

A little respect

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accusation that this writer took two Ambassadors to the Election Commission on the night of election result in 2001. (What she is trying to imply by this only she knows. But I can make a guess, and my reaction is -- is it another example of how she weaves fiction to justify her own biases and prejudices?)

Why does a leader of her stature have so little respect for truth? Why does she listen to gossip in making her comments? Why does she not verify her facts before she goes public with a statement? Most importantly, what does it say about somebody who was our prime minister once and may very well be again if her party wins the coming election? Can statements full of such non-facts (I am not calling them lies only to show respect) increase public confidence in her leadership abilities?

Sheikh Hasina compared our fictional visit to the US Ambassador's house with her general secretary's going to a tea party there with the purpose of meeting his BNP counterpart to discuss the initial steps for the two-party dialogue. Mr Abdul Jalil himself has said to the press, TV and to BBC that if the BNP secretary general is sincere about the dialogue, then he should come to the US Ambassador's tea party. So, it was not an ordinary tea party, in fact a very crucial one. So the question is, are the two comparable? For the sake of argument, even if we had visited the US Ambassador's house (which, I repeat, we did not), can the visit of two editors, on a matter of such a

limited scope, be comparable to Jalil-Bhuiyan visit to the US Ambassador's residence whose scope was the future of the coming elections with all its severe and far-reaching implications?

There is also the question of timing. Go ahead and have as many tea parties you want and in as many ambassadors' houses you like. The question of propriety arose when the venue was chosen as the initiating ground for the all-crucial dialogue on the very day the two secretaries general were supposed to talk about it.

So, first the story of the visit was false, second the timing was disastrous, and third even if it had taken place, the incidents are not comparable by any stretch of imagination. So, why did Sheikh Hasina suddenly decide to go public with this accusation against the two editors? Simply, in our view, because she did not want to admit that she had made a blunder by agreeing to join the tea party at that crucial moment.

This is the crux of all our problems. Our leaders, both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, never want to admit that they make mistakes, and if and when somebody points them out, they start making public attacks on them, true or false, mostly false.

A little respect for truth would help the nation immensely.

Hope for settlement

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election to be held in a free and fair manner."

On the first day of the talks Thursday, the AL general secretary placed the 31-point electoral reforms before Bhuiyan. He also asked his ruling party counterpart to resolve first the issue of Justice Hasan before moving to the other issues.

The AL Central Working Committee and the 14-party alliance, meanwhile, have decided that they would not compromise on their call for the issue of Hasan to be settled first.

Immediately after the talks, Jalil rushed to the residence of AL President Sheikh Hasina. There he briefed her and the party's senior leaders about the developments.

Shortly before resumption of the negotiations, Bhuiyan met Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office and discussed the opposition's posture on Justice Hasan and the other issues, sources said.

Among others, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed and BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman were present at the meeting that lasted for about an hour.

On the other hand, the senior

leaders of the opposition line-up at a meeting had reiterated that it would not take up any other issues if the government side does not deal with the opposition's objection to Hasan being the chief adviser.

According to them, reconstitution of the Election Commission should be the next issue to address. The 14-party also has plans for vigorous street agitations in case of the dialogue failing to break the stalemate over the reform agenda.

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday at with leaders of her party's front organisations at a city community centre said they will not budge on the reform proposals.

A huge number of leaders and workers from both BNP and AL gathered in front of the Sangsad Bhaban while the dialogue was in progress inside. They chanted slogans for their parties.

Besides, Sujon, an NGO working to promote good governance, yesterday formed a human chain seeking to signify the public expectation for a positive outcome of the parley between the two opposing parties.

Feeder operators

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controlled mainly by a Singapore-based business syndicate who prevent any new company from entering into the business, sources said, adding that the Chittagong port authorities hardly take any decision ignoring the CFTC's suggestions.

The group often imposes additional surcharge on Chittagong bound container cargoes in the pretext of congestion. On June 5, the CFTC enforced \$130 additional surcharge on each TEU of Chittagong-bound containers.

They also enforced a sudden strike on September 2 abandoning the activities of loading and unloading cargoes at Chittagong port and Chittagong bound cargo at connecting ports, leading to piling up of export and import goods on the port yard.

The Bangladesh flag carrier vessels belonging to HRC and BSC however did not join the strike.

The group called the strike protesting a defamation case filed by Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

The strike was withdrawn following discussion with the government and an understanding with the BGMEA.

The five shipping companies under the CFTC are QC Shipping, Advanced Container Line (PIL Bangladesh), Orient Express Line (OEL), Seacon Bangladesh Ltd and American President Line (APL).

Their dominance became evident when two new feeder vessels recently expressed desire to operate on the route between Chittagong and Singapore.

The CFTC vehemently opposed the initiative and threatened to impose a fresh surcharge of \$50 on all Chittagong-bound containers. The CFTC chairman of Singapore chapter, A C Lim, also flew to Bangladesh and strongly lobbied the government high-ups against joining of any new companies in the existing convoy.

Local companies Everbest Shipping and Continental Traders brought two feeder vessels named Eagle Progress and Eagle Pioneer. But they could not start operation due to opposition by the CFTC.

Jamal Uddin Quader Chowdhury, managing director of QC Shipping Ltd and an influential member of CFTF, denied the allegation of creating monopoly in the business and resisting any one's

joining the route.

The shipping companies on the route are doing business on the basis of competition, he said, adding, "I have no problem if 100 shipping companies operate vessels on the route."

The CPA is supposed to take the decision about whether or not to allow a ship, he said.

Denying the allegation of money siphoning by the shipping companies, the QC managing director said the Bangladeshi shipping companies and other ship operators are bound to obey the same rules and regulations.

"My company is a Bangladeshi company and we pay tax to the government and give accounts to the Bangladesh Bank," he said.

He said carrying Bangladeshi flag in operating ships is "not very much significant". He also claimed that his company recruits Bangladeshi crew and seamen.

Jamal Uddin, however, admitted the possibility of imposing fresh surcharge on the Chittagong port by the CFTC due to heavy congestion. The inefficiency and limitations of the Chittagong Port Authority are mainly responsible for creating congestion at the port, he said.

Although the CFTC opposes the operation of any new company on the route, they are replacing the smaller ships with big ones, sources said.

Earlier, the CFTC companies used to charter smaller ships with capacity of 300 to 400 TEUs. But recently they have hired a number of ships with 700-1000 TEUs capacity.

The freight charge of the container in the route also remains high due to CFTC's monopoly. Now, the average freight per TEU is \$300.

If there were no local feeder service on the route, the freight would have gone to \$1000 per TEU by this time, said a high official of a leading shipping company.

If new companies are allowed to operate vessels on the route, the CFTC will no longer have monopoly and the CPA will get relief from the threat of additional surcharge, sources said, adding that the freight on the route will also come down significantly.

30 killed

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"An M1A2 Abrams tank was struck by multiple RPG rounds and was severely damaged," the US military statement said. "IA and MND-B soldiers engaged the enemy forces and killed approximately 30 of the terrorists," it said, adding that Iraqi and US troops had suffered no casualties.

"Reportedly, up to 10 enemy RPG teams attacked the combined forces, of which six teams were destroyed," it said.

By midday, Diwaniya, 180km south of Baghdad, was reported to be quiet, but there was a heavy US military presence.

"There is an American tank on every corner of Diwaniya," said one resident, who declined to be named.

"Nobody slept in Diwaniya last night. The fighting was very fierce," he added.

US and Iraqi troops have launched numerous operations in recent weeks against the Mehdi Army in their hunt for sectarian death squads accused of carrying out indiscriminate killings.

The US military statement said the high-value target, whom it did not name, had been captured by Iraqi troops during the operation.

It said the suspect was accused of involvement in the deaths of Iraqi soldiers on August 28, when 20 soldiers were killed in a battle with Shia militiamen in the city.

At least 13 were reported at the time to have been executed after they ran out of ammunition.

A Reuters reporter in the city heard machine-gun fire from 1 am to 6 am on Sunday as well as the sound of helicopter gunships overhead. Residents reported seeing the tank on fire.

Iraqi soldiers fired into the air on Sunday to chase away reporters trying to take pictures of the Abrams as it was being recovered by US soldiers.

People to foil

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a constitutional government in the interim. "And their responsibility would be to take legal actions against those who create chaos and anarchy in the country during the interim period."

Khaleda, chairperson of the ruling BNP, said the opposition must have to go to the polls if they have confidence in the people and if they had done work for public welfare.

But she alleged that the opposition has carried out acts of terrorism under the reign of godfathers. "So they are afraid to go before the people, so they want to foil the election."

The prime minister said the 2007 general election is very important for Bangladesh and that conspiracy is going on to foil this election to create constitutional vacuum.

Turning to electricity problem, she admitted that there remained some electricity problem and urged people to hold patience for some time. She said if her government came to power next time, they would give first priority to solving the power problem.

She said the present government has already taken steps to overcome the electricity problem.

50 injured

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Witnesses said the lawmaker of the ruling coalition later escaped unhurt with the help of police.

The agitators also damaged 20 vehicles on the highway during the clash, disrupting traffic movement on the busy route for five hours from 12:00 noon.

Upazila AL President Abdus Sobhan Hasan, however, said the Shibir activists instigated by the Jamaat MP attacked their procession.

Police reinforcements were deployed at the scene to bring the situation under control.

Meanwhile, local Awami and Juba League threatened to block the Dhaka-Chittagong highway if the authorities didn't arrest the killers of Hedayetullah within 36 hours.

REB appointment

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completing the period of leave preparatory to retirement (LPR) and drawing all retirement benefits.

Sheikh Ahmed Ali is now holding the position of the member finance. Ali served the REB for 25 years and had worked as the controller of accounts and finances since the retirement of Latifur Rahman until being appointed as member two months back.

Ali's appointment is temporary as he is now under scrutiny by the Superior Selection Board (SSB).

Ali was given the appointment as per the REB board's recommendation to the power ministry. The post of member finance fell vacant when the previous member left the REB to join the Energy Regulatory Commission a few months ago.

When Ali was appointed the member finance, the REB filled up four vacant subordinate posts, including that of the controller, through regular promotions.

If the contractual appointment is made effective, it will imply that Ali and the four other promoted officials will return to their previous posts. "This is the kind of mess the government has nurtured in the power sector for the last five years," commented an official.

24pc population

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"Accurate figures are not available for urban areas, but in effect between 25 and 30 million of the country's citizens are chronically poor," it said.

While it is clear that Bangladesh does not provide an easy context for poverty reduction, the recent economic growth in the country, improvements in services and the resilience and innovation of the poorest all augur well, it said.

Bangladesh will not help its poorest if it believes that "growth alone" should be the policy focus, the study noted.

Prof Rehman Sobhan, chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), spoke as the chief guest at the launch of the study. Dr Quazi Shahabuddin, director general of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), presided over the ceremony.

Presenting the overview of the study at the BIDS conference room, Binayak Sen said if inequality continues to rise the poorest will face the prospect of "anti-poorest" growth in the future. "To avoid this situation the government will need to pay increasing attention to policies to moderate inequality," he observed.

However, the study said overall Bangladesh is well on its way to achieve most of the millennium development goals (MDG) except income poverty reduction (goal 1/target 1), reduction in maternal mortality rate, and perhaps reduction in under-five mortality rate.

It is also lagging behind in respect of the key social indicator: adult illiteracy, it said adding there is a possibility that the easy gains have been achieved and more effort will be needed to continue to make progress.

MDG attainment will require that all routes to poverty reduction are pursued -- economic growth, improved governance and state service delivery, continued NGO

contributions, and community action and cooperation.

Growth is essential if the poorest are to be helped out of poverty. But the quality of growth is as important as the quantity of growth, the study said in one of the six main elements of its strategic framework.

Growth alone will not be sufficient for the chronically poor to escape their poverty. Public action by the state, NGOs, communities and private citizens is needed to reduce the livelihood insecurity that keeps poor people poor and drives the vulnerable into abject poverty.

Infrastructure support is necessary for both rural and urban areas, it said adding that the government must take reform of the tax system seriously to finance public investments in poverty reduction for the poorest.

Access to finance and other assets is critical for the graduation of chronically and extremely poor people, the study said adding that efforts must be made to help the poorest achieve a minimum level of citizenship.

Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud, former adviser to caretaker government, Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, managing director of PKSF, and Dr Quazi Mesbahuddin Ahmed, member of the Planning Commission, spoke as special guests, delivering lectures on different aspects of poverty.

Reviewing the study, Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), said there is a need to devise a mechanism for addressing the poverty issue in a different manner.

"It is necessary to ensure policies taken do not increase the problem," he observed.

No scope

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poles and oars after the Eid to protect the right of vote.

"Then we will see how our reform proposals are not implemented," she said.

"Reform proposals had been given after taking opinions of different political parties and members of the civil society to ensure a free and fair election in the country," she added.

Referring to those who speak about compromise over the reform proposals, Hasina said, "Do they want to create an opportunity for the BNP-Jamaat coalition to rig the next election?"

To make some compromise means to give some chance to rig the election, the former prime minister said.

Hasina reiterated that no free and fair election is possible under the jurisdiction of KM Hasan and the Election Commission in its current composition.

"We want a neutral and non-partisan caretaker government as per the constitution. But KM Hasan and Aziz are BNP partisans. The chief adviser to the caretaker government should be appointed on the basis of a con-

sensus and the Election Commission must be reconstituted to ensure free and fair elections," she said.

"In 1996 Khaleda Zia said she did not understand the concept of caretaker government and there was no one neutral barring insane people and children," Hasina said, adding that people finally made Khaleda understand the demand for elections under a caretaker government.

The prime minister should take a lesson from the 1996 incident, Hasina said.

The opposition leader accused the government of failure to curb skyrocketing prices of essentials, unbribed corruption, the rise of militancy, and solve power crisis.

If the opposition coalition is voted to power, they will keep prices of essentials under control, curb militancy, and increase power generation.

AL Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader, organising secretaries Abdur Rahman and Mahmudur Rahman Manna also spoke at the meeting.

Judicial enquiry

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for submitting his probe report yesterday.

Taking the complaint into cognisance, Metropolitan Magistrate Syed Mohammad Mojibul Haq ordered the judicial probe into the matter after former Officer AFM Sahab Uddin Ahmed filed the case with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka.

The accused are: Deputy Commissioner of police Obaidur Rahman Khan, Officer-in-charge (OC) of Gulshan Police Station Mahbub Alam Khan, sub-inspectors Jasim Uddin and Faisal Zaman and driver to the deputy inspector general (DIG) of Special Branch Haviidar Abdul Khaleq.

Asif, Shoebuzzaman and 21 others, who were also injured in the incident, have been shown as witnesses.

The DMP joint commissioner yesterday told The Daily Star that he had extended his time but did not disclose when he will submit his report.

He said, "I will submit the report soon." He, however, declined to give any details on his findings.

In his complaint, Sahab Uddin mentioned that Zumman Ali, one of the security guards of National Shooting Federation, asked the chauffeur of DIG Dr Sadiqur Rahman to park the four-wheel-drive vehicle to another place when the driver was attempting to park it in front of the federation complex at 12:15pm.

But the chauffeur Haviidar Abdul Khaleq became angry with the guard and was locked in an argument with him, which turned into a scuffle.

Other guards and employees of the complex came out and joined the confrontation while the chauffeur requested help from patrol

police who were on duty in the area.

A three-member police patrol team led by Sub-inspector Jasim rushed to the spot with North Zone Deputy Commissioner of Police Obaidur Rahman Khan, Assistant Commissioner Zannatul Hasan and OC of Gulshan Police Station Mahbub Alam Khan.

As per direction of the DC and the OC, the policemen entered the complex and started beating up whoever they found inside the complex.

Around 30 shooters, who were practising inside, came out hearing the commotion and fell victim to the indiscriminate beating.

At least 25 shooters were seriously injured.

Among them, internationally acclaimed shooter Asif, who was preparing for the Asian Games to be held in Doha in December, and another shooter Shoebuzzaman were seriously injured, the complainant said.

After the beating at the complex, police arrested five including the shooters and took them to Gulshan Police Station where they were beaten up again before sending them to a court charging them with assaults.

The court, on receiving bail petitions, freed Asif and Shoeb and sent the other three to jail.

Earlier, Gulshan police did not allow the Shooting Federation officials to enter it when they went there for filing a case in this connection.

As the police did not allow them to enter it, the complainant filed the case with the court.

CEC

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me," he said as the reporters asked him if he is going to resign when he was coming out of his office escorted by police.

Reporters had to struggle for interviewing the CEC as the police obstructed them from asking questions.

The question of his resignation arose, as there was speculation by different media following the dialogue between the Awami League (AL) General Secretary Abdul Jalil and BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan.

It has been reported that Bhuiyan, in response to the demands of Jalil, softened regarding the removal of CEC MA Aziz, but was firm on the question of Justice KM Hasan who is supposed to be the chief of the next caretaker government.

The opposition has been objecting to Hasan's taking over the post calling him a partisan.

CEC Aziz gave rise to a number of controversies for making a faulty voter list where the number of voters was shown more than the number of people actually eligible as well as for not following the High Court (HC) verdict on fresh voter list.

2 outlaws killed

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and Digholia Police Station of Khulna district.

He died during an arms recovery operation at Shiromoni at about 3:30am when his accomplices ambushed the Rab.

Rab recovered a shutter gun and two shotgun cartridges from his possession. The law enforcers also fired 35 rounds of shots during the 21-minute long shootout in which two of them also sustained injuries.

The press release further added that Billal Hossain belonged to the Haroon faction of the outlawed Purbia Banglar Communist Party (PBCP). The encounter between the Rab and his accomplices took place at Goalbathan under Rupsha upazila.

Several criminal cases, including three for murder, were filed against him with the Rupsha Police Station of Khulna district and Fakirhat Police Station of Bagerhat district.

Rab recovered a pipe-gun and three bullets from his possession, the press release said.

Bombs hurled

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Kushtia-2 constituency, for the attack.

Khaleq, however, dismissed the allegation saying people who were subjected to repression by Shahidul might have carried out the attack.

Witnesses said the criminals around 5:00pm hurled the two bombs on a microbus of the motorcade when it was near Bhedmai intersection close to MA Khaleq's house.

The microbus was travelling next to Shahidul's. All the injured including the policemen were on board the vehicle.

Following the blasts, Shahidul along with at least 50 BNP activists went into the house of Khaleq and launched a broadside against the residents of the house.

As Khaleq was not at home, they vandalised the nearby house of Khaleq's aide Nabiruddin and beat up his wife.

Additional policemen, Bangladesh Rifles members and Rapid Action Battalion men were deployed to avert any untoward incidents.

Gayle crushes

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break even as the lights were being switched on at the Motera Stadium.

Lara smashed his counterpart Prosper Utseya for two consecutive sixes to bring an early end to the one-sided contest.

The 21-year-old Utseya, who beat Lara at the toss and elected to take first strike in good batting conditions, top-scored for his side with 27.

Zimbabwe were in danger of falling below the lowest-ever Champions Trophy total of 65 by the United States against Australia in 2004 when they slipped to 58-7 by the 19th over.

But Utseya and Anthony Ireland prevented that humiliation by adding 24 for the eighth wicket, the highest partnership in the dismal innings.

Only Bangladesh among the Test-playing nations have faced worse in the tournament, making 77 against New Zealand in Colombo in 2002.

The Zimbabweans played into Lara's hands as eight batsmen failed to reach double figures. Two ran themselves out attempting risky singles.

The beleaguered African nation, who lost the services of top stars like Andy Flower and Heath Streak due to political turmoil in the cricket administration at home, have fallen below 100 for the eighth time in one-day internationals.

The rout on Sunday followed a 5-0 hammering suffered by Zimbabwe against Lara's men in the West Indies in April.

Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are the other two teams in the round-robin qualifying league where the top two will advance to the main tournament starting on October 15.

N Korean N-test plan worries China, Japan

AFF, Beijing

Aunited China and Japan kept up the pressure on North Korea yesterday following landmark talks overshadowed by global jitters at the Stalinist regime's stated plan to test an atom bomb.

Visiting Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao reaffirmed their commitment to a non-nuclear Korean peninsula, after the first top level Sino-Japanese summit in Beijing since 2001.

The two countries, who have been uneasy neighbours in recent years, were meeting one day after a shooting incident on the heavily fortified Korean border set off alarm bells around the world.

"Both sides expressed deep concern about recent situations over the Korean peninsula, including the issue of nuclear tests," said a joint statement after Abe's meetings with Wen and Chinese President Hu Jintao.

It also said both nations would "work hard" to push for the resumption of the stalled six-nation talks on the North Korean nuclear issue.

China and Japan were committed to realising "a non-nuclear Korean peninsula as well as maintaining peace and stability in Northeast Asia," according to the statement.

The North Korean issue has cast a shadow over Abe's visit to China, his first foreign trip since becoming prime minister two weeks ago. He is due to travel to Seoul on Monday for talks with South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun.

The world has been on alert after North Korea said last week it would test its first atom bomb, a threat that could theoretically be carried out at anytime.

Before leaving Tokyo, Abe, who forged his career as a hardliner on North Korea, said he would "exchange frank opinions" with Beijing and Seoul.

"We have to stop North Korea from conducting a nuclear test," he said.

China and South Korea have in the past adopted a more conciliatory line and warned against further isolating impoverished North Korea, a reclusive regime enveloped by a personality cult surrounding Kim Jong-Il.

In North Korea, official media reported patriotic celebrations marking the ninth anniversary Sunday of Kim taking office as ruling party chief,

praising his Songun (military-first) policy.

"We should display the might of Songun Korea and bring about a great surge in the building of a great prosperous, powerful nation under the leadership of Kim Jong-Il," the state news agency KCNA said.

It made no reference to the plans for a nuclear test announced Tuesday by the regime, nor has there been any official reaction to a UN Security Council statement Friday urging Pyongyang to drop the idea.

On Saturday, South Korean soldiers fired dozens of warning shots at North Korean troops who had strayed over the frontier, the most heavily defended in the world.

It was the first time since May that troops from the North had crossed the military demarcation line into the sensitive no-man's land separating the two nations, which remain technically at war after the 1950-1953 Korean War.

The five men, one of whom appeared armed, later returned to their own side, but the incident jarred nerves already frayed by intense speculation over when a test might go ahead.

In Seoul, a senior foreign ministry official said that Chun Yung-Woo, the South's chief delegate to stalled six-country talks on North Korea's nuclear programme, would meet Monday in Beijing with Chinese counterpart Wu Dawei.

Pyongyang has boycotted the talks -- grouping the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States -- since last November in protest at US sanctions against a Macau bank accused of laundering money for the regime.

The official said the North was under round-the-clock surveillance and that so far the South Koreans had spotted no unusual movement that might suggest a nuclear test was imminent.

If the North carries out a successful test, it would be the eighth country to possess the world's most destructive weapon and admit it, the others being Britain, China, France, India, Pakistan, Russia and the United States.

Israel is widely presumed to have nuclear weapons but has never officially said so.

The last country to test a bomb was Pakistan in 1998.</