

# LATE S. M. ALI

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## Truancy among doctors

It's time they made amends for it

HAT the World Development Report 2004 has said about doctor absenteeism in the primary healthcare centres of Bangladesh must make one sit up and take note: 74 per cent of doctors remain absent from duty. Much as the Director General of Health Services may contest the figure trying to put up a slightly better face of absenteeism by citing another statistical ratio, the truth is that an overwhelming number of medics posted to rural health centres keep away from their places of duty. They are shown on the organisational chart of a health complex alright, but in reality, many of them could be shuttling between the rural health centre and the nearby city or town, if not the capital city. Often private practice is a huge distraction.

Successive governments have tried to curb the health cadre professionals' penchant for hanging on to the cities at the expense of rural health centres. Administrative circulars fattened the files while duty dodgers among the medics were asked to explain their conduct; but when the chips came down, political will was missing.

There can't be any second opinion on the bottomline of the World Development Report: doctor absenteeism is depriving poor people of essential health services 'in access, in quantity and in quality'. Basically, what we have so far known through personal experiences or newspaper reports has now received international focus and attention. That is where lies the significance of such a high profile study as the World Development Report. The global expose of those doctors' indifference to their duties cannot be palatable to them. Now that the whole world knows about it, the truant among doctors should see themselves in the mirror and be self-enlightened to play by the book. They owe it to the nation to serve the poor patients who turn to them for relief and cure. By virtue of the Hippocratic Oath, they are a cut above others in terms of commitment to the welfare of the society and humanity. We hope the message sinks in them and they act accordingly. We know the doctors have difficulties and constraints but given the level of public expectations from them it is only desirable that they deliver.

Importantly, our network of rural health complexes is reputably among the best in the developing world. But what is a healthcare centre worth if the equipment rusts and the wards and outdoors are virtually empty of patients just because the required number of doctors are not on duty.

# **Positive flashes by Bangladesh cricketers**

We should only get better and better from here

ANGLADESH cricket team has done it again, only with a string of sparks perhaps to light their way to the future. Maybe the expectations were too high, maybe the players themselves were responsible for such hopes. But they have proved cynics wrong by graduating through the Pakistan tour in terms of improved performances. The first signs of improvement were noticeable since the terminal phase of the Australian series. Then the Tigers played with so much commitment since the beginning of the Pakistan tour that expecting the unexpected almost became a norm as the matches went ahead. Take the tests where Habibul Bashar, Javed Omar, Aloke Kapali and Rajin Saleh, the biggest find for Bangladesh. showed us that we can hold our ground at trying times; where Tapash Baishya, Khaled Mahmud and above all Muhammed Rafiq emerged as bowling successes. It was no different story in the ODIs. In the Multan test, the moral victory was ours. Since it was a touch-and-go situation, the widely debated catch by Pakistani captain Rashid Latif could have or probably would have made a huge difference had it been ruled out on the ground. Suffice it to mention that the ICC verdict vindicated our position on the issue. Who knows, a win at that stage could have laid the foundation for a greater success. Pakistan's cricketing superiority was not matched by a sportsman spirit, and to a certain extent, by the yardstick of courtesy. At times, the Tigers even gave the seasoned opposition a hard time for which they weren't prepared and their captain acknowledged as much. For that matter, watching them play till the last day of a test match or not getting out before the fifty overs of a one dayer was something of a sea-change. All said and done, we can now only hope that they will be able to put the momentum to a better use during the upcoming matches against England. They have a tougher task ahead, a job cut out for them.



**MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD** 

T seems that we live in an uncivilized world. A member state of the UN is vowing to remove, if necessary by assassination the head of another nation. From where does it get such an abominable strength? It is a common knowledge that America has been the only source of that strength. Unfortunately, America forgets its own national interest. By giving blind support to Israel for domestic reasons, America has made itself "the most hated country in the world". This was a remark of a former Ambassador who has been watching Middle East situation very closely. I, however, differed with him somewhat. My comment was that it's not America which is most hated, it is the American Administration and its supporters. There are millions in America who oppose Bush Administration. Even in Bush Administration itself, there are many who do not support the policies and acts of the Administration but continue as they have to as bureaucrats though some resigned earlier.

By unilaterally declaring a war against Iraq, Bush Administration made the UN irrelevant. Being a veto wielding power in the UNSC. America used its veto to kill the resolution that was meant to stop Israel from carrying

#### out its evil plan to assassinate Arafat, parts of the world. Sooner America an elected leader of the Palestinian realises this fact, better will it be for the

**Israel threatens to assassinate Arafat !** 

people. Colin Powell, however, said Americans. such an act would destabilise the Sharon's threat has turned out to be entire region and this meant Bush totally counterproductive. Arafat has Administration discouraged Israel emerged stronger within Palestinian from committing such an evil act. This territories. The net result is that Amerwas a welcome step, but unfortunately ica has lost more grounds in the M-E America later again voted against the and elsewhere. America may feel that it UN General Assembly (UNGA) resoluwould continue to receive support tion which under the advice of the EU from its friendly states in the M-E, but members, was already amended to this may ultimately turn out to be an

partly true as Abbas wanted to crack down on Hamas and other extremist groups but Arafat and the Palestinian Authority could not allow it without reciprocal responses from Israel. These groups do carry out suicide bombings on Israelis, which is seen by America, Israel and many others as terrorist acts, but these groups say they are the resistance groups fighting against Israeli occupation and there-

fore they carry out attacks against

two major suicide bombings that killed 15 Israelis . Just to cover up his own terrorist actions and also to pass on the blame to Arafat, Sharon described Arafat as an "obstacle to peace". Unfortunately, President Bush and his Administration went by what Sharon said without even caring for its own Road Map. It is no use saying that America remains committed to the Road Map but effectively joins hands

properties and this resulted in the last plan as he knows none can do anything as Washington will continue to protect Sharon and his country (Israel) regardless of the outcome of any Israeli action. In any case, Israel would not bother about world reactions. What is important to Sharon is to finish Arafat as he failed to do it during Beirut days in 1980s and he wants to do it now as he appears sure that he has the protection of President Bush and his administration. He probably could not have expected such an open support from

Democrats. Therefore, it has become necessary to keep watch on Sharon's activities towards Arafat in order to see that UN resolution is not flouted. It is also necessary to send UN forces to the Palestinian area to keep Israeli troops and Palestinian fighters apart. The stationing of UN forces may help Israel considerably as these forces may act as the security barriers (wall) and Israel may not have to build border security walls any more, which it had to abandon at least temporarily under the

directive of Bush Administration.

Indeed, President Bush has rightly

described security walls as a "prob-

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST It has become necessary to keep watch on Sharon's activities towards Arafat in order to see that UN resolution is not

flouted. It is also necessary to send UN forces to the Palestinian area to keep Israeli troops and Palestinian fighters apart...In case Israel opposes stationing of any UN force in Israel's territory, which it did earlier, let the UN force be stationed in considerable number in all Palestinian areas and particularly around Arafat's headsquarters at Ramallah. This will certainly curb suicide bombings and also stop Israel from implementing its evil plan to assassinate Arafat.

meet America's earlier objections in terms of inclusion of 'Palestinian' terrorism in the resolution. In such a situation America could at best abstain to make Israel happy as America knows very well that Israel would flout the UNGA resolution any way as it has the reputation of doing so since Israel was established. Such an abstention could have saved America from the present embarrassment and international condemnation. Anyway, Bush Administration cares little about international reaction on any issue After all, America is the superpower and uni-lateralism seems to be its policy now.

American diplomacy has really been much polluted by Israeli factor. As stated before, this has made all Americans virtually unsafe not only in Middle East but also in many other

illusion as authorities of these friendly states may increasingly come under pressure from the common Arabs to take a stand against America. The signs are already there. After Saddam, the political environment in the Arab world has changed considerably as America and Israel have become the occupiers of a great part of Arab world. Therefore, it is highly doubtful whether those friendly states can withstand for long the political pressure from their common Arab citizens. President Bush has described Arafat

as a 'failed leader'; he, however, said he remained committed to the Road Map to peace in the M-E. While praising Mahmud Abbas's role as the former Prime Minister of Palestinian people, Bush accused Arafat of noncooperation with Abbas. It appears

Israel. So there is a huge gap in the understanding of the problems. It is quite clear that Israeli occupation is the main cause for terrorism and once the occupation ends, it is expected that there would not be terrorism any more and here comes the American sponsored Road Map to peace and the determination of the American Administration to implement it. As America has exclusive control over Israel, it has to act intelligently and equitably so that this Road Map gets implemented.

American Administration must also recognise that it is Israel which had over 14 serious reservations over the Road Map. And it is Sharon who never knew what peace is, and torpedoed the Road Map by continuing his planned targeted assassinations and destruction of Palestinian homes and against it, Sharon may carry out his evil

with Sharon for destroying it by vetoing the appropriate UN resolutions. This leads people to have a lot of doubts about America's real intension on and commitment to the Road Map. Of course, it is known that America wants peace and stability in the world but when it comes to Israel, America's foreign policy options get completely blurred.

As M-E affairs and particularly Israeli-Palestinian situation are spinning out of control, the UN General Assembly resolution asking Israel to abandon its plan to kill or remove Arafat physically is timely and appropriate. But Sharon government has already rejected the resolution by terming it a "miserable one". It was already known and hence no surprise. But despite Washington's advice

In case Israel opposes stationing of any UN force in Israel's territory, which it did earlier, let the UN force be stationed in considerable number in all Palestinian areas and particularly around Arafat's headsquarters at Ramallah. This will certainly curb suicide bombings and also stop Israel from implementing its evil plan to assassinate Arafat.

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary and Ambassador and founder president of North South

# Time for paradigm shift

always supported the military-led establishment remain in power through the thick of dictatorships or This is tantamount to the Heavens falling or the earth opening up. Where will these forlorn elites go The military regime in power -- no

semi-success of stabilisation programme, expiry of debt rescheduling period if it coincides with the US disengaging itself from the commitment to underpin Pakistan economy, the going will get rough for Islamabad again after a while, quite similar to what was like in 1998. More so because of the new short-term high interest loans that will have to be contracted as a result of the policy well summed up by Mr. Kasuri. The US will scarcely help Pakistan now to go on a buying spree of

tangle or significantly strengthen national security to enable Pakistan to fight a successful war

Thinking about national security, a sane assessment of the events of 2002 shows that (a) the 56 years long arms build up has left Pakistan far behind India in conventional arms; and as for the Nuclear Deterrent, two facts need to be fully assessed: First, the very Indian threat of invasion in 2002, and it was a credible one, represented the initial failure of the deterrence of that

issue now is not Kashmir -- that has been pushed back to Greek calends, if its solution means its inclusion in Pakistan. The more relevant question is what happens to the people of Pakistan.

If there is war and atomic weapons are used, all of Pakistan is threatened with a return to the stone age minus millions who will die. A war without the use of nuclear devices is hard to conceive: the losing side will be sorely tempted to use the Ultimate Weapon.

sion. It is time to stop confronting India altogether and pursue a policy of reconciliation and friendly cooperation with the Indian people. Allow India, if it wants to have an air force of 4,000 top of the line aircraft, an eight ocean navy and two million strong army with ultra modern gadgetry. They will surely pay for those things. Pakistanis should gradually disarm and give up all those juvenile macho notions of militarism and foolish extolling of physical bravery. What they should be concerned with is Pakistanis' survival in safety and honour and mainly engaging in economic and social construction.

All of this leads to one major conclu-

Truth to tell. India would pose no radical threat to Pakistan if Pakistan were to de-link with it and ignores India's infatuation with the notion that military strength alone will make for national greatness. Pakistan should instead, worry about how much food shelter, jobs, education and healthcare for its millions of poor it can provide. If Pakistanis do not interfere with its dreams, India will pose no greater threat to Pakistan than it does to

Let us eradicate dire poverty by guaranteeing jobs to all able-bodied men and women. It is time to undertake this as a constitutional duty of the state: if it cannot provide jobs to all, let the unemployed be paid a social security allowance as a matter of legal right. That will force the state to shift the policy paradigm from national security to people's social security.

disrespect is meant to Messrs Jamali and Shujaat Hussain -- has not distinguished itself for original thinking. Its eggheads have come up with a clever-

The results of 56 years of cold war happened in or to India is not germane here. Pakistan now stands quite close

Deterrent and secondly. India adum-More likely however is the prolongaand arms races is before us. What has brated a new doctrine that India can go ahead with its invasion despite there being Pakistan's atomic forces. This

tion of non peace and no war, as of now -- all of us only progressively becoming poorer and the elites getting richer -until an implosion destroys extensively.

PLAIN WORDS

new arms

M B NAQVI

OLLOWING a flurry of news items about an emerging new US-Israel-India axis, rising tide of Indo-Israel military cooperation and Israeli PM Ariel Sharon's New Delhi visit, Pakistan's reaction was summed up by Foreign Minister Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri: "We will do whatever is required to make sure that the minimum credible balance (with India) is maintained. We have done that for 56 years". This is a clear declaration of policy that Pakistan will continue to run the arms race with its traditional 'enemy'.

Given the background of 56 years of

thin of bogus democracies and has underwritten all military dictators, if also at a political price. Now here is a powerful undertow of strategic interests of the US coalescing with those of Israel and India (Pakistan's 'enemy').

cold war, interspersed with four or five wars and half-wars, this is an expected knee-ierk reaction to the emergence of the informal US-Israel-India strategic convergence. US Assistant Secretary of State Ms. Rocca has denied its existence, perhaps for the record. This is one of those terminological exactitudes that politicians take recourse to when being really truthful can hurt some of their interests. The trend of growing congruence of strategic perceptions among the governments of the three states is unmistakable. It is like an active living together already. whether or not formal wedding ceremonies have taken place.

There is no doubt it poses a painful dilemma to the ruling establishment of this country. Fifty-year old central plank of Pakistan's foreign policy was to be loyal camp followers of the US. The latter in return sporadically supported (in 1950s) Pakistan over Kashmir, gave it military aid off and on,

by-quarter, not half, idea of recognising Israel. Which, in their expectations, would dilute the unwelcome potentialities of the new axis. In other words, US and Israel would be so overjoyed by this master stroke that they will either drop India altogether or somehow prevent it from becoming any greater threat to Pakistan. It is a silly notion. The very cornerstone of this trend is the growing US disenchantment with Pakistan for a variety of reasons, though exigencies of the Afghan situation requires a lot of cooperation from Pakistan. Hence, the US' alliance with it, though it is quite ambiguous. But real long-term US interests are not involved here, however much Islamabad shows Central Asia to the US in the atlas

And yet a new policy orientation has to be found because putting all one's eggs -- military, political and economic in American basket has brought Pakistan to a sorry pass. Despite the

to the bottom of the list of countries in terms of Human Development Indicators as a result of running an openended cold war with India. Poverty has grown -- some say to 33 and some say 43 per cent of the people are living below the poverty line. The stunning prosperity of about 5 per cent of Pakistanis does not compensate for the mass poverty that has been caused by the long cold war and arms races with India. More of the arms races can only worsen the present conditions.

What makes this doubly unacceptable is to assess the chances of acquiring -- yes, the aim was to acquire -Kashmir are less bright today than at any time in the past. The top general has said that there is no military solution of Kashmir problem. In fact, so long as sanity prevails neither country can go to war with the other. Then, why start on another long phase of expensive military build up that cannot, repeat cannot, either meaningfully facilitate the resolution of Kashmin

was, on one hand, daring Pakistan to use the Bomb first and, on the other,

reminding Islamabad why would not a larger nuclear deterrent (of India) deter more. The threat was explicit: if Pakistan made a nuclear strike first, Indian response would be so massive as to take out all six or seven major urban-industrial centres of Pakistan. That situation is likely to persist. What will be the point in such a war?

The situation however remains grim. The state of near-war between India and Pakistan has not ended: no peace has been negotiated; and instead, there are clear indications that India remains committed to the objective of becoming a great military power. Pakistan has declared that it will go on trying to catch up. From a Pakistani viewpoint, the arms race with India is a foolish enterprise. Confront India -- the logical result of arms race -- in 2004 or 2006, the 2002 syndrome will still be repeated. The

A nuclear exchange will anyhow be the Big Tragedy. But a limitless vista of India endeavouring to become a military colossus and Pakistan struggling hard to catch up on a faster moving India will have evil consequences too. Both will destroy us in this country: a nuclear war will be a sudden end to what civilisation there is and other physical losses to both. But an indefinite continuance of cold war and arms race will mean inexorably moving towards a social bust up. The worst sufferers in this will be those whose politics and purses are benefitting immensely by this confrontation with India. How real is this danger? Nobody knows for sure. But if it could happen to the USSR, it can happen to Pakistan perhaps quicker because the basic policy orientation -- more military spending at the expense of social

Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan or Bangladesh. For the rest, if the Indians go berserk and attack for no reason, Pakistanis will resist as best as they can in addition to what the armed forces might be able to do. War in any case is unlikely

Let us eradicate dire poverty by guaranteeing jobs to all able-bodied men and women. It is time to undertake this as a constitutional duty of the state: if it cannot provide jobs to all, let the unemployed be paid a social security allowance as a matter of legal right. That will force the state to shift the policy paradigm from national security to people's social security. That would correct many imbalances at home and make human lives richer in more senses than one. Hopefully, the results of resulting peace dividends might make India change too. But that is up to historical forces

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TO THE EDITOR

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

### Follow up on Rupali **Bank story**

I am surprised to see that The Daily Star did not follow up on the news report on Bangladesh Bank demanding explanation from Rupali Bank as to how Hafez Ibrahim MP had been a director of the bank for the last ten years, whilst, according to Bangladesh Bank rules, none can hold the post of director for more than six years. Abdul Matin One-mail

### **US veto gives Israel** licence to kill

This is in reference to the veto used by the United States torpedoing the resolution sponsored by Syria at the UN Security Council on Tuesday, September 15, which demanded that Israel would not harm or deport the Palestinian president Yasser Arafat.

Even though the resolution was quite balanced in expressing "grave concern" at the recent rise in violence

and condemned both suicide bombings and Israel's targeted assassinations of Palestinian militants for causing "enormous suffering to many innocent victims"; the US was the only one of the 15 countries on the Security

Council to oppose the resolution. The United States champions freedom, democracy and upholding of international law. During the last 36 vears. Israel has violated as many as 69 UN resolutions with impunity. For the last 36 years, the Palestinians, under occupation, have been deprived so

much of their fundamental rights and freedom that many of them now believe that there is nothing they could live for; there is something to die for -dignity, end of humiliation

Not surprising though, considering the United States' dubious policies. that this veto coincided with an ongoing United States Congress debate on whether to impose sanctions on Syria. The proposed legislation is reported to have accused Damascus of "supporting terrorism and developing weapons

of mass destruction and condemns its military presence in Lebanon". It seems hilarious to me that the proposed legislation is captioned as the "Syria Accountability and Leba

nese Sovereignty Restoration Act". And it demands of Damascus to change its behaviour or face American sanctions. The US Secretary of State Powell made it more explicit when he said, "Svrians have not complied with US wishes" Such is the magnitude of the US'

double-standards. When they themselves have no qualms in occupying a country like Iraq in the name of freedom, they also can pulverize Syria for military presence in Lebanon. And, when the US is expected to

spend 59.50 billion dollars for education in the year 2003 as per the report of US Census Bureau, they are spending the amount of 358.20 billion dollars on defence. The amount of 87 billion dollars, requested by President Bush to fight 'terrorism' in Iraq and Afghanistan, would cost each US

citizen an amount of 297.93 dollars while the requested amount is enough to make a gift of 1,641 dollars to each citizen of Iraq and Afghanistan.

I understand that the US and its citizens have the right to spend their money anywhere and for any purpose. My question is, will not they want the payment back with interest from the region they are going to spend in. Lastly, echoing the fear of chief Palestinian negotiator, Saeb Erekat, I merely hope that Israel would not use the US veto as a "licence to kill" Ahmed Mohiuddin

## On e-mail

#### The eighth wonder

If anything has ruined our country, it is the nexus between politicians, lower judiciary, the police, criminals and the bureaucrats. Together they are the eighth wonder if the seventh one is Tajmahal. Can anyone do anything about it? Probably not

We are the most unfortunate citizens of a promising country

brought down to ruination by this nexus Sumitra Hasan South Khulshi, Chittagong

#### "New look, new waste"

The front-page pictorial in the DS (14/9) under the caption "New look, new waste" should be an eye opener to our policymakers and the general people. It is understood, the Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP) funded by the World Bank is spending hundreds of crore of taka for the economy is stagnant, industrialisation fibre era - can afford the luxury to spend billions (in taka) in face lifts of its streets. It is not only vulgar but an

insult to the people and their struggle to improve their fate.

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

This is where the World Bank activities become questionable and their true intentions raise suspicions in public mind. If one is a reader of Dr Joseph Stieglitz, John Pilger and the likes then one does not need to be informed of the World Bank, IMF or ADB objectives and the interests they

A person with the least sanity would rather hope that the money were spent in education, building new industries, railways and bridges etc - the sort of real assistance to the nation, its economy and its people. Instead of doing so, they feed us their hidden agenda. You just don't need to go too far; if your daily commuting takes you to the Science Laboratory, you will see the wonder (!) of World Bank planners. They have so meticulously worked to turn this traffic junction into a severe bottleneck, creating a U-turn on a main road never seen or allowed in any city and throwing all traffic into

chaos leaving the poor traffic police begging to God for a better traffic solution. It was far better before the implementation of the grand plan

amenities -- is the same.

germinated from fertile brains. One also needs to take the case of Rupsha bridge which is being built without a rail link. I fail to comprehend the idea of connecting a seaport without the railway link. Water and railway form the most cost-effective means of transport and go hand in hand in all interfacing points (ports). They are comparatively safer, environment-friendly and carry volume that no other mode or means can. The Mongla port has this great opportunity to play an important role in regional trade and transport but the opportunity will be lost if our policymakers fail to appreciate the importance of a railway link. It is imperative for an efficient, safer, cost effective as well as manageable means of transport. Our road infrastructures will not be able to support the trade volume that will generate once a consensus is reached among the regional governments. Besides, a large part of global traffic is now containerised and there can not be any effective mode than railways when surface movement of the containers become necessary for land

locked regions and countries.

So the question is why not World Bank and their associated friends fund the projects that are absolutely vital for the nation to improve its fate? Or is it the repeat of the story of petty bourgeois who would rather hand out money to the young people to have good time and good food but will not support them when they seek assistance for their school/college fees. The rationale is simple and obvious, they (petty bourgeois) do not want the unequal to become an equal.

#### Khandaker R Zaman

Allseas Shipping Limited Yousuf Chamber, Dilkusha Commer cial Area, Dhaka

serve.

beautification of the city. Much of this spending is being made on dismantling perfectly functional road dividers and islands and building new ones. I wonder whether a nation where literacy is poor, unemployment is severe even among the educated, is at snail's pace, does know how to tackle the challenges in the post multi-