

Arrested extremists going scot-free

Weak prosecution wrecks cases

WE are troubled by the report appearing in a leading Bangla daily stating that many Islamic militants who were arrested repeatedly, some of them re-handled, have been let off every time they were arrested. This was because either there was 'lack of evidence' or the evidence was not properly recorded while the case was being prepared. In some cases, names of the accused were dropped from the final report of the police. A case in point is that of Bangla Bhai who, as reported, was arrested with some of his associates twice, in 2002 and 2003, but were inexplicably let off because of the weak case prepared by the police, either deliberately or perhaps under pressure from the top. This is something that even the concerned police super of the district appeared to have taken cognizance of, and we are given to understand that departmental proceedings are being initiated against the errant IO.

The report also brings to light the fact that some of the militants arrested in connection with the 17th Aug bombings had been arrested previously but subsequently let off due to the inherent lacunae in presenting the case for prosecution.

This is where our concern lies. Because it is difficult, reading the report, not to form the impression that there might have been a degree of complicity of the administration in seeing that these militants went free. The apprehensions that were expressed in the media many times in the past, that there is a great deal of pressure on the investigating agency by the people at the helms of affairs may not be unfounded either. Some have conceded that the process of investigation gets derailed as the merit of the cases is diluted because of political interference from the top. Particularly, the investigating agencies are demotivated to pursue a case when they find ministers and senior leaders in the government repeatedly denying the existence of religious militants in the country, terming it as media propaganda.

Unless the process of investigation is depoliticised, we will not be able to get to the bottom of any of the bombing incidents, far less the incidents of 17th August.

New low in police discipline

Cops as arms dealers

WE are extremely concerned over the seizure of some smuggled AK47 rifles, linked to the yet unresolved Chittagong arms haul, biggest-ever in the country, from two police sergeants who have been taken into custody with their two 'criminal' accomplices in Chittagong on Saturday. It goes to reinforce the impression that the ranks of the wayward among law enforcers are increasing and the types of crimes they have started indulging in were thought to have been the exclusive preserve of hardcore criminals so far.

What is even more worrisome is the fact that not only the two cops were in possession of AK47 rifles, they were also important witnesses in the sensational case relating to 10 truckloads of arms hauled up at the Chittagong Urea Fertilizer Factory jetty last year.

And that's not all -- some of the AK47s they possessed, six to be precise, reportedly went into the hands of a notorious criminal who is a close aide of a top Shibir cadre. Such dealing in weapons by police officials gets our hackles up as to how much more of the arms seized in Chittagong might have been spirited away to the underworld caches!

We must congratulate Rab on their intrepid handling in this case, because had they not arrested Akash with an AK47 and their subsequent investigation not led to the disclosure about the two police sergeants' involvement in the dealings, the latter probably would have been still roaming. This thought undoubtedly troubles us a lot.

It also brings the main issue to the fore viz. the irresolution of the whole arms haul case which reflects a gross failure on the part of the authorities. It also raises our suspicion about some law enforcers' involvement in the proliferation of weapons as purveyors and distributors of illegal arms. There does not seem to exist any specific mechanism for ensuring transparency and accountability of forces in respect of handling arms and ammunition after their seizures! We, therefore, see an impelling necessity for the authorities to put appropriate measures in place to avert recurrence of such rabid criminal behaviour on the part of those who are supposed to be providing security to society.

The EU in disarray



M. ABDULL HAFIZ

THE European Union has so far survived crisis after crisis on sheer brinkmanship. The bloc's skilful policymakers are master craftsmen of political compromises which have kept the EU on track for over five decades by applying first aid remedies and quick fix solutions. But in the meantime the internal discord of the organisation only deepened. Indeed the EU has been plunged into unprecedented disarray following failure by the bloc's leaders at a recent summit to endorse a new seven-year financial blueprint for the 25 nations. The budget collapse, coming only weeks after stinging rejection of first ever EU constitution by French and Dutch voters is a powerful blow to the EU's hopes of becoming a power and a counter-weight to the United States. "We are in deep crisis... we have failed", said Luxembourg prime minister, Jean Claude Juncker whose country had still

been the EU president. After the failed summit the European commission President Manuel Barroso admitted dejectedly, "We are certainly not in good shape". Inevitably the summit collapse was followed by a spate of accusing statements by EU leaders seeking to prove that they were not personally responsible for the failure. German chancellor Gerhard

budget refund if France, a major beneficiary of EU farm subsidies had agreed to slash the bloc's expenditure on agriculture. Farm spending currently takes up 40 per cent of the EU budget. The recrimination and bad-tempered exchanges among the EU leaders are likely to continue for months. But the problems besetting the EU are not just the fault of this or that nation. A visibly

the summit's collapse on the member countries that are trapped in the past and refuse to reform their economies. But he agreed that Europe was divided and the division was based on whether you wanted a European Union that would be able to cope with the future or one that would be "trapped in the past." According to Blair EU needed a thorough debate on where its funding

reforms and deregulation and the social welfare model espoused by France and Germany. The gap between the two is unlikely to be bridged anytime soon. To make things worse the decision making in the EU has now been rendered difficult given the fact that the bloc is now comprised of diverse nations including many poorer Eastern European countries. The new Europe is, in fact, a far cry

forged even last year's enlargement and helped launch EU's common foreign and security policy. Berlin-Paris axis has been diluted because of the shifting alliance of the new members. The political future of both Chirac and Schroeder is uncertain.

The repercussions of EU's setback and its shattered dream of countering the US' unilateralist policy in global politics would cast a gloom not only in Europe but across various parts of the world where people are inspired by EU model of regional cooperation for development and prosperity. The leading nations of Asia who saw emerging multilateralism in Europe's attempt to reassert its global standing will be disappointed. However, even the doomsayers will not predict EU's disappearance. The new dynamics would grow within Europe itself to put it back on track and initiate a forward move afresh. One of the silverlinings is the shifting of November 2006 deadline for constitutional ratification to 2007 by when there might be new leaders running the countries like Germany, France and the Netherlands to turn the tide of popular mood in different direction with its profound impact on the making of new Europe.

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PERSPECTIVES

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Schroeder blamed the summit debacle on the headline stance taken by Britain which refused to accept any change in its 4.6 bn euro annual budget rebate and the Netherlands which demanded a radical cut in its contribution to EU coffers. French president Jaques Chirac was adamant that British prime minister Tony Blair's stubborn stance on the rebate was the sole reason for summit debacle. Blair in turn said he could have accepted a review of London's

dejected Juncker told reporters that the summit fiasco was in fact the result of a widening philosophical gulf created among the EU's prominent members. Some nations want to build politically integrated EU while others are content with big free trading common market.

The Luxembourg Prime Minister accused Britain of ensuring a complete reorientation of the EU's economic policy by revamping the budget. For his part Britain's foreign secretary Jack Straw blamed

should go in 21st century and called for redirecting moves towards biotechnology, high-tech and education. Blair claimed that his ideas concerned modernisation and not any ideology. If not all some nations like Netherlands and Sweden favoured Blair's ideas and demanded throughout the summit a budget revamp before they would give any spending plan a green light.

The economic divide in the EU is really between Blair's liberal

from the cohesion club of rich nations that it used to be.

Even if the bloc had survived crisis in the past, putting the EU back on its feet has become far more difficult with the ever growing numbers of EU's squabbling family members fighting long and hard to preserve their national interests. Moreover, the expanded club is no longer propelled by powerful France-Germany alliance which once pioneered European integration, brought in the euro currency,

August 17 our last wake-up call

BRIGADIER GENERAL M. SAKHAWAT HUSSAIN (RETD)

WHAT happened on August 17, 2005 in Bangladesh was the manifestation of the internal fragility of a country, which is divided on political ideology. This had to happen as the political bickering gathered momentum, one to evict the incumbent from power, other to grab it, relegating the national security aspect in spite of the writings on the wall.

What happened on 17th August 2005 was not something new but what was awesome was the enormity of the event. 17th blast is till date unprecedented in the annals of terror. Hardly any parallel can be drawn where the whole country was rocked in a synchronised manner. It still remains unfathomable. About 400 blasts were caused in a spate of half an hour. Whosoever was at the command end of the dastardly act has conveyed the message loud and clear, displayed their prowess where the security apparatus looked ridiculous.

The blast and the leaflets claiming responsibility raised many questions that may not be simple to answer. Such an act only signals the inability of the government to treat the warnings that it got from the series of previous blasts that saw much more devastation than what the 17th Aug blasts have produced. Compared to the past blasts this may not have caused as severe a devastation but this was good enough to put the Bangladesh

government in a tight spot and us in the list of countries struck by extremists that the western world has been apprehensive about, including our immediate neighbour. One cannot any more deny that there are extremists, grown in size for many reasons, either directly involved or has been used for political or for other

look place in areas, which are supposed to have been under regular surveillance like the district headquarters. The perpetrators chose the heart of the civil administration with such ease that these lead to only one conclusion of intelligence failure and if not then failure at the execution level as the State Minister for Home himself was heard saying that he

lar attire or presumably connected with the self-declared perpetrators, the JMB (Jama'at ul Mujahideen Bangladesh), a little known Islamist group, calling to establish a state system based on the Sharia, that exists in no Muslim country, let alone in a country like Bangladesh where Islam spread through Sufiism, that makes us a tolerant society which

Who would they rule or preside over if few thousand peacekeepers are sent to 'stabilize a destabilized neighborhood' as the chief minister West Bengal puts it. I can only draw inference of the Ivory Coast a country that failed only for political reasons.

It is political bickering that has provided space for either home-

Jihadists or not, this was the last wake up call as the two Indian analysts has put it. It is for our politicians to take them seriously, if not, they should be prepared for public wrath that is already brewing. Should this be taken as last wake-up call by the parties in politics and differentiate between national security and their petty political priorities? We can only appeal to saner section of our leaders to come together on national issues before it is too late. Warnings are on the wall, try to read them.

strategic advantage, both inside and outside the country. But at this juncture I would rather concentrate within the country and where we have gone wrong though it has to be said that we hardly took any lesson from the past mistakes.

It would be a simplistic conclusion to put the entire blame on the intelligence apparatus without looking at the inside workings of these organisation. No doubt that there has been massive intelligence failure looking at the enormous extent of the operation. Question then is why is that the security organisations could not claim any preemptory success even in a small remote district town like Borguna or Bagerhat? What prevented the preemption that perhaps was logical, for the intelligence should have anticipated such kind of threat?

Surprisingly, most of the blast

had information for 14 to 16 August. He then changed his statement saying that he himself was surprised like others (Daily Star-18 August 2005). He never defended the intelligence apparatus if his earlier statement was correct. Rather his changed statement also underlines the failure theory.

However, whosoever is responsible for such lapses does not matter because we do not have the culture of accepting responsibility, at least that we know of. As usual there would be some changes at bureaucratic level as a fallout of the incidence but political failure would remain veiled, as it had always been. Political blame-game continues as usual and the police take actions as usual rounding up so-called suspects in hundreds to prove their efficiency.

Unfortunately, this time it is anyone and anybody of a particu-

can hardly be changed through coercion. I firmly believe that this fact is well known to the perpetrators of the nation-wide blasts. Therefore, one needs to be careful in generalising the issue that is already showing sign of dissension in the society, and that could be one bigger aim of the extremist group.

Having said all the above, what lessons can we possibly learn though we should have taken these lessons earlier to prevent what has happened. We need to differentiate national security, national interest and political or personal mileage. Unfortunately, political blame-game is taking shape as the opposition declared strike without giving much importance to the public sentiments which desires to see the end of political bickering to close ranks to find a way out from the virulent atmosphere which has almost put the country into brink of disaster.

grown or outside-motivated jihadist forces. If there was an intelligence failure the main reason is that all state apparatuses have long been politicised in that they can hardly attend to the national security aspect. Some of us have warned time and again that our political leaders have never taken into account the national issues.

As immediate ramification of the blast one Indian analyst Mr. Anand Kumar puts it mildly, "These blasts also indicate the danger posed by the Islamists to the political system of the country in the coming days. But the impact of this Islamic extremism would not remain limited to Bangladesh and is bound to affect other territories which the world has seen in recent times".

Let's also quote from another Indian analyst who is frequently quoted in international press, Mr. B. Raman. He writes, "Their (so

called Jihadist's) internal objective is to covertly use the fundamentalist and jihadi terrorist organisations for consolidating their power and undermining their political opponents. Their external objective is to use these organisations against India. The state-sponsored growth of these organisations has enabled them to take advantage of the silent complicity of the two Governments to promote their own Islamic and pan-Islamic objectives". These are dangerous conclusions if taken as sublime warnings.

Finally, let me explicitly say that our nation is in grave danger. Many wakeup calls that the nation has received but we pretended to sleep over them. However, as claimed by the Jihadist group in their leaflet, they reminded us of those warnings. It mentions that they had issued three earlier warnings. To me, Jihadists or not, this was the last wake up call as the two Indian analysts has put it. It is for our politicians to take them seriously, if not, they should be prepared for public wrath that is already brewing. Should this be taken as last wakeup call by the parties in politics and differentiate between national security and their petty political priorities? We can only appeal to saner section of our leaders to come together on national issues before it is too late.

Warnings are on the wall, try to read them.

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The politics of belief and truth

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"H AS anyone seen, have you seen in your own eyes, that man landed on the moon? The Maulavi Shahib (an Islamic teacher) asked me somewhat angrily shortly after the lunar landing in 1969. He was not convinced that a mortal man could land on the moon, a heavenly body. That conversation left a lasting impression on the teen-ager that I was. Why do some people want to believe what they believe to be true, despite the facts that disprove or falsify his or her beliefs?

While having a conversation with a pro-BNP businessman in Singapore, he raised a similar skepticism as to who were responsible for the August 17 bombings in Bangladesh. He said: "Who knows, who bombed -- but it must be a political party with national reach." This gentleman was a little discreet, but a ruling party leader in North Bengal was not so tactful; he claimed the Awami League, the major Opposition Party, were responsible for the attacks.

Why would Awami League do such things? Of course, the forthcoming Saarc meeting that Awami League for some reasons want to sabotage. Similar accusations were made

by ruling party leaders last year after the brutal killing of Mr. Kibria, the well-respected Finance Minister of Awami League government. Allegations were made that Awami League wanted to spoil the ensuing Saarc meeting, and thus sacrificed one of its leaders. Let me tell you, these are not just outrageous, wild, and unsubstantiated allegations made by the morally and intellectually retarded, there are

bosses implanted these beliefs in his mind. We grow up believing many things that do not exist in the real world. But sometime propaganda machines -- politically motivated -- tend to create illusions and implant beliefs in our minds. I met a North Korean some years ago -- a seemingly sensible man who believed everything his supreme leader told. Socialisation may explain the source of beliefs but we need to know what sustains it. I would

ties. Given the sensitivity of the issue of religion in the US culture, it would be almost impossible to know the religious background of the people who worked in the World Trade Centre. Therefore, such a belief was highly implausible and it fits only with a conspiracy theory that the enemies of Muslims were behind the terrorist attack to tarnish the image of the Muslims.

Those who believe in that

constructed, like the example of the Pakistani policeman. Propaganda aside, what people say as what they believe can be explained by the political advantages.

The ruling party leader, a state minister, in putting the blame on the opposition Awami League is trying to create a smoke screen and to get some undue political advantage. Similarly, the opposition would like to put the blame on the government for political milie-

arresting the culture of irresponsibility. There are many factors for the emergence of the culture of irresponsibility where politicians --minus the likes of Dr. Kamal Hossain -- play a big role but the factor that has the most direct bearing is the culture of impunity.

Bangladesh has had the inglorious record of using the parliament, a noble institution for drafting laws presumably to ensure the rights of the people to live in peace and to secure justice, to pass law that gave immunity to the culprits, otherwise known as indemnity bill. If criminals are not tried and punished, if judges feel "embarrassed" to pass judgments, if sections of the police force fail to demonstrate confidence in the judiciary by becoming the accuser, prosecutor, judge and the executor all in one, if political leaders rather than being role models of responsibility make irresponsible statements based on innuendos and white lies, how can we expect to break the cultures of immunity and irresponsibility? We must return to a culture of responsibility in order to deal with endemic violence and to strengthen democracy in Bangladesh.

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many seemingly decent folks who tend to believe these to be facts. But why?

In the early stage of the liberation war, a Pakistani policeman imported from the Punjab shared a "fact" with me that was kept secret from the Bengalis. The "fact" was that Sheikh Mujib was a full colonel in the Indian Army and his mission was the destroy Pakistan for which he had been working for a long time!

The policeman's belief is understandable. In order to make him do the dirty work, his

venture a hypothesis. Beliefs are closely related to our sense of self-worth.

Some people believe that on 9/11 there were no Jews in the World Trade Centre in New York. I was asked about this subject by seemingly sensible people. My answer was this: the US census does not have religion as a category so we do not know exactly how many Jews or Muslims live in the US let alone work in the World Trade Centre. The figures of religious groups in the US are estimates provided by the respective religious communi-

conspiracy theory find some comfort in the belief that the Muslims were innocent of the attack. I can think of many positions on 9/11 ranging from a great tragedy to a reprisal from the victims who used the weapon of the weak. However, the issue at hand is belief. Why do some people need comfort in their beliefs? For some people, beliefs are close to their sense of self-worth.

But is belief simply a matter of psychology? I think not. There is a political dimension of belief. Some beliefs are politically

Connivance or incompetence ?

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BICHOLITO

THAT a particular group avowing seeping social change in the name of religion could pull off a coordinated series of bomb blasts in 63 of 64 districts strikes one as another serious lapse in governance in the country.

For the perpetrators to be so successful in inducing fear and introducing chaos in the lives of the citizenry could be explained by two main reasons: they were either aided by accomplices from within the law enforcement establishment whose connivance, it seems, is easy to purchase these days.

Alternatively, the hate-mongers were successful because the law enforcers have proven once again their utter incompetence in providing basic security to Bangladeshis.

Both explanations apply to many past episodes (Ahsanullah Master, SAMS Kibria, Ivy Rahman, the attack on Sheikh Hasina, as well as the British Ambassador to Bangladesh) too numerous to list individually that have turned up little to placate the fears and uncertainties that many of us face today.

Either of the two reasons is also a serious cause for alarm to the common people who continue to remain neglected while power-brokers flex their muscles arrogantly and jostle for advantage to continue the story of exploitation, marginalization and dehumanization that has gripped the country for the past three decades.

Strangely, heads haven't rolled after any of the heinous episodes, neither are any expected to roll after this most recent one. This raises questions, again and again, as to why the power establishment that cannot protect basic rights of those who empower them should continue to occupy the seats of governance.

But raising that question is like the refrain of a broken record that falls on the deaf ears of an imperious power-structure immersed in self-glory and self-gratification while the lives of the masses continue to degenerate. So what is new?