

## Sluggish response to voter list updating CEC's stubbornness baffling

First indication of the poor response to the office-centered process of updating the voter list confirms our worst fears. It might fail to, as we had said, even touch the fringes of the task of updating the list.

How, for example, would the commissioners, ensconced in their offices, even if their functionaries have gone down to the ward and union levels, verify the number of the deceased since the last updating of the list, glued to their chairs? This is not possible without going door-to-door physically. How will the EC identify those who have shifted residence since the last electoral roll was updated? Again, it is not possible without visiting each and every household in the city and the village.

The many supporting documents that one has to produce before the registration officers to get enlisted as a voter will dissuade people from registering. And this will keep most of those that have attained eligibility as voters out of the franchise, something that is the bounden duty of the EC to ensure does not happen.

Will the CEC please tell us how he would determine the fake voters on the roll, not to speak of the duplicate names in the voter list of which there are many? Are we to believe that he expects the fake voters to take human form, turn up in the election commissioner's office and declare in front of him that they are fake voters? There is no other way than to go door-to-door to rid the errors of the 2001 voter list that had been exposed in the report of the NDI as well as the EU after the last election and to which the CEC had referred soon after assumption of his office. And yet the CEC, overwhelmed by his ego, continues with his obstinacy.

Granted that these are early days yet of the CEC's month long plan of voter list updating. But we wonder whether the EC should spend any length of time to see a system that is fundamentally flawed can work. It will be an utter waste of time and energy.

We feel that there is no other alternative but for the CEC to conform to the very clear method prescribed in the rules for updating voter list. This is as clear as daylight, but for some inexplicable reason has failed to dawn on the CEC.

We find his obstinacy baffling.

## Our fabulous love for football

*It should help propel our improvement in soccer*

BAKGLADESH'S high passion for football was vivified by two sets of incidents. First, it was zero sum tolerance for electrical short supplies whenever and wherever these occurred; and secondly, the bemoaning and heart-break our compatriots suffered when their two most favourite teams -- Brazil and Argentina -- were knocked out of the quarterfinal stages by France and Germany.

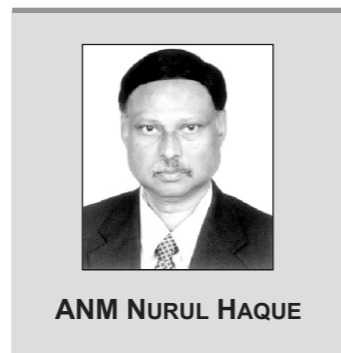
Electrical failures in places created almost a riotous situation; but thanks to precautionary security deployments and extra care taken by power authorities not to flounder on the electrical front, things went generally well. There was no major denial of soccer watching.

It was evident from the beginning of the World Cup that Brazil and Argentina were the two most popular teams with very large followings of Bangladeshi fans. So intense was the commitment of the fans that on the other night two staunch supporters of Argentina, one at the old town of the city and the other in Noakhali died following heart attacks while witnessing the match over TV. They couldn't simply take the shock of the defeat of Argentina. The defeat of Brazil that followed is yet to witness similar death by shock but one can be almost certain that the heartache it evoked must have been very gnawing among the supporters in Bangladesh. As for the deceased we extend our sincerest condolence to their bereaved families.

There is absolutely no reason why we cannot better the standard of the game in Bangladesh given the robust enthusiasm for soccer across the country. We should be able to carve out a position at the regional and Asian levels of the game. We should also remember that football happens to be a game of high entertainment in the lives of our people and symbol of unity at community levels and beyond particularly at this stage of social unrest.

In the meantime we wait anxiously for the remainder of the games to see as to which European team lifts the FIFA World Cup, most coveted trophy in the world of football often called "the game of the century."

# The ferocity of the police



ANM NURUL HAQUE

THE ferocity of the police in recent days, particularly against political activists and journalists, has greatly exercised the mind of the conscious citizen. Physical abuse of women, beating up of students and political activists was never before so rife. Arrest was never so easy and violation of human rights was never so frequent as it has been during the last part of the tenure of the BNP-led alliance government. This is happening either without, or on the slightest, provocation, or on political diktat.

The ferocity with which our police force have been falling on upon the political activists as well as innocent pedestrians has struck us all quite dumb. The police excesses have left a pertinent question that demands an answer: Does the political party in power run the police contingent through a mechanism of remote control? The mass arrests and harassment of the common people following the Dhaka siege program launched by the opposition was perhaps the worst manifestation of untenable professional conduct of the police.

**BY THE NUMBERS**  
Bangladesh, as an elected member of the new UN Human Rights Council, is committed to promote and protect human rights of all of its citizens. But the human rights are mostly violated by the law enforcers. According to the report of the Asian Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh has failed to protect rights of torture victims. Torture is endemic throughout Bangladesh. It is virtually impossible to have a complaint lodged if the alleged perpetrators are part of the police or the ruling party.

This obviously reveals the partisan use of police by the government.

People across the world depend largely on their police for the security of their life and property. But the grim reality in Bangladesh, though, has been quite the opposite. In fact, no other institution is so despised by the people in our country as the police. The police and our political leaders are equally responsible for the failure of the police to rise up to the expectations of the entire nation. And one of the reasons for the spurt in crime in recent days is, perhaps, the dilemma of the police as to which criminal to nab and which not to.

The extent to which the police contingent has been politicised, gives us real cause to be anxious. Because it is an indispensable institution without which the country would degenerate into lawlessness and anarchy. The recent ferocity of police on political activists is no doubt the consequence of political control of police. If the purposes of political bosses are served well, the police have nothing to worry about. Therefore, the policemen from top to bottom are now busy pleasing the political

bosses to vie for survival, promotion, and lucrative postings.

The journalists, of course, are specially targeted by the police. The ferocity of the police on the journalists during Bangladesh-Australia test match at Chittagong stadium on April 16, was an unthinkable act. At least twenty journalists were injured, three of them seriously, when some policemen led by the DC (port), in an uncalculated for action mercilessly beat the on-duty journalists. Amid countrywide protests against such brutality by police, the authorities, as a way of appeasing the journalists, have suspended a police sergeant and closed the DC (port) who led the attack.

The High Court issued a rule on the government on April 19 to explain why it should not form a judicial inquiry committee to probe the incidents of police attack on journalists in Chittagong. The government on April 20 formed a one-member judicial enquiry commission to probe the police atrocities on journalists in Chittagong.

While a congenial relation between the media-men and the

police is a must for providing security to the journalists, the hostile attitude of the high-ups in the ruling alliance towards the journalists has encouraged the police in their actions against the journalists.

The police are growing more ferocious day by day, failing to tackle crowds in a democratic manner, particularly the ones agitating against the government. The ferocity of the police crossed all limits in the handling of four recent incidents -- the people's uprisings in Kansat and Demra, against the journalists in Chittagong, and the opposition's sit-in program in front of the prime minister's office.

The discussants at a roundtable styled: "A human rights perspective of police behaviour in crowd management," attributed this particular failure of the police to different reasons, including undemocratic governance and lack of respect for human rights.

The cabinet committee on law and order has approved on May 22, a massive reform in police organogram suggesting an increase of over 26,000 more members. The new organogram

aims at better quality of service, training and logistic support, besides increasing the number of officers. Police strength will be raised to 143,578 from the existing 117,224 as per the new organogram.

Increase in number of police force is quite justified as our police department is undermanned in proportion to our population. Present police-public ratio in our country is 1:1300 while it is 1:728 in India. But one finds it bewildering to imagine that partisan recruitment of these new members will lead the police force into a perpetual state of disrepute.

The government has already made a few compromises on the training of 3,500 police officers and constables, recruited on the basis of their party affiliation, to get them inducted permanently before its tenure ends. The training period for the ASPs has been reduced from one year to nine months, for SIs, from one year to six months, and for the constables from six months to four months.

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exemplary punishment for violation of human rights.

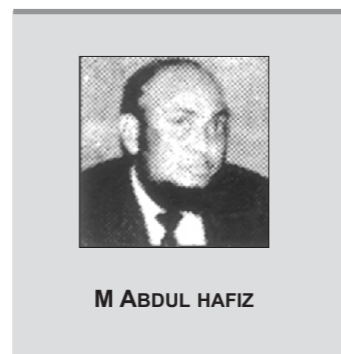
We are really tired of hearing from the prime minister and home minister about the police and people being friends, particularly in all the glitter and glamour of the yearly Police Week programs. The reality remains that our police are yet to convince us that they can ensure the security of life and property of the people. Apart from serious erosion of police image over the years, a steady recklessness in their professional conduct has only added to our woes. The insurmountable gap between the police and people is growing as the police become synonymous with terror and ferocity.

We cannot, however, agree with the call recently made by AL president Sheikh Hasina urging the families of the victims of police ferocity to prepare a list of the policemen who are torturing the opposition MPs and activists for taking revenge. The blame really lies more with the persons who are using police as a political tool than with the offending policemen.

Nevertheless, it is indeed both painful and shameful for the nation to see on TV screens and on the front page of national dailies, the pictures of policemen who appear to take unseemly pleasure in wielding their batons on everyone around including the lawmakers and women. The political leaders now in power must remember that they will also have to submit to the same fate when they will be in opposition.

ANM Nurul Haque is a columnist of The Daily Star.

# My Lai to Haditha: A gory trail of atrocity



M ABDUL HAFIZ

WHILE the US Marines and their commanders successfully concealed for months the massacre of 24 unarmed civilians including women and children in Iraq's north-western farming town of Haditha in November last year -- facts have started to surface following a probe by a US Congress committee which is interrogating the Marines involved and the residents of the area where the dastardly incident occurred.

It is now becoming apparent that the wanton act had the approval of the seniors. The US Marines first shot dead five unarmed persons including four students who tried to run away from a patrol party which had stopped their taxi-cab. Then an explosion ripped through a

**PERSPECTIVES**  
The American military in Iraq is not only stretched out, it's also under physical and psychological stress, which has apparently reached its elastic limit. The inability of the US forces to hold ground in much of Iraq, and the cat and mouse chase that has since ensued, have compelled most Marines and soldiers to live in self-imposed isolation -- behind massive concrete barriers, bales of concertina wire, and perimeters guarded by sniper towers and tanks. These are anything but the signs of impending collapse of the insurgency!

military patrol vehicle, killing its US driver.

Suspecting involvement of the people in the neighbourhood, the Marines went about forcibly smashing into nearby homes and killing their occupants. In one of the houses eight unarmed civilians including six women were shot dead. The massacre, which came to light in March this year following disclosures made in a report published by a leading US magazine, claimed the lives of 24 innocent Iraqis who were killed by the Marines in cold blood. It could be the worst known case of abuse by the US soldiers since the 2003 invasion and comes at a time when public opinion polls show falling US public support for the war.

In Haditha, the number of the people massacred by the Marines on the morning of November 19 was not quite on the My Lai scale, but the methodology and madness revealed chilling similarity. It is eerily reminiscent of the My Lai carnage of Vietnam in 1968 when the soldiers of Charlie Company commanded by Lieutenant William Calley moved into that Vietnamese village.

Men, women and children including babies were killed in the carnage that followed. Playing children were shot in the back of the head, elderly men were hacked to death with bayonets. The people were shot in their knees and in the back with hands in the air. More than 500 people were killed just in

hours. Some of the corpses were mutilated. Some women who were not killed were gang-raped. Other villagers were beaten and tortured.

The man commanding Charlie Company was sentenced to life imprisonment through a court martial. He was however pardoned by great human rights champion, Richard Nixon. We are yet to see how the wheels of justice roll in the Haditha tragedy -- particularly when the US-led occupation forces are desperately trying to salvage their moral authority from the debris of the Abu-Gharib prison scandal involving American soldiers.

The Haditha massacre details are hugely damning -- more so when the Bush administration

cannot convince the public at home why it continues to hang on in Iraq in the face of mounting resistance to the presence of US troops who suffer more and more casualties.

Both in My Lai and Haditha, double crimes were committed: first the massacre, then a cover-up. My Lai was unraveled only much later through journalistic persistence including a piece by Seymour Hersh. In Haditha we see much the same pattern. The massacre took place last November. It took the mainstream US media four months to uncover the story and another six months for the military to confirm.

In Iraqi news networks, though, there are scores of stories of unarmed civilians killed by US-led coalition forces backed by video footage, but few make it into the western media. In this context, Haditha is made to seem exceptional but with its gravity diminished by the obligatory and nauseating ministerial comment that things were worse under Saddam. What an excuse for perpetrating US atrocities in collaboration with the pro-occupation Iraqi dispensation now in place!

Notwithstanding My Lai and the like, the Americans eventually pulled out of Vietnam, but not

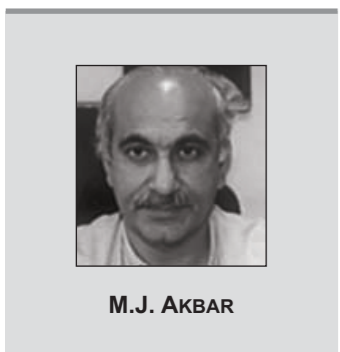
before Nixon and Kissinger, in a bid to save American face, tried to break North Vietnamese will by unleashing a savage bombing campaign on Hanoi and Haiphong. Will was not broken, but much unnecessary carnage was caused.

How long before the Americans call it a day and pull out of Iraq. How much more carnage must we see before the US can say it has saved face in Iraq? How many more Hadithas, Saamaras, and Fallujahs? Those who can not remember the past -- its failures and ignominy -- are indeed condemned to repeat it.

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Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BIISS.

# Summer in Moscow



M.J. AKBAR

MOSCOW seems shamefaced about summer. Thirty degrees centigrade in the forenoon of last Wednesday is forty degrees higher than it was during my last visit in December. Moscow then was a grey world flecked with snow white. The wind screamed at the fur hat and taunted the ear muffs. Local faces had the confident serenity of a winter people, and a mild chuckle in the eyes at the visitor's bewilderment at winter. Summer heat has surprised men and disoriented technology. The air-conditioner in my fancy, new hotel room leaks like an overburdened tarpaulin in monsoon. Complaints evoke genuine sympathy and the occasional mechanic, but no solutions. If the heater had been giving trouble in December they would have known precisely what

**BYLINE**

**As an Indian, my first preference was for the old colonies: Australia, Ghana, Togo. The whimper-exit of Ghana eliminated that option. My sympathy should, logically, have then transferred to the comparatively underdeveloped world, and thus to Latin America. The Latins also play great football. But, frankly, it is difficult to support a continent one has never visited. You can't put a context to your cheering. Logic took me to the next category: the countries in which one had good friends. I am pleased to report that some of my best friends are English, but England ruled itself out because it had made the mistake of ruling India once. That left me with Germany and Italy. Both won on Friday night. Thank you, Moscow.**

to do.

The male dress code for summer is linen half-sleeves. For women, it is a bit of an undress code: they peel off as much as they dare and store up the sun in their skins for the long dark winter just around the corner.

I wonder if the side-to-side and back-to-back traffic at noon is another sign of summer, with people finding any excuse to get out of office. This is not office-rush; this is out-of-office rush. By Friday afternoon this escalates into out-of-town mass escape. The weekend is sacrosanct from Siberia to California: as they put it, only thieves and policemen work on weekends. Not even newspapers are published on weekends.

Information is an unnecessary intrusion on tranquility. If a world war broke out on Saturday Muscovites would probably not know until Monday. On the other hand, they did fight a world war, albeit a cold one, for five decades -- with both sides taking the weekend off. Very civilised. I wonder what would have happened if the Soviet Union and the West had fought each other on all seven days.

The role model for new Russia is a former KGB agent, Alexander Lebedev. A fortnight ago he threw a party in England at the 8,500-acre estate in Northamptonshire where Princess Diana was born and now lies buried. When Lebedev throws a party, it travels

very far indeed. His idea of entertainment was a volatile mixture of Russia Wild East, Hollywood, confused Arabian Nights and high art. Extras in 18th century dress lounged among the distant trees. Others wandered around leading wolves on leashes. Cossacks charged across the English landscape. A camel or two sauntered by.

The Christ Church Cathedral schoolboys' choir sang from the balcony to shift the mood. One of Russia's finest pianists, Andrei Gavrilov, soothed guests along with oysters and champagne. After dinner dancing was in charge of the Black Eyed Peas (a band) with help from a videolinked U2. The guest of honour was

former Comrade Mikhail Gorbachev. The cause: to raise funds for the Raisa Gorbachev Foundation to help children suffering from cancer. Money was raised by auction (of a ride in the world's fastest MiG, for instance). Salman Rushdie was among the guests, but I have no idea whether he coughed up anything. One million pounds were raised in a single night. How much money was spent on that single night? £1.3 million. Lebedev could have saved everyone the trouble and handed his bill for the party to the foundation, but that wouldn't have been any fun, would it? Charity begins at home.

How did Lebedev become a billionaire, starting from a KGB salary? He resigned and set up an investment company during the heyday of Gorbachev's glasnost. He stood on the same side of the barricades as the reformers when the old established order nearly pulled off a successful coup in 1991. In 1995 he was rewarded with the chairmanship of the National Reserve Bank, which was struggling to stay in business. It stopped struggling after Lebedev got the account for Gazprom, the massive state-owned energy conglomerate. Lebedev now owns 31% of Aeroflot, among other things. He also contested for mayor of Mos-

cow and semi-secretly dreams of becoming President of the Russian Federation one day. Watch the news.

I gather that the new international corporate mantra for upwardly mobile management types is to look each morning in the mirror and call yourself a rock star. This apparently provides enough of an ego boost to send your competence soaring. But take your time about behaving like Lebedev, or indeed any other rock star. Here is what I gathered from one article in a magazine abandoned at an airport. When Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt went to Namibia to have their baby in the mother of all nations, they demanded, and got, a no-fly zone over their villa. Foreign journalists were permitted to enter the country during their stay only if the Jolie-Pitt gang had cleared their arrival. A South African journal who violated this ban ended up in prison for three days.

Namibia declared a national holiday to celebrate the birth of the infant Jolie. What makes you laugh-cry more? Rock-star stupidity or Namibia's idiocy? Elizabeth Taylor wanted Buckingham Palace swept for security when she went to collect the gong that made her Dame

Commander of the Order of the British Empire. (It exists. Britain

still rules a couple of tiny islands in the West Indies.) Tom Cruise's servants had to sign a contract that punished them with an escalating series of fines if they were caught passing on information to the media. A nanny could, theoretically, end up with a bill for a million dollars. Any management trainee with a hint of such airs is likely to get the sack rather than a promotion.

Maxine Maters, my Dutch friend who lives in Moscow and is the publisher of Moscow News, thought it a big relief that Holland had not qualified for the World Cup. It gave her the liberty of being neutral. Modestly, I pointed out that I had the same freedom. India had not qualified either. I changed the subject before she could ask me at what point of the tournament India had been eliminated.

I had the liberty of being neutral while watching Argentina play Germany on the big plasma screen set up in the hotel foyer. The commentary was in Russian, and it did not matter. There is no verbal commentary that can match the swooping cameras darting upon faces, on the field, on the sidelines or in the stands. Cameras create the ratings in sport. If the cameras had been inside our hotel at that hour, they would have dwelt I suspect on the

undress-code ladies occupying the sofa between me and screen. I did wonder though if the real game of these ladies was football.

Since neutrality is anaemic, I have tried out a variation of historical determinism in order to find out who I should support. This system might also be called Losers' Ladder. It is based on empire and colonies. As an Indian, my first preference was for the old colonies: Australia, Ghana, Togo. The whimper-exit of Ghana eliminated that option. My sympathy should, logically, have then transferred to the comparatively underdeveloped world, and thus to Latin America. The Latins also play great football. But, frankly, it is difficult to support a continent one has never visited. You can't put a context to your cheering. Logic took me to the next category: the countries in which one had good friends. I am pleased to report that some of my best friends are English, but England ruled itself out because it had made the mistake of ruling India once. That left me with Germany and Italy.

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MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.