

Musharraf second time lucky

Pakistan needs him at the moment

THE meaning of two successive assassination attempts on the Pakistani president is lost on nobody. Neither is the implication on Pakistan, if those attempts had succeeded. We, therefore, are greatly relieved that the general is still at the helm of Pakistan's affairs. This is because we think that if Pakistan ever needed him -- now is the time. Though, as a newspaper, we are fundamentally opposed to military rule, and have said so repeatedly ever since Musharraf's takeover, we are, however, forced to acknowledge that he has navigated Pakistan very skilfully through extremely treacherous national and international waters. He has taken bold steps against religious extremism, has dealt a severe blow to the Talibanisation of his country and generally has taken a modernist line in conducting Pakistan's affairs. These could have been the reasons for the attempts on his life, and that is precisely the reason for our relief at their failure.

President Musharraf can be said to sitting in perhaps the hottest government seat in the world. On the one hand, he is under pressure from the US to help hunt down terrorists and Islamic extremists. On the other, he cannot go too far in that direction, to retain the domestic constituency that he must have to be effective. He sees the need to go for rapprochement with India and yet cannot seem to be making too many concessions on Kashmir. And finally, he cannot continue to rule as a military dictator without any legitimacy and hence must take significant steps towards handing over power to an elected government.

All sides considered, he cannot be said to be in an enviable position by any stretch of the imagination. What the world is now eagerly waiting an answer to is whether he still enjoys the Pakistani army's total loyalty or are these attempts on his life indications of an erosion of the army's loyalty towards him? It is our belief that he has already taken too long to democratise Pakistan's politics and the further he delays, the greater will be the complications he will face. He must get the Pakistani people behind his policies that we think are more or less in the right direction. He cannot let Pakistan go the extremist route, and to prevent that he must get the people behind him. So he must hold elections at the earliest and hand over power to an elected government. Democracy has a way of finding solutions in tough situations. The tasks are easier outlined than done but that is the type of challenge the Pakistani president faces. Good luck to him and to the people of Pakistan.

Narai river pollution

Waterways must be cleaned up

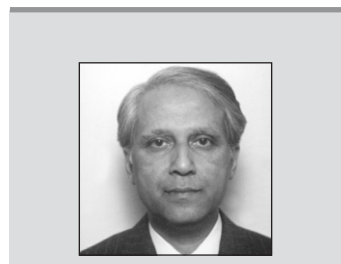
THE pollution of the Narai river running alongside Trimohoni must be seen to be believed. It was not long ago that the 2.5 lakh residents of the 12 villages in the region used the river water for cooking, washing clothes and bathing. Now, however, the river is choked with industrial waste and untreated sewage from Dhaka city which has reduced the river to a pitch-black, foul-smelling abomination. The Narai flows on into the Balu and Shitalakhya rivers, polluting them in turn.

The water of the Narai is no longer usable and the river's pollution is a health hazard to those who live in its vicinity. The water cannot be drunk, and if used for washing or cooking, exposes the villagers to all manner of contamination. The black sludge in the river pollutes the entire area and is a breeding ground for mosquitoes and disease.

Residents in the area have repeatedly brought their plight to the attention of the government, and the government has repeatedly pledged to resolve their problems. Dhaka city mayor, Sadeque Hossain Khoka, has promised to establish treatment plants at Rampura to treat the waste and sewage that flows through canals from the city into the Narai, but despite the fact that the pollution gets worse every day, no concrete steps have been taken to do anything to ameliorate the problem.

The time is past due for official action. And this is just a microcosm of the greater problem. If the government does not implement a concerted policy to deal with the vast quantities of industrial waste and untreated sewage that contaminates our waterways, soon the rivers which are the life-blood of the country will all be choked with pollution. It is critical that attention is paid to cleaning up of our waterways before it is too late.

Handling peace and governance in Iraq



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

THE much vaunted Presidential guards failed to save Baghdad with their ring of steel. A disoriented, distracted and depressed Saddam has also been counted out in terms of the proverbial thirty pieces of silver. The coalition have 'got him' but final success appears to be still many barbs away.

What the Coalition Authority and the nominal Governing Council face today in Iraq are hard choices. There is the question of legitimacy which affects every facet of that country's renewed emergence as a sovereign entity. So called non-implementation of UN Resolutions helped to start the war. The absence of requisite UN Resolutions continue to hamper the emergence of peace.

The taking into custody of Saddam, the killing of his sons or the arrest of the leading members of the past Iraqi Administration have not really brought about peace within the war-affected country. The incidence of regular attacks continues and governance is far from stable. Different multilateral institutions have cut back on their presence and many foreign voluntary organisations are disassociating themselves from more intensive activity on the ground.

The real problem has been the finding of an acceptable formula for the United Nations. This was highlighted in the year-end UN news conference on 19 December. The UN Secretary General indicated that he was still not clear about the definition of the key role that the United Nations was expected to play in Iraq. He said "what I am asking is for them to indicate to me exactly what role they want the United Nations to play, who is going to be responsible

for what, and who takes what decision, so that there is no confusion." This is important. Annan has repeatedly insisted on a clear UN role so that he can then weigh whether the tasks were worth the security risks.

There is a political connotation in having UN associated within Iraq. This has to be understood by all the players including those in the Iraqi Governing Council. As such, it did not help matters when we were informed by Iraq's acting Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari

Talking to 'Newsweek' (15 December), Mr. Dominique de Villepin, the French Foreign Minister made some interesting observations. He pointed out that 'we have a unique opportunity today because more and more countries in the world are either democratic or aspire to democracy'. After commenting that 'it is not as though Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus,' he has also suggested that 'the big lesson from Iraq is that the international community should remain united, and that if you want

been given full opportunity. This chance should not be lost.

Hamid al-Kifai, the spokesman of the US-appointed transitional Council recently told AFP that 'all the Governing Council members agree that Saddam must be tried in Iraq by Iraqi judges'. This is sensible. However, what is important is the formulation of a credible tribunal based on transparency that would give full access to those willing to testify and defend the ousted dictator. Saddam's daughter, Mrs. Raghad

authorities, particularly the CIA to obtain information from Saddam regarding the alleged presence of weapons of mass destruction. Added to this had been the furore of a possible death penalty. The United Kingdom has already spoken out against the possible use of capital punishment. The European Union is also clear in their stance about this subject.

Occupying Iraq has been the easier part of the bargain. It is essential that the Government Council in Iraq understand that

easily accepted, given the costly and time consuming trials that have been underway for some years now with regard to incidents in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The Coalition Authority would probably also desist such a move.

The other option according to many would be to set up or create a hybrid court as is now in operation in Kosovo, East Timor and Sierra Leone. In such a matrix, the tribunal could be set up in Iraq and consist of local Iraqi and international judges and also jurists recommended and selected by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference or the Arab League and be based on a combination of domestic and international criminal legal provisions. The experience of the United Nations and the International Court of Justice could also be associated with regard to the administrative format. Such a measure would lend credibility.

There is general acceptance for such a Tribunal. Many non-Iraqis support the creation of such a Court. Two serious problems however delimit this option -- the Iraqi Governing Council's desire to retain the death penalty in all proceedings and the Statute adopted by the Governing Council on December 10, 2003 (pertaining to the formation of 'The Iraqi Special Tribunal for Crimes against Humanity') which has conferred jurisdiction over Iraqi nationals and residents accused of specified crimes committed between July 16, 1968 and May 1, 2003. This has complicated the situation. Fortunately, till now, the US government while repeatedly expressing support for prosecution of Baath -- era crimes in Iraqi courts, has not endorsed the Governing Council's desire to prosecute Saddam before the Special Iraqi Tribunal.

The Coalition Authority today is at an important crossroad. These are sensitive times. The eventual credibility of the administrative machinery of "free" Iraq is at stake. The Muslim world not having seen any evidence of weapons of mass destruction till now, is waiting to see a trial above criticism. This opportunity at least must not be lost.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

POST BREAKFAST

Saddam's trial can be the litmus test. There are many possible charges that could be fielded against him -- campaign against the Kurds in the 1980s, the use of poison gas at Halabja, suppression of Kurdish and Shia revolts after the first Gulf War, brutality against the Marsh Arabs and crimes committed in the unprovoked aggressions against Iran and Kuwait... The only question that remains is how to try him without creating fresh grounds of controversy.

(in a recent meeting of the UN Security Council) that the United Nations could not be a political player in his country. This was disappointing.

Another opportunity was lost in November when the United Nations was excluded from the agreement between the Coalition and the Governing Council related to the handing over of power to a provisional government in June 2004 and general elections by the end of 2005.

Similarly, the efforts of the Coalition Authority to bar countries other than Coalition partners from bidding for reconstruction contracts in Iraq has smacked of political immaturity. This 'divisive' policy will not facilitate return of stability and faster reconstruction within Iraq. What is required now is association of more countries in the effort to rebuild Iraq. This is the only way to encourage other countries who are sitting on the fence to send troops to restore peace and security in that war ravaged country. In the recent past, France, Russia and Germany have hinted that they were willing to reconsider and re-examine the large debts that Iraq owes them. Such olive branches should not be spurned.

to be effective, you need its legitimacy'. He has gone on to add that 'the US has to assume its responsibilities in the world, and it must do so as part of a team.' It is this last phrase that is so significant for reconciliation of all parties.

Governance is a difficult word. It denotes certain factors which need to be available for its proper usage. It also connotes certain aspects, which if present, will lend credence and legality to the process of governance. Meeting out justice and ensuring fair judicial trials are building blocks for a credible system of governance.

We have already seen the great debate that has surfaced over the eventual trial of Saddam. Various shades of opinion have already been expressed. The US Administration has signalled that the Iraqi people will decide what to do with Saddam. At the same time suggestions have made about the prospect of an 'ultimate penalty'. This is a critical juncture. The way the Coalition Administration and the Governing Council determine the fate of Saddam will create their own image. This is an opportunity to show to the rest of the world in general and the Arab world in particular that there is no hunger for and that the judicial process has

Hussain, speaking from Amman has pointed out that she had little faith in her father receiving proper justice within the new Iraq (as the trial will be conducted by a regime which is not recognised internationally) and has proposed that there be a trial under international supervision. She believes that this will enable her to appoint attorneys from abroad to defend her father properly.

Here comes the crunch. Access to lawyers and other forms of defence would be essential if any trial is to be construed as legal. It should also be held by a truly elected government of the people of Iraq.

In the meantime, delicate and sensitive questions are also being raised about the status of Saddam Hussain. The United States has promised to grant him the protections stemming from the Geneva Conventions but is not willing to regard him as an actual prisoner of war. This has led to some critics alleging that provisions of Article 13 of the Third Convention of the Geneva Conventions related to prisoners are not being strictly followed. Concern has also been expressed that undue pressure might be employed by the detaining

ruling the country will be facilitated if they are seen to be listening to all sides. This will ease the path of governance.

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Some have suggested that he should be tried before the International Criminal Court. This however cannot be done as most of the crimes he might be charged with were committed before July 1, 2002, the date from which the Statute for this Court came into force. The UN Security Council could establish an ad hoc tribunal with jurisdiction over crimes committed by the Baath regime. Such a step would however not be

Bangladesh will take off only after improved law and order situation

DR. FAKHURUDDIN AHMED writes from Princeton

AFTER a visit home eleven months ago, the writer returned inspired and optimistic about Bangladesh's future. Two events probably contributed towards the writer's optimism. First, in an unprecedented move, ordinary citizens and the media, through legal means, were successful in having the two-stroke baby taxis banned. Consequently, the particulates in Dhaka's air dropped by 50 per cent, making it easier for everyone to breathe. Secondly, with the army's crackdown against the terrorists, suddenly Bangladesh became safe. As the writer drove from Dhaka to his ancestral home in Fazligerhat, ten miles from Feni, his brother remarked that before the crackdown, we would have had to pay extortion money to the warlords' *chandabaz* at numerous locations, especially around Feni, during our journey. While the banning of the two-stroke baby taxis is irreversible, the terrorists have made a comeback. How successfully Bangladesh tackles the law and order situation and controls the terrorists will determine how quickly Bangladesh achieves development and prosperity.

Chinese students are taught, a Chinese colleague once told me, that democracy is not a panacea for all ills. "If democracy is so good, why is India so poor?" the Chinese were left to ponder. Democracy is not a guarantee for anything. Unless there is peace and tranquility, development is bound to suffer. India's problem has been lack of peace. It has fought three wars with Pakistan, one with China. India's relation with Pakistan has always been confrontational, requiring the expenditure of crores of rupees on defense. Then there is the question of a restive population. Since its independence in 1947, there have been intermittent Sikh and Naga/Mizo secession insurgencies. There has been unrest in Assam. And for the last fourteen

years India has been embroiled in a murderous uprising in Kashmir. None of these are conducive to rapid development. Bangladesh is fortunate in that we have none of Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Buddhists and Chakmas and other tribals -- to be truly equal, and participate equally in the nation's development.

For developmental paradigms Bangladesh must turn its eyes away from the West and towards the East. Our submission to Western hegemony has brought us nothing but subjugation, humiliation, aid-dependency, and very little

hostages to whatever happens to Muslims in India. Another requirement for Bangladesh to forge ahead is for all its citizens -- Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Buddhists and Chakmas and other tribals -- to be truly equal, and participate equally in the nation's development.

The writer considers himself fortunate to have studied with a large number of Hindu students in the primary school and in the university, and with Christian and Chakma students in High School (Faujdarhat Cadet College). When one is exposed to students belonging to different faiths, those religions are not abstract concepts any more, but have faces to go with the faiths. Interaction with Chakma students made the writer appreciate their unique culture. We must let them practice their culture, and let their culture flourish. As the majority or elder brothers, so to speak, we must be generous to them. I was extremely pleased to see the Chakmas and other tribals moving into the mainstream of Bangladeshi life. This must be accelerated. We must be equally generous to our Hindu and Christian communities. We must treat our Hindu population with dignity and as equals, let them practice their religion freely, and when necessary protect their houses of worship. The same should be true for Christian Bangladeshis. Hindu Bangladeshis must not be held

development. This is the time to break free from the West's suffocating embrace. Our models should be our near neighbours -- Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, the latter two Muslim democracies. One of the secrets of the success of Malaysia and Indonesia has been to treat their minority Chinese citizens as equals and to harness the business acumen of their Chinese citizens for the development of their nations. Malaysia and Indonesia have developed their nations relying mainly on indigenous ingenuity and respecting their indigenous heritage. They have achieved western standards of development and living, without much western assistance. We must do the same. This is not necessarily a blanket criticism of western efforts. What works in Western Europe and America, may not work in Bangladesh, because of our geographic, racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious differences. Because of our proximity, and similarity of our race, ethnicity, culture and religion, what works in

Malaysia and Indonesia, might very well work in Bangladesh.

When one looks at Muslim nations in the Middle East and North Africa, all one sees are nations headed by despotic kings (who had succeeded their despotic father kings), life-long dictators and life-long Presidents. Of the four Muslim majority nations that practice democracy, three Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia -- are in Southeast Asia (the other being non-Arab Turkey). Instead of being on the fringe of the Islamic world -- Bangladesh,

and Europe. One can witness vivid sign of women's empowerment whenever one happens to be near a garment factory during the change of shifts. A friend of mine, a civil engineering professor at BUET, told me that in spite of the erroneous assertion of our western masters that the soil of Dhaka is too soft for even a house basement, Bangladeshi engineers are drawing up blueprints for underground trains at Dhaka. I saw Bangladesh's private sector bursting with entrepreneurial enthusiasm. It is the duty of the government to get out of the way!

150 million, Bangladesh is the world's fourth largest democracy (after India, US and Indonesia). Bangladesh is twice the democracy as is the UK, France, Germany and Italy (each with a population of around 60 million), and 25-times the democracy Israel (6 million) is. Along with Muslim Indonesia's Megawati Sukarnoputri, currently Bangladesh is one of the only two democracies headed by a woman. Bangladesh is the only democracy EVER in the history of the world to have had two women as both the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition (Khaleda Zia, and Sheikh Hasina) for thirteen years, and counting (March 1991-...). Yet, Bangladesh gets no respect.

Instead of profusely praising Bangladesh's unique feat in the field of democracy, *The New York Times*, in its December 14 editorial blasted Bangladesh as a nation of "Muslim extremism," "a culture hemmed in by extremism and corruption," and among the world's most dangerous countries for journalists, and asked "Washington...to demand" from no less than a dignitary than Bangladesh's Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, the release of an obscure, unheard-of-before Bangladeshi journalist arrested on the charges of espionage for Israel. How *The New York Times*, which made no mention of Bangladesh's democracy in its editorial, learned so much about the arrest of the person in question, Mr. Salahuddin Shoab Choudhury, so quickly, and wrote an editorial vouching for his innocence and demanding his release, when long time Bangladeshi journalists like the writer had never heard of him, remains a mystery! Bangladeshis at home abroad and must be proactive in publicising the moderation and democratic values Bangladesh espouses, and counter malicious smear campaigns being waged by certain quarters in the US, who are livid because Bangladesh has had the audacity to stand up to an accused Israeli spy!

There is one area of national life the private sector cannot provide: security. That is the government's responsibility. The government must tackle the law and order situation head on, and win. Without a law-abiding citizenry, Bangladesh's elevation into the upper echelon of prosperous nations will remain a pipe dream. The last thing Bangladesh needs is unsolicited advice from foreigners. No foreign nation should tell Bangladesh what to do. Bangladesh should act in its own interest, not in the interest of India, US or any other country. If a foreign nation truly wants to help Bangladesh develop its police and security forces, it should put its money where its mouth is and provide the funds for training and up to date weapons; otherwise Bangladesh should ignore their advice. The better course for Bangladesh to follow is to be self-reliant and start its own weapons factory.

Finally, a little bragging is in order. With a population nearing

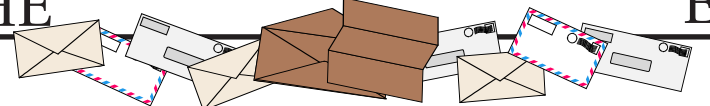
LETTER FROM AMERICA

The government must tackle the law and order situation head on, and win. Without a law-abiding citizenry, Bangladesh's elevation into the upper echelon of prosperous nations will remain a pipe dream. The last thing Bangladesh needs is unsolicited advice from foreigners. No foreign nation should tell Bangladesh what to do. Bangladesh should act in its own interest, not in the interest of India, US or any other country.

Malaysia and Indonesia are Islam's new, progressive frontiers! We must also forge friendly relations with the regional superpower, China. A Chinese colleague once told me that it is China's policy to come to the aid of smaller nations persecuted by bigger ones. I am delighted to note that Bangladesh government is aggressively pursuing the above "Eastern strategy."

During my visit I was also impressed with the entrepreneurship of the Bangladeshis. We have an acute sense of demand and supply. There are over thirty private universities in Dhaka alone (albeit, many are one-building university!) For the affluent, there are several city malls; the one I visited, Rifles Square, rivals any in America in terms of décor, cleanliness and quality of merchandise, including fast food. A friend took me to his factory in the Export Processing Zone in Savar. The machinery, the 24-hour operation and the product of his denim factory rival any in America

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



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.

Look East and Prosper

I saw news article in The Daily Star that Bangladesh foreign minister, Mr. Morshed Khan will focus Bangladesh economic policy on the basis of "Look East" policy. It is about time to realise the importance of look east policy rather than the look west policy we had forever.

I left Bangladesh 23 years ago as a student. As one of the founder member of the then Democratic Students League under the leadership of Syed Tushar Ali in Bangladesh we understood the path of economic freedom perhaps

more than any one else. We strongly advocated free economy, which ultimately became the theme of BNP and AL more than a decade later.

There is no difference between both BNP and AL. Both are latecomers in terms of understanding the power of free economy. At least they came to realisation that the country cannot prosper by nationalisation alone. We need to empower all individuals who are entrepreneurs and who are going to run the business for profit.

In early 90's I wrote to the then prime minister of Bangladesh and director, Board of Investment to follow the path of free economy.

Later I wrote a letter to The Daily Star stating why we should follow the path of free economy and look east rather than look west.

Bangladesh should seek the membership of ASEAN. We should follow the model of Malaysia and its policy of Look East.

Ekram Belal
New Jersey, USA

Ahmadia Issue

I don't understand why we are interfering with the Ahmadia people because they are not disturbing our belief or religious activities. The Ahmadia sect is so much worried and feeling so much

insecured that they have issued a big appeal to their fellow countrymen on 05-12-03 through the Daily Prothom Alo. Their appeal has opened my eyes and removed many misunderstandings about their beliefs. What I knew earlier was that this sect does not believe in Prophet Mohammed (SM) as the last prophet. According to them this is totally misleading and wrong. The only thing which they differently believe is that the promised Imam Mahdi has already come in this world in the person of Mr. Gholam Ahmed of Qadian village in East Panjab. This is not a fundamental belief or basis of Islam to declare anybody non-

Muslim, Mushrik or Murdat.

To me this is not a major issue to declare Jehad or create chaos among the peace loving citizens of Bangladesh. Nobody can impose his belief on others. I would appeal to the general public and the government, in particular to show restraint and tolerance towards people with different theocratic beliefs. There are many sects in all major religions of the world i.e. Christians, Hindus and Muslims with different beliefs but that does not mean that are all wrong. They must have solid reasons behind such beliefs. We are not authorised to change their beliefs by force or violence. We should be proud of

our multi-religious, multi-racial society where we all live in peace and harmony without creating any chaos in the society. Here the government of the country has a big role to play.
Mohammed Alauddin
Dhaka, on-mail

Sound pollution: Disturbance at night

You are all aware of the construction works that are going on in Magbazar, Eskaton, Banglamotors and Shahbag area these days. Many high rise buildings have been built in these areas, plus other new buildings are

now under construction. At most of these places work goes on at night also. This causes loud noise badly affecting the sleep of the old people and the children. Many complaints were made to the 'police' to stop this menace but with no result.

I would humbly request your correspondent to make a tour of this area and see the level of 'construction work' going on and loud sound of men and machines.

Our health/environment ministry, City Corporation, and other related law enforcing agencies should jointly make a survey of the entire Dhaka city and enforce strict 'code of conduct' to stop the sound pollution of the

city and save the citizens from distress and misery. Unfortunately the government is sleeping. The responsible persons should wake up and do their assigned jobs or get sacked. Without strict law enforcement, we cannot expect any improvement.

We are ranked as the most corrupt nation of the world. This is a shame. Let us all try to take positive steps to improve the administration of every government department and other agencies for overall improvement.

Mother in distress
On mail