

Pakistan's 9/11?

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BEENA SARWAR

THE truck laden with 1000 kg of explosives that suicide attackers rammed into the high-security Marriott Hotel in Pakistan's capital Islamabad on September 20 demolished a major power symbol, prompting many to call it Pakistan's 9/11. Although the number of casualties, around 60, was far below the over 150 killed in the attack on late former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's welcome procession of October 18 last year, this attack had greater symbolic significance.

Many foreigners patronise the five-storey, 290-room hotel that was also reportedly being used for a covert operation by US marines, who were seen unloading a US embassy truckload of steel boxes the night of September 17 -- the day

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gillani met US Admiral Mike Mullen in Islamabad and convinced him to cease America's military incursions into Pakistan.

The Marriott's physical proximity to the country's power centres places it in a high-security area near the Parliament, Supreme Court, Presidency and Diplomatic Enclave that houses many foreign missions, including the American, British, and Indian, close to several television and radio stations. Although most casualties were Pakistani -- security guards and drivers -- the dozen foreigners killed included American, German and Vietnamese citizens, besides the Czech ambassador.

The attack was symbolically timed. It overshadowed the newly elected president's maiden address to the joint parliamentary session of

the National Assembly (elected representatives of the federal parliament) and the Senate (upper house) hours earlier. Beefed up security ahead of the address is believed to have deflected the attack from the National Assembly, which may have been its original target.

Then, the attackers struck at a traditionally peaceful time of daily thanksgiving, soon after iftar when Muslims end their dawn-to-dusk fast during the holy month of Ramadan.

The message was clear: they can strike Pakistan's capital, and they care nothing for democracy or for religion.

No one has claimed responsibility but the attack is assumed to be work of Pakistani Taliban (closely allied with al-Qaeda) who have strongholds in the country's north-west bordering Afghanistan. The



The aftermath.

American attack on this area on September 3, barely two days after Pakistan's president took oath, and subsequent such strikes generated great resentment. However, Pakistan's threat of retaliation against these incursions has little meaning given America's military might, and Pakistan's client state status and heavy dependence on the US. And yet there are plenty of emotionally charged people here who are eager to fight America.

within its heartland. Pakistan reluctantly and half-heartedly abandoned its Taliban allies in post-9/11 Afghanistan, as they were successors of the Mujahideen it supported in America's war against communist Russia. After September 11, 2001, the American attack on Afghanistan drove Taliban elements across the border into Pakistan's north-western tribal areas where they have ethnic, linguistic and historic ties. Their al-Qaeda friends, who have developed ties here through matrimony and a common enemy (America), joined them.

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The government must correct this perception -- al-Qaeda and the Taliban pose a threat not just to the US and Afghanistan but also to Pakistan as a nation, and to any democratic system. It must ensure

that all elements of the state apparatus follow this policy. A military-only option is clearly not the answer: there must be a political road-map. That is why it is imperative for a political government to be in place that represents the aspirations of the people.

The electorate made these aspirations clear during the general elections in February 2008: it wanted a change from past policies. This means rejecting military interference in politics and the politics of hate and religion, reining in the intelligence agencies (which have historic ties with the Mujahideen and their Taliban successors), and establishing peace with Pakistan's eastern and western neighbours India and Afghanistan.

Currently, despite the difficulties, a widespread support for the democratic process is visible in Pakistan. In areas where the Pakistan government has enlisted local support against the Taliban, they have managed to push back the movement. Unfortunately, the heavy-handed military approach is undermining this support and boosting the Taliban. Since early August, pushed by America, the

Pakistan army has been bombing Bajaur, the north-west tribal agency sandwiched between Afghanistan and the settled North West Frontier Province (NWFP).

Some 300,000 people are estimated to have fled the fighting, taking refuge in inadequate relief camps around the cities of Mardan and Peshawar. According to the lawyer and television talk show host Ayesha Tammy Haq who recently visited these camps, the displaced people say the same thing: "They wanted to be a part of Pakistan and to be treated like Pakistanis with enforceable rights," she wrote in a newspaper column.

"They want to see development, schools, hospitals, jobs, better and safer futures for their children. None of them claimed to support the Taliban. In fact they said they did not want the system of governance that the Taliban had on offer, they want to see the constitution of Pakistan apply to them not the (colonial) Frontier Crimes Regulation Act, they want to know that they have rights and a say in their futures."

The writer is a journalist and documentary filmmaker based in Karachi.

LEST WE FORGET

In memory of an executor

MAMUN RASHID

ON September 1, Bangladesh lost an executor and a creative genius. With his passing, there is one less member of the already limited Bangladeshi talent pool. Yes, I am talking about one of the most eminent and competent government officials and engineers -- Qamrul Islam Siddiqui -- who was a secretary in the Ministry of Works and Housing and a chief engineer of Local Government Engineering Department (LGED).

He also served as chairman of the Power Development Board (BPDB) and was president of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh. He was the first chairperson of Global Water Partnership, South Asian Region in 2003 and 2004. Lately, he was holding the post of chairman, Bangladesh Water Partnership. Siddiqui, who left us only at the age of 63, died of a massive cardiac arrest in New Jersey, USA.

Siddiqui was not only a public servant; he was also an intrepid freedom fighter. He was well



Qamrul Islam Siddiqui

regarded in Bangladesh for his legendary contribution to infrastructure building and was known as the architect of rural infrastructural development. More importantly, he was renowned for his creative thinking and execution capabilities. His image as a visionary executor made him stand out in his contemporary league.

While writing this obituary, my eyes drift away to a book -- From Third World to First -- The Singapore Story -- which I found lying on my table a few months back. I was reminded of my discussions with Mr. Siddiqui the other day at the Gulshan Lake Park, when

he said that Bangladesh was in dire need of positive thinkers and executors. We need people like Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, the ex-prime minister of Singapore to change the mathematics of our country's economy.

Mr. Siddiqui not only advised me to read the book but, to my utter surprise, also dropped it on my desk the following day. That was his unique way of enlightening others.

I first met him in the early '90s, when he was the chief engineer at LGED and said to be the busiest bureaucrat in the country. All along, I found Mr. Siddiqui to be an exceptionally energetic and workaholic person, an amiable person who did not let our age difference act as a barrier in our friendship.

I saw in him the passion for achieving things, the passion that unifies and inspires people to do things with "military precision." Mr. Siddiqui was a freedom fighter. In his professional life he carried the same spirit, passion and inspiration for the development of his motherland. Only a few fortunate people can live up to their commitments through their lives, and Mr. Siddiqui was one of those privi-

leged. He single-handedly developed LGED as an institution and executed his dreams, passion and commitment to build a better Bangladesh.

Mr. Siddiqui, the founding chief engineer of LGED, realised the importance of rural infrastructure development. He could convince all the government departments, development partners, and experts in multilateral institutions that for bringing positive and structural changes in Bangladesh, a country which is burdened with exponential population growth and poor infrastructure, there was no other alternative but infrastructure development. Hence, unlike many other government institutions, LGED really progressed, performed and worked for the country's development.

During the 1980s and 1990s, LGED developed roads, transportation networks, drainage, waste disposal facilities etc for almost all municipalities. It worked to develop the country's health sector, and built irrigation facilities and rubber dams for farmers. It also worked on alternative fuel by

building bio-gas plants and solar panels.

Mr. Siddiqui will be remembered for his strategic vision and contribution in all these developments, where he applied new and innovative engineering technologies. As a result, LGED was recognised as a development model in the public sector.

He was a social thinker and believed in change, new initiatives and social progress. For example, under his supervision, LGED involved rural women for road maintenance works, which created employment for millions of women labourers. He was a great admirer of information technology.

LGED was the first government office in Bangladesh to use computers and LAN systems. He was also a founding member of a village school which promoted computer education besides providing general education and vocational training.

Mr. Qamrul Islam Siddiqui was a visionary leader. He was well known for transformational leadership role and management techniques in the bureaucratic

setup. He used to share his vision with his team members, and motivated them to achieve goals despite the constraints. In the bureaucratic environment, shared visions and hand-holding, the virtues that made Mr. Siddiqui a distinguished member in the bureaucratic club, are not common.

His enlightened thinking created a difference in millions of lives. Through his architecture in rural development, he contributed directly to emancipation of millions of people. Not too many professionals in Bangladesh were as successful as he was.

For his outstanding contribution to nation building, he was awarded the Poet Jasimuddin Gold Medal, IEB Gold Medal, Sher-e-Bangla Gold Medal, Engineer's Gold Medal and JICA scholarship. The World Bank declared him "Person of the year" in 1999.

We have lost a creative executor. We have lost a person who could demonstrate that, amidst all the constraints, a person "with passion in the heart and fire in the belly" can win against the odds.

Mamun Rashid is a columnist for The Daily Star.

BANGLADESH IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Protecting mother and child

This piece is from the series of summaries of papers presented at the "Bangladesh in the 21st Century" conference held at Harvard University (June 13-14). The views expressed in the articles are expressly those of the authors.

RASHIDA BEGUM and RUNA LAILA

HEALTH experts are becoming more conscious about human behaviour in quality health care provision. In order to meet the community demand, health systems need to be more adaptive in considering their strategies. Experts have to take into account the findings from behavioural studies.

Our study discusses the factors to consider during health planning.

It is built on knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) surveys as they are the most frequently used studies in health-seeking behaviour research.

No clear-cut and definite health policy has emerged even after 37 years of liberation. The utilisation of the health care delivery system is pathetic, especially for females. The burden of disease is the same for females as for males. But their probability of seeking health care outside the household was found to be less than that of males.

Women of reproductive age (15-49) constitute about one fourth of the total population. The contraceptive prevalence rate is 58 (1997-2005). Although the maternal mortality ratio has declined from 554 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 320-400 in 2001, the status of maternal health remained an area of significant challenges in Bangladesh. Because of the relatively low status of woman in Bangladesh and lack of access to reproductive health services, maternal mortality remains unacceptably high.

This study assesses health seeking behaviour regarding reproductive health care of rural women so that researchers, government, politicians, non-government organisations (NGOs) and international agencies can take the appropriate direction to meet the targets of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of 75% reduction of maternal mortality between 1990 and 2015.

The present structure and functioning of the health services in Bangladesh is oriented towards delivery of primary health care to the vast rural population. At the union level, each health sub-centre is posted with one medical officer, one medical assistant and one pharmacist at the upazilla health and family welfare complex. Besides these, ESP (essential service

packages) is delivered at upazilla level and lower through the establishment of community clinics with a family welfare visitor (FWV) and one health assistant each.

These clinics are "one stop" first-level services in the villages and are free of cost. But the utilisation of government facilities by the poor is very low. A recent study by the Department of International Development (DID) has shown that mostly the rich are utilising public sector services.

A study of the Matlab demographic surveillance system shows that a total of 1037 women of reproductive age died during a 10 year period (1976-85), and 37% of them were maternal deaths. Haemorrhage, eclampsia, prolonged/obstructed labour, puerperal sepsis and abortion-related deaths are found to be the main causes of death.

Over three-quarters of all maternal deaths were from direct obstetric complications needing timely and adequate medical intervention. Preventing unplanned pregnancies alone could avert around one-quarter of maternal deaths, including those that result from unsafe abortion.

In the development war, we are poised at the midpoint between declaration of MDG and the 2015 target date. There are obviously some gains, and success is still possible in most parts of the world. But they also show how much remains to be done.

Study findings

240 women of reproductive age, with at least one under-five child, were randomly selected and interviewed from two different villages

in Gabtoli Upazilla -- Chaksadu and Shakatia.

Most of the respondents were between 15-30 years in age, and a majority of them were housewives. A few had higher secondary education or above, but the illiterate group was nearly three times as big as the higher secondary group. Most of them were poor. Only about 10.54% of women had earning (total family income) above Tk.500. Those earning less than Tk.2000 per month income were about four times as many as the previous income group.

Their housing also corresponds to their income level. For example, 23% of them had pucca (brick built) house. Tinned roof houses were the maximum, which were three times more than brick built houses. Among these people, only 4.13% of women went for routine medical checkup if they felt sick. But a majority of them sought medical care when some complications arose or persisted, which accounted for 15 times more than routine medical checkup.

The number of people who went for medical care if there was severe complication was 12 times greater than the routine care group. A majority of the women sought allopathic treatment, which was 19 times more than Ayurvedic/Unani treatment and was followed by Homeopathic treatment, which was just above 4 times as much as Ayurvedic/Unani treatment.

It is surprising that 15% women were not taking ante-natal checkup, though there were community clinics within 3 kilometers of their villages. Most astonishing was the fact that 84% of births took place at home, which was 5 times

greater than institutional delivery. In the case of home delivery, only 17.5% births were assisted by trained birth attendants.

On the other side, untrained dais or relatives conducted 82.5% of the births, which was around five times more than the previous case. The number of women who were against going to non-qualified persons to seek treatment was 44.46%, followed by the "not costly" mentality.


The positive and promising findings of the survey were that under-five children were 100% immunised and 100% families were practicing family planning. Among them, 90% females participated in family planning in the form of injection (56%), oral pill (30%), intra-uterine contraceptive device (IUCD) (10%), others (4%), where men had 10% family planning participation.

Out of 460 upazillas, the study was conducted in two villages of a single upazilla. So, a definite conclusion is not in order. But the study gives us a glimpse of health seeking behaviour of the rural women of the reproductive age.

It is clear that the effectiveness of the government maternal and child health services is not satisfactory. Moreover, NGO health centers provide their services to that area. To sum up, due to lower socio-economic and literacy level, stigma, and unawareness, women do not seek appropriate quality reproductive health care.

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ONLY IN ASIA
by Nury Vittachi

Play your part in the financial crisis: Have a gloat

COLUMNS about the current financial crisis fill the newspapers. Yet, a reader points out that the most important issue of all has not yet been considered: Should we gloat?

For decades, unbelievably rich bankers have been filling supermarket trolleys with Porches, yachts and mansions, while the rest of us struggle to pay for the basic staples of life (food, shelter and a broadband internet connection).

Now overpaid fat cats are being thrown out on the street in vast numbers.

"It seems to me that the correct response from the normal person on the street would be to gloat hysterically in a maniacal fashion," reader Sunita Chau told me.

But, she is unsure whether she should go down to the financial district and dance around on the pavements, saying, "Serves you right, fat b****s," or whether a more measured response would be appropriate, such as wearing a t-shirt with a message on it saying: "Don't blame me: I kept my money under my mattress" or "At last my broker is broke: I am" or "Jump, banker, jump."

This is an interesting question, Sunita, which I passed on to an investment banker, who agreed to comment as long as I did not print his name.

"People shouldn't gloat," he said. "First, half the people thrown out of work are support staff who earn very little, and a proportion of the others are juniors, who get a medium salary, but work round the clock, seven days a week for it."

I thought about this and realised why he did not wish to give his name. "So, the only people who deserve to be sneered at are those at the top of the ladder such as you?"

"Er, yes, I suppose so," he replied.

I made a rude noise and put the phone down. But my sympathies were aroused by the fact that one of my neighbours worked in Asia for Bear Stearns, and when that

died, she shifted to Lehman Bros -- and watched that firm crumble from the inside. I couldn't possibly gloat at her. She is not just a nice person, but a veritable Mother Teresa when it comes to doing good works in her spare time.

To adjudicate on the matter I went to the wisest person I know: my mentor/ bartender. He gave the matter some thought while he fixed me a stiff drink of double orange juice with a little something in it (orange juice).

"I would recommend selective gloating," he said. "Most employees of banks get salaries which are not that much above the norm. They deserve sympathy. But the people who created this horrible crisis are the greedy, over-paid decision-makers at the top of the ladder -- the directors and chairmen."

"So it's okay to gloat at their misery?"

"It's our DUTY to gloat at their misery," he said. "In fact, there should really be organised

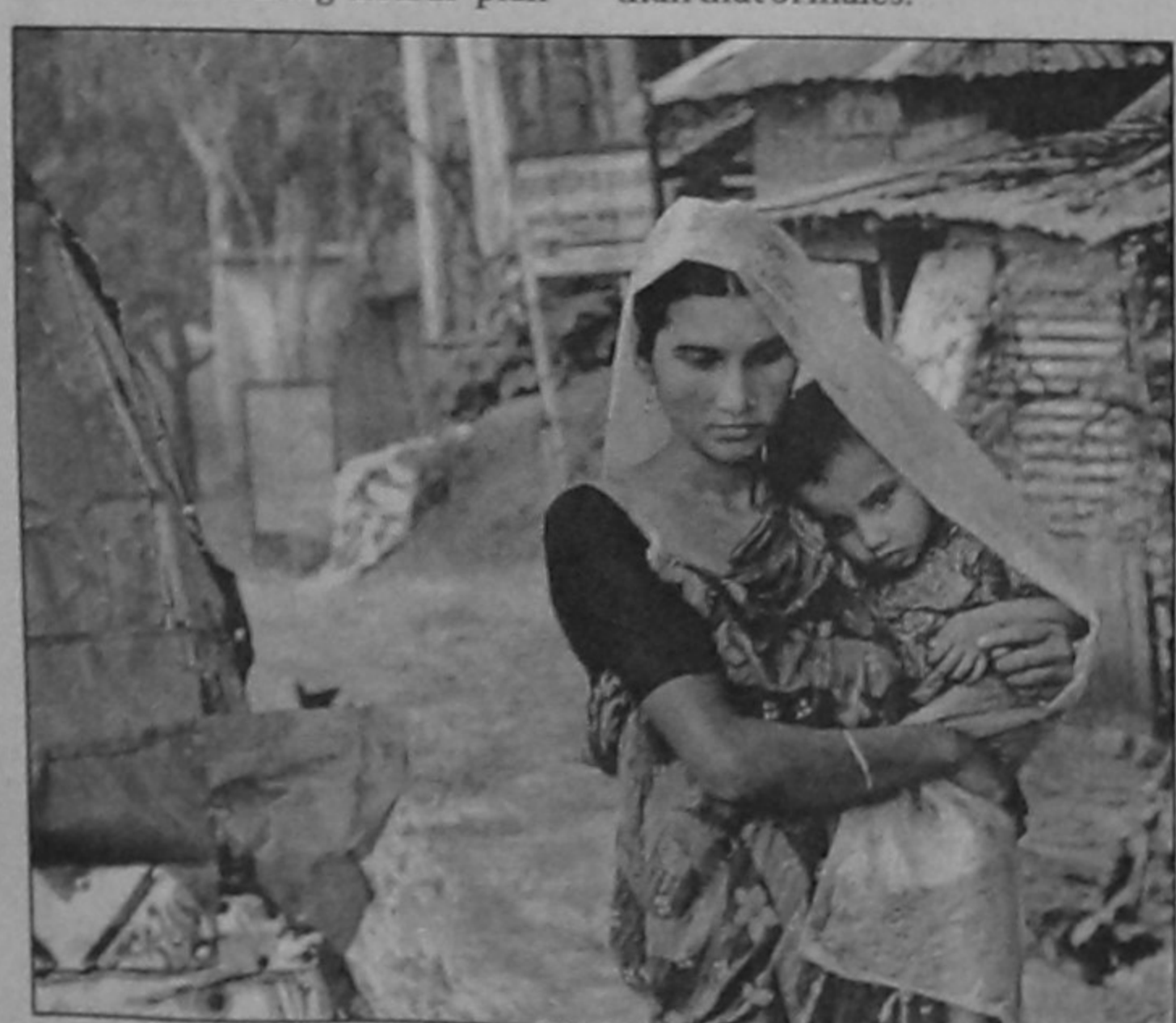


gloating sessions, where masses of ordinary people can assemble and gloat for 10 to 15 minutes as a sort of public service."

That's a neat idea. Here's one way of doing it. Take a deep breath. Call up images of greedy top bankers on to your computer screen. Make a rude finger gesture at the screen while making a scornful "nyeh-nyeh" noise. Oh, that feels GOOD.

(And when no one is looking, I shall have a little dance.)

Feel free to gloat in print on our columnist's website: www.vittachi.com



Are they really protected?

QUDDUS ALAM / DRK NEWS