

Govt still lukewarm on terror information

Lack of openness will only further lower public confidence

THE government has for long ignored the counsel of the media and civil society that it should make public facts of the investigations surrounding the bomb blasts since August 17 to increase public confidence in the investigation process and to help foster a sense of security and safety in the public mind.

The government is not only ignoring the justifiable expectations of the public, it is also failing to comply in a material sense with a high court order.

The two reports that the government has submitted to the HC in response to the November 30 ruling instructing it to report progress of investigations every two weeks are so threadbare and partial that in no way can they be described as being in compliance with the court order. To make matters worse, the two reports are more or less identical despite the fact that they have been issued at two-week intervals.

This is highly regrettable. The government has not only a moral duty, it now has a legal obligation to inform the public of the results of the ongoing investigations, but it has cavalierly continued with utter disregard both for the rights and expectations of the public, and now the law of the land.

In the first place, the public has a right to know how the investigations are progressing. The serial bomb blasts of August 17 and the suicide bombings since then have understandably unnerved the entire nation, and it is incumbent on the government to project a sense of security. Details of what steps the government has taken and what has been uncovered so far would go a long way in raising public morale and restoring a sense of safety.

The second reason why it is in the government's interest to release more information is in this way it can dispel suspicions, which have been raised in several quarters, that it has something to hide. The longer the government stonewalls and refuses to discuss openly the status and findings of the investigations, the deeper will grow the public belief that the reason that it is being so unforthcoming is that the investigations are either uncovering information that it does not wish to share or have hardly progressed at all.

This is no time for politics as usual and it is no time for circling the wagons. The government's continued lukewarm response to the demand for information is harmful both to public interest and to its own credibility.

Incidence of break-in and robbery

Tough law enforcement called for

IT'S a case of an alarming come-back of a certain category of criminals who had gone into hiding or preferred a low profile in the face of lately intensified special force activism in Dhaka city.

In two separate incidents on Monday and Tuesday, albeit falling in a pattern, a private firm's computer accessories were vandalised with Tk eight lakh from its kitty spirited away while 13 bookshops were robbed of Tk 18 lakh and a number of books.

The victims and people of the locality would point their fingers at some gangs operating in the specific localities to have been responsible for such dare-devil acts. Yet every time such an incident takes place the law-enforcing people seem to be groping for the culprits. We simply fail to understand as to why it has to be this way. Each time a robbery or murder takes place in some shopping complex the police action seems to end in such words of wisdom like, "this is apparently the result of some personal rivalry or business conflicts that existed between the victims and the perpetrators or vested interests."

We are at our wit's end as to how as many as 16 lethally armed youths could carry out such violence at city's Reza market yesterday and that too in broad day light. In this case too people of the locality have come up with the name of a city's top ranking goon suspected of having had a hand in the incident. Predictably, each time something like this happens the police tend to arrest some members of the hired security personnel on duty. Thereafter not much is heard of except for the familiar pattern of intimidation and threats by some "known and unknown callers over telephone" pronounced to the victims.

It must be pointed out that the relatively smaller business houses and traders are an integral part of our economy. We must allow them to carry on with their business in an environment free from fear and intimidation.

What impedes a minimum understanding between AL and BNP?

M. ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

WHEN the people of the country are anxious about the rapid rise of militancy with the new dimension of suicide bombings by the misguided Islamic militants, when the people are worried about the fate of their nascent democracy due to the confrontational politics of the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the two major political parties which have ruled the independent Bangladesh for most of the period of her existence, when the people are ashamed of seeing their beloved country at the top of the list of the corrupt countries for five successive years beginning from 2001, when the people are frustrated to see the parliament largely dysfunctional due to sustained boycott by the main opposition party, when the people are hard hit by the rising rate of inflation which is 7 percent or so against 3 percent or so four years ago, the ruling BNP and the main opposition AL are engaged in a war of words.

Particularly, the chiefs of these two parties are attacking each other in language which sometimes exceed the limits of democratic norms and decency. The chairperson of the BNP and prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia in her speech the other day at the Paltan Maidan called the combined opposition by all the names available and then threatened to file sedition cases against the her and others for speaking against the government and inciting people to overthrow the administration. Such a speech was not expected of her. The nation has been disappointed.

On the other hand, the quick reply of Sheikh Hasina, the AL president and leader of the opposition, was also not satisfactory or befitting by any means. Sheikh Hasina threatened to file a counter case against Begum Khaleda Zia for the grenade attack of August 21, 2004, knowing fully well that she can at best file a case for an attempt to murder and nothing more. The

rivalry between the AL and the BNP has reached such a height that arriving at a minimum understanding between them on important and crucial national issues seems to be a far cry.

Now the question is what impedes a minimum understanding between the AL and the BNP?

First, both the AL and the BNP battle over the history of the country. The AL and the BNP wish to fashion the birth of Bangladesh reflecting the leading role by their founders. The AL wants to take full credit for achieving the independence of Bangladesh and downplays the role of others who fought the liberation war.

The constitution of Bangladesh that was adopted on November 4,

After coming to power in 2001, Begum Khaleda Zia initiated steps, according to some, to shift the focus of the liberation war from Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to Ziaur Rahman. This has enraged the AL.

Second, personalised animosity between Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, as manifested by their behaviour throughout the 1990s, acts as a serious impediment to a minimum understanding between them. Sreeradh Datta in her Bangladesh: A Fragile Democracy (2004) writes: "Much of their animosity revolves around the assassinations of Mujib and Zia. If the latter's lenience to Mujib's assassins kindled the Awami League's hostility towards the BNP, the Awami League was

other.

Third, while the AL identifies itself with secularism, democracy and Bengali nationalism, the BNP stands for absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah, Bangladeshi nationalism and democracy. But according to many what really matters is that both parties fail to co-operate not only because they underestimate each other's political strength but also because each has an urge to establish a monopolistic rule by knocking out the other, believing that the losing party would simply fade away.

Fourth, during the last 14 plus years, many a government programme, both developmental and non-developmental, has suffered due to mutual ill-will of

the ruling party or the leading leadership, must do everything towards developing a political culture that would contribute to the successful functioning of democracy. The onus primarily lies on the leadership of ruling party. To attain the objective, the ruling leadership must, among others, respect the opinion of the public and opposition, resolve all political disputes with the spirit of democracy, take all steps to make parliament effective and build up honest and devoted future leaders. But such a happy situation has not prevailed in the country.

Let me refer to two burning issues. The AL-led 14-party opposition combine has recently announced a programme. Reforms

minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan agreed to discuss with the mainstream opposition all the issues including the reforms in the CTG. But the prime minister and chairperson of the BNP Begum Khaleda Zia has ruled out the possibility of any discussion on the CTG. This appears to have blocked the opportunity of a dialogue between the ruling alliance and the mainstream opposition to arrive at a minimum understanding on important and crucial national issues.

Last but not the least, an important feature in Bangladesh politics is the hereditary nature of leadership developed in the party system, particularly in the AL and the BNP. Sheikh Hasina joined national politics in 1981 as president of the AL banking on the image of her assassinated father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Begum Khaleda Zia joined politics a couple of years later banking on the image of her assassinated husband Ziaur Rahman. Although both of them are well settled in their respective positions, yet they are possibly pondering over abdicating to their successors. Begum Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman is already a very influential figure in the BNP. According to many observers, his assumption of the chairmanship of the BNP is only a matter of time. The rise of hereditary leadership in the major political parties under the guise of democracy generally impedes the growth of politics based on understanding and good behaviour.

To conclude, a democratic system cannot function without political parties. Different political parties may have different political programmes and ideological opinions. But nothing should deter the political parties, in particular the ruling BNP and the main opposition AL, to talk to each other inside the parliament or outside to arrive at a minimum understanding on the crucial national issues. Above all, the country belongs to us all.

M. Abdul Latif Mondal is a former Secretary to the Government

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1972 did not contain the provision of the nation's father. The fourth amendment to the constitution brought by the AL government in January, 1975 declared Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as "Father of the Nation." Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman continued to remain the father figure and during the immediate past AL government headed by Sheikh Hasina was projected prominently in official ceremonies and functions.

Ziaur Rahman who read out the proclamation of independence over the radio was either ignored or downplayed. The BNP founded by Ziaur Rahman in September, 1978 emerged as a leading party and ruled the country till March, 1982 when General HM Ershad seized power in a military coup. Since the fall of Ershad government in December, 1990, the BNP and the AL have been ruling the country in succession.

accused of tacitly backing Zia's assassination in May 1981. In short, each accuses the other of compliance in the death of its founding leader."

President HM Ershad skillfully exploited the Begum Khaleda Zia/Sheikh Hasina animosity to remain in power for about a decade.

Although Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina temporarily joined hands to bring the downfall of Ershad, they soon started to show their true colours. Both Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia have failed to gracefully accept their defeats in the parliamentary elections held since 1991. When in opposition they have resorted to street agitations, strikes and sustained boycott of parliament.

Personalised antagonism between Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina has reached such a level that they do not even meet socially. They do not have the time or the inclination to talk to each

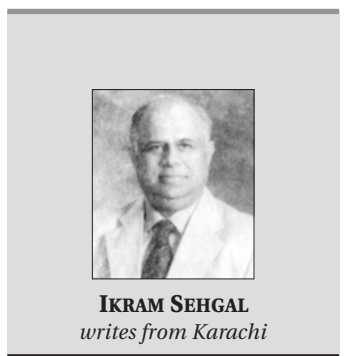
the two leaders. Although politicisation of administration is not an unknown phenomenon, it reached a new height during the successive rule of the BNP and the AL. The bureaucrats loyal to the AL have suffered during the BNP rule and vice versa. All these have been the causes of irritation of the leaders of these two parties and have thereby reduced the scope of understanding between them.

Fifth, political analysts are of opinion that the success of a parliamentary democracy depends upon the democratic spirit of tolerance, devoted sense of respect and relentless response towards the institutionalism of democracy. In a country like Bangladesh where democracy has made a fresh start, the political parties, particularly

in the caretaker government (CTG) and in the Election Commission (EC) are the two most important points in the programme. But the BNP has not even agreed to discuss reforms in the CTG. On the other hand, the prime minister has invited 25 plus political parties and some professional groups to discuss and find out ways to combat the rising militancy including the suicide bombings by the misguided Islamic militants. But the main opposition AL has rejected outright the prime minister's invitation. Such behaviour of the ruling party and the main opposition simply blocks development of an understanding between them.

Sixth, a cursory look into the constitutions of the AL and the BNP shows that the president or chairperson enjoys absolute authority. Even the senior party leaders are hesitant to say anything that will not be liked by the party chief. According to the media, the BNP secretary general and the LGRD

Dams, why not to damn!



IKRAM SEHGAL writes from Karachi

FOR a country blessed with many rivers, the unpleasant hometruth is that there is impending scarcity of water in Pakistan because of acute shortage of storage capacity. This will become further acute in the near future, a full blown crisis not so far in the distant future. The looming disaster can be overcome in several ways, not the least being, viz (1) conserving the water we have and maximising its effect, (2) eliminating, or at least minimising wastage and (3) apportioning it judiciously on a need-to-have basis. While there are notwithstanding alternate sources of generating electricity, power from water sources is far cheaper.

To cater for the loss of the exclusive use of the waters of the eastern rivers Ravi, Sutlej and Beas, to India, because of the 1960 Indus Water Treaty, Pakistan went for a number of dams, barrages and link canals in the three western ones, Indus, Jehlum and Chenab meant for its exclusive use. With the help of the World Bank (WB) in the 60s and 70s, mega projects such as Mangla Dam and Tarbela Dam meant both for irrigation and cheap electricity were set up. With increasing requirement for both water and power, two additional dams are needed between now and

2015. Estimates of existing shortage of water range from 9-12 MAF based on estimated water requirement of 115-116 MAF at farm gate. The existing water 105-106 MAF available at farm gate is calculated as viz (1) surface 61-62 MAF and (2) 43-44 MAF underground water from irrigation system, about 40-42 MAF being lost through evaporation/seepage. The annual average flow of water downstream of Kotri Barrage into the sea is estimated at 35 MAF.

Only 44 of the 77 million acres

Water escape from Kotri can be quite substantial, ranging from a low of 8 MAF to as high as 92 MAF. With surpluses in the river system available only for a period of 70-100 days, storage is essential, to be used judiciously for agriculture, hydropower generation, flood control, etc. Storage has to be large enough for inter-season (Kharif Rabi) transfer and inter-year transfer from wet to dry years. The planned multi-purpose dams of Basha and Kalabagh on the Indus are complementary and give us about 10-12 MAF, the minimum requirement. Sindh would get

three additional units. 200 kms upstream of Tarbela and outside the monsoon range, Basha Dam has a catchment area of 50 MAF yearly. Non-perennial canals of Sindh and Balochistan receiving perennial supplies, large tracts of Barani lands will receive irrigation water from new canals. Basha drawback is that it needs sustained upgrading of 110 kms of Karakoram Highway (KHH) over a period of 4-6 years, with remedial work on about 300 kms supporting roads.

The facts about Kalabagh are contrary to apprehensions voiced, viz (1) how can Peshawar valley

will be done in model villages.

Among Sindh's concerns are escapes below Kotri. Reviewing three studies done by independent consultants' consortium, a WB-appointed "Panel of Experts" recommended at least 3.6 MAF escape per year to check seawater intrusion, fishing and environmental sustainability, and maintenance of the river channel. The caveat is that 25 MAF be released in concentrated form as flood flow every five years (Kharif season) for maintaining mangrove vegetation and preserving river morphology in the Indus delta.

Accord; (4) fears that cultivation in riverain (Salaiba) areas would be adversely affected are also incorrect, additional water would be available for tubewells; (5) fears about seawater intrusion in Indus estuary increasing are also wrong, studies show it is already at the maximum now without fear of further aggravation, (6) fear about seawater intrusion seriously affecting existing aquifer system is wrong, freshwater gradient being southwards to lower part of delta, it cannot effect the existing system; (7) with mangrove forests comprising only 0.32 MA of the totally inundated Indus Delta (about 1.53 MA), fears that these may be endangered are wrong. Mangrove forests cover only 7,400 acres, 95 percent of the plants are in 0.32 MA and are salt tolerant species; (8) fisheries stock has never declined due to progressive reduction of surface water supplies.

How do we overcome the deep-rooted apprehensions of Sindh about diversion of water from Kalabagh by Punjab? What credible constitutional guarantees can be put in place to assuage their fears? Can a cast-iron mechanism satisfy Sindh? Can the provinces share the additional water as well as the revenues from the cheap electricity guaranteed? The President is on a fail-safe line with respect to the political fallout versus the over-riding national interest. Will he risk his place in history (and in the country) by taking decisions which may be unpopular, at least in one province?

The more emotional response from Sindh needs to be assuaged, viz (1) the feeling there is no surplus water but Kalabagh Dam can be filled by only 6 MAF, and during July to September about 35 MAF will be available, (2) Sindh fears desertification but dams only accumulate water during floods and water will be available during dry periods; canal withdrawals are actually increasing to 2 MAF; (3) with no plan in the design for high level outlets apprehension about those being used to divert water from dams with NWFP drawing water in excess of its requirements is wrong. Even if the two canals were included in the project they would draw according to a telemetry system as per the 1991 Water

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AS I SEE IT

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suitable for cultivation in Pakistan are presently being irrigated, including Barani areas the total under cultivation jumps to 54.5 million acres. Another about 22 million acres can be brought under cultivation. If the irrigation channels are lined and with improved agriculture practices, another 15-20 MAF would be needed by 2020. The additional storage capacity required will be 20-25 MAF or 4-5 large dams. Pakistan existing storage capacity is only 10 percent, the world average is 40 percent of average annual river flows. Tarbela, Mangla and Chasma dams with 15 MAF represents 90 percent of the storage capacity. Silting will lose these dams 6 MAF by 2010, equivalent to one mega dam.

additional assured supply of 2.2 MAF because of Kalabagh, the water supply at GM Barrage improving for canal water available during all seasons. This will augment Basha Dam construction by another 2.2 MAF, water increasing at Guddu Barrage. Supply will also increase from Mangla Dam to Sindh during early Kharif season (March-April). Flow of water below Kotri, estimated presently during Moonsoon season (at 8-10 MAF), will be better regulated throughout of the year. Nearest to the power load centre and transmission network, Kalabagh, with a catchment of 90 MAF, is ready for implementation and can be completed in 6-7 years in 2012. It will enhance Tarbela generation by 30 percent by installation of

fear flooding, particularly Nowshera Town with breakwater of Kalabagh Lake 10 miles downstream? (2) with lowest ground level above 170 feet and the conservation level of Kalabagh at 915 feet, water logging and salinity of Mardan, Pabbi and Swabi plains is not possible; (3) with Mardan's SCARP operations, far above Kalabagh levels how can it be affected? (4) with the lake extending 92 miles up from Indus river and 36 miles up from Soan river, maximum cultivable land submerged will be 30,000 acres (24,500 acres in Punjab); (4) population dislocation will be about one lakh with 65 percent from Punjab and only 35 percent from NWFP; (5) resettlement of dislocated process

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

New Year
New days come in our lives with lot of happiness, fun, excitement and also with anxiety, sorrow.
We don't know what surprises are waiting for us in the New Year, as every moment is unpredictable in life.
Every moment there is a chance of losing something and gaining at the same time. Every moment is a chance to turn around too. Every moment we can get little improved, and have the chance of betterment.
Every new day shows us new light and shows us a dream of a new world, a world where there is no pain, pain of losing. A whole new world where there is no sorrow, no dispute, no discrimination, no poverty, no first world, no third world, no religious clashes. No one feels insecure or suppressed. No one feels that he belongs to a minority group. Everyone is living

in peace and everyone is having freedom.
Maybe we can't do anything, but what's the problem with thinking? One day the world will be changed.
Happy New Year to all!
Cantara Wali Ruhil
Dhaka University

Tickless travelling
Travelling without ticket is a bad habit which only dishonest people can think of. It should be treated as a crime. It creates trouble when the ticket checker comes to check tickets and even genuine passengers are harassed because of the dishonesty of fellow travellers.
Md Omar Faruk
IUC

Crop output in Bangladesh
The Rome based Food and Agricul-

ture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations in its recent report has said that Bangladesh and the Philippines are among the Asian countries that have increased their rice production substantially this year.
That's good news for Bangladesh in general and the Bangladesh government in particular together with its various agricultural organisations plus Kishibids (Agriculturists) and the farmers.
Professor Zahidul Haque
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka

Promise not fulfilled
The government promised that it would contain terrorism. But the government's promise has not yet been reflected in its deeds. Bomb scare is running high across the country. And the terrorists that the government failed to rein in are responsible for these bomb

attacks. Many innocent people have fallen victim to bomb blasts. We cannot move freely. Even we cannot attend any meeting or gathering as bomb attacks can occur any time. We are extremely worried about the situation prevailing in the country.
If we do not have the freedom of movement, how can the government claim that the situation is under control?
Anoaruzzaman
Alamdanga High School, Chuadanga

Introduce more buses
The cantonment bound passengers from Shahbag to Balughat via Farmgate, Jahangir Gate, Garrison and CMH face all sorts of trouble. The commuters wait for the bus at Farmgate usually from 4:00pm to 9:00pm in a long queue to return to their respective destinations from workplaces.

Though male passengers can somehow handle the situation, women are almost helpless in this hassle. They have to stand on the road hour after hour to return home.
I would request the authorities concerned to look into the matter and increase the number of buses on this route in order to alleviate the sufferings of passengers, particularly women passengers. They should consider the fact that the number of passengers on this route is increasing day by day.
Belal
University of Dhaka

Victory Day
Our Victory Day is the symbol of our joy. It conveys the message of the supreme sacrifice that the freedom fighters made to liberate our country from the clutches of colonial rule. It is the greatest

achievement of this nation. We lost our near and dear ones to get this freedom. We got a free land, sky, and sun. We show our due respect to them. We respect our great history. We appreciate all noble things and deeds of valour.
The martyrs will ever remain a source of inspiration to this nation.
Uttam Kumar Bhowmick
Sree Ramakrishna Ashram, Comilla

Non-achievements
Our political masters, while pointing out the weaknesses of the opponents never devote any time during their public speeches on the problems the regime has not succeeding in solving. Talk about your own weaknesses.
The first item is institutionalised corruption prevailing in the society at all levels. How many of those prosecuted are in opposition

camps? How many civil servants have been exposed? The counter service in government offices is dismal; as also the port services, and in documentation activities.
Next is nepotism; shielding those in their own camps. No data released in the press. Why this hush-hush affair? The civil service has been politicised. The replies are evasive. Dismissive attitudes are dangerous for the main party in power.
Too many killings these days on flimsy pretexts (like tendering rivalry; establishing local zamindaris, etc). One-sided prosecutions are not effective in changing the mores of the society.
The labour unions have been spoilt due to politicisation. Result? Too much systems loss in the public sectors—the factories are closing down or running at a loss. We have to import fertiliser when we can export it; and smuggle it rather than

contain the situation. Look at the price of sugar-bitter governance!
Latest: the adolescent suicide bombers, preceded by the 500-bomb blasts warning. It is unbelievable that the government (intelligent agencies) was unaware of the impending disaster. Who are shielding whom?
Now the accent is on recapturing power, through fair or foul means. The main issue is not who are going to run the country in the future, but how to bring back normal life styles right now, without any delay. Millions of voters are losing confidence in political governance.
The list of grievances is too long, and well known to the common man. Come down from the ivory tower, and save yourselves first, before promising to protect others!
AZ,
Dhaka