

The US dumped by the UN

HARUN UR RASHID

US foreign and defence policy under President George W. Bush appears to be disconcerting. Its import on other countries is not lost. The confrontational policy on China and North Korea seems to ignore the views of its allies in Europe since the US does not need them to fight "the evil empire" (Soviet Union). Every one is nervous about what the US does to a re-run of "star wars" in the space.

When the Bush administration expelled Russian "spies" from the US, bombed Iraq, angered Europe by withdrawing support from the 1997 Kyoto Protocol and did not trust North Korea, international community kept quiet because they were helpless to do anything against such US policies. However its consequences became clear for the US in recent days in the UN.

First, the US failed to get elected in the 53-member UN Human Rights Commission. It was a voting time to fill 14 vacant places on the Commission three of them were earmarked for the Western countries. France, Austria and Sweden got elected but not the US. This is devastating experience for the US, in particular when Austria (with an extreme right-wing party in the coalition government) obtained more votes than the US. Second, it

The US has come to grips with the unpalatable truth that it is neither liked nor respected in the UN. Many UN experts believe that the US can get back on track if it cares to listen to the voices of the international community. The bottom line is that money or might does not always buy respect or votes.

lost its seat on the 13-member UN International Narcotics Control Board.

This is the first time in history of the UN that the US failed to secure seats in the Commission and the Board. This is ironic because the US took initiative to establish the Human Rights Commission in 1946 and the Narcotics Board in 1964. For the US, the unthinkable has occurred.

The consequences are serious for the US. Its standing in the UN has crumbled and its role in the UN bodies has been crippled. The US will be unable to vote in the Human Rights Commission and will find it difficult to sponsor any resolution on violation of human rights against China or Cuba at the Commission. It appears to be a great setback politically for the US as it had tabled draft resolutions against China and Cuba almost regularly every year. At the Narcotics Board, the loss of a seat of the US renders it incapable of playing a major role in combating drug trafficking and substance

abuse, in particular in Latin American countries.

The double dumping of the US by the international community appears to be an indication that the US is losing support and respect from the members of the UN, numbering now 192.

The question is: Why did the US fail to secure seats in the UN agencies?

In the UN bodies there is no permanent seat for any one (except in the Security Council). Each country including a big power has to earn its seat through secret ballots. Although there could be written pledges of support sufficient enough for a country to win an election, this strength may not reflect in the result because many countries may change their minds and vote another country. This kind of phenomenon is not uncommon in UN elections. No one knows who voted whom in secret ballots.

Washington's main mistake appeared to be that they were complacent with the written pledges

of support and did not lobby hard with the member-countries. Furthermore they assumed that no country would really dare to kick the super power off the two UN bodies.

Some UN experts argue that the Bush administration is out of touch with the sentiments of international community. The unpopular policies, such as its confrontational attitude towards China and North Korea, its withdrawal of support from the 1997 Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gases, its intention to withdraw from 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and to go ahead with missile defence shield appear to have irked international community.

The enunciation of such policies has given the impression that the US is overbearing and impervious to the opinion of others. The US policy of "go alone" is seen as contrary to the spirit of the UN Charter. An increasing number of countries accuse the US of bringing back the tension-filled days of the Cold War and arms race, instead of creating a new world order with language of

peace and justice. In this era of globalisation, the test of good policies rests on interactions that remove obstacles to development and result in mutually beneficial cooperation between states.

There has been a subtle shift of power from the US to the European Union (EU) in recent years. They pay more dues to the UN than the US and want that reflected within the UN bodies.

An undercurrent struggle for power in the UN between the US and EU has surfaced and many EU members do not automatically support the US in the election to the UN bodies. This fact has not gone unnoticed in the developing countries. One hundred thirty three developing countries group themselves as "Group of 77" in the UN and co-ordinate their policy. Many of them are willing to treat the US as just another country.

The US is the largest defaulter in payment of its dues to the UN. While other countries continue to make payment of their dues to the UN, the US has failed to do so. Critics have

accused that the US has not given importance to the role of the UN rather it would prefer to see the UN financially weak so that it can control the body. It is reported that the House of Representatives voted to withhold US\$244 million in back dues to the UN in retaliation for not securing a seat in the Human Rights Commission.

The non-involvement of the new US administration in on-going military confrontation with the Palestinians has not gone down well with Islamic countries. The attack by the US on human rights record of Russia, China and Cuba was seen by other countries a double standard policy of the US.

Besides the above factors, the anti-American attitude that has always existed in some form or another in the UN corridors has acquired a new expression in voting the US out of the UN bodies. The US has come to grips with the unpalatable truth that it is neither liked nor respected in the UN. Many UN experts believe that the US can get back on track if it cares to listen to the voices of the international community. The bottom line is that money or might does not always buy respect or votes.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

Dr. Rubaiul Murshed
All health information to keep you up to date

Before the doctor comes

Blisters

These are thin "bubbles" that form on the skin, damaged by function, e.g. shoe's rubbing, or a burn. During healing, new skin forms at the base of the blister and the liquid which is present is absorbed. The outer layer of dead skin eventually peels off.

What to do

* See a doctor if your blister covers an area the size of your hand.
* Blisters should not be broken as this could lead to infection.
* If it does break or is likely to be damaged, the area should be covered with a dry non-adhesive dressing.

Burns and scalds

Burns are caused by dry heat like flames and hot electrical equipment. Scalds are caused by wet heat, such as steam or boiling water. There is always a risk of infection with both burns and scalds because of the damage they do to the skin.

What to do
* Cool the damaged area under cold running water for at least ten minutes.
* Try to remove anything that might constrict the area if it swells, e.g. rings or tight clothing.

* Cover with a sterile dressing.
* Always seek medical advice for all but minor burns and scalds.

Never

* remove anything sticking to the burn;
* apply butter, oil or grease to the damaged area;
* burst any blisters;
* use an adhesive dressing.

Tomorrow: Around the world.

To survive, get the story right

DAVID ROBIE writes from Suva

On October 20 last year, three editorial staffers of state-owned Radio Fiji were detained and questioned for seven hours over a news story.

They were threatened with charges under the Emergency Powers Act for refusing to reveal their sources in connection with a story in the morning bulletin about a split in the Fijian military.

The chief executive, news director and a reporter were first detained and then taken away from the radio station by armed soldiers. They were eventually handed over to the police.

On 13 November police arrested and charged two Fiji Times journalists with unlawful assembly over the seizure of a military barracks by rebel soldiers. The pair were remanded, accused of "mingling with rebels".

Both these incidents occurred in Fiji following the May 2000 coup led by failed businessman George Speight who held the elected prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry of the minority Indian community and his cabinet hostage in the parliament building.

Such intimidation is not peculiar to Fiji. Although the killing of troublesome journalists is almost unheard of, and prison terms rare, "the Pacific is littered with instances of publishers and journalists being chastised and chased", writes Seona Smiles in a new book on the region's media released in April.

The Pacific Journalist is published by the University of South Pacific. Seona Smiles, a feisty columnist on the Rupert Murdoch-owned daily newspaper, Fiji Times, is a contributor.

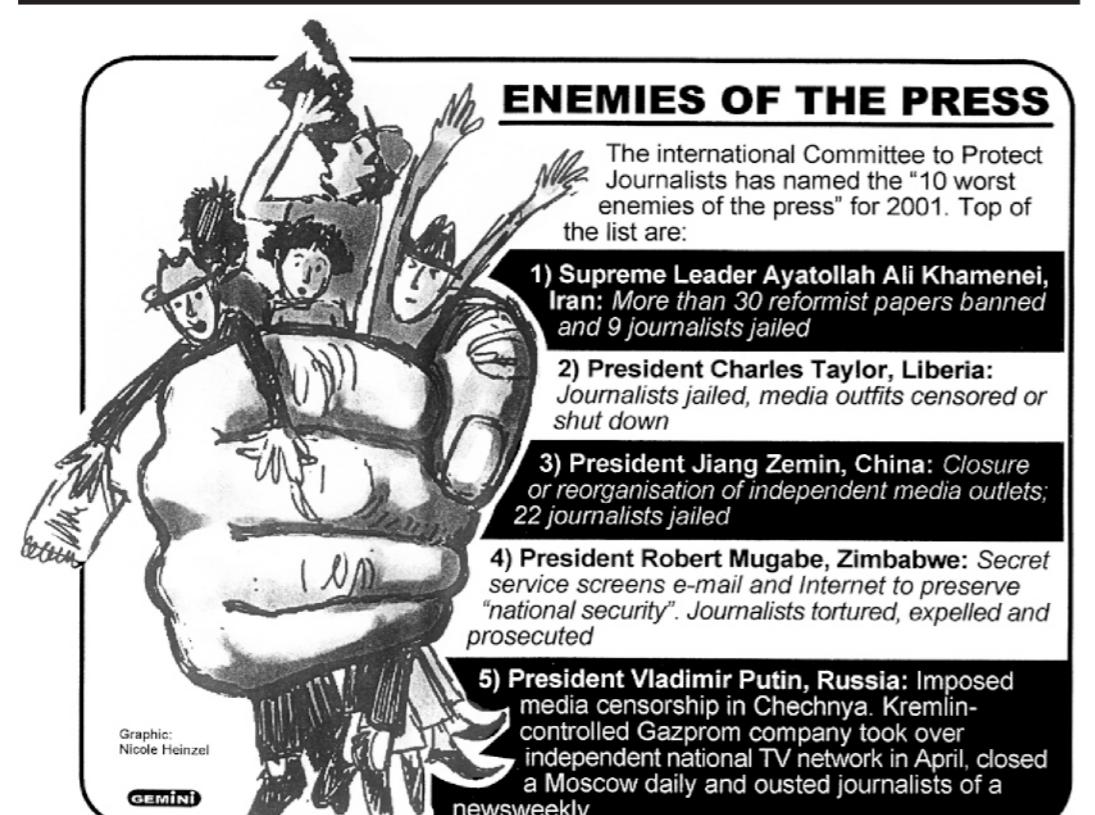
The Pacific region is not particularly known for its tolerance for news media. Journalists from the numerous independent island states are usually considered trouble-makers and are treated with derision by their political leaders.

Societies in the South Pacific have deep-rooted beliefs about respect for authority and the privileges of their tribal chiefs that can translate into a lack of accountability and transparency.

All this is coupled with a strongly disapproving attitude towards those who question, probe and publish, says the book.

It cites several cases of harassment and intimidation of journalists. Among them is the deportation of British-born publisher Marc Neil-Jones of the Vanuatu Trading Post by Prime Minister Barak Sope for vigorously probing allegations of corruption.

Wars, coups and bloody conflicts are increasingly common in the Pacific region. Reporting these events is difficult especially when national governments denounce journalism and intimidate the media. The only defence available for the region's young and inexperienced journalists is accurate and balanced reporting, writes Gemini News Service, citing a new book on Pacific journalism.



Another was the unprecedented banning of French news-agency correspondent Michael Field from the annual South Pacific Forum political meeting in Kiribati.

Field angered the authorities by probing too much into the pollution problems in Kiribati the previous year. His investigations were described as "culturally sensitive".

"Expatriates and non-citizens can be dealt with by throwing them out of the country," points out Smiles. But it is tougher for the locals.

The growing number of indigenous journalists are a different tool of the whistle, however, and some tough measures are bandied about to deal with them," she says.

Pacific governments frequently come up with draft laws aimed at gagging or controlling the media through licensing measures, or a raft of fines aimed at journalists or company directors.

Public opposition and media lobbying have so far kept at bay governments armed with draconian laws, but the survival of media freedom in the region remains doubtful.

In 1996, the editor of the Times of Tonga, Kalafi Moala, one of his senior journalists and a pro-democracy parliamentarian were jailed for contempt of parliament over a news report published by the paper.

Fiji's caretaker prime minister Laisenia Qarase, whose post-coup regime has twice been declared illegal by the courts, complained about journalistic standards at a recent media event.

"Far too many reporters still lack basic skills and sound professional judgement," he said.

"They are uncertain interviewers, poor verbal communicators, have problems with accuracy and are short on knowledge of current

affairs. The result is that coverage sometimes compromises the ideals of a free press," Qarase chided journalists.

Smiles herself echoes the views of Qarase and other political leaders in the Pacific by accepting the youth and limited experience of many reporters from these islands.

The median age of Fijian journalists is 22 and their average experience 2.5 years, according to research cited in the book.

The attempted coup in Fiji, the Solomon Islands ethnic conflict and the secessionist struggle in Papua New Guinea have stirred vigorous debates on the quality of reporting and the role of the media.

It is indeed a frightening prospect to consider a predominantly young, relatively inexperienced, sometimes politically naive and occasionally quite unjustifiably confident media corps, that can have far-reaching effects on public opinion and community action and attitudes," says Smiles.

The international Committee to Protect Journalists has named the "10 worst enemies of the press" for 2001. Top of the list are:

opinion and community action and attitudes," says Smiles.

High standards of accuracy and balance, argues the book, is the "journalist's defence against authoritarian control and the forces that want to silence the whistleblowers".

Jale Moala, one of Fiji's most experienced editors, says that political assignments pose specific challenges to journalists with their greatest challenge because of the cultural dilemmas they face.

"This is because politics in the region is so often mixed up with issues like culture and tribal loyalties that it can become difficult for reporters to maintain impartiality and direction, especially if they are themselves part of the cultural group involved."

Referring to the May 2000 attempted coup, Moala says much of the reporting was less than impartial.

The reporters were either "swept away by the euphoria of the moment" or feared to report impartially.

"As a result the perpetrators of the terrorist action received publicity that at the time seemed to legitimise their actions and their existence," Moala recalls. And the subtleties of Pacific conflict are not easily understood by foreign journalists. Radio Australia's correspondent in Port Moresby, Richard Dinnen, tells of his own experience in the Solomon Islands in mid-2000.

"It was a curious story. Here was a country tearing itself apart, yet it was still possible to stroll down the main street [of the capital Honiara] and buy a nice chilled coconut and drink it sitting in the shade."

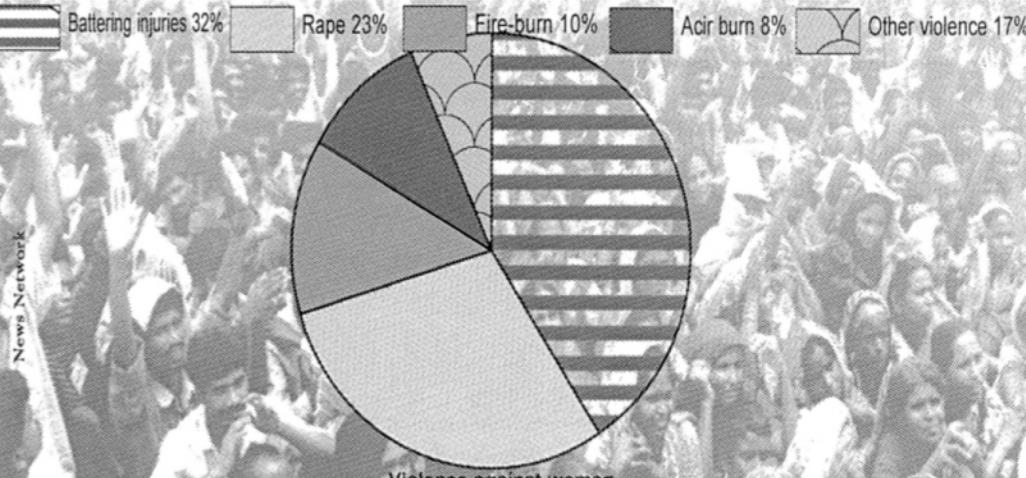
"Just a few minutes' drive away, the elected prime minister was trapped in his residence, no longer able to govern, fearing for his life," says Dinnen.

Explaining this to foreign print, radio and television audiences is a challenge not easily understood.

David Robie is a New Zealand journalist and journalism coordinator of the University of the South Pacific.

In Bangladesh women become victims of violence at the hands of their own friends and family members than from strangers, according to a study by Naripakka, a women organisation. The study, "Violence against Women in Bangladesh", showed that 63 percent of the patients interviewed at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) said they were hospitalised with violence related injuries they have suffered in their houses.

It revealed that the in-house violence was mainly perpetrated by relatives, especially by their brothers-in-law and husbands. The other culprits who wounded the women were lovers or suitors, known persons, fathers and strangers. The forms of violence seen at the DMCH during a six-month period included battering related injuries- 32 percent, rape- 23 percent, fire burns- 10 percent, acid burns- 8 percent and poisoning and other injuries- 5 percent. Six of the victims died of their injuries, the study said.



Interviews with 719 women showed that 60 percent of them were hit or beaten by their husbands. 20 percent reported sexual abuse inflicting pain deliberately while 67 percent verbal abuse using humiliating words and shouts by husbands.

Information collected from two special courts showed that women and teenagers mainly become victims of abduction, which is 49 percent. Among 117 cases, 101 girls from 11 to 20 years of age were either abducted by or eloped with their suitors or lovers. The other cases filed with courts were for rape 33 percent, torture and dowry 11 percent, trafficking 4 percent, acid burns 2 percent and fire burns 1 percent.

The study, which showed that crimes against women are increasing, suggested women education and late marriage (after 25) as protective factors. It also showed that woman's income level, occupation or social status has no effect on the attitude of the society towards the weaker sex. It recommended measures to ensure the rights of women in the society. It included individual, social and government steps to raise the social and legal status of women in the society.

Excerpts from the 'declassified' main report of Hamoodur Rahman Commission

MILITARY ASPECT-VI

ONE final aspect of the formulation of the war plans must be noticed, namely, that there was an utter lack of joint planning by the three services, except to the extent that the commander-in-chief of the Pakistan Air Force was brought into the picture by the GHQ while planning the army offensive. The naval headquarters were hardly consulted during the formulation of the war plans, and the naval commander-in-chief continued to function from Karachi, practically in isolation from the other two services. The defence committee of the cabinet, and the joint chiefs committee did not meet at all to evolve an integrated plan for the defence of Pakistan; nor did these bodies have any opportunity of considering the implications of the army action in East Pakistan, its repercussions on the military situation between India and Pakistan, the opening of the western front, the surrender in East Pakistan and the ceasefire in West Pakistan.

Mist of the decision were either individual decisions of Gen Yahya Khan in his capacity as president and supreme commander of the armed forces or at best they were GHQ decisions in consultation with the commander-in-chief of the Pakistan air force. Even the planning staff of the air headquarters did not establish any close liaison with the general staff of the army during the planning stage. An inevitable result

of these failures has been that the three services were practically fighting their own battles in isolation, so much so that even the commander-in-chief of the Pakistan air force complained before the commission that he was not informed in time about the offensive launched by 18 Div against Ramgarh in the Rajasthan area. He also gave the impression that he was not consulted when the GHQ decided to call off the big army offensive in the south, for which he was keeping in readiness a major part of his force.

These matters will come in for a detailed discussion when we consider the question of the higher direction of war and also the manner of execution of these plans, but they are significant in the present context as showing that apart from the inherent weaknesses of the army plans, the planning processes themselves were defective and not likely to produce the best results by way of coordinate joint plans of the defence of Pakistan.

Our conclusions may be summarised as follows:-

(a) We find that plans for the defence of Pakistan were formulated by the three services in practical isolation from each other, no use having been made by Gen Yahya Khan of the defence committee of the cabinet and the joint chiefs committee for evolving an integrated and coordinated plan. Almost all the

(c) the GHQ failed to examine the detailed plan for the defence of Dacca under the mistaken notion that this was a matter of detail to be sorted out by the Eastern Command with its lower form concerned. In view of the admitted vital importance of Dacca from the military and political angles and the fact that the end of Dacca was bound to mean the end of East Pakistan it was incumbent upon GHQ to guide, direct and influence the plan for the close defence of Dacca, but it failed to do so;

(d) the master plan for the Western Theatre suffered from a serious weakness inasmuch as it did not spell out, in concrete terms, the time relationship with the Indian invasion of East Pakistan, nor did it clearly state the circumstances and factors which the commander-in-chief was to take into account in launching the army reserves. As a result, this most elaborate plan was liable to be thwarted by the indecision of an individual, a disaster which actually occurred. In view of the accepted strategic and the public declaration made by Gen Yahya Khan the master plan should have automatically come into force according to its own time-table from the day the Indian launched the open invasion of East Pakistan.

TOMORROW