

## Our heart goes out to the people of Iran

*Earthquake devastates an historical treasure*

ONCE again the people of Iran have been subjected to a severe natural disaster. Till the writing of this comment more than 5,000 people are confirmed to be dead and 20,000 are suspected buried under the rubble. The figure is likely to rise much further. We extend our deepest sympathy and heartfelt condolence to the families of the victims and pray for the salvation of the departed souls. The need of the moment is to gather international support to come to the aid of the suffering people of Iran. Already an international effort appears to be under way which includes President George Bush of the US, who only the other day termed Iran as a part of an 'Axis of Evil' and other world leaders.

The world must respond more promptly and vigorously. The need for assistance will rise by the day if not by the hour. The particular thing about earthquakes is that the buildings and structures that survive the initial disaster are often unsafe for any use as they are seriously weakened by the quake. So what is estimated to be the extent of disaster at the outset soon proves to be wrong as new facts reveals the real extent of the tragedy. In addition to the need for assistance Iran has asked for help in the search for survivors which require very sophisticated tools and skills to undertake. As has been seen from many earthquakes elsewhere that people survive under the rubbles for days and hundreds, if not thousands of lives can be saved if rescue operation can be conducted in time.

We are happy to note that world leaders appear to have risen above politics and narrow interest and are trying to come to Iran's aid at this moment of need. It is obvious that requirements will be of all sorts of items from food, water, medicine to temporary shelter. There is also an appeal for body bags to gather the mortal remains of the dead and bury them with some semblance of dignity.

We from Bangladesh should consider being part of the international effort to aid Iran. We can send teams of doctors and engineers including paramedics and even some quantum of medicines. Even if limited, we must express our solidarity with the Iranian people, not only through words, but also through deeds.

## Insecure ports

*The looters have to be wiped out*

THE high-powered committee formed three years ago to deal with crime at the ports has failed to set things right. Criminals pose a grave threat to ships at both Chittagong and Mongla ports. The point will be made clear by the fact that at least two incidents of robbery are taking place at the ports every week.

That is cause for great concern. Not only is the shipping industry threatened by the criminal activities, the country's image is also damaged when its ports become unsafe for foreign ships. The costs of shipping go up when ships have to carry an extra number of security men when they enter our ports. It is a reflection on the security arrangements at our ports.

While the problem might be an offshoot of the overall lawlessness in the country, it deserves far sterner handling, as criminal-infested ports are bound to have a negative impact on the export-import business. Viewed from that angle, it should not take much time for the decision-makers to realise that the activities of the criminals are being allowed to undermine normal functioning of the ports which amounts to obstructing or causing harm to trade and commerce. Is this an acceptable proposition?

There must be some areas where lawlessness cannot have any place. We simply cannot afford to allow the ports to become happy hunting grounds for looters and robbers. The Daily Star account of the modus operandi of the criminals makes it amply clear how they are taking advantage of poor surveillance. But it defies understanding as to why the law enforcers seem powerless to do anything to dislodge them.

However, the criminals have to be dislodged in the larger interest of shipping and business. The decision-makers have to come out of their chrysalis of academic thinking and planning only. The situation calls for drastic action against the criminals, which the government must take immediately.

# Nuclear disarmament in the Middle East

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

EXIT of a bedraggled Saddam Hussein captured from a rat hole heralding his final exit from the global scene appears to have encouraged selective nuclear non-proliferation. On 19th December 24, 2003 President Bush revealed that after nine months of "quiet diplomacy" with Anglo-US officials Libyan leader Qaddafi has publicly confirmed his commitment to disclose and dismantle all weapons of mass destruction programmes; to allow immediate and unconditional international inspections on all nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programmes and help oversee their elimination. President Bush reiterated that "opposing proliferation is one of the highest priorities of the war against terror" as terrorists, if they ever gain WMD, would kill hundreds of thousands of innocent people "without hesitation and without mercy." He assured that the US would continue its vigilance against proliferation through enhanced intelligence capabilities; interdiction of materials and technologies in transit; insistence on multi-lateral approach as in the case of North Korea; and support IAEA "to hold Iran to its treaty obligations". Only a day earlier Iran signed additional nuclear inspection agreements described by the Arms Control Association (ACA) as "a significant step towards ensuring that Iran lives up to its commitment under NPT to forswear nuclear weapons."

ACA believes that Iran is now closer to weapon-making capability than previously thought and that Iran has been pursuing for many years nuclear activities in violation of the NPT obligations. However, to make Iran turn away permanently from the pursuit of nuclear programme will need joint US-EU-Russian strategy. An important element of such a strategy has to be US and Israeli guarantee not to attack Iranian nuclear facilities thus reducing Iranian incentive to acquire nuclear weapons to defend itself and at the same time to increase benefits to Iran for openness and compliance.

Another element has to be unambiguous US position of not acquiescing with the undeclared status of other nuclearised countries particularly that of Israel. One should, however, not forget that on several occasions in 1999 then Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told President Clinton that Israel would never sign Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMTC) because it would be suicidal. This "nuclear ambiguity" according to McGeorge Bundy (of Kennedy era) and William Crow Jr (former Head of CIA) is a significant impediment to arms control and non-proliferation because no Israeli

US sanctions against Libya; and return of the Americans to the Libyan oil fields. In case of Iran one may recall that the late Ayatollah Khomeini used to consider possession of nuclear weapons as immoral.

It is now recognized that the real danger to international security and stability is the possession of WMD by rogue states and terrorists. International vigilance, particularly by P-5 of the UNSC, is essential to guard against the possibility of nuclear weapons and/or technology falling into the hands of non-state actors. Rogue states have to be identified, isolated and pun-

their departure reportedly arranged/agreed upon by Pakistani authorities; (c) Pakistan's long history of political instability cannot rule out the possibility of a coup d'etat by Islamist elements who will then control the nuclear arsenal; and, (d) Pakistan's image as one of the most unstable nations in the world. In the case of Israel, in the long run it will be difficult to maintain its nuclear monopoly in the Middle East without courting potentially catastrophic consequences. Israel should pursue with US support stronger engagement in nuclear non-proliferation regime, an engagement which

potential enemies. This has complicated the global security system. That is why non-proliferation is so vitally important now in the war on terror. During the Cold War the USA and USSR ensured the security of the members of their respective camps and therefore there was no incentive for nuclear proliferation nor was it allowed by the camp leaders. But the end of the Cold War cut the knot binding the camp followers and set them adrift. Some of these countries in the absence of nuclear umbrella, started clandestine nuclear programmes to ensure their security. This ushered in the process of horizontal proliferation of

tation which in the past could only be inflicted upon by nation states. It has therefore become greatly important to control the supply of nuclear weapons and technology lest they fall into wrong hands. But ignoring the demand side of the equation, in the case of Middle East for example, would not eliminate the problem of proliferation. In this context Colonel Gaddafi's recent interview given to CNN becomes relevant. He reportedly said that his government's "corrective actions" in renouncing WMD would not only encourage North Korea, Iran and Syria (suspected of having nuclear programme) to abandon their destructive efforts but would also "tighten the noose around the Israelis, so that they would expose their programme of weapons of mass destruction."

Recent Iranian and Libyan actions prove that diplomacy works more effectively than preemptive military attacks as in the case of Iraq in which the justification for the attack changed from Al-Qaida connection to WMD elimination to liberation of Iraqis from the clutches of a dictator. In May this year, Senator Dianne Feinstein expressed her fear that by adopting a policy of unilateralism and preemption, by undermining international law and institutions, and by increasing US reliance on nuclear weapons Bush administration may actually be encouraging proliferation which the US wants to prevent. It would therefore be prudent for the Diarchic Consuls of the world to forswear the use of arms and not to be Quixotic by imagining windmills as giants, flocks of sheep as enemy soldiers, and country inns as castles to be defeated and destroyed. The developed and developing worlds are at one in defeating terrorism. Those who thought otherwise are seeing the futility of their course. It would, therefore, be advisable to bring Iran and Libya within the fold of a democratic global society while at the same time continue efforts to correct distortions which exist on the demand side of the equation on proliferation.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is former Secretary and Ambassador.

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government can make a convincing case that no state need to fear a nuclear Israel unless the Jewish state is threatened with extinction. If one were to mention the cases of India and Pakistan then acquisition of nuclear weapons by India is clearly to secure itself from mainly China (and now increasingly Pakistan) while Pakistan's acquisition is to balance her defense capabilities vis-à-vis India which has absolute superiority in conventional weapons over Pakistan. It is therefore not surprising that 2000 NPT Review Conference recognized that universality would depend on successful efforts to enhance regional security in tension filled areas like the Middle East and South Asia.

Though the neo-cons in the US would like people to believe that the Iranian and Libyan decision on nuclear disarmament was to avoid the fate of Iraqi "regime change", one should not find it difficult to believe Libyan Prime Minister's statement that the decision was made to divert resources from purchasing military hardware to developmental efforts in order to raise the standard of living of the people; further opening of Western markets consequent upon lifting of

ished for the slightest infraction of non-proliferation regime. It is now reported that Pakistani nuclear scientists including the father of Pakistani atom bomb may have passed crucial technology relating to uranium enrichment to Iran, North Korea and possibly other nations (NYT22.12.03). As a charter member of the NPT and a country with substantial leverage with Pakistan, the US bears substantial responsibility to bring pressure on Pakistan so that Pakistan does not assist non-nuclear states in acquiring nuclear technology. Problem, however, arises from US reluctance to take a hard line with Pakistan because of that country's "front line" status in the war on terror. It is feared that militant Islamists holding strong anti-US sentiments may get political mileage from discomfiture caused to Pakistani military ruler, should the US take him to task. On the other hand, soft paddling by the US may have grave danger because of (a) suspicious links between some elements of Pakistani military establishment with Al-Qaida and rogue states; (b) reported departure of two Pakistani nuclear scientists to reclusive Myanmar on the eve of they being questioned by the US authorities,

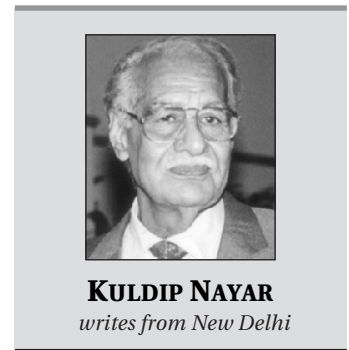
should not be a hostage to finding a just, stable and enduring peace in the region.

Terrorist attacks on 9/11 on New York and Washington will be considered as iconic moments when the history of the twenty first century will be written. As the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union irrevocably changed the global power balance events of 9/11 removed the veil which had shrouded the "new unilateralism" which had effectively been enjoyed by the US for the last decades of the Twentieth century. American pre-eminence, its unrivalled power, its unchallenged domination, its global hegemony became apparent to all. As opposed to the Cold War days, Russian affairs expert Nicolai Zlobin explains, the definition of war itself has changed. Contemporary warfare is a mechanism for regime change or a mechanism for regulating the activities of a regime in a given country. The nature of the enemy has changed, its army has become shadowy, and its hierarchy unknown. In the event of defeat of the enemy there is no one to negotiate the terms of surrender with. In effect the world has to deal with the absence of statehood in

nuclear weapons. If the end of the Cold War induced some countries to embark on the nuclear path it also contributed to the emergence of failed states, a vitally important player in the war on terror. During the Cold War the two camps competed for influence by providing economic and military aid to weak and corrupt regimes in the name of ideological causes. The end of the Cold War meant deprivation of assistance which had hitherto propped up these regimes plunging them into the abyss of politico-economic disaster which their ineffective institutions, weak political culture, ethnic and religious fragmentation could not cope with.

It has already been stated that the nuclear proliferation results from, which Robert Jarvis calls "security dilemma", the classic example being Indo-Pak arms race. The problem of proliferation faced by the international community, particularly the great powers, is that they look at the issue from the supply side ignoring the demand side of the equation. Indubitably the supply side has acquired greater weightage because of the emergence of non-state actors who can cause scarring economic, political and psychological devas-

## Congress lost in banalities



KULDEEP NAYAR  
writes from New Delhi

THE Congress seldom licks its wounds. It is a correcting exercise. It serves as a process to recover the strength or pride, both of which the party has lost. Even after the rout in Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, the party is reluctant to face up to the realities. The exercise of resignation by some at the top was a non-exercise. Congress president Sonia Gandhi advised all to go back to their work. No head rolled. The party does not have the word, accountability, in its dictionary. It is business as usual.

But how does the Congress rehabilitate itself in the eyes of the people? They are going away from it. The party has been losing its stock. Why? Still, the party has not shed its pompousness. It has been spoiled further by the illusion of power. A surfeit of leaders at every level gives you the impression as if they are all set to take the oath of office. Most of them make you feel small, not because of their unblemished record but because of their sense of superiority. They talk at you, not to you. They behave as if they have all the answers.

Really speaking, the Congress leaders have come to live in a make-belief world. Even if you do

not expect them to work like Indira Gandhi who returned to power in 1980 after the party was in a shambles following the excesses during the emergency (1975-77), they must go back to the people and try to understand their disillusionment for the party. Why are they staying distant?

To begin with, the Congress should learn to say 'sorry'. It should have offered apologies to workers and supporters after the three assembly elections. But then the

do never in the economic field. Dever did he imagine that the party would renounce those ideals and turn out to be corrupt. Yet his real disappointment is over the stalwart's equivocal stand on communalism and casteism. He finds most of leaders mixed up. A bit of saffronisation has come to affect their thinking. This is happening at a time when the party's image, damaged by the Shah Bano case and the opening the locks at the temple in Ayodhya, is far from repaired. The party should at least

pracharaks (preachers) who are busy poisoning the minds of people even in deep tribal areas. The biggest problem the party faces today is the whispering campaign against the Italian born Sonia Gandhi. The Congressmen are themselves fanning it. In the Hindi speaking heartland her foreign origin is said to account for most support to the BJP. The party has to think ways to overcome the disadvantage.

Many have been hoping against

give ideas to the party men. But it is a bit too soon. However, some discussion on this point is bound to begin in the party before long. Rao's statement that he is ready for active politics is significant. Whoever the leader, the Congress must realise that its strength lies at the grassroots. It must return there instead of feeling happy with the exposure in the media.

In modern times when something soft and glossy provides the answer, the Congress has retrieved

in high places. Can the Congress initiate a movement on this count? Leaders should be prepared to go to jail. People's attention may get diverted from Hindutva propaganda to something appealing.

Such a movement may attract the like-minded people and parties. The Congress should in any case seek their support and make them its allies in the battle for justice. Unfortunately when it comes to alliances, the Congress gives the impression as if it does not need others, but they need it. The mere call that all secular parties should get together is not adequate; the Congress must approach each one of them.

The non-BJP parties recall with horror the treatment meted out to Shiela Dixit after she had swept the polls in Delhi. They fear the same coterie around Sonia Gandhi may not give them a fair deal. Coteries are nothing new in the Congress. Even the tallest leader like Nehru could not escape them. But then when he saw the coterie coming in the way of his direct contact with people, he cut it down to size. Can Sonia Gandhi do the same?

The Congress needs fresh air -- and fresh ideas. Too many Lilliputs have pinned down the giant. The Congress has to free itself from them. By doing so, the party may win back lakhs of people who still cling to the inheritance of Gandhi and Nehru -- the ethos of pluralism and the rule of law.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

One thing that increasingly bothers the common man -- or voter -- is the rule of law. He or she does not feel secure. Neither of them has confidence that the law would be enforced against persons in high places. Can the Congress initiate a movement on this count? Leaders should be prepared to go to jail. People's attention may get diverted from Hindutva propaganda to something appealing.

party has not yet said 'sorry' for the emergency which destroyed the country's institutions. It looks as if the Congress has lost sensitivity. This is the worst that can happen to any political party because it reflects a closed mind, if not an arrogant attitude. Still if the Congress wants to retrieve the ground, it has to go back to those values which do not come merely by hanging the photos of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad or Lal Bahadur Shastri but by following them relentlessly and honestly. An average person had kinship with the party because it gave him a sense of fulfilment. He had a feeling that just as he had the independence made under the Congress he would

be clear in its mind that it will have no truck with communalism of any type -- Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Christian. Sonia Gandhi sounds u n c o m p r o m i s i n g o n communalism. Can she fire her party men with the same commitment? It was seen during the last assembly elections that Sonia Gandhi attracted huge crowds. But when it came to discussions on the nitty-gritty of pluralism at panchayatghars or chupals, the RSS men were there to participate, argue and influence. The Congressmen were nowhere.

The old concept of workers going to villages and living there has very few takers in the party. Naturally, that task has been monopolised by the RSS

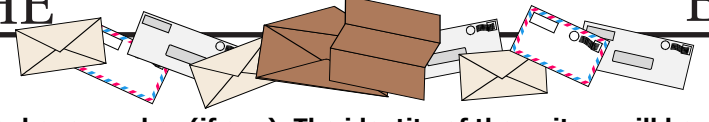
hope that she will stay as the Congress president and renounce any claim to prime ministership if the Congress ever coalesces a majority after the general election. It would have been better if the party had kept the question of leadership open till after the polls. But the party has already converted the forthcoming polls into a battle between Sonia Gandhi and Atal Behari Vajpayee instead of between the Congress and the BJP. This suits the Sangh parivar better.

In any case, the Congress cannot dwell on the Sonia Gandhi factor. It has to move on. The acquittal of Narasimha Rao from every case of corruption -- the last one was the Lakhubhai Pathak allegation of Rao's swindling of \$1 lakh -- may

a 250-page report by Sam Pitroda to improve its image. He was Rajiv Gandhi's wiz kid who sought to apply America's technology to the communication system. Political parties are not automats. They are a product of ideology, sacrifice and hard work. The Congress has lost such traits. This is what all the analysis of the Pranab Mukherjee committee is about on the defeat in the three states. Who is where is not important. The party has to think of ways to attain the pre-eminent position it once enjoyed.

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## 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.

### Muslims and Saddam

It astonishes me to see how so many Muslims have come to turn a blind eye towards atrocities committed by their own. Case in point are two letters published on December 24, questioning the legitimacy of the American invasion of Iraq, and the right of an internal Iraqi tribunal to try the former President Saddam Hussein.

It was not very long ago when the US was criticised for responding too slowly to the genocide in Rwanda. Today they are criticised for responding to the threat Saddam Hussein posed to the West and his own people. This all leads me to suspect that the noise of protest stems not from concern for the suffering Iraqis, but from an institutionalised hatred for the US. Call it jealousy, call it what you will.

Had the critics amongst the Muslims actually cared for the plight of the Iraqis, it would have been Muslim countries that removed the dictator. It should have been Muslim countries that lead the end of his brutal regime. It

should be the Muslims who bring about democracy and respect for human rights to the rest of the countries of the Middle East; and if Muslims fail to do so, I see no reason to complain when the West steps in. The modernisation of the Middle East is a job that simply has to be done -- the influence of fundamentalism has proven to be far too great a threat to the cultures and civilisations of the world. The US cannot be blamed for trying to guarantee her own security and that of her allies.

To be totally honest, it is nothing short of hypocritical that so many of us Muslims exaggerate the excesses of others while we turn a blind eye to the many atrocities of our own.

Omar Siddiquee  
New York, USA

### Internal resistance in Israel

Three months after the petition in which 27 pilots of the Israeli Air Force refused to obey "illegal and

immoral" orders to take part in the targeted raids of the army against Palestinian activists, members of Sayeret Matkal, the prestigious elite commandos of the army also refused to be used in the Palestinian territories.

Specialising in commando operations behind the enemy lines, Sayeret Matkal was covered with glory, in particular in the raid of Entebbe, in Uganda, to release the Israeli passengers of an Air France flight in June 1976. Thirteen former members of this unit, including nine reservists, decided to say no. The outcry has been enormous.

"Our deep concern as for the future of the State of Israel, as a democratic, Zionist and Jewish State, and our preoccupation with its moral image and its values, do not enable us any more to keep silent. We say to you today: we will not take any more part in the oppression of the rights of millions of Palestinians. We will not be used any more as a rampart for colonisation. We will not let destroy what

human exists in us by the operations of an occupying army," wrote the signatories of the petition. The letter was addressed to the commander of the unit with copies to Chief of Staff General Moshe Yaalon, Minister for Defence Shaul Mofaz, and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

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### American foreign policy and values

This refers to Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed's write-up in The Daily Star (Dec 15).

United States of America has done a wonderful job in embellishing a society with what has come to be popularly known as the 'American way of life'. Through decades of uninterrupted evolution, has flourished a community embedded with good feelings together with other con-

geniality. This is evident in Dr. Ahmed's kind neighbour who proffered help quite spontaneously. Examples of such gestures are abundant in the United States. Conveyed by media, Hollywood movies and real life instances such niceties are being typically associated with 'American' values.

It would be quite appropriate to construe that any given society, if fostered like the American one, would manifest the same qualities. Somewhat like 'Biryani': cooked with the right ingredients whether in a desolate place like 'Grand Canyon' or in any other place of the world, the dish will be as savoury as ever and enjoyed by those who taste it and be referred to as any other Tom, Dick or Harry's 'Biryani'.

Among various mechanisms, American foreign policy too plays a significant role in promoting, protecting and fostering the American way of life and therefore, essentially its inter-

ests. In fact counter-productive and detrimental to American interests would be incorporation of American values in American foreign policy. Such an act would be akin to sharing goodies with other than own kind and in turn defeat the whole purpose of sheltering the values. Like Dr. Ahmed much as we would like to see the values in their external policies, a complacent State Department would probably discard the suggestion as superfluous. By virtue of being the greatest economic and military power America can afford to orchestrate policies and impose its will without values accompanying its foreign policy. If this affordability is the cause behind anti-American sentiments then obviously it is either being grossly misunderstood or deliberately ignored.

A rather carefully and painstakingly woven rug forms the basis of a solid foundation on which dwells the great 'American Dream' stuffed with material wealth. Once the rug is pulled out

from beneath the feet of content Americans, Dr. Ahmed's kind neighbour would perhaps soon be driving a jalopy instead of the 'humongous SUV'. Other factors contributing to a content life would also disappear. Under these subordinated circumstances, would the same neighbour have been equally kind? Discontentment breeds ill feelings just as contentment tends to fertilise good feelings in humans. Maybe relevant here is a rather insightful popular vernacular saying: 'to a hungry, the world is all prose (not poetry)'.

Religious overtures will function as long as an atmosphere resides conducive to practising. A candid attempt has been made to both unravel and analyse what may inhere beyond the apparent. Through revelations we can both appreciate and understand basic human nature. Nothing more, nothing less.

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International

### telephone call rate

The decision of the government regarding the reduction of the rate of charges on international telephone call with 10 countries has been appreciated by the people at large. It is reported that USA and UK are countries selected to get this opportunity to begin with initially.

It may be mentioned that the number of ISD calls with India are comparatively larger since interactions on trade, education, tourism etc are more frequent with India due to geographical proximity and movement of the people apart from any other consideration. Thus, any experiment should also include India in the list at least in this sector to get a realistic result.

I therefore, request the ministry of post and telecommunication to revise their plan of action and take a wise decision by including a close neighbour in the list.

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