

Rough economic weather ahead

PM sees long term diversification as the only way out

THE PM has told a delegation of business leaders on Saturday to face the challenges of global recession unitedly. This statement by the PM of Bangladesh is both a recognition of reality as well as a call to face up to facts that will rule the international economic environment in the immediate to mid term future. The happy days when wealth could be ensured by simply organizing a set of stitching machine and women behind them is possibly over. This has to be recognized by the exporting community as quickly as possible.

The crisis is actually hitting the working class much more than others and that effect is immediate. The situation is bad enough to warrant a major NGO, BRAC, to start a rehabilitation programme for the newly unemployed women from the ready made garments sector. They have become victims of a major disaster, less dramatic than a flood but equally devastating. And we don't seem to have been prepared for it at all.

Our policy makers seem to be still pinning their hope on mercy from the US market but this isn't forthcoming. And it probably won't, because the US economy is ruled by the market and priorities of the US society and not ours. We should recognize that we went wrong through the absurd mono-dependence on a single sector, which again depended on the demand situation in only one or two countries.

While globalization is inevitable, it has pitfalls and we are observing that now. One hopes that the economic planners and wisdom providers can do something to create necessary cushions to absorb the shocks.

Begum Zia has said that Bangladesh should look into handicrafts and IT products to replace the declining garments market and has also announced 100-day programme to overcome the crisis. It may well take much longer and people will have to learn to wait for better times.

But what they must learn to survive in the inter-linked global market that is heavily loaded against the developing world is the need for reducing economic dependence on any one country. Diversification is a natural tool of survival and the responsibility to ensure that is of the national government. That was neglected.

It's best not to chase a dead duck to find the golden egg. Much better if everyone took a long painful breath and started to plan economic activities not only geared for immediate wealth but sustainability as well. Nobody is going to bail us out unless we are ready to do it ourselves.

War in Afghanistan entering a dangerous phase

Time for the UN to put together a solution

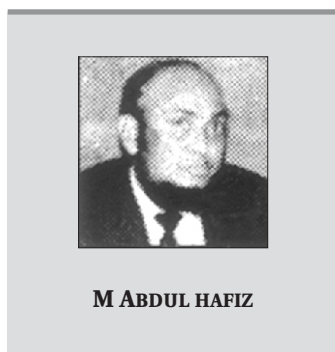
WE wonder whether the world should derive a sense of triumph or one of foreboding from the fall of Mazar-i-Sharif to the Northern Alliance. After 35 days of an incessant US state of the art bombing in Afghanistan designed to soften Taliban positions which intermittently strayed off-target killing civilians and sending numerous others scurrying for the borders, that Taliban-held strategic city has succumbed to the opposition advance. Needless to say, this couldn't be pulled off without the US aerial assault.

From this point on, the war in Afghanistan is set to be convoluted, intense and infinitely more costly in human terms. Whilst it seems fraught with dangers of escalation within Afghanistan, it can get no-holds-barred in terms of reprisals being threatened to go beyond the borders of that country. Osama bin Laden's latest disclosure that he not merely possesses nuclear and chemical weapons but would use them against the United States, if attacked, might add a dreadful dimension to the threat perception in the US. This also sits in with the apprehension in the western world that nukes could have surreptitiously reached the hands of their implacable enemies. At the other pole, the fall of Mazar-i-Sharif has opened up the border with Uzbekistan freeing up the military hardware supplies to the Northern Alliance. The latter are aiming to link up with Tajikistan as well, where Russian weapons are stockpiled waiting to be shipped to them. Those two states of former Soviet Union also have nuclear arsenal as dangerous vestigial remnants.

The strategic attainment in the north provides the coalition forces a foothold on the ground in addition to the fire power being rained on Afghanistan. But Northern Alliance -- they are helping to fight the Taliban -- lacks representative character besides being a medley of warlords, each with ambitions of his own. In terms of ethnicity, they are a minority in the demographic make-up of Afghanistan. The majority Pastuns are, by and large, Taliban. They have to be integrated into any future government for Afghanistan to be effective, if and when the Taliban will have been toppled from power. Russian Federation, India and Iran are opposed to the Taliban being included in any future set-up but Pakistan would like the 'moderate Taliban' to be part of it.

The most practical viewpoint to take under the circumstances would be to let the United Nations knit together the multi-ethnic divisions into a national government for the purpose of holding elections in order that the Afghans themselves can choose the leaders they would like to be governed by.

'Enduring Freedom' or enduring war?



M. ABDUL HAFIZ

THERE had always been an element of chivalry in a war. An enemy was seldom engaged in a conflict unless it is of comparable strength. Not only the crops, the places of worship and the homesteads of the civilians were spared in a war, the weak -- the old, infirm and women -- specially taken care of. Going by those age-old conventions what we are witnessing today in Afghanistan in the name of war on terrorism appears to be cold-blooded murder of the innocents having nothing to do with the war. After having miserably failed in either rounding up Osama bin-Laden or destroying his al-Qaida networks or bringing down their Taliban protectors the US-led 'international coalition' is, ostensibly in a fit of rage, turning its operation Enduring Freedom into a long drawn out war of attrition against its recalcitrant 'enemy'. No country would have ordinarily taken on an opponent of Afghanistan's misery, despondency and impoverishment let alone the question of going whole hog for its capitulation. Yet, it is an irony that the world's sole superpower has decided to wage an unequal war against a country which it itself armed, trained and organised to fight another superpower two decades ago.

Even without going into those unsavoury discourses the world community has a duty to save an entire population of a country now facing decimation as a result of the wrath of an angry avenger. That the

US would make 'horrible example' of its enemy, whosoever it was, could be anticipated from the beginning when a frenzy for revenge and calls for retribution to 'teach the terrorists the lesson of their life' filled the air soon after September 11 carnage. Then as its needle of suspicion sharply moved to point at bin Laden and his Taliban supporters for the terrorists' attack on the US there was no looking back for the Americans --

mines. With a prolonged drought and as a result of long-term effect of the war the country had become an environmental wreck. During the period of Soviet occupation millions of Afghans fled to neighbouring Pakistan and Iran where they live in squalor.

These conditions exacerbated from 1996 when Taliban rule was established. Their repressive policy and harsh rule led to further exodus. A series of trade and economic

sanctions sealed the fate of this land-locked resource-poor country. Since the UN imposed its draconian sanction in December last year, any prospect of the country's recovery was bleak and there was a new spate of migration across its porous borders. According to World Food Programme (WFP) there were around one million people in Afghanistan at the point of starvation even at that time. Apart from millions of refugees in neighbouring countries there were 2,00,000 internal refugees within the country itself. The country was already pitted against the West by failing to comply with its demand to extradite Osama bin-Laden to the US for the latter's alleged involvement in a number of terrorist actions. Before the outbreak of the ongoing war the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan was already causing concern for the international community. Now it has been pushed to the brink of a catastrophe.

As the operation Enduring Freedom rages in full fury the Afghans trapped within their own country now face the music. They

place anytime. The start of the war on 7 October halted United Nations food deliveries for more than a month. The officials of the World Food Programme calculate the country's need at 52,000 metric tons a month. Even if there is plenty of food near the borders but getting them in before the winter closes the mountain roads this month is a nightmare. The United Nations forecast the death of at least 1,00,000 children during the ensuing winter.

Even when the peace, if at all, descends on Afghanistan it will take long indeed to remove the scar of the war producing a lot of destitutes, orphans and crippled ones. The unexploded bomb and other explosives will be taking their toll. The presence in the atmosphere of Depleted Uranium (DU), now used in high-potential munitions, will play havoc with the health and hygiene of the population. Worse still, the disruption in social and ethnic equilibrium, inherent in an imposed dispensation brought about by the 'quillings' will destabilise the nation. The region also cannot be without

agency Oxfam warned before September 11 that the drought and the Taliban policy of selective and controlled flow of humanitarian assistance would leave two million Afghans hungry by the end of the year. Now with aid flows, whatever are their sources, totally disrupted the picture will be more grim. The British secretary for International Development had been predicting for months that Afghanistan was awaiting a catastrophe to take

its vicious fallout. The longer will be the duration of 'Enduring Freedom', the more complex will be the tangle in Afghanistan.

However, the critics say that the US has missed a historic opportunity of earning, instead, worldwide goodwill. Barring diehard fanatics none regardless of one's colour, creed and nationality approves of wanton killing of citizens either in USA or elsewhere. The outpourings of the sympathy for the American people after September 11 tragedy would have erased the long standing image of an 'Ugly American'. The world would have forgotten many of the terrorist acts perpetrated by the US itself. It perhaps would have overlooked a million children killed in Iraq as a result of US-manipulated sanction or condoned thousands dead in West Asia. There are moments when hearts sparked by mere gesture expand to embrace everything. The world would have even buried in the past the memory of 2,20,000 dead in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It would have liked to ignore even Vietnam and many other covert operations in Chile, Panama, Nicaragua, Iran, Indonesia and so on. Because, for a change America was the victim of aggression and its people were among the sufferers. They could have used this change as an opportunity to win friends and allies the world over for a rational, just and popular drive against terrorism.

But instead they opted for a show of force, an arrogance and vengeance that are too excessive, arbitrary, abrasive and indiscriminate. In the process it has thrown to the winds the strength of western liberalism -- its tolerance, humility and capacity of self criticism in an hour of crisis. As a result, the support and sympathy for the US in the wake of September 11 carnage are inexorably giving way to deep misgivings about the rationality of American response and serious doubts about American intention in the name of anti-terrorist war.

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Big (Redd) M Abdul Hafiz is former DG of BISS

The US should look at its own backyard

SAKYA SEN MITRA
writes from Kolkata

A couple of months have passed since the attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre took place at New York. Since then, George Bush has been shouting for revenge. However, other than killing a few terrorists here and there and destroying civilian properties and lives in Afghanistan, the United States has not achieved anything. Their war against what they call "the attack on freedom" will continue. Whether they will be able to achieve their goal of a fearless world is debatable.

Since September 11, 2001, the Americans are a different people. They are panicky. As much as George Bush has been shouting himself hoarse to urge the Americans back to normalcy, he has not been able to do so. People are refusing to work on high rises, hate crimes against Indians, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis are on the increase. And above all, the people of the 54 states that make up the USA are jittery. They are not venturing out of their cocoons unless it is an absolute necessity. Night club life has come to a standstill. Even the casinos at Atlantic City (termed as the Las Vegas of the East) are running empty. And the main reason for that is the American President and his administration. George W Bush (jr) disappeared for more than seven hours on September 11. Nobody could say where he was. And that resulted in a massive implantation of fear in

the minds of the American people. Even now, questions are being raised regarding his "vanishing act" on that particular day. A thing, that prompted quite a few American citizens to write letters to the newspapers criticising it.

Then comes the 900 arrests and detentions that have been conducted by the FBI. The problem is that even now the FBI has failed to link any of these people directly to attacks on September 11. There are a number of circumstantial evi-

those arrested were associated with the attacks. A month later, the FBI was forced to release the six that they had picked up. The members of the three families had come for medical treatment to Boston from Riyadh. However, there were no announcement in the media regarding the innocence of these people.

The common men on the streets of America are not really very knowledgeable. If you ask them about cities from the Asian sub-

continent, there ignorance will become very apparent. To them life consists of work, weekend outings, a few beers and fast cars. However, there are a few enlightened ones, who are openly questioning the authenticity of American foreign policy. But their numbers are so nominal, that they have not been able to really make an effect. However, the Bush administration is being forced to face questions as to why the Americans will support a Saudi Arabian regime and why would America continue to support Israel. Like the professor of History at Harvard who said, "Today we are losing people simply because in the last 50 years we have murdered others of other countries. If the withdrawal of support to Israel and the

troops from Saudi Arabia helps us to prevent a further loss of lives why are we hesitant to do so. We do not need anything from the world. So we can live a self-sufficient life."

Other intellectuals have also condemned the hypocrisy of the various Governments that have ruled the country and the media. A millionaire philanthropist by the name of Robin Gray in Philadelphia said, "Americans are dying every year in various parts of the world. There have been no calls for

that they had no way to prevent it. Can you imagine, the FBI issuing a search for Arab linguists after the attack? Before that their computers had intercepted thousands and thousands of messages in Arabic. But they did not have the necessary manpower to decipher them. The killings of innocents are always condemnable. But it happened simply because the American Governments in the last 50 years had tried to be too overbearing to the poor under-developed countries.

America, will not be able to rest peacefully until and unless it sheds its big brother image. It will not be wrong to mention, that even within the United States millions perhaps secretly enjoyed the humiliation that the United States suffered at the hands of the Osama Bin Laden. These are people, who are not Americans but who have made the country their home for the last 50 years or more. People of the Asian and South American background who have settled down in the United States and have become American citizens only to find that subtle yet cruel forms of racial discrimination exist. The flouting of American money and muscle power have saddened them. Yet, they have been forced to join the bandwagon of supporting the United States simply because they have decided to settle in America. The United States needs to look at its own backyard to find out the reasons for which it is being attacked.

Bombs in Afghanistan may kill one Bin Laden, but will give rise to a thousand more. As a Muslim Historian by the name of Abbas Mohammod Pervaz said over the radio a few days back, "George Bush is repeatedly using the word crusade in the fight against Bin Laden. What he is forgetting is that to the Muslims, crusade is a very holy word. It will unite the Muslim world further against America. And America will never win the war against terrorism."

The American media and the government are desperately trying to implicate terrorists to the Anthrax attacks. The fact is that the association of "White Supremacy Groups" behind the attacks cannot be ruled out. A few years ago, these groups had threatened biological warfare on the Government and the media for supporting issues like abortion, living together and free sex. However, nobody is talking about this suspicion. The public, the media and the Government are all channeling their resources to try and prove that these anthrax attacks are the handiwork of Muslim terrorists. They are not even trying to investigate whether white men are behind the attacks or not.

Cave Man vs Bush Man

RUKSHANA H CHOWDHURY

WAR has again become the major news of our world today. It is not the first war of the 21st century (as President Bush in his little American world believes) but it is definitely the most serious.

One highly sophisticated attack against the US and now small Afghan children have to pay the price. Medicine and food in one set of planes and bombs in another. Is this a joke? There should be a third set of planes carrying timetables telling the Afghans when to run for the bombs and when to run out for the aid. And of course a fourth set of planes carrying messages telling them when they're going to "accidentally" hit a hospital or civilian village.

Such sophisticated weaponry of the richest country in the world and yet they remain unable to control them, missing their targets often. Yet quite they accuse Laden of being quite capable of manufacturing nuclear weapons.

I can just imagine Laden in his little Afghan (?) cave (Cave A), measuring out three teaspoons of radium, five teaspoons of plutonium, mixed together with liquids and other "nuke stuff", all packed tightly into glass bottles then carrying them out on donkeys and catapulting them out in the general direction of America! But now that

Laden claims to possess nukes no further comment.

In cave B he packs anthrax (I know there's no proof but, what the hell, let's accuse him of this too, it's on everybody's mind) into envelopes (of course he wears gloves and a mask) and posts them off to various parts of the world from his third cave, the postal express cave.

Yes Bush, beware! The Laden Cave Man (copyright Marvel Comics) is out to get you!

Bush Man, able to head the No. 1 nation, forgets the names of other heads of state and also misses targets as big as stadium, versus Cave Man, able to single-handedly terrorise the world, be the No.1 most wanted yet still maintain adulation of millions.

Whole countries have been unable to set up nuclear weapons or nuclear stations but Cave Man has managed to pack one in to his many caves. He must be some kind of demigod, the kind from the Greek ages of Zeus. Laden should be punished if he is guilty. His guilt is still not proven. He has the capability of being rapists, does that mean we should put them all in jail? He alone should be punished. Why is Afghanistan being punished for this one man? Afghanistani children are suffering, dying, watching their country disintegrate.

Bush has repeatedly said in

many different ways not to associate Islam with terrorism and of course by doing this repeatedly he has made everyone associate Islam with terrorism. The West has never been accepting of Islam, but that's another chapter.

The US has bombed a nation. Now they tell us the military has run out of targets to hit in Afghanistan. Is this some kind of warning? Will America turn her guns elsewhere? Who's next on this "well, there are a couple of terrorists in so and so, let's start bombing there" list?

This is not the solution as Bush Man should clearly see by now. Cave Man is still out there and Bush Man continues to bomb randomly.

In under three hours, on September 11th terrorists (mad men) hijacked planes, took control, and murdered 6000 people. They left their mark in history and in the hearts of millions. They accomplished the evil they wanted to.

The world then turned to Bush of the most powerful nation to see what he would do. He remained in hiding in Airforce One for a few hours, then top level meetings, publicized phonecalls, promises of justice and finally a war. Bush has accomplished nothing.

The world was united by one evil act, but Bush managed to divide that world. And Bush Man continues not to associate terrorism with Islam by talking of a cru-

sade while Muslim countries have their separate meetings about what to do. Meanwhile Cave Man grows in mythical stature as to his power to terrorise the world.

Now Afghan children lie in hospital, minds traumatized, faces scarred. Millions of refugees face an uncertain future. All of these victims with hearts full of despair; despair turning to anger, perhaps to vengeance thus again, each victim turning into another Laden. Is this the mark you want to leave, President Bush? The creation of millions of Ladens to replace the one you couldn't catch? Is this part of your great accomplishment?

Stop the bombing! Find the guilty and punish them. Be the one who found the evil men who did the September 11th act and punished them accordingly. Not the one who had to destroy a whole nation, women, children, elderly because one man might be there. This should never have been a military war but a war of intelligence. If the CIA, FBI had been doing their job in the first place, instead of feeling neglected for themselves, this probably never would have happened. But then again they wouldn't have received the attention, extra money, extra power that they did as a result.

President Bush, please use your resources of intelligence, not your wealth of arms.

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OPINION

America's policies against terrorism!

YOUSUF AZIZ

THIS is in response of a letter "An American Opinion" published on October 30 in The Daily Star. At first I would like to assure that I, like most of the people of Bangladesh, do not support the attacks on WTC on September 11 or any other terrorist acts that have caused civilian casualties around the world. I also want to see those responsible for such heinous acts brought to book. But also I do not support all of America's actions and policies towards the world, and its present attacks on Afghanistan that are causing loss of innocent lives.

I would ask the letter writer to go through the history and find how and why Osama Bin Laden was born. Laden was created by America and since he's no longer serving America's interest, he has become America's biggest enemy. Please don't be confused, I am not supporting the attacks on WTC nor am I supporting Osama Bin Laden or his terrorist activities. I only want to inform you that America is suffering for its double-standard towards the world, especially the Muslim world. I believe a simple terrorist can not be as desperate as to give up his life to establish something. If one vows to give up his life to fight against a nation as strong as

America then there must be some reason. America must have done something wrong. If America is so honest how can you justify its acts at Vietnam or Hiroshima and Nagasaki or its stand over Israel? America used chemical weapons on the people of Vietnam and for what? Surely not to feed the Vietnamese children with milk! And about Hiroshima and Nagasaki, though Japan surrendered to the allies, what could possibly be the reason of dropping two atomic bombs and killing millions of innocent people? And still after so many years America hasn't yet apologized! And now? America is shamelessly supporting the illegal acts of Israel such as indiscriminate killing of innocent Palestinians, assassination of high ranking Palestinian officials, grabbing of more Palestinian lands and occupation of Islam's third holiest Al-Aqsa mosque.

Surprisingly killing and torturing of innocent, unarmed Palestinians is not terrorism, not even a crime! And America is still continuing to support Israel for its acts! Isn't that terrorism? I think you need to redefine the word 'terrorism', being the wealthiest and strongest nation of the world does not give USA the right to do whatever it wants. Not to forget Israel was created by the support of America and Britain. America is

supplying Israel with the most advanced weapons of war but warns Palestinians to give up their arms and their struggle for survival and freedom! And now Israel owns nuclear weapons and America sees nothing objectionable to it! After ten years of Gulf War America is still bombing Iraq and against the lifting of economic sanctions that is killing thousand of Iraqi civilians especially children every month. And that's because Iraq is perceived to be a threat to Israel! And this is what you call "America's firm stand against terrorism"! You must not forget America didn't involve itself with the Gulf War not for humanitarian cause; America was paid in dollars for it. And according to the illegal acts of Israel such as indiscriminate killing of innocent Palestinians, assassination of high ranking Palestinian officials, grabbing of more Palestinian lands and occupation of Islam's third holiest Al-Aqsa mosque.

Also I would kindly like to ask what America was doing when we, the people of Bangladesh, were fighting for our freedom in 1971. What stand did America take when Pakistani army was killing millions of innocent, unarmed people? America was shamelessly support-

ing the barbaric acts of Pakistan army and was supplying them with large amount of arms and ammunition. When that failed to stop our quest for freedom, America tried to send the Seventh-Fleet! And thanks for America's support the Pakistani army committed what is known as "the largest genocide in the history of mankind".

America is suffering for its ill-fated double-standard policies and will suffer more if it does not change its stand. Please do not confuse, I am not an anti-American. I would really like to thank America, its people and its organisations for their support and aids for building a better Bangladesh and also for their humanitarian activities all over the world. I believe no one is perfect and so isn't America. But it's time for America to rethink and revise its actions and policies towards the Muslim world. Because I believe no conscious citizen of the world would like to see any more innocent deaths from heinous terrorist attacks, nor will he like to see more killings of innocent Palestinians by the Israeli army. After September 11 you are angry we know; you have every right to be. But please don't let your anger take away your good senses. Let the good senses prevail.

Yousuf Aziz writes from Dhaka Cantonment