

The dastardly attack: Peace process preferred

Brig Gen (Retd.) Syed ABM Ashrafuzzaman

The people of Bangladesh have been helplessly watching a series of heinous attacks with bombs, grenades and guns on public meetings and gatherings, on places of worship and recreation, and on political leaders and foreign diplomats for the last six years or so.

The latest such attack took place on 21st August. Thank God, this time the leader of the opposition narrowly escaped death. 19 people were reportedly killed and a few hundred suffered grievous injuries. The government agencies have not yet been able to identify any of the criminals behind these attacks, not to speak of bringing them to book, though inquiries by different agencies were held in every case.

Every time such incident occurs, we see the government reacting in a routine manner, of course, without any tangible outcome. We know there are a number of government agencies whose job is to act and forestall such anti-state activities by taking pre-emptive actions. Can we ask a simple question to our government: why are these agencies not doing their job? And if they continue to fail in their duties, why should people pay taxes for their maintenance?

After the 8/21 incident, when the whole nation was taken aback with shock and grief, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia tried to meet the Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina to personally convey her sympathy and sentiments to the latter. There was no reason to believe that the PM was not sincere in her effort. But the opposition leader's supporters blocked the road in front of Sheikh Hasina's residence so as not to allow the PM to come and meet her.

The common people of Bangladesh have long been expecting and eagerly waiting for this meeting so that the two leaders can, at least, come to talking terms and work together during a national crisis. But unfortunately, it wasn't to be done. Behind the cloud of the 8/21 incident, a silver lining appeared in Begum Zia's desire to meet Sheikh Hasina. But Sheikh Hasina disappointed the entire nation by outright rejecting Begum Zia's proposal. Sheikh Hasina has certainly caused immense damage to our national unity at a time when the whole nation felt it imperative to work together and fight the evil force that is causing so much damage and destruction throughout the country.

It appears she has not learnt any political lessons from her illustrious father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In those stormy days of March 1971 the great leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman continued to meet and negotiate with Yahya and Bhutto, knowing by that time that these two persons were the worst enemies of the people of the then East Pakistan. But he did so as he was seeking a peaceful solution. Later, while still in the Mianwali jail, he even discussed with his captor Bhutto about the future relationship between Bangladesh and Pakistan. That is the quality of a great politician who never refuses to talk even to his or her worst political adversary. In politics, there is no room for personal sentiments or ego. The interest of the state and the people must always reign supreme in the minds of every politician.