

## Sylhet deserves better Time to realise its full potential

Sylhet has tremendous untapped potential, not merely worthy of being harnessed for its own development but also for the growth of the national economy at large. It is one area in the country which can boast of a large Bangladeshi Diaspora in the UK, USA and other foreign countries. By far the biggest proportion of foreign currency remittance to Bangladesh is contributed by expatriates of Sylheti origin. They are being instrumental behind the direct transfer of resources and wealth from their places of work abroad.

All this has been happening since before the independence of Bangladesh. And, the time has now come to put a pertinent question to ourselves: what has Sylhet got in return for the bonanza in whatever limited sense, they have been providing the country with?

Unfortunately, most of the investments have been into non-productive service sector so that the multiplier effect of such capital investment has been missing in the broader economy, to say nothing of Sylhet itself remaining backward on the whole.

There is no special plan and no development strategy which has evolved with an eye to absorbing surplus money of potential investors from the Bangladeshi Diaspora into productive sectors. In fact, there is no special mechanism whereby Sylhetis will feel encouraged to come and invest in a big way. And most of those who are into investment have burnt their fingers in the heat of bureaucratic red-tape. They don't feel adequately cared for.

Sylhet needs better infrastructure in terms of its communication with the port city Chittagong. With the infrastructure so revamped, gas and agro-based industries can be established in the region. The area is naturally endowed; and adjacent as it is to the north-eastern region of India, has enormous possibilities for self-growth as well as a booster to the development of Bangladesh economy.

We are, therefore, at one with the leaders and academics of Sylhet in demanding that an EPZ and an industrial park be established in the area so as to help it bloom into a prosperous region.

## An act of extreme cruelty It should never recur

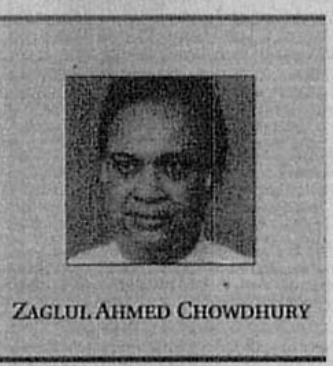
The news of the dastardly killing of a 3 year-old toddler has shocked us beyond measure. The entire society is dumbfounded at the extent of the cruelty with which the murder was carried out. The poor woman has been working at the place as part-time cook. She was already living in a state of extreme deprivation and distress when came the barbaric killing of her baby boy.

No words are enough to condemn the cruel circumstances under which the child was done to death. He was enticed away by the murderer, a senior college student on the promise of listening to music and was rammed against the floor until his mother was able to rescue him in a severely injured condition. The little boy was killed for no fault of his other than littering things.

Law should deal with the incident with strong and swift hands. We believe that it should also serve as warning bell for the entire society. This incident is symptomatic of a bigger social ailment: the casual manner in which we are playing around with human lives. Remember, the attempted murders of three school-going children by their mates only the other day! It is our impression that the growing pressures of living has destabilised social balance needed for an all round growth of a healthy society.

The sociologists can explain the phenomenon but it is the duty of the law and order forces to act in stout defence of social equilibrium. The time is running out, we should get our act together in combating violence in all its manifestations.

# Will govt-Maoist dialogue end Nepal's woes?



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

The much awaited high level important talks between the government and ultra leftist Maoists in Nepal took place on a positive note and rather unexpectedly, but happily, produced tangible results.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and Maoist supreme "Prachanda" achieved significant progress in their first meeting and the development is being seen as a remarkable step towards a lasting settlement of the problems that have plagued the picturesque Himalayan country for long.

Recently, a new chapter in the history of Nepal was written as King Gyanendra had to bow down to people's demand for him to give up absolute power and restore the representative government which he had scrapped in a bid to consolidate monarchy. This development

## MATTERS AROUND US

The progress in the Koirala-Prachanda talks has been described rightly by most as "historic" even though the road ahead is still bumpy. The omens are quite encouraging and the government and Maoists need to seize this opportunity to end Nepal's woes, failing which, both will be accountable to their people. The parliament has gone into recess to allow the new developments to take proper shape. Hopefully, both sides will live upto the expectations despite the fact that they are yet to deal with certain vexing issues.

was followed by a decision of the parliament to clip the powers of the King turning the monarchy once again into a ceremonial one. Recently the parliament also formalised the decisions taken earlier.

Now, close on the heels of all these democratic steps, the government and the radical leftists, who together worked against King Gyanendra under a loose alliance despite their differences on a variety of policies, are engaged in complex dialogue on the future of the nation. Following preparatory talks, the highest level discussions went off fairly well raising hopes that the long suffering country is now seeing light at the end of the tunnel. The decade-old Maoist insurgency is also telling heavily on Nepal, which was embroiled in a pro-democracy agitation. Problems centering the Maoists stalked the nation even after the

# Living on the front-line



ZAFAR SOBHAN

Last week, I wrote about the environment in general and the need for our policy-makers to understand that if they do not balance development and industrialization with environmental sustainability, then all the economic gains we have made and continue to make will be moot.

Any planning for the future must take into account the fact that Bangladesh needs to remain a livable country, and that environmental pollution of waterways etc and the effect of urbanization and industrialization need to be focused on as we develop a blueprint for the future. Prompted by my recent viewing of the documentary film made by ex-US Vice-President Al Gore entitled "An Inconvenient Truth" on the threat of global warming, today I would like to specifically address the issue of global warming and the potential impact on Bangladesh, and what we need to be doing about it.

Despite what the know-nothings in the Bush administration might try to have us believe, there is no serious scientific debate

## STRAIGHT TALK

Bangladesh is already inundated with flooding every monsoon, but with global warming melting the polar ice-caps and the level of the oceans rising as a result, things stand to get far worse in the not too distant future. If the ocean level rises even a few feet (which is entirely possible within the next few decades), 40 percent of the country will be permanently underwater, displacing as many as 60 million people.

as to the fact of global warming and the dire consequences for the planet. Global warming is a reality and the entire world needs to get real about dealing with it.

In the final analysis, the Bush administration's refusal to sign the Kyoto accord and constant peddling of pseudo-science to try to down-play the evidence for global warming may go down in history as an even more cataclysmic blunder than the invasion of Iraq when it comes to long-term negative consequences for the planet.

While this is a problem for everyone, the country which will suffer the most in terms of numbers of people adversely effected by global warming (as though we haven't had enough to overcome in terms of floods and cyclones), would be, you guessed it, Bangladesh.

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underwater, displacing as many as 60 million people.

If we think the country is overcrowded now, imagine what it would be like with 40 percent underwater.

This is a serious issue that we need to contend with. The catastrophic consequences are so great that almost everything else pales in comparison. We really need to have a plan in place to try to ward off this eventuality or a contingency plan in case the worst happens.

Make no mistake about it. Bangladesh with the bottom 40 percent inundated by sea-water would cease to be a functional state. There are many good things happening in the country and I resist any suggestion that we are anything close to being a failed state.

Nevertheless, like any other country, Bangladesh simply could not cope with such a cataclysmic event. If the southern half of the country goes underwater and we do not have a plan in place, then, as night follows day, the entire country will descend into chaos and dysfunction.

So what can we do about it?

Skeptics may point out that in Bangladesh our contribution to global warming is actually rather negligible, and that continuing to maintain a small carbon foot-print, while beneficial to the environment in general, isn't going to help us when it comes to global warming.

This is true, but there is much else that we can also do.

In the first place, we need to become more vocal on the world stage to tout the dangers of global warming. We need to join hands with and put the moral weight of our 140 million souls behind the anti-global warming movement. Bangladesh needs to be at the forefront of the anti-global warming movement. No one has more to lose.

Frankly, a campaign highlighting the evils of global warming and the catastrophic consequences for Bangladesh (perhaps an ad in the New York Times or funding a documentary on the plight of communities in southern Bangladesh who would be effected) would have been a far better use of a million dollars than a campaign to supposedly boost the image of the country. We need to make our voices

heard and our opinions count when it comes to this issue. Every foreign mission in Dhaka should be informed that as far as Bangladesh is concerned, attention to this matter is how we gauge whether a country is friendly towards us or not.

After all, regardless of the amount of aid that is piped in, if you are supporting policies that will ultimately result in 60 million people being rendered homeless, that isn't being much of a friend, is it?

There are all sorts of other measures that we can also take. One suggestion that is gaining ground is that the biggest polluting countries have a moral obligation to take in "climate change refugees." This might be a good policy proposal to put weight behind.

In this line, for the past decade at least, India has been apologetic about Bangladeshi migrants coming over the border. Well, imagine how it will be when half of Bangladesh is underwater. India is one of the world's biggest contributors to global warming, so it is only fair (and practical) that it pledge to take in some Bangladeshis rendered homeless

by the effects of global warming or help us to resolve the coming crisis in some other way.

Better to start addressing the issue now than in 30 years when the country is half underwater and it is too late. So we need to put climate change and how to manage its effects and the implications for the two countries on the agenda of bilateral discussion with India as well.

Finally, we need to plan for a future in which there are a lot more of us but a lot less space. This means planning for a highly urbanized country, which, by definition, will be non-agricultural.

This means planning for high-rise buildings and massive population concentrations. This means thinking about mass public transportation and connectivity and building a post-industrial economy. This means thinking of the Bangladesh of the future. There are models out there for us to base our plans on, but we need to first fully understand what our future will look like to adequately plan for it.

We need to realize that the Bangladesh of the future will have to be highly urbanized and that our pastoral way of life will not last past the half-way mark of the 21st century. This is a terrible thing for Bangladeshis to have to contemplate, but the sooner we come to terms with it, the sooner we can begin to plan for such an eventuality.

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# Why lag behind the race for the next UNSG?

ABDUL HANNAN

The UN has an informal agreed regional rotation system which dictates that this is Asia's 'turn' to have a UN secretary general. The American UN ambassador John Bolton, however, insists on having a UNSG from East Europe which has remained unrepresented during the last 60 years of UN. The first UN secretary general, Trygve Lie of Norway, Dag Hammarskjold of Sweden and Kurt Waldheim of Austria were all from Europe. While Boutros Boutros Ghali of Egypt and Kofi Annan of Ghana were from Africa, Javier Perez de Cuellar of Peru was the lone representative from Latin America. U Thant of Burma (Myanmar) has been the only UN secretary general from Asia. By convention, the big five permanent members of the Security Council and the Oceania, Australia and New Zealand have stayed away from the race for the post of secretary general. Kofi Annan is the solitary exception who has been appointed UNSG from the ranks of international civil servants in the UN secretariat. Traditionally, high profile candidates have been rejected in favour of middle powers. For instance Dwight Eisenhower Anthony Eden and Charles de Gaulle were considered for the post of first secretary general but rejected in favour of Trygve Lie.

The race for the post of next UN secretary general from Asia received fresh momentum last week when India announced the name of Shashi Tharoor, UN under secretary general for com-

It is not understood why the foreign office has not taken any initiative on the matter. We talk of building our image abroad. If nominated, it seems Bangladesh has a fair chance of winning the race. In the complex dynamics of power play in international politics within the headquarters of global diplomacy on the East River in Manhattan surprises are a daily happening. It is worthwhile to try. Let not our posterity blame us for a missed opportunity to feel proud.

munication and public information to succeed Kofi Annan whose two terms expire at the end of the year. The announcement has thrown a spanner on long shot hopes of Thai deputy prime minister Sura Kirat Sathi Rathai, South Korean foreign minister Banki Moon and Sri Lanka's Jayantha Dharmapala advisor to the president, who are already in the run for the top UN job. Bright, articulate and a writer in his own right, Shashi Tharoor is fifty and if elected, he will be the youngest ever UN secretary general. Speculation is also rife that Pakistan will soon join the fray and the names of prime minister Shaikat Aziz and UN ambassador Munir Akram are in circulation. The name of Nafis Sadiq former UNFPA under secretary general and now special envoy of UNSG for AIDS/HIV in Asia and Pacific is also being mentioned. If elected, she will be the first female UNSG.

According to the UN charter, UNSG is the chief administrator of the UN secretariat and its various agencies and is appointed by UN General Assembly on the recommendation of Security Council on a 5-year term usually extended for another term. However, the roll of UNSG has assumed increasing importance with the passage of time as a high profile diplomat to face up to the diverse challenges of

global agenda of international peace and security, prevention of armed conflict, resolution of civil strife, fostering economic development, enhancing social equality and promoting international law. The UNSG has also to address the issues of UN reform, promotion of democracy and human rights and the sovereignty of the individual, protection of environment and empowerment of women and grapple with the problems of global poverty and lack of health, sanitation and water facility. The qualification needed for the job is political vision, personal charm and charisma and persuasive power, managerial skill and above all high diplomatic acumen to steer clear of rivalries of international politics and harmonise balance, compromise and loyalty to conflicting interest of 191 members of General Assembly and five permanent members of Security Council.

Winning support of major powers, particularly USA, Russia and China is central to the success of the job of the UNSG. It is well known how Boutros Boutros Ghali became a casualty in failing to secure a second term of his office because he alienated the (support of) USA. It is a tall order and must be remembered before nominating someone for the post to avoid embarrass-

ment.

Bangladesh deeply committed to the principle and purposes of the UN has never taken a back seat at the UN but has remained actively involved and engaged in deliberations and negotiations on every issue debated and discussed in the UN and the roll call of its achievement is impressive and acknowledged by the international community. Bangladesh has been twice elected member of the Security Council and has the distinct honour of being elected the president of UN General Assembly and heading the UN 5th Committee (administrative and budgetary), Committee on Programme and Coordination (CPC), UNCIEF Executive Board, UN Population Award Committee and the Group of 77. Bangladesh has also held the position of rotating presidency of the Security Council, coordinator of least developed countries. Above all, Bangladesh has earned international acclaim as the top troops contributing country in the UN peace keeping operation in various strife-torn trouble spots in the world. In the background of such impressive performance internationally it is only appropriate and legitimate for Bangladesh to have aspiration for the post of UNSG which potentially is within our reach. What is needed is to grasp

the opportunity by making an intelligent decision in the selection of the right candidate soon. Time is running out. The election will take place in late September/early October.

It is not understood why the foreign office has not taken any initiative on the matter. We talk of building our image abroad. To serve our national interest by promoting the cause of our international prestige and honour it is time to rise above petty jealousy and narrow partisan consideration. The names of three of our outstanding diplomats come to the fore. One is Reaz Rahman, adviser to the prime minister on foreign affairs who has previous background of UN experience as Bangladesh Ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations, the second is Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed Choudhury, presently our ambassador to the UN. The other is Anwarul Karim Chowdhury, currently UN under secretary general for the least developed countries and High Representative for land-locked developing countries and small island developing states. After late SAMS Kibria, the former finance minister, he is the senior most UN official from Bangladesh.

Anwarul Karim Chowdhury has the advantage of becoming a long timer in UN system which he

knows inside out and is a well-known face in the podium, committees and corridors of power in the UN. He would be a formidable candidate with impeccable credentials for the job and stands out in the crowd of nominated candidates in view of rare privilege of his continuous 25 years UN work experience in one capacity or another and distinguished record of solid accomplishments. It is expected he will find acceptance by the broadest membership of the UN. He was Ambassador and permanent representative to the UN, and represented Bangladesh in 14 UN general assembly sessions. He held the rotating presidency of the Security Council and was elected chairman of the UN 5th committee, chairman of UNICEF Executive Board, chairman of the UN Population Award Committee and vice chairman of ECOSOC. He was also the UNICEF Director for Japan, Australia and New Zealand. He is the recipient of U Thant Award and UNESCO gold medal for culture and peace.

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Gayendra's taking over of power, had held talks with the Maoists. An eight-point understanding has been arrived at to get the country out of the crisis. The two sides agreed to dissolve the parliament, form an interim government and hold elections for a constituent assembly to frame a new constitution. Indeed, these are big achievements given their differences on some matters. Elections for a body to redraft the constitution is a key demand of the Maoists, who demand abolition of the monarchy. There is hardly an iota of doubt about the positive results of the meeting between the two top leaders. Indeed, this is a big achievement.

However, some thorny issues may still create problems in further progress of the implementation of the decisions which were agreed upon in principle. First, the radicals want dissolution of the parliament within a month and elections to the constituent assembly by April, 2007. The government seems ambivalent on the timing of both as no clear confirmation was available from its side. Secondly, prime minister Koirala reportedly said that monarchy may continue just as a ceremonial one in line with Britain or Japan whereas the Maoists are totally against its existence. Nepal's powerful demo-

cratic neighbour, India, have may an influence on these matters and prime minister Koirala paid a visit to New Delhi before talks with Prachanda. His talks with Indian leaders primarily dwelt on bilateral economic and other assistance to Nepal. India is understood to be favouring titular monarchy, but also gives the impression that it is upto the people of Nepal to decide on the issue.

Kathmandu's another big neighbour is communist China, which seeks to maintain a distance from the internal affairs of Nepal. However, its interests in the developments of this strategically important tiny neighbour can not be overlooked. Nepalese in general were for continuation of ceremonial monarchy like in the last years of assassinated King Birendra, but many of them turned hostile to the throne because of the lust for power and wealth of present King Gyanendra, who also came down mercilessly on mass agitation. This issue may pose problems for the government, whose seven partners do not necessarily hold the same views on this matter.

But the crux of the matter is that the two sides are showing welcome signs of accommodation and this has made the progress possible. The government has given certain big concessions while the radicals,

too, have shown readiness to come out in the open. "Prachanda" is now behaving like a regular politician and the ultras are ready to share power in the interim government. The truce reached earlier is holding well. However, the fate of the arms with the ultras and their control over vast areas in the countryside may cause irritation towards understanding when they get down to brass tacks. But the bottom line is that both are demonstrating sincerity and a willingness to resolve the problems as both are also believed to be under pressure from the people to rid the nation of the crises since the King is no longer a credible stumbling block.

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