

PM's resolve welcome

Decisive action awaited

IT is heartening to note that the Prime Minister has sent out a strong message to the extremists saying that the perpetrators of the recent bomb blasts will not escape justice. She has made the commitment while meeting a select group of Islamic scholars thereby reiterating what Islam basically stands for: peace and complete rejection of violence in society.

While welcoming her commitment, we must say that implementing her resolve will involve not only facing some hard truths but also doing something decisive about them. The direction that the investigations are taking has been rather revealing dropping hints at some of her coalition partners' possible links with the activities of the extremists. The main issue confronting her today is what is she going to do with the increasing indications of a linkage between some elements within her coalition and outlawed extremist outfit like Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) that bears sinister implication for the country's future. Although Jamaat has issued rejoinders against such allegations, the impressions gathered from those arrested and interrogated cannot be brushed aside until the process of investigation has been completed yielding a definitive result. Besides, the prime minister can always tap in on her intelligence agencies to get to the bottom of things.

The challenge before her is clear-cut. The most important issue facing the country today is this spate of terrorist bomb blasts. Any attempt by any quarter to deal with the matter in a half hearted way or sweep things under the carpet will be suicidal not just for the ruling coalition but for the future of the entire nation. We, therefore, sincerely hope that the PM will face the challenge head-on and exorcise extremism root and branch from wherever it exists and in whichever form. We, on our part, are ready stand by her on any decisive action she takes to uproot terrorism. We wish her well.

Peace prize sends the right message

Congratulations to ElBaradei, IAEA

THE International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and its Egyptian Director General Mohamed ElBaradei have been awarded the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize for their 'significant' contribution to nuclear nonproliferation - an issue of great global concern today.

The Nobel Committee's decision shows that it has seen world peace through the nuclear prism and highlighted its nonproliferation as the most challenging agenda of our times. Without question, the nuclear issue is the biggest bargaining chip in international politics. The countries which possess nuclear arms talk of balance of power having been achieved through such weapons working as a deterrent. At the same time, the advocates of nuclear nonproliferation who also include big new nuclear powers are convinced that the weapons can only push the world towards massive self-destruction. So, there is some double standard at work here.

Iran and North Korea are allegedly going in for uranium enrichment as a 'precursor to acquiring a bomb,' and the negotiations with these two countries have so far failed, as they refuse to bow to the international pressure for abandoning their nuclear programmes professedly conceived for peaceful purposes. As it is, the world has been at risk of experiencing more and more countries going nuke for quite some time past.

Against this backdrop, the exponents of nuclear nonproliferation under the UN auspices have assumed a greater role than any time before. It won't be pointless here to mention that if the IAEA were allowed to work to the best of its ability in Iraq, while inspecting the suspected nuclear and chemical sites, and their findings from time to time were heeded, the war in Iraq could have been avoided. The IAEA kept saying that it had failed to trace any WMD, but the US ignored the message. And the Iraq war, as everybody knows, has created more problems than it has solved. It is causing incalculable misfortune not only to the people of Iraq but that of the USA as well.

With the IAEA and ElBaradei coming under the spotlight with their winning the Nobel Peace Prize, the international community should take it as a reminder for containing the nuclear menace with a renewed sense of urgency.

The American frontier

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

WHEN Tarzan of the Apes declared to Jane that he had "come across the ages and distant past from the lair of the primeval man to claim you, and for your sake I have become a civilised man," he was, perhaps, not speaking of the "superiority" of the moral and social values of the Eurocentric civilisation, but of the violence of the wanderers and conquistadors expressed even by Teddy Roosevelt with his words "peace cannot be had until the civilised nations have expanded in some shape over the barbarous nation. It is our duty toward the people living in barbarism to see that they are freed from chains."

To Teddy Roosevelt the "civilised" people meant the white Christians having a certain kinship of blood and tracing their culture to Greco-Roman civilisations. But then in Teddy Roosevelt's time (1901-09), or even before him, Chief Justice John Marshall had nullified "the right [of Native Americans] to complete sovereignty as independent nations [as this position was] necessarily diminished and the power to dispose of the soil at their own will," on the ground that the right was dictated by "the original fundamental principle that discovery gave exclusive title to those who made it."

Even John Marshall neatly forgot that prior to the European "discovery," the Native Americans had discovered America, but being "savages" and "domestic dependent nations," they did not have the right to sell the land as they wished. It was, therefore, necessary for Tarzan of the Apes to be Lord Greystoke (he was unaware of his aristocratic roots) to claim Jane, which he could not have done while remaining as Tarzan of the Apes.

Eric Chefitz contends in his book *The Poetics of Imperialism* that we must be in translation between cultures and between groups within one's own culture to understand the dynamics of imperialism. One could argue that imperialism, meaning in its most general sense the formation of an empire in which one nation has

extended its domination over other nations, often through the process of colonialism, is an archaic term irrelevant in the 21st century.

But if one were to take Edward Said's interpretation of imperialism as "the practice, theory and attitude of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory" then the term may gain respectable currency in the present day world. One could construe Edward Said's definition to embrace western values, both cultural and political, which are expected to be followed by the "unenlightened" parts of the world.

Even JA Hobson's assertion in his book -- that as a nation enters the machine economy, that nation's manufacturers and traders prevail upon their government to acquire

tsunamis, or Katrinas and Ritats they hardly have time to focus their attention on alien environment.

Perhaps the blame for rampant inequality raging in the world could be more appropriately put at the door of the leaders of the developed and the developing countries. How long does it take, one may ask of the leaders of G-8, to fulfill their pledge given decades back to provide 0.7 percent of their GDP as development aid to the needy countries? Why, one may ask, it is necessary to spend more than four hundred billion dollars on defense when there is no enemy in sight? Why, one may ask, is it necessary to spend billions of dollars even after the "liberation" of Iraq, when people of Louisiana and Texas are wading in water and are being housed in shelters because

was the "violent expression of a global extremist ideology, an ideology rooted in the oppression and despair of the modern Middle East." She was candid (as was Council on Foreign Relations President Richard Haas) about the American tolerance of "democracy deficit" in many countries on the mistaken presumption that to act otherwise would threaten a stable status quo and global security.

Dr. Rice totally disagrees with the cautious belief that greater freedom of choice and liberty would empower extremism. On the contrary, she argues, extremism cannot thrive in a political culture of transparency and openness. Human beings will always choose the natural life over the constant fear of death, choose to be ruled with the consent of the governed and

Former EU External Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten's rejoinder that the European experience of hundreds of years of war has convinced them that compromise is better than conflict sounded feeble against President Bush's declaration that "America has and intends to keep military strength beyond challenge, thereby making the destabilising arms race of other eras pointless." Though President Bush's reelection may not necessarily reflect the sentient response of the American voters of his policy of aggrandisement (almost half the voters voted for John Kerry), his belief in his policy has certainly received intellectual muscle from highly credentialed academicians dubbed as "new sovereignists" who have advanced deterministic arguments for safeguarding US sover-

In the ultimate analysis, realpolitik demands that although -- from the Kennedy administration's Alliance for Progress to Nixon-Kissinger's doctrine of multipolarity -- US attempts were not directed at promoting democracy in the Third World and despite skewed nature of US policy towards political Islam and the controversial Bush doctrine of preemption, all nations of the world, particularly those living on the fringe of the technologically advanced nations, have been put on notice to practice a universally accepted code of conduct.

colonies in order to profitably sell their products and to acquire raw materials -- can be translated to the present day world if one were to observe the terms of trade working against the developing countries, diminishing quantum of aid and assistance and increasing conditionality associated with such assistance, and restrictive market access granted by the developed countries to the developing countries.

The unfathomable gulf between these two worlds cannot only be understood by Hobbesian explanation rooted in the acquisitive and violent nature of man but more by the indifference felt by the rich towards the poor. It would, however, be unfair to blame the citizens of the trillion dollar economies of indifference or bias against any particular group of people based on race, religion, colour, or ethnicity. Most of these people, having been blessed with opportunities to better themselves both horizontally and vertically, remain so engrossed with their daily life that unless there are

their houses were washed away, and for what reason a segment of the population of the richest country in the world could not move to safer places because they had no transport money?

One commentator has described President Bush as the most fiscally irresponsible president in US history. This criticism may not be totally out of place if one scrutinizes, which American voters rarely do, the allocation of resources to different sectors of the economy. But the Bush administration's defense and Iraq expenditure has a purpose - the spread of democracy throughout the world. President Bush said in his second inaugural address: "The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world." This firm conviction of the Bush administration defines the American frontier.

In a recent speech at Princeton University, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice expounded Bush administration's doctrine in greater detail. The root cause of 9/11, she said,

not by coercion of the state, by rule of law and not by the whim of the rulers. In unambiguous terms Dr. Rice affirms the Bush administration's determination to back democracy advocates "with power in all its forms: political and economic, cultural and moral, and, yes, sometimes military. Any champion of democracy who promotes principle without power can make no real difference in the lives of the oppressed people..

By advocating military intervention, if necessary, Dr. Rice appears to echo Robert Kagan's thesis on power and weakness. In Kagan's view, American military strength has produced a propensity to use that strength while Europe's military weakness has produced aversion to the exercise of military power. Europeans' belief in "the post-modern system," Kagan adds, is because they would like inter-state relations to rest on the balance of power and rejection of force, and to step out of the Hobbesian world of anarchy into the Kantian world of perpetual peace.

eighty and the US constitution on the ground of the US being fully sovereign.

To them, US sovereignty is absolute, illimitable, and non-dissipatory, and most international laws are too amorphous to justify US consent, intrusive in character, and the international law making process as unaccountable. These people and many other Americans, in the words of Francis Fukuyama, "tend not to see any source of domestic legitimacy higher than nation-state" thereby making multipolarity fractious and irrelevant. This belief is further strengthened by Dr. Rice's omission in her Princeton University speech of any role to be played by the UN "in a world where evil is still very real," though presumably her usage of the term "evil" was meant for terrorism, as distinct from Ronald Reagan's Evil Empire or President Bush's Axis of Evil, which were directed at the Soviet Union and pre-invasion Iraq-Iran-North Korea.

If the determinants of the American

frontier are belief in western liberal values, practice of democracy and good governance, and absolute collaboration in the universal war on terror, then this frontier would envelop the entire world. In that case, countries like Bangladesh, apparently having donor-recipient relationship with the US, gains importance in the US foreign policy matrix. The reported creation of a South Asian Security Desk at the US State Department under Christine Rocca to help South Asian countries to combat terrorism provides substance to this premise.

Additionally, the testimony given only a few days back by Stephen Cohen, having unassailable expertise on South Asian affairs, to the US House of Representative Armed Forces Committee on South Asian Security and the US is noteworthy. Speaking on terrorism, Dr. Cohen theorises that a likely source of Islamic terrorism directed against the US could come from "a Pakistan that itself slipped into political chaos or a Bangladesh that seems to be unsure of its identity." Though Bangladesh is doing better than Henry Kissinger's "basket case" scenario, Stephen Cohen finds Bangladesh plagued by "divided leadership, a growing radical Islamic presence, and chronic suspicion of India."

In the ultimate analysis, realpolitik demands that although -- from the Kennedy administration's Alliance for Progress to Nixon-Kissinger's doctrine of multipolarity -- US attempts were not directed at promoting democracy in the Third World and despite skewed nature of US policy towards political Islam and the controversial Bush doctrine of preemption, all nations of the world, particularly those living on the fringe of the technologically advanced nations, have been put on notice to practice a universally accepted code of conduct.

In other words Tarzan of the Apes has to don the attire of Lord Greystoke to remain a functional member of the international community.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

Saarc needs greater interactions in new phase



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

THE South Asian Association for Regional development (Saarc) is set for its 13th summit in Bangladesh capital Dhaka on November 12 and 13 and the leaders are expected to discuss issues pertaining to strengthening of the seven-nation regional forum in the third decade of its existence. After two postponements early this year, the summit is now agreed upon by all the member states for new dates and they are eagerly waiting for the event. The next summit is expected to take into account the progress made so far by the twenty-year-old organisation with its headquarters in Kathmandu, and more importantly to chart a course for the activities of the forum in its third decade.

The Saarc is no longer a nascent organisation and it has acquired larger reputation by now in the international arena even though its progress over the twenty years might not be anything remarkable. Many feel that its progress has been rather sluggish, but this itself can be seen as a positive development

given the fact that the forum had come up belying many skepticism and is continuing with modest achievements despite certain problems. In the meantime it is also gaining greater acceptance by various quarters. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) sometime ago finally accepted this regional forum as an Observer in the world body. The decision gives Saarc a distinct advantage for interaction with the UN and its system. Multilateral forums like Commonwealth, OIC and

assiduously nurtured regional forum enters a new phase. The Saarc often comes in for criticism for the reason that it has not succeeded in delivering the expected results in twenty years. Then again there are cynics, who believe that the forum has not made any mark at all. However, an overwhelming majority seems to feel that there is no reason whatsoever for being euphoric about the Saarc but they are convinced that it is delivering -- although not in a big way. There is

reverted to original track. That is where the strength of the forum lies even though the deferment of the important events for the Saarc is not desirable.

It is important that the Saarc summit takes place regularly in time as stipulated in the charter of the organisation. The charter provides this clearly for the reason that a summit once in a year should not be difficult since members come from one region and their number is not large. Commonwealth leaders (CHOGM) meet once in

MATTERS AROUND US

It is imperative that the positive spirit is maintained through appropriate and timely follow up actions. For resources and technical and other assistance, the SAARC in the new phase should develop greater interactions with international organisations and agencies for effectively helping its programmes. It should also have links with other regional forums for experiences and collaborative relationship because this will simply be helpful for the forum.

the NAM were accorded this status by the United Nations. No doubt, for the Saarc it has come little late. Evidently, the UN closely monitored the Saarc and finally reached the conclusion that it is sparing no effort to develop effective cooperative mechanism among seven nations in the most densely populated region of the world -- albeit critics' observation that its range of cooperation in concrete terms should have been more visible.

The Saarc representing 1.4 billion people is in the threshold of beginning its course in its third decade. It was launched in Dhaka in 1985 and it is through the coming summit in the Bangladesh capital next month the

hardly any denying that SAARC is often crippled by manifold problems including political differences, but what is noteworthy is the fact that it's progressing surmounting the obstacles. It has maintained its existence and is also showing expanding activities.

True, the Saarc has often been a victim of political problems that certainly exist in South Asia, congenitally known for a milieu. Postponements and calling off the summits are not new phenomenon. Still, the staging of the summit itself is something to cheer about. Differences have bedevilled the Saarc to some extent, but what is praiseworthy is that the setbacks have always been temporary and the forum

two years, nonaligned and Islamic countries once in three years. All these groups have big number of members who come from different continents, whereas seven Saarc members are neighbours. Hence the decision for annual conference of the leaders was a rational one as this should also provide the members to have talks at highest level for overall interest of the region. Sadly, this vision did not work for the forum well as annual summit remains a distant dream even though it was one of the basic intentions of the Saarc.

Consequently, the forum suffered in the absence of meetings of their leaders at regular intervals. Arguably, the Saarc secretariat and other level meetings are

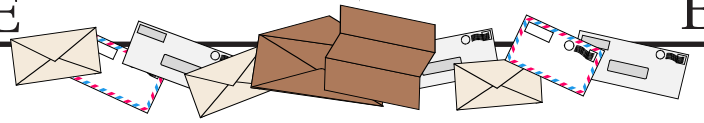
useful, but consultations by the leaders are imperative for the development of the organisation, which is afflicted by manifold problems mainly stemming from political differences. After all, it is the summit that effectively helps clear the hindrances that scuttle the expected growth of the forum. Bangladesh has particular reason to be anxious about the Saarc as this country mooted the idea. When Bangladesh conceived the south Asian forum, the proposal was greeted with a large

established cooperation in varied fields through the integrated programmes of actions (IPA) and the technical committees dealing with important areas have also performed reasonably well. But the inherent mistrust in the region and particularly between the two main players of the spectrum -- India and Pakistan -- seems to mar the expected development of the forum. The summits always leave a sobering effect on the political climate of the region. This is the Islamabad summit that produced a breakthrough in the Indo-Pak dialogue as the two nuclear-powered arch-rivals are now carrying out talks for improving their often battered ties.

Islamabad summit took up a series of programmes in the economic, social and other sectors and all these are commendable. It is imperative that the positive spirit is maintained through appropriate and timely follow up actions. For resources and technical and other assistance, the Saarc in the new phase should develop greater interactions with international organisations and agencies for effectively helping its programmes. It should also have links with other regional forums for experiences and collaborative relationship because this will simply be helpful for the forum. As the time for the next summit is drawing nearer, the Saarc may consider having greater interactions at international level in various forms in addition to its normal agenda awaiting for the 13th summit.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is Foreign Editor of BSS.

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.

"Joy Bangla"

The declaration of the founder of Pakistan of Mohammad Ali Jinnah that "Urdu and Urdu shall be the state language of Pakistan" sparked the flame of independence and we achieved that. Our language is now highly regarded internationally.

I am afraid if repetition of the quote of a former Pakistani dictator by our state minister for youth and sports echoes the sentiments of Pakistanis. I wish the minister had any better quotation while addressing the cricketers who have the potential to do well in the international arena.

Bangladesh was born with the slogan "Joy Bangla" which was replaced by "Bangladesh Jindabad" on 15/8/75 (with a Pakistani flavour). How about "Joy Bangladesh" which is

pure Bangla?
Thomas Gomes Bhura
Monipuripara
Tejgaon, Dhaka 1215

Food terrorism

I am very much pleased to observe that the government has waged war against "Food Terrorism." The recent drive in food processing industries, markets, hotels and restaurants has exposed a terrible scene of food adulteration. Adulterated and rotten foods are being sold freely in the market. After 34 years of our independence, the government has at last realised the gravity of the situation and taken stern action against unhygienic production, processing and marketing of foods. People are appalled that they have so long been taking these adulterated foods and afraid that these foods might destroy their immune

system. The newspapers and television channels are disseminating news about the ant-adulteration drive.

People do not know where to find safe and hygienic foods and to whom they should lodge complaints against the sellers of adulterated foods.

In fact, we are hostages to a section of dishonest food traders. Substandard foods that are produced in an unhygienic environment are served in reputed hotels, restaurants bakeries, icecream parlors fast food & sweet-meat shops etc.

Shops sell adulterated & low quality foods. Edible oil, biscuits, spices, soft drinks, fruit juice, icecream and bottled water have in most cases no BSTI certification. In some cases, the products have no manufacturing or expiry date. We cannot identify whether the

foods are pure or not. Hence people should prefer starving (!) to consuming poisonous foods.

These dishonest food sellers, taking advantage of people's vulnerability, force them to ingest poison and push them towards certain death. They are real enemies of the people and the nation. Hence we should stand united and build resistance against these perpetrators of heinous crimes. I hope that the government would continue the drive against adulterated food. Let's raise the slogan We want pure, quality foods.
Md. Shahidul Islam
Khaligaon, Dhaka

Make parliament effective

Our government always says that it

wants to make the parliament an effective forum by ensuring the opposition's participation. But this is nothing but rhetoric, which has no practical value. The main opposition gets no chance in parliament to speak about people's sufferings. The Daily Star in its 19 September issue reported that the speaker rejected all the 28 notices, submitted by the opposition lawmakers demanding holding of discussion on the August 17 countrywide serial blasts, the 21 August grenade attack on an Awami League rally, and price hike of essentials. Does the government think that these are not important issues? Or, does it want to avoid its accountability to the people?

This attitude is not democratic at all. Every time, before beginning of a session, the government blames the

opposition for not joining the parliament, but it never tries to convince the opposition that the required time will be allotted for discussion. On the contrary, the ruling party lawmakers threaten the opposition activists. A few days ago BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said, "Come to parliament or face police baton on the streets." A cabinet minister and a key policymaker of the ruling alliance could say this!

So how can we believe that this government is not an autocratic one?
Sufian Sythet

Pre-paid gas

Gas is a valuable asset of Bangladesh, which will of course not be available on a permanent basis. In our neighbouring country (India) gas is not available

in the desired quantity, they have to use gas cylinder for domestic consumption. But in our country we use gas as much as we want to. We think we have a surfeit of gas. For this reason, people save a matchstick and keep the burner on round the clock. Recently, Titas Gas launched the pre-paid gas meter in Banani area in the city. It is a very good step to prevent gas misuse. They have two types of cards-- double burners (Tk 400) and for more than double burners you have to pay Tk 600. In this system consumers pay no monthly fixed charge. The consumers will decide how much they will spend (no use no pay).

It is a good system, but it has some problems, the prepaid card is not available everywhere. It is available in banks and Titas Gas office only. So, if a consumer's card is finished at night, he

will have to wait till the morning for his burner to function. Again if the meter does not work for some reason or the other, then his burner won't supply gas.

The engineers of Titas Gas say that they have installed the meter for only one year. Then who will take care of it after the expiry of one year? There are many questions now in the minds of the local people about the new system. We congratulate the government and Titas Gas, but they must ensure that the new system works well in the interest of the people.

It is not enough to introduce something new, they have to take into consideration the problems that the consumers may face.
Md Shahrar Parvez
Banani