

Drug abuse

Social awareness and concerted effort can blunt its force

THE International Day against Drug Abuse and Trafficking was observed on June 26, amid a demonstration of youthful exuberance and enthusiasm.

A concert organised by the *Prothom Alo* drew thousands of boys and girls saying an emphatic 'no' to drug abuse. They raised their voice against the menace nibbling on the vitals of our most potent force -- the youth. It has indeed been a special way in our context of creating social awareness about the hazards of addiction.

It is distressing to learn that school students form a big chunk of drug addicts. So if nothing is done -- and we continue to plod along routines lines -- to check proliferation of drug abuse that can cause more havoc than other weapons of mass destruction, we will end up losing a big part of the force of youth. The latest statistics and picture of the extent of drug abuse show that the menace has not only grown big, it is further growing in size.

But the steps to counter it appear to be too routine and general. There are two facets to the issue which have to be taken into consideration. First, it is not possible for any country alone to put an end to drug trafficking which is now a big business run by very well organised international crime syndicates. So we have to be part of the regional and global efforts in this respect. The countries in this region should work on building a defence mechanism against drug trafficking on the basis of cooperation and commitment to wiping out the traffickers.

Second, the rehabilitation scheme for bringing back the addicts to normal life must attain the desired level of coverage and efficiency. Regrettably, we have not achieved much in this area so far. There should be more organised and effective ways of counselling and guiding the addicts so that they can once again lead a normal life.

Concerts and street plays can go a long way to laying bare the horrible fate that a drug addict will suffer and thus raise the level of public awareness. However, the ultimate success of our programmes will depend on activating the services that drug addicts need and an adequate response to drug trafficking and marketing.

Pressure mounts for release of Suu Kyi

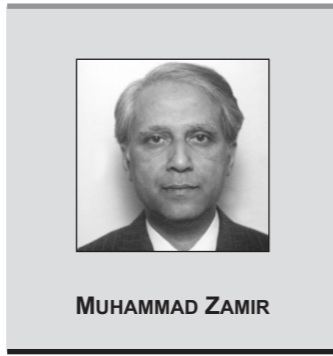
For how long do the junta test people's patience?

THE pressure on the Myanmar military junta is mounting day by day to release the detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Apart from formal demands to release her immediately from prison, most of the countries have already begun to show their determination in taking bold steps to ensure her release. Japan has threatened that it would halt its hefty economic aid to the country. A Japanese official told reporters after a meeting with the UN special envoy to Myanmar, Razali Ismail that Tokyo had informed the Myanmar government that aid would be halted if it refused to release Suu Kyi. And as recently as Thursday, the United States gave shape to the threats they had been making ever since Suu Kyi's detention.

Reports say that Washington was preparing new sanctions against Myanmar that would freeze personal assets of members of the ruling junta and ban remittances from its nationals working in the US. If President Bush signs on the executive order, then it would surely mean trouble for the junta. It's rather bemusing to witness the junta turning a complete deaf ear to the outcry on Suu Kyi's arrest, both internationally and internally. Not just in Myanmar itself, many elsewhere, especially students in the eastern countries, have been extremely vocal against Suu Kyi's detention. It would be interesting to see for how long they can hold onto their position. Defying the requests and the subsequent demand by the international community and testing their patience might become too heavy a load for the junta to carry.

The west has already denounced the government's reason for putting Suu Kyi under 'temporary protective custody.' To undermine those protesting her arrest, is an insult to the international community. Why did she need to be put under such protection and that's also at an undisclosed location, is a question the junta would have to answer convincingly. Because all of their reasoning so far have been anything but convincing. Here we would again like to the draw the attention of ASEAN who probably could have played the most significant role in freeing Suu Kyi from the clutches of the junta. We wonder what's stopping ASEAN governments from moving, even after a special request from US Secretary of State Colin Powell at its recently held summit? May be it's their close business partnership with Myanmar. But unless they show enough grit in listening to what the rest of the world is saying, their intention would remain highly suspicious.

Expanding our cultural horizon



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

WE have been confronted for over fifty years with a crisis of confidence. It is our identity that has been the cause of debate, concern, and contradiction. Over the years we have faced this predicament and intellectuals of different persuasion have argued endlessly on the merits and demerits of various aspects of our cultural ethos. This inability to agree on a common identity has cast its shadow not only on our socio-cultural life but also on our approach towards politics and international relations.

Various factors have been identified and stressed at different times to determine the scope and extent of our cultural background. The degree of fluidity and the indeterminate nature of its definition have however meant that Bangladesh despite an active cultural scene, has been unable to truly project its rich heritage. The most disappointing aspect has been the impact on cultural institutions with every change of government. Philosophical differences have ended up in drastic transformations of personnel management.

It is time that we establish a matrix and try to really agree on some fundamentals. Such an exercise should carefully examine the different elements -- starting from the manner in which we express our salutations to important factors like language and literature and the philosophy that encourages art, sculpture, music and folk-lore. This is necessary for establishing a common ground.

Having decided on least common denominators, we could then try to include different facets. This is important because the national language of Bangladesh and 21 February are both part of the world cultural inheritance. The fact that UNESCO has declared 21 February to be the International Mother Language Day makes it incumbent upon us to be able to project to the rest of the world an agreed and basic culture that sets apart people of Bangladesh from the rest of

South and South East Asia.

The Bangladeshi ethnic consciousness that has inspired the gradual evolution of its culture is based on a mosaic that includes the rural background of its population. It is reflected particularly in its pristine literary forms, its poetry, its music, its songs, its musical instruments and choreography in dance forms. It is here that we need to look for common and accepted

and the development of classical and folk music on a parallel track. Historians have also noted that it was quite common not only for mutual exchange of ideas between the classical and folk music but also between what was practised in the then Bengal and its adjoining regions. Strains of *Charya geeti*, *Geetogovinda*, *Krishna kirtan* and *Mongol geeti* (devotional hymns) found their way into the musical repertoire of what is now Myanmar,

expressions in Bangladesh where there need not be any dispute. Here one would like to refer to rural poetic songs like the *Kabi gaan*, *Jatra gaan* and the *Baul gaan*. These are extremely popular forms of entertainment in the rural areas of Bangladesh. They are particularly liked because such art forms rely on inter-action between more than one person. Consequently, being practised in groups, they could form the core for musical troupes going

is mostly absent. Quite often we also get lectured on by country or groups of countries about non-observance of fundamental human rights.

We have embarked on a path where we are seeking deepening of economic cooperation with countries in the East. We need to also consider whether there can be expanded cultural cooperation with these neighbours. Having started near home, we could possibly think

poetry, novels, painting, sculpture or cuisine represent South Asia as far as the West is concerned. Their corporate sector assists in this endeavour. After India, in terms of cultural recognition comes Sri Lanka and then Nepal.

We stand marginalised today, to say the least. Yet, it is our language that has been chosen by UNESCO. We are lagging behind because we are not making full use of our potential. Gaining wider respect and admiration for our literature, art and music will require hard work, but it can be done.

This can start with a careful examination of what we have, what we want to achieve and what we need to do to get there. Unfortunately, the existing infrastructure lacks the capacity to take us forward.

The Bangla Academy, staffed with some dedicated individuals lack adequate resources for undertaking research or translating into English, French or German important Bengali publications. Rare books and manuscripts are preserved under most unsatisfactory conditions. There is very little interaction between those working in this Institution and in similar Institutions abroad. There are very few cultural exchange programmes whereby individuals from this Academy can go abroad for training. It is a similar situation in the Shilpakala Academy.

There is scope for us to benefit from international cooperation in culture. The European Union and many other countries, if approached, could become our partners in this field. UNESCO has indirectly opened the portal for us.

It is true that every Government in Bangladesh has tried in its own way to strengthen the infrastructures of our cultural horizon. However, while some progress has been achieved internally, it is still far from satisfactory.

We should learn from India, Thailand and Sri Lanka and analyse why their tourism industry and their cultural exhibition have taken off in such a great way. In a large measure it is probably because they have been able to successfully export their own ethnic cultural image. We can do the same if we can work together without politicising what we possess.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

POST BREAKFAST

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links. This short article is a very superficial appreciation of some of the non-controversial elements in our nation's cultural map. We can probably stress these aspects at the time of the projection of our culture.

There can hardly be any debate about the sources of our musical tradition. It goes back hundreds of years. All connoisseurs know that from ancient times there have been two styles in our music: one is the *margyo* or the classical and the other is the *deshi* or the folk music. Classical music emphasises the play of the *ragas* and the tunes rather than the play of words and phrases to express feelings. On the other hand, folk music lays equal emphasis on words and music and reflects the feelings of the common people. All of us can at least agree that both the classical and folk music of Bangladesh have developed from the ancient rural civilization of Bengal and from the tradition of solo performances by artistes.

By nature, we are emotional and music has been the most common form of expression of our feelings. It may be recalled here that the oldest form of music in Bengal that has survived with modifications until recent times is known as *charya geeti*. Sculptures and terracotta reliefs in buildings depicting dancers and musical instruments suggest that there might have been other musical forms, but unfortunately they have not survived.

One thing is however quite clear. From the times of the Mauryas and the Guptas, what is now Bangladesh has seen a flowering of culture

the North Eastern States of India and Thailand. In fact, there are great similarities in the musical structures of Indonesian devotional music of Bali and that of Bengal.

The parting of ways between the music practised in Bengal and the neighbouring regions came with the advent of the British in India. From nineteenth century onwards, with the influence of western education and culture, the music of Bengal became more diversified and richer in content. This was largely due to the contributions made during this period by musicians of great talent. In fact, one could say that the modern era of music of what is now Bangladesh and the State of West Bengal in India dates from the time of Ramnidhi Gupta (famous for his *tappa* in early 19th century) and reaching its peak later that century and in the early 20th century at the time of Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam.

There are other musical

abroad.

One can now turn towards poetry and art. Unfortunately, for the last decade we have seen preferences being given sometimes to certain artistes and litterateurs, irrespective of their true abilities. These selections are made more on the basis of perceived political affiliation. This has impaired our image in the world. We should try to avoid this. This affects our ability to present the best amongst us in the international arena.

Time has now come for us to expand our horizons. It is in this context that we need to try to project ourselves abroad. We have to try to erase the pernicious after effects of being known as a country where in this day and age, men go around throwing acid on innocent women and girl children. Our image today is really very disappointing. We head the list in matters of corruption and are continuously being battered with suggestions that good governance

also of entering into more intensive cultural cooperation in the fullest sense of the term with other South Asian countries. We have SAARC and South Asian sports competitions, but one does not really hear of South Asian cultural festivals and competitions. Bangladesh can take the lead here.

Then comes the western group of countries, particularly those in Europe, North America and Australia. Since our independence, over the last three decades, hundreds of thousands of people of Bangladeshi origin have moved their residences to these areas. In many cases they are full citizens of countries in these regions, but they retain their affection and linkage with their motherland. It is important that we evolve a national policy whereby we enter into cultural framework agreements with those countries where we have a fair representation of Bengali speaking citizens.

Today's electronic age, Bangladesh is inundated with external influence and aspects of foreign culture starting from toiletries to music and art forms. Unfortunately, we are unable to project our own culture into homes abroad due to inadequate resources. Consequently, the importance of our language and our culture fails to get the desired exposition.

Comparatively, India is more successful. Today her traditions, mores and ways of life are easily recognised. Her authors and artistes, be they involved in music,



When invasion is the name of the game

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

WITH THE US army's sweeping initial victory in Iraq, the doctrines of state sovereignty, territorial integrity, right of self-determination, as well as the concept of guaranteed independent identity had gone through a radical transformation. All this the smaller and weaker nations all over the world have enjoyed throughout the post World War II period. But with the gap of merely a couple of months after the fall of Baghdad people are no longer talking about an invasion that had taken place in the region. The meaning and understanding of the word 'invasion' thus also had taken a reverse course. It means that when the mighty and powerful invades a relatively weaker country, it can be replaced by the glorifying term 'liberation'. The 'liberation' of Iraq is a stark reminder of that fact. It is more so because most of the second-grade power players of the world are now trying to jump over the fence to join the game that US marines have started with their toppling the statues of Saddam Hussein in the streets of Baghdad.

Japan, being a second-grader in international politics, is looking desperately for a way out to bypass all existing barriers to join that 'great game' by sending its troops to the treacherous Iraqi deserts. But as country's constitution is still upholding the principle of denouncing the war, the policy-makers in Tokyo are finding it a bit difficult to fulfill the desire of being part of the game. At the same time, this in no way means that they are sitting idly and accepting the specific clause of the Japanese constitution as *fait accompli*.

In the fertile ground of politics there always remains loopholes that can provide skilful politicians rooms for careful manoeuvring. The main ruling political party of Japan, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and particularly Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, are presently involved exactly in such calculative handling of sensitive political issues. This might soon result in heavily armed

within the main ruling party too was not an easy job. As many senior politicians within the LDP voiced concern that the bill would put Japan's Self Defence Forces in danger, the party delayed the approval of the bill by a day before it was ready for submission to the cabinet. At the end of the day Koizumi was able to put down dissent and pass it over the cabi-

observers in Japan believe that the passage of the new bill at the parliament will not be easy for the government. Not only because the opposition camp is expected to oppose the bill, but also because some LDP heavyweights too remain dissatisfied with its provisions. The move for a possible dispatch of Japanese military personnel to Iraq came after Koizumi met US President George

order; and activities to help dismantle biological, chemical and other weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. But the last part was later removed due to objections from leading LDP members. They claimed that it made no sense to include such responsibility when no weapons of mass destruction was uncovered in Iraq.

Overly, the bill subscribes to the

actually be deployed? The US army has just started a major mop-up operation across the country and US soldiers continue to be killed and wounded in a steady stream of ambush by Iraqis. As a result, many are now inclined to believe that sending Japanese military personnel without carefully calculating the risk might turn out to be catastrophic.

The question that many are asking is just where in Iraq Japanese troops will actually be deployed? The US army has just started a major mop-up operation across the country and US soldiers continue to be killed and wounded in a steady stream of ambush by Iraqis. As a result, many are now inclined to believe that sending Japanese military personnel without carefully calculating the risk might turn out to be catastrophic.

Japanese troops being stationed in troubled spots around Iraq. That would definitely turn our existing understanding of the military forces of Japan completely obsolete. And that would mark the start of a whole new chapter in Japanese reality, when for the first time after country's unconditional surrender in 1954 Japanese soldiers will be seen again patrolling the streets of cities far outside the border of their own country. But a number of hard obstacles still remain to be overcome before that collective dream of a group of leading Japanese politicians might turn into reality.

The LDP recently gave backing to a controversial bill allowing the government to send troops to Iraq. The proposed law has already been heavily criticised as going against a constitution that even puts a barrier on having a regular army for the country. And passage of the bill

net for its prior approval before submitting the bill to the Diet. The government now wants the Diet to enact the new bill by late July. The ruling coalition has already extended the current session of the Diet by 40 days to enable lawmakers to meet the deadline. But the passage of the bill would need much more than just extending the parliamentary session as opposition parties, angered by ruling camp's decision to go ahead with the bill without consulting properly with others, are refusing to discuss a timetable with the governing coalition. The opposition camp is insisting that their own fact finding missions to Iraq have come to a definite conclusion that the situation in Iraq remains volatile. It is also not clear what exact role Japan's Self Defence Forces personnel are to perform in Iraq.

As the loggerhead continues,

W. Bush in Texas last month. There President Bush asked Koizumi for visible cooperation in the reconstruction of Iraq, and Koizumi agreed to do so in a best possible way. As a result, critics are also charging that the new law is another symbol that Japan is merely following the US lead in dealing with Iraq. No doubt Washington is pleased to find Japan moving along the road just as the US would like to see her to do.

The bill, officially named as the bill for humanitarian and reconstruction aid in Iraq, comprises 21 clauses in three chapters. In its original form the bill mainly detailed activities to be carried out by Japan's Self Defence Forces in three different fields, namely: distributing humanitarian aid and reconstruction support; logistic support for US and British forces to help restore and maintain public

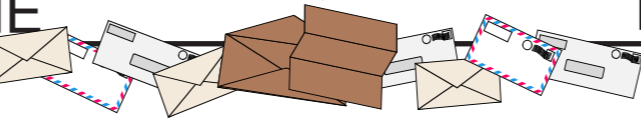
idea of global cooperation in the process of reconstructing Iraq. But critics claim that the dispatch of Japanese troops for that purpose would definitely amount to involving them in clearing up the mess that has been created as a result of direct intervention from outside. They also think sending Self Defence Forces personnel to help rebuild Iraq might pose a danger to their lives.

The bill also mentions that Japanese Self Defence Forces personnel are to carry out their mission in places where presently there are no combat operations going on and where there are less chances that combat operations are to take place any time soon. This provision too is being criticised for not taking into consideration the realities of situation in present day Iraq. The question that many are asking is just where in Iraq Japanese troops will

Moreover, Japanese Self Defence Forces personnel will be given permission to use weapons only for self protection and to protect colleagues and other people involved in works related to reconstruction under their supervision. This too raises further question about what they are supposed to do in case another wave of looting and destruction starts in Iraqi cities where they are to be deployed. Are they supposed to remain 'neutral' spectators just like the Americans did when Baghdad was systematically looted and robbed?

There is an urgent need for Japan to clarify such important issues before sending troops to so-called non-combat zones of a country where there is no shortage of any combat operation. But it seems the present Japanese leadership is not in a rush to find out satisfactory answers to any such queries. Their thoughts are probably too occupied by the superficial presence of an enemy next door. And to contain that enemy in a meaningful way, they would probably need strong support and cooperation from the mightiest of all military powers in human history. Hence, it would not be wise at all to ignore the request coming from that power, be it at the cost of risking lives of its own citizens.

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.

High perks for the high-ups and social justice

The elected high-ups have been rewarded by the government in terms of perks as high as 40% to 400%, presumably to make sure that they can maintain even a higher standard of living in a high inflation-laden economy and compare themselves well with their counterparts from the well heeled countries. After all, Bangladesh has an image to keep! The government functionaries also got a small share of the recompense @10% of their salary (of course tax-free), not bad compared to their easy and permanent nature of job-conditions with ample scope "other benefits" or the like.

However, who bothers for the hundreds of thousands of employees of the private and non-government sectors who must pay taxes to the exchequer but would get nothing extra to make both ends meet? Again, what about 60% of our population who live below subsistence level? It appears that no one is there to think about these hapless people, who live as if in another world not affected by the awful inflation, need not go for shopping against sky-high price-rise, and who are but outcasts in a crude and rude society. Pertinently, it may be worthwhile to quote a few lines from the recently published famous best-seller "Living History" where Hillary Rodham Clinton wrote: "Bangladesh, the most densely populated country on earth, presented the starkest

contrast of wealth and poverty I saw in South Asia..."

Here, the authorities made no effort to the destitute behind brightly coloured cloth. "That Mrs. Hillary is 100% right has been proved once again by the bare-faced policy of the government of appeasing the affluent and preaching austerity for the deprived. A novel social justice indeed!" Hafejul Alam Dhaka

Foreign dignitary and Leader of the Opposition

The news published in many dailies that Mrs. Megawati and Mr. Colin Powell both declined to meet the Leader of the Opposition because the AL declined to withdraw the call

for hartal is indeed another example of the level of national humiliation that our politicians can cause us for narrow and often selfish and redundant causes that harm not them but the nation. The snubbing that she received from the visitors to Bangladesh was really not hers; it has been felt by most of us who have followed this issue. As Bangladeshis, the AL has humiliated us.

There are more vital questions that would make the call of hartal by the AL look so anti-national. The tragedy of the death of the student leader belonging to the student wing of the AL notwithstanding, papers have reported that he was indulging in extortion and anti-social activities for which he ran into conflict with others pursuing the same goals and was killed as a consequence. How would the AL respond to these facts

that papers reporting on the death have revealed? Then there are more questions. How did the AL just jump to the conclusion that this was done by the BNP?

We the people are fed up with hartals and want it to end. Why not hold a national referendum on hartal and deal with the issue for once and for all?

Shahjahan Ahmed Dhanmandi, Dhaka

Ban on catching fish fries

Ministry of Fisheries usually impose a ban on catching fish fries in the Bengali month of 'Asar'. But the period is too short. Ban should be at least for two months 'Asar' and 'Srabon'. And it should be applicable not only on catching but sale also.

Unless it is applied to sale it will not have desired impact.

It is also found that the ban is usually on paper only. Fishermen keep on catching fish fries without any let or hindrance. So to make it meaningful magistrates should be deputed at least in urban markets for imposing exemplary punishment to the lawbreakers. I therefore appeal to Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock to rise to the occasion and do something concrete in this regard so that production of fish can increase substantially in the long run.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury Mohakhali, Dhaka

Failed UN?

After the illegal and brutal aggression in Iraq by two superpowers USA and UK on the false pretext of WMD we fully realise that the United

Nations is incapable to protect the legitimate interest, rights and security of small countries against the wrong doings of powerful nations.

This organisation has totally failed to maintain peace in the world, protect human rights and particularly killing of innocent civilians in Iraq against the barbaric onslaught of American and British military forces. The Secretary General of UN observed with fear the devastating air attack and cluster bombings of Iraqi civilians in utter silence without protest or condemnation against the aggressors. It has become clear that UN is maintained and funded by the superpowers to serve their own selfish interest and to legalise their bizarre actions; and also to put pressure on smaller nations to agree on issues favourable to the superpowers them-

selves.

The biggest of such examples is the ban on proliferation of WMD by United Nations while countries like USA, UK, Russia, France, China and some favoured countries like India, Pakistan and Israel possess WMD in the name of security and self-defence. Israel particularly has strengthened militarily with the help of the United States.

The role of United Nations, particularly after Iraq and Afghanistan, has become one of 'Relief and Rehabilitation' and not of maintaining peace and security among all the nations in the world.

Abul Mujahid Nandankanan, Chittagong