LATE S. M. ALI

**DHAKA THURSDAY JULY 14, 2005** 

# Another extra-judicial kill-

This time no evidence that deceased even

a criminal

HE death of Jagannath University student Iqbal Hossain Masum in police custody is merely the latest in a long line of questionable killings that have been committed upon innocent and criminal alike by the authorities. What makes this case even more egregious is that there is zero evidence that Masum was even a criminal and the official explanation for his death is transparently false.

Masum was taken away from a family function by members of the DB's Cheetah unit on the night of July 9, and after his father searched high and low for him all night all over Dhaka city, he was finally located the next morning at DMCH morgue. The official explanation that he died in crossfire is absurd on its face, as he was killed in the middle of the night while in police custody

Even worse is the fact that there is no evidence tying Masum to any crime. Police concede that his name appears in no FIR and claim that information of his criminality comes from interrogations of others in custody. In addition, unknown people held a procession in Masum's locality celebrating his death, in an apparent move to smear his name and imply his criminality. But ocals have said that Masum was no criminal and that those taking out the procession are not known to the locality.

No one doubts that law and order was a serious problem, and required a dramatic solution. But it now appears that these kinds of extra-judicial killings are the government's preferred method of dealing with the problem. The top criminals are not touched, only the small fry and even the innocent are made the fall guys. The government has not even bothered to make a pretence of institutional reform or trying to establish law and order through legitimate means.

Not only is the government's modus operandi immoral, but due to its lack of imagination and seriousness to address the real underlying law and order problem, the approach will ultimately prove ineffective, and in the long run lead to more atroci ties like the killing Masum.

An executive inquiry has been authorised. However, we have seen that these kinds of inquiries never go anywhere and are nothing more than an attempt to whitewash the truth and distract the public from the enormity of the official misconduct. It is not enough. We demand discontinuance of the method and a full judicial inquiry into Masum's killing to have all the questions that surround it answered.

#### Indifference amounting to criminal neglect

Launch tragedies mostly man-made

HIPPING authorities and launch owners have given a jolt to public sensibilities about launch disasters by terming them as 'normal' conveniently forgetting how devastatingly frequent they have been in recent times. This comes at a time when the criticism against poor river traffic management has been further intensified with the experts and the press hav ing described the deaths in rivers being tantamount to "preplanned" killing.

The statement of shipping people and launch owners also amounts to an unconditional capitulation to the vagaries of nature. They have, in effect, admitted that they are not capable of solving the problems and drawbacks of the existing river communication system.

More than 4,000 people have died in launch accidents in the ast decade with the number of fatalities reaching as high as 500 in three major accidents in last year alone. The shipping minister, however, doesn't see anything beyond his 'bad luck' in the series of mishaps.

It seems the government having failed to secure the com ance of launch operators with the safety standards, have decided to shut their eyes to the fundamental drawbacks of the existing river traffic system. Only that can explain why even they

are now resorting to a fatalistic acceptance of the disasters. The flaws that have been detected by the experts are far too many. The launches have faulty designs, and it is reported that owners get the designs approved through bribing after building the launches and not before embarking on the project. There is no effective signalling system and the crew are often untrained and unskilled. These along with overloading make the launches doubly vulnerable to capsize.

So the ploy of downplaying the accidents and terming press reports as being exaggerated sounds ridiculous. This attempt to make short shrift of the fatal accidents is indefensible, outrageous and totally untenable.

The authorities are not expected to trifle with an issue as serious as launch accidents. The government should act with a sense of urgency and devise ways and means to enforce the navigational rules. It has to come down heavily on the corrupt practices that are responsible for the vulnerability of launches.

## Lessons from the London blasts



Bria Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN ndc, psc (Retd)

T was not a question of "if" but "when" London would be visited by the same phenomenon that saw wanton destruction of civilian lives in Madrid, Bali, Jakarta, and elsewhere, following the commencement on the West's war on terror led by the US in 2002. It was thus not surprising, after the London blasts, to hear analysts querying as to why it took so long in coming. Looking at the very professional way that the post July 7 blast situation was handled it is quite clear that the authorities were expecting this to happen, even if one chooses to dismiss reports that the British authorities had a definite hint that this might happen sooner rather

than later For one thing, the British have a very thorough security plan in place, which has proved effective, without being overbearing or intrusive on its citizens, in thwarting terrorists attacks. Reportedly, the intelligence agencies had managed to put off eight attempted terrorist attacks in the

game like this, the terrorists need to be lucky only once, whereas the security forces need luck to go their way every day. And no system is totally foolproof to prevent determined groups to circumvent

This is the first suicide attack in Europe and certainly the most serious bombing incident and the largest casualty that London or indeed Britain has suffered since

been made and the British police have revealed the identity of all but one of the four suspected bombers. Although their al Qaeda link is yet to be established, experts suggest that their modus operandi point to al Qaeda connections. Thus, the rationale of the perpetrators may not be far to seek. Although Mr. Blair sees no causal link between his Iraq policy and the bombings of July 7, and

claim linkages only to validate an immoral act. They should be seen for what they are -- terrorists -and dealt with as such. To hold people of a particular community responsible for the actions of the perpetrators and subject them to revenge acts as a consequence will only be playing into the hands

The British government must not make this incident an ex post facto justification of the Iraq war.

launched. Therefore, there must be something wrong with the US strategy, which has fanned rather than stunted the rise of terrorism around the world

Third, given the faulty strategy of the war on terror, how do we change course to address the issue? What, if any, new strategy does the international community need to formulate to douse the flames of terrorism?

The Madrid conference on

consensus, reinforced by the London bombings, has been that it is not by military means alone that terrorism can be subdued. As one ex-British Foreign Secretary recently spelt out, there must be deemphasising of the confrontational attitude, in particular on the part of the US, and more involvement of the moderate voices in the Muslim world, in conceiving strategies.

followed by the US. The general

What is heartening to note is that it has dawned on the leaders, and not a moment too soon, that there is the need to go into the root causes of this phenomenon. You can destroy a bunch of terrorists, but terrorism will keep on coming back unless the reason that causes it to reappear is addressed. Even Mr. Blair has been moved to acknowledge this truism.

However, in conceiving strategies it would be an unmitigated folly to consider acts of terror as a mere tactic, as some senior retired US generals have been led to believe. Terrorism is a strategy adopted by the terrorist; therefore, the causal link between the terrorists and the current spate of terrorism must be addressed if it is to be effectively countered.

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the IRA bombings began in 1971. However, at the risk of sounding cynical and to put the matter in perspective, there has been on the average one London every day in Iraq since the handing over of sovereignty in June 2004.

The difference in the reactions to post 9/11 and post 7/7 is also very remarkable. There was nothing that exposed, if there were any at all, malice in the utterances of anybody, common people or officials, against any particular community or demonstration of a revenge mentality. There was no hurry in Britain to link "Islam" to the bombing, as evident from the remarks of the assistant commissioner of the London police to the press on the day of the incidents, although the perpetrators, as it turns out, belong to the Muslim faith

while some other political leaders in Britain have been more circumspect in their comments, one fails to see what other motives could be attributed to the four suicide bombers? George Galloway has been denounced for saying that Londoners have paid the price for Iraq and Afghanistan. He saw the bombing as a consequence of the US-led coalition's actions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Guantanamo, which had inflamed hatred of the West in the Muslim world. Be that as it may, taking innocent lives for the policies of governments, whether in Iraq or in Britain or Spain or Indonesia, is an idea abhorrent to and despised by

It would, however, be folly to link the perpetrators with any particular community. Terrorists have no religion or creed. They

Nor should it become an excuse for enacting draconian laws in the name of fighting terrorism that one fears might well be the case, following in the footsteps of the Americans. These are some of the long-term consequences of the London blast that observers fear the British might eventually have to face. It will be interesting to see how the demands of security and safety of its citizens are reconciled with the need to keep democratic institutions and practices alive in the UK. There are several other things

that the London bombings have reaffirmed and raised several questions about. First, there can be no absolute.

guarantee against terrorists. Second, we are no more secure

against terrorism now than when the war against terror was

fies to the seriousness with which the world community holds the issue. There is much merit in the formula that was presented at Madrid by the UN Secretary General that merits consideration.

terrorism in March this year testi-

While the US had a good chance to successfully tackle international terrorism when it launched its operations in Afghanistan, with the concurrence of the international community by and large, it squandered the opportunity because of the overobsession of Mr. Bush and the hawks in his cabinet with regime change in Irag.

Since the London blasts, there have been dispassionate arquments on the current anti-terror policy in several quarters in the West, calling for a complete reformation of the strategy being

in the polls, or maintaining party

criminals? Unilateral action,

however noble, will put the party

concerned. in or out of power, in

serious short term disadvantage.

No leader, however strong and

determined, will risk this, and a

serious push for elimination of

corruption in Bangladesh is

highly unlikely. Government of

the corrupt and by the corrupt is

likely to continue for the foresee-

able future. Bangladesh politics

## The corruption paradox

M. AHMED

OUR years ago when Transparency International determined that Bangladesh was the most corrupt country in the world many Bangladeshis were shocked, but few were surprised. Corruption has been widespread for many years, to the extent that even for an individual determined to live an honest life, it is almost impossible to make a detour around corruption. Everyday things like getting a telephone line fixed, obtaining a trade licence or getting a gas connection is possible only if one is able and willing to bribe. A hawker, shopkeeper, or van puller comes out on the street with full knowledge that he will have to give in to the will of mastans and bribe police in course of his daily struggle to earn a living. In addition to the financial loss there would be forced submission to dishonesty, enough to make one wonder whether one really is free citizen of a free country. Refusal to comply results in denial of basic right to earn a living and may even result in beating, stabbing, or murder. If this is not terrorism, what is? Personally, I find bribes etc

distasteful and I have tried my utmost to avoid bribing or to be bribed. I fully believed and tried lived up to Tagore's dictum that equal blame should go to those who do wrong and those who condone it. As a senior government official I had a degree of immunity from demands of bribes because I could to send people out to get things done without bribes, using my position. Sending personal assistants etc on

such errands was in itself misuse of privilege, but I justified that to myself as part of my personal anti-corruption drive. In other words, my position protected me from bribe seekers, who are everywhere.

After retirement however I have lost my protection, and I have to satisfy petty bribe takers, which is now the most unsavoury part of my life. It gives me a feeling of not being a free man of a free country, as others decide whether or not I can live an honest

tion has attained new heights in spite of elections and government changes proving time and again that we are not about to rid ourselves of this degrading phenomenon through normal political and administrative processes. The biggest hurdle on the way to fighting corruption is that because of its persistence and pervasiveness, corrupt ways have attained de facto legitimacy in the society, as people have accepted it as a fact of life, and the government nods quietly.

better. So great is the involvement of the political parties and the governments in corruption that the only voice against it, though not effective yet, comes from outside the country. One might wonder why the government of Bangladesh must

condone and in a way encourage corruption in the face of widespread condemnation abroad and disapproval inside the country. The reason, in my opinion, is that the political strength of the principal actors of our political system corrupt will soon have a stranglehold over the activities of the government. They will encircle the chief executive, centralise control, and limit access to the centre of power to the chosen few. This process has been facilitated by absence of democratic process within the parties where one person has been endowed with monarchical power.

Another reason why the status

quo is maintained year after year and regime after regime is

has simply lost its ability to take corrective actions through elecbecause of intense and no holds tions. Democracy is more or less

> sure to do something about corruption can only come from the donors. They should do so firstly because they were part of the problem, and also because in contemporary Bangladesh there is no better issue which will address their political, economic, governance and human right concerns. The US is specially well placed to play the role of terminator of corruption. US has articulated its concerns, but has not taken any concrete actions. Specially effective will be a policy of visa denials to the corrupt and their children to the US. The ultimate dream of the corrupt is to head to the US and to send their children there. It gives

them the kind of fulfillment they do

not get in their own country. This

action will fall in line with the objec-

tives of the war on terror. A prece-

dent has already been created by

similar action in case of Narendra

In the absence of dialogue among the parties, can any parties of or unilateral action on issues like student politics, politicisation of administration, hartals, rigging in the polls, or maintaining party criminals? Unilateral action, however noble, will put the party concerned, in or out of power, in serious short term disadvantage.

life. Before submitting to such ignominy, I however tried to obtain assistance of my friends and colleagues who were still occupying positions of some influence, but soon they and I got tired of swimming against the current. I now very reluctantly pay for fitness certificate of my fully fit car and either forego train trips or pay bribes for train tickets. I am amazed at the depth of the bribe takers club; of which almost everybody seems to be a member, and the takes are proportional to the rank of the taker. When the TI index came out,

politicians and bureaucrats who form the citadel of corruption and participate in, condone, and personally benefit from it, made feeble protests or expressed glee depending on whether they were in or out of power. The nation however has had the stigma attached to it ever since, and as a Bangladeshi you feel it following you while travelling abroad. In the meanwhile, actual level of corrup-

Controlling corruption should have been an important part of the government's strategy of improving governance, which is every government's primary obligation. Some degree of corruption exists in almost every country, developing countries have higher levels of corruption, because governments cannot formulate effective policies, give enough resources, and cannot muster the necessary political will. But it can reach the level as it has in Bangladesh only if the government and major political parties participate in it. For proof, vou need to look no further than the performance of erstwhile Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC) under successive governments and the new botched ACC. BAC, working under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister, was used as a tool of political victimisation to silence political opposition and to allow free run to friends and allies. There is no evidence that the ACC will do any

is underpinned by financial, physical, and organisational structure steeped in black money generated by crime and corruption. You will know this from the fact that no political party is willing to make public information about its sources of income and heads of expenditure though they must be collecting and spending millions for party related activities ranging from rallies, elections, hartal enforcements, and to maintain offices.

Once a new government is elected, it has only a small window of opportunity to initiate measures to deal with the menace of corruption. This is a short period between the election results and announcement of the cabinet posts. After the cabinet posts have been announced and right people have not been put in the right places it is already too late. The die has been cast and a major change of course, such as initiation of an anticorruption drive, is almost impossible. The

barred political rivalry (again caused by the lure of plunder in power), the major Bangladeshi political parties are highly polarised. Personal hatred has become the basis for public policy. There is no middle ground where leaders of different parties can meet. Parties are also highly polarised in their inner working. They are simply and completely devoid of any political ideology or programs that may attract workers with character and right kind of competence. Blind and narrow loyalty is the only quality required to climb the party ladders. Anyone raising questions about propriety or legality of party actions or policies is dealt with harshly. Section 70 of the constitution reflects and institutionalises absence of dialogue and internal dissent.

In the absence of dialogue among the parties, can any party go for unilateral action on issues like student politics, politicisation of administration, hartals, rigging

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

meaningless in this situation and has been reduced to election formalities only. At this juncture, effective pres-

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Modi of India.

### TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

attacked, you must defend it. Terror in London

than anyone. your column space, but I was I am not new to Bangladesh. I surprised that Ms Ashfia's have made several visits to my response (published 12 July) to relations here. I have always my letter (published 10 July) been struck by the warmth and took my comments out of congenerosity of the people of this text, and I feel I must make a country, and I know they will brief reply sympathise with the British I did not blame any individual people, whatever they think of or organisation for the London

I am sorry to take up more of

bombings, for the simple reason

that I have no idea who was

responsible. As a British Muslim

who has vigorously opposed

British and American policy on

the Middle East and Iraq, and

who was one of the million who

marched through London as part

of the campaign to try and stop

our government from attacking

Iraq, I am well aware of the

damage caused and the dan-

gers created by Anglo-American

actions. But the immediate

aftermath of a terrorist bombing

is not the time for political

debate. When your country is

the British government. Al-Hajj Dr David Cheesman Luton, Bedfordshire, UK

Bangladeshis know this better

I refer to the letter of Ashfia, Dhaka, in response to the letter of Dr. David Cheesman.Let me please reply to each point of Ashfia. Point: "The question to ponder is who or what made them so?" My reply: Because they perceive injustice has been done and think that killing mostly innocent people will cure that injustice. They are wrong. Point: "What will we call a modern Bush?" My reply: Look we all know Bush is a raving lunatic in charge of the asylum. ButÊkilling innocent people does not change that. Point: "Why did the British people allow (we respectfully refer to the age-old British democracy and strong public opinion) their prime minister...'

My reply: You must under-

stand this. Tony Blair is in love with Bush, the people of Great Britain are NOT in love with Bush or Blair, so do not blame us for them. As for democracy, you have "democracy" in Bangladesh but does that stop your corrupt politicians? NO. Does it mean that you can tell the BNP leaders to find the killers of Awami League people ? NO. So you understand democracy is iust a word, the same as in UK. You should also know that ONLY 30% or so of British people actually voted for Blair, but on that he got into power. Point:

Why do they poke their nose in

the developing countries on the pretext of giving aid?

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.

My reply: If you do not want the aid, use your democracy and tell the donors you do not want it. But do not think that taxpavers are going to continue to give money merely to go straight into pockets of corrupt people, as that is what happens to a lot of

Zabidur Rahman Toronto

LPG expansion

plan An industry expert has applauded the objectives of the Finance Minister, Mr Saifur Rahman, and the Advisor to the Energy Ministry, stating that despite the general misconceptions currently being reported regarding the capacity of the Bangladesh LPG industry, the industry has more than ample capacity to produce, import and distribute LPG in not only cylinder form for cooking purposes but also for wider use, such as industrial & commercial use and as an environmentally acceptable substitute to octane.

I, Country Manager for Kleenheat Gas, Bangladesh, stated that the current Bangladesh LPG industry is not more than 80,000 metric tonnes per annum with Petrobangla producing up to 25.000 metric tonnes at its 2 plants.

The balance is imported by 4 private operators who have invested in excess of US\$50 million, developing LPG import and bottling facilities since 1999, when the government of Bangladesh announced it would encourage private operators into the LPG industry. The combined import and bottling capacity of these 4 facilities is upwards of 200,000 metric tonnes per annum when fully

The 4 LPG facilities, located at Mongla Port and Chittagong,

utilised.

are clearly under utilised and facing huge financial pressures due to the lack of market expansion. Original estimates of the size of the market have not materialised due to a number of factors and as in most countries where LPG use has flourished a ioint and pro-active approach by both the government and the private operators is necessary to stimulate growth and develop

a sustainable LPG industry. I disputed recent claims that the expansion of the LPG industry will put a strain on foreign currency reserves, stating that the import cost of LPG is considered minimal when compared to the huge and increasing level of subsidies currently being funded by the government on oil based alternatives, when in fact it would help reduce subsidy debt, increase government revenue in the form of VAT and import duties as well as create opportunities for a large number of small business people in

Bangladesh

LPG offered users a portable, economical, efficient and environment friendly alternative to more traditional fuels in locations where natural gas was not available and would continue to grow in popularity throughout the country as it has globally with the government's support.

Mr Klaus Gohra Country Manager

Kleenheat Gas, Bangladesh

#### Defence

Compared to neighbouring countries we maybe known as weak. If someone says we need to update our defence forces then many will ask the same question, "Why we need to spend our money for defence if we are among the list of developing countries." The answer was given by Air Commodore (retd) Ishfaq I. Choudhury while writing in "Strategic Issues" on June 24, 2005.

The writer said, "I, for one, have always argued that the treat Bangladesh

faces at present and in the coming decades is not so much from external aggression but more from internal dissension and disorder." Maybe he is right. If the terrorists around the world find our forces as a weak opponent, then they may think they can make progress living in our country.

Our forces have proved their worth, specially in UN peacekeeping missions in a few countries. If you have an army than you have to build it strongly. Though, we do not have a strong industrial base or doesn't have huge financial ability, but still we must give due priority to defence.

Tahsin Hyder

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