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The Killing of Shah A.M.S. Kibria: Mounting Evidence of the Government's Ill-Intent

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Recent statements by senior BNP-Jamaat leaders – at public meetings and in the Press – as well as certain actions of the Government have raised some disturbing questions in the minds of many people in this country and abroad. It seems that the BNP-Jamaat have not been able to “get their story straight” regarding the assassination of my father on 27 January, 2005. The obvious lies and contradictory statements of individuals such as, for example, Mr. Sircar, “the third most important personality of the country”, have damaged the image of this “failed government”, perhaps irreparably.

There are three distinct sets of issues involved.

- The **first** set of issues that need to be considered involve the unsubstantiated allegations by senior Ministers and others in the Government as to the identity of those who carried out the grenade attack on my father, Shah A.M.S. Kibria, M.P., at a public meeting in his constituency on 27 January, 2005.
- There is also a **second**, quite distinct set of issues relating to the events in the aftermath of the attack, including the failure to arrange proper medical attention or helicopter transportation to Dhaka for my father. He died after about 4 hours, apparently without receiving even the most minimal medical attention.
- The **third** set of issues relates to the Government's handling of the local investigation so far (and the attempts to free some of the local BNP leaders that have been initially arrested) and the Government's failure to quickly arrange for a credible and thorough investigation led by a reputed international agency (the FBI of the United States).

First: the allegations of Government ministers regarding the attack. It seems that BNP-Jamaat Ministers have a predilection for immediately assigning blame (to the Opposition) without bothering to obtain the results of any proper investigation. This is not the type of behaviour one expects from any responsible public representative. What worries me is that perhaps there is something much more sinister at work here. Mr. Saifur Rahman has made a statement about the possible nature of the attack that will no doubt interest investigators (see my commentary of February 7, 2005). Mr. Nizami also has made a statement indicating that he has information about the perpetrators of the attack. My father's activities during the 1971 War of Liberation and Mr. Nizami's rather different role are very well-documented, suggesting probable cause, or at least that there may be a connection here. Finally, we note with interest the statements of Mr. Mannan Bhuiyan on 7 February, in which he accused the Awami League (AL) - the party whose Government my father served in as Finance Minister – of carrying out the attack. This is a very serious charge, and I am sure that we all would like to know the basis of this allegation. I have a cursory knowledge of the nature of libel and defamation laws in this country, but unless he provides proof of these allegations, would not the AL have good grounds to sue Mr. Mannan Bhuiyan for libel?

Second: the events after the attack. It appears to be a case of the “dog that didn’t bark”. Before anyone with the word “Honourable” in front of their name gets agitated - No, I am not calling anyone a dog, it is merely a figure of speech. Frankly, at this point we do not know who carried out the initial grenade attack – that must await the results of a proper FBI-led investigation. What we do know is that there appears to be a consistent pattern of action – or inaction – on the part of this Government that suggests more than willful negligence. The remarkable public admission of ignorance on the part of the “third most important personality of the country” is a case in point. Moreover, Mr. Mannan Bhuiyan has publicly made the claim that an offer of a helicopter was made but that it was declined. To whom was this offer made? Who declined this offer? We want to know.

Third: the investigation of the attack. That the Government has been dragging its feet on the issue of permitting the FBI to begin its investigations without restrictive conditions is already well-known. When was the request for FBI assistance made? What conditions is the Government trying to impose? Given the record of the Government with regard to past investigations, the extremely professional officials of the FBI have figured out that they should refuse to come here as a “token” presence under the direction and control of the Government. Such a practice has clearly not worked in past investigations.

There are competent and conscientious people within all agencies of the current Government – people who place their duties to the Republic above all else. But they are hampered by powerful forces within the Government, as has been reflected in the course of the local investigation so far. The *Janakantha* of Feb 9 reports that investigators have told them (on condition of anonymity) “They have tied our hands and feet and then ordered us to run”. Police have been told not to move against anyone without obtaining permission. There are “unwritten rules” (imposed from above) about whom they can arrest and those they cannot touch. After a local BNP leader called Qayum was arrested in Habiganj there has reportedly been strong pressure from “higher authorities” to have him released. Five individuals have been arrested so far – they are to be jointly interrogated. The focus of the investigation has been on the possible beneficiaries of the killing, notably a powerful local BNP leader who has become rich very quickly under the patronage of a powerful minister of the Government. It is reported that this local leader went overseas just prior to the killing, but his unsavoury record, his influence over the local administration and his connections have reportedly made him the focus of police enquiries. This and other reports suggest that those behind the assassination may have links that may extend quite wide – and reach high levels within this Government.

One must always fear the “plausible rogue” much more than the person who is so very obviously vicious and malevolent. The “gentlemen” in fancy suits able to mouth the right phrases – with frequent mentions of “transparency”, “accountability”, “rule of law”, “dialogue”, and “adherence to the Constitution and democratic processes” are those against whom the nation must remain vigilant. The avarice, ruthlessness and arrogance of these leaders have brought the entire political system into disrepute. They are clever people but they have made mistakes before – as the farce of the February 15 “elections” of 1996 demonstrated. These same people now complacently believe that they have built

up an unassailable framework for rigging the next elections – by filling the administration and Election Commission with their agents. They are under the impression that they can act with impunity because their return to power is assured through systematic electoral fraud. Certainly, in the past these individuals have been able to dupe some of the less perceptive of our citizens both here and abroad. But I feel that they underestimate the intelligence of the people of our country. I don't think too many people these days are taken in when they see large meetings addressed by these BNP-Jamaat "leaders" – gatherings attended largely by people who have been "trucked in" in exchange for 50 taka and a plate of *biriyani*. Not that there is anything wrong with giving these poor people a free meal. That is the least that this Government could do – given its abject failure in keeping down the price of rice and other essentials. I will write about the Government's warped economic priorities in another commentary.

What is fascinating is that some important BNP-Jamaat leaders have chosen to expose their true natures in the aftermath of my father's assassination. Has not their "willful negligence" or even connivance in the death of my father become increasingly obvious? When an FBI-led investigation is completed, would not the true roles of these leaders become known to all? Their public denials and protestations of innocence fool no one. I do believe that a time will come when the failure of this Government to successfully prosecute a single investigation of the numerous bomb, grenade and other attacks during their tenure will no longer remain a "mystery". The "charitable view" – that this Government is merely grossly incompetent – may then no longer be tenable.

Ironically, the campaign of lies, deception and unsubstantiated charges that senior BNP-Jamaat leaders (notably Messrs. Saifur Rahman, Nizami and Mannan Bhuiyan) have launched in the wake of my father's assassination have failed miserably as a subterfuge. Their statements have perhaps revealed much more than they intended. In this regard, I would recall Abraham Lincoln's famous words, "You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time".