

## TI's corruption ranking

Get out of the ostrich mentality

**B**ANGLADESH 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

**D**urga 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 their 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?



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

**T**HE 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

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.

## POST BREAKFAST

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.

Terrorist bombings have also taken place within Bangladesh leaving many dead and hundreds injured.

Over the last three years, there have been regime changes in Afghanistan and Iraq, but terrorists have also shown defiance through their malicious actions in Bali, in Madrid, in Moscow, and in Riyadh.

This unrest, that has pervaded the world provokes one to ask some hard questions about how the "war on terror" is being conducted.

Take Afghanistan for example. While the Americans were successful in being able to remove the Taliban regime, most of the things that have happened since then have been examples of how to get it wrong.

We have had a presidential election there, but it has only resulted in more controversy. The whole electoral process and mechanism have been subject to debate. This has made results that much more inconsequential. There

process in Afghanistan is somewhat of a sham, being put in place firstly to enhance Bush's image before the US election, and secondly, to enable the US and British governments to slowly distance themselves from the "quagmire."

As I have noted in one of my earlier columns, today, provincial warlords rule most of the country in real terms. The opium harvest, virtually wiped out by the Taliban, has returned with a vengeance. Law and order outside Kabul has also gone down in the absence of visible NATO troops.

Afghanistan, three years down the road, is possibly only marginally less dangerous than what it was before. It is at a sensitive cross-road where its countryside is again in danger of dissolving into chaos. Despite some progress in education, health care, and infrastructure, Afghanistan remains far more unstable than Western leaders care to admit. Afghanistan is sanctioned by the UN Security Council or in accordance with the UN Charter has predictably generated discussion. Barely a day has gone by without more criticism of the Coalition's decision to invade Iraq. Recently, there has also been the definitive confirmation from the Iraqi Survey Group that Saddam did not in fact possess any weapon of mass destruction -- the main *casus belli* for the US and Britain.

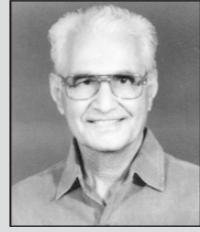
Newly leaked Whitehall documents have also exposed the secret manoeuvring behind Blair's decision to go to war. It would appear that in March 2002, he was more concerned about regime change, than, as he said publicly, with the danger from WMD. They also revealed that many British senior officials privately believed that Mr. Bush wanted to complete his father's unfinished 1991 business in a "grudge match" against the Iraqi leader.

I will overlook these dodgy

September 19: "We were told that the conquest of Iraq was a victory against terror. It now seems like a spectacular own goal." The imbroglio that is Iraq, and the role it is playing in fostering terrorism, was also aptly described on September 20 by Sir Ivor Roberts (the British Ambassador in Rome) during a meeting in Tuscany, Italy when he observed that George Bush was "the best recruiting sergeant for al-Qaeda." This candid appraisal might have been a diplomatic indiscretion but was full of double-meaning. His criticism went further by alleging that the Bush Administration was subject to "conditioning and pressure" from Israel and the Jewish lobby. His remarks, and that of the former British Ambassador to Uzbekistan (dismissed from his post last week), also showed a growing mood of self-criticism and second thoughts over the war on terror and Iraq within the Blair government.

Tony Benn, British statesman, in

## Is realism enough?



M B NAQVI

writes from Karachi

**P**RESIDENT 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 unauthorized use of nuclear weapons."

The Pakistani realists, sans idealism, need to reflect on what is the incentive for India to do what Pakistan wants it to do, now that India cannot be coerced. How and under what pressure or inducement would an Indian government

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

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

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

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.

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Looking closely at the European model of regional integration, it is based primarily on the people-to-people reconciliation between France and Germany in accordance with an elaborate plan of producing more understanding and adding new commonalities. The vision of common prosperity of actual people can be acceptable to all SAARC members.

Harder thinking is needed on this "vision thing." It must aim at something specific -- constructive and worthwhile in itself. SAARC should adapt a programme of banishing dire poverty through a progressive social security system for all the inhabitants of the region in a given timeframe. The commitment should be legally binding which will force all states to reorient their priorities and this would become priority one. National Security can

countries by integrating their economies without disturbing national frontiers, the way EU has achieved both integration and preserved national identities. Why not SAARC do the same?

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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.

## PLAIN WORDS

The hardest subject concerns nuclear weapons. 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.

nuclear restraint; and three, maintain a balance of conventional forces between Pakistan and India." Despite these prerequisites of stability not having been met, Pakistan concurs with India that "nuclear weapons in South Asia were essential for regional stability."

The foregoing is Pakistan's maximalist position. India has its own realistic hardliners. They do talk of stability and peace. But all these maximalist demands of Pakistan are likely to be rejected by them. They have their own maximalist positions: basically status quo on Kashmir, CBMs about the nukes are negotiable, no agreed balance of power with Pakistan in any field is desired, while the other six disputes can be discussed -- with India negotiating from a position of strength.

The Pakistani realists, sans idealism, need to reflect on what is the incentive for India to do what Pakistan wants it to do, now that India cannot be coerced. How and under what pressure or inducement would an Indian government

the realists -- determined players of *realpolitik* game -- if they tamely agreed with Pakistani arguments in a spirit of sweet reasonableness; agreeing to what morality or international law demands would be unacceptable to them. Inter-state politics is not morality play.

By introducing some idealism, the "vision thing," one only recommends realism to be informed with morality and international law. It includes offering to India something in return for what we demand of it: Pakistan's demands cover solutions to all eight problems. These should be based on international law and fair play. It is not easy to think how one can produce sweet reasonableness among Indians for accepting the demands of international law and morality. That is the mischief of *realpolitik*, given the asymmetry in military strengths.

It is not easy to think of what can be offered other than a cooperative partnership, based on the commonalities of the Subcontinent's history of the last 1000 to 1200 years. Building on commonalities for the inhabitants of the region in a given timeframe. The commitment should be legally binding which will force all states to reorient their priorities and this would become priority one. National Security can

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