

## Limited gain at the G-8 Disappointment over environment

IN the aftermath of the terrorist attack on London, there was much speculation that the G-8 summit at Gleneagles would be side-tracked from the issues it had convened to discuss, in order to address the issue of terror and security. However, the fact that the G-8 was able to continue with its stated agenda, even against the backdrop of the carnage in London, made the agreements reached at the summit all the more laudable.

The summit ended with the leaders of the world's wealthiest eight countries signing the biggest aid deal in history for Africa. According to the agreement, development aid to Africa would be doubled to \$48 billion by the year 2010, and debt would be written off for the 18 most indebted African countries. This alone counts as a considerable achievement.

Other positive developments were agreements to tackle diseases such as HIV/Aids and malaria, and to provide \$3 billion a year for the next three years for the Palestinian Authority to help build up institutions.

However, there were still some disappointments with respect to the summit. The first was that even though dialogue on climate change has come some way, the US is still dragging its feet on any kind of commitment, and nothing concrete was agreed to in terms of the environment.

Similarly there was nothing solid agreed to in terms of eliminating agricultural subsidies by the G-8 nations (and the rest of the EU) which would have been of far more help to the African countries (and the rest of us) than increased aid and debt write off.

It is estimated that if Africa boosted its share of world exports by just 1 percent worldwide, it would earn an additional \$70 billion: far outstripping even the generous amount agreed to at Gleneagles. Finally, it should not be forgotten that far more of the world's poor live in Asia than in Africa, and that this part of the world should not be neglected.

Nevertheless, the agreement reached at Gleneagles represents a real watershed for the world. It shows that the wealthier countries are finally willing to accept responsibility for alleviating poverty and acting for the common global good. No doubt they could have gone even further in their commitments, but there is also no doubt that the summit should be seen as a very positive development.

## After the highhandedness Not even regrets expressed

THE incident in which some photojournalists were beaten up by NSI people at the weekend was a rude shock to all and sundry. Strangely enough, even though a few days have since passed by, no regrets have been expressed by them over the matter. On the contrary, they have filed a case against some 20 journalists pressing charges for what they perceived to be violation of law by the latter!

The basic charge against the victims of ham-handed treatment is that they had tried to take photographs of the wall of the NSI building. This however was not attempted with any sinister intent but in appreciation of the fact that it was one of the very few walls in the city which was free from graffiti. So neither the act nor the motive behind it had anything that should have provoked such hostile action on the part of NSI people. It does not behove any government agency on the side of law to break the norms of civilised conduct towards members of the journalist community. If they were to do so, how would they stand apart from the thugs? Furthermore, the photographers are reported to have lost some of the equipment they were carrying when they came under attack. It seems the attackers were in a vindictive frame of mind; otherwise they wouldn't have pounced on the journalists without giving them a chance to explain themselves. If the latter had committed something wrong in the eye of their tormentors it could have been pointed out with courteous words; but what right did they have to assault the journalists?

We condemn the outrageous show of muscle power. The assault on the photojournalists must be regarded as an attack on their freedom to work. And this might really mean undermining the press as a whole. The awkward trend will have to be discouraged for the good of society.

An elected government can only be expected to redress the wrongdoing against the journalists who must be allowed to work in an atmosphere conducive to the fulfilment of their professional responsibilities. To this end, the errand should be brought to book.

M. ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

PARLIAMENTARY system of government is nowadays one of the three most practised systems of government, the other two being presidential and dual. The framers of the constitution of Bangladesh that was adopted on November 4, 1972 and came into force on December 16 of the same year decided in favour of a parliamentary system of government, but the conditions required for the successful functioning of such a parliamentary democracy did not exist in the newly independent Bangladesh. The result was the demise of the parliamentary democracy within a period of less than three years of its introduction.

After staying fifteen-plus years under various military and presidential rules, the country reintroduced parliamentary democracy in 1991. Although three general elections of members of parliament (MP) were held between 1991 and 2001 under the caretaker government, which is unique, yet the base of a well-founded modern democratic system of government is still fragile. Repetition of the antagonistic unparliamentary political environment of the period 1973-75 has been remarked. So, many have raised questions about the future of parliamentary democracy in the country.

According to some political analysts and researchers, the factors that primarily contributed to the failure of the first parliamentary system of government in Bangladesh were: (1) constitutional, (2) political, and (3) socio-economic.

The constitutional factors included adoption of the constitution that provided for a parliamentary system of government in which all the powers were vested in the Prime Minister, and the President was relegated to a ceremonial head of the state. The framers of our constitution heavily depended upon the constitution of India. But like the President of India, the President of Bangladesh was neither vested with the executive powers of the republic nor was he made a part of Parliament.

In the words of an analyst, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of the nation and

Prime Minister had clear-cut supremacy over the two Presidents who could not perform their duty to preserve and protect the constitution when its provisions were misused by the government. The replacement of multi-party parliamentary democracy by the one-party presidential system of government through the Constitution (Fourth Amendment) Act dated, January 25, 1975 led to the demise of the first parliamentary system of government.

The political factors that contributed to the failure of the first parliament may be identified as rivalry between two factions of the ruling AL led by Tajuddin Ahmed and Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmed, the resignation tendered by Tajuddin Ahmed from the post of Finance

them and within a short period they started losing public credibility.

On the economic front, the nine-month liberation war left Bangladesh virtually stagnant. Immediately after independence, the country suffered from an inflationary spiral. Prices of daily necessities went beyond the purchasing power of the common people. The devastating floods in mid-1972, and food aid cut off under PL 480 worsened the crisis, which caused food deficit and ultimately famine. Confronted with the deteriorating law and order situation, worsening economic condition, and other problems, the government proclaimed a state of emergency on December 28, 1974. Within the next twenty-five days, parliament passed the fourth amendment

bringing an end to the first parliamentary system of government.

After fifteen-plus years under different military and presidential rules, the country got back its parliamentary democracy in 1991 through the Constitution (Twelfth Amendment) Act, 1991. Since its reintroduction in 1991, parliamentary democracy has been facing various problems. The prevailing conditions cannot be called satisfying for the successful functioning of parliamentary system of government.

First, the confrontational politics of the two major political parties, namely the BNP and the AL, which have held the state powers during the last fourteen years, have created an unhealthy situation for the growth of the nascent democracy in general and parliamentary system of government in particular.

Parliament is the symbol of democracy. It is the place for the discussion, debate, and settlement of all sorts of national and important issues. But both the AL and the BNP, when in opposition, have resorted to street agitation, hartals, seeking solution to political, economic, and other issues.

Third, democracy is one of the fundamental principles of state policy. The framers of the constitution incorporated articles in the constitution that would ensure effective participation of people through the elected representatives in administration at all levels, including the local government. The fourth amendment, introducing one-party presidential system of government in 1975 deleted these provisions. These provisions were revived when parliamentary system was reintroduced in 1991. In spite of the constitutional obligation to have local government bodies composed of elected persons in every unit of the republic, the elected local government body now exists only at the union level. The elected local government

necessities of life. The common people lack necessary purchasing power to procure the basic necessities of life.

Fifth, Amnesty International, the US State Department, and the European Union have expressed concern over the poor human rights in the country. Serious concern has been expressed over the extra-judicial killings following the deployment of the rapid action battalion (RAB). Some people have come to compare RAB with Rakkhi Bahini.

Last but not the least, politicisation of administration during the last one decade or so has obstructed the growth of an efficient and impartial bureaucracy. There is frequent interference in the process of governance by the ruling party and their leaders. Pointing to an all-pervasive politicisation from administration to law enforcing agencies, one noted economist has recently said that all recruitments beginning from a primary teacher to a police constable are being done on political considerations. It has also disintegrated the civil society. Even business organisations like the FBCCI, BGMEA, the professional bodies of engineers and doctors have not been spared of the curse of politicisation.

To conclude, conditions conducive to successful functioning of parliamentary system of government have to prevail. This is a responsibility of the alliance in power and the main opposition and other political parties, having representation in parliament or not. However, the ruling alliance has to take the main responsibility. It should be sincere in resolving all political disputes with the spirit of democracy without resorting to any repressive measures. It should encourage and help to grow and develop a strong opposition or coalition of opposition parties capable of offering an alternative government. Parliamentary democracy may again be at stake if the factors unfriendly to the successful functioning of parliamentary democracy are not tackled in time.

M. Abdul Latif Mondal is a former Secretary to the government.

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Minister on October 26, 1973, the opposition movement outside parliament led by the Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) and the National Awami Party (Maulana Bhasani), the challenge and threat from the underground radical parties such as Purbo Banglar Shamyabadi Dal, Sarbohara Party, and Purbo Pakistaner Communist Party, and fourth amendment of the constitution in January 1975 leading to the introduction of dictatorial one-party presidential system of government in place of multi-party parliamentary democracy.

According to some analysts, a war-ravaged Bangladesh did not have the basic socio-political atmosphere immediately after the war to have the luxury of establishing a system of government which demands social tolerance, a basic civil society, adequate law and order situation, and above all experience and respect towards democratic institutions. The unregulated activities of the Rakkhi Bahini, particularly at the initial stage, leading to killings, looting, and even rape, enraged the ordinary people who started hating

parliament to solve political and other issues gives signal that congenial atmosphere does not largely exist for the successful functioning of parliamentary system of government.

Second, many civil society leaders are of the opinion that democracy in Bangladesh is under "intensive care" where money and muscle reign supreme over politics. Dynastic nature of politics in the country reflects its inner weakness and lack of democratic credibility of the parties concerned. Money and muscle are the main instruments in our politics. Those who invest heavily in politics may expect adequate return; as a result parliament has become a commercial enterprise, leaving no time for the lawmakers to discuss serious public issues. Bangladesh has reached a stage where the leaders of the ruling and the main opposition parties are not even on talking terms. Bad politics is driving out good politicians from the political domain of the country. Such a situation does not help the smooth functioning of parliamentary democracy.

bodies at the zila (district) and upazila (sub-district) levels have remained non-functional since the reintroduction of the parliamentary system of government. The election pledge of the major political parties to revive elected local government bodies at the zila and upazila levels has remained unfulfilled. Democratization of the local government bodies is a means to institutionalising democracy at the grassroots level. Absence of democratic local government at the grassroots levels hampers the functioning of parliamentary system of government.

Fourth, in the economic front, high rate (about 50 percent) of poverty persists. Poverty Monitoring Survey Report (2004) of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics shows that the income disparity gap between the poor and the rich widened in six years until 2004. Household income comparison in particular shows that the rich saw a household income level rise of 13.36 per cent while the poor found it decreasing by 3.56 percent. The nation is engulfed by a high rate of inflation and price spiral of daily

# Get out of Baghdad

## London bombings should spur Bush and Blair to pull out of Iraq and renew the fight against our real enemies

JOE CONASON

RESPONDING appropriately to the atrocities in London means mourning the dead and caring for the wounded, declaring defiance to terrorism, and proclaiming support for every effort to find and punish the perpetrators. On those matters we should all be able to agree and unite, just as we did on September 11, 2001.

But this isn't September 11 anymore. Americans and our traditional allies have come a long way since then, at great cost in blood and money -- while the unity that sustained us after the 9/11 attacks has been squandered in a dubious war and partisan politics.

George W. Bush and Tony Blair will understandably try to bolster their waning popularity with rallying cries against acts of terror. Their initial reactions to the London bombings were simple expressions of resolve, but we may soon hear them claim that this sickening assault proves the wisdom of their decision to invade Iraq.

The president, prime minister, and their surrogates will remind

us that the war on terrorism is a global struggle with an enemy that respects no borders. Their sonorous phrases will be intended to silence those of us who believe that the war in Iraq is, at best, a distraction from the war to exterminate al-Qaida, and, at worst, an incitement of new terrorists.

nonexistent, and now, more than two years after the capture of Baghdad, we have uncovered no further proof. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who was formerly isolated in a corner of northern Iraq, now roams that country at will, inflicting murder on Iraqis and Americans.

There is no need for Bush and Blair to confess their grave error in Iraq. There is an urgent need for them to extricate us from that destructive distraction -- and to mobilise the resources and alliances we will need to defeat our real enemies in the years to come.

Such tactics will no doubt resonate on the authoritarian right, where questioning the commander in chief is tantamount to treason. But sooner or later the hard questions will have to be answered, and when they are, the hollowness of the arguments used to justify the war in Iraq will be exposed.

We were told that the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime would deprive the terrorists of a friend and sponsor, and make the world safer. The evidence linking Saddam to al-Qaida was always somewhere between flimsy and

We were told that the war would concentrate the Islamists in Iraq, allowing us to confront them in warfare that guaranteed their destruction. This was the infamous "flytrap" theory floated by various amateur counter-terrorists, also known as war-bloggers. It has long been exposed as a stupid idea but the human price for that stupidity has only begun to be paid. Recent assessments by the CIA indicate that a new generation of urban terrorists is being recruited and trained for the Iraqi conflict, and that in years to come the survivors

will disperse to wreak destruction elsewhere. Two days before the London bombings, Knight-Ridder reported that the use of improvised explosive devices or IEDs, the weapon of choice against both Iraqis and our troops, has now spread to Afghanistan.

We were told that the war in

vengeance on them. Damaged and depleted by the demands of the Iraq occupation, the Army and Marines may no longer be ready to finish the war in Afghanistan.

We were told that overthrowing Saddam Hussein and installing a friendly government in Iraq would be cheap and easy. Billions of

dollars and thousands of lives have put the lie to those false assurances -- and no one has been held accountable. What could we have done to ensure our safety with \$100 billion or \$200 billion or \$300 billion? What will we do if we are attacked again here and need the National Guard troops who have been deployed to occupy Iraq?

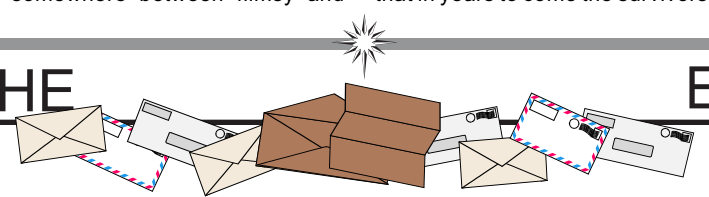
We were told that the war in Iraq would not distract from the essential tasks of securing our cities, borders, and transportation systems. The Department of

Homeland Security remains in utter disorder, its priorities skewed by contractor lobbyists and pork-barrel deals. The waste and petty corruption wouldn't matter if the government were making adequate progress toward its own security goals. In late June, former DHS inspector general Clark Kent Ervin told the members of the 9/11 Commission that despite the warning provided by the Madrid train bombing, "relatively little has been done in this country" to secure mass transit from terror attacks. The same can be said for chemical and nuclear plants, among other potential targets.

There is no need for Bush and Blair to confess their grave error in Iraq. There is an urgent need for them to extricate us from that destructive distraction -- and to mobilise the resources and alliances we will need to defeat our real enemies in the years to come.

Courtesy: Salon.com. Joe Conason writes a weekly column for Salon and the New York Observer.

# TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



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.

## Terror in London

As someone who uses King's Cross Station every day, and for whom the TV pictures from London are shots of my normal working environment, I would like to take the opportunity of my visit to Bangladesh for a wedding to put on record for your readers that, whatever the terrorists' aims may be, they will not succeed through violence. The people of Britain have never given

in to terrorism in the past, and we will not allow ourselves to be terrorised, now or in the future.

London is probably the most diverse city in the world. People originating from over 200 countries live there, speaking over 300 languages. The victims of Thursday's bombs will be from all communities Christians and

Muslims, Jews, Hindus and Sikhs, Europeans, Americans, Asians. This is an attack on the world, not just London. Last year, in Luton, where I live, we

raised money for the victims of the terrible floods in Bangladesh. We hope it provided some practical assistance but most of all we wanted to make a gesture of solidarity with the suffering of Bangladesh. The UK certainly does not need any money, but I hope the people of Bangladesh will show solidarity with the people of Britain in the face of these dreadful events.

Dr. David Cheesman  
Luton Bedfordshire, UK

## Newspapers' demands

Leaders of Newspaper Owner's Association of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Sangbadpatri Parishad and Journalists Union demanded exemption or reduction of tax on imported newsprint, and increase in the rate of government advertisements. We do not know how the government would respond to the demands but a question has come to my mind, maybe it would arise in

the minds of most of the readers. Will the leaders of the said associations take any step to reduce the prices of newspapers if the government accepts their demands? The reason behind the question is that I consider publishing of newspaper as a profitable business in Bangladesh nowadays, as I see more than 50 percent space of a newspaper is filled with advertisement and the total costs of advertisements are enough to bear the expenses in connection with the publishing of a newspaper. On the other hand, readers are being compelled to buy advertisement prioritised newspapers at a high price which is fetching a big amount of money for the publishers. So, I do not think the tax is burdensome for them and they are incurring loss due to low rate of government advertisement.

The publishers should think of reducing the prices of newspapers if the government meets their demands and the government should look into the matter if they

respond to publishers' demands.  
H Muhiit  
Chittagong

## AL leaders

AL leaders speak so proudly all the time as if they are the only masters of democracy doing everything to protect it for the people. But calling hartal any time for their own interest, ignoring national interests, obstructing the poor people from earning their daily bread and halting daily routine life of the people in general are a clear violation of fundamental democratic rights of the people. May we ask the hartal callers: who gave you the right to create disturbance and destroy the economic growth of the country?

What kind of democracy is this by which you are not only taking away the fundamental rights but also seriously disturbing the peace of the people in particular and undermining the reputation of our nation in general before the world. You

were not elected to call hartal all the time and disturb the normal life of the people, but to go to the parliament and help make law to serve the people.  
Abul, US

## Preventing launch disasters

A trinity of disasters on the odd days of May (15th, 17th & 19th) with around 300 dead has totally shaken our confidence on river traffic; a vital communication link in Bangladesh. The Perhaps Inland Water Transport is just a dangling department, and whoever heads it, the fault lies with them. After all when all is said and done; it is an act of God who creates the storms. Puns aside; what can we do to prevent such occurrence? A few pragmatic ideas are placed for consideration. The powers that be can take it or leave it; most probably they will leave it.

a) Have all motorised passenger or cargo carrying inland water-

vessels registered with a locally formed professional classification society like Lloyds, ABS, NKK etc.

b) We should allow only 3 or 4 standardised proven designs of vessels covering passenger capacities from 200 to 800 or whatever is considered as normal for the trade. Similarly, we could have a few standard designs for cargo vessels from say 25 tons to 100 tons or capacity that is suited to the trade.

c) The Sareng, Sukani and Driver must have valid license to work.

d) All vessels must have radio communication set to weather forecast wavebands only, which cannot be tuned to any other channel. If need be hourly weather forecasts through a specific inland marine band can be introduced.

e) Needless to say standardised safety gadgets must be on board.

Can the powers that be try to make a start to minimise this uncalled for loss of life in rivers?

S. A. Mansoor  
Gulshan, Dhaka

## Charity musical show

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to singer Runa Laila and actor Alamgir for their involvement in different charity works in Bangladesh. They have recently organised a charity musical show - the money raised from which went to the fund for physically challenged children of the country. They also joined a 'walk' that was aimed at raising public awareness about global hunger as well as raising funds for WFP's (World Food Programme) Global School Feeding Campaign. I applaud their involvement in such humanitarian efforts.

Runa and Alamgir can be examples to other 'rich and famous' people who should come forward, not only during relief operations but also on a regular basis to contribute in any way possible for

these downtrodden people. Unfortunately, there is a constant need for money for the rehabilitation of poor and hapless people everywhere in the country. Charity concerts, 'One-day football/cricket match, silent auctions, 'Dinner with your favourite celebrity/personality' are examples of activities that can be arranged to raise money for the acid victims, the AIDS patients, the lepers, the handicapped community and so forth.

In the words of Runa Laila herself, "We (the artists) are privileged that we can give something back to the society. Artists have a special gift through which we can mobilise people." This statement stands so true in the above context.

Halimul Mannan  
Monroe, Louisiana