

Physical insecurity of journalists

A blow to free press

TRADITIONALLY, journalists have fended for themselves. But not anymore. This is because the community is divided in the middle. Such a division rules out any perception of a common danger, a unifying force in the face of stunning odds. But what is danger to some may be vicarian pleasure to others that is the underlying reality today. Even so, not all is lost. We are heartened by the sympathy and support that the 11-party leftist alliance demonstrated for the journalist community on Saturday. They formed a human chain to protest attacks on journalists in different parts of the country, thereby spearheading a political reaction to the scribes becoming an endangered species. Some civil society groups have also voiced a grave concern over the aggravating environment for working journalists. But the Opposition has failed to join issues with them. The ruling party, on the other hand, has remained blameworthy by refusing to dissociate itself with the excesses committed by its local warlords against the reporters who had the courage to spill the beans as a call of duty.

The journalist bodies have done very little beyond merely issuing statements of concern and outrage over the incidents. These carried very little conviction, firstly because the representative bodies are themselves split entities, and secondly because their professional views are coloured by partisan and political myopia. In other words, politics got the better of their best judgement.

But does it mean though that the ruling party will take advantage of the disunity in the journalistic ranks and turn a blind eye to some of its constituents' maltreatment of news-men? On the contrary, we think it is a basic responsibility of the state as represented by the government of the day that it goes all-out to protect, preserve and promote the rights of the journalists who constitute the fourth estate. Constitutionally, freedom of speech and expression, which for all practical purposes the free press epitomises, is a fundamental pillar of democracy. But the Prime Minister's coinage of 'media-terrorism' to explain away the incidents and her suspicion about the *bona fides* of the journalists 'who might not have had any accreditation cards' could not have helped matters at all.

That press freedom is central to good governance is a universally accepted fact today. Only a short-sighted political leader can overlook it.

First blind person on Mt Everest

Where there is a will there is a way

EVER there was an example of triumph in the face of adversity, this is it. The 32-year-old blind mountain climber who has scaled Mt Everest, has given us a rare inspiration. Erik Weihenmayer of Colorado has become the first blind person to conquer Mt Everest, the highest peak in the world.

Since a degenerative eye disease afflicted him at the age of 13, Weihenmayer has lived in a dark world. But clearly, his spirit could not be extinguished. It shone so brightly that this blind man dreamed of reaching heights that have daunted and defeated others better endowed than he. Over the years, the 29,029-foot peak has claimed many casualties, killing and maiming ambitious climbers with youth and all their faculties on their side.

So how did Weihenmayer do it? His special tools were a pair of poles that enabled him to probe the terrain, following another climber who went before him. But there was more to his feat than the use of tools or mastery of the technique of climbing.

Weihenmayer had the courage to dream of achieving that which many 'normal' climbers would regard as daunting and certainly one with a handicap such as blindness would regard as impossible. He believed that he could do it. He possessed an indomitable spirit that would not be vanquished.

To translate ambitions and aims into reality is the quest of all humanity. But how many actually dare to wish for the impossible and then, to persist against odds to get their wish? How many remain committed to their goals, when obstacles appear to thwart them? Weihenmayer's conquest of Mt Everest must send us all the message that limitations can be overcome, no matter how impossible they might seem to be. It is this belief that must inspire us. It is this example that we salute today.

Requiem for Middle East peace process



BRIG (RTD) M ABDUL HAFIZ

IN middle-east today there is no more the talk of peace either of Oslo brand or an alternative of any variety. The West Bank and Gaza, the epicentre of the conflict in the region is now in flame. So the prevailing mood is obviously that of fire-fighting to put down this flame first. The concerned quarters are pushing hard for a diplomatic resolution to the latest series of violences that have left more them 500 dead, mostly Palestinians since September, 28 last year. There are however few signs that the fast escalating conflict can be contained so easily. As the eight moths old Al-Aqsa Intifada keeps raging in full fury the increasing Israeli reprisals demonstrate their determination to quell the uprising with sheer force. In the meantime Israel has brought into action weapons as deadly and warlike as missiles, helicopter gunships and combat-aircraft with which she has been routinely raiding the official Palestinian targets. With none to stand between them neither the United States, now obsessed with its missile defence programme, nor the regional Arab leaders as divided as ever there exists no trace of an effort to bring back peace. Neither is there a pretension for it with any of the contenders. For all practical pur-

pose the Oslo process is long dead with no other peace initiative taking its place. The beginning of the end of the process inevitably came almost a year ago when President Bill Clinton, in search of a legacy during his last year in office, made in haste a failed attempt at reaching a final status agreement or something preparatory to it between the Palestinians and Israel at Camp David in July 2000. The Palestinians were

was signed in 1993. New settlements were built in the West Bank and Gaza under both Labour and Likud Party governments in contravention of international law and Oslo prohibitions. Some 200,000 Jewish settlers lived in 200 settlements in West Bank and Gaza strip. An additional 130,000 Jewish Israelis also resided in East Jerusalem. Not one settler or settlement had been removed in seven years of peace process.

graphic way the inconsistency and contradictions inherent in Oslo process. It clearly showed that the peace envisioned by the Palestinians was not the peace Israel was prepared to offer. The maximum Israel was prepared to compromise on various issues did not satisfy even the minimum expectations of the Palestinians. For example, Israel was neither prepared to acknowledge the Palestinian's right to return nor did it agree to remove

problem of Israel's proposed annexation of the 10 per cent of West Bank land with which Israel wanted to cut West Bank into three separate cantons, each completely surrounded by areas of Israeli control. For the Palestinians, the proposal to turn the West Bank, which is only 20 per cent of pre-1948 Palestine, into a series of 'Bantustans' was unacceptable and it could not be the basis of a viable state. Even if the Palestinians were in doubts before

support for Israel where he was arguably the most admired US President since Harry S Truman. When the Camp David finally failed Clinton put all the blame squarely on Arafat. Soon after the summit, in an appearance on Israeli television Clinton was more explicit about blaming the Palestinians and threatening to move the US embassy from Telaviv to Jerusalem if an agreement was not concluded by next fall. This totally broke the mutual confidence built up over the years between the US and Palestinians and latter now openly accused the US of taking Israel's side.

The US devoted extraordinary energy and resources to the peace process but the working assumptions that guided American interlocutors tarnished the image of the US as an honest broker from the beginning. At the centre of the credibility problem with the Arabs was President Clinton himself who had been in the view of many Israeli observers, the most pro-Israeli US President in the history. His predication for Israeli viewpoints was blatant on the question of Jerusalem the one on which the negotiation broke off.

After the failure of Camp David II during the late July 2000, there was hardly anything left of Oslo process. A deep acrimony soon filled in the entire political and diplomatic space. A series of accusation and counter accusation followed. A seething anger and despair on either side awaited only a spark to be ignited into a flame. Ariel Sharon's provocative September 28 visit to Haram-al-Sharif just provided that spark. As a result the West Bank is burning and so is the dream of a Palestine. Can another Oslo turn that dream into a reality!

PERSPECTIVES

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persuaded to go to Camp David Summit already frustrated. Because after seven years of Oslo Accords and so many subsequent agreements (Oslo I, Gaza-Jericho, Oslo II, Hebron, Wye River) Palestinians still controlled only 13 per cent of West Bank and Gaza and none of East Jerusalem and that too with insult and ignominy. For example, for the benefit of 400 Jewish settlers living in downtown Hebron 20,000 Palestinians in nearby neighbourhood were kept under constant and harsh military occupation. For 5000 Jewish settlers, Israel still controlled one third of the Gaza strip at the expense of more than one million Palestinian living there.

This is not all. The expansion of settlements and new constructions continued throughout the period since the Declaration of Principles

With such 'gains' of the peace process the Palestinians had few incentive to go Camp David. Just before the summit Arafat's approval rating among the Palestinians dropped to miserable 31 per cent. With that standing among his disillusioned people Arafat had to negotiate the most crucial deal of the peace process. It was extremely difficult task when the ordinary Palestinians were still believing that the peace would lead to the removal of illegal Israeli settlements, a recognition of the right of return for millions of Palestinian refugees and a complete withdrawal by Israel to the 1967 border according to the UNSC resolution numbers 242 and 338. For Arafat it was a litmus test of sorts.

As it was feared Camp David II brought out for the first time in most

the Jewish settlements from West Bank and Gaza strip. On Jerusalem, even after the Palestinians agreed to cede the Jewish Quarter and Western Wall which were under Arab control till 1967 to Israel, the latter still insisted on retaining its sovereignty also over Haram-al-Sharif temple mount area of Jerusalem. For years, Palestinian public opinion polls had shown that, given a choice between an agreement that gave the Palestinians a state without East Jerusalem and no agreement at all, the vast majority of Palestinians would choose the latter. By disregarding this emotion Arafat went far beyond the limit and wanted only the control of Haram-al-Sharif. Arafat, at this point, saw no room for compromise and the summit collapsed.

Equally complex had been the

the summit about US-Israeli intentions, the Camp David II clearly exposed their game plan to the Palestinian. By rejecting Israeli proposal backed by the US Arafat only echoed the feelings of the vast majority of the Palestinians.

The Palestinians were not in much illusion about Bill Clinton's mediation even earlier. When he was elected President in 1992 Clinton was seen by most Arabs especially the Palestinians as Israel's most ardent supporter because of his campaign pronouncements and the overwhelming support he had received from the Jewish voters. Although Clinton moved close also to the Palestinians (Clinton received Arafat twenty-two times in the White House) as the Oslo process progressed it was never at the expense of Clinton's

ARDESHIR COWASJEE

writes from Karachi

HERE is a world of difference between the Code Napoleon and the Code Naqvi, which is soon to fall upon us. Whereas General Napoleon Bonaparte did proclaim that his code was indestructible, he was not so presumptuous as to maintain it was immutable, unchangeable. But General Tanvir Naqvi and his co-generals insist that the laws they intend to enforce will forever remain in the form in which they are now presented to this country.

The Code Napoleon, officially known as the Code Civil des Français, became the law of France in 1804 and remains extant to this day, with revisions. France is one of the great countries and has learnt how to live with the world. It is pragmatic, able to smell out rats, corrupt prime ministers and their corrupt spouses, and crooked admirals of countries with which it does business. It comfortably relieves the governments of such countries of much money and where necessary bribes with kickbacks, sells its submarines, and then decorates the admirals who were so friendly and cooperative.

It is not so much the system or the laws which matter it is the men who administer the system and implement the laws. Our province of Sindh can boast of having had a few competent men who have done their best to effectively govern.

The oldest of such men to come to mind is Astad Gorwala, a Parsi of Bombay, an officer of the Indian Civil Service, who spent most of his career in Sindh administering the province prior to partition. He was incorruptible, a man of the people,

sought out by each district. When he retired he went back to Bombay and became a pamphleteer, constantly opposing the corrupt and the inefficient administrators of the government.

I hold a copy of his pamphlet, 'Opinion,' of August 28 1979. On top of the front page I read, "Weekly Copy, Paisas 5, Annual Subscription Rs.2." The page opens up, "Since independence, presidents of India have been scholars, gentle-

steady rise up the hierarchy. When, at the end of 1988, Benazir Bhutto embarked upon her democratic adventure, she appointed him chief secretary of Sindh. He was of course given orders by husband Asif, which he tended to ignore. This was not to the liking of Benazir, who called him, told him very firmly that he had upset her husband, and that "when my husband speaks you must take it that the prime minister speaks."

servant Abdul Karim Lodhi. His help was sought to instigate Benazir Bhutto's election as president of the Oxford Union, as had been ordered by her father. He refused to bend, or to involve himself in the unorthodox action required of him, and, ZAB following form, ordered his dismissal. He was reinstated by Zia and was later selected by daughter Benazir to follow Idris as her chief secretary in Sindh.

During Lodhi's tenure, Zubair

He wrote incessantly against Indira Gandhi and her emergency. But when she closed down many a newspaper and arrested and jailed many an editor, she gave special instructions that neither Gorwala nor his pamphlet was to be touched. And, when Gorwala lay ill and dying, Indira took the trouble to call on him at his Ridge Road home, his publishing house.

men and scholars, politicians, even clowns arousing the laughter of Indians at least. Now we have a trickster as president... Why all this trickery, oh Trickster Niliam Sanjiva Reddy? You, from the exalted Rashtrapati Bhawan, are not likely to make a reply, so we must make do with our own humble speculations."

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Now to administrators of Sindh who people still remember. We start with Kunwar Idris, district magistrate and collector of Karachi in the late 1960s and early 1970s, starting his

He survived with the PPP government until the end of 1989 when he had to decide between either taking action according to the dictates of his conscience or "responding positively, without question, to the party programme and its democratic principles," the party and its leader having swum through "rivers of blood" to get where they were. His choice displeased Benazir and he was shunted into a siding to head Bankers Equity.

Idris retired honorably, is now a member of the private sector, and writes a weekly column which is printed besides mine each Sunday in the *Dawn*. As can be judged from his writings, he is highly skeptical of the Code Naqvi, with good reason, and its general might do well to have a talk with him.

During the first half of the 1970s, ZAB's government found in London, happily posted in our High Commission as economic counselor, civil

Kidwai was secretary of the provincial transport ministry. One fine day Zubair and the managing-director of the Karachi Transport Corporation who had been summoned to his office were physically threatened by their minister, the PPP stalwart Manzoor Wassan. The minister, having failed to gain his secretary's acquiescence in wrongdoing through purely verbal means, thought he could do so at gunpoint, using his armed guards.

The incident was obviously reported to the chief secretary who wrote to his chief minister, Aftab Shahban Mirani, asking him to immediately issue orders to his ministers and other party members instructing them "that no one shall cause firearms or any other weapons to be carried into the office rooms. If anybody does so, from now onwards, Sir, with due respect, one will have to order the physical removal from the secretariat of both

the minister and his companions bearing arms. The government has provided adequate police security in the secretariat. If that is not considered enough by anybody, it cannot be supplemented by ruffians Now, reverting to the ugly incident, Sir, it so happens that both the affected officers have a known reputation for uprightness, competence and integrity. One wonders if anything similar can be used to describe the errant minister Mr

Manzoor Wassan should personally apologize to both officers, preferably in the presence of his private secretary and the two guards (of course, minus their weapons).....

Lodhi survived Benazir. Then came Jam Sadiq Ali as chief minister of the Jatoi caretaker government who one day swore that for as long as he was CM of Sindh, Lodhi would be his CS. Two days later, Lodhi was removed and installed as Head of State Life.

Another strong officer, Saeed Mehdi, was sent to Sindh as chief secretary at the start of Nawaz Sharif's second round. He was humane, he helped people. Firm, incorruptible, he stood up well to the bullying tactics of his chief minister, the corrupt (now absconding) Liaquat Jatoi. Jatoi did his best but could not manage to get rid of him as Mehdi had gained the trust of his boss Nawaz. To Mehdi's misfortune, he was so trusted by Nawaz that he

took him away from Sindh and posted him as his principal secretary in Islamabad. He remained as such until October 12, 1999, when he was arrested along with his boss from the prime minister's mansion.

Nawaz has since hit the jackpot and languishes in Saudi Arabia, but Mehdi remains in jail in Pakistan, a forgotten man. It is time someone woke up to his existence. It is time for the chief executive to pass judgment on his sins or crimes, give him bail, and move him over to house arrest. No man who has served with or under Mehdi speaks ill of him.

When Mehdi so unluckily left Karachi, his replacement was Zubair Kidwai. He lasted with Liaquat Jatoi for eight months and was then moved to federal government. When General Pervez Musharraf took over, Kidwai was brought back as chief secretary and again managed to last a mere eight months with the military government before being again shifted to Islamabad and rewarded with the post of secretary to the ministry of religious affairs from where he will soon retire.

General Tanvir Naqvi should remember that the system he is setting up must have checks and balances galore as it will be operated by corrupt, venal, inept men, which is all that elections can now throw up. Men such as the four officers I have mentioned can well be used to help 'restructure', to help in the grassroots devolution process, to help set up the Code Naqvi so that it too may last for two centuries and more.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.

THIS PHOTORIAL HAS BEEN SENT BY AZIZ AMIRUL FROM UTTARA. WE WOULD LIKE MORE CONTRIBUTIONS FROM OUR READERS. PLEASE SEND US YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS FOR PHOTORIAL.

Negligence at its best!

These costly electricity transformers are lying under the open sky, unnoticed for several months, being affected by all kinds of inclement weather. When the whole country is under the grip of a severe power shortage, this valuable equipment lies exposed to damage. Once again this demonstrates the insensible and careless attitude of public departments. The authorities must preserve public property and stop this negligence now.

Tribal homes torched

I was very alarmed to read J. B. Larma's statement ("Vested quarters & settlers out to scuttle accord", May26) that 45 tribal homes were torched last week in the presence of the Bangladesh Army..

Sadly, our country is so undemocratic and so poorly governed that such atrocities are not uncommon. But my question is why don't we hear about these shocking events unless someone like J. B. Larma makes a statement to the press?

Surely each major newspaper has a CHT correspondent. It is the responsibility of the journalists to alert general public of such acts immediately so that those who are responsible can be held accountable.

It would be really great if your newspaper prints a regular column on events of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Zeeshan Hasan
Dhanmondi, Dhaka, on e-mail

Foreigners in India

On May 24, a ridiculous advertisement appeared in some local dailies of Delhi about which your esteemed readers ought to know and must raise their voices against it.

The advertisement issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (Foreigners Division) reads thus: "This is for the information of general public that as per the Foreigners (Report to Police) Order, 1971, made under the Foreigners Act, 1946, every holder of passport or other person shall report to

the officer-in-charge of the nearest police station the arrival or presence in his household or in any premises occupied by him or under his control of any foreigner, if he knows or has reasons to believe that he is a foreigner. Non-compliance of this order would attract punitive action under the Foreigners Act, 1946, i.e. imprisonment up to a period of five years or with fine or both."

Foreign countries may look upon India as one of the most liberal and democratic countries but its citizens will not accept that view if they are branded criminals for allowing foreigners into their homes. This ridiculous advertisement or government order does not even specify how long a foreigner must stay at a given location before the police must be informed.

Need Indians report to the police even about casual visits by foreigners to their homes, about a cup of tea or meals they have shared with them?

The Ministry of Home Affairs must issue a press note clarifying such vital questions that arise in the minds of hospitable and law-abiding people of India.

Omar Luther King
Shillong, India, on e-mail

Don't hit local users

The submission of 'lowering the rate for local, NWD, ISD calls' proposal of BTB to the Ministry of Finance took me and other computer science/engineering students as well

absolutely by surprise

This shocking news was published on the very next day of the 'World Telecommunication Day'. The theme of this day was "The Internet: challenges, opportunities and prospects" and all who saw BTV on that day must have noticed that the Minister of Post & Telecommunications and the Chairman of BTB told the viewers that they are trying to increase the number of internet users throughout the country. BTB is also modernising its transmission system by installing high capacity microwave and optical fibre known as submarine cable which goes under the Bay of Bengal.

It is a very good news that BTB has intended to reduce local, NWD and ISD rate. They have decided to introduce time-based rate on local calls to cover revenue loss. But it is an absolutely detrimental and destructive decision for the Internet sector, which has started flourishing and has much prospect and also the possibility of earning foreign currency. This will simply destroy the computer sector which has already been announced a 'thrust' sector by our prime minister.

As for revenue loss of the government, it depends mostly on the intention of the BTB. If the BTB officials wish, they can reduce it to its minimum by impeding unauthorised and illegal use of phone lines, by creating accountability inside the BTB and by increasing the morale of the BTB employees.

Internet is the back bone of the computer sector. It doesn't require

much intelligence to understand this, but our 'great (!) policy makers seem to ignore it. I strongly oppose this dual role of Post & Telecommunication Ministry and BTB and request all Internet users to stand beside me and support me on this issue.

Abu Hena Mostafa Huda
Dhanmondi, Dhaka, on e-mail

US\$ 7 billion or Tk 35,000 crore is needed for increasing the telephone density in the country to four per cent within the current decade. This was revealed in a seminar in the private sector (BSS report, April 22).

What has been done by the two democratic regimes during the last ten years? Why has there been this go-slow policy?

Why are the BTB and the Telecommunication Ministry silent about it and why are they over-publicising the micro conversion project like conversion of district telephone exchanges from analogue to digital?

The main telephone sector (the outdated fixed line system) is not being released from the clutches of the public sector for investment and development by the private sector. It is obvious that foreign and international investors are hesitant to finance the projects under government control. The name of Worldtel came up in the press sometime ago, as also the outdated Japanese Handphone system, but it is all quiet before the general elections.

Why is the government being so harsh to the middle class, charging

Tk 20,000 per new telephone line as installation charges? Why is this rate the highest on the world?

The prime minister talks about every topic, but hardly pays any serious attention to the IT and telecom.

Alif Zabr
Dhaka

Towards Kashmir

It is indeed very good news that after almost 52 years of occupation, the Indian government has finally realised that there is no alternative to tripartite talks involving Kashmir, Pakistan and India.

For 50 years, India and Pakistan have fought with each other, they have fought three wars, suffered tremendous losses in terms of men, material and money without any success for both parties except disgrace and pain. All the fighting and suffering are due to one reason, Kashmir. The people of Kashmir neither want India nor Pakistan but independence.

We, the people of Bangladesh, are hopeful that with the Indian government's readiness to talk to Pakistan, the South Asian people can achieve a permanent breakthrough on the Kashmir dispute.

Sohail Ahmad
Massachusetts, USA, on e-mail