

# Must we beseech FBI-Scotland Yard ad infinitum?

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MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE government has sought the assistance of external agencies in properly and expeditiously investigating the dastardly depredations of the Pilkhana tragedy. Not many people have reservations about such a request for help; but there is at least one prominent public figure who entertains doubts about the use of foreign help in such matters. He is former president Hossain Mohammad Ershad, who has said that foreign investigators who do not know our language cannot make much headway.

The language deficiency cited does not merit serious attention as the foreign investigators are expected primarily to render technical assistance in areas that our outfits are not experienced in. The issue that perhaps demands urgent attention of our political and executive functionaries now is the neglect in brushing-up our investigative skills over the preceding years.

The sad reality is that every time a heinous crime involving loss of lives occurs, we look for external assistance without realising how galling such a scenario is to the national honour. Delving into the legality of the role of

external agencies in our criminal investigation does not serve much purpose, but what must concern us are the factors that have brought us to such a pretty pass.

Our citizens need to know why our investigating outfits have to live with the double stigma of being partisan and inefficient. One may ask why our national level political leaders openly impute motives on the part of our investigators and cast doubt on their integrity. Who has failed whom? Have political leaders encouraged and abetted the malfeasance of the investigators?

Viewed from another angle, are we victims of misplaced priorities because of the follies of myopic policymakers and malevolent professionals? In misplaced exuberance, have we extolled the benefits of the so-called crossfire to the detriment of cultivating a scientific culture in law enforcement? These are queries that need to be pondered in serious earnest.

Now may be the time when we must know why investigative efficiency of the police has deteriorated so sharply over the years, and whether such efficiency can be regained in isolation without setting the expected organisational goal of the police. It may also be appropriate to know the pattern of resource allocation for increasing the professional compe-

tence of investigative outfits. We may have to know if there is a lack of proper emphasis in fixing priorities and deciding the core functions of the police in a pluralist society like ours.

We have to appreciate that the cumulative neglect towards increasing investigative efficiency over the last decade has brought us to a situation where we are uncomfortably witnessing external agencies dealing with matters about which we may at best seek expert opinion only. Purchasing lethal weapons may serve inadequately explained goals but investigation has to be scientific and level-headed to prove equal to the stress following an incident, and credible enough to withstand the subsequent rigorous scrutiny in a court of law.

Experienced observers are of the view that the investigating agencies shall continue to remain inactive and incapacitated until the political authorities decide to treat criminal violence as a purely criminal phenomenon and desist from interfering in the investigative process. Immediate actions to secure the place of occurrence for preservation of physical evidence will not follow if the investigators remain in a state of bewilderment following the enormity of one such incident.

Institution capacity building, insofar as it relates to modern scientific investigation, is not on anybody's priority list. There is, therefore, no wonder that after each incident there is a demand for impartial investigation by a foreign or international agency on account of

alleged lack of investigative acumen, in addition to other political and psychological factors. The question is: where do we go from this impasse?

If we are not willing to forsake one of the primary state functions we cannot lose any further time in modernising our investigative outfits. Must we not realise that calling foreign investigation agencies to conduct activities on our soil amounts to a disgraceful admission of our operational and administrative inefficiency? What we need to plug the gaps in this regard is some modest investment on capital machineries and training.

However, equipping the investigators will not serve the purpose if investigation does not become the unaffected and unfettered jurisdiction of the investigators. The inaction and the resultant incapacity characterising each incident of serious violence hangs heavy on the national scene, and is giving rise to mounting international concern. The need, therefore, is to empower the investigators through lawful directives and ensure the growth of a healthy political climate for peaceful resolution.

The question of the sincerity of the political authority is very significant. The required sincerity can only be proved through concrete actions like proper registration of the case, energising of the intelligence network for proper apprehension, collection of material, physical and circumstantial evidence, effective laboratory testing and, finally, expeditious investigation. All these can be made possible if



From England to Bangladesh. Why?

the political executives show adequate determination and agree to go by the book.

The field executives related to criminal investigation have the ability and competence to withstand the pressures of sustained investigation and present a legally tenable charge-sheet. The rest is a matter for the law courts to decide. After all, the booking of perpetrators is possible by working through the existing criminal intelligence network. If, in the past, we had been able to detect clueless murder cases there is no reason to think that the same cannot be done now.

In fact, public functionaries, including the investigators, must be helped and facilitated to so conduct themselves that the difference between government and the state interests are not diluted, thereby upholding the hallowed ethos of our public service. If this can be done at the earliest we may be able to halt the pernicious slide towards an environment of all-pervasive lack of trust and confidence in the ability and impartiality of our investigative apparatus.

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# Curse of Al Khansaa

Months have passed since the women publicly renounced Al Qaeda, but townspeople still ostracise them. The women are forbidden to veil their faces, so they can always be recognised on the street.

JESSICA RAMIREZ

THE women are outcasts in Duluyah, an Iraqi town an hour's drive north of Baghdad. Everyone knows they once belonged to Al Khansaa -- an all-female suicide-bomber wing of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) -- and their neighbours have had plenty of trouble in their lives already without getting mixed up with extremists. "All the people know who they are," says a local official, asking not to be quoted by name. "I told my wife not to go near them."

Months have passed since the women publicly renounced Al Qaeda, but townspeople still ostracise them. The women are forbidden to veil their faces, so they can always be recognised on the street. One day not long ago, four of them went outside at the same time, and the police switchboard was swamped with frantic calls. When the teenage daughter of one former Khansaa member was expelled

from school, the girl wept at having to pay for her mother's sins.

In Iraq's long, slow march back to some semblance of normalcy, the story of the women bombers of Duluyah is a cautionary tale. Certainly US and Iraqi officials are hoping the remnants of the insurgency will follow their example and quit the *jihad*.

But while former insurgents in many places have switched sides and returned to normal life, the wounds of Iraq's civil war are not easily healed. Few refugees have returned to their original homes.

Former fighters in Anbar province have been murdered by victims' relatives. And all too often, as the Khansaa women have discovered, fear trumps forgiveness.

The Duluyah network began to unravel when Sana Alwan blew herself up. Like many other Khansaa women, she relied on the men in her life for guidance. Most Khansaa members joined because their fathers, husbands or brothers sug-



Ostracised by their own.

gested it.

Some were married off to foreign *jihadists* who ordered them to sign up. Others enlisted voluntarily, seeking revenge for the deaths of loved ones. In Alwan's case, several of her male relatives were recruited by Al Qaeda and then killed or captured by coalition forces or pro-government Iraqis.

One day in late September Alwan

walked up to a security checkpoint manned by local Iraqis and asked the way to the hospital. One of the guards froze. Alwan's face was veiled, but he recognised the voice as belonging to his niece. Members of the family had warned him she was having "bad thoughts." "Get away from her!" he shouted.

The other guards scrambled for cover as he shot Alwan with his AK-47.

Crumpling to the ground, she screamed, "God is great!" and set off her suicide vest. The checkpoint's blast walls trembled, but no one else was badly hurt.

Many in town think Alwan was out to get the town's religious leader, Mullah Nadhum al-Jabouri, when she was stopped. She'd complained that the preacher had lured her brothers into the insurgency and then had them arrested after he joined up with the Americans.

Soon after the bombing, security forces captured a woman who confessed to leading the Duluyah cell. Nine other suspected members were picked up, and authorities uncovered a cache of suicide vests as well.

Al Khansaa was disintegrating, and not only because of the arrests. Many of the remaining members could no longer endure the way their neighbours ostracised and shamed them.

Four of the women went to Mullah Nadhum. "They came to me because I am very powerful. I am the master," says Nadhum. "They asked me to find a way to let them come back into society. The young ones could not marry anyone in the tribe, the old could not go out to the markets and the middle-aged could not find jobs."

Nadhum talked the women into

reconciling, and in late November, 18 turned themselves in; 23 others soon joined them. This cleared their slates. But the real beneficiaries have been Nadhum and local tribal leaders. "I think that some in the Jabouri tribe recognised that, as a tribe, this has bettered their standing," says Lt. Col. David Hodne, battalion commander, 3rd Squadron 4th Cavalry regiment, which covers Duluyah. "Now they can claim, 'we've turned in an AQI [network]'. The women themselves aren't so lucky, Hodne admits: "The minute they associated themselves with Al Khansaa, they were in a lose-lose situation ... At least they're alive."

True enough, but one neighbour, who lives down the street from some of the women, spends his time filing police complaints in hopes of forcing them to move. Other women have had trouble claiming social-welfare payments. A go-between recently told Iraqi officials the women were "afraid that out of desperation, need and financial trouble, they will return back to the same path." This isn't the death Al Qaeda promised the women of Al Khansaa, but it's not much of a life, either.

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# Indian order, Pak disorder

There is a striking, albeit accidental, similarity between Islamabad and New Delhi. Both have governments on their way out without any certainty about what is on the way in. The difference in the transition is the story of the subcontinent.

MJ AKBAR

THE most dangerous kind of lie is the one that has a tiny bit of truth mixed inside. As maxims go, that is not very well known. Liars do not advertise their wares, and the truthful are easily seduced. The broad space between honesty and deception is occupied by the gullible. To prey on the gullible is the politician's art.

Politicians in power have an advantage. They can segue the clout of office with the credibility of the medium to

make a sale. The transaction is propelled by a primary rule of advertising: hearing is believing. Shoddy goods are packaged in the glamour of power. There is a catch, though. Those in power lose their capacity to notice when they have become stale, let alone putrid. Asif Zardari has long crossed his sell-by date.

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nent.

The process in India is natural, orderly and bubbling with the excitement of many ambitions. Sharad Pawar is quite correct when he says that every political party can have its own candidate for prime minister. There is no divine right in democracy. Pawar is too astute a professional to have made his bid unless he was confident that the present coalition would need radical restructuring, starting from the top. The Congress has said that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will continue; Pawar does not think so. Many hearts are beating more quietly, including within the Congress.

The contenders have been encouraged by the sight of NDA dropping a chunk from the side like an iceberg caught in Orissa heat. Every satrap is keeping all options open. Naveen Patnaik may have left the BJP but he has not joined the

Congress or the Third Front. Sensible politicians know only one thing, that no one knows what might emerge when the verdict is read out by the greatest jury in the world, the Indian electorate. The array in India is in sharp contrast to the disarray in Pakistan.

Zardari has always used the dangerous lie to great effect. He used it to reach the president's office and then upgraded a non-executive post into an authoritarian outpost. The same tactic was used with Delhi over Mumbai terrorism; a little truth was fed into a massive cover-up to protect the Lashkar-e-Taiba. He bluffed Nawaz Sharif by promising an independent judiciary and then turned judges into a row of poodles on morphine. They obediently dismissed an elected government in Punjab, triggering off the long march of lawyers and opposition parties on Islamabad and the crisis that woke up

the only uncle still sending Pakistan Christmas gifts. A phone call from Richard Holbrooke in Washington diluted the crisis by reversing Zardari's orders and castrating his role in government. It also indicated the degree to which Pakistan has compromised its independence. America has become the principal arbiter of its internal affairs.

Leaders depart when their moment is over in any nation, but in a democracy they depart with dignity. Delhi has, in my estimate, the largest collection of ex-prime ministers in the world -- and given the likely evolution of politics in the next few years, more are on the way.

It would be dangerous if the victors and losers of the long march forget that the real danger to Pakistan still comes from the short march. The Taliban is only a short march away from Islamabad. The Taliban did not take Afghanistan in one swoop, but

city by city. One is not suggesting that Pakistan is as vulnerable as Afghanistan was in the winter of 1994, or that wars between its politicians resemble the pitched battles between the various claimants to Kabul. But the fall of Swat is not a solution; it has become the fortress of a dangerous problem. Shopkeepers in Peshawar selling "modern" clothes for women have begun to get the message and are fleeing to other cities. But is there sufficient space for retreat? Peshawar is less than 90 minutes from Islamabad.

A compromise that keeps Zardari in office but out of power is the application of a band-aid when the disease is cancer. Power abhors a vacuum. If it has left Zardari's grasp, then it can only gravitate back to where it has always been more comfortable: in army headquarters.

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# The wildly inaccurate instructions trick



AN incendiary apple puff mystery; the literary festival becomes a love-fest; and grumbles over a world poetry prize

Good morning. Today we are going to talk about Western food.

A host of exciting western delicacies are being imported to Asia, exciting our palates and destroying our kitchens.

Perhaps the most remarkable of these is the apple puff. This is some sort of innocent-looking pastry item that recently appeared in the frozen section of my supermarket.

Actually, the air-conditioning is so high, the entire supermarket is now the frozen section. I'm convinced this is a trick to make us buy more. Unless I spend each visit sprinting along the aisles with a massively over-loaded shopping trolley, I risk death by hypothermia.

I arrived breathless at the cashier's counter to discover that I had snatched up a pack of 12 mini apple puffs, imported from Australia. The instructions said: "Using high energy setting on

microwave, heat frozen pastries for five minutes."

I slipped a couple into the machine, and while waiting for them to warm, I recalled the previous western delicacy I had tried: a Scottish dish called porridge.

The instructions for that dish told me to place the rolled oats in hot water and heat for three to five minutes on the stove. I did that. Five minutes later, I ended up with a pile of rolled oats at the bottom of a pan of hot water.

I phoned a European friend. "What is porridge supposed to look like?" I said.

"Like a human brain on a dish," she said.

"That sounds yummy," I lied. But it

was not what I had in front of me. She lived nearby, so came over to investigate. She told me my oats were still raw. She said the instructions on the packet were wildly inaccurate. She halved the water and quadrupled the cooking time and soon produced something that looked remarkably like a bowl of sticky mucus.

But it didn't taste as bad as it looked. It tasted much, much worse. "Are you sure one is supposed to eat this?" I asked, my heart sinking. "It's not a type of glue?"

This reverie was interrupted by the realisation that the newly purchased apple puffs were also turning into an

interesting experiment.

After one minute they started throbbing. At two minutes they collapsed. At three minutes they turned brown. At four minutes they turned black. At four and half minutes they burst into flame. At five minutes the fire alarm went off, the kitchen filled with smoke, and everyone ran away screaming.

I phoned my western friend. "What do apple puffs look like when they're cooked?" I said.

"The same as when they are raw, only golden and crispy."

"Oh. Not like lumps of coal?" I asked. "And what about the flames?"

"What flames?" she replied. I realised

that I had once more been hit by the "wildly inaccurate instructions" trick.

Now I realise that if I lived in America, I could sue the vendor of both these items, the Parkshop supermarket chain, for almost burning down my kitchen. If this was America, I could sue the store for humiliation. Indeed, if this was America, I could sue Scotland and Australia for inventing inedible foodstuffs.

But this is Asia, where the Silly Lawsuit, a sign of a sophisticated modern society, does not yet exist. Thank God.

I had rice for dinner.

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