

Commendable statements by the PM

It will need political will to make them come true

THE newly elected Prime Minister Khaleda Zia could not be making more appropriate statements than she is making now. But the question is will they be followed up by equally appropriate actions? First, in her meeting with the secretaries and later, in that of the field level officials the DCs, SPs and other senior officials the PM made it abundantly clear that she wanted her administration to deliver and to act in neutral and non-partisan manner. On both the occasions she stressed law and order to be her priority and asked all to act without fear or favour. So far so good.

Her words have sent the right signal. However, our experience shows that it is not sufficient to do the trick. Our bureaucrats are quite used to hearing such words by all elected governments soon after taking power. They have learnt from experience that all political governments have a "public relations" face and a "real" face, which are usually never the same. Till proven otherwise our officials act on this assumption, for they do not start taking action before knowing the "real face." That is where political will comes into play. May we humbly remind the new PM that her predecessor was never wanting in similar exhortations. In fact we could never have enough of Sheikh Hasina's statements that "terrorists have no party", "catch them even if they belong to the ruling party", "act without fear or favour", etc. Where the former PM failed was in demonstrating her political will behind those statements, which our bureaucrats sensed in no time and as such never took her seriously again. In fact all her other signals (Hazari, Mazumdar, Maqbul, Selim and others) and actions of her ministers indicated the exact opposite.

If the new PM wants to succeed in her anti-terrorist agenda the first thing she will have to do is break the criminal edifice within her party. As long as there is even the slightest indication that she will tolerate "some" criminals just because they were useful during the opposition days, her anti-terrorism campaign will not work. It has to be a clean, complete and conscious action. Half measures never did, and never will, work. Is the PM ready and willing to make such a total and unambiguous commitment? Experience shows that criminals have a way of penetrating politics and taking control. Unless completely uprooted, they will always come back. The irony is that politicians always think that they will not make the mistake of their predecessor and, unlike the former, they will be able to control the criminals and use them only 'as they wish and when necessary'. Take the example of the present take-over by the so-called BNP supporters of bus terminals, vegetable and wholesale markets, shopping centres and students' dormitories from the AL supporters. It is nothing but a case of the same people just changing their sign boards. These criminals did the same changeover after June '96 election victory of AL. The then ruling party thought that would be able to use these turncoats against the opposition. But we now know better.

We, therefore, strongly suggest that these well-known criminal groups must immediately be exposed and put behind bars. The argument may be that these elements will prove useful as and when the AL starts its proclaimed agitational programme and as such they should be accepted in the BNP ranks. More cynically it may be said that 'if we do not keep them with us then they will join the rank of opposition and add strength to their destructive designs'. The PM must not allow these false arguments to influence her. She must know very well from her own experience of the '91-'96 period and that of Sheikh Hasina's during '96-2001 that criminals never help constructive politics. They only destroy one's own party.

We urge the new PM to demonstrate her political will behind what she is saying. She must demonstrate rightaway that she means every word of what she is saying, and to do that she must start with her own party.

HAIDER A. KHAN

ALTHOUGH no international organization such as the IMF is ready to admit it yet, the world economy is already in recession. The growth rate is expected to slow by at least two per cent from last year's recorded growth of four per cent. But even this may turn out to be an overly optimistic forecast.

Up until the end of summer, it seemed to economic analysts that a world economic recovery might be possible. Japan's mild recession might have been turned around with some help from the increased demand from the expected expansion through the fiscal and monetary injections to the ailing US economy. The restored demand in the US economy could also have pulled the Europeans along. But the tragic events of September 11 have changed all that. This is the impact of what the economists call an exogenous shock -- in this instance a totally unanticipated one. The ultimate economic consequences of this shock to the world economy are unpredictable. But the short run impact is clearly a global recession.

The consequences for the emerging markets of Asia have already been palpable -- from falling stock prices and profits to deepening unemployment. It may not seem obvious, but for poor countries such as Bangladesh, the development goals of growth, poverty alleviation, checking environmental decay etc. have

into a global depression. In this case, the plight of developing countries will be even more miserable than what already is the case. With possibly massive unemployment and a downward spiraling world economy, development assistance which is already not a high priority matter for the industrialized countries will become

where the US experiences an upturn by the middle of next year, with a simultaneous upturn in Europe and Japan. Monetary expansion will provide the underpinning for demand expansion. With some luck this may just work.

However, as Keynes pointed out during the Great Depression of the

economic conundrum the world has been forced to face since Sep. 11. And to tell the truth no one really knows the answer to -- as the North Americans are fond of saying -- this million dollar question yet.

A substantial US recovery is a sine qua non for global recovery.

And if the US recovery is neither prompt nor promising, the European

developing economies will at best supplant along. Latin America is already in recession. Default in Argentina is likely. Brazil has debt problems and Mexico is entering a crisis. The Asian tigers are yet to recover. If Japan capsizes, it will take the rest of Asia with it. Thus the situation, once again, does not look great for the poorer Asian countries like Bangladesh.

This is the time for us to think of both self-reliance and regional cooperation to the extent it is feasible. The government needs to cut unnecessary bureaucratic expenditures, but not expenditures in the social sectors. It also needs to increase its efforts to collect taxes from delinquent taxpayers even as investment credits for credible economic projects are given. Correcting the problem of non-performing loans and generally cleaning up the financial sector should proceed vigorously. But even with the best governance, Bangladesh faces a tough future -- at least for the next few years. Without good governance, our future is bleak indeed.

Haider A. Khan is Prof. of International Economics at the Graduate School, University of Denver, USA. He is currently on sabbatical leave visiting universities and research institutes in Japan and Europe.

This is the time for us to think of both self-reliance and regional cooperation to the extent it is feasible. The government needs to cut unnecessary bureaucratic expenditures, but not expenditures in the social sectors. It also needs to increase its efforts to collect taxes from delinquent taxpayers even as investment credits for credible economic projects are given.

already been seriously affected. It is unlikely that domestic revenue and foreign aid shortfalls can be made up in the next few years. What is more likely is a deteriorating economy with increased toll in terms of unemployment, poverty and environmental degradation. Unless the international agencies step in with accelerated aid which is used properly, this scenario is likely to continue.

Even a greater danger is the real possibility of the recession turning

of even lower priority. Domestic discontent will become the politically most urgent issue for these countries to face. The risk is understood by some policymakers even at the US treasury and the Fed. The call for tax cuts, increased government expenditures and coordinated interest rate cuts among the G-7 countries show that the risk of a global recession is real.

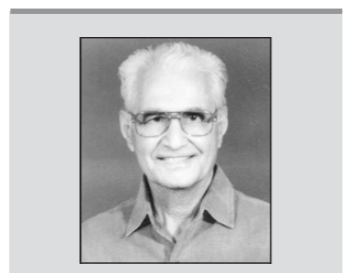
Therefore, the question is: how can the world avoid a depression? The benign scenario is the one

30s, the key to such monetary expansion to work is the level of business and consumer confidence. If such confidence is lacking extra money will not be invested for creating jobs and income. The so-called multiplier process of economic expansion will grind to a halt. The Japanese stagnation of the 90s point to such a scenario. Can the US prove that it can restore confidence quickly enough to pull the rest of the world with it? This indeed is the crux of the whole

Union will come to regret its decision to bind its hands by the provisions of the Maastricht treaty. By agreeing to stringent convergence criteria for restricting deficits and credit creation the EU has in effect abolished macroeconomic policy flexibility to a large extent. Once the US proves unable to provide the economic momentum for world recovery, EU itself can not come to the rescue under the current rules of the game.

Under such circumstances the

A teenager's guide to war and all that



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

LOOK what is happening is American bombers and missiles are killing Afghan men, women and children. That is what happens when you bomb a city or town. The US government calls it a long, hard war against only international terrorism, focusing right now on Osama bin Laden, his Al-Qaida organisation's network and their hosts, the Taliban regime. But, it does not know where Osama, Mullah Omar or Al-Qaida men are. So they are killing a large number of boys, girls, women and men by using cluster bombs that kill maximum number of people. And now the Bush government has informed it will be in Afghanistan a long time and will also take the war to other countries. What does all this mean?

We all hate terrorism and we surely support anti-terrorist cause. How can we not support it? And thus we have to support Pakistani government's decision to give "full support" to the US-led campaign by allowing the use of its air space, exchanging intelligence and providing logistic support. Although America took this cooperation rather than Musharraf government gave it. But in a way this ongoing war is our war but in a larger view it is America's and UK's. In expensive wars, what Bush and Blair governments say cannot be accepted at face value. No, I don't suspect the sincerity of Bush or Blair. It is just that events, as they happen, alter their perspective and mind of decision-makers.

Irrespective of what ideas the top government leaders begin with, once the war starts the generals take over. With them come grey suited security thinkers, flanked by propagandists and media persons, claiming to be friends and philosophers of generals and governments.

Last in the train are big business executives out for a killing. Usually the wishes and purposes of this gentry functionally overpower and transform the government's original objectives. Actually what the generals themselves desire by way of objectives is security thinkers' wish list within reason, of course. As the war in Afghanistan proceeds with troops, Americans or proxies, start advancing into the vacuum created by the early crumbling of formal

The old Great Game between Russia and Britain of the 18th and 19th Centuries has been resumed in a new setting with only China notionally opposing the US and UK, while

Russians will be thankful if the US continues to allow IMF, and encourage EU and Germany, to bankroll President Putin's government. This US presence in Afghanistan will push China, notionally, back from the area. It will be several steps

things show it is not our war; it is more an American strategist's war?

Reverting to the idea of change in attitudes, the process is relentless. Matters in real life are however mixed up. As for fighting terrorism, one cannot refuse to cooperate. But what is terrorism and how has it arisen in its malign modern form? Isn't a Palestinian nationalist a terrorist for Sharon? Many Americans, given the clout of the pro-Israel lobby, dare not disagree with

pose.

But larger questions are involved. Is military force the best instrument to change a mind set of a terrorist? It is ideas in his brain that make him a terrorist by pulling him away from peaceful methods. Shouldn't we go to the roots of the ideas and situations that shape a terrorist? The true need is thus for a humanistic education that inculcates values of respect for human beings, their equality and fraternity and a rational and scientific way of thinking. But that is a long

had been given full opportunity to make their case with an Israeli Authority that was ready, conceivably, to rectify the manifest wrongs they were complaining against. Suicide bombers of Hamas are of the same genre as those who killed over six thousand in New York on September 11 and for the same general reason. Governments can and should make the international order more law based and morally better. That will eliminate terrorism.

To any intelligent teenager a manipulative and exploitative political order among nations founded on, and reinforced by, a similar manipulative and exploitative globalisation is the biggest source of terrorism. The latter can only be fought against with longer-term patient steps. Among the relatively shorter term specific problems is one of Afghanistan. One is not too sorry, in the given circumstances, that Pakistan's role as its functionally paramount power has been terminated and it is for good. But no decent person like you will approve of the Anglo-American experts and generals becoming its new super masters.

You will agree it is time the Afghans were treated as normal human beings with normal human rights like everybody else. True, they have hitherto lived in a tribal and feudal society. But that is no reason why they should be sentenced to remain socially underdeveloped and politically at the mercy of their cruel warlords, tribal chiefs and armed Mullahs. Let us all push for the UN General Assembly to be given full charge of Afghanistan. Let it save the Afghans from perpetual anarchy and conflict. Let it take over, disarm all combatants, organise a crash economic revival programme, allow the media freedom and hold a free election. Let the powerful of the world stand aside and allow Afghans to be sovereigns of their own land otherwise be ready to face frequent eruptions of desperate terrorism in many places.

Most of the running sores in the world need to be treated democratically and morally if terrorism is to be prevented.

MB Naqvi is a noted columnist in Pakistan

PLAIN WORDS

Let us all push for the UN General Assembly to be given full charge of Afghanistan. Let it save the Afghans from perpetual anarchy and conflict. Let it take over, disarm all combatants, organise a crash economic revival programme, allow the media freedom and hold a free election. Most of the running sores in the world need to be treated democratically and morally if terrorism is to be prevented.

Taliban resistance war aims of Bush and Blair will increasingly begin to look like what had hitherto been mere strategic possibilities. This is what I mean by others' war; it will then be the war for American strategic purposes.

Don't forget that Afghanistan will soon be up for grabs. Not that war will necessarily end. Only formal battles by Taliban's Army will come to an end and with that the collapse of their administration in Kabul and Kandahar. Taliban's remnants will, as many assume, take their resistance to mountains, caves and ravines. Isolated siege, search and kill operations will probably go on indefinitely. The Anglo-American forces will probably have to stay on in Afghanistan indefinitely, as indeed they have started saying. That gives their security specialists full scope to motivate and guide the general staff to serve the ends they think need to be achieved.

Standing on the Afghan promontory, so to speak, the US (and UK) can exert effective influence on a few steps short of telling others what to do former Soviet central Asian republics with their still untapped resources of oil, gas and other minerals. It will be so much easier as many of these republics will already be in the loop of the 'war against terrorism'.

closer to being encircled while, at any rate, can remain hopeful of retaining its trading and FDI advantages. Which is why it may not resist or even compete in central Asia. The US means to become, and looks like becoming, the boss who manages most of Asia. There are other advantages that US strategists are sure to expect from the war. It has brought both India and Pakistan into the same loop. Insofar as Pakistan is concerned, it is a hooked fish with so many bases in the use of US military. The Indians are only too eager to become coordinate with Pakistan. Both can be, conceivably, parts of an integrated US power structure, centred on the Gulf sheikhdoms if they stay in the loop. At any rate, India is an easy possibility while Pakistan is a secured asset for the US. That opens up many possibilities for American diplomats, backed as they are by troops nearby, to talk about Pakistan's nuclear and missile programmes especially after promising some ministerial posts in the future in Afghan government. They can give concessions to India in Kashmir such as Pakistan applying sharp brakes on the Jihad. Doubtless all these are still fanatics in the minds of American experts. But they can soon be on the agenda that is to say if the going remains smooth for the allies. Don't these

Israelis and the Administration is, more or less, a hostage to pro-Israelis. Just ask how do South Indians view the LTTE suicide bombers, though the Sri Lankan establishment hates them as terrorists. Same is true of cross-border terrorism in Kashmir, with Pakistani Right regarding them as Jihadis while Jaswant Singh calls them terrorists. This is also the case about Osama, Al-Qaida and Taliban; Islamic Right in many countries takes them to be Jihadis and anti-imperialist.

Let's face it: no one can define terrorism in a way that will be universally acceptable. Doubtless there are many people like us who refuse to accept violent ways of achieving any political, social, economic or cultural purpose. They rely on human reason and tolerate all views, wanting to settle matters being settled by rational argumentation. But real world also contains so many governments, powerful vested interests and malevolent knaves with plenty of resources. It is possible to see, if the evidence available to Bush, Blair and Musharraf is really convincing, that Osama's hosts needed to be forced to make over Osama. I could conceivably have approved of a strictly limited police action, provided it was confined only to the specific pur-

haul aim. Even so, in such matters, cutting corners can be dangerous.

But don't think governments cannot also do many useful things. Take those Arab boys who hijacked four American airliners and rammed them into three buildings on Sept 11 last. Why did they do what they did? Weren't they protesting against the Arab people being kicked around, insulted and exploited for so long? This was as much a protest against the despotic Arab regimes the US keeps propped up. So long as these Sheikhdoms toe Washington's line they are safe. They risk being punished the way Iraq is being punished if they defy. To most people in Pakistan those terrorists, despite the commonly perceived error of their ways of action, were protesting against the foreign and economic policies of the US, Israel and other developed countries. People on this side of Suez are outraged at what men like Sharon, Netin Yahoo and Begin were and are doing in the Israeli-occupied areas to the Palestinians. This seething anger is also aimed at the US for its no-holds-barred support to the indisputable state gangsterism of Israel. Are revenge killings by Israelis any less terrorists? The discomfort and occasional hurt to Israelis by stone throwing Arab boys is to be regretted but only if it can be shown they

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.



Jam-packed

STAR PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

A typical rush hour jam in front of Dhanmondi Hawker's Market. Violation of traffic rules, driving on the wrong side of the road and haphazard parking are a few of the common causes of bottleneck on the streets. No one follows the rules and no body's there to implement the rules. When on the roads, one is sure to have a terrible experience. Hope the new government would take necessary initiatives to tame the unruly traffic of Dhaka.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Attack on Afghanistan

To me any man made activity that would disrupt peace and security of a country without any genuine cause is terrorism. The horrific incident of 11th September is indeed terrorism. But what about attacking Afghanistan and killing the helpless Afghans?

The Taliban government said that they would consider handing over Osama Bin Laden to US if provided concrete evidence of his involvement in the September 11 incident. But the US opted for war.

To my disappointment, the Pakistan, Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia have supported the American act. Pakistan has allowed the Americans to use their air space and ground to attack the Afghans. They have forgotten that in the Holy Quran, there is no mention of Pakistan or Afghanistan. Rather we have been termed as Muslims and that is our only identity. I urge all Muslim countries to unite and withdraw all sorts of assistance to the US. It's time to realise that America has not waged a war against terrorism but against Islam.

Sameer Ahmed Khan Mojib
Dhanmondi, Dhaka, on e-mail

US, Afghanistan and Laden

I was wondering whether the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers was a blessing in disguise for the

Afghanis? And for the whole world?

What would have been the scenario if Bangladesh had been the target of terrorist attack instead of the US, and half of the country's population had perished? What would have been the reaction of these high and mighty countries?

Uprooting terrorism is an enormous task, a task that can be undertaken only by a super power like the US to form this worldwide coalition, who, other than America had the logistics to undertake such a mission?

What action was taken when thousands of innocent people had to lay down their lives over the years? Would the US have bothered to take up this matter so seriously if their interest hadn't been at stake?

It is heartening to know that UN has pledged to rebuild Afghanistan after Bin Laden is brought to justice. They will have a wonderful future. I hope killing Bin Laden doesn't take too long, for time is running out. It will be a tragedy if in their endeavour to give a good life to the Afghans, a 100 more Bin Ladens are born.
DR. Nazneen Anwar
DOHS, Banani

Minority oppression

I could not believe my eyes when I read that one of our so called "highly educated (what a farce)" advisors remarked that "communal riot is a natural phenomenon". Oh! How ashamed I felt. I must say that this advisor probably was

referring to the nature he grew up in and the one he wants to see Bangladesh become rather than the nature of the people of Bangladesh.

Isn't we Muslims supposed to stand up against repression? Supposed to defend the weak? Probably we are more of a munafiq than a believer. For the first time in my life I am ashamed to be a Bangladeshi (Even during Ershad's riot plot the govt. at least condemned it officially).

I pray to Him that He gives me whatever punishment befitting to me in this earth for not being able to help the minority in my country so that I can escape his wrath in the hereafter.

Dr. Talat Islam
Los Angeles, USA, on e-mail

Communal harmony

We thought that BNP would bring an end to terrorism. Then why do we hear that AL workers are being harassed, their hands being cut-off? Why is it that the first time in the country's history the Durga Puja will be celebrated quietly? Why are Hindu women being raped?

Why do we have a 60 member cabinet - and 6 of them technocrats - even when we have a fragile economy and reducing government expenses should be a priority?

And biggest irony of all, today Nizami is able to set his feet on the sacred grounds of the Jatiyo Smitiashoudho. I was also very happy like most Bangladeshis when

I found out that BNP is forming the next government. But now it seems we created a monster to get rid of the beast?

Himu Hasnat
Va, USA, on e-mail

Act immediately

We all appreciated the fairly peaceful election, which saw a change of parliamentary party. The track record must not be damaged by any hooligans of any party.

The newly elected ruling party must ensure that Bangladesh remains a country for all ethnic, religious groups of the population. The government must act immediately and forcefully to reassure our ethnic and religious minorities.

Saleh Khan Majlis
Cologne, Germany, on e-mail

New govt and new hope

The election is over and the new government has taken charge. People gave their verdict in favour of the BNP with the hope that peace will be restored in society. Will Khaleda Zia's government be able to provide the much-needed security so that we can walk and breathe freely?

Can't we all work towards achieving a prosperous future by brushing off our personal interest for one term?
AAhmed, on e-mail

BNP's pledges

Amidst festive mood the eighth parliamentary election was conducted and the result of the poll is unique. BNP led 4-party alliance got an overwhelming majority and has been elected to rule the country for the next five years. It is time the BNP fulfilled their election pledges:

1. A 500 hundred seat of strong parliament and increased reserved seats for women.
2. Creation of three new ministries for freedom fighters, expatriates and garments.
3. Establishment of special court in every district for speedy trial.
4. Independent anti-corruption commission with neutral members.
5. Disclosure of wealth of PM, ministers and MPs.
6. Separation of judiciary from the executive bench.
7. Full autonomy of the state-rum media.
8. Permanent pay commission for government employees.
9. State patronisation for making local industries profitable.
10. Nationalisation of all non-government primary schools.

Establishment of rule of law and curbing terrorism may be considered the prime agenda for the new government. It is experienced that party in power tend to forget the election pledges. Hope the new government would prove otherwise.
M.H. Bari
Khulna, on e-mail