

Travel alert

No Bangladeshi link to international terror

IT seems as though the travel alerts issued by the US and Australia for their citizens traveling to Bangladesh, and the report issued by Canada that Bangladesh may be emerging as a haven for Islamic terrorists in South Asia, were in the end not such dire warnings after all.

Canada declined even to follow up its report with a warning to its own citizens, and the US and Australia clarified that their advisories were merely fresh extensions of previous alerts. The US ambassador termed his state department's alert a public announcement to keep US citizens in Bangladesh cautious that fell short of an official travel warning, going so far as to add that the US was satisfied with security measures taken by the Bangladesh government.

Nevertheless, the government was right to respond as it did, and we would like to second its statement on local links to international terror. The US travel alert, which warned its citizens to remain vigilant in public places frequented by foreigners and to avoid large crowds, seemed particularly on the alarmist side. The government is correct to state that foreign citizens are generally secure in Bangladesh and that no Bangladeshi has been held anywhere in the world in connection with international terror.

This is not to say that we don't have problems of our own with law and order and political unrest and even with acts of domestic terrorism. But let us not confuse our real problems that urgently need to be addressed with phantom ones that run the risk of diverting resources from where they are truly needed.

These kind of travel advisories and reports can tarnish the image of Bangladesh overseas and could have a negative impact on trade, foreign investment and tourism to name only a few sectors. As such, it is important that we speak up and set the record straight.

Death in remand

Let the probe get to the bottom of it

THE death in police remand of an accused in Chittagong business magnate Jamal Choudhury abduction case has raised a host of questions. The investigation into the case is now travelling further into gray areas, after months of abortive attempts by police to arrest the abductors.

Finally, they got hold of a man suspected to have had a role in the crime. But his death in remand, which police claim to have been due to a natural cause, is destined to give rise to misgivings in the public mind as it already has.

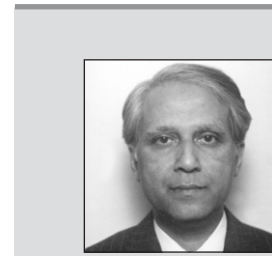
Allegations of custodial death have to be taken very seriously because these relate to a blatant violation of human rights. Though it is the first incident in 25 years insofar as the CMP is concerned, the fact remains that 61 deaths were recorded in police and jail custody in the country in the first nine months of the current year. Dispensation of justice is greatly obstructed when such deaths occur. What is also to be noted here is that the unnatural deaths come under international scrutiny.

The progress in the Jamal Choudhury abduction case has been too slow, if any. People began to believe that they were getting only a partial view of the whole episode. Public resentment is growing because police cannot even say whether the man is still alive or not.

One wonders whether the death of Amar Kanti Das will not be a setback to the investigation process.

A three-member probe body is reported to have been formed to find out what really happened. We believe the truth regarding such a death should be unearthed not only for the sake of investigation into the case, but also to serve the cause of human rights, justice and fair play.

Intervention and international issues



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

these conflicts and the instability that could result from these situations for the wider world. Some political analysts now claim that it was a "no man's land of international law" and the international community had floundered because it was without clear guidelines on "when to go in" or intervene.

Recent events in Iraq and Afghanistan have again raised the important question of when we can intervene in the affairs of

merely became a subset of what arose from different political contexts. There seemed to be an emerging consensus that intervention was justified in situations in which there was a clear threat to peace and security but doubt remained as to preemptive self-defence.

Discussion in different meetings generally agreed that threats emanating from internal situations, including acts of tyranny, or gross human rights violations (as

However, this responsibility not being clearly defined has led to a conceptual vacuum with the Iraq crisis. The problem of legality has been further compounded by the probability of internal instability giving rise to terrorism. Rationale for intervention in Iraq has now consequently shifted to tyranny and suffering of the people, which is closely linked to human rights questions. It is now being used to justify intervention in Iraq whereas the WMD argu-

the international community was won over with the argument as to what was the bigger threat, allowing mass killings to go on in Kosovo, or going against international law by circumventing the UNSC? Some jurists now claim that the action taken in Kosovo led to the UN suffering from a loss in credibility. Others argue that this might appear to be so, but in no way did such course of action reduce the scope of multilateral approval that was required for

provide the willingness to stay, help and actually resolve the problem. After the experience in Iraq, the principles of international law need to be reconfirmed. We need to stick to these rules but at the same time try to identify whether some degree of reform can be brought into the fabric.

An important factor is sometimes forgotten by us. The charter was written and focussed on the state of world affairs in 1945, when internal state situations were not integrated into plans for UN action. International relations have evolved over the last six decades. We now have the primary task of mapping out the scope of threats, identifying the gaps and giving attention to how the situation can be redressed. Addressing the problems related to internal situations of other countries should no longer be construed as a mere matter of altruism.

Now, whether the rest of the world likes it or not, the world agenda is "threat driven," from the Western point of view. The West is taking a defensive reaction against perceived threats. The world in general and the developing countries in particular need a holistic strategy. The question of terrorist attacks, the development and use of WMDs and their consequences, have a certain applicability in contemporary international relations and the evolution of international law needs to take that into consideration. The institution involved with pre-emptive action on WMDs, the international Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA), also needs to be strengthened.

It is of crucial importance that we find a common frame of policy and devise a common structure to address these issues. Unless we do that, intervention in international affairs will create more problems than answers.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

POST BREAKFAST

The world in general and the developing countries in particular need a holistic strategy. The question of terrorist attacks, the development and use of WMDs and their consequences, have a certain applicability in contemporary international relations and the evolution of international law needs to take that into consideration... It is of crucial importance that we find a common frame of policy and devise a common structure to address these issues. Unless we do that, intervention in international affairs will create more problems than answers.

another State. There is significant need to reiterate the premise of primacy of multilateralism within the international system. We have to recognise the existence of certain ground rules for the use of force and the need of getting the UN and regional organisations to perform together to create a world, in which, as former US President Clinton had put it, "the US would be comfortable living when it is no longer the top dog."

When Kofi Annan had initially called for guidelines on intervention in 1999, he met with little more than "trench digging," with developing countries keen on intervention in certain respects but nursing the "old wounds of their colonial past" and developed countries hesitant on the grounds of preserving sovereignty and integrity. As a consequence, the UN Commission focussed on determining the international consensus and changing the language of the debate. In reality, the "when to intervene question"

had been the case in Somalia, Rwanda and Kosovo) gave rise to criteria for possible intervention. These issues were generally framed as the non-intervention in a sovereign state versus the protection of individual human rights.

In the recent past various international jurists and human rights activists have also been focussing on the issue of intervention in terms of victims' rights. They are trying to redefine the notion of sovereignty and the realisation that the Westphalian concept of it needs to be muted and reframed. They are pointing out that sovereignty needs not only to be understood in terms of integrity of territory and borders, but also in terms of responsibility of a state toward its own people. In this regard they are asserting that when a state fails or abdicates in its responsibility for taking care of its citizens, such responsibility then falls on the international community.

ment was earlier used as primary justification.

International responsibility appears to have assumed a three-dimensional perspective to prevent the collapse of a state, to react after the first signs of collapse and to rebuild. One might say that these three fall under the umbrella term of the responsibility to protect. This responsibility also appears to be based on criteria like establishing a just cause for intervention, whether there should be military action, the possible consequences for the civilian population, whether the country would indeed be better off after invasion than before and lastly as to who is the right authority to sanction military intervention. The absence of a clear UN Security Council mandate and the absence of a self-defence principle has made the Iraqi intervention this year difficult to justify.

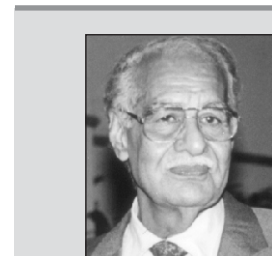
Military intervention in Kosovo, in a manner of speaking, was also in defiance of the UN, but

Iraq.

This debate on intervention will remain unresolved because the institutional structure of the United Nations has become incapable of dealing with large-scale humanitarian issues and is generally dysfunctional in dealing with the real impact of human security in failed states. Except in some areas, the United Nations is facing difficulty in achieving its primary objectives -- conflict prevention, peace keeping and peace building. Two years ago the world re-discovered the common threat of terrorism and starkly realised the insufficiency and inefficiency of existing means to counteract this threat.

Whatever be the different views regarding intervention, one common denominator should be accepted. The consent of the United Nations Security Council should be sought prior to any military intervention. We need to have a legal basis behind our commitment. This will in turn

Communal genie is out



KULDEEP NAYAR

writes from New Delhi

has saturated the three Hindi-speaking states with the Hindutva chauvinism so much that it oozes out support wherever you seek. Even caste, a deeply entrenched feeling, is only second in appeal compared to religion. The BJP does not have to even mention the word Hindu to get a vote. The response is automatic.

Still, after the BJP's sweep, Vajpayee said that they did not play the Hindu card. When you

in the saffronised atmosphere.

In the tribal areas of Chattisgarh, the RSS has been working systematically for the last 25 years. During the last election, the Congress was able to get most of the seats from the area. But this time the RSS had filled the tribals with Hindutva that it had only to take them to the polling booths. In a way, it was similar to the brainwashing done in Gujarat where the tribals were brought to effect

believes it can speak about Hindutva and parivartan (change) in the same breath.

Muslim organisations like the Milli Council and certain individual leaders from the community helped the BJP by appealing to the Muslims to vote either for the Congress or some Muslim candidates they mentioned by name. They tried to play a Muslim card. But it misfired and gave strength to the Sangh parivar's thesis that

on the spot. The RSS is no longer on the defensive and propagates freely that religion and politics go hand in hand. In all the three states, it has had its say in the selection of candidates. Roughly 100 whole-time RSS workers have become members of the three legislative assemblies.

The BJP has also done away with the pretence of being distant from the RSS. Not long ago, both were at pains to prove that they

south. The strategy is familiar. In Bangalore, religious heads of various mutts met to make a unanimous demand for the construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya. Tagodia was there to say that to raise the temple at the site where the Babri masjid stood was "the religious right" of Hindus and those politicians who opposed the construction of the temple should "shift their base to Pakistan."

I have no doubt in my mind that the mandir will be made an issue in a big way in the general election, due any time between now and October next. That the Sangh parivar will polarise the country is not something that worries the BJP. It thrives in such an atmosphere. Efforts are afoot to make dent at places where pluralism stands like a rock. That secular forces are demoralised goes without saying.

Ajit Jogi's case based on a tape-recorded offer to the BJP MLAs to cross over has been referred to the CBI. But Dilip Singh Judo's cash-on-camera scam has made little progress. Before the election results, the opposition had decided not to let the house function if Judo's scam was not sorted out. After the results, the opposition had no courage even to interrupt question hour. The issue before the nation is not whether to strengthen the Congress or look for an alternative but how to save secularism in the country. This, indeed, is a challenge.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

That the Sangh parivar will polarise the country is not something that worries the BJP. It thrives in such an atmosphere. Efforts are afoot to make dent at places where pluralism stands like a rock. That secular forces are demoralised goes without saying... The issue before the nation is not whether to strengthen the Congress or look for an alternative but how to save secularism in the country. This, indeed, is a challenge.

put up Uma Bharti for the Madhya Pradesh chief ministership, you do not have to play any card. Her Hindutva credentials are so clear and categorical that there is no room for anybody to mistake. She was riding the shoulders of Human Resources Minister Murli Manohar Joshi when the fanatics were razing the Babri masjid to the ground. Vasundhara Raje is no stranger to the Hidutva forces either. Her mother, Vijay Raje Scindia, was a topmost BJP leader and stayed at the pinnacle for years. Vasundhara's ideological stand has been too well known. She was also a BJP minister at the centre. The party did not have to play the Hindu card when the candidate was Vasundhara. That she was "Mata Scindia's daughter" was enough to evoke response

killings in Ahmedbad and Vadodara.

Still one thing that surprises me is why the Sangh parivar is underplaying the role of religion in the BJP's victory. It was a saffron sweep. The parivar should feel elated that its relentless efforts have borne fruit, whatever worth it is. Praveen Tagodia of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad was at least frank when he hailed the BJP sweep as "a Hindutva victory." Why should the BJP have a second thought now when it seems that the genie of communalism is out of the bottle completely. This is what the party has been trying since long. Its public support to development is only because of increasing unemployment and the yawning distance between the haves and the have-nots. It

the Muslims organise themselves only as Muslims.

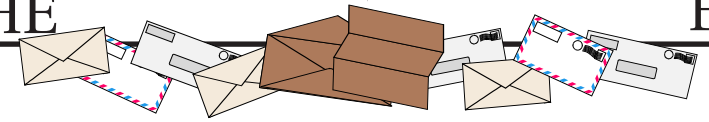
I was amused to hear Civil Aviation Minister Rajiv Pratap Adivi's argument on a TV show that if you drive us to Hindutva, we would be forced to "take up Hindutva." I thought it was the question of one's belief. You do not become parochial because someone provokes you. The BJP is a product of communal politics and it is going to be repeated whether Rudi admits it or not.

A new development in the RSS after the elections is that it has given up the burqa politics and has come out openly in the field. There was a time when it would stay in the background. Its reported linkage with the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi put it

were different. Those who argued that the BJP was a political arm of the RSS were criticised for casting aspersions on its independent political stance. It was considered necessary to play down the Prime Minister's remark in New York that he was a swamy sevak. Even when he stood in knickers at a RSS conclave, the embarrassment caused to his defenders was sought to be rationalised. There was a belief that the façade of the BJP and the RSS as being two separate entities worked far better than the fact that they were one. Now the BJP MPs say at the top of their voice that they are the RSS men. It has become a matter of pride for individuals and the party to trace their political baptism to the RSS.

The RSS is penetrating the

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR 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.

US remitters' problem

After the 9/11 tragedy, the US government has taken many preventing steps to ward off repetition of such heinous crimes.

One such step is restriction on transfer of money from one state to the other by the foreigners residing there. Bangladeshi remitters have been sending their money through Sonali Exchange located in New York. The remitters staying in different states are now unable to send their money through Sonali Exchange, the remitting charges of which are reasonable. Many people are sending money through private banks but the charges are too high, more than thirty times higher than usual.

This restriction of the US government is meant for such criminal groups or persons who could be using funds for destructive purposes. With a little persuasion, our embassy in the US may convince the US authorities to waive such restriction for Bangladeshi remitters up to \$3,000 or so a month. I hope our finance ministry will

urge our embassy officials in the US to negotiate and get the embargo lifted for the remitters. The US government is not against genuine remittances, one must not forget.

AZ Ahmed
House No. 119, Road-2,
Sugandha Residential Area,
Chittagong

Why Concord failed?

I read the write-up of one Mr S M Mansoor, Gulshan who found out the reason of Concord's failure.

When this aircraft was developed in late fifties and early sixties, that is, before the western rockets were fired in the outer space, was the supreme achievement in metallurgical science and pure jet engines. The outer skin of the aircraft was a sheet of high grade Titanium to withstand the very high and very low temperature. The inner layer of the fuselage was impregnated with the outer skin in a manner, which was not known to metallurgical experts of advanced countries, till the time space capsule was fired in this space.

As the concord breaks the sound barrier twice to reach 1450 miles per hour which is double the speed of the Earth's rotation on its axis and faster than a rifle bullet, there is no unusual sensation inside the cabin. You experience only an increased engine thrust. No "sonic booms" are heard inside the aircraft at any time. The only sound is a unique "sizzle" of rushing air, higher in pitch than is heard in subsonic air travel. At 65,000 feet altitude, you can view the curvature of Earth.

For Mr Mansoor's information, I would like to inform that at 65,000 feet altitude the temperature is minus 76 degree Fahrenheit. The very high speed of concord produces enough friction with the atmosphere to cause outside air temperature to rise by over 400 degrees as it passes the tip of the aircraft's nose. This friction is so high as to melt the metal of an aircraft which is not streamlined and outer skin is not technically meant to withstand this heat. As the air streaks past the fuselage, it is still hot enough to boil water. Mr. Mansoor perhaps has no clue to such devel-

opment of material science.

A. K. Azad
604-380 Murray St. Ottawa,
ONK1N8W1, Canada.

Can't we become a bit sympathetic

Like the other day when I got on a Farmgate bound bus, I had to experience the atrocity of some passengers who raised the right of equality intentionally to condone some standing women while waiting for their destined seats. As we all know about the outcome of rush hour co-ordinated with jam and hustle-bustle, people become impatient towards others. Though, after some mumbling and nagging, finally, those concerted intransigent retired before the protest of some of the passengers who are concerned about sympathy rather than the authority of printed declaration "Mohila Aashon". But that was not all, even, the mood of such non-stopping negotiation was still tuning vehemently in the whisper of some of the boarded chaps. I was in bewilderment thinking whether it was a matter of compliance or of

sympathy, since the number of so called sympathisers were few for the spurned women, let alone those stubborn passengers. Besides our reverence towards rules, can't we become a little earnest as we do towards our mother and sister, as well as keeping aside this dispute of the grim of equality?

Saad,
J.U.

Football not the answer

I had a hearty laugh reading Mr. Azad Miah's letter "Will we catch up with the world?" that I thought was written with a lot of boyish enthusiasm. The examples he has cited to justify a game of football (kicking out governments) in Bangladesh is too unrealistic even to be taken half-seriously. For a start, his examples of kicked out leaders mostly represent presidential or similar governments; we have a parliamentary system. Even then, if we would have to play this kicking game, then it will be a game that would never end in Bangladesh, at least not in the

foreseeable future. The leaders waiting in the wings to replace the ladies are no better. So when would Mr. Miah ask us to stop this game of football? Does he intend to write into our constitution a right for the people to kick a government out every time that they are perceived as having failed? Importantly, who are the people and how do they decide?

Seriously, despite the severity of our problems, it would not be fair to conclude that in Bangladesh we need to take as drastic a measure as in, say, Georgia, and kick out a government that the people have elected freely and fairly with almost a 2/3rd majority. Then again, neither the lady now in power nor the other lady in opposition have failed that miserably to deserve the judgement that Mr. Miah has imposed on them. If one were to look at Bangladesh dispassionately, the country has moved ahead, albeit slowly, on the socio-economic aspects of development under this prime minister, as under the leader of the opposition when she was the PM. Our GDP growth has been good under the ladies as is our growth in

areas of export enhancement, education, population control, poverty alleviation, etc. etc.

We have failed most abjectly in the political spheres and in maintaining law and order and arresting corruption. This is where we need to look and where our tragedy as a nation lies for these two areas should be the easiest to resolve given even a moderate sense of goodwill and love for the country among our political leaders. Here the two ladies together with their political colleagues must bear the wrath of the people. The PM who came on an agenda of law and order appeared on course to do her job till she declared amnesty for the army that was doing a fine job. The other lady is crying foul that the PM is protecting criminal godfathers in her party, forgetting she supported well-known terrorists like Joyal Hazari in the last election. In fact, both of them are either directly or indirectly nurturing criminals, allowing the cancer to spread deep into the body politic. Kicking either out won't help solve this problem for their replacements would do the

very same thing. What will solve the problem is for the two ladies with their colleagues to jointly decide to end the criminalisation of our politics because our political leaders and political parties recruit and protect the criminals. We will end this criminalisation only when the political leaders end their links with criminals.

The other major problem, that of corruption, cannot also be ended by the suggested game of football. It has many causes, most important of which is the irrational relationship between the pay of government servants and prices. The causes must be identified and addressed. A change at the top by kicking a PM out will in fact create more corruption. Bangladesh sits on the doorstep of development; a door that our politicians are blocking. We don't need a perpetual game of football. We need just a simple understanding among our political parties not to keep ties with criminals and if they do that, the door will open, assuring us of a bright future.

Shahjahan Ahmed
Dhanmandi R/A, Dhaka