

Dhaka, Sunday, September 25, 1994

Despicable

The venue of political terrorism has perhaps temporarily shifted from the campus to the railway stations and even beyond - into the interior of the adjacent townships. The gun was trained on a mobile target for a change this time around. The passenger-packed inter-city train Rupsa pulling before Ishurdi and Natore with the opposition leader Sheikh Hasina on board launching her campaign for a neutral caretaker government, fell victim to a torrential gunfire on Friday Earlier in the day. Awami League processionists were interceded reportedly by BNP activists, a hundred cocktails were blasted in the ensuing clashes, police opened fire, an Awami League dais was pulled down and the general public ran for their lives. It was Dante's inferno - relived.

But where was the provocation for all these to happen? The opposition leader Sheikh Hasina was obviously within her rights to propagate her views so long as she did it peacefully. Mass contact through railway journeys is not a novel idea. topmost government and opposition leaders do it in other countries so routinely without ruffling any feathers. Placing hindrances on the way of such a programme can complicate matters both politically and administratively. As for the ill-fated train it was delayed by several hours at each of the stations so that the crowds surged and the troubles multiplied. It is the law and order people who were caught in the worst kind of a dilemma having to do with tight-rope walking between professional dictates and political stress.

The Ishurdi incident, in some accounts, has been put down to an alleged attack by Awami League supporters on a public meeting held by a BNP state minister earlier on. When political temperature runs high at the national level localised troubles have a way of spilling over with scant regard for the symbolic consequences thereof. That an attack on a train carrying the opposition leader could create a greater furore than that on a state minister's rally was squarely missed by the avengers.

On the national level we have been imploring upon the major political parties to pull themselves back from the brink they have gotten to over their differences centering on the caretaker government issue. Our concern chiefly is to head off any possible confrontation between the government and the opposition or subversion of the political system, the chances of which have surely grown lately. The incidents in Ishurdi and Natore boded ill for the nation by indicating that political confrontation in some form may have already begun in the outlying areas, and this can engulf the entire country, if not contained forth-

It devolves upon the top leaders of the major political parties to abide by the basic rule of being cognizant and tolerant of each other's views without which the nascent democratic structure is bound to crumble into pieces. While the leading lights in the political parties should set an example by avoiding provocative and incendiary remarks against their opponents they have also to hold in check their workers in the nooks and crannies of the country. A political leadership has to lead and not to be led. This holds equally true for both sides of the political divide. Officially a government may not resort to repression but it could unnecessarily earn the bad name of otherwise seemingly doing so just because of the excesses committed by overzealous party activists.

What we need most today are instructive political tolerance percolating the lower levels of political parties and administrative neutrality in governance.

Dhaka, Thimpu Focus on Trade

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's two-day visit to Bhutan marks yet another step towards forging warmer relations and further co-operation between the tiny Himalayan country and Bangladesh. The prime minister's visit is specially significant because it is the first in a series of trips she has planned to other SAARC countries. As the chairperson of the South Asian forum, Begum Zia must do everything in her capacity to expand the area of co-operation in the sevenmember body during her term. The regional cooperation however cannot take a concrete and highly effective shape unless bilateral relations between them improve. Such a visit to each of the six other member-countries is meant to provide for the special touch needed to work a miracle.

Reports on her trip and the joint communique issued from the capitals of the two countries are categorical that the prime minister's visit has been able to provide a fresh impetus in the wideranging co-operation between them. The area of trade has received a special status in the deliberations between the Bangladesh Prime Minister and Bhutanese King Jigme Singye Wangchuk. The aim is to expand, diversify and balance trade between Dhaka and Thimpu. To this end the two countries have agreed to explore all avenues such as the opening of additional transit points, and expanding modes of transport and transship-

ment. Both the countries have some basis of complementarity to go for a few ventures of joint economic collaboration. Although poverty alleviation is an onus for an individual nation, in today's reality bilateral and regional efforts have been recognised as an effective strategy for survival and also for acquiring a competitive edge. On this count, SAARC certainly should be the ideal vehicle for the member-states to reach the goal. It is more or less some common problems that they all share and their joint efforts through a forum can help them overcome those. Some progress has already been made but compared to other regional fora, it is still at a primary stage of taking

The forum's planning and finance ministers' meeting, the 14th session of the Council of Ministers and the ministerial meetings on the youth, the disabled and the women and family health, have made some headway in areas of common concern but not much in concrete terms. This situation should change; and the sooner the better. Considering the priorities attached to economic development by both Dhaka and Thimpu, one hopes that the theme can be extended beyond the borders of the two countries to the rest of the region. To avoid duplication and unnecessary competition in international market over a common exportable item, a common marketing strategy can be adopted.

Another Handshake at Oslo Agreement Anniversary

VEN after one year of signing of the Oslo Agreement, the peace process in the Middle East faces many obstacles. The implementation of the agreement has been extremely slow The enthusiasm of Arafat is still discernible from his another warm handshake with Shimon Peres at Oslo while observing Oslo Agreement anniversary, but Palestinian people are getting increasingly impatient and nervous about their future. Israeli authorities including army are jealously and, apparently, unwillingly transferring civilian power bit by bit - to the Palestinian authority. The problems have been compounded by the inability of the donor agencies to deliver the promised aid to the Palestinian authority for running the Palestinian self-rule. They have so far given about \$20 million out of \$2.25 bil lion. Though some progress was reported at the last Paris meeting but everything got bogged down on Palestinians' demand for setting aside some aid funds for East Jerusalem institutions, which israelis said were beyond the scope of present negotiations. This issue has, however, been resolved at Oslo when Arafat agreed to take up Jerusalem issues at an appropriate time and that no fund to be allocated for institu-

Another argument was that no credible financial authority or system was in action with proper accountability that could handle such a large aid money. Task is gigantic and huge amount of funds are needed to sustain whatever happened on the ground.

nearly half a century

infected the United

Nations General Assembly

deliberations will be muted if

not silenced during its 49th

Two issues that have made

the Assembly a battleground

for decades — South Africa and

the Arab-Israeli hostility --

have been toned down or

deleted entirely from its

agenda. The fiercely debated

apartheid item has been

deleted and the Committee

against Apartheid dissolved in

the wake of South Africa's

transformation to a non-racial

And while there will still be

bitter words from some Arab

countries, the general anti-

Israel fulminations will be muf-

Palestine Liberation Organi-

sation and Israel and the new

relationship between Israel

and Jordan. Diplomats predict

that except for an occasional

largely insignificant flare-up.

three months of unaccustomed

harmony and business-like

proceedings will prevail at the

run-up to the 1995 golden

nated by the planning for the

50th anniversary next year and

the largely ceremonial inflow

of presidents, prime ministers

and probably a king or two.

More than 60 of the speakers

in the general debate will be

The agenda will be domi-

anniversary year of the UN.

fled by the accord between the *

government.

tions at East Jerusalem at this

World Bank and other donor agencies must move fast and just not blame Arafat for inaction. If necessary, they should have their own offices in Jericho and Gaza to disburse funds in collaboration with Palestinian Economic Authority and oversee their use. Anyway, this is not PLO's Tunis base and big waste is not expected. Arafat is now in the midst of his own people who need funds and he must be conscious of this. Therefore, even with some weak institutional support donors may consider releasing funds. Otherwise, risk of collapse is great. Israeli Foreign Office Director General Savir cor rectly assessed the situation when he said, without funds

So far Israel has only handed over the problems under self rule, namely education, health care, tourism infrastructure development, etc. All these require funds and this is what is not there Israelis should also be equally worried - century old enemies now turned friends are the closest neighbours. Any eruption in Gaza-Jericho and rest of occupied territories will engulf Israel too. So Israel should extend all help in the matter of obtaining necessary funds for running the present limited self-rule.

Palestinian self-rule would fail.

Success of Self-rule

The success of self-rule is Israel's concern too as this was largely Israel's idea as Palestinians wanted Palestinian State, not self-rule. Therefore, Israelis must do their part to make self-rule a success and success depends also on a strong Palestine political

structure. This is why election in occupied territories is extremely important israel should also be seriously inter ested in the Palestinian election as this will establish another democracy in the desert. Indeed, earlier Israel itself criticized Arafat for not hold ing the election. Now when Arafat is ready. Israel is dragging its feet it is raising questions on election of the Palestinian National Council Legislature of 100 members: it is arguing that election should be held to elect only an Executive Council of 25 members. Now the basic question is

as they will elect their own people, Such an election will also determine the size and the strength of Hamas and its supporters in the area and obviously bring them through the election into the Normal stream of Palestinian politics This will indeed enable Arafat to chart his course of political actions concerning Hamas and other Palestinian radicals. This is extremely important for Israel too. Taming of Hamas is necessary if violence in the occupied territories is to be curbed. There is particular urgency now in view of newly emerging Jewish terrorist

SPOTLICIT ON MUDDLE BAST

Muslehuddin Ahmad

whether PLO is performing self-rule function in Jericho and Gaza and running some civilian affairs in rest of West Bank as an agent of Israel. This could never be the spirit of Oslo agreement. Even for selfrule Palestinians will have to have their own laws and rules and regulations and these cannot be enacted without the Palestinian National Council Legislature.

Moreover, if the alleged personal style of Arafat's rule (some amount of personal authority is initially needed to bring order in a chaotic situation) is to be brought to an end, election of a new Palestinian National Council which has almost lost its validity, if not legitimacy, is urgently needed. This election will reflect the wishes of Palestinian people in Gaza, Jericho and rest of West Bank

groups which are very active in East Jerusalem, Hebron, Kiryat Arba and some other Jewish settlement areas in the occupied territories. It is encouraging that Israeli Government has already arrested some of the Jewish terrorist leaders. But once Jewish terrorists and Hamas start facing each other, violence will run beyond con-

For these and many other valid reasons, Israel should agree to the present schedule of November 1, 1994 for holding election of the Palestinian National Council and make all preparations for withdrawing the Israeli army before election as per Oslo Agreement Israeli army should also hand over the population register of occupied territories to the PLO for necessary election preparations at its end Any delay in holding the election will only complicate situation and add to the existing

Israeli Settlers

Another sensitive political

issue for Rabin is - whether Israeli settlements should be dismantled and settlers resettled within Israel proper There are only about 120,000 settlers in West Bank and Gaza occupying about 20% of the occupied territories. Considerable political efforts and funding would be needed if dismantling of settlement is undertaken. But the thorny question is whether all settlers will willingly move out. Apparently not. The formation of terrorist groups itself indicates their resistance to any such move. But general policy of giving land and fund to the intending settlers may help the situation. If majority move out to Israel through such policy incentive, the situation may become manageable. Here, rich Arab States may consider offering special funds, if acceptable to Israel, for such resettlements within Israel. This may help ease the present tensions and also the future negotiations on the final status of the occupied territories. Those actions are to be initiated soon as Rabin faces general election in 1996. The situation may change completely in 1996

It is the time now, after one year of Oslo Agreement, for Rabin Govt to get reconciled with the idea of Palestinian sovereignty over the occupied territories as the negotiation on final status of the occupied territories will start in two years' time. Israel is the occupier and forceful occupation

sovereignty. Unflateral annexation does not create legitimacy. The UN and the international community never recognized Israel's occupation and this is why the UN through its resolutions repeatedly asked Israel to vacate the occupied territories. The recent diplomatic fuss created by Israel over Pakistan Prime Minister's proposed visit to Jericho was unfortunate. Such visits should be encouraged and occupation formalities of Israel be brought to the minimum. While the implementation

can never entitle it to the

of the Oslo Agreement has been painfully slow and apparent peace in the M-E - a comprehensive one - is miles away, tug of war has started between Rabin and Peres for winning the Nobel Peace Prize. Of course, both deserve consideration, but there is at least another - a very important one, namely Arafat, who abandoned everything and every one and alone took a plunge into the unknown destiny through M-E peace process. Indeed, the limited peace that has been achieved was due to his move - a very bold one. Therefore, any consideration for awarding Nobel Peace Prize for M-E peace must include Arafat, Chairman of PLO. Finally very significant contributions of the US in the M-E peace process should also deserve due consideration. If rules permit, the Nobel Peace Prize may be awarded to the organisation and states. These illustrious persons represent and they may receive this honour on behalf of their organization and states. Nobel Peace Prize will undoubtedly move M-E peace process forward.

The World's biggest Talking Shop Gets down to Business

Ted Morello writes from New York

The United Nations General Assembly opens its 49th session (Sept 26) on a note of optimism. The two vexed questions that have dominated the proceedings in the past - apartheid and the Palestinian issues — are off the agenda. This will give the delegates more time to use the forum for discussing development issues.

The big five defaulters Total outstanding contributions to UN's budget as of May 31 1994 - \$957 million US \$531 Japan \$105 55% S. Africa \$57 Ukraine \$45 Others \$191

either heads of state or government.

Key speakers on the September 26 opening day will include Presidents Bill Clinton of the United States and Boris Yeltsin of Russia. Before general debate closes three weeks later, addresses also will have been delivered by nearly 100 dignitaries heading their na-

tional delegations. The welcome for Pope John

Paul II, scheduled to address the Assembly on October 21. will be dampened by two of his widely criticised recent actions, both touching on the

UN International Conference on Population and Development by stalling family palling initiatives, the core of the Cairo conclave. And he was condemned for heaping papal honours on former UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, ostracised for his Nazi associations.

Taiwan will create a brief flurry when, for the second consecutive year, it hammers at the UN's door for admission as a member. The outcome is certain to be a replay of last year's when its application died without ever reaching the Assembly floor.

Most of the agenda items are hoary holdover resolutions inscribed more in hope than in expectation that they will be voted into effect: complete disarmament, nuclear-free zones, health and education for all by the year 2000, debt relief, narcotics control, East

In the Assembly presidential chair, there will be changing of the guard. Stepping He virtually wrecked the down will be Samuel Insanally of Guyana, the first representative of an Anglo-Caribbean country to the regionally rotated post, formerly monopolised by Latin Americans.

His successor will be Ivory

Coast Foreign Minister Amara Essy, the first Franco-African to wield the Assembly gavel. He is only the sixth "true" African (preceded by representatives from Liberia, Ghana Tanzania, Zambia and Nigeria) elected to the position in the UN's 49-year history.

Like Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali of Egypt, past presidents from the continent's Arab north (Tunisia and Algeria) were considered to represent countries that were only geographically - not culturally, historically or racially — African.

In organisational revamping, Insanally has been active throughout his year-long term in working to negotiate more Assembly input into UN decision-malling. Increasingly, most decisions have been made by the 15-nation Security Council.

Even there, the 10 nonpermanent members have been at the mercy of a caucus of the council's veto-wielding Big Five (United States, Russia, Britain, France and China), in effect controlled by the US. the world's only superpower. It then remains only for the Assembly to rubber-stamp the Council decisions, more often than not amid strident but in-

effectual protests. Despite Insanally's efforts, it is unlikely that the expansion of the Council, the key to its

restructuring, will command the necessary consensus. For while it is generally agreed that because of their status as world economic powerhouses. Japan and Germany merit permanent membership, there are rival claimants to the posi-

Nigeria, Brazil and India are among those clamouring for the status, on the justifiable grounds that none of the permanent members, incumbent or prospective, represent the developing world. The incoming president will be spared a crippling debate on the issue, which will be pigeonholed for future General Assemblies to

grapple with. Instead, Essy inherits an unorthodox and apparently successful initiative introduced by his predecessor as a way of getting informed advice on development, a high priority for

this session. The innovation, patterned after US Congressional practice, consisted of a week of development hearings that drew on broad-ranging experts from outside the usual closed circle of UN diplomats, who are not necessarily the most informed or even sympathetic to the

needs of developing countries. As the guardian of the UN's purse strings, the Assembly will also be confronted with the world organisation's devastating deficit, already well over \$3 billion. It's unlikely to be significantly less by the session's end. In all, this will be a tame Assembly and, as a result, likely to be a more productive - GEMINI NEWS

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Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

"The Future of Jute: Problems and Prospects"

Sir, I on behalf of myself and members of the Bangladesh Jute Mills Association thank you for organising a roundtable on "The Future of Jute: Problems and Prospects" as well as publishing a supplement on the same in September 19 issue of your esteemed daily.

This, we believe, will go a long way in educating the people about the jute industry's present position and future prospects. We highly appreciate your gesture in touching upon the most vital sector of the country's economy and hope you will continue to do the same in future.

Syed Mohsen Ali Chairman, BJMA, Dhaka

New wave of ethnic cleansing

Sir, Mother Teressa is a household name. She has travelled to anywhere across the world whenever the humanity fell in distress caused either by tyrants or by natural calamities. Age has been no bar for her to undertake journeys even to difficult corners of the globe. Her greatness and record of humanitarian service was duly recognised as she was awarded

a 'Nobel prize'. It appears, however, that she has not so far paid a visit to Bosnia-Herzegovina, where in the name of ethnic-cleansing a minority Muslim com-

munity is being subjected to persecution, torture and rape. They were being denied even the right to self-defence and were cordoned off from all sides. There were reports that as many as fifty thousand Muslim women were made pregnant by the Serbs and kept confined so that they could not get rid of these unwanted pregnancy. I would like to think that a visit by Mother Teressa perhaps could kindle the light of human feelings among the people of Yugoslavia. The United Nations, at least, on this issue, has palpably failed to 'call a spade a spade' and take required action against the perpetrators. Lack of determination, undue delays and waverings saw at least three unkind European winters pass over them when the Bosnian Muslims were left in the open without any warm clothes.

The empty threats of going into military action by way of air-strike least bothered the Serbs. The lives of some of the UN personnel engaged in relief work were even not spared by the perpetrators. Thanks are due to Baroness Margaret Thatcher who was outspoken and candid in her views about the right of self-defense of the Bosnian Muslims. But her views seemed to have melted away in the midst of parlia-

mentary procrastination. his servants 'to spread on the earth and seek His bounty.' So no area or a place is anybody's preserve. But good conscience and collective morality seem to

have disappeared or been partisan against a particular community. As such the victims have no other alternative than to beseech Divine intervention, which we believe will surely come.

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Fighting AIDS

Sir, AIDS is the latest and probably the greatest threat before mankind today which is fast engulfing the entire world, despite keenest efforts by the developed countries to combat it effectively. Expensive research works are on to find out antidotes and injections to cure the AIDS patients and innocent AIDS virus carriers all over the world.

Of late our Govt. also has stood up with profound seriousness and right earnestness. to identify, detect and segregate the AIDS patients and the carriers of AIDS viruses, hidden and spread out all over the country, in order to arrest their spreading.

As a first step the government has started anti-AIDS propaganda as it is of vital national importance through its national media e.g. radio, television and the newspapers. But what has lost sight of the government is that the bulk of our population (over 80 p.c.) is illiterate. They will hardly understand the message so dramatically presented by our TV, radio and stage artists through our media.

Why our approach to this menacing disease should be a shy one and can't we be courageous enough to plain talk and tell our simple folks It is God's earth. God bade e.g. truck and bus drivers. auto-rickshaw drivers, rickshaw pullers and millions of floating population, coming from far-flung villages, who frequently makes visits to the

cities and towns on various commitments that they are equally valuable to this dis-

Those among the above cat-

egories, who earn their bread, staying at cities and towns, away from their homes and near and dear ones for months together, can't help their biological urges, which force them to visit' the cheap redlight areas off and on to ventilate their physical desires. They sometime even prefer it to cinema shows or other amusements. And in this process who knows how many of these innocent souls are contacting the AIDS virus unwittingly and unconsciously passing it on to their beloved wives, whom they meet after a considerably long time.

No one knows the exact number of the AIDS afflicted people in our country. It is upto the government to initiate a battle against this menace before it takes a monstrous shape.

Flt. Lt (Retd) Mohiuddin South Kafrul Dhaka Cantt., Dhaka.

"This Brinkmanship..."

Sir, I fully endorse every word, every sentence and every paragraph of your free and frank editorial "This brinkmanship may Easily Go Out of Hand" of September 12, 1994. Congratulations on your indepth thoughts, foresightedness, courage and patriotism.

Bangladesh is a country of natural calamities and political crisis. The sufferings of the people know no bounds. We all need to make clear distinction between ends and means before we become frustrated. turn berserk and run amuck none of which is desirable.

O H Kabir Dhaka

OPINION

Focus Shifted from the Culprit

So the tragedy lay in the after- place. math, not so much in the Obviously the students were original accident.

done in a foolishly uncon- ties. trolled rage, diverting the focus from both the who and the absolve the unruly students of

why of it. class fellows in other bogeys rampage. But did they have enough of a provocation to beat up railway employees, set the Sholashahar railway Station on fire and move in strength to the far-out central railway building (CRB) where another volley of attack was launched? They ransacked 20 office rooms breaking glass panes and telephone sets. Eight transports were also damaged.

The derailment of Chitta- They were apparently progong University shuttle train voked into all this when, after near Sholashahar on Saturday the accident, the railway emlast did not take a toll of any ployees set about operating the student's life. For that matter, train leaving behind the none other died from it. But it derailed bogey in a bid to rehas had tragic consequences. duce the tension gripping the

in no mood to let them do so. Not a single accident is They recalled that their earlier keeping within its confines. demands for repairing the We wish it had. For, over-reac- tracks, changing the sleepers tion has a way of rendering and adding more bogeys to fixation of responsibility for a that shuttle train had fallen on lapse extremely difficult. As if a deaf ears. The railway authorismoke-gun was fired to let the ties are to blame for having al real culprit escape the spot- lowed the deplorable condilight which got turned to inci- tions of the tracks, in particudents triggered by the acci- lar, to continue. We are hoping dent. None of that TV serial that they will draw a lesson Fall Guy stuff put together to from this, tone up loose ends throw dust into the eyes of the here and there and pull up evil incarnate but something those who neglected their du-

At any rate, this is not to their part of the impropriety. As the train went off rail. The right thing for them students crammed into a com- would have been to represent partment jumped out to safety before the railway authorities but had scars on landing. Their in Chittagong and demand punishment of those responsiwent livid with anger and on a ble for what looked like an avoidable mishap. In the process, they could ensure speedy repair and revamping of the railway tracks, something their wrath was all about.

All this would have stopped fishing in the troubled waters by various politically motivated labour unions.

> An Onlooker Dhaka.