

DCC renews commitments

Problems remain in basic areas, though

THE mayor presented the Tk 762.96 crore DCC budget for fiscal 2003-04 on Monday and sounded quite upbeat about putting an end to certain nagging problems of the city.

As a matter of fact, the DCC has set itself some ambitious goals apart from concentrating on areas like road construction and repair, mosquito eradication and conservancy. The plans include construction of a seven- kilometre long flyover from Jatrabari to Gulistan and a 33-storey car park-cum-commercial building in Motijheel.

The mayor also announced that there would be no 'rutted roads' in the city by February next year, which represents a high water-mark in ambition given the trackrecord of failure on that score. But the citizens would definitely like him to succeed there, this time around.

Presentation of a new DCC budget has traditionally been an occasion to make commitments and promises. But what happens after that is a lacklustre implementation of goals and persistence of old problems with routine regularity. What has the mayor done in basic areas like road maintenance, garbage disposal and eradication of mosquitoes? He certainly has, and will have, the advantage of having the support of the ruling party during his full tenure.

Obviously, the roads in the city are in bad shape; most of them have developed cracks and potholes, which make movement of both vehicles and pedestrians a hazardous proposition, particularly during the rainy season. So if the DCC really succeeds in giving the roads a much better look by February, as the mayor has promised, it will have done a very significant part of its job.

Mosquito eradication is another area where the DCC has faced carping criticism for its poor performance. Similarly, the DCC is yet to attain the minimal level of efficiency in garbage disposal and maintenance of surface drains. So the City Corporation will have to do a lot to live up to the commitments made by the mayor.

The success of the plans will depend to a great extent on the DCC's ability to generate funds. And for that to happen, it is imperative that its tax collection system is streamlined.

We believe the DCC should concentrate fully on setting things right internally, particularly on curbing corruption which is eating into the vitals of the organisation.

Rift between Arafat and Abbas on mend

British stand commendable

IT'S rather unfortunate to witness the numerous obstacles the Middle East peace process has been facing even though the Israelis and the Palestinians seem keen on an olive branch. The latest incident in Tel Aviv where a Palestinian man stabbed three people, killing one of them, goes to show how volatile the situation still is. We can only hope that the cycle of violence would not spiral.

The Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Prime Minister Mahmud Abbas -- both should realise that the rift between them can only damage the real prospect for peace. And with Israeli leader Ariel Sharon's effort to isolate Arafat internationally, things can only get worse. On that point, we have some reason to take heart, though. Both Arafat and Abbas seem to be trying to bury the hatchets and work together for a long lasting solution in the region which they had been struggling to achieve for so long. Whether in the past Arafat was trying to undermine Abbas or whether Abbas was reportedly very soft towards Israel, the bottomline is both of them are striving to reach the same destination. And, therefore, any kind of personality clash or a 'conflict of power' between the two political heavy-weights would only jeopardise the prospect of a solution.

Here we would like to commend the British government for rejecting Israel's appeals to break off relations with Arafat. The firm decision by Tony Blair's government to deal with Arafat 'where it was appropriate since he was an elected leader' should din the right sense into ears of the Israeli premier. With this kind of support behind them, the Palestinian leaders should be able to easily sort out their differences and show the world a united front, because that's what the world wants to see.

A matter of national security



M ABDUL HAFIZ

THE biggest ever haul of ammunitions and explosives late last month, it was hoped, would serve as a wake-up call for our political class prompting it to close ranks to confront the danger inherent in it. Instead what we witnessed was its jaundiced reaction to the whole episode which might as well had infringed the bounds of our national security. Non-challant of such grave possibility the major political parties and their leaders already made forays in pointing their accusing fingers at each other in their usual blame game even before the most preliminaries of an investigation was underway. It was at once politically crass and cynic and aimed at scoring points at the cost of opponent while serving no purpose in unravelling the mystery surrounding the haul. The naivety of the authority in the handling of the situation is indeed frustrating.

It is argued that it becomes a matter of national security whenever the nation's core values are threatened and on the top of these values is the question of the sovereignty and its territorial integrity. Pending a credible investigation although nothing is exactly known as yet as to the origin, destination and the purpose of the consignment, the very fact that our territory was used for the unlawful trafficking is at the least discomfoting. If the trafficking had

involved a trans-border movement it also certainly violated the territorial integrity and sanctity of the country.

Whatever might be the source of the unlawful ammunitions and explosives and whatever could be the motives behind their trafficking, the size of the haul and the location of the cache deep inside our territory suggest that the country is splashed with these lethal items which when put to use can wreak havoc in the society. It's syndromes are already writ large on the face of our society where the criminals have virtually the field day and are capable of advancing their nefarious activities with a measure of impunity. What is however more disturbing is that the presence of a huge quantity of unmarked bullets and explosives in the country's interior -- irrespective of whosever are the criminals behind it and whatever source have they been procured from -- puts a question mark on the sovereign authority that we are able to exercise over our territory. In all reckoning we seem to share that authority with gangsters and outlaws.

In the parlance of national security the maintenance of conditions conducive to an uninterrupted development and social progress is another important core value for a developing country like Bangladesh for the continued wellbeing of its impoverished people. Have we been able to maintain those conditions is an apt question to be asked at this junct-

ture. The Bogra episode is just one odd instance of the denials of those conditions. But when the wide-spread chaos, virtual breakdown of law and order and social disorders now prevailing in the country are viewed in their entirety, the composite picture is indeed bleak.

Whatever manifestation of this bleakness we come across is only the tip of the iceberg. Anything,

more serious and unpredictable, can happen -- given the state of country's internal order at this point of time.

If the ammunition of Bogra is a threat to our national security, the prevailing domestic order that, in more than one way, makes it possible is also a threat to our national security in more significant way. Not only it makes Bogra-like epi-

sode worth undertaking, it constantly stand in the way of our development and progress wherein lies our real security. It does so by allowing our criminals in disrupting the stability of the country -- thus denying the conditions essential for our development, growth, production, economic activities and so on. The situation is compounded by the



free rein enjoyed by the criminal elements masquerading as paramilitary groups of any ruling dispensations who in a political void, need them desperately.

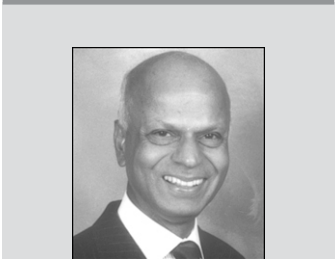
The consecutive governments of the country failed to provide an environment conducive either to development or security. These cumulative failures rendered our national security wobbly at the best. It will only exacerbate with the politicisation of its issues. The situation surrounding Bogra haul is still opaque and it is dangerous to comment anything purely on conjectures. Under the circumstances let the experts take care of the mystery that continues to shroud the haul while politicians on either side of the divide can keep mum instead of incensing the mood of blaming each other.

Not only that, They will do a great service to the nation if they help create, with their political conduct, a condition that can rid the nation from its present predicaments -- its poor governance, downhill slide of lawlessness and pervasive corruption at all levels. Only with that it is possible to avert the repetition of Bogra-like episode. It calls for a holistic approach to combat threats to our national security -- a mere 'fire fighting' to contain the menace will prolong the threats even if there is a reprieve in sight.

What is still more crucial is a collective effort of all political forces of the country to root out the threats to our security. A successful security or foreign policy is always based on consensus. No government can achieve that by excluding certain part of the political force from the whole process -- and certainly not by embittering inter-party relationship through a senseless blame game.

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BIISS.

Human development: Less rhetoric and more action required



CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM
writes from Madrid

THIS year's report on human development (Human Development Report, 2003) has just been published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Since I have sometimes been accused of being a pessimist on matters concerning human development, let me start off on a rather positive note. Both Bangladesh and Spain have reasons to be happy about their respective positions in this year's Human Development Index (HDI), because both have improved their ranking. Out of 175 countries surveyed, Bangladesh has jumped from 145th position to 139th, which in my opinion, is a remarkable achievement. Spain has improved its ranking from 21st to 19th. Although none of the South Asian countries belong to the High Human Development category, India (127), Sri Lanka (99), and Bangladesh (139) have achieved Medium Human Development category. Pakistan (144) fell into the Low Human Development category. Over the years Bangladesh has made slow but steady progress in improving health and sanitation and in reducing fertility, which is a good pointer on gender equality.

Longevity, education, a relatively high standard of living and gender parity have helped Spain to achieve a high ranking in the OECD group of Leading Industrial nations. In the HDI, Spain is ahead

of Italy, Portugal and Greece but comes after the United Kingdom (13) France (17) and Germany (18). With an average life expectancy of 79.1 years, Spain occupies the sixth place in the world in terms of longevity. In this respect Japan (81.3 years), Sweden (79.9 years), Hong Kong (79.7 years), Iceland (79.6 years) and Canada (79.1 years) come before Spain. Zambia (Africa) comes last (33.4 years).

Actually the overall human development situation in Africa continues to be poor -- in many cases it is even worse than before.

mental task of collating and updating the data on a regular basis. But this is not its only contribution to the development of these countries. It provides all sorts of other useful services as well. Actually it was set up by the United Nations General Assembly in 1965 "to provide technical assistance, to improve living standards and promote economic growth" in countries which are economically under-developed.

Social scientists have, for decades, been trying to agree upon a common definition of standard

But the dollar figures often gave a distorted view of the relative positions of the countries in the ranking because they did not take into consideration the differences in existing price levels of same or similar products in different countries. The PPP (Purchasing Power Parities) method was invented to address the problem. The use of this method in adjusting the price levels in different countries gave a more accurate relative picture of the economies of the participating countries. Needless to say, it sometimes produced results,

certain goods and services but also a number of other items such as literacy, longevity, calorie intake, housing, access to safe water supply, infant mortality etc.

Using this method, the UNDP, this year, has reached some pretty devastating conclusions about human development such as: In more than 50 countries, instead of making progress, the human development situation has actually regressed; more than 1200 million people live on less than one dollar a day; more than 10 million children die every year for lack of preven-

of globalisation) bear a tremendous responsibility for the deteriorating conditions in these countries. While commenting on the unfairness of farm subsidies, its Director for Energy and Environment, Mr. Alvaro Umaña has just mentioned that in the EU, for each cow, a farmer gets a subsidy of \$930 (I think, I should remind the reader that the average per capita income in Sierra Leone is \$ 470). Once again, the Programme (UNDP) recommends that the industrialised nations of the West must honour their pledge to open their markets to products from the less industrialised nations and demolish their system of protection.

Again, in spite of the UN resolution recommending the industrialised countries to give 0.7 per cent of their GNP as development aid to poorer countries, the actual contributions fall far short of the target. The EU's development aid reaches 0.34 per cent of the GNP and at the end of 2002, the UN contribution was a mere 0.12 per cent of its GNP.

In a compassionate article published in the *International Herald Tribune* (July 10, 2003), Prof. Jeffrey Sachs of the Columbia University pointed out that, "Our world is dangerously out of kilter when a few hundred people in the United States command more income than 166 million people in Africa--with millions of the poor dying each year as a result of their impoverishment.....Bush's trip to Africa should open our eyes to these realities, as well as to the possibilities they raise to help ease the pain in the world."

I do not know whether anyone would pay heed to Prof. Sachs's words and do something "to ease the pain in the world", but I feel slightly more optimistic about human development. As long as there are people like Prof. Sachs, one should not lose faith in human solidarity.

LETTER FROM EUROPE

Prof. Jeffrey Sachs of the Columbia University pointed out that, "Our world is dangerously out of kilter when a few hundred people in the United States command more income than 166 million people in Africa--with millions of the poor dying each year as a result of their impoverishment....." I do not know whether anyone would pay heed to Prof. Sachs's words and do something "to ease the pain in the world".

South Africa, one of the few African countries belonging to the Medium Human Development category, has slipped from 107th to 111th in the index. The last position in world ranking is held by Sierra Leone (per capita income \$470). The situation is not very much better in Latin America and the Caribbean countries.

According to this report, Norway continues to be the best country to live in. Iceland and Sweden occupy the second and third positions respectively. The United States has slipped from sixth to seventh position. While in Luxembourg only 3.9 per cent of the population live under the poverty line, in the United States this percentage stands at 17 per cent, which is the worst among the most developed nations of the world.

Since without reliable information no remedial measures can be taken, the poorer countries of the world are particularly indebted to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for this monu-

of living and to devise reliable methods for the purpose of obtaining comparable statistics for the most industrialised, less industrialised, developing and the least developed nations of the world. It has not been an easy task. First of all, the social scientists had to agree on a set of quantitative indicators to measure the relative level of living of the participating countries. Until recently only material items such as per capita income, ownership of various consumer goods, contribution of manufacturing to the GNP were taken into consideration while preparing the index. Leaving aside the problems inherent in collecting reliable data from such diverse sources to calculate average figures for a group or a country, --which often disguised individual or group variations of enormous magnitude -- there was also the problem of translating figures quoted in dozens of different currencies into one generally accepted standard currency, i.e., the US dollar.

which were quite different to the ones produced, using the conventional method.

Even though this new quantitative measurement (the PPP) of the use or ownership of material goods was considered as an important step in the right direction, the social scientists were not entirely happy with the outcome. Several other questions kept nagging them: Was it (the measurement of economic growth) enough to enable one to assess the real standard of living of a group, a community or a country? Wasn't there something missing? What about the quality of life?

It is in this field that the UNDP has made and is still making important contributions. According to UNDP, human development is a process of expanding choices. In an attempt to reflect the quality of life in different parts of the world, the Human Development Index (first published in 1990), not only takes into account the per capita income and ownership of

tive medical care; more than 500,000 women die at child birth or during pregnancy; more than a thousand million people in developing countries do not have access to safe drinking water; etc. Besides pointing out the deteriorating HIV/AIDS situation in Africa (14 countries in Africa and the Caribbean account for nearly half of the world's infections of HIV), the Programme sends a terse message to the world, at the current pace, sub-Saharan Africa will not reduce child mortality by two-thirds until 150 years after the date set by the MDG (Millennium Development Goals).

After reading all this, it is difficult to maintain optimism about human development for the poor or for that matter to have any faith in human solidarity. Once again the UNDP points out that although many of these under-developed countries suffer from chronic corruption at the governmental level (which must be remedied), unfair trade terms (a skewed form

In memoriam

Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed

End of an era

MESBAH-US-SALEHEEN

IT is undoubtedly a sad news for the nation, for relatives, friends and thousand admirers that Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed is no more. With his demise, the nation has seen an end of an era. While studying economics in the London School of Economic he joined the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn, London. He was a very distinguished lawyer, a gentleman par excellence and above all, he guided the nation in numerous crisis through his timely advices in legal matters. His credentials were impeccable and he will be remembered through ages for these. He held various important charges in the Government of Bangladesh and was known for his transparent integrity and dedication. His arguments in diversified legal matters remain to be very important documents of reference. His abiding interest was grassroots democ-

cracy, for which he considered the need of bifurcation of judicial system from administration. In his later years of life, it was probably his last ambition to see the separation of judiciary. It was Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed who started the process during his sojourn stay as an adviser to the caretaker government in 2001. Although the matter now lies in the final stage, it is pity that Barrister Ishtiaq could not see the materialisation of this during his lifetime. Barrister Ishtiaq was a quiet, self-effacing lawyer who quietly worked for the improvement of democracy and civil society. For this he will be long remembered. In an interview with *Channel 1*, Barrister Ishtiaq narrated the arduous road he had to go through to reach the pinnacle that he ultimately scaled. A brilliant product of the University of Dhaka, he always wanted to be an independent professional man, and as such chose to become a lawyer instead of becoming a

civil servant.

Barrister Ishtiaq was the husband of my first cousin National Professor Sufia Ahmed. I have had many memorable fond memories of him. He could relate to people of all ages at a party or in a function. He could communicate with people at ease. He was a very witty, articulate and charming person. Barrister Ishtiaq was an institution, and an inspiration to many of us. He was a lovable person with great warmth. It is for sure that the nation will miss this remarkable man for years to come. Let us pray to Almighty Allah for the salvation of his soul and offer our deep condolences to the bereaved members of his family, National Professor Sufia Ahmed, Justice Refaat Ahmed, Dr. Raina Ahmed and his grand children. May Allah grant him eternal peace in Heaven.

Mesbah-us-Saleheen is Professor of Geography and Environment, Jahangirnagar University.

Amazingly broad minded

M ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

IN the passing away (12 July) of Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed, a renowned lawyer, champion of democracy and rule of law, two-time Adviser to the non-party care-taker government, the nation has lost one of its illustrious sons.

I came in close contact with Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed when he became for the second time an Adviser to the care-taker government in July 2001. He was given the charge of the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs and the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism. I was fortunate to work under him as the Chairman of Bangladesh Parijaton Corporation (BPC) within a week of his assumption of office of the Adviser, he met the officers of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism and the heads of the autonomous bodies under that ministry. He urged us all to work without fear or favour for the welfare of the country and its people. He requested us to give whole-hearted support to the care-taker government to enable it to hold the general election peacefully, fairly and impartially.

When the meeting was almost over, he looked at me and asked me to take him to some important places which have got bright prospects to attract tourists from home and abroad so that he could do something for the promotion and development of tourism in the country during his tenure as Adviser. I took his wish seriously. But in spite of all efforts, I could take him only to four places of tourist attraction and these were the Sunderbans, Cox's Bazar, Rangamati and Chittagong. The visit to the Sunderbans was to see the prospects of eco-tourism there. The visit to Cox's Bazar, Rangamati and Chittagong were in conjunction with the programme of the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs in those places. I knew that it was very difficult for him to spend a day or two outside the capital.

Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed was a very intelligent and large hearted man. During his tenure as the Adviser, he could realise the importance of tourism industry in the economy of Bangladesh. On the occasion of World Tourism Day on 27 September, 2001, I wrote an article in a number of national dailies. In the article I tried to say that Bangladesh pos-

sessed a natural tourism base which was an important pre-requisite for promotion and development of tourism industry, and how tourism could help create employment opportunities, earn foreign exchange and alleviate poverty in the country. Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed highly praised the article and on many an occasion, he mentioned that whatever he learned about tourism was due to me. This naturally embarrassed me. But I was amazed to see the broadness of his mind.

It was either on the day of Eid-ul-Azha or on Independence Day of 2002 I met Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed last at Bangabhaban. I was then Secretary, Ministry of Food. He enquired about me and my family. It is my misfortune that I could not meet him again during his life time. I pray to Allah for the peace of the departed soul and express my sympathy to the members of the bereaved family.

MA Abdul Latif Mondal is a former secretary to the government.

