

LATE S. M. ALI DHAKA SUNDAY OCTOBER 8, 2006

#### Dialogue must succeed

There is too much at stake

HE positive vibes emanating from the BNP-AL dialogue so far, the affirmative note in the statements made jointly to the press, and the sincere manner in which the dialogue has been conducted over the first two days of the talks, cannot but convey to the people an optimistic note regarding its outcome.

The two days of talks with the third round being held today, indicate a degree of progress in the talks where, we are pleased to note, all the issues have been taken into consideration in totality to address the political impasse that the nation faces today. Without that, at the risk of sounding pessimistic, we are afraid we may be looking down the barrel of political uncertainty, with all its attendant ramifications.

All of us are waiting very eagerly, with bated breath, for a positive outcome of the talks. The fever-pitch interest of the man on the street demonstrates the very high stakes in the talks. We are sure that the political parties also realise that the dialogue cannot fail and for them much is at stake too.

On the success of the talks depends the democratic future of the country, something that cannot be lost on the two major political parties either. And in this regard we reiterate once again what we said not very long ago, that the parties must approach the matter with an open mind, and with an attitude of give and take because displaying inflexibility can only be counterproductive, the ultimate sufferer will not be any particular political party but the people of Bangladesh. It would do well for the parties to keep in mind that the decisions that result from the talks should not only address the current political standoff, it must cater for unforeseen situations of the future also.

What we would like to request the two political parties is that the current congenial atmosphere, under which the two parties are meeting, reportedly after 11 years, must be allowed to continue. Nothing that may be construed as a pressure tactic or to convey negative signals in what is said or done should be allowed to occur.

The talks must not fail. There is too much at stake in its success for all of us.

### Bus plunge tragedy

Highway patrol imperative

T least 30 garment workers are reported missing following a bus plunge into a river near Aminbazar. Many of the victims may have been swept away by a strong current, particularly after rescuers smashed the windows of the sunken vehicle.

This was an accident that once again proved how unsafe the highways have become. As eyewitness accounts suggest, the driver lost control over the vehicle while trying to let a car overtake the bus. The roadside made slippery by drizzles must have been the cause behind the bus tumbling down into the river.

The rescue operations that followed were a total botchup. The cable of the crane used to lift the vehicle snapped, which was an extremely shocking experience for the onlookers that included the near and dear ones of the victims. It was really a heart-rending scene.

The local people rushed to the spot and tried their best to help the trapped people come out of the vehicle. But it is the rescue operations on the part of the designated organisations that left a lot to be desired.

The manager of the apparel factory concerned contradicted the report that a big number of garment workers were missing. If his version of the accident is true, then there were less than a dozen workers of his factory in the bus. However, reports coming from the spot do not corroborate the manager's claim. The point that we want to make is: human lives should not be such a cheap and negligible thing that there could be such big discrepancies between two versions of the same accident. Nobody should be allowed to evade his/her responsibility when something goes so terribly wrong and when disowning the victims could be prompted by understandable motives. Some accidents cannot really be prevented, but it is really sad that we have failed to remove the elementary risk factors on the roads. In this case, the driver of the bus and that of the car which overtook the former appear to have made mistakes, but it is also true that road conditions are far from safe in most places due to poor maintenance. We wonder what has happened to the much-vaunted highway patrol police. When will their presence be felt?



#### SHAHNOOR WAHID

T'S like cleaning up your own mess. Politicians of Bangladesh have created a mess of everything that came in contact with their tentacles -- our society, rule of law, economy, education, health, and politics itself.

The mess is of gargantuan proportion and it will take quite an effort to clear it up to bring coherence, order, and civility back again. And at the moment, there is a big show on in the capital to clear up that mess by the same politicians who have created it.

It beats common sense as to why grown up politicians should need a lot of prodding, persuasion, round table, long table, and square table discussions and words of wisdom from the civil society to wake up and realise that the country was on the crossroads of collapse, and that

Don't the politicians have independent mental faculty to do

is generating boredom among the audience. their own analysis and reach a conclusion? Don't they have properly functioning eyes, ears, and gray cells to see, hear, and calculate the outcome of what they have been doing and undoing all the time in the name of

Much ado about a mess?

serving the people? Are they imbeciles who need to be told what is good and what is bad for the country? If a rickshaw-puller or a vegetable vendor may talk about the importance of settling the differences so that a free and fair election can be held, why could not the so-called veteran politicians say this long before in a joint communiqué?

Today, the nation remains hostage to the whims of these politicians, who seem to be enjoving every bit of the glare of the sun-gun and media coverage. There is an air of show and pomp in the whole comical episode of dialogue that belies the

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SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

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belies the solemnity it entails. The glitz, the crowd, and the arrival of the

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of overweight supporters. Frankly speaking, the show surrounding the over-

hyped dialogue has been stretched beyond comprehension and tolerance and

surrounding the over-hyped dialogue has been stretched beyond comprehension and tolerance and is generating boredom among the audience. The people have to work from dawn to dusk to earn an honest living. They have to worry about the fire in the kitchen market, another mess created by the politicians

The tricks of Sircar Never in the two hundred plus

history of parliamentary democracv has any nation been blessed with a speaker of parliament like Mr Jamiruddin Sircar. His tricks and magical acts to keep the opposition outside the edifice

called Jatiya Sangsad during the full tenure of the BNP-led government reminds us of the vanishing tricks of magician PC Sarcar. It is only our sheer luck that Jamiruddin Sircar did not learn the trick to vanish the entire

parliament building! Our very own Sircar will go down in history as someone who set inimitable examples as a blatantly partisan person while running the affairs of a democratic institution. He was largely responsible for making the multi-party democratic system look so dismal and useless through misusing his power and position. Our memory fails to recall any other person so partisan to have occupied the supposedly neutral seat of speaker

For the last five years, Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar has spoken to a half-full house, as the other half always remained

empty for many reasons. Either the opposition members staved out following a walkout after a bitter argument with the speaker on getting the floor, which the latter did not entertain. As a result, we have seen that the opposition members were hardly given the floor to speak out their minds on issues of national mportance.

Strangely enough, most of the alliance MPs and cabinet members were also not regular in attending the parliament sessions, which led to quorum crisis on most occasions. This had prompted the prime minister to reprimand the absentee law makers with threats of action. But that hardly worked.

All throughout the tenure, Sircar never made any great effort to hide his sentiments and rock solid determination not to give the floor to the opposition. His deft fingers would switch off the microphone of the opposition members as and when he pleased.

On the very last day of the last session he allowed the ruling alliance members to talk about Rakkhi Bahini, but did not allow the opposition members to discuss contemporary issues like police brutality or Rab.

Jamiruddin Sircar will haunt us in our peaceful sleep for many more years.

Shahnoor Wahid is Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star

## Iraq conflict a cause celebre for jihadists

GOING DEEPER

The intelligence estimate records four underlying factors fuelling the jihadist movement:(1)Entrenched grievances such as corruption, injustice, and fear of Western domination leading to anger, humiliation, and a sense of powerlessness; (2) "Iraqi" jihad; (3) Slow pace of real and sustained economic, social, and political reforms in many Muslim majority nations; and (4) Pervasive anti-US sentiment among Muslims.

dispersion UCH to President Bush's

anger, the Democrats have started using some leaked portions of the report by the National Intelligence Estimate. called "Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States," to embarrass the president and the Republican Party in the forthcoming Congressional elections.

The NIE, representing the consensus of 16 US intelligence agennations; and (4) Pervasive anti-US cies, prepared the report in April. As part of the leaked report was proving damning for the president he Bernard Lewis's thesis of millennial ordered some parts of the report to be declassified Contrary to President Bush's message, incessantly delivered to the American people, that the Iraq war was needed to save the Americans from al-Qaeda sponsored terrorism, the NIE report has dubbed the Iraq invasion as a "cause celebre" for jihadists, "breeding a deep resentment of US involvement in the Muslim world and cultivating supporters for the global jihadist movement." Despite global jihadist movement's decentralization, lack of strategic coherence, and diffusion. the NIE assesses that the iihadists. though now consisting of a small number of Muslims, are increasing both in number and geographical

but also among the Muslims themselves

The intelligence estimate records four underlying factors This is apart from the internecine fuelling the jihadist movement: (1) Shia-Sunni conflict, with one group Entrenched grievances such as craving for modernity to bring the corruption, injustice, and fear of Islamic world into the process of Western domination leading to globalization, while the other group asserts that too much modernity anger, humiliation, and a sense of powerlessness; (2) "Iraqi" jihad; (3) has already crept into Muslim Slow pace of real and sustained culture and, therefore, is to be economic, social, and political resisted at any cost. reforms in many Muslim majority

The NIE report assesses that the jihadists regard Europe, with its extensive Muslim diaspora as an important source of recruitment and for staging terrorist attacks, as invasion and occupation of Iraq, demonstrated by the Madrid and

nance

theocracy constricting, particularly, the rights of women, though the same constitution guarantees 25% seats in parliament to women.

If Bush fails in Iraq, he will have failed in his war on terror regardless of the fact that the US mainland may remain secure. In a recently published book, The Next Attack: The Failure of the War on Terror, authors Daniel Beniamin and Steven Simon posit that unilateralism, provocative rhetoric like "axis-of-evil." overly aggressive tactics, and most of all, the have inflamed Islamic radicalism

nothing new. I recall how India

was treated in the early fifties

when it requested the US for food-

grains. The US Congress dawdled

over the bill for months, knowing

thing special for the protection

and development of small coun-

tries. Many looked towards us for

quidance. But our eves were fixed

on the nuclear agreement dis-

This is not because we do not

cussed at Washington.

about \$300 billion, remains far from being a democratic and stable country

Former Defense Secretary Melvin Laird's exhortation to President Bush that the Iraq war should carry the message of American determination that the fight is about freedom and liberty has not found resonance in either Iraq or in the Muslim world.

On the contrary, people have started questioning the very thesis whether, but for the invasion of Iraq, there would have been an Islamic problem. Islamic scholars question Bernard Lewis's claim of Islam's differing "cultural values" as "expressed" through its treatment of women, stoning to death for adultery, cutting off of hands for theft, conflation of mosque and

state, etc.

This thesis, they claim, fails to account for the "civilizational conflict" of Europeans killed by other Europeans (including the Holocaust) and Americans in the two great wars fought in the last century alone, and the Cold War between Christian West and atheist/Eastern Orthodox Christians of then USSR and Eastern Europe. Professor John Mueller observes: "Although it remains heretical to say so, the evidence so far suggests that fears of the omnipresent terrorist may have been over-blown, the threat presented within the United States by al-Qaeda greatly exaggerated. The massive and expensive homeland security apparatus erected after 9/11 may be persecuting some,

Tocqueville apprehended so many years ago, about international affairs, the Achilles' heel of American democracy. Today, new sovereigntists believe that American interests need not be subordinated to international law, that in any case are too amorphous

tion is not thoughtful, subtle, and

sophisticated but, as Alexis de

to merit US consent, and that multilateralism is not the way to safeguard American security. To be fair, one has to admit that throughout US history no American administration hesitated to adopt pre-emptive military policy when national interest was threatened. This has been the case before, during, and after the

Cold War. Besides, the US today appears to have an uncomfortable relationship with the nationalism of others. that by definition seeks maximum independence to develop, define, and pursue a state's national goals. This can happen only in a multipolar world and not in an asymmetrical world with the US acting as the global hegemon.

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

Frankly speaking, the show

they need to sit for a dialogue.

We are greatly shocked at the tragic loss of some budding lives and express our sympathy for the bereaved families.

Christianity, and the Muslim world's significant defeats at the hands of the Christians "since the failure of the second Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683 and the rise of the European colonial empires in Asia and Africa. Islam has been on the defensive and the Christian and post-Christian civilization of Europe and her daughters have brought the whole world, including Islam, within its orbit."

sentiment among Muslims.

This accords with historian

rivalry between Islam and

Even before the events of 9/11, eruptions of Muslim discontent have been witnessed in different forms, not only vis-a-vis the Western world, seen by a section of purists among Muslims as "degenerate" and, therefore, to be abhorred and violently eliminated,

London bombings. But the jihadist around the world

It is interesting, notes Princeton appeal may not be so strong as many Muslims, particularly the religious professor. Elaine women, may not like their ultra-Paegels, that these days the "use conservative Sharia based goverof Satan to represent one's enemies lends to conflict a specific kind The flagship of President Bush's of moral and religious interpretawar on terror, Iraq, has a constitution in which 'we' are God's people tion which has made Islam the and 'they' are God's enemies, and

ours." official religion of the country and General Wesley Clark in his the basic source of legislation, with book Winning Modern Wars the proviso that no law can be enacted that contradicts the basic expressed the sentiment that by Islamic laws. Besides, the Iraqi widening the war on terror the Bush constitution gives the Iragis the administration has led the US to the freedom "in their personal status path of isolation and insecurity. Contrary to the Bush administraaccording to their religions, sects, beliefs, or choices." Some liberal tion's hope, Iraq, after the death Iragis apprehend that this could and injury of hundreds of American soldiers and an expenditure of very well result in an Iranian-style

As regards the NIE's key judgments, what is, perhaps, most striking is the absence of any mention of the Palestinian issue and of Israeli aggession that everyone would consider to be the casus belli of tension between the West and the Muslim world. As the declassified report contains only a part of the report, one hopes that the intelligence apparatus of the only superpower of the world would not ignore such a vital point.

spying on many, inconveniencing Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and most, and taxing all to defend the Ambassador.

that scarcely exists." Unfortunately, the foreign policy

United States against an enemy

## followed by the Bush administra-

thing basically wrong with our policies, and we need to think

afresh Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri, and even Indira Gandhi would appoint public men as envoys in leading countries and in the neighof Fire. bourhood. Washington, Moscow, London, and Beijing were closed to bureaucrats. Similarly, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka had tall men from India. These were sensitive posts, requiring non-official appraisal. The Sonia Gandhi-Manmohan Singh nexus has only retired bureaucrats for such posts and they too are being extended, not because they are outstanding but because they have someone in New Delhi to back them up. A new foreign secretary cannot usher in a new foreign policy, but Shiv Shankar

have a full-time foreign minister. Menon has in him the qualities to This is because we have no forpush through new ideas, new eign policy. There is ad-hocism, avenues, and new ways of accomno long-term thinking. Conditions modation. But what can he do have changed since the days of when our foreign policy is politi-Nehru, but we pursue the same cised?

old policies which gave good By not rebutting President General results during the Cold War, but Pervez Musharraf's claim that not 35 years later. When we fail to Pakistan had won at Kargil, the make even Sri Lanka or Nepal our Manmohan Singh government has close friends, there must be someplayed politics. The credit of repulsing

#### the mujahideen along with the Paksitan forces, and clearing the Kargil heights, goes to the Vajpayeeled coalition. The Congress and its allies kept quiet at that time, just as they have done now after Musharraf's claim of victory in his book, In the Line

The then army chief, General VP Malik has taken up the matter with the government. He wants a "systematic rebuttal" to be issued at the highest level, not by the army but by the government. He feels disappointed that it is not forthcoming. "We have become so reactive that we cannot protect our own strategic achievements. I can't let this man to get away with the things he has claimed in his book," says Malik

The general has a point. But he should know that an all-party meeting after the ceasefire fell through because the then opposition thought that the Vajpayee-led government would take the credit. Little did they realise that the credit was that of the army. Such an approach is suicidal for a country's foreign policy which draws strength from bipartisan support.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist

# Indian foreign policy lacks humility



KULDIP NAYAR writes from New Delhi

HAT the government of India's nominee for the UNSecretary General post had to withdraw from the contest does not come as a surprise. The unkindest cut was the "no" from the United States, a country whichwe have been trying to woo by going out of the way

Shashi Tharoor was never a winning candidate. He was not tall enough in Asia, much less in the world, to deserve the post. An eminent person, even a former minister, would have gone down better

The reverse goes beyond the qualifications of the candidate. When even the Sri Lankan candidate withdraws in favour of the South Korean nominee, our entire

# BETWEEN THE LINES

The reverse goes beyond the qualifications of the candidate. When even the Sri Lankan candidate withdraws in favour of the South Korean nominee, our entire foreign policy has a question mark against it. If this incident makes us ponder over our policy on how to improve relations with other countries, it is probably a good jolt. We are making no impression in the international field because of our arrogance. We have a superiority complex when we deal with next-door countries or comparatively less affluent nations.

foreign policy has a guestion mark against it. If this incident makes us ponder over our policy on how to improve relations with other countries, it is probably a good jolt. Our eight percent economic growth has sent us soaring to the

skies. We are considering ourselves a global power when our feet should have been firmly planted on the ground. A country where half the population goes to bed without food cannot gloat over its limited achievements. We are making no impression

in the international field because of our arrogance. We have a superiority complex when we deal with next-door countries or com-

paratively less affluent nations. Our prestige was high when we emerged from the 150 year long slavery. Foreign countries looked at us with awe because we had freed ourselves from the mighty

British without firing a shot. Our biggest asset has been humility. That is lessening rapidly. Even if we had been a developed nation, we would have not gone far with our obsession of "spectacular growth." Both politicians and bureaucrats cite the eight percent growth at every international meet when they are in a tight corner, or fail to make a point. Recently, an air delegation did so.

In a way, we are trying to

become an America in the region behaviour-wise and developmentwise. Like Washington, we talk at other countries, but do not talk to them. I am not referring to our dealings with Pakistan which itself is an intransigent country, nor about Bangladesh. I have in mind the South Asian and African countries with which we are developing economic relations. Why is there no emphasis on cultural, or other, ties? This could help us fight against the western culture, consumerism. India has a long tradition of people-to-people contact. But our government is only particular about business delegations. The rest are way down.

We have been slipping down in international esteem for some time. But the worst period has been since our proximity to America increased. We have been so much focused on the Indo-US nuclear agreement that

our anxiety to clinch it we have even tilted towards America. knowing well that friendship with it would mean dotting i's and crossing the t's at Washington's bidding. True, we need nuclear energy but not at the expense of

our dignity The manner in which America, particularly the State Department has tried to impose on us certain conditions shows that Washington seeks supplicants, not friends. They come heavy when they are dealing with a democratic country. I have my doubts on the treaty emerging unscathed from the US Congress. It is due to what the into the ears of senators and its own interests to quard.

State Department has whispered congressmen. The State Department wants its pound of flesh in terms of concessions on recycling used fuel. New Delhi has

But America's pressure is

well that thousands of Indians were on the verge of starvation. we are oblivious to other things. In The recent NAM conference, even though not relevant in the old sense, was our best opportunity.

Yet we gave no thought on how to go about the movement which Jawaharlal Nehru had initiated to stay non-aligned. A meeting of 160-odd countries at Havana could have set into motion some-