

Combating terrorism

Collective efforts need of the hour

As the nation struggles to absorb the shock of the grenade attack on an AL rally, the political leaders should play their due role in dispelling suspicions, rumours and the sense of insecurity created among people.

The best way to attain this objective is to refrain from doing anything which will strengthen the hands of the enemies of democracy and the rule of law. The leaders should not miss the point that they are dealing with terrorism of a monstrous kind and the only way to tame it is to remain united. By snuffing out so many human lives, the terrorists have actually challenged the whole law enforcing mechanism that is in place now. The crime is also a test of political will to combat terrorism.

So, it is imperative that the attack on the AL rally is placed in the right perspective. If the politicians lose sight of the broader goal of defeating the dark forces, they will be doing a great disservice to the nation. What we want to say in clear terms is that terrorist activities should be seen as a threat to our very existence. The terrorists are trying to ruin whatever we have achieved as a nation through destabilising the country. The attempt on the life of the leader of the opposition was indeed an attempt to throttle the democratic process.

The cases of bomb blasts have to be resolved not only to serve the cause of justice, but also to make sure that a collective concern is addressed in right earnest, and the culprits brought to full public view. They must not be allowed to get away with their clandestine operations, as they have so far in the absence of any legal action.

There is a lot to learn from other democratic countries. Nowhere in the civilised world is terrorism mixed up with party politics, and nothing is more important than realising that terrorism is an enemy that has to be countered collectively.

So, it is a fight between the democratic polity and the forces out to destroy it. The parties, irrespective of their political ideology and beliefs, have to wage a war against the subversive elements. The situation is alarming because they have already made inroads into the heart of our political system -- a truth manifested by Saturday's attack.

Titas officials threatened

Unruly trade unionism is the root cause

THE Managing Director of the state-owned Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited was given police protection at his own office, not because he was under threat from any outsider, but a group of employees working under him. However unfortunate and ridiculous it may sound, that is the reality. And the reason was that he transferred eighteen employees, mostly meter readers, in line with the recommendations of the parliamentary standing committee on the energy ministry, for their alleged corruption. It seemed to have irked the trade union leaders enough to prompt them to resort to a kind of behaviour that was against good order and discipline.

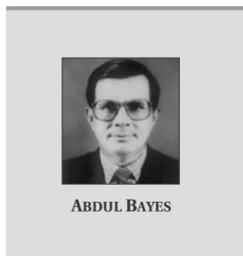
Trade unions and its leaders are there to ensure that the interest of the workers are upheld, but individual interests or activities by the workers that are in gross violation of the principles of trade unionism should not be countenanced.

It is now obvious that some of the subordinate employees wield so much influence that they cannot only postpone transfer of other employees, they can threaten high officials of the company with dire consequences also, for not doing their bidding. Such an audacious behaviour cannot be possible without patronisation of and protection from persons, at some level in the hierarchy. Otherwise, how dare they make such threats and get away with it?

Allegations of corruption against the field staff of Titas, especially the meter readers are nothing new. In fact it has been reported quite extensively how they make huge sums of money by exploiting their position. The consumers end up being hostage to their illegal ways of functioning. That is why we consider the decision to transfer these errant employees timely and appropriate and hope that such action serves as an example for others in similar position.

At the same time we are also concerned about the security of the high officials who dare to take such drastic, yet necessary steps. It is now for the government to ensure their safety.

Language of weapon against weapon of language



ABDUL BAYES

WE find no words for condemning the heinous heralds of grenade attacks on a peaceful and democratic gathering organised by Awami League (AL) in front of its central office at Bangabandhu Avenue. Last Saturday, the meeting was organised to protest against a panoply of pernicious, provocative, and painful events unleashed by the fundamentalist forces throughout the country. A series of sad incidents followed one after another, killing or hurting a number of political activists, intellectuals, and writers. Sylhet has been on the hit list of those forces and of late, the British High Commissioner and AL leaders were seriously wounded. The attack on eminent writer Humayun Azad and his subsequent death drives home the point why Bangladesh today is being dubbed to be a "failed state." Killing, hijacking, repressions on minorities and women continue to be the order of the day, with no sign of abatement in the near future. Needless to

mention perhaps that "economic fundamentals" must go wrong when "fundamentalists forces" go right. This time, the target was Sheikh Hasina, the leader of the opposition and the daughter of the father of the nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was in the month of August that her father was brutally killed. It is again in the month of August that she escaped death by a few seconds. The month of August thus turns out to be a month of

the worst kind in our memory.

Sordidly, we appear to sense a sign of intolerance among the parties in power. The language of weapon has growingly been replacing the weapon of language in recent times. People are being denied their political freedom. Opposition parties are being tortured for expressing their views against the government. Writers are being "sentenced to death" for writing about the rights of the people. Ahmadiyya

always insecure. But, unfortunately, they reduced the security forces at her house immediately after they came to power. Begum Khaleda Zia, be it as Prime Minister or opposition leader always lives in the cantonment where security fences are relatively tight. It should have been courteous on the part of the government to see that the leader of the opposition gets the same kind of treatment. Nobody in our country seems to think that one swallow does never make a spring.

should they react like this?

Take it or not, Bangladesh is dubbed as a "failed state." In terms of corruption or confrontation, the country sadly secures the first position. Failures tend to fall upon us from all fronts -- economic, political, and social. Initially, the gun was marked at the opposition parties, especially AL, with the hypothesis that false propaganda were marshaled by the opposition to tarnish

aided bomb blasts at its own meeting.

Rumours loom large that, at present in Bangladesh, there is a government within a government. The government is said to be driven by the "devilish" deeds of these forces within. Also looming large is the notion that these forces tend to run the government rather the other way round. Whatever be the hypotheses surrounding the painful positions, the fact remains that Bangladesh seemingly stands as symbol of terrorism where freedom is forfeited, writings invite wrath, and good governance groans under a reign of terror and torture under the umbrella of unknown forces within the parties in power.

We strongly denounce such kind of developments. Bangladesh should be a land loaded with thesis and anti-thesis. I may not agree with you but would fight for your rights to speak until death -- this should be the motto of every government and citizen. Without such an environment, the country might turn into a Taliban state where development is destined for demise, uplift is to face an uproot.

Maybe more will die, but this would generate more heat than cool. We wish the leader of the opposition and her followers a long life. We wish the end of the anarchic politics and governance that Bangladesh is faced with. The sooner it comes, the better it is for both position and opposition.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

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shock and shame for the whole nation.

The series of grenade attacks, reportedly, left at least 20 people killed and a few hundred seriously wounded. We are told that top AL leaders like Abdur Razzaque, Amir Hossain Amu, and Suranjit Sengupta are fighting for a comeback to normal life. A number of women activists were also killed. Begum Ivy Rahman, the agile and active leader has to see her two legs lost following an operation. As eyewitnesses tell us, grenades fell from the roofs of the adjacent buildings like drops of rains. Apparently, it was close to a "political genocide" of

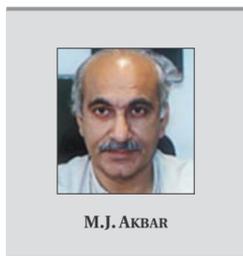
community is not allowed to perform its religious functions. My daughters always suggest to me that I come home before the sunset, lest I am attacked by goons for expressing my views. But why? Am I not a citizen of an independent and democratic country where rights are reserved in the constitution? Why should the language of weapon rule over my weapon of language? Are we in the midst of a medieval age? Is it the Bangladesh for which we fought and 30 lakh people shed their blood?

The government comprising BNP and Jamaat know quite well that Sheikh Hasina and her family members are

Another sad episode to cite. It is quite likely that the followers of AL would come to the streets for agitating against the attacks on their leaders and workers. Had it been the case with BNP, the same would have happened, we suppose. But unfortunately, the cadres or "goons" of the ruling party, allegedly attacked the Jahangirnagar University campus, in Narayanganj and everywhere where peaceful processions paraded the streets. Such an act of vandalism allegedly by the ruling party vanguards seemingly suggests that the government is lenient or indifferent to the happenings of last Saturday. Otherwise, why

the image of the government. Pro-government newspapers and editors organised a number of seminars and workshops to establish the "false paradigm." To this effect, a number of eminent intellectuals and politicians were arrested and tortured. Things, however, did not improve with those perceptions. Bomb blasts at different places were termed as acts of the opposition to destabilise the government. In support of this theory, opposition political leaders and workers were arrested and subdued. Things worsened. We shall not be surprised if we hear the hypothesis that it was AL that her-

Gold mettle



M.J. AKBAR

CONSPIRACY is the only possible explanation. What other reason can there be for keeping cricket out of the Olympics? Modern Olympics are not built around individual genius, otherwise football and hockey would not be permitted. They, like cricket, are eleven-a-side field games. Don't tell me, either, that Greeks did not play cricket. I can't recall Plato recording an in-depth dialogue on football either, or trap shooting for that matter. So how did these sports join the Olympics pantheon? It is possible that the game was once considered interminable, but one-dayers have changed all that. Two weeks is sufficient time to finish a proper cricket contest. The only reason for keeping cricket out of the Olympics is that this is the one sport in which India would have, or at least could have, won the gold medal.

Septics will pounce on the "flaw" in the proposition. How can India be so confident of a cricket gold with Australia around? Cynics get that way because they are unreal pessimists. Australia would never be able to send its best side because of the time-money equation. Do you think Matthew Hayden and Shane Warne are going to play at the rates offered by a mere Olympics? It would be cheaper for them to stay at home and avoid injury, which is how David Beckham treats the five-ring s h o w .

We on the other hand would send our best, partly because of the throbbing spirit of nationalism that always lurks above the surface of our players' psyche, and mostly because of generous goading from Subroto Roy Sahara. No contest. Except possibly from Pakistan. They do not have a Sahara out there, but the fact that they are even worse than us in the other disciplines might force their generals to order a pre-emptive strike through their cricket team.

or 103 kilograms? That makes sense to me.

Moreover, Sanamacha had evidence sitting in front of her eyes. Sitting is the right term, since this particular bit of evidence could not stand. The great bronze hope of India, Karnam Malleshwari, star of the 63-kg category, could not get a first lift of 100 kg up to her knees. But a star will always remain a star. Malleshwari, borrowing deep from the innards of high Indian philosophy, treated failure with the scorn it

realised that he had thrown a short put rather than a shot put, he immediately disqualified himself so that his distance would not become part of the records. And so, while gossip will swirl endlessly through the mists of time, history will never know for sure whether Bahadur Singh's throw was less than the distance thrown by women in the parallel event. If there was a gold medal for quick thinking, Bahadur Singh would have been on the podium, with the national tricolour

in front of television cameras.

The anger is not at failure, but at complete absence of pride: either pride in individual achievement, or pride in national success. Every four years, millions of Indians across the world feel a sense of humiliation as their national squad is relegated to an abysmal joke. I would prefer it if we did not win a single medal rather than find my country at the bottom, in serious competition with Mongolia, Slovenia, and Trinidad and Tobago. Every time we are offered

hundred rupees a day into a mega-business is an evident example. One star in the cricket team makes more than the whole of the hockey team together. Money breeds success and success breeds money. Which comes first? Investment. Who makes the investment? The person who wants to make money. Television is rich enough to fund the conversion of football by the cooperation of advertisers. Government's only role will be to offer tax breaks and incentives to those who make such investment in national pride. It will also be much cheaper than running a sports ministry.

Decision Number 2: Order all part-timers out of sports. If politicians want to head sports bodies then they must take a sabbatical from politics. Today, the controllers of sport take far more out of their position than they put into the game. The culture of sports-power is redolent of the 1950s when worthies were placed in charge of associations not because they knew anything, but because their "pull" was expected to pull in resources. Today sports is a fully professional business. The Chinese state succeeds because it works on the old Soviet model of child-to-star human management after a hardheaded cull of hopefuls. When sports becomes a means to reward that is more enduring than glory, then it will draw from an ever-increasing pool. Cricket has achieved that. Irfan Pathan and Virender Sehwag have emerged from ordinary and very Indian neighbourhoods to dominate a game redolent of Oxford and Cambridge. Once Eknath Solkar was an anachronism, Abid Ali the workhorse, and Tiger Pataudi the captain. Now, a Pataudi would be a rarity.

Decision Number 3: Dream big. And try and push cricket into the Olympics. With hockey gone, we need to restart somewhere.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

BYLINE

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I also accuse the International Olympics Committee of being unfair and discriminatory to our athletes where dope-tests are concerned. Why is the IOC harassing poor Pratima Kumari and the even poorer Sanamacha Chanu? Neither knew that "drug" is a four-letter word. Pratima thought that she was being given an injection to improve some other performance by specially trained Bulgarian doctors. Everyone knows how much good testosterone can do to increase happiness, and a weightlifter needs all the mental peace available. Haven't you seen their faces as they pull up bars of metal that seem to have a special equation with the centre of gravity? Sanamacha, on the other hand, was being coldly rational, and the IOC has no right to penalise a sportsperson for a display of intellect. She had taken diuretics to lose weight. The logic is flawless. If lifting your own weight gets beyond you, how can you lift another 53

deserves. She walked contemptuously past her coach and did not bother to return for the two other attempts she was entitled to. Luckily, there were no senior officials present, since they never are, or she would have walked contemptuously past them as well. It transpired later that the great Malleshwari's husband, who has not stopped laughing since Sydney, could have informed these high officials that Malleshwari was finding it difficult to lift even a thought beyond the knee, but everyone forgot to ask him. They were too busy getting their tickets booked for Athens.

Our athletes may have an occasional problem with speed on the racetrack, but let it be known that they have the fastest minds in the business. You may not necessarily equate the shot put with intellect, but that is your problem. Shot put maestro Bahadur Singh clipped the world record for fastest reaction to failure. When the brave Bahadur

lying glorious and high behind him. Maybe they should add such a category, along with cricket.

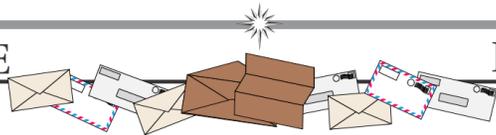
If the purpose of dope testing is to find who in the Olympic contingent is a dope, then it is my confident submission that the International Olympic Committee was searching among the wrong people, at least as far as the Indian contingent was concerned. If the IOC had any sense it would ignore the 76 Indian sportspersons spanning 14 disciplines at Athens and concentrate on the swirling crowd of celebrity officials, spanning all categories of indiscipline. That is where the IOC could find substance abuse of a pretty high order. (They would of course have to include Scotch in the list of banned substances, as well as fatty foods, but try asking anyone fond of either or both whether abuse is possible or not.) The real dopes are high on office in the sports kingdom. They can offer 32 different versions of a trademark beam

hope; each time we are fed a lemon. In 1980, China did not win a single medal, not gold, not silver, not bronze. Twenty years later, in Sydney, they had 59 medals. This year China heads the table at the moment of writing, and could be looking at perhaps 80 medals. Chinese sport is controlled by a bureaucracy. But it is a bureaucracy that cares about national pride. We have a floating mix of quasi-independent bodies and government busybodies, and therefore accountability also floats.

Is there an answer better than criticism?

Yes. In sports this mixed-economy model does not work. So, the first thing to do is to disband the sports ministry in the government of India and encourage sports to become what it should be, a valuable part of the entertainment industry. When you start by being valuable, you will soon become invaluable. The conversion of cricket from a dreary loser-sport in which players were lucky to get a

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



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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.

Inefficiency or corruption?

I have paid all the WASA bills timely and regularly. And I have got a clearance Certificate No. 16426 dated 23-10-2003.

There is no WASA bill outstanding against me up to 31-12-2002. But now I have been asked by the WASA, Dhaka, to pay an outstanding amount of Tk 4,759 prior to the period of 31-12-2002. What should I do now?

Who is responsible for the gross irregularities, lapses, omissions and negligence of duty? The consumer (customer) or the WASA? Who will look into the matter?
OH Kabir
Dhaka-1203

A subtle difference

I read in Bill Clinton's book that all human beings (over six billion) are genetically the same to the extent of 99.9 per cent. It is the difference of 0.1 per cent (one in every thousand) that

is causing all the trouble in civilisations and societies, as politics, economics, sociology, and religion bear witness.

As a Bangladeshi, I wonder how this one-tenth of one percent difference of opinion is holding this nation from taking off, just because Sk. Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia cannot reach a consensus on issues at the national level!

Our micro world is in trouble, and defying macro efforts at reconciliation. It sounds silly that such a microscopic difference makes all the difference in the rise of a nation or changing civilisations. The implications are beyond grasp. I give up.
AZ, Dhaka

A real paradox

The write-up, "Bangladesh is cheap!" by Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, a Bangladeshi expatriate in the US, has drawn my attention. His ephemeral sojourn in Dhaka was full of experi-

ences that perplexed me immensely. He told that everything in Bangladesh is really cheap. That is fanciful indeed. Bangladesh is cheap for the affluent like Mr. Ahmed. But Bangladesh is always pricey for the typical Bangladeshis.

He was surprised that a taxi-cab cost him Tk 27 only from Sheraton Hotel to Dhanmondi. But he should have been informed that most of the city dwellers cannot afford a cab for a hassle-free trip. He had experience of Banga Bazar that is typically cheap, but if he visited the outlets of Nike or Planet Fashion, he might have been puzzled.

Molla Mohammad Shaheen
Dept of English, DU

Asia Cup

The Asia Cup cricket was held in Sri Lanka. The hosts won the Cup beating India by 25 runs in the final. I would like to congratulate the Sri Lankan team for their very fine showing in all the matches that they

played. But I think Jaysurya was a little lucky to have been chosen the man of the series. Though he played superbly, Shoabi Malik of Pakistan was a serious contender for that position.
Zahid Mollik
Karatia, Tangail.

Death in RAB custody

The formation of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) was aimed at curbing terrorism, lawlessness, and corruption and restoring confidence of the people amid the deteriorating law and order situation. When the law enforcing agencies had lost their control over the situation, this special force at least showed some glimpse of hope as they were trying to improve the situation. In some cases they have been successful. They compelled many listed criminals to surrender and people in some localities felt a bit relieved. But the thing which has stigmatised their much applauded activities is custodial death.

The killing of "Pichchi Hannan" is the latest case in point. Hannan, the undeclared king of underworld, could have disclosed at lot of information that could help the RAB to arrest many other terrorists and persons, indirectly associated with terrorism in some way or the other. It is not pointless to suggest that some influential people might have played a role in eliminating him. Pichchi Hannan candidly admitted that he was a terrorist. He was not brought to justice on fictitious charges of killing, abduction and human trafficking. But the men who patronised him are equally guilty of those sins, and, as such, they must also be punished. Otherwise, justice won't be meted out to them.
ABM Shafiqul Islam
Dept. of English
Jahangirnagar University

Our education System

In this sub-continent, the education system is more or less the same everywhere. It is undergoing signifi-

cant changes in other countries, but the situation remains unchanged here in Bangladesh.

There is something wrong with the attitudes of the parents in our country. They want their children to get high grades, but acquisition of knowledge remains a neglected issue. The students memorise everything, but do not really learn their lessons.

The result is that the standard of education is going down and we have already lost that competitive edge when it comes to students from other neighbouring countries.

The education authorities should look into the matter and take such steps as will remove the existing anomalies in the education system. A change in attitude is also called for as far as the parents are concerned.
Mohammed Khajam Faruqui
(Lonney)
Dhaka

Chain of command in LGED

Recently, the Chief Engineer (CE) of the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) issued a letter concerning the chain of command in the LGED. Some officers are writing letters directly to higher authorities, bypassing intermediate officials. The CE has requested all concerned not to do so for the sake of chain of command. It is clear from the directive that he is very much worried about the chain of command in the LGED. It is only likely that one occurrence will be followed by another.

Obviously, this cannot ensure good governance. In these circumstances, I want to draw the attention of the CE to certain matters. The CE should allow LGED field level employees and officials to practise democracy not through procession but by co-ordination meetings with high officials, like the CE himself, to put an end to the anomalies in the organisation.
Md Saidul Islam (Liton)

Aruapara, Kushtia Gender discrimination

It was interesting to go through the editorial under the caption 'Gender discrimination in elected body' (DS 18 August, 2004). It gave us relevant information regarding women issues. The write-up informed us how certain things were a clear violation of constitutional provisions.

We hope this historic decision would be an eye-opener to our gender blind politicians. Thanks to the women commissioner who came forward to file a case against the government's discriminatory circular. We also salute the judges for their neutral verdict.

We must not forget that our government has signed a number of international conventions regarding gender parity and also chalked out a national action plan as well as a national policy for advancement of women.
M Mamunur Rahman
Gender Training Officer
UNDP