

FOUNDER EDITOR LATE S. M. ALI

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RAB operations

Sense of security and concern for human rights

HERE is a dilemma here. While there is clearly the question of human rights in the so many deaths in encounter and custody since RAB started operations, there is also a palpable sense of relief among the common people, now that the ranks of the hardened criminals in Bangladesh appear to be in disarray and that they are on the defensive.

Not for a moment do we condone the custodial deaths, but it must be said that the sense of psychological assuagement in the public stems perhaps from their acceptance of the reality that the horrendously poor law and order necessitated some tough measures.

One cannot, however, lose sight of the long-term consequences of investing a law-enforcing agency such as the RAB with undiluted and sweeping powers that might eventually run counter to the principles of the rule of law and natural justice. There would perhaps be a greater degree of acceptance if its focus was restricted to crime control without any excesses committed.

We would be remiss if we did not stress the fact that the downside of law and order is due to a nexus between politicians and criminals. It is the ruling party under whose sponsorship godfathers and criminals were mostly nurtured and government now has to resort to forming 'special forces' to tackle these elements.

We feel that in stemming the deterioration, root causes must be gone into because employment of elite forces can only be a palliative. We would like to see a situation where, in the maintenance of law and order, the usual instruments of the state are employed without infringing human rights and civil liberties.

Poor standard of products Rights of consumers must be the top priority

WE seem to be living in a society where anyone can commit an illegal act without any fear of getting caught and be punished for it. It's almost like a do as you wish kind of a situation where no one is accountable or afraid of the consequences. This type of attitude has taken such a gigantic leap that we, the common people, are suffering the most now.

Surveys conducted by Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI), the only government institution responsible for checking and approving the quality of products before they go out in market for sale, and Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB), a civil rights group, revealed that we have become hostage to the manipulation and criminal activities of a group of unscrupulous businessmen. We are simply disgusted to learn that almost all the basic items that we buy and consume in good faith are not only way below the standard level, some manufacturers do not even follow the proper procedure to ensure the standard, thus making them extremely harmful to our health.

This has to come to a stop. Not all of us can afford to turn to foreign products instead. We know that BSTI does not have enough manpower or strict enough law to nab and punish those who are flouting the laws. We are also waiting for the Consumers Rights Act, prepared jointly by CAB and the commerce ministry, to be approved. We also remember an announcement by the former commerce minister on setting up a watchdog called 'Consumer Council'. We wonder what happened to that idea? Following the observance of World Standard Day, we would expect realistic actions from the government to make us feel safe and healthy, not just run of the mill statements.

Reduction of flood related damages



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

LOCATED in a typical tropical monsoon zone, Bangladesh, a deltaic country, has undergone the misery and devastation of another cataclysmic flooding of a large part of its territory. Extraordinary precipitation in the upper reaches of the GMB Basin area (of about 1.72 million sq km) resulted in more than usual total inflow of water into Bangladesh through the 54 rivers that enter Bangladesh from India.

At the household level, people in both villages as well as towns have not only lost their crops but also their valuable assets like live-stock and poultry. Their houses have been damaged and they are now being forced to seek loans on unfavourable terms to start life again. At the community level, bridges, culverts, educational establishments and socio-cultural structures in the rural areas have suffered serious loss. Other important structures like embankments, sluice gates, protective works and canals have also suffered.

recede as fast as it should have because of the unfortunate synchronisation between the flood peaks and high sea levels. This year, flooding has been intense, probably not as long in duration, but as devastating in its consequence. The UNDP has estimated that Bangladesh will need at least one year to recover from the destruction inflicted by the flood on its economy. Newspapers and the electronic media have reported in clinical detail the damage caused to infrastructure and to the economic and social life of the more than 30 million citizens who have had to face the

to be decided upon by the relevant branches of government and the numerous civil society representatives who have been closely associated in mitigating the effects of flooding from Day One. They will have to tabulate figures and arrive at a consensus. I shall restrict my views to suggestions on the various factors which might enable a lower riparian country like Bangladesh to tackle this persistent problem.

the Commission a South Asian institutional format. The should be charged with the task of considering the different problems related to water in an integrated manner, set against the demand and supply of all water users in these three Basins within the national and the regional contexts at different times of the year. In this context, this Commission should identify the structural measures and regulatory mechanism that will facilitate control of water. This may include the setting up of storage reservoirs and identifying the various points where such construction can be

and dredged properly, it will enhance the conveyance capacity of the rivers. This in turn will make carriage of excess flood waters more effective. This Commission may, as has already been suggested in various workshops in Bangladesh, also consider some non-structural measures. The first might be termed as flood proofing which would require long term measures to mitigate the effects of flood. These measures have already been in practice in countries like the USA, Japan and parts of Europe. These measures will not prevent floods from inundating a

spirit of South Asian cooperation -- flood forecasting and warning as an effective non-structural measure. Transmuting of data in this regard has to be undertaken in real time for satisfactory results. Current satellite and telecommunication technology can make this process a success.

Today's article will however not be complete without necessary reference to the steps that need to be undertaken pertaining to post-flood rehabilitation.

The major components of rehabilitation will include -- employment generation for the rural poor, rehabilitation of associated agricultural activities, reconstruction of rural infrastructure, re-installation of the electricity supply system, rebuilding of houses and reestablishing of the industrial units.

All these measures will require funds. The government may consider convening a special session of the Parliament to discuss the various inter-related issues openly and arrive at a consensus approach.

The Awami League Government was able to tackle the flood crisis in 1998 very effectively. Despite dire predictions, there were few deaths and the scenario returned to normalcy very soon. There was no famine and no major shift of rural population to urban areas in search of livelihood. In fact, the next year there was a bumper harvest which greatly assisted in economic recovery. There were also no allegations from donors that there was misuse of funds and materials provided for flood relief and rehabilitation.

I can only hope that this time round, the present Government will be able to emerge from the crisis with some degree of credibility. Their efforts have been criticised and many questions raised. The people will ultimately judge and their judgement will definitely influence the next general elections.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador and Regional Member from Bangladesh to the Global Water Partnership.



The first step should be to set up a South Asian Water Management Commission consisting of water experts from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal -- to examine associated problems with the Ganges Basin, the Brahmaputra Basin and the Meghna Basin. Secretary-General of SAARC can also be included as a Member on an ex-officio basis to give the Commission a South Asian institutional format.

wrath of flood waters. It has destroyed standing crops, devoured fertile agricultural lands and sometimes turned agricultural lands into infertile tracts by covering the area with coarse sand grains in its wake.

Today, it is clear that flood management in this region cannot be the sole responsibility of only one of the lower riparian states. It is a common obligation that has to be faced collectively. It is also important to understand that human misery caused by a natural disaster has to be tackled through shared resource expenditure. In this context, political will will be required to put into effect viable water management juxtaposed with integrated water resources management.

I will not enter into the realm of quantification of damages sustained and the possible consequent impact on our economy. This will, like in other years be the source of contention, claims and counter-claims. There will be charges of politicisation of figures and lack of clarity. I will leave this factor

undertaken. Bangladesh is situated in the lowest deltaic or estuarine courses of the major river systems and consequently cannot provide suitable location for any storage reservoir. It can only be built upstream of the Ganges in Nepal or in the upstream of the Brahmaputra in north-eastern India. Some structures can also be built in the hilly regions of Bhutan through which rivers flow down and subsequently merge with the Brahmaputra. Such a measure will serve the twin purpose of attenuating flood discharge during the rainy season and augmenting the dry season flow with the stored water. It will also ensure protection of crops from flood and provide irrigation facilities during the lean season.

Similarly, specialists should also undertake a broad picture review of how to construct, more effectively, embankments as an engineering device for flood protection. Two important factors however need to be taken into account while doing so -- the possible effect on the environment and also the unpredictable behaviour of a river. Another area that will need attention will be the potential for channel improvement in rivers that have been affected by gradual alluvial deposition of sediments. The Goral in Bangladesh is an excellent example of this. If the derelict channels can be opened

ended up with the Palestinians (Israel labels any assistance to the Palestinians as contribution to Hamas!) Any individual or nation that aids the Palestinian civilians is on Israel's enemy list. Saudi assistance to the Palestinians has made the Saudis Israel's prime enemy. Saddam Hussein used to send money to the family of Palestinian suicide bombers AFTER they had blown themselves up without their family's knowledge, and AFTER Israel had blown up their houses in response. That was another reason Israel wanted America to invade Iraq. Hamas has

particular area but will be aimed at eliminating or reducing loss of human lives or animal wealth. These steps are expected to ensure that though there will be disruption in the lives of the affected people, they will still have the security to sustain economic and social life after a flood. The measures within this provision might include raising floor levels of homesteads and industrial facilities above recognised flood levels, introducing land-use zoning, better provision of designated flood shelters, ensuring that water supplies through tubewells and other health-related facilities can operate above the potential flood level. This could also include designing of roads to be above peak flood level, the provision of additional bridges or culverts to improve water flows through flood prone designated areas and ensuring that embankments are not washed away.

The above measures might require minor structural support and public sector financial intervention. However, in order to be successful, it will presuppose a bi-partisan approach and coordination in development activities related to flood control and drainage. It will also require that hydrological data and analysis are available to those involved with design and construction of the requisite infrastructure.

Another important feature has to be agreed upon and introduced in the true

Israel is slowly destroying America

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

ISRAEL was created by the United Nations Security Council, without consulting the wishes of the people who lived there, the Palestinians. That is why Israel is illegal. Imagine the western nations allowing the immigration of Europeans to Bangladesh, renaming and handing over the control of the nation to those few immigrants without consulting the wishes of the native residents. That is exactly what happened to the Palestinians in 1948. Similar attempts were made by white European settlers in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and apartheid South Africa. Both failed. South Africa and Zimbabwe are now ruled by the black majorities. Israel exists and thrives only because of western, especially one hundred percent US support, which is slowly but surely destroying America itself. Morally, the only way Israel can exist is through the goodwill of the Palestinians. In reality, these days the only way Palestinian civilian men, women and children can live another day is through the goodwill of Israeli soldiers and settlers, which is nonexistent. Under the sheer hypocrisy and injustice of it all, something has got to give.

President Bush never talks about introducing justice in the world, because "justice" and the 100 per cent US backing for the illegal state of Israel are contradictory; that is why Mr. Bush talks only about "freedom and democracy." "Justice," is the call of the weak, such as the Muslims and the Palestinians. Ironically, when they were weak Americans too begged for "justice" during their revolutionary struggle against the persecution by the British. After President Dwight D. Eisenhower forced Israel (and Britain and France) to withdraw from the Suez Canal, Egypt, in 1956, American Jews were determined never to let that happen again. During the 1960 presidential campaign they attempted to bribe the eventual winner, John F. Kennedy, in exchange for a promise not to pressure Israel. They need not have bothered. The Democrats in general and the Kennedys in particular have always been among the staunchest supporters of Israel. Democratic Presidential candidate Senator John F. Kerry's grandfather was a Jew. (Kerry is a Catholic.)

Although Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon did not personally like the Jews, for strategic reasons they continued to favour Israel. Johnson and Nixon were impressed by Israel's victory in the Six Day War of 1967, in which Israel defeated the combined might of 14 Arab nations. With the Soviet-phobic Arabs mired in dictatorships and monarchies, Nixon found the pro-west Israeli democracy more dependable and made Israel a strategic partner. Weakened and distracted by the Watergate scandal, as Nixon was fighting to save his

escaped the wrath of the Zionists because his presidency coincided with the Oslo peace process (1993-2000), when Israelis and Palestinians negotiated directly. The neoconservatives and Zionist Jews who dominate the current Bush administration -- Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, John Bolton, Richard Perle, Daniel Pipes and Richard Abrams, to name only a few -- were totally against Oslo and any compromise with the Palestinians. Wolfowitz and Perle worked with Benjamin Netanyahu to scuttle Oslo.

nuclear materials ("yellow cakes") from Niger, to make the case for attacking Iraq. Since then the press has suppressed all news about the spy because the case is "sensitive" and "might embarrass Israel!" Spies always work for the enemy. Why is this cover-up to "protect" Israel? What about protecting America and its interest? The Jewish neocons have taken over the Bush administration. They have forced the administration to attack Iraq. Close to 1100 American soldiers have died so far; about 8000 have been permanently maimed. Not a single Israeli has

says that the Muslims are finally fighting back and that the biggest threat to the US "is the defensive Jihad, an Islamic military reaction triggered by an attack by non-Muslims on the Islamic faith, on Muslims, on Muslim territory." Scheuer adds that America is "fighting a worldwide Islamic insurgency -- not criminality or terrorism," and that none of Osama bin Laden's reason for waging war on the US "have anything to do with our freedom, liberty and democracy, (as President Bush claims) but everything to do with US policies and actions in the Muslim world, notably unlimited support for Israel's repression of the Palestinians and the destruction of Iraq." Scheuer breaks the ultimate taboo in the Zionist-controlled US media by criticising America's "one-way alliance" with Israel, and that "Israelis have succeeded in lacing tight the ropes binding the American Gulliver to the Jewish state and its policies."

Because of the illegal way it was founded and the brutal manner in which it suppresses the Palestinians, Israel has few friends and many enemies in the world. When Israeli misdeeds are put to vote in the United Nations General Assembly, out of about 200 members only three or four vote in Israel's favour (usually, the US, Israel, Marshall Islands and Micronesia). Before President Bush started America on a Jewish neocon-driven disastrous course, the world, including the Muslim world admired and looked up to America. The catastrophic course charted by Mr. Bush has transformed many US friends into US enemies, especially in the Muslim world. Israel has long given up on the world. It has decided that the only way to prosper is by "lacing tight the ropes binding the American Gulliver to the Jewish state and its policies." It is a great strategy for Israel. But, what about America's interests? Should America not be deeply concerned about the new enemies President Bush has made in the last three years by his unilateralism, the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and carte blanche support for the criminal policies of Ariel Sharon? Is it in America's interest, and does America have enough resources and moral capital to make all of Israel's enemies, which is pretty much the whole world, its own? I don't think so.



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presidency, President Nixon's Secretary of State and the de facto President, Dr. Henry Kissinger, who is Jewish, took advantage of America's absentmindedness to irreversibly cement Israel's diplomatic, economic and military ties with the US. Under Kissinger, Israel's and America's interests became one and the same. It was Kissinger who mandated that the US would never talk to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) until it recognised Israel. Thus the Palestinians were asked to give up their trump card for a seat at the table. Even after the Palestinians recognised Israel, the world can see that it has done them no good.

Over the last forty years, the supporters of Israel and the Zionists in America have gained a stranglehold over the American media and politics. Even though Israel murders scores of Palestinian civilians daily, there is absolutely no criticism of Israel in the Zionist-controlled US media! Any US president who was deemed fair to the Palestinians or remotely critical of Israel (such as Jimmy Carter and George Herbert Walker Bush) was quickly booted out of office. President Bill Clinton

According to The New York Times, Sharon wants to withdraw from Gaza so that he can keep all of the West Bank. The neocon Zionist Jews are keeping America in check as Sharon completes the West Bank annexation. The neocon Zionist Jews have now enlisted the support of Muslim-hating evangelical Christians, a solid voting block for President Bush, who want Israel to occupy all of Palestine so that Christ can return. In their theology, Christ will only return when Palestine is 100 per cent Jewish; but after Christ returns all the Jews will be either converted to Christianity or killed! The neocon Zionist Jewish-evangelical Christian lobby is so powerful that President Bush now takes orders from Israel's Ariel Sharon. It is great for Israel, but is it good for America?

The world has forgotten about the Israeli spy caught two months ago, with links to Wolfowitz and Feith, operating out of the office of Douglas Feith, the under secretary of defence for policy. He was caught passing America's secrets to American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). It is Mr. Feith's office which has concocted the myth about Iraq acquiring

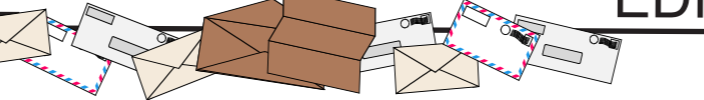
been killed in Iraq. It is rumoured that if Mr. Bush wins a second term the neocons will force Mr. Bush to attack Syria and Iran next. Defeat of all Israel's enemies in the region will be great for Israel. What about America's interest, which will be permanently damaged in the Muslim world?

Last month, Yusuf Islam (the former British pop superstar Cat Stevens, with hits such as "Morning has Broken," "Moon Shadow," and "Peace Train") was detained and deported upon arriving at the US. Yusuf Islam has been to the US 19 times since 9/11, the last two months ago. True to his words in "Peace Train," Yusuf Islam has been promoting peace worldwide. Immediately after 9/11, he condemned the hijackers in an editorial that said "terrorists have hijacked Islam." He vehemently condemned Beslan massacre. So why is Yusuf Islam suddenly on the US's "No Fly" list? Simple. The Israelis put him on their no-fly list sometime back. They apparently complained to the US that since Yusuf Islam is on Israel's list, he should be on the US's list too! He is now. The Israelis say that some of Yusuf Islam's charitable contributions

always said that their enemy is Israel, not America. Israel desperately wants to make America Hamas's enemy as well. That will be great for Israel. But, what about America's interest which will be catastrophically harmed by taking on Israel's enemies as its own? The Jewish neocons defend only Israel's interest. Shouldn't patriotic Americans stand up to them and defend America's interests?

Whenever Israel shoots at, or fires American-made missiles at Palestinian civilians, they very cleverly label their victims as Palestinian "militants" or "terrorists" (a terminology America too is borrowing to label insurgents in Iraq, unfortunately). Without verifying whether the victims are indeed "militants" or civilians, the Zionist-controlled US media faithfully parrots the Israeli line to demonise the civilian victims as animals, whose death the world should celebrate! When Israelis die, as they did because of a despicable terrorist act in Tabá, Egypt last week, that makes the front page of The New York Times -- with a quarter-page bloody photograph! In his book, "Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror," active CIA officer Michael Scheuer

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.

Ramzan power crisis Julfikar Ali Manik's report on the subject (DS: 14 Oct) highlights the shortage of gas as the crux of the problem related to power shortage. PDB officials quantify gas shortage at around 150MMCF, resulting in power shortfall of around 500MW. Despite all the top brass of Energy, Power and Mineral Resources ministries meeting it appears that nothing tangible has come out of it except identifying the power shortage to run between 200 and 400 MW dur-

ing Ramzan and Puja. The usual tool to bridge this shortage is popularly called "load management", a high sounding phrase; but actually it will be load shedding causing misery to the electricity consumers. The powers to be are not much concerned as they live in places where alternative residential power through captive gensets or UPS is assured. The discomfort and problems are felt by the average consumer who does not have the luxury of these sources and who are in

the vast majority. Coming as it is with Tata's demand of ensured gas supply prior to making investment is a realistic rational given the poor showing of gas sector in Bangladesh. Something needs to be done in the gas sector, soon, otherwise our "frail" country will be "frailer". One options in the long term could be to maximise utilisation of our coal resources towards power generation so that we have built in flexibility of fuel across the power sector, and divert gas to more profitable

ventures. In the short term there are proven and viable options, which in the writer's opinion could easily provide around 100 MW to greater Dhaka without needing a kilogram of coal or a cubic meter of gas. The investment will be only in plant, load distribution and management equipment. As these are small units, the gestation period is also very short, and if funded up, a two-year time frame is very realistic. One wonders why this idea has not been picked up by our power sector as a cost effective approach to meet

the ever-growing gap between demand and supply. May be the powers to be in the power sector have a mindset for mega power plants. No one is focused on to alternative energy sources which for a power starved and cash strapped country should get top priority. Developed countries consider and practice this option normally. Unfortunately to us it seems as farfetched as a moon landing! SA Mansoor Gulshan, Dhaka Employing military

force in Iran and DPRK Once again, the jaw-dropping arrogance of the West is on display for all to see. Iran and DPRK are not some territory or protectorate or US-controlled banana republics. They are independent countries, and as such have the right to enrich uranium if they so choose. The United States and many of its allies in the United Nations, including Great Britain, France, Russia, Pakistan, India and Israel all have nuclear weapons. How utterly arrogant it

seems that these powers possess such weapons while at the same time are demanding that others should not. Any attempt to employ military force against Iran and DPRK will only result in yet another un-winnable war and in further development of nuclear weapons by emerging powers that refuse to be subdued any longer. Sirajul Islam Social sciences researcher and consultant, Shyamoli, Dhaka Grenade probe I was wondering whether Bangla-

desh government would ever get the message that its grenade attack probe is laughable by any standard. Nobody has gotten any satisfactory answer regarding many of the recent bombings against the progressive forces. I am sure that Germans and many others are forced to break the diplomatic protocols to show their real displeasure about the total incompetence of Bangladesh government. This so called astringent like mentality would only bring more shame for the government! Dev On e-mail