

India's mega water offensive

Bangladesh can do a lot to deter it

INDIA'S master plan to inter-link the transboundary rivers has left us dumbfounded. A severe kind of water injustice, unprecedented with its sheer insensitivity to a lower riparian country's survivability, is apparently brewing. The unilateral plan envisages digging of more than 600 miles of link-canal between rivers common to both India and Bangladesh like the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. Hundreds of reservoirs and dams are also in prospect. The whole idea is to divert the so-called surplus water from 37 rivers to areas in north and south India which are drought-prone and users of irrigation networks.

India's assessment of 'excess water' is myopically Indian, and therefore, totally exclusionary to the water requirements of Bangladesh. We ask, if this is not water xenophobia, what is? Previously, we heard of the multiple detrimental effect of interfering with the historical flow of the Ganges in relation to the Farakka barrage question. But now, what India seems up to is nothing less than changing the courses of major rivers, rather redrawing the hydrological map of the international river water basins in this region.

The implications are dreadful. If the water flow in the upper reaches is whittled down by 10 to 20 per cent, it will have a devastating effect on the climate, ecology, geomorphology, bio-diversity and navigational activities in the lower riparian Bangladesh. The lower basins will dry up as the subterranean water table fell drastically. Concomitantly, it will be like the adverse impact of Farakka multiplied or extrapolated.

The grandiose plan has taken hold of a segment of the Indian thought-process. So much so that even expert warnings within India about the dire consequences of changing the historical courses of rivers are being overlooked. India has moved ahead with the plan to a somewhat frightful extent. Disposing of a writ about the 43-year timeframe for implementing the plan, a three-member Indian Supreme Court bench led by the chief justice said, "We do expect that the programme when drawn up would try and ensure that the link projects are completed within a reasonable time of not more than ten years." The Indian government has cashed in on it. Former central minister for power and now a Lok Sabha member, RSS leader Suresh Pravu has been appointed chairman of the high-power commission constituted for implementing the mega project.

India's unilateralism with trans-border rivers deals a body-blow to bilateral ethics, transgresses SAARC spirit and undermines standard international practices. Bangladesh feels wronged for not being consulted despite the availability of the instrumentalities of the Joint Rivers Commission and the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty, not to mention the routine bilateral diplomatic channels. Indeed, as a JRC member maintained, India's unilateral move to inter-link the transboundary rivers contravened Article 9 of the Indo-Bangla Ganges Water-sharing Treaty, which provides for giving due share of common river water to the co-riparian.

The totally self-serving nature of India's water plan is patently deplorable. But can that fact put Bangladesh diplomats' failure to monitor a scenario that has been unfolding for quite a while in any better light? The Indian National Water Development Agency (NWDA) laid out the plan at least three years ago, not to mention the run-up and spade-work phases going further back. Was any warning signal received from our missions in the next-door neighbouring countries? If the answer is in the positive, what stance was taken by the foreign office, including taking the issue to the parliament? Writing letters seeking details of a seemingly unfolding plan or sending protest notes in the wake of media reports or summoning an acting high commissioner of India are by and large routine reactive steps. These are not the stuffs of which truly pre-emptive diplomacy is made.

Needless to say, we must not accept the Indian plan as a *fait accompli*. We must oppose it tooth and nail to dissuade India from the path of exclusivity in terms of water management. Basically, the JRC which is mandated to meet thrice a year but has not met in the last two years at all, ought to go into an immediate session in order to clear the air about the sharing of the common river waters. If necessary, we may not hesitate to represent our case at the world capitals so that international financing of such a unilateral Indian plan is eschewed. The best approach, however, will be to convince India with our belief that the so-called dividends Delhi is aiming to obtain from its master plan are all achievable through a regional plan for collective water management. Moreover, the heavy political cost that India would have had to unquestionably pay otherwise would be avoided if she took the regional approach.

WASHINGTON CONSENSUS-3

How democratic is democracy?

AKN AHMED

ANOTHER key element of Washington Consensus is democracy and freedom. US political leaders are always fond of proclaiming that establishment of democracy all over the world is one of the important goals of US foreign policy. In fact the recent war on Iraq has aimed at regime change in order to force Iraqi people to be free from the tyrannical rule of Saddam Hussein. Earlier, in the recent past USA had marched its troops to Panama, Grenada and Haiti to free the people of those countries from tyrannical rule and establish democracy. Currently American policy markers, President Bush included are openly supporting students' agitation against the government in Iran so that this movement brings down the present regime, and to bring about American brand of democracy. Some leaders are even saying over television that the military option is not off the table. In the 50s USA sent troops to Vietnam to fight the communists and to establish freedom and democracy there.

USA in modern time is Mecca for worshippers of democracy. In many respects it is rightly so. USA has a written constitution providing fundamental rights including freedom of speech for the people, protection against illegal search and seizure, elected government, independent judiciary, respect for law and executive responsive to the will of people through their elected representative system and through referendum and recall. But does USA domestically practice in real terms the democracy it preaches to the outside world? Here are some examples.

Example #1: In 1950s CIA installed the Shah of Iran to the throne by staging a coup in complicity with Iranian generals and by assassinating the elected leader Mossadegh, who earlier abolished monarchy. How the so-called democracy imposed by America under the Shah is superior to Iran's home grown democratic movements such as its constitutional Revolution of the early 20th. Century or mid century parliamentary system headed by Mohammed Mossadegh?

Example #2: In 1973 an armed coup in Chile against its elected leader Allende was staged by some

generals in the army in collaboration with CIA leading to assassination of Allende, slaughtering and detention of a large number of people who supported the elected government. **Example #3:** In the recent past General Musharraf, who ousted by coup the elected leader of Pakistan has been embraced as a friend by President Bush despite the fact that Pakistan a year back had supplied nuclear bomb technology to North Korea. On June 25, 2003 he was the first South East Asian country leader to be entertained in Camp David and warmly praised by President Bush. Pakistan was also promised aid of three billion dollars over a period of four years, half of which was economic and the other half for defence related expenses including upgrading of her MIG 15 planes. This promise was made without extracting any assurance from the

Chinese origin who were mostly engaged in trade or business. **Example #5:** During Reagan presidency USA laid mines in the sea around Nicaragua. When Nicaraguan government filed a case in the International Court of Justice in The Hague against this intrusion, the Court ordered the US government to remove those mines. United States government refused to carry out the order. **Example #6:** Even within USA during World War II the US government illegally interned all nationals of Japanese origin in concentration camps denying the victims their rights to recourse to the court of law as guaranteed by the American Constitution. Only in the recent past US Congress and the President apologised to the victims and their descendants for this illegal action. **Example #7:** At the present moment, under the so-called

when some were ready to leave USA permanently. According to the *Washington Post* Report, the number of people so detained stood between 4000 to 5000. It is understood that the Attorney General is planning to put Patriot's Act, passed as a temporary measure, expiring in the end of 2004, in permanent statute book. One should ponder very carefully whether preemptive attack on a country on "faith based intelligence" and arbitrary arrest and detention of persons on "faith based suspicions" are really the strong points of democracy for sale abroad.

Justice Department officials through their actions seems to be echoing what historian Gibbon has said in his famous book (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* Volume III) "The urgent consideration of the public safety

Let us not forget, that the bottom line of American democracy in the beginning was: Jefferson after declaring in Philadelphia that all men are created equal, went to his slaves in Virginia. It still continues to be what Paul Bremer, American Pro-Counsel in Iraq had stated: "higher living standards and political freedom can not emerge if economic freedom is denied." (Article in *Washington Journal* June 20, 2003). **Example # 9:** Government under American democracy is supposed to be government of the people, for the people and by the people as enunciated by President Abraham Lincoln. But because of high cost of contesting in elections and corrupt money flowing to legislators and political parties through lobbyists and special interest groups, elections to the Congress and to the position of President has become a

objectives may be laudable but the means are not. Unless of course we are called upon to believe like communists that the end justifies the means. In fact these instances have been mentioned only to demonstrate the undemocratic aspects of American democratic government. Some inherent faults and deficiencies of American democracy were pointed out by Toqueville in as early as middle of 19th. Century when he wrote his famous book (*Democracy in America*, 1838AD). Pointing out the political hazards of American democracy he then observed that political parties were "an inherent evil of free government," the press was prone to gratuitous muckraking, the electorate tend to vote mediocrity into high office and above all there was the danger of the "tyranny of the majority". But that risk, he believed, was held in check by the vitality of some distinctively American institutions that tended to preserve individual freedom, the decentralization of government, the power of the courts, the strength of the associational life and the vigor of country's churches. Over the years since then, the defects pointed out by him have aggravated and the checks mentioned by him have largely disappeared. American government has now become centralized, bureaucratic and secretive than ever. Its election procedure is riddled with corruption; American public has alienated from its government and is now frequently voting with their feet. Churches are riddled with sexual and other abuses losing their high moral ground and the respect of the community they are supposed to serve.

Given this situation, is it appropriate to sell American brand of democracy to other countries by pressure, and eventually by war? Should we not revisit what Karl Popper, an eminent philosopher of the 20th. Century said, "We must plan for freedom and not only for security, if for no other reason than that only freedom can make security secure"? (The Open Society and its Enemies).

AKN Ahmed is the former Governor of Bangladesh Bank.

Next Friday: How developed is development model?

Some inherent faults and deficiencies of American democracy were pointed out by Toqueville in as early as middle of 19th. Century when he wrote his famous book (*Democracy in America*, 1838AD)... But that risk, he believed, was held in check by the vitality of some distinctively American institutions... Over the years since then, the defects pointed out by him have aggravated and the checks mentioned by him have largely disappeared.

General that Pakistan Army would abdicate its rule and genuine democracy will be restored in the country.

Earlier in the 80s USA funneled through still worse army dictator General Ziaul Huq immense sums of money and huge quantities of arms including large number of stinger missiles to Afghan fundamentalists and the so-called Saudi Arabian Mujahideens. In consequence, Russian Army retreated and Afghan government toppled towards the late 80s but Taliban and Osama Bin Laden appeared in Afghan horizon with left over stinger missiles and arms.

Example #4: In the late 60s CIA in collaboration with some generals staged an armed coup against Mr Sukarno and installed General Suharto as the president of Indonesia. President Suharto, in turn, in the name of purging the communists slaughtered and or detained about a million people without even any semblance of trial. Among those slaughtered and or detained, there were a large number of people of

Patriot's Act and Protection of Witness Act, a large number of people have been arrested and held in custody on mere suspicion and against whom no evidence of wrong doing could be established. A recent report of the Inspector General of Justice Department itself makes a chilling reading. The people are held without bond, without regard to actual evidence that they are dangerous, a flight risk, or tied to terrorism. In fact some were arrested when they appeared before the authorities voluntarily in response to their request. During detention they are held 23 hours a day lockdown (one hour in theory for exercise) and are physically and verbally abused by prison guards. (*Washington Post*, June 26, 2003). They were initially barred from communicating with each other and outside world including lawyers. Even detainees whose immigration cases were resolved remained locked up simply because FBI had not cleared them, a process that took an average of 80 days and as long as 245 days to complete. This happened even

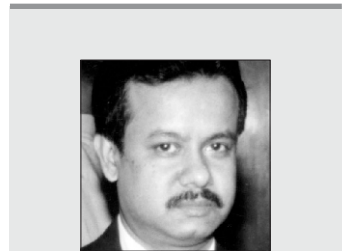
may undoubtedly authorise the violation of every positive law. How far that or any other consideration may operate to dissolve the natural obligations of humanity and justice is a doctrine of which I am ignorant and so desire to remain ignorant." While these happenings are going on in his administration, President Bush in honour of Torture Victims Recognition Day said on June 26, "The United States is committed to the world wide elimination of torture and we are leading this fight, by example. I call on the governments to join with the United States and the community of law abiding nations in prohibiting, investigating, and prosecuting all acts of torture and an undertaking to prevent other cruel and unusual punishment"! (*Washington Post* June 27, 2003).

Example #8: The declaration of Independence and the Constitution of USA in the beginning excluded black population and women from all rights and privileges enjoyed by an American citizen. Only after long-sufferings, these rights have been earned by them through struggle.

spectacle of money, power and not the true worth of the candidate. The faceless donors, corporate and wealthy individuals have really become the makers and breakers of the American Presidency and Houses of Congress. Even the so-called independent media have now become chattels of the concentrated money power. This has been amply demonstrated during just concluded Iraq war. Journalists are supposed to be professional skeptics, but nowhere in their reports, on or about Iraq this quality was displayed. If the first quality of war is truth, then the media is the next. During the Iraq war, journalists have allowed themselves to be embedded in army vehicles for reporting war news, losing their independence to find news by themselves. None of them has reported, in compliance with the reported government directives, on the number of Iraqis killed. The Army has also openly confessed that they have not kept any count of Iraqis killed during battles.

In the instances cited above, the

Penance of love



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

LOVE came on a rainy day as he ran for a shelter and she followed him. They stood under the canopy of a shop as raindrops pattering on the ground kept dirtying their shoes. Love shone in their eyes as one looked at another and thought they were made for each other.

The confession, however, came much later on a dry sunny day, when she told him in a hospital bed how much she would regret it if she had to die before her dream came true. He came home and prayed in earnest that if the time had come for her to go, then he should go with her as well. He walked around the hospital in the middle of the night, unable to visit her in the cabin because her mother was staying with her.

In the frenzy of love that looked finished before it started, he vowed to himself again and again that if only death spared her from its clutches, he would never let go of her from his bosom. The memory of the rainy day revolved in his mind and he was convinced it was destiny that love should cast its spell on both

at once. After she got well and went home, he distributed sweets in the neighborhood mosque and told his friends that he was fortunate amongst men, because God had answered his prayers.

She said to him that if anything had brought her back from the gorge of death, it was the power of love. She promised to love him for the rest of her life and asked him to promise that he would do the same in return. He caught a butterfly for her and described the colours on its wings. She wept on his shoulder like a

head and asked him to swear in the honour of their love that he would quit politics as soon as he got out of jail.

After his release, he discussed politics with her. He argued that students should have concern for the future and prepare themselves to take the responsibility of their country. She disagreed with him and called politics poison for young minds. The young men hardly knew the difference between good and evil and politics only made them exploits in the hands of the wicked

couldn't, because politics required compromise, which condemned truth. Politics was based on mobile truth, she added, which was why the politicians shifted in their strategy to avoid the sacrifice and suffering, which were needed to establish the absolute truth. He retorted that she was talking about prophets, not politicians. She replied that politicians were the secular prophets, the inspired teachers or leaders for the common mass, only if they could be sincere and honest.

During student unrest in the

marriage on his shoulder in order to ensure that he stayed out of harm's way. He took her to a Chinese restaurant to celebrate the decision and bought her a diamond ring for engagement. She reminded him that it was the power of love, which carried them through hurdles and hardships. He promised to love her forever, because she was the best thing that had ever happened to him.

Two months later he called in the middle of night and told her that the police was after him again. When

ated by him, embarrassed before her own family. She failed to understand how deeply a man could love her if his promises were so flimsy. She refused to take his calls and told her parents that she would call off the engagement.

He sent her flowers on her twenty-second birthday, wishing to see her even for a glimpse. She refused to take the flowers and told the deliverer that she no longer had anything to do with the sender. He madly called her house throughout the day, but she refused to come to the phone. Her parents asked him not to call again until their daughter was settled in her soul.

Next day he died in police encounter outside a student hostel. There were conflicting accounts of how he died; some said he was killed elsewhere and then brought to the hostel; some said he was hiding in the hostel where he got killed during a police raid. She fainted when she heard the news of his death and regained her senses two days later. She told everyone, who came to know how she was, that she had taken a dive into death with the man of her love and come out from the other side of his grave.

Love, she concluded, was no different from politics. One has to lose if other has to win. She would need the rest of her life to sort out who had won and who had lost between two of them. Meanwhile, she wished to die for him every day, because the love that came on a rainy day now burned in her heart like a blazing sun.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

CROSS TALK

Love, she concluded, was no different from politics. One has to lose if other has to win. She would need the rest of her life to sort out who had won and who had lost between two of them. Meanwhile, she wished to die for him every day, because the love that came on a rainy day now burned in her heart like a blazing sun.

child, because it reminded her of the colours in her own life since she fell in love with him. She told him between tears that dreams were wings for humans and she wished to spread her wings in the sky of love.

One night the police picked him up from the house as a suspect for the murder of a student leader. He pleaded innocence, but the court slammed detention on him for fifteen days. She visited him in jail, taking food, books, and cigarettes for him. She told him that her father was one of the best lawyers in town and he would fight his case in court. Then she placed his hand on her

ones. He reasoned that it was his duty to love his country. She reasoned that love could never be a duty so much as honesty could never be a policy. She claimed that a mother didn't love her child because it was her duty, but because it was her nature. Politicians must adopt politics based on character, not on charisma. He wanted to know what was the difference. She explained that character thrived on principles, whereas charisma thrived on prejudice. Character led to the truth and charisma led to a target.

He asked what if politics could make truth its target. She said it

university, he went into hiding. She told him that she was disappointed in him, failing to understand why he had to make her unhappy when it wasn't needed. He regretted his mistake and promised to give up politics, once that particular trouble was resolved. He claimed that he was innocent, and politics was nothing but a dirty game where people who erred blamed it on others.

Her father talked to his friends and used their influence to have all charges dropped against him. When he came out of his hiding, the families got together and decided that they ought to put the yoke of

her father called the police station, the officer-in-charge told him that his would-be son-in-law was involved in a conspiracy to assassinate a political figure. When he called again in the morning, she told him that he had betrayed her by getting involved in politics. He said he knew nothing of any conspiracy against anybody and he had not met anyone in the political circle since he got engaged to her.

For the first time since she met him, her mind wavered in doubt. Her father warned her that the young man she loved had streaks of a politician in his character, and he couldn't be trusted. She felt humili-

Sergio Vieira de Mello: A tribute from a friend and colleague

SHAMSUL BARI

IN 1978, I joined the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and met a young man named Sergio Vieira de Mello. Sergio and I struck up a friendship almost immediately: we shared a common love of singing folk melodies, a passion for our work, and a deep attachment to Bangladesh. I was the first Bangladeshi to work for the UN agency; Sergio had commenced his career in the UN in war-torn East Pakistan, and as such bore witness to the devastation and suffering which accompanied the birth of Bangladesh in 1971.

This week the television brought me the news of my friend's horrific death, of the attack on the offices of Sergio Vieira de Mello, the Special Representative of the Secretary General in Iraq and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The attack in Baghdad cut short the career of one of the finest UN diplomats in the history of the world body. He possessed and excelled in all the essential qualities required of a successful UN diplomat. He served the organization for 33 years, through some of its most difficult challenges, armed with a unique combination of intellect, wit, determination, hard work,

charm, impartiality, the enviable powers of articulation and persuasion, and above all, dedication to the goals and objectives of the United Nations.

As the world learns of the enormity of our loss in the days ahead through eulogies to Sergio in the world media, those who had the privilege to know him and work with him in the UN will have to grapple with their personal loss for the passing away of an extraordinary friend and colleague. And for me, his passing away is doubly painful because of the loss of a very dear friend is compounded by the loss of a person who was very close to my country, Bangladesh. In that sense I consider his death a national loss.

Sergio always remembered fondly his work in what was then East Pakistan, visiting remote parts of the Rangpur and other districts to determine whether it was safe for Bengali refugees to return. "Shamsul," he used to tell me, "I wish CNN was there when Bangladesh was going through those very difficult days before its creation, so that the entire world would know what was happening in that place. Many later instances of a similar nature which we are used to witnessing in recent years over the CNN pale into insignificance."

My friendship with Sergio grew over the next

twenty years through our common involvement in refugee issues. When more than a million and a half Vietnamese refugees were fleeing their homes in rickety boats over the high seas, many thousands perishing in the process, Sergio's immense talents as a negotiator were invaluable. Only those privy to the negotiations to resolve the "boat people" problem know his tremendous contribution to ending the exodus: simultaneously convincing both the Vietnamese authorities and the international community of the need for a negotiated settlement of this long-festering humanitarian problem.

Those who knew him were constantly amazed by how he managed to work with a variety of factions even when he did not see eye to eye with them on substantive issues. This is because he understood that the only power the UN had in dealing with disputes that divide nations and societies is the art of persuasion, combined with sincerity and dedication to the cause of peace.

It is thus not difficult to understand why Sergio was involved on behalf of the UN in some of the most vexing problems confronting the international community: in Lebanon, as the Adviser to UN forces (1981); in Rwanda as the

Humanitarian Coordinator (1996); in Kosovo as the Special UN Representative (1999); in East Timor as the Head of UN Operations (2000); and more recently in Iraq as the Special Representative of the Secretary General (2003). Apart from these more visible responsibilities, his roles in various activities relating to the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) made him the undisputed star of the organization for some 30 years. His work on behalf of the organization on issues relating to Sudan, Cyprus, Vietnam, the former Soviet Republics in transition, Mozambique, Peru, Yugoslav Republics and so many other places, will remain indelible in the annals of that organization.

I saw Sergio up close as he smoothed the painful process of transition from the former Soviet Union to the newly founded Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). He oversaw the entire process, interacting with me in my parallel role in the Central Asian Republics. Later, Sergio and I were engaged in negotiating with the Taliban and other parties involved in the Afghan refugee problem and with the multiple parties involved with the Kurdish issue in Northern Iraq. During each of these delicate

discussions, I felt keenly how much more difficult it would have been for us if he had not been involved. He was a master craftsman in the art.

Traveling and socializing with Sergio in many places and cities in the world, I knew the effect of his boyish charms on our hosts and new acquaintances, particularly of the opposite sex. Being around with him was thus great fun. Over the years I witnessed these debonair qualities of his blossom and flourish. Our friendship continued to deepen in the process. So when I took retirement from UNHCR in 1999, one of my more difficult tasks was to say good-bye to Sergio.

He had already left UNHCR for another UN job, but he was surprisingly emotional because I was returning to Bangladesh after many decades. He told me how much he would love to visit the country again. We last spoke in April. He had assumed the role of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. He pointed out to me that his new position would make it easier for him to come to Bangladesh. He looked forward to visiting me and my family in my own country.

The loss of Sergio is more than a personal loss; it is very much a national loss. He would have been a friend of this country for many more



Shamsul Bari is a retired UN civil servant.

years: he was only 55 when killed. I have no doubt that some day he would have been the Secretary General of the UN, one with a soft corner in his heart for Bangladesh always.