

Missing vehicles

Things need to be set right immediately

A report of the establishment ministry has revealed that no fewer than 26,348 project vehicles are being used by 43 ministries and divisions, in clear violation of the rules. Only 303 vehicles belonging to different projects implemented between 1997 and 2004 were handed over to the central transport pool. So the syndrome of missing vehicles has worsened greatly.

The obvious point of concern is that vehicles, some of them quite expensive, bought for development projects are now in unauthorised use. One would not be surprised if many of them have been lost for good.

The parliamentary standing committee on establishment ministry has endorsed the recommendation that there be proper use of such vehicles. Obviously, the illegal users have to be identified and punished. The drain on the public exchequer is far too evident, since the fuel costs must have been borne by the government after the projects were closed down. So it has not only been a breach of the law but also spending of public money without proper authorisation. The question of a fundamental financial rule being violated does arise for cogent reasons.

It is also an example of development finance going the wrong way. Software and transport purchases usually take away big chunk of project funds -- an issue that has faced criticism on a regular basis. On top of that, we now have the issue of those missing vehicles. The exchequer has been robbed of money and it also brings into notice the extent of the use of government transports by the officials.

The issue calls for something more than routine handling of anomalies and irregularities. A scooping investigation must be conducted to find out how misuse of government vehicles took place on such a scale and why the vehicles were not made over to the central pool. Amendment to the public transport rules, as suggested by the ministry itself, should also be considered in right earnest. The decision makers should put their heads together and write out a comprehensive code for use of government vehicles, including those handed over after completion of projects.

Access to modern healthcare

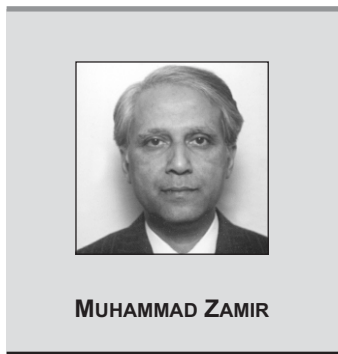
Apollo Hospital should show the way for more such centres

WE welcome one of the most major and path-breaking events in the private health care sector in Bangladesh in recent times. The opening of the prestigious Apollo Hospital, a world class hospital chain, equipped with latest technologies in medical care, is certainly a good news for our country where basic medical care facilities are still scarce because of many factors, specially resource constraint, as the Prime Minister herself admitted while inaugurating the hospital. We agree with the PM in saying that since the government cannot ensure proper medical care to the citizens, it's also up to the private sector to come forward to fulfil that need.

And that's why we hope that this would be only the first of many more such initiatives to come. Because the increasing trend among the Bangladeshi patients to go abroad for treatment spending millions in foreign exchange would hopefully be stemmed through establishment of more similar hospitals. Undoubtedly we should modernise our existing hospital services bringing them at par with the best in the region. We must have a state of the art facilities available in the country. And with keeping that in mind, we must be cognisant of the archaic laws, especially those relating to participation of foreign specialists in our medicare system. We are not saying that we should not patronise our own doctors whom we have trained up by spending money from the exchequer; but the issue here is of transfer of technology and training on modern medical care that is required.

And, lastly, the aim should always be to provide the service to people from all strata of society. Not just the rich and the privileged, middle and low income groups should also have easy access to the medicare as it is also their basic right. We are glad that Apollo has decided to keep ten percent of the beds free of charge for the poor. Also, since it is the epitome of referral hospital, it should keep its doors open to the terminally ill patients of middle and low income groups. Only then it will have served its noble purpose with a laudable human face.

Cooperation on security and counter-terrorism



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

ACCORDING to published reports, the US Department of Homeland Security now has 180 000 employees. It also oversees 22 agencies. Over the last two years, the role of the Department of Homeland Security in assuring the American way of life and protecting US citizens has grown both in terms of depth as well as potential. Recently, this multifaceted role has also begun to appreciate that protecting US citizens starts not within the US but abroad.

In this context, their vision of homeland security now encompasses the possibility of "integration of nations." An obvious international implication has entered the scene. Strategy planners now feel that international cooperation has to be ensured on the fundamental basis of mutual understanding and the exchange of ideas.

The first step in this direction is being attempted by the United States within its existing partnership with the EU and its 25 Members States. Policy planners believe that there is a fair chance of success, given the fact, that the relationship is based on shared interests, common goals and 'mutual' respect. Both parties in the transatlantic

partnership accept that collective action is needed to fight the 'indiscriminate evil' that characterises terrorist activity. This they believe will assist in tackling root causes of terrorism, which "uses fear and enslaves the poor and needy."

A recent seminar in Brussels held in the European Policy Centre dealt in detail about the various factors that lead to terrorism. The workshop also examined how threats arising out of terrorism could be contained.

South and Southeast Asia has also proven that "we are indeed one people and that humanity binds us all." It has also reaffirmed the need to rely on international cooperation rather than just a patchwork of unilateralism.

I believe that integration of nations with regard to security is important. This has to be built on a relationship of trust, swift and transparent sharing of information, improved public communication

and has now grown into a network that includes 28 global ports.

In addition, international port and shipping facilities have now also signed up to an internationally agreed security code developed by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). This has essentially created a world standard for shipping and port safety.

We, in South Asia, can also note that both the US as well as Europe now believe that it is better to com-

is a "tremendous" technological tool that can, not only accurately identify and cross-check travellers and potential terrorists, but also provide increased travel document safety and important identity theft protection. Such provisions are absolutely vital for terrorist prone South Asia. I think that this entire region could benefit greatly from and agreement on a set of standards for capturing, analysing, storing, reading, sharing and protecting sensitive information

tant of this is the very definition of the word terrorism. Till today, there has not been any legal international agreement on the denotation and the connotation of this word. It is being interpreted differently, according to the need of every country. Sometimes, such description arises out of political requirements. That greatly affects the prescription. There is need that the USA, the EU and other developed countries sit down with developing nations and agree on a specific definition. Without such a common international definition of terrorism, the war against terrorism will continue to suffer.

Three other factors have continued to trouble the international community the application of capital punishment for crimes, the possibility of extradition arrangements and whether or not to create a separate international tribunal to deal with terrorists alone. This last aspect has gained special attention given the fact that according to the USA and some other nations, terrorists are essentially combatants and should be treated differently from ordinary criminals.

Nevertheless, one thing is very clear. There is paramount need for international and regional cooperation despite disagreements on interpretations and the judicial process to be followed with regard to terrorist acts. Terrorists threaten affect social and economic lives of the people in any country. It also destroys the principle of democracy and associated freedoms.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador -- any response to mzamir@dhaka.net

POST BREAKFAST

There are nonetheless certain factors that continue to create obstacles in the international fight against terrorism. There is need that the USA, the EU and other developed countries sit down with developing nations and agree on a specific definition. Without such a common international definition of terrorism, the war against terrorism will continue to suffer.

In this regard, participants also underlined that threats from terrorism had increased given the fact that the benefits and advances of modern societies were also available to terrorists as they were to ordinary citizens with often devastating consequences.

There is general consensus, not only on both sides of the Atlantic, but also in Japan and South Asia that the world has to face up to these new realities. There is also awareness that the global response to terrorist threat must not only be firm but also based on the world community being engaged in fostering increased strategic communication through multilateral frameworks to prevent terrorist activity.

It is true that domestic priorities might create differing strategic interests but the recent Tsunami in

and the shared use of next-generation technologies. There also has to be constant communication at an operational level. This will allow making of decisions faster. It will also ramp up security more easily. This will also enable better protection of civil liberties.

South Asia can take a leaf out of the successful collaboration that is taking place between Europe, Japan and the USA. I am referring to maritime and aviation safety. The container security initiative (CSI), a joint initiative underwritten by the EU, US and other global partners at ports around the world, have enabled enhanced targeting and screening of high-risk cargo throughout the supply chain. This effort begun as a bilateral initiative between port authorities in Rotterdam and US customs inspectors

municate government-to-government than to rely on airlines alone to process information and to take appropriate action against threats to airlines. Such an approach is contributing towards consolidation of international partnerships with other governments. Step taken in this direction are also ensuring that the privacy concerns of airline passengers are upheld and there is protection of civil liberties.

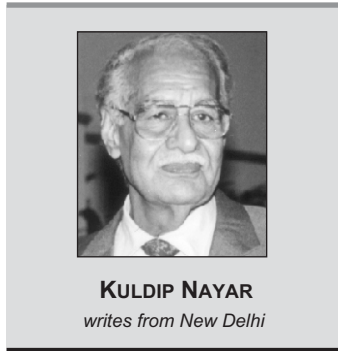
There is another area which needs urgent attention. This relates to biometrics. Unfortunately, South Asia is lagging behind in this regard. We need to move into the future, sooner than later. Common international standards of biometrics are being developed. There is also general agreement that biometrics

(biometric data), which would lead to a maximum interoperability between systems.

Dismantling that terrorist threat will however be very difficult without understanding the root causes of terrorist activity. Such effort will also require at the same time, the seizing of terrorist assets, disrupting terrorist cells, and continuing arrests of terrorist suspects. The Bangladesh government, like Pakistan's and India's appear to have finally woken up to this factor and are now taking suitable steps. This is a difficult task but struggle against any form of terrorism will always be a test of will and fortitude.

There are nonetheless certain factors that continue to create obstacles in the international fight against terrorism. The most impor-

Something concrete must emerge from contacts



KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

IT is sheer coincidence that the Chinese Premier Wen Jaibao and the Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf are visiting New Delhi within the space of four days this month. One leaves India on April 12 and the other arrives on 17. In a way, both are coming for the same purpose: to firm up the right on the Indian territory they claim.

However, the difference between the two is that Beijing has created congenial conditions for an agreement, establishing trade routes and economic ties with New Delhi. Islamabad, on the other hand, has yet to offer New Delhi the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status that India gave Pakistan some years ago. Islamabad concedes it has no other option because of the obligation under the WTO charter but doesn't know how to cope with hostile domestic lobby.

There is yet another big difference. China froze its claim on the Indian territory so as to move ahead in other fields. Both sides concurred not to disturb the status quo, although it tilted towards China. The result is the confidence the two have built to take up the

prickly border question.

Pakistan wants even the 56-year-old Line of Control (LoC) to break up like a glass, as Musharraf put it in his latest statement. He does not favour implementing the confidence building measures (CBMs) until there is a settlement on Kashmir. The threatening attitude by Islamabad has not undergone any change over the years, unlike that of Beijing which has been cooing peace for some time.

not tally with the reality on the ground; two, it is in no position to take back the lost territory forcibly. In adopting this line, the successive governments at the Centre have gone even against Parliament's unanimous resolution to recover every inch of Indian land under the Chinese occupation.

Pakistan may have to traverse the same path to come to the conclusion that the LoC cannot be changed nor can Kashmir settled

other weapons?

Washington knows all that. But it has to sustain its armament factories which have many US Congressmen and senators in their pocket. It is no secret that the Lockheed Martin that produces F-16s was about to slash its workforce because it had no orders. The supply to Pakistan will keep the plant going and if India follows the Pakistan's example, the Lockheed Martin may need to

definitely not in the area that China believes is close to its frontiers. It is also worried over the proposition that America may "build India into a world power to counter China". This may well explain why Beijing is keen on burying the hatchet with New Delhi even on the boundary question.

Otherwise also, the hostility with India does not pay China which has realised that the democratic system it resented during Jawaharlal

with Pakistan as America is talking about India. But what Washington and Beijing really want is to suck India and Pakistan into their scheme of things.

Alas, both New Delhi and Islamabad are still not focused on their region. Why don't they come together to constitute another centre of power, from Iran to Myanmar. They are culturally akin to one another and command resources and markets which can excel other economic and military arrangement. They are talking about everything except an economic union. Were they to concentrate on forging alliances they would have America at their door, not the vice-versa.

People in India and Pakistan have shown that they want to live in peace. They have discovered that both hit it off well. They should freeze their territorial disputes, as China has done, till they have built enough confidence in each other to take up even the most intractable problem like Kashmir. New Delhi and Beijing have walked far through the trade way. This does not mean that Kashmir should be put on the back burner. The process of Kashmiris talking among themselves that began at Kathmandu should gain momentum. They should be allowed to meet freely. Something concrete may emerge from these contacts. India and Pakistan can pick up the thread from the Kashmiris let it off.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

People in India and Pakistan have shown that they want to live in peace. They have discovered that both hit it off well. They should freeze their territorial disputes, as China has done, till they have built enough confidence in each other to take up even the most intractable problem like Kashmir. New Delhi and Beijing have walked far through the trade way. This does not mean that Kashmir should be put on the back burner. The process of Kashmiris talking among themselves that began at Kathmandu should gain momentum.

It has reportedly offered to exchange the territory it has claimed in Arunachal Pradesh in the west with India's recognition of China's possession of Aksai Chin area in the east. New Delhi has come a long way since this is more or less what China had suggested to India as a solution before the 1962 war.

It may sound comical but New Delhi used to treat Beijing in the same manner as Islamabad does New Delhi. India's stance then was not to hold any dialogue with China until it returned the territory it had occupied in the 1962 war. New Delhi has taken almost 25 years to face facts: one, what it claims may

through ultimatums or wars which, in any case, the two countries have fought four times in the last 50 years. The situation does not look like changing even after Pakistan's acquisition of F-16s which at best can fuel the arms race. This happened some 35 years ago when America gave Pakistan the Patton tanks. At that time also, Washington had assured New Delhi that Islamabad would not be allowed to use the Patton tanks against India. But America could not do anything when Pakistan introduced them in the 1965 war. F-16s are worse because they are the carriers of nuclear weapons. If hostilities are ruled out, then why F-16s are any

expand its business.

That the US is willing to give India more sophisticated weapons only complicates the situation, making Pakistan feel more insecure and taking the normalisation between New Delhi and Islamabad farther. Dictatorship and democracy mean the same thing to America when its own interests are involved.

This is the reason why 'China resents the role of the US in the Asia-Pacific region', as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice ruefully realised when she was not occupying the position. Understandably, Beijing does not want Washington to poke its nose all over the world,

Nehru's days is not expansive in its policies. Nor is it difficult to live with such a country. In fact, Beijing wants to correct the impression that the communist China cannot live as a friend with the democratic India. The Chinese premier told Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in Laos recently that "the handshake between you and me will catch the attention of the world". This is also meant to convey the US a message of sorts.

China is, therefore, keen on India and Pakistan finding a peaceful solution to their problems. This, Beijing believes, will keep America out of the region. China is as much talking about 'a strategic alliance'

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.

Freedom of press

I have noted with concern your editorial titled 'Judgement likely to curb freedom of press' of 23 March 2005. You have vouched for lofty goals of 'freedom of press', 'people's right to know' and how High Court's judgement has 'curbed the people's right to know'. Fine! But have not you considered that feeding false and fabricated information to public infringes the 'freedom of others'? Do not you feel that there should be a provision of accountability on the part of press too? Or are the journalists immune from everything and must get away with any fabricated and motivated information? Certainly not. They should be punished for printing false information and damaging somebody, be it a judge or a common man? As a high profile media man, I am sure you are aware of journalists being put behind bars in the USA for concealing source of information to judiciary. The offence here is more serious. It is not concealment but falsehood. I salute our judiciary for creating precedence. I also request our lawmakers to enact

law to restrain media people from publishing or transmitting false information. Accountability should not be flaunted in the pretext of press freedom. Being a leader of your community, will you please work for ensuring true journalism to prevail.

Abdul Alim

Gulshan, Dhaka 1212

Anarchy

Almost everyday, the Prime Minister and other Ministers are talking about anarchy and they are preaching that opposition parties are out to create anarchic situation in the country. Of course they do not forget to mention about involvement of foreign hands in the conspiracy against the government. The recent hartals and other opposition protests started after the killing of SAMS Kibria. The other day, police charge sheeted 10 BNP men for involvement in Kibria killing. Now who is instigating opposition protest? The government should not expect that opposition party will be victimised through killings and at the

same time it will keep mum! After every killing from Ahsan Ullah Master to SAMS Kibria, the government blasted opposition but the same government formed charge sheet against its own men. I think it is the elements in government that are creating anarchy not those in the opposition. It is now proved that opposition is not killing own men to create issue for movement. Rather helpless opposition is being forced to go for movement by the government.

Nafees Ahmed

Dhanmondi, Dhaka

In response to Obaid from Brisbane

I believe my write up was taken out of context. I only meant to include that English medium schools provide or provided during my time a great education. But, if a person is ambitious and wants to learn he/she will succeed regardless of what type of school (English or Bangla) one attends. My write-up was in response of many people in our country who think that "English-

medium" and "disloyal to Bangladesh" go hand in hand.

I only wrote to reflect that there are greater benefits in receiving a good education at an English medium school in our country that provides a curriculum of a comparatively higher standard as opposed to that in a Bangla medium schools. While I have to say that I do agree with you when you say no one stands in the way of "affluence" there is also no denying that a negative social view regarding English medium school still exists in our country. Myself and those like me were subjected to quite a few snide comments while I attended school back home.

I never claimed to solely uphold our "national image" but rather wanted to bring to the forefront the fact that many students from English medium schools have done well abroad professionally as well as academically. Bangladesh's only recognition in the world is that we are one of the most corrupt counties, we are poverty stricken and we often

suffer from natural calamities. I believe that success in different areas would be something positive to have Bangladesh and Bangladeshis link with. Of course there are plenty of graduates from non-English medium schools who have achieved the same. But, from personal experience and from the experience of others like me I can easily say that we were better prepared. But the main gist of what I wanted to say was that there is nothing wrong with attending English medium schools. If some students can afford it they have a right to receive whatever form of education they want. But, it would be nice if people would stop looking at these students negatively.

Zeenat Z. Syed

UPS Deployment

Media fever!

Recently, pungent repercussion of government against media has bemused me enormously whether we are undergoing a democratic tenure or something else. Free

flow of information is the supposition of democracy and good governance. Media is the mirror for government. Media to point out the facts for taking necessary measures to offset the problem promptly that facilitates to keep its popularity intact. But the government is approaching media as a competitor rather than as a collaborator. This type of unfavourable tussle between media and government is apprehending us a lot to come up with the competitive world. We expect media should be run independently for which it is committed to society and it is wise enough to accept media as a boon rather than a bane for every government across the globe.

Kumar Kajol
BBA(Management)
University of Dhaka

About Marmas

Most of the people in our country do not know about the Marma tribe. The Marma lives in the CHT. The Marmas live in the CHT. They are Buddhists. They generally make their homes on the hilltops. Most religious rites and festivities of the

Marmas are based on the seasons of the year and take place during the full moon. Marmas respect their elders a lot. They are very hospitable. They are simple innocent. Most marriages are based on love matches with the bridal couple getting to know each other before marriage. Marmas do not allow child marriage. Young men and women get an opportunity to know each other closely at the New Year's festival. This is the time they choose their partners. Divorced and widowed women are permitted to remarry. Dogs are the favourite pets of Marma people. They have fine culture. But some people of CHT burn their houses. Actually government ignores them. How long will they repress them? Will government save them and their culture?

Thuihla Mong
University of Rajshahi

Conspiracy against Islam

One of the unusual news that recently rocked the Muslim world was about an incident of a Jumma prayer. Recently in NY, USA, a

Jumma prayer was lead by a female imam and in the same congregation another female participant performed the ajan. The organisers of the programme claimed that a step to modernise the traditional Muslim religion. This is probably the first incident in 1400 years where the entire jamaat was led by a female imam. People who have little knowledge about Islam are probably jumping up and down in joy muttering that something great was done. One third of the participants of this jamaat were male. This is a true conspiracy to give Islam a bad name and change its tradition and value. Muslims around the world should be careful about such incident and must stand together to stop such act against Islam. Islam came as a complete code of life through the revelation of the Holy Quran and any new addition is an innovation that leads to jannah. Mohammad S Jamal
Toronto, Canada