

Email threat suspect

Information please

THE authorities responded quickly to the email that was sent to *Prothom Alo* on August 23, claiming responsibility for August 21 and threatening to kill Sheikh Hasina within seven days. Tracing the email to a cyber-cafe in Elephant Road, they arrested Shaibal Saha Partha on August 26 and immediately took him into custody for questioning.

The details surrounding Partha's arrest and the evidence against him remain shrouded in uncertainty. More importantly, it appears that not even his most basic rights under the constitution have been respected, and that his detention and interrogation have not been conducted in accordance with the rule of law and the country's rules of criminal procedure.

After he was picked up by the police, the suspect disappeared for four days. Neither his local police nor the SB nor the CID would confirm to his family that he was in custody, he was not produced before a magistrate within 24 hours, as the law requires, nor was he permitted to consult an attorney, as is also his right.

Partha was finally produced in court on August 30, limping and bearing visible signs of the torture that his lawyer claims he has suffered in custody. His bail petition was rejected and he was again remanded into police custody for further interrogation. He has not been heard from since.

Regardless of the gravity of the offence anyone is charged with, for the authorities to disappear a suspect for four days with no information to his family or any other party is unacceptable. Nor can there be any justification for the mistreatment of a suspect in custody.

What makes the Partha's situation even worse is that according to those knowledgeable about the facts of the case, there does not seem to be convincing evidence that he was the only possible sender and that there could have been dozens of other possible senders from the same location.

Respect for common decency and the rule of law compel us to demand that the authorities make full disclosure of Partha's present condition and the charges and evidence against him and grant him his constitutional rights immediately.

Blast in Jakarta

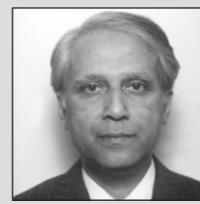
Time to get our acts together

WE are both shocked and concerned over the repeated attempts by terrorist groups to create anarchy and kill innocent civilians all over the world. The latest being the bomb attack outside the Australian embassy in Indonesian capital Jakarta that killed at least nine people and injured hundreds. It is, most frighteningly, becoming a regular pattern. All kinds of security and precautionary measures seem to be turning out non-effective. Even though, as the reports say, there was strong intelligence about a possible attack in Jakarta, the authorities failed to save its citizens from falling victim to the force of destruction.

We express our deepest sympathies to the families of the dead and the injured. At the same time we strongly condemn the cowardly and dastardly act by the terrorists who, by putting innocent lives into jeopardy, have only displayed their total indifference to humanity. Just a week ago, more than three hundred innocent children and their parents died after being held hostage for two days without any water or food by a group of Chechen rebels. We reiterate our position: no matter how justified one's cause is, killing innocent people or taking them hostage to fulfil that desire is simply unacceptable. In the latest incident, though the apparent target was a foreign embassy, it was the native citizens who bore the brunt of the attack. All those who died and most of the injured were Indonesians. It is difficult to understand how do the terrorist groups expect support from their own people whose lives are put at grave risk by their actions.

It is time the whole world got its act together and devised a strategy to be actually able to combat terrorism. The recent attacks should be an eye opener of sorts for all the countries including Bangladesh that have been the targets of bomb attacks recently. The perpetrators cannot be allowed to think in any way that we are intimidated by their act of terrorism. We urge all for a concerted effort to send out a firm signal to these groups that they will never achieve their target with such despicable acts.

Need for real wages for civil servants



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

AT every opportunity, the public in general, and politicians in particular, continue to berate bureaucrats in Bangladesh as being inefficient and corrupt. This is also the standard assessment of most donor agencies.

What we sometimes tend to forget, however, is that our bureaucrats in more ways than one, are like footballs, being kicked around by every political party that come to power or by the special interest groups these parties tend to support.

This unfortunate scenario has evolved over time partially because of political nepotism during the process of selection and also probably because the more meritorious students are no longer interested in joining government service due to its poor salary potential. The growth of the private sector, better opportunities in banking, insurance and financial institutions and being professional lawyers, doctors or engineers or architects have become more attractive. There is also the greater possibility of obtaining scholarships and studying abroad. The scenario has changed.

The other day I was talking to a retired colleague about the Government's decision to form the sixth National Pay Commission (NPC). He reminded me in this context of a few interesting facts. I shall share them with my readers.

He pointed out that towards 1968, the maximum monthly salary for a civil servant -- a Central Secretary, was Pakistani Rupees 3000/- (about US Dollar 650/-) from which income tax of about 22 per cent was deducted at source. He also reminded me that most officers

of the Central Superior Services started off with a monthly salary between Rupees 450 to 500, i.e., about USD 75 to 105 at the then current rates (the latter being so for those belonging to the Pakistan Foreign Service and the Civil Service of Pakistan). Such Officers enjoyed other facilities which included decent housing, medi-care and possibilities of securing loans and advances so that the officer could either buy a motor-cycle (so preferred by bachelors) or a car. A new Toyota Corolla in those days cost about Rupees 10,500/- and a Volkswagen at Rupees 16,000/-. Officers also had the privilege of paying sometimes less than nine months salary to purchase half a

facilities and the salary structure were such that a civil servant could live with his family decently on his earned income. There was no such thing as 'systems loss' and if anyone was found to be corrupt was generally ostracized socially, and there was every likelihood that he would have difficulty in getting his daughter married off. Sadly, things have changed.

The Liberation War in 1971 and the then socialistic impulses initiated a major change. In early 1972, the highest monthly salary of a Civil Servant was reduced to Taka 1000/- or about USD 145/-. The lowest member in the rung received about Taka 100/- per month. Absence of resources, devastation

of five members. This has since been reduced to four -- parents and two children. Their assumptions in this regard have been reflected over the decades in the different recommendations offered by NPCs. The second NPC recommended 21 grades and the minimum and maximum monthly pay scale thereunder ranged between Taka 225 and Taka 3000. This was made effective from July 1, 1977. The third NPC -- between Taka 500 and Taka 6000/- This came into effect from 1 June 1985. The fourth NPC fixed monthly salary scales between Taka 1000 and Taka 10,000 and came into effect from 1 July 1991. The fifth and last NPC fixed monthly salary scales between Taka 1500 and Taka

that there are about 450 persons in the civil service (Joint Secretaries upwards) who get paid the highest three scales. This group also gets additional facilities in terms of housing and transportation -- but nothing special in terms of medical or educational support. There are about 100,000 other civil servants who do not fall within their categories.

This body is expected to submit report by November this year. That is cutting it fine. They have a lot of work, and one does not really know if all that is expected of them, can be completed within such a short space of time. They have to obtain the opinions of government organisations, statutory bodies and enterprises. They should also consult the civil society and the private sector. Unless they have intensive, open-minded dialogue, they will end up with routine incremental benefits and leave many basic issues and questions unanswered.

The sixth NPC needs to carefully scrutinise existing facts like organograms and job descriptions, possible downsizing of the government machinery to tackle overstaffing in the middle and lower ranks and vertical mobility on the basis of merit. They should also determine ways and means as to how the independence of the civil service can be restored.

POST BREAKFAST

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bigha of residential land in planned residential areas. I am referring here to plots in Dhanmandi, Banani and Gulshan in Dhaka and similar quality plots in Chittagong or Rajshahi or Khulna.

The salary structure, living conditions and future prospects, coupled with retirement plans and provident fund savings made Central Superior Services quite attractive. Consequently, more often than not, most of the students who were in the top five per cent in different university faculties tried to become a civil servant. There was also the added prestige of the past Indian Civil Services where a bureaucrat was confident that he would not be discriminated against because of perceived political orientations and that merit alone would determine his future within the service. Consequently, he could discharge his duties without fear or favour. Politicians also respected them for their general honesty. Even petty civil servants rarely trod the path of corruption because the

caused by the war and need for reconstruction -- all juxtaposed to create a matrix where, overnight, almost every bureaucrat found his salary reduced by more than half and sometimes two-thirds. Everyone however took this measure with good grace because it was felt that all should step in and help re-build the country.

Nevertheless, the impracticality of the situation was soon evident and that led to the appointment of the first Pay Commission. This became effective from 1 July, 1973. New pay scales with 10 grades emerged with minimum and maximum salaries being pegged between Taka 130 and Taka 2000/- In between, the Taka had devalued. As such, this roughly maintained in USD terms the figures that had been fixed in early 1972, with very marginal and minimal additions.

Successive NPCs since 1973 have tried to focus on the needs of government servants. Their efforts in the Seventies considered a bureaucratic family unit to consist of

15,000 (that is between USD 32 and 265 per month according to 1997 rates of exchange) and came into operation from July 1, 1997. So, in effect, in straight number terms, senior civil servants are still not getting the salary their predecessors received nearly four decades ago.

I will not debate statistics here. The fact of the matter is that the current medical allowance received by a government servant is sufficient for any one member of his family to visit a doctor once every three months and undertake required pathological tests once every four months. The transportation and rental situation is so bad that I shall refrain from making any comments. The majority of family members of civil servants are however fortunate enough to wear decent clothes and footwear because of the surplus RMG items and footwear that are so easily available at reasonable prices. Thank God for that.

A rough guesstimate suggests

employees are below that of a per capita income family. In effect, they are mostly below the poverty line of USD one and a half a day. Consequently, it is not strange that corruption should have become so pervasive among meter readers, telephone linesmen and petty law enforcing personnel.

Some pundits in the Administration suggest that we cannot increase salaries in real terms because of resource constraints. This logic is just unacceptable. A foreign consultant observed the other day that 'if we pay peanuts, we will only get monkeys'.

Such a comment was very disappointing, but then there was a degree of truth in it. We have a situation where civil servants earning a monthly salary of USD 250 are making decisions on implementation of projects running into millions of USD. This is just not tenable, particularly where you have persons from the private sector offering carrots at every opportunity.

It was therefore a welcome

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

On the road to perdition!

A former law-enforcer's concern

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE title definitely sounds scary and one may brand it as a piece of extreme pessimism of a retrograde mind. We are thinking of the Bangladeshi polity where, admittedly, there is a pall of gloom, anger and frustration in the inability to properly counter the evil forces of destabilisation. Centuries ago, the great Roman orator Cicero said that the 'Safety of the people is the highest law' and the same holds good today, definitely with a much greater intensity on a wider international scale. We shall limit our discussions to the Bangladesh scenario where even the incorrigible optimist will admit that there appears serious cracks in some vital institutions of the state. The sociologists tell us that the foundation of a society principally rests upon the proper and effective working of the corrective and regulatory institutions like the education, judicial system and the press. Although none of these institutions work in a watertight compartment and in fact are interrelated in the workplace, yet this writer for practical reasons would like to concentrate in the cracks appearing in one sub-system of the judicial system. The reference is to the police organisation about whose under-performance all sections of the society are justifiably vocal.

Present scenario and some queries

Adept in the game of buck passing and always finding justification for our inaction, we may still harp on the much-repeated excuse of inheriting a colonial police system but the ground reality is that the books and guidelines that the colonial masters left do not stand in the way of developing a truly professional organisation. This aspect assumes heightened significance today in Bangladesh when everyone raises the accusing finger towards police and pronounces that the latter are ill-equipped and incapable to handle the crisis arising out of the galloping violence and in particular the multi-

ple bomb blasts of the recent past. Assuming that we have now reached a nearly hopeless situation, is it not time to do some real soul searching and find out why we are in such a mess as alleged in the pronouncements of the guardians and the pundits?

Now may be the time when we must know why investigative efficiency of the police has deteriorated and whether such efficiency can be attained in isolation without setting the expected organisational goal of the police. It may also be appropriate now to know the pattern of resource allocation for increasing the professional competence of the

Ground reality and some police functions

Police functions can be broadly categorised into crime and public order duties although they cannot be bracketed in watertight compartments. In Bangladesh, a disproportionately large segment of the police manpower has to be earmarked for the public order contingencies because of the volatility of our body politic. A case in point is that of Dhaka Metropolitan Police where less than 15 percent of the entire strength of more than 25,000 personnel is earmarked for investigation of crime. More manpower, though not the only index of better

modernise our investigative machinery, to say the least.

The cumulative neglect towards increasing the investigative efficiency over the last decade and even before that has brought us to a situation where we are uncomfortably watching external agencies dealing with matters on our soil in which we may at best seek expert opinion only. No useful purpose will be served by fixing responsibility for failure at this stage but if we do not want our pride and professionalism to be further hurt, we would do well to invest more and allocate greater resources for proper recruitment, in-service training, modernisation of

consideration.

Intelligence

The broad police function of maintaining public order for ensuring internal security is closely associated with the task of collecting and collating intelligence in the interests of the state. In reality, in our situation, the interests of the state often get diluted and mixed up with the interests of the government of the day. The situation is marked by an unfortunate lack of understanding and appreciation of the requirements of the state and the government in a democratic and pluralist society like ours. The unpleasant truth is that agencies maintain file

the political authority. If they (agency) have to remain preoccupied with largely inconsequential partisan matters to the detriment of national interest, then we will not be able to manage the crisis situation, not to speak of forestalling the tragedies of recent times. We have been criticising the agencies very loudly without, however, appreciating the impediments to the growth of an apolitical professional organisation. Time has come when we must have the honesty to call a spade a spade and realise that the governments will change hands but not the state.

In Bangladesh today we are passing through a sad time when doubts are being expressed publicly about the efficacy and honesty of some vital organs of the state whose functions can neither be arrogated to others nor be privatised. The compounding tragedy is that such criticisms by leaders of our society cannot be summarily dismissed for reasons mentioned hereinbefore. It would not be prudent to treat a disease by denying its very existence. At the same time we cannot give in to the cynics by agreeing to endure what cannot be cured. The cumulative neglect towards increasing the investigative efficiency over the last decade and even before that has brought us to a situation where we are uncomfortably watching external agencies dealing with matters on our soil in which we may at best seek expert opinion only. No useful purpose will be served by fixing responsibility for failure at this stage but if we do not want our pride and professionalism to be further hurt, we would do well to invest more and allocate greater resources for proper recruitment, in-service training, modernisation of

and shadow the leaders and workers of pronouncedly constitutional politics-oriented parties belonging to the opposition who are recognised partners in the business of politics. At some point of time when such opposition party comes to power, there is an uneasy relationship between the political masters and the agencies. In such a scenario professionalism becomes the worst casualty, sense of direction is lost, the organisation dips into a lackadaisical environment and interests of the state take a back seat giving greater space to partisan considerations. In saying so one is not oblivious of the fact that State interests may undergo change but the values of a democratic polity are universal and as such demand unconditional adherence to it.

Intelligence agencies of the region and beyond cooperate for mutually beneficial reasons but the national agency is expected to be able to effectively serve national interests if directed appropriately by

investigative outfits. One may also venture to know if there is a lack of proper emphasis in fixing priorities and deciding the core functions of police in a pluralist society like ours.

The above queries are, without doubt, in public interest and therefore, in the fitness of things can no longer be the subject of discussion for a select few who, until now have not displayed sufficient concern and pragmatism for modernising our police outfit. The select few which include this writer amongst other former police chiefs and political leaders have not succeeded in the desired manner but that must not debar them from making analysis and framing recommendations so that we do not reach a precipice and plunge the polity into anarchy. As a popular advertisement on anti-drug movement in USA says that the fact that you were an ex-addict should not hold you back from counselling your addicted son because the drugs destroy an entire generation.

For facility of understanding and clarity let us look at the budgetary provision of the CID (Criminal Investigation Department) a national outfit that is exclusively meant for investigation of serious and scheduled offences of the country. Upon perusal it is surprising to note that in the budget of more than Tk 35 crore for the CID for the year 2004-2005 there is no allocation whatsoever for purchasing scientific equipment for the crime laboratory of CID, the apex investigating outfit of the country. This is lamentable in the background of the commitment to

Forensic Laboratory and specialist squads for investigation. Barking out orders or purchasing lethal weapons may serve some purposes but investigation has to be scientific, modern and level headed to prove equal to the initial stress following an incident and strong enough to withstand the subsequent test of rigorous scrutiny in the court of law. If that happens is the expectation of every well-meaning citizen then full confidence will be restored in the efficacy and impartiality of the investigation body and responsible leaders will not demand external intervention and supervision.

Let us remember that investigation of a criminal offence is the exclusive function of the investigative body of a sovereign state and any deviation in this regard places that body and the sovereign people in shame and disgrace. At the same time we must take sufficient care to ensure that the process of investigation is not initiated by the alleged political direction and extraneous

considerations.

At the same time we cannot give in to the cynics by agreeing to endure what cannot be cured. We can definitely overcome the impasse by dint of political goodwill and foresight if we admit that the damage caused during the yester-years have to be repaired and the safety and security of the people will receive unbiased attention. Let us be forewarned that progress in the damage repairing will be slow but if we can muster enough courage to initiate the process and avoid being myopic, our future generations would be the proud citizens of a healthy polity. Our politicians, have to take the lead. Let them rise to the occasion.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is former Inspector General of Police and Secretary to the Government

and all such things.

Castro and the US

I have just watched a TV programme on Fidel Castro and Cuba and read your editorial. I am terribly sorry to tell you that I expect some deep insight about US presence in connection with terrorism in Bangladesh from you who brilliantly identified incident of 21st August as an attack on democracy. It was an excellent editorial. As Castro just mentioned that the US always feels its national security is under threat, with Castro I want to add that bomb explosion in Bangladesh makes the US again 'feel vulnerable' in an unjust world.

Let Bangladesh fight its own battle to protect itself from terrorism. The reporter owe it to the readers to tell them what others said?

who can kill innocent people easily in the name of Jihad. I am sorry to say now practically there are no freedom in one country. So we must have a unified education system with freedom to choose subjects (including religion).

Dr Mahboob Hossain

Niigata University of Pharmacy, Niigata, Japan

thoughts echo throughout the page, giving us hope and aspirations that all is not lost as yet. But the question is, whether there are any people on the two sides (ruling and opposition) to keep their respective parties abreast of the desire of the common people, so that they can learn, reform and act accordingly? As a government doctor, I have worked for the last 20 years in different capacities in various hospitals. Since we are rarely gifted with the art of writing (this is something that wanes with years of gruelling studies and devouring gigantic syllabuses) we are not in the habit of upholding our experiences. At times I feel the need that some of our experiences should come to light.

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