

## Floods of racial divide

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abandoned along the elevated highways that criss-cross the city of 1.5m people, now mostly ending in water ramps. Bodies floated spread-eagled in the dark waters below. With rescue efforts for the living in full swing, the dead lay neglected as convoys of soldiers, police, paramedics, and boat rescue teams from as far away as California and Illinois whizzed by.

One half-naked man could have been asleep with his head on a pillow, his final repose only given away by his mightily expanded stomach in the burning heat.

The neglect of the dead despite the publicly admitted danger of diseases such as cholera reflected the compartmentalised approach to the evacuation effort that in its attempt to organise everything on military lines fell victim to its rigidity.

Buses could only pick up large groups of people in large convoys, so small groups and stragglers were ignored. The city resembles the aftermath of a war zone. Largely deserted streets are full of debris and rubbish, with large crowds of displaced people gathered together to protect themselves from widespread looting, occasional arson, and rape.

And yet, unlike the immediate post-war trauma, there are no UN workers registering and setting up sanctuaries, no NGOs such as Médecins Sans Frontières assisting. This is an all-American effort and overwhelmingly official, which means very ponderous until it gets rolling. Citizens trying to get into the city to help or inspect their homes are blocked at checkpoints.

With recriminations mounting and President George W. Bush looking to apportion blame, authorities have protested that the extent of the calamity has overwhelmed them. Some 80 per cent of the city, much of it built below sea level between a large lake and a mighty river, remains under water. The coastal areas of Mississippi to the east were also devastated.

Large numbers of people tens of thousands ignored the mandatory evacuation order to flee ahead of Katrina's arrival last Sunday. But then tens of thousands had no means to get out of New Orleans.

One of them was Connie Emalle, a New Orleans hotel worker seen on Saturday pushing her belongings in a plastic bin on an office chair with wheels, inching along in a line of people towards a cordon of armed National Guards who would assign them to a bus. Where the bus would take them, no one was quite sure. Houston, Texas, perhaps.

The oldest, weakest and infants were among the last to leave. Nearly all were black and very poor.

All they knew is that finally they would be out of the Convention Center, a vast complex of halls, cafeterias and meeting rooms where finance ministers of the Americas had once conferred in splendour. But since the floodwaters surged on Tuesday it had become the refuge for thousands of people and then their prison.

But worse than a prison, they said, as there was no security, no food or water, no electricity for three days. During this time, they said, girls and boys were raped in the dark and had their throats cut and bodies were stuffed in the kitchens while looters and madmen exchanged fire with weapons they had looted.

No one we found could actually say they saw the bodies, but three heavily armed soldiers of the National Guard came kicking in doors and shining torches into rooms and corridors as the last stragglers left, saying they were under orders to find the bodies.

In the street outside lay the body of one man shot in the head, covered with black blankets and surrounded by office chairs as if he had been the focus of a discussion topic. A man who would only identify himself as "IP" said he had seen police gun him down the day before as he got in the way of a convoy carrying the mayor who had come to inspect the scene.

A soldier of the National Guard confirmed he had been shot by police.

The entire fetid complex reeked of excrement. Piles of litter, abandoned clothing and nappies lay everywhere. Phyllis Riley, 51, seeking to maintain her dignity in clothes smeared in vomit, apologised for her condition but said she had asthma and could hardly breathe and had not seen a single medical worker in the five days since Katrina landed.

In the sheer terror of feeling totally abandoned for several days, before an inkling of help even began to arrive, people clutched desperately at rumours. Ms Emalle had heard of three warships being diverted from Iraq, including an aircraft carrier.

"The aircraft carrier was to get people up north where water was deepest," she said confidently.

Geraldine Levy said her son protected four Australian tourists from rapists in the convention centre. "Can you imagine? Four white women on their own?"

And then she cursed her government asking how the Australian embassy had been able to evacuate its citizens and she was still caught in hell, now separated from her son after being bussed to the airport.

Ms Levy echoed the thoughts and words of many black Americans we spoke to over the weekend who, while often heroic or stoic in the face of the death and depravity around them, were deeply bitter and angry at the rich white people who run their country.

"They opened the levees to save the whole neighbourhood to protect their investments," declared Larry Crawford, 34, believing, as many sincerely do, that some districts were deliberately flooded to relieve the pressure on the dykes protecting

ing others.

Inconceivable today, yet this is what happened in 1927 with the great Mississippi flood that made a million people homeless. Not only that, as John Barry documents in his social history *Rising Tide*, black work gangs were held as virtual prisoners in squalid "concentration camps" while shoring up the levees to protect plantations. Many black Americans living in the north are descended from those who abandoned the Delta that year, after the landowners escaped the floods on a steamer to the music of "Bye, Bye Blackbird".

This week, almost nothing has been said in the news or by officials about the poor eastern suburb of Chalmette. Many of the houses said to number 27,000 are totally under water. Here the death toll is thought to be greatest, possibly running well into the thousands, said police. Several hundred corpses are reported to have been gathered by locals in one school alone.

Senior officials, who have no bodies to count because there are no orders to collect any, say they have no idea how many people have died. One told a press conference on Saturday it could be one or two thousand.

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## India raises

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forced to continue selling fuel at June's rate.

Crude prices have risen more than 50 percent this year.

"The cabinet has decided to increase prices of petrol by 3 rupees a litre (7 US cents) and diesel by 2 rupees a litre," Oil Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar told reporters.

The loss of revenue for the state-run oil companies as a result of the squeeze was also likely to lead to a loss of dividend earnings worth billions of rupees for the cash-strapped federal government.

"I think we will be able to substantially recover the projected losses of oil companies. However, a great deal would depend on international oil prices," Aiyar said.

Prices of kerosene and cooking gas were left unchanged.

Prices vary from state to state but using New Delhi prices as a base, the cost of petrol and diesel will be about 7 percent more, keeping Indian prices among the highest state-regulated ones in Asia. The country imports 70 percent of its oil.

US light crude Clc1 hit a record \$70.85 a barrel last week. The average price so far this year is \$54.53 a barrel, up about 30 percent on 2004.

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## Elderly man

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take revenge on his another accomplice Kawser.

The criminals opened fire on Nabi, the elder brother of Kaoser, taking him to be Kawser. Nabi died on the spot.

The criminals also shot Safa who came to the aid of the victim. He was admitted to local Upazila Health Complex for bullet wounds.

Sources said Nasir was caught while committing robbery and sent to jail earlier this year. He blamed Kawser, who had a dispute with him over a piece of land, for his arrest. After being released on bail few days back, he attacked on vengeance, sources said.

## Uneasy calm

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(planning) and freedom fighter Major (retd) Moktadir was on the top of the list while Senior General Manager Mukbul E Elahi, a technical cadre official of Petrobangla, in the second position.

Petrobangla officials expressed surprise as the appointment took place at a time when the seniority list was waiting for approval by the Superior Selection Board (SSB).

The SSB is scheduled to pick up officials for appointment as Petrobangla directors in a couple of weeks.

The Energy and Mineral Resources Division (EMRD) said the officials were given current charges, as the SSB will take time in giving the appointments. The delay will hamper the activities of the Petrobangla, it added.

However, Petrobangla officials said no temporary appointment was made although the director posts of planning and operation along with mine and minerals remained vacant for two to 11 months.

"For smooth functioning, the appointments should have been made much earlier. But the current charge appointments have been made at a time when the SSB is about to give its approval," said an official smelling a rat in the hurried appointment.

In making the current charge appointments, the EMRD said the technical posts should be filled up by the technical persons.

But officials alleged that Makbul E Elahi, who is a technical cadre official and was second on the seniority list, was not given the current charge.

Officials also alleged that although hurried appointments were made to director planning and operation, the post of director (mine and minerals) remains vacant.

## Opposition

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Earlier in the day, an emergency meeting of the AL Central Working Committee (ALCWC) decided in principle to go for a hartal, and asked party leaders to fix the date in consultation with other opposition parties.

AL chief Sheikh Hasina chaired the meeting at the party's Dhanmondi office.

Replies to a query, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil told reporters that the party will not join the parliament session that begins tomorrow, and continue its boycott of the House.

The court instantly fined them Tk 40,800. The same court also raided Orchid Plaza restaurant and fined them Tk 5,400 for not maintaining proper hygiene standards.

Another mobile court led by Mizanur Rahman raided five restaurants in the Ramna area and fined them Tk 25,000. The restaurants did not maintain required hygiene standards, a source present with the mobile court said.

Another mobile court led by Muhibul Haq raided five restaurants in the Ramna area and fined them Tk 50,000 from selling rotten food and preserving food in an unhygienic standards.

Meanwhile, a rights group has opposed the recently approved draft bill of the "Pure Food Ordinance-2005", terming it too weak. In a statement, B a n g l a d e s h Manobadihan Samonoy Parishad (BMS) said adulterators have been killing people with slow poisoning. But the government has fixed the highest punishment at only three years imprisonment and Tk 3 lakh in fines.

The highest punishment for the adulterators should be life term imprisonment, they demanded in the statement.

## Militants trained

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his involvement in the blasts to a first class magistrate on Tuesday in the district, reports BDNEWS.

In his statement, Delwar also said the banned militant outfit's network is spread over Kalihati, Bashail and Deltangal of Tangail.

Hailing from Araihazar of Narayanganj, he stands accused in several cases. He had been involved in militant activities across Tangail under different names like Rahmatullah and Moulana Samad.

In another development, police arrested five more people on Monday night in Bagerhat and Tangail, suspecting their involvement in the August 17 blasts.

Osman Gani Shamim, Asadul Islam Azad and Obaydullah, the three men arrested in Tangail, are JMB operatives and students of Dhalapara Kawmi Madrasa. A court yesterday placed them on a five-day remand.

Those arrested in Bagerhat are Moulana Abdullah Gazi, 35, a teacher of Shahidullah Fazl Madrasa of Chitalmal, and Moulana Daud Sheikh, imam of Saraili Ahle Hadith Mosque.

Bagerhat police made the arrests following confessional statement of JMB leader Mohammed Barkatullah.

Meanwhile, Khulna police said Masud bin Isaque, arrested in the city on Monday, is an Indian national.

Masud, a suspected leader of an Islamist extremist group, has been living illegally in Khulna for the last 12 years. He hails from Chabib Pargana of the Indian state of West Bengal.

Police sources said Masud will be sent to Dhaka today for interrogation by JJC.

BDNEWS reports: Leaflets of JMB were found again on the veranda of Gaibanda Press Club yesterday morning. The two-page leaflets describe the history of Jama'at Mujahideen's emergence in Bangladesh and details the key persons as well as their responsibilities.

Similar leaflets were found in the club on Monday.

Our Staff correspondent from Khulna adds: Abdur Rahim Salafi alias Bagerhat, arrested five days ago in Pirojpur district, was sent to Joint Interrogation Cell (JIC) in the capital yesterday, a day after police seized two International passports issued to his name.

Earlier Salafi was taken on a seven-day remand in a case filed for August 17 blasts in Khulna city and Bagerhat town.

Detective Branch (DB) of police said Salafi, who studied in a kamwi madrasa in Chandpur, had visited India thrice and Saudi Arabia once in the last one year.

Police were quizzing him to know the reasons for his holding two international passports and visiting India and Saudi Arabia.

UNB reports: Police on Monday night raided the house of Abdul Aziz alias Mujahid Bhai in Purbo Kachar village but failed to nab him. Aziz is

suspected to have links to the countrywide explosions.

Locals said he has gone into hiding.

Maulana Abdul Mannan, arrested on August 30 in Sirajganj, mentioned his name, along with those of others in his confessional statement.

Known as a leader of Harkatul Jihad, Abdul Aziz and 40 others were arrested with arms in the deep forest of Ukhia in Cox's Bazar in February 1996. All of them were later convicted and awarded life term in prison. But they all secured bail from the High Court.

## Iraq

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"Honestly I wish we had never been given that programme, and I wish the UN will never be asked to undertake that kind of program again. There were failures; there were inadequacies; there were situations that we couldn't deal with," Annan said.

The Independent Inquiry Committee, headed by former US Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker, has been investigating how much Annan knew about an oil-for-food contract awarded to a Swiss company.

In a March interim report, Volcker said there was not enough evidence to show that Annan knew of a contract he had claimed.

Annan said it would be unfair for the world to view criticism of the country either have to consume less or earn more to survive in this situation of price hike of all the essentials.

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