

# Sharon and September 11

## Cancun gets cerebral

Rhetoric recedes as hard bargaining fronts out

**A**MIDST criticism that the WTO is a weapon for rich nations and multinational companies to perpetuate a self-serving trade regime, some statistics are being tossed around that point to a shaft of light, as it were, at the end of the tunnel. Trade can be five times more instrumental in bringing development to a poor country than foreign aid. If there is one per cent increase in the Least Developed Countries' share of world trade, it would make a marked difference in their poverty situation. World Bank says that removal of barriers to trade in farm and other goods could add more than \$500 billion a year to world income by 2015, lifting 144 million people out of poverty.

Another massive potentiality for hammering out a fair deal to the developing countries is embedded in the fact that the Western farm subsidies are currently worth six times more than all global aid spending. If the production and export subsidies in the West were cut substantially it would create a level playing field for our farmers and exporters. Subsidisation is uneconomic, because it generates surpluses and causes export dumping thereby keeping the providing countries' inefficient farmers in business while the hard-working and barely subsisting peasantry in the LDCs are getting a raw deal. As though this is not enough of an unfair deal to agriculture in the developing world, the latter are kept under constant pressure by the rich countries to scale down their own subsidies. How is one to explain this particular variety of double standard?

Let's refresh our memory about the promise made in Doha by the rich countries in November, 2001 to slash the \$300 billion in subsidies they pay each year to their farmers. Having botched their agricultural policies, they have now taken to denouncing developing countries for demanding what was promised at Doha. What a strange instance of self-righteousness taken to a hypocritical extreme! There is more to it; as for the developing countries' demand that rich countries scrap the handouts they give to their farmers, the United States and the European Union are saying that the proposition is politically impracticable. Don't they see the political or social cost the developing world is having to pay in terms of unstable conditions because of their continuing poverty situation? Even the pressure being put on the poorer countries to cut their subsidies entails an element of social or political cost.

The poor states comprise four-fifths of the WTO membership. They ought to have a major clout in the negotiation process. More because it is one-country-one-vote equation. There is no veto power for the USA, EU or Japan. Yet, the discriminatory world trade regime continues. This is not to say that all is well between the US, EU and Japan; for they have their trade wars. But while they trade concessions amongst themselves to strike a balance between contradictory demands, their reaction to the developing countries' trade needs appears to have been a different ball-game.

The strategy of the developing countries seems to be to break the Gordian Knot of the joint stance taken by the USA and EU on the question of greater marketing access to farm products from the developing world. But 'with the USA threatening to dismantle the multilateral trade framework, if negotiations do not progress, the EU would be hard-pressed to try and garner something substantial out of the Cancun multilateral forum in order to maintain balance with the US in trade matters.' Which way it will go is anybody's guess.

The global foreign investment and competition rules being insisted upon by the EU have been viewed by the developing countries with reservations. 'These could prevent them imposing stringent regulations on foreign multinationals' (The Guardian).

In the overall context, it is vital for the developing countries to unify their positions in order that their bargaining power is adequately enhanced in relation to the USA and EU. There has been a reference to 'a new militancy among the developing countries led by China, Brazil and India who are determined not to be bulldozed in the horse trading.' The interests of this G-20 and those of the majority LDCs should not collide in any way.



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

**A**RIEL Sharon's eight visits to the White House led, in the view of many, to the removal of Saddam Hussein. Israel was afraid of one country in the Middle East and that was Iraq with Saddam. So Saddam must go even if thousands of American soldiers have to give their lives. Yes, Saddam did go, but what about Americans? Are they not facing another Vietnam?

Arafat's turn was next to Saddam. This was reflected in the official statements of Sharon government (ref. Netanyahu's open speech on Arafat's future). But as Europe gave its support to Arafat, he was not physically thrown out of Palestinian territories; he was, however, confined to his headquarters in Ramallah which was battered several times by the Israeli army.

As Iraq became too much of a burden and also for showing to the world that America wants peace in the area, President Bush and his administration went for a sort of "Road Map" for Peace between Israel and Palestinians, but insisted on no role for Arafat. Arafat who remained virtually a prisoner in his headquarters in Ramallah, was obliged to go for some form of democracy in his own administra-

tion and grudgingly nominated Mahmud Abbas as the Prime Minister. Abbas had support of Bush Administration and Sharon government and had some form of success in negotiating a ceasefire. Surprisingly even Hamas and Islamic Jihad agreed to stop attacks against Israel.

This was a great achievement which Sharon government could have taken full advantage of to take the American Road Map toward peace. But Sharon apparently was not interested in peace. His government continued to carry on its targeted killing of Palestinians by branding them as terrorists. To justify their killings, Israeli army simply declares some persons as terrorists and tells the world that such persons have been involved in series of suicide bombings against Israelis though they never produce any proof.

They think that they need not produce any proof as Sharon government considers all Palestinians as terrorists. Unfortunately Bush Administration goes by what Sharon says as President Bush declared Sharon, an alleged war criminal, as a 'man of peace'. What a travesty of truth! Sharon became a man of peace and Arafat, a co-sharer of Nobel Peace Prize,

became an "obstacle to peace". It is this belief and consequent misguided Middle East Policy of Bush Administration, which has led to present situation in the area.

The high-handedness of Sharon government exceeded all limits. An invalid octogenarian Sk Yassin, the spiritual leader of Hamas, became the target of Israeli assassination. He was attacked but luckily escaped death. There could not be any bigger stupidity than going for

the killing of Sk. Yassin. It was known that any attack on him will inflame practically the entire Palestinian community. The result was obvious -- there were two suicide bombings on Tuesday, September 9 in Israel that killed at least 15 Israelis and injured scores. Who is responsible for this disaster? It's Sharon government and its disastrous policy towards Palestinians.

Mahmud Abbas has already resigned and speaker Ahmad Korei

has been nominated as the next Prime Minister of Palestinian Authority. But he has not yet assumed the responsibility and has asked for Israeli government commitment to ending targeted killings, withdrawal from the Palestinian areas etc. But Israeli killing machine continued its operation and hence the present killings and counter killings.

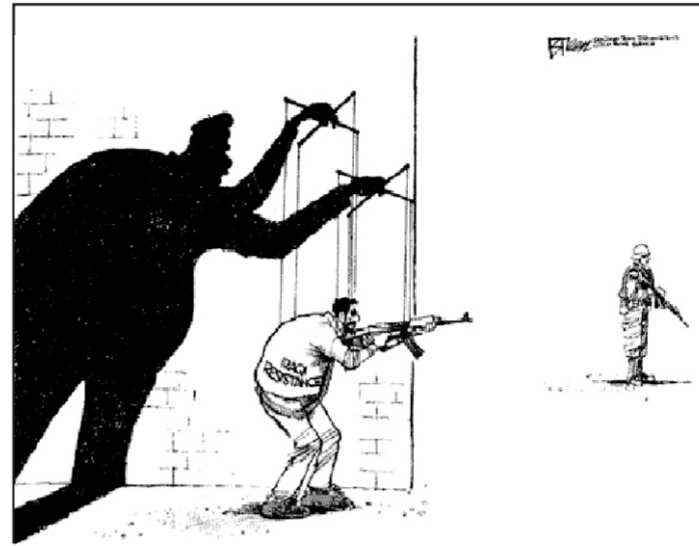
Though a large number of Israelis belong to "Peace Now" movement, Israel has the most extremist government headed by a known Sabra-Chatilla butcher Sharon. Unfortunately, Israeli majority voted him to power and they pay for their mistake. Israelis are likely to be the biggest loser as Israel may ultimately turn out to be an unlivable place for the Jews -- both good Jews and bad (extremist) Jews.

The Palestinians lost their land long ago and they have nothing more to lose; they are now engaged in the resistance movement which is seen as terrorism by Israel, USA and probably some others who have links with Israel. But the fact remains that Israel has been engaged in State terrorism and it is Israel which is responsible for America's present woes in the Middle East and elsewhere.

There was no 9/11 before

## SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

**Mahmud Abbas has already resigned and speaker Ahmad Korei has been nominated as the next Prime Minister of Palestinian Authority. But he has not yet assumed the responsibility and has asked for Israeli government commitment to ending targeted killings, withdrawal from the Palestinian areas etc. But Israeli killing machine continued its operation and hence the present killings and counter killings.**



## Taking your own life



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

**B**EFORE George Eastman, the inventor of Eastman Kodak and roll film, did away with his life, he wrote in his suicide note, "To my friends: My work is done. Why wait?" George Sanders, the British actor, wrote in his suicide note, "Dear world, I am leaving you because I am bored. I feel I have lived long enough." Both men were successful and gifted, one an entrepreneur and another a star, yet each was harried by a compulsive instinct to take his own life. Why?

People take their lives all the time for different reasons in different ways. The suicide bombers volunteer to be blown into pieces so that they kill others by the blast of their bombs. In 1933, a 19-year-old Japanese student named Kiyoko Matsumoto committed suicide by jumping into the 1000-foot crater of a volcano on the island of Oshima, Japan, which started a bizarre fashion followed by three hundred children. Bobby Sands, the IRA activist, starved for 66 days and died from hunger strike. Horace Wells, who pioneered the use of anesthesia,

anaesthetised himself with chloroform and slashed open his thigh with a razor in 1848.

Suicide is sudden death with a difference. All deaths are accidental, even when someone dies in the deathbed. Doctors can only give a timeframe of death, three months to six months, even in most predictable cases, but the exact hour of dying is not known until death. Thus while every other kind of death happens by chance, suicide happens by choice. It is the only time the actor gets to decide when

before taking his own life to follow his Führer. For them life was over because they had lost the war, because their struggle to conquer and subjugate for the primacy of the Aryan race, which rendered meaning to their very existence, was no longer relevant. Harikiri and *seppuku* are suicidal methods, which have held death and dignity in a delicate balance for respectable men in the Japanese society.

Thus when suicide is the honourable exit for the mighty, it's also the escape for the meek. Parents,

kind of a psychological malfunction? Do people lose their minds before they arrive at a decision to withdraw themselves from this world? How do they convince themselves to throw away life, while others are ready to kill for it?

Suicide is often made dramatic as if to signify the life it's about to erase. In 1970, a newscaster named Chris Hubbock shot herself during broadcast right after she finished rattling off, "And now, in keeping with Channel 40's policy of always bringing you the latest in

to attempt suicide are young women between 15 and 19 years. About 25 per cent of the population personally know someone who has committed suicide. Most common causes of suicide are single marital status, unemployment, social deprivation, history of physical or sexual abuse, social isolation and alcohol or drug problems. Women have a special reason to attempt suicide, which is if they suffer from eating disorder. The most frequently used method in suicide attempts is self-poisoning, about

die anyway in the end, and suicide only hastens the inevitable. But then suicide is also cowardice laced in courage. Why would anybody dare taking his own life unless he is desperate to escape from this world? Suicide is often like burning the house to kill the termites.

Yet people live as they die, and some of them take their own lives when living becomes unbearable. But that isn't true all the time. Michael Hutchence, a member of the Australian rock group INXS, hanged himself to death in a suspected case of autoerotic asphyxiation. Autoerotic asphyxiation arose out of the observation that men executed by hanging often got an erection and sometimes ejaculated. It's described in detail in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Why it works is unclear. The simplest explanation is that lack of oxygen causes lightheadedness, reducing inhibitions and enhancing the sexual experience.

At times, therefore, suicide is unintended death although its performer is aware of the risk in it. The same thing is true for explorers, adventurers, conquerors, rulers, and heroes who have died to bring forth a good cause. They knew they could die before they embarked on their risks. That makes every noble cause a suicidal act. Although every suicide may not be a noble act, the realisation that one isn't capable of it also pushes one over the edge.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

## CROSS TALK

**In a sense, suicides are volunteers in a fixed game. People must die anyway in the end, and suicide only hastens the inevitable. But then suicide is also cowardice laced in courage. Why would anybody dare taking his own life unless he is desperate to escape from this world? Suicide is often like burning the house to kill the termites.**

the curtain will drop during the show.

Suicide is a lot like leaving a theatre in the middle of a movie or cutting off a conversation when one is bored. If man is mortal, suicide predestines it like a reservation clerk who breaks the serial for a small payoff and brings forward the doctor's appointment for a patient who arrives late. Suicide is premature death; it's early cashing in of life because the present value of future streams of staying alive isn't worth one's time.

At times suicide is the last resort, the end of the rope for men and women who have no other recourse. Hitler committed suicide when his defeat was certain, and Goebbel killed his children and wife

who fail to provide for their children, kill their children and then take their own lives. Dishonoured women often commit suicide in shame and anger for the plunder of their jewels in the hands of insensitive men. A rickshaw driver killed himself in northern part of Bangladesh because he couldn't find justice for his daughter who was raped. During the Buddhist crisis in South Vietnam in the spring of 1963, a monk immolated himself in downtown Saigon in protest against the government's favouritism of Catholics.

But the biggest question is how people arrive at their decision to commit suicide, meek and mighty alike. Is it an emotional imbalance, a sentimental overcharge or some

blood and guts, in living colour, you're about to see another first -- an attempted suicide." Some people prefer to die with a bang, while others do it with a whimper.

Somehow the decision to take one's life is rooted in a conflict. All suicides are misfits, people who fail to cope with their environment, therefore suffering from misgivings, doubts, fears, betrayals, and diffidence that put them in a void. Somehow everyone lives two lives, one inside and another outside, one that faces him and one that faces the world. When these two worlds drift apart, the person falls through the crack.

Statistics show that 75 per cent of those who fall through the crack are men. But then most likely group

85.4 per cent according to a survey.

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche extolled suicide as a great source of comfort, because it enabled the calm passage across many a bad night. Suicide gives those who need it, an option to cop out if life is no longer relevant, interesting or useful. A film director named James Whale took his own life in 1957 and gave his reason for it in a suicide note, "The future is just old age and illness and pain.... I must have peace and this is the only way." To some people, suicide is the end of life for a new beginning, it's like surrendering the old licence for renewal, eschewing the old to embrace the new.

In a sense, suicides are volunteers in a fixed game. People must

# Nine/eleven and 'a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind'

ZAFAR SOBHAN

**T**WO years afterwards seems an appropriate date to reflect on the co-ordinated terrorist strikes on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon on the morning of September 11, 2001 and on how America has responded to its unprecedented tragedy.

It was early morning and I was still pattering around my tiny West-side apartment drying my hair absent-mindedly with a towel and rubbing the sleep from my eyes. The TV was blaring something about a plane flying into each of the Twin Towers though no-one could tell whether this was some kind of accident or deliberate. Could the first one have been an accident and the second some kind of botched rescue attempt? There were also scattered unconfirmed reports of planes being hijacked from JFK and Boston but no-one was putting the two together yet. I hurried downstairs. The subway to work wasn't working -- bad sign -- the train originated at the World Trade Centre -- so I hailed a passing cab and getting in told the cabbie to put the radio up. A third plane had just flown into the Pentagon. That

settled it. This was no accident.

Crowds of my colleagues had gathered visibly anxious and frightened -- at the reception area next to my office to gaze tearfully through the floor-to-ceiling picture window at the devastation just south of us. I preferred to observe in solitude through the window in my own office hoping that no-one I knew at my previous firm -- I had myself worked in Tower One for two years until September 2000 -- was caught up in the inferno. I remember that it was just as I was thinking to myself how fortunate that the towers had been hit so high that they looked unlikely to fall -- that the top of Tower One began to crumble spewing massive clouds of dust and debris and collapsing in on itself one floor after another all but vapourising as the tower disintegrated before my eyes.

The next few days I still remember with some measure of shock and disbelief: walking home on foot in the blazing heat through crowds of panic-stricken New Yorkers -- being glued to the TV and the endless loop of the planes hitting buildings and the buildings coming down for the next 48 hours -- the massive despairing candle-light vigils held by friends and family of

**The emotion on both sides was genuine and -- for all its tragedy -- 9/11 marked a real opportunity in America's relationship with the rest of the world. However the vast reservoirs of good-will and sympathy that were spontaneously generated in the wake of 9/11 have been squandered by President Bush's arrogant unilateralism and evident contempt for what the US Constitution calls "a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind."**

those who were still missing and in the days immediately following it seemed as though the Americans had understood and appreciated the reaction of the world to their plight. In his address to the nation and the world shortly after 9/11 President Bush seemed to manfully hold back tears of gratitude as he overflowed with thanks for the world community's generous response and vowed that America would never forget it.

The emotion on both sides was genuine and -- for all its tragedy -- 9/11 marked a real opportunity in America's relationship with the rest of the world. However the vast reservoirs of good-will and sympathy that were spontaneously generated in the wake of 9/11 have been squandered by President Bush's arrogant unilateralism and evident contempt for what the US Constitution calls "a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind."

those who were still missing and in the days immediately following it seemed as though the Americans had understood and appreciated the reaction of the world to their plight. In his address to the nation and the world shortly after 9/11 President Bush seemed to manfully hold back tears of gratitude as he overflowed with thanks for the world community's generous response and vowed that America would never forget it.

The emotion on both sides was genuine and -- for all its tragedy -- 9/11 marked a real opportunity in America's relationship with the rest of the world. However the vast reservoirs of good-will and sympathy that were spontaneously generated in the wake of 9/11 have been squandered by President Bush's arrogant unilateralism and evident contempt for what the US Constitution calls "a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind."



In its every action both before and since 9/11 the Bush administration has shown a truly breathtaking indifference to popular opinion beyond its shores (and within its shores too for that matter). The tone of its foreign policy seems calculated to offend and to show disregard for the sentiments of others. Shortly after its election the Bush administration moved quickly to pour scorn on the Kyoto Accord and the ICC and to impose its views on matters from UN public health funds to abrogation of the ABM treaty.

The outpouring of sympathy and good-will following 9/11 was if nothing else an opportunity for the Bush administration to put its foreign policy on a different track. Sadly, the administration has resisted this approach at every turn. The war on Iraq which the US has lied and blustered and bullied its way into is the perfect example of the Bush administration's utter disregard and contempt for the opinion of others. Nothing could convince the world more of the administration's arrogance and xenophobia than the manner in which it has rushed to war and continues to mishandle the peace and to resist all dissenting opinion.

Nevertheless, on this second anniversary of 9/11 I would urge the world not to give America up as lost and to reflect on the fact that President Bush was elected with less than 50 per cent of the popular vote and is becoming increasingly unpopular in the US. I would suggest that arrogance and xenophobia and contempt for the world is not endemic to the US but is a trade-mark feature of the Bush administration and represents an approach which is supported by a distinct minority of the country. In addition, bear in mind that the populace has been cowed both by the unprecedented events of 9/11 as well as the administration's blatant scare-mongering and so support for an over-aggressive foreign policy can perhaps also be understood in this context.

But there is hope. One should not confuse the Bush administration and its arrogance and swagger with the sentiments of the US population as a whole. The Declaration of Independence was written in 1776 out of "a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind" and 225 years later there are still many Americans who harbour such a sentiment -- and some of them are even running for President.