

Suicide by a helpless girl Some one must take responsibility for her death

WE are simply lost for words in reacting to the sad and unnecessary death of young college student Farzana Afreen Rumi in Khulna. It would be impossible for all of us to understand her state of mind when she hanged herself in her own home and at a moment when a group of local 'mastans' were trying to break the door with a 'mission to kidnap her' in broad daylight!

What is so worrying and disturbing at the same time is the attitude of the neighbours toward the whole incident. Rumi's father had approached the elders of the area for help, but none made any efforts. Not only that, no one came forward to help when Romy and his gang barged into his house threatening to kidnap Rumi!

And the less said about the police, the better. If newspaper reports are to be believed, then they did their jobs alright. When the local police was informed about an earlier threat made by Romy, reportedly they asked Rumi's parents to file a false robbery case against him. Since they didn't, police most conveniently did not take any action against him.

Digging of roads

It cannot be an unending process

CITY dwellers, steeped in a host of civic problems as they are, seldom hear anything being done to mitigate their sufferings. So the Dhaka City Corporation's bid to put a brake on round-the-year road digging may bring some relief to them.

The DCC has decided that the utility service providers will have to seek its permission before digging roads. Strange though it may sound, road digging is no longer a minor problem for the huge number of vehicles and pedestrians moving on the city thoroughfares.

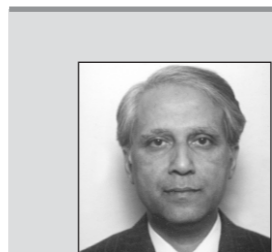
The utility service providers appear to be totally oblivious of the inconvenience that they cause to people by digging, and most often leaving the mutilated roads not sufficiently repaired once their job is done. Big holes or furrows in the middle of the busy thoroughfares are a common sight in the city.

The biggest problem is that the badly ruptured roads add to the seemingly insoluble traffic tangles in the city. The decision-makers are apparently worried about jams, and so are the road users. But the factors responsible for such jams have not been eliminated in a planned way.

Reports also say that as per the existing rules the utility service providers have to take prior approval of the DCC before digging a road, but there is no provision for penalising the violators of the rules. However, the DCC's plan of seeking compensation from the utility service providers, when they fail to complete their work within the stipulated period of time, should be executed in right earnest.

The DCC has rightly felt that road digging is going on indiscriminately and something has to be done to make the lives of road users less miserable. We believe that lack of coordination among the agencies concerned is a major problem, which must be resolved before the situation can improve.

US-Europe relations after Iraq war



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

IN history, each situation is different and has to be judged on its own merit. Important events provide us with a roadmap, and help us to prognosticate as to how the present might affect the future. I believe that what we are witnessing today is an international occurrence that will not only cast its own shadow on future strategy and planning in the Middle East and Asia but will also affect the evolution of future events in Europe and its relations with the US.

It would appear from reports coming out of different European countries that Europeans were shocked not only by the scale of their own disarray over the Iraq crisis but also by the depth of the rifts that this conflict has opened up inside the European Union.

The splitting of NATO, when France, Germany and Belgium balked at committing themselves to aiding Turkey in the event of an Iraqi attack, was symptomatic of a more serious malaise. It revealed that the European Union's vaunted common foreign and security policy was hollow and non-existent.

This disarray appears to be based on much more than what is happening in Iraq. The issue of whether it has been right or even useful to attack Iraq has been a catalyst that has brought to the surface long dormant divisions over the nature of European security. The European media might have focussed attention on disagreements between governments, but more alarming has been the policymaker's sense of bewilderment over what the challenges to peace really were.

One would tend to think that the missing cornerstone of European Union's common foreign and security policy has been what military planners

call common threat assessment. The fifteen nations of the EU today are unable to agree on the nature of their shared security or on the geographical limits of their 'security neighbourhood.' They are also unable to agree on whether they should seek or accept global defence and security responsibilities.

Nearer to home they are at odds over the balance between European countries' sovereign powers and the sharing of their defence capabilities, and consequently also their financial commitments. The latest round of the ministerial meeting in the NATO headquarters also demonstrated that

tion of their security aims 18 years after the alliance's launch in 1949, and it laid the groundwork for detente and the eventual end of the Cold War. Giles Merritt, the eminent Secretary-General of Friends of Europe has recently pointed out that, 36 years after the Harmel Report, Europe probably urgently requires after Iraq a fresh security doctrine.

In this context, it has also been stressed that Washington probably needs to re-define its security policy criteria. Attention is drawn to the fact that international opinion through mass protests have clearly indicated that the Bush Administration's doc-

better pool their military resources, so that their political leaders can have improved levels of military clout. It is in this regard that I anticipate a new trans-Atlantic doctrine after Iraq. One would be even tempted to call it 'Harmel-II,' consistent with Hollywood.

The new cooperation will probably stress more on the industrial component. Whatever the differences of opinion today between the USA and certain countries in Europe, it cannot be in the long-term interests of the United States for Europe's military capabilities to lag too far behind. The only solution will be to strengthen the

Consequently, existing heavy forces might be replaced in Europe by more rapidly deployable troops.

It is already being suggested in this regard that the US Army will probably soon move their new hi-tech Stryker brigades to Europe. Military analysts are also predicting that other highly ready and deployable units might be moved to Europe, possibly on a rotational basis rather than permanent stationing. It is also being pointed out in this context that some of these expeditionary forces could be positioned in South-eastern Europe, in places like Romania and Bulgaria, for easier transit to troubled areas. This

opinion, it is unlikely that any of these three will follow the United States into future military adventures, should the Washington hawks turn their attention to other 'rogue' states. Similarly, it is improbable that the East Europeans who backed the United States over Iraq will want to choose between the Americans and the Franco-German duo. Being emerging democracies, they would naturally want to be friends with both and will obviously worry about a divided EU.

The Europeans have shared interests on most areas of foreign policy. Nevertheless, in a post-war Iraq framework, several important issues will still have to be faced.

There is the prickly question of reconstruction of Iraq. The insistence that 'a central role' be played by the United Nations as opposed to a 'vital role' is expected to cause disharmony. Similarly, the concept of a US dominated administration is going to be difficult. It might initially cause another fracture between the Old and New Europeans. However, in all probability, a consensus will eventually emerge, given the vital economic interests for all.

The Europeans and the US will also have to come to a broad agreement with regard to the 'road map' for the establishment of the Palestinian state and the future Middle-East peace process. This is a factor that can only be termed as crucial.

Lastly, the EU will have to sort out differences of opinion between itself and the US over EU's efforts to engage Iran, with which it is negotiating a new trade agreement, much to the dislike of the Bush Administration.

Much will depend on what Washington does once the fighting ends, as well as the degree to which European coalition partners follow America's lead.

It will however be the common and shared interests, i.e., oil and gas, terrorism, drugs and illegal immigration, that will in the long run paper over, I believe, the cracks that have appeared today within Europe and between certain countries of Europe and the USA.

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Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

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discussion of military burden-sharing across the Atlantic and within Europe is dominated more by airy platitudes than agreed, hard facts.

It would be worthwhile to note here that the 105-member Convention on the Future of Europe (an advisory body), will be issuing their mid-year recommendations in the near future on how to streamline and reform the EU. It is expected that they will touch on defence and security. Critics are waiting to see how the current Iraq war, its progress and its attendant political crisis will affect the convention's future reform package.

The other evening, a commentator made an interesting observation on television. He pointed out that on paper the European members of NATO have two million troops in uniform. In practice, the experts believe that less than five percent of them could ever be mobilised as fighting units of a NATO response force.

The problem appears to be overlapping. Each European country has its own military structure, from fighting troops to the cook and book-keepers who keep them fed and paid. Weaponry duplications abound.

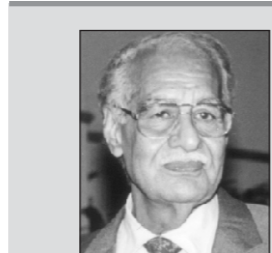
One of the important fall-outs of the Iraq crisis will be a European initiative to find out how they can

European defence industries. It will consequently target greater defence spending and more burden sharing by Europe against a much more open approach by the Pentagon and the US Congress to defence equipment sales by non-US suppliers.

The next question that arises is, what might be the future strategic basis for the US forces in Europe? This aspect is important because today, according to Hans Binnendijk, a Professor in the Centre for Technology and National Security Policy, there are 109,000 US troops in Europe, including 65,000 ground, 34,000 air and 10,000 naval personnel. More than half of that number is currently stationed in Germany.

Important changes have taken place in the recent past and these factors might influence future US strategy. Today, the US no longer needs to hedge against a resurgent Russia, so remnants of the Cold War posture (despite the recent spat over Iraq) could be withdrawn. Consequently, the US Army's V Corps and its armoured and mechanised divisions, designed for territorial defence, now deployed in the Gulf may not return to Germany. The US planners might now think that the threat was more in the Gulf region rather than in Europe and as such it will be better to be closer to the scene of a possible future conflict.

Jingoism and journalism



KULDIP NAYYAR writes from New Delhi

I WAS studying at the Northwestern University in America in the early fifties when McCarthyism was at its height. Individuals or groups were publicly accused of political disloyalty without proof. Every liberal was dubbed a communist.

It turned neighbour against neighbour. Idealism touched its nadir. Few people thought that the US would be able to get over those dark days. Still it turned the corner in the beginning of the sixties. Old values of liberty and democracy returned with a vengeance. Must we conform? The people asked. It was their right to rebel.

People felt generally ashamed of that phase of bigotry. But the suffering, which the period of McCarthyism brought on people, can never be forgotten. It was a lawless rule. Some lost key positions; some got their unblemished reputation soiled. Some of the best brains left the fields of art and science. Even today most Americans recall that period with horror and hate.

I have no doubt that a decade or so later, the same thing will happen: the US will remember the current time of

arrogance and boorishness with similar pangs of conscience. By then, the Bush Administration would be history. And the feeling of unlimited power would be tinged with some humility.

The same society, which has failed to realise that it imposed an unjust and illegal war against Iraq, would introspect and admit that it was wrong in doing so. Wreaking vengeance for the World Trade Centre's destruction on the civil population, including women

power. The real America has been pushed to the background by a new breed of power-crazy men at the White House, the Pentagon and the State Department. The world should be patient till the old America, which liberated itself from Britain and founded a pluralistic society, asserts itself again. The concept of individual freedom and independence are too deeply rooted in the land to be ended by Bush who, in any case, is an appointee of the US Supreme Court.

and children, in Iraq would be considered an act of inhuman cruelty.

The vision and the message of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt and John Kennedy would be refurbished. President Bush would be relegated to an insignificant footnote in the history of America. The problem is how long this period of non-accountability would continue. Even if Bush is defeated in 2004, the feeling of being the most powerful country in the world -- America has 43 per cent of the world's wealth -- can tempt the likes of Rumsfelds and Powells to arbitrarily change the world order.

It is not oil alone. It is the hubris of

What do those people who burn British and American flags think they achieve by their childish acts? If any-

tion that brought the young and the old together in a series of protests against the WTO is surfacing again. As days go by, the opinion against America's unilateralism will become more vocal. I only hope that the protest does not become parochial -- that of the Arabs and Muslims. It is a worldwide anger. Let it stay that way.

The problem is to push the governments of our region to take a stand against America's might which has already exposed the UN. The western

BETWEEN THE LINES

The criticism is against the manner in which America, supported by Great Britain, went ahead with the attack without getting the sanction of the UN. It would have come if the two had only waited a bit longer...Our media's complaint is that western news agencies did not cover the fierce resistance the Iraqis put up at Basra and other places. As someone rightly said, the foreign TV networks tried to sell the world "an antiseptic war, one in which there were no torn and bleeding victims."

media dominates the world. Even people in countries like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, who have come on the streets to protest against the war on Iraq, depend on western news agencies for information. The prejudice of the agencies gets reflected in our newspapers and most of the electronic media. And we disseminate what we get.

But this is not the first time it has happened. The Indian media has always been found wanting in the coverage of war or peace outside its shores. Our dependence on western news agencies is pathetic. Our two main news agencies -- PTI and UNI -- have disseminated whatever Reuters of the UK or the Associated Press of

the sanction of the UN. It would have come if the two had only waited a bit longer.

Our media's complaint is that western news agencies did not cover the fierce resistance the Iraqis put up at Basra and other places. As someone rightly said, the foreign TV networks tried to sell the world "an antiseptic war, one in which there were no torn and bleeding victims." No weapon of mass destruction has been found in Iraq. Still the information the western media put across from day one was nothing but that. First the emphasis was on the removal of Saddam and his two sons, the demand made by Bush. As he changed, the western media too asked for a new regime. In the end, it

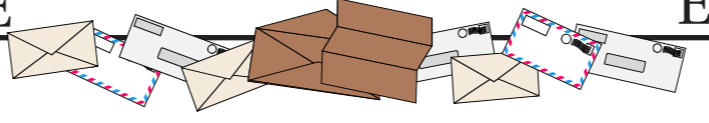
was the installation of a democratic set-up by the Iraqis. Woefully, the western media has become a willing tool in the hands of America and the UK.

We were run down when we caved in during the emergency (1975-77). I am certain that the press in the west, with all its democratic traditions, would behave in the same way if something like the emergency was imposed in America or the UK. Like us, they would also crawl. All the Pulitzer Prize winners would have a question mark against their credibility. Writing well is not enough, writing the truth is more important. For the sake of "national interest" the media should not swerve from its path. Journalists have to be objective. In a democracy, the media cannot afford to have even an iota of doubt raised about what it says. What holds good for India is true of both Pakistan and Bangladesh or, for that matter, most countries in the third world. There too, the media uses the copy from the western agency. And it did so to cover the Iraq war.

It is strange that India should see Pakistan and Bangladesh through Reuters or AP and vice-versa. Of course, during even a small conflict, as was seen at Kargil, the truth becomes a casualty because of the jingoism that takes over. But an exchange of even a tainted report by Indians and Pakistanis may be better than what is available now. The problem with India and Pakistan is that their minds are so prejudiced against each other that they would rather depend on the western news agencies than something that has the authentic flavour of the region and truth.

Kuldeep Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

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.

"ZIA neon sign flashes in Arabic"

This is to all the people 'for' the ZIA neon sign in Arabic. Right now, it's not about whether Arabic is an important language or not. It's not about whether our constitution says we are an Islamic state or not. Nor is it about whether Bangladesh is a secular state or not.

Arabic signboard at the airport, it is bound to create some controversy, given the state of current world affairs. It seems as though Bangladesh is trying to make a statement to the world about world politics. There's nothing wrong in making statements, true, but this particular statement is telling people that we are taking a side, and not remaining neutral. It is not surprising, then, that people would react the way they have to the sign. If the neon sign had been there for the last ten years, people wouldn't have said anything. The main problem is, why now? We can do without the extra publicity on this front.

\*\*\* In response to M.A. Bashar's letter (April 16) I ask what does Arabic being the common language of Muslims have to do with the newly placed sign at the airport? Bangladesh is a secular country and a multi-religious society. Our cultural identity and language is Bengali, regardless of our faiths. Bengali is our mother tongue and English is the dominant language used in international interaction. Therefore, it is logical to have signs in Bengali and English throughout Bangladesh. For the writers who have mentioned a closer relationship with our Arab brothers as a justification for the Arabic sign, do you know what our Muslim Arab brothers think of us?

They think we are poor and backward people meant to be their drivers, cooks, and domestic help. Do you still want a closer brotherhood? Rashid Chowdhury George Mason University, USA

Yet another Bush bluff from Belfast Recently Hans Blix said that the Iraq aggression by Bush was predetermined. Earlier the international community noted that the purpose of the swung constantly. For example, initially it was to disarm Saddam Hussein. Then it was WMD recovery, a regime change and so forth. Finally it was settled out to be freedom of Iraq. Mr. Blix noted that the WMD issue was relegated to fourth place. Even in the

fourth week of Iraq invasion and deployment of 'favourable' arms inspectors no trace of WMD was found let alone huge lot. Blix is waiting with interest for the finishing chapter of 'WMD episode'. Now it appears that arms inspection was a bluff by Bush to the international community. Now just a week back in Belfast, Bush said regarding UN involvement in reconstruction of Iraq that, "We are committed to international community". God forbid! M.U. Chowdhury One-mail

Marketing of social concept Human rights and humanity are the most forgettable two concepts lacking

of which is the main reason for this peace less earth. The world is now submerging under discrimination, hatred, war, conflict and so on. These worldwide dispute and clash can be reduced by successful utilisation by marketing of social concept. We can communicate some message over the world that will help people to remind the universal truth like "All are equal in the world", "One creator but different concepts", "Global state", "Love can establish a peaceful earth, not war" etc. The peace-loving people, celebrity, media, organisation and the state can take the initiative to spread concepts throughout the world and help restore peace and sanity in the world. Towhid Hossain Mazumder One-mail