

Endangered Environment

WITH severe arsenic contamination of ground water, lead pollution of air in the urban areas, fast decimation of wetland and greenery, our environment and, for that matter, our existence is indeed endangered. What's more, there is the looming threat of global warming-induced sea-level rise that would affect low-lying developing countries like ours the most. Indeed, the blame rests squarely on the industrial nations in this regard; for our share in emission of greenhouse gas into the atmosphere is near to nothing. However, we haven't been able to make a difference in areas where we could have done so. Encroachment, and destruction thereby, of natural water body and forests goes unabated. That we have failed to bring about a reversal of the alarming trend has its roots in our collective indifference to environmental issues. Until and unless every citizen is made aware of his or her rights and responsibilities to the environment, the country stands very little chance of survival. That was the key message the speakers and participants at the two-day international conference on environment, that concluded in the capital on Saturday, tried to send across. Also, they put accent on a stronger role from the civil society in this behalf. Admittedly, we have been very slow to react to our environmental imperatives and our actions, tentative and indecisive as they are, have so far failed to make much of an impact. The question, however, remains: how do we go about retrieving the situation?

Certainly, the government won't be able to make much progress, no matter how strict relevant laws and their enforcement are, so long as the citizenry do not actively participate in the process. Towards sensitising and inspiring individuals into participation, the civil society can make a greater impact than the government. Besides, the former can also pressurise the latter into enacting new laws and amending the old ones to meet the need of the hour. Nevertheless, the primary objective of the civil society should be to educate individuals and help them put themselves in an environmental perspective, thereby inducing in them eco-friendly behaviour. The process to save the environment must be bottom-up, not the other way round. When individuals become wary of environmental concerns, it will have a chain reaction, encompassing the community, the nation, the region and eventually the whole world. Politics and bureaucracy, national and international, will then move in steps with the needs of the world population. Environment should receive our utmost attention, for environment and existence are synonymous. Such realisation must dawn on us sooner than later lest we lead ourselves willy-nilly to self-destruction.

Give Them Work

SURVEY findings suggest that serious problems facing the nation are unemployment and an alarming rise in crimes followed by political instability. The survey conducted by an eminent organisation based in Mumbai covered four South Asian countries including Bangladesh. Newspaper reports are so replete with gory stories of crimes — murder, arson, looting, rape etc. — that one does not need a survey to determine that crime is on the top of the list of all the social evils. There has been a steep climb of the unemployment curve both in rural and urban areas of Bangladesh. In the absence of adequate employment opportunities, particularly in rural Bangladesh, a massive migration of unemployed rural youth and agricultural labour to the city has been taking place. And then there is the problem of unemployment of educated youth, skilled and semi-skilled labour. These are the problems that have never been squarely addressed by any government of the country and as a result they have become enormous over time, and almost impossible to solve now. Unless the government goes about the job of creating employment for the vast masses of unemployed youth of the country the situation is bound to deteriorate and no amount of policy intervention at a later stage can improve it.

Since the return of democracy in the country we have been watching with awe the race for power between the leading political parties and a penchant for personal gains at the cost of the well-being of the people. Since liberation no government has adopted any pragmatic policy for either industrialisation or agriculture extension that could generate employment for thousands of educated, skilled and semi-skilled youth of the country. This could ensure them better future and save them from frustration and the horrible prospect of a bleak future.

Unemployment has remained a curse for the younger generations throughout the world; but it needs not be the case if the full potential of micro-enterprises can be realised. It is a pity that the energy, imagination and genius of our young men and women have never been fruitfully utilised to take the country forward. In the new millennium let it be the priority of the government and the private sector to harness the immense prospect of the youth power in the nation-building endeavour.

Stop This

AFTER the shameful episode on the Dhaka University campus, a similar incident sends shivers down our spine. A lady was assaulted reportedly by three motorbike-riders in the city's New Iskaton area on Thursday night. The deplorable incident took place right in front of the victim's house. The offenders also beat up her husband who was accompanying her to Mirpur. There have, however, been two arrests made in this connection but the accused were freed on bail on Friday. The third person involved in this is yet to be arrested. Police, as usual, said they were doing their best but our question is: how dare they commit such an abominable crime? The crime throws an open challenge to law enforcement. Now with our already plummeting law and order, the tendency to tug at ladies' clothes adds one more dimension to robbery.

If we fail to check this savagery well in time, then no woman would be safe from licentious elements moving around the city. If experience is any guide, such criminals could dare the exploits apparently because of their connection with the ruling party. This obviously works against the interest of the ruling party itself — and it must be discouraged. We would expect the ruling party to tighten its grip over the student wing. We expect the evildoers to be deterredly punished. We believe that a combined effort of the government, the ruling party and the law enforcers will stop this once and for all.

THE Indo-Pakistani relations have recently dipped to a new low. A fresh tension has been brewing up between the sub continent's arch rivals since the hijacking of an Indian airliner by a mysterious quartet who after traversing the air space of at least half a dozen countries took it to Taliban-held Kandahar with 160 passengers and crew on board. In absence of any one or any agency taking the responsibility of that daredevil action the needle of suspicion in India instinctively pointed towards Pakistan although the latter, from the beginning of the crisis, did everything to dispel India's misgivings of her by playing a good Samaritan to the hostages. Pakistan supplied fuel to the distressed aircraft, offered medical treatment to the patient and allowed Islamabad to be used as a base for UN humanitarian team apart from generally condemning the incident. Yet India persisted to obliquely refer to Pakistan's complicity in whole hijacking drama.

Later after the rescue of the hostages in exchange of three Kashmiri militants held in Indian custody, the Indian suspicion took the shape of outright allegations against Pakistan who also now joined the brawl. The mutual acrimony and allegations have now been brought to a crescendo and they take an ominous turn with none other than Prime Minister of India appealing to the international community, particularly the United States to declare Pakistan a terrorist state. Earlier Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's Chief Executive hardened his stance on Kashmir and ruled the possibility of a nuclear war on its count. The war of words raged in full fury.

Such strain and tension in relationship are nothing unusual between India and Pak-

The attempt to demonise Pakistan by calling it terrorist state brings to the fore some of the fundamental issues and raises some ugly questions as to the origin of terrorism in Kashmir. It is true that since 1989 an indigenous uprising by the Kashmiris for what they called 'Huryat' (freedom) was later aided by outsiders of many motives and hues but no insurgency could be sustained in Kashmir without the support of the Kashmiris themselves.

istan who fought three wars with each other since 1947 and had constantly been at loggerheads over disputed Indian state of Kashmir. Their armes were fielded more than once to be eyeball to eyeball at each other. Only recently they fought a high altitude war across the line of control in Kargil from where Pakistan had to scale down under American pressure. For the war in Kargil Pakistan was accused of betrayal after Lahore Declaration only months earlier while the Mujahideens, believed to be sponsored by Pakistan, grudgingly climbed down the Kargil mountains after their stunning initial success.

Pakistan's Kargil muddle-up notwithstanding the Indo-Pakistani relation was not totally down to dump. It was still restorable so long Nawaz Sharif distanced himself from the Mujahideens who fought in Kargil and India was prepared to do business with his government. In fact, the subtle moves were underway to put back on rail the stalled Foreign Secretaries level dialogue. But those prospects were rendered null and void with the seizing of power by General Pervez Musharraf who was widely perceived in India as mastermind behind Kargil shake-up. Not only the way the present crisis has been building up will be difficult to defuse, Indian mindset will remain obsessed with the General's 'commando image' vis-a-vis India.

With Musharraf the days of India-bashing and lambasting what Pakistan calls 'Indian hegemony' are back. The Lahore

Back to the Brink

The attempt to demonise Pakistan by calling it terrorist state brings to the fore some of the fundamental issues and raises some ugly questions as to the origin of terrorism in Kashmir. It is true that since 1989 an indigenous uprising by the Kashmiris for what they called 'Huryat' (freedom) was later aided by outsiders of many motives and hues but no insurgency could be sustained in Kashmir without the support of the Kashmiris themselves.

process obviously stands undermined as the new Pakistani leadership has drifted away from a relatively relaxed mode of Indo-Pakistani relationship that briefly existed during the tenure of Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister. In an interview to BBC the chief executive of Pakistan has given short shrift to Lahore process and related agreements. Musharraf made it clear that Pakistan wanted a Kashmir-first solution of bilateral problems and saw little merit in 'two plus six' Foreign Secretary level charade that ac-

between the two countries. However, now after the public appearance in Pakistan of Maulana Masud Azher, one of the militants released by India in hijack drama, and his anti-India pronouncements put the onus of dispensing justice squarely on Pakistan. It will be closely watched by international community how Pakistan maintains her innocence with regard to hijacking and absolute its alleged complicity. At least one country — the United States has asked Pakistan to apprehend and bring

request to make Pakistan a pariah state.

India has been trying the strategem for sometimes past by portraying herself as an innocent victim of international terrorism from across the line of control in Kashmir and repeatedly pointed her accusing finger to Pakistan. India's Kargil war with Pakistan also accentuated a crucial change in South block's attitude towards the US and NATO countries: a search for good will and trust and her disassociation from confrontation. In a clear departure from her traditional policies with regard to the West India started wooing it since the Kargil war. The trend could be evident during the course of shooting down of the Atlantic and debate over India's nuclear doctrine. India's new policy thrust is evidently intended to bring the West in her favour to face Pakistan's protracted proxy war in Kashmir. But despite of India's warming up with the West the latter's response is lukewarm at the best. At least the United States does not seem prepared to offset the region's strategic balance by unduly tilting to one side.

Surprisingly, after the Mujahideen's setback in Kargil war when the L of C is kept under increased vigilance and the valley of Jammu and Kashmir is practically sealed, a stepped-up insurgency has rocked the state as never before. As the guns fell quiet in Kargil the army and paramilitary camps were attacked in a series of intrepid operations in Kashmir. The similar operations have now become almost a daily affair in the state. The Kargil victory might have come handy in India for a national resurgence but the core problem in Kashmir — whether the state will continue to remain a part of Indian union or snap its tenuous link — remains as alive as before.

A jittered authority quickly

put the blame for increased violence in Kashmir on ubiquitous infiltrators from across the border. At the same time the desperate security forces in Kashmir, now totalling seven lac, unleash their own terror to quell the insurgency. The villages are razed to the ground in response to any militant attack in their vicinity. Can the flame of revolt in Kashmir be put down just by declaring some country terrorist? A solution may lie in a dispassionate evaluation of the situation that has now obtained in Kashmir and addressing the issues fundamental to the crisis.

turn the searchlight inwards, to focus on India's real problems, and our rulers' numerous failures. It won't do to malign, demonise, and ridicule Pakistan. That only plays into the hands of Hindutva and turns us blind to our own responsibilities.

True, Pakistan shouldn't be equated with India. The two are not mirror-images of each other. Democracy and secularism are entrenched here in ways they are not in Pakistan. But they are under attack. There are pressures on India to diminish the pathology long characteristic of Pakistan.

These must be resisted. So must the attempt to parody Pakistan as a terrorist, aggressive state and glorify India as an eternally peaceful, harmless, nation. India has also messed around in Sindh and Baluchistan, as has Pakistan in Kashmir and Punjab.

India broke up Pakistan and annexed another country — Sikkim. It has militarily intervened in Sri Lanka and Maldives and bullied other neighbours. India's image is very different from its self-deception. We shouldn't humiliate or punish Pakistan. Wisdom demands reconciliation, dialogue, cooperation. Beggar-thy-neighbour machismo is the road to disaster.

PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

the hijackers to book, if they are in Pakistan.

But branding a neighbour terrorist is perhaps fraught with danger. More so when the neighbouring country is equipped with nuclear arsenal. No nuclear power can afford to keep its nuclear rival in isolation. Understandably there are few takers of India's perception of Pakistan as a terrorist country. The Western countries are rather discreet on the matter and reluctant to be swayed away by India's terror-phobia. During the Kargil conflict they lent diplomatic support to India in vacating aggression by Pakistan-sponsored militants. Now in an anticlimax they seem to have cold-shouldered India's

Post-Hijack Blame Game

Turn the Probe Inwards

Praful Bidwai writes from New Delhi

Are we just wishing Kashmir problem away even after having painfully learned that it won't vanish whether we use brutal force or our best public relations? The time has come to turn the searchlight inwards, to focus on India's real problems, and our rulers' numerous failures. It won't do to malign, demonise, and ridicule Pakistan.

independently, that is a matter to be painstakingly established, not insinuated through speculative argument or guesswork.

Even less uplifting is the spectacle of travel agents rounded up in Mumbai Central, who issued fake passports to the hijackers. The counterfeit ration cards, concocted addresses, and blank school-leaving certificates damn our own officials, not Pakistan. We shouldn't point fingers at other unless we clean up our own act in a transparent, convincing manner.

Here, New Delhi has an abysmal record. It is yet to publish the Henderson-Brooks report on the 1962 war or abide by the 30-year secrecy rule. All recent White Papers have been whitewash jobs, not even resembling their rationale — the fullest official statement of all the facts on a subject. The official reluctance to publish even the "sanitised" Subrahmanyam report on Kargil further confirms this.

It does not stand to reason that Islamabad — estranged from the US, under flak for its support to Islamicist causes, and with its economy near collapse — would want to risk a high-profile hijacking and further antagonise Washington. Although some Pakistani dirty-tricks agency could have acted

BK Subba Rao, to ISRO. Barring the Larkins Brothers case, the government has failed to secure any convictions. It falsely accused Capt Subba Rao of trying to leak India's "nuclear secrets" (in his own PhD thesis) to the US. It had to apologise unconditionally. It must take its claims with a pinch of salt.

However, even more questionable is the government's larger diplomatic agenda: to isolate Pakistan as a "terrorist state", and enter into an exclusive relationship of proximity with the US, symbolised by a Bill Clinton visit. Nothing would please New Delhi more than a Clinton visit which skips Islamabad — the greatest legitimisation of Hindutva.

This BJP agenda will inevitably cause long-term damage to India's relations with other states, especially Pakistan. Hegemony-seeking Washington today represents the ugliest face of global capitalism. Alliance with it will India hostility, not respect or friendship.

Hardly more edifying is our past record on "spy scandals" — from the Samba case, through

tighten security and launch more repression — is proving counter-productive. Even a state as militarily well-organised as Israel could not prevent its own prime minister's assassination. Kashmir needs more than police methods.

So we must pause and ask: Even if we isolate Pakistan, will that really help contain terrorism? Is it realistic to expect the US to be sympathetic to India on the core Kashmir dispute? Are we really sincere about a peaceful, negotiated solution to Kashmir? What have we done to promote it by talking to moderate elements?

Are we just wishing Kashmir problem away even after having painfully learned that it won't vanish whether we use brutal force or our best public relations? The time has come to

To the Editor...

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.

Gratitude to police

Sir. We would like to convey our special thanks and heartfelt gratitude to our policemen for a brilliant help. On the night of 12.01.2000 at 1 a.m., my uncle had a severe heart attack. We were looking for a transport, at least a rickshaw. There was no man, no rickshaw, no baby-taxi or ambulance at Pirebagh, Mirpur. Even we did not have telephone facility to make some arrangements for any transports.

At last we saw a police van passing by. We requested a passing police officer to help us. He cordially listened to us and promptly gave a lift to the hospital. They also helped us with the patient. They did not take any money from us.

We always expect this type of service from our police personnel. If they did not give us this better and faster service, the 80-year-old patient would not able to survive.

We don't remember the policemen's names and designations. But we would like to convey our gratitude to our Police Department.

Akmal Mustafa Tipu Dhaka.

Money for muggers

Sir. What sort of country are we living in, where one gets stabbed to death for not having more than 100 taka for the muggers? The law and order of this country has deteriorated too far. No one is safe here except the politicians.

And the irony is that the politicians were elected to power to save the people of this country — not themselves.

If this is the state of

even though we appreciate the role played by them last year by holding the exam after midnight instead of postponing it — this year in case a hartal is declared on any exam day, they may stick to the schedule without delaying it. It may be difficult — but not impossible — to move around in Dhaka city during hartals. It will be the responsibility of us, the guardians, to teach ourselves to the exam centre with the candidates.

Nazmul Huda Choudhury
Uttara, Dhaka

What's going on at the airport?

Sir. One of my friends, who went to Dhaka from Japan, to celebrate the Eid-ul Fitr with his family had recently encountered a terrible robbery at Zia International Airport. It was about midnight on January 5, 2000, my friend along with his wife and their only son arrived at ZIA, where their family members received them. But, soon after they proceeded towards their microbus standing inside the ZIA's parking area, suddenly a gang of about 7-8 gunmen blocked their way and snatched away US \$2000 and other valuables. I came to know this while calling my friend in Dhaka on the Eid day. He was so disappointed. Well, my friend and his family could luckily avoid any onslaught on their lives.

Everybody knows the alleged involvement of drivers as well as the on-duty law enforcers in such incidents. This has been a blow not only to my friend, but also to thousands of homecoming Bangladeshis staying abroad, who often encounter similar incidents. This is a regular picture at ZIA.

As these exams are conducted internationally, it is not possible to postpone any part of it. Last year, one such exam was held after midnight due to hartal. This year for justified reasons, we parents are very much worried.

Therefore, I earnestly request the political parties to refrain from hartals during the examination period. And I also request the British Council —

Dr. M. Alam
Post-Doctoral Fellow
National Institute of Infectious Diseases
Shinjuku-ku 1-23-1
Tokyo, Japan

OPINION

The Crisis of Democracy

Abul M Ahmad

Our politicians are having a tough time facing the nurturing of democratic culture in the country, as clearly brought out in the column Panorama (DS Dec 26). The issues and implications raised therein have to be responded to publicly by the politicians, to restore their credibility with the tired electorate. This is not a problem created by the citizens, but the latter have the right to intervene and ask the politicians to behave, in the interest of the politicians themselves, and for bringing back a sense of democratic security in the public mind. The experiments are lasting too long in a poor country whose sustaining capacity is limited due to environmental circumstances.

The clever and ad hoc concept of neutral, non-politician, caretaker government to conduct the general elections is a non-starter, because it is a negative solution of no-confidence amongst the politicians themselves. This mechanism is similar to a state of having the cake and eating it too.

Why the constitution has to be changed to accommodate some weakness amongst the political parties? The clever politicians wish to transfer the benefit of the doubt for a short and interim period, and then come back to the field and lose the benefit, and go about their ways of hoodwinking the people. The voters have seen the modus operandi of both the major parties when each was in power, and the verdict is not all palatable for the political leadership.

There are several areas of problems, which did not exist before. On the one hand, there is a lot of sermonising about democracy (first comes the acceptance in principle, then the practice of the precept); while on the other hand there is more breach in practice than in the belief of the concept of democracy. This stage is lasting too long.

If the politicians are not yet ready for democracy, then let the duration of the caretaker government be extended after careful debate (political coalition won't work), to enable the political dust to settle down (to contain political asthma) for the sapling of democracy to