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POINT * COUNTERPOINT

Election 2007: What role for the donors? The Muslims America loves

against Pakistani military ruler

The challenges for the nation increased by three folds with no extra land added over the last five and a half decades. Under these circumstances. the donors' role, in our view, is to keep reminding the PMO to take lessons from our friends in the north and south. If the government engages in pitched battle with the support of its cadres and thugs to control legitimate demonstration, they are simple playing with fire -- that is the lesson from history.

DR MOAZZEM HOSSAIN

HAT happened to Bangladesh's north and south over the last few months could not have been anticipated even six months ago. Nepal has rolled back to democracy and Thailand has lost its PM through people power.

Both the nations have enjoyed good relations with Bangladesh for some time. Nepal's king came to Dhaka in the last Saarc meeting and the former PM of Thailand even flew to Chittagong to accompany Bangladesh's PM when Begum Zia visited Chiang Mai and Bangkok in 2005.

The way politics is unfolding in Dhaka in recent months, it is a nightmare for any commentator to predict what will happen next. This commentary, however, is not about a prediction on fall or rise of the government. It rather makes some observations about Bangladesh's donors and their roles in the next general election whenever it is held.

The donors, particularly, the US, the EU, Japan and Australia played a major role in holding the last three elections (1991, 1996, and 2001) in terms of sending international poll observers. One accepts it or not, but without an "all clear" from the international poll observers, no winning party could have legitimately claimed the seat of power in the past.

This time thinks look different. Already, the US and the EU made it clear that they are not going to accept the legitimacy of a winner in the next election, unless the election has been found to be conducted on a "level playing field." By all means, this is a pre-emptive strike by the donors

This kind of early warning has never been heard of in the history of an independent nation. The donors after taking a close look at the activities surrounding the next election, either on the part of the incumbent, the EC, or the prospective head of the CTG, were forced

to issue such a warning Since the beginning of this year, the US State Department and the UK Foreign Office despatched many concrete proposals to the incumbent and the opposition with a view to holding a free and fair election. The latest despatch was the EU envoys' press conference in Dhaka and an IMF delegation meeting the Opposition Leader on

Monday May 8. The messages from these two groups of foreign donors have been clear. The EU wants a compromise between the government and the opposition and the IMF seeks supports from the opposition on the PRGF including cooperation in the energy sector.

Whatever they say in public, the undercover agenda is clear. They warn the government and the opposition against any turmoil like recently seen in the kingdoms of Nepal and Thailand. One may. however, mention that the trouble in Nepal was the creation of the sitting king, while a catastrophe was avoided in Thailand by the direct intervention of the king of that nation, who is very popular

and revered In Bangladesh's case, the donors know it well that this nation has no king or queen who could have come forward to rescue the nation in a crisis. It is, therefore, someone from the donors who has to play the role of a saviour to keep the rival political parties talking. Alternatively, there is always a

threat of a third party to grab power (to which Bangladesh is not a stranger). Obviously, this is a huge task for the donors, particularly, the envoys from the EU, US, Australia, and Japan to take a mediator's

It was not long ago that the Bangladesh-born UK envoy was the victim of the political expediency committed on this soil. Also, the US had to withdraw the members of its civilian peace corps a few months back due to a threat on their lives again from the Islamist quarter.

Under these circumstances, the donors' role up to the next election is indeed a huge challenge. One would argue that the forces which have been terrorising the nation are under custody now, including all the Shura members of the JMB. The point is, how can one be sure that the nation is now floating on milk and honey as far as the terrorists are concerned?

Having said that, the donors must accept the fact that, Bangladesh politicians in the seat of power never learn from history. The envoys of donor nations will not forget the scenes they witnessed during the by-election for Dhaka-10 in 2004. We purposefully mentioned this case since most of the envoys do live in and around this area The objective here is to remind

the donors not to make the same mistakes of learning no lessons from Bangladesh's political history and playing the game only for the interest of a few.

For the greater interest of the nation, this land was bloodied over and over again since the period of the partition of the greater India in 1947. Bangalees fought a language movement in 1950s, fought

General Ayub in the 1960s, fought a liberation war in early 1970s. fought against Bangladeshi military ruler General Ershad in 1980s, fought against the first government of Khaleda Zia in mid 1990s, and now another fight is brewing against the Khaleda-Nizami government. In other words, those of us who

were born during the language movement in early 1950s have not witnessed a decade in the last fifty vears when no blood was spilled on this soil due to police brutality on the street.

To face the challenge ahead one must understand the pulse of the Bengalee nation. Any wrong move now will turn the nation into a huge man-made catastrophe. One must also remember that in the 1950s this nation had 55 million people, in the 1970s it had 75 million, and now it has 140 million.

The challenges for the nation increased by three folds with no extra land added over the last five and a half decades. Under these circumstances the donors' role in our view, is to keep reminding the PMO to take lessons from our friends in the north and south. If the government engages in pitched battle with the support of its cadres and thugs to control legitimate demonstration, they are simple playing with fire -- that is the lesson from history.

Finally, during the Nepalese crisis, Dr Manmohan Singh's government in India played a strong but positive role to defuse the stalemate. Bangladesh's donors must act decisively to bring the government to their senses before it gets out of control. One does not have to remind the donors that a week in politics is a very long

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M. SHAHID ALAM

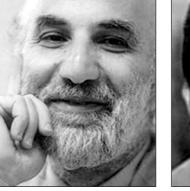
EING a Muslim today -- in the middle of America's "war against global terrorism" -carries some new hazards. But it is not without its bright side for a few Muslims who are eager to profit from this war.

Muslims need little tutoring in the hazards they now face. Many tens of thousands are already dead in wars imposed by the United States -- on Iraq and Afghanistan. The death toll is expected to climb, perhaps steeply, as these wars are carried to Iran, Syria or Pakistan. Iranians also face the prospect -- perhaps, imminent -- of incineration in nuclear strikes.

Death or dislocation in wars are not the only hazards that confront Muslims. In principle, any Muslim of Pax America and Pax Israelica. can also become the object of "extraordinary renditions." No matter where they happen to be, they could be kidnapped by the CIA, hooded, and transported to secret offshore preferred to do it himself. Then, the US prisons or delivered into the hands of US-friendly regimes with exper-tise in the fine arts of interrowhy bother to recruit them to denation. No one knows how many nounce their own people. As a result, Muslims have suffered this cruel fate -- or how many of them are still alive.

By comparison, Muslims who are captured or bought and imprisoned putting down the uppity natives -in Guantanamo as "enemy combatants" are lucky. After facing down several legal challenges to these detentions, the US now brings these prisoners before military review boards. Although many of them have been cleared of any terrorist connections, it is quite touching that the US is now refusing to release them -- it says -- because they could be tor-tured by their own governments. The prisoners can now thank

In fairness, America's "war



against global terrorism" has also

created a few hard-to-resist oppor-

tunities. The chief beneficiaries of

the new US posture are the Muslim

rulers eager to get the US more

firmly behind the wars they have

been waging against their own

people. They are happy to torture

Muslims "rendered" to them by the

on flights to Guantanamo.

breeds



Irshad Manji, Fouad Ajami, Wafa Sultan, Salman Rushdie

Orientalists was strong. The pay for in America's most prestigious news paper?

If the only Muslims that the United

States can recruit in its battle for

ideas are at best mediocrities -- or

worse, nobodies -- what chance is

there that it can win the battle for

Muslim hearts and minds? The

short answer is: very little. Muslims

are not helpless children. You

cannot mo-lest them and then

expect to mollify them with trifles

and protestations of pure intentions.

That may have worked for a while. It

dense a mass to be moved by wars.

Military might could not break the

spirit of Palestinians, Afghans, Bos-

nians, Chechens, Lebanese,

Moros, and Iraqis. What chance is

there that wars will be more effective

if applied against larger masses of

to change Muslims unless it first

thinks seriously about changing its

policies towards Muslims

Americans must stop deluding

themselves. Muslims do not hate

their freedom: they only want that

freedom for themselves. The United

States and Israel seek to build their

power over a mass of prostrate

Muslim bodies. Stop doing that and

The United States cannot expect

Muslims are too large and too

will not work for ever.

Muslims?

such turncoats was good too. Soon a whole crop of native Orientalists arrived on the scene. Perhaps, the most distinguished members of this coterie include Nirad Chaudhuri, V. S. Naipaul, Fouad Ajami, and Salman Rushdie. They are some of the best loved natives in the West.

CIA, and, periodically, they capture Then there came the "war against their own "terrorists" and put them global terrorism" creating an instant boom in the market for Orientalists The "war against global terrorof Muslim vintage. The West now ism" is also a war of ideas. In order demanded Muslims who would diagnose their own problems as the to defeat the "terrorists" the US must win the hearts and minds of West wanted to see them -- as the Muslims. This is where Muslims can unavoidable failings of their religion help. The US needs a few "good" and culture. The West now Muslims to persuade the "bad" ones demanded Muslims who would to reform their religion, to learn to range themselves against their own appreciate the inestimable benefits people -- who would denounce the just struggles of their own people as moral aberrations, as symptoms of In the heyday of the old colonialism, the white man did not need any a sick society.

help from the natives in putting down So far these boom conditions their religion and culture. Indeed, he have not evoked a copious supply of Muslim Orientalists. Irshad Manji opinion of the natives carried lit-tle has made herself the most visible weight with the whites anyway. So na-tive Orientalist by cravenly playing to Western and Zionist demands for demonizing Muslims and Palestinians, I can think of a few Orientalists wrote countless tomes denigrating the cultures of the lesser others, but they have little to recommend themselves other than their Today the West needs help in mediocrity. This must be a bit disappointing for those who had pinned their hopes on using Muslim defeces-pecially the Muslims. One reason for this is that with the death of tors to win the battle for Muslim

the old colonialism, some natives hearts and minds. There are some indications that have begun to talk for themselves. A few are even talking back at the this disappointment is turning to des-peration. On March 11 the New Orientalists raising all sorts of uncomfortable questions. This York Times published a front page hasn't been good: and something story on Dr. Wafa Sultan, "a largely had to be done about it. In the 1970s unknown Syrian-American psychiathe West began to patronize "natrist, nursing a deep anger and despair about her fellow Muslims." tives" who were deft at put-ting down their own people. Was the Deep anger and despair at fellow

Muslims? Are these the new qualifi-

cations for Muslims to gain visibility

ket would have exposed its weak-

nesses, and the management.

responsible to shareholders, would

have to consider investments or

reformative measures to satisfy

At present, the reflexes and

responses of BPC managers,

responsible to state bureaucrats.

West losing its confidence? The demand for "native' then you will have a chance to win Muslim hearts and minds M. Shahid Alam is professor economics at a

university in Boston.

the US for offering sanctuary.

vated economic development plans. Clawing profits to state coffers hampers the output, exploration, and development that keep

demand.

prices down. However, Bangladesh's high fuel prices and short supplies are not due to the global oil situation as much as they are of its own making. The government not only controls price but also enjoys monopoly of

know that the virtual monopolist is a total failure. BPC or PDB must face private competition.

The government should backpedal to its core function: the security of life, property, and liberty. To distribute wealth or to attain full employment is not their task and the process has left the country poorer and corrupt, without elec-

However, Bangladesh's high fuel prices and short supplies are not due to the global oil situation as much as they are of its own making. The government not only controls price but also enjoys monopoly of oil importation and refining that causes the crisis. If BPC were a fully corporate structure, the market would have exposed its weaknesses, and the management, responsible to shareholders, would have to consider investments or reformative measures to satisfy demand.

eries, congestion at ports, increase in demand, unionism, hartals, and the like, government pricing falls apart.

The governments then aggressively accuses retailers and traders of hoarding, smuggling, and dishonesty. Government highhandedness pushes prices further up as traders, fearful of their lives, refrain from normal trading.

not the cartels or syndicates that the government holds responsible. To counter high consumer prices, the government can turn

existing Export Processing Zones to Free Trading Zones as in China, or as India is contemplating. The ideal, however, would be free trade with expanding economies as India and China, and developed economies as the US. South Korea

system will. Fuel prices, if freed, can be fluctuating and when high, consumers can take various options to counter the rise

For example, when prices rise, consumers may conserve fuel, plan their travels better, rely more on public transport such as rickshaws and the like. Moreover, high prices would prompt traders to increase supply and reduce fuel

price but government forbids this.

NIZAM AHMAD

EOPLE have historically agitated for food but frenzied demand for electricity, water, and fuel, is new in modern times, and reveals the truth that government price controls do not work and never will. The idea that government can supplant the market and fix prices is the greatest policy blunder continuing in Bangladesh.

Prices are the outcome of market forces, not determined by the cost of production, as believed conventionally, but by what people are "willing to pay." There is no opportunity for a government to fix and impose prices on people. Price is the lifeblood of an economy and when controlled irretrievably dam-

ages the economy A book entitled Forty Centuries oped of Wage and Price Controls by

Government price control is wrong

Robert Schuettinger and Dr. Eamon Butler of London's Adam Smith Institute cites a fourthousand year historical record of economic catastrophe caused by price controls. In Athens, there was "omnipres-

ence of the state in regulating grain production and distribution with an army of inspectors." At hand, was the death penalty for those evading price controls, but smuggling was rampant, and traders risked lives to supply grains thus saving lives. French politicians, after the

Revolution, invented the "Law of the Maximum" in 1793, imposing price controls on grain and a list of other items. With such controls, a

famine-like situation quickly devel-The "German economic miracle" began in 1948 after abolition of price controls that the US opposed

(rations and price controls were still popular in Washington and the thinking was that controls would benefit a war-devastated economy)

In the US, price controls caused the energy crisis in the 1970s under President Nixon. The US government controlled prices at domestic well-heads and at the pump in response to overseas oil instability. The result was public chaos and long queues at petrol stations.

Government price controls do work at times, but when faced with uncertainties such as international price shocks, war, trouble at refin-

Criminalisation sweeps over the country and too often in conjunction with the authorities.

In 1974. Bangladesh's regulative controls such as food grain permits worsened the famine and may have even caused it, as no famine situation occurred again with the removal of such regulations. Without price and movement controls, market prices do jump. but traders procure more and move goods from low-priced areas to high, thus avoiding total scarcities as in famine.

Consumer prices today have sky-rocketed, as producers did not get cold storage facilities due to power failures. Furthermore, costly dollar, credit crunch, trade obstacles, anti-smuggling drives, hartals, extortion, and lawlessness have all swelled market prices --

boomed by its de facto free trade with Japan and US, notes Prof. Sudha Shenov at Australia's University of Newcastle.

Bangladesh today also faces acute fuel shortage or supply disruptions. A major cause for this is government's price control of fuel. Fixed prices severely distort the fuel market. IMF recommends an increase in price to reduce budgetary shortfalls, which the government rejects as a political folly. However, the issue is not whether to hike or when to do it, but never to do it.

Fuel price controls promote smuggling to neighbouring countries, and engaging the security forces to stop it is an invitation to join the illegal trade. Government power cannot stop smuggling, but liberal reformation of the economic

Furthermore, in response to continuous price hike there can be investments in cheaper public transportation. Similarly, farmers would respond suitably to diesel prices. Prices when fixed do not create positive consumer, producer, and entrepreneurial response, but perpetual scarcities, smuggling, and suffering.

Nonetheless, other than domestic reasons for high fuel price there are also international ones. The first being state ownership and control of oil resources.

The American Petroleum faced with acute shortages, steep Institute estimates that state oil prices, and street agitations. companies nearly own 80 percent of the world's oil reserves. Stateelectricity provider, PDB, been a owned companies do not reinvest corporate entity, the government, oil profits in exploration or production but spend on politically moti-

oil importation and refining that tricity, without fuel, and with concauses the crisis. If BPC were a sumer prices beyond reach fully corporate structure, the mar-

Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud in a recent seminar, said it is too late for the sitting government to provide electricity but it is never too late for the government to pen down radical reforms that will vield results, not in a few months, but if

correctly made. in a few years Reforms do not need the World are inefficient and unresponsive to Bank or the IMF, or a consultant, market needs. Furthermore, as but common sense, a belief in the there is no transparency, no one people, and in transforming the knows what is happening until government from a failed provider of food, water, electricity, and fuel to Similarly, had the state-owned a trustworthy warden of law and order

the opposition, and the agitators Nizam Ahmad is Director of Liberal Bangla, UK. would not have to wait for years to

the characteristic of wishing that

Matters of intelligence

Few know more about the behind-the-scenes machinations in the Middle East than Israel's notorious Mossad intelligence agency. Of course, the Mossad has inspired its fair share of conspiracy theories as well. As the agency's director from 1998 to 2002, Efraim Halevy was at the center of many of them -- from the fallout after an actual botched plot to smear poison on the neck of Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal, to the apocryphal stories of what the agency knew before September 11. Newsweek's Kevin Peraino asked Halevy -- currently promoting his new memoir, "Man in the Shadows" -- for his thoughts on Iran's nuclear ambitions and the ongoing unrest in the region. Excerpts:

solution to the Iranian problem

Kevin Peraino: How far away do you think Iran is from getting the bomb?

Efraim Halevy: I think there is a necessity to define exactly what you are talking about. If the problem is how far are they from getting the potential where they can produce a nuclear device, that's one question. The (real) question is whether they are capable of putting together a credible strategic capability, which is something different. I would say that within the next decade they would have the chance of getting the capability if they were left alone. Why do US and Israeli intelligence estimates seem to differ on this?

I don't think the Americans and the Israelis are talking about the same thing. I think the Israelis are talking about what I was saying before, and I think the Americans are talking about something more comprehensive. I think the difference between the American and Israeli estimates is not that far apart Do you think regime change is necessary in Iran? Ultimately, there will be no real

without dealing with it in its entirety. I think the United States has embarked on efforts to, uh ... encourage the regime change. Could Iran's nuclear program be deterred, as former USnationalsecurity adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski recently suggested? With all due respect, I differ from Brzezinski on this. I think once the Iranians have the capability, one

should not assume that their mindset would be the mindset that we would like it to be. One of the big mistakes that can be made is to believe that once the Iranians have the capability, that they'll think like people think when they're in Washington.

What kind of retaliation could the world expect in the event of an attack on Iran? The Iranians supported terrorism

of the Hizbullah type, and one has to take into account that Iran might resort to this. With the current situation in

Lebanon, would Hizbullah necessarily take orders from Iran? Look. Hizbullah is a Shiite force in

Lebanon, and as such they take their inspiration from Iran. They receive arms and military support from Iran. However, if pressure in Lebanon continues to mount internally, it could be that under very,

very severe strain, Hizbullah in Lebanon would act in its own selfinterest, rather than simply a subsidiary of Iranian policies Is there anything that the United States can do to salvage the war

in Iraq? I would say one thing. I think it's very important at this particular juncture to try to propel one or two or three local military figures of the emerging Iraqi armed forces to be a visible part of the administration. The people in Iraq have become accustomed over the years to a certain style of leadership. And there is a great importance to be attached to the symbol of a uniform.

Are you talking about a military dictator? No, I'm not saying a military

dictator. I don't want to say something against the democratization process. But somewhere in the bevy of leadership there should also be uniformed people who are promi

nent who would command the respect of the population.

Is the current Israeli policy of squeezing and hoping to topple Hamas the right policy? Or is a more nuanced approach called for?

I think it is legitimate to maintain pressure on the government, and to press the government in order to bring about -- I don't know about a regime change -- but to bring about a policy change. There are people in Hamas who are no fools. Hamas has nuances within it. I think Hamas is making a mistake in letting (Damascus-based political bureau leader) Khaled Meshaal be a party to the decision-making process in Hamas. The decisions should be made by the current leadership inside the territories.

Do you think Hamas will be able to raise the money required to keep the Palestinian Authority afloat?

I think there's no chance. They went to Iran, and the Iranians offered them a paltry \$50 million That's less than what they need for one month. And the money has not yet come through, anyway. Hamas will have to learn the hard way.

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BUDDHA PURNIMA The message of peace and happiness

DR SUKOMAL BARUA

ODAY is the full moon day of Vesakha blessed by the Birth (624 BC), Enlightenment (589 BC) and Mahaparinibbana (S44B) of the Buddha. It is very sacred and significant day to the Buddhist world. This day brings peace, integrity, brotherhood and universal love and compassion for all sentient beings of the world. The

According to Abhidhammic tradition "Buddha" actually means "an aware person", and was more of an adjective than a name in the beginning. Later, Gotama who was a real person, came to be called "Buddha" only after the realisation of the truth of life. What exactly was it that Buddha realised? Through his acute awareness he realised: "the world is full of sufferings." It was his self-discovery of the low of life and it was the only

The Buddha defined four kinds of suffering and described eight effects of suffering on humanity. The four kinds of pain or suffering generated by human existence in this world are: Birth, Old Age, Sickness and Death.

The Buddha suggested several

ways to overcome the pain and suffering of life. He said if we are

aware of the inconsistence of life. and accept the teaching of the nonexistence of material things in the world, we can eliminate our edictions and desires for our everyday lives, and achieve true freedom through the sufferings of life.

Buddhism teaches that suffering can be banished by reaching the level of Buddhahood. People can reach this stage by diminishing anger, temptation and ignorance about the truth of life. The word "Buddhahood" laterally means "a level without burning" and is meant to mean "a level of calmness of the mind." Buddhism is based on the cult of non-violence, peace, universal love and compassion. The first sermon of the Buddha is: "Go ye, O Bhikkhus and wander forth for the gain of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, for the gain, for the welfare of men. Proclain O Bhikkhus the doctrine glorious, preach ye a life of holiness, perfection and purification."

From the above statement appears a message of all embracing love for all the universe and for all the sentient beings. It is an unlimited selfgiving compassion toward all creatures as described in the script: "Just as a mother protects her only child at the risk of her own life, so one should

have boundless compassion for all sentient beings."

sons relationships and generates

unwholesome Kamma. The other

approach, repression, also fails to

dispel the destructive force of ill will.

It merely turns that force around and

pushes it inward, where it becomes

transmogrified into self-contempt,

loving kindness has the characteris-

tic of wishing for the happiness and

welfare of others, compassion has

others be free from suffering, a wish Intentions of good will oppose to be extended without limits to all intentions of ill will, thoughts govliving beings. erned by anger and aversion. As in The first precept of Panchashila the case of desire, there are two "Refrain from taking lives or harming ineffective ways of handling ill-will: living beings" is the basic teaching One is to yield to it, to express the of the Buddha for non-violence and aversion by bodily or verbal action. universal love. He uttered: "Hatred This approach releases the tension, does not cease by hatred but it helps drive the anger "out of one's ceases by non-hatred -- love, brothsystem," but it also poses certain erhood, peace and compassion." dangers. It breeds resentment and Therefore, at this crucial time of retaliation, creates enemies, poi-

the world, we consider it necessary to remind all people about the concept of Panchashila, which is very essential at this hour. Hence we progress towards this ideal and not regress, that we go forward together as brothers and sisters for the sake of peace and well-being in the universe, without being selfish and taking sides against one another. Sabbe Satta Sukhita Hontu May all beings by happy. May peace prevail on the earth.

Department of Sanskrit and Pali, University of Dhaka and Presidium Member, Centre for Interfaith Harmony-Bangladesh

Professor Sukomal Barua is former Chairman

aggressive, and violent thoughts Compassion supplies the complement to loving kindness. Whereas

chronic depression, or a tendency to absurd outbursts of violence. So, script says "If a man were to conquer in battle a thousand times a thousand men, and another conguer one, himself, he indeed is the greatest of conquerors." The intention of harmlessness is thought guided by compassion, coming up in opposition to cruel,

sacred day is being observe by the UN head office as the United Nations Day of Vesakha-2550 with religious fervour and dignity.

true concept