

## A providential escape

Need to beef up aviation safety

EVERYONE must have heaved a sigh of relief at the miraculous escape of the passengers of the ill-fated F-28 from what was a close shave with death. It was an act of providence that a fatal disaster could be averted.

It may not be appropriate on our part to comment on the accident itself since we do not as yet have any definitive information on it. There are, however, questions that come instantly to the mind.

First, if the weather was inclement why was the aircraft allowed to take off from Dhaka in the first place? It could have been possible that the weather over Sylhet deteriorated after the aircraft left Dhaka, in which case why did the Sylhet control tower permit landing of the aircraft at Osmani? Second, Sylhet Osmani Airport being an international airport is supposed to be equipped with the necessary gadgets and instruments to aid aircraft landing in heavy rain.

Last but not least, from the press reports it appears that the aircraft overshot the touch down point as a result of which it failed to stop in time and consequently plunged into the canal at the end of the runway.

There are some serious lessons to be learnt, the most important being the age of the aircrafts used on domestic route, which must be constantly under scrutiny as, naturally, the older versions of aircrafts are less likely to have the latest equipment. The second, and equally important, is ensuring the competence and proficiency of our pilots by means of a good training package providing them with the skill to handle emergencies. Latest training aids, like simulation cockpits, must be used to provide our pilots with the skill and confidence to handle difficult situations. Modern technology sees to it that under adverse conditions the human factor plays as little a role as possible.

There is an urgent need, we feel, for the government to make a public statement of the safety procedures that are currently in place to make passenger flying safe in Bangladesh. We also suggest that a task force be formed immediately to assess all aspects of flying safety and recommend measures that would enhance passenger confidence in the national carrier.

## Thumbs up to Maathai

Environment recognised as an element of peace

WANGARI Maathai, a Kenyan ecologist, has won this year's Nobel Peace Prize creating something of a stir. Maathai is the first African woman to have been awarded the prize for her remarkable contribution to preservation of the environment in her country. Basically, the Green Belt Movement of which she is the moving spirit has changed the lives of people in Africa in many ways, apart from being a highly successful tree plantation project.

The Nobel Committee's decision to award the prize to a woman from a continent grappling with a host of socio-economic and environmental problems is very significant. Women environmentalists have long been doing a great job in many countries and Maathai's winning the prize is a recognition of not only her own service, but also that of all the women across the globe who have been nurturing the environment with motherly affection.

Maathai's choice as the winner has indeed added a new dimension to the aura of the Nobel prize for peace. There could be no better way of bringing environmental concerns into focus than rewarding a leading environmentalist at the highest level of global recognition. The Nobel Prize will go a long way in projecting the value of the work that Maathai has done in the collective interest of the people of her country and Africa and in pushing environmental concerns to the world centre-stage.

Environmental issues are important not only for maintaining ecological balance and a wholesome world to live in, but also for peace and harmony. The environment can be equated with peace as many conflicts in the present day world originate from the failure to resolve environmental issues.

In the ultimate analysis, the task of checking environmental degeneration cannot be accomplished unless the leading nations do their part in contributing to the whole process. They must subject themselves to the international conventions that form the basis of the fight against environmental pollution. The Rio Earth Summit and Kyoto Protocol could have had a much bigger impact if the developed nations were ready to take the lead in protecting the environment within the framework of international cooperation and understanding in this inter-dependent world.

# South Asia: A changing horizon

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

INDIAN Prime Minister Dr. Man Mohan Singh told the US Council of Foreign Relations that real partnership requires more than shared commitment to democracy, it requires a convergence of interests and a shared world view. Indian priority would be to transform the Indian economy into a "modern, middle income economy" which, according to Dr. Singh, could be possible by a sustained economic growth close to 6 percent per annum (three times the growth rate of industrialised countries); India having the fourth largest GDP in the world (on purchasing power parity basis) and existence of a vibrant private sector, infrastructure of law and commercial accounting conducive to modern business. India seeks her "due place in global councils" which has remained largely fossilised without recognising the momentous political, social, economic and demographic changes that have taken place in the world since the end of the Second World War.

India, scarred by cross-border terrorism for decades dating from the time when terrorism was either not understood or ignored in the confusion of the process of identification of good and evil seen through the prism of cold war rivalry, is justifiably insistent on elimination of terrorism in all its forms. Yet as V.R. Raghavan (of Delhi Policy Group) pointed out, despite US introduction of the term "harbouring state" as one that funds, trains or allows its territory to be used by terrorists, New Delhi's expectation of the US to see Pakistan-backed terrorism in Kashmir as no less menacing than the one US is set to confront, was belied. Pakistan's role in promoting Al-Qaeda and the Taliban notwithstanding US administration saw Pakistan's potentials in its war on terror as being far more important than India's argument that trans-border terrorism be considered as of similar ilk.

One must, however, admit that Pakistan's support of Al-Qaeda and Taliban were guided by several factors. Firstly, ever since its inception Pakistan has consistently aligned itself with the US and the West through SEATO, CENTO and

other military alliances. This was caused by Pakistan's obsessive fear of Indian military threat that was espousing non-aligned movement to the utter disapproval of cold war warriors like John Foster Dulles and many others. Though Jack Kennedy tried to mend fences with India Nixon-Kissinger tilt in favour of Pakistan during the Bangladesh war of liberation demonstrated fully that Pakistan's absolute dedication to the American cold war cause had paid off. It, therefore, seemed eminently logical to President Ziaul Huq to support the Taliban push to unseat the Soviet backed regimes and compliment the CIA proxy war in Afghanistan. Secondly, given Pakistan's socio-political structure as evidenced by powerful showing by Islamist political parties and the formation of government by the combine of these parties (Mutahida Majlis-e-Amal) in Beluchistan and

ally and financial rewards helped General Musharraf to retain power despite assassination attempts on his life. If anything the first Bush-Kerry debate has shown unanimity on the concept of preemption (despite confusion over passing global test) and war on terror though the two have diverged on ways to wage such war. Senator Kerry said in no uncertain terms that throughout American history no President had ever ceded the power to take preemptive action necessary to protect the USA. Therefore, Bush doctrine of preemption is not strikingly new. What was found abhorrent globally was the sense of exclusion felt by the allies, replacement of internationalism by unilateralism, ridiculing trusted allies as "old Europe" and their preference to subordinate military muscularity to international law as reflective of weakness stemming from the post-

nationalism wavering between isolationism and unilateralism and the forces of internationalism. On the other hand the practice of Bush foreign policy has inflamed the world making it imperative to discipline American power and temper its ethnocentrism. A recent Pew Research Centre polls show declining support for the US during the last two years from 75 to 58 per cent in Britain, from 63 to 37 per cent in France, from 61 to 37 per cent in Germany. Interestingly both Chancellor Schroeder and South Korean President won their elections due to their opposition to the US invasion of Iraq. It is all the more ironic that both Germany and South Korea owe their survival and economic prosperity to American military and economic support extended to them for over fifty years.

What should be worrisome to Bush administration is the fact that a

**What then should the American long-term policy be in South Asia? In the short term US cannot dispense with Pakistani cooperation in the war on terror because despite expulsion of the Taliban from power they are reportedly regrouping in Afghanistan and the capture of Osama bin Laden, believed to be hiding somewhere along the Afghan-Pakistan border, before November Presidential elections is essential for a Bush victory. But for the long haul US has to stop equating an unstable nuclear-armed Pakistan with the largest democracy in the world. Pakistan's political instability defies description.**

NWFP which mirrored popular support for fundamentalist tenets of Islam Pakistan could not but have supported Al-Qaeda/Taliban inspired terrorism. Thirdly, Pakistan always perceived Afghanistan as providing strategic depth against threat from India and had studiously pursued ties with the Al-Qaeda/Taliban mix to obtain that strategic advantage.

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 considered as a defining moment of modern times changed the existing scenario. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice's meeting with a visiting Pakistani Minister and Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage's demands conveyed to Inter Services Intelligence Chief that Pakistan fully cooperate with the US or be regarded as an ally of the Al-Qaeda with serious consequences to follow left President Musharraf with no option but to capitulate to American wishes. Admittedly the bestowal of the status of a major non-NATO

second world war massive contraction of power of erstwhile European behemoths. One is therefore hesitant to accept without reservation Madeline Albright's assertion of tectonic shift in the American foreign and defence policies following the transfer of power from Clinton to Bush.

Virginia University Professor Melvin Leffler finds resonance of Bush's goals with Jeffersonian vision of an empire of liberty, Woodrow Wilson's missive of a world made safe for democracy, Franklin Roosevelt's four freedoms, and Jack Kennedy's determination to oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty. Leffler points out that Bill Clinton had approved the use of preemptive force (in June 1995) regarding counter-terrorism. But the difference between Clinton and Bush approach lay in Clinton administration's successful attempt to contain and co-opt mounting parochial

June 2003 public opinion survey found 45 percent Pakistanis had at least "some confidence" in Osama bin Laden's ability to "do right things about world affairs". In January 2004 testifying before Senate Foreign Relations Committee one senior expert stated that "Pakistan is probably the most anti-American country in the world right now, ranging from radical Islamists on the one side to the liberal and westernised elite on the other" (Pakistan-US Relations, Congressional Research Service, February 6, 2004).

Another CRS Report to the US Congress (November 2003) on international terrorism in South Asia referring to then CIA Director George Tenet's statement to Senate Select Committee on Intelligence stated that despite Pakistan's "crucial" cooperation doubts remained about Islamabad's commitment to core US concerns in the vast "lawless zones" of the Afghan - Pakistani border

reportedly regrouping in Afghanistan and the capture of Osama bin Laden, believed to be hiding somewhere along the Afghan-Pakistan border, before November Presidential elections is essential for a Bush victory. But for the long haul US has to stop equating an unstable nuclear-armed Pakistan with the largest democracy in the world. Pakistan's political instability defies description. Most of its history after partition of India in 1947 has been written under military rule. India, on the other hand, "takes pride" in the words of Dr. Manmohan Singh "in the unaffected regularity of our electorate voting their representatives into and out of office quite matter of factly".

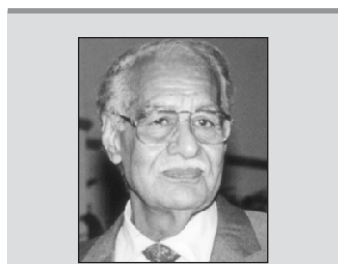
Washington has been coming around to recognising India's significance in the global division of power. Ashwani Kumar, a member of Rajya Sabha, sees in President Bush's statement about India's emergence as a significant power (while nomi-

nating Robert Blackwell as US ambassador to Delhi) and President Clinton's visit to India in 2000 as indicative of American acceptance of India's potentials. Though Clinton failed in his objective to make India forego nuclear weapons, his visit, first by a President in twenty-two years, helped to correct an imbalanced US policy towards South Asia. Political analyst Victor Gobreav suggests that strengthening of the US-India relations would discourage a Russia-China - India strategic alliance with unmistakably anti-US bias - a thesis dismissed by Harvard Professor Joseph Nye on the ground that the likelihood that such an alliance would pose a serious challenge to the US is minimal.

It is argued that despite common minimum programme concluded with the communist allies by United Progressive Alliance headed by Sonia Gandhi US-India economic relations could be further strengthened. If bureaucratic hurdles are eliminated, India could attract \$20 billion dollars in foreign investment every year. For the US to forge sustained and durable ties with India it will need to declare its support for India's permanent membership in the UNSC. For India to be a global player she has to allow the US to play the role of a purposive facilitator in the Kashmir dispute. If arrogance of power has humbled George Bush in the court of international opinion, it is not likely to serve Indian purpose as well. For India to be looked upon as the true inheritor of an ancient civilisation she has to get the support of her neighbours not through coercive diplomacy or ignoring the legitimate concerns of her neighbours but through the use of "soft power" by setting her political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences of others. Equally India's neighbours should abandon their confrontational attitude towards India just because of India's size and might. Our efforts should be directed towards synergistic endeavour so that South Asian poor can hope to live a life of dignity that they so richly deserve.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

# Hero to zero worship



KULDIP NAYYAR  
writes from New Delhi

WE in the subcontinent revere religious leaders but tend to forget national heroes. Mahatma Gandhi and Mohammad Ali Jinnah have stood the test of time because both are respected as father of their nation. However, the Bangladesh founder, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, has been undermined by the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party for political reasons.

The successors have not done too well. Jawaharlal Nehru in India is receding into the background because of ever-new appraisal of his contribution. Liaquat Ali Khan in Pakistan never had that type of sheen. He went into oblivion long ago. Tajuddin in Bangladesh was killed in jail along with other three national leaders. Those who came after them were leaders of political parties. They did not make the grade. Some stole the show but only for a short period. Lal Bahadur Shastri and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, moulded in different cast, still retain their popularity. One was modest and unassuming, the other flamboyant and swaggering. There is nothing common between the two except that they have left behind something for peo-

ple to recall. The Congress had ignored Shastri for years. The party displayed in pandals and posters the photos of only Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi. Shastri's picture, if at all exhibited, was on some distant pole. Someone prodded the Congress to celebrate his 100th birth anniversary. He too, like Mahatma Gandhi, was born on October 2.

The cultural ministry woke up five days before his centenary and constituted a national committee to chalk

Minister Kosygin, asked him not to insist on Pakistan President Ayub Khan to renounce force for the solution of problems with India. Shastri's reply was: "You will have to talk to another Prime Minister." Ultimately, Ayub wrote in his own hand that Pakistan would not resort to arms. This document is in the archives of our External Affairs Ministry.

I saw former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee attending Shastri's function but not that of Mahatma Gandhi at the Gandhi Smriti. He was there last year when he was the

I do not know what protocol considerations came in their way. Or, they kept themselves on the other end choosing? However, the vice-president was present at the birth centenary celebrations of one RSS pracharak, Sahab Apte. Was it because K.S. Sudharshan, the RSS chief, was in the chair?

But what is really disconcerting is the language which politicians in the subcontinent have begun to use against their opponent. Some years ago none would even think of hitting below the belt. Today they start with it.

and try to pull it down. By abusing Manmohan Singh, Sinha has only lowered himself in the eyes of the public.

My disappointment is over the silence of both Vajpayee and L.K. Advani, the two top leaders of the BJP who often talk of values. I thought they would tick off Sinha in one way or the other to make amends. Their attitude speaks volumes about their preference when it comes to the BJP. They had exposed themselves over the carnage in Gujarat by siding with chief

would he build when he does not know which word to use and when?

There is yet another person who is giving a bad name to the BJP. What Uma Bharati has done brings no laurels to the party. She has politicised even the national flag which transcends parochialism and party considerations. Once again Advani exposes his sense of discretion when he compares Jayaprakash Narayan's movement with that of the Tiranga yatra by Uma

Bharati. Not long ago, he used to compare his Babri masjid yatra with Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi Salt march. After he was chastised for that, he is more "modest" than before.

I returned from Bangalore a few days ago where I saw the damage Uma Bharati has done to the homogenous society of Karnataka. Several areas are now considered "sensitive" and people living there do not know what will happen to them in the days to come. "Communalism is beginning to creep in the south," says Janaki Jain, a renowned economist living in Bangalore, as her husband L.K. Jain, a Gandhian, who was once a member of the Planning Commission, nods in assent.

I do not know why the BJP does not understand that Hindutva will destroy the very fabric of our society. In a secular polity, it has no place. The party should have learnt the lesson after its defeat at the Lok Sabha polls. But then its problem is that it has no other programme to offer. The campaign during the Maharashtra assembly election showed that.

Kuldip Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

# 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.

## Kundan Lal, Saigal

This is in response to the letter under the above caption by R D Qureshi which was published in these columns on 01.9.2004.

The required information is as follows:- Golap Hoyer Uthuk Fute-Lyric: Banikumar (1907-1974). Ekhone Uthibe Chand and Naiba Chumale Prio: Lyric: Pronab Roy (1911-1975).

My phone number is 8124503. I would much appreciate, if in this connection, Mr. Qureshi gets in touch with me.

**K G M Latiful Bari**  
Apartment D-3, House 65  
Road 12 A (new) Dhanmondi  
Dhaka.

## DU in doldrums

As a student of Dhaka University who has already lost a year in a session jam, thanks to our beloved 'Blue' and 'White' panel teachers and the politics of the JCD and the BCL, I am very much anxious about our future. We are studying here, hoping for a bright future. The campus has become a heaven for the hoodlums. The most worrying part is

the role of our teachers who are active in this game. While they are regular in private universities, they are rarely serious about taking classes at DU.

I think its time for the real sufferers--the general students along with likeminded teachers -- to resist the activities of the two political parties.

**DU Student**

## Iraq scene

With sinking hearts we are watching the situation in Iraq. It is so appalling that words are failing me to describe my anguish. The historic country has turned into a heap of ruins and a huge number of Iraqis are dying. They are embroiled in a civil war; it has come to this stage due to the maneuvering of the United States. It is hovering overhead like a vulture.

United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan took quite a long time to declare that the invasion of Iraq was "illegal". It is not clear why the Security Council could not stop the war. Is it a toothless tiger? We do not understand why the Iraqis are referred to as 'terrorists'. Has the meaning of 'terrorist' changed? They should be called freedom

fighters who are defending their country from the hands of the intruders, who had invaded it in the name of introducing democracy. We are praying to the Almighty Allah so that Iraq finds peace.

**Nur Jahan**

**Dhaka**

## Country boats

It is surprising that the government is still ignoring a vast traditional industry: the design, development and manufacture of millions of country boats (add launches) used in this country for centuries. A French naval architect, who has settled in Bangladesh, has established a boat museum (recent BTV documentary, Sept 24). Similar step-motherly treatment prevails in the cycle rickshaw industry (although silk and handloom cottage industries have some official recognition).

Our transport system is heavily dependent on inland waterways in this delta region, but there is too much publicity on roads, bridges and culverts projects. Public and official awareness (from the development angle) of IWT panorama is

negligible. River and flood control are enjoying government attention, but not the crafts which ply on the waters.

Trained professionals have to pay attention to the riverine transport sector, considering the high losses of lives due to capsizes during stormy weather, year after year. That is the problem with our elected politicians: Their professional expertise are never tested as MPs or ministers. Politicking is more than thunderous public speeches, and solution about small local problems (for future votes).

The IWTA may review opening another division dealing with river transport and craft.

**A Mawaz, Dhaka**

## Cargo space for vegetables

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman has recently assured of adequate cargo space in aircraft for ensuring export of vegetables and allied food items. The minister also talked about chartering of special aircraft to ship the

cargo to various destinations. The minister was talking to a delegation from the Bangladesh Fruits, Vegetables and Allied Products Exporters Association (BFVAPEA) which met him on 18 September 2004. The delegation informed the minister that due to scarcity of cargo space in aircraft they cannot increase export of vegetables and other food items which now fetches Tk 500 crore a year. They brought it to the notice of the minister that there was a huge demand for Bangladeshi vegetables abroad. At present, they are exporting 4,000 tones a year, and they have the capability of exporting around 10,000 MT a year.

There is no doubt that vegetables and allied food sector is a potential sector for increasing our export earnings. We sincerely hope that the finance minister will soon translate his assurance into reality by solving all the problems including cargo space problem in the vegetable export sector.

**M Zahidul Haque**  
Professor, Dept of Agril Extension & Information System, BAU

## ICC Champions

## Trophy

ICC Champions Trophy has been a fabulous tournament. When we speak of Cricket's heritage and early evolution, we go back to England. It was really good to see that the ICC chose England, the authentic birthplace of the game, as the venue of this tournament. I regret Bangladesh's failure but I don't feel totally depressed about it. I believe they are still gaining experience at this level and they need some time to make themselves capable of facing other teams, which are playing international cricket for a long period of time. Previously, champion teams like Sri Lanka and New Zealand had to go through a similar type of struggle. Eventually, they proved themselves to be two of the best cricketing nations. There isn't much to be worried about. We still have time to figure out our mistakes. I believe failure can serve as the first step toward success.

Two of my favorite teams are Pakistan and England. I support them mainly because I enjoy the way they play the game. Everyone has the right to support his team. It's regrettable that some people seem to have the tendency of mixing political and religious issues with sports.

Personally, I believe every sporting event should be free from sordid rivalries. People shouldn't see the opposition team in the context of ideological and political beliefs.

**KH. Asef Safa Kabir Upal**  
Lalmatia, Dhaka-1207

## An appeal

The SSC/HSC/BA/MBA programmes of the Bangladesh Open University have facilitated the education system of this country. We are proud of this and happy indeed. At present, we have two classes a month. The teachers of the colleges and universities have decided to finish the courses quickly and many students as such find it difficult to understand the contents of the books. If the university authorities assigned four classes a month, the teachers of college or university could complete the courses smoothly.

Moreover, it will be possible for all the students to prepare themselves and do well in the examinations. In these programmes there are many studious students who are in service and for want of time they cannot watch the TV programme or listen to

the radio. They cannot even have a private tutor for want of money.

Therefore what we need is a sound and clear understanding of the lessons from our respected class teachers.

For making the system more effective it is necessary to arrange two more classes a month. We request our respected Vice Chancellor to give permission for the introduction of two more classes a month, considering the above situation.

**Md. Habibur Rahman (Habib)**  
BA Programme, Student of BOU, Sk. Borhanuddin University College.

**Good step**  
It is a good step that the home ministry plans to make a fresh list of smugglers.

Once the list is made it should be made public without hiding the names of the smugglers known to have political links.

**Abdul Malek Wari, Dhaka.**