

Unsolved abduction mysteries

A litmus test for Ctg police

PRESS reports suggest that the kidnappings in Chittagong might have had something to do with an unholy nexus between the law enforcers and the kidnappers.

The role of the police has come under scrutiny because of the way in which they have handled some recent abduction cases. Hardly any case of kidnapping was settled without the victims' family paying the ransom money a clear indication of police failing to make a dent in the crime. Police also got involved in many a case very late and acted mainly as mediators between the kidnappers and the victims' families, which again raises a very legitimate question what the police were doing to rescue the victims immediately after the crimes were committed? The kidnappers were exploiting the psychological vulnerability of the families of the victims and police could apparently help only to strike a deal between the two parties. So the abductors were rewarded with success and that certainly emboldened them to go for more misadventures. The role of the police appeared to have been a secondary one, essentially reactive to the incidents or the circumstances generated by them.

The police seem to be aware of what has been going on. Police officials have admitted that they knew the possible locations of the kidnappers' hideouts, but have not been able to do anything against them. Nor could they explain the high incidence of this specific type of crime in a particular region. It is not enough to say that the wooded terrain in most parts Chittagong makes it difficult for the police to trace and arrest the kidnappers. There may also be truth in the observation that the list of criminals that the police have is old and needs revision. But, again, only the police themselves can update the list.

The police should ask themselves why the businessmen of Chittagong have called upon the government to deploy the army in order to curb the crime. The appeal was definitely made out of sheer frustration and desperation, and it has also made it plain that they have no faith in the efficiency and honesty of the police. So it is now an acid test for the Chittagong police to prove their worth.

Felicitations to Grameen Phone

It has made history

OUR heartiest congratulations to Grameen Phone on their resounding success in reaching one million subscribers mark since its inception in 1997. They have not just achieved a goal, they have also accomplished a feat, which only a few years ago could not even be considered a remote possibility. This only shows Grameen's wide acceptance among mobile phone users. It has also put them on the same pedestal with the biggest cell phone operators in South Asia.

What is interesting to note here is that the number of subscribers of the state owned telephone operator BTTB has reached only 7 lakhs in the last 33 years in comparison with one million subscribers of Grameen Phone. So, the latter has become the fastest growing private enterprise in the telecommunications sector. Others can only follow the lead and aspire to be a better service provider. Grameen Phone's success probably lies in its hands-on and innovative approaches which unfortunately the public sector BTTB has been found wanting in, largely because of its snugly-held monopoly over the sector. Stories of woes faced by those who had applied for BTTB connection are often heard. While it takes only few days and fewer documents to get a mobile connection, it takes months, in some cases years, to get a BTTB connection if one goes through the normal channels.

Comparisons aside, we would urge the authorities to provide more facilities to Grameen Phone to enable them to provide better services to its subscribers. For example, all mobile-to-mobile connections of Grameen Phone which account for over 90 per cent of its total subscribers could be interconnected with the BTTB lines. The government could give them a tax break to provide better service at lower cost. Especially telephone usage by women in the villages of Bangladesh needs to be encouraged further. It can't be ignored that the company has contributed over Tk 1300 crore to the government exchequer since it rolled into business. And, lastly, time is ripe for Grameen Phone to go for perfection in terms of service-delivery based on its track-record of successes in the country's telecommunication sector.

Current trends in US-Saudi relations

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

TWENTY-eight pages of the US Congressional Joint Enquiry Report into the terrorist attacks on nine-eleven remain classified. Reportedly this portion of the enquiry dealt with alleged support by Saudi citizens and even officials to the terrorist attacks on New York and Pentagon. Naturally this was totally unacceptable to the Saudis. Prince Saud al Faisal, the Saudi Foreign Minister, personally requested President Bush to declassify the pages enabling Saudi Arabia to respond. President Bush declined apparently to protect the method and sources of the alleged information. However valid were the reasons for refusal by President Bush from the point of view of the art of intelligence and would perhaps have been appreciated by Intrepid, it would have been prudent for the US administration to consider the embers of anger burning in the hearts of some Americans (mercifully quietist yet) for the "sins" of Osama bin Laden (of Yemeni descent) and fifteen of the hijackers being of Saudi origin and of Saudi support of the Taliban government in Afghanistan (pre-nine eleven events).

Daniel Pipes and his likes are not too few to be ignored all together. In one of his recent articles (The Scandal of US-Saudi Relations: National Interests-Winter 2002/03) Daniel Pipes chronicles American obsequiousness in her relations with the kingdom. He has given examples of Defence Department's order (since withdrawn) on female service personnel stationed in the KSA to wear head to foot abayas at base; abduction of children by Saudi fathers born out of wedlock with American citizens; discriminatory treatment meted out to Christians and Jews; Saudi censorship of mail sent to American citizens resident in the KSA etc. Republican Congressman Ben Gilman, chairman of the House International Committee, was quoted as saying that Saudi money official or unofficial was behind much of the Islamic rhetoric and activities in the world today. Daniel Pipes faults the US administration with laxity for non-intervention in the funding of militant Islamic institutions in the US as with pedestrian speed in pursuit of human rights and democracy in the KSA as opposed to orgiastic display of determination in other parts of the world.

Henry Kissinger (Years of Upheavals 1982) narrated his experience of a dinner with a Saudi monarch who (oblivious of Kissinger's Jewish ancestry) told him of the dual conspiracy by the

Jews and the Communists to undermine the civilized world as was known then and that Israel was the middle eastern outpost of that plot. Steven Emerson in his book The American House of Saud characterised the behaviour of several US ambassadors posted to the KSA as "visceral, over self interested sycophancy".

Such brutal and often parochial assessment apart one should be reminded of the rock hard stability of Saudi-US relations established by King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud in 1945. As of recent events one could cite the series of pronouncements by Saudi ulemas (after the nine-eleven terrorist attacks) declaring that neither suicide nor killing of non-combatants is permissible in Islam. During the cold war Saudi Arabia played a key role in meeting a number of US foreign policy objectives including the expulsion of the

alleged Saudi funding of terrorism one has to comprehend the principle of zakat, one of the five obligations for a Muslim, which provides for compulsory donation of a part of personal wealth to the poor and towards charity. The Saudis from the modest to the extremely wealthy are obligated to donate zakat money to charitable causes.

Though there is no incontrovertible proof yet of any money having been diverted to finance terrorism during the 1990-91 Gulf Crisis Saudi authorities discovered that some of the recipients of Saudi money were opposed to coalition efforts against Saddam Hussein. The Saudi authorities immediately clamped down on financial networks supporting these groups and took a number of measures to counter Islamist extremism.

The neo-conservative critics of Saudi Arabia would be well advised

between the present day Saudi Arabia and pre-Khomeini Iran e.g. an authoritarian government, an unbalanced economy, heavy dependence on oil revenue, problematic demographic growth, disparate income distribution and political persecution. But in the context of today one is doubtful about the utility of religion as a revolutionary force particularly Sunni Islam which is more reliant on consensus.

Instead of embarking on a crusade against Saudi Arabia (and by extension war on Islam) the western powers may try to introspect into the shadowy alleys of its not so transparent past activities. Professor Anthony Clark of Georgetown University (International law and preemptive use of military force-The Washington Quarterly-Spring 2003) cited several cases of aggrandisement in the twentieth century unauthorised by the UNSC:

being labeled as school yard bully; and clients (Israel is the client). They found that when the Arabs think of the US they think of Israel and when the US thinks of the Arabs they think of terrorism.

Terrorist attacks of nine-eleven have indeed been a turning point in American history. To the Americans nationalism comes easily and naturally. Convicted of the superiority of the American values and institutions Americans abhor state intervention in the promotion of nationalism. In many other societies, particularly developing ones, nationalism is aggravated, fuelled by past grievances caused by external powers and once subjected to colonial past. In authoritarian regimes promotion of nationalism needs deployment of state's resources, propagation by state controlled media, display of government orchestrated parades of crack

skeptical about American policy of "zero tolerance" of terrorism when they see American acquiescence of Israeli "zero tolerance" policy in occupied Palestine. It is seen not only as a US-Israeli unholy alliance but also a Judeo-Christian alliance and that war on terrorism is actually a war on Islam. Saudi crown prince Abdullah is reportedly worried about US loss of credibility and moral stature in the region because of its preemptive policy and Palestine policy. Prince Abdullah is also worried about the inability of the US public to understand the strongly conservative nature of Saudi society, the popular support of the conservative brand of Islam, abhorrence of dissolute permissive libertarian practices of the western society and most importantly Saudi suspicion of divergent US policies in different parts of the world.

Perhaps President Bush is not overly optimistic when he recently declared that half of Al-Qaida top leadership has either been killed or detained and the other half is on the run. His assessment is supported by the inability of the Al-Qaida to bring the Arab people out on the streets against the US; to pounce "puppet" governments and replace them with Islamists; or sustain an intense tempo of terrorism against US targets. This inability could spell the beginning of the end of Al-Qaida. If such an assumption can be made then it would be prudent for the US not to embark on a forensic investigation of the Saudi regime as yet since such incursion could affect both regional stability and global energy security. It has been suggested that the US may wish to define its relationship with KSA as one of strategic relationship based on common interests rather than a friendship based on common values; encourage Saudi authorities to institute political reforms; and urge financial transparency in tracking social and charitable activities abroad and counsel restrain on proselytising activities abroad. It would be unwise to open the champagne bottles just because Saddam regime is gone without assessing the depth of the wound inflicted upon Islamic polity.

American propagation of instruments of modernity in the form of democracy and capitalism occasionally appears hypocritical given American refusal to submit itself to Kyoto Protocol, International Criminal Court, and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. While due to insularity such divorce from international consensus may not mean much to domestic constituency but it is generally incomprehensible to those living outside the United States. Like others Saudis remain

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Soviets from Afghanistan.

To many western minds Wahabism, practiced and promoted in the KSA, may seem a particularly intolerant form of Islam and Saudi Arabia very "closed" society. In their parochial interpretation Saudi general education and cultural system actively generates intolerance towards other faiths and ultimately finds grotesque expression in terrorism. Before we delve into this question we may ascertain the source of stability of the Saudi regime which should be of great interest to the US and the west. Dr. Michael Donovan of the Centre of Defence Information believes that the Al- Saud's political authority exists by virtue of its intimate alliance with the Wahabi movement which arose out of politico-religious conflict in Saudi Arabia in the eighteenth century. Holy Quran being extremely monotheistic, Dr. Donovan finds no justification in the separation of the church and the state in Wahabism in contrast to the Christian west. Therefore the clearly defined religious puritanism of Abdul Wahab provides a basis for the Saudi royal family's political authority and legitimacy. The religious leadership (ulema) however retains considerable influence as evidenced by 1964 royal family deposition of King Saud sanctioned by the ulema.

To understand the allegation of

to remember that one of Osama bin Laden's primary goal is to drive a wedge between the US and KSA. As analyst Lawrence Freedman noted that in the seventies millions of dollars from the USA flowed to support the Irish Republican Army but the British opted for constructive engagement with the US instead of branding them as supporters of terrorism. For Osama bin Laden the Saudi King is an apostate who has allowed "occupation" of the holy land by infidel armies. Such close proximity of the western forces to the holy places of Makkah and Medina, in the eyes of the Islamists, is heretical and dependence on foreign forces for the defence of the holy places is derogation of Islamic credentials of the monarch. Under such circumstances cool heads in Washington D.C. may be reminded that KSA remains the only Muslim country endowed with religious leadership, wealth and good relations with the western powers.

Saudi Arabia continues to be a crucially important player in the international oil market with its substantial oil resources and excess production capacity. It is doubtful that Russian oil can be a substitute for Saudi oil or oil from the Caspian Sea can be despite construction of multiple pipelines a replacement of Saudi oil. Some analysts, however, have found some similarities in circumstances

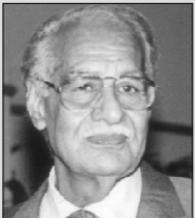
Soviet action in Czechoslovakia(1948); North Korean invasion of South Korea(1950); US action in Guatemala(1954); Israeli, French and British invasion of Egypt(1956); Bay of Pigs(1961); Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia(1968); Soviet invasion of Hungary(1956); Six day war (1973); Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea(1979); Soviet invasion of Afghanistan(1979); Falklands war(1982); US invasion of Grenada(1983) and of Panama(1989); and Iraqi invasion of Kuwait(1990). It may be appropriate here to quote from Professor Samuel Huntington. "The west won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion but rather by its superiority of applying organised violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-westerners never do".

In December last chairman and president of the Middle East Institute of Washington D.C. on a trip to Egypt and Saudi Arabia discovered that at the official level there was an increasing conviction that the US administration had little understanding of the region; were reluctant to understand political dynamics faced by traditional friends; and were formulating policies based on false premises. They found a perception pervasive throughout the region that US policies are driven by six Cs: - cowboys; colonialism; conspiracy; coca cola; cowardice(here US is

troops and latest weaponry. Distinct as the Americans understand nationalism Minxin Pei of Carnegie Foundation found that the Americans viewed nine-eleven terrorist attacks as an assault on US democratic freedoms and institutions. He, too, faults the US administration with inability to deal with nationalism abroad. As an example he cites the rising nationalism of South Korean younger generation who consider North Koreans as kins and not monsters while in Washington's universalistic political values North Korea is not only the last Stalinist communist outpost in the world but also as an aspirant for WMD is a dangerous candidate for transference of WMD technology and hardware to terrorist hands in exchange of money. North Korea is already accused of bartering missile technology in exchange of nuclear technology to some countries.

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Getting away with murder



KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

PARLIAMENT and the Supreme Court are the highest bodies in any democratic country. One legislates and the other interprets, keeping in mind the dictates of the constitution and equity. Both institutions, in fact, provide the axon on which the wheel of democratic structure turns. At times the two may work at cross purposes but only accidentally. Seldom has this happened by design. But last week it did. The Indian parliament made history of sorts by restoring an archaic service rule which the Supreme Court had struck down three years ago.

The rule said that government permission was required before any action was contemplated against an official holding the position of joint secretary or above. The court threw it out on the ground that "every person accused of committing the same offence is to be dealt with in the same manner."

Yet, the government brought the Central Vigilance Commission bill which parliament passed to restore the *status quo ante*, that is, the compulsion to have government's prior permission to move against a joint secretary or above. Why this provision has been reinstated even

over the years. The revelation came through a diary which was seized during a raid on a farmhouse in Delhi. The diary gave the names of politicians and bureaucrats along with the amount of money they had received from abroad. I was a member of the Parliament Select Committee which considered the Central Vigilance Commission bill before its introduction in parliament. The manner in which representatives of political parties, including the CPI (M), wanted to restore the prior permission power to the government convinced me that all rulers, no matter what their ideology was, used civil servants for their party and personal ends.

No member of the committee listened to my plea that the exper-

ience of the emergency should be a warning that our civil service readily caved in before the extra-constitutional authorities and the senior among them became instruments of tyranny.

I wrote a dissenting note: "There has been no way to know why permission was granted in one case and rejected in another. The head of the department concerned has no guidelines from the government to follow. The entire process is ad hoc,

BETWEEN THE LINES

Apart from the question of corruption, what certainly can be sensed is that there is a general and wider acceptance of the officials who indulge in short-circuiting the administrative procedures -- level-jumping in the chains of command, and non-conformity to standard administrative norms and values...Institutions have come to be doubted. And that is not good for democracy.

order been obeyed, ministers would not have known how to get their "work" done.

Before the emergency (1975-77), the number of officials who acted as errand boys of the rulers was small. But after that, the number of such bureaucrats has multiplied. Rulers knew how a mere threat or a covetable position could make civil servants do even the dirtiest work. The desire for self-protection -- desire for survival -- was the factor for obedience during the emergency.

I do not know whether the prior permission rule operates in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka or Nepal. But something like that must be in existence because ministers in those countries too get away literally with murder as in India. The only

capricious and whimsical. The Supreme Court rightly did away with the rule of jungle..."

Neither parties in power nor those in the opposition cared to support me when the bill came before the Rajya Sabha for approval last week. Privately, many told me that what I said was correct. But they admitted that their parties thought differently. Their parties also run the governments in some states.

My biggest disappointment came from the Attorney General. He was asked for his opinion before the government introduced the bill in parliament. He gave his approval. The highest judicial officer should have taken the orders of the Supreme Court more seriously. He on the one hand and parliament on the other have done something

jumping in the chains of command, and non-conformity to standard administrative norms and values. It is the absence of service sanctions and the non-critical, almost supine, acceptance of the wrongdoings of the members of the services by the general run of officials that spurs others to swell the ranks of the wrong-doers.

The CVC has been pushed, unwittingly, into another controversy which has to do with the health of the institutions. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is the top vigilance body of parliament to scrutinise whether the budget allocations are spent properly. So important is the question that the chairmanship of the committee is always given to a member in the opposition.

For some reasons the govern-

ment has felt edgy over the expenditure during the Kargil war. Certain leaks have appeared in the press to suggest that some of the equipment, flown in from abroad, was never used although it was meant for use at Kargil. The report of the PAC was awaited to know the truth. Defence Minister George Fernandes, who entrusted all defence purchases to the CVC for examination, has refused to give the PAC the CVC report on Kargil. Why? His explanation is that the report is "secret."

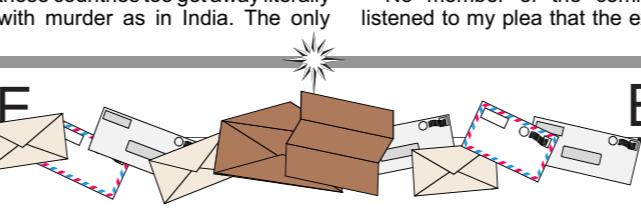
Parliamentary committees have been shown top secret reports in the past. Why this plea now? Fernandes is insulting the MPs and their august body, parliament, when he says that he has the right to withhold certain information from them in the name of secrecy.

Apparently, the report has revealed something which the defence ministry wants to hide. Those who are denying its access to MPs can be hauled up for breach of rights that parliament enjoys. The opposition was within its rights to create a rumpus in both houses of parliament on the government's refusal to show the report to the PAC. The PAC has a large contingent of members from the ruling coalition.

The government's refusal to show the CVC report to the PAC and the restoration of prior approval of the government to move against senior officials convey the same message: extraneous considerations are far more important than transparency which gives confidence to governance. Institutions have come to be doubted. And that is not good for democracy.

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.

Magnetic train

I read the report in DS about the "Magnetic Train". I would like to express my views on it. First the report states "US\$500 million", when in fact it is a fiction unless Mr. Wagner has some miraculous new Maglev system that no one else knows about. Secondly the report says, appositely, "...Commission sources said it opposed the plan for magnetic train because nowhere in the world this system has been installed at such a high cost". How can US\$500million for a 500-KM track be considered "high cost"? It is cheaper than any other rail system, even though it is a high figure. Let me enlighten the readers with some

facts on Magnetic Levitation (Maglev) Railway systems so that they can make their own opinions. Transrapid is a German company who have a Maglev system that costs around US\$65 million plus per mile. Indeed they constructed a track in Shanghai which cost a massive amount and did not work properly.

The reason is that they used a "smart" track and a "dumb" train. It means their system put all the high-tech stuffs in the track and not in the train. There is also another company in the US called "American Maglev Technology" who have a Maglev system, but