

## Neutralising use of arms in election

Political parties need to extend helping hand

WEAPONS are trouble, legal or illegal. In Bangladesh's context, it is more so just before, during and immediately after the election, be it local or national. So, when the caretaker government had singled out confiscation of illegal arms as its topmost priority towards helping the Election Commission conduct a peaceful, free and fair general election, we felt assured. Still, in the back of our minds, there was the fear that it would not be possible to round up all illegal arms, estimated to be somewhere above 250,000, in such a short period of time at the disposal of the present government. Our apprehension has come true. Although weapons and explosives confiscated so far in the ongoing special drive (more than five thousand and over 180,000 respectively) far outnumber the exploits of similar countrywide combing operations undertaken before the 1991 and 1996 elections, they are minuscule before the suspected numbers in existence. The most realistic inference which can be drawn at this point in time is that more than 200,000 illegal weapons might be out in the open when the nation goes to polls 11 days later. Then there are more than five thousand licensed weapons, a bulk of which, according to reports in the media, are in the possession of leaders and activists of the Awami League and its front organisations.

A bleak scenario indeed. There are a few positives, nevertheless. The confiscation rate of the special police drive may be modest; but it has been successful nonetheless to send the terrorists underground with their caches of illegal arms. There remains the possibility of their re-emergence just before the election though; however, their effectiveness would stand largely nullified by the countrywide deployment of armed forces on election duty. As for the licensed weapons, the council of advisors on Monday decided that all authorised pistols and revolvers would have to be deposited with the police stations a week ahead of the election date. Besides, no licensed single or double-barrel guns would be allowed in public.

Still, whether the election would be marred by violence and bloodletting is a matter that critically hinges on how the political parties tend to behave, especially the major two, namely the AL and the BNP. So far neither of the two has made any effort to rein in their trouble-mongering cadres and activists. The news of more than 100 deaths and grievous injury to hundreds of others perpetrated in countrywide political violence bears testimony to this effect. If we are expecting the caretaker government to cast a magic spell and pull off a peaceful election all by itself, we would certainly be wrong. That's why the caretaker government has never tired of seeking cooperation from the political parties.

## Bangladesh acts to prevent ozone depletion

But when will the world act on global warming?

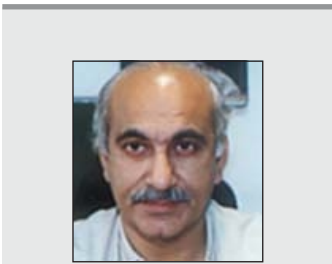
THE Government of Bangladesh has announced that it will cut the consumption of the harmful ozone gas emitting products as per international accords. The ozone layer protects harmful radiation from the sun to reach earth and its inhabitants, which can cause many hazards including a high incidence of cancer, especially skin cancer. The developed world is particularly threatened by this depletion of the layer and international accords exist to protect the layer. Bangladesh has signed them and is doing its bit.

This depletion is being caused among other reasons by overuse of certain type of consumer products including coolants used in air-conditioners, fridges etc. Other agents are also responsible. But the developed world, especially the United States while focussing on ozone depletion has ignored the dangers posed by global warming. Bangladesh will be one of the worst affected places in the world and the threat of almost one third of it being drowned is a real one. Yet even the simplest international protocols like the Rio and Kyoto agreements are being ignored. In effect it means following an aggressive policy of limitless consumption to suit a lifestyle which results in a high degree of carbon emission. This is changing the world's climate dramatically for the worse. It practically is a death sentence on Bangladesh and other low lying or impoverished countries.

It is a strange paradox that while Bangladesh though it has little contribution to the depletion of ozone layer follows international agreements she can't make the United States and other developing countries agree to lessen minute bits of carbon emission. Loss of cultivable land, massive epidemics, intense cyclones, sea level rise forcing millions to become refugees are only few of the many disasters just waiting to happen. It's a nightmare beyond description staring us in the face with no sanctuary in sight.

One applauds the Bangladesh government for its adherence to such treaties. It's a sign of being part of the comity of nations. But can't the Bangladesh government at least raise its voice in protest and not mew in agreement every time as it is being washed away.

# The rebirth of history



M.J. AKBAR

EVERY ten or fifteen years there comes a swivel moment in the poker game of history that determines the fortunes of the world. In 1964 an American President sent a few troops to a country called Vietnam to save the world from Communism. In 1979 the Soviet Union sent troops into Afghanistan to save Communism from the world. In 1990 Saddam Hussein sent troops into Kuwait to seize its oil for Iraq. And now in 2001 a network of shadows has sent a few of its troops into the United States to prove that it can hit the most sacred symbols of America's military and economic power. Since this is a story of human beings, there are emotional chains and practical, if hidden, interconnections between events. The parallel between Vietnam and Afghanistan is a cliché. Iraq is the only country to publicly applaud the Jihadis who destroyed the twin towers of New York, the Pentagon of Washington and forced the President of America into hiding in his own country for a good part of a day that will define this decade, a day on which began, in the words of President George Bush, the first war of the twenty-first century. If, as certain optimistic academics wrote, history came to an end with the defeat of the Soviet Union after four decades of Cold War, then history was clearly reborn on Tuesday, the 11th of September 2001.

Thirty-eight thousand one hundred and ninety-four Americans died in Vietnam. The count is not over, but more than 15,000 Americans may have already died on the first day of the first war of the twenty-first century. America has a lot to recover from the debris of the Pentagon, starting with its credibility. Washington has to answer an assertion made by Osama bin Laden in a videotape that swam across websites and was hawked in bazaars in June: "America is much weaker than it appears."

Am I mistaken when I begin this chapter with an event that took

place in a small town in the north of Afghanistan, Faizabad? Two "journalists", Moroccans with Belgian passports named Karim and Kassam, travelled from London to Pakistan and from there to Kabul. In the capital of Afghanistan they met Taliban officials on the pretext of working on a story. On 9 September these "journalists" met, by appointment for an interview, Ahmad Shah Masood, leader of the Northern Alliance against Kabul, a war hero many times over, and the only

Soviets in Afghanistan. In the process Osama bin Laden found his conviction, but he did not lose his memory.

It is axiomatic that those who planned the invasion of the United States were aware of the fury of the American response. They were probably goading this response, in any case, in their search for an apocalypse. If Osama bin Laden was the mastermind, then he knew that he would be emotional target and Kabul the political destination.

soldiers need a commander to lead, a target to achieve, and a treasurer to keep them well-fed. The moment that Masood, the lion of Panjsher, had been waiting for ever since he lost to the Taliban would have arrived.

The elimination of Ahmad Shah Masood was not an accident.

One thought must have already entered the mind of President George Bush Jr as he follows almost precisely in the footsteps of his father, the last American Presi-

provided Afghanistan years of stability before Moscow's meddling with the civilian governments under the king destroyed stability for more generations than it had lasted.

Afghanistan understands war. Geography has made it history's battleground. It has seen war all through recorded history, from Alexander to Chingiz Khan (who reached the banks of the Indus and then retreated before the Indian heat) to Nadir Shah and the endless armies that marched and looted and

died, in 1124 he had created a cult called the Ashishin (from which we get the word assassin) that chose as its target not just the infidel but all the Muslim princes that it placed in the category of betrayers, of near apostates who had weakened Islam by weakening their observance of the tenets of Islam. For the last 35 years of his life Hassan lived in the mountain castle of Alamut, an inaccessible stronghold from where this abstemious ascetic spread terror across the Muslim world. His followers penetrated every court, waiting for his signal for suicide missions in which they assassinated their targets (Masood, in that sense, was genuinely assassinated). Their terror lasted for far upward of a century; and in the end they were finally destroyed by Muslim states determined to quench their fanatic fervour. It was not just kings and princes who turned against them. As the scholar Dr Rafiq Zakaria confirmed to this columnist, one of the greatest theologians in Islamic history, Imam Ghazali warned Muslims that if they did not stop this sect the terrorists would hurt Islam immeasurably. This was not the spirit of Islam.

The challenge before America is to separate the Taliban movement from the broad sweep of the Muslim world; the two are neither the same nor interchangeable. The contradictions will be difficult to manage in the confusion of conflict: Pakistan's generals, for instance, could pay a price for accepting every American demand. But war has a logic that is not always logical. Perhaps generals will understand this better than others.

The unspoken danger is that Pakistan will become embroiled as heavily in this conflict as it was in the last Afghan war, also conducted with the help of Pakistani generals, then under Zia ul Haq. But General Zia was a fortunate man; the whole of Pakistan was united in the effort. General Pervez Musharraf could consider himself lucky if half his country is behind his support for the United States. Pakistan has changed because of the policies and politics its various leaderships have pursued, but that is another story. What is relevant, and dangerously relevant, is that unlike in the Eighties, Pakistan is an active nuclear power now.

If you get up from the table alive in this poker game, you've won.

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## BYLINE

The unspoken danger is that Pakistan will become embroiled as heavily in this conflict as it was in the last Afghan war, also conducted with the help of Pakistani generals, then under Zia ul Haq. But General Zia was a fortunate man; the whole of Pakistan was united in the effort. General Pervez Musharraf could consider himself lucky if half his country is behind his support for the United States.

commander who prevented the Taliban from controlling the whole of Afghanistan. The two fake journalists carried bombs, either hidden in a camera or strapped to the body. They blew themselves up, and Masood died later from shrapnel wounds. It was the first of the suicide missions that would shake the world. How does Faizabad connect with New York, Washington, Boston, Pittsburgh, Florida and perhaps a few place-names we have yet to learn about?

The most remarkable aspect of this operation was the superb planning. Analysts will long debate and study what this multi-city, years-long operation revealed and what it exposed of America's government, its private and public institutions, free-and-fluid society, and of course mindscape. But there is no doubt that those who thought this out, thought it through very thoroughly. This operation was planned by someone who understood America, who knew how it worked, who knew where it was porous, who knew where it had lived for some years in the United States, and had probably worked with its administration at some level. Someone who knew the psychological impact of a strike on symbols as powerful as the First Home of politics, the First Home of the military, and the First Home of finance. Someone with the biodata of Osama bin Laden, who once spent his father's money on high society hangouts and, when a sudden opportunity arose, worked with the CIA to fill an empty life with the adventure of a war against the

America would declare war. What would be the nature of this assault? Americans would of course use their aircraft carriers in the Indian Ocean, for which they needed no one's permission. The south was in that sense secure, and undefended by Kabul. India would obviously help in any way it could, but geopolitics imposed limitations on what India could do for the war effort. Pakistan was easy to read. Its government did not have the strength to stand up to any American wish list. American air power would operate from Pakistan and perhaps India as well. But ground troops as an assault force through the Pakistan-Afghanistan border were another matter. Pakistan was not a country where the government was in full control. There would be popular sentiment against an American presence; worse, there was the potential for sabotage by the innumerable, armed jihadi groups spawned for reasons stretching from Moscow to Kashmir. The most effective land assault could only be from the north, through that small gap outside the control of the Taliban near Tajikistan. Russia, embittered by Chechnya, would be a ready ally, but with reservations about sending its own troops. Americans would be reluctant as well to involve its troops; and if forced to do so, would minimise the body-exposure. Washington would always prefer to use the men under Masood, re-arming them with the best weaponry, and filling out ranks with well-paid recruits from the Tajiks or any tribes that were willing to cooperate for any reason in the drive towards Kabul. But all

dent to take his country to war (the attack on Yugoslavia during President Clinton's term was a blip rather than a battle). That thought is not about who is the enemy. Henry Kissinger, the ranking Republican intellectual, has outlined both the enemy and the methodology of the response: "Any government that shelters groups capable of this kind of attack, whether or not they can be shown to have been involved in this attack, must pay an exorbitant price." That is 29 words meaning Afghanistan. The method? "It is something to do calmly, carefully and inexorably."

The question in Bush's mind must surely be not about when to start the war, but when to stop. His father paid a heavy price because he did not know the answer to the second question; he confused the start with victory, with the result that Saddam Hussein is still in charge of Iraq and has 47 countries (including India) doing business with him. What will be Washington's war aim? Once war starts, its result will be determined by only one reality. Has the Taliban government been replaced in Kabul or not? Osama bin Laden may seem like an attractive trophy, but his capture or elimination is not the answer, as any serious analyst will confirm. A martyr is always more dangerous than a living leader. America's real target has to be the movement that was nurtured by Islamabad and has now secured a national base from which a network of disciples and agents can seek and kill across the world. America's purpose will surely be the restoration of the monarchy that

pillaged and raped through the devastations of the second millennium, ending with British rule. The first millennium was serene in comparison. The Afghans have conquered and been subjugated. They have been ruled by Greeks, Persians, Mongols, Central Asians, Indians (Delhi ruled Kabul for two hundred years), British and Russians. The cliché about Afghanistan is that it has been more difficult to get out than to get in.

War has returned to Afghanistan, but this time with important variations.

Both the United States and Afghanistan will be defending something larger than self-interest. The United States is fighting for its honour as well as for its leadership of a world it has steadily tried to fashion in its own image, built on the ideals of democracy and prosperity, equality of all citizens and constantly rising levels of material comfort. Afghanistan is in the constant frenzy of a jihad that it has chalked out as its rationale for existence. Kabul will not seek to involve either Muslim countries or their governments to its side. It will seek support from the underprivileged shadows of Muslim communities, from men whose faith leads them to treat death as their gift to a larger cause.

There is a precedence in Islamic history for this phenomenon. It emerged from the Ismaili sect of the Shias. In the second half of the eleventh century (a period of decline for Islamic power) Hasan-I Sabbah was born. We do not have the exact date of his birth, but by the time he

# America a time to reflect

WASIF ISLAM

I think anyone with a shred of humanity in him/her would condemn the soul shattering events of last Tuesday in the USA. I personally feel numbed and shocked and my heart goes out to all the unfortunate victims of the carnage. How can man do this to man? Who are these people taking away lives of innocent people, young, old, women, children, Jews, Chinese, Bangladeshis, Germans, Christians, Muslims?

President Bush vowed vengeance while waving a flag over the smoldering ruins of what was the World Trade Centre.

President Bush said in his speech to the nation on Tuesday that "we were attacked" because the United States is "the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world," and the perpetrators of the attacks want to stamp out this beacon.

Does this satisfactorily explain why the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon took place? A General interviewed on ABC said that this was an attack by "an enemy who hates us." He gave no reason for this intense hatred nor was he asked to do so.

Are Americans content to accept the president's explanation that they are hated so intensely and these events occurred because this enemy resents their being a country of freedom and opportunity? Are they content to assume that it is their best that brought this about?

That these dastardly deeds were born of envy and jealousy alone? Have you heard of cause and effect? What did the

American Governments 'cause' in the past that we now are seeing such a grotesque effect? Who then is really responsible?

Shouldn't the American people ask "what actions of ours could be perceived by some as so terribly wrong as to evoke such hatred and anger and such a ghastly response?" What was the perceived wrong these people were attempting to right? But do they feel that they share in responsibility for wrongs that somehow made those who carried out these acts feel justified?

America is a great country. It offers freedoms and opportunities to its citizens. One can be proud of the many achievements they have made. But Americans should also know that their government, acting on behalf of its citizens, has perpetrated unspeakable acts of violence against the citizens of other states. Isn't it surprising and shocking, that Palestinians were celebrating in the streets of Jerusalem and in the stifling refugee camp in Lebanon on Tuesday? Why were people dancing in the streets of cities of Iran? Why were they distributing sweets in Iraq? While the whole world stood trancelike and agast?

Why did Chile have to go through 17 years of terrible oppression under Gen. Augusto Pinochet after the CIA instigated the coup that led to the death of the democratically elected president, Salvador Allende, in a country that had a history of 100 years of democracy? Why did the US oust Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala? Why did they spend billions of dollars decimating the countryside of Nicaragua? What about the genocide in

VietNam? Why was the American Air force napalm bombing Cambodia? How long did they support apartheid in South Africa and kept other oppressive regimes in office?

More recently, how many babies died in Iraq due to crippling sanctions ordered by the US? Why does the US give away 5 billion dollars to Israel annually so that Israel can buy weapons to kill Palestinians?

American newspapers headlines read "America: Stunned, Saddened and Now Ready for Revenge." Is revenge what the perpetrators of Tuesday's crimes seek? Will revenge in return solve anything? Has America found a scape goat in Bin Laden? They should satisfy the world with incontrovertible evidence against him before attempting any violence.

Why must impoverished, war torn, famine plagued Afghanistan be targeted for punishment due to American lapses in security against terrorism? Again, is the American might pitted against one man, Osama bin Laden? Just does not sound right. There is no doubt in anyone's mind that the perpetrators need to be identified and their supporters held accountable. But revenge, unbalanced by truth, will gain nothing but increased rage and further acts of revenge. Revenge, unaccompanied by self-examination, accomplishes nothing. There are other ways to right wrongs and to resolve conflict.

These are trying times for America, it's a time to do some soul searching, a time for introspection. The great do not seek revenge, they are not haughty and proud, the great are humble, humane and forgiving.

# Afghanistan: A bitter harvest

IN its understandable rage for justice, America may be tempted to overlook one uncomfortable fact. Its own policies in Afghanistan a decade and more ago helped to create both Osama bin Laden and the fundamentalist Taliban regime that shelters him.

The notion of jihad, or holy war, had almost ceased to exist in the Muslim world after the tenth century until it was revived, with American encouragement, to fire an international pan-Islamic movement after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. For the next ten years, the CIA and Saudi intelligence together pumped in billions of dollars' worth of arms and ammunition through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) to the many mujahideen groups fighting in Afghanistan.

The policy worked: the Soviet Union suffered such terrible losses in Afghanistan that it withdrew its forces in 1989, and the humiliation of that defeat, following on from the crippling cost of the campaign, helped to undermine the Soviet system itself. But there was a terrible legacy: Afghanistan was left awash with weapons, warlords and extreme religious zealotry.

For the past ten years that deadly brew has spread its ill-effects widely. Pakistan has suffered terrible destabilisation. But the Afghanis, the name given to the young Muslim men who fought the infidel in Afghanistan, have carried their jihad far beyond: to the corrupt kingdoms of the Gulf, to the repressive states of the southern Mediterranean, and now, perhaps, to New York and Washington, DC.

Chief among the Afghanis was Mr bin Laden, a scion of one of Saudi Arabia's richest business families. Recruited by the Saudi intelligence chief, Prince Turki al Faisal, to

help raise funds for the jihad, he became central to the recruitment and training of mujahideen from across the Muslim world. Mr bin Laden fought against the Russians on the side of the ISI's favourite Afghan, Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, whose Hezb-e-Islami party became the largest recipient of CIA money.

After the Russians withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, the Americans quickly lost interest in the country and a struggle for power erupted among the mujahideen. But since no group was strong enough to capture and hold Kabul, the capital, Afghanistan slumped into anarchy. In 1995-96, a movement of Pathan students Taliban from religious schools in the border regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan swept the country, promising a restoration of order. They enjoyed Pakistani backing, and almost certainly the approval of the Americans.

Meanwhile, Mr bin Laden had become a self-avowed enemy of America, appalled at the presence of American troops on holy Saudi soil during the Gulf war. Exiled to Sudan, he was soon forced to leave. He secretly returned to Afghanistan, becoming a guest of the Taliban, whose interpretation of Islam and hostility to the West he shares. After attacks on two American embassies in 1998, America tried to persuade the Taliban to surrender him. When the regime refused, the Americans retaliated by raining cruise missiles on guerrilla camps in Afghanistan. The Taliban have steadfastly refused to hand Mr bin Laden over. As their guest he remains.

The Economist  
September 15, 2001

## PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.



STAR PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN

### How strong is democratic institution?

Enthusiasts are on their way to 'campaigning' for their respective party or candidate. In the countryside the monsoon water has not receded yet, the path is still muddy, but nothing can deter their zeal. They are strong in will. Fine. But whom they ask the voters to cast their votes for? How democratic and 'dependable' the person is? How strong the democratic institution itself be under him/her? These are questions that perturb the silent majority.

### Call from an American

This is my stand I hope you will all stand beside me!

To the Muslim and Arab community

My heart goes out to all of you who are experiencing the backlash to the terrorist act on Tuesday. May I please apologize for those who don't understand that you cannot diminish a whole community, a whole race, a whole religion because of others' behaviors. I have many friends from the Middle East. Before the attack I never thought of them to be anything but what they showed me they were and even after I feel exactly the same about them. I don't question who is my friend and where they come from, just as they don't question who I am. Not once have I thought otherwise. I am very selective of my friends and would not choose someone that did not share my values whether they are Christians, Muslims, Catholics, Buddhists ect ... We are all humans whether we believe in God, Alla or Buddha. Humanity is universal, love is universal, peace is universal.

Again I apologize for those who don't understand other cultures. I have seen things on the news of

people attacking Muslims and Arabs ruining their businesses; for this I am deeply hurt. My friend's restaurant has been very slow this week as I am sure many of you are experiencing the same thing. I will pray for you as I pray for all affected by this horrific act.

Assalamalaikum universal communities, I think that everyone around the world can now feel what I feel on an everyday basis. Cruelty and inhumane acts, prejudice of other races and are always an everyday image in my mind. The images of yesterday and years ago will never compare to the images we all face now. Welcome all of you to my world. Please let this tragedy remind you of the black man that lives next door to you that you have never said hello to. The Egyptian woman that sits next to you at work that you have failed to look at. The Lebanese child that you don't let your child play with. The Hispanics that you are forever calling Amego, they all have names use them. The gay man that you harass when he walks by. The list goes on and on but I think you can get the picture.

I also have to give President Bush a lot of love and credit for the wonderful job he is doing. National

day of Peace is long overdue. Maybe this tragedy will bring prayer back into our schools.

My thoughts are that if you are not willing to stand up for your beliefs, than your beliefs were not strong enough to begin with. Let's all make a stand. Let someone of a different race, color, religion into your life.

But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?

John 5:47  
Barbara A. Savage,  
United States of America  
on e-mail

### Attack on US and Bangladesh

The heinous attack that shook the world irrespective of caste, religion, region has greatly stirred Bangladesh is at home and abroad. I came to learn from your newspaper that the US has sought airspace and port facilities from Dhaka for a possible attack on terrorists based in Afghanistan. India and Pakistan have already given their consent.

Then why we are delaying to give our consent to U.S for a possible use of airspace, if needed? It is true that Bangladesh has to think about a number of things before

giving consent to any country to use her airspace. It is also true that the US is the main partner of Bangladesh in international world.

We can't bypass this main issue but to share with other countries to eradicate terrorism. The caretaker government should immediately sit with main political parties to give immediate response to US if so asked. Otherwise, it might cause a severe pain for us and Bangladesh can be regarded as a soil for the shelter. Bangladesh has to prove herself that she is the partner of US in its time of need.

It is the time to fight against terrorism, anarchy and to drive out the evils from the earth. If Pakistan and India can do that, why can't we? We are friends of peace, harmony and want to disarm and punish the perpetrators of those inhuman acts.

Asad,  
University of Saskatchewan,  
Saskatoon, Canada.

### How can you help?

Bangladesh watches and keeps on watching. Now Bangladesh must make up its mind, to be with the pro-western forces or to be with the radical forces. We are sick and tired of seeing our country remain inert

and confused, which has no say on anything ever going on in the world.

Bangladesh as the third largest Muslim country has not played any significant role for the Palestinians, Chechnians, Kashmiris or Bosnians. When any crisis has arisen, it just watches and keeps on watching. How is it possible that the country could not establish a foreign policy guideline in last thirty years? From 1971 to 1975 it was under certain support, then from 1976 to 1981 it changed that track and started aligning with the western forces. From 1981 the country started its confusing policy.

The necessity is now vital, growing fundamentalist forces in the country and developing pro western middle class and elite are moving dangerously toward each other. In between lies our government that is consistently staying in policy dilemma. There must be a path to follow. In no issue we have seen anybody has asked for our opinion. Except kissing the Arab leaders on the airport, we have no achievement so far. But we have to prove perhaps that even beggars can be choosers!

Hasanat Alamgir,  
Vancouver, British Columbia