

## River journey turning into death-trap

*The last call for passenger safety sounded*

At least 78 people died in yet another launch capsizing Sunday last. The mishap took place only a few kilometres away from the Sadarghat river terminal.

Perhaps, the tragedy would meet with the same routine treatment: the deaths will be condoled and those holding high public offices will tell us that navigational rules had to be enforced strictly. But the long series of condolences or condemnations will do little to prevent another accident, or relieve those of worries who are planning to make river journeys in future.

What is particularly regrettable is that people are dying in accidents, most of which are avoidable. Even Sunday's disaster could have been avoided, or the damage minimised, if the launch crew listened to the passengers who asked them to keep the vessel as close to the bank as possible. But the good counsel went unheeded. There was obviously nobody to think about the safety of the helpless passengers.

Something has to be said about weather forecasts, at present a 24-hourly affair that tends to be more of an academic interest than any practical value. The forecast for such a long time cannot cover for the mercurial changes in the atmosphere to help head off accidents. Weather bulletins should be released for a much shorter period of time, and it must be made mandatory that the launch operators have the latest bulletin with them before starting a journey.

Next comes the question of how trained and experienced these launch crew are. It has been found that many of them do not have the necessary training and background for taking charge of such big launches.

Other flaws are no less scary; launches violate navigational rules and resort to overloading. There is no mechanism for monitoring their activities, especially whether they are using approved routes or not. If there is one, it's on paper only, given the frequency of accidents. Not long ago, some launches were found to be built in violation of approved designs. That could easily make a double-decker craft in particular very vulnerable as the crucially important balance could be lost in stormy weather. Even a barge could be converted into a launch!

We see something in the likeness of dockyards on either side of the Buriganga. Are they authorised by the concerned department to run a business which has a direct bearing on the lives of citizens? All these serious drawbacks will have to be removed before launch journeys can be made safe.

## Garner in Baghdad

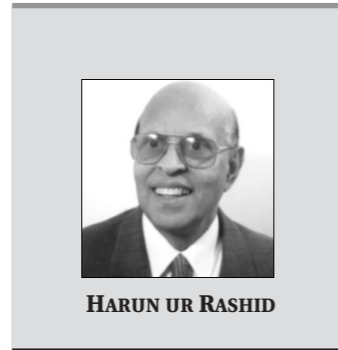
*Occupying forces must leave sooner than later*

THE much-vaunted arrival in Baghdad of the so-called administrator in 'war-torn' Iraq has quite expectedly met with disapproval of those at the receiving end. And why not? Retired US General Jay Garner is known to be a former arms dealer, never in his career did he take up any diplomatic responsibilities either. Yet he was chosen by the US administration to head the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) in Iraq. On arrival, he reportedly said that his intention was to introduce 'a new system' in Iraq. But who gave him the mandate to do so? Definitely not the Iraqi people, nor did all the other countries under any UN umbrella.

Undoubtedly, General Garner has landed on the soil of a highly critical country. A country that has been ruled by a military dictator for more than two decades, a country that went into total anarchy and chaos after its leader fell, a country that has been reeling in lawlessness, plunder and disruption in daily necessities like electricity and water supplies cannot be generous with a foreign administrator. He has a tough task ahead no doubt, but he has a tougher image problem to address. In the perception of Iraqi people, he would always be seen as being in charge of US occupation. Whatever steps he takes to bring order and peace in the country would be viewed with suspicion and skepticism.

But here we would like to make a point -- since the occupying forces whose primary job was to tackle lawlessness after taking control of the country, failed miserably in that basic area, it is only natural for us to have a nagging doubt about the prospect of success of the ORHA mission. The US has already failed to win support of the common Iraqis; regular demonstrations in Baghdad and other parts of the country against the occupying forces are glaring examples of that. And now it's obvious from the reaction of the Iraqis that Jay Garner does not have public acceptance. We hope the occupation period will end quickly and an indigenous Iraqi government will be in power as soon as possible even during the interim period.

# What is the motive behind sudden concern over WMD?



HARUN UR RASHID

THE existing concern about weapons of mass destruction appears to be a smokescreen for an ulterior agenda. This is because weapons of mass destruction have been around for centuries and many states have indiscriminately used them. No one now talks about it and there seems to be a total amnesia about the use in the past of the weapons of mass destruction.

History makes it clear that those states that now oppose possession of weapons of mass destruction not only possess them but also used them during wars. The idea is that big powers can possess and use them but not any one else that the big powers dislike. This is totally unfair and discriminatory. One rule exists for big powers and their close allies and another one for the rest!

It is interesting to note that big powers had used biological and chemical weapons during wars. Even they used them to eliminate native population in occupied lands. It is appropriate that a brief history of development of weapons of mass destruction is closely looked at.

When Hernando Cortes (Spanish) and his soldiers introduced smallpox to the New World in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it had a devastating effect on the indige-

nous population -- historians say millions perished in what the Aztecs called "the Great Dying". Smallpox had devastated native population in Latin America. Captain Simeon Ecuery of the Royal American Regiment made a subsequent cynical note in his diary: "Out of our regard for them (the Indians) we gave them two blankets and a handkerchief out of the smallpox hospital. I hope it will have the desired effect". The blankets performed as intended.

mainland, thousands of Chinese prisoners were reportedly experimented on from 1939 to 1945, usually with fatal results. America instigated its own programme in 1942 in response to this and the potential for similar developments in Germany.

After the World War II the Russians used captured Japanese germ warfare scientists to greatly enhance their biological weapons programme. By the end of the 1970s the Soviet Union's Biopreparat agency employed 60,000

tribes". Those tribes are now known as Iraqis and Kurds.

The nuclear age began in 1945 when America dropped two atomic bombs -- one on Hiroshima on 6 August and the other on Nagasaki on 9 August. Some people died immediately in Hiroshima and 37,000 died in Nagasaki. Later thousands more died because of radioactive fallout. No atomic bombs have been used after 1945. However America warned Iraq before the war that if biological or chemical weapons

carried out to produce biological weapons. The Protocol could not be adopted in 2001 because America rejected it. With regard to chemical weapons, the 1993 Chemical Convention prohibits the manufacture of chemical weapons except for medical and research purposes.

The Conventions are in fact ineffective because chemical and biological weapons are easy to produce and any individual with a science degree may be able to produce such weapons. That

nuclear weapons and not to test its weapons publicly. In return Washington pledged not to pressurize Israel to ratify the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Israel is allowed to have weapons of mass destruction but no one in the region can possess them. If they do, America threatens to launch pre-emptive attack on them or impose sanctions against them. The logic seems bizarre but one can find a rational in the attitude in that no Islamic country in the Middle East should have them so that Israel's military might reign supreme.

The gross discriminatory and double standard approach of America is not likely to inspire people who dream a world of cooperation and peace. The war on Iraq has taught the world that there is nothing more dangerous than a lone superpower that can at its will change the contours of political history through naked aggression... Many political observers suggest that President Bush appears to have deflected his domestic woes by waging war on Iraq.

Many political observers suggest that President Bush appears to have deflected his domestic woes by waging war on Iraq. In that sense the President may have taken the advice in a passage near the end of Shakespeare's *Henry IV* where the dying King warns his son about political enemies who might exploit his domestic troubles and advises him to wage wars in foreign countries:

"Be it thy course to busy giddy minds With foreign quarrels, that action, hence borne out May waste the memory of the former days."

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

## BOTTOM LINE

The gross discriminatory and double standard approach of America is not likely to inspire people who dream a world of cooperation and peace. The war on Iraq has taught the world that there is nothing more dangerous than a lone superpower that can at its will change the contours of political history through naked aggression... Many political observers suggest that President Bush appears to have deflected his domestic woes by waging war on Iraq.

It had been argued by some that smallpox was deliberately released among Australian Aborigines as well. There has been much speculation as to what caused the disease to appear in the local Aboriginal population 14 months after the arrival of the Europeans. Late Professor Noel Butlin argued in his 1983 book, *Our Original Aggression*, that the source of outbreak was most likely that smallpox scabs were carried on board the First Fleet to Australia.

Russia experimented with poisonous gas in 1915 and a Special Gas Brigade was formed to attack the Germans with gas cylinders known as "Flying Pigs". The Russians began a formal research programme into the use of biological weapons in the 1920s but it was Japanese research that was known to be the most frightening. In the laboratory complex on the Chinese

people. It had the capacity to produce hundreds of tonnes of biological agents and had stockpiled thousands of plague, anthrax and smallpox bombs. America too continued its biological programmes with a custom built complex at Fort Detrick, Maryland. America tested biological weapons on more than 3,000 troops in the 60s and 70s and used them in Vietnam war.

More than 125,000 tonnes of gas was used during the First World War and an estimated one in four artillery shells in 1918 contained chemicals. After the First World War, many decried the use of gas warfare. Winton Churchill however canvassed the possibility of deploying it in the battle to keep Mesopotamia (Iraq) in the British Empire. As Secretary of State for War Churchill wrote in 1920: "I do not understand this squeamishness about the use of gas..... I am strongly in favour of using poisonous gas against uncivilized

were used, they would retaliate with atomic weapons.

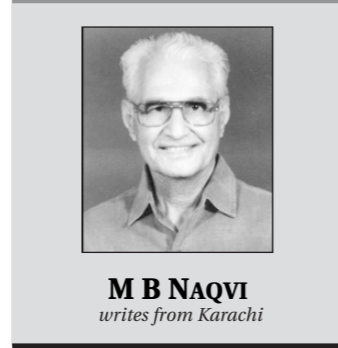
From 1915 to 1980s huge resources were expended by big powers on the development of chemical and biological weapons. International community was deeply concerned with the presence of deadly weapons and adopted two international conventions on Biological weapons. The first one was in 1925. The 1925 Protocol prohibited only the use of biological weapons but not their production. In 1972 another biological Weapons Convention was adopted that prohibited production and use of biological weapons.

The verification regime under the terms of the Conventions is very weak. An additional Protocol to strengthen the 1972 Convention was prepared so that independent inspectors might verify in countries where enough suspicions and alleged activities were

is why these weapons are commonly referred to as "the poor man's atom Bombs". Chemical weapons can be made in pharmaceutical laboratories and many substances that have industrial uses, such as metal cleaning or photo developing materials, can be turned into dangerous weapons. While a big stockpile of chemical weapons is required to kill large number of people, only a small quantity of germ (biological weapons) is needed to kill tens of thousands of people. While people die immediately with chemical weapons, a biological attack, although deadly, may not take effect for several days.

There are about 25 countries in the world that are believed to possess chemical and biological weapons. Israel is one of them and is believed to have nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. Israel reportedly agreed with America in 1969 not to declare its

# India's hand of friendship?



M B NAQVI  
writes from Karachi

SOME of the knee jerk reactions to the Indian Premier AB Vajpayee's April 18 offer of unconditional negotiations on all contentious issues between India and Pakistan, including Kashmir, have been sceptical or negative. More so, because he mentioned the usual Indian line about negotiations being impossible while cross border terrorism from Pakistan's side goes on. Isn't it proof that the symbolism of Friday's offer of unconditional talks was bogus? Well, Pakistanis have to remember some background facts.

Mr. Vajpayee is India's Prime Minister and his politics is that of an old and tried BJP-RSS man. He has in fact returned to 1999 when his new government, soon after the two sets of nuclear tests and some brutal murder of Hindus in Kashmir decided to open negotiations with Pakistan. Mr. Vajpayee then rode a bus to Lahore and signed various documents there with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. There were indications that the talks had gone well. But the Kargil adventure sabotaged whatever progress had been made and Nawaz Sharif was forced to beg peace in Washington and agree to basically Indian conditions. And a freeze returned to Indo-Pakistan relations.

Vajpayee made yet another overture and Agra talks resulted. These failed miserably because Pakistan expected the Indians to climb down on Kashmir while the military hostilities around Kargil had been a dismal failure. The rest of the story is known.

Following the October attack on Srinagar Assembly, there was another on Indian Parliament itself in December 2001. After Agra's failure the BJP government started a furious propaganda campaign against Pakistan and

continued it for over a year. The Indian authorities have kept on talking about a war during it and later defining it as a preemptive one. None of it can be forgotten or erased from the record. The official Indian campaign has created a vicious anti-Pakistani climate of opinion in India in which a real war, preemptive or not, would naturally be supported by a lot of

retaliate with nuclear weapons. In other words, the Indian preemption is predicated on a sudden massive nuclear strike. Conversely also, should Pakistan find itself cornered and decides to make a strike, it too will have to be preemptive with all that it has.

Therefore war is no longer a mere

COAS and an all-powerful President. He means to keep an upper hand over the Parliament and keep the Prime Minister as his man Friday doing what he wants him to do. The opposition is fighting against it. There is a deadlock between the government and the opposition. The President is in no mood to make any serious concession and the opposition has probably burnt

After the sacrifice of 70,000 young men's lives and horrible human miseries in Kashmir, the Kashmiris' cause has not been advanced an inch by what is called Jihad and which the Indians call terrorism. If Pakistanis can see with a clear eye, they would find all their own trusted foreign friends in India's corner. One means Iran and China both; the Chinese too

domestic issues have been sorted out, the central issue concerns the amplitude of General Pervez Musharraf's powers. If he is not willing to make any patriotic sacrifice by shedding some of his powers that are foreign to a democracy, the outlook would be dreary and bleak. That would not be the ambience in which a creative reformulation of foreign policy would be possible in accordance with the main thrust and sanction of a vibrant democracy. What chance can there be of India and Pakistan succeeding or avoiding sterile arms races and possible nuclear war?

Mentioning weaknesses of Pakistan at this stage and in this context is not promoting defeatism and pessimism. Let's face the fact that the world views Pakistan as an unstable and brittle state; it must be factored in. The need is for constructive thinking and seizing whatever opportunities there might be in this situation. Can the Jamali-Musharraf team rise above the puerile and dated formulations on Kashmir and think of a paradigm shift?

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

## PLAIN WORDS

If Pakistanis can see with a clear eye, they would find all their own trusted foreign friends in India's corner. One means Iran and China both; the Chinese too want Pakistan to negotiate with India if necessary on India's terms. The Americans and the British have already pitched in on the Indian side. It is a time when Pakistan has to change its basic policies, both in the sphere of foreign affairs and the main features of its domestic politics.

Indians and also to enable BJP to remain in power, perhaps winning another national election a year hence.

Pakistanis cannot expect Mr. Vajpayee to talk like an impartial observer or a foreigner. He has to keep his political rear safe. He has also to keep his line of retreat open, with a viable line of action in case the overture this time also fails. It is optional to expect that the Indian government will, on encountering another failure in India-Pakistan talks, fall back on more of the same: what it has been doing since December 2001 or may be it might actually go to a war. Nothing can be said for sure.

A word in parenthesis about the next and easily possible war between the two countries is in order. The conditions, based on both countries' off-repeated stances, are propitious enough for a war, although a comforting conclusion can be drawn that the reasons why the Indians did not actually go to war with Pakistan last year still largely apply.

Insofar as the war itself is concerned, a little realistic thinking is in order. India's preemptive war cannot now be a simple conventional foray in merely Azad Kashmir. Why? Because Pakistanis have long held that it would mean an all out war and that they would fight a full fledged war with whatever they have. Therefore, the preemptive strike will have to be such as to cripple Pakistan's ability to

deadly cricket. The nuclear dimension now ensures mutual defeat and totally unacceptable destruction. Whatever India decides it is its business. Pakistan has no rational reason to countenance any war whatever. Ergo, it must do everything humanly possible to avoid a war. It is no time for macho talk of professional soldiers; it is time to be realistic.

To repeat, Mr. Vajpayee is not suing for peace from a position of weakness. What he has said on Friday in Srinagar is an offer of unconditional talks. It was happily seized by Pakistani PM and FM as such. They were right. There is no point in insisting on looking too sceptically into the gift horse's mouth. Mr. Vajpayee can comfortably live with the success in the talks as well as failure in them. Insofar as can be seen, his calculation seems to be to win a national election at the crest of an admiring wave for having befriended a long lost brother. But he can go back with equal ease in the case of the talks' failure and redouble his anti-Pakistan vitriol to win another election by in some way repeating a Gujarat. Is Pakistan equally well-prepared for failure?

This is not Pakistan's finest hour. It has had a constitutional breakdown in 1999 and a personal dictatorship of a General has obtained since then. The General is now claiming to make a slow and rather halting transition to a democracy with which he can live with all his jobs and powers intact as a

its boat by over commitment and probably cannot retreat. It is an unpromising background for serious Indo-Pakistan negotiations, no matter whether the famous centrality of Kashmir is actually respected by India or not.

Even so, Pakistanis have to remember that they carry a terrible burden -- of the failure of their Kashmir policy.

want Pakistan to negotiate with India if necessary on India's terms. The Americans and the British have already pitched in on the Indian side. It is a time when Pakistan has to change its basic policies, both in the sphere of foreign affairs and the main features of its domestic politics.

While foreign policy would naturally take care of itself after the main



## Lest we forget

# Shazneen: How I remember you

SHAHEEN ANAM

It has been five years. Five years since that horrible fateful night when you were so cruelly taken away from all those who loved you, knew you and those who would have someday known and loved you. Your young life was extinguished before your youthful beauty could blossom, before you had the chance to experience the challenges and the excitement of adulthood.

Since then we have all gone ahead with the business of life. We have found ways to occupy ourselves, have found satisfaction and happiness in our professional and personal lives. However, your death left a wound somewhere deep within, not only within those who loved you, but also within those who heard or read about your tragic death. This is a wound that just refuses to heal. It does not heal because your death symbolises the vulnerability of young girls in our society. The wound erupts into a searing pain every time a young life is cruelly extinguished through acts of wanton violence.

Many of us had made solemn promises to make your death mean something in our own lives. To use it as a rallying point and prevent further such violence against our girl children. In spite of those promises, violence against children and young girls have continued unabated. Since then countless incidents of rape, murder, suicide, acid attacks have occurred while society has watched helplessly. We have not been successful in curbing the violence and cruelty that occurs toward our children everyday. The worst victims of such violence are young adolescent girls. Just in the last two days two young girls were forced to commit suicide because of rape and teasing.

If we are serious about eliminating violence against children then we will have to address this problem jointly. This must include members of the civil society, activists, law enforcers, policy makers, children themselves and parents. There has to be a social transformation and attitude change whereby the entire society will galvanise together to resist violence against children. Only then we will be able to combat this scourge which manifests itself like a



disease in our society. Recently the only positive sign has been the quick disposal in courts of some cases of

violence against young girls. At least some satisfaction can be derived from the fact that the crime has been acknowledged and the culprits will now be held accountable.

Shazneen, your death had triggered many different kinds of reaction in us. In the beginning it was fear. Parents became fearful of leaving their young daughters alone at home. Trust was severely eroded as parents were not sure who they could or could not allow inside their houses. Parents become more protective about their young girls and this resulted in less freedom for them. Over time much of that has changed. Life slowly came back to normal for most of us. However, deep inside that fear still lurks, what if? The group that was most affected were children from your generation. It took them a long time to reconcile to the fact that someone among them could actually die a cruel death. For them Shazneen you will forever remain their friend, young beautiful and youthful.

For a parent like me Shazneen, I remember you sometimes when I see my 14 year old daughter giggle and laugh at something silly. You were only 15 and

must have laughed in the same way. You too must have annoyed your parents with your constant phone calls and wanting to spend time with friends just as she does. You too must have been their beloved, adored daughter just as she is. The sight of a bunch of young girls in weddings and parties, pretending to be all grown up is another reminder that you could have been one of them. The eternal questions remains, why you? Why someone like you had to die a cruel and painful death. There is no answer, just that would remind us that this could have happened to anyone of us or to our children.

That is why such violence must be condemned and some action taken by each and everyone of us. It does not matter if we knew or did not know you. You symbolise our young and often vulnerable girls. If we are at all serious about preventing these acts then we must act unitedly. Everyone of us in our own way must do something directly or indirectly to resist and prevent violence. We have a responsibility towards our children. They need protection and help and for too long we have shrugged that responsibility. It is

surely time that we collectively responded to that call.

After five years what is foremost in our minds is the ongoing court case against those who allegedly committed this act. We are all waiting eagerly for the conclusion of the due process of law. The trauma this has caused your family is unimaginable. Their patience, dignity and perseverance have already become an example for others to learn from. All we now ask for is justice and God willing we will get justice soon.

Shazneen, I will continue to see you in my daughter's smile, in the laughter of other children and in the exuberance of young girls impatient to become adults. The wound that your death caused may heal someday in a more just and humane world. A world where young life is not taken away so cruelly and callously. A world where every girl child is permitted to blossom and grow into adulthood. A world where she will be considered equal to anyone else, beautiful, confident and courageous.