

Political violence bodes ill for polls

Time to roll it back for a good election

FROM wielding staves to pumping bullets to bursting bombs – political violence has peaked off to a haemorrhagic plateau, dreadfully less than a week before the polls. Two bombs were exploded at AL candidate Sheikh Helal's public rally in Bagerhat with lethal results. Helal escaping with minor injury, nonetheless there is no telling the panic gripping his constituency. After Sirajganj, Chittagong and Bhola it's Bagerhat now that has been rocked in the political mayhem serial. Since the bloody clashes have evidently overshoot the known range of so-called gangster-infested four 'sensitive districts' we have reasons to be wary of the trend.

The political parties have to take the bulk of the responsibility for this surge in violence. By constantly questioning the neutrality of the caretaker administration and pressuring it to do their bidding they did undermine its authority in the eye of their followers. Besides, the vituperative and highly personalised exchanges of words between the top leaders of major political parties tended to incense the overall electioneering atmosphere.

While laying the blame at the doorstep of the political leaders, we are not being unmindful at all of the last-minute posting and transfer spree that gave the new incumbents very little lead time to come to grips with their jobs.

At any rate, the onus is on the political leadership to improve things rapidly from here on in view of their heavy stake in the elections. They must send words across to their respective candidates urging them to persuade their supporters to apply maximum restraint in their dealings with opponents at this heightening phase of electioneering.

With the deployment of the armed forces in the interiors of the country, the overall situation is likely to start improving in good time for the polls. In the essence, it is a question of credibility for the caretaker government to ensure that the voter turn-out is good as a hallmark of free and fair elections.

Menace of global warming

It's about time we made our concerns heard

THE Bonn breakthrough on the Kyoto Protocol, sceptics say, has actually turned back the clock on the global combat against climate change. The European Union (EU) says that the Bonn deal, or compromise if you like, has "rescued the Kyoto Protocol"; however, there are reasons to believe otherwise. It has been a victory for the EU, indeed. After all, the climate change negotiations in Bonn on June 23 did arrive at a conclusion to go along the Kyoto lines without the United States, which incidentally produces nearly a quarter of total world emission of greenhouse gases. However, without the Americans ratifying, emissions from all the industrialised countries (including the US) could rise between 9.4 per cent and 11.6 per cent above 1990 levels by 2008-12, even higher than "business as usual", predictions for which vary from 6.8 to 10.2 per cent.

These fearsome figures could only translate into predicaments of cataclysmic proportions for a deltaic country such as ours. About 3,500 square kilometres of the country's coastal area risk inundation. According to an international conference, recently held in the city, one metre of sea-level rise would submerge 16 per cent of the country's landmass and induce frequent cyclones, severe floods, salinity intrusion and desertification, not to speak of the concomitant socioeconomic costs.

Still, successive governments have been somewhat fatalistic about the worrisome issue. True, climate change is a phenomenon beyond the control of Bangladesh or any other least developed country. After all, the country only belches into the air 0.5 per cent of total greenhouse emission, against the US' 20.4 per cent and Australia's 32.2 per cent. In common speak, we would be paying the price for others' misdeeds.

What do we do then? Just sit back and let the industrialised nations design our doom? Certainly not. Our negotiators have so far failed to make our concerns heard at the international forums. Harsh it could sound, but the fact of the matter is that we have not yet mastered the art of negotiations. As a result, at the international conferences on climate change, we have so far been mere bystanders. It's about time that changed.

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

Innovative, yet inconvenient

Election office in a life size replica of party symbol! Innovative indeed, and it also gives a festive look. But not to the convenience of the pedestrians; it blocks the whole sidewalk. Political parties should do better keeping in consideration the point of public convenience, for they are doing everything to gain public support, not lose it by any means!

Who is Laden, how does he operate from hideout?



HARUN UR RASHID

ACCORDING to the US intelligence agencies, all investigations indicate that Osama bin Laden is the prime suspect for masterminding the ghastly and unimaginable terrorist attacks on the Twin Tower in New York and Pentagon in Washington, although Osama denied his involvement in the attack. The US demanded Osama be handed over to the US by the Taliban and this demand was reinforced by the recent UN Security Council resolution (Bangladesh is a member of the 15-member Council). The Council of Clerics in Afghanistan told Osama to leave the country voluntarily and this action has obviously not been able to satisfy the US.

The present scenario arising out of the attack reminds me of a thesis propounded in the mid-90s by a Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington in his controversial book (*The Clash of Civilisations*) predicting that the post-cold war shape of world politics would see a war of cultures between non-western 'civilisations' and 'liberal' western values. The world, Huntington prophesied, was about to be turned into a global nightmare with non-Christian civilisations trying to destroy America and its allies. Some in the West believe that the terrorist attacks on 11 September in New York and Washington reflect Huntington's predictions. Many, however, have rejected his thesis on the ground that moral values advocated by great religions have common denominators and his proposition ignores links that bind eastern and western civilisations.

Who is this man? Osama, born in 1955 in Saudi Arabia, belongs to a very rich Laden family, originally from Hadramouth, Southern Yemen. He is number 17 of 52 children of his father. Last year it

was reported that he married a young Yemeni girl, (his fourth wife), in Afghanistan. His father made huge fortunes in running a construction company in Saudi Arabia. It was reported that all government contracts went to his father's firm and the Laden family was known to be close to the Saudi royal family. He inherited a part of his father's fortune, some say about US\$300 million dollars.

Osama started his career as an engineer and is known to be quiet,

his activities could have been controlled or monitored by others. His refuge under a hardline fundamentalist Taliban regime became a boon for him.

Reports suggest that he established an organisation, *Al-Qaeda* (meaning 'the Base') to fight against America because he believes that the presence of US troops in Saudi Arabia has violated the sanctity of the holy places. His training centres are reported to hold 2000 men at one time and it is believed he has

the US is the superpower and dominates the world, he appears to consider the US an "evil empire" and his prime target.

How does Osama operate? Osama's *Al-Qaeda* is known to be a very secretive organisation. According to the US agencies it has been able to establish its presence in about 60 countries. They recruit ideologically motivated 'fundamentalist' young people who are prepared to die for the "cause". When they are captured or when a suicide

Afghanistan or has a link to *Al-Qaeda*. It means that *Al-Qaeda* operates in a tangled web of contacts, connections and semi-autonomous cells stretching around the globe. Many believe that the US prosecutors will find it difficult to provide hard evidence that links the terrorist attacks in the US to Osama. Many also caution that the US should not jump to conclusion that Osama is responsible for the September 11 attacks because Tel Aviv's military intelligence service is

intelligence is reported to have intercepted conversation between two suspects linked to bin Laden saying that they had hit two targets.

A question is why has Osama not been captured despite there being a US\$5 million reward to catch him? Is it because he lives under the protection of Taliban in Afghanistan or is it because there is no hard evidence against him?

Osama's alleged activities and Islam: Many Islamic scholars maintain that the meaning of the word, *jihad* (struggle) has often been misconstrued. *Jihad* signifies a physical, moral, spiritual and intellectual effort to conquer the forces of evil in oneself and in one's society. They argue that there are plenty of Arabic words denoting armed combat, such as *harb* (war), *sira'a* (combat), *ma'araka* (battle) or *qital* (killing) which are not employed in the holy Quran if war had been the principal way of engaging in this effort.

Fanaticism connotes unreasonableness and has no place in Islam. Islam obliges its followers to bring the use of reason to interpret the teachings of Islam. Blind faith or orthodoxy is discouraged in Islam. Paradise in Islam is not attained by doing "wrong" things in life. Osama's alleged masterminding of terrorist attacks constitute disloyalty to his 'cause', reflect want of courage and true understanding of the spirit of Islam. Viewed in this light, they suggest that Osama and his followers have adopted unIslamic means to carry out the objectives. Osama's brother Abdullah Awad was reported saying on 15 September that "we consider those acts an unspeakable contravention of the principles of our religion" and denounced the terrorist attack on the US.

Conclusion: It appears that the US, the only superpower in the world, is pitted against an individual who allegedly directs global network of terrorists from hideout in Afghanistan. It is a strange phenomenon at this dawn of the 21st century. One may eliminate Osama but the idea instilled among his followers may not fade away or die unless the causes of terrorism are addressed with equity and justice. Justice, according to Socrates and Plato, is a virtue which gives every one his/her due.

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BOTTOM LINE

It appears that the US, the only superpower in the world, is pitted against an individual who allegedly directs global network of terrorists from hideout in Afghanistan. It is a strange phenomenon at this dawn of the 21st century. One may eliminate Osama but the idea instilled among his followers may not fade away or die unless the causes of terrorism are addressed with equity and justice.

kind and deeply religious. His career took a sharp turn at the age of 24 when he was deeply disturbed at the 'invasion' of Islamic country Afghanistan in 1979 by the former Soviet Union. He left Saudi Arabia and joined the Afghan Mujahideen to oust Soviet communist (Godless) army from Afghanistan. During 1979-89 CIA and Pakistan intelligence agencies (ISI) gave all armed and logistical assistance to Osama and his dedicated fighters to defeat the Soviet army in Afghanistan. Many suggest that the close contact between CIA and Osama made them aware of each other's strategy in guerrilla warfare. Even some of his training bases were reported to be built by CIA.

After the defeat of Soviet forces in Afghanistan in 1989, he returned to his business in Saudi Arabia. However this was interrupted by the Gulf War in 1990. He is known to have opposed the presence of US troops in Saudi Arabia but his views were rejected by the Saudi government. He started a campaign to force US out from Middle East in the wake of Gulf War and to "liberate" the holiest cities of Mecca and Medina from western influence. He lost his Saudi citizenship for his actions. He went to Sudan and eventually pressure was put on the Sudanese government to expel him from the country. He had to leave Sudan and took refuge in Afghanistan in 1996. Some say if he had been allowed to remain in Sudan,

5,000 Arab fighters waging war alongside local Taliban forces. The British politician Tony Benn recently in a TV interview took the view that the presence of American soldiers in Saudi Arabia was an understandable affront to many fundamentalist Muslims and was comparable to a situation if Muslim soldiers were to occupy Rome to protect Italy and the Vatican. He said that many Christians would resent the presence of Muslim soldiers around the Vatican and probably would mobilise to get them out.

Furthermore, Osama did not approve the sanctions against Iraq leading to death of thousands of children in the country and the unilateral decision of US-Britain to impose a 'no-fly zones' in southern and northern Iraq to protect the Shi'ite Muslims and Kurds was seen as arrogant and illegal.

Why is Osama against America? Many analysts suggest that there are three main possible reasons. First is the presence of US troops in Saudi Arabia. He appears to be determined to ensure that the US troops leave Saudi Arabia. Second, in his view he sees an assault on Islam by the West. The displacement of Palestinians and denial of their rights is considered by him to be a product of conspiracy of the West. Third, he believes that in the wake of globalisation western materialistic and cultural values have a 'corrupting' impact on Muslims and have to be resisted. Since

bomber/hijacker kills himself, there are other volunteers to take their place.

From US intelligence reports, a pattern emerges that persons may live in any country for years, leading normal lives while acquiring the necessary training and contacts to carry out an attack. His followers tend to operate in small groups and have little or no direct contact with Osama. One member usually does not know the identity of someone he has been asked to contact or even why he has been ordered to carry out a task. Some reports suggest that the hijackers of the US planes may not have ever known each other until they boarded the planes. One example of how this works came to light after the 1999 arrest of Ahmed Ressam, an Algerian citizen who lived in Canada. He was charged for an alleged plot to blow up Los Angeles International airport during millennium celebrations. Ressam told authorities that he planned to plant a suitcase bomb at the airport but no one else connected with the plot knew the precise target Ressam had selected (according to *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*).

Some of the key followers may have only contacts with Osama which are secret, unrecorded and via go-betweens who do not take part in terrorist attacks. For example Person A who has contact with person B who is an associate with person C who either spent time in

reported to suspect Iraq sponsoring the attack on the New York Trade Centre and Pentagon. Reports indicate that the Boston based hijackers had connections to Jordan and Kuala Lumpur contacts as well as suspects in Algeria and Hamburg (Germany).

Some maintain that Osama's wealth makes him an easy target because he is suspected to finance his network, especially in regions where the US remains unpopular and which have large number of unemployed young adults. He is allegedly to be the financial bind that holds all the clandestine groups together.

List of terrorist activities allegedly linked to Osama: In 1992, bomb attacks on two Aden hotels two Austrian tourists and blasts narrowly missed 100 American servicemen. In 1993 bomb exploded at World Trade Centre in New York, killing six and injuring more than 1000. In 1998 bombing of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania killed more than 220 people including a dozen Americans. In September 2000, Jordan sentenced to death six militants linked to bin Laden for plotting attacks against Israeli and US targets. In October 2000, attack on USS Cole in Yemeni port of Aden killed 17 American sailors and wounded 39. The perpetrators were allegedly linked to bin Laden. Following the attacks on 11 September in the US heartland, US

OPINION

The sheriff and the outlaw

DR ZAKIR HUSAIN

GEORGE Bush wants Osama Bin Laden and wants him desperately dead or alive. He has evoked the Wild West poster days of the USA when the frontier law and justice prevailed. However, it appears that in his own, as he put it, the "first war of the twenty-first century", President George Bush is apparently ready to pronounce guilt and pass sentence more on suspicion than on proven guilt. Is that acceptable in international law? One of the problems in the post Cold War days is the increasing tendency to use US domestic law above the norms of international law when it suits US interests.

In the immediate aftermath of the twin tower attack, again there is quick and ready ethnic stereotyping and targeting of "innocent" civilians in the US itself even if US citizens. In this case the people of Arab and South Asian origin are the victims.

Both Bush and Blair were quick to declare that the attacks were against civilisation itself, not merely against American assets and interests. What civilisation are they talking about? Are they not inadvertently or deliberately misdirecting their own people into benign ignorance or belligerent arrogance? Are they equating the Western institutions and way of life with civilisation? By implication, is the Western civilisation the only one that matters and worth fighting for? Is the rest of the world obliged to uphold or emulate the only civilisation there is. By implication, are other cultures and institutions not so civilised?

The least that one would expect from the champions of Western

civilisation is to show civilised behaviour themselves. They have the singular responsibility to stay away from hate, revenge, and gross disregard for human lives as they talk of being custodians of civilisation. Regrettably, there is not much evidence; on the country there is orchestrated cry for rough and ready punishment, revenge, war. And "pulsification" and hunting down of the enemy. The world has heard more of war, and warnings to presumed host States than of identifying the origin of desperation and acts of desperation.

To add further to the demonstration of indifference to the dignity and sentiments of Muslims and the Arabs in particular, George Bush has announced a "crusade" - a rallying call against evil doers. By doing so, Bush is rallying a Christian fundamentalist coalition yet the US administration is talking of a world wide coalition including in particular the Arab World. Is it a mere slip of phrase? Is the West trying to win another crusade in this first war of the twenty-first century?

The past decades have seen instances of indifference to human rights, insensitivity to civilian deaths from US smart bombs, protection and pampering of tyrant and undemocratic regimes in countries when that suited US. The US has been particularly unjust in the Arab Middle East. The litany of deceit at worst and motivated tilt at best are many. Vietnam, Palestine, Iraq come to mind. To add to the contradictions, the US as the champion of democracy and human rights does not hesitate to plot and finance clandestine or open subversion. How you reconcile such acts with

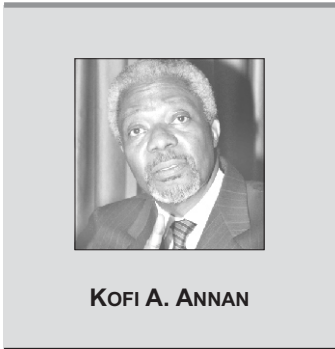
freedom, democracy, and international law. Even more callous and tragic (to the victims) have been the apparent disregard for the loss of innocent human lives directly or indirectly resulting from US actions. Civilian deaths in Iraq, Yugoslavia, are sought to be dismissed either as collateral damage or pilot error.

The point of all the above is that if the US continues to refuse to accept the responsibility of its foreign policy and specific dealing with other countries and peoples that are perceived as humiliating and unjust, then how can it assume innocence and immunity from the repercussions.

The September 11 attack is, among other things, a clear though terrible signal for a review of the US and Western policy in general towards other countries and peoples. That review should take place in a spirit of genuine understanding and respect for the dignity and rights of other peoples. Any other course of action driven by revenge and denial of justice to others will not only be futile but also aggravate terror. Desperate people can take desperate action. Let the US be not driven by desperation for it has today the power to be destructive but also the obligation to be responsible. If Bush and Blair truly believe they have to fight this war to establish democracy and civilisation to win, let them introspect and go deeper into the cause of imbalance and terror, demonstrate unmistakably the values of democracy and show tolerance, wisdom and generosity that are the hallmarks of a civilised society.

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Uniting against terrorism



KOFI A. ANNAN

THE terrorists who attacked the United States on 11 September aimed at one nation, but wounded an entire world. Rarely, if ever, has the world been as united as it was on that terrible day. It was a unity born of horror, of fear, of outrage, and of profound sympathy with the people of the United States. It was a unity born also of the fact that the World Trade Center was home to men and women of every faith from more than sixty nations. This was truly an attack on all humanity, and all humanity has a stake in defeating the forces behind it.

As the United States decides what actions it will take in defence of its citizens, and as the world comes to terms with the global implications of this calamity, the unity of 11 September will be invoked, and it will be tested. I have expressed to President Bush and Mayor Giuliani and to New Yorkers at services in Churches, Synagogues and Mosques the complete solidarity of the United Nations with the United States and its people in their hour of grief. In less than forty-eight hours, the Security Council and the Gen-

eral Assembly joined me in condemning the attacks and voted to support actions taken against those responsible and the states who aid, support, or harbor them. Of this solidarity, let no one be in doubt.

Nor should anyone question the world-wide resolve to fight this scourge for as long as is needed. Indeed, the most eloquent global answer so far to last week's attacks has been the commitment of states from every faith and region to act firmly against terrorism.

At a time like this, the world is defined not only by what it is *for*, but by what and who it is *against*. The United Nations and the international community must have the courage to recognize that just as there are common aims, there are common enemies. To defeat them, all nations of good will must join forces in a common effort encompassing every aspect of the open, free global system so wickedly exploited by the perpetrators of last week's atrocities.

The United Nations is uniquely positioned to advance this effort. It provides the forum necessary for building a universal coalition, and can ensure global legitimacy for the long-term response to terrorism. United Nations conventions already provide a legal framework for many of the steps that must be taken to eradicate terrorism including the extradition and prosecution of offenders and the suppression of money laundering. These conventions must be implemented in full.

Essential to this response, however, is that it deepen and not fracture the global unity of 11 September. While the world must recognize that there are enemies common to all societies, it must equally

understand that they are not *they* are *never* defined by religious or national descent. No people, no region and no religion should be condemned, assaulted or targeted because of the unspeakable acts of individuals. In Mayor Giuliani's words, "that is exactly what we are fighting here." He and President Bush have shown admirable leadership in condemning attacks on Muslims in the United States, and around the world other leaders have done the same. To do otherwise, and to allow divisions between and within societies to be exacerbated by these acts, would be to do the terrorists' work for them, and no one could wish for such an outcome.

Terrorism today threatens every society, every people, and as the world takes action against its perpetrators, we have all been reminded of the necessity of addressing the full range of conditions which permit the growth of this kind of hatred and depravity. We must confront violence, bigotry and hatred even more resolutely. The work of the United Nations must continue as we address the ills of our time conflict, ignorance, poverty and disease. Doing so will not end every source of hatred and every act of violence there are those who will hate and who will kill even if every injustice is ended. But if the world can show that it will carry on, that it will persevere in creating a stronger, more just, more benevolent and more genuine international community across all lines of religion and race, then terrorism will have failed.

Kofi Annan is Secretary-General of the United Nations

Laden should come out from hideout

Osama bin Laden is not an Afghan national. He is a Saudi born billionaire living in Afghanistan. Our question is why should the innocent people of Afghanistan suffer for the crime, if any, committed by Osama bin Laden? Above all Osama bin Laden has denied his involvement in attacking US. As Osama bin Laden claims that he is not involved in the attack he (Osama bin Laden), if honest and brave, should come out from his hide-out in Afghanistan, surrender before the International Court of Justice and prove that he is not guilty.

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Has FEMA changed its character?

People are shocked and surprised at the statement made by former Finance Minister and Awami League chief election coordinator Mr SAMS Kibria at a press conference on 21.8.01 about the Fair Election Monitoring Alliance

(FEMA), Manabik Shahajya Sangstha (MSS) and the Study and Research Group (SRG). We find his statement as unfounded and not based on facts, besides it contradicts his very own earlier assertions.

We can recall the work of FEMA as an organization since 1995 when it was established. Manabik Shahajya Sangstha (MSS) initiated the formation of FEMA the country's largest coalition to do election monitoring. Today FEMA comprises more than 200 NGOs and other Civil Society organizations and has chapters in all the 64 districts of the country. Each of these committees are led by prominent citizens. Over the years it has earned credibility and enhanced capacity to do large-scale election monitoring activity.

FEMA observed the February 1996 election and rejected it as not being free and fair at all. Mr Kibria then took up his pen quoting from the FEMA report. FEMA election observation reports endorsed the credibility of the June 1996 election and Mr Kibria again lauded FEMA's works. We fail to understand the reasons behind his change of heart. Is it because FEMA exposed the

electoral fraud committed by the then ruling Awami League during the Pabna-2 and Tangail-2 by-elections and several other non-participatory by-elections held during the AL rule? Is it because FEMA has urged for creating a level playing field ahead of the election to the 8th parliament?

The FEMA National Committee has very respectable, learned, objective, conscious people with no partisan interest to protect and its decisions are made collectively and reports are based on the findings of its hundreds and thousands of observers. Thus there is no scope for any one person to influence FEMA decisions. It is important to note that opposition parties tend to benefit more from organizations like FEMA as in developing democracies most often the offenders are the ruling party. Thus AL found an ally in FEMA when they were in the opposition.

FEMA's objective is to safeguard the electoral process, contribute to holding of democratic elections in the country and it is not interested in the outcome of the process. Why Awami League is objecting to the Election Commission not to allow

FEMA to monitor the October 1 general election, when for all practical purpose it is the only one which can field thousands of trained and experienced poll monitors?

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Why strike at JU?

Jahangirnagar University is now facing a crucial time. We, the general students, are made to face an unexpected session jam. In the name of anti-rapist movement some interested groups are about to hamper the congenial atmosphere of this university. All of the students of this university feel proud because probably it is the first university in Bangladesh in which students protest against rape. And we feel proud to say that our campus is free from so called Jamaat-Shibir atrocities. But what is really happening here now? Is it really an anti-rapist movement or carrying out of a political deal? We know that the previous authority of this university punished the rapists. Of course we should hate a rapist. Protesting a rapist some student parties demanded that the authority should

not permit him to take part in examination. The authority and the teachers of English Department announced they would not permit him. But the agitators carried on their movement, was it fair? The VC accused seven students for misbehaving with him and expelled them.

Why they misbehaved with a teacher when he clearly declared that he would keep the campus free from rapists and killers? Protesting the expulsion, the same parties called an indefinite strike at Jahangirnagar University. They also resort to road blockade when the issue is internal and has nothing to do with the public. Of course it is a democratic right. But in the name of democracy they obstruct others from taking examination and classes. So we are going to face an unexpected session jam. We, the distraught students want to request all parties to avoid strike and road blocking and uphold the benefit of all students. We also request the varsity authority to negotiate with agitators and try to break the deadlock. Sharif Rasel Economics (27th Batch), JU

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

