

SAARC pledges to fight terror and poverty

Meet the commitments with unflinching determination

SAARC has pledged to eradicate poverty and terrorism at the end of the Kathmandu summit. Given the realities of the region these are two of the most apt objectives. South Asia has been pushed to the brink of near-destruction by what has been termed as terrorist actions. Meanwhile, the internal compulsions that fuel such extreme actions could be rooted in the inability of the existing state management structure to eradicate poverty. It also reflects on the failure to jettison the historical baggage of mutual distrust. Both issues need specific attention and one will probably lead to the resolution of other.

In South Asia, what is called terrorism in contemporary language also happens to be cross border linked in almost all the cases. This kind of making the neighbour's life tough attitude appears to have a lot of support from the power elite, who set the agenda, decide actions and finally take pledges as well. The record is not worth anything to be proud of and the casualty in this involvement has been poverty eradication in the ultimate analysis. People are becoming poorer and losing interest in the state because all that the states are in effect delivering is a vicious poverty cycle feeding on military overspending.

It's within the might of the South Asian states to handle their problems. It's easier to tackle terror than poverty eradication but that's where the motivation is poor. In case of Kashmir, the problem has become a political tool. Although both sides know that no military solution is possible, hostilities remain. This is because internal politics has been constructed on the basis of hard line positions and effectively sold to their own people. The governments have now become prisoner of their own rhetoric and can't work towards peace.

Poverty eradication can hardly compete with the aphrodisiac power of war mongering. Chances of conflict and terror are therefore more than that of poverty reduction. Unfortunately, the poor are not in power in the SAARC zone, the world's poorest. And priorities appear to be set by sources with no serious stake in poverty reduction.

Till that happens, no matter what the SAARC pledges, we may expect to see more of terror and poverty. However, there is nothing to prevent us from welcoming it and wishing that it happens.

Duty levied on imported milk as luxury item

Need to have a domestic supply system in place

DUTY has been imposed on a number of imported items including powdered milk as 'luxuries'. Since consumption of milk is considered essential for most human beings, especially children, one may be hard pressed to explain milk as a luxury. This becomes all the more difficult because alternate sources of milk supply are barely there in Bangladesh.

The immediate effects are clear. Shortage of supply due to price rise plus additional increases due to currency devaluation. It will also encourage cross-border supply of Indian milk products without any quality control and a host of other difficulties will emerge all of which together will make milk less easy to buy.

The government has, however, argued that the price rise will encourage local dairy industry. One hopes that is a serious policy intent because the objective is to increase the supply of a critical product like milk. However, till date this hasn't happened. Imposing tax on import is a very small part of the solution.

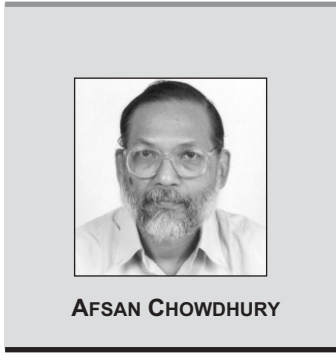
Powdered milk is certainly not all good news. Children under two years are not supposed to have anything other than mother's milk and the powdered milk and their fancy adverts have often kept children and mother's milk apart. If the practice of giving breast milk to young children increases due to price rise of powdered milk, this will be good news.

But there are other children, too and most, in the absence of an organised supply of fresh milk, as in India, have turned to powdered milk. As price increases, children on the economic borders may be denied milk or given in a very diluted form and that is wrong.

However, instead of arguing for lowering the price, it's more sensible to argue for an organized growth of the dairy industry. India's Amul co-operative is a global legend of success in this area. Not only is this the largest enterprise of its kind but a fully public sector one too. Bangladesh can learn a lot from this sterling example.

Instead of just being price regulators and currency managers, the government must realise that pro-active governance means making things happen. That's what the people expect and need. Make the milk industry grow rather than just play with the prices.

Just old-fashioned cricket memories



AFSAN CHOWDHURY

THEY are just memories and nothing more. In fact, they are rapidly fading. The first casualty is of course names but thank God events are still not gone. I remember going to watch the West-Indies Pakistan test match in 1958. My father used to work for the National Bank of Pakistan and they as ticket vendors had a special enclosure at the Dhaka stadium. It was my first exposure to festivities in a public venue. It was a safe, violence free time and we as kids were thrilled to have all the goodies that came with the game. There were caps, flipper books which if you flipped quickly, you could see a player in motion, hitting or bowling. There were magazines with autobio of the stars. Chewing gum wrappers on the stars on the pack. My older brothers understood the game but I probably wasn't old enough to. But I enjoyed the game, the atmosphere, being allowed to go out with the elders. My one cricket memory is of the legendary West Indian pacer Wesley Hall taking a long long walk back and come running to send a ball of fire down the pitch. He was black and his teeth were white when he smiled at children seeking autographs.

TWO days after the match was over the Principal of our school Mrs. Willes of Willes Little Flower School which still exists -- came and took us upstairs to meet a special person. It was F.C. "Gary" Alexander, the wicket keeper Captain of the West

Indies team. He took my exercise book and flipped the pages reading aloud. He saw the poem we were learning and laughed happily. He had learnt the same poem when in school. We connected. Then he signed his name. I kept that book for years till time and shifting addresses stole it. Alexander was a white man in the Caribbean team. Soon Australia would take all white players away and the Caribbean teams would become the hell raisers they are famed for, which is now a bit of a

Fazal came rushing and bowled and bowled Harvey out. I remember that magical moment when icons take birth. The last I saw of him was in a sweater with a crowd in front if the dressing room shouting, "Pakistan Zindabad". There was no money for playing cricket then. One got paid in "zindabads."

Sports have always been a substitute for war and war has always been a metaphor for patriotism. Fazal was a Pakistani who bowled Pakistan to victory during

of Surrey. I still do.

ONE day my father returned home from office carrying an autograph book in his hand. He had all the Hanif brothers' signature in it. Apparently, a friend as a gift gave this to him. At least two brothers worked in the bank. It was like getting a century when you are on a test debut. There can be no bigger prize for a fan I guess. This book survived till 1971 when the flames of that year swallowed so much including priceless

from Karachi or the Punjab. Two names were well known at the test level. There was a Eurasian Duncan Sharpe who was very good and his 56 against Australia in a Karachi test was a major innings. He later migrated to Australia and after a spell of league matches coached there too. Another player was Antao D'souza, who sent down fast balls. He was a Goanese and had come to Karachi after India took over the Portuguese colony of Goa. There was a Goa colony in Karachi and

Sachin, Azhar and others. Azhar's wife Sangeeta sat with the cup while others jostled with baggage from the conveyor belt. We all huddled there. My bag came, Sachin's bag came. We both picked it up, almost at the same time. That was real history. Sachin and I picked our bag from the same baggage belt. That's pretty close to opening the innings together, don't you think?

COUPLE of years back I was in Sri Lanka and three teams stayed at the same hotel. Pakistan, Australia and Sri Lanka. I sat at the table next to Inzamam's family and had breakfast, Wasim aligned from the lift and smiled at me -- and a few others -- and late at night saw the younger Pakistanis go out with a slightly sheepish look. I saw Chaminda Vaas in shorts running -- what muscular legs -- and the Australians work out in the gym with grim commitment. But violence has driven the crowds away from the field in Sri Lanka and all one sees are crowds in front of the TV sets. Somebody should deconstruct what that means to the nature of the game. You play for a small crowd but are under greater scrutiny.

SHALL we ever find a finer moment than when we became the ICC Champions? I remember the weeping crowd, the weeping individuals. We had won. We rarely win in anything so cricket had become the metaphor for life. For most people, it's half war and half fun, for us it's everything. That's why it's so hard on others and us. But as one letter writer has written, let's pay some attention to kabaddi too. As the sports chief of The Daily Star said, it's like the Royal Bengal tiger. The national sports too is facing extinction. Cricket yes but kabaddi too.

Meanwhile, it's time for drinks and hurrah.

Afsan Chowdhury is a Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART

Shall we ever find a finer moment than when we became the ICC Champions? I remember the weeping crowd, the weeping individuals. We had won. We rarely win in anything so cricket had become the metaphor for life. For most people, it's half war and half fun, for us it's everything. That's why it's so hard on others and us. But as one letter writer has written, let's pay some attention to kabaddi too.

memory. In the sixties, a cricket team meant the calypso kings.

I was born in Tikatuly of Hathkola and I find that most people remember the cricket team and the soccer team of that neighbourhood. Most players were serious about the game and even as a child, I remember cricket conversations. Some of the players went on to play league cricket and many became established in their own world. That included two performing artists. Bulbul Ahmed and Aly Zaker both played I think, though not necessarily with equal zest. Aly Zaker or our Chatlu mama still is in cricket providing commentary and occasional wisdom on TV. My earliest memories seem to have a foot in cricket.

I learnt the word "footwork" when the Australians came to play in Dhaka. If memory serves, Pakistan won a famous victory and I remember that duel which Pakistan's star Fazal Mahmood had with Neil Harvey the Australian bat. At 96, Fazal took a new ball. He showed it to the gallery, we all cheered. Neil bowed to him or something and then

the first England tour at Oval. He was everyone's post-colonial hero. He had humbled mother England.

But our real hero was Hanif Muhammed, the "little master". He was the wizard, the king. We collected everything we got about him for our scrapbook. He came from a family of batsmen and all had probably played in test matches. There was Rais, Wazir, Mushtaque, Hanif and Sadiq and Shoaib and others, sons and brothers, some names of which escape now. In Karachi, when we lived there in 1963-64, we went to see their residence in Garden Road. I don't think I ever did that for anyone.

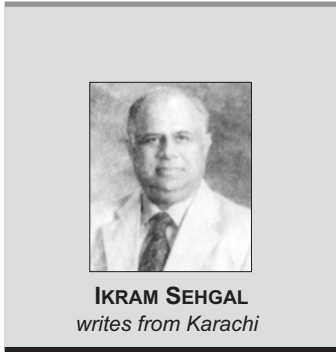
England came to play with Pakistan in Dhaka and Hanif scored a century. It was a second in a row. I remember watching Ken Barrington play for England. He was hugely popular with the crowd. He would bounce the ball like a tennis ball and we would roll in our hard chairs and laugh. Tom Graveny, Tiltmus, Snow, Pullar, Barber and so many other English names. Barrington played for Surrey. We all became followers

and useless possessions. Now the memory has become a substitute for that autograph book. Now it can never be lost.

MY last three years in school was in Shaheen School which was real heavy in sports no matter how bad we were individually. One day it was announced that there was going to be a cricket clinic. It was going to be conducted by Mr Mushtaque. We all knew who he was. He was Hanif Mohd.'s coach. We all took lessons. So here I am who was taught how to use a backfoot by no less a soul than Hanif's coach. Even I am impressed. He was a fast forlorn, managing to make a life by coaching enthusiastic schoolboys dreaming to be Hanif. He barely made a living.

CRICKET became part of the nationalist movement too. The East Pakistan Cricket Control Board XI played against Karachi XI and we also thought that there would be a day when Bengali players would play in the national team. There was hope of course. Not all players were

Of this and that



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

IN the past year we have lived through a historical watershed. First, Agra was an illusion created by the magnificence of the Taj Mahal, India never really wanted to discuss Kashmir seriously. The whole Agra exercise was an Indian drama meant to show to the world that as an emerging regional power with potential to be part of the second string of Superpowers Club (the US on the top only a club of one) comprising Russia, China, UK and France, India was serious about peace and stability in the region, and ready to discuss contentious issues.

While a horrific tragedy for the US, Sep 11 was somewhat of a Godsent to Pakistan. First of all it rid us of the Taliban that we were nurturing as a yoke around our image in the world. Next it disabused us as to how much Afghans love Pakistan, they hunted down and killed like animals those poor misguided creatures who had gone to Afghanistan mostly on the strength of their religious leaders' clarion calls that Islam was in danger. For two decades we have played host to three million ungrateful Afghan refugees, other than being an

economic burden on us, they are the main cause of the breakdown of not only law and order but the erosion of the fabric of our society. The likes of Riaz Basra, etc took open refuge in Afghanistan and the Taliban thumbed their nose at us when we asked for their extradition. However, let us look at the bright side, the religious parties were found to have only limited street power, Musharraf was vindicated in taking the calculated risks of joining the Coalition irrespective of the fact that US

future in permitting any deviations and rank aberrations.

If Sep 11 had not happened, we would have been close to a default. With aid flowing in, with debt rescheduling and with the "Hundi" system under virtual eradication in the world because of the nexus between money-laundering and terrorism, the economy was on the way to stability. Even though export orders dried up, the lifting of sanctions, increased quotas, trade incentives, etc meant that there was

President Bush had made him an offer he couldn't refuse. With the religious parties exposed as having feet of clay, their nuisance value needs to be eliminated on a permanent basis by simply banning them. The same must apply to ethnic parties, it is anathema to the ideology of the country to have these fringe elements take part of the population off on a tangent from what should be a common national goal for their own motives. Will the west permit such extremist religious or ethnic parties to take part in the electoral process? Only those parties should be allowed who confirm their commitment to the ideology of the nation, there is no

light at the end of the economic tunnel. Even though the present economic team are far from being economic Einsteins, they are honest and more importantly, not only are they lucky, they have a very lucky leader. Look what a mess the IMF has made out of Argentina, three Presidents in two weeks and a currency change has still not stopped the economic meltdown. Fortunately for our economists, our parallel black economy, the unregulated sector, keeps us afloat, otherwise with the country awash with weapons, anarchy let loose in Pakistan would have different ramifications than in Argentina, in Pakistan stone-throwing and car-

burning is kindergarten stuff. The bright side is the State Bank of Pakistan, small-in-size Ishrat Hussain is a giant on the economic map of Pakistan. He has continued the resurrection of the nationalized commercial banks (NCBs) even though I personally think his patience with some Heads of NCBs and senior banking executives is overdone. There is method in his madness as he has shown in Allied Bank, even though corrupt people like Effendi who were the actual

Well into the third year of the military regime, the problem of deep rot in the system has been identified mostly but not eradicated, the client-patron relationship that derails fairplay and justice contrives to survive, and well. This client-patron relationship is at the very heart of all nepotism, favouritism and corruption. No system can be reformed without breaking its evil shackles. And by the look of it, since this sincere and honest regime has itself become a victim of this virus, how can it ever be eliminated?

bagmen for people like Usmani and Jauhar still manage to live in clover on Bank's salaries. However, we have not done much in the matter of revenue collection and unless that is done no amount of brilliance, honesty, dedication, etc is going to change the economy in a hundred years. The principle of taxation is (1) make the rules simple and (2) decentralize collection as much as possible. Unless Gen Musharraf appoints a full-time Revenue Minister, and puts CBR directly under the charge of a Special Task Force, no amount of reforms is going to increase the flow of revenues. At present, we collect only about 30 per cent of the revenues that should

accrue to us. It is estimated that at cost of 10 per cent to the taxpayer, which goes into the pocket of our corrupt revenue collecting staff, 70 per cent is lost to the State. Even if we were to increase the quantum of collection to 50 per cent, there would be a sea change in Pakistan's economic fortunes. That is this military regime's weak point.

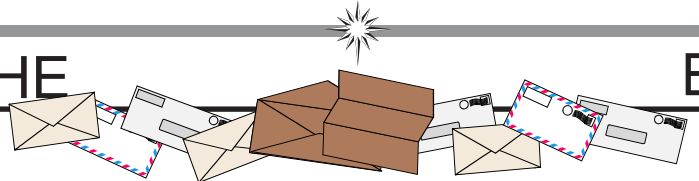
On the subject of corruption, National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has done an excellent job, but selectively. The other criticism is

Similarly take the case of Yusuf Beg Mirza, MD PTV and his manipulation of PTV accounts after he contrived the ouster of Government appointee Finance Director Asad Elahi. No government or semi-government firm can have a Finance Director who is not an appointee from the Ministry of Finance, yet for four years Iqbal Hussain, a permanent employee of PTV, has been acting as Finance Director. Moreover it is only recently that Board of Directors was constituted from non-PTV employees as per the norms, up till now all the Directors were rubber-stamping back-scratching employees who had a vested interest in covering the financial shenanigans of each other. PTV served me a legal notice through their lawyer when I called Yusuf Beg Mirza "corrupt". Well I am again doing so and he should have the courage to sue me for defamation himself, not hide behind the money of PTV.

Well into the third year of the military regime, the problem of deep rot in the system has been identified mostly but not eradicated, the client-patron relationship that derails fairplay and justice contrives to survive, and well. This client-patron relationship is at the very heart of all nepotism, favouritism and corruption. No system can be reformed without breaking its evil shackles. And by the look of it, since this sincere and honest regime has itself become a victim of this virus, how can it ever be eliminated?

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



Kibria explains AL stance

You condemned, in your editorial dated January 7, 2002, the Awami League leaders in such sweeping language that you did not even consider the possibility that there may be others--perhaps millions--who equally strongly hold the opposite view. Is it not possible that there may be at least some truth in what the Awami League leaders have said?

Take, for instance, the case of the Ordinance that was drafted by the CEC and approved by the caretaker government. I personally met Justice Shahabuddin and showed him the extraordinary and dangerous provisions of the draft document that not only ran counter to democratic norms and values, these would have made a mockery of the whole electoral process. He agreed with me that these provisions were against common sense and would hit the fundamental rights of citizens guaranteed by the Constitution. I came away reassured that here was a man of high integrity who would surely defend the people's right against conspiratorial manoeuvres by certain quarters. He was astonished when I asserted that the president had duly approved the Ordinance. He was fully aware of our objections. He also knew that the new law would amount to changing the rules in the middle of the game. He also knew that the draft law had

neither any popular mandate or consensus nor parliamentary approval. Only after we mounted a campaign against it that some of the provisions were deleted by promulgating another Ordinance though many of the new rules proposed for introduction remained unchanged.

Contrary to general impression, the president enjoys vastly increased power during the caretaker government. Not only does he control the Armed Forces, he can also act by disregarding the advice of the Chief Adviser under article 58(E) of the Constitution. Why did he not, one is entitled to ask, act against the atrocities being perpetrated across the country against the Awami League leaders and activists in the aftermath of the elections? Why was he mute when there was a nation-wide assault on the minorities? He did not hesitate to speak up against the elected government's policies but a magic spell must have been cast to seal his mouth when all the national dailies (including your esteemed paper) were daily reporting the violent attacks on the minorities by the victorious BNP-Jamaat leaders and activists?

In the five years as president when the Awami League was in power, he was too shy to utter the words, "Joy Bangla" the inspiring battle cry of the nation during the Liberation War. But he seemed to embrace the "Bangladesh Zindabad" slogan with alacrity. History has many examples of

particular situations that created illusions about a man. Such illusions are also broken by other situations that expose the dark side of the man's character. It may be a sad-dening experience for those who lionised him for so long, but one must, sooner or later, recognise the reality.

Shah AMS Kibria
Former Finance Minister and AL's chief election coordinator

Vicious vilification against the former President

It is very sad that the Awami League has attacked our former President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, whom the public remembers with gratitude for the role he played and with his firm, impartial and visionary guidance during his tenure.

I would request him not to take AL's accusation seriously; they are out of their mind after losing the election.

What a shame for the party like Awami League which was once led by great leaders like Suhrawardy and Maulana Bhashani! Is there no bold good leader in AL to oust the bad elements including Sheikh Hasina and lead AL towards democracy?

Tarun
Bandarban

Shahabuddin and AL

Thank you so much for publishing the people's sentiment on AL accusing the former President. But unlike many I was not surprised at AL's comments about Shahabuddin Ahmed.

Anyone who has minimum insight about AL politics can easily understand where and for what AL politics stands. No word is enough to condemn them as they are above any condemnation. You can criticise or condemn a person, a group or a party who warrant minimum merit to do that. We earnestly hope that as a responsible newspaper you would highlight those very important issues regarding national interests and please investigate the yellow journalism by one of the most notorious columnists Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury who brought bad name to the entire journalism industry. We want immediate punishment of this journalist for character assassination and yellow journalism.

Nasir, on e-mail

AL complains to Tony Blair

AL has once again proven that they will stop at nothing to sabotage our nation's international standing if they perceive the slightest possibility of hurting the BNP government.

The sad thing is that BNP would probably have done just the same.

MA, on e-mail

My compliment to Blair

Kindly refer to your news "This govt has links with Taliban, AL tells Blair" (January 5) and convey my compliments to Tony Blair for his indomitable courage to go to the countryside on a govt tour attending a BRAC-arranged function. I could not help check myself compose this compliment in a prosody as follows:

Mr. Blair how you dare visit a countryside, even when you learn from our opposition leaders about Taliban linking. Is it that you never care what you hear?

Anyway, I must admire you for the courage you have shown, which the former US President Bill Clinton failed to show.

Shaheedul Islam
DOHS(Old), Banani

War of the civilisations-- Yes!

As a Muslim, I agree with the views expressed by Indian columnist MJ Akbar (December 25) on the visa processing procedure recently adopted by the USA for Muslim visitors.

On one hand, the western experts and the media are adamant that there is no war of civilisations; on the other hand, after capturing Afghanistan, the Yankees are waiting for other Muslim countries/nations for

similar onslaught, completely sidelining the UN system.

The US should find out why the terrorist agencies are against the American policies. The main cause is the blind American support to Jewish Israel, another terrorist country.

This war will not end and the world is going to witness the third phase of this battle of civilisations. The US has gone beyond the point of no return. So be it.

Abd, Dhaka

"War, may be, peace"

In his editorial page article titled "War, may be, peace", Mr. MJ Akbar has asserted that terror must get out of subcontract's life.

I hope he was also including in his remarks the terror unleashed by the Indian Army in Kashmir where they have brutally killed 80,000 civilians.

Jamil Ahmed

Houston, Texas, USA

Feminine modesty

I really do not understand the spate of letters on *hijab, purdah and burqa*. Modesty can be applied outside religion also. The spirit of the religious injunction encourages practice of modesty in manner, dress, behaviour, poise, and in social intercourse.

It is prudent for the ladies not to attract attention in public places.

A Citizen, Dhaka

May the year 2002 be a happy one

The first year of this century was not a very happy one. The September 11 attack resulted in retaliative attack against Afghanistan, and was given the name "War against Terrorism". The whole world was terror-stricken and every country all around the globe got affected by it some way or another. Afterwards the Israeli aggression against Palestine made the Muslim world appalled and outraged. Another violent incident occurred in Delhi at the Parliament House premises and many other countries went through unrest, instability and violence.

We do not know what is in store for us in the year 2002, we can only wish and pray for peace and happiness. We wish those who have power would act sensible and humane.

Nur Jahan, Chittagong

"India's woes"

Two letters "India's woes" were published in your daily, one by Mr Sajjad Hussain (December 21) and the other, a rejoinder by one Bhatnaturally (December 23). It seems that Mr Hussain is very fond of 'rhetoric' words, which he uses anywhere and everywhere, be it on the writing of an individual like Mr Afsan Chowdhury or on the policy of a country like India. In either case he

fails to make any critical point for the reader. So, we may conclude that his observations are nothing more than a rhetorical effort.

However, I strongly disapprove Bhatnaturally's terming a country of 130 million people as a pipsqueak. Any country, however small it may be, cannot be considered a pipsqueak in international politics. Likewise, India however big it may be in size and in terms of population has yet to come out of the grump of third world countries. Its claim to be treated as a super power after the nuclear tests was rejected by Bill Clinton and Arundhoti Roy described it as some childish whim to play in the world cup just because it had a football ground!

Mr Hussain's observation that the memories of Kargil are still fresh and alive within Indian military, is a glaring example of his shallow knowledge in military matters. Surely the secret advancement of a few army units in a high altitude area, when the political leaders of both the countries were engaged in discussion to bring about genuine peace in the subcontinent, was an act of treachery. But, every Indian should bear in mind that Pakistan however small it may be, is not a paper tiger and has got nuclear power as well.

Rezaul Karim
Banani, Dhaka