

Voice of Shakthi Thursday 13 September 2001

The tragic events which unfolded in New York and Washington on Tuesday are too well-known to be repeated here. The final death toll from the bombings of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon are not known yet but it is estimated to be in the thousands. Nobody has yet claimed responsibility but the Saudi Businessman Osama Bin Laden is considered the Number One suspect.

The first thing we wish to say about this barbaric attack is that we condemn it unreservedly. This is not because the majority of the dead are Americans or because it happened in America, but because we unreservedly condemn all acts of terror against defenceless civilian targets. No matter why or by whom they are committed, they are cowardly and dastardly acts and should be treated as such. Killing of innocent civilians cannot be justified by any cause.

But while condemning this dastardly act, we would also like to bring attention to its underlying causes. There are many people who see this as an act of pure terrorism perpetrated by a bunch of sick, demented individuals. As such, the only way to stop it is to fight the terrorists and destroy them. We beg to differ. We feel that people wish to risk their lives in carrying out these attacks because they feel they are making a point by doing it. The point is usually that they can make their enemies feel insecure, whenever and wherever they want. This we believe is what the terrorist acts on Tuesday demonstrated to America so spectacularly and devastatingly.

The fact is that in recent times a large section of humanity has come to see the West headed by the United States as their Number One enemy. The demise of the Soviet Union and rapid globalisation has given the Western Capitalist powers full run of the world and in the eyes of less affluent and more marginalised sections of the international community - which incidentally, comprises the great majority of people on earth - they have abused this power. The West is seen as preaching equality and freedom on the one hand and using its military and economic muscle to force weaker nations into toeing their line. When compliance is not forthcoming they have shamelessly resorted to actions which have caused a great deal of suffering to ordinary people. The plight of Iraq is a case in point. The Iraqi people continue to be punished for Saddam Hussein's intransigence. The number of Iraqi infants who have died as a result of the inhuman sanctions is not known but it is probably much greater than the number that died in the terrorist attacks on Tuesday. Many people in the Third World would readily describe such deprivation also as a form of terrorism, the terror all the more greater because it creates a sense of hopelessness and persecution over a period of many years.

Arrogance and high-handedness in dealing with dissent has created a lot of enemies for the United States and the West. It creates a desire to hit back and hurt that which is hurting you to the best of your ability. It also

brings forth people who wish to undertake that mission. What we have probably seen is that hatred carried to a chilling height by a group of individuals who cared not about their own lives or the innocent lives they destroyed in doing it. Their act of terror differs from the many acts of aggression and manipulation used by the US and the West to impose their will on the defenceless peoples of the developing world only in its nakedness. This was probably because unlike the George Bushes and the Bill Clintons of this world, Osama Bin Ladens do not have smart bombs and cruise missiles - only highly motivated individuals with hatred at fever pitch.

So long as the West gives just cause for the rest of the world to hate it, the rest of the world will produce people who are willing to die and kill indiscriminately to express their hatred. There will always be Bin Ladens willing to exploit their hatred. There will also be many people dancing in the streets of the Middle East rejoicing the horror perpetrated on innocent American - and Western - civilians. They cannot be killed off one by one or terrorised into submission. The solution is to create a more equitable and just world. That cannot be done with the arrogance and the self-righteousness which the West seems to display in abundance.