

World pushed on to a dangerous path

Sanity should prevail on the US to step back from brink

THE most dreadful has happened. This being passed off as a joint US-British bombing of Iraqi air defence site is a fig-leaf. It's a crude euphemism for unilateral action. Another technical by-pass that reads equally, if not more, perfidious has to do with bombing into 'no-flying zone', the latter itself not sanctioned by UN resolutions, due to 'threats posed to coalition aircrafts'. A hundred aircrafts mounting a single biggest operation since 1991 -- what is this if not a precursor to a full-fledged invasion of Iraq designed to eliminate Saddam Hussein and enforce a leadership change of US-British liking. The question is: at what cost to the rule of law in international affairs?

The burden of proof that Saddam has developed chemical, biological and nuclear war capabilities has lain on the US -- unfulfilled to-date. The UN inspectors had been at work in Iraq for years to find out Saddam's weaponry status. Since the point of time at which they left Iraq and their mission was discontinued what extraordinary compulsion emerged that made the US-British raid inevitable? And even if they have such a dossier of new information, why didn't they share it with their European colleagues, or for that matter, Kofi Annan who has so many UN resolutions on Iraq to mind. Also pertinently, the Arab or Muslim world leaders who were coalition partners with the US in the last Gulf War have not been consulted before the raid either. Wouldn't they be physically the most severely jolted in the event that a full-scale war broke out in Iraq?

The impression one feels impelled to draw from all this is it's but an Israeli agenda that the USA and Britain are implementing.

Millions of Iraqi children have suffered malnutrition and deformities under the UN sanctions imposed since 1991. As if that was not enough, the country now faces another spectre of a devastating high tech war -- thanks to the US' hell-bent determination to make it happen.

It's a perilous path the US is pushing Europe, the Arab countries and herself on to. The rest of the world cannot be immune to the escalatory after-effects should it result in an outbreak of an open war. The European and Arab leaders must now persuade Bush to step back from what definitely is teetering at the edge of disaster.

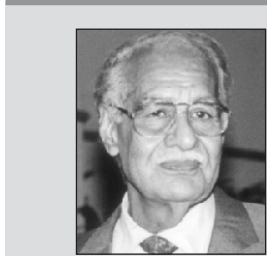
Ban on LTTE goes

Peace hopes brighten amidst political tension in Sri Lanka

DESPITE firm opposition from President Chandrika Kumaratunga, the Sri Lankan government of Ranil Wickremesinghe has stuck to its promise for removal of a four-year ban on the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ten days ahead of the Oslo-brokered peace talks in Thailand on September 16. The ban went at midnight last Wednesday, touching off tension across the country's political spectrum. President Kumaratunga has already expressed her opposition to the government action, commenting early last week that the removal of the ban "should be based on the positive results from the peace talks". The hard-line nationalists and Marxists have also joined the bandwagon. The main Marxist party in Sri Lanka People's Liberation Front (JVP), which twice led armed struggles to overthrow governments in 1971 and 1987, has vowed to topple the Wickremesinghe administration, saying it is "kneeling before the LTTE and dancing to the tune of Western imperialist forces".

Mr Wickremesinghe nonetheless appears adamant to forge the internationally backed accord with the Tamil guerrillas. He has not only lifted the ban but also been discussing a stop-gap administrative arrangement to undertake reconstruction and rehabilitation work in war-affected areas before the conflict is resolved through peace negotiations. His single-minded pursuit of peace in a country that has been ravaged by separatist conflict over the past three decades, claiming more than 60,000 lives, is indeed laudable. However, Mr Wickremesinghe is on a political minefield that may go off any moment. Sri Lankan politics is extremely volatile and any difference of opinion could lead to armed conflict. The LTTE may have made the country bleed for three decades; however, there are others like the JVP who can also turn Sri Lanka into a killing field. The first JVP insurrection claimed 20,000 lives and the second, which lasted nearly three years, another 60,000. Therefore, Prime Minister Wickremesinghe should engage in political dialogue with the disgruntled immediately and involve them in the peace process. Peace must return to the emerald island, and that's something Bangladesh would like to see happen as a friend of Sri Lanka.

The blinkers and the truth



KULDEEP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

THE tragic loss of lives on September 11 last year at the World Trade Centre had another side to it: the humiliation of the strongest nation in the world by a handful of men. Here was America, which represented the bipolar world after emerging victorious in the cold war against the Soviet Union and defeating the ideology of communism. Just one man hiding in a backward country masterminded a plan, which spanned thousands of miles to strike at New York and Washington to avenge the humiliation of helplessness against untrammelled power.

True, almost every nation in the world came to rally behind the US. None dared to stand aside. Countries like India offered even bases for operation against Afghanistan, where arch terrorist Osama-bin Laden, who orchestrated the strike, without America's asking. Still, all this could not undo the fact that someone had dared to challenge the world's most powerful nation. By defeating the Taliban and the Al-Qaida, America has put another government at the helm in Afghanistan. But it has not eliminated them, much less their ideology of fundamentalism. And the humiliation part still stares the US in the face.

When Washington talks in terms

of attacking Iraq and eliminating Saddam Hussain, this humiliation is still at the back of its mind. The downfall of Saddam may establish that America can punish any country in the world. Those who believe that democracy has to be implanted by outsiders where dictatorships have come to stay may also welcome Saddam's exit. Still America's victory will not wash off the blot of humiliation.

That President Bush was justified in declaring a war against

matter. This is the crux of the problem.

If the world is to be for the survival of the fittest, both respect and humiliation become relative words. They mean different things to different nations. Imposition by the strong does not mean humiliation of the weak. Every nation has its self-respect. When driven to the wall, it will fight back and do anything to protect it.

The Taliban and the Al-Qaida were hawking the honour of the

mentalism and violence to take over in many countries.

In India, we are likely to recall December 13 every year as the date when a suicidal attack was made on our parliament, the symbol of the country's democracy. September 11 and December 13 together should have marked the autumn of 2001 as the advent of a new era in international politics. For, terrorism was posing the gravest threat to democracy and to all civil societies which cherished plurality and permitted

the Al-Qaida's cult. But he put his weight behind President Bush and Washington. It is another matter -- no doubt, regrettable -- that President Musharraf has a different face for India. His definition of terrorism undergoes a change when it comes to cross-border terrorism. India's case is pathetic. It announced all the assistance within an hour of the September 11 attack. I wonder if the then Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh, embarrassingly pro-American, had consulted even the prime minister before the announcement.

attack on WTC -- makes one wonder whether the terrorists are sought to be punished or the nations whose views do not tally with Washington's. If America had realised that the sovereignty of every country, big or small, had to be respected, the resentment against Washington would not have been so vocal as it is today. It is a tragedy that the animus of America is now against the Muslims. It is apparent from the way the Islamic countries or the Muslims living in the US are being treated. Sometimes one wonders if after decimating the ideology of communism, America's target is Islam. Washington should understand that the September 11 action could be repeated. Next time, the target may not be a building but something else. Such an eventuality can be warded off if people do not feel enslaved in their own country. They cannot be an exploited lot all the time. Many in the world are becoming desperate because they are not having enough avenues to overcome poverty, ignorance or ill health. They are helpless. Not just America. Even the other western countries do not seem to realise this.

Washington cannot overcome its humiliation by humiliating the nations that do not see eye to eye with it on all issues. The international community is beset with contradictions -- political, economic and social. It must resolve them peacefully. Instead, the powerful countries are now throwing their weight about in a brazen manner. Such countries will do well if they learn a little humility. It is their refusal to acknowledge this truth that was at the back of the terrorist strikes in the US. If they had understood this basic point, the September 11 disaster could have been avoided.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

The international community is beset with contradictions -- political, economic and social. It must resolve them peacefully. Instead, the powerful countries are now throwing their weight about in a brazen manner. Such countries will do well if they learn a little humility. It is their refusal to acknowledge this truth that was at the back of the terrorist strikes in the US. If they had understood this basic point, the September 11 disaster could have been avoided.

terrorism after the September 11 happenings has seldom been questioned. He should have done it long before when terrorism was at its peak in our part of the world. America was least bothered about terrorism till the fire reached its shores. But its fight against terrorism, which is far from complete, does not make up for the humiliation. This is so because Washington's eyes are still fixed at the wrong site. It wants to regain its prestige by acting as the world's policeman -- not as the one who cares about the humiliation of others. When the American president stands by Israel and justifies its acts of brutality against Yasser Arafat and the Palestinians, he apparently thinks that the humiliation of the weak doesn't

Afghans and even the Pakistanis in the name of religion. America allowed such fundamentalists to come up and even fed it through arms and other assistance to serve its own purpose. It believed -- and still does -- that the people living in the third world deserved to wallow in prejudice and bias and that their genius was not suited to democracy. In any case Kabul was considered too far and too weak to challenge the West and Washington. Moscow too had played with Afghanistan's dignity. But none of these powers ever measured the resentment of the Afghans. The world woke up when the terrorists struck at New York. It was too late in the day. By then Washington had allowed the Frankenstein's monster of funda-

dissent. India had long been familiar with the menace of terror but the vulnerability of the US came to it as a shock.

True, Islamabad also came to realise the mistake of supporting fundamentalists when they began to kill people in Pakistan. Islamabad was happy as long as the target was India. But those who had tasted blood were bound to sniff for it everywhere. A mild Muslim was not good enough, nor was an aspiring democrat. Fundamentalists wanted to change them. And they killed the defiant.

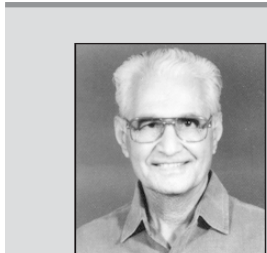
It is difficult to say whether America's ultimatum to Pakistan for taking sides or the killings by the fundamentalists made President Pervez Musharraf see the reality of

But the tilt of Washington towards Islamabad has not been straightened. Democrat America has all the good adjectives for the military ruler of Pakistan.

After hesitating in the beginning, General Musharraf came all the way. He had no choice. He could not afford to stand alone and become another Saddam Hussain. But India had an alternative. It could have used the opportunity to get the non-aligned nations together to decide on how to fight fundamentalists without America prodding particular countries. Washington would have then realised that it could not take every country for granted.

The manner in which America has gone about curbing terrorism -- its proclaimed sole purpose after the

The underlying assumptions matter



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

DIRE things are frequently said about the stability and survival of the Pakistan state. Dark scenarios are written and social contradictions analysed. Hence the foreboding. But all this lie certain assumptions. The factors leading to a crash remain only worse. That crash or collapse continues to hover neither happening nor going away.

The underlying assumptions concern the people of Pakistan. Analysts think that one dark day the people would rise and will smash all that nonsense. Doom saying therefore follows. It began in earnest in 1970s after the country was dismembered, leaving deep scars on Pakistan's security establishment though not the people. In the decades since Bangladesh's emergence all the other polarisations have in fact worsened with the conditions. But no dire thing has taken place. It is however necessary to examine the state of various polarisations that describe Pakistan politics.

First, let's look at the people with rich diversities of ethnicity and politics while the second big force is what may be called 'strategic enclave' or the establishment as comprising the collection of retired civil and military officers, media persons dealing with defence matters, rightwing politicians and scientists in nuclear and defence establishments. What binds them together is common faith in a militaristic view to national security, 'a realistic foreign policy and the value of the nuclear weapons'. It includes the top serving military officials to whom modesty comes rarely. It has been termed the establishment, the Permanent Government or Invisible Government.

There is supposedly a desperate battle between these two forces. It is the main assumptions, though

supported by three major protest agitations' history of 1968-69, 1977 and 1983. In each case there was an apparent clash of interest between the mainstream rightwing political parties and the 'strategic enclave'. As movements go, they were large and serious affairs between democracy and the military dictators with some elected politicians condemned as Fascists. But looked at closely, in terms of social origins and mores, there was not much to distinguish either from the

liberal view -- but over the long haul. For, their outlook on life, the automatic acceptance of ancient traditions and the attitudes result in frequent tribal clashes, a sense of honour that requires killing one's own daughter or sister or wife on the mere suspicion of an adulterous affair with someone; they require no proofs. In a recent such case, where one higher and other a lower caste were involved, area's social notables mediated a settlement in which the erring lower caste was required

to stay home they are sectarian terrorists, killers of the minorities, protectors of the greatness of the Prophet and various other emotional causes. Pakistan authorities apparently do not share the American view; they find no evidence of al-Qaida being the mastermind here. No one knows for sure.

There has been an unholy relationship between Islamic parties, the government and of course the extremist groups -- more than a dozen at the last count. The fact is that the military regime has performed two U-turns: first on Taliban and the second on the Jihad in Kashmir by promising to stop it permanently. It does seem that both the Americans -- not necessarily State Department -- and the Indians are not convinced that that umbilical chord has been cut. Western media has accused the Musharraf government of being soft on some and harsh on other groups. The Americans seem to be accusing that Islamabad is scapegoating some, while letting the bulk of them off the hook. Insofar as the Kashmiri's Jihadis are concerned, it is difficult to believe that Musharraf government can afford to cheat on its promises to the American government. Even the Indian government concedes that the continuing incidents might not enjoy Musharraf's active support. Several Jihadist outfits are big and powerful enough to

continue in their own momentum.

Emerging point is that over the years since Gen. Ziaul Haq began his Islamisation of Pakistan Army, Islamic fanatics cannot be wholeheartedly fought and eliminated. If the regime delinks itself politically and makes an effort to contain them, it should be enough, considering various ground realities. Insofar as the main religious parties are concerned, they have a dubious relationship with the government. Each has had a relationship with the army

single seat in any election. Baluchistan is different. It is still a tribal society properly so-called where the Sardars can, in the rare event of their uniting, create a political force. On current indications young Sardar Mengal-led coalition if it enlists the support of Jamhoori Watan Party of Nawab Akbar Bugti and the Pushtoon Nationalist Party of Mahmood Achakzai (son of Abdus Samad Achakzai) might emerge as big force.

But in Sindh, every uneducated ardent nationalist and usually unemployed Sindh, while loudly hating the Army and the Punjabis, does not vote for any nationalist party. He votes for Benazir Bhutto who claims to be the last hope for the Pakistan federation. The issue has virtually died down in the Frontier, though the rhetoric remains. The Frontier is far too integrated economically with Pakistan and demographically with Afghanistan; Pushtoon nationalists' old fire has more or less dissipated. The tentacles that the narcotics trade, the Afghan Mujahideen and Pakistan's intelligence agencies have spread so much poison that the old Pushtoon nationalism has become an uncertain light. The unexplained wealth of the social elites in all these provinces is robbing them of any spirit that makes a nationalist fight.

General Pervez Musharraf has laid the groundwork for a long rule. He has tailored the Constitution around his personality; by most accounts, he is determined to win the October elections; he cannot afford to encounter a Parliament that either refuses to accept him as President for the next five years or his Constitution. He is sure to do what it takes to win an election; the entire administration has been oriented to do just that. Money is also apparently no problem. While it is to be conceded that no one can be sure of an election, the chances of Musharraf-loving politicians in very good numbers are more than even. One's personal hunch is that no matter who wins in the polls, the government that Parliament throws up, will accept Musharraf and work his Constitution. But that prognostication does not exclude either a raging and tearing popular mass movement against the regime or worse. As a minimum Pakistan may have leaped backwards into the 1990s.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

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

"Letters to the Editor"

The Daily Star should be congratulated for its "Letters to the Editor" section. As an avid reader of your newspaper, I have found this section particularly interesting. Lively discussions on both domestic and international topics are regularly taking place in this page.

This is quite fascinating as I write this letter from Sweden, where newspapers seldom publish viewpoints from ordinary readers as much as you do. At a time when our image as a nation has been greatly tarnished by repeatedly being the most corrupt nation, we have every reason to be proud of your newspaper, which upholds the true spirit of democracy by making its letters column available to readers, irrespective of their view points.

Ahmed Rafiq
Stockholm, Sweden

Sarwar Ahmed about pride in the army. To be honest I wouldn't agree that the army safeguards our democracy. As a matter of fact, for a large part of the history of Bangladesh, we are abused and ruled by the army.

Bangladesh was ranked in the bottom of the list by Transparency International. But if you factor in democracy and freedom, we'd be more than half way up that list.

I'm not proud that our army marches about in various third world hell-holes with their UN helmets. I am proud that unlike Turkey, I can criticise them without being jailed for years.

Azad
Dhaka

Banning polybag and auto-rickshaw-- a different view

The government has banned production, sale and use of Polythene

bags. And it is generally held that it had been a good decision at the national interest and the implementation is hailed as a great government success.

Now the axe has fallen on 2-stroke auto-rickshaw. It is expected that banning of these vehicles would clean air pollution these vehicles are creating.

I have a different opinion about both the government decisions. I am yet to be convinced that elimination of polythene bags have made our city roads cleaner or our city drainage system free from choking and thus allowing free flow of rain water. The roads are as dirty and stenchy as before and the rainwater keep the roads inundated as long as it is used to before the banning of the polythene bags. It is quite obvious that we have failed to diagnose the disease. We are taking steps to cure headache by chopping off the head itself.

If we want to have cleaner roads then we have to do the cleaning of

the roads as many times as it needs every day irrespective of the type of dirt on the road. That is as simple as that. If we want to see the drains allowing free flow of water we have to do the cleaning of the drains on a continual basis. We have popularly elected city leaders to look after the city infrastructures. Unfortunately they have little time to devote to the services for which they have been voted for.

Now let us come to the case of auto-rickshaws. The reason the 3-wheelers are being banned is that these vehicles add to the air pollution. This air pollution comes from the type of fuel they use. If that is the reason, could we not have thought for alternative fuel? Conversion kits for use of CNG or LPG are available in the world market. As fuel CNG & LPG would be much cleaner compared to petrol mixed with lubricant. These are even comparatively cost effective.

Nurul Bashar
Khilgoan, Dhaka

"Of Bangla and English"

This is in response to T. Rahman's letter regarding the letter I wrote. Over the last few weeks I've seen criticism for English medium students, about the way they dress, the way they talk and walk and their mediocre education system. None of us are angels are we? I mean, if, among 50-60 English medium students you find one who is a snob, has a peculiar accent etc-- does this reflect the values and the character of all the other English medium students?

Mr Rahman, the only reason why I came out this strongly in my letter is simply because it hurts me to see this terrible misunderstanding being fuelled based on the lies of just a few people. A few days ago someone's wife went to some shop and this English medium girl was supposedly telling the tailor that her dress was too long or something. I'm sorry,

even if that may be true, this is the last thing by which you should judge us. A lot of English based female students don't even wear Westernised clothes and even if some do, no-- it doesn't reflect the kind of person she is.

Let's stop this nonsense now. We are not doing this country a service at all by creating rift between Bengali and English based students. We will only benefit and be happy if we all learn to help one another and be friends with one another.

Arafat Hasan
Dhaka

"Biman's wrong decision"

This is in response to a letter by Shafiqat (September 4), who praised Biman's decision to purchase brand new 777s. I think it is a wrong-headed move. It is high folly for a cash-strapped airline to purchase such expensive aircraft when

there are more serious fundamental problems that need to be addressed.

There is a complete lack of professional management at the airline. Most of the upper management is politically appointed with little or no experience in running an airline. And such, Biman is treated more of a fiefdom than a company. How often have Biman aircraft (some of them in mid-flight) been commandeered by various government ministers and their entourage, at the expense of booting fare-paying passengers?

We have read various letters in this newspaper how some had to deal with insolent airline employees who ill-treated them and whom would only reconfirm a booking if the bribe was right.

On an operation level, Biman's route structure is a mess. To some destination it only flies once a week or you have to make a minimum of two stops to get there. And recently, if offered a tender to dry-lease

another DC-10 aircraft!

Unless these problems are resolved, the purchase of new aircraft will hardly turn things around, and many Bangladeshis, including myself, will continue to fly foreign carriers.

Karim Abdulla
On-8

Private universities

Recently Bangladesh is experiencing a mushroom growth of private universities, some of them are named after foreign renowned educational institutions. Most interestingly these are residential houses turned into university buildings. One wonders whether these universities provide quality education or not. I hope the Education Minister keeps an eye on these so-called universities.

FH
Dhanmondi, Dhaka