

Call This an Emergency

Floods have taken a very serious turn. It is downright premonitory of a cataclysm the like of which cannot be fully conjured up by drawing comparisons with the 1954 and 1988 deluges. The essential thing to realise is that alluvial deposits over time have filled up the basins, changed the courses of rivers and clogged all sorts of waterways. Simultaneously, bunds and barrages have been put up, embankments laid, population has increased and habitations have spilled over.

Indeed, given so many vulnerabilities including the climatic change cropping up since the benchmark years of 1994 and 1988, we are afraid, from the look of things that perhaps we are in for an unprecedented catastrophe this time around.

We sincerely hope and pray that Providence would intervene and turn the tide around. As we do such earnest beseeching for Godly mercy we feel we must do whatever it takes to minimise the effects of floods, and, in their aftermath, help the crest-fallen people rebuild their lives.

A survey of the damages already wrought needs to be followed up with a projection into the future up to mid-September when the flood waters will have subsided. At 20 out of the 46 points on the four major rivers showing rising waters we have such a menacing situation. Just think what would happen if the rivers should cross the danger mark at, say, 15 more points. Teesta barrage had to be opened. Several embankments and dykes have given in. DND embankment in Dhaka and flood control embankments at Rajshahi, Pabna and Bogra have all breached. Dhaka-Chittagong highway is submerged at several points risking a closure. The Dhaka-Tangail and Dhaka-Sylhet highways are in danger. Army engineering help is necessary to keep the communication system working somehow.

The inundation of the mid-section of the country being of a severe nature, Dhaka and its surrounding belt are afflicted by hazardous living conditions with diarrhoea, jaundice and viral fever breaking out in an epidemic form.

It is obviously past the stage when we could be content with one-liners like 'relief is being distributed every day' or 'Tk 8 crore allocated to post-flood rehabilitation'. A broad-based national effort needs to be launched to secure cooperation and goodwill of all concerned behind the challenging task. It is time, therefore, that we declared a national disaster emergency and widened the focus of crisis-management by including all political parties and relevant professional groups in the undertaking. The situation, we repeat, is too grave for any misplaced confidence of the ruling party that it can handle it all by itself.

Farcical

The Jahangirnagar University unit of BCL (Bangladesh Chhatra League), student front of the ruling Awami League, has shown just how absurd attitudes can be. Demanding the trial and punishment of those responsible for the alleged rape of three students of the varsity they called for an indefinite strike on the campus from yesterday. We don't understand the rationale behind such a quixotic call. It contradicts the very idea on which the programme has been founded: identification and punishment of the alleged rapists. If the investigation to ferret out the culprits in the shortest possible time is what they want, how could they think of a programme that, for all practical purposes, will insensitive the whole institution? Will a shut down university speed up the trial? This is a farce. BCL seems to have had their priorities badly mixed up. They seem to be more intent on polishing up their image which stands somewhat tarnished in the face of allegations about one of their leaders' involvement in the rape cases than doing things that may facilitate the work of the fact-finding committee.

In order to sound loud in their protest against what they have described as baseless and motivated journalism of a section of the press they have gone on an overdrive of zeal that appears not only theatrical but pointless also. As a student front of the ruling party it could and should have thought up ways other than disruptive agitation to exert pressure on the authorities for ensuring justice. If they are so keen on the early identification of the rapists they should call off the strike immediately. If the BCL does not call off the programme of its own volition the party in power will be well advised to desist its student front from pursuing a nonsensical course of action. We also demand the university authorities help the probe committee in every conceivable way to find out the culprits and punish them as soon as possible.

An Avoidable Surprise

The other day Bangladesh Rifles, our border sentinels, in tandem with villagers beat back its Indian counterpart Border Security Forces' furtive attempt to push in a group of so-called Bangladeshi people through a bordering point at Naogaon. It is clear from the news item published in a leading Bangla daily yesterday that something like that happened and there could be more of it. The BSF is reportedly trying to set up camps in areas adjacent to the West Bengal border where they plan to assemble people branded as Bangladeshi so that they can get on with the push-in programme in a more concerted manner.

This is most undesirable when one looks at the excellent bilateral relationship that exists between India and Bangladesh. There is absolutely no need for vitiating the neighbourly relationship over a matter that can be addressed under the purview of standard bilateral norms and practices followed in such matters. The recent statement of a top-brass West Bengal state police official who in an interview with the BBC claimed that near about one lakh 'Bangladeshis' had been sent back in the last seven years or so only goes to underline a pattern of unilateral thinking on the other side of the border. But attempts to push people forcibly across the border are antithetical to the finesse and sensitivity that international relations demand.

US Strikes in Sudan and Afghanistan : An Appraisal

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

The intrusion into a sovereign country appears to be a bad precedent in international affairs as it proves only one fact that "might is right". One could argue that the US action against terrorism could be supported if the modalities were pursued through the UN. Otherwise the effectiveness and credibility of the UN are placed in jeopardy by actions of one of the founders of the UN.

US launched military strikes in Khartoum (Sudan) and on "terrorist" targets in Afghanistan on 21 August. The military operations were believed to have been carried out by cruise missiles from Red Sea and Arabian Sea combined with air attacks. There were serious speculations of imminent US attacks on Afghanistan when the US personnel from Pakistan and the foreign personnel from Afghanistan were directed by the US to leave the respective countries (in fact they did leave).

President Clinton interrupted his holiday at Martha's Vine Yard and gave the order. He returned to Washington and addressed the US people in a national televised hook-up. He cited four reasons which prompted him to take the decision. The reasons were the past attacks on US military helicopters in Somalia, the immediate past attacks on 7 August on US Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, the imminent planned attack on US interests and proposed early acquisition by the "terrorists" of chemical weapons.

The questions that are asked are: Why did the US do it? Was there any credible evidence against Mr. Osama's activities and the plant in Khartoum? Did the US consult other Security Council members? Did the President go through the normal procedure of briefing the US National Security Council and Congress? Was it a diversionary tactic of the President to subsume his own personal trouble?

I shall attempt to answer the questions in this paper.

Possible Complicity in Bombing US Embassies

Soon after the devastating bombing of the US Embassies in Nairobi (Kenya) and in Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), the US agents began their extensive and intensive investigations to ascertain the culprits. A key suspect in the embassy bombings was directed to an alleged international network of terror run by the multi-millionaire Saudi dissident Osama bin

Laden living in Afghanistan for the last two years. The US Secretary of State has called on the Taliban authorities to hand over Mr. Osama bin Laden.

Meanwhile, Pakistan arrested a male person on 14 August on his arrival by air from Nairobi for travelling on a fake Yemeni passport and after interrogation was deported to Nairobi. He was identified as Mohammad Sadig Odeh (34). Mr. Odeh was a great find by the US investigators. He has since led the investigators to a Nairobi Hotel where the bombs used in the attacks were assembled. The US agents raided the hotel and reportedly found 80 kilograms of TNT in two rooms.

In a record of interrogation published in a Pakistani newspaper, Mr. Odeh, a Palestinian Arab, admitted being part of Osama's network of Islamic militants which concentrated attacks on US interests worldwide because of the perceived unjust policy pursued by the US towards the Arab world. He told police that Mr. Osama bin Laden controlled an army of about 5000 Islamic militants operating in Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Egypt, Yemen, Ethiopia, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Philippines. He identified Afghanistan as a key base for training the guerrillas, and said hundreds of surface-to-air missiles, mortars, rockets and even "stinger" anti-aircraft missiles were stored at Osama's depots across the country.

He claimed credit for downing US helicopters in Somalia, killing 18 US personnel, and landmine attacks which claimed several more American lives elsewhere in the country.

Pakistan authorities had arrested two additional suspects in the bombings of the embassies on 18 August when they attempted to cross into Afghanistan at the border check post at Torkham in the Khyber Pass in Pakistan.

Stateless Terrorism

The US is confronted with the Stateless terrorism which is a hydra-headed monster. It is not a State-sponsored terrorism which the US used to deal with. An individual takes a refuge in one country and carries out "terrorist" activities through the fanatical agents in various countries. The US suspects that this Osama group was responsible for demolition of residential building of US personnel in Khobar in Saudi Arabia in 1996. If this Laden group gets on hand the chemical weapons (nerve gas), the consequences will be disastrous. It is alleged that Iraq's nerve gas weapons were transported to Sudan for safe-keeping.

Possible Reasons of Military Strikes

Once the US administration was at hand with the "convincing" evidential materials, they claim that they opted for the military strikes in Sudan and Afghanistan for a number of reasons. Let me explain.

First, the US does not wish to be perceived as a "do-nothing" superpower when its embassies were attacked resulting in the loss of innocent precious lives. It wishes to give a signal to the terrorist organisations, as it did in the past by bombing Tripoli under Reagan's administration, that the US would not sit as a silent spectator. By this US action, it is likely to throw off the balance of terrorist activities in Afghanistan.

Second, given the credible evidence provided by the US investigators to the US administration, President Clinton does not want to be seen as a weak President at a time when he is in deep trouble within his own country. The President wishes to be seen as decisive and strong.

Third, the military strikes

would appear to give a strong message to Iraq's leadership not to undertake any misadventure at a time when the US Presidency is seen to be beleaguered with its credibility within the country. The recent reported non-cooperation by Iraq with the UN Special Team of inspections is an instance, in point.

Fourthly, it also appears to give a warning to President of Yugoslavia for his continued military actions against Kosovo's Albanian nationals and to other terrorist organisations in the West that the US has a global responsibility to ensure international peace and security. It is intended to convey an indirect message to Myanmar's leadership that the US would not tolerate the harsh and anti-democratic treatment of its opposition leader Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi who is believed to have passed more than a week in a van at a road block to ensure her rights of freedom of movement in the country.

Fifthly, the US must have calculated that Sudan and Afghanistan were isolated from the international community because of their links with Islamic militants. The military strikes would not be likely to evoke robust retributions from the Islamic World because both Egypt, a neighbour of Sudan and Iran, a neighbour of Afghanistan have uneasy relationships with each other.

Finally, the US attacks were not launched against any country for its State sponsored terrorism. The US claims that this was directed at the Stateless terrorism, a new phenomenon where an individual builds up a network of terrorists to attack the US interests from the territory of other countries.

Reactions of the US Action

A few Republican Senators questioned the decision of Pres-

ident Clinton. They alleged that neither the Congress nor the National Security Council was briefed by the President prior to taking action. Although it is the President's sole decision whether to launch a strike or not, they claimed that the President would usually consult both these state apparatus. This time President did not appear to follow the normal procedure and this raised the question whether the purpose of the President's decision was primarily to deflect the US people from his personal credibility problem. US Defence Secretary Cohen, however, rejected the claim and defended the President for his action to protect US interests and nationals.

Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair who was the first foreign leader to be contacted by President Clinton following the attack strongly supported the action against "international terrorists". (Mr. Blair spent last week dealing with the bombing in Omagh, Northern Ireland). Israel supported the action but this support will be counter-productive for the US in the Islamic world.

Conclusion

The action of the US appears to be not only retaliatory but also seeks to disable the terrorist operational activities. The strikes are seen to be partly preventive in nature.

While it is understandable the heavy cost of terrorism to the US in the recent bombings, the unilateral action without the UN involvement is likely to anger the Third world countries, in particular the Arab world. They will see the action as a policy of double-standards of the US. While Israel can violate the resolutions of the UN Security Council with impunity and is responsible for bloodshed in the West Bank, the US administration remains silent. They will perceive that once the Muslim countries are in picture, the US comes with a heavy hand.

It is true that terrorism is to be condemned wholeheartedly — but the method of dealing with terrorism has to be seen as fair. If a powerful country takes the law into its own hands, the world could plunge into a chaos. I would argue that the US should have called an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council and would have made out a case with credible evidence that stateless terrorism operated by Osama bin Laden constitutes a grave threat to international peace and security as the US had, in the past produced to the Security Council documentary evidence of Soviet Missiles stationed in Cuba prior to its naval blockade of Soviet warships in 1961.

The intrusion into a sovereign country appears to be a bad precedent in international affairs as it proves only one fact that "might is right". One could argue that the US action against terrorism could be supported if the modalities were pursued through the UN. Otherwise the effectiveness and credibility of the UN are placed in jeopardy by actions of one of the founders of the UN.

The writer is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN

Juma Janjh Naal!

Whether it be Mian Nawaz Sharif, Ms Benazir, Imran Khan or Farooq Leghari, all have to be extra careful about the "Juma Janjh Naal" types who infiltrate the nucleus of every winning Party and give them the facade of a strength not in keeping with their real size.

To the credit of Former President Sardar Farooq Leghari, instead of waiting at the sidelines till the present government succumbs to the consequences of attempting Hara-Kari even for a fortnight or so, he has adopted the legitimate route of political activism to try and come to power. On 14 August 1998 he launched his much propagated Millat Party, long on rhetoric but seemingly short of new ideas and/or a cohesive framework for political action from a still to be unveiled manifesto. Except for a handful of persons who one can label as electable or technocrats, a majority of those who attended the convention do not inspire much confidence for the future. However that is the start of any party. PPP began on Edwards Road, Lahore in the late 60s with very few human assets. One agrees that the idea is right, fresh faces must be encouraged to come and clean up the political scene in the country. This will be an uphill task. In the sub-continent Moghul Emperor Akbar the Great set the trend of bucking the system when he tried to set up a parallel religion to amalgamate all those existing then. His "Din-e-Elahi" ultimately became the butt of jokes through history. Farooq Leghari will have to work really hard politically to avoid the "Zillat Party" tag that people have already started to label his new found political grouping with.

As a dedicated PPP man, Farooq Leghari's nomination for President by Ms Benazir in 1993 was the ultimate reward for blind loyalty. It is unbelievable that as a close associate of Ms Benazir he was not able to discern the very visible negative traits in her personality and behaviour pattern in the 15 or so odd years he spent with her in and out of the political wilderness. One stint was spent with Ms Benazir in power when she was married and Farooq Leghari should have been able to surmise for himself Mr. Zardari's tendencies to loot the nation seemingly as his bounden right for having married the nation's daughter. His transformation, from a die-hard loyalist to an unforgiving enemy, can mostly be laid at the door of Asif Zardari's shenanigans. Leghari cannot completely absolve himself fully of the guilt of the pillage engi-

neered between 1993 and 1996. It was only when Zardari transgressed into his personal affairs that Leghari suddenly saw the light and dismissed his mentor from office. For that one act alone he deserves full credit, otherwise Pakistan would have been worse off by end 1996 where we are in 1998. The difference between that period and the present is that as much as one may vilify Mian Nawaz Sharif, the fact remains that his economic team cushioned the blow that was to ultimately come in mid-1998 by a series of far-reaching reforms and stabilising of the financial institutions by bringing in capable management.

From 1993 to late 1996, Zardari's cronies were in every level of financial management and their aim was singular — to channel money into his and

room for a third party to flourish. A vacuum in the political fabric of Pakistan that Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaf (PTI) has been valiantly trying to fulfil. Despite Imran Khan's obvious charisma his political appeal has still not matured enough to materialise into a potent political nuisance value as yet. That he will be a coming force in years to come no one should doubt, the very fact of his keeping to the hustings despite the disappointment of the last elections suggests that. A systematic study of the percentage following of PML(N) and PPP shows that each of the two major parties possesses a basic core of about 20-25 per cent of the voting populace with a floating percentage of about 15-20 per cent. Depending upon the mood of the populace at any given time the "float" vote will always go with whoever are the winners. There is a particular crowd that is extremely "professional" about joining up with whoever is the ruling party. This lot has no ideology, no conscience and owes its allegiance to only its own crass interests, which amounts to mostly filling their own pockets through various means. Whichever government comes to power will find this element aligned with it, at least till they are discovered and evicted by the ruling party or they themselves conclude that there is no profit in remaining associated with the rulers. In short, these are the "good time fellas" who benefit from opportunity that is available in quantity with those governing the nation, they live only to celebrate.

A group which joins with (Naal) every wedding party (Janjh) is called Janjh Naal. Many years ago famous character actor Alaudin embellished the role of such a personality called "Juma" in a less than memorable film with a rather self-explanatory title, "Juma Janjh Naal". One wonders how many who came to the Millat Party launch convention in Lahore were serious about their commitment to the new party? Or did they just come for the good food served to over 2200 guests at a cost of Rs. 1 million plus at the Pearl Continental Lahore? Whether it be Mian Nawaz Sharif, Ms Benazir, Imran Khan or Farooq Leghari, all have to be extra careful about the "Juma Janjh Naal" (JJN) types who infiltrate the nucleus of every winning Party and give them the facade of a strength not in keeping with their real size.

In the circumstances, Imran has had more time and opportunity to get a political machine together, one that has already fought an election within months of the Party's inception. As such logic dictates that Millat Party may not be in a position to entice more voters onto its platform relative to Tehrik-i-Insaf's persuasion powers. At best Millat Party will eat partly into PTI's garnering of the "float" vote, thereby polarising the political divide further. Whether one is the PML(N), PPP, PTI and/or the newly launched Millat Party (MP), one element of the

direction the majority of the "float" decides to take dictates the make-up of the Assemblies in any general elections. In the last four occasions whenever has been the ruling party has taken a beating because the populace has been frustrated with their performance, the urban area has been particularly sensitive to bad governance. Since he has not been able to attract political heavyweights across the country, Farooq Leghari is gambling upon attracting the "float" element disenchanted with both the parties.

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AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

their pockets. What was quite apparent to almost the whole country in 1994 and 1995 should also have been seen by Leghari much earlier than in late 1996, in fact should have been anticipated by him as early as 1993 as "a man of conscience and principles". To put it bluntly, out of deference to the fact that he was made President by Ms Benazir he stood by and allowed this country to be looted by her husband at will. Theoretically at least Farooq Leghari is correct in seeing a possible political bonanza, the public is totally disenchanted with PPP and getting frustrated with the series of *faux pas* being committed by the coterie around Mian Nawaz Sharif, if not the PML(N) as a whole. In addition, Ms Benazir's Swiss nemesis seems to be tightening the noose of accountability around her and by extension, with.

ANP and MQM are regional parties without any hope of a national following except in parts. Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) is well organised nationally but is in comparison very much lesser in numbers, the other religious parties are strong in regions and parts. There does exist

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Does it matter? ... No I suppose not, especially to anyone who has no pride in their nation's identity and standing in

the world. But I live in hope, perhaps meetings can be convened and decisions made and then I may be able to send another letter to you - say at: editor@dailystar.co.bd!

Joseph Jabbar
London, UK

Water-logging

Sir, Besides experiencing almost a 1988 level flood, Dhaka is also experiencing water logging not comparable with any past year. The scourge has only increased over the years. Whether modern city planning at the threshold of 21st century?

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