

## Ashura mayhem

### We condemn the barbarism

ASHURA is the day we commemorate the tragedy of Karbala where the Prophet's (pbuh) grandson Hazrat Imam Hussein (RA) and his immediate family were martyred. It is the most holy and sacred day of the Shia calendar, and for all Muslims is a day of solemnity and holiness on which they mourn and contemplate the horrors of tyranny.

Not much could be more unholy and sacrilegious than to brutally and indiscriminately murder hundreds of Shia mourners on this most sacred day. The mass murder of over 200 innocent people shames us all as human beings. There are no words to adequately capture the utter depravity and barbarity of the slaughter. This was carnage so brutal, so indecent, so inhuman that it is scarcely imaginable. It is sickening to contemplate that human can do this to human, that Muslim can do this to Muslim.

In Karbala more than 100 lay dead, including 15 children. In Baghdad, suicide bombers detonated bombs inside the holy Kazamiya shrine, leaving the mosaic-walled courtyard inside the shrine strewn with the dead and maimed. At last count, the death toll was 65 and still climbing.

Indeed, the death toll could have been even higher. Another bomber was captured at Kazimiya after his explosives failed to detonate, police in Basra discovered two women strapped with explosives marching in an Ashura procession, and other bombs were found near Shia mosques in Basra and Najaf.

It seems clear that the perpetrators are trying to promote strife between the Shia and Sunni communities in an attempt to make Iraq ungovernable. Regardless of what one thinks of the US occupation of Iraq and how much one wishes for their withdrawal, no decent person can support this kind of horrendous butchery that is intended to drive a wedge between Muslims and foment civil war.

Right now, Muslims need to unite and not make war on one another. The massacre of Shias was not restricted to Iraq. In Quetta at least 40 people were killed and 150 injured when three gunmen attacked a procession of Shia worshippers. The spectre of sectarian conflict tearing the Muslim world apart at the seams is too awful and terrifying to even contemplate. The last thing Muslims need right now is a bloody and barbaric civil war, and we must all stand together to condemn the Ashura killings with one voice.

## Adulterated foodstuffs flood market

### Who is in charge?

A survey conducted by the Consumers Association of Bangladesh has revealed that more than 50 per cent products in the market, food items in particular, are adulterated. It is not hard to guess what people are ingesting in the name of food.

The discovery, however, should not surprise anybody since it has been known for years, or even decades, that adulteration is an uncontrolled vice which poses a grave threat to public health. Nutritional value of foods has also been lowered greatly, thanks to adulteration and use of low quality ingredients. It is a punishable offence, but, regrettably enough, the dishonest elements involved in it have never been brought to justice the way they ought to have been.

The press has regularly been carrying reports on adulteration and production of substandard foods and other commodities. But that has failed, for some inexplicable reason, to sensitize the decision-makers who are still not ready to embark on a tough mission to stop adulteration. People are not getting value for their money, or even are buying poison at times, but the law enforcers are yet to come to their rescue.

It seems curbing adulteration is not seen as part of governmental functions that primarily revolve around law and order and development projects in our context. Otherwise how is one to explain the continuing lack of a consumer protection law.

The problem is attributable, to a great extent, to the fact that the rights of consumers have been felt only in their conspicuous absence. Selling adulterated foods or spurious medicines amounts to cheating the consumers, apart from being a health hazard. But lack of awareness among people coupled with the age-old tradition of not reacting to the harmful practices has created a situation in which the producers and sellers are getting away with anything and everything.

The CAB leaders have called for greater unity and agitation, if necessary, to put an end to adulteration and production of spurious goods.

However, the government should do its bit by launching a drive against the unscrupulous producers and traders. Since it is not an issue that we can ignore without exposing people to grave health hazards, the law enforcers should act with a sense of urgency.

## Karnaphuli Bridge

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**Ahmed R Chowdury**  
*Uttara, Dhaka*

## The emperor's wardrobe

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# The global economy and Indonesia



NURURDDIN MAHMUD KAMAL

THE recent invasion in Iraq show that the most potent weapon in modern war is pseudo-information. The rest of the world may think about the subject differently, but Blair and Bush have told the world their views on it as was written in the *George Orwell's* great prophetic work, 1984. What however they didn't mention is that the main theme of their WMD phobia is the creation of a business world in the west.

Those views aside, on the surface it is mobile phones or holidays booked on the Internet. Beneath the gloss, it is *globalisation of poverty* as Arundhati Roy writes. This is a world where most human beings never make a phone call and live on less than a dollar a day, where thousands of children die everyday from diarrhea because millions of people have no access to clean water (UN Report, cited in the London *Guardian*, October 22, 2001).

It is no wonder that a sophisticated system of plunder is widening the existing divide between the rich and the poor as never before. Take the case of Indonesia for instance. The disgraced president General Suharto was a blue-eyed leader of the west. He basically designed a legal infrastructure for investment in Indonesia with the assistance and support of IMF, the World Bank and the many well-wishers in the west. With his master plan prepared in the mid sixties, mountains of copper and gold, nickel and bauxite were handed out to American transnational companies. Of the thirty-four oil companies operating in the late sixties in the deep sea of Indonesia under the production-sharing contract (PSC) almost eighty per

cent were American companies. A group of American, Japanese and French companies got a tropical forest of Sumatra; and so on. The plunder was unabated.

But, when asked about the authenticity regarding violent deaths of about one million people in bringing the *new global economy* in Indonesia, there was no answer from either IMF or Suharto. In fact, this was never allowed to be discussed. Only the world's fourth most populous

country Indonesia was shown the *magical ladder* of economic growth. *The news on massacre* was not taken into cognisance. Instead, Suharto's ascendancy as 'the west's best news' in years was focused continuously. James Reston, the then doyen of the American columnists, told readers of the *New York Times* that bloody events in Indonesia were a *gleam of light* in Asia. The Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt said, "With a million communist sympathisers knocked off, I think it's safe to assume a reorientation has taken place". But it's a surprise that Indonesian scholars in the American universities approved Suharto's big lie about a communist coup as being the cause of killings, while western corporations annotated his regime's stability.

It was only much later that the world learned that the American Embassy was supplying names and ticking them off as they were no more. In establishing the Suharto regime, the involvement of IMF and the World Bank was part of it. Sukarno, the former President of Indonesia, had kicked them off; now Suharto would bring them back. That was the deal (*The New Rulers of the World*, John Pilger, London, 2002). The silence continued more than a quarter of a century, until it was broken by the cries of Suharto's victims in the East Timor: a second genocide

conducted with western military backing. In 1998, General Suharto was forced to resign after about 32 years of his dictatorial regime, taking with him severance pay estimated at US \$ 15 billion, the equivalent of almost 13 per cent of Indonesia's foreign debt, much of it owed to the World Bank (The World Bank reports, September 1997 and March 1998).

During his dictatorship, seldom a day would pass when General Suharto was not being congratulated by western politicians and scholars for bringing *stability* to the nation. In Bangladesh, over the past two decades, governments fought tooth and nail to obtain certificates of good conduct from the west. When human rights violation was reported, the government's simply disagreed. Be that as it may, for Suharto, British politicians were especially appreciative, beginning with Harold Wilson's foreign secretary, Michael Stewart, who in 1966 lauded the dictator's 'sensible economic policies' and said his regime was not aggressive (Carmel Budiardjo and Liem Soei Liong, *The War against East Timor*, London: Zed Books, 1984, P.49). Margaret Thatcher, one time British Prime Minister (popularly known as Iron lady) called Suharto "one of our very best and most valuable friends". In 1997, Robin Cook's first trip abroad as foreign secretary of UK included Indonesia, where he shook hands warmly with Suharto: so warmly that a colour photograph of the pair of them was chosen, bizarrely, to illustrate the British Foreign Office's report on human rights in the world.

They all knew, of course, Amnesty International almost filled a room with evidence of Suharto's grisly record. Robin Cook as aware of an exhaustive investigation by the foreign

officers' committee of the Australian Parliament that concluded Suharto's troops had caused deaths of at least 200,000 East Timorese, a third of the population (Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, *Australia's Relations with Indonesia*, Canberra : Australian Government Publishing Service, 1993, P.96). Yet, Britain was the biggest weapons supplier to Indonesia, during the New Labour's first year

in office, with Blair approving eleven arms deals with Indonesia under cover of the Official Secrets Act and Cook's declaration of an ethical dimension to foreign policy (John Pilger, *Flying the Flag, Arming the World; Hidden Agendas*, London: Vintage, 1998).

The World Bank emphasises these days that its mission in Indonesia, as anywhere else, is 'poverty reduction and reaching out to the poor'. It was the World Bank that set up 86 million US dollar loan to build the Shangrilla Hotel (in Jakarta), which would provide the security of regular employment! Before 1997, there were more banks in downtown Jakarta, than in any city on earth; half of them went bust when the *dynamic economy* collapsed beneath the weight of its barely credible corruption. During Suharto's thirty-two years dictatorship, contracts of 'global' capital poured into Indonesia. The World Bank handed out more than 30 billion US dollars. In August 1997, a secret internal World Bank report disclosed the greatest scandal in the history of 'development' that at least 20 to 30 per cent of the bank's loans 'are diverted through informal payments to Government of Indonesia staff and politicians (World Bank, *Confidential Assessment-Corrupted Bank Funds*: Summary of RSI staff views regarding the problem of 'leakage'

from World Bank project budgets, Jakarta, August, 1997). Besides, the arms trade is one of globalisation's successes, and Indonesia has played a vital role. The Western countries helped Suharto's government to secure huge modern arms and weapons, used to terrorise the Indonesians.

Let's take a pause and recall about President Ahmed Sukarno. He was a revolutionary socialist who led his people to independence after 350 years of Dutch rule.

A mercurial leader, he was spellbinding in the affairs of state. He was aware of Washington's understandable annoyance essentially because he had taken over most of the private holdings of the Dutch and had vowed to drive them out of West Irian (New Guinea); he had requested for Russian arms; and he had brought the communists into his new coalition government. From the start of its independence in 1949 until 1957 Indonesia was a parliamentary democracy. The power of the central government was balanced and diffused by the local powers of Indonesia's six major and 3000 minor islands stretching in a 3000-mile arc from the Malayan peninsula. But in a surprise move, Sukarno declared parliamentary democracy to be a failure in Indonesia. A dissident group grew. The CIA and the State Department of the US overtly and covertly supported the dissident political group. They were planning to oust Sukarno. Even if Sukarno were not overthrown, they argued, it might be possible for Sumatra, Indonesia's big oil producer, to secede, thereby protecting private American and Dutch holdings. That was the actual intent. They were looking for an occasion. It came soon.

General Nasutin, the army chief, promptly asserted his allegiance by dishonourably discharging six high-ranking

officers who had sided with the rebels. The US government using the media threatened Indonesian government. Sukarno accused the US of direct intervention and warned Washington not to play with fire in Indonesia. Brigadier Suharto (who later became a general) was looking for an opportune moment to kill two birds with one bullet.

He took over through a bloody coup the country's administration from Sukarno, the father figure of that nation. According to a CIA memorandum, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan of UK and President John Kennedy of the United States had agreed to *liquidate* President Sukarno, depending on the situation and available opportunities. The CIA author added, "it is not clear to me whether murder or overthrow is intended by the word liquidate" (*The Times*, August 8, 1986; cited by Paul Lashmar and James Oliver in *Britain's Secret Propaganda War 1948-1977*, London: Sutton, 1998, P.4). Sukarno was a populist, the founder of modern Indonesia and of the non-aligned movement of developing countries, which he hoped would forge a genuine *third way* between the spheres of two superpowers.

In 1955, he convened the Asia-Africa Conference in the Javanese hill city of Bandung. It was the first time the leaders of the non-aligned countries, the majority of humanity, had met to forge a bond on common interests: a prospect that alarmed the western powers, especially the vision and idealism of non-alignment represented a potentially popular force that might seriously challenge neocolonialism. In 1996, as a member of a Bangladesh delegation, I had the opportunity to visit Indonesia and watch the faded tableaux and black-and-white photographs in the museum at Bandung and in the forecourt of the splendid art deco of Savoy Hotel where Bandung principles were displayed. I understand that the Indonesians have not yet removed the photograph of their father of the nation from Bandung Conference Hall.

Nuruddin Mahmud Kamal is a former government official.

## CHRONICLE

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## OPINION

## Where is my country?

MASUD RANA SARKER  
*writes from Ottawa, Canada*

NO sooner had I logged on to internet to read news from Bangladesh than I came across the news of Professor Humayun Azad having been stabbed by as yet unknown thugs. I just wrote the other day in The Daily Star condemning the attack on Dr. Kamal Hossain. How many more protest editorials, columns and letters we do have to write in days to come, only Allah knows. Sometimes it feels good to think that in the last century as a nation we got off to a very good start. For example Satyendra Nath Bose who was once a professor of physics of Dhaka University wrote Einstein a letter in 1924 in which he described how Einstein's light quanta, the photons, could form a kind of "gas," similar to the one consisting of atoms or molecules. Einstein rewrote and improved Bose's paper and submitted it for joint publication. This new form of gas is a new form of matter in which the individual particles are known as Bosons after Bose's name. The Bose-Einstein statistics made the groundbreaking predictions about the behaviour of matter at extremely low temperatures. At such low temperatures, viscosity

of liquefied gases disappears, resulting in superfluidity. The process is called Bose-Einstein condensation.

In June 1995, Carl Weiman and Eric Cornell used high powered lasers and a new technique for cooling matter to close to absolute zero to super-cool about 2000 atoms of rubidium. These atoms were found to possess the qualities of a Bose-Einstein condensate. Shortly afterwards, Wolfgang Ketterle reproduced the result. For their work, these three scientists shared the 2001 Nobel Prize.

I cited the above things to say that Bangladesh was the country where Mr. Bose was once a professor. This is the country which created Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore. This country during the British colonial period was the cultural point and, before the British came, was the most enriched place in the sub-continent. Intellectually and culturally we started as a leader. In today's intellectual, scientific and political bankruptcy of Bangladesh, Humayun Azad is a prominent intellectual, litterateur and linguist with bold and stubborn intellectual honesty. He is the linguist who requested funding from then President Ershad for a long term research project to write a Bangla dictionary but was

rejected. Those who know the importance of research in Bangla language and for that matter of a Bangla dictionary as a backup to the development in science and literature of Bangladesh understand what a missed opportunity it was not to utilise as profound and resourceful an asset as Humayun Azad. Today he is struggling for his life at CMH.

My pen knows no word to condemn this brutal attempt to kill Prof Azad. I am wondering which country it is that cannot give security to Prof Azad, Dr. Kamal, opposition political leaders, not to mention the common citizenry. Is this my country? My country -- the one where Bose, Tagore, Shahidullah grew and flourished freely and without inhibition. I have got to tell you this is not my country that has tried to kill its best children. Mine is not the country where one of the best children is lies stabbed in the hospital while his family is gets threat call. It seems like I have lost my country. It is not the first time but there has been a persistent continuity of countless feather-ruffling and hackle-raising incidents in this land of lost country. Is there any lost-and-found service in this universe where I can write to, call or go to in order to look for my lost country?

MAHBUBUL KARIM (SOHEL)

HOW to contemplate on the vicious attack on Professor Humayun Azad? Several minutes passed by. And several hours are gone. Only things come into mind are expletives detesting the maddening profanity engulfing our world, not to be written for the civil consumption.

The horrific images published in several newspapers, showing the blood soaked shirt, the deep wounds in his left jaw, dazedly walking, still conscious, but looked in pain. Professor Humayun Azad is fighting for his life in Combined Military Hospital. And this for expressing views against communalism and fundamentalism's resurrection!

What is happening in Bangladesh?

A nation born out from the oppression and colonialism filled past, fought a sanguine battle against subjugation, a proud nation for its national identity, its cultural vibrancy, is in the grip of recurrence of defeated forces of the past, and their successors, long thought to be buried in the trash-bin of history.

Is communalism and religious fundamentalism the only responsible entity in degradation of moral and political fabric?

Indeed there are resurgence of fundamentalists, many of them

engaged in their conniving onslaught of grabbing power, like the others, in the name of Almighty, the provocation on behalf of omnipotence, materialising the ultimate goal of eradicating the intrinsic tranquil nature of Bangladesh.

Power is corrupting. Power insinuates political leaders of all hues to distort facts.

The political culture in Bangladesh is puzzling. Some say, there is no veracity in contemporary political leaders. Their allegiance shifts, their ideals reshaped and repackaged for the suitability of their fierce desire. The major political parties, mainly the two, in the past had shook hands with diametrically opposite mullahs or corrupted and convicted leaders of the past for the sake of shoddy political gain.

There are also allegations of embracing violence under the cloak of political agitation, hired guns, goons and thugs have been nourished and fed, protected under official seal. Like changing sports team, these highly coveted bullies are lured from one political entity to another.

There is the unmistakable linkage among the attack on Professor Humayun Azad, the exploding of bombs in Romna Batamul and movie theaters, killings of liberal journalists, uncompromising political leaders, and activists in various parts, suppression of minorities and

ransacking or burning of their religious places. Not long ago the scorching of eleven Hindus of the same family stirred the soul of this nation. The same can be said on killings of people with opposing views.

Is the hacking of Professor Humayun Azad an isolated incident? In most likelihood, No. He was hacked for his intrepid views on freedom, the defeated force and fundamentalism.

In the waning days of 1971, along with the killings of hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis from all level, there was a systematic approach on eliminating the doctors, professors, engineers, writers, journalists and the overall intelligentsia.

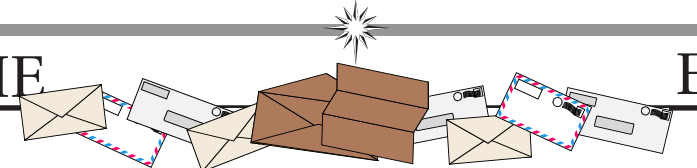
The terror, that all-mighty word of our time, acts as a forewarning: rescind from your unpalatable views on liberty, or you are the next.

But the nation that has tasted the flavour of liberty, the victorious terror is never a certainty.

Professor Humayun Azad, the respected teacher at Dhaka University, rested on the cold hospital bed, is struggling, and in enormous pain, but the shocking imagery of butchery may very well boost the struggle against terror and the twisty powerful "leaders" behind its cryptic design.

Mahbubul Karim (Sohel) is a freelance writer.

## 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.

### Karnaphuli Bridge

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**Ahmed R Chowdury**  
*Uttara, Dhaka*

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capital C the new catch word from the West!

However, I believe that having a clear understanding of the issues to be faced, Ms. Huq should be well qualified to take on the free for all battle scenario post 2005.

Should the battle be too strenuous, I am confident the writer of the interesting article can fall back upon writing as a career.

**SA Mansoor**  
*Gulshan, Dhaka*

### Barbaric!

What's going on in our country? Humayun Azad has been stabbed by unknown assailants!

There is no security of life for the eminent people, let alone the ordinary ones. I condemn the attack and urge the government to

be tough on the elements who are a threat to peace and social harmony.

**Shameem, Ore-mail**

### ZIA

Dhaka's Zia International Airport has improved a lot in the past few years. The airport check-in and immigration layouts have improved remarkably during the last two years. The departure portion is now comparable to most other international airports. The new parking structure attached to the main terminal is a great job done. The arrival portion is still messy, especially outside the airport. Placing transparent glass between the baggage unloading people and the baggage claiming passengers has also

reduced the baggage cutting (stealing) disasters.

However, still there is a lot of scope for improvement in the following areas:

The duty free shop: Going in to the duty shop at the Dhaka airport, foreigners would definitely want to find stuff to take back home that represents Bangladesh. Currently, there's very little in that shop that gives an essence of Bangladesh.

Real-time arrival/departures: It must link its real-time flight arrival/departures to internet sites which would be very valuable contribution towards passenger satisfaction.

Luggage handling for arriving passengers takes a very long time. One can also see the handlers tossing luggage on the conveyor

belts, not a pretty site. A yellow cab booth should be opened somewhere inside the terminal building so that people don't get hassled by the cab drivers and middlemen.

Next improvement must involve changing of several security personnel who ruin the day for many by mishandling the situation. First-time foreigners with no one to meet may still be perplexed at the chaos, once outside the neat terminal.

**Eng. MASiddique**  
*Project Engineer, ZIA, Dhaka*

### An open letter

I was moved by the shocking pictures of a blood-soaked and bandaged Prof. Humayun Azad of Dhaka University on the front

pages of online Bangladeshi dailies. This is an open and frank letter to Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, the honourable home minister. It is your duty, sir, to (a) ensure the safety and security of the residents of Bangladesh and (b) to make sure that its laws are enforced to a bare minimum level to sustain a safe yet economically viable work environment. Indeed, one of the election promises of the BNP was to put the brakes on the sliding law and order situation left behind by the AL.

You tried to cover up your own failure as you did with reference to the recent attack on Dr. Kamal Hossain's car in Rangamati. What will you say this time?

I take this opportunity to express my hearty appreciation of the prime minister for probing into the

failure of the police to safeguard Dr. Kamal Hossain, even though he is her political opponent. It showed graciousness expected from a national leader.

**Shabbir A. Bashar**  
*Stanford University, California, USA*

### A message

I wholly support Mohammad Badrul Ahsan concerning last week's Cross Talk on the Anti-Corruption Bill. Along with him I myself, and I am sure a good number of fellow citizens, would also want to send the message that 'corruption is like charity which begins at home' to the political and bureaucratic elite of Bangladesh.

**Tasnim**  
*Japan*