What is the Point?

Dhaka, Sunday, November 15, 1998

A US military attack, evidently higher tech. than the 1989-vintage, seems demonically imminent on Iraq for the latter's defiant refusal to submit to further UN weapons inspections. As the wardrum beating sears the auditory nerves of sane people around the world they wonder whether trampling a centipede underfoot would be any sign of valour, let alone compassion, a noble human instinct that so many had thought was ingrained in the US profile of 'dedication to a cause.' Defiance' of a despoiled country resonates with a total back-tothe-wall desperation. It is that particular psychological dead-end condition in which a nation could be raring to say, 'Well, since we are dying anyway under the weight of economic sanctions what if we died from air strikes?

As if to reinforce that horrifying choice for Iraq we have this latest bombshell from the Llyod Assurance giant that it was seriously thinking of withdrawing any insurance cover from ships carrying the UN food-for-oil cargo into the ill-failed country. The crippling economic sanctions and the low food rations have put the lives of women and children in grave danger with malnutrition stalking their future. In that horrific context it is difficult to imagine why the imperilled human plight should not be the uppermost concern of the world leadership.

Circumspect military experts and media analysts in the West have openly expressed doubt that any specific purpose will be served by the US airstrikes. Saddam's perceived military potential to produce weapons of annihilation may not be destroyed, and what looks like a bleaker prospect is that no end can be visualised to the air strikes unlike in the case Gulf War. Isn't it sabre-rattling then?

Prominent US Republican Senator Dick Lugar has floated the idea that killing President Saddam Hossain could be the only way to stop Iraq from threatening its neighbours with weapons of mass destruction. What kind of international civility is projected by such an utterance! Let's not have terrorism to replace another perceived instance of terrorism. Reneging is not terrorising, but armed overreaction can amount to it.

All we want is a time-table for withdrawal of economic sanctions against the Iraqi people. And Saddam will certainly have reaped as he had sown. Meanwhile, exhaustion of threats must not be construed as the end of the diplomatic world.

Investigating Crime

The Law Commission's attempt to look for ways to reform the system of criminal justice appears to have produced some tangible results. Although the feedback it has received from a panel of experts is in the form of observations and suggestions, this will provide a strong basis on which to build. The experts have identified corruption and political interference as key obstacles to the process of investigation in criminal cases, while lack of specialised manpower and equipment is no less of an impediment.

The observations made by the experts, at the request of the Law Commission which aims to hold a workshop later this month to finalise reform programmes, have not come as a surprise to anyone remotely conversant with criminal justice in Bangladesh. One of the principal reasons why law and order has become an apparently intractable problem is that criminals often think they are beyond the law. This feeling has grown as the line between the worlds of politics and criminality has increasingly become blurred. Political pressure to thwart criminal justice has increased, which has had a demoralising effect on the police. Given such circumstances, there is little doubt that nothing short of a thorough overhauling can make criminal investigation in Bangladesh effective and credible.

The first step of this reform process should be to set up a specialised criminal investigation agency, with its own, highly-trained manpower and access to adequate resources to procure the technology necessary to carry out effective investigations. The structure of this agency should be separate from the police forces. While the Ministry of Home Affairs would naturally be its administrative overseer, a special parliamentary committee should be set up to ensure its accountability. On top of it all, there should be an operational link-up between this agency and the office of the Ombudsman when that is set up - to ensure that aggrieved people are receiving justice and prevent corruption within the agency.

Brutality in Jakarta

We are flabbergasted and horrified by the degree of force which the Indonesian military applied on pro-reform demonstrators in the streets of Jakarta on Friday, the fifth day of their attempted protest march on the parliament. A special session called by President Habibi to consider amendments to the Constitution was on; but it could not be viewed with equanimity by most people because the members who were assembled there drew their origins from the discredited Suharto days with a baggage of history slung around their shoulders to carry. The protesters thought they could not just be trusted with the job. As a matter of fact, since their demonstrations in May which led to a more or less same-side change of guard with Suharto abdicating in favour of his Vice President Habibi, the students have made no bones about their disgust over the continuation of Suharto legacy.

They are for radical reforms, both political and economic and would not settle for anything short of a complete demolition of corruption and cronyism of the previous era. The talk of reserved number of seats for the army in parliament — 50 out of 500 — could not be music to the ears of pro-reform civilians.

The mayhem in the streets of Jakarta on Friday having scant regard for the consequences to follow lends itself to two interpretations. First, it could be a temperamental outburst of any particular segment in the army which is seen as factionalised. Secondly, they could not have acted without covert or obvert orders from the top. Whatever the truth, Indonesia's troubles have only deepened.

The Iraq Crisis Flares up Again

Instead of resorting to new bombings, the United States along with the other Security Council members should try to convince Hussein that, if he cooperates, the UN would lift the economic sanctions that have crippled the Iraqi economy.

ADDAM Hussein has decided to freeze all Cooperation with the UN weapons inspection team and has demanded that Security Council lift the embargo that was imposed after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990. As UN inspectors and humanitarian aid workers are pulling out of Iraq. American ground troops, warplanes and ships are heading for the Persian Gulf.

Reports are circulating in the media that the United States is considering a sweeping and sustained air attack in order to inflict long lasting damage on Saddam Hussein's military forces and regime. Sources point out to several ominous signs. The US State Department has asked all its' non-essential personnel to leave Kuwait and Israel, apparently in case Iraq might launch a retaliatory attack on those countries. The chief UN weapons inspector has also ordered his foreign staff to leave Iraq. Israel has started distributing gas masks among its citizens as a precautionary measure in case of Iraqi retalia-

tion. For the last few months, about 25,000 US military personnel 170 warplanes, and two dozen Navy ships - some of them capable of firing longrange Tomahawk cruise missiles - have been stationed in the Gulf region near Iraq. The US Defense Secretary on Thursday authorized the deployment of more aircraft carriers, troops, stealth bombers, F-16s, and B-1 bombers in the

region. Clinton and his military advisors, in weighing their narrowing options, believe that in the absence of UN inspections, massive air strikes against Iraq would help to degrade Saddam's capability of manufacturing the weapons of mass destruction or the means of delivering them.

Their decision to seriously consider launching air strikes is also prompted by recent reports that Iraq is getting ready to station some of its surface-to-air missiles around the country. Until recently, these missiles had remained in storage, where spy planes could more readily keep track of them. If the missile are dispersed, they could present a more significant

threat to U S pilots. So U S mili-

tary planners would like to

strike before these Iraqi mis-

siles are moved around. If air strikes do occur, they would initially target a series of suspected weapons and missile caches, elite Republican Guard military units, power plants, industrial facilities, airfields, presidential palaces, and whatever other facilities help to keep

Saddam in power. Several recent developments have allowed the US administration to consider a far more sustained and punishing attack against Iraq than had been expected. First, the Democrats' strong showing in last week's congressional elections gave Clinton more confidence to act forcefully. Second, unlike past confrontations, Russia, China, and France have voiced muted protest against military at tacks. Clinton also feels that the recently concluded agreement between Israel and the Palestinians has strengthened the US position, both in Europe

and Middle-east. The US and Iraq has sparred in recent months over various issues. For instance, during the last stand-off, Iraq denied the UN weapons inspection team access to so-called 'sensitive sites' including many palaces

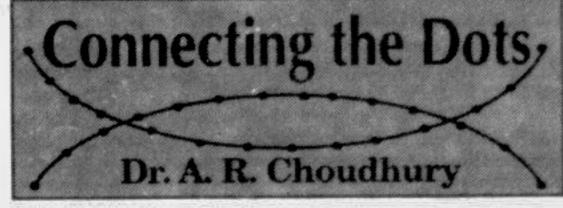
belonging to Saddam Hussein. Iraq argued that such inspection violates its sovereignty. Mediation by Kofi Annan brought the encounter to a peaceful end.

During another stand-off in late 1997, Saddam Hussein expelled Americans from the UN inspection team. Diplomacy by Russia persuaded Hussein to take the Americans back. In the course of the negotiations, he extracted some assurances from the Russians that future teams would be more balanced and would include inspectors from a

another. Although the latest election results has bolstered his stand with the American people, the House of Representative is scheduled to start the impeachment hearing against him next week. Whenever a political leader faces trouble in the domestic front, it has become customary to look at foreign scapegoats in order to divert the attention of the people. For Clinton, who can be a better scapegoat than Saddam Hus-

Saddam is not a saint either. Who can forget the atrocities





number of countries. However, the composition of inspection teams that were sent later did have a provocative look. For example, the team led by Scott Ritter, a former U S marine and intelligence officer who worked in the Gulf war and who has since resigned from the inspection team, had 16 members of which 14 were either American or British. This gave Saddam Hussein the excuse he was looking for in order to stop the work of the inspection team and thus precipitate another crisis.

President Clinton, on the other hand, is eagerly looking for an issue to divert the attention of the American people. In recent months, he has been besieged by scandals, one after committed by his army in Kuwait and the misery and sufferings that he has brought upon his own people? There can be no doubt about his intransigence. He flagrantly defied UN requests to allow the inspectors to visit sites that may contain

weapons of mass destruction.

Although US warnings to Iraq have become increasingly harsh, one thing has not changed: the serious drawbacks to any US military action. It is difficult to see what would be achieved by a new bombing campaign. It would not enhance the prospects of a permanent solution to the ongoing crisis in the region but would only add to the misery and suffering of the common people of Iraq, destroy the Gulf war alliance and weaken the Security Council. Such a campaign would be counter-productive for at least

several reasons. First, the people of Iraq have already suffered immensely. both due to Saddam's autocratic regime as well as the economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations. Any new bombing by the United States would simply add to their misery. During the last stand-off between the UN and Iraq. Hussein put human shields on the grounds of his palaces and other potential targets.

Second, any new military action is opposed by most of the world, including the Arab nations. US air strikes would magnify their dissatisfaction with the double standard in US foreign policy. One area certain to be affected is the Middle East peace dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis. Many Arabs feel that the US is willing to attack an Arab country, but not willing to pressure the current Israeli government to seriously continue with the peace process. Relations between the United States and the Arab world would likely suffer in the aftermath of a military strike and would only fuel regional suspicion of US intentions.

Third, it has been clear from previous bombings that a military campaign may not destroy all of Hussein's chemical and biological weapons, which are easy to conceal and move. This time the US objective is more destruction than deterrence. If the US attacks a chemical weapons site, it will release chemical agents. Similarly hits on a biological weapons

site would release biological agents. The exact consequences of such an attack and the collateral damages that it can inflict in terms of human lives and environmental pollution are hard to imagine! Finally, an attack would

also give Hussein another excuse to break off negotiations and contacts with the United Nations. Such contact appears to be the only hope to resolve the impending crisis in that re-

From Iraq's perspective. there is no light at the end of the tunnel. They believe, with some truth, that no matter how much they comply with the UN directives, economic sanctions will not be lifted in any time soon. They see it as a game with no end. So they see no reason for playing fair. They have no in-

centive to comply. They only way United Nations can make Saddam comply would be by explicitly linking Iraqi compliance with the lifting of the economic embargo against Iraq.

Instead of resorting to new bombings, the United States along with the other Security Council members should try to convince Hussein that, if he cooperates, the UN would lift the economic sanctions that have crippled the Iraqi economy.

The United States and the international community must realise that compliance is more important than bringing down Hussein. By responding to the economic issues raised by the sanctions, the international community would not only acknowledge Iraq's concern, but would also provide Iraq with incentives to be more cooperative and obey UN resolutions.

The solution to the current crisis will arise not from new air strikes but from new initiatives to withdraw the economic sanctions.

From Lahore to Delhi, and Back Again

While some progress has been made in the field of trade and commerce, a major achievement at the talks is

obviously the completion of most of the formalities on the proposed trans-border bus service linking New Delhi

and Lahore. Both sides, currently working out the nitty-gritty of the scheme, expect "bus service" will begin

some time this month or the next

HE trans-border bus service between India and Pakistan — agreed upon by the traditional rivals for the first time — appears one of the major areas of convergence of views during the week-long "composite talks" held in New Delhi. Both New Delhi and Islamabad attached great importance to the justconcluded parleys since the talks, spread over seven days engaging different delegations from two countries, were meant

o cover a variety of issues olution of some problems in a e hand and cooperation in some areas on the other.

However, the main bone of contention that bedevils the Indo-Pakistan relationship. the "Kashmir" issue, was not on the agenda. The matter is being dealt separately on a different plane. Two countries held talks mainly on that problem at the level of the foreign secretaries in Islamabad last month. They are scheduled to have the next round of discussions early next year in New Delhi.

The "composite" talks covered trade and commerce, culture, communications, sports and some other important issues including the maritime boundary and dispute over the "Siachen glacier". While some progress has been made in the field of trade and commerce, a major achievement at the talks is obviously the completion of most of the formalities on the proposed trans-border bus service linking New Delhi and Lahore. Both sides, currently working out the nitty-gritty of the scheme, expect "bus service" will begin some time this

month or the next. The "bus service" between India and Pakistan is neces-

sary, and of course, of extreme symbolic importance, to bring the belligerent nations closer by widening the scope of, what they call. "people-to-people" contacts. Prime ministers of the two countries. Atal Bihari Vaipayee and Nawaz Sharif, decided on this during their last meeting in New York, in September on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

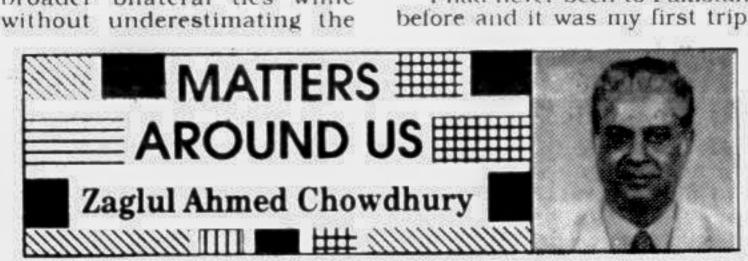
It was the second meeting between the two heads of government since May, this year. when their bitter ties further worsened following explosions of several nuclear device by India in the first part of the month and a riposte coming from Pakistan in the second half of that month. Two prime ministers had first met since then in Colombo during the SAARC summit and the second meeting did help much in reducing the tensions. The meeting was considered broadly positive as the prime ministers decided to have discussions at various levels on different issues, the "bus service" being one of them.

The "bus service" is necessary because a large number of people travel to meet their estranged relatives and friends. and visit religious sites, or just take the trip for emotional reasons. It also characterises the basic tenor of the bilateral ties that exist between the two countries. Since the "Kashmir" or other delicate issues cannot be resolved immediately, the two

prime ministers decided they could be put on the backburner and progress should be made in some innocuous areas such as the "bus service". But once again the question that comes to my mind is how long India and Pakistan can maintain this "service" if put to practice and how far they can eventually stretch it? Of course, the "service" here implies not only the bus service but also much broader bilateral ties while

in the S-98 Pachscheel Park in the Indian capital Mrs. Tandon was excited to know that I was going to Lahore since she hails from there and migrated to Delhi with the family in the wake of the 1947 partition. She was nurturing the memories of Lahore and requested me to have a look at the house they once lived in near the "Anarkali Market" if I found the time and the opportunity.

I had never been to Pakistan



utility of the service. Incidentally, I had the opportunity to travel from New Delhi to Lahore by bus many vears ago although no such "bus service" existed between two countries then. It was in 1983 when I was posted In New Delhi as a Bangladesh journalist and my office sent me a message from Dhaka to proceed to Islamabad to cover the SAARC foreign secretary level meeting The SAARC was still in the formative stage then. I thought it would be more educative and entertaining to travel by road from New Delhi rather than flying in a short time. My landlady

which, indeed, turned out to be both interesting and strange. Interesting, because the trip took me through the east and west Punjab — the breadbasket of India and Pakistan. It was also the area that constitutes relatively industrially prosper ous area in both countries. The "Attari" border was bristling with activities as quite a good number of people were travelling from both sides. It was strange because, only upon arrival at "Attari". I realised that the border is meant for mainly the citizens of India and Pakistan. When they saw a

Bangladesh national there the

immigration officials in the Indian side raised eve-brows. I had the necessary papers from the Pakistan high com-

mission in New Delhi and Indian home ministry. Still, immigration officials from both sides took a long time to clear me although I was shown courtesy and honour. It was then I realised that despite so much differences and animosities the people of two countries. particularly in the Punjab area. are bound by different form of commonalities. I could not visit the house of my landlady at Lahore on my way back from Islamabad but she was thrilled nevertheless simply for the reason that I had been to her onetime favourite city. I wondered why the two governments were not working on a system like the "bus service" when there is so much of contact between the

two countries. When I met Indian and Pakistani journalists and officials at the SAARC meeting in Islamabad. I drew their attention to this issue. Many journalists from both countries have familial or nostalgic attachment to the other side. Host of the meeting Pakistan foreign secretary Niaz Naik and his Indian counterpart M. K. Rasgotra took interest in the matter after the journalists also spoke on this. Ataul Karim was then the foreign secretary of Bangladesh. It's been more than fifteen years since I had that experience, and India and Pakistan

have finally agreed to a "bus service". An innocent and beneficial step has finally been taken but the it has taken such a longtime.

Two months ago, I was on a journalist delegation was on tour of some European countries at the invitation of the European Union and the European Journalists Council. We travelled from one country to the other, mainly by bus, and we did not know when we crossed the common border as they have done away with even the immigration and customs formalities. Such a situation is highly unlikely in the SAARC region where mistrust and recrimination are the order of the day, but why can't we simple things be done particularly when people are benefited?

The Indo Pakistan agreement on "bus service" comes as a good piece of news when all we hear is their troops exchanging fire and the high-ups exchanging provocative statements on nuclear and other issues. If the bus service is implemented, this will bring their people closer because they can travel in onego from New Delhi to Lahore, some 328 miles without changing transports several times which will also avoid other

Certainly, it is a good development in the direction of "people-to-people" contact for which the SAARC is committed. But can they maintain it or will the good decision be obviated by had developments in other areas? Can they, in the long run, stretch the route beyond the limit they have now agreed upon? Hopefully, they can. But once again only time can tell.

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Politics

Sir. There is nothing wrong in the caption above. Second class politics can be tolerated to some extent, and first class political behaviour is not expected immediately — we voters have that much tolerance!

I strongly support in principle the gist of the DS editorial of Oct 22 on the despicable culture and standard of current political stances in Bangladesh today, based on party first, country later.

As a voter for several decades, I'd like to appeal to my fellow voters not to vote for "leaders" who cannot deliver the goods, and who believe in the present state of negative politics. We are taking too long a time to learn and conduct politics in the normal way generally acceptable to all shades of opinion.

Now political opponents are treated as anti-national, and the Parliament is not working, while sermons on democracy are over-flooding the egos of the have-not leaders; and the attention is diverted to the natural floods, and to the weaknesses of others, who are denounced as enemies of the state. How long are we going to hear such blah-blah? To be blunt, in my opinion the present standard of politics is the greatest enemy of the country. Let there be a Referendum on this issue, after heated debate in the JS.

Fair enough? Deliver, or get thrown out during the next elections. This is not a seditious statement, and the fear of the SPA should not be dangled before strong personal and individual opinions. Already there have been too many arrests in too short a period, which is suspicious. There is no method in the madness (of several parties).

Both AL and BNP should start some heart-searching exercises inside their central citadels to serve the public in an acceptable way, and not block the way to the fast development of the country. The people are beginning to realise that both the major parties cannot deliver the goods because they can never work together in national interest (consensus), due to the charismatic bug embedded in their systems.

The politicians have developed a bad image for themselves and it is up to them to remove it; not by haranguing the people. but by changing the approach to political activity. Both the mafor parties should sit down in marathon sessions (as the Jews and Muslims are doing for Palestine, and far away in Washington) and come out with communiqué to serve the public transparently.

Are the two leaders aware that the voters might reject both of them in the near future? Why there is no democracy within the parties? This question is never answered in public. The political leaders are quite aware why political criticism is so severe. No more beating about the bush please.

The CHT and Farakka accords are examples of hurried, immature agreements without national consensus, and the nation is paying the price for the impractical aspects and the delays, despite flawless promises, assurances, and mud-slinging

(we have plenty of mud for millions of 'leaders'!).

Consensus has to come back at the national level, simply because it is not there, and the leaders have made no effort to reach the same (workable formula). The country does not belong to one single political party, despite all its contributions recorded in history; however strongly they represent the people. There is a limit to the art of political bluffing. Play the game or get the red card! What's wrong in this statement?

Abul M Ahmad Dhaka

Stolen cars and car parts

Sir, In Calcutta we were astonished to see private cars, motor bikes etc., all parked on the roads, openly, all through the night. This surprised us a lot, for this is unimaginable in our country or in the city of Dhaka. Over here, car and car parts theft is rampant, even in broad daylight, not to speak of nights. Which usually is the favourite time for all kinds of thefts, robberies and other crimes in our mega-city. But car thieves are so much bolder and daring than their other colleagues' that they don't need the cloak of darkness to commit their crime! They are such dare devils that you leave the car for barely 15 minutes, and their job will be done!

You come out of the bank or shop, reach for your car parked in a busy road, not in a deserted or quiet lane, and are dismayed to find the rear-view mirrors or the rubber lining of the wind screen or the wheel plates etc., gone. Just disappeared in thin air! How they manage to do it so fast, that too in broad day light, on a busy thorough fare, amidst so many people, is quite a feat and amazing. You can't help but give credit to these notorious ex-

At night their expertise is incredible, for they silently and

stealthily enter the compound and soundlessly remove as big a part as the whole dashboard of the car with steering and the whole control panel! How they do that, so quickly and then carry away such a huge part of the car is unbelievable.

Another interesting aspec of this car parts stealing business is, when you are victimised the only thing that you can do is to replace the stolen part as soon as possible. It is not much use lodging a FIR etc., in this country of ours. Can the police ever catch the thieves or get you back the vital stolen parts? So all that the helpless victim can do is to go to the shops which sell second-hand parts of the cars. What they will do, is, ask you to come back in a day or two, if that particular part is not available. But they will get it for you in the shortest possible time, that is for sure! How they do that is again not difficult to guess. The part will of course be stolen from another unlucky guy like yourself, and sold to you. Or, worst still, you may even buy your own stolen car part unwittingly! New car parts are not always available

here and are far too expensive. Now going back to the original puzzle, how come car parts are not stolen in Calcutta, which is like Dhaka in so many other ways? Why this amazing difference in car parts theft case? I couldn't help but ask a taxi driver this question. His answer was. We had the same problem that you have in Dhaka now, but then our government stepped in and closed down all the second-hand car parts shops. So when the thieves didn't have any place to sell, they stopped stealing.

What an ingenious idea! That it worked like magic we could see for ourselves. Why didn't our government ever think of that or still doesn't? It is always in such a malaise where citizens' welfare is concerned that even if you give it an idea, it will never act or react timely. People's sufferings seem to be lowest in its list of priorities. Just our bad luck, alas!

Dr. Sabrina Q. Rashid, Dhaka

Cantonment, Dhaka

Post-flood help

Sir. Through an earlier communication (Daily Star. 19/10/98), we identified the important areas requiring serious attention of those involved in post-flood rehabilitation (PER)

With ANANDO's experience of integrated social welfare work at the grassroot throughout the country applying Technology for Human Welfare (THW), we are now providing free technical advisory service for individuals and organisations engaged in PER.

Prof. Dr. S S M A Khorasani House 16B, Road 23, Banani, Dhaka-1213.

Rickshaw drive at night

Sir. Almost everyday roads and streets of the metropolitan city of Dhaka are plunged into darkness due to loadshedding. In such a horrible and dangerous situation thousands of rickshaws are plying on the public thoroughfares unmindfully and recklessly without any light or signal light fitted with them. As such rickshawpullers are meeting with accidents every now and then hitting and injuring numerous pedestrians and passengers daily. The rickshawpullers without any objections, prevention, held up, impediment obstruction and punishment from the law enforcing agencies are openly and freedly violating traffic rules and driving rickshaws without any light fitted on the rickshaws.

We are surprised and shocked what our authorities concerned are doing? Would the DCC, DMP and Ministry of Home Affairs kindly pay attention to the serious offence and matter and make the rickshawpullers use light on the rick

shaws while driving the vehicle at night for safety and security of the members of the public and maintenance of traffic

O. H. Kabir 6. Hare Street Wari, Dhaka-1203

"At any cost"

Sir, Personalities stationed in higher echelons of our society, very often bless us with their address, harangues and sermons on various facets of our corporate life. While passing through miles

of slums emitting nauseating

stench, such a high-up usually avows, "We are determined to eradicate slums." On another occasion when question papers or fiscal policies are leaked long before they are due to be published, the big-boss of education or finance sector usually express a determination like "the culprits must be brought to book". Once again when a newly constructed culvert is going down the gutters only after a few days use, the boss from the works department spews wrath by declaring, "the delinquent must not go away unpunished. Interestingly, what such personalities add to after each of the statements is a hyperbole or superlative like "at any cost." Consequently we hear that the Minister of Fishery is expressing his oath to preserve the interests of the physician "at any cost", the Foreign Minister likewise is speaking on a matter relating to education sector or the Law Minister is speaking about seed and crops diversification programme. Each of the haranguers says that the target will be achieved or something will be preserved or someone will be punished or impeded 'at

many times can one use the same thing?

Now the question is how

Iftekhar Hamid 29, Nawabpur Dhaka