

Terrorist attack in Saudi Arabia

The fall-out syndrome

No person can fail to be shocked and horrified by Sunday's Riyadh housing complex bomb blast that has left at least 17 dead and 120 injured. There can be no justification for the taking of innocent lives, and we condemn in the strongest possible terms those who are responsible for the carnage. Our hearts go out to the families of the victims, and we hope that justice for the perpetrators of this outrage is swift and severe.

We would also like to express our concern for the many Bangladeshi expatriates working in Saudi Arabia, especially as the blast appeared to be aimed at foreigners in the kingdom. We hope that the Bangladeshi mission is taking all possible steps to secure the safety of our fellow countrymen.

Who were behind the attack and what they hoped to accomplish through such an atrocity remains unclear. The fact that the devastated housing complex was home mainly to families from other Arab countries and not Westerners makes the motive behind the attack even harder to fathom.

The US is right to feel that terrorism is a scourge that must be opposed and rooted out everywhere in the world. However, the Bush administration's belief that the overthrow of Saddam's admittedly brutal dictatorship in Iraq would lead to greater stability in the region has proved to be dead wrong.

Far from bringing stability to the region, the US-led war has succeeded only in plunging Iraq into chaos and destabilising the entire Middle East. We feel that the bomb blast in Riyadh is just the latest evidence of the increasing volatility in the region that the US-led war has wrought.

While we condemn terrorism in all its forms and do not wish to shift the blame for terrorist outrages away from those who perpetrate them, it remains undeniable that as long as the US continues its occupation of Iraq, the instability in the Middle East will only increase and, as a result, atrocity such as Sunday's bombing will tragically become more and more frequent.

JCD infighting

Bodes ill for campus peace

Two factions of the JCD, the student front of the BNP, are reported to be engaged in a fight for supremacy on the Dhaka University campus. The troubled engagement revolves around control over seats in the dormitories and collection of tolls from different sources. They have clashed with each other at least six times since a new JCD committee was formed early this year.

Students have complained that the situation was more or less similar when the BCL was dominating the campus politics during the AL rule. Things are not changing for the better.

The chronic problem is actually at the root of the worrying syndrome called campus violence. The political parties, the major ones to be precise, have been consistent enough in their commitment to peace and a conducive academic atmosphere on the campus. But the commitment has not been translated into action against the unruly elements within the student organisations.

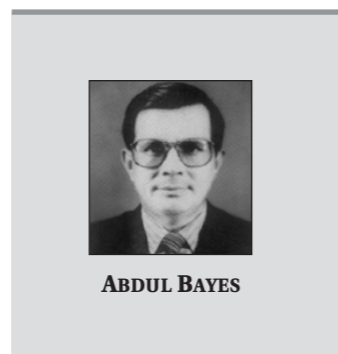
They have set up the illegal business of collecting tolls from traders and contractors working in and around the campus. The seats in the dormitories are another source of wheeling and dealing for so-called students activists.

There is no reason why the political parties should still be unaware of the presence of outsiders in their student bodies. But lack of action against the undesirable elements is indeed a mystery that continues to baffle all the stakeholders.

When two groups within the student organisation linked to the ruling party fight for the dubious honour of having no challenger in illegal activities, the vulnerability of the campus to violence increases manifold.

That is a truth that the BNP policymakers must not only realise but also act upon to weed out hooliganism from student politics. As the ruling party BNP has to take the initiative to rein in elements that can be a liability to its image.

Drives, drivers and diversification



ABDUL BAYES

An international workshop on "Agricultural Diversification and Vertical Integration in South Asia" was held in New Delhi from November 5 to 6. The workshop owes to the collaborative efforts of the Federation of the Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT). Presided over by an eminent economist, Isher Judge Ahluwalia, of the Maryland University, the inaugural session was also addressed by the union minister for agriculture Shri Rajnath Singh, FICCI president Y K Modi, chiefs of IFPRI and ICRISAT, Dr Joachim von Braun and William Dar, respectively, and by Dr Ashok Gulati, the man behind the overall management. I had the privilege of participating in that workshop and to say something on the institutional arrangements in Bangladesh that are seemingly driving at diversification in agriculture. It is true that diversification is not a new issue and farmers have long been doing that. But given the growing trend globalisation, the issue needs to be revisited to be tuned to time.

A different demand pattern

South Asia (SA) is likely to witness a different type of agriculture than what has hitherto been in evidence. For the last two decades, SA on average witnessed a growth rate of over 5 per cent per annum. Consumption and expenditure patterns changed, paripassu. Known as subsistence economies, many of farmers in SA including the smaller ones, are reportedly moving towards the markets both for perishable and non-perishable products. In

Super markets!

There is an avalanche of literature pointing to growing changes in the retail chain for agricultural products. Super markets in Asia took off 5-7 years behind Latin America but is registering a much faster growth. Share of super markets in sales of fresh and packaged foods is 50 per cent in Latin America, 30 per cent in Southeast Asia and 48 per cent in China. In India, the share is not as high but could swell soon. What about

wholesale markets at Karwan Bazar and Shampur as focal point are giving rise to an alternative chain. My students also worked out that direct buying by Proshika -- an NGO involved in diversification -- of vegetables from farmers tend to provide a better margins for farmers compared to that by the vendors. By and large, the demand for organic vegetables is growing in super markets and so the farmers have to respond to the supply. The development in the communi-

policy changes are not placed forth in due course, we might again fail to fuel diversification and provide a fair price to farmers.

While 40 per cent or so of agricultural produce in Thailand is processed, in SA the share is only 2 per cent. The markets for HVCs in Thailand are more deregulated than in SA. Painfully, in SA economies, 25-30 per cent of the HVCs are lost in post harvest period due to the lack of storage, preservation and transport

gic investment and policy issues.

Private initiatives

Allow me to recall the contribution of Pran -- a private sector initiative that, possibly, pioneered the agro processing in Bangladesh. All over the country, Pran group has 4-5 thousand contract farmers to feed the factories. Agricultural raw materials are being turned into manufactured items through higher levels of value addition. It is nice to note that Pran products are now being sold to northeast Indian markets legally (and also illegally). The markets for aromatic rice are on a rise. I personally believe that given proper policy planks, agro processing in Bangladesh has a bright future. Since majority of farmers in Bangladesh are small holders, the changes might benefit them as well. Of course, like the green revolution, the initial incentives could go more to the larger ones but with the passage of time, the small could catch up.

Policies and perspectives

But to live up to that expectation, the public sector has to do a lot of things. Internal and external transport facilities, investment on researches, export incentives etc -- all have to hover around agro processing activities. Mind that agro processing activities and agricultural exports tend to add more value to the domestic economy than others. It is the only sector, where the major inputs originate from the soil. The drives, the drivers and the diversification issues would, hopefully, find a berth in the mindset of the policy makers.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

Given proper policy planks, agro processing in Bangladesh has a bright future. Since majority of farmers in Bangladesh are small holders, the changes might benefit them as well. Of course, like the green revolution, the initial incentives could go more to the larger ones but with the passage of time, the small could catch up... But to live up to that expectation, the public sector has to do a lot of things.

India, for example, fruits and poultry witnessed the fastest growth. In Bangladesh, empirical evidences show that per capita consumption of High Value Crops (HVCs) between 1990/91 and 1999/2000 grew tremendously: fish 9 per cent, meat 49 per cent, poultry 120 per cent and milk 55 per cent. Projections of a 7 per cent growth rate and the consequent injections of demand for these products were done by Mahabub Hossain (IRRI) and Rushidan Rahman (BIDS). Their findings signaled to the need for a surge in supply to match the demand. There is, in records, cereal surpluses in SA countries especially in India and Bangladesh -- thanks to the green revolution -- and the release of land is partly leading to diversification.

Bangladesh? My second year economics students informed me that there are 30 to 35 super markets in Dhaka city alone that deal directly in agricultural products. At the moments, these markets are marked for the relatively rich segment in per capita income scale but growingly luring the lower middle class too. The reasons are cleanliness, no hassles of haggling and comforts

Agora, Meenabazar, Kenakata, Isles and others comprise the "super six" super markets controlling a larger part of the retail chains. Some of them have their own farms to feed the markets, some bank on agents to procure products, few on NGOs to supply them and few are attempting to buy directly from the growers. Thus, the traditional retail chain with the

construction of the Bongabandhu Bridge (Jamuna Bridge) helped quick marketing of the perishable produce from the northern part of the country. Added to this, is the role of the mobile phones on generating information about supply and demand. Some of the growers in and around Dhaka city are having direct orders from the super markets and some also are going for contract growing.

The changes are apparently looming large. In the face of a 4-5 years judgment, the scenario could be mere symbolic but if one foresees the future spanning over 10 to 15 years, one would have to recognise the fact that traditional cropping patterns and marketing managements are likely to change dramatically. If associated

facilities. If the post harvest losses could be minimised, HVCs could cause a miracle in rural areas in SA.

Points to ponder

But all that glitters might not be gold. Joachim von Braun of IFPRI mentioned, diversification is a strategic issue and the context changes always. Diversification does not come through declarations but is driven by, inter alia, (a) market forces; (b) new technologies; (c) infrastructural investments; (d) changing consumer demand and (e) a panopoly of policy changes e.g. setting taxes, land tenure security etc. The most important point to ponder over is that there could be too much diversification. What one should look for is optimal diversification that can be worked out through identifying strate-

Will Sri Lanka plunge into bigger crisis?

ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

It is a fast developing situation in Sri Lanka, the small but resourceful south Asian country, which has long been convulsed by a civil war. But silver lining had emerged in recent times for a possible negotiated settlement of the crisis involving the minority Tamils concentrated in the northern region of the country. The trouble this time has not come from the Tamils but from within the government, where a "co-habitation" authority exists. Rather paradoxically, here is a government where the president and the prime minister are from rival political platforms, and more interestingly, none is toothless -- both yield considerable powers. It is neither a presidential nor a parliamentary form of democracy. The government is run by the cabinet headed by the prime minister with majority support in parliament while the presidency can suspend or scrap the parliament and dismiss the government and ministers showing a thumb to the elected prime minister. It is against this background that president Chandrika Kumaratunga is now in serious loggerheads with prime minister Ranil Wickremasinghe's government.

She declared a state of emergency, which was later withdrawn, suspended the parliament till a specific time and dismissed three key ministers -- heightening her tensions with the prime minister, who was at that time away to United States for talks with president George W. Bush. The developments have come as serious setbacks to a country which is striving for a settlement with the Tamil militants and the efforts made some headway even though peace remains a distant achievement. The government-Tamil talks did make some progress but were then suspended

due to differences, but then again ground was getting conducive for resumption. It is at this time the president-prime minister crisis came to a head throwing the peace process into uncertainty on one hand and accentuating the political crisis on the other. However the president-prime minister rivalry is nothing new and has only exacerbated.

In fact, this was expected as tough measures from the president was anticipated since she largely disapproved the peace process with the Tamils and accused Ranil's govern-

ment of adopting soft stance against the militants. But the prime minister turned the table on the president, saying he received the mandate in the parliamentary polls in favour of peace with the rebels. At the heart of the trouble is the rivalry between the two leaders and their political forums. Chandrika was elected president for a six-year term beating Ranil, who later won the parliamentary polls defeating president's "Freedom Party" and its allies. The Co-habitation government is working somehow but it was a matter of time when the problems would explode. The president could never reconcile with a situation where her nemesis is in control of the things while she definitely enjoys certain powers. The current crisis is a logical development out of their differences.

Norway was taking fresh initiative to get the stalled Sri Lankan peace efforts back to negotiation table. The Tamil rebels suspended the peace

dialogue in April this year after six rounds that made some headway towards a negotiated solution of the civil war. The rebels complained against the Colombo government of slow implementation of the understanding reached towards settling the crisis and consequently the dialogue suffered badly raising fears of collapse of the process which was so assiduously nurtured. Very recently, two sides narrowed down the differences at least to resume the talks after the Tamils submitted new proposals. The hardening of stance of the

Bangkok mid last year, which was marked by remarkable progress since the LTTE agreed to give a major concession -- abandoning the demand for a separate sovereign country. The government side also reciprocated by taking series of conciliatory measures and all these made things bright, giving the impression that a permanent settlement of the civil war may not be too difficult despite the fact that the task in hand was quite contentious. However, the Tigers boycotted the Tokyo meeting protesting government failures to accept a

had to roll back from emergency declaration sensing that this may cause trouble for her. The prime minister has received an endorsement of his government from most foreign powers including the US and this is one reason that emergency was withdrawn coinciding Ranil's return to the country. The peace process has been largely welcomed at home and abroad.

The president is clearly seeking to arouse majority Sinhalese sentiment against the Tamils on the peace process, accusing Ranil's govern-

ment of turning "blind eye" to majority mood. She has also termed the latest proposal given by the rebels to resume talks as amounting to bifurcation of the country. But the prime minister says most countrymen want a settlement of the civil war which has continued for 20 years with no victory in sight claiming more than 60,000 lives. It is believed that the opinion is strong that Sri Lanka can not afford any longer the war to go since the nation is paying too dearly. The suspension of parliament just before the presentation of the budget has not been liked by most Lankans. The prime minister, on return to the country from Washington, has stressed on the need for the parliament to meet as early as possible. He is asking for this since he knows that he has majority in the house and is also demanding return of three key portfolios including the defence which the president herself has taken

over. On the other side of the fence, the Tamil Tigers, who are no longer demanding straight independence, are watching this situation and say they are patient and in no mood to resume the hostilities. Needless to say they are favourably disposed to the prime minister. It is implausible to think that the current president-prime minister crisis will be resolved easily since Chandrika will remain in her position till December, 2005 while the present parliament has also spent less than half of its tenure. However, it is possible that the president may dissolve the house and call fresh elections as a last resort. However, she may not be too keen for snap elections as most people favour peace and support Ranil government. The prime minister is not averse to fresh polls, which may be one of the options for resolving present crisis in Sri Lanka. But the bottom line is that the country should not be allowed to be back to "square one" on the vital issue of peace to end the devastating civil war.

The rivalry in extreme form between the two political forums of Sri Lanka is proving suicidal for the island nation. The civil war has already reversed its expected progress. Political unrest or instability would only put further pressure on the country. The country is divided on the present crisis but tough steps by the president, although permitted by the constitution, are largely seen as stemming from personal and political jealousy and expediency, and not for national interests.

The current situation may precipitate deeper trouble unless true spirit of "co-habitation" is demonstrated and more rationale role is expected from the president.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist.

MATTERS AROUND US

The rivalry in extreme form between the two political forums of Sri Lanka is proving suicidal for the island nation. The civil war has already reversed its expected progress. Political unrest or instability would only put further pressure on the country.

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had followed a recent international conference on Sri Lanka in Japan when donors and others made substantial commitments for rebuilding the country afflicted by long civil war. The Tigers did not attend the Tokyo meeting although they actively participated in the earlier peace conferences in different countries. The government-LTTE talks were made possible from early last year when Oslo intensified its mediation to resolve the Sri Lankan imbroglio through dialogue between the warring groups. The conflict has taken huge toll on both sides and once it appeared that the country was bleeding to white as the full blown war continued unabated. But the Norwegian efforts, although often ran into occasional trouble, bore fruits as two sides sat to discuss the issue after plenty of preparations.

The first meeting took place in demand that Tigers should have charge of provincial administration in their region. Later, prime minister Wickremasinghe announced readiness to accept the main part of the demand which removed fears of continued boycott of the talks. But president Chandrika has always been against such concessions to the rebels. The rivalry between president and the prime minister continued to mar the peace process. President's Peoples Alliance (PA) had failed to make progress on peace when it was in power and evidently it cannot relish a situation where the rival's government succeeds. Chandrika enjoys some powers as the president under the constitution and remains at the helm for six-year term regardless of the outcome of the parliamentary polls. As such, it is unlikely that she would not at all use these powers against the political foes. She did but

ment of turning "blind eye" to majority mood. She has also termed the latest proposal given by the rebels to resume talks as amounting to bifurcation of the country. But the prime minister says most countrymen want a settlement of the civil war which has continued for 20 years with no victory in sight claiming more than 60,000 lives. It is believed that the opinion is strong that Sri Lanka can not afford any longer the war to go since the nation is paying too dearly. The suspension of parliament just before the presentation of the budget has not been liked by most Lankans. The prime minister, on return to the country from Washington, has stressed on the need for the parliament to meet as early as possible. He is asking for this since he knows that he has majority in the house and is also demanding return of three key portfolios including the defence which the president herself has taken

something totally unknown. People in other countries have risen against brutal leaders and they have successfully brought them to justice. Sadly, with the current rate of literacy in our country, we have a long way to go before our people see the difference in political system of Bangladesh and other countries. Looks like both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina have at least another 15 years to settle their scores and to decorate their families. For AL and BNP, there is a very simple rule: if you are in the opposition, try your best to undermine the country and the government. That way the public will blame the ruling party. And if you are the ruling party, then do your best to wipe out the opposition. It is obvious that neither of these leaders will step down willingly and they can't be pulled down from their chairs by any court ruling or law since these people are above the law. But this is where the people's power comes in. It is not

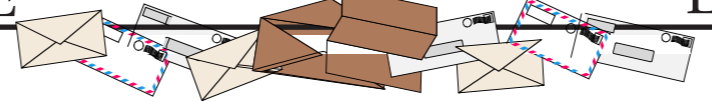
During the last Awami League period, media had played a vital role in publishing the wrong-doings of government and their stooges. People were mostly influenced by the fair media reports, not by the rhetorical speeches of the alliance leaders.

Print media like The Daily Star plays a pioneering role in exposing both the good and bad side of the society. It's the duty and obligation of media to express the real situation of the society whatever may be its scenario. Though it's not exceptional that some media don't follow the same path. But, accusing the media of negative reporting cannot be the solution. In practice, it will make the problem more complex and provoke the partymen to do whatever they like. Besides, democracy is unworkable without criticism. **Salam** 3rd year, Department of law Chittagong University

The media and negative writing (!)

According to The Daily Star report (Monday, October 20) Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has condemned the so called media's negative reporting over her coalition government's success. It's fashionable indeed and in this regard I would say that it's the media which put her four party alliance in power.

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.

Workers' agitation

It's a grave concern that at this critical juncture, the knitwear workers' agitation in Narayanganj has turned into an unprecedented violence. Because of the incidence, in addition to the call for a general strike and the mass vandalisation of factories, which compelled to close down more than 250 export oriented factory units, one fact becomes crystal clear: regardless of who is to blame for the incidence, should this agitation is allowed to continue, Bangladeshi knitwear exports would collapse, as foreign buyers would cancel pending orders.

In other words, unless a matured and responsible solution is offered to the problem compounded by the monthly decline in export of Tk 300 crores worth of Ready-made Garments to the US market alone, not only this agitation would bring the downfall of Bangladeshi garment exports for good, given the negative reputation of Bangladeshi work ethics

abroad, the future inflow of foreign investment also is likely to come to a halt.

In a changing pace of globalisation and persistent economic recession, the question is, whether Bangladesh can afford to lose its only source of foreign earnings? I hope that irrespective of political affiliation, in the light of long view of national interest, instead of pointing fingers to others and fanning the fuel, the incumbent government, opposition political parties, civic bodies, business and chamber organisations, and trade unions would attempt to solve the problem. **Shibly Azad** Columbia University NYC, USA

When teachers go wrong!

It drives me crazy when I see people praising criminals. For example, to stress the importance of discipline for the benefit of a child, can a teacher

make reference to Adolph Hitler or Gen Yahya Khan and say that they were very disciplined people and everybody should try his best to be so disciplined? What message would you then give your students if you were teaching in a school? Thanks to Mrs Dilruba Zaman of the Education Ministry, who scrutinised such a practice advocated by Rev Mrs Angela Robinson.

Rev Mrs Angela Robinson, in a letter recently published in these columns, expressed her admiration for Israel saying, "Within a generation, they (the Israelis) were among the finest soldiers in the world. They began sending agricultural advisers all over the world to poorer countries..." and goes on to indicate that this piece of reality can be used to teach children to think. Wow! Her teaching techniques in her British School in Dhaka must be one of the latest ones! I would like to know what else children learn in this school.

Child-psychology tells us that children learn by association. If you tell a child that 'X' in 'Y' is good, then the child will associate the two (i.e. X and Y) and will think Y must be good too. In Rev Mrs Angela Robinson's example, if she tells the children in her school that having a superb agriculture is excellent and Israel has it, then the children will end up concluding that Israel is also good, which, through an inevitable extension of that association will also mean if Israel is not liked by some people, they are jealous or bad.

I am sure Rev Mrs Angela Robinson doesn't want her students to come to those conclusions. The cruel, wicked state of Israel needs to be portrayed in a like manner so that the children, who will lead our nation one day, are not deprived of the truth. **Kamrul Ahsan** University of Cambridge, UK

Dictatorial democracy

Both Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia had enough chances to develop

Bangladesh. It is now clear that none of them has any intention of doing anything for the people who vote for them, pay their honorarium and sometimes even die for them. Therefore, the obvious thing to do for Bengali people is to get rid of them.

Sadly, we have gone beyond this point. Bengalis are no longer able to decide who rules their country. It doesn't matter who they vote for. Leaders in Bangladesh don't win by votes any longer; they win by force. Saddam's Iraq, Milosovich's Yugoslavia, Mugabe's Zimbabwe, Pol Pot's Cambodia and our Bangladesh have one thing in common; they are/were ruled by one party, one dictatorial leader. The only thing different about Bangladesh is that, currently it is ruled by not one, but two parties and two dictatorial leaders.

However, despite having more than one political party, Bangladesh is just one step behind some of the nastiest one-man dictatorial regimes in the world. But rest assured, both

AL and BNP are doing their best to make our country a full-time dictatorial regime. They both want to wipe out the other. That way they can have the whole country for themselves as long as they want and they wouldn't have to face any election. The good news for Bengalis is that we still have two parties. The bad news is that both of these parties are exactly the same. So in essence, we have a one party-two-leader-dictatorial democracy!

For AL and BNP, there is a very simple rule: if you are in the opposition, try your best to undermine the country and the government. That way the public will blame the ruling party. And if you are the ruling party, then do your best to wipe out the opposition. It is obvious that neither of these leaders will step down willingly and they can't be pulled down from their chairs by any court ruling or law since these people are above the law. But this is where the people's power comes in. It is not