

Western Muslims: "Collateral damage" of London bombers

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ASIF Saleh, director of a Bangladeshi human rights group Dristipat, has a Bangla restaurant fixation. Whenever the group has a meeting, it ends up in a Bangladeshi restaurant. Last Sunday's meeting in London was, naturally, in Brick Lane. Surrounded by hordes of Bangladeshi restaurants, sari shops and music stores, we were at home and ready to talk about our group's work.

After lunch we strolled down to an outdoor cafe and sat and watched the crowds. Brick Lane is now a tremendously hip area and we watched the throngs of trendy Londoners do the rounds of expensive new fashion labels that were springing up right next to the Karai Houses. Although bearing the trajectory of gentrification, Brick Lane will always stay Bangla Town. Apparently some of the landlords in the area are Bangladeshis, and they are determined to keep the area Bengali. As I looked at the crowds, I mused how much London had changed in four decades. Brick Lane is one of many manifestations of London's vibrant and visible Bengali community. Although New York has a strong Bangladeshi population as well (the group that had the fastest growth between 1990-2000), it's a relatively young migrant population. By contrast Britain's Bengali population date back to the time of the colonial encounter. With roots in Britain that go back decades, they are part of a newly confident British Asian mosaic.

When my father came to England in the 1960s, London was a nasty, brutish place for Asians. Bengalis waiting at bus stations would get attacked with broken bottles, and "Paki" became a familiar taunt. My friend Udayan's father recalls looking at newspaper ads for lodging that simply said, "No Smokers, No Dogs, No Indians." Politicians mirrored and magnified the rage on the streets. Enoch Powell's "rivers of blood" and racist election campaigns by the Tories paved the way for the 1970s, which was the decade of the ultra-right wing National Front (formed from an amalgam of League of Empire Loyalists, Racial Preservation Society, and Greater Britain Movement). By 1973, anti-Asian sentiments were at fever-pitch, buoyed by the masses of expelled Asians arriving from Uganda, and the National Front scored upwards of 16 percent in some local elections. The murder of Bengali tailor Altab Ahmed was a turning point, mobilizing the first ever "Rock Against Racism" concert, and galvanizing the left to form anti-Nazi coalitions to fight back against the

xenophobic tide.

Although the NF was dogged by internecine conflict and accusations about a Nazi past, its poisonous ideology slowly seeped into the mainstream. The most famous convert was Thatcher, with her 1978 statement that white people were frightened of being "rather swamped" by people of "an alien culture." It was under Thatcherite England that draconian immigration

But things can always change very quickly. Two days after my cheerful walk in Brick Lane, the London bombings shattered the bright mood of Britain 2005. Although much has been made about the fact that the bombers even targeted Liverpool Street (very near Brick Lane) and the heavily Arab Edgware Road, and that one of the first victims was Sahara Islam, the bombings may indeed

vigilantes patrolling the US-Mexico border, why shouldn't it happen in England as well? The US at least started from a stance of welcoming immigration, from which it is now retreating. By contrast, England has never welcomed immigrants, and has only let them in grudgingly. An apocryphal story talks about a British Asian man who was confronted and asked who he was. "I'm the creditor" he said, referring to the

and Brigasti Rossi. Whatever the (most likely mixed) theoretical inspiration, the resulting damage is highest on Muslims themselves. On a conventional level, you can argue that Afghan and Iraqi civilians who are dying are the victims of the 9/11 repercussions. But the single largest victims, the "collateral damage" of my title, are the Muslim migrants in the diaspora, particularly Europe and North America.

The ongoing civil rights violations of Western Muslims are well-documented. What is less well understood is the accompanying sea-change in attitudes towards immigration. Even before the London bombings, Europe had passed draconian and far-reaching immigration controls. The barriers to migration will only keep getting higher. In a globalized world, everything moves across borders, including people. Immigration is a basic fact of this century — and it is always a positive force, for the migrants, for their new adopted homes, and for their country of origin. So migration will continue, but will be dramatically reduced by new security fears. Anti-immigrant groups have also found the perfect weapon — instead of bullying racists, they can now repaint themselves as super-patriots, only caring about the safety of the nation.

In any migration crackdown, all are affected, but the hardest hit will be Muslim migrants. Thus Al Qaeda and its children have single-handedly brought about the largest reversal of fortune in the lives of millions of Muslim immigrants in the West. Their attacks have created an environment where racial profiling, random detention and deportation are increasingly the norm. Reza Aslan has described the current conflagration as a civil war within Islam, where the West is only a bystander. It is certainly true that the greatest threat to radical Islamists come from progressive and modernising Muslims. At the same time, the progressive Muslim agenda is the biggest victim of these attacks.

The extremist groups, though small in number, have launched flamboyant and public spectacles using modern tools of war. The response from the progressive majority in Islam is a muted mixture of condemnation and hand-wringing. More drastic measures are now necessary. I am reminded of London's Finsbury mosque, once a haven for radical Islamists. A group of moderates staged a counter-coup, seizing the board of the mosque and ousting the old guard. Direct confrontations like this, and even stronger ones, need to be our new method. Islam is in the midst of a civil war, and one side is fighting with genteel and ineffective weapons.

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British Muslims hold vigil after London terror attack.

laws were passed, including the elimination of citizenship through birth. But although the laws were moving towards less immigration, popular perceptions were shifting. The 1980s saw a surge of race riots, but Blacks and Asians also made headway in visible public arena, helping to soften public attitudes towards migrants. Hanif Kureishi, Goodness Gracious Me, Monica Ali, Nasser Hussain, Lord Ali, Prince Nasim, Meera Syal, Lord Dholakia, these were just some of the very public faces of the "new Britain". England's most popular dish is now chicken tikka, and Indian food (mostly run by Bangladeshis) is a multi-billion pound industry with the average Briton going for Indian food once a week. Although still a drop in the bucket, events like "Africa '05", Arts Council's DECIBEL scheme, and Otolith Group's show on Black Audio Film Collective, would have been unthinkable ten years back. The last general election saw the active courting of the "Muslim vote," and fifteen non-white MPs are now in Parliament.

succeed in driving a wedge between British Muslims and the rest of the country. Politicians have repeatedly called for respecting diversity, Muslim clerics have condemned the bombings, and the general public has not shown a xenophobic hysteria. But it only takes a small, determined gang of racists to start race riots. We saw it before in Brixton and Bradford, and we may see it again. With the revelation that the prime suspects are British Asians from Leeds, the attacks on mosques are sure to grow. Most worrying is the spectre of parties like the BNP which are already using anti-Muslim hatred as a key platform after 9/11--their divisive campaigns are likely to get sharper and more effective. Less than a week after the attacks, the BNP has already used photos of the bombed London bus in an election leaflet for the Barking by-elections. The slogan next to the photo simply says, "Maybe now it's time to start listening to the BNP."

If groups like the Minutemen can change America's image from "immigration nation" to nation of

centuries of exploitation of India that built the British empire. "We are here, because you were there" is a common cry in England and France, arguing that immigration is a minimum right in exchange for an exploitative colonial past. But that argument has never taken hold in the popular imagination. Anti-immigrant and Islamophobic sentiments remain a powerful tool for a resurgent right, already galvanized by Turkey's possible entry into the EU. The London bombers have handed them the ultimate propaganda weapon, and the fallout is just beginning.

All this makes me think of the bombers themselves. From Al Qaeda to Madrid to Leeds, the background and motivations of the bombers are varied, as is their educational and class background. But what do they hope to accomplish? Perhaps it all springs from the Lebanon theory — make it too expensive for the "occupation" (wherever it may be) to continue. At another level, it is the "bring the war home" theory of Baader Meinhof

SSC results examined

MANZOOR AHMED and SHAHIDUL ISLAM

THE Secondary School Certificate examination, first public examination after 15 years of schooling, is a milestone in a student's life and the gateway to his or her further education and career possibilities. What do the recently published 2005 SSC results tell us about our schools?

Here are some salient facts about the 2005 results. Almost a half of the select group qualified as candidates failed the test. The SSC candidates were a select group who had gone through a screening process beginning in the primary school. Only about a half of the primary school age children — when non-enrolled, dropout and actual completers are counted — complete primary education. Of these, about 80 percent go on to secondary school. Of all who enroll in grade six, only about one-third make it to grade ten and can become candidates for SSC. It is clear that the candidates for the SSC examination were a highly select group who had passed through a gauntlet of elimination steps. It is safe to conclude that children of the poor — almost half of the population by various definitions, such as minimum calorie intake for sustenance or an income of one dollar a day — were not among the SSC candidates. Yet, after 15 years of schooling, roughly half of the select group failed the test.

Wide variations were found in the results from the seven education boards. Among the seven boards, the pass rate varied widely — from 43.13 percent for Rajshahi to 69.19 percent for Jessore. A fifty percent difference in the pass rate from one board to another raises questions about the validity and reliability of the examination. There is no plausible reason to believe that there is such a difference in standard of education and teaching between the two boards to explain such a difference. There is speculation in the Jessore board the English papers in which many students fail were deliberately graded liberally. Only 18 percent failed in both papers in English in Jessore compared to 47 percent in Rajshahi and 48 percent in Barisal.

A jump in students scoring perfect GPA of 5 does not indicate higher quality. In 2004, the number of students making perfect score of GPA 5 quadrupled from the previous year, and it again doubled in 2005. This outcome was the result of a new calculation method. Since 2004, the scores above 40 percent for an optional subject (the so called fourth paper) was added equally to all the compulsory subjects, thus artificially boosting the grade point average. Even with this boost, of those who passed in 2005, 10.75 percent had scores of GPA 4 and above, and 22.12 percent had GPA between 1 and 3. In other words,

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SSC exam results: Something to celebrate?

more than double the students were at the bottom end of the scale compared to those at the upper end of the scale. A normal statistical distribution of talent in a population is expected to be more balanced.

A small number of elite institutions consistently did well. A small number of well-known elite institutions, mostly located in the urban centres, mostly high tuition private institutions and extremely competitive, and high cost public institutions such as the cadet colleges, have been topping in high grade point averages and total pass rates. At the same time, in 409 secondary institutions including 224 madrasas, not a single student passed the 2005 examination. In 1,136 institutions, the pass rate was 20 percent or less. All of these institutions received government subsidies which included 90 percent of teachers' salary and other grants.

Girls have not fared as well as the boys. An average of six percentage point difference in favour of boys has persisted in the last three years in the total pass rates for all secondary level examinations. In 2005, the overall pass rate was 56.66 percent for boys and 50.94 percent for girls. The disadvantage of girls has been found at all levels of GPA scores. Among total candidates, 45 percent were girls.

The SSC results clearly indicate a serious problem with the way the schools are run, teaching and learning is carried out, and educational access and opportunities are distributed. If the right to quality education were guaranteed to all children, at

least three times the 2005 number of about 1 million should have been candidates for SSC level examinations, and almost all should have passed the examination to acquire a school leaving certificate.

The overall quality and equity issues in education can be addressed only through a sustained process of reforms in governance of the education system backed up by political commitment as has been pointed out in many public forums and education studies.

The SSC results also point to problems regarding the validity and reliability of the examination system itself. The large variations over time and among different boards, and uncertainty about what the scores really mean indicated need for a systematic and permanent research and professional capacity building programme on the examination system and learning assessment.

It should be recognised that education assessment is a highly specialised and technical subject. Mistakes and deficiencies in this respect have serious consequences for individuals and the society. The Education Boards should urgently seek the cooperation of national institutions such as the Institute of Education and Research, Dhaka University and the Institute of Education and Development, BRAC University in jointly initiating a research and technical capacity building programme on the examination system.

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Bangladesh's image and the PM

ABDULLAH A. DEWAN and GHULAM RAHMAN

IN recent days, the Prime Minister seems to have become awakened to the image problem of Bangladesh abroad. The PM complains that vested interest groups and their allies in collaboration with local and foreign media are spreading unfounded and false allegations with ill motives to harm the image of the country.

The PM complained that while Bangladesh is being lauded everywhere for being a moderate and democratic country, a vested quarter is carrying out propaganda at home and abroad to put the country and its people in jeopardy. The seeming hypocrisy here is that the PM raised the spectre of a public discourse and debate on our country's image (for which she has been rebuking the opposition leader for a while now) on foreign soil.

It is important to know that no one can tarnish the image of a country by spreading lies and falsehoods at home and abroad, simply because propaganda has no half-life. In the Internet era important news sprinkles out like an inverted pyramid. No sooner do incidents worthy of news emerge, but almost instantaneously they crop up either on our personal computer or television screen. The Internet acts almost like a borderless global media in which anyone with a personal computer and a connection becomes his or her media spotlight.

Bangladesh is certainly a democratic country and the media enjoys a certain degree of freedom. However, Freedom House's 2005 annual press freedom survey of 192 countries and territories rated Bangladesh "Not Free."

On the issues of Civil Power and Electoral Politics, Bangladesh ranked "Partly Free." The world has been putting pressure on the ruling 4-party alliance government for good governance along to crack down against repression of minorities. The alliance has been in power for the last four years, and in each of these years the country has been bruised by being designated the most corrupt country in the world by Transparency International.

Obviously, corruption was not brought by the alliance government. During the fag end of AL rule, the country also was designated the most corrupt country. The alliance won a landslide victory in the national election of 2002 with the promise of eradicating corruption and rescuing the citizens from the nightmares of gangsters and terror groups. After taking over the government, the promises were left in the back burner and precious time was lost while the maladies of

be the architect of the sale out of country's interest in the infamous Kafco deal, asserted that all the officials of Petrobangla are corrupt to their teeth. Are these insiders of the government conspiring to tarnish the image of the country?

The CPI score is not a product of any conspiracy; it is a reflection of the experiences the people of Bangladesh go through every day. Economic growth theories taught us that lack of rule of law and inefficiency holds back the pace of

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corruption and the weak enforcement of the rule of law proliferated.

During a press briefing (after the EU ambassadors meeting in Dhaka on July 13), the British High Commissioner stated that the EU programme for Bangladesh would be promoting rights of minorities, press freedom, streamlining legal system, setting up of a human rights commission, etc.

These issues the ambassadors have articulated are no different than those being voiced by the opposition leaders and the media. The difference is that the opposition leaders and the media are screaming too loud and the people are listening. The EU ambassadors also observed that the responsibility for holding a free and fair election lies with the government and the people of Bangladesh, not outsiders.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman's shocking admission that corruption with its all-pervasive spirit has been engulfing "all the ministries, with the National Board of Revenue being among the top" was long overdue. This assertion was further reinforced by government ministers and MPs when their recent meeting about the development of coastal areas turned into a forum of discussions about widespread bureaucratic corruption. The outgoing State Minister of Energy, who was widely believed to

progress in poverty alleviation. Yes, of course, the country has made progress in many sectors, but not to the point of calling for celebration with champagne and caviar. Some people have become very rich. Almost half the population is still under the poverty line. The gap between the rich and the poor has widened beyond proportion and is still widening by the day. One does not need to be part of a conspiracy to talk about the discriminating oddities of the economic and political conditions prevailing in Bangladesh.

There are several indirect social and economic factors which contribute to a country's well-being. These are: (a) level of democracy, (b) rule of law, (c) corruption, (d) free media, (e) ethnic fractionalisation, (f) years of schooling, (g) population density, (h) value of work, (i) trust and investment, (j) health care, and (k) production and consumption of energy.

Eye-balling these vital statistics indicate that a country with everything similar to Bangladesh except rule of law, corruption, and trust and investment achieves a much higher GDP per capita than Bangladesh. Not surprisingly, all three factors fall within the purview of the rule of law, which Bangladesh lacks miserably.

A collection of factors which potentially raise a country's image in the community of nations are:

(a) democratic principles and institutions, (b) rule of law and governance, (c) quality of export goods produced, (d) freedom of the media, (e) intellectual activities, (f) literacy, and (g) freedom of religion.

Being poor is not a crime, but being corrupt is. Failing to follow the democratic principles of governance in letter and spirit is not a crime, but violation of the constitution by letting the rule of law to become the rule of the ruling party and other political functionaries (the

people and the prestige which the PM desperately needs at home and abroad. To save democracy and the country's honour, our leaders must set examples as never happened before in our traditions.

Now that the reform proposals for the care-taker government have been made, the government must not disparage them with acrimonious remarks. The reforms must be based on consensus having absolutely no kernel of advantage to any political party, and the final product must be adhered to in letter and spirit.

The world is watching Bangladesh through the magnifying lenses of their embassies and the censorship-insulated media of the Internet. It is unheard of that the media and opposition leaders of a country have ever conspired against their own people against its sovereignty and independence.

Who can be more patriotic to the country than the current PM, widow of the former freedom fighter and President, and the current opposition leader, also a former PM, and daughter of the beloved Bangabandhu, the father of the nation?

The opposition leaders and the media not only want to preserve our evolving democracy, freedom of the media, and rule of law, they want to perfect them. A smear campaign against the media and the opposition parties (or against the government) is an outmoded relic of the former Pakistan military junta.

Unfortunately, much to our dismay, there exist reams of compelling evidence against the ruling government (and the erstwhile AL government) for why the country's image may have been tarnished.

The good image of a nation cannot be fabricated by exaggerating facts and distorting stories, nor can it be diminished by a false smear campaign against the government. It can, however, be transformed from bad to good, and vice versa, only by the policies and actions of the party in power.

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FAISAL AHMED

JAPAN is one of the countries which were affected the most due to World War II. Two of Japan's cities — Hiroshima and Nagasaki — were turned into ashes some fifty years ago in 1945 at the end of World War II. At the end of the war, Japan was suffering from severe famine and the US was their only hope for relief goods. But who knew that within the next fifty years, that the US would have a hard time competing with the now economic giant Japan?

Japan's development in the fields of economy didn't come overnight. It was the result of the Japanese government's unique and effective policies and regulations. During the post-war period, Japan realised that their biggest asset were their employees of various companies. If they need to get a raise in the economy, they need to focus on their employees more than any other prospect of the company. Therefore, the government of Japan specified some regulations in the employment system. One of which was "lifetime employment."

Lifetime employment, as mentioned by E. J. Lincoln in his article in Brookings Review is a "practice at large farms of hiring workers directly out of school and retaining them until mandatory retirement age." Japan needed a stable workforce after World War II for a raise in productivity. To get a stable workforce wasn't easy because most of the Japanese people were devastated by the war and attracting the employees toward their work was a relatively hard task. Therefore the government of Japan came up with the "lifetime employment" strategy to make the employees more motivated toward their work.

Though this method of hiring employees for the rest of their lifetime was quite new and surreal into other developed or developing countries, Japan was committed to make it a success. Japanese companies started to put more emphasis on their employees more than the share holders which increased the earnestness and constancy of the workers. Such acts by the companies also helped to increase annual profit as the company's

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PM Khaleda Zia meets with Emperor Akihito.

workers were more devoted to their work than ever.

The influence of "lifetime employment" became quite clear in 1970 when Japan faced a major crisis in its oil supply. At that time, Japan needed more investment to recover from the loss. But during that period, some Japanese employees of affiliated companies were supposed to achieve their annual increment in salary. But the labour unions did not demand their promotion because that might hamper the financial condition of the companies. They also realised that they were in the same boat along with the companies. And if the companies drowned, they would have to drown with it. This indicates that the employees were concerned about their companies and they understood that their fate depended on the productivity of their companies.

Although "lifetime employment" played a key role in Japan's post-war economic expansion, some

economists assume that it isn't advantageous for today's modern economic world. As mentioned in Japan Digest, lifetime employment is one of the reason's suggested for Japan's "stagnant productivity growth rate and high costs." It is also causing unemployment. Moreover, many Japanese companies have a large number of workers who aren't needed anymore. Those companies are unable to fire them because of the "lifetime employment" scheme which is regulated by the government of Japan.

To conclude, lifetime employment shows that employees are the power of a company's economic profit and expansion. Developed countries should recognise this method to make the employees more faithful and devoted towards the company. This will, beyond doubt, have a very positive impact on the performance of the company.

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