

US-Bangladesh counter-terrorism deal

Indigenous capacity building should be the focus

WE welcome the arrival of the US State Department's coordinator for counter-terrorism in Bangladesh and greet the news of the likely signing of a protocol on counter-terrorism collaboration between Bangladesh and the US with enthusiasm. To us this demonstrates that the government is serious about getting to the bottom of the August 21 attack as well as the other acts of terror over the years.

However, we would like to reiterate our position that US involvement in counter-terrorism -- while appreciated -- is not a silver bullet and that, in the final analysis, the responsibility for making the country safe from terror must lie solely with the government.

That the government has acquiesced to assistance from outside is a good thing. The simple fact of the matter is that at present the government is woefully unprepared to handle an investigation of such magnitude by itself without outside assistance. The US is one of the most knowledgeable countries in the world when it comes to combating terror, with a wealth of experience and resources, and there can be no doubt that availing ourselves of their expertise is a positive step for the August 21 investigation and the broader fight against terror.

Nevertheless, we should not be lulled into thinking that signing a protocol or convening a joint working group will solve our problems. Ultimately, responsibility for keeping the country safe and secure lies in the hands of the government, and the focus on any collaboration with the US or any other country must be on capacity building so that we develop the internal resources not only to investigate terror attacks but also to stop them before they occur.

The eyes of the world are upon us. World leaders from Kofi Annan to President Bush have expressed concern at the situation in the country. In the past, successive governments have been unable to conduct an even minimally competent investigation of previous acts of terror, but this time we cannot afford to fail. The government's credibility is on the line -- not only domestically but internationally as well. This is the government's last chance to demonstrate that it has the will and the ability to fight terror and to preserve national security.

Sylhet bomb blast

Some questions for the authorities

THE recent news of a bomb blast in Sylhet that killed two people including an 11-year old boy, in addition to being yet another tragedy, raises a number of disturbing questions that the authorities would do well to answer in order to reassure the understandably nervous public.

The first question is what manner of bomb was it that exploded. It has been reported that the explosive device was 9.5 kg in weight and that the bomb blast left a two-foot deep crater. The explosion -- which also severely injured seven others -- blasted some of the victims' body parts yards away and thus the bomb in question seems to have been quite powerful.

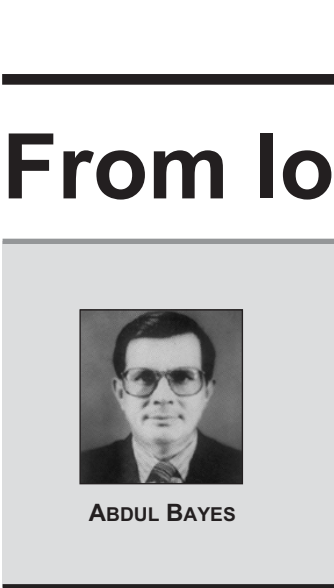
The public needs to know how such a deadly device could end up in the hands of an ordinary citizen, and whether, as has been suggested by the DIG of police, the individual concerned has any record of involvement with explosives. Can the authorities confirm if this is the case?

It has been reported that the bomb was initially picked up from the firing range of the Jalalabad cantonment by a group of teenagers who sold it as scrap metal. Can the authorities confirm that the cantonment was indeed the source of the bomb? If not, then where did such a deadly device originate?

If the bomb did indeed come from the cantonment, this too raises a host of questions. If the bomb was the unexploded residue of some military drill or target practice, how is it that it was apparently allowed to be scavenged for scrap metal? The army theoretically has very strict accounting procedures for arms and ammunition, with every bullet being fired needing to be accounted for, and any unexploded device should not have been permitted to fall into the hands of civilians.

If this was indeed the source of the bomb, then it raises difficult questions as to what kind of other gaps exist in the army's accounting practices for arms and ammunition and whether other devices could similarly have been pilfered or gone missing.

It is still unconfirmed that the bomb did indeed come from the cantonment, as has been reported. The first step is for the authorities to thoroughly investigate the matter and then to inform the public of the provenance of the explosive device. This troubling incident raises many questions. It is time the authorities began providing us with answers.



ABDUL BAYES

BANGLADESH is known as a rice growing economy with principal attention given to rice. At the lower end of the per capita income scale, the proportion of the budget spent on the staple food rice is much higher. Besides, the poor tend to derive a big share of the calories they need from rice. However, the Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2000 reveals that per capita consumption of cereals decreased while that of High-Value Agricultural (HVA) products increased during the last decade. Noticeably, per capita daily consumption of fruits, livestock products, and vegetables posited an upward trend. A projection GDP growth rate of 7 per cent per annum also tends to indicate a significant rise in the daily consumption of non-cereal food items. This rise would, obviously, be prominent in the case of income-elastic goods such as fruits, vegetables, fish, and meat and milk items. The reasons are not hard to find.

First, Bangladesh realized a respectable rate of economic growth during the 1990s; it averaged 5-6 per cent per annum during the period, 1996-2000. An average of 5 per cent plus growth rate, achieved up to 2003, points to a remarkable progress compared to the average of 3-4 per cent during the last two decades. A declining population growth rate, at 1.3 per cent per year, has helped in raising the per capita income. On the other hand, a fall in the rice prices has contributed to a rise in the real

minor sector, often largely part-time and subsistence-oriented at the early stage of development, the rural non-farm economy develops to become a major motor of economic growth in its own right, not only for the countryside but for the economy as a whole. Its growth also has important implications for the welfare of women and poor households, sometimes helping to offset inequities that can arise within the agricultural sector.

Second, Bangladesh has also witnessed a remarkable progress in

University (Savar, Dhaka) has shown that large farmers (owning above 300 decimals) market 70 per cent of their paddy, the middle farmers market 42 per cent and the small ones (up to 150 decimals) market 36 per cent. About 80-90 per cent of the vegetables produced by these farmers are now being marketed. The figures shown by the survey seemingly stand close to the national level statistics on the marketed surplus. A decade ago, the proportion of marketed products was almost negli-

income would lead to a 6.5 per cent rise in the demand for food items. Apparently, neither elasticity coefficients nor incremental income share would justify a substantial change in the retail chain. Information reveals that within the food sector, the market for non-crop agriculture is strong. For example, fruits, fisheries, and livestock products tend to claim a larger part of the incremental income and also these products display high elastic demands. By and large, both incremental budget share and the

term in Bangladesh that both expenditure elasticity and average and marginal budget shares for high-value agriculture have increased over the last two decades or so in rural areas. Possibly, that would indicate the trend for urban areas too.

Assuming that demand would rise for the above-mentioned products, with a paripassu rise in growth rate, the required growth rate in supply of these products, these projections show that growth rates of supply of non-cereal food items would have to be much higher to keep up with the growing demands.

Thus, the time has come to shift policy emphasis from the concept of "rice first" for food security. There was a time when the importance of rice reigned high, but now, with positive structural changes in the economy, we should focus on high value agriculture. Some of our individuals and institutions have demonstrated that given the proper environment, they can raise the exports of vegetables and other non-rice crops. Extension services now should be geared towards production of high value crops. But bear in mind, rice still needs more research for releasing lands for high value crops. Institutions, incentives, and innovations need to be directed towards non-rice crops. The future seems to be bright in this respect.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

The time has come to shift policy emphasis from the concept of "rice first" for food security. There was a time when the importance of rice reigned high, but now, with positive structural changes in the economy, we should focus on high value agriculture. Some of our individuals and institutions have demonstrated that given the proper environment, they can raise the exports of vegetables and other non-rice crops.

income of the poor people. The contribution of agricultural sector to GDP has been on a gradual wane over the years to stand at about 23 per cent in 2001.

Empirical evidence from sample household surveys have shown that the growth in rural incomes over the period 1987-2000 was largely due to the non-agricultural sectors. The fastest growing economic activities were business and trade, followed by non-rice agricultural crops. Non-agricultural sector emerged as the engine of rural uplift which reminds us of the observations made by economists: From a relatively a

the communication sector, both in roads and telecommunications. Cellular phones are now available in many rural areas to help the information flow, and the poor have largely been benefited from such a technology. The construction of the largest bridge, named Bangabandhu Bridge, has helped in marketing of perishable products from the northern side to distant districts. The northern region, once deemed to be the poorest, is now poised to benefit from crop diversification programmes following the construction of this bridge.

And third, a recent survey of eight villages conducted by Jahangirnagar

ble, if not non-existent. Quite obviously, the release of land through HYV-cultivation has, along with the development in rural marketing networks and communication, contributed to an increase in the commercialisation of agriculture.

Let us now have a look at the pattern of expenditure also. It has been found that rural households spend about 52 per cent of their income on food items, originating from agriculture, but they spend 34 per cent of their incremental income on food items. The income elasticity has been estimated to be 0.65, implying that a 10 per cent rise in

income elasticity of demand for non-cereal crops (potato, vegetables, oilseeds, pulses, spices, etc.) are much higher than those of cereal crops. Since non-cereal crops and non-crop agricultural products are more perishable in nature and have higher marketable surplus, the findings indicate stronger potential for the expansion of their market for rural processing, storage, trade, and transportation activities.

Unfortunately, an intertemporal variation in elasticity and budget shares could not be produced in this paper, but it has been shown in a recent book on rural livelihood sys-

Bangladesh: Thirty-three years later

SIGMA HUDA

GOLDEN Bengal was once upon a time the envy of the Western world, where diaphanous muslins and spices were in great demand. The exotic and prosperous land with its temperamental flowing rivers, swaying jute plants, flamboyant krishnachuras and pure temple flowers, and sweet and poetic people constantly beckoned to the rest of the world, who long desired to be a part of this land.

I first saw the influence of Bangala in Malacca, Malaysia, where its colourful history kept reminding me of what was Bangala. The history of Malacca kept talking of the influence of Bangala and the West of Bangala (which included the Arabs, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French, and the English traders). Bangladesh was not only a mystic and scenic land of diaphanous muslins and spices, flowing rivers and swaying palms, flowering trees and sweet smelling flowers, but a land full of poets and writers, lovers of nature and aesthetic beauty. They were simple hard working people with honest minds.

The "envy of the world" saw many conquerors in various guise -- traders and preachers alike -- set their influence on this once upon a time serene

and prosperous deltaic and fertile region of the sub-continent. A variety of people laid down their traits and we can see diverse cultures mixed into one unique Bengali culture -- a real remix! And so the years rolled on.

Then what happened? The British left India in 1947 by joining two extreme boundaries (East and West) into one country (Pakistan), which was divided by a large chunk of another independent country (India). The joining/fusion of two extreme

defence, gave rise to discontent and uprising in the East wing. West Pakistan was developed at the cost of "Bangala" -- once upon a time the great and prosperous country -- whose golden fibre, tea, betel leaves, rice, fish, etc. all added to the wealth of Pakistan for the development of its Western wing whilst the hard working inhabitants of East Pakistan continued to toil and live in sub-standard conditions of survival. The six points demands were welcomed by the

In conclusion, the people should become united and forget animosities. Let us learn from other democracies the respect that one political party has for the other, and how the government and the opposition can work together to build, develop, and thereby strengthen, the country, which will in turn prevent any unwanted third person from interfering or destroying the nation.

wings having no similar or common culture or language, but bonded by one religion was, in the eyes of many, a mistake. If religion was to be the only unifying factor, then the different sovereign Muslim or Christian countries should all be unified to become Islamistan or Christianistan!

So, what was inevitable occurred. Exploitation by the West wing of Pakistan, within which territory the capital was located and which controlled the finance, foreign policy, and

local people of East Pakistan and the subsequent election of 1970 which gave the Awami League a thumping victory saw the real intentions of the government. Then came the black night of March 25, 1971.

We all know the rest. All genuine Bangladeshis united, and with the unified movement, we were successful in routing out the marauding Pakistanis. We became Bangladesh! Victory was achieved in record nine months time. Unity was

of Liberation, where every one of the peace-loving, serene, and poetic Bangladeshis joined hands to free themselves from continued poverty, hardship, and exploitation to build a beautiful Sonar Bangla?

Everything is politicised, and people are being forced to follow one or the other political camps. As if they can have no independent thoughts. Even the grenades and bombs are being made to fall within this or that political camp. We learnt that offend-

the first public place bombing of 1997 had been properly investigated and attackers punished promptly; if the first arms haul case had been completed and the offenders punished, then today in 2004, we would not have seen the spate of bombs and chopping of people in different places. Due to the failure of the past regimes to control crime, the innocent persons are suffering. Who do we blame? I leave it to the readers to guess.

In conclusion, the people should become united and forget animosities. Let us learn from other democracies the respect that one political party has for the other, and how the government and the opposition can work together to build, develop, and thereby strengthen, the country, which will in turn prevent any unwanted third person from interfering or destroying the nation. No citizen is interested in the power play of political parties, rather, they care less for who is where, and their only concern is how to ensure a safe, secure, free from worry life, where food, clothing, education, and health is taken care of. A life that they had thought was possible when they sacrificed their lives and property for what is now Bangladesh.

Therefore, dear readers, please rise and send a strong message to the political parties that they must stop this dangerous game of who comes to power, and if they cannot stop their race to power then they should not involve innocent bystanders in their quest.

Sigma Huda is an Advocate.

Once drawn to Zion, now glad to leave

JOSHUA HAMMER

DURING my first visit to Israel, in the spring of 1981, I almost decided not to go back home. The seduction began shortly after I arrived at Ben Gurion airport, when I was joined on the bus to Jerusalem by a dozen Israeli soldiers. As a secular Jew from New York City, I was stirred beyond expectation by these young warriors in yarmulkes clipped to their heads, Galil rifles slung over their shoulders who had put their lives on the line to defend their fragile state. Days later I was so moved by the sight of Orthodox worshippers praying at the Western Wall that I accepted an offer on the spot to enroll in a yeshiva, an academy of Talmudic learning meant to lure lapsed American Jews back into the fold. The spiritual awakening faded fast! Stayed at the yeshiva for two days but Israel had left its mark on me.

Twenty years later I finally made it

back, this time as Newsweek's Jerusalem bureau chief. The country I encountered had become a vastly different place. The Camp David talks had just ended in failure, and stone-throwing Palestinians were facing off against frightened Israeli troops at checkpoints across the West Bank and Gaza. I couldn't imagine then how bad things would get the new

promised a military victory, and it seems he's delivered it. The terrorist group Hamas has been driven underground, the old leadership destroyed. When I met the commander of the Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in Jenin three weeks ago, he conceded that Israel's security barrier had made it "nearly impossible" to launch attacks across the Green Line. The last major sui-

site of a suicide attack in September 2003 that killed seven Israelis. The place was packed, a welcome sign of normality.

So why feel disheartened? Because the calm Sharon has achieved is one-sided -- enforced by military might, without interest in fair solutions. Because I know that Israeli soldiers are killing people on the other side of the wall -- out of sight, out of mind -- with regularity.

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waves of bus and cafe bombings, the targeted killings of Palestinians, the military incursions. Now, as I prepare to leave after nearly four years living in the thick of the intifada, after 3,000 deaths and a dozen failed peace initiatives, I'm filled with a sense of personal relief and deep disillusionment.

Yes, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon

cide attack inside Israel came in March, when 10 people were killed in a double bombing at Ashdod port. (More than 100 Israelis died in terror attacks in March 2002.) In a recent poll, 65 percent of Israelis say they consider themselves safe, a high figure by the standards of the past few years. Last night I walked past the Hillel cafe in my neighborhood the

other side of the wall -- out of sight, out of mind -- with regularity.

(Two hundred Palestinians have been killed in the past four months, many of them civilians blown away by panicky teenage soldiers.) Because Sharon plans to withdraw from Gaza only to focus on his real goal: permanent occupation of most of the West Bank. Because the Bush administra-

tion, rather than lean on Sharon to stop expanding Jewish settlements, has given these obstacles to peace its blessing.

During the time I've been here I've seen a coarsening of attitudes on both sides. I recently met an Israeli soldier at Erez Crossing, the volatile entry point to Gaza, who asked me if I'd heard the latest joke making the

There are moments when I feel that Jerusalem could be a wonderful place to live. Jogging at sunset along the Sherover Promenade, I look out over the Old City walls, the Dome of the Rock, the Judean Desert glowing at twilight, and recapture some of the excitement that drew me to Israel two decades ago. Then I look a little farther to the east, and see the stark gray barrier marching across the barren hills dividing Jerusalem from the West Bank -- Sharon's Wall. The new Israel, resting secure for the moment, has turned its back on the seething people on the other side. It's hard to imagine how the calm can last.

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Joshua Hammer was Newsweek's Jerusalem bureau chief from 2001-2004.

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.

An Islamic American history

I read, with much pleasure, the article by Dr Liaquat Ali Khan in the DS of September 5, titled "An Islamic American History" concerning the present mullah of his mosque in Kansas. He told the story of how this black American had been born, having to endure white racism and then moved into the extremist black racism of the organisation The Nation of Islam, ie "all whites are evil and wicked." However, after 1975, the organisation changed to a more moderate stance. Through the proper study and experience of true Islam, his heart was changed and he now leads the Islamic Center of Topeka, Kansas "with an open and generous heart."

Those of us who know that much of what hits the headlines today, in the name of Islam, is but a distorted shadow of its true self, are longing for

those who call themselves "real" or "moderate" Muslims, to take a higher profile and be seen to be doing more to help their co-religionists to get out of the ditch that they have dug for themselves. May I make a modest suggestion?

I am reliably informed that some of the best new thinking in Islam, including by those who urge the 'opening of the gates of reason', is going on in English. Some of the Muslims who are now living overseas, benefiting from the kind of education offered, living in an environment that encourages creative thinking and refusing to demand the life of a ghetto in order to keep their identity are becoming scholars and thinkers. They are read all over the world - except of course, very widely anyway, in Bangladesh because of the low usage of English here.

Is it not possible to hasten the translation of some of these books into Bengali and a good translation at

that? I am not talking about the wilder extremes of "modern" scholarship. All religions, both major and minor, are suffering from the free-for-all of the wilder extremes of expression! But, surely, the world needs more attention given to the writings of genuine research and the kind of thinking that tries to apply all that is best in ones' religious tradition to the tough business of living, as a religious person, in the Millennium. Just focussing on the past and endlessly repeating our Good Books, can only get us so far. It is the application of the great truths of our faiths to the wounds of the world where the great gap lies. There is a chasm between belief and behaviour that needs a lot of hard work -- and the sooner the better.

Sobhan Choudhury

Lalmatia, Dhaka

Beware of fast growth rate

China's fast growth rate is worrying the international economists and planners (BBC news item). In many instances, the heated economy causes burnouts, bringing in depression in the market, facing the misery of bailouts.

In Bangladesh, the growth rate of mobile telephones has been very high, as the public-controlled fixed-line telephone system utterly failed to cope with the huge demand in the market for many years. There appears to be a future in investment in the telecom markets.

On the other hand, high-rise buildings for residential flats and luxury shopping centres are also coming up fast in Dhaka (and some other major cities). The demand comes from a very limited rich clientele, while the huge percentage of middle class families cannot afford expensive flats for rent or purchase. Amongst those who have money, there are groups in grey areas, creating unstable founda-

tions. The question, which naturally crops up is: Can the huge investments be recovered as per planned projections in a least-developed country such as Bangladesh? Islands of prosperity have to be viewed critically in societies where the general standard of living is low, and where the majority live around the poverty line, and almost one half of the population is illiterate. With absence of heavy industries, the rural agribusiness is the major sustainer of the economy, plus the garment exports and dollars earned abroad. Experts may throw some more light on the topic, for awareness and general knowledge, while the government regulations need the right tone through feedback systems to tackle sudden changes in the market. Even a highly developed nation like Japan had to pass through more than a decade of decline. Economic sine waves are very unpredictable; and slow lanes are observed in many countries.

A Husnain, Dhaka.

Managing committee of government high school

The government officers constitute the managing committee of government high schools where the Deputy Commissioner holds the post of president in an ex-officio status. I am not against the Deputy Commissioner holding the post of president. Moreover! I think it benefits all concerned. It has been noticed that the other members of the managing committee are generally government officers like government engineers, civil surgeon etc. The irony is that, no one from the guardians is a member of the managing committee. I feel that representation of the guardians can benefit both the organisation & the students. In this connection I solicit immediate attention of all concerned to review the

issue of having guardians in the managing committee of the government high school.

Md Abu Taher
Pubali Bank Ltd.
Moulvibazar Branch,
Moulvibazar.

The victims

—We deeply mourn for the victims and their families of the August 21 carnage. The September 1 issue of Daily Star has recorded the plight of the many injured who are still in need of medical attention due to hundreds of splinters in their arms, limbs, eyes and other parts of their body. That the hospitals have so far provided free medicare to these victims is to be appreciated. But more needs to be done, such as long-term treatment whereby the splinters can be taken out one by one. Many of these people were the sole earning members of their families. Some form of help

needs to be provided also. We appeal to the government to take up each individual case and arrange for their proper treatment in the country.

After all, the government is ultimately responsible for providing security at such a major gathering, including that of the leader of the opposition, particularly in the wake of attacks in Gazipur and Sylhet. The survivors of the latest disastrous and violent incident need the caring hand of the government now.

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