

Bomb blasts in London: What do they portend?



M. M. REZAUL KARIM

A series of bomb blasts rocked the heart of London on the 7th instant. It occurred within seconds of one another, signifying a timing device which coordinated attacks almost precisely at the same time in several places, thereby leaving no scope of taking urgent and instant measures of caution in other areas. The exact casualty figures are still unknown. About 50 deaths have been confirmed but the bodies are yet to be identified. Several hundred people are still missing and an unknown number of dead passengers still trapped in the hard-to-salvage coaches from the London Underground. Never in the history of London, a horrific and widespread act of terrorism such as this occurred. The police said they had no forewarning. Evidently, the perpetrators of such a meticulously planned and well-coordinated crime would not generally like to leave behind any clue before operation.

It was about 9 O'clock in the morning on the fateful day. A friend of my daughter telephoned to say that some explosions had occurred at the Aldgate Tube Station in central London. They cancelled their rendezvous and decided to stay home. But a few minutes later, I left for the airport on my way back home to Dhaka. I was completely oblivious of the magnitude of the blasts and being ignorant of one of the blasts having occurred also at the Edgware Road Tube station, only a hundred meters away from where I was staying. Fortunately, I was going in the opposite direction towards the airport. Having reached Heathrow, sitting in the passengers' lounge I, along with other passengers, watched with great horror the terrible scenes of killings and carnage that took place in the Tavistock Square, Kings Cross and other places. Buses were blown up and debris scattered all over the areas. People were stunned. All except those, who had imperative compulsions to go out, paid heed to the police warning to stay indoors.

The events coincided with the holding of the G-8 Summit at Glenangles in neighbouring

Scotland where leaders of the richest nations assembled to deliberate and to decide upon some of the major issues facing the world today. President Bush emphasized on the need for reduction of poverty in Africa and the group pledged a sum of \$50 billion in aid for this purpose. Some commented it was too small and came too late. Leaders of five other major countries, who went

refused to subscribe to the resolution of the Kyoto convention on the plea it would harm American economy, and called for effective participation by emerging economies like China and India. Anyway, the news of the massive demonstrations that took place near the site of the G-8 Summit was overshadowed by the terror in London. The G-8 Summit was partially disrupted, as the

terrorists would not succeed, but at the same time admitted that such events could not be averted. People knew about the immense power and the well-knit network of this most sought after terrorist organisation, which defied billions of dollars worth of American and British efforts directed against them. In many quarters a tendency exists to believe that the Al-Qaeda and similar other

opposes violence, especially against people of other faiths. Sura Kaferun in the holy Quran clearly states that the "unbelievers," meaning who do not share the Islamic faith, should pursue their own faith freely, as the "believers" should also likewise do their own.

It is, however, true but coincidental that many of the major problem areas and issues have some bearing on the people, who belong to the Islamic faith. That is why some organisation or group of persons being victims of circumstances and wanting to take revenge, even at the cost of their own lives, may consist of those who are Muslims and their nomenclature may bear Islamic connotation. But it would be simply wrong to brand them Islamic or their action ordained by precepts of Islam. There are, however, some organisations, which may call for "Jehad" or religious war against infidels, but no sane mind would subscribe that the present situation calls for such a war reminiscent of what had happened in the Middle Ages. A rational thinking would allow people to share the view that many of the political ills of the present day world that bred violence appear to be a product of the age-old Arab-Israeli conflict and the consequential war in Iraq. An amicable settlement of the fundamental problems would eliminate the root cause of world terrorism and definitely reduce intensity and spread of violence all over the world. On the other hand, sheer and brute use of force as well as relentless repression will only breed greater and unending violence.

Despite what was said about the fundamental issues that warrant lasting solution, no one can and should condone violence of any form and nature which causes death of innocent people and destruction of their property. About the London incidents, some say that the major security apparatus was diverted and engaged to provide adequate protection to the leaders of the G-8 Summit in Scotland, thereby leaving London and other cities relatively less guarded. But this argument cannot be sustained. Anyway, with all the intelligence and high technology available in the developed world, as these are constantly pouring in London at the moment, one would expect that the perpetrators of this dastardly crime would be apprehended soon and meted with due punishment. Let no people face such a gruesome tragedy again.

M.M.Rezaul Karim, a former Ambassador, is a member of BNP's Advisory Council.

CURRENTS AND CROSSCURRENTS

Despite what was said about the fundamental issues that warrant lasting solution, no one can and should condone violence of any form and nature which causes death of innocent people and destruction of their property. Anyway, with all the intelligence and high technology available in the developed world, as these are constantly pouring in London at the moment, one would expect that the perpetrators of this dastardly crime would be apprehended soon and meted with due punishment.

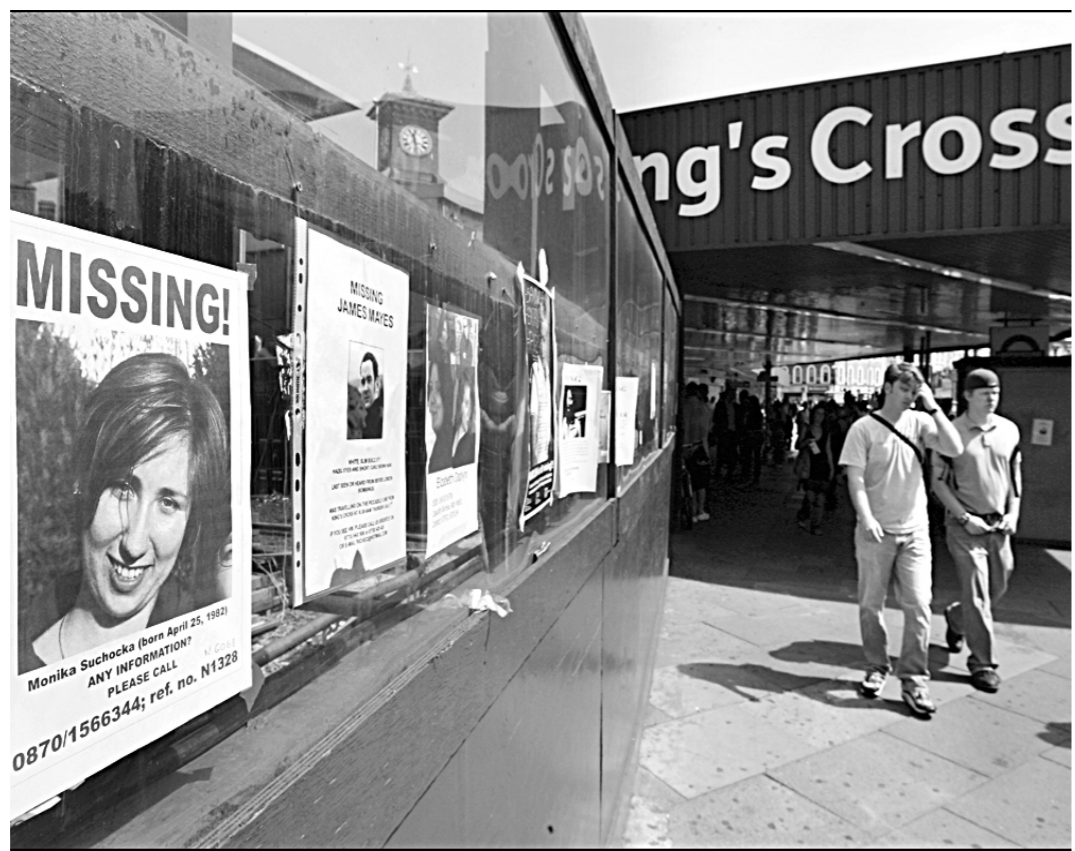


PHOTO:AFP

Passers-by walk past pictures of the people missing following the bomb attacks at King's Cross Station in London. A chain of blasts rocked London on July 8 killing at least 50.

there as observers, stressed on the imperative need for liberalisation of trade and the sharing of responsibility of environmental degradation by rich nations. Huge subsidies given specially on some agricultural outputs both in America and Europe unfairly hindered exports of many developing nations and went against the ideals and principles of the WMD. President Bush

ost Chairman, Prime Minister Tony Blair, had to leave abruptly for London to take stock of the situation and to do the needful. It was also natural to assume that the participating leaders of the Summit were also shaken up by their perception to come so close to real danger.

The Al-Qaeda or some like-minded network reportedly owned responsibility for this attack. Prime Minister Blair asserted that

organisations are totally identified with the Muslim community. It is not so. The prompt and unreserved condemnation made by Muslim countries and organisations all over the world, especially in Britain, testifies to that. There may have been coincidences, for reasons not much difficult to trace, but it would be unjust to term them as organisations based on Islam. Islam literally means peace and never preaches but

LEST WE FORGET

Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed

Rare example of a committed personality

DR. SUFIA AHMED

SYED Ishtiaq Ahmed, teacher, jurist, lawyer, Attorney-General, two-time Adviser in neutral Caretaker Governments and an eminent public figure, devotedly served the nation in different capacities in legal, social, economic and political arenas of the country.

He was born on January 18, 1932 at Ghazipur in United Provinces in British India, into an aristocratic feudal family. His father, Syed Zafar Ahmed, was a flourishing businessman and landowner at Hilli, District of Dinajpur in North Bengal, now a part of India.

After the partition of 1947, his family migrated to East Pakistan. He passed his SSC from Mymensingh Zilla School in 1948 and HSC from the Dhaka College in 1950. He obtained B.A. (Hons.) and M.A. degrees in Economics from Dhaka University in 1953 and 1954, respectively, securing first position in both the examinations.

He was called to the Bar from Lincoln's Inn in England, and simultaneously acquired M.Sc. degree in Economics from the London School of Economics in 1954. Thereafter he taught in a secondary school in England from 1954 to 1960.

He started his legal practice in the then East Pakistan High Court in 1960, and continued until his death, on July 12, 2003. He also taught law at Dhaka University as a part-time teacher from 1961 to 1968 and served the university as a senior legal adviser from 1972 to 1991.

He was appointed an Additional Attorney General in 1972 and the Attorney General in 1976. He was twice elected President of the Supreme Court Bar Association, in 1978-79 and 1989-90.

He was an active member of the Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA), served as its alternate chairman from 1985 to 1991 and as chairman from 1992 until his death. He was the founder member of the Board of Trustees of Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust, and served in the capacity until his death.

Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed represented Bangladesh in the United Nations General Assembly in 1978. Recruited as a member of the International Election Observer Group, he helped to monitor national elections of Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Maldives.

During his legal career spanning over four decades he deservedly earned a high reputation as a brilliant lawyer, specialising in civil law matters, and was universally acknowledged as a leading constitutional expert. His arguments in diversified legal matters are regarded as invaluable documents for elucidation and interpretation of laws. The Supreme Court often called him as amicus curie to assist the Court in deciding the most difficult and complex issues and aspects of the constitution.



Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed (1932 - 2003)

Among the epoch-making cases where he provided his professional excellence mention should be made of the famous case of *Anwar Hossain vs. The State* widely known as the 8th Amendment Case. The 8th Amendment to the Constitution compromised the integrity of the High Court by creating several divisional benches in different parts of the country. Lawyers led by Ishtiaq Ahmed and a few others launched a relentless battle to undo it. They finally succeeded and the part of the 8th Amendment of the Constitution concerning the establishment of several high courts was declared void and unconstitutional in 1989. On the exposition of constitutional matters, Ishtiaq Ahmed's incisive legal mind hardly had any equal. This case is regarded as a milestone in the constitutional history of Bangladesh.

He held the freedom of the speech, especially of the press, close to his heart and fought exemplary legal battles in the court to uphold freedom of press. The famous instances of legal proceeding to annul the government ban, in which Ishtiaq Ahmed won resounding legal victories against the government, includes cases concerning the ban on the weekly *Jai Jai Din* in 1990 and 1996, the weekly *Khobore Kagoj* and the daily *Manab Jamin*. His arguments in favour of these weeklies and newspapers form a memorable chapter in the history of the freedom of the press.

Ishtiaq Ahmed made a significant contribution to the struggle for the establishment of democracy, rule of law, and independence of the judiciary. In the eighties, he was one of the undisputed leaders of the movement of the lawyers which eventually emerged as the peoples' movement heralding the fall of autocracy in 1990. He suffered imprisonment twice, in 1983 and 1987, in the course of the struggle of the lawyers to restore the dignity of the High Court.

After the restoration of the democratic system in 1991, he was instrumental in effecting the change-over from presidential to parliamentary system of government. He was one of the chief

architects of the unique neutral caretaker system of government introduced in Bangladesh.

During the caretaker government of 2001, he laboriously worked on a legal framework to separate the judiciary from the executive in pursuance of the mandate of the constitution, but certain political compulsions stood in the way of its immediate implementation.

He was sought to be appointed adviser in the interim government of 1991 by the then Acting President, Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, but declined the offer for personal reasons. Subsequently, he was appointed adviser to the caretaker governments of 1996 and 2001. The fact that he was invited to serve all the three successive neutral caretaker governments demonstrated people's confidence in his honesty, integrity as a leader, conscience keeper and a guardian who steered the nation with his wise counsel during crucial periods of national crisis.

Ishtiaq Ahmed was a fire-brand political activist and eloquent speaker in Bengali and English, since his school days. He was closely associated with the Mukul Foz and Bratachari Movements. In 1946, he joined the agitation and protest rally at Kolkata against the capital punishment meted out by the British to two Indian National Army officers and was interned. During the Language Movement in 1952, he courted arrest for the second time, and the third time in 1954 for opposing the imposition of Governor General's rule in East Pakistan after the arbitrary dismissal of the elected government.

In 1953, he joined the movement against the ban on meetings of students by the then Pakistan government. He also supported the agitation in favour of the demands of the fourth class employees of Dhaka University. During the first phase of his student life he was a supporter of the Pakistan movement and was influenced by pro-Islamic political ideals. During his university days at Dhaka and London, he went through a radical ideological metamorphosis and gained a wider political perspective. He transformed into a left-leaning, progressive, secular, non-partisan, anti-autocratic, passionately democratic persona with abiding faith in constitutional liberalism, and became a staunch defender of people's rights.

He was a rare example of a dynamic personality deeply committed to his profession who could still be interested and involved in so many activities of value to society. Ishtiaq Ahmed was a writer, a lover of Tagore's poems, a noted philanthropist, a collector of paintings by Bangladeshi artists and a keen gardener.

He has left behind three unpublished manuscripts on anti-autocracy movement, experience of caretaker governments, and judicial review.

Hot pursuit, cold feet



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

EVERYONE, except some of our over-zealous politicians, knows that terrorist attacks in political venues or on politicians have some other over-ambitious and power hungry politician's fingerprints all over it. If these attackers or their godfathers remain beyond the police net despite police hunt or sure identification, you can almost be sure that it is to the safe sanctuary of these self-styled leaders and godfathers that they have fled for shelter and succour. We don't need FBI or Interpol's help track down these terrorists or their godfathers who are behind these vile crimes. People know that without the help of some people in the administration all these criminal gangs would collapse. The problem is, what can we do about it.

Since the grenade attack last August at the AL meeting at Paltan maidan, the demands that government do something have reached a crescendo. Barring a few leaders in the ruling coalition and on the lunatic fringe of the hard-core extremist leaning politicians, there is a general consensus that the grenade attack of August 21, the bomb attack on the British High Commissioner, the assassination of Ahsanullah Master, and lastly

the killing of SAMS Kibria are evil designs directed to destabilise the country. These attacks are defining moments for the country, irrespective of party affiliation, politics, or religion, and if the government fails yet again to take convincing and decisive steps, there will be a dangerous loss of faith in its ability to act.

What most people mean by decisive action is to strike against the godfathers and masterminds working and designing such nefarious policies. Precisely true, there should be people in the government firmly convinced in the ethos and philosophy in the creation as well as in the existence of Bangladesh.

Sadly enough, we have still such person holding ministerial status in the government who often says that he feels embarrassed to see a screen, not a flag fluttering over the flag stand of his car! He goes further, pointing a finger of doubt if this country was liberated at the cost of the blood of three million people. A patriot, no doubt with doubtful allegiance to the country he belongs to, he laments the unfortunate state of the country that could not produce a poet who could compose a national anthem for the country, and is in such a pathetic state that he had to borrow some lines from Rabindranath. Exhorting people to compose a national anthem after more than three decades of liberation speaks of an evil mind taking refuge and growing in strength in the sanctimonious glory of power and influence.

Salahuddin Quader Chaudhury, an adviser to the Prime minister on parliamentary affairs, who made such utterances as reported in the newspapers in the recent past, is a product of time and generation that

In the past three and half years there was so much the ruling coalition government could do to give governance a new direction, but they did nothing but tinker. At a time when the nation was facing a series of crises ranging from spiraling price hike of food items, sporadic killing of businessmen and politicians in the safe zone of their houses and business firms compounded by Tangratila gas well explosion, the administration allowed the Ershad-Bidisha marital drama (totally a non-issue in the national perspective) to come on the centre-stage.



BB Avenue grenade attack killed 21 including AL leader Ivy Rahman.

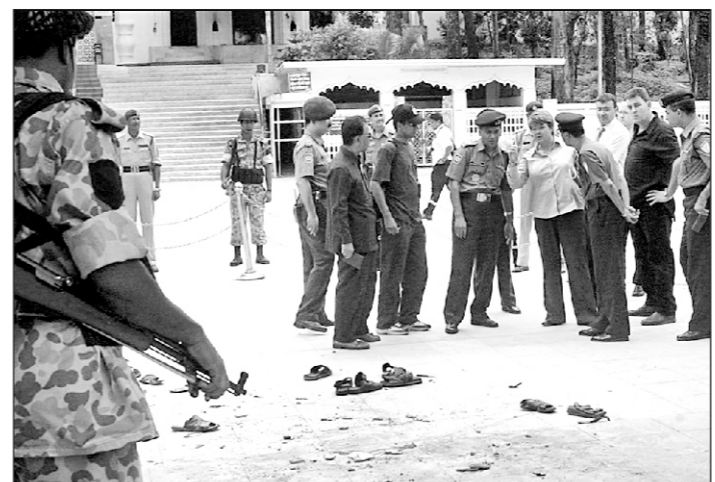
was long in eclipse, but whose outlook and attitudes are now making a comeback at the highest levels of the government.

The law enforcement agency in the country is in "hot pursuit" to exact a confession from one Jaz Miah, nabbed after one year, who they claim was utilised by the clandestine Seven Star killer group to explode the bombs on August 21. The reports about confession as published in the newspapers in the country were hardly credible, either to the people or to the FBI or Interpol, and they went away, further embarrassing the government.

Nothing that our intelligence agencies have done in the past few

years since indicates that they improved their information gathering system. So the question is: can they work independently, free of all outside influences? The absence of full comprehension of the nature of the problem we currently face is something that baffles our hunt for killers and perpetrators of crime. In the early years of the 1980s, we had political problems that bred violence. Currently we are dealing with jihadi terrorism of an altogether different type and infinitely more dangerous kind.

The other frightening aspect of the government's understanding of the problem is that almost nothing has been done to train our police



Syllhet Shah Jalal Majar blast injured British High Commissioner.

force in dealing with terrorists and crime investigations. Merely raising the number of thanas from 22 to 51 in the Dhaka metropolitan city will not improve the efficiency of police work. Say, for example, hundreds of policemen and intelligence agencies were on duty very close to the meeting venue during the August 21 attack, yet the terrorists made good their escape after finishing their assigned job. The same was the case in connection with the attack on the British High Commissioner at Shah Jalal Majar in Sylhet and at Kibria's meeting venue at Habiganj.

Immediately after the incident on August 21, the Home Minister's

announcement of the award of Tk one crore as a reward to anyone providing a clue to the attack went up in smoke, without anyone giving any clue or any crime investigation agency making any headway in booking the culprits. By and large, police work in the country is shoddy and amateur. Interrogation methods continue to be primitive and hectic activities follow for some days when a terrorist attack has hit someone somewhere. In most cases, policemen and curious onlookers can be seen trampling flat-footedly over evidence, instead of sifting through it with necessary care, a most vital aspect in the

modern day crime investigation.

SAMS Kibria, Ahsanullah Master, and Professor Yunus of Rajshahi, to name only a few of the political leaders and educationists killed in the recent past, went the way of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib, Ziaur Rahman, and the four liberation war leaders, falling victim to a climate of violence, hatred, and power politics that have steadily overtaken the country. With investigations proceeding at snail's pace and criminals adopting new tricks and strategies, the country has become hostage to terrible uncertainty and anarchic situation. The killing of all such patriotic leaders and educationists of name and fame sickened the country with shame and impotent rage.

Not that violence would strike the country with surprise nowadays. On the other hand, the bloody ideologies of extremism and inter-party vengeance have been threatening to eclipse all norms of democracy in the country. In recent times, as the administration led by the ruling coalition is caught in a maze of corruption resorted to by some over-ambitious leaders and greedy officials, a virus of cynicism and violence have so infected public life as to raise the danger of a moribund political system.

Mentionably, the LGED ministry has recently constituted an enquiry committee to probe how a hefty sum of Tk 25 crore could be spent by Dhaka Wasa from the last week of May to June this year to remove illegal structures over the old canals of Dhaka city with no tangible result of relieving the residents from the problem of water-logging that disrupted civic life recently just with the on-set of the rainy season.

Political vengeance and business feuds lead to a wave of killings in urban areas almost every day. In recent times, DMP and intelligence agencies could not make any headway in arresting the killers of criminal turned politician Sagir in the old part of the city. The counter killing of Shawon, one of the alleged killers of Sagir, reported to be in police custody, is also shrouded in mystery, as newspaper reports quote witnesses who differ with the police version. Meanwhile, if the enquiry committee formed to probe the killing of Shawon could go ahead with their work unhindered and find the real accomplice, people's faith in the crime investigation system that seems to be fast eroding might be restored.

In the past three and half years there was so much the ruling coalition government could do to give governance a new direction, but they did nothing but tinker. At a time when the nation was facing a series of crises ranging from spiraling price hike of food items, sporadic killing of businessmen and politicians in the safe zone of their houses and business firms compounded by Tangratila gas well explosion, the administration allowed the Ershad-Bidisha marital drama (totally a non-issue in the national perspective) to come on the centre-stage.

If the government is keen to nab the real culprit in the money laundering case, it would do well to concentrate its attention on the real one, leaving aside the lesser devil. It seems, as if governance in the country has been reduced to a bizarre satire in which farcical issues assume gigantic proportions and real issues are treated as immaterial.

Md. Asadullah Khan is a former teacher of physics and Controller of Examinations, BUET