LATE S. M. ALI DHAKA THURSDAY MARCH 10, 2005

Rab's action against errant members

The elite force must remain above controversy

T is welcome news that some internal monitoring and weeding out operations are taking place within Rab, the elite anti-crime force. With the arrest of a subinspector who was reportedly caught while taking bribe, the number of Rab personnel brought to book so far has risen to 107.

The house cleaning campaign has to be further intensified in view of the fact that Rab is performing the very challenging job of containing a crime wave of an intractable nature. Rab has been given such powers as would warrant a constant vigil against any abuse of the

In the months since its inception Rab actions, though claimed by its proponents to be an all-out attempt to rein in hardened criminals, have given rise to some pertinent questions. As is common knowledge, we have expressed serious reservations about the ever swelling number of deaths in "crossfire", and we do it again today. Where human lives are involved, the exercise of the rule of law, whose other name is due process of law, assumes critical significance. Rab should be extremely careful in maintaining its image as an instrument of combating crime so that its actions do not, even unwittingly, breed any public misgiving. The charges of corruption that some Rab members are now facing are a proof of the seriousness with which the aberration is being looked at by the authorities. The internal monitoring and accountability exercise must be taken forward

The punishments that the accused Rab members have been meted out range from being sent back to their mother organisation to being imprisoned. Rab will have to remain above any controversy and work within the framework of law to attain the desired level of effectiveness as an anti-

Fresh onslaught on **Ahmadiyyas imminent**

Time for the government to back up its words

HE anti-Ahmadiyya bigots are once again on the move and March 11 has been slated as the day for action. The Rajshahi branch of the International Khatme Nabuwat Movement has announced its plans to lay siege to Ahmadiyya mosques in Bogra that day, meanwhile the Gaibandha branch has declared a similar programme against the Ahmadiyya establishments in that

In addition, the anti-Ahmadiyya forces have been holding processions and rallies all over the northern districts of Bangladesh for the past week, spewing hatred, demanding that the Ahmadiyyas be declared non-Muslims, and laying the groundwork for their agitation on

The government recently announced that it is finally going to take the issue of religious extremism seriously. It has banned the extremist JMJB and JMB organisations and begun to arrest some of their leaders and activists. The government's turn-around on extremists was welcome, since it had spent so much time denying that there was a problem in the country.

March 11 is a chance for the government to show that it really means business when it comes to stamping out religious extremism in any form or shape. The government must take a stand on Friday to show that there is zero tolerance for religious bigotry and violence. The anti-Ahmadiyya movement is fueled by bigotry that makes a mockery of our constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion, it has committed and continues to threaten violence and disorder, and it has committed and continues to threaten to commit serious crimes against both the Ahmadiyya community and against the peace.

Standing firm against the extremists and ensuring the safety and security of the Ahmadiyya community and their mosques is only the first step. The government should take the initiative to reverse its ban on Ahmadiyya publications which has only encouraged and emboldened the bigots, and it should think about banning the anti-Ahmadiyya groups who have been guilty of violent crime and continue to show their disregard for the constitution, the law, and the principles of democracy.

This would send the message that the government is really serious about combating religious extremism and violence and crime committed in the name of religion.

When the construction of Mohakhali

Flyover started, our hearts became

filled with the hope that we would not

be stuck on the road any more. The

traffic problem would not hamper us

any more and we waited for more

than three years to have it done.

When it was inaugurated last

November we were thrilled, but

alas! Now it has become the main

reason for traffic congestion. Since

it started operating, the cantonment

road was closed and all the traffic

came pouring into that particular

road from Mohakhali to the Old

Airport Road. The traffic is so terrible

that no taxi is willing to take you to

Dhanmondi or Mohammadpur in the

evening. In the morning you will see

a huge queue of vehicles from the

Old Airport Road to Gulshan or

Banani. This is a problem, which is

Foreign ministry and the image of the country



T is reported that the government policymakers are considering in taking steps to recast the structure of the foreign ministry for its diplomatic "failure" in handling the poor Bangladesh image abroad. The news of recasting or restructuring the foreign ministry is

In April 2004, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs told the media that it decided to recommend shaking up the ministry's hierarchy as well as organizing the country's missions abroad to make them "dynamic." The Chair man of the Committee reportedly told to the newsmen that: "The present structure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not suit the needs of time. It should be reorganized in accordance with economic diplo-

Before I make a few suggestions on the restructure of the ministry, let me make some preliminary observations on the reported "failure" of the ministry to uphold Bangladesh's abroad when an anti-Bangladesh campaign is being carried out globally.

What do foreign relations

Foreign relations consist not only of political relations directed towards other states, but also economic includina foreian investment, commercial, and cultural relations with governments and people of other countries. Often people-to-people relations are outside the purview of governmental relations, except for ssuing visas or entry permits. It is the totality of relations of the country that ultimately counts and relations in respect of political or economic cannot be compartmentalized.

Who are the main actors in foreign relations?

Under the parliamentary system of government, usually the Prime Minister sets the directions of foreign policy in political and economic relations. The main thrust of foreign relations is ordinarily decided by the Prime Minister in consultation with a number key ministers. Once the policy is decided, several ministries are involved to implement policy and the foreign ministry is only one

power. They have tinkered with it as

to be noted. Intelligence agencies have inputs in the decision of policy and this classified information is only communicated to the Prime Minister and, if permitted by the Prime Minister, to other ministers or senior bureaucrats on a "need to know" basis.

political relations, which are the domain of the foreign ministry, other relations are being conducted by various ministries and departments of the government. For example, with regard to the availability of external economic relations, including foreign investment, Economic Relations Division that deals with foreign agencies and signs the agreements. Commercial/Trade agreements are dealt with by the Ministry of Commerce.

Foreign ministry is hardly involved in

the above two categories of

The opening of commercial

Taiwanese office in Dhaka was

reportedly permitted without any

consultation with the foreign minis-

try, although later it was largely the

foreign ministry that had to be

involved in removing misunder-standing with China. That means a

number of ministries of the govern-

ment are involved in foreign rela-

Secretariat appears to be the coor-

dinating or supervising agency.

ions and the Prime Minister's

In the Bangladesh Embassies in

the key countries abroad, it is not

only foreign ministry officials but

other officials of various minis-

tries/department are posted. Eco-

nomic, commercial, defence liaison

and cultural/Educational functions

of the embassies are performed by

officers posted from other minis-

It is noted that many of the

Ambassadors posted in the key

countries abroad are not often

drawn from foreign service cadre

officers and are not ordinarily

accountable to the foreign ministry

because they are appointed on

"political considerations" (this

practice is not confined to Bangla-

desh only). They have the ears of

the highest echelon of political

had always been in the forefront in

the eyes of the past civil and military

governments when they came into

Furthermore, foreign ministry

tries/departments.

instances

ramifications in future. Often the ministry has to take in officers from various sources because it is only the ministry that suits and fits people of all statures and rank. The foreign ministry is usually the victim of political expediency under all

In the light of the above facts, in ment that has to bear the responsi-

world look at Bangla-

The view from outside is multi-

my view, it is not fair to single out the foreign ministry for its alleged "failure" in countering the bad image of the country overseas. Rather I would argue it is the whole govern-

How does the rest of the

faceted. It is social, political, eco-

to foreign investors, its record of egregious human rights violations was well known all over the world. Even today, attempts are being made to put General Pinochet on trial for his involvement in breach of human rights.

Reforms of the foreign ministry

overdue.

BOTTOM LINE

The government needs to be firm in its goal in removing violence and intolerant behaviour by extremist organiza-

tions. If it fails, no restructuring of the foreign ministry will be of any help. In a world of the existing information

technology, nothing can be hidden from those who are interested in doing business with Bangladesh.

The above observations do not, however, mean that the restructuring of the foreign ministry is not necessary. In my view it is long

The present structure of the foreign ministry was established soon after independence. Some of the senior officers of the foreign ministry have put together the structure of the ministry with great dedication and devotion to meet the macy. This is because private sectors know where the shoe pinches and therefore are in a position to place their inputs to the government agencies.

This being the case, an overall coordinating cell may be considered where all the ingredients of economic diplomacy are thrashed out and thereafter entrust the ministries or departments to implement it.

With regard to the foreign ministry, in my view, the external trade wing and external resources wing are required to be merged with the foreign ministry together with the officers experienced in the areas. In many countries, Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been re-designated as Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade.

The present structure of the foreign ministry does not consist of

two important divisions: research

and archives. Furthermore the legal

division is very weak and it needs to

of the foreign ministry and should

provide periodical analytical reports

on strategic, security issues. They

also will issue periodic or monthly

assessment report on likely events

in a country, in the region and glob-

ally so that the government is pre-

pared to address the issues before

surprised with an event outside its

borders and must have the policy at

hand when and if they occur. The

graphical regions and activities of

nternational organization within the

foreign ministry handle day-to-day

existing divisions based on geo-

The government should not be

Research Division is a think-tank

be much strengthened.

hey occur.

publish them in a book form year after year. A year book of the foreign ministry is required to be published so that every one knows what was the target and what was achieved.

Another fact is to be mentioned is that it is often reported that enough resources have not been provided to the foreign ministry and embassies abroad to effectively perform the job. If resources are not adequate, mere accusation does not help, rather affects adversely morale of officers who are by and large are good and dedicated to the interests of the country.

Conclusion

Governments should reflect the views of the people of Bangladesh, the people the governments represent and their values. However on the rise of Islamic extremism in the country, views of many government leaders do not conform with those of the people

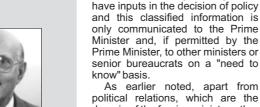
Intolerant and violent conduct has been going on for the last two years and many foreign journalists and domestic media have been urging the government to stamp out the rise of intolerant Islamic extremism. Only on February 23 did the government organizations operating in the coun-

The negative image of Bangladesh is not a matter of concern for ordinary people in other countries One can argue that in some countries the majority of people do not know much about Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a responsible member of international community and has been integrating with the world economy. Therefore negative image may have an adverse impact on its trade, investment, and aid commit-

ment. The negative image slowly built over the past two years cannot be removed right away by banning the two organizations nor can it be counteracted by revealing the positive socio-economic indicators. The country is seen as a whole including its political environment and human rights record. There is always a long time-gap before perception is changed

Having banned the two extremist organizations, everyone at home and abroad is now watching what further steps the government takes. The government needs to be firm in its goal in removing violence and intolerant behaviour by extremist organizations. If it fails, no restructuring of the foreign ministry will be of any help. In a world of the existing information technology, nothing can be hidden from those who are interested in doing business with Bangladesh.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh



nothing new

There is another fact that needs

nomic and cultural areas, all combined that gives the image of a country. Perception is a mental construction and is not quantifiable. In many ways, it is an elusive concept. To many psychologists, perception is easier to experience than

to define. Perception, like reputation, is a slow process and is gradually built on facts and on interactions with people who live in the country including foreigners. The interactions can be both at home and abroad and consist of at different levels, official and private. Media reports are powerful medium to keep abreast what occurs in a country. Perception derived from one sphere spill over to another and they are all interrelated. Once perception is formed, it takes time to

remove it, like reputation. Improved social and economic indicators of a country do not necessarily translate into good image. It is a misreading of the situation. Improved social and economic conditions are one of the important factors of good governance but are not sufficient enough to remove the negative image of a country. There is a saying: "Man does not live on bread alone." This adage implies that besides socio-economic conditions, there are other aspects of conditions of human life that need to be taken into account how a country

is governed. For example during the 70s, although Chile, under the military dictator General Augusto Pinochet, progressed in economic terms because of opening up its markets

structure of the Pakistan Foreign But that initial period has been over after, say four or five years. One important criterion is that Bangladesh entered fully into inter-

national community after its admis-

sion to the UN in September 1974.

urgency of the time. The essence of

the period was the urgency and they

quickly replicated it almost from the

That was the time when the ministry should have been advisedly restruc-Although in the past there have been considerations of shaking the structure of the ministry, no substantial restructuring has been done except a few cosmetic changes with regard to the strength of officers of

the ministry. Since economic diplomacy is the aim of all governments, it is necessary to recast the foreign ministry to be effective in economic diplomacy Economic diplomacy is the policy of advancing policies of economic interest. It includes policies relating to production, movement or exchange of goods, services, labour in other countries and also includes policy of foreign investment in the

Therefore the task under economic diplomacy is quite comprehensive and does not at all fit in with the existing "Rules of Business" of the foreign ministry of the government or any other single ministry or department of the government.

Another feature of economic diplomacy is the involvement of private sectors in the decisionmaking process in economic diplo-

matters. They have little time to conduct research on strategic issues or the likely events beyond borders. Some say a foreign ministry without research division is a ship without a rudder. For legal division, the government may recruit successful bright

students from law faculties and send them to overseas universities to conduct higher studies on subjects important to Bangladesh, such as international river law, sea law, maritime boundary, international trade law, intellectual property law and information technology. Archives division is to keep all

past records, of statements of policies made publicly in the country or in the forum of international organizations by leaders of government, past and present and should

> ending the Iraq War. "One of our major strategies will be to organise opposition in each state to the involvement of the National Guard

decided that the UFPJ's main objectivewould be to work for an end to the U.S. war in Iraq so that U.S. troops could be brought home. "We need to focus our work because we

of the UFPJ's work (e.g. they advo-

cated that we engage in direct

electoral activity) or were utterly

unfeasible (e.g. a proposal that we

in the Iraq War," McPhearson revealed. "By showing how the Iraq War is depleting our resources a home, we hope to put pressure on local officials and force them to take a stand against the war."

The UFPJ has organised some

upcoming events that will help further its agenda. It is staging a big demonstration at Fort Bragg in North Carolina next March 19 and another demonstration in New York City in May, which will call for an end to both the U.S. occupation of Iraq and the global nuclear arms race. "This year marks the 60th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but the horror and threat of nuclear war is fading from human consciousness," Dobbs said

The anti-war coalition needs to be not only focused but patient as well, added Dobbs, "We will need to apply continuous pressure on the Bush administration if we hope to get it to pull our troops out of Iraq." he said. "We are mindful that the effort to end the Vietnam War went on for a very long time.

Ron Chepesiuk is a South Carolina-based journalist, a Visiting Professor at Chittagong

Anti-Iraq war campaign mounting up

RON CHEPESIUK

AST February 19 to 21, more than 500 representatives from United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ), the country's largest anti Iraq War coalition, met in St. Louis to begin an important strategy and planning conference. It was the first major gathering of anti war activists since the re-election of George W.Ê Bush, Jr., and the policies adopted at the meeting are expected to largely shape the future strategy of the country's anti war movement.

"The meeting's objective was to strengthen the coalition's campaign to change Bush administration policies." said Bill Dobbs, media coordinator for the New York City based UFPJ.Ê"We want to get the U.S. people more involved in ending Bush's deceptive, illegal and disas-

trous policies.' Founded in October 2002, UFPJ sparked the two biggest U.S. protests against the Iraq War, in February and March 2003. During the last election, UFPJ demonstrated outside the Democratic Convention in Boston and the Republican Convention in New York City, a protest that attracted half a million people. Today, the organisation has close to a thousand local, regional and national peace groups under its umbrella, including Black Voices for Peace, the American Friends Ser-

vice Committee, Military Families Speak Out, Iraq Veterans Against the War, and Veterans for Peace, "We are a part of a coalition that's

broad-based but still a work in progress." said Michael McPhearson, Executive Director of the St. Louis based Veterans for Peace (VFP), which has 4,500 members. "We can only grow as long as Bush pursues his militaristic

Suheir Hammad of Def Poetry Jam, musician Tiye Giraud and actor Danny Glover. "Building a strong anti war movement in the world's one, unchecked superpower is central," Glover told the media.

"That's why I'll be in St. Louis Glover, who achieved fame for

his role in the "Lethal Weapon" series of movies, which also starred conservative Mel Gibson, joined the UFPJ protest outside the Republi-

lives and why they believe our troops should be bought back home now," he revealed. During the weekend, the assembly held three plenary sessions with

"They spoke in personal terms

about the impact of the war on their

panelists addressing three major issues: the strategy needed to end the war in Iraq, the state of the U.S. movement and alliance building and "the state of the world-global move-

do on-the-ground organising in

The UFPJ has organised some upcoming events that will help further its agenda. It is staging a big demonstration at Fort Bragg in North Carolina next March 19 and another demonstration in New York City in May, which will call for an end to both the U.S. occupation of Iraq and the global nuclear arms race.

foreign agenda." The VFPJ held its first national assembly for peace and justice in June 2003 in Chicago. "We established our operational framework, elected our leadership and set our immediate priorities, Dobbs explained. "In our operating document, there is a line of text mandating that we hold a national assembly every 18 months."

The second national assembly in St. Louis, an intense working meeting held over two and half days. attracted some prominent personalities, including radical Angel Davis,

can National Convention last august, while supporting Dennis Kucinich's presidential campaign. In one voice over he did for a Kucinich commercial, Glover said: "If preemptive war continues to drive our foreign policy, if our volunteer troops are stretched thinner and thinner, you could be facing a compulsory draft. All young Americans deserve a world without end, not a war without end."

The speeches that military veterans and their families gave were a conference highlight, Dobbs noted.

ments building power." Throughout the two days, the delegates broke up into small groups to discuss, debate and decide upon a refined strategic framework for the UFPJ. as well as the various programmes. projects and organisational issues facing the anti-war coalition

About 60 proposals recommending strategies, campaigns and projects were brought forward for the Assembly to consider. According to an explanation on the UFPJ web site, "Some proposals were rejected because they fell outside the scope can't go in a lot of different directions," said McPhearson, who was an assembly delegate. "That doesn't mean we don't have to work towards that goal to the exclusion of everything else taking place." As an example, McPhearson said the UFPJ would mobilise for action if there were any signs that the U.S. planned to bomb, invade or wage war against Iran, Syria, North Korea, or any other country.

have only so many resources and

On day two, the assembly agreed on the measures to further its goal of

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

University and a Research Associate with the

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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. deteriorating day by day. And to add Mohakhali Flyover

> narrow the roads which eventually aggravate the problem. Isn't there anything that the government can do to reduce this unbearable traffic problem?

insult to the injury, the police check-

points play a vital role in the morning

traffic snarl.ÊThe huge barricades

Will they let the citizens to have a less traffic problem day? I believe if the cantonment road is opened once again, the traffic problem will ease tremendously. Please let us have the advantage of having a flyover and enjoy its usage. **Badal Hasib** Dhanmondi

Question leakage

We are well informed about the recent question leakage in the

25thÊBCS exams, thanks to reports carried by the press. This is agonising as well as alarming. It has become a culture. Such a destructive culture cannot be carried on for long. The BCS is the most competitive andÊcrucial exam among the public job exams. So corrupt practices are totally unexpected in such an exam. If this foul play continues, the unqualified candidates will qualify.

The government should take

immediate steps to stop all such corrupt practices. Rezaul Haque Sumon Department of Economics University of Dhaka

Quorum crisis It is common news that there is

quorum crisis in our parliament. May I remind our honourable MPs that

we, the voters, have elected them to represent us in the parliament. It is regrettable to see that once the MPs are elected they tend to forget the basic truth that they are the voices of the millions of voters who have voted them to represent them in the JS. My reading of the situation is that our MPs are more involved in other activities than law making.

It is sad to note that the ruling party, which enjoys absolute majority in parliament, has no control over its MPs, as far as attending the JS is concerned. Honourable MPs are reminded that it is their duty to attend parliament regularly and to take interest in the proceedings. Maybe, newspapers should

publish the names of MPs who are not attending the JS regularly so that we, the voters, can learn what is going on **Shahed Jamil**

Gulshan, Dhak

'Attacks on NGOs Mr Firoz Alam, in his article on

'Attacks on NGOs' (The Daily Star, 5 March 2005), has pointed out the role played by the NGOs in the country by "creating a group of critically aware civil society, empowering the women, raising awareness among the community about their rights, and all these activities go against those who prefer ignorance, darkness and exploitation." He has also referred to the problems that the NGOs are faced with following the recent attacks on some of their offices in some parts of the country.

But, unfortunately, Mr Alam has made some remarks about the creation of the Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh (FNB) without verifying the facts. Without repeating the

leading to the creation of the Federation, it is only pertinent to point out that the leading personalities of the NGO movement in Bangladesh, who were constrained to form FNB, were the pioneers of ADAB in the '70s and they are not with ADAB anymore. FNB was sponsored by the NGOs themselves in the back drop of the ineffectiveness of ADAB. It was not sponsored by any quarters outside the NGO sector, and it is the unanimous decision of more than 2.000 NGOs of the country, big medium and small, to form such a Federation to protect and safeguard

details of the unfortunate situation

the interest of the NGO community. To name a few, old and large members like BRAC, BELA, CAMPE, Gonoshasthya Kendra Nijera Kori, RDRS, RIC, SAMATA etc are all with FNB and membership of more such organisations is

under process. It is definitely unfair and unkind to try to indicate that leaders of these renowned organisations are the instruments of what Mr Alam said, "The divide and rule approach of the establishment." Leaders of these organisations as also others in FNB are on record as pro-poor, pro-NGO and staunchly independent civil society stalwarts of the country known at home and abroad. Mr Alam's assertion that ADAB and FNB "have taken a face to face

position" also does not reflect the reality. ADAB was registered as an 'NGO' whereas FNB is a 'Federation'. FNB's doors are open to ADAB also. As a matter of fact, many of the ADAB members are members of FNB and many of them are programme partners of large NGOs which are members of FNB.

It may also be recalled that the

leaders repeatedly urged upon the government to refrain from harassing the NGOs and in the process ultimately bring sufferings to the poor and disadvantaged people for whom these NGOs work. M Tajul Islam Director, FNB

press statements of FNB and its

Indo-Pak cricket The matches between India and

Pakistan always generate a lot of enthusiasm and excitement. Cricket fans are looking forward to some thrilling matches this time around also. Cricket is a positive catalyst for the

two countries which have had many bad patches of strained relations in the A citizen

Dhaka