

Will this also be a forgotten story?

BRIG. GEN. GYASUDDIN A CHOWDHURY BB, psc (Retd)

THE whole nation is shocked and suffering from bomb phobia since the attack on Awami League rally on 21st August believably to kill its leader. Earlier also series of bomb attacks were carried out within the country, one was aimed at the innocent British High Commissioner. The latest one is the most serous of its kind, that killed 20 and injured more than 200.

These sorts of incidents have taken place on several places repeatedly, probably many more to come who knows. In those incidents too many people were killed and injured. So far we know, none has been prosecuted or punished for committing such heinous crime. Do we call it a total failure of the government?

Earlier in all such cases bombs were found to be made with crude explosives; used in mining etc. But the latest one used at Awami League meeting on 21st of August were of military type, ARGES 84 most lethal latest generation hand grenades. These are of Austrian origin used by many countries. It has 3500 small round steel pellets as we find in the shot gun cartridges. Within four seconds of the removal of the safety lever its explosives get activated thus blasting/ripping off the outer cover of the grenade and shooting the pellets all around the radius of the point of impact/blast of the bomb. It could cause serious damage up to 25 meters and normal damage up to 150 meters.

This was revealed that these bombs are being used by Al Qaeda and were also used in the attack on Parliament house in New Delhi. A very well organised group is involved in this sort of operations in some countries. Involvement of intelligent organisations with the tacit approval of the government of some countries cannot be ruled out.

For quite some time the discussion about the discovery of lethal military weapons were being car-

ried out in the independent media. The capture of ammunition at Bogra, capture of arms at Badda area in Dhaka and lastly capture of huge amount of small arms and ammunition, rocket launchers at Chittagong should have given enough headach to the government. But was there any serious attempt of the government to unearth the source and apprehend the culprits and their godfathers? Question remains.

At Bogra at the cache of military ammunition, one carrier truck, the

number of labourers and took obviously lot of time. How come government having so many intelligence organisations like, NSI, DGFI, SB, DB, Coast Guard and Port Intelligence Organisations and Custom Intelligence did not have a clue of such shipments and unloading?

Half of those weapons and ammunitions, if fallen in the hands of miscreants either in the city of Dhaka or Chittagong, an Infantry Division would have needed years to oust and destroy them in an urban

leaders were standing. One or two well trained marksman fired good number of rifle shots at the vehicle of Shekh Hasina accurately at the desired spot although total chaos and pandemonium prevailed after the first grenade was thrown. This was well executed operation well rehearsed and positioned at the time of execution. It took place at a place where almost 200 police personnel, 30 DGFI personnel, dozens of NSI, SB, DB and other personnel were positioned to keep watch on the public gathering. Government and its machineries either has failed or kept aloof.

A motor cycle was ridden over the person of Dr. B. Chowdhury, the former President while he was going in a peaceful procession to declare his party. A stone was thrown at Maj.A.Mannan at the same spot by a cadre injuring him seriously. No action was taken by the government against those. Democracy was smashed under the wheel of a bike, to relish the scene by the custodian of democracy. Government should realise that a Frankenstein is being created in the country. It will not recognise its creator when time will come.

It seems that many more arms and ammunitions have been smuggled in the country. Not only political leaders are frightened but also the people of the country are shaken. The shivering will continue as people are apprehensive about their safety and security. Our credibility to the world community is at stake. Because of the latest event export will suffer to a much greater length, at a juncture when the apprehension of multi fiber issues in 2005 is haunting the business community, and the flood has already taken its toll.

We cannot keep quiet as responsible citizens. If the government is unable to handle these problems it should form a National Government to counter the armed gangs and also economic depression likely to come soon because of recent flood and oil price hike.

The earlier the government realises this national crisis the better it is for the country.

The writer served as Director, Military Operations in A HQs and is a former Ambassador.

Ensuring quality engineering education

DR A S M A HASEEB

THE quality and relevance of education that an engineer receives is of great importance to the country's development and economic activities. The nation therefore has a great stake in how our engineers are being trained. Recently, the four BITs (Bangladesh Institute of Technology) have been upgraded into Universities. A number of private Universities have also started offering engineering degrees in some disciplines. These indicate that there is a realization of the importance of engineering education in the country. However, the mere increase in the number of engineering graduates or the mere conversion of the BITs into Universities does not by itself guarantee the quality of education necessary to support the industrial development of the country.

In order to keep pace with astonishingly rapid technological developments and at the same time make engineering education more relevant to the societal needs, academicians and researchers worldwide are putting great efforts. Different national level bodies have been installed in developed and leading developing countries to monitor and enhance the quality of engineering education. One such body, well known worldwide, is the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) of the US. ABET sets up criteria for and monitors engineering programmes to ensure quality in engineering education. The 2003-2004 ABET accreditation criteria require that engineering education programmes must demonstrate that their graduates acquire the following attributes during his/her course of study:

- a) an ability to apply knowledge of mathematics, science, and engineering;
- b) an ability to design and conduct experiments, as well as to analyze and interpret data;
- c) an ability to design a system, component, or process to meet desired needs;
- d) an ability to function in multidisciplinary teams;
- e) an ability to identify, formulate, and solve engineering problems;
- f) an understanding of professional and ethical responsibility;
- g) an ability to communicate effectively;
- h) the broad education necessary to understand the impact of engineering solutions in a global/societal context;
- i) a recognition of the need for and an

ability to engage in lifelong learning, j) a knowledge of contemporary issues, and k) an ability to use the techniques, skills, and modern engineering tools necessary for engineering practice.

It is time that our educational leaders think how far we have been able to instill such qualities in our engineering graduates.

There are enormous scopes and need for the improvement of the quality of engineering education in terms of both 'software' and 'hardware' in this country. On the 'soft ware' side, the mindset of the educators are to be changed, from the traditional to a

carried out to assess the need for engineering graduates by local graduates. The adequacy of preparation of engineering graduates and their relevance to the local job market need to be critically analysed. There appears to be a real gap between the supply and demand situations of engineering graduates in the country. While a sizable number of engineering graduates remain unemployed at present, many industrial units in the country are currently employing foreign engineering professionals particularly from India, Pakistan, etc. In order to reduce the gap, there has to be a dialogue

In modern technology, education and research go hand in hand. Institutions with good research environment can provide enriching and creative experience to their students so as to encourage innovation that is key to achieving a sound indigenous technological base in the country. BUET has been playing a leading role in the field of engineering education in the country. It is only through quality education and advanced research that BUET can retain its position of role model for other engineering institutions.

quality oriented one. There has to be a system in place in each of the engineering institutions that defines quality of education, develop means to measure it, monitor the quality and improve upon it on a sustainable basis. Such a system is seen to be almost totally non-existent (or very feeble, if it at all exists in some form) at present in the engineering institutions of the country. On the "hardware" side, a sizable investment in terms of laboratory infrastructure in Universities that are lagging far behind is long overdue. Engineering graduates coming out of the Universities including BUET, with exposure to old equipment of the fifties of the last century or very little exposure to modern equipment, are finding obvious difficulties in industries that are using modern equipment. Modern teaching aids like models, software, audiovisual aids etc. should be routinely used in teaching to make difficult engineering subjects understandable to the students within the limited time span available.

Engineering education in the country so far has hardly been need-based. No formal survey has been

between employers, academic institutions and government. Engineering scenario has undergone significant changes in the country in recent years. Earlier engineering graduates were only tuned to work in government enterprises. This is not the situation any more. Industries have been established in the private sector which currently employ a large number of engineering graduates. In order to speed up industrialization, more engineering graduates should emerge as entrepreneurs. It is now very important that our education system instill entrepreneurial and innovative zeal in our engineering graduates.

Engineering education can hardly be discussed without referring to the existing engineering capabilities of the country. With the exception of the civil construction sector in the country, engineering in general still means routine operation and some maintenance. The country has no engineering capability to design and develop industrial process, materials, machine/ devices etc. right from the drawing board. This is not surprising in view of the fact that practically nothing

has been done so far to initiate and sustain engineering research in this country. There is no engineering research institution in the country. This is in contrast to the agriculture sector, where nationwide R&D infrastructure exists (in more than twenty R&D organizations) and a sizable amount of investment has been made in agricultural research. The outcome has been positive as evidenced by increased agricultural production. No such parallel investment has been made in the engineering sector. In order to achieve the required rate of economic growth to repeal poverty, the country must direct its attention towards the industrial sector. Capacity build up and innovation in engineering is a precondition to achieving industrial growth.

In modern technology, education and research go hand in hand. Institutions with good research environment can provide enriching and creative experience to their students so as to encourage innovation that is key to achieving a sound indigenous technological base in the country. BUET has been playing a leading role in the field of engineering education in the country. With the establishment of four new universities of engineering and technology in the country, BUET has even greater role to play in the future. BUET should emphasise even more on quality rather than quantity. It should limit the number of its undergraduate intake and engage itself vigorously in research. It should set definitive goals to expand its masters and Ph.D. programmes. It is only through quality education and advanced research that BUET can retain its position of role model for other engineering institutions.

Finally, the policy makers and academic leaders must realize that there must be a system in place in the country to induce, monitor and ensure the quality of engineering education on a sustainable basis in the country. In parallel with this, the country must give due emphasis on engineering research in order to develop a base for indigenous engineering capabilities. It is high time to devise a comprehensive national level policy and action plan in this connection.

Dr A S M A Haseeb is Professor, Department of Materials and Metallurgical Engineering, BUET

South Asia's democratisation

Will Maldives remain too far ?



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

CIVIL societies in the South Asian region are not turning a blind eye to the developments in one of its smallest nations because the issue of representative authority is inextricably linked with the recent situation in the Maldives. The tiny Indian ocean island state is now experiencing pro-democracy movement and a state of emergency has been declared there to quell the unrest. This is not for the first time during the 25-year rule of president Mamoon Abdul Gayoom that the small but attractive country has been convulsed by demands of democratic rule as it is governed by one party system. The pattern of governance is continuing for long without reforms

towards turning it into representative character. The country of less than only three lakh people is otherwise generally quiet and the ascendancy of president Gayoom is quite strong without any sign of slackening his authority. He is not known for any iron-fist kind of rule or a tough dictator. In fact, he has a sober and gentle image abroad which is not without any reason.

SAARC who has attended all the summits being a founder-leader of the regional forum. The King of another small state Bhutan is the other such leader who is still in the helm but he has not taken part in all the SAARC heads of government conference. But the issue of democracy at home is altogether a different matter and there can be an uproar if it is lacking in the country. President Gayoom is exactly facing the

democracy after an elected government was overthrown by the military more than four years ago. A semblance of democratic rule is there following parliamentary elections and an elected prime minister but the real power is rested with the president, who remains in active service of the army as its head. Pakistan was stripped of its membership of the Commonwealth following the removal of the elected government

background of authoritarian rule just a few years ago. All these are commendable since people's wishes must be reflected in the system of governance and this is finding larger acceptance across the world as a logical corollary to the wind of change.

Maldives may be a small country but it has its own charm and importance. The leader of the nation is also respected otherwise in the regional and international context because of his image and intellectual ambience.

However, what is evidently lacking in the Maldives is the democratic rule. The declaration of the state of emergency was followed by arrests of pro-democracy activists and alleged repression on them. The Maldivian democratic party (MDP), which is campaigning for multi-party democracy, alleged that pro-democracy activists are coming under all forms of harassment. It is possible that the agitation may once again be crushed or subdued as was done in the past. But the flame of aspirations for democratic rule cannot be crushed permanently as its noble ideals will continue to inspire its people for a system of governance that will reflect their will. It will be laudable if the persons in the helm in a country which is tiny but well known for sophistication of its citizens and their standard of education move towards representative government. President Gayoom should feel the wind of democracy which will some day definitely blow over his picturesque land and it is better if sooner it takes place. It will be additionally desirable if he has a role in that positive development for which he will be more commendably remembered in the history of the Maldivians.

The South Asian centre for policy studies, the non-government body of eminent persons drawn from the member states (with persons like Ibrahim Zaki Hasan being associated with it) is not oblivious of the pro-democracy agitation in Maldives and it is high time that president Gayoom takes due note of this without further delay although none expects democracy will be introduced in the country overnight. A slow but effective process may begin in conformity with the aspirations of his people.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist.

MATTERS AROUND US

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President Gayoom, regardless of the size of his nation, is not unknown in the international arena and he has particularly played an active role in the growth and development of the seven-nation South Asian Association (SAARC) which has earned for him admiration in the region. He is probably the only head of state in the

same. The promised political reforms has not come by and hence is the pro-democracy agitation in the Maldives.

South Asia is largely a democratic region as most of the countries here are practicing representative government for a long time. The case of Pakistan and Bhutan is little different since the former is yet to witness return of full

but it was restored sometime ago as the process of return of democracy highlighted by the parliamentary

elections was taken into account. This development notwithstanding, the country is yet to revert to full representative authority. The tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan is clearly not a democracy but the King possibly feels the need for giving up certain authority -- albeit slowly and in a limited way to the people and some signs are discernible in that direction.

Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Nepal are democracies even though these nations at times experience strain on the system. But there is no alternative to representative government and this needs to be upheld and strengthened at any cost.

Little further away, the southeast Asian countries have also moved forward in the quest for democratic rule and some of them have admirably abandoned undemocratic and dictatorial form of governance. Indonesia, the largest nation in that region and biggest Muslim country in the world in terms of population saw for the first time election to the presidency through direct popular votes which, however, failed to give a decisive verdict and the run-off voting will take place next month. But this is a great leap forward for the country which was under one-man dictatorial rule for long spell of 32 years not long ago. The Philippines is also having representative authority with a similar