

Example set for quick disposal of cases

We need to replicate this

It is welcome piece of news that a monitoring cell has been instrumental in the disposal of 14 sensational cases in less than a year's time. The cell created in April last year had listed 172 cases as requiring expeditious disposal. Ninety of them are under trial now. Fourteen cases were taken up as high priority ones and have accordingly been disposed of. So, there are 158 cases still to be taken care of. Of these cases 'remarkable' progress is said to have been made in 15 cases. On another level, 54 cases are under investigation among the total 172 labelled as sensational.

The eye-opening discovery about the quickening pace of disposal is that many witnesses who had earlier balked at making any deposition came forward on hearing that a monitoring cell was created. We know for certain that key witnesses have often kept from deposing out of fright of reprisal threatened by accused persons or suspected criminals. More often than not intimidation and threat put such potential witnesses in limbo. The quick disposal of cases has therefore provided us a proof of how persons having evidence can be persuaded to shake off their diffidence in coming forward.

It is also understood from the successful handling of the 14 cases that certain other forward-looking norms have been set. For instance, we learn that the process of investigation was in particular finished on double-quick basis. Then the monitoring cell also put pressure on the medical front to ensure submission of post-mortem report in time. Particularly useful has been the assignment of one police official to each court to pursue a case to its completion. It was also ensured that an accused appeared before the court when required without playing truant.

In all, we have now the right recipe for quickening disposal of a big lot of pending cases. This must be applied in handling the remainder of the sensational cases -- numbering 158 that are before the monitoring cell now. Thereafter the experiences gathered can be replicated to multiply the success stories in terms of bringing criminals to justice at the earliest. Handing down of conviction to murderers and rapists is the best way of delivering justice to the aggrieved. We believe, where there is a will, there is a way.

Fire deaths

Slums remain highly vulnerable to the hazard

At least three lives were lost in two separate incidents of fire in the city on Wednesday. The incidents are further proof that the make-shift structures in the city slums, made with inflammable materials, are highly vulnerable to fire.

Fire incidents usually take place with greater frequency during the dry season. The hazard is multiplied by strong wind that helps fire spread very quickly. Matters are made worse by the fact that slum dwellers do not even take the elementary precautions to prevent fire. After every incident, it is usually found that the fire had originated because of carelessness on the part of the inmates in a densely populated area.

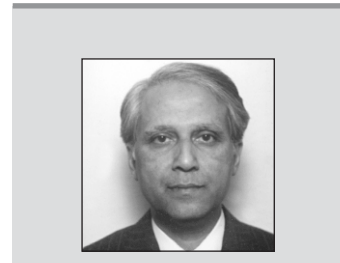
Quick action on the part of fire brigade can minimise losses. But in our context, the fire fighting units lack both speed and modern equipment. This is particularly true about the units stationed outside Dhaka. Then unplanned growth of slums and other structures has blocked roads and lanes in many places, which makes it difficult for fire fighting vehicles to operate effectively. Many lives are lost every year, but the situation remains unchanged.

When it comes to slum fire, the situation cannot improve as long as people do not go by the basic safety rules. Fire in such cases originates from things like mosquito coil, cigarette butts, ovens etc. But loss of lives and property can be avoided easily if people remain careful enough to eliminate the sources of fire. Of course, they have to realise that a little caution can help avert a big disaster.

There is still no effective mechanism for dissemination of information on different aspects of fire prevention and fighting. The fire incidents show that slums are a sore point in our scheme of urban living. There are hundreds of squalid and congested slums where fire can wreak havoc -- a point that needs no elaboration if we consider the number of fire deaths in the city over the last few years. But the deaths do not appear to have made much of an impression on the city planners and fire fighters.

The concerned authorities and agencies should come up with a more effective plan of preventing fire and minimising losses caused by it.

India's feelings of insecurity



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

As a firestorm rages towards the Middle East, one factor remains constant in South Asia. Indian leaders continue to express their serious anxiety about the security considerations pertaining to India. In more ways than one, the neighbouring region as well as the extended fraternity wielding power on the world stage are being reminded that India is within her rights to play a supervisory role in her relations with her neighbours. Some former Indian diplomats have gone to the extent of even suggesting that India has her own sphere of influence and that must be recognised by other countries. This is also being reflected in their 'responsible' media. There appears to be a growing proclivity of lecturing to others as to what needs to be done.

It is being argued by some in India that the former Prime Minister I K Gujral was soft towards his neighbours and that his doctrine of goodwill was not necessarily the best. 'India Today' (10 February, 2003) has gone to the extent of proposing that 'India needs a new carrot and stick doctrine to deal with its neighbours'. Such statements at best appear to be not only patronising and supercilious but also in bad taste.

India is a great democracy. Despite the serious imbalance created in its ethos by the resurgence of Hindu nationalism, there are still millions of sane, secular Indians. India might not have the best of border guards (given that 'twenty million illegal Bangladeshi immigrants' have allegedly gone through the porous border) but they have modern, efficient armed forces. In fact they are the dominant military power in the subcontinent. They also have a large industrial base and primary industries of all description. Their products earn for them many billions of US dollars from their neighbours. This in turn creates millions of jobs for Indian citizens. It is a vast and powerful country which has for some time been lobbying for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.

While its quest for security is understandable, it should also

pause to ascertain whether what is being done is the best way of doing it. It does not help to try to project India as a Colossus. Neighbours then feel insecure. The warmth goes out of their bilateral relations. This in turn has an inverse reaction.

India needs to be more pragmatic in its relations with the outside world. In order to achieve a high moral ground it has to be consistent. Sometimes, it might be useful to wear the shoes of its neighbouring leaders and see their

Such broad based allegations generate unnecessary tension, particularly when it is suggested that India should 'carry out covert strikes on militant bases.' It is proposed without hesitation that special troops could be sent 'to strike camps in the desolate Chittagong hills.' Such irresponsible assertions in the media spawn anxiety and suspicion.

What is worrying is that there are today two nuclear powers in South Asia. A spat, however minor, can have catalytic ramifications. In

Pradesh, and 447,150 to Rajasthan. This is not all. It has also been alleged that 468 have gone to Jammu and Kashmir, 20 to Himachal Pradesh, 12 to Karnataka, 344 to Punjab, 712 to Harayana and 4020 to Andaman and Nicobar Islands. There is however no indication as to how such precise figures were arrived at and the basis on which a person has been identified as a Bangladeshi. I like to think that I am a rational person, but I must admit that such figures defy sanity.

electoral rolls reflect such changes. The matter becomes even more intriguing when one sees the very small figures in some of the states (given the total population of these states) and also the unreasonableness of Bangladeshis arriving in boats in different Indian islands. One would have thought that the Indian Navy and the international press would have latched on to such arrivals of boat people.

What surprises one is the utter haste with which push-in efforts have re-started on the border with

ans and exercising efficient control over its own dissidents so that they do not try to infiltrate into adjoining countries.

Her neighbours also have a role to play here. No indirect support should be extended by any one of them to those who are attempting to create anarchy within South Asia through terrorist means. Disputes, whatever they might be, should be settled through negotiations and dialogue.

Security is not only physical, it is also a matter of the mind. India may like to carefully analyse the path taken by France and Germany in resolving problems. It may also carefully examine the efforts undertaken by these countries to ensure security for themselves without being a source of concern for their smaller neighbours.

Confidence building measures and not provocative action will be required on the part of India to foster their concept of a South Asian Union. Such a step will require reduction of tension in the psyche of her smaller neighbours. India can give effective leadership only by considering existing problems in the area from a wider perspective. This will in turn ensure stability and strengthen security for all countries in South Asia.

I will conclude by quoting from one of my poems which I read out recently in Almaty, Kazakhstan where I had gone to participate in a conference on Peace and Security.

What is peace
It is but the simple pleasure of laughter,
of the smile on a happy face.

It is but friendship that encourages hope,
that evokes understanding.

It is but the negation of suffering, conflict,
denial, double standards.

Peace is being free,
being able to agree to disagree.
Peace is pursuit of patience,
of tolerance, of cooperation.
What is security?

It is but surety that you can sleep at night
awake in your own bed, in your own home.

It is but assurance that
there is food for the body, liberty for the soul.

Security is knowledge of not being mere shadows,
of being equal, with justice for all.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador

POST BREAKFAST

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point of view with regard to existing problems. Each country is sovereign and has a domestic opinion with regard to various issues. The citizens of another country might not always agree with India over everything.

Like many others, I have watched carefully the manner by which India has slowly shifted its stand with regard to Myanmar. It is now making strategic investments in that country so that it can have greater 'connectivity' to ASEAN. This initiative is also aimed to help the north-eastern states of India. There is great sense in this tactical step. This change in mind-set could probably be used to find solution to other issues regarding other neighbours.

Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha referring to the many challenges being faced by him has correctly mentioned in an interview that India cannot change its neighbours and that it is 'better to live with them in peace'. In this context he has also said that India has goodwill for them and 'wanted to live in harmony and share its prosperity.' These are praiseworthy intentions.

In this context he has pointed out that India seeks friendship and cooperation from Bangladesh. Well, in that case we have no problem. Bangladesh desires the same. Unfortunately, the ground reality appears to be different. Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Myanmar are all accused of harbouring Indian terrorists and permitting their territories to be used for activities against India.

such a situation, one automatically feels uneasy when former Indian Ambassador C Dasgupta espouses a controversial doctrine about Indian responses to events in the region. In keeping with India's pre-occupation with Pakistan, he advocates fashioning out a 'new doctrine of sub-conventional warfare which means hitting back at terrorists in Pakistan with an element of credible deniability and simultaneously making an offering they can't accept for a dialogue so that blame falls on Pakistan for not moving forward' (India Today, 10 February, 2003). We have not seen anything in the media where Indian officials have expressed any reservation about such ideas. This does not help matters for smaller states like Bangladesh or Nepal or Sri Lanka or Bhutan.

One can understand any political party in any country trying to swing public opinion its way to gain an advantage in domestic elections. However, it would also be pertinent to seriously consider whether inflaming public opinion on mistaken assumptions is the best way of doing things.

A case in point is the recent tirade against Bangladesh over supposed illegal immigrants moving from this country to India. Amazing figures have been put forward in the Indian press -- 7,650,123 to West Bengal, 6,700,228 to Assam, 40,518 to Meghalaya, 34,874 to Tripura, 79,730 to Nagaland, 1,072 to Arunachal Pradesh, 641,396 to Bihar, 41,339 to Orissa, 28,034 to Maharashtra, 502,366 to Delhi, 34,874 to Uttar

It can be recollected that assurances were given very soon after 1973 that all refugees of Bangladeshi origin, who had sought sanctuary in India during the liberation war, had returned home. This, in those days was seen as a massive vote of confidence in the future of the new country. Consequently, it is difficult to understand now why, ten million having come back, should be followed by fifteen million going out to India. It is sometimes suggested in the Indian media that poor Bangladeshis leave for want of jobs, welfare schemes and security' but this appears to be hardly tenable. One cannot particularly understand how greater security can be felt in areas which continue to suffer from communal riots and where being a Muslim is easily noted.

In practical terms, it might be possible that some persons have overstayed valid visas. In some cases, it might also be possible that some who are involved in cross-border smuggling operations have opted for temporary residency, their presence (perhaps) being made possible through corruption among the local officials responsible for controlling illegal immigration and maintaining law and order.

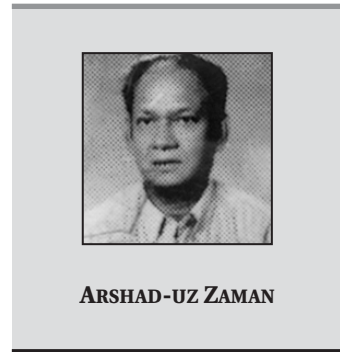
Nevertheless, to suggest figures of the above magnitude defies credibility. It is difficult to accept such figures given the fact that no radical demographic change is evident in the Indian states bordering Bangladesh. Neither the Indian census nor the Indian

Bangladesh. One thought that the recent diplomatic initiatives had created an atmosphere of restraint. Both countries have agreed that it was imperative that the ground for an enduring solution of this problem was prepared with patience and care before the convening of the secretary-level meeting in April. This was a reasonable approach. One would have thought that calm would have been restored into the scene. This is not happening. This has to be avoided. The right atmosphere has to be created ahead of the talks.

Security is important for India. It is only correct that it should be concerned about it. In these uncertain times, when terrorists have shaken the world order, security cannot be neglected. However, it is something that affects all states including India's neighbours. If India feels insecure because of subjective interpretation of its interests, and then embarks on unilateral measures, it harms its own position.

Greater coordination among its intelligence agencies, muscular Hindu nationalism, erecting of fences and using hi-tech surveillance devices will be of little help in guaranteeing security for its people of some of the issues which cause irritation with its neighbours are not addressed. This includes sorting out outstanding border delineations, lowering tariff barriers, actively finding ways to remove trade imbalances, investing surplus capital in countries which through their imports are providing jobs to millions of Indi-

'In Turkey, democracy is victorious'



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

deal was struck that Turkey would allow stationing of US troops on her soil in exchange for the US taking care of the long ailing Turkish economy. Repeatedly Turkey laid down the condition that any attempt by the US to set up a Kurdish state in Northern Iraq would be considered 'casus belli'. Although the US has been proclaiming loudly that she will under no circumstances attempt to do any such thing, the Turks have all

hardest decisions to take. She was faced with the prospect of watching the setting up of a Kurdish state at her borders. She tried to cushion the blow by moving her troops and armour close to the border. Then followed intricate negotiations lasting for months for US compensation to the massive loss to the Turkish economy, which closing of the border with Iraq would invariably result. Finally on the Governmental and the State level a deal

Turkish armed forces have a commanding voice. After long deliberations the Security Council approved the deal.

Behind the imposing Grand National Assembly building, stands majestically the Mausoleum of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, sitting on the Cankaya hill, the highest point of Ankara. It is as if Ataturk is watching over the rapidly expanding capital of the state, which he started nearly eighty

the war. In the mother of all parliaments, the House of Commons in London, in a motion regarding the possible war in Iraq, 123 members of the ruling Labour party voted against its own leader. Because of the large majority in the House of Commons Prime Minister Tony Blair avoided being thrown out of office. The other camp follower John Howard, Prime Minister of Australia does not appear to do much better as his countrymen

of the Grand National Assembly is obvious. We have to respect it. This is what democracy is all about'. US Ambassador in Ankara Robert Pearson stated "we were hoping for a favourable result. Only US continues to be a friend of Turkey". BBC in its commentary stated "in Turkey, democracy is victorious" whereas Austrian state TV commented Turkey "showed the red card to the US".

The leader of the ruling AK party of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is shortly going to take over the reins of power as Prime Minister, stated after the vote "relations with friend and ally US were not established in a day nor are they going to be spoilt in a day. Iraq must not misinterpret the Assembly vote and must abide by the UN decisions." There can be no doubt that the vote by the Grand National Assembly will have a profound impact on the war preparations by the US and Britain. The proposed pincer movement upon Iraq will require total military rethinking. It appears to be a Herculean task.

As a way out more and voices are rising that Saddam Hussein should go to exile and save humanity the scourge of a war that nobody wants. Since Saddam may be labelling under the illusion that he is winning, he may not be ready to quit yet. Mounting war preparations was a long affair. Winding down the war may be an equally arduous task, if not more so.

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THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

The leader of the ruling AK party of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is shortly going to take over the reins of power as Prime Minister, stated after the vote "relations with friend and ally US were not established in a day nor are they going to be spoilt in a day. Iraq must not misinterpret the Assembly vote and must abide by the UN decisions." There can be no doubt that the vote by the Grand National Assembly will have a profound impact on the war preparations by the US and Britain.

along taken this promise with more than a grain of salt.

The Kurds are spread within the borders of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria with Turkey holding the largest number and nearly one third of the Turkish population of nearly 70 million are Kurds. Britain in the heydays of her Empire where sun never set, did her utmost to set up a Kurdish state without ever succeeding. Apparently US has inherited that mantle.

For the Turks it was one of the

was struck. It was decided that the US would station 62,000 troops on bases in Turkey and as compensation for the losses suffered by Turkey for the closure of her border with Iraq US would virtually underwrite to pull Turkish economy from the ailing condition in which she has existed for decades. For months US and Turkish negotiators have discussed the issues threardbare and the matter was finally taken up by the highest decision making organ, namely the State Security Council, where the

years ago. It is a measure of the faith of Ataturk in his people that now their representatives have responded to the wishes of her people.

The wishes of the Turks have been manifested in very clear way. They will have no part in a war, which appears more and more ludicrous. By a conservative estimate nearly 95 per cent of the Turks are against the war. People by the thousands throughout the world have been demonstrating against

continue to demonstrate against him. Indeed both Blair and Howard cut very sorry figures in public appearances. Sitting on top US President George Bush continues to threaten Saddam Hussein of Iraq with dire consequences. Indeed he has been doing it at such regular monotony that less and less people take his threat seriously.

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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.

"Valentine's Day"

It seems that 'Valentine's Day' has once again stirred the hornet's nest. Mr. Arafat (February 21) has managed to deliver quite an indifferent analysis of the matter in terms of freedom of expression, while Ms. Shanaz (February 21) adopted quite a sarcastic, yet realistic tone on the matter altogether. There is no point in dragging this discussion further. Some people like to celebrate Valentine's Day, some don't.

However, the opposing groups must not attempt to impose their views on others. I agree with Mr. Minhaj Ahmed's (February 19) view on the subject, but it is not justified to ask anyone to keep their mouths shut. Mr. Yahya (February 17) responded in his

usual way, but to say 'if someone is gullible enough to be lured into the commercial appeal of the day, let him/her be', is insensitive. The news item 'Hindu hardliners hit lovers' (February 15) is also disturbing. Hardliners tend to be a narrow-minded group who follow outdated and discriminatory norms, and are opposed, to the point of being destructive, to views and practices contradictory to their own.

We must understand Valentine's Day in context of the thinking of the current generation. They have their own set of views and practices. These views and practices may not be acceptable to older previous generation, and the hardliners, but it does not mean they are perverted. What is right for one group of people does not

necessarily have to be right for another group. If to our present generation, Valentine's Day is suitable for expressing love or liking one feels for a special someone, then please let it be so. How we view Valentine's Day depends largely on how we interpret it. I request those who are opposed to it, to at least, look at it from the viewpoint of the youngsters.

Rahat Bari Toohoon
Hattirpool, Dhaka

Saddam a threat to the UK?

It is absolutely disgraceful to see the stupidity of the argument, "Saddam is a threat to the UK", emanating from the war hawks (Blair & Co) in the UK. Saddam or

Iraq has historically never invaded or attacked the UK or the US. If anything, it was the British leader, Winston Churchill who gas the Kurds in Iraq in the 1920s. It is an insult to ones intelligence to suggest that the country that is unable to defend its own border pose threat to a country that is thousands of miles apart.

So the war hawks continue to elaborate by claiming that Saddam may give the terrorists some of the weapons to attack UK. In response to this, the following points need to be considered.

a) It was the US that was targeted in all the pre and post 9/11 attacks and not the UK, and there are no reasons to believe that UK would be targeted.

b) By the stance taken by Tony

Blair post 9/11 has jeopardised British interest in the Middle East, and raised the possibility of an attack for the first time. Hence to really avert this threat it would be far better for Tony Blair to halt his support for Bush and listen to the British and international public opinion.

c) It is illegal and immoral to pre-empt a war on that basis that someone may give weapons to the "terrorists", and may attack the UK with it. This is effectively pronouncing judgement and dispensing punishment before the action has taken place.

d) At this critical point we should note that if anything there is more chance of an attack manufactured by the CIA, or Mossad in order to provide the "justification" for war and attempt to sway the public

opinion in favour of war.

Yamin Zakaria
London, UK

Save Buriganga

I was reading your editorial about the ill fate of Buriganga and was extremely shocked by the news. Not only the Government should be blamed for this pathetic condition of this important river but there are some other people who should be blamed as well. Why is the Government allowing these people to establish industries near the river? Because of poisonous chemicals and industrial wastes the River is being destroyed every day. If this keep on happening then what is the point of having the Department of environment? It is time for each and every one of

us to save this River and the marine lives.

Minhaj Ahmed
Uttara, Dhaka

Water is a resource. But it can be a scourge of terrible proportion when polluted. The Government should look into the matter with gravity.

The news item "Where all the sewers run" is distressing.

Mohammad Zaman
North Carolina, USA

Mosquito

I am no fan of Mayor Khoka, although he's better than Hanif any day. He has been a general failure in almost everything, even those stupid rickshaw lanes which

Hanif put up haven't all been removed yet. Although from day one those rickshaw lanes did nothing but hamper traffic and now are just a hazard.

But it irritates me when Ministers give orders that most minor deities would be afraid of asking. How can Mannan Bhuiyan ask for mosquitoes to be eradicated within 15 days? Are he and the rest of the jumbo cabinet planning to go out and spray the streets themselves?

LGRD Ministers should have better things to do than give pronouncements like '15 days for mosquito eradication' or 'two weeks before people forget about the millionaire meter reader'.

Kim
Dhaka