

Independent child protection authority needed

Actions must match promises made by the PM at UNGA

THE world leaders have met at a special session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to discuss critical matters relating to the protection of children all over the world. Children are victims of both covert and overt violence. Local editions of global war, cross border, internal and external conflicts and other forms of social violence have made life for children extremely difficult. The unrecognized and worst victims of conflicts are children.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in her speech at the Special Session on Children has asked for commitment and concrete measures as well as mobilization at all levels for resources to promote sound growth and development of children. Her words are serious and sincere and events at home show how urgent the task is.

The death of a young child, less than two years old by the bullets of a *santrasi* in the street of a Dhaka neighbourhood brings home with a chilling exactitude the fact that even normal streets are life threats for children. No other single incident can magnify the horror of social terrorism that has permeated our lives and stolen safety from our mind. It shows that one has to deal with protection at the very doorstep while committing pledges at the global level. In view of such an emergency, we should immediately form a Child Protection Authority with appropriate legal power to deal with the issues of child safety.

There is social support for the idea of Ombudsperson for various sectors but we generally think in terms of political and economic governance issue forgetting that management of child related issues has been the most dismal. The shooting incident at Badda shows how the law and order can deteriorate to the point that innocent children are slaughtered even as the PM speaks on their safety in the highest assembly of the world.

Should such a body come into being, the government is assured of support from all sections of society and especially the media which are more aware of the situation than others. A body that has independent autonomous existence with constitutional responsibility and power is the only antidote that can help the children now in many dangers.

We hope the connection between the promises made at UNGA will match the concerns that are obvious in the tragic street of Badda. Surely, children deserve more than just speeches. A child protection authority that already exists in other countries will help the cause a long way.

More violence in Palestine

Attack the disease not the symptoms, please

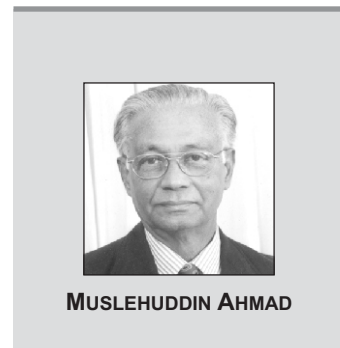
THE endorsement by the Israeli cabinet to launch retaliatory attacks on "Palestinian terrorist targets" has already been done and now the world including the Palestinians wait for the violence to begin. The latest episode in the Middle East drama has lessons to be drawn but which doesn't look like will be done. Peace seems a distant image and the belligerence of the Israelis and the suicide bombers aren't likely to be stilled by the latest version of what is obviously more to come.

The latest event has cast doubts on the Israeli strategy to invade Palestine and carry out mass murders as Israelis did in Jenin and other places to contain terror. Sharon justified this and the US government and the media supported it as well arguing that this was an essential exercise in the "anti-terror" campaign. Sadly, as many had predicted, it has almost immediately led to another horrific suicide bomb attack and the situation looks like there're more to come. The tolerance threshold of the Palestinians is much more than that of the Israelis and certainly more than the US lobby. That will let them carry on this suicidal violence.

The endorsement of the Israeli cabinet of the decision to retaliate means birth of more suicide bombers. And no matter how many Jenins happen, this will not cool down them. The fatal mistake lies in equating the Palestine Authority with the bombers who are under the leadership of an autonomous idea called extremism rather than an administrative body. Worse is to think that a new leadership other than Arafat can do anything. The bombers with every attack are going beyond the call of any leadership and the Israelis and the US must stop deluding themselves about this 'control' business. History of the last three decades has shown that there is no military solution to the problem. As the only country that can ensure peace, the US must act now.

This isn't an internal problem of the Jewish and the Palestinian people. It belongs to entire humanity and we are all responsible. If the forces at play can lay aside religious and racial loyalties and look at it as a security issue, peace has a chance. Otherwise, Palestine will burn on and with it will the rest of the world.

Another suicide bombing near Tel Aviv -- what next?



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

ARIEL Sharon, a regular visitor to the White House, rushed out of Washington as another suicide bombing took place in the suburb of Tel Aviv killing 16 Israelis. The bombing took place at a Pool Billiard Club. As the report states a suicide bomber walked up the third floor into the club with a suitcase in hand and blew himself up killing 16 Israelis and injuring another 50. One wonders whether there was any security around the club at all and if so what did they do to prevent the man, not a member of the club, from going up with a suitcase in hand? Sharon immediately blamed Arafat for the bombing. Total madness. Sharon undertakes military operations in the Palestinian territories for catching and killing terrorists, but he and his security forces cannot even catch a man who walks up the third floor of a club merrily and leisurely and blow up people around him. This is total failure on the part of Sharon as he failed to provide security to his people. Instead of running after the "terrorists" in the Palestinian areas, he should secure his own borders and places within the borders. The security forces that remain engaged in the Palestinian territories including Bethlehem could have been well used within Israeli borders. But that does not seem to be the intention and policy of Sharon; he is busy in discrediting the elected leader of another nation because of his personal revulsion against Arafat. It's good that Sharon practically failed to bring Bush Administration to his side on the issue of discarding Arafat and exiling him.

However, Arafat who has just been released from Israel's illegal confinement in Ramallah, strongly condemned the suicide bombing. He also immediately issued an order in Arabic asking the Palestinian security forces, whatever is left of it after the devastating Israeli invasion and killing, to prevent all attacks against Israeli civilians. This was followed by arrests so far of some 14 activists of Hamas which claimed the responsibility for the Tel Aviv suicide bombing. Thus Arafat

ington did not pay much attention to it and Sharon was rightly advised to deal with Arafat who is the elected leader of the Palestinian people. Washington being a 'good and committed' friend of Israel, faces domestic political problem to go too much into Israel's alleged massacre and war crimes. That's why the UN is the right body to deal effectively with it. Unfortunately, the Secretary General was unable to implement the unanimous resolution of the UNSC on Fact-finding Mission for

sary to interview Israeli army personnel; most of them, except some reservists, would have justified army actions. However, the trail of devastation left by Sharon's army on the ground would have proved the war crimes committed by it. This failure went against the UN Secretary General. In any case, the world now knows what happened in Jenin. However, another International Peace Conference on Middle East is in the offing! This time by a "Quartet". Dictionary meaning of Quartet

Unfortunately, the US Senate recently passed a resolution, 94-2, giving full support to Israel. Interestingly, the idea of a regional peace conference was floated first by Ariel Sharon, but he said he would not sit with Arafat. So, to avoid further embarrassment, the US seems to have down graded it to the level of Foreign Ministers. The idea is good and Colin Powell deserves thanks for his effort which President Bush embraced despite reported objections from some within the Adminis-

ing for half a century, that would have been the end of Arafat and Palestinian Authority (PA) and it would have been impossible to implement such a deal. Hamas and the extremists would have totally taken over. There would have been more bloodshed in the area. Because of the existence of the PA, some semblance of calm prevailed but everything went out of control with the September visit of Ariel Sharon to the Al-Aqsa compound. Indeed, Sharon made the very month of September unholly and dangerous resulting in terrorists attack on the World Trade Center.

If the US wants to maintain that it is an honest and impartial broker in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, President Bush should decide to ask Arafat to see him at the White House. This would immensely help situation on the ground. There may even be reduction in suicide bombings as the Palestinians would see some hope in the peace process. Leaving Arafat out in the cold and US President's repeated meetings with Sharon, a man with bizarre background of terrorism in Sabra and Shatilla and the most recent one in Jenin, because of the domestic pressure, shows only partisanship of the US.

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

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followed up his order by action on the ground as generally demanded by Washington. But unfortunately, Israel has already amassed a large Israeli army around Gaza to launch an assault. This will be disastrous as such attacks will only invite more suicide bombings. One may call suicide bombings terrorism but confinement of a leader of a nation by another nation's leader is certainly the highest form of terrorism and a crime unknown in the history of nations. Unfortunately, an unjust war against the so-called terror can only create more terrorists and suicide bombers unless root causes like occupation, invasions, illegal confinements, murder of innocent civilians etc are removed altogether.

Prime Minister Sharon carried a 100-page document which Palestinian Authority described as fraudulent and lies, to Washington to prove that Arafat is a terrorist. Sharon has been making such efforts for some time obviously with the aim of covering up his own terrorist acts and war crimes committed even before and recently in Jenin. Apparently Wash-

Jenin. He abandoned this Mission, the members of which were waiting anxiously in Geneva for a go ahead signal. Ariel Sharon finally refused to accept the Mission though the membership and some parts of the terms and conditions were modified as demanded by Israel. Still this did not satisfy Ariel Sharon. This was obvious as Sharon knew that this Mission would be able to confirm the war crimes committed by Sharon and his army. This is why Sharon insisted that the Mission should interview only those Israeli army men approved by him and must not give its conclusions. One wonders why the Mission was abandoned at all. Jenin is not a part of Israel. It was known that Israel would not cooperate as the Mission's report was likely to go against Israel. The UN Mission could reach West Bank and Jenin from a neighboring country, say, Jordan by car. It could see the devastation and complete its work by interviewing the people in and around Jenin. Even many foreigners have been there since the invasion began. It was not neces-

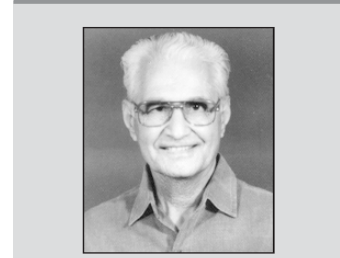
is: a group of four people playing music or singing together. They may do it together but listener would be only one -- Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel. Would he lend his ear to it even if it be the best of productions of the Four? When he did not listen to the "music" (unfortunately the music was not to the liking of Sharon) of the best friend -- President Bush of the US -- what chance is there that he would listen to the music of the quartet? Indeed, President Bush failed to lead the events in the M-E because of the total defiance by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. He defied with total impunity the "instructions" of the President of the US. The instructions in the form of "withdraw immediately" and "now", allow Arafat to travel to Beirut to attend Arab summit, allow UN fact-finding mission to Jenin etc were totally rejected by Sharon. The defiance by Israel of the US President is defiance of the US itself. But still overwhelming support of the US politicians is there for Israel though the mood among the public is somewhat mixed.

tration. Powell said, "This is the time for prompt action to take advantage of this new window of opportunity that has been presented to us, and we intend to do just that." It's also a big question whether Powell would be able to swim through the turbulent political environment in the Congress and party in the Administration.

Bush's accusation that Arafat failed to lead his people does not seem to be valid though nobody would say that the man is faultless as nobody is. He has been in this horribly difficult game for decades. Arafat's several visits to the White House and negotiations with former Israeli PM Ehud Barak under the leadership of former President Clinton do prove Arafat's leadership. There is a misconception particularly in the US about Arafat's failure to agree to the deal which some say was the best deal. The details show that the deal was far less than what was demanded by the Palestinians. Indeed, if Arafat accepted the truncated Palestine with nothing for the refugees who have been languish-

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Fascism: defeated, not dead



M B NAQVI

writes from Karachi

MONSIEUR Jean-Marie le Pen, the leader of French fascist party, has not made it to the Elysee Palace. That will be some solace to the immigrants, liberals and socialists in France and decent people everywhere. But that is not enough, as almost 20 per cent of the French have voted for a fascist leader. Who can forget that for a far Right fringe succeeded in eliminating all the forces of the Left and Centre in the Presidential contest in the second largest European power.

That was a major development. It should ring alarm bells that fascist notions and hate-foreigner sentiments lie just beneath the surface that can recreate 1920s and 1930s in some fashion. It is necessary to recognise the actual strength of this social, political and ideological tendency and to comprehend its conceptual implications. Such tendencies are not confined to white nations alone. We had better look for the soul-mates of European fascists near home in Pakistan and rest of South Asia. But first let's be sure of what are the defining qualities of fascism, with its ideological underpinnings always fashioned out of local traditions and conditions.

Despite the apparent diversities there are basic philosophical similarities in all versions of fascism.

The supreme value for any fascism, no matter where, is not man, qua man: it is some collectivity that is largely a mental construct or at most an ideological political force; it is not a concrete or material thing: it can be a nation, race, religion, sect, culture, language or class or a recognisable community. Welfare and rights of the human individual are subordinated to the greatness or glory of that non-material collectivity. It is a politics that is characterised by an exclusionary ethno-nationalism's apotheosis -- the

commonplace stereotyping that may have little basis in fact. It is remarkable that it is never concerned with the basic rights of individuals, their concrete welfare or any change in social and economic status quo. Its basic tendencies being chauvinistic and jingoistic, it solves the unemployment and poverty problems through a big rearmament plan that militarises the society. It suits war and related industries that make big profits without allowing wage levels to rise too much in the name of patriotism.

tellers and a few historians, not to mention its huge size and the rich linguistic, religious and cultural pluralities. Currently, a fairly Far Right party, BJP, leads its central government and rules India. It is sustained by a highly chauvinistic and jingoistic ideology of Hindutva. It is working for Hinduisation of Indian life and culture while reserving its ire for the Muslim minority in India. How it works is shown by the demolition of Babri Mosque in 1992 that soon catapulted BJP into power. It

Pakistan, if seen in totality, is illuminating. BJP's attitude to history and text book writing is redolent of what the Nazis had done in this field in Germany in addition to many other conceptual commonalities. In Pakistan too it is necessary to see if the cap fits. Far Right, mainly religious parties, start with the sovereignty of Allah and say that the Quran and (unmodified) Shariat are being the supreme law of the land; their unit of cognisance is the politically vague and imprecise entity: the Umma. It is all about Shariah punishments,

Islamicists, including JUP and JI, regarded Afghan Taliban regime as the genuinely Islamic State and therefore worthy of support.

That about covers the Islamic spectrum, except for the Shias -- the hated minority to be expelled and isolated. It is obvious that what the religious and even non-religious Right will lade out as Islamic State will approximate to a Taliban-like fascism -- in basics. That Pakistan has been in an unending confrontation with the Hindu-dominated but bigger, richer and more powerful India, imposes certain limits on Islamicists' flights of fancy. But as a philosophical and political tendency it is not too different from what BJP is doing in the Indian context or what fascism was in the European context. One's focus is, quite selfishly, on the India-Pakistan part of South Asia. A small article cannot tackle all the various facets of politics in populous South Asia, let alone the vast third world.

Let others take up the necessary challenge. In short, ordinary citizen's concrete rights and welfare are not the concerns of either Hindutva or the Islamic ideology here. Indeed, their emphasis is so far away from these as to preempt these mundane but badly-needed requirements of us all. If we Pakistanis want to stay free, live under the rule of law, with equal rights for all Pakistanis and under a representative democratic dispensation, we must put a dyke against such movements and forces (like Taliban). For these preempt democratic rights for all and a governance that is dedicated to executing democratically-approved economic programmes with a view to delivering sustainable development that can give gainful employment to all (or provide a social security net below which no one is allowed to fall).

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

PLAIN WORDS

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supreme value -- that is chauvinistic about local folk traditions inherited from a past that is part-history, part-imaginary or at least an exaggeration of past glories. But it is incomplete without an ethnic enemy; there has to be a group to hate with its largely imaginary faults (stereotyping or/and profiling). For Hitler's fascism such a group was the Jewry and for Mr. le Pen it is third world (Arab) immigrants and all those other lesser Europeans.

Such politics is nothing if not populist, flourishing among the lumpen and lower middle classes -- best in conditions of unemployment and penury. Fascism begins by identifying with the majority ethnic group, massively evoking its past glories, real and imaginary, organising its supporters in a quasi-militarist organisation while strongly propagating against the internal or external 'enemy', reflecting the

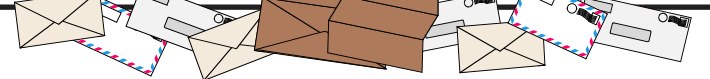
Hence they fund such movements massively. For such politics, an aggressive foreign policy comes naturally. It relies on coercive diplomacy. What with unending hate propaganda and an accelerating (re)armament plan, a war generally results. It is equally destructive for all but more so for the fascist powers that act as prime movers. So far all successful fascist powers were completely destroyed in the end, causing horrible sufferings and losses to their own people. Examples from Japan, Germany and Italy are classic; but more can be cited from Europe itself. Let's now look at the politics in India and Pakistan. The Indian politics is characterised by many qualities and some complexities that have resulted from six thousand years of history -- and often quasi- or quarter-history -- underlining the admixture of myths with facts woven by bards, story

strengthens its claims to power or its perpetuation by actions not in enriching the poor Hindu's life but by demonstrative actions against the enemy group: Muslims. See how doggedly Vajpayee government defends its Gujarat government's pogrom, amounting to ethnic cleansing, and driving the hated minority into ghettos. Can we not see philosophical similarities with European fascisms here: the supreme value is not the ordinary Hindu's economic and social uplift; it is the greater glory of a vague Hindutva category, distinct from ordinary Hindu men and women. Its motive force is to show the supposedly pampered minority its place by force and state action. The BJP's chauvinistic and jingoistic character and policies are no secret, with its enthusiasm about militarisation and arms build up.

Their foreign policy vis-a-vis

Zakat and Ushr as the panacea and interest-less economy without any other specification. Gen. Zia's Islamisation, at the time, had met with the effective approval of all Islamicists. Anyone can see that Islamicists today want Mullah Mohammad Omar-like Amirul Momineen (dictator of the faithful) to run the state with no limitation on his powers other than Quran, Shariah and his own nominated Shoorah (the advisory body), if that. The ordinary faithful Muslim, as a citizen, is required to merely obey his rulers; there is not a word about individual Muslim citizen's rights or welfare, except for what might seem expedient to the Amir, let alone for the non-Muslim Zimmis. If we take the Taliban, Pakistani as well as Afghan, as the natural products of the Islamic doctrines preached by JUI (in all its splinters), it shows why, give or take a few excesses, all

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



We Bengalis are our main enemy

No Hanadar Bahini is required now to destroy our country. Because:

1. Our political leaders are there to divide us into many fractions and create enmity among us.
2. Our loan defaulters and corrupt officials and extortionists are enough to loot the poor public.
3. Our kidnappers are enough to slaughter our children.
5. Our doctors are enough to make the poor public succumb to death.

Reaz
Notre Dame college, Dhaka

Seating arrangement for O-Level examination

O-level (GCG) examination seating venues are generally arranged in British Council as well as in other institutions. In North-South University, the seating arrangement is made in 11th floor. This is a matter

of great concern that during examinations, all the lifts of the North-South University are sometimes kept off, for which the students have to climb up to 11th floor on foot. Last year a student reportedly fell sick. Moreover such long climbs by student immediately to their examinations will naturally affect their performance. The authorities concerned are requested to take necessary steps in this respect.

Kabir Ahmed
Dhaka

"Potka fish"

My thanks to Dr Rahaman for replying to my letter. I am only sorry he doesn't have any recipes but from what he's saying, it may be better to stay away from Potka fish. Although it just occurred to me that since this fish is thrown away as wastage, there might be a prospect for its export to Japan. Something to ponder.
Don Quixote

Dhaka Fake Swimmers!

Bangladesh really is a joke isn't it? First the government got us suspended by FIFA for not reading the regulations properly. Then one of the heirs of BNP was hoisted as the head of Bangladesh cricket although he had no prior experience with the sport. Recently a cricket match was cancelled so that there could be a reception for the winner of the Dhaka Mayoral election. And now fake swimmers are sent to Korea and the Minister feigns ignorance!

The State Minister should be made to resign for his incompetence and for embarrassing us.

Tinting
Dhaka

Safe transports! Whose problem?

It is an old story to tell. All of us accustomed to news of road

accidents and during this part of the year with more cases of launch accidents causing loss of human lives and resources. Can we hold anyone responsible? Possibly the answer is 'no'.

In this present context of privatisation and shrinking the role of the state, this is an area that the government should be able to do something positive- that is making the roads safe.

- How can we do this?
1. Monitor if the National Road Safety Council is holding its regular meeting and discussing, monitoring road accidents all over the country.
 2. Investigate each of the cases of road accidents and identify the areas prone to road accidents and declare those as accident zone in distinct understandable signals.
 3. Make the issue of road safety an agenda for political discourse- this is a recipe that cannot be imposed upon.
 4. Strict enforcement of motor vehicle rules is a must. If needed make new rules- make people more

accountable for their actions, reward for good efforts etc.

5. Contract out 'road safety compliance certification'- a scheme that can be developed to be provided by private sector qualified agents all over the country.

6. Invest in road safety such as highway patrol.

7. Highway patrol, road-clearing etc can be contracted out, this would cater for both road safety as well as for ensuring safe passage of vehicles at night against road dacoity.

8. Automatic road camera and over speed control camera have to be set up in highways.

9. Road police should be dedicated for roads for a particular area and not covered by Thana police. They should not be given any other duty such as law and order duty. They should have specific targets and not be transferred or closed or suspended for bad performance or gross negligence of duty, rather they should be terminated if such complaints are received.

10. 'Ensuring safe roads' should be a political agenda on which citizens should vote in future, through quantifiable figures people would see and vote for those who had done better in this area.

MM Haque, on e-mail

Joining is not staying in Parliament

There seems to be a lot of speculation on whether the AL chief will allow the MPs to join the next session of the parliament. She will only join if the wiser heads in the party can prevail over her blind lust for BNP's blood. BNP would also have to be extremely ingratiating in order to woo the opposition back.

But what if they did join? Within two days on one pretext or another she will lead a walkout from the House. And BNP will certainly not help matters by doing the best they can to rub AL's noses in their electoral defeat.

With neither leader behaving

with any maturity or sense of duty to the people, I can hardly see any solution.

Cervantes
Dhaka

Forgo copying!

The news item, "Summary trial for HSC cheats" (May 6) has drawn my attention. The HSC exam of this year will kick off on May 16. To pass in HSC exam is not an open sesame in our country. I think a faction of the students cheat. So, they should be disciplined.

I hope the Ministry of Education has taken needful initiatives to stymie the blueprint and boost the quality of education.

Shaheen
DU

Bitter irony

Thank you very much for your article, Mr. Sahed Ali. Yes, it indeed is a bitter irony that 32 criminals have been elected as DCC

commissioners. How can we expect terrorists to be the ideal representatives of the people of their respective localities?

The 4-party alliance clearly vowed prior to the general election that their prime objective would be to eradicate terrorism from the society. But ironically, 27 terrorists, belonging to their own party, have now become DCC commissioners. It is also shameful for the police for being unable to arrest any of the 32 top terrorists of the country. Couldn't our police nab them while these criminals were carrying out their election campaigns? This simply shows the ineptness and impotency of our police force.

Also our government have made a mockery of their words by allowing their own men (terrorists) to participate in the election and also by not bringing them to justice. It now seems that arresting these criminals will only remain a dream.

Sameer Ahmed Khan Mojlish
Dhaka