

Cancellation of test welcome

Now investigate the scandal

THE government has made the Public Service Commission cancel the BCS preliminary test marred as it was by allegations of question paper leakage. In a knee-jerk reaction to the expose, what the PSC chairperson said amounted to misinforming and misleading people about the actual state of affairs. She denied the leakage allegations in unequivocal terms. That would have, in another clime and set of circumstances, been dubbed as gross misrepresentation of facts. She did it when the alleged leakage in view of the proof possessed by a Dhaka University student pointed to so many people making money by trampling national interests, not to speak of bringing disrepute to such a high profile constitutional body as the Public Service Commission.

Whenever something goes awfully wrong, the first reaction from an institution involved is usually one of flat refusal to shoulder the responsibility for it. To tell the truth, it is part of the whole issue of governance. We seem to fail to do anything properly including the holding of a preliminary test for selecting government officers. It is essential to note that the PSC cancelled the test at the instance of the government, it was not an act of its own volition.

There are two points to be made here. First, even in regard to a constitutional body, as high as the PSC, the government had to step in and instruct it to do something the latter should have done to make amends for a lapse. It was anachronistic to norms of behaviour one would like to see followed between the executive and a constitutional body like the PSC. Secondly, what is highly relevant here is also the fact that if the PSC had acted properly, there would not have been the need for the cabinet to send instructions to it.

We strongly believe that the cancellation of the test should by no means be the end of it; there should be a thorough investigation to fix the responsibility and punish the culprits.

Relocation of tanneries

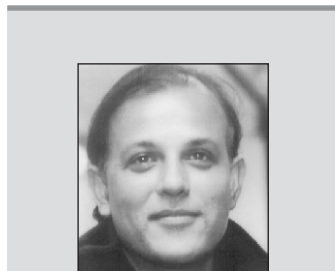
Let it be done before it's too late

WE welcome the directives by the High Court to the government on relocation of the tanneries from Hazaribagh area to Savar in eighteen months' time. We were nothing short of happy when the Prime Minister had announced quite a while ago her government's decision to relocate the tannery plants from a densely populated area to a more suitable exclusive zone. It was heartening to see that the authorities were at last paying heed to the long overdue demands by the environmentalists. But sadly it has so far remained a declaration of intent only and a mere announcement. The agencies concerned have made little headway in relocating the tannery industries, the PM's directives notwithstanding. In other words, they are not alive to the damage it's causing to the environment.

According to recent surveys, a huge quantity of untreated toxic wastes are discharged everyday from the tanneries to their ultimate destination, the Buriganga river. The river had already been polluted much beyond the permissible level; and now with the toxic wastes pollution has reached such a level that those passing by the area as well as those living nearby have begun to complain of eye and skin irritation. There is no doubt that these symptoms are a direct result of residents being exposed to toxic substances over a long period of time. In addition, the oxygen level in the river has reached zero point putting the marine life at grave risk.

We have no doubt that whatever legal and technical hurdles there are, if the authorities are sincere, those obstacles can be overcome. People have already paid too high a price for no fault of theirs. It is time for the government to translate extant decisions into action. Any further delay in moving the tanneries to an exclusive zone will put the river and the people around in a grave environmental jeopardy.

So who is winning?



K.A.S. MURSHID

THE dogs of war have been unleashed. War is now inevitable and no one can prevent it -- neither the UN, nor the French, the Russians or the two million demonstrators who took to the streets of London or the millions world-wide who have made their views abundantly clear. I doubt very much if Mr. Bush himself could stop the war even if he wanted to. SUPERMAN, it would seem, has painted himself into a corner from where the only exit is blocked off by Kryptonite! He is determined to save the world from EVIL, even if that means destroying the very world that he is trying to save. And that includes not just Iraq but also the economies of Europe, the US itself and that of the entire world. The institutional damage done to e.g. the UN, the European Union and NATO is likely to be huge, but by far the biggest victim will be the erosion of Western Values -- a process that is already well underway.

There are not many people, I fear who have come out in support

of the American position. THEY have had a terrible time trying to convince the 'frontline states' to come forward and be saved -- but alas no one seems interested. Even Turkey, battered by the worst recession since the Second World War and badly in need of a bail out package from Uncle Sam, turned down a very lucrative offer. It simply would not do in today's political and moral climate to be permanently stigmatized as an American stooge. SUPERMAN

country and will result in the unthinkable act of indefinite foreign military rule over an independent, sovereign member of the United Nations, in the year of THEIR Lord 2003 AD. At this point we ought to quietly remind ourselves that the US maintains a permanent military presence in at least half a dozen countries -- many far from its shores -- including South Korea, Japan, Germany and the Philippines. This serves one very practical purpose -- it is a daily

reminder to these nations of who actually is in charge! There is little doubt that the military presence in Afghanistan will continue -- till such time as the Afghans decide that enough is enough and bid them farewell (as they have done in the past to the Russians and the British).

You see the problem with technological superiority is that you can flatten your enemy from a safe distance and even manage to capture power. What you cannot do, however, is rule because that requires a physical presence not up in the air but solidly on the ground.

Now ground realities have a tendency of not responding very favourably to US-led designs, especially when it involves governing another country or even using one as a base. Efforts to buy support have not been spectacularly successful either -- ungrateful lot, aren't they?

There is little chance now that the Iraq War will receive the blessings of the UN and will therefore be deemed illegal, even criminal by

tion. The only rationale for the war that has been put forward is an irrational fear (if that's what it is) of a possible Iraqi potential to do the US in, 'one day'. Such is the basis of the forthcoming war in Iraq. And it should have led the *Economist* to ponder over what sort of a world that we are about to inherit. It should have been able to ask if Saddam is SO unpopular in his own country, why aren't there thousands of Iraqis quietly (or even not so quietly) singing Mr. Bush's tune? Is it possible that there is method even in this madness? Frankly, I see no method at all -- only more madness! Consider a few facts: The 'free' world today is deeply divided -- more divided perhaps than at any other time in its history. Muslims have been targeted because of their religion -- causing the rift to widen. Europe and NATO have suffered heavily -- so much so that we may be on the threshold of a major re-alignment of forces that could ultimately usher in a new cold war or at least a cool war. The war on terror has been overshadowed by Iraq and has been put on the back burner. In the meantime the price of oil continues to climb and the US and the world economy continue to be battered by a long, deep and painful recession. And of course, the worst is still to come. I have not even mentioned the other costs: costs in terms of military spending or in terms of erosion of civil liberties. Arbitrary detention, indefinite incarceration, trial without a jury or by a military tribunal have now become acceptable -- not just in Bongo Bongo Land but even in the bastions of Western Democracy. So if the taste of the pudding is in the eating who do you suppose is winning the war? I leave that up to you to deduce my dear Watson.

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BETWEEN YOURSELF AND ME

The war on terror has been overshadowed by Iraq and has been put on the back burner. In the meantime the price of oil continues to climb and the US and the world economy continue to be battered by a long, deep and painful recession. And of course, the worst is still to come. I have not even mentioned the other costs: costs in terms of military spending or in terms of erosion of civil liberties. Arbitrary detention, indefinite incarceration, trial without a jury or by a military tribunal have now become acceptable...

should really ask himself why.

Actually, America does have some interesting allies (apart from Blair, that is). I was horrified to find that the *Economist* (a London-based magazine) that I generally respect, adopting the Bush-Blair position completely and uncritically. So much so that it thought nothing of ascribing base commercial motives to the French, Russian and presumably, German opposition to the War, while clearly suggesting that the motives of Messrs. Bush and Blair are pure and noble. Let there be no mistake. This war will almost certainly dismember a

most of the sane, civilized world. It is hardly surprising that this would not cause Donald Rumsfeld from losing sleep. It is, however, distressing that the *Economist* should rally to Rumsfeld's side. It is of no consequence that the combined military intelligence of the West failed to unearth any credible proof of the existence of WMD in Iraq; it is immaterial that no terror link could be established between Iraq and Al Qaeda; it is irrelevant that the people of Iraq have been subjected to a harsh, relentless sanctions regime that has caused widespread malnutrition and starva-

Or is it the case that Mr. Bush has now achieved for Saddam what he would never have been able to do on his own -- unite the Iraqis in a common anti-American cause? In fact, I believe Mr. Bush has single-handedly promoted the cause of the riff-raffs and trouble-makers of the world and brought about an unprecedented upsurge of sympathy for all those who look upon the USA of today with anxiety, disbelief and fear. We are indeed entitled to ask of Mr. Bush: 'What the hell is going on, Sir?'

The real agenda

Bangladesh's eastern strategy is excellent!

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED writes from Princeton

EVER since Bangladesh's "East Pakistan" days, Bangladesh has always looked westward for friendship, first towards "West Pakistan," and after 1971, towards India. The "West Pakistanis" exploited us economically and politically for twenty-four years, and when the moment of truth arrived in 1971, instead of handing over political power to the democratically elected majority leader of Pakistan, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, they unleashed the savage Pakistani army on unarmed Bangladeshi civilians. After three million deaths, and innumerable rapes and mayhem perpetrated by Pak soldiers, Bangladesh gained its independence by expelling the Pakistanis, with India's assistance.

Although Bangladeshis will eternally remain grateful to the Indians in general, and the West Bengalis in particular for helping them gain independence in 1971, the subsequent experience with India has not been any better. At the very outset, the Indian soldiers stunned and dismayed Bangladeshis by taking away most of the military equipment left behind by the Pakistanis in 1971. Our father of the nation, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was a generous man. Mujib and Indira Gandhi agreed to swap some lands to make Bangladeshi enclaves within India and Indian territories around Bangladesh more contiguous. Without any hesitation, Mujib handed over Bangladeshi enclaves, Dahagram and Angarpota, to India, which the Indians annexed with wild celebrations. Thirty years later, India is yet to reciprocate and give Bangladesh equal

amount of adjoining Indian land, and clearly never will! Let us remember that India's land mass is 22-times larger than Bangladesh's. So, where is the generosity of the big brother? Everyone knows of the incredible harassment Bangladeshi citizens of Tin Bigha faces at the hands of Indian border guards every day. India continues to dump its goods into Bangladesh, while levying stiff tariffs on Bangladeshi exports to India. Last year, Indian government officials, from the Prime Minister and Home Minister Mr. L. K. Advani on down,

interest too? Let us consider our near neighbours to the East and South. Myanmar did not campaign for Bangladesh's inclusion on the US's list of terror-risk nations; neither did Thailand or China. None of these are Muslim-majority nations; the majority of their citizens are Buddhists. On the contrary, Thailand, China and Myanmar covet Bangladesh's friendship. We should heartily reciprocate.

Who can forget that displaying unprecedented friendship, last December the Prime Minister of

period of time. Closer links with these ethnically and geographically nearer cousins will help us learn things about indigenous development that we have been unable to learn by shamelessly aping the West all these years.

Our history is intertwined with that of Myanmar (Burma), especially its Arakan region adjacent to Bangladesh. In Bangladeshi folklore, children were lulled to sleep by invoking the fear of an attack by the extortionist "Borgi's": ("Chelae ghumalo, para juralo, Borgi elo deshae," translated, "the

overthrew Burma's government, declared martial law, and closed Burma to the rest of the world, the Burmese national football team was a formidable presence at Dhaka's Aga Khan Gold Cup. It will be excellent to renew our historic links with the brothers and sisters of Myanmar. Road links to Arakan will be very easy, if we both agree to build a bridge over the Naaf River. Road link with Yangon will be harder, because of the mountains, but not impossible, in this day and age of technology. Sealed off from the rest of the world since 1962,

Minister's visit to China last December, a road-link between Kunming, China, and Bangladesh through Myanmar has been proposed. Another excellent idea!

All experts agree that China is the world's next superpower. Unlike the Soviet Union, which collapsed under the strain of a superpower military backed by a third world economy, China is on course to becoming an economic superpower first. China has been a nuclear power since 1964, and has entered the space age. Historically, China has been a friend of the Muslim world. Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington noted in his seminal work, that in "The Clash of Civilizations," China has aligned itself with the Islamic world. China realizes the ever-increasing clout of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims, unlike the current superpower under President Bush, which is sacrificing the Muslim world for short term political gain, and for currying favour with the Jews, with disastrous consequences for America's future. Just look at the mile-age Israel has gotten out of coercing the world's only superpower, America, to be its "friend." China, on the other hand, courts Bangladesh's friendship. This is a friendship of the willing. If the already friendly China-Bangladesh relationship blossoms into something even warmer, when Bangladesh's friend China takes its place as the world's next superpower, it will do wonders for Bangladesh's economy and security. Least of all, Bangladesh will not then have to worry about being bullied by any of its neighbours.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

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accused Bangladesh of harbouring Al Qaeda terrorists, and actively campaigned for Bangladesh's inclusion on the US's list of terror-risk nations. They succeeded! Such hostility does not a good neighbour make. Studying the Indo-Bangladesh relationship of the last thirty-two years, one is forced to conclude that India does not want to be Bangladesh's friend, but wants to dominate it.

Nevertheless, Bangladesh should strive to maintain friendly relations with all its near neighbours, especially India, with whom it shares so much history and culture. One cannot blame India for looking after its own interests. That being the case, shouldn't Bangladesh be looking after its own

Thailand came to Chittagong to escort our Prime Minister to Thailand? Bangladeshis in large numbers visit Bangkok, the Thai capital, many for medical treatment. Chittagong and the beautiful Chiang Mai, Thailand's second largest city and only a stone's throw from Chittagong, has already been linked by air, thanks to Thailand's initiative. An excellent collaboration! Hopefully, road links with Thailand will follow soon. Anyone who has visited Thailand, Singapore, China, Malaysia and Indonesia knows that these near neighbours of Bangladesh have progressed by leaps and bounds over the last fifty years, compared to the lethargic development of the subcontinent during the same

boys are asleep, the neighbourhood is quiet, the Borgis are here.") I am not sure if the "Borgi" came exclusively from Myanmar, but the "Mawgs" certainly did. The "Mawgs" were terrorists and gave rise to the derivative Bangla expression, "Mawger Mulluk," (or, "rule by the terrorists.") On a more pleasant note, intermarriage between Bangladeshis and Burmese were common. One of the writer's distant uncles had married a Burmese woman. In the field of literature, a substantial portion of the plot of Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's "Rajlakshmi and Srikant" was set in Burma. We seem to have forgotten that Burma too was a part of British India. Up until 1962, when General Ne Win

Myanmar is beginning to open its doors to the world, Bangladesh and individual Bangladeshis stand to prosper enormously by participating in Myanmar's development.

In developing Bangladesh's infrastructure, Japan and China have been Bangladesh's best friends. From the construction of the bridges over the rivers Buriganga and Pakshi, and miles of roads and highways, to the construction of the congestion-relieving fly over in Dhaka's fashionable Gulshan, many of Bangladesh's most difficult construction projects have been financed and undertaken by China. More important, China wants Bangladesh's friendship. During our Prime

Relations with neighbours: Stresses and strains

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

ONE is amazed to hear from L. K. Advani, on 19 February that relations with Bangladesh would further deteriorate if the government of Bangladesh did not take action with regard to illegal entry of Bangladeshis into India as agreed upon. We are aware from the meeting between the Foreign Ministers of Bangladesh and India that Foreign Secretaries of the two countries would meet in Dhaka in April to address the issue of illegal immigrants. What kind of compulsion dictated India's Deputy PM to utter such warning in the parliament only four days after the visit of Bangladesh Foreign Minister to India? Apparently in response to Advani's warning the Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh at a weekly press briefing on 20 February said that Bangladesh was committed to follow the laid down procedure in dealing with illegal movements of people. Any deviation will be tantamount to deviation from the written understanding. It is not understood why India came out with such a statement when both the countries had agreed to address the problem.

Let us analyse the reasons that might have influenced the Indian leaders to start anti-Bangladesh campaign. As soon as new govern-

ment of four-party alliance headed by BNP took office in October 2001, the Prime Minister of India Atal Behari Vajpayee sent special envoy Brojesw Misra, who is a top bureaucrat in India, to congratulate Prime Minister of Bangladesh and express the support of the government of India towards working together for the improvement of bilateral relations. The special envoy also handed over a letter of invitation from India's Prime Minister to Bangladesh Prime Minister to visit India. It was followed by the visit of India's Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha to Dhaka in August 2002. India attached importance to this visit as this visit was preceded by the visit of Pakistan's President from 29-31 July. Indian Foreign Minister assured to revive institutional mechanism to resolve the outstanding issues. More than one year has gone by since Indian Prime Minister had extended invitation to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. Instead of paying a visit to India the Prime Minister of Bangladesh chose to pay a visit to China, which might have caused misgiving in the minds of policy makers of India.

Political analysts argue that the government of India extended hand of cooperation with the hope of receiving reciprocal cooperation but Bangladesh government showed disregard to the gesture

support by Indian Prime Minister. Signing of umbrella defence cooperation agreement with China also might have caused suspicion in the minds of policy makers of India.

The expectation of Indian leadership was naturally high as the 4-party alliance enjoy support of two thirds majority in the Parliament, which means the government in power could muster necessary

support in favour of a decision with regard to transshipment to north-eastern parts of India through Bangladesh territory, apart from sale of gas to India. Possibly BJP led coalition in India counted more on BNP-led coalition government as BNP has not yet been stigmatized as pro-India in the politics of Bangladesh.

Another school of thought suggests that two recent developments, which relate to construction of Asian Highway and Pakistan's bid to re-entry into Com-

wealth, might have caused misgiving in understanding Bangladesh's position vis-a-vis India. During Awami League government of Sheikh Hasina it was agreed that Asian Highway could be linked through Tamabil-Jafflong border, but present government decided to link Asian Highway through Cox's Bazar-Teknaf and Myanmar. That means India would naturally be deprived of the benefit she was

an anti-Bangladesh campaign. India's Deputy Prime Minister L. K. Advani, Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha, Defence Minister Fernandez and even Prime Minister Atal Behari himself, joined the orchestrated campaign against Bangladesh. Indian politicians blamed Bangladesh for extending support to insurgents from North-eastern part apart from hobnobbing with Pakistan's ISI. On top of

these allegations India's Deputy Prime Minister started harping on alleged illegal immigrants from Bangladesh issue. These show signs of stresses and strains in the relations between Bangladesh and India. Recent push-ins of alleged illegal Bangladeshis by India has caused unnecessary tension.

This being the position between two neighbouring countries, one has to analyze the internal situation in India to find out further reasons for such anti-Bangladesh stance.

BJP has been facing serious setbacks in recent elections in the states including that of Jammu & Kashmir. On the issue of massacres of Muslims by state sponsored terrorists in Gujarat, BJP government in Gujarat was accused of fomenting communal hatred. According to Indian analysts, BJP did not succeed in containing terrorism nor it succeeded in taming Hindu extremist organiza-

tion. Apart from these, BJP is having insurmountable problems in nominating its next leader, who will be acceptable to all factions within the BJP. Indian leaders might have thought it more appropriate to divert attention of the people from the crux of the problem.

Some analysts would have us to believe that mass murder of Muslims in Gujarat was the strategy for BJP for winning elections. What-

ever might be the reasons including intimidation of Muslim voters, Narendra Modi won the elections on BJP ticket. This strategy of winning elections will go down in the history of India as a black chapter. In a commentary in the *Times of India* of 8 December 2002 Swami Nathan Ayer said that "if this establishes communal killing as the basis for election success, it could become official BJP strategy in state after state, ripping India apart." In this connection, I would like to mention that publicity chief of S S Kapalang faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland said on 15 February that Nagas would not tolerate any political party trying to use religious issue during electioneering in Nagaland. This warning is apparently directed against BNP government, which became victorious in Gujarat state riding a Hindutva wave.

Some commentators attributed India's "illegal immigrants" rhetoric to another electioneering strategy of BJP. Whatever might be the internal compulsion in the politics it should not have influenced foreign relations. This has become a bad precedent anyway.

After 11 September episodes in America, terrorism has become overriding factor in the conduct of foreign relations. India also has been playing this terrorism card.

This has been reflected in India's campaign against Pakistan about cross-border terrorism in Jammu-Kashmir. The visit of General Musharraf to Bangladesh was not well received in New Delhi. India's campaign maligning Bangladesh with the ISI of Pakistan is the reflection of the Indian displeasure.

The push-in bids and unnecessary propaganda campaign would vitiate the relations between the two countries which the two close-door neighbours could hardly afford.

Being big neighbour Indian leaders should eschew narrow interests and show magnanimity towards its small neighbours for the interest of the people of this region. Bangladesh's relations with its neighbours depend on mutual benefit and interest and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. Distrust and suspicion that exist apparently between Bangladesh and India will not lead to anywhere if the anti-Bangladesh campaign continued. Wisdom should prevail on the Indian leaders to develop good neighbourly relations with their small neighbouring countries.

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