LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA SUNDAY JULY 6, 2003

Munitions haul

Investigators must get to the bottom

T is generally believed that the explosives and ammunition seizure in Bogra, the biggest ever of its kind, could lead to gathering of valuable information about terrorists operating in the country, or whether they are using it as a transit route for international arms trading.

Police have said 'confusing remarks' about the incident won't serve the cause of investigation. Few people would disagree, but police themselves appear to have drawn some premature conclusions. It sounds quite plausible that 'munitions were brought to the country to create lawlessness,' but that is only a vague generalisation. We have to consider the fact that there is more than one theory on the 'ultimate destination' of the heavy load of munitions, Bangladesh, India and Nepal having figured in the speculations. So, police have rightly advised people not to indulge in wild speculations while commenting on the haul, but are themselves apparently trying to draw inferences that sound like premature conclu-

People would like to see the mystery surrounding such an unprecedented munitions haul solved as quickly as possible. Getting at the root of all blasts and explosives recoveries has become doubly important since armed outlaws now pose a serious threat to the law enforcers themselves in the southern districts, apart from the general slide in law and order.

It would be an unfortunate reflection on our investigative skills if the biggest ammo discovery goes the same way as the bomb blasts did, the probes there having proven inconclusive even after such a long time since they took place.

There is a general consensus that the arms traders have to be caught if we do not want to leave an issue of grave concern unresolved. Actually what is at stake here is national security. The government owes it to the people to get to the bottom of it. Unquestionably, there should be a thoroughly professional and impartial investigation, one that is unmarred by any extraneous factor like politics. Politicisation of such an issue is something least desired by the people and will only obstruct and derail the process of fair and objective investigation. The word of caution is relevant because few incidents of this type usually go without the politicians raising their accusatory fingers at their rivals, caring little about the possibility of misleading the investigation process. This is a matter over which all political parties need to bury their hatchets for the good of the country, its people and future gov-

Suicide bombing in Quetta

A shocking act of bigotry

HE suicide bomber attack on a Shi'ite mosque in Quetta that killed and injured scores of people has raised a spectre of sectarianism in Pakistan once again. What an outrageous crime in the name of religion! And this isn't even the first time that Shi ite minority has come under attack. There have been sporadic incidents in parts of the country since the beginning of the year. It wasn't just the civilians who became victims, even several Shi'ite members of the police force were also gunned down, allegedly by Sunni elements. But none of the attacks have been as fierce as Saturday's suicide bombing. This has been a highly irresponsible act as it bears the portents of fomenting sectarian violence as the initial riot suggested. We hope there would be no deterioration in the current situation.

Sectarianism is an undoubted expression of religious bigotry. The sad thing is, when bigotry gets an upper hand in relation to religion, not only does it cost innocent lives, but also religion some of its good name. That's something the extremists do not seem to grasp. They should realise that the religion or sect they are fighting for does not support violence, killing or any extreme actions. Loss of innocent lives can never bring the success they want to achieve. We have always condemned such cowardly acts of violence; we will continue to do so.

The outcome of this sort of majoritarian assertion of religion is neither democratic nor religious. That is the lesson for Muslims of all sects and countries to draw here. They should rise above sectarianism, because it is a double-edged sword harbour as it does both orthodoxy and militancy. Abuse of religion by anyone in any manner is unacceptable; religion should remain a powerful influence for peace in every society.

US security concerns and the Muslim world

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

HERE is a certain degree of unease in many parts of the world after the Íraq war. This unease is more pronouncedly felt in the Muslim world than elsewhere. Despite the fact that some of the Arab neighbours of Iraq, may have heaved a sigh of relief at the disappearance of Saddam Hussein from the global scene, the blatant illegal ity of Iraq war and the use of naked force without global consent has put many in the world in a quan dary. These parts of the world would have been happier if the Anglo-US use of force, aided and abetted by some countries of the old and new Europe, could have some sem blance of Kantian moral imperative backing their military endeavour in an otherwise seemingly Hobbesian world of strife. The promise of Americans as "liberators" has quickly turned into the reality of US troops as "occupiers" in Iraq in the eyes of most Iraqis and that of many countries of the world. The argu ment that number of US and British troops are being killed by a handful of people still loyal to Saddam Hussein is getting less and less convincing even to the erstwhile Iraqi dissidents who while expressing their eternal gratitude to President Bush and Prime Minister Blair for getting rid of Saddam Hussein are insistent that the governance of Iraq should be handed over to the Iragis without further delay.

Americans are perplexed and angry over this apparent "ingratitude" of the Iraqis that they are not appreciative of the immense risk taken by them in causing destabilisation of the international political construct familiar to the people of the world since the second world war; in putting on line the unwavering trust of the international community in the impeccable moral virtues and values possessed by the US; the financial cost the US may be asked to bear for the reconstruction of Iraq; and the political cost of fracturing the transatlantic alliance. Americans historically have a positive view of occupation. The US occupation of Germany and Japan after the Second World War helped transform both into world economies. The Muslim world has the experiences of Israeli occupation of Arab territories which conjures up images of genocidal brutality by Israel meted out to unarmed civil ians in the occupied lands. Former Under Secretary of State for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy Charlotte Beers told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee early this year of the "frighteningly wide" between how America sees itself and how the rest of the world sees

Regarding the Muslim world Charlotte Beers told FRC that "millions of ordinary people have gravely distorted but carefully cultivated images of us -- images so negative, so weird, so hostile that I can assure you a young generation of terrorists are being created". This failure of the American public diplomacy in trying " to do a better job of telling our story" in the words of President Bush could be due to stylistic difference (American penchant for speaking straight as

Yasser Arafat emphatically declared that fighting terror was not a war against Arabs or Muslims or Islam and refused clemency to acts of terrorism in the name of Palestinian

Notwithstanding the total support extended to the US war on terror there is a pervasive belief in the Muslim world that the US policy towards the Muslims is skewed by negative stereotypes of Islam that fail to recognise its diversity. It has been argued that radical Islamic government of the day helped Reza Shah Pahlvi to restore his brutal egime by ousting popular Iranian Prime Minister Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh.

It has now been recognised by US policy makers that "democratic exceptions" made in the past by the US administrations by avoiding scrutiny of internal workings of countries in the interest of ensuring steady flow of oil, containing Soviet, Iranian or Iraqi influence or securing military bases did not further

democratic deficit in Muslim countries by encouraging democracy to take roots in these societies, the Bush doctrine of preemptive/preventive war would continue to be the primary tool of war on terror. This doctrine, as is well known, has been in the center of controversy in the US and beyond. Last May Senator Dianne Feinstein addressing the Centre for Defence Information said that by adopting a policy of unilateralism and preemp tion undermining international law

and institutions and by increasing

US reliance on nuclear weapons

(including first strike against non-

nuclear states) Bush administration

may actually encourage prolifera-

tion of WMD while seeking to

achieve the reverse. Referring to

Nuclear Posture Review Senator

Feinstein spoke of potential grave

dangers if the US were to develop

low yield nuclear weapons which in

turn would justify other countries to

do the same increasing the atten-

dant risk of such weapons falling

into the hands of "enemy states or

terrorist groups". Her concerns were echoed by former Secretary of

State Madeline Albright who stated

that in all American history there

has never been such a tectonic shift

in foreign and security policies as

between Clinton and Bush adminis

trations. If Iraq war was in imple-

mentation of the doctrine of pre-

emption/prevention (Saddam

unacceptable. Therefore imposition of naval quarantine over Cuba by President Kennedy was in effect an act of preemption. They argue that what constituted "maximum peril" to President Kennedy has increased manifold in today's world in which shadowy terrorists act in concert with rogue states.

While accepting the validity of US security concerns, the Muslim world would remain wary about the methods to be used by the US to meet these challenges. The *Nuclear Posture Review* (of January 2002) identified as possible targets countries like North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Libya. Saddam Hussein is gone. In case of Iran British Foreign ecretary Jack Straw has assured during his recent visit to Tehran that military action against Iran was not on the card. US General Anthony Zinni who has had extensive experience of the Middle East assessed that within the next one to three years the clerics would be gone and young people and those that were slowly turning the tide would have turned Iran around. Michael Leden of American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank, is of the opinion that the Iranian people have shown themselves to be the most pro-American population in the Muslim world but the Iranian regime is arguably the most anti-American on earth. Therefore if Iran folds anyway why bother to embark on a military adventure which may delay the departure of the clerics. US, according to General Zinni, would like President Musharraf to succeed because if he fails then Pakistan could end up in chaos like Afghanistan or become a fundamentalist state like Iran in the early days of the Ayatollah or fall under the thumbs of hardliner generals with consequent increased tension

In the ultimate analysis, the Muslim world would not like to see another Muslim country pulverized like Iraq or Afghanistan. After all most Muslims are neither Islamists nor modern day Kharijites (Kharijites were people who lived outside civilization, using terrorism against their enemies and committed murders on a large scale for political objectives). Besides, Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civiliza tions though an arresting thesis is not an incontrovertible one. One would, therefore, hope that the US would continue its dialogue with the Muslim world and solve the root causes of terrorism through political and developmental engage

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former secretary and

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opposed to Muslim perception of direct talks as being confrontational and threatening to its collective social fabric) as to no less Muslim world's valid perception of monocentric policy of favouring Israel to the total disregard of the injustice meted out daily to the Arabs, in particular to the Palestinians American Public Diplomacy in the Àrab World- June 2003-R.S.Zaharna, American University).

developmental engagements.

It is now universally recognised that the tragic events of nine-eleven have decidedly impacted upon US policy on war on terrorism. The import of the nine-eleven events was perhaps no less significant than the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour which finally helped the decision of President Roosevelt to take America into the war against Nazism and Fascism. A direct result of the September eleven terrorist attacks was the dislodgement of the Taliban from Afghanistan, a war which the US waged from high moral ground , in which NATO joined hands though Afghanistan was "out of the area", in which the international community (including the entire Muslim world) extended its full support to the US military actions. This complete fusion of support for the US actions was possible because of the odious nature of the Taliban regime and the determination of the international community to deny terrorists any pretext to justify their heinous crime in the name of religion or politics. One may recall that the Organisation of Islamic Conference strongly condemned the terrorist acts of nine-eleven and observed that "the brutal acts of terror ran counter to the teachings of divine religions as well as ethical and human values". Arab League called the attacks "dreadful"

movements often arise out of legitimate needs and grievances of the oppressed sectors of the population who see the US as partly responsible for their sufferings. Professor Stephen Zunes of the University of San Francisco has pointed out that from the time of the crusades through European colonial era to the war on Iraq Western Christians have killed far more Muslims than the reverse. Given this strong sense of history among the Muslims Washington's use and threat of military force result in popular reaction that often takes the form of religious extremism. Professor Zunes faults the US policy makers for their support of repressive regimes which makes democratic and non-violent options for the Islamic opposition extremely difficult. In hindsight one could successfully argue that the Iranian Islamic Řevolution would not have taken place had not the US

world was both altruistic and self interested. In his view countries plagued by economic stagnation and lack of opportunity, closed political system and burgeoning population fuel alienation of their citizens resulting in transformation of these societies into breeding grounds for extremists and terrorists bent upon harming US interests. Equally important, he felt, the growing gulf between many Islamic regimes and their citizens would limit the ability of these regimes to respond coherently to issues of vital

American interest in the long run

because no extremist Islamic move-

ment has ever evolved in demo-

cratic societies. Ambassador Rich-

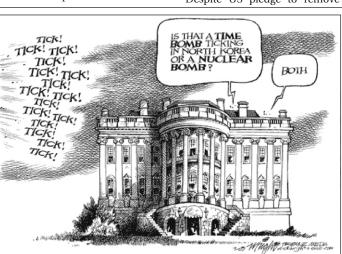
ard Haas, head of policy planning in

the US State department explained

that America's rationale in promot-

ing democratisation in the Muslim

interest to the US. Despite US pledge to remove



Hussein was believed to be in possession of WMD which could be launched under an hour) then we have also seen French-German Russian reluctance to bless US military action through the UNSC Basically the fault line dividing the US and Europe centres around disagreement regarding source and gravity of threats to western societies and on responses to these threats. Supporters of Bush doctrine cite the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and President Kennedy' following words: "we no longer live in a world where only actual firing of weapons represents a sufficient challenge to a nation's security to constitute maximum peril". To Jack Kennedy any substantial increased possibility of their use or sudden change of their deployment was

tourism would not be held as

hostage to the main problem. The

A journey towards tomorrow



KULDIP NAYAR writes from New Delhi

HAT began at the Wagah border as a mere visit to Pakistan turned into an explosion of goodwill and friendship. We, the nine Indian parliamentarians who travelled to Pakistan a few days ago, were swept off our feet by love and affection showered upon us at Lahore Islamabad and Karachi.

It was almost a people's war against the age-old prejudice and hatred against India. They were prepared to jettison the baggage of hostility so as to live as good neighbours in peace. They wanted to reach out to people in India.

But if the message from our side is that no give and take policy is required or some form of sabre rattling, the window of opportunity opened by Prime Minister Vajpayee's initiative could shut for many more decades to come. There is need for people on both sides to assert themselves and denounce those whose rhetoric is coming in the way of peace. The highest point of our nine-day visit was the reception by the Jammat-e-Islami that announced publicly that they wanted to befriend India. It was their first reception to any Indian delegation since the establishment

of Pakistan. They assured us that they would like to solve all problems, including Kashmir, through dialogue. Their wish was to bury the hatchet once and for all

One commentator from Pakistan has e-mailed me a message: "You have achieved the impossible. Of all the people Liaqat Baloch of the Jamaat-e-Islami is ecstatic on the private channels of Pakistan about the reception they hosted.

Fazlur Rehman, chief of the amalgam of six religious parties, the itself. Asma Jehangir, a byword for human rights and Dr Mubashir Hasan, who has done pioneering work in the field of India-Pakistan relations, were among the scores of people who welcomed us. We heard the refrain of a familiar song: "We shall overcome (Hum honge kamivab)

Our first halt was Lahore. Pawan Bansal, a Congress MP in the team, remarked that every face reminded him of a face he had seen in India before. It was his maiden visit to

was that of hardliners. We found them pragmatic and accommodative. Retired chief justice Nasim Hasan, who was in the chair, said that he was once a staunch sup-porter of right of self-determination but now his views had changed. He said it was wrong to think that Indians were "our enemies." One proposal that emerged at the meetng was that India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal should become a single economic unit like the European Union to enable people and goods move

It was Islamabad where we met Sherry Rehman and M.S. Bhandare who were sparing no effort for narrowing the distance between the two countries. Both sides needed scores of Sherrys and Bhandares to

Protocol-wise, the Pakistan government was correct. The acting President of Pakistan gave a dinner in our honour. The Speaker of the Lahore Assembly too hosted dinner at the chamber. The

BETWEEN THE LINES

People-to-people contact is the answer to the wall of suspicion and distrust which has got erected between the two countries. People on both sides have no option other than working on their own for building a movement to put pressure on governments for normalisation.

Mutahada Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), in the Pakistan National Assembly added another dimension. He said: "Track Two is all right. But without Track One, the fauj (the army), anything can be stymied. We should ponder over that." A top leader whispered to me that the core problem was not Kashmir but the corps commanders.

There is no doubt that the military remains the most important factor in the affairs of Pakistan, But people are visibly unhappy and restive. Never before had I heard in Punjabi such a barrage of unprintable words against the military. Both former Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif have got rehabilitated in the eyes of the Pakistanis. Our travel through Pakistan began at the Wagah border

Pakistan. Shahid Siddiqui, general secretary of the Samajwadi Party, who had been to Pakistan before. said that he did not feel he had come to a different country --something $he\,felt\,in\,Bangladesh\, \dot{a}nd\,Nepal.$

Senior retired military officers have constituted in Lahore a group, the India-Pakistan Soldiers Initiative for Peace. At the dinner they hosted -- some 50 top brass were present -- the chairman admitted that the wars both countries had waged were pointless. It was time we forgot the past and began a new chapter of peace and harmony. Hostilities had not solved any problem; friendship would. We perceived a similar desire at a roundtable discussion with the writers, columnists, retired judges and civil servants. Their reputation

without restriction. The Lahore Chamber of Commerce also welcomed the proposal. They estimated that the two countries lost revenues worth nearly \$6 billion (Rs 3,000 crore) annually because of illegal trade through Dubai or Singapore. They were keen to sell in Indian markets. They wanted joint ventures. Asked why Pakistan had not extended the MFN status to India when the latter did it nearly 10 years ago, we got no satisfactory answer. Some said that the reciprocal step got entangled in Pakistan's politics. Economic ties could be the sinews of a firm relationship. If we were to allow Pakistan sell its products in India without any impost -- a suggestion I made 30 years ago --the Pakistanis would develop a vested interest in our progress.

Information Minister of Sindh held a reception. But the central government remained distant. Our last halt was Karachi. The Press Club, which had never kowtowed to the martial law administrators, was as lively as ever. This is where a journalist asked us point-blank ábout Gujarat. None of us had any defence and we admitted that it was a shame for a secular polity. Kashmir was raised practically at every meeting. No specific solution was offered. There was a demand to settle it. My argument that India would not accept any solution on the basis of religion was attacked by a couple of newspapers. But people on the whole tended to agree with me. We should start talks on Kashmir after ensuring that other problems like trade and

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

majority of the people supported this approach. At many places we pointed out that talks would have little meaning if cross-border terrorism continued. People generally agreed. But two poets at Islamahad resented even our raising the point. They, like some others in Pakistan, could not fathom the resentment crossborder terrorism was creating throughout India and jeopardising the process of normalisation. I am convinced that people-to-people contact is the answer to the wall of suspicion and distrust which has got erected between the two countries. People on both sides have no option other than working on their own for building a movement to put pressure on governments for normalisation. n India, political parties are dragging their feet. But people in Pakistan seem to be ahead in seeking good relations. They probably feel that an understanding with India would give them an opportunity to give vent to their pent-up feelings against oppression. They do not like America, despite Pakistan's official posture. They would rather have close relations with India.

The tour was over. I took the same patchy road from Lahore to Amritsar to cross over into India which I did some 55 years ago Then I had been broken on the wrack of history. I was a refugee. This time I travelled with my eight colleagues from parliament. It was a journey towards a better tomorrow. I am sure that despite the difference of governments, the distant neighbours will get close

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

"Vitriol points to dark tunnel'

Lead editorial of The Daily Star on 26th June, 2003 is of course not the first time in which our leaders both in power and opposition have been urged to exercise restraint in order to foster the desired political culture for the good of this nation. The way vengeance/anger against each other as individual or party is going on, every one knows it will definitely go from bad to worse and may end up nothing short of a probable disaster for all of us in the very near future. The contents of the said editorial should hopefully work as chilling reminders to our sane elements/civic society to bring sense in our body politics to prevent anything like what happened to some of the African nations in the recent past.

Reconciliation and understanding the democratic values by all concerned can transform this unique homogeneous nation to a model of developments for the entire South Asia. The farewell

speech by Mr. Frederick Temple, ountry Director for the World Bank outlined a picture of our country which is also considered pertinent in this context that our eaders may like to take note of before it is too late. We definitely have all the potentials to change our fate but it is imperative for whoever in power or opposition to realise the importance of an appropriate environment which enable us to work for the desired goal in the interests of all.

Z. Rahman Gulshan, Dhaka

Asian Development Bank and gas export

Asian Development Bank's current stance strongly supports sale of our natural gas to Índia. No problem at all if this is just an advice. But ADB's advice has gone far beyond just an advice as it also adds that $Bangladesh\ won't\ get\ any\ aid\ if\ gas$ is not sold to India

Md. Mamunur Rashid Ittara, Dhaka

Telephone bill defaulters

We are simply stunned that some members of the Jatiya Sangsad owe

Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board 12 crore taka bill for their residence telephone. We resent and protest this act and want to know how those telephones still remain working when T&T does not hesitate to disconnect telephone lines of the common people even if a single bill of small amount remains unpaid.

We suggest that the telephone allowance of the present MPs should go directly to the T&T Revenue Office and they should pay for their residence phone bill from their own pocket and their telephone lines must be disconnected if they fail to

As for other defaulters, the government must resort to other ways to make them pay their unpaid telephone bills.

Nur Jahan

Mahfuz Anam's commentary

On June 21, 2003 Mr. Mahfuz Anam wrote a commentary on some current issues regarding journalism without fear or favour emphasising on *The Daily Star* slogan "Committed to Peoples Right to Know". The commentary was more like an answer to the defamation case filed by Salauddin Quader Chowdhury.

We the readers thank The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam for his thoughts on journalism that we very much agree with. But it is undoubtedly a saddening matter that the PM's Parliamentary Affairs Adviser went to court

regarding some reports on his personal records. As he has been nominated for the top OIC post, it is certainly a good news, but what frustrate us is that he went against only the editors of two particular dailies though the same reports were published in other national dailies of the country.

It is the duty of the media to unfold what is unknown to the public. We don't expect such types of harassment of journalists. The Daily Star is requested to lead its caravan of truth without any fear. MS Ali Saikat

Dhaka University

Government, foreign aids and development

Ours is a country depended on foreign aid and our foreign policy, more or less, is influenced by this fact. It is noticeable that in the last couple of years foreign investment has reduced. We have no strong lobby also. But it is a good news that the World Bank, and after that IMF, have agreed to provide financial for Bangladesh.

However, our previous experiences of development works with foreign loans are not positive. Because the usual practice is the government takes loans and spends the money for its own interest. Now we are in debt. And the situation is quite pitiful for the nation.

There is no sustainability of our so-called development activities. The government talks

about poverty reduction policy by the year 2015, but will our government be able to succeed? There is a large gap between the poor and rich. And the women's position in the society is also vulnerable in our country.

The government talks about many things, but do very little. We have failed as a democracy. The government does not seem at all accountable and transparent to the citizens, as they should be. For such condition it is essential to grow awareness and the government must use a big amount of loan in a sustainable way so that it can meet the present need as well as the future. Khaleda Nasrin

Dhaka University