

Yunus clarifies his position

Sticks to campaign for honest and competent candidates

ON the eve of his departure for Korea to receive the Seoul Peace Prize, Nobel laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus while replying to questions put to him by newsmen at the airport revealed his mind on certain contemporary issues that have been agitating the minds of the people.

He has categorically stated that he would not join as chief adviser of the caretaker government, no matter who requested him to do so. He feels there are competent people around us who can do the job. We are heartened by the fact that he has taken an unambiguous stance on an issue that is at best hypothetical.

This has set at rest speculations centring around him since his winning the Nobel prize. After having reached the stature of a Nobel laureate with worldwide renown and reputation, he should remain above all forms of controversy. In the event he were to join as chief of the caretaker government, howsoever he might have tried to play a neutral role, his name would still have been dragged into debate.

Prof Yunus has also reiterated his commitment to the campaign for honest, clean and competent candidates for the forthcoming elections. He has been associated with the campaign since its launch and now extends his staunch support to the ongoing movement. There is absolutely no doubt that sustainable economic development with a robust forward looking vision for Bangladesh will remain a far cry unless people with clean records and proven competence get elected to the parliament, the House of the people.

When he says these things as one who has greatly endeared himself to the people by winning the Nobel Peace Prize, his words are expected to have some influence on the choice of electoral candidates at party levels.

In the end, we would very much like to share Prof Yunus' optimism about a positive outcome to the dialogue to be sealed on return of the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader from abroad.

Homebound people

Where have the tickets gone?

THE homebound people are facing all sorts of difficulty in collecting bus, train or launch tickets before the forthcoming Eid-ul-Fitr. Tickets have disappeared well before most of the people could approach the counter!

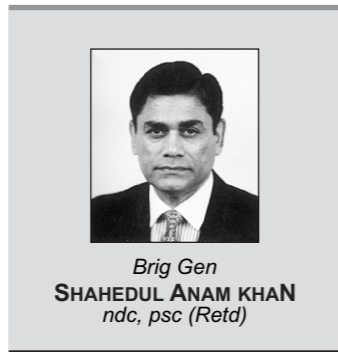
It is the same old story. The tickets are available in the black market at much higher prices. Regrettably, this is true not only about the privately owned bus services but also about the train and steamers operated by government agencies. The result is that the helpless and worried passengers are making frantic efforts to buy tickets.

The suffering that the people were subjected to last year should serve as a pointer as to what kind of experience they usually have while making home-bound journeys. A huge number of them remained stuck at the river terminal for nearly two days and had to celebrate Eid at the half-way stage of the arduous bus trips. The question is, why cannot the authorities concerned take the measures that would greatly reduce the suffering of people? The illegal business that transport operators in both the public and private sectors indulge in at the cost of the people has gone on unabated year after year. They are exploiting the helplessness of people in a planned way, yet the law enforcers are not doing anything to foil their machination.

People are not asking for too much -- they want to buy tickets at a fair price. The railway and BIWTA authorities usually introduce some special trains or steamers which do very little to ease the pressure. What the decision-makers need to do is to assess the whole situation accurately and take the necessary steps. The number of home-bound people during such festivals has increased manifold in the recent years, but there has been no corresponding increase in the number of trains and steamers. The whole task of providing transportation facilities for people during festive occasions has to be brought under a clear, need-oriented action plan.

As for the private operators, their activities should be kept under close vigil, so that black marketeers cannot take control of the situation. Much has been said and written about the issue. When will the authorities wake up to a dire need of the people?

About face in Iraq?



IS a change of the US strategy vis-a-vis Iraq in the offing? Are we likely to see the beginning of the end of the presence of coalition forces in Iraq soon? It would seem so. Certain developments point to that possibility in spite of the Bush administration's denial.

The assertion of senior Republicans that the Iraq situation is moving sideways and their call for redesigning the future course in Iraq may have put severe pressure on the US president to seek alternatives.

This perception has been reinforced by leaked portions of a report (that was to come out only after the November 7 mid-term elections) of the Iraq Study Group (ISG), co-chaired by former secretary of state James Baker, that it might suggest policy changes to the Bush administration, that might offer alternatives to "staying the course" in Iraq.

The possibility of changing course has been further increased by Gen Sir Richard Dannatt's implied suggestion that the British should get out of Iraq



Indeed Mr Bush is in a tight spot in Iraq and no matter how brave a face he may put on, he is looking down the barrel. The situation has become so intricate and the options so complex that implementing one may result in negating many others. Changing course is not a bad thing. A good statesman is one who can see beyond his nose and adjust to changed circumstances. What is perhaps of concern to Mr Bush is whether changing the course would allow his forces to leave Iraq with dignity, with the credibility of the military machine that he let loose in Iraq unscathed, and whether it would keep his political credentials intact. The question is: is he capable of seeing beyond his nose?

"sometime soon" because their presence "exacerbates" security problems in Iraq. Although he later clarified that "sometime soon" does not mean immediately, it is very clear that the political aim of the occupation was beyond the capability of the British forces to achieve in terms of military objectives. The same is also equally true of the US forces in Iraq.

It was a bitter truth that the most senior British soldier came out last week with reports on how badly things were going in Iraq. He hit the nail squarely on the head when he said that the British presence (symbolising foreign occupation) in Iraq has caused the situation to worsen. The commander of the British army, a very small part of which is operating in Iraq, hinted that they would much sooner be out of the country. This must have jolted the Blair administration although Mr Blair continues to insist that it would take place only after "the job is done."

After three years in Iraq one remains confused about the exact nature of the job and how long it might take to complete it. This has also prompted the opposition in Britain to call for a new Iraq strategy.

Although Gen Dannatt later said that there was not even a cigarette-paper-thin chasm between him and the prime minister, he insisted that he was quite convinced that things were more difficult than expected and the result was contrary to his anticipation. If he was a soldier speaking up for the army, he was also sending a clear message to his political masters that the British troops were out of their depths -- a situation not entirely of their own making, one might add. High hopes, according to him, have not been realised, and thus he feels that these troops ought to pack up. However, he later clarified that the pull-out would not be before their mission is accomplished within a reasonable length of time.

No doubt the occupation forces are running out of ideas and there is a stalemate in the sense that the political objectives have not been achieved as yet and there is no indication that they are likely to be achieved soon.

There is no doubt that the bipartisan ISG, set up at the urging of the Congress, will come out with viable options that would be short of "cut and run" but at the same time would convey to the rest of the world, particularly to the Iraqis that they are not being abandoned. Mr Baker and his team would presumably provide an exit strategy for the coalition forces in Iraq.

There are several predicaments that confront the Bush-Blair coalition in Iraq. In spite of the claim that there is still not a full-fledged civil war in Iraq, the fact is that civil war has been going on in Iraq for the last one year or more. But equally seriously, there is a four-pronged war going on at the moment according to experts: the

war of jihadists against US troops, the war of nationalists against US troops, the war of Sunni jihadists against Shias, and the war of Shia militias against Sunnis, and any action to alleviate one area could impact the other.

The reason the US has been so far unwilling to acknowledge that there is a civil war in Iraq is that it would be politically impossible to keep US troops in a country where there is an ongoing civil war.

Given such trying circumstances in Iraq, and the rapidly dwindling home support for his war in Iraq, it was only natural for Mr Bush to look for new strategies. But the administration seems unsure as to how effective the new strategies would be (provided he opted for those) given the radical attitudinal change that would be required of the Bush administration in implementing these strategies.

For example, if stability in Iraq were to be the main option, it would mean ditching democracy and have Iraq ruled by a strong man who would be able to take strong measures to quell the current spate of violence. Considering the level of the current conflict that will indeed be a difficult proposition, but more importantly Mr. Bush's very rationale of "spreading democracy" in the region and championing freedom of the Iraqi people will collapse.

The other alternative, as contemplated by the panel, is to bring in other countries to sort out the mess. And these include Syria and Iran. Given that one is consid-

ered a member of the "Axis of Evil" and the other a sponsor of international terrorism by the Bush administration, it would be a bitter pill for the Bush administration to swallow. But that is an alternative even the Iraqi president feels is most likely to see the end of violence. What is even more remarkable is the view that even the insurgents should be brought to the discussion table for the sake of peace and integrity in Iraq.

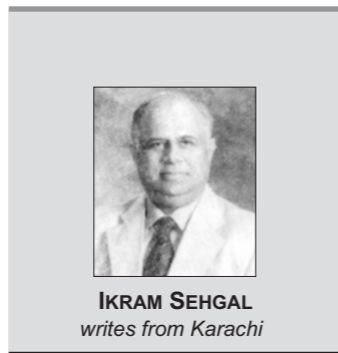
Indeed Mr Bush is in a tight spot in Iraq and no matter how brave a face he may put on, he is looking down the barrel. The situation has become so intricate and the options so complex that implementing one may result in negating many others.

Changing course is not a bad thing. A good statesman is one who can see beyond his nose and adjust to changed circumstances. What is perhaps of concern to Mr Bush is whether changing the course would allow his forces to leave Iraq with dignity, with the credibility of the military machine that he let loose in Iraq unscathed, and whether it would keep his political credentials intact.

The question is: is he capable of seeing beyond his nose?

The author is Editor, Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

In the line of fire



SENATOR Tariq Azeem has the credentials and the integrity to do a much better job for the government of Pakistan (GOP) than the likes of Muhammad Ali Durrani. His present job description as minister of state for information and broadcasting seems limited to requesting the minister to request the president to speak.

At the iftar/dinner hosted for the media at the Serena Hotel in Islamabad on Wednesday October 11, Durrani's courtier-like introduction of the president was positively embarrassing. He went overboard with his unadulterated flattery. A hard-bitten Pakistani media does not take kindly to such public displays of fawning and servility. This clouds the Perverz Musharraf image of a blunt, no-nonsense soldier who speaks his mind and is not given to such public displays of adulation.

Perverz Musharraf is in his element when he speaks what is in his heart without affectation. His main theme was the deep concern about polarization between moderates and extremists in Islam, with international perception recognizing extremists (who are a minority) as the true

representatives of Islam rather than the overwhelming silent majority of moderates. He made an impassioned appeal for all sections of society to support his efforts to shun extremism.

After al-Qaeda was bombed out of Afghanistan some terrorists came across (literally) into greener pastures in Pakistan. The international public perception is that Pakistan has become the epicenter for terrorism. The country's front-line role in the "war against terrorism" is discounted, despite the grievous sacrifices Pakistan has made during the last 5 years. Then again, Pakistan is accused of nuclear proliferation, money-laundering, violation of women's rights, etc. Perverz Musharraf has a harrowing job defending Pakistan's position in public, and repeating it on a day after day basis to visiting dignitaries can be quite frustrating.

The agreement with the tribals in FATA is certainly a matter of satisfaction, it will bring interim peace to the region. The long-term solution is to go down the economic route, but that seems to be half-heartedly on the agenda. The "Reconstruction Opportunity Zones" (ROZs) proposal is good but not good enough. The whole

AS I SEE IT

Perverz Musharraf has been a good leader during a period of great crisis for Pakistan. One accepts his logic that he deliberately put his credibility, and a place in history, in the line of fire in explaining Pakistan's side to a world audience to contain our increasingly eroding credibility as a sovereign nation, but it could still go horribly wrong. One admires his courage in doing so, but only time will tell whether his calculated risk will pay.

of FATA should be designated as a Free Trade Zone (FTZ), maybe even by giving them off-shore status like Mauritius, Jersey Islands, Bahamas, etc.

About Balochistan, and economic initiatives thereof, the president enumerated the efforts being taken to remove the development disparity with the other provinces. More has been done by the present regime for emancipation of the Baloch masses than those before it. The president was firm in stating that he would not allow anyone to take the law into their hands. The recalcitrant tribal Sardars who are a law unto themselves were put on notice. The fundamental responsibility of the government is to enforce the laws of the land. This includes bringing to heel those who think it is their inherent right to go around killing people, blowing up pipelines, transmission towers, bridges and planting landmines, etc. Balochi qualms can be overcome if pragmatic economic initiatives to a hand-in-hand with genuine provincial autonomy.

Given that Perverz Musharraf has an undeniable right to present his own point of view, nevertheless one had profound reservations about his launching in the

Line of Fire at this time, because it has put the state, the institutions of the state, and himself at risk of collateral damage. The logic he puts forward is, however, convincing.

It is true the world takes him to be upright and credible, in contrast Pakistan is perceived as being "ground zero" for a myriad number of the world's major problems. The presentation of Pakistan's viewpoint through his personal autobiography would give credibility to much of the facts that the world had misperceptions and doubts about. In effect, he has taken a calculated risk in gambling with his person and place in history.

While his version of the AQ Khan episode may be the subject of criticism locally, in international circles it vindicates Pakistan's position that nuclear proliferation was the act of one man rather than being state sanctioned. It absolves Pakistan's image as an out of control "rogue nation," a necessary statement of fact. We have to live in a real world where heads of state and/or heads of government are involved in pragmatic political and administrative compromises, not exactly "koshier," or for that matter popular,

but necessary in the exigencies of the country's interest.

I must respectfully disagree with Gen Perverz Musharraf concerning his disparaging and unnecessary comments about Lt Gen (Retd) Ali Kuli Khan Khattak. In the ultimate success on being appointed COAS over Ali Kuli and Khalid Nawaz, Perverz Musharraf should have been magnanimous. In the 48 years that I have known Gen Ali Kuli, I have never seen him doing or saying anything wrong, either professionally or in his personal capacity. Ali Kuli was an excellent professional soldier, and he remains in civilian life as an upright, honest, correct and exemplary human being.

The 29th Pakistan Military Academy (PMA) Long Course was perhaps the finest intake from the 25th to 36th PMA (the last of the Long Courses pre-1965), truly amazing. Ali, Khalid Nawaz and Perverz Musharraf were among the top six cadets from the 29th nominated for Sandhurst.

As "Top Guns" of the course (including outrageously brave Shabbir Sharif Shaheed, Nishan-e-Haider), Ali Kuli, Khalid Nawaz, and Perverz Musharraf rose together to the rank of Lt Gen and can rightly claim to be the best of the best, the crème de la crème. Ali Kuli went off to Sandhurst and Shabbir Sharif got the coveted Sword of Honour, Khalid Nawaz graduated as Company Senior Under Officer (SUO) and Musharraf as Battalion JOO. Musharraf would have graduated at least 6 rungs higher except for an unfortunate incident.

I have personally heard Ali Kuli speak up in Perverz Musharraf's defence as recently as November 2005 in New Delhi at

the World Economic Forum's India Economic Summit, when he was asked a leading (and deliberately mischievous) question about Musharraf's being appointed as COAS over his head. As examples for younger officers to emulate, it does not benefit the two, who remained good friends till October 12, 1999, to be taking potshots at each other.

Ali Kuli and Khalid Nawaz (a "Gallian" to add to his credentials) opted for retirement in the best traditions of the service when Musharraf, nominally their junior, became COAS. Loving and respecting Ali Kuli as my older brother, I also admire what Musharraf has been doing for Pakistan as president. Like both of them a Sandhurst candidate, I humbly request them to cool it in the best interests of the army and the country.

Perverz Musharraf has been a good leader during a period of great crisis for Pakistan. One accepts his logic that he deliberately put his credibility, and a place in history, in the line of fire in explaining Pakistan's side to a world audience to contain our increasingly eroding credibility as a sovereign nation, but it could still go horribly wrong. One admires his courage in doing so, but only time will tell whether his calculated risk will pay.

Ikrum Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

A great social thinker and reformer

ABDUL QUADER writes from Canberra

I always believed that Dr Muhammad Yunus, the founder of the Grameen Bank, would one day win the Nobel Peace Prize for his unique social institution that has shaped the lives of many poor people, not only in Bangladesh but in many other countries where the institution was replicated.

Many people thought that he would get the Nobel Prize in economics. Even the former US President Bill Clinton in his autobiography was of the view that Dr Yunus should have won the Nobel Prize in economics many years ago. But, personally, I never subscribed to this view for my own reasons and way of thinking. I said to myself: "If Dr Yunus ever gets the Nobel Prize, he will get it for peace."

On occasions in the past I had discussions with some close associates in Canberra on Dr Yunus's prospects of winning a Nobel Prize. In these social discussions I expressed my opinion

Very often, especially in developing countries such as Bangladesh, the rules and regulations made by governments stand in the way of economic and social advancement of the people they are elected to serve. The government is a necessary evil in some respects. So we cannot do without the government, even though we may not like many of its policies and actions. However, what Dr Yunus and the Grameen Bank have shown is that even in case of monumental governmental barriers, under certain social conditions, people can move forward if they are given the chance.

that while he was an economics professor at a university, and is considered as an economist, Dr Yunus basically created a unique social institution, with the effective management of micro-credit, that has helped the poor to come out of poverty and lead a decent life.

Dr Yunus's success has long been recognised, so the model is now adopted in many countries as a strategy to reduce and eradicate poverty. To me, the Grameen Bank's mission is peace through eradication of poverty. This boils down to the point that social security depends, to a large extent, on economic security.

Micro-credit itself is not a new concept invented by Dr Yunus and the Grameen Bank. The credit system, called "mahajani loan," which has been in practice for many decades in Bangladesh is basically micro-credit (this loan is often provided with a simple hand note as a collateral), and the loans that were extended by the legendary Kabulwalas during the British rule in India, and even after the partition of India, were nothing but micro-credit. But these kinds of loans are exploitative in nature, having no involvement of any institutional arrangements. And these, mostly, went against the interests of the poor in terms of

further deterioration of their economic and social conditions.

In my view, the biggest achievement of Dr Muhammad Yunus is that he rightly understood that man is a social animal, and developed an economic incentive structure linked with the social behaviour of men (and, for that matter, women). Through his social experiment with institution building he has influenced the group behaviour of the poor, and he has structured his credit programme in a way that enables the poor borrowers, especially the women, to take responsibility and be accountable for their work. The group incentive structure of the

Grameen Bank is what has made his social experiment a success that has changed the lives of millions of people.

To me, the winning of the Nobel Peace Prize by Dr Yunus is an embodiment of the self-confidence and determination achieved by the poor in raising their own standards of living with a small supervised credit. This was unthinkable few decades ago.

The Nobel Prize citation, inter alia, states "to create economic and social development from below" is suggestive of the poor people's efforts to fully participate in economic opportunities if the right incentive structures and institutional regimes are made available. The award also implies that social institutions can survive only if real and sustainable benefits are secured for those whom the institutions are meant to serve.

Globalisation has had significant impact on people's lives all over the world. The world has become smaller, so to speak, with the rapidly changing communications technology, and has become

more integrated with free movement of capital, human resources and technology of all kinds.

While the onslaught of globalisation has led to adverse consequences for some countries and groups of people in those countries, many of the poor people have gainfully exploited the opportunities provided by globalisation. The opportunities associated with the wide-spread use of modern technology, such as the mobile phone, are a case in point, and Grameen Phone is a shining example of this.

The Grameen Bank clients have benefited from the use of mobile phones in terms of further economic development. Globalisation means integration of activities, far and wide. Nowadays, the macro dimensions of world economics can be strongly linked with the micro dimensions prevailing in a village in Bangladesh, or elsewhere.

The Grameen Bank's activities are not about "reverse globalisation," rather they are about "stronger globalisation" because people of different eco-

nomical and social status can exploit the opportunities to participate as global citizens in many activities if they are supported by the right institutional arrangements. These arrangements do not necessarily have to be provided by the government; they can be developed and nurtured through social institutions as the Grameen Bank has vividly demonstrated.

Very often, especially in developing countries such as Bangladesh, the rules and regulations made by governments stand in the way of economic and social advancement of the people they are elected to serve. This view was also expressed by Dr Muhammad Yunus at an NTV interview, on October 13, after he had won the Nobel Prize.

I think the reasons behind the barriers imposed by the government have to do with the traditional social norms of holding authority to establish control so that vested interests are served. The government is a necessary evil in some respects. So we cannot do without the govern-

ment, even though we may not like many of its policies and actions. However, what Dr Yunus and the Grameen Bank have shown is that even in case of monumental governmental barriers, under certain social conditions, people can move forward if they are given the chance.

In fine, I consider Dr Yunus as a great social thinker and reformer who has developed a sustainable social institution like the Grameen Bank that will continue to work for the poor in Bangladesh, as well as in many other countries around the world. The award of the Nobel Peace Prize recognises his lasting contribution to the enhancement of human welfare, especially of the poorest of the poor.

Abdul Quader is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.