

## It's a disappointment

*Let the Summit be held sooner than later*

WE were aware of speculations of uncertainty stalking the Saarc Summit, but these have unfortunately come true now. We wish they hadn't.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's cancellation of a planned visit to Dhaka to participate in the 13th Saarc Summit scheduled for February 6 and 7 has led to its postponement. Bangladesh government which had made elaborate preparations for the event has reasons to feel frustrated. This is the second postponement of the summit after the tsunami-induced one early January.

Let's not forget, deeper down the surface, it is a country or a nation that hosts such an august conference more than a government, and the sense of pride that a people derive from seeing it take place, happens to be extremely self-fulfilling, gratifying and inspiring. Bangladeshis pride themselves on pioneering the concept of Saarc and the late lamented SAMS Kibria who fell martyr to a diabolical brand of political extremism had made a signal contribution to the formation of Saarc. Thus we are a natural votary of continuity of Saarc summity cycles, so that the organisation grows from strength to strength creating in the process rewarding and lasting bonds between the peoples of South Asia region.

Judging by what the Indian spokesman said in New Delhi about the last-minute change in Singh's plans, this appears to have been caused by the disturbing developments in Nepal and a deteriorating security situation in Bangladesh. It is not for us to make any value judgement on India's perception of the latest Nepalese scenario, but insofar as the security ambience in Bangladesh goes, we do have some observations to make. We understand the question of security but given all the assurances of the government of Bangladesh and India's security teams' presence, the visit could have been possible, more so in view of the exhaustive measures put in place in Dhaka for the safe movement and sojourn of the delegates to the Saarc Summit.

The agenda finalised for decision-making at the Dhaka Summit were of great import in terms of regional cooperation in the realms of trade and investment; combating trafficking in children, women and drugs; and controlling cross-border terrorism. All these were set against an otherwise congenial backdrop of improved Indo-Pak relations. We very much hope, so does the world, that the 13th Saarc Summit would be held sooner than later.

## Nepal in whirlpool

*Politicians must rule the roost*

THE political situation in Nepal, where parliamentary democracy has not had a smooth sailing since its inception in 1991, has once again become murky with King Gyanendra dismissing the coalition government of Sher Bahadur Thapa. Levelled as a 'monarchic coup', the move comes at a time when the country is deeply embroiled in a fight against Maoist rebels. The insurgency-ridden political uncertainty is likely to be exacerbated by the dismissal of the Deoba-led all-party government.

We are greatly concerned over the crisis that Nepal, a country so friendly to Bangladesh, is now passing through. The government of Deuba has been sacked twice in the last two years and the country is still groping for a stable multi-party system of government which has eluded it over the last 14 years. It is evident that the constitutional monarchy has overtaken the transition to a democratic order based on broad political consensus that has been a durable basis of effective governance. The King insists that he had acted to safeguard the "larger interests" of the country and has pledged to restore democracy under his own chairmanship. This kind of defence in favour of any extreme measure in politics is not new. But the politicians of Nepal, particularly in the coalition government of Deuba, have rejected the action as nothing but a coup on the part of the monarch.

The ground reality is that Nepal has been struggling to fend off the Maoist insurgency. So it was absolutely necessary to have unity at the political level which could ensure a strong government. But that has not happened so far, and the country's drift towards uncertainty is again quite noticeable. The monarchy was supposed to be the symbol of national unity, but there is no doubt that frequent intervention on its part in governance will only sow the seeds of divisiveness and weaken the government.

The King by his actions has created a political vacuum that has to be filled urgently to avoid further deepening of the crisis.

# Another bloody carnage!



Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN ndc, psc (Retd)

IT was with a feeling of trepidation that I woke up to attend the telephone very early on the morning of Friday last. I had no idea what time it was and my apprehension was confirmed when the caller gave me the sad news of Mr. Kibria's death and the circumstances under which it had happened. A bomb attack at an Awami League (AL) meeting in Habiganj the previous evening had taken the lives of four others and injured more than seventy.

Let me dilate on what transpired between the caller and me subsequently.

He put me several questions, the first of which was, "Why was it that majority of the bomb blasts were occurring in Sylhet and who were behind these incidents?" Those were indeed million-dollar questions whose answers have eluded even the government and the investigating agencies all these years, far be it for me to offer a plausible explanation to these events.

It is indeed significant that, of the eight major incidents of bomb blasts in the country since Jan 12, 2004, five had occurred in Sylhet (greater), and the targets, which included the British High Commissioner to Bangladesh, were high profile. But it is not important that the incidents were occurring in Sylhet

but that they were happening in Bangladesh and the main targets of these attacks were the main opposition party, or important personages of a particular political hue or cultural organisations. These were the issues that I feel we ought to dwell on, although, the Sylhet equation is indeed very relevant.

The simple answer to the question was that if we could find out the perpetrators of these attacks, we would perhaps be able to say why these were happening in Sylhet. By

It could perhaps be that the security in Sylhet is lax and the perpetrators find it easy to carry out their nefarious acts there.

Again, another argument could be that the majority of those made targets of the attacks, apart from being politicians of standing, hail from Sylhet, who were subjected to attacks when they were at party meetings or some sort of assemblage; they were never targeted individually.

One could also ask whether

The second question, a natural corollary, is why are the attacks targeted at the main opposition party? It is a fact that, of the eight attacks carried out since Jan 2004, Awami League (AL) was the target in four of these. From available reports it appears that Mr. Kibria was not a victim of a random grenade attack but died as a result of injuries inflicted by the grenade thrown at him directly.

That, this is the work of those that do not approve of AL politics and all

However, it would be a fair assumption that the aims and objectives of the Aug 21 grenade attack and the recent attack in Habiganj stem from entirely different motivations than that which prompted the other attacks since 1999. Whether the perpetrators are the same is difficult to say. The type of weapons used in these attacks point to their common link, at least of those that occurred since May 2004.

It may be presumptuous to suggest government complicity in the

matter of grave concern that the biggest arms haul in Bangladesh still remains a mystery. At least the current LGRD minister has made it bold to acknowledge the weakness of the administration to find out the culprits behind these acts.

At the risk of being repetitious, it must be said again that there is an urgent need for capacity building in respect of investigation. The intelligence agencies must also concentrate on acquiring expertise on counter terror intelligence along with enhancing their counterintelligence capabilities. One of the reasons these acts have been repeated with impunity is the rank ineptness of relevant agencies to preempt these happenings in the first place.

The recent incident further reinforces the demand that investigations into these episodes are conducted objectively without any interference, because, interference not only saps the initiative of the agencies and those who conduct the investigations, it affects their output also. Intelligence agencies are on record that they were unable to pursue militants' links of some of the explosions due to pressure from government high-ups.

The government has been prompt in seeking international assistance in investigating the recent incident, but we must not keep our eyes closed to all the possibilities, as some of us are wont to do. The causal links must be established as well as the cost and benefit of these actions must be calculated until excluded by a process of elimination.

The author is Editor, Defense and Strategic Affairs, the Daily Star.

**The fact that none of the governments so far has been able to get to the bottom of any of the bomb incidents since 1999 and bring any of the perpetrators to book, has only emboldened the extremists. It is a matter of grave concern that the biggest arms haul in Bangladesh still remains a mystery. There is an urgent need for capacity building in respect of investigation. The intelligence agencies must also concentrate on acquiring expertise on counter terror intelligence.**

the same argument, if we could determine why Sylhet was the venue of majority of the bomb attacks, identifying the perpetrators would not be difficult. But alas! We can do neither with precision since we do not have all the facts on hand. Neither has the government been able to get to the bottom of these, in spite of the international assistance that it has received since 8/21. And the public is not privy to what has been unearthed so far by the committees entrusted with finding out the facts of these occurrences either.

However, we can perhaps explore on these incidents and see if we cannot detect a pattern in the recent grenade attacks.

First, why is it that the perpetrators are choosing Sylhet to carry out the attacks? For all one can say, it is perhaps a coincidence. But, that would run the risk of being characterised as a very simplistic and facile explanation.

Sylhet's close proximity to the border has anything to do with the large proportion of these incidents taking place there? May be, but that means the presence of trans-boundary factor in the equation. That possibility notwithstanding, attributing the bomb attacks on the AL to some dissident elements of another country seems far-fetched, unless of course, these elements have an axe to grind against it.

There is perhaps strong rationale in the argument that, of the many pockets in Bangladesh that are suspected of having the presence of extremist elements, Sylhet is one; and Sylhet is where they are better organised and directed.

There is also the possibility that this and other bomb attacks have been externally inspired, designed to make Bangladesh unstable. But we are not to know, since the findings of the investigations have not been made public yet.

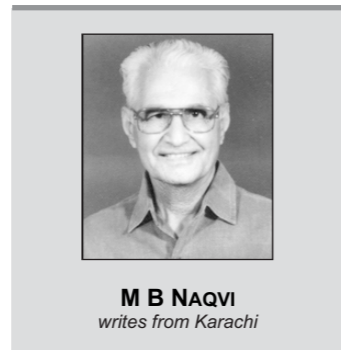
that it professes, in particular the opinions and views of Mr. Kibria, could be a plausible explanation. Not being able to counter it through open platform politics they resort to such acts, to convey a message to AL. However, one cannot find credibility in the argument that these acts are designed to wipe the AL out of political reckoning. One would hope that a party like AL is made of sterner stuff, enough to withstand such adversities.

While it may not be possible to identify the perpetrators conclusively at this point in time on the evidence that are available so far, a profile analysis of the targets of the attacks since 1999 might provide one with a likely image of the culprits, and expose the character, motivation and the religious inclination of the people behind these attacks. A close look at the disposition and character of the majority of the targets might also suggest the motivations of these attacks.

recent incident. But one cannot help notice the reluctance of many in the administration, to acknowledge the possible existence of extremist groups in Bangladesh with strong religious motivations, capable of carrying out violence such as the recent one in Habiganj. Regrettably, such remarks display an ostrich like attitude when it comes to acknowledging the presence of radical elements in our country. Acknowledging the possibility of the presence of religious extremists in Bangladesh does not adversely affect our image abroad, on the contrary, what sully our reputation, not to speak of the grave implications these have for our national security, are acts like the one we witnessed in Habiganj recently.

Also, the fact that none of the governments so far has been able to get to the bottom of any of the bomb incidents since 1999 and bring any of the perpetrators to book, has only emboldened the extremists. It is a

# Coronation speech and after



THAT Bush aides hastened to explain away the purport of the inaugural speech by President George W Bush could be expected. The fiery Bush rhetoric on Freedom and Democracy had made America's long-time favourites worried. They needed reassurances. They were told that pro-democracy drive was not aimed at states like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, Jordan and it might apply to Syria and Iran.

What it means is clear. Reality comprises two elements: words cost nothing and secondly, there are hard American interests that in practice override what was in effect the Bush manifesto for his second term. If the beautiful sentiments of his manifesto are not meant to apply universally, they become secondary, if not worthless to real American interests and concerns.

Primacy goes to interests. Not that one can object to American Administration pursuing its national interests and to subordinate the expedient rhetoric. There is nothing new in that. All states do that. But what is exasperating is to be subjected to such passionately idealistic and high minded sentiments that befool the unwary but in practice go on befriending the assorted Kings

and dictators, exempting them from the logic of what is being proclaimed as the Grand Idea: freedom or democracy.

What are America's main interests? US foreign policy has necessarily to do what the American economy needs. That is a categorical imperative -- and it cannot be objected to in theory, though one can object the methods adopted involve sacrificing others' interests.

elude. Basic facts about this clutch of issues are clear. Israel came into existence in 1948 in the teeth of Arabs' opposition by a UN resolution, piloted by the US and UK diplomacy. Arab states rushed to occupy Palestine areas where Israel was going to be established. But the Israeli settlers' vigilante groups managed to defeat all Arab armies put together. Arab states did

Arabs became advocates of two states in Palestine: Israel and Palestine: But the real man who symbolised the Arab-Israeli dispute was Abu Ammar (Arafat) who also accepted this solution. Even so, peace eluded Arabs. Why?

The cause was Israeli bad faith. It had, with the help of Dr. Kissinger, double-crossed Abu Ammar. It professed it liked peace with Arabs and sought their recognition. But

return to their homes in Jerusalem and elsewhere in Israel from where Israeli fundamentalists had driven out in 1948. Israeli hardliners make no bones about what they want: they want to drive out the Palestinians from West Bank and annex these areas.

A test of Israeli intentions is on hand. New election in occupied Palestine has thrown up Abu Mazen as the new elected President; these

realistic without a solution of Palestine problem.

It is true that the Israeli establishment partially realises that hardliners of their own and that of American necons do not fully realize that as time passes, Arabs are not likely to become more moderate and meek. Rather the contrary may happen. Stability of ME has already eroded so much; continuation of the frustrations of Arabs and arrogance of US-Israeli combine is sure to radicalise Arabs more. The US has tremendous stakes in the stability of ME. It possibly stands to lose some of its stake in oil. General Arab sentiment is against the US that is seen as the protector of Israel and is not an honest broker: it is far too committed to Israel -- and at Arabs' expense.

The point is simple: both Israel and US, as its chief protector, have gone too far in oppressing and humiliating Palestinians; nor are they trusted by any Arab to be straightforward. Somehow the American expertise fails to notice the long-term consequences of Arabs' anger and frustration over their own Kings' subservience to the ugly American -- think of what the Arabs are likely to have concluded from Fallujah and Abu Ghraib. Israel would soon see the limits of its power and opportunities.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

# PLAIN WORDS

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Let's be specific.

When one deals with the interests of a world power, the unavoidable course is to look for the problems and areas that preempt most of its time, energy and resources. Inevitably, ME emerges as a set of complex problems in which the US is deeply involved. These problems are many. But those that grab the attention are two: the first is the age-old Arab-Israeli problem; this is the oldest and difficult even in theory. The second is the possible spreading chaos in Iraq despite Jan 30 polls. Iraq, requiring ampler treatment, will be taken up next time. Here one must stay confined to the Arab-Israel dispute. For, this is the key to many ME problems and so long as it is not solved, ME will remain unstable and democratisation of Arab countries will continue to

not recognise Israel for a long time. In 1967 Israel mounted a sudden, preemptive 'Six Day War' and occupied all of remaining Palestine and chunks of territories that belonged to Jordan, Syria, Egypt; it occupied a strip of land in Lebanon separately.

By 1974-75 the so-called Arabs' Rejectionist Front had had its unity broken by the Kissingerian concept of Mini-Palestine; it was accepted by a growing number of conservative Arab states -- and at length even the legendary Yasser Arafat came to accept this two-state solution of the Palestine problem. Although Israel had made sub-rosa contacts with Arab states like Jordan and Morocco earlier, the sudden appearance of Anwar-us-Sadat in the Israeli Knesset in 1977 was a spectacular breakthrough. More

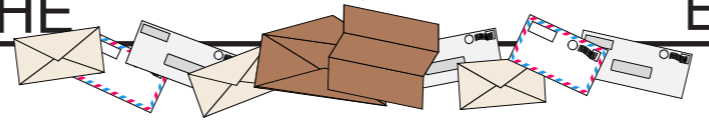
what it loved more was Arab lands primarily in Palestine. Not only that. Even initially (1948) Israel occupied more land by force in Palestine than the UN had sanctioned it. But in 1967 war, it occupied all of Palestine and many more lands of Syria, Egypt and Lebanon; it has not ended its military occupation of these even after almost 38 years except returning Sinai to reward Sadat.

Most Arabs are aware that the Israeli fundamentalist ultras do not want any peaceful settlement; all they want is Palestinian lands minus the Arabs. On one pretext or another, Israel refuses to make peace with them. See what happened to Oslo Agreements. It does not accept such elementary demands of Arabs as Jerusalem's control and the right of refugees to

polls were credible. Palestinian-Israeli talks impend. Would Israel show some flexibility and magnanimity? Would the talks succeed? Would not Israel go on demanding more concessions from Arabs while making none? Only time will show.

What the US does not realise is that the Palestinians' cause is now an Arab cause. Pro-west governments in the region are sitting on dynamite of growing popular resistance. If the US and Israel refuse to be fair minded toward Palestinians, the stability of conservative Kings and dictators cannot be guaranteed by US alone. The Israelis' dream of mixing American capital, their own organising and managerial talents and Arabs' natural resources and labour to produce untold riches for US and themselves while improving Arabs' lot somewhat more is not

# TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

## Country's image

Heinous attacks and killings of the intellectuals and progressive politicians are quickly turning Bangladesh into another Afghanistan. The secular Bangladesh has already got the titles of Taliban, cocoon of terror, world's most corrupt country, haven of terrorists, dangerous to the journalists and worst woman and child trafficking land in the world. The present government is encouraging all these evil forces and their Taliban style activities for the sake of the unity of the coalition in power, and telling the rest of the world that none of those activities exist in Bangladesh like the Ostrich hides its head in the sand.

The New York Times, Time Magazine, Far Eastern Economic Review, Washington Post, Guardian, Herald Tribune, Asia Week, Wall Street Journal, Economist, and News Week are publishing so many articles full of evidence that fanatic

elements exist in Bangladesh. Reports from the Amnesty International, European Union, Human Rights Watch, US State Department and so many other international organizations continually urge the government to stop such activities, but the government is putting the blame on the opposition parties, or the minority groups.

It would be too late for the nation to survive as a democratic one, if we all don't come forward now to stop it. We don't want our beloved country to be turned into another Afghanistan or Iraq due to the wrong leadership.

I strongly urge the civil society to come forward for our own existence. SAMS Kibria, Ahsanullah Master, Manik Shaha, Monjurul Imam, Montaz Uddin, Gopal Krishna Shaha, Iy Rahman, Humayun Azad, Prof. Younus, Humayun Kabir Balu, Shamsur Rahman and so many have already been killed. Poet Shamsur Rahman, Shahriar Kabir,

Arefin Siddique, Advocate Humayun and former prime minister and the leader of the opposition, Sheikh Hasina, have been attacked several times.

Please come forward, all progressive forces, civil society members, human rights organizations and freedom loving people, before we drift further to chaos and confusion.

**Mohammed Ail Siddique**  
New York, US.

## Betrayers strike again

While the country was passing through a fairly stable political atmosphere, political parties started to organise their respective positions for the next general election of the country, huge foreign investments to the tune of over US\$ 7 billion (as stated by BOI) from India, Taiwan, France, China are almost in final stage and some more

are on the table for discussion, economic indicators are showing the positive signs as stated in the recent reports of World Bank and IMF, the betrayers, who don't want to see the country's prosperity, have struck again.

The foreign media have started publishing lots of misleading reports and articles and at home the gruesome killing of SAMS Kibria has created a very uncertain situation. We should be on guard against enemies both at home and abroad.

**Fakhrul Alam**  
Siddeswari, Dhaka

## Attention: DCC

We are still very disorganised. From our veranda we can see the road below in front of our flat. A dozen cattle (every 10-15 yards) were slaughtered for qurbani by the roadside and skinned and the meat cut up. It was a gory sight. One of my nieces, a ten-year old child, was hiding herself in the bedroom

unable to bear the sight of blood flowing freely in the road, and the unpleasant display of the slaughtered animals. She won't venture out for a couple of days, it is a trauma for her at this impressionable age. We are not friendly to our children.

The municipalities (DCC) can easily arrange for some open outdoor community centres in each locality for the slaughter of cattle, and for the organised disposal of the left-overs. This servicing cost could be recovered by selling tickets for booking. When the problem can be solved, why we do not do something about it?

**A Husnain**  
Dhaka

## A tale of 'hajaj'

It still shivers me when I remember that terrible scene on a day in 1982--just soon after Ershad ousted the elected government of President Justice MA Sattar of the BNP

on the pretext of corruption in the country. I was one of the victims of that tragedy. On the fateful day 25 May, 1982, I was, to my utter surprise, suddenly picked up from my office chamber at the BW Bhahan by a team of police led by an army officer on charge of criticising and accusing the Martial Law, under MLR 15, and they drove me straight to the zonal army control centre at Shurawady Uddyan, but, thank God, I was not harassed.

I had to spend a couple of days at the Gulshan PS and was locked in the hajaj cot toilet of the PS where about 7 more people including some well-to-do ones were lodged.

In the hajaj, I noticed the toilet was overflowing with human excreta, that-flooded the entire floor of the hajaj. But after about 20 minutes, it again went down through the same toilet, as the flow subsided. Thus it continued to flow up and down, time and again, throughout the day and night. The entire

floor was soiled with suffocating smell and no space was left to stand anywhere on the floor. It was a most terrible scene.

No one was there to do anything about it.

**Hussain Imam Chowdhury**  
Mirpur, Dhaka

## Disappointed

I am very disappointed reading the sermon of Saudi Arabia's Grand Mufti during the Hajj. He has totally failed to highlight the deficiencies of the Muslims throughout the world for which they have remained backward and poor and as a result on the receiving end both in knowledge and all other fields for the last few hundred years since the renaissance in Europe. May I venture to say that liberal education, science, secularism, pluralism, rationality, free thinking and above all humanitarianism are the pillars of success in the modern world.

We cannot think of making any

real headway to be at par with the developed countries of the world without promoting these.

**A Shah**  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

## Great victory

It was nice to see our cricketers reaching another milestone. Their first ever ODI series victory has left them in a position to think about achieving more in future. They must go ahead to become a truly competitive side in international cricket.

I wish the boys all the best.

**A fan**  
Dhaka

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We have a new e-mail address for the Letters to the Editor page. Please send your letters to [letters@thedailystar.net](mailto:letters@thedailystar.net)