

Holiday deaths on the road

Avoidable annual tragedies

FROM last Tuesday through Friday nearly two dozen highway points all over the country were splattered with blood. That many road accidents took a toll of 65 commuters while 208 were wounded within a span of just four days. In one accident as many as 16 died, and in another, a whole family of eight was killed. There's a lot more left to the post-Eid inter-district mobility, so that the scenario portends greater fatalities unless precautions are swiftly put in place to head these off.

There have been all kinds of disasters: Head-on collision, three vehicles going out of control and mangling each other, bus hitting a motorcycle or autorickshaw from behind, a car ramming against a tree or nose-diving into a ditch, so on and so forth. Even pedestrians were overrun.

These accidents were just waiting to happen. To top off our poor road safety standards routinely causing mishaps round the year, there has been the holiday slack on the part of law-enforcers and transport managers and operators. That the people would be desperate to visit their village homes during Eid holidays and might lower their guard to some extent should have been the basic assumptions behind arranging transport services for them guaranteeing adequate road safety.

To meet the mounting commutation needs of citizens during a festival, all kinds of vehicles, even jalopies, are pressed into service by road merchants. Is there any monitoring or supervision of the road-worthiness of the vehicles put to use and the qualifications of drivers plying them?

All these underscore the over-arching necessity for averting the massive seasonal callousness by having a highway safety strategy in place during festival times. The BRTA, transport owners and the still amorphous highway patrol police which ought to come into play without any loss of time, should be able to put a brake on the road accidents galore. Let's not forget, our accidents are still very largely man-made.

Bush in Baghdad

Secrecy is hardly the hallmark of a 'liberator'

PRESIDENT Bush's night trip to Baghdad seemed out of character with the leader of a "victorious nation" claiming himself to be the 'liberator' of the country that his troops have captured. It bears enough testimony to the tenuous US hold on the situation in Iraq and, more important, the fragility of the Bush mission.

The President Bush had started it on a note of vibrant optimism and the White House announced, time and again, that Americans would be given a hearty welcome by Iraqi people. If that were true, then Bush's trip needn't have been wrapped in impenetrable secrecy; instead, it should have been an occasion to rejoice. A liberator, after all, doesn't need the cover of darkness; nor do his soldiers need morale boosting.

Mr. Bush is now facing a host of tricky questions both at home and abroad. The very rationale behind the war, which was never quite above board, is coming increasingly under international scrutiny; Mr. Bush's popularity rating has dropped; and many Americans have begun to ask why the soldiers are in Iraq, even after the 'decisive' victory has been achieved. The incongruities in the White House version of the war, and its aftermath, are becoming visible even to the Americans, who were once overwhelmed by the weight of the reasoning in favour of toppling Saddam Hussein.

So the trip has been a two-pronged move: boosting the sagging morale of US soldiers and putting a brake on the carping criticism that the president's Iraq policy is facing at home.

That said, it is far from clear what the trip has actually achieved. President Bush did not meet the representatives of Iraqi people for whom his concern sounded a bit too overriding only a few months back. Does he still believe that a morally rejuvenated army will be enough to heal the wounds inflicted on the psyche of Iraqi people?

Whereto from Istanbul?

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

Al Qaida has claimed responsibility for the twin bombing in Istanbul and threatened fresh attacks against the US and Japan. Predictably Japanese Prime Minister has refused to be daunted by the Al-Qaida threats though he has postponed for the time being his plan to send Japanese troops to Iraq.

President Bush during his recent State Visit to Britain (the first by an American President since that of Woodrow Wilson in 1918) referring to domestic terrorism in Iraq 'by the followers of the former regime and by outside terrorists' reaffirmed Anglo-US resolve 'to complete the process of bringing freedom, security and peace to Iraq'. In his Whitehall Palace speech he warned his audience about the false hope that the danger of terrorism had passed. As example he cited terrorist attacks in Bali, Jakarta, Casablanca, Mumbai, Mombasa, Naijap, Riyad, Baghdad and Istanbul. His zealous belief in open societies, free markets, compassionate government and democracy appeared missionary, a mission shared by Great Britain in the world beyond the balance of power or the simple pursuit of interest'. Once again he warned the United Nations 'from solemnly choosing its own irrelevance and inviting the fate of the League of Nations'. He expressed his belief that it was not enough to meet the dangers of the world with resolutions but with resolve.

Bush's Whitehall Palace speech was multi-dimensional: partly agreeing with Charles Krauthammer's 'new unilateralism' school of thought i.e. due to unequalled preeminence the US does not have to be constrained by others; and partly subscribing to Joseph Nye's American Paradox i.e. despite unequalled and unchallengeable American superiority global problems like terrorism, environmental degradation and proliferation of WMD cannot be resolved without the cooperation of other nations. Despite persistent rumours that hawks around President Bush (e.g. Condoleezza Rice) are loosing ground to doves (e.g. Colin Powell), rumours strengthened by a leaked classified report by the Joint Chiefs of Staff which blamed hurried and inadequate planning for the Iraq crisis with too great focus on invasion and not enough on organising peace, Bush did not appear to have moved away at all from his widely controversial

Doctrine of Preemption. He told his Whitehall Palace audience that global peace and security was inextricably linked with the willingness of nations to use force to meet 'aggression and evil' and 'that duty sometimes requires violent restraint of violent men' (and) measured use of force is all that protects us from a chaotic world ruled by force'.

But US response in both Afghanistan and Iraq was disproportionately harsh considering (a) a quarter million people were killed in the first Gulf War (according to Vietnam veterans against war); (b) Iraq war not only violated UN Charter but also provisions of international law which as ratified treaties are part of 'the Supreme Law of the Land' according to article VI of the US Constitution; (c) even before US bombing began in October 2001 Iraq was already a country reduced to pre-industrial age for a considerable period of time' (according to UN Special Rapporteur and for-

sion of clauses contained in the Weinberger Doctrine. Bush NSS has ignored one of the principal clauses which warn that US troops should not be committed to battle without a 'reasonable assurance of support of US public opinion and Congress'. Former Secretary of State George Schultz once said 'A great power must bear responsibility for its inactions as well as the consequences of its actions'. In an article in Foreign Policy (Sept/Oct 2003) Madeline Albright has dispelled the notion that the US has relied solely 'on a reactive posture' in the past. She added that in the name of self-defence, US administrations of both parties initiated actions that had violated sovereignty of other nations. According to her, Bush administration's pre-emption doctrine will prove a departure from past practices only if it is implemented in a manner that is aggressive, indifferent to precedents, and careless of information used to justify military actions. Uncalibrated actions, she fears,

war on terror for more than two years, writes The Scotsman (Nov 22nd), the US and British governments have clearly not been able to penetrate the higher reaches of Al-Qaida with informers or agents making it difficult to gain positive intelligence on Al-Qaida strategy or targets. Some Western analysts believe that Osama bin Laden by striking at 'soft targets' is trying to create an image of invincibility and consequently increased support from amongst the vulnerable, and by constantly adapting to new targets, tactics and weapons Al-Qaida is stretching Western security forces and keeping them off balance. It is feared that if the strike in Istanbul is a warning to a pro-western Muslim nation then in the Middle East Al-Qaida is likely to strike at more targets undermining pro-US regimes. On the other hand General Peter Pace, Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on a recent visit to Afghanistan is reported to have said that Osama bin Laden has 'taken him

into conflict. Such a conflictual situation can easily be visualised for Iraq which was not only not fully adorned with all aspects of modernity but since the first Gulf War was already in pre-industrial stage. Therefore attempts to modernise a basically tribal-conservative society following western model that too by an occupation power is bound to be resisted by the people who see their traditional way of life being irreversibly changed through introduction of unfamiliar institutions and invasion of a trans-national culture and ideology with great appeal particularly to the youth.

This power to transform a society through co-option, called 'soft power' by Joseph Nye, reflect the ability to project the powers to shape what others want in the form of attractive culture and ideology. The 'soft power' is different from 'hard power' which rests on inducement or threat expressed generally in the form of military or economic power. Those who refuse 'soft power'

context of the immediate events', yet, says Luis Rubin (of the Mexican Centre for Research for Development), the punishment should not be at the expense of the values that are the mainstay of the West such as liberty, rule of law and democracy. Such an approach would not only be moral but also be essentially practical. The best way to ensure that Al-Qaida expounds is by responding with more hatred through unjustified destruction, violation of human dignity and abandonment of the rule of law.

Leading authorities on international terrorism have already advised that the US should move beyond the concept of deterrence and towards influence as an appropriate complement to military action. As terrorists are not simply single entities but often is a system enveloping diverse elements, some of them may be amenable to inducement.

Despite American display of muscularity in Indo-China and other places during the Cold War period it is generally accepted that what separates the US from all previous major powers is that it is least territorial and most idealistic of all. Americans barring the neo-cons are often embarrassed by the use of power which is contrary to the character of the Greek, Roman, British, French and Soviet colonialists. Only the recent advent of President Bush who is surrounded by PNAC members has marred the traditional image of the Americans as global benefactor. Though David Held (of London School of Economics) found the intensity of the range of responses to the terrorism of nine-eleven as 'fully understandable' and the desire for vengeance 'perfectly natural within the

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

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mer Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari); and, (d) Iraq was already the home of the world's most traumatised children below twelve years of age since Operation Desert Storm. Perhaps the most comforting part of the speech was his commitment to the global expansion of democracy which by implication was reiteration of Clintonian premise of 'democratic peace' (democracies do not go to war with other 'freedom deficit' in different parts of the world to serve short term political and strategic interests; for sake of decades of failed policies in the Middle East'; and, 'no longer should we think tyranny is benign because it is temporarily convenient' and our great democracies should oppose tyranny wherever found'. He called upon the West to change their thinking that 'Islam is somewhat inconsistent with democratic culture'.

President Bush's reference to the use of force as a last resort reminds one of the last of the six commandments of the Weinberger's Doctrine expounded by the then Defence Secretary Casper Weinberger in November 1984. It is not to say that Bush National Security Strategy has been amended by includ-

ing will raise troubling questions about whether the US is placing itself above the law or tacitly acknowledges the right of every nation to act militarily against threats that are merely potential or suspected.

That most of the world still remains skeptical of Bush-Blair pursuit of war on terrorism through Iraq invasion is to state the obvious. Indeed British Labour MP Tam Dalyell (The Sunday Herald Scotland 16.11.02) expressed his opinion that neo-conservative think-tank Project for New American Century (PNAC) peopled by Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz etc had articulated their plans to attack Iraq to achieve 'regime change' long before nine-eleven and that he (Tam Dalyell) was 'appalled that a British Labour Prime Minister should get into bed with a crew which has this (Vietnam war draft dodger Cheney and men who have never experienced the horrors of war) moral standing'.

While no one in his/her right mind would support the barbarism perpetrated by Al-Qaida on innocent civilians, the efficacy of Bush-Blair strategy of fighting this scourge is now being increasingly questioned. Despite waging

self out of the picture' and his capture was not essential for the war on terrorism. But the new US ambassador to Kabul Zalmay Khalidzad had earlier spoke of redoubling US efforts to capture Osama and other leading Al-Qaida figures. Despite this apparent contradiction US forces are claiming success in Afghanistan while independent observers assess that Hamid Karzai controls Kabul, if at all, and is dependent on US soldiers for his physical security.

One may, therefore, assume that though 'regime changes' have been effected both in Afghanistan and Iraq peace has not returned to either country. While Afghanistan has gone back to its tribal ways, Iraq is witnessing daily Anglo-US-Italian casualties. Perhaps an explanation can partly be found in eminent philosopher Karl Popper's thesis given in The Open Society and its Enemies. Popper argued that in liberal societies there are always remnants of tribalism from which they come and that the shock of transition to modern society frequently prompt reactionary movements to attempt to return to their origin. Modernity and tribalism thus en-

of the west explain to their followers that adoption of alien life style would mean for them the abuse and exploitation they believe globalisation represents and also would be impious. Such interpretation of soft power which is cooptive as opposed to coercive hard power often find grotesque expression through terrorism as most recently seen in Istanbul.

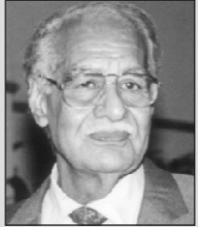
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Shah's entry had already made the APHC acceptable. The rest is too familiar to be repeated.

The question that arises is whether the talks would be on the lines that Sheikh Abdullah had with the government under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. There was an agreement as well in 1975. Gillani is already pooh-poohing the talks by saying that they would be another Sheikh-type exercise without purpose. New Delhi should be prudent in its approach. The APHC has come to the negotiating table for the first time and it has put no prior conditions. That it has dissociated itself from Gillani's support for accession to Pakistan and Yasin Malik's demand for independence is an indication that the APHC wants to avoid the two extremes. Can some formula be worked out to give the valley an autonomous status?

A map showing the division of Jammu and Kashmir has been attributed to the APHC. Jammu and Ladakh are shown under India and the valley and most of Kashmir presently with Pakistan under the dual control of New Delhi and Islamabad. Some features are similar to the trifurcation, a formula that the RSS had adumbrated.

Can't afford another partition



KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

NEW Delhi should thank Islamabad for a positive response from the All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC) to Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani's offer for talks. Had Pakistan not encouraged Syed Ali Shah Gillani, its Trojan horse, to break away from the organisation, the APHC might not have agreed on the meeting. Gillani would have insisted, like in the past, on having a third chair for Pakistan at the negotiating table. New Delhi could not have accepted such a proposition because it would have meant extending recognition to Islamabad as a partner. It is true that India has conceded in the Shimla agreement (1972) that it will meet Pakistan to have a final settlement on Jammu and Kashmir. Off and on, New Delhi has reiterated the assurance. Even otherwise, if India had been able to find a permanent solution to the Kashmir problem without involving Pakistan, it would have done so years ago.

Where Pakistan goes wrong is in its belief that such a situation can force India to discuss the Kashmir's accession de novo. A few Pakistani leaders took the same route in the past but

realised even after hostilities that it was not possible to reopen the whole issue. No government of any party can stay in power if it ever tries to tinker with the accession. Cross-border terrorism is an irritation but it is not something with which India cannot live. It has been doing so for more than 12 years. In any case, after the 9/11 happenings in the US, the whole scenario has changed. Terrorism of any kind at any place has come to be considered an act of violence against humanity. As President Pervez Musharraf has him-

not at the expense of Pakistan. They say so. Policy-makers at Islamabad have turned out to be shortsighted. Fearing the talks at some time, they have cut the ground from under their own feet by playing the Islamic card through Gillani, the Jamiat-e-Islami leader. His stand for Kashmir's merger with the Islamic state of Pakistan is not popular. It has, in fact, alienated the state's two other regions, the Hindu-majority Jammu and the Buddhist-majority Ladakh on the one hand and pushed up the back of communal elements in

got mired in communalism. Jammu and Ladakh have drifted away from the valley, both emotionally and otherwise. They have begun to assert their own identity, regional and religious. The APHC has been forced to admit that its sway is confined to the precincts of the valley. Yasin Malik of JKLF has fired the imagination of Kashmiris by raising the slogan of independence. The situation today is such that the majority of population that was once pro-Pakistan is now pro-Azadi. But it is increasingly realising that independent

return to the valley, he said, would be decided after Kashmir was settled. Some APHC leaders were unhappy with the approach. But they felt helpless because there were too many Pakistani guns in their midst. Too many foreign diplomats visiting them had spoken in different voices and given them an exaggerated notion of world's support to their cause. When the 9/11 happenings jolted the APHC's thinking, it did not want to be seen linked with terrorism in any way. Their fear was that they might one day be

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dubbed partners of the Al-Qaida which mentioned Kashmir as one of the territories they would free for Muslims. However, it must be said to the credit of the Kashmiris that not a single person from among them participated in the Taliban's jihad in Afghanistan. There were Muslims from every part of the world but not from India.

Gillani and Pakistan have miscalculated their support. The Kashmiris are not fundamentalists. Nor are they willing to launch another liberation struggle. They are too tired and too sick of violence. They want peace with honour. New Delhi's attitude towards the APHC underwent a change when Abbas, a liberal, came to head the organisation. Gillani's exit and Shabbir

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BETWEEN THE LINES

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self admitted that there is a perception that he and his government are supporting extremists and terrorists. Islamabad would realise, if it has not already done so, that the 85-odd camps it has established along the Line of Control (LoC) to train the jihadis are counter-productive. They may be seen as evidence of the Al-Qaida activity.

What is going to hurt Pakistan the most is the split in the APHC. Its main leaders like Mir Waiz Omar Farooq, Abdul Ghani Bhatt and APHC's new president Abbas Ansari have been looking towards Islamabad for years. They are so much cut up that they did not attend even the iftar dinner party of the Pakistan High Commissioner to India. Their decision to talk to Delhi is

the rest of India on the other. New Delhi too has contributed towards communalising the situation. Some 13 years ago, it appointed Jagmohan, now a Union Minister, the governor of Jammu and Kashmir youth who had raised the standard of revolt against New Delhi. Two, they have given a religious colour to the movement which was purely national in character. The movement became suspect. Thousands who sacrificed their lives did not make the kind of impact they would have made if there had been no outsider.

Gillani sabotaged the movement in another way: he argued that the Kashmiris would join Pakistan after they had 'freed' themselves from India. Even the question of pandits has

been a pipedream. The biggest loss of the APHC has been at the hands of the Pakistani-sponsored jihadis. One, they have damaged the cause of the Kashmiri youth who had raised the standard of revolt against New Delhi. Two, they have given a religious colour to the movement which was purely national in character. The movement became suspect. Thousands who sacrificed their lives did not make the kind of impact they would have made if there had been no outsider.

In that critical situation, the PM went to Saudi Arabia for performing 'Omrah'. One wished she had remained beside her unfortunate countrymen in their hour of need.

Walid Haq

Shahjahanpur, Dhaka

The 'Monga' situation has been prevailing in the northern districts of the country. Allegedly, the relief materials are insufficient and have not been distributed properly. Apart from this situation, the prices of most of the essentials are also high. The affected people have starved and some reportedly have died already for want of food.

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'Omrah' and 'Monga'

Among all these problems, healthcare is perhaps the most critical one. Only the rich patients can go abroad and get better healthcare, spending a large amount of money. On the other hand, the poor, being deprived of modern treatment, have to die.

To rescue the deprived people, the philanthropists should come forward and set a charitable hospital of international standard at Cox's Bazaar called 'Sea King Hospital'. I hope such a hospital will serve the poor people of Cox's Bazaar.