

AI Report

It should awaken us to the reality

THE Amnesty International Report 2004 has pinpointed certain human rights abuses in Bangladesh. That includes police excesses, attack on Hindus and Ahmadiyyas and violence against women.

There were 13 custodial deaths in the country in 2003, which has been mentioned as an example of cop brutality. The disproportionate use of force in dealing with demonstrations has also drawn the attention of the watchdog body. Finally, the harsh treatment meted out to certain Hindu families and members of the Ahmadiyya community has also been highlighted in the report.

Now, what should be our response to the observations, some of which are very serious in nature? We usually dismiss all these as part of AI's routine exercises. We try to dilute and play down the incidents mentioned in the reports as highly exaggerated accounts of normal happenings. That is the stock response. But it is now clear that aspersions are pouring in from more than one direction. Not long ago, the Transparency International rated Bangladesh as the most corrupt country in the world. We questioned the validity of the observation and locked horns with the TI. Similarly, the Committee to Protect Journalists observed that Bangladesh was the worst place for journalists. So, it is not just one individual or an organisation that we can blame for smearing Bangladesh.

What is not at issue is whether the country is the most "dangerous" place for journalists or the "most corrupt". What weighs heavily on us is that violence against journalists, or the members of any community for that matter, and the most "corrupt" status of the nation are reflective of governance failure, which needs immediate actions to be mitigated or alleviated.

But on account of this "summary dismissal" of whatever adverse reports are made by the international organisations, what we see is total inaction on the issues raised. So the trends, far from being reversed, are basically reinforced. And we are caught in the quagmire of tarnished image and bad reputation.

So it follows that we are not helping ourselves at all by ignoring or undermining the observations of the watchdog bodies. And that also has a negative impact on politics and economy. These are the things that the decision-makers should not overlook while assessing the observations of the AI, TI or any other international organisation.

Draft UN resolution and Iraq's sovereignty

Occupation by another name?

THE current efforts of US and Britain to get a new resolution on Iraq passed is understandable. The new draft resolution on Iraq, on the anvil of the Security Council, suggests the coalition allies' determination to seek an exit strategy from Iraq. Envisaging a leading role for the UN in overseeing the process to an elected government in Iraq is also an acknowledgement by these two countries of the UN's key role in Iraq's political dénouement.

However, the draft resolution raises more questions than it resolves. One cannot but be chary of the possibilities that post 30 June 2004 handover, and even post 2005 election that is envisaged in the handover plan, may still leave Iraq with very much an abridged sovereignty, under the control of the US, legalised by a UN mandate.

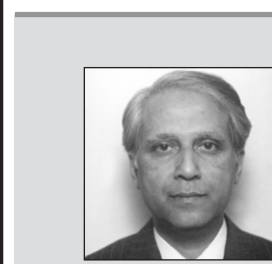
For example, the draft resolution is quite ambiguous, if not silent, about the exit of the multinational forces (MNF) that would be in place through a UN mandate, under stipulations of the new resolution. Even more opaque are the composition, command and control arrangements and scope of operations of this force. There is also a large question mark of the writ of the Interim Government on the MNF. Even the British and the US have different responses on this issue.

One is also not certain if the prospective troops contributing countries would be inclined to provide troops to the MNF whose composition would largely be that of the current occupation forces. One would also hesitate to call it a UN mission in Iraq when in fact it would really be a continued existence of the occupation forces under a changed name only.

Both France and Russia have expressed their reservations while China has suggested changes to the draft that echoes their concerns. We feel that these suggestions merit serious consideration of the Council.

Many aspects of the draft would have to be clarified by the two major powers if they want to dispel the common perception that the new resolution would not be occupation under another name.

A gentleman at India's helm



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

THE entire region has watched with fascination the surprising drama that has unfolded this month on the Indian political stage. The unforeseen electoral result was due to BJP and its allies missing the undercurrent of popular sentiment. While they talked of the stock market, foreign exchange reserves and economic growth, Sonia Gandhi was highlighting issues like jobs and electricity. She was conversing in a language that common people, living in the rural areas could understand.

The unanticipated victory of the Congress-led coalition has brought forth not only new equations within India but also different expectations for the neighbouring region.

Dr Manmohan Singh, although not yet a member of the Lok Sabha, has been sworn in as the new Indian Prime Minister on 22 May, at the head of a 67-member Coalition Cabinet that includes 28 Cabinet Ministers, of whom 18 are from the Congress Party. Several Congress veterans have been included along with leaders of the DMK, NCP, RJD, LJP, JMM and TRS — all of whom had Cabinet aspirations. Surprise inclusions were however that of former Lok Sabha Speaker Shivraj Patil and former Deputy Speaker PM Sayeed, both of whom were defeated in the recent polls.

The decision by Sonia Gandhi to subordinate her personal ambitions to party interest has gained for her a high moral platform and also lent that much more respect for her Party. It was indeed a masterstroke that has caught the members of the Indian Opposition by surprise. The

goons in the BJP and the RSS who spearheaded the hate campaign against Sonia must now know that they appear to be more 'bullies' than the 'champions' of Hindu Indian ethos.

Sonia's simple decision, effectively put at rest the possible confrontation that was being planned by her political opponents. Potential controversy because of her 'foreign origin' was nipped in the bud through a pre-emptive strike. Her gesture, because of her 'inner voice' will make her that much more popular with the electorate who will see

rect. His reputation as a reformist has restored a degree of calm among the business circles. His comments ahead of taking over as Prime Minister were significant in this regard. He mentioned that his government will be committed to an orderly and healthy development of the capital market and that its policies will be in favour of growth, investment and employment.

These are good ideas, but achieving them might not be that easy for the new Prime Minister. The most important dilemma for him will be whether the government (with its

might mean the sacking of numerous workers, which as everyone knows does not help in any eventual re-election scenario. Consequently, the assignment ahead will be delicate. The important question will be whether the Communists will look the other way if Congress tries to change the labour laws? One would assume that the Communists might, if the Prime Minister juxtaposes his technical competence with social conscience.

It is true that Dr Manmohan Singh in the past, as Finance Minister, made some effective contributions

on providing education, universal health care and better housing for tens of millions of slum dwellers as well as boosting food production in the mainly agricultural economy. Any critic would say — easier said than done. However, I feel that this time round, the Congress-led Coalition will have the necessary resources to achieve a part of this goal. The robust economic trend within India should generate employment, particularly in the services sector, and also facilitate the growth of more small industrial units. As in some parts of India, the

late confidence building measures. We also need to support every effort taken by these two countries towards crisis management. It must be remembered that regional stability will be possible only if there is greater understanding. The excellent opportunity initiated by the last SAARC Summit should not be lost. The new Indian Prime Minister can strengthen this emerging process and take it forward. As an eminent economist, he knows more than anyone else that it is poverty, illiteracy and lack of effective social tools that are our common enemy. Reduction of tension will free our economic potentials and facilitate development and growth.

There is some speculation that the new Indian government, consistent with the old Congress philosophy, will be less enthusiastic about Israel and lining up behind Washington in its fight against terror. It would be careful about assumptions of this nature. One would think that the current matrix that exists between India and these two countries and their implied spheres of influence will not permit a great deal of distancing from existing positions. Any change might affect the emerging status of India in terms of defence strategy, trade, outsourcing opportunities and investment. That, more than anything else, will persuade them to maintain their current status quo, but probably, with a slight suggestion of balance.

Dr Singh, because of his background and party affiliation, will also be aware that Bangladesh, under the changed scenario, will now hope for a quick, fair and just resolution of some of the existing bilateral problems. The questions of equitable trans-boundary river water management and sharing, the prospect of greater trade access into India of Bangladeshi goods and the completion of the demarcation of international borders will have to be addressed. This will help in fostering friendship and reducing concerns.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

POST BREAKFAST

Dr. Singh will also be aware that Bangladesh, under the changed scenario, will now hope for a quick, fair and just resolution of some of the existing bilateral problems. The questions of equitable trans-boundary river water management and sharing, the prospect of greater trade access into India of Bangladeshi goods and the completion of the demarcation of international borders will have to be addressed.

this as a sacrifice on her part and that of her family for the greater good of India. One can only hope that the essence of this step will not be lost on other leaders in the region.

This choice has also underlined the secular aspect of current Indian politics — the President is a Muslim, the Prime Minister is from the Sikh community and the Leader of the Parliamentary Party belonging to the ruling Coalition is from the Christian faith. The concept of minorities having access to highest leadership positions in India has been proved. It has been, in its own way, a public relations coup. The unsavoury details of what happened in Gujarat a few years ago will now be viewed more as an aberration in the context of modern India.

Dr Manmohan Singh has an enormous responsibility that has been thrust on his shoulders. He has a difficult and unenviable task to live up to the aspirations of the upper middle class and the affluent sections in India along with its many foreign investors. One must admit that his first steps have been cor-

ruptural poor and strong agriculture lobby), should have as its priority growth or distributive justice, deficit control or more subsidies. One of the important allies of the Congress-led Coalition, the Communists, want to retain subsidies on food, fertilizer, electricity and almost everything else. The Congress on the other hand is committed to "attain and sustain" economic growth of 8 per cent to 10 per cent, which will require reducing India's chronic budget deficit.

The new Administration will also have to take on the unpopular task of businesses having more leverage in hiring and firing workers. This will assume special importance given the fact that the Indian textile industry will want the right to hire contract workers before the December 31 expiration of the quota system of garment imports by the United States and other developed countries. As the global textile market opens up, Indian business will want their government to help them catch up with Chinese manufacturers. This will require amendment of India's antiquated labour laws. This

towards reform. He abolished the system of government licensing in most industries, slashed import tariffs, opened oil refining, telecommunications and the stock market to foreign investors. He also broke the government's monopoly on mutual funds. This time, however, he has to go that extra mile of progressive economics knowing full well that total hands-off style of management will not be compatible with the declared Congress philosophy of 'selective privatisation'. The phrase, 'needs of the common man', will cast its own shadow on every strategic decision pertaining to economic policies. The Indian Prime Minister commands respect for his integrity and intellect, but will need sharp skills to manage the wide-range of party leaders (with their diverse agenda) who have looked only to the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty to lead. They will be a handful of disparate allies with competing demands.

I will now turn to the social and international equation.

The Indian Prime Minister has said that the main emphasis of his government's programme would be

rest of India should also be able to profit from better healthcare and higher primary and secondary educational participation with a benevolent left-mix government in New Delhi.

He has also reiterated that India will seek "most friendly relations" with her neighbours, "more so with Pakistan than with any other country." Such sentiments are indeed welcome, given the fact that no problem is intractable if there is a political will to work towards just and durable solutions. The decision to appoint Natwar Singh as the External Affairs Minister will bring rich experience into the scene.

We need to follow Indian foreign policy initiatives in the region with great care. For India, Pakistan is the most important player in South Asia. Consequently, not too much should be read into the postponement of talks between the two countries to reduce the risk of nuclear war. There has been a transition and that makes such delay understandable. The Pakistan Government should make all efforts to continue its dialogue with India and try to stimu-

Of and for cricket

MEGASTHENEIS

SIR Gajapatairaj Vijaya Ananda, the Maharajkumar of Vizianagram, was one of those rare and fortunate individuals to have captained his team in his maiden appearance in test cricket. In the England-India series of 1936, comprising three tests, Sir Gajapat batted low down in the order, mostly at no.9, and scored respectively 19 not out, 6, 6, 0 not out, 1 and 1; not exactly a distinguished performance. He did not bowl, but did take a low left-handed catch at backward point to dismiss Duckworth of the bowling of Nissar in the first test. In the intervening time between the first and second tests, he was conferred his knighthood, something which surely added to his prestige if not to his prowess at cricket. India lost the series 2-0, and Sir Gajapat never played at the test level again. Clearly he was not a player of test calibre and there is nothing to suggest that he was more adept in his handling of players.

One of the few outstanding players of his rather limited team, Lala Amarnath, who scored a century on his test debut — against England in 1933-34 and which incidentally was the first century by an Indian in tests — was sent back for disciplinary reasons before the first test. Amarnath, who had blossomed into a genuine all-rounder, had, when he was sent back, scored three centuries and taken 32 wickets in first class fixtures of the tour. A subsequent inquiry exonerated him. Years later after the War he was to captain India himself but by then the years had inevitably taken their toll.

The Indian team, though completely outclassed, did have some players of class and calibre. Its opening attacking of Nissar, genuinely fast, and Amar Singh, of lesser velocity but who seemed to make pace off the pitch in the manner of Maurice Tate, and could swing and cut the ball to devastating effect, was perhaps as good as any to open the bowling for India. The batting line-up included the likes of Merchant, Mushtaq Ali and CK Nayudu; at their best they would certainly vie for a place in any Indian team, past or present.

Whatever Sir Gajapat's deficiencies as player or captain, he was a

true aficionado of the game, who could savour its great moments and appreciate a masterly innings or a great bowling effort as well as anybody. He found his true metier or vocation after the War as a commentator over radio, using the far easier to remember name of Vizzy. His style of commentary was bluff, anecdotal and at times discursive. In his articulation or power of description, he was not quite the equal of his compatriot Pearson Sureta, but he was so full of cricket lore and trivia that he was just as easy and more informative to listen to. When the tempo of a game became too staid or sedate for his taste, he would reminisce about great days, deeds and players of the past, the likes of Hobbs, Hammond

triumphal tour of Pakistan. It is futile, fruitless and odious to compare teams of different eras. Few would disagree though that India has ever before been such a potent force to contend with in test cricket. In Pakistan they won, and handsomely too, both the test and one-day series. Earlier, against every prediction of the foremost pundits of the game, they had drawn the test series in Australia. No other team has performed so creditably against Australia, especially in Australia, in recent years. With a modicum of luck, India could even have won the rubber; it was Australia that was lucky to get off with a drawn series.

Prior to the Australian tour, the likes of Ravi Shastri had expected

however, without some help from the wicket, and unless the ball is pitched in the right spot and aimed at the right direction. Old shibboleths about line and length for bowlers still hold true. Pakistan's batting is competent enough but still a little green. It is inexplicable thus that a player of the class of Saeed Anwar could be so cavalierly jettisoned and forced into premature retirement — shades of Sir Gajapat and Lala Amarnath! Surely, precious few teams today can claim such an "embarras de richesses" in batting that would justify such an omission. It is equally enigmatic that Pakistan could not prepare pitches that would have reinforced its bowling strengths, a practice that is acceptable and commonplace in all

cricket parlance, doing something.

The uncertainties of cricket of which Vizzy spoke are much reduced today. Pitches are covered and not, as before, exposed to the elements. Neutral umpires officiate in tests. A third umpire is also available to give a definitive ruling, when asked, with the benefit of modern technology to obviate human error. Unlike Popes, umpires never will be infallible. Umpiring errors, though reduced relative to the past, thus continue to be made. Appeals for run-out and also stumping are not infrequently referred to third umpires, but there is a reluctance to refer appeals for leg before and catches, even in cases where a decision on the basis of the human

column on cricket without mention of Brian Lara's recent phenomenal feat against England. Left-handed batsmen have a special elegance and appeal to the aesthetic senses. One hopes that Lara in his pomp, with his high back lift, lissome, feline, almost feral grace will continue to enthral and give pleasure to cricket lovers the world over for several more years to come.

Sir Neville Cardus and R.C. Robertson-Glasgow are said to have helped raise cricket reporting from journalism to an art. Sir Neville rose from the humblest of origins to become a knight of the realm and President of his beloved Lancashire County Cricket Club. To Australian Prime Minister Menzies, he was the "supreme stylist". Bradman saw in him a "literary genius" and cricket writer, Alan Gibson, was of the view that in the 20th century, possibly only George Orwell, PG Wodehouse and Bernard Darwin could match him for felicity of prose. Robertson-Glasgow, as his hyphenated name would suggest, came from the upper echelons of society. He was a product of public school — Charterhouse — and Oxford and also played first class cricket for both his University and Somerset. In their time, the greatest left-handed batsman was Frank Woolley. His professional career spanned over three decades, and his aggregate of runs in first class cricket is second only to that of Hobbs. Singularly enough Cardus and Robertson-Glasgow evoked similar imagines in writing about Woolley. Cardus wrote: "Cricket belongs entirely to summer every time that Woolley bats an innings... The bloom of the year is on it, making for sweetness. And the very brevity of summer is in it too, making for loveliness". For Robertson-Glasgow, "...there was all summer in a stroke by Woolley and he batted as it is sometimes shown in dreams".

If Sir Neville and Robertson-Glasgow were alive to see Lara on song at the crease, they would surely be hard-pressed in their search for superlatives to describe the batting phenomenon of cricket today.

LIGHTEN UP

One would not wish to complete a column on cricket without mention of Brian Lara's recent phenomenal feat against England... Sir Neville Cardus and R.C. Robertson-Glasgow are said to have helped raise cricket reporting from journalism to an art... If Sir Neville and Robertson-Glasgow were alive to see Lara on song at the crease, they would surely be hard-pressed in their search for superlatives to describe the batting phenomenon of cricket today.

and Learie Constantine.

In the 1958-59 tour of India by the West Indies, the latter were for the first time in years without any of the 'terrible trio', Weekes, Walcott and Worrell, to bolster their middle order batting. The West Indies was in effect rebuilding its side around Garfield Sobers, who had achieved astonishing feats at home against Pakistan earlier. In the third test, Kanhai plundered a double century off the Indian attack. Vizzy was almost ecstatic in his approbation, as a new star announced himself to the world of cricket. Kanhai's late cut, he felt, was so late that it could be called posthumous. There were a few homilies and prescriptions that he would never tire of repeating. Matches were won by bowlers and not batsmen, unless they were of the Bradman class, cricket was a game of such uncertainties that anyone foolhardy enough to make persistent and dogmatic predictions would invariably have, at some point, to eat the humble pie; so true.

India recently concluded its

no better than a 2-0 defeat for India. They were wrong. Before the Pakistan series Imran Khan suggested that India would win the one-dayers and Pakistan the tests. He was wrong. After the first test Ian Chappell asserted with characteristic aplomb that Pakistan would be "brown-washed" 3-0. Even he was wrong.

Pakistan's strength was in its much vaunted bowling attack; India's in the depth and solidity of its batting. At the end of the day, the team that prevailed was the one that played as a team, was more professional in approach, mentally tougher and more resilient, and also better attuned temperamentally to the demands of the modern game. Television replays would suggest that India also enjoyed "a little bit of luck" in the shape of a few crucial umpiring decisions.

Pakistan has the quickest pace attack in the world today in Akhtar and Sami, and also a good pair of spinners in Kaneria and Saqlain. Sheer pace can accomplish little,

cricket-playing countries.

The Indian bowlers performed to potential, and perhaps more, but were not unplayable. It was in his batting, however, that India excelled. Tendulkar remains in a class by himself and opener Sehawg is a player of verve and panache. The basic responsibility of an opener is to take the shine off the new ball. Few, however, go about this task with Sehawg's gusto and uninhibited stroke-play from the very first ball of an innings. Barry Richards and perhaps Greenidge come to mind. And there is, of course, Victor Trumper of the "Golden Age", who according to contemporaries and even later generations, epitomised the essence and true spirit of the game and set new standards of batsmanship. That India could score 600 without contributions from Tendulkar and Sehawg is testimony enough to the pre-eminence of its batting. And yet, virtually this same side floundered in New Zealand when the ball was, in

senses or reflexes is difficult. It only compounds matters that television replays instantly expose any umpiring error. Paradoxically or coincidentally, the relatively vulnerable teams more often than others seem to be at the receiving end of bad decisions.

Umpiring mistakes have always been part of the game, as Vizzy would say, but to the extent these can be remedied or reduced, it makes no sense not to do so. Bad decisions can distort the outcome of a match. When a batsman misjudges the length or speed of a delivery, he may lose his wicket. When a bowler bowls a half volley, he may be hit for four. When an umpire errs, however, someone else pays the penalty, a bowler, a batsman and inevitably a team. In days of old this was accepted, but now, with technology affording remedy, some change is perhaps called for. Umpires can surely be encouraged to make more liberal use of the facility of the third umpire. One would not wish to complete a

of the Berg case. Strange, very strange,

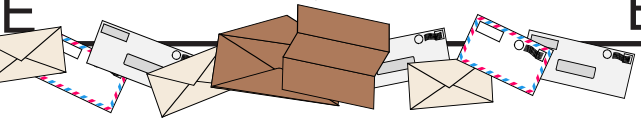
Berg's family sued the Federal government for illegally detaining his son, but the officials claim that Berg had been detained by Iraqi police, although interviewed three times by the FBI while in custody. They could not save their son.

Our thoughts are united with the Berg family in its grief.

The timing of this act serves the American administration and occupation forces in Iraq to present excuses and pretexts for their inhumane practices against Iraqi detainees. Sadly enough, the truth will once again elude us.

Syeda Akhtar (RN)
Gulshan, Dhaka

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.

India democracy

India, the very nearest neighbour of us, once again proved itself as the emblem of healthy and strong democracy.

Democracy is sustained through the practice of respecting the opposition's constructive ideas. It becomes effective only if we accept the right of our rivals to disagree with us on any issue.

Tawhidur Rahman
Nazrul Islam Hall, BUET

The flip side

As the world watches the events in the jails in Iraq, the Muslim world is highly charged to find the evidences of brutality of US soldiers to Iraqi prisoners. What US soldiers at the prison did is immoral and it has been

brought out by US media and the Secretary of Defence had to answer to the Congress and actions are being taken to minimise it. An evil act is always evil. I see a flood of outrage in the newspapers "letter to the editor" section, and rightly so.

Now, in Iraq a US civilian was beheaded as a counter-measure for the jail events. Before the war at Mosul, five US contractors were burned and their charred body parts were hung on a bridge. Are those acts of self defence?

I would count how many letters are published in this newspaper, along with mine, condemning violence and brutality of both sides.

M Hussein
USA

Colonisation by the

US?

After the 9/11 attack, the US showed an excuse to attack Afghanistan to trace out Osama bin Laden and his accomplices as the US government thought Laden was responsible for world-wide terrorism and they deemed it their duty to terminate terrorism by bulldozing the country, the supposed stronghold of Laden. But they could not find him out. They toppled the government of Afghanistan, arrested Mollah Omar and put a person of their choice on the throne of Afghanistan. Though they promised, they have not yet installed a government in that country by the Afghans themselves.

Again, they attacked Iraq for its supposed possession of WMD

which, they thought, would be used by the autocratic ruler, Saddam Hussain to set the world in peril. They thought it their solemn duty to relieve the world from the supposed havoc by attacking Iraq. The attack was more or less based on a hypothetical thesis work of a university student and the fantasy of CIA. They did not find WMD rather they toppled the government, arrested Saddam Hussain, killed his two sons and put their chosen man in the government. They are talking about transferring power to the Iraqis but are tacitly avoiding it.

The two cases obviously raised a question in our mind whether the US is trying to set colony in the 21st century to ensure absolute hegemony world-wide. It is invading a country to relieve it of its misery, but

the question is who has given it such authority? The Americans thought that they would be a welcome guest in Iraq but their speculations failed them.

Mahfuzul Haque
Dhaka

Nazism and Bushism

The recent photographs of how the Iraqis have been tortured physically and mentally by the US and British soldiers can very much portray the brutal scenes of the concentration camps of Nazis. It was understandable since the Germans hated the Jews as they felt they were betrayed by them after the First World War. But what about these skinheads? What is their grudge against these helpless Iraqis? Has

Nazism been replaced by Bushism or Blairism?

Arman Khan
Tejgaon, Farmgate, Dhaka

Sinister web of politics

"The Iraqi police do not tell the FBI what to do, the FBI tells the Iraqi police what to do.

"Who do they think they're kidding?" said Berg's father Michael while talking to the Associated Press.

It is strange that the son of a father who opposed the war in Iraq, a son who believed in helping others was doomed to die in the hands of faceless assassins.

Berg, the 26 year old private contractor, would have been safe by