

## Rein in Israel

### Mideast peace at stake

THE world is once again a mute spectator to Israel's utter lack of regard for human lives. The bloodshed and wanton destruction perpetrated on Gaza and Lebanon, on the excuse of right of self-defence is as obnoxious an argument as it is untenable by logic. There is a limit to convoluted arguments being made a pretext for launching actions for fulfilment of long-term strategic objectives. What Israel has done, with the tacit support of its major ally takes us back to the days when the laws of the jungle dominated human relationship.

These acts portend a dangerous future for the Middle East. The vestige of peace in the region that was so long hanging tenuously at best has all but gone and the blatant use of force has come to be the main arbiter. Regrettably, peace has very little chance of succeeding when the chief errand in the region is encouraged by the lone superpower in its acts of violence. This was only too evident when the draft UN resolution that had the backing of the ten members of the Security Council but opposed by the US fell through.

The excuse of self-defence has been carried to the extreme once too often. For the sake of an Israeli soldier the entire Palestinian population in Gaza has been subject to indescribable sufferings at the hands of the Israeli military. How is it possible to abduct representative of a sovereign state as Israel has done by capturing a number of Palestinian legislators? And in trying to wipe out Hezbollah it has killed innocent civilians in Lebanon.

While no doubt the force applied by Israel has been disproportionate we wonder whether use of force that has led to the deaths of innocent civilians in Gaza and Lebanon and the destruction of Lebanon's airport and blockade of its seas is justified at all. To make the infrastructure targets of Israeli bombings only to free kidnapped Israeli soldiers has made the entire population of Gaza and Lebanon helpless hostage to Israeli aggression.

The international community must act with speed to rein in Israel. Not only will their inaction lead to more loss of innocent civilians, there is all the chance that the region will be plunged further into the boiling cauldron, stifling permanently whatever protagonists of peace left in the area.

## SME potential untapped

### Remove the impediments

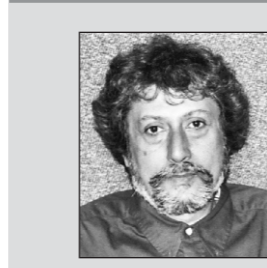
DESPIITE the fact that the small and medium enterprises (SM) are contributing impressively to the growth of the country's economy, a number of impediments still thwart the utilisation of the sector's full potential. Among them are lack of bank finance, lack of security, lack of utility services and infrastructure facilities. For instance, they are depending largely on self-finance, whereas, bank finance accounts for only 10 percent of their capital. These and more interesting facts on SMEs have been revealed by experts in a seminar on "Local Business Dynamics: Ground Realities and Policy Challenges, held in the city on Friday.

We are happy to learn that not only an 'entrepreneurship culture' is growing in the country at local levels, as many as 41 percent of the entrepreneurs were found to be new entrants in business. We believe infusion of new blood would bring diversity and dynamism in the entire business sector. But, it appears from the seminar findings, a great deal more remains to be done to keep the upward trend going. First and foremost, the impediments need to be removed. There are the licensing authorities that are unnecessarily making patenting formalities complex. There is the problem of security and toll collection by the local goons. Then the sector could do with a preferential tax structure something similar to those offered to big time investors. The sector also needs institutional support through networking with others including the local bodies.

The major recommendation that came from the seminar was establishment of an SME foundation, which would make financial assistance available for the entrepreneurs. If we look at the phenomenal growth of China and Malaysia, we would find how SMEs primarily made it possible. Today, some countries are showing interest to relocate their industrial units in Bangladesh.

We feel our entrepreneurs should lose no time to make the best use of this opportunity for the overall development of the country. We hope the relevant authorities would help remove the obstacles that deter many worthwhile initiatives.

## War on Error



SHAHNOOR WAHID

WE have heard about War on Terror, War on Corruption, War on Hunger, War on Poverty, War on Drugs, and so on and so forth. To be candid, there are so many war cries around that the commotion has actually chased "peace" out of the window. Though some of the wars are significant, the rest are merely sound and fury of gargantuan proportion. Therefore, both the utility and futility of these wars should prove to be interesting subjects for the scholars to do research on.

But we are going to talk about a different kind of war here. It is about the one war that we all

missed to wage so far. It is the War on Error. Think of it! This would be the "Mother of all Wars!" In fact, the War on Error would ultimately stop all wars! In this war the enemy is tiny and non-lethal. A simple-looking "error." Therefore it would not require a big army to pin it down and eliminate. Why is this war so important? Good question.

If we look around, we shall discover trace of an error, tiny or big, intentional or unintentional, that has always snowballed into a major catastrophe. This has happened time and again, in our family life, social life, professional life and also in our national life. In our national life we have been facing one catas-

trope after another, all because of an error made by someone, somewhere down the line. As a nation we have often paid a heavy price for that. For some of the errors, we are still paying the installments and paying through the nose.

If we want to look for examples of present day errors, we only have to peep through the window of the election commission of the country. Plentiful errors are file-bound in that office. That office is in a mess all because of an error the top guns made while taking a bureaucratic decision regarding preparation of an authentic and universally acceptable voter list. They made the first error. Then they

tried to side-track it. There they made the second error. Then the third.

Soon the snowballing effect began and today the entire office lies buried under a massive ball of snow. The interesting part of the story is, the people buried underneath are still refusing to accept our rescue attempts, to grab the lifeline thrown at them. They still believe that they can get out of the mess all by themselves! So, one can now hear the huffing and puffing sound coming from below.

At the kitchen market front one would still find footprints of the first error that created another mess of outlandish proportion. The people, who go

to the markets on a daily basis, were the first to detect the error that looked ominous. They sent distress signals to the relevant people on day one. But the bigwigs in the government and administration never bothered to identify or correct that error.

It is because they never learned to take any lesson from history. They thought the error would simply go away one day! What a massive wishful thinking! There they made the second error. Soon the tiny error grew bigger and bigger and swallowed the entire market sector. The bigwigs in the government and administration scratched their heads trying to figure out what went wrong. They are looking everywhere but not at that tiny-winy error they had brushed under the rug long ago.

Today, we see teachers lying on the roads, hungry and thirsty, and exposed to the elements. Shall we also mention "exposed to humiliation"? Why are they on the roads and not in classrooms? What forced them to leave home and come sit on the dirt of city roads? This sordid

situation also tells the story of that tiny-winy error that someone made somewhere, and which is now responsible for creating an explosive situation.

Someone did not care to listen to the words of the teachers in the first place, thereby making the first error. Then when their words turned into angry words, that someone tried to block the road for further talks with them. That was the second error. Then the usual snowballing began taking down everything that came on the way. But, if a war had been launched on error long ago, things would not have come to such a pass.

Error is a word where only the letter "T" is missing. That means an error can turn into something of the proportion of a terror, if given the breeding ground. The terrors of today are fallouts of yesterday's errors. Therefore, the War on Error would leave no room for an error to flourish and proliferate. We should not lose any time to launch this all-important war.

Shahnoor Wahid is a Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

## An unforgivable act

In the final analysis, the Mumbai bomb blasts reminds us of the JMB terrorist activities in Bangladesh which have been contained for the present but make us acutely aware of the vulnerability that we face in our daily life. Neither the pockets of poverty nor the islands of affluence are immune to the terrorist attacks. The world must unite to eliminate this curse from the earth forever if civilization is to reach Francis Fukuyama's final destination.

### KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

SURPRISINGLY Pakistani Foreign Minister Mahmud Ali Kasuri tried to link the July 11 Mumbai bomb blasts with the unresolved Kashmir dispute. Perhaps being on a tour of the US Mahmud Ali Kasuri was not au courant with his president's reaction to the Mumbai carnage. The Pakistan Foreign Ministry, in step with the rest of the world, condemned and rejected the bomb blasts and called for terrorism to be "countered effectively and comprehensively."

Terrorism may have root causes but can never have any justification. It is war taken to the door steps of innocent civilians because the non-state actors do not have the courage and the support of the people at large for their presumed noble cause for which they commit heinous and cowardly acts. These criminals regardless of their religious, ethnic, or any other identity must be pursued relentlessly and given such punishment that hopefully would deter others from following this path.

Mumbai is not a solitary example of terror perpetrated in India. Recently grenades thrown at tourists in Kashmir have killed and injured a number of people

with the result that many Indians who had earlier planned to go to Kashmir during upcoming holidays have now changed their mind and are going elsewhere. India has been the victim of cross-border terrorism for decades supported by external finance and manned by outsiders and their cohorts within the country with training and weapons having been supplied by external actors.

The Mumbai blasts are suspected to have been carried out by Laskar-e-Toiba and the banned Students Islamic Movement of India. Predictably the BJP leaders accused the UPA government of having been lax in meeting terrorist threats like the one that happened in Mumbai. Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and Congress President Sonia Gandhi called for calm and expressed the government's resolve to "defeat the forces of terrorism."

The Oslo Conference of June 2003 that identified some of the pre-conditions setting the stage of terrorism certainly does not apply to India. The conference, inter alia, identified lack of democracy, liberty and rule of law; failed or weak states; historical antecedents of political violence, civil wars, revolution, dictatorship or occupation;

hegemony and inequality of power; corrupt government upheld by powerful external actors; repression by foreign occupation by colonial powers; discrimination based on religious or ethnic origin; social injustice as catalytic agents for terrorism.

India with its age-old traditions resulting from diversity and uninterrupted practice of democracy can hardly be accused of harbouring the contagion of any of these malaises. But then again to claim that all is well in India would be a fallacious premise. The efforts to unite India on the basis of Hindutva or cultural nationalism have not been universally accepted. Indeed many Hindus particularly those belonging to the lower caste, not to speak of Muslims, are reluctant to accept this concept as an adequate replacement of Nehruvian secularism which, perhaps, was the first attempt in the Indian sub-continent to follow, for example, George Holyoke's or Charles Bradlaugh's concept of secularism as not being against religion.

Pandit Nehru's exasperation with "what is called religion or at any rate organized religion in India" expressed in his autobiography does not detract from the

fact that religion plays a very important role in the daily life of the people of this sub-continent. But then, as Yale Professor Paul Bloom points out, the US, the richest and the undisputed leader of the post-cold war world, is a poster child of supernatural belief where about 96% believe in God in the Biblical sense, miracles, devils and angels. As opposed to the Christian conservatives who were believed to be "largely poor, uneducated and easy to command," 40% of the scientists believe in God regardless of Karl Marx's contention that mankind had adopted God as an opiate to soothe the pain of existence, or as claimed by some philosophers that man's devotion to a supernatural deity is because he "cannot deal with chaos" or Freudian interpretation about the necessity of religious belief to exorcise the terrors of nature, particularly the cruelty of fate, as shown in our inevitable end in death.

The problem of humanity is not so much with religion per se as it is with the dogmatic interpretation of faith, Osama bin Laden is perhaps the best living example of this aberration, where death and destruction is meted out with abandon in the name of faith based politics. Religious terrorists are more dangerous than politico-secular terrorists (not that there can be any apology for their acts which are no less directed at civilian men, women and children) because they believe that they are answerable only to their God, an expedient solace to be found in Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard's consideration of the dilemma of whether there can be a "teleological

suspension of the ethical" -- a situation wherein normal moral considerations are justifiably overridden when appealing to a higher ideal comparable, albeit in a different context, to Professor Michael Byers argument of "exceptional illegality" to justify intervention "where a serious threat exists, no invitation can be obtained, and the council (UNSC) is not prepared to act" as distinct from humanitarian intervention advocated by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, or Princeton's Ann Marie Slaughter's Duty to Protect or those who advocate a more expansive interpretation of the UN Charter advocating intervention as a natural adaptation of the concept of "imminence" in today's world of WMD.

After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the international community resolved to hold the instigating, financing, and/or harbouring country as equally responsible as the terrorists and therefore liable to be punished. Given the brutality of the terrorism perpetrated at Mumbai, London, Madrid, New York, Washington, Nairobi and Dar-es-Salam, to name only a few, the international community should be unforgiving of the crimes committed, unrelenting in the pursuit of the terrorists, and resist any temptation to justify terrorism for scoring parochial advantage.

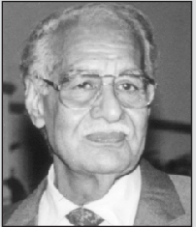
Saarc Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism that embraces Hague Convention of 1970, Montreal Convention of 1971, New York Convention of 1973 and UN Resolution 2625(XXV) among others, enjoins South Asian countries in

particular along with the rest of the world to spare no efforts to bring the culprits of the Mumbai massacre to book. Civilization demands that man be accountable for their actions and if guns are used against unarmed people then bigger guns should be deployed to put them out of commission. In such cases it becomes indeed difficult to quarrel with Bush Doctrine of Pre-emption which Colin Powell had assured the international community was really directed at non-state actors and not at sovereign countries who panicked after the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq, and remain to be convinced in view of continuing diplomatic offensive against Iran with an important part of Washington foreign and defense establishment being allegedly convinced of eventual military conflict with Iran, a belief further strengthened by the removal of Jack Straw from the post of Foreign Secretary because of his public opposition to any military adventure in Iran.

In the final analysis, the Mumbai bomb blasts reminds us of the JMB terrorist activities in Bangladesh which have been contained for the present but make us acutely aware of the vulnerability that we face in our daily life. Neither the pockets of poverty nor the islands of affluence are immune to the terrorist attacks. The world must unite to eliminate this curse from the earth forever if civilization is to reach Francis Fukuyama's final destination.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

## Dhaka is looking up



KULDIP NAYAR  
writes from New Delhi

WHENEVER I have visited Bangladesh in the past, I have wondered whether the country would ever make it. I have often expressed apprehension over the future of 150 million people with practically no natural resources, except gas.

Still I have never lost faith in the Bangladesh people because I have followed them in their liberation struggle. How bravely did they defy the ruthless Pakistan army to be on their own. There is nothing more difficult than to initiate a new order of things. The Bangladeshis did it. First, they created an environment of independence and then established the democratic system which even Pakistan envied.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

I have never lost faith in the Bangladesh people because I have followed them in their liberation struggle. How bravely did they defy the ruthless Pakistan army to be on their own. There is nothing more difficult than to initiate a new order of things. The Bangladeshis did it. First, they created an environment of independence and then established the democratic system which even Pakistan envied. No doubt, the ever-increasing bomb blasts scare you in Bangladesh but back home I found in Mumbai a series of blasts which were no less alarming.

No doubt, the ever-increasing bomb blasts scare you in Bangladesh but back home I found in Mumbai a series of blasts which were no less alarming. Fundamentalists are responsible in Bangladesh, and so is my inference in the case of Mumbai. Too much fanaticism is killing the best in all the three countries Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. Some of their nationals seem involved. Who is controlling them is yet to be known.

But their designs are obvious. They do not want any nation to stay secular or democratic.

There were only freedom fighters when I went to Dhaka within a few days of its inde-

pendence. I heard the slogan "Joi Bangla" at the airport itself. Passengers looked like people returning to the promised-land. They were willing to make any sacrifice to stay free. When Sheikh Mujib-ur Rahman, founder and father of Bangladesh, said: "We will have to turn the independence movement into a struggle for building our country," it sounded more of faith than a program.

Dhaka was then an overgrown town. The countryside was poor and the teeming millions had all the aspirations. Today, Dhaka is an expanding city beaming with confidence and spreading like any world capital. So many offices and

restaurants are coming up that I lost the count by the time I reached the hotel from the airport. The country has already recorded an annual growth rate of six per cent. The yearly remittances are \$6 billion and the trade with India exceeds \$3 billion. Some 33 years ago, I saw nearly every rickshaw-puller in banyan. Today they wear shirts.

Poverty still stares at your face. But then neither the eight per cent growth in India nor the seven per cent in Pakistan has licked poverty. The plus point in Bangladesh is that its people are conscious of their limitations and realise that they have a long distance to go. In con-

trast, the civil society in India and Pakistan believes that it has already arrived. They are oblivious to their social obligation and lead a life which has the parameters of class, caste and the region to which they originally belong.

Unlike India and Pakistan, non-government organisations in Bangladesh have done a tremendous job. The credit given by voluntary bodies has changed the complexion of several parts in the countryside and made people self-sufficient. They are so confident now that the perennial floods do not drive them to cities as was the case a decade ago. They manage their own affairs locally, without depending on the government which in any case is far behind the people's initiative.

The postponement by the Tatas of \$3 billion investment till after the elections early next year is unfortunate. It looks as if Dhaka was not willing to offer the required use of gas lest it should become a poll issue. But the fact is that the impression built over the years is that India's use of gas, however remunerative, is not in the interest of Bangladeshis.

The ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is said to be responsible for this. Probably, things will work out after elections. But, in the meanwhile, the Tata deal postponement may become grist to the propaganda mills in India against Bangladesh. Still when its trade with India exceeds \$3 billion -- and it is increasing all the time -- a reverse in the deal should be taken in its stride both in India and Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is a viable proposition now. Sooner or later, many Tata-like projects will come. All that the people in Bangladesh have to understand is that the gas is a source of wealth when used. It will earn them money for development. The successive governments have used the gas for political battles. Dhaka has come a cropper, not New Delhi. Already more than three decades have been wasted. Imagine the amount of foreign exchange Bangladesh would have earned to spend on development.

In fact, the bias against India, visible during the BNP's rule is disconcerting. A country cannot live with its neighbour in enmity when the two have so much in

common, besides the long border. Culturally, Dhaka and Kolkata are so close to each other that even at hostile meetings the songs of Rabindra Nath Tagore and Nazam-ul-Islam are sung at both places. However, Bangladesh's problems, regarding minorities, a recent report by South Asian Human Rights says, are no different from those of India and Pakistan. This similarity emanates from the centuries old common, historical, cultural and political background. The point to worry about in Bangladesh is that public and political culture appears increasingly premised on playing the religious majority card and marginalising minority groups despite a long history of accommodation and tolerance of diversity.

The Jamaat-e-Islami, a constituent of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's government, has played havoc in the country because it has all the official patronage to vitiate the atmosphere. Islamists have injected fundamentalism even in remote villages where Muslims and Hindus have lived side by side for centuries. It is evident that Bangladesh is undergoing a

process of belated Islamisation that is threatening a more inclusive and hybrid Bengali national ideology.

They are after the Ahmadiyas these days. The hate politics is being engineered against them and they are a victim of the worst type of crimes. The pressure on the government is so immense and relentless that the Ahmadiyas may even be declared as non-Muslims as in Pakistan.

Still, a Bangladeshi is offended if you compare him with a Pakistani in any way. The Bangladeshis have neither forgotten nor forgiven the Pakistanis for what their army or the Punjabi culture did to them. Time may heal wounds. In the meanwhile, Islamabad would do well to repatriate some three lakh "Biharis," the stranded Pakistanis, who have been living in Bangladesh for the last 34 years in deplorable physical and psychological conditions.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.