

## Attack on police

The outlaws must be reined in

**P**OLICE are clearly finding it difficult to contain the latest wave of attacks on them by the criminals operating in the southern region in the name of an outlawed political party. Two policemen were killed in the latest attack.

At least six policemen have been killed by the outlaws over the last four months in Khulna district alone, and that goes to show the extent of the helplessness of the law enforcers in the face of armed attacks.

But police do not seem to be prepared to counter the unlawful activities of the so-called extremists. It has been reported by the press that the outlaws have adopted the strategy of launching a direct attack on police. So there is reason to believe that the police administration is aware of what is happening. However, the response to the armed attack does not indicate that police are doing anything beyond the routine measures to cope with the situation.

Police from the nearest camp took 15 minutes to come to the spot where two of their colleagues were gunned down on Thursday last and did not have much to do as the killers had left the place. That is surely a sign of the law enforcing mechanism moving a bit too slow.

The attackers are carrying lethal weapons and it seems they are operating according to a plan. So police will have to gather that extra speed and firepower to contain them.

Quite a few incidents have taken place in the recent past which indicate that such attacks will be launched in future also. So police have to work out a strategy with a view to blunting the force of political extremism manifesting itself in its ugliest form in certain areas.

Of course, police have to do something more than waiting for another strike by the outlaws. The decision-makers should carefully examine different aspects of the problem and decide how best they can address it. The police have to be better trained and equipped to deal with this particular type of crime, but then it is equally important to get at the root of the problem. The outlaws have to be disarmed and brought back to normal life under a broad scheme of rehabilitation except for those facing specific charges.

The noose of the law must be tightened before the situation goes further out of control.

## Stalemate at ZIA

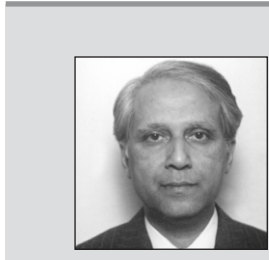
We hope similar incidents would not occur in the future

**T**HE four-hour long stalemate at Zia International Airport on Wednesday bringing all its activities to a standstill can only be condemned, if nothing more. If the employees of Biman had any grievances against the police department, they should have dealt with it in a professional manner. Stopping work and not allowing any flights to either take off or land can't be an acceptable manner of protest. Apparently local police had detained four employees of Biman's engineering division in connection with a foreign currency recovery case from a toilet of a Biman aircraft last month. Learning of the arrest, their colleagues instantly stopped work bringing an international airport to a complete standstill, for almost four hours!

The engineers were detained for questioning by the police to which the police had every right. They were neither accused nor charged with anything. So what was the need to react so angrily? If the agitated employees were so confident about their innocence, then why didn't they simply wait and see what the police was going to do next? Instead, in the name of protesting the 'harassment' of their colleagues, they put hundreds of passengers in suffering for no fault of theirs. According to reports, a Biman flight from Dhaka to London was delayed by at least ten hours, and another flight to Singapore took off three hours late. Now who would take the blame for such irresponsible and unprofessional behaviour? Who would pay the price for the harassment suffered by the passengers?

Bangladesh Biman had been under pressure for a long time to maintain schedule of their flights. In fact many prefer to fly by other airlines because of the bad reputation Biman has 'earned' over the years. And incidents like Wednesday's would definitely not help to enhance Biman's image and that of the management of ZIA, in the future. We wonder what the airport authority was doing when the whole fiasco was taking place. Why did the intervention by the minister and high government officials that brought the situation under control take so long? The minister has reportedly assured them that action would be taken against those who had 'harassed' the Biman employees, but we demand action against those as well who instigated the stalemate at ZIA, bringing shame to the nation.

# The Mid-East thicket and the US



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

**T**HE war weary world has watched with great concern the faltering and hesitant steps that have been taken since Taba (24 September 1995) by Israel and the PLO in their quest for a just peace. One remembers the optimism generated because of the Taba accords which gave self-rule to the Palestinians in Bethlehem, Jenin, Nablus, Qalqilya, Ramallah, Tuulkarm, parts of Hebron and 450 other villages. It also allowed Jewish settlements to stay. Subsequently, Palestinians signed a deal with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on 15 January, 1997 which cleared the way for the handing over of approximately 80 per cent of Hebron to Palestinian rule. Later, on 23 October, 1998, Arafat, Netanyahu and Bill Clinton signed the Wye River deal for a phased Israeli withdrawal from 13 per cent of the West Bank in exchange for Palestinian security measures. This commitment was however frozen only two months later as the Israeli government claimed that the Palestinians had failed to keep their bargain.

Between December 1998 and July 2000, efforts were made for a resolution of the growing crisis but all initiatives failed. Both sides only hardened their positions. Events that followed the terrorist attacks of 11 September only complicated the crisis even further.

Consequently, when the road map for peace was announced by the United States, the United Nations, the European Union and Russia, interested parties felt that there was a chance. Events have moved apace since then, leading up to the three-way summit in Aqaba, Jordan on 4 June, 2003. This was possible mainly because the United States and its present Administration finally decided to take a more hands-on inter-active process. Peace was once again given a chance and the region a moment of opportunity.

As expected, American pressure has encouraged Mr Sharon to express his commitment accepting the creation of a viable Palestinian state on contiguous territory. He has also indicated that he will take the first step by dismantling illegal Jewish outposts in the occupied territories. A few small and unimportant illegal settlements have been taken out, but serious efforts in this direction are still lacking.

On the other hand, the Palestinian Prime Minister Mr Abbas,

shed and misery.

We have today an interesting scenario in the Mid-East. The real difference this time is the most obvious one. The US President has won a war in Iraq that has removed one of Israel's greatest enemies. This in turn has led to the reshaping of the security map of the whole region.

Previous US Presidents used Egypt and Jordan to seek peace agreements. Erstwhile Presidents,

Israeli arms.

This is an alternative scenario that has been brought about by the Iraq war and President Bush's instinctive agenda.

It has been a soft beginning, but not inconsistent with Israel's obsession with security. A least common denominator has been agreed to as a fundamental equation and one can build on that. The recent announcement by militant Hamas Jihad groups that they

recent terrorist activities in Riyadh have shaken American complacency that the campaign against terrorism had been won along with the war on Iraq. The Saudi attacks also exposed deep new anxieties in Washington over the Saudi government's ability to help crush terrorist cells in their midst.

The sharpened distrust of Iran is also not helping American policy makers. Iran is trying their patience by supporting militant Shiite groups in Iraq and accelerating

It is against this backdrop that one needs to appreciate the baby-steps being taken in Palestine. It is true that it will draw Mr Bush and his aides into a risky new phase of direct involvement in negotiating a settlement on the most intractable problems. This morass has dragged down many previous negotiators, but he should not feel anxious or discouraged with the built-in tough choices.

The US, whenever necessary, despite next year being associated with elections, should exert pressure on Israel along with Palestine. They will also have to be magnanimous towards Europe and Arab States and work with them. They have always played a dominant role in that region and need to continue to do so. If necessary, the US administration should also be prepared to commit American forces in the field to monitor progress on the peace plan. Having the National Security Adviser directly involved has been an important step in the right direction.

It is equally important that Sharon should offer encouragement to his moderate Palestinian opposite number and stop mocking him as an impotent 'chick without feathers' and 'cry-baby'. This does not facilitate the process. Similarly, the Israeli administration despite the vague nature of some of the phrases of the Aqaba agreement should show real 'restraint' in their interpretation of this word, particularly in the context of Israel's ability to pre-empt 'terrorist' attack.

The principal protagonists in the region should understand that the stakes are far higher for the Israelis and the Palestinians after more than two years of bloodshed without mercy. It has cost thousands of lives and that must stop.

Ultimately, much will rest on factors the leaders cannot control: on the attitudes of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, and on whether they are able to compromise. However, there must be sincerity in approach and the political will to come together. The whole of the world is watching.

President Bush has used the phrase 'ride-herd' with regard to the US role and one hopes that peace loving people will not be disappointed with the outcome of his efforts.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

## POST BREAKFAST

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better known as Abu Mazen having declared an end to the Intifada of the past 23 month, has not really been able to exert full control over the Palestinian militants. He has urged everyone concerned to resort to peaceful means in 'our' quest to end the occupation and the suffering of 'Palestinians and Israelis'. Such declarations have however not been completely agreed to by the radical elements in Palestine.

Nevertheless, there have been important aspects if one reads between the lines. Crucially, Mr Bush has announced that the US would take control of monitoring whether the two sides are fulfilling their promises under the road map. This has removed an important area of contention: Israel's demand to have the right to judge whether the Palestinians are doing enough to curb violence. However the Aqaba summit discussions appear to have left out some significant matters. Most notably, no mention was made of Israel's 14 objections to the road map, which Sharon has said were a 'red line' that could not be crossed. Nor was any mention made of his earlier demand that the Palestinians must renounce the right of their refugees to return to Israel before the road map can be implemented.

What is however important is that there is again some hope and considerable opportunity. It is a cautious start, but much better than the present status of blood-

most notably the elder Bush, also brought pressure on Israel. However none have been able to discuss the prospects in terms of a change for the whole region. It is in this context that the current US President has an edge over his predecessors.

The US Administration's emphasis on factors that a Palestinian state has to be viable and that its territory has to be continuous, are both important. This is a direct contradiction of Sharon's traditional view. This itself is vital, given Israel's implied position that any Palestinian state would be a series of separate bits that could be easily controlled and swamped by

agree to a three-month suspension of attacks on Israelis will contribute towards confidence-building. Palestinian leaders Marwan Barghouti, Khaled Mashal and Ramadan Shalah have shown great maturity in this regard. Israel can also contribute to this emergent process by stopping targeted killing of Palestinians.

The Mid-East imbroglio is a difficult scene because of its economic and political importance. Today, the region is once again testing American leadership in ways that would tax any US administration. There has been no peaceful period for the US after the victory of the 'Coalition' in Iraq. The

their alleged nuclear arms programme. Unfortunately, any way out at this point of time seems unlikely as any conciliatory steps by Iran would be interpreted by their conservative leadership as having caved in to American pressure. The situation is delicate and requires care and caution.

The unhappiness within the US armed forces in not being able to go after alleged Qaeda units leaving Afghanistan for Pakistan is also raising temperatures. Little can be done in this regard given the resurgence of Islamic parties in the Pakistani Province of North West Frontier bordering Afghanistan.

All these crises are unfolding against a backdrop of rising bitterness and confusion in Iraq, where the Coalition forces are being blamed for their comparative 'failure' to deliver basic services and for their inability to find the disputed Weapons of Mass Destruction. The contiguous region has also noticed with concern the forced deferral of American plans to install an interim Iraqi governing authority. *The New York Times* reflected on this when they recently noted that "American credibility in the region has also been sapped...by the failure to find Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden or any unconventional weapons in Iraq - the rationale the Administration presented for the war" (Steven R Weisman, 27 May, 2003).



# Is Sri Lanka slipping back to war?

ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

**R**ATHER unexpectedly, fears now loom large that Sri Lanka, ravaged by nearly two decades of civil war, may again slip back to hostilities ending the peace efforts that have been continuing for last several months. The Norwegian-brokered dialogue between the government and the Tamil Tigers on a possible resolution of the long-running conflict in the island state raised prospects in recent months for a settlement but certain negative developments have come as stunning setbacks to the positive ambience. Unfortunately, the latest situation has threatened to take Sri Lanka back to square one, which will all out conflict between the rebels and the government side. If this really happens, the development would deliver a big blow not only to the country but the entire region which feels peace in the island state is necessary for harmony and stability in South Asia.

Things were moving in the right direction till a string of developments started to put the on-going peace efforts in jeopardy. Fortunately, both sides are still showing signs of patience and are not willing to break the truce. This holds out the promise that peace process has not collapsed and contending parties are not drifting away from negotiating table. Yet peace in Sri Lanka appears in the distance to the dismay of those who want the island state to resolve the civil war permanently for progress and prosperity of the nation.

The sinking of a rebel ship by the government forces and political

slaying have raised fears of the country slipping back to war amidst threats by the Tamil Tiger leadership that they will do things kindly. They have warned of 'grave consequences' unless the government makes amends to the conditions that ran counter to the peace efforts. The hardening of stance by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) follows a recent international conference on Sri Lanka in Japan when donors and others made substantial commitments for rebuilding the country afflicted by long civil war centering

after plenty of ground work preparations.

The first meeting took place in Bangkok mid last year, which was marked by remarkable progress since the LTTE agreed to give a major concession abandoning the demand for a separate sovereign country. The government side also reciprocated by taking series of conciliatory measures and all these made things bright, giving the impression that a permanent settlement may not be difficult despite the fact that the task in hand was quite complex and any

ance (PA) of the president sits in the opposition in parliament in a strange system of "co-habitation" government in which the president and the prime minister come from rival political platforms. The prime minister runs the government based on the majority consent in parliament but the presidency also enjoys certain important powers like dissolving the house and the government. Chandrika is against giving too much concessions to the Tigers and her problems with the prime minister on other issues as well have caused uneasiness in the

is also not averse to new parliamentary elections. The president, under the constitution, remains at the helm for six year term regardless of the outcome of the polls for legislature.

The problems with the president notwithstanding, the prime minister is continuing efforts to resolve the conflict with the rebels. But latest developments have come as grave negation of the positive environment that was created following painstaking efforts. Sri Lankan government and the rebels will be commended if they ignore

ties is on the cards, slipping back to war will be the most unfortunate development that the state can ill afford.

The positive sign is that the Tamil Tigers have expressed their desire to revive the talks despite certain conditional setback in gaining some more powers for them. They have not spoken about resumption of hostilities although it is clear that they are seeking to extract more concessions. Their London-based chief negotiator in the peace talks Anton Balasingham had a meeting with Norwegian mediator Erik Solheim when the two discussed the impasse. Prime minister Ranil Wickramasinghe visited London for talks with British prime minister Tony Blair on the Lankan peace process. The government is keen to revive the talks although president Kumaratunga feels that the prime minister should not show much willingness to go back to dialogue unless the Tigers soften their stance. She also believes that the Tigers would soon resort to their aggressive designs with attacks on Lankan interests.

This will be unwelcome to think that the obstacles will be removed easily but contacts and efforts are expected to reduce the chances of returning to war. The need of the hour is not to let the opportunities created after so much of assiduously nurtured efforts go awry and all contending parties must show sagacity for greater interests.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist.

## MATTERS AROUND US

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the demand of the Tamil Tigers on an independent state in the northern Jaffna region. The Tigers did not attend the Tokyo meeting although they actively participated in the earlier peace conferences in different countries. The government-LTTE talks were made possible from early last year when Qaboos intensified his mediation to resolve the imbroglio through dialogue between the two sides. The conflict has taken huge toll on both sides and once it appeared that the country was bleeding to white as almost a full blown war continued unabated. But the Norwegian efforts, although running into occasional trouble, bore fruits as two sides sat to discuss the issue

solution was difficult. The Tigers boycotted the Tokyo meeting protesting government failures to accept a demand that Tigers should have charge of provincial administration in their region. However, prime minister Ranil Wickramasinghe announced readiness to accept the main part of the demand which removed fears of continued boycott of the talks. But then things turned for the bad unexpectedly delivering a body blow to the peace process.

Meanwhile, the rivalry between president Chandrika Kumaratunga and prime minister Ranil Wickramasinghe continued to mar the peace process. Peoples Alli-

country. A possibility is stalking that the nation may witness fresh elections.

This fragile president-premier relationship is having an adverse impact on the dialogue with rebels. Analysts feel that earlier Chandrika's government failed to make much headway in peace efforts with the rebels although two sides did agree on cease fire and this could be one of the main reasons why she may not relish a success in the area by rival political platform's government. The prime minister says they won last parliament polls with a pro-peace position and the government wants to carry forward with this mandate. It

the new pin pricks, stressing more to consolidate the gains towards peace which has been achieved after great efforts. The road to peace in the country is very bumpy and is strewn with many complexities, which, however, is not unusual. What is required is patience and further spirit of accommodation to turn the effort into success. Cessation of hostilities and the truce need to be maintained at all cost. The "Co-habitation" government also needs to work in cohesion in this direction since larger interest for the nation and people must get precedence over partisan or individual political rivalries. While no immediate resumption of hostili-

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

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

## Thank you CITYCELL!

On July 2, The Daily Star published a letter "Who shall save the cellular telephone users from sufferings?". Soon after the letter was published, the relevant response from the CityCell came down for a real "manhunt" to search me out. Lastly, we met on July 3, 2003 and had a fruitful discussion on the problems that I had mentioned in the letter.

Some problems like the SMS was solved, as they looked into the matter. The other problem of poor signal strength at the locality I am living in shall be solved they promised me. At least, if not solved immediately, they will take up some measures to minimise the problem.

I really appreciate the steps they had taken to solve the problems. I hope their sincerity to solve problems of the customers will enable them overcome the competition in

the market. One thing that I should note here is that if the operators are sincere in their efforts to provide all the services they always advertise, then they will create trust amongst the users of them as well.

Sajjad Waheed, Dhaka

## Kibria visits Saifur

'Politics took backseat as Kibria visits ailing Saifur' was the heading for the news on the subject. A former finance minister may visit the present finance minister who is ill. What politics has to do with this visit? Why the news regarding the visit should be captioned that way? Our journalists should be more cautious in using words and phrases while reporting on our politicians. They should not put extra importance to every word and to every move of our political people.

Look at the Dhaka City. Almost all the roads and footpaths are broken. This city has turned into

one of the dirtiest cities in the world. Same is the condition of the Chittagong City. Who cares! And only a few days back a photograph in friendly gesture towards each other of the mayors of these two cities was published in different national dailies with an 'appropriate' caption.

As if the dailies wanted to make the people of this country believe that the friendly gesture between two of them, belonging to two rival political parties, is the eighth wonder of the world. Whenever Begum Khaleda Zia or Sheikh Hasina says something, no matter how insignificant are those words in essence, our media report, as if those are celestial words.

It is time to make our politicians understand that they are not the master of the people, but they are there to serve them. The citizens of this country are not mere voters; they are, above all, human beings. Our journalists are to play a very

important role in this campaign to make our politicians know their true position. They are (the journalists) to restrain their pens and cameras so that the politicians of this country come down on earth.

AGS, Dhaka

## Sheikh Hasina's baseless utterances

Sheikh Hasina is doing it again. Her recent statement that BNP Government supports the Taliban and establishing a Taliban style government in Bangladesh is so totally void of truth and so utterly against our national interests that it is time someone did something about it.

She seems undeterred in her maligning campaign against the BNP's image little caring that she is damaging Bangladesh's image. In an inter-dependent world where we can never hope to progress without

support and understanding of the West, Sheikh Hasina's thoughtless and baseless utterances are placing us in a position where we would soon be marginalised by the West.

Shahjahan Ahmed, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

## DA for pensioners

The Government has announced 10 per cent dearness allowance for the officials, which will give them some relief although this will not match inflation since the last pay-hike. But unfortunately nothing has been mentioned regarding the pensioners who too are equally hard hit by inflation. It is therefore requested that pensioners may be included in the order that will be issued by Ministry of Finance hopefully very soon.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury DOHS, Mohakhali, Dhaka

## More catholic than

## the Pope

This is in response to the latest letters by Mahmood Elahi published in this page. Though his letters lack substance, I must admit and admire his imagination emerging from preoccupied thoughts.

It is clear that he cannot update and accommodate recent changes. The British and US public are questioning the justification of Iraq aggression on the ground that no traces of WMDs were found in Iraq even after three months of massing a civilisation there. How Mr. Elahi like his beloved leader President Bush is assured of their presence? It may be noted that ignoring the UN arms inspectors, the US sent a huge delegation for searching the WMDs. They also failed in their attempts other than coming up with few rubbish.

BBC broadcast a news regarding Iraq's possession of WMDs manipulated by Blair's office. With these

evidences before him, still Mr. Elahi is sure of getting the WMDs in Iraq. Is he not trying to be more catholic than the Pope?

M. U. Chowdhury Dhaka

## At the mercy of CNG drivers

Is there anybody or authority to check deception on the public? I think there is none in the true sense of the term. For only occasionally some govt. dept. or organ takes some actions against 'adulteration' or 'deception' and most of the time the public forget about the resolution or the outcome, as public memory is so short. And many don't even bother what happened!

If you recall, the BRTA had fixed fare for the CNG autorickshaw at tk.12/- for 1<sup>st</sup> CNG, 5/- for successive km (1/- for 1/5km, waiting per 2 mins. Tk.1/- etc.). But do you

remember this was supposed to be effective till 15th April, '03, whereafter the revised rate (which was also decided already in cooperation with those concerned) of Tk.10/- to start with and successive charges of Tk.4/- for 1km, 1/- for 1/4km and 1/- for waiting etc. was supposed to be effective? But alas! We all are being charged quietly as per the original calibration of the meters. Did anybody care for the resolution or regulation? Over and above most drivers are asking for extra money taxing the riders who have no alternative but to be at their mercy.

I have another query-- is there anybody to make routine-check on the meters of CNG and Taxis? I have a feeling that some of unscrupulous drivers are tempted to tamper with the meter. Let us be fair with the fare meter and not be unfair with the innocent public.

AF Rahman Dhaka