

## Thanks to the UN A move in the right direction

We are touched by the promptitude with which the international community have decided to come forward to help alleviate the plight of the flood-affected people of Bangladesh. We are all the more moved by the gesture because it is being made by them on their own without any appeal having been made to that effect by the government of Bangladesh. We thank the British government for its quick grasp of the gravity of the situation. All this speaks volumes about the humanitarian concern being felt by the world community for the deluge-imperilled Bangladeshis.

The UN has taken upon itself the responsibility for floating an appeal to the member-states for assistance in a context where Bangladesh government has neither approached the UN for it nor has individually appealed to any other country for the same. But it will take some time, at least ten days, by one count, to make such an appeal by the United Nations because it would need to be endorsed by all the UN bodies. Besides, the draft appeal would be shown to Bangladesh government before being finalised and sent to the UN members. One can foresee that another time-span will be required for the actual assistance to be indicated and delivered by the countries concerned. So, we are looking at the prospect of a delay that could prove disastrous for the flood victims.

The suggestion is, if the UN secretary-general were formally moved by Bangladesh government earlier on, we could have gotten ourselves some lead-time in tackling the pressing needs for reaching succour to millions of destitute people having very little food, water and medicines to survive. From this standpoint, we are a bit confused by the appeal-related sensibilities of the government in regard to a natural disaster of such enormity and destructive sweep. Now that the UN has taken the initiative, it is for the government to do all it can to expedite the inflow of assistance.

## Going to world court Laudable move by British MPs

THE news of forty British MPs requesting the UN secretary general to seek advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice, to determine the legality of the British war on Iraq should be welcomed by all those that are committed to the principles of justice and fairplay. Interestingly the group of forty is led by one of Blair's own party men, Alan Simpson. Reportedly, the group cuts across partylines.

The recent report by Lord Butler was very 'British' in that it rather extraordinarily arrived at the conclusion that everybody was beyond reproach and nobody made any mistakes, what if there was failure of intelligence. Blair could only take comfort in the Butler exculpation. Yet that is not what the more perspicacious see in the doings of the British Prime Minister. Concern arises when one sees powerful countries riding roughshod on international norms and sentiments in pursuing their selfish national interest, as was done by the Americans and the British in Iraq.

Does the contention of the 'group of forty' that the motivations for approaching the secretary general of the UN, to seek clarification from the highest international judicial body, about the legitimacy of the war in Iraq, reflect the sentiments of the majority world opinion? Yes, it does, in a way.

This, we feel, bodes well for balance in international order. Although the world court can only offer verdicts that are non-binding, the moral force behind their verdict cannot but have some effect on international dealings of states. We wait eagerly for the Court's verdict, in particular on the legality of the much-misused "pre-emptive wars".

What we fail to understand, however, is why the MPs have fallen back on the office of the UN secretary general at this point in time when the damage has already been done. One can only wonder whether they could not have brought their power to generate opinion at home as well as in their parliament to dissuade the Blair government from going into Iraq in the first place.

No body can deny that this was a war that, by all counts, was illegal, World Court or not.

## Floods and farmers



AMM SHAWKAT ALI

It is widely known that floods are a recurrent event in Bangladesh. Some people believe that most devastating floods generally occur in Bangladesh after an interval of every fifty years. In support of this contention, senior citizens cite the examples of 1904, 1954, and 2004 floods. While this may be generally true, it is also true that in between 50 years interval, worst types of floods occurred in 1974, 1987, 1988, 1998, and 1999. The most recent one is what the county is experiencing now.

**Past efforts to contain floods**  
Following the worst floods of 1954, studies conducted led to the birth of East Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) in 1959. The water wing of this parastatal was made responsible for not only containing flood but also development of water resources for irrigation to raise crops. The stress then was largely on the construction of large embankments with water control devices to facilitate drainage and irrigation. There was a policy shift following a study titled Land and Water Sector study conducted by the International Development Association (IDA) in 1972. This study laid more emphasis on small scale Flood Control and Drainage (FCD). But large projects, generally known as Flood Control Drainage and Irrigation (FCDI), continued.

**FAP**  
The elements of FAP consisted of 11 main components and 15 supporting studies. The total cost of FAP amounted to \$131.1 million. The studies generated lot of investment projects amounting to some billions of dollars. It is not known, how many

### Two schools of thought

In the wake of the floods of 1987 and 1988, two schools of thought emerged. The Eastern Waters study of the late eighties argued that floods are a fact of life and Bangladesh has to live with floods. Disaster management principles divide actions into three parts. First, the pre-disaster, which consists of warning for the people in areas likely to be badly affected. Second, during disaster stage, when not much action except emergency supplies are made available. Third, the post-

disaster stage when rehabilitation work is undertaken. These are mainly in the fields of agriculture, infrastructure, and medical care where needed.

of the projects have been implemented and with what results. All that is known is exactly 10 years after the FAP was endorsed, the floods hit again, and it was preceded by the devastating floods of 1998 and 1999. Disaster management principles divide actions into three parts. First, the pre-disaster, which consists of warning for the people in areas likely to be badly affected. Second, during disaster stage, when not much action except emergency supplies are made available. Third, the post-

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(HYV) of Aman are transplanted, for which seedlings are necessary. The sowing period for Aman is July-September. There are at least two big hurdles now. First, availability of quality seeds, which have location-specific acceptability to the farmers. Second, raising Aman seedlings will require at least 30-35 days. It is not known when the flood water will recede. In 1998, it took about 54 days. If God forbid, the same time as in 1998 is taken this year, Aman may also be a lost crop in the flood-affected areas. In that event, the total production loss on account of Aman and Aus may be well over 12 million tons of cereals. Can this be recouped by increased production of Boro and Wheat? It was done in 1998. It can be done now provided ARP goes well. NGOs and the development partners will also need to join in the efforts at rehabilitation of farmers.

### Seeds for Aman for next season

Where will the farmers get the supply of Aman seeds for the next year? This is a critical issue given the fact that all the seeds in flood affected areas have been lost or damaged. Can there be a quick assessment of the farmer's needs for Aman seeds? Can the shortfall be met by import from India? How much money will be needed?

**Allocation under ARP 2004**  
Newspaper reports indicate that so far the amount allocated is only Tk. 20 million. Decision to allocate a further sum of Tk. 180 million has been taken. Bureaucratic red-tapeism may delay release and actual disbursement of funds. The time to act is now. Otherwise, all the honest intention of the government will be lost. The farmers will be left in the lurch.

AMM Shawkat Ali, PhD, is a former Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture.

## WORTH A LOOK

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floods. The idea was to go beyond the immediate provision of emergency supplies of food, clothing, shelter, etc. Following a request from the government of Bangladesh, the World Bank agreed to coordinate the efforts of the countries having an interest in a long-term plan of action. On July 16, 1989, communiqué of the G-7 Summit in Paris endorsed the proposal and called on the international community to support the government and the people of Bangladesh in finding solutions to the flood problem. Flood Action Plan (FAP) was drawn up as a result of these developments.

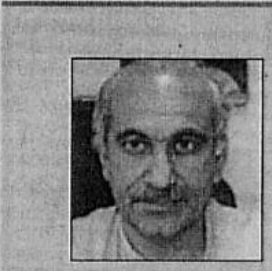
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**Crop damage in 1998 and 1999 floods**  
According to Bangladesh Economic Survey (2001), 3.37 million tons of food crops of 1.73 million hectares of land were damaged in 1998 floods. The total area under crops damaged in 1999 was only 0.12 million hectares and the production loss was 0.38 million tons. Some foreign news media predicted in 1998 that about one million people would perish by starvation. Nothing of the sort happened largely due to efficient management of agricultural rehabilitation programme (ARP). The government of the day allocated Tk. 300 million that resulted in unprecedented level of production of Boro and wheat crops. In addition to the government sources, different donors and private organisations contributed Tk. 92.9 million for ARP. Besides, 81 NGOs of Bangladesh spent Tk. 382.4 million for rehabili-

Tk. 200 million. The Agriculture Minister is reported to have directed that each affected farmer would get required seed and fertilizers free of cost. Some cautionary signals, in the meantime, have appeared in the press. First, if seedlings of Aman are not distributed to the affected farmers and planted by September 15, 2004, few lakhs of farmers would die of starvation. Second, the programme to distribute seeds after flood waters recede would not be fruitful. It was asserted that the need was to provide cash for the farmers to buy seedlings. Others have emphasised the need for resorting to floating seedbed to raise seedlings.

**Time is a critical factor**  
Aus may be treated as a lost crop in flood affected areas. However, Aus contributes but little to the total production of cereals. What about Aman? The high yielding varieties

## Law and misorder



M.J. AKBAR

YOU do not need to send out a circular for Delhi to become sycophancy-compliant. It comes with the union territory.

The sycophancy of Delhi's ruling class is non-partisan and non-communal. It is offered to anyone in power, irrespective of whether the gods themselves want the offering or not. This does not mean that the divinities are not pleased by the homage. It is a rare god who is immune to flattery. The more intelligent forms of divine life expect subtler forms of homage, and subtlety itself becomes an indicator of the supplicant's abilities, which in turn must be appropriately rewarded. For this is a give-and-take game. There is nothing called a one-way street in the corridors of power although the occasional unfortunate has been known to get trapped in a *cul de sac*.

Sensible bureaucrats know that there is never any harm in leaving a pat of butter beside the politician's daily bread. The gesture does not have to be ostentatious. Only the vulgar demand excess, and this is a good moment to note that vulgarity is not the exclusive of any particular race or class. Indeed, the rich have far more means to exhibit their vulgarity.

The Case of the Mis-spelt Name is a classic Delhi tale. The text is poignant. The sub-texts are hilarious, or, at the very least, tragic-comic. For

the uninitiated, here are the details. Kewal Krishna Chugh is a programme officer at the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, a worthy government organisation sated with good intentions. It is headed by a public figure of varying degrees of lustre, but run by professional bureaucrats of the Indian Foreign Service (IFS). Its purpose is to showcase Indian culture to the world, and mirror the world's culture (as defined by the world's governments) to India. In practice, this means that the ICCR can send

began to grind the moment the "protest" about the mis-spelling reached ICCR. When such wheels grind, they have to make mincemeat of somebody. Some scapegoat has to be slaughtered.

And so one morning when he reached office, Krishna Chugh says he got an office memo saying that the director-general of ICCR, Rakesh Kumar, an IFS officer, was very angry, and demanded an explanation. Mr Chugh apologised to the DG, added that he had made every effort to avoid the mistake, and then

Punjab than Thiruvananthapuram. The cultural distance is equal. His colleague Mr Varghese (possibly a Syrian Christian from Kottayam), was being given the kind of last post that long years of service merit. Mr Chugh was getting shafted.

## BYLINE

Moral of the story? Court the courts. Everyone is doing it, whether on reservation of jobs for Muslims or Punjab's abrogation of water treaties, so why not you? It is often alleged that law and order have collapsed in India. That is wrong. Order may have collapsed. That is because politicians are in charge of order. The law remains upright, because judges are in charge of law.

Indian artistes to various famous and vague parts of the world. Classical dancers are its favourite export, but it has been known to send *qawwali* troupes to central Asia as well.

A parallel function is to host foreign cultural ensembles in India. So when the Chinese want to send acrobats, or the Koreans musicians, ICCR welcomes them and provides them with an audience. The ICCR also organises estimable functions like the one for the presentation of the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding on July 9. For such purposes it has acquired a permanent bureaucracy that spreads its domestic wings across the country, and soars abroad to perch in specific, culturally important cities. If you chance upon a centre for Indian culture in Cairo, for instance, then thank the ICCR.

Krishna Chugh, obviously a north Indian (I mention this, because it is an important element of one sub-

"Vadhara" rather than Vadra. Someone from Mrs Vadra's office took the trouble of pointing out this error. So far, so normal.

Before we proceed, and since her name has been now mentioned, it would be fair to point out that Mrs Priyanka Vadra cannot be held responsible for anything that happened to Mr Chugh. I doubt if she read the invitation too carefully. These things appear by the basketful at VIP residences in Delhi, and end up, without making history, as part of some wastepaper-basket.

The person in her office was also doing nothing more than correcting a minor mistake for future reference, a perfectly legitimate act on the part of any secretary. As Priyanka pointed out when the details tumbled out, she gets some 500 cards a day. I would be surprised if she knew anything about the matter. Even if she does not, yet, have a country to run, she has other things to do. But the wheels of sycophancy

apologised to 10 Janpath as well. But he was relieved of his post, and then, through the relevant departmental promotions committee, transferred to Thiruvananthapuram, along with a colleague, T.J. Varghese. Mr Chugh protested, and when he was ignored went to the Delhi High Court. His complaint was unjust; Kerala was a punishment posting, not a promotion.

Why? We must now shift, in our search for justice, to what Hercules Poirot often called the psychology of the individual. Our first individual is Mr Chugh. He has put in 32 years of work and has only another five left. He is settled in Delhi, and looks forward to a pleasant sunset at ICCR. What greater punishment can there be for an ageing Punjabi than solitary confinement in the furthest tip of India, as distant from family and friends as could be, ignorant of local language or customs. As the crow flies, Tehran is much closer to

of guilt. It is, of course, equally possible that I am entering psychological territory about which I know damn-all. However, no mercy is ever shown to a scapegoat.

Mr Chugh decided that he was not going to be a goat. He did not expect redress from higher authority. He knew that in this case higher authority was punishing him to appease some even higher authority; perhaps the minister, in the hope of some juicy reward. (Opportunities thin out the higher you travel towards the bureaucratic stratosphere.) Mr Chugh must also have known that the IFS supports its own, and would have sniffed away a mere programme officer. And so he challenged the power of the System through the power of the judge. His case came before Justice Manmohan Sarin.

One element of his plea was particularly interesting, and became a mitigating factor in the stay on transfer. Mr Chugh told the court that he had done all he could to ensure that the spelling was correct. He checked with MTNL (proving how the phone directory must be in a mess), websites (you have been warned) and the people at 10 Janpath, where Mrs Sonia Gandhi lives. No one corrected him. So what do we infer? That Mr Chugh was not immune, to the change of power equations in Delhi. It is safe to assume that even if he had any doubts about the 1,799 other invitees, he did not double or triple check.

Second, Mr Chugh sensed that "Vadhara" did not seem right. For one thing, there is a Sindh air about it. "Vadhara" means landlind in Sindh and while a prized title, does not exist outside that province. So neither Mr Chugh's diligence, nor his sense of reality, could be faulted. But the judge laid his hand unerringly on the key point: "The adage -- what is there in a name -- does not carry any conviction with the authorities. An error for which a reasonable explanation was tendered by the petitioner should not have invited a punitive transfer simply because it concerns those who are in the higher echelons of power."

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MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

## OPINION

## The Kashmir conundrum

KULDIP NAYAR

NATIONS, like individuals, look ugly when they break rules. This was the nth time that Pakistan raised Kashmir at the SAARC foreign ministers' conference in Islamabad. The rule is that no bilateral issue will be raised at such meetings. The violation not only exasperated India but also other members of SAARC. Pakistan's obvious purpose was to focus attention on Kashmir, something which it has been trying this for quite some time. In real, it wants India to accept Kashmir as a disputed territory.

I have not been able to make out Islamabad's obsession. This is the status which New Delhi cannot accept for many reasons. It primarily means an amendment to the Indian constitution which lists Jammu and Kashmir as part of the Union. Any alteration in the state's status needs a constitutional bill that requires for approval a two-thirds majority in each of the two

houses of parliament. How is it possible for any government in India to take such a course? Without bringing in the terminology of dispute, India has, indeed, conceded the point. When it discusses Kashmir it comes to that, although not in as many words. After all, New Delhi does not hold talks with Islamabad on Tamil Nadu, West Bengal or even Pakistan's neighbouring states of Punjab, Gujarat or Rajasthan. Why only Jammu and Kashmir? This should have satisfied Pakistan.

When the Shimla Agreement between Mrs Indira Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the then Prime Ministers, singled out "Jammu and Kashmir" for "a final settlement," New Delhi said in no uncertain terms that the status of the state was still to be determined. More recently, former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and President General Pervez Musharraf underlined the same point in their joint statement. They specifically men-

tioned Kashmir as a topic for talks. Had Kashmir not been a matter pending settlement, the question of discussing it again and again would not have arisen.

**One way out is people-to-people contact, not only through easy visas but also through free trade. Both countries should become a single economic unit (with Bangladesh added) so that the ties of trade and commerce develop into the ties of dependence and friendship. Once the people of the two countries come to have an equation of that level, Kashmir will be automatically solved.**

My impression is that Pakistan has no policy on Kashmir. It kicks up dust all the time to confuse the issue. Except the contention that the state should become part of Pakistan because of its Muslim majority, what claim does it have over Kashmir? On the one hand, it says that the independent status of the state is not acceptable. On the other, it knows fully well that the demand of the preponderant majority of Kashmiris is for *azadi* (independence). Even

Pakistan's most loyal exponent, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, says if it is the *azadi* the Kashmiris want, they would have it.

The only policy of Pakistan seems

that Pakistan was not in a position to take Kashmir forcibly from India. It goes to Sharif's credit that he said India was not in a position to give Kashmir to Pakistan on a platter.

sult" anybody. The talks between him and Pakistan's foreign minister Kasuri in Islamabad had made the confusion more confounded. Both are saying different things while

stan to sign the Indus Water Treaty, more than 40 years ago.

Ayub's version as recorded by Qadir is: Nehru was insulting. I tried to talk to him on Kashmir thrice, each time with the observation that since both countries had solved a big problem like the Indus Waters, they should tackle Kashmir to settle things once and for all. Every time, Nehru either started looking at the ceiling or outside the window. Once I felt that he had gone to sleep. He simply did not want to talk on the subject. He was an accepted leader of India and people in Pakistan listened to me; we should not have lost that opportunity.

Opportunities have, indeed, arisen even after the Nehru-Ayub meeting. The biggest was at Shimla in 1972 when Bhutto reportedly agreed to accept the Line of Control as the international border. But he dared not even broach the subject after return from Shimla because Pakistan had not yet got over the

humiliation of losing the Bangladesh war. Still it is stuck in the minds of Pakistan's rulers that the valley should be part of Pakistan because it has Muslims in a majority. Facts as they are, this is not going to be possible. No amount of Pakistan-sponsored infiltration has changed the situation. All that has done is to communalise the Kashmir movement which was once indigenous in content and national in character. Islamabad fails to realise that Kashmir is not a religious issue.

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Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.