

## We mourn his death

*Fahd legacy glimpsed*

HERE is an extraordinariness about the requiem to the death of Saudi Monarch Fahd Bin Abdul Aziz. Not a colossus, in the conventional sense of that expression, has passed away; yet in reality it seems very much so. The demise, in ripe old age of Saudi King Fahd, who had passed on the gavel of day-to-day administration to crown prince Abdullah a decade ago, following a heart attack, has still stirred up a groundswell of emotions that could only be likened to bemoaning the death of a Titan.

Assuming kingship in mid-1982 against the turbulent backdrop of Ayatollah Khomeini's founding of a Republic in Shiite Iran and the blitzkrieg take-over of the holy mosque in Mecca by some Islamic radicals, Fahd ruled Saudi Arabia for the next 13 years with a steady hand until his exit to the background due to illness.

He successfully weathered the oil crises and could use the fuel effectively in gaining leverage on the world economic stage as a power to reckon with.

In spite of being credited with liberal leanings, he had to be acquiescent to the power of the religious establishment as could be noticed in the application of rigid social codes in the peninsula.

Something of an arbiter in the region, he called up Lebanese MPs to the Saudi mountain resort Taef to devise a peace plan that ended 15-year long civil war in Lebanon. But, as for late King Fahd's image of 'a stout defender of Arab causes', one feels his being an ally of the USA appeared to dilute his espousal of Palestinian rights.

Continuity is the hallmark of not only the Saudi system of succession of power but also that of the country's policies. One very much hopes though, that the unfinished agenda of the former king in terms of establishing social liberalism and representative government will be taken up by his successor king Abdullah and implemented on a gradual but progressive basis.

We condole King Fahd's death and wish his successor all the best.

## Magsaysay for Matiur

*We all can be justifiably proud*

WE are delighted at the Editor of Prothom Alo Matiur Rahman winning the Magsaysay award. We are sure we speak for the entire media in Bangladesh, particularly the print media, when we say that it is a matter of singular pride for us to see one of our colleagues being honoured with the Asian version of the Nobel Prize. We consider it a very timely international recognition of the independent and responsible press in Bangladesh. He has made us all proud.

We rejoice in his honour and we revel in the glory that it has brought to the nation in general and to the journalist community in particular. It has come at such a time when there are concerted efforts by some of the very powerful ministers of the government to denigrate the press.

Matiur Rahman has to be congratulated for not only winning the very prestigious award, but also for his generous and extraordinary gesture of donating the entire amount of the prize money, no small amount by any definition, for the benefit of those whose lot he strove to improve.

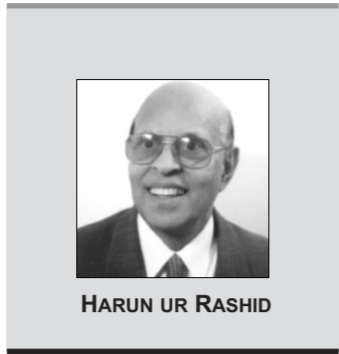
Along with Matiur Rahman, congratulations are in order for all those that are associated with him in his venture, in particular the members of his team in the paper and his family, but for whose help it might not have been possible to achieve what he has.

Matiur has given a new meaning to the notion of social responsibility. His achievement underscores his demonstrated leadership, not only in highlighting and projecting, through the pages of his paper, the many social maladies that afflict us, but also going even further and taking on the responsibility of providing succor and ameliorating the sufferings of the victims of these social ills. He has set an example, worth emulating, of the admirable use of the media to do something tangible and of long-term consequence to the society.

There is a lot that we can learn from the lead that he has given in undertaking constructive role in the society.

We all wish Matiur Rahman more success not only in his professional career but also in the social work that he is involved in.

# No link between London bombings and Iraq?



HARUN UR RASHID

BOTH British Prime Minister Tony Blair and his Foreign Secretary Jack Straw strongly deny that there is any link between the London's bombings and the Iraqi war. However a respected British think-tank, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, known as Chatham House, in London has released a report on July 18 that contradicts their views, with the following in part:

"The UK is at particular risk because it is the closest ally of the US, has deployed armed forces in the military campaigns to topple the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and in Iraq. Al-Qaeda's taped propaganda messages have repeatedly threatened attacks on the UK."

The report titled "Security, Terrorism and the UK" was drawn up by the chairman of the Terrorism Research Centre, at Scotland's prestigious University of St. Andrews, Paul Wilkinson and the University of Southampton's Professor Frank Gregory.

The above observation, contained in the Chatham House report, should come as no surprise but the very fact that it comes out from the Chatham House lends its credibility and weight to the argument that the London bombings are linked to the Blair policy of going to war in Iraq.

As far back as February 2002, intelligence chiefs had warned the Prime Minister that Al-Qaeda and

associated groups continued to represent by far the greatest terrorist threat to Western interests, and that threat would be heightened by military action against Iraq.

Prime Minister Tony Blair and his members of the Cabinet do not like the report because they insisted that the July 7 attack had nothing to do with the war in Iraq. The report exposes them to their flawed policy on Iraq, which they thought they left behind. But at every step of security, "the Iraq factor" haunts them. The Iraqi war may not be the only factor, but to suggest that Iraqi war

suffer from economic malaise. They are educated (two of them were students and one teacher), have integrated with the British way of life, and are much richer than their earlier generations had been. He concludes that some of the young British-born Muslims are obviously troubled by the world politics of the current days. They perceive the way innocent Palestinians, Iraqis, and Afghans are murdered every day without impunity, in the name of "terrorism" is not right and at that moment of their inflamed indignation and roused

The flawed foreign policy of the US was impressively enumerated in a book titled "Why people hate America?" (2002) by Ziauddin Sardar and Meryl Wyn Davies.

According to the authors, this pertinent question was never answered by the Bush administration. They argue that the question has acquired the status of fact, a statement whose meaning can be assumed, rather than a basis for inquiry. The need to know has been transformed into "a reason not to know."

The bombings in Bali in 2002 were

overseas (it is reported that some British nationals came to the resort for holiday after the July 7 attack in London, to get away from threat of terrorism).

### Shoot to kill

One of the consequences of the London bombings was the shoot-to-kill policy that was activated. It claimed the death of an innocent 27-year old Brazilian electrician, Jean Charles de Menezes. It was not a tragedy, but simple cold-blooded murder in a country where capital punishment is outlawed.

British Foreign Secretary regretted the mistake to his counter-part in Brazil, the policy has not been reversed. Such knee-jerk reaction of police may alienate minority communities in Britain, according to one Muslim commentator.

There is a broader question in a liberal democratic country like Britain: whether Britain will surrender further civil liberties in the name of security. Britons instinctively resist the kind of security approach adopted in the US after 9/11. The question is does the shoot-to-kill policy is consistent with liberal democratic values that Prime Minister Blair has talked about so much after the London bombings?

### Conclusion

Political observers believe that new terrorism-related laws in Britain cannot deport ideas or block them. Freedom of speech is a fundamental right, but must be exercised responsibly. The British authorities must ensure that draconian laws must be balanced with civil liberties. The tragic death of an innocent Brazilian at the hands of police on "mistaken identity" has instilled fears among minority communities that their safety, taken for granted, does not exist anymore with the police.

A recent poll published by *The Times* said three-quarters of the public thought bombings and security scares would be part of London life for the foreseeable future. They are asking now: who is responsible for such a state of affairs? Is the Blair government's active involvement in the Iraqi war causing all the problems?

Barister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

## BOTTOM LINE

**A recent poll published by The Times said three-quarters of the public thought bombings and security scares would be part of London life for the foreseeable future. They are asking now: who is responsible for such a state of affairs? Is the Blair government's active involvement in the Iraqi war causing all the problems?**

has nothing to do with the London bombings seems to fly in the face of reality

President Bush reportedly said that he waging war in Iraq to prevent terrorist attacks in mainland America. Unfortunately, the opposite appears to be true in respect of the UK. Terrorism has hit London. The failed bomb attacks in the London's transportation system on July 21 instilled fear among the commuters. More people now cycle their way to work in London. For the first time Bangladeshis in UK find terrorism staring at their face.

### Searching questions

One British Muslim commentator during his interview on BBC World asked a very relevant question. Why is it that the British-born Muslims want to return to their homeland (say Pakistan) for a dose of extremism?

He argues that young Muslims of this generation are neither alienated from the mainstream nor

passions, they are victims to exploitation and recruitment by the extremists.

It is true that many terrorist attacks occurred before the Iraqi war and in that way one can argue that terrorist attacks occurred before the Iraqi war. The terrorist attacks occurred in 1993 at the World Trade Centre and in 1996 on the US troops quarters in Khobar (Saudi Arabia). The US Embassy in Kenya and Tanzania were attacked in 1998. The US warship was attacked, killing US soldiers in 2000 near Yemen. Then came the notorious 9/11.

Why did terrorist attacks occur in the first place before the Iraqi war?

Most experts believe that policy of the US towards the Middle East has been flawed because of its continuing support for its ally, Israel. Almost all Arabs in 21 countries find the US policy discriminating and unjust towards Palestinians. The anger and anguish of many Arabs swelled up and extremists have exploited them.

targeted against Australians because Australia supported the US in the war and sent troops to Afghanistan. The same phenomenon occurred in Spain in 2004 because it sent troops to Iraq. It seems all the countries including the Muslim majority ones that are pro-US are being targeted by the terrorists. Morocco, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia are frequently in their sights.

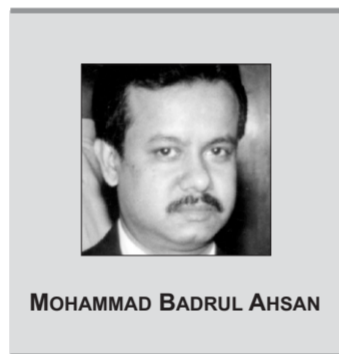
The July 16 devastating al-Qaeda linked attacks at the Red Sea resort of Sharm El-Sheikh in Egypt, that left at least 88 dead, have turned the spotlight once more on Osama bin Laden's deputy and Egypt's most shadowy son, Ayman al-Zawahiri. The al-Qaeda reportedly claimed swiftly that the attacks were a "part of the response against the global evil powers which are spilling the blood of Muslims."

In Britain, the attacks on the Egyptian sea resort sent chills through British people that they were not safe either at home or

Many believe that the death of Menezes was due to profiling a Brazilian as an Arab or Asian by the police because of their prejudices. Furthermore, there are many questions to answer by the London police. Why, for example, did plainclothes policemen even allow him to board a busy bus and reach a tube station, if they had reasonable suspicions he was concealing a bomb under his winter coat? Did Menezes realise he was being pursued by police officers or did he run because he thought he was about to be mugged?

The death of Menezes has raised reasonable fears within Britain's minority Muslim communities that police, instead of being a protector, has become a killer. The long-held benign image of British police has been shattered. Furthermore police may find it difficult to get intelligence on extremist groups from minority groups after the horrible mistake. Although the

# The Pied Piper of Washington



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

TONY Williams, the Mayor of Washington has promised to install more cameras in the nation's capital. Hillary Clinton, the Senator from New York, has demanded more cameras for her city. The Washington Metro Authority is planning to impart security training to its employees including the janitors. Everywhere in the US, there is an escalated level of worries marked by enhanced surveillance. If eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, never before has that price appeared so high in the face of imminent threat to national security.

Welcome to the United States, once the land of freedom, now busy sealing its borders, waterways, and airspace. On July 21, the House voted to extend the Patriot Act for an indefinite period. Prompted by the terrorist bombings in London, the US lawmakers agreed to renew key provisions of the act that were set to expire by the end of 2005. A terrified nation is preparing for the long haul in its fight to terrify terrorism.

So the House voted 257-171 in favor of the Patriot Act, authorising federal agents to use roving wire-taps and to search library and medical records. Anyone attacking a rail or mass-transit vehicle would get 20-year jail term, a 30-year sentence if the vehicle carries

nuclear material, and life imprisonment with the possibility of death penalty if anyone is killed in such an attack. One inherent weakness of this tough legislation is that suicide bombers don't live to stand trial for their crimes.

That is the irony of the whole thing! If the weapons of mass destruction weren't found in Iraq, the US invasion has made them prolific. About 400 suicide bombings took place in Iraq since then, not to speak of other cities like London, Karachi,

The question is what have George Bush and his allies achieved so far in their attack on terrorism? The answer is that they have made terrorism even more terrible.

According to an estimate in February 2002, the total number of people who died in the 9/11 attack stood at 2,843. But this year about 90,000 people died in the United States due to hospital-related infections. According to statistics of 2002: 107,000 people died of accidents, 125,000 died of lower respi-

strategy of George Kennan, the US political analyst, advisor, and diplomat. He stated in his top secret Policy Planning Study 23: "[W]e have about 50 percent of the world's wealth, but only 6.3 percent of its population. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity. To do so, we will have to dispense with all sentimentality. We should cease to talk about vague and

high levels of its military expenditures. Hence, the threat of rogue states was invented. The Gulf War was the first contrived opportunity to test this justification with the American people. The justification also appealed outside the United States since it assured protection of oil company profits and the flow of oil to Europe and Japan which needed it much more than the United States.

The concepts of Islamic fundamentalism, radicalism, militancy, totalitarianism, and terrorism fit the

\$15 billion. The US budget for covert operations, a euphemism for US terrorism, alone is double this amount.

While the paltry budget of the rogue states make them unlikely threats to US security, the invasion of Iraq under false pretext and continued support of Israel make it clear that the United States is following the Kennan course, which is a confluence of many opportunities. It justifies the large military budget in the United States, weakens the resurgence of Islam, gives the Christian world a chance to vindicate its defeat in the Crusades, assures Europe and Japan of a stable supply of oil, strengthens Israel against the Palestinian threat, and lastly, rewards India in its rivalry with Pakistan.

The world is bending to a conspiracy, which comes in the rhythms of a new music. George Bush is getting what he wants, the great conductor of the symphony orchestra where the chorus of terrorism blends with the tune of democracy. More arrogance, more terrorism, more security, more suspicion, more violation of human rights, cheating, falsification, intimidation, destruction, and killing! George Bush might rid us of the terrorists, but he is surely going to make off with innocence and decency.

It reminds me of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, who came to rid the city of rats and disappeared with all children. Put more cameras all around us to keep an eye on him. Pssst! This Pied Pier lives in Washington.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

## CROSS TALK

**George Bush might rid us of the terrorists, but he is surely going to make off with innocence and decency. It reminds me of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, who came to rid the city of rats and disappeared with its children. Put more cameras all around us to keep an eye on him. Pssst! This Pied Pier lives in Washington.**

Cairo, and Madrid. There is a deadly bomb ticking in the hearts and minds of suicide bombers who are preparing to strike large populations, God knows where and when.

The United States is ready to do what it can to prevent these attacks. In an interview with WFLA-AM in Orlando, Florida on July 15, Tom Tancredo, a Republican Congressman from Colorado said that the United States could even take out the Muslim holy sites, including Mecca, if Muslim fundamentalist terrorists attacked his country with nuclear weapons. He has been accused of bigotry since then, although some have applauded what he said.

One thing leading to another, the US attack on terrorism has turned into chaos. While Osama bin Laden still remains at large, and Iraq and Afghanistan remain pretty much unmanageable, terrorism today is more prevalent than ever before.

ratory diseases, 65,000 died of influenza/pneumonia, and 73,000 died of diabetes. Why is the United States so determined to root out terrorism after 9/11?

The easy answer is that it is not number of casualties that is important. What is important is the causality, the attack on a superpower which made it angry. But the hard answer is also believed by many people, that the attack on terrorism is a false pretense to push an agenda of conspiracy. That conspiracy is a campaign to demonise Islam and Muslims for larger Western interests.

The growing coalition between rightwing Christian forces, Zionism, and lately right-wing Hinduism, through defense pacts and other special American ties with India (Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has been recently accorded an unprecedented reception at the White House), resonates with the

unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards, and democratization."

Kennan's formulation has been the guiding principle of US foreign policy after World War II, which has shifted ground by forging new alliances and abandoning old ones, manipulating world events, ends always justifying means. When communism collapsed, it was essential to look for new grounds again to justify the large military spending. In 1989 former Defense Secretary McNamara made it obvious before the Senate Budget Committee when he said that the US defense spending could be cut in half.

The military-industrial complex in the United States had two options. It had to undergo massive shifts in spending, which would have been an unwelcome prospect for the defense establishment. Else, it had to find new ways to justify continued

bill. The Palestine problem provided the platform as radical militant groups like Hamas and others attacked US embassies and military presence in the Middle East and Africa. Earlier, Ronald Reagan, who has been lionised by the right as the greatest American of all times, even ahead of the likes of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington, presided over the transition. He helped disintegrate the Soviet Union and attacked Libya to set the stage for a new world order.

Talk about the ridiculous rogue states! The International Institute for Strategic Studies reveals that the total US defense budget is \$262 billion, which accounts for about 37 percent of global military expenditures. Russia, Japan, and China respectively spend \$80 billion, \$42 billion, and \$7 billion. Whereas the six "rogue states" -- Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria, North Korea -- have a combined annual military budget of

## OPINION

# Improving the quality of parliamentary proceedings

ABMS ZAHUR

EMPEROR Akbar became Akbar the Great. He proved to be a good administrator, a good negotiator and a good leader, though he did not have any formal education. Of course that was in sixteenth and seventeenth century when administration was much simpler and he was a king. Moreover he could leader a lot from his able house tutor. He was guided by a bunch of able and experienced advisors. However, his ability to choose his advisors is commendable. In Bangladesh we are striving hard to establish parliamentary democracy in a society with a very high rate of illiteracy (57%), low per capita income, low urban residence, weak local government, and relatively few private associations. The task of running administration in such an environment efficiently may

be difficult but not impossible. In a parliamentary democracy parliamentarians are lawmakers, national policy makers and guide to executive. As such these representatives of the people (regarded as very important persons) should be fully aware of their role. If they fail to participate in the discussions on national issues, if they cannot show enough interest in attending even the parliament sessions, then what can we expect from them? Some empty promises, some consolatory statements, not to be taken seriously!

Policy making in a democratic country is a highly demanding and difficult task because behind every policy there is some objective which may be short term or long term. In formulating a national policy it is to be seen carefully as to its acceptability to the people on implementation. Because we do not have good system of assessing people's opin-

**Though 14 years have elapsed after the fall of dictatorial regime of Ershad, we have not yet realised fully the strength of common people. Why should we hesitate to accept that it is the common people who have so far kept the limping democracy of Bangladesh alive. Be it struggle for independence, be it throwing out dictatorship, be it ensuring fair election -- the common people's contribution has been the most.**

ion, we can rarely successfully implement even good policies. To elaborate the point further let me take a hypothetical case. All conscious and educated people understand that there is an urgent need for right sizing the government because too many less than efficient persons are performing too little work inefficiently. Maintaining a large number of them at a huge cost is a crippling burden on the government.

Not elected government may ever dare to slash even one third of the personnel without strong support from people. In certain cases we see part implementation of plans (only

those parts where resistance is not given). Foreign aided projects face another kind of hindrance. Delay in reimbursement or release results in cost escalation, sometimes it also causes unnecessary modification of the plans to accommodate the wishes of pressure groups or so-called high-ups. Discussion on big plans or critical issues must be made in the parliament because they touch all the segments of the people. But such discussion will only be meaningful and effective if the participating members can really understand it properly. If the members fail to understand properly then

they will not participate or remain absent from the sessions. For proper understanding a reasonable level of education is required and particularly the ministers will be more efficient and responsible if vigorous discussions are held in the parliament.

Moreover, the members will be able to show their worth during discussions. While giving nomination all parties must ensure that their candidates are capable of understanding the complex and intricate issues. Through sheer flattery or wealth no member can serve the interest of either the party or the government or

the country. After all, presence of a large number of dumb politicians is not a pretty sight.

It is unfortunate that we have not been able to make majority of our MPs coming up with good suggestions to modify certain plans to make them more realistic and efficient. If it could be done the entire scenario of our development will be more vigorous. Government must encourage the more knowledgeable and the more experienced to participate in discussions. We hear a lot from the government about its preparation to fact the challenge of the 21st century. How far it has really been able to show

its preparation has remained a moot point.

Broadly speaking the following points must be emphasised to bring qualitative change in government decisions and improved pace in implementation of decisions:

- Knowledgeable and experienced ministers, members of parliament and small number of but efficient civil servants;
- Drastic reduction in corruption;
- Proper in time briefing of parliament members;
- Use of reliable statistical data in preparation of plans;
- Quick release or reimbursement of funds;
- No change or modification in the plans once the plan starts;
- Political consideration be given only if it is strongly supported by economic consideration.

Though 14 years have elapsed after the fall of dictatorial regime of Ershad, we have not yet realised

fully the strength of common people. Why should we hesitate to accept that it is the common people who have so far kept the limping democracy of Bangladesh alive. Be it struggle for independence, be it throwing out dictatorship, be it ensuring fair election -- the common people's contribution has been the most. They become frustrated when the party in position betrays or their representatives concerned fail to contribute to their welfare because of lack of knowledge or experience. With the increase in the rate of literacy and improvement in standard of living, the stature of MPs needs to be elevated. The days of catchy slogans, exploiting dynastic glory are over. Better candidates will, however, be available if the parties can recognise merit and reputation.

ABMS Zahur is a retired Joint Secretary.