Buddhism, which is the biggest religion in the world, may turn anti-Islamic. Hitherto non-existing tensions between Buddhism and Islam may get formed. Second, Buddhism, which never was a communal religion, might take a communal posture. Bigoted acts of a small communal sect within any religion posits that entire religion in a negative light before the global community. When the Babri Masjid was destroyed by the RSS/VHP operating from within Hinduism, it put the entire religion to test. The present act of the Taliban will put the entire Islam also to test. The political mileage gained out of such destruction is a momentary one.

The people of the world in the context of globalisation has a choice between secularist modernity and anti-developmental fundamentalist medievalism. It is a situation of a war of nerves, not only in India but at the global level, between secularism and communalism. The West, which has evolved a secular modernist development process, living within the broad contours of religion, is advancing very fast. The East, particularly the subcontinent, is likely to get caught in the vortex of fundamentalist wars, which hamper all development. The destruction of the Babri Masjid and the Buddha statues are cases in point.

Islam which brought about several reforms in human life, particularly in its first 500 years, will move backwards if it allows Taliban-like forces to emerge. The Taliban should know that Asia became a continent of great religions because of the initial steps of the Buddha. Islam owes the Buddha as much as Hinduism and Christianity do him.

The Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid, Syed Ahmed Bukhari, very surprisingly supported the Taliban attack on the Buddha in Afghanistan. He did so in the view that it was a retaliatory act against the Hindu communal agenda being set by the Hindutva forces in India. Such a wrong un-

derstanding is rooted in the fact that Buddhism is being projected by the Hindutva forces as part of Hinduism. Unfortunately, for many Muslim scholars Indian history starts only with the establishment of Muslim kingdoms. For them, pre-Islamic India is mono-Hinduistic. In fact, it is the Muslim writers who named India Hindustan. They never understood that Brahminic Hinduism and Buddhism were two major contending religions before the Muslim kingdoms were established in India. One version is that the attacks of Hinduism against Buddhism weakened Buddhism before Islam took shape in India. There is a serious contention of many historians that many Hindu temples (which have by now become monuments in their own historical right) are restructured Buddha-Jain viharas.

Ambedkar, who revived Buddhism and transformed it in India into a religion of Dalits, had held both Brahminic-Hindus and bigoted Muslims responsible for the elimination of Buddhism from India. The Taliban does not seem to realise that Buddhism today is a religion of the poorest of the poor in India. The RSS/VHP do not treat the Buddha with the same spiritual reverence as they treat a mythological figure like Rama. For example, the Hindutvawadis will not accept that all non-Muslims, non-Christians, non-Sikhs and non-Parsees should be declared Buddhists but not Hindus. Such a proposal does not go against the Indian nationhood, as the Buddha is the greatest ancient Indian, who is not a mythological figure like Rama. Yet the Buddha would not be acceptable to them. Such is the difference between Hinduism and Buddhism. How and why should the Buddha become a retaliatory target of the Taliban?

Afghanistan has been suffering from Taliban fundamentalism for quite some time. It could never show the signs of a mature nation. No nation can enter into a path of development if it does not produce thinkers who can understand the positive linkages of the ancient past and modern nationhood. The Buddha statues are a great heritage of all modern people of the world. The Taliban must preserve them with respect. Let the Muslim world intervene and stop such vandalism in the interests of global peace.

Taliban has little to lose in pursuing domestic agenda

By Jal Taraporevala

MUMBAI: The supreme leader of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Mulla Mohammad Omar, has again stated that external pressure will not undermine the ideological commitment of the government in any way. This assertion, coming as it does soon after the regime launched a campaign to destroy Buddhist statues, scarcely augurs well for the prospects of stability in the country.

The leadership of the Taliban seems to have calculated that it does not have much more to lose were it to continue to pursue its domestic agenda in the way it thinks fit in view of its international isolation. Moreover, recent events appear to suggest that the hardliners in the Taliban have further consolidated their position vis-a-vis the relative moderates.

Given the mounting international criticism against the Taliban and the United Nations arms embargo

which is now in force against the Afghan government, the opposition Northern Alliance could well be encouraged to try and launch a significant military offensive once the spring season sets in. It is, however, debatable as to how effective such an offensive would be.

After all, the military balance is heavily tilted in favour of the Taliban, both in terms of ammunition

— NEWS ANALYSIS —

and territorial possession. The only region where the opposition holds the edge is in the north-eastern part of the country around the Panjshir Valley, which is under the control of forces loyal to Ahmad Shah Masood.

The UN arms embargo against the Taliban notwithstanding, it is likely that the Afghan government will not find it too difficult to purchase additional stocks of weapons. This is because the Security Council has not provided for any ma-

chinery to monitor the embargo. In any case, Pakistan is against the sanctions and its rugged and mountainous border with Afghanistan provides an ideal route for the illegal supply of weapons. The effectiveness of the Northern Alliance has also been reduced as a result of the lack of real unity in its ranks, not least the differences between the Tajiks and Uzbeks.

The continuing effects of drought in the country, the increasing international isolation of the regime and the diversion of a substantial amount of resources to the military sector have exacerbated the problems on the economic front. This factor, coupled with widespread concern about the possibility of an outbreak of large-scale fighting in Afghanistan in the near future, could result in a growing inflow of refugees into Iran and Pakistan where more than four million Afghans are currently housed in

THE TIMES OF INDIA

12 MAR 2001

For Bamiyan's 'refugees in stone', there is no escape route in sight

By Siddharth Varadarajan
The Times of India News Service

KABUL: The Taliban's order to destroy all statues from Afghanistan's pre-Islamic past, including the two Bamiyan Buddhas, has left people here appalled. Except for Taliban leaders and cadres, not a single Afghan that this correspondent met supported the militia's decision. "I had read about Atilla burning libraries but is there any parallel to this madness?" asked the owner of a drug store in northern Kabul. "Gear box *kharab hai*," a taxi driver said pointing to his head, explaining the Taliban's decision. At the Torkham border check-post with Pakistan, where thousands of Afghan refugees arrive everyday, a Kabul-based trader used a poignant metaphor to describe the statues' plight. "Look at all these people," he said, "Afghanistan has become a country of refugees. Had the Buddhas not been made of stone, they would also have become *mohajirs*."

Most Afghans reject the suggestion that the destruction of ancient statues has Koranic sanction. One shopkeeper in downtown Kabul claimed that Hazrat Usman and Hazrat Ali had passed by Bamiyan during their travels but did not feel the need to destroy the statues. "When they were happy to leave the Buddhas alone, who is the Taliban to say they must be destroyed?" he said.

"The Buddhas are part of the *sarmaya* (wealth) of

the Afghan nation," a butcher in Kabul said. "How is the future of Islam affected by these pieces of stone?" One man who had lived for 15 years in Pakistan's Kohat as a refugee said, "We feel very sad. But we can do nothing about it." Tugging forlornly on his beard, he added, "When I am not even free to shave, what can I do for the Buddhas?"

Till today, there has been no credible eyewitness account of the statues' fate. Journalists are not being allowed in and Bamiyan town is said to be deserted because of the recent fighting between the Taliban and the Hizb-e-Wahadat. Even the Taliban has been giving conflicting accounts: some suggest the destruction has already been done, others say it was suspended for the Eid holidays but would be completed soon. Either way, it is clear that the statues' days are numbered.

On Saturday, Mullah Mohammed Omar, Amir-ul-Momineen (Commander of the Faithful) and head of the Taliban's Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), rejected an appeal from Pakistan's interior minister Moinuddin Haider. IEA foreign minister Abdul Walal Motawakil, considered a moderate, said his government rejected a "compromise" suggestion that a wall be built in front of the Buddhas to block them from view. "We have the money to build a wall or even to take care of the statues. But this is not about money. The statues have to be destroyed."

STILL IN STONE AGE



THE TIMES OF INDIA

12 MAR 2001

12 MAR 2001

No religious basis for appeals: Taliban

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, MARCH 11. The Afghanistan Foreign Minister, Mr. Wakil Ahmad Mutawakkil, today rejected an appeal by the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, to halt the destruction of the pre-Islamic artefacts in Afghanistan and conveyed to him in unambiguous terms that the Taliban was determined to destroy all artifacts including the two giant Buddha statues which it considers as 'anti-Islamic'.

At a meeting with Mr. Annan here, the Taliban Minister argued that there was neither logic or religious basis for the appeals made from all over the world for reversal of the edict on destruction of the artefacts. The half-an-hour meeting with the U.N. Secretary General took place at the behest of Taliban militia.

Though the Taliban Minister sought to characterise the encounter with Mr. Annan as 'comparatively better' there was no meeting point between the U.N. Secretary General and Mr. Muktawakkil.

The Minister complained that the humanitarian assistance be-

ing provided by U.N. agencies for the affected people in Afghanistan was 'too little and too late' and blamed the U.N. for the setback in the efforts at reconciliation with the opposition.

The only issue on which he sounded a little optimistic was related to Osama bin Laden, dissident Saudi billionaire. He said the Taliban was hopeful that with a new administration at the helm of affairs in Washington, a solution would emerge on the issue. At the same time he said no new proposal came up in the course of his meeting with the U.N. Secretary General on the subject.

The Minister said it would be a matter of days if not weeks before the relics including the Buddha statues were razed to the ground. He said the operation was taking time as they were 'tough'. When a reporter remarked that he had never seen a Taliban Minister being so happy and asked if it was the response of the regime to the irritation from the entire world, the Minister remarked that "don't forget we recently celebrated Bakrid".

Addressing a crowded news conference at the Taliban Embas-

sy, Mr. Muttawakkil left no one in doubt that his interaction with Mr. Annan had not helped in furthering either the agenda of the international community or the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The large number of national and international media personnel who had gathered at the Taliban Embassy had to wait for more than one-and-a-half hours after Mr. Muktawakkil had finished his meeting with Mr. Annan. The explanation was the Minister had rushed to meet the Pakistan Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdul Sattar, immediately after his encounter with the U.N. Secretary General. Mr. Muktawakkil blamed the international community for the 'excessive exaggeration' of the edict issued by Mullah Omar on destruction of the historic artifacts. He wondered why there was such a hue and cry over destruction of monuments that were no longer worshipped.

Stating that the Taliban had no intention to hurt the sentiments of any one in the world, the Minister maintained that the Afghans would have been better off if they were Christians before the advent of Islam in Afghanistan on the

plea that Christianity was a 'more just religion'.

The Minister said unlike in places like India where worshipped monuments like the Babri Masjid were demolished, the Taliban had only undertaken destruction of relics that were no longer worshipped. "The international community is unnecessarily getting worked up. It should not forget our decision on control of narcotics".

The Minister categorically ruled out shifting or sale of the relics to any other part of the country on the plea that the decree of Mullah Omar sought their destruction. Asked why the press and public were being kept out of the demolition operation, the Minister said they would be allowed to visit the sites once the operation was complete.

In response to a question, he said the Taliban did not expect the edict to affect international humanitarian assistance and asserted that destruction of the relics was purely an internal affair of Afghanistan. Muslim countries were making an appeal for a review of the decision under pressure from non-Muslim countries.

THE HINDU

MAR 11 2001

Taliban demolition: When Rip Van Winkle awoke at Bamiyan

JYOTI MALHOTRA
NEW DELHI

OVER the past few days, the world seems to have woken up from its Rip Van Winkle-like slumber to take notice of the Taliban's latest act of cultural terrorism. Light hours after Mullah Omar, the Taliban's supreme leader, ordered that the Bamiyan Buddhas were offensive to the Islamic regime, the UN Security Council passed a resolution, moved by Russia, against the "incomprehensible and wanton" destruction.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell told journalists in Washington, "It's horrible, it's a tragedy, it's a crime against humankind and I deplore it," adding fleet-footedly, "I don't know the extent of damage at this time."

I simply haven't been briefed in the morning because I've been in other meetings."

Even China, which remains overwhelmingly influenced by its Buddhist past despite its Commu-

nist present, broke its silence long enough to say, "We have taken note of the relevant reports. The Buddha statues are world renowned and are listed as a world cultural heritage to be protected," the foreign ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao added.

Notably, the Chinese murmur did not criticise the vandalism. In fact, it was brilliantly timed, not too early or too late, but almost immediately following the Security Council resolution, which it had lazily allowed to pass.

Perhaps, Beijing had - just like the Taliban leadership, smirking from behind its full turbans - noted the deafening silence emanating from Washington after Mullah Omar had passed his directive, as from the rest of the Western world and Japan.

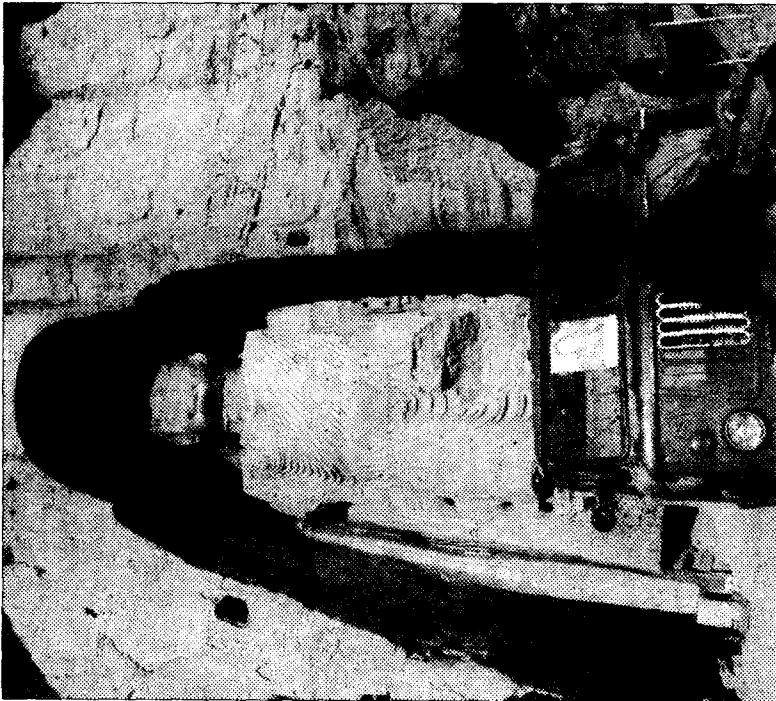
What did a few statues matter when other, sexier issues like the National Missile Defense programme, the Middle East peace process, raising the defence budget in China and the survival of the

they said, so as to gain time and try and bring the artefacts out of Afghanistan - and into Western museums."

Dixit's brief, co-authored by the government, was to let them have it. "I told them that it was futile to believe that the Taliban could be engaged constructively, when it had clearly announced that it had decided to do away with its pre-Islamic heritage," he said. The Taliban, he added, was deliberately stoking instability in the region.

"When action can be taken against Libya and Iraq and missiles can be fired into Afghan towns because US embassies have been bombed in Kenya and Sudan, why can't any action be taken against the Taliban?" he asked. Interestingly, the near-unanimous reaction of the delegates was that the Indian representative's remarks were "too idealistic."

Analysts point out that the enormous cleavage in response between India, Sri Lanka, the Buddhist world and the West, China



and Japan on this issue, has only promoted cynicism in this region. "It is not America's heritage, it is ours," one strategic analyst pointed out, reiterating the commonly held view that if the Taliban gave up Osama bin Laden to the US, recognition of Mullah Omar's regime would be round the corner.

China's reasons for keeping quiet was the fear that the outside world would feel increasingly free to criticise China over the destruction of its own heritage, especially in Tibet.

Colin Powell's avowal of regret, meanwhile, seems to have come just in time, but only just. In India, the sense of enthusiasm about the US (as a result of the Clintonian dispensation) seems rapidly in danger of fading away. The near-absence of reaction till now on the Taliban seems to have gone down very badly among Indians. "Of what use are the various joint working groups with the US, including the one on Afghanistan," is the refrain here.

INDIAN EXPRESS

1 2 MAR 2001

Major part of Buddhas destroyed: Taliban

Kabul, March 10 (Reuters): Afghanistan's Taliban rulers said today the ancient Bamiyan Buddha statues had mostly been destroyed and the rest of the work would be completed soon.

Taliban spokesman Abdul Hayee Mutmaeen said by telephone from the southern city of Kandahar that about 80 per cent of the two historic Buddhas had been destroyed.

"They have been destroyed up to 80 per cent. The work will be completed soon," said Mutmaeen.

He gave no other details. It was the first time that the Taliban had confirmed that the movement was carrying out the destruction of the statues — which tower 53 metres and 38 metres and were hewn out of sandstone cliffs almost 2,000 years ago.

The Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP), quoting sources in Afghanistan, said the demolition of the statues was underway again today. The agency said yesterday the top quarter of the taller statue had been blown

off with explosives. "Since last evening the Taliban have blasted the smaller statue as well, blowing off its top. Blasts at the smaller statue are taking place today (Saturday) as well," said AIP.

"The two statues are not completely destroyed as yet but the process is going on," it said. The two Buddha statues are the best known of the relics the Taliban aim to smash but foreign minister Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil said the demolition was not an attack on Buddhism.

"I will try to resolve the misunderstanding, that our move is not aimed against Buddhism," Muttawakil said by telephone from the southern city of Kandahar, the Taliban's seat of power.

Muttawakil today said he would meet UN secretary-general Kofi Annan tomorrow for talks which would cover their controversial order to destroy all statues. Muttawakil said he would travel to Islamabad tomorrow to meet Annan, who is due in Pakistan on the first leg of a South

Asian tour. "I will discuss with Annan the bad condition of the Afghan people, the injustice of the UN and imposition of sanctions as well as the Afghanistan crisis as a whole," Muttawakil said. "The statues issue will also come up in the agenda of the talks and I will say to him that this is an internal and religious issue and it is not intended to confront the world."

A UN official in Islamabad confirmed to Reuters that Annan would meet Muttawakil tomorrow but gave no other details

about the meeting.

Taliban's spiritual leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, issued the edict to destroy all statues in Afghanistan last month on the grounds that they are un-Islamic and promote idol worship. The order, which has sparked international outrage, was issued a month after the UN imposed new sanctions against the Taliban, aimed mainly to force them to hand over Saudi militant Osama bin Laden, who is accused of blowing up two US embassies.

THE TELEGRAPH
11 MAR 2001

RESTORATION CHANGED BAMIIAN

BLIND FAITH

Rakhaldas Sengupta gave nine years of his life to restoring the Bamiyan Buddhas, now being targeted by the Taliban. **Avijit Ghosh** reports

For Rakhaldas Sengupta, it was a plain case of heartbreak. Back in the sixties, as the leader of a team from the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), he was in charge of an arduous restoration project of the two giant Buddha statues of Bamiyan in Afghanistan. A project that took nine years of his life. Life then was driving along the dusty road from Kabul to Bamiyan on a Land Rover, staying in a hilltop prison converted into a hotel, working with convicts doubling up as free labour and dreaming of the restored images all night. The Buddhas were the bookmark of Sengupta's life.

But after the Taliban's assault on the twin statues last week, what remains for Sengupta are a melange of snapshots, a little rough on the edges and turning yellow with time. And a treasure trove of memories that the passage of years has failed to corrode. Sengupta, now 75, remembers Bamiyan like yesterday.

"I was awestruck when I first saw the Buddhas," he says, sitting in his spacious New Delhi residence. "I thought, oh God, where have I landed myself."

It all started after Humayun Kabir, then union minister of scientific subjects and culture, visited Afghanistan in 1963. Kabul asked the minister for help to restore the images which were disintegrating with every passing season. India agreed to cooperate and Sengupta was asked by Amalananda Ghosh, then director-general, ASI, if he would be interested in taking up the restoration project.

Sengupta was in two minds about taking up the offer. The enormity of the project and the difficult topography were daunting. Nine foreign archaeological missions had already backed out. "The DG asked me to think twice before agreeing to the job. There were two sides to the coin. We would have been vulnerable to criticism if we failed in our endeavour. On the other hand, success meant a positive image for the institution as well as for the country," says Sengupta, then posted as Chief Archaeological Engineer. Sengupta had worked on restoration projects involving sculptures as a special officer for Ellora Caves (1956-61), but none of such magnitude. The Bamiyan Buddhas were an entirely different kettle of fish. The Big Buddha was an astounding 55 metres high, the fourth tallest Buddha statue in the world. Situated a kilometre away, the Small Buddha was 38 metres high. The location, the climatic conditions, the materials used — everything was different.

But high on enthusiasm and spurred on by the excitement of doing something big, Sengupta acquiesced. He had one condition though: a free hand in selecting his team. "I wanted people who would obey me and translate my idea into practice," he explains.

It was only when he first saw the rock-cut statues, with their beautiful murals, that the sheer scale and vastness of the project dawned on him. "I had not anticipated such a huge and complicated task. But having said yes, I couldn't go back on my word. It was obvious that implementing the project would mean a tremendous amount of work and skill," says Sengupta.

Worse, Bamiyan was a small village having long lost its days of ancient glory. Located about 250 kilometres north-west of Kabul, it nestled between the snow-peaked mountain ranges of the Hindu Kush and Koh-i-baba. The altitude was about 2,850 metres. On the ancient Silk Route connecting western Asia and India, Bamiyan had also been a camping place for caravans. In the course of time, it developed into a major centre of Buddhism.

The precise date of the Bamiyan Buddha colossi and the identity of their sponsors is still a matter of debate. Dates vary from third to sixth century AD. It is certain though that the site was visited by the Chinese traveller Huen Tsang in the seventh century and the Korean monk Hue Chao in the eighth. "But it seemed to have fallen into disrepair from the ninth century onwards," says Sengupta.

Man and nature conspired towards the slow, and inevitable, destruction of the colossi. Medieval emperor Genghis Khan burnt a portion of its wooden armature. Its broken legs were allegedly the handiwork of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. There were modern vandals as well. "When we went up to see the painting, we discovered gunshots and arrowheads beneath the plasters," recalls Sengupta. The Hindu Kush area was also vulnerable to earthquakes. A major one in the early years of the century created a huge crack in the Small Buddha. But the chief mischief maker was rather unwater. For six months, the mountain peaks



UNDER SIEGE: An Afghan soldier stands near the Blind Buddhas of Bamiyan

of Bamiyan were covered with snow. According to Sengupta, when the snow melted, the water rushed down in a torrent causing cuts in the cliff. Due to this, some of the painted figures had either disappeared or were badly damaged.

The task of putting it all back together was gargantuan. More so because Bamiyan was in the middle of nowhere. To buy anything, the ASI team had to drive back to Kabul and there was no guarantee it would be found there either. Which meant that they had to get it from India. The whole project, therefore, required careful planning, an uncanny

ability to foresee what would be required and to procure it accordingly. For instance, the chemicals needed for restoration work were first shipped to Karachi from India. From there they were taken to Kabul before they finally reached Bamiyan.

Sengupta and his team finally began restoration work in 1969. The years in between were spent scouting for UNESCO funds which never materialised. Finally, India and Afghanistan decided to share the cost. The hosts were to provide residential accommodation, transport, labour and all indigenous materials. India had to take care of the ex-

pertise and other materials not available locally. The overall cost came to about Rs 20 lakh.

The prestigious project saw Sengupta divide his time between New Delhi, Kabul and Bamiyan. At the site, work began as early as 8.30 am. The labourers, mostly convicts supplied by the governor, worked under the supervision of armed guards.

Whenever in Bamiyan, Sengupta would visit the site by 9.30 am and supervise work till 1 pm. He would return to the small hotel for lunch, usually consisting of half a *naan* ("we used the other half as a napkin after the meal"), vegetables, curd and the occasional chicken. Around 2.30 pm, he would go back to the site again and work till 6 pm. In the pre-TV era, the 16-member strong ASI team would spend their evenings playing cards and listening to the transistor. And they would eagerly await visiting Indian families, mostly Sikh traders who had settled centuries ago in Kabul and occasionally visited the place as tourists. "We had a standing instruction that any such family would have to share a meal with us," says Sengupta.

The long work hours notwithstanding, the project went on for nine long years. Primarily because the biting winter and heavy snowfall stopped work for six months. "We worked from April to September. There was no restoration work for six months — from October to March. The *chowkidars* looked after the monuments during the intervening period," says Sengupta.

Work in Bamiyan was not restricted to planning out a step-by-step restoration. It also meant looking into matters of administration, cutting through red tape and getting things done — no mean task when it involved two governments.

It was also about fighting mischievous Pakistani propaganda. A booklet circulated in Bamiyan alleged that Indians were using UNESCO money for the project. That they were attending to Buddhist monuments only because they were Hindus. To counter this, Sengupta also distributed pamphlets providing a clear and accurate picture. "That ended the propaganda," he says.

The team leader went on a secular offensive when he was requested by a minister in Mohammed Daud's regime to restore a 15th century Timurid mosque, Khwaza Pasha. The mosque, decorated with coloured tiles, was falling apart. "I shifted two engineers there and we stopped further damage," Sengupta says. The project was completed in two years and the mosque was in use again.

It was a different Afghanistan those days. There were no signs of militancy, and Islamic resurgence was a distant drum. "The statues were not worshipped, but the locals took a lot of pride in them," Sengupta reminisces.

As work progressed in Bamiyan, the changes in the Buddha statues were apparent. Gradually, the cracks became less apparent. As an insurance against tremors, belts of iron bars were installed around the separated chunks of rocks.

The new face of the Buddha also created a new Bamiyan. What was once a sleepy village of farmers playing host to the odd, accidental tourist, suddenly became a tourism hotspot. Hotels and restaurants sprung up. With increasing employment opportunities, many who had left the town came back. A hundred and twenty tents, earlier used by nomads, were now spread out to accommodate the increasing flow of tourists.

The new Bamiyan had something for everybody. Hippies stayed in rundown homes. Rich tourists came overland from as far as Iraq and Iran in double-decker buses. Pilgrims from Japan and Korea flew to Kabul. The bumpy journey by road was soon replaced by a commercial air taxi service. A Canadian Otter aircraft took 25 minutes to take tourists from Kabul to Bamiyan. The Buddha images had transformed the village, providing a filip to its economic growth.

When the project was finally completed, Sengupta says he was filled with a sense of relief and pride. "We earned a lot of prestige outside India," says the conservator who was born in Noakhali, now in Bangladesh, but migrated to India during the Partition. But the statues had extracted their pound of flesh. Immediately after the completion of the project in 1977, Sengupta suffered a massive heart attack — a fallout of severe stress that juggling the faraway assignment brought. He never went back to Bamiyan.

After all these years, Padma Shree Rakhaldas Sengupta cannot comprehend why the Taliban has dealt such a barbarous blow to the Buddhas, which had brought pride and prosperity to Bamiyan. And this time, he knows, they cannot be restored.

Taliban urged to halt vandalism

India offers to preserve Buddha relics at UN session

United Nations, March 10

THE UNITED Nations General Assembly has urged Taliban to take immediate action to prevent destruction of historic monuments in Afghanistan, even as New Delhi expressed willingness to arrange for the transfer of artefacts to India where they would be preserved for all mankind.

In a non-binding resolution, sponsored by over 100 nations and approved by consensus yesterday, the general assembly urged the Taliban to take immediate action to prevent further destruction of the unique relics and other monuments.

Participating in the discussion on the resolution introduced by Germany, Indian ambassador to the UN Kamallesh Sharma told

the assembly that the relics could be shifted to India in the full knowledge and clear understanding that they are in the first place and above all, treasures of the Afghan people themselves.

Condemning the destruction of statues and relics, Sharma said Taliban's decision "demonstrates, yet again, that destruction is the Taliban's only creed. It has destroyed ethnic harmony in Afghanistan; it has strangled the desire of

Afghan girls and women for education; and it had ruthlessly trampled upon the human rights of Afghans".

He said despite protests, appeals and international outrage, the Taliban is bent upon committing "a grievous misdeed, indeed, a sacrilege to humanity, to the civilizational

and cultural inheritance of all mankind, by starting to destroy the incomparable and unique statues of Buddha at Bamiyan, celebrated over almost two millennia"

The UN general assembly adopted a resolution on Friday urging Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia to halt the destruction of statues and non-Islamic shrines.

The text was adopted by consensus after a debate in which countries housing some of the world's greatest archaeological treasures, such as Cambodia, Egypt, Guatemala and India, condemned Taliban's attack.

The assembly said it was "deeply concerned and appalled by the Taliban edict of February 26, 2001, ordering destruction of all statues and non-Islamic

shrines in Afghanistan."

The destruction of two colossal sandstone statues of Buddha near Bamiyan in central Afghanistan "would be an irreparable loss for humanity as a whole," the assembly observed.

The resolution reminded the Taliban of its "previous commitments to protect Afghanistan's cultural heritage from all acts of vandalism, damage and theft." It called upon member states to help safeguard the sculptures "including, if necessary, their temporary relocation or removal from public view."

Meanwhile, a top official of Afghanistan's ruling Taliban said on Saturday he would meet U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan this weekend for talks regarding Buddha statues.

Agencies

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 MAR 2001

11 MAR 2001

Bombarding at Bamiyan

Fear as the Other Face of Terror

By SANJOY HAZARIKA

11-10 107

THE devastation of history as seen in the Taliban's systematic destruction of the Buddhas at Bamiyan in Afghanistan should have been expected. After all, this is not some revisionist group or radical fundamentalist gang out to stamp its own special terrorist imprimatur on our times. The motive is deeper and therefore, culturally and philosophically, a greater assault on the truth.

The outrage at Bamiyan is not an assertion of Islamic purity but should be seen for what it truly represents: an unmitigated fear of facing up to the past, of a refusal to acknowledge that past as part of a national history and identity.

What future awaits a nation so fearful of its past? It is not as if history began with one messiah and there was nothing before him. This is a fact accepted by religions and religious leaders across the world. The fear of the past makes men (and women) do stranger and seemingly illogical things. But let us, for a moment, look at what the Taliban and its shadowy leadership were seeking to establish through the murders of two great unarmed, peaceful religious figures at Bamiyan.

There are those who say that the Taliban govern by terror, that in their age and their land, women cannot walk about unveiled, that men cannot trim their beards, that prayer five times a day is a must for every citizen. This is the obvious. What we can only guess at is the violence with which such edicts are implemented. The decadence of the outside world is attacked. But what of the fear and frustration that the thought police bring to the streets, into homes, offices and schools. Their job is to harm those who may be straying from the narrow Talibanistic path. This is not necessarily the right path, no matter how strongly they may declare their religiosity.

Thus, to see the destruction of the Buddhas as an statement of intolerance or fanaticism is to miss the point. It is a decision taken out of fear. No matter how angrily the Taliban may deny this or however they may seek to justify the act, we should remind ourselves that the other face of terror is fear. In this case, it is fear of the knowledge that the history of Afghanistan is greater than its Islamic existence. In most societies, and particularly

sense of history, this reality would be accepted and people would move on. Bamiyan and Kabul as well as other Afghan towns were on the Great Silk Route which brought ideas, trade, cultures and conquerors to a region stretching from Europe through Central Asia and India to China. This is a part of the history of the world and those who seek to deny this are diminishing their own countries and societies.

The Taliban wishes to assert that what Bamiyan does not represent is its past. Perhaps it is right. After all, it did not exist at the time. But the Bamiyan rock cuts are a majestic, indivisible part of the region which bombs and bluster cannot destroy.

One wonders what are the thoughts of those who have awakened to the sight of the Buddhas over the centuries? Are they happy that these gentle giants, who sought

IN BRIEF

- The destruction at Bamiyan is fuelled by fear
- The Taliban must remember that it is easier to destroy than to build
- It has failed to give the Afghans the basics of development

no harm to others and only their good, have been blasted to bits in the face of a worldwide outcry seeking their safety? Did they see this as a loss of something that had been an integral part of their lives, of their waking, sleeping, living and dying?

If the bombings were not bad enough, there are worrying reports about the treatment of religious minorities in the country. Hindus and Sikhs have reportedly been ordered to wear patches of yellow on their clothes to show their religious affiliation; their homes are also to be painted with yellow. An Afghan minister sought to impress the world media by keeping up a barrage of words about how the statues were being brought down. In his haste, he let slip a great truth, which the Taliban would do well to remember: It is easier to destroy than to build.

The bombings at Bamiyan need

just a repudiation of the past but a concern about what may yet be. One is not talking in terms of new faiths taking over there. But is there a fear among the rulers of today that the gentleness of tolerance will overcome the violence of terror and hate?

It is a fact that men and women of other religious and philosophical persuasions walked the ancient roads and valleys of Afghanistan, at a time when it was divided into many conflicting tribes and communities. The fierce loyalties inspired by tribal codes are legendary. They persist to this day, making any effort at governance near impossible.

It is now over a decade since the last of the Soviet troops left the Central Asian country. In this period, there has been a singular failure to forge an Afghan identity acceptable to all groups. This is connected to the failure to form an administration that can bring peace and the basics of development such as drinking water, power, roads — forget about equality and justice. It is a tragedy of inestimable proportions that sees over a million Afghans, a sizable proportion of the national population, still living in refugee camps in Pakistan.

Surely, the camp people have a right to return to their homeland. Yet, they remain reluctant to go back until so long as terror and fear, those inseparable twins, stalk Afghanistan long after liberation from the imperialist.

The Taliban may have destroyed the Buddhas. But what have they built in their rule? It is worth reflecting here on Babur, the first Mughal emperor, who is buried on the outskirts of Kabul.

Babur is as much a part of the history of India as he is of Afghanistan, Samarkhand and Farghana. There are those who rail against him and his invasion of India in 1526. But few would contest that his victory over Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat was one of the decisive moments in Indian, nay Asian, history. The BJP and its cohorts would do well to rein in their extreme elements in the following days. We cannot allow a replication either of Bamiyan here or of the destruction of the Babri Masjid or any harm to the Muslim community.

A nation that denies its past cannot have a future.

Taliban & the art of destruction

AN affront to civilisation. An outrage against human cultures. An act of gratuitous vandalism. An exhibition of extreme intolerance. By their destruction of the giant Buddha statues in Bamiyan, the Taliban have shown themselves in their true -- and lurid -- colours.

Few recent events have united the countries of the world so completely; although it has to be said, a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan has already placed itself among the "rogue states" of the world, by its hospitality to Osama bin Laden, by its notorious denial of education to women, by its aversion to anything that savours of humane and pleasurable consolations of poor people's lives.

A regime on which sanctions have

imagination be said to be an "offence" to a religion that did not then exist.

For the United States, it is fitting that such treasures should find their way into museums, since all cultures and civilisations that preceded the supreme achievement of its own are only archaic curiosities which serve to light the way to the supremacy of the present over the past, which is a form of temporal colonialism.

The emblems and artefacts of culture, especially of cultures dead and buried, can be securely locked behind glass, to be looked at by bands of yawning tourists: their modern incarnations scarcely threaten a world made safe for Pepsi and McDonald's.

When the European ministers of culture express their revulsion against the actions of the Taliban, they, too, are on shaky ground. For the cultural vandalism of Europe over half a millennium has been so breathtaking as to make the iconoclasm of the Taliban appear as a minor act of destructiveness compared to the elegant European art of laying waste of civilisations: after all, statues are

The extinguishing, not only of cultural artefacts, but also of the living flesh and blood that created them, was the great expertise in which Europe had no rival; exterminism of the lesser breeds of humanity, the evacuation of the vast spaces of the Americas and of Australia of ancient cultures, was merely a regrettable necessity to accommodate the impatient overflowing populations of the Old World. As to the British occupation of India, the destruction of its industry, its artisanal skills, its agriculture and forest-cultures, the manipulation of famine as an instrument of high policy -- none of this gives confidence that the Europeans are the secure custodians of cultural diversity.

Their idea of cultural preservation is on conspicuous display in such institutions as the British museum, the largest repository of stolen goods in the world. India, too, was universally praised for its offer to give refuge to the threatened statuaries. But alas, in faithful imitation of its sometime colonial occupiers, India, too, has been compelled (by the logic of the post-imperial era, in which it, too, is now a bit-player in the new world order) to

When European ministers of culture express their revulsion against the Taliban's actions, they, too, are on shaky ground. The cultural vandalism of Europe over half a millennium has been so breathtaking as to make the Taliban's iconoclasm appear as a minor act...

already been imposed by an "international community" is unlikely to listen very attentively to the representations of that community's envoys and representatives when they urge moderation and tolerance.

There is nothing to be said in favour of the Taliban's action; but there is much to reflect on in the response to it by the rest of the world.

First of all, a number of American museums offered to give space to the repudiated monuments from a past which pre-dated Islam, and which cannot therefore, by any stretch of the

NEW VISTAS

JEREMY SEABROOK



An undated photo of the world's tallest statue of Buddha (175ft or 53 metres) in Bamiyan that came under the Taliban's axe. — AP/PTI

exercise the same levels of tolerance to the cultures of peoples on its periphery which the British once extended to the country as a whole.

Self-determination of its own captive peoples is also a cultural issue; as is

perpetuation of artefacts, customs, traditions and beliefs are also the essence of culture. Respect for these is not strongly in evidence in contemporary India. When those who would reclaim cultural autonomy, independence and indigenous forms of self-reliance take action, they are called subversives, terrorists, insurgents and worse.

I was struck by a remark made in the pages of the *Standard* in 1883, where a British resident of Calcutta solemnly asserted, "There are no works of high mental culture in the Bengali language." An identical attitude links these sentiments to those of the dominant Indian cultures towards peoples, ethnicities, tribes, animists, Adivasis struggling for survival on the outposts of its own smaller, though not significantly different, imperium.

It seems that countries are like individuals: destined to play out in perpetuity the cruelties they themselves have experienced. Abused children become abusers, victims become executioners, and if the formerly oppressed know so well how to exercise tyranny, this is because they have observed the effectiveness of this particular mode of government from the receiving end.

None of this is intended to minimise the vengeful self-righteousness of the Taliban; although it should not be forgotten that the same people were armed and encouraged by the West in their hatred of and desire to bring down the Soviet Union.

Then, the possibility of Islamic fundamentalism appeared a mild threat compared to the godless creed of a socialist dystopia; and they acted accordingly. The monster they armed and nourished now poses a threat on an altogether different scale from when it was employed in the defeat and humiliation of a former enemy.

And the anger and outrage provoked by the sacrilegious vandalism of the Taliban can scarcely be because this is abhorrent to today's imperial powers: it is precisely because the threats of the Taliban, the breaking of exhibits in the national museum in Kabul, exemplify, make concrete, embody in the most stark and material way, the present business of the dominant powers in the world -- which is

also the more subtle, but systematic demolition of cultures.

Everything must go down before their idols, their images, their totems. All over the world, languages are becoming extinct, human cultures are being driven to the edge of survival, cultural practice and tradition are being wiped out in the name of a global business culture which melts down all the wonders of the world, all the riches of civilisation into things to be driven to market, so that the heritage of humankind becomes commodities like cattle, wristwatches or plastic buckets.

So when the Taliban train their guns and their shells on the sandstone Buddhas of Bamiyan, let us by all means call these things by their proper name, which is an assault upon the patrimony of humanity.

None of this is intended to minimise the vengeful self-righteousness of the Taliban; although it should not be forgotten that the same people were armed and encouraged by the West in their hatred of and desire to bring down the Soviet Union

But do not let those who carry out by subterfuge, by stealth, by manipulation precisely the same forms of demolition, become the heroic representatives of virtue and the upholders of a cultural diversity which they aim to snuff out as completely as the Taliban wishes to finish off all evidence that there was life in the world before Islam.

(The author lives in Britain. He has written plays for stage, television and radio, made TV documentaries, published more than 30 books and contributes to leading journals around the world.)

The Taliban are not Muslims. They are simply mad, bad and dangerous

Devils citing the scripture

BY SYED SHAHABUDDIN

THE DELIBERATE destruction of a priceless cultural heritage by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan is nothing short of cultural genocide and a crime against humanity. Words are not adequate to express the horror of this reversion to barbarian vandalism in the 21st century. To deplore the act or condemn its perpetrators is not enough. The Taliban regime has by this monstrous act put itself outside the pale of civilisation. It has forfeited its place in the community of nations.

What is more horrifying is that it has tried to justify its deed in the name of Islam. Even in the days when nation-states did not exist and there were no international boundaries, when the armies of Islam emerging from the Arab peninsula defeated the mighty Roman and Sassanian empires, overran Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Iran and established Muslim dominance from the Atlantic to central Asia, they did not touch ancient monuments.

The Pharaonic monuments in Egypt, the Greek and Roman monuments in Syria, Turkey, Tunisia, Algeria and Spain, the Babylonian monuments in Iraq, the Persepolis in Iran and, until now, the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan, all stand as lasting testimony to Islamic tolerance. Indeed, the Islamic armies were instructed to respect the faith of the people of other religions and not to touch their places of worship.

The theological point is that these monuments and statues were not idols as they were not being worshipped. Also the Taliban leadership is perhaps not aware of the fact that unless an idol is perfect in form, it cannot be worshipped. Even slight mutilations make it unfit for worship. So there was no possibility of the religious relics — either inside museums or outside — which have all been affected by the passage of time, to be ever worshipped. So why are they being smashed all over Afghanistan?

Can the Taliban quote any mandate from the Holy *Quran* to justify what they have done in Afghanistan?

A true Muslim sees history as a manifestation of Allah's will. He accepts it and does not seek to rewrite it. People of different races, languages and religion rise and fall, play their part on the stage of history and disappear, leaving some relics behind. A Muslim does not try to obliterate these relics. He understands that worldly power is a gift of Allah. He bestows it upon whomsoever He wills and takes it away whenever He wills. In His wisdom Allah created a multi-religious world and gave man free will to profess the religion of his choice.

Allah commands Muslims to respect the right of non-Muslims to have faiths of their own and not to exercise coercion on matters of faith. Allah commands Mus-



BARBERISM: An offending fringe is forcibly clipped at a Taliban militia checkpoint

lims not to revile the gods of other religions and to argue with non-Muslims in matters of faith in a courteous manner.

So the action of the Taliban regime is blatantly un-Islamic. But it has put the credibility of Islam and Muslims into question.

Much is made of the temples destroyed in India by Muslim invaders. But modern research establishes that destruction of temples was a fall-out of politics. Those associated with the ruling dynasties or with rebellion against the Muslim State faced destruction. There was no government destruction of places of worship of the non-Muslims. Indeed, the Muslim State in India guaranteed their security and bestowed *jagirs* and grants for their maintenance.

Can the Taliban regime explain why Mahamud Ghaznavi — who hailed from Ghazna in Afghanistan and attacked and looted the Somnath temple twice — spared the Bamiyan Buddhas which were not far from his capital?

Can the Taliban regime understand that emperor Aurangzeb, who is eulogised for establishing the first and the last Islamic State in India based on the *Shariat*, did not touch the Ajanta and the Ellora caves, which were almost next to his military camp in the Deccan during the last 20 years of his life?

Can the Taliban overlook the fact that their immediate Muslim neighbours — who also claim to be Islamic States —

Iran and Pakistan, have condemned its cultural carnage, apart from condemnations by other Muslim States and the Organisation of Islamic Conference?

Can the Taliban regime be so insensitive to international opinion that they do not see the damage they are doing to Islam and the strength they are providing to anti-Islamic propaganda and to the academicians who project Islam as a medieval religion and as the enemy of the West and modernity?

Can't the Taliban regime see how their action leaves the Muslim minorities defenceless when they face the onslaught on their places of worship and culture?

Another justification floated by the Taliban refers to the destruction of the Babri masjid in 1992. No doubt both acts of vandalism constitute crime against humanity, against man's cultural heritage but can one vile act ever justify another? Secondly, can the considered act of State be compared with the fury of an aroused mob? Thirdly, the demolition of the Babri masjid was condemned by a vast majority of the Indian people including the highest in the land — in politics, government, judiciary, legislature, academia and those in the field of culture.

Above all, the Taliban excuse is no more than an afterthought — but a highly significant one because it shows that religious fanaticism operates alike every-

where and uses similar arguments to justify itself. There is indeed a marked similarity in the mind of the Taliban and the Sangh parivar.

Apart from the religious perspective, the question begs us for an answer: what motivated the Taliban regime to suddenly wake up to its 'religious duty'? Was it a sudden burst of fanaticism? After all, Bamiyan itself has been a battlefield between them and their rivals. It has been won and lost by them several times during the civil war which is still raging. Was it to gain world attention when they have been isolated? Was it a reaction to not being recognised as the legitimate face of governance in Afghanistan? Or perhaps a reaction to the sanctions imposed against them?

Surely, it was not a religious impulse that made them destroy the statues. Mullah Omar cannot be such an egoist as to rate himself as the only true Muslim who ever walked on the soil of Afghanistan. If the real intention and purpose was to seek world attention, obviously they have gained nothing but revulsion and anger. The act has not brought them any closer to being admitted to the international society. They are now more isolated than ever before. And it will take longer and better credentials for them to be admitted to the United Nations.

But there is another issue which stares us in the face: the deafening silence of the Great Powers, the permanent members of the UN Security Council. The dastardly act of the Taliban revives memories in the West of the defence of Europe at Poitiers and at the gates of Vienna against Muslim armies. These memories give credence to the image of Islamic as the 'Enemy' and supports the theory of an inevitable civilisational conflict between Islam and Christianity (the latter supported by Hinduism and Buddhism).

The sphinx-like silence is indeed inexplicable. The concept of national sovereignty is a worn out concept now. Could the Taliban have persisted in their nefarious enterprise if confronted by a unanimous warning of the Security Council? Or a unanimous resolution of the UN General Assembly?

Are the United States, Russia and China still engaged in the Great Game which regards Afghanistan as strategically critical to their — once imperial, now economic — quest in central Asia? Are they still hoping to make competitive bids for the heart and soul of the Taliban regime, rather than act unitedly to overpower it?

The author is advocate, Supreme Court of India, and Convener, Babri Masjid Movement Coordination Committee

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 9 MAR 2001

Bullets for the Buddha

While Hunger, Deaths Stalk Afghans

By JAWID LAIQ

IN the past three years, scorching droughts and intensely cold winters have ravaged Afghanistan. During the past two months, hundreds of Afghan children have frozen to death in Herat with night temperatures reaching minus 20 degrees Celsius. Drought has destroyed food crops and famine is about to strike the population.

The Taliban officials and their chief, Mullah Mohammad Omar, appear to despise the Afghan people and ignore their plight. These fundamentalists continue to acquire artillery, tanks and ammunition through the clandestine, international arms market but have made no attempt to import food, blankets and tents. At this moment of calamity, the United States and Russia, who were mainly instrumental in turning Afghanistan into a seething cauldron of armed factions, have pushed through yet another UN resolution further isolating Afghanistan. As in Iraq, where 10 years of sanctions have fortified Saddam Hussein and his trigger-happy henchmen and increased the suffering of the Iraqi people, so in Afghanistan where the Taliban strut about while the people starve.

In isolated rage, Mullah Omar has commanded his restless bands of followers to use their artillery and tanks to devastate the exquisite labour of years of divine love by the ancient forebears of the Afghan people who had carved the tallest standing Buddhas out of the sandstone cliffs at Bamiyan. Two of the aesthetic marvels of the world have been turned into dust. Public outrage here and abroad is absolutely justified. It ought to be directed at Mullah Omar and his prime creators — Leonid Brezhnev, Ronald Reagan and Zia-ul-Haq — and not against an entire people who have not sinned but have suffered at the hands of a series of ever worsening tyrannies for the last 23 years.

A pluralist, tolerant and fun-loving society has been forcibly enveloped in a dark, dismal shroud by the weird and barbaric decrees of the Taliban. Till 1992, when the Marxist regime in Kabul was ousted by a mixed bunch of opposition groups, the folk traditions of Afghan society were prevalent. Music, singing and dancing were segments embedded in the Afghan mosaic. Afghans celebrated their national feast days, and especially weddings, by public dancing in which both men and women participated, though taking care not to touch each other. The performance of the national dance, the attan, had long been a feature of Afghan life. In Kabul, Kandahar and Jalalabad,

Hindus and Sikhs, most of whom had become Afghan nationals, lived in complete harmony with Afghan Muslims. Even now, many Afghans speak a basic version of Hindi picked up from Hindi films and lyrics which are currently banned by the Taliban.

A semblance of the pluralist colour and variety of pre-Taliban Afghan life can be witnessed every year on March 21 in Delhi's Lodi Gardens where hundreds of Afghan refugee families gather to celebrate the secular spring festival of Navroz. The young in mini-skirts and jeans, the grandmothers in black chadors, aquiline-featured Pashtuns as well as Uzbeks, picnic together by the shade of the monuments built by their ancestors. The refugees are remnants of the tolerant society which persisted in Afghanistan till the early 1990s. Many of the refugees in Delhi are those who fled from the wild ferocity of the Taliban who finally subjugated Kabul in September 1996. They have joined earlier streams of hapless refugees who had fled from

grasped the coup as a shortcut to instant revolution to be effected from the top. Drastic land reforms, social change and women's emancipation were sought to be implemented overnight without political groundwork. The attempts at forced reform met popular resistance from disparate groups of liberals, nationalists and Islamists. The unexpected resistance led to bloody infighting between the PDPA's Parcham and Khalq factions. Nur Mohammad Taraki, the first president of the Revolutionary Council, was killed and replaced by Hafizullah Amin, who in turn was killed and replaced by the Soviet-backed Babrak Karmal.

The Soviet invasion united temporarily the factions of the Afghan resistance and ignited a dormant and fierce Afghan nationalism. At least one million Afghans and some 20,000 Soviet soldiers died in the war against Soviet occupation which was intensified by a mindless flood of arms supplies to the resistance by Ronald Reagan's administration. The CIA and the Pakistani military establishment under Zia-ul-Haq directed the bulk of these arms to the Islamist groups within the resistance. Most of the fighting against the Soviet army was done by non-Islamist groups who brought the superpower to a stalemate. According to Artyom Borovik, the renowned Russian chronicler of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan who was killed in a mysterious air crash last year, Mikhail Gorbachov's policy of glasnost or opening up of Soviet society proclaimed in 1987 grew out of the Afghan stalemate. In 1988, Gorbachov started the process of disengagement which led to the last Soviet contingent withdrawing from Afghanistan on February 15, 1989.

The Afghan resistance soon fell into disarray. A vestige of the Marxist regime lasted in Kabul under Mohammad Najibullah till April 1992 when it was overthrown by a ragtag bunch of fighters who attacked each other and terrorised the civil population indiscriminately. Benazir Bhutto's interior minister, Nasirullah Babar, and the ISI initially trained and armed the Taliban in Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan. In 1994, the Taliban were sent to restore order in Afghanistan by the Pakistani military. By 1998, they controlled 90 per cent of Afghanistan. The Taliban are now way beyond the control of the Pakistani army or anyone else.

(The writer is a former research officer on Afghanistan, Amnesty International, London.)

IN BRIEF

- The Taliban is pursuing its own agenda while the Afghan people starve
- A pluralist society has been straitjacketed by the Taliban
- The Taliban is now way beyond the control of those who created it

Afghanistan during the communist regime from April 1978 to April 1992 and during the terrible internecine bloodletting between various Afghan political factions and ethnic groups between 1992 and 1996. In Delhi, the refugees have faced sporadic incidents of assault and harassment, especially during the Kargil conflict and whenever terrorist violence has escalated in Kashmir. These unfortunate incidents have been documented in *Abandoned and Betrayed*, a report published by the South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre. The victims of the Taliban have been equated with the allies of the Taliban by some of Delhi's angered inhabitants.

The Taliban are the brutalised products of the past 23 years of violence which began with a coup in Kabul in April 1978 by a small group of junior, Marxist-inclined army officers inspired by friends in the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The party

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 9 MAR 2001

Japanese team leaves for talks with Taliban

TOKYO: Representatives from Japan's ruling parties left for Afghanistan on Wednesday to urge the Taliban to halt its demolition of the nation's pre-Islamic artworks, a foreign ministry official said.

The three-member mission, including lawmaker Akihiko Kumashiro of the Liberal Democratic Party, is carrying a letter from foreign minister Yohei Kono urging the Taliban to reconsider its decision. The team hoped to meet Taliban foreign minister Abdul Wakil, but no date had been set yet, officials said.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Security Council on Tuesday joined in other UN bodies, governments and religious and cultural organisations in urging the Taliban to halt the "incomprehensible and wanton" destruction of an important part "of the world's cultural treasure".

Ukraine's acting UN ambassador Valeri Kuchynski, who read the council statement, said the latest information the council had was that "the Taliban authorities had started the preparations for the destruction but we have not received the actual confirmation that the destruction took place".

Efforts are being made to prevent the destruction of the non-Islamic shrines and artifacts, he told reporters. Philippe de Montebello, director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, was in contact with the Taliban through an intermediary in Afghanistan trying to negotiate the possibility of moving the biggest and most important Buddha statues to other places at the museum's expense, Mr Kuchynski said.

But the Taliban's ambassador to Pakistan, Abdul Salam Zaeef, had reiterated on Tuesday that the February 26 order by the leader of the Islamic religious militia, Mullah Mohammed Omar, to destroy all statues in the country as idolatrous would be carried out despite the international outcry.

He said in Islamabad that parts of the massive statues had been destroyed and demolition would resume after Eid. "We don't know how long it will take to destroy them, but they will be eliminated," he was reported as saying. "I am being told from Kabul that they are using mainly explosives because the statues are very strong. We do not want to spend more money or resources to destroy them. That's why we are using explosives," he said. He said troops had demolished 25 per cent of the two Buddhas. Taliban's information and culture minister Qatradullah Jamal had said earlier the legs had already been destroyed.

Meanwhile, U.S. secretary of state Colin Powell has also deplored the Taliban leadership for its "crime against humanity". Reports from Washington quoted him as saying, "It's horrible, it's a tragedy, it's a crime against humankind, and I deplore it." He added that he was trying to find out whether the Buddha statues built 2,000 years ago had been completely destroyed.

"I don't know the extent of damage at this time. I simply haven't been briefed in the course of the morning because I've been in other meetings, and so I don't know whether the two major Buddhas have now been taken down totally," he told the media on Tuesday. "So we'll get the information out to you (newsmen) as soon as we can."

Ending a week-long silence, China on Wednesday half-heartedly joined the growing international condemnation of the Taliban. "We have taken note of the relevant reports," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao said while taking refuge under an earlier statement made by the state-run Buddhist Association of China (BAC). (Agencies)

Demolition of Buddhas stopped during Id

ASSOCIATED PRESS

KABUL, March 6. - Demolition of two giant stone monoliths of Buddha, hewn from a cliff face in Central Bamiyan, was stopped during the Id-ul-Zoha, but the order to destroy Afghanistan's pre-Islamic relics stands and their destruction is a certainty, a Taliban official said today.

"Because of Id, the work of destroying the Buddhas has stopped, but it will be done after Id," the Taliban's ambassador to neighbouring Pakistan Abdul Salam Zaeef told reporters in Islamabad. The holiday, which began yesterday, ends on Thursday. "We don't know how long it will take to destroy them, but they will be eliminated," he said.

Earlier Taliban officials said that dynamite was being used to destroy the Bamiyan Buddhas.

Taliban-Pak ties: Global condemnation of Taliban's move and sectarian violence in Pakistan, allegedly by Taliban-trained Sunni militants against the Shias, could have a serious fallout on ties between Islamabad and the militia, diplomats said, adds PTI from Islamabad. "But Pakistan, like USA, cannot wish away the Taliban as they believe that it provides a strategic depth to any future confrontation with India," a diplomat said.

CPI-M stand: The CPI-M politburo today condemned the "reprehensible" act of the Taliban, adds SNS Kolkata. It condemned the threats of retaliation by the Bajrang Dal. It is ironic that the VHP-RSS, responsible for the Babari Masjid demolition, are condemning the Taliban, CPI-M said.

THE STATESMAN

- 7 MAR 2001

Taliban leader defends Bamiyan demolition

Kabul, March 5

THE SUPREME leader of Afghanistan's ruling Taliban movement on Monday defended his controversial order to destroy historic statues as an honour for Islam and the nation.

In a message quoted by the official Voice of Shariat radio, Mullah Mohammad Omar dismissed criticism of the plan and said Afghan Muslims should be proud of smashing the statues.

"It is a shame for those Afghans who criticise this decree," the radio quoted Omar, who denounces what he calls un-Islamic idols, as saying.

"I ask Afghans and world's Muslims to use their sound wisdom... Do you prefer to be a breaker of idols or a seller of idols? Is it appropriate to be influenced by the propaganda of the infidels?" he added.

The purist Islamic Taliban have vowed to destroy all statues in the country, including two massive and ancient Buddhas in Bamiyan, towering 175 feet (53 metres) and 120 feet (36.5 metres) and carved into sandstone cliffs.

Omar's call sparked international outrage and calls from around the globe for a change of heart. New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art offered to buy the statues to save them.

Omar said the statues to be destroyed formed only one percent of Afghanistan's historical relics and Islamic principles ordered their annihilation.

In an indirect reference to repeated international coverage of the statue saga, Omar said that the British Broadcasting Corporation and other Western media had begun a campaign against the Quran, the Muslim holy book.

"I ask the Muslim people of Afghanistan not to be afraid of the infidels' pressure... and do not synchronise with them," he said. Earlier, Afghan Islamic clerics urged Omar not to bow to international pressure and to push ahead with the plan.

Their call was echoed through loud speakers in most mosques in the Afghan capital Kabul on

the occasion of the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha, or Feast of the Sacrifice.

"They (non-Muslims) want to deviate us from our firm responsibility and we here request that the policy of smashing these idols to go ahead," said one cleric.

Rabbani rues act

THE HEAD of anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan, who is the country's internationally recognised President, has condemned the Taliban campaign of destruction of the country's pre-Islamic heritage, adds a report from Islamabad.

In a statement prepared in his

lah Mohammad Omar, had ordered the destruction of all statues - including two world-famous Buddhas carved into a cliff in Bamiyan province - on the grounds they are un-Islamic.

Afghanistan was a centre of Buddhist culture before the arrival of Islam more than 1,200 years ago.

"From thousands of years ago this country has involved and formed different civilisations and cultures," the statement said. "During this long history, no system has tried to destroy the historic monuments of the country - instead has made efforts to preserve them."

Rabbani, whose government is also Islamic, said in the state-

recognition of the national government transferred from Rabbani, who they drove from Kabul in 1996. But diplomats say their destruction of Afghan's cultural heritage has strengthened the position of those leading the opposition to any dealings with the Taliban.

The Taliban say the opposition, which holds less than 10 percent of Afghanistan, is getting arms from Russia and Iran. The opposition, an alliance united mainly by opposition to the Taliban, accuses neighbouring Pakistan of arming and directing the Taliban.

Pakistan, the only country in the world to have an embassy in Kabul dealing with the Taliban, denies any military involvement with the movement, which sprang from Islamic schools in the border areas of Pakistan.

The United States has led opposition to the Taliban, determined to force them to turn over Osama bin Laden, the Saudi militant accused of directing the destruction of two U.S. embassies from his sanctuary in Afghanistan.

"Let us show the world that Muslims are united in their beliefs and will not bow down to any pressure at any cost," another said. The Taliban say they have smashed major statue collections in several parts of the country since last week when Omar first issued his decree to destroy the statues. The fate of the colossal Buddhas at Bamiyan, hewn out of the rock face at least 15 centuries ago, remains unknown.

A Taliban source told Reuters on Sunday that they had yet to begin destroying the relics. Other officials have said the piece-by-piece demolition was already underway. Protests against the destruction have come from far and near.

Leading industrialised countries, Muslim and Buddhist nations, and the United Nations have urged the Taliban to scrap the plan, saying the statues are part of the world's common historical and cultural heritage.

Reuters



PHOTO / AFP

Clerics from various faiths take part in an anti-Taliban demonstration at New Delhi on Monday.

remote northern headquarters of Faisabad on Sunday and sent to Reuters on Monday. Burhanuddin Rabbani said governments throughout the long history of Afghanistan had preserved the treasures left by their predecessors. "We strongly condemn and oppose the Taliban's anti-national and anti-cultural action in respect to the destruction of Buddhist statues in Afghanistan," said the statement, issued by Rabbani's foreign affairs office.

The Taliban announced a week ago that their leader, Mullah

their religion respected other beliefs. The Taliban maintains its action, which has drawn world-wide condemnation, is needed to help create the world's purest Islamic state.

"Our cultural policy applies to all historical monuments and naturally covers the Buddha's statues of Bamiyan province in Afghanistan which have been left from the Buddhist religion. It is clear that they are not worshipped in Afghanistan," it said.

The Taliban have been campaigning to have international

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 6 MAR 2001

Forces of darkness fight history on the Afghan front

By FARRUKH DHONDY

The American comics of old characterised the fire of big repeating guns onomatopoeically as Buddha-buddha-buddha! Even at the time, I marvelled at the unwitting sacrilege, little realising that one day the forces of darkness in the world would actually employ machine guns to blast to smithereens the two hundred-foot statues of Buddhas which have stood in the mountainous, rocky alcoves of Afghanistan for 2000 years.

The Taliban have ordered the destruction of all idols. They will destroy Buddhist temples, shrines, statues. All traces of the Hindu, Zen and Taoist religions, all traces of the cultural influence of the great civilisations whose representatives crossed these frontiers, from Alexander through to

MOVING FINGER

the Mongolians, the Indians and the Chinese who traversed the silk routes, are to be wiped out. Pol Pot and Attila the Hun ride again, this time in the name of Islam.

Will the rest of the Muslim world join the protest of civilisation against this vandalism? With the burst of machine guns that powders the rock of the Buddhas, these ugly people will pulverise the image and even the fabric of living Islam. The Taliban, who claim to be scholars of Islam and to be following the dictates of the Koran, are, in one mindless and meaningless gesture, declaring their brand of Islam to be an enemy of history. Their history begins and ends in sixth century Arabia. No good saying to them the world is older than that, my friend.

No good, because theirs is the hardened attitude of a revealed religion and their interpretation of it,

which is rejected by other Muslim scholarship and Muslim history, sets Islam against culture. It may be true that Muhammad Ghori and Muhammad Ghaznavi in their armed forays into India destroyed Hindu temples and slaughtered the aristocracy and priesthood of Hindu society. It may be true that some Muslim monarchs or despots saw it as their religious duty to eradicate idolatry from nations which practised it.

But isn't it different in Afghanistan today? The armies of the Taliban are fighting are Muslim. There is no significant population of Buddhists whose souls need saving from these great monuments of the past. It is possible that news of the worship of these idols, by passing Hollywood actors who have converted to Buddhism, has reached Mulla Mohammad Omar and that he is setting out to save their souls from idolatry. Or perhaps the Taliban hope to threaten the US into lifting sanctions using the Buddhas as hostage.

The irony of the situation is that corrupt Pakistani generals have, through greed, acted as the unwitting saviours of Afghanistan's heritage and have smuggled statues, figurines and works of Buddhist or more ancient art to fashionable auction houses and unscrupulous museums for a price. There are some unsung Schindlers in Lahore or Islamabad. Their thefts will disperse the works of art and take them to alien contexts, but it will at least save them

from the vandalism of the fundos.

I can't pretend to begin to know or understand what Koranic sanction these barbarians at the gate think they have for such destruction. It's a question I would dearly like to put to my knowledgeable Muslim friends. Does Islam indeed decree the destruction of all other faiths, or is that belligerence only sanctioned when the Muslims are in power and



A giant Buddha statue in Bamian targeted by the Taliban

in the majority? That is a theological question whose answer is important, but of less consequence than asking how a great religion will co-exist with the realities of human history. It is a question that the Muslim world will have to explore and come to terms with in Afghanistan, Iran, Indonesia, where

the interaction between Saudi-funded Islam and the continuing pre-Islamic civilisations of the islands has resulted in murderous conflict, and in Egypt, where there are those who would dynamite the pyramids given half a chance. Such barbarism can be kept at bay, contained within its borders with difficulty, suppressed from without, but it can only be fundamentally addressed and challenged from within. Islamic theologians of the world, disunite!

MY FORMER boss, one Jeremy Isaacs, was viewing an England vs. India Test on his TV when he called me in for a dressing down on some now-forgotten matter. He is an addict and was watching the screen as we talked.

"Remarkable! What's this boy's name, again?" he asked.

"Shivaramakrishnan," I said.

"His parents weren't taking any chances," he said. The incident comes to mind when I read about the greasy net of hospitality and patronage the Hinduja brothers spread in Britain. Four ministers have been pilloried in the press and asked questions in Parliament about their dealings with Groucho, Harpo and Chico, as a section of the British press has taken to calling them owing to their tendency to pop up unexpectedly in Tory, Liberal Democrat and even Civil Service company.

They are photographed with Thatcher, with Hague, with Paddy Ashdown and anyone else who consents to pose with them. Liberal, Tory, Labour, they aren't taking any chances. The photographs have inspired journalists to refer to the trio as the Piglets, a literary allusion to the snoutish appearance of characters in a nursery story which involves a Big Bad Wolf who blows their house down.

Taliban chief unfazed by outcry

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

KABUL, March 5. - Taliban chief Mulla Mohammad Omar today termed as "drama" the global outcry over the demolition of Buddha relics and urged all Muslims to support him.

He reacted for the first time to the outrage over the demolition drive and declared that the annihilation of Buddhist statues would proceed despite international condemnation and protests from Islamic states.

"Now that we are destroying false idols, the world has made a drama out of this. The Muslims of the world...Should use their common sense," the Taliban militia's radio Shariat quoted him as saying.

"I would like to ask you, do you prefer to be called statue-destroyers or statue-sellers?" he said, adding that the statues, including the giant ancient Buddhas in Bamiyan province,

were only "one per cent" of Afghanistan's historical heritage.

The UN envoy, Mr Pierre Lafrance, arrived in Islamabad empty-handed, admitting his failure to convince Taliban to stop the destruction, adds PTI.

"No, I wasn't able to persuade them. But there are faint hopes that Taliban will save the Buddha statues," he told reporters.

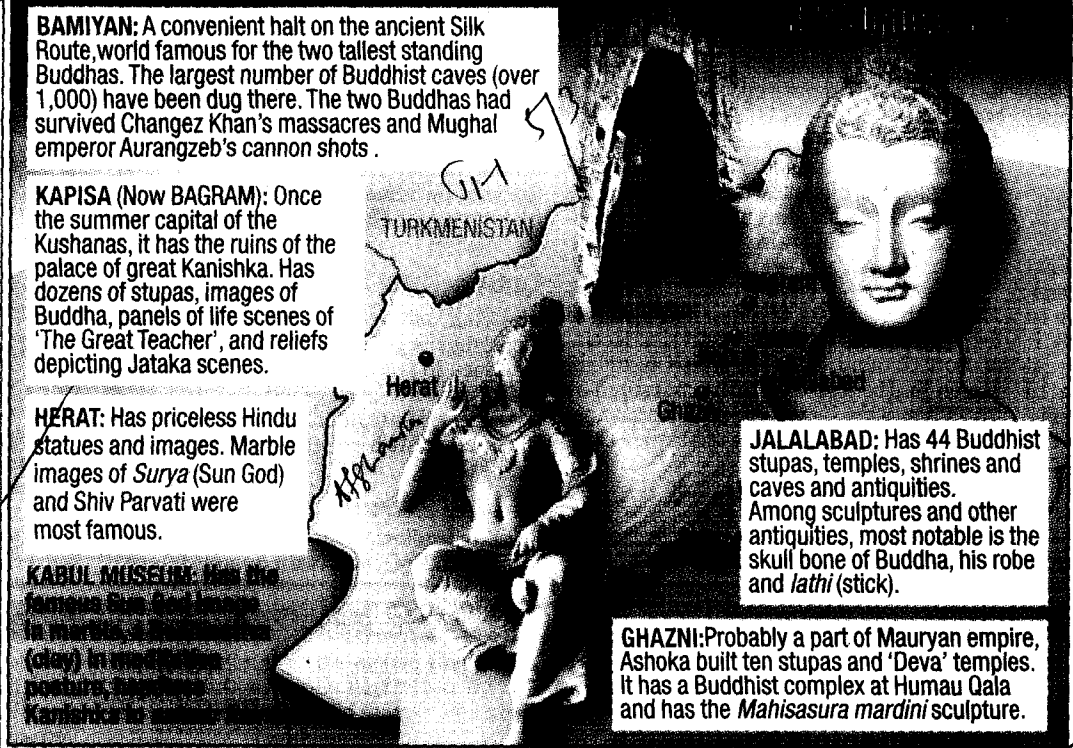
However, Taliban foreign minister Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil, who met Mr Lafrance at Kandahar yesterday, refused to withdraw the edict regarding the statues.

Minorities panel condemns move: The West Bengal Minorities Commission today condemned the destruction and described it as "not only sacrilegious but against all cannons of Islamic principles," adds SNS Kolkata.

Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya condemned the attack, saying "it was an example of Fascism."

THE STATESMAN

MAR 10 1999



BAMIYAN: A convenient halt on the ancient Silk Route, world famous for the two tallest standing Buddhas. The largest number of Buddhist caves (over 1,000) have been dug there. The two Buddhas had survived Changez Khan's massacres and Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's cannon shots.

KAPISA (Now BAGRAM): Once the summer capital of the Kushanas, it has the ruins of the palace of great Kanishka. Has dozens of stupas, images of Buddha, panels of life scenes of 'The Great Teacher', and reliefs depicting Jataka scenes.

HERAT: Has priceless Hindu statues and images. Marble images of *Surya* (Sun God) and *Shiv Parvati* were most famous.

KABUL MUSEUM: Has the famous Sun God image in marble (day) in the past, but now in Kandahar.

JALALABAD: Has 44 Buddhist stupas, temples, shrines and caves and antiquities. Among sculptures and other antiquities, most notable is the skull bone of Buddha, his robe and *lathi* (stick).

GHAZNI: Probably a part of Mauryan empire, Ashoka built ten stupas and 'Deva' temples. It has a Buddhist complex at Humau Qala and has the *Mahisasura mardini* sculpture.

Islamic intellectuals condemn action

The Times of India News Service
NEW DELHI: Over 70 top-ranking Islamic intellectuals from across the world have unanimously condemned the destruction of the famous Buddha statues, including those at Bamiyan, and other idols in Afghanistan under the decree of the ruling Islamic fundamentalist Taliban.

Terming the destruction by guns and rockets as "unwarranted" and "totally un-Islamic", the body of Islamic intellectuals stressed: "Islam orders us to respect the places of worship of other religions. Islam does not allow destruction of religious places of any community."

Describing the Taliban decree as "unfortunate," the intellectuals in a joint statement said, "Historical monuments are the heritage of all mankind and do not belong to any government or people." The demolition was "totally un-Islamic and unwarranted", they said.

The signatories include Fetehpuri Jama Masjid Shahi Imam Mufti Mukarram Ahmad, Islamic Centre president Mualana Waheeduddin Khan, Hamdard University vice-chancellor Syed Hamid, former MP Syed Shahbuddin, Bharati Majlis chairman Javed Habib, Asghar Ali Engineer, Jamia Millia professors Farida Khanum, Zubair Ahmad Farooqi and Shafiq Ahmad Khan Nadwi, London-based Muslim Institute director M Ghayasuddin, Jerusalem-based journalist Khalid Amayreh, Jawaid Qaddus of the University of Michigan, Zafar Iqbal from Wahington, Parwaiz Wahid of the US's Northeastern University, Athens-based journalist Nawab Khan, CM Naim of the University of Chicago, artist Javed Akhtar, and Institute of Islamic and Arab Studies director Zafarul Islam Khan.

Buddha statues reduced to rubble

KABUL: Taliban officials said on Sunday ancient Bamiyan Buddhas were nearly destroyed and ruled out any hope for their preservation ahead of talks with a special United Nations envoy.

Minister of information and culture Mawlawi Qudratullah Jamal said the destruction of "un-Islamic" ancient statues was in progress throughout the country despite international appeals for their preservation.

He said large portions of the Buddha figures in central Bamiyan province, dating back more than 1,500 years, had already been reduced to rubble, along with thousands of other statues throughout the country. "Work is in progress on them. They are massive if you see them closely," he said.

Foreign minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel said the Bamiyan Buddhas would soon be destroyed as he prepared for talks with UNESCO special envoy Pierre Lafrance in the Taliban's southern stronghold of Kandahar. "The edict will be implemented *inshallah* (god willing)," Mutawakel said shortly before Mr Lafrance's arrival.

"We would like to see the UNESCO envoy. It is good that we can explain to him that what we are doing is an internal issue and we do not want to confront the world." The Islamic militia last week began smashing statues around the country to prevent idolatry, but Mr Lafrance said on Saturday there was a "faint glimpse of hope" they could still be saved. He cited conflicting reports from Taliban officials about the extent of the destruction so far and the nature of the order from Taliban supreme leader Mulla Mohammad Omar which authorised the iconoclasm.

In another development, journalists have been barred from visiting the Kabul museum and Bamiyan province where the Taliban have recently engaged in heavy battles with armed opposition forces. Shortly after arriving in Kandahar, Mr Lafrance began meetings with officials, including Mutawakel, UN sources in Kabul said. Buddhism's most prominent leader, the Dalai Lama, said he was "deeply concerned" about the Taliban's attempts to erase Afghanistan's pre-Islamic history. (Agencies)

► See Edit: The Buddha Smiles, Page 10

Rehab plan for Kutch farmers unveiled

The Times of India News Service
GANDHINAGAR: The Keshubhai Patel government on Friday announced a Rs 434.65-crore scheme to rehabilitate farmers affected by the recent earthquake.

The scheme includes a Rs 181.25-crore rehabilitation package, a Rs 117.5-crore package to rebuild farm infrastructure facilities and a Rs 135.9-crore package to provide agricultural equipment.

Announcing this after the cabinet approval, agriculture minister Becharbhai Bhadani admitted, "We have no separate data for Kutch. The scheme is meant for Gujarat. The survey is still on. We

would know the exact amount Kutch will get later." The scheme does not include the animal husbandry package, crucial for Kutch's rural population. Most farmers of the district are dependent on cattle breeding as a major source of income.

The "memorandum on the Quake Damage in Gujarat" submitted to the Centre last month had underlined that "animal husbandry is an important economic activity in the affected areas", suggesting "it is necessary to sustain the animal husbandry infrastructure and ensure that the health of the animal population does not

deteriorate". About 18,600 head of cattle have perished in the quake. The memorandum had worked out a Rs 40-crore scheme for the enhancement of milk production and a Rs 5.3 crore scheme to breed better goats and sheep.

With an estimated 1,45,000 farmers having been affected by the quake, the scheme approved on Friday announced Rs 10,000 for the small and marginal farmer and Rs 15,000 for the others. To rebuild farm facilities destroyed in the quake, those that have suffered complete loss would be given Rs 10,000 each, while the others would get Rs 2,500.

YOU SAID IT by Laxman



If they honestly implement the rule this will be one of the richest states!

The terminators: Taliban destroys Buddha statues

K. J. M. Varma

ISLAMABAD 1 MARCH

DISREGARDING THE international outcry over its decision to destroy the ancient Bamiyan Buddha statues and other heritage artefacts, Afghanistan's Taliban on Thursday began pounding the statues to pieces in various cities by using canons and battle tanks.

Afghanistan radio quoted Taliban information minister Quadratullah Jamal as telling reporters in Kabul that on Thursday Taliban started destroying statues in Kandahar, Bamiyan, Herat and Kabul museum following a fresh decree from its chief, Mullah Omar.

"We will use all means, including canon and tanks to destroy the statues," the Taliban information minister said.

The destruction started even as Taliban's close ally Pakistan, under considerable pressure from various Saarc as well as several western countries, appealed to the Taliban leadership to protect the rich historical monuments.

"We appeal to the Afghan government to take measures to fully protect Afghanistan's rich historical monuments, sites and artefacts which are part of world's cultural heritage," the official spokesman said.

Heads of missions of several countries including Sri Lanka and Japan met Pakistan and Taliban officials to stop the decision to destroy the statues. The decree for the destruction of statues was



LAND OF INFIDELS: Afghan military trucks park under the shadow of a huge Buddha statue in Bamiyan. — AFP

issued after consultations with religious leaders and Taliban Islamic Supreme Court, the minister said.

The orders for destruction have been issued "because these statues have remained as a shrine of infidels and they are worshipping these statues and probably it will be changed for shrines again, while god almighty is the real shrine and all the false shrines should be smashed," the decree said.

Omar had directed the ministries of promotion of virtue and prevention of vice, information and culture to destroy all the statues in order to implement the judgments of Ulema and Supreme Court.

— PTI //

The Economic Times

5 MAR 2001

No recognition for Taliban after demolition

BY JACK REDDEN

Islamabad, March 4: The Taliban's hopes for transformation from a band of Islamic zealots to internationally recognised government of Afghanistan lie as shattered as the historic statues they have labelled un-Islamic.

"I'm sure the Taliban would like international recognition," Dimitri Loundras, the Greek ambassador to Pakistan and head of a committee dealing with the Taliban on archaeological issues for the UN, commented bitterly. "But that will never come to them." If the Taliban did not realise the anger they would trigger by ordering the

destruction of all statues from Afghanistan's rich past — "idols" in their interpretation of Islam — they also have shown no willingness to compromise.

Taliban's culture minister Qudratullah Jamal exulted on Saturday over the ease with which the destruction had been carried out so far. He talked of a piece-by-piece demolition of the two soaring statues of Buddha in Bamiyan — the tallest in the world and Afghanistan's best-known archaeological treasure.

"They are putting themselves beyond the pale," one senior diplomat said. "In the 21st century there are some things that are just not acceptable." World

outrage has gone far beyond western countries to encompass those with large Buddhist populations and even Muslim countries alarmed at the image of Islam spread by the Taliban.

"We feel we were betrayed," Masamai Kinefuchi, a Japanese diplomat in Islamabad, said on Friday at a news conference called to condemn the campaign of destruction. A stream of diplomats, including Francesc Vendrell, an envoy of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, have discussed the statues with one member of the Taliban leadership only to find another was saying elsewhere there would be no halt in the destruction. The

Taliban say they are merely carrying out the edict of their reclusive leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, to enforce an Islamic ban on images of living things — part of their efforts to create the world's purest Muslim state.

"It has nothing to do with a give and take policy," Mr Jamal said, rejecting speculation the Taliban have struck out wildly because of the world's refusal to accept them. "We deem it a must to finish them all because of our religious responsibility."

But the decision to proceed with their iconoclastic campaign reversed promises made by Omar himself to protect the pre-Islamic treasures of Afghanistan

where invaders from Alexander the Great to Tamerlane left a priceless legacy. "I'm sure the Taliban authority are in a difficult position at this moment because of the sanctions of the UN Security Council," said Mr Loundras, who held talks with the Taliban in Kabul on the day the destruction order was issued.

"Maybe they just do it to show they have a reaction, or because there is internal strife," he said. Certainly the Taliban feel isolated, perhaps concluding even before the latest disastrous publicity that they would never win acceptance as the legitimate government away from their opponents. (Reuters)

VOICES FROM PAKISTAN

Leave the relics alone

Pakistan has requested the Taliban government twice in two days (March 1 and 2) to reconsider its decision to destroy all historic Buddhist statues in the areas under its control in Afghanistan.

It has been joined by the international community, especially India, Iran and the UN, Unesco, in asking for the Buddhist relics to be spared. Sri Lanka also chipped in with an appeal. Unfortunately, all these appeals seem have fallen on deaf ears in Kabul.

Dawn, Karachi

A question of tolerance

True to their unpredictable reputation, Afghanistan's ruling Taliban have once again sprung a surprise on the world and earned renewed international hostility just when it appeared that they had scored a major diplomatic success by strictly implementing a ban on opium and poppy-cultivation. All the good work done by them by ensuring that no poppy was cultivated seems to have been

forgotten now that the focus of attention has shifted to the fate of Afghanistan's glorious cultural heritage. This avoidable crisis has erupted at a time when thousands of Afghans displaced by drought and war are living in unbelievable misery both inside and outside Afghanistan. It is indeed tragic that concern for human beings still alive has been overshadowed by the international outcry to save stone-made statues.

The News, Jang Group

Hue and cry

In the midst of appeals from all over the world, Taliban are reported to have started implementing their decision to demolish all statues in Afghanistan. Reports suggest that Taliban soldiers are under instructions to carry out operation for the purpose. Pakistan expressed concern over Taliban's decision to destroy some of the historical artefacts and appealed to Kabul to take measures to fully protect Afghanistan's heritage.

Pakistan Observer

Taliban reject Iran's offer to safeguard Buddha statues

Islamabad, March 4: Taliban foreign minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakil on Sunday rejected an Iranian offer to take Afghanistan's historic Buddha statues into safe-keeping.

The rejection overshadowed a visit by Unesco envoy Pierre Lafrance, who left Islamabad for Afghanistan on Sunday on a mission to save the statues from destruction by the Taliban. A senior official of the Iranian foreign ministry made the offer to Mr Mutawakil by phone this morning, the Afghan foreign minister told the Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press agency.

Mr Mutawakil rejected both Iran's offer to buy the statues from Afghanistan or remove them to Iran for safe-keeping, saying both options were in conflict with Islamic teach-

ing. "We accept it is our duty to protect archaeological heritage," Mr Mutawakil said, "but Islam is against keeping statues. Hence the order to destroy them."

He continued: "The question of removing them would have arisen if we did not have museums. As for buying the statues, Islam teaches that one should not wish on another Muslim something that you would not wish on yourself — and both our countries are Muslim."

While Mr Lafrance was meeting in Islamabad with a diplomatic representative of the regime on Saturday, the Taliban minister in charge of culture vowed the destruction would continue. Mr Lafrance expressed his anger and demanded an immediate stop to the destruction. (DPA)

THE ASIAN AGE

- 5 MAR 2001

No reason to stop destruction, UNESCO told

KABUL, MARCH 4. The UNESCO special envoy, Mr. Pierre Lafrance, who yesterday said there was a "faint glimpse of hope" that the Bamiyan statues and other ancient Buddhist relics in Afghanistan could still be saved, today failed to persuade the Taliban militia to stop the demolition.

The Taliban Foreign Minister, Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil, said he had detailed discussions with Mr. Lafrance in Kandahar, but could see no reason to stop the destruction, the private Afghan Islamic Press reported.

"I do not see any chance to change our decision and stop the demolition of these statues," he

was quoted as saying after the talks.

Mr. Lafrance, former French ambassador to Iran and Pakistan, was sent on Friday from Europe on an emergency mission to persuade the Taliban to stop destroying the precious statues.

Taliban officials said the Bamiyan Buddhas were nearly destroyed and ruled out any hope for their preservation. The Minister of Information and Culture, Mawlawi Qudratullah Jamal, said the destruction of "un-Islamic" ancient statues was continuing throughout the country. He said large portions of the Bamiyan Buddhas had already been re-

duced to a rubble. "Work is in progress on them. They are massive if you see them closely."

"We are not against culture, but we don't believe in these things. They are against Islam," Mr. Muttawakil told AP in a telephonic interview from southern Kandahar, headquarters of the Taliban.

Iran offer spurned

Meanwhile, Mr. Muttawakil rejected an Iranian offer to take the Buddha statues into safe-keeping. A senior official of the Iranian Foreign Ministry made the offer to Mr. Muttawakil by phone this morning. The Afghan Foreign Minister told the Pakistan-based

Afghan Islamic Press. Mr. Muttawakil rejected both Iran's offer to buy the statues from Afghanistan or remove them to Iran for safe-keeping, saying both options were in conflict with Islamic teaching.

"We accept it is our duty to protect the archaeological heritage... but Islam is against keeping statues,"

He continued: "The question of removing them would have arisen if we did not have museums. As for buying the statues, Islam teaches that one should not wish on another Muslim something that you would not wish on yourself — and both our countries are Muslim." — AFP, DPA

THE MINIST

5 MAR 2000

By Jyotirmaya Sharma

The Taliban is a state of mind, ours as much as theirs

For every Mullah Muhammad Omar in Afghanistan, there is a Giriraj Kishore in India

THE pro-Soviet leftists in the 1970s wanted to de-Islamise Afghanistan. The Afghans resented their atheism. Faith for them was a symbol of personal, as well as cultural identity. This gave birth to a religious war or jihad against the Soviets. For the Americans, the mujahideen were not terrorists at that point of time: they were freedom-fighters. Communism, nationalism and short-sightedness produced the Taliban.

In India, politics masquerades as religiosity and religion has got politicised. The Taliban and the Sangh Parivar are, at one level, empirical entities. At another level, they are states of mind. Intolerance, destruction, violence and irrationality come as naturally to them as breathing. For every Mulla Muhammad Omar in Afghanistan, there is a corresponding Giriraj Kishore in India. Similarly, for every felling of the Bamiyan Buddha, there is a parallel in the destruction of the Babri Masjid in India. The Buddha looks on, amused.

It is the politics of 'friend and foe' which has brought this

about. And nationalism. Exclusivity, fear of complexity and plurality as well. Why get so hysterical over the destruction of a few statues in Afghanistan? Why not get equally charged by the razing to the ground of the Babri Masjid? Because power is an addiction and can only be attained through dividing people, by shedding blood, by vitiating every gentle norm in society.

The Talibanised minds of the self-appointed saviours of Hindus have no concern for monuments and heritage either. Almost every museum in India is a

super-glorified godown; invariably, every monument has been converted into a spittoon and a urinal. Nobody but a handful of idle moralisers are bothered. Heritage is neither 'mine' nor 'theirs', it is ours. But we are either oblivious or resentful of the past. This is self-hatred. Why do we hate ourselves? Because we fear complexity and plurality.

It is unofficial modernity—represented by the former Soviets and the present-day Americans—which has pushed the young men in Afghanistan into a kind of medievalism. Every

Why get so hysterical over the destruction of statues in Afghanistan? Why not get equally charged by the razing of the Babri Masjid? Because power is an addiction and can only be attained through dividing people and by shedding blood

tyrant, bigot and zealot has a hit-list where culture figures at the very top of this list. For every tyrant carries with him two essential objects: a gun and a pocket calculator. Culture, on the other hand, unsettles. It holds a normative mirror in front of us. Talibanisation has nothing to do with the form of government prevalent in a country. One look at the Shiv Sena activists on Valentine's Day rubbishes all the virtues attributed to democracy.

The Buddha stands smiling at the spectacle of his statues being bombed. An earnest reporter

asks for a soundbite, that supreme form of reductionism. The Buddha obliges. He says, "It is by destroying, stilling, stopping all imaginings, all supposings, all thoughts of 'I am the doer', 'Mine is the doer', all latent 'I am', that a Truth-finder is freed with no residuum for rebirth remaining... You would like to possess something that was permanent, stable, eternal, not liable to change, that would stand fast like unto the eternal. But can you see any such possession? Neither can I."



Is there an international law which could have prevented the Taliban from vandalising historical monuments?

Opinion is divided. R. P. Anand, professor of international law at Jawaharlal Nehru University, says there is no provision under international law which can challenge a sovereign country's right to do whatever it wants within its own borders. "The UNESCO charter does have a clause which says that world heritage must be protected but it does not have any legal binding," says Anand.

His colleague, V. S. Mani, disagrees. There is a universal treaty called the UNESCO Convention on Protection of Cultural Property During Armed Conflict, which was signed in 1954 by most countries including Afghanistan. There are also two international conventions: the UNESCO Declaration for Cultural Heritage, which makes it obligatory for all signatories to protect places of cultural heritage; and the United Nations convention on tolerance.

"All these come under international law," says Mani.

So, the Taliban can be held accountable. The hitch: before filing such a case in the International Court of Justice, the parties concerned should agree to accept the court's jurisdiction. Will the Taliban agree to this? Unlikely.

What steps can the international community take?

Mani: Under the 1954 treaty, the world community can either use diplomatic means or go for the UN option: the Security Council could pass a resolution to use force or other measures to prevent such acts.

Anand: The international community can only request the Taliban

community take?

Mani: Under the 1954 treaty, the world community can either use diplomatic means or go for the UN option: the Security Council could pass a resolution to use force or other measures to prevent such acts.

Anand: The international community can only request the Taliban

community take? Mani: Under the 1954 treaty, the world community can either use diplomatic means or go for the UN option: the Security Council could pass a resolution to use force or other measures to prevent such acts.

Anand: The international community can only request the Taliban

Why is the world helpless?

Because there appears to be no international law to check the Taliban's acts of vandalism. *Mona Mehta reports*

age the Taj Mahal?

Mani: In normal conditions, the 1954 treaty does not apply. Take the destruction of the Babri Masjid. It was the responsibility of the government of the day to take care of the site. A sovereign country is subject to some obligations under international law. Preserving the cultural heritage is one such obligation. In case someone tries to damage a site of such historical and cultural importance as the Taj, people can approach the supreme court, citing infringement of human rights.

Anand: In the 19th century, the

Britishers had turned the Taj into a stable. When you have the sovereign right over a territory, you have unlimited freedom, at least theoretically, to do anything you like. No court of international law can do anything to challenge your right. The Taliban has issued a decree in its own territory, over a monument in its own territory, so there is nothing one can do about it legally.

As for the Taj, the local people can take the issue to the supreme court and it can issue directives to prevent such a deed or punish the perpetrators of such an act.

The Taliban's Ten Commandments

- * Women you should not step outside your residence. If you go outside the house, you should not be like women who use to go with fashionable clothes, wearing much cosmetics and appearing in front of every man before the coming of Islam.
 - * Female patients should go to female physicians. In case a male physician is needed, the female patient should be accompanied by close relatives. During examination, the female patients and male physicians both should be dressed in the Islamic 'hijab' (veil)... Male physicians should not touch or see the other parts of female patients except for the affected part.
 - * To prevent shaving of the beard and its cutting. After one and a half months of being observed with a shaved and/or cut beard, he should be arrested and imprisoned until his beard gets bushy.
 - * To prevent keeping pigeons and playing with birds. Within ten days of being notified, this habit/hobby should stop. After the ten days, this should be monitored and the pigeons and any other playing birds should be killed.
 - * To prevent kite-flying. Kite shops in the city should be abolished.
 - * To prevent idolatry. Pictures/portraits should be abolished in vehicles, shops, hotels and elsewhere. The monitors should tear up all pictures.
 - * To prevent shaving of the beard and its cutting. After one and a half months of being observed with a shaved and/or cut beard, he should be arrested and imprisoned until his beard gets bushy.
 - * To prevent keeping pigeons and playing with birds. Within ten days of being notified, this habit/hobby should stop. After the ten days, this should be monitored and the pigeons and any other playing birds should be killed.
 - * To prevent kite-flying. Kite shops in the city should be abolished.
 - * To prevent idolatry. Pictures/portraits should be abolished in vehicles, shops, hotels and elsewhere. The monitors should tear up all pictures.
 - * To prevent British and American hairstyle. People with long hair should be arrested and taken to the Religious Police department to shave off their hair. The criminal has to pay the barber.
 - * To prevent wearing ladies' clothes and taking female body measures by tailor. If women or fashion magazines are seen in the shop, the tailor should be imprisoned.
- (Excerpts from 'Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia' by Ahmed Rashid. Taken from a translation handed to Western agencies for implementation. The grammar and spellings are reproduced here as they appeared in the original)

'A page of history has been torn'

By Maneesh Pandey

NEW DELHI: For Indian archaeologists, it was a dark day. The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the puritanical Taliban militia has come as a

has been torn'

By Maneesh Pandey

NEW DELHI: For Indian archaeologists, it was a dark day. The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the puritanical Taliban militia has come as a personal blow to those who've been associated with this country and it's rich cultural heritage: through their writings or as part of restoration teams involved in preserving them. And they are all pained to see the 'Great Teacher' facing Taliban tanks and rockets.

As M. N. Deshpande, former director-general (D-G) of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), says, "A page of history has been torn from the world of civilisation."

The veteran archaeologist still remembers the day he went with Atal Behari Vajpayee (then external affairs minister) to hand over the restored Bamiyan Buddhas to the Afghanistan government. Till today, he took pride that India was among the nine foreign archaeological missions stationed there in the 1960s, and earned special appreciation from the then Afghan government for restoring their heritage, particularly the tallest-standing Bamiyan Buddhas.

"The neighbourly bond was cemented further. It boosted prospects for cultural tourism and within a short span of time, money started pouring in from the tourists," says Deshpande.

"It was not always work, but sometimes a picnic, too," remembers R. Sengupta, an archaeological expert and head of the ASI restoration mission in Bamiyan. He becomes emotional as he recalls those "beautiful days" of Afghan hospitality and the wonderful delicacies that he savoured.

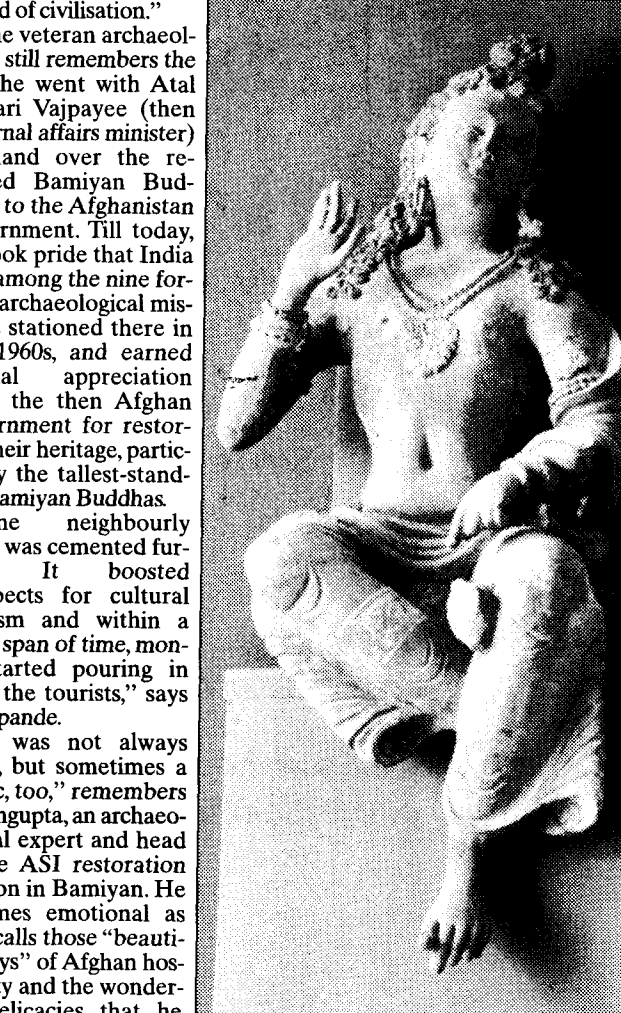
M. C. Joshi, another former D-G of ASI, calls it the "most unfortunate incident" and a blow to the UNESCO's theme of "global heritage". He questions the Taliban's interpretation of Islam, and says the uncultured step by the Taliban is contradictory to the tenets of Islam. "The Taliban militia has totally ignored the fact that even Islamic invaders like Ghazni or Khalji never touched any monument. They were only against worshipping, saying it was un-Islamic. Deserted temples or monuments were never touched. That's why Ellora survived even after being so close

Donations, drug money sustain the Taliban...

...but sanctions, along with new laws, like the toughened British law that came into force last month, have put the lid on Kabul's activities, says **Mahendra Ved**

money sustain the Taliban...

...but sanctions, along with new laws, like the toughened British law that came into force last month, have put the lid on Kabul's activities, says **Mahendra Ved**



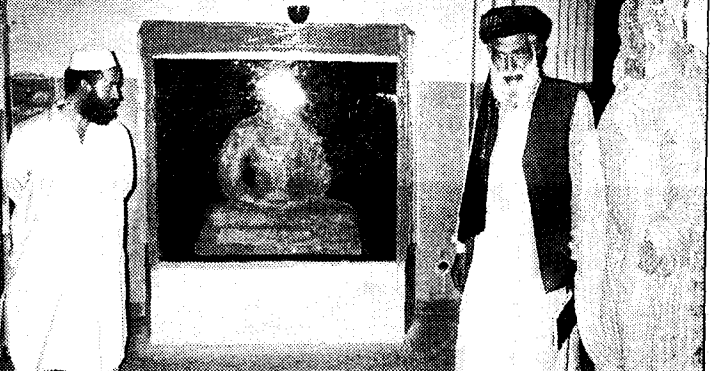
STONED GLORY: A 1963 picture of a statue from a Buddhist monastery in Afghanistan bears silent witness to the country's pre-Islamic history. Afghanistan's hardline rulers ignored world pleas last week and began destroying all statues, their logic being that these insult Islam

Archaeologists in the neighbourhood have also been quick to react. Senake Bandaranayake, Sri Lanka's high commissioner in New Delhi and an archaeologist himself, still hopes that the international outcry will yield some fruitful results. "That will at least help in restoring some fine specimens of man-made artefacts and sculptures for humanity."

Who are these holy warriors?

The Taliban: It comprises the Islamic militia of Afghanistan and students of madrassas who became extremists. Today, they've captured more than two-thirds of Afghanistan, which was in a state of virtual disintegration before 1994.

- How they began:** In September 1994, the Taliban appeared on the Afghan political scene, rescuing a Pakistani convoy of 30 trucks heading for Central Asia.
- January 1995:** The Taliban captures the province of Ghazni.
- April 1995:** Omar is declared the Amir-ul-Momineen (leader of all Muslims).
- September 1995:** The Taliban captures Laghman, Sarobi and Kabul after Afghan government troops retreat, fearing heavy civilian casualties. The Taliban kills and hangs former Afghan President Najibullah, along with his brother, Shahpur Ahmadzai. Sebghatullah Mujadedi, the leader of the National Islamic Salvation of Afghanistan, supports the Taliban takeover of Kabul.
- October 1995:** The Taliban forces people to pray five times a day in Kabul and pass a law saying women should not work. Deputy foreign minister of Afghanistan Abdul Ghafoorzai denounces the Taliban at the U.N.
- December 1995:** Omar tells the Taliban over Kabul Radio to relax its harsh treatment of people in Kabul.
- September 1995:** The Taliban captures Laghman, Sarobi and Kabul after Afghan government troops retreat, fearing heavy civilian casualties. The Taliban kills and hangs former Afghan President Najibullah, along with his brother, Shahpur Ahmadzai. Sebghatullah Mujadedi, the leader of the National Islamic Salvation of Afghanistan, supports the Taliban takeover of Kabul.
- October 1995:** The Taliban forces people to pray five times a day in Kabul and pass a law saying women should not work. Deputy foreign minister of Afghanistan Abdul Ghafoorzai denounces the Taliban at the U.N.
- December 1995:** Omar tells the Taliban over Kabul Radio to relax its harsh treatment of people in Kabul.

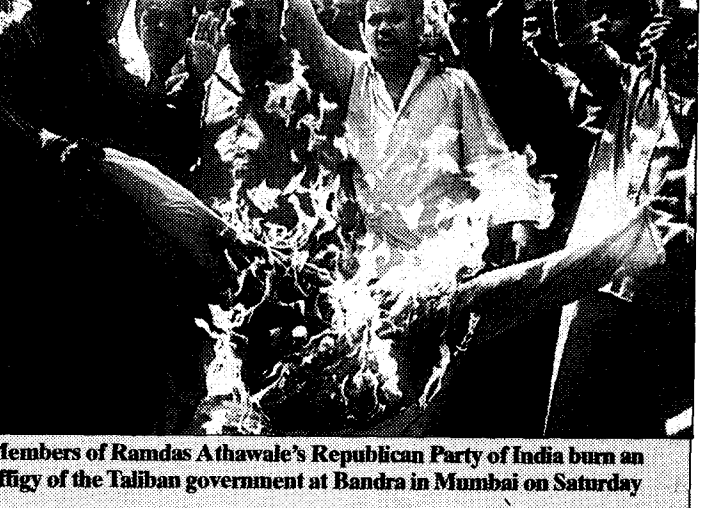


JUST A YEAR AGO: Two Taliban members pose next to Buddha statues in the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul on Independence Day on August 18 last year. These might perhaps be the last pictures of the famed relics

September 26, 1996: The Taliban takes over Kabul. Its leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, aged 39, has never been photographed or met Western diplomats and journalists. He's also known as the Amir-ul-Momineen or Commander of the Faithful. A ten-member interim ruling council or Supreme Shura is the most powerful ruling body and is based in Kandahar.

The others: The Taliban leadership can boast of being the most disabled in the world today. A leg of Taliban governor of Kandahar Mullah Mohammad Hassan is a wooden peg, in the style of Long John Silver, the pirate in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. Hassan lost his leg in 1989 on the Kandahar front, just before Soviet troops began their withdrawal from Afghanistan. Mullah Omar lost his right eye in 1989 when a rocket exploded close by. Justice minister Nuruddin Turabi and former foreign minister Mohammed Ghaus are also one-eyed. Mayor of Kabul Abdul Majid has a leg and two fingers missing.

Other leaders, including military commanders, have similar disabilities. The Taliban's wounds are a constant reminder of 20 years of war, which has killed over 1.5 million people and devastated the country.



Members of Ramdas Athavale's Republican Party of India burn an effigy of the Taliban government at Bandra in Mumbai on Saturday

Confirmed Reservation for Wait-listed Passengers
One more ADDITIONAL SPECIAL TRAIN to VARANASI
to meet the overwhelming response to earlier Additional Special Trains

VARANASI SPECIAL
on 7th March, 2001

Passengers having wait-listed tickets for Allahabad - Varanasi direction for 5th, 6th or 7th March, 2001 on Train nos. 1027, 1067, 1071, 1093, 2141, 2165, 3004, 3202, 3448, 5217 or 5219 can opt for reserved berths on 141 A Dn. Lokmanya Tilak (T) - Varanasi Additional Special Train

Departure from LT (T) at 0030 hrs. on 07.03.2001 (i.e. just after midnight of 06.03.2001)

Arrival at Varanasi at 0420 hrs. on 08.03.2001

Halts: Thane, Kalyan, Igatpuri, Nasik Road, Mannod, Bhusaval, Itarsi, Jabalpur, Katni, Satna, Allahabad, Jangra and Bhadohi.

TIMINGS	141A Dn. Station	
	Time	Station
0030	D	Lokmanya Tilak (T)
0820	A	Bhusaval
0830	D	
1710	A	Jabalpur
1720	D	
0110	A	Allahabad
0140	D	
0420	A	Varanasi

Reserved Accommodation: Sleeper Class only. 720 berths in each train (There will be no AC coaches).

Clerkage: Rs.10/- per passenger.

Composition: 10 Sleeper Class, 6 Unreserved General 1st Class and 2 General 1st Class-cum-Guards Brake Vans.

Procedure for Reservation: Passengers having wait-listed Sleeper Class tickets in any of the trains indicated above for Allahabad, Varanasi and for other stations where this Special halts and intending to get confirmed reservation on the Additional Special Train should get their tickets revalidated at any of the following reservation centres: Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (Counter No. 21) • Lokmanya Tilak (T) (Counter No. 07) • Kalyan (Counter No. 09)

Hurry! Reservation on first-come-first-served basis. Reservation open from Monday 5th March, 2001 from 0900 hrs.

For Last Minute Passengers: After accommodating the wait-listed passengers, if any berths are still available, the same will be allotted to last minute passengers just before departure of the trains at the ticket booth on the platform.

Unreserved Accommodation: 560 seats in General Second Class.

CENTRAL RAILWAY
Customer service — first and foremost

Taliban: Another Frankenstein's monster

IN A world full of horrors, there is no shortage of political barbarism. Remember how Idi Amin would eat the livers of his enemies after he had killed them? Or how the Francophile Emperor Bokassa would kill (and, according to some versions, eat) small children? Compared to such abominations, the destruction of Buddha statues by Afghanistan's Taliban regime may not seem particularly horrific.

But the fanatically-pursued destruction of pre-Islamic heritage is just one symptom of the Taliban's barbarism. As Pramit Pal Chaudhuri pointed out in yesterday's HT, things have got so bad in Afghanistan that 'statue-exporters' (all non-Muslims except Jews and Christians) have to paint their roofs yellow and wear bits of yellow cloth at all times to remind them of their inferior status. The way in which Hindus and Sikhs are treated in Afghanistan is uncomfortably reminiscent of the manner in which the Nazis treated Jews.

Not that Muslims have it much easier. If you are caught thieving they cut your arm off. If the militia don't like you, they can summarily execute you on the spot — no questions asked. No woman is allowed to wear white because this is the colour of the Taliban's flag. Lakhs of Afghans have no water but the regime does not care about the terrible drought; it is too busy dynamiting statues. Anyone caught committing a homosexual act is crushed under a large stone as punishment. (Presumably this is not rigidly enforced. Otherwise, given the proclivities of Afghan

men — Mujahideen included — they would have run out of boulders, rocks and even small stones, by now.)

The sad state of today's Afghanistan shows us what happens when politicians either misuse religion or pretend that terrorists are freedom fighters.

Take Indra Gandhi, for instance. She armed and trained the LTTE on the grounds that it was a legitimate political organisation. Not only is the sub-continent still paying the price of that blunder, but the LTTE eventually killed her own son. And she propped up Jai-Ram Singh Bhindranwale as a religious counter to the Akalis. The consequences wrecked Punjab for over a decade and she paid for the mistake with her life.

But why blame Mrs Gandhi alone? The main reason why South Asia is in such a mess today is because America made exactly the same mistakes as her. If the LTTE were the illegitimate offspring of her Sri Lanka policy, then the Taliban are the logical consequence of Ronald Reagan's Afghanistan policy. And if Bhindranwale was her Frankenstein, then Osama bin Laden is the monster created by American policymakers.

Much of what is wrong with our region today — especially the barbaric rise of the Taliban — is the consequence of superpower rivalry in the Eighties. Over the winter of 1979-80, the Russian army entered Afghanistan. It was a foolish decision and the US was quick to see that the situation had the potential to grow into the Soviet Union's version of the Vietnam war.

President Reagan and his CIA Director William Casey decided to tie the Russians down in Afghanistan by financing, arming and organising so-called resistance organisations using Zia-ul-Haq's Pakistan as a staging point. The General was delighted. Not only would his regime have access to American arms and funds, he would also win the undivided attention of the White House.

Over the next decade, the US poured billions into Afghanistan through the Pakistan funnel. According to Bob Woodward's *Veil*, Pakistan boasted the world's biggest CIA station and its army (along with US 'advisers') was used to train the resistance. Because there were no ideological issues involved, the resistance was organised on religious lines: the soldiers of Islam (the Mujahideen) fighting their *jihad* against the Godless Russian communists.

In the short-term, the strategy worked. The Afghan war sapped the Soviet Union of money and morale. Eventually, the Russians withdrew in disgrace — and the cost of war played a major role in the collapse of the Soviet Union.

But in the long-term, this strategy devastated the region and eventually rebounded on America. Every single party involved in the battle — and even those on the fringes like India — paid a heavy price. The people of Afghanistan, of course, suffered the most. Ever since the Russians left, there have been one untold million deaths, and, ending up with a million or so Mujahideen

COUNTERPOINT

Vir Sanghvi



iban, drawn from the ranks of the Mujahideen trained in Pakistan under the auspices of the US.

Pakistan paid nearly as significant a price. The easy availability of arms and trained assassins destroyed law and order in large parts of the country. A parallel economy based on the opium poppy cultivated by the Afghans (the country has 72 per cent of the world's crop) and refined into heroin by the Pakistanis, took over from the legal Zia and Reagan to fight the Russians. The Islamic forces unleashed by unbalanced the secular order in Pakistan. And eventually, that unhappy country came to the present pass where regimes collapse overnight and it goes from tyrant to crook to dictator. A bankrupt Pakistan now has only two exports: heroin and terrorism.

India has also lost out. Once the Americans moved on in 1988-89, Pakistan had to find something to do with the terrorists trained for the Afghan operation. Its solution was to send them to Kashmir — it is no coincidence that the Kashmir militancy began just as the war against the Russians was ending in Afghanistan. Nor it is accidental that the so-called Kashmiri militants (so-called because many of them are not Kashmiris at all) frame their opposition to India in the language of religious war, *jihad*, Mujahideen etc.

The US has also lost out. The people of Afghanistan recognise that their country was no more than a theatre for the American war against Russia and hate the US for it. This hatred is epitomised

by the very Mujahideen the Americans created out of nothing. Comprised in the main of illiterate, unwashed peasants and tribes, people who were told to follow religious leaders for the *jihad* against the Russians, the likes of the Taliban now swallow everything that any mad mullah may decree.

Sometimes the mullahs tell them to destroy Buddha statues and persecute Hindus. But more often than not, they tell them to attack that den of sin and un-Islamic practices: the United States. Osama bin Laden, for instance, was a rich Saudi youth who got sucked into the Afghan conflict by the American-inspired rhetoric of a *jihad*. Once he had seen off the Russians, he ran out of things to do. He now spends his time sending terrorists to Kashmir and blowing up American embassies.

The Americans now tell us that these people are dangerous. They frown at the term Mujahideen, once glorified by innumerable Hollywood blockbusters, and say that *jihad* is a global menace. They declare that the very acts they once trained the Mujahideen to perform in Afghanistan — blowing up government buildings, taking out inconvenient politicians etc. — are an affront to civilisation.

They appear to see no irony in this. But the biggest loser has been the image of Islam. The Taliban are God's gift to the VHP. They conform to every RSS caricature of Muslims: they are fanatical, murderous, insensitive and uncivilised. It is much easier to convince people that a *mandir* was destroyed by invaders who then built

the Babri Masjid now, than it was before the Taliban blasted the Buddha statues. Internationally too, more and more people in the West are now unable to say the word 'Islamic' without adding 'fundamentalist' to it. The entirely unfair image of Muslims as violent fanatics has taken firm hold.

That makes it all the more important for us to realise that it is individuals and groups that are evil, not entire races, countries or religion. However much support he may have commanded at his peak, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale did not represent the Sikh psyche; he represented himself. Similarly, just because the LTTE are terrorist murderers, it does not follow that all Sri Lankans or all Tamils are blood-thirsty. And of course, just because Dara Singh burnt Graham Staines and his two children alive, it does not follow that Hindus are murderous pyromaniacs.

The roots of all these actions lay not in race or in religion; they lay in politics. So it is with the Taliban. The same Afghans who now destroy idols were happy to preserve them 20 years ago. The Pakistani generals who send terrorists to Kashmir are sons and grandsons of people our parents and grandparents were friends with in the Partition days.

If there is a lesson in the barbarism of the Taliban, it is this: whenever politicians base their appeal on ethnicity or religion rather than ideas, everybody suffers. Today it is the Buddha statues; yesterday it was the Babri masjid. Who knows what it will be tomorrow?

The Taliban are God's gift to the VHP. They conform to every RSS caricature of Muslims: they are fanatical, murderous, insensitive and uncivilised

Vandalising a sacred heritage

The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas was a deliberate act of vandalism by the Taliban to provoke the international community, says B. MURALIDHAR REDDY.

THE TALIBAN is back in the news. It threatened to destroy all statues in Afghanistan including the famous Bamiyan Buddhas. And, despite worldwide protests, it did. 'Operation history demolition' began on Thursday following a decree by the Taliban supremo, Mullah Mohammad Omar, last Monday. The order declared the statues, including the world's tallest standing Buddha, as insulting to Islam. This logic is a reflection of the bigotry and medieval mindset of the Taliban. The whole world, including Pakistan, tried in vain to impress upon the zealots that the decree turns the spirit of tolerance enjoined upon by Islam on its head.

"Because God is one God and these statues are there to be worshipped and that is wrong. They should be destroyed so that they are not worshipped now or in the future," read the decree.

This is not the first time the Taliban has shaken the conscience of the world. There have been decrees galore in the past, particularly related to women, that disturbed the world community. Remember the punishment meted out to a football team from Pakistan. The players were sent back with their heads shaven for wearing shorts — supposedly un-Islamic conduct. But the latest decree clearly takes the cake.

It was a deliberate and calculated act of vandalism by the Taliban to provoke the international community. Perhaps it was intended to convey to the world the 'nuisance value' of the regime that claims to control 95 per cent of Afghanistan. May be it was the Taliban's revenge for the additional sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council. And what a revenge!

The timing seems to suggest that the Taliban wanted to send out a clear signal of its utter contempt for world opinion. The decree came when an international delegation was in Kabul seeking assurances about the preservation of Afghanistan's heritage. The delegation, consisting of the

Italian and Greek Ambassadors based in Islamabad and members of the Islamabad-based Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage, had gone there in the wake of reports in the press that priceless artifacts in the Kabul museum faced serious threat of ruin. Much of the museum suffered in the civil war in Afghanistan after the Soviets beat a retreat. Archaeologists were concerned over reports that many of the artifacts were stolen and sold in the open market.

The delegation was assured by the Taliban Information and Culture Minister, Qudratullah Jalal, that the reports about the state of the Kabul museum were baseless propaganda. And then came the bombshell from Mullah Omar. The most famous are the two ancient Buddha statues carved into a sandstone mountain in central Bamiyan province. They stand 175 and 114 feet tall and date back to the second century A.D.

Passionate appeals from all over the world to spare them had

no impact on the Taliban. The condemnation of the decree and the request made by the United Nations Secretary, Mr. Kofi Annan, only evoked a typical response from the Taliban Foreign Minister, Mr. Muttawakil. "You who have lived in Afghanistan, have you ever seen any decision of the Islamic Emirate reversed?"

The diplomatic community in Islamabad led by Sri Lanka made frantic efforts to prevail upon the Taliban to re-think. First the diplomats explored the option of taking up the matter with the military regime in Pakistan in the hope that it would persuade Kabul to respect the international sentiment. When Islamabad threw up its hands, some directly approached the Afghanistan mission despite the fact that they have no diplomatic relations with the Taliban. Not only did the Taliban Ambassador defend the decree of Mullah Omar as irreversible but he also wondered why destruction of mere 'statues' made of stone should be a matter

of such breast-beating. The Taliban Ambassador reportedly asked the diplomats why such passion was missing in the international community over the deaths of innocent people in Afghanistan on account of sanctions and drought.

Indeed a valid question. But does not the same logic hold good for the Taliban regime. The very fact that its leadership is busy in issuing decrees to destroy statues at a juncture when millions of people are suffering for want of basic necessities speaks volumes for its priorities.

The whole episode also brings into sharp focus the debate on the merits of the policy of isolation of the Taliban regime. Have the sanctions helped in taming the Taliban? Or have they only made it dig in? Is there a point in Pakistan's contention that "engagement rather than isolation" is the best way to deal with a regime that by hook or by crook controls 95 per cent of Afghanistan? There are no easy answers.



the order to destroy statues in Afghanistan is a clash of civilisations whereby the Taliban's world is full of infidels casting their dark shadow on the True Faith

BLOWING UP BUDDHAS

1/3
9/28
[THE Taliban is having fun. Mullah Mohammed Omar has just ordered destruction of all statues in Afghanistan, including the giant, world heritage Buddhas at Bamiyan, despite the protests from Unesco in Paris. This is a clash of civilisations with a backward displacement in time by about 12 centuries: the Taliban's world is full of infidels and idol-worshippers, casting their dark shadow on the True Faith. It's going to be boring talking about this unless we can expand the argument a little and say that what we have here, in Afghanistan, but also in many other parts of the world, including India, is a clash between, grosso modo, two orders of knowledge that are determined not just by religion, but by wholly modern factors such as economic inequality and the lack of opportunity that is concomitant with it.

The grievances of the deprived, which is what the Taliban essentially are, in a broad sense, because they are poor Pashtun farmers of the south, pitted against the relatively more socially advanced Uzbeks, Tajiks and Shias of the north, cannot be understood in terms of politics and economics. Because, ultimately, in a modern world, all power structures are knowledge-based: knowledge is power. What the Taliban contests, through the brand of Islam that it pro-

The author is Senior Leader Writer, The Statesman.

pagates, is the liberal-democratic world's claim to moral superiority — civil liberties, rights of women — whereas, in the Taliban's understanding, this moral superiority is just a camouflage for military and economic might.

The Taliban is right and wrong at the same time: the values of Western civilisation are not always upheld by those who project the power

By SOUMITRO DAS

decai Lippman (Rabbi Meir Kahane?) in Philip Roth's novel *The Counterlife*: why is it, he asks, that Jewish intellectuals in Jerusalem are ready to espouse the Arab point of view, while no Arab intellectual is ever heard defending the Israeli point of view? The reason,

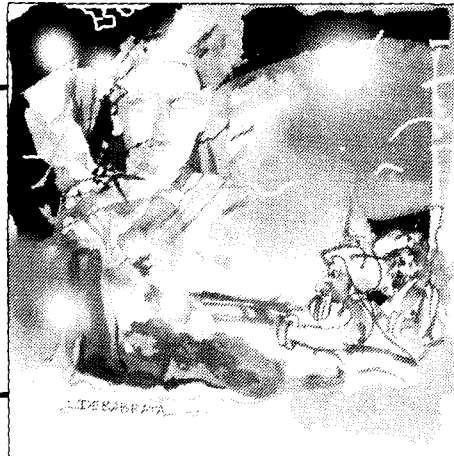
Taliban, which is political in nature, is readily translated into gestures of defiance against what we may call the Western understanding of the world. For the simple reason that the Taliban's own power is based, like all power, on its own understanding of the world,

saffronise the historical research establishment in this country, that the limited spread of education in the Hindi heartland has given rise to some kind of a mass historical awareness, that is rooted in oral traditions, that has nothing to do with the methods of history scholarship, which has its representatives in politics and is now making claims on the domain of written history, against what it perceives to be a biased elite. It is a system of belief rejecting its own repudiation by formal scholarship, fighting back to retain its relevance in a world that is implacably hostile.

The Taliban is under no such compulsion, it is in effective control of two-thirds of Afghanistan. Therefore, its methods are bound to be more primitive, cruder, a more direct expression of what it thinks the world should be like. Political factors are not missing in this decision to destroy statues. The Taliban is effectively isolated, under a United Nations sanctions regime, evicted from most Western capitals and under quasi-universal opprobrium. It has nothing to lose.

One has to understand the mind of these peasants. Blowing up 2000-year-old Buddhas, which the rest of the world considers to be priceless historical artefacts, is their way of telling the world that they are not intimidated by its judgement of their regime. It is a political gesture. Although an empty and thoughtless one.

The Taliban is effectively isolated, evicted from most Western capitals and under quasi-universal opprobrium. It has nothing to lose



necessary to preserve them, that is just the way it is. One could argue, similarly, that the idea that the British represented was much bigger and stronger than could be understood from the actions of individual Englishmen in India. This is a contradiction that we do not need to explain here, except to say that the relationship between power and the ideals of a particular civilisation is neither symmetrical nor harmonious, which is why the West harbours such large communities of dissidents at all times.

This is a view of the world that is beyond the comprehension of the Taliban. One is reminded of the right-wing West Bank demagogue, Mor-

he says, is that Islam is not a religion of doubt.

Our contention is that doubt begins to exist only beyond a certain cultural threshold when modernistic influences begin to break traditions of unquestioning obedience and unquestioning acceptance. The Israelis, European Jews and their descendants, are obviously far ahead of their neighbours in this respect, which is one reason why they have better guns and planes and radars, better tactical skills as well, the other reason being the Jewish lobby in the United States.

With the result that a challenge, such as the one thrown at the West by the

derived from the Koran and from Islamic law. Of course, one could say that another gesture could be found. But the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan is a particularly spectacular one, just as the destruction of the Babari Masjid was, in India.

Nirad Chaudhuri and VS Naipaul have said this before: this particular mass action reflects the reawakening of a historical consciousness among North Indian Hindus. This is correct, but they did not specify what kind of historical consciousness we are dealing with here. We tried to argue, elsewhere, of the attempts to

THE STATESMAN

4 MAR 2002

Vandalism gives ex-ASI chief sleepless nights

YOGESH KUMAR
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 3. - From the land of Buddha, he went to Bamiyan in Afghanistan to preserve Buddhist cultural heritage. After nine years of blood, sweat and tears, his dream now has been shattered by a fundamentalist organisation.

As the international community continues to express its pain and anger over the demolition of two historic Buddha statues at Bamiyan by the Taliban militia men, former director, Archaeological Survey of India, Dr R Sengupta could not sleep after the "mindless vandalism of Taliban forces." He is one of those very few who had quietly spent nine years to conserve these statues.

"I am deeply shocked even at the thought of demolition of the Buddha statues at Bamiyan. I am so attached to these statues that any damage to them is a personal loss to me," said Dr Sengupta.

As a young and energetic archaeologist, Dr

Sengupta was mesmerised by the very sight of the statues when he landed at Bamiyan in the summers of 1969. "I had never seen such giant statues in my life. The restoration work was also very challenging," he recalled.

Dr Sengupta was heading a special ASI team entrusted with the responsibility of conserving the fourth tallest Buddha statue in the world. "I lived close to those towering Buddha statues for

nine working years to conserve them and their demolition deeply pains," said Dr Sengupta. "There is no possibility of preserving them for future because as these statues are carved on rocks and it is impossible to shift them to any other place".

Dr Sengupta fondly recalls his days in Bamiyan. "In the first week of May 1969, I reached Kabul and after another eight hours of journey I reached Bamiyan situated on the foothills of Hindukush Valley at an altitude of 8000 metres. "It was painful to see those

■ Taliban destroy Buddha statues, page 12

■ See TALIBAN: page 10

THE STATESMAN

4 MAR 2001

Buddha falls to Taliban outrage

■ World watches aghast as fanatics strike at ancient heritage

AGENCIES
KABUL, MAR 2

AFGHANISTAN'S ancient Buddha statues in central Bamiyan province came under a barrage of rocket and tank fire from the ruling Taliban militia today as the world watched in horror.

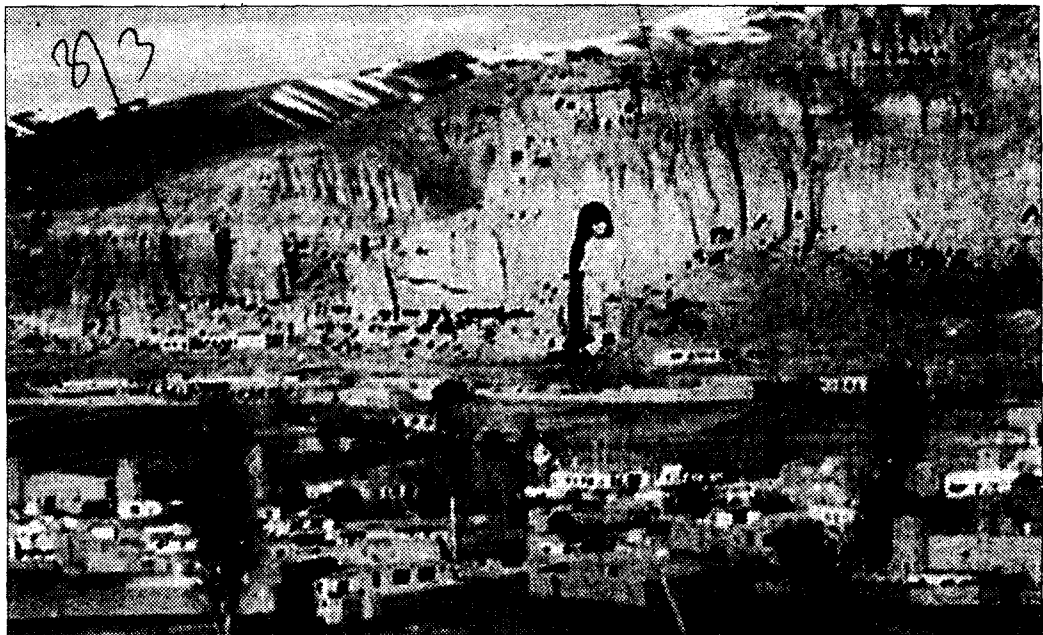
Taliban and opposition officials said militia fighters were attacking the two giant stone Buddhas, estimated to have been built between the second and fifth centuries AD, with rockets, tanks and even automatic rifles.

"They have started attacking the Buddhas with guns and tank shells - with whatever arms they are carrying," a militia source said, declining to be named. "People are firing at them out of their own sentiments."

Fatigal Taliban soldiers yesterday started destroying all statues throughout the country in compliance with a decree issued Monday by Supreme Leader Mulla Mohammad Omar.

Omar said the decision was in line with a fatwa from local Islamic clerics designed to prevent the worshipping of "false idols."

The militia had also started accumulating explosives around the two Buddhas, a report said today, but it appears local commanders were taking matters into their own hands before the statues could be



CYNOSURE OF HATRED: A 53-metre-high Buddha which is being targeted by the Taliban, looks out over a small town in the heart of the Hindu Kush mountains in Bamiyan valley - Reuters

dynamited. Explosives had been brought to Bamiyan from surrounding areas, the scene of heavy fighting recently, the Afghan Islamic Press reported.

Meanwhile, the chief of the UN's political wing in Afghanistan has warned the Taliban against carrying out demolition of ancient Buddha statues, saying the militia's move would provoke international outrage.

UN Special Mission to

India offers help

■ A concerned India offered on Friday to look after the artefacts for all mankind. "If the Taliban do not wish to retain this inheritance, India would be happy to arrange for the transfer of all these artefacts to India where they would be kept safely," Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh said.

Afghanistan Chief Francesco Vendrell discussed the Taliban's edict calling for the destruction of all pre-Islamic statues and shrines with the militia's Foreign Minister Wakil Mohammad Muttawakil.

"Voicing UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's strong concern about the edict, Vendrell asked the Taliban not to carry it out and warned that if implemented, it would provoke international outrage," a UN spokesman said.

INDIAN EXPRESS

3 MAR 2001

Handwritten: *Abdullah*

SATURDAY, MARCH 3, 2001

BARBARIC TALIBAN

Handwritten: *4-12*

THE ANARCHIC OUTRAGE by the barbaric Taliban 'rulers' of Afghanistan in seeking to obliterate the country's ancient cultural heritage, in the name of religious rectitude, is a crude affront to basic civilisational decency. It is also a self-incriminating disaster for the Taliban whose alienation on the global stage will only intensify. Of crass intolerance and insensitivity is the political edict that the Taliban's spiritual leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, issued so as to rewrite the Afghan history. He has fervently exhorted his followers to destroy the substance and 'spirit' of their priceless cultural relics, including in particular the celebrated statues of the Buddha in the Bamiyan province. The avalanche of international appeals for sanity has had no salutary effect on the Taliban, which is reported to be aghast instead that there must be so much concern over "stone figures" and not about the economic plight of the Afghan people. For nearly four years now, the Taliban's legitimacy as the governing entity in Kabul has remained unrecognised by the larger international community. The reason has much to do with the strange alchemy of the Taliban's principles of 'governance': a mixture of one-faction politics and perceived 'religious' injunctions. Yet, it is not impossible for the global community to separate the issues at stake — the secular question of protecting mankind's cultural heritage and the Afghan-specific puzzle relating to the Taliban's 'crusading' zeal as the unrivalled Islamic fundamentalist outfit. In fact, it is not altogether unlikely that the reclusive Mullah Omar may have calculated that the global community's inevitable concern over his new fiat could give an alienated Taliban just the opening for an engagement which has been eluding it in its dealings with the outside world. But the international community has, by refusing to appease the Taliban, nullified any such gameplan.

The Taliban's domestic policy has hurtled Afghanistan towards the position of a failed state. Having first broken the political grip over Kabul

by Prof. Burhanuddin Rabbani and his anti-communist 'mujahideen' allies, the Taliban has only managed to foist a destabilising 'religious' code on Afghanistan's multi-ethnic society. Unseemly and unprofitable is the Taliban's governing agenda of turning its back on modernity — the abolition of television as also photography, besides the imposition of codes about dress as also appearance in regard to men and women, not to mention the 'religious' diktat against even elementary education for the female population. The Taliban's 'governance'-charter is rightly seen by most sections of the global society as a putative interpretation of some period-specific and purported Islamic practices. Arguably, however, these aspects of a 'Talibanised order' inside Afghanistan impinge on its intrinsic internal jurisdiction, except insofar as universal human rights can be shown to be at stake. Yet, the protection of humanity's cultural heritage, a task not neglected by key Muslim-majority states with a rich history predating Islam, is a legitimate international concern in regard to Afghanistan.

Formidable are the many challenges before the Taliban, originally an externally-sponsored group with an anti-communist bias and also an anti-'mujahideen' pedigree. Having emerged as an alternative to the 'mujahideen' groups that interminably squabbled for power in the wake of the Soviet pullout from Afghanistan, the Taliban seems to suffer from a peculiar sense of deprivation at finding itself being sidelined by the international community. But Mullah Omar's isolation, reflected at present by the U.N. sanctions on the Taliban, has been caused, in part, by its refusal to be transparent about its 'guest' — Osama bin Laden, the alleged mastermind behind the perceived plans for an inter-continental 'holy crusade' against the non-Islamic world. The current Kabul 'regime' has either guided or allowed 'jihad' groups, including those operating in Jammu and Kashmir, to derive inspiration from the Taliban's 'guest'.

THE HINDU

Statues in many Afghan cities will be smashed: Taliban

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, MARCH 2. The Taliban Ambassador to Pakistan, Maulvi Abdul Salam Zaeef, said today that all was set to destroy the Buddha statues in Bamiyan Buddha statues in Afghanistan.

In an informal talk with reporters here, Mr. Zaeef said preparations were on to smash statues in various cities including the Buddha statues.

A "programme is also being made to destroy statues in Kabul, Ghazi, Jalalabad, Herat and Kandahar," he said even as diplomats from several countries made a beeline to the Taliban Embassy here to enquire about the demolition.

Among those who visited the embassy were the Ambassadors of Sweden and Greece.

The Taliban decision to ban the entry of media into areas where the relics are earmarked for destruction has left everyone guessing about the ground situation.

On Thursday, the Taliban Information Minister, Qudratullah Jamal, said the demolition had begun in the light of the decree issued by Mullah Omar.

"We will use all means and resources to enforce Mullah Omar's edict. Statues have no importance for us," the Taliban envoy said.

Pak. appeal

Reuters reports:

Pakistan made a fresh appeal today to Afghanistan's ruling Taliban movement to stop destroying Buddha statues. "The Government of Pakistan joins all other nations in appealing to the Taliban to reconsider the reported decision regarding the statues of Lord Buddha," a Foreign Ministry statement said.

The statement was the second in two days urging the Taliban to reconsider its decision to destroy all historic statues in the areas of Afghanistan it controls. "Respect for other religions and for their beliefs is enjoined upon Muslims," the statement said.

A cultural genocide, say Muslim clerics

MUMBAI, MARCH 2. Leading Islamic clerics today condemned destruction of Afghanistan's ancient Buddha statues in central Bamiyan

province by the ruling Taliban, saying it was "un-Islamic" and "an act of cultural genocide against humanity".

"The Taliban act is against the Islamic traditions and not conforming with the tenets of Quran," Zahir Abbas Rizvi, general secretary of Shia Council of India, told reporters here.

"Historically during the rule of Islamic rulers, the non-Islamic subjects and their idols of worship have been protected," Maulana Khalid Ashraf, a member of Ulema Council said here.

The clerics addressed reporters in the office of the Maharashtra Labour, Minister, Mr. Husain Dalwai.

Such incidents would create a wedge between Muslims and people of other religions worldwide, Gulam Pesh-e-Imam, the president of Anjuman-e-Islam Education Institute, said.

Meanwhile, NCP activists under the leadership of the State general secretary, Mr. Gurnath Kulkarni, burnt the effigy of Mulla Omar to protest the incident.

The party workers also raised slogans against the Taliban. — PTI

A file photo of the 53-metre tall, 2000-year-old Buddha statue in Bamiyan, 150 km from Kabul, in Afghanistan. — AP

Taliban axe falls on Buddha statues

KABUL, MARCH 1. Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia said today that they had started destroying all statues in the country, including the world's tallest standing Buddha in the central province of Bamiyan.

"The work started about five hours ago but I do not know how much of it (the Bamiyan Buddhas) has been destroyed," the Taliban Information and Culture Minister, Mr. Qudratullah Jamal, told AFP. "It will be destroyed by every means. All statues are being destroyed." He said Taliban soldiers were also wrecking ancient statues in the Kabul museum and elsewhere in the provinces of Ghazni, Herat, Jalalabad and Kandahar.

An edict announced on Monday by the militia's supreme leader, Mulla Mohammad Omar, calling for the destruction of all statues in line with "Islamic" laws, has caused shock around the world.

The two massive Bamiyan Buddhas, carved into a sandstone cliff near the provincial capital in central Afghanistan, stand 50m and 34.5m tall and date back to around the second century.

Appeals for their preservation have come from the United States, France, Thailand, Japan, Sri Lanka, Iran and the U.N. Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, chief of the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), said their destruction would be a "real cultural disaster that will cause irreparable harm to a heritage of exceptional universal value."

But Afghanistan's Foreign Minister, Mr. Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel, said the edict was irreversible. "Have you ever seen any decision of the Islamic Emirate (Taliban) reversed," he asked. — AFP

Protest in India: Page 13

THE HINDU

- 2 MAR 2001

Taliban destroys statues

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

KABUL, Mar. 1. - Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia today said they have started destroying all statues in the country, including the world's tallest standing Buddha in the central province of Bamian.

"The work started about five hours ago but I do not know how much of it has been destroyed," Taliban information and culture minister, Mr Qudratullah Jamal said.

He said Taliban soldiers were also wrecking ancient statues in Kabul museum and elsewhere in the provinces of Ghazni, Herat, Jalalabad and Kandahar. "It will be destroyed by

every means. All the statues are being destroyed," he added.

An edict announced Monday by the militia's supreme leader, Mr Mulla Mohammad Omar, calling for the destruction of all statues in line with "Islamic" laws, has shocked the world.

Afghanistan is home to an array of pre-Islamic historic treasures from its days as a key stop on the ancient Silk Road, and a strategic battleground for conquerers dating back to Alexander the Great. The two massive Bamian Buddhas, carved into a sandstone cliff near the provincial capital in central Afghanistan, stand 50 meters and 34.5 meters tall respectively.

IRAN CONDEMNS DESTRUCTION

DUBAI, Mar. 1. - Iran has strongly condemned the ruling Taliban's decision to destroy ancient Buddha statues in Afghanistan, and called upon the United Nations to take serious action against the regime in the war-torn country.

"Strangely certain Taliban-led individuals, calling themselves 'cleric', have ordered destruction of ancient sites citing blasphemy and idolising as reasons," a statement released by Iran's Cultural Heritage Organisation said.

The statement quoted by IRNA said that "the territory of Afghanistan, linking the Central Asian region, Indian sub-continent, and the Iranian plateau, has long been home to various tribes".

The Taliban regime vowed on Tuesday to destroy all statues from the country's rich cultural past, declaring the world-famous sculptures as un-Islamic. The decision has come in for sharp criticism from many countries, especially Buddhist nations. - UNI

THE STATESMAN

2 MAR 2001

Taliban chief defends order to destroy statues

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

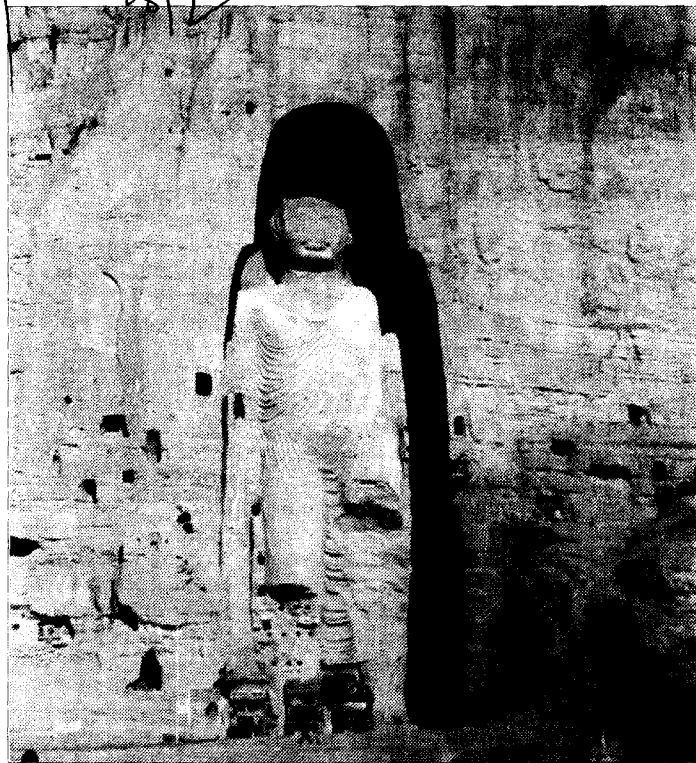
KABUL, Feb. 27. - The Taliban militia leader in Afghanistan today shrugged off international condemnation of his order to destroy ancient Buddhist statues.

"All we are breaking are stones," Mulla Mohammad Omar told the Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press. The order to destroy all statues in Afghanistan, including those from the country's pre-Islamic history, was in line with "Islamic" beliefs, he said.

"According to Islam, I don't worry about anything. My job is the implementation of Islamic order," he said from the militia's stronghold in southern Kandahar.

The order, announced late yesterday on the official Taliban's Radio Shariat, said: "All statues remaining in various parts of the country must be broken ... They represent gods of infidels. Only Allah, the Almighty, deserves to be worshipped, not anyone or anything else." The ministry of information and culture and the religious police would carry out the destruction, the broadcast added.

The decree has drawn immediate criticism from Unesco, which demanded the Taliban



Taliban leaders have ordered the destruction of this 2,000-year-old Buddha statue, the world's tallest, in Bamiyan, 150 km west of Kabul. - AP/PTI

"halt the destruction of hewn from cliffs in Bamiyan (Afghanistan's) cultural heritage." Archaeologists too have expressed concern for the country's best-known archaeological site - two massive Buddhas that pre date the arrival of Islam in Afghanistan. The head of one of the statues was blown off in 1998 when Taliban captured Bamiyan.

THE STATESMAN

28 FEB 2001

HP-13 Taliban at war with statues too

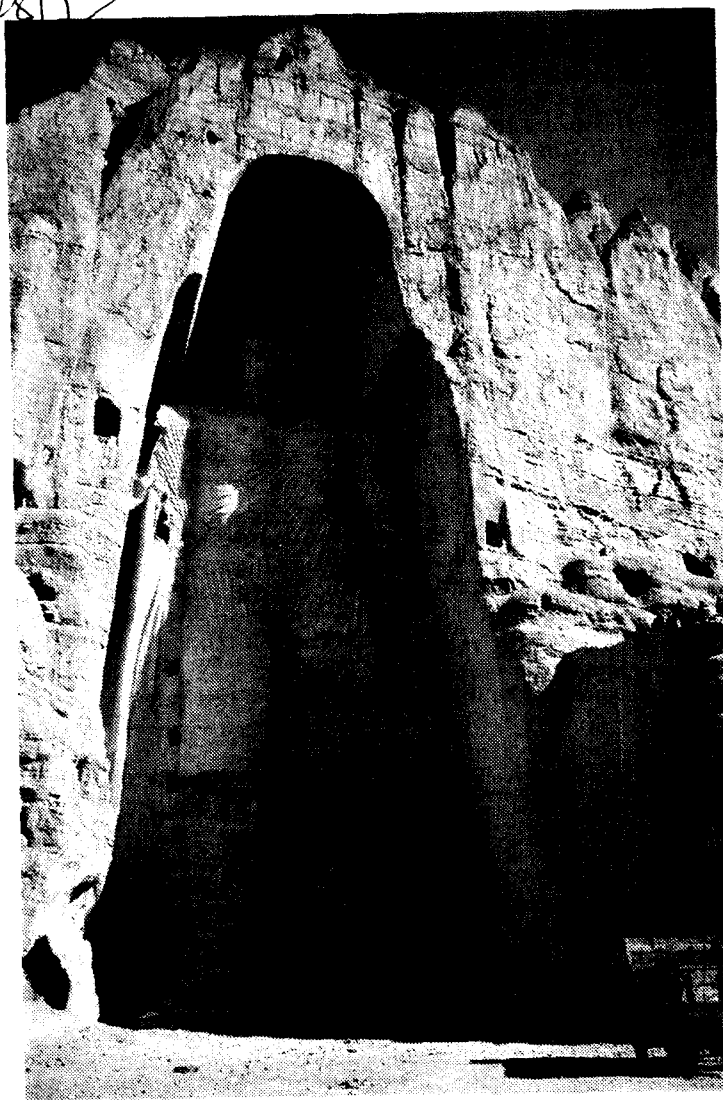
ISLAMABAD, FEB. 27. Afghanistan's ruling Taliban today vowed to destroy all statues from the country's rich cultural past, declaring that the world-famous sculptures are un-Islamic. The first targets could be the collection of the National Museum in Kabul — already suspected of being vandalised — and Afghanistan's best-known archaeological site, the two towering Buddhas carved into a cliff face at Bamiyan.

"There is a decision of religious scholars on this matter, this will be implemented — for sure," Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, the Taliban ambassador in Pakistan, said after reading out the formal decree ordering the destruction.

Mr. Zaeef dismissed criticism by the United Nations — which has placed the Bamiyan statues on its list of world heritage monuments — as interference in an internal affair and the Taliban's religious beliefs. He said the action was necessary to ensure no one worshipped a statue. The Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press quoted Taliban leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, as being unyielding about protests: "I don't care about anything else but Islam."

Mr. Zaeef read a statement sent from the Taliban headquarters in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar after the decision of a religious committee ordering the "smashing of all statues. "Even if the pieces of the destroyed statues made of gems, stones and metal can be of value to its owner, these remaining parts should also be smashed," said Mr. Zaeef.

The first news of the attack on statues came on Monday in an announcement by the Taliban's radio that Mr. Omar had ordered the destruction of all statues. The



An undated file picture of the 53-metre, 2000-year-old statue of the Buddha located in Bamiyan, 150 km west of Kabul, whose destruction Afghanistan's hardline Taliban ordered on Monday. The world's tallest standing Buddha statue has already been damaged in fighting. — AP

Paris-based United Nations educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation immediately urged

all concerned, especially Afghans, to "stop the destruction of their cultural heritage".

"Situated at a crossroads of the ancient silk routes, Afghanistan enjoys a unique cultural heritage marked by multiple influences from Persia, Greece, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam," UNESCO said. But Mr. Zaeef said the destruction of statues, including those in Bamiyan that soar 53 metres (178 feet) and 38 metres (125 feet) respectively, would eliminate only "a small percentage" of the country's heritage.

Most statues date from nearly 2,000 years ago, when Afghanistan was a centre of Buddhist learning and pilgrimage. They were largely untouched for more than a millennium after the arrival of Islam, surviving even the onslaughts of Genghis Khan in the 13th century and Tamerlane in the 14th century. — Reuters

An assault on heritage: India

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 27. India today condemned the decree issued by the Taliban regime to destroy all statues in Afghanistan.

According to an External Affairs Ministry statement, these relics including the Bamiyan Buddhas stand witness to the pride of the Afghan people.

"The Taliban edict constitutes an assault not only on the Afghan tradition but also on the common heritage of humankind."

The decree issued by Mullah Omar "profiles the Taliban's narrow and obscurantist ideologies." The statement recalls the Taliban's 1988 decree which required that Afghan nationals who professed faith in the Hindu religion wear a distinctive piece of cloth and mark to be easily distinguished.

THE HINDU

28 FEB 2001

Playing politics with the dying

Afghanistan has overcome tremendous odds before, but never has it found itself in such a difficult situation with no friends to bank on. With its infrastructure ruined by the incessant fighting over the past two decades, the prolonged drought conditions that has rendered its lands barren and the United Nations sanctions that has made the nation a pariah, Afghanistan is tottering at the brink.

Since the imposition of fresh sanctions on Afghanistan from January 19, 2001, largely on account of the taliban refusal to hand over Osama bin Laden to the United States, there has been a virtual stampede of Afghan refugees trying to gain entry into Pakistan. The same thing happened when the Red Army invaded Afghanistan in 1979 and there was a mass migration to neighbouring countries like Iran and Pakistan. What is shocking is that this time the refugees are being stopped at the Pakistan border.

Abdul Salam Zaeef, the taliban ambassador to Islamabad, has urged Pakistan to accord brotherly treatment to the Afghans. A UN representative in Peshawar has also called on Islamabad to open its borders to the hungry and fleeing Afghans. But Pakistan is unwilling to do so, no matter how strongly it may feel for the Afghans. The state is already playing host to nearly two million Afghan refugees who entered the country after the Soviet invasion.

The message from Pakistan is that it cannot share the misfortune of the Afghans alone and that others, such as the UN, must step forward. There is a general feeling in the country that the

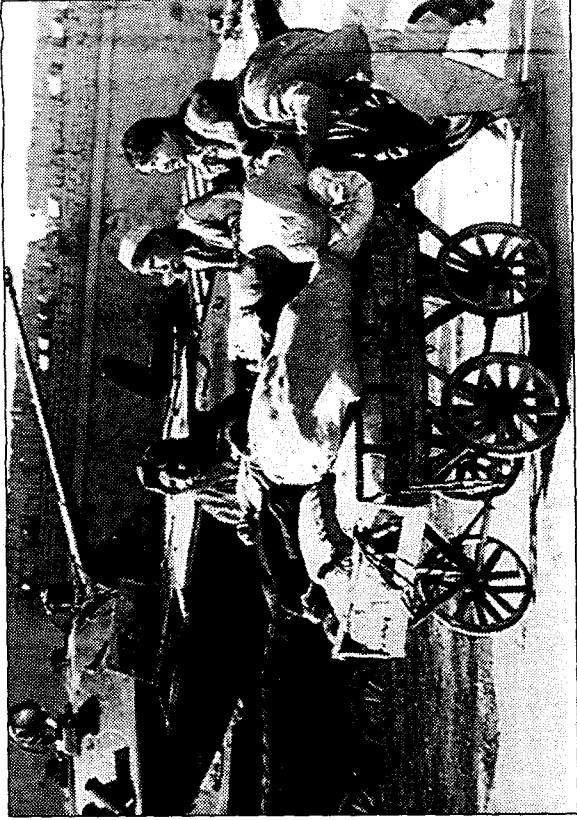
UN sanctions are more directed at Islamabad than at Kabul. This assumption is, of course, debatable. But it remains a tight-rope walk for Pakistan since any misreading of Islamabad's act *vis-à-vis* the taliban can land it in trouble.

Despite all that, Pakistan is sending foodstuff worth more than Rs 100 million to the Afghans, arguing that while the UN sanctions hold, it cannot be a spectator to human misery. It may be mentioned here that Pakistan is one of the three countries — Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates being the others — who have recognized the taliban regime in Afghanistan.

It is apparent that the parties responsible one way or the other for the Afghan crisis are now reluctant to pay their share of the cost. There cannot be two opinions that there would have been no Afghan crisis had the Russians not invaded Afghanistan. Also, the crisis would have been resolved had the Americans, after bleeding the Soviets to death in the terrains of Afghanistan, not left the country to its fate. The two are in the arena again, this time not as adversaries but as compatriots. This should ring alarm bells both for the taliban and Pakistan.

Diplomatic circles in Islamabad believe that Russia is exploiting the taliban bogey to maintain and extend its influence over the central Asian states, whose resources are vital for its economic development. A diplomat from an east European country in fact could not fathom how the so-called rebels are finding their way into Tajikistan despite the presence of Rus-

The West must take note of the human dimensions of the crisis in Afghanistan, writes Khalid Akhtar



No shortcuts from hell

ian troops on the Tajik border.

Evidently, everyone has an axe to grind. The Russians may need the taliban, but in an unstable form, for justifying its armed presence in one or more central Asian states. It is not certain whether after resolving the bin Laden issue, the US interest in Afghanistan will wane. For the time being, the US relief goods are welcome to the Afghans. Pakistan might "fine tune" its Afghan policy following the envoys' con-

ference recommendations, but it is difficult to predict what this might entail.

The Northern Alliance in Afghanistan has been pushed by the taliban to the very northern fringes. But with Moscow, New Delhi and Tehran supplying it arms and Washington extending it the required diplomatic support, the alliance remains an effective force, capable of causing trouble to the taliban. Even the North Atlantic Treaty Organization appears

hostile towards the taliban. The secretary general of Nato recently did not rule out a Nato operation against the taliban, saying "the Nato charter binds it to any resolution passed by the UN security council," adding that the "members of Nato are members of UN also".

However, in view of an unprecedented human disaster looming on Afghanistan, politics and military considerations should take a back seat. The scale of human sufferings within Afghanistan is unimaginable. After the imposition of sanctions, the value of the Afghan currency has crashed, kicking up the prices of essential goods beyond the reach of even those who have money. Due to years of fighting, nothing has been left intact. There are no roads, the social sector is non-existent, the irrigation network is in tatters, there are no jobs, and at the same time, no hopes for the future. Immediate steps are needed to avert a catastrophe. The West has both the financial resources and the political will, but won't apply them in the case of Afghanistan.

The problem is that the Afghan crisis is being viewed through tainted political glasses. That the taliban have caused concern to the international community on more than one count goes without saying. Their unconventional methods of statecraft, their harsh treatment of women, their attempts to export their social, religious and political philosophy to the neighbours, have caused offence. But they also enjoyed a great deal of legitimacy, not only because they controlled 95 per cent of the territory, but because they had established their writ as well,

which is a rare achievement in the prevailing situation.

The magnitude of the calamity that has hit Afghanistan is not being measured correctly. In the past few days, some 600 Afghans, mostly women and children, have died due to cold in makeshift camps in Herat. In all, over 500,000 Afghans have been displaced due to civil war and drought. They are likely to perish, if not provided with shelter and succour.

Sadly, the UN is far from shouldering its responsibilities. Erick De Mul, UN coordinator for Afghanistan, has said that "Afghanistan is not a pretty site for setting up camps", adding that "we do not have enough funds to look after the people inside Afghanistan". But the point is that the camps have to be set up if the UN genuinely wants to help the drought-stricken people. Secondly, if the UN does not have enough money for relief work, the poor countries of the area have none. Quite obviously, Afghanistan is very low in the UN priority-list.

It is neither advisable nor morally right to play politics with the taliban on dead bodies. Shanghai Five, which at the moment has confined itself to monitoring the political and military developments in Afghanistan, can play a positive role in helping avert, or at least lessen the intensity of, a human disaster in Afghanistan whose consequences can easily spill over to the backyards of the big powers as well. Leaving the Afghans to count their dead will be an ominous message to the region as well as the world.

Taliban denial on Laden hand-over

KABUL, Feb. 20. ⁵ Talibans officials today denied reports that they were set to hand over alleged terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden to Saudi Arabia for trial.

"This is totally untrue. The Islamic Emirate policy on Osama has not changed," said Abdul Hanan Hemat, chief of official Bakhtar news agency.

A Pakistani newspaper on Monday quoted a "high-level" but unnamed source as saying Taliban supreme leader Mulla Mohammad Omar made the offer to visiting Pakistani interior minister Moinuddin Haider earlier this month.

But Hemat said Bin Laden was not discussed during Mr Haider's two-day visit, which focused on Islamabad's request for the extradition of 60 Pakistani fugitives. — **AFP**

THE STATESMAN

FEB 20 2001

Kabul keep on Saudi Osama trial

Islamabad, Feb. 19 (PTI): Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia has told Pakistan that it is willing to hand over Saudi dissident and terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden to his native country to face trial, a leading Pakistani daily reported today.

The offer to send bin Laden to Saudi Arabia was made by Taliban's supreme leader Mulla Moinuddeen Haider during the latter's recent visit to Kabul, *The Dawn* quoting authori-

tative sources said. Omar offered to hand over bin Laden to Saudi Arabia even without Haider raising the issue, the newspaper said.

"We never raised the Osama issue. It was raised by no less a person than Mulla Omar during the talks," it quoted a high level Pakistan official.

The paper quoted the official as saying that Omar told Haider that if Saudi Arabia was not willing to accept Osama because of political repercussions in the country, Kabul was ready to shift him

to another Muslim country. He however did not name any particular country, the official said.

The Saudi government has already stripped bin Laden of his citizenship for his terrorist activities at home and abroad. Since then he has stayed put in Afghanistan under Taliban patronage.

Leader detained

Police today detained the acting chief of the party of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on his way

to a meeting in Karachi, a party official said.

Ejaz Shafi, vice-president of the Pakistan Muslim League, said police in Sindh province stopped the party's acting president Javed Hashmi and 50 members in Nooriabad, 40 km south of the port city of Karachi. "They have locked up Javed Hashmi and 50 leaders of the Muslim League in a police station in Nooriabad," Shafi said. He said the group had been on the way to a meeting and news conference in Karachi.

THE TELEGRAPH

20 FEB 2001

Taliban massacred 300 civilians: Report

New York, February 19

A US-BASED human rights organisation has alleged that Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia massacred more than 300 civilians last month and demanded an immediate inquiry by the United Nations.

The Human Rights Watch (HRW), in a report made public today, said the Taliban detained over 300 Shiite Muslims, including staff members of humanitarian organisations, in Bamiyan province and herded them to district assembly points where they were shot dead by firing squads.

The killings took place between January 8 and 12, it said quoting eyewitnesses.

The killings, the HRW said, were part of a pattern of efforts to intimidate the minority population and to deter them from supporting the opposition alliance. Independent observers and the UN have confirmed the massacre. The HRW urged speedy action by UN, accusing the global body of failing to hold both sides in Afghan civil war.

"It is critical that the investigation be conducted by a small expert team as quickly as

possible, before crucial evidence disappears," the group said.

"A prompt and thorough investigation could deter further killings of the civilians," Sidney Jones, HRW Director for Asia, said.

The international focus on Afghanistan in recent months has almost exclusively been on the Taliban's reported support for terrorism abroad. But the same should be directed to stop killings of civilians in Afghanistan, Jones said.

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson on Friday last called for the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry into human rights abuse.

UN's Asma Jehangir said she was deeply concerned "over continuing reports of

massacres and extrajudicial executions in Afghanistan." "At least two mass-grave sites have allegedly been identified by the local population."

Jehangir said she also had reports of torture and summary execution of prisoners being held by opposition leader Ahmed Shah Masood. "Such atrocities require the immediate attention of the international community," she said.

(PTI)

'The killings were part of a pattern of efforts to intimidate the minority population and to deter them from supporting the opposition'

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 FEB 1997

Situation in Afghanistan disturbing: UN official

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, FEB. 16. A senior official of the United Nations (U.N.) has said after a tour of Afghanistan that the situation there continues to be extremely disturbing despite the emergency relief measures in the last few days and appealed to the world community to respond generously to help the displaced people.

The Under Secretary General of the U.N., Mr. Kenzo Oshima, told a news conference here that the sheer scale of the crisis made it impossible for Afghans and aid agencies to overcome the situation on their own. "In my report to the U.N. Secretary General, I pledge to do the necessary to raise awareness of the situation".

Mr. Oshima has been specially deputed by the U.N. Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan, to visit Afghanistan and Pakistan for a first hand assessment of the plight of the displaced persons. In the course of his visit to Afghanistan he visited several refugee camps including those in Herat where on the night of January 29 in one of the camps over 100 people perished due to extreme cold.

Mr. Oshima said he met representatives of the Taliban and the opposition Northern Alliance and impressed upon them on the need to stop fighting and to take care of the needs of the people. "I urged the Taliban authorities to provide better environment for the aid agencies engaged in relief operations".

In response to a question on the fresh sanctions imposed by the U.N. and their impact on relief

operations, Mr. Oshima conceded that the sanctions had made the task of humanitarian assistance difficult. Mr. Oshima would devote some space in his report on the impact of the sanctions on the people of Afghanistan.

On the decision of the Taliban government to close down the office of the U.N. Special Mission on Afghanistan, Mr. Oshima said that the Taliban authorities had agreed in principle to let the U.N. function. The Taliban had ordered closure of the U.N. office in retaliation to the decision of the U.S. to close down the Taliban office in New York.

Mr. Oshima would be in New Delhi tomorrow to discuss with the Indian government about the situation arising out of the earthquake in Gujarat and the relief and rehabilitation measures launched.

Indian investor tops Forbes' Midas list

NEW YORK, FEB. 16. India-born billionaire venture capitalist and founder of Sun Microsystems Mr. Vinod Khosla, has topped the Midas list of investors, compiled by the prestigious US financial magazine, *Forbes International*.

Forty-six year old Mr. Khosla had raked in \$ 15 billion by investing in about half-a-dozen makers of breakthrough Telecom gear. Mr. Khosla, *Forbes* says, has made a career of determining which companies will thrive and that none is shrewder than him in the field.— PTI

THE HINDU

17 FEB 2001

U.S., U.N. sorting out Taliban issue

14921 By Sridhar Krishnaswami 1572

UNITED NATIONS, FEB. 14. The United States has said that it will take into account the views of the United Nations on the closure of the Taliban office in New York. The State Department spokesman, Mr. Richard Boucher, conveyed views to this effect as talks began in Washington between Mr. Francesc Vendrell, the U.N. Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Afghanistan and senior officials of the Bush administration.

Officials in Washington maintain that Mr. Vendrell's visit had been previously scheduled, but the fact remains that last week's decision of the administration to shut down the Taliban's office in New York and reviewing the visa status of Mr. Abdul Hakeem Mujahid has pushed this issue to the forefront.

The Taliban has made no bones of the fact that there will be a political/diplomatic price to pay for shutting down its operations, which is liaising with the U.N. Publicly, officials at the U.N. have said little on the Bush administration's latest decision, but privately many here take the view that this will most

certainly complicate the process, not just on the humanitarian front but on the peace process itself.

At least one American diplomat here has said that there will be no change in the United States' position — the Taliban office would have to be closed, remarked Ms Nancy Soderberg, the U.S. envoy. But that remark has left the possibility of Washington and the U.N. meeting each other half way. That is, while the office will be shut down, the Taliban representative could stay on. "Obviously, we will be listening to Mr. Vendrell's views and concerns", Mr. Boucher remarked.

Mr. Vendrell is meeting senior officials of the Bush administration that include the Acting Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Mr. Alan Eastham, and officials in charge of Counter-Terrorism. The Special Envoy of the U.N. Secretary General has expressed the hope that a way will be found to keep the Taliban delegate in New York. If the Taliban shuts down the U.N. office in Afghanistan that would "constitute another handicap in the work that we are trying to do on the peace front", Mr. Vendrell has maintained.

SECRET

14 FEB 1999

U.N. warns of disaster in Afghanistan

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

119-17

UNITED NATIONS, FEB. 12. Officials at the world body have not yet responded to the threat from the Taliban in Afghanistan that it will shut down the U.N. Office of Special Mission in that country by way of retaliation for the United States asking its representative in New York to close shop. Kabul's rationale has been that the Office of Special Mission is political and not humanitarian and, therefore, will be closed if the Taliban was not allowed to operate in New York.

The move of the Bush administration and the response from Kabul should be seen in the context of the U.N. Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan, announcing last week that he planned to send the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Kenzo Oshima, to Afghanistan to assess the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation. Privately, there has been misgivings here on the U.S. decision to show the Taliban the door.

On Thursday, the State Department told Mr. Abdul Hakeem Mujahid to shut down the Taliban's New York operations as a part of the sanctions imposed on his country. At the same time, Washington also said Mr. Mujahid's visa status was being reviewed. The Taliban maintains that no formal letter from the Bush administration in this regard has been received.

According to reports reaching here, the Taliban has apparently told the U.N. that its office in Afghanistan is being closed and that the special envoy of the Secretary General will be denied a visa if its representative's visa in New York is reviewed.

The U.N. and its functional offices have been trying to mobilise international humanitarian assistance which has been less than forthcoming. Against a target of \$230 million, contributions have been in the neighbourhood of \$14 million. And U.N. officials have warned that a disaster would follow if the



Afghan refugees wait for their turn to get soup at the Mashlak camp, 17 km west of Herat, near the Afghan-Iran border. About 47,000 Afghans are living in miserable conditions in the camp. In the past two weeks, dozens of children died due to severe cold. — AP

problem is not addressed immediately.

The world body faces a two-fold challenge — in Afghanistan itself with the internally displaced people and in camps in neighbouring Pakistan. Compounding the troubles for the U.N. is that Islamabad has apparently informed New York that it is not prepared to open a new refugee camp on the grounds that it cannot "afford" to add to the nearly two million Afghans already in the country. Pakistan has been urging the world body to set up more facilities inside Afghanistan to prevent people from fleeing the country.

If the Clinton administration made its determination well known on the subject of sanctions, there is little change in the attitude of the new Bush administration.

But in spite of the sanctions, officials in Washington are pointing out that the U.S. is the largest donor of humanitarian assistance with the U.S. Agency for International Development organising two more airlifts last week. The U.S. maintains that its sanctions against the Taliban are targeted at the fundamentalist regime and would not affect humanitarian assistance.

MEDIEVAL REGIME

Without a future

IT seems the Taliban, which has been described as a "medieval, narcotics producing country" by the secretary of the Russian Security Council, is feeling the international heat. The UN Security Council recently passed a fresh resolution, China and Malaysia abstaining, that imposes an arms and travel embargo on Afghanistan, while calling upon the Taliban to close its terrorist training camps and hand Osama bin Laden over — to whom it doesn't say, but probably the United States, the party most recently aggrieved. As Ahmed Shah Masood, fighting a lone battle against the militia, said in an interview, unless the embargo is respected by Pakistan, it has little meaning. It is a well-known fact that Pakistani regular troops man the Taliban's Migs, AN-12 transport aircraft as well as its long range guns and that without their superior tactical skills, the student militia would have had little chance of taking the country by storm. So, unless the embargo works on the Pakistani side of the Afghan border, the Taliban are going to be safe, albeit extremely and precariously dependent.

The heat is probably being felt in terms of the economy. Ariana is already out of operation, the limited trade with the Gulf has come to a halt. There is a drought which has driven thousands of Afghans into Pakistan as refugees. There are shortages of essential items, while the latest UN resolution has led to the withdrawal of the skeleton UN relief staff from Kabul. Except for the south, the country is surrounded by hostile neighbours. Outside the region, moral and financial succour is provided by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, although it is true that the OIC invited the Taliban to its last session. In fact, many Arab countries, like Egypt and Algeria have even less reason to love the hardline Afghan Islamists, since their own terrorists are inspired and manned by Afghan war veterans and financed by Osama bin Laden and the consortium behind him. This feeling of utter isolation has heightened the Taliban's sense of insecurity, especially since no great Islamist revival is in the offing in Central Asia — regimes are digging in their heels and Russia is offering them whatever they need. This may be the reason for the step down on the bin Laden issue. The Taliban offers to send bin Laden to a third country in exchange for recognition by the US. This is a laughable proposition, gas pipeline notwithstanding — in any case, what kind of security can a hardline Islamic regime provide to the leader of the free world? The demand for recognition indicates that the Taliban understands that it cannot be a credible regime for long only as a surrogate or an appendage, especially since the relationship promotes the same dementia in Pakistan where the social and political picture is vastly different and may bring about a critical reappraisal of the Afghan adventure.

PARTY VS PARTY

Meanwhile, more pie in the sky

PARTIES and politics in the Mughal court was a symptom of the empire's terminal decline. In Bengal, the party keeps the hoi-polloi guessing on whether it will spawn more outfits in the run-up to elections 2001. Subhas Chakraborty doesn't seem to be inclined to rock the boat just yet. Nevertheless, it seems amazing that the dissident leader could fly no less than three trial balloons in the course of his meeting with Buddhadev Bhattacharya. For the transport minister's dismal track record would suggest that the schemes are for the birds. What he has to say about them is inadequate, almost perfunctory. A Rs 50-crore Millennium Hall, a floating auditorium on the Ganga below the second Hooghly bridge, may be Kolkata's joke of the millennium, courtesy a government that can't dredge canals or even carpet roads properly. There is also the awesome prospect of a Rs 60-crore flyover connecting Vivekananda Road with Howrah bridge. Over the past year, the city has been treated to more sighs than bridges and flyovers. Literally, the one at Gariahat is yet to get off the ground. The Mullickbazar and Maulali projects have been dropped, fearing a major dislocation of basic services. And to use the language of understatement, the Japanese consultants aren't happy with the quality or even the pace of construction. The Rs 80-crore third promise — a pedestrian plaza linking Sealdah with BBD Bagh — deserves to be laughed out of court given traffic conditions. Nor for that matter is it Subhas's idea. A scheme, mooted by the police in the early eighties, is sought to be revived.

How does the government propose to generate resources? Further, any attempt to bring the city under the pickaxe almost invariably aggravates lumpenisation of urban development. The least that was expected of the minister, post-1996 polls, was an improvement in state bus services. On the contrary, there has been a drastic curtailment in the number of routes and vehicles — with promises of air-conditioned trams and trolleys thrown in for comic relief. The commuter can well do without more pie in the sky.

40-17
912
Taliban for
Osama 'trial by
Muslim judges'

DUBAI, FEB. 8. Pakistan's military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf, was today quoted as saying that Afghanistan's ruling Taliban might agree to hand over the Saudi dissident, Osama bin Laden, for trial by Islamic judges in a Muslim country.

Gen. Musharraf made his comments in an interview published in Arabic by *Al-Khaleej*, a newspaper in the United Arab Emirates. He said the Taliban would never hand over Osama to the U.S., which wants to try him for allegedly blowing up its embassies in East Africa.

"Let me tell you that the Taliban want to see a solution for this issue, but the question is how. The Taliban are ready for dialogue and in my opinion, a solution should be discussed realistically in a way that brings together the two extreme positions," he said. "The U.S. is demanding that Osama be handed over to it... But this is impossible and the Taliban will never hand him over." — Reuters

THE HINDU

- 9 FEB 2001

U.S. to send emergency aid to Afghanistan

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, FEB. 7. Fearing a deterioration of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan either by way of a major refugee migration or a major famine, the Bush administration has decided to send emergency assistance to that country. "... The international community has begun a response but the response is nowhere near meeting the need. So we are very concerned about the impact of this drought," says Mr. Leonard Rogers, acting Assistant Administrator for Humanitarian Response of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Two airlifts have been scheduled, one to Herat in Afghanistan and the other to Pakistan to meet the needs of the recently arrived refugees. The United Nations has estimated that about 80,000 internally displaced persons are in camps outside of Herat and being subjected to sub-zero temperatures. The USAID has said its relief flights carrying tents, blankets, water jugs and medical supplies are valued at around \$500,000. In addition, the USAID is providing \$50,000 to the International Rescue Committee to purchase essential items locally. In Afghanistan the assistance will be distributed by personnel working for the U.N.

USAID has said it is providing \$2 million to two non-government organisations working in Afghanistan — Save the Children and Mercy Corps International — to provide for basic heating and cooking supplies. The State Department has contributed \$1 million to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to provide assistance to the victims of the Afghan conflict. The U.S. is the largest single donor of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, having contributed \$113 million last year to Afghans in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

At the Washington Foreign Press Centre, the acting Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Mr. Alan Eastham said there were several causes for this humanitarian disaster. "They are both natural and manmade. The largest is the natural catastrophe of the drought which has been underway for months and months in Afghanistan. The other, unfortunately, is the inability of a country in civil war to respond to the needs of its citizens," Mr. Eastham remarked.

THE HINDU

- 8 FEB 2001

Taliban ready for talks on Osama

ST-9
6/2

Afghanistan

ZAHID HUSSAIN
THE TIMES, LONDON

KANDAHAR, Feb. 5. — The Taliban will consider sending Osama bin Laden to a third country if the West recognises them as Afghanistan's legitimate government.

Taliban leaders fear that the USA and other Western countries would continue to ostracise their administration even if Osama leaves Afghanistan.

"We hope the new US administration will be more flexible and engage with us," the Taliban foreign minister, Mr Abdul Wakil Muttawakil, said.

Mr Muttawakil has written Mr George W Bush, saying his administration is prepared to resolve the Osama issue through negotiations.

General Pervez Musharraf too feels the suggestion of sending Osama abroad seems workable. Pakistan's military ruler said it is not yet clear which country may provide sanctuary to the Saudi-born terrorist charged with the World Trade Centre bombing.

But most Afghans believe the action would worsen their misery. "We don't care about Osama, but worry more about what would happen to us," Mr Zarif Khan said.

Prices of food and other



Osama bin Laden

commodities have gone up as the value of Afghan currency has crashed from 67,000 to 85,000 to a dollar since the UN sanctions were enforced on 19 January.

Unlike in November 1999, when the UN first imposed sanctions on the Taliban, public reaction against the latest

measure has been muted. On the first occasion, an Italian UN aid official was killed by an angry mob in Kabul.

The sanctions and threat of a retaliatory attack by the USA has not stopped Osama from

moving freely and running his international terrorist network from Afghanistan.

Earlier this month, the Saudi millionaire, who has a \$5 million reward on his head, made his first public appearance in two years at his son's wedding in Kandahar. Shar-i-Nau, the neighborhood where the ceremony took place, has a large concentration of Arab Islamic militants believed to be Osama's supporters.

While Osama is occasionally seen in Kandahar, he has a network of training centres in Farmada, outside Jalalabad in east Afghanistan.

So far, the sanctions seem to have had little impact on the Taliban administration besides strengthening the hardline faction within the movement, led by reclusive Mulla Omar.

THE STATESMAN

6 FEB 2001

Taliban bargains for Laden's exile

Vijay Dutt
London, February 5

Afghanistan
17-13

THE TALIBAN would consider the possibility of sending Osama bin Laden to a third country if the Western governments assure that they will immediately recognise the Afghan Government headed by Mullah Omar.

The report in the media here has unfolded another surprise and twist in the never-ending speculations about Osama.

He is the number one renegade on the United States list of most wanted men, since the bombing of its two embassies in Africa.

Its offer of \$5 million for Osama's capture remains. Senior Taliban leaders have therefore expressed fear that the US among other Western powers would not recognise Taliban administration as legitimate even if Laden is

exiled from Afghanistan.

But Taliban Government is squirming under the United Nations sanctions.

The latest offer is seen by the intelligence and political analysts as an outcome of the recent statement of Gen Pervez Musharraf that the exiling of Laden was a viable objective.

The Foreign Minister Abdul Wakil Muttawakil has told the *Times*, "We hope the new American administration will be more flexible and engage with us." He has written a letter

to President George Walker Bush also.

The latest offer is seen by the intelligence and political analysts as an outcome of the recent statement of Gen Pervez Musharraf that the exiling of Laden was a viable objective.

He also, possibly under US pressure, wrote to Mullah Omar to consider the international concern over Laden's presence in Afghanistan.

But at the same time General Pervez Musharraf made it clear that he would not let Laden come to Pakistan.

The identity of the country to which Taliban would wish to send the most wanted man is thus unclear. Laden is also wary of being spotted by the United States satellites if he travels to another country. He could either be caught or killed. That is why the Taliban's offer might not be acceptable to Laden as well as to a lot of his supporters in Taliban ranks.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

6 FEB 05

Biggest Afghan exodus in three years

Rory McCarthy in Shamshatu

IN THE biggest exodus from Afghanistan for four years, 150,000 people have poured into northern Pakistan in the past five months to escape drought and war. Most of these refugees now live in grim and freezing conditions in camps around Peshawar, where aid agencies are struggling to cope. In one crowded camp nine children died from exposure in just one week in January, say agencies.

The impact of Afghanistan's worst drought for 30 years has been made worse by fighting across a swath of the north between the hardline Taliban militia and the forces of the government it ousted. This mountainous area is the last sizeable chunk of the country holding out against the regime.

"The conditions in Afghanistan are worse than they are here," said Mohammed Abdi Adar, of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Peshawar. "There are areas which the aid agencies cannot reach or do not have the resources to deal with. The ones who made it are the lucky ones."

In the far west of Afghanistan, up to 500 refugees have died in camps in Herat since heavy snowfalls in late January drove temperatures at night down to -30C (-22F), says UN. Its staff believe at least 80,000 others who have

flocked to the city are at risk.

International aid donations for Afghanistan have slowed to a trickle in the past year. The UN has launched an urgent appeal for £2.3 million to feed and clothe the Herat refugees. So far just £130,000 has arrived.

"We have to come to terms with the fact that we will see many people die in Afghanistan this year," said Erick de Mul, UN coordinator for Afghanistan.

In Pakistan thousands of refugees have been

From Barren Camps to Pakistan

moved to a new camp at Shamshatu, a mud-brown wasteland 20 miles south of Peshawar.

Most of Shamshatu's 60,000 Afghans live in canvas tents and survive on handouts of wheat flour, cooking oil and lentils. But the World Food Programme says supplies will last only two months more.

Clutching their red and green "verification cards" hundreds of men stood in a circle waiting to collect a ticket to exchange for food. Crouched on the floor in the centre of the ring in a roped-off block sat dozens of women covered from head to foot by their burqas. Most of them were widows.

Qudsia Ghafar was waiting for a food ticket for her family. Her husband lost both his feet in

45-12 512
a landmine blast but made the week-long journey with his family from their home in Panjsher valley in northern Afghanistan a month ago.

"We had nothing to eat, there was no food," she said. "Our house was burned when the Russians came and now it has been destroyed again by the Taliban. They put my husband and my father in jail. My father is still in our village. We didn't have the money to bring him with us."

Pakistan closed the border crossing at Torikham in the Khyber Pass in November, saying it could not cope with the influx of refugees. Over 2 million Afghans fled during the Soviet occupation in the 1980s, live in Pakistan.

Nearly 600 people are still crossing every day, by bribing the guards or evading checkpoints. It is the largest wave since September 1996 when Taliban fighters seized the capital, Kabul.

From Bagram, in central Afghanistan, Ahmad Shah and his wife travelled for five days with their five children. "Now we want to learn a trade and work because Afghans don't want assistance, they want to work."

When the fighting is finished, "we will go back and rebuild our houses," said Mr Shah, who worked in Bagram as a nurse and English teacher. "I am always thinking about my house and the grapevines I had. Now there is nothing."

Guardian News Service

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

5 FEB 2001

Refugees: Pak. gets tough

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, JAN. 28. Faced with deluge of new refugees from Afghanistan in the wake of fresh sanctions by the United Nations Security Council, Pakistan for the first time initiated tough measures for the arrest and deportation of the refugees.

Reports from the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) suggest that on Saturday the police arrested Afghan refugees for deportation to Afghanistan. There is no way the local police could have acted against the Afghan refugees without a nod from Islamabad.

Through the decision, Pakistan is sending out a clear message to the refugees as well as to the international community that it is not the headache of Pakistan alone to deal with the mess arising out of the protracted war in Afghanistan.

Pakistan is sore, particularly with the United States and the West, for having abandoned the Afghans after the withdrawal of

Soviet troops from the country in 1989 and has not missed any opportunity to remind them of the role of the Afghan war in the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

No doubt, the move to deport the illegal Afghans is also influenced to a great extent by the enormous burden it has posed to Pakistan in the last two decades. There are an estimated 2.5 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and most of them are settled in the provinces of NWFP and Balochistan. The presence of such a large number of refugees in the two provinces has led to serious socio-economic problems.

The case of Pakistan is that its economic situation does not permit any further accommodation of the Afghan refugees and if the international community has any sympathy for the plight of the refugees, it should contribute generously for their relief and rehabilitation programme.

A day before the U.N. adopted the fresh sanctions resolution the Pakistan Foreign Minister, Mr.

Abdul Sattar, told a news conference in Islamabad that unless a major international effort was launched to provide humanitarian assistance to the Afghans, creating a safety net against starvation, the world would be witnessing one of the gravest human tragedies of our times.

The Interior Minister, Maj. Gen. (ret'd) Moinuddin Haider, while addressing a meeting of the Islamabad Chambers of Commerce and Industry, voiced the concern of Pakistan on the continuing influx of Afghans.

While stating that Pakistan cannot afford millions of Afghan refugees on its soil, the Minister called upon the international community to extend due assistance to provide food and shelter to the ever-increasing number of refugees. "Either the influx should stop or the international community should come forward with help to look after them," he told the meeting.

THE HINDU

THE HINDU

29 JAN 2001

Afghan leader seeks U.S. help in stalling Pak support for Taliban

WASHINGTON: A leader of the northern-based opposition in Afghanistan urged the Bush administration on Wednesday to pressure Pakistan to end its support for the ruling Taliban militia.

Abdullah Abdullah, foreign affairs specialist of the Northern Alliance group of Afghanistan, called Pakistan the "main and ultimate patron" of the Taliban and said the United States should seek ways to end Pakistan's "aggressive policies" towards his country. Abdullah spoke to a gathering on Capi-

tol Hill.

Among other recommendations, he said Bush administration should seek strict enforcement of the UN arms embargo against the Taliban and should support the formation of a broad-based, multi-ethnic and fully representative government in Afghanistan.

The Northern Alliance is made up of predominantly ethnic and religious minorities and is squeezed into several small pockets in the country's north-eastern region and controls five per cent of Afghanistan. (AP)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

25 JAN 2001

SANCTIONS ON TALIBAN / INDIA DISCUSSES FALLOUT WITH U.S., TURKEY

Pak. holds the key to success ^{23/1}

By Atul Aneja ^{110-1A}

NEW DELHI, JAN. 22. India has held intensive discussions with the United States and Turkey on the fallout of international sanctions on the Taliban and ways to bring peace to strife-torn Afghanistan in the future.

Official-level talks were held last week with Mr. Jeffrey Lunsted, director of the Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan desk in the U.S. State Department. Mr. Lunsted was here after a week-long visit to Pakistan where he visited Peshawar and Islamabad.

Turkey's special envoy on Afghanistan, Mr. Aydemir Erman, is also here for consultations.

According to highly-placed sources in the Government, the U.S. response is determined by two key considerations.

Washington would want the sanctions to be enforced provided their implementation does not challenge the authority of Pakistan's Chief Executive, General Pervez Musharraf. Pakistan is the centrepiece of the enforcement regime, seeking the snapping of arms supply to the Taliban and the withdrawal of foreign military advisers from Afghan soil.

Neighbouring Pakistan will have to be involved in the implementation of the sanctions, which came into effect on Friday last.

The United Nations Security Council resolution demands the handover of the Saudi fugitive, Osama bin Laden, and the closure of militant training camps in Afghanistan.

It is, however, felt that any intrusive enforcement mechanism operating from Pakistani soil can result in a huge political backlash against Gen. Musharraf. For instance, an enforcement regime involving the positioning of

U.N. inspectors in Pakistan could be construed as a humiliation by Islamabad.

In turn, the perceived "sell-out" can be a rallying point for anti-Musharraf demonstrations, especially by the Islamic extremists who are already challenging his authority openly.

A groundswell of opposition to Gen. Musharraf, still seen as the possible bulwark against radicalism in the Afghan-Pakistan strategic arc by the U.S., is unlikely to suit Washington's larger geopolitical interests.

Hoping for internal consolidation under him, a section of the U.S. establishment feels it may still not be too late for the General to take on the pan-Islamic militants frontally. Despite some rumblings, his corps commanders, who form the nucleus of the Pakistani establishment, are largely united and will back him in case of a crackdown.

Satellite surveillance

Given the sensitivity in Pakistan of the mechanism to implement the sanctions, the U.S. may not be inclined to consider a "Iraq-type" enforcement regime.

A more discreet arrangement, revolving round satellite surveillance of the Pakistan-Afghan border, may have to be evolved. On-site physical inspections, however, may have to be enforced in case there is a pattern to sanction-busting from the Pakistani side.

The "transition documents" of the outgoing Clinton administration are also likely to advocate the framework for achieving a political settlement for Afghanistan in the future.

One view circulating in Washington is that political negotiations between the Pushtun-dominated Taliban and the Northern Alliance of Commander Ahmad Shah Masood, which

has a strong ethnic Tajik accent, may not be enough.

The framework for a durable solution may have to be broadened and involve other ethnic groups as well. Some Afghans, residing abroad, should also have a say in the peace process, whenever it begins.

The U.S. is also likely to be interested in reviving the Loya Jirga, a representative grand assembly of Afghans.

Washington, however, realises that the military situation has to be tackled before any political settlement can be visualised.

Serious negotiations may not be possible unless the Northern Alliance makes more gains on the battle front.

Taliban planning offensive?

Aware that the military situation will be the key to a future settlement, the Northern Alliance feels the Taliban is getting ready to unleash a bloody winter campaign against it.

"The Taliban's objective would be to seize the entire country in order to present a *fait accompli* at the negotiating table," says Afghanistan's Ambassador to India, Mr. Masood Khalili.

Mr. Khalili, who represents the Northern Alliance, says that after Ramzan, Pakistan has pushed a large body of troops into the Kunduz area of northwest Afghanistan.

Some of these forces belong to Pakistan's Cherat division.

The Taliban's objective is to extend the constituency of radicalism from Pakistan to parts of Central Asia.

This, in case it happens, will threaten the stability in the region and beyond, he says.

THE HINDU

23 JAN 2001

Taliban denies closure of its offices in Pak.

Ho-1
By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, JAN. 21. The Taliban has denied as "baseless" reports in the Pakistani press that Islamabad has closed down all its offices, following the slapping of United Nations Security Council sanctions on the fundamentalist regime in Afghanistan. 22/1

The Taliban Ambassador in Pakistan, Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, told *The Hindu* that "even the United Nations resolution does not talk of closing down of our offices. So where is the question".

When contacted, the Pakistan Foreign office Additional Secretary and official spokesman, Mr. Riaz Mohammad Khan, said the resolution required the member-countries to "scale down" the strength of the diplomatic missions of the Taliban, and Pakistan was ascertaining the strength of the mission staff in the country.

Mr. Khan told a news conference on Saturday that Pakistan would abide by the sanctions resolution. In a separate TV interview, the Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdul Sattar, said Pakistan, in cooperation with Afghanistan, would do its best to mitigate the sufferings of Afghans.

The report in *The News*, (since denied by the Taliban Ambassador), said the Interior Ministry had sent a communication to all four provinces ordering immediate closure of all offices of the Taliban and the Ariana Airlines (official airline of Afghanistan), besides freezing of funds and other financial assets of the Afghanistan-based Saudi dissident, Osama bin Laden.

THE HINDU

22 JAN 2001

Laden wants to leave Afghanistan

Mubashir Zaidi
Islamabad, January 9

SAUDI DISSIDENT Osama Bin Laden has requested Taliban leader Mullah Omar to allow him and associates to leave Afghanistan and shift their operational headquarter somewhere else, *The News* reported today.

The paper said that Yemen could be Osama's new destination citing Osama's recent marriage to a daughter of an influential Syed of Yemen.

The daily added that Mullah Omar has already started consultations with his cabinet to decide whether to allow Osama to leave Afghanistan.

Source said that Mullah Omar had initially requested Osama to continue his Afghan stay and assured him of the approval of



Afghan people and the Taliban cabinet.

"Omar believes Osama's depart-

ture would demoralise Afghans and the jihadi forces active in Afghanistan for whom Osama's presence is a source of inspiration. In this backdrop, Omar after obtaining the approval was expected to address the nation to make a unanimous appeal to Osama to continue his stay in Afghanistan," the report stated, adding that Osama, on the other hand, believes his presence in Afghanistan would multiply Afghans' miseries arising out of UN sanctions on Taliban.

The paper said that Osama's chances of migration to Yemen are bright as Osama's family has acquired a few islands near Yemen where some of his elder family members had once offered Osama to keep his family members (wives and children) in one of these islands.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 JAN 2001

Afghanistan: a 'state' of new concern

110-12
By P. S. Suryanarayana 6/1

THE NEW and powerful 'international norm' of containing worldwide terrorism has produced a dramatic political alliance across the continents. Of much strategic importance is the manner in which the United States and post-Soviet Russia have now made common cause at the United Nations. They authored the latest sanctions, primarily an arms embargo, that the U.N. Security Council has imposed on Afghanistan. More precisely, Afghanistan's present Taliban regime remains isolated by the major powers and most other countries despite its control of the capital (Kabul) since September 1996. It is common knowledge that the U.S. and the former Soviet Union had viewed Afghanistan, which borders Pakistan in the overall Indian strategic neighbourhood, as one of the last frontiers during the fierce Cold War that ended only about a decade ago. Running through the same territory of Afghanistan, ironically, are the new battle lines of the present joint fight by the U.S. and Russia against the growing menace of international terrorism. Their opponent is the Taliban, and this battle has nothing to do with any unfinished Cold War agenda of either Russia or the U.S.

The Taliban, a radical Islamist outfit by its own professions and practices, is widely believed to control about 90-95 per cent of the rugged Afghan territory at this stage. Yet, the Taliban, which makes no secret of its origins as a protégé of Pakistan, finds itself on the wrong side of the international ethos of the 21st century. The reasons centre on the Taliban's 'governing agenda' that consists of some period-specific practices of religious orthodoxy, which the larger international community sees now as obscurantism when applied politically. A more salient reason for the Taliban's alienation from the international stage now is the presence of the controversial Osama bin Laden in that south-west Asian country. Osama is widely regarded as the elusive high priest of anti-West Islamisation and the new cult of borderless terrorism. With 'Osama' denoting a 'lion', though, he has come to play the godfather to the Taliban in its politics. This international perception is, of course, stoutly de-

nied by the Taliban. Yet, the unanswered question is why the Taliban, which is already guided by a spiritual leader like Mullah Omar, should play host to Osama, especially if he does not really run the affairs of Afghanistan.

The Taliban's constant refrain is that Osama, an enormously wealthy political dissident of Saudi Arabia, is only a "guest" of the current "government" in Kabul. He is also said to keep himself aloof from the 'Talibanisation' of either Afghanistan, a multi-ethnic society fractured along sec-

Secondly and more significantly, the Taliban navigates across the vortex of a maelstrom — Islam's ideological-civilisational 'assault' on the West as orchestrated by Osama. As an original political dissident of a U.S.-friendly Saudi Arabia, itself the bastion of Islam, Osama is an obvious 'leader' of such a 'crusade'. This is so despite his rise to political prominence in the now-bygone international ambience of the U.S.-sponsored 'Islamic' struggle against the old Soviet Union and its 'puppet regime' in Kabul in the 1980s.

The Taliban finds itself on the wrong side of the international ethos... One reason for this is the presence of Osama bin Laden on its territory.

tarian Islamic lines, or of the other countries in its vicinity. Significantly, however, the Taliban has, in recent months, begun to acknowledge once again that Osama is indeed present in Afghanistan. Several months after the U.S.' cruise missile attacks on his suspected terrorist training dens in Afghanistan in 1998, the Taliban started disputing his very presence within the territory under its firm control. Western intelligence had it, too, that Pakistan also could have played a part in spreading stories that the Taliban and Osama might have fallen out after the U.S.' action against him.

The shadow-play over the simple question of Osama's whereabouts is relevant to the international community on two counts. The degeneration of Afghanistan as a 'failed state' has led to a prospect of destabilisation of territories outside it, including India's Jammu and Kashmir. The feared exponential effect of the 'Talibanisation' of a one-time 'progressive' Afghanistan is that Islamic radicalism as a political 'philosophy' may be 'exported' to neighbouring Muslim societies in Central Asia and to the Kashmir valley. In addition, Western intelligence officials lend credence to the suspicions of their Indian counterparts that some Pakistan-based militant groups of ostensible 'Kashmiri' orientation are actually inspired by Osama and the Taliban brand of fundamentalism.

The collapse of the Soviet Union by the early 1990s and the consequent political-ideological vacuum that confronted the U.S. led in the West to the identification of international terrorism as a looming threat to the emergence of a post-Cold War global order. While terrorism was often overlooked by one side or the other during the Cold War as the means to an end, such violence is now increasingly viewed as politically immoral on the international scene. Diverse countries facing varied external threats of 'jihad' or Islamic revolution have now found it easier to seek a common front against the Taliban and its 'warrior-guardian', Osama. The U.S., which sees itself as a direct target of Osama, and Russia, which still fancies the fundamentalism-weary Central Asian states as its allies, have been joined by India in this context. Some Western critics of the outgoing Clinton administration argue that Washington will run the risk of losing its considerable clout among the Arab-Islamists by joining hands with Russia and India, both portrayed as having a vested strategic interest in riding on the U.S.' shoulders to try and destroy the Taliban. The point missed in this scare-mongering, though, is that Afghanistan, if not brought back to the global mainstream as a responsible player, can destabilise a wider geostrategic area with considerable potential for petro-driven economic activities.

The latest Afghan-related reservations expressed by China and Malaysia, during the U.N. deliberations on the sanctions against the Taliban, have much to do with their fears of a possible humanitarian fallout in that country. With this aspect being addressed by the U.N. itself, there really is no evidence of any Chinese strategic sympathy for Osama. If Osama and the Taliban have become synonymous in this international discourse, the reason is traceable to the latter's political compulsions.

If the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan does not figure in Noam Chomsky's characteristic work on 'rogue states', and if Yossef Bodansky's delineation of Osama's intelligence-graphic profile does not fully establish the equation between the Saudi dissident and the present Kabul 'regime', the reasons may have something to do with the incompleteness of its evolution. This is not to suggest that the Taliban, which initially showed some promise of being a 'puritanical' outfit, is or must be seen as a political 'rogue'. The fact simply is that the circumstances of the Taliban's rise were such that it needs an expansive political space to free itself from the burdens of the agendas of its original sponsors. In one sense, it is arguable (but not established) that Osama's wealth may have substituted the suspected initial funding of the Taliban by a U.S.-friendly Saudi Arabia. Having shaped the Taliban into a political entity, as widely believed, Pakistan at present is still busy in visualising its own world view. As for the old diplomatic speculation that the U.S. had originally conceived of the need for a so-called 'non-mujahideen' outfit at the height of the post-communist Afghan civil war in the mid-1990s, the Taliban's evolution-graph, as gleaned in Washington for some time now, must have disillusioned it. But some 'leaders' of the post-communist and pre-Taliban vintage in Afghanistan are still around on that country's political fringes. It is in this context that the U.S. and Russia have made clear that their initiative for the latest Afghan-related sanctions at the U.N. is not a step towards supporting these anti-Taliban forces. The question is how the Taliban will respond to this diplomatic 'encirclement'.

THE HINDU

6 JAN 2001