

Sinister intent

Bangla
5/2
Targeting minorities in Bangladesh 7/6/11

The burning alive of 12 members of an influential Hindu family in Chittagong by armed terrorists is the most ghastly incident of minority persecution since Begum Khaleda Zia's BNP-Jamat e Islam coalition came to power in October 2001. Although for well over a year she allowed her own supporters as also those of the Jamat to unleash terror on the minorities for daring to vote for the Awami League in the parliamentary elections, Wednesday's incident is unprecedented and that women and a four-day-old baby were thrown into leaping flames underscored the barbarity. The recovery of explosive material reinforces the belief that they came with murder in their hearts. And yet the Khaleda government has tried to explain the dreadful happening as a simple case of dacoity, a law and order problem. Similar was the stance of her government when hundreds of minority women were raped by her party cadres in the southern districts, specially in Bhola. In all cases of rape and killing, officials attributed them to family feuds, disputes regarding property and even failed romance — an ingenious way of covering up the anti-minority bias.

Just like the Sil family in Chittagong, others of the minority communities have been systematically targeted. The purpose is to force them to flee to India. That would not only deplete Awami League's minority vote bank but also provide an opportunity to grab minority properties. The sinister intent of the Khaleda government is quite clear. Even the international human rights groups have publicly acknowledged this.

আনন্দ সর্জনা

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22 SEP 2003

ভারতে নদী

প্রভাত ঘোষ • ঢাকা

২২ সেপ্টেম্বর: ভারতের নদীসংযোগ প্রকল্পকে ঘিরে স্ফোত দানা বাঁধছে বাংলাদেশে। আসন্ন ভারত-বাংলাদেশ যৌথ নদী কমিশনের (জে আর সি) বৈঠকে এ ব্যাপারে কড়া মনোভাব গ্রহণের সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে বাংলাদেশ সরকার। বাংলাদেশের আশঙ্কা, ওই প্রকল্পের ফলে ভারত থেকে বাংলাদেশে প্রবাহিত বিভিন্ন নদীর জল কমে যাবে। এমনকী, অসমের বরাক নদীর উপর প্রস্তাবিত জলবিদ্যুৎ প্রকল্পেরও বিরোধিতা করার সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে বাংলাদেশ সরকার।

বাংলাদেশের মতে, ভারত থেকে গঙ্গা, ব্রহ্মপুত্র, তিস্তা-সহ যে সব নদী বাংলাদেশে প্রবাহিত হয়েছে, সেইসব নদীর জল সমানভাবে বাংলাদেশকেও দেওয়া হোক। ভারতের নদীসংযোগ প্রকল্পের বিরুদ্ধে ব্যাপক প্রচার চালাচ্ছে বাংলাদেশের শাসক দল বাংলাদেশ ন্যাশনালিস্ট পার্টি (বি এন পি)-র নেতৃত্বাধীন চার দলের জোট।

বিষয়টি এমনই স্পর্শকাতর যে, এ ব্যাপারে এখনই

সংযোগ প্রকল্পের বিরুদ্ধে

ভারত থেকে জল টেনে নিলে তা গঙ্গা জল-বটন চুক্তিকে লঙ্ঘন করা হবে বলেও বাংলাদেশ মনে করে। এই প্রসঙ্গে যৌথ নদী কমিশনের অন্যতম সদস্য তৌহিদুল আনোয়ার খান বলেছেন, “বিষয়টি দুই দেশের কাছেই খুবই স্পর্শকাতর। সেই কারণে বাংলাদেশ দ্বিপাক্ষিক আলোচনার মাধ্যমে এই সমস্যা সমাধানের পক্ষপাতী।” শুধু নদী সংযোগ প্রকল্প বন্ধ করে দেওয়াই নয়, ভারত থেকে বয়ে যাওয়া সাতটি নদীর জলেরও সমান ভাগভাগি চায় বাংলাদেশ সরকার। এরমধ্যে ত্রিপুরার গোমতী, মনু, খোয়াই আর পশ্চিমবঙ্গের তিস্তা, করলা অত্যন্ত। এ ব্যাপারে তৌহিদুল আনোয়ার বলেন, “গত জানুয়ারি মাসে ঢাকায় এক বৈঠকে এবং জাপানে অনুষ্ঠিত বিশ্ব জল সম্মেলনে ভারত বলেছে তাদের বেশ কিছু রাজ্যে ব্যাপক জল সঙ্কট দেখা দিয়েছে। এই মোকাবিলায় জনোই এই সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে ভারত সরকার।

তারা এখনও সরকারি ভাবে আমাদের কিছু না জানালেও আমরা জানতে পেরেছি উত্তর পূর্বাঞ্চলে

বিএনপি-জোট

জলবিদ্যুৎ প্রকল্পের জন্য অসমের বরাক নদীর উপর তিপাইমুখ বাঁধ নির্মাণ করা হবে। এই বাঁধ তৈরি হলে যেখানা অববাহিকায় জলের প্রবাহ ব্যাপকভাবে কমে যাবে। এতে বাংলাদেশের মারাত্মক ক্ষতি হবে।” জে আর সি বৈঠকে এই বিষয়টিও তোলা হবে বলে জানিয়েছেন ওই সদস্য। এ দিকে, ঢাকা অভিযোগ জানিয়েছে, তিস্তার জল ভাগভাগি নিয়ে ভারতের সঙ্গে কয়েকটি বৈঠক হলেও চুক্তি স্বাক্ষরের ইচ্ছা ভারতের দিক থেকে দেখা যায়নি। দিল্লির বৈঠকে এই বিষয়টি হাড়াও গঙ্গার জলের ন্যায় হিসাব চাওয়া হবে বলে জানা গিয়েছে।

ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের নদী বিশেষজ্ঞ অধ্যাপক মালোয়ার হোসেন বলেন, ফরাক্ষা বাঁধের জন্য মারাত্মক ক্ষতির সম্মুখীন হয়েছিল বাংলাদেশ। গঙ্গা জল-বটন চুক্তি করে সেই অবস্থা কাটানো গিয়েছে। একই ভাবে ব্রহ্মপুত্রের জলকে নদী সংযোগ প্রকল্পের মাধ্যমে মধ্যপ্রদেশ ও দক্ষিণ ভারতের খরাপিীড়িত অঞ্চলে নিয়ে গেলে মেঘনা শুকিয়ে যাবে। তাই সঙ্গত কারণেই ভারতের এই প্রকল্প পরিত্যাগ করা উচিত।

1 killed in Bangladesh violence

SF-11
28/9

DHAKA, Sept. 27. — A political activist was gunned down and police used batons to disperse protesters today as Bangladesh was shut down by an Opposition-called strike, officials and witnesses said.

Police baton-charged some 50 women activists of the main Opposition Awami League who tried to break through a security barricade in Dhaka's Dhanmandi area where their party's leader Sheikh Hasina Wajed lives, witnesses said. They said police detained some of the activists. Elsewhere in Dhaka, three vehicles were torched late yesterday by suspected Opposition activists, Channel I television reported.

An Awami League leader in the south-western Khulna district was gunned down by unknown assailants yesterday, officials said. Police said the victim, Tashar Hasan, was wanted for alleged past criminal activity. — AFP

THE STATESMAN

28 SEP 2003

Khaleda disappoints

Bad choice for OIC secretariat

By nominating Salahuddin Qader Chowdhury for Secretary-General of the Organisation of Islamic Conference, Begum Khaleda Zia shoots herself in the foot and antagonises India in the bargain. Salahuddin Qader, as her adviser on parliamentary affairs, enjoys the rank of cabinet minister. Even 32 years after Bangladesh's liberation he swears by Pakistan and regrets that he and his father's desperate bid to play Pakistan's game in what was then East Pakistan did not succeed. He still takes pride in the fact that he personally tortured and butchered freedom fighters and leaders of minority communities — the instances are well documented by those demanding his trial and conviction as war criminal. Persecuting minorities and killing their notable leaders by his private army are still his forte, demonstrated by the recent murder of two noted monks, a Buddhist and a Hindu, in his parliamentary constituency. He had even murdered a student leader of the ruling BNP and made disparaging remarks about Begum Zia that led to his expulsion from the party. But his infinite capacity to unleash violence on communal lines, apart from his reputation as an India baiter facilitated his return. His strong overt linkages with Islamabad have helped.

Already his nomination has evoked protests from intellectuals besides a large section of the Press and Opposition. His nomination is considered an insult both to Bangladesh and the apex Islamic body. More so as Bangladesh has no dearth of eminently suitable candidates. In a sense Salahuddin's nomination symbolises the mindset of Begum Zia's government which is pro-Islamic and pro-Pakistan. She is playing with fire. Elements in her government are pleading for a confederation with Pakistan. Dhaka and Islamabad are jointly lobbying for Salahuddin's candidature which should be a cause of concern for Delhi. This forum, has in the past, been manipulated against India. We should be firm with Bangladesh.

FOR STATEMENT

08 AUG 2003

08 AUG 2003

Hasina, former naval chief charged in graft case

Dhaka, Aug. 4 (PTI): Former Premier and opposition leader Sheikh Hasina Wajed was charged in a graft case involving the purchase of a naval frigate from South Korea at a "loss" of \$88 million.

After a year-long investigation, the anti-corruption bureau filed the charges against Sheikh Hasina and former navy chief Nurul Islam at a court in Dhaka yesterday.

The bureau has charged Hasina and Islam for their involvement in the purchase of a DW-2000H frigate for the Bangladesh navy from the Daewoo Corporation during the opposition leader's tenure as Prime Minister from 1996 to 2001.

The bureau alleged that the accused were instrumental in handing the deal to the Korean company even though it was not the lowest bidder.

Daewoo was the fourth lowest bidder at \$99.97 million and were awarded the contract to supply the "unproven design frigate". As a result of this, the bureau alleged, the country suffered losses of more than 5 billion taka (\$88 million).

The frigate was delivered six months ahead of schedule towards the end of Hasina's tenure as Prime Minister. However, authorities in February detected some irregularities in its construction and decided to decommission it from the navy.

Bangladesh
5-7
5/8

Outwitted by Dhaka

By nominating Salauddin for the top OIC job, the BNP-Jamaat dispensation has only exposed its true colours, writes BIBHUTI BHUSAN NANDY

CONTEMPORARY Bangladesh has no dearth of communalist crooks and thugs. The most vicious of them all who evokes instant hatred and horror at the very mention of his name is Salauddin Qader Chaudhury. A Bangladesh Nationalist Party MP and Adviser on parliamentary affairs to the incumbent Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, for the people of Bangladesh this man is evil personified, stalking a large swathe of Chittagong district and doing or undoing whatever pleases him or whatever he perceives as serving his personal interest and political agenda.

Salauddin defies all canons and constraints of law and morality. His steady rise in parliamentary politics rests squarely on the skillful exercise of his devious electioneering controls and his ability to manipulate and intimidate voters and the administration alike. No politician or political party has dared to challenge his ever-expanding terror networks and arm-twisting terror tactics.

Like their father late Fazlul Qader Chaudhury, Salauddin and his equally redoubtable sibling Gias Qader are wholly and irrevocably sold out to Pakistan. The blood-curdling horrors that the father-and-sons trio had perpetrated in conjunction with the marauding Pakistani army during the liberation war in 1971 are forever etched in the public mind.

The Bangladesh Liberation War Documents and a report by the people's commission appointed by the Committee for Elimination of the Killers and Collaborators of 1971 describe in horrifying details some of the brutalities Salauddin had gratuitously committed against freedom fighters in Chittagong district. These include the gruesome killing of 71-year-old principal Nutan Chandra Singha, and assassination of Farooq, a student leader and Dayalhari Biswas, another college student.

Soon after the liberation of Bangladesh, Salauddin and his father were arrested when they were about to flee to Pakistan with a maund of gold. Following a brief detention, they were let off under the general amnesty declared by the Sheikh Mujib government. Salauddin has thrived ever since on numerous heinous crimes. Killing and maiming of political opponents are his favourite pastimes.



BEGUM KHALEDA ZIA: What has she got to say about BNP MP and advisor on parliamentary affairs Salauddin Qader Chaudhury who has been doing his best to strengthen anti-India feelings?

The assassination of Gnyanajyoti Bhikshu of the Raujan Buddhist monastery by the Aziz Bahini, Salauddin's private army of terrorists, last year is one of the most horrendous crimes against religious minorities in Bangladesh in recent times. Salauddin sheltered the main assassin Aziz in his own house and arranged his safe escape to the Middle East.

Salauddin Qader Chaudhury lets go no pretext to spit venom against India to arouse communal passions against religious minorities. He is invariably involved in every act of Hindu-cleansing in Raujan upazilla and Chittagong metropolitan areas.

It's an open secret that Salauddin has made a huge fortune through his close links with the criminal underworld and smuggling networks operating in the Chittagong port and coastal belt. Despite his pathological hatred for India, in 1991, he made a frantic bid for the GSA of the Indian Airlines and Air India. His failure to clinch that

lucrative deal only sharpened his enmity towards India.

Originally a diehard Muslim Leaguer, Salauddin served as a Cabinet minister in the late Eighties in the Cabinet of Gen. Ershad. He joined the BNP just before the parliamentary election in 2001. His machinations ensured the defeat of the BNP candidate and freedom fighter Col. (Retd.) Oli Ahmed to the unofficial Jamaat candidate Shajahan Chaudhury. Despite this treachery, Begum Zia appointed him her adviser on parliamentary affairs solely for the purpose of using his unending mischief potential against the Awami League. Salauddin has been doing this task most effectively, making it impossible for the opposition Awami League to function in the Parliament.

Despite this un-edifying profile of the man, the BNP-Jamaat government has nominated Salauddin as its candidate for the post of Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Coun-

tries. This has triggered an avalanche of protests throughout the country. For his part, Salauddin has launched a fierce counter-offensive against his detractors. He has filed two defamation cases against the editors of two respected dailies of Dhaka for publishing criticisms of his nomination.

The Bangladesh intelligentsia has no doubt at all that the Khaleda government has nominated this war criminal for the OIC assignment at the instance of Islamabad in the hope that, should he scrape through, it would enormously increase the leverage of the Pakistan-Bangladesh axis in the Islamic world that can be used, among other things, to discomfit and disturb India.

It is for the OIC member states to decide if a man of Salauddin's character and credentials should become the Organisation's chief executive. India has no *locus standi* in the matter, but two developments in this context merit comments.

Last month, Salauddin devoted his 50-minute budget speech in the parliament entirely to calumniating the Awami League, calling the opposition leader Sheikh Hasina as *bua* (housemaid). What is worse, comparing Sheikh Mujib with the Ufa leader Anup Chetia, he asserted in the presence of Prime Minister Begum Zia: "Chetia continued to speak for the independence of his country from the prison in Bangladesh, but during his detention in Pakistan Sheikh Mujib had said that he did not want independence and preferred an undivided Pakistan", adding: "Unlike Chetia, Mujib did not have the courage for independence." By eulogising Anup Chetia the aspirant for the post of OIC General Secretary unwittingly called the bluff in Dhaka's insistent disclaimer that it has nothing to do with the cross-border terrorism in north-east India.

In another significant development, Tareq Rehman, Begum Zia's son and heir-apparent, has "conveyed" to an Indian diplomat in Dhaka that the real reason for nominating Salauddin Qader Chaudhury for the OIC assignment is to "ease him out of the country" and "that's all to India's advantage." The diplomat readily fell for the dope and approvingly reported his "intelligence coup" to New Delhi. A less naive officer, with a touch of professionalism, in his place would have seen through the game and advised his headquarters that by nominating Salauddin for the top OIC job the BNP-Jamaat dispensation had only exposed its true colours. He would have pointed out how his predecessor, under a spell of the same Young Turk, and in league with his boss back home, had messed up India's time-tested policy priorities in Bangladesh, causing irreparable damage to Indo-Bangla relations.

Clearly, a small coterie of researchers and analysts continue to dupe a clueless government into complacency about Dhaka's ever sharpening anti-India agenda. Is there no way to hold them to account?

(The writer is former Additional Secretary, Research and Analysis Wing, Cabinet Secretariat, retired Director General, Indo-Tibetan Border Police and former National Security Adviser, Government of Mauritius)

Naidu feel-good at Atal feet

RADHIKARAMASESHAN

Raipur, July 18: M. Venkaiah Naidu atoned and Atal Bihari Vajpayee basked as paeans flowed copiously from the BJP president's lips in his opening remarks at the national executive.

Anxious to put behind the controversy his remarks on the iron man versus development man kicked up, Naidu was quoted as saying: "The situation in the country can be summed up in just one sentence: There is a feel good factor." The second half of the sentence was highlighted in capital letters in the press release.

"The people have seen, tested and judged the performance of the NDA government under Shri Atalji's leadership. As I observed in Indore, too, there is perhaps no precedent for a Prime Minister to remain as popular as Shri Atalji is after five years in the saddle. This gives the confidence that, under his... leadership, the BJP along with our allies will

win a renewed and bigger mandate...."

Naidu's speech was an acknowledgement of Vajpayee's supremacy in government and party: he endorsed the Prime Minister's approach of fighting elections in a coalition in a spirit of give-and-take and not by taking hard positions on Hindutva.

Although it was absent from the handout, BJP spokesman Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi quoted Naidu as ruling out thrusting Ramjanmabhoomi, a common civil code and abrogation of Article 370 on the NDA.

In the handout, Naidu said: "Hindutva is the soul of India. We are proud of it but it cannot be an election issue. Nor can

Hindutva be projected as a narrow religious concept. We are committed to secularism but are opposed to pseudo-secularism." It is now more or less clear that as in 1999, the BJP will not have a separate manifesto.

But as a sop to the hawks, Naidu reportedly stressed the need for population control and called on the government to take "firm and decisive steps". His remarks, again excluded from the handout, were read in the context of the VHP's campaign targeting minorities. Naqvi, however, denied communal overtones.

Naidu's time frame for putting Vajpayee on a pedestal was the three months from the April Indore executive till Raipur. "Under the visionary leadership of our Prime Minister,... (NDA) has traversed a long distance in these three months."

The reasons: Vajpayee's visits to the G8 summit and China, his Pakistan peace initiative and the launch of the pension and health insurance schemes.

■ See Page 6

QUOTE

I had told Fernandes that whenever he goes to Amarnath, he should take me along

NITISH KUMAR

THE TELEGRAPH

CBI confirms extradition move

Statesman News Service

BHOPAL, July 16. — The Central Bureau of Investigation today told the CJM court here that it had written on 21 April 2003 to the Ministry of External Affairs to take up extradition of Mr Warren Anderson, the main suspect in the Bhopal gas tragedy case.

The CBI's two letters submitted in the court today revealed the MEA on 5 May 2003 had written to the deputy chief of Indian embassy in Washington, Mr Alok Prasad, asking him to forward Mr Anderson's extradition request to

the concerned US officials.

The second letter submitted in the court was about MEA confirming to the CBI about forwarding extradition request letter to Indian embassy in Washington.

The MEA's letter to Mr Prasad said the documents — in three volumes (pages not mentioned) — "have been duly forwarded by MEA and authenticated by the US embassy in New Delhi".

The CBI has understandably written a 45-page letter explaining why Mr Anderson should be extradited to India.

It is for the first time that the Indian government has started

move for Mr Anderson's extradition.

The CBI disclosure, however, does not specify if the extradition request letter had been delivered to the concerned US officials.

The CBI today also submitted an application with relevant documents and left it to the court to decide on whether Dow Chemicals could be listed as an accused in the gas tragedy case.

Last September, the court had asked the CBI to "verify" the merger between Union Carbide and Dow Chemicals, USA.

The case will be heard on 16-17 September.

Double blow for India abroad

Students to be vetted by Cool Britannia...

LONDON, July 12. — There's more bad news for students contemplating higher studies in the West. Already under pressure by tightened US student visa regulations, Indian post-graduate scholars are now likely to be "vetted" under Britain's decade-old Voluntary Vetting Scheme before being accepted by a British university if the area of their research is seen as contributing to weapons proliferation.

The UK — or Cool Britannia as the current dispensation reportedly sees itself — has undertaken a review of the scheme to see whether it could be made compulsory to prevent potential terrorists from infiltrating British laboratories in the guise of research scholars. "A comprehensive review is on to look into merits of making the Vetting

Scheme Compulsory," a Foreign and Commonwealth Office spokesman said.

India is among the 10 countries affected by the vetting scheme. The others are Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Israel, Egypt, Cuba, Libya and North Korea. Under the scheme, if a British university has "concerns" about an applicant from one of these countries, it sends his or her details to the foreign office for "vetting". The "no-go" areas of research include aeronautical engineering, computing science, mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, electronic engineering, genetics, biochemistry, biotechnology, biology, ceramics and glass technology, microbiology, bio-physics, nuclear physics and chemistry.

— PTI/SNS

600 feared dead in Bangladesh steamer disaster

Associated Press
Dhaka, July 9

SOME 600 people have gone missing and are feared dead after an overcrowded ferry capsized in Bangladesh late on Tuesday. The triple-deck ferry with 750 people on board sank at the meeting point of the Padma, Meghna and the Dakatia as it was approaching a ferry terminal in Chandpur town near Dhaka.

Many of the passengers were sleeping when the ferry went down. About 150 people swam to safety and were rescued by fishermen, said Manzoor-e-Elahi, the area's administrator.

Two bodies have so far been recovered, said police officer Abu Rahat. Searchers have been unable to locate the sunken ferry, now believed to be under 200 feet of water.

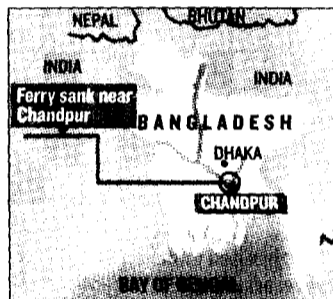
The ferry was travelling from Dhaka to the Bhola district when it met with the accident, said Elahi. Some newspapers said the ferry might even have been carrying over 1,000 passengers, nearly three times its capacity.

The ferry was "extremely overcrowded" as about 400 passengers boarded it at the last moment after another ferry cancelled its voyage, said a Dhaka paper. "I was in the upper deck with my three-year-old daughter," said Rina Begum (25), a survivor, who was rescued by fishermen. "There was a big jolt after which the ferry started sinking."

Heavy monsoon rains have swollen many rivers in Bangladesh. Elahi said police and locals were using boats to



Relatives mourn the dead.



GRAPHICS: JAYANTO MAITRA

search for survivors. A salvage ship equipped with cranes to pull out sunken ships arrived at the accident site on Wednesday.

Frequent boat accidents claim hundreds of lives every year in Bangladesh. Following protests by boat operators in April, Bangladesh officials withdrew a ban on night travel by ferries — enforced after a series of accidents. In return, ferry-owners promised not to operate vessels in inclement weather and to follow safety regulations.

Two river ferries went down on April 21 in separate accidents near Dhaka, killing over 135 people.

10 JUL 2003

Converts to violence

DESTROY the minorities' sense of belonging so that they are forced to flee the country... after selling their property for a song... This strategy... will rid the country of not only the minorities... but also all the ethnic groups, and turn it into a monolithic, theocratic state...." This is so true about the Sangh Parivar in India. Unfortunately, it's true about the rulers in our neighbouring Bangladesh. For the words following "theocratic state" in the People's Investigation Commission report are: "... on the lines Pakistan and Afghanistan". Distressingly, this minority bashing in Bangladesh is one of the after-effects of the saffron brigade's worst crime: the demolition of Babari Masjid in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992.

PIC is an independent body of leading Bangladeshi intellectuals. It has conducted a detailed inquiry into the persecution of minorities after the 1 October 2001 parliamentary elections in which the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Jamat-e-Islami combine came to power. PIC blames the ruling alliance for unleashing "planned and systematic attacks" which have surpassed the atrocities committed on the minorities during the 1971 liberation war. The 102-page PIC report says the "planned attacks" were carried out to attain "far reaching objectives", such as "cutting off the minorities from the... social and political mainstream by destroying... the unique concept of pluralism and unity-in-diversity... carefully nurtured for ages as part of Bengali culture and society". The other objective was "to establish a theocratic state and a monolithic social system which negates the ideals, history and struggle that led to the creation of a nation state called the People's Republic of Bangladesh". A more sinister purpose of the persecution was to help resolve the "minority issue... irritating some people since partition". PIC deplores the fact that the old Pakistani legacy of discriminating against and harassing the minorities continues with impunity even in Bangladesh.

PIC is headed by Prof. Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, Jehangir Nagar University's ex-vice chancellor, and published its report in Dhaka last week. Given its findings the ruling parties in Dhaka and New Delhi are frighteningly similar. For example, says the PIC report, the main purpose of minority persecution was to "create and consolidate communalism as a political weapon which would help strengthen and spread

Bangladesh is the Gujarat of Hindus and other minorities. But a group of rational people is fighting against communalisation, writes MANASH GHOSH

religion-based communal politics in the country". But unlike in India, "unfortunately no political party has spoken against... this grim reality despite being aware of its dangers" in Bangladesh.

PIC was formed up by Bangladesh's civil rights stalwarts such as Prof. Anis-uz-Zaman, Mosharraf Hosain, Siraj-ul-Islam Chowdhury, Barrister Shafiq Khan after the Khaleda Zia government refused to honour its commitment to international human rights groups to probe complaints against minority persecution. Leave alone filing a report, neither Khaleda Zia's principal secretary, Kamal Siddiqui, who headed a committee of secretaries to probe such atrocities, nor any other committee member has visited any of the affected villages even after 20 months. Instead, her government's stand is that "no persecution

of any kind has taken place because there is no minority or majority community in Bangladesh. All are Bangladeshis. Press reports on persecution are mostly exaggerated and baseless. Stray attacks have taken place because of personal animosity and revenge... The Opposition's conspiracy is also responsible." But PIC has nailed the government's lie by standing against a repressive state machinery trying to thwart attempts to get at the truth.

PIC terms the persecution as "successful staging of mindless violence on a national scale, the dress rehearsal for which was held in 1992 when the Bangladeshi minorities were systematically looted, raped and forced to flee their homes after the demolition of the Babari Masjid". Says the report: "That was the first time when Bangladeshi minorities were told that Bangladesh was

a Muslim majority country where their existence was dependent on the sweet will of the majority community."

The commission indicts the government for not enforcing the rule of law. This "deliberate inaction to allow culprits to roam freely is very much in tune with the policies pursued by communal governments" when Pakistan ruled over what later became Bangladesh. Doesn't this smell of the government's "tacit approval" of the perpetrators' crime? Won't this embolden them to commit more such crimes?

The latest attacks, says PIC, have broken all previous atrocity records, for this time Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Adivasis of all social and economic strata and professions have been targeted. Christians in Savar, Pabna, Barisal and many south-western districts have been attacked and their women raped.



BEGUM KHALEDA ZIA: Has a lot of questions to answer.

Adivasis in northern Bangladesh have not been spared either. "Minorities living in the rural areas, especially women, were targeted irrespective of whether they were rich or poor." But the poor have borne the brunt of the attacks.

The motive of the attackers is clear: cleansing the country of minorities. "Or else, why should," PIC argues, "8-year-old girls and 60-year-old women be raped?... Why should women and girls be raped in front of their husbands and parents? Why should 100-year-old Rajkumar Das, an apolitical, faceless figure of Bhola's Annadaprasad village, be beaten mercilessly with iron rods? And why should the minorities be tried by BNP-sponsored 'people's court' for committing the 'grievous crime of voting for the Awami League'? And why should huge sums be extorted in the form of 'safety tax', 'minority tax' and 'defence tax' from them for letting them stay in the country?"

The report says the immediate objective was to "create a fear psychosis so that the minorities would not vote" and flee their homes - echoes of Gujarat Assembly election 2002.

PIC has categorised Bhola, Barisal and Bagerhat as the "most severely affected districts" and Chittagong, Sirajganj, Pabna and Rajshahi as "severely affected districts". Minorities in Jhenaidah, Natore, Gajipore, Kishoreganj, Feni and Patuakhali districts too have been attacked. Khaleda Zia's ruling alliance considers minorities as Awami League votebank. The attacks were launched to neutralise this very votebank. But most of the 41% Awami League votes were of Muslims.

The minorities have lost faith in the state machinery because, as they told PIC, the civil administration and the security forces have failed to protect their

life and property during troubled times. "The minorities ask questions like... why are we deprived of our rights despite constitutional sanctions?" Says the report: "All the persecuted minorities told PIC in unequivocal terms that they want their names struck off the voters' list... because they don't want to vote, for the state won't protect them from becoming targets of political vengeance and personal greed." The minorities have lost the will to resist because in many areas, such as Lalmohan in Bhola, local officials not only encouraged criminals to rape women and loot people but also threatened the victims to "shut up or face the consequences". More than 100 rape cases were reported from Bhola's small Lord Hardinge Union alone.

Neighbours are like brothers. But like Gujarat, in Bangladesh too they turned into monsters. The PIC report says minorities are "devastated" because they were attacked by their neighbours and influential people many of whom are "god-fathers" of the ruling party. "People, highly respected in their areas, became objects of hate after the polls. Students who till the other day bowed reverentially to their teachers didn't hesitate to beat them mercilessly; even patients didn't think twice before vandalising and torching dispensaries of dedicated doctors... Some of the Muslims who sheltered or dared to rescue the minorities were attacked too... This has forced mass migration to India".

The report cites instances of mass migration to India after the last polls and in December 1992. "It is an established fact that Hindus have been continuously migrating to India which the government here refuses to acknowledge. A look at the successive census figures will establish this truth. The government refuses to explain the reasons for the sharp decline in the Hindu population, though the decadal growth of the Muslim population is rising sharply," says the report.

PIC has warned Dhaka that minority persecution is attracting world attention. Abdel Fattah special rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights for Religious Intolerance, has already visited Bangladesh and prepared a report in which he has expressed serious concern over all forms of religious intolerance and discrimination in Bangladesh - and urged the government to eliminate them.

(The author is Senior Leader Writer, The Statesman.)

CJ appointment 'politicised'

By Haroon Habib

Reza *10-15* *15/6*

DHAKA, JUNE 24. Justice K. M. Hasan has been sworn-in as the Chief Justice of Bangladesh by the President, Iajuddin Ahmed, amid an unprecedented boycott by the Supreme Court Bar Association.

Mr. Justice Hasan replaced Mr. Justice Mainur Reza Chowdhury on his retirement on Monday.

Contending that Mr. Justice Hasan superseded two seniors, the Bar Association president, Rukunuddin Mahmud, said that such appointments were highly politicised.

The Association had officially 'disapproved' of it and termed it as a "violation of (the) long-standing tradition and convention".

It, however, felicitated the new Chief Justice "in line with the long-standing tradition of the bar". The appointment was made at a time when the Bar and the Government are already in a face-off over the non-confirmation of six additional judges appointed by the previous Awami League Government and on the vital question of the independence of the judiciary.

The Association in a resolution said, "The appointment of the Chief Justice was unprecedented in the annals of Bangladesh's judiciary."

But the Law Minister, Moudud Ahmed, defended the action saying Mr. Justice Hasan had been a "victim of injustice".

Repairing the damage

5.6 Khaleda's SAFMA jamboree 12/6

Begum Khaleda Zia would have been well advised to turn the searchlight inwards before appealing to 170 journalists of south Asia to fight narrowness, limited vision and conflict and instead support peace, friendship and humanism at the recent two-day session of South Asia Free Media (SAFMA) in Dhaka. She claimed at the conference, jointly financed by the UNDP and the Norwegian government, that the Press was free in her country and government imposed no restrictions on foreign journalists. Her assertion is in stark contrast with facts independently established. The Committee to Protect Journalists and Reporters Sans Frontier have said in unambiguous terms that persecution of journalists in Bangladesh has reached intolerable levels and professionals faced death threats. Their reports were not allowed to be distributed to SAFMA delegates. In her 20 months in office, four journalists have been killed, 25 have been unlawfully detained, 250 have suffered inhuman persecution and 30 newspaper offices were attacked. Threatened with retaliation for exposing corruption and misdeeds of party leaders, reporters have fled their homes in moffusil towns. She has detained and persecuted the country's leading human rights activist and columnist Shahriar Kabir for highlighting torture, rape and loot of minority property by party activists. He was charged with sedition for "showing the government in poor light and tarnishing the country's image abroad". Identical charges were leveled against two foreign journalists of Channel Four for filming a documentary "From secularism to Islamisation".

The purpose of hosting the SAFMA jamboree was to attempt to repair the damage that her government's image has suffered for its pronounced intolerance towards honest journalists, academics, human rights activists and religious and ethnic minorities. Khaleda refuses to learn from history and is treading the same path which alienated the Awami League from the masses. The SAFMA conference has backfired.

Fresh turmoil in Chittagong Hills

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, MAY 27. The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh has once again plunged into unrest less than five years after the landmark peace accord signed between the Government and tribal rebels' group, Shanti Bahini, in 1997. Growing incidents of human right violations and armed hostilities now grip the region, say both tribal and non-tribal inhabitants of the hills. The signing of the accord brought an end to decades-old armed hostilities between Bangladesh security forces and Parbattya Chaattagram Janasanghati Samity (PCJSS), the mother organisation of the tribal insurgents.

The accord facilitated the return of thousands of tribal refugees who crossed the border into the Indian State of Tripura. A new law was enacted preserving the separate identity of the tribal people and paving the way for setting up the autono-

Bangladesh HT-11 2815
mous Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council. The supreme leader of the PCJSS, Santu Larma, became chairman of the Council. However, peace and stability — the principal objectives of the accord — has not been restored.

Many of the basic issues like establishment of the tribals' right on their land has not been settled. The rivalry between the pro and anti-accord elements, advocates of full autonomy for the Hill Tracts, the United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF), is strengthening. Also, there is no end to tribal-Bengali settlers rivalry. Certain quarters are trying to provoke it anew, it has been alleged. Although the peace treaty was widely applauded both at home and abroad, the present ruling quarters had vehemently opposed it and registered their protest even holding a 'long march' to Chitagon Hill Tracts. The CHT situation took a dramatic turn

when terrorists, two years ago, held hostage three foreign nationals in deep forest, demanding a ransom of Taka 9 crores.

The incident that drew international attention, proved the weakness in the implementation of the accord. The hostages were, however, freed unhurt. In April this year, incidents of arson occurred in Kamalchari, resulting in the burning of scores of houses belonging to tribals.

Meanwhile, the PCJSS chief, Santu Larma, addressing a rally of his tribal supporters at Dhaka University campus, alleged that certain quarters were trying to wreck the peace treaty. He expressed his firm commitment to resist the machinations. The Netherlands Human right Commission in a report said armed hostilities between PCJSS and UPDF divided tribal communities. The skirmishes led to human rights violations, thus blocking implementation of peace accord.

THE HINDI KISTAN TIMES

28 MAY 2003

Bangladesh, Myanmar conclude border talks

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, MAY 22. A high-level three-day conference on border issues by Bangladesh and Myanmar concluded here today with the signing of Joint Record of Discussions (JRD).

Officials of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) discussed various important issues relating to border with a delegation of the Immigration Headquarters of Myan-

mar. The BDR Director General, Major General M Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, led the Bangladesh side while the Myanmar delegation was headed by the Director General, Immigration Headquarters, U. Maung Htay.

The two countries signed the JRD at the end of the conference paving the way to hold meetings between the two countries every six months to resolve border related problems. They dis-

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cussed cross border smuggling, Bangladeshi fishermen's problems in fishing in the Bay, and holding of commander-level flag meetings and DG-level conference in every six months.

Repatriation of innocent trespassers of both the countries, exchanging lists of detained citizens of respective countries and other bilateral issues also came up for discussion.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary, Shamsur Mo-bin Chowdhury, said at a press briefing today that the Government is keen to expeditiously complete the repatriation process of the Rohingya refugees of Myanmar.

The long-pending issue was not discussed in the just-concluded border conference between the two neighbours.

23 MAY 2003

THE HINDU

Hasina reiterates demand for mid-term poll

Banaka Das

117-12/575

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, MAY 4. The Leader of the Opposition in the Bangladesh Parliament, Sheikh Hasina, has asked the Khaleda Zia Government to step down, paving the way for mid-term elections as the country was "heading for a disaster" under the BNP-Jamaat alliance rule.

The president of the Awami League (AL) which lost the last election to the Khaleda Zia-led four-party alliance in October 2001 in a poll claimed as "highly controversial" is now on a cross-country tour to initiate a possible "mass movement" against the 18-month-old Government.

A staunch critic of Begum Zia's "sheltering of the anti-lib-

eration and fundamentalist forces,"

Ms. Hasina also strongly believes that the movement for a mid-term poll would gain momentum soon.

However, there is no indication whether the left parties, which are equally critical of the Khaleda rule, will support the call for mid-term polls.

The repeated moves by the AL to bring the Opposition under a single anti-Government platform have floundered as the left parties are for a "third force".

Ms. Hasina told a public meeting in northern Rangpur on Saturday that the Khaleda Government had no "right to cling to power" as it had de-

stroyed vital sectors in the last 18 months. Referring to the "the secret killing spree, dacoity, kidnap, repression, torture and rape" across the country, she said such lawlessness and corruption could not be sustained for long.

"In the last 18 months 21,000 women and children have been raped and 24,000 people brutally killed. Prices of essential commodities, including rice, pulse, soybean oil and kerosene, have gone up.

The Government has released 45,000 terrorists from jail and unleashed a reign of terror across the country, mainly to suppress the Opposition and secular, pro-liberation forces," she alleged.

[Faint stamp]

5 MAY 2003

Donors put Bangla govt in the dock

DHAKA, May 18. — The Bangladesh government came under fire from donor countries and multilateral agencies for its failure to ensure good governance, improve law and order and check extortion.

The donors including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund identified these areas as the major stumbling blocks to growth and poverty alleviation on the first day of the two-day meeting of the Bangladesh Development Forum here yesterday.

Some 20 countries and representatives from multilateral development agencies are participating in the meeting, inaugurated by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. The meeting reviewed the government's relations with NGOs, the investment climate, size of the cabinet, red tapism,

availability of ports and the salary of state employees.

Most donors identified law and order deterioration, human rights violation and excessive bureaucratic control as the factors discouraging both local and foreign investment in Bangladesh. World Bank vice-president for South Asia Ms Meiko Nashimizu said the people were the worst sufferers because of rampant corruption and that eradication of corruption could raise the GDP. The donors wanted to know if the government would form an independent anti-corruption commission and whether the rural population will benefit from it.

Sources said Bangladesh is likely to receive \$800 million in aid for the next fiscal to support its balance of payment crisis. — SNS

14 MAY 2003

15 MAY 2003

THE STATESMAN

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By Haroon Habib

Benina

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The president of the Awami League (AL) which lost the last election to the Khaleda Zia-led four-party alliance in October 2001 in a poll claimed as "highly controversial" is now on a cross-country tour to initiate a possible "mass movement" against the 18-month-old Government.

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DAMNING INDICTMENT

Donors warn Khaleda against rights violations

CLOSE on the heels of strong condemnation of Begum Khaleda Zia's government by visiting members of the European Parliament for "grossly violating human rights" of Bangladeshis in the name of restoring law and order comes the report of the US state department holding her government solely responsible for letting the law enforcement agencies "commit excessive brutalities and extra judicial killings." Both EU parliamentarians and the US human rights report accuse her government of subjecting the country's minorities to "gross discrimination". But it is her government's indemnity legislation, which has attracted the severest condemnation. The EU has termed it as a "licence to kill innocent people" and reminded her government that by providing legal protection to the killers her government has violated all canons of justice and civilised behaviour. Serious doubts have been expressed about her government's democratic credentials and character. The custodial death of 57 people in two months has shocked the world. The EU has threatened to suspend development aid to Bangladesh if there was any further deterioration in her government's human rights record. Suspension of EU aid to Myanmar and imposing sanctions on the Yangon junta have been cited. But all this has had no impact. On international women's day her party goons killed a male member and raped three women of an influential minority family in Bagerhat for four hours "for daring to vote for Awami League" in the rural body election. They also looted property worth lakhs and told the family "to flee to India". The signal that these BNP goons convey is that similar fate awaits minorities who vote for the Awami League. Since October 2001 parliament elections armed cadres of the ruling BNP and Jamat-e-Islami have used rape as a weapon to terrorize minorities and the Opposition. It is also considered an effective instrument to force people to flee to India to protect their honour. Bangladesh Press and human rights groups have published reams of fully documented reports of the exodus.

What has caused considerable concern to donors specially the EU is the "official assertion" by a senior minister in Begum Zia's Cabinet belonging to fundamentalist Jamat-e-Islam to make Bangladesh wholly Islamic and introduce Sharia Laws "since we are a Muslim majority country." Another Islamic fundamentalist partner in the coalition recently renewed calls for enforcement of *fatwa* which the High Court in a landmark judgement in 2001 had called illegal and banned Muslim clerics from issuing it. This is the natural fallout of the gross indulgence that Begum Zia has given to the fundamentalists and Islamic terror groups which in recent years have carried out eight bombing attacks killing over 100 people. Unfortunately, she doesn't realize that she is creating a Frankenstein, which may prove her undoing.

6 APR 2003

THE STATESMAN

Khaleda for peaceful solution to Iraq crisis

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, MARCH 3. Bangladesh has told the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, Christina Rocca, that the country wants a peaceful resolution to the Iraq crisis, and also under the U.N. umbrella.

The Government's position was communicated to the visiting U.S. Assistant Secretary of State by the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, and the Foreign Minister, Morshed Khan, officials here said.

Ms. Khaleda Zia explained to Ms. Rocca that whether it is Iraq, North Korea or Israel, Bangladesh is against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Iraq must comply with the U.N. resolution 1441 and other violators like Israel should also be pressured to comply with U.N. resolutions.

"It is also important to find a just solution to establish an independent Palestine at the earliest," the Prime Minister said. Ms. Rocca's visit to Dhaka is being considered significant against the backdrop of a growing anti-war campaign against the possible U.S.-led war on Iraq. Her visit is for winning support from South Asian countries to the Bush-Blair position, diplomatic experts say.

Besides meeting the Prime Minister, Ms. Rocca made a courtesy call on the leader of the Opposition and former Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina. There was no official confirmation whether the U.S. official sought any support from Dhaka. However the U.S. ambassador, Mary Ann Peters, said earlier that the U.S. would seek Dhaka's "moral support" in the event of a war.

Mr. Morshed Khan said, "She did not seek any support from Dhaka on Iraq issue." Earlier on Saturday, Bangladesh and the U.S. signed a scientific and technological cooperation agreement to exchange personnel and information and technology under the deal and collaborate on subjects of "mutual interests".

4 MAR 2002

THE HINDU

LARGE STEP BACKWARDS

Fundamentalists target RKM in Bangladesh

THE Begum Khaleda Zia government's decision to curtail validity of resident visas to Ramakrishna Mission monks is intended to convey a message and it is not inspiring. This is the first time since Bangladesh's liberation, with Indian assistance, that the facility has been withdrawn from those who have worked tirelessly and selflessly to spread education and health care and provided succour whenever nature's fury has wreaked havoc in Bangladesh. For this the RKM authorities have earned kudos not only from the country's top political leadership, including military dictators — Ziaur Rahman and H M Ershad — but also from international relief agencies all of which have lauded its role in mitigating the hardship of suffering humanity. Considerations of caste and creed have never influenced their work. Their schools, charitable clinics and dispensaries and drills for disaster management and relief have become models for many NGOs in Bangladesh.

Some monks have devoted a major part of their lives to Bangladesh's social and economic development. Even Begum Zia during her first term in office respected their contribution. So what has gone wrong now? The answer is simple. The presence of two fundamentalist partners in her coalition government — the Jamat-I Islam and Islami Oikya Jote. This is proved by the admission of Dhaka's immigration authorities that they have "received orders from above" to refuse long-term resident visas. Both the Jamat and the IOJ are scared of RKM's much respected secular credentials and its highly acclaimed track record of service. Secularism is anathema to them and inconvenient to their new and bigoted thinking. It is not an accident that the Jamat has been put in charge of the social welfare portfolio. As an example of mindless fundamentalism it is hard to beat.

At the same time Zia's government is allowing numerous foreign Islamic organisations to mushroom and operate without any hindrance throughout the country. Shahdat e Al Hikma, whose leaders claim that they are funded by ISI and Dawood Ibrahim and have 35,000 trained commandos for ushering in Islamic revolution, was recently banned after its members were found responsible for a series of powerful bomb blasts in Dinajpur.

A prominent member of Begum Khaleda Zia's cabinet is the outfit's mastermind. Another foreign funded militant Islamic group — Jamat-ul-Mujahideen — was in the forefront to sabotage the language martyrs' day programmes. Islamic radicals have always targeted secular institutions, including the nine Ramakrishna Mission centres in Bangladesh, with unconcealed glee. If the Ramakrishna Mission withdraws entirely from Bangladesh, it will not be long before the Bangladesh government comes under pressure from its own population to beg it to return. No one is indispensable but some are more indispensable than others!

Bangladesh cracks down on Dawood-funded extremist outfit

Press Trust of India

DHAKA, Feb. 17. — In the first crackdown on an extremist Islamic outfit by the Khaleda Zia government, Bangladesh has banned the newly-formed 'Shahadat-e-Al-Hikma', a group funded by underworld don Dawood Ibrahim.

"After observing activities of Al-Hikma, it was found to be a threat to the country's peace and security, and that is why the decision to ban it has been taken," Bangladesh home minister Mr Altaf Hussain Chowdhury told Parliament yesterday. The minister, who made the announcement while making a statement on powerful bomb blasts at a religious institution in northern Dinajpur on Thursday, said the ban was effective from 9 February, a day after the outfit was formally launched. Three people, including two teachers of the madrasa where the blasts occurred, were arrested after the incident.

Mr Kawsar Hossain Siddique, convenor of Al-Hikma, while announcing its launch on 8 February, had said the outfit was financed by Dawood Ibrahim, who heads the list of most-wanted terrorists in India.

The government was determined to bring

to book those people who are out to destabilise the administration and have defamed the country abroad," Mr Chowdhury said. The Opposition welcomed the move, saying the government had admitted to the presence of terrorist elements in the country.

This is the first time an Islamic organisation was banned by the BNP-led coalition government in which the fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami is an important partner. Mr Suranjit Sen Gupta, of Awami League, called for the formation of a parliamentary committee to probe into the source of funding and arms flow into such terrorist outfits. The government rejected the demand, and Awami League workers staged a walkout in protest.

Describing Al-Hikma as "a political party", Mr Siddique had claimed the outfit had 10,000 commandos and 25,000 fighters working to bring about an Islamic revolution. He has gone into hiding since then, media reports said here. He claimed, a prominent member of Begum Zia's cabinet — Barrister Mr Moudud Ahmed, minister for law, justice and parliamentary affairs, has helped Al-Hikma, *Bhorer Kagoj*, a vernacular daily, reported today. Mr Ahmed is yet to comment on this allegation.

1 8 FEB 2003

THE STATESMAN

Bangla bans Dawood terror outfit

Dhaka, Feb. 17 (PTI): Bangladesh has banned the newly-formed Shahadat-e-al-Hikma, a group funded by underworld don Dawood Ibrahim, in the first crackdown on an extremist Islamic outfit by the Khaleda Zia government.

"After observing the activities of al Hikma, it was found to be a threat to the peace and security of the country and that's why the decision has been taken to ban it," Bangladesh home minister Altaf Hussain Chowdhury told the country's Parliament yesterday.

The announcement coincides with the return of foreign minister Mohammed Morshed Khan from New Delhi, where both Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani told him that Bangladesh must address India's security concerns.

Hussain, who announced the decision while making a statement on the blasts at a religious institution in northern Dinajpur, said the ban was effective from February 9, a day after the outfit had been formally launched.

Three people, including two teachers of the madarsa where the blasts occurred, were arrested after the incident.

Kawsar Hossain Siddique, convenor of al Hikma, said on February 8 that his outfit was financed by Dawood Ibrahim, who heads the list of most-wanted terrorists in India and is the prime accused in the Bombay blasts case. "The government was determined to bring to book those who are out to destabilise the administration and defame the country abroad," Chowdhury said.

The Opposition welcomed



Khaleda Zia greets participants at the Commonwealth Journalists Association conference in Dhaka on Monday. (Reuters)

the move, saying the government had admitted to the presence of terrorist elements in the country.

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Suranjit Sen Gupta of the main Opposition party, the Awami League, called for the formation of a parliamentary com-

mittee to probe into the funding and source of arms of such terrorist outfits. However, the government rejected the demand and the Awami League staged a walkout in protest.

Describing, al Hikma as "a political party", Siddique claimed the outfit had 10,000 commandos and 25,000 fighters working in the country to bring about an Islamic revolution. Media reports here said Siddique

had gone in hiding since then.

He claimed that a prominent member of Begum Zia's Cabinet, minister for law, justice and parliamentary affairs Moudud Ahmed, had helped al Hikma, vernacular daily *Bhorer Kagoj* reported today.

Khaleda blames media

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia today accused foreign media of spreading lies that her predominant-

tly Muslim nation has become a haven for al Qaida and the Taliban. "We have noticed with deep sadness that a campaign has been going on, particularly in the foreign media, undermining the position of Bangladesh," Zia said today while inaugurating the Commonwealth Journalists Association conference.

Over 80 journalists from 23 Commonwealth countries are attending the five-day meet.

Promoting fundamentalists

Bangladesh 51-8
Khaleda is playing a dangerous game 5/2

Close on the heels of cancellation of football matches in Bangladesh between a visiting Indian women's team and local women's clubs comes the news of another cancellation — a fashion show in Dhaka featuring Indian models. Both were the result of threats by newly-floated Islamic fundamentalist groups which consider participation of women in fashion shows and games obscene. The fact that Indian participants were asked to return home for security reasons indicates how audacious such outfits have become. But this should surprise no one. Obscurantist and religious outfits are being openly patronised by Begum Zia's BNP — Jamat-I-Islam coalition government. Jamat calls itself a fundamentalist party and flaunts its "fraternal ties" with its Pakistani counterpart. Not surprisingly its MPs have demanded demolition of statues in public places, abolition of Bengali new year celebrations and issued fatwas banning screening of films and staging dramas considered un-Islamic. Begum Zia allowed fundamentalists to police the literary and cultural world. During her earlier 1991-96 rule she encouraged Islamists to hound Taslima Nasreen, declaring her an "infidel" and fixing Taka 50,000 on her head for "un-Islamic" writings. As partners in her government, they feel emboldened to pronounce in the presence of her ministers that the country's leading intellectuals will be liquidated the 1971 way. The threat is real. Three years ago even Sheikh Hasina as prime minister could not guarantee security for high court judges who in a landmark judgement declared fatwas illegal. Security agencies suspect that Islamists are behind all the 10 bombings which since 1998 have claimed over 100 lives and given Bangladesh the image of a violent country. Interestingly, targets of attack were entertainment centres, Kadiani mosques, Christian churches, Bengali new year celebrations and cultural and political functions of Leftists all of which they want banned. Before the last parliamentary poll they openly chanted "we are all Taliban, Bangladesh will become Afghanistan". Recently Begum Zia quietly ordered the release of eight west Asians "recruiting youths for training (?) abroad."

Mujib and Hasina cannot escape blame for politically rehabilitating Islamists and making them respectable. Mujib started it by granting amnesty to the Jamat whose killers were responsible for the 1971 genocide. President Ziaur Rahman not only facilitated the return of senior Jamat leaders who collaborated with Pakistan during the liberation war but also gave them pride of place in his government. He encouraged them by banishing secularism as a state principle. In 1996 Hasina to dislodge Begum Zia from power allowed Jamat to join forces with her. Her government has helped them to spread, consolidate and flex their political muscle. So what Indian women footballers and fashion models faced recently in Bangladesh may well be the shape of things to come.

5 FEB 2003

THE STATESMAN

Khaleda invites Pak. investments

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By Haroon Habib 110-15
Dhaka Pak

DHAKA, MARCH 19. The Bangladesh Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, has emphasised the need to bolster the country's Joint Business Council with Pakistan, formed during the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf's visit to Dhaka last year, to strengthen economic cooperation between the two countries.

Ms Khaleda's suggestions came when the visiting Pakistan Minister for Industries and Production, Liaquat Ali Jatoi, called on her office on Monday. She requested Mr. Jatoi to encourage his country's entrepreneurs to invest in Bangladesh "either individually or in joint ventures".

She mentioned the Chittagong Steel Mills Complex, textiles and agro-based industries as potential areas for investment.

Mr. Jatoi showed keen interest in investment in ventures in the exclusive economic zone. The Prime Minister said a Bangladesh business delegation would visit Pakistan soon. Pakistan has shown interest in investing in a fertilizer plant and restructuring the Karnaphuli paper mills, besides offering soft term loans for modernisation of Bangladesh's ailing sugar mills. Mr. Jatoi also met the Industries Minister, M. K. Anwar. An Industries Ministry official said Pakistan had proposed to invest up to \$400 millions in fertilizer and paper plants.

20 MAR 2003

THE HINDU

Khaleda Zia assails foreign media

By Haroon Habib

AD-15

1812 ✓
DHAKA, FEB. 17. The Bangladesh Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, said today that while her Government would encourage free press, the foreign media was "undermining the position of her country" by carrying out a "campaign" against the administration.

Addressing media delegates at the Commonwealth Journalists' Association conference here, Begum Zia brushed aside the charges that her Government was holding power with the help of fundamentalist Islamic groups. "This is not true. My party, the BNP, won nearly two-thirds of the seats in the last general election and we could have formed a government by ourselves," she pointed out. "Yet, we decided to form a partnership with the Jamaat-e-Islami to honour a commitment made before the election".

The coalition Government, headed by Begum Zia, is facing a barrage of criticism at home and abroad for "patronising funda-

mentalists", and "harbouring anti-Indian terrorists" — a charge made by India.

Brushing aside the "propaganda" that local Hindus and Christians were fleeing to neighbouring India in thousands, she said: "This is also not true. I ask you to make your own personal enquiries and publish the truth." There was no communal violence in the country even after the communal riots in western India, she added.

"The third propaganda is that Bangladesh is playing host to the Jehadis from Afghanistan and beyond, and that Bangladesh has allowed deadly cargo to be imported secretly and, therefore, people should be afraid of Bangladesh...Again this is complete fabrication. The picture is quite the opposite. Bangladesh supported the Western move in dislodging the Taliban Government in Afghanistan."

About "Operation Clean Heart" in which the Government had to call the army to combat lawlessness, Begum Zia blamed the foreign media for "not giving the Govern-

ment due credit" for its success. She, however, failed to mention the widespread allegations of human rights violations — the "custodial deaths" of at least 48 persons — and the controversial Indemnity Ordinance through which the actions of the army were kept above the law of the land.

Admitting that in today's troubled international scenario, "painting Bangladesh black harms us deeply", she assured that "our doors are open for all the media people". However, a number of leading journalists, including two Britons, were arrested recently and charges of sedition were framed against them. All except one were released on bail. The journalists, later, alleged that they had been tortured while in custody.

The CJA conference is being attended by 70 journalists from home and abroad, including the Editor of *The Hindu*, N. Ravi, who presented the keynote speech on "Civil society and good governance: the journalists role" in the inaugural session.

1 8 FEB 2003

SEE HINDI

Dhaka lodges protest with US envoy

*Bangla 12
SF. 3*

Statesman News Service

DHAKA, Jan. 20. — In the backdrop of the USA putting Bangladesh in the list of terror-risk countries, the foreign ministry on Sunday called the US Ambassador Ms Marry Ann Peters and handed her a protest note.

Foreign minister Mr M Morshed Khan, who had a one-to-one meeting with the US envoy, conveyed Bangladesh's concern and asked to know the basis on which the USA included Bangladesh in the list. "This is unacceptable to us and it

Zulfikar widow

KARACHI, Jan. 20. — The widow of former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto died over the weekend after suffering a heart attack, family sources said today. She was 87.

Shirin Amir Begum, the late Prime Minister's first wife, died after being taken to a hospital yesterday, said Ghulam Nabi Bhutto, Begum's nephew. — AP

is also not clear on what basis the USA put Bangladesh on the restrictive list, de-

spite Bangladesh wholeheartedly supporting the global fight against terrorism," Mr Khan reportedly told the US envoy.

After the meeting, Ms Peters said there was no cause for worry as it was simply a registration process for long term security of the USA and it would not create problem for Bangladeshis.

Army officer wounded: An army officer was wounded when suspected tribal activists opened fire on a military patrol in Bangladesh's South-east hill region, security sources said here today, adds AFP from Chittagong.

THE STATESMAN

21 JAN 2003

Bangladesh on US terror-risk list

SNS & The Daily Star/ANN

DHAKA, Jan. 17. — The USA has added Bangladesh to a list of countries in the US stricter restrictions in the US immigration process under the post-September 11 vigilance against terrorism. Dhaka has termed the decision unfortunate and asked Washington to keep Bangladesh off the terror-risk country list.

The main features of the list are:

- Bangladeshis to register with INS between 24 February and 28 March
- Applies to visitors staying for more than 30 days
- US residents, diplomats, green card holders exempted
- Students, business travel-

lers, visiting relatives to face restrictions

- Fingerprints, photos to identify suspects even if they travel on false documents

The country's business circles are concerned at the US decision as they feel that exports to their largest market will be hit.

Foreign secretary Mir Shamsur Mobin Chowdhury disclosed the US decision at a press briefing yesterday.

He had received a message in this regard from the Bangladesh mission in Washington earlier in the day.

Under the restrictions, Bangladeshi men aged between 16 and 45 will have to register with the US immigration authorities. They will

have to visit local Immigration and Naturalisation Services offices to be photographed. They will also have to produce certain documents.

The registration is part of a broader INS plan to set up, by 2005, a comprehensive system detailing who is entering, leaving and staying in the USA. Long-term visitors to the USA from Bangladesh will have to register at local INS offices from 24 February to 28 March.

Along with Bangladesh, Indonesia, Jordan, Egypt and Kuwait have also been included in a fourth "call-in group" which raised the number of such countries to 25. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were included in the third group in December.

Some countries included in the lists are considered "potential havens for terrorists".

Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Somalia, Syria, Sudan, Tunisia, Yemen and UAE were listed in the first two groups. The only non-Muslim country included in the list is North Korea.

"We trust and hope that it is a temporary measure and its impact will be limited," Mr Chowdhury said.

However, US ambassador in Dhaka Ms Mary Ann Peters said yesterday that the goal of the security measure called National Security System Exit Registration System is to "better track all foreign visitors" to the USA.

Awami leader gets bail

DHAKA, Jan. 17. — A prominent leader of Opposition party Awami League was released today, three days after the High Court declared his detention in a murder case "illegal." To-fail Ahmed, former minister, was freed on bail after the HC on Tuesday declared his detention in a murder case illegal and ordered his release. The fate of journalist Saleem Samad, who was also ordered to be released on the same day after his detention was declared "illegal", is yet not known. — PTI

Manpower issue to figure in Bangladesh-Malaysia talks

The Star/Asia News Network

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan. 13. — Manpower export to Malaysia could top the agenda when Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia meets Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohammad on the sidelines of the 24 to 25 February Non-alignment Movement summit here.

The summit was scheduled for Dhaka but later shifted to Kuala Lumpur after the Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led coalition government declined to host it on grounds of financial constraints.

According to sources, Begum Zia may request Dr Mahathir for withdrawal of the

ban on fresh recruitment from Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh delegation would take every opportunity to raise manpower export with the Malaysian government. The Mahathir government slapped a ban on fresh recruitment from Bangladesh in 1997 after it found out that many foreign workers had stayed back upon expiry of their contracts and did not seek any permission in this regard. Since then, the South-east Asian country has allowed workers from a number of other developing and underdeveloped countries. Some 500,000 Bangladesh workers were employed in mills and factories in Malaysia during the 1995-96 period.

14 JAN 2003

THE STATESMAN

Ordinance irks Bangla leaders

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

DHAKA, Jan. 11. — The promulgation of an Ordinance by the President on Thursday indemnifying the members of the armed forces, law enforcement and civil administration for their actions during the anti-crime drive has made political and social leaders angry.

Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina described the Ordinance as contrary to the spirit of the constitution and fundamental rights. She said the government, especially the Prime Minister, would have to bear the responsibility for the custodial deaths during the joint drive. More than 40 people died in army or police custody during the government's "Operation Clean Heart" drive that

started on 16 October to curb crimes and recover illegal arms.

Sources said although the government denied custodial deaths during the drive, the promulgation of the Ordinance indemnifying the persons who were involved in the drive proved the acceptance of the government that there were custodial deaths.

Mr Moinul Hossain Chowdhury, former adviser to the last caretaker government and retired Major-General, cautioned that giving outright indemnity to the members of the joint forces would affect discipline of the military.

Mr Rokonuddin Mahmud, barrister, said the government should have resolved the issue at the time of calling the army for a joint operation.

Bangla law reprieve to anti-crime atrocities

Statesman News Service

DHAKA, Jan. 10. — The Bangladeshi President has promulgated an Ordinance indemnifying all actions of the Armed Forces, law enforcement and civil administration personnel during the countrywide drive against crime from 16 October 2002 to 9 January.

Dr Iajuddin Ahmed signed the Joint Drive Indemnity Ordinance last night after a special Cabinet meeting approved it giving legal cover to the acts done during the drive. With the promulgation, there would be now no scope to file any civil or criminal suit against the members of the joint forces — Armed Forces, BDR, Police, Ansar and civil administration — for their all actions during the drive.

“It’s necessary and pertinent in the interest of the people to indemnify all the persons, including members of the Armed Forces and law enforcers, for all the acts done during the joint drive,” the Ordinance states.

More than 40 people died in custody during the operation while many were severely injured. A few cases were also filed in this regard.

THE STATESMAN

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