

## Ban on Student Politics

This is for the first time that university teachers in a large body, one hundred of JU teachers to be precise, have come forward taking an unambiguous public stance on student politics. Echoing the President's recent call for a 10-year moratorium on student politics they have formally declared this support for it urging that effective measures be taken to put it in place. Making a distinction between student activism in support of political parties and student politics that is internalised and purely institution-oriented — divorced from any links with national political parties — the teachers said they would not mind to see latter kind of 'politics' on the campus.

The print media by and large has already been forthcoming about President Shahabuddin's ringing calls for placing a ban on student politics reinforced by the political parties' failure to rid themselves of their student fronts and vice versa, despite the entreaties galore from all quarters. The guardians of students have been generally supportive of the President's concerns over political rectitude on the campus and his calls for a moratorium on student politics. Despite such overwhelming media and public endorsement of the moral position to excise vicious politics from the campus, there has been a missing link of a most vital component of the university population — the teachers — choosing to remain inarticulate about it. Now that Jahangirnagar University teachers have spoken, the teachers of other universities and important educational institutions must speak out too.

They are the cream of the society, leaders of education, guardians of the students and persons highly knowledgeable in the in's and out's of campus politics and outside environment. Last but not the least, the teachers are 'political animals', and so too are students, both highly perceptive of and keen on whatever is happening in the national political arena and having their opinions on it. For reasons of their intimate understanding of the students' sensibilities and requirements the teaching community is best placed to provide us guidance in this matter. They must first discuss the pros and cons of the proposed 10-year moratorium, come to a consensus on the definition of student politics that may be permissible within the four walls of academic institution given the dictum that 'today's students need to be groomed as tomorrow's leaders', and then publicly voice their comprehensive support for a suitable moratorium on student politics as we know it.

## Business Concerns

The business community has often been found to be ahead of official thinking. This is possibly because they represent the "grassroots" of the industrial economy, being the ones carrying the burden of trade, commerce and industry. It was not surprising, therefore, to hear leaders of various chambers of commerce and industry speak on a whole range of issues that the government ought to be paying greater attention to, than it is doing at the present.

One such issue raised on Saturday at the conference hall of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) was establishment of direct road links with various bordering points in India. It appears that while the government is thinking only in terms of the vote-catching Dhaka-Calcutta and Dhaka-Ajmeer routes, it may have ignored the economically important destinations such as Agartala, Shillong, Darjeeling, Gauhati etc. The business community's proposal for direct road links with these points needs to be thoroughly examined by the ministries concerned.

Another important point was the issue of bank interest rate. The business community is the principal victim of high interest rates, and this is adversely affecting investment and economic growth. But given the sheer size of the non-performing loans in banks' lending portfolio, it remains a mystery as to how interest rates could be reduced. The private sector accounts for nearly half of bad debts that, combined with public sector liabilities, have forced banks to keep interest rates at a high level. The government has to pursue the bad debt issue with seriousness, so that the level of default shows a decline and terms of lending improve for new entrepreneurs.

But more immediate is the worry expressed over law and order. Criminity affecting business, particularly extortion and kidnapping for ransom has increased unabated despite loud claims of success in the battle against crimes. Political involvement in such criminal activities, particularly extortion, remains high. It is this paper's view that extortion is not inevitable in a developing society, nor is it beyond redress. But the government needs to show steely resolve and rise above partisan interest if it is sincere about eradicating extortion from society.

## DMP's New Gesture

Our hearts are gladdened at the prospect of a grand new service idea floated by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP). It has advised persons drawing big amount of money from banks to call the DMP for help and protection, if necessary. Contact numbers have also been published in the newspapers. This is highly commendable and we congratulate the DMP for their sincere urge to help people in need. In the face of deteriorating crime situation in the city and before the Eid shopping frenzy builds up it has been a timely offer of help coming from the already overworked police force. Instead of seeing additional responsibility befall the slim shoulders of the DMP we would love to have a situation in the country where people would hardly need any police protection to withdraw their money from the banks and carry it home. Is it too much to ask from the DMP? If we take a look around us we find much better atmosphere and law and order situation. Even in a highly risky place like Colombo people hardly ask for police help for such day to day transactions. We are afraid that a police escort would draw attention of the muggers and make the client more vulnerable than he would normally have been without police around him. Nonetheless, we admire the DMP for their thoughtful suggestion and offer of selfless service to the public.

# Pakistan's Afghan Policy: Chasing a Mirage

*Unless the Taliban can be put under leash, Pakistan's finger in Afghan furnace will burn and her dream of a secured western front and strategic depth as well as sharing of Central Asian oil bonanza will remain as elusive as ever.*

EVERY often the professional camaraderie comes into play to transcend the barrier of geography and ethno-religious identity and establishes contact even between the adversaries. I saw the soldiers on guard at either side of Berlin Wall and an invisible line of divide at Panmun-Jom exchanging pleasantries and cracking jokes. But anytime I visited Torkham, the checkpost on Pak-Afghan border in the Khyber Pass, the spectacle was entirely different. Neither the smartly turned out Khyber Rifles men nor the stone-faced Afghan militia ever transmitted any such expression across the border. Stranger to each other they stood motionless at their posts and scanned each other's territory like hawks. That stiffness once symbolised the state of relationship between the two estranged neighbours across the Durand Lines.

The delineation was imposed by British India's Foreign Secretary, Sir Mortimer Durand between Durrani Kingdom of Afghanistan and British Indian empire in 1893 and was accepted by successive Afghan rulers from Amir Abdur Rahman to King Amanullah but the fact that the line was drawn arbitrarily with no regards to ethnic tribes living astride it made the Durand line somewhat controversial.

With the departure of British from the subcontinent the legacy was obviously inherited by Pakistan for which she paid dearly during the most part of her existence.

At the time of British exit King Zahir Shah of Afghanistan saw in the new dispensation of territories an opportunity to enlarge his kingdom and, if possible, obtain an access to the sea for his landlocked country. One of the devices he adopted towards this end was the demand for what he called an independent state of Pushtunistan comprising the lands where his fellow Pushtuns were in majority in Pakistan.

At Afghanistan's behest a Loya Jirga — a grand assembly of tribal elders met in July 1949 and repudiated the frontier agreements sowing the seeds of Pak-Afghan tensions. Pakistan's retaliation by halting movement of goods from Karachi to Afghanistan, the murder of Liaqat Ali Khan in the hands of an Afghan assassin

overflight of American spy plane U-2 from Pakistan's Badaber base and Pakistan's military alliance with the US only heightened those tensions. As a result not only the diplomatic relations between the two neighbours were severed several times, forces were also mobilised against each other. By mid-fifties Pushtunistan issue was internationalised with the Soviets openly supporting the Afghans. The Cold War politics also gradually spilled into Pak-Afghan relations and made it all the more complex.

Pakistani could not however afford this relationship with her Muslim neighbour in her western flank. She already had a hostile neighbour in her eastern flank — several times larger in size and resources and military potentials. The bitterness generated by the partition and her war already fought with India over Kashmir set the trends and patterns of future Indo-Pakistani relationship.

Pakistan obsessed with her insecurity vis-a-vis her eastern neighbour was rather considering Afghanistan together with Iran to be her strategic depth in the event of conflicts with India. On Afghanistan's part, she also could not confront Pakistan on whom the backward and the landlocked country was desperately dependent for trade and transit for long.

Moreover, not only both the countries had been in close proximity of each other, they shared many experiences of the history.

The initiative came from Pakistan to normalise relations with the strategic Kingdom of Hindukush when President Iskander Mirza paid a visit to Kabul in 1956. It was reciprocated by King Zahir Shah's return visit in 1958. Although bungled at times, the Pak-Afghan relations was — now onward — characterised by positive signs and upswings in the relationships which however never turned into that of unalloyed friendship.

Nevertheless, by the time the Saur Revolution took place in 1978 the Pushtunistan issue was significantly toned down and the frontier between the two became relatively peaceful — due mainly to the cross cur-

rent of many dynamics of Afghanistan's domestic politics. In fact, Sardar Daud, the assassinated President of pre-revolution Afghanistan, who found confrontation with Pakistan counterproductive was belatedly moving towards a rapprochement with Pakistan.

The Saur Revolution followed by Soviet invasion a year later had been a watershed in Pak-Afghan relations. They brought both prospects and difficulties for Pakistan in her bid to improve relations with Afghanistan. During long Soviet occupation period Pakistan not only sheltered hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees, she also took active interest in the resistance movement against the pro-Soviet government in Kabul with a hope that

to Afghan statehood while no outsider including Pakistan knew whom to deal with in Afghanistan. As the Soviets pulled out from Afghanistan and Soviet Union itself collapsed, which the Afghans like the most of the world neither believed nor expected, the Mujahideen forces emerging from the theological schools in Balochistan and NWFP of Pakistan. Without waiting any longer to build up a consensus among the Mujahideen leaders Pakistan opted for trying the Taliban for a stable internal order in Afghanistan so that she could share the oil bonanza of Central Asia and her dream of reviving the 'silk route' to the region could be materialised.

Pakistan, in spite of her great role in the war of resistance found itself marginalised in Afghan affair. A central gov-

ernment and gas resources of Central Asia via Afghan territory.

It is believed that Pakistani impatience for quick and acceptable end to Afghan civil war was a major factor behind its backing of Pushtun dominated Taliban forces emerging from the theological schools in Balochistan and NWFP of Pakistan. Without waiting any longer to build up a consensus among the Mujahideen leaders Pakistan opted for trying the Taliban for a stable internal order in Afghanistan so that she could share the oil bonanza of Central Asia and her dream of reviving the 'silk route' to the region could be materialised.

Pakistan was the first country to recognise it.

But can Taliban secure Pak-

istani interests in Afghanistan? How long would they be able to hold on to Kabul? How strong are they both internally? Taliban are yet to consolidate their conquests in the country's north and west where the Tajiks, Hazaras and Shias are united by 'Northern Alliance' subtly backed by Iran. Taliban are unacceptable to both Russia and Central Asian Republics who are concerned at the spread of Islamic extremism in the southern reaches of CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States). Even the US view them with disfavour as they provide sanctuary to terrorists and tend to extend 'Jihad' beyond Afghan soil.

Besides, many believe that

Talibans' brand of puritanical Islam is only a tool to achieve the Pushtuns' ethnic interests in Afghanistan. Pushtuns are the largest ethnic group in the country who held sway over whole of Afghanistan until Saur Revolution. But they were given rather inferior position in post-Najibullah government under Rabbani. Taliban wanted to put an end to this ignominy and restore the past glory of the Pushtuns. Once the primary objectives were achieved the Pushtun dominated Taliban started to fall in

line of their tribes, subtribes, clans and families thus greatly diluting Taliban solidarity and at the same time keeping the civil war alive. For example, the relations between Taliban and Hezb-i-Islami were never cordial although both are Pushtun formations because the two had separately fought for the control of several Afghan provinces.

However, the vital question is how much influence can Pakistan exert on Taliban-led Afghanistan. The point to be understood here is that the understanding reached by Pakistan — whether with Mujahideens or Taliban — seldom went beyond a partnership of convenience. The Taliban and their backers in Pakistan have entirely different goals which are hardly compatible with those of Pakistani administration. Pakistan once grouped up Mujahideen leaders and now backs Taliban, but like in any alliance of convenience it may also frustrate Pakistani intentions.

There is no evidence as yet that Pakistan has been able to control either the events or the attitudes of the Taliban once unleashed from Pakistan's religious seminaries. Also the Taliban's ranks have now been swelled by various elements within Afghanistan including even the former PDPA activists. Pakistan is aware of the harm the Taliban clash with Central Asian Republics would cause to her but she cannot refrain them from spreading religious extremism chagrined by those republics. Taliban's killing of Iranian diplomats in Mazar-i-Sharif has already strained Pakistan's relation with traditionally friendly country Iran. Taliban have influenced also Pakistan's internal politics more effectively than the latter could do in Afghanistan.

The close ideological and military ties between Pakistani religious extremists and their Taliban allies have already fuelled political instability and sectarian violence making Pakistan itself a potential target of terrorism from the camps of its Afghan allies. Unless the Taliban can be put under leash, Pakistan's finger in Afghan furnace will burn and her dream of a secured western front and strategic depth as well as sharing of Central Asian oil bonanza will remain as elusive as ever.



## PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

Pakistan would be subsequently able to install a friendly government in Afghanistan.

As the Mujahideen war of resistance started against the Soviet occupation forces its leaders were in the hands of Pakistanis — albeit at their mercy in the sanctuaries in Peshawar. It was Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) which organised, planned and coordinated this biggest clandestine operation since World War II. The Pakistan hopes were however dashed once the resistance war ended in Afghanistan.

Because the aftermath of civil war in Afghanistan brought in its wake a fundamental change in Afghan polity. It marked the end of a central authority exercised by Pushtun dominated Durrani rulers for over two centuries till Sardar Daud's violent death in the revolution as well as a central government maintained under PDPA (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan) rules.

Now onward it was a threat

ernment — of a sort — remained in power in Kabul with Rabbani-Masood combination in predominant position till 1996 according to Islamabad Declaration of 1993. But its non-Pushtun composition and propensity to accommodate left leaning forces was unacceptable to Pakistani decision makers. Pakistani persuasion to broaden the base of the government failed and inevitably cracks appeared in Pakistan's relation with Tajik-dominated Rabbani government.

So long Pakistan wanted a friendly government in Kabul. Now she aspired to have a pliant government with whom she could chart and guide the course of turbulent Afghan politics. Because after the collapse of Soviet Union and demise of Cold War her stakes in Afghanistan were considerably reduced. It was no more the question of a secured western front or strategic depth only. Pakistani desire to direct the course of Afghan policy acquired a new urgency as their fuel-starved country was presented with an opportunity for an access to oil

in the collection of oil

in road and bridge building, to oversee and monitor contractors in other fields, etc.

While some posts require Cols, Briggs and Maj Gens, the most valuable position in the Army is the Major, a man found not suitable for any number of reasons for going on to the rank of Lt Cols. A vast number of Majors are usually available in any given year, mostly they are between 40-45 years of age, just right in experience and maturity to do jobs in which they do not replace civilians but complement them in many ways. Someone up there in the military hierarchy has to think this one through.

The corrupt have an enduring ambition other than making money for themselves, that is to corrupt others around them. That is the easiest way rulers have to retain power. One of the problems the COAS has to face is when to say "no" even in the face of temptation from the camps of its Afghan allies. Unless the Taliban can be put under leash, Pakistan's finger in Afghan furnace will burn and her dream of a secured western front and strategic depth as well as sharing of Central Asian oil bonanza will remain as elusive as ever.

## AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

There are rumours that military courts may be established to try cases of power theft, an endemic problem, in Pakistan. The rumour mills went overboard and stories started appearing in the national Press, thankfully denied by Brig Rashid Qureshi, Director ISPR himself that "there is no proposal to take over the Railways and JCOs are not being appointed to look after garbage cleaning in Lahore", unquote.

Without trying to teach anyone the primary role of the

tend to severely disparage any adverse performance while ignoring the successes. During the 80s and even the 90s the performance of uniformed personnel in civilian jobs has been as good or as bad as the individual. Some people have made money their ancestors could not dream about but their descendants will enjoy. Let us put it bluntly, has the corruption in WAPDA, Pakistan Steel, PASSCO, National Fertiliser, etc, lessened even though at times their heads have been uniformed or

tend to severely disparage any adverse performance while ignoring the successes. During the 80s and even the 90s the performance of uniformed personnel in civilian jobs has been as good or as bad as the individual. Some people have made money their ancestors could not dream about but their descendants will enjoy. Let us put it bluntly, has the corruption in WAPDA, Pakistan Steel, PASSCO, National Fertiliser, etc, lessened even though at times their heads have been uniformed or

ex-uniformed men of integrity?

Why does not the Army commission a blue-ribbed high-powered survey of the living conditions of ex-uniformed personnel?

This is not to cast any asper-

sions on the vast majority of honourable people like former Chairman JCSC Gen Sharif

who lives in virtual austerity

while a few of their colleagues

(and their sons) wallow in un-

limited wealth. Where did this

money come from? Some of it

can be traced back to Defence Purchases but most of it was ac-

cumulated during tenures occu-

pying civilian jobs.

Putting the Army in civvies

in the 80s resulted in the high

price of undercutting of profes-

posts to counter smuggling and

because the fault lies with the lack of proper education at home but with the teachers again. During each exam most students do not answer all the questions either because they have learnt to neglect their duties from their teachers or be-

cause they feel that is what they are supposed to do. Here the teachers should instruct the students how to prepare for an exam and answer the questions successfully.

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What seems to be more impor-

tant is that the government will

silently observe the role of a

number of ME countries.

The base and transit passage

facilities provided by those

countries would have to watch

out for long-term interests of

the hawks. History has many

such instances to prove that

clash of interest can turn a

friend into a foe at any time.

Operation Desert Fox is indeed

a clever ploy emitting signals of

dangerous days ahead.

Therefore may I request the

minister for Post and Telecommunications to kindly

take a decision to convert the