

Probe body

Must be credible and trustworthy

OUR reaction to the news of the formation of a one-man probe body cannot but be somewhat mixed. While there can be no question about the need for a thorough investigation of last Saturday's tragedy, our doubt stems from the fate of all the previous probe committee reports and their inability to get to the roots of the issue. In addition, the time allotted to the committee to do its work appears unduly optimistic to us.

Regrettably, none of the reports or recommendations of the previous probe committees have seen the light of the day. Even less has any government seen fit to act upon their recommendations, if, indeed, there were any. Many even feel that a judicial committee will only help in stalling the matter. Those who have rejected the formation of the committee may have good reason to do so.

We feel that there is considerable merit in the suggestion that such a probe body should be composed of one or more retired chief justices so that it can work independently and in a neutral manner. It is also our opinion that, given the graduation in the degree of sophistication of the weapons used, the body should also comprise weapons experts.

Finally, the matter being so grave as to impact on our state security, there is considerable merit in deciding the composition of the committee through consultation with all concerned.

We are not privy to the terms of reference of the one-man probe body. The output of this probe body must not end up the way of the previous ones. Thus we feel it should be tasked with specific responsibilities, including identifying the perpetrators of this act and their sponsors and cohorts, both inside and outside the country. We also urge the government to make the report public once it is completed.

One would also hope that the probe body would identify the causes for the grave lapse in the security measures afforded the leader of the opposition, which she, by virtue of her position, is entitled to from the state.

We cannot emphasise enough the timely use of foreign assistance that is on offer, instead of waiting until after the probe body completes its job. Why not use the foreign expertise to assist the probe body in its investigative work?

The probe body, hopefully reconstituted, must deliver to the nation. Not only is the credibility of the government at stake, more importantly, the safety of the people and the security of the nation is in jeopardy.

International air travel to go private

First step towards open skies to be applauded

IN the midst if what can only be described as a horrendous week for the country, there is one piece of news that we feel could be a positive sign for things to come. The news is that the Civil Aviation Authority has granted GMG airlines permission to commence Chittagong-Kolkata flights from September 8, making it the first private Bangladeshi airline to operate overseas.

This new initiative is to be welcomed for a number of reasons. Most crucially, what it indicates is that the Civil Aviation Authority has finally fully accepted the idea that expanded private air travel would be of benefit to the consumer, and is acting on this understanding.

This permission for the expansion of the services offered by private airlines can only be of benefit to the customers, and in addition to offering more frequent flights than are available at present, will also, due to greater competition, hopefully have the effect of lowering prices and improving services on our national carrier and the other airlines that currently ply the Bangladesh-India route.

A further benefit of the Civil Aviation Authority's permission to GMG to operate internationally is that it paves the way for discussion of an open sky policy between Bangladesh and India, which can only be of mutual benefit to both countries, and which can be used as a blueprint for similar arrangements with other regional countries.

Indeed, just such an understanding was reached at a meeting between the respective aviation authorities of Bangladesh and India earlier this week, and such a policy will also be advanced, and the consumers will also correspondingly benefit, if India's private airlines such as Jet and Sahara are permitted to operate flights to Bangladesh, as they have expressed interest in doing.

Ultimately, opening up Bangladeshi and Indian airspace to airlines from the other country should go a long way towards greater mutual cooperation which is always a worthy goal, and, if a success, can be expanded to the entire region, which, in today's interdependent world, would be beneficial to everyone.

The Civil Aviation Authority's granting of permission to a private airline to operate internationally is a good first step.

Saga of bomb blasts and black Saturday



YET again another bomb attack in Bangladesh! This time in the capital itself, and the target was of high value. By all definition, this attack is qualitatively different from all the past bomb attacks. Looking at the records it appears that from 1996 to date, the Awami League has been the target of a large number of these attacks. A previously unheard-of group, Hikmatul Jihad has claimed responsibility for the attack, the first time any group has done so.

Incidentally, a grenade is, generically speaking, a bomb. A grenade like the one used at the Awami League rally, can only be projected up to 30-40 meters by hand and between 200-250 meters with the help of a special delivery contraption. A bomb can vary in size and lethality whereas a grenade, due to the very nature of its usage, is limited in size as well lethality. Thus, although the Udichi bomb blast was one single detonation, compared to the twelve or thirteen at the Awami League rally, the casualty figures were relatively greater in respect of the Udichi incident. The little technical aside was necessary, since one faced the question as to whether the device that was detonated at the Awami League meeting was a "grenade" or a "bomb."

The attack on the Awami League rally is qualitatively different than the previous ones for several reasons. Never before in Bangladesh were such high value targets made the object of militant attack. Never before did we behold a situation where a bomb attack was conducted with such precision and professionalism. The modus operandi of the perpetrators points to a well-organised group, trained and committed to carry out a dangerous mission. Never before

was of the more lethal variety containing pre-formed pellets with enhanced lethality because of its high fragment density. Grenades are more sophisticated than a homemade device or devices put together ingeniously.

This incident is also different from the previous ones in that the attack was carried out by a trained group, a fact confirmed by investigating officers, who slipped through the security cordons of whatever defini-

were on a suicide mission, which was clearly not the case. The roof top location, from where the grenades were apparently hurled, provided the stand off distance; but again, this raises some corollaries that we will address later.

The disconcerting aspect of all these is that we now see a graduation, from use of indigenous explosive devices (IED), to more sophisticated and lethal devices like hand grenades. Even more matter for worry is

complete freedom of operation. One finds it difficult to accept this proposition, if the police description of its force deployment is to be taken to be accurate. On a secured rooftop, in broad daylight, not only to hurl grenades with some degree of accuracy but also to fire small arms weapons seems too brazen to not draw attention to oneself.

Could this particular incident, or the other recent ones, have been predicted? This is a pertinent ques-

phone calls that have been made recently? There is no doubt the aim of this particular attack was to destabilise the country. Who are the beneficiaries of the ensuing instability? Who stands to gain from eliminating the Awami League leadership? Do those that have engaged in recent spate of bomb attacks, have external sponsors or they are home grown?

Without appearing to be didactic it can be said that a cut and dried answer is difficult. But the investigators must keep all the options open. The causal link as well as the cost and benefit of these actions must be calculated until excluded by a process of elimination.

Several armies in the region use the type of grenade used in the recent attacks. But these are also in the possession of various militant groups in the region. Militants having external links or who are externally motivated and sponsored, have easier access to these weapons than do those who are indigenous.

The fact that all the bombings since 1996 have remained unsolved is a severe indictment of the successive governments' inability, unwillingness, and lack of commitment to see these cases resolved. We were apparently so puerile as to think that these incidents were a one-off case and that although the rest of the region was struggling against this phenomenon, we were somehow safe from it.

Help in investigation of this case is on offer. It is time we took it up. That should not hurt any ego, on the contrary, it could ensure safety and security of Bangladesh in the long run.

The author is Editor Defence and Strategic Issues, The Daily Star.

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have we seen so many "bombs" been hurled at one gathering and in such quick succession.

Going by the descriptions of the eyewitnesses and the video reports, there is very little doubt that anybody else other than the Awami League leadership was the target of this assault. That an area weapon was used points to the fact that no one single individual in particular was the target; the idea was to take out the Awami League leadership in one go. Reportedly, there were bullet marks in Hasina's vehicle, which points to the fact that more than one type of weapon was used.

The qualitative difference is also in the choice of the weapons that were used - grenades. Grenades are highly lethal weapons with extremely damaging consequences within a short radius of effect, as borne out by the number of deaths and injured caused by the blasts. Also, the type of injury sustained by the victims indicates that the grenade that was used

that might have been in place, remained surreptitious and undetected from well before the meeting started, hurled the grenades just as soon as the leader of the opposition finished speaking, and made good their escape. All these speak of a well-coordinated operation.

That the grenades were targeted at the truck that was working as a podium for the Awami League leaders, and they all detonated, reportedly in very close proximity to the truck, suggests that all the grenades were hurled from within thirty to fifty meters of it. It also suggests that the attackers had pretty good prior knowledge as to the exact location of the truck, in order to be able to pre-position themselves to be within grenade throwing distance from the podium yet at a stand off range for their own safety. To have thrown a grenade from a close distance, in a recumbent or prone position at street level, as described by some, is difficult to accept, unless these people

that weapons, manufactured exclusively for military use, are now in the hands of clandestine militant groups. Needless to say, it takes some training and the self-assurance that comes with it, to operate such devices. The long and short of the matter is that we are now faced with not only the reality of the existence of extremists and militants in our country, we are also faced with a disconcerting prospect of having to combat this evidently highly-trained menace, something that we may not be fully prepared for at this moment.

Now to the corollary questions related to the August 21 assault on the Awami League rally. As per reports, there was a large contingent of security and law enforcement agencies in the area. The question that comes up is that, several militants slipped through police cordon, ensconced themselves in the spot, in close proximity of each other, and threw the hand grenades just as soon as Hasina finished her speech with

tion that should be asked by any Bangladeshi. The important thing to remember is that capacity to predict such occurrences and interdict or preempt the perpetrators requires real time information as well as the ability to convert this information into actionable intelligence. Unfortunately we do not have the wherewithal, the technical expertise, or the human intelligence capability good enough for what we expect the intelligence agencies to do.

Could the bomb attack have been prevented? Perhaps yes. Pervasive security measures and plugging of holes and creating a cordon sanitaire can act as a disincentive to the militants. Unfortunately, as per press reports, the large number of police and other security personnel that were there were only to secure against the rally rather than secure the rally itself.

Is there a link between the detonations that have taken place recently in the country? What about the "hoax"

OPINION

Let not fanatics discredit fundamentals of Islam

KAZI ALAUDDIN AHMED

A news item released to the press recently revealed that the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations has expressed its concern over alleged obstructing the Kadianis in Bangladesh in the performance of their religious rites freely. It was also reported to have demanded immediate stoppage of oppression and torture of the Kadianis. Besides, they have urged upon the government of Bangladesh to take appropriate legal action against the perpetrators of such oppressive acts. A letter in this regard was reported to have been sent to the Bangladesh Foreign Ministry in July this year. The letter included allegations of prohibiting Kadiani publications and of raids on their mosques at different places of the country, particularly at Teigaon, Bakshibazar in the capital city and in Chittagong and Khulna. It was also known that the foreign ministry passed on that letter of the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations to the Home Ministry for investigation. The latter was reported to have asked the police headquarters and different intelligence agencies to take care of the complaint. The Home Ministry was also reported to have directed earlier the same agencies to investigate into another specific complaint forwarded to them by the

US Embassy on the activities of an extremist Islamic militant group in the name of Al-Haramain in Bangladesh.

Different police and intelligence sources had confirmed some 'unpleasant' incidents with the Kadianis some time past at the instance of some vested interests. They claimed to have been very alert so as not to allow repetition of such aggressive acts that could threaten the security of

situation across the country all the more complex, Massive arms haul at Chittagong and Dhaka, frequent bomb blasts, ruthless killing of civilians, journalists, politicians and lawyers are some of few episodes as would be enough to discredit any government worth its name.

And inspite of the tacit assurance from the law enforcing agencies vis-a-vis the government the hydra-headed protagonists of religious extremism

shrewd contrivers from outside.

For the causes of Islam these are the people always pretending to be die-hard 'Musalmans' ever prepared to make any sacrifice. If they are really sure that there is no undercurrent of mischief none would contest the bona fide of their claims. But, when they start behaving like the abhorring and abominable fanatics totally bereft of tolerance of Islam abnegating the undisputed commands of the

specific dictates of Allah. Curiously enough there are the religious leaders with some political bias who have been known since long to be strong opponents to Moududi's Jamaat-e-Islami, at least in respect of their religious attachments.' Ironically, in the political arena they are very much allies though being almost ignored members of the 4-party alliance now in power.

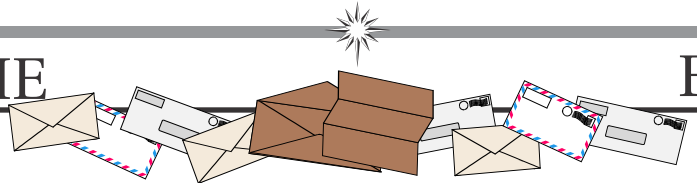
The 'ulema' alluded to above in

person to be just a mere repetition of the last game.

The intermittent turmoil over the Kadiani's, I have a hunch, is the creation of some shrewd contrivers behind the scene in the national and international arena. They might even comprise some people or groups of people abroad who have no special interest for Islam. They could be those notorious infidels who are scared about Islam for its ever expanding attraction to the non-Muslims in the western world. I have no hesitation to say that such periodical assault on our sacred religion Islam by its own followers who are otherwise quite respected in the precinct of religion, has been a favourite pastime with those having dubious connection, traders of illegal arms and deliberate perpetrators of unrest in the society. In consequence whereof the image of our country as a 'moderate Muslim country' (and that of the administration already saddled with manifold problems mostly from a terrible law and order situation,) is being pushed to a point of no return. The concern expressed by the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations must therefore be taken into serious consideration to make an all out effort at arresting situation from further aggravating before it is too late.

Kazi Alauddin Ahmed is an industrial consultant.

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.

Bring the culprits to justice

The grenade attack on the AL rally was really shocking. This heinous attempt to silence "protest against the Sylhet bomb attack" clearly shows that people are losing their freedom of speech. The situation is getting worse as the parties are unable to face the challenge collectively.

So, please find out the real culprits. We don't want repetition of such incidents.

Shamana Yasmin
Department of English, DU ***

Allah help us all.

Emran Taher
Montreal, Canada ***

We are proud to be Muslims. Our religion teaches us not to harm anyone and to be tolerant to the other religions. But some people are now killing fellow humans. I do not know what religion those people are following.

I was shocked to learn the news of the bomb blasts in Sheikh Hasina's meeting. We should strongly protest against such madness. May Allah show us the right path.

Nazrul Islam Rizvi
Nurjahan Road, Mohammadpur, Dhaka ***

really a dangerous proposition. We must raise our voice against the deadly bombers.

Putul
Department of law, DU ***

It is worse than the worst nightmare. After hoaxes, came the horrible incidents. The government has always been complacent towards the extremists. Bangla Bhai still reigns supreme in his region. They can get away with killing innocent people in cinema halls, Ramna Batamul etc. Even the foreign dignitaries are not safe. The sheer Negligence, and in some cases explicit patronisation from elements within the government, has led to the attack on the opposition leader which claimed 18 human lives and maimed hundreds. The hospitals in Dhaka were not enough to take care of the injured. The magnitude of the attack was unimaginable.

It is the government which is sup-

posed to ensure security for all. It has failed miserably to do so. Even a section of the government is alleged to have links with the extremist elements (one minister has backed up Bangla Bhai publicly).

Joy
Dhaka ***

The horror continues...

The horror of the previous bomb blasts had not been wiped out from the memories of the people when another one occurred at the meeting of the AL, taking 20 lives and injuring hundreds of others. The irony lies in the fact that the meeting was arranged to protest against the bomb blasts at different places in the country.

And the people who were apparently protesting against bomb blasts themselves became the victims. Truly speaking, what happened at Bangabandhu Avenue on the 21" was really shocking, but our subconscious

mind was perhaps ready for this kind of news. We were hearing about threats of possible bomb attacks on different important places including the airport, Dhaka University and many others. Common people of Bangladesh have no security of life at present. It seems that the country has sunken into anarchy. The present circumstances will only help Bangladesh to be recognised as a "terrorist" nation all over the world. And I'm sure no Bangladeshi would like it. So, giving 'traditional' speeches of condemnation after every bomb blast is not enough to solve the problem. A united approach of the political parties is required to deal with the matter.

Wajahat Anwar
Mirpur, Dhaka ***

term!). His soul was soaring and fractious. Even in the midst of a miasmic milieu he flourished as a thoughtful and fiercely patriotic man (if the definition of patriotism has not changed yet!). In his writings he always tried to preserve the centripetality of secular ideals rooted in our precious independence. With the unfortunate emergence of once-marginal anti-lib forces as major power brokers, preservation of this centripetality is becoming increasingly difficult. I am a believer. I also believe in the freedom of a non-believer to speak. My belief is grounded well and I do not mind! But those who build their houses on shaky grounds just cannot hold their own and go ballistic at the slightest undulations of ornery wind ... They tried to eliminate him, but failed.

But really did they?

The enormous stress (both physical & mental) that he underwent over the last few months of his abbreviated life

definitely affected his heart greatly and adversely. I have no reason to suspect any proximate maleficence, but I also cannot believe that those stress factors have nothing to do with his untimely parting.

There is much ado in some quarters about the reactions of Dr. Azad's children. These are petty and inconsequential. One should never lose the perspective that they lost their beloved father. One should never lose the perspective that their father died a natural death and yet an aura of extra-natural remains...

I honestly do not know how I would have reacted!!

Mohammad Zaman
On e-mail ***

Burial of Humayun Azad

We were informed that the body of Humayun Azad would be donated to

Let love beautify ugliness

I enjoyed the movie "Beauty and the beast" by Jean Cocteau on 13 August, 2004 at the auditorium of Bishwa Shahityya Kendro, Dhaka. That's a nice movie. Its message is that love can transform humans in many ways.

We have a lot to learn from it.

Mohammad Ariful Islam
RUET, Rajshahi ***