

Think of the Afghans

Banded about, nowhere to go, they deserve utmost consideration

By all accounts, a humanitarian disaster of 'stunning proportions' has begun unfolding in and around Afghanistan. The US retaliatory strikes looking imminent after two weeks of the terrorist attacks on her mainland, Afghans are a people on the move looking for a safe retreat. But they have little choice as they look around. Neighbouring Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan on the west and China up on the north and Pakistan to the east have closed down their borders.

But they are trickling into Pakistan anyhow, a country which has traditionally provided refuge to the Afghans since 1979, the year marking the beginning of Soviet occupation of their homeland. Already there are two million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. They are the ones who fled Soviet invasion, its battles against the Mujahideen and the civil war that followed the end of Soviet occupation as per the Afghan accord signed in Geneva in 1988 by Pakistan and Afghanistan, and guaranteed by the United States and the then Soviet Union.

Down the road, the Afghans went through the ordeals due to a fundamentalist Taliban surge, the sheltering of Osama bin Laden, US sanctions and a punishing drought for three consecutive years. Should a retaliatory strike come to pass the last nail in the coffin will be driven.

The number of internally displaced people is put at 4.4 million, they being the ones driven by starvation to seek food wherever they could get. With the two million Afghan refugees encamped in Pakistan added to the above figure, we have 6.4 million who are either internally or externally displaced. A fresh war could send at least another two million scrambling for exodus into neighbouring countries, especially Pakistan. Thus the number of displaced Afghans could exceed the halfway mark of the total population. And those that will decide to stay back in Afghanistan will be hounded by the war rendering it extremely difficult for the UNHCR to reach succour to the moving target groups.

So, it is a stupendous moral question that is involved in the preparations being finalised by the US for retaliatory action, which can only be ignored to the peril of an international order. For, it is likely to spawn more of terrorism in the world. Furthermore, we wonder how the ends of justice would be served by such an action, let alone the considerations of international law which cannot be made a short shrift of.

Tributes to Samar Das and Peter Shore

Two men who conquered time and passed into history

We mourn the death of Samar Das and Lord Peter Shore, both of whom passed away recently. We pay homage to two men who had not just achieved greatness but reached that permanent space in life and death, which many aspire for but few can achieve.

Samar Das will not only be remembered for his music which kept so many enthralled for so many decades but also for his commitment to the role of creative people in a democratic struggle. He wasn't just part of the movement when it put on militant robes in the 1960s but later in 1971 when it truly mattered. During the liberation war, he joined the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro as its chief music director. He organised the artists in Mujibnagar to help construct the musical landscape of the newly emerging country.

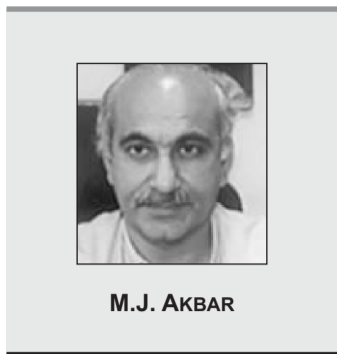
One of his great moments came when he was commissioned to arrange and organise the musical score of the national anthem. It was a once in a lifetime moment not just for the artist but any nation's history as well. And few served Tagore- his poetry and music- and one's own country as Samar Das did in his finest hour. He will live as long as Bangladesh does.

Lord Peter Shore, as a Labour Party MP in Britain, stood by us as a tower of strength during that very difficult time in 1971. He not only drew international attention to the plight of the refugees running away from wanton death but also defended the fight back by Bangladeshi partisans. Along with a few others he raised the profile of the struggle and legitimised it in the global arena. He continued to support the cause of Bangladesh even after and also lent his clout to many other causes of societies, peoples and communities experiencing difficulties and discriminations. Lord Peter Shore was also active in the British charity world.

These two noble souls played a significant role in the birth of this country, being some of those who made it possible. By remaining steadfast to the cause of supporting the oppressed and upholding the essential dignity of all people, they overcame the shallowness of time and reached the pages of history.

We salute them.

World war three: Dead or alive



M.J. AKBAR

COULD it be that these words mean one thing in America and quite another in Afghanistan? Has President George Bush fully understood the nature of the war that has been launched? He has identified his enemy, but has he defined him? Has the President of the United States missed something vital about September 11?

Dead or Alive is a classic phrase out of the historical American consciousness, a shorthand for justice through the generations that lifted the nation out of the uncertainties of the nineteenth century into a superpower of the twentieth. However, it works on one condition.

You cannot threaten someone who is ready to die with death. If those who invaded the United States were afraid of death they would be alive today. The hijackers who flew unerringly into the symbols of American power had come to terms with death. President Bush has an enemy who may not be ready to surrender, but he is ready to die. The United States should, theoretically, understand the culture of Jihad, because it has used it in the past.

The last war that the United States fought was not in Afghanistan but in Iraq, but there is a common theme that has evolved through two decades of American experience with Muslim nations. Afghanistan was the simplest. It was clear-cut, and therefore devoid of any ambiguity. Even the Russians understood this, albeit at substantial cost. A dictatorship in Moscow had invaded a neighbouring country to protect a puppet; this was conquest, which the Afghan people resisted. Most of them required no spur stronger than nationalism. A segment introduced Jihad into the equation. Washington had no problems with any motive as long as it was directed against the Communist Cold Warriors. Iraq was more muddled, even if it seemed to be as simple. Nationalism was at play here, of course. An unwelcome dictatorship had invaded a small neighbour to seize its rich resources. But Saddam Hussein echoed some larger concerns as well, as for instance the veracity of boundaries drawn by colonial powers and American support for Israel. This did not work because his own reputation for law and justice was hardly exemplary. Both Afghanistan and Iraq were wars in the defence of sovereignty, and even

the friends of Iraq and the Soviet Union (India among them) could not argue the case for invasion with any degree of conviction if they did it at all.

World War Three is different. Afghanistan has not declared any formal war on the United States. Its guilt lies in the protection it provides to groups that engage in war in the pursuit of their causes. We in India do not need any education about the impact of such abetment, and if the Americans do nothing more than eliminate a few nests in Afghanistan and Pakistan Delhi will breathe more easily. But that is not the essence of the problem for Washington. America's problem is that this is a war beyond boundaries, and beyond nationalities. Even if Operation Infinite, or Finite, Justice succeeds the war will not stop. This is a war being fought in the mind, not on the ground or in the air.

This mind has not been shaped

something about it."

His son Shah Abdul Aziz (1746-1824) issued a fatwa against Christianity in the year that the British made the Mughal emperor in Delhi a puppet: Unbelief, he said, was now in control of north India and the region could no longer be called Dar al-Islam. His disciple, Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi, born in 1786, would pick up the sword in a land that had become Dar al-Harb, or the House of War. In 1822-23, the two went together on haj and discovered in Mecca a movement started by a man born, coincidentally, in the same year as Shah Waliullah, 1703. His name was Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, of Najd, Arabia. If Shah Waliullah had witnessed Mughal rule collapse into wretched misery, Wahhab had despaired of the decadent Turk. From 1744, when Wahhab found support from the ruler of Diriyah, Muhammad ibn Saud, and despite the death of Wahhab himself in 1787, the

had persuaded the three main orders of India, the Naqshbandi, Qadiri and Chishti, to join his revivalism under the name of Tariq-e-Muhammadiyah, or The Way of Muhammad. Jihad moved away from the banners of nobles and into the hearts of peasants and artisans; he began to be called the Mahdi. Bareilvi was caught and killed in 1831, but the movement survived him. Three well-known ulema of the Shah Waliullah school took part in the 1857 revolt: Imdadullah, Muhammad Qasim Nanutovi and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi. After its collapse, the first migrated to Mecca. The other two escaped punishment for lack of evidence and started a seminary which began modestly but gradually became second only to Al-Azhar as a centre of Islamic learning. It was situated in the small town called Deoband.

The British were deeply perturbed by a central worry, which might be asked in a different formu-

Allah change the condition of a people until they change it themselves."

To say that Muslims needed to change was to state the obvious. The mission of this restless visionary was less obvious: the revival of Islam as a world power. The Western-Christian advance from Africa to India, Afghani argued, could be reversed by pan-Islamic unity, political will, and, most important, the inspiration of the Salat al Salih, the pious ancestors, whose Jihad had succeeded because they had unswerving faith in the Quran and the Prophet. He argued passionately against the western perfidy that the Quran was anti-modern or inconsistent with the scientific temper. He wanted a declaration of war against western imperialists. Nikki Keddie in *An Islamic Response to Imperialism* (University of California Press, 1968) stresses that Afghani's thinking, which did not find immediate sym-

Pakistan and Afghanistan is a variation of that same conflict of ideas. The Pakistani establishment has voiced a line after September 11 that has been heard before. That good sense demands a temporary compromise with the Christian West, a proposition at the heart of the speech made by President Pervez Musharraf to his nation. The justification sought from the Prophet's own strategic agreement with the Jews has also been heard before.

But there are wars and wars. The radicalised Muslims do not see themselves as the original band of the faithful who had to face persecution and torture in the early days. They look upon the history of 1400 years and see all but the last three hundred as a sequence of almost continuous glory of Islamic power being resurrected and saved from the collapse by the regeneration of faith that enabled a newer dynasty of Muslim rulers invigorated by the restoration of faith.

They want vision, leadership, sacrifice, martyrdom, not leaders who bargain for potato chips.

General Pervez Musharraf responded to a great crisis in Pakistan's history, something perhaps on par with Bangladesh, like a shopkeeper. He traded his geography for a few hundred million dollars from America and a few snide remarks about India. Those dollars will melt. And those remarks will serve no purpose, because they are nervous rather than lacerating.

Superpowers, in any event, have short memories; the more powerful you are the shorter it gets. Islamabad's generals, battered out of post-Agra complacency, are refusing to take cognizance of even what Washington is formally telling India: that the self-interest profiles of the United States and India are in unprecedented harmony; that the war might start north of Kabul but will embrace terrorism worldwide. Of course America will have its own problems in that now famous Phase Two which Washington has told Delhi to wait for. Sri Lanka will for instance want to know if the LTTE can be called terrorists and Britain will doubtless make polite enquiries about the IRA. China is already wondering in public how the Americans would like to describe the Dalai Lama. Delhi should expect less clarity in that Phase Two than its dreamy-eyed policymakers are promising just now. Shopkeeping is not a temptation reserved for Pakistan's generals; ledgers are out in Delhi as well. You make a poor bargain in a haze and this dust will not settle gently.

Politicians communicate best when there is simplicity in purpose; when the enemy can be painted in black and white. The armada is pouring into the seas of the Indian subcontinent, and the air is alive with the sound of impending war. This battleground, however, will be grey. And this war will be fought in the corners of the mind, which is a far larger space than Afghanistan.

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BYLINE

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just by America; it was being formed a quarter of a century before the French Revolution.

Shah Waliullah, born in Delhi in 1703, descended from the family of the Khalifa, Hazrat Omar. Before he died in 1762 he had witnessed the collapse and degradation of one of the two great centers of Muslim power in the world, the Mughal empire. His father, Abdur Rahim, a scholar-bureaucrat in Aurangzeb's court had founded the Rahimiyya Madrasah in Delhi, and Shah Waliullah took charge of this institution at the age of 17, when his father died. More than a hundred books and monographs are testimony to his fame as a preeminent Islamic scholar. Shah Waliullah analysed both victory and defeat through the illumination of the Holy Quran: victory was the reward of faith; ergo, decline was the consequence of decadence. He prescribed a return to first principles. In an Islamic response to an Islamic dilemma (unlike many others later down the line, who would look for reform towards the rising light from the Christian west), Shah Waliullah called for unity of the international umma, faith and a Jihad that would cleanse Muslims. Ian Douglas, in his biography of Maulana Azad, sums up the impact of his ideas: "Shah Waliullah's descendants and their disciples perpetuated his ideas of reform into the nineteenth century in two major areas...in the political realm, his ideas of Jihad and Islamic solidarity in the face of external aggression were expanded to include both a recognition of the European threat and a desire to do

Wahhabis flowered with astonishing vigour, taking the holy cities by 1804 (and promptly demolishing the graves of warriors). It was only in 1819 that the Ottomans were able to stem this tide, by defeating Abdullah ibn Saud and sending him to Istanbul where he was beheaded without too much fuss. But Sayyid Bareilvi gave the Wahhabis another home in India.

The story of the Bareilvi upsurge is sprinkled through fifty years of Jihad against the British, from Bengal of Dudu Miyan and Titu Meer to the borders of Afghanistan. The Bareilvis were undeterred by the failure of the mutiny in 1857 and continued to fight their holy war long after the princes and soldiers had been defeated. The Jama Taseer, printed in 1867, insisted that Muslims in India had only two options: to wage war on the infidel, or to emigrate to a country ruled by Muslims (Afghanistan was the nearest). Sir William Hunter, who spent a substantial part of his career in the Indian government trying to understand this phenomenon, and angrily called Bareilvi a "bandit" also noted in his seminal report The Indian Mussalmans: "I cannot help the conviction that there was an intermediate time in Sayyid Ahmad's life when his whole soul yearned with a great pain for the salvation of his countrymen, and when his heart turned singly to God."

But what Hunter feared most was the "seditious masses in the heart of the Empire", for Bareilvi had achieved something more than his spiritual predecessors: he had made this a mass movement. He

lation even today. Sir William was commissioned to answer the question posed by Lord Mayo: Are Muslims bound by their religion to rebel against the Queen?

Sir William reported the official answers from the various schools of theology. The established Hanafi, Malik and Shaafi schools pronounced that as long as Muslims were allowed to practice their personal Quranic laws there was no justification for Jihad. The Shias had a satisfactory reply as well: only a rightful Imam could lead a Jihad. That left the "misguided Wahhabis". The British response, in the words of E.C.Bailey, home secretary in 1870: neglect of the education of the Muslim masses and disrespect for their interests and traditions.

Exactly that time there came to India a visitor who lived in Hyderabad for two years. He called himself an Afghani, although technically he was an Iranian, born in Hamadan. He was born Sayyid Jamal ad-Din in either 1838 or 1839. By the time he died of cancer of the chin in 1897 he had taken his message through the rumbling heart of the British empire, and on to Afghanistan, Moscow, Paris and London where he died in poverty, accused, ironically, by the Turkish Sultan of having ended in the pay of British intelligence. (If at all true this would certainly substantiate the oft-made accusation that the British were extremely miserly towards their agents.)

Afghani's favourite quotation from the Holy Quran was the core of his message: Verse 2 of Surah 13 (The Thunder), "Verily, never will

OPINION

BNP manifesto: A 500-seat parliament and three new ministries!

M. SHAFIULLAH

At the end of the presentation of BNP manifesto for elections 2001 at the Winter Garden of Dhaka Sheraton Hotel on 7 September a bewildered diplomat of a donor country cross-checked with a colleague whether he heard correct the number of MPs would be raised to 500 from present strength of 300 if the party is voted to power. He was assured that there was no scope of his hard of hearing. A quick glance at the 18-page glossy publication reconfirmed his apprehension.

The party chairperson's plea for 'more representatives for more people' sounded logical under a democratic dispensation but the diplomat was worried because more members mean more expenditure. Being a development partner of Bangladesh his country would be required to bear an additional burden of development assistance [a refined term which replaced foreign aid] in the name of strengthening democratic institution of a third world country.

The dilemma of the diplomat is how to justify to his government an increased allocation of assistance

package in the event of the BNP chairperson's 500-strong parliament seeing the light of the day. For during his more than two years stint in Dhaka the diplomat reported to Home government the opposition party was boycotting the parliament uninterrupted. His government was appalled to learn that members of parliament of this particular aid recipient country are entitled to draw their salary and perks without speaking for the people who elect them.

If they come to parliament for five minuets to put a signature in every 90 days their membership remain valid for five years. In addition, it is within their privilege to import expensive transport without paying tax to the public exchequer. Most of the Members themselves also write off utility charges and staggering telephone bills. The package of privileges enjoyed by Bangladesh MPs is beyond the wildest dream of the Parliament Members of the donor countries.

As it was in the 300-member House if the opposition bench remained empty how many people will be required to remove dust from the unoccupied seat in the 500 member parliament? And where is

the resource to feed additional 200 all devouring mouths? Is not it within the bound of propriety of the donor countries and the Bangladesh tax payers to ask for the rationale and compulsion of BNP's generosity of inflated representation under the background that even half of the existing members abstained from attending the sessions?

It could be assumed that the party must have burnt mid night oil in taking into consideration the availability of space for expansion of the main assembly hall of parliament building to accommodate additional 200 members with estimated cost and source of funding before incorporating the proposal in the manifesto. It would be fair to expect that the party will not keep the electorate in the dark of how many crore taka the nation will have to bear to turn the BNP dream into reality.

Besides, caring for more representation to an increased number of population, the analogy of the next door neighbour might have influenced thought process of the BNP policy planners. The party might argued if India has 545 members in the parliament why should Bangladesh lag behind? But India is a country of one billion population with enormous size and economy.

Should Bangladesh with 120 million and LDC status have 500 members? It appears that BNP think tank bulldozed all frontiers of thought in launching campaign for oversized parliament for Bangladesh keeping the real issue close to the chest.

The party faced unexpected numbers of 'rebels' who could not be accommodated for nomination mainly due to conceding 40 seats to its alliance comprising ultra right political parties of Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Oikya Jote and a splinter group of Jatiya Party besides a number of financiers who opted last moment to BNP for nomination. In the proposed 500 seats the party will be able to accommodate more of its own members to quell growing rebellion as well as allot more than hundred fifty seats to religion based parties and other denominations opposed to rival Awami League in future parliament. For the poor people of Bangladesh this may be the last straw on the camel's back but in the present day political culture they are expendable and the party pursuits are considered ahead of national interest.

BNP envisages a separate ministry for the freedom fighters after 30 years of liberation of Ban-

gladesh in a coalition government with Jamaat-e-Islami and Islamic Oikya Jote whose role in 1971 is still vivid in memory. A number of freedom fighters in BNP could not be nominated due to seat sharing bargain with Islamic parties whom many perceived as enemies of liberation. In this backdrop BNP thought to contain the dissatisfaction within rank and file of freedom fighters under her fold by the bait of a new ministry for them. Does the BNP has a list of genuine freedom fighters compiled during its three term rule of the country to set up the proposed ministry?

The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association persuaded the opposition in vain to keep the industry off limit of recurrent hartals. Their representations were trampled down to the enormous loss of markets abroad. Now to placate this vote bank sector a pledge is made in the manifesto to create a new ministry which will be useless without hartal culture being abolished. No such direction is incorporated in the 32-agenda manifesto nor even indicated afterwards. On the contrary Awami League chief gave a broad hint to avoid hartal following release of party manifesto. The ready-made

garment industry did earn in an average five billion dollars per year without a separate ministry until it came to grip with hartal during the last couple of years. The industry needs hartal free atmosphere more than a separate ministry to recapture the lost markets.

A laissez faire is prevailing in the overseas labour markets for which strict compliance of existing rules are necessary together with amalgamation of BMET and BOESL into a single entity under Department of Overseas Bangladeshis to monitor market, produce skilled workers and look after welfare of the wage earners. Proposed separate ministry will create more red tape to the detriment of manpower export. Besides, such a white elephant will eat out the earnings of workers. A long standing demand to grant voting right to overseas nationals is left out cleverly in the manifesto.

Politicians excel magicians in creating illusion before the unsuspecting voters on the eve of elections. Voters have to find out the gaps between illusion and reality, promise and a better performance.

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PHOTORIAL

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PHOTO: STAR

Seizing the opportunity!

This is election time. So many candidates of quite a number of parties are in the fray with high pitch campaign exploiting all possible means they can. Decorators were busy erecting arches and symbol replicas for them; printers supplied them reams and reams of posters, and also others, including artisans and craftsmen, might have lent their services. So why the florists lag behind? There must be buyers for their innovations, too, and in scores no doubt!

Election hullabaloo

The government is reportedly spending an estimated amount of Taka 200 crore for the general elections 2001. Which party MPs would render sincere and honest services to the people? Has the government scrutinized and made public the assets and properties of former MPs and ministers who are contesting the 2001 general elections? If not, why? Most of the political parties including Awami League, BNP, JP JI and others have announced their respective election manifestos with certain promises as usual. But would the socio-economic condition of the people improve after they come to power?

Would there be no road traffic jam? No late attendance of office, no corruption and irregularities by public servants in government offices and public sector corporations? No boycott of Jatiya Sangsad? No water supply crisis? By all probability, no. It does not matter if this party or that wins the general elections 2001, the overall political situation of the country and

socio-economic condition of the people would not change for years to come.

However let us hope against hope for the best and hold a free, fair and impartial general election, elect capable, honest and amiable persons to the Jatiya Sangsad and wait, wait and wait.

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Why new text books every year?

We feel concerned that the authorities have reportedly asked working teachers to send their academic qualification, bio-data, etc., so that writers for new text books on all subjects can be selected. It is regrettable to note that of late changing of text books has become almost a yearly matter and no one even bothers to think what hardship parents/guardians have to go through in buying so many new books. Moreover, in cities and big towns education for girls is not free nor does any student receive any

extra fund for buying books, which, if they had not been changed, could have been bought at two-thirds the original price (or even less) from students who have passed out.

It is absolutely a kind of mania to force students to feel that what their immediate seniors have studied was not correct or was wrong. We shudder to think what kind of English books most of our working teachers (many of whom do not have even a modest idea about English literature or language) are going to write and whose efforts the concerned authority is to approve! The newly introduced English book for class IX and X has six poems culled by prominent poets but these are hardly taught at any school nor did any Board insist on teaching them. Is it not a proven fact that the Education Boards know very well that many teachers do not have the capability to teach or convey the message of those poems?

It is about time that the concerned authorities stopped their yearly experimentation and adhered to a settled policy in the

matter of text books. If the production and sale of textbooks is a matter of monetary profit to the education authorities and others, what can students caught in such a system expect? Those in high authority who can put a halt to this play, should not hang back but take instant action. Education is what fuels the economy by building a competitive workforce the first requirement in the global market.

Mujibul Haque
Sobhanbag, Dhaka

SSF security

Provision of SSF security after completion of tenure for the former Prime Minister Sk. Hasina was taken by her cabinet. The cabinet had some reasonable background for undertaking such a decision. This decision was politically criticized by then opposition party BNP and even Mr. Mannan Bhuiyan filed a case against it.

Khaleda Zia did not feel insecure for last five years after completion of her tenure. But BNP's demand for similar security has some points too.

They actually disregarded our illiterate mass people whom BNP thought might get attracted by seeing military security and it can influence voters.

But what reason Justice Latifur Rahman had to include his name in it? A temporary government for three months that too neutral and non-partisan?

Isn't it strange? Justice Latifur Rahman's predecessor Justice Habibur Rahman did not and do not need anything like that. Why then present caretaker government chief felt this urge? What's the background? Is he doing something partisan that he might need this in future? Apart from all other complaints against him, only this single incident is enough to characterize him as 'not neutral'. People of Bangladesh accepted the rank of 'ex-chief justice' as caretaker and interim government chief because they expect justice from that position.

G. Chowdhury
USA, on e-mail