

Theatrics of nomination

Politics of opportunism, no morality, no principle

IT would not be wrong to say that the theatrics that one saw of the BNP in determining their nominee for a vacant parliamentary seat has evoked laughter if not derision from the public.

The seat had fallen vacant when the sitting MP belonging to the opposition, in his wisdom, thought it fit to be a political turncoat and join the ruling BNP. He was to be quickly rewarded for floor-crossing with a ruling party nomination for the very seat he had vacated. But it is the prospect of a rebellion at the grassroots level as well as the threat of the let-down BNP leader Abu Zafar that he would be leaving the ruling party which forced its high-ups to rescind their decision in favour of the original BNP hand.

We fail to understand why in the first place a person with an allegedly questionable background was given priority over someone who has had a longer association with the party, without considering the adverse impact and the negative fallout of the action?

What one also fails to understand is why did the ruling party decide in favour of someone who is not only new in the party but whose motivation for crossing the floor was dubious to say the least. It is none of our concern as to who the parties wishes to admit into their fold, but if the motivation for joining a party is to escape the arm of law, and in turn being rewarded with a nomination for the parliament by-election, one can only lament at the sheer lack of principles and morality that drive politics and politicians today in Bangladesh.

The comical display, of one of the largest political parties and the major partner in the ruling alliance, has to be the worst kind of horse-trading and political expediency that one has had the misfortune of seeing in recent times. What lessons do we take from it? What examples are the political leaders setting for the future of a democratic party.

We would like to think that politics is still imbued with a modicum of principles. Otherwise democracy can only be a matter of form, not substance and, therefore, hollow.

The hopelessly ignored ones

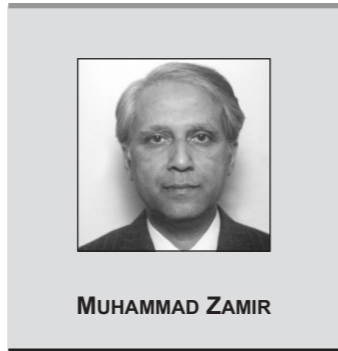
Case for auto-active emergency care

THESE patients are no one's responsibility. At least that's what it seems like. They landed in Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) compound without any identity and nobody either to stand by them or look after them. They are also the kind of patients who are thrown by the wayside in an accident, picked up and left before the emergency unit of the hospital with none to attend to them. We are talking about those people who, as reported by The Daily Star last Tuesday, become helpless by the turn of events and face a gruesome fate that no human being deserves.

At first being brought to the hospital in a critical and unconscious state and then left unattended for days on end is not only unacceptable, but also inhuman. And the reasons like there is no one to pay for their treatment or no one to take their responsibility or there is shortage of doctors to attend them sound very unfortunate to say the least. What was the fault of an unidentified 28-year old woman who was brought with severe head injuries caused by a road accident and was left unconscious on the hospital corridor without any treatment for several days? What was the fault of another woman, around 55 years of age, who after lying on a bed with a saline apparatus hanging over her died after four days?

The Social Welfare Department claims that it often provides these patients with financial help, but there is no adequate fund for their treatment. On the other hand, the doctors claim that they and the nurses are often overwhelmed by the huge number of patients they have to attend to, which can result in lack of treatment for them. Whatever the reasons are, the reality now tells us that a separate stand by emergency unit for these hopelessly ignored people must be formed at DMCH, especially since the number of them is increasing. Whether the health ministry can be involved in this process is a possibility that can be looked into. Or may be both the health and social welfare ministry can jointly take measures and provide these poor, destitute people with at least basic medical facilities.

Potential for positive engagement with India



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

AT long last, India feels reassured and confident of its pre-eminence in South Asia and the adjoining region. Clear indications of support from major powers, including the USA, and a resurgent economy have been crucial factors. The fact that they are now being compared in the same breath with Japan and Germany have also created an awareness that they have a clear responsibility to be seen as more accommodating in their bilateral relationships with their neighbours. It is being understood by the New Delhi leadership that flexibility is called for.

This is good. It is important for removing tension and constructing bridges. This is a sign of maturity.

A positive example of this has been the recent agreements over the past weekend with Pakistan. Both countries undertook significant measures towards reducing the risk of an accidental nuclear war. This will assist the peace process between India and Pakistan and also reduce concern among their neighbours.

The three-day visit of the Indian External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh to Bangladesh was a similar good step. As expected, a large number of issues were placed on the table. Our Foreign Minister indicated that discussions were held in 'a very frank and candid atmosphere'. One would not have

expected anything else.

The vital aspect that we need to understand is that, this was the beginning of a process. In a way, it was a resumption that was long overdue.

Milton wrote long ago that 'dialogue is knowledge in the making'. What happened in Dhaka was essential. It might not have solved all the existing problems. It cleared the atmosphere. The fact that the Indian External Affairs Minister's visit was accompanied by Track-2

In the meantime, this time in Dhaka, the two sides appear to have had a wide-ranging analysis of how things stand.

Consistent with diplomatic courtesies, both sides agreed to remove irritants that have often strained relations between the two neighbours. Need for peaceful solutions were particularly stressed with regard to security issues and border problems. This was given priority given the direct impact of trans-border arms smuggling, alleged

cutties and failures in governance, acts of terror, natural disasters and economic shifts due to post-MFA reorganisation. The postponement of the Summit also created its own ramifications and misunderstandings. Consequently, the consensus, that all South Asian countries need to work together to improve the sub-continental situation assumes special connotation. If this view persists, it will help to make the Summit a success.

The visit of the Indian External

should also include up-gradation of land ports, sea ports, telecommunication links and financial linkages. We can make phone calls to any place in the USA, Canada and many countries in Europe for Taka 7.50 per minute, but it costs many times more to make a call to India. This is affecting those who are involved in bilateral trade between the two countries. The volume of such trade has now grown to over \$1.6 billion, and this does not include

one can only characterise such attempts as being short-sighted and negative. We must not destroy hard earned confidence building measures and waste scarce opportunities for the evolution of a South Asian spirit.

I am an optimist by nature. I believe that India is beginning to understand that Bangladesh is not a threat to India's security. We believe in peaceful co-existence. We also want to take advantage of India's look-east policy and the numerous complementarities and synergies in the fields of economy, education, information technology and energy. These are important elements for bolstering and expanding areas of trade and investment for our large populations.

Both sides need to move forward. It would be useful to avoid embittering bilateral relations with provocative statements or controversial plans (river-linkages). People of both countries, because of past history and cultural linkages, share ties of friendship that need to be further nurtured.

We have several opportunities coming our way and they need to be utilised. This includes meetings of the India-Bangladesh Joint Economic Commission, the Joint Working Group on boundary demarcation, adverse possession and enclaves and also of the Home Secretaries of the two governments. There will also hopefully be visits to Bangladesh in the coming months of senior Indian Cabinet Ministers (including Minister for Water Resources, Minister for Commerce and the Minister for Energy) and also of Mr Manmohan Singh, the Indian Prime Minister. The near-future is filled with potential for progress. The scope for a new beginning has surfaced. Cordiality and political good-will must prevail over mistrust.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

POST BREAKFAST

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discussions between civil society representatives of both countries added to the comprehensive approach. The CPD deserves special commendation for this arrangement.

The visit of Natwar Singh was like the servicing of a re-conditioned car -- the battery was recharged, spark plugs changed, engine oil replaced along with the oil and air filters. The combustion mechanism was also more efficiently calibrated. One hopes that the engine of understanding and bilateral cooperation will now function more smoothly.

Several high level visits are expected over the coming months. They are, in all likelihood, going to add further impetus and might even usher in greater political will to resolve differences. We have to wait and see.

illegal migration and criminalisation of the border areas. I believe that coming to a final agreement with regard to the remaining few miles of the border and the guidelines and sharing information pertaining to criminals and terrorists will facilitate a joint approach towards tackling common threats of insecurity and fundamentalism. What is probably needed is greater political will and trust in each other. That is the only way out.

I take this opportunity to also welcome the realisation of both sides that there needs to be further integration of regional cooperation. There is no other alternative. We are all looking forward towards the forthcoming SAARC Summit later on this year in Dhaka. South Asia has had more than its share of disquiet. We have witnessed diffi-

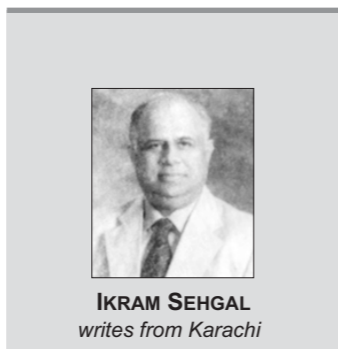
culties and failures in governance, acts of terror, natural disasters and economic shifts due to post-MFA reorganisation. The postponement of the Summit also created its own ramifications and misunderstandings. Consequently, the consensus, that all South Asian countries need to work together to improve the sub-continental situation assumes special connotation. If this view persists, it will help to make the Summit a success.

The visit of the Indian External Affairs Minister was also unique because of it having been welcomed in a bi-partisan manner. Sheikh Hasina, Awami League President and Leader of the Opposition also underlined on the need for a strong constructive engagement and political commitment of both governments to resolve outstanding differences, particularly the huge trade gap. Quite correctly, she outlined that economic and political relations have to be improved further by removing the irritants. This view was consistent with that of the government.

informal trade -- euphemism for smuggling.

This aspiration for a closer, proactive relationship cannot however be achieved without active support from India. As the dominant partner and the regional power, they have to exercise self control. It was disconcerting to read a report in the 'New Age' (8 August) that Indian intelligence agencies offer handsome money to journalists to write articles against Bangladesh and two other neighbouring countries (Pakistan and Nepal). This was being claimed by Arun Rajnath, New Delhi correspondent of the Washington based online newspaper 'South Asian Tribune'. The same person has also alleged that harassment is meted 'towards journalists who refuse to comply with official directives'. One hopes that this report is wrong. If

Coping with terrorism



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

TODAY'S suicide bombers may be mostly of Muslim origin, but terrorism has no religion or nationality. During World War II, Japanese pilots made their aircraft into flying bombs in "kamikaze" (divine wind) attacks against US warships in a desperate effort to break the stronghold of the US Navy over the Pacific. Today's "divine" bombings are an aberration, warped logic and reaction thereof to the real and/or perceived failures and shortcomings of society in dispensing equitable justice and providing good governance. For many centuries Jews have been on the receiving end of Christian wrath, Muslims were similarly subjected to the brutal excesses of the Crusades. Both Jews and Muslims together faced the tortures of the Inquisition. Over 6 million were killed by the murderous horror of the Nazi-era Holocaust. The sustained persecution of Muslims for the past 50 years may be nowhere near matching that horrific scale in absolute murder, but on a pro-rata basis more human beings are affected across the world.

While for the past 50-60 years Palestine has been occupying

centre-stage in Muslim anguish, terrorism is now fertile ground for breeding in a host of other territories, not the least being Iraq and Afghanistan. While only a handful have taken up arms, the perception among most Muslims of all leanings is that Islam is increasingly being targeted. While, regrettably, there is no countering violence except to match it with more violence, terrorism cannot be fought by military means alone, "an eye for an eye" is only a short term means to an end. Over an elongated period this "scorched-earth"

sors -- feudals, the wealthy elite, members of the civil administration, the judiciary, anyone of consequence in governance, etc. Many youth in eastern and central India frustrated at being given short shrift by society have become susceptible to "Naxalite" thought. To a young 25-year old, the fight of the underdog against tyranny and injustice had romantic connotations, but the brutal murders of possible innocents as "collateral damage" put a damper on any such notions. Non-violent initiatives are required to combat terrorism,

cal bind, such compulsions forcing him to (a) deny acknowledging the obvious, that the latest wave of terrorist attacks in UK is because of the Iraq war, (b) shift all the blame for the terrorism on the warped ideology of its perpetrators instead of coping with the root causes, and (c) pass the buck to Pakistan and to the madrasahs in toto on circumstantial evidence that would be laughed out of any court in the British judicial system. While we cannot escape culpability, it is disappointing to see a failure to apportion responsibility across the

parents cannot afford to send them to any school, again almost half of them i.e. 40-45 percent are sent to madrasahs by their parents because they are hard pressed to feed them one square meal a day and invariably the seminaries provide food, a frugal one maybe, but a meal nevertheless. When either planning alternative schools or restructuring the madrasahs, reform will have to cater for one wholesome midday meal.

In the flush of "victory" in ending the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, we set aside logic and

control in Kabul when we should have remained neutral in the infighting. Even at home, adopting a "divide and rule" policy within Pakistan politics, our intelligence agencies marginalised the mainstream PPP and PML (N) and contrived to have the combined MMA win more seats than all the individual religious parties had ever got together. It should have been taken as a warning signal, a wake-up call. We have been reduced to having the Supreme Court bail us out of the "Hasba Bill" quagmire. Can we afford to hand over our future to religious ideologues who have no understanding or patience with anyone who does not adhere to their interpretation of religions strictures? Alienating friend and foe alike, we are up the creek without a paddle.

There may not be "training camps" as our detractors suggest on prime time TV, but "private sector enterprise" is still sending individuals across borders with murder and mayhem on their minds. Turning a blind eye does not absolve us of culpability in targeting civilians. In the present world environment how does one draw the line between militancy and terrorism? We cannot run, or be seen to be running, with the hares while hunting with the hounds. We have to distance ourselves from our own clandestine Afghan policy, not only in words but deeds. For our own good as a country (and its future survival thereof) we must adhere to some of the important principles in coping with terrorism. Let's face up to the truth, we are our own worst enemy!

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

AS I SEE IT

We cannot run, or be seen to be running, with the hares while hunting with the hounds. We have to distance ourselves from our own clandestine Afghan policy, not only in words but deeds. For our own good as a country (and its future survival thereof) we must adhere to some of the important principles in coping with terrorism. Let's face up to the truth, we are our own worst enemy!

policy applied to human beings becomes counter-productive. On the other hand, have the "suicide bombings" weakened the resolve of the US military in Iraq or seen an escalation in their reaction? As an unwilling "guest" of the Indian government in 1971 for a few months, I came face to face with the warped logic of Naxalites from one of their incarcerated leaders, Majumdar, in Agartala Jail. The war waged by Naxals is now over four decades old. There is no purer terrorism than that practiced by them in many areas of India, their avowed enemy is civilised society, and their objective is the elimination of all those seen to be oppres-

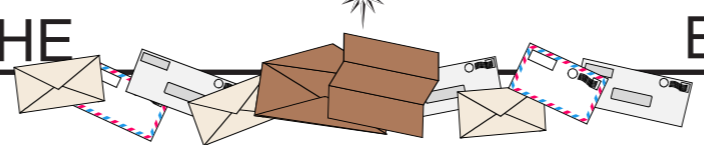
four need special mention viz (1) dispensing of equitable justice, (2) maintaining absolute credibility, (3) providing sound education, and (4) curbing religious militancy. One must develop and maintain credibility. One can get away for some time with getting the people to believe what you want them to hear, but there will be a backlash when they find out the truth, the lack of credibility is grist for those who have chosen the path of militancy, society's failure to present (and/or face) the truth is exploited as enough reason for violent reaction. One must face up to unpalatable facts of life. Western politicians like Tony Blair are in a politi-

board, one associates "fairplay" with the British personality.

There is no substitute to providing comprehensive education, particularly in the early formative years. A vast majority of madrasahs are excellent NGOs, but they mostly impart religious education to the exclusion of almost everything else. These need to be re-structured as educational institutions with a wide range of disciplines, on a bedrock of religious teachings. For parents without means to send their children to school, the madrasahs are a very welcome (and in nearly all cases, the only) alternative. Nearly 85-90 percent of the seminary students attend madrasahs because their

reason, and conveniently forgot that the whole free world was involved in that effort. Some "adventurers" encouraged militancy, using Kashmir as an excuse they went far field, from Morocco to Mindanao. Those who have not heard a shot fired in anger usually become too big for their boots as they rise higher in rank (the risk of becoming a casualty is far less). To say that we are ambivalent in curbing religious militancy is to be charitable. Scores of organisations set up shop, it became profitable to be considered a "jihadi." We also blurred the distinction between religion and nationalism in having the Pakhtun majority Taliban take

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.

Congratulations Matiuur Rahman!

I am very much glad to know the name of the winners of Magsaysay Award 2005. Famous journalist Matiuur Rahman who is the editor of the daily Prothom Alo is one of the winners of this award. It's not only a great honour for him but also the whole nation. Working magnificently through various public welfare fields, writing against all black and dark approaches and speaking for making a glorious society Matiuur Rahman tries to enrich our country. So he is the most suitable person for getting this award. That's why selection committee can be thanked. I hope Matiuur Rahman will continue his journey of truth. Thanks to him again.

Sadat Shahriar
Dept. of EEE, RUET
Rajshahi
Top class journalism

Your front-page report by Shaheen Mollah (Deprived war hero DS-30 July) is probably the best investigative reporting that I have come across lately. Please accept my congratulations for a moving real account of humanity in distress. Your subsequent staff correspondent's report (DS-31 July) confirms the quality of reporting and the encouraging response thereof.

I would request you to please mobilise and follow up to provide all support and help that needs to be given. Your office should be the focal point of channelling all financial and non-financial help for Mr. Arafat Ali Khan. It will ensure transparency and lack of any system loss that invariably occurs in such cases.

You will not only do a worthwhile service, but also as a Muslim I believe Allah will reward you for helping a helpless human being. Please set this up and I will try my best to mobilise funds from friends

and family to arrange all that is needed to rehabilitate this valiant son of Bangladesh.

S.A. Mansoor
Gulshan, Dhaka

Cruelty of school teachers

I would like to thank you and your reporter Imrul Hasan for the write-up in Star City about the cruelty of schoolteachers in some renowned schools of the city.

I was a student of Motijee Ideal School & College. Currently I am studying at Notre Dame College. The days of my school life still haunts me because some of our teachers used to beat us for petty faults. My brother is now also studying in class seven at Ideal School. Last Monday a teacher severely punished my brother along with 30 other students for their childish prank. Your reporter also reported that incident. Punishing students for petty faults has become a common

phenomenon at Ideal School.

You might say that in order to achieve better academic results, sometimes teachers should beat the students for their own good. I also agree with you. But this should not cross the limit at all. Last Monday's incident has created a very bad impact on my brother.

In the developed countries, teachers know how to give lessons to students without punishing. But here in our country, not only Ideal School, but also some other renowned schools, are still giving punishment to their students physically.

I urge you to please write an editorial in your esteemed daily about this so that there created a public awareness about physical beating by teachers. Beating innocent children should stop forever.

NS
Dhaka
Tata and Bangladesh
Multinationals are essential to a country's development. Recently

the Indian giant Tata has shown interest in Bangladesh. If Tata starts its operation in Bangladesh, unemployment problem of the country could be solved to an extent, as it would need a large amount of labour force to fuel its industries. They will also earn foreign currencies for us and may develop infrastructure for their interest. In the past we have seen China showed interest in transnational corporatins (TNC) by making Special Economic Zones for them. The BNP government can follow such policies but also must limit the freedom of such companies so they cannot exploit us in any way. Low quality goods, if any, produced by Tata should not be allowed to find a place in the domestic market for the greater interest of the people.

Areader
Dhaka
Whither low and justice?
How a law minister can support a

criminal sentenced to death for his alleged involvement in killing and illegal activities is not understood by me. Though I have completed my university education and have tried to keep an eye on international affairs throughout my educational life. I never came across such thing. Now I am totally dumb-founded after watching the activities of our law, justice and parliamentary minister. Always he talks about the rule of law, institutionalisation of democracy to establish good governance for attaining economic emancipation for the grassroots people. But what has he done about the notorious Zhintu has created sensation among the people of all walks of life.

I can not decipher his sentiment whether he yearns to serve the downtrodden nation who mandated him to assume power or he is totally for the men of BNP. Where will the people go if the law minister is behaving like this? To demand

his resignation is not the solution now. Such type of person should be brought to justice themselves and tried to set an example in national and international arena. People should voice their demand now and educated people should knuckle down to create mass awareness for sake of greater national interest.

Bazlur Rahman
Mohsin Hall, Dhaka University

Grameen Phone network

Grameen Phone subscribers of Petroleum sector, Patenga, Chittagong have been facing trouble in mobile phone communication for weak network of Grameen Phone. Even sometimes in some places of the sector Grameen network shows "No Service" or "Limited Service". As a result, Grameen users cannot talk smoothly/uninterruptedly or

cannot use their cell phones at all and thus keep their cell phones off.

But what we know is that the other operators' network remains full and some of Grameen users already switched over to other Operators' connections due to Grameen's weak network in that area. Under the circumstances, Grameen Phone should take necessary steps to enhance their network in the said area.

H Muhit
Chittagong

Underground train for Dhaka

Bangladesh being a flood prone region underground metro railway system is not suitable for Bangladesh. Overhead monorail system is most appropriate for Dhaka.

Shafiq U. Rahman
On e-mail