

Doomsayers and skeptics

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

THE world is in a fix, uncertain about the foreign and security policies the next Bush administration would take in the next four years. The raging debate has been divided by James Mann (of John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies) into two schools of thoughts: the Doomsayers and the Skeptics. Doomsayers add the Skeptics. Doomsayers would point out that the current Fallujah offensive, legitimating argument being of necessity to clear the way for the Iraq elections early next year advanced by the Allawi government and the US authorities notwithstanding, as incontrovertible proof that the team of Republican cold warriors would continue to hold sway over the Bush White House. They would also point out that the distinct possibility of Colin Powell's exit would "remove the last bulwark against complete neo-conservative control of the US foreign policy". The skeptics would argue that even if the second Bush administration were to expand its highly controversial policy of preventive war in Iraq to other areas to further war on terror and prevent nuclear proliferation it would face military, political, diplomatic and economic constraints rendering such pursuits fruitless. Besides, argues James Mann, the neocons did not control first Bush administration's policy towards China and Russia that conformed to the classic realist principles of Henry Kissinger and former National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft.

Perhaps Colin Powell gave the most authoritative narrative of second Bush administration's foreign policy goals during his most recent visit to Mexico. Powell reiterated that war on terror would remain a priority of the administration, others being consolidation of "success" in Afghanistan, fighting alongside Pakistan "to defeat the Al-

Qaida and Taliban elements that are working in the frontier areas of Pakistan" (reconfirmed to the Pakistani Foreign Minister by Richard Armitage), situation in Iraq, unfolding drama in the Middle East (foremost being Yasser Arafat's health condition), and cementing strong transatlantic relations. Powell's failure to mention Iran issue could be indicative of adjournment of Bush first term policy in view of Franco-German-British negotiations with Iran while relating to North Korea the omission was

in its spirit, and in its movements". The Doomsayers concerns also resonate in the words of Alexander Hamilton that the "spirit of moderation in a state of overwhelming power is a phenomenon which has not yet appeared and which no wise man will expect ever to see".

It has been argued that Bush's running amok as a bull in a china shop in his first term was due to his inexperience with the complexities of the Presidency as he was only a governor of Texas before he became President. Such an argument

preemption replaced the doctrines of containment and deterrence that had served the world well for over fifty years.

It is claimed that Bush's victory over Kerry is due to strong backing from his party's conservative base, urban, Jewish, Catholic and female voters. Many voters cited "moral values" as the most important issue as opposed to economy, terrorism or Iraq. Though forty nine percent of the Americans voted for John Kerry one has to ask oneself as to whether the US has become a conservative

tism and libertarianism because of self-transmutation of their values making their hitherto purist conception a thing of the past. Problems could emerge if a conservative Bush administration disparaging forty nine percent opposition to it as incoherent and dispensable objection by a non-covenanted group embark on a crusade to impose upon the world a neo-conservative agenda with elements of Christian Right and Pentecostal movement forming its inherent parts then a clash of civilizations would be unavoidable. But if instead of pursuing improvident policies Madisonian advice is heeded in that the formation of the government should not only be aimed to control the governed but also to control itself then Bush administration's proclivity to transgress the boundaries of international law based on self-induced conviction of moral imperative to accord legitimacy to conduct exceptional to international law might be kept in check.

If "democracy deficit" is a problem in some parts of the world then "legitimacy deficit" continues to be a problem of some of the actions of the Bush administration. To restore global confidence in the US leadership will take time and sincere efforts by the second Bush administration which would in part depend on the composition of the next administration and the leadership, now that both houses of the Congress are in Republican hands, demonstrated by President Bush.

perhaps due to as yet unformed foreign and defense team of the Bush second administration. One, however, should remind oneself of President Bush's unambiguous declaration in favour of six way talks with North Korea over John Kerry's proposal for bilateral talks.

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However much the skeptics doubt the Doomsayers projections for the next four years it is difficult to foresee a complete transformation of Bush personality from a blind folded racehorse raring to go to a monkish patience and tolerance to see the other side of the coin. Indeed under Bush, writes Robert Tucker and David Hendrickson (Foreign Affairs-Nov/Dec 2004) the United States has assumed many of the very features of "rogue nations" against which it has rhetorically and sometimes literally done battle over the years. They describe Bush policy in the words of Edmund Burke after seeing the French revolutionaries as "military in principle, in its maxims,

becomes untenable if one considers Franklin Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan, Woodrow Wilson, Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton and many others. Only those who are elected President for the second time or have been Vice President can claim familiarity with the labyrinthine intricacies of the Oval Office. Bush chose, according to Ivo Daldaar (of Brookings Institution), not to follow Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman who could have imposed an imperium commensurate with American prowess after the Second World War but chose to create the UN, NATO and Bretton Woods system. Bush's choice to pursue military option ran counter to the four pillars that supported US legitimacy in the post World War II era, writes Tucker and Hendrickson, which were its commitment to international law, its acceptance of consensual decision making, its reputation for moderation, and its identification with the preservation of peace. Doctrine of

Migration of Marxism to the land of no return (despite China and North Korea) has mercifully rid the world of ideological conflict and the end of the Cold War can be compared with the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) as the last of the great wars of religion. Global concern, therefore, is not so much about a possible virulent conflict between conserva-

Arafat as I knew him



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

YASSER Arafat is no more. His dream of a truly independent Palestine remains unfulfilled. I had the good fortune of knowing Yasser Arafat, and work very closely with him for many years. He was the President of Palestinian Authority and most importantly occupied the hearts and minds of the people of Palestine.

I first met Arafat in Rabat, where I had gone to attend the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) Foreign Ministers' meeting. I was Bangladesh Ambassador in Egypt. What struck me about Arafat was not only his trademark baggy trousers, loosely hanging jacket, keffiyeh and unshaven beard but his utter simplicity and straight forwardness. Although it was an OIC Foreign Ministers' Conference, the question of Palestine dominated it and there was an uproar about Egypt, which was expelled from the OIC for having signed a Peace Treaty with Israel.

In 1980 I joined the OIC as its Assistant Secretary General in Charge of Political Affairs, Legal Affairs and Information. Within the OIC Secretariat hierarchy I stood second to Habib Chatty, the Secretary General. I acted frequently as Secretary General. This was September 1980 and the fratricidal war between Iraq and Iran had started. The OIC was faced with the biggest challenge of its decade long existence for its two important members were locked in fierce, bloody battle. The OIC had a Summit meeting - the first of its kind when Heads of State of the member countries met in front of the Holy Kaaba as Koranic verses rang out. The only absentee was Imam Ruhollah Khomeini, who took the stand that since Saddam Hussein, the President of Iraq was the aggressor, he would not sit with him. The Summit decided to set up an eight-member Peace Committee composed of eight Heads of State. Since there was great sensitivity about inclusion of an Arab Head of State, it was decided to include Yasser Arafat along, because Iran had a special feeling about Arafat's struggle for independence against Israel.

Iran had broken diplomatic relations with Israel and handed over its Embassy in Tehran to Arafat. Secretary General Habib Chatty and I represented the Secretariat and organised with the help of Saudi authorities the trip to Tehran and Baghdad trying to bring about a cease fire. Since I was involved with the arrangements I came in close, frequent contact with Arafat. My first impressions about Arafat were confirmed as a man of utter simplicity. He did me the unique honour of sending his Ambassador to Jeddah, who presented his credentials. Gen. Ziaur Rahman, then President of Bangladesh played an important role in trying to find a peaceful

THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

He has left this world and not seen the birth of a Free Palestine. He can rest in peace with the thought that from a fractured people he has galvanised a nation proud of its heritage. He has taught them to fight for their rights and no matter how long and difficult the journey, freedom to the people of Palestine will come sooner than we may think.



solution to the Iran-Iraq war. He invited President Sekou Toure of Guinea, Chairman of the Peace Committee, Chairman Yasser Arafat, Habib Chatty and myself to visit Bangladesh, where he held a mini Peace Committee Summit.

In 1982 I came to Dhaka again and met Sheikh Hasina who had returned from exile and had taken over charge of the Awami League political party, which had played a pioneering role in the creation of Bangladesh. I called on Sheikh Hasina, who told me in the presence of two former Bangladesh Foreign Ministers, Dr. Kamal Hossain and Abdus Samad Azad, that she had been invited to Algiers, where her late father had sent me as Ambassador. She was aware of my closeness to Bangabandhu, whom I profoundly admired, and asked me to help her in her maiden foreign trip. I promised to do my best. On my return to Jeddah I learnt that Arafat was in Jeddah and I met him at his breakfast table (I had by then established fraternal relations with him) and told him that the daughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had taken over the leadership of the Awami League and would attend the AAPSO Conference in Algiers. He promised to help her in every way.

True to his word Arafat contacted Sheikh Hasina in Algiers and as told by Hasina to me in Jeddah, where she came as my guest on her return trip to Bangladesh, that Arafat had looked after her like her father and later invited her to visit Tunis, which had become his headquarters. I believe it was in 1982 that Arafat and his close comrades-in-arms were surrounded by the troops of the Israeli military chief Ariel Sharon in Beirut, the capital of Lebanon. The Palestinians, whose headquarters was then Damascus, the capital of Syria, invited me to Damascus to show OIC solidarity with Palestine struggle.

Along with his struggle on the

ground Yasser Arafat has carried on a world wide campaign for the establishment of a homeland for his people. He came tantalisingly close during the Presidency of Bill Clinton with the USA. It is doubtless beyond a shadow of doubt that for the foreseeable future US direct involvement is essential for a solution of the half century old Palestine-Israel conflict. During the Presidency of Bill Clinton there was more than a ray of hope as the US President was perfectly even handed in dealing with the Palestinians and the Israelis, who have such a powerful influence in the USA. During Bill Clinton the White House doors were wide open for Arafat and the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak. During the last four years of US President George Bush, we have witnessed the pendulum tilting totally towards Ariel Sharon and no handshake with Arafat, although the US prides in carrying democracy throughout the world and Arafat is one rare Arab leader elected by his own people. Sharon has vowed publicly to kill Arafat and has held him in Ramallah in inhuman conditions. Arab world is awash with rumours that Sharon's men have poisoned Arafat.

I grieve for my friend Yasser Arafat. He has left this world and not seen the birth of a Free Palestine. He can rest in peace with the thought that from a fractured people he has galvanised a nation proud of its heritage. He has taught them to fight for their rights and no matter how long and difficult the journey, freedom to the people of Palestine will come sooner than we may think.

I pray for the salvation of the soul of Brother Arafat. It has been a great event of my life to have known President Yasser Arafat.

Arshad-Uz Zaman is a former Ambassador.

The biotechnology trap: Real or hypothetical

HASEENA KHAN

ONE of the pages on agriculture of a vernacular daily had a lead story on the possibility of growing mustard in the saline coastal regions of Bangladesh. This story was on the success of the scientists of Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture in using gamma radiation to get a variety of mustard which could tolerate the salinity of the coastal regions. This was heralded as a success, which I think it is.

Are we trying to kid ourselves by thinking that GM would lead to overexploitation of our land? Does it mean we are not overexploiting it now? That would definitely be wishful thinking. GM is all about bringing fallow land under agriculture like the saline coastal belt, or growing crops in flood prone or drought prone regions. This does not agree with overexploitation. Any debate on GM is good. General public needs to be made aware about both the potentiality and the dangers of this new technology. It is important to see which outweighs the other.

But wait a minute, is it not known that what gamma radiation does is introduce mutations

or changes in the genetic material? Then is this not genetic modification? Do I see any environmentalist protesting against it, resisting its release? I do not think any such thing will happen, because it never has. Even if there had been any protest it had never been strong enough to stop its use. Perhaps it had been realised that such technology was after all, beneficial. We have had been using radiation for crop improvement for quite a long time now.

Mr. Nazrul Islam, a journalist and an environmentalist did mention in his November 1 Daily Star article titled The Biotechnology Trap that some debate had been generated when nuclear technology was introduced. But this has subsided and now we are debating more vehemently about GM.

Tampering with the underlying structures of an organism -- by means of changing the genetic material that help make that organism may raise alarms in many. But have we ever thought about the consequences brought about by the use of radiation in getting a particular breed of a plant, a method that has been in use in our country for quite a long time now?

As in the mustard story, gamma radiation is used in such cases to bring about a desired change in the DNA molecule (a molecule that controls the uniqueness of the plant and all living beings for that matter) and then plants are selected for the acquisition of a particular trait. While selecting for a particular trait what we often overlook is the fact that many more changes would have been induced by the radiation. These changes at the DNA level can bring about other unforeseen changes. This is something our environmentalists conveniently ignore.

Would anyone who has any knowledge about the chemical composition of DNA, the genetic material, deny that causing changes in the DNA molecule using gamma ray does not constitute a genetic modification (GM)?

Why is it then we fear genetic modification only when this is induced by transgenicity? We get a transgenic plant when we introduce a foreign gene (a gene is a piece of DNA molecule that confers a particular trait) into the plant. We know of plants which grow in the marshy saline regions of the Sunderbans. These plants grow on saline land because they

have specific genes, genes which allow such growth. What if we identified those genes, isolated them from the saline tolerant plant, and put them in a plant that does not grow in salty coastal regions, like the afore-mentioned mustard or rice? Why would introducing changes in the DNA molecule by radiation be safer than putting in a gene from another plant? The later approach is more targeted and does not bring about random changes in the DNA molecule as happens in the case of radiation mutation.

With our ever-growing human population, we need to explore every possible avenue to help increase food production. Our farmers will readily embrace any technology as long as it is affordable and profitable. It would be unwise to throw away any valuable tool using philosophical arguments and claiming hypothetical risks. There had always been people who resisted new technology. If we look back into history we will find those few visionaries who saw the potentials of new technology and pressed ahead. For what they did often at great personal risk, we enjoy the benefits of technology today.

There is this small but vocal minority of misinformed and misguided activists who are opposed to genetic modification of our crop varieties. Should we let them dictate us?

Today we are faced by the challenges of feeding the growing population in the ever-declining agricultural land. We would be better served if these problems were tackled using technology available to us, rather than let them be side-tracked because of fears of new technology. Our fears must be debated in a spirit of scientific openness. Above all, it must be remembered that no one has a monopoly on truth and knowledge -- certainly not those who are unwilling to accept that there are two sides to every issue.

Because of the visible means by which global corporations are consolidating their control over the food industry, genetic engineering has inspired opposition in many countries of the world.

Yes, we may be fearful of the MNCs. We need to be. But why fear a new technology without actually ascertaining if there is any ground to be fearful? Even if the "real interest of the MNCs in genetic engineering is not to

make third world agriculture more productive but rather to generate profits" it does not mean that we should sit idle and not develop manpower and infrastructure in genetic engineering so that we are able to initiate our own research into developing transgenic crops in our country.

If we are always advocating fear and resistance, most of which is unjustified and biased, how can the right kind of public awareness be generated? An awareness that would be necessary to get public funding for such research? It does not take much to realise that without our own research base in such areas, we are bound to fall prey to MNCs. Negative opinion on GM technology can therefore be very damaging.

It is claimed that eating transgenic food in which new proteins are produced can give rise to allergic reactions or cause toxicity or is thought to alter the metabolism of the food producing plant or animal. For quite some time now Bt soyabean has been in the markets of the US and some other countries including perhaps Bangladesh (since there are no monitoring system in operation in Bangladesh it is quite likely that transgenic processed food may already have made way into our markets). Allergenicity due to such food would have been noticed at least in the countries where availability of such food is public knowledge. And also all the fear of toxicity and alteration of the metabolic pathway of the genetically modified organism (plants in this case) can also be attributed to crops improved through use of radiation.

There is also no reason why GM crops should mean mechanisation and thus displace farmers from the land, as feared by Mr. Islam. A GM crop is like any other crop, and is cultivated in the same way as any other crop, and there is no requirement of mechanisation. There could be movements for resisting displacement of farmers from their land through the introduction of machines, by unscrupulous business people. But this is a completely different story and has nothing to do with GM crops.

Are we trying to kid ourselves by thinking that GM would lead to overexploitation of our land? Does it mean we are not overexploiting it now? That would definitely be wishful thinking. GM is all about bringing fallow land under agriculture like the saline coastal belt, or growing crops in flood prone or drought prone regions. This does not agree with overexploitation.

Any debate on GM is good. General public needs to be made aware about both the potentiality and the dangers of this new technology.

It is important to see which outweighs the other.

Haseena Khan, Ph.D. is Professor and Chairperson, Department of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, Dhaka University.



Dr. Rubaitul Murshed
All health information to keep you up to date
Please get your Blood Pressure checked

HIGH Blood pressure (hypertension) is indeed a silent slayer or killer. As it is usually asymptomatic, it is sensible to check your blood pressure (BP) routinely. And if you have headaches, blurred vision, feel dizzy or sleep disturbances, a thorough screening is essential. Many young men and women are suffering from high blood pressure these days in Bangladesh (probably mostly in the cities) along with aged people. According to some medicine specialists, "only half of the affected have been identified; only half of the identified have been managed, and only half of those are satisfactorily treated." If treated in time one could have been saved from "retinopathy" (limiting vision/eyesight), "paralytic attack" (brain-chances increase seven fold) or peripheral arterial disease (pain on walking). As well high BP can damage your kidneys and there could be erectile dysfunction (penis reduces its rigidity). Chronic hypertension also causes pregnancy related problems along with growth retardation and premature birth. But above all, high BP is a major risk factor for stroke and myocardial infarction (squeezing pain in the centre of the chest caused by occlusion of one or more of the coronary arteries).

Study reveals that high blood pressure speeds up the formation of fatty acids in the arteries, and puts the heart under additional damage. Our heart is the vehicle that drives us through existence. Chances of angina or heart attack add to three-fold in cases of hypertension (high BP) people.

Blood Pressure (BP): What does it mean?

Blood Pressure is the pressure of blood flow. Heart endlessly pumps blood through blood vessels to different parts of the body. The flow produces pressure against the vessel walls. Blood Pressure is a measure of this pressure. This value is affected by innumerable factors, the more important being the condition of one's heart and arteries. Arteries that are clogged affect the flow of blood circulation and limit the amount of blood to heart, following in strokes or heart attacks.

How is BP properly measured?

BP measurements are indicated by 2 numbers, e.g., 140/90 mmHg, 120/80 mmHg. The higher number is the systolic blood pressure (top value) and is the pressure in the arteries when the heart is pumping blood. The other number indicates the diastolic blood pressure (bottom value) and measures the lower pressure when the heart is at rest between beats.

But remember, one or two readings may not indicate the true blood pressure. By taking regular readings at a predetermined time each day, you will be alerted with any irregularities and early precautionary action can be taken against potential health problems. The World Health Organisation has set a classification or standard by which blood pressure, whether systolic or diastolic, is compared. This helps to decide whether your pressure readings are considered high or low. Then again, for children the numbers are different; and special tables are obtainable with child specialists.

Did you know?

No BP drugs or medicine can help (a hypertensive) if not accompanied by healthy eating habits and regular exercise. Don't forget, if you would like some more advice, pop into your local clinic/health centre/hospital and talk to the doctor.

Irresponsible art and tragic death

Theo Van Gogh's Submission

By pushing society into chaos, Van Gogh's killer hoped to spark a conflagration between the Netherlands and its Muslim immigrants. Calmer heads must prevail in the days ahead. Muslims are now part of the European fabric -- they cannot be considered outsiders, nor should they be treated as such.

NAAEM MOHAIEEMEN

IT is no longer possible to view *Submission* and give a "balanced" response to the work. No matter what our feelings about the effectiveness or irresponsibility of the film, director Theo Van Gogh's shocking murder is the unspoken shadow that now lies over any discussion of it.

Following Van Gogh's sudden murder on an Amsterdam street, the Muslim community condemned the killing loudly. Clerics clearly stated that, this was no way to conduct debate in civilised societies. Freedom of speech must be valued and respected.

But these statements of disavowal were not enough for those on the Dutch right who would exploit this tragedy to further a racist agenda.

Van Gogh's death has provided the perfect excuse for the simmering xenophobia that lurks underneath Europe's genteel surface. Fiery anti-Muslim demagogue Pym Fortuyn also exploited these tensions, before his assassination by a Dutch animal rights activist.

Ironically, Van Gogh was an admirer of Fortuyn and had just finished a documentary about him. Already, after Van Gogh's death, there is talk of developing a national database that will track the "risk profile" of immigrants in the Netherlands.

Over the weekend, Dutch racists firebombed eight mosques and a Muslim school, signalling a scary trend that is likely to continue as the

European right seeks to battle what they call the "enemy within."

The memories of Kristallnacht in Germany are not that distant, and they could still be repeated within this century against European Muslims.

Women's rights within Islam are a long-debated topic. There are myriad crises in the way that Muslim peoples and countries treat women. But many of these issues are linked to culture, demagoguery, misogyny, poverty and above all, male fear of female advancement -- not religion. Religion is only the excuse, but in fact there is very little in Islam that condones such behavior.

But Theo Van Gogh had little patience for such nuanced discussions. Instead, *Submission* is a jumbled attack on abuse of Muslim women, which makes no distinction between distortion of religion, and actual theology.

Telling the story of a Muslim woman who is pushed into a forced marriage and then raped by her uncle, the 9-minute film intersperses a voice-over with images of Quranic *ayats* on walls, and a praying woman.

The core of the *Submission* controversy is over one incendiary piece of imagery. The praying woman is completely naked, the only part or her that is covered is her face, with a supposedly "Islamic" veil. Across her breasts, navel, and thighs are a thin diaphanous cloth -- through which text from the Quran is clearly visible on her body. Nude to the camera, she repeatedly bows down to pray -- even reading a Sura from the Quran at the beginning of the film.

The camera lingers with a fetishist's eye over her nakedness, at one point zooming in on her raised finger (used during prayer to indicate the one-ness of God). The nudity adds nothing to the critique, but it applies a devastating slap to the face of Muslim piety.

There are many valid critiques of the Muslim world's treatment of women, and there is much reform that is needed. There are many critiques and reform work that is being done by Muslim theorists, activists, and academics like Fatima Mernissi, Asma Jahangir, Lella Ahmed, Amina Wadud, and Kecia Ali, among others.

But that reform needs to be through constructive critique, not through irresponsible provocations. If Van Gogh sincerely intended to "help" Muslims, to reform them -- he would have made a different film.

Though Van Gogh's work was irresponsible, damaging, and filmed with thinly-veiled contempt, nothing can justify his murder. Just as Van Gogh was intolerant of Muslims, his killer was intolerant of free speech. In many ways, his murderer is the flip side of the Dutch racists.

By pushing society into chaos, Van Gogh's killer hoped to spark a conflagration between the Netherlands and its Muslim immigrants. Calmer heads must prevail in the days ahead. Muslims are now part of the European fabric -- they cannot be considered outsiders, nor should they be treated as such.

Naaem Mohaiemen is New York correspondent for The Daily Star.