LATE S. M. ALI

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#### A vital project in a bind

Government should renegotiate with the WB

major project, financed by the World Bank, for development of the transport infrastructure in the city, has almost run aground -- thanks to lack of coordination and understanding between the DCC and the RHD, the two principal agencies involved in the pro-

The World Bank has withdrawn nearly 50 per cent of the Tk 1300 crore allocation for the project -- a clear sign of the donor institution being disillusioned with the progress made in its implementation. The fund cuts have led to dropping of two major components of the plan -- construction of a flyover at Jatrabari and a transport-testing laboratory, the first one having to do with reduction of traffic congestion and the second with pollution control.

The DCC and the RHD are now blaming each other for the World Bank decision to withdraw funds. Obviously, they are trying to hide behind their failures by passing the buck against each other. The WB had made it clear to the DCC that it would have to appoint private operators for the three upcoming inter-district bus terminals. But the DCC says that it could not appoint private operators as there was no bidder for operating the terminals which are yet to be in place. This does not, however, sound very convincing. We think construction of the terminals and selection of private sector operators could go hand-in-hand without one being conditional upon the other.

We are not interested in the long-drawn verbal duel between the DCC and the RHD, nor are we prepared to believe that it is too late to salvage the project. If the DCC has failed to convince the WB that it was not possible to appoint private operators before the terminals were actually constructed, then it can only blame itself for the failure to advance on it. The DCC and the RHD must also acknowledge the fact that by trading accusations they are sending confusing signals to the donor agency.

All is not lost; we urge the government to renegotiate the issue with the WB and get the withdrawn funds released for early completion of the project. Since the WB agreed to finance the project in view of its importance in the first place, we believe it would be responsive to good reasoning. It hardly needs saying that the project is crucially important for a city like Dhaka where the transport sector is in a total disarray. The structural improvements that the project seeks to bring about could go a long way in bringing back discipline to the transport sector. It is unfortunate that the project has lost some of its steam due to mishandling. The government should go for the corrective measures without wasting any more time to bring the project back on rails.

#### Fire at slums

Let's take a deeper look and do something

E are deeply saddened by the gruesome death of six members in a family due to fire that broke out in a Chittagong slum day before yesterday. Shanty dwellings made of inflammable materials are extremely vulnerable to fire accidents. In fact this is the season for these -- thanks to hot lightened wind moving up with heavier winds flowing into the empty spaces to spread the fire-balls. Sadly those trapped in the fire like Chan Mia's family lose their lives; others perhaps lose their valuable possessions accumulated over many years by

Demands to compensate the victims of such calamity have rarely been entertained nor any measures taken to pre-empt such fires by making people aware of the hazards of callous living and the dos and don'ts of living in shags. It would be very difficult to find even a single example of necessary actions taken by the concerned authorities to prevent such accidents. As always, even in this case the fire fighters found it extremely difficult to reach the spot because of narrow lanes. In addition, the slums are usually built in a disorganised manner, mostly on land parcels occupied illegally by hoodlums and they have unauthorised and dangerously exposed electric connections. The low income groups have no proper habitat; they need to be given some by the state in a housing zone earmarked for them.

The fire service never seems to be able to determine the real reason for the fire. A very commonly mentioned cause for fire has been electric short-circuit. At other times, blame is put on the hand-made ovens. But have the authorities ever tried to ascertain the actual reasons for the disasters so as to avert them in the future? We never seen any follow-up measures taken by the department concerned. We merely sympathise with those who lose lives and all their belongings, however little they are, and carry on with our normal day-to-day work. It is time for all of us to realise that life is too precious to let it end in such a

### In serious conversation



K.A.S. MURSHID

ROM time to time we find ourselves engaged in serious conversation with e.g. a visiting dignitary who is trying to make sense of the confusion he finds himself confronted with, during a brief visit to the country. For the sake of such persons and indeed of anyone else who may be interested, I reproduce this imaginary conversation that I have had with one such visitor

Q. So tell me about the situation with regard to **poverty**? Is it true that it is continuing to worsen and that the rich-poor divide has wid-

A. Well, it is true and not true. In proportionate terms, there has been a decline in poverty -- in other words, there has been a decline of one percent per year in poverty rates over the last decade. The number of poor people, however, has continued to increase -- largely because of population growth. As far as inequality is concerned, the rich-poor divide has indeed widened quite sharply.

Q. What about the impact of **globalisation** and WTO -- how do you guys assess their impact?

A. Bangladesh has liberalised its economy significantly. For exam-ple, its trading regime is operating well within WTO rules and norms. However, the pace of liberalisation has slackened in recent years, perhaps because of a perception that other countries in the region are responding even more slowly. There is some concern especially with regard to India which has been slow to open up its economy to imports from Bangladesh, using

both tariff and non-tariff barriers.

Perhaps we are excessively focused

Q. What is the state of reforms, especially **macro reforms** in the country?

A. Actually we have had some successes with macro reforms. reforms, banking reforms and privatisation of public enterprises. even the Finance Minister has come out strongly (and publicly) in their favour. One does get this strange feeling when one hears a powerful government luminary complaining about the state of the NCBs, for example. Hmm -- I thought WE are the ones who ought to be doing the complaining! Wonder who we should appeal to

why has this issue divided the country so much?

right away, if possible. And it is this company that has been exerting all the influence that it can muster. In my humble opinion, limited exports per se will neither make us rich nor will it make us poor. The direct impact on energy security is unlikely to be adverse while the indirect effect (via greater investments in exploration and develop-

The main problem however, relates mainly to trust or should one say, mistrust? Ordinary people

security

ment) is likely to enhance energy

sometime with regard to reserves and domestic demand

Q. You have talked about the state of governance -- how do you think governance and accountability can be improved?

A. Ultimately the problem is embedded in our particular brand of politics. In my honest opinion (and this is off the record), the best solution would be to persuade the two ladies to resign, or at least to take a back seat. Since that is unlikely to happen we need to focus attention on crucial institutions like the parliament, the judiciary, the police and generally the legal framework. The parliament is perhaps the most important and one must begin from the premise that parliamentary committees are critical and must be allowed to operate and that the opposition must be allowed to talk. The onus of improving the climate of governance and accountability lies squarely with the ruling party and the parliament -- and that is precisely where reforms -- sorry that's the wrong word a new commitment must be forthcoming. Once again, one doesn't see that happening. Do you suppose you could raise this with important people like President Bush for example, or Kofi Annan? Perhaps we can even get a UN resolution that asks Bangladesh to ensure that opposition MPs are allowed to speak on the floor of the parliament? A deadline would also need to be set -- perhaps in terms of days rather than

#### the easy ones -- such as rationalis-

Rather what one can say is that we have been successful in tackling ation of the structure of tariffs, controlling monetary expansion and improving revenue generation and collection. We have had rather little luck with financial sector

Q. Tell us about gas exports --

## BETWEEN YOURSELF AND ME

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on the Indian position which inevitably has meant inadequate recognition of the global situation. While generally South Asia (including Bangladesh) remains relatively closed with regard to the rest of the world, other regions of the world, especially Southeast and East Asia have become far better integrated. We should recognise that after 2004 we will come into direct competition with many countries in this region, and therefore must act accordingly. In other words we cannot afford to tie our responses to global challenges on the basis of what India can or cannot do, does or does not do -- we have to look further afield for inspiration!

In other words, the big challenges have remained inadequately

O. Why? Isn't the government interested in carrying out these reforms?

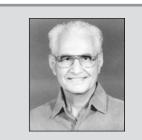
A. The government is not a uniform, homogeneous entity there are various push and pull factors in operation. In the case of these particular reforms the pull appears to be greater than the push. Another way of saying this is that the real courage and political will required to carry these through remain elusive. Obviously there are strong and well entrenched forces that have so far been able to thwart these reforms despite the fact that

A. Let us remind ourselves that BOTH the parties entered into exploration and development contracts only too willingly while in power. Did they NOT expect to strike gas? One should also remember that the oil companies signed contracts that specifically forbid pipeline exports -- again these were signed only too willingly. There clearly was duplicity involved, perhaps even a broad 'understanding' that eventually, if need be, exports would be allowed -- but this is just speculation. The fact of the matter is that we signed too many contracts and these do not allow for pipeline exports. It would appear that only one IOC is really keen on exporting -- and

are concerned that any agreement to export may in fact result in inequitable deals that will fail to safeguard the interests of the country. (Just as there is a widespread belief that the contracts signed earlier with IOCs were inequitable). There is also acute concern that whatever revenues are generated will be squandered or worse -- given the poor state of governance and accountability in the country. Therefore, according to this point of view, it may well be best for us to keep our gas well underground -- at least till governance improves substantially. This argument is actually much more persuasive than the useless and static debate that has raged for

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### An unresolved conundrum



M B NAQVI writes from Karachi

HE newly elected National Assembly has tied itself into knots over the Legal Framework Order, made by the COAS-President. He intended it to be an integral part of the Constitution which then was not in force. But the question is: can a Constitution be alive, if it is not in force? When, for the LFO was enforced by Gen. Pervez Musharraf, he was ruling the country in contravention of the Constitution and by virtue of the Pakistan Army's coup d'etat on Oct 12, 1999.

The LFO is the will of the military Commander who had seized power from a lawful government. The rest of the country, being unarmed and under virtual occupation, had no choice in the matter. Gen. Musharraf said he is amending a non-existent Constitution -- it existed as a text only -- or so the people concluded. When Musharraf said he is restoring democracy under LFO, the people like a starving man ate what was available -- a crow: the LFO. Everyone did what was required by the LFO because there was nothing else to do.

But now that a Parliament has come into being, no matter how or under what rules, many of its members want to be free of the shackles that Gen. Musharraf has devised in the shape of LFO. They dislike and reject what the LFO stands for, regarding it an authorised distortion in the Constitution's text -- which was all that existed at the time. Thus amended text is not the Constitution because the Parliament has not made it in the given manner. The opponents of King's party want the Constitution to be what it was on Oct 11,

1999. Hence the rumpus in the Lower House and the frightened cries from the Treasury benches.

What is LFO and its effect? It is nothing new. It is but another version of Gen. Zia's Eighth Amendment. It is like the Interim Constitution of CMLA-President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The LFO is meant to do what Gen. Yahya Khan's LFO was designed for. Indeed, this 2002 LFO is designed to do what 1962 Constitution did for the self-promoted Field Marshal. It sanctifies the military's coup d'etat, enables the military

lessly hear of what is going on in Islamabad and meekly accept the fait accompli. Bureaucracy, the rest of the Army and superior Judiciary offer no resistance and start on a course to ingratiate themselves with the ruling general with alac-rity. Press, before 1990s, used to lead the pack with paeans of praise. True, a few politicians never fell into the category of time servers. But their voices in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s remained ineffectual -partly because people stopped being motivated enough to support the opposition's calls after realising that all their efforts in

possible in the current international climate of opinion. Besides, in this age of Info-highway and multiple TV channels, it is pointless to muzzle the press too tightly when information is bound to filter through from foreign channels. Moreover, a succession of dictators now make their rear -- their sole constituency -- unsafe as others become impatient for their turn. Anyway, the people have seen this charade of a supposedly goodintentioned General bursting in on a white charger, sweeping away the Constitution and supposedly corrupt civilian politicians and

Since Pakistan belongs neither to Pakistan Army nor to politicians, let us take note of what the owners of the state, the people, think, What are their rights? How well have they been served by the military dictators in the past? Do they want the military to go on ruling? Are they behind Gen. Musharraf who wears so many hats: COAS, an effective Cin-C of all the armed forces, President of the National Security Council and the President of Pakistan -and in this order. Do the people support him and his LFO?

This last is the key question. It

and done, still possess the traits and attitudes underlying what many scholars have called Muslim Separatism in Indian history, Bulk of the Muslims of the Subcontinent are low caste converts from Hinduism, living in a sea of Hindudom. Hence their fierce clutching at their Islamic identity -- for fear of sinking back into the assimilative Hinduism where their place will be at the bottom of the heap. It also explains their instinctive acceptance of authoritarian rule -- originally of Muslim Kings who were expected to save them and who also met their psychological need to identify with the central author-

It is such mental baggage that seems to have shaped the history of Pakistani politics. At the conscious plane, the people are modern and democratic. At the subconscious level, they attach themselves to the authoritarian ruler and their demonstrative insistence on their Islamic character has helped religious parties to become strong. People are being pulled in these two opposite directions. Autocratic rulers naturally encourage and patronise the old and by now a misplaced emphasis on Islamic identity. In a country 96 or 97 per cent Muslim, being a Muslim is no big deal or distinction. The national agenda should now be written with reference to the chal-

lenges the people of this country are required to meet. A specific question is now relevant: would a basically militarydominated but democracyseeming civilian set up satisfy the urges of the people along with ministering effectively to their needs, including enabling them to enjoy all the human rights? The LFOed democracy would be just such a regime. Only the military will be the gainer and the people will be the losers. Would the politicians clearly explain to the people who gains what and who loses? Shouldn't the military be now forced to stay in its barracks? The Generals have made enough of a mess. More of the same militarydominated rule would darken the

# PLAIN WORDS

Most Pakistanis, all said and done, still possess the traits and attitudes underlying what many scholars have called Muslim Separatism in Indian history. ..It is such mental baggage that seems to have shaped the history of Pakistani politics. At the conscious plane, the people are modern and democratic. At the subconscious level, they attach themselves to the authoritarian ruler and their demonstrative insistence on their Islamic character has helped religious parties to become strong.

Commander to go on ruling indefinitely --- at one remove.

Looked at closely, it enables the Army to remain the hegemon over the rest of the country. It does so by establishing a bogus democracy. A bogus democracy? True, such a military-bestowed democracy such as were the cases in 1960s or 1980s -- has all the institutions of Parliament, Supreme Court and the rest of the paraphernalia of a democracy. But the President is given a veto power. It is ensured through his right to dismiss the Parliament and make laws by decree. Once the judges, bureaucrats and a certain type of politicians -- who knows that serving a General in power is the way to butter his toast -- realise who is the real authority and power in the land, they begin to serve him. This has repeatedly happened and it

had begun even before 1958. But after 1958 it became a regular drill; a C-in-C seizes power from a constitutional government, begins ruling by decree under his personal authority, people helpdictators

One does not intend to belittle the people's role in Pakistan's short history. They have denied legitimacy to all military dictators, each one of whom remained on the defensive to the last. People's preference is always self-rule (democracy) and they have never bought the political nonsense that the dictators have propagated. But, one does find them somewhat apathetic and a little cynical today. Obviously, growing unemployment and various uncertainties amid high prices explain much of the apathy. But their political preferences -- human freedoms. democracy and accountability of the rulers -- remain unchanged. They still respect and love the politicians that seem upright and devoted to democracy.

Things do seem to have become difficult for the military dictator. For one thing, the press is freer today than ever. It is not easy to take away this freedom -- hardly

1969 and in 1977 against military tries to begin again -- and again. Today's self-serving argument

of King's men and women is valid enough that all the NA, Senate and PAs members have participated in elections under the LFO. In other words, under orders of Gen. Musharraf. Indeed, the entire civilian structure of state was, and is, subordinate to the will of the President. How can you crib now? What is the point of all the hullabaloo that the opposition MNAs have raised in the Lower House? So long as the President controls the state and all its agencies, the situation cannot change. King's men are mortally afraid that if the NA becomes too unruly or rebellious the President can send the NA and other elected bodies packing. He can revert to pre-LFO days -- in theory. All their investment and labours will go down the drain -before they have recovered their investments.

It is for the opposition parties to give the answers. One's interest is not centred so much on the opposition parties as on the people.

when civilian bureaucrats became authoritarian rulers. The people by their powerlessness, allowed the power to pass on successively to Ghulam Mohammad, Iskandar Mirza and finally to Ayub Khan (after which it has staved with whoever became the Army C-in-C). The ease with which the authoritarians seized and kept power for all these four decades and more needs an explanation. How could it happen? More so, as one has noted a while ago that people's conscious preference is still selfdetermination and full democratic rights. But a people who have lived under tinpot dictators for so long, without anything too serious happening to the dictators, would have to have some inherited traits that favour authoritarianism.

actually dates back to early 1950s

The true reason seems to be that living in the age they do, they are genuine democrats and have proved that by their earlier conduct until about 1970s. After that, with the rise of religious parties, all atavistic tendencies have come to the fore. Most Pakistanis, all said

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future of Pakistan.

# WMD: The forgotten chapters

M. SHAFIULLAH

APAN, the economic giant grinds to a halt for a minute in silence on 6 August every year. In that space in time men and machine stop in remembrance to those millions who were roasted alive instantaneously and the immediate survivors in their thousands slowly reduced to ashes through radium-contamination in the most degrading condition ever known to mankind. On that day in 1945 -- which by all reckoning was the darkest day of the 20th century -- innocent Japanese men, women and children fell victim to the nuclear Holocaust in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, two densely populated cities in Japan. At the fag end of the Second World War fatigued and exhausted Japan became the first victim of the Weapons of Mass Destruction. To day's Crusader to destroy Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq had the unique distinction of using the very weapon against unarmed civilians first time and retaines the solo title to-date.

Throughout the Cold War era this very champion of human rights and 'defender of life, liberty and freedom' on this planet argued that the nuclear weapons had brought peace through nuclear deterrence and, therefore, justified stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction.

The Declaration of Independ-

ence of that great nation says, "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal" but in reality when it came to the crunch on whom to drop the Atom Bomb whether on Germany who invaded one European country after another or on Italy and Japan who joined subsequently the Axis Power, axe fell on the Japanese. America is the land of European settlers. They were drawn from almost every corner of Europe. To Americans, Europe is the Fatherland. The waters of Atlantic has been the eternal bond for both the parents and the offsprings. The deadly fall-out of nuclear bomb had it been dropped on either Germany or Italy would have engulfed much of Europe. Therefore perhaps Italy and Germany were discriminated against Japan. The Whites were spared. American hands were kept clean of patricide The weapon of mass destruction was tested on the Yellow Race with all fire and fury of the Seven Hells.

Has history drawn final curtain on the First Chapter of Genocide written in human skeleton of innocent souls? No. From archive in the Pacific shore soulful cries render the air heavy in the Atlantic on 6 August every year reminding of the crime committed against humanity in an unimaginable

In the classic theory of Divine Justice it was ordained that crime

visits the criminal at a time of its choosing.. Has it already paid such visits? It's a matter of deep understanding and introspection. Will eliminating suspected weapons of mass destruction from dictator Saddam and continued stockpiling of much more lethal weapons in the bloody hands of Sharon Nethenyaho in the Arab heartland be able to stop the 'visit of the crime'? Perhaps it has some answer in the State of the Union Address of

What was the American experience of nuclear inspection in Israel in the first place? It is now almost a forgotten chapter that Washington carried out abortive inspections of Israeli nuclear installations for ten vears from 1961 to 1969. Israel most grudgingly agreed to US inspection international intrusion into its clandestine operation. Under Atom for Peace Programme President Eisenhower provided technology for a small reactor other nationality. After stalling for months the first

inspection was allowed on 18 May 1961 under tight Israeli control for a day only. At the insistence of Kennedy another Israeli-guided inspection was allowed after 16 months but only for 40 minutes. Not satisfied Secretary of State Dean Rusk conveyed to Israelis that President Kennedy wanted semi-annual unhindered access of

was cautious enough to settle down for one daylong inspection under Israeli control. When Nixon came to power Henry Kissinger, a first-generation American Jew was appointed his Assistant National Security Adviser in the White House. Israel became a full-

blooded non-declared nuclear power. US inspection was abandoned in 1969. Will IAEA dare to burn its finger by touching the most sensitive US organ in the

White House watchers say the new standard is "American bil standard". To meet the new American standard UN has been merged with the multilateral desk in the State Department, turning 10 Downing Street into European Branch office with Blair on deputation paid by British commoners. UN Secretary-General has been assigned to organise humanitarian assistance to 'oil-war' survivors.

We're strongly supporting the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA] in its mission to track and control nuclear materials around the world. We're working with other governments to secure nuclear materials in the former Soviet Union, and to strengthen global treaties banning the production and shipment of missile technologies and weapons of mass destruction." Will IAEA be allowed to fulfil its mission to track and control nuclear and other weapons

of mass destruction in Israel?

30 January. Therein it was stated,"

military nuclear science. In 1958 U-2 spy plane, contrary to Eisenhower's expectation reported construction of nuclear reactor at Dimona deep in the Negev desert thousand of KM away from Tel Aviv. Eisenhower was succeeded by Kennedy who was skeptical of the Israeli intention and asked for inspection of the site. With impeccable terrorist record, David Ben-Gurion was then Prime Minister who accepted inspection only by scientists of US Atomic Commission and debarred Soviet or any

outside Tel Aviv to encourage non-

US scientists to Negev reactors but defiant Ben-Gurion offered one supervised inspection per year. His successor Levi Eshkol agreed to Washington's term but by that time Israel installed false control-room panels and walled passages leading to Dimona's critical installation. It was a bluff that the American inspectors smoothly swallowed. Next year in 1962 Kennedy was assassinated leaving the world to intelligent guess who masterminded the gruesome murder in broad daylight?

Next President Lyndon Johnson

Middle East?

The International Herald Tribune report on 3 February says, Israel is poised to become India's largest arm supplier, and India desperately wants Washington's approval to buy the US-Israelibuilt Arrow missiles defensive system under its military partnership with Israel. Both India and Israel are secular democracies under terrorist attack from Islamic militants. Simon Peres calls India Israel's best friend in the region." If the Herald Tribune finding is accurate, Israeli missile system would

despite what was stated in the State of the Union Address' to strengthen treaties banning shipment of missile technologies. Traffic sign indicates road to Washington is through Tel Aviv. Secretary of State Collin Powell

make smooth sail to Indian arsenal

put UN on notice on 5 February. Addressing the Security Council he said, "Iraq had already been found guilty of material breach of its obligations stretching back over .6 previous resolutions and 12 years. Iraq has now placed itself in danger of the serious consequences called for in UN Resolutions 1441. And this body [UN] places itself in danger of irrelevance if it allows Iraq to continue to defy its will without responding effectively and immediately." UK and US pressed sixteen plus resolution number 1441 against Iraq during twelve years, only one resolution number 1405 was adopted with abstention of US against Israel in May 2002 to find out the extent of Israeli massacre of Ienin Palestinian refugee camp. That too was disdainfully defied by Israel with impunity of US. No other resolution against Israel for wanton violation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory saw the light of the day due to Anglo-US opposition.

Bush-Blair are in war-hysteria to implement Resolution 1441 against Iraq not only to destroy suspected weapons of mass destruction but also to disarm while keeping the nuclear and wide range of weapons of mass destruction in the Israeli arsenal. US opposed India and Pakistan going nuclear, as they are adversary neighbours, brought them under economic sanction for flouting her will. Arabs and Israelis are at each other's throat. Under benign US eves Israel is the only nuclear power in the region, Arabs are It was said of American double-

standard until recently but now Washington corrected itself. Under Bush, America returned to one standard. White House watchers say the new standard is "American oil standard ". To meet the new American standard UN has been merged with the multilateral desk in the State Department turning 10 Downing Street into European Branch office with Blair on deputation paid by British commoners. UN Secretary-General has been assigned to organise humanitarian assistance to 'oil-war' survivors. Washington appears to determine weapons of mass destruction with massive killings to bring down the size of world population to maintain balance of nature as well as to remove any one standing in its way to oil fields

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