

Israeli pilots' compunction

Sharon better draw the message

THE news that 27 Israeli pilots submitted a signed petition last Wednesday, saying that it was not possible for them to take part in the air raids against civilians in Palestinian areas, is significant. They termed such attacks "illegal and immoral".

The pilots' stand should eliminate the illusion that the Israeli government may still have about the legitimacy of the military mission against the people of Palestine, subjugated yet yearning to breathe free.

The global community has been raising its voice against massacring of civilians by Sharon's raiders. But the hawkish prime minister has never bothered to heed the international opinion and is still trying to bludgeon Palestinians into submission, though his efforts have only been rewarded with more deaths and destruction. Israel's disproportionate application of force -- use of helicopter gunships and all sorts of lethal weapons against stone-throwing Palestinian youths -- has been condemned by peace-loving people across the world. But Tel Aviv has been trying to prove the historical truth that Palestinians have the right to have a homeland of their own wrong through repressive measures. But how long can it hoodwink public opinion on the atrocities?

Sharon has received a different message this time around. Some of his own people are now questioning the moral validity of Israel's plan. He should go for a little introspection and ask himself why Israelis themselves are finding the mission unacceptable. The reserve pilots have acted out of the compunction caused by the crimes perpetrated by Israel against innocent Palestinians.

The Israeli government has received some other signals too. Former prime minister Shimon Peres praised Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat as a harbinger of peace. His words came at a time when Tel Aviv was planning to liquidate Arafat, in the mistaken belief that his exit would weaken the resistance movement. Peres, known as a moderate, has tried to draw the attention of the hardliners in his country to the truth that blood-letting is not the solution to the Middle East crisis. Sharon and his men should see his point before the truth starts ringing louder.

The only option open to Tel Aviv is to stop killing innocent civilians and accept the finality of the statehood of Palestine.

Tragic end of a promising career condoled

Rampage should have been avoided

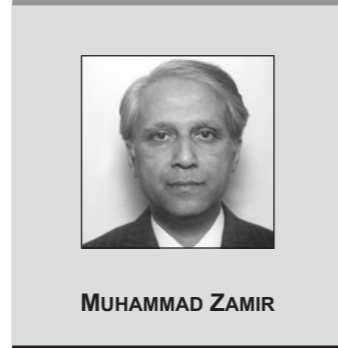
SAGAR, a bright student of Dhaka University, tragically died after being knocked down by two buses at the Chankhar Pool intersection the other day. We are deeply saddened and dismayed by the reckless accident that put an end to a promising career. A meritorious student, Sagar had worked hard to reach Dhaka University including giving tuition to finance his education. Naturally his parents had big dreams about him, which have been dashed in a most cruel manner.

We strongly feel and agree with the aggrieved fellow students of his that movement of heavy and big vehicles must be stopped in and around the campus with immediate effect. But taking out the anger and frustrations on others who had no link with the tragic incident could not be supported either.

It was like crossing the threshold of normal grief and condolences. We understand their anger -- a young man who had a lot of things going for him, whose poor parents had long been waiting for him to pass out of the university and get a decent job met with a tragic end for no fault of his. But his fellow students also must remember that such wild and unruly reaction had never stopped recurrence of such accidents in the past. Yes, the authorities should have acted much earlier to avert such an accident whose possibility looked real after the filling station was built and heavy vehicles were frequenting it. But wasn't it a reaction overkill on the part of some of the students who behaved that way?

The subsequent clashes between the police and the students were avoidable. So many were injured in the process. The sequel to the accident was itself a misfortune. One may have reasons to feel angry over the cause of tragic incidents, but one need not take the anger out on others who have no connection with the incident.

India's disputed inter-river basin water project



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

THE decision by India and Bangladesh to convene a meeting towards the end of September to discuss the question of sharing waters has been most appropriate. One hopes that this will be the first of many such meetings that will seriously address the issue and ascertain ways and means as to how to avert disaster for millions of people inhabiting the Gangetic basin.

India's latest mega plan for inter-linking rivers is a follow-up of other previous projects that have been part of a dream for that country.

The notion that rivers need to be linked started in India in the 19th century. Sir Arthur Cotton first thought of a plan to link rivers in southern India to aid inland navigation. The idea was subsequently abandoned because inland navigation lost ground to the emerging strength of the railway network.

After independence, Captain Dinshaw Dastur, an airline pilot proposed the fanciful 'Garland Canal.' Later, Dr KL Rao, former Indian Minister for Water Resources proposed the Ganga-Cauvery Link. Popular with the Indian population, it proposed that the link could take off near Patna, pass through the basins of the Sone, Narmada, Tapi, Godavari, Krishna and Pennar rivers, and join the Cauvery upstream of the Grand Anicut. It was expected that under such a Plan, 2640 km long, it would be possible to withdraw 60,000 cusec from the flood flows of the Ganges for about 150 days in the year. It would also involve a lift of a substantial part of that water over 1500 feet. The scheme was carefully examined and discarded not only because of its impracticality but also because of the financial outlay required. It was also felt that the whole thing would require very large energy component.

The inter-linking of rivers is also often referred to as inter-basin transfers. Many hydrologists think that this format provides a solution whereby disparities in the different river basins can be overcome through water transfers taking place from the surplus basins to the deficit basins. It is this philosophy that has led some to suggest the tapping of surplus resources of the mighty Brahmaputra. According to one school of opinion in India, a significant part of the water resources of India, estimated in terms of the flows near the terminal points of the river systems, lies in the Brahmaputra, far from the areas where the demand for water is high.

It may be recalled that in the talks with Bangladesh over river waters in the seventies and eighties, India proposed a gigantic (100,000 cusecs) Brahmaputra-Ganges gravity link canal taking off from Jogighopa (Barrage across the Brahmaputra) in India, passing through Bangladesh, and joining the Ganges just above Farakka. This proposal was rejected by Bangladesh for many valid reasons. Some in India then thought of diverting the Brahmaputra waters to the Ganges entirely through Indian territory (the Siliguri chicken-neck) but found that topographic needs would require and involve large lifts which be both unviable and also questionable.

The issue however refused to die. It was just set aside in the rear burner. As has been noted by an analyst, the Brahmaputra diversion plan was not even part of the Indian agenda during the last Joint River Commission meeting held in Dhaka in January 2001.

The whole idea came back to forefront in India with a passing observation by the Indian President Mr Abdul Kalam in his address to the Nation on the eve of the Indian Independence Day on 14 August, 2002. He pointed out to the fact that some states in India continued to suffer perpetually from drought while others faced misery from floods and wondered whether some solution could be found. Acting on the President's observations, an Indian lawyer, Ranjit Kumar filed a Public Interest Litigation case before the Indian Supreme Court the same month. He raised the question of networking of rivers for the first time within the judicial process. Subsequently, a bench headed by the then Chief Justice of India, BN Kirpal, after considering the matter as an independent writ petition ruled that there should be inter-linking of rivers in India. He also set a 10 year deadline for the implementing of the project. An order was also passed on October 31, 2002 in contravention of all agreed and acceptable international legal norms and conventions. Subsequently, the Indian government set up a high

powered task force under former Union Minister Suresh Prabhu MP to oversee the Scheme.

Analysts noted that the directive had political bonus written all over it, and was therefore immediately seized upon by the Indian government which had been facing the intractable problem of the inter-state Cauvery water dispute. Prime Minister Vajpayee to the happiness of his party extended his personal support and pledged that his government would pursue the matter on a war footing. His rivals in the Congress Party have also seen the wisdom in backing a populist idea. All the high sounding views about

Pennar and Cauvery basins through Submarekha in West Bengal and Mahanadi of Orissa.

Such steps would have disastrous impact on the economy of Bangladesh, its ecology, the livelihood of its people, its eco-system. It will also in the long run lead to internal displacement of millions of its citizens. Specialists have also pointed out that implementation of such a project would most certainly lead to more severe flooding in the monsoon and worse droughts in the lean season. Such vagaries would also contribute to increased salinity across the country and sharp fall in sweet water levels.

POST BREAKFAST

It is disappointing that the Joint Committee of Experts set up in July, 1997 between the two countries has held so far only five meetings. Meaningful progress is being thwarted. In the absence of any agreement on sharing the common rivers...This phenomenon is already causing serious adversity in the economic life of the people in these areas and also in the environment. We just cannot allow further aggravation.

supporting international law appears to have been swept under the carpet. Water is now being seen as being part of better internal security.

It is understood that the Indian Perspective Plan with regard to this Project envisages developments in two components -- those for the Peninsular rivers and those for the Himalayan rivers. The Peninsular rivers again could be roughly divided into four stages which would include -- the inter-linking of Mahanadi-Godavari-Krishna-Cauvery rivers, the inter-linking of west flowing rivers, the inter-linking of Ken-Chambal (thereby providing water grid for Madhya Pradesh and Uttara Pradesh) and diversion of other west flowing rivers linked with the Western Ghats to meet the water demands of Kerala and other adjoining drought affected areas.

The Himalayan rivers component envisage construction of storages on the principal tributaries of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra in India, Nepal and Bhutan. Within this context, canal systems are also being thought of to be inter-linked to transfer surplus flows of the eastern tributaries of the Ganges to the West, apart from linking the main Brahmaputra and its tributaries with the Ganges, and the Ganges with Mahanadi.

The Indian Plan expects the following benefits to accrue from the Scheme -- raising the ultimate irrigation potential from 113 million hectares to 148-150 million hectares and generation of 34,000 million KW of Power. In addition, Indian economists are also pointing out potential benefits like flood control, better navigation, water supply, fisheries, salinity and pollution control.

The Indian National Water Development Agency proposes to complete all the feasibility studies by 2005. It is also going to work out how to complete 30 links-14 Himalayan and 16 Peninsular over the next ten years. Initially, the cost of the entire project is expected to exceed \$118 billion (approximately Indian Rupees 560,000 crores).

The only problem is that this selfish approach is meant to assist the Indian population at the expense of Bangladesh.

India is apparently stressing on the Hornum Doctrine, which originated in the United States in 1895, but has never gained universal acceptance. It is conveniently forgetting various provisions of the Montevideo Declaration of American States (1933), the views of the 1977 UN Water Conference held in Mar del Plata, the decision of the Lake Lanoux Arbitral Tribunal in the dispute between Spain and France and those of legal experts from the International Law Commission.

Notable water expert, Tauhidul Anwar Khan, Member of the Joint River Commission has also very correctly pointed out that India's unilateral move to inter-link the trans-boundary rivers contravenes existing Articles of the 1996 Treaty between Bangladesh and India with regard to the sharing of the Ganges Waters at Farakka. According to him, such a scheme would be contrary to the body and spirit of Articles 2(2) and 9 of this Treaty and would affect providing of due share of common river's water to a co-riparian. He also pointed out that Bangladesh has always believed in resolving water issues through talks and considers that augmenting and harvesting surplus water for greater good of the region should come only through collective understanding and not through unilateral decision-making.

The Indian plan envisages transfer of water of the Ganges and its tributaries to Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat. Similarly, it also plans to divert the waters of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries to the Ganges and from there to the Godavari, Krishna,

These factors would juxtapose to eventually destroy the largest mangrove forest in the world, the Sunderbans.

The cause for anxiety and concern arises out of Indian plans to particularly divert water from the Brahmaputra. In the dry season, flows of the Brahmaputra in Bangladesh is roughly 123,000 cusec. Out of this a minimum of 70,000 cusec must be maintained near Ishaghat in lower Meghna to check ingress of salinity from the Bay of Bengal. The additional water of the Brahmaputra is required for agricultural use particularly in vast areas of the north-east and north-west regions of the country. Because of the insufficiency in the supply of water from the Ganges, this country needs the Brahmaputra.

The Government of India is now claiming that the Indian river linking plan would not transfer water of the Brahmaputra from its existing dry season flows. It is adding that it aims to conserve some amount of the monsoon flows of the river in the upstream reservoirs for transfer to the Ganges and elsewhere. This claim is however flawed. Surveys carried out in Assam and Bangladesh have shown that little of the monsoon flows of the Brahmaputra can be harnessed by storage. Moreover, most of the catchments of the proposed storage reservoirs in the upper part of the Brahmaputra basin fall within China. These reservoirs will also have to be located in highly seismic zones and therefore be latently dangerous.

What is required is acceptance of Article 8 of the 1996 Treaty and the need to co-operate with each other in finding a solution to the long term problem of augmenting the flows of the Ganges during the dry season. It should be a South Asian approach with Nepal and Bhutan also being associated. Consistent with proposals put forward earlier by Bangladesh in 1983, four dams could be built at Chispani, Trisulganga, Seli and Sapt Kosi in Nepal. There would then not only be additional flow of over 100,000 cusec into the Ganges during the lean period January to May but also avoid extraction from the Brahmaputra.

It is disappointing that the Joint Committee of Experts set up in July, 1997 between the two countries has held so far only five meetings. Meaningful progress is being thwarted. In the absence of any agreement on sharing the common rivers, the dry season flows of the Teesta, Manu, Khowini, Gumti, Muhuri in Bangladesh have been drastically reduced by upstream diversions across the borders. The same has been the case with the flows of Mohananda, Bhairab, Kodla and a number of other common rivers. This phenomenon is already causing serious adversity in the economic life of the people in these areas and also in the environment. We just cannot allow further aggravation.

If the Indian government has taken up the Plan reportedly on a war footing, then our government should also react accordingly in sensitising world opinion. It is here that our Ministry of Foreign Affairs should act closely with other relevant Ministries and Institutions within the country. Unfortunately, except for superficial efforts, one does not notice any particular urgency in the manner things are being dealt with. By now the Prime Minister should have requested for the convening of a Special Session of our Parliament to discuss this issue to underline its national importance. The Leader of the Opposition should also treat this Scheme as one of bipartisan concern.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador

EU GSP: The Rules of Origin issue

ZILLUL HYE RAZI

FOR a long time Bangladesh has been demanding for, change in the Rules of Origin (RoO) under EU GSP. However in all that time the focus had exclusively been putting in efforts to get duty-free access for RMG produced with imported fabric. EU on certain grounds did not agree to this and the textile manufactures of Bangladesh also opposed it. Nevertheless, the effort continues.

Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) is a unilateral preferential trade arrangement, which is governed by a set of rules different from those applicable in regular trade. The rules are based on the rationale to promote industrialisation of the developing countries through a reduced or zero-duty access to the developed importing countries. The Rules of Origin for GSP, thus, tend to be tougher than that of regular trade. Unless the required value addition is done, an export item will not be considered eligible under GSP. It can still be exported, but a regular tariff will be imposed, for LDCs quota will not be there and GATT rules of origin will be applied.

EBA-- anything for Bangladesh?

Bangladesh warmly welcomed Everything But Arms (EBA) initiative of the EU when GSP Regulation was amended (February, 2001) to continue LDC's zero duty access to EU market for an indefinite period and for export of everything but arms. However, all Bangladesh export items have already been entering EU market under duty and quota free trade regime (LDC treatment under GSP). But Bangladesh's GSP utilisations could not be much in the textile category, although significant increase in the utilisation has been observed in the last couple of years. Interestingly, this increase coincided with a change in the Rules of Origin for knitted garments (1999) allowing imported yarn to be manufactured and exported under GSP. The GSP utilisation in the woven garments, however, remained very low. It may be mentioned here that Readymade Garments now cover about 90% of the total export to EU from Bangladesh. There is a growing fear that Bangladesh will not be able to maintain the current market share in EU after 2005, when competitors will not have any quota restriction. Simultaneously, absence of market knowledge, expertise and proper infrastructure (including standards, certifications and packaging facility) will deter the prospect of venturing into new non-textile export items. The tough Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) regulations and inadequate capacity to fulfil Rules of Origin for GSP also considered practical impediments for any possible diversification or new investment in the prospective agro-processed export items. Any Trade Related Technical Assistance (TRTA) sought by LDCs like Bangladesh cannot avoid looking at these issues in a holistic manner.

A case for change in the Rules

It is really surprising that Bangladesh, despite acknowledging the urgent need for diversification of its very narrow-based exports, never looked into the potential for changes required in the RoO for other items where Bangladesh missed the eligibility for GSP. There are items like leatherwear, light engineering products, electrical products, plastic materials, agricultural products etc that can qualify for the GSP if there are some changes in the existing rules. Bangladesh needs to identify these items and, with justification, request EU to relax the rules.

European Community framed the RoO for the GSP decades

ago as an instrument to help industrialization of the developing countries through a preferential trade regime. Although there were, in successive years, further concession like duty and quota free access provided for LDCs, there had not been any major change in the original RoO of GSP. These rules were framed with some valid arguments in facilitating industrialization and ensuring certain processing before giving the originating status to an exportable item to be eligible for a preferential entry. Nevertheless the rules were same for the developing countries and the LDCs, despite their gaps in the stages of economic development. Adhering to the RoO for GSP had been very difficult, if not impossible, for most of the eligible industrial items, produced in the LDCs. The result was obvious, especially in the manufacturing sector, where the benefits of GSP had been enjoyed mostly by the developing countries not the LDCs.

The changes in the rules for knitted products (1999) showed a positive impact on Bangladesh exports to EU, both in terms of value and overall GSP utilization. The post-2005 scenario will place Bangladesh RMG exports into a very stiff competition. Bangladesh may retain that edge on price but it would largely depend on receiving GSP. It is quite likely that woven items will

Bangladesh had always been at a disadvantaged situation, being virtually the only major player among the LDCs in textile trade, with inadequate backward linkage capacity. Thus, Bangladesh has been requesting, since late eighties, to relax the rules albeit only for RMG exports. In other items, it came close to producing some exportable items, but could not avail GSP, due to Rules of Origin, sometimes missing marginally in the value addition criteria. As for agro-proce-ssed items, the EC GSP rule of wholly obtained in the exporting country was a big impediment for Bangladesh, as this prevented sourcing of any raw materials from outside the country.

lose its present share of EU market dramatically unless these enter EU duty free. The only issue that worries many is the impact of any relaxation in the rules for the export of woven items on the growing textile-manufacturing sector of the country. This should be judged in the light of overall impact of post-2005 trade regime on the economy and the long-term competitiveness of our textile sector. A projectionist approach on the issue could very well be counter-productive.

Recent trade pattern

Since 1986, following EC-Bangladesh Textile Agreement, RMG exports very quickly took an overwhelming share of total exports to EU. The growth in the exports to EU had also been phenomenal. It was mainly for the quota-free access, not that much for duty free access of Bangla-deshi textile products. The GSP utilisation increased, together with the sudden growth in knit export to EU after the relaxation of the rule in 1999. The share of woven (shirts, trousers) and knitted products

(T-shirts, sweaters) about five years ago, (of the total RMG export to EU) was 60 and 40 per cent respectively. Since 1999 share of the knitted RMG started increasing and it is now about 51 per cent. Apparently, the better backward linkage (reduced lead-time) and duty free status (owing to the change in the Rules of Origin) provided better business, which kept the overall growth despite the recent economic depression. The EBA and SAARC Regional Cumulation (not applied, though) did not show any further improvement. EBA, explained earlier, was not relevant for Bangladesh. We may add here that SAARC Regional Cumulation, a misunderstood system, could not be applied owing to the higher value addition criteria and the controversy it generated within Bangladesh. Nevertheless, it is evident that RMG (only woven product is relevant here) export can hardly be benefited from SAARC Regional Cumulation. However, the debate completely overlooked the possibilities offered by the Regional Cumulation in other sectors. Presumably, this could have helped exports of agro-processed items, leather products and light engineering products. The new windows of opportunity for SMEs of the region and a beginning of a possible diversification in Bangladesh exports were lost. Some of the recommendations, following studies on the issue, were forwarded with a spirit of conflict resolution between the two warring sub-sectors. These recommendations were not technically feasible and did not address the essence of the problems faced by the country's exports.

The developing countries did not press for the relaxation of rules for GSP. Their industrial products were wholly obtained within the country. Bangladesh had always been at a disadvantaged situation, being virtually the only major player among the LDCs in textile trade, with inadequate backward linkage capacity. Thus, Bangladesh has been requesting, since late eighties, to relax the rules albeit only for RMG exports. In other items, it came close to producing some exportable items, but could not avail GSP, due to Rules of Origin, sometimes missing marginally in the value addition criteria. As for agro-processed items, the EC GSP rule of wholly obtained in the exporting country was a big impediment for Bangladesh, as this prevented sourcing of any raw materials from outside the country.

Looking for an argument to change the Rules of Origin for GSP, we have to consider the external trade regime for the product concerned. In other words, an assessment has to be done in the light of available edge (triff rate in the importing country, duty applicable to competitors and cost of production) enjoyed under a preferential trade.

Presumably, the raw materials for export items will enter Bangladesh with zero duty or with marginal duty. Accordingly, the regulatory framework of the country needs to be very effective to prevent major distortions in the domestic market following the relaxation in the rules. It may be worth noting that following GATT Agreement, there are at least 3 areas where the duty remained high in the developed markets like USA and EU. These are for footwear, textile and food products. In the case of EU one can add bicycles into that list. If Bangladesh wants to export some of these items (these are usually labour-intensive) to EU under GSP, the existing rules will be a great constraint. If the rules are relaxed Bangladesh has a chance to take the advantage.

The author works for the Delegation of the European Commission to Bangladesh. Opinions expressed are personal and do not in any way reflect the views of the European Commission.

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.

Iraqi police to the rescue

Peter D Feaver, professor of political science at Duke University in North Carolina recently pointed out, "The plain truth is that United Nations does old-fashioned peace-keeping rather well and neo-colonial nation-building fairly well, but only when those missions are not significantly challenged by local militarised groups. If the critics are right that the problem in Iraq is security, then the UN is probably not the

vehicle for addressing it." Rather than looking at the UN-led multinational force to provide security, the US should look to Iraq's Shias, who constitute more than 60 per cent of the population. Iraq's Shia majority has shown admirable restraint and moderation even after the bombing of their holiest shrine at Najaf. Though most Shias believe the bombing, in which their most respected leader was killed, was the handiwork of Saddam's armed henchmen, there was no backlash against Sunni Arabs who make up

only 16 per cent of the population. The Americans should quickly hand over power to the interim government led by Dr. Ahmed Chalabi and restore order with the help of an Iraqi police force; Shia and Kurdish militias and coalition forces can provide logistical support. This will allow the American troops to stay in the background and avoid combat casualties. Only when the interim government has restored order, should the UN join the reconstruction of Iraq. **Mahmood Elahi**

Demolition and reconstruction of road-dividers

It seems that good sense has prevailed and the demolition work of road-dividers on the Airport Road and at Malibagh crossing has been stopped, at least for the time being! Now, the demolished portions should be restored immediately as per the existing design that is not only highly functional but also occupies the minimum space of the road. The only

thing that needs to be done is to paint the top of the divider in red and white or to fix with cat's eye for the convenience of drivers at night.

Recently some people have raised the question of whether there should be any divider at all on the Airport Road as it is not a highway. True, it cannot be called a highway as it is within the city limits. But the point to remember here is, this important road runs from Banani Gate to the Airport point without being intersected by any other road along this stretch of

about 8 kms. As a result, people drive at a high speed on this road and without any divider there is bound to be repetition of tragic head-on collisions of the recent past. Do we want them to happen again?

Road-dividers are essential to ensure discipline of vehicular traffic on the roads for the safety for all of us. **Abul Mohsin Siddheswari Circular Road, Dhaka**

Forgery in BUET

Mr. Khalid Hussein's letter in The

Daily Star, September 21, 2003 seemed biased. He seems to know the role of the personalised investigation committee as well as the higher statutory body of the syndicate in BUET -- still he did not honour their decisions. Reports reveal that the syndicate's ruling was a result of a long thereabout deliberation -- we should have the mentality to respect the decision in the interest of the rule of law.

I have some understanding of the situation and therefore know that

the whole affair is the result of fabricated and targeted activities of a discredited teacher of the same department. He was convicted of immoral acts earlier and now has implicated two respectable teachers -- how much credibility the whole process has? Let the law take its own course and leave the BUET institution, having some public credibility, alone.

Salim Al-Haq
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