

We oppose tele-tapping

Raising the spectre of a police state?

NO one would deny that the deteriorating law and order situation has become a serious problem for the country. Nor would anyone argue with the statement that national security must remain a paramount concern, and that we should not hesitate to take the steps necessary to ensure that it is not breached. Nevertheless, we cannot help but be concerned with the official green light apparently being given to a plan to tap phone calls and email communications. One wonders whether this is the best way for the government to cut down on crime and protect national security.

The debate over tele-tapping has been going on for some time now. The telecommunications ministry has seemingly been persuaded by the intelligence services to amend the existing telecommunication act to permit electronic eavesdropping. At the behest of the telecommunication ministry, Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission has prepared a draft outline of the changes demanded by the security agencies. The move reportedly has the blessings of the Prime Minister's Office.

When law enforcement authorities are unable to get to the bottom of the biggest arms haul in our nation's history and fail to deter bomb blasts and other forms of crime, they should do some soul-searching to improve their performance, instead of acting in desperation to impinge on civil liberties of people. To amend a law that has been protecting citizens from an invasion of their privacy, personal freedom and right to communications is a regressive step. The sweeping powers being contemplated to be given to the intelligence agencies for eavesdropping and using tapped information in the court of law as evidence will open the door to an abuse of power that is patently repugnant to democratic sensibilities. Are we looking for a police state after treading such a long path of democracy?

It seems to us that the law enforcement authorities and intelligence agencies are using their lack of eavesdropping powers as an excuse for not performing their jobs better. Even without adopting the proposed eavesdropping measures, there is much room for improvement in how the police and the security agencies operate. It would be a better idea to concentrate on rectifying some of these other shortcomings than to be so quick to surrender our fundamental right to live without undue government intrusion into our lives.

Killing of Rantissi

Fuel to greater violence

THE assassination of Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantissi, less than a month after Sheikh Ahmed Yassin was killed in a similar fashion, has caused outrage among all the people in the world who want to see peace established in the Middle East.

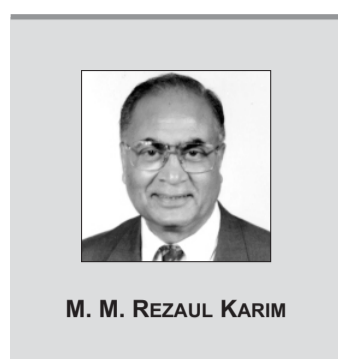
It is state-sponsored terrorism in its most blatant form. The EU and all Middle Eastern countries have condemned the killing, but the United States, which has already waged two wars to oppose 'state-sponsored terrorism', has endorsed the assassination, thus giving Tel Aviv further encouragement to commit such crime. Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qorei has very rightly termed the attack a 'direct result' of US support for Israel. The lone superpower has thrown its weight behind a state which indulges in and boasts of terrorism, without showing the slightest regard for international laws.

President Bush had given Tel Aviv the green signal on retaining the settlements on the West Bank after pulling out from Gaza. The US stand on the settlement issue amounts to lending a legality to all the barbaric acts committed by the Israelis on the West Bank in its bid to perpetuate its occupation of Palestinian land.

The killings of Hamas leaders have thrown the peace plan into complete disarray and established beyond an iota of doubt the fact that Israel does not believe in peace.

The EU leaders have reacted to the latest killing by saying that it won't help the peace process. While they are absolutely right in their assessment, it is time the UN insist on Israel that it implement the relevant resolutions of the UNSC. Meanwhile, the US must realise that if its prime objective is to contain state-sponsored terrorism, Tel Aviv must be dissuaded from carrying out targeted assassinations.

Complex turn in Arab-Israeli conflicts



M. M. REZAUL KARIM

THE assassination of Abdul Aziz Rantissi, successor to the assassinated spiritual leader and founder of Hamas, Shaikh Ahmad Yassin, on 17 April, rendered the perennially complex Middle East situation even more complex. The Palestinian people had already been deeply grieved at the planned, and publicly stated as such, assassination of Shaikh Yassin on the 22nd ultimo. Within days Israeli Prime Minister went to Washington and obtained President Bush's endorsement of his formula for withdrawal from the occupied land, much to the consternation of the Palestinians. This was followed closely by the latest assassination of Abdul Aziz Rantissi, another planned target of the Israelis.

The Palestinians thus received three severe blows in quick succession, two from their avowed enemy, Israel, and the other from the one considered to be an honest peace-broker, the United States. These made the angry Palestin-

ians more angry and deeply outraged. Their determination to avenge became stronger. The Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia stated that the American approval of the controversial Israeli proposition about withdrawal from Gaza and the West Bank caused to encourage the Israelis to kill the last of the Hamas leaders. The reactions of the Israelis have been mixed. Prime Minister Sharon and the hardliners have been happy. Sharon even commended the

ported the latter with funds and media. On the other hand, the American Democratic Party has always sought to steer a relative course of balance and moderation on this vexed issue. Two democratic Presidents of the USA were instrumental in making outstanding contributions to the advancement of peace in the region. President Jimmy Carter successfully brokered the Camp David Agreement in 1978 between Israel and Egypt, and President Bill Clinton

the more orthodox religious Party to no end. Their influence on the disposal of the case against him would be though uncertain, but worth trying, according to Sharon's strategy planners. The one who has to pay dearly for this adventure or misadventure, regrettably, is the peace process itself. The prospect of a negotiated peace under the US initiative has now receded to an unwelcome distance.

Why was it so? One may traverse a little to the past. The

endorsement of Sharon's proposal added salt to the injury for the Arabs. But Bush is hard-pressed for votes in the coming elections and the Jewish votes are both significant and precious.

According to Sharon's plan, the Israeli troops will withdraw from the Gaza strip and from the bulk of the West Bank, but Israel will retain a number of Jewish settlements in the West Bank. On the other hand, the Palestinian refugees will not be allowed to

strategy of the settlers, who had, at the very outset of their settlement, ignominiously cast aside the world opinion and hoped to be condoned ultimately by their patrons for their pre-meditated defiance.

What does then the future hold for the Arabs, the Israelis and the world at large? It is an axiomatic truth that security of Israel and Palestine is interdependent and cannot be accomplished without being in union. The situation in the Middle East has always had its impact felt not only in the region but in the rest of the world. What influence will the recent developments have on the peace process in the region? Will the Palestinians eschew the insults and the injuries that were inflicted upon them? Or, will they be forced to yield to moderation by sacrificing their rights, which they hold as sacred, sublime and just? This is a million dollar question and no one is able to answer. Yet, the peace-loving people of the world must seek to advance the cause of peace and development by way of encouraging application of the principles of reason, fairness and justice. And, what better solution can there be than the one acceptable to both the contending parties, perhaps through the good offices of a truly impartial catalyst?

M.M.Rezaul Karim, a former Ambassador, is a member of BNP's Advisory Council.

CURRENTS AND CROSSCURRENTS

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perpetrators of the crimes as their legitimate duty. The moderate Labour leaders, in contrast, remained significantly silent.

President George W Bush Jr.'s endorsement of Sharon's "plan of withdrawal from Gaza and the West Bank" was unfortunate, though not unexpected. Israel's Likud Party and America's GOP, the Republicans, have been traditionally close, one generally supporting the other. The common binding force, the rich and influential American Jewry, has always put in a substantial input into the Republican vote bank and sup-

positively sought to establish rapprochement between President Yasser Arafat and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin for which the latter even had to pay with his life.

Prime Minister Sharon obviously has a personal stake in the latest developments of the situation in the region. Accusation of a corruption scandal involving his son in a real estate development project a dozen years ago made him redesign his strategy. He invoked the precious support of the US President on an issue which pleased the radical elements of his Party and

negotiations for a peaceful settlement of the dispute between the Palestinians and the Israelis have always depended on the strategy of exchange of peace for land. The Palestinians will get back the occupied Gaza strip and the West Bank in exchange for total and lasting peace for the Israelis. The Palestine will obtain its statehood and live together with Israel in dignity and peace. Sharon's proposition changed this postulate, which had constituted the cornerstone of the policy of negotiations between the two opposing sides. The American

return to Israel, as had been contemplated and agreed to before. Both Sharon and Bush rested their reasoning on the theory of pragmatism and the changed situation. As for the Jewish settlement, done in defiance of the agreement and ignoring entreaties from the international community, they would remain adamant to dismantle their settlements and the Israeli authorities would be too hard-pressed to meet the consequences and the resultant outcry of such dismantlement. But one has to forget this was the precise

'What is good for the poor is good for everybody'

M SHAMSUL HAQUE

THE given title is from an essay published in the *Economist* of London during the US invasion of Afghanistan. Professor J. Sach, a reputed economist, then of Harvard University and now in the Earth Institute at Yale University, mentioned that the US was spending \$12m a day for bombing Afghanistan. Instead if half that amount was spent for poverty reduction there, perhaps the war on terror would not have been necessary. Poverty, he wrote, was at the root of terrorism and other social ills all over the world. Reduction of poverty was suggested as the better alternative to fight terrorism through the so called war on terrorism.

Terrorism of many known and unknown varieties including corruption is also a major social problem in Bangladesh. Needless to mention that young men from the poorer sections of the society are attracted more to calls for joining such groups as they lack education and also employment. The poor also live on the fringes of nature and they also cause many environmental degradation including water pollution, forest depletion and communicable diseases etc. Recently the business community is crying loud against terrorism and extortion as they seemed to have exceeded any previous level. However as we know the business community is not going to bear all the costs of disruptions. They have been passing them on to the buyers most of whom are poor. This is perhaps the main cause behind recent spate of rising prices in the country. As prices of essential continue to rise unabated most of the people, specially fixed income earners and rural consumers with

stagnant prices for agri-products and rural services suffer badly. In our case this is likely to create major social unrest and the opposition parties are perhaps taking advantage of the situation to unseat an elected government. Hence poverty reduction must be a worthwhile strategy for any government that wants to govern the country as majority of the population is poor.

Literature on strategic management, of which planning is one element, emphasises identifying strengths and weaknesses, and

bring poverty further down. What needs to be done for these sectors have been widely discussed at national and international levels. For example RMG is likely to face more competition after 2005 when MFA is withdrawn. Cost reduction must be a strategy for RMG. How can that be attained is already identified. Lower cost of capital if needed by giving subsidy, improving design and increasing workers' skill, among other things.

Recently held MFI world summit in Dhaka identified certain actions such as scaling up of MF

season against their land or crop on the field? MFIs so far targeted mostly landless poor and non-farm activities. The scaling up of MFIs that was suggested in the Summit at Dhaka should cover crop production and storage. That will have tremendous impact on incomes of farmers and they will in turn invest and consume more of other goods and services.

What has been said above is that we should utilise our revealed strengths in RMGs, NGO-MFIs and give incentives to the farmers to produce more. On the other

river erosion, crop failures and above all loss of employment opportunity. An example may be given from thousands of cows recently distributed in the char areas in Kurigram district by the Prime Minister. Livestock like those have to be serviced by veterinary doctors so that they do not die from some diseases that are very common in Bangladesh. Providing insurance coverage for these cattle head against death is a good measure of social protection for the poor. The premium needed to cover these cows may be collected

be reoriented towards that. The Finance Minister and others are on record stating about very high wastages and siphoning of funds from construction projects by some quarters. Half of the amount budgeted for construction of a bridge and paved motor ways goes in the air he said. If we look at the ADP of this year highest allocation is for construction by all departments of the government. Can we think of reducing the size of allocation for construction of new roads and bridges and buildings for the next five years? I can see two such bridges on the same river in my own area lying unused for years. Rather funds should be provided for maintenance of existing roads and smaller river crossings should be done by ferry boats where heavy vehicles do not move. As strategy revenue collection imperative to finance such wasteful construction projects is counter productive as it is also not pro-poor.

In conclusion it may be said that if you take care of the poor every one is benefited including the government, the business community and the rest of the society. It will reduce growth of terrorism in the source. For that build our revealed strengths in RMGs, NGO-MFIs, agriculture and manpower export. At the same time reduce our weaknesses in the delivery of many public services such as education and health care and social protection against vulnerability of the poor.

M Shamsul Haque is the Vice Chancellor, City University, Banani, Dhaka.

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opportunities and threats. So far amidst all the trials and tribulations we achieved certain degree of success in four sectors directly related with poverty reduction. These are the RMG industry, NGOs/MFIs, sending workers abroad and increase in food production. RMG industry employs about two million workers, 80 per cent of whom are women from rural areas. Roughly about 10 million people live on the earnings of RMG industry. NGOs with and without micro credit reportedly reached 55 per cent of the total population, that is about 60-65 million people. Food grain production has trebled since 1972, when population roughly doubled. And over three million people are working abroad and remittances from them reached \$3.0 billion a year. These are very significant achievements by any standard, regional and global. Performance in all these sectors should be further geared up to

introduction of insurance and some regulatory framework etc. Government should not compete with MFIs as it does not have the capability. It may simply distort the system that is working well. Instead the proposed NGO Foundation is a good move and it should be supported by donors.

No doubt food production can be increased under the existing small holding that we have in the country. Problem lies in input output prices for the agriculture sector. Growers have no control over any of them. Paddy, potato and vegetable prices go down sharply at harvesting time as small growers cannot hold them. Farmers mostly sell their output forward to money lenders and middlemen as they cannot finance purchase of inputs, seed, fertilizer and water from their savings which never accrue to them given the system. Can GOB and NGOs do something to provide credits to the growers during the growing

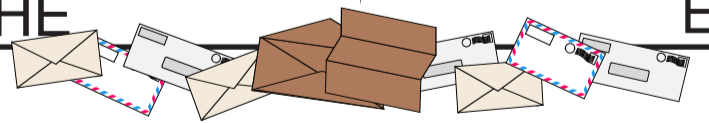
hand, we must try to reduce our weaknesses in delivery of certain public services such as education and health, law and order. It is true the poor are dependent on public education and health services. But what is the quality of those services? Enrolling more girls to schools and colleges is good provided they obtain certain skills in language and quantitative analysis at the least. Currently very little is learnt and the system loss in failures in public examinations is huge. Investment in improving the quality of education must be an essential element in poverty reduction strategy. Health services in the public sector also need to be strengthened by more investment in community based models.

Another aspect in which weakness exists is vulnerability to uncertainty and risk for the poor. That is they do not have social protection against unforeseen events such as floods, droughts,

partly from the recipients and partly from some donor agencies. Crop insurance for marginal holding farmers can be introduced by some NGOs on a cooperative basis. The coverage of old age allowance should be expanded in all districts. Above all unemployed youths should be given some vocational training that is in demand at home and abroad. We must recognise that it will be impossible to employ all these youths within the country at any foreseeable future. It is also known that there exists manpower shortage in many countries and it is likely to increase in the future. A targeted approach to combine training in skills and languages and job search and placement by the concerned ministries should form an element in poverty reduction strategy.

At macro economic level employment generation must be the focus and for that matter so called development projects must

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



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Strengthen the coast guard

In view of the huge seizure of arms at Chittagong port, it is imperative to review the strength and performance of the newly established Coast Guard network in Bangladesh. The auxiliary wing of the Navy can contribute a lot, beside the regular civil agencies (Sea Customs, Shipping) including an auxiliary air wing for helicopter spotting exercises.

We had been neglecting coastal security patrolling so long, but the global situation is different now. There is no point in depending too much on foreign vessels and 100 per cent equipment. This is a chance for our ailing shipbuilding industry to revive. With our huge manpower (human resources, as it is termed these days) we can develop quickly in any field. Availability of energy sources is not a problem, as the country is literally

floating on gas, as per media reports. Joint investment is no problem, with possibility of export to the developing countries of such security set-ups at affordable prices.

Abdali
Dhaka

BTV World

The entrance of BTV World into the world wide satellite channels crossing its national boundary is no doubt a milestone. It is better late than never. The whole nation was looking eagerly to the auspicious inaugural ceremony of the BTV World on April 11, 2004. With its inauguration, people in about 100 countries of Asia, Australia, some parts of Europe and Africa would be able to enjoy the programmes on this channel. It has opened the doors of a great opportunity to display our joy, sorrow, heritage, history, culture, progress, and prosperity. It will

surely take the responsibility of removing the negative ideas about us.

BTV was nearly dormant in this competitive era of the sky culture. Now-a-days people are using near about 100 satellite channels remaining open 24 hours. These commercial channels are attracting them with different colourful programmes. The elites of the country turned their faces away from BTV more than a decade ago, as its programmes were dull and stale. Thus people became inclined to external culture. It was a threat to our national values.

TV channel is a national property. It would be unwelcome and unpopular if it is used for personal interests. It should be kept impartial, otherwise the voice of the nation and the mirror of Bangladesh would be monotonous and hazy.

Saif Altaf
Swaralipi, Bandarba

Dhanmondi Lake

Lakes and parks are the only serene areas left for the city dwellers. People from all walks of life come here in order to breathe in the open air. They want to get rid of the tension of chaotic city life.

What do the visitors expect from these areas? The probable answer is a relaxing place surrounded by nature. They want the place to be hygienic. There should not be any dust or dirty waste to make it a bitter experience for the visitors. And these areas should be declared smoking free zone.

I had an opportunity to visit the Dhanmondi Lake with my family and I found the atmosphere very unhealthy. People were smoking constantly. Young lovers come to this place, but they often do not maintain the decencies. All these things are disgusting and intolerable. So immediate steps are

needed to set things right.

Kazmin Samia
Dhaka

'Bush Fire'

The 'Bush Fire' that was ignited by the controversial US presidential election, 2000, in Florida spread to Afghanistan in 2001, turned wild in Iraq in 2002 and has now engulfed the whole world. The US ballots have been converted into US bullets, democracy has become a mockery and slavery has replaced liberty.

US President George Bush has cooked up concocted stories, manufactured lies, raised a hue and cry, killed thousands of innocent Afghan and Iraqi men, women and children in his bid to capture Osama bin Laden and to destroy the alleged weapons of mass destruction.

The USA in league with Israel, the UK and other sycophants

has resorted to state terrorism world wide and the victims of the state terrorism have been compelled to unleash stateless terrorism and launch suicide bomb attacks to retaliate and avenge the crimes against humanity.

And so from time to time the streets of Jerusalem, Gaza Strip, West Bank, Tel-Aviv, New York, Washington, Kabul, Baghdad, Bali, Karachi, Istanbul, Casablanca, Jeddah, Kuwait and Madrid are littered with dead bodies. One does not know how and when the bloodbath would come to an end.

OH Kabir
Dhaka

Coaching centres

Coaching centre is a private school or college that is governed by private authorities. There are many coaching centres in our country. In recent times they are growing up like mushrooms in every corner of our cities. Especially they are found in the commercial areas around the school/colleges. The guardians send their children to the coaching centres in the hope of better teaching. But the authorities of these centres create heavy pressure upon the students, which is beyond the capacity of the students. They are to memorise the notes given by their teachers.

As a result, the natural growth of their brains is hampered. The authorities of these institutions collect a large amount of money from the students, as per their wishes, in the name of tuition fees

and note charges. So it is quite impossible on the part of a poor father to send his children to a coaching centre.

Moreover, the teachers of the government schools and colleges are becoming a liability. Sometimes they are seen teaching in so called coaching centres. They are totally indifferent to the students of their own institutions. Thus the education of the students is badly impaired.

I believe that a coaching centre is a threat to our future generations. The men at the helm should take note of the problems created by coaching centres.

SK Suzit
Korotia, Tangail