

# Baghdad and London

## A dreadful similarity

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MANZOOR AHMED

No sane person can condone the carnage in London. The direct victims -- the dead and the injured -- had no responsibility for whatever grievance the perpetrators wanted to avenge or causes to which they wanted to draw attention. Other than the casualties themselves, many others suffered and continue to suffer -- people in anguish for their loved ones, people in fear and insecurity, people with the daily rhythm of life disrupted, and people with their lives thrown into turmoil and uncertainty. Indirectly, as witnessed in the wake of 9/11, the whole society becomes the victim. Seemingly rational people including politicians and public figures, who should know better, are gripped by xenophobia and suspicion and begin to react in hysteria and hostility.

What London tasted on July 7, 2005 and Madrid on March 11, 2004 (God forbid its repetition elsewhere) is the daily fare in Baghdad since the "mission of democracy and freedom" was unleashed on Iraq two years ago. In fact, there cannot be a parallel between Baghdad and London or Madrid. The destruction and devastation caused to Baghdad and Iraq by the "coali-

tion" invasion and the cumulative effect of the state of war between the invading forces and the insurgents as well as the daily suicide bombings have made life unlivable in Baghdad and large parts of Iraq. Madrid had returned to normalcy. The underground system started running in London the next day and people began gingerly going about their daily business. No such hope of normalcy for the denizens of Baghdad.

Drawing a direct line of cause and effect between Baghdad and London would be too simplistic. But dismissing any link, which is the official line of the chief warriors of the "war against terrorism," George Bush and Tony Blair, is a tragic folly. They, in fact, reject any plausible precedent-antecedent relationship in the upsurge of terrorism in recent years. They are tireless in claiming victory for their war on terrorism, even though it has spawned daily terror and violence, producing victims hundreds of times greater than those of 9/11, 7/7 and 3/11 put together. Tony Blair, hurrying back from Gleneagles golf resort in Scotland to London, interrupting the G8 summit, declared that "the purpose of terrorism is just that." George Bush, standing by Blair at Gleneagles, vowed an uninter-

rupted war until terrorists are defeated. No matter who they are, where they are, and what drives countless young people to strap dynamites to their stomach and blow themselves and all around them up. The inevitable consequence of this illogic of denial is an endless war with no frontline that will only begot more violence and greater spread of terrorism.

King Abdullah of Jordan sounded the right note in his reaction to the London tragedy. The King mourned the tragedy and denounced the attack, but appealed that the roots of despair and injustice that lead people to resort to extreme action must be addressed. He noted the violent impasse in Iraq is created by the action and policy of the "coalition" defying world opinion and international law, and the injustice to the Palestinian people perpetrated by Israel with one-sided backing from the United States. Are George Bush and Tony Blair ready to listen to the anguished voice of the world given expression by King Abdullah?

Dr. Manzoor Ahmed generally writes on education and development issues.

# A look in the mirror for America

DERRICK Z. JACKSON

In his initial reaction yesterday to the London transit bombings, President Bush denied "people killing innocent people." He said: "The contrast couldn't be clearer between the intentions and the hearts of those of us who care deeply about human rights and human liberty and those who kill -- those who have got such evil in their heart that they will take the lives of innocent folks."

This came a week and a half after Bush invoked the innocent in his Fort Bragg, N.C., speech in an attempt to shore up sagging American support for his invasion and occupation of Iraq. Doggedly tying 9/11 to Saddam Hussein even though no lie existed, Bush said of global terrorists: "There is no limit to the innocent lives they are willing to take. We see the nature of the enemy in terrorists who exploded car bombs along a busy shopping street in Baghdad, including one outside a mosque. We see the nature of the enemy in terrorists who sent a suicide bomber to a teaching hospital in Mosul. We see the nature of the enemy in terrorists who behead civilian hostages and broadcast their atrocities for the world to see."

Bush also said the enemy will fail. "The terrorists can kill the innocent, but they cannot stop the advance of freedom," he said. Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair said the "slaughter of innocent people" will fail to cover the British people, and Canada's Prime Minister Paul Martin called the attack an "unspeakable attack on the innocent."

It was all appropriate in the moment. In a greater context, there is a tragic hollowness. The world, of course, shares the sympathies of Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York, who said the London bombings were a "despicable, cowardly act." Yet every invoking of the innocents also reminds us of our despicable, cowardly killing of innocent

The innocents in the so-called war on terror are always "our" citizens or the citizens of our allies. The only innocent Iraqis are those killed by "insurgents." Our soldiers clearly did not intend to kill innocents. But this posturing of America as the great innocent, when everyone knows we kill innocents ourselves, is likely only to make us look more like the devil in the eyes of a suicide bomber.

Iraqi civilians.

Or perhaps you forgot about them. That was by design. We have rightfully mourned the loss of nearly 3,000 people on 9/11. We have begun mourning the loss of about 40 people in London. We have mourned the loss of 1,751 US soldiers, who, bless them, were following orders of their commander in chief. But to this day, there has

been no major acknowledgement, let alone apology, by Bush or Blair for the massive amounts of carnage we created in a war waged over what turned out to be a lie, the nonexistent weapons of mass destruction.

These innocents never existed, either in Iraq or Afghanistan. "We don't do body counts," said both General Tommy Franks, former

commander, and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. When Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt was asked about the images of American soldiers killing innocent civilians on Arab television, Kimmitt said: "My solution is quite simple: Change the channel. Change the channel to a legitimate, authoritative, honest news station. The stations that are

showing Americans intentionally killing women and children are not legitimate news sources. That is propaganda. And that is lies."

The United States waged its own war of propaganda by refusing to conduct a legitimate, authoritative, honest accounting of the deaths of innocent civilians. As it urged people to change the channel, the Bush administration cut off all channels to finding out what we did to women, men, and children who were shopping, working, or leaving their mosques. In an invasion based on falsehoods, the truth of the civilian carnage might have been too hard for Americans to take, and support for the war might have ended in the first few weeks.

The propaganda of an invasion with invisible innocents surely allowed Bush to seamlessly switch his stated reason from the unique horrors of WMD to liberating an oppressed people. It is a lot easier to tell the world you are their great liberator if you do not have to own up to the thousands of dead people who will never get the chance to vote in that free election. It sounds a little bit like people who say African-Americans should be thankful for slavery because they are no longer in Africa.

Worse, this denial of death, in a war that did not have to happen, is sure to fuel the very terrorism we say we will defeat. The innocents in the so-called war on terror are always "our" citizens or the citizens of our allies. The only innocent Iraqis are those killed by "insurgents." Our soldiers clearly did not intend to kill innocents. But this posturing of America as the great innocent, when everyone knows we kill innocents ourselves, is likely only to make us look more like the devil in the eyes of a suicide bomber.

Derrick Z. Jackson is a columnist for The Boston Globe. Courtesy: The Boston Globe.



One of the scenes of London blasts

PHOTO: AFP



Bomb blast: Typical of present day Baghdad

PHOTO: AFP

# Good governance and development agencies

MD. AZMAL HOSSAIN

GOOD governance is a popular term in the development sector as well as in the political arena. Our political leaders and donors are often heard to utter the words "good governance" at different levels and in different contexts. Moreover, it is generally understood that good governance is a basic precondition for smooth development in any sector.

We feel sometimes that we have lack of good governance in various sectors, such as bureaucracy or local government. The key points of good governance are transparency and accountability. But have we ever thought about the internal dynamism and good governance in the development sectors?

We have had little chance to think about them, because we assumed they were supposed to be harbingers of producing good governance practices. We are always talking about or writing about the poor governance of various governmental departments, such as police, customs, taxation, etc.

But on the other hand, if we look at the development arena, there is a serious lack of transparency and accountability. Ironically, development organisations and agencies are advocating for restoring good governance practices, otherwise corruption will not be eliminated. Interesting to say, they are even not at all transparent when it comes to recruiting employees within their own organisations.

Some international renowned development organisation has ever

look back for their lack of transparency within the organization mechanism. Example, one of the senior official of an organization sometimes does not know what is happening presently on his top brass. The top brass even not interested or share the dissemination process at all. If we really look at the internal mechanism of such organization the situation is really horrible there. The working environment is so dirty and official language sometimes has crossed the limit. But due to unemployment we are sublimed to the system and we ever think to raise our voices against the ill motives. Moreover, we are used to it due to maintain our so-called social status. Some of us are really busy for fettering the outsiders. This is a very grimming picture in our development sectors. The situation of national and

local NGOs is alarming. The senior officials are very used to castigating the subordinate.

In this degrading situation in the development official's practices, we should think of alternatives. Otherwise we will never remove our colonial practices. We ever could be thinking of our independent identity. We must remove our fettering attitudes towards development partners. We never indulge ourselves within the dirty practices at all. Charity begins at home. We always have to think about the proverb. When development organisations and agencies advocate for good governance, but we do not maintain such within ourselves, that is very self-contradictory. The same problems exist in the government sectors as well. People seek the help of NGOs to

relieve their miseries when they are refused justice from the government mechanism. We should at least maintain these areas for restoring people's rights. If we fail to do this, the nation will not forgive us in the long run. People will then also treat the development establishment as a hypocritical one.

Finally, we should at least maintain our own identity for using our best practices within our own periphery. To maintain transparency and accountability is obviously an urgent matter for all of us.

MD. Azmal Hossain is a development activist.

# When a building can collapse without an earthquake

PROF. M. H. RASHID

EVEN without an earthquake a building can collapse. The recent collapse of the Spectrum Garment factory building at Savar is a glaring example. There may be more than one reason behind a building collapse. These can be broadly classified in several categories: (1) The building is placed on a lowland, jheel or drainage channel; (2) Faulty design and drawings for substructure (foundation) and superstructure; (3) Selection of improper construction materials and (4) Defective and improper construction works. In this write-up, we are going to briefly discuss a few factors that can cause the collapse of a small to medium height building. Many of the reasons are very inconspicuous which can easily be avoided with mere care and a little extra cost but our ignorance, negligence and greed influence us to ignore them. Building technology is not new in this country and people of Bangladesh have seen two or three storied buildings for long 200 years if not more. Many of those are still standing.

Apparently keeping everything all right, still a building can collapse, if it is erected on lowland. It has been noticed that the owner has purchased a plot on the brink of a jheel and he wants to make a 6-storied house. He hires a mistri and his workers start driving 15 to 20 ft. long, untreated sal bali piles. Even sometimes bamboo poles of the similar length are used. In course of time, the sal bali piles may vanish, eaten up by termites or borers and the building then rest entirely on the soft silt. It is bound to settle and then to collapse. Or the owner may get advice from some of his friends and fills the ditch with sand over which he starts his construction as usual. At the bottom of these wetlands below the water lies a layer of fine silt which makes it water tight. This silt layer can't take any load or in other words lacks bearing capacity. This layer is usually underlain by a layer of silty clay, clay or sand. A building made on this type of soil is bound to tilt or settle down. Settlement of a building will not necessarily be uniform or symmetrical. One corner may settle more than the others and the building will be subject to excessive bending or twisting and the building will ultimately collapse.

Building foundations must be laid on a firm ground. There are some definite methods of determining the bearing capacity of various categories of soils

and also methods of piling or consolidation of the filling soil. If one doesn't care to follow those set rules then his building is liable to collapse even without an earthquake. Recent collapse of the 10-storied Spectrum Sweater factory at Savar is that. Hence, it's always better to select a high ground for any building avoiding all sorts of filled up land. If at all the lowland can't be avoided then proper investigation of the sub-soil is to be done and foundation is to be designed by a qualified and experienced Foundation Engineer.

Next comes the question of proper planning and design of the building. There are two distinctly different types of buildings -- brick-walled concrete-roof building and concrete framed building. In brick-walled building the roof load is carried by the brick walls and then the walls transmit this load to the ground through the foundation. Here we need a firm ground to carry the weight of the building. In older buildings, the roofs were made of lime concrete on 1" thick, 12" x 12" burned clay tiles supported by small wooden rafters or steel t-beams (eM@v). These are again supported by wooden beams or steel I-sections (Kwo). The lime concrete made of hydrated lime, surki (burnt brick dust) and khoa (brick chips) is placed in 6" to 8" layers on clay tiles and is hammered down to 3" to 4" thickness. The old houses of Bengal (Bangladesh and West Bengal) dating back to the Sultanate era are made with these type of terraced roof. Later at the beginning of the twentieth century during the British Raj cement concrete roof was introduced in Bengal. Still lime was profusely used in building construction in mortar and in plastering works. The old railway station buildings, the British government offices are usually of this type and many of them are still usable with little repair and maintenance.

Mosques and culverts made during the Sultanate Period are still remaining in tact in several places in Bengal where only lime and surki were used instead of any cement. In Bajra Jogini village of Sonargaon area, the present writer noticed the three-span road culvert made of small bricks and lime mortar of the sixteenth century. It was surprising to notice that the small bricks in lime mortar formed a solid stone element without showing the trace of a joint. It's more interesting that the artisans who made this culvert had profound experience based knowledge in foundation works of bridges and buildings. The

It always proves economic to take advice of a qualified engineer with sufficient field experience to plan, design and supervise the construction of the house strictly according to the Building Codes at a small fraction of the total cost of the building. Never use inferior materials in construction of a house. Best building materials will ultimately pay off the extra material cost as these will provide the owner a durable and healthy building which will not only provide safety in an earthquake but also invariably reduce the maintenance cost.

bridge did not tilt or settle as it did not collapse for long five hundred years but it was only corroded due to weathering on the southern face. Many old buildings of this type have been wilfully destroyed during and immediately after the liberation war. The Bhowmic Bari, a palatial house in Kushtia district was demolished by the greedy people to collect bricks, floor-stones and timber (Burma teak) of the doors, windows, staircases and sunshades. The Lahiri House of Kushtia town suffered the same fate. Surely, there may be thousands of old houses meeting the same fate all over the country.

Usually old houses of this type of construction were limited to two-storey-high with similar floor areas in the top and bottom stories with the staircase placed at the centre. Walls are usually thick, 25 to 30 in. for ground floor, and 15 to 25 in. for the top floor with thick lime mortar plaster inside. The roof height is also not less than 15 ft. floor to floor with wide ventilators just below the roof level. All these provided a natural air-conditioning effect for these old buildings keeping them cool in summer and warm in winter. For wide brick foundations, usually over-burnt bricks to offset saline effects were used over an 8 to 10 inch thick layer of lime concrete. Many of these types of buildings could withstand the great earthquakes of 1897 and 1935. The profusely ornamental Kanta Mandir of Dinajpur escaped any damage but the nine minarets (chura) were destroyed in 1897 earthquake. It also destroyed the "Deul" (tower) of Jaipurhat commemorating the Great Journey of Shree Chaitannya on foot from his birthplace, Nabadwipa to his ancestral home in Shreehatta (Sylhet). No damage of any mosque was, however, recorded. In fact, brick buildings with 15 to 25 in. thick wall cemented in lime mortar and plastered in lime make them not only cool and cosy but also stable.

After partition of India in 1947, the lime stone quarries were placed outside the boundaries of the newly independ-



Spectrum building collapsed due to faulty construction

PHOTO: STAR

ent Bangladesh (then East Bengal and later East Pakistan). Consequently, use of hydrated lime in building works was abruptly replaced by Portland cement in mortar, plaster and also in roof casting. The International Earthquake Association with its head office in Tokyo but research activities limited in California specifies that in a moderate earthquake zone, height of a masonry building should be restricted to 9 metres i.e. up to three stories. There should be a concrete tie on the plinth, over the door and window openings and also below the roof. Moreover, total area of opening in any wall will not exceed 1/3 of the vertical area of the wall itself. There shouldn't be any overhang or cantilever and protruded Cornish or chimney over the roof. Moreover the floors should be

symmetrical that is the top floor should be similar as the bottom one with the staircase at the middle of the floors.

The reinforced concrete floor design is taught in the undergraduate level. Footing guidance is available in Building Code Requirements for Reinforced Concrete by the American Concrete Institute, which is revised in every four years, supported by discussion and comparison of simultaneous laboratory research at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Illinois and Lehigh University at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. It's simple to understand but easy to follow. It provides all details of RCC floor supported by brick walls or in a RCC framed building of medium height. We have also a Building Code of our own which provides similar guid-

ance as the ACI Code. Economic design and durable construction, however, greatly depend on the academic performance and field experience of the qualified Engineer. Proper selection of span ratios and selection of floor system not only adds to the economic design but also provides stability of the structure. For example, a floor space of 40 ft. x 60 ft. can be covered up in more than one way and it's the engineer's job to find out system that will lead to an economic design ultimately yielding a saving in materials, cost of shuttering and labour. But an ordinary beam-girder arrangement with columns dividing the floor space in 20ft. x 20ft. will definitely add to the safety of the building in earthquake shaking. Again excessive reinforcing steel provided

over and above the actual requirement will reduce the ductility and make the concrete structure brittle, being easily vulnerable to collapse during an earthquake. Now-a-days, designs software are available in the market but they are not foolproof. Adequate knowledge and training are necessary to use these programmes to design any structure.

A medium high (six storied) building can collapse even without an earthquake if the quality of materials and quality of construction are not rigidly controlled. For a building of reinforced concrete quality of the construction material and quality of the construction itself are very important. First class bricks, may be a little bit over-burnt will insure against saline corrosion at the slight extra cost of increased quantity of mortar used. Bricks should be soaked in clean potable water for at least 24 hours before their use. This will wash out any un-burnt salt in them. Durability of the cement mortar depends on the quality of the cement and quality of the sand. The Chhatak cement was once found to be the best cement in the country confirming the ASTM (American Society of Testing Materials) standard (also BSS). The present writer while engaged in the Structures & Concrete Laboratory of the Anshulal Engg College and later BUET got very good result of the Chhatak Cement. Later many other cement companies have been established in Bangladesh and many of them produce better quality cement than imported brands.

However, the dusty sand used in mortar mars the quality of the cement. According to the ACI (mentioned earlier) Code coarse (Ottawa) sand is to be used in the mortar. We have coarse Sylhet sand of FM (Fineness Modulus) 2.2 to 2.8 but for mortar we use fine Kaliakur sand (FM 1.5 to 2.0) and for concrete we use a mixture of Sylhet and Kaliakur sand. This practice is followed by our Public Works Department (PWD). The present writer with his close association with the BUET laboratory couldn't find any justification of this practice. Building technology being an Applied Science, all the clauses must be supported by research and experiment instead of personal opinion. It was found that if the sand was screened and washed (i.e. the dust was removed), the strength of the mortar as well as the concrete was increased. Again if only Sylhet sand is used in concrete instead of a mixture of Sylhet and Kaliakur, the crushing strength of concrete is remark-

ably increased. Proper mixing, casting and curing of concrete add to the strength and durability of the concrete. And the higher is the strength of concrete the less is the creep.

Creep is the permanent deformation and deflection of concrete structural members. A concrete slab or beam is permanently bent (deflected) and excessive deflection makes it cracked. This is due to the creep factor of concrete. The crushing strength of a concrete block made of certain brand of cement, sand of a particular variety and chips of a kind can be determined within a month's time but creep factor of the same concrete takes many years to determine. A column can be dangerously shortened due to creep when the entire load will be carried by the reinforcing bars. The bars will buckle and the column will fail leading to the collapse of the building. This will happen in 10 to 15 years after construction for the sole reason keeping other factors ideal. Concrete made of brick chips instead of stone chips may have a satisfactory crushing strength but has a higher creep factor as observed by Prof. Adam Neville engaged in the Structures & Concrete Laboratory of the ACI. Hence AUEAT College and later BUET got very good result of the Chhatak Cement. Later many other cement companies have been established in Bangladesh and many of them produce better quality cement than imported brands.

In fine it can be said that to make a safe house with hard earned money, one must go for a good high land. Filled up wetlands or drains (wetlands and drainage channels are mostly khas lands) are not suitable for a safe and healthy home. It always proves economic to take advice of a qualified engineer with sufficient field experience to plan, design and supervise the construction of the house strictly according to the Building Codes at a small fraction of the total cost of the building. Never use inferior materials in construction of a house. Best building materials will ultimately pay off the extra material cost as these will provide the owner a durable and healthy building which will not only provide safety in an earthquake but also invariably reduce the maintenance cost.

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