

Aug 21 grenade attack

Expedite and do justice

WHILE the nation revisited on August 21 the dreadful memory of grenade attack at an AL rally nine years ago, the trial process to bring the masterminds and the perpetrators of that bloodbath to justice plods amid uncertainties. Of the 491 prosecution witnesses, the court has recorded the statements of only 73 witnesses so far.

Regrettably, the perpetrators of the premeditated dastardly grenade assault that killed 24 AL leaders and activists and injured 300 present at the rally have been escaping justice for so long, thanks to the non-challant attitude of the then-BNP government. This led to wiping out much of the evidence and forensic clues of the crime immediately after the attack including misguiding, delaying and derailing the investigation process. Instances like instituting a one-member judicial commission that reportedly discovered foreign hand in the plot and chargesheeting a small-time criminal, the infamous Joj Mia betrayed a lack of seriousness.

However, some concrete steps like framing charges against a number of the accused with recording of statement by prosecution witnesses started during the caretaker government in 2008. Then after assuming office in 2009, the incumbent AL government restarted investigations into the case ending in submission of supplementary chargesheets against a number of other suspects. And the trial process beset with various legal tangles has been dragging on since.

The government, with its term in office ending within the next few months, should therefore make every effort to expedite the trial process to complete it sooner than later and mete out justice to the culprits of the gruesome attack on political opponents.

Is the public truly being served?

Increase professionalism to better image

A study conducted by the Dhaka University's Criminology and Criminal Justice department has found an overwhelming number of respondents expressing satisfaction with the services provided by Dhaka Metropolitan Police. The fact that the study was mainly funded by the police department and the thin spread of sample size in the study may have contributed to a sharp contrast with the outcome of the survey carried out by Transparency International Bangladesh that put the law enforcement agency in the docks along with political parties as being heavily corrupt.

The police force works within various limitations including its numerical strength that is largely employed in traffic management, VIP duties and keeping an eye on political programmes so that the force is thinly spread countrywide as far as crime control activities go. There is no denying that this is one agency whose actions are heavily influenced by the party in power and therefore this paper has always advocated for police reform to change all that. There is dire need for better training, instilling service mentality, better pay, living conditions and equipment for the police to effectively maintain law and order in an increasingly sophisticated criminal world.

For people's perceptions to change about law enforcement agency's heavy handed dealings, the force needs to evolve into a professional outfit that is free of political interference. Only when public needs and interests are protected can the police expect a change in people's general perception of the force as one dedicated to service of the people.

'Forgiving Highway' to enhance highway safety

RIDWAN QUAILUM

VEHICLES running off the roads and then colliding with trees or poles, or falling into ditches and ponds causing injury and death, are common incidents on the country's highways. Such accidents may happen as a result of driver's lack of concentration, fatigue, drunk driving, speeding, inconsistent road design, poor driving conditions or faulty vehicle. Since driver error and mechanical fault in vehicles are unpredictable, it is felt that crashes are unavoidable as well. This is why, besides trying to keep vehicles on the roadway, highway engineers also have to try to reduce the number and severity of accidents. Several countries have successfully done so by applying the 'Forgiving Highway' concept.

Forgiving Highway is a concept that is designed to "forgive" mishaps on the road as a result of driver error or faulty vehicle. The objective of this concept is to reduce the severity of the crash in the event a vehicle runs off the roadway.

Providing highway shoulder ensures that even if a vehicle leaves the travel lane, it is still on the paved surface, which will make it easier for vehicles to return to the travel lane. A highway shoulder works as a buffer between the roadway and roadside objects by providing some extra paved space for a stable and clear recovery area for drivers who have left the travel lane.

The second thing is removing and relocating roadside hazards such as trees, poles, boards etc., further away from the edge of the travel way. This greatly reduces the severity of an accident as the vehicles are able to stop without colliding with any object.

In cases where obstacles cannot be removed, they should be 'protected' or be able to 'breakaway' to dissipate the energy of the crash, which helps to reduce the severity of injuries.

Other than fixed objects such as trees or poles, ditches and ponds can also be found along highways. In places where ditches and ponds are located close to the highway, the forgiving highway requires the use of barriers such as guardrails along the highway. To prevent run-off road vehicles from driving through a guardrail, the end of the guardrail is buried or fish (curved) tails are provided to reduce the severity of the collision. In addition, flattening and rounding slopes and ditch sections has also become a standard design as part of the concept.

The writer is a Transportation Engineer working in Thailand.

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen
SHAHEDEL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

ONE ventures to comment on a sub judice case not without a little bit of trepidation, more so when it relates to a very sensitive and important case like that of the grenade attack on the then leader of the opposition and the current PM, Sheikh Hasina, on August 21, 2004.

Our intention is not to influence the trial. The very nature of the case and the potential magnitude of the outcome, had the perpetrators achieved their aim, require that the case run its course and that the real criminals are punished through the due process of law. The truth must emerge and the mastermind exposed.

If one notices a trace of uncertainty in my wish for the case being able, or allowed, to run its course, it stems from the way the most dastardly episode in our history, after August 15, 1975, was handled at its seminal stages. The apparent attempts at the state level, to not only divert the focus of the case but also to derail it, is apparent from the way a scapegoat was produced in the form of 'Joj Mian.' The question is why the attempt to hide the facts unless it was to protect the actual perpetrators.

August 21 episode was not like any other incident of bomb attacks that have occurred in Bangladesh. There were many firsts for August 21, 2004, as we have mentioned before in these very columns in the past, and bear repetition, if only because of the magnitude of the event, with potential consequences that might have been as bad as those that followed the events of August 15, 1975.

The country was very badly served by the then party in government, the BNP, because of the way political considerations were allowed to outweigh the need to uphold justice and rule of law. And what was the interest of the government of the day in deflecting the case unless there was complicity of people close to, if not directly associated with, it. Our reasons for thinking so are backed by arguments we had proffered nine years ago, even before any enquiry into the incident could be started. And we restate some of those points.

Unlike all the bombings before, and, one might suggest, all those that followed August 21, 2004, except for the attack that killed Mr. Kibria in 2005, the motivation was entirely political and not religious. And never before in Bangladesh were such high value targets, the entire AL leadership, attacked with such precision and professionalism. That hand grenades, an area weapon, were used, suggests that the intention was to take out the entire Awami League leadership in one go.

The qualitative difference is also in the choice of the weapons used -- grenade. It is a highly lethal weapon with extreme damaging consequence within a short radius of effect, as borne out by the number of deaths and

injured. Also, the type of injury sustained by the victims suggest that the grenade used was of the more deadly variety containing pellets with enhanced lethality because of its high fragment density.

This incident is also different from the previous ones because of the manner in which the attack was carried out. It was conducted by a trained and committed group. To slip surreptitiously through the security cordons of whatever definition that might have been in place, remain undetected from well before the meeting started, hurl the grenades from a stand off distance just as soon as the



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leader of the opposition had finished speaking, and make good their escape after that, is a remarkable feat that speaks of a well-planned operation. Ingress and egress from such an area requires a degree of help and logistic support. The question is how could they escape unless helped to do so? Who helped them is the million dollar question.

Apart from the 'Joj Mian' charade, the judicial inquiry had pointed to 'external hands' in the attack. The Zainul Commission report has not been made public, but we do not know whether the BNP government had conducted further inquiry to confirm that opinion.

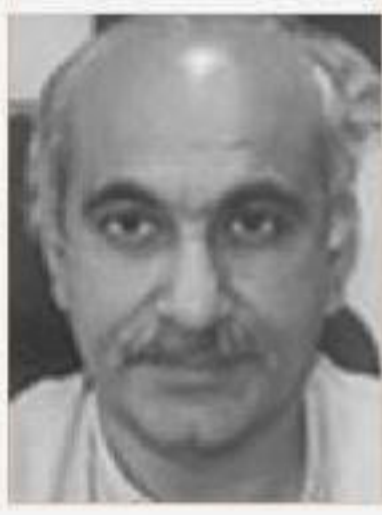
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We hope that the trial will be completed without undue delay; some of the questions, one would hope, will also have been answered by the time it is over.

The writer is Editor, Oped and Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

Reboot or rewind to 1963

BYLINE



M.J. AKBAR

IT is distressing to note that India, which gave mathematics the noble concept of zero, should have missed the chance to offer history a perfect numerical symmetry. If a dollar was worth one rupee in 1947, then 66 years later poetic justice suggests it should be worth 66 rupees instead of a tawdry variable between 61 or 62. A rupee a year is a lyrical measure of decline. A few rupees more, and the Indian economy could have become such a sing-along nursery rhyme.

Satire is the thin wedge that separates fear from panic. Indian businessmen are not yet panic-stricken, but they are edging towards the zone of fear. As hemorrhaging international confidence in India weakens fund inflows, they know we cannot easily defend a rupee under siege. The statistics are chilling. Debt in the current fiscal is running at \$172 billion. The Reserve Bank has foreign exchange for just seven months' imports, which would have been manageable if the bleed was not moving from drip to gush. There is deep worry that vacuous governance and an unstable political environment will lead us to the door of the IMF in Washington, a large begging bowl in hand. Instead of answers, the UPA government is offering alibis, some of them so lame they seem struck with polio at birth. India has become the worst story in the BRIC club.

A robust economy, which is what India had become, does not wither because it has been suddenly hit by lightning; it enters a coma, limb by limb. This UPA administration believed that it could buy time with illusion, or by passing the blame to external factors or home-grown socialists. Last year, it even tried to scapegoat former finance minister Pranab Mukherjee after he moved upstairs to the president's palace, and P. Chidambaram was given the finance portfolio.

A sudden flurry of stories appeared—foreign correspondents seemed particularly gullible—suggesting that Chidambaram would, with a wizard's touch, strengthen the rupee, slash the energy bill, reduce the deficit, pump up industrial production and tame inflation. Tell that to the onions in 2013.

Those at the rough end of inflation, the poor, are tired of excuses. They look at a nourishing monsoon and wonder why, as they head to the vegetable market,

prices go up when there is drought, and rise further when there is rain. This is their translation of a government's economic record. In 2005 a still buoyant Dr. Manmohan Singh promised the nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort that poverty and ignorance (the term he used was jehalat) would end in 10 years. His plaintive admission, in this year's Independence speech, that there was still a long way to go, is bitter testament to a failed decade.

The only culprit that the government can find is gold. Gold is the minor luxury that a confident economy purchases for its middle class. The cost of gold imports has become a problem only because the economy has imploded.

Analogy comes easily in conversation. Those with a reasonable memory have begun to worry about a return to 1991, when we sent our national gold reserves to London as collateral for foreign exchange. If we are not careful we might be staring at 1963, when finance minister Morarji Desai imposed gold control to save foreign exchange. Desai, and a much-weakened prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, could issue orders and change laws but they could not thwart the Indian's appetite for gold, even when he was in a much more abstemious mood half a century ago. All that happened in the 1960s was that the consumer turned to smugglers. From this emerged underworld icons like Haji Mastan, Kareem Lala and their heir, Dawood Ibrahim. India has paid a heavy price, including the whirlash of terrorism.

When a nation's confidence is undermined, adversaries abroad pounce to take advantage, and uncertainty within encourages social tensions. In the 1960s we were tested by both China and Pakistan; today Pakistan ambushes an Indian army patrol, kills five jawans and passes a resolution in its parliament condemning Indian aggression. We will not, thank heaven, return to the sixties. India is much stronger now, and there is only so much harm that an indecisive government can inflict upon a nation's ability. All governments in a democracy are temporary.

Equally, the optimism that we had begun to take for granted, perhaps out of complacency, has been derailed. The challenge of 2014 is not going to be winning an election, but restoring the economy to health and vigour. A nation is only as strong as its economy. There is no magic wand as we enter our 67th year. There was no wand in 1991 either. We recovered because we needed the shock to come to our senses. It is time for a radical reboot once again.

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The writer is Editor of The Sunday Guardian, published from Delhi, India on Sunday, published from London and Editorial Director, India Today and Headlines Today.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Shameful!

After watching the television reports and reading in the newspapers about the way an O level student was involved in the killing of her own parents, I am ashamed to be an English medium student. Though it is not the case with 99 out of a 100 English medium students, it is of great concern that drug abuse has been prevalent in our society, and now the cancer has been spreading among teenagers too. Still, killing parents for not allowing one to consume yaba just shows how much immoral our society has become.

Tauhidul Islam

The Aga Khan School, Dhaka

Reckless driving on holidays

During the Eid holidays, most of the streets in Dhaka remain fairly empty. Some pleasure seekers take this opportunity to go on a reckless adventure by driving a car or motorbike at dangerous speed. Unfortunately these people use the city streets instead of racing tracks putting themselves and others at risk. Terrible accidents have happened even during the last holidays.

This dangerous practice should not be allowed to continue. The print and electronic media can play a role here by making the mass people aware of the hazards of reckless driving, especially on the eve of the holidays. Friends should also encourage others to drive safe and abide by traffic laws. Save the racing for the tracks and let us enjoy the holidays.

Shahriar Kabir

Dept. of EEE

BUET

Show leniency to Ashrafal

The ACSU has partially revealed its investigation report on BPL match fixing. They are yet to name all the accomplices in the fixing allegation excluding Ashrafal. They have also mentioned that indicted cricketers may be banned for five years to life-term.

Mohammad Ashrafal emerged in Bangladesh cricket by hitting a ton against Sri Lanka as the junior most debutant in world cricket. From then, he contributed to the victory of our team many times. Who can forget his heroic century against the mighty Aussies that ensured our victory? Meanwhile, circumstantially, he became involved in fixing crime. But he has set a decent instance of confessing wrongdoing, and begging pardon in public. Besides, when a manager puts his player under compulsion to fix a match threatening his career, one can hardly disoblige.

Now, as a Bangladeshi and as an Ashrafal fan, I would request the ICC to consider his repentance before punishing him. If he is banned for five years, that would terminate his career. He of course deserves punishment, but please show leniency to him because of his remorse.

Tashrif Billah

Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Hopes bleak," published on August 18, 2013

Sheikh Monirul Islam, Opee

We love our country so much but those politicians, businessmen and bureaucrats don't. We need to be united to get rid of them finally. They are destroying this beautiful country. We need new policy, new leadership and new style of governance.

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Who do you think is to blame for this? The same old outdated and selfish politicians or the people who still continue to vote for them again and again despite being aware of their previous records? This country needs other political forces so that the main two parties, including the two leading ladies, finally realise that they can't get away with whatever they want to do by simply delivering sweet sounding speech at election time.

Doronto

There is still time for BNP and AL to settle the CTC issue. Once time is exhausted, either third force about which AL and BNP are much scared will come in or the country is likely to see problems like in Egypt, Syria or Libya. AL and BNP should keep in mind that when they fight for power, the entire nation suffers.

"I won't budge" (August 19, 2013)

Sheikh Monirul Islam, Opee

She is in politics for vengeance. Still we elected her...what a stupid nation!!

SM

People and country can go to hell but you won't budge.

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Of course she won't budge! Her ego is more important than the entire nation. After all, her party was responsible for liberating this nation and so they now own this nation and the people.

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

Democracy will be tumbled in Hasina's hand. Her intransigence will boost BNP to topple her government by subversive movement.

Nds

This determination to stick to the constitution -- the supreme law of the land -- deserves our unqualified appreciation. This indicates her dedication to establish the rule of law in society which constitutes the backbone of real democracy.