LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA FRIDAY DECEMBER 5, 2003

Attack on college teacher

Ugly manifestation of criminality

HE leg tendons of a college teacher were severed by unknown assailants in Gopalganj on Wednesday. It caused public commotion and people of Gopalganj town came out on the roads to register their protest against the attacka sure sign of people losing their patience with the latest surge in

Now, it is not easy to work out why a college teacher became the target of the elements with a beastly appetite (what else could it be?) for revenge. Since police have not yet succeeded in arresting the attackers, it is not possible to ascertain the motive behind the crime. But what is pretty clear is that the lives of citizens are insecure and nobody knows who will be the next victim of the lingering lawlessness.

The government move to bring those committing mind-boggling crimes before speedy trial courts was a timely one. But the criminals are still taking advantage of the lax enforcement of the law which allows many of them to escape lightly. The speedy trial courts were set up with the objective of accelerating the pace of dispensation of justice. We believe the crimes, like the one committed in Gopalganj, should be dealt with by a speedy trial court. Such simple solutions, however, often elude us because the success rate of police in arresting the most wanted criminals is not at all satisfactory. Police high-ups should look into the matter and try to improve their score on this account crucially important to the whole plan of containing the crime

The way people are reacting to ghastly crimes must also be taken note of. They are feeling insecure and finding the situation unbearable. What the decisionmakers must not overlook is that the public outcry often leads to disruptions like strike calls and road barricades. So it is imperative that crime is handled the way it should be in the interest of all concerned. But for that to happen, police must win back people's confidence by making sure that criminals do not go

Caring for the disabled

Equal opportunity approach needed

HE National Disabled Welfare Foundation drawing on a recent World Bank survey has put the figure of mentally and physically retarded people in the country at 10 per cent of the population. The just-observed World Disabled Day has highlighted the incidence of disablement in the country from three angles: disability by malnutrition and lack of medicare; by violence, road accidents and natural calamities; and by mental causes. Looking at the factors inducing impairment, both physical and mental, we find that the maladies are, to a large extent, preventable. So, there has to be a containment strategy in place touching on a whole range of development concerns. The focus is now entirely on those who are disabled and for obvious reasons; but a significant part of the priority needs to be accorded to the preventative aspect of handling crisis.

The first imperative for reducing the incidence of disablement and rehabilitating those that are crippled is to have a reliable database on the entirety of the subject. Effective strategies can only be drawn out on the basis of accurate data analyses. Disablement is something far too obvious to go unreported or remain unknown. Little extra effort can help firm up the data-

It is all very good that we are thinking of easing the plight of the retarded. But most of what has been proposed is rudimentary in nature that in other countries had become a tangible reality a long time ago. For instance, they will have separate ticket counters in railway stations, bus terminals, airports and crossriver ferry terminals. A quota of seats will be reserved for them in public transports and that ramps are to be provided in government offices to facilitate movement of wheel chairs for them. The government has also decided to earmark one per cent quota for participation of the disabled in Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination. So much more needs to be done

An 'equal opportunity' approach will be the right route to take for the advancement of the disabled as useful citizens of the country.

The war within Islam



ZAFAR SOBHAN

MERICANS can be so obtuse sometimes. Thomas Friedman's column in the New York Times week, entitled Letter from Tikrit, is a case in point. The column is in the form of a rhetorical device that Friedman frequently uses -- an imaginary memo from one political personage to another. Letter from Tikrit is an imaginary memo from Saddam Hussein to President Bush.

The entire column was filled with Friedman's typically annoying simplisticness, but what really caught my eye was a paragraph near the end of the column in "Saddam" waxes philosophical on "the war of ideas" that the US is ostensibly waging in the Middle East:

"Yes, Bush, you and Blair have kicked off something very big -- a war of ideas with, and within Islam. It's as big as the cold war. But to win, you have to mobilize your whole society, as you did in the cold war. You are talking about trying to change a whole civilization, whose backward, fanatical elements -- when combined with modern technology --

Let's leave aside for the moment Friedman's apparently Freudian slip in writing that Blair and Bush have kicked off a war of ideas with Islam. Friedman can usually be relied upon to keep to

the official line that the US is not at war with Islam -- over ideas or anything else. Perhaps he miswrote -- or perhaps he meant to say that Saddam thinks that the US is waging a war against Islam -these imaginary memos to the president Friedman ghost-writes

My real point of contention with Friedman's column is with the assumption contained in the statement that the invasion of Iraq has kicked off a war of ideas within Islam and that it can thus bring and Tony Blair of all people -- have kicked off a war of ideas within

The war of ideas that is raging within Islam -- between moderate progressive Islam and fanatical fundamentalist Islam -- has been raging for a lot longer than since the US and the UK invaded Iraq.

In Bangladesh we have been waging this war for over 30 years, at least since the time of our Liber-

bombing at Ramna Park on the first day of the Bengali new year a

There have been ferocious acts of carnage committed against the Hindu minority in the country -the most recent being the atrocity in Banhskhali where 11 members of a Hindu family were burned alive by persons unknown.

lately stepped up their attacks on the country's Ahmadiya popula-tion for following a heterodox

Americans may not have known much about fundamentalist Islam before 9/11 -- except as a staunch ally in the cold war -- but we in the Muslim world sure did.

Bush and Blair didn't kick anything off -- they have just now belatedly realized what has been going on in the Muslim world for he past few decades.

What America learned on 9/11 was what we in the Muslim world have known for a long time. There

caused incalculable damage.

The fact is that that the US-led invasion of Iraq has made things tremendously difficult for those of us on the moderate side of the divide.

If Bush and Blair understood that the war within Islam predated their invasion of Irag, they might be able to comprehend just how devastating the invasion has been to moderates in this war.

They would have known that invading Iraq would accomplish nothing beyond strengthening the hand of the extremists and undermining the moderates.

They would have understood that they will never be able to bring about the change they desire in the Muslim world through

It is true that massive reform is needed in the Muslim world -- but for this reform to take place, it must come from within. It cannot be imposed by the West.

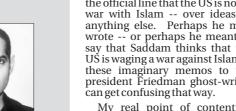
The more they try to impose their ideas of reform on the Muslim world, the more Bush and Blair undermine the very reform

they claim to seek. It would be bad enough if the only casualties of this misguided foreign policy were the US and the UK. But the real long-term casual-ties are the foot-soldiers in the war

The invasion has done nothing more than to stoke the anger and bitterness and resentment that permeates the Muslim world, and the fury and frustration that Muslims feel about the invasion is breeding a new generation of fundamentalists.

The invasion of Iraq has been a disaster for the war for the hearts and minds of the Muslim

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I have news for Tom Friedman.

ation War, when religious extrem-

And religious extremists have

What America learned on 9/11 was what we in the Muslim world have known for a long time. There is a small but deadly minority within the Muslim community who are dedicated to remaking the world in their image of Islam and are willing to go to any length of carnage to achieve their goals. And they have been waging a bloody war on the rest of us all these many years. Welcome to our world.

STRAIGHT TALK

about reform in the Muslim world.

Please bear in mind that Friedman won a Pulitzer prize for his supposedly penetrating analysis of the Muslim world following 9/11 and is generally considered to be the pre-eminent Middle-Eastern affairs commentator in

But what his Letter to Tikrit demonstrates is how utterly clueless Friedman is when it comes to understanding the Muslim world.

This is a principal reason why Muslims around the world are frustrated by US foreign policy and the Bush administration's simplistic prescriptions for peace and security.

It is the ignorance and the presumption that people like Friedman bring to any political discourse. The idea that the US and the UK -- that George Bush ists assisted the Pakistani army in their genocidal attack on the population and formed para-military death squads to terrorise the

Thankfully, in Bangladesh I would say that the forces of moderate Islam are winning the battle for the hearts and minds of the Muslim majority. We enshrined secularism in the constitution, and religious fundamentalists have never enjoyed widespread popular support, as evidenced by their consistently poor showing in national elections

This is not to say that we have no extremists or that they are not dangerous or that they have not caused serious damage to the nation. In recent years there have been atrocities such as bomb blasts killing dozens at a cultural event and who can forget the strain of Islam. But, by and large, most Muslim

intolerant actions and ideas of the religious extremists, and subscribe to a more tolerant and moderate interpretation of Islam. The situation is far from perfect, but things are going reasonably well on this front in the war within Islam. And Bangladesh is not the only

Bangladeshis do not support the

Muslim country in which this war for the soul of Islam is being waged. From Indonesia to Pakistan to Turkey to Algeria to Iran -there is a war being waged for the hearts and minds of the Muslim world that has been going on for

This war didn't start on September 11, 2001 and it most certainly didn't start when George Bush invaded Iraq nine months

the world in their image of Islam and are willing to go to any length of carnage to achieve their goals. And they have been waging a bloody war on the rest of us all these many years. Welcome to This understanding should be

is a small but deadly minority

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who are dedicated to remaking

the context through which Americans view the invasion of Iraq. If people like Tom Friedman had even the slightest insight into the Muslim world, they would be able to understand just what the stakes are in Iraq -- for the West and for the Muslim world.

Far from kicking off something big, what Bush and Blair have in reality done is to blunder into an extremely delicate and finelybalanced political situation and

The irony of George Bush



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

HE irony of George W. Bush fighting against terrorism has the curious resonance of the drunkard's joke. The joke has it that a drunkard was trying to find under the street lamp what he had lost further down the road. When asked why he was looking in the wrong place, the answer was that he couldn't see it in the dark. The recent flurry of deaths and destruction in Istanbul and Baghdad has confirmed that the source of terrorism was not concentrated in one particular place. George Bush hasn't been looking where he should.

That is why, even after the US has taken over Afghanistan and Iraq, terrorism hasn't stopped. We don't know if George Bush is planning to take Turkey now. But if he follows the trail of terror, he take a few other must also countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. If George Bush likes, he may rule every country which has unruly folks.

But meanwhile he must realize that his attack on terrorism has united its splintered cause. The end of terrorism, he promised, isn't in sight. Instead the gyre of vengeance has widened, while the center of terrorism keeps shifting

from one country to another. It's not Afghanistan, Iraq or the Middle East. The wave of terror now stretches from Indonesia to India, Sudan to Saudi Arabia, making every country on earth fear if the next hit would come there. And the target of terror is spreading as well. It is not just the Israelis, Americans or British. The Italians Spaniards, Japanese and South Koreans have also come under

Recently, the US President has given splendid speeches, first at racy no deeper than a label. Why is air force commander says in the this sudden rush for democracy in the Middle East now?

Well, there is nothing wrong if democracy should come to the Middle East sooner than later. But how is terrorism linked to democracy? Terrorists are not despots or tyrants, who oppress their people. Rather they rise amongst the people to turn their hatred for oppressors into reprisals. The struggle for democracy has many exam- ples when soldiers of freedom died at the end of hanga volunteer. Bush has never cared to look in the heart of a suicide bomber, where love of freedom ignites the deadly bombs. If democracy is all about freedom, where does it ring louder than the cry of freedom proclaimed in those self-immolating explosions?

movie Pearl Harbor that there is

nothing stronger than the heart of

Democracy also started as an ideology, if George Bush will remember, an ideology that transformed into a political system. honor the king. In other countries, including USA, neither is required.

Freedom, when dictated by others, turns into chains of subjugation. If military dictatorship and theocratic rules "are a straight, smooth highway to nowhere" as George Bush said in his NED speech, it's because they never recognized freedom in its own glory. Perhaps pushing a particuar brand of democracy is no different either. It constricts freedom no less than its adversarOsama bin Laden and his band of brothers tell us the opposite thing. They claim to have excused and accommodated the United States in the Middle East for too long. Now they are fighting. The bad news is that others are also picking up their fight in faraway

in the Middle East can be debated.

History will judge one day which side is fighting for the right cause. George Bush and Tony Blair have often said that history wouldn't forgive them if they didn't deal with terrorism. How their vaunted confidence in history has an uncanny resonance of the past! When the Nazi leaders sat around the table to plan the extinction of the Jews, one of the things they often said to each other was how history was going to honor them for advancing the purity of the human race.

The irony of history turned it upside down! People are held in Guantanamo Bay without trial The Homeland Security can arrest people in the United States with out their Miranda rights. The Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq has shut down Al-Arabia TV station. The US Army has arrested the wife and daughter of a Saddam lovalist to find out about their fugitive. They are breaking into Iraqi homes to make arrests.

Saddam Hussain used to do all of those to stay in power. His was a reign of terror. Hell, George Bush does the same to stay in Iraq, and he calls it democracy. The irony is worse than we thought. We have to believe that it's not a joke.

CROSS TALK

But meanwhile he must realize that his attack on terrorism has united its splintered cause. The end of terrorism, he promised, isn't in sight. Instead the gyre of vengeance has widened, while the center of terrorism keeps shifting from one country to another. It's not Afghanistan, Iraq or the Middle East. The wave of terror now stretches from Indonesia to India, Sudan to Saudi Arabia, making every country on earth fear if the next hit would come there.

the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in Washington DC and then at the receptions in London, to defend his invasion of Iraq. He called it a part of the US commitment to democracy. He reminded us that the advance of freedom depended on the success of democracy. He also gave us a bit of a history lesson. The story of democracy is 2500-year old, and until the 1970s, there were about 40 democracies in the world.

Bingo! What does it tell us? Democracy hasn't been exactly a cakewalk for mankind. Thousand years of struggle has brought only a few hundred years of success, that also for a few countries of the world. Most countries still lag behind, and some have democ-

for disturbing the man's rope peace of an empire.

The American freedom is also the outcome of one such disturbance, the American Revolution, when freedom-loving Americans had taken up arms against the British Empire. Osama bin Laden is no George Washington, and he may not be fighting for the right reason. But one can bet that George Washington was as much a wanted man to the imperial rulers of Britain as Osama bin Laden is today to the US and its

This is where George Bush has never looked. Ideas become ideology when people adopt it like a faith and prepare to die for it. The

And every oppressor's hand only drove it deeper into the hearts of people, whose aspiration for freedom was sustained by the courage and sacrifice of those who died for it. There is something magical about the way it happens. It turns into a mystical force that draws the believers into a state of It's not true that democracy

doesn't condescend to culture. In England where democracy struck its roots for the very first time, monarchy is still upheld as the supreme institution. In some countries, the viewers are asked to stand up to honor the national flag before feature presentation in the movie theaters. In Thailand, the viewers are asked to stand up to

George Bush needs to take a

hard look at it, if he truly wants to put an end to terrorism. It is not enough to claim that America has "put power at the service of principle," if that power makes it a principle to deny a group of people their right to express freedom. He is right to say, "sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe." This is where the darkness descends and truth gets lost. This is where George Bush chooses to be under the street

Whether the Western nations have excused and accommodated

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker

OPINION

The TI report and the rationale of our reactions

SYED ALI REJA

E experience an uproar every time Transparency International publishes its report on corruption. Such furore can be attributed to Bangladesh being found to be the most corrupt country in the TI survey net. I don't know for sure, but I wonder whether the other countries that are not far behind Bangladesh are swept by such heated debate. I am afraid we betray our proclivity to, and connivance at, corruption through our hyper-sensitivity to such reports. As people say, a sinner denounces sin the loudest.

To be corrupt is a crime and to make-believe otherwise is a greater crime. It is tantamount to fraud and self-deception. There have been efforts to

discredit the TI report. That the report has been based on newspaper reports and hence superficial; that all the countries of the

world have not come up in TI survey; that more large scale corruption is being committed in developed countries and so on. Such disparaging estimation of the TI report, in fact, little detracts from the weight it carries worldwide. Our clamour itself following the report speaks a lot about its bearings with our image (if any, though one may very rightly wonder how a least developed country with a very low human development position and a terror-stricken society could enjoy any sort of positive image in the world comity of nations) which we've increasingly been fussy about. As regards the attempt to dis-

credit the TI report as its having been based on press reports, I'd like to say that it is no statesmanlike acumen flatly looking down upon press reports. Reports are supposed to be the outcome of long, meticulous efforts at striking the truth behind the facade of

our tinsel polity. A report is best judged by its readers. A regular reader can measure the credibility of a report If a report inspires a general

perception of belief and is not effectively challenged or refuted, it carries all the merit and weight A country or a government

being corrupted or not does not depend on being so branded or not by an organisation. A rotten fish stinks of its condition. A vendor's clamour in favour of his fish cannot give lie to the fact that the fish is rotten in its head and all over. The people of a country need no extra human faculty to perceive the extent and existence of corruption in their country.

The experiences of our daily life speak amply about what and how we are. What we get when we seek service of any state utility, when we take our patients to a hospital, when we take to court for justice,

when we seek our children's admission to a school, when we in a state of distress and misery, solicit the help of the police, when we draw the kind attention of our political or bureaucratic high-ups for any help as a matter of right? What we encounter in each of the cases above only accentuates the painful reality of all-pervasive corruption in our homeland called Bangladesh. It will not pay in the long run if

we fight shy of this phenomenon that corruption having started in the head has now permeated every part of the body of our state and society. Our people have long been frustrated to find the two greatest institutions of the state equally steeped in corruption. The civil and military leaders who have been part of our political scenarios have let go of the rein of corruption to their sheer aggrandizement. Involvement and commission indulgence and connivance on their part have

paved the way for the civil and military servants to follow suit. If anyone who is not somebody in terms of money, power, or clout approaches a political or government functionary for some legal and due help and is spared the venal bite, it will certainly be a rare example of serendipity. In present circumstances we render ourselves only vulnerable if we dare to deny the preying guys any

When corruption braves in, governance takes to its heels. One may ask how people still live here if the situation is so precarious. The answer is: The indomitable human urge for life and that hope runs eternal in man. He can be destroyed, but cannot be defeated, to borrow from Hemingway. Even in hell, man tries to peer for rays of light out of heaven. In Bangladesh, the press, the fourth estate is heaven, from where emanates the rays of hope for such long, long let down peo-

ple. At every step we feel a sense of deprivation. But while we read the pages of a newspaper (exceptions are not unusual), we don't feel let down. Rather, we feel we are our right to know enjoyng thanks to the tenacious courage of the press.

But the fourth estate cannot alone change the other estates. The political leaders are the architects of society. If they prefer the unfair to the fair, the present state of thing will, perhaps, be the eternal lot of our people. Plain living and high thinking has long taken leave of our leadership. Amassing wealth by putting integrity, altruism, sacrifice for posterity on the pyre is their sole mission. Everyday our political and bureaucratic high-ups with not many exceptions make a bonfire of good sense. Personal agenda always remains their topmost priority. With their cupidity scaling higher and higher, their political rhetoric and

histrionics amount to strutting and fretting upon the stage, signifying nothing for the country. We had been a nation deceived

by the rulers and bureaucrats alike since long before Transparency International came into being or it started to cover Bangladesh in its survey. Our daily experiences have just been reflected in the TI report. We may fall out with TI, but such acrimonious reactions will not pay off in the least in lessening our selfinflicted miseries. We need not acclaim or defame it. We just need to mend our ways. The rulers cannot continue to perpetrate their personal and partisan agenda, nor we the ruled should keep our fingers crossed. Our leaders, our lawmakers, our bureaucrats urgently need to realize that they have long ceased to inspire for them any regard in the minds of the people. It is not a good omen for the nation as a whole. The leaders are supposed

to guide us along the road to prosperity, peace and glory. They will never be able to do so as long as they do not overcome the lures of easy personal and partisan gains through corruption and other sharp practices. If the political leaders do not maintain a clean state and a clear conscience they will never be able to stop the corruption of the government officials. Example is better than Corruption is committed also in many developed countries. Evil

instinct of man is not peculiar to a certain group or category of states. But very few states reel under such hideous prevalence of corruption as Bangladesh. It is ludicrous to feel complacent by seeking semblance of our poor show in other countries. It is high time we thrash out ways to stop the relentless sweep of corruption across the fabric of our national