

# "Do the right thing". Really?!

## The case of the missing youths!

*Can't be taken lightly*

**T**HE most significant issue that has occupied the minds of the people in this country in the aftermath of the gruesome killings of twenty Bangladeshi, Japanese and Italians on July 1, is the matter of the youths that have gone missing in the last several years, and who may have joined the ranks of the international extremist groups. All the five terrorists killed in the encounter with the army commandoes had been missing from home for quite a while. This is a case that admits of no laxity. Various numbers of those missing are making the rounds which are merely ballpark figures and that makes it even more imperative for the authorities to delve into it urgently. And this should be done in two phases we feel.

Firstly, the security agencies should ascertain the exact number of the youths that have left home without a trace. And to get to all the facts it is essential that the cooperation of the parents in particular, and the society at large, is important. One of the reasons we feel that parents hesitate to go to the police is the fear of harassment that they might have to suffer after lodging a complaint. This we feel is not an unfounded apprehension which the police should take all necessary steps to assuage. And after this, schools, colleges and such institutions could be involved.

Without getting to the facts we are afraid the concerned authorities would not be able to formulate an effective countermeasure to stem this trend which should be the second step in our effort to mitigate the problem.

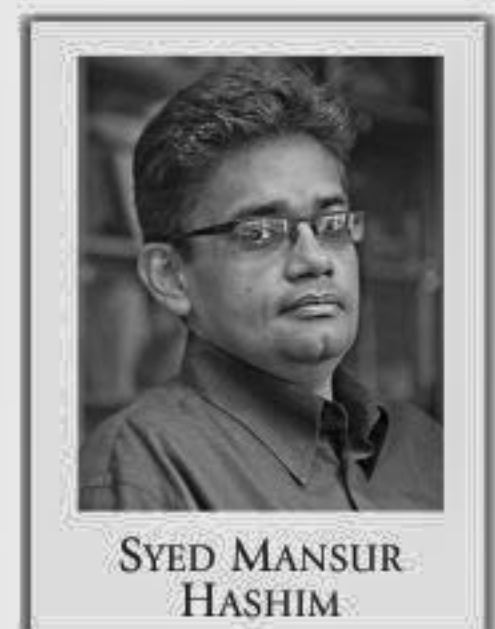
## The futility of the Iraq invasion

*Take measures to bring peace*

**W**HAT most of the world had believed to be true about the rationale of the Iraq invasion, the Chilcot report has confirmed in black and white. And it is now evidently clear from comments made by John Prescott, the number two man in the Labour government at that time that the war was illegal, that being launched on false pretexts. One of its chief protagonists, Tony Blair, has apologised for his actions. While apologising for ones mistake may be a noble gesture, when it costs the deaths of millions and the destruction of a society, the mistake should be atoned for.

Blair has said sorry for the 179 British soldiers killed in the Iraq war but remains conspicuously silent about half a million or so Iraqis killed since the US, along with Great Britain and its allies, invaded that country on the excuse of finding weapons of mass destruction which it never possessed.

Chilcot's report on the Iraq War substantiates claims that the consequence of the invasion has given rise to terrorism and unrest that has engulfed the region with no signs of abating. Therefore, while we think saying sorry is a welcome development we are disappointed to note that the west has not learnt any lessons from their experience in Iraq. On the contrary a flawed policy is being pursued that contains no prospect of peace to the region. Initiatives must be launched to ensure that reconciliation is brought to the fractured country that Iraq is today through meaningful engagement of all the stakeholders therein instead of a divide and rule policy.



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

**M**R. Tony Blair sent a personal note to President George W. Bush on July 28, 2002, a full eight months before the Iraq campaign with the opening

lines "I will be with, whatever..." basically throwing in his full support behind an American-led invasion - were it to go ahead, which it did. The Iraq inquiry known as the Chilcot Report has made some damning remarks about Mr. Blair and his "right thing to do" policy that saw Britain riding side by side with the United States in its campaign that led to the invasion of Iraq.

With the unveiling of the report, we come face to face with the bare facts about the misinformation campaign that led to building up the case against Saddam's Iraq that set into motion events which culminated in that country's invasion. The occupation of Iraq effectively destroyed the secular nature of the country and resulted in US-led forces to be bogged down for the next 13 years in a war that was not won and blew the lid off the whole radical and extremist militant outfits which had been suppressed under Saddam's regime.

The report is interesting in the sense that there is no mention of holding anyone accountable. Hence, the recommendations mentioned are suggestions and there is no question of anyone facing any litigation. All very convenient because it means the Iraqi people who have had to put up with invasion that resulted in the deaths of 200 British, including 179 soldiers, at least 4,500 American and more than 150,000 Iraqis over the course of more than a decade cannot seek justice in a court of law. The Iraq misadventure, as it is called sometimes, was not a blame

that rests on Mr. Blair's shoulders alone, but those in his inner circle share the blame equally. The intelligence presented for going to war with a nation purported to have "weapons of mass destruction" was sketchy at best and that a sitting prime minister was able to carry forward the case for aggression is deplorable.

The perceived threat posed by Iraq's henchmen Saddam was effectively blown out of proportions and warmongering was let loose to persuade an unsuspecting nation to lend its tacit

Iraq expert in Britain's delegation to the UN from 1997- 2002) in a recent article: "A thug named Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a marginal figure in Al Qaeda, was elevated in the jihadist hierarchy when Secretary of State Colin Powell, in his notorious prewar speech to the United Nations Security Council, falsely naming him as an ally of Saddam Hussein. As a result, Mr. Zarqawi gained status as America's declared enemy, an authority he exploited to become an extremist leader in the Sunni insurgency in Iraq. Breaking with Al Qaeda, he founded the

both the British people and anyone else interested because two major powers decided to opt for military actions based on faulty, or to put it more bluntly by some members of the British establishment, erroneous intelligence without fully exploring diplomatic or peaceful measures to resolve the crisis.

It is interesting that Mr. Blair has gone for full disclosure in a two-hour news conference where he took responsibility for intelligence failures and wrong steps, but remained resolute in the face of new information (as concluded in the report)



ILLUSTRATION: SCOTT CLISSOLD

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support to securing world peace - through invasion. Not all allies were duped of course. The French government under Jacques Chirac fought tooth and nail to stop it because they were not convinced of the "evidence" presented. With a UN veto likely from the French, a split amongst the allies did not deter the British from moving ahead with the Americans to launch the most ill-conceived attack on a country that never had any weapons of mass destruction. The build up to and the actual invasion of Iraq set forth events which have now become the world's problem.

As put by Carne, Ross (Executive Director of Independent Diplomat and

group that became the Islamic State, which today occupies Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul, and vast stretch of territory across Iraq and Syria, and just this week killed more than 200 civilians in suicide bombings in Baghdad."

The Chilcot report is something that has been seven years in the making. And although outgoing PM Cameron has stated that the government will implement the recommendations, at the end of the day it is just another report. Mr. Blair may have taken "full responsibility" to lead his nation into the war, but does it absolve him of the immorality of the whole affair? The report in its entirety should be read by

that it was the right decision to go to war. As he stated "There will not be a day of my life where I do not relive and rethink what happened. People ask me why I spend so much time in the Middle East today. This is why. This is why I work on Middle East peace." Perhaps the death of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis in the aftermath of the invasion and the failure to find weapons of mass destruction (the primary reason that was touted as basis for the invasion in the first place) and the destruction of one of the cradles of civilisation would weigh on anyone's mind, even a former prime minister.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

# Solidarity in Grief, United in Resolve

MANZOOR HASAN

**T**HE unthinkable has happened. The worst fears have come true. The nation is shocked by the barbaric acts of a handful of young men. Emotion has engulfed us for the right reasons. Bangladesh has yet again grabbed the world headlines for the wrong reasons. Not long ago, we used to proudly announce that Bangladeshis are peace-loving and tolerant, the ubiquitous smiling-face that welcomed foreigners into our midst and made them feel at home. Alas, the incident of July 1, 2016, has now starkly revealed so many hard realities! We have lost many precious lives - Italians, Japanese, Indian and Bangladeshis - who had dedicated their lives to the well-being and prosperity of Bangladesh. They are gone forever but can we, as a nation step back and reflect?

Looking at the faces of the victims and perpetrators, I am struck by their age and socio-economic background. They are our children and our future. One group of young people is moving forward educationally and will become our new leaders in different sectors. The other group has become alienated and is espousing radical ideology, a trend not just confined to Bangladesh. Why are we losing our boys and girls in this way? What is motivating them? How are we, as a society, failing them in their aspiration? Are we giving sufficient time

and space to vent their grievances? Is the transition from an agrarian society to a digital one becoming too traumatic for many among us? As parents, are we losing touch with our children? There are many questions that come to mind. As parents and families, we have to candidly ask such questions but this will call for a concerted effort with leadership coming from all levels. Are we ready for this serious self-examination and self-correction?

The other issue, which has struck me, is the straitjacket diagnostic that has become the norm in this age of 'fight against terror'. 'Pundits' are giving sophisticated ideological interpretations, and no doubt there is much value to this and is necessary. But is there a more down-to-earth explanation that we are ignoring? The long arms of ISIS and Al Qaeda have reached Bangladesh, and there is certainly some truth in this. We all are aware of the destructive nature of these organisations, and their selective interpretation of Islam has become their trademark. The majority peace-loving Muslims of this world will have to take a stand. It is apparent that many thousands of innocent Muslims, along with non-Muslims, have already paid heavily, and will continue to do so in the years to come until we have collectively succeeded in winning over the hearts and minds of the alienated youth. Rather than looking for complex theories and getting trapped in sophistry, let us be

honest with ourselves and call a spade a spade. The truth is that the present crisis is a predominantly home-grown creation, and the commitment to resolve

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has to come from within Bangladesh. The other, and probably, the most important factor is our own resolve to work together, as a society. This is the

time to come together, particularly politically. Unfortunately, the global trend is not helpful. Even in a mature democracy like the United Kingdom, we find much dissension and distrust. But there are also some very positive lessons to be taken: coming together in grief on the shocking killing of the young and compassionate British MP, Jo Cox; acceptance of the verdict of the Brexit referendum despite the close call; and making way for new leadership within the UK ruling party. In Bangladesh, we are facing different issues within a complex context. But despite the complexity of our situation in Bangladesh, our expectation is that our politicians will set aside the past differences and work together on some of the key national interest issues, such as, the youth of Bangladesh. If we fail, the dissatisfied youth of Bangladesh will remain very vulnerable. For the sake of the future of the generations to come, we have no other option but to stand shoulder to shoulder to face the present crisis, some will say, our existential moment. As the victims are being buried all around the world, we stand in vigil and resolve wholeheartedly to work together for a more attractive and meaningful future, particularly for the young men and women of Bangladesh.

The writer is a barrister and Executive Director of the South Asian Institute of Advanced Legal & Human Rights Studies.

## COMMENTS

**"He cannot be my son"**  
(July 10, 2016)

Hashem Miah

Militants are expanding their networks in Bangladesh. It has to be stopped now.

Enamul Haque

How many more lives will have to be lost? We have to defeat extremism at all levels.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Bangladesh's 7/16

This was waiting to happen and it happened due to the government's inept handling of the threat from the terrorists who have been serially killing bloggers, university teachers, Hindus, Christians, Buddhists and moderate Muslims. The government was always in denial and underplayed the threats.

The mission of tarnishing the image of Bangladesh started with the

ransacking of Buddhist monasteries at Ramu on September 29, 2012. But the government was never serious about bringing the perpetrators to book. Now the extremists have achieved their biggest victory to date, and succeeded to portray to the international community that militancy is gaining force in Bangladesh.

In the case of Gulshan attack, was it not a mistake to launch the rescue

operation the following morning? Could the RAB not take action immediately after the first shootout? If that had been the case then the lives of the foreigners and Bangladeshis could be saved. It took several hours to slaughter all those persons throughout the whole night and the delayed operation allowed them to just do that.

Ibne Azad, On e-mail



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

### Blood, shock, horror

I never thought that I would live to see such a day. When are we going to fight this evil as a nation united - instead of passively listening to partisan political rhetoric?

My heart goes out to the bereaved families; and to those who got injured.

Ashfaq Chowdhry  
Banani, Dhaka