

Dhaka, Monday, May 31, 1999

Defuse Tension over Kashmir

Since the beginning of India's air strikes on 'strategic positions held by Pakistani infiltrators' on Wednesday last and Pakistan's downing of two Indian aircraft closely on its heels, tensions in Kashmir have only boiled over. Chief of the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), Major General Joseph Bali of the Hungarian army, assesses the situation in the following words: "If I compare with the last year, the level of tension is much higher."

Even as the military rhetoric over Kashmir mounts there is a parallel move by India and Pakistan to engage each other in talks to de-escalate the heightening tensions. It augurs well that Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's offer for ministerial level talks with India has been 'accepted' by his Indian counterpart Atal Behari Vajpayee. The meet is due next week; but there is little likelihood that the air strikes will be halted by India in the prelude to the talks, something that Nawaz Sharif reportedly insisted on. We believe that the hot line communication between Nawaz Sharif and Vajpayee that has already taken place will help ease things up perceptibly.

Our hope is both sides will see the wisdom of exercising all the diplomatic options available to them instead of adopting military means to straighten the latest angularity in Kashmir crisis. Their stakes are higher than before now that they have gone nuclear and successfully tested missiles capable of carrying atomic warheads long dis-

As Pakistan looks upon the crisis as another opportunity to seek international intervention in the Kashmir dispute, India braces itself to combat it by insisting that the question should be resolved entirely bilaterally. The interesting thing to note here is that while India and Pakistan go about their respective perceptions of what is the 'proper approach' towards solving the Kashmir issue, a third party of Kashmiris have long since emerged seeking independence of Kashmir.

What certainly reads like a redeeming feature is that both India and Pakistan are keen on the agenda to continue with the talks and keep the Kashmir conflict localised for fear, maybe, of being drawn willy-nilly into nuclear misadventurism. But to step into a high-calibrated conventional war even in Kashmir could have escalatory consequences of a mutually self-destructive nature. We urge both sides to defuse the tensions by diplomatic means.

Tribute to Zia

Today we pay our tribute to late President Ziaur Rahman who was assassinated on 30 May 1981 at Chittagong Circuit House. A valiant freedom fighter who boosted the morale of a struggling people in those dark days of Pakistan through his independence proclamations, in the name Bangabandhu, over the Kalurghat transmitter at Chittagong, Major Zia will always be remembered by those who had listened to him. Apart from his contributions as a freedom fighter, we pay our respects to a man who reintroduced multiparty political system in the country. A large numb ... of political parities, old and new, registered themselves by virtue of that historic move. Vitally also, President Zia restored the chain of command in the armed forces.

In addition to all that, he should be remembered for his contributions to the freedom of press in Bangladesh. The print media, specially the daily and weekly newspapers, were free from government ownership and control. Today we remember him and condemn his assassination.

We call upon all political parties to show respect where it is due. We do not want our children to grow up in an environment of hate and intolerance and with a split vision of our leadership heritage. Time has come when a child, raised in whatever political environment, needs to be taught to show respect to all political leaders, irrespective of the parties they led. Otherwise we shall be failing in our duty to develop a political culture that teaches respect for and tolerance of each other which are the cornerstone of a truly democratic society to

which w Vanishing Medicines

The news in yesterday's Daily Star of pilfering drugs from the leading healthcare establishments like Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Mitford Hospital, Institute of Cardio Vascular Diseases etc., and selling them in 'open market' underlines the fact that no place is immune from racketeering these days. Buying and selling of stolen medicines at the Mitford market can be traced to nexus between the hospital staff and the traders. Scarcity of medicines, including, life saving ones, at the hospitals, is engineered by a section of hospital insiders. Again, the fear of marketing hazardous blood-serum is also there. This adds to the degradation of our healthcare system by transfusion-related deadly diseases like Hepatitis-B, HIV/AIDS

The presence of this "open drug market syndicate" on a frightening scale only points to dereliction of duty on the part of hospital authorities and the health directorate people. As a result, our commitment towards 'Health for All by the Year 2000' sounds rather hollow.

This illegal drug-marketing must not be allowed to continue. The authorities will have to devise ways, first to curb, and then to eliminate this felonious communion between the hospital personnel and the drug retailers. An honest endeavour is indeed needed to uproot this kind of drug racketeering besetting government hospitals, otherwise medicare centres outside Dhaka are bound to be infected by this disease.

NATO Fault-lines in the Balkans

The NATO must develop a negotiating strategy with the full understanding of Balkans' history, its ethno-religious divide, and its own peculiar conflict dynamics.

T ATO's high-tech war in the Balkans conducted from the safety of very high altitude yielded so far very poor results. In the third month of the war in which little has gone right up till now the United States faces the ignominy of helplessness before a tiny defiant enemy who refuses to budge. More so, because only the US has all political, military, economic and cultural power, all rolled into one force with the ability to set a global agenda yet there have been times when the Clinton administration never seemed to comprehend what it wanted to do with its power in Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, Bosnia and now in Kosovo. All it has achieved are what the NATO has admitted as 'collateral damages' in hitting as its target a passenger train in Kosova, 'inadvertently' dropping a bomb on tractors carrying the Kosovar refugees across the border and destroying 'by mistake' the Chinese embassy in Belgrade with three of its Chinese inmates killed. So far, the picture is a total

Instead of accomplishing any of its goals - strategic, political and even humanitarian the NATO has, as a matter of fact, strengthened Milosevic's hold on power, destabilised the neighbouring countries, destroyed the Rambouillet peace formula and, most important, actually worsened the plight of Kosovar Albanians majority of whom are now dislodged from their home under the cover of war smoke. Russia, who holds vital key to any settlement with Belgrade, was pushed aside and the war was started. The Russians are now, if belatedly, recognised by NATO as the only valid intermediary. But managing the Russians at this critical juncture is, by itself, a challenging task. Russia is in a state of political meltdown after Yeltsin sacked his prime minister Primakov. It is already in economic ruin. The timing could not be worse for the west to enter into understanding

with Russia on Serbia. Then there is China. NATO's bombing of its embassy in Belgrade prompted a genuine

HE month of May, last

between the two south Asian

arch-rivals, India and

Pakistan, over their nuclear

explosions. The tensions that

had mounted reached an alarm-

ing state but it later subsided

through a series of contacts fi-

nally capped by the "Lahore dec-

laration" in February, this

year. The month of May, this

year was a quiet one for New

Delhi and Islamabad and in

fact, the period this year held

better promise for an improved

Indo-Pakistan ties since it was

not long ago that the prime

ministers of the two countries

vowed to spare no efforts for the

betterment of the often-hostile

relationship. Both sides had

the Lahore summit as remarks

able in easing tensions between

the two neighbours whose

decades-old belligerent rela-

tions have been a constant

source of concern and anxiety

for the region and interna-

But the second half of the

month saw such developments

involving the two countries as

made many to sit up and think

about the shape of things that is

likely to come from sudden

flaring up of tensions between

India and Pakistan. They came

so close to confrontation over

the Indian actions against the

"infiltrators" in Kashmir -

whom Pakistan calls "Muja-

hedins" - that many felt as if

another war is imminent. Such

an assumption was only the

logical corollary to the spate of

the developments that took

place almost suddenly taking

many by surprise. In its bid to

flush out the "infiltrators" from

the Kargil area of the Indian-

controlled Kashmir, the Indian

Air Force went into action and

Pakistan claimed that it shot

down two combat aircraft over

tional community.

year, had witnessed

unexpected tensions

wave of anger in Beijing. The bad timing goes far beyond Kosovo. China, the one big power besides Russia that has been firmly opposed to the NATO campaign is now demanding a halt to the bombing before talks can start in the UNSC. Through a bizarre turns and twists of the events the NATO led by the US now faces the prospect of a great power rivalry with both Russia and China. Even if a Russia, now in dire need of an IMF rescue, can be forced into compliance, Sino-American ties have been under increasing strains for some time and would remain sterile for foreseeable future. And the setback in the relationship is all due to the murderous blunder of the NATO forces!

NATO's political leaders seem to have gone haywire in evolving a rational perception of the war which is certainly not an optional extra of diplomatic policy; neither is that a gesture of irritation at being unable to impose one's power. But it is exactly the way they treated it and ignored the golden rule of the war that it should not be resorted to except under absolute necessity. As neither necessity nor common prudence dictated the NATO war against Serbia it has produced nothing but humanitarian catastrophe it was intended to prevent. Least of all war is a good way of making peace. Most of the wars leave their original objectives far behind. Already NATO's original objective of enforcing Rambouillet agreement and preventing the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo are dead and forgotten. Rambouillet has by now become only a relevant footnote in the diplomatic history and ethnic cleansing has actually taken place.

There is already a Vietnam syndrome in the Balkans. Most visible of it is a growing yearning for peace with honour. As the NATO is now looking forward to reach a peace settle-

ment, the war itself is a liability. There is hardly an exit route. Not only the diplomatic, political and military strategies were misconceived in the Balkans, they were all miserably bungled up. The NATO leaders understood neither the Balkans nor the nature of war in its treacherous terrain. They thought that the war could be won without casualties from 15,000 feet, did not visualise refugees in hundred thousands and their indescribable trauma and had no alternative military plan if the bombing failed to produce expected results. Almost unbelievably there was

cisive war was consciously set aside by the US and her allies all of whom seemed shy about using ground forces in the Balkans. Bill Clinton, the draft-dodger of the Vietnam war leads a nation which has developed a visceral opposition to any engagement involving the return of young soldiers in body bags. From the beginning, the NATO had ruled out ground invasion. Both the potential NATO staging posts — Hungary and Greece - had strong reasons to oppose it. Germany, France and Italy who all have left wing coalition governments are also opposed to ground war. The



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

no contingency plan to come up with. They also did not foresee political difference that would split-NATO at a later time. If the diplomacy leading to Balkan war was flawed by an arrogant disregard of Russia an absurd military strategy depended on the belief that Milosevic could be forced to capitulate and accept Rambouillet terms by bombing alone. Bill Clinton, Gerhard Shroder and Tony Blair - the key leaders of the NATO never experienced bombing. At the time of Vietnam war they all held pacifist views. Bombing is doubtlessly frightening and makes one angry but strengthens his wills to resist. The allied bombing contributed little to victory over the Nazis during Second World War. Two decades later, carpet bombing of North Vietnam did little to break Hanoi's will. The world knows how little effect the bombing

had on Saddam Hussain. The grand invasion, an inescapable requirement for a de-

Americans are still haunted by Vietnam experience. If the bombing was likely to be ineffective and a ground invasion was unacceptable to almost every NATO member except perhaps Britain and Turkey it made no sense to start the air strikes. But, on the contrary, air operations are necessary to support the ground operations which alone bring the war to some meaningful conclusion.

In hindsight it seems that the NATO did not take history into account in evolving its Balkan policies. The conflict in the Balkans dates back to the period when the Turks pushed into Europe during the 14th century. The event drove a wedge between the Ottomans and the Eastern Roman empire. between the Islam and Christianity and between the Turks and the Slavs. Ever since the Ottoman occupation of the Balkans the various nationalities of the region have been waging wars for their national lib-

eration. The Balkan wars had their long histories and the record of their savageries. In the name of a Pan-Slavism the Tsarist Russia often appeared in Balkan scenes and overreached herself, for example, in Crimean war. Russia militarily 'liberated' Bulgaria from Ottoman Turks on whom it imposed the treaty of Sanstefano. Again in 1914 after having been unbearably provoked six years earlier by Austro-Hungary's annexation of Bosnia, Tsar Nicholas II felt honour bound to protect Serbia from what he saw bullying by central powers following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Yugoslavia itself, established in 1919 was always more of a timebomb than a nation. It contained at least six hostile ethnic groups, forced to live inside its borders. Tito, during his life time and the threat of Soviet power afterwards held those hostile people together in an uneasy and resentful partnership. But NATO was not an empire and could not possibly subdue the Balkans as Emperor Angustus or Stalin subdued them. It has neither the will nor the unity to achieve that formidable and thankless a task After having lost the credibility of its air war and no immediate agenda to pursue either

in Serbia or Kosovo NATO is morally bound to concentrate on the humanitarian aspects of the war. But without at least a workable peace nothing can be done to help the very large numbers of Albanians who are still trapped inside Kosovo. So long as the war goes on their lives will be intolerable and presumably many more will try to leave for uncertain destination. Nobody knows where many of them are, or whether they have access to food, medicine and shelter. If the war is not over before the autumn. tens of thousands may die from exposure, malnutrition and disease. The war to date has

been bad enough for the Kosovars but a continuation of the war could be worse. There is also the risk of rising civilian causalities from the bombing itself as NATO runs out of prime military targets. However genuine the original humanitarian motivation of the bombing, the humanitarian arguments now call for peace.

Washington and its NATO allies have now only two options - wage a full war with an objective of physically marching upto Belgrade in a ground invasion or cut a deal with Milosevic with Russia's intermediation. Even if some quarters in the NATO countries do see the logic of an immediate ground invasion the leadership has been dithering for unusually long whether to commit the ground forces and in what strength. There is also tendency to contemptuously underestimate the Serbian military prowess. But if NATO believes that the vital interests of the US and Europe are at stake in south Balkan then it must openly declare a ground war on Yugoslavia, announce its support for an independent Kosovo and take all necessary steps to achieve that goal. The military experts estimate the deployment at minimum 200,000 ground troops. Hitler could not control an occupied Yugoslavia with 37 divisions during

Second World War. If NATO wants to avoid that gory path it must develop a negotiating strategy with the full understanding of Balkans' history, its ethno-religious divide, and its own peculiar conflict dynamics. Even if Russia is considered an economic pariah. and underdog of its kind and an unequal among the equals it is the indispensable key to the solution of any of the Balkan crises. But then the things are fast changing in the Balkans and with every passing day happenings on the ground will control events. The NATO countries must be able to seize opportunity to their advantage from those chains of events. The writer is former Director

General of Bangladesh Institute of International & Strategic

Indo-Pakistan Tensions

Why This Sudden Flare-up?

The "Lahore Declaration" had injected some positive elements in the ties of the two countries and also in the overall political environment of the region. It is desirable that the spirit of the declaration is brought into play to ward off any major crisis so that people of the region as a whole can heave a sigh of relief. After all, confrontation and war cannot be beneficial for them whatever be their intentions and compulsions.

its territories. The development was fraught with alarming level of worsening of the ties between the two countries both whom of late have acquired nuclear capabilities and are armed with sophisticated missiles. Pakistan said it had to do it as the planes intruded into their airspace - a version with which India did not fully agree. New Delhi acknowledged the loss of two planes but said one of them crashed due to mechanical trouble. Whatever the versions of the two sides, the fact remains that the level of tensions and border clashes between them reached a near-nadir stage evoking widespread concerns in different quarters.

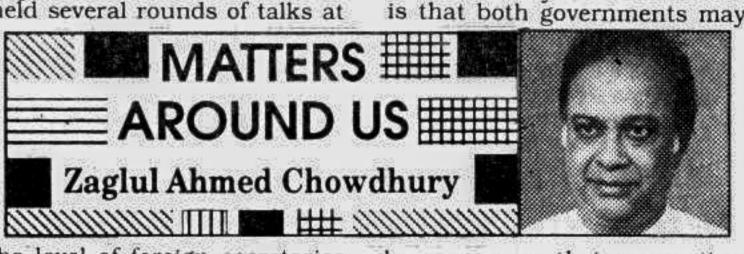
The West and the international community is currently more engrossed with the "Kosovo" crisis. Otherwise, this developing Indo-Pakistan crisis would have certainly been the major flash point of international trouble-spots and trouble-shooting at the moment. Nonetheless, the situation is being perceived as potentially great to destabilise peace not only in the south Asian region but also beyond in a larger perspective. But why is this unanticipated sudden eruption of tensions over "Kashmir"? Will the developments lead to a larger conflagration like a war? What can be the shape of things as far as the

two countries are concerned in the near or the foreseeable future? And finally, what could be the implications of this situation? There is no denying that "Kashmir" issue is the main bone of contention in the Indo-Pakistan relations.

All noble and pious protestations notwithstanding, it is commonly believed that this dispute thwarts all efforts to improve their ties. Two sides held several rounds of talks at

of progress is made in other ar eas like Pakistan cricket team visiting India or Indian hockey team playing in Pakistan or film units of one country is allowed to shoot in another country. The timing of the current clashes in the Kargil area in the India-held Kashmir is intriguing. There are varying interpretations of this develop-

One widely believed notion



the level of foreign secretaries on bilateral matters but discussions were generally back to square one since no progress could be achieved as two sides adopt diametrically opposite positions on this issue even though both say they are more than keen to normalise relations. New Delhi and Islamabad also held "composite talks" covering different areas of cooperation and expanded the area of such cooperation but the basic objective of changing the fundamental climate remains the same. "Kashmir issue" remains a burning source of their belligerence no matter how much

have eyes on their respective domestic conditions while car rying out the current policies and actions in Kashmir. The caretaker government of prime minister A.B. Vajpayee is approaching the coming September general polls with a desire to return to power but faces stiff competition from the Congress and also to an extent from the United Front comprising the leftists and the centerists. Some analysts feel that when the Vajpayee administration exploded the nuclear devices last year, that helped it domestically since the government was walking a tight rope over its razor-

thin support in parliament and threats by some recalcitrant allies to withdraw the support. This time, if the government ahead of the polls could demonstrate its strong policies and ability to act on firm footing, evidently it is expected to earn tremendous popularity. Moreover, if it is a patriotic issue involving the defence, obviously this will arouse passions and even the opposition parties cannot differ on such actions of the persons in authority. As such, Vajpayee government is definitely be benefitted by this situation. Then, one can raise a question that the situation in "Kargil" cannot be the creation of this Vajpayee government since this is the work of the "infiltrators" or the "Mujahedin" Some analysts say that the involvement of the Air Force could be unwarranted and an attempt to show that it was too serious and the government has acted very firmly.

On the Pakistani side, Nawaz Sharif government - despite its overwhelming support in the national assembly - is bogged down on a number of issues like the increasing confrontation with the press resulting from arrest of newsmen Najam Sethi and others, clamour by human rights groups and others over the maltreatment being meted out in jail to the husband of main opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, and a

bad economy coupled with the deteriorating law and order situation in the premier city Karachi. Some feel that the government may have chosen this time to harp on the "Kashmir" issue to distract the public opinion. In any case, both the governments may have domestic compulsions to engage themselves in the issues that are expected to favour them. Pakistan may even feel that a situation like this will be difficult to be handled by a caretaker government in India and Islamabad may accrue dividends from it.

However, the present clashes are unlikely to turn into a full war since the two nuclear-capable nations cannot really afford to let the incidents go that far since the consequences could be more than disastrous. Both know the nuclear prowess of each other and none can rule out the use of this dangerous weapon in the event of desperation. This is a point that is likely to keep both the warring sides to keep off from turning the clashes into a major conflict. The implications of the current clashes are bad for south Asia where more than one billion people are crammed and most of them are mired in poverty. The "Lahore Declaration" had injected some positive elements in the ties of the two countries and also in the overall political environment of the region. It is desirable that the spirit of the declaration is brought into play to ward off any major crisis so that people of the region as a whole can heave a sigh of relief. After all confrontation and war cannot, be beneficial for them whatever be their intentions and compul-

The writer is Special Correspondent of Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha

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.

Stop harassing us

Sir. Better late than never, I would like to draw the attention of all our conscious citizens to the shameful event that took place at TSC on the Pahela Baisakh of this year (14th April 1999). A group of youth as usual chosen some ladies as their target and thus harassed a number of innocent DU female students. Actually this is not the first time this kind of incident took place. These so-called gentle young people do it on each and every occasion.

Whether its a concert, a fair, a meeting, a programme or a shopping complex — women are always their one and only target. I don't think any women in this country feel safe for a single second at a single place. Previous examples showed that we are not even safe at our own houses, let alone other places. Surprisingly male students didn't seem to be much bothered about this incident. I guess, to them, it's like an amusement that they usually get by teasing

women in the street. No, you really don't need to join the feminist party to protest against these horrifying acts which would lower down your position in the society! You just need to be a human,

which is really rare nowadays. We are warning you that time has changed .you won't be able to do this we are getting prepared with all our forces that you can't even think of.

Shehnaz Shahriar New DOHS, Dhaka, 1207

Unforgivable offence

Sir, It is noticed with great remorse that the highly sophisticated weapons used by NATO could go absolutely out of control so easily. The "accidental" bomb attack by NATO upon the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade on the morning of 8.5.99 was neither acceptable nor forgivable. No matter how the alliance terms this as "highly regrettable", the damage to lives and property should be accountable by NATO and they ought to apologize publicly as well as compensate for the damage caused. What surprises us is that these so-called "Precision Guided Munitions" could be so inaccurate that it makes us wonder whether or not the super-powers stage these war-like dramas merely to test the effectiveness of their

equipment. But how long are we to be used as live lab guineapigs only for their fulfillment? Aren't our lives worth anything? True, history shows that the Nazis carried out the same inhuman tasks long time back. But we were under the impression that what the Nazis did then was barbaric and not to be repeated ever again. Where did we go wrong? The constant killings of Iraqi and Yugoslav civilians remind us of a more advanced Nazis only who use their mouths as weapons. Is that what we expected from the US, who simply use the NATO for their own benefit?

Masroor Ahmed Deepak

Osmani Uddyan

Sir, Osmani Uddyan is at the border of Old and New Dhaka cities separating them by 11000 trees. A wonderful sight to watch. But sorry to say that the trees of the Uddyan will be cut down and it will be replaced by buildings. As Bangladesh is going to host the NAM conference in the year 2001, Bangabandhu Convention Centre and other buildings will be constructed

No doubt it will destroy the beauty of the Uddyan. Plenty of open space and vast land are there in and around the city such as 130 acres of khas land opposite Gulshan Rifle Club, 3.8 acres of land near the PM's office, vast areas at Bijoy Sarani, Bhasantek (Mirpur), khas lands at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in Agargaon and also at Tongi beside the Turag river or at Gazipur near the National park.

I humbly ask Sheikh Hasina to save the 11,000 trees of Osmani Uddayan.

Igbal Ahmed New Eskaton Road Dhaka.

Human follies

Sir, The DS has done well to expose the rent-seeking tendencies of the 'sporting clubs controlling attractive playground sites; viz Abahani field on Satmasjid Rd (desperate to erect shopping lots under a none-essential gallery); and the Dhanmondi ground beside Mirpur Rd and Dhanmondi R/A Rd 8/9, where we see more melas (fair) than sports games (the disease in the cricket field and off-the field is worse!).

Rent-seeking tendency is a human weakness, and the A Zabr politicians in power have to be strict with themselves and their governance the latter has to be in 'public interest', and not based on nepotism or favouritism. The weakness is greater because the indirect and back-door requests come from their own camps; and it is natural to offer 'rewards' and 'bakshish' in some official form for services rendered, for the party or the nation (analyze the FF racket after 29 years).

This is negative or reverse patronisation, so well known to the sycophants. The tendency to remain in the good books of the boss has to be discouraged at any level, high or low. During my service career I used to know many officials who used to drop in to the rooms of their superiors for respectful 'adda', to keep

the relationship well-oiled, for possible future exploitation. This social attitude might have developed from the centuriesold zamindari system which developed in united Bengal during the British period and ear-

The eradication of sycophancy should be well planned, and there should be no gaps for these deceptive bugs and virus to hide and play games of hide and seek. But it is a difficult task for our leaders (political and otherwise), who themselves cannot resist temptation and rent-seeking opportunities, the theory is simple: do not encourage the environment where certain undesirable cultures could thrive. Nip it in the bud, if you have the moral courage.

"The Zulum of the Landlords"

Sir, The above titled letter from Mr Abul M Ahmad on 21 May, 1999 attracted my attention because I am a retired person living in a rented flat at Uttara, Dhaka. For the convenience of the tenants I wish to know the full address of the Rent Control Department and its telephone number in order to avoid any unpleasant situation arising at any time in fu-

It is also important to make fair deals between the houseowners and the tenants in respect of the monthly rent as per the rent control-principles of the government. Some of the tenants at times become the victim of the whims of the houseowners who are said to be the "social menace" because of their link with anti-social elements.

We request the government to make rent-control acts operative and updated to save the tenants and in particular retired persons from the greedy house-owners.

M A Osman Ali Ameer Complex Uttara Sector-7. Dhaka.

Money lenders?

Sir. Most of the NGOs in our country are operating credit programme among the poor women, living in the slum areas. But recently in a workshop, our finance minister told that it the NGOs continue to charge high interest rate, these would turn into rent-seeking institu-

It is sure that our country has already achieved international reputation for the success in the micro-credit programme which benefits poor people, and the government is also extending support to it. So this type of NGOs should not behave like the traditional money lenders.

There should be a legal system to control it.

Mostafa Sohel Dhaka