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US and Middle East

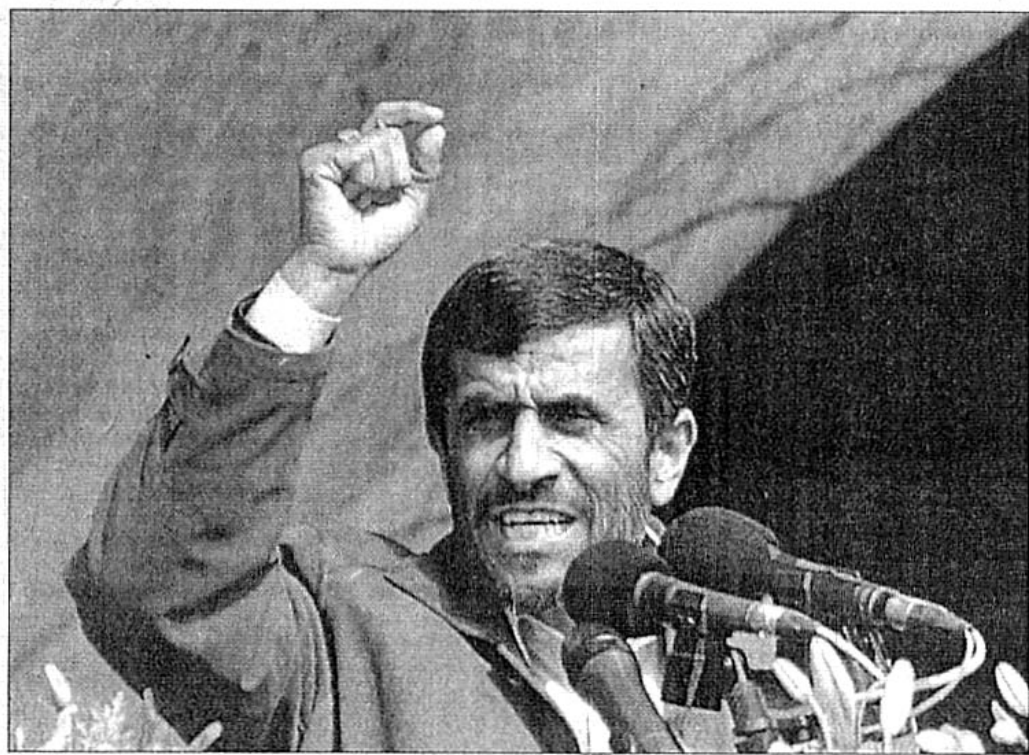
It is very interesting to note that President Bush, all of a sudden, has started walking anti-clockwise. A hawk who never knew anything besides war and war of words suddenly turns into a peace-broker! This move, however, raises some doubts among the critics. Is this a groundwork for initiating another war in the Middle East? Is this the preparation of Israel and the US for the so-called pre-emptive aerial attack on Iran's nuclear sites? The fear remains high. It would be interesting to examine the following issues.

The US in the last several years has been recklessly trying to halt Iran's uranium enriching process, which Iran relentlessly claims to be only for peaceful purpose. On the other hand, Russia is trying the reverse, reinvigorating Iran's efforts in building more nuclear sites including supplying the needed raw uranium. The show came into intensity level during the last two years. The US was

looking to use the UN Security Council to go ahead with its Iran venture instead. The Iraq experience barred the US from going unilaterally and pushed them to think that way. But a number of US initiatives supported by the western powers were blocked by two other permanent members of the Security Council - Russia and China who have great economic interest in Iran. Yet, the US unilaterally imposed more rigid sanctions on Iran and continually considered attacking the Islamic Republic.

Now, it is up to the Arab nations to assess the situation. If Annapolis can bring any positive results for the millions of Palestinians and the rest of the Middle East people, that would be a real milestone. But there are many questions that need to be answered before we get a clear picture.

Sultan Mohammed Zakaria
On e-mail



Guns of America

I am writing with reference to "Guns in America again (and again)," by Prof. Charles R. Larson (Dec. 24).

Prof. Larson is absolutely right when he says: "It's open hunting season in the United States again. This week's carnage: Eight people slain by a gunman at a shopping mall in Omaha, several others at two churches in Colorado. What will be the country's reaction? Business as usual. Collective amnesia."

"Nothing has changed. It's always shoot-to-kill time in America, the rite of manhood in a country led by neo-cons, right-wingers, and lying conservatives. And once again, to the amazement of people in the rest of the world, America attacked itself, elevated home-grown terrorism into a five-minute talk-show debate about what's wrong with the country."

The US Constitution says: "Citizens right to bear arms must not be infringed." This leads us to the question: Does this right to bear arms extend to the right to kill? Guns have no other purpose but to kill. If it is for defending the country from foreign aggression, then one should join the armed forces or become a part of a militia. This is exactly what the U.S. Constitution says as it refers to a "well-armed militia." If the right to bear arms is to defend from a tyrannical government, in a democracy, you use ballot, not bullet, to change the government. If it is to defend from criminals, then you should join the law-enforcement officers. In a civilized society, you don't carry guns to protect yourself.

The gun lobby and their supporters have extended the Constitution to justify the anarchic proliferation of guns in America. They tend to downplay the havoc caused by widespread use of firearms in domestic and workplace violence. A look at Texas will make the point clear.

When 14-year-old Juan Ramon, of Haltom City, near Fort Worth, got angry after a family row, he didn't kick the family dog or sulk. He did what many Texans traditionally do when they get very angry: with a family gun ready at hand, he started shooting. He shot a dog and injured three neighbours, before killing a cop who had answered an emergency call. Later that afternoon, Juan was killed in a hail of police bullets.

Nobody really knows why Juan did it -- everyone knows if there were no guns in the house, this would have taken place. Juan Ramon's weekend shooting spree was quickly followed by several other shooting deaths -- and all within weeks of the Feb. 28, 1993, shootout at the Branch Davidian cult's compound near Waco. In the Lone Star state, the national capital of gun culture, such stark tragedies are nothing unusual.

Texas has a population of about 17 million. Between them, they own 68 million guns -- or four guns for every man, woman and child. Not surprisingly, every year thousands are being cut down by gun-fire in Texas.

The indifference over what to do about the anarchic proliferation of guns is not confined to Texas. In Washington, the Brady Bill (a modest gun control legislation named after Ronald Reagan's press secretary who was maimed in the 1981 assassination attempt) was allowed to expire by the earlier Republican-dominated House and the new Democratic majority have shown little interest to revive it. The nation has been shocked by school shootings by children with apparent access to family guns. But most Americans are unwilling to recognize that the nation's lack of adequate gun control is allowing so many irresponsible people to acquire gun with devastating consequences. Incredibly, the earlier Republican-dominated Senate led by Senator Bill Frist passed a bill making gun manufacturers immune to lawsuits by those who are injured by their products.

In Canada, where laws exist to control gun ownership, the growing trend of gun smuggling from the United States is posing a serious problem. The lax-legislation of many American states, where a driver's licence is the simple requirement to buy a handgun, makes it easy and profitable to purchase firearms and bring them to Canada. This calls for tighter border control for people entering Canada from the United States.

Mahmood Elahi
Ottawa, Canada

Registration of parties

I would welcome the Chief Election Commissioner's remark about political party registration. Political leaders talk about democracy but they did not practise it. Intra-party democracy is very important for strengthening the whole process, but it is absent in the parties.

So, how can we expect democracy to work in this country?
Nurnobe
Chittagong University

Eid and people in distress

The Eid-ul-Azha was celebrated much the same way it is every year. The rich enjoyed every bit of the occasion, while the poor observed the show of pomp.

I think we should think about what happened in the country last month. People were uprooted by the devastating cyclone. Thousands were killed and there were the mind-boggling scenes of the dead awaiting burial.

We should not be carried away by the thoughts of our own aggr-

dizement only.
Touhidul Abedin
Gyandipol, Dhaka

Stop wasting electricity

The article by your columnist Mr. A.N.M. Nurul Haque "Need for national austerity" was a timely one.

We talk a lot about electricity but hardly talk of conservation and proper use of such resources. Unproductive use of power should be avoided at all costs and power management should be the top priority of every government and respective agencies. While the rest of the country suffers and reels under power shortage, here in the capital and other cities the misuse is blatant. Streets are lighted much more than required, so are shopping malls waste a lot of electricity.

Some of the houses in posh residential areas have their gates and boundaries so lighted that one gets the impression that a festival is going on!

So, austerity is the need of the hour. The austerity measures can only commence with strong governmental directives. If these measures are not taken immediately, we will have nothing left for the next generation and will leave them with only heavy national and foreign debts to service.

The need for austerity as suggested by Mr. Nurul Haque should be our slogan now.
Mumtaz Ahmed
One-mail

An appeal to Chief Adviser

It is proved that your government is doing a tremendous job to uproot corruption, but I would request you to pay a bit more attention to a case named "Extortion by unknown phone callers" which hasn't been stopped yet. Lots of people like me, who live abroad, are always worried about their families back home, because our families are threatened by the extortionists every day. They know that we are able to give them what they want. But why should we give them the money which we have earned by selling our blood? The question arises, is there anyone to stop them? Yes, the government can do that. But we are unfortunate enough till today as nothing has been done to rein in those hoodlums.

I would appeal to you to look into the matter and save us from those professional extortionists.
Md Shafiqur Rahman
London, UK

Arms haul case

The news of the haul of 10 truckloads of sophisticated firearms in Chittagong on 2nd April 2004 is still fresh in my mind. This incident had

been the talk of the country for many days. I remember. Undoubtedly, this was the biggest arms haul in the history of our country.

Initially, everyone expected that the mystery over the haul would soon be resolved, but to our utter dismay, this case has not been resolved even after almost four years!

The then four-party alliance govt. cannot evade the responsibility of this case.

There should be a proper investigation into this arms haul case to find out the people behind it.

Pablu Chakma
Mirpur, Dhaka

Why this fear?

I was spending the summer of 1979 with my sister in Massachusetts for a break from my college. My brother-in-law suggested that we go to New York museum to watch something special. At first I wasn't very enthusiastic. Boy! Was I for a treat!

They were presenting a show of the treasures of the Czars. The following week the treasures from the tomb of king Tutankhamen from Egypt. The show was not only spectacular but at the same time very enriching. The mere works on the objects was transcending people to the time it was made, giving us a glimpse of its people and their culture.

These priceless objects were brought to the museum for a tour and to be returned to its country of origin after the show. Such shows are a common practice in many countries. They share their collection of artefacts with each other and enlighten themselves.

Sadly, very sadly, this concept of exchange of artefact shows and tours have not dawned on the authorities of this sub-continent. I believe when the

people in this country are protesting against any tour of our artefacts, they are living in the fear of our past. The time when the colonialists were stealing whatever they could have their hands on.

Times have changed and we should actually encourage artefact tour shows. Think about all the goodies that were stolen from this sub-continent can return for a tour show. The Kohinoor and so many countless treasures can be arranged for a tour of the sub-continent.

It is high time for the authorities of the Saarc member states to wake up to this reality that is widely being practised in so many countries.

Shantoo
Mahakhali, Dhaka

Look into it

A new rule has been enforced for the link road "Gulshan-1 to Mohakhali"; there is restriction on rickshaw from 9:00am to 9:00pm. What about the general office going people? What about the female workers? You will not get any rickshaw if it is even near to 9:00am because they have to get back to Mohakhali before 9:00am. In this situation the general people are suffering in the morning as well in the evening.

Who are the people benefited by this rule? People having cars & people being rich enough to travel by cabs!

The decision-makers should look into the matter in the interest of a huge number of commuters who find themselves stuck on the road due to the enforcement of the new rule.

Zahid Abdullah
One-mail

Road in bad shape

Much has been said and written about the dilapidated condition of the Habiganj to Hiala and Hiala to Sujatpur road via Ikram, during the last three decades.

But as ill luck would have it, no government felt it necessary to repair the road used by a huge number of people.

The matter deserves immediate attention.
Peerzada Syed Rofiqul Hussain
Hiala Shaheb Bari, Habiganj

US assistance

Last week in your op-ed, Ms. Geeta Pasi wrote with the above heading on the commitment of the USA and its people to standing by the people of Bangladesh all the time. It surely is appreciated with the immediate reaction of the USA to send the Marines to assist our hurricane-affected people. The immediate need of those people is always fresh water and we had seen that after the 1991 natural disaster the US marines undertook 'Operation Sea Angel', doing an excellent job delivering purified water, foods and medicines. At that time the Marines did a great job and were highly appreciated although when they first arrived there was a lot of hesitation and suspicion as it is now. I personally feel they should be welcomed (as I did back in 1991) and appreciated for their humanitarian duty but of course it should

be all very transparent.

The USA and Bangladesh have a lot in common, especially the spirit of freedom is a cord that binds us together. The 1775 Revolution and our Liberation War bind the two peoples together in our struggle for freedom and liberty. That is why in 1971 even when the Nixon Administration was against us, the US people and the media gave 100% support to our cause. We have seen that in 1971 many from the State Department supported our cause and even sent letters of protest.

The US aid and other development support to Bangladesh had been substantial from the very beginning and this collaboration can be beneficial for both if we deal with each other as equals. In the future, the USA can be our partner in development, trade and the democratic process.
Akku Chowdhury
Banani, Dhaka

"Bottomless basket"

I have read the very perspicacious writing of the WFP Country Director under the above heading published on 15 December.

I feel Mr. Kissinger's comments on Bangladesh do not have any importance today, as with change of the administrative set-up and introduction of effective coherent policy, the country is moving ahead steadily, despite some impediments for smooth growth and development. In the last 25 years the country was under the rule of both autocratic and democratic governments, and the desired level of growth could not be achieved.

Nevertheless, there are areas where we have made good progress as many of our products are now exported to the developed world.
Nasar
One-mail

Cricketers do it, again

The Tigers' triumph over the Kiwis has once again proved that in the shortest version of the game we really have a chance!

However, I believe that the boys will do well in other versions of the game also and won't capitulate without a fight against the formidable New Zealanders.
Ashish
Dhaka

Community radio

A campaign has been going on in the country for the past several years to introduce a new type of broadcasting media, which is widely known as community radio, but it has so far met with cold shoulders from policy level people for no justified reason, except only for fear of loosening their grips over local matters and their monstrous power undercut. But it has been proved that there is a lot of central level inadequacy to cope with local matters such as education, natural disaster, cultural life and many other issues. The need for people to

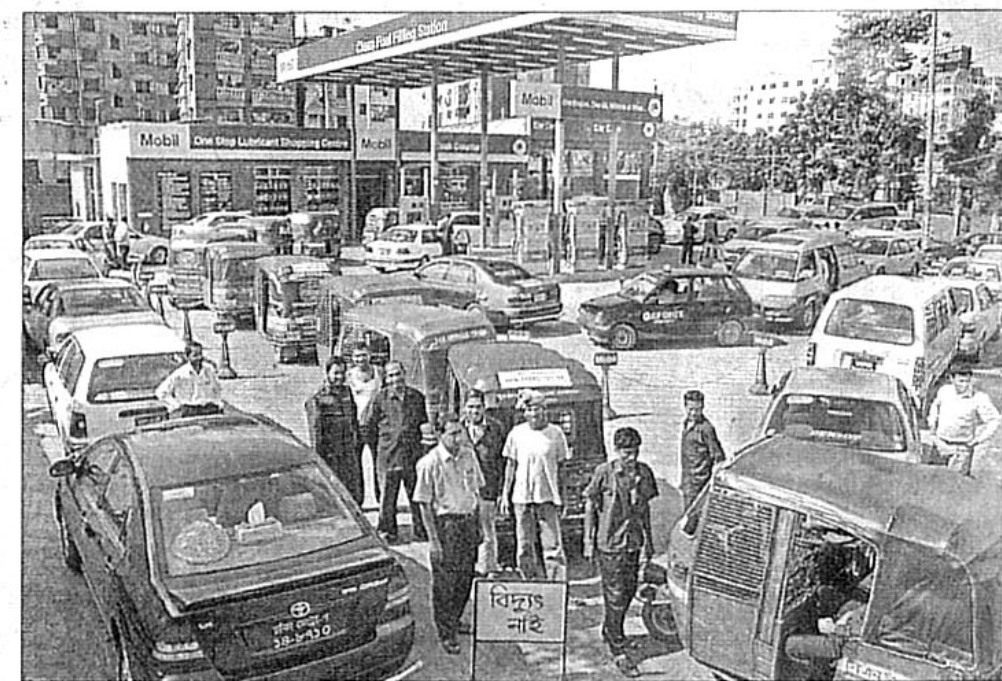
share their views and concerns through a local media and policy makers listening to their voices is becoming a crying need.

Coming into being in 1947 at Sutatenza, a village in Colombia, by a young priest and amateur radio operator, Jose Salcedo, with the objective of running informal education, the idea of community radio matured into a truly community type in ownership and sharing and also turned radical through Miner's Radio of Bolivia in 1949 that heroically fought for the miners' cause until its trampling down by the government in 1980. Since then the movement for community radio has spread worldwide and even coalesced into the World Association of Community Radio

Broadcasters (AMARC) in 1983 giving further boost to its campaign. Across the globe, once remote and isolated corners are now kicking with thousands of such community radios. Finding its foothold in our backyard in South Asia through the state-supported Kothmale Community Radio in Sri Lanka in 1989, a truly community-owned radio station in South Asia began with the pioneering Radio Sagarmatha in Nepal in 1997, which brought the King's deadly rage upon itself in 2005, but is still kicking and alive. India caught up soon in 2001 with a decision to issue licences for private radio stations. In 2006 it made and approved a community radio policy. Now there are many such

radio stations in that country. In Bangladesh some NGOs have been campaigning for it. It has enormous prospects, as they argue, in disaster-prone areas, within excluded communities and for special purposes like education. It is especially important in facing the challenges of cyclone and tidal bores in coastal districts of Patuakhali, Bhola, Chittagong etc. There such radios will be helpful in spreading warnings, taking precaution, minimising damage and mitigating sufferings through information sharing.
Alamgir Khan
Program Officer
Other Vision Communication
A media organization, Shyamoli, Dhaka

CNG filling stations



While the government policy is to maximise the use of CNG for motorised transports like buses, trucks, taxis, auto-rickshaws and private cars, the numbers of CNG filling stations are few and far between. Long queues in filling stations for CNG is a major factor discouraging people from CNG conversion of their vehicles!

The reason behind this is the numerous permissions that are needed and the time, effort and red-tape involved in the process. It is unnerving and totally discouraging. Apart from permission from the gas company, which will supply the gas to the CNG filling station; no objection certificates have to be obtained from: (1) Local Council (2) Deputy Commissioner (3) Municipality or City Corporation (4) Roads & Highways Dept. (5) Dept. of Environment (6) Dept. of Explosives (7) PDB or REB! After all this a final clearance has to be obtained from RPGCL, where all the seven permissions will have to be shown and

recorded! Assuming high speed and highly efficient department functions; the minimum possible time will be no less than sixteen weeks; that too if you are fortunate! No wonder if you get frustrated; and withdraw from this "Paper Hurdle Chase" and call it quits in sheer frustration!

Time, patience and repeated "tadbir" at every step and needed "lubrication" as and where needed are par for the course! One wonders why RPGCL alone cannot do all this. They are administratively and technically fully capable of doing it. Should the process not be a one-stop service if necessary with a service fee for inspection, evaluation and other needed steps? The CTG should seriously look into the current procedure; so that paper work and unnecessary frustrations are cut down for prospective investors in the greater interest of maximising CNG use.

S.A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Let the poor smile



Every Eid brings two types of feelings. The people who are well to do enjoy Eid in a truly festive mood. Preparation for the Eid goes on for a long time. On the other hand a gloomy, dismal situation is seen in the huts of the poor who pass their days throughout the year half fed/unfed. This situation made one of the philanthropists (a retired chairman of a sector corporation) of our village to do something for the poor

that would make them enjoy Eid with rich foods like others in the village and thus making them feel that Eid comes to their doors also. With that idea in mind, the above-mentioned benevolent man came in to help the poor of our village, Balia, Hajigonj, on Eid day. The first step was collecting the numbers and names of the poor families of the village and then making packets containing shemai, sugar, milk, fine rice, mugdal, oil and

in separate packets saree & lungi. These packets were distributed among the people listed earlier. Holding the packets they went home smiling.

Readers, now imagine how the world will be changed if we could follow that man.

MAA Ilim
Ex. Banker
Indira Road, Dhaka