

Building deathtraps

Rajuk caught napping again

THE house of cards like collapse of an unauthorised built structure at Nandipara in the metropolis is just a tip of the iceberg. The entire city may be dotted with hazardous constructions just waiting to crumble on the heads of their inmates. The particular mishap has had a history of negligence and callousness on the part of the capital development authority -- Rajuk -- going back to last September. There may be a string of such weak constructions with a longer history of indifference from the same agency of the government. As for the latest one, some pillars were originally stuck into a water body to put some tinsheds on. Then the owner went on to build a concrete structure on the same, blindfolded to the need for elementary engineering safeguards. He apparently did not approach Rajuk with any plan, nor the latter had at any point of time spotted it happening and stopped the same.

The latest building collapse has added one more dimension to our habitat safety concerns. What happens when people build structures entirely of their own without having sought Rajuk's approval? At least some file-work would have left clues to monitor such illegal building activities, we know Rajuk would like to take such a plea in self-defence. But this argument would be entirely unacceptable for two reasons: one, Rajuk being the mandated authority to develop the city and not degrade it, will be without any reason for existence if it should press that lame logic. Secondly, there is strong suspicion that the entire capital city and its peripheries are abuzz with unauthorised building spree, let alone those with either faulty plans or committing violation of approved plans.

We have seen that with each incident of building collapse, the rot within is gallingly revealed. One would find that a whole range of construction, building and zoning regulations have been flouted right, left and centre over time with full impunity. But such revelations only rend the air and remain confined to theoretical discussion. Hardly any lesson is drawn, follow-up made, or the supervisory role of the Rajuk beefed up. The inaction is basically an incentive for the corrupt, dishonest and irresponsible to cut corners and break law with reckless abandon.

Given such chaos in the construction sector, we think a case is well made out for the government to set up a commission to determine the extent of the violation of building codes and devise ways and means to mitigate it.

Last-ditch diplomacy

It should prevail

US Secretary of State Colin Powell's call to the journalists and arms inspectors to leave Iraq only shows how desperate his country and its allies have become to initiate a war against Baghdad. While people and leaders around the world continue to urge for peace, George Bush and his thinning number of allies seem bent upon making a war on Iraq at a break-neck speed. But why did Powell ask only the journalists and arms inspectors to leave? Was it because he didn't want the world to see the damage an attack may cause in Iraq? Or does he think that the arms inspectors have finished their job? May be he was simply concerned about their safety. But shouldn't he be more concerned about the thousands of civilians who are at far greater risk should US forces invade Iraq?

But at least we can hope against hope that something peaceable will emerge from the last-ditch diplomacy at work. It was a bit relieving to know that President Bush was prepared to go 'that extra mile on the diplomatic front' to avert a war. But how long is that extra mile remains to be seen. Critically, the deadline for Iraq to disarm theoretically ending on Monday, they have extended it by only a single day. So the margin of manoeuvrability is too narrow to work on. If the US was willing to give Iraq some more time 'to come clean on weapons of mass destruction', then how would they explain the massing of hundreds of thousands of troops in the Gulf?

Meanwhile, the joint call by France, Russia and Germany -- leading opponents to any US-led war -- for emergency UN talks to bridge the diplomatic chasm on Iraq cannot be ignored. Their suggestions for a compromise on time limits for the arms inspectors could resolve some of the major differences of opinion. They have always demanded that the inspectors be allowed to finish their job first before contemplating the war option. The US and its allies are vehemently against it. But shouldn't the world leaders come to a compromise on a question of life and death not just for the Iraqi people but also those in the adjoining areas, to say nothing of the body-blow it will deal to the world order and global economy?

Immigration bogey bodes ill for Indo-Bangla relations



M ABDUL HAFIZ

AFTER the gory episode of Padua in 2001, the somnolent border between India and Bangladesh was, for the first time awakened early last month to the cracks of flying bullets and brawls over the push-in and push-out of the people whom both the countries refused to accept as their citizens. In its wake the reinforcements were called, bunkers dug and war-like postures taken on either side of the troubled border raking up dormant bickering in our bilateral relationship and threatening a major showdown. The border-shootout was preceded by provocative speeches by the hawks of India's ultra-right ruling coalition. For example, L K Advani, India's deputy prime minister told the journalists on 7 November last that both Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency and the al-Qaeda are active in Bangladesh, from where they now conduct subversive operations against India. Again on 6 January Advani, while addressing the state chief secretaries said that as many as 15 million Bangladeshis have been illegally staying in India and deserve to be deported. Later a senior Bangladeshi diplomat was summoned to MEA (Ministry of

External Affairs) and served a demarche' registering India's plea that Dhaka recognise the gravity of the situation and tackle it sincerely and in a spirit of cooperation. But in the meantime the BSF 'push back' of 'illegal Bangladeshis' already started and Bangladesh Foreign Ministry alleged that the BSF was actually deporting India's Bengali Muslims in the name of pushing back 'Bangladeshi infiltra-

It may be recalled that when Bangladesh government was rather exasperated in dealing with '74 famine, the polemic started, for the first time, over Bangladeshi exodus to India due mainly to the food shortage in the country as New Delhi lodged a protest with Bangladesh against a large number of Bangladeshis moving into India. Bangladesh, however, dismissed the protest asserting that the emi-

and acute food shortage during the subsequent years the remnants of those visitors who have returned in the wake of '74 famine -- something that was possibly interpreted by the Indians as an influx into India at that time.

When viewed against this background an Indian concern over Bangladeshi emigrants at that juncture of time appears, in retrospect, highly preposterous and

phenomenon with a complex set of dynamics working behind it. From time immemorial people have been migrating from one place to another always in search of a greener pasture. According to a noted Indian demographer: "Human beings like water move downwards from higher level of misery". Even if India lies at a slightly less higher level of misery than Bangladesh it has seldom been an attrac-

from Tibet, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Myanmar. Out of these recorded Bangladeshis in India the majority are essentially economic refugees fighting for mere survival by moving from one of the world's poorest countries into one that is slightly less poor. At the same time they also contribute to the economy of the host country by meeting its demand of cheap labour by Indian household and employers.

It is unjustified for high government functionaries in India to inflate the number of these hapless refugees for making allegations not backed by systematic survey and empirical evidence. Wherever investigations were undertaken -- for example in Delhi where BJP launched an 'Oust Bangladeshis' campaign ten years ago, or in Mumbai where the Shiv Sena followed the suit in 1995 -- the results disproved the official claim. This is also true of the latest surveys in Delhi in areas such as Yamuna Pushta where the police found just 200 Bangladeshis instead of the tens of thousands expected. Whatever is the real picture of Bangladeshis in India the damage has already been done to the relationship between India and Bangladesh which have been destined by the geography to live forever as each other's neighbour. The approach the ultra-right BJP-led government adopted, a communal prism through which the whole issue was viewed and the semi-military operation the Indian authority launched to summarily deport 'illegally overstaying migrants from Bangladesh' did not bode well for Indo-Bangladesh relations.

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BISS.

PERSPECTIVES

Whatever is the real picture of Bangladeshi illegals in India the damage has already been done to the relationship between India and Bangladesh which have been destined by the geography to live forever as each other's neighbour. The approach the ultra-right BJP-led government adopted, a communal prism through which the whole issue was viewed and the semi-military operation the Indian authority launched to summarily deport 'illegally overstaying migrants from Bangladesh' did not bode well for Indo-Bangladesh relations.

tors' and 'in contravention of the laid down legal rules to deport the illegal people.'

The Indian complaints of illegal Bangladeshis in India is nothing new and has been applied also earlier as a lever along with many others at the disposal of India whenever Bangladesh asserted her position vis-a-vis her powerful neighbour in bilateral dealings. This myth has been built up by India over a period of time -- both by its government and powerful media. The myth that millions of Bangladeshis have been illegally staying in India seems to be a ploy carefully contrived as early as in 1970s. Apparently it was to blunt the cutting edges of so many grievances Bangladesh started voicing against India soon after its independence.

grants were actually Indians who had come to Bangladesh soon after the liberation. As a matter of fact it was Bangladesh which worried more about such population influx as evident from a position paper prepared by Mujib Nagar government as back as in June, 1971. The paper observed that 'considering the economy of West Bengal and the socio-political conditions prevalent there, the people originally from erstwhile East Pakistan who are still not settled in India may find it worth trying to go back to their original home in Bangladesh'. As rightly predicted there was, in fact, a large number of visitors from West Bengal in the early months of liberation as if on a pilgrimage to their forefathers' land. Deterred, however, by a war-ravaged economy of Bangladesh

Advani's recent revelation of 20 million Bangladeshi illegally living in India is indeed incredible. The furor over Bangladeshi emigrants was most pronounced in a series of 'anti-foreigner' agitations that started in Assam in 1978. In a triangular conflict among the Assamese, Bengalis and tribals, only the unauthorised settlers from erstwhile East Pakistan and Bangladesh were made the scapegoat and thus target of all atrocities including the infamous 'Nellie massacre' of Bengali Muslims during the agitations. At a point of time, presumably to dramatise the issue, India decided to fence the Indo-Bangladesh border. Although it did not materialise the unsubstantiated wild reporting on the issue continued in Indian Press.

The migration is a historical

destination for the migrants. Rather, a large number of Indians migrated to various parts of the world including Bangladesh where the Indian *Maruaris* had been a bustling community even during Pakistan period. Migration is a highly individual choice and has little to do with the state policy. Thus an odd cross-border movement of the people from Bangladesh under still more odd circumstances can not however be ruled out. But the presence of 15 or 20 million Bangladeshis in India can only be a wild exaggeration, based on reckless speculation, coupled with paranoia. Admittedly there are some 'aliens' in India whose numbers are put at maximum 325,600 by UN High Commissioner for refugees. They include also Bangladeshis apart from people

War for hegemony, not justice

Stand up for peace!



PROF. BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

LAST month, the Blair government flagrantly plagiarised a journal article and claimed the information in it was based on British intelligence and proved Iraq's involvement in global 'terrorism'. The intention was to damn Iraq -- and justify war.

Now, it transpires that Anglo-American allegations about Iraq's attempts to buy uranium from Niger are also based on crude forgery, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

IAEA chief Mohammed El-Baradei has also confirmed that there's no evidence Iraq has been pursuing illegal nuclear activities. He examined the aluminium tubes, which the Americans allege, amidst much a hullabaloo, were used to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons. He found no such 'indications'.

Thus, some of the critical 'evidence' cited for claiming that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction

(WMD) remains unsupported even after inspections at more than 3,000 sites.

After UNMOVIC chief Hans Blix reported that a "pro-active" Iraq has undertaken a "substantial measure of disarmament", it's impossible to construct a plausible case for war. As Mr Blix put it: "We are not watching the destruction of toothpicks. Lethal weapons are being destroyed."

How does Mr George Bush rationalise war? First, he wanted to disarm Iraq of WMD. Next, he said Mr Saddam Hussein is a tyrant; hence, "regime change" is imperative. Now he declares: "I will not leave the American people at the mercy of the Iraqi dictator... if we need to act, we will act. And we really don't need... UN approval to do so..."

Mr Bush rants: "My job is to protect America, and that's exactly

America's real war objectives have to do with oil, Israel, and Islam -- re-making the Middle East through "moderate-Islamist" (read, pro-US) regimes. They derive from the ambition to dominate the world.

The US will easily win the war. But winning the peace is another matter. War will kill massively and unleash uncontrollable forces in Iraq. This will send shockwaves through three key countries: Saudi

the US as never before. America has pressured a number of states, including the six uncommitted Third World countries on the Security Council, to build a "Coalition of the Willing" -- in fact, a Coalition of the Coerced.

However, not even one major state has joined the US-led alliance. Turkey has defied Washington by refusing to station troops -- despite the offer of \$30 billion and half of Iraq's territory.

opposed a Parliament resolution on Iraq. He refused to commit India not to provide military assistance to the US.

But two days later, he suddenly declared that India stands for peace and opposes external aggression to effect a regime change in Iraq. He also said the weapons inspectors should be given more time and warned against "puppet regimes".

But in the UN, India's vacillating stand on Iraq has further softened despite Mr Blix's March 7 report, which demolishes the argument for war. No wonder US ambassador Blackwill has expressed "satisfaction" with India's UN position.

This must change. New Delhi should take a harmonised stand based on sound moral principles, multilateralism, and informed public opinion. In a *Hindustan Times* opinion poll in Delhi, 87 percent of people say war on Iraq isn't justified; only five percent say India should offer military support to the US.

It's a safe bet that this view is shared countrywide. Official policy must reflect it.

Prof. Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

These societies are boiling with discontent against rulers who are seen as despotic and slavishly pro-Western. Heightened turmoil is liable to take on a religious-fundamentalist form. This will poison the Middle Eastern and South Asian climate. Ultimately, it will make even Americans more insecure.

Yet, it is on this flimsy factual basis that the US is rushing into war. Nearly 300,000 US and British troops are in the Gulf. If Washington and London cannot muster the required nine votes (out of 15) for the "second resolution", they may bypass the Security Council and launch war any time.

The moral case for war on Iraq is non-existent. According to Just War theory, any use of force must follow the exhaustion of all other means. War's goals must be just. Force must not be excessive nor indiscriminate.

None of these conditions is fulfilled in Iraq's case. What lacks a *casus belli* (rationale for war) cannot be a war for justice. It can only be a war to establish hegemony.

what I'm going to do... I put my hand on the Bible and took that oath, and that's exactly what I am going to do..." He cited 9/11 *eight times* in his press conference.

This is perverse. For one, there's no link whatever between Iraq and 9/11. For another, Mr Bush's three rationales are mutually contradictory. And for a third, it's preposterous to claim that Iraq "threatens" America and it cannot be deterred except by war.

Nobody sane can believe that a badly impoverished, sanctions-battered Iraq with its crude first-generation missiles (with a range of 150-180 km and without even a guidance system) poses a serious threat to the US from 8,000 km away!

Arabia, Egypt and Pakistan.

These societies are boiling with discontent against rulers who are seen as despotic and slavishly pro-Western. Heightened turmoil is liable to take on a religious-fundamentalist form. This will poison the Middle Eastern and South Asian climate. Ultimately, it will make even Americans more insecure.

That's why the US Establishment figures like former President Jimmy Carter, former Secretary of State Warren Christopher, and countless former generals oppose war on Iraq. They warn against its likely damage to the United Nations, and to the US's own alliances.

Imperial arrogance has isolated

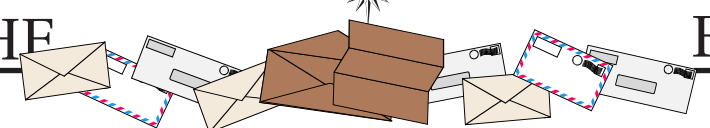
Not one of the Security Council's "fence-sitters" has declared support for the "second resolution". The US needs five of their six votes, and no veto. But Pakistan is abstaining, and Chile, Guinea and Cameroon seem intractable.

This is history's most unpopular war. It's sending tremors through governments -- witness Labour in Britain where ministers are revolting. This war was opposed for months before it began -- for the highest moral reasons.

Countries like India can contribute to the global anti-war effort. But the Vajpayee government is hesitant, being tempted by the promise of crumbs from post-war Iraq's reconstruction.

On March 10, Mr Vajpayee

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.

New strength of the old France

Mr Bush could never fulfil all his pledges of tax-cuts and at the same time keep up with billions of dollars to Israel and his huge defence spending. He needed some money coming from "outside" sources to make up for his tax-cuts. As a result, the invasion of Iraq has always been a big factor in Bush's budget. The invasion has to happen, no matter who says what and how well Saddam co-operates. To make matters worse, Bush has already spent a lot of money by sending his huge military to the Gulf. So now if Bush doesn't get Iraq's oil, he wouldn't have enough money to honour his pledge and so he is likely to lose his job. But if he does go to war without a second resolution, again the angry American public will take his job. Which is where France comes in. Thanks to Blair and Bush, both of these warmongers have locked themselves in a corner and given the key to France! France is not isolated, instead France is now in a very strong position. President Chirac has the support of his people and even British public!

France may not be able to stop the war and Blair/Bush might go alone. But that will not change the fact that they will be committing war crimes. If they want to go alone without a second resolution, let

them. It is Blair and Bush who lied to us about their mysterious evidence, they deceived us with their dossier and they are the ones who are starting the war. And now out of nowhere, they blame France! Is it because both Blair and Bush's jobs depends on France's veto?

Azad Miah
Oldham, UK

Resist the US-British aggression

Finally, the hypocrisy of the US has become clear. By testing the most powerful non-nuclear bomb, it has become clear who actually possesses weapons of mass destruction. While US and Britain along with Spain have been trying to pass a second resolution, France, Russia, Germany, China etc have been opposing the motion with all their efforts.

If the US attacks Iraq with its "coalition of the willing", then the countries, opposing the war should also form a coalition and fight the US forces to protect the innocent Iraqis.

Sameer Ahmed Khan Mojlilsh
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Iraq
If a solution to Iraq crisis is found

today, the experts predict that the crude oil prices in the international market will start falling sharply from tomorrow.

Will the OPEC countries including those in the Middle East, minus Iraq, really like it?

Faruq Aziz Khan
Joar Sahara, Dhaka

The US wants democracy?

Many of the letters have advocated the honourable intentions of the United States, which is to establish democracy by removing the cruel dictator (Saddam Hussein). If the US claims to be motivated by ethical reasons, then why does it continue to sell lethal weapons to cruel dictators, as it did to Saddam in the 1980s? It is the profit that motivates the US, not compassion. Why the US has prolonged the cruel economic sanction against Iraq, which harms no one but the innocent civilian population. Why is it the US is suddenly concerned about the cruelty inflicted by Saddam after all these years but turns a blind eye to the incessant cruelty of Israel, led by a war criminal (Butcher of Sabra-Shatila), which has been going on since 1948 on a far greater scale! As for democracy, this is simply another red herring. We all witness how the US brought "democracy" back to

Kuwait after the first Gulf War, not to mention its current "democratic" allies of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar and Pakistan. Why not push for democracy in these countries?

As for Mr. Erin Hanson's letter (12/03/03), we Bangladeshis may be poor but we are not gullible. Ordinary Arabs want to be liberated from all the oppressive regimes, not just the ones that satisfy Corporate-America. Liberation means genuine independence, not the forceful imposition of "democracy", with a US friendly regime, that can virtually supply free oil and remain blind to Israeli oppression. The US did not and do not want democracy in the Middle East for the simple reason, it would allow the ordinary masses to acquire genuine control of its vast oil resources. Consequently, America would have to learn to buy the oil. That America cannot permit, as the American dream must be realised, even if it is a nightmare for the world!

Yamin Zakaria
UK, London

War on Iraq

The lead story in The Spectator by Dantel Gruger has a very interesting argument in favour of what it has the courage to call Neo-colonialism.

He argues that a new doctrine of

international order is emerging, of which the imminent war is a crucial outing. "It is the doctrine of humanitarian intervention -- or, to give it its proper name, neo-colonialism. This doctrine is driven by the firm belief -- uncluttered by relativist self-loathing -- in the universal principles of liberty and justice. It gives expression to our sense that everyone, not just the West, has a right to live in a decent country -- and that the West has a duty to help them do so. In particular, it gives substance to the vacuities of the 'ethical foreign policy'."

Kruger draws parallels between America's war on terror and Britain's war on slavery in the 19th Century. "The slave trade was outlawed throughout the British dominions in 1834, and it was simultaneously decided that no one else should be allowed to practise it either. For the next 30 years the prime duty of the Royal Navy was to eradicate the slave trade on the high seas.

By and large Britain did this duty alone. Overwhelmingly the most powerful nation on earth, it chafed at the restraints of international co-operation. Britain did the work, often ignoring diplomatic sensitivities by attacking slaving stations on sovereign territory, or stopping and searching ships flying neutral colours. The Americans in particular, the hypocrites of their

day, were more a hindrance than a help: they bleated about British 'unilateralism' and protested about the need for 'international law', while all the time its entrepreneurs were running their own slave ships between Africa and the Southern states.

One thinks of the French, urging the 'UN route' while Total-Fina schemes to win Iraq's oil contracts.

The task today for Britain's imperial heir is to reverse the debilitating effects of socialism and tyranny in the developing world. This does not require perpetual territorial conquest; but it does require regime change, where regimes will not change themselves.

Pray that the doctrine of the Allies prevails, and we will see the realisation of Thomas Jefferson's dream: an 'empire of liberty'."

MA
Dhaka

Ganguly, the great!

The question has to be asked now because victory and defeat on a big stage -- and it doesn't get bigger than the World Cup semi-finals and final -- have a way of clouding our perceptions, especially in their immediate aftermath. And it is a simple question: Is Sourav Ganguly the best captain the Indian cricket has ever had?

No matter what happens a few days from now, when India plays the semi-final and then, possibly, the final on March 23, this is perhaps the right time to ponder on the Ganguly question.

Indian cricket has never had a captain who has been quite as equally loved and loathed as Ganguly has been in his time in the hottest seat in Indian sport. The Ganguly we see today, on and off the field, is very much a product of the times. Indian cricket could never have had a Ganguly in the 1950s or 1960s or even in the 1980s. Can you imagine the Nawab of Pataudi Jr. sporting the sort of attitude that Ganguly wears like his favourite hat? Can you imagine that real Prince of Indian cricket making Garfield Sobers wait in the middle for the toss in a game of psychological one-upmanship?

Those were different days. And Pataudi was a different kind of man. Other long-reigning Indian captains, such as Sunil Gavaskar, Kapil Dev and Mohammed Azharuddin, all did the best they could but none of them ever managed to impose their personality on the team like Ganguly has done so successfully.

In many ways, this is Ganguly's team first. The Indian team next. And that is not a bad thing altogether, given the results.

What is more, from a team

perspective too, Ganguly seems to have done all the right things. He has taken talented young men under his wings, trusted his instincts and backed them -- Yuvraj, Nehra, you name them -- and finally demanded, and got, superlative performances from them. If, now, he is the *Dada* of all he surveys, then Ganguly deserves it.

Anwar Zahed
Strasbourg, Sweden

Bangladesh's image and conspiracy theory!

I wonder what would be your reaction to the recent reports on Islamic extremists in Bangladesh. I recall you were quicker than our government in denying earlier reports in the foreign and local media. Where do we stand now in protecting our image and how credible do we now look in terms of our conspiracy theory that the opposition party were responsible for all those bomb explosions?

As I said many times, don't deny and hide! Face the reality and act. I am glad the government did wake up but can they withstand pressures from within and without?

Mak Khan
Australia