

The grenade hauls

Countrywide mop-up operation needed

WITH each passing day information are pouring in of the seizures of grenades and firearms abandoned by extremist groups. Since the joint forces have been on pursuit of variously labelled terrorist elements on the basis of information, mainly gathered from arrested suspects, the clandestine operatives are on the run. That explains the discovery of abandoned weapons. There is a growing suspicion, however, that substantial number of bombs or firearms may have been hidden away in various parts of the country. The success of the joint forces gives us hope that the remaining arms caches will be unearthed soon.

At least eight grenade attacks have been executed since 2003 with scores of people dying and sustaining injuries in the process. Beginning with the April 2, 2004 Chittagong arms haul through the attack on AL rally on August 21 to the hurling of bomb at British High Commissioner Anwar Chowdhury to the lethal attack on AL leader SAMS Kibria, none of the investigations has been conclusive. Although arrests were made no conviction has been handed to any guilty person.

It is extremely important to note that if the investigations had established facts of the cases, these had been tried and punishment meted out to those proven guilty, then the terrorists would have been subdued. The incidence of bomb blasts and arms haul would have been few and far between.

The fact is that neighbouring Bangladesh are the volatile northeastern region of India and also Myanmar. Considerable arms smuggling takes place in the area; arms traffickers have no nationality, they are enemies of all countries. It has to be acknowledged that unless there is demand for weapons, why there would be any supply? With further raids the security forces can eliminate the danger from within. Acting on this premise, it shouldn't be difficult for RAB to track down the local militant groups' networking and linkages.

It is crucially important that the linkage factors are fully detected and eliminated. Thus we stress the need for regional cooperation which the SAARC envisages in terms of fighting arms and drugs smuggling to be accomplished on top priority basis.

Kosovo declares itself free

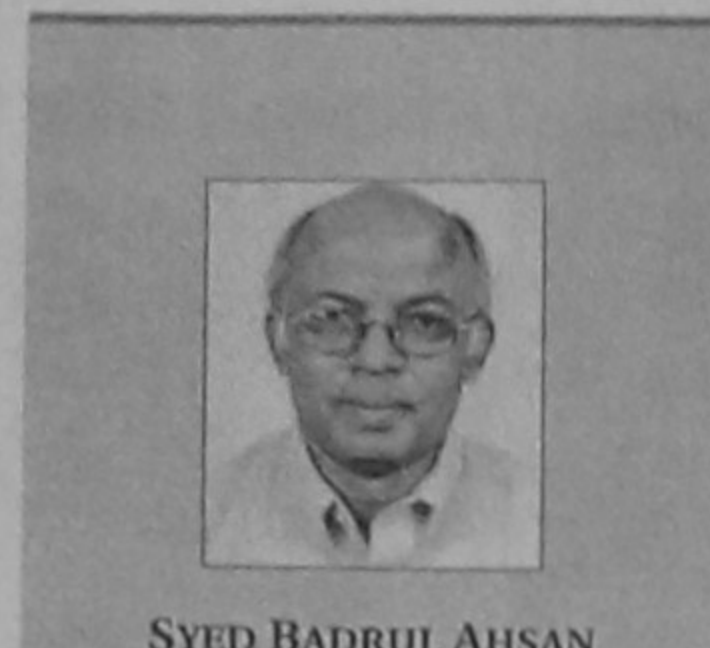
It needs the world's support and encouragement

KOSOVO's declaration of independence has caused quite a few powerful, and widening, ripples in the international community. With Serbia, from which state the Kosovars have now prised themselves out as a free entity, angrily denouncing the move, it is but natural that Kosovo's leaders will feel some heat in the days ahead. The Serbian foreign minister's statement that Kosovo will never find a place in the United Nations, together with Russian opposition to the independence move, will certainly not scupper Kosovo's status as a free state. But it does point to a situation where the new state will find it hard to find acceptability among a certain section of the global community.

That is clearly the reason why the leaders of the world's newest state have written to governments across the world seeking recognition for an independent Kosovo. The good news here is that Kosovo enjoys the support of the West. With Washington and the European Union willingly agreeing to the freedom move, the people and government of Kosovo will find some much needed comfort in what they mean to do about themselves from here on. There is, moreover, the fact the plan put forth by Marti Ahtisaari, then a special UN envoy and later president of Finland, in the late 1990s regarding Kosovo's graduation to supervised independence remains in place. The plan was devised in the aftermath of the Serbs' military onslaught on Kosovo, which had attempted to move out of a federation that was already crumbling in a post-Cold War world. It is thus logical to suggest that the step Kosovo, with a majority population of ethnic Albanians, has now taken does not at all fly in the face of reality.

As the United Nations prepares to discuss the issue owing to the fact that Russia and its friends have not acknowledged Kosovo's declaration of independence, one expects the creation of an atmosphere where the new country will eventually, and soon, find a niche for itself in the world. It can do without the hostility of its detractors. What it cannot do without is the sympathy and support of other nations as it tries strengthening its political and economic foundations.

Kosovo and the dimensions of freedom



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

HOW you take Kosovo's declaration of independence is strictly a matter of opinion. Even so, there is that primeval stirring in the soul which keeps speaking of the beauty of freedom. We in Bangladesh understand, and readily too, what it means to be free, having gone through the collective travails involved in a grim struggle for freedom. Or ask the people of East Timor. They will tell you of their sufferings, their long tale of woe under Indonesian occupation, for years on end, until they came by freedom. And so it is that we are vicariously made aware of the beauty that brings freedom in a package to the people of Kosovo.

No matter what the men in Belgrade think, no matter what President Putin might suggest, the fact is that Kosovars are celebrating in Pristina. You cannot grudge them that.

Freedom is not something you can disagree with. Back in the 1960s, as the Igbo in Nigeria went to war against the federation in their struggle for a free Biafra, a good number of people around the world were in support of the Igbo. For the fifteen years after that regressive step was taken, Smith found himself in a straitjacket. It was the blacks who took over. The proof of that is there before you, in the image of the much maligned and yet cantankerous Robert Mugabe. The point here is that

GROUND REALITIES

It is against this background of black and white, of black versus white, that you must consider the freedom the people of Kosovo have decided to give themselves. And when you do, you might not choose to forget the many pieces into which Josip Broz Tito's Yugoslavia, so meticulously crafted in the 1940s and so much a symbol of the human spirit in Cold War times, shattered in the 1990s.

And, of course, there were many who quite did not agree that Biafra needed to be free. And yet, it was the desperation of the Biafrans, made increasingly more desperate by the battering they were getting from Yakubu Gowon's Nigeria, that aroused the sympathy of the world.

Biafra lost; and Ojukwu made his way out of his short-lived country. But the memory of Biafra persists, sometimes as sad poetry. Ask any Igbo today. You just might hear him tell you how he has gone on believing in the old cause, decades after the cause turned out to be a lost one.

Speaking of causes, there are people who certainly undermine the principle of freedom through using it in obtuse manner. Ian Smith, a man with an extremely poor sense of history and a poorer understanding of culture, thought in November 1965 that Rhodesia's whites, a minuscule amidst a vast black majority, could secure for themselves a safe future by going for a unilateral declaration of independence.

For the fifteen years after that regressive step was taken, Smith found himself in a straitjacket. It was the blacks who took over. The proof of that is there before you, in the image of the much maligned and yet cantankerous Robert Mugabe. The point here is that

your desire to be free must not sail against the winds of history and tradition.

Smith did not understand this lesson. He ought to have taken a leaf out of Charles de Gaulle's book on Algeria. The French leader turned into an instant statesman when he realised that men like Ahmed Ben Bella needed to have Algeria for themselves.

History is forever a changing, even transforming, process. Which is why the Nazis, with all their ideas of Aryan purity and Anschluss and the like, did not last. Which might also be why, someday in the far if not near future, Taiwan will need to get back to its old union with mainland China. Of course, Taiwan has been a rather tantalising model of westernised democracy. That is no reason, though, to think it can stay free of the mother country for an indefinite period of time.

Freedom and reality sometimes work at cross-purposes. In the old days, the big reality in our lives was the Soviet Union, until it was replaced by gusts of freedom in Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia, and in so many other places that used to be known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Ah, but then comes the significant question of the degree of freedom that leaves a society or a nation satisfied with the ambience

of liberty. Freedom that leaves a country twisted out of shape and turned on its head is liberty that lengthens itself into an unending stream of horror. The partition of India, for all the lyrical tenor of Nehru's tryst with destiny, left in its wake a trail of devastation, the consequences of which are being felt sixty plus years after the slicing.

Was Pakistan an inevitability? Or was it a blunder that might have been avoided? These are questions you can go on trying to answer for a long, long time, arriving at no definitive conclusion. There are, in history, questions that have never been answered to human satisfaction. The world is not perfect.

And because the world is not perfect, we bump into the sad, sordid tales of colonised nations making their raucous way to freedom. It was an intensely emotional Patrice Lumumba who took King Baudouin of Belgium to task at the independence day celebrations in Leopoldville in 1960. We do not blame him, for the monarch had just heaped praise on his rapacious ancestor Leopold II.

Anyone with a fairly good understanding of history, with an appreciation of sensibilities, would have stayed away from an invocation of a man who literally stole Congo's resources for years.

Lumumba's indignation was right, of course. The manner of it was not. The biggest of shocks, though, came in the way the Belgians and their friends bumped him off. Not a trace of Lumumba was left anywhere. Freedom for the people of Congo, thus, came in post-colonial trauma and in a surfeit of tribal fury. First Moise Tshombe and then Joseph Mobutu ravaged the land. A free Congo still searches for peace, and slips deeper into trouble. The heart still wallows in darkness.

It is against this background of black and white, of black versus white, that you must consider the freedom the people of Kosovo have decided to give themselves. And when you do, you might not choose to forget the many pieces into which Josip Broz Tito's Yugoslavia, so meticulously crafted in the 1940s and so much a symbol of the human spirit in Cold War times, shattered in the 1990s. And then there were the efforts, in the 1950s, to build and broaden the base of freedom.

Gamal Abdel Nasser tried a marriage between Egypt and Syria and called it the United Arab Republic. It ended in a quiet divorce not many years later. And freedom, or a free state, has been a time-honoured demand of the Kurds - in Iran, Turkey and Iraq. There has been a long struggle, alternately fitful and persistent.

With Abdullah Ocalan in jail, perhaps till mortality overtakes him, the skies remain stark and bare for his people. For the people of Palestine, freedom remains hostage to the likes of Ehud Olmert, of men who profess to combat terrorism through their own horrifying versions of terror.

The people of Kuwait know the meaning of freedom. Their world

having gone dark through Saddam Hussein's invasion in August 1990, they were not to see their world of equanimity restored until months later, when the West, its own economic interests prevailing over everything else, moved in to eject the Iraqi lock, stock and barrel. The biggest irony of all, at this point in time, is of course the rapidity with which Iraq saw its state of freedom dissipate when George W. Bush and Tony Blair decided to invade the country on pretexts that have since turned out to be monumental untruths. Iraqi freedom is a thing of the past; and Iraq has been reduced to a country where murder is practised to perfection.

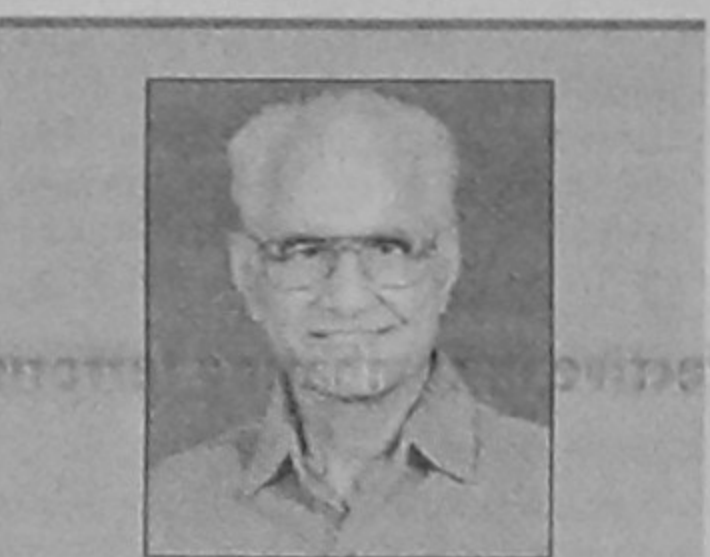
In diverse regions of the globe, while states have graduated to freedom, their citizens have not. A whole swath of societies, beginning with Ghana in 1957, moved into freedom and then, pretty inexplicably, saw the ruling class imposing discipline on their peoples that was as unwarranted as it was preposterous. Sekou Toure ruled in freedom; his people stayed subjugated.

Founding fathers, men of the class of Kenneth Kaunda and Julius Nyerere, did not believe in democratic pluralism until late in the day. Between them, Milton Obote and Idi Amin destroyed Uganda, one through his dictatorial inclinations, the other through macabre buffoonery.

That said, let Kosovo stay free, as Eritrea has stayed free ever since Issaias Afewerki prised it out of its anti-historical union with Ethiopia. Men deserve to be free. That is the cardinal, sustainable truth we learned in 1776 and in 1789.

Syed Badrul Ahsan is Editor, Current Affairs, The Daily Star.

New government and the challenges



M.B. NAQVI
writes from Karachi

IT is too early to speculate about the next government and its chances. Polls ended on Monday evening, and not all the results are available at this writing. One settles for unavoidable challenges facing the state, leaving reflection on its prospects for next time.

Remember the earlier accusations of pre, during and post-poll rigging? Few believe that so long as President Pervez Musharraf remains in charge a free election is impossible. Since his own future is at stake, Musharraf was bound to ensure a victory for his friends. Opposition parties assume that the poll results can only confirm his plans. There are sure to be charges of rigging; people have to examine such claims.

The election's circumstances have to be noted. There were severe shortages of wheat, flour, pulses, meat, electricity, gas and almost everything of daily use, and the prices went through the roof. Many accuse connivance of erstwhile rulers with hoarders and profiteers.

Some claim that this government was of the rich, by the rich and for the rich. It achieved the goal of enriching the rich by mak-

PLAIN WORDS

Islamic extremism of the Taliban and al-Qaeda kind, now making waves in Pakistan's northwest and major urban centres, is an urgent problem. A national strategy has to be evolved. Bound up with it is the need to review Pakistan's Afghan policy, involving reassessment of relations with America. Islamic extremism is basically a problem for Pakistanis to sort out.

ing the poor poorer. Can the next government meet the challenge of bringing down, or even holding, the prices of electricity, petrol, other utility charges and food-stuffs? Unless it brings the inflationary pressures down, the stability of the economy can be destroyed and, combined with possible political agitations, it can lead to catastrophe.

The government is being formed amidst a badly fractured politics. There are three major parties and three or four quasi-major parties, each important in a particular region. Common solutions to common problems that are galore are sure to remain elusive. While some are temporary, other problems are of long-standing nature. Fundamental ones have never been resolved. All demand attention, and major political parties differ on the solutions. There is much acrimony, and distrust of one another.

There is the immediate question of what to do with detained judges and lawyers. Reforms to undo what Gen. Musharraf did on November 3 last are urgently needed. Constitutional distortions need to be amended away. Gagging measures against electronic media and press need immediate withdrawal.

Innumerable "disappearances" and the two insurgencies call for immediate corrective action. In this context, former Gen. Pervez Musharraf should be held accountable for illegal actions and constitutional deviations and distortions. The choice of doing the right thing, or settling for continuing with President Musharraf in order to oblige America and Nato powers and the army, is a false one.

Associated with the foregoing is the Pakistan military's dominant role. Politicians gullibly say that the army should be sent back to the barracks. Examined closely, only one major politician says this today; it is PML (N) that may be trusted to ensure that the army goes back to barracks. This process will not be easy. It may be long.

Opposition politicians frequently exploit the army's itch for power because it is always in need of more resources. Which is why it takes over and uses power-hungry politicians. This has to be prevented. A convention has to be evolved whereby politicians and generals do not socialise.

Islamic extremism of the Taliban and al-Qaeda kind, now making waves in Pakistan's northwest and major urban centres, is

an urgent problem. A national strategy has to be evolved. Bound up with it is the need to review Pakistan's Afghan policy, involving reassessment of relations with America. Islamic extremism is basically a problem for Pakistanis to sort out.

No one is, or can be, against Islam in Pakistan. But the kind of Islam now being thrust upon the country is not the Islam to which most Pakistanis subscribe. It is a sectional one, and that too of a very small segment. Major religious parties have adequately represented Islam for most Muslims. They have sufficed since the colonial period. There is no new conflict over Islam. That is the starting point. After that, the issue has to be sorted out through democratic reforms, providing economic justice and development to tribal areas, to begin with.

The second big question, never resolved, is about regional nationalisms. In theory, its solution is known, easy, and is there; accept the federal principle. But the Pakistan Federation has been highly centralised, and provincial governments are scarcely more than municipalities.

The real power rests with the centre in terms of who actually makes important decisions and

exercises taxation powers. Except the fiction of provincial taxes, Islamabad keeps the real taxation in its own hands. That is not acceptable to political opinion in Sindh, NWFP and Balochistan. Sindh has been restive; three or four uprisings and military crack-downs have taken place in Balochistan, and the ongoing political turmoil in the NWFP's tribal areas is related both to the New Islam and the violation of federal principle.

The question was theoretically resolved in 1973 through Z.A. Bhutto's Constitution. But the problem here is that he and his successors never lived by this Constitution. A patchwork of emergency and dishonestly intended constitutional amendments has controlled this 1973 Constitution. Two military dictators have disfigured it one way, and one prime minister having a "heavy mandate" tried to amend it another way. Happily, he now thinks it was a mistake.

The issue can be resolved if Islamabad, GHQ and feudal gentry accept the federal principle by enhancing the Constitution's provisions for provincial autonomy.

Who can forget the rampant feudal mentality and the growing absentee landlordism? The solution for feudal mentality is the untrammelled working of democratic dispensation over time. Actual enjoyment of fundamental human rights is the precondition. But it is not the only one. The rich-poor divide and social insecurity of the majority need to be drastically reduced.

As for the rich-poor divide, the

first thing to do is to change the decades old economic paradigm that originated in Washington Consensus. Pakistanis should evolve their own economic paradigm specifically for Pakistan. Ensuring steady economic development with a humane face is the requirement. The first priority is ending mass poverty upfront.

The old trickle-down theory of development has produced the current volatile condition. It has been a fraud, and what trickles down is poverty. Pakistan is rich enough in economists to write a new set of objections.

A review of Pakistan's Afghan policy cannot wait. The lingering one actually aims at dominating Afghanistan sometime to make it serve Pakistan's security ends by adding strategic depth to it. This has failed. It will now put Pakistan in confrontation with America and Nato among others.

Anyway, it is morally wrong and politically dangerous. Reassessing it will entail a new relationship with America. There is no call to become inimical to America. It is too big and powerful a country to alienate or be close to. Let Pakistan and America remain friends but maintain a distance, and emphasise economic and cultural cooperation. Also involved is a new India policy based on primacy to regional cooperation and strengthening Saarc. If necessary, bring in China and Iran into it to make it co-terminus with most of southern Asia, leaving aside the Gulf Sheikhdoms and SE Asia that are too different to be a part of Saarc and are US-dominated withal.

M.B. Naqvi is a leading Pakistani columnist.

McCain's nomination good news for Dems

LETTER FROM AMERICA

The truth is, to many Americans, Barack Obama does not come across as all that black. His language, intonation, and mannerisms are more mainstream than black. America has never seen a black candidate like Obama. Or a candidate like him, period. In his crossover appeal, Barack Obama is like Tiger Woods. Perhaps it takes a qualified candidate like Barack Obama for America to demonstrate that American racism is exaggerated.

FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

FOR the first time in 48 years, a senator will be elected president of the United States of America on November 4. Since Massachusetts senator John F. Kennedy's election in 1960, several other Senators tried to emulate him, among them

Barry Goldwater (1964), George McGovern (1972), Bob Dole (1996), and John Kerry (2004). Sitting presidents, former vice-presidents or former governors defeated them all.

This year, one among the trio of sitting senators -- Senator John McCain, Senator Hillary Clinton and Senator Barack Obama -- will

be elected president. And the chances are that America will elect either its first woman or its first black president.

With the exception of Ronald Reagan, a consummate actor, America has not treated elderly presidential candidates kindly. Reagan was 69 when he was elected president in 1980. On

August 29, 2008, John McCain will turn 72. Hillary Clinton is 60 and Barack Obama is 46.

When there was that much of a gap in age, the younger candidates defeated even sitting presidents. Eleven years younger Jimmy Carter defeated sitting President Gerald Ford in 1976. Twenty-two years younger Bill Clinton dethroned the sitting President George Herbert Walker Bush in 1992. And when the 23 years older Bob Dole challenged Clinton in 1996, it was no contest. Democrats are salivating at the prospect of 26-year younger Barack Obama, he of chiseled physique and golden voice, taking on the grizzled and gruff-voiced McCain.

America also has an eye for good looks and an ear for a good voice. Kennedy, Reagan and

Clinton were not only more handsome but were also more articulate than their opponents. It is said that in the 1960 presidential election, American women voted for Kennedy because he was handsome and American men voted for him because he had a pretty wife!

America also has fascination for height. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Reagan and Clinton were much taller than their opponents. Among the three candidates this year, Obama is clearly the winner on looks although Hillary Clinton is also a good-looking woman. Advantage Democrats. Obama is the one with the golden voice. Hillary cackles and claps too much, and McCain speaks in a monotonous monotone. Advantage Obama. When they stand side by side, Obama dwarfs McCain. So,

clearly, advantage Obama.

What about the fact that Obama is black? America will never elect a black man president, goes the conventional wisdom. Interestingly, many whites are questioning why, with a black father and white mother, Obama is labeled "black." Logically, he could just as well be labeled "white."

Although Barack has not made a fuss about it, but golf legend Tiger Woods has about his being labeled "black." Woods' dad, the late Earl Woods, was a black man with some caucasian blood. Tiger's mother, Kulkida, is Thai. If he is labeled only "black," that is disrespectful to his mother, Tiger says. Tiger coined the term "Cablasan" to describe his heritage. ("Ca" for caucasian, "bl" for black, "asian" for Asian.)

The truth is, to many Americans, Barack Obama does not come across as all that black. His language, intonation, and mannerisms are more mainstream than black. America has never seen a black candidate like Obama. Or a candidate like him, period. In his crossover appeal, Barack Obama is like Tiger Woods. Perhaps it takes a qualified candidate like Barack Obama for America to demonstrate that American racism is exaggerated.

Historians will write many volumes on how Hillary Clinton's front-runner status and the "inevitability" towards the Democratic party presidential nomination got derailed by one Barack Obama peddling "hope." The Clinton campaign was so haughty, so certain that they would wrap-up the nomination on February 5 that they did

not make plans for February 6 and beyond. Obamadid.

Barack Obama's campaign is better organised, has more troops on the ground, more money and much more enthusiasm going forward. It is true that the Clintons are most dangerous when they are cornered. But, right now, Barack Obama has 130 more pledged delegates, has won twice as many states, and leads in the popular votes cast count.

Despite the Clintons' mastery of sophistry, it will be extremely difficult for them to convince the super-delegates to support Hillary Clinton when Barack Obama leads in every important category.

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, a Rhodes Scholar, is a Daily Star columnist.