

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

Murder of Saudi embassy official

We are deeply shocked

THE murder of a Saudi embassy official, Khalaf AlAli, in Dhaka by unidentified assailants in the high security diplomatic enclave at upmarket Gulshan area of the city is highly regrettable and deeply saddening.

We express our utmost grief and condolence at the shocking incident and convey our deep sympathy to the bereaved family of the deceased, his colleagues at the embassy and to the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). We are particularly perturbed at this grievous murder since this is for the first time that any employee of an embassy has been killed in this way in the city.

As reported in the media, the victim was shot by the culprits at dead of night near his residence. Being informed by a security guard of another embassy, the police came to the spot and took the critically injured Saudi embassy official to a private hospital where he died in the morning. The incident calls for further beefing up the security situation of the diplomatic zone, to avoid any repetition of such deplorable incident in the future. Since the diplomats and other members on the staff of the foreign missions are our valued guests, we must ensure every possible measure to ensure their safety in this country.

We hope the undesirable incident will not in any way leave a negative impact on the cordial bilateral relations that now exist between the two countries. And given the history of brotherly relationship between the peoples and the governments of these two nations, it is further expected that the incident would be looked upon in its right perspective and treated as such by the general public and the media in Saudi Arabia.

Since the incident is highly sensitive, we would like to caution all quarters including the opposition against making any irresponsible remark or any attempt at trying to capitalise the incident to fulfil their narrow personal or political end.

We urge upon the government to mount an expeditious investigation into the murder so that the killers could be caught and brought to book within the shortest possible time.

Gender Equity Index on Bangladesh

We must exercise cautious satisfaction

BANGLADESH has scored higher than India, Pakistan and Afghanistan in terms of gender equity, according to the Gender Equity Index (GEI) 2012 released by Social Watch, a Manila-based civil society network.

The report evokes mixed feelings. While taking pride in the fact that the country has secured a good position among South Asian countries with 55 points, we must keep in mind the better examples, where countries which have done well, such as Norway, Finland and Iceland, have scored in the high eighties. More importantly, how do the said points translate into reality for women and men in Bangladesh? The index measures the gaps between women and men in the areas of education, economic and political empowerment.

Women in our country have advanced in all three fields -- more girls go to school; women contribute greatly to the economy, especially through the garment industry and remittance from migrant workers; and politically, too, there are more women on the scene, in the Cabinet, in Parliament, and, perhaps even more so in terms of grassroots political and social activism. However, discrimination continues to exist in all these fields, with more girls dropping out of school to fulfil household duties or get married, unequal wages and facilities at work and sometimes ornamental or insignificant participation of women in politics. Moreover, violence against women continues unabated and the law of the land itself, such as citizenship laws and especially personal or family laws, are heavily biased against women.

The Women Development Policy, which could have addressed some of these issues, is yet to be passed, 15 years into its initial drafting. Bangladeshi women have seen progress and success in the last few decades, but there is still a long way to go before true gender equality is established, and this International Women's Day, the GEI



Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

IF there has been a furore about the presence of US Special Forces on our soil it was not unjustified. The media in Bangladesh had

quoted a part of the US Pacific Commander's deposition at a Congressional hearing that, "We have currently special forces assist teams...laid down in Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, as well as India."

We would like to put our faith even in the US ambassador's suggestion not to believe what appears in the media, but such a disclaimer from the source would have been more appropriate and would have helped further dispel the doubts.

Although the matter has been somewhat clarified by the relevant ministry in Bangladesh when the said report appeared in the media, and since then by the US ambassador in Dhaka, that no permanent US forces are based in Dhaka, there are a few questions that need the government to respond. Our questions stem from not only the reported presence of US "assist teams" in this region but also from the claims that Bangladesh is an active partner in the global war on terror being conducted by the US.

Firstly, even if we were to accept the clarifications regarding actual stationing of troops in Bangladesh, it would still be for the government to spell out the actual nature of the

presence of US teams. Is it merely a training team or one that is of sizeable strength, albeit in Bangladesh temporarily? And what is actually the type of training that the so called assist team is imparting? How often do our security forces involve themselves with the Americans in joint training, and is training restricted to theory only, and if not, does training involve tactical maneuvers without troops or with troops?

It is no secret that our government

interested in is the level and type of cooperation in the US war on terror.

The US Pacific commander had said in the said deposition: "Bangladesh has emerged as a particularly effective partner in the fight against terror, cooperating with India as well as the US to counter VEO activity by actors such as LeT." And that is a different ball game altogether.

Certainly most of the world differs with the US definition of global war on terror (GWOT) and also the way it

spawn the phenomenon. We must understand the underlying thrust of the US strategy where the GWOT has been made an excuse to reorder the world order. What should one make of the fact that as early as the evening of 9/11 Bush had told his advisors that he saw the attacks as a chance to do what he had decided he would long before his administration had come to power, and Donald Rumsfeld, who was yet to be appointed the defence secretary, told his boss that he believed that the US military power was needed "to help discipline the world." What the US had embarked upon was a road to neo-imperialism and the Bush Doctrine was used to chastise the world. While sanity may have partly returned to US planners after Obama took over with the realisation that use of force has its limit, many see the Obama Doctrine as a "Bush redux."

It should not be lost upon our policymakers that a direct involvement with the US in its so called GWOT is fraught with high degree of risk for Bangladesh. Not only would it not go down well with the people, because of the warped notion of the war on terror conveyed to the Muslim world by the US, we would have to be prepared to face retaliatory attacks by those that are made targets of US actions. We should not forget that if we are willing to embrace a bear we should be prepared to suffer some broken bones too.

The writer is Editor, Oped and Defence & Strategic Affairs, *The Daily Star*.

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has been cooperating with other countries, particularly the US and the UK, for enhancing its counter and anti-terrorism capability. And given the threat we had been exposed to or the potential threat that we face, although not anywhere near what some of the other countries of South Asia have been and are exposed to, we have to nonetheless prepare ourselves to address the issue with a degree of professionalism and competence.

However, while one should welcome any cooperation that enhances our capability to combat this threat, the extent of the cooperation is something whose details ought to be made public. And what we are particularly

has been pursued, with painful results both for the US, its allies, but more particularly so by countries that were made the direct targets of US attacks, Iraq and Afghanistan. And one has to look only at Pakistan to see consequences of being a direct ally in a venture that was laced with deceit and falsehood. Both operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom have been unmitigated disasters for the US. No wonder that that the Bush administration had renamed GWOT as the "long war." So what war on terror is the US talking about that we are participating in with them? Are we getting entangled in the "long war?"

In fact, US strategy has only helped

Asian women: Same countries, different worlds

NOELEN HEYZER

WE are in a race against time -- with just three years left to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Many of our people, even in the same country, continue to live in different worlds. This is especially true for large numbers of Asian women, whose experience of development and growth remains starkly different from that of men -- especially when compounded by disparities of ethnicity, caste, economic status, education and geographical location.

The best celebration of International Women's Day this year will be a commitment to redouble our efforts in a final push on the MDGs to 2015 -- because confronting gender inequality and advancing the empowerment of women holds the key to accelerating regional development and meeting the Goals.

The power of the MDGs lies in their promise of a better world. Since their adoption by the member states of the United Nations in 2001, the eight Goals have become universally recognised as important milestones in the pursuit of a more equitable future for all.

The new *Asia-Pacific MDG Report 2011/12* makes it clear that addressing disparities in Asia and the Pacific, especially through narrowing gender gaps, holds the key to a big final push on the MDGs.

Published in February by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the United Nations Development Programme and the Asian Development Bank, the Report shows much progress. Our region has

already made great strides by halving the incidence of poverty, reducing HIV prevalence, stopping the spread of tuberculosis, and halving the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water.

Major gaps still remain however across Goals, across sub-regions, and especially within countries. One indicator of these challenges is the still-unacceptably low level of maternal health across the region. For too many Asian women, giving birth is

other Asia-Pacific countries however, are unlikely to achieve the target unless we accelerate progress.

The positive news is that the countries currently off-track can reach the current target by reducing maternal deaths by only two to three per 100,000 live births annually for the next three years. Our ultimate aim however, must remain the avoidance of all preventable deaths.

Similarly, around half of the off-track countries could reach the target

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In 2008, with about 140,000 deaths, our region accounted for almost 40% of maternal mortality in the developing world. In South Asia, for instance, maternal mortality ratios are almost 70% higher than the world average and nine times those of Europe and Central Asia. With a number of multi-sectoral and very achievable development interventions however, we could have saved the lives of almost 150,000 women by 2015 in this one area alone.

Countries like China, Vietnam and Turkey are well on their way to joining Bhutan, Iran and the Maldives, who have achieved the MDG target of reducing these deaths by three-quarters by 2015. More than thirty

of ensuring skilled birth attendance by simply increasing rates of attendance by 3% per year -- and 11 million women would benefit. The message is clear: the Goals are achievable. We are so close to the finishing line -- it is time for one final big push to 2015.

A recurring theme of the Report -- the impact of social and economic disparities -- is highlighted by the huge gaps within countries in access to and use of maternal health services, like antenatal care and skilled birth attendance. We must address the social determinants of health. The economic status of households, levels of educational attainment, and the decision-making autonomy of women consistently underpin these disparities -- making these critical

areas for effective policy interventions.

On the Goal of promoting gender equality and empowering women, the countries of Asia and the Pacific have effectively eliminated gender disparities in primary, secondary and tertiary education but as many as 25 million children of primary-school age remain out of school -- most of whom are girls. Women also tend to be under-represented in the sciences and engineering, even in those countries where the tertiary enrolment of women outnumbers that of men.

Contrary to what many believe these are not women's issues alone. This inequality translates into increased poverty and lower human development for everyone -- men and women alike. Lack of women's participation in the labour market costs the Asia-Pacific region about \$ 89 billion annually.

Our shared responsibility, as the guardians of the MDGs, is to fulfil their promise by meeting the expectations which they have raised -- of a world more free of poverty, hunger, and disease, of people empowered by education, enjoying equality and a better quality of life.

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As Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Dr. Heyzer is the most senior UN official in the region and the first woman ever appointed to this position. She led the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) for 14 years.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March 8

- 1010**
Ferdowsi completes his *Shāhnāmah*.
- 1722**
The Safavid Empire of Iran is defeated by an army from Afghanistan at The Battle of Gulnabad, pushing Iran into anarchy.
- 1736**
Nader Shah, founder of the Afsharid dynasty, is crowned Shah of Iran.
- 1911**
International Women's Day is launched in Copenhagen, Denmark, by Clara Zetkin, leader of the Women's Office for the Social Democratic Party in Germany.
- 1920**
The Arab Kingdom of Syria, the first modern Arab state to come into existence, is established.
- 1957**
Egypt re-opens the Suez Canal after the Suez Crisis.
- 1963**
The Ba'ath Party comes to power in Syria in a coup d'état by a clique of quasi-leftist Syrian Army officers calling themselves the National Council of the Revolutionary Command.
- 2004**
A new constitution is signed by Iraq's Governing Council.