

Why these excesses?

Dire need felt for tolerance, again

SATURDAY'S hartal saw police swooping on pickets in the city, which resulted in more than 50 men and women being injured including a former minister. Similar incidents occurred in other places also. The police say they act when demonstrators try to break their cordons. But what defies understanding is: why commit excesses?

Indeed, police handling of the situations that arise on hartal days, when sit-ins, rallies and demonstrations are organised, leaves a lot to be desired. They often lose control and apply crude methods to disperse the demonstrators. Even the deployment of women police to face women demonstrators is no guarantee, as we saw in the past, that decencies would be observed under all circumstances.

Clubbing of women by police takes the issue into the domain of not only basic human rights, but also the norms of civility which require that women be treated with a bit of extra caution and respect.

When the law enforcers show great determination to foil rallies and processions, it amounts to the denial of not only civil but political rights as well.

The right to voice dissent is an essential ingredient of a democratic culture. Hence, it must not be confused with the highly questionable validity of hartal which has a big negative impact on society. A shutdown is counter-productive and so is the attempt by the law enforcers to harry the pickets as long as they remain peaceful.

What happened in Lalmonirhat is even worse. The anti-hartal elements are reported to have raided the homes of opposition leaders and activists. This was the kind of high-handedness that can cause irreparable damage to politics, particularly when further democratisation of society is our goal.

The onus lies with the government, with all its levers of power, to be extra cautious in its approach to political opposition and dissent. It has to take a more sensible view of the opposition's agitation plan and refrain from any reaction overkill. The ruling party has to make sure that the police does not cross the critical behavioral thresholds. The opposition, for its part, should not rely on disruptive programmes that cause more trouble to people than the government.

UNDP's review team for CHT

Development work must resume early

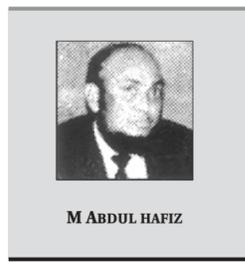
THE arrival of a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) team from the headquarters to review the development scenario in the hill districts is a significant development in an otherwise deadlocked situation. Its presence apparently prompted by a representation from Shantu Lama, chairman of the interim regional council and chief of PCJSS, is expected to end the impasse hit by the UNDP development projects.

The tribal leader had alleged on behalf of the interim regional council that the local UNDP office was being exclusionary in terms of associating the regional and district councils with the development process. The allegations went so far as to object to the UNDP's inclusion of plainland settlers as beneficiaries of its projects.

The litany put a stop to the resumption of development activities which were planned to be undertaken in full-swing from July last year. It is important to note that the decision to resume UNDP work followed a detailed risk assessment survey conducted by a team of experts. The reassessment was done in light of the abduction of three foreign nationals in February 2001 that brought the UNDP's involvement to a standstill. All this means that while the overall risk assessment was favourable, an entirely new dimension of tribal objections came in the way of continuing with the development projects.

Both the UNDP resident office and the headquarters have, in effect, proved sensitive to the need for associating the indigenous people with the development processes in CHT. If it were not so, the work itself wouldn't have stopped following the 'reservations' voiced by the tribal leadership in the first place. Also, by the same token, the headquarters wouldn't have sent a team to the CHT if they were not committed to the all-round development of the inhabitants of the CHT. This inherent truth must not be overlooked by the leaders of all communities in the hill districts.

The coming of an American empire



M ABDUL HAFIZ

FOR last couple of years a new term has been introduced to refer to the role of America in today's global affairs: empire. Even if it was not anything complimentary in the beginning the term has now begun to be music to the ears of the Americans. Already a large body of literature has proliferated to proclaim the new identity for the world's sole superpower and the average Americans are indeed savouring it. For all practical purposes such an empire has since been in place notwithstanding the accompanying anachronism. In fact, any realistic discussion of the US' foreign policy now cannot but begin with the recognition that most of the world sees the United States as a nascent imperial power inspite of the latter's views and

preferences on the contrary. Some nations feel happy with the US' new identity, viewing it as benign liberal empire that can protect them from the ambitious local powers while some grudge it because it stands on the way of their goal. Still others accept it as a hard fact of life and acquiesce the US' new status.

It was inevitable. American

world. There had been rise and fall of empires in the past and each one of them had its rival to contend with. But America is not only the world's sole superpower, it is also the sole empire -- something that never happened before in history -- a sole empire global in scope that seeks to reinvent the nations of the world in its own image. It is also for the first time that the world view

serious economic challenge from Japan. The collapse of Soviet Union in 1991 and the stagnation of Japanese economy since then in tandem with military and economic ascent of the US in the 1990s made the US' apex position in the global power structure all too clear. With the coming of the new millenium what we are witnessing now is the coming of a

utopian vision was born -- the notion that the US is both entitled and obliged to promote its values, particularly that of democracy wherever it can -- by force, if necessary. The idea was promoted by a grotesque alliance of aggressive Wilsonians and neo-conservatives whose apparent belief that the US cannot settle for anything less than worldwide

become all too common. The American efforts in the name of humanitarian aid and nation building projects proved only banal and were all but white wash. Under the cover of restoring or introducing democracy, both defending Panama Canal or attacking Grenada were primarily to serve important American interests.

It is also condescending to claim that America has the right to impose democracy on other nations and cultures regardless of their circumstances and preferences. Treating democracy as a divine revelation -- and Washington as its prophet and global enforcer -- simply does not square with the historical record of this form of government, nor with the geo-political realities of the modern world. The principal problem is the mistaken belief that democracy is talisman for all the world's ills, including terrorism, and the US has a responsibility to promote democratic government wherever in the world it is lacking irrespective of whatever are the social and political costs involved. Or else few cares whether America has an empire as long as its course is guided by the law of history.

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PERSPECTIVES

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empire, as it exists today, was the logical culmination of America's supreme position on four key dimensions that constitute power: as the world's sole superpower, albeit, a hyper power, the only high-tech military power and leader in the 'revolution of military affairs', the largest economic power -- a driving force behind globalisation and exemplar of 'soft power' and disseminator of popular culture throughout the

prevalent in the national leadership perfectly fits in promoting such ambition.

America's unipolar moment confronted now by the world was long over due. Its rise to the supreme position on each of the dimensions mentioned was already under way by the 1980's but at that time the ascendancy, even if real, was obfuscated by formidable military challenge from the Soviet Union and a

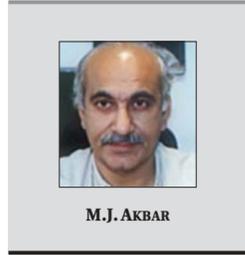
new empire as well.

So far, so good. However there appeared snags as the pragmatism waned in the US' imperial designs and the disintegration of Soviet Union removed the only credible external constraints on the US' international behaviour. The US' unchallenged military, economic and political superiority facilitated the view that it could do almost any thing it wanted to do in international arena. In this milieu a new

revolution in diffusing their values. But strangely such ideas have more in common with the totalitarian philosophy of Trotsky than with the legacy of America's founding fathers or even the muscular but pragmatic idealism of Roosevelt.

The pursuit of moralistic project under self proclaimed righteousness has undermined not only American interest, but also the American values. The double standard and deception have

Happy, or unhappy, New Year



M.J. AKBAR

ONLY one Indian, as far as I know, is apprehensive about the coming year, a friend who comforts himself with a droll form of piquancy. This could be either because he is from Calcutta or he is in advertising; although I suppose a combination of the two would be a guarantee of such self-indulgence. His Gross Domestic Contentment has been sharply affected by some calendar-gazing. Do you know, he informs me through e-mail, that May Day in 2004 falls on Saturday. That means one less holiday. Independence Day comes on Sunday; another holiday gone. Onam (28-29 August) will be celebrated on Saturday-Sunday: damn, two substantive holidays disappear! As if this was not enough, Gandhi Jayanti is on a Saturday as well, as is Vijaya Dashami (23 October). Just to prove that such woes can be multi-ethnic, Christmas and Boxing Day also take up a weekend. Since this is going to be such a wretched year it is entirely in character that its impact will cross over: 1 and 2 January, 2005 will also cover the weekend. That means a good ten holidays lost from our brieflives.

On the other hand, this must be upbeat news for finance minister Jaswant Singh. With ten extra days of productivity, the economy, which has shown remarkable bounce under his watch, should be doing a pole-vault next year. If he can convert feel-good 2003 into a feel-better 2004, he will have launched our country towards the cyberspace of developed-economy

nationalism.

One person whose Gross Domestic Contentment may have been affected by thoughts of 2004 is Sonia Gandhi. She is looking not just at 10 less holidays in 2004, but 30 less seats in the Lok Sabha. Nearly six years ago a Congress clique that wanted to rescue the party from the clutches of a generally emotional Sitaram Kesri anointed her Joan of Arc. In her first electoral test, Sonia Gandhi startled everyone by dipping far

herself, at least most of the time, knew where she was going. And whether icy or not, Indira Gandhi could communicate with the voter, an essential and non-negotiable requirement in democratic politics. Even if Sonia Gandhi had something to say, she simply does not know how to communicate it.

In five years, the Congress has identified itself with only two ideas. One was to make Sonia Gandhi Prime Minister. The second was good governance, an image it

Paani'); a vibrant foreign policy that has turned India into the emerging international star; and a vision for the subcontinent, with a rational approach towards Pakistan -- which Islamabad reciprocated. Vajpayee changed the agenda for India, certain that this would persuade the BJP to follow.

Vis-à-vis Pakistan, Mr Vajpayee has drawn a larger line beside a small one. The small line divided us; the larger line could extend to a

India.

In one of the more astonishing bits of national trivia, Vajpayee, who is nearly 80, won the most votes in an MTV poll this year! In contrast, the Congress under Sonia has retained the dubious virtues of a weary brand name, selling Polson's butter from the 1950s when Amul of the 1980s is determined to stop Kraft from taking over the 2000s. An old brand name is not necessarily a liability, but you have to know how to re-

probably too late to do anything about the Congress in time for the next election. Time, after a lot of patience, has run out. The pre-Sonia problem of the party has not been rectified: the party is still absent in UP, Bihar, Bengal and Tamil Nadu, which means that it is not even at the starting gate in 200 seats. Throw in the fact that it will be wiped out in Maharashtra, and the party is over in some 250 seats. There are losses looming in the Northeast, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Kerala and Punjab. There are only two states where the Congress will do better than last time, Andhra Pradesh and Haryana; and in Hyderabad it has to deal with the formidable political skills of Chandrababu Naidu.

What else does 2004 offer? I am looking forward to one war between India and Pakistan that could break out in March, if we are lucky; a genuine six-week conflict that will answer two questions. The first is an old one -- which cricket team is better. Pakistan have a lean, mean side shaped by not the docile, gifted Inzamam, but by that old, gifted rabble-rouser Javed Miandad. Their bowlers are cobra-cheetahs: the ball rises like a venomous hood at blurring speed. What a contest it will be between the fire of Shoaib and Sami and the arson of Sehwag, Rahul, Sachin and Laxman. Both sides are on a high with inspirational performances in Australia and New Zealand; they will be at their best when they meet on the killing fields of Lahore and Karachi. We do not bowl as well as they do, although Kumble fancies Pakistan in quite the way that Laxman prefers Australians. But they do not bat as well as we do. The umpires, thank God, will be neutral.

But the question I really want answered is this. Which of the two Indians will turn out to be more popular in Pakistan in 2004 -- Sachin Tendulkar or Atal Behari Vajpayee?

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

BYLINE

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below the Kesri bottom line. Her party was, however, generous. Every resurrection needs time. Sonia Gandhi's undisputed leadership and innate dynamism would bring its rewards in 2004. Well, 2004 is here, and elections are only some weeks away. She should have been discussing an alternative Cabinet, according to the hopes of her loyalists. Instead, she is busy acquiring a new "image" and making telephone calls for help. Only Muhammad Ali could float like a butterfly and sting like a bee. After behaving like a Queen Bee for six years, it is a bit meaningless to try and float like a butterfly for three months. It certainly is not enough to create political alliances. While Sonia Gandhi is looking for allies, most of her potential allies are looking the other way.

Image, in fact, is not the real issue. Indira Gandhi would be as icy as Kailas, but everyone knew where she was coming from; and she

sought to reinforce through a series of party-Chief Minister conferences. As for its claimed plank of secularism, the party lost considerable credibility over its handling of Gujarat. There was much initial lip service, but no serious effort to mount a decisive attack on the government in Delhi. More ridiculously, Sonia Gandhi was persuaded that the only way to defeat Narendra Modi was to imitate him. She believed that "soft Hindutva" could be sold softly, without anyone else hearing about it. Such naiveté would be inexcusable, even in a novice.

In the meantime, the BJP took the measure of the Congress on both leadership and good governance. In an extraordinary political turnaround, Atal Behari Vajpayee led his party away from Gujarat memory and made it the standard bearer of all the issues that the Congress was identified with in its best days: economic progress for the poor ('Bijli, Sarak,

circle that includes the whole of South Asia and drags it collectively into a world where prosperity is much more in demand than hostility. Hostility hardens India and Pakistan; peace melts us, and we return to our natural selves. The sentiment on either side when the first civilian planes landed in Islamabad and Lahore and Delhi and Karachi was neither artificial nor ephemeral. It came from a sense of what we were and what we could become.

There was one constituency that the Congress could have cultivated in the last five years, if anyone had thought about it: the Indian young. This is now an increasingly non-casteist, non-ethnic, non-communal class. It is not yet wholly so, and there are many cases of slippage into old, lethal attitudes, but Generation Next is clearly heading in that direction. Its primal energy is still urban, but that energy is infectious and travelling fast into semi-urban

invent yourself for an ever-evolving market. The profile of the voter is always in forward flux, and a political party must be relevant to changing demographics. The better-managed old brands know that this is the only way to keep alive. Lux and Colgate are still selling. But you cannot sell Lux today by showing Nimmi in the ads. In my own newspaper business, *The Times of India* used to be called "The Old Lady of Bori Bunder" in Mumbai when I was a trainee there in the early Seventies. No one equates old ladies with the *Times* anymore.

A political party is a much harder sell, because it must address a whole beehive of needs in a complex, huge and very often irrational, market. It must fuse heritage, and contemporary compulsions to a horizon. Personality can help, but only if that person is a team leader with chemistry -- neither a saint nor a dictator will do in a democracy. It is

OPINION

Migration, money and management

DR. FAZLUL ALAM

PROFESSOR Abdul Bayes is a pleasure to read. I find him truthful, non-ideological and scientific. Not many economists of the day offer land related studies with a view to overcoming economic ills and poverty. Having failed in solving the poverty from various prescriptions, we are now even going to ICT as our next resort! Bayes does not write on such ephemeral issues and cosmetic solutions. His basic theorisation for the cause of poverty in Bangladesh relates to the patterns of land ownership, production and distribution system. Professor Bayes seems untiring to stress the importance of land and necessity of land reforms to revitalise our economy.

Now that Professor Bayes has picked up the issue of migration and economy (Tuesday, Dec 9), and promised further articles on this, I eagerly await to read the rest. At the same time, I feel some light thrown on what has already been published might bring further attention to his writings.

Management of the remittance of the migrants is an economic issue and I am sure a better system than our present one can be devised, particularly if our policy makers show some respect to and recognition of the theoretical issues in which academics like Professor Bayes *et al* are all the time crying in the wilderness. I am overjoyed to record that Bayes has dismissed push-pull, a popular theory of migration. I would like him to announce this dismissal loudly to the academic world as well as to the organisations dealing with migration. Please allow me to add that along with push-pull paradigm, surplus labour-shortage of labour paradigm, chain theory have all been labeled as

classical and well rejected by modern migration research. Not only that they are ahistorical and that they belong to the marginalist school of economics, they are not, by the definition of 'theory', theories at all. At best, they are called descriptions of migration trends at certain junctures of history.

Surprisingly, these theories are still oft quoted and reverently alluded to and these serve the purposes of the dominant powers to present

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migrants as lowly, poor and carpetbaggers *etc etc* so that discriminatory treatments and marginalisation of the migrants can be rationalised. Of course, the same early migration studies would extol the virtues of European migration (basically colonial occupation *en masse*) to non-European lands as spreading of civilisation to the backward lands. So, the ideology was intended to derogate the migrants from non-dominant countries totally ignoring the fact that their movements to the developed countries were for helping the economy of the host countries, and that the decision to migrate might

have been personal, but it would not have taken place without the inducement that the host countries had offered. In recent studies that concentrate on the voluntary nature of the modern migration (short or permanent), it is well proven that the present labour migration is not so voluntary and that it is a continuation of the system of importing labour either by force (slave trade), or by coercion (indentured labour), or as now by inducing individuals of specific countries (lottery for US).

True that the people wish to travel seeking adventure (wanderlust), or in search of jobs for overcoming poverty. Professor Bayes has pointed out that the poor do not migrate as the better offs do. There are very large number of first time Bangladeshi migrants all over the world (unscientific estimate puts it to 10 million, including short term ones), and they earn foreign exchange for Bangladesh. We must know whether their hard earned and remitted foreign exchange will make any real economic improvement in Bangladesh. The reality is that if the foreign exchange is used to import luxury goods and pay for the foreign travels and expenses of the business people and of course of the government officials, real economic improvement will be thwarted. So, improving the FEarning by remittance does not serve the masses of Bangladeshi people, but it assists to maintain high life-styles of the privileged class, including the government officials, parliamentarians, politicians and business people, in our poverty stricken country. Whichever way we manage to improve our foreign exchange earnings, we shall not progress towards solving our economic problems if we do not adopt policies to make the best use of that money for improving the lot of the common people.

Bangla, not Bengali, please

FAKHRUDDIN A CHOWDHURY

I am an expatriate Bangladeshi on vacation here now. Ever since my arrival from Australia here a few days ago I had been a regular and keen reader of *The Daily Star*. It has given me immense pleasure in reading your newspaper as it covers a wide range of news and current affairs. The post-editorial opinion page includes articles of high standard and quality which are no less prestigious than the foreign political opinion coverage, if not better.

The reading of one such opinion article of 29 December 2003 had obliged me to write this. The article I am referring to was written by Hafeezul Alam entitled "Civil society needs to be perked up right away". The article refers to the names of two distinguished sons of Bangladesh Dr B. Chowdhury and Dr Kamal Hossain. Their continued contribution to the social life of Bangladesh had enlightened me. However enlightenment I may have gained I was equally disheartened to notice that the word 'Bengali' had been used to depict our beloved language Bangla that we speak. Bengali is a word probably was used as a translation of Bangla by our past colonial rulers to suit their convenience. It should be about time we realise the fact that there cannot be a translation of the name of a language. We must without any further delay universally adopt the name Bangla for our language and abolish altogether the

translated word 'Bengali' from the vocabulary sooner the better.

As expats we had been working extremely hard to keep Bangla and our culture alive among our next generation. For last few continuous years I had been an integral part of a working group who were actively pursuing to include Bangla in our state

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schools whereby our sons and daughters could take up Bangla as a second language in their school-leaving exams. We are not successful yet but a lot of progress had been made and now the early-education school children are getting scope to learn Bangla at primary level. Hopefully it will be promoted to high school and university levels one day soon.

We are promoting the name of our language as Bangla at every opportunity that

comes to our hand. To universally achieve that goal we need the assistance from home as well. It gave me much-needed comfort when you used the word Bangla in your editorial covering the tragic loss of 15 members of our elite armed forces in the air crash in Benin. We need this kind of educative publicity among our citizenry. Bangla Academy or similar organisational forums could be used as means of more publicity.

It does not bode well to use a translated name for the language for which blood had been shed for the right to speak and hence that day was marked as an international day and event of the last millennium. We must not make ourselves less admired in the eyes of our international well-wishers and admirers.

I want to take this opportunity to highlight one other issue which requires attention. To us the expats, the change of spelling of our capital Dhaka in line with the pronunciation was a most pleasing news of the eighties of last millennium. Such reform should apply to other spheres such as adopting 'Chattagram' for Chittagong that comes to mind. One does not have to go further than neighbouring India to notice that Mumbai has been adopted for Bombay, Chennai for Madras, Kolkata for Calcutta and so on. That will help us shake off the legacies of our colonial past and the universal use of Bangla would reflect the nation we live in and represent abroad.