US decision. Anticipating Pakistani

LATE S. M. ALI

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JS body points finger at shipping ministry

Allegations of corruption must be probed into

HE Parliamentary Standing committee on the Shipping Ministry in its meeting held on March 8 raised some serious questions about suspected corrupt practices inside the ministry. The allegations basically rallied round the minister himself who happens to be one of its members. The main allegation was related to unusual hiking of price (43 percent) in the third tender for the construction of a ocean going vessel from Tk 91 crore to Tk. 130 crore. A similar question was also raised with regard to the increase of costs from Tk. 300 crore to Tk 400 crore for the construction of container terminal at the port of Chittagong. The JS body also raised questions on the reappointment of a retired additional secretary as the new chairman of the Shipping Corporation which apparently suffered a loss of Tk 110 crore earlier when the same person was in

It is important to note that all these observations were made by the committee chairman who happens to be a ruling BNP lawmaker. The other committee members were in complete agreement. It is indeed ironical that while a decision was made at the committee's earlier meetings held on 4 May and 10 November last year that any decision for purchase of vessel would be taken only after due discussions at the committee, the committee was not summoned to discuss about the entire process of construction of a new vessel. It may not be irrelevant to mention here that guite some time back a similar question was raised involving a project to be executed by the same ministry under financing of Dutch Government when a charge of corruption was brought by the donor country against none other the minister himself.

Corruption in Bangladesh has reached horrific proportions -- something that is known the world over to our shame. It is thus imperative on the part of the government to do all it can to purge out all corrupt elements -- which has definitely become a high point of public concern. When the future of the nation and its good name is at stake removal of such individuals should be carried out forthwith and without any hesitation. However, such removal should be preceded by a fair and independent enquiry of the allegations leveled with the results made public. If this is not done the only way the nation would asses the matter is as the famous saying goes, "silence is the sign of admission", and in this case the burden of guilt will lie squarely and heavily on the shoulders of Administration.

Bangladeshi workers' plight

Our govt must do more to protect their rights

number of Bangladeshi workers in Saudi Arabia are reported to be facing great difficulties due to irregular payment of salaries by their employers. In the worst case, they have not been paid anything in seven months. Now, this is worrying news as around two lakh Bangladeshi job seekers go to Saudi Arabia every year. And it has for years been recruiting our workers in various fields. The complaints raise serious concern about the future of the workers.

The issue has not been addressed by the parties concerned. The Bangladesh mission in Saudi Arabia should keep itself apprised of the violations of the terms and conditions that the employers themselves have set for the workers. There must also be some mechanism whereby the Bangladeshi workers overseas are enlisted with the missions. Their plight, in this instance, is quite inexplicable since they are working in Saudi Arabia after fulfilling all the legal requirements. It seems the employers are simply taking advantage of the helplessness of the workers, who had to deposit their work permits with the employers, which leaves them with no option of getting a

The Saudi government took stern action in the past against the companies failing to ensure regular payment of salaries. So the entire gamut of the issue should be brought before the Saudi authorities so that the irregularities could be eliminated.

The recruiting agents also create problems for the job seekers. For example, the government has made it a rule that no Bangladeshi should seek a job in Saudi Arabia for less than 400 riyals a month, but the rule is being violated by the recruiting agents.

It is no secret that Bangladeshi workers, whose professional excellence and efficiency have never been questioned, often land in all kinds of trouble abroad for no fault of theirs. The missions abroad, the recruiting agents, the employers and all others concerned should address the issue in right earnest. It is a question of upholding the basic rights of the workers.

US strategic presence in South Asia



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

OR more reasons than one, through Afghanistan, India and then Pakistan, last week evoked serious interest in the region It took a few years for Bush to coordi nate such a visit, but it was something that was awaited.

Since the events of 11 September more than four years ago, a great deal has happened in both South Asia as well as the Middle East. The balance of power has gradually swung away cautious support for the US agenda. A strategic shift has taken place since the US intervention in Afghanistan.

Despite existing difficulties, Kabul is now reasonably free of fundamentalist anti-democratic forces. The presence of international armed forces contingents has not reduced the level of production of opium, but has, at least, opened many windows for the long-suffering women-folk of that country. There is beginning to be a meaningful gender participation in Afghanistan's administrative process. Consequently, Bush's visit to that country, ahead of India not only underlined US commitment against the Taliban but also its continued presence in the re-construction of that war-ravaged country. This was required.

In Pakistan, President Musharraf has had to do a delicate balancing act as a 'staunch' ally of the USA in 'their fight against terror.' However, on more than one occasion, both Afghan President Karzai and some US intelligence operatives have accused him of being soft in tackling 'crossborder foreign origin militants.' It was probably such criticism that induced the Pakistani authorities to carry out such a strong counter-attack against suspected Al-Qaeda militants in North Waziristan (while Bush was visiting

neighbouring Afghanistan). Press reports have indicated that upto 40 militants, mainly of foreign origin were killed in that incident. Obviously, it was Musharraf's way of telling Bush that he was trying as well as he could.

The state of bilateral relationship between the USA and India has also undergone broad changes since Bush came to the presidency. This is evident in the initiatives taken by the current Indian Administration and also the past Indian government. They have both tried to reflect the aspirations of the 300 million Indians who are now termed as what the Bush team sees as the future of a peaceful and prosperous world. It is in this context that the USA wants to encourage India to emerge as a meaningful partner

Mr. Michael Greene, the US National Security Director for Asian Affairs has underscored two other important elements that have attracted the USA towards India. He has pointed out that in addition to India's established democracy and its growing middle class (with its burgeoning buying capacity), there is also the absence of Al-Qaeda (deUSA as a possible step for furthering its status as a world power -- including, hopefully, a permanent seat on an expanded UN Security Council. Bush's visit to the region was wrapped in a multi-tier complex security structure, creating havoc for the local populations, but, at the end of the day, at least for India, it has paid

President Bush recognised that 'stakes' were not only high in South Asia but also that 'the opportunities' were 'unprecedented'. The Nuclear

challenging and demanded compromise from both governments. Differences had to be bridged over New Delhi's plan to separate its civilian and military nuclear programmes and to skirt around the subjects of proliferation, safeguards and inspection.

It is understood that India under this arrangement can have access to US civilian atomic technology. It will also help lift a global ban on New Delhi receiving nuclear fuels and reactors from the 44-nation Nuclear Supply Group to meet its energy

disappointment, he has already gone on record in a news conference. where he has suggested that Pakistan should be patient with US nuclear cooperation with India. Pakistani analysts have interpreted this as a possible future agreement with Pakistan as well. Such an assumption however appears quite unlikely in the near future given Secretary of State Rice's comment on 3 March that it was 'not the time for such an arrangement with Pakistan'. Nevertheless, the scenario could change, if like the proverbial magi-President Musharraf could deliver Osama bin Laden out of a magic hat. That might enhance trust in the Pakistani leadership both within the US Administration and the US In Pakistan, as well as in India,

Bush apparently underlined that Kashmir should not continue to be a source of violence and distrust between these two countries. Bush is also supposed to have stressed that the USA supports a resolution in Kashmir that is acceptable to India, Pakistan and the inhabitants of Kashmir. There was, however, no indication that USA can mediate in this matter. Pakistan will try to take heart that the issue was raised. I do not however see how least common denominators can be identified in this regard, given the stated positions of the three parties. This opportunity having passed, I am also skeptical whether anything significant will emerge on Kashmir during the remaining term of the Bush Presi-

One thing is, however, clear. Policy makers in South Asia now know that India is the only one sitting at the high table.

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deal that has been agreed to by USA POST BREAKFAST

In Pakistan, as well as in India, Bush apparently underlined that Kashmir should not continue to be a source of violence and distrust between these two countries. Bush is also supposed to have stressed that the USA supports a resolution in Kashmir that is acceptable to India, Pakistan and the inhabitants of Kashmir. There was, however, no indication that USA can mediate in this matter.

'metropolitan nationalists' by Indian social scientists. The new Indian middle class is inclined to define its interests mostly in economic terms. This is dictating Indian foreign policy. Harish Khare has interestingly suggested that "these Indians want to improve their life-style, many times over in their lifetime, and they believe that a serious and sustained economic engagement with the US is the key to such hopes." They want a reflection of the American dream in India.

Obviously, such a guest demands greater availability of energy to fuel the economic cycle. It is this essentia factor that has led India to modify its nationalist approach to international issues. We have already witnessed this in its voting in the IAEA over acquisition of nuclear capability by Iran Consequently, 'enlightened selfinterest' appears to have been the catalytic factor in India's accommodation of Israeli and US perceptions.

We understand what India wants within this new India-US axis. We need to now examine what the USA desires out of India.

The USA believes that the evolution of US-India ties is one of the most significant developments of the early part of the 21st century. For the US Administration, India exemplifies

spite having a Muslim population of 150 million). Such an assessment, for obvious reasons will be a source of comfort for those US business interests who view India as a better place to invest for the long term as compared to China. Clyde Prestowitz president of the US Economic Strategy Institute has supported this thesis even further, by claiming that contrary to China, India's banking and financia institutions are well established and have long been lending on the basis of market-based analysis, which explains their more mature use of capital. Such comments have helped to create an opinion that investment is less risky in India, in its democratic atmosphere, as compared to the opaque, authoritarian environment of China. One suspects that quite a bit of spin is involved in this assumption. However, it is bound to affect US entrepreneurial culture.

The US, through such a Presidential visit, the third in the last three decades, has sought to cement relations with a huge and fast-growing economy. At the same time they believe that building ties with India can indirectly and directly influence the strategic matrix between other States in Asia and giant China. On the other hand India's policy makers also see this maturing relationship with the

and India will cut through their past history and offer India a 'tailor-made regime' outside of the NPT. It has become clear from the agreement that although still outside the NPT, India has become vital for the United States. It has been termed by Bush as a key element in a strategic partnership. It has also been described as 'historic.' 'not an easy deal' but 'necessary.' Bush has also hinted that the provisions of the agreement would 'enable us' to work with the US Congress which till now has considered such an arrangement as smacking of double standards (particularly with reference to current efforts within IAEA regarding Iran's quest for civilian nuclear Right now, India derives only 3

percent of its energy needs from nuclear energy. It hopes that this latest agreement will allow it to develop its nuclear energy potential, thereby reducing its demand on scarce world supply of fossil fuel. This in turn is expected to translate itself into low oil prices for the US consumer The deal first agreed to in principle

on July 18 last year aims to give India access to long denied US nuclear equipment and fuel to meet its soaring energy needs. The negotiations were from the negotiations. Indian scientists and nationalists were averse to any monitoring constraint being put in place as these fast breeder reactors can produce weapon grade plutonium required for nuclear bombs. One will have to wait and see how much has been given up by India. China for obvious reasons is a bit nervous and has already indicated that it will be monitoring the situation very

carefully. Their Foreign Ministry

spokesman Qin Gang has cautiously

spelt out that the US-India 'cooperation

Reportedly, India wanted to

exclude their 'fast breeder' reactors

must conform with the requirements and provisions of the international nonproliferation regime and the obligations undertaken by all countries. The nuclear agreement with India will also bother Pakistan. It will be evidence of a clear shift of USA towards India as opposed to Pakistan. Islamabad has also been lobbying for some time now for international access to civilian nuclear technology. Its efforts have however beer

proliferation measures before being granted such access President Bush realises that Pakistan will be upset with this latest

opposed by critics who say that

Pakistan has to first tighten up its non-

The parlous politicisation of police



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

T is indeed sad to note that the media reports are no longer guarded and understated about the well-known but less publicised pernicious politicisation of the police force of the country. In fact both front the editorial in the print media clearly portray nation's concern about the devastating effects of such alleged blatant politicisation on our body politic. In their justified anguish the media has sought the intervention of the chief executive of the country to stem the rot and take corrective measures before the nation finds itself in an ungovernable scenario

Postures and mentality A clear understanding of the dividing line between state and government/party interests is one of the fundamental requirements of a democracy. Such realisation assumes heightened significance in polities that have been subjected to colonial rule for a long time. A People's Republic ought to be different from the governance culture of dictatorship or the colonial administration and the same must be a manifest reality to emulate and to draw lesson from. Unfortunately, however, our feudal mindset has not changed although feudalism is a relic of the past. It is such mindset that demands personalised and partisan attention from the services of the republic and would not let institutions grow to support and sustain our not-very-adult and mature democracy.

Political behaviour and aberrations

Our politicians betray a pathetic lack of appreciation of the imperative that the foundation of a civilised society depends upon the effective and impartial working of some corrective institutions, prominent among which is the public service. They appear to be perilously oblivious to the reality that the regulatory outfit of police must be demonstrably impartial to ensure public confidence in the governance ability of the ruling class. The ruling

bruised democratic credentials. First of all, the police needs to be insulated from political executive and other interferences in promotions, postings and security of tenure. The people must not get an impression that the investigation agencies are very efficient while taking the required action against those not in power and that as against those in power, their edge is blunted. If police act impartially, credibility would be restored to the investigative authorities. This is very important because as long as the impression persists that a policeman is not an general spirit of service to weaker sections, women and children, serving the people and functioning as per rule of law and due process of law. Therefore, if due to large-scale politicisation the police start acting at the behest of extralegal persons which is a genuine suspicion, then mostly they will round up innocent persons and permit the quilty to escape

The police continue to be the principal investigating agency for the state under the criminal procedure code in addition to being the primary outfit responsible for prevention of

service can damage the police image as much as police involvement in politics. Police in their professional capacity have to be apolitical and impartial in their application of law. Interference with the statutory duties of the police contrary to the provisions of law has to be deprecated at all times and more so when it impedes the performance of their duties in the maintenance of public order and investigation of cases. Issuing orders only after obtaining the approval of the political executive are to be viewed as

performed through contractual arrangements either. Only persons with solemnly sworn lovalty to the state who have been examined, selected and verified in a constitutional process are expected to conscientiously perform the onerous responsibilities without profit motive. If this is accepted as an article of faith and conviction then a serious and sincere attempt should be made to recruit the best type of young persons at grassroots and intermediary evels of the police organisation and train them appropriately. Police officials at these levels come into contact with the common man. Recruitments at this layer, therefore, may be entrusted to a existing departmental arrange It is the considered view of many

public order and investigation of criminal

cases cannot be arrogated to private bodies. These functions can not be

that as long as the policing function comprising detection of crime and prosecution of criminals remains under the control of the executive it may not be easy to bring about a reduction in unjust political interference in police functions. The well grounded fear is that the undesirable subordination of the investigative police to the executive breeds a cynicism that corrodes all positive cultural values. The investigating organ needs autonomy and constitutional protection made possible through radical conceptual and structural changes. Tinkering with the issue will not help.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is a former Secretary

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forget that the police was the dominant visible symbol of repressive imperial alien power and that de-colonisation requires large-scale behavioural and attitudinal changes of the political masters and the public servants belonging to this vital organ of the state. Thus while admonitions from the pulpit come in plenty for rational behaviour on the part of enforcement officials, in reality, unhealthy pressures are regularly exerted to carry out the wishes of the ruling coterie in the most expeditious manner. It is the continuance of such regressive mentality that has brought us to the present lamentable scenario wherein the police outfit has been described a lackey of the political government. Nothing could be more sad and frustrating than that. The legal position and

parties in their misplaced exuberance

imperatives

If we want to get out of the aforementioned undesirable situation, we have to take quick action to repair our badly

unbiased friend of people, the concept of an orderly society would not be achieved.

Since our police system conceived and grew in a colonial ecology and is now planted in a developmental democratic and prismatic environment where a new ruling class is passing through numerous stresses and strains, it becomes difficult for the police to obtain and secure a close cooperation of the people and thereby discharge its functions and fulfil its role efficaciously. There is, therefore, a need to appreciate the role perception of the police system in our changing environment so that we can understand and identify the challenges emanating from the systemic stresses and strains and be able to formulate viable responses

Our police is the most significant sub-system of the criminal justice system. It is also a limb of the executive system and the judiciary which takes its energy from the legislative system. Our constitutional value depicts

hard for upholding the constitutional objective of protection of an individual's dignity and civic rights. Since justice is the ensuring of civil liberties it s only proper that the police truly become its protector and defender. A politicised police force will not be able to ensure a sense of security in the community and will not succeed in enlisting the cooperation and participation of people in crime prevention programmes. Similarly, the political appointees may not appreciate that their job is not to encroach upon the rights and liberty of the individual and the premonition is that they may look upon themselves as mere pawns in the hands of governing elite. They cannot be expected to be accountable to the real sovereign, the people. Such policemen will inevitably compromise the dignity of the individual citizen. In such a scenario, democracy will gather deficits at our peril.

crime. They should, therefore, strive

The service ethos and elan Few things in the world of police

There are credible fears that the police image in Bangladesh will suffer a grave damage if politicisation continues unabated. We already have the unfortunate spectacle of a police service in whose investigative fairness the major opposition political parties and a sizable section of the civil society entertain grave doubt. Criminal cases relating to victims of diabolical and dismal murders that are considered as acts of political vendetta, are not investigated properly, according to the versions of complainants and relations. There are persistently vociferous demands to arrange for proper investigation of sensational cases by external agencies including international organisation. Without doubt, such appeals and petitioning indicate the deep distrust of the impartiality of the state's investigative apparatus. No sensible Bangladeshi would feel at ease in such an unsettling environ-

It must be appreciated very clearly that the regulatory functions of the state like maintenance and preservation of

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

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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.

"Muslim headcount in Indian army..."

Praful Bidwai's Article "Muslim headcount in Indian army: Hypocrisy or misconceived fears?" in The Daily Star of February 27, 2006 touches on some important points on how the political and military leaders of India can improve that country's military in terms of proper representations of all religious and ethnic groups that constitute today's India. The article clearly deserves to be published and talked about in Indian newspapers.

For a Bangladeshi readership would it not be more relevant for someone to talk about the miserable condition of the representations of religious minorities in the armed forces of Bangladesh? I hope Mr.

military would encourage Bangladeshi journalists to do honest analyses on why their country's military has such a pathetic and record on recruiting from the minority communities Sukhamaya Bain

Bidwai's critical article on the Indian

On e-mail

Israel issue

I agree with the comments of Mr. Taslim of Dhaka University published in The Daily Star on 22 February 2006. To try to wipe out a map from the globe is not (should not be) a job of human beings. Simultaneously we have to compare the activities of both who has been threatened and who has threatened. If Israel's activities are harmful to others and Iran doesn't do anything which goes against Israel, why Israel is very much worried of nuclear capability of Iran? Israel has example of pouring bomb in Irag. Iran doesn't have such nasty instance although it is perceived that Israel has N capability.

Mr. Taslim is right that Mr. Ahmedinizad has no capability to face the so-called multi-attacks of Western countries (WCs). It is better to die than to accept something wrong as real human being. You cannot sway our head toward that doesn't have legitimacy if you are a man of moral character and good personality. Mr. Taslim's question of unity of Muslim countries is very much important. Mr. Ahmedinizad should try to unify the Muslim world; as well as Muslim countries should be united for their

own interest; not to fight but to protect

themselves. Because Islam is a religion of peace; no clash is welcome. As the Muslim world has derailed from that straight way, they

Actually this is a play of WCs, which will never be ended. Israel and Palestine are players and they (WCs) are watching it as coaches. If WCs express that both Israel and Palestine are out of control or do not listen to them, then why are they not imposing sanction on them? Iraq has not listened and has gone under sanction and later attack which still has been killing a number of innocents every day. There is no question of human rights, child rights, and woman rights. Whatever the WCs

do is right! WCs should compromise one by one since they are leading the world What is the connotation of skipping nuke to Iran? Masud Rana

Tata Group's investment proposal

It is understood that both our government and Tata Group delegation have failed to strike a balance in respect of Tata's proposal of big size industrial investment targeting our natural resources like gas and coal. There was no fault in their selecting our country as a potential place of investment looking at vast human resources and availability of energy. The investment was considered lucrative from their point of view but our gain would also have been enormous by way of technology and foreign currency transfer, growth of auxiliary industries, employment generation and growth of gross domestic product with increase in exportables.

The negotiation team of the Government consisting only of the officials, I am afraid, often dogmatized, is still in the primordial stage, having no international exposure. They have been allowed to face such a highly specialised, technically sound professional group who skilfully stupefied them with hard bargain and the end result was emergence of a foregone conclusion. There is no dearth of skilled negotiators in the country but unfortunately no invitation was extended to them. Unnecessarily eight/nine months time has been spoiled and in the meantime our own currency has been devalued by more

China. India. Thailand etc. have been encouraging foreign investment with open mind raising their GDP and par capita income. Their highly experienced team of negotiators are often invited to participate in the investment proposals, given free rein and their recommendation of best option suitable to both sides is put into use. Neither have we taken steps to develop a team of skilled negotiators nor have the mind to hire a team giving them free rein.

Donor agencies have recently warned our country managers in this regard. A faction of socio-political group has been publicly loud for nonawarding the Tata group to have access over our natural resources without devising ways of utilising the same for benefit of our people. As of today the entire country is reeling

crises but neither the government has the ability to produce nor at its best to encourage both local and foreign investors to utilize our resources as raw materials. Natural gas and coal are our

under severe power and fertilizer

resources exploration of which requires huge technological and cash investment and if explored and exploited positively. The crises as are being faced today would be mitigated. Conversely, inertia of the government also had contribution for failure to sign the deal as their own investment towards development of human resources, modernisation and smooth operation of railway and port services was one of the major . component of Tata Group's list of facilities demanded of.

Rezaul Huq