

JMB escapee killed in shootout

Raises many questions

VERY soon after JMB militant Rakib Hasan was arrested following his escapade along with other convicted militants, which itself was a serious security lapse, he was killed in a so-called shootout. The police regurgitated the same old story about the circumstances of the 'shootout' as they did in many other cases in the past.

The difference in this case is that Rakib as a high risk prisoner, especially after his being recaptured, and therefore was a vital source of information which is now lost. This raises many questions.

Much as one is surprised at the manner in which the Rakib and his co-convicts were snatched from the prison van by their cohorts in broad daylight, we are even more surprised at his being killed reflecting another instance of callousness on the law-enforcers' part.

It may be recalled that after Rakib's capture, the Deputy Inspector General of Police, in reply to journalists' questions if Rakib might be killed in a shootout, had assured that everything would be done for his security. So, naturally, questions arise about his death.

Given gravity of the issue and association of the dead JMB man with serious crimes, his death may hinder investigation into JMB's reappearance. The government should probe the matter and make a public statement on it.

Tannery relocation in sight

Get CETP up and running

THE drama of relocation of toxic-producing tanneries from Hazaribagh to Savar has been played out over a decade. After repeated delays due to primarily who will pay for relocation and the setting up of a central effluent treatment plant (CETP), the residents of Dhaka see the prospect of being free of the hazardous material being dumped into the river system by hundreds of tanneries located in the city. According to the roadmap some 25 companies are scheduled to construct factories this year and the whole relocation is scheduled to be completed within 2016. We welcome this long delayed move and hope the government will do the needful to get the stalled CETP installation back on track.

What is ironic here is that the go-slow momentum of the project has shot the project cost up by more than Tk1,000cr. We are perplexed as to why the contracting company has been allowed to miss the deadline on such a crucial part of the relocation programme. The fact that the country earned nearly a billion dollars in export proceeds from leather industry last fiscal that is about 25 per cent higher than the preceding fiscal year, makes it an important sector. With Bangladesh facing a deadline from the European Union to cut its toxic levels in the leather producing industry, we hope that authorities will impress upon the industry to expedite relocation. Besides, the health issues affecting some 15million Dhaka residents cannot be ignored any longer.

Hackers: Please tell us how you did it!

ABDUL MATIN

IT is reported that a state-owned bank lost \$250,000 (Tk 2 crore) to cyber-crooks, who allegedly hacked into the bank's security system (DS February 23, 2014). The crime took place in September last year while one of its branches was transferring the amount to the United Kingdom on behalf of its client in Bangladesh. The money was stolen by London-based hackers, who transferred it to Turkey. An official of the state-run bank was suspended for alleged involvement in the cyber-theft.

Last month, it was reported that 30 to 35 accounts of a private bank had been hacked. Between October and November last year, hackers transferred around Taka twenty lac to other accounts without the knowledge of the account holders. It is suspected that the hackers did so as an experiment to determine the risks involved in such embezzlement. According to the Bangladesh Bank, the internet banking system of the bank was not fully automatic.

Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM) studied 50 such fraud cases. According to their findings, 30% of the banks are vulnerable to cyber-frauds. Among the cases studied, 43% of the frauds took place with ATM and plastic cards, 25% with mobile banking, 15% with cheque processing and e-fund transfer, and 12% with internet banking. It is thus obvious that frauds are wide-spread in our country and the hackers are smarter than the security experts of our banks since they go scot-free in most of the cases.

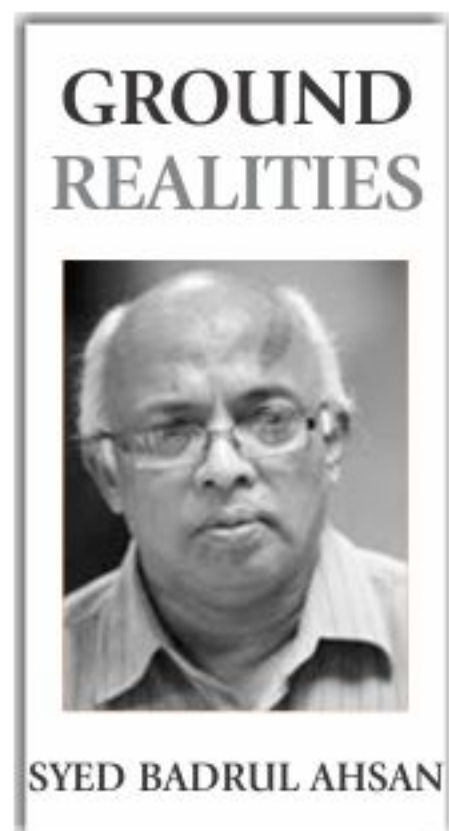
Bank frauds are not unique in Bangladesh and take place all over the world. It is interesting to note that even though the names of the banks with fraud cases are widely publicised in our country, foreign banks rarely disclose the incidents to the public. This is done in order to preserve the goodwill of the banks, even though the hackers, particularly in the western countries, are identified and caught in most cases.

A couple of decades ago, I read a story about a US bank employee who managed to flee from the country after electronically stealing several million dollars. Unable to find how the theft was committed, the bank authorities secretly contacted the employee and assured him that he would neither be required to refund any stolen money nor will he be liable to any legal action only if he disclosed how he transferred the money! The idea was to improve the bank's security system with the cooperation of the hacker!

I wonder if our banks are at the same stage like the US bank was decades ago and would like to grant immunity to the hackers in exchange for disclosing how they did it!

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

Murder most foul . . .



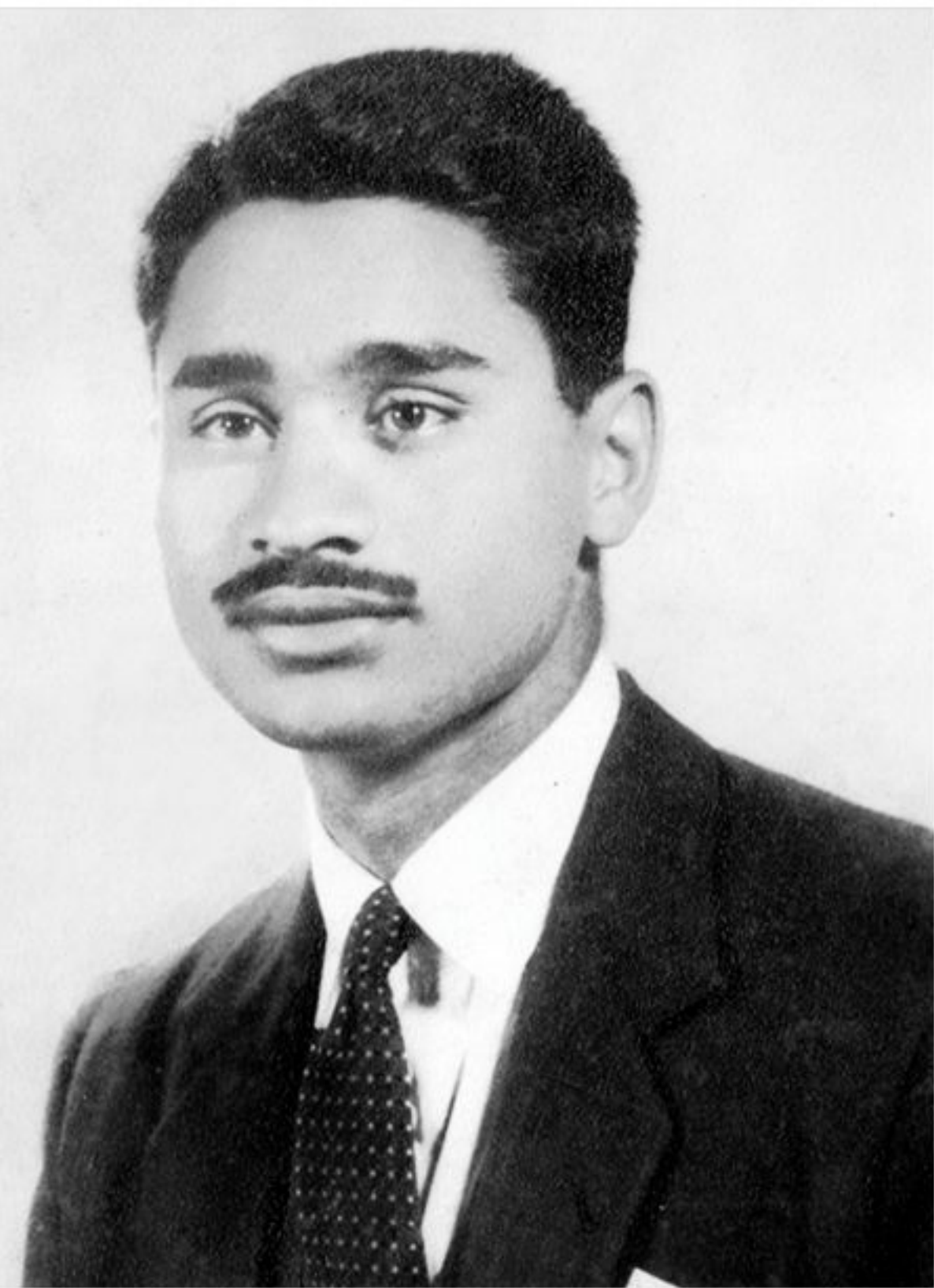
SYED BADRUL AHSAN

LAWRENCE Lifschultz's reflections on the murder of Major General Mohammad Abul Manzur in June 1981 are, for the nation's political leadership as also for the people of Bangladesh, a broad hint that all past conspiracies should be investigated in their totality and the truth behind them revealed. The good part of our otherwise sad post-1975 history is that a beginning has been made, through bringing the assassins of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to justice. The process of a fresh new judicial look at the jail killings of November 1975 is also underway. All of which is a breath of fresh air, for they point to the slow climb back up to rule of law in this country.

And yet there are gaps in the Bangabandhu murder case that must be filled. Much more should have been done to explore and expose the deep conspiracy which went into the planning of the coup d'etat of August 15, 1975. Khondakar Moshtaque, the commerce minister who took over as Bangladesh's president once it became a certainty that Bangabandhu was dead, was never charged in the case. He should have been, seeing that every finger has always pointed to him as the most notorious among the cabal of coup planners. Despite the fact that he is dead -- and he was fortunate enough to die three months before the Awami League returned to power in June 1996 -- there is the obvious necessity to prosecute him in posthumous manner for the August 1975 tragedy. The depressing story of August 1975 will have gaping holes in it unless Moshtaque's role, as also that of men like Taheruddin Thakur, is inquired into.

There is a paramount need for a full, detailed and unambiguous inquiry into the circumstances that led to the killing of Major General Khaled Musharraf, Colonel Huda and Major Haider on the morning of November 7, 1975. There is the strong likelihood that the men who ordered their murder as well as the renegade soldiers who carried out the instructions of those men are yet around, ageing and physically and mentally in a state of decline. That, however, is no reason for them to escape justice. And that being the point, it is perfectly natural for citizens to demand that these men, having stayed a step ahead of the law after the commission of their criminality, be hauled up before a court of law. Musharraf and his two comrades were tenacious soldiers and brilliant tacticians in the War of Liberation. Pretending that they did not exist is an insult to the country.

There are, one can safely assume, a very large number of killers on the loose in this country. Just as Pakistan army officers who ordered and themselves committed genocide



and rape in Bangladesh in 1971 are today an ageing or dying lot, there are former military officers, like the one (apart from Ershad) Lifschultz points his finger at over the Manzur murder, who have killed scores of other officers and soldiers and have never been punished. They instead rose to the top, taking the cream out of the socio-political cake for themselves and others like them. Those officers who subjected the thirteen army officers charged with General Zia's assassination to inhuman torture and subsequently had them hanged must surely be around, indeed could well be part of the social circuit today. If the collective national goal is a restoration of decency in the country, these criminally-minded officers should be placed before a court of law for their complicity in crime and tried in the larger national interest.

There is too, judging by the manner in which Justice Abdus Sattar acquiesced in the matter of transferring General Manzur from police to army custody in June 1981, a prime requirement to prosecute, posthumously, the man who took over as acting president of the country after the Zia murder. Justice Sattar knew Manzur would not live if the army took charge of him and yet he did not say no to General Ershad. Worse, he felt, as it now seems on reflection, little need to consider a presidential pardon for the thirteen falsely convicted officers. Conscience troubled him not at all.

That takes us back to the travesty of justice we have lived with since the execution of Colonel Abu Taher in July 1976. Every bit of evidence, every report on the so-called court martial of this courageous freedom fighter is a sad reflection on how General Ziaur Rahman perpetrated one of the most horrific crimes in the history of the country through a misuse of political authority. Again, as in the matter of President Sattar, it becomes important that President ASM Sayem be brought under a posthumous spotlight, for the simple reason that he was unwilling or afraid to say no to Zia at a time when he could have asserted his authority through refusing to countenance Taher's execution after that shoddy trial. An inquiry into the game resorted to by Zia ought to be initiated, for it is not right, in the larger perspective of history, that one who has committed manifest crime through denying his captive the rights that a prisoner is entitled to be allowed to go free.

The call of justice does not have space for holy cows. Now that questions, at once concrete and definitive, have been raised about the Manzur murder, the government can do two simple things. First, it can relieve General Hussein Muhammad Ershad of his responsibilities as the special envoy of the prime minister. Second, it can initiate a purposeful legal inquiry into the former military ruler's role or otherwise in the assassination of General Ziaur Rahman and the murder of General Abul Manzur, all acts committed in the space of four days.

We rest our case.

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Reviving Ukraine's economy



THE NEW GLOBAL ECONOMY

UKRAINE has suddenly arrived at a democratic breakthrough. After former President Viktor Yanukovich incited major bloodshed, many of his MPs defected to the opposition, creating a large majority. In order to consolidate its authority, whatever new government emerges will need to act fast and resolutely -- and receive considerable international support -- to overhaul the country's crisis-ridden economy.

Ukraine suffers from three large economic problems. First, its foreign payments are unsustainable. Its current-account deficit last year was an estimated 8.3% of GDP, and its foreign-currency reserves are quickly being depleted, covering just over two months of imports. Second, public finances are also unsustainable, with the budget deficit reaching almost 8% of GDP and government-bond yields skyrocketing. Third, the economy has been in recession for five quarters since mid-2012.

These problems reflect Yanukovich's economic policy, which had one aim: enriching him, his family, and a few of his cronies. During the last four years, Ukraine has experienced unprecedented embezzlement by its rulers, with estimates putting the Yanukovich family's wealth at \$12 billion. Here, too, the new government will need international assistance if it is to recover at least some of this loot.

With Yanukovich out of the way, official extortion of Ukrainian business should end, enabling the economy to recover. In fact, Ukraine's GDP actually grew by 3.3% in the last quarter of 2013, because his cronyism was stifled by the protests. Yet much can and must be done very quickly, because Ukraine is running out of money.

For starters, the new parliamentary majority needs to appoint a new government, so that a fresh economic-policy agenda can be launched. A new central bank governor also should be named, with the first order of business being to float the exchange rate. This would lead to a substantial devaluation of perhaps 10%, thereby ending the current run on the hryvnia, eliminating the current-account deficit, and enabling a reduction in Ukraine's extremely high interest rates, which would stimulate investment.

As soon as a government has been appointed, the International Monetary Fund should send a mission to Ukraine. Within two weeks, the IMF mission could conclude a new financial stabilization program with the new administration. The IMF works fast and could make a first large disbursement in late March.

The IMF could lend Ukraine \$10-12 billion for a one-year stabilization program, with the European Union using \$3-5 billion from its balance-of-payments facility to co-finance an IMF standby program. These two sources alone could cover much of the \$35 billion in external financing that Yuriy Kolobov, Ukraine's acting finance minister, has said the country could need over the next two years. Moreover,

IMF loans carry a lower interest rate and a longer maturity than the Russian loans on which the Yanukovich government relied (and which are unlikely to continue).

The conditions that the IMF places on its loans can help Ukraine undo Yanukovich's venal policies. First and foremost, Ukraine will have to reduce its budget deficit sharply, which, given large tax revenues, should be accomplished through expenditure cuts and freezes. Large industrial subsidies -- for example, to the coal industry -- amount to nothing but giveaways to Yanukovich's supporters and should be eliminated immediately. Likewise, gas prices should be liberalized to stop corrupt enrichment from regulatory arbitrage. Needy consumers, not wealthy producers, should receive assistance.

Similarly, the IMF will insist on the reintroduction of competitive tenders. Since 2010, orderly public procurement has ceased, with Yanukovich simply doling out state contracts to friends and acolytes at twice the market price. Naturally, sales of state enterprises to loyalists -- typically at rock-bottom prices -- must end as well.

Another source of corruption has been refunds of value-added tax for exporters, for which top tax officials charge a commission. Putting a stop to this would stimulate exports.

In addition, Ukraine should reintroduce the simplified tax code for small businesses that Yanukovich abolished. Two million small enterprises were wiped out by that change; many of them could be revived if tax procedures were no longer prohibitive.

Ukraine also needs to work with the EU. Within a week, the new government can fulfill the EU's conditions for signing the long-concluded Association Agreement, and doing so should be on the agenda at the EU-Ukraine summit in March. Parliament has already scheduled new elections, and former Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko has been released from prison. The only remaining EU condition -- legislation reforming the prosecutor's office -- can be adopted quickly.

The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement will greatly benefit Ukraine. It amounts to a comprehensive reform program for the Ukrainian state apparatus, including its law-enforcement bodies. Sixty state agencies in various EU countries have already concluded agreements with their Ukrainian counterparts concerning the necessary reforms.

The agreement also contains a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, which will open the vast European market to Ukrainian exporters -- and thus attract more foreign direct investment to Ukraine. This will also help to safeguard the country against possible Russian trade sanctions.

Here, diplomacy will play an important role as well. The United States and the EU need to persuade Russian President Vladimir Putin to reach an understanding with Ukraine's new leaders, rather than follow through on his threat to impose sanctions. Peaceful co-existence, not mounting bilateral tension, is in both countries' best interest.

The writer is a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics and a former economic adviser to the Ukrainian government.
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(Exclusive to The Daily Star)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Tigers must show patience

The Bangladeshi cricketers committed the same mistakes in every match played against Sri Lanka. Mistiming and lack of patience were our bats-



men's common problem. I believe most of the players of our team desperately need to have patience; there's no need to go for shots in every delivery.

Tigers' performance in the recent series has been below our expectations. However, I believe, all our players have the potential to play better; they need to become confident before the Asia Cup.

Nafis Nihal Ferdous
Sylhet

Will BDR mutiny mystery remain unsolved?

The BDR massacre on the 25th of February 2009 was a terrible incident and a number of innocent patriots had to die as a result of the brutal actions of some mindless mutineers. The reason of the revolt was a mere argument regarding the wages and benefits of these workers. There must have been some help from outside that emboldened the mutineers.

As a citizen of the country and friend of a martyr's son, it sends chill down my spine to recall the horrible incident and the injustice that took place on that day.

Unless some urgent steps are taken, the mystery behind the tragic death of so many soldiers and officers will forever remain unexplained.

Ahona tabassum Raisa
The Aga Khan School, Dhaka

How preposterous!

I have been dumbfounded to hear a letter broadcast at the programme 'Preeti Vajoneshu' on the BBC Bangla Service (BBS). The writer asked why there were more female journalists than male ones on the staff of BBS. At this age of technological revolution and women empowerment, I don't understand how a man can ask this question. However, the BBC's answer has put the female folks on a pedestal: "Still we have not been able to bring a balance between male and female journalists but we have been trying to do that." To me it is quality and eligibility based on which media houses recruit journalists.

Nahida Farhana
Teacher
London-Bridge International School
Jurain, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Dhaka getting awful getup," published on February 22, 2014

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

A very good scope for someone close to the ruling party to get rich, through the courtesy of the hardworking taxpayers.

Voice

This beautification is the most hideous distraction on the roads of Dhaka. These different coloured and patterned tiles are the ugliest things; seems like someone got them second hand from the street sellers.

Akhtar Shah

Whilst I go along with the concept that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder", I also know, one can't expect a boy to do a man's job! You need trained and time-tested real craftsmen and creative artists to produce praiseworthy beautification.

AH

There is a limit to how bad taste can be. Why is Vinyl World doing a prestigious project like this? This should be given to a prominent architect who has an eye for beauty. Unfortunately, 99 pc of things constructed in Bangladesh is average or below average, let alone the finishing quality which is mostly below average.

Snr Citizen

Pinnacle of corruption! Where is ACC?

Deep Purple Blue

Thanks to DS for the report. Why on earth such contract was awarded through secret negotiation and not public tender? Tk. 4.5 crore is not small money for Bangladesh.

Barkat

Where corruption exists, nothing else is considered.