

Dhaka, Friday, February 28, 1992

Dashing Hopes for ME Peace

The United States has been much more precise than most experts expected in reiterating its opposition to the settlement of Russian Jews by Israel in occupied Arab territories. During a congressional hearing on Tuesday, the Secretary of State James Baker said that Washington would grant Israel 10 billion dollar in loan guarantees only if Tel Aviv froze settlements, including homes already under construction.

Mr Baker had spoken on the subject before, expressing his country's opposition to the settlement policy pursued by Tel Aviv. A new element in his latest statement is the reference to "homes already under construction" which should also be frozen, if Israel sought the loan guarantees from Washington. This was what Palestinians had asked for, more or less as a condition for joining the fourth round of talks on the Middle East in Washington. In this sense, Mr Baker, the architect of the peace negotiation, has met the Palestinians at least half way, if not more.

As a matter of expediency, Tel Aviv may well agree to freeze all new Jewish settlements in occupied Arab territories and halt work on homes already under construction. But for how long? Having opened its gates wide for Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union and East European countries, Israel must now find homes and jobs for the new arrivals, even at the cost of original inhabitants, the Arabs, who live in the territories. The latest estimates put the number of new settlers at 100,000, living among 1.75 million Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israel says that it will discuss the question of settlements after three years when the final status of the territory will be determined. It is obvious, as feared by Palestinians, that Tel Aviv is determined to change the demographic composition of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank during the coming three years. By then, Israel may well control so much of the land in the occupied territories that there will be nothing left to negotiate about. Herein lies the crux of the problem and the dilemma facing the Palestinians, the Arab states and the international community.

What kind of concessions can the Palestinians make to put a new lease of life into the talks? One cannot expect them to close their eyes to the grim fact, underscored by Yitzhak Shamir, that Israel will not abandon its policy of establishing new settlements "in this or that part of the land of Israel." The statement clearly means that regardless of Washington's present position, as outlined by Mr Baker before the US Congress, Israel has no intention of changing its policy on the subject. The most it will do is to gain time to keep Washington in good humour.

The international community must make up its mind as to the rights of the Palestinians in their own land. Many western nations, not to mention the Third World countries, have accepted these rights and have argued with Tel Aviv to exchange territory for peace and thus begin a new chapter in its relationship with its Arab neighbours and the Palestinian people. This is what the current peace talks are all about. If Tel Aviv continues to pursue a rigid line on the question of settlement of Jewish immigrants, the hope of any breakthrough in search of a lasting compromise will end in vain.

Drug Trafficking at ZIA

An 18-year-old American girl was arrested at Zia International Airport for alleged drug trafficking on Tuesday. The recovery of three kg and 300 grammes of heroin from her is the third such haul in just five months. One lurking suspicion is that more such cases have gone undetected. But then the only international airport of ours is not the only transit point in the country; several other points well connected with land and sea routes seem to have made this land a happy haven for the drug traffickers to carry out their illegal trade. That a Nigerian dared carry with him as much as 30 kg of heroin once is an ample proof of the laxity of surveillance at the airport.

But it is not a question of laxity alone, ZIA is pitifully running short of the facilities required for dealing with drug trafficking through it. Not only has it not a single sneaking dog for drug detection but facilities for a chemical test of urine to conclusively prove whether one has pills of drug in the stomach are also lacking. On top of this — and surprisingly — the Customs at ZIA is inadequately manned. Another vital point that has received little attention is the training for the men and women responsible for surveillance encompassing the on-the-spot checking, knowledge of drug dealers in the incoming flights and possible destinations of drugs carried by the traffickers.

We wish we could challenge the view that ZIA and for that matter the entire routes of Bangladesh are a very weak spot for carrying out the illegal drug business. It has become a favourite transit point en route to European destinations from the Golden Triangle and even the Golden Crescent — the two major sources of drugs. In the process, however, the Bangladesh domestic market for opium has become considerably large. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that the number of drug addicts, according to the government estimate — which is rather conservative — has been put at 200,000. The danger posed by the increasing drug addiction for a poor country like ours is so potentially annihilating that the routes of drug trafficking have to be plugged soon enough. No matter how big the challenge is. It has to be taken up in close co-operation with international communities. After all, it is a common problem for all the peoples throughout the globe. And that is a good reason why help will be forthcoming, provided that we ourselves have made our option clear in dealing with the problem as efficiently as it demands.

Non-aligned will Go for Changes at the UN

Michael Jansen writes from Larnaca, Cyprus

The Non-aligned Movement was the product of the Cold War. As Cold War-dominated politics disappear the 103-member movement is reassessing its position. At a ministerial meeting called to discuss the new situation it was agreed to put the South's interests onto the global agenda by strengthening the UN. However, lack of strong leadership may render the movement ineffective.

THE 103-member Non-aligned Movement (NAM) is reassessing its position in international relations. At a ministerial meeting just held here to discuss an action plan for the post-Cold War era, 53 of the 54 members present agreed that the movement should go on.

Delegates were aware that NAM has failed, particularly over the last decade, to make a significant impact on world affairs.

Critics argue that the Movement has been unable to formulate common policies on problems of special concern to the developing countries. Some had even talked of dissolving the Movement.

But when Egypt, a founder member, put forward the notion that NAM should merge with its offshoot, the Group of 77, on the ground that economic issues were paramount, the other 53 members reacted with stunned silence. They had come to Cyprus neither to praise nor to bury non-alignment.

The response was defensive. Many of the 170 delegates, including several of the 20 foreign ministers present, suggested that Egypt was acting on behalf of the United States.

Washington has always subscribed to the opinion of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles that non-alignment, as equidistance between the US and Soviet poles, was "immoral". And now that the US is the sole remaining pole, non-alignment is "immoral" because it indicates a certain distancing from the Bush Administration's "new world order".

Having agreed that NAM should survive the Larnaca meeting, members were asked to consider enrolling four of the former Soviet Central Asian Republics — Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan — as full members, Germany and China as "observers" and the Netherlands as a "guest" participant.

On the practical plane, delegates agreed that Indonesia should take over from the present chairman, Yugoslavia, which, because of its own domestic problems, has allowed NAM to drift, rudderless, during Belgrade's entire term in office.

To prevent a repetition of this situation, proposals to create a co-chairman or "troika" of past, serving and future chairmen — like the European Community presidency — and for the setting up of a permanent secretariat were put forward to be considered by the ministerial meeting in Bali in April and the autumn summit in Jakarta.

But neither multiple chairmanship nor a secretariat will provide NAM with leadership — a quality lacking ever since the last committed leader of the non-aligned, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, was assassinated in 1984. There is no leader of her stature on the horizon and India, as the largest non-aligned country, has refused to take a leading role.

Delegates agreed to disagree about the Movement's role. Three distinct groupings emerged. The first, led by Egypt and Cyprus and including Indonesia and Syria, favours cooperation with the West.

The second comprises the countries which would like to confront the US but dare not do so because of economic and political vulnerability. The most influential is India. Others include Palestine, Zimbabwe and Algeria.

Algerian Foreign Minister Lakhdar Brahimi spoke for both groupings when he urged NAM to take Washington's "new world order" into account since its "superiority is a fact." These two groups stress NAM's role as a sort of trade union of the disadvantaged, engaged in collective bargaining over the world's resources with the affluent, advantaged Western powers.

The third grouping consists of countries like Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Cuba and Libya which insist that NAM should, in the words of Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati,

"confront the hegemony of the West." Their object is to use NAM as a shield against the US.

This group advocates that NAM adopt an aggressive anti-Western political stand in order to prevent the imposition of Washington's "order" on the non-aligned. Iraqi delegate Wasim Zahawi warned that this new "order" seemed to be characterised by "neo-colonial interventionism" rather than "internationalism" and the rule of the law.

No delegate at the meeting conceived of practicing non-alignment as its founder, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, intended: as the exercise of "independence of judgement" in foreign policy rather than the established practice of "equidistance" between the two Cold War power blocs.

The present political focus of the non-aligned is on the issue of nuclear proliferation, the development of weapons of mass destruction, human rights abuses and violation of democratic norms.

All NAM members consider outside intervention, particularly in these areas, as infringement of sovereignty and interference in their internal affairs. Their fear of intervention in the name of the "new world order" could compel them to come together to some purpose and to devise some practical measures for collective defence.

The economic issue which most concerns the non-aligned at this juncture is the pre-occupation of the West with the economies of eastern Europe

and the former Soviet Union. Many developing countries see aid and investment funds flowing into these countries at their expense.

NAM members are aware that they must assert the interests of their movement within the United Nations. In particular, the six non-aligned non-permanent members of the Security Council — India, Morocco, Zimbabwe, Ecuador, Venezuela and Cape Verde — have been pressed to co-ordinate more closely on the current resolutions of the Council on the relaxing of the embargo on non-military supplies to Iraq.

The Iranian Foreign Minister urged NAM to strive for greater decision-making powers for the General Assembly to promote democracy and equality among nations — an endeavour certain to be resisted by the US.

There is a consensus among the non-aligned that the Security Council itself should be its primary target for reform since the body created in 1945 in the post-war era of East-West competition is no longer relevant to the post-colonial, post-Cold War period.

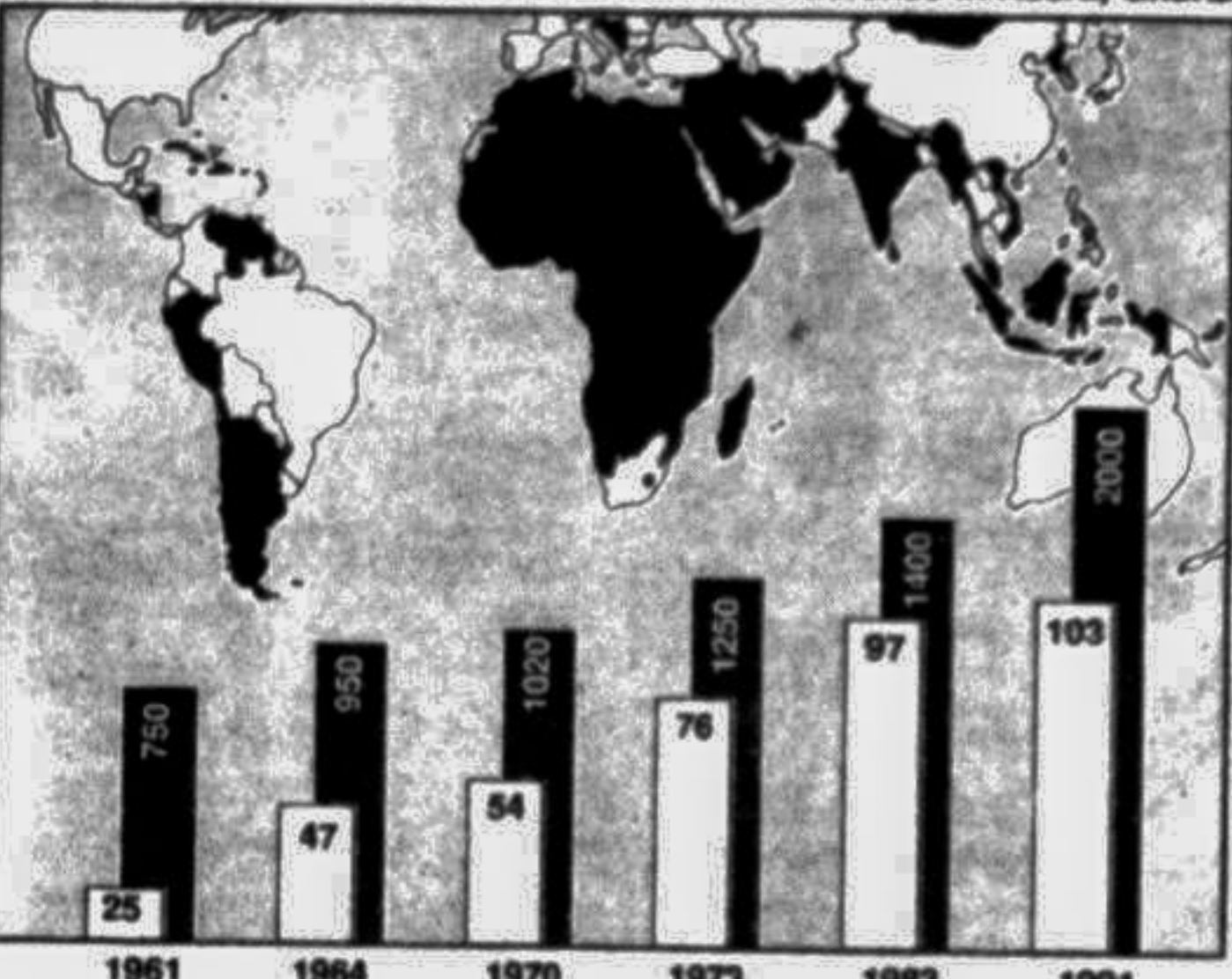
The UN 50th anniversary in 1995 could be the moment to enlarge the Council by five new permanent members — Germany and Japan, as powerful industrialised states, and India, Brazil and Nigeria, as larger, more advanced developing states.

Elevation to the Council of three of its members would, necessarily, enhance NAM's importance in world affairs and could compel other members to take it more seriously, particularly if the non-aligned combined to follow a courageous Nehruvian policy of independent judgement.

— GEMINI NEWS
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The Non-aligned Movement

Non-aligned Movement was conceived at Afro-Asian conference in Bandung, Indonesia, 1955. 29 nations attended. First summit was in Belgrade, 1961. Number of full members reached 103 when Mongolia was admitted at 1991 Ministerial Conference in Accra, Ghana



Non-alignment means not tying yourself with military blocs of nations or with a nation. It means trying to view things independently, and trying to maintain friendly relations with all countries
NEHRU, FIRST INDIAN PRIME MINISTER, 1961

THE CHALLENGES OF THE NINETIES-II

Needed Unity around National Consensus on Basic Goals

by Dr. Kamal Hossain

As conscious citizens, we can mobilise support among professional and other people's organisations and concerned citizens in efforts aimed at developing consensus. The common object would be to contribute to the process of consensus building on national goals.

THE "Task Forces" set up under the caretaker government, which had drawn upon the professional skills and experience of some 250 of the best and the brightest among the experts of Bangladesh in different fields, had spelt out some of the goals that could be consensus goals for the decade. These goals include: a minimum 5.5 per cent rate of growth; a minimum annual growth rate of around 4 per cent for agriculture, 8 per cent for industry, and 6 per cent for the services sector and an increase in exports at an average rate of 8 per cent a year. Consensus goals presented by the Task Force on poverty recommended Poverty Alleviation Programmes for the decade of the nineties, which would include: (i) Universal Primary School Facilities, (ii) Universal Secondary School Facilities, (iii) Primary Health Care Facilities, (iv) Income support for destitute female-headed households, (v) Housing programme for homeless destitutes and (vi) Employment guarantee schemes for the most vulnerable bottom 10 per cent. The total cost of these programmes is estimated to be Tk. 1807 crore for the period 1990-1995 and Tk. 2372 crore for the period 1995-2000.

It was expected that a democratic Government which had emerged through a united movement would bring about a basic change in the state of governance involving and inspiring the people and would be able to take bold initiatives in reviving the economy, restoring the rule of law and bringing about significant improvement in the field of education. This remains the people's priorities. It is a matter of

concern that the Government instead of seeking to involve everyone in a consensus approach to build democracy and to deliver the fruits of democracy to the people is acting in a partisan manner. Major policy issues and legislation are not being fully debated in Parliament and in public. Major policy decisions are being taken abruptly or not being taken at all. Legislation by Ordinance is taking place in cases where there is no justification for such abrupt legislation by-passing Parliament. The result is continuing economic stagnation, deterioration in the law and order situation and deepening crisis in educational institutions. Questions are being raised about the neutrality of the law-enforcing agencies. We must take serious note of these matters and press together for adoption of corrective measures immediately.

The challenges of the nineties, therefore, call for urgent adoption of the needed corrective measures and for agreement on clearly-defined national goals and priorities to be pursued during the decade. We cannot remain adrift as a nation. The direction in which we are to move must be set. A Chinese proverb says, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step." The first step has to be taken in the right direction, if the journey is to take us to the desired destination. Parliament itself and other public fora should

accord the highest priority to the task of achieving a consensus on national goals and priorities for the nineties. This permits of no delay.

Specific Annual Targets

Once the direction is set, specific annual targets will have to be fixed. When doing so people must be taken into confidence. Only through their involvement in the process of establishing the priorities and targets, will they become committed to the realisation of those goals and targets. The uphill climb from despair and dependence to dignity and self-reliance will require a spirit of sacrifice and sense of dedication, such as the entire nation demonstrated in 1971 and once again during the united movement in 1990. Only by reviving this spirit, will we be able to rise above narrow personal and group interests and to commit ourselves to national goals. The revival of this spirit will help in the creation of a new work ethic and a new sense of social responsibility. We could then expect the much-needed increase in productivity, and in the rate of domestic savings, as well as mobilisation of domestic resources. This would also contribute towards elimination of waste and misuse and misallocation of resources. Maximum utilization of capacity and of our resources and avoiding cost and time overruns in project implementation would be among some of the results we could expect from a revived

sense of national purpose.

How can we revive the spirit of national unity and solidarity and a sense of national purpose? I believe we can use the same methods which have succeeded in the past namely to create broad-based unity around a national consensus on certain basic goals. There could be an earnest appeal to political leaders, to the Government and the opposition, to sit together to take stock of the national situation and to agree on national priorities. As conscious citizens, we can mobilise support among professional and other people's organizations and concerned citizens in efforts aimed at developing consensus. The Reports of the Task Forces and other documents prepared by professional experts could provide useful materials for the purpose. The common object would be to contribute to the process of consensus-building on national goals.

I would also suggest a number of concrete and specific initiatives which Government, political parties in opposition, professional and other people's organizations and conscious citizens, could take to bring about a concerted national drive to cure ourselves of the sicknesses which have been handed down to us from the previous corrupt authoritarian order.

I would urge that through discussions, the Government and the political parties in opposition, could agree on certain national survival goals and priorities and undertake to co-operate in implementing those goals. Each of the parties will be under a duty to use all its powers to persuade its supporting organizations viz., workers' organizations, peasants' organizations, youth and student organizations, to strive their utmost to achieve these goals.

To reinforce the efforts of the political parties, professional and other people's organizations and conscious citizens could, after discussions in depth in their own forum, adopt a Charter of National Solidarity and Cooperation pledging to work together to achieve the agreed national goals. The Charter would remind everyone of his/her specific responsibilities and tasks and of the need to cooperate in carrying out the common tasks. The role of the press will be important as it must disseminate and motivate every one to work unitedly to achieve national goals and targets.

Concrete Measures

To strengthen democratic institutions and to cure them of the diseases inherited from the past the following concrete measures are suggested:

(i) To make Parliament more effective, parliamentary committees could take up issues requiring urgent attention and hold a number of sittings, open to the public and press, so that people may be aware of the progress being made in identifying critical problems and the consensus which was being developed with regard to their urgent solutions. Some of these sessions could be similar to public hearings, held by the US Senate, where testimony can be received from concerned individuals and organizations and from eminent experts. Our Constitution by Article 76 has made a special provision enabling such testimony to be taken. A special Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights, using its investigative powers effectively, could play a valuable part in promoting respect for human rights.

(ii) The constitutional office of Ombudsman, as envisaged by Article 77 of the Constitution should immediately be established. Parliament should entrust the Ombudsman with the responsibilities and powers to investigate any action taken by any Ministry, public officer or statutory public authority, as well as any grievances of public servants or involving educational institutions, and to dispose of them in a fair and impartial manner. This constitutional institution could help to

defuse and resolve disagreements between Government and opposition or other aggrieved parties and could ensure transparency and openness. This could enhance public confidence in the administration and also help to build confidence between the Government and the opposition.

(iii) Immediate steps need to be taken fully to re-establish the rule of law as follows: (a) Separation of judiciary from the executive should be promptly implemented; (b) In order to remind the law-enforcing agencies of the basic change that has come about through restoration of democracy, Parliament may by unanimous resolution, record that in a democracy the nation expects the law-enforcing agencies to act and enforce the law with neutrality. No officer or personnel of any law-enforcing agency is expected to carry out any unlawful order or to show any partiality in favour of any person on the basis of his political or other affiliations. Any deviation from these fundamental norms would constitute a grave offence punishable by law. (c) With a view to the electronic media, radio and television, functioning as national instruments to inform and motivate the people and not as partisan media, the pledge to the nation made in the declaration of 19 November, 1990, that radio and television should be entrusted to an autonomous agency, should be implemented without delay. (d) With regard to the present state of the universities and educational institutions, given the grave concern that is felt by all sections, including students, parents, teachers and citizens at large and society in general, Parliament may consider adopting a unanimous resolution, declaring that the nation will not tolerate the destruction of its educational institutions by induction of arms and armed "militants". The resolution could urge all teachers, students and citizens unitedly to ensure that peace and a congenial environment is maintained in all educational institutions. Concerned citizens could help to promote a congenial environment in all educational institutions through mobilizing public opinion, appealing to students and teachers, and by strengthening the national consensus in this matter. A bolder initiative could be kept in view if the crisis continues to remain unresolved: concerned citizens — in thousands — could form a human wall of peace around the campus of the University of Dhaka and maintain it until the campus is cleansed of arms and those who wield them. We could thus show, as we did during the movement last year, that ordinary citizens need not remain helpless bystanders to the destruction of their vital institutions. (Concluded)

To the Editor...

State of affairs, MPs and government

Sir, There was bill seeking the raise of benefits of the MPs which will cost an additional amount of Taka 3.0 crore per year. If passed, an extra amount of Taka 90,909.09 per MP will get spent apart from the existing benefits they are already enjoying. Bangladesh is one of the world's poorest countries; we have a heavy burden of foreign debts on our shoulder, and that is going to be repaid out of the taxes paid by us, the people, not by the for 'fortunate' MPs.

Some of the MPs rate themselves as senior than the Secretaries in Ministries; why such controversy? You are elected by vote, and there should not be any doubt about your status. Maybe sometimes your educational and other qualifications are lacking, but you are our elected representatives to the Parliament and your status is above any Government servant.

The MPs are bestowed with

the responsibility to look after the interest of respective constituencies; but what they are in reality doing? They can spend millions during election period; why they are so eager to spend more money from the Exchequer. The Government is the caretaker of the Exchequer, not its owner to spend it as to their wishes and to pass any bill to suit their interests which might even against the interest of the poor people, who have elected them to the Parliament. After about an year of the democratic Government activities, people are in doubt, whether the Government is for the people or the people are for the Government.

The Minister and opposition leaders are frequently holding meetings on busy roads causing serious traffic problems without any attention towards discipline. The Government is paying little heed to the illogical strikes; people want to see drastic and immediate action against such disturbing activities. Democracy doesn't mean 'full liberty'. It may be noted; "Absolute liberty refers to absence of liberty." And MPs and for that matter the Government are elected to look after the interest of the people.

Quazi Reza-ul-Hoque
Advocate, Supreme Court,
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Police PR

Sir, The Police Department appears to be rather modest in publicizing its achievements in its day-to-day work. This might help in changing its adverse public image. BTU could allot 30 minutes a month to law and order activities; including the activities of other law enforcing agencies such as the Customs/Excise, border patrols, VDP and the Ansars.

For example, when the drivers of killer trucks/buses are caught, the news item of the accident is not followed up to satisfy the public curiosity as to what punishment was meted out to the culprits by the court.

Why there is a complete blackout of the followup news? In this case our investigating press reporters cannot escape part of the blame — to keep the readers informed. Such news might have some deterrent effect, and also boost public confidence in the increasing efficiency of the public services.

Mirpur: an appeal

Sir, Mirpur has become a hell for the residents due to different groups of criminals, anti-social, drug addicts, thugs, and also murderers — who openly move everywhere terrorising the whole area.

It is not practicable for one officer with little force to control this vast township where thousands of houses are forcibly occupied and dwelt by these muggers.

The area should be combed by the law enforcing agencies and made a peaceful abode for the innocent citizens.

A resident of Mirpur Section 1.