

## Beijing - Dhaka cooperation

Unrealised potential is huge

BEIJING and Dhaka have agreed to boost cooperation in a wide range of fields as part of greater economic interaction between the two countries.

The convergence of trade and economic priorities of China and Bangladesh was visible in the six accords signed during the Bangladesh PM's trip to Beijing. There were significant developments like China's offer of 300 million RMD for the North Dhaka Water Treatment Plant and Sewerage Plant - a crucially important project for Dhaka city. China has also agreed to extend cooperation to peaceful use of nuclear energy in Bangladesh, which we need due to the mounting energy shortage.

The accords and MOUs signed cover various sectors and should lead to greater cooperation between China and Bangladesh based on a pragmatic assessment of our needs. China has shown keen interest in investing in Bangladesh's developing economy which has certain strong points. We have a large domestic consumer base which could turn any foreign investment into a lucrative proposition. Then we have duty free access to some rich countries which is a big advantage that investors can always exploit. Our incentive package compares favourably to other competitors in the field. Of course low labour and production costs are also a plus point that prospective investors should be interested in. Finally, China has huge potential to invest in any EPZ in Bangladesh, designed and operated to cater to the needs of foreign investors.

One of the major developments is that China has agreed to import ready-made garments from Bangladesh. It is our competitor in this field, but there are many complementarities that the two sides could take advantage of. China and Bangladesh can have mutually beneficial trade relations in many areas because of these complementarities.

The PM has assured the Chinese investors of all cooperation from the Bangladesh side and also proposed that the two countries develop "strategic" trade ties in order to reap maximum benefits from the joint ventures. We believe China will favourably examine the PM's proposal.

## August 21 carnage

Terrorism continues to threaten our stability

TODAY is the first anniversary of the grenade attacks on the AL rally at Bangabandhu Avenue that killed 21 people, including front-line leader Ivy Rahman, and left over 200 injured. The shock and horror that we felt on that day and our deepest sympathy for the families of the dead and maimed are only increased by the fact that, one year on, justice is far from being done, and that last week's serial bomb blasts have shown that we are still far from safe.

It is true that 15 arrests have been made and that the police have in hand a confessional statement that implicates 10 known criminals allegedly absconding in Kolkata. But the fact is that the various terrorists who are responsible for killing more than 148 people since 1999 have not been brought to justice, and that the authorities remain in the dark as to the extent of the threat.

August 21 was supposed to be a wax-up call. The one benefit to come out of the unspeakable tragedy was supposed to be that it rammed home the fact that there are dangerous extremists in our midst and that the government needed to take serious action to safeguard the nation.

How then is it possible for more close to 500 bombs to be exploded in 63 districts with the government remaining clueless? The only thing worse than the criminal incompetence shown by the authorities is the realisation that this happened even after they were supposed to be on high alert.

The political parties responded to August 21 the same way they have to last week's blasts -- by pointing fingers at each other. These kinds of unsupported accusations are not helpful and only succeed in hampering the investigation and letting the real culprits off the hook.

What needs to be done is for the government to pull out all the stops in tackling terror. Last week's blasts show that, shamefully, this had not been done. There is no excuse for the government's negligence which is a severe black mark on its record. The point now is to swiftly take the security measures which should have been taken in the aftermath of the Bangabandhu Avenue carnage, but which weren't.

The best way for all of us to honour the memory of the August 21 dead is for the nation to unite to ensure that the terrorists behind the attack are brought to justice.

## It is time to confront

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

FINALLY Bangladesh has been invaded in a big way by terrorists professing Islamic extremism. Perhaps the events of August 17 should spell the end of our ostrich-like attitude in denying the presence of Islamic extremism in the country. The presence of this cancerous element in our midst was never an invention of the media, which remains by and large agnostic in their attitude towards internecine fight among politicians, and remains dedicated to their duty to present the truth to the people of Bangladesh. Nor it has been the result of conspiratorial actions by the opposition political parties, who are gunning for the ouster of the present government, and certainly not due to conspiracy hatched by foreign powers to malign the country and its image abroad.

The incredible inefficiency displayed by the authorities in preempting the well-organised bomb blasts throughout the country within a span of half an hour cannot but generate fear among the law-abiding people of Bangladesh. That the perpetrators of the bombings spree could have caused widespread damage, should they have intended, is by itself frightening.

One gets the feeling the people are hostages in the hands of the Islamic extremists who, should they chose, can kill off their "enemies" with impunity. What is no less worrisome is the fact that foot soldiers arrested by the law enforcement agents are common people with the distinction that almost all of them (as reported in the newspapers) are students of religious schools or are dedicated

to attaining a glorious life hereafter by establishing Islamic rule in Bangladesh.

Recently Pew Research Center and Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life have found that almost half of all Americans believe that Islam is more likely than other religions to encourage violence among its followers. The London carnage did not apparently have any appreciable impact on the views held by the Americans on

would negate the very spirit of participatory democracy and may not reflect the true will of the people along with the distinct possibility of their becoming hand-maidens of the Islamic extremists does not appear to have been seriously considered by the authorities.

There is no reason to believe that the West has slackened its vigil on ensuring security and prosecuting the evil-doers. On the contrary, the London bombings

become a casualty of the August 17 bombings. Already the summit has been postponed twice. Reportedly the Pakistan President has expressed full confidence in the ability of the Bangladesh government to hold the meeting as scheduled. One, however, has not yet heard such unequivocal assurance from other Saarc participants. It is possible that they are reluctant to comment on a development, however worrisome, of a purely

supply of ready-made garments to other countries. The elimination of MFA, abolishing quota for countries like Bangladesh ensuring a guaranteed supply to markets like the US, has been catastrophic. China has reportedly taken over a disproportionately large chunk of the US market which has alarmed the US Congress and the US textile industry.

As a result the US administration has not only imposed a restrictive quota in textile imports from China,

able to play its role as an effective member of the international community which failed states are not able to do. But, then, in these days of abridged sovereignty and international penchant for the doctrine of the "responsibility to protect" it is essential that the all Bangladeshis should be active in confronting the menace of Islamic extremism and terrorism.

Gone are the days when the Muslim countries could only condemn acts perpetrated by Islamic extremists and do nothing. The time has now come for us to confront these terrorists. This is not a fight between the purists and so-called detractors for the soul of Islam. It is not a fight to prevent devout Muslims from being engulfed by a "degenerate western culture."

It is a fight against evil men who do not hesitate to take their "battle" to innocent men, women, and children in the name of Islam. It is a fight against those who want regression and prevent our society from acquiring a quality of life which Bangladeshis so richly deserve. It is a fight against parochial politics, where politicians routinely conduct public affairs for private gains, regardless of the misery inflicted upon the people.

Perhaps our religious leaders could consider whether these kinds of Islamic terrorists can be excommunicated from the Islamic brotherhood and declared as non-Muslims. There is so much at stake and so little time to act. One hopes our leaders will not once again fail the people.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

**This is not a fight between the purists and so-called detractors for the soul of Islam. It is a fight against evil men who do not hesitate to take their "battle" to innocent men, women, and children in the name of Islam. Perhaps our religious leaders could consider whether these kinds of Islamic terrorists can be excommunicated from the Islamic brotherhood and declared as non-Muslims. There is so much at stake and so little time to act. One hopes our leaders will not once again fail the people.**

their fellow Muslim compatriots, and the American public continues to decisively reject the idea that the terrorist attacks of recent years are part of a major conflict between the people of America and Europe on the one hand and the Islamic people on the other.

However, incidents such as August 17 will re-enforce the Western view that the struggle waged by the Taliban and their followers might have shifted to areas regarded as "soft" because of lax supervision by the authorities (perhaps to spare their spiritual partners the embarrassment of the apprehension of their foot soldiers in the commission of acts of infamy, and also because their non-apprehension would, the authorities mistakenly believe, eliminate political opposition and ensure a smooth return to authority with renewed mandate).

That such a return to "power"

have strengthened certainly the British resolve to crack down on suspected Islamic militants by introducing the distinct possibility of legislating criminalisation of speech, an aberration from the long British liberal tradition of safeguarding fundamental human rights dating from the Magna Carta.

It is truly unfortunate that Bangladesh will no longer be able to project itself as a moderate Muslim country free of Islamic extremism. Nor will our authorities be able to dismiss reports on the growing influence of Islamic extremists by foreign powers and media as totally false. Indubitably Bangladesh will now be included, if she had not already been, in the black book of the Western powers as a country to be watched intrusively.

One hopes that the holding of the November Saarc summit will not

domestic nature. It is equally possible that the Saarc countries may not pronounce themselves so close to the incident and would prefer to wait till an appropriate time to declare their willingness or refusal to participate in the summit.

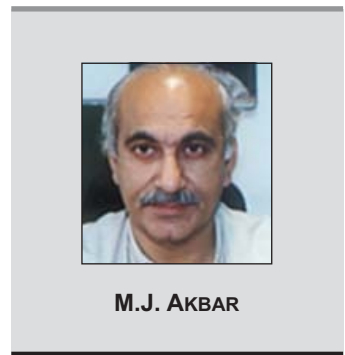
In any case, the agencies responsible for ensuring the security of their respective heads of state (or government) would like to be fully assured of the safety of their charges. One could recall here the changes made in the schedule prepared during President Clinton's visit to Bangladesh at the insistence of the Secret Service, a fact admitted by Bill Clinton to ABC's Peter Jennings.

Adverse effects on our trade and investment, though difficult to quantify at the moment, are bound to be considerable. Reports have started filtering in of foreign buyers canceling their orders or shifting their source of

but is also now engaged in negotiating an agreement with China regulating Chinese export of garments to the US. In the backdrop of shrinking RMG export market the August 17 bombing cannot but have a negative effect on our economy, which is already badly affected by spiraling energy prices in the international market.

The sheer audacity shown by the bombers in the face of reported governmental alert, apprehending possible disturbances by opposition in the wake of national mourning day for Bangabandhu's assassination on August 15, and the total failure by both the intelligence community and law enforcement agencies to predict the bombings, the scale of which implies long time preparation, and almost faultless execution, may introduce the question as to how near Bangladesh is to becoming a failed state. Fortunately, Bangladesh is still

## The moral code of Indian democracy



THE BJP and the NDA will have every right to taunt the fulsome apology by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for 1984 once they have familiarised themselves with the letter "A". It is not only the first letter of most alphabets but also the first letter of the word "apology." They should then apologise profusely for the macabre riots of Gujarat on the last day of February and March 2002.

They could do it individually, with master baiter Narendra Modi leading them. Or they could orchestrate their efforts to include the Panchratna of the NDA: Vajpayee, Advani, Joshi, Sinha, and of course the ubiquitous George Fernandes, who regularly charged in where angels feared to tread. Of the five, Vajpayee, then Prime Minister, did sound apologetic, but heckled mercilessly by the bright young things of his own party, retreated ceremoniously to the peace and comfort of his chair. There was no hint of regret from the others. After Modi won the Gujarat Assembly elections, even the need for regret was forgotten.

The three major sequences of barbarism in the last 21 years have been the anti-Sikh riots of 1984, the Babri riots of 1992 and 1993, and

the Gujarat riots of 2002. Roughly the same numbers died while millions were traumatised. For the space of about three days mobs were permitted by a deliberately absent authority to kill Sikhs in 1984 and Muslims in 1992 and 2002. There was no official explanation offered for the barbarism. How could there be, for those in power were either perpetrators or abettors of barbarism. In each case the unofficial explanation, advanced

Khalistani Sikhs abroadnote the adjective, it is Khalistani Sikhs, not all Sikhscelebrating. But a government is not a mob, unless it chooses to become one. I was in Calcutta in 1984. Jyoti Basu was chief minister. The anger in Calcutta was no less than in Delhi, and incidents began to occur. Jyoti Basu did not choose to win his next election by washing his hands in Sikh blood. Instead he ordered the Calcutta police to do its first and foremost duty, and protect

ing to the barbaric impulse.

The irony is that the Congress would have won in 1984 without presiding over the "spontaneous" reaction. I cannot be certain but I daresay that Modi would have won Gujarat also without Godhra because he is an efficient administrator with little interest in the parallel disease of Indian politics, corruption. But both were tempted by the easy option since their backbone had been washed away along with

the Muslims was ordered by local BJP leaders and implemented by local thugs.

Dr Manmohan Singh was an economic bureaucrat in 1984, but he was finance minister in 1992, and therefore bears far greater responsibility for the events of 1992 and 1993. But at least he has apologised and done so from the office of the Prime Minister of India. An apology may not seem enough, and indeed it is not enough, given the

Manmohan Singh remembers that. Two decades have passed since 1984. A Sikh child born after those terrible riots has already voted once. More than a decade has gone by since 1992. Less than four years have passed since the Godhra riots. Dramatically differing time spanswith one thing in common. In each case the Congress or the BJP or the Shiv Sena won an immediate victory. And in each case the "victorious" party did not know that this was the last trumpet on the way to doom.

The Congress lost in 1989 and has lost its role as a national party.

These days 145 seats in Parliament are advertised as a heroic victory. The Shiv Sena has lost its moorings, and is slipping into a coma. And within three years of Godhra the BJP, which thought that Gujarat was the base of a triumphant relaunch, has discovered that Gujarat was the basis of a defeat that has decomposed into an inner stench. Time has its own law of justice.

There is a moral law that operates in India's democracy, a moral law whose judge and jury is the Indian voter and whose accused is the Indian politician. It is the same moral law that keeps the Left Front in power in Bengal and which will give it an overwhelming victory in the elections next year.

I believe that Dr Manmohan Singh apologised precisely because he is a deeply moral person. But this apology is only a first step. He should not confuse it with the horizon.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

## BYLINE

**There is a moral law that operates in India's democracy, a moral law whose judge and jury is the Indian voter and whose accused is the Indian politician. It is the same moral law that keeps the Left Front in power in Bengal and which will give it an overwhelming victory in the elections next year. I believe that Dr Manmohan Singh apologised precisely because he is a deeply moral person. But this apology is only a first step. He should not confuse it with the horizon.**

through the party network (party is an obvious pun), was "spontaneity" before which the administrative machinery was apparently helpless. This was an utter, malignant, unforgivable, immoral, and inhuman lie. In all cases the government deliberately fed the violence for political profit for a carefully calibrated period after which the same government ordered the violence to stop. The blood tap was switched on. And the blood tap was switched off.

God knows there was provocation in 1984. What could be more provocative than the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi after the sea-saw of violence through which Punjab had suffered in the previous years culminating with the assault on the Golden Temple, known as Operation Bluestar? This was further aggravated by images of

every citizen of this country, just as he gave security and safety to Muslims in 1992 after the destruction of the Babri mosque under the watchful eye of P.V. Narasimha Rao (the same watchful eye presided over the anti-Sikh riots in 1984 incidentally, this time as home minister). The Calcutta police is made up of the same Indians who man the Delhi police or the Gujarat police. They are not particularly angelic. They obey orders.

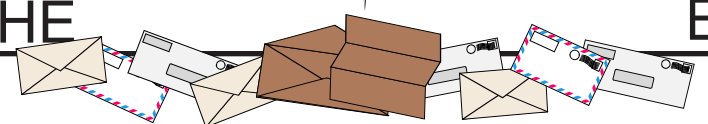
Jyoti Basu's moral courage also gave the lie to the dangerous cynicism that has become a core philosophy of the BJP and the Congress, which insists that electoral victory justifies every immoral decision. The Congress victory in 1984 and the Modi victory later became "self-evident" exonerations. But Basu and the Left Front have won every election in Bengal without pander-

ing to the barbaric impulse.

any moral fibre that they may have once possessed. Organised violence is stage-managed. The Congress and the BJP, along with the Shiv Sena in 1992 and 1993, perpetrated deliberate violence against minorities. The system buys time for political parties through commissions. It bought the Congress 21 years after 1984. But those who suffer the truth and those who know the truth do not need commissions. One of the most wrenching moments of my life was to watch a Sikh being burnt to death in front of a gurdwara in Delhi. It happened on the second day of the 1984 riots, and not on the first "spontaneous" day. The howling mobs on that day were mobilised by Congress leaders who saw victory and ministerships ahead and got them too. Gujarat's pogrom against

horrors of the crime for which guilt is being accepted. An apology may mean nothing to the thousands whose world was ripped apart by lust of mob-evil. An apology does not exonerate the maniacs who fed on the blood of minorities. Such is the cynicism within the Congress that it actually thought it could get away without taking any action against the few that the Nanavati Commission thought fit to name. The Congress thought it could fudge its way with the help of a helpful report and Dr Manmohan Singh went along with his party instead of taking action at the beginning, instead of waiting for Parliament and media to place a mirror before his face. But an apology is something and something is better than nothing. An apology is the beginning of a process and not the end of the story. I do hope Dr

## 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.

### Food traders in trouble

I work in a Chinese restaurant and as an ordinary citizen of this country, I am very happy with this ongoing drive against adulterated food. But I think good and honest businessmen are also suffering because of no clear-cut policy for food business. I think the authorities concerned should sit and make some rules so that people in food business know what to do and what not to do. Many sauces (like Kikoman sauce, Fish sauce, Soya sauce), which are used in foreign cuisine and an integral part of food making, come from abroad and are widely available in market. How come these sauces are being sold freely in market without BSTI seal! And when we are using the same sauce in our restaurant, we are being fined and jailed! I am also very much surprised to see that there is no food-safety expert among the anti-

adulteration teams. How a magistrate, who has no expertise in food, can decide which foods are adulterated and which are not? All the restaurants make some items like fried chicken, kebab half done so that they can serve the food promptly when the orders come. But restaurants are being fined for keeping food half prepared without which it is impossible to run business. So we are now in a great quandary. I would request the government to look into the matter because millions of people are directly or indirectly involved in this business. Any rash decision will endanger many people's daily bread. Innocent and honest businessmen must not be harassed in the name of anti-adulteration drive.

**Sohel**  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

### Media under attack

I was appalled reading the cover

story "Media under attack" by Shamim Ahsan in a recent issue of SWM. It is really shocking to note that ministers are desperate to curtail media freedom, specially that of the print media that has been playing a truly great role by upholding the truth.

It'll be a grave blunder for the government and a misfortune for all of us if

the proposed idea of intimidating the media is carried out.

People do pin their high hopes about the country on the unbiased media because of the fact that it is only the media that has been revealing harsh truths and thus rendering great service to the nation. Furthermore, a free media is a prerequisite for democracy.

Media is the voice of the people and any attempt to strangle this voice will curtail their hopes.

This is an unfortunate state where learned persons in power are speaking against the media & its role.

Finally, congratulations to Shamim Ahsan for writing the fine cover story.

**Rafiqul Islam Rime**  
Agrabad, Chittagong

### Zainul Abedin

As a (foreign) lover of Bangla art, I like to put the attention of the authorities concerned at the following. On page 70 of the Bangla textbook, class three, primary education, used in all government primary schools in the country (and approved by the Textbook Board Authority), it is mentioned that the famous Bangladeshi painter, Mr. Zainul Abedin, died on the 28th April 1976. However, to my knowledge, the painter died one month later, i.e. on 28th May 1976 (according to the brochure "A saga of Man and Nature, The Art of Zainul Abedin", published by the Bengal Foundation, and the collectors' album of reproductions of 25 paintings by Zainul Abedin, published by

Shilpangan, with an introduction written by the wife of Mr. Zainul Abedin, Mrs. Jahannara Abedin).

Of course I can be wrong, therefore to avoid confusing the young Bangladesh learners, clarification should be made in this regard.

Willy Legendre  
Baharchara, Cox's Bazar

### Tata and Bangladesh

Your "reader" (DS: Aug 13) has presented a broad pros and cons scenario of the proposed Tata investment in Bangladesh. However as far as one can gather, till date it seems to be a one way traffic. Figuratively, it appears that Tata is ramming into Bangladesh's limited natural gas resources; and that too at special favoured prices!

In return their proposals both for steel and fertiliser production is flawed. The steel product proposed, is not what we need, and may be most of it has to be sent to India at a specially favoured price! The ferti-

liser production will waste a lot of ammonia, which may also have to be sent to India for further processing or could destroy our environment. Only the coal based power plant and coal mining proposal appears to be realistic on its own.

Tata's attitude seems to be take it or leave it. One wonders if the whole idea is to utilise cheap natural gas from Bangladesh for making products for Indian consumption. In the national overview the potential employment of around 2,000 people is nothing compared to the benefits for Tata. May be it is an indirect way of taking natural gas from Bangladesh to serve Tata and India's interest.

Let the nation be aware, and carefully look before we leap and ink a fundamentally flawed agreement to sell out our steel and fertiliser future for a pittance. It is not just a minor issue.

**A Tata watcher**  
On e-mail

### Electronic billboard

Don't look -- you may face an accident.

The concept that electronic billboards and others could promote accidents and which incidentally is a legacy from developed countries, where they have an excellent record for safety measures, does sound like a biased view.

I have noticed that these huge electronic billboards (I know there are bigger ones) have been placed quite appropriately at various intersections where I have to wait for my bus - sometimes for more than half an hour. It has been a relief to wait out the arrival on a hot sultry evening watching the ads. I have the common sense to stand on the designated places like footpath and other waiting platforms of which there are a plenty and these are far better managed

now. And definitely when I walk down the street to the other side, shouldn't I concentrate on the traffic movement, rather than my favourite advertisement - and if I want to see the whole of it I can always wait it out.

**Sazzad Hossain**  
Gulshan 2, Dhaka

### Sharing needles

Many HIV infections occur when people share needles to inject heroin or other drugs. This risk can be greatly reduced by cleaning needles with a bleach solution before re-using them.

According to a Bangladesh government report, near about 9 per cent people in Dhaka are infected with HIV due to Sharing Needles.

**Md Sakibur Rahman Khan**  
Khulna