

## TI's corruption ranking

### Get out of the ostrich mentality

BANGLADESH has the misfortune once again of being adjudged, on the basis of Transparency International's corruption perception index (CPI), the most corrupt among 146 countries listed for ranking this year. It does feel bad, but what's even worse obviously is our topping the corruption list for the fourth time on a trot.

But the worst, abjectly self-demeaning part of it is that those who could stem the tide of corruption have done nothing about it, never felt the urge to. By their non-chalance and total inaction they have only reinforced the long-felt suspicion in the public mind that being the beneficiary of a corrupt system they could not be expected to go against it.

All this has become something of a ritual -- the TI releases its annual reports placing Bangladesh atop the corruption pyramid and the government of Bangladesh promptly spurning it without so much as batting an eye-lid!

No sooner had the latest TI report been released, pat came the law minister Mondud Ahmed's rejection; the criteria are 'unacceptable' he contended post-haste. No explanation, nor any suggestion offered as to what could be a better methodology. Health minister Mosharraf Hossain thought the assessment was based on 'wrong information'. There was even a not-so-oblique remark by a spokesman that the poor ranking of Bangladesh owed it to 'yellow journalism'. Perhaps, we should have ranked first on the global listing on blame-shifting and buck-passing.

The governmental reactions to World Bank reports, World Economic Forum assessments and above all, to the TI reports have invariably been squint-eyed and politically motivated. If there be any critical remark or negative reference in their assessments, the government of the day would reject it out of hand and place it at the doorstep of the predecessor government who are in the opposition now. By contrast, positive remarks would be enthusiastically owned up and made a political capital of by the incumbent. In the process, nothing is done to improve the situation and corruption rules the roost striking deeper roots in the government and society.

The bankruptcy of these stock reactions is most poignantly illustrated by the fact that in the governments' vociferous denial of the most corrupt label, it tends to miss out on the fundamental truth that we are a corrupt country after all.

The point is not whether we are first or second or 23rd on the corruption list, the issue is there has been no sincere effort to see a turn-around in the situation. As we chase the mirage of an independent anti-corruption commission and an ombudsman office, corruption queers the pitch of what could be three percent addition to our GDP growth rate.

## Durga Puja

### Festival of unmixed joy

Durga Puja, the biggest religious festival of the Hindu community, is being celebrated in the country amid great enthusiasm and festivity. More than 19,000 well decorated mandaps have been set up all over Bangladesh by the worshippers of Goddess Durga. It is a highly auspicious occasion to the devotees as they seek the blessings of the Goddess who descends on earth as the saviour of humanity and destroyer of all evils. Her transient stay inspires the devotees to remain on the path of truth and righteousness.

It is a festival of unmixed joy and merry-making as people get together to celebrate the Puja in an atmosphere of friendship and bonhomie. The drudgery of life is forgotten as the hilarious mood continues until the devotees bid her farewell on the tenth day. The immersion of the Goddess today will mark the end of the celebrations.

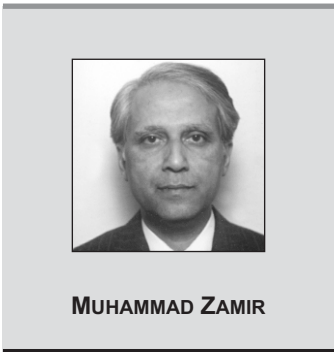
Puja celebrations are part of our age old religio-cultural ethos which has place for all creeds. People in this country have always been known for their tolerance and respect for all faiths.

The consensus on religious harmony and recognition of the rights of the minorities are of course a prerequisite for peaceful co-existence of the people, regardless of their faith. Regrettably, we have watched with a sense of worry that attempts have been made by certain disruptive elements to hurt the feelings of the minority Hindus through vandalism of the most deplorable kind. Such elements do not represent the majority people who want the minorities to have full freedom in every respect. Still their presence in society is something that we cannot acquiesce in. These elements must be reined in as a matter of principle.

The government has taken many steps to ensure that the Puja festivities are not obstructed in any way and the devotees feel secure enough during the celebrations. The government must have done what it deemed necessary, but we feel that communal harmony should be a spontaneous process stemming from the hearts of the people.

Happy Bijoya.

# Is the war on terror being lost?



THE United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan observed earlier this week that the Iraq war has done little to increase security across the world or halt the activities of international terrorists. He has touched on a sensitive subject ahead of the US Presidential elections.

More than three years have passed since September 11, 2001. Like the past two years, ritual gatherings have taken place in Lower Manhattan, New York, a lonely patch of earth in rural Pennsylvania, and a spot near the restored breach in the Pentagon.

The crowds were slightly smaller this year than in the past years, the collective grief probably slightly restrained given the gradual healing of raw wounds. This year, once again, affected families paid special homage by observing minutes of silence and recitation of names of the 2,749 who perished on that day. They remembered the worst terrorist attack in US history, which seared the national psyche and left pain in its wake throughout the world.

The immediate and spontaneous response had been outrage and anger. On that day of infamy, almost everyone identified with stricken America. This included the entire Islamic world which supported the common determination to root out terrorism.

Yet, in the last three years, this

sympathy has dwindled. Support, it is generally agreed, has been frittered away. The US has become more controversial, and NATO left under more strain. For various reasons, many embittered Muslims also perceive the "war on terror" as an assault on Islam itself.

Recent weeks have shown that terrorists can and do continue to strike almost at will. The terrible evil perpetrated at Beslan, Russia has been followed by bombing of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta.

will be a superficial calm but little acceptance. This might, in all probability, lead to unravelling of the political infrastructure once again. It is already being seen as being a top-down effort rather than a grass roots decision. This will only add to the brew of trouble.

One can only hope that Tony Blair will remember his original promise to the Afghans: "This time we will not walk away from you." Most analysts are already pointing fingers and reiterating that the evolving political

a nation building challenge beside which even Iraq pales into insignificance.

Let us now look at Iraq. The last four weeks have proved one thing again and again. Despite claims that Iraq has changed for the better and that democracy is back, Iraq's administrative horizon is littered with corpses, suicide bombings, and continued civilian deaths.

Kofi Annan's uncharacteristically blunt statement that the Iraq invasion was illegal and not

dossiers but nearly six hundred days after Bush's boast that the mission was accomplished in Iraq, the number of US troops dead in Iraq has crossed 1,000 and civilian casualties are beyond 13,000. The country itself is in shambles where bandits of different descriptions, militias of questionable backgrounds, and kidnappers flourish.

The current scenario persuades me to quote Robin Cook's (former British Cabinet Minister) statement, published in the Times of London on

his latest book, *Free Radical*, has put his finger on the nail in this regard. He has alleged that this current disappointing situation is due to "no serious thought" having been given by Washington or London "as to the likely consequence of the war and what policies should be pursued after the war was won in Iraq."

Any serious appraisal of the prevailing scenario would tempt one to conclude that we are left today with a "war on terror" that is hardly going anywhere, and that the contemporary world is more full of anger and prejudice than before.

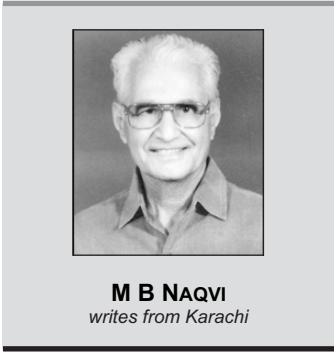
The quest for security, both individual and collective, has resulted not only in serious changes of life-style, but also in erosion of civil rights and good-will among different communities. A twist has surfaced within community relations where it is being recognised that anti-terror measures are alienating Muslims and that stop and search powers are being employed disproportionately against Muslims in Britain and the US. This adverse view was recently reflected in a report published by the Anglican Council of the Church of England.

The increasing lawlessness, the fast-spreading anarchy, the spiralling casualties of innocent civilians in Iraq, and the demoting of the Palestinian issue to the back-burner are all contributing in their own way to anti-US feelings all over the Muslim world and eroding the huge international good-will that went the US's way after 9/11. The net result appears to be that Americans are now probably more vulnerable rather than more secure. This is indeed paradoxical.

Terrorism is unfortunately in robust health and news of its early demise appears to be a gross exaggeration.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

# Is realism enough?



PRESIDENT Pervez Musharraf came through as a robust realist while addressing Indian journalists recently, saying that, given sincerity and flexibility by both India and Pakistan, Kashmir issue can be resolved in "one full day." He wanted both sides to give up their "maximalist courses," as neither can dictate to the other. The purpose should be to expeditiously resolve disputes and prevent a ruinous arms race in the Subcontinent.

What are the "maximalist courses" in the Pakistan President's view? Musharraf attaches much importance to two subjects: Kashmir and the security environment. India's maximalist position vis-à-vis Kashmir can be crudely reduced to "we keep what we have" -- no change in its constitutional status is acceptable to any Indian government. Pakistan's maximalist positions on both issues are known.

On security issues -- the two nuclear deterrents staring at each other from close quarters -- the position apparently is a happy one, as stated by Ambassador Shaukat Umar in the First Committee of UN General Assembly: both India and Pakistan were committed to working for strategic stability and have declared that "their nuclear capability is a factor for stability in South Asia. They are committed to taking measures necessary to reduce the risk of an accidental or unauthorised use of nuclear weapons."

But this happy position is not unqualified. Umar called upon India to accept new CBMs to enhance strategic stability in the conventional forces and to avoid arms race, temper its weapons acquisition and maintain an "acceptable" ratio of forces with Islamabad. He noted that a "durable peace and security in South Asia will require an earnest effort to: one, resolve the outstanding disputes, particularly Jammu and Kashmir; two, promote mutual

change its stance on Kashmir, for instance? The idea of strategic balance of power with Pakistan is anathema to Indian realists: They want India to be a pre-eminent power in South Asia primarily in military strength, conventional and atomic; they would hate to be bogged down into any agreed balance of power with Pakistan.

Pakistani realists have also to reflect on why would India stop acquiring the sinews and currency

India's answer: India is a larger country with larger responsibilities and it has to keep pace with China and other great powers. Why should Pakistan or other SAARC members trap it into regional balances of power?

The same reasoning informs India's policies on other issues. India expects the weaker states to make necessary adjustments without inconveniencing the stronger party. Indians would not be

ties that exist for common ends is easy. There do exist bases for friendly cooperation between Pakistan and India. But that will have to take in most of the other SAARC members. The idea is to conceptually recreate historical India's ambience before the British acquired dominion over it. The aim of glory of a socially ambiguous nation needs to be replaced with direct uplifting of living standards of the masses of people in the seven

be left to attenuated armies. A huge shift is required. Can it be done?

It is even more difficult than the difficulties being experienced in resolving the eight problems. All that can be said is that if the ruling classes of the seven states can be persuaded into adopting this new aim in place of today's selfish *realpolitik*, there would be hope. It is feasible. Only political will is required. Means can always be found and, in any case, the goal is to be achieved progressively over years, not in one go.

The hardest subject concerns nuclear weapons. Both India and Pakistan are of one mind regarding them: they are claimed to be necessary for the security and peace of the Subcontinent. It is *non sequitur*. That is a huge mistake. No one in India can sleep without worry so long as nuclear weapons in Pakistan wait to wreak havoc in India. Conversely, which Pakistani general can be complacent about Indian nukes? There is no defence against these weapons. These are for mass murder and aggression. Their very presence creates profound mistrust by destroying trust entirely. Both countries have proposed CBMs supposedly as a solution of the problem. They are nothing of the kind. CBMs can only ensure that accidents and unauthorised launching of nuclear weapons will become more difficult. Just that much.

CBMs are sort of pain killers. They are not a solution to the problem of two hostile nuclear deterrents sitting cheek by jowl in India and Pakistan. The kind of crises that led to countless military tensions, three regular wars and several quasi wars, including Kargil, cannot be prevented by CBMs. The worry is about such situations.

It is the authorised persons' finger on the red button, given their track record, that is the real threat.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

## 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.

### Whither Islam?

Bush can no longer beat about the bush, as Kerry will not give him any easy points. The US presidential election is drawing huge and usual interest all over the world, as American presence elsewhere is more unauthorised than legitimate. The Iraq operation is a case in point.

The question uppermost in the minds of more than a billion Muslims (25 per cent of the world population of six billion, compared to 20 per cent Christians) is whether Islam has to take a rear seat, because of the Jews and crude oil (energy).

The West (industrialised world) in facing its sunset decades, except for the lone US, separated by two vast oceans -- a colossal victim of megalomania! The allies are deserting Uncle Sam one by one, and Blair's heart has made a trip to

the hospital for check-up (EWS: early warning signal).

Will the Yankees go for a new leadership, or convert the bush into a beautiful forest? Military might cannot solve political, social, and religious issues (it could not in Korea and Vietnam in earlier decades, and Hitler also failed).

Thanks to the pre-emptive philosophy introduced in the new millennium, Islam has to sit up and take notice of the weaknesses amongst the Muslims, individuals and state. No core unity, but OIC is not pointing it out. Too many monarchies strewn about all around the world. Copy-book governance? Islam is a flexible religion, simplified for practical applications, independent of local or international situations.

Saudi Arabia has to take some initiative. It is mum and quiet, with all

the din around. Its silence is inscrutable. Make some noise and be heard. Lead, or be led, or the mantle might change hands. The Muslims are waiting for the right lead.

AZ, Dhaka

### US influence

I refer to Mr Shahjahan Ahmed's letter (Oct 4) "Whither Bangladesh." The current global religious movement (of extremists) is different from the one existing in 1971, when Pakistan broke up. Now some of these extremist Islamic fundamentalist groups wish Pakistan and independent Bangladesh to cooperate in joint efforts.

The US now controls Pakistan through a puppet regime, and India is also in the Yankee camp. Dhaka has not the capability or outside

assistance to keep out of the Western influence in South Asia. The 21/8 carnage might have some link with this evil master plan of the foreign vested groups. Therefore national unity at the political front in Dhaka is extremely essential for the independent survival of Bangladesh. But the two major parties are foolishly chasing each other.

Abdali, Dhaka

### Floods and polythene bags

More than two years ago, the government banned the production, sale, and use of polythene bags in the country. The then Minister of Environment, while advocating the banning of polythene use, cited about a dozen reasons (some of them unscientific, even ludicrous) to justify the ban. One such reason,

often loudly proclaimed by the minister, the DOE officials, as well as some ill-informed journalists, was that since polythene is not biodegradable, it gets into the city sewers through open manholes (thanks to the efficiency of DCC), and therefore, causes floods in Dhaka streets whenever it rains. The rationale was that Dhaka streets will become flood-free if polythene bags are not used. The recent rains and floods in Dhaka as well as the June floods have amply shown how ridiculous was the claim of the minister and the over zealous ministry officials! All of us must have also seen on TV that, during flood relief operations, the ministers and the politicians distribute food and other perishable commodities in polythene bags, and not in jute or paper bags, as advocated by the former Minister of Environment.

### Incommunicado

Dhaka

### Probe body report on Aug 21 attack

The one man Judicial Enquiry Commission has performed its task within the stipulated period of six weeks. It submitted the probe report on October 2. The full content of the report remained with the government and it is the duty of the government to make it public. Only some abstract information was available to the media, including the press, and we could know very little of that.

What information we could gather so far consists of the following facts:

Some external force or foreign state could be involved in it. The further explanation made is that

neither the AL nor the BNP is helping any external force to achieve its goals. So the force concerned needs a puppet government in Bangladesh. The police and intelligence services have failed to perform their duties properly.

The AL made the mistake of rescheduling the venue of the rally from Muktangan to BB Avenue.

The AL was found less than adequately cooperating with the commission since they did not respond to the call of interview.

I fully agree with most of the points. But how the committee is holding the view that a foreign state (not some terrorists!) is associated with such a heinous act? The probe did not disclose the name of the state, stating that such an act would go beyond diplomatic norms. So more than one state can suspect that they have been suspected for the attack.