

Terrorist bombs again

Calls for an intensified crackdown on the extremists

BEFORE the memories of the August 17 bombings across the country could fade away, the attackers have struck again. The court buildings in Chittagong, Chandpur and Laxmipur were the targets yesterday with at least two persons dead and more than a dozen injured. Words are not enough to condemn this senseless, wanton act of violence, which once again exposed the vulnerability of citizens to terrorist designs.

The government, after some initial hesitation, launched a vigorous campaign to arrest the criminals in connection with the August 17 bomb attacks and new information have been emerging about the intent and linkages behind these. On the whole, there is apparently a strong government resolve to contain the wave of terrorism across the country.

But the latest attacks at three court buildings, at the heart of administrative seats have confirmed that the vulnerability exists and the zealots are quite determined to execute their lethal plans.

The intent was more insidious this time around and their modus operandi more sophisticated as the bombs were reportedly cleverly hidden within as innocuous things as books and geometry boxes used by children. This, if anything, is an indication of the special efforts the terrorists are making to ensure the success of whatever mission they set their eyes on.

Some of the attackers were caught by the police and local people which is a good break. It is expected that vital information regarding the terrorists will soon come out and the law enforcers will be in a position to identify the entire network behind the attacks.

The government's task is to intensify the drive against terrorism, and it certainly deserves the support of all and sundry, since the terrorists now pose a lethal threat to our very existence. Now the government has to concentrate fully on eliminating the menace that looks more and more dangerous with each passing day. It is time for the government to hit back hard. The media will fully support the campaign against such subversive activities.

Foreign Ministry clears the air

BDR chief had better refrained

AT last there is an attempt to clear the air of misunderstanding created by what was an unnecessary remark by the BDR chief. We hope that the foreign ministry's statement will help dispel misgivings in the minds of our neighbour.

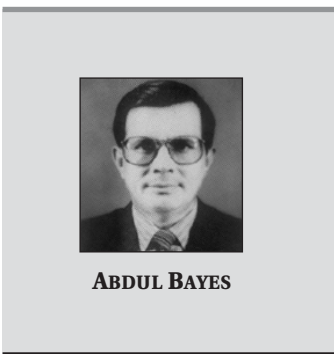
However, there are two points that we would like to make in this matter, both about the content of the statement and on the manner of communicating the position. First, on the context of the statement, the transborder criminal links to the August 17 bombings have been pegged on the arrest of only one Indian national who, reportedly, have been living in Bangladesh for more than a decade. The Indian police have arrested his brother, and this is what should be emphasised to our mutual advantage in netting the criminals and tackling trans-border crimes rather than making it a matter of contention between the two countries.

Second, insofar as the manner of conveying our position is concerned, it is clear from the foreign ministry's statement that what the DG BDR said at the press conference is very much the government position on the issue. That being so, was the DG BDR the appropriate one to convey our official position on such an issue? We feel that such matters should have been better left to those at the appropriate level, delivered only through diplomatic channel, after due deliberations. Even if the issue was discussed between the chiefs of the two border forces, a sensitive matter such as this should have not been articulated in a manner where there is always a possibility of various inferences being drawn from one's remarks. Thus we are constrained to say that DG BDR went much beyond his brief of the border conference and it complicated the matter.

Essentially, it needs to be said that both sides have taken steps recently to reverse the state of their relationship, which even the most inveterate optimist would have to admit was at a low ebb. The positive move was demonstrated recently in two very high level ministerial visits, the latest of which was that of India's Water Resource Minister, Mr. Priyoranjan Das Munshi, which witnessed very positive developments on water issues between the two neighbours.

We would like to see our relationship moving positively forward rather than getting bogged down in remarks made off the cuff. We must do everything to dispel any misgivings in the minds of the Indian leadership and reinforce the positive trends in Bangladesh-India relations that we witnessed recently.

Four years of false hopes



NOTWITHSTANDING the allegation that the general election was engineered in 2001, two of the most important promises that placed the ruling BNP-Jamaat alliance to power were: (a) the much avowed cut in corruption and (b) a frantic fight against terrorism. After four years of its existence in power -- October 1 was the day when the ruling alliance got to power -- one needs to evaluate the performances of the government pitted mainly against those two promises. Of course, we are not oblivious of other promises like raising standard of living of the people, democratisation of the society and meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) etc.

The fact that corruption during the last four years has not been reduced but raised to an unimaginable limit, is amply documented by the TTB reports. Securing first position -- and more so in successive years -- is always a point of pleasure. But when it amounts to corruption, it invokes severest pains to those who love Bangladesh. Despite the declaration during the election, the government miserably failed to contain corruption during its four years in power.

Especially, the complaints against some of the cabinet ministers and powerful political players within the party in power and the inactions thereupon could hardly be accepted on the heels of heightened expectations.

The second most important consideration was terrorism. Terrorism had gripped the nation more than ever before. The law and order situa-

tion deteriorated so much that the government had to create extra agencies to fight it. Operations of different variety underwent, allegedly, at the cost of human rights and a considerable number of people have been killed in the name of cross-fire. Had they not been killed this way, so runs the argument, the mentors of the criminals could be unearthed. It appeared that for the last four years, the government became captive of the guns and the goons. During the last four years, what the government seemingly fought well is not terrorism but its political opponents. The law enforcing agencies were directed more towards punishing political activists that stood opposed rather than taming terrorists. Needless to mention perhaps, the gruesome grenade attack on an anti-terrorism

ally led by Awami League and the subsequent killing of a number of leaders and workers pointed to the apparent failure of the law enforcing agencies. The killers of SAMS Kibria, MP and Ahsan Ullah Master, MP along with hundreds others are still to be hunted for and brought to book. One would suspect as it seems that sort state patronised serial killing took place in Bangladesh during the

corruption and terrorism in the country, the government seemingly failed to stand up to its election pledges. False hopes led to true hypes among the countrymen.

Coming to the question of raising living standard of the people, one is faced with a fundamental fallacy. The inflation rate perked the highest ever point during the last one decade. Hovering roughly around 8

developmental works on physical and human infrastructure, especially in universities, that were initiated during the last regime almost stalled. The Science and Technology Universities set up by the earlier government have not been treated well to face the upcoming challenges. All the public universities are faced with this or that scam and jam. Money and muscle appeared as important deter-

now the rate is 0.23 percentage point per year. At the present rate of reduction, it would take almost forty years to eradicate poverty from the country. Empirical evidences tend to show that over the years, people have been severely deficient in micro nutrients. The necessary conditions of meeting MDG goals cease to exist. For example, appropriate resource allocation and good governance are key to the attainment of the goals enshrined in the MDG document. On both counts, the government could not leave any praiseworthy records.

Most importantly perhaps, the country's image abroad has been tarnished severely over the years. In the 1970s, we were known economically marginalised a large portion of the population. Inequality of income increased over the period under review. By and large, once known as a secular and democratic society, Bangladesh growingly earned the wrath of an emerging country of fundamentalists. Some even tend to call it a failed state.

The four years of the current rulers, perhaps, taken us far back. But we need to march forward to regain our lost image. May be, many miles to go before we sleep. But we want to sleep in peace and in harmony. We expect from a government just that.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

The country's image abroad has been tarnished severely over the years. In the 1970s, we were known economically poor but rich in social and political programmes. The post independence government aimed at economic growth with a human face. By 2001, we have marginally grown richer in economic terms but poorer in terms of social and political status. By and large, once known as a secular and democratic society, Bangladesh growingly earned the wrath of an emerging country of fundamentalists.

last four years.

Further, a new development in the world of terrorism in Bangladesh also invited awe and indignation, home and abroad. That is the emergence of fundamentalist forces. Initially, the government denied their existence and blamed the opposition parties especially Awami League for tarnishing the image of the country. But subsequently, especially with the bomb blasts on 17 August across the country, the government has been making modest attempts to hunt for the goons. The message seems to be clear that a partner of the alliance in power might have close links with the recent bomb blasts but for a fear of losing vote banks, the government apparently moves half heartedly. Thus, on account of containing

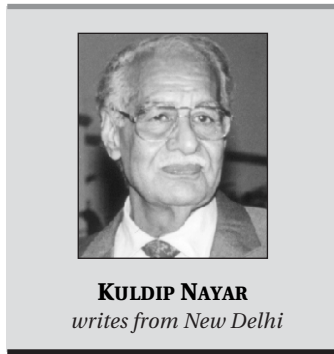
per cent per year, the soaring prices of essentials have already reduced people's real income. The price of rice, to take an example, that stood at Tk 11 just five years back rose to Tk.22 at present. The prices of non-rice food quadrupled on some occasions. Given the limited income and the distribution of budget share among items, it is the poor who have been facing more the ill fate over the period under consideration. In the absence of a similar rise in income, people find it hard to maintain their earlier standard of living. Unemployment rose sharply in the wake of closing down of quite a number of enterprises and lack of opportunities of employment generation elsewhere.

Education has been totally politicised during the last four years. The

minants of admission or employment in universities. Employment of political cadres in these institutions went to negate the very objectives of the institutions. The Education Policy of the earlier government -- adopted on the basis of discussions with stakeholders and made suitable for meeting the challenges of the 21 century -- was replaced by an Education Policy that mostly looked 40 years behind. By and large, if education is called the backbone of a nation then, suffice it to say, the nation's backbone has developed a serious injury during the last four years.

Bangladesh is one of the few developing countries which performed miserably in meeting the MDG goals. During the last government, poverty had been going down at 1.3 percentage point per year but

Diplomacy at gunpoint



WHEN interests come into conflict with policies, the latter suffer. Something like that happened to India at Vienna where it voted against Iran at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to ensure the supply of civil nuclear reactors and their technology from America and Europe. New Delhi said goodbye to its traditional non-alignment. Tehran did not lose a minute to express its "unhappiness" over India's voting. It was protesting against the violation of its own interests. However, Iran preferred to stop at that and did not go beyond to cancel the proposed gas deal as was the verbal warning by Iran's ambassador at Vienna.

Whatever the explanation, New Delhi acted under pressure. It had in mind America's legislation to accommodate India. The US Congress had made it clear before the voting at the IAEA that its response would be dependent on how New Delhi voted. It was diplomacy at gunpoint. In a similar circumstance, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru

would have acted differently. Although India was weak, he challenged the UK and France when they tried to capture the Suez. He saw to their withdrawal. But Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is no Nehru and Foreign Minister Natwar Singh is only a babe in the woods of diplomacy. They had no gumption to stand up to the almighty America.

I suspect that Manmohan Singh

energy to make up for the loss of civil nuclear reactors goes without saying. But India did not want to displease America. However, it came as a relief when the IAEA's resolution did not suggest that Iran would be straight-away hauled up before the UN Security Council. This gave New Delhi a leeway. It could officially say that it had taken a "midway" stand to push diplomacy and dialogue as the way to

not found, has made the world wary. It would exhaust all peaceful avenues before punishing Iran. It should feel doubly assured because New Delhi would support it if Tehran has nothing to hide in the field of nuclear proliferation.

Tehran should realise that New Delhi stood by Iran through thick and think for decades. Maybe, it appreciates this because Iran's

BETWEEN THE LINES

India's problem is that it is trying to ride two horses at the same time. It wants to project the image of being non-aligned while recognising the advantage of siding with America. Even non-alignment has a question mark against it. Non-alignment can mean values but self-interest spells disaster to ideals. India has no heart for the sacrifices such a course demands. The voting at Vienna was a challenge. That India did not come out well was because it could not afford to annoy America although it knew that New Delhi would hurt Tehran in the process.

assured India's vote when he met President Bush at New York at the latter's initiative. It is clear from Bush's observation that "Prime Minister is a good person. We can do business with him." Natwar Singh met US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice only to confirm India's decision. Even before Manmohan Singh and Natwar Singh left New Delhi, the government seemed to have decided to side with America in the face of outbursts like the one made by Republican Congressman Tom Luntton that nuclear power reactors would be available to India on the condition of "reciprocity" to isolate Iran.

That Tehran would have given New Delhi more gas to produce

find an amicable solution. New Delhi also said that it supported the European Union's resolution which gave time to Tehran to establish beyond doubt that its nuclear programme was only for peaceful purposes. Still at the back of India's mind was, as Manmohan Singh said, that it did not want another nuclear state in its neighbourhood.

The fact that the matter has not yet been referred to the Security Council indicates that some way would be found to allay the fears of Iran on American attack. Europe has ruled out a war. India too would put its foot down if ever the situation came to such a pass. Probably, America's unilateral war against Iraq, even when weapons of mass destruction

embassy at New Delhi has officially stated that the friendship does not diminish by one act, however dislikeable. Iran has assured India that the gas deal held good, the supply of which is to begin in 2009. It goes without saying that New Delhi will go on trying that Iran is not a target of America which has its age-old policy to draw it out for war.

True, Tehran is "very disturbed" over India's voting. It said that it could not imagine that a founder of the non-aligned movement could vote against another member nation. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the world has become unipolar where the neo-conservatives of America lay the law. They are power crazy and brook no dissent. India has

that the values were sacrificed but many will agree that Pakistan had to save itself from destruction.

I do not want to labour on the point that India and Iran share a culture which goes back to thousands of years and that their relationship is age old. These things will remain whatever the voting at Vienna or Iran's reaction. Saadi's Persian poetry will not become something foreign to Indians, nor will our music, dance and architecture be lost on the Iranians. These ties of emotions will never weaken. The current period is testing, indeed.

Even otherwise, tit for tat is not a mature reaction. It is definitely not called for New Delhi which has a long record of its unstinted support to

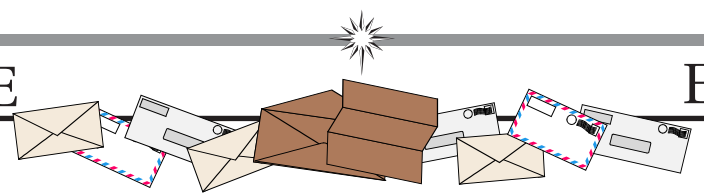
Tehran despite all the pressure. A principle cannot be stoutly defended by the language of 'no' or by condemning those who do not accept it. This is an old approach of the bigoted aspects of some countries. It is not the approach of feeling that perhaps others might also have some share of the truth. I find this approach wholly unscientific, unreasonable and uncivilised, whether it is applied in the realm of religion or economic theory or anything else. I am glad that Iran did not act hastily. It should wait for the next step and see how the IAEA resolution takes shape.

India's problem is that it is trying to ride two horses at the same time. It wants to project the image of being non-aligned while recognising the advantage of siding with America. Even non-alignment has a question mark against it. Non-alignment can mean values but self-interest spells disaster to ideals. India has no heart for the sacrifices such a course demands.

The voting at Vienna was a challenge. That India did not come out well was because it could not afford to annoy America although it knew that New Delhi would hurt Tehran in the process. The belated reaction of Iran to underline the friendship between the two countries indicates that Tehran is conscious of New Delhi's predicament. One expects that from friends.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



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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.

Dr. Ahmed's reply

As a journalist I am never offended if someone writes a letter disagreeing with me. But the letter by Air Cdre Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury (Retd.) published in The Daily Star on September 30 viciously attacks me personally.

If a letter writer claims to quote from articles of mine that were published in The Daily Star, the quotes must be correct. Cdre Choudhury's quotes and insinuations are malicious and wrong.

Although I do live in the Princeton area, you coined the byline "Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton," I did not. This is certainly not "to mention that he is from Princeton; the idea is probably to impress the readers with his Ivy League connections," as Cdre Choudhury puts it. How these personal attacks have anything to do

with my column I have no idea!

He criticises me for introducing "his nephew who became the second Rhodes Scholar of Bangladeshi origin; Dr. Ahmed being the first." Once again this is incorrect. In my January 2005 piece I congratulated Sabeel Rahman, who happens to be my kid cousin, not my nephew, on becoming the first Bangladeshi American Rhodes scholar. I was the first "East Pakistani" to win the Rhodes scholarship. You know that I am far too classy to, and never did, say anything like, "Dr. Ahmed wondered why the natives were complaining of high costs of living when things were so cheap and a journey by rickshaw cost only few cents" as Cdre Choudhury accuses me of. He continues with his lies: "Once he even gave some tips to Tiger Wood on how to improve his golf swing although he

admits never to have hit the golf green."

First of all, it's Tiger Woods, not Wood, and I am not that stupid to offer probably the greatest golf player ever tips. All I said was that experts agreed that he should go back to his pervious swing coach. And of course I could never have said that I admit to never hitting the golf green, because I have played golf. In the second paragraph of the letter Cdre Choudhury says of me, "He argues that the signatories, all except one from New England states, had eyes on Bangladeshi vote bank." Please check my article published in The Daily Star on September 23, and you will see no mention of any "vote bank."

Cdre Choudhury makes things up and then accuses me of having said those things!

Fakhruddin Ahmed

One-mail

What is the ACC doing?

We appreciated the formation of an Independent Anti-corruption Commission headed by one Retd. Justice, to eliminate corruption. But the Chairman of the newly formed ACC might have been threatened by some top bureaucrats for issuing urgent notices to all secretaries of the Bangladesh government to furnish the whereabouts of the newly purchased twenty six thousand government vehicles, which had apparently vanished into thin air.

This was disclosed by the print media. All the secretaries concerned might have been suspected of having a role in it, and thus till today there has been no further queries on the missing costly vehicles.

The swindler group in the bureau-

cracy might have formed a syndicate for destroying all records of those vehicles and thus all the government vehicles have been lost. After the disclosure of the facts the nation as a whole was stunned at the extent of corruption in the ministries. We being the law abiding citizens and tax payers of this developing country would humbly draw the kind attention of the Honourable Prime Minister to be very strict and ensure that the government employees and officials responsible for the large scale plundering of national assets do not go unpunished.

Besides, the ACC should be empowered to take necessary steps against the corrupt gang of officials, whoever they might be.

Peerzada Syed Rofiqul Hussain
Hiala shahe bari
Habigonj

Allowance, VGF cards and stipends

For sometime now, our government is giving old age/widow allowance to some poor aged persons and destitute widows and also issuing VGF card to help mitigate the sufferings of the poverty stricken people. It is also offering free primary education and stipend to students.

There are no prescribed rules, regulations and procedures for granting of old age/widow allowance, issuance of VGF card, free primary education and students' stipend and, as such, many deserving men, women and children are being deprived of the financial help and assistance which our government has allotted and made provisions for the needy and destitute people. And so it is alleged that the government fund is being misused and misappropriated.

We strongly demand of our government to let the members of the public know clearly the procedures, rules and regulations and to streamline the grant of old age/widow allowance, issuance of VGF card, free primary education and stipend for students without further delay.

OH Kabir
Dhaka-1203

Listening to the radio

Listening to the radio is not a very popular habit these days. But I find it has its unique way and place in life.

Radio is not as demanding to one's attention as TV. The listener can switch attention between the radio and some other things at will. He might be all ears at the news of Iraq war, and then go back to his studies keeping an ear open for cricket news. Since radio does not overwhelm

one's senses, a person can easily conduct other activities simultaneously driving for example. So the radio should have its due place in our lives.

Ashish Ahsan
Uttara, Dhaka

Fanatics strike again

The bomb attacks in three places yesterday should be the final reminder of the fact that we are living with a great menace--the religious fanatics.

The government should have no more hesitation to admit that everybody in this society is now threatened by the fanatic elements.

It is time to stand up to the challenge.

Mansoor Raja
Dhaka