

Get rid of trigger-happy attitude

Why must public demonstration end up in massacre?

We note with concern the increasing tendency among the law and order forces to open fire on public demonstrations. They are easily moved to the extreme by the slightest provocation that could otherwise have been worked off by intelligent handling at the right time. Ironically, the proclivity that used to be a trademark with the police force of an alien power seems to be gradually possessed by our law enforcers of the native land. And that at an incalculable cost.

The latest case in point is the Dinajpur firing resorted to by the police and paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) on the demonstrators protesting a plan for open pit-mining at Phulbari coal field. Their apprehensions were it would trigger massive eviction and loss of farmlands if the coal mine project were implemented. Environmental groups having ecological concerns have found a common cause with them.

The firing has proved to be lethal with seven demonstrators killed and as many as three hundred reportedly wounded. The brutal act reminds of the Kansat massacre, though the perspectives were not the same. The ferocity with which demonstrators are being attacked is totally unacceptable. Has the police, or for that matter, paramilitary forces forgotten standard methods of crowd control rather than opening fire on demonstrators that far from defusing tension exacerbates it into wider and far more raging police-people confrontation.

Was there any warning issued before firing or were shots fired in the blank to ward off the agitators? The police and BDR were armed but the demonstrators didn't hold guns; so as custodians of law and order, the former needed to display a greater sense of responsibility in using their weapons than they actually did. It was not even shooting below the knee, rather it was shoot to kill. This is a dangerous attitude on the part of law enforcers under pressured circumstances. It is totally contrary to democratic norms and damaging to national image.

We demand an immediate independent investigation into the whole incident with the probe report made public and the guilty brought to book. Has this ever happened with the previous firing incidents? If it had, we would not have perhaps seen its recurrence.

We condole their deaths

The peacekeepers have done us proud

We are greatly shocked to learn that six Bangladeshi peacekeepers were killed in a road crash in Ivory Coast on Friday. Their noble mission of supporting peace process in the West African state ended even before they could set about accomplishing the task assigned to them, as they died immediately after reaching the country.

This is not the first time that Bangladeshi peacekeepers in African countries have lost their lives under most unfortunate circumstances. Our peacekeepers are known for their commitment and dedication. They always won the hearts of people in the countries where they were deployed. The peacekeepers had to work under trying conditions where chances of being misunderstood or treated as enemies could not be ruled out; but our soldiers lived up to people's expectations with their excellent performance. The sympathy and love for the people of the beleaguered countries inspired them to perform their duties so well.

They have brightened the image of the country and Bangladeshi peacekeepers are now rated very highly by the UN.

The deaths of the soldiers sadden us greatly but they have also left a message for the world that is now witnessing fratricidal wars and seemingly unending conflicts. Humanity is but like a close-knit family where national boundaries should not deter anybody from coming to the rescue of those in distress. The dead peacekeepers had the sole objective of serving the people of Ivory Coast though they were aliens to them. They had come from a distant land with goodwill and determination to play their due role in peace keeping.

Sadly enough, many countries are still facing complex internal problems or conflicts with other states, which are being costly both in terms of men and material. However, as a firm believer in international peace Bangladesh is always ready to extend a helping hand to these countries, whatever may be the price for such engagement in the peace process.

We condole the deaths of the six peacekeepers and express our deepest sympathy for the members of the bereaved families.

All in the name of God

CLOSEUP JAPAN

When misdeeds and sins accumulate, many of us tend to look for other mortals like us who might seem to be closer to God as they usually claim, so that the self-proclaimed loving children of divinity might act on sinners' behalf to convince God that the crime committed by such and such persons are not serious enough for them to be sent to hell.

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

EVERY religion proclaims God as a supreme authority who decides our fate and destiny. Hence there always has been a certain amount of fear and respect for the supreme power whose wrath might lead us to the eternal fire of hell. And, who is not scared of that? As a result, despite all our misdeeds throughout life, all of us cherish the deep desire in the heart to be forgiven by the supreme authority and escape from the fate of being dumped in eternal hellfire. And when misdeeds and sins accumulate, many of us tend to look for other mortals like us who might seem to be closer to God as they usually claim, so that the self-proclaimed loving children of

A requiem for justice subverted



M ABDUL HAFIZ

PERSPECTIVES

There has emerged a pattern of political elimination in this country that started with the killing of the nation's founding father. It was soon followed by the killing of four national leaders in prison. Fitting in the same pattern, the fundamentalist forces which were defeated in 1971 could have enacted August 21 with the acquiescence and abettment of their ideological cohorts. At least, according to the gut feeling of the common people, the finger of doubt points toward them. Such a possibility seems to have been set aside right from the beginning. Instead, in an orchestrated wave of propaganda crafted by interested quarters, accusations have been raised against terrorist gangs, foreign hands and the Awami League itself.

sis, if not with punitive action by the authorities.

On that fateful afternoon of August 21, 2002 when, in broad daylight, grenades were lobbed into the makeshift dais from where the AL chief, cordonned by party volunteers, had finished her concluding speech seconds before the explosions took place. The attack killed twenty-four and maimed three hundred of AL's dedicated activists. The law enforcers, as well as intelligence agencies, apart from thousands of the members of the public, were privy to the whole episode. Yet, two years on, no one knows what was it for, and who was behind the mayhem. It is an inexplicable lapse by the authorities, and morally repugnant for the establishment, not to be able to tell the people the truth behind the lethal attack which has "enormous political implications, since the entire leadership of Awami League was present at the rally."

In the eyes of US congressmen, who recently wrote to our Prime minister for a "new, fully free probe" into the mystery that still persists, "the failure of the ruling government is symbolic of a serious diminution of the rule of law in Bangladesh and it has emboldened lawlessness and allowed Islamic extremist elements to gain ground."

Notwithstanding such aspersion the government does not seem to be pushed much, and has been playing hide and seek in this regard. The home minister is now saying that the progress in investigation is not satisfactory, although a year ago the criminal investigation department (CID) had claimed "significant progress" in the probe saying that it was about to submit the chargesheet. Lutfuzzaman Babar also claimed "stupendous progress" in investigation last June in New York.

These contradictions and dichotomies in the pronouncements from responsible quarters of the government are not without

reason. They are frantically trying to divert the course of the probe toward a pre-determined conclusion. In the meantime the people wonder about the fate of the investigation in which the establishment's only visible success is the apprehension of one Joj Miah of Noakhali, and extracting from him a confessional statement that points to the involvement of the country's top terrorists who had, however, left the country before August 21.

As regards justice, it seems to have been already subverted. "Justice delayed, Justice denied" -- as the adage goes. There is little justice that can be dispensed at this late stage.

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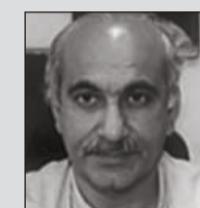
Instead, in an orchestrated wave of propaganda crafted by interested quarters, accusations have been raised against terrorist gangs, foreign hands and the Awami League itself.

The problem is that the authorities do not think that the public has common sense. They, unfortunately, take them to be a bunch of morons who would accept the establishment's subterfuge as a substitute for a fair probe. At the moment the linchpin is one obscure Joj Miah, a vagabond from Noakhali, who has been domesticated to wag his tail as dictated for a paltry sum of 2000 taka per month, given as stipend, apparently from the public coffer. Let us wait and see how the melodrama reaches its denouement.

However, credit is due to the CID and Home Ministry apparatchiks who could craftily handle both, the FBI and Interpol, who came rushing to Bangladesh to solve the country's terror problem, but went back unutilised.

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End of the beginning



M.J. AKBAR

BYLINE

What options does Bush have? The best option is the most obvious. All the nations of the region, who are staring at a growing disaster, need to sit at a table to discuss what can be saved from this wreck. America needs to be at this table as well, along with France and Russia, and Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. America can bomb rock and sand, draw blood each day from the shadows and comfort itself with passing lullabies, but will not bring peace. Peace will come through collective will and this can only be determined when nation-profiling ends, and diplomacy begins.

arrests. Insurgents, clearly loyal to Sadr, began shelling the British base, Camp Abu Naji, which had 1,200 soldiers and was on the border of Iran. In simple language, the British withdrew from the camp, which was looted when they left, so clearly the withdrawal was less than orderly. The decision may have been encouraged by the fact that the 2nd Battalion of the Iraqi army's 4th Brigade mutinied.

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In the British military dictionary this was called "repositioning."

In the Arabic military dictionary this is called "defeat."

The story went on to say that local Arabs of Amarah called on Sadr's soldiers all day to congratulate them on their victory. And just in case you were wondering, Moqtada al-Sadr was one of the leaders who were instrumental in the formation of the present government in Baghdad.

Are you confused enough, or would you like some more information?

The only stark, non-confusing facts on the Post page were in the list of American dead that was placed just beside the story, based on a Pentagon notification. There were seven more American names, bringing the total of American deaths to 2,617. On the Op-Ed page, columnist David

Ignatius reported from Baghdad that in July more than 1,500 Iraqis had died in Baghdad alone. He added, however, that tough action by the Americans had led to a marked improvement. Far fewer Iraqis were dying.

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It is an assessment that suits Washington as much as Baghdad. You get a strong sense that the beginning that George Bush made, along with Tony Blair, five years in Afghanistan and three years ago in Iraq has come to an end, and they do not know which way to turn. Bush and Blair look deflated. Their faces are tense, not intense.

The question was always dominant, but is now consuming America: why are American troops in Iraq? What precisely is their mission statement? Surely America has not made this huge investment in men, money and national credibility in order to become the policeman of a chaotic Baghdad?

Bush's answers change as regularly as the seasons. He now

thrusts his jaw in the vague direction of television cameras and asserts that American troops will never leave Iraq under his watch, that he will never cut and run. Why? Because the job is not finished. What is the job? If he does not kill terrorists in Iraq, he says, they will come to America to kill Americans.

Unfortunately, where Bush sees terror, most Americans see quicksand.

This narrative cannot be propelled even by the discovery of plots by British intelligence. The 9/11 Commission has now debunked one of the key arguments that took Bush to Iraq, by clearly stating that there was no link between 9/11 and Saddam Hussein. Bush has responded with an unbelievable assertion, that he never said so. Certainly Dick Cheney did, when he alleged that Mohammad Atta had met an Iraqi intelligence agent. You can perhaps get away skating on such thin ice when the voter gives you the benefit of the doubt. It was benefit of doubt that re-elected Bush. But now the doubts have multiplied, and the benefit is streaming in the opposite direction.

Bush still has loyalists who sincerely believe that he did not lie before his Iraq misadventure;

but they now concede that he was misled. The distinction is not going to be very clear to the thousands upon thousands of young men, both Iraqi and American, who have died because Bush was either deceived, or he deceived the world. The difference is going to be lost on those Iraqis who were tortured and raped and killed during this war without a mission, as America's finest journalists are revealing in news reports and books of chilling horror, like the just-published bestseller, *Fiasco*.

Inevitably, the price of war has reached the American middle class: through daily images on television, through a deficit that has crossed five trillion dollars, through gas prices that have jumped and house prices that have dropped. The middle class has kept Bush and the Republicans in power, and there are increasing signs that it is no longer buying the Bush narrative. For five years Bush and Blair have rather enjoyed their leap into history. Suddenly, in the last few weeks, the politics of the rebound has reached their doorstep. Blair might have the easier journey as he exits that doorstep, for the parliamentary system has sufficient flexibility for change. By next summer, unless he is blessed by extraordinary luck, Blair will be an ex-Prime Minister. Bush will not be ex-President till January 2009, but by next summer he just might be wishing that America had a parliamentary system and he could retire to his ranch. If the Democrats win even one of the two Houses of Congress this November, they will start impeachment proceedings against Bush for misleading America into the septic morass of a war without horizons.

When the objective keeps changing, so does the definition of

victory. American soldiers have been more confused than clear in the various campaigns of Iraq, since no one knows who is an enemy and who is a friend.

America is beginning to recognize the price, but the greater cost will of course be borne by Iraq and the region. The war that has been restarted is one without either boundaries or mercy, since the fire that is heating this cauldron is wild. All we need is a few more noble intentions, like the current favourite of some American policymakers: to divide Iraq into three independent nations, for Sunnis, Shias and Kurds. The day a Kurdistan begins to look possible, Syria, Iran and Turkey will send their armies to smash the thought. They will not be squeamish about the blood they will shed. The Kurds are living so far in a zone of calm, but it is the calm of a dead sea.

What options does Bush have? The best option is the most obvious. All the nations of the region, who are staring at a growing disaster, need to sit at a table to discuss what can be saved from this wreck. America needs to be at this table as well, along with France and Russia, and Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.

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M.J.Akbar is Chief Editor of the *Asian Age*.

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EVERY religion proclaims God as a supreme authority who decides our fate and destiny. Hence there always has been a certain amount of fear and respect for the supreme power whose wrath might lead us to the eternal fire of hell. And, who is not scared of that? As a result, despite all our misdeeds throughout life, all of us cherish the deep desire in the heart to be forgiven by the supreme authority and escape from the fate of being dumped in eternal hellfire. And when misdeeds and sins accumulate, many of us tend to look for other mortals like us who might seem to be closer to God as they usually claim, so that the self-proclaimed loving children of

divinity might act on sinners' behalf to convince God that the crime committed by such and such persons are not serious enough for them to be sent to hell. Despite the fact that not a single religious teaching overtly recognizes the existence of such go-betweens in God's relationship with mortals, in each and every religion their presence is virtually unaccountable. More sinners a society has, more frequent they are. The covert reason no doubt is that, for some religion is a good business too.

I am sure many of our readers still remember the self-proclaimed saint of our society, who, during the military regime, tactfully utilized the weaker points of our sinful and corrupt military-civilian bureaucracy to build his own glittering world of money and power. Through carefully manipulating the teachings of God and conveying the message to his disciples, many of whom were highly corrupt individuals holding prominent positions in the society, he pretended to make them to the path of salvation.

Details painted the larger picture. Local resentment had boiled into anger when British soldiers entered a mosque to make

she is taken to a Shinto shrine to get God's blessings immediately after birth. The next religious ritual is during marriage. And finally, religious ritual makes a third comeback in one's life after death as religious ceremony to mark the death. It is organized following Buddhist teachings where the deceased also gets a new posthumous name.

So, religious practices in Japan seem to be few and quite simple. As a result, many in the country claim either being atheists or simply agnostics. But once again, the fear of burning in eternal hellish flame is something that compels many to look for a way to get rid of that fear as well.

Japan, for quite long, has been known as being a unique country where religion plays no significant role. Majority of the people of Japan tend to claim themselves agnostics as far as religious faith goes. But there are obviously those who follow religious rituals methodically, but they tend to belong to the minority. For the majority, Japanese religious rituals touch their lives only three times throughout the period of their existence in this world.

The first time religion reaches a person's life in Japan is when he or

Shinrikyo, the doomsday cult that conducted deadly sarin gas attacks on Tokyo subway in March 1995, killing a number of passengers and injuring many others. Aum's eventual twist and turn and reversal of fate were supposed to send an alarming signal to those who still cherish the desire for salvation through the services of self proclaimed "God's loved ones." But no, it did not happen and new forms of religion in Japan still continue to be good business for many who are smart enough to see in religious practices a very lucrative source of earning easy money through the exploitation people's blind faith.

A new sect that has been in the media limelight in recent days in Japan is known as Setsuri. The meaning of the Japanese word Setsuri is providence and it is now known that the founder of the sect, the 61-year-old Korean, Jung Myung Seok, is in the Interpol wanted list for his alleged sexual assaults on female followers in South Korea. Japanese media have reported that even before he was put on the wanted list, Jung visited Japan frequently and was suspected of sexual

violence against many Japanese female students who were attracted to the cult through its tactful recruitment campaign.

Jung founded the Setsuri cult around 1980 after breaking away from the Unification Church led by Sun Myung Moon. The Guru coerced more than 300 Japanese members to wed in mass ceremonies modeled on Unification Church. Former cult members now say the founder would interview prospective brides and sometimes sexually assault them. Between the year 2000 and last spring, Setsuri organized five mass weddings. A group of lawyers trying to help Japanese members leave the sect has filed a criminal complaint against three of cult's main figures and they say they would also seek to hold the founder criminally liable for his alleged rapes.

It is quite surprising that most of those who were attracted to the cult are serious-minded young people who feel alienated from their families and educational institutions and wish to change their lives. As a result, it seems that the business minded religious Gurus are well aware of the underlying problems of a given

society and they tactfully maneuver in such troubled waters to recruit their followers. Setsuri, for example, approached students under the guise