

As Palestine burns

The Israeli attack foreshadows a dark era

ISRAEL has unleashed its devastating forces against Palestine to make sure that a lesson is finally learnt about combating a stronger enemy. And this time around the US is supporting Israel. While a few weeks back, the US, which needed Arab support in the anti-Afghan coalition had seemed a moderating force and ready to listen to both sides, it certainly looks different now having endorsed the attacks on Palestine. This came about after a series of attacks on Israeli people by extremist Palestinian groups. The US can hardly do but cheer Israel on as it itself is just finishing up the Afghan campaign where the fight was also against "terror". This catch-all word will be the platform for all future actions, which the US will lead.

One of course forgets that what is called terrorism is the result of a series of historical events. That situation that leads to indiscriminate deaths through violence doesn't suddenly happen or end either. It seems that what is terrorism is defined by who defines. The killing by Israel including in Shabra and Shatila camps is not a terrorist act but the Palestinian attacks are. This may sound unfair to many but this is the real world.

The intensity seems to indicate that the US will now go on an all-out offensive against those not in its camp. This could indeed be a transition point in human history as the world gets completely split into the powerful exercising great might and the powerless unable to manage its world.

The developing world is now going to be marginalized to an extent never thought possible before. This will primarily happen because of the worldview of the western powers and also because of the nature of the rulers of the developing world. More keen to consolidate personal power than lead their people, they have brought the situation to a point where they are only able to lead the people to a point of no return.

Palestine created the entire "Arab terror" phenomenon and now that chapter may well be about to be closed. It does seem that Israel can do no wrong because the US now sanctions their war. The Iraqi attrition has legitimized prolonged suffering to ensure security and the Afghan war has legitimized use of extreme force. There is nothing that can probably stand in the way of the victorious West now.

Somewhere in all this moderation has been lost. It belongs neither to the small groups which cause civilian casualties nor to those who in the name of fighting them cause civilian casualties as well.

Blood Bank crisis

A case of planning failure as usual

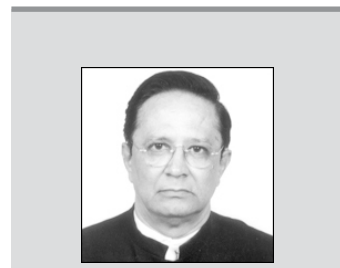
WE are flabbergasted to know that many scheduled critical surgical operations are being deferred on account of a drastic drop in blood supply from the Red Crescent Centre. The centre as the prime collector of blood donated on voluntary basis usually maintains a daily supply of 75 to 80 bags to various hospitals and clinics in the city. This has now plummeted to 50 bags only, so that some 30 patients needing blood transfusion are having to go without it.

The reason for the shortfall is put down to a Ramadan injunction that prohibits donation of blood during fasting. The Red Crescent authorities have taken initiative to encourage non-Muslims to come forward in mitigating this temporary crisis of blood donation.

It augurs well that the Farmgate Church has participated in the collection programme tallying 35 bags in donation to fill in the gap. We are glad to note also that the Ram Krishna Mission is not lagging behind in this. We must be grateful to them for their humanitarian consideration towards fellow citizens. We don't know whether the Red Crescent's call for voluntary donation of blood by Muslims after *Iftar* will meet with success.

Anyway, what all this experience points to is the fact that we seldom plan ahead for contingencies knowing full well these will visit us in due course. Couldn't the Red Crescent people think of stepping up collection of blood during the pre-Ramadan months to be able to maintain a resident stock for the lean Ramadan month? Of course, their blood screening standards will have improved simultaneously. The blood bank authorities elsewhere in the country should sit up and take note of this in order that they are able to do the needful every year.

The question is whether we reform student politics or ban it



S H IMAM

THE government wants 'student politics' banned. Moratorium or ban, something needs to be clamped on what goes in the name of student politics these days.

For practical reasons, however, this cannot be done by passing a law unilaterally on the strength of the ruling alliance's majority in parliament, far less through an administrative edict. That's why Law Minister Moudud Ahmed has told the BBC recently that the government aimed to put the ban in place by a consensus (with the opposition). He suggested in general terms that students needed to be delinked from national politics.

The reports too are that the government is trying to open a dialogue with the political parties on the subject. But the current mood in the Opposition may be too sour for them to feel drawn into a discourse over the matter, far less respond the offer of consensus right away. It hardly needs to be stressed what

we are looking for here as no ordinary bipartisan understanding, because the problem is too entrenched and ramified to lend itself to any easy solution. It requires a cross-party understanding with a high degree of honest and sustainable commitment to be resolved.

We remember when Sheikh Hasina was in power she offered to ban, student politics if Begum Zia agreed. The degeneracy of student

leading up to the birth of Bangladesh and were part and parcel of the upheaval for restoration of democracy in 1990. Also in those times they stood by oppressed people throughout the world often articulating their views on burning international topics through meetings held in the open air. Of course, there were quislings of the power that was but they would be marginalised by the force of enlightenment holding sway all over. The students

of politics on the campus and their extortionist forays have affected the larger society as well.

The puritan politics flourished in a different context when the political opposition to colonial or military masters had to draw on support from students and the courageous segments of the media and civic society. Let me share an anecdote here to illustrate a refreshing variation. It was Hussein Shaheed Suhrawardy who in the thick of a

politics. Its links with national is amply underlined by the fact that some political parties even have the final say about the composition of the central committee of their student fronts.

If the students unions, from the apex DUCSU downwards, have constitutions that strictly forbid links with political parties and are abided by the unions and the political parties themselves abjure use of student as political tools then the

suggested above there's no reason why student politics cannot confined within the perimeter of student unions subject to regular elections to these bodies. One is reminded of the long-pending DUCSU election here that considerably vitiated the atmosphere on the campuses.

The students aged 18 and above, are voters, they have the right to vote, they have the right to canvass for election candidates and even take part in the polls themselves, if they wish to. If the eligible ones should even like to be members of any political party, so be it, but under no circumstances should they allow their political beliefs to be imposed on the academic life of students.

The students' role as conscientious objectors to social or even political injustices may not have outlived its utility even though the civil society including various legal environmental women and child activist groups are playing it out in a large measure now. They should be able to debate national issues, articulate their views through appropriate fora where necessary.

One feels in the end though that the political opposition's failure to play its due role and its running confrontation with the government have not only induced student politics to go astray but also left the agenda for reforming it squarely unaddressed.

S H Imam is Associate Editor of The Daily Star

JUST ANOTHER VIEW

The students' role as conscientious objectors to social or even political injustices may not have outlived its utility even though the civil society including various legal environmental women and child activist groups are playing it out in a large measure now. They should be able to debate national issues, articulate their views through appropriate fora where necessary... the political opposition's failure to play its due role and its running confrontation with the government have not only induced student politics to go astray but also left the agenda for reforming it squarely unaddressed.

politics has been bad as it is, and looking at it from a position of power or from out of power cannot make it any better. Sheikh Hasina will rise in public esteem if she agreed to implement her earlier commitment to reform or ban student politics.

Student power has had two faces: one is a glorious chapter that belongs to history, and the other is its drifting over time into the present deplorable state. Students led the Language Movement of 1952, vanguarded the national struggle for freedom in the late 'sixties

become the darling of the people, highly regarded, esteemed and respected, the people always hoping that student will not fail to stand for justice and fairplay when the time came.

All that is a far cry now. The general students' longing for studies to make a worthwhile career is suppressed under the deadweight of unprincipled student politics given to maintaining feildoms through use of arms largely at the behest of parent political parties. The criminalisation

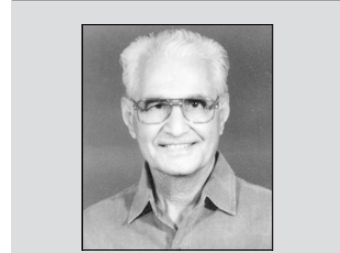
Democratic Action Committee engagement in Dhaka around 1962 curly advised a visiting group of students to go back to studies when told they had called for a student strike seeking a change of examination dates.

For historical reasons we are having to think about banning student politics while most other countries do not need to do so, because they don't have student politics. They have student union activities alright which obviously cannot match our kind of student

benefit will be enormous in two respects: first, the students will have an outlet for self-expression; and secondly, national politics will be kept from intruding into the student affairs. But, of course, the teaching community will have a catalytic role to play in establishing their natural authority over the students. And they can do it best by keeping their political differences to themselves. The students must have respectable teachers to look up to.

With sufficient safeguards as

Past is future



M B NAQVI

writes from Karachi

YES, President Gen. Pervez Musharraf has so declared: although polls to the National and Provincial Assemblies shall be held by October 2002, he has 'decided' to remain the President of Pakistan indefinitely. That is that. There is no point in engaging in an academic discussion about dictatorship is or is not better than democracy. We had better concentrate on facts. Since there exists no countervailing force to constrain Gen. Musharraf, his will be done. Until such a political force emerges from the political action by mainstream or other parties, we had better adjust to the reality of indefinitely continuing dictatorship. What shape would this expected reality take is known through experience. Some of the obvious implications may be noted in passing. Next year's polls will inevitably come under a questionmark throughout the world. Here is Gen. Musharraf obviously proclaiming that elected National and Provincial Assemblies will not be able to question his 'decision'. The elected system would thus be subordinate to him. The how of it does not really matter; the reality does. He has many instruments to constrain and circumscribe the Assemblies just as he, by virtue of being the Army chief, could suppress all the Assemblies and put the Constitution in abeyance.

A Constitution in abeyance is a euphemism for setting aside or suppressing it while a gossamer-thin pretence is made that it has not been abrogated and might some day be brought back. But a Constitution, like virginity, is destroyed once a government or ruler violates it by disobeying. What might be revived will be a new thing, the credibility of which will depend on who has brought it into being and how. So what is to be expected is an elected

conditioning or even encouraging religious extremism. He already makes an exception of Jihadis in Kashmir. Eventual orientation shall depend on circumstances and expediency, including foreign pressures. For the present, he is permitting the press to be free. That is also his plus point, even if it is only a safety valve. That is his plus point as a person and ruler, though his instincts and gut reactions seem to conform to the dictatorial pattern.

Supposing none of that happens, what can we expect from the Taliban who may have sought refuge in Pakistan? Would the leopard change its spots? There is also the larger question of the overall reactions of the religious parties and Jihadis in this country to the final fall of the Taliban regime. The immediate reaction is known: the religious lobbies have been stunned into silence by the rapidly with which the Taliban bubble has

Kashmir Jihad as so much cross-border terrorism, endorsing the Indian view, the fond hopes of having become secure can turn into delusions; no core interest of Pakistan, however defined, will be safe. The very idea of a foreign power securing core interests of another seems inherently unsound.

There is the economy. Those who believe the government publicity are in a state of euphoria: plenty of money --- in comparison with the

moment. A likely crisis in the relations with the US over Kashmir Jihad might soon be approaching. It bears repeating that the American sympathies, insofar as Kashmir is concerned, are with the Indians rather than with Pakistanis or Kashmiris as such. What can be sure is that the Americans will opt for stability any day. Stability means preservation of the status quo. Would the regime too stand for status quo in Kashmir? Or can it accept that? So a crisis can be foreseen. Hopefully the regime will ride out of it somehow just as it will have to deal with the fallout from Afghanistan on the political life of the country that can be compounded by the ups and downs of the economy, with its growing unemployment and poverty. Anyone would think that faced with such complex challenges, the one-man regime would feel the need for recruiting the help from politicians of political stature who command, or are capable of commanding, support from the common people. At the very least, it should be consulting them, if not associating them, now. What seems logical to others is that the regime needs help and assistance from popular leaders, by giving them an honourable and significant place in the governance of the country. This does not seem expedient or desirable to the President.

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MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan

PLAIN WORDS

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system that by itself will not matter and the ultimate power shall continue to reside where it happens to live today.

One defect of dictatorship is that it provides no system of succession. There is no known and peaceful or legal way in which another can succeed the dictator who overstates his welcome. The possibilities are troublesome. But that cannot now be helped. In any case, the people have no role in such proceedings, though they are the ones who can suffer collateral damage in almost all circumstances. It is true, a dictator can be, and occasionally is, benevolent. But he could as easily be a tyrannical one.

As it sometimes happens, President Musharraf is, for most of the liberal-minded, a benign one who is embarked on the welcome course of containing religious extremists. Glory be to God. But, and it is a part of the system, he can just as easily revert to the previous policy of

It is also useless to point out the enormity of challenges that face Pakistan at a time when he has shown his intention to remain a dictator. Circumstances compel one to take a passing note of what impends in the weeks and months ahead. The messy affair of mopping up the Taliban resistance in the neighbouring country is sure to throw a lot of political troubles into the lap of Pakistan. Apart from the bumper fireballs of Osama and Mulla Omar, the innumerable Taliban fighters and activists are sure to find some way of sneaking into Pakistan. The danger of hot pursuit by Coalition forces is one of the many dangers. Already, Pakistan's border has been violated by British troops pursuing their prey; American bombers have dropped bombs on Pakistan territory. Some of it will have to be repeated if the presence of Taliban in some numbers are suspected to be hiding here.

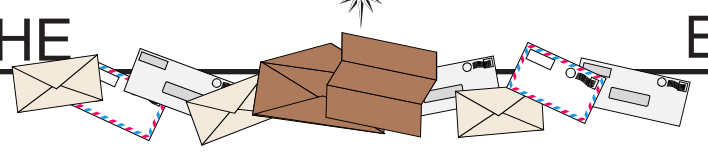
burst. Not merely that. But the ease with which so many Taliban fighters came out of Kunduz simply to join their opponent army cannot but be a traumatizing process for the naïve Jihadis. Any way, the longer term impact on the minds of those who think more or less like Taliban needs to be studied with the purpose of dealing with emerging forces or tendencies.

The renewed alliance with the US is the sheet anchor of all policies now. It is hoped that core interests --- national security, Kashmir cause and nuclear weapons' safety, as Islamabad defines them --- are thus safe. After the US Ambassador to India's recent statement about the US readiness to address the cross-border terrorism in Kashmir, prudence behind these hopes need to be rethought. Has Islamabad correctly evaluated the situation --- and Kashmir Jihad's place in the evolving geopolitical situation in Asia? Should the Yanks actually see

state of affairs that prevailed in recent years --- is pouring in and more seems to be on the way. The impression is that the pipeline of foreign aid is in full operation and is likely to remain so. All the other problems that were being discussed before September 11 seem to have been forgotten. There was the question of turning around the economy by overcoming the recession. Many others were talking about the actual ways of getting out of the debt trap. Still others were discussing the perennial issues of the economy, wanting genuine development and to eradicate poverty and ensure rapid progress with a human face. But most of the talk today is about how much aid has been received, how much more will be coming in and how much debt relief is forthcoming. Nothing else is being heard.

The Musharraf regime shall have to face the fact that the aid pipeline can be turned off at any

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



What about George Harrison?

We Bangladeshis living in America are waiting eagerly to see how the present government reacts to the departed soul of George Harrison. If we recall our liberation history and try to find out our friends and foes, we will see how George Harrison, John Lennon and Ravi Shankar helped people of Bangladesh.

Millions of dollars had been collected to support the liberation war of Bangladesh through the "Concert for Bangladesh". It was not only a simple concert, it was a great political gain for the then East Pakistan. During that period, the US government did not support our liberation movement.

Ravi Shankar influenced the great singer George Harrison and had the concert take place. This was the first time during 1971, American people heard about the liberation movement of Bangladesh. After the concert in different universities American students organised protest and condemn the US government's role regarding East Pakistan. Not only that Edward Kennedy spoke openly in the congress session on favour of Bangladesh liberation, they also planned to visit Bangladeshi refugees in Calcutta. It was people like George Harrison and others changed the political views of former US government that time.

As a whole America is very

shocked from the death of George Harrison. We people of Bangladesh in America, we will be very happy if President Badruddoza Chowdhury and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to send message of condolence to the wife and son of George Harrison and thus recall the benefit we had received as nation from him. Please recall also Ravi Shankar and his role during our liberation struggle. People of Bangladesh has learnt very little from the history and I will be grateful if they at least recognise who their friends and foes were during the Liberation War.

In America, we had organised a condolence meeting to pay tribute to the departed soul of George Harrison, who used to be known as the "friend of Bangladesh".

Isaac Barol
Lake Charles, USA

"Who are these cheats?"

This is in reference to the letter "Who are these cheats?" (November 23). I had been through similar experience but dodged successfully making any payment.

During the years 97-98, I used get phone calls from one Mr Kabir introducing himself as Deputy Commissioner of Taxes, asking for contribution for religious cause. When I inquired as to how he got my name, he replied that he selected my 'up and coming Firm' from the

company circle of the Income Tax Department.

On his last call he asked for my contribution towards sending 100 maunds of rice from Badamtoli ghat to an orphanage in Sharshina Sharif. I had to find good many excuses to save myself. Hope others were as lucky as I was.

Iskander Meah
Gulshan, Dhaka

Let the Kashmiris decide

I really appreciate the concern shown by Mr. Samir Saha about stopping theocracy taking power in Kashmir ("On Kashmir, theocracy, and secularism", December 5). Wouldn't the best way to stop the extremists from taking control of Kashmir would be to allow them to exercise their fundamental rights to decide their own future as enshrined in the United Nations resolutions and promised to them by the Indian government?

A citizen, on e-mail

"Brutality Bangladesh style"

It is sad that even the basic human rights do not exist in Bangladesh or in any other third world country for that matter. I have seen it happen too many times right in front of me.

Once I saw a rickshaw-puller being kicked by an army soldier who was driving a motorcycle. The

rickshaw-puller's fault was that he came in front of the motorcycle. It was there and I know that the army soldier was driving too fast. This happened in Dhaka Cantonment. A couple of military police came and took the rickshaw-puller away.

I wonder whether we are a third world country because we don't respect the basic human rights or is it we are a third world country therefore do not have the capability to ensure basic human rights? And if we can't ensure the basic rights of a human being then what is the meaning of having a Constitution or citizenship?

Anup Deb
San Jose

Thank you

I wish to thank you for a wonderful editorial "What was the need for this heavy-handed attitude?" (November 26). Democracy, in fact, starts with dialogues and ends in harmonious understanding between the party in power and the party in opposition. It calls for extreme tolerance, freedom of expression and wider vision of the political leaders who are to guide the nation towards prosperity.

Democracy has become a new type of culture in the 21st century demanding the highest order of integrity, sincerity and co-operation between the public and the representatives of people in the Parliament.

In a country like ours we must try to nurture the traits of democracy for the common good. Otherwise the neglected and the poor would continue to suffer in all aspects of life.

Abul Ashraf Noor
Dhaka

Trust and gullibility

In Dhaka, it looks so easy for political leaders to make promises publicly, and later get out of it, may be the public is so gullible.

Distrust of political leadership is a serious aberration in the society, as national security could be breached at the wrong moment.

How to remove the unwanted, and the undesirable? It is more than witch-hunting.

Mwz
Dhaka

Gas export

The issue of gas export is a burning question of our time. The government's hasty affirmative nod regarding export of gas has created much controversy.

It is very astonishing that the ruling party campaigned strongly against the sale of gas while in opposition but after assuming power, it is working in a reverse direction. What prompted them to go for gas export? The country's dwindled economic position is a matter of great concern no doubt or is there any international lobby-

ing/pressure for it?

The whole issue is very unclear and we don't even know the actual quantity of our gas reserve. So, on what basis will the government take a major decision on gas export?

Our Petrobangla experts and industry inside the country are critical of the way the government is handling this sensitive issue. The main opposition already threatens to go for continuous strike if decision for export of gas taken. The Unocal proposal to export gas must be checked, re-examined and thoroughly vetted. Above all it needs a very patriotic decision.

M.H. Bari
Khulna

Expectations

BNP was voted to power in the hope that Bangladesh will be a corruption free country. The present government has already taken a 100-day package agenda and pledged that by that time terrorism will be vanquished from all universities.

Now we are waiting for that. We are believers in work. We want an immediate action. Now we are looking forward to enjoying the outcome of terrorist free campus and terrorist free country.

Russel
Shahjalal University
of Science & Technology, Sylhet

Profile of a student

activist

In the early 70's my "friend" was an intermediate student in a college in Sylhet. I also was an intermediate student in the next door college. I knew him, because he was a known student leader. I finished my medical school and internship. I went abroad in early 80's. In early 90's I happened to come across an issue of Weekly Bichitra. And to my utter surprise I found that my friend was still a student. In fact, he was elected V.P. of Dhaka University Students Union. I wondered about his poor parents. Were they still sending him money? So far I knew, student politics never paid. At the end of his student life, he was an MP in the last Parliament. And whao.....it was a paid job!"

Painful though, may be it is time to stop this kind of student politics.

Mohammad A. Zaman, M.D
North Carolina, USA

What ails Bangladesh?

I, like most readers, have often asked myself what ails Bangladesh. There is corruption and inefficiency in every stratum of the political, bureaucratic and the social structure. Violence, extortion and lawlessness straddles everything and everywhere you look. Garbage on the streets, pollution in the air, and hopelessness in the minds.

Am I being too judgmental, am I

being too pessimistic? I do hope so, but unfortunately I do not believe that is the case. Therefore I ask myself, what went wrong in our past? What is going wrong now? What has brought us to the verge of this political, environmental and humanitarian collapse? I know Bangladesh is a densely populated country with little natural resources. But there are other countries, which are also densely populated and have little natural resources. Is there an unholy international conspiracy against Bangladesh? I don't think so. Therefore, the obvious and unavoidable question becomes, is it us? But then what is it with us? On a personal or individual level Bangladeshis are as intelligent, as ambitious, as hardworking and as talented as members of any other society are. But why do we fail collectively? So many questions, so few answers.

A. Zaman
Minnesota, USA

ANNOUNCEMENT
We invite our readers to send us their views on ban on student politics and ban on trade unions.