

"Call from an American"

I have been touched by Barbara A Savage's letter titled as above in the Letters to the Editor column of September 19. I also share her feelings that we are humans first, and a friend is a friend, whoever or whatever he or she may be. I want to thank her for her words for those who are experiencing the backlash to the terrorist acts in the United States.

M Ghulam Murtaza
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Walaikum salaam, Barbara! This is what I (a woman symbolising motherhood and peace) wanted to hear from an American at this very moment when the whole world is in mental turmoil. And I am so happy that such a feeling came from a like-minded person of a different culture.

The horrendous terrorism not only sliced through the twin towers of New York but it cut through the hearts of innumerable families of the world irrespective of their creed and colour. President Bush has valiantly taken up the challenge to avenge the terrorism. However, he has to be cautious in expressing his sentiments. Mr Bush today is not only the president of the USA, but he is the leader of the world's sole super power.

We hope "smoking" out terrorists would not mean further loss of innocent men, women and children. Peace will dawn on world when we treat a human to be a human irrespective of his belief and country of origin. Revenge begets revenge but this does not mean we let acts of terrorism go unpunished. Never. Terrorists are cowards inasmuch as they do not come identified.

As a Muslim I would also want the world to know that Islam is a religion of peace and not of sword as so very wrongly focused by some. Every religion has its group of fundamentalists, who bring havoc to one's society in the name of religion. The fearful incidents that are travelling here from the Western world as reaction of the 11th September incident are causing concerns to Muslims round the world. The western people have to understand that the Taliban and the Muslim community are not the same. Terrorists to suit their purpose could garb on any religion.

Thus on this first year of the 21st century let us establish this to be a world to share and clasp each others hand in conviction that we shall overcome all kinds of adversities and disasters with our united efforts. We should believe that we are first and foremost citizens of one world. Let the 21st century see the world as an embodiment of peace and not a ground for a Third World War.

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Bombing Afghanistan back to the Stone Age

The other day I heard a lot of talk about "bombing Afghanistan back to the Stone Age". Ronn Owens, on KGO Talk Radio, said that this would mean killing innocent people - people who had nothing to do with this atrocity, but "we're at war, we have to accept collateral damage". "What else can we do? What is your suggestion?" he had asked. Minutes later I heard a TV pundit discussing whether we "have the belly to do what must be done".

And I thought about these issues especially hard because I am from Afghanistan, and even though I've lived here for 35 years, I've never lost track of what's been going on over there. So I want to share a few thoughts with anyone who will listen.

I speak as one who hates the Taliban and Osama Bin Laden. There is no doubt in my mind that these people were responsible for the atrocity in New York. I fervently wish to see those monsters punished.

But the Taliban and Bin Laden are not Afghanistan. They're not even the government of Afghanistan. The Taliban are a cult of ignorant psychotics who captured Afghanistan in 1997 and have been holding the country in bondage ever since. Bin Laden is a political criminal with a master plan. When you think Taliban, think Nazis. When you think Bin Laden, think Hitler. And when you think "the people of Afghanistan", think "the Jews in the concentration camps". It's not only that the Afghan people had nothing to do with this atrocity they were the first victims of the perpetrators. They would love for someone to eliminate the Taliban and clear out the rat's nest of international thugs holed up in their country. I guarantee it.

Some say, if that's the case, why don't the Afghans rise up and overthrow the Taliban themselves? The answer is, they're starved, exhausted, damaged, and incapacitated. A few years ago, the United Nations estimated that there are 500,000 disabled orphans in Afghanistan - a country with no economy, no food. Millions of



The face of terror.

Afghans are widows of the approximately two million men killed during the war with the Soviets. And the Taliban has been executing these women for being women. The soil of Afghanistan is littered with land mines and almost all the farms have been destroyed. The Afghan people have tried to overthrow the Taliban. They haven't been able to.

We come now to the question of bombing Afghanistan back to the Stone Age. Trouble with that scheme is, it's already been done. The Soviets took care of it. Make the Afghans suffer? They're already suffering. Level their houses? Done. Turn their schools into piles of rubble? Done. Eradicate their hospitals? Done. Destroy their infrastructure? There is no infrastructure. Cut them off from medicine and health care? Too late. Someone already did all that.

New bombs would only land in the rubble of earlier bombs. Would they at least get the Taliban? Not likely. In today's Afghanistan, only the Taliban eat, only they have the means to move around. They'd slip away and hide. (They have already, I hear.) Maybe, the bombs would get some of those disabled orphans - they don't move too fast, they don't even have wheelchairs. But flying over Kabul and dropping bombs wouldn't really be a strike against the criminals who did this horrific thing. Actually it would be making common cause with the Taliban - by raping once again the people they've been raping all this time.

So what else can be done, then? Let me now speak with true fear and trembling. The only way to get Bin Laden is to go in there with ground troops. I think that when people speak of "having the belly to do what needs to be done", many of them are thinking in terms of having the belly to kill as many as needed. They are thinking about overcoming moral qualms about killing innocent people. But it's the belly to die not kill that's actually on the table. Americans will die in a land war to get Bin Laden. It's not just some Americans would die fighting their way through Afghanistan to Bin Laden's hideout. It's much bigger than that. To get any troops to Afghanistan, we'd have to go through Pakistan. Would they let us? Not likely. The conquest of Pakistan would have to be first. Will other Muslim nations just stand by? You see where I'm going. The invasion approach is a flirtation with global war between Islam and the West.

And that is Bin Laden's programme. That's exactly what he wants and why he did this thing. Read his speeches and statements. It's all right there. At the moment, of course, Islam as such does not exist. There are Muslims and there are Muslim countries, but no such political entity as Islam. Bin Laden believes that if he can get a war started, he can constitute this entity and he'd be running it. He really believes Islam would beat the West. It might seem ridiculous, but he figures if he can polarise the world into Islam and the West, he's got a billion soldiers. If the West wrecks a holocaust in Muslim lands, that's a billion people with nothing left to lose, even better from Bin Laden's point of view. He's probably wrong about winning, in the end the West would probably over-

come - whatever that would mean in such a war; but the war would last for years and millions would die, not just theirs but ours. Who has the belly for that? Bin Laden yes, but anyone else?

I don't have a solution. But I do believe that suffering and poverty are the soil in which terrorism grows. Bin Laden and his cohorts want to bait us into creating more such soil, so they and their kind can flourish. We can't let him do that.

Tamim Ansary
On e-mail

The United States vows to fight terrorism and so does almost all countries of the world. If this combat against terrorism begins with an attack on Afghanistan, will it continue with attacks on other countries where there are other terrorist organisations and networks? I think the answer is no. If Osama Bin Laden is the mastermind behind the disaster in US as is believed by the US, then what arguments justify attacking Afghanistan? Had the mastermind been living in Germany or England, would the US have attacked Germany or England? What the US is attempting to do is fight fire with fire which will eventually lead to a wild fire or a conflagration.

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As a Bangladeshi living in Canada, I am very much dismayed rather shocked to learn the inhuman acts of certain radical Muslims in bombing of World Trade Centre, which resulted in loss of many innocent men and women. Employees from 62 countries used to work at the WTC and among them there are many Bangladeshis. Many Muslims lost their lives prematurely in the wake of heinous acts of certain barbarians.

This is a great slur in the name of Islam. Islam never teaches or advocates killing of innocent people.

Fanaticism drives people to madness, which negates the true principles of religion. We have seen during the War of Independence of Bangladesh Pakistani army mercilessly kill innumerable innocent men, women and children in the name of Islam. Does Islam teach violence? Again Canada being the closest ally of the US, it has to bear the consequences of loss in business. Due to closure of all airports in the US at that time, all planes were diverted to Canadian airports particularly in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. As many as 500 flights came to Toronto and 30,000 passengers were stranded in the airport.

In the end we hope and pray that saner elements should prevail among the people to save the world from the acts of terrorism and disaster.

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Do not attack Afghanistan

We strongly condemn terrorists' attacks in the US, express our deepest sorrow for the hundreds of innocent people killed,



America prepares for war.



The menacing rickshaws.

A serious matter

The three-wheelers rickshaws and auto-rickshaws are serving little or no purpose at all and are a real nuisance. They are solely responsible for endless traffic jams that we experience every time we go out. The main problem, however, is that which ruling government will have the courage to remove these vehicles. Thousands, or should I say, millions of votes will be given away to the opposition. I am sure the governments of past, present and future will be selfish enough not to do anything of the sort. I agree that it will be a problem for those who do not have a car, but taxicabs will be a much better alternative.

Life for all would be much better if more taxicabs are introduced, even though these cabs are most ordinary and are nothing to write home about. We have to combat this problem instead of complaining all the time about traffic jams. One may come up with the question that if the jobs of these people are taken away, how will they feed their family. If the government takes

some measures and jobs are created in other major cities such as Chittagong, Khulna, Jessore and Sylhet, then the population of Dhaka will reduce drastically and rickshaw-pullers would find jobs there. There are just too many vehicles on the roads. For creating jobs in other cities, the government must lower the interest rates and provide grants to businessmen so that they may invest. Its easier said than done, but if no measures are taken, then, the situation in Dhaka will be a pitiable one in a couple of years. If the above measures are considered seriously by the government, we will have a better future. If all the fellow citizens join hands and try to persuade the government to act accordingly, we will definitely make Bangladesh a better place to live in.

Amer Junaid
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For fairness to young learners

All right. Many advanced and developing countries are following the 'grading system' in their countries. But funny as it may be authority or authorities concerned do not mention the names of those countries for obvious reasons. One of our esteemed writer to this column has written in support of the grading system in our country introduced for the first time by the Education Boards. Another writer has written about 'his' educational career in US, but he has failed to mention the method or methods which is/are being followed there and based on what kind of answer script. The writer knows very well that in no country is an 'F' awarded.

As an education-ist I can assure all that at A, O, or Cambridge system of education there is no 'F' grade at any level nor in our own. Grades A, B, C, D appear according to the numbers (marks)

received by students but those who cannot achieve the minimum number get 'U' which means Un-graded. Based on 'U' grade/grades a student may be allowed to get admission to the next higher class only in one's own institution. But on getting a 'U' in any public exam, may they be A or O level or Cambridge system, there is no scope for getting to the next higher class.

The writer who studied 'A' level in USA probably received poor grades. Otherwise what is he doing in Dhaka, Bangladesh? Brilliant students of our own country are much sought by USA for the quality we possess and the integrity, honesty and dedication to work we show. USA even has Bangladeshis working at NASA.

The Ministry of Education and the Education Boards must cancel the grades and do the needful to encourage the young and tender-minded learners with immediate effect and encourage them to go for real talent

and merit. Let us not try to defend ourselves foolishly and destroy the sparkling future of the nation.

Mujibul Haque
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Voting is an amanat

The other evening I watched a voter, a farmer carrying a load of the golden fibre, jute, on his head, facing the ETV camera, and telling his countrymen and women that the voting right was a divine amanat with mankind, and this blessing should not be misused. It made a deep impression on me. I mused why our political leaders do not talk in this way.

Alif Zabr
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Separation of judiciary

Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed's quoted determination to separate the judiciary from the executive is indeed very significant and as such very much laudable. The proper development of democratic process in Bangladesh needs an independent judi-

ciary. All the thug-gery, political terrorism and harassment that we have been witnessing can be minimised to a great extent if the judicial functions of the magistrates are taken away to prevent manipulation by politicians and thugs.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid's article on the subject (DS, September 11) is very lucid and timely. To have real and effective separation of powers, it needs the co-operation of both the political parties to amend the constitution in the next parliament. But the interim government immediately can take a small step by abolishing the judicial functions of the magistrates by an executive order. The Awami League and the BNP cannot object because election manifestos of both parties contain the same objective.

Time is running out. We wish Mr Ishtiaq Ahmed well and fully support his effort to fulfill the cherished aspiration of the nation.

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Come out of fantasy

It is noteworthy that student politics is a mischievous thing to support, but students of Dhaka University have become weapons of selfish political leaders, who are only manipulating them. The students are tied up with in a vicious circle of power. They infer that one day they will also become MPs, surfeit with bungalows and cars and become influential as well. Within moments, however, the sweet dreams come to tragic ends when student leaders like Firoz get murdered by miscreants. So please come out of the fantasy world.

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AL's view on caretaker government
Shah AMS Kibria in a meeting of the AmCham told that if Awami League (AL) were voted to power they would rethink the caretaker government's provision in constitution. Are they

going to abolish that provision from constitution? If so, why they then spoiled 173 days of the nation in the name of strike in 1994 - 1996, demanding caretaker government? Why they destroyed public property and killed innocent people?

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One of the major political parties has reportedly said that it would offer presidency to Chief Advisor Latifur Rahman, if it came to power. The report has naturally raised quite a commotion in the political arena as well as in the public mind. The Awami League has demanded a clarification from the chief advisor in this regard, although the latter has made it public through a press statement that he has no desire to become the president of the republic.

In another development, former finance minister and chief of the AL election conducting committee Shah

AMS Kibria has recently told a luncheon meeting of the AmCham that his party would rethink the provision of the caretaker government, if voted to power. It seems the party is planning to change the system because it is not working.

The AL should remember that they agitated against the BNP government and enforced 173 days of hartal to have the provision of the caretaker government incorporated in the constitution. Why is it now thinking of a change in the system? Is it because of the administrative reshuffle and the changes to some crucial posts effected by the caretaker government? Is AL thinking that the whole caretaker government is working against them and so they will not be able to come to power?

We should remember that caretaker government cannot do anything according to the preference of a party. It is bonded

and bounded to the constitution. The system of caretaker government cannot be altered simply by taking into consideration the activities of the last few days. We must not forget that if people give a party sufficient vote to go to power, it doesn't mean that they have given the right to do anything the party wants. If any political party acts according to its wishes, ignoring people's demand and history, the party has to suffer as has been proved.

We have struggled against autocracy and established caretaker government and we hope the next parliamentary election will consolidate the foundation of the caretaker government. If the next election is fair and free, democracy will win, the caretaker government will be institutionalised and people's hopes and aspirations will be realised.

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