DHAKA MONDAY DECEMBER 29, 2003

Peacekeepers die

They had made valuable contribution

E are deeply shocked to learn that 15 Bangladeshi peacekeepers, who were stationed in Sierra Leone and Liberia, died in a plane crash in Benin on Thursday. Their noble mission of helping the two beleaguered African nations to recover from civil disorder ended on a sad note.

The members of the Bangladesh army have been serving on peace missions abroad with a sense of dedication and commitment, which has been highly appreciated by the countries concerned and other international agencies. The peace mission in Sierra Leone was no exception. In fact, our peacekeepers succeeded in winning the hearts and minds of the people of Sierra Leone and their service was acknowledged in a very perceptible way when Bangla was recognised as one of the official languages of Sierra Leone last year. The peacekeepers played an important role in the development of the country's communication network by constructing the Mile-91 Magburaka Road which was opened to traffic in December 1992.

The tragedy cut short the lives of the men who could have rendered even more valuable service to the cause of peace. One does not have to explain what it means in today's chaotic world.

Words are not enough to console the family members of the dead army officers. Their agony became even more unbearable as they were expecting to wel-

Death has ended their lives, but their memories will remain alive both at home and in the countries where they had endeared themselves to people as peacekeep-

The habit of media bashing must stop

We need studied comments and not reckless remarks

HE fact that people will criticise the press is not only natural but also healthy. We in the independent press welcome it because it leads to creation of discerning readership that can only help us become more efficient and professional. What however frustrate us are comments of policy makers and learned personalities that reveal a fundamental lack of understanding how the

Former chief justice and chief advisor Latifur Rahman, a sophisticated and sensible man, could not hold his temptation to take a swipe at the press -- the same press that gave him unstinted support when he headed the caretaker government and without whose backing he could not have carried out the sweeping changes for which he is given so much credit for -- while addressing the BFUJ conference last Saturday. He said newspapers are unable to make their expected contribution because they are not guided by a proper policy. What policy does he want to promulgate to guide us? Of all the institutions in Bangladesh, the independent media has made perhaps the greatest contribution towards the strengthening of democracy and upholding civic rights in the country. The media has been an unrelenting voice against corruption, abuse of power, acrimonious politics, violence, hartals, extremism and misgovernance. All this has been possible because we do NOT have policy to guide the media. As reported he did not say much about strengthening press freedom. He did touch on government repression of media men and women, the criminal attacks on reporters, the many death threats that our staff regularly face, but was not emphatic enough. He did not say anything about doing away with the Official Secrecy Act which lies at the root of the lack of accountability of the government and the occasional mis-reporting by the media because no official feels it is his or her duty to tell the people the facts about an issue being reported.

To add insult to injury the former chief justice said, "I humbly request all newspersons to prepare reports based on facts. What, if not facts, are our story based on, may we ask? Is it the learned chief justice's view that we report from our imagination, that he requests us to base them on facts? We, on our part, humbly request him to cite instances of our reports which were not based on facts. We are surprised that journalists present on the occasion did not make the same demand of him as we make today.

It is sad that one of the best achievements of Bangladesh, that of free and independent media, is so trivialised. A more serious criticism of the press is what we need, and not unthinking and reckless remarks, as we said earlier.

The pipe dream of turning the Iraq war into a moral case!



plethora of reasons was advanced by the American hawks to justify their war in Iraq. As soon as one argument for the invasion and occupation of Iraq collapsed they switched to another. However, over the past few months, almost all the warriors - Bush, Blair and the belligerents in both the conservative and liberal press have fallen back on the last line of their defence. The argument of 'a moral case for Iraq'. After having exhausted all the lies in stock -- the lies about WMO, Saddam's alleged link with al-Qaeda and about Saddamcontrolled Iraq posing an imminent and immediate threat to the US national security -- now there is a moral case for Iraq war.

The ploy of the war-cabal to trap the American people, Bush's main audience of concern in an election year -- is craftily contrived to retain the president's credibility as a saviour and redeemer and his image as a crusader. Indeed, George Bush thrives on the guillibility of the Americans and is desperately at work to keep them lost in the maze of umpteen numbers of lies about the real end-game in Iraq. The neo-con's game to trap the Americans and keep them engrossed in a big charade has hardly lost any of its bite or thrust in last seven months after Bush announced the end of major military combat in Iraq. It has rather acquired greater punch and urgency because of the impending presidential election next year. As far as the occupation of Iraq was concerned the US only hardened its stance in the face of increasing

repatriated with wounds and ailments as well as the prospect of 1,30,000 soldiers returning home with horror stories to tell and the need to face the anger of 1,28,000 families to whom it was no more possible to justify the war finally broke Bush's will and neo-cons

It was at this crucial juncture that the news of Saddam's capture came. The mood was obviously celebratory both in Pentagon and White House because more of good news came indeed in a gush. A the creation, as a result, of a more

election now seems guaranteed. Because as claimed by Bush now, there was a moral case for deposing Saddam willy-nilly by violent means, although there was a normal case also for not doing so.

That Saddam is no longer at the helm in Iraq as a result of US invasion could have been a good thing. But it must be weighed against the killings of thousands of Iraqis, the possibility of a civil war in Iraq, the anger the invasion has generated throughout the Muslim world and

strategic imperative. It's power is not to sustain the lives of others but to sustain itself. It can make the moral case but that does not mean that it is motivated by morality. When it suits its purpose to append a moral justification to its action it will do so. It acts because it cares about its own interest. The US like all great powers does have a consistent approach to global affairs. But it is not morally consistent.

All empires work according to the rule of practical advantage rather than those of kindness or power to elected Iraqis. But he wants them to be elected by ones handpicked by his viceroy, Paul Bremer and his band of Iraqi acolytes. Hopefully for the Bush team the Iraqi people will be 'free' to accept those puppets as 'their' elected representative. The American pipedream of

short-changing the shia majority has since been exploded. The politically conscious, fiercely nationalist and well disciplined shia lot has the necessary wherewithal to turn the screws on the reneging Americans and capacity to mount a gritty challenge to them and call Bush's bluff through exposing his double-faced plan by removing its sugar coating. In the meantime the resistance in Iraq has only stiffened even after Saddam's capture. The American analysts also admit that Saddam's capture will make no dent in

To make things worse for Bush not a single country agreed to shoulder any part of stabilisation in Iraq. The donors' conference was similarly a farce as \$ 20 bn out of \$33.6 bn committed to Iraq came from the US and nearly the whole of the remainder was offered as loan which Iraq would not be in a position to repay. At the end of the day nothing much has changed in Iraq even with the glad tidings of Saddam's capture and whole lot of positive changes in favour of Bush's possible election victory next year. Neither has there a difference been made by turning Iraq war into a moral case.

PERSPECTIVES

To make things worse for Bush not a single country agreed to shoulder any part of stabilisation in Iraq. The donors' conference was similarly a farce as \$ 20 bn out of \$33.6 bn committed to Iraq came from the US and nearly the whole of the remainder was offered as loan which Iraq would not be in a position to repay. At the end of the day nothing much has changed in Iraq even with the glad tidings of Saddam's capture and whole lot of positive changes in favour of Bush's possible election victory next year.

Yet a time came when behind the fig-leaf of accelerating an orderly transfer of power to an Iraqi government, Washington was getting ready to cut and run from Iraq. What seemed to take heart out of the Americans was the downing of five helicopters two months ago and the loss of 40 US lives. The first three of them might well have proved a catalyst of sorts, for Paul Bremer was summoned to Washington after the third crash. But in reality, the American position had already become untenable well before then. Also the rapid body counts in Iraq, 416 killed and 6,800

rejuvenated Bush recovered from his exasperation suddenly awakened to a new realisation that he could claim that the economy turned around with 7.4 per cent GDP growth, his tax cut had indeed paid off and the unemployment also was falling. All he had now to further claim that he got rid of a monstrous dictator, was about to bigin the process of democratising Iraq and would soon bring troops back home. Every initiative on Iraq emerging now from the oval office is indeed focussed on mid 2004 with its blowback on Bush's reelection -- albeit election -- for Bush was not elected as such in 2000. But next year, if not anything else, his

hospitable environment in which terrorism can operate, the reassertion of imperial power and vitiation of international law. These costs certainly outweigh the undoubted benefit of the overthrow of Saddam. But is it worth

Also the keypoint overlooked by all those who have made the moral case for Iraq war is that the moral case is not necessarily the moral reason. Whatever the arguments for toppling Saddam on humanitarian ground may have been it is not why Bush or Blair went to war. A super-power seldom has moral imperative. What it always has is

war the two empires supported whichever indigenous leaders advanced their interests. Those who imagine that the strategic calculus has somehow been overturned in today's power-relations are deceiving themselves.

moral decency. During the cold

As regards democracy in Iraq, even its architects, Condoleeza Rice, Paul Bremer & Co who are trying to manufacture one to be imposed on Iraqi people are themselves confused about how to implement the dubious scheme chalked up in Washington. Bush, the master of double speak promises to handover

Brig (retd) Hafiz is former DG of BIISS.

Nuclear fallacy



N December 2002 the United States accused Iran of launch-

With Tehran seriously in "noncompliance" with international non-proliferation accords, Washington agreed in Sep 2003 to support a proposal by Britain, Germany and France to give Iran a deadline until October 31 to fully disclose its nuclear activities and allow surprise inspections of all sites by UN inspectors. In Oct 2003 the Foreign Ministers of Britain, France and Germany visited Teh $ran\,and\,received\,a\,commitment\,for$ 'total transparency" over its nuclear activities. Subsequently Iran filed a report to the IAEA admitting to failures in honouring international nuclear safeguards, UN Security Council, which would have left Iran vulnerable to sanctions, IAEA criticism stopped short of calling for a UN Security Council meeting on the nuclear issue. Finally in late October 2003 Iran

stan. Arms experts said these rumours were widespread but unproven. Pakistan, which had declared its nuclear capability in May 1998 with a series of underground nuclear tests in response to

It is possible that Iran is trying to divert the focus on its nuclear programme, after all it denied its very existence till very recently and one can understand Tehran's ished, how hard would it have been for them to acquire uranium enrichment equipment? The scandal in India, have been established in Iran for decades and have always been identified as a main source for Iran's weapons and equipment, two brothers receiving the highest civil decoration from Iran in the past two decades. The Iranian nuclear programme is not new, the Bushehr plant being constructed by Germany during the Shah's reign, was abandoned

command and control system and a very stringent export control regime. We take our responsibility as a nuclear weapons State very

The US reaction has been significant. US spokesmen have repeatedly stated that they are satisfied with the assurances given by President Musharraf. White House spokesman Scott McClellan called Musharraf's personal assurances "important" and said close cooperation between the United States and Pakistan in the war on terrortem was established nothing of the sort has happened". The Government of Pakistan needs to put its information

mechanism into high gear to

strict command and control sys-

counter this rather targeted disinformation campaign that seeks to discredit Pakistan's image. There is no evidence on record that Pakistan is anything but a responsible nuclear State fully committed to every kind of nuclear nonproliferation regime and it has a well-placed mechanism to safeguard its nuclear assets. The priority on security is such that the nuclear programme has remained under wraps for over 25 years, not a mean achievement in a country where the most sensitive information is usually leaked within hours. It is quite obvious that anyone associated with the country's nuclear programme would be subject to stringent security procedures, particularly travel within and outside the country. There was an attempt in the 70s (and then in the 80s) to label Pakistan's bomb as an "Islamic Bomb", this canard fell apart despite the sophistication of the disinformation campaign, the first one even had a full-fledged TV documentary. One of the early constraints that Pakistan put on itself to safeguard its national interest was to have an extremely effective export control regime in place. President Gen Pervez Musharraf has repeatedly assured international leaders that our nuclear weapons are not "Islamic' in nature as some motivated countries have been suggesting, the truth of the matter is that in the absence of conventional defence

parity we have been forced to go

the nuclear option because of our

own security compulsions. Every

nation has a right to have a credible

defence, we have exercised that

right but in a responsible and

but still denying that it sought to similar detonations by rival India, develop nuclear weapons. Threathas strongly denied sharing ening to refer its concerns to the nuclear technology with any other



ing a secret nuclear weapons programme, supporting the accusation by satellite images of two sites under construction in Natanz and Arak. Denying any military purpose behind its nuclear activities, while maintaining that its nuclear sites were designed purely to provide nuclear fuel for future power plants, Tehran agreed to IAEA inspections. The UN nuclear watchdog agency carried out a series of non-conclusive inspections from February this year until May. In July 2003 when another IAEA team began a fresh round of inspections, UN nuclear experts discovered traces of enriched uranium capable of making weapons in Natanz. While confirming this the IAEA Chief Mohammed Elbaradei did question its usefulness for non-military purposes. Under pressure Iran agreed to negotiate a draft protocol allowing surprise inspections but said inspectors would not be given complete freedom of movement.

in a country where the most sensitive information is usually leaked within hours. succumbed to international pressure and signed an additional protocol to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to allow surprise UN inspections of all its nuclear installations.

Despite clear evidence that Iran's nuclear programme had been acquired from several countries, among those named were Russia and China, etc, Pakistan was put on the mat by Vienna-based Western diplomats who engaged in motivated leaking of suspicions that Iranian officials had shown IAEA inspectors blueprints created by the Dutch-British-German enrichment firm Urenco which were identical to ones Pakistan is known to have acquired and developed. Iran told the IAEA that it got the designs from a "middleman" in 1987. The diplomats said the IAEA has been investigating whether the designs came from Pakistan. These Vienna diplomats repeated motivated and highly misleading suspicions that North Korea also got this centrifuge technology from Paki-

enthusiasm to shift the "heat" on to some other country, albeit a "friendly" one (even theoretically). Documents provided by Iran to UN nuclear inspectors since early November have exposed the out lines of vast, secret procurement network that successfully acquired thousands of sensitive parts and tools from many countries. The plans and components, acquired over several instalments from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, allowed Iran to leapfrog over several major technological hurdles to make its own enriched uranium the report added. During the almost decade-long Iran-Iraq War in the 80s, Iran had been denied weapons, equipment and spares for its mostly US supplied war machine earlier during the Shah's reign, yet it managed to get its needs, at a price. It is quite conceivable Iran tapped the same "middlemen" to get what they wanted. Those "middlemen", mostly US, Indian and European origin, kept the Iranian war arsenal replen-

only when the Shah was overthrown in 1979.

There is no evidence on record that Pakistan is anything but a responsible nuclear state fully committed to every kind

of nuclear non-proliferation regime and it has a well-placed mechanism to safeguard its nuclear assets. The priority

on security is such that the nuclear programme has remained under wraps for over 25 years, not a mean achievement

IAEA has approached Pakistan following information from Iran that a handful of our nuclear scientists may have been helping Teheran's nuclear programme, Pakistan unmediatedly started "debriefing" a few scientists, namely Yasin Chohan and Farooq Mohammad, directors of the country's key facility of Kahuta Research Laboratory (KRL). Chohan has since returned home but Mohammad Farooq is still being questioned. The creator of Pakistan's nuclear bomb, Abdul Qadeer Khan (AQK), had also been asked to clarify some of the points on their debriefing but government has not placed unspecified restrictions on him. A couple of days ago AQK appeared at an international conference hosted by Prof Dr Atta ur Rahman the Minister of State for Science and Technology. "Pakistan has never proliferated and will never proliferate", said a Pakistani spokesman, "we have a very strong

transfers of nuclear technology and know-how that might have taken place in the past. Despite US concerns about proliferation, of these revelations on US-Pakistani relations. "President Musharraf has assured us that that is not happening now. And that's mportant", McClellan said.

ism would continue -- despite any

Masood Khan, Pakistan's Foreign Ministry spokesman, said quite categorically, "we have been fully cooperating with IAEA, the Government of Pakistan has never authorised or initiated any transfers of sensitive nuclear technology. A very small number of individuals were under investigation and if they are found responsible at the end of debriefing session, we shall take action against such individuals if warranted and if they are found culpable under our laws. Nobody is above the law". He further stated, "Pakistan takes its responsibility as a nuclear weapons State very seriously. Since a

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

mature manner.

OPINION

Civil society needs to be perked up right away

HAFEEJUL ALAM

Flate, Dr. B. Chowdhury and Dr. Kamal Hossain hit the media world and appeared rather as new political phenomena of Bangladesh. At least their recent public utterances and the sensational reporting bear that out. There is no doubt that Bangladesh is passing through a very difficult time with a slumping economy and a scruffy law and order situation. Even some of the high-ups of the ruling party are reportedly dubbing the government as almost dysfunctional. Under such a situation, the reappearance of seasoned leaders like Dr. Chowdhury and Dr. Hossain in the political arena of Bangladesh beckons a great deal of national significance and augers well for the polity.

According to the declared programme of Dr. Chowdhury, he would first meet the different professional groups of the civil society. It may be pertinent here to delineate "civil society", as many political leaders and columnists interpreted the term guite differently and there has been an apparent but unnecessary mystification

between the "political parties" and the "civil society". In the speeches of different political leaders and also in certain newspaper columns, the term civil society has been used to mean the broad spectrum of the professionals of the country such as the journalists, writers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, professors, retired judges and bureaucrats etc. The question that may quite naturally come to one's mind is whether the members of the major political parties are also the members of the civil society? If so, then why the term "civil society" is often used as if it's another group outside the existing political groups? A few politicians even called the civil society as a pressure group. However, the fact remains that the

civil society is neither a pressure group, nor a political group, nor even a so-called third force in the political arena of Bangladesh. The civil society is what it should literally and sensibly mean. By the word "civil" we mean "of or relating to the citizens of a country" and by the word "society" we mean an association or a social order. Therefore, the civil society is nothing but the association of the

citizens of the country. As we know, a citizen of a democratic country has certain rights which may include voting right, right to speak or write, own property, and many other fundamental rights. On the other hand, a citizen has also certain definite obligations such as allegiance to the sovereignty of the country and it's constitution and all other legal provisions and a definite commitment to do good for the country and be supportive to the fellow citizens. Therefore, the members of the citizen's association or the civil society exhibit certain essential characteristics and these are:

(a) they must have allegiance to the sovereignty of the country and its constitution;

(b) they must be conscious of their rights and obligations and be the law abiding citi-

they must have a commitment to the welfare of the fellow citizens.

It follows therefore that the concept of the civil society has a distinct connotation of ethics and that all the conscientious citizens of a country, in sharp contrast to the criminals and corrupt individ-

uals, are the members of its civil society. Thus the members of the civil society may include the members of the opposition parties as also those of ruling political parties, professors and the students, the doctors and the nurses. the top bureaucrats and the petty clerks, the industrialists and the workers, the landlords and the peasants, the intellectuals and the laymen, and there can be no stratification on social, economic, political, or any other ground apart from that of morality or rectitude. Therefore, it makes sense when Dr. Chowdhury says that by the civil society, " I mean any conscious patriotic individual in general, where people from any quarter, professional groups, political parties get in." Accordingly, the civil society of

Bangladesh takes in the vast multitude of people all over the country as opposed to any group or segment and therefore, there is no scope to belittle the role of the civil society in the national political arena. However, unlike the political activists, the members of the civil society generally remain dormant almost like a sleeping tiger, then again once the tige

wakes up for any compelling reason, it can take control of the entire situation and nothing can stop it from proclaiming that he is the real The real power of the civil soci-

ety lies in the moral power of it's members and armed with the moral power, the civil societies of different countries could radically change their destinies. It may be pertinent to note that the incidence of civil disobedience movement has a direct linkage with the civil society. The civil disobedience is a form of non-violent opposition to government policy, usually on the grounds of conscience and morality. As we know from the history, the first exponent of the civil disobedience movement was M L King, who led black civil rights movement in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. More elaborate form of civil disobedience was launched by Mahatma Gandhi leading to the independence of India in 1947. In our national context, we had since observed the power of the civil society in our language movement in the year 1952. Here, may we not forget that the movement for recognising Bengali as the state language was a

distinct movement of the civil society as opposed to an agenda of any of the then political parties, albeit a few political parties only lent support to the movement at a later stage. It's now a historical fact that the said movement resulted in the advancement of our Bengali nationalism leading ultimately to our independence as a sovereign

It is generally felt that the time has come to perk up the civil society once again to get rid of the prevailing malfunctions, and that Bangladesh would never be able to face the challenge of the new millennium unless immediate steps are taken to ensure "a government of the people, by the people and for the people." However, it is also not expected that Dr. B. Chowdhury can change the scenario all by himself. Therefore, it is rational for him to take into account the national celebrities like Dr. Kamal Hossain, and other important personalities and join hands with the saner political groups to form an alternative front or platform and take a national stand to get a good riddance from the putrid polity. For Bangladesh, it has almost become a craze to

 $support\,or\,not\,to\,support\,a\,political$ party on the basis of one's acceptability or non-acceptability of the deceased leaders instead of the living ones. This incoherent attitude needs to be given up right

The tenure of the government is also a vital factor in ensuring people's democratic rights as well as in reining in the un-satiable greed for power and money, creating thereby an awful vested interest group. In Sweden, the term of the government was for three years even a few years ago and in the western democracies, normally it is four years. With the sociopolitical index of the countries like Bangladesh, it would be fairly reasonable that the term of an elected government should be not more than three years, in order that the accountability situation of the party in power as also the sustainability process of democracy can find a real strength. Frequent elections, albeit may appear to be a bit expensive monetarily. would go a long way to bring about a socio-economic stability by calming down the political fevers and heated rivalries of the opposing political parties. This would also ensure a better evaluation process of the system of governance through people's frequent participation.

There is no doubt that the people could no more be happy with the subsequent dynastic rules and that the advent of the personalities like Dr. B. Chowdhury or Dr. Kamal Hossain in the leadership of the civil society heralds a new dimension in the total political spectrum of the country, for the country is almost starving for an enlightened direction. Obviously, this would involve a great deal of organisational activities on the one hand and coping with the black money and muscle power on the other. In the national context, it is not important which political power or personality comes to power or which one leaves it, but it is absolutely important to contain the present sizzling state of affairs, and ensure a thriving economy. If the goal is clear, the purpose is honest, and the efforts are sincere, the days are not far off when the nation shall be led by the personalities who would be leaders in their own rights, instead of the past legacies.

Hafeejul Alam is a management specialist.