

## New allowances for lawmakers

*Some pertinent questions*

THE Jatiya Sangsad has passed a bill raising the perks and allowances of lawmakers by 100 to 600 per cent. Our position is, let them get all the benefits they deserve, and none should grudge it. But the question is: will the people get the value for their money, given some of their track-records?

It is indeed difficult to explain why lack of quorum should have been obstructing the proceedings of the House quite often when, ironically, the presence of only 60 members is needed out of 300 to form a quorum. Not long ago, statistics on the huge financial losses incurred by the government owing to the quorum crisis were carried by the press.

The MPs are given the facility of buying duty-free cars. But didn't some of them sell off such cars in the past and, in some cases, even the permits for import? Then a section of them have pushed the telephone bill default culture on to a scandalous level. By doing so, they surely did not set examples worth emulating.

Then comes the question of how committed many of the MPs are to the constituencies they represent. Have they given proof of the representational quality that should be an essential trait of an elected public office?

So, what we believe is that increased perks should be tagged to a performance expectations chart. Unless the distribution of benefits is performance-oriented the argument of this being need-based cannot hold good.

We would like to raise two relevant points about the performance, role and leadership expected of the lawmakers. First, as public representatives they should be guided by their conscience, not by party dictates alone. Second, Opposition MPs are getting a kind of step-motherly treatment in matters relating to allotment or similar benefits. That amounts to punishing the whole constituency that voted for a particular candidate. The idea of not giving the opposition MPs their due is extended a bit too far when they are not allowed into various local bodies and committees, thus depriving them of performing to the best of their potential.

The lawmakers assess, evaluate and criticise the performance of government functionaries as a matter of right in their capacity as public representatives. But people do not expect them to be totally oblivious of their own performance.

## Health alert

*Roll up the sleeves*

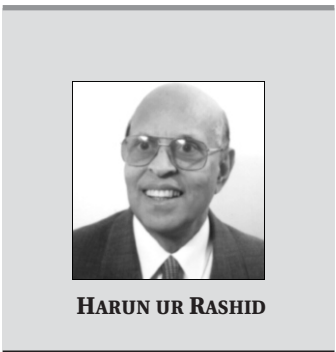
FOUR persons have reportedly died of diarrhoea in flood-affected parts of the country. As water rises in some districts and recedes in other areas, the danger of waterborne diseases breaking out stares us in the face. The most worrisome side to it is the utter vulnerability of children. Three of the four who died are children. So, it is clear where our focal-point of attention should lie.

The government has already begun to send relief materials to some of the affected areas. One would expect that sufficient quantities of medicines, water purifying tablets, ORS sachets and vaccines are on their way to the flood-hit areas, if these have not already reached there. Health risks should be the primary concern for the relief operations. Reports indicate that diarrhoea has already afflicted people in the northern districts, many of whom have been hospitalised.

Floods not only create water-logging but also exacerbate the pollution around us. Even people on the peripheries of the flooded area remain vulnerable to water- and air-borne diseases. So, a comprehensive preparedness and precautionary umbrella should be spread over the country.

The predictions of widespread and long-lasting flooding can already be heard. The heavy rains since June have put the rivers in a spate but so long as the Padma, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna do not swell simultaneously there cannot be any catastrophic flood. In 1998, we had a dreadful flood. Five years on, we simply hope that amnesia has not developed amongst us to be disoriented from what it took then to tackle its aftermath. Let's devise a contingency plan, if we don't have one as yet, and start operationalising it without any loss of time.

# Has Vajpayee's visit opened a new chapter in Indo-China relations?



HARUN UR RASHID

THE five-day visit of India's Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to China from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> June has been hailed in many quarters as the beginning of a "new chapter" of their relations. India's Defence Minister Fernandes called the visit "the let's-be-friends" trip to China. It seems that it is too premature to say the visit has heralded a breakthrough in their bilateral relations because there are many major issues that will continue to play a "disagreeable" role in their relations.

It is true that Vajpayee was the first Indian Prime Minister on Chinese soil in 10 years. During the visit nine agreements were signed in areas of science, technology, commerce and education. Both countries pledged to ease visa rules and decided to set up joint infrastructure development projects, focusing on water and energy areas. China allowed border trade with Sikkim while India accepted Tibet as part of China. These steps are welcome to ease tension between the two giant nations.

### Complex nature of relations

China-India relationships are complex. Since both are large nations with enormous natural and human resources, they have the capability to influence, in many ways, events in Asia. On some issues both nations converge and on others they differ. At an early stage both countries wanted to live in peaceful co-existence and as friends.

It may be recalled that in the 50s India's first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had dreamt of Sino-Indian friendship on the basis of "five principles" of co-existence between the two countries in the "Panchasheel Treaty" of 1954 and the slogan "Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai"

was afloat. At the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung (Indonesia) in 1955 it was at the sole initiative of Prime Minister Nehru, China's Prime Minister Zou-En-lai participated in the conference at a time when the US did not recognise Communist China.

But reality soon dawned on them in 1959 when the Tibetan leader the Dalai Lama (now 67 years of age) was given political asylum in India with his 15,000 followers. Thereafter in the autumn of 1962 a disastrous border

been addressed.

First, although India somehow accepted Tibet as a part of China, China did not accept Indian sovereignty over former Buddhist Kingdom of Sikkim annexed by India in 1975 but only allowed border trade between Sikkim and China. The visit has not been able to resolve territorial disputes that have soured relations for the past 40 years.

India claims 38,000 square kilometers on the western end of

Second, China stays angry about India's harbouring the god-king 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama (real name Tenzin Gyatso) and his Tibetan government-in-exile at Dharmasala in the Himalayan peaks in northern India. The recognition of Tibet as a part of China has not changed the status of the Dalai Lama and his government-in-exile.

The Dalai Lama has been a political thorn to China because he has campaigned indefatigably for the rights of the Tibetan people. In the past the Dalai Lama's meeting

Third, in the eyes of India, no other Asian country has ever backed and armed another Asian country as China backed and armed Pakistan over the last thirty years in such a consistent manner. India is annoyed about China's close relationship with Pakistan and in particular their military cooperation. India suspects that China exported missile technology to Pakistan. Wedged between nuclear China and Pakistan, India sees its strategic interests endangered. In the words of an Indian

gic ambitions on the Indian Ocean. On the whole China appears to increase its ability to influence and even to intervene events in the Indian Ocean (as India deployed its carrier *Vikrant* into the Bay of Bengal during the 1971 war against Pakistan) and many observers believe that India sees China as the "mother" of all its security concerns from the Bay of Bengal to the Persian Gulf.

Finally, although both China and India have been alarmed by the US military action, first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq, it appears that China is concerned by the growing military cooperation between India and the US. The idea that India could act as a "friendly host" for the US in a future Asian crisis, say between China and Taiwan, does not provide comfort to China. Furthermore China at its heart seems to be aware that India is being militarily propped up as a counterweight to China in the Asia-Pacific region.

### Conclusion

During the visit both China and India tread warily in improving economic relations but their political rivalry remains. Partnership is achievable when both share same goals and values and that stage does not appear to come in their relationship. However there is a realisation that seeking to isolate either of them is unworkable and as a result there seems to be compulsion on both sides to work out a relationship that is mutually beneficial.

Many political observers believe that the visit has been rich in symbolism but lacking in substance. Still, in the world of international diplomacy, it will probably be considered a success. As Winston Churchill once said "To jaw-jaw is always better than to war-war". What is necessary is a good working relationship between the two giants that do not pretend there are no differences and seek co-operation where possible. A big falling out between Beijing and New Delhi could be catastrophic for the region's security and economy and for smaller countries in South Asia. It is in that context that the visit becomes significant.

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## BOTTOM LINE

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war broke out with China that culminated in a humiliating military defeat for India. The defeat squarely fell on the shoulders of Nehru and his Defence Minister V.K. Krishna Menon. The consequences were so devastating for Nehru that he did not live long and died in May 1964.

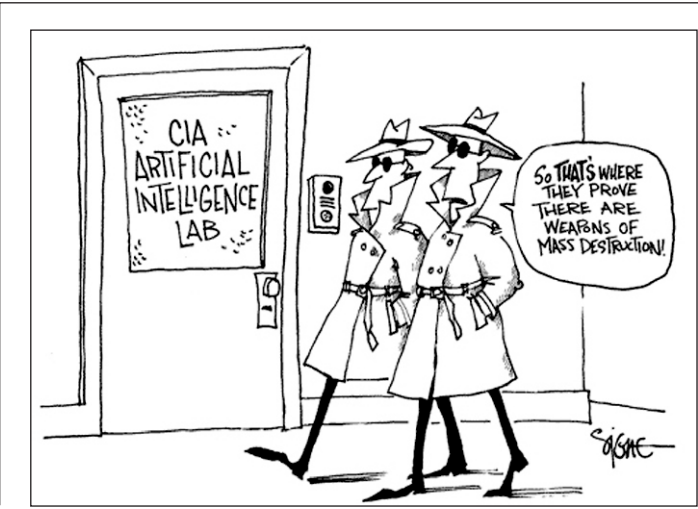
During the current visit, both Prime Ministers of China and India said all "the right words" people want to hear on furthering their bilateral relations. Both countries face economic challenges from the US, Europe and Japan that drive the global economy. Like termites the forces of globalisation may gnaw away their influence in world economy unless China and India through their co-operative efforts can face up to the challenge. India and China can learn from each other in promoting new joint ventures and bilateral trade. However, economic relations between countries only thrive when political relations are stable and mutually trustful. For instance Pakistan-India strained relations have impeded growth of their economic relations.

### Issues that divide

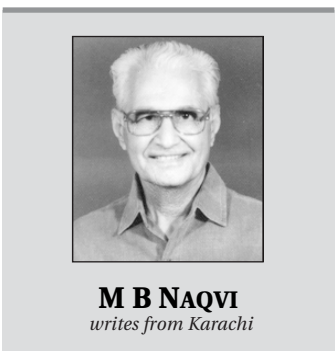
Each nation has developed its own national and security interests that include rivalry in domination of Asian region. The success of the Vajpayee visit may be assessed in terms of the following core political and strategic issues that divide the nations and during the visit, it appears, that none of them has

the Tibetan plateau that is now held by China and says that Pakistan has illegally ceded 5,180 square kilometers of the part of Kashmir it controls to China. On the other hand Chinese claim 90,000 square kilometers in the eastern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh still marked as an independent country on Chinese maps. In an interview with Indian journalist, the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao reportedly said the border question was a "historical burden on our two countries left over by the colonialists" and China wanted a "fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution".

with India's Prime Minister was seen as "interference in China's internal affairs". Furthermore the Tibetan Youth Congress, the largest dissident faction within the 130,000 Tibetan exile community living in India advocates a violent uprising in Tibet, if necessary. They oppose any move to renounce Tibetan sovereignty or to forego guarantees of autonomy. The Dalai Lama has reportedly angered China when he said in 1998 that "If I die in exile and if the Tibetan people wish to continue the institution of the Dalai Lama, my reincarnation will not be born under the Chinese".



# Fearful polarisation



M B NAQVI  
writes from Karachi

IT was a day of terror in Quetta on Friday July 4. Sectarian terrorists struck and struck hard. Three assailants entered the compound of a Shia Imam Bargah and mosque in the heart of the city and opened automatic fire on the praying crowd and one among them was a suicide bomber who also perished. The casualties from the two assailants' indiscriminate firing were 53 dead and over 60 wounded. If we add the three assailants who were also killed, the tally of the dead goes up to 56. It was clearly a sectarian attack on a day that the six religious parties' alliance, MMA, was observing as a day of protest against President Musharraf. Nobody knows who did it and why.

The phenomenon is well known in Pakistan. Earlier Karachi used to be the terror capital of Pakistan. It looks like shifting to Quetta where this massive attack is second within a month. The earlier one had killed about a dozen police cadets belonging to the (Shia) Hazara tribe with many more wounded. As usual, not one person could be identified or the conspiracy exposed. One of the major similarities in various sectarian attacks is that they are mounted on mosques at prayer times when the casualties can only be high. Time was when a mosque used to be a place of peace and safe asylum; anyone who take asylum in a mosque used to be sure of protection even against the police, food and a place to sleep. Now mosques and Imam Bargahs are regularly attacked, though to be fair, Christian churches are also attacked at

congregation times. On Saturday some armed terrorists shot and killed a Roman Catholic Cleric. This practice of Pakistani terrorists is hard to find in other countries, though one is told that a few such cases have taken place in Egypt and Algeria.

There are three ways of looking at the incident. First is of the pragmatists, especially in the police forces, who generally take each incident to be a separate one caused by a combination of local circumstances, often personal animosity and tribal feuds. These gentlemen take pride in being realists. For them it is only a law and order matter. It is another

from the government: acceptance of General Musharraf's fiat in amending the Constitution, the amendments being known as Legal Framework Order (LFO), and the question of Musharraf's taking off his uniform to get himself elected normally as a President.

The MMA wanted to accommodate the General to the maximum extent. It was prepared to help amend the Constitution generally in accordance with the wishes of the General, provided only if he gave a date on which he would take off his uniform. The MMA had given him a year to do so. But the General wants to take everything anyone has to give

tively by Maulana Fazlur Rehman and Ex-Senator Samiul Haq. Both these factions had worked in close mesh with the intelligence agencies and both had provided the nurseries where Taliban were nurtured and sent out to Afghanistan to rule it. They are the professors of the hardest view of Islam, more or less akin to the Wahabi school of Saudi Arabia. The Mujahideen and the Taliban who made history in Afghanistan are also more or less the same people who are carrying out Jihad in Indian controlled Kashmir in terms of faith.

The most important face of these Jihadis -- and Taliban for that mat-

## PLAIN WORDS

**The empty words spoken loudly and too frequently are now taking their revenge. Few know how to square the various circles that define the Pakistan polity. .. Pakistan's experience more or less conclusively proves that for Muslim societies to remain united, free and modern, politics has to be secular, with religion being kept strictly out of the state business**

matter that except in few cases the law enforcement agencies (LEAs) have seldom succeeded in catching the actual culprits or conspirators who generally walk away or ride away safely. Later many arrests are often made, some cases are initiated but more than half of them get thrown out of courts for lack of reliable evidence. So much for realism.

There is another group that links the incident to the current crisis between the government and the MMA. Contrary to the earlier expectations of unavowed but considerable sub rosa cooperation between General Musharraf and the religious parties after their spectacular showing in last October's election, it was widely believed that the two are sure to cooperate. The very success of MMA was seen as having been due to the help rendered by the administration. Indeed they had come fairly close together over the contentious issues that divide the MMA

without conceding anything in return. At length the talks broke down. The two are now poised for a clash and Friday July 4 was the first major protest day observed by the MMA.

Liberal opinion is still suspicious of both the General and the MMA. It thinks that some day somehow the old links between them will reassert themselves and a deal will be struck. It is noted by all that the two cannot afford to alienate each other. Much rides on their tacit understanding and unavowed cooperation. But that is for the future to show. People should wait a while and see what does the MMA do.

MMA's main parties are sought to be divided by the government. They are Jamaat-i-Islami led by Qazi Hussain Ahmed, who also is the friend, philosopher and guide of the Hizbul Mujahideen in India, Kashmir and Pakistan. The second major party is Jamiat-i-Ulema Islam, (JUI) which has two factions led respec-

ter -- is that they double being sectarian terrorists. They are such Islamic purists that any perceived deviation from the faith in sectarian terms is utterly unacceptable. In terms of their faith the deviationists become Murdads or apostates, deserving to be killed. Indeed they think killing them is a matter of higher priority over mere Kafirs. This is the kind of orientation that the Deobandi School, the main-spring of these branches steered clear of sectarianism by becoming more tolerant and advocating secular politics. That was safer and Muslims could call themselves simply Muslims because they did not emphasise the sectarian details of their faith which is exactly the same as now being propagated by the Jihadis and their mentors.

The third group links the sectarian terrorism to the basic polarisations that have prevented Pakistanis from becoming a nation. Quite early in the proceedings after partition,

factor in the polity.

Other mainstream parties imperfectly represented all the modernism there has been in Pakistan. But their rhetoric has reverberated and has come back to haunt everyone. It was all very well in 1950s and 1960s. The PPP and Pakistan Muslim League could get away with mere rhetoric. By and by after the Americans gave millions of dollars and arms for the first Afghanistan war in the 1980s, the Ulema, supported by the undercover agencies, began to talk grandly: We know what Islam is; these westernised types know nothing about it; if Pakistan has to be an Islamic State we will have to tell them; it will have to be based on Shariah. But unfortunately the Shariah among the Muslims is a variable concept. There are hundreds of sects and each one has its own Shariah. During British period, thanks to Jamiat-i-Ulema Hind, the sectarian differences could be contained, though often incited by

the British and their paid Mullahs. In Pakistan Mullahs now scent power. They are going flat out for power in their own right.

There are fears that General Musharraf, for all his undoubted power, reinforced by the support of George W. Bush at Camp David, there may be elements within the armed forces who would stand by MMA, especially the JUI part of it. Even the Jamaat-i-Islami Chief Qazi Hussain Ahmed seems to have a kind of confidence that is not warranted by his ability to bring down the government through street agitation. His relationship with General Musharraf has seen many ups and downs and he has often said extremely harsh things about Musharraf. It is an uncertain and fear inspiring situation.

Whether we relate the recrudescence of sectarian terrorism to Musharraf government's tussle with MMA or to the basic circumstance of Pakistan's creation in the name of Islam, the fact of the matter is that the society is polarised and the sectarian consciousness now amounts to what the Indians call communalism in their own context. It is a fearful situation because it is also a fundamental polarisation which is just one of the several basic ones. Briefly there are two others among the main ones: concerning the civil and military relationship and the foreign policy of making Pakistan a satellite of America. These differences at the most basic level remain to be sorted out. But the empty words spoken loudly and too frequently are now taking their revenge. Few know how to square the various circles that define the Pakistan polity.

Pakistan's experience more or less conclusively proves that for Muslim societies to remain united, free and modern, politics has to be secular, with religion being kept strictly out of the state business. Otherwise there would be troubles like we see in Pakistan, Algeria and Egypt, not to mention many others.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

## OPINION

# On sending troops to Iraq

MOHAMMAD ZAMAN

COLIN Powell, on his stop-over in Dhaka, tacitly asked for help in Iraq. To be in the good book of the Big Brother is a big issue for the lesser brothers. Pakistan is mulling over and even the sub-continental giant, India has not ruled out the possibility outright. Arguments, both pro and anti, are in flux. But eventually it is the national interest that ought to be served.

Contrary arguments are largely philosophical. Iraq war is deemed as unilateral and unnecessary on an already de-fanged dictator, who happens to be at odds with the US

Government. Lingering post-war uncertainty in finding a proof for WMD further undermines the US position. Sending troops to Iraq to shore up a tired US military shall only legitimise an occupation. Thrust of this argument is immense and finds easy reverberation in mind. There are practical reasons too. First, both internal and external public sentiments are not in sync yet. There is a possibility that the other countries (especially Muslim countries) might view such move in a negative light. Secondly, the Iraqi people can view the Bangladeshi troops as extension of an occupation army and this may spoil our future relationship with Iraq.

Lastly, safety of our lesser-armed troops can be in real peril. The daily reports of emerging guerilla warfare are not comfortable news to gut without certain queasiness. For a country like Bangladesh, it can be an internal as well as external disaster, if its troops get in situation similar to that of Nazaf where multiple civilians were killed by the US forces.

Arguments in favour are primarily practical. However, before putting forward those arguments, I shall venture to refute the contrary arguments. Philosophical argument is overpowering and can not be refuted effectively with any amount

of logic, unless a totally new paradigm of world order, as advanced by the Bush administration, is accepted. Even with such acceptance, it is difficult to stomach a predation on false pretense. The practical reasons, however, can be refuted with significant ease and certainty. The public sentiment is rather fluid and should be taken as such. It is not so arcane a fact that our politicians have special relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Those Arab States obviously are acting for their own reasons. And one should not forget that an Arab country provided the base and launching pad for the invasion of

neighbouring Iraq. So why Bangladesh should worry about the opinions of those countries, who themselves have no opinion of their own? A smidgen of help from fellow third world country eventually shall be appreciated by the people of Iraq. Safety of the troops in a still volatile evolving situation is always a concern. An all-voluntary military (like the one in Bangladesh) must know the nature of their job description. Military leaders must make appropriate plans. Nation's political leaders must make decision for national interest and military has to follow suit. Unexpected eventuality should not tie the hands of astute political

judgment.

Bangladesh opposed the war on moral ground. That was fine. But the fact on ground seems different now. Pre-war morality has to morph now to a post-war reality. And that reality is simple. Bangladesh or no Bangladesh, the US is going to do what it is set out to do. India, Pakistan, Turkey and many other larger countries can say no to the US and still can do business because of other strategically important reasons. Bangladesh has no such luxury. On this specific issue, the importance of Bangladesh lies in its Muslim-majority status and in its functioning (anemic though) democracy. For Bangladesh it is a

kind of an economic adrenaline in the vein.

With loss of an important export-advantage to the United States, large sector of Bangladesh economy is hanging on a languid state. Morality and philosophy sounds great in oration, but eventually it is the "economy stupid!" Bangladesh should plot its course independent of its neighbours. They are in a comparatively better position. They can wait and bargain. Bangladesh should decide fast and I hope positively.

It's a jungle out there. Beasts of prey abound. This is not a pretty

world. Deep in the space the massive stars makes the submissive ones more submissive, thus making them revolve around and around. Zero plus Zero adds to Zero. One needs to put a real number to get something concrete. That real number seems to be a Big Brother (at least for the present time). I bet, the neighbours shall be there in due time. Getting on the wagon, however, when it is moving, by any means, is not the smarter choice.

Mohammad Zaman resides in North Carolina USA.