

## International Day of Peace

## Key to prosperity

**B**ANGLADESH with the rest of the world community observed 'International Day of Peace' on September 21, expressing solidarity with the call to 'make peace not just a priority, but a passion.' We believe these words have given the present global peace efforts the much-needed thrust to drive home the urgency it entails. Truly, establishing peace has to be more than part of national or international politics of the mundane kind.

We are further encouraged to learn that all UN member countries have agreed to observe September 21 as a day of global ceasefire and peace and non-violence (UN Resolution 55/282). In this light, we note, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said emphatically: 'Peace is one of humanity's most precious needs. It is also the UN's highest calling. It draws together all of our worldwide work, from peacekeeping and preventive diplomacy to promoting human rights and development.'

The International Day of Peace was established by a United Nations resolution in 1981. In 2002, the UN General Assembly set September 21 as the permanent date for the International Day of Peace. In establishing the day, the United Nations General Assembly decided that it would be appropriate: "To devote a specific time to concentrate the efforts of the United Nations and its Member States, as well as of the whole of mankind, to promoting the ideals of peace and to giving positive evidence of their commitment to peace in all viable ways. The International Day of Peace should be devoted to commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace both within and among all nations and peoples."

The people of Bangladesh are intrinsically peace-loving and they believe that peace and harmony are two prerequisites for holistic development of a nation. Accordingly Bangladesh takes measures to promote the two in all spheres of its society as well as in global perspective. In this connection we may say with lot of pride that the Bangladeshi contingents in the UN peacekeeping missions have set splendid examples of unwavering commitment to peace wherever they are deployed. And within the country Bangladesh has taken measures to ensure that anti-social or obscurantist elements do not get any foothold to jeopardise our internal peace.

We hope on the International Day of Peace our pledge to uphold peace in the face of any threat, external or internal, will not waver.

## A highway stretch in bad shape

## Its repair brooks no delay

**T**HE dismal state of a thirty-four kilometer highway section between Bogra and Sherpur in northern Bangladesh has been depicted in a front-page report in our paper on Tuesday last. This road is regarded as an arterial one which has assumed vital importance following the construction of the Jamuna Bridge that has reduced by a half the travel time from Dhaka to the northern region. This was one of the best highway when constructed in 1978 but now it has as many as 13 thousand potholes along a 13 kilometers stretch, it is learnt. Another measure of how bad the road has become can be gauged from the long queues of vehicles stranded and one and a half hours time being taken to cover the short distance. Bumpy craters are a hazard to movement and on Sunday alone, several lorries were found with broken wheel and axles.

Obviously, we had nice and smooth highways built, mostly with foreign assistance, and then defaulted on its mandatory periodic repair allowing these to go virtually uncared for. Maintenance seems to get the lowest priority with us. Timely repair is key to keeping the roads and highways serviceable which are under constant use. About the Bogra-Sherpur highway opportunities presented themselves in some form or the other to do up the roads. The attempts reportedly proved abortive. For instance, in 2004 World Bank offered Tk 42 crore for the purpose and tenders were floated, but later on, the Bank pulled back its funds. The following year, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) committed Tk 43 crore for maintenance work but this also did not materialise due to red tape. RHD's own effort to maintain the road at a cost of Tk 16 crore couldn't be pulled off for dearth of funds.

We believe the latest RHD initiative to repair the worst affected 18.50 kilometer stretch at a cost of Tk 20 crore will meet with success. We understand for this to happen the weight of goods transported through the highway has to be properly overseen and regulated. We urge the authorities concerned to give the matter the priority it deserves for the sake of smoothing the journey to the northern region.

## Inter-cultural dialogue and South Asia



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

of Europe. In 2003, during the Italian Presidency of the EU, the EU Interior Ministers took another step. They agreed on a Declaration that recognised the potential for contribution by different communities towards social cohesion and the establishment of a more stable prospect towards better governance of ICD.

The latest efforts in pushing this idea further forward (in an expanded, diverse Europe) came

nars and workshops have clarified two aspects. Firstly, ICD is worth giving a try despite the recognition that there is vagueness about the implementation of agreed decisions. Secondly, shortcomings might be due to failure to agree about the purpose and implications of ICD.

The rest of the world has been watching Europe's efforts with care. Some among them, particularly in India and South East Asia,

those of other faith. We have to overcome any rigidity that might exist within our mind-set, particularly within our region.

This scenario brings us to two important factors. Is ICD about global integration, understanding and discovering common denominators, or is it specifically just linked to concerns about the integration of those who have immigrant status (legal or illegal)? The latter aspect particularly focuses on

can engage themselves towards greater connectivity and understanding.

ICD can also assist in the creation of a pluralistic society in South Asia. In such a situation, different perceptions can become interactive but still retain their separate identities within the sphere of self-containment. This could facilitate unity in diversity and also promote ideas of peace and solidarity. In this context it could be

special consideration to ICD. We talk of a South Asian ethos. We even have a central, formal association to embody this image. Unfortunately, our connectivity is confined to speeches only. If one scratches the surface, one will only find suspicion, mistrust and lack of understanding.

ICD to me is probably the sole tool that can transport us out of this mire of latent instability that characterises our region. Let us through ICD identify, discover and develop strategies for a productive interaction within the South Asian fabric that will over-ride narrow national and religious interests.

Such interactive activity could be initiated through the joint publication of periodicals on art, poetry, short stories, sculpture, adages, traditions, herbal medicine,

through the preparation of joint documentaries for the TV in areas of architecture and archeology and through the arranging of CDs on folk-music and folk-art. The recent visit to Dhaka of the legendary cinema actor Saumitra Chatterjee was a boon for thespians to rediscover the finer aspects of their craft. During his visit Chatterjee shared his experiences of working with the famous film Director Satyajit Ray. The discussions on acting and cinema that took place during his short trip will be invaluable for our own film industry.

These are common denominators that bind us all together as South Asians. ICD will, and can act as a catalyst in the positive areas of bonding and changing our mindset.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

## POST BREAKFAST

Time has come for the South Asian political leadership to give special consideration to ICD. We talk of a South Asian ethos. We even have a central, formal association to embody this image. Unfortunately, our connectivity is confined to speeches only. If one scratches the surface, one will only find suspicion, mistrust and lack of understanding. ICD to me is probably the sole tool that can transport us out of this mire of latent instability that characterises our region.

with the European Council and the European Parliament adopting in December 2006 a decision on ICD. In May 2007, the European Commission also launched the first-ever European strategy for culture, with the aim of promoting strategic awareness of diversity and values.

ICD has probably been most consistent in the European Union. It has moved forward steadily and gradually. What started in the form of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in 1995 has slowly evolved, thanks to the great interest taken in this regard particularly during the Prodi Presidency of the European Commission. In December 2001 and March 2002, the Prodi Commission took the initiative to bring together religious leaders, intellectuals and practitioners in the socio-economic and cultural sectors from different parts

have raised the question as to the required nature of actors and stakeholders. There are also some who wonder whether culture can be a channel or the object of dialogue. Another panel in the Middle East, discussing ICD as a tool, has raised a different fundamental point. They have speculated as to whether secular institutions that do not 'do religion' can engage in inter-faith work through ICD.

These are all valid areas of anxiety. Nevertheless, I think that it would be wrong to restrict the concept of ICD to narrow definitions. We have to look at the wider

ICD opens many metaphysical windows. The issues it raises are complex but ICD has to be seen against the broader canvas. ICD should not be construed as just dialogue between Muslims and

disconnectivity arising out of inherited traditions -- cultural, ethnic, or religious as opposed to the acquired socio-cultural matrix.

I believe that ambivalence exists in this context both with regard to definition as well as framework. This lack of clarity is enhancing misinterpretation of rights -- both secular as well as religious. It is also holding back understanding and stability.

Sara Silvestri has described ICD as 'an over-arching framework that brings together and balances' the many concerns and different priorities. From that point of view ICD may be considered as a viable political tool for welding a form of soft power. In the prevailing scenario, ICD could then become in South Asia, a basis for a wider participation where the civil society as well as the political leaderships

a means for preventing 'clash of civilizations' within South Asia. It could also act as a subtle link for establishing stronger bonds between peoples by dealing with 'real' issues (jobs, education and social opportunities) and avoiding fuzziness.

South Asia till today has not given ICD the importance it deserves. It has been relegated to the background in inter-state relations because of the implicit and persistent demands pertaining to certain factors associated with 'security' -- prevention, protection, pursuit and response. This has resulted in South Asian countries being unable to rise over the challenge of mental barriers. We have also failed to create social cohesion among our different communities.

Time has come for the South Asian political leadership to give

INDO-US NUCLEAR TREATY  
Government and leftists reach a 'compromise'!

ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

**T**HE raging debate stemming from the differences between the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and its supporter leftists on the Indo-US civilian nuclear deal seems to have abated to some extent for the time being as both sides probably are not much willing to keep the pot boiling for a variety of reasons.

It is not meant to say that the government and the leftists have shifted their positions on the issue, but what is discernible is a pause in the controversy evidently mainly for the reason that both sides are weighing their likely losses and gains in the event the differences heighten leading to the inevitable -- the fall of Dr. Manmohan Singh government. It appears both are more or less convinced that such a development is unlikely to bring political dividends to either side and hence the government and the leftists are making relatively less noise over it.

However, both seem conscious that any concession on the much-talked about nuclear deal will be seen as weakness by the other side and as such both are sticking to their hitherto positions even though less acrimony is being noticed these days. If prime minister Dr. Manmohan Singh or external affairs minister Pranab Mukherjee are apparently in no mood to show any flexibility, main leftist leader Prakash Karat is unbending by the same token.

But fact remains that the dispute

centering the nuclear deal is not threatening the UPA government, as seriously as it appeared sometime ago though the row has not subsided.

The ruling rainbow coalition is nearing two third of its five year term although it is a minority government relying totally on the outside support of the leftists, who attached no strict conditions to the government for their cooperation. The communist party of India (Marxist), the major left force and its allies are opposed to the US

rift between the government and its left supporters has changed the overall scenario in the largest democracy of the world.

Otherwise, it is a measure of success for the UPA government headed by Dr. Singh that it has completed most part of the tenure without confronting any major crisis although some minor rupture was unavoidable.

Following the last general elections, ruling alliance replaced

is hell-bent to go ahead with this. The differences would not have mattered had the UPA enjoyed majority in the lower house.

But what now may take a serious turn is the possibility of the fall of the government triggered by the withdrawal of the support by the left if the differences exacerbate.

India is experiencing coalition culture for sometime past when it comes to governing the country and it is now almost inconceivable that any

Speculations were rife in the Indian political circles hardly a few weeks ago that the midterm or early elections are round the corner. The reason for such talk making the rounds is obviously the government-leftists dispute. Will the government be benefited by snap or early polls?

What about the left parties, which have now maximum number of seats in parliament since the independence of India?

Evidently, the stake is high for

## MATTERS AROUND US

None can afford to be seen as having lost ground on the issue and as such both would continue to harp on their known positions -- albeit not vociferously. It can be a kind of unofficial compromise for the time being as it may suit the strategies of both even though it will be height of folly to assume that the dispute has been largely resolved or the controversy has died down.

understandably on ideological line.

They are not supposed to relish a cordial relationship with Washington, but the government of Dr. Manmohan Singh has developed closer ties with the US. The civilian atomic cooperation accord broadly reached during president George Bush's visit to India in 2005, and finalised recently, is an eyesore for the leftists and it is no surprise.

But the government-leftists differences have undeniably created uncertainty about the future of the Indian government although most analysts believe that things are unlikely to reach such a pass that will warrant a fall of ruling coalition. The current government is at the helm on support of the leftists and in the event of the withdrawal of this crucial support, Dr. Manmohan Singh ministry will collapse as a logical development to the situation.

The ruling alliance led by the Indian national Congress of Mrs. Sonia Gandhi is firm in the saddle with no major problem threatening its existence. But the differences over the nuclear deal is causing a serious

another coalition government -- National Democratic Alliance (NDA) -- headed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The UPA has no requisite majority in the house, but it formed the government on the support of the communists, who have 60 members. Many thought that this outside support would not last long since the leftists do not see eye to eye on many issues with the UPA even though they have common approach on the issue of secularism and some other broad matters.

Such assessment had largely been belied since the understanding remained somewhat unhindered although some issues created some misunderstanding between the two in the past, but not to the extent of causing any major problem. Foreign investment, too close relations with the United States, and policies towards agriculture are some of the issues that caused differences.

But presently the much-talked about Indo-US civilian nuclear deal is proving to be a difficult nut when the leftists are opposing the agreement tooth-and-nail while the government

single party can have its government in the south bloc. Needless to say that this pattern of government is getting strengthened in India and the present UPA government is no exception.

Gone are the days when a single political party could muster enough support in the lower house of parliament and stake claim to form a government of its own. Even the major parties seldom these days remotely dream of having an absolute majority in the 545-member lower house of parliament (Lok Sabha), elected by direct popular votes. They either seek to reach electoral understanding before the voting or look for like-minded parties in the event of necessity to form a government as an absolute majority is often lacking.

The previous NDA government and its successor UPA alliance -- all fit in the same milieu of coalition culture. The coming together of different political forces for the purpose of rule is not unusual in parliamentary democracy, which may come by both under compulsion or sheer political issues.

On the other hand, it is assumed that most Indians are not willing to see their country going for mid-term elections somewhat "unnecessarily" and they may blame the left should the voting finally happen. The leftists may end up with losses in the polls and leaders are divided on support to

both since it may be difficult for them to retain the present position -- the UPA being in power and the left having a strong position in parliament and an influence on the government. If the government chooses to continue with the nuclear deal, it will irritate its supporter leftists, who eventually may be forced to take a tough decision like calling off the support from the government, meaning the fall of the ruling coalition.

At the same time it is also very difficult for government to roll back from the deal, which is seen as a landmark accord by many Indians -- let alone the ruling circles -- as a "special" facility by no less a country than the United States. So, Dr. Manmohan Singh government cannot scrap the deal even when the pressure to do is quite strong.

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the UPA on the nuclear debate.

Elderly Jyoti Basu along with Sitaram Yechury are believed to taken a soft line as they are against early polls. CPI(M) general secretary Prakash Karat and some others seem more hardline. Similarly, the ruling circles have also hawks and doves on the issue.

However, a softening of approach is noticeable in both sides and probably few would oppose an unritten compromise for it's a kind of compromise without a loss of face. The leftists are not insisting on scrapping the deal, but are only asking the government not to proceed further with it. The government cannot roll back, but may slow down the progress towards its implementation.

The accord requires India to approach the international atomic agency in Vienna for approval of the deal under which New Delhi will receive manifold cooperation including supply of fuel for developing its civilian nuclear sector. Main opposition NDA says the deal is welcome but sees it as limiting India's sovereignty on atomic programmes.

The leftists consider it anti-national in addition to their own opposition to the US. NDA's stand is not bothering the government, but the leftists are a headache on the issue. May be the UPA alliance and the leftists are seeking to strike a balance -- the former will not hurry in implementing the deal while the latter will not demand scrapping of it.

But none can afford to be seen as having lost ground on the issue and as such both would continue to harp on their known positions -- albeit not vociferously. It can be a kind of unofficial compromise for the time being as it may suit the strategies of both even though it will be height of folly to assume that the dispute has been largely resolved or the controversy has died down.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist.

## Whither permanent flood control measures?

ALTAFUR RAHMAN

**T**HIS year flood has occurred within a short span of time causing havoc to people's life in the affected areas. Flood does not occur due to one or two days of heavy downpour rather it's an accumulation of water over a certain period which together with heavy rainfall and other factors causes floods in adjacent, especially lower riparian areas. Essentially it is a problem of drainage congestion.

The river Brahmaputra receives run off from some of the heaviest rainfall areas of earth. It includes lower Himalayan region, Assam Meghalaya hills. Just above the international boundary of Bangladesh the river Brahmaputra enters into Bangladesh after making a nearly 90 degree turn, which slows down the drainage of water thus causing floods during the monsoon. In that matter Padma (Ganges) river which enters into Bangladesh from India from the west also makes a

sharp turn in order to flow out into the sea along with waters of Brahmaputra river and later Meghna river. According to Dr. Amin Nishat an international water expert of Bangladesh the flow of three rivers (Brahmaputra, Padma and Meghna) produces a funnel like effect before emptying into the sea, which reduces the rate of drainage.

Bangladesh northern region is mostly plain land whereas the areas above it are of higher elevation and hilly which is also another reason for onrush of water into Bangladesh. If we look at Brahmaputra river we shall see that most of the smaller tributaries join it from the north west. These include incoming rivers such as Tista, Karatoya, Gumi and others, which add to the floodwater instead of draining it out. In contrast, there are less number of outgoing branches which carry out the function of draining water from Brahmaputra river. This is also one of the main reasons why drainage of Brahmaputra river is not fast enough.

It