

Unfortunate border killings *Contradictions on the ground avoidable*

WE are distressed to note that, in spite of many resolutions that are taken at the highest level between Bangladesh and India to handle border situations in a manner that is in keeping with the spirit of good neighbourliness and friendship, it appears that the spirit does not trickle down to the field level. Some recent facts will bear us out. Even decisions of local flag meetings in the wake of any such incident do not get transmitted to the field level, so it seems.

A case in point is the lynching of four Bangladeshis across the Bangladesh border in the Indian territory after their abduction which is not in the category of issues that fall under the definition of routine 'border problem'. We condemn this brutality. Even if one were to say that the Bangladeshis had 'trespassed' into the Indian territory, although reports suggest otherwise, was it not for the BSF to take it up with the BDR, instead of letting these unfortunates be victims of an inhuman act?

Allegations are there that the Bangladeshis were handed over to the Indian villagers by the BSF, which, if true, is a reprehensible conduct by any norm. It seems that this was a retributive action. The BSF had, reportedly, offered a prize on the head of one of those lynched. Regrettably this occurred only a few days after three of our nationals died by BSF bullets in Putia.

We notice with dismay the inordinate delay in holding flag meetings following such deplorable incidents. In fact an incident of border killings of Bangladeshis happened while a flag meeting was in progress. Clearly, the decisions of the flag meetings are observed in their disregard rather than in their adherence. Failure of the field level troops to implement orders causes one to wonder whether the local BSF personnel are acting on their own or that there is a miscommunication between what is declared and what is allowed to happen.

Flag meetings must be held on a regular basis, which would, we feel prevent such incidents from happening. And, orders stemming from decisions at higher levels can be violated only on pain of severe punishment.

Good intentions and commitment to peace can prevent such senseless killings that can detract both parties from addressing the real extant border issues.

Remembering 9/11

Has the world become safer?

FOUR long years have passed since the world witnessed one of the most horrific scenes of terrorism in modern history when two hijacked aircrafts flew into the World Trade Centre in New York and another at the Pentagon in Washington with a cataclysmic effect. Three thousand people were killed, not just Americans, but citizens of many other countries.

Much that we reminisce the deep scar left on humanity by the unprecedented attack, the instant feeling of helplessness and vulnerability emanating from it has not really worn off; in fact, it has increased down the road. The words used by many four years ago that 'the world will never be the same again' have become truer in a more poignant manner as we live through it in real life.

Despite intensive international efforts to uproot terrorism 'at any cost', the latter has struck deeper roots and fanned out across the world. In one word, in spite of the war against terror, or as many tend to believe because of it, the world has become more insecure than it had been immediately after 9/11.

The primacy of multilateral authority in dealing with international terrorism, especially when it amounts to preventive intervention in the affairs of a state or states, stands demolished by the supremacy asserted of a unilateralist decision-making process.

That's why, at the time of its 60th anniversary, the United Nations (UN) does stand in dire need of reform. It is the bounden duty of the comity of nations to try and reorder the existing UN system so that it is auto-responsive to the contemporary realities of international affairs. Unfortunately, faith- or ideology-based militancy, ethnic extremism, and to a large extent, state terrorism -- all these have brought the world to such a position that nothing short of an effective multilateral UN approach can salvage the world from a self-destructive course it finds itself catapulted on to. This might appear a bit wishful when the strategic interests of the only superpower are touted to be overriding the rationale for multilateralism, but that is the only option to take if we are to rid the world of explosive terrorism.

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

IT is difficult to be sanguine if President Bush's insistence on bringing about democracy in the broader Middle East will ultimately serve the US interest in the conflict-ridden zone, which for ages has acted as a politico-cultural contestant of the West. The Bush administration's logic behind the advocacy for democracy is manifold.

At one extreme the administration, stung by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, has come to realise that "democracy deficit" tolerated by successive US administrations responding to the situations demanded by the Cold War resulted in dictatorial regimes in many Muslim countries where dissent often meant being sent to the gulags while profligate elites lived life of moral degeneration ultimately acted against the interest of the West.

At the other end of the spectrum was the conviction of the liberal thinkers and embraced by the necons that democracies do not go to war against one another simply because waging war by a democracy would need distilled approval of different branches of the administration thus making it a difficult venture. Besides, in a democracy, governments being ultimately accountable to the people, they do not have the luxury enjoyed by a fascist, Nazi or a Stalinist dictator.

This argument can be equally extended to non-state actors who have made terrorism their religion. The western world, therefore, is preoccupied with Islamic fundamentalism and political Islam due to its realisation that policies followed hitherto had given birth to failed states in the vacuum left by the Cold War which helped

incubate the vitriolic contagion of al-Qaeda variety.

In the panic following 9/11 new Cold War warriors equated Islamic fundamentalism with political Islam. While Islamic fundamentalism encapsulates the emotional, spiritual, and political response of the Muslims to the acute politico-economic crisis in the Middle East and the Muslims' frustration over the inability of Pan-Arab nationalism to deliver political goods to the citizens, political Islam aims at

would wash away terrorist activities.

Some Middle East experts have suggested that as the root cause of al-Qaeda lie in poverty and educational deficiencies in countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan, for example, caused by the authoritarian nature of the rulers, the terrorist menace could have been better tackled through political reform.

But a counter argument proffered by liberal thinker Paul

argued that al-Qaedaist appeal is not due to lack of modernity in the Islamic society, but due to its excess which in the view of so-called purists is instrumental in contributing to social "degeneration" of the western culture, having contagion-effect on Muslim societies. If western libertarian values are believed to be inextricably linked with democratic values, then terrorists would logically be driven not by a desire for democracy, but by their

disproving Lewis' contention, the 2003 Pew Global Attitude Project found that a strong majority of those surveyed in Kuwait (83 percent), Jordan (68 percent), and Palestine (53 percent) was supportive of democracy. This position was further strengthened by large voter turn out in Algeria, Palestine, Kuwait, and Yemen elections. The point that comes out is that the Islamic world may be averse to accepting American policies, but not American values

sation are more likely than not to opt for some kind of Islamic rule. Gregory Gause's findings show that only in Morocco where more secular leftist parties have a long history and established presence, or in Lebanon where the Christian-Muslim dynamic determines electoral politics, pluralities of people surveyed in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, UAE, Egypt, etc would support greater role for clergy in their political system.

In Pakistan, the great majority of people would, given a chance, opt for some sort of Islamic rule in addition to the increasing theocratic influence in two of the provinces ruled by the Mullahs. The Bush administration would, therefore, be well advised to listen to Harvard Professor Jessica Stern that "democratisation is not necessarily the best way to fight Islamic extremism." Perhaps, the Bush administration may wish to strengthen the secular and progressive forces to fight fundamentalist forces, both within and outside the electoral process.

The creation of a democratic political and social order in the Islamic world would not be easy. But vigilance would have to be maintained to see that civil liberties and rule of law prevails, that state failure does not give way to extremist religious ideology, that corrupt governments do not succeed in refusing to integrate dissident groups and emerging social classes, etc. In any case, hasty "democratisation" of the Muslim world may not serve the interest either of the people who are being "democratised" or of the US, the prime mover of the next democratic wave.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

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establishing a global Islamic order through challenging the status quo within the Islamic states, and through establishing a transnational network of contacts.

The question has, however, arisen whether the democratisation of Muslim societies would necessarily reduce terrorism and prevent fresh recruits to the terrorist outfits. Vermont University Professor Gregory Gause holds the view that in the absence of data available showing a strong relationship between democracy and absence or reduction of terrorism, the phenomenon appears to stem from factors other than regime type. He argues that since the al-Qaedaists are not fighting for democracy but for the establishment of what they believe to be a purist version of an Islamic state, there is no reason to believe that a tidal wave of democracy

Berman states that this approach may not succeed as al-Qaeda ideology and radical Islam are driven by a fear and hatred of liberal Islam which they see as a "hideous schizophrenia" of the West that divides the state from religion and promotes individual freedom.

A similar strand of argument finds that modernity rather than democracy should be used as the most important tool to fight global terrorism. Since modernity involves more than improved material conditions and entails a transformation in beliefs and philosophies, al-Qaedaists, with their narrow interpretation of religious dogmas interspersed with voyeuristic attractions and/or fearful retribution, would lose their way in the maze of diasporic struggle for identity.

But then again it has also been

opposition to foreign domination.

The continuing insurgency in Iraq is a case in point. Despite American assertion to the effect that the insurgents are mainly foreigners, the insurgents are by and large Iraqi Arab Sunnis who are fighting against being dispossessed, and now the list of their grievances has been added to by the new constitution rejected by the Sunnis (to be put to a country wide referendum in mid-October). Sunni insurgency does not mean Iraqi opposition to democracy, as more than half of the Iraqis went to the polls in the January parliamentary elections, despite threats from the insurgents not to turn up to vote.

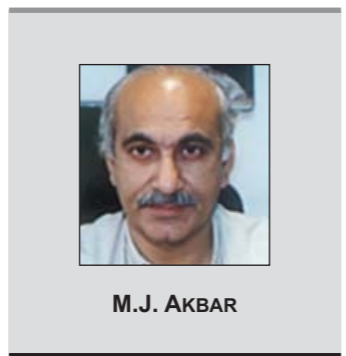
Historian Bernard Lewis once said the democracy is a peculiarly western way of conducting business which may or may not be suitable for others. Perhaps

which quintessentially are not very different from western liberal values. Citing the Iraq war as an example, the majority of people polled in most Islamic countries are convinced that the war was motivated by Washington's desire for oil, to protect Israel (which needed no protection anyway), and to weaken the Islamic world.

Arabs, indeed, the entire Muslim world, have a keen sense of history. Often they are reminded of Samuel Huntington's observation: "The West won the world not by superiority of its ideas or values or religion, but rather by the superiority in applying organised violence. Westerners often forget this fact, non-Westerners never do."

If Iraq can be taken as a barometer then many Islamic countries spurred on by the US to speed up the process of democrati-

King George Canute



M.J. AKBAR

THERE are too many internet terrorists scurrying around planting stink bombs in the very heart of the Green Zone where George Bush's credibility lives. One of the most entertaining stink bombs that came my way compared the rain

Mumbai in July with the rain havoc in New Orleans in August: 18 inches fell in New Orleans, 37 in Mumbai. Mumbai has 24 times the population of New Orleans. In 48 hours, 37 died in Mumbai and a hundred in New Orleans. In 12 hours the Indian Army and Navy were in Mumbai; it took 48 hours in America. Now which, asked this mischievous sender, is the third world country?

Four years ago, George Bush and Tony Blair were the undisputed masters of the response to arbitrary, provocative, barbaric terrorism. They strode the moral high ground.

Today a hurricane laps around the feet of King George Canute and erodes the sand below his throne while he helplessly orders the waters of New Orleans to recede.

A question does not become a

fact; America is not a third world nation. But a question is always a part of an early warning system. Gods can slip and Recover their footing; that is a familiar of all mythology as well as its first cousin, history. The test of leadership is the distance between slip and tip-over. For once you've lost your balance, descent is so much faster than ascent.

Victory is Rama; it has one face. Defeat is Ravana; it has ten

just a natural disaster. It was a mirror in which America saw the inherent inequality of the Bush world-view. The mind that protects the profits of oil companies at the expense of the Iraqi people is not so different from the mindset that persuades a powerful leader to head west towards a fundraiser while thousands die in the east of his own country.

George Bush has an accountant's view of the world. On one

regarded as the Punch and Judy of a particularly nasty tragedy?

They don't need to establish a commission to find the answer. They can take a hard look at the difference in the world's reaction to the two wars that they launched, one in Afghanistan, and the other in Iraq. I cannot think of a nation that did not support them, particularly after the Taliban in Kabul did not hand over Osama bin Laden for trial. Pakistan, Afghanistan's closest ally,

occupation.

George Bush should have listened to the man he sacked after re-election, his former secretary of state Colin Powell. Powell supported the massing of troops on the borders of Saddam Hussein's Iraq, but he was a reluctant warrior. He did not want to tip-over into a war with all its unforeseen consequences (rarely have there been as many unforeseen consequences as in Iraq after Bush got onto an aircraft

not something that American troops could do for Iraqis. To destroy a dictator as evil as Saddam might be important, but the world has to devise means that are morally acceptable. A moral cause cannot be sustained by immoral means. A war for freedom tends to lose its legitimacy when it ends up in the profit sheets of a Halliburton.

War is a course of last resort. It has a justification when it has a moral basis. When it becomes an occupation then those who oppose it acquire the moral strength. Bush and Blair surrendered the moral edge in Iraq that they possessed against the Taliban. To dismiss the response of the desperate in Iraq as terrorism, as Bush and Blair do, will not get them anywhere. It will certainly not convince the young people who are ready to die in a battle against those they perceive to be conquerors rather than liberators. Even those who welcomed Bush and Blair because they hated Saddam and his brutal dictatorship have joined the war against the perpetrators of "collateral damage," the pretty phrase for excesses against civilians in Iraq.

T.S. Eliot wrote, famously: This is the way the world ends, Not with a bang but a whimper. This is the way some Presidents and Prime Ministers end, not with a halo but as a joke, destroyed by a stink bomb.

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BYLINE

On the fourth anniversary of 9/11 Bush and Blair must address one question: why have they lost so much respect across so much of the world? This collapse of trust has taken place in their own countries as well. Why were they trusted to lead a war against terrorism once and are now regarded as the Punch and Judy of a particularly nasty tragedy?

faces. One of the latter is the cost of conflict. New Orleans is expected to cost \$150 billion. That is not all that much for the world's richest economy. But fifteen dollars can become difficult to find when a tycoon has crossed his credit limit many times. The most powerful businessmen, owners of the finest brands, know this -- or learn it to their cost. The cost of the conflicts that Bush has taken his country into is not measured only in hard cash; it is being measured in wet blood.

Mahatma Gandhi used to say that all the hidden dirt of society flows into the hut during a flood. Hidden dirt of all kinds is flowing into American consciousness after New Orleans. The waters have to recede; the dirt will stay in the memory. New Orleans was not

side is a list of assets: friends, generally respectful and always obedient in a moment of need. On the other side is the column of liabilities: enemies, always evil, violent, barbaric, backward and without the redeeming virtue of having had a renaissance.

Reality, sadly, has more colours than black and white. A state of war is also a state of mind, and it is a poor leader who thinks that any conflict is a black-and-white confrontation.

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sacrificed its strategic interests: India and Pakistan were on the same side.

By the time Bush and Blair had forced the hands of the clock towards Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the most powerful nations of Europe, France and Germany, both their people and their governments, had publicly rejected the rationale for war against Iraq, at that time. The last phrase is important, because if Hans Blix, the UN inspector, had been given time he might have proved that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Maybe that is why he was not given time. Four years later, even the legitimacy of the presence in Afghanistan has been eroded as it begins to look like an occupation. In Iraq, there is no doubt: it is an

carrier in order to declare victory). Powell argued that intimidation had to be tried before the shooting started. But Bush and Blair were in heavy league with hubris. They thought that defeating Saddam was a stroll into Baghdad. That might have been true. But they did not realise that defeating Saddam was not quite the same thing as defeating the Iraqi people, and that the people would mobilise once they saw the war for what it was, and what became explicit when the records of the oil ministry were more important to the occupation forces than the treasures of the national museum. Or Bush might have thought about his father's view of war when he successfully drove Saddam out of Kuwait. Nation-building, said Bush the Elder (and Wiser), was

OPINION

Needed closer Indo-Bangla understanding

ABMS ZAHUR

WE are aware of the fact that the present relationship between India and Bangladesh is not very much cordial. The knowledgeable public of Bangladesh understand that a number of hurdles are to be crossed before these countries can come closer. The statements as "we can easily solve that problems because we do not have any serious hurdle like Kashmir" are, perhaps either oversimplification of the solution of accumulated irritants or ignoring them deliberately. In case of Kashmir crisis both India and Pakistan are trying to negotiate amicably without adequate representation of Kashmiris under pressure from the US. So far as Bangladesh is concerned problems are bilateral. These problems, if ignored by both the countries, may become tri- or multi-lateral with the passage of time. Though India played a pivotal role in attaining the independence of Bangladesh, not much of the

bilateral problems could be solved satisfactorily during the last 34 years. In fact new problems are arising mainly because of peculiar Indian attitude. Now time has come for it to realise the necessity of cooperation from its smaller neighbours in its quest for rapid economic growth and rise in stature as one of the major powers of Asia.

No doubt Bangladesh could not have established itself as an independent country so quickly had there been no strong Indian support. This does not mean that a sovereign country like Bangladesh should behave like a stooge of India. India never cared to develop real friendship with Bangladesh perhaps because Bangladesh is a poor least developed country. By starting Farakka Barrage by occupying the Island of Talpatti, by depriving Bangladesh of its legitimate share of river waters, by killing Bangladeshis on slightest pretexts on Bangladesh border, by continuous 'push in' of so-called Bangladeshis ignoring all

Bureaucrats or experts may not be able to come up with some easy solutions to the problems. But mutual trust, once created, will certainly bring good result to the satisfaction of the peoples of both the countries. As we see common peoples of both sides are keen to develop cordial and close relationship among themselves, it is up to political authorities to decide as to whether the proposition for mutual sacrifice within permissible limit, when necessary, should be acceptable or not.

international formalities, by not reducing adequately the serious Indo-Bangla trade imbalance the Indian government is certainly not helping development of good relationship.

The devices like joint economic commission or joint river commission can, perhaps, help exchange of data or bring out certain facts. The experts can help the political leadership to understand the problems, it is up to the political leaders to decide as to how much to gain or concede from the deals. Plainly speaking, if Bangladesh cannot be allowed free access to Nepal and Bhutan (both members of BIMSTEC and SAARC), easier

access to Indian market or complete border demarcation or proper consultation in each case where barbed wire fencing is to be constructed within 150 yard, of border is not held or practice of 'push in' is stopped we cannot see any prospect for better relationship between these countries.

In this dismal scenario, however, we see some light after the recent visit of Indian Foreign Minister Mr Natvar Singh. Situation may further improve with the ensuing visit of Indian Commerce Minister. The SAARC Summit, if held, as per schedule, may further facilitate increasing understanding. However, to be realistic we

should not expect a sudden turn or positive change. We shall have to proceed step by step after we complete prioritisation of issues. As we proceed the press of both sides will have to be careful, particularly in handling sensitive issues.

It would be wrong to assume that backed by USA, India would be able to dominate in the SAARC region. Obviously the US would like to support India if it can compete with China both economically and militarily. Despite recent trend for high growth it is doubtful about future ability of India. What is more important for India is its domestic

peace. If peace can be ensured the rate of growth will automatically rise. In attaining her peace or prosperity Bangladesh can prove to be important. Cooperation from Bangladesh depends on removal of present irritants and hurdles.

Despite Indian Foreign Minister's assurance for a better future no positive signs can be traced. Killing of Bangladeshis by BSF, border fencing, or push in are going on. Even malpractice of supplying sub-standard or rotten materials by Indian suppliers alleged to be in practice. Let us wait for further discussion with the Indian Commerce Minister.

The economic benefit is more

attractive than cultural affinity. Without waiting for Indian goodwill we may start vigorous effort to obtain supplies from Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam or China. We may go for further development of trade with EU countries or east European countries or Latin American countries. In taking such measures there may be temporary short supply to the inconvenience of traders, industrialists or common men. The government may therefore take the concerned people in its confidence. Once we can successfully accomplish the job things will automatically improve.

Let us not give up hope. It may not be too distant a future when India and Bangladesh would come closer because they need each other as neighbours. Without Indian cooperation there, perhaps, cannot be rapid development of technical capability particularly in sectors like agriculture, information technology, medicine, water management or solar energy or controlling fundamentalism. On the

other hand India may be benefitted through cooperation from Bangladesh in her effort for developing the eastern provinces or West Bengal, or overcoming present energy crisis, or easing port congestion in Kolkata etc. What is needed is continuous dialogue with free mind in cordial atmosphere.

There is no easy solution to remove the hurdles in developing better relation. Bureaucrats or experts may not be able to come up with some easy solutions to the problems. But mutual trust, once created, will certainly bring good result to the satisfaction of the peoples of both the countries. As we see common peoples of both sides are keen to develop cordial and close relationship among themselves, it is up to political authorities to decide as to whether the proposition for mutual sacrifice within permissible limit, when necessary, should be acceptable or not.

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