

Carnage at Bangabandhu Avenue: What next?

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THE commando style operation on the life of Sheikh Hasina and slaughter of Awami League leaders and supporters has shocked the nation. I pay homage to Ivy Rahman, the elegant lady of last half a century, and all those who lost their lives and limbs in the carnage. The way world leaders including President George W. Bush and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan condemned the carnage and felt concerned for the health and safety of Sheikh Hasina, their ambassadors went beyond protocol to demand apprehension and punishment of the culprits it can no longer be taken complacently, as has been done many times before. It's a grave national concern. It should work as a wake up call to those who had been either pretending to be asleep or enjoying the many attempts on the life of Sheikh Hasina and other VVIPs.

On February 28, imminent writer Professor Humayun Azad was severely stabbed and his minor son escaped from kidnappers on July 25. The mutilated professor apparently succumbed to fear and frustration alone in Germany. There was grenade attack on the life of Khulna Mayor on April 1, 2004. Ten truckloads of sophisticated arms, ammunitions, grenades and bombs coming through clandestine sea route of Chittagong were hauled up, by sheer coincidence, on April 3, 2004. There was attack on the motorcade of Sheikh Hasina on the same day. My good friend Commodore Rabbani died in Bangkok due to bullet injury of April 12. Before the nation could pass over the shock and awe of all these, Ahsanullah Master MP was gunned down on May 8, and His Excellency the British High Commissioner was miraculously saved in a bomb attack on May 22. On June 28, Editor Humayun Kabir of Khulna was bombed to death. After the war zone of Iraq and Afghanistan per capita violence is probably the highest in Bangladesh seemingly crossing the threshold of failed states.

These heinous trains of events and

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Ground zero of attack

many more in less than six months time suggest an anonymous army being supplied with sophisticated arms, ammunitions, grenades and bombs by clandestine sources to perpetuate a reign of terror in Bangladesh. Latest attempt on the life of the Leader of the Opposition on August 21 appears convincing enough that the hauled up weapons in Chittagong were meant for some terrorist political elements of the country! As seizure of ten truckload weapons could not dent the nefarious activities, it is deduced some supplies of

sophisticated weapons had already reached the destination or still reaching from a steady source or sources.

It is surprising that not a single terrorist could be traced so far out of all these cases. It is as strange as it is mysterious. The helpless nation is aghast with anger and despair as their elected government and law and order machinery cannot stop serial killing of politicians, intellectuals and gunrunning, much less apprehend the criminals. The grenades and rocket launchers and AK-

47 rifles are war grade materials, used by the soldiers in combat. These terrorists who seem to have declared a war on Bangladesh are highly motivated and cool planners, may have harsh training and experience in the breeding grounds elsewhere. Ten truckloads of sophisticated weapons cost fifty million dollars in the international market and three to five times more in the underworld. Who can bankroll all these? It could be either a country or a terrorist outfit with a political design or revenge. As killers are following the shadows continuously, time is fast running out. Arrest the trend before damage done to our democracy goes beyond repair. We are surely in crisis zone and democracy is in harms way. Those who are killing elected representatives and political leaders can not have faith or purpose within the permissible limits of democracy.

Who are possible suspects? To trace back, we might as well go back to 71 and 75, chronicle all major antidemocratic and anti-people designs. We may go to Bali, Indonesia and other places, explore terror-breeding links and seek international help if necessary. This is hard professional job demanding highest dedication and deductive intelligence, not a legal squabbling. Partisan politics will shroud the criminal forces operating to derail our

democracy, the only value area of Bangladesh. In such a gathering of political luminaries all overt and covert security and intelligence agencies must have been on duty on that fateful afternoon. Individuals on duty must answer, as to what they have seen and done on that fateful moment. How come culprits, presumably at least half a dozen of them, penetrated so close and after throwing killer grenades and firing shots for such frightful time could safely vanish without any trace! It is either callus failure or deliberate complacency of persons on duty. There must have been hundreds of police and plain clothed persons of various law enforcing and intelligence agencies on duty in and around ground zero of the attack. Some duty personnel with their experienced eyes must have seen something which is likely to provide vital lead, even breakthrough in the shrouded mystery. Let the inquiries proceed quickly and boldly with honest intention.

Hikmatul Jihad has claimed the responsibility of the slaughter and threatened to kill Sheikh Hasina in next seven days. Immediate requirement is beefing up of round the clock security of Leader of the Opposition. It was wrong to withdraw Special Security Force (SSF) from her security. Both the Leaders of House and Opposition need coverage of these very well trained well-equipped and dedicated professionals. As the founding DG of PSF, now SSF I take pride in mentioning that since raising of this professional body in 86 there has not been any attempt on the lives of the VVIPs covered by this elite force. The Prime Minister can show minimum gesture of sympathy and goodwill by ordering back immediate SSF coverage to Sheikh Hasina. Leader of the Opposition is one of the surviving daughters of Bangabandhu and the case is hanging in the Supreme Court, verdict of jail killing of four national leaders is due on September 7. She needs maximum protection now.

Politics in Bangladesh can't infinitely browse in the wilderness of gunrunning and killing. Government must ensure safety and security of the citizens before welfare could start. That very first purpose of government is missing today. As the world leaders are expressing concern on the security environment with special reference to the threat faced by the leader of the opposition we are in a crisis. The government must move immediately and firmly before we are stamped as a security bankrupt country or a failed state. The concept of sovereign vanity or absolute power is increasingly getting outdated to the universally accepted values. If we fail to respond to the calls of the time, they may as well ignore us. Let's face it; we have a dependent economy in an interdependent world.

IN MEMORIAM

As I saw Ivy Rahman

AYESHA KHANAM

I first saw Ivy Rahman in 1966/1967 at Eden College as a student. Though I had my graduation course in Dhaka University but I was involved with student movement and had some organisational responsibilities to look after in some girls colleges and schools. There I also met Sheikh Hasina, present leader of the opposition in the Parliament besides Ivy Rahman, the then Student League top woman leader and some others. I belonged to Student Union. Two organisations had always their competition in winning the student cabinet in college students union. Both of us were very active in the students' movement.

Later on during 1968-69 students' mass upsurge, 1970-historic national election, 1971-liberation war, and thereafter Ivy was involved in Awami League women's section and I in the women's movement.

Ivy Rahman was a classmate of one of my very close friends, Jebunnisa Monju from Netrokona. So in that way she happened to be a friend of my friend. So a good relationship developed with her beyond the organisational one. Since 1967 till that fateful 21 August 2004, during this long 37 years we developed also a good working relationship which turned into a personal relationship which was full of friendship, debate, discussion, agitation.

In 1974 Zillur Rahman was the General Secretary of Awami League. He was sick and for treatment he was in Moscow. I was visiting Moscow after attending WIDF's council meeting. We were in the same hotel and we returned in the same plane. Ivy and I had a long time to talk about some of women's issues in Bangladesh, about her very early marriage, of unpreparedness for adopting many things, Zillur Rahman's full cooperation as a husband in getting her higher education etc.

After 1975, this country had a hard time, specially the Awami League leaders and their families. Ivy had to face that. From 1975 to 1990 Ivy was in the first rank facing struggle, uncertainty in her personal life, organising movement, mobilising mass women under the banner of Awami League.

After 1990 I found a new Ivy. I found a basic change in her attitude and behaviour pattern. She was becoming



more and more a down to earth person and it continued during the time between 1996-2000, when Awami League was in power. She came out as a very good organiser in holding the workshop for highly discussed Family Law Reform. She had to contact 45 organisations. Though there was a guidance and advice from the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina but in practice it was Ivy Rahman who had to organise the whole thing. At that time I really found a new Ivy Rahman, very calm and quiet, ready to accept any criticism from any side and, ready to endorse it in the main draft-document.

At that time she was in charge of Jatiya Mahila Sangstha. In the beginning Jatiya Mahila Sangstha office was in Segunbagicha, very near to Bangladesh Mahila Parishad office. We spent many an evening in her office in preparing draft document of the Bill of Women and Child Repression Act- 2000 with Advocate Gazizul Haque and others. We 10-12 women activists spent many hours in her office. She was so cordial and as a host she was taking care of us in every matter. She was looking after every body's food, transport and other things. During this time I had an opportunity to talk with her about others issues of women's movement, issues of gender equality, issues of patriarchal culture, which is a main obstacle in women's empowerment. We agreed on every issue.

During the time of drafting Family Law-Reform document Ivy stood always by the side of women's movement. History of women's movement and our lives and practical experiences tell us that gender equality issues have always been very critical issues because these always go against tides. We had many critical remarks and comments on the primary draft, Ivy was always with us. When it was necessary she was even critic of her own party government's stand. At the time I found Ivy as very consistent, committed to gender equality issues.

Many of us know that, women's movement in Bangladesh engaged in a continuous struggle for equal participation in Parliament. Women's movement has a demand for introducing direct election and increasing the number of reserved seats in the Parliament. In this movement Ivy was very active and very strong supporter. She was maintaining liaison between her party Awami League and us. She always actively cooperated with women's movement without party barrier. Last 10 years of her life made her more rich in knowledge about gender issues. She had gathered many practical knowledge about the inferior status of women in a male dominated, patriarchal political culture. She highly valued the role of women's movement in Bangladesh. She had a great respect for Poet Sufia Kamal. Last June 2004 Ivy and we had our last programme. We met her and we stood for more than one hour in a human chain in demand for changing the present Government Bill which was again going for indirect election of women in the Parliament.

We have been passing through a very critical time in our life and at that time when we need a strong partner like Ivy, unfortunately we miss her forever. But we will remember her beautiful and confident face throughout our life.

I met hundreds of women workers and wives of political leaders in the 60's who ultimately became inactive and lost their activist's role after getting power and affluence. Ivy was an exception. Ivy Rahman remained a political and women's right activist till the last breath of her life. To me it is the main strength of her character. That's why I respect her. She will remain in our mind ever after.

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