

Israel's no-holds-barred belligerence

US must stop it rightaway

ISRAEL has gone ahead and taken the war to Palestine. This is the latest step in retaliation against suicide attacks by Palestinian militants. Palestinians say their actions are in retaliation against Israeli occupation. While the argument goes on, the USA has openly endorsed Israel. Thus, force has been incorporated as a legitimate method of settling international disputes.

The US Defense Secretary has said that Iraq, Iran and Syria have encouraged the culture of suicide bombing. Thus, both Israel and the USA have decided that the only settlement in Palestine will come from the barrel of Israeli guns.

The world applies double standards when it judges acts of such violence. When the Palestinians retaliate against actions by the Israelis they are routinely condemned by the US and used as justification to invade Palestinian land and hold on to it. It seems that the latest strategy is to force Arafat to accept dictated peace. Unfortunately, this is a deadly misreading because no matter what the Western world says, the logic of the violated is not the same as that of the perpetrator. Arafat has been marginalized after the Israeli attacks and there is no visible enemy left even for a legitimate negotiation.

Obviously, Israel will have its way and since the US has given its backing this phase of war will continue but the ultimate fate seems impossible to define. Just as Israel goes back to Biblical era to justify its creation, Palestinians too go back to their history of expulsion to justify their stand. The sponsors of Israel surely had never expected the situation to become like this. Sadly, they don't see what the situation may become tomorrow either.

The US has said that Arafat's life is 'secured' as promised by the Israelis. This automatically means that other Palestinian lives are not. Sadly, the US has never spoken with a siller tongue than it speaks now. Power doesn't necessarily vest one with wisdom, it seems.

What policy angle makes the US decide to let its closest ally continue with its dangerous game is unclear but it obviously feels impervious to any danger. Unfortunately, history has shown that a false sense of security is worse than fear. We are all under threat today.

The monster of hate that is now loose in the Middle East will not be silenced by guns and armoured cars. It needs the power of just and dignified peace to be quietened. Unfortunately, the one country that could have made a difference believes right now that it can afford to have wars. And let others have it too.

Again a ghoulish murder

Shihab's killers must get exemplary punishment

DEPOSED pieces of a 13-year-old schoolboy, kidnapped on February 7, were recovered from swamps and manholes at three different places in the city's Bashabo and North Gorai areas on Monday. The night before police arrested three teenagers, who confessed to the abduction and killing of Khandaker Shihab Ahmed. Three more, including two women, were arrested later on. There should now be a full investigation into the crime before the matter goes to court. And the police must make sure there remains no hole in their case for the criminals to slip through. The killers must get exemplary punishment for the horrific crime they have committed.

Meanwhile, we need to confront the cruel reality Shihab's death has unfolded. We must realise that the monstrous murder points to an increasingly insecure and unsafe society we now live in. Shihab's killers are not creatures of an outside world; they are very much a part of the world we live in. The accused are all in their teens and twenties, and by their own admission, they kidnapped the hapless schoolboy to make some quick money and ensure passage to a life abroad. The killers knew their prey; they lived in the same neighbourhood. Still, they did not hesitate a bit when it came to kidnapping or killing Shihab. The tragic incident has a sadly familiar ring to it. Remember, Ammar Shamsi, the ill-fated O-level student who was kidnapped and killed by his own friends on October 16 last year. When young men take to such gory crimes for money, it points not only to the law and order failure but also the moribund moral fabric of a society. The enormity of the challenge thrown up by the dastardly killings of Shihab, Ammar Shamsi and so many like them lies there.

That said, we must also realise that young people these days turn to crime for money because they have seen their seniors do it with impunity. What could be a more poignant pointer to our law enforcement mechanism than that? The incidence of crime has multiplied outrageously in recent times because of our repeated failure to bring criminals to justice. Shihab's case gives us another chance to set an example through trial and punishment that deters such abominable crimes.

'If I fall take my place'

(Arafat in 1968)

M SHAFIULLAH

If I fall take my place, I am fida [self-sacrifier]. "Those were the immortal words of the world's most veteran of the freedom fighters in March 1968 on the eve of leading a resistance against Israeli occupation forces in Karama refugee camp.

The Jewish State captured the West Bank including East Jerusalem and Al-Aksa Mosque, the Gaza Strip and the Syrian Golan Heights in the six-day war on 5 June 1967. On 28 June Israel razed Maghabra neighborhood adjacent to Al-Aksa Mosque which was an open assault on the Islamic character of Jerusalem. The Security Council Resolution 242 of November 1967 called for Israel to withdraw its armed forces from territories occupied in the conflict. Although the State of Israel owes existence to the UN Partition Plan of 1947 it was unwilling to comply with the resolution of the Security Council because of what it perceived to be "the risk to its own security" and refused to negotiate with Palestinians or any Arab states.

After humiliating defeat Nasser needed time to rearm. The Arabs desperately needed some one to lift their spirit, keep their hope alive and to safeguard religious and cultural heritage threatened by Israeli onslaught. Arafat and his Fatah filled the vacuum symbolically which the war created.

Located on the main road connecting West Bank with Jordan the Karama refugee camps were the den of the guerrillas and Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan threatened to wipe out the stronghold in a matter of hours. Arafat was confronted with a major military decision. Strategists argued that the avoidance of frontal confrontation was intrinsic to guerrilla tactics, brought home experiences of Mao and Giap together vis-a-vis Israeli strength and outcome of 1967 war. Arafat prevailed, "We want to convince the world that there are those in the Arab world who will not withdraw or flee."

The spoils of war



K.A.S. MURSHID

associates. In the process it's all but washed clean. If you were to ask me today I couldn't tell you what happened -- a case of severe amnesia perhaps. I would however, refer you to a most impeccable and trustworthy source: Mr. G. Azam and Associates. Now THEY have forgotten nothing and have persevered steadfastly and single-mindedly, and built upon their memories a dream of power and glory. And lo and behold they are almost there

look at the number of 'shaheeds' we have -- probably the highest per capita shaheed availability in the whole world! And what do we have to show for it? All that blood and gore to no avail -- good only for the occasional rhetoric on 'the meaning of 1971' and such stuff. Thus, socialism soon became a bad word and secularism was considered blasphemous. Notions of equity disappeared from the political lexicon to be replaced by shallow

examples of any female BCB). Remember this story well -- if you weren't there, ask your dad. I for myself never believed the story so that I will stick to my proposition that it all started with the brief-case guy. Who was he? (Those of you who are gender sensitive need to be reassured that there are no recorded examples of any female BCB).

While the BCB phenomenon was widely discussed and debated at the time, no socio-economic profile is available. Generally he seemed to

BETWEEN YOURSELF AND ME

A corollary to the capture of state power is maintenance of effective control over one's expanding interests. What better way to do this than harbouring scores of semi-dependent goons? The cost is not great -- all one needs to do is let them seek out and exploit the lower order rents (protection money, toll-collection, lower echelons of politics, a role in local government) -- peanuts for the chimps!

ONCE upon a time there was a war in a little known corner of the earth that only Ravi Shankar and George Harrison knew existed -- a war where countless people died and many suffered horrendously. It isn't quite certain that all those horrid things actually happened, mind you.

At least that's what has been suggested. At any rate, let bygones be bygones. After all we need to look forward and forget that horrid episode about which we all disagree: Not so many people died/were raped/ abducted/tortured; No He didn't declare independence, and No, absolutely not, we did not fight for a secular, independent, democratic state, we fought to establish a moderate Muslim country on the Bay of Bengal. Memories after all have become dimmed and it is so important to remind everyone How It All Happened and Why (without of course dwelling on the blood and gore). I do however hope to be excused from this exercise. I simply cannot bear to reminisce even after all these years. I find it difficult to dwell for very long on that period of agony and despair, or even to think about fallen friends, neighbours and

and the promised moment is nigh! Let's move on to a different story -- the story I had set out to explore in the first place but somehow got distracted. That damn war was supposed to have made us better human beings: more confident, hardworking, honest, committed to fair-play and equity, and all set to take on the world -- a new star was to have risen on the horizon. But it did not take long for dreams to be dashed and for hope to turn into despair. A different war was soon launched replacing that in the battlefield by the most blatant competition for the spoils of war. In the desperate bid for self-aggrandisement, ideology and values were the first to go (so much for cheap slogans like 'the blood of the martyrs are never shed in vain') -- you are a fool if you believe in such rubbish. I mean just

concerns for poverty alleviation. The new political paradigm slowly but surely took root: intensify the anti-poverty rhetoric while looting and plundering everything that can be appropriated. Anyone who has had the opportunity (to rob, plunder, steal) but not become wealthy must surely be a congenital fool.

Enter rent-seeking man

It all began with those damn brief-cases. Only if we hadn't imported any! The easy availability of cheap brief-cases led to the emergence of the earliest rent-seekers in the land: The Brief Case Businessman (BCB). (There are some who would argue that actually it all started even earlier with the appearance of The Blanket Thief, who was the first to realise the huge potential for profit from sale of blankets received as aid). Anyone who was around in 1974 would

be someone who had a low opportunity cost (i.e. did not have a job, had low levels of qualifications). His most useful traits were (a) well-developed grovelling skills and an ability to ingratiate himself easily, and (b) in possession of a very thick skin. The main trick was to act as an agent to supply an imported item to the public sector (chemicals, spares, raw material) at roughly ten times the market price -- a trick that has been perfected over time and used successfully in buying e.g. aircraft and ships. We must remember that there were hardly any privately owned industries in those days. The public sector was vast and had to be kept supplied by all manner of imported items purchased usually with aid money. The opportunities before BCB were therefore huge. The more success-

ary leaders knew this to be a self-evident truth and thus proceeded to deliberately create one where none existed before. What better way to promote capitalism than to provide cheap loans to ex-BCB turned indentors to enable them to evolve into a productive, industrial elite? And of course charity always had to begin at home, with one's sons, daughters, in-laws, husbands of mistresses and other dependents. The rest of the story is too well-known to bear repetition. Let us just say that things proceeded as planned giving rise to a 100 or so elite families, known by their new surnames that usually end with "Group" (e.g. Habibabi Group, Faltu Group). A new class has now been created of which we may be justly proud. There remains a minor problem of making these people pay back their loans. But then what's all

The history under assault



M ABDUL HAFIZ

ON 21 March, amidst outrageous protests by Awami League the Jatiya Sangsads scrapped the act for the preservation and display of the portrait of the father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was done with a speed and urgency as if the BNP alliance was mandated to power in last election for this purpose. It has already started to forget that its victory was a resounding reply to AL's hubris and the latter's failure to protect the public from an ever escalating terror, deteriorating law and order and deep rooted corruption. Finding no other alternative, not only the people desperately pinned their hopes on BNP alliance but the latter also pledged to the voters to rid them from the maladies. Even as the one tenth of its tenure is about to be over the alliance is not even within the periphery of redressing those concerns of the people. It is unfortunate that the alliance has instead chosen to make this highly provocative and controversial

legislation which will inevitably divide the nation rendering the country's political landscape murky. However, the AL's enactment of the law in this regard was also no less ill-conceived as were many of its steps to restore the heritage of Sheikh Mujibur Raman during the last five years of its rule. A mindless throwback to the past in the name of reviving the memory of Mujib was neither in step with the march of the time, nor in conformity with changed

But then the AL excesses can also be seen as a backlash to 21 years of neglect and disrespect to Mujib's heritage. It is indeed intriguing that with the political changes of 1975 attempts were made to erase the name of Mujib from the face of the country he created. The post-1975 governments, in a systematic manner, did everything to ensure that the country was left with no trace of Mujib's heritage. It was an unpardonable aberration of the

tion is avoidable by accepting with grace the verdict of the history. The independence of a country is the product of historical process spanning years, decades and at times even longer times. The independence of Bangladesh was no exception and could not have been achieved through any single event like a speech, declaration or hoisting of a flag. It will be 'historically perverse' if anyone denies the centrality of Sheikh Mujibur

PERSPECTIVES

The independence of a country is the product of historical process spanning years, decades and at times even longer times. The independence of Bangladesh was no exception and could not have been achieved through any single event like a speech, declaration or hoisting of a flag. It will be 'historically perverse' if anyone denies the centrality of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in that process right from the movements for our autonomy to the war of independence.

mood and aspiration of a spanking new generation. It obviously backfired and a reckless naming spree and crude exhibition of Mujib with or without a context caused annoyance even for the staunch admirers of the great man. The more the AL sycophants continued to lionise him beyond proportion the more trivialised had become his stature. Mujib was, to his people, one of the folks next door, a friend and an icon they passionately loved. But the Awamis made out of him what he was not: a superman, infallible and a symbol of perfection who could not have committed any mistake. As a result, Mujib, once the heart throb of the millions became a stranger to his people.

history causing irreparable damage to the upcoming generation which was misguided and confused. Now it is again not only the matter of enactment and repeal of legislation, it is the question of a historical truth which is under assault. It is the opening up of an old wound that bled the nation profusely for years. The sophistries are invented to dispute the fundamental facts of the history through provocative statements by some lawmakers. An equally incendiary response from AL stalwarts makes the situation explosive just when we are in dire need of reconciliation, understanding and national consensus to address a plethora of hard issues confronting the polity. Yet this situa-

Rahman in that process right from the movements for our autonomy to the war of independence. This country produced great leaders of the stature of Sher-e-Bangla, Shahid Suhrawardy and Moulana Bhashani each of whom played their roles in preparing the nation for eventually clinching its independence.

But it was Sheikh Mujibur

Rahman who had been destined to

play the decisive role in the long

historical process culminating in our

Independence. After the death of

Suhrawardy, his mentor, in 1963

when he took the helm of Awami

League and floated his six-point in

1966 it was a political earthquake,

so to say, for the rulers in Pakistan.

Mujib with his inspiring leadership kept lit the beacon of hope either physically or symbolically. During those fateful days he walked a razor's edge when each of his steps came under sharp scrutiny of both the authority and his people. And he successfully led us to the goal we set for ourselves: emancipation from the yoke of an alien rule. It is not for nothing that he became a legend during his lifetime. Far away from those days of trials and tribulation both in terms of time and space now it is easy to fabricate history to suit one's purpose while denying its facts.

There is proposal to put up the

portrait of Late Ziaur Raman,

another great son of the soil, along

the hurry? Only half of our nation's financial assets are non-performing -- we still have another 50 percent to play with. There is another problem with these Groupwallahs. They want all the action for themselves, and what better way to achieve just that than entering into politics and capturing state power? Rents Unlimited will soon be incorporated here in Bangladesh.

A corollary to the capture of state power is maintenance of effective control over one's expanding interests. What better way to do this than harbouring scores of semi-dependent goons? The cost is not great -- all one needs to do is let them seek out and exploit the lower order rents (protection money, toll-collection, lower echelons of politics, a role in local government) -- peanuts for the chimps!

Whither homo economicus?

The animal doesn't really exist in Bangladesh despite what some may have you believe. The prototype does exist but is difficult to locate. Economic Man is shy by nature and avoids bright lights since he is set upon by all manner of predators: local mastans, political mastans and so on. It simply does not pay to be seen. Can he evolve under the intense shadow of the Groups? Perhaps, but let me leave this discussion for another day.

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side that of Sheikh Mujib. However, drawing this parallel, is irrelevant and preposterous because they as national heroes, belong to different field and time frame. They seldom crossed each others way and there is no clash between status of each other. Ziaur Rahman was one of the eleven sector commanders during the war of independence. If he is accorded the status equal to that of the nation's founding father what's about the rest of the sector commanders who all fought valiantly during the war? It is argued that as a declarer of Independence Late Zia ought to be given a special place in the pantheon of national heroes. Then what's about one who hoisted first the national flag or one who first read out the 'Ishtehar' of independence. This way we are likely to be stuck in the labyrinth of tricky debate.

After the assassination of Sheikh Mujib when Ziaur Rahman took over the rein of Bangladesh he proved to be an astute administrator. In fact, it was late Zia who laid the foundation of a modern, forward looking Bangladesh. Zia for the first time gave some shape to the war ravaged country. He introduced economic discipline in the country and brought Bangladesh in international arena from the influence of Moscow and Delhi. These are also the part of history for which Zia, will be remembered. But the credits, if any, for bringing the country in its existence it's entirely Mujib's due.

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Israel was in for surprise. The ill-trained and ill-equipped Palestinians under the cover of Jordanian artillery heroically held their line in the rocky terrain for hours against estimated fifteen thousand-strong Israeli army. Although Palestinians suffered heavier casualty but performed better than the Arabs in 1948 and 1967. Israelis did not press further and withdrew leaving one tank, one APC and few trucks which the Fatah fighters paraded in triumph.

In time the streets and alleys of Arab capitals were full of the pictures of the Karama martyrs of seventeen who had refused to surrender after being forced in to a cave. Arafat appeared in the picture with Kuffiya (head scarf).

And Kaffiya, first used in 1936-39 during anti-British rebellion, became the emblem of Palestinian fighters. Arafat Kaffiya was painstakingly shaped resembling map of Palestine. The exercise took nearly one hour every morning. He was in military fatigue with a pendent containing a sura of Holy Koran around his neck but hidden from public view. He became a familiar face in the Middle East and was called Mr. Palestine, symbolizing the country and his people. He displayed natural instinct to interpret what the Arab audience wanted and showed exceptional talent in manipulating international media. Arafat added slogans which immortalized the occasion "If I fall take my place, I am

committed to various ideologies from moderate to extreme. Shortly before he took over PLO Arafat was interviewed by Time Magazine. Arafat was on the cover of Time on 15 December 1968 which was largest single publicity as well as close-range examination of the emerging Palestinian leader. During interview Arafat showed little understanding or appreciation of the history and reasons for Western backing for Israel. To him backing Israel was harmful to Arab relations with the West. He wanted them to be neutral. To the Time interviewers Arafat was a guerrilla leader, an intense and committed advocate of an armed struggle against a superior force.

Time took its toll in the last forty years but envies the steel in the man. In the quagmire of Arab politics