

Kudos for capture

Time for govt to face the challenge head on

THE raid that resulted in the arrest of 11 suspected militants and the seizure of incriminating documents and materials is cause for congratulation. Hats off to the authorities who conducted the raid with precision and efficiency.

We are also gratified to note that the raid was accomplished following a tip-off by locals. This is a good sign. It indicates that members of the public are vigilant enough to note suspicious activity, and that they are bold enough and concerned enough to do something about it. The action also speaks of the close coordination between the police and local communities, which is the hallmark of good law enforcement.

The media has been writing about small and active groups of extremist stripes in Bangladesh for some time now. It should be noted that one of the arrestees is known as a leader of the notorious Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) and is the principal accused in a murder case.

The government at first denied the presence of such elements and even denied the very existence of an extremist outfit like the JMJB which bloodied its hands with murders. Subsequently, people in authority even cast aspersions on those who documented the atrocities of militants before finally coming to a grudging acceptance of the problem.

The time has come for this kind of short-sighted denial response pattern to end. There is no question that there exist groups, though very small, who are given to extremist interpretation of Islam and are being trained and armed to be potentially dangerous.

The government should realise that militancy is a worldwide problem. We have seen its deadly effects recently in London. Other countries from Spain to Morocco to Indonesia are also facing the same. It does not diminish the government to acknowledge that we too have a problem with militancy, but it does diminish the government to pretend that it does not exist.

The time for the government taking umbrage and thinking that all reports of militancy are fabricated to discredit it is long past. The time has come for the government to face facts, and face them head-on. The recent raid, which was the result of collaboration between the locals and the police, shows that some members of the public and some within the administration are taking the threat seriously and taking affirmative measures. We all should be doing the same.

Distressed DND residents

Permanent solution needed

VERY little government effort to salvage the DND area from water logging is visible. This has become a regular feature for the DND area where, almost six months in a year, the residents have to live in waterlogged conditions.

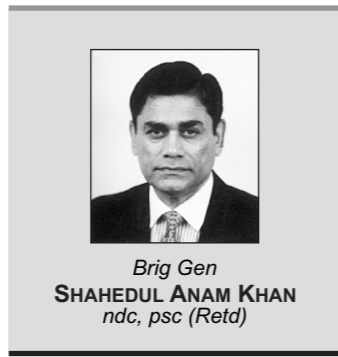
There appears to be a game of ping pong with two ministries, the LGRD and Water Resources ministries, trying to pass the baby to each other in an effort to avoid responsibility of tackling the situation, that has caused the two million or so inhabitants of the area the most indescribable hardship. For the last fortnight, as like several months last year, the people of the DND area have been completely marooned, deprived of the ability to lead a normal life.

The Dhaka WASA is totally non-existent in this area while the Water Development Board has been trying to flush out water with its four pumps. Some of the reasons of water logging such as encroachments of the drainage canals for the rain waters, illegal occupation and construction of structures of various definitions on water channels, unplanned construction of houses and blockage of drainage, unplanned development of the area etc, are known to all. Yet appropriate actions have not been taken despite the Prime Minister's instructions last year to take up the matter on an urgent basis.

Like so many other areas in our governance, this too is not without its political interference. Reportedly, many of the illegal occupants and encroachers are politically connected and are standing in the way of the authorities taking necessary measures to mitigate the sufferings of the people of the area.

There are many problems inherent and associated with the Cordon Approach to flood control, as is evident from the current situation in the DND area. But these are not insurmountable, more so when the aggravating factors are man-made. Temporary palliatives, like pumping out water, are not obviously the solution. The main reasons for water logging must be removed, and long-term permanent measures undertaken to mitigate, if not render the DND area completely free of water logging.

What is behind the Indo-US 'New Framework'?



THE recently concluded Indo-US defence agreement termed the "New Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship" has been characterised in many ways. Some see it as a defence pact with much more than a mere military connotation, while others see it as an alliance that will allow the stronger of the two to dominate the international strategic scenario, particularly in Asia, at the expense of the smaller partner fulfilling a surrogate role only.

However, very few would contest the assertion that this is the most far-reaching and comprehensive military agreement that India has ever signed with any country, and goes further than the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in 1971 with the then Soviet Union.

It certainly is an upgrading of Indo-US bilateral security relationship under the 1995 Agreed Minute of Defence relations, which was rendered virtually void after imposition of US sanctions following Pokhran in 1998.

The Indo-US "New Framework" is perhaps the culmination of the US plans to see India become a major world power, that Dr Rice promised India in March

this year.

The "New Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship" promises enhanced military co-operation, including joint weapons production and development, further transfer of technology, expanded two-way defence trade, joint patrols of Asian sea-lanes, and enhanced intelligence exchanges and dual training programs. It also provides for US assistance to India on missile defence, including the latest

corporate interests matching with India's desire for diplomatic gains.

There was much distress in India in March last year when the United States accorded Pakistan the unique honour of being named a Major Non-NATO Ally. There was even a call by influential Indians to embark on "economic warfare with the 'enemy'." According to commentators, there was a "perceived hollowiness" in the nature of the Indo-US strategic relationship that

between the two countries, it was in India's strategic interest to seek understanding with the US, without giving short shrift to Russia, by then struggling to recover from its internal political and economic trauma.

India has hardly been outside the ambit of an alliance, either structured or loose, during the entire period of the Cold War. Even though its founding fathers, out of a sacred desire to keep away from the international power game,

huge investment. That means a more thriving US defence industry. It is a simple question of economics; that is what all this exercise is about! And, as a recent Economist Intelligence Unit report suggests, the US is keen to break into this sizeable and potentially lucrative market for arms, hoping in particular to win a contract worth \$4-5 billion to supply India's air force with 126 multi-role fighters.

Let us examine the operative statements that accompany the

(Japan and Korea) for long, and now Central Asia, (Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan) make this rationale unconvincing.

Western think tanks as well as some analysts in this part of the world see the recent moves as a part of the strategy to counter China's growing influence that the US consider is threatening its interest. In reality, China has neither the power nor the strategic assets, much less the intention, to threaten US strategic interests.

What the US is actually apprehensive about, though, is China's growing economic strength that might eventually catch up with it. Thus, a policy that forced the former USSR to over spend on defence and thereby suffer an economic collapse may not be bad strategy against China. Whether China will be forced to go for large-scale military acquisition should it ever feel threatened with the actual prospects of being hemmed in, is a matter of conjecture.

For India its UN bid is the primary reason behind its current diplomatic maneuverings. Its rapprochement with China and assurance of continued Russian support precludes any misgiving from the two Asian giants. Thus, India's defense compact with the lone super power, with a large prospect of financial gains for the US, is for buying its support for a permanent seat at the UN. Nothing will give India more strategic dividend than a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.

That, more than anything else, is the major motivation for the Indo-US New Framework.

The author is Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

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Patriot Advanced Capability-III system.

Noticeable are the attempts of the Indian press as well as of some Indian analysts to project the "New Framework" as anything but a treaty, least of all a pact. It makes very little difference what name one calls it by; what is important are the potential benefits it holds out for both the parties, and what are, and will be, the implications for the other countries of the region.

Notwithstanding the strategic compulsions of containing China, as well as fulfilling US aspirations of stamping its presence in Asia, the latest Indo-US agreement is pure and simple economics dictating politics and foreign policy, strategy merely playing a supportive, if not altogether peripheral, role. It is a classic case of enlightened self-interests of two major democracies of the world being dovetailed to enhance US

sprung from the fact that India was kept completely in the dark about the lifting of sanctions against Pakistan. What has compelled the changed position and shifts, particularly on the part of India, to partake in such a pact, which has come under fire from some quarters within the country?

The strategic shift has been in evidence ever since the breakup of the Soviet Union, in the way that India moved militarily closer to the US and to the West, although not totally away from Russia. Since 1991, there started the first of the many cooperations in the military sector, starting with interactions on tactical and strategic plane at both bilateral and multilateral levels, culminating in joint military exercises, something hardly conceivable during the Cold War era. It was again the realisation by India's strategic planners, and rightly so that, notwithstanding the Cold War acrimony that existed

primarily out of economic reasons, propounded the non-aligned philosophy. Yet, for most part of the Cold War India remained either under treaty obligations or in close strategic partnership with the Soviet Union. It had nothing much to do with principles, if ever principles and international relations were congruous, but a lot to do with the pursuit of vital national interests. This was so vividly evident soon after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, India's staunchest ally and its major military partner during the Cold War.

Russia remains, and will remain so, until the induction of the transformative system in certain areas of the Indian military is completed. And that is one of the aims of the recent defence arrangements -- to transform India's military. That is the key point that one has to keep in mind. New weapons platforms mean

recent military pact between the two countries. The framework stated that both India and the US were entering a new era, "transforming our relationships to reflect our common principles and shared national interests." Coming from countries that were on the opposite sides of the Cold War, one wonders what are the national interests that are common to the two countries? Apart from the fact that there is a common preoccupation on terrorism, there is a great disconnect between the two countries on how to fight it; US modality is considered skewed, following double standards. India was the only country in South Asia to have censured US aggression on Iraq in its parliament.

Insofar as its not-so-openly-articulated-but-implicit policy of stamping its strategic presence in Asia, is concerned, the fact that the US is already present here, particularly in the Northeast

The PM's visit and the Japanese media

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

PRIME Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has now returned to her normal busy schedule in Dhaka after completing a four-day official visit to Japan. This was her first Japan visit in more than a decade and hence it carried significant importance for both countries. Begum Zia arrived at Tokyo's Haneda airport on board a special Biman flight in the late evening of July 11 and was received by the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Shugen Tanikawa. She was taken straight to Tokyo's Imperial Hotel where she stayed until her departure on July 15.

The most significant part of the visit being the official discussion with the Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi on July 14, the PM spent the first two days in Japan without having much discussion with the officials of the host country. It was in the evening of July 13 that her visit really picked up momentum as she attended a reception hosted by the Japan-Bangladesh Parliamentary League. The League is a pressure group of Japanese Diet members who try to lobby for Bangladesh on various issues and is presently headed by Shin Sakurai, a veteran parliamentarian of the main ruling Liberal Democratic Party and a former cabinet minister.

In between her arrival and joining the reception of the Parliamentary League, the PM of course attended a few important programs like the laying down of foundation stone of a Shaheed Minar in a Tokyo park and addressing a group of expatriate Bangladeshis at the hotel. But both of these programs had more of a Bangladeshi colouring rather than

reflecting bilateral character. The Shaheed Minar program was arranged between a ward office of the city of Tokyo and the Bangladesh side, and no high officials of either the Japanese government or the Metropolitan Government of Tokyo attended the function.

All these issues have by now been widely covered and reported in our media, more because a 19-member media delegation also accompanied the PM to Japan. Bangladeshi audience, both readers of newspapers and television

Bangladeshi newspapers that covered the visit extensively, and failed to locate even a single column small news item. Television in Japan too maintained the darkness with equal strictness. The only exception was Japan's public broadcasting network NHK, which interviewed Begum Zia during her stay in Tokyo. But for NHK television too the visit turned out to be a non-news as nothing was reported in its news programs.

If the silence of the Japanese media was part of a surprise, the circle was completed on July 14, the day

"Indigenous Jumma people from Bangladesh called Wednesday on Tokyo to suspend official development assistance (ODA) to their country until human rights there improve. Representatives from the 10-member Jumma People's Network (Japan) filed the request with the Foreign Ministry. They said their people had been forcibly evicted from their homes and massacred."

That's the only focus Bangladesh received in the Japanese media during the four days that our PM stayed in Tokyo.

why the action on part of the Japanese media turned out to be a concerted act, rather than an individual one where only one particular newspaper or broadcaster picked up the issue and highlighted it. Moreover, why it was published on the day when the crucial bilateral talks were supposed to be held.

It wouldn't be a gross misjudgment to say that the overall outcome of the visit could not please the host as Japan was eyeing over winning our support in joining the group of countries to co-sponsor a

came increasingly concerned that their calculation might not eventually work out and this was probably the origin of the disappointment of the host country.

Does this hypothesis imply that the Japanese government has a strong influence over the country's media and the government can in times manipulate the contents of news item? Yes, this is precisely how the media work in Japan. Various Reporters' Clubs attached to each and every ministry, important offices, and political parties tend to develop a cozy relationship with the sources of news. This atmosphere of mutual understanding becomes helpful to both sides as the source can have a say over certain news items when there is a need and the media do not need to go through numerous channels to obtain information from the sources.

The nature of the report on hill people of Bangladesh suggests that it was most likely released through the Reporters' Club of the foreign ministry and this might prompt analysts to conclude that the host was not in a happy mood during the visit of our PM. We can also conclude that this mood of the host didn't fail to draw the attention of media representatives of concerned Reporters' Clubs and hence there was also a concerted action on their part to keep a complete silence. It should be noted that the media in Japan is in full support of the resolution drafted by the group of four countries and would like to see Japan joining the rank of important decision makers of the United Nations.

CLOSEUP JAPAN

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viewers, are now well aware of the details of the visit. As for the media of the host country, a completely reverse situation characterised the visit and I'm sure members of the Bangladesh media team that accompanied the PM were also puzzled by this total silence of their Japanese colleagues.

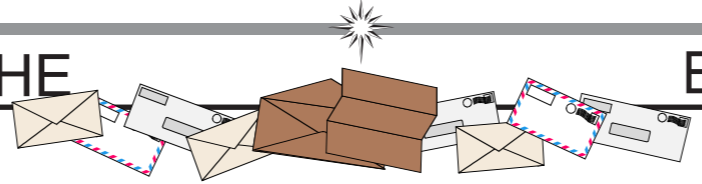
Throughout the period of Begum Zia's stay in Japan, not a single Japanese newspaper reported anything about the visit except running the supplement that was paid for by the concerned parties and hence had no news value. As a result it turned out to be completely puzzling, as Bangladeshis in Japan tried to find out the Japanese position about the visit soon after browsing the web pages of

our PM met her Japanese counterpart for official bilateral discussions. The expatriate Bangladeshis in Japan, who were searching desperately for any news in the pages of Japanese newspapers about the visit and about their country, at last came across a small news item that dealt with their country. But a quick glance was enough to find out that if there was any link of that particular news item with the visit of our PM, it had the link from a negative position. Since it was a brief report that almost all Japanese newspapers carried on the same day, let me quote in full the version that the English edition of Japan's influential daily Asahi Shimbun carried. It reads like this:

This obviously raises a few questions about the attitude of the Japanese media, as well as about our failure to convey the message properly to draw the media's attention more to the crucial issues of bilateral ties rather than to issues that can have overall negative impact on the visit. The hill people of Bangladesh obviously tried to manipulate the opportunity of the visit to convey their message in a meaningful way and there is no doubt they have cleverly outsmarted our officials in this regard. Saying so, I'm not denying that their rights are being violated and despite the signing of a peace treaty, they are facing serious problems that need to be addressed. But there still remains the unsolved question of

resolution on behalf of four countries including Japan that deals with the reform of the United Nations. For Japan the timing of the visit was of utmost importance as the time for submission of the resolution is quickly approaching. The Japanese side made it clear on several occasions that Tokyo would consider the UN reform proposal as one of the most important issues to be discussed at the highest level talks. And there was also faint hope among Japanese officials that winning the support of Bangladesh would not be that difficult as Japan always stood by the country and hardly made any request to Dhaka carrying that much importance. But as the visit of our PM was drawing nearer, Tokyo be-

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.

What a shame!

I was shocked to see a news item in The Daily Star dated 27-06-05 where a widow of a slain police sergeant, Mr. Farhad, protested against a hero's burial to the registered criminal Sagir Ahmed.

This criminal killed not only her on duty husband but was also involved in many other heinous crimes registered in different police stations.

Mohammed Alauddin
Dhaka

Lopsided claims

The official claims of 'Development' in different sectors of the society through much publicised projects is rather lopsided, missing out on many weak black holes in a system. There are many examples.

Fish, vegetable and fruit exports and marketing: the weakest links are inadequate canning industry and cold storage depots at rural depth. Only export of frozen and fresh items are publicised. What about non-frozen packing, storage and use at home

and abroad? Even locals cannot buy these items off season in perceivable packings? There is complete silence in this development area. Why? The consumers have to be offered choices.

Leather: scanty news on value-added products and its export and QC. The SMEs in the shoes and bags areas do not get R&D backup; and the financial side implications do not get highlight.

RMG: administration and management are poor, but official focus is absent on enforcing the basic phases of regulatory practices. Now factory building collapse and frequent fires are drawing international attention, not to speak of poor HR culture. Now the factory owners are demanding assistance from the importers, on the plea of quoting lower export prices to grab orders. Why multistoried buildings are allowed as factories, and that too without adequate safety measures? There are no periodical drills (poor PR by BGMEA); and the amenities to workers are not publicised. There are only fire-safety inspectors to look after

several thousand factories. and the budget is silent on remedial measures (same is the situation in ensuring safe food in the bazaars). When politicians seek publicity on ego trips, that is the end of scientific, progressive development.

The session jams and student politics in the campus are not commented upon by the MPs, who concentrate on finding perpetual fault with the opposition tactics. There is complete absence of constructive criticism by the higher ups. It is not possible in a society of sycophants and culture of nepotism.

Why the co-operative system cannot be revived in a healthy and honest manner? The finger points to only one type of culprit political abuse of power and influence.

Political internal discipline is not enforced for public awareness. When political field workers break the rules, there is no corrective mechanism or deterrent action. There is no point in soliciting votes for *mastan* training centres! Why a voter like this writer speak in such a strange

language, never heard from politicians? The huge communication gap between the rulers and the ruled, known as modern democracy!

Big business magnates are controlling development policies. Feedback systems are cheap (in the long run), and practical. We prance too much on the branches, ignoring foundation nurture. Result: operations never reach 'effortless' routine level performance. The mood-of-the-moment should be discouraged. Be a silent worker in the background. This is the job of the civil service, but it has been tarnished, and its motivation poisoned. No re-orientation programmes are announced. There is too much hankering for laying foundation stones. [One is reserved for the individual at the graveyard at the end of the game!]

A Mahseen
Dhaka

Let them speak

The newspapers may encourage writing by ex-MPs and retired politicians to regale the citizens with spicy inside stories of working, and tales of honesty within the political parties, and dedicated performances by the politicians in power (ref ex-MP Maj Akhtaruzzaman's commentary in DS, July 6).

Electricity can be obtained from water; hence it is no wonder, in principle, to appoint a former senior officer of the Water Board to become the Chairman of PDB. The chairman is being replaced too frequently, for reasons not unknown to the public.

Now the finance minister has gone one step further, and said (DS July 6) that the NBR would become empty if action were taken against corrupt officials. Why have the post of inspectors when they do not inspect honestly? Pay them less with commission for each detection.

But it would not work, as the commission from omissions would be much higher. In fact high bribes are offered for such appointments and postings.

How the prime minister is going to contain entrenched evil prac-

tices in the public services? It should be the number one priority before the next general elections (if held in time or prematurely).

Similar stories everywhere: Ctg port, electric bills, Rajuk way of working, the apathy of DCC, using 25-year old planes in Biman, students preparing for degrees in political agitation [BA (PA)].

The country has gone to the dogs; but dogs are faithful to their masters!

AZ
Dhaka

BBC audience research project

It is encouraging to learn that the BBC world Service Trust and BBC Bengali Service are going to launch an audience research project in Bangladesh involving a series of radio debates and programmes addressing governance issues. The project will conduct two national public surveys, a qualitative impact study with the project's audience members and press monitoring.

Audience research is an impor-

tant aid for developing an I-E-C (information-education-communication) strategy. I think audience research projects on agricultural and family planning programmes should also be undertaken in our country.

I wish the BBC audience research project all success.

Zahidul Haque

Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka-1207

Armed forces division and the PERC

Thanks for the comprehensive report on the activities of the Armed Forces Division (Armed Forces Division dwarfs ministry power, 5 July 2005). You quoted from persons who remained anonymous but you failed to mention the recommendations of the Public Expenditure Review Commission, a commission created by the present government immediately after its taking office. This Commission, headed by M Hafizuddin Khan, an ex auditor-general, in its final report submitted in December

2003, recommended that the AFD be merged with the ministry of defence. Apart from downsizing the government, this action, the Commission mentioned, would save expenditure and result in avoiding duplication of the same activities. The Commission also recommended that the Ministry of Liberation War be merged with the defence ministry. Unfortunately, this excellent report on government expenditure did not see the light of the day, probably because it made some rather bold recommendations that the government found uncomfortable. I suggest your paper organise a roundtable conference, where politicians, economists, budget specialists and representatives from the civil society and the government could discuss the PERC's report in detail and examine the possibility of their being implemented.

AZ M Abdul Ali
Uttara, Dhaka