

Attack on AL rally

We condemn this reprehensible act

YET another bomb attack! This time the targets were the top leadership of the main opposition, Awami League. Initial accounts speak of very high casualty figures including many deaths. It is an irony that the attack was directed at a rally, organised to deplore similar acts of senseless violence.

The way the attack was carried out points to a very well organised, well planned and a professionally executed operation. It would not be wrong to suggest that the timing, the mechanism used and the targets were selected in a manner, which would cause the maximum death and destruction.

No word is strong enough to condemn this most heinous and dastardly acts in recent times. Our hearts go out to the families of all those who have lost their lives. We understand that the leader of the opposition, Sheikh Hasina escaped the attack unscathed though AL leaders claimed her car was shot at too. We are relieved at the news of her well being. At the same time we cannot but express our anguish and dismay at the large number of casualties that the attack has caused.

We are shocked at the senseless killing of innocent people. This is the latest in a series of bomb attacks that have targeted VIPs and politically important personalities as well as innocent civilians. What is galling is the fact that instead of looking at these attacks in an objective manner, all sorts of rationalisation was resorted to, to deflect the attention elsewhere, thus diluting the seriousness of the cases.

We fail to understand the motives of those that are perpetrating these violent acts. We have been alerting the government, ad naseaum, to get at the roots of all the bomb blasts that have occurred in the country. We had also cautioned the authorities of the serious consequences of letting these incidents go untracked and unsolved.

At times like this it is but natural for tempers to be frayed. But we must guard against recrimination and blame game. All of us must keep our calm. At the same time, no effort should be spared by the government to ensure that there is no breakdown of law and order, and go whole hog to track down those responsible for this heinous crime.

Nothing will please the perpetrators more than see to us degenerating into chaos and conflict.

Regional media cooperation

Allow free flow of information and movement of journalists in South Asia

WE could not agree more wholeheartedly with the call for free flow of information and free movement of journalists throughout the South Asian region that was raised on the first day of the three-day regional conference organised by South Asian Free Media Association.

South Asian regional cooperation has become the watchword of the twenty-first century in this part of the world, and in recent years the Saarc nations have taken significant steps to advance such cooperation on both bilateral and multilateral fronts. As negotiations over a free trade area for the region as well as other forms of regional cooperation pick up speed, the concept of free movement of information within the region that was brought up on the first day of the conference deserves closer attention.

Free media is indispensable to the creation of a functional democracy in which the government is accountable for its actions and the rights of the general public are upheld. Similarly, if we truly wish to create a workable and cooperative community of South Asian nations, the media must be able to cross national borders to investigate and to throw light on issues of concern.

This means that information as well as media personnel must be permitted to flow across national borders Currently, media is among the most restricted of professions for foreigners within the region, and it is these restrictions that must be lifted if information is to cross national boundaries in a meaningful way and mutual understanding thus strengthened.

It is our belief that greater intra-regional media access could only be of benefit to the public by making the government more accountable, and that, similarly, if Bangladeshi journalists and publications had greater access to information outside our borders, such greater access would also be in the national interest.

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

IMMANUEL Kant's proposal for the formation of a federation or league of the world's nations, which would allow countries to unite and punish any nation guilty of an act of aggression through what is sometimes referred to as collective security, briefly came to life when the League of Nations was formed. But the League failed to live up to the Kantian expectation of a federation that would protect the rights of small nations who get caught in the power struggle of bigger nations, mainly because several of the major countries, notably the United States, were not members, while others who were members failed to oppose the aggressions by Japan, Germany, and Italy, which caused the outbreak of the Second World War.

In 1942, the twenty-two nation coalition against German-Japanese-Italian axis powers signed a Declaration of the United Nations (the name coined by President Franklin Roosevelt), accepting the principles of the Atlantic Charter (earlier signed by Roosevelt and Winston Churchill). A year later, the four war time allies -- the US, Britain, the Soviet Union, and China -- agreed to establish an international organisation which eventually became the United Nations in October 1945.

This sojourn into history was necessary to comprehend fully the frustration and restlessness that has gripped the international community following the apparent failure of the United Nations to prevent intervention in Kosovo (though generally supported by the world at large) and aggression on Iraq (described as an unjust war by the international community). The essence of both the League of Nations and the UN lay in the universal expectation for security from aggression by others.

It is not true that the paralysis of the UN has suddenly been discovered in the post-Cold War era.

Indeed, the real cause behind NATO's birth was the protection of "our cherished freedoms" (in the words of John Foster Dulles) with military defence, religious faith, and

demonstration of western political and social system as counter-attraction to communism. Inherent in this western move was their belief in the inadequacy of the UN security system and the paralysis of the Security Council caused by the use of veto powers by the USSR.

In the 1946-89 period, out of 232 vetoes cast 113 were cast by the USSR, as against 68 by the US, 29 by Britain,

at "the inability of states to reconcile national interests when skilful and visionary diplomacy would make unity possible." He urged for the revision of the concept of national interest that has failed to keep in step with the profound global changes following the end of the Cold War. Kofi Annan's appeal was for subordinating national interest-guided policy to the rule of law. But the terrorist attacks of 9/11

China necessitating NATO intervention called into question UNSC capacity to perform its functions and revved anew the debate for its reforms. Reforms suggested are basically the following: (a) an increase in the number of elected members retaining the five permanent members; (b) two more permanent members (Japan and Germany) and three more elected from Asia, Africa, and Latin America;

UN can lend unique legitimacy to military intervention fell on deaf ears of the Bush administration. But then one must recognise the fact of irreversible change in the global construct in the post-Cold War era in terms of nation-state's responsibility not only in its conduct of inter-state relations but also its treatment of its own people for retaining sovereignty.

In this context Tony Blair's enuncia-

Boutros Ghali laid emphasis on promoting democracy within the architecture of the UN as the world's largest and most inclusive organisation. While Boutros Ghali's prescription would have been ideal in the changed circumstances prevailing in the world today, both the developed and the developing countries should join hands in rewriting the UN Charter so that it will be capable of meeting the politico-economic challenges of the 21st century.

and 18 by France. Most of the Soviet vetoes were cast at the initial period of the UN. This led Canada's Lester Pearson to conclude that the UN clearly was not capable of meeting the threat to international peace and security which the western powers felt was gathering at that time (1949).

If the UN Charter were to be considered as the constitution of the world committed to the maintenance of international peace and security, with the Security Council given the responsibility to determine the existence of any threat to peace and to decide on measures to suppress international lawlessness, then any departure from the normative doctrine of international peace causes international concern. This concern becomes palpable as strain increases between the forces trying to guard against any attack on nation-state sovereignty as against the doctrine of human security enunciated in the mid-1990s by the Commission on Global Governance, by refusing to confine the concept of security exclusively to the protection of states, ignoring the interests of the people in whose name sovereignty is exercised.

Additional strain has been put by an era of globalisation turning into an era of American-westernisation of international concerns. Kofi Annan alluded to this strain in the Hague Appeal for Peace in 1999 by expressing his worry

changed irreversibly any American pretension to subject its actions to the dictates of international law. This was made abundantly clear by President Bush in September 2002 when he declared his determination to seek unilateral redress should the UN fail to act to meet the perceived twin threat of terrorism and of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

In his quest to punish the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, President Bush received solid support from the American people and of the international community. So when the Taliban were driven out, the entire world either applauded or acquiesced with NATO assault led by the US on Afghanistan. This became obligatory as NATO for the first time in its history invoked Article 5 of its charter that effectively translated 9/11 attacks on the US as attack on all NATO members. Besides Afghanistan war could be construed as having UNSC blessings because the Security Council had established that terrorists may be considered as agents of the state that harbour them and made it illegal to sponsor or shelter terrorists. So the Taliban regime's refusal to hand over Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaida network to the international community made Afghanistan vulnerable to international reprisal.

In Kosovo, however, UNSC paralysis due to veto threat from Russia and

and c) "semi-permanent members" with no veto power. There is almost universal appreciation of the fact that the present composition of the UNSC and veto power of P-5 reflective of the situation following the Second World War needs reform.

Former Secretary General Boutros Ghali observed in his Agenda for Democratisation that the UN had little moral authority to preach democracy to the outside world when it was not practicing it in its own backyard. It is often pointed out that four out of five permanent members are "European" (a concept that includes the US) and "industrialised" countries, the latter argument that goes against Japan's inclusion while in its entirety the argument works against Germany.

Besides, Argentina, Mexico, and Pakistan question the choice of Brazil and India to be taken in as permanent members. Despite differences over future composition of the UNSC, among member states its democratisation is essential to arrest the increasing trend towards unilateralism. One has to bear in mind President Bush's warning of the UN becoming irrelevant if it failed to act on Iraq as of the recent US Congress resolution on Sudan urging Bush administration to act unilaterally in the UN failed to act to meet the humanitarian disaster in Darfur. Kofi Annan's mild chastisement of President Bush that only the

tion of the Doctrine of International Community (in April 1999) becomes relevant. Referring to Kosovo as a just war based, not on territorial ambition but on values, Blair's doctrine contained the explicit recognition that states nowadays were mutually dependent and the national interests of states were to a significant degree governed by international collaboration. Blair's doctrine is essentially aimed at breaking down insularity of states and furthering politico-economic collaboration among states based on the values of liberty, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and an open society. This automatically meant that dictators everywhere were put on notice that their minority rule (Saddam Hussein), ethnic cleansing (Milosevic), undemocratic rule (in many countries of the world) were not acceptable and the international community (mainly the West) would not stand idly by while disharmonious domestic rule and aberrant international conduct continued unabated.

Tony Blair had no doubts in his mind that intervention in Kosovo was just and delayed action in Rwanda was an unforgivable moral lapse. His doctrine was not meant to be confined to Europe or the West but would have universal applicability. It was obvious that in the application of this doctrine the instrument of humanitarian intervention would be necessary. Tony

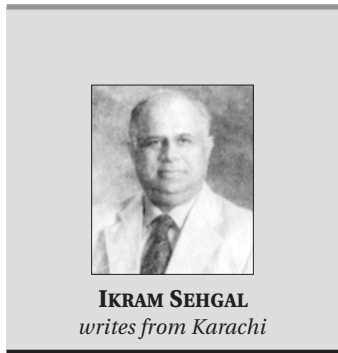
Blair was, however, acutely aware of the centrality of the UN in this quest for a world ruled by law and international cooperation. But for the UN to play a central role the organisation and particularly the Security Council had to be reformed enabling it to respond effectively to the challenges of the 21st century. Blair allowed that for too long non-intervention has remained inviolable and sacrosanct in the UN Charter. And he argued that acts of genocide and large scale abuse of human rights producing massive flow of refugees (from then East Pakistan into adjoining states of India and currently from Darfur into Chad) could be described as threat to international peace and security. Therefore the UN Charter needed to be amended to include humanitarian grounds as part of international law sanctioning intervention in serious cases.

Blair's doctrine of international community, writes Professor Robert Jackson of Boston University, is an interventionist doctrine that connects national security and international security with human security in foreign countries. Blair's doctrine, Jackson adds, is descendant of the old European standard of civilisation and in calling for UN reforms Tony Blair not only questioned the principle of inviolability relating to non-intervention, but also recommended that the basic UN doctrine of equal sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-intervention would be subject to qualification and revision.

Boutros Ghali in his Agenda for Democratisation laid emphasis on promoting democracy within the architecture of the UN, as the world's largest and most inclusive organisation. He felt a clear need for an organisation in which all principal organs function in balance and harmony. While Boutros Ghali's prescription would have been ideal in the changed circumstances prevailing in the world today, both the developed and the developing countries should join hands in rewriting the UN Charter so that it will be capable of meeting the politico-economic challenges of the 21st century.

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Justifying the means



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

COMMENTING about the democratic process in Pakistan in 1970, BBC Host David Frost made the famous remark, "They are going to hold general elections in Pakistan, they are going to elect all the generals!" After what happened to us in 1970 after the General Elections, it may not have been a bad idea to have done just that, elect all the generals!

This could be laughed off as a funny suggestion if a school of thought within the army did not seriously believe that. The tragedy is that having conducted the most free elections in Pakistan's history, 1971's generals could not bring themselves to hand over power to those not in line with their thinking. They convinced themselves (and many across the broad spectrum of the body politic willingly became like-minded) that "military action" was good for the sovereignty and integrity of Pakistan, and thereby lost half the country.

Today's uniformed lot have generally been far more sophisticated than their predecessors. Gen Pervez Musharraf's "Martial Law" was well camouflaged, with the "Chief Martial Law Administrator" (CMLA) being called "Chief Executive." However, sophistication goes by the board when power begins to feed on itself and becomes self-perpetuating -- it begins to affect one's better judgement.

A banker with an illustrious career at a renowned US international bank, Shaukat Aziz's elevation to PM will be generally welcomed in the international media as an excellent choice. A western-oriented economist with liberal ideas is in line with the western recipe for progressive democracies of the third world, the perfect foil to the religious intolerance sweeping through the muslim world. In fact Shaukat represents an acid test for Musharraf, a signal to the west not only

or two at one time is considered "rest and recreation," multiple crises at any given time is considered as routine, certainly not beyond the capacity of someone like Musharraf to handle.

The immediate crisis is political. As the winning margins for Shaukat Aziz in the two constituencies in the recent NA by-elections have shown, the powers of incumbency will always influence the peoples' choice to vote for the government's favourite. In both cases PPP candidates suffered massive

defections but under further pressure and frustration, the diehards left in PPP and PML (N) may choose not to go to the unified PML but to regional parties with separatist tendencies in Sindh and Balochistan. While these regional parties still do not have credibility enough in the streets to mount a serious challenge to the Federation, on the issue of water they can arouse emotions enough to do lasting damage for the unity of the country. The first priority for the unified PML is to get its

terrorists in good number proliferate throughout Pakistan.

Nevertheless except for attacking high profile targets like the President, the PM and other VIPs, Al-Qaeda would have to have a death-wish trying to indulge in terrorist activity in Pakistan. The problem is that a number of militant religious organisations have increased their activities alarmingly in copycat fashion, the media publicity t h a t

A l-Qaeda has been getting acts as encour-

a grave danger to the country's image as a responsible member of the comity of nations.

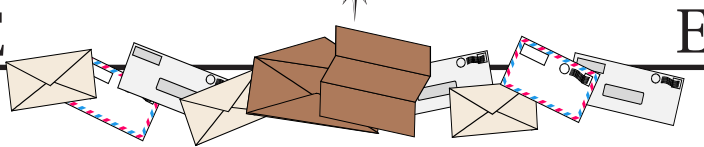
As both the President and the PM have stated, the fact that a number of Al-Qaeda operatives have been captured from the refuge given to them by Jamaat-I-Islami (JI) activists is not enough to ban JI as a party. Even with one's severe reservations about JI's role in sending our youth to die in Afghanistan (they never seem to talk of the connivance of Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Daadullah in handing over to Presidential candidate Rashid Dostum almost all Pakistanis supporting the Taliban defending Konduz in return for the freedom of the Afghan Taliban and himself, Dostum promptly buried alive thousands of Pakistanis in containers in Shebergan), one cannot deny that JI has very faithful and activist cadres who are not only honest and committed Pakistanis but have always been at the forefront of democratic activism.

Relegated to being a democratic minority, along with their parties in the coalition of religious parties, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal, the JI leaders are tasting power for the first time in Pakistan. A JI ban will be God-sent for their cadres, it will create a groundswell of sympathy that may well overwhelm the streets. Individuals who have given safe haven to terrorists must be taken to task but unless there is incontrovertible evidence of JI's active support as a party for Al-Qaeda they should not be a sweeping condemnation of JI as a terrorist organisation.

It is said that the end justifies the means, in the case of Pakistan we have to watch out that the means used may well justify the end, as it almost did in 1971.

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TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



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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.

Clinton's book

Bill Clinton's autobiography My Life has been very carefully edited by a team of expert editors with the proper bandwidth and backgrounds. It appears that the draft has been revised several times, to prune what to add and what to subtract, the angles to project, and which items to relegate to low-key, and which items to highlight.

There are subtle propaganda artifices for enhancement of the image of a political leader on the playing fields of history, past, present and future, the human angle, poverty. Middle class, taxes and an assortment of rights' have been duly emphasized, with a great deal of political analysis, for future judgement by critics and observers. The script would have been different

without the controlling influences of the editorial experts.

Some write their stories, and many dictate these days. The difference jars, and the effects vary on the type of readers. Great leaders like Churchill and Nehru hand-wrote the first drafts. Putting it down on paper organizes the thinking process, and the output undergoes an auto-editing process-- there is a method in the obsession.

Any way, the life of a world leader is worth reading, benefiting the gleaner of the rich harvest from biographies and autobiographies. Nothing like first-hand comments.

Bill Clinton projected himself as a human being, the leadership part is secondary (evolves automatically, as a seedling grows into a tree). But he took time to emphasize how a person

becomes a politician, and how to apply the skills learnt..

In these 957 pages, there are many tips and lessons for the politicians living in different parts of the world, who impose their patriotic spirit on the people (electorate, if democracy prevails.) Reading the book in 2004 in Dhaka, many aspects of US foreign policies are projected sharply in focus, explaining some of the actions, interaction, fall-outs, and consequences which bug the international scene, dominated by a lone super-power, grappling with the use, non-use, and misuse of power and influence.

According to current press reports, Prime Minister Blair in London was thinking seriously of resigning after the Iraq fiasco.

Politics may not be a dirty game, but

the operational environment is shadier than transparent, more questionable than clear, and more complex to the majority of the voters than the politicians project during the election campaigns. They seek the ever-elusive benefit of the doubt, living in a different world.

More notes in the making from daily reading of this fat book. Too much political details and names, not essential for the foreign readers. Like the abridged version of Toynbee's Study of History, someone has to abridge this volume, as a fast-food package. Of course it would be translated into Bangla. Who are in this game in Dhaka? A Mayaz Dhaka

Governance with less

paperwork

The government recently amended some procedures for approving certain categories of draft development projects quickly, with some less paperwork and processing.

Former US president Bill Clinton mentions in his book that during his tenure of eight years, his administration reduced the paperwork in government offices by 16,000 pages of regulations, and cut down the federal workforce by 300,000 personnel, and saved the exchequer \$136 million in tax money.

Let Dhaka set a target for 1,000 pages, to start with. Time limit? From here to eternity! Long live Bangladesh!

AZ, Dhaka

Debating style

The debating style adopted by the school and college students, as seen on BTV, needs to be reviewed by the teachers and authorities.

Regardless of the rich points incorporated in the debates, all debaters hurry, and try to say more than possible within the allotted time, disturbing the poise of the speaker.

They must learn the art of editing, and summarizing their themes within the time available (five or ten minutes). The delivery is too fast, and there is lack of modulation and pauses (watch Vaipayee, the ex Indian PM). What is practised is additive speeches-- cram the audience with a gluttony of words. The question of quantity Vs quality comes in. In art also, we are behind in subtractive art (like Zen painting). In the latter, there is interactive reaction

between the artist and the viewer, as the latter tries to fill in the gaps with his own imagination. That is why the viewer enjoys it more (but all viewers cannot explain it). Dropping a hint and elaborating on a point are different types of art. Eloquence has hidden traps, which a subjective mood cannot detect.

These undesirable habits go later into the public speeches, as we watch our politicians go wild with all sorts of gestures and postures. Why convey language through body language, as in dancing or pantomime? Our language is developed enough to convey complex thoughts without getting passionate.

There are many other points, but this column is not for tutorials.

A Hunsain

Dhaka

Death of Humayun Azad

Dr Humayun Azad, litterateur and professor of Dhaka University, died on August 12 in Germany. The German government is saying that he died of heart attack and it was a natural death, while his family members claim it to be a planned murder, as he was always under the threat of some fanatics. The confusion regarding his death has to be removed once and for all.

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