

The new Mayor must install a real city government

Performance matters most to the citizens

THE City Corporation polls are now over without any major incidence of violence as feared and a low voters turnout at least in Dhaka, as expected. The army and other forces were deployed as promised but violence was as absent as the voters in politics mad Dhaka where the most prestigious seat was up for election. We now have a new Mayor in Sadek Hossain Khoka and one hopes that all the promises made by him including expanding the scope of city government will now come into being.

Meanwhile the leading opposition party the Awami League has stated that it rejects the elections and also cited the low turnout as an indication of the public mood. Awami League however will not be able to sell this argument as it didn't participate in the polls at all and has little legitimacy to make such comments. Their involvement in the city polls would have showed that the party was concerned about the voters' welfare as well as politics since city elections are not as much about city political clout as it is about providing urban support services to its citizens. In this phase of heightened environment of politics above people, Awami League chose politics and thereby excluded themselves from the debate.

Critical to the notion of governance of course will be the idea of city government. There has been much resistance to this idea because it seems Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh is unduly concentrated with people, power and politics. But Dhaka as just an adjunct part of the country will be impossible to govern. As the issues surrounding Dhaka city has shown, it has got individual problems that need special attention, be it in the management of the solid and liquid waste or eradication of mosquito and waterlogging. The city's law and order situation and traffic management are all part of the demanding menu which Sadek Hossain Khoka will have to take care of.

But it's eminently possible and Sadek Hossain Khoka can get much of it done. He can begin by installing a process of transparency in the way the City Corporation's tendering scene is handled and proceed to establish a direct communication system with the residents. The new Mayor, by ensuring a city government in real sense of the term can make life memorable for himself as a political administrator and for the people he has declared to serve.

One may well forget the quality of this election but they aren't likely to forget a bad performance and on that account the new Mayor will not have much competition with the immediate past one. There are too many foul odours -- apart from Dhaka's regular ones -- which follow him. That way Khoka has a relatively easier job but there is no doubt that this is the most important political job he has ever held.

We wish him and other elected mayors the best.

Submarine cable consortium a great news

Bangladesh must start thinking IT

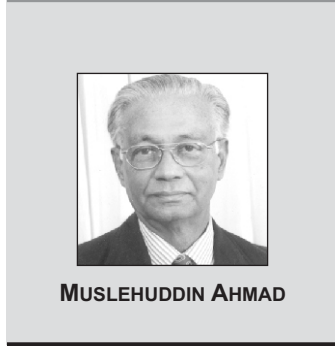
BANGLADESH has finally been invited to the submarine cable consortium which for all members of the e-world is one of the best news possible. The first meeting to be held in Cairo will certainly repair a major flaw in the web combine that is necessary for moving forward on the information highway.

Media reports suggest that by being an early bird Bangladesh can access many facilities and the cost for Bangladesh will not be more than 60 million dollars, a pittance compared to the revenue and facilities that will be generated. This will come into operation not later than March 2004.

Growth in Bangladesh has been hampered considerably by lack of access to submarine cables and in fact this was partly because the need and demand for the web world was underestimated. This has resulted in extremely slow development of the IT initiatives and Bangladesh has certainly lost out in the first round process. It can't afford to do this again.

Experts and futurists have all said that Bangladesh needs the IT world for survival because smokestack industries have collapsed and sweatshops are also on their way out. This means that for a labour surplus country the only way out is to gain skills as this surplus labour is essentially unskilled and with a diminishing demand in the world. To avoid being a left out standing marooned in the global future we need connectivity. The submarine consortium is a welcome opportunity which we must avail ourselves of now to achieve that.

Jenin -- the 'ground zero' of Palestine



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

WHILE returning from New York by car after having visited the Ground Zero, the most ghastly example of terrorists' attacks on America's pride, The World Trade Centre, something that immediately flashed back in my mind was the utterly devastated Palestinian town of Jenin, as shown in the American TV. On reaching Andover, I switched on the television and one of the US channels, probably MSNBC or CNN (dated April 16, 2002) suddenly mentioned the "Ground Zero of Jenin" while reporting about the situation there after Israeli army's brutal operations. This abundantly reflected the feelings not only of myself but that of millions around the world, who are neither Arabs nor the blind supporters of the Palestinians. Various reports clearly showed the war crimes in the form of mass murders and the devastation that Israeli army committed at Jenin for over two weeks under the order of Prime Minister Sharon.

The TV pictures showed utter destruction of the houses of the refugee camp. Some reporters used the word "earthquake" to describe the devastations in Jenin. The same expression "earthquake" was also used by UN senior Envoy Terje Larsen while describing the dreadful situation in Jenin. He also said, "However just the cause is, there are illegitimate means and the means that have been used are illegitimate and morally repugnant." William Burns, Assistant Secretary of State while visiting Jenin said, "I just think what we are seeing here is a terrible human tragedy." When the Assistant Secretary of State of the USA himself described it as a "human tragedy" and UN Envoy Larsen called it "horrible scenes of human suffering", what other evidences would the world need to prove the massacre committed by Sharon and his associates in Jenin? The dead were lying in the rubble as Israeli army did not

allow the Red Cross, other humanitarian agencies, ambulances, pressmen etc to visit Jenin for over nine days when they were committing the carnage at the refugee camps in Jenin. Israeli argument was that it was a war zone and a dangerous place, but all these reporters and international agencies do work in such war zones. As they wanted to go, the risk was theirs and not Israel's. Therefore, the natural conclusion the world would take is that Israeli army wanted to hide the massacre it was committing within the refugee camps.

Asleigh Banfield, Bill Hammer and several others of American TV network were vivid and clear. So were the reports of some reporters of European media. The independent of the UK reported "grizzly evidence of a war crime amid the ruins of Jenin." A monstrous war crime that Israel has tried to cover up for a fortnight has finally been exposed. Its troops have caused devastation in the centre of the Jenin refugee camp... It was also reported in the American media that the dead were in a decomposed state and reportedly at least one reporter nearly fainted

Israeli army under the leadership of Sharon has been committing terrorism -- indeed war crimes -- against the Palestinian people and here the US gets the bad name or even gets involved because of its unflinching support for Israel. The most recent one was in Jenin and there are irrefutable evidences to prove Sharon and Israeli army's state terrorism and war crimes. Some say that the armed struggle and particularly the suicide bombings by the Palestinians for recovering their land are the terrorist acts. And here all the Arab countries get involved because

continued to defy the President and unfortunately Sharon's refusal has certainly tainted the US President's image abroad. Powell also met Sharon several times and must have given the message of President Bush for withdrawal but to no effect. Apparently, Sharon took advantage of the conflicting signals earlier sent from the Administration and also of the tacit support of some Congressmen for Sharon's military actions.

President Bush did well by rejecting Sharon's plea and asking Powell to meet Arafat in Ramallah. Powell met Arafat twice, but got no promise

to heed President Bush's instructions gives some lessons to the US Administration in the formulation of subsequent policies towards Israel and the region as a whole. It is widely believed that Administration's pro-Israeli policies are damaging its wider political and strategic interests in the region and particularly its war against terrorism. More and more countries are going against the US. The US citizens are at risk in those places. Already the US appears to have problems even with many of its European allies on the issue of dealing with terrorism as Israeli military actions have seriously clouded the US's vision of "fight against terrorism".

Let President Bush decide whether he should continue to support Israel and give enormous aid. Sr. Bush as president reportedly halted some aid to Israel at one stage because of Israel's non compliance of US wishes on M-E conflict) that sustains Israel and its ferocious army -- indeed the superpower in the region -- that commits state terrorism against the people of Palestine. Sharon's terrorism in Jenin dwarfed all the suicide bombings put together.

Indeed, it appears that President Bush has at long last taken a plunge into the region's malignant problems. He should indeed go for fixing Sharon who has openly defied the US president. Let President Bush give some serious thought to his over all policy parameters in the region. Secretary Powell should be taken into confidence as he has now full facts about the region. President Bush may seriously consider the Saudi proposal for implementation and ask Israel to withdraw fully to 1967 borders including withdrawal from Golan Heights (there may be some mutually acceptable adjustments in some areas). Palestinian refugee claims are also to be considered on compassionate grounds with the commitment to pay adequate compensations to those who would not be able to return to their homes. Such an arrangement may bring peace in the region. If full peace is achieved and all Arab countries go for normalization of relations with Israel, then the violence by Hamas and other radicals would die down. This would indeed be the best way to fight terrorism.

Muslehuiddin Ahmad is a former Secretary and Ambassador and founder president of North South University

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

Indeed, it appears that President Bush has at long last taken a plunge into the region's malignant problems. He should indeed go for fixing Sharon who has openly defied the US president. Let President Bush give some serious thought to his over all policy parameters in the region. If full peace is achieved and all Arab countries go for normalization of relations with Israel, then the violence by Hamas and other radicals would die down. This would indeed be the best way to fight terrorism.

Yes, several of the suicide bombings were from Jenin. But it was Israeli "illegal occupation" and its atrocities against the Palestinian population, which made them the suicide bombers. They were not born suicide bombers. The Palestinians hardly have anything to resist occupation and Israeli atrocities and that's why they used their "bodies as gunpowder to burn the enemies" as put by Ms Andaleeb before she carried out the latest suicide bombing in Jerusalem. What is the difference between someone carrying a bomb in F 16 and the other carrying a belt of bombs on his own person? Both kill people who happen to be civilians. Yes, there is a difference -- one kills and the other also kills but gets killed in the process; the latter sacrifices life but the other not.

However, suicide is wrong and suicide bombing to kill civilians could not be justified by any means. And this was condemned by Arafat and his Palestinian Authority (PA). If Palestinians had American F16, Ms Andaleeb and other Palestinians probably would have gone for pilot training and thereafter used the F16 to bomb Israelis who could be civilians too. But as the present arguments and definitions go, then such bombings and killings would not have been categorized as terrorism as the method of killing by using American equipment would have been "civilized".

The reports by Ruhla Ameen,

while covering the scenes.. The final figure of dead would not be known for months. However, Jenin remains the "Ground Zero of Palestine", but will there be any action from the civilized world as has been done for the Ground Zero of New York ?

September 11 terrorists' attack has divided the world irrevocably. And more so because of the Bush doctrine -- "either you are with us or with the terrorists" -- which has brought the issue of terrorism into intense world focus. Therefore, it has become absolutely necessary to have a clear definition of terrorism under the auspices of the UN General Assembly where all the countries of the world are represented. The definition can not be given by the UNSC as it is infected with veto.

Now practically every action, armed or otherwise, against a nation and the people is judged in the light of terrorism. The focus has become still more intense because of Israeli-Palestinian conflict in which the world unfortunately stands divided. It was most unfortunate and shocking too that Sharon and his associates justified Israeli army's brutal actions against the Palestinians by saying that Israel was fighting the same war that the US was fighting in Afghanistan. The entire premise is wrong and dangerously misleading.

Israeli army action in the name of fighting terrorism has brought the Bush doctrine under serious question. However, according to many,

of their support to Intefada of the Palestinian people. Recently, Saudi Arabia was being blamed by the US media for its effort to raise funds for the Palestinian victims of Israeli atrocities as those victims might include the suicide bombers too. Therefore, all these are making the interstate relationship extremely complicated. One can debate the issue of suicide bombings but armed struggle is a legitimate one as per decisions of the Human Rights Committee. Therefore, it is all the more important to have an acceptable definition of terrorism immediately so that pointing of fingers wrongly at the individuals and states could be avoided.

The most powerful man on earth today looks somewhat weaker as his words or even clear instructions to Israel to "withdraw immediately" and "now" for valid reasons from recently occupied areas of Palestinian territories were openly defied by Sharon. It was unprecedented and obviously President Bush did not like this. He dispatched his Secretary of State Colin Powell to the region. Powell spent days in consulting the neighboring Arab leaders, which allowed enough time to Sharon to withdraw from the recently occupied areas. But unfortunately Sharon as usual did not budge an inch. President Bush personally telephoned Sharon and that clearly showed his personal desire and indeed his interest in immediate withdrawal. But Sharon

to go for the cease-fire. Arafat reportedly wanted to know what Secretary Powell has brought from Sharon in terms of withdrawal of Israeli army. Apparently Powell did not have anything to put on the table. Arafat also did not offer anything in terms of cease-fire as Powell was not even able to get Arafat's confinement lifted. Arafat remained holed up in his Ramallah's devastated office where Powell met him. It was really incredible that Powell could not even make Sharon agree to lift Israel's illegal siege on Arafat who was not Sharon's subject under any definition of the civilized world. Under such a situation it was obvious that Arafat could not agree to a cease-fire.

Powell's mission was widely reported as a failure. Yes, it was so in terms of the final result i.e. the cease-fire. But one success is already there as the UNSC has unanimously approved a resolution supporting a mission to gather information on Israeli military actions in Jenin. Hopefully this would establish the facts in Jenin. Such a resolution would have normally been impossible unless Powell was in the area. He had apparently most of the information regarding Israeli actions in Jenin. Secretary Powell would have scored more points diplomatically if he had visited Jenin personally. He did visit northern Israel which was facing rocket attacks from Hezbollah. Further success is also possible if Powell's failure to have the cease-fire in hand because of Sharon's refusal

Credibility gap in US' Middle East policy

ABDUL HANAN

ASKED why they could not win the 1967 war with Israel, the late Egyptian President Anwar Saadat said, "You cannot fight America." What he meant perhaps was that Israel drew its strength from the support of America. The Egyptian President was not wrong when viewed against the US policy towards the recent three-week long Israeli brutal military campaign in Palestinian territories of West Bank and the statement by President Bush in the Oval in course of briefing on the outcome of Secretary of State Colin Powell's Middle East Peace Mission. He said that the mission had achieved its objectives as Israel was soon going to withdraw its troops according to its time table promised to him by Prime Minister Sharon. He warned the Arab neighbours against funding the Palestinian terrorists and threatened freezing Palestine assets and withholding funds to the Palestine Authority and withdrawing recognition to PLO, and hastened to add that "Sharon was a man of peace". An extraordinary statement by an extraordinary President indeed. An unabashed compliment to a person who has earned notoriety as a war criminal in the Arab world for his massacre in Palestinian refugee camps of Shabra and Shatila during his 1982 military campaign in Lebanon. An appreciation for a person who, since taking over from prime minister Barak nineteen months ago has cancelled all peace negotiations with the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and killed over one thousand Palestinians by tank, artillery, missile and helicopter gunship fires. A praise for a person who has earned international condemnation and outrage at his brutal military assault and siege of the West Bank towns of Zenin, Ramallah, Nablus, Bethlehem and other places in an orgy of extermination campaign against the Palestinians. But George Bush, President of America is an honourable man.

Sharon is a man of peace indeed. For 13 days on end he imposed curfew in the occupied Palestinians towns without the supply of food, fuel, water, electricity and medical help and denied access of the international media, relief organisa-

tions and the International Red Cross and ambulance so that his army could carry on house to house search and arrest of all able bodied Palestinians suspected to be potential terrorists; destroy effectively all civil, economic and security infrastructure of the Palestinian Authority and perpetrate ruthless atrocities and death of Palestinian people. He has humiliated, humbled and holed up Yasser Arafat, the elected leader of the Palestinian Authority within the confines of his headquarters. He refused the request of visits by a EU Observers team and Marie Robinson, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to verify reports of human rights violation and massacre in the Palestinian refugee camps of Zenin. At a time when the world is waiting breathless at the potential danger of yet another tragedy of a massacre of about 200 hundred Palestinians

reports of what happened in Zenin. Israel has since accepted a watered down UN Security Council resolution on sending an international fact finding mission to Zenin. Chris Patten also warned that the Israeli violence will create bitterness which will breed more suicide bomb attacks. He could not be more true. There were two incidents of suicide bomb attacks in Israel and Jerusalem when the Israeli army offensive was at the height of its operation in West Bank. It also belied the assumption shared by the Bush and Sharon that Yasser Arafat sponsors terrorism. Held incommunicado in his headquarters he could not have done that. There was angry uproar in the British Parliament at the "barbaric action" of Israel. The foreign secretary Jack Straw was forced to issue a statement condemning the use of "disproportionate and excessive force" in the

UN High commissioner for the Palestinian Refugees regretted the destruction of refugee medical clinics and water supply stations and the refusal to the Agency to offer medical and other humanitarian help to affected people. Yet "Sharon is a man of peace" to President Bush.

Fearing international isolation and finger pointing the US went along with Security Council Resolutions without vetoing and asked Israel to pull out its troops "as soon as possible" and "without delay" and conspicuously not immediately. At the height of mounting international criticism of the grim humanitarian situation caused by the Israeli action, President Bush sent Colin Powell on a Middle East Peace Mission. But instead of rushing to Jerusalem he went to Morocco to hold talks with the king of Morocco and the king of Jordan, Prince

discursive and desultory nature of Powell's travel itinerary showed that it was more of a public relations exercise to preempt criticism of American inaction than a visit with a serious purpose. A suspicion shared by a wide spectrum of public opinion is that Powell's Middle East Peace mission was a ploy to buy time for Sharon to complete his mission of a final solution of Palestine problem by destroying all semblance of the civilian, security and economic infrastructure of Palestine Authority so that the idea of a Palestine State was not viable.

Sponsoring the Security Council resolution by America for sending an international fact finding mission to Zenin may yet be another shrewd facade for public consumption to cover up its hidden and private agenda of support to Israel. The international community was dismayed by the Bush-White House

civilizational outrage. Nor it is a conflict between the rich nations and the poverty stricken ones. While condemning each suicide bomb attack inflicting innocent civilian casualties as the most heinous and dastardly crime, it must be understood that the underlying root cause of so-called terrorism is deeply political. It must be understood that the suicide bomb attackers who kill themselves to kill their enemy has a cause which is to live with freedom, justice, honour and dignity. Every act of Palestinian suicide bomb attack is motivated by retaliation for violence and a deep sense of injustice and indignity suffered by them in the hands of Israeli perpetrator, perceived to be aided and abetted by the United States for its support to Israel. America's pro-Israel policy is not in its own interest. It is not understood why by supporting Israel to please the Jewish lobby and constituency, the Bush-White House should bring the danger of terrorism at its door step. Raised in comfort, the American people are peace loving, kind and compassionate. It is unfortunate that they are now living haunted constantly by fear and anxiety of terror alert and travel warnings and looking over their shoulder for a potential terrorist lurking behind. They deserve a better deal from the Bush-White House not by unleashing war on terrorism but by addressing its root cause. The so-called terrorism will be ended once for all if the Bush-White House make amends for its Middle East policy and is prepared to accept at heart the reality of a Palestine state for a just and lasting solution.

The Oslo Agreement, the Mitchell Plan and the Saudi Plan providing for the recognition of the state of Israel within secure borders, vacation of occupation and settlement of Palestinian territories of West Bank and Gaza by Israel and the statehood of Palestine are on hand. What is needed is implementation of and putting them in place by the proposed international peace conference under the auspices of the United Nations participated by the contending parties and principal actors. It is doubtful if the Bush-White House has the political will and vision to do that.

Abdul Hanan is a former Press Counsellor, Bangladesh UN Mission in New York.

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

Thanks a lot to the Finance Minister

In Bangladesh rarely we get a chance to thank our government for its success in any field. We have come to know, through the news item 'Next budget to have deficit cut measures' (April 18) that the government has succeeded in increasing the inflow of remittances over 33 per cent in the first three quarters of the current fiscal year compared to the same period of the last fiscal.

I don't want to miss this rare opportunity to thank our FM for his taking tough and efficacious measures to achieve this amazing success. No success is out of our reach, if we Bangladeshis are dedicated to our national interests.

Faruque Hasan
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

MIGs and helicopters

In reply to Mr Samee's letter (April 24). All I have to say is with Non Resident Bengali's (NRB's) like our friend here, thank god the government never figured out how to enfranchise them.

In regards to MW's letter, I am sorry if I appeared to be doing an about face. My arguments in favour of ground based air defence as opposed to MIGs were in respect for those people who think we should maintain the armed forces. I was trying to show that even if I were to accept that such a defensive posture is necessary, which I don't, MIGs were the wrong mix for us. I think we have established that there are far better ways to defend ourselves, which are more commensurate to our financial strength and strategic requirements.

Now in regards to our country's defence, I am sure MW agrees with me that the BDR and Coast Guard should be strengthened. I have never asked for the abolishment of these two institutions that I do feel are necessary for maintaining the territorial integrity of our country as well as to counter smugglers and protect fishing rights. The BDR is under armed and ill equipped and the same for the coast guard. Of the few G-3 and AK-47 assault rifles we have, who do you think needs them more? The BDR who exchange fire with the Burmese and the BSF or the Army Commando's in their barracks and the parade ground?

Imagine how many fast patrol boats armed only with .50 calibre machine guns we could buy instead of that Kim-chi frigate which doesn't work. As a matter of fact and correct me if I am wrong, the Naval shipyard

has the ability to assemble all the patrol boats we would need to protect our maritime rights.

The above are examples of what I would call misplaced priorities. Why do you believe that we absolutely require a standing army, navy and air force? Why not an alternative like National Service? Why do we accept silently the armed forces involvement in banking and hotel management? If we accept this we'll end up like Indonesia. This is regression not progress.

In regards to India, I really honestly do not think we have to fear a full-scale invasion from them. At most we have border skirmishes; India has more than enough on its plate to want to invade Bangladesh.

And as for Burma, whom I don't trust, a re-enforced BDR should be able to deal with them. I should mention that statistically and

historically, a democracy is far less likely to go to war than say a country run by a military junta. But even then Burma has enough trouble dealing with the Karen's and their own democracy movement (whom we should support) to want to seriously bother us.

So I would stand by my argument for abolishing the army, navy and air force. While maintaining a strengthened BDR (with an air wing) and the Coast Guard. The military only preserves democracy when the civilian government controls it. Not necessarily the case with us.

Biggles
Dhaka

Telephone system

It seems, at long last the BTBT has started thinking positively.

The first item appears to me the

recent leaflet on the reduction of international and domestic tariff. There are two aspects of this ray of light seen through a small window of BTBT. Firstly reduction of tariff itself (though not enough) secondly the method of transmitting this information to the subscribers.

It seems to be a revolutionary conception for the BTBT to issue leaflets and attaching them with their bills. Good we welcome these steps which are towards the right direction. If the BTBT has to compete with Internet and mobile phones they have to turn their organisation in to a user-friendly one.

! As far as the international tariff is concerned the rate should be halved and charged per half a minute units instead one minutes' unit. This way the subscribers will not be subjected to pay for a full minute for a few

seconds of last minute conversation. BTBT will get money for the actual duration of conversation.

! As BTBT cannot or do not provide ISD access to all the subscribers, the minimum charge of 3 minutes for operator assisted calls, they should abolish the minimum 3 minutes charge and the 2 minutes of PP charge. If and when the BTBT are in a position to providing all their digital subscribers with ISD access, the three minute minimum charge may be introduced for operator assisted calls, as in other countries.

! Central Enquiry service for tariff rules and directory service should be modernised and re-introduced. "17" and "18" have ceased to function a long ago. What is really required is a real modern telephone service.

A disgruntled subscriber
Dhaka

Why I like The Daily Star so much

I am a regular reader of The Daily Star for years. And I think that it is the most popular and qualitative English daily in our country. Is there any thing that The Daily Star cannot provide us with? The Star magazine, Life Style, Rising Stars -- always neat and exclusive in presentation. I am just mesmerised by your style. I have great love for English language and would be glad if you publish this letter in your letter page; and thus encourage my spirit of learning the language more elaborately.

Sharif
DU