

Window of Opportunity

THIS may sound like building castles in the air at this stage but we would still take that joy ride come as the offer does from an authentic voice in the Japanese business community.

The current thinking among Japanese investors to favour Bangladesh is induced by a number of factors with one common thread running through them all which is unfailing Japanese pragmatism in business decisions.

So, this is a window of opportunity about to fling open before us. But the excellent prospects cannot be realised without our stepping back from hartals, improving the law and order situation, and upgrading the infrastructure in a quick enough succession.

This is Unacceptable

THE good news is that classes at BUET have finally resumed Sunday after an unscheduled 68-day closure of the university. The bad news is that the All Party Student Unity (APSU) has threatened to "launch a movement on the campus if the authorities fail to reconsider its decision".

The whole situation has become untenable and, in this regard, APSU's position is certainly unacceptable. As representative body of the student community, the APSU was expected to readily regret the rampage and call for strict disciplinary measures for the aberrants.

Until and unless the APSU produces concrete evidence pointing at flaws or partiality in the probe report, there is no reason whatsoever for the authorities to pay heed to them. If the students, implicated one way or the other and punished thereby, feel sinned against, they can always plead for justice in the court of law.

Ill-tempered Teacher

ONCE upon a time the Pathshalas (primary schools) of this region used to be controlled by the red-eyed Pundit Moshais (teachers) and their canes. Similarly the Maktabas and Madrassahs (Muslim religious schools) were disciplined by bearded Moulvi Sahebs (religion teachers) with the help of canes.

But the cruelty shown by a teacher of Dhanmondi Boys' School on eight-year-old student Mahfuzur Rahman Nion on Saturday as reported in a prominent Bangla daily hurts our sensibilities. The heavy punishment meted out to the child by a lady teacher has been not only grossly out of proportion to the offence he purportedly committed but also patently indefensible as a teaching method.

IN September 1997 India's Space Programme had crossed an important technological threshold. Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) then launched its first Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) enabling India to place her Remote Sensing Satellite into the optimal 900 km altitude orbit.

The successful launch of PSLV-C2 in March 1999 was the fourth successful flight in the PSLV series and considered a milestone in the Indian space programme. In the present configuration the 44.4 meter tall, 294-tonne PSLV can launch 1200 kg at 820 km high Polar Orbit. It has sufficiently demonstrated the capability of Indian scientists to build operational launch vehicle to place Indian satellites in orbit from within the country.

By any reckoning, India's space programme is now advanced enough to be used for power projection and force multiplication through satellite reconnaissance, intelligence gathering and communication service. All these capabilities combined with the modernisation of India's conventional forces will, by the turn of the century, begin to affect the strategic relationship between India and its traditional adversaries — Pakistan and China.

India's Space Programme Military and Strategic Implications

With the maturation of India's satellite-based reconnaissance intelligence and communication capabilities Pakistan's potential nuclear deterrence against India would be vulnerable to Indian first strike. With these assets at disposal New Delhi can also effectively counter a Chinese conventional military threat.

ance of power will have important security implication for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean region.

When first conceived in the 1960s India's space programme was intended to play a role in broader national policy of planned socio-economic development. From the beginning the satellite communication, educational television programme, meteorology and natural resources, survey and management had been its priority areas.

Although these agenda continue to dominate India's space programmes the military spin off envisaged in the programme also gained primacy. Soon after India's 1974 nuclear test the report of the development of Satellite Launch Vehicle (SLV)-3 came to light although its first test which failed in 1979 was years away.

space programme emerged when SLV-3's first stage was used in Agni missile. It was in spite of the ISRO's persistent opposition to the military application of its dual use project such as SLV-3.

In July 1983 India embarked upon an Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP) which was pursued through India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). This organisation



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

tion, however, borrowed its human resources and technology from the ISRO. In a move resented by ISRO community Dr Abdul Kalam, the roundtable head of the ISRO's SLV projects was shifted to DRDO with a dozen of scientists. The team soon designed 2500 km range Agni missile. The Agni is relatively light, and therefore transportable making it an ideal second strike mobile intermediate range ballistic missile (IRBM) system.

only if launched from insecure launch sites in Northeast India.

The IG-MDP under DRDO also involved itself in the development of Prithvi, a 250 km range surface to surface missile of great potentials. The Prithvi missile based on the Soviet SA-2 missile is a 4-ton liquid fuel missile and one hundred of them have been ordered for the Indian Army and Airforce. DRDO has developed 9 km range Trishul and 25km range Akash,

ing arm of India's Space Agency, ISRO's PSLV-C2 launched in March this year sent three satellites including Republic of Korea's KITSAT-3 and German DLR-TUBSAT into orbit under a commercial agreement, thus making India's entry into competitive launch services market.

But the strategic utility of India's space asset is equally remarkable. India's space assets provide India with first-generation military communications and reconnaissance capabilities, which, though currently limited, can be greatly enhanced with upgradation to the present generation of systems. This upgraded systems would affect the calculations of regional security planners on both conventional and nuclear issues.

option of reliably launching a conventional strike against Pakistan's F-16, one of the latter's nuclear delivery systems at their air bases. Pakistan's missile forces can also be detected and monitored by Indian satellites and she may therefore not escape an Indian first strike.

India's satellite reconnaissance satellite enable, her to counter Chinese conventional threat in the short term. Also her satellite intelligence capabilities give her military planners invaluable tactical and strategic information on Chinese military forces in Tibet. The IRS satellite system with its 6-day repeat cycles or a future series of dedicated military satellites would give India's armed forces adequate warning about the movement of Chinese troops from central China towards Tibet and India. It would in turn be helpful for India to deploy its forces in time to counter any Chinese aggression.

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War and Peace: Catch-22

it is increasingly clear that strong third party, in this case maybe the US or China jointly, or even the EU or the G-8 in combination, could attempt a Camp David or Oslo-type mediation. With neither side blinking, or very correctly without being able to blink, someone has to come and break the logjam so that both sides get some face-saving.

WRONG-footed by the blunders committed by the Indian Army in Kargil, the Indian Government is presently situated between a rock and a hard place. The series of Pokhran nuclear blasts in May last year allowed Pakistan an honourable passage out of the self-imposed nuclear closet within weeks of the Indian explosions.

Obviously those occupying the no-man's land came from the Pakistani side. By accepting that Mujahideen were across the LoC, Pakistan committed a cardinal mistake of credibility when it had no reason to. Both sides had as much right to dominate the no-man's land. If the Indians had fixed positions there, where were the bunkers, the communications and logistics system? In the enthusiasm of some quarters in Pakistan to hog the credit the media battle was lost. Pakistan walked into a credibility trap by trying to justify Mujahideen across the LoC when the truth

was that it should have been read the other way around for world consumption. However, credit must be given to the General Staff for showing up the fragile Indian Lines of Communication (L of C) through the length and breadth of Kashmir and in doing so, internationalising the Kashmir issue very rapidly even as Kosovo was fading away as a flash-point.

If BJP was not facing a crucial election in a few months, the Indian reaction would perhaps have been more muted. Faced with a loss of territory, and egg in the face, subject to criticism by the Congress and other Opposition parties, stung by the large losses in men and material, set back by the significant and visible lack of morale among the ground troops and above all militarily stumped by the cutting off of two Indian Divisions in Ladakh and a Division in Siachen, India is in no position to back off. It would mean political hara-kiri. As such, other than air and artillery bombardment along with ground assaults, they have mounted an intense world and local media campaign to support a many-strated diplomatic offensive and a concerted domestic campaign to shore up the Armed Forces morale. The Indians have been simultaneously threatening Pakistan with all-out war in the hope that Pakistan would fall for the bluff and back off. This also threatens the world with possible nuclear apocalypse if they

do not use pressure on Pakistan. The world seems to have bought this argument. The Indians are publicly debating in the electronic and print media "whether to give the Mujahideen safe passage". As if the Mujahideen are asking for or will need "safe passage", if it was not so macabre it would be a joke.

Presently, both the inherent military factors and the weather are against the Indians

force. Would the Indians risk the loss of Kashmir and about half a million men, both military and para-military? Or would they rather keep up the bluster for another 45 days till a window of opportunity presents itself between Aug 15 and Sept 30 to try for a quick knockout blow across the international border? By threatening war they are holding the world to ransom, a crude form of nuclear blackmail.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

from either widening the local war by crossing the LoC or even the international border (thus declaring all-out war). The heat and impending monsoons would greatly hamper large-scale manoeuvres. On the other hand, the induction of 50-60000 Afghan Mujahideen in battle groups of 4000-5000 could easily cause a catastrophe for the Indians if they cross the LoC into held Kashmir at 10-12 different locations and complete the unfinished agenda of Operation Gibraltar (1965). The Indian Army, totally dependent upon a tenuous L of C across mountainous terrain, would easily be isolated into Brigade/Unit Groups without the tactical or logistical interaction as a contiguous fighting

What about our own situation? One cannot live with the blatant misinformation that this brilliant plan was conceived and implemented in isolation of GHQ or the Government. There is a regular war going on in Siachen where Indians crossed the LoC in 1984 by taking advantage of lack of demarcation. If either we (or the Mujahideen) took up positions in an unoccupied portion of a no-man's land in the same region, why should we have a defensive attitude by trying to sell what is potentially unsaleable, particularly when the truth will suffice. By muddying up our

version we gave our credibility a hard knock and India got away with losing two aircraft on our side of the LoC. Now we find ourselves in a bind. With a lot of genuine public fervour in Pakistan about freeing Kashmir, the Government has been boxed into such a corner that the PM has been threatened publicly with assassination in a public meeting if he should back down. Important public personalities have gone on record (some in open letters in the print media) as saying that they would combine to bring the government down if they saw any sign of caving in.

Ever sensitive to public reaction and a hawk on Kashmir despite his otherwise dovish plumage as a man of peace, PM Nawaz Sharif is in the same situation he was in before the May 28 Chagil blasts, any weakness would mean political catastrophe. Demeaning the whole gamut of the Kashmir problem along with Kargil, the PM's message through Gen Zinni, commander US Central Command, who came to see him on behalf of President Clinton would be the same. Almost the same thing could have been stated by the COAS, any back off would invite a public reaction definitely but also create severe misgivings among the disciplined Armed Forces. Historically, the Pentagon has been closer to Pakistan than the State Department, would

the US military sit by and allow the State Department to "use a hammer to remove a fly from a friend's forehead" according to a Chinese proverb? Are memories that short that Pakistan's brave stand against the full might of Superpower USSR in Afghanistan during the last decade, even as India was vigorously supporting the Soviet invasion, has been so easily forgotten? Through 40 of its 50 years, India vociferously opposed the US, is that easily forgotten? Pakistan cannot back down in Kargil; it cannot accept anything less than a *quid pro quo*, at the least, even as a face-saving gesture.

We are in a Catch-22 bind, one where the Gordian knot is becoming more complicated by the day. If Pakistan cannot afford a war; neither can India, the collateral damage to the economies would be devastating. However it is increasingly clear that strong third party, in this case maybe the US or China jointly, or even the EU or the G-8 in combination, could attempt a Camp David or Oslo-type mediation. With neither side blinking, or very correctly without being able to blink, someone has to come and break the logjam so that both sides get some face-saving. Maybe the whole of the no-man's land can be declared a Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) with UN or NATO monitors keeping the peace, maybe joint patrols could be established who know what face-to-face talks could lead to. If the Indians are stupid enough to start a war in the next 45 days we live in real hope that one day we will see peace in a free Kashmir.

To the Editor...

So long Gordon

Sir, This is to say 'so long' to our former cricket coach Gordon Greenidge.

Gordon, you have been like a Flash Gordon to our cricket. You must be feeling some kind of agony inside that we are so ungrateful and rude. But the fact is, we are not an ungrateful nation, you remember, we have awarded the honorary citizenship to you after the ICC triumph in 1997. It's just that you, and Syed Ashraful Haq are the victims of ugly politics of BCB people.

The way you have been sacked prior to our historic victory over Pakistan in 1999 World Cup is really very painful and we are very much ashamed of it. You ignited the spirit and much needed confidence in our players and worked very hard for the last three years but the BCB officials turned you into a villain and nobody from the Sports Ministry or BCB seemed to appreciate your effort.

Well, so long Gordon, pray for our cricket from the Caribbean.

Maskur Reza, 189, Green Road, Dhaka

Cricket and politics

Sir, Our cricket team won two matches in the World Cup, one against the Asian giants and the World Cup favourite Pakistan — congrats, Bangladesh cricket team!

But there is a but in it. Already we have started mixing politics with sports. The Public Reception for the cricket team arranged by the Dhaka Mayor looked more like a political meeting rather than a reception where 71 came as a major issue

in speeches of many of the speakers. Innumerable VIPs, (mostly politicians of the ruling party) of all ranks had to present bouquets to the players and it so happened that at one stage the VIPs outnumbered the bouquets and they had to take bouquets from one player and hand it over to another. The scene was not only boring but farcical too. Then again many suggested that the game between Bangladesh and Pakistan was a fix-up. Some find malice in Wasim Akram addressing Bangladesh players as 'brothers'. And yet some (Nazma Ali's 'Miandad! No thanks' DS 15 June) started questioning Miandad's integrity if he is hired as Bangladesh coach, he being an Punjabi.

For God's sake, keep your personal feelings to yourself and politicising for political forum and leave sports alone and let it flourish in its sportive fervour otherwise, we will be doing immense harm to the blooming sports of ours.

Brig Mahmood, House#59, Road#7, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

Public roads and streets

Sir, Would our MPs of both the ruling and opposition parties kindly tell us what is the meaning, necessity, significance and justification of public roads and streets?

Would they also kindly let us know what is the constitutionality and legality, lawfulness and legitimacy of public roads and streets and the present actual situation?

It is a common phenomenon in the city that any unscrupulous person can occupy, seize and take over any portion of the public road or street, establish a shop or workshop, store goods and commodities, sell varieties of items park vehicles haphazardly, or put up barricade on the public road and streets for indefinite period without any interference, check and objection

by the law enforcing authorities, DCC officials and DMP.

The unscrupulous elements are however required to pay from time to time a lump sum amount of 'toll tax' to the local mastans, DCC officials or the police.

Our authorities concerned are spending crores of taka from the public exchequer for the construction, repair and maintenance of public roads and streets for the economic development, movement of people and transportation of goods and commodities but due to lack of administrative supervision and control the aims, objectives and purpose of public roads and streets are bogged down and spoilt.

O. H. Kabir, 6, Hare Street, Wari, Dhaka

MI G 29

Sir, The Government is buying MiG 29 from Russia. It is astonishing and surprising for a country which can't make its national budget without foreign aid. The country which is

hunger and poverty stricken, and is one of the poorest countries of the world is going to buy MiG 29s, disregarding its national development and alleviation of hunger and poverty. We urge the government to change the decision immediately and spend the money for the national development.

There is no threat to Bangladesh's sovereignty and independence. And if any threat of any kind comes up, the mass people will definitely face it. We want to remind the government that poor have no enemy. The sooner the government withdraws its decisions, the better it is for the nation.

Obaidul Haq Pirjada, Advocate and convener of Durniti Khedao Party, Bangladesh, 1840 Winona Blvd #303, Los Angeles, CA 90027, USA

OPINION

Bangladesh's Defense Budget and MiG-29s Purchase

Dr. A.H. Jaffor Ullah

From the time the news of MiG-29s purchase by Bangladesh Air Force was made public, I saw editorial write-ups sprang up in Bangladesh. The news has also received wide publicity in the western world albeit with a tinge of negativity. Why not? A country that is not capable of feeding her population two square meals a day and where the infant mortality rate is still alarmingly high, the thought of buying sophisticated military hardware to keep the sky above free of intruders does not make free of a sense.

The sad part of the story is that both the government and the defense establishment of the nation do not visualize the incongruity of such an expensive shopping binge considering general impoverishment that seems to be a permanent fixture in this land of 120+ million people.

On June 30, the day after Bangladesh Air Force and visiting Russian delegation leader consummated the sale of eight MiG-29s war planes, Dhaka's premier newspaper The Daily Star mildly criticized the purchase because no national debate over the purchase of the plane ever took place in any public forum. The cost and maintenance of each MiG-29 plane were mentioned in the DS editorial to highlight the financial burden that may result from this purchase of these high performance combat planes. I did not come across any editorial the other English dailies. The consensus in Bangladesh concerning defense establishment is that it is better not to talk about such 'touchy' issue. Also, the consensus is the sky above Bangladesh should remain free. Any obtrusive venture from Bangladesh's neighbor should be deterred at any cost. Thus, most newspapers view the fire warning of Bangladesh's security from the perspective of Air Force a legitimate concern of our defense es-

ablishment. With this kind of logic it makes perfect sense to spend an extra \$115 million to safeguard the national security of Bangladesh. After all, it is a "small" price to pay. They might opine that there is no such thing as "free lunch" in this dog-eat-dog world.

Two days after the publication of the DS editorial on July 2, the ex-Vice-Marshal of Bangladesh, Murtaz Uddin Ahmed gave a "befitting" rejoinder telling us that in this post-Cold War days a small country like Bangladesh has every reason to be concerned about the security of its air space. The ex-BAF chief obliquely referred our giant neighbor a country not to be trusted. This justification, whether it has any merit or not, is enough for Bangladesh's security conscious administration to give their consent for obtaining MiG-29 planes. The cost issue had always been a secondary one.

Bangladesh's entire budget for the fiscal year 1997-98 was about \$ 6.62 billion dollars. Of this, the defense budget was about \$ 978 million or 14.77 per cent. I do not have the hard figures for the 1999-2000 but it is very likely that the defense budget would be over a billion-dollar. A Reuters report from Dhaka had indicated that the proposed defence budget would be 17 per cent more than the last year. This would be done to accommodate the purchase or finance of eight MiG-29s combat aircrafts. Bangladesh typically allocates about 24 per cent of the total budget into education sector. This deserves commendation from us all. In fact, we would not mind seeing a slight increase in education budget because the need needs more trained people in every sphere of Bangladesh's national life. The education

money is working in Bangladesh and there is tangible result one can discern. However, when you talk about defence budget, which is running second to education budget, one will be hard pressed to come up with any tangible results coming from defence related activities. I think the defence is drawing much too much financial resources from the budget of this impoverished land and not giving any perceptible return.

Unlike Pakistan and India who are pitted against each other and who often wage full-scale wars, Bangladesh is lucky to be in the position she is in. This off-again-on-again belligerence between India and Pakistan is putting a strain on defence budget of both the countries. But why Bangladesh has to tread the same water? Instead of increasing the defence budget 17 per cent this year alone, what we needed was to decrease the budget by same percentage point. The money could have been diverted to technical education for training unskilled high school dropouts so that they may become welders, electricians, plumbers, carpenters, tinsmiths, etc. But guess what, the reality in Bangladesh? The unskilled labourers will remain unskilled for a long time to come and we will have eight shiny MiG-29s delivered to our doorsteps by the Russians. Politicians and airforce men will greet those planes enthusiastically thinking that Bangladesh's sovereignty and independence will be rock solid now. In due course, of course, the planes will make their monthly rounds with deafening sound and most people in Bangladesh will feel a sigh of relief knowing that the country is at good hand.

The author who lives in New Orleans, USA, is a Senior Research Scientist working in the field of Protein Chemistry and Molecular Genetics.