

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.

History repeats itself

History repeats itself... we made joke of this famous quotation with our fellow Canadian students just a few days back. To my utter disbelief and horror, history repeated itself, and this time with even more brutality. The history of the subcontinent is full of bloodshed and assassination of cult figures: MK Gandhi, Sheikh Mujib, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Senior

Bhutto, and now his daughter Benazir Bhutto. One common pattern visible through all these assassinations and bloodsheds is that the targets are obvious, the comparatively secular leaders. In Bangladesh we have seen life threatening attempts on Hasina, who though has compromised with the secular identity of her party, still remains the strongest semi-

secular leader in the country. Gandhis were believed to be the epitome of secularism despite their consequent denigration. The causes of these murders are arguably different but the outcomes are strikingly similar: the assassination of Gandhis emboldened the strength of BJP; the death of Mujib paved the way for fundamental and anti liberation elements within the country, and the hanging of senior Bhutto terminated any possibility of secular and democratic resurgence in Pakistan compounded by the unceremonious role of military leaders.

One must admit that all these leaders had periods of diminishing popularity owing to their reckless use of state machinery, charges of corruption, and mishandling of their respective political parties. Having said, these are the leaders who were possibly one of the best breeds among the countries' politicians (not in terms of honesty but organisational power). The pathetic fates of these leaders definitely show the turbulent and violent nature of politics in the subcontinent. The subcontinent would never be able to come out of this guilt: the killing of the father.

India, owing to its democratic structure, seems to

have been able to reassert itself of late, but Bangladesh and Pakistan are in shambles. These two countries continue to turn the clock backwards after rare periods of relative stability and success. It's easy to blame the conspiracy that surrounds these leaders but at the end it is their responsibility to overcome any conspiracy and protect the interest of the country. We mourn the death of Benazir but must not forget that her unceremonious exit from power was the result of unbridled corruption. We condemn the way Hasina was incarcerated but maintain that she failed to carry forward the mantle historically bestowed upon her.

Anyway, the bottom line remains that the secular forces need to learn the art of statesmanship. Indulging in corruption and misuse of power only strengthens their detractors. We condemn all the deaths and assassinations but again we sincerely hope that the secular leaders will learn from their previous mistakes, and be able to reverse the trend of history repeating itself.

Manoj Misra
President
Bangladesh Students' Association
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Canada

ians, by the politicians, for the politicians", and devil take the people once the vote is cast!

For the duration of office, our vocal and capable politicians are extremely busy in an extremely efficient manner to practise their capability to get at wealth-- "by hook or by crook" from every nook and cranny.

A prospective voter
One-mail

World Bank and post office

I appreciate Mr. SA Mansoor's views regarding Prof Yunus.

Prof Yunus has recently criticised the World Bank and has compared it with the Post Office. But, indeed, the post offices can help in reducing poverty in the poor countries and at the same time can become financially viable if the government takes adequate business development strategies for them.

The post offices can be turned into creative business centres like the Barclays' business centres in the UK with little changes.

May I therefore, request the authorities concerned to think about our post offices to attack poverty, a word used by a former World Bank president.

Ruhul Chowdhury
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Newspapers

Newspapers have been playing a vital role in ensuring free flow of information and in directing the societies in attaining moral standard. Even in this era of electronic media, the popularity of newspaper as a print media has not declined, rather it is increasing day by day. According to a report released in 2007 by the Paris-based World Association of Newspapers (WAN), the global newspaper circulation has increased by 9.95 per cent during the period 2001-2005.

In Bangladesh, newspaper performs an important role in keeping the state affairs overhauled and in retaining truth and moral values. In 2007, newspapers in Bangladesh contributed significantly in accelerating the caretaker government's drive against corruption.

But it is a matter of great regret that some newspapers in our country are passing through a serious crisis while some are yet to implement the Wage Board's recommendations for journalists and press workers. It is sincerely expected that the government will take appropriate measures to resolve the prevailing newspaper crisis.

In spite of very many limitations and certain restrictions our newspapers are still performing quite effectively and efficiently. So I would propose that the Year 2008 be observed as the Year of Newspaper Excellence.

Meanwhile, I extend my heartfelt New Year's greetings to you, all the journalists and staff members of DS.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Chairman
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka

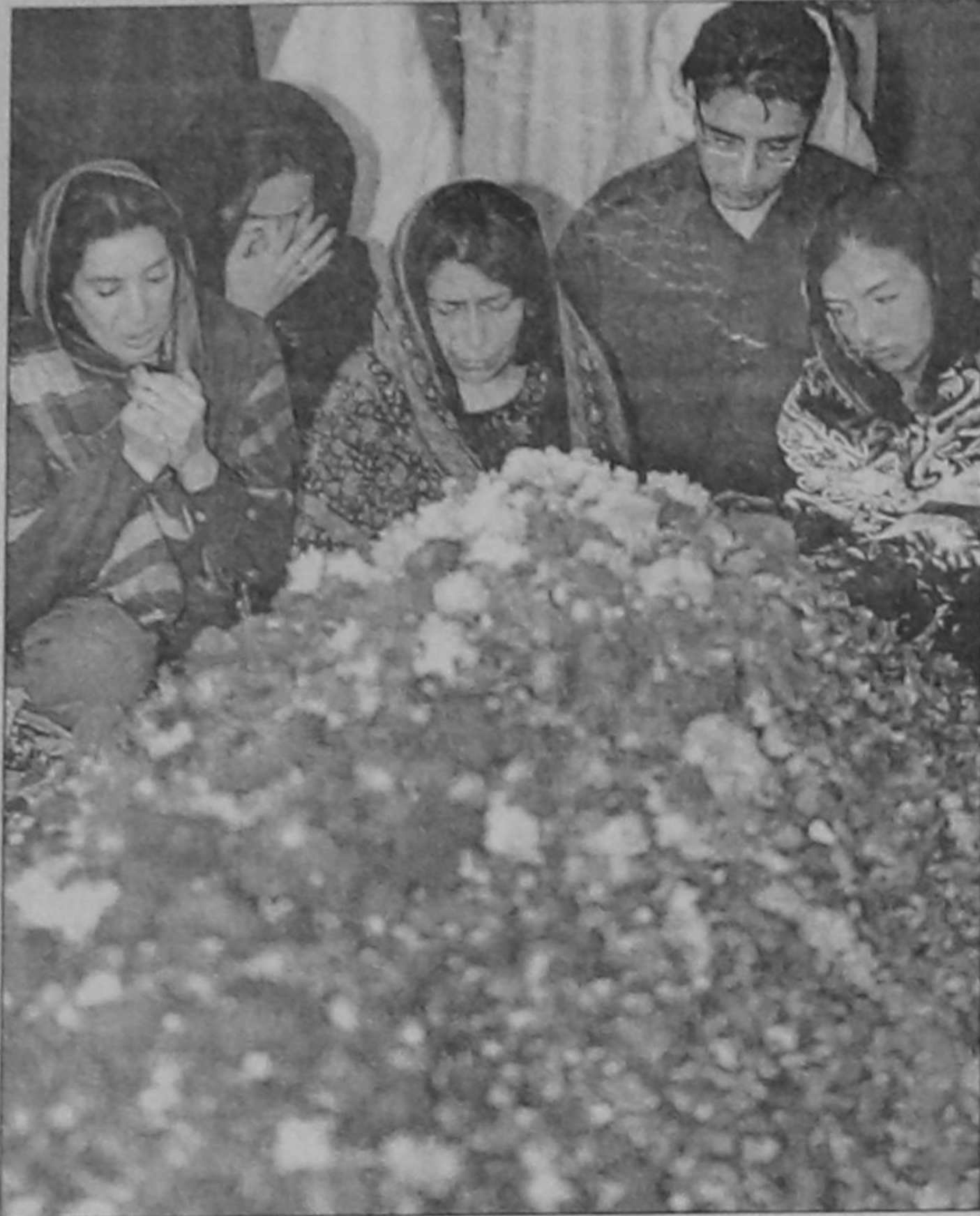
Helping cyclone victims

We have been watching the pictures of Sidr victims of South Bangladesh in cable TVs. It is obvious that the people of those areas are so poor that they cannot afford to construct strong shelters, which can sustain a cyclone like Sidr. The governments in the past constructed shelters to save people from cyclone and tsunami. But those are not enough in number to accommodate all the people. The present government is preparing projects with its own funds as well as with the help of donors to build more shelters. It sounds nice. The experts also support this idea as a short-term measure to save human lives. To supplement the short-term measure additional long-term measures are also needed to reduce future sufferings of the people in the coastal belt. The following projects may be considered:

The southern areas of Bangladesh are full of rivers, canals, ponds and other water bodies, which are very suitable for duck, goose and swan farming. The government and NGOs may choose one family from one village and donate 200 ducks or 100 geese or 50 swans for initiating tiny farming. This measure will increase regular income of the family and in the long run the family will be able to construct a sustainable house. Production of egg and



meat will increase, which ultimately should help to reduce shortage of protein supply in the country.
Md. Ashraf Hossain
Panthapath, Dhaka



Death of a leader

Today we mourn the sudden and tragic death of the former prime minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto. This is a tragic loss not only for the people of Pakistan but also for the people who loved and respected her dearly.

She was, of course, a brave woman, a charismatic leader and an affectionate mother of three children. This wanton crime was an act of cowardice and those involved should definitely be brought to justice. What is happening in Pakistan in recent times is an alarming sign to the security of this nation. Pakistan has become a haven for the fundamentalists. And stringent measures have to be taken against those who are a threat to the establishment of democracy in Pakistan.

We express sympathy for the bereaved family of Benazir Bhutto. It was a cowardly act, to say the least.

Minhaj Ahmed
Uttara, Dhaka

Paris-bound statues

The report that Paris-bound statues were stolen from Dhaka airport was very surprising. But for me, opposition to lending Bangladesh's art and artefacts to

France by Dhaka's art connoisseurs was more apprehensive and astounding.

Exchanging artefacts between museums and cultural centres for public exhibitions are normal practices in civilized societies. I have seen many famous paintings at different museums in Sweden, Denmark and Norway where the museums very often borrow collections from other museums for public shows. I visited Louvre Museum to have a look at Mona Lisa (or La Gioconda) but unfortunately she was on trips to Japan or America for public shows on all those three occasions. Fortunately, I had a sweet encounter with Mona Lisa during one of her trips to Denmark even though I did not feel so much thrilled by meeting her as I had expected. Guimet Museum in France did a favour to Bangladesh by borrowing 143 artefacts for public exhibition in their country. Those who opposed this lending lack proper understanding of things and, to say the least, have no knowledge of arts and artefacts and are motivated by some other reasons for their opposition. The story of Troy would have remained story only if someone did not excavate the Troy site (a place close to Gallipoli and very close to the town of Canakkale in Turkey).

Ramses the great would have been buried for ever under sands if he was not found and exhibited to people. "Vishnu" and "Bust of Vishnu", the statues that are from Gupta era of the seventh century are not that old and it would have got more publicity and much attention from people in Europe who admire and love such things very much. Why oppose lending it to somebody who knows how to take care of it and make it known to culture loving people? Why are we such strange people always ready to take a stance on wrong things. I donated some very valuable dolls to Dhaka National Museum in Oct 2001 and I know what problem the director of that museum had in receiving these dolls because those were dolls. The Director had to rename the dolls as "Symbols of World Civilization". What a strange people we are and we dare to talk so loudly about art and culture!

Now, two 1,500-year-old terracotta Vishnu statues bound for an exhibition at Guimet Museum were stolen while in the custody of Air France at Zia International Airport (ZIA). How that could happen is a million dollar question. Those so called art connoisseurs may kindly ponder for a while and explain to us why it was never stolen from the museum

having less security arrangements than the Dhaka airport.

Is it difficult to find out the culprits?

Tayeb Husain
Sweden

Trial of war criminals

I did not see our great liberation war but I know how my forefathers fought for giving us an independent country. I also know who are the Razakars, Al-Badr and Al-Shams and what they were doing during the liberation war. They are beasts.

Now, the question is when will they be brought to trial?
Mohammad Anisur Rahman
M.com (Management)
Govt. Commerce College

Lack of a statesman

A writer has correctly identified our lack of a statesman needed to lead us; as published in the letters column of a local English daily. For us unfortunately, a statesman is an extremely rare or possibly extinct species in Bangladesh!

Politicians are here, there and everywhere; "dime a dozen" of "all shades and sides" keen to climb the throne, to mess up the country by their version of democracy which can be defined as "of the politi-

For less US involvement abroad

As the US presidential race for 2008 is shaping up, domestic issues are now dominating the political debate. Even Iraq war, which earlier dominated the debate, is now down in the list of priorities. Economic issues, like subprime mortgage crisis and budget and trade deficits, are now on the top of the agenda. Environment and healthcare are other dominant issues. War on terrorism, which was the hallmark of the Bush administration, is no longer the major public concern.

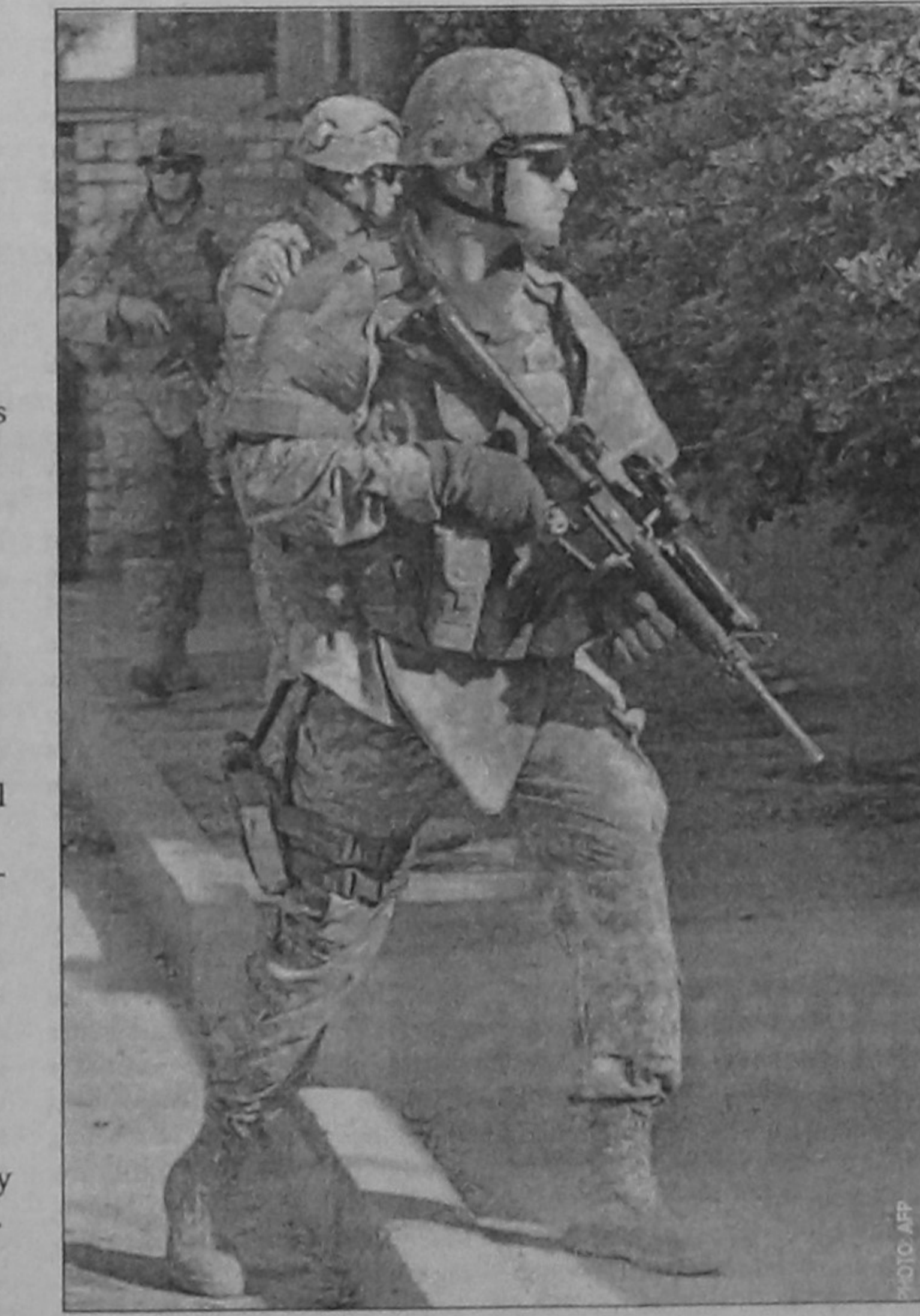
In fact, the U.S. public think that Al-Qaeda and its terrorist networks around the world are not such a great threat to the U.S. security. Despite its bravado, Al-Qaeda has not been able to carry out any attack in the U.S. soil after 9/11. The war in Iraq is now costing far more American lives and most Americans want an end to U.S. military involvement in Iraq. After the publication of the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) that Iran has

abandoned its programme to acquire an atomic bomb in 2003, Iran has also receded from the political discourse.

The U.S. political elites seem to be losing their interests in the world affairs outside the United States. Many US policymakers are calling for a review of America's involvement in the world. Although they still consider the world is a dangerous place, they also think that the United States is carrying disproportionately the burden for the global security and its allies in Europe are not contributing enough. As such, the United States must reduce its involvement and remain selectively involved in global affairs where its strategic and security interests are at stake. The priorities are: NATO, the defence of Japan, Taiwan and South Korea and the growing economic and military power of China. Even the Middle East, which has been the main concern of the United States, is considered a lesser concern. Although the United States is a big

importer of the Middle Eastern oil, its dependence on the region is declining with Canada, Mexico, Venezuela and Nigeria becoming the major suppliers of energy to the United States. The United States is also developing bio-fuel as an alternative to oil. All this implies that the United States will be less dependent on Middle Eastern oil and consequently, its interests in the region will decline.

But this may lead to a catch 22 situation. As the United States prepare to a phased withdrawal of its troops from Iraq, other regional nations will try to fill the vacuum and a conflict might arise out of this scramble for power. Shiite Iran is obviously looking for an opportunity to dominate the region long controlled by Sunni Arab states. By dismantling Saddam Hussein's minority Sunni-rule in Iraq, the United States has actually strengthened Iran's position. With the Shiite majority in Iraq dominating the military



and security forces, Iran now has a Shiite ally it never had before. The Sunni Kingdom of Saudi Arabia feels most threatened by the prospect of a link-up of two Shiite countries in the Middle East. Although Sunnis are a majority in the Muslim world, most of them live outside the Middle East in Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and this gives the Shiites a strategic advantage as they are concentrated in Iran and Iraq. Moreover, Saudi Arabia has a restless Shiite minority who look to Iran as their leader. As such, any Iran-Iraq link-up after the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq is likely to increase Saudi Arabia's sense of insecurity. Despite its vast oil reserves, Saudi Arabia's small 25 million population is no match to Iran's 70 million and Iran's armed forces are many times bigger than the small Saudi armed forces. This is why there is a lingering fear of the Iranian domination even if Iran doesn't explode any nuclear device.

Israel is another country which is concerned about Iranian threat to its security. Iranian threat to Israel comes mainly from its support for Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Thus peace in the Middle East remains fragile unless the regional countries make efforts to ensure it. Iran is obviously in an advantageous position in any conflict and may like to fish in troubled water. As such, complete U.S. withdrawal from Iraq may only lead to a bigger conflict. To avert the looming crisis, the regional states must work out a compromise on how to live in peace. Also, five power blocs -- the U.S., China, the E.U, Russia and India -- that are trying to assert their global roles, must act in concert to stem any future war in the Middle East. With the United States no longer willing to carry the burden of the global security, other powers must step in to ensure peace and stability.
Mahmood Elahi
Ottawa, Canada

In our country without considering the awareness of above health hazards, many industries marketed the low cost energy saving bulbs! Will the manufacturers or the authorities concerned take the responsibility of disclosing the potential health and environment hazards of these bulbs and educate users on disposing of or recycling the same?
W. Islam
Uttara, Dhaka

Sea turtle trade

I am writing after reading a shocking piece of news that I just went through in newspapers (Dec 26, 2007), that two endangered Olive Ridley Sea Turtle have been sold in front of the Shib Mandir near Tanti Bazar in Dhaka city. It's really very sad to see this sort of news. All sea turtles are endangered throughout the whole world and are protected by law even in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government has already signed different international agreements to save sea turtle. So, the sale of a Ridley turtle in the middle of a capital in front of many people is not acceptable.
Zahirul Islam
Marinelife Alliance
Cox's Bazar