

## Behind the cancelled political intelligence office



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

the mode and manner of gathering it. Coming to specifics, how much of surveillance of constitutionally-oriented political parties should be necessary in public interest? How do we prevent the dilution of State and government interests that has so often derailed our intelligence outfits from their real job?

It may be relevant to point out that our constitution narrates eloquently our national interests. It says that the aim of the state is to

our real national interests.

If we delve into the past we will be confronted with shamefully unpleasant facts. In the not-too-distant past we had the unpalatable experience of witnessing a very sensitive intelligence organization working principally for the whims and caprices of a virtual dictator and using public funds for creating and destabilizing political parties, political horse-trading and shadowing people on personal and flimsy

scenario, professionalism becomes the worst casualty, sense of direction is lost, and the organization dips into a lackadaisical environment and interests of the state take a back seat surrendering greater space to partisan considerations. It is needless to say that the values of a democratic polity are universal and as such demand unconditional adherence to it.

Bangladesh polity is now challenged by hostile groups that pro-

striving to achieve should be an advertised fact.

The most serious occupational hazard in the intelligence field is prejudice. While we are all creatures of prejudice, we must be able to avoid bending of facts obtained through intelligence to suit or defeat a particular political viewpoint.

We have to admit that we are not really at peace with the so-called religious extremists because they have declared war on our system of government and life. The reality is that we are faced with a closed, conspiratorial and scheming enemy. We cannot hope to maintain our position securely if our opponent is confident that they can attack us at the time and place of their choosing and without any forewarning.

In the last analysis the most important safeguards lie in the character and self-discipline of the leadership of the intelligence service and of the people who work for it--on the kind of men and women on the job, their integrity and their respect for the democratic processes and their sense of duty and devotion in carrying out their important and delicate tasks.

Our intelligence organization needs to work under pragmatic political leadership and if properly and professionally steered, it does not threaten our liberties. If we operate by the book, we will be adequately informed of the perils which face us. If we do not know the designs of the so-called religious extremists, then we could well be isolated and our liberties, too could be in jeopardy. Therefore, we must be ready to deal with all aspects of the not-very-visible war of the bigots with all its ramifications and fronts, supported by external resources. The last thing we can afford to do now is to put our intelligence in chains. Its protective and informative role is indispensable in time of unique and continuing violence in the name of religion.

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## STRAIGHT LINE

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realize the democratic process in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality and justice, political, economic and social, will be secured for all citizens. It further affirms that it is our sacred duty to safeguard, protect and defend this constitution and to maintain its supremacy as the embodiment of the will of the people of Bangladesh. It categorically states that the constitution is, as the solemn expression of the will of the people, the supreme law of the Republic.

The above constitutional stipulations have been highlighted because apparently the mission and strategy of our crime fighting and intelligence organizations had not been stable at least in so far as the domestic threat scenario is concerned. It is felt that those have invariably substantially altered with the change of a political government. One may not be far from the reality to say that it has been our unfortunate experience to witness the differing political agendas often clouding the pragmatic understanding and appreciation of

grounds. No wonder in such a scenario the professional efficiency was sacrificed and public servants turned into personal servants with the attendant ignominy.

One has to remember that ensuring internal security is closely associated with the task of collecting and collating intelligence in the interests of the state. In reality, in our situation, the interests of the state often get diluted and mixed up with the interests of the government of the day. The situation is marked by an unfortunate lack of understanding and appreciation of the requirements of the state and the government in a democratic and pluralist society like ours.

The unpleasant truth is that intelligence agencies maintain file and shadow the leaders and workers of pronouncedly constitutional politics-oriented parties belonging to the opposition who are recognized partners in the business of politics. At some point of time when such opposition party comes to power, there is an uneasy relationship between the political bosses and the agencies. In such a

less a philosophy of life and of government inimical to our own. In fact, we are now facing an adversary who are armed enough to commit widespread violence. In our free society while our defences and deterrents are largely prepared in open fashion, our new antagonists have succeeded in building a formidable wall of secrecy and security. So, to bridge the gap and warn ourselves in time, we have to rely more and more upon our intelligence operations. There is a need to break through the shield of secrecy of the bigots. The special techniques which are unique to secret intelligence operations are needed to penetrate the security barriers of the extremists' outfits.

Our preparation to combat the extremists cannot wait for evidences of the likelihood of further hostile acts against us. We should, therefore, be forewarned and forearmed. The act of forewarning could itself constitute one of the most effective deterrents to the bigot's appetite for attack. Intelligence should not be a tabooed subject. What we are

## Traffic congestion: Does it defy solution?



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

indiscriminate parking are some of the hazards contributing to unusual delay in the journey from anywhere to anywhere of the city. Commuting in the city is almost like buying a one way ticket to hell. Mass transit system perhaps a way out. No doubt it costs a big fund but big cities are opting for it. In India, Kolkata has a metro rail and Bangalore and Jaipur are planning 'light rail transit systems' that will have electrically

wheelers is growing at a breathtaking pace. The total number of vehicles on the city road is about 7.5 lakh, at least five times the number it was in 1990. The weight of freight moved on the city roads in recent times has jumped at least 50 times in this period and the number of passengers leap-frogged 70 times.

The major cause of congestion and road jam can be attributed to lack of judicious land use or city's

technology of the ubiquitous road roller has also changed. The discovery -- that a vibratory motion introduced in the wheels helped compact fresh bitumen better -- has meant that roads last much longer. Most road construction companies now have such rollers on their fleet.

What is most shocking, none of the utility organizations like DCC, RAJUK, WASA or Titas Gas has any coordination in its plans. To

although their speedy trial and punishment are still a distant dream.

It hardly needs to be told that smooth, wide and motorable road connection would kick-start the economy, create jobs, increase business activities and enable phenomenal savings in fuel and cut loss in man-hour. Notwithstanding the fact that this sprawling metropolis is a city of dreams for many, yet for those inhabiting this capital it often becomes a city of nightmares. The nightmare is manifested by the mind boggling traffic jams and shortage of mass transportation made worse by the extremely poor condition of the roads plus piles of debris, rubbishes, wastes, bricks and pebbles blocking transportation services and pedestrian movement. There is virtually no care taken of city roads but strictly speaking maintenance holds the key to a road's structural quality and therefore its capacity to withstand traffic and ease congestion.

There is no doubt that road sector is most eligible to kick-start the economy. With immediate measures to ease traffic congestion, widening of the city roads as well as maintaining them in the proper condition, the gains will far outweigh the cost. Annual savings on fuel, spare parts and vehicle maintenance will be substantial. Trade would get a fillip as travel time is expected to be reduced by 50 percent. Yearly savings due to fewer accident and damage to property will be several crores of taka. The earlier government agencies, City Corporation and other utility organizations realize the path to growth the better.

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## BITTER TRUTH

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driven rail carriages plying on raised platforms. In the present catastrophic situation that baffles and bewilders citizenry every day, the capital planners might think of introducing "high speed tram network" that would ply from one end of a flyover to the other on its designated side without creating traffic jam. If efforts are taken up to introduce mass transportation through withdrawal of taxicabs, tempos and minibuses carrying fewer than 30 passengers from the main roads, there could be some easing of the traffic congestion.

Other than the influx of new cars that are hitting the road everyday, there is huge increase in the number of rickshaws, most of which, allegedly unlicensed and covering 21.9 sq ft per person compared to one third of the space for a bus passenger. This unrelenting increase in the number of rickshaws has further added to traffic jam and congestion at busy intersections like Mohakhali, Farmgate, Sonargaon, Gulistan, Hatkhola, Green Road, Elephant Road and Dhanmondi crossings. On such busier intersections and in at least 10 rail crossings in the city, vehicles are caught in traffic snarls that often last 30 minutes at a stretch in one location. Other than being late in offices, workplaces or any scheduled appointment, mental disgust, exhaustion in these hot summer days and loss of effective man hours is a colossal drain on the resources for the whole nation. On the 220 km road space covering 340 sq km city area from Narayanganj to Savar, the volume of buses, trucks, cars and three

scarce road space. Transportation plan in big cities are done through appraisal of 'travel demand management' that aims at reducing trips in congested parts of the city. This important tool aims at reducing the impact of traffic by influencing people's travel behaviour. TDM can be achieved through growth management, road pricing, auto-restricted zones, parking management, ride sharing (car pooling), alternative working hours (staggered hours, flexible time, compressed work week). In Dhaka city, it seems there is no parking policy in force. With road space blocked by a fleet of cars on both sides along commercial buildings and business centres at Motijheel, Gulshan, Banani, Dhanmondi, New Market, Hatirpool and Elephant Road, traffic movement comes to a grinding halt causing unceasing congestion.

City roads constitute less than 10 per cent of the country's road network but carry as much as 50 per cent of the vehicular traffic. With such an overload, maintenance naturally is a nightmare. The problem, as such, is posed by the rapid deterioration of the road-top or the macadam which is stingily laid. With advancement in technology, road engineers are looking for economic ways of road repairing. One technique is this: instead of just spreading a fresh layer of bitumen, the existing layer is recycled. Bitumen trains, as these are known, scrape off the old layer, assess how much reinforcement is required, add the stuff and re-lay the road. This way almost 30 per cent of the cost can be saved. Meanwhile, the

## 'Siam' -- not simple self-denial

KAZI AULAD HOSSAIN

THE grand edifice of Islam stands on five very strong pillars (Rokons) viz: (1) Kalima (faith), (2) Salat (daily 5-time prayer), (3) Siam (fasting), (4) Hajj (pilgrimage) and (5) Zakat (the poor's due). Fasting or Siam is, therefore, one of these strong pillars. Siam is an Arabic word which means fasting, abstinence from food and drink. But when considered from the point of view of Islamic terminology the connotation is something more, something broader.

In Islam, Siam is not simple self-denial, nor it is self-torture. If a Muslim, affluent by standard, restrains himself from food and drink for certain hours every day for a period of 30 days, and simultaneously does not glorify his Creator Benign Allah Who has conferred on him innumerable gifts, and as a supplicant does not supplicate Him during this holy month of Ramadan for his guidance so that he can, in the very words of Almighty Allah "walk in the right way", then his fasting is of no use to him. Such a fasting person has not been able to appreciate, according to the commendation of a commentator of international repute Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali, "the full lesson of self-denial by fasting".

Yes there must be complete abstinence from food and drink for certain hours every day during the holy month of Ramadan, but unless such abstinence is coupled with glorification of and supplication to Almighty Allah, and also for moral and spiritual uplift, then such self-denial is like a shell without kernel or a rose without scent.

I may quote here what Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali has said while commenting on Ayat (Verse) 184 of Sura (Chapter) Al-Baqara (The Cow) relating to Siam or fasting. He says: "Muslim fast is not meant for self torture. Benign and Bounteous Allah is very considerate for in the said Ayat 184, He also says Fasting for a number of days but if any one of you is ill or on a journey, the prescribed number (should be made up) from days later. For those who can do it with hardship is a ransom i.e. feeding of one that is indigent. But he that will give more of his will is better for him. And it is better for you that ye fast, if you only knew it."

According to a prize winning book "Ar Raheeq Al Makhlut" (The Sealed Nectar) written by Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mosourpuri, the exact date of the revelation of

first five verses of Sura Alaq of the Holy Qur'an is Monday 21<sup>st</sup> Ramadan night 610 AD with Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) exactly 40 years, 6 months and 12 days old. "We know during this holy month of Ramadan ("the month of heat") it was the usual practice of Muhammad (pbuh) to retire to cave Hira of the Mount An-noor for meditation and it was on the aforesaid night that the said Sura was revealed unto him by Almighty Allah while the revelation continued for a long period of over 22 years (610-32 AD).

It may be mentioned in this connection that the following Ayats of Sura Alaq moved and overwhelmed the Prophet (pbuh) for proper preservation of the holy Qur-an:

- (i) "Read in the name of thy Lord Who created"
- (ii) "Who created man from something which clings"
- (iii) "Read thy Lord is the most Noble"
- (iv) "Who teacheth by the pen"
- (v) "Teacheth man that which he knew not"

In this connection we may also recall here that while eulogizing the first Revelation during Ramadan a renowned scholar Professor Hamidullah has opined in the introduction to his French translation of the holy Qur-an that

one of the themes of the first Revelation "praise of the pen as a means of human knowledge" would explain the holy Prophet's concern for the preservation of the holy Qur-an. The inevitable result was that the Prophet (pbuh) who had a wonderful power to memorize the Qur-anic Ayats as and when they were revealed unto him, asked his companions ("Sahabis") including his Private Secretary also to memorize and write down the Ayats.

Again, the holy month of Ramadan is dear to the Muslims because like the Journey by Night (Shab-e-Miraj) and Shab-e-Barat (the Night of Salvation), Shab-e-Qadr, or the Night of Honour is also very important to them. Mentionable, on the 27<sup>th</sup> night of the month of Ramadan, Shab-e-Qadr is observed by the Muslims all over the world with due solemnity and fervour for, Almighty Allah says in His noble Qur-an, among other things, "And what will explain to thee the Night of Honour is? The Night of Honour (Shab-e-Qadr) is better than a thousand months".

The holy month of Ramadan has come again, let us welcome it and try our best to observe Siam along with its concomitant rites and duties.

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## Government by consensus

**The interim government is working to hold a free, fair and credible election by the end of the year to establish true democracy. Speculation is that AL, BNP (reformists), IP (Ershad), and BDB will participate in the election. The parliament will act like a Constituent Assembly and the Constitution may be amended, if necessary, to remove any inconsistencies and haziness to suit the genius of the people. Hopefully, the new government will operate with a new outlook.**

A.B.M.S. ZAHUR

DESPISE repeated assurances from the CA, the army chief and the CEC, people are becoming increasingly disillusioned about holding of the national election by December 2008. Speculation is rife that the election may be deferred till March 2009. However, we still believe in the CA, the army chief and CEC.

Though the CTG is working hard to obtain full assurance from all parties for participation in the national election, the position of the divided BNP is not clear as yet. The party is more interested in the unconditional release of Khaleda Zia and Tarique from detention, and is playing all its cards to achieve its objective.

Though the CA is striving hard to ensure participation of BNP in the election some advisers are of the opinion that even participation of the BNP's reformist group should be enough as the people are interested in casting their votes in a peaceful atmosphere. As an experienced politician, Khaleda understands that unification of BNP will be time consuming, and that her own and her family's image has been tarnished to a large extent due to recent events. Thus, her party may not win a majority in the election.

It would, therefore, be advisable not to participate in the election, which will make the government weak. This will result in collapse of the government and there will be a new election soon after, in which the four-party alliance may be able to win -- as it had done in 2001. This, however, is mere speculation.

It may so happen that both BNP and AL will participate in the election without their present chiefs. Such a gesture may be welcomed by the CTG because it will avoid many "ifs" and "buts."

Donor countries and agencies may have reached a conclusion (another speculation) that, for establishing democracy in Bangladesh AL was preferable as the country attained freedom under its leadership. On the other hand, BNP is seen as having a fundamentalist leaning and its partners still do not seem to fully believe in the independence of Bangladesh. Moreover, under its regime the militants may regain their power and strength to cause harm to the nascent democracy. The police have reported that JMB and Huji are regrouping.

It is true that both the chiefs (of AL and BNP) have tremendous popularity. Without them, neither party may gain majority in the parliament and, as such, there may be no other option than forming an alliance government led by AL. If Khaleda is not allowed to contest because of technical reasons she may not allow the new government to operate peacefully and smoothly. However, there would be enough time for new government for obtaining approval of decisions (including ordinances) of CTG in the parliament.

Though the CTG may have lost a bit of its popularity due to its failure to control the price hike of some essential commodities it has surely achieved much in other fields. In our import-based market economy it is extremely difficult to contain price hike of imported items like edible oil, food grain and some other consumer items. In addition, the recent unprecedented increase in the price of petroleum has put tremendous pressure on the economy.

It is unfortunate that BNP perhaps considers the CTG as its competitor. In fact, the CTG has, through its hard and sincere labour, put the derailed govern-

ment on the track despite many obstacles. The CTG needs cooperation, not contest or competition.

Though democracy may not be as strict as a non-accountable government, the people want democracy because it is accountable and ensures freedom of thinking and participation. This does not mean that we can afford to be insensitive about our choice of leadership. We cannot forget the horrible days prior to 1/11, when the 4-party alliance government was running like a dictatorship government where money and muscle were dominating people's lives.

The interim government is working to hold a free, fair and credible election by the end of the year to establish true democracy. Is it worried about the possibility of a return to the situation that existed before 1/11, and nullification of all its good deeds by the new elected government because the major parties have not accepted the proposal for national charter, nor registered themselves or reformed their parties? However, speculation is that AL, BNP (reformists), IP (Ershad), and BDB will participate in the election.

There is also speculation about the possibility of inclusion of representatives from various professions, and some advisers from the present CTG, in the new cabinet in addition to elected representatives. Well, this may not happen at all, if not necessary. The parliament will act like a Constituent Assembly and the Constitution may be amended, if necessary, to remove any inconsistencies and haziness to suit the genius of the people. Hopefully, the new government will operate with a new outlook to maintain continuity of the good deeds of its predecessors.

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