

## Convene a special session of parliament

*It can be the starting point for consensus building*

**E**XPORT leaders of the garments and textiles sector have given a clarion call to Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to prevent recurrence of religious terrorism that rocked the country recently. Their desperate cry for a prime ministerial initiative is impelled by an apprehension that the nerve-wracking security jolts like those of August 17 portend loss of business unless we show sure signs of seeing the back of the problem.

Apparel exports fetch 78 percent of our export earnings and, in spite of the post-MFA quota phase-out, the garment sector keeps thriving, so that the sense of loss would be so much the greater if the new-found bullish trend in the business is even partially eroded due to any negative perception of our internal security scenario.

We share the sense of desperation, despair and urgency reverberating from the concerns voiced by the leaders of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) and Bangladesh Textiles Mills Association (BTMA).

Our own sense is that if the dangerously loaded, apocalyptic August 17 serial bombings cannot unite the political parties on the one-point national security agenda, then what will! We know that the several bomb blasts in the past should have provided enough motivation to the political parties to have addressed the rising spectre of ideological terrorism before it could grow into some kind of a sleeping but wily monster it has. If the early signals were heeded and a robust cross-party political will was forged, the extremist menace we face today would have been long neutralised.

It is never too late, and it's the prime minister's role that will play a crucial part in bringing about a bipartisan discussion on the issues thrown up by the countrywide bombings. There is a great need to begin on a clean slate by her, unstuck from the widely shared impressions that the ruling party had given no space to the opposition either in or out of parliament. The rules must now be changed from those of disengagement to that of positive engagement.

The parliament session is scheduled for September 8 and, surprisingly it is not stated to be exclusively devoted to the August 17 concerns. What we suggest is that a special session of parliament be held immediately on the question rather than waiting for what now is frustratingly intended to be some partisan blowing of hot air on floor of the House. This is the government's great opportunity to engage the opposition in parliament by convening a special JS session and assuring the opposition that they will be given more than their share of time to have their say.

## Intelligence agencies under microscope

*Depoliticise and reorientate the apparatus*

**I**n the wake of the record-breaking bombing incidents of Aug 17th much has been written and said about the performance of the intelligence agencies in Bangladesh. Our worst apprehensions regarding the misutilisation of our intelligence apparatus, driven more by parochial party, rather than national interest, expressed through this column, has been borne out by the views that emerged at a roundtable on the issue the other day.

The recommendations that came out of the discussion were nothing esoteric but are in the knowledge of the administration. What is lacking is the political will of those that are responsible to task and direct these agencies. It needs no elaboration that this was something that was woefully missing.

The fact that a national asset, entrusted with the task of ensuring our security, has been so brazenly employed for petty party interest is inexcusable, and the government owes it to the people to explain this. One wonders when will the political parties learn to distinguish between the party, the administration and the state. Party interest must never be equated with the national interest.

The intelligence agencies can only provide intelligence to the government. The decision on the subsequent course of action is entirely that of the government. There are reasons to believe that the reports of the intelligence agencies are not always given due credence, or do not find favour with the party in power since that might clash with its overall political and election strategy. Recent reports appearing in some newspapers confirm this view.

There is a large number of intelligence setups in the country. It is the responsibility of the government to both determine the priority of tasks as well as to coordinate their efforts and share their output. This is only possible if the government employs them without political bias, with the national security interest in view. Otherwise we are destined to suffer many more 17th August or even worse.

## Moderate Muslim nation?

DR ALAMGIR HUSSAIN

**O**VER the last decade, there had been scores of bomb blasts in Bangladesh, which have killed about 150 people. The preferred targets for such bombings have been movie theatres, entertainment parks and shows such as Jatras and village fairs, etc.

There has also been a new trend of bombing the opposition political rallies and meetings in recent times, notably the August 21, 2004 bombing of Awami League (AL) rally in Dhaka which killed 22 people including Ivy Rahman and another AL rally bombing in Hobiganj on January 27 that killed 5 people including the former finance minister SAMS Kibria.

There has also been bombing of Sufi shrines, including one in Sylhet

in which the UK High Commissioner to Bangladesh was hurt. On top of that there have been threats to many entertainment shows and festivals, and without heightened security arrangement, no such shows and festivals could be held anywhere in Bangladesh for some time.

Finally, there have been numerous death threats to secular thinkers and writers including targeted assassination attempts as happened to poet Shamsur Rahman and Humayun Azad.

These sorts of bombing across the country over the last decade clearly display a pattern typical of an orchestrated Islamic terror campaign, since the targets for these bombings are places and events considered sinful by the Islamic fundamentalists. And yet, the government has been in persistent

denial of the presence of any such terrorist groups in the country whilst innocent people continue to be killed on a regular basis in such bombings.

Most strikingly, the international community, including the United States and United Kingdom, fail to see any such terrorist activities in Bangladesh and label this country a "model moderate Muslim state."

On August 17, a staggering 450 bombs exploded synchronised across the country in an attack that shook the nation. Although the low-

intensity bombs killed two and injured over 100, but such a wave of bombing is unprecedented in the history of terror campaigns by the Islamic zealots anywhere in the world.

Does not this extraordinary bombing clearly say that the country not only harbours terror groups, but also that these groups are very widespread, well-organised, sophisticated, and capable of causing mayhem any time? Is the government still going to stand its traditional ground and claim that

there are no terror groups in Bangladesh? Not impossible, given the lack of responsibility our government has displayed towards the welfare of the nation and the citizens.

But not this time! State Minister in charge of Home Affairs Lutfuzzaman Babar conceded: "These are planned incidents. We had intelligence report(s) about such plan but that expired a few days back."

When there was intelligence report on plans of terror attacks of

such massive scale, why then the government has been in consistent denial of the presence of any terror groups in the country? This time, the government clearly does not have any way to deny the fact, given the massive scale of the bombing.

Is the government now going to wake up and do some cleaning-up work? One cannot be very sure of that. From the intelligence report(s) disclosed by the Minister, it becomes evident that the terror attacks were planned for August 15 -- the 30th anniversary of the tragic

and brutal assassination of the nation's founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family in 1975.

This fact points clearly to who might have unleashed this orchestrated campaign of countrywide bombing. The timing suggests that the perpetrators might be the defeated forces of 1971 war of independence. There is hardly any doubt that one of the main defeated force of 1971 was the Jamaat-e-Islami, which is part of the current alliance government.

In my opinion, it is unlikely that such a huge terror campaign could have been launched by fundamentalists in the country without the support, patronisation, or at least the knowledge of Jamaat. No other Islamic groups in the country have such considerable logistical and organisational capacity. It is under-

standably doubtful that the present government will crack down on these shadowy but menacing extremist groups.

Yet, for the sake of our nation, it is imperative for the government to exterminate these groups. Else the country is well on the march toward becoming a fundamentalist state.

And if that happens, the BNP will also not be saved from the ire of the terror of brutality. The nation learned its lesson in 1971 -- the memory of which is very vivid in the minds of our people. If we have to shed blood one more time at the hands of the obscurant adversaries within such a short time, that will not only be extremely unfortunate, but also will prove that Bangladeshis are a nation of simpletons.

Dr Alamgir Hussain is a researcher and freelance writer.

FOUNDER EDITOR

LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA WEDNESDAY AUGUST 24, 2005

## Keep the wolf far hence

*It can be the starting point for consensus building*

**E**XPORT leaders of the garments and textiles sector have given a clarion call to Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to prevent recurrence of religious terrorism that rocked the country recently. Their desperate cry for a prime ministerial initiative is impelled by an apprehension that the nerve-wracking security jolts like those of August 17 portend loss of business unless we show sure signs of seeing the back of the problem.

Apparel exports fetch 78 percent of our export earnings and, in spite of the post-MFA quota phase-out, the garment sector keeps thriving, so that the sense of loss would be so much the greater if the new-found bullish trend in the business is even partially eroded due to any negative perception of our internal security scenario.

We share the sense of desperation, despair and urgency reverberating from the concerns voiced by the leaders of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) and Bangladesh Textiles Mills Association (BTMA).

Our own sense is that if the dangerously loaded, apocalyptic August 17 serial bombings cannot unite the political parties on the one-point national security agenda, then what will! We know that the several bomb blasts in the past should have provided enough motivation to the political parties to have addressed the rising spectre of ideological terrorism before it could grow into some kind of a sleeping but wily monster it has. If the early signals were heeded and a robust cross-party political will was forged, the extremist menace we face today would have been long neutralised.

It is never too late, and it's the prime minister's role that will play a crucial part in bringing about a bipartisan discussion on the issues thrown up by the countrywide bombings. There is a great need to begin on a clean slate by her, unstuck from the widely shared impressions that the ruling party had given no space to the opposition either in or out of parliament. The rules must now be changed from those of disengagement to that of positive engagement.

The parliament session is scheduled for September 8 and, surprisingly it is not stated to be exclusively devoted to the August 17 concerns. What we suggest is that a special session of parliament be held immediately on the question rather than waiting for what now is frustratingly intended to be some partisan blowing of hot air on floor of the House. This is the government's great opportunity to engage the opposition in parliament by convening a special JS session and assuring the opposition that they will be given more than their share of time to have their say.

## Intelligence agencies under microscope

*Depoliticise and reorientate the apparatus*

**I**n the wake of the record-breaking bombing incidents of Aug 17th much has been written and said about the performance of the intelligence agencies in Bangladesh. Our worst apprehensions regarding the misutilisation of our intelligence apparatus, driven more by parochial party, rather than national interest, expressed through this column, has been borne out by the views that emerged at a roundtable on the issue the other day.

The recommendations that came out of the discussion were nothing esoteric but are in the knowledge of the administration. What is lacking is the political will of those that are responsible to task and direct these agencies. It needs no elaboration that this was something that was woefully missing.

The intelligence agencies can only provide intelligence to the government. The decision on the subsequent course of action is entirely that of the government. There are reasons to believe that the reports of the intelligence agencies are not always given due credence, or do not find favour with the party in power since that might clash with its overall political and election strategy. Recent reports appearing in some newspapers confirm this view.

There is a large number of intelligence setups in the country. It is the responsibility of the government to both determine the priority of tasks as well as to coordinate their efforts and share their output. This is only possible if the government employs them without political bias, with the national security interest in view. Otherwise we are destined to suffer many more 17th August or even worse.

## Moderate Muslim nation?

DR ALAMGIR HUSSAIN

**O**VER the last decade, there had been scores of bomb blasts in Bangladesh, which have killed about 150 people. The preferred targets for such bombings have been movie theatres, entertainment parks and shows such as Jatras and village fairs, etc.

Finally, there have been numerous death threats to secular thinkers and writers including targeted assassination attempts as happened to poet Shamsur Rahman and Humayun Azad.

These sorts of bombing across the country over the last decade clearly display a pattern typical of an orchestrated Islamic terror campaign, since the targets for these bombings are places and events considered sinful by the Islamic fundamentalists. And yet, the government has been in persistent

denial of the presence of any such terrorist groups in the country whilst innocent people continue to be killed on a regular basis in such bombings.

Most strikingly, the international community, including the United States and United Kingdom, fail to see any such terrorist activities in Bangladesh and label this country a "model moderate Muslim state."

On August 17, a staggering 450 bombs exploded synchronised across the country in an attack that shook the nation. Although the low-

intensity bombs killed two and injured over 100, but such a wave of bombing is unprecedented in the history of terror campaigns by the Islamic zealots anywhere in the world.

Does not this extraordinary bombing clearly say that the country not only harbours terror groups, but also that these groups are very widespread, well-organised, sophisticated, and capable of causing mayhem any time? Is the government still going to stand its traditional ground and claim that

there are no terror groups in Bangladesh? Not impossible, given the lack of responsibility our government has displayed towards the welfare of the nation and the citizens.

But not this time! State Minister in charge of Home Affairs Lutfuzzaman Babar conceded: "These are planned incidents. We had intelligence report(s) about such plan but that expired a few days back."

When there was intelligence report on plans of terror attacks of

such massive scale, why then the government has been in consistent denial of the presence of any terror groups in the country? This time, the government clearly does not have any way to deny the fact, given the massive scale of the bombing.

Is the government now going to wake up and do some cleaning-up work? One cannot be very sure of that. From the intelligence report(s) disclosed by the Minister, it becomes evident that the terror attacks were planned for August 15 -- the 30th anniversary of the tragic

and brutal assassination of the nation's founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family in 1975.

This fact points clearly to who might have unleashed this orchestrated campaign of countrywide bombing. The timing suggests that the perpetrators might be the defeated forces of 1971 war of independence. There is hardly any doubt that one of the main defeated force of 1971 was the Jamaat-e-Islami, which is part of the current alliance government.

In my opinion, it is unlikely that such a huge terror campaign could have been launched by fundamentalists in the country without the support, patronisation, or at least the knowledge of Jamaat. No other Islamic groups in the country have such considerable logistical and organisational capacity. It is under-

standably doubtful that the present government will crack down on these shadowy but menacing extremist groups.

Yet, for the sake of our nation, it is imperative for the government to exterminate these groups. Else the country is well on the march toward becoming a fundamentalist state.

And if that happens, the BNP will also not be saved from the ire of the terror of brutality. The nation learned its lesson in 1971 -- the memory of which is very vivid in the minds of our people. If we have to shed blood one more time at the hands of the obscurant adversaries within such a short time, that will not only be extremely unfortunate, but also will prove that Bangladeshis are a nation of simpletons.

Dr Alamgir Hussain is a researcher and freelance writer.

FOUNDER EDITOR

LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA WEDNESDAY AUGUST 24, 2005

## Convene a special ses- sion of parliament

*It can be the starting point for consensus building*

**E**XPORT leaders of the garments and textiles sector have given a clarion call to Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to prevent recurrence of religious terrorism that rocked the country recently. Their desperate cry for a prime ministerial initiative is impelled by an apprehension that the nerve-wracking security jolts like those of August 17 portend loss of business unless we show sure signs of seeing the back of the problem.

Apparel exports fetch 78 percent of our export earnings and, in spite of the post-MFA quota phase-out, the garment sector keeps thriving, so that the sense of loss would be so much the greater if the new-found bullish trend in the business is even partially eroded due to any negative perception of our internal security scenario.

We share the sense of desperation, despair and urgency reverberating from the concerns voiced by the leaders of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) and Bangladesh Textiles Mills Association (BTMA).

Our own sense is that if the dangerously loaded, apocalyptic August 17 serial bombings cannot unite the political parties on the one-point national security agenda, then what will! We know that the several bomb blasts in the past should have provided enough motivation to the political parties to have addressed the rising spectre of ideological terrorism before it could grow into some kind of a sleeping but wily monster it has. If the early signals were heeded and a robust cross-party political will was forged, the extremist menace we face today would have been long neutralised.

It is never too late, and it's the prime minister's role that will play a crucial part in bringing about a bipartisan discussion on the issues thrown up by the countrywide bombings. There is a great need to begin on a clean slate by her, unstuck from the widely shared impressions that the ruling party had given no space to the opposition either in or out of parliament. The rules must now be changed from those of disengagement to that of positive engagement.

The parliament session is scheduled for September 8 and, surprisingly it is not stated to be exclusively devoted to the August 17 concerns. What we suggest is that a special session of parliament be held immediately on the question rather than waiting for what now is frustratingly intended to be some partisan blowing of hot air on floor of the House. This is the government's great opportunity to engage the opposition in parliament by convening a special JS session and assuring the opposition that they will be given more than their share of time to have their say.

## Intelligence agencies under microscope

*Depoliticise and reorientate the apparatus*

**I**n the wake of the record-breaking bombing incidents of Aug 17th much has been written and said about the performance of the intelligence agencies in Bangladesh. Our worst apprehensions regarding the misutilisation of our intelligence apparatus, driven more by parochial party, rather than national interest, expressed through this column, has been borne out by the views that emerged at a roundtable on the issue the other day.

The recommendations that came out of the discussion were nothing esoteric but are in the knowledge of the administration. What is lacking is the political will of those that are responsible to task and direct these agencies. It needs no elaboration that this was something that was woefully missing.

The fact that a national asset, entrusted with the task of ensuring our security, has been so brazenly employed for petty party interest is inexcusable, and the government owes it to the people to explain this. One wonders when will the political parties learn to distinguish between the