

Punish the guilty but spare the innocent

Fear looms that the slaughter of innocents could be unbearably high

THE drums of a possible future war of massive proportions have already begun to roll. What was sparked off with the attack on the US soil is now threatening to spill over into the entire world. Ordinary and innocent citizens, Americans, Arabs or Bangladeshi may feel that their future itself is under attack.

Everyone condemns the terrorist attack in the US, which has killed thousands of innocents. It has also pointed to the new reality of the global nature of any violent acts as we see a major representation of many countries in the death list including Bangladeshis. The innocence of the dead is confirmed even if the total body number awaits confirmation. But are we to see more?

The West has pushed for a global coalition against terrorism and many countries have signed in already. Bangladesh too has agreed to lend support. But a retributive attack against Afghanistan will certainly lead to a major loss of lives and many have already expressed their concern on this. The streets are speaking out against more violence.

Everyone feels that the guilty terrorists should be punished and that the innocent shouldn't pay the price. This has to be the basic premise of any global action. This is in consonance with the public opinion everywhere. The innocent mustn't die anymore.

This applies to Afghanistan as well, a people who have suffered for long under various regimes and are now staring at the firing end of a global gun of wrath but the Afghan people are also innocent. The world can't offer them only two dreadful options: death or more death.

Those who are taking the final decision on the matter must recognize that signing what may be the death sentence of a people will not be acceptable to the rest of the world. And the coalition that will form the moral foundations of a concerted attack against terrorism may itself be threatened.

It seems to be too late for peace at least for the time being. But one seriously hopes that no situation may arise when only fewer innocent voices are left to search for a respite from wars.

Please punish the guilty but spare the innocent.

Prisoners' plight

Calls for infrastructural enhancement

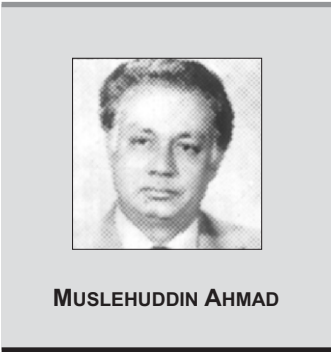
THE condition at the central jails in Feni, Noakhali and Laxmipur is representative of the country's overall prison system - overcrowded, understaffed, ill equipped and, above all, neglected by the authorities. Let us take the case of Laxmipur jail for a better understanding of the overall situation. It has accommodation facility for 121 inmates and a legion of 38 prison guards. Currently, there are 743 prisoners, almost seven times its capacity. Conversely, there has not been any effort to increase the number of prison guards. The ratio of prisoner to guard at the Laxmipur jail is nearly 20 to one. And, believe it or not, such overcrowding has not been occasioned by any extraordinary events. According to local jail authorities, there has been a fractional rise in the number of inmates due to the ongoing special police drive to confiscate illegal arms and arrest terrorist and criminal elements. They are happy at that, for obvious reasons. Bails granted by the courts of law to the accused in different cases, to the jail authorities, mean that they won't have to worry about cramming a few more people into the already spilling-over prison cells.

Overcrowded prisons at different districts of the country, where inmates have to rest or sleep in shifts and have scabies and other fungal infections, hold the grim prospect of a total law and order breakdown. The authorities should keep in mind that revolts in prison stem from growing displeasure among inmates at being deprived of basic requirements. Worryingly still, authorities at these prisons, as the personnel counts suggest, are not equipped to deal with any such emergency.

Basically, therefore, there are two areas that need immediate attention - expansion of physical infrastructure at different jails and recruitment of more guards. Before that, however, there should be a comprehensive survey on the entire prison system - number of inmates and guards, existing capacity, etc. The study, once conducted, would help the authorities map out the line of action. Whatever the methods may be, they should immediately go about redressing the prison problems, lest these should snowball into crises.

America's war against terrorism

Arafat's unilateral ceasefire to help global coalition



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

AMERICA declared war against the terrorists who carried out a devastating attack on the twin towers of The World Trade Center and Pentagon, the symbol of American power, on September 11, 2001 killing thousands of Americans and many people of different nationalities. This obviously outraged the Americans and also the peace loving people around the world. American President George W Bush rightly declared that "America is at war" against terrorism. He also said publicly that he was "angry". Angry he must be but anger of 'the most powerful man on earth' should not influence the decisions and consequent actions that America should take to combat terrorism. These have to be cool and calculating, befitting the superpower and also keeping in view the historical facts and agonizing experiences of the former super power Soviet Union at a particular terrain. Any action would undoubtedly affect America's relations with the rest of the world. Not only that America's actions against a particular target, if not based on hard and credible evidence, might destabilize the front-line governments but also others that would support America. So considerable fall-out effects cannot be ruled out.

Osama bin Laden has been declared as the "prime suspect" by the Administration. It must have its reasons for such a conclusion. But that they have wide support and the supporters are spread all over.

Talebans regime received the recommendation of the Ulemas (religious leaders) of Afghanistan that Osama bin Laden should leave Afghanistan voluntarily. As both Mullah Omar, the leader of Afghanistan, and Osama are related to each other by marriage, it is difficult to guess whether Osama would at all be asked to leave though there were already suggestions that Osama has probably left Afghanistan for an unknown destination. There is, however, no confirmation of this. May be this is just a guess.

In the meantime, Afghan leaders have declared Jihad (holy war) against the US if it attacks Afghanistan. There appears to be high tension in Pakistan as there have already been several demonstrations there, particularly in the Frontier province against Pakistani President's decision to give full

support to the USA. Even President Musharaf reportedly admitted that about 10-15 per cent of Pakistanis support Afghan position which means support to Osama bin Laden. India and Bangladesh reportedly gave full support to the USA in its war against terrorism.

As various reports show some of the suspects were in the USA and nobody could doubt their activities as nobody could detect the activities of Timothy MacVeigh until he blew up the Federal building at Oklahoma. The US Administration

dent Jacques Chirac, a deep search has to be launched to identify the "causes" for such inhuman and terrible attacks and appropriate actions are to be taken to eliminate those.

This brings us to at least one area of confrontation in Middle-East where the US has been deeply involved. It seems that the US Administration, despite the unprecedented situation at home, has at long last been giving some deep thought to the problems in the area and asked Israel's Prime Minister

and "Israel's bin Laden". This reportedly "irked" even the US Administration. He said, "If you ask me whether Israel will make concessions so that one Arab country or another will take part in the coalition, the answer is emphatic no." This clearly went against the interest of the US in terms of its decision to form a global coalition to fight terrorism. Indeed, nobody has asked him to make concessions; he should only vacate the land Israel occupied in 1967 war. This is no concession. This was backed by the UN resolutions which

from helicopters that pierced through the bedroom of a Palestinian lady who was sleeping there with her three small children.

However, diplomatic pressure was heavy on both Sharon and Arafat to stop fighting as the world was getting ready for a bigger fight against terrorism. Arafat did the right thing; he responded immediately. He announced his decision to cease fire to dozens of diplomats who assembled in Gaza two days ago. He also sent an open letter saying, "I have issued strict instructions for a total commitment to the cease-fire." Arafat also said that he was unilaterally declaring cease-fire 'to help the United States in its campaign against terrorism'. In the circumstances Israel also had to act. It also announced that it has ordered the army to cease all offensive operations against the Palestinians. Israeli troops started pulling out of the areas they occupied inside the Palestinian controlled area including Jenin. Shimon Peres said, "The declaration by Arafat and Israel can be a turning point and the beginning of political discussions..."

I would not say this was the result of American pressure. We have a lot of respect for the Americans. One telephone call from (President) Bush is very important and we don't need further pressure."

This is what everyone is saying. America should and its hands off policy towards Middle-East. Just a call from the top - the President of the United States - to Israeli authority to shun its aggressive policies and resume peace talks would do the job. Such a talk under US supervision would lead to the implementation of Mitchell report. This will certainly reduce violence and would put the peace process back on track. This will also help America in its effort to fight terrorism.

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary, Ambassador and Founder President of North South University. He is also the Chairman of Civic Watch Bangladesh

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

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must be checking whether people like Timothy MacVeigh were also in these aircraft who might have had similar pilot training as these were very precision hits and could not be carried out by some people having only casual training. The present suspects used American materials, equipment, technology, expertise to bring devastation on American institutions and establishments. Therefore, the consequences are to be weighed properly in the context of the prevailing situation because of wide repercussions that may follow. Thus a comprehensive war against terrorism would every sensible man on earth support but sudden military strikes on a target may turn out to be counterproductive and may indeed result in 'braking out' of terrorism all over unless done conscientiously on the basis of hard facts and evidences. This is why before launching any 'conceivable military action' as put by Presi-

Ariel Sharon to engage in a negotiation with the Palestinians to reduce the problems at least in one area which would help the US to have a wider coalition to fight terrorism. Though the former deputy director of Mossad said that Israeli-Palestinian problem was something of a very marginal nature in the present horrible episode, still the reduction of violence in the M-E could favourably influence the decisions of many Arabs towards the proposed global coalition against terrorism.

Unfortunately, Ariel Sharon did not pay any heed to the US advice and as usual was pursuing his aggressive and repressive policies and actions against the Palestinians. Indeed, he continued to increase his military strikes against Palestinian targets taking the advantage of the situation. The worst thing was that he even called Arafat "an unreconstructed terrorist"

Israel has been defying.

Unfortunately, Israel is in the wrong hand at a time when the US is trying to build up a wider coalition to fight the menace of international terrorism. In such a fight the presence of practically all Arabs states is necessary. The *Jerusalem Post* reported that "Sharon spared no words in condemning Arafat. Sharon said, 'Arafat today standing at the head of a terror coalition is not a partner for dialogue.... If he will act against terror I have many doubts about this, many doubts... He is head of a terror coalition against us. Do you see the US negotiating with bin Laden? Can you imagine like that?' But if one looks at Sharon's history as a Defense Minister while Israel invaded Lebanon and massacred thousands of Palestinian civilians, then no further proof is necessary. Even two days back, Israeli forces under his authority sent missiles

Not to promote war but to preserve peace

MAJOR GENERAL (RETD) SYED MUHAMMAD IBRAHIM BP

"THE real object of an Army is to prepare for war....." American Secretary of State Elihu Root used these words to introduce his 1894 proposals, which among other things led to the creation of the Army War College located at Carlisle Barracks in the state of Pennsylvania. General John M Shalikashvili, a famous US military commander of very recent times wrote: "..... as I think back upon my time at the Army War College, I cannot help but feel indebted to the school for its profound impact on me. It is a stepping stone to a new plane of thinking." Personally as an old War College graduate (International Fellow Class of 1990), I could not have articulated my feelings better. The motto of the US Army War College is: "Not to promote war but to preserve peace". Now the world community is passing through one of the most crucial moments of its own history. Right decision will promote peace, wrong decision will promote war. Myself, as an individual peace-loving citizen of a peace-loving country, unequivocally condemn the terrorist attacks in USA which killed few thousand innocent people.

Having said that, I must also join other souls and minds across the world searching out the best response to avoid such violence in future, as well as simultaneously pacify the disturbed souls of those who have lost their loved ones or mend the injured national pride of the Americans.

As a religion, Islam enunciates peace. Therefore, for ardent Muslims peace is synonymous with

Islam. Let us recall the days of the Muslim ruler during the days of the Crusade, Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi. He had heard of the critical illness of his battle field rival King Richard. That was an opportunity to attack and, in all probability and feasibility, destroy the demoralized army of King Richard. Salahuddin decided otherwise. Salahuddin arranged for his treatment and recovery; he even paid personal visit under disguise. The behaviour of Salahuddin is an example of morality and leadership. It was because of the feelings in the mind of Salahuddin about the teachings of Islam. The Old and the New Testament contain enough forbearing about use of force on unknown enemy, or on suspected enemy.

Between 1990 and 2001 there is a great heredity in leadership in the USA. The then President Bush is available at 'beck and call' to his son President Bush Junior. The then Secretary of Defence Dick Cheney is today's Vice President. The then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell is now the Secretary of State.

When Colin Powell was the Joint Chief of Staff barely for twenty four hours, the military coup in Panama against Noriega regime had begun. The Middle East crisis arising out of the invasion of Kuwait came much later. Earlier, when he was offered the chairmanship, Colin Powell was the most junior of the fifteen four-star generals legally eligible for the chairmanship, and had been himself a four-star General barely for four months. Powell was Dick Cheney's candidate. Despite apprehension from critics, Powell provided an excellent leadership in 1990-91. We urge him now also to

provide sagacious leadership. Give repeated thoughts to the course of action you take. We are with you in your struggle against terrorism, but you may not find many friends in your assault against a whole people the bulk of whom are innocent. It is difficult to articulate our feelings, yet more difficult for you (the American leadership) to decide. There is a phrase in Bangla language which essentially means "igniting a canon to kill a mosquito." Will you not consider the line of least resistance and least violence? Or you want to wait and decide a while later! I am sure you are keeping track of the world opinion. Let me quote a few lines from two different capitals, namely, Bangkok and Dhaka.

For example, in Bangkok (Thailand) the headline of a report in *'The Nation'* of Sunday, September 16" was like this: "Civil Groups urge Non-violent Resolution." The report continues: "In an attempt to seek a peaceful resolution to the terrorist atrocities committed against the United States, Thai and international civil groups are trying to build momentum to bring the perpetrators to justice by applying diplomacy and rules of law rather than by bombs and bullets. Amid the escalating rhetoric of harsh military retaliation, a growing number of academics and international media are urging the public to look at root causes of the last Tuesday's attacks. A coalition of religious organizations met in Bangkok yesterday to plan a campaign that includes a letter to be submitted to the US Embassy this week." "More violence is not the answer" said Sarawuth Patumraj, coordinator for Thailand's Committee of Human Rights Organizations.

Another different evaluation of the 11" September event was articulated by US philosopher Francis Fukuyama. He wrote: "The United States risks emerging from these attacks a different country, more united, less absorbed and much more dependent on the help of its friends to carry out what will become a new national project of eradicating terrorism. Not since Pearl Harbor, has any enemy been able to kill Americans on American soil, and that was in far-off Hawaii. That situation had led to the emergence of a notion of exceptionalism in American foreign policy. Tuesday's Kami Kazi attacks in New York and Washington mark the end of America's exceptionalism in its foreign policy."

One time foreign minister of Thailand, Dr Surin Pitsurwan and currently a Democrat MP wrote: "Let's look beyond revenge. If the horrific events of 11 September 2001 once again manifest the dangers of alienating impassioned interest groups, then for the sake of mankind, isn't it about time we brought them more into the fold? Revenge and any degree of violence in retaliatory operations may appear to be justifiable and politically correct at first glance. The punishment must fit the crime. Domestic political pressure in USA is building up by the hour. Indecisiveness and delay will only increase frustration. But any miscalculation or indiscriminate acts of violence will lead to another cycle of violence, another chain reaction, involving more and more people and spreading wider and wider, affecting lives under every roof of this global village of ours. We must

realize that violence begets violence in the endless cycle of violence. Emotional outbursts are hard to contain. The force of irrationality will be so overwhelming that we will lose sight of the root cause of this heinous crime."

Leading English daily of Dhaka, The Daily Star in the September 14" issue, printed a special page (Page-9) and gave it a headline "We condemn, we protest." In the front page in the first column (of the same day) was printed the reaction of the Government of Bangladesh. Chief Advisor Justice Latifur Rahman was quoted as denouncing all acts of terrorism that run counter to human values and divine religions including Islam. Bangladesh government and people of Bangladesh stand unitedly and solidly by the American people at this hour of national tragedy. On the same day, The Daily Star in its editorial page printed two columns. First column was titled "What price safety?" It was Kuldip Nayar of New Delhi. Part of the column reads, "The entire world should fight against it unitedly and methodically. America has promised to do so. But this is not the time to settle personal scores with the countries. This is the time to analyze what breeds fanaticism and how the people and countries which get involved for pecuniary or political gains can be retrieved as well as punished. There should be no victimization." In the editorial page of The Daily Star of 16" September, a Bangladeshi citizen, Barrister Harunur Rashid who was also once a Bangladesh ambassador to the UN at Geneva, wrote his regular column titled "Wake up call for the US." The writer says, "The reason

for military response by the US for such terrible attacks is overwhelming. Although war is outlawed by the charter of the UN, it permits an armed attack under two circumstances: a) The Security Council can authorise an armed attack under chapter VII, and b) a country can launch an armed attack as a self-defence under article 51 of the charter. In the present case, the attackers are not conventional enemies and the purpose of the military action lies in its effectiveness to eradicate terrorism. If there is no good chance of achieving its objectives, it may cause severe unintended consequences of a cycle of violence/terrorism unlikely to rival anything we have experienced before. It remains to be seen what the US will do?" In the same page of The Daily Star, Professor Taj I Hashmi wrote, "In sum, while the normal, peace loving people should condemn the dastardly acts of terrorism against America or against humanity and civilization they should warn the US about the disastrous consequences of waging a war against a country, group or even worse, an individual on the basis of bare suspicion."

I have carefully selected the above extracts to give a diversified view. In this backdrop we appeal to the community of leaders to let logic and rationality prevail upon them as opposed to populist emotion.

Syed Muhammad Ibrahim BP, a retired general, now heads the Centre for Strategic and Peace Studies Dhaka.

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: A K M MOHSIN

Undaunted by disability

He lost his limb, not determination. He overcame his disability by courage Shahin never sought help nor begged. He now earns bread for himself and his family by plying his motor-powered boat across the wide river, from Mukhtarpur ferry ghat in Munshiganj, safely carrying passengers up and down like any other able bodied helmsman. And he lives an honest and honourable life. Shouldn't others unfortunately in such dire straits emulate him?

Proposed US backlash

As expected, US is now preparing itself to strike heavily in Afghanistan both by air and perhaps supported by ground troops in pursuit of Bin Laden. But one wonders whether US has definite proof of Laden's involvement in the recent attack on US installations in New York and Washington. If we learn from the past experience as in the case of Oklahoma blast, the involvement of local dissident groups in the current incident also cannot be ruled out. The question which haunts everybody's mind is, how such a daring attack, result of long preparations might be, executed in perfection of highest order, could be launched right under the nose of the US administration by the alleged person sitting in a cave in remote Afghanistan without having access to modern sophisticated technologies who even appears to have penetrated in US defence system in hitting Pentagon apparently by decoding its controls. US has not yet come up with any concrete evidence about Bin Laden's involvement in the matter which he so long has denied. Being a des-

perate person and with no fear of death there is no reason why this person should lie. The questions still remain unanswered are, where were the airport security, FBI, CIA, and overall defence security system in the most powerful and advanced country of the world. Without the involvement of, directly or indirectly, or at least of the knowledge of these agencies how these kinds of massive security breaches could occur is any body's guess. Surprisingly, within two days of the attack the authorities claimed to have rounded up fifty suspects and unearthed their hideout and training camps etc. and also even published the names and photographs of the alleged hijackers who also reported to have perished in the attack. But the information was subsequently proved to be false as some of them have protested the misleading information who are still alive and leading normal life in their countries. If the authorities are so efficient why they could not detect them earlier and why after? In the Kennedy murder case the truth was never revealed and the entire matter was hushed up and all investigations buried. In case of Oklahoma blast, only one person

was brought to book but the background still remained a mystery to the public. Thirty per cent of the US administration is totally controlled by the Jewish faction who are out to discredit Muslims in the world by any means. This incident also, as found in the past, might have been masterminded by them in collaboration with their local sympathisers. When the world focus is now drawn to this incident, the Zionist regime in Tel Aviv, taking advantage of the situation, has stepped up its barbaric attack on the innocent civilians in Palestine and surprisingly without even a single protest from the 'civilised' western world who boast of being the propagators and champions of human rights.

Therefore, there is reason to believe that, all steps that are being taken against the so-called suspects hurriedly, are to hoodwink the world and the American people in particular. It is high time for the world to find out the real problem facing them and solve it politically so that the evil of terrorism is permanently removed from the eyebrows of the mankind for ever. By embarking upon dangerous military adventures like attacking Afghanistan thus bringing more

deaths and untold misery to its poor innocent civilians, only another crime will be committed against humanity. I am sure, the great American people are conscious about the consequences of such fruitless military mission and will rise in one voice to stop such step and persuade the US administration to take the issue to UN for taking suitable joint steps under the UN umbrella to combat terrorism globally. Mobilising of entire war machinery, unprecedented even in a World War situation, against only one "suspect" and not even an accused, is something which perhaps the world cannot accept.

Mohammad Ataul Hoque
Eskaton Garden Road, Dhaka

We expect rational acts from the United States

Hell broke loose on September 11, 2001 in New York and Washington, the twin towers of the World Trade Centre have been demolished and the premises of Pentagon has suffered destruction by terrorist attack. This demonic act horrified us, it is heart-rending and our deep

sympathy to the families of those who have lost their near and dear ones. We grieve with the people of America for this irreparable loss. People from all over the world were working at the World Trade Centre, many Bangladeshis also perished in this appalling incident. We despise and abhor this sort of acts in which innocent people are being perished.

It is very astonishing that United States did not waste time pointing its fingers toward Osama bin Laden for this criminal act, did not wait for any concrete proof for his involvement. And in the wake of this announcement innocent Muslims residing in America, Australia, England and other places are being harassed. We are deeply upset by this turn of events.

It is the duty of the governments of those countries to give security to the Muslim community. Why should Muslims in general suffer on the assumption that the misdeed was done by a section of people whose religion is Islam?

Nur Jahan
East Nasirabad, Chittagong