

# Taliban influence in bureaucracy

By A. Ameer

Militancy

THE growing threat of violent extremism in different parts of Pakistan including Fata and Malakand Division is a matter of serious concern.

The harrowing factor is that the writ of the Taliban is solidifying both in the north and the south not only in the Pashtun belt but also in the heartland of Pakistan.

That a high-level provincial official posted in Swat should write a letter to the NWFP home department implying the complicity of the commissioner of Malakand Division in the ever-expanding influence of the Taliban in the region is an illustration of what is happening and how.

An alliance of extremist forces in Kashmir, Punjab, Fata and the NWFP and their strategy for Pakistan's disintegration in the near future have virtually paralysed the administrations in the different settled districts of the NWFP — not to mention the threats made by extremists to invade Islamabad very soon. After the February peace deal between the NWFP government and the banned Tehrik Nifaz-i-Shariat Mohammadi (TNSM), the Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP) chapter of Swat started a three-pronged assault on the state.

Firstly, the Swat chapter of the TTP started recruitment and the construction of bunkers on a large scale in different parts of Swat while the military and security establishment and the government maintained control in different ways. The security establishment and the Pakistani government seem to be oblivious of the fact that the Taliban movement is far more agile than the security establishment's response to their onslaught from different directions.

Secondly, the Swat chapter of the TTP, in line with the Taliban alliances in Fata and the rest of Pakistan, were readjusting and relocating therein and have started expanding their assaults from the north to the south of the NWFP. The present onslaught by the Taliban on Buner and Dir is part of this strategy.

Thirdly, the Taliban have started consolidating their posi-

shops and the owners would go to the DCO office for complaints, the DCO would tell them to close the shops because, according to him, running the business was un-Islamic. The present commissioner was also seen by the locals visiting Mamdherai *markaz* (centre) for Friday prayers frequently.

On April 5, 2009 a battalion of the Taliban militia with heavy weaponry crossed over the hills from Swat to Buner to avowedly supervise the implementation of the Nizam-i-Adl. The local residents of Buner had been resisting the inflow of the Taliban for a long time. The local elders intervened and tried to convince the Taliban to return but the latter opened fire at them, leaving several injured. Later the Taliban captured three policemen and two civilians, and killed them.

The local residents, the people of lower Buner and Sultanwas, gathered to move upward to face the Taliban while the people of upper Buner provided reinforcements. Fighting began and in the ensuing gun-battle some 17 members of the Taliban are said to have been killed. The questions on the minds of the local people were: why would the Taliban come with heavy weapons if they did not want to control Buner? And why were the Taliban allowed by the commissioner to move from Swat to Buner with heavy weapons?

On April 6, a delegation of the TNSM along with the commissioner Malakand Division went to Buner to negotiate with the local elders. They tried to convince the local elders to allow the Taliban to enter the valley. While the delegation engaged the local administration and the elders of Buner, the Taliban started getting reinforcements. In the context of the Taliban expansion to Buner, it is interesting to note the ideological role played by the relatively less known Jamaati Ashaatutoheed WaSunna, the creation of Maulana Tahir Panjpiri, the father of the infamous Major Amir, a well-known IB and ISI operative in the past and allegedly behind the notorious Operation Midnight Jackal.

ted consolidating their positions vis-à-vis the security establishment by controlling strategic passes and side valleys of Swat, Buner, Shangla and Dir. In this scenario, reports that a part of the civil bureaucracy in the NWFP,

Fata and elsewhere in Pakistan facilitates the process of Talibanisation is likely to be a worrisome factor for elements within and outside the country.

The present commissioner of Malakand Division is said to have been posted in lower Dir in the early 1990s when the TNSM was in the process of becoming a formidable extremist organisation with a jihadi ideology. The commissioner was said to have been a frequent visitor of Maulana Sufi Mohammad's maddrasah and allegedly worked behind the scenes with the initial support of the local khans for the TNSM in 1994 when it brought the whole administration of Malakand Division to a standstill.

Many who saw the 1994 uprising of Malakand Division bear testimony to the fact that the present commissioner of the latter provided all-out help to the insurgents coming from Dir to Swat.

In the early era of Fazlullah's rise in Swat, again the present commissioner of Malakand Division was posted as the district coordination officer. He was the one, according to local residents, who facilitated the establishment of Fazlullah's FM radio. He was the one who convinced the local jirga of Mamdherai and Mingora to allow the FM radio to function. It was reported in 2006-07 in the local press that when the Taliban in Swat started destroying CD shops and barber

## Many officials in Fata and the NWFP have links with the Taliban.

Major Amir, Syed Mohammad Javed (the present commissioner Malakand Division) and Maulana Sufi Mohammad are said to have been quite close since a long time.

According to eyewitnesses, during the recent stand-off between the Taliban and the people of Buner, the commissioner of Malakand Division made efforts to convince the people to allow the Taliban to enter Buner. The commissioner is said to have become annoyed with the superintendent of police in Buner for informing the people about the impending onslaught by the Taliban on the former.

The present commissioner of Malakand Division belongs to a religious family in Shergarh, Malakand Agency. The provincial government of the NWFP deemed it a better solution to the problem to ask for his services during the peace deal with the militants of Swat recently. This seems to be a matter of concern for all those who want to resist the Taliban and preserve a modern civilisation as opposed to adopting a mediaeval way of life.

The fact is that parts of the civilian administration in Fata, the NWFP and the rest of Pakistan is infested with the jihadi ideology and connected to the sympathisers of the Taliban in one way or the other. ■

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