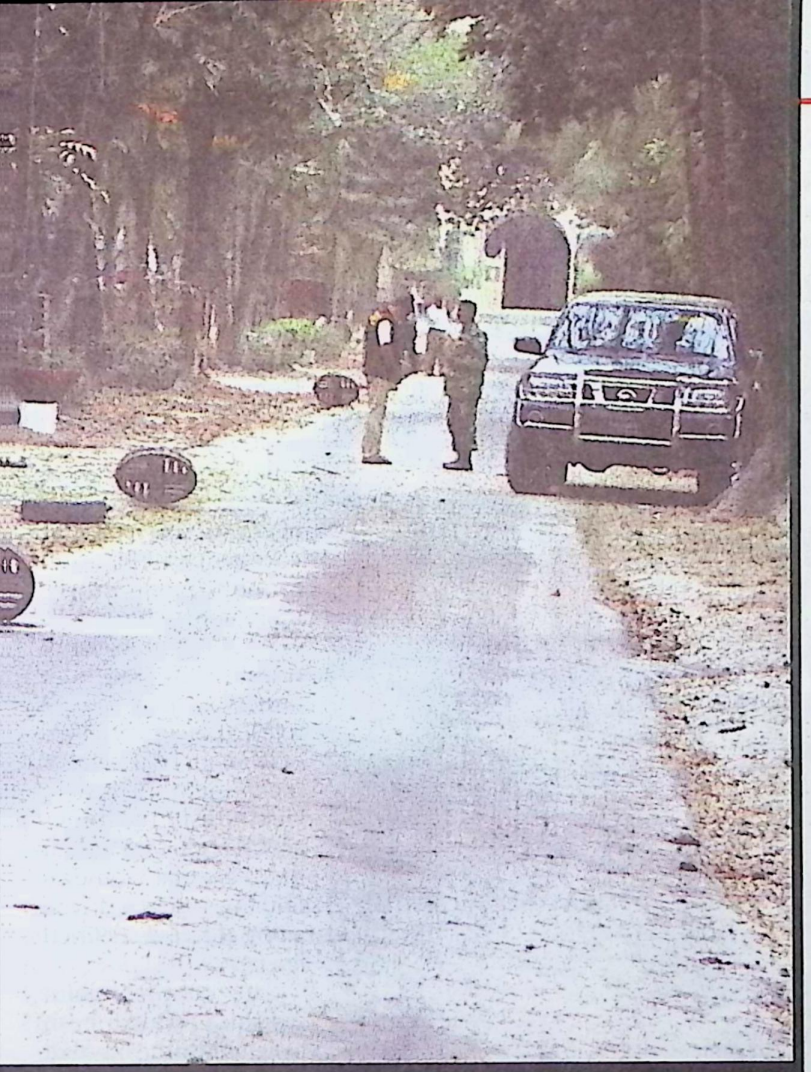


alley of Death

themselves. Tents display uniforms, boots, mirrors, clothes, sandals, and some newly bought items all left behind in a hurry as they fled the place after wreaking havoc on the nation. A putrid smell from graves, from where bodies have been removed, demonstrates the grotesque acts that were committed. The graves are shallow and small and not the kind of mass graves you would have imagined. In a hurry, the killers barely managed to dig the ground and dumped bodies and squeezed them in a tiny space before they could run.

Next, I go to the BDR mortuary. In one of the adjoining rooms, deep scars of blood spread all around. They had gathered a number of officers before the shooting spree which explains why the blood spilled so profusely. Also visible are traces of blood in floors where bodies subsequently have been dragged into. Flies roam around telling you of the recentness of events. In some corner rooms, there are BDR uniforms piled and thrown away by the deserters.

Officers' quarters give you the impression of a living graveyard as there is no soul around. Clothes put up for drying after laundry are still hanging from the ropes. In the car parking, some are burnt almost to ashes as a pack of dogs lick the car's body. It is too disgusting to think what might have happened to lure dogs into an otherwise lifeless object. Dogs stare at me and look confused. I slowly approach the cars as dogs move away to other side of fence from where they came to this no man's land. The car's interior has been so badly burnt that anything living thing inside must have evaporated. So unbelievably ghastly!

Apartment blocks bear the same sign of premeditation as selected apartments out of the whole block have been put into fire. So does houses of senior officers put into fire and looted mercilessly. DG's house has been sealed off but I have seen the drawing room where we used to have chats, the porch, the verandah, and the dining room. Cracked glasses, bloodied floors, twisted furniture, booted picture frames, emptied lockers, scattered sandals, broken trophies all bearing hallmarks of bites of unchained mad dogs let loose by some evil forces which only God knows from where they came. DG's Office has the same fate with an ironical poster still hanging that says, "Attitude is Everything". A belief we both used to share and have written in our offices.

Gardens of roses for which Pilkhana is famous for is intact. So are orchids that lay line by line in different colours pink, white, yellow. Sometimes the DG used to take me on a walk in these gardens and would say, "Whenever I am too worried or upset, I take a stroll here and forget everything." I wonder, had he been alive would this walk have sufficed to bear the grief he would have been struck with. How many gardens and how many walks would he have needed to bear with loss of so many of his colleagues? He can now walk and gaze in the gardens of heaven as long as he wants as time has ceased to function in the land of eternity.

As I leave the Valley of Death behind and think of the honour, respect, and gratitude that the nation has expressed for the martyrs who have been the bravest and finest in life and most loved and missed in death. For us left behind, when in a rainy day our gardens come into full life as rain drops and flower petals embrace each other in the tune of nature, we shall know that those above the sky, are smiling at us knowing what we are missing in the heavens even as our own tears and those of nature come together in lamenting the irreplaceable. To the valiant soldiers who paid the ultimate price for the nation a grateful salute from us all. May God be with you always as you find peace and home in His Kingdom of Eternity.

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