

The US war has become an indiscriminate killing campaign

Neither terrorism nor wars against it follow moral paths

WHAT began as a war against terrorism has now become an attack against the powerless. The western coalition can no longer convince people outside their own world that the fight isn't just meant to heal the damage to the US ego suffered by the September 11 attack. It has become a campaign by the most powerful on one of the poorest, helpless people of the world. If what we are observing is the shape of things to come, we should shiver in unknown terror of what we have become and what we will be.

Had the US led western coalition really gone about attacking Osama bin Laden and his supporters one would certainly have supported the action but here is no evidence of that. The US may further intensify carpet bombing and Omar and Osama bin Laden himself may be captured or killed -- though nobody is even remotely sanguine about that -- but the dead and the injured who had nothing to do with the politics of Afghanistan and what happened on September 11 are paying a price rarely paid by any people for a war they nothing to do with.

Most Afghans face extreme suffering and possible death from starvation as winter brings snow on the land. No less deadly than the US bombs, they will cut off supply routes and make delivery of emergency food rations impossible. There is no way of knowing what will be the outcome of this operation but the human cost is definitely obvious as desperate millions inside try everything to save themselves but fail.

The September 11 attack by terrorists appear to justify whatever the Western coalition decides to do and the number of those that may die as a result of their desire to see Afghanistan punished. The Afghan people, at least as innocent as those who died in the attack on New York have no one to complain even.

We know Osama bin Laden doesn't care how many lives are lost to achieve whatever cause he supports. Can the US argue that their attack on Afghanistan is any different in method, objective or regard for who dies or lives? It may have started on a higher moral plane but is no longer the case anymore.

We have stood up firmly against terrorism. We wholeheartedly condemned the killing of the innocent in the Twin Tower of the World Trade Centre. In the same spirit we are forced to condemn the indiscriminate killing of Afghan women, children and the ordinary citizens resulting from the carpet bombing going on now. We cannot stand by and be a silent spectator of the destruction of a whole people.

Doing away with lethal polybags

Govt must stay the course and implement the decision without fail

THE government's decision to ban manufacture of polythene and its use as shopping bags in the capital city from January 1 couldn't have come a day earlier. Kudos to the environment ministry for taking a move that has been long overdue. This permanent garbage of a non-biodegradable material has been the single most daunting environmental challenge before us. The fact that it does not get absorbed in the soil, has meant choking of the drainage system, to say nothing of denuding the soil capital and posing other health hazards.

We should not allow even an iota of skepticism to creep in on the question of dealing with the fall-out of the proposed ban: viz. conversion of the polythene units into other industrial processes and re-employment of the people rendered jobless by the shutdown of the polythene enterprise. We have an excellent fallback position to capitalise on. We return to jute bags mainly whilst the prospects for pressing textiles or multi-fibre materials into service remain to be tapped. Paper bags could be ordinarily used as disposable material. Needless to say, they are all environment-friendly, and barring the tetra packs, re-usable many times over. From that point of view, those are going to be economical as well.

The biggest benefit to come off the switchover exercise is the triggering of the much-awaited rejuvenation of the jute and textile industries. These industries badly need a shot in the arm by way of product diversification catering to increased demands. The projected high demand for jute and textile bags when materialising will help bolster the industries in those two sectors, which in turn will greatly facilitate absorption of employees thrown out of jobs by the closure of polythene units.

Similar vigorous actions are awaited to rid the air of lead poisoning and industrial effluents. Simultaneously, the city's polluted lifeline, namely the Buriganga, will have to be saved from an impending disaster. What needs to be done in each of these areas is far too known to bear repetition. Just pick up the right recipes from the repository, use them in earnest and deliver the services the citizens have been impatiently waiting for.

Need we remind the government here that tough decisions have to be taken in the first few months of its incumbency? Our suggestion is bite the bullet if you have to, but get on with what you must do now or regret over missed opportunities for the rest of your tenure.

From sublime to the ridiculous



BRIG (RTD) M ABDUL HAFIZ

ETHER you are with us, or you are with the terrorists'. In the face of this newly proclaimed gospel of US imperialism, there could be few countries not to be with America. Even the traditionally recalcitrant ones fell in line. None could say 'we are with neither'. Because none had the courage to take the ire of the world's most heavily armed country in its most menacing mood. But they all made it look somewhat respectable by waving out arguments and putting up conditions that would eventually lead to total agreement with the US on its war against terrorism.

While Pakistan was indeed exasperated in proving its bonafide as a genuinely anti-terrorist warrior and improving its anti-Taliban credential, none had trivialised its image so much as India that once prided on its leadership of newly emergent nations and non-aligned world.

Pakistan had no alternative other than capitulating to American pressure to 'stand up' and 'be counted' lest it would be treated the same way as Taliban in bearing the brunt of US' anger. Neither did the US have more profitable alternative to Pakistani facilities in waging war against terrorists' bases in Afghanistan. There was a

convergence of interests. So, their marriage of convenience had been as a matter of fact, a foregone conclusion. But the way the BJP-led India reacted 'to the terrorists' attack on America came as an embarrassment even to the self-respecting Indians.

India was among the few countries that expressed unqualified support to the US. Prime Minister Vajpayee wrote to President Bush right on 11 September when the Twin Tower was still crumbling to promise cooperation "in the investigation into the crime and strengthening our partnership in leading international efforts to ensure that terrorism never succeeds". Two days later the cabinet committee on security decided to

although she may be a few notches above in the equation. But in the ultimate analysis India is again bracketed with Pakistan!

India was not however, rebuffed in this manner for the first time. In the immediate aftermath of Pokhran II in 1998 Vajpayee found in Bill Clinton at least one world leader whom he owed an explanation. Accordingly, in a confidential letter addressed to the US president, Vajpayee described the US and India as 'natural allies' and pointed to China as common source of threat to both of the countries. Vajpayee's feelings were not immediately reciprocated by Clinton who however ignored Indian prime minister's uncalled for warning about China and

India's abject servility in court- ing Uncle Sam can be traced from the whole series of moves it took to be in line. With the US' global strategic interests giving the country's global policy a pro-American orientation. In pursuit of its great power ambitions the BJP-led India wanted to carry favours from the world's sole superpower and had no qualm in jettisoning in the process its lofty ideals the country stood for since its independence.

On assumption of power in 1998, although the BJP-led government enacted its controversial Pokhran II, it did not immediately give India the stature of a great power which, it was painfully realised, could be accorded only by the US-led West. Thus began

warmed up with India with an unexpected alacrity right from the beginning presumably keeping in view its revised Asian policy. Obviously the Indo-US relations were put on their fast tracks from both sides.

A high point of emerging closeness between the US and India came in May last when Richard Armitage the Deputy Secretary of State was in New Delhi drumming up support for Bush administration's NMD (National Missile Defence) plan. India was visibly overwhelmed to be among the few countries, mostly the US allies, where Bush emissaries were sent for NMD briefings. In response India showed astounding loyalty to the United States by embracing the

new wave of cold war and weaponisation of outer space which Bush's plan for NMD actually entailed.

India's traditional friends within the third world are dismayed at unprincipled support to a retaliatory and revengeful war against an impoverished Afghanistan without even raising a moral or humanitarian question about targeting the innocents 'Just on Conjecture'. A popular resentment in national honour in offering a *carte blanche* to the US. In the meantime, India seems to be building on its newfound opportunistic friendship with Israel. The BJP leadership has since been assiduously promoting the US-Israel-India security axis. The BJP regime has in the past three years stepped up collaboration with Israel particularly in nuclear and military spheres. They worked in close union in the recent Racism Conference in Durban to rescue each other on their Achilles' heels which were in issue of Zionism for Israel and caste issue for India.

Whether India understands or not, a strategic imperative has dictated the US' tilt toward Pakistan in the present crisis, although the US will keep its relations with both India and Pakistan on an even keel. It is to be seen if the US' present predilection for Pakistan will be reversed once the crisis is over. But there had never been dearth of crisis for the US in the past to repeatedly turn to Pakistan and enlist its support. The cycle of violence that was initiated on September 11 last will continue to embroil this region in volatility for long time to come. And Pakistan will be invariably called upon to play a role in it.

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PERSPECTIVES

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offer unconditional cooperation and facilities for any US operation in pursuit of the terrorists responsible for crimes in New York and Washington. The BJP government led the country to a state of euphoria over its possible role as a 'front line' state in the world's war against terrorism. It also made the people believe that the country was on the verge of being in 'strategic partnership' with the US.

Vajpayee government was however taken aback when the US ignored its anxious offer and chose Pakistan instead. India soon came to the sad realisation that the along with Pakistan is still viewed through the same American prism,

undertook his historic journey of Beijing two months later. The same year Vajpayee government, in a clear departure from the country's practices in the past, fully supported the US unilateral missile attacks on Sudan and Afghanistan after the bombing of US embassies in East Africa hoping that the US would endorse India's ruthless counter-terrorism against the freedom fighters in Kashmir. That did not happen. Even after the horrific terrorist attack on the US, she does not seem inclined to share leadership with India in its global efforts against terrorism, let alone the question of accepting a strategic partnership.

India's quest for its acceptance to the US as the latter's natural ally.

Driven by the lure of an 'emerging market' in India and its possible usefulness against China, President Clinton did move closer to India during the latter half of his second term but some perceptual gap persisted. As a result, Bill Clinton was fated only to play the role of paving the way for his successor notwithstanding his high-profile visit of India early last year. But India's real captivation commenced only with the installation of Bush administration with which Vajpayee government invested rather heavily.

The new administration also

missile defence with its concomitant world-wide security implications.

India's support was significant when even the US traditional allies were critical of the plan to weaponise the outer space and in the process scrap the ABM treaty which the international community considered a bulwark against a renewed arms race. Ironically, India was among the first few countries that supported ABM treaty based on the doctrine of MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) in 1972. By unconditionally endorsing NMD plan, India apparently gave up its long struggle against international arms race, a

New prospects in Indo-Bangladesh ties



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

A special envoy of Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee has just paid a visit to Bangladesh and held talks with key figures of the new government in Dhaka. The visit of Brajesh Mishra, principal secretary and national security adviser to the Indian prime minister, was not only the first important visit here from India but also from abroad after Begum Khaleda Zia's administration took over on October 10.

Exchanges of visits by important dignitaries are a part of the state-to-state relationship. Given the sensitivity attached to the relations between the neighbours, such visits carry additional significance, because neighbourliness itself gives birth to contentious matters while there is no denying that this aspect of the geographical location also provides advantages in many ways. As a new government has taken over in Bangladesh, exchanges of visits at different levels between Dhaka and other countries will now be a normal feature. And first such important visit has come from a country which is Bangladesh's immediate

neighbour and whose ties with Bangladesh are not only important but also sensitive in many ways.

One main question surrounding the outcome of the recent polls in the country was: what could be the shape of bilateral ties with India since a new government has come to power in Dhaka?

The question is all the more interesting and talked-about one for the simple reason that the government that was in power for five years preceding the brief caretaker one was of a party which is generally seen as closer to New Delhi than other parties.

The visit of Mishra, an experienced diplomat who was India's Permanent Representative to the

sions quite prominently because both nations have stakes on these matters.

Two sides have expressed satisfaction at the discussions, which from the Indian side was also participated by its High Commissioner Monilal Tripati, Additional Secretary in the territorial desk in the South Bloc, External Affairs Ministry Promotesh Rath and Deputy High Commissioner in Dhaka P.R. Chakravarty.

While being interested about the tone and tenor of the Indo-Bangladesh relationship in the changed context, one should not forget the fact that a BNP government in Bangladesh earlier did deal with Indian government both run

once again seldom happens in state-to-state ties. It is normally perceived that a Congress government is more favourably disposed to an AL government in Bangladesh because of "1971" when Congress government was in power in New Delhi.

However, the previous government Sheikh Hasina dealt with non-Congress governments in India - first of the United Front (UF) one led by H.D. Deva Gowda and later by I.K. Gujral in two stages and then the multi-party NDA governments led by BJP's Vajpayee. It had little problems with either the UF or the NDA government. In fact, the water treaty was signed during the UF

with Delhi were quite friendly with the Janata Party government headed by Morarji Desai. Vajpayee was then not only the external affairs minister, but also an influential figure. Two governments appeared to work well in developing ties and removing irritants including on the water issue by signing an agreement. As such, it was not a surprise when Vajpayee as the Indian PM sent a congratulatory message to Khaleda Zia on her election victory and then forming the government. So, it is not first time that a BNP government in dealing with a government in which Vajpayee is a key person.

Mishra's talks here covered issues like Dhaka's plea to improve

it for benefits after keeping domestic reserve for a considerable period of time.

The new government in Bangladesh has particular interest in the SAARC as late president Zia successfully mooted the concept. Two major countries of the region - India and Pakistan - initially dragged their feet on the idea but later supported and actively participated. The present delay of the next summit is attributed to Indo-Pakistan rivalry. But both nations agreed recently that the summit would be held by year-end or beginning of new year. Now first week of the new year seems the probable time and India is learnt to have agreed to this timing.

Mishra's visit to Dhaka took place at an appropriate time since it was necessary from Indian side to signal broadly what would characterise ties with Bangladesh's new government. On Dhaka's part too, it was important, as relations with India need to be given importance because of both mutual advantages.

The visit by law minister of Pakistan, Shahida Jamali, who is also the granddaughter of late leader H.S. Shurwardhy would also help in settling matters with Islamabad as well as activating the SAARC. Relationship with neighbours constitutes a considerably important parameter of foreign policy and the new government of Bangladesh is expected to take due note of this vital aspect.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior special correspondent of BSS.

MATTERS AROUND US

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UN and now seen as a key official wielding considerable clout in decisionmaking matters in the South Bloc, is definitely a positive step. He called on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and held substantial talks with the Foreign Minister and senior-most minister in the cabinet Professor B. Chowdhury, State Minister Reaz Rahman and Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury. They discussed different areas of bilateral ties and other issues of common concern. Needless to say, regional situation stemming from the Afghan crisis and the SAARC figured in the discus-

by Congress and non-Congress parties. When Khaleda Zia was prime minister in the first stint following the 1991 polls, the Bangladesh government dealt with a Congress government headed by P.V. Narasimha Rao. It was almost the same time that new governments took over in both Delhi and Dhaka and during their tenure Dhaka hosted a SAARC summit in which the Indian prime minister attended. Two governments found more of convergence of views instead of differences on certain matters. Nothing came seriously on the way to affect the ties which

government India when opposition BJP had expressed reservation on the agreement. Later, coming to power it upheld the accord since government-to-government treaties are seldom dishonoured. It is worthwhile to remember here that CPM leader and former West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu also played a role in the water treaty as a strong force in the UF and his interest was also for the reason that his roots are from today's Bangladesh.

It's worthwhile to remember that when Ziaur Rahman was in power in Bangladesh, Dhaka's ties

some clauses of the water accord, gas export to India, Indian measures to reduce the yawning gap in the bilateral trade and rejuvenation of the SAARC. All these issues are of enormous importance from Bangladesh's points of view. However, gas export is a debated matter as the main opposition Awami League is opposing it. It is up to the new government to weigh the pros and cons before taking any final decision. Finance Minister Saifur Rahman has already given indication of government's mind when he said there's no point of keeping it underground and not exporting

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.



PHOTO: STAR

The ungainly skyline

Packed like a deck of cards, the high rises of Motijheel stand tall but immensely disorganised. They neither add to the beauty either as they have grown without any proper planning. But they reflect the spirit of that part of the city that is sworn to collection and display of wealth, are ambitious and sometimes slightly ugly.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE

A great soul indeed

I had the good fortune of knowing Mr. Azimur Rahman (Harun Bhai), chairman of Mediaworld Limited. I loved him as a relative, respected him as a friend and adored him as a person whose humility and honesty will forever remain a source of inspiration for me.

Just a week before his demise I had this wonderful conversation with him while he was in Singapore on a trip. He was emphasising on the importance of neutrality and freedom of media. He was a firm believer of freedom of expression with the conviction of courage and impartiality.

Long ago, I read somewhere a quote from Ram Krishna "All great men are unknown". Harun Bhai was one of them. I believe that we can truly pay our homage to this great soul by following his ideals of integrity and humility. May Allah give him His eternal blessing.
Dr. Habib Khondker
Singapore, on e-mail

"I am not ashamed"

This is in reference to the letter "I am not ashamed" (October 30) by Kamal Haq. Could the writer be able to provide any evidence as to where, when or in what situation did Nizami or Mujahid proclaimed that they did nothing wrong in 1971? I think they know very well that they committed a serious mistake collaborating with Pak Army in 1971.

If the writer is in a habit of going through the newspapers, he will see that they bear respect for the independence of Bangladesh and they declared this a number of times. Please try to realise the fact that they have got people's mandate to sit in the Parliament. We should all try to prosper the nation and not engage ourselves into bickering of the past.
Shuvo, on e-mail

Communal harmony

There's no denying of the fact that Bangladesh has set an example to the outside world as a haven in maintaining communal harmony.

However, with the formation of the newly elected BNP-led 4-party alliance the situation seemed to have deteriorated. Some stray incidences in harassing the minority are reported across the country. Immediately after taking oath as the Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has promised the countrymen particularly the minority groups of taking stern action in combating terrorism against those found involved and stop repression on the minority groups.

Recently, the Home Minister while talking to the newsmen categorically stressed that the troublemakers irrespective of party affiliation will be brought to book. This proves the present government's sincere attitude towards the minority groups, which will certainly help improve and maintain

communal harmony in the country. Let us unite together irrespective of caste, creed and religion in building a prosperous nation and prove the outside world that Bangladesh is probably the only country which truly maintains communal harmony.
Shamim Al-Rashid
Olympia International

Lessons to Learn

We would like to congratulate BNP for getting people's mandate to rule the country for the next five years. We hope that BNP will take lesson from the recently held election and learn that people have the power to reject the politicians and policies that protect the criminals and unleash terror.

We hope BNP will take immediate steps to stop its own activists from attacking other party workers. BNP needs to make an example of replacing corrupt and criminal leaders and workers with smart and dedicated ones, of treating the opposition with respect and dignity, and of fulfilling its promises to restore law and order in the country.
Wafa Tawfeeq
Dallas, USA, on e-mail

The American philosophy

I'm writing this letter in response to the letter "The American philoso-

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

phy" (October 27). As an American staying here in Dhaka, I take offence to some of the writer's views.

First of all, how can anyone judge a place in two weeks time? Especially if he were travelling by a greyhound bus, he couldn't have stayed in one place for too long.

If the writer had taken the time to get to know any of the "real Americans" he would have known some of the nicest people.

Granted there are "good and bad" in every race, nationality etc just like here. Which by the way, I've been here almost three years and I've seen a very few people jumping to be my friend.

As far as the individualism that the writer has referred to, I think the writer has confused it with independence. We are taught at an early age to be independent, to get employment, our own place to live etc. Just because we don't live with our parents, siblings or other family members (as is common in this and other societies), doesn't mean that we don't love our families just as much! And yes, most of us are polite, unlike going to Gausia Market, where people are too busy pushing one out of the way to say "excuse me".

I'm not sure where the writer shopped; when he said supermarket I think he meant grocery store. Because I've shopped for food my entire life and I've never seen any items from Asia, unless it in the

Ethnic food store or an Ethnic food store. If the writer meant the knock-nacks, toys etc from "department stores", of course a lot of merchandise is shipped in from China, Taiwan and of course garments from Bangladesh. Isn't it helping the other country's economies?

Yes, I agree there are a lot of changes that need to take place on the international front, but that is a political war, not to be held against the average everyday American.

I would never judge a nation or its people in such a short period of time, but that's just my "American philosophy".
R Hossain
Dhaka, on e-mail

Garment export

There is too much panic in the media on the alarming dip in export of garments.

In the importing countries a family has to buy clothes several times a year, as it is a semi-consumable item (not capital expenditure) and it is not that costly (as buying a car).

Therefore the market is likely to settle down to a new pattern after a while. You can't do without clothes, and garments are produced in the third world countries.
A Mawaz
Dhaka