

Statesman editorial

Lacking acumen, let alone 'statesmanship'

THE Statesman, a well known Indian daily, has run two editorials on the August 21 attack on an AL rally and its aftermath, one of which is titled "Khaleda's game plan: Kill Hasina and banish democracy". We believe it is an outrageous attempt to implicate an elected prime minister in an abortive attempt to assassinate a political rival. It is really unfortunate that the Statesman has violated fundamental journalistic ethics by rushing headlong to a conclusion, when both internal and international investigations into the attack are going on.

However, even more shocking is the suggestion, at the end of one editorial, that it was time for Delhi to act firmly. What does it mean "Delhi should act firmly"? Are we to understand that Delhi was acting all along but softly and now it is time for it to be firm. How does India come into the picture? Does the paper believe that it is India's prerogative to act 'firmly' or 'softly' on Bangladesh's internal matters according to its wishes? We would urge the newspaper to refrain from pursuing the brand of journalism that breeds misunderstanding and misgivings between two neighbouring countries.

Coming back to the charges levelled against Khaleda Zia, it is not known, as no source is quoted, how the newspaper is so convinced that she masterminded the carnage. For The Statesman, it might have been a wild guess, but for us the situation is very disturbing. The two major parties have failed to maintain a working relationship which has created great political uncertainty.

The enormity of the crime perpetrated against the AL is hard to describe. But what citizens of Bangladesh cannot afford at this moment is to indulge in, or entertain, unrestrained speculations which can be extremely detrimental to the interest of the nation.

The media in Bangladesh has been playing an assertive role against terrorism of every denomination. We would like to assure all concerned that in this case also we will continue to perform our job until the killers are brought to justice. We expect the press in neighbouring countries to contribute in a positive way to our fight against terrorism. They must refrain from doing anything that may send wrong signals, especially refrain from making comments that appear to suggest getting involved in the internal affairs of neighbouring countries.

12 Nepalese executed by Iraqi insurgents

Not all the insurgents are heroes

THE recent execution of twelve Nepalese workers in Iraq by a group calling itself Ansar-al-Sunna is only the latest in a long line of kidnappings and executions of innocent civilians carried out by insurgent groups with the aim of terrorising foreign workers into leaving Iraq.

Let us first reiterate a point that has been made countless times in this editorial page before: no cause can justify the terrorising and killing of innocent civilians, and we condemn this brutal mass execution in the most unambiguous of terms.

The fact that the twelve Nepalese hostages who were summarily executed had no personal connection whatsoever with the occupation forces and that Nepal has played no part in the US-led occupation makes the gruesome killings even more egregious and despicable.

This latest atrocity should come as a salutary reminder to those of us who are opposed to the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq that not all of the elements who are fighting against the occupation are noble and heroic.

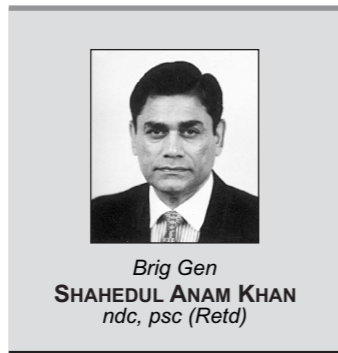
This is not to say that all of the insurgents fighting against what is now the Provisional Government of Iraq are to be equally condemned or that the continued struggle against the appointed (by the US) provisional government is unjustified.

The provisional government is an unelected body that has been installed by the US-led occupation forces, and resistance to it -- even armed resistance -- is a perfectly understandable and justifiable response.

However, a distinction must be drawn between the insurgents who are concentrating their efforts against legitimate military targets and abiding by the rules of war and the norms of civilised conduct, and those who are seeking to terrorise Iraqis and foreigners alike with acts of calculated brutality.

The fact that the cause of the insurgents to rid Iraq of foreign occupation may be just must not blind us to the fact that groups like Ansar-al-Sunna are nothing more than murderous terrorists who deserve the harshest condemnation and denunciation for their horrific acts.

Small arms, big problems



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

THE sorrowful consequences of unbridled diffusion of small arms and light weapons (SA&LW) in Bangladesh were made abundantly clear on August 21. This was not the first time that explosives were used to cause mayhem in Bangladesh, but to our knowledge, it was perhaps the first time that something that is classified under small arms (i.e. hand grenades) was used to wreak havoc on a mass scale.

The issue of small arms has always been a big problem but only events like August 21 brings it to focus.

Illicit proliferation of SA&LW has emerged as a threat to economic and sociopolitical security in the national, regional, and global context. Regrettably, the phrase "small and light" trivialises the lethality of such arms, when in reality their destructive capacity ranges from frightening to actual killing of innocent people. More lives have been lost from the effect of SA&LW through sub-conventional and internal conflicts, in which these weapons were the handiest tools, than in conventional conflict where "large" weapons were used.

These two terms are misleading, serving as a euphemism for large-scale carnage that they are

capable of causing. The harmful impact of these weapons on our society and national security at large is neither light nor small. In an ex-post sense, the effect on our society is far more devastating than "big arms" and "heavy weapons." The impact is not only physical, but also psychological and societal, and therefore lasts longer. The profound impact of the August 21 bears this out. Although we had been living

hundred thousand people are killed annually by small arms fire alone. Because they are inexpensive, simple to use and portable, small arms lower the barrier for violence and terror. Their widespread availability multiplies their lethal effectiveness and makes conflict easier. This is what makes small arms not only weapons of mass terror -- they are actually the weapons of mass destruction. "Small arms" is big business

errand to try to determine the source of these illegal weapons, which are, in fact, many. In most cases quite legitimately produced and procured weapons find their way into illegal transactions through many loopholes not least of which is the improper use of the end user certificate. Small arms are proliferated through both legal and illegal trade.

Easy availability of small arms is what empowers the sub-state

the state, towards the other side. The state is put at a disadvantage.

The important question is, can small arms diffusion be stopped altogether?

It may be difficult to stop the diffusion completely. However, any attempt to curb the phenomenon must take into account the supply as well as the demand side of the equation. One cannot possibly put a cap on the supply side if there are end users at home

the endemic societal violence. When a government fails to ensure fair play, when lack of empowerment stifles human growth, when needs and demands of various elements are overlooked, pockets of discontent begin to appear. They seek to redress the imbalance, perceived or real, by use of force, and weapons acts as an efficacious supplement.

What is often lost sight of when one talks about SA&LW is the natal link between drugs and small arms. There are common characteristics of these two phenomena, one supplements the other and each often generates demand for the other.

What escapes our notice also is the fact that there are close trans-frontier linkages between the dealers of small arms and drugs. The synergy is deep rooted and pervasive.

The problem, being multidimensional, demands a multidimensional approach. While the aspect of physical security predominates the discourse of this issue it would be a folly not to take into account the humanitarian development related component of the matter.

Two important aspects emerge from this issue. First is the universality of the problem, i.e. it cannot be combated in isolation by individual states, but will require the cooperation of the world community, particularly the neighbours. Second and equally important aspect is that it must be tackled in a comprehensive manner where development and security will be synonymous and their objectives coterminous.

The author is Editor, Defense and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

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under the shadow of "large" weapons, mankind is very much the worse for wear due to the internal and sub-conventional conflicts and militancy stemming from ethnic aspirations. Terrorism and use of terror tactics by various groups and the social and political violence, has mutated into an adverse security situation for Bangladesh.

But, whereas there has not been a large scale use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) since August 1945, (except in the Iran-Iraq war and on Halbjia and Pinjwin) the world is seized with the issue of WMD, where sovereign countries are being invaded on suspicion of its possession, and where international laws are being flouted by making WMD an excuse for aggression. Absence of any international treaty or other legal instruments for dealing with these weapons, unlike nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, compounds the problem further.

Let us put the matter in perspective by considering some statistics. By one account, seven

too. According to one report, nearly seven million commercial handguns and long guns were produced during 2000. About 75 percent of these were made in the US or the European Union. At least 98 countries can or do produce small arms and/or ammunition. Around 16 billion units of ammunition were produced during 2001. The global small arms stockpile is estimated at 639 million guns. Approximately 59 percent of this arsenal is in the hands of civilians -- over 377 million weapons. The government armed forces, police, insurgents and other non-state actors own the remainder. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council -- France, Russia, China, the UK, and the US -- together account for 88 percent of the world's conventional arms exports. By another estimate, illicit arms transfer represent at least 50 percent of the total licit international trade, the annual value of which is between three and six billion USD.

It would be running a fool's

and non-state actors. The consequence is the weakening of the state's power and authority. Analyses of scholarship on this issue indicate that sophistication and technological developments favour the terrorists and sub-state actors rather than the government. The upshot of sophistication is the high casualty rates that these weapons are able to inflict.

Insofar as South Asia is concerned, the terrorists and militants have a qualitative edge over the government forces because of the type of small arms and light weapons they possess. Compare the weapons that were hauled up in Chittagong with those that are held by our security agencies and the asymmetry will be clear.

The predicament that governments find themselves in is that, as more and more sophistication in small arms and light weapons are sought by them, and as more such weapons are developed, more and more are these diffused to non-state and sub-state actors, shifting the asymmetry, that should ideally exist in favour of

willing to go to any lengths to acquire these weapons. The causes that motivate demand must be addressed and those factors that exercise duress causing its increased supply must be taken into account to make any control measures workable. Both social and political factors generate demand; in the case of Bangladesh both factors need to be addressed in equal measure.

In Bangladesh, as indeed in the rest of the region, there is a symbiotic relationship between politics and small arms. Small arms have become the arbiter of differences and settling of political scores. Armed militant groups of various shades have easy access to these weapons. That these elements in Bangladesh enjoy political patronage have become patently clear from the confessions of several leaders belonging to hard core criminal groups, apprehended by the security forces in the last few months.

Poor governance has much to answer for the increased weaponisation of our society and

A fresh start for Japan to win a permanent Security Council seat

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

JAPAN'S aspiration to become a real power-player in international politics by becoming one of the few privileged nations holding the powerful veto rights at the United Nations Security Council dates back to country's tremendous economic success in late 1980s. It was also the time when Japan became the top donor nation in terms of total disbursement of official development assistance (ODA), which lifted Tokyo's image in the eyes of recipient countries around the world. The newly found prestige and assertiveness that followed after the country became known as a generous donor to various governments particularly those in Asia, the policymakers in Tokyo somehow came to the conclusion that the next step in gaining increasing international reputation would be to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council, which would allow Japan to exert more leverage in the shaping of a new world order.

It was also a time of confusion, as many things suddenly appeared to be uncertain due to the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Hence there were calls from different quarters to overhaul thoroughly the systems that guided global politics throughout the period of Cold War rivalry. The arrangement for the Eastern Block, the Warsaw Pact, ceased to exist from the moment the Soviet Union was no longer to claim its hegemony over a power-

ful military block standing firmly against the other alliance in the form of NATO. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization itself was also in a shaky position as the purpose for its existence suddenly became vague, as the enemy against which it was supposed to defend the other half of Europe made it clear that it no longer was willing to get involved in the game.

As for the United Nations, the period between late 1980s and

their own demand of allowing the country to become a permanent member of the Security Council. This is how the idea of Japan becoming a permanent Security Council member was born and for the next few years the country was seen trying to convince others about the virtues of allowing Tokyo to play that role.

But it also didn't take much longer for the call of a sweeping reform of the United Nations to die down as the only remaining

destruction of Saddam Hussein continued under the careful guidance of none other than George W. Bush and his close aides, it became further clear that the powerful nations like the United States would need a UN that would be capable only of serving its interest in times of need. The subsequent resolutions passed at the Security Council allowing the warmongers to use them at their will can be looked easily as to be the lowest point the world body

to be the right time to resurface its old demand of getting a permanent seat at the Security Council. When the Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi addresses the UN General Assembly on September 21, he will tell the audience that Japan seeks a permanent seat that would allow Tokyo to take more active part in deciding the course of global politics.

Japan is presently the second largest financial contributor of the

to engage in military activities outside the territorial borders of Japan. Although there are some who are willing to get rid of the article to take part more aggressively in overseas missions like that in Iraq, for which specific law was needed to enact to bypass the constitutional bindings, there are also many in Japan who would find it extremely offensive if there is any attempt to revise article 9 of the constitution. Hence Koizumi has to walk on a tight rope as he is set to renew Japan's demand for permanent membership of the UN Security Council. He has already made it clear he will tell the UN gathering that there will be no change in country's pacifist constitution. But this might not please Japan's closest and powerful ally, the United States, as US Secretary of State Colin Powell and his deputy Richard Armitage have said earlier that Japan should review article 9 if it wants permanent membership. Armitage even hinted that article 9 is hindering the Japan-US alliance.

So, for the time being it looks as if by bringing the idea back to the table Japan simply wants to show the world that it has not backed down from its earlier demand. Much in the future will depend on how other interested players act on this specific issue. There is no doubt the goal for Japan and others is a long term one as the reform of the United Nations itself might turn out to be extremely slow and time consuming.

Article 9 of the Japanese constitutions forbids the country



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early 1990s was a defining moment as many around the world felt that to make the world body a real and vibrant organization capable of serving the purpose for which it was established, there was an urgent need to change and amend thoroughly its structure and functioning. But at the same time, there was little agreement among real players as well as outsiders in world politics on the modality of such changes and also on what really should change. Different quarters started to stress on different aspects of the world body and Japanese policymakers obviously thought it to be the right time to press for

superpower realized that allowing the UN to play an important role might undermine the superiority that it started to enjoy in global politics as being the most powerful nation on earth. Since then, as the UN was forced to a corner, those who were calling for reform also gradually toned down their voices as they came to realize the futility of such reforms in the changing geo-political situation. For Japan too, there was no choice but to give the demand for a permanent Security Council membership a back seat for the time being.

Meanwhile, as the hocus pocus surrounding the weapons of mass

had sunk since the day it came into existence.

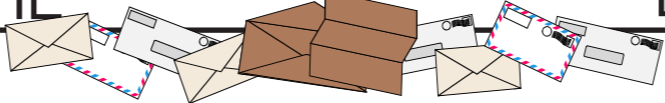
But the muddy water that the soldiers of fortune sent to Iraq by the Bush administration eventually found them submerged into, gave a new lease of life to the UN as it is increasingly becoming clear that it is the UN that probably can show a way out of that deadly trap. With such a realization reemerged all those old debates and demands that were so lively discussed during the first half of 1990s.

As Germany and some other nations are already in the field with the renewed call to reactivate the UN, Japan might have thought

United Nations depends on Japan for almost 20 percent of its total expenditure and this huge financial stake is what fuels Tokyo's desire to become a more active player in global politics. But not everyone is convinced that the role Japan intends to play by becoming a permanent member of the Security Council is going to be a real useful one and there is no shortage of skeptics at home as well, who are concerned that an expanded role of Japan might eventually mean sacrificing country's war denouncing constitution.

Article 9 of the Japanese constitutions forbids the country

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.

Suspect in email threat

The arrest of one Shaibal Saha Partha from a cyber cafe in the city after an email threat was allegedly sent from the same cafe and subsequent news that the authorities may have picked up the wrong person made me wonder if they were trying to make him the scapegoat. I find similarities between Partha's arrest and many of the arrests being made here in the US in the post 9/11 era. I quote here what your New York correspondent wrote (Aug 30) on the protests in NY ahead of the Republican convention where one of the organisers of the protests announced "First of all, ...if you're a recent immigrant who is not a naturalised citizen yet, be very careful. Don't get arrested.... Especially, ...if you look like a Muslim."! The Wash-

ington Post in its Aug 28 issue wrote about how events like the demonstrations centring the Republican convention in NY make people of the Muslim community living in Brooklyn afraid of being picked up for suspicious activities, just because they happen to be Muslims. As of August 29, four days into the arrest, Partha's poor family does not have any information about Partha. No matter what happens and who does what for no matter what cause, it is always the common people who are made to suffer everywhere.

KM Zubair Sadeque
Duquesne University, USA

Fate of terrorists!

I heard the news on Channel 1 at 10:30pm on 29th April 2004 that the mastermind of Shamsur killing was

nabbed. Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and Detective Branch (DB) of Khulna police in a joint operation arrested Asaduzzaman Litu, a charge-sheeted accused in journalist Shamsur Rahman murder case, at Abhoyanagar upazilla of Jessore. When I was listening to the news, I had to prepare myself to listen to another news that Litu had died during a police operation like other charge-sheeted terrorists (Pichchi Hannan, Kala Faruk etc).

Yes, my apprehension came true, on August 30 morning I heard that Litu had died.

Minuara Begum
Gulshan, Dhaka

Email sender and Yahoo

It is very sad to know through your news item that Saibal Saha

Partha who was taken into custody on suspicion of sending an intimidating email to Prothom Alo has been severely tortured before being produced in court for a further four days' remand. One can feel what nightmarish days Partha is passing in the investigation (torture) cell of police.

As per your earlier report, anybody could have sent the message from the Internet cafe in question. It has been reported that the broadband line is also being used by many others. I feel the matter should have been taken up with Yahoo before taking anybody to custody on suspicion. Only God knows what's going on in this country.

Ziauddin Ahmed
On e-mail

AL demand

I was really surprised when I saw in the DS of 29-Aug that the AL now wants an international probe under the UN or Commonwealth to investigate the 21 August grenade attack. Is everyone and everything so hopelessly politicised in Bangladesh that we really cannot think of anybody in our own country to be "neutral" and hence such a demand?

If the UN or Commonwealth have never done such a thing for any other country, will they make a start for the case in Bangladesh?

And, if we are to believe that such an issue relating to national security has to be entrusted to any one of the world-bodies then, instead of making such bits and pieces of requests, we should propose to the rest of the world to make an

arrangement to run all the affairs of our country!
CNR
Chittagong

"Freedom of belief in Islam"

I express my thanks to the writer for such a thoughtful article as well as you for publishing that. There are several fields in which Islam is greatly misunderstood, one of which is freedom of belief.

The writer has nicely clarified the fact before us. She distinguished between punishable and non punishable apostates and has quoted examples from history.

She has also mentioned the reasons of misunderstanding and at last suggested what is to be done. We expect more articles on such topics.
Feroz

On e-mail Keep it up

Your motto: "Journalism without fear or favour" could not ring truer than in the light of the events unfolding following the grenade attack on the opposition leader Sheikh Hasina. The Daily Star is continuing to report objectively and giving detailed and unbiased coverage of the prevailing mood in Bangladesh, which is something I found lacking in other newspapers.

This is precisely the sort of stance that is needed in the aftermath of a terrorist attack and should be promoted amongst the Bangladeshis. Our civil society must not be coerced into silence, but taught to fight these criminals back in every manner possible. The terrorists' goals are self-justifying and open-ended: someday they might want to kill the

mother who is fighting for the cause of mothers in the country or another day they might want to go after their own people.

They have no rational thought process, but an ideology or a belief that is ill-imported and taken out of context. Their grievances against our civil society are not legitimate but invoked, shaped and moulded by sources outside the country. They are a brute force.

The Daily Star's unrelenting efforts in voicing the concerns of the true citizens of Bangladesh for whom the country's peace and well being matter so much will surely go a long way towards fighting these criminals. Well done!

Saadi Islam Chowdhury
English Department, Rajshahi University