

## The greatest show on earth has begun

*It's a celebration of human spirit and fun*

THE greatest show on earth has begun. In what has been the most appropriate billing possible, this is a celebration not just of talent, training, stamina and planning but also of the spirit that makes sports such a magnificent matter in human history. The FIFA World Cup is an enduring salute to the joyous spirit of the human kind.

The first world cup of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has drawn huge attention for various reasons. It's not only being held in Asia for the first time ever but is being hosted jointly for the first time as well. The fact that two bitter rivals in many fields -- Japan and South Korea -- are jointly putting up the show is in itself an indication that people and countries are willing to go to great lengths to uphold the symbol of a truly significant event. In terms of distributing joy amongst the largest number of people in most parts of the world, this has no parallel. One has to be thankful that there is such an event that can bring people so close and make everyone sing as one.

One of course doesn't forget that the event is also a celebration of nationalism as well but recent trends are more international than ever. But the super stars like Zidane, Ronaldo, Beckham and Figo and others are as much part of all the people who love them as much they belong to their own flag. In fact these players playing in various parts of Europe are part of a common sports culture and that has happened because clubs have dominated the sports world and not national bureaucracies.

So obviously the spirit of common humanity is rooted here. As the tournament begins, it will not only celebrate a game but also the longing for victories in life which can be fought and shared and in the end ensure a great deal of fun for all together.

Victory to the FIFA Cup.

## Election commission ponders electoral reforms

*Improvements are always necessary and welcome*

THE national Election Commission has met a number of time to look into loopholes regarding restrictions on electioneering of those holding office and other issues which cause controversy. This was particularly noted as complaints have risen that MPs and ministers are often active in campaigning which influence the results. The fact that known and listed criminals were also on the candidates' list and many actually were elected caused criticism of the EC and this needs urgent repairing.

Reports suggest that the EC plans to look at a whole range of issues concerning its work including how elections are going to be managed at the Upazila level. Amendments to the Code of Conduct governing the participants will also be examined.

The voters have certain major concerns, which needs immediate addressing. The blatant spending of money violating all rules is a serious matter. Elections are swiftly becoming a game, which only the rich can play, and not a contest to win the right to legislate on public behalf. This is a major issue and the EC must be able to rein this in and install some regulatory mechanism. It must control this spending spree and thereby enable everyone including the non-wealthy to be a candidate. Otherwise the House has a danger of becoming a rich man's club and the EC a facilitating agency of the same.

The other point is to plug those legal loopholes that allow criminals to become part of the local government structure. The violent deaths of two newly elected Ward Commissioners show that the existing system is out of date with contemporary social situation. Obviously the EC is operating under laws which were adopted when criminals didn't strive en masse for public office or were encouraged by powers that be to do so.

However, the Election Commission is to be congratulated for deciding to review the polls system and its attendant laws. This is a country with an extra-ordinary pressure on EC, political protocols and ultimately issues that ECs in other countries may not have to face. All the more why it needs to be on its toes and be beyond the reproach of being slow to reform. One hopes whatever possible will be done knowing fully well that this is one body that is under constant scrutiny.

# Highway from Dhaka to Bangkok and beyond



M ANWARUL HAQ

SEVERAL foreign diplomats based in Dhaka not to mention the innumerable well-off, looking for a short break, fly to Bangkok more than once every month. If it is not for business, it is for pleasure and these travellers normally take their family members along.

Bangkok, once known as a place of pleasure and leisure, has for several years now emerged as a regional hub for business, trading and for multilateral diplomatic meets.

Still, to most of us the Thai capital requiring only two hours by air seems to be a distant destination. If one is travelling on normal fare, the ticket costs no less than Taka 20,000. When one moves with family, the fare seems highly prohibitive and trips become automatically restrictive.

But now comes the good news that efforts are on the anvil to weave the Bangladesh capital by road with the Thai capital passing through the port city of Chittagong, by way of Cox's Bazar with the world's longest sea beach, going right across the Naaf river into Yangon and then onwards to connect Bangkok. Once traffic arrives at Bangkok, it can move easily over the existing Asian Highway network by car onwards to Singapore and Malaysia.

If one is going in his automobile, after the proposed Dhaka-Bangkok roadway opens, one can drive himself or with his chauffeur and move with family at a more economic cost and enjoy all the exotic

sights on the way if time permits. Besides, one would get the additional benefit of carrying a handsome amount of luggage in the baggage compartment of the car and not be restricted to a mere 20 or 22 kilos as in planes.

When the Dhaka-Bangkok route opens, it means more tourists, more travellers, more businessmen on the move. Overall it means increased economic activity for Bangladesh and Myanmar not to mention Thailand, Malaysia or Singapore

linkages rather than live in splendid isolation. They are recognising that linkages among national highways to create international artery of routes are now the most important aspect for development of trade, tourism and for attracting investment.

Two developments relating to the South-east Asian highway connection seemed to have happened in the space of the last one month. One plan includes Bangladesh while the other according to sources

Jaswant Singh. Thailand's foreign minister Surakiart and Myanmar's foreign minister Au Win Aung were present at the three-nation meeting. The Thai foreign minister even said that his country was willing to consider offering a loan to Myanmar to pay for the road construction.

While welcoming the transnational developments in the communications sector, Dhaka has to seriously ponder as to what implications such a tri-national highway bypassing or totally ignoring

Dhaka, without any further delay, must seize the opportunity to discuss with New Delhi any deviation in the original plan of the Asian Highway connecting Bangladesh and call for a correction.

However, what Dhaka should at the same time pursue with eagerness and vigour is the second proposed route of the Asian Highway linking Bangladesh with Thailand through Myanmar at a convenient place a few kilometres up Teknaf across the Naaf.

shortly expected to go to Bangkok to meet his Myanmar counterpart to work out mutual details regarding the proposed Dhaka-Bangkok linkage through Yangon. The Myanmar authorities, according to sources, are already interested in getting connected with Teknaf, Chittagong and Dhaka.

Although Bangladesh has good roads on its side, on some stretches inside Myanmar there is swampy terrain while some parts are hilly. However, the Myanmar authorities two years back constructed a ten feet wide road for several hundred kilometres which would now need some repairing. Some 30 kilometres missing road link to connect the Bangladesh side needs to be embarked upon.

Both Dhaka and Yangon could work out plans jointly or with the assistance of an international consortium to spruce up the roadway inside Myanmar.

The new Dhaka-Yangon-Bangkok road connection will shorten the distance between Thailand and Bangladesh by at least 500 kilometres. While this road could open up a shorter and speedier linkage with two of our eastern neighbours, the original scheme of the Asian Highway passing through Sylhet can still go ahead which will link India and provide another connection for Bangladesh to China.

Mentionably another window of opening would be the "North-South Economic Corridor" also being considered by Bangkok to connect Chittagong with Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province of southern China, Laos and northern Thailand.

Before anything Bangladesh must proceed with full thrust and with a strong political will to convince Myanmar about the new opportunities that both countries could take advantage of and immediately start working for opening the road to Bangkok.

M Anwarul Haq is Diplomatic and Defence Correspondent of The Daily Star

## ACCORD AND DISCORD

The new Dhaka-Yangon-Bangkok road connection will shorten the distance between Thailand and Bangladesh by at least 500 kilometres. While this road could open up a shorter and speedier linkage with two of our eastern neighbours, the original scheme of the Asian Highway passing through Sylhet can still go ahead which will link India and provide another connection for Bangladesh to China... Bangladesh must proceed with a strong political will to convince Myanmar about the new opportunities that both countries could take advantage of and immediately start working for opening the road to Bangkok.

who are sometimes suffering from an overload of sorts.

According to an expert assessment, the Dhaka-Bangkok roadway has the potential to increase trade and investment two-fold within five years of its operation in all the three countries.

The planned Dhaka-Bangkok connection is proposed both as a part of the great Trans Asian Highway Plan and also independently as tri-nation action scheme.

While the Asian Highway has been on the cards for over three decades, intra-nation bickering among the South Asian countries has failed it to be operational except building of stretches of roads popularly called Asian Highway in some countries or the so-called Biswaroad in Bangladesh.

But it seems many countries in South Asia and South-east Asia are finally waking up to realize that it is better to have international road

excludes Bangladesh.

In one development, which has excluded Bangladesh, foreign ministers of three countries...India, Myanmar and Thailand sat in a meeting in Yangon last April to link up a highway between the three countries.

The three foreign ministers decided to set up technical groups that would start work as early as possible to weave or link parts of the highway connecting India, Myanmar and Thailand.

The three foreign ministers have even fixed a time-frame of "18 to 24 months" to develop the links.

It was told at the meeting that India has built a road connecting six of the seven northeastern states to northern Myanmar, "which will continue on to central Burma, if construction could be finished in two years and everyone agreed."

India was represented at the meeting by its foreign minister

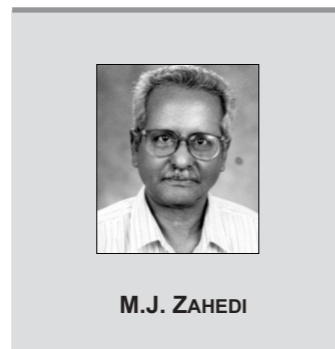
Bangladesh could lead to in the immediate and distant future. The proposed highway, if it goes ahead, according to a new Indian plan, will not only bypass Bangladesh but proceed from Tamu in Myanmar through Imphal in India and go through Dispur and Siliguri onwards through Nepal to connect New Delhi. Earlier the Asian Highway was intended to connect Tamu, Imphal and Austogram in Sylhet. In 1995, the government opted for linking Sylhet, Tamabil, Dispur and Tamu.

The proposed India-Myanmar-Thailand highway would simply cast aside Bangladesh to the wayside and perhaps push us more into isolation -- a strategy which was previously followed by neighbouring Myanmar but being rapidly discarded now. Yangon is now gradually planning to open its road network for transit and transnational highway connectivity.

Interestingly, the proposal to connect Dhaka with Bangkok through Yangon came from the highest authorities in Thailand. Among others Thai Deputy Prime Minister Pitak Inrawattawant at a recent meeting with Bangladesh Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury in Bangkok expressed keen interest in linking Dhaka with Thailand. The idea was further bolstered by a 30-member experts group meeting held from May 8 to 10 in Bangkok -- all participants of the greater Asian Highway scheme. Bangladesh delegation was represented by former director of EXCAP Dr Rahmatullah and two officials at the country's Bangkok embassy. The second routing proposal co-envisioned by Bangkok and Dhaka has been endorsed by the Yangon representative at the meeting.

Bangladesh Communications Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda is

# Time to resolve Kashmir dispute by peaceful means



M.J. ZAHEDI

DESPITE Mr. Atal Vihari Vajpayee toning down his language, the sky on the Pakistan-India border still cannot be said to be fully clear. The Indian prime minister himself said at the end of a three-day visit to Kashmir that lightning could still strike.

Mr Vajpayee's remarks followed a meeting held in Srinagar to discuss security in the strife-torn state in view of increased activities by militants in the held state in which the situation had never been normal during 1947, especially since the last twelve years. Tensions became especially grave over a May 14 attack by militants on an army cantonment and a passenger bus in Jammu that left over 30 people dead. The meeting also came in the wake of the killing of senior separatist leader Lone by unidentified gunmen, during a political rally. The worsening situation led Pakistan to seek UN intervention for restraining India from warpath. Pakistan has been following a path of restraint to avert an armed conflict between the

two nuclear-powered neighbours.

Undoubtedly, the situation needs intervention by the UN and the international community to advise and make India forsake the path of violence and choose the path of negotiations. Latest reports say that Russia has invited both the side for a meeting early next month. Pakistan has welcomed the Russian initiative. Pakistan also has assured that it will cooperate with the UN and the international community for reducing tension and for preserving peace

and aggressive statements hinting at action, followed by the expulsion of the Pakistan high commissioner from New Delhi, escalation in shelling by Indian forces across the line of control distinguishes India from Pakistan, it going soft and making compromises which some people think are beyond limits. If, however, India goes for pushing its limited war option, as ill advised by many of its military advisers, it would be leading the whole region in trouble giving birth to

an editorial, Mr Vajpayee went to Indian-held Kashmir to shout out a war cry in virtual listening distance. It does not need much effort to understand what was being said'. Even if there is no possibility of war as the prime minister indicates, the method he used did not imply as such.

And the matter is not only confined to Pakistan. The world community, especially the major powers, ought to intervene and maintain a military balance in the region. It is

Azad Kashmir so that it may be able to de-escalate its military deployment with some semblance of grace.

However it needs a solid pretext to embark upon its military adventure against Pakistan. Apparently it wants to avail itself of its oft-repeated allegation of cross-border terrorism against Pakistan to salvage its position. If that is so, she must realize that she will only be treading on the path of self-destruction.

Media reports say that the deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage is also expected to visit the region very soon for the same purpose.

Many people however feel intrigued that the United States should have chosen this very crucial moment to have joint military exercises with India. The USA should have exercised extreme caution to establish its credentials as an impartial peace-broker. The USA has also done another wrong thing, many feel, that is it has publicly endorsed the upcoming elections in occupied Kashmir which, as in the past, are being opposed by the Kashmiris. Regrettably, such ill-conceived moves, on the part of the United States, may not only dilute its own leverage in Pakistan but may also create difficulties for President Pervez Musharraf in his fight against terrorism.

It is time that the Indian leaders gave serious thought to resolving the long-standing Kashmir dispute by peaceful means, i.e. through dialogue, rather than embarking upon an adventure against Pakistan. Posterity will never forgive them for their irresponsible behaviour that can, and most certainly will, only bring hardship for them.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

## LETTER FROM KARACHI

Given India's superiority over Pakistan in conventional forces, many are apprehending a nuclear war between India and Pakistan. They however know that it will result in loss of life and property, which will be unprecedented in both the countries. The US, alarmed at the dangerous prospect, has been doing its best to reduce the tension. Ms Christina Rocca, assistant secretary of state, recently visited both India and Pakistan, for this purpose. However her mission did not succeed owing to India's usual obduracy.

and promoting dialogue between the two countries.

New Delhi refuses to accept that even if some of the militants may be of Pakistan origin, they cannot in any way be taken to be carrying out an official mission in Indian occupied Kashmir or India since Pakistan is pursuing a policy of restraint and firmly believes that it is the only way out of the brewing imbroglio. The difference in the attitudes of New Delhi and Islamabad can be distinguished by the actions on both the sides: the uproar in the Indian parlia-

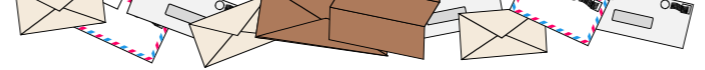
ment shades of conflict that might one day boomerang to India's detriment though for the time being India might be getting quite confident in dealing a big blow to Pakistan in the name of retaliating against so-called cross border infiltration and terrorism. Dawn has rightly said, 'once it begins, a military conflict follows a logic and momentum of its own and has a tendency to go beyond limits'. Pakistan has been saying, and rightly so, that a limited war can easily transform into an unlimited or full-scale war. As *The News* wrote in

time for the world to consider this demand of Pakistan with sincerity otherwise it would be pushing the situation rapidly to the brink of a disaster that would be one of the worst human tragedies of the contemporary times. Whom -- Pakistanis or Indians -- the disaster affects most is not the matter to be considered.

From Mr Vajpayee's latest statement, it seems that India is looking for a face-saving device to end its existing predicament. It may be contemplating a symbolic strike in

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# TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



## Corruption by PDB

I refer to your report, "Power division bent on costly power project" (May 28).

It is mentioned in your report that the cost of setting up a new 180 MW power plant is US\$66 million. The PDB is however bent on spending US\$66 million to make an expansion of 109 MW to an existing power plant. What is the logic behind PDB's insistence?

What caught my eye is the fact that US\$126 million was spent to set up a meagre 36 MW power plant at Haripur. According to costing provided in a Japanese study, one over 300 MW power plant could have been set up with US\$126 million. So who bought several cars, apartments and holidays with all the extra money?

I draw the attention of our Finance Minister who is desperately trying to lower project costs in the proposed budget. Mr Minister, are you aware of such massive corruption in the PDB? Can you get the relevant committee members fired on the grounds of incompetence and greed? I sure hope so.

Muquaddam Ali  
On e-mail

Bad news zaps the

## good one

This is great news for some. Now Bangladesh is guaranteed to be hobbled with power outages for a good number of years.

But the good news is for the BNP men and their partners. All those pet projects rife with irregularities that those poor AL ministers nursed through only to see axed will now be revived. Only this time we'll be creating BNP millionaires.

AL, BNP is there a difference?

Astreix  
Dhaka

## Are we becoming fundamentalists?

A few days ago, our government has banned the first ever Bangladeshi representation in Cannes film festival, and recently they put restriction on cable channels. The government's excuse is, these have repercussion in our culture.

Are we turning into a fundamentalist county as accused by some foreign media?

Maksood Mohiuddin  
University of Texas, USA

DESA bill

This is in reference to Mr. C. M. Dhar's letter on DESA bill (May 24). I reside in the same area and have similar problem with DESA bills. Mr. Dhar is lucky to receive the bill three days ahead. We usually receive those three to seven sometimes even more days later than the noted LPD.

The billing system is full of irregularities. It is very funny to note the DESA charging LPS for the late payment, rather they should compensate the subscribers for their inability to meet their demands due to their faulty distribution system.

S. Imam  
Moghbar, Dhaka

## CNG

This government is supposed to be promoting the use of CNG in Bangladesh.

Yet not one of the tenders for new vehicles being published in the papers specifies the requirement of CNG. I was also reading in the paper about the additional Volvo buses being bought for the BRTC. But those aren't CNG either.

If the government is serious about CNG then why not convert all its present vehicles? Not only would that be a great boon for the conver-

sion companies but the resultant demand would also force the opening of more filling stations. But since this government is only interested in studies and lots of hot air that might be too much to ask for.

But now that we have a brand new mayor freshly ensconced in Nagar Bhaban, who by the way, promised to curb pollution, why not start with his DCC vehicles?

MA  
Dhaka

## Arctic ice is melting

The ice that covers the Arctic Ocean has been shrinking for decades, and some people predict that within 50 years it could disappear completely. The loss of that ice can have profound effects on weather patterns within the Arctic Circle and all around the world.

John Walsh, an atmospheric scientist at the University of Illinois, studies the changing Arctic climate. He says that as the Arctic Ocean loses its ice cover, it will absorb more energy from the sun. Right now, more than half the solar energy that hits the Arctic Ocean is reflected back into space by the bright white layer of ice and snow. As the ice disappears, the ocean will absorb more solar energy during the sum-

mer, and it will release that energy later.

The fall and at least the early winter of each year would be far warmer than they are now because they would have open water with the two oceans that has absorbed the summer heat. And over the fall and early winter, that heat would gradually be released to atmosphere.

Walsh says, the loss of Arctic ice might be felt far outside the Arctic Circle. For example, it could change the salinity and temperature of the North Atlantic Ocean, and that could disrupt major ocean currents. The Gulf Stream is one of them, and it is critical for carrying warm water north from the tropics and moderating the climate of Europe.

So the real risk here, in a climatic sense, is that if we somehow change that picture because the distribution of sea ice changes, we could be affecting the global ocean and in turn climates far from the Arctic.

The loss of Arctic ice appears to be part of a warming trend that is being recorded all over the world and is showing signs of appearing first and most forcefully inside the Arctic Circle.

M.A. Obaydullah  
Banani, Dhaka

"Talk and let others

## be listened to"

I am sorry, but Mr. Bangal Chele of USA (May 29), seems to be totally out of order as far as my views are concerned. I seem to have touched a sore point!

However, nowhere, in my correspondence, have I given any indication whatsoever that chose defence as the only issue. My one and only argument was and is against Mr. Biggle's suggestion regarding complete dismantling of Bangladesh armed forces; and against those who sing in the same chorus. Unless otherwise Mr. Bangal Chele can prove to the contrary to what I have stated above, his 'wise counsel' - laced with some choice adjectives that he was so kind to bestow me with - should apply to him without any question.

Ashfaq Chowdhury  
Banani, Dhaka

## BRTC taxicabs

I do not think it's a good idea to expand any governmental organisation. Especially one such as BRTC which is rife with pilferage and waste not to mention corruption.

Presumably if Dhaka needs 4,000 buses and there are only

2,250 there has to be an explanation why the market cannot fill this need. Normally wherever there is demand for a good or service the private sector will provide it for a profit, which is so much more desirable than BRTC expanding its fleets through the inevitable, rigged tenders.

Why then has the private sector not done so? I'd imagine the answer lies in restrictions put in place by the government. Solve that first, encourage the private sector to supply this commercial need and get rid of the very thought of expansion of any governmental role.

T. Ali  
Dhaka

## Ban on TV satellite channel

Kudos to BNP government for their decision to impose ban on MTV and Channel V. Firstly for being sensitive to Bangladeshi culture and religious values which have been stamped for so long. Secondly for showing the courage to admit the fault of their own making and righting the wrong they have done during their previous rule (its was

BNP who issued the satellite channel TV before). Thirdly for the guts to take the bull by the horn in brushing away foul cries of the wolves around, who wanted to profit from satellite business or those cultural drifters who don't know where their proper station is. Fourthly, for addressing the root cause of cultural degeneration than just treating the symptoms.

For one thing we have not been faithful to our culture or values for long. The ever-increasing crime against women - abduction rape, murder - has an umbilical root to objectification of women that so rampant in these so-called musical channel. The motto is sex sell in disguise.

Even in the west - here is Canada - MTV is rated as an adult channel, meaning not suitable for general/family viewing. We have something to learn from these western societies who care for the family, society, women and morals.

Ferdous Islam  
Toronto, Canada