

## Our HDI ranking

Only good governance can improve it

THE UNDP report on HDI has pointed out certain successes that the country has achieved in areas like expansion of health facilities and income generation for women. The country's income level would have been much higher if the ODA from the rich countries were greater and if the international trade regime were not discriminatory.

However the country's Human Development Index (HDI) ranking has gone a notch down to 139, out of 177 countries. The ranking is the lowest among the South Asian countries, though others in the region, except Sri Lanka, are not doing much better.

The UNDP report has made the noteworthy observation that low income is no barrier to human development. That is an appreciation of our performance, but the truth remains that citizens' rights cannot be established fully as long as poverty persists.

The UNDP Resident Representative, Larry Maramis, has admitted that discrimination in world trade and violence were hindering the growth of many developing economies. Maramis has very rightly observed that our human index ranking can be improved if the political parties work together to ensure human security. If only political violence could be curbed in our context, the social inputs going into HDI would be a good deal more contributory. Now, it is up to the political parties to decide how they will respond to these plain truths.

We believe the government-NGO partnership is a key factor in our social development. The role of NGOs merits great appreciation, but there is a lot of room for improvement in terms of service delivery from the state sector.

We think the role of the media in the development process should be evaluated correctly. The media has always been a positive catalyst, focussing on the shortcomings as well as the success stories of human resource development.

The efforts that need to be devoted to HDI are being obstructed by lack of good governance. This is a crucially important issue that has to be addressed in right earnest.

## Praises for Bangladesh

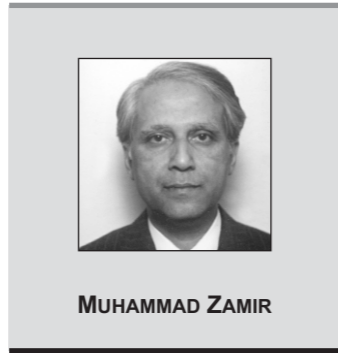
Acknowledgement is much appreciated

MUCH that we are swathed in compassion and sympathy for the unprecedented damage and devastation caused by the catastrophic Katrina, it is nonetheless heartening to know that the media of the United States thought highly of the way Bangladesh has been managing the prelude to and aftermath of natural disasters the country has been historically vulnerable to. In fact Bangladesh became popularly known in the West as the country of 'natural disasters' in the eighties and nineties when natural calamities struck the country almost every year leaving behind a trail of extensive destruction and huge loss of lives.

But now the acknowledgements by the media in the US about our efficient handling of disaster situations, in the wake of their own calamity in the last week or so, should be much appreciated. There is no doubt that Bangladesh, over the years, has achieved considerable expertise in disaster management in the whole world. Especially since the nature's egregious plunder of 1991 when at least one hundred and thirty thousand people died in one of the biggest cyclones of recent times. The elevated cyclone shelters built by the Bangladesh government along the coastal regions, more emphasis by the authorities on storm warning system using indigenous methods to evacuate people -- all these have contributed largely in decreasing the number of casualties in later calamities.

Lack of sensitisation of the people in order to gauge the seriousness of the situation and leave the disaster prone areas as quickly as possible was probably one of the many reasons for the large number of casualties being feared in New Orleans right now. At the same time, lack of preparations by the authorities to provide these helpless people with safe shelters and food only added to the woes. As it has been widely accepted by all that Bangladesh, hardened from many experiences, has acquired certain skills and expertise in disaster management and handling of the aftermath, perhaps the US authorities can take a cue from Bangladesh's experience in handling such unpredictable circumstances, which they surely are not accustomed to.

# Extremism, terrorism and Bangladesh



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

A debate continues within the international community about an agreed and acceptable definition of the term terrorism. Efforts have been made by jurists as well as politicians to identify common traits that essentially denote or connote all the characteristics of the word. The United Nations, despite many sessions has yet to arrive at a consensus on 'a good definition' that all of us 'can live with'.

This column will appear just ahead of 11th September, more popularly recognised as 9/11. It will be the fourth anniversary of the disaster that befell the cities of New York and Washington, USA and completely turned the world upside down. The urgency, panic and terror that were unleashed on that fateful morning have really not subsided. They appear to have grown and spread.

Indiscriminate terrorist acts have multiplied and so have the number of innocent civilian victims. Grenades, low and high intensity indigenous bombs and suicide attacks have slowly changed our concept of security. It has also raised questions as to whether the fight against terror undertaken by some countries has been a success. I will not offer any answer but shall affirm that the tentacles of terrorism and fundamentalism have spread to many parts of the world, including Bangladesh.

Disgruntled and disaffected elements have used perverted interpretations of three principal common denominators -- radical opinions about Islam, views regarding the orthodox format of Islamic governance and opposition to secularism -- to advance their

cause. These extremists are motivated, well-organised and well-equipped in terms of access to funds on the basis of international contacts. They are immune to humanitarian consequences of their actions and not circumscribed by rules of engagement.

Our constitution reflects the secular amity that has always existed within our geographical environment. The Preamble, Articles 2A and 11 highlight our respect for fundamental freedoms. They

through this evolution for the last two decades. It has not been as intense as in the case of Pakistan. Yet, the effect of such inter-action has been very clear, both in rural as well as in urban areas.

Investigative reports have revealed that money obtained from abroad (Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Libya, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia) by Islamic oriented NGOs in Bangladesh has been used not only for religious education and orphanages but also invested in business sec-

The events of 17th August have underlined one simple message. There is a divide in the understanding of Islam in Bangladesh. It has also reaffirmed that there are some who are willing to kill indiscriminately to achieve their own version of radical Islamic governance. We today have a threat which neglected any further, can cause serious havoc. We need to wake up to the reality that politicisation of this problem and mere denial will not encourage it to disappear.

carriage of justice against the perpetrators of the criminal acts.

The general public have been assured by the government that serious investigations are underway. They have also been urged, most correctly, not to speculate. Similarly, civil society has been requested to help identify and apprehend the mentors involved in committing these heinous crimes. There have been many arrests. Joint investigation units are also trying to tie up the loose ends.

to take all necessary measures for guaranteeing safety not only of the common citizen but also for others involved with investment and trade.

In this context, it would be worthwhile for the intelligence agencies to undertake in-depth efforts to ascertain how these extreme groups are accessing to their funds, their method of disbursement of such funds, the organogram of these groups and the basis of their connectivity. Lastly, in addition to identifying the real leadership of these groups, the concerned agencies should also try to establish the reasons as to why and how law-abiding and peaceful citizens are being convinced to take up arms against their own state. It is important to understand the psychology of an extremist or a terrorist in order to contain him.

We must understand that we are fast losing our credibility in the international community. Our track-record in the past has been unsatisfactory. In this regard, it would be important for us to take note of the comments made recently in Dhaka by Mr Paul Wolfowitz, the President of the World Bank. He has acknowledged that 'on the whole this is a very tolerant country'. He has also significantly pointed out that 'the mainstream forces in the country who believe in keeping this a tolerant society can unite on this important issue instead of arguing over smaller things.'

It is a shame that not one individual has been punished as yet for the major crimes that I have enumerated earlier. This time round (unlike previous occasions), police should neither be reluctant nor be influenced about bringing charges against militants if there is specific evidence. There has to be justice without fear, favour or being 'embarrassed'. Good governance demands that ultimate responsibility be assigned. Failure in this regard will only encourage terrorists to carry out future operations with further impunity.

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

## POST BREAKFAST

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mirror the spirit of tolerance and understanding evident in our music, poetry, drama and other forms of literary expression. Our constitution also bears testimony not only to our aspirations but also to how Bangladeshis in general (except for a minuscule minority) came together, irrespective of religion, to liberate their country.

Three decades later, the values appear to have changed. The general population, who are inherently secular by temperament, have watched with dismay not only the gradual radicalisation of their daily lives but also the emergence of militant Islam in our country. It is probably the direct result of millions of Bangladeshis proceeding to conservative and feudal Arab countries for their livelihood. Having spent many years in confined intellectual environments, hundreds of thousands have returned with a more restricted vision of Islam. They have also sponsored and encouraged the growth of madrasa education, supported by funding from various Middle Eastern charitable institutions.

Bangladesh has been going

through this evolution for the last two decades. It has not been as intense as in the case of Pakistan. Yet, the effect of such inter-action has been very clear, both in rural as well as in urban areas.

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The general public have been assured by the government that serious investigations are underway. They have also been urged, most correctly, not to speculate. Similarly, civil society has been requested to help identify and apprehend the mentors involved in committing these heinous crimes. There have been many arrests. Joint investigation units are also trying to tie up the loose ends.

These are good steps. However, the process has to be sustained and should not suffer because of politicisation. We must also remember that unnecessary blame game and discovery of alleged foreign connections will not resolve this problem. The real perpetrators need to be discovered and punished. There cannot be any compromise on this.

There needs to be a bi-partisan approach which should also include responsible Islamic political parties. The latter, in particular, have to understand that even Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries will be careful about future recruitment of personnel from Bangladesh, if it is found that there is a wide Islamic militant presence in this country.

Unchecked growth of militant Islam in Bangladesh will definitely impact on various areas of our national life - including trade and the possibility of our students being able to study abroad. This is as serious as it can get, and there is no room for inadequate response.

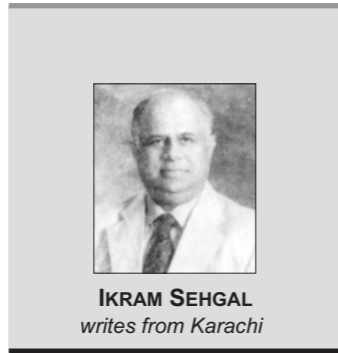
Steps should be taken urgently to sharpen our security apparatus and to make it more effective. We have

It took the government four days to acknowledge that the series of blasts was an attack on our independence and sovereignty, on our democratic values and beliefs and on our image of being a tolerant society. It has also been termed as an attack on all Bangladeshi citizens irrespective of their religious faiths and political beliefs. This time round, emphasis has also been given not only to the determination to find out the criminals who carried out the acts but also those who had planned the operations from behind the scenes.

The proverbial penny seems to have finally dropped. Better late than never. At least, journalists are now not being blamed for publishing lies about extremist religious elements within the country.

A few weeks have passed since that fateful morning of 17th August. A year has passed since 21st August. Nearly eight months have passed since the assassination of former Finance Minister Kibria. Thirty years have passed since the shameful killings of 15 August. In between, there have been many other blasts and killings but no

## Coping with disaster



IKRAM SEHGAL  
writes from Karachi

THE TV images from New Orleans were unreal. Was this really happening? And in the first world? With ample warnings days before Hurricane Katrina actually hit the US Gulf Coast, why were effective steps not taken to anticipate the impending disaster? Why was relief not pre-positioned, why was a possible law and order problem overlooked, particularly when a million residents had evacuated the city by road? Evacuees compounded in the affected cities because of the breakdown of the city's dykes, causing flooding, destruction of electricity and sewerage facilities, lack of potable water and medical facilities, etc further aggravated by looting by armed gangs and the administration's inability to remove corpses. Far beyond the capabilities of the States of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, the Federal relief effort did not go into full gear until riding a severe tide of criticism from friend and foe alike US President George Bush belatedly visited the affected area five days after the storm. His "political damage control" effort included calling the Federal relief response "unacceptable".

Trying to pre-empt the bi-partisan mounting criticism, the President

visited the storm affected area again three days later. Even after 9-10 days relief had not reached survivors marooned on their houses or in downtown buildings. Army and National Guard units took over policing with orders to "shoot-to-kill" looters on sight and with rescue helicopters filling the sky some order seemed emerging out of chaos. The deep South is hard-core Republican country, the delayed response will have a profound effect on future State and US Congressional elec-

coastal areas like Kuakata, etc) were swept almost clean of humans, animals and houses. A conservative estimate believed more than 300,000 people to have perished. Except for the odd cement structure and the occasional tree, a giant lawn-mower cum road-roller seemed to have wiped the area clean. With additional two Alouette-3 helicopters sent in a C-130 from Chaklala, the two MI-8s of the Logistic Flight (Log Flt) Eastern Command flew extensive rescue and

frustration of being ignored among the masses in East Pakistan. The Federal Government remained distant, seemingly cold and unfeeling in Islamabad. The perception of little or no relief set the stage for far reaching adverse consequences. The cyclone brought the anti-Pakistan antagonism building up over the years to a head, in such circumstances it was sheer madness to go through with the scheduled Nov 30 elections. The political result was a foregone conclusion, a

or is a surprise, coping with any kind of disaster, whether natural or man-made, does not differ in essentials. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are common for both. First and foremost we must pre-position supplies, particularly potable water, meals ready to eat (MRE), medical requisites, blankets, tents, etc. One may include containerised field ambulance units ready to match up with earmarked doctors. For mass evacuation, vehicles must be earmarked as well as possible destina-

kept aside. Lessons can be learnt from the initial failure of the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to respond swiftly and adequately. A majority of the affecteds being coloured, race has become an issue as the reason for the delayed reaction. Handled by politicians relief effort can become politicised as Tsunami's aftermath has shown in Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Indonesia etc. To keep it apolitical, the command structure should flow directly from the President, a permanent "Crisis Management Agency" being established under the Chairman Joint Services Committee (CJSC) for effective coordination of ground, air and naval resources in support of the effort of the civil administration. The Ministry of Finance must devise an SOP to address post-disaster issues. People will be without jobs, without food and shelter, their children will be without schools, continuing medical care will be needed and rehabilitation thereof, etc, etc. The short, medium and long-term economic consequences and remedial measures thereof have to be worked out, each disaster will have different dynamics.

The most powerful nation on Earth has been given a body blow despite adequate warning because the Federal Government kept hoping for the best. Third world countries must invariably plan for the worst or suffer far worse consequences if the relief effort mounted is too little, too late.

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

## AS I SEE IT

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relief missions. Starting before the crack of dawn, we flew 9 to 10 hours daily in the affected areas till after dusk had set in. Our Flight Commander, Maj (later Brig) Tirmizi was magnificent, his constant encouragement and cool handling kept the helicopter pilots flying well "above and beyond the call of duty", far beyond normal endurance limits.

Joined by a dozen Soviet, Saudi, British and US helicopter teams, we were the only means of succour and transportation in the affected areas, other than slow-moving launches, small boats, barges, etc. Despite our Herculean effort and that of thousands of troops, civil administrators and volunteers on the ground, the task was way beyond us, the presence of foreign helicopters highlighting our inadequacies. Why were more helicopters not sent from West Pakistan? Those missing helicopters became symbolic of the

massive protest against the Federation as it existed then, it later became a mandate against the very continuity of Pakistan as a nation.

Forgive me for digressing on a personal note, if my younger (and only) sister Shahnaz (Azimuddin Ahmed) had not heard from me by 6 pm she would wait anxiously gazing southwards from the rooftop of her in-laws' house, 3A Purana Paltan, Dhaka. Only after I come in low overhead after dusk and dipped the rotors of the Alouette-3 helicopter sideways as recognition she would go down to tend to her two small children. Look at fate, thirty four years later because of a sister's prayers for her brother's safe return I am living to tell the tale while my beloved sister died in an unfortunate medical accident in 1977 in Dhaka and lies buried in Banani graveyard.

Whether it comes with a warning

or is a surprise, coping with any kind of disaster, whether natural or man-made, does not differ in essentials. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are common for both. First and foremost we must pre-position supplies, particularly potable water, meals ready to eat (MRE), medical requisites, blankets, tents, etc. One may include containerised field ambulance units ready to match up with earmarked doctors. For mass evacuation, vehicles must be earmarked as well as possible destina-

tions. Flooding being commonplace in most disasters, collapsible flat-bottom boats with outboard motors and submersible generators and pumps should also be stored. Lightly armed troops trained to handle both disaster relief and law and order must be earmarked, carrying only vitally necessary equipment to avoid being overburdened. Civilian personnel to supervise and administer relief efforts, medical staff, communications personnel, engineers with heavy earth-moving equipment and cranes, as well as containerised communication units must be clearly earmarked. "Disaster Mobilisation Plans" as well as "Disaster Relief Plans" for each area have to be coordinated and dovetailed with Provincial and Federal Plans. Sufficient Reserve Funds, activated only during an emergency, must be

kept aside. Lessons can be learnt from the initial failure of the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to respond swiftly and adequately. A majority of the affecteds being coloured, race has become an issue as the reason for the delayed reaction. Handled by politicians relief effort can become politicised as Tsunami's aftermath has shown in Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Indonesia etc. To keep it apolitical, the command structure should flow directly from the President, a permanent "Crisis Management Agency" being established under the Chairman Joint Services Committee (CJSC) for effective coordination of ground, air and naval resources in support of the effort of the civil administration. The Ministry of Finance must devise an SOP to address post-disaster issues. People will be without jobs, without food and shelter, their children will be without schools, continuing medical care will be needed and rehabilitation thereof, etc, etc. The short, medium and long-term economic consequences and remedial measures thereof have to be worked out, each disaster will have different dynamics.

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## 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.

### Flurry of bombing

The co-ordinated flurry of bombing has made us horrible and awe-struck.

Undercurrent of religious bigotry and fanaticism was there but to make it public with a bang is a "real gem" of inaugural audacity!

It's a challenge to all secular and moderate forces. Does the government has the will and power to face and deal it or will bask on spurious safety of "unholy alliance" to remain in power. I think it's not the time of "to be or not to be" but to unite and resist against "slings and arrows" of outrageous dogma.

Dr. Nazrul Islam  
Uttara, Dhaka

### Seeking from GrameenPhone

I am one of the subscribers of the

Bangladesh's leading mobile phone operator, namely GrameenPhone. Grameen had launched their most expensive package called EASY GOLD two years back. I got my EASY GOLD connection when it cost around Tk 13,000. But it was a disappointing decision I made which I feel now.

The connection now costs something around Tk 2,000. Not only that, Grameen hasn't given any extraordinary services to its Easy Gold subscribers. There are no reduced call rates for them or any T&T incoming free minutes. Nor they are able to send SMS at lower cost. Even they are not allowed to use GPRS service.

I am now wondering what was really in GrameenPhone's mind when they decided to launch Easy Gold? What they decided to provide

(unique service) which is why they asked 13,000 for the connection? Especially when at the same time some other was selling the same services at half the price of Easy Gold!

I am wondering why Grameen is so reluctant in giving Easy Gold subscribers the services they are providing to Djuice, anytime 500 packages. Shouldn't Grameen care more for their subscribers who had spent 13,000 taka reasonably hoping to get something special?

Mahmudur Rahman Erash  
Kakrail, Dhaka

### Journalists in Khulna

Media people in Khulna continue to be in grave danger. The latest on this front is that three newsmen have in the past few days been threatened with death. Of the three, one happens to be the president of

the Khulna Press Club. For quite a long time journalists of Khulna are working under threat. Many of them have even killed, like Humaun Kabir (Balu), Manik Chandra Shaha, Sheik Belal Hassain.

I pray to government to protect the journalists of Khulna.

Md Sakibur Rahman Khan  
Shamsur Rahman Road, Khulna

### Saarc

I was reading a letter on the issues of Saarc in the DS letters column of August 26, 2005. I would like to share some ideas on the referred issues.

In my opinion many of us do not realise that Saarc is a concept of integration.

If such effective integration is made, many of the problems or conflicts within the region, such as Kashmir and so on will automatically

be solved as a result of the working economic integration.

Very close to the conflicts within the Saarc region is the aspect of religion, which is again misunderstood by many of us. In simplification all countries are countries of the Creator. Such as Americans say, 'God's country' or 'In God we trust' so call the creator Allah. America certainly without any doubt pays the most, as we pay 'Zakat'. As such the dreams of establishing 'Islamic states' are superfluous. Moreover such ideas are also imposed on one community by another which regard the former as being outside theirs.

If there had been really any pragmatic model with the existing Islamic States then there would have been maximum integration along the OIC countries with Oic; let alone within the countries of the Middle East.

It is the people who can be followers of Islam or not. Whatever the real Islam is, in fact, every nation on the earth believes in the Creator or followers of Deen in other words. In Islam there is no street fighting. Rather there are lifelong education, principles, values and practice. Therefore everybody would continue with his or her own belief. There is no harm with the system. People also will be rewarded or restrained by the Creator according to their deeds based on beliefs.

As such the lesson is not to waste time on any Utopian idea, rather it is to give priorities to economic freedom, principles, values, education, science and arts, commerce and so on. Deliver justice and charity.

Abdullah Al Mahmud  
UK

### Supporting Pakistani

### cricketers

I just read what Mr. Ghias who agreed with a previous write up that talked against Bangladeshi women who supported Pakistani cricket players. It is interesting that after 34 years of independence we are still so hung up with the country with which we went to war, and still partake in the blame game. Pakistan is so unwilling to admit truth about the political fiasco that led to the separation of our countries.

In our country we have a whole generation of people who think about Pakistan and the word enemy synonymously without giving much thought to the fact that our own citizens have done more damage to our country than was done after 1947 up until 1971. Why do we not think about the fact that we won. Victory was ours and we have our own cricket team.

If supporting good sportsmen in a popular sport is a crime on grounds of political subjugation then no one should ever support any Englishman in any sport, talk in English, watch English movies. Why? Simple, we have been subjected to the British rule longer than that of Pakistan. All of this is quite ridiculous people will always support celebrities regardless of what countries they are from. These sports figures, actors, actresses have earned the right to be worshipped in the fields that they excel in. I don't think the females in question think about the players' backgrounds but simply their ability in the field. We shall not forever be stuck as a nation in the past.

Zeenat Z. Syed  
UPS eDeployment