

Think of the Afghans

Bandied 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.

PHOTORIAL

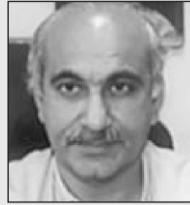
Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.



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

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 abettors, 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 Barelvi, 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-Muhammadiya, 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. Barelvi was caught and killed in 1831, but the movement survived him. Three well-known ulama of the Shah Waliullah school took part in the 1857 revolt: Imdadullah, Muhammad Qasim Nanotvi 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 formula

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 never 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.

Superrowers, 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 unprecedent 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 is dreamt of in another Sayyid, another authentic genius of the Muslim evolution in the nineteenth century, who was knighted for his efforts and is now famous as Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the founder of Aligarh Muslim University. His thesis was that the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent could best secure their future, in a world beset with a majority Hindu population, through cooperation with the British. To trace the subsequent history of this thesis would be more ambitious than the ambit of a modest column, but suffice it to say that while the Deobandis, in a more moderate, early 20th century manifestation, encouraged Hindu-Muslim cooperation under Gandhi against the British, the Sir Sayyid school took a course that eventually reached one horizon in the creation of Pakistan.

At 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.)

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

pathy and had to await the collapse of alternative models till well into the twentieth century, form the basis of the modern radical Islamic response. "Afghani initiated the partial transformation of Islam from a generally held religious faith into an ideology of political use in uniting Muslims against the West. The disciples of Afghani began to disseminate his thinking through journals, and from here emerged an organization that has become familiar, the Muslim Brotherhood.

The British Empire contained, as has been repeatedly pointed out, the largest number of Muslims in one political entity. Their answer in the jewel of their crown was, as we have noted, education. They found their man in another Sayyid, another authentic genius of the Muslim evolution in the nineteenth century, who was knighted for his efforts and is now famous as Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the founder of Aligarh Muslim University. His thesis was that the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent could best secure their future, in a world beset with a majority Hindu population, through cooperation with the British. To trace the subsequent history of this thesis would be more ambitious than the ambit of a modest column, but suffice it to say that while the Deobandis, in a more moderate, early 20th century manifestation, encouraged Hindu-Muslim cooperation under Gandhi against the British, the Sir Sayyid school took a course that eventually reached one horizon in the creation of Pakistan.

What are we witnessing today in that area that stretches across

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BYLINE

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.

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.

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 argue 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 Bangladesh.

BNP chief gave a broad hint to avoid hartial 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 hartial during the last couple of years. The industry needs hartial free atmosphere more than a separate ministry to recapture the lost markets.

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 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.

M. Shafullah is a former Ambassador to Libya, Tunisia, Malta and the State of Palestine.

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 scrutinised 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 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