

A price stabilisation move

Will it pay dividends?

THE government's decision to launch the biggest ever vulnerable group feeding (VGF) programme, which is intended to benefit 45 lakh people, comes at a time when the country is not grappling with any natural disaster, or its aftereffects. Furthermore, the government has opted for the open market sale (OMS) of rice, which, along with the VGF programme, will constitute a major intervention in the rice market. This is not to detract from the fact that the poor and the vulnerable do need feeding, though.

The government may have a two-fold argument in favour of launching the VGF and OMS programmes. First, the prices of rice are not dropping despite good *aus* and *boro* harvests. The prices still remain outside the reach of the poor. Second, many a miller or big farmer is resorting to hoarding. The millers have been benefited by generous bank loans and are trying to create an artificial crisis and make profit out of it. The underlying reason seems to be an anxiety that increasing prices is a political risk no government can trifle with when the elections are drawing closer.

But that which the government is trying to head off might creep in if the VGF programme on a scale that it is being envisaged is not steered clear of any partisan consideration which is perhaps raring to influence the enlisting of VGF beneficiaries. Since the country is not in the grip of a major disaster, or an economic emergency, the government decision could be interpreted as an overdose of intervention in the market. The administration has to allay any misgiving that the whole exercise was driven by political expediency.

The issue needs to be examined from the economic standpoint, as it is likely to have a big impact on the rice market. The decision-makers have to ensure that while the consumers are relieved of some pressure created by the rice price hike, the growers also get remunerative prices for their products. The point is particularly relevant, as the farmers had to endure higher prices of agricultural inputs including diesel this season.

The government intervention can produce the desired results only if the really needy are brought under the VGF programme and the OMS operation is efficiently carried out taking lessons from the past pitfalls in similar ventures.

Dhaka-Tehran ties

Iranian business delegation visit a positive step

THE trip to Dhaka made by a high-powered Iranian business delegation this week is an encouraging sign of the steady globalisation of commerce, and is precisely the kind of enterprise that both the private sector and the public sector need to be initiating. There are many potential synergies between our two economies, and better trade and investment relations should work to the benefit of both sides.

The Iranians are clearly very keen to further extend their hand of friendship across the South Asian region. Iran is already deep in negotiation with India to construct a gas pipeline between the two countries that would cross through Pakistan -- an initiative that has the blessings of both the South Asian rivals. This trip to Bangladesh underscores their commitment to further engagement with this part of the world, and should be welcomed by us.

As far as Bangladesh is concerned, the relationship with Iran is already good. We are pleased that Iran is one of the few countries in the world with whom we actually have a trade surplus. But things could always be better. It is estimated that the current volume of trade, between \$40 and \$50 million, could be increased ten-fold.

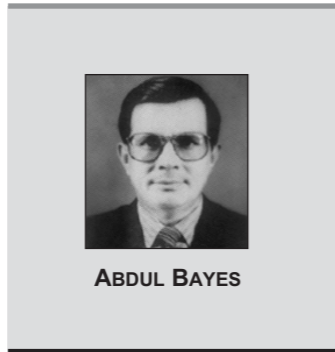
Iran is a rich potential market for Bangladeshi tea and ready-made garments. In addition the visiting delegation has made it clear that Iran is keen to make itself useful to our economy in any number of other ways as well.

For instance, the use of Bandar Abbas port to get access to the Central Asian nations is an attractive proposition. Similarly, setting up backward linkage industries to support the RMG sector would help us to improve the paltry 21 percent value addition that is the current norm.

The other way in which Iranian input would be welcome is direct investment and technology transfer. In terms of investment, the visiting Iranians have expressed interest in initiatives as wide-ranging as agro-based industry, food processing, poultry, dairy, fisheries, and livestock, to of course, oil, gas, and coal.

Not only would investment in these sectors be welcome, Iran can also bring to the table oil and gas exploration expertise and other advanced energy-related technological know-how. Similarly, heavy vehicle and textile manufacturing expertise could profitably be shared.

Acloser relationship with Iran would certainly be advantageous to us and we are glad to see that the private sector at least is pursuing this idea.



ABDUL BAYES

THE nation is going to witness a two-day long convention against terrorism starting from Tuesday, 30 August 2005. It is to be held at the Engineers' Institute and addressed by renowned social scientists. Eminent lawyer Barrister Rokonuddin Mahmud and civil society stalwart Abul Mal Abdul Muhit, along with others, are putting up their best to make it a success. We are told that the leader of opposition and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina will grace the occasion and would speak on behalf of those torn apart by terrorist attacks in recent times. Personally, I reckon that the concept of a convention against terrorism in Bangladesh is timely and quite in tune with the exigencies of the situation prevailing in the country at the moment.

There is no denying the fact that the spectre of terrorism has been haunting us for a long time. But,

perhaps, it is hitting us all the more heinously now than ever before. Back in 1975 on August 15, the nation witnessed the brutal killing of the Father of the Nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members. Unfortunately the killers of 1975 even emerged as healers for the nation in subsequent periods. Seemingly, "crime and reward" replaced "crime and punishment". A sense of feeling often embarrassed judges in

blasts was orchestrated to kill Sheikh Hasina. She, however, could escape by a razor thin margin but the attack cost 22 lives including Begum Ivy Rahman -- a front line woman activist in the country. Top ranking leaders like Abdur Razzaque, Obaidul Kader, Bahauddin Nasim and others groaned with injuries in hospitals for several days. The image of the country went down sharply. The world denounced the devilish act.

and large, secular and democratic forces faced the fire. The government as usual failed to bring the culprits to book. The law of the land lay lame to tame the terrorists. Bangladesh began to be on the brink of being bracketed as a terrorist spot.

Then came August 17 2005. Some 500 simultaneous bomb blasts in 63 districts at common points rafter pierced through the heart of the nation. Never in the

and trade communities expressed their deep concerns over a declining economic output.

The above mentioned episodes are tip of the ice berg, bone breaking though. Let us mark incidents of August 15, 17 and 21 as national catastrophes. But at local and regional levels, terrorism began traveling too fast since the assumption of power by the present coalition government. After the general election of 2001, terrorists

these forces are up to take us to a medieval age. Unfortunately for the country sections of the forces are alleged to be allies of the party in power. They are nourished and nurtured under the umbrella of "vote bank". Thus, we see no sign of an abatement of the ferocity in the near future if the calculus of politics continues to be so. Under the scenario, the nation can, perhaps, hardly expect a committed crackdown on these forces.

But people can do that. The nation needs to be on board a secular and democratic ship. The progressive forces of the country must unite to rise against the destructive forces. The ongoing movement of 14-party alliance needs also to be supported by other pro-liberation parties to face the extremist fundamentalist forces in the country. Awami League led a freedom movement to free us from the clutch of the Pakistan colony. This time, another freedom movement should be launched to free us from the clutch of criminals. May be a long way to go, may be more to mourn but definitely a destination is there.

On that score alone, the convention against terrorism can claim appreciation. Let us all be aware of the costs of terrorism for the nation and eke out the benefits through wiping it out from the society. We must win over the woes.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University

BENEATH THE SURFACE

Awami League led a freedom movement to free us from the clutch of the Pakistan colony. This time, another freedom movement should be launched to free us from the clutch of criminals. May be a long way to go, may be more to mourn but definitely a destination is there. On that score alone, the convention against terrorism can claim appreciation. Let us all be aware of the costs of terrorism for the nation and eke out the benefits through wiping it out from the society.

hearing this brutal murder case. The lukewarm attitude of the governments in ensuring justice, and an overall lack of justice in the society went a long way to encourage terrorism in the country. Bangladesh was apparently waiting on the wings to be listed as a terrorist spot.

The spectre of terrorism again visited us on August 21. It was a public meeting against terrorism organised by the main opposition party, Awami League. A gruesome attack through a series of grenade

But till now, none of the terrorists could be taken to task. It is being alleged that the party in power played dilly-dally to look for the criminals and arrange for their trial.

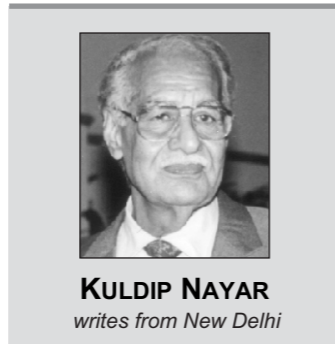
In between, barbarism through blasts boomed. The British High Commissioner was seriously hurt by a bomb blast in Sylhet. Eminent politicians Ahsan Ullah master MP and SAMS Kibria MP lost their lives on account of grenade attacks. Drs Humayun Azad and Yunus were killed by terrorists. By

history of any nation such an act of attacks has taken place. This time, government sources revealed that organised terrorist groups orchestrated the blasts. Whereas, the same government had long been denying the existence for such groups in the country. It had been shifting the blame on to opposition parties for tarnishing the image of the country. At international level, the image of the country reached the lowest ebb. Reportedly, foreign investors are flying away for fear of further attacks. Business

attacked minorities for their alleged alignment with Awami League. Males were manhandled and even killed, women were raped. Houses were burnt down and assets stolen. A reign of terror swept over whole Bangladesh and the waves of which does not seem to wane.

The growth and dispersion of fundamentalist forces in the country is, however, the main concern today. As opposed to a secular and democratic path of progress that our martyrs shed blood for,

Natwar's pride, neighbours' agony



KULDEEP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

AN obsession, magnificent or otherwise, is an obsession. It is an impulse that a person cannot escape. Foreign Minister Natwar Singh is overpowered by the idea that India must be on the UN Security Council. To him the membership represents the country's foreign policy.

First, he sent on government expense his retired colleagues to different countries to woo support. Then he approached practically every nation in Africa to line them up behind a formula through which he thought he would see India on the Security Council. Now there is hardly any statement he makes without talking about the membership. Naturally, the policy is big power-centric at the expense of neighbouring countries.

This may well explain why Natwar Singh had very little to say on some 370-bomb blasts in Bangladesh or the foreign minister's murder at Colombo. Even otherwise, he has a simplistic view of the world and does not want to face the sea change it has undergone since the end of the cold war

when he was a career diplomat. He has his mind set on the Nehruvian non-alignment, not realising that India's own credentials have come to be challenged after its defence "agreement" with the US.

The habit of living in the past has dulled Natwar Singh's reaction to the present. Otherwise, it is difficult to understand why he could not read the Bangladesh

two sides of the same coin.

The way to retrieve it is through economics. This has been always so. Wooden bureaucrats in India have seldom appreciated this point. The proposed visit of Industry Minister Kamal Nath is a step in the right direction. Why has India wasted so many years? And what is the guarantee that it has got it right this time?

Probably, India's make-up is

ance and killing if New Delhi had been seen moving towards integration. Whenever I met Kadirgamar at Delhi or Colombo, he would talk about his dream of seeing the India-Sri Lanka economic union coming true. Even now New Delhi has not learnt any lesson from his murder, more so from the civil war between the Sinhalese majority and a separatist Tamil majority. Since 1983,

ter's Office indicates that Manmohan Singh will himself supervise the peace process. It may be because of Natwar Singh's mindset or because Manmohan Singh and President General Pervez Musharraf have hit it off well.

In fact, Siachin, Baglihar, Kishen Ganga and Sir Creek can be sorted out at one go. There has to be give-and-take by both sides.

jointly, not on the basis of three rivers with one country and the other three with another.

I do not know how India is going to sort out the mess in Nepal. Here Natwar Singh had the correct instincts. He wanted the democratic forces, political parties, to be strengthened against the dictatorial King. But some retired army officers at Delhi seem to have influenced the government on the basis of their connections with the Gorkha soldiers. America's pressure to be on the side of the King may have been another compulsion with New Delhi.

It is obvious that both China and Pakistan are taking advantage of the situation. Their systems of governance are such that the democratic leeway does not fit in. India has to help Nepal's political parties which, however limited in vision, represent the voice of people. Natwar Singh should continue to support the democratic structure which will prevail in the long run.

My purpose of drawing attention to Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan is to make the Foreign Minister realise that membership of the Security Council is important but more important is the normalisation of relations with the countries around us. He cannot pursue his obsession at the expense of our neighbours.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Natwar Singh should continue to support the democratic structure which will prevail in the long run. My purpose of drawing attention to Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan is to make the Foreign Minister realise that membership of the Security Council is important but more important is the normalisation of relations with the countries around us. He cannot pursue his obsession at the expense of our neighbours.

situation when he was at Dhaka a few days before the bomb blasts. If he wanted to befriend the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), he should have moved earlier, not when the country's general election is due next year and when the BNP is keen to spread the impression of having good relations with India to win liberal voters.

What happened to Bangladesh was the writing on the wall. The rise of fundamentalism was inevitable when the Jamaat-e-Islami got credibility -- and opportunity -- after its two members were appointed ministers. The alliance between the two parties is so firm that religion and politics are the

such that it does not react to a situation until it explodes on its face. Sri Lanka has been wanting a complete economic integration with India for a long time. It is one country which does not see an "ugly Indian." But New Delhi is still drawing up a list of commodities which it cannot allow without duty and excise and which it can. It is a strange response to a country which is demanding complete economic integration.

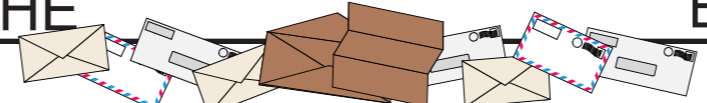
Had the process of integration begun, it would have spilled over to the political field by this time. Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar might have escaped murder. The LTTE might have changed its tactics of de-

more than 65,000 people have died. True, New Delhi burnt its fingers when it sent the Indian Peace Keeping Force to Sri Lanka in 1988. But conditions have changed since. The LTTE wants to have a settlement with Colombo. Both sides trust India. It must step in now to span the distance between the LTTE and President Chandirika Kumaratunge to consolidate Sri Lanka's unity.

Confidence building measures between India and Pakistan also need consolidation. Natwar Singh has been rightly ticked off. He has not been doing anything except crossing the t's and dotting the i's. The seasoned S. Lamba's appointment in the Prime Minis-

Pakistan should accept the Line of Control's extension through Siachin, a straight line as would have been drawn in 1972 between the commanders of the two countries. On the other hand, India should demolish at Baglihar, the structure which can be used to impound water. The Indus Water Treaty allows the use of run-off-water to produce power. But New Delhi cannot impound the river water allotted to Pakistan. In the same spirit the Kishen Ganga and Sir Creek can be solved. Natwar Singh should have done that. The Prime Minister may do it now because he is reportedly of the view that the entire Indus basin should be developed

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.

Genocide and UN

In 1948, the UN passed an act, also known as 'Genocide Convention', which came into effect from 1951.

According to this, any of the following action, when committed with the intent to eliminate a particular national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, constitutes genocide: (1) killing (2) causing serious bodily or 'mental' harm (3) deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to kill, (4) imposing measures intended to prevent births, and (5) forcibly transferring children out of a group.

Despite the very existence of this convention, genocide has been committed all over the world time and again. The UN should take a tougher stand on the issue to justify its rules.

Abu Raihan
South-Hall, CUET

National unity

When countries are attacked by outside forces or by forces within they often unite in their grief to work together. We saw this after 9/11 and 7/7. The government and opposition parties put aside bipartisan arguments and make decisions as one to help the citizens cope with the fear that will probably change their lives forever.

Bangladesh went through such an event. It is unimaginable that 459 bombs went off without notice in public near crowded areas. If the

culprits wished to do more damage they might have succeeded. This would be a wake up call for our Home Office to investigate how such a planned event went unnoticed. It is not the first time we have had bombings in Bangladesh. In most cases there have been greater number of deaths and many have been injured. But, even then the Home Office did not take these threats seriously and more often than not people have seen it as a new arena for political control and conflict.

But, this event was different because it clearly showed a rising feeling of a group of people who do not believe in country or people and who would go out of their way to instil fear. They worked against Bangladesh, against Bangladeshis, including our politicians and their families. One had at least hoped that we would see unity in such an atmosphere where the politicians would put aside their animosity and work towards a joint effort to enhance security.

Unfortunately, it is too much to expect. Instead of unity we have seen members of our opposition party pointing fingers at the other party and calling haral. It is not enough that movement and day to day living may have been stunted due to these bombs, they had to go ahead and completely stop businesses. This event instead of being a lesson for improving our infrastructure will be used in a blame

game without any benefit.

We have a problem in our country and its time we actually worked on it. The security within our country is a myth, the infrastructure available to our investigative agencies are probably sub par because after all they have not detected this bombing or the ones before that. At least they were able to detain many members who may be linked to the bombings and the group who have accepted responsibility. We hope our court systems will successfully and appropriately convict the culprits who have been caught. One could only hope that a proper example is set so that such an event does not take place or people would think twice about attacking our country and its people. We hope the media gets the proper opportunity to do their duty for the nation to investigate and report. There is nothing worse than living in fear and not getting all the detailed information in the news.

It is time for unity, not time for haral and not time to take part in the blame game.
Zeenat Z. Syed
UPS eDeployment

Voter list

A study of Washington based National Democratic Institute for International Affairs revealed that one out of twelve names in the voter list is erroneous in Bangladesh. The report is apparently authentic and

rational enough. A fake voter list is a threat to the smooth functioning of our nascent democracy. To conduct a fair and free poll a flawless electoral roll is a pre-requisite for any democratic country. We came to know that the Election Commission is going to revise the existing voter list to make it updated so that it can conduct the next national election smoothly. And for this our CEC has talked to myriad so-called political parties of the country to get their feedback.

So far we know the existing voter list of our country is very much flawed. Many sham names are incorporated in the list to rig the election. The mechanism to make the list accurate is not modern and the people who are assigned to do it are not well trained for such kind of work. The voter list must be updated urgently.

All the names of those who are dead should be deleted and all the eligible ones should be included in the new list so that they can exercise their voting right.
Molla Mohammad Shaheen
Dept of English, DU

What enmity?

For some of us politics in Bangladesh has always been a schizophrenic affair. Whenever any political hot issue comes into spotlight, we withdraw from patriotism (do we have much?) to form any conclusive opinion with casual

acquaintances and even with friends, leave alone comradeship in buses or other public transport. We go *schmaltz* (excessively sentimental) with our own respective party affiliation.

Observing the turn of events after the simultaneous bombing on the 17 August 22, 2005, it became quite obvious to everyone that a combined effort of various political parties should be a priority to tackle this grave situation. We are unable to do so for a very primitive reason - fear of a rebuttal of all our past enmity.

We may finally realise that political parties are only part of the system to uphold the sovereignty of a country, and not the other way round. Then - what enmity?
Sazzad Hossain
One-mail

Use peaceful tactics to stop BSF brutality

The Daily Star reported on 24 August 2005 that Motaleb (age 27, resident of Ailatali village, Haluaghat upazila, Mymensingh) was shot by the Indian BSF while he was returning home with his cattle on Monday afternoon, and that he died on the way to hospital.

Recently "Odhikar, a human rights coalition, reported that 328 Bangladesh civilians have been killed by the BSF in the last five years. Why is our Government allowing India to get away with

killing our people?

I am not advocating armed retaliation against the BSF. We need to maintain peaceful relations with India. We should adopt peaceful means to punish India for killing our people.

In fiscal year 2004-2005 Bangladesh imported goods from India valued at US\$1,800 million (Taka 12,000 crore). Probably about one million Indian workers are employed in the Indian factories to manufacture the goods we imported. By banning imports from India, we could make one million India workers unemployed, the Indian government simply cannot afford to lose a million jobs.

We urge the Foreign Ministry to issue an ultimatum to India. The BSF must immediately stop shooting Bangladesh civilians inside Bangladesh territory and they must agree to pay compensation to the families of the 328 Bangladeshis whom they have killed. If they do not agree to this, we should impose a ban on all imports from India.
Selim Kowser
House, 91, Road 7/A
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

'Private tuition in DU central library'

I have seen a write-up written by Mr. Imrul Hasan in your newspaper dated August 10, 2005 on private tuition in Dhaka University central library. The article stated that now-a-

day some students are using the library as private tuition center. And that's why the general students are disturbed. Thanks a lot for giving this type of important information.

I want to add something to this. That is the outer scenario of Dhaka University Central Library. It is seen that some students are playing cards, even gambling; pair of students (one boy one girl) apparently making romance! These are not desirable, too.
Md. Kamrul Ahsan
Borshola, Natun Bajor
Air Road, Sylhet

Communication gaps in the society

After the 500-bomb burst on 17 Aug, the ruling coalition regime is facing a crisis of confidence. Millions of families and citizens are suffering from an acute sense of insecurity, and all patriots are thinking about the future phase of the nation. This is the time of a transition, known or unknown. How far the situation is within the government's control is not yet clear. Uncertainty breeds doubts and no-confidence. Be blunt and clear.

The official reactions so far have been disappointing. The two major political parties have created a deep divide in the society for the last 15 years (if started much earlier), and 500 bombs in half an hour might create further complications. The priority today is not the erosion of

the vote bank, but retaining public confidence in the current regime.

What is the direction of the future path? Are we going to travel on an unknown and unfamiliar path? Confidence in political leadership is at the lowest ebb, as there is no consensus at the highest moment of crisis. Where are the true leaders to seek support and protection? It is high time for a change in leadership, or change in leadership mentality and approach, to save Bangladesh. Can't we unite to face the common crisis?

The 17 Aug demo is a grim reminder of a drowsing governance. Or, is it the outcome of certain compromises (not made public) which are not in national interest. The Prime Minister has to assert herself publicly and in the cabinet. If necessary the coalition setup may be reviewed. Each and every citizen must feel safe. What is on the menu?

The masterminds behind the blast have demonstrated that they cannot be brushed aside lightly. Today politics itself is in danger, not to speak of democracy, and human rights, and the different types of freedoms supposed to be enjoyed by the citizens or voters. Operation Rescue must be publicised quickly.
Insecure citizen
Dhaka