

When will the ACC start functioning?

Teething time too long for comfort

THE Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has taken nearly ten months to make up its mind about the number of staff of the now-defunct Anti-Corruption Bureau (Bac) it would like to absorb. The commission has decided to employ 50 per cent of the laid off officials of the erstwhile bureau.

Needless to say, adequate manning of an organisation is key to its functioning; more so, in the case of a statutory organisation like the ACC. The job of accomplishing this task cannot be an unduly lengthy process with the ACC, particularly when it was set up to contain corruption — arguably the number one malaise plaguing governance in Bangladesh. The ACC had inducted some Bac officials in June last, but could not finalise the whole list of the staff it wanted to retain from the bureau. There was, and perhaps still is, considerable disagreement among the ACC chairman and the commissioners, and between the commissioners, on the absorption issue. It is there that the commission has had its biggest starting problem.

Even its jurisdiction and sphere of activities have apparently not been defined clearly. The point was made clear when the ACC tried to probe the case of 'missing cars' under projects financed by our development partners. Its maiden venture into the sensational case proved to be a setback, as its jurisdiction was virtually challenged by the ministries concerned. Its organogram is yet to take shape and its procedures are shaky. Little wonder, the commission switched to a less committal course of corruption prevention, as was evident when it turned its attention to the ports and the NBR.

Importantly, the ACC has not yet finished sifting through the cases inherited from Bac so as to determine which ones amongst them they will pursue.

The way the organisation is evolving cannot but raise the question again: when will it start exercising its writ, or more precisely perhaps, when will it be enabled to get on with its mandate? The government, too, has a responsibility.

Katrina fallout issues

Tragedy compounded by governance failure

THE destruction of the city of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina and the accompanying massive loss of life has been nothing short of mind-boggling. New Orleans lies in ruins. It needs to be totally evacuated, and months will be needed before it is even habitable again. The cost of reconstruction is estimated to top \$100 billion. Even more chillingly, as the authorities go door to door and street to street to recover corpses, the death toll has climbed into the thousands, and may reach as high as 10,000, over three times the toll of 9/11.

But what is truly tragic about the devastation is how much of it could have been avoided or ameliorated. The first point to be made is that the abject failure of the Federal Emergency Management Agency did not occur by happenstance. The agency had been systematically neglected and disempowered by the Bush administration. The agency was headed by a political appointee, folded into the Department of Homeland Security, underfunded, and left to wither on the vine.

Disaster relief was made a low priority by the current administration. Money that was needed to shore up levees and provide emergency relief was diverted to tax cuts for the wealthy, and President Bush's selection of a crony with zero relevant experience to run the agency is evidence of his indifference to its mission.

The hurricane has also laid bare the fact of poverty in the US and its effects. Most of the victims who were trapped in the city could not leave. They had no money, no transport, and nowhere to go. Plans to evacuate them before the city flooded, and to rescue them after, were incomplete and inefficient. The heavily African-American make-up of the victims only serves to highlight the racial underpinnings of such poverty. It was mostly poor blacks who were left behind and not taken care of by the government.

The administration is already in furious damage control, attempting to minimise the political fall-out with an intensity it conspicuously didn't bring to the actual crisis. President Bush's policies, his inaction, and his self-serving statements that "no one could have anticipated" the devastation, all underline how important it is that there must be a true investigation to get to the bottom of how such a catastrophe could have occurred. The dead and dispossessed deserve more than a 9/11 Commission style white-wash that holds no one accountable.

In Bangladesh, we understand only too well the destructive power of nature, and our hearts and prayers must go out to America in its hour of need. The Bangladesh government has pledged to send \$1 million, which we applaud as a token of gesture, and it is indeed poignant to think that the US could perhaps have benefited in terms of logistical planning and rescue and relief operations from the lessons that we have learned through hard experience.

Is there more to August 17 than mere 'intelligence failure'?



Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN ndc, psc (Retd)

ALL the finger-pointing for the failure to detect, anticipate, or pre-empt the August 17 bombings has been at the intelligence agencies. Most commentators have laid the onus squarely at the door of the intelligence apparatus. Some have questioned the very justification of maintaining the large number of intelligence organisations when they cannot detect the chain of anti-state activities that culminated with, what some commentators term facetiously, the record-breaking number of bombings.

It appears that such an explanation is designed to gain some reprieve from having to explain to the public for the moment why the bombings could not be anticipated. Indeed, there was a failure to prevent the bombings, but was it entirely due to the shortcomings of the intelligence agencies? Was it organic to the agencies or did the lacunae lie somewhere else? Time has come to such a pass that the relevant authorities must clarify as to what was behind this failure

But, given the disclosure made by many of the arrested suspects of the August 17 blasts, as well as revelations in many press reports since, one finds it hard to continue to conform to the idea of "intelligence failure" that was the problem. In fact, many believe that there is far more to it than mere "intelligence failure," and there is persuasive evidence to support this view.

If there was intelligence failure, the natural corollary would be why

what they are designed for. And the fault cannot lie entirely with the agencies, those who direct and task them must also bear some responsibility for this failure. The outfit was clumsily used during the pseudo-democratic rule. Regrettably, even the democratically elected governments, claiming to reside within the democratic norms, have followed the tradition of utilising the intelligence set up for political ends, in some cases in an even more blatant way. Thus,

description, which is fairly well defined, but in the form of technical and trained resources as well as in the way that these agencies are directed and tasked. But many commentators would like to believe that the national intelligence apparatus is not quite as sloppy or incompetent as some have made it out to be. What is the basis of these formulations?

It is that — in spite of the inherent shortcomings of the agencies, the quality of its human resources that

group indeed exists in the country and we do not put it past their capability to conduct such an operation.

There is enough evidence following the developments since August 17 to believe that not all the intelligence agencies were in a state of inertness. A very in-depth six part serialised report, appearing in the DS from August 21-26, recounts the growth of the militant outfits in Bangladesh. It portrays how these outfits took roots in our

ground realities and address them as such that has a lot to do with what we endure today.

The frustration in the intelligence community is only natural when reports forecasting grave consequences of the sinister activities of religious extremists operating under the shelter of some religious NGOs are left to gather dust. Another article regarding intelligence brief, made out in 1999, demonstrates the sloppy manner in which a case with specific intelligence was handled that allowed the suspects to go free. Can one be faulted for concluding that either not much credence was accorded by the relevant authority to the reports, or that actions were not initiated as a matter of policy?

If one were to take a stock of all the reports on extremist activities that appeared in the press between August 18 and now, one cannot but conclude that not all the developments in this regard over the last decade can be attributed to the failure of the intelligence agencies. Indifference to agency reports has much to do with the situation that we are facing today.

While some may feel that "intelligence failure" is a good excuse, they would do well to remember that a good excuse is one that cannot be used over and over again.

The author is Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

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did the apparatus "fail"? It is a question that bears resemblance to those asked after 9/11. The committee that looked into the intelligence failure of 9/11 has put its finger on the operational as well as political reasons as to why the CIA and other intelligence apparatuses in the US failed to predict one of the largest terrorist operations till date. It is hoped that our government, while going into the roots of 8/17, would not neglect to secure all information to determine where and why the intelligence agencies had gone awry.

At the risk of sounding repetitive it has to be said that that our intelligence agencies have been used primarily for purposes other than

the intelligence apparatus failed to deliver when it came to the crunch.

There is common belief that those selected to head the top agencies were put there primarily on considerations other than merit or competence. Unfortunately, loyalty to individuals took precedence over any other consideration, much to the detriment of the nation. What the boss wanted to hear was more important than what he or she ought to have been told. Everybody was happy and the job was secure. Unfortunately, it was the nation and the country that was left insecure.

There is indeed the need to overhaul the intelligence agencies, but not so much in terms of their job

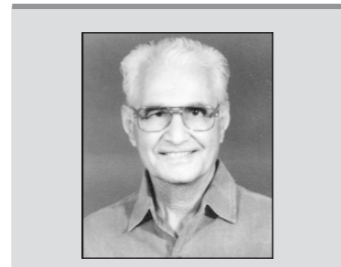
leaves much to be desired, the utter lack of technical support, and the poor direction that is predominated by political considerations — one finds it hard to accept that they did not get the wind of what these militants were up to prior to August 17!

While it is never possible to forecast the exact date or the type of operations a clandestine group would launch, inference drawn from collated information can give a pretty conclusive indication of the likely actions of any outfit, militant or otherwise. That is, if we actually have related information that we can convert into actionable intelligence, and more importantly, if we are prepared to believe that such a

rural areas, apparently unbeknownst to our law enforcement agencies. In fact, the Special Branch of the police had prepared a report in 2003, which laid out the details of the threat that these militant outfits were likely to pose to the state. Is one to believe that the leaflets that were being distributed by the militant organisations in some parts of the country in February and March this year escaped the notice of the policy planners?

It is therefore not so much to the lack of intelligence or timely reports that one can attribute entirely the rise of the religious outfits in Bangladesh. It is the apathy or the unwillingness on the part of the administration to accept the

What is going on in Iraq?



M B NAQVI writes from Karachi

WHAT happened in Baghdad on Wednesday, August 31 was sad and saddening. Death of a thousand persons in a stampede after three mortar attacks and a rumour is a terrible tragedy. It was not a natural calamity that has to be endured. There was obvious political intent of some force that had had mortars fired and then spread the rumour of there being suicide bombers present in the vast Shia crowd assembled in the Kazmieh district of Baghdad for religious purposes. Whoever he was, he was allowing his murderous malevolence to run riot.

Somehow Sunni attacks on Shia targets in present circumstances in Iraq do not make sense. Iraq's insurgency is all about getting the American occupation forces out. Given that the insurgents do not wish to see the political structures put up by Americans succeed, how is the present course calculated to achieve the objective of departure of US forces from Iraq? Since Sunnis have socially, politically, and economically dominated Iraq for the last 80 years and more, their elites must be credited with some political savvy. Are they displaying

it?

It is sad to see the communal leadership of Iraqi Sunnis adopt an unwise course in a grave crisis. Can no one amongst their leadership realise that provoking the large Shia majority can have devastating long-term effects in today's Iraq? It can kill the state of Iraq for good. Who can be so senseless as not to realise that the old order has finally gone; there is now no going back to Saddam, or

no point in pining for old privileges; they will never return.

The point is that the Sunnis are displaying political insanity. What they are doing is to provide Ameri-ships the excuse to stay on because of what they say is a bad security situation. If they had wanted to see the end of American occupation they should have patched up with the other forces in the country to put up working political structures — army, police,

bad blood between Shias and Sunnis is something newly contrived.

Remember that this insurgency against American occupation of Iraq was first started by the Shia stormy petrel Muqtada al-Sadr, and Sunnis joined it later. Sadr is, like Sunnis, advocating the rejection of the new constitution. Apart from other factors, these two instances show that there is no real political divide over dealing with

egy is to form a government, have a constitution and an army, and then ask the Yanks to go home by denying them any excuse to stay on. As for the Shia in him, Sadr is as strong an anti-American as any Sunni leader. If such sentiments are found among extremist Shias, even if many others are not "extremists," the political bases for an inveterate sectarianism would be less strong than is being put about. One hears more about the sectar-

- whose population does not exceed 20-22 per cent of Iraq's population.

What then is going on in Iraq? Zaqawi's Sunni militants targeting Imam Musi-i-Kazim's mausoleum and Shia crowd do not make sense. Why would they do it? Which of their real interests would be served? Whoever fired the mortars wanted to create bad blood among Shias and Sunnis. But the direct impact of lawlessness is that the ramshackle civilian arrangement, put together by the Americans, would become even more unviable. That can postpone American troops' departure indefinitely. How would that happen?

It is simple. Americans can say any time that this political construct has not worked. We will begin again. Why give the excuse of keeping peace and Iraq together for foreign military to stay on? The Jafari regime has taken nearly three years. Another experiment will take another three to five years.

Is it the desire of Mr. Zaqawi that Americans should permanently remain in Iraq on the plea of providing security to successive political structures that they will be forced to put up? Had they joined forces with Ayatollah Sistani, Kurd leaders, and their own moderates, the hardline Sunnis would achieve much better results for themselves through the creation of a smoothly working national government.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

PLAIN WORDS

Is it the desire of Mr. Zaqawi that Americans should permanently remain in Iraq on the plea of providing security to successive political structures that they will be forced to put up? Had they joined forces with Ayatollah Sistani, Kurd leaders, and their own moderates, the hardline Sunnis would achieve much better results for themselves through the creation of a smoothly working national government.

pre-Saddam, days, much less to the Ottoman Empire. They have to correctly assess the scale of change wrought by the Saddam regime's destruction and American occupation.

The best course for Sunnis, if they want to preserve Iraq as a state with national unity and integrity, would be in their making up with the Shias and Kurds. The disappearance of the Iraqi state would be disastrous for all Arabs. The only beneficiary would be Israel; it would be the removal of a major threat to their state's security. True, the Sunnis in Iraq are angry and frustrated. They have lost their socially and economically privileged position. But privileges at the expense of others last only while they last. Once social conditions change, old privileges are thrown out of the window. There is

and the rest of the bureaucracy. That and democratic provisions in a new constitution, would ensure equal citizenship rights for all Iraqis: Kurds, Shias, and Sunnis. That is the best to aspire for.

It is strange that so much sectarian violence is taking place in a society that was largely secular. It was ruled by a primarily secular and nationalist Baath party. No one can forget that Iraq was the most developed among all the Arab countries, and among its professional classes, all communities were represented. Moreover, Iraq fought an eight years long war with the Shia theocratic state of Iran with an army in which Shias outnumbered others. That army did not disintegrate in the war for eight long years. That showed the measure of social solidarity among all Iraqi communities. The present

American occupation to parallel the sectarian one; it is a political question and opinions on it cut across sectarian lines. International media's overplaying of sectarian divide from the very start is not accidental: all the official American and expert preoccupation was about Iraq's vulnerability to a three-way division among Shias, Sunnis, and Kurds, and with expectations of an eventual Shia-Sunni civil war.

Local Arabs (Shias) have blamed Americans for what happened on August 31. Shias are apparently the most politically satisfied section among the Iraqis. The extremist Shia faction led by Sadr was the first to take a strong Arab nationalist line, shared by Sunnis. So much so there were clashes between Sadr's militants and Ayatollah Sistani's followers. Is Sistani pro-US? His political strat-

egy divide from outside Arabists than either from Arabs or other people of the Middle East.

Sectarianism scarcely motivates politics on any large scale. Witness the tacit support that Iran lent to the Americans in their war in Afghanistan. It did not make any trouble for anyone in Iraq so far, despite a few American accusations that no one has taken seriously. Indeed, Iran maintained benevolent neutrality because its hated enemy, Saddam and the Baath, have been removed from the scene. Iraqis should welcome any successfully working arrangement in Iraq, provided only that helps write a democratic constitution and most other groups accept it. A Shia-Sunni reconciliation over an honest democratic representation to all communities would greatly be helpful to Sunnis -

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.

Student politics

I am a student of Dhaka University. Some days ago I came to know from one of my classmates what actually goes on in the name of student politics in the so called "Oxford of the East". He is from Chittagong and wanted accommodation in a hall. But when he went to that hall a student leader told him that he must attend the political meetings, demonstrations even if there is a class or an exam. So he had no other option but to find accommodation in a mess.

Every year the largest chunk of the budget is allocated to the education sector. But what is the use of it if politics goes on like this? It seems the political leaders of our country do not even have the ability to understand the importance of education.

Sharmin
Dhaka University

Most corrupt country

Our country has been termed four times consecutively one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Now after the countrywide bomb blasts, it may be regarded as a terrorist country as well in the eyes of the world at large.

Now the question arises, what are we heading for?
Syed Ashek Ahmed
EEE, RUET

Poverty and terrorism

Why Rangpur, Joypurhat, Kushtia, Naogaon are the breeding grounds of terrorists? And for whom is this 'wake-up' call?

If we look at it closely, it will be clear that from the very beginning our economy was weak and those parts of our country were the worst affected. Rangpur is known for its monga.

The economic crisis is the creation of our morally bankrupt politicians.

Our politicians pursued corruption, nepotism, vote-bank robbery, and violence at the cost of the nation.

We are a nation cheated by our own politicians. The problems that the country is facing now are the outcome of their self-serving policies and they alone can solve them. It's a 'wake-up' call for them, not for general people.

Abu Raihan
South-Hall, CUET

Poor press coverage

The Dhaka newspapers deserve appreciation for their detailed reports on the findings of the mobile courts against food adulteration all over the country. It is very unfortunate that the people of Chittagong have to find out such in-depth facts on the leading Chittagong restaurants/food shops from the newspa-

pers based in the capital. The Chittagong newspapers seem to have adopted a policy of "concealment" by not mentioning the names of the guilty establishments and their irregularities. For example, the leading daily newspaper of Chittagong, in its issue of 12-Aug, only gave the total amount of fines realised by the magistrate and no other details at all! Even though this one was a case of resisting the law-enforcers and even threatening the City Corporation representative! Is this intentional because the big food merchants also happen to be the biggest advertisers? Is this fair journalism? In order to crush such unholy 'nexus', the authorities should adopt a system of issuing a press release after each raid and make it mandatory for the media to print it verbatim.

It is the people's right to know. Otherwise, this section of the press should be held responsible as a party to the crimes committed by dishonest food sellers.

CNR
Chittagong

Saarc and Pakistan

Democracy is not a fault free system. But an imperfect democracy is still far better than military dictatorship or any other totalitarian system. Paradoxically, Mr. Khan (Chicago) wants a peaceful and democratic resolution of Kashmir problem but he thinks democracy is no good for third world countries and people are not ready for it. That shows how people contradict themselves without realising it. Mr. Khan's blanket statements about third world countries are incorrect and disrespectful towards the masses of third world countries. There are plenty of third world democracies that are functioning and taking deep roots into the traditions of those countries. I don't think people would appreciate Mr. Khan's poo-hooing their achievements. I have no doubt that many Pakistani people

would love to have a real democratic government than military people telling them what is good for the nation. Needless to say, President Musharraf has not wiped out all the corruption or looting from Pakistani society.

If democratic system is good for developed countries, why can't it be great for poorer countries? "What's good for the goose is good for the gander"! I truly believe in it!

No doubt that China has done great without being democratic but with the same breath many other communist countries like Cuba and North Korea have dismally failed. But the true Chinese potential will never be materialised until Chinese people are allowed to think freely!

Saarc is the only organisation that we have. It may not be perfect but it can be improved with sincere engagement of all the countries. We can easily stop talking to each other and fight for another 50 years, or do right by making the subcontinent a peaceful place.

Dev
Boston University, US

BCB election

It is really sad to see dirty politics getting involved in sports. How can eminent sports organisers be thrown out from the BCB committee in such a disgraceful manner?

I was also stunned to see some of the names in the committee who had never been involved in cricket.

A former cricketer
On e-mail

Give them helicopters!

It was interesting to see many eager ladies queuing up for applying to get nomination to become women MPs. While they had come to give interviews in support of their candidature all were talking to give away their lives for the betterment of the people particularly women in their constituencies. It was amazing to see so

many women of our country so eager to change our lives paying Tk 340,000 each (as quoted by one of the candidates). We should be proud of these ladies who are ready to pay to serve the country.

Then came the announcement of candidates' names the deserving were rewarded.

But their voice changed. Now they wanted tax-free cars to be given to them. How can they visit their constituencies if they don't have any vehicles? I have a suggestion here. The government should allow these would be selfless women MPs to import Tax Free Helicopters. This will enable them to reach remote places in their constituencies to offer their service.

I earnestly request to government to consider this proposal and suggest that the would be women MPs actively pursue this issue.

Amerul Haq
On e-mail