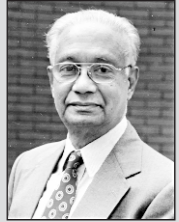


Israel's arrogance may lead to its own peril



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

The situation in Lebanon is out of control. Israel has said it must "finish" its job. A US official has said that Israel needs time to "defang" Hezbollah. The international community which has been looking for an immediate cease-fire to save innocent lives on both sides should see the areas of interest of both America and Israel in the Middle East. So Israel has been allowed time and Israeli killing machines continue their operations against men, women and children of Lebanon and Palestine. Some Israeli men, women and children would also be sacrificed in the process by Israeli leadership.

If I were an Israeli I would have certainly asked my leaders as to what future does Israel have when it could not come to terms with Arab neighbours even after 57 years of its existence in the region. Future appears bleak because of its arrogance. Its arrogance and land greed may destroy the Road Map initiative and strengthen Hezbollah-Hamas aim and drive to One-State solution against Jewish extremists' "Greater Israel" based on the myth of the Biblical "Promised Land."

Does Israel derive such arrogance from America? This question leads one to suggest that Israel is an extension of America in the region already equipped with nuclear weapons. Israel is a mighty military power and goes for collective punishment of the Arab population whenever it chooses to do so even for small offences committed by any one of them in the region.

It is known to the world that several Arab countries and particularly Palestinians and Lebanese are at war with Israel as the latter is an occupier of the Arab land. Israel occupies major part of Palestine and still occupies Sheba farm which Lebanon claims to be its territory. So sudden killing of one or two Israeli soldiers and abduction of another by the Palestinians (Hamas) which happened on June 25 should have been treated as normal war actions against mass killing of Palestinians by Israel from time to time. The offer of Hamas was exchange of Arab prisoners in Israeli jail.

This would have enabled Corporal Gilad Shalit to walk back home. Instead Israel went for "disproportionate" military response. Result was obvious massive destruction of Palestinian lives and properties in Gaza. Kassam rockets did not stop; they continued to fly over to Israel to do some small mischief there. It is quite possible that under the present volatile situation Corporal Shalit

may have to be carried back home instead of his walking back home.

Lebanon episode was similar retaliation from Hezbollah, probably timed to coincide with Hamas operation, against Israel's continued occupation of Sheba farm and keeping thousands of Arabs including Lebanese nationals in Israeli jail. Hezbollah killed eight (some say three) Israeli soldiers and kidnapped two more and sought exchange of them against Arab prisoners in Israeli jails something that Hamas also demanded. There are, of course, questions whether Hezbollah should have done it at all at this stage knowing well the nature of Israeli government. But, anyway, it happened. The sensible and indeed best course for Israel would have been to engage the other concerned governments (President Mahmud Abbas of Palestinian Authority and western supported Lebanese government), where such episodes took place, and negotiate the release of the kidnapped soldiers. The world would have supported Israel and blamed Hezbollah.

If the lives of the soldiers were more important to Israel than show of its arrogance and military might, Israel could easily release many Arab prisoners, if not all, to obtain the release of the kidnapped soldiers. It did so before and later captured even more to compensate for the reduction of Arab population in the Israeli jail. One of the parents of the kidnapped Israeli soldiers said in his interview to the media that Israel earlier entered into such negotiations and obtained good results, but he was baffled that this time Israel decided to launch a war which has made the fate of his son terribly uncertain.

Indeed, the whole world is helpless when it comes to dealing with Israel as America will always do whatever it takes to protect Israel. This is why when the rest of the G8 countries in St. Petersburg summit last wanted ceasefire, American

President Bush continued to harp on the same theme that Israel has the right to defend itself.

Yes, Israel has the right to defend itself, but not by destroying another country. Indeed, President Bush looked very agitated, even more agitated than Israeli PM Ehud Olmert, when he spoke about the situation in Lebanon as if he was defending his own country. He continued to press on the point even during his private mutterings, unfortunately when the microphone was on, with Prime Minister Blair that Syria must do something to stop Hezbollah.

How could Syria help when Syria was out of Lebanon? President Bush also said "the root of the problem is Hezbollah." Hezbollah is, of course, a problem but Israel is the bigger problem as the occupier of the Arab land. If occupation is vacated, there will be no more of such "problem" Hezbollah and Hamas as resistance groups (terrorist in the eyes of Israel and the western world) will disappear. Who wants to sacrifice life unnecessarily?

What has Israel achieved by launching a deadly war against Lebanon, where America and the western world took painstaking efforts recently to install pro-western government? Has it got back its kidnapped soldiers? No, and the chances of getting them back alive appear very slim today.

Israel has destroyed the economy of Lebanon, which was trying to emerge from destruction earlier inflicted by Israel and civil war over a period of some 20 years. Israel has destroyed its airport, sea port, roads, bridges, culverts, civilian homes, hospitals, schools, power plants, etc. These are certainly not Hezbollah hideouts. Israel destroys everything in the name of destroying Hezbollah. Can Israel destroy Hezbollah? No, it has indeed gained huge strength now.

Above all, Israel has killed over 300 people, men women and

children, in Lebanon and about 19 Lebanese soldiers. Prime Minister Fuad Siniora said more than one thousand Lebanese civilians have been injured. Over half a million Lebanese have left home and become refugees in Syria and other Arab states. Similar destructive forces are also being used in Gaza. Helpless and innocent Palestinians were killed by Israeli gun fire.

Israel launched terrible war against Lebanon and Palestinian territory knowing fully well that these are unarmed countries and they have no means to fight a war against mighty Israel. Could Israel launch such a war against a country equally equipped militarily? No, not at all. This is why it seems that Iran has been trying to have some deterrent in the form of nuclear bombs which could enable her to face nuclear Israel. Israel has been seriously blaming Iran for Lebanon crisis.

Delivery of such "disproportionate" and excessive force against the helpless population of a sover-

ign country like Lebanon and Palestinians amounts to war crime as a responsible government of a civilized country can never resort to such a massive war to obtain release of only three soldiers. Such a thing is unheard of in the civilized world.

The world has not turned out to be uncivilized; the UN is still working, though American unilateralism has somewhat marginalised the UN. The UN could help deal with situations like this and obtain release of kidnapped soldiers. But Israel has hardly anything to do with the UN. As long as America is there, Israel has nothing to worry. Indeed, the root of all problems in the Middle East is Israeli occupation and not Hezbollah, though sometimes Hezbollah acts irrationally.

The loss on Israeli side during nine days of war is also fairly high by Israeli standards. So far about 15 Israeli civilians and some 14 Israeli soldiers have been killed. Was it worth the release of three soldiers? This was simply unneces-

sary. Good diplomacy with some flexibility could do the job. The release of kidnapped soldiers should have been the major aim of Israel. Delivery of rockets could have been taken care of on temporary basis, but it is a matter that should be in the long term agenda in the context of over all vacation of occupation and establishment of peace.

Israel has not learnt any lesson from its past mistakes. It has again sent ground troops into South Lebanon, which it was forced to vacate in 2000 after sacrificing a great number of Israeli lives against even a bigger number of Lebanese lives. It is known that Israel vacated South Lebanon because of Hezbollah and this is why even the present pro-western Lebanese government says Hezbollah is a resistance force though Israel and its friends say it is a terrorist organization. Under the present world order there is no acceptable definition of terrorism. So if the resistance forces are terrorists, then the occupiers are bigger terrorists.

The occupier Israel merrily kidnaps and keeps in custody foreign government ministers and parliament members, openly assassinate other countries' political leaders, indulges in death of civilians and destruction of civilian assets and government establishments. It does all these with total impunity. The whole world keeps quiet on such violation of international law by Israel or just uses the hollow word "restraint" which means nothing to Israel. It says it

wants to finish the job of disarming Hezbollah as called for by the UN resolution 1559. But as experts like Gary Zatzman, a member of Jewish community point out, 1559 never called for disarming Hezbollah: "Resolution 1559 represents everything that has become so odious about the entire Security Council process at the UN. The provision interpreted as demanding Hezbollah to disarm says zero about Hezbollah. It says non-governmental militias that threaten the integrity of Lebanese state should be disarmed.... But the present (pro-western) Lebanese government ... does not consider the Hezbollah's militia as a threat to the integrity of Lebanese territory."

Israel says its incursion into south Lebanon on the seventh day of its operation is a temporary one but it is undoubtedly an invasion of a sovereign territory. Reports show heavy fighting between Israeli ground forces and Hezbollah fighters. Hezbollah also wanted ground fight as it cannot conduct aerial fighting. America and Israel say Syria and Iran are providing arms to Hezbollah. Now the question is: who provided arms including nuclear weapons to Israel?

The Stabilization Force that was discussed in G8 summit at St. Petersburg last week may go to Lebanon only after the UNSC approves the same. It would take some time. Better course for Israel would be to move out of South Lebanon immediately. With Ariel Sharon out of action, one would have expected better handling of

the situation in Israel. But Ehud Olmert seems to be more arrogant than his mentor Ariel Sharon. It is unfortunate that even Shimon Peres appeared to have lost his good sense that enabled him to share the Nobel Peace Prize with Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat.

The situation in Lebanon is out of control. Israel has said it must "finish" its job. A US official has said that Israel needs time to "defang" Hezbollah. The international community which has been looking for an immediate cease-fire to save innocent lives on both sides should see the areas of interest of both America and Israel in the Middle East.

So Israel has been allowed time and Israeli killing machines continue their operations against men, women and children of Lebanon and Palestine. Some Israeli men, women and children would also be sacrificed in the process by Israeli leadership.

However, it should be remembered that no power on Earth, starting from the Pharaohs through big empires like Greek, Roman, Persian, etc, all the way to Hitler could finish their jobs. They all had to abandon and go; all joined the pages of history. Same would happen to others too; only good deeds and good humanitarian works would prevail and not military might and arrogance.

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Israeli air strikes continue in Lebanon (left) and Gaza (right).



PHOTO:AFP

Bombing investigations and unsavoury questions



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

STRAIGHT LINE

We will definitely put ourselves and our future generation in peril by our inability to let a truly professional investigating agency grow in accordance with the dictates of the law. Viewing criminal occurrences from a political angle only will be ruinous because that would not only be a damper to the growth of professionalism but also in the process shatter the remaining confidence reposed in the vital institutions of the State.

JUSTIFIABLE worries have been ventilated about the fate of investigation of bombing incidents in Bangladesh with particular reference to 'Udichi' tragedy of March 1999. It may be relevant to mention here that the connected criminal case ended in chargesheet in December 1999 and the trial finally concluded in 2006. All accused persons have been let off for insufficient evidence and the investigating officer faces a stricture from the court for apparently perfunctory work. The question as to who is at fault and in what degree can be established only by scrutinising all the related papers and documents by competent personnel.

In the fitness of things every criminal case should be disposed of on its own merit. That is the ideal. There are, however, objective conditions in Bangladesh to doubt that the fate of some cases, if not many, did not have the benefit of such ideal standard. The inordinate delay in the holding of trial of the 'Udichi' incident should not escape the attention of concerned commentators. Some cynics said that the expeditious holding of this trial may have produced different findings. This writer is not sure but would like to dwell upon certain facts and circumstances of our socio-political existence and in particular the perilous political polarisation of our society that has a definite bearing upon the basic regulatory function of investigation by the state agency, the police.

If the investigating agency stands accused of being dictated by the wishes of successive political regimes as has been commented upon, then we need to find out why this has happened. In the same vein one needs to know why some very high-profile politically sensitive accused did not have the benefit of obtaining bail in any one of the multiple cases lodged against him at a particular point of time but subsequently got it in all the cases with the ushering in of another political regime. It is not for this writer to ascertain the varying

judicial wisdom but the concerned members of public get upset when they see the same accused (since convicted) being sought after by the powers that be. Does not such a scenario send disconcerting and conflicting signals to the investigating agency whose operatives have learnt to live with the reality? The cynics might say that consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds and as such our investigative agencies must be able to appreciate the dynamics (!) of emerging political reality.

The pernicious culture of playing to the tune of unscrupulous political masters or pandering to their unholly wishes by the investigating agencies and other sensitive State agencies has not occurred all on a sudden. Spells of unconstitutional rule, particularly during 1982-90, have substantially damaged the ethos of our public service including the investigating agencies. While leadership deficits account for some malfeasance, the real damage has been done by an insensitive and myopic dictatorial establishment that was hell-bent to screw all regulatory and corrective institutions. The unwholesome effect of such institution-bashing is now being felt by a concerned citizenry. One is, however, not oblivious of the fact that the democratically elected but temperamentally dictatorial regimes since 1991 have been any better in realising the damage done to the professionalism of the services. The halo and elan of public service has meant little to the political leadership who have spent more time and energy in fostering the growth of pliable and time-serving personnel for achieving their selfish goals.

While the public's right to be informed cannot be denied and the nation's concern for the safety and security of innocent lives cannot be brushed aside, we will perhaps do well to look at the factual dimension of the bomb blasts in a dispassionate manner. Almost immediate apportioning of blame mostly on rivals of the other camp by responsible persons after each occurrence has become a pathetic recurrent reality. Indiscreet and

informed comments in such sensitive matters further compound the environment in our society where almost everybody -- from the humble to the mighty -- has some expertise on law and order, observes a cynic who has been in the business of law and order for quite some time.

Unfortunately, not many people realise that dangerously accusatory comments even before the investigation has started to create an undesirable influence on the investigators, particularly in our society for reasons that perhaps do not need elaboration. This, however, does not mean that our investigators invariably tailor their investigations according to the dictates of the authority as often alleged in the media. Nor are they indulging in the dangerous game of playing to the gallery as is the practice in some segments of our administration. What, however, is not attracting our attention is the predicament of the investigating agency in a situation marked by opposing pulls and lack of adequate scientific supports. Investigations of bomb blast cases need sustained painstaking efforts in a professional manner without any influence peddling. Readers may recollect the time, energy and resources devoted to the investigation of the explosion incident that led to the death of Rajiv Gandhi of India. It needs to be emphasised that unnecessary and motivated haste in the investigation of such cases might prove counter-productive.

The police including the central outfit of CID (Criminal Investigation Department) have been portrayed as having very little or no technical expertise and therefore, deemed as incapable of satisfactorily investigating bomb blast cases. That is the impression one gets if one has to go by the media reports. These reports often do not mention that technical expertise is only one part of the investigative process, that collection of non-physical evidence on the basis of sound and credible intelligence plays a major part, that our police officers trained outside the country do not find adequate technical and organisational sup-

port on return to efficiently operate, that some such bomb incident cases ended in chargesheet and did not have the benefit of expeditious trial and last but not the least, the difficulties experienced by investigating officers in the face of virulent claims and counter claims of culpability loudly made by leaders from across the political divide.

While the police must unearth and detect the bomb blast cases and prevent such incidents from happening by dint of quality intelligence, they cannot be expected to put a complete stop to such incidents because of circumstances beyond their control. Extreme views advocating and implementing annihilation of the opponent is a sad socio-political reality of our society and in rooting out this menace the police is at best a marginal player. Similarly, the so-called extermination campaign of class enemy by apparently ideological motivated elements cannot be effectively controlled by adopting a purely conventional law and

order approach. Extremism of the so-called fundamentalist variety can be countered by a joint strategy of persuasion and tough action, with political direction being conspicuously pronounced.

In all these matters, the acumen needed is political sagacity and patience to fight the painfully long battle against extremist depredations and insurgency. If it is a political battle with armed support and not the other way, we will definitely overcome the present predicament sooner than apprehended. Violence must not be allowed to be a way of our life along with a political consensus to abjure it. The police, admittedly, in this regard have a secondary role to perform and that relates to prevention of some description and intensive investigation once the damage has been done. Let us make sustained efforts to facilitate the organisation in acquiring the hallmarks of a professionally upright body.

First of all, it has to be ensured that following a bomb blast leaders

of the political parties do not engage themselves in an acrimonious blame game and thus help and facilitate the investigators to do their job in a professional manner. Political or ideological linkage, if any, would be brought to light if the occurrence is treated like a criminal offence. A pre-conceived notion about possible perpetrators will more often lead to the harassment of innocent citizens while the real criminals will move unhindered. We must ensure that in upholding the public's right to be informed, a situation is not willy-nilly created wherein the entire process amounts to an investigation by the media. Needless to mention, such a scenario will seriously prejudice the rights of the victims and the interest of the prosecution because in our legal system the onus is on the defendant/criminal is guilty beyond the least shadow of doubt. Let us remember that the anger, excitement and the euphoria will not be there at the time of trial before the court which will pronounce its verdict on the basis of cold facts and credible evidence.

Secondly, there is a pressing need of adequate training, both in-country and external to be organised along with simultaneous creation of exclusive units in selected places. These units must have sufficient technical support to conduct the initial investigation. Since these exclusive units will not

attract volunteers for practical reasons, it would be necessary to provide them very attractive incentives (material and non-material) for drawing the proper talents from the police organisation. At the same time very intensive or in-depth exposure will not be necessary at this stage as the Armed Forces expertise can always be counted upon as supplementary assistance.

Thirdly, increased support needs to be given for strengthening the laboratory of CID that has a ballistics section in a less-than-modern condition. Some high quality and high priced capital equipment have to be bought for this section for providing technical support to the investigators whose reports, strengthened by such support will automatically assume considerable significance evidence wise. Consequently, it would be easier to convict the mischief makers.

In a perilously polarised polity where criminals enjoy political patronage, criminal activities are accorded respectability for so-called political compulsions and a loathsome all-pervasive distrust between different social and political groups prevail, the predicament of police investigators who have the double jeopardy of being less-than-credible in the eyes of the law of the land and the members of public, can only be appreciated by a reasoned observer. Our investi-

gators definitely suffer from inadequate scientific support but even under the present circumstances they can achieve commendable success. Our investigators for reasons known, do not operate in a favourable environment where helpful information comes voluntarily from members of public but still like our physicians they do good clinical investigation without laboratory support by virtue of their intuition, gut reaction and the limited information network.

We will definitely put ourselves and our future generation in peril by our inability to let a truly professional investigating agency grow in accordance with the dictates of the law. Viewing criminal occurrences from a political angle only will be ruinous because that would not only be a damper to the growth of professionalism but also in the process shatter the remaining confidence reposed in the vital institutions of the State. We still have pockets of excellence in our investigative outfits and it shall be in the fitness of things to allow such outfits to attain professional excellence without being tainted by any direction. Let the actual facts and circumstances of the incident be ascertained as is the job of the investigator and let that be placed before the court for adjudging the guilt.

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Many an incident of bomb blast occurred in Dhaka (left) and elsewhere (Gazipur) after Udichi.

