

## Government's inadequate response

*Symptomatic of lack of urgency?*

**T**HE fact that it took the government four days to officially react to the bomb blasts that shook the nation on August 17 is perplexing. We understand that official announcements of condemnation are little more than formalities, but what makes the government's silence on the matter more worrisome is that it has been accompanied by very little in the way of reassurance, or even signs that the government has the situation under control.

The government has responded to the bomb blasts in much the same way it had to similar incidents in the past. There seems to be little sense of urgency at the highest political level that one would have expected to see on the heels of Begum Zia's thoughtfully early return from China in view of the August 17 bombings. Furthermore, there has been precious little information released by the government as to status of the investigation, so the public is pretty much in the dark and does not know what to think.

It is understandable that the government does not wish to create a panic. However, by being seen to be rather laid back and by keeping much information about the investigation to itself, the government is actually fueling speculation and fear about extremists' presence. The bombing has set the nation's nerves on edge, and people need to see that the government is doing something to follow up and to keep them safe.

The most important thing at a time like this is to ensure national security. This means a government that is fully alert and fully engaged with rooting out the terrorists and safeguarding the public. We have seen no evidence of this as yet.

The big thing which is necessary at a time like this is mass awareness, so that people fully comprehend the threat and can be vigilant to protect themselves and to help prevent another attack. But awareness cannot be created unless the people are informed of what the situation is, where things stand and what's the government doing about it.

The government has responded with similar indifference and opacity to past terrorist attacks. But in the aftermath of the August 17 blasts, such apparent nonchalance is utterly undesirable. The government needs to demonstrate to us that the bomb blasts are its primary concern, and it needs to keep the public abreast of what it knows and what steps it is taking in this regard.

## Border skirmishes avoidable

*Better communication is the key*

**T**HE flag meeting between the Indian Border Security Forces (BSF) and the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) has ended the border skirmish which saw the two sides exchanging fire for at least 48 hours. The outcome of the meeting suggests that they were dealing with basically issues that could have been resolved peacefully had the meeting been held before the BSF and BDR embarked on a confrontational course.

So the question is, why could not they arrange the flag meeting well before the situation went out of control? Why those shoot-outs and red alerts were resorted to that only served to strain relations between the two neighbours? There are well laid out procedures, that both sides should repossess their faith in and abide by, for settling any dispute or defusing tension. Why can't they remain within the procedures? Once the meeting was held, the task of bringing back peace appeared surprisingly easy.

And that is something which shows that lack of communication is at the root of problems cropping up between the BDR and the BSF so often. The point that we are trying to drive home is that there should be more effective communication between them in order to avoid the kind of flare-up witnessed along the Chapainnawabganj border.

What has come out of the meeting is that they have agreed not to dump sandbags and concrete blocks within 150 yards of the zero line on either side of the border. And in case of protecting river banks, an understanding has been reached that both sides will refrain from doing anything that might change the flow of the river.

So they didn't have to address tricky issues, rather the decision to go by the JRC rules was enough to settle the dispute which caused so much suffering to the people living in the border area. It is in the interest of good neighbourliness that border tension is not allowed to explode into shoot-outs, which are most undesirable when it comes to two friendly nations.

Finally, we expect that the understanding reached in top level meetings between Dhaka and Delhi will be amply reflected in the situation in border areas.

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

**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.**

### Saarc and Pakistan

I must say I am a little annoyed by Mr. Khan's assertion that the Kashmir issue should be solved by Saarc, and only then Pakistan will be a good participating member of the organisation. Saarc was not involved in creating the Kashmir problem, nor it should be burdened to solve that problem. It is a bilateral problem and it should be solved bilaterally with Pakistanis talking to Indians.

Since Kashmir is the main problem for Pakistan and Pakistanis, I would also like to say that Pakistan is not an innocent participant of that problem.

Pakistanis need to talk more about their own democratic aspirations, than about the Kashmir problem.

What can Pakistan offer to

Kashmiris that they could not offer to Bangladeshis who were very much part of Pakistan? What crime did Bangladeshis commit by voting for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman? It was all democratic! Wasn't it? Millions of Bangladeshis were butchered by then ruling Pakistani military and their collaborators. Was anybody punished for that crime?

Pakistani obsession with Kashmir has created many problems for that country. We have witnessed the rise and fall of Taliban and the miseries that were brought upon Afghan people.

Pakistan has become a hub of extremists who have been giving Islam a bad name all over the world. The words came out of the mouth of none other than President Musharraf.

The Saarc dream will probably remain a dream for many South Asians. The region is

too diverse and incapable of thinking beyond the religious boundaries. I do not think the region is ready to think big yet. Free trade

may come involving certain countries, but visa-free entry would be too dangerous for the stability of the region.

Nobody wants extremists to move from one country to another with no documentation. I do not want them in my neighbourhood.

**Dev**

Boston University, US

### Students

The disparity is very much noticeable between what students are learning and what actually they are doing in their practical life.

Students have to commit themselves to essays such as "The Duties of Students," and other topics related with morality, demeanour to the superiors, responsibilities to the society, to the

state, and to the world. Are all these things merely for the exam affairs?

This is an easy answer, and that is emphatically yes; as we hardly have any practical example of that bookish learning. They don't respect the principle of honesty; hardly any sense of responsibility grows in them. They only think what others should do, rather than what they themselves should. For lack of sense of humanity, they hardly help others. We must find out

a solution to this problem to build a civilised society.

**Md. Minhazur Rahman**  
Jahangirnagar University

### Foreign words and phrases

I am drawn to letters pertaining to the intrusion of foreign words and phrases in our mother tongue, Bangla, that appeared in your daily recently. It high-

lights the prejudices that many people, even in 2005, still have towards foreign languages. One has to accept that language changes and that is what constitutes its interest and variety. There are certain words and phrases, which in their source language are far more graphic, concise and eloquent than if they are translated.

Are we to emasculate our language to such a point that any word or phrase which might be considered difficult or elitist should be avoided? Certainly not. We would be at a nadir of linguistic expression unless we measure well with other progressive languages of the contemporary world.

The richness of any language develops from its history and its contact with other countries and their language and literature. It is high time we realise this.

**Syed Badrul Haque**

### Rhodes Scholars

Mr. Niaz Asadullah's defence of the calibre of Bangladeshi Rhodes Scholars (Among the Scholars: an update, The Daily Star, August 16) makes little sense. If the Bangladeshi Rhodes Scholars are performing as well as Mr. Asadullah claims they are, there would have been absolutely no reason on earth for the Rhodes people to suspend the single Rhodes scholarship to Bangladesh for five long years!

The painful truth is obvious, and the honest should admit it: they are not performing well.

Mr. Asadullah neglected to specify how the Bangladeshi Rhodes Scholars have distinguished themselves at Oxford. Almost every student who is admitted as an undergraduate or graduate student at Oxford gets his or her degree. It is a routine occurrence at Oxford; it is not a mark of distinction.

Rhodes Scholars are supposed to excel. Regrettably, those from Bangladesh are not doing so, resulting in the suspension for five years of the single Rhodes Scholarship allotted to Bangladesh.

This is sad news for Bangladesh.

**Taher Salam**

New York, US

### "The prude and prudence"

I hardly miss the weekly article of Mr. M. J. Akbar published in your daily. His articles are in fact the demonstrations of his scholarly quality, his humanity and humour and the acuteness of his perception. His latest piece "The prude and prudence" is no exception.

I therefore feel embarrassed to point out that this brilliant piece of writing suffers from factual mistake,

that bomb blasts might rock the districts, was there any attempt to contain the crisis?

Questions also loom large over the role of the Parliament in these cases. Be it 21 or 17 August or a Tangatila-like devastation, we witness no discussions on these issues in the House. It is the observation that these incidents are like national catastrophes and duly demand a detailed discussion in the parliament and thus to look for ways and means to come out of the menace. Why is the government reluctant to do that?

Presumably, there is no answer to that question at the moment. Nor there was any before. But reading the month of August historically, one would come to the conclusion that absence of the rule of law and justice, the inability and the inaction in bringing the killers to the book and a grievously bad governance might continue to make it a month to mourn in the years to come. It is not the party in power or in opposition that is in peril; it seems to us that the heart of the whole nation is pierced through by the brutal blasts.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University

## Black August



ABDUL BAYES

post-independence life, dictatorship displaced democracy, and in disguise for quite sometime military rule replaced people's rule in running the state affairs. Since the assassination of Bangabandhu till today, we practically achieved very little in terms of socio-economic and political uplift.

The economy witnessed a sharp U turn from a socialistic voyage to a bourgeoisie backlash. As of now in August 2005, neither democracy nor development denotes any

years. Instead of bringing them to book, the successive governments prised them with precious positions in government and business activities. Thus, not surprisingly perhaps, killing, terrorism, toll collection and rent seeking began to boom in the backdrop of 'amnesty' to the killers. However, during the last Awami League rule, the killers were tried and taken to justice subject to the hearing of the High Court. Meantime, the government changed and upheld secularism and social justice. While a number of activists of the party were killed and wounded in that gruesome attack, Sheikh Hasina escaped death narrowly by the blessings of the Almighty. The whole world stood up to decry the attack. The image of the country reached the lowest ebb ever. But to an utter dismay, the ruling party blamed Awami League for the blasts and thus, indirectly, put up a curtain before the criminals. The attackers

the perpetrators in bombing around cultural and political festivities -- as we witnessed before -- this time the situation took us all aback. The national and international print and electronic media headlined the heinous heralding and condemned the course that Bangladesh is forced to follow. The image of the country abroad dipped to a low ebb. The already tarnished image begun to torn apart with adverse consequences on trade, business and

## BENEATH THE SURFACE

**Reading the month of August historically, one would come to the conclusion that absence of the rule of law and justice, the inability and the inaction in bringing the killers to the book and a grievously bad governance might continue to make it a month to mourn in the years to come. It is not the party in power or in opposition that is in peril; it seems to us that the heart of the whole nation is pierced through by the brutal blasts.**

meaning to the commoners. Poverty still persists pervasively to put around 45 per cent of the total population below the poverty line. The rate of saving and investment remains to be pitifully low. Inequality of income increased tremendously over the years and for a consecutive run of four years, the country topped the list of corruption in the world. Bangladesh is now being bracketed as a basket of corruption and criminal activities. Money and muscle now-a-days tend to manacle pure politics. The rise of fundamentalist forces all over the country added a further fillip to the ongoing deceleration in the march towards so-called development.

More painfully, the killers of 1975 and their associates emerged as the 'healers' of the nation in subsequent

some of the judges reportedly expressed their 'embarrassment' in hearing the heinous activities of the killers. Justice is being delayed seemingly to deny the justice. All these went to tarnish the image of the country abroad.

Another August and another agony appeared on the horizon of Bangladesh on August 21, 2004.

After 29 years of the killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Rahman, an attempt was made on the life of his daughter Sheikh Hasina -- the former Prime Minister of Bangladesh and the Leader of the Opposition in the Parliament. Series of grenade attacks were made on a public meeting in 2004 with a view to wiping out top notches of Awami League -- the party that led the freedom movement and vows to

investment.

Then again, pitifully though, the same old dirty tricks were taken up to divert the attention from catching the criminals to crusading against the main opposition party for its alleged involvement.

One wonders as to how an organised attack, simultaneously in 63 districts, could come in the wake of the presence of so many intelligence agencies in the country. It is being reported that the government was aware of such an attack at an earlier time (may be 14, 15 or 16 August) but bewildered by the blasts taking place on 17 August. But one may question that wisdom, too. What precautionary measures the government agencies took to avert such a happening? Knowing fully well

## Saarc summit under threat?



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

Bangladesh. The event suffered two postponements earlier and any risk of its once again not taking place on schedule if any iota of doubt was there had been eliminated by the interests of all the seven member nations.

The first postponement of the 13th Saarc summit was due to a natural calamity that struck several member countries while the second one was called off as India had expressed its inability to attend

on the right track of normalisation, and a recent meeting in New Delhi between the two countries on the sensitive nuclear issues at high officials level was seen as a further development in their often-battered relationship. Needless to say, Saarc particularly the summit had fallen victim to Indo-Pakistani hostilities many a time before. Scheduled conferences of the heads of government had to be deferred indefinitely and was made possible only

Postponement of Saarc summit is not a new phenomenon albeit the deferment cannot be anything desirable if not based on consensus. Saarc has had such experience many times before, causing temporary dismay in the grouping. The last summit in Pakistan was held only after a long delay because of Indo-Pakistani bilateral problems. When the tsunami catastrophe struck India, Sri Lanka, and Maldives at the end

of 2004 leading to the postponement of the much-awaited 13th summit in early January, the event was deferred as all agreed that the heads of government could not meet at a time when three of the seven members were hit by the disaster.

But the second postponement stemming from India's decision not to attend, citing political reasons, was largely not acceptable but no summit is possible without unanimity of all members. India might have felt that it had rationale behind its decision, but there can be no denying that the host nation let down. After all, the preparations for such an event are a massive task for a country like Bangladesh, and it was evidently shocked.

The next summit is expected to take a number of important decisions crucial to the socio-economic cooperative efforts, including Safta.

ing and one can hope that the seemingly intractable matters as regards Safta or other important issues will now be closer to consensus.

The visit of the Indian External Affairs Minister to Bangladesh has taken place at a time when it was needed not only for bettering bilateral relations, but also on a regional scale. Saarc, despite its admittedly sluggish progress, is undoubtedly a positive development in a region where such a venture was somewhat inconceivable owing to inherent mistrust and enmity that characterises the environment of this part of the world.

The achievements of Saarc may not be anything to brag about, but the very fact that it is functioning under difficult conditions and has also made some progress in itself something for which the region can in a way

boast about. Hopefully, the positive political climate that pervades South Asia now will effectively and positively contribute to the success of the next Saarc summit. The omens seem positive for the upcoming event and bilateral contacts among the important members of Saarc are contributing to this desirable situation. Recent events like the killing of the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister and spate of orchestrated bomb explosions in Bangladesh must not be allowed to scuttle the timely holding of the summit since the event has already been quite delayed and must not suffer any further. Pakistani President Gen. Pervez Musharraf has told Bangladesh Foreign Minister Hemayetuddin in Islamabad that his country is looking forward to a successful summit.

The Indian minister's expressed concerns like many other countries over the bomb explosions, but it appears that they also feel the need for the summit taking place in due time. The summits play a pivotal role in the effective operation of Saarc and many important decisions are to be taken by the leaders in the upcoming conference. While the next Saarc summit must go unhindered for the larger interest of the region, it is also the bounden duty of the host nation to see to it that appropriate conditions--internally, diplomatically, and otherwise--remain conducive for the summit, and there can be no slackening in this direction.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist in

when their bilateral ties improved. The current state of New Delhi-Islamabad relations provides encouragement to the overall South Asian political milieu. There is hardly any denying that their bilateral ties have a bearing on the regional scene.

Undoubtedly, certain developments in the South Asian region early this year gave rise to speculations whether the political climate had worsened, causing some irritation in the area where the situation was broadly healthy in the preceding year. The postponement of the scheduled 13th Saarc summit for the second time and developments in Nepal marking the dismissal of an elected government definitely caused fissures in the region. India had then cited the Nepal situation and also security conditions in Bangladesh as reasons for being unable to attend the event.

Are we to emasculate our language to such a point that any word or phrase which might be considered difficult or elitist should be avoided? Certainly not. We would be at a nadir of linguistic expression unless we measure well with other progressive languages of the contemporary world.

The richness of any language develops from its history and its contact with other countries and their language and literature. It is high time we realise this.

**Syed Badrul Haque**

## EDITOR TO THE EDIT