

A move, at last!

Making it effective is the challenge

IN the face of constant media hammering, environmentalists' oft-expressed concern over surface and air pollution and the city-dwellers' grumbling about squalid living conditions, a city canal cleanup drive spearheaded by Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (DWASA) has got underway. That the government is finally seized of the twin problems of choking of natural water channels and the consequent water logging in Dhaka city is welcome. But just; because the verdict on a decision in a self complicated matter such as this has to be reserved till its full and final implementation.

The removal of encroachments on the canals intended to restore their natural water flows which an inter-ministerial meeting at the LGRD ministry had ordered in February for WASA to carry out with assistance from law enforcers envisages a massive undertaking. Are we taking a bite bigger than we can chew? Anyway, given the size of the operation, it has to be broken up into manageable phases so as to be implemented in full. On the other hand, if it is too staggered, fragmentary and piecemeal, the campaign might stray into wilderness.

Let it be a phase-by-phase operation, but there has to be an overall time-schedule, tight and compressed within which the tasks will have to be completed. As far as we can see, there are administrative, logistic, legalistic, and financial aspects to the undertaking which hardly need any elaboration except to say that land records must be incontestable, and that the operation will have to be carried out in a neutral, incorruptible and no-nonsense manner. Of course, as far as the slum-dwellers go, it has to be linked to a rehabilitation programme where you need a monetary provision. The social cost will have to be met.

On the scientific front, removal of illegal structures from the canals gone derelict from disuse will not by itself make them ebullient with natural water flows. These will have to be linked to the rivers girdling Dhaka.

Did we think through it all before taking the plunge?

Print media in a bind

Newsprint cost high

THE exponential rise in the cost of newsprint in Bangladesh is a matter of grave concern for the print media in particular and for the textbook printers and publishers as well.

The newspapers are under tremendous pressure to bear the cost of imported newsprint. A combination of circumstances have compounded the problem. One is the inability of our newsprint industry to meet local demands, which compels newsprint import in an environment which is captive to the exporters, the price of this commodity having gone up manifold in the last several years, with its spiraling tendency unabated.

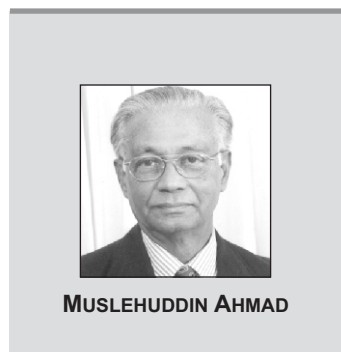
The point at issue here is the increase in newsprint tariff over and above the increase of its price in the international market in the last fiscal year. This, with other associated taxes, an additional 60 percent has to be paid by the importers on the C&F price of the newsprint. The tax exemption that is provided to the newspapers on the 50 percent import quota of newspapers based on the statistics of the Audit Bureau of Circulation has not helped to mitigate the problem since the local producers are unable to meet our demands for newsprint. The quality of the locally produced newsprint is also not upto the required standard. This is a most difficult situation for the newspaper industry.

The tariff rates of news prints in India and Pakistan are in the region of 5 percent *ad valorem* and, in spite of their producing adequate quantity of it locally, the interest of the newspaper industry has been upheld by keeping tariff on news print at a low level.

The high cost of newsprint has inevitably pushed up the cost of production of newspapers. And, the newspaper industry, unlike the other commodity or service sectors, cannot transfer the extra cost to the readers because of the purchasing capacity of the general readers.

While the government can do very little about price of newsprint in the international market, we would hope, for the sake of the readership as well as the newspaper industry, that the government would consider reduction of the high tariff rates of imported newsprint.

Fresh land grabbing -- 3500 new homes near Jerusalem!



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

ISRAELI Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, a diehard proponent and supporter of the could not be expected to suddenly change his mindset on Israeli settlements issue. His unilateral decision to disengage from Gaza was apparently intended to show to the world that he is a man of peace which he is certainly not. But unfortunately President Bush termed him as a man of peace! Height of misjudgment, indeed. Sharon's entire career was involved in fighting the Arabs, particularly the Palestinians and killing them. He is known as "The butcher" of Sabra and Shatila - the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.

Sharon's fresh proposal to build 3500 new Israeli homes at a place between Maaleh Adumin and Jerusalem is indeed intended to create a barrier between the proposed Palestinian State in the West Bank and Jerusalem. This means that the Palestinians cannot have a contiguous state with Jerusalem as its capital. Moreover, this entire area is a prime land for the Palestinians as there is a possibility for the Palestinians to build appropriate administrative buildings in the area. So Sharon's policy is to block such possibility even if it means giving up

Gaza which is already a dangerous place for the Israelis. Sharon knows well that Israelis cannot continue to stay in Gaza and hence the need for disengagement. But he has worked out the policy to have the full compensation -- indeed a better one -- by building more settlements in the prime land near Jerusalem.

Sharon is a dirtily clever person. He knows that he has to face election in the near future and this is the only way he could show to the Israeli

settlements, are totally against the international law and also against the specific UN resolutions. The UN has specifically prohibited any settlements in the occupied area. In short, Israelis should simply leave the occupied territories as per resolutions 232 and 338. But Israel has been merely violating the UN resolutions and not only building settlements but also putting up walls and barriers in the name of stopping Palestinian attackers. But does

nately, some nations' governments are blindly, unnecessarily and unwisely supporting Israel, which may, one day, lead to their sufferings too. History does not spare any one.

However, it is a good thing that Bush Administration has started showing some signs of changes in its policies towards Israeli-Palestinian issue. May be, Iraq disaster has something to do with this. Recently, it has shown its displeasure over the proposed new

3500 new homes between Maaleh Adumin (the most populous settlement in the West Bank) and Jerusalem cannot but give us concern. Russia also said that this 'contradicts the terms of the M-E peace road map' It may be noted that Russia is one of the members of the Quartet that came up with the "Road Map" which is now the latest peace proposal accepted fully by the Palestinians and also by Israel though with some 14 reservations.

very little chance to return with his party in majority. This would mean his Gaza disengagement plan would face a setback and more damaging would be his plan of holding on to the greater part of the West Bank.

As it seems, it would be good for Labour to go for the general election instead of clinging on to Sharon's coalition. Labour is likely to form a government with the support of some small parties and pursue its policy of peace with the Palestinians. Majority of Israeli public appears to be fed up with the present dangerous situation and may go for the Road Map with the purpose of achieving peace with Palestinians. Only Israeli Jihadis support Sharon and insist on grabbing more Palestinian land, but majority of Israelis apparently want peace instead of land. With Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazzen) as the President of Palestinian Authority, Labour could work out a reasonable deal that could save both Israelis and Palestinians from the present ruinous path.

It is a very fragile ceasefire that exists now. The "new homes" will only erupt fresh violence and burn not only the homes but also the home-owners. Bush Administration should remain strict on the "new homes" proposal and continue to pursue the Road Map to achieve some form of peace. Any eruption of further violence on the sensitive and indeed dangerous issue of "new homes" may not only make Mahmud Abbas powerless and helpless, but may even dislodge him at a particular point in time.

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

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ultra rightists -- indeed *Jehadi* Jews -- that he has got more important and safer land for Israelis, much better than far away insecure Gaza, and more importantly it could easily block Palestinians' claim on Jerusalem. This might take away the heat from the Israeli Jihadis who are likely to support and fight for the Israelis of Gaza.

Just on March 28, Israeli Knesset (parliament) passed a resolution rejecting the opposition's demand for referendum on Gaza disengagement. This means that Sharon has the green signal to dismantle 21 Israeli settlements in Gaza. Though there were some protests and more protests are likely, many Israelis in Gaza settlements agreed to move away to another location in the West Bank already under Israeli occupation.

The proposed new settlements near Maaleh Adumin, though shown as extension of existing

Israel bother about the UN as long as the US is on its side? Israel has been the worst violator of UN resolutions but can any one say or do anything about it? No. The history shows that the "Children of Israel" have been the repeated violators of their Covenants even with God and were, therefore, punished by God that included their moving in wilderness for forty years before reaching the "promised land".

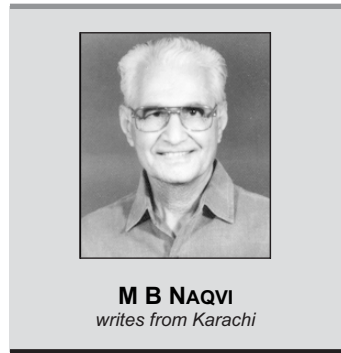
The "promised land" was not exclusively meant for them; other people were also living there. The "Children of Israel" were landless and therefore God provided them with the "land" for building homes along with others. But Israeli *Jehadis* think that they have exclusive right on the "promised land" and hence occupation is no crime. History also says that it's a very arrogant nation and has therefore suffered repeatedly. They have not learned the lesson yet. But unfortu-

Israeli homes near Maaleh Adumin in the West Bank. Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State said, 'Israel's plan to build more settlements in West Bank stands "at odds with American policy," and should come to a "full stop" as this goes against the provisions of the Road Map and could stand in the way of any progress in the peace talks with the Palestinians. She also told the reporters that the US expected Israel "to be careful about anything" 'including settlements' new laws or the route of a barrier being built to separate Israelis from Palestinians.' One can only hope that these words would be communicated in strong and meaningful way so that this does not become only a rhetoric and diplomatic exercise not to be taken seriously.

Russia has also expressed its concern over the proposed new settlements and said, " Israel's announced plans to build more than

Shimon Peres, Labour Leader, who is now the Deputy Prime Minister in the latest coalition government in Israel, was interviewed some days ago on the issue of new settlements near Maaleh Adumin and he said he had no official knowledge of the proposal/plan. He and his party would consider the matter seriously when the issue would be brought up officially and obviously this would have to be seen in the light of international law and Israel's commitments. He appeared to have indicated that his party might reconsider whether to stay in the coalition government if the plan is pushed through. Apparently the plan was completed at the official level with the tacit support of the hawks in Sharon government. The only way to block this is for the Labour to act decisively. Sharon knows that if Labour breaks away, his coalition govt will fall and the general election would ensue where Sharon has

Simple facts about Balochistan



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

MANY explanations are being offered for the Balochistan situation, some of them commendable. Most such efforts are, however, partisan and not free from their own spin. A simple political geography of Balochistan, seen objectively, should provide a balanced perspective.

Let's begin with what has been grabbing the headlines first: trouble in Sui and Dera Bugti. The March 17 clash in which 10 soldiers and over 60 civilians died and many more were injured was a major tragedy. Damage to property in Dera Bugti was, in view of the general poverty of its populace, very considerable. That was supposedly the retaliation for what the Bugtis had done in menacingly surrounding the Frontier Constabulary's camp -- housing some 300 soldiers who were being supplied by air. Now, this action and an ambush of LEAs were themselves in retaliation for what the FC had done to protesting tribesmen, angered by the gang rape of Dr. Shazia Khalid inside the hospital run by the gas company in its Sui installations.

In addition, there is a regular campaign of sabotage and ambush while bomb blasts continue in many

places. A shadowy Balochistan Liberation Army is claiming credit for these attacks on infrastructure -- railway tracks, gas pipelines, and governmental symbols. Trouble in Sui and Dera Bugti is not an isolated event, sparked either by the rape incident or by the revolt of Sardar Akbar Bugti. The situation on the whole is one of a slow burning of the fuse of a Baloch nationalist revolt, with occasional spectacular flare ups like the Dera Bugti one. Such

control one third of National Parliament and two out of four provincial governments. They have to be taken seriously, more so for the future because of the 2002 polls.

Obvious significance of this force is the presence of Taliban in fairly large numbers that had made the American Ambassador to Afghanistan and the top US General there complain publicly that President Musharraf is not showing equal diligence in arresting or killing

Ideological physiognomy of the Jihadists is relevant. They may have originated in the Deobandi seminaries (being an offspring of JUI) but they have sharply veered from the historical legacy of Deoband's Darul Uloom: in pre-independence India Shia-Sunni riots never involved Deobandi Sunnis. In Pakistan one face of all these Jihadis is their intense hatred of Shias. The same person can in one phase be a Taliban, and in another be a free-

rally today costs two to three crore rupees. Where are their billions coming from? From the meagre contributions of their members?

While the context remains Balochistan, it is necessary to note two or three circumstances. Balochistan is an arid desert with sparse population that is extraordinarily poor. But that does not exclude some extraordinarily rich individuals. Mainstay of the province's economy is patches of agri-

takes from him too many (indirect) taxes but delivers -- what? Its record in establishing schools, hospitals, and providing jobs in Balochistan is worse than that in any other province. It just shows a stern face. It has left large swathes of territories to be governed at the tribal Sardars' will; human rights of these people are not equal to those in Punjab or Sindh. This state has never bothered to develop the area despite its resources; if the poor people have no realistic prospect of finding a job, who should take the rap? Authority has deliberately neglected and occasionally it propagates against the Sardars while the fact is that this pre-independence arrangement has been carefully preserved as a matter of policy. Why? Is it because bureaucracy has more opportunities to do as it will without any accountability?

One fact needs underlining: the province has been neglected while some improvements are visible elsewhere. Given its clear-cut ethnic identities, different from a non-democratic Centre where all power, money and authority reside, is it strange that a nationalism, conscious of injustices done to it, has arisen?

Once this is grasped, what is to be expected is the working out of the dynamic of a deprived nationality's struggle -- with its ups and downs -- for attaining power for itself. How much power to reorder their lives they want, much will depend on how the central authorities handle the issue now. Watching Islamabad's past and current mindset -- reliance on a too clever by half tactic of stern military action followed by sweet talk with some money to go on buying time for the status quo -- is profoundly distressing.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

PLAIN WORDS

The third major force in Balochistan is, of course, the Pakistan state that operates largely through the army and paramilitary forces. It has both money and overwhelming force. From the viewpoint of an ordinary Baloch, this state takes from him too many (indirect) taxes but delivers -- what? Its record in establishing schools, hospitals, and providing jobs in Balochistan is worse than that in any other province. It just shows a stern face.

incidents are symptomatic. The central reality of a nationalist struggle, at the end of its tether, must be gasped.

To continue with the map of Balochistan politics, the second major force is extreme Islamicist forces; they comprise, in addition to many militant Islamic outfits, various Jihadists who participated in the two Afghan Jihad, viz. of 1980s and after 1992, various Jihadist organisations that waged Jihad in Indian controlled Kashmir. There are, of course, Talibans and their protectors. These forces include religiously-oriented political parties, now constituting MMA, especially JUI with its splinters, that provide a broad-spectrum political cover to all these Jihadists. Contrary to the normal view of Pakistan politics that Islamicist parties were no more than of marginal importance, these now

Taliban, mainly in Balochistan, that he is displaying with regard to al-Qaeda fugitives. But for Pakistanis, there are more worrying facets of this force.

The first -- and hopefully temporary -- is the interpenetration of these Islamicists with the Pakistan Army, especially its intelligence agencies; anyone can make the connection: if there are so many Taliban in Pakistan and the army has not done to them what it has done to al-Qaeda, an obvious conclusion follows: Either it has strong sympathies with Taliban or it is afraid of the reaction of their friends and protectors. Insofar as the military controllers of Pakistan's policy may wish to retain the option to reactivate the Jihad in Kashmir when necessary, they would scarcely want to decimate their old and would-be recruits.

dom fighter in Kashmir, and in yet another phase be a sectarian terrorist. That post-Zia army's and Jamaate Islami's ideological contributions have gone into the making of their current political philosophy.

Some point out the strange phenomenon of the current riches of Islamicist parties; to all appearances money has been no problem for any religious party or leader. Earlier there was an easy explanation: ample funding could be relied upon from American CIA and Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Iran, Libya, etc. But that phase came to an end by about 1990, though some could still be coming from the Arab sources. After 2001 the Americans have not, for some odd reason, focused on the funding of MMA parties and their spiritual offspring. They have escaped all serious scrutiny. This is strange and needs study. One big

culture and fruit growing, some minerals, sparsely exploited, except of course the natural gas. But smuggling, narcotics and gun running trades, with Afghanistan and NWFP connections, have flourished and have generated a lot of money. The profits from heroin and cannabis trades are massive: western estimates are \$3 to 4 billion and this is pocketed largely by a small number of the politically important individuals. Could it be that the super-rich buy respectability here as well as the prospect of lenient treatment from the Almighty on the Day of Judgement, if they fund Islamicists?

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OPINION

Media bashing: A troubling syndrome

NAZRUL ISLAM

THE article "Motivated journalism troubling Bangladesh" by Helal Uddin Ahmed drew my attention. Going through the article, it seems that Mr Helal (the editor of DFP published Bangladesh Quarterly is likely to be a government servant) has joined the bandwagon of media bashing in this country.

I read all the news items referred to in the article of Mr Helal who also gave some quotes from the sources of the news items. After going through the quotes, I did not find anything that can be termed as "motivated" in the negative sense. Journalists should have some sort of motivation, which must be for truth and for the greater cause of the people and the nation. Without motivation for truth, a journalist cannot be a true journalist; rather he or she would be turned into a public relations officer. The recent media bashing by the ministers and bureaucrats expose their intention that journalists should become PROs for the country.

The headline of the article in

the first sight gave an impression that the news items released by BDNEWS and UNB were the distortions of the statements made by the sources. However, the article itself carries the truth that the two independent news agencies did not distort the statements. They just reproduced the statements with necessary paraphrasing. Then what was the fault of the two agencies? I think, the only "sin" they committed is the reproduction of the news item in the country's news media enabling the people to know about the sentiments of the US Secretary of State and the Indian External Affairs Minister. The notion seems to be: "The foreign media carried their opinions, no problem, as the country's people do not have access to those media. But why you people dug it out and circulated in our media?"

No doubt the news items irked the government high-ups substantially when the country (or at least the government) is suffering from a serious image crisis. But the government neither came up with a rejoinder to the news items nor lodged any formal protest to

What is troubling is that the government, instead of taking remedial measures to the problems the country has been facing, and plugging the holes, has started media bashing in an effort to intimidate the press into self-censorship. It can be done, but the ultimate result would neither be beneficial for the government nor for the people. Those who are ruling now, if they go to the opposite side, will be the first to raise their voices for the freedom of press.

the statements. That means the items released by the two agencies were based on fact and truth.

As the government is oath-bound to protect the interests of the people and the nation, the journalists have also the responsibility to keep the people informed about what is going on against their interests. When foreigners perceive an ill-notion about our country and people mainly for the misdeeds and mistakes of the ruling class and bureaucrats, it is the duty of the press to inform people how they are being demeaned before the world and by whom.

The image of the government and the interests of the people are two conflicting issues, hanging on opposite poles. When we say ours is a corrupt country, it simply

means that our government machinery is corrupt. The general public has no relation with this corruption. People naturally want that the press unearth the corruption, whereas such revelation would definitely tarnish the image of the government. So, the government's perception about the press remains always negative.

In the *India Today* interview, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said, "There is more that we probably need to do on Bangladesh, which is, I think, a place that is becoming quite troubling" and BDNEWS in the first line of its news item wrote: "UN Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has said Bangladesh is becoming quite troubling."

Giving the quotes of both the statements of Rice and the

BDNEWS story, the author said, "What a distortion of facts!" Where is the distortion? It is beyond my understanding, and I think, also of the other readers, where the distortions have taken place.

The author wrote about "motivated journalism." Who is motivated? Our press or the Indian press? About what the Indian press said, I have nothing to say, and I think the author also did not point his finger at the Indian press. Then, how did our two independent news agencies become the "motivated" ones? Did they themselves produce the stories? No, they did not produce anything on their own. Is it a sin to reveal on our people what others are thinking about us?

People have every right to know what our friends and donors think about us. There is no doubt that the

US is one of the greatest friends of Bangladesh. The BDNEWS and UNB just informed the people of the opinions of the US government. Is this distorted journalism? I think the news agencies performed a great job in enabling the people and the government to know the US government view about us. Instead of bashing the media, the government should thank them for discharging their duty excellently, which can help the government undertake corrective measures.

The reasons behind the heart-burn of the ruling class and the bureaucrats are easily understandable. Whenever a donor or foreign diplomat passes negative remarks, the blame goes on the government. The government is perhaps more worried about its vote bank than the welfare of the people. So,

whenever anything negative comes out in the press, the government jumps on the press.

Nothing seems to be wrong for the ministers and bureaucrats when they tarnish the country's image by their deeds. But the government machinery joins in the chorus of criticism of the media when those are made public through the press. They start giving sermons on responsible journalism. As if our ruling class is highly responsible, patriotic, and unselfish, as if they have no acquaintance with corrupt practices, as if they are all Mr. Clean!

The writer gave an example of how Indian leaders are united in the question of national interest. Comparing Indian leaders with ours is nothing more than childish thinking. The Indian leaders are patriotic, the Indian bureaucrats are accountable to the people, not to the ruling party, the Indian bureaucrats never associate themselves with politics, the Indians never get into disputes over who is the father of the nation, they never rob the rights of others, Indian leaders shout in the parliament but have dinner or lunch at a

same table, the Indians never sell out their national interests for personal gains. On the other hand, our leaders and bureaucrats can go to any extent for their personal interests. Our bureaucrats are more political than the politicians, corruption is at the core of their ethics. Do you need an example? Just give a look at various contracts offered to different domestic and foreign companies. You would find revealing facts.

What is troubling is that the government, instead of taking remedial measures to the problems the country has been facing, and plugging the holes, has started media bashing in an effort to intimidate the press into self-censorship. It can be done, but the ultimate result would neither be beneficial for the government nor for the people. Those who are ruling now, if they go to the opposite side, will be the first to raise their voices for the freedom of press.

Nazrul Islam is a freelance journalist.