

We demand a white paper

Biman must set its house in order before buying planes

AFTER the DC-10 accident in Chittagong on July 1, the drawn-out salvage operation is just about approaching the finishing line. And, the promptly constituted inquiry committee is far from putting its pen to paper; yet, here we are now, being served up with the news that Biman has government's nod to acquire four new aircrafts to its fleet since reduced to 18 after the accident.

The state minister for civil aviation without a spot of bother has had, actually, the temerity of proposing ten new aircrafts, as though 'hitting the iron when it is hot'. The finance minister has agreed to buy four, but one only hopes without resort to suppliers' credit.

Biman, the national flag carrier, could turn out to be a national shame if the cascading falls in its standards of management, operational efficiency and passenger safety are not arrested and a radical improvement effected in those vital areas.

In Sylhet, the blessings of Hazrat Shah Jalal (R) saved a Biman disaster while those of Shah Amanat came to the rescue of the passengers aboard the DC-10 in Chittagong, the finance minister quipped wondering how long the dervishes could bless us to survive despite our failings. The state minister for civil aviation admitted to losing sleep at night on 25-year-old vintage aircrafts! What kind of a fleet are we flying and the safety concerns we are reflecting for the passengers?

Whichever way one might look at the situation, the objective conditions cannot but raise questions about the state minister's leadership quality and his levels of competence. The very image of Biman reeks with corruption and mismanagement in the public mind.

There is no escaping an impression, therefore, that Biman is using the latest accident as a ploy to push its proposal for buying new planes which might only fatten the purse of some high-ups through commission payments and kickbacks. Only five months ago, the finance ministry had shot down the proposal for buying new aircrafts underscoring the pressing need for overcoming mismanagement as a better alternative. What has occasioned the change of heart?

We demand that a white paper be issued on all aspects of the running of Biman's affairs as soon as possible. Also, we want a high powered inquiry committee set up to go into the whole question of Biman's operational deficiencies, including commercial pitfalls and passengers safety standards. It is very strange that while reputed international airlines are increasing their numbers of flights into Dhaka to serve wide ranging passenger flows, Biman Bangladesh Airlines is on a declining course.

Bravo, London!

We share your moment of joy

OUR heartiest congratulations to Britain on her winning the bid to host the 2012 Olympics. It definitely was a 'golden day' for the country as mentioned by the British media after the announcement was made on Wednesday amidst much fanfare and celebration. The extraordinary team effort by the British, from the members of Royal family to a host of sport stars, in putting together a winning bid, has earned the appreciation of the Bangladeshis watching it all happen nearer home in Singapore.

We share the joy, happiness and jubilation of the British people. This, not only because we have historical ties and excellent contemporary bilateral relations with Britain, but also because there is a huge Bangladeshi Diaspora in the UK, serving not just the host country but their country of origin as well. It is especially heartening that the centre-stage of the games will be East London where a large number of South Asians, mainly Bangladeshis, live. We can't forget British leaders' contributions towards the cause of Bangladesh's freedom in 1971.

The win will no doubt boost the morale of the British people in a big way and will rejuvenate their economy which is already on a strong footing with sizeable investments over a period of time. It will have spin-off effects on the tourism industry even before and after the games.

But let's not forget that organising such a monumental sporting event has its risks which can only be obviated through impeccable coordination at every step of the way to the grand finale.

Some of the countries that had hosted the games in the past have reeled from the excess expenses and costs they entailed. We hope Britain will not fall into that trap.

A city that has had a failed football World Cup bid, a city that has not hosted the Olympics since 1948, a city that had very little hope even four years ago, is now having a leap of its mind to heartily rejoice in.

Bush policy of arrogance: More foes, few friends

SYED ASHAUQUE HAQUE

IT is not just the US that has changed irrevocably after the most horrendous attack on America on September 11, 2001. The whole world has changed since then, and yet many in the West have little idea about how much the change has been.

A potentially bigger change is taking place, though, in Muslim countries that is fuelling fanaticism and strengthening fundamentalist forces, and weakening the secular bases. And Bangladesh, which has a long history of being a moderate Muslim nation, is not spared from the 9/11 fallout, either.

The greatest tragedy of 9/11 is not what the US lost on that fatal morning but what the world has lost since then — which is a lot. The support or non-support for al-Qaeda, Saddam Hussein, or the Taliban is not contributing to the gradual change in the Muslim world, as moderate Muslims never regarded those ultra-Islamists as Islamic heroes taking on the infidel. Rather, it's the post-9/11 US policy that bracketed together the secular Muslims and the Islamist militants, greatly contributing to the cause of religious fundamentalists

across the globe.

Secular Muslims have been quite understandably caught on the horns of a dilemma over taking a position on George W. Bush's war on terror. They could subscribe neither to terrorism being perpetrated in the name of Islam nor to Bush's post-9/11 foreign policy pursued with outrageous arrogance.

Iraq war, false WMD cry

Like other Muslims nations, Bangladesh could not throw its weight behind the second US-led invasion of Iraq justified on a false cry for weapons of mass destruction. The attempt of Bush and his 'well-dressed butler' — as The Economist once put — Tony Blair, the British prime minister, to link Osama bin Laden's Taliban with former Iraq dictator Saddam failed to convince even their rabid supporters in the Muslim world.

Feeding the world half-truths and distorted facts, the US war-mongers delved into this dirty war in Iraq, which led to the killings of thousands of innocent civilians and a queerly spectacular rise of insurgency. The US war against its former henchman Saddam made the Iraqi people easy targets of

The 21st century world



ZAFAR SOBHAN

I have recently returned from the inaugural summit of the Forum of Young Global Leaders held in Zermatt in Switzerland from June 24-28. The idea behind the forum is to bring together young men and women from around the world who have demonstrated leadership capacity or potential (apparently defined somewhat broadly) and commitment, and to create a network of influential actors to address issues and problems of a transnational nature from a transnational perspective.

The meeting had three components. The first component was a series of presentations given to us by experts in the five designated areas of focus: health, environment, global governance, poverty and development, and education. The first day we were also treated to a powerful lecture by Professor Hans Rosling from the Karolinska Institute (Sweden) on historical trends and what they can tell us about the future.

The second component was workshops, in which we tried to isolate the key problems in each of the designated fields and brainstorm possible solutions, and panel discussions and question and answer sessions, where we got to both pick the brains of the experts present as well as voice our own ideas.

Finally, there were sessions in

which we discussed the organisational and operational structure of the forum and how we should proceed in the coming years.

The first thing I noticed about the summit was similar to what I had noticed when I attended the World Economic Forum annual meeting at Davos in January.

In the US, where I have spent most of my adult life, there is still a big debate as to the responsibility individuals bear towards one

another and the appropriate role of the state in solving society's problems. There are many conservatives who believe that the good society is one in which each person acts solely in his or her own self interest, and that this understanding should be the basis for public policy and private endeavour, and that we do not have any responsibility, either individually or collectively, to one another, or to help remedy the ills and injustices of society at large.

I remain astonished that a view which is so transparently and self-evidently incorrect should retain such currency, but that is an argument that can wait for another day.

The interesting thing was that at Zermatt this point of view was dismissed out of hand without discussion. The basic premise of our all being there and addressing the issues we were addressing was that there is such a thing as the global community, and as such, we all have a collective responsibility to bring about change for the better.

Thus, diseases such as Aids and malaria which kill over a million people a year are not just the problem of the stricken countries, but of all of us. The same understanding goes for issues of poverty and development in the third world.

Such an understanding is especially crucial to addressing the issue of the environment, as the environment is the pre-eminent issue requiring a transnational solution, due to the fact that climate change

does affect all of us (though some more than others) in a way that, say, malaria might not.

The basic premise behind the forum is that the continued existence of extreme poverty and ill health are moral obscenities in a time of such widespread global prosperity, and that we have a duty as a global community to rectify this.

This understanding gets to the heart of what we at the summit determined was the real dilemma that the world is facing today.

One can argue that the 20th century was the century which saw the concept of the common good and the government's responsibility to its citizens first assert itself with muscularity at the national level, and that the principle struggle of the 20th century was the struggle between conceptions of national interest and narrow self-interest.

The pre-eminence of the idea of the national interest is what helped build the nation states and laid the foundation for concepts such as

unemployment insurance and social security and nationalised health. Of course there is still much debate over these issues (especially in the US), but by and large, the 20th century saw the establishment of the social welfare model for the modern state, and the triumph of the idea that the individual good should be subordinated to the common good.

In the 21st century, the problem will be how to view things from a

were willing to do is in the interests of the common global good.

Bush recently reiterated this point in an interview ahead of the G-8 summit when asked about aid to Africa. He would act in what he perceives to be the interests of the US. Period.

Right now that is more or less how most countries feel to some extent. The US is not the only offender in this respect. European agricultural subsidies that contribute to the

or, more precisely, the Bush administration — is driving world affairs. The Bush administration does not believe in a multilateral world order. It does not believe in the concept of the common global good. It believes in acting solely in its own self-interest. It should thus not be surprised when other countries such as Iran or North Korea do the same.

If the most powerful country in the world is concerned only with looking out for number one, then you can bet that the rest of the world will follow suit.

But as I said at the start of this piece, the good thing about this forum is that it is committed to this vision of a world of interdependence and shared responsibility.

And this to me is our central challenge.

In each country there are those who look at things through the prism of narrow national self-interest. Indeed, some would consider it treason to do otherwise.

But even as markets have been globalised, what is lagging behind is our sense of global community. The sense that we are all in this together. The sense that the life and livelihood and health of people in far-off lands are important things for us to be concerned about. The sense that we should look beyond our narrow national self-interest to the global good.

This is my hope for the forum. We aren't going to solve the problems of the world. But if we can somehow, in each of our countries, promote this agenda, and help push the world to a recognition of our collective responsibility for our shared destiny, I feel we will have performed a worthwhile service.

Zafar Sobhan is Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

Attack on pluralism



KULDEEP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

THERE are two ways of looking at the attack on the Ram Janmabhoomi-cum-Babri masjid complex in Ayodhya where a makeshift temple has stood since the demolition of the masjid some 14 years ago. One is that it is a terrorist act which India is experiencing every now and then. The other is that some elements are bent upon disturbing pluralism and homogeneity in the country and they particularly chose Ayodhya to stoke the Hindu-Muslim tension.

If we take the first possibility, the normal reaction would be to tighten the security and improve the intelligence apparatus to foil such occurrences. New Delhi has done that and has re-alerted the states. Still a high-level inquiry is needed to know all about the attack. There is no doubting that the Congress-ruled Centre and the Mulayam Singh Yadav-ruled Uttar Pradesh, which have been jointly asked by the Supreme Court to protect the complex till the disposal of the case, were not as vigilant as the situation demanded. It has been officially announced that the Centre had warned that religious

places in the country could be attacked.

The second assumption is more credible, because despite many attempts in the last eight-ten years, no communal disturbance of consequence has taken place. Apparently, this is not the liking of the Sangh parivar which thrives in an atmosphere where it can arouse suspicion against the Muslim community and where the Hindus look under siege in their own country. It is

realise that the Hindus by and large voted against the BJP in the last general elections for having tried to saffronise the society. The mood in the country is different. The parivar has not been able to sell the mandir despite its several attempts.

The manner in which the militants' attack was decimated in no time shows that if the government is determined to deal with a situation, it cannot go out of hand. This was in contrast to the BJP government

tion to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the parivar's militant group. Within an hour Praveen Jagodia announced a countrywide bandh for a week. A few incidents of disturbances have already taken place. At present the BJP has preferred to state its protest at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, not at the complex in Ayodhya. However, one doesn't know whether at some stage Advani may have another yatra to reproach his credentials.

underline the importance of a settlement at Ayodhya. The case has been going on for years and the end is nowhere near. Even the Liberhan commission, appointed 14 years ago to find out the gamut of the demolition of the mosque, is still continuing with limitless extensions. It suits the Sangh parivar to keep the pot boiling because the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri masjid dispute is its main plank.

But what is not understandable is

democratic India where communalism, isolation, untouchability, bigotry, and exploitation of man by man have no place, and, while religion is free, it is not allowed to interfere with the political and economic aspects of a nation's life. All this business of Hindu and Muslim and Christian and Sikh must cease so far as our political life is concerned, and we must build a united but composite nation where both individual and national freedoms are secure.

Islamabad's quick condemnation of the attack was welcome. So was the statement by Hizbul Mujahideen which characterised it as "anti-Hindu and anti-Muslim." However, it is unfortunate that the Lakshar-e-Toiba, which is a suspect in the terrorist act, continues to have its headquarters in Pakistan.

According to Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee, the terrorist camps are still intact in Pakistan; the infiltration has decreased because of India's vigilance, not by any Pakistani action.

Assurances by New Delhi and Islamabad that the peace process will continue indicate the confidence which the two sides have developed in each other. The redeeming factor is that both Manmohan Singh and President General Pervez Musharraf have hit it off well. They can take care of the fallout from incidents like the one at Ayodhya. However, the disconcerting part is that Islamabad does not want to proceed on the confidence building measures until Kashmir is sorted out. This is like waiting for the cows to return home.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Islamabad's quick condemnation of the attack was welcome. So was the statement by Hizbul Mujahideen which characterised it as "anti-Hindu and anti-Muslim." Assurances by New Delhi and Islamabad that the peace process will continue indicate the confidence which the two sides have developed in each other. The redeeming factor is that both Manmohan Singh and President General Pervez Musharraf have hit it off well. They can take care of the fallout from incidents like the one at Ayodhya.

unfortunate, but the reaction of the parivar has been on these lines.

The parivar has interpreted the terrorist attack as an attack on Hinduism. (I was amused to see Jaswant Singh saying so because he is supposed to be sober). Strange, the five terrorists who were killed even after piercing through the first barricade should have posed a threat to the entire Hindu community of more than 800 millions. But then the parivar has to exaggerate things. Its agenda is different. It wants a Hindu rashtra instead of the plural society we have. The parivar believes that it is a godsend opportunity to reinforce its Hindutva stance and wants to exploit it to the hilt. Little does it

under Kalyan Singh, who was at the back of the masjid's demolition. Top BJP leaders watched the destruction with glee. A photo of Uma Bharti riding the shoulders of Murl Manohar Joshi is a testimony to the BJP's doing. L.K. Advani called on the crowd then to throw burning tyres on the road to stall the central forces which, in any case, did not act. Then Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao was a "reluctant partner" at the Centre.

The intention of RSS is clear. It wants to have the maximum political mileage out of the attack and does not seem to mind any fallout, even violence. That is the reason why it has entrusted the job of agita-

Narendra Modi, as he is, has announced Rs 10 lakh as compensation to every injured jawan at Ayodhya. He should be spending the money on the rehabilitation of thousands of people hit by the floods in the state.

The Gujarat riot victims are far from settled. He needs every penny. Worse, he is setting new precedents. He could have sent money to chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav or, still better, to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The BJP-ruled states have been behaving since their defeat at the polls, as if they are a category by themselves, ruled by Nagpur and not New Delhi.

The incident does, however,

why the non-BJP parties in the NDA are playing into the hands of the parivar? The stake is pluralism and more. The parivar does not realise that the foundation of the democratic structure is laid on the foundation of secularism.

Once that is weakened, the entire edifice may come crumbling down. The parivar expects the Hindu rashtra emerging from the ruins.

Like Mohammad Ali Jinnah's famous speech of August 11, where he foresaw Pakistan as a secular country, Jawaharlal Nehru's speech on December 13, 1947, at the Allahabad University was equally significant. He said:

"We aim at a strong, free and

The Bush administration has to understand Islam first before deciding about who it should fight with or against. The US leadership has to accept the conventional wisdom that war is by no means the only remedy to terrorism. Also, Bush has to realise the fact that any real change in the Muslim world should come from within and not be imposed by any US might.

assault from both insurgents and the US war allies alike.

Needless to mention, the reports on false WMD claim, brutal torture of Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib and other Iraqi jails, and abuse of Quran by a few US soldiers at Guantanamo Bay could only enrage the Muslims at the alliance's lying for its unjust war, spreading hatred towards the US policy of aggression.

The heat of a muted anger against the mindless war could be felt among predominantly secular Muslims in Bangladesh. And that set the stage for the fundamentalist forces in Bangladesh to capitalise on the general sentiment against the present US policy. Many previously unheard-of religious outfits brought out rallies, burnt Bush effigies and chanted slogans against the US in which the secular Muslims saw little to object

to.

New world order

In the post-9/11 US policy, the countries that were reluctant to join Bush's war on terror were regarded as allies of terrorism. Such arrogance of America's cowboy president only could help the world get dangerously divided, forcing scores to believe that the Bush war is a sort of American jihad, its own brand of fundamentalism, against Islamist terrorists as well as peace-loving Muslims.

The world had a new order as formulated by the US, with South Asian nuclear rivals India and Pakistan scrambling to win the Bush heart first. India leaped to seize the opportunity to kill a few birds with one strategic stone. That move forced army-ruled Pakistan to choose, and it has chosen to take a guarded 'secular

route' amidst outcry from Muslims.

A new South Asian order based solely on loyalty to the US policy is not what Bangladesh wanted at the expense of its characteristics as a moderate religious nation. So, Bangladesh not only missed out on the US offer but not openly supporting the US war in Iraq, but also remained oblivious of the fact that the ultra-Islamic militants could choose this very country, ridden with corruption and embroiled in confrontational politics, as their next destination.

Secular Muslims in Bangladesh sadly witnessed the rise of religious hard-liners who conventionally cashed in on the anti-America sentiment. All grenade attacks, blasts, assaults on the Ahmadiyya community, and activities of radical religious organisations that have occurred in Bangladesh since 9/11

appeared to have similarity with those in Pakistan. Many in civil society believe that these are the by-products of the US war in Afghanistan and bordering Pakistan, and that the US was unusually quick to spread its terror war over Asia, but painfully slow to help the affected countries to take care of the war baggage.

Human rights concern

Secret trials, eavesdropping on the Internet, racial profiling, and mass detentions now form the essence of the US policy, or at least it seems so.

Rights groups have been accusing the US of grossly violating people's basic civil and human rights, with Amnesty International observing that the war on terror must not be an excuse to deny these rights.

The controversial Patriot Act

that has allowed the US agencies to 'sneak and peak' searches of people's homes and offices sent a chill down the spine of the Muslim population of America, severely curtailing their freedom since 9/11.

The situation is so suffocating that scores of Bangladeshi-Americans started telling their relatives back home that they no longer want to live in what once was the land of freedom.

A Bangladeshi professor living in New York had to part with his 30-year-old beard in fear of possible harassment by law-enforcing agencies and anti-Muslim groups.

A 16-year-old girl, Tashnuba Hayder, was arrested in New York City on the charge of 'domestic terrorism' by the FBI. But after weeks of intense interrogation, she was deported to Bangladesh for violating immigration laws! The American media ran stories on the traumatised Tashnuba and her family, depicting chilling details of police-state intimidation and anti-Muslim persecution.

Many such stories of harassment are there, and all these tales

of horror have won America more foes than friends in Bangladesh.

Conclusion

The Bush administration has to understand Islam first before deciding about who it should fight with or against. The US leadership has to accept the conventional wisdom that war is by no means the only remedy to terrorism. Also, Bush has to realise the fact that any real change in the Muslim world should come from within and not be imposed by any US might.

If need be, the US can focus on changing the internal dynamics in Muslim countries by strengthening secular forces.

It is about time the US abandoned its military atrocities and foreign policy of arrogance and tried to understand why it is hated so much all over the world.

There is not much to argue if one says that only a policy of patience and pragmatism will surely help the Bush administration win over the Muslim world. At least, I won't.

The author is Joint News Editor of The Daily Star.