LATE S. M. ALI

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### Take JMB threat seriously

Allow no leeway to the outlaws

HAT the operatives of the hitherto banned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) are believed to be reorganising in remote areas of the country with the intent to strike at selected targets anytime is worrying news indeed. These armed activists of the outlawed organisation have been lying low since the arrest and trial of the kingpins, waiting for the opportune moment to resurface and strike. The latest intelligence report on the possibility of their return only confirms our fear, which we had expressed on many occasions in the past, that we have not yet seen the last of the JMB carnage in Bangladesh.

While we share the concern of all about the sinister development, we at the same time appreciate that the government has taken the threat with due seriousness and has directed the law enforcing and intelligence agencies to remain vigilant against them. There can be no denying that now the onus rests on the government to take the fight to the territory of the terrorists, instead of letting them come out in the open, to create anarchy with reinforced firepower. They have already done enough damage to human life, property and social stability, as well as to our longstanding image as a democratic country where religious fundamentalism is not given space to flourish in any guise. Henceforth, the message is simple and clear: Hunt down the remaining JMB outlaws and eliminate terrorism once and for all to reinstate equilibrium in society.

As a note of caution, we might as well say here that the top players in the government including the prime minister should not find any reason to let complacency set in on the question of achieving success in uprooting completely the JMB terrorists. This would be similar to lowering our guard while the enemy lurked in the bushes. With general elections coming up fast, these outlawed elements must not be given any option to upset the process. We strongly feel that the threat of attacks from JMB and similar outfits has to be viewed strictly from national security point of view and not, we repeat NOT, from any partisan point of view. Anything other than that might prove to be too costly for the nation in the future.

#### Killing of UN observers

Highly condemnable act

HE Israeli air raids in Lebanon over the past two weeks have killed hundreds of Lebanese men, women and children, with over half a million Lebanese fleeing the country to safety for fear of their lives. It is an irony that while the Israeli authorities continue to claim that they are bombing through precision targeting their enemy hideouts, all that they have done so far is bomb civilian residences and public buildings, causing extensive damages to all kinds of infrastructure and killing innocent

The height of Israeli precision bombing was evidenced when it bombed the building that housed the UN observers killing four of them. It was a deliberate attack, and the death of the four observers, that resulted from the bombings that was continued for many hours, even though numerous communications were made with the Israelis from the ground indicating the identity of the building, was nothing but deliberate murder.

The Israeli action has indeed crossed all limits. It is simply reflective of an attitude that is not only arrogant but also of a mindset that is swayed by its military might having least regard for human lives. What is of concern and worry for all sane people around the world is that the world's most powerful nation has directly contributed to the build up of this grotesque mentality through providing moral, diplomatic, and material support. There is no respite for the Lebanese, because, failure of the hastily arranged 15nation talks in Rome has put paid to the hope of a ceasefire in the near future.

The Israeli incursion, which we apprehend might soon turn into a full-fledged invasion of Lebanon, and its military adventures in the occupied territories are sending the wrong signals to nations around the world that might is right. The universally accepted norms of civil and human rights are slowly turning out to be mere hollow slogans. At the same time the only world body, the UN, the lone association entrusted with the duty of ensuring peace through mediating between nations, now stands ineffective and helpless in the face of such brutality and arrogance.

# Don't know much about history



ZAFAR SOBHAN

HE return of American journalist Larry Lifschultz to Dhaka to present a very well received address to mark the 30th anniversary of the execution of Col Abu Taher has rekindled interest in one of the epochal moments in Bangladesh's short but blood-stained history that has nevertheless long lain hidden from plain sight

The presentation, which we reprinted in The Daily Star on Monday, has led to a number of follow up pieces by commentators and columnists and has ignited discussion and debate anywhere people read newspapers in the country, and not a moment to soon.

In and of itself, this is a good sign. It is good to see that the country is not yet so jaded with disillusionment nor so indifferent to questions of right and wrong that we have entirely buried our memory of the execution together with the body of one of the true heroes of the liberation war.

Lifschultz told me that he was hoping to soon bring out a new STRAIGHT TALK

But we cannot be a country whose entire identity and sense of nationhood is based on untruth. Until we come to terms with our past and until we bring into the light of day the truth about our history, we will never be able to create a true national identity, and we will continue to be a nation divided, going nowhere fast.

edition of his first-rate book on the November 7 uprising and its antecedents and aftermath, The Unfinished Revolution, and I can think of no publication that I would more like to see for sale in the local market

That this seminal work of modern Bangladeshi history has been out of print for many years, both in the original and in Bangla translation, let alone become a set text in colleges and universities, tells us everything we need to know about our national commitment to truly understanding and facing up to our history. It's a damn shame

But even before Lifschultz came to give his speech, the execution of Taher and the extinquishing of his revolutionary movement (that had been swept under the carpet and politely ignored for far too long) had been on my mind.

television show called Agamir Kontho that will begin airing on Banglavision at the end of next month. It is a weekly talk show intended to give voice to the younger generation, where

I recently appeared on a new

issues are discussed by a panel of young professionals, academics, etc with questions and comments from a studio audience of university students.

The subject under discussion when I appeared was whether today's youth know enough about the history of Bangladesh, and what was interesting to note was that while the students, who were impressively articulate and intelligent, could confidently reel off the significance of dates such as 1905 and 1911 and 1947, it was clear that they had only the vaguest of knowledge and even less understanding of the events of

To say that the truth about this most tumultuous of years in the history of independent Bangladesh has been and continues to be officially suppressed would be to understate rather considerably the sophistication and extent of the propagandizing and revisionism that has gone into the effort.

Not only is there a whitewash in official text-books, but on each November 7 the whitewash is given another sickeningly hypocritical and, one can only assume, consciously deceitful coating

The day is commemorated by full-page government ads in all the newspapers and the ostentatious laying of wreaths and giving of speeches lauding Taher's heroism in coming to the rescue of his old friend Gen Ziaur Rahman.

But what is left conspicuously unspoken is the fact that soon thereafter this self-same old friend of Taher's turned into his executioner and ruthlessly and comprehensively liquidated his revolutionary movement.

Similarly, that hundreds if not thousands of others were executed in this liquidation and in the suppression of countless other abortive coups during the seventies is something very few Bangladeshis, specially those who were not born then, know anything about at all.

Ask school-children or even university students today about the post-1975 killings. They don't

Then ask them about the liberation war. They will tell you frankly that the history has been so thoroughly muddied and politicized that they no longer even know what is true and what is not, who to believe and who not to.

The reason for the revisionist historiography and propaganda that passes for history today is simple: from the days of the war itself, the Awami League has tried to wrap itself in the flag of the liberation war and claim sole ownership of the mantle of libera-

Rather than cede this ground or to point out that the AL does not own the liberation war and that others also played their part, the revisionists have chosen to instead construct their own revisionist history of the war, its genesis, and its aftermath, to paint the AL and Bangabandhu in the worst possible light.

Part of this revisionist historiography is the denigration of the mage of Bangabandhu and the careful burnishing of the image of President Zia in an attempt to elevate him to co-equal if not preeminent status in the nation's iconography

The converse of the fact that few know the full story of the coups and counter-coups of 1975 and their bloody aftermath is that every child knows about the famine and atrocities, though little else, and with no context, of the AL years immediately after liberation.

It is important to question this

process of myth-making and propagandizing because it helps us understand the forces that control the nation's historical narrative and it helps us understand where the balance of power truly lies in this country.

It has always seemed to me that Bangladesh gives the lie to the stereotype that there are no secrets in the subcontinent. There is so much of our history that remains shrouded in mystery including the real forces behind the assassinations of both Bangabandhu and President Zia.

Understanding this is again important because it keeps us on notice that there are still shadowy forces behind the scenes and that there is still much that we do not know about who calls the shots and how the country is run

But there is also another deeper issue. Some might say, let bygones be bygones, the past is the past, and it is long overdue for the country to forget its ancient enmities and divisions and move forward as one.

Perhaps. But we cannot be a country whose entire identity and sense of nationhood is based on untruth. Until we come to terms with our past and until we bring into the light of day the truth about our history, we will never be able to create a true national identity, and we will continue to be a nation divided, going nowhere fast

Zafar Sobhan is Assistant Editor. The Daily Star.

### Take care of friends



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

If you have not talked to a friend in a while, pick up the phone and talk to him now. Friendship is coming under crunch, and you might regret if you do not take care of friends. Look at the US, one of the most affluent countries in the world. There is a growing fear of loneliness gripping its people. It is not only outside the country, the Americans are losing friends inside the country as well. An average American had three friends in 1985. He has only two

Joseph Epstein writes in his book Friendship: An Expose' that the prominence and importance of friendship in the American lives have been on a steady decline over the last 40 years. His book coincides with a study done by sociologists at Duke and the University of Arizona, which reports that Americans have fewer friends today than they did 20 years agowith 25 per cent admitting they have no confi-

So forget the old days of picking and choosing friends. Do not

MATTERS AROUND US

In fact, the forum received a shot in the arm when the United Nations General

Assembly (UNGA) granted it "observer" status not long ago. Although it

came a little late, nonetheless, the recognition is a boost for Saarc which has

now embarked on international interactions. Likewise, the European (EU)

CROSS TALK

If you have not talked to your friend, give him a call or pay him a visit to seek out that parallelism which goes back in time. Childhood friends, boyhood friends, friends who went to school with you, friends who rolled with you in the mud of the same playground, friends who played marbles with you, flew kites, rode bikes, went to movies, friends who grew up with you in the layers of time, a piece of your life is lost in each of them. Each of them is like a piece of shattered mirror, where you will find your own reflection.

worry if a friend in need is a friend indeed. You will be lucky to have a friend indeed! Never mind those watchwords against fairweather friends. Even money can not buy friends anymore. Otherwise, why should an affluent society like the US come to this? Quit treating friendship like a restricted diet. Take by the handful to keep enough if most slip away

The latest research shows that the Americans are becoming lonely irrespective of sex, race. education or age. Intimacy within families has gone down too. But nearly one in tena much higher share than in 1985 -- reports that their husband or wife is the only person they confide in. In many cases the Americans are turning to their estranged, even divorced, spouses for friendship since they already know each other's best kept secrets.

It was as if to prove that point, the harrowing tale of a lonesome American surfaced in The

Washington Post. An eighty-year old salesman stopped coming to work one day. Nobody bothered to find out why he was suddenly missing until his skeleton was found five years later in the bathtub of his house. Now police have a hard time identifying the dead. They can not find a friend or blood relation who can help with

The story only reconfirmed what the study revealed. Weakening bonds of friendship, which other studies affirm, have far-reaching effects. Among them: fewer people to turn to for help in crises such as Hurricane Katrina, fewer watchdogs to deter neighbourhood crime. fewer visitors for hospital patients and fewer participants in community groups. The decline, which was greatest in estimates of the number of friends outside the family, also puts added pressure on spouses, families and counselors

Meanwhile something inter-

esting has been happening in the American society. The Americans are spending more time in their bathrooms, cooped up in the luxury of more space, iridescent glass tiles, multiple shower heads, heated mirrors, body sprays, instant steam, soaring skylights and portable speakers connected to wireless iPod transmitters. More money is not bringing them friends. They are receding into the more private quarters of their private homes

Amazing statistics if you wish to know. According to Kitchen and Bath magazine, Americans will spend 22 billion dollars on bathrooms in 2006, which is 10 times the amount the US government will spend on Aids research this year. It is six times the annual budget of Kenya. If keeping friends is expensive, losing them is not cheap either!

It is an irony that flush with money, the Americans are faced with loneliness. Perhaps more consumption eventually con-

which is no longer nascent, and

has become more well known,

although its effectiveness and

efficacy are often seen with a

degree of doubt by several quar-

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Likewise, the European (EU) has

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him to countenance his own hollowness. If parents are concerned that too many friends could spoil their children, here is something for them to think. Better spoiled than alone, because loneliness is painful like slow death. Emerson defined that a friend

sumes the consumer and leaves

is a person with whom one may be sincere, before whom one may think aloud. Alexander Pope even said it better in his letter to Jonathan Swift. He wrote that we lose our best part in every friend. But I like most what Henry Brooks Adams said: "One friend in a lifetime is much; two are many; three are hardly possible. Friendship needs a certain parallelism of life, a community of thought, a rivalry of aim."

According to Tennyson, one makes no friend if one never made a foe. Friendship is the flipside of enmity, a fine balance which, if slightly disturbed, can turn the coin. Remember how many friends you have lost already, how many people who were cheek by jowl, hand in glove, have already vanished. When was the last time you saw vour best friend? Do vou have best friend for that matter, a buddy, a pal, a soul mate who gives you the confidence that you are not alone?

Barry Wellman and Jeffrey Boase of the University of Toronto found in their survey that Americans say they feel close to an average of fifteen others besides their friends. Friendship is a people-intensive industry, more closeness with more people increasing the chance of producing more friends. Friendship abides by the law of large numbers, greater the number of experiments, greater the chance

If you have not talked to your friend, give him a call or pay him a visit to seek out that parallelism which goes back in time. Childhood friends, boyhood friends, friends who went to school with you, friends who rolled with you in the mud of the same playground, friends who played marbles with you, flew kites, rode bikes, went to movies, friends who grew up with you in the layers of time, a piece of your life is lost in each of them. Each of them is like a piece of shattered mirror, where you will find your own reflection

It is a terrible thing not to have friends, which means you have never opened your heart to anyone. You do not have a confidante, someone you can trust with your innermost secrets. You never ventured out of your shell, which means you have remained a prisoner of your own lonely self.

Talk to your friends and take care of them unless you are planning an expansion of your

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker

## Saarc foreign ministers need to shape up



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

HE foreign ministers of South Asian countries, under the aegis of the Saarc council of ministers, are meeting in Dhaka for two days from August 1 and their discussions, taking place halfway between the last Saarc summit in Dhaka and the next one in India, are seen as quite important.

While follow up actions with regard to the decisions of the "Dhaka Declaration" will come in for thorough examination, the ministers will have to tackle a number of issues, some still somewhat contentious like the Safta, which all the member states had Furthermore, the ministers also need to infuse dynamism into the

third decade, and is coming under increasing pressure to deliver the Earlier, the Saarc "standing

forum that has stepped into its

committee." composed of the foreign secretaries, met in Dhaka for the first time after the 13th summit of the seven-nation forum in November and discussed the on-going Saarc issues

They also prepared the ground work for their ministers. The council of ministers is a political level forum and, obviously, it can decide many issues where the "standing committee" is not competent enough to make the decisions. Hence, the Dhaka meeting of the foreign ministers assumes special significance ahead of the

next summit in 2007

has expressed willingness for its association with the forum.

Since the last summit. Saarc activities appear to be more pronounced and action-oriented compared to the previous phase when the forum of 1.4 billion people of the world's most densely populated region was clearly bedeviled by inertia and a kind of slackening in the drive that had initially propelled the member nations for working in close concert for their socio-economic development.

Evidently, Saarc is also undergoing expansion and changes, making it more representative at the regional scale and also at the international level. Consequently, both, potentials and challenges for the forum are also increasing.

as the eighth member of this South Asian forum, and its foreign minister will attend the Dhaka conference as "observer" on special invitation. Kabul is expected to be formally taken as a full fledged Saarc member at the next summit. Two economically powerful Asian nations. Japan and China, having close links with South Asia have also been accepted as "observers" by the last summit. This decision is likely to be beneficial for Saarc which requires innovative economic interactions and assistance in its

Afghanistan has been admitted

the new interactions. living in the region. While the decision of the lead-

gigantic guest for improving the

quality of life of the vast multitude

ers to admit one country as member, and two others as "observers," provides better prospects for Saarc, which has not shown significant performance during the first two decades, even though its utility has not been questioned. The United States and South Korea have also shown interest in becoming "observers." and the Dhaka meeting of the council of ministers will discuss the issue.

Saarc's larger ambit in various forms has opened up, both, promises and challenges for the regional body. Politics undeniably creates an undercurrent of tension in Saarc although it is wholly meant to concentrate on the economic issues, and the forum's new contacts with varying political lines hopefully will not affect its cohesiveness.

The growing interest demon-

What is important for Saarc is Saarc has been a victim of to make the best use of all these politics over the last twenty years contacts since resource conowing to the differences of the straint is a major handicap for any member states and such a fear key program aimed at providing may not be seen as totally collective benefits, and the experunfounded. Hopefully, any such tise of these links will also be apprehension will prove to be Saarc has a number of issues misplaced and the forum will accrue maximum benefits from

in hand, including strengthening of its secretariat, functioning of the regional centres, various

strated by several important national and sectoral focal points nations for links with Saarc clearly discussed at the last summit An important matter for the points to increasing international acceptability of the organisation

forum is consideration of the mechanism for strengthening the regional centres, two of which are now functioning in Bangladesh, and four others are being set up -forestry in Bhutan, cultural in Sri Lanka, energy in Pakistan, and

disaster management in India. The ministers will discuss the South Asian development fund (SADF), which will start function-

status not long ago. Although it ing with a capital of \$300 million. The conference will also have to take up issues like Safta that have been agreed upon, but irritants involving some member states are still being noticed. For instance, the Indian commerce minister, Kamal Nath, has said in New Delhi that Pakistan is not truly complying with the Safta decisions in terms of issues with India, while Islamabad has a

The nitty gritty of Safta requires to be further streamlined. It is hoped that the council of ministers will resolve whatever differences they may face on current and future programs of Saarc, and live up to the expectations that the third decade of the forum is one of action and for delivering concrete results

An interesting, and significant feature of the Saarc conferences is the bilateral contacts on the sidelines of the meeting which often prove to have a sobering effect on the relationship of the member states whose ties may suffer from irritants or misunder-

This time, such a meeting between the foreign ministers of India and Pakistan is likely to be a cynosure of many eyes as the process of improving bilateral ties seems to have suffered a setback - albeit no rupture -- due to certain recent developments

Hopefully, the Dhaka meeting will provide the opportunity to put their ties back on track. This is particularly important for a healthy political environment in the region which has a bearing on Saarc

Zaglul A. Chowdhury is the Foreign Editor of