

South Asian concern for effective water management



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

International Court terms wall illegal

Chance for US to show its commitment to international law

THE recent ruling handed down by the International Court of Justice that the four hundred and forty mile wall being erected by Israel, ostensibly for security purposes, is in contravention of international law, and the court's directive to the UN Security Council "to take action to bring to an end the illegal situation resulting from the construction of the wall" is one more opportunity for the US government to show the world that it truly is committed to the rule of international law.

The current US administration's commitment to international law has been called into serious question by its own unlawful invasion and occupation of Iraq, and standing in the way of the UN Security Council's compliance with the ICJ directive would only serve as yet another example of the Bush administration's contempt for international law and the opinion of the international community.

There can be little argument that the wall being constructed by the Sharon administration is both unlawful as well as immoral. There can be no justification for the fact that 85 percent of the wall is being built on Palestinian land or that 200,000 Palestinians will be trapped on the Israeli side of the wall that cuts through villages and townships, and has necessitated the demolition of hundreds of buildings, tens of thousands of trees, and miles of important infrastructure such as water networks.

This would not be the first time that the Israeli government has defied international law and opinion, but the salient fact here, as ever, is the support of the US, which has provided it with its military, economic, and political life-line.

Crucially, the ICJ has issued its directive not only to the Israeli government, but also to the UN Security Council. It remains to be seen whether the US will, once again, use its veto to thwart the will of the international community and to contravene international law.

With the US currently bogged down in Iraq and President Bush's ambitious plans to remake the Middle East foundering, it seems worthwhile to note that continued unthinking support for Sharon's wall is no way to win the hearts and minds in the Middle East.

Girls' home in Nilphamari

The founders deserve special recognition

A silent revolution it is indeed. The report on the national page of The Daily Star on Thursday last about an elderly couple's lone campaign against illiteracy, dowry and early marriage in a far-flung village in Nilphamari district, must get a special mention. Because it is not always that we get to hear about such noteworthy efforts by common people. An elderly couple, Pizirul Alam and his wife Motahara Alam who have been running a children's home, 'Chadmoni', in Charoadangi village for the destitute girls deserve more than just token appreciation. For they have single handedly taken up a responsibility that has already brought in a highly positive social change. Without waiting for any external help, this childless couple set up this home in 1999 in their own village and worked relentlessly to make their dream come true.

They travelled from village to village trying to convince the poor parents of girls and motivate them about the strength those girls possessed that needed to be tapped. Their determination to make their dream a reality is not only praiseworthy, but also a lesson for others to learn. Providing facilities to a group of poor unprivileged girls to become educated and self-reliant at the same time will bring the much needed change in attitudes, today or tomorrow. In fact it is already showing the signs of a better future for the girls, as the report mentioned. Apparently incidents of early marriage and dowry have remarkably decreased in the villages after the awareness campaign by the founders of Chadmoni.

Not surprisingly, the girls in the home and their parents only have praises for this couple. So do the local civil society. Pizirul Alam and his wife have shown us that one only needs to have the will and sincerity to fulfil his/her dreams, especially dreams like this that benefit the society more than the individuals. They have also made us realise that it's time we got up and did our own little bit to change the society's attitude towards the female population. We join voices with Pizirul Alam in saying that an educated girl is an asset, not a liability.

SINCE the beginning of July, as expected, millions of people in this region, including Bangladesh, have been subjected not only to the onslaught of rain but also to flooding of low-lying areas. At the same time we have read newspaper reports of drought in several parts of western India. It has been a tale of either too much of water or too little at the right time.

It was as such a great pleasure to be able to participate this month in the Third South Asia Water Forum (SAWAF-III), a water related conference, which was convened in Dhaka from July 13-15 and to inter-act with hydrologists, engineers and environmental activists from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Japan, Australia, Malaysia, Netherlands, UK and the USA. It may be recalled here that SAWAF-I was held in Kathmandu, Nepal in January, 2002 and SAWAF-II in Islamabad, Pakistan in December, 2002. My association with the SAWAF-III meeting resulted from my being the Regional Member (South Asia) from Bangladesh to the Global Water Partnership Forum.

Several months of preparation had gone in arranging the Forum which was sponsored by GWP (South Asia), Japan Water Forum

and the UNDP. Participated by more than 250 delegates, lasting for three days, the gathering was conducted through 12 technical sessions and 2 plenary sessions.

Originally, the theme of the Forum was to be restricted to 'Flood Management', but wisely, it was decided to widen its perspective to accommodate intensive discussion on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). This shift enabled partici-

7 country papers and 15 separate statements.

SAWAF-III has been Track-2 diplomacy at its best. It has been a success for GWP-SAS-RWP Bangladesh Chapter and the team of Organisers. An important international meeting was held in Dhaka without too much of a fuss and very little expenditure.

The meeting quite correctly underlined the fact that we will be able to fight global poverty and protect life forms around us only if

forward in an integrated manner and try to create a sustainable and suitable paradigm for water management according to needs -- be it flood or drought or desertification. South Asia, appears to have all the problems and also most unfortunately very little political will within its leadership to resolve these issues.

It was against this background that SAWAF-III examined all the ramifications of different situations. There were heated debates, but fortunately, there was the absence of

circulation and to undertake correct assessment of surface water as well as ground water resources for all basins, for incorporation in all future plans;

-- that coastal zones need to be considered as an integral part of freshwater management;

-- that countries in the region should not only look at market mechanism but should also pay attention to social values, historical and cultural practices while preparing IWRM plans;

-- that there were inseparable links between sound sanitation services and safe supply of drinking water. Consequently there was need to mobilise additional funds for water supply and sanitation programmes particularly for the many mega-cities in South Asia. It was recognised in this context that the private sector could play a pivotal role in this regard.

-- that there was need to improve and make available better flood forecasting information to gain lead-time in tackling the problem for downstream populations, and that this process should also include early warning systems, spatial planning and decision support systems; and

-- that today, there are cost effective technologies for rainwater harvesting and for re-use of city effluents for agriculture, aquaculture and eco-sanitation and that these technologies should be promoted all over the region.

The SAWAF-III meeting has identified new windows of opportunity. The Forum's deliberations have reiterated its role as a facilitator for fostering regional cooperation with regard to river basin management and resolving issues that go beyond the IWRM National Plans of the respective South Asian countries. The SAARC Secretariat needs to carefully follow the thought process of this Group and extend, if possible, institutional support.

South Asia, as I have noted earlier, is a region which has many things to offer. What we now need is political will. We need to take advantage of changed political circumstances and ensure that water instead of becoming a force of discord, becomes a catalyst for peace, understanding and collective prosperity.

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pants in the technical sessions to focus on diverse essential related sectors like -- a) flood, climate change and disaster management; b) water, food, agriculture and environment; c) water, governance and financing; d) water, poverty and livelihoods; e) water and energy; f) MDGs and targets; g) practices and legal framework and institutions pertaining to IWRM; h) water for peace and trans-boundary water issue; i) water supply and sanitation and j) River Basin Organisations and Area Water Partnerships.

These are complex issues which are inter-related. All of them impact on the lives of nearly 1.4 billion people who live in South Asia. Consequently, analysts in the Forum followed the discussion and dialogue with great interest. This was reflected in the presentation of 75 technical papers, 5 keynote papers,

we manage our water more equitably and sustainably.

The World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002, recognised that availability of water is central to the achievement of most MDG goals, including, reducing hunger and poverty, improving the environment, ameliorating slum conditions, educating more girl children and decreasing child mortality. This integrated approach has led to the emergence of the Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM), so essential for water efficiency plans.

Margaret Catley-Carlson, Chair GWP Stockholm, Sweden has meaningfully pointed out that there is really no ready blueprint for any country or for a region. I agree with her, I also believe that countries need to initiate action at the point where their water challenges exist. They have to subsequently move

inflexibility and acrimony that usually marks Track-I inter-governmental positions on ways to manage floods, on water for food, on water supply and sanitation and on water governance and investments. Issues were addressed with an open mind and that was important. It took note of the challenges being faced by the region due to population growth, food shortage and the need to increase food production to meet the increasing demand and the necessity to pay due attention to water use efficiency, maintenance of the quality of the environment and protection of nature.

The blend of experience of the participants was best represented in the recommendations that emerged from the Forum:

-- all countries in the region need to ascertain correct figures related to availability of water resources in

-- that grassroots level stakeholders need to be appropriately incorporated in all future planning and operation of water management projects. In this regard, very wisely, it was suggested that civil society should be given a monitoring role to ensure transparency;

-- that traditional methods of managing water in developing appropriate technologies and environmental considerations lead to sustainable livelihood that have long term effects on reducing poverty;

-- that there is a strong nexus between floods, droughts and poverty, and as such, steps be taken to map the critical areas for preparation of appropriate strategies to address these concerns;

-- that time has come to associate the private sector in a more meaningful and effective manner;

China-Bangladesh ties can be further strengthened for mutual benefits



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

not too long ago. Sino-Indian ties, once characterised by warmth of "Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai", were soured by the 1962 border clashes which took long time to repair and the process still continues. Their ties are expected to be better with a change of government in New Delhi mainly because of the influence of the leftists in the new administration.

China says it is keen to see greater cooperation among the South Asian nations so that these countries can jettison their bilateral differences as far as possible on one hand and develop cooperative ventures bene-

all possible areas to enhance the cooperation. Since democracy was restored in Bangladesh through the 1991 general elections, key political leaders visited China at the invitation of Beijing and reaffirmed their support to the Sino-Bangladesh ties. The present prime minister received a warm ovation during her visit to China as an opposition leader four years ago. Likewise, present main opposition leader was there last year. This exemplifies the importance China occupies in Bangladesh and fittingly, a closer Dhaka-Beijing relationship will be of immense advantage for both and obviously

global economic power competing with Western developed nations. A visit to Beijing and country's main commercial city Shanghai would leave one convinced that glittering touches of development are so palpable that these can justifiably be envious for the advanced economies. The foreign direct investment is huge and the foreign exchange reserve is a whopping more than US dollars 400 billion. More and more foreign investments are pouring in to beef up the local investment. Pudong, the extended area of Shanghai, is bristling with all activities bearing the testimony of devel-

direct flight from Dhaka or Chittagong will take hardly two hours but one has to travel through Bangkok taking almost twenty-four hours considering the hassle of the connecting flights. The Deputy Governor of Yunnan says there is no lack of interest on their part for a direct flight with Bangladesh and he himself is leading a delegation to Dhaka soon to discuss cooperation including the air flight.

It is important that Bangladesh fully realises the gestures and seizes the opportunities for developing a steady and effective inter-governmental cooperative mecha-

cannot be overlooked in any serious analysis particularly when viewed from the point of recent developments in the bilateral ties. The "Taiwan" factor certainly did cause some ripples in the otherwise excellent Dhaka-Beijing links and there can be no denying of this as reported by the press. China is not averse to some kind of commercial ties by other countries with Taiwan, which it considers as defiant province that Beijing hopes would eventually reunite with the mainland through peaceful process.

However, it is a major international problem involving not only geographically small Taiwan but big global powers. The United States has strategic stakes on the issue for long. China itself has huge investment from Taiwan. But Beijing is certainly very sensitive and looks askance at any gesture with Taiwan that has political overtones. It reacted very sharply at a recent visit by a senior minister of Singapore, who is set to become the next prime minister, to Taiwan although the city-state insisted that the visit was private and unofficial. It is believed that whatever misunderstanding or strain caused in the bilateral ties over a Taiwan trade office in Dhaka has largely disappeared.

Relations with China embodies both political and economic values. Nothing should be done from either side that is potentially dangerous to scuttle cordiality and friendship which stand for mutual benefits. A closer Sino-Bangladesh relationship is imperative for healthy bilateral and regional environment and there can be no slackening in this direction with mutual commitment for furtherance of congenial political and economic atmosphere.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist.

MATTERS AROUND US

Relations with China embodies both political and economic values. Nothing should be done from either side that is potentially dangerous to scuttle cordiality and friendship which stand for mutual benefits. A closer Sino-Bangladesh relationship is imperative for healthy bilateral and regional environment and there can be no slackening in this direction with mutual commitment for furtherance of congenial political and economic atmosphere.

fitting its vast multitude on the other. Undoubtedly, Chinese influence in South Asia can be reckoned with significance in the sense that it is attaching importance to the region as a whole and also seeks to develop ties at bilateral level. During talks recently with a Bangladesh media delegation comprising national editors and senior journalists, important Chinese figures including assistant ministers made adequate references to Beijing's policy to encourage the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and spoke of sufficient importance to bilateral ties with Dhaka.

From China's point of view, it is keen to further develop political and economic cooperative ties with Bangladesh, a country it values as a good friend. Dhaka, on its part, for nearly thirty years, has also explored

little more for the smaller partner.

But the bigger nation hardly poses itself as a world or regional power and instead loves to identify as a member of the developing world as much as most of the nations are. The Chinese ambassador here Chai Xi, an expert on Bangladesh affairs, who speaks fluent Bengali as he was a student here and later rose to become envoy from young diplomat, rightly says that his main task is to put the bilateral cooperative interactions into a more productive frame. However, there exist areas which need to be identified for economic cooperation by extending the gamut of trade and commerce.

The communist China has opened up its economic front since 1978 and has made remarkable progress in industrialisation and in the process is emerging as a major

ponent in an amazing speed in a country which has maintained its communist philosophy by one-party rule but made significant innovations in the economic arena by introducing free economy.

Chinese leaders say the country adheres to Marxism-Leninism, which does not discourage innovations. The famous maxim that the "colour of the cat -- white or black -- does not matter, what matters whether it can kill the mouse" is often quoted in the context of national development and prosperity.

On bilateral plane, efforts can be made to bring areas geographically closer to Bangladesh for closer cooperation. For instance, the Yunnan province is not far from here but potentials still remain unexploited. The beautiful provincial capital Kunming is buzzing with foreign tourists and investors. A

nism that also covers multi-lateral beneficial ventures. The Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar (BCIM) economic cooperation covering Yunnan province of China, Bihar and northeast of India, Bangladesh and Myanmar with a total area of 1.65 million square km and 403 million people holds big promise for cooperation. It is important that all quarters pursue the venture with all seriousness for enormous benefits complimentary to each other. Foot-dragging on decision making often causes great harm and Bangladesh needs to be particularly alert on this should it want to integrate itself in this enterprise that can produce high results including easier communications through road links.

One issue that has both political and economic repercussions in the context of Sino-Bangladesh ties

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.

The image of our politics

In this country of floods, our politics operate in water-tight compartments. The gridlock has paralysed the nation into a monomania of masterly inactivity. In this ICT Age, the communication gap between the two major political parties in Dhaka is starkly contradictory to the smooth flow of democratic rhetoric.

Our flow of the bile is terrific, and our super mobile tongues create non-stop records. From where this energy comes from, which cannot be transferred to the development projects and routine operation and maintenance? Ago.

The deadly serious politicians have sent on forced retirement their scanty sense of humor, and cannot take it easy. Too ruffled all the time. Small minds have less elbow room for accommodation. They cannot make the nation laugh with their own antics. Too serious to be attractive, and too repelling to be invited.

the branches on which they are perching and crowing. When they land on the soil, they try to bulldoze everyone in sight. Are we becoming a nation of bullfighters as in Spain. Balod use the horns and gore the enemy.

The tongue is spicy but the curry is bhejal, the rice full of stones, and the drinking water contaminated with political arsenic. This brand of hostage politics is not at all liberating. The horizon is getting narrower and narrower, but the leader are supposed to be expansive and broad-minded. Moral height widens the horizon.

Alms begging or alms giving? Who beg and who wish to rule? Beggars cannot run the show. Why our politicians are so helpless that they go about ranting all the while? Rouse or calm the nerves? Hartal is the art of doing nothing and get the work done through others! Create chaos to bring about order! This is the latest scientific discovery on cosmological principle, but Bangladesh is the country of wrong applications!

What the children have to learn from the elders who work in the

political field? If they were asked to write an essay, what would they write about our fire-brand politicians? What is negative complaint? Twelve years wasted in political adda. We are a nation of adda-baz during working hours. Look at the way the long list of demands are placed before the government by CBAs in the business sector, without telling the public what the manufacturers were doing to ensure quality control of the products marketed. Our society is fond of showing one side of the coin, learnt from the perverse political culture of the times. It is time to point out that our politics is a rent-seeking business as witnessed in some other sectors of the business world. We have no respect for law and order, as it applies to "others", and not to ourselves! We are always seeking exemptions. We have huge excuse-making factories, churning out demands in street agitation's, petition submissions, and labelling the authorities on the flimsiest of pretext. It is otherwise known as passing on the buck, the losses, and keeping the profit. Exemplary exam-

ples are neither for sale nor display. It is out of date, these Nanoo Bhai maxims.

Coming back to what the people expect from the two major political parties is to shun this allergy of unreachability which is not a part of our social and cultural behavior pattern. Our traditional amiability has been burnt out into hard balls of hate campaigns. Mobility comes from flexibility and malleability. Our nature has hardened into fixed reference points of hate rating indices.

A Mahseen Dhaka

The approach to hartal

The approach to political hartal is changing. Now one major political party is indulging in hartal and enforcing it for ulterior motive; that is, to instill fear of physical, violent reprisal. The victims are the non-political citizens, the public and the voters. The effect on the target (the regime) is not so apparent and clear, for formation of clear public opinion.

For voluntary support by the masses (electorate), the purpose and utility of continued hartal throughout each month has to be understood through self-analysis, without being falsely indoctrinated. The nuisance value of hartal has increased, and the irritation generated is more than that from mosquito bites.

The varieties of negative approaches is not impressive. The party's image is eroding, and it is cumulative in effect. The responsibility for weakening the party rests solely on the senior party leaders, who cannot explain the real motivation for continuing with hartal. An evil game looks natural after some time. The party is not achieving its announced objectives in the third year of operation of hartal, which is practically paralysed, if not still-born. Hartal is suffering from cancer (if not TB).

The party appears to have run out of ideas, and has thrown the burden on the helpless citizens, and the armed goonda groups, who masquerade as field workers. We are facing terrorist politics. It cannot continue indefinitely, as continued violence is against human nature.

Return to peaceful, voluntary hartal is not possible without an intervening gap, to purge out the intruders who believe in violence. The vested groups would not give in easily, as they are short-changing the public and not paying the real price of the goods and services commandeered for private gain. The cosmic law of compensation is already taking its toll; but it is rather indirect and camouflaged.

Violence will now increase in the vertical scale, and the signs are already there. When one's life is in danger, it is not possible for that person to concentrate on his business, vocation, avocation, or profession, and contribute to the society and the GDP.