LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA SATURDAY OCTOBER 18, 2008

Trivialising the melamine scare

This is absolutely untenable

month has passed since we were caught up in melamine scare triggered by detection of the industrial toxic element in Chinese powder milk which took a toll of child lives with 54,000 children fallen sick in that country. What have we done all this time to screen out hazardous milk available in the local market? Virtually nothing, just waiting for authentic test results from our research centres as the milk got consumed indiscriminately with damage being done to public health, especially child health -- insidiously. Melamine deposits in the kidney hinders its functioning apart from forming stones in the bladder.

Following newspaper reports nearly a month ago, the BSTI being handicapped by poor laboratory facilities, sent some 46 samples to Dhaka University Chemistry Department to do the testing on. The varsity department took its time to come out with its test results; only on Wednesday it conveyed to the BSTI that eight popular brands had melamine malcontent. Thereupon, the government in a press handout on Thursday advised consumers not to use the brands 'temporarily'. The Commerce Ministry has decided to have a few samples tested at the BCSIR and the Atomic Energy Commission labs. The question is why was it not done before?

It is disquieting to learn that there was no uniformity in the testing procedures or the reagents used by the DU Department of Chemistry, Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution and the private Plasma Plus Lab resulting in confusion over the findings. While the chemistry department found melamine in eight brands, the BSTI and the Plasma Plus detected toxic element in one brand of milk only. Now, after such a long winded detour, the authorities are contemplating sending the samples abroad for further testing, analysis and confirmation.

All this is essentially an indictment on successive governments turning a blind eye to the pressing need for adequately equipping the BSTI to be able to detect public health hazards in essential consumer items, produced or imported. The lessons learnt must not be missed on the ministry concerned, which should do everything in its power to beef the BSTI's capacity with adequate research and laboratory facilities.

The government has already wasted a good deal of time wrangling over the issue sending negative signals about trivialising a public health concern. An appropriate action plan to weed out the hazardous milk brooks no further delay.

Farm output

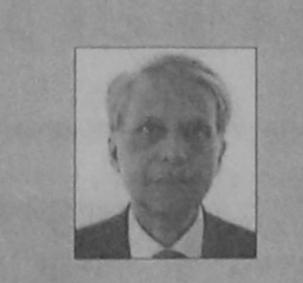
Pragmatic policy needed to attain food security

HE occasion of World Food Day provided the opportunity for local and UN agriculture experts and the government top executives to take a deep look at the prevailing conditions in the agriculture sector of the country. Though we have heard of some success stories like bumper Boro cultivation past season to inspire us, yet we believe a great deal still remains to be achieved to reach the desired goal. There is no denying that with the rapid growth of our population the necessity to pay more attention to increasing domestic food output is but a stark reality that has to be addressed with more dynamism in thoughts and action. Food being the daily requirement of the fifteen crore people of the country, there is no scope to push the issue behind other less important ones. Boosting domestic farm output has become more pertinent today as the price index of food items in the international markets fail to remain at a stable level. From our past experiences we strongly feel the country needs a pragmatic and sustainable agricultural policy backed by government and non-government support to farmers to ensure food security. It needs no emphasising that Bangladesh, because of the lack of a stable agriculture policy, is faced with multifarious problems that need immediate attention of the government.

There are also other factors associated with cultivation that need to be addressed by the experts. For example, it is common knowledge that rampant use of chemicals as fertilisers and insecticides is damaging the soil quality of the farmlands and these chemical agents are polluting water resources in the nearby water bodies. Therefore, agriculture experts will have to find alternatives to these harmful chemicals to ensure safety of food that we eat. The amount of loss of crops in natural calamities like cyclones and floods is another area that needs to be looked into by the experts. The loss of crops under such circumstances must be reduced to the minimum through adopting modern harvesting and storage methods.

A pragmatic policy will benefit the farmers only when the relevant agencies will ensure timely supply of seeds, fertiliser, water and other inputs. A break in the chain will prove to be disastrous for the sector. We support the views of the experts that vigorous attempts have to be made to attain the much needed food security through enhancing domestic farm production with the application of low-cost technologies suitable for our country.

Future challenges for the US leadership



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

ECENT debates have confirmed the important I role of such a form of engagement in US electoral politics. The long awaited first showdown between Mr McCain and Mr Obama, the two US Presidential candidates, took place in the last week of September. It was followed by a debate between the Vice-Presidential rivals. The Presidential contenders returned to the podium a few days later. Foreign policy, national security and domestic issues (proposals that might affect taxation, healthcare and socioeconomic opportunities) related to the troubled US social-economic scene took center-stage.

This election to the US Presidency has turned out to be the most expensive campaign in the history of democracy. Monitored closely by the world print and electronic media, it has been marked by edgy, cautious maneuvering between the candidates and also the policy-makers of the rival Republican and Democratic political parties. Each debate has ended with both rivals claiming victory. Pollsters have also been busy with interesting results classified according to age, gender, political belief, race and commitment (the undecided factor) to different issues. They have also been careful to point out the possibilities of margins of

This time round, the US Presidential election has been of special interest to peoples all over

the world. For the first time, we have will in tackling the menace of clisignificant additions to the matrix -- mate change and finding an acceptthe presence of an Afro-Caribbean and a lady. One is tempted to say that it has added colour to the cam-

United States, because of the very is watching the US Presidential nature of its electoral process, has campaign and waiting for the long been very complex. The long pri- shadow that will be cast by its next mary season which helped to select a candidate from the two largest tainted by controversy and debat- attending workshops and seminars.

able compromise within the international trading regime. There are also the festering problems of poverty reduction and the containing of This latest electoral contest in the communicable diseases. The world

I have been to several European parties has at times also been countries in the last three months able assumptions and rumours. The As always, discussions in these

constructively engage with Russia sionaryworld markets. over the future expansion of NATO

lot of over-heated US Presidential campaign rhetoric about their country. George Bush did this, so did Bill Clinton. This time round, the focus has not been so much on

This is understandable given the (given the need to protect the Baltic fact that The Bank of China has invested heavily to the tune of \$400 The Chinese are used to hearing a billion in America's bond market and in Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. So, continued turbulence in the US financial and housing markets is creating fear in China. The Chinese are also waiting to see how the next China. They however know that US President will handle the major policy is more important than challenge it is facing from China in Africa where China has not only China, despite provocations over become a commercial competitor to Tibet, has restrained itself from the US but also a political factor.

its energy and mineral resources

requirements, has changed the rules

In keeping with Russia's recent

bellicosity, Russian analysts have

also been very clear about what

future US policy directions need to

be. The US, one has pointed out,

needs to stop acting like a teacher to

the rest of the world, 'rid its foreign

policy' of the subjective ideology

that has created double standards

(whereby 'the US closes its eyes to al

sorts of faults in countries it likes,

and declares them fully democratic

when they clearly aren't'). The

Russians want a more participatory

role from the USA as far as the

President will inherit many intractable problems -- a falling dollar, possible rises in oil price, an improved but insecure Iraq, a fragile Afghanistan, a Pakistan saddled with instability, the unresolved Middle East peace process, an angry and dissatisfied nuclear North Korea, the possibility of direct talks with an emerging Iran and a pugnacious Russia. The United States will also have to face the hard reality of an economic overstretch that matches its military overstretch. The best way forward might be to launch, as a first step, a regional political and diplomatic effort in South Asia -- focusing on problem-

solving dialogues to ease regional tensions -- between India and Pakistan, and Afghanistan and Pakistan. This could create the space for Pakistan and Afghanistan to start a dialogue with insurgents who are no longer prepared to support al-Qaeda. The initiative also needs to be accompanied by an economic package to stimulate economic opportunities in the vast rural hinterlands in this region. Similar meaningful initiatives could also be undertaken with regard to the Middle East peace process. The USA must understand that hunger and deprivation are synonymous with injustice. They also act as catalytic agents for radicalist networks. The USA has to realize that the best protection for Israel, its ally, is to have an independent workable Palestinian State. That will definitely take the sting away from the terrorists' tail.

In all of these areas, dramatic shifts in policy -- either hawkish or dovish -are going to be difficult to implement. Yet, countries all over the world will continue to look to Washington for leadership in the collective global effort towards the establishment of stability, building of infrastructure, creation of jobs and tackling of extremism and poverty.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador and can be reached at

POST BREAKFAST

Come January 2009, the next US President will inherit many intractable problems -- a falling dollar, possible rises in oil price, an improved but insecure Iraq, a fragile Afghanistan, a Pakistan saddled with instability, the unresolved Middle East peace process, an angry and dissatisfied nuclear North Korea, the possibility of direct talks with an emerging Iran and a pugnacious Russia.

use of the internet has also played a privotal role in fund-raising and ran for many months and left its imprint on the subsequent electoral the running mates for the principal candidates.

trouble free US Presidential election in November.

It is being held in a critical period of US history. The image of the US around the world has sharply deteriorated since the start of the war in Iraq. In addition to questionable advances in the War against Terror (particularly in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan) and the Middle East peace initiative, other issues have emerged that have raised anxiety levels among other countries in the world. This includes the recent financial meltdown in Wall Street, the absence of sufficient political

meetings, proved to be a good learning experience especially pertaining highlighting issues. The primaries to what the world is expecting out of the next US President.

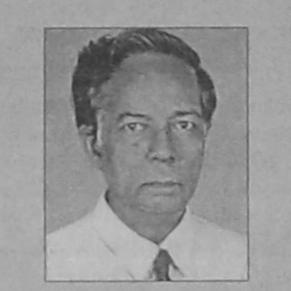
dynamics. Its after-burner effects believes in the need for reconcilia- few aspects. They have acknowl- conditionality. This has presented also contributed to the selection of tion of America with the world -- a edged that Chinese-American itself as a great strategic problem for sort of healing of the emotional gap. relations improved under the Bush It wants an America that will give Administration and the govern-We will now hopefully have a priority to the restoration of the ment of Hu Jintao but have pointed American image. It was also clear out that President Bush remains a that if the next US president were to very controversial figure in the eyes be Barack Obama, the colour of his of the Chinese people -- most espeskin would do a great deal to change radically the image of America in the world. Obama is seen to be more in tune on diplomatic and strategic matters with the Europeans, though not necessarily on economic matters (where Democrats are believed to be protectionist). In addition, Obama, despite his relative inexperience in foreign policy, is perceived as a symbol of change and hope. It is stabilising financial markets, dealalso generally expected that ing with a weakened US dollar, high

policy imperatives of the two US Presidential candidates. Chinese analysts participating in workshops of the game in this region by offering It appears that Europe in general abroad have however underlined a aid and investment without political cially for his doctrine of preemption. After 9/11 Bush proclaimed that the world had changed. Now the Chinese are wondering whether the next US President will change the world back ... or change it in different ways. In this context, they have noted that the next US President will have to engage more intensively in Obama, unlike Bush, will try to oil prices and the threat of reces-

making any comments about the China, it may be recalled, because of

Russian sphere of influence is con-Come January 2009, the next US

Contain crimes from reaching new heights



Biplob Chakravarty, AGM and three endeavour becomes a tortuous either control or eliminate their other employees of ACI near process, with no support coming to Tejgaon Industrial Area and snatched 52 lakh taka kept in several cartons in the microbus after shooting Biplob because he resisted. Biplob was admitted to a city hospital in a critical condition. On man after shooting him down.

mugging and murder are too many

the victim from any quarters. What is worse is that the law enforcers seem to have realised they can get away without being booked because they can twist laws, invent loopholes and manipulate tricky

most such cases of crimes, young

business competitors or political rivals. Allegations are rife that these godfathers operate their invisible business in the form of clandestine terror attacks with the protection and patronage of some high ups in administration and politics.

The sequel to factional politics have anticipated trouble in the prehas simmered in the country for the last seven years or more. But in recent times hatred, animosity, rivalry and greed for power and money just before the national and poor as well as affluent parents are upazila polls have touched new

national polls, Khan Ibne Zaman was hacked to death by unidentified assailants who entered Zaman's house by scaling the boundary wall of his three-storey house at Khalishpur. Given Khulna's history of factional as well as journalist killing, the administration should poll days and taken precautions. Khulna witnessed killing of at least 13 journalists and some prominent political leaders and activists during

the last ten years. People only wonder how these

In the core of all such dastardly acts, there is one call that cry out for solution long since. We must all assume our responsibilities for not being indifferent to the circumstances that breed crimes of this sort. We must look to the communities that know nothing but frustration. We have seen some of our past leaders and stalwarts of the past regime indulge in corruption and immoral acts and then resign or leave the country in the face of public protest. We had bureaucrats amassing wealth and siphoning that out of the country without accountability and with impunity. Many of our youngsters see and act

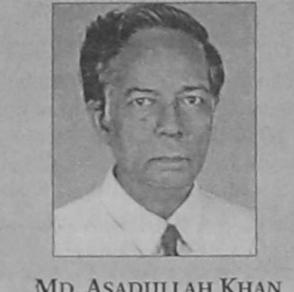
However the terrorists and gang-

sters must be shown what incalculable harm they have done to the society and must be made to pay the price. While releasing the dreaded criminals and drug lords out on bail in the face of vociferous arguments of the defence and on the plea of lax and shoddy police investigation report, it would be better for all concerned with the dispensation of justice to remember what Justice Murshed, Chief Justice of the then East Pakistan, said during the turbulent days of then Pakistani President Ayub Khan's dictatorial rule: "The strength of the Judiciary does not lie in the panoplied authority of physical might but in the commands it has over the minds and hearts of men. Such respect and prestige are the result of just decisions given with independence and courage. The Court that cannot stand before the unjust fury of an impassioned mob or the arrogant high-handedness of misguided authority is not worthy of its tradition. It would indeed be a sad day when a single individual may have the slightest reason for entertaining any misgiving with regard to obtain-

and Controller of Examinations, BUET.

ing justice in his case. This will spell

factors or points in their favour for September 29, in the Tongi area under Gazipur Thana, muggers any wrongdoing or not doing the coming by motorcycle extorted two 'duty',



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

OR the last three months Dhaka city has been witness to a series of horrific crimes including murder, extortion and rape, some of which happened in unusual circumstances. The murder of Fariduddin, a businessman at Shyampur, in the morning of August 14 last while he was taking breakfast in his own restaurant followed by the killing of Rubel Howladar, a driver of a microbus, on the same day at Gulshan Link road after taking possession of his vehicle, are painful reminders of the violence and anarchy that gripped the country in the pre 1/11 days. The deteriorating law and order situation that marked the rule of the past alliance government had shown remarkable signs of improvement after the take over by the present CTG, but now with their days numbered and all eyes focused on holding the parliamentary elections in December next, the law and order has slipped considerably.

Incidents of crime like murder and mugging are now the main topic of household discussions. Dhaka city has also attained the dubious distinction of being a criminals' paradise, where the most heinous crimes are committed in broad daylight. Report carried by the media on September 15 last indicated that a group of gangsters coming by motorcycle blocked the movement of a microbus carrying

Incidents of horrific crimes like

and half lakh taka from a young . Unhappily for the country, in men with drug habits born of both

BITTER TRUTH

These grotesque incidents send shock waves through the spine of an impoverished nation that has helplessly witnessed so much of these killings, robbing, other atrocities in recent times. The present state of things that have rocked the community and the society is a sort of anarchy. Anarchy, as all people know, is an excess of freedom. Anarchy is the absence of rules, ethical limits, and any moral sense.

to be mentioned within the narrow space of a column. Abu Yousuf (28), a businessman in the Tikatully area was shot on October 10 last as he refused earlier to pay toll to the extortionists as per their demand In another incident at Polash under Narsingdi upazila burglars looted 11 lakh taka in cash and 13 thousand Saudi rival from the house of Nurul Islam on October 9 last after stabbing his son and daughter-inlaw who had returned from Saudi Arabia some days ago. Other than crimes like dare- devil robbery in and around the city limits, mugging is a very common and torturous, even murderous type of hassle people have to undergo these days. People are afraid to take the cases of their trauma and suffering to the police. Because fear of corruption, retaliation and harassment on the other end of the road to justice has

rather become usual. The whole

BETWEEN THE LINES

World financial crisis can be turned into an opportunity for the region to lessen dollar transactions. We can meet most

needs from our own resources. And it becomes all the more necessary for civil societies to band together with

national and international experts to put moral and legal pressure on Swiss banks to reveal the identities of account

holders. This money belongs to the people of South Asia and it should be available to them when they need it.

getting involved because of lack of moral and social values in society, influence of satellite TV and inadequate games and recreational facili-

Two juvenile muggers Liton and Ranju of Maghbazar area who killed two school boys of Nayatola after abusing them sexually in April last confessed to the Detective Branch of the Police their involvement in other crimes, and that they committed these gruesome killings while being under the influence of vicious drug cannabis. "These criminals are in pain inside"so says a social psychologist in the country "acting out their pain, in most cases on innocent victims."

Admittedly true, drug coupled with inducement of some godfathers with money and weapons make potent cocktail that fuels crime these days. In most cases these godfathers utilize them to

past indicated that in the Tala Parliament member were killed as a recent killing of Arifuzzaman Chanchol, a popular Jubodal leader and Chairman of Dhandia Union Council under Tala upazila by a

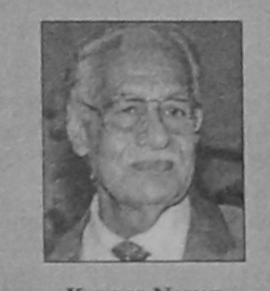
notorious rebel group vying for power in the upcoming upazila elections, as alleged in the media report quoting the S.P of Satkhira district, points to clandestine pattern of politics taking roots in most areas of the country.

the morning of October 14 that senior joint secretary of Khulna city AL and aspirant for the Khulna-3 constituency in the upcoming

heights. That in turn have sparked spate of killings and extortion and more killings and atrocities. Report terrorist attacks could go on carried by the media in the recent unabated when the country's newspapers are full throated in their upazila of Satkhira district, ten vilification of the dirty activities of a elected representatives at upazila handful of goons. How could the level including one former whole society become captive in the hands of a limited number of monsequel to factional politics. The strously dreaded gangsters? All these grotesque incidents send shock waves through the spine of an impoverished nation that has helplessly witnessed so much of these killings, robbing, other atrocities in recent times. The present state of things that have rocked the community and the society is a sort of anarchy. Anarchy, as all people know, is an excess of freedom. Anarchy is the absence of rules, ethical limits, and People learnt with shock again in any moral sense. These criminals are psychic cases. They have lost, perhaps never developed, that psychic appendage we call con-

the doom of civilized existence." Md. Asadullah Khan is a former teacher of physics

Bank on Swiss bank savings



KULDIP NAYAR writes from New Delhi

HIS is not a grandma's prescription. This is plain __ commonsense. Whenever you are hard up you reach for the money you have hidden. India or, for that matter, the entire South Asia, is facing the crisis of liquidity. And this is the time when politicians, industrialists and bureaucrats from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka should bring back the money they

have stashed away in Swiss banks. The amount reportedly runs into billions of dollars which the corrupt elite have come to possess through dishonest methods. I do not want to argue the rights and wrongs of their deeds because that would start

another kind of a debate. We need money to stave off the crisis we face. Even otherwise, if the corrupt have even an iota of patriotism, they should not hesitate to bring back the much-required finance to bolster our sagging economies.

Since Switzerland maintains secret bank accounts, it is not possible for any intelligence agency, however resourceful, to trace the money. The account holders will have to do it themselves provided they feel the pain which their nation and China \$96 billion. If India's is going through.

I do not know how much money crore people would get Rs 1 lakh is hidden by the Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Nepalese or the Sri Lankans. But the estimate about

Indians is around \$1,500 billion which, translated into rupees, comes to some 675 thousand crores (I have calculated it at the rate of Rs 45 per dollar). Indeed, the figure is mind-boggling.

In the 2006 report on black money in Swiss banks, the Swiss Banking Association has put the deposits of five top countries as: India, the highest, with \$1456 billions, Russia \$470 billion, the UK \$390 billion, Ukraine \$100 billion deposits were to be distributed, 45

When I was India's High Commissioner at London, I met a

party. He said that his bank alone had so much money of Indians that their country could meet foreign exchange requirements for 10 Five Year Plans. Those were the days when we were acutely short of foreign exchange and had even pledged our gold to the Bank of England as a guarantee.

not getting better. India is bound to be affected sooner or later. The money in Switzerland would come in handy at this time. Yet, the question is how to persuade the corrupt politicians, IAS, IPS, Indian Revenue Service (IRS) personnel and industrialists to move their piles from

bank manager from Switzerland at a abroad to India. Threats to them will not work because nobody except the Swiss banks knows how much they have. There has to be an appeal to their better senses and assurance that they can possess most of the money legally.

It sounds immoral. But there will have to be something like a tax holiday or some scheme where no Financial situation in the world is questions are asked. If they were to give one-third of the amount they have abroad, they can retain the rest. I wish they realise that onethird is too little a price they will be paying for legitimising their loot in which they have indulged since independence.

Switzerland provides are a drag on poor countries. It is the exploitation to which South Asia has been subjected to by the West for centuries. A book written by a Western economist -- entitled Capitalism's Achilles' heel: Dirty Money and How to Renege the Free Market System -estimates that at least \$5 billion have been shifted out of poorer countries to the West since the mid-

Still the markets and several banks in the West have crashed. They are in fact responsible for ruining our measly financial institutions. Imagine what would have happened to them if they did not have the money which our corrupt industrialists, bureaucrats and politicians have deposited with them? Add to this the money they have stashed away else -- wherein the UK, the US and tax havens like St Kitts.

South Asia has been hit because it is part of the global economy which has caved in. Under pressure from the West, we have opened up several sectors to them. It has been seen during the last few weeks that they have been the first to sell their shares in various Indian companies, bringing the share market tumbling down. It is estimated that in India In fact, tax havens that alone they were withdrawing Rs

2,000-Rs 3,000 crore in foreign exchange per week because they experienced hardship in their own

In India, the Left who were supporters of the Manmohan Singh government have saved us from further disaster by not allowing some financial sectors opening up to the global players. We also owe it to the Left that the Western institutions were not allowed to enter insurance to the full extent. The Left also put in place some regulatory

measures on banks. The economic crisis, primarily because of Western wasteful living, brought the entire Europe, America and others together the other day at Washington to discuss how to overcome the situation. I wish New Delhi had taken the initiative to get the countries of South Asia around the same table to have a joint action

to face the problem. Poor countries have a lot of resilience. They may therefore weather the storm. But it will be again at the expense of the lower half. In a capitalist economy, the upper half loses luxuries, not comforts. The poor had to cut down on their necessities. One per cent of world population is said to be holding more than 57 per cent of the total global wealth. Manmohan Singh who authored a

South-South Commission report

proposed a close commerce and economic cooperation among the countries in the third world. The suggestions never took off. He should wash off the stigma by grouping the countries in South Asia into a common market. World financial crisis can be turned into an opportunity for the region to lessen dollar transactions. We can meet most needs from our own resources. We have men and material, technology and manpower to do so. We have lost enough to the West before and after independence. Let

us at least start depending on ourselves and do away with such foreign goods that are available in the region. And it becomes all the more necessary for civil societies to band together with national and international experts to put moral and legal pressure on Swiss banks to reveal the identities of account holders. This money belongs to the people of South Asia and it should be available to them when they need it. We should also develop confidence to borrow from one another instead of looking towards the West.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.