

Dent on Govt's Credibility

SATURDAY'S attack on the GrameenPhone Soutlet in Barisal, allegedly by some ruling party activists 'denied' of their 'demand for free mobile phones', minutes after the chief guest of the inauguration ceremony, none other than the home minister himself, left the venue, has had us dumbfounded. The incident, in our view, sends a few disquieting messages across the society.

First, the central leadership of the AL exercises very little control over its field-level activists; in other words, there appears no such thing as a chain of command working within the party. Otherwise, how could such an instance of hooliganism take place at a function that featured two senior AL leaders? Worse still, absence of the Chief Whip in the parliament, reportedly 'unhappy' at not being the chief guest himself and over exclusion of some local leaders from the guests' list, smacked of a 'cold war' amongst the senior members of the party.

Second, the leaders and the activists of the ruling party may have started believing that they are above the law, and can get away with bending the law here and breaking the law there. Administrative indifference whenever and wherever AL men are implicated has certainly lent weight to their belief.

And, the last, the government's avowal towards ensuring maximum foreign direct investment is nothing more than political rhetoric. Law and order being one of the major concerns of potential foreign investors, it has not even tried to contain the law-breakers within its party ranks.

Overall, such an incident stands out as an indicator of malgovernance, decimating the government's credibility in the public mind and projecting an inauspicious image to the international community and thereby harming our FDI potential. The country, in the long run, stands a loser — socially, politically and economically.

We hope that the home minister, who is also in charge of telecommunications ministry, realises the far-reaching implications of what has happened in Barisal. Immediately, we feel, he should intervene and instruct the local administration to arrest those who vandalised and looted the GrameenPhone outlet. By no means should the culprits be allowed to get away. At the same time, security and safety should be ensured for the mobile operator there, so that it can operate without the fear of retribution from the aggrieved AL men. And the ruling party leadership must devise ways to have total control over its grassroots activists; for it is ultimately responsible for their actions.

A Glimmer of Hope

GOVERNMENT'S decision to convert the existing gauto-rickshaws to run on compressed natural gas (CNG) is most welcome but this decision should not in any way jeopardise the earlier one to withdraw these two-stroke monsters in phases and ban their import into the country altogether. It is true that a large number of people who now depend for their livelihood on these contraptions will be thrown out of employment if these are banned overnight but the phasing out of these three-wheelers has become a priority for the sake of public health.

The World Bank initiative to train around 400 mechanics in the proper maintenance of these machines is a step in the right direction which will minimise the incidences of air pollution to a great extent. The idea of educating the taxi drivers in the use of pure fuel and lubricant should be implemented with all seriousness and this will entail a lot of educative material and public relations, specially with the drivers' and the owners' associations.

The idea of conversion needs proper logistics for successful implementation. First, there should be sufficient number of workshops to convert the fifty thousand baby taxis of Dhaka city alone and may be another equal numbers in the districts. Secondly, there should be sufficient number of filling stations with a good stock of gas cylinders to avoid any hiccup and shortage. Thirdly, the drivers and technicians of these filling stations must be trained adequately so that they can run the machines safely and avoid accidents. Fourthly, a time frame for the whole exercise, the conversion and particularly the withdrawal of these three-wheelers altogether from the roads of Bangladesh, has to be announced by the government and strictly followed. At the same time the import of less harmful 4-stroke engines has to be ensured so that a large number of 'baby taxi drivers are not thrown out of employment. And finally, unlike many other projects of the government, delayed or shelved, we want this one to be implemented in public interest without any delay.

Why Should They Suffer?

WHY should they suffer for no faults of their own? A hundred and thirty-two girl students of Motijheel Model School and College are on the verge of losing a valuable academic year and also a precious period of time from their budding lives for irresponsible and callous attitude of the college authority. Since the problem came into fore, the students (and their guardians) have been coaxing and demanding permission from the college as well as the Board authorities to sit for the exam and to allow them to fill up the necessary forms. But nothing positive has been achieved in this regard. At one stage even the education minister expressed his inability to go beyond the existing rules and regretted his helplessness in this regard.

By all accounts the college authority appears to be responsible for the whole sordid episode of not following the 1998 syllabus, keeping the students in the dark and showing indifference in the matter of filling up forms for the final exams. The Board chairman indicated consideration of the demands of the students for the future but has categorically denied that he sees any prospects for them to take the exams which are only seven days away.

The exasperation and frustration of these unfortunate students can very well be imagined and we offer our sincerest sympathies to them. At the same time we fervently request the Board Chairman and the Education Minister to kindly look into the matter with profound compassion to avoid ruination of careers of these innocent students and also ask for a thorough investigation in the matter and punishment of those responsible for this despicable act.

NO one invites a guest to be admonished by the latter, no matter how much honoured the guest may be. Pakistan did — and that too at a cost. The guest was allowed to do it in public. For bare face saving, Pakistan did not find an alternative to it. Because it could be a greater ignominy if the President of a country known to be Pakistan's longest time ally would have wound up his South Asian jaunt without setting his feet on its soil. General Musharraf, the country's military ruler, provided further incentives for the visit after months of hard bargaining on restoration of democracy and his obstinate refusal to give a timeframe for the purpose. On the eve of Bill Clinton's brief stopover in Islamabad he announced his plan for holding 'local elections' at the end of the year as a first step for the country's democratisation.

All these were, in no way, considerations in July 1961 when Ayub Khan, the first of Pakistan's military rulers visited the United States and addressed the joint session of the US Congress — indeed a high point of US-Pakistan relations. Neither was anything of this kind demanded when in early eighties the US pumped billions of dollars and sophisticated arms into Ziaul Haq's Pakistan. Those were the times for great congruence of interests which it is no more. Pakistan realised rather late — if it really

IT IS a strange coincidence that President K.R. Narayanan gave awards for bravery at Kargil on the day and the time when former Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was sentenced to 25 years. The latter, too, said in a statement before the court that he was being 'punished' for Kargil. Nawaz Sharif meant that he was being tried for the withdrawals at Kargil. He may well be speaking the truth. But the judgment is the worst form of nemesis. It is a retribution of sorts since it is well established by now that Sharif was in the know about the Kargil operation. The probe that India conducted confirms this. So does the statement by Pakistan Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf that "everyone was on board". The unkindest cut is that Sharif knew about the operation when he welcomed the Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at the Amritsar-Wagah border last year. Still, as far as the judgment is concerned, it is brutal and bewildering. Brutal because a sentence for 25 years is nearly double the period of life imprisonment — 14 years — the maximum given to a culprit in the subcontinent. Bewildering because the judge's claim that the conspiracy has been proved hangs in the air. All the co-conspirators have been left off. Only Nawaz Sharif has been punished. How could he have hatched the conspiracy single-handed?

The Anti-Terrorist Court Judge Rehmattullah Jaffari, who gave the verdict, was the second judge to try Nawaz Sharif. The first judge took the case complained that he was unable to perform his duties with plain-clothes security personnel attending the proceedings. He referred the case to another court. The sentence is, however, ominous for the prospects of democracy in Pakistan. The judgment has buried it still deeper. In the past 25 years, two elected Prime Ministers have been disgraced in public and their families harassed. One was hanged and the other

has been sentenced to imprisonment for two and a half decades. The fact remains that people vote them in. Normally, the armed forces should defend the constitution, which guarantees institutions like parliament, not thwart it. But then that is the course which Pakistan has followed for the last 40 years. The experience tells us that the armed forces in the third world seldom give up their hold even when they return to the barracks after intervention.

None can predict how events will unfold themselves in Pakistan in the next few years. It can stay authoritarian for a long time. Still one can say with certainty that Sharif will not serve the full term of 25 years. Sooner or later, Pakistan will return to a democratic set-up. Political institutions will then revive. Whichever party or combination comes to power, it will release Sharif. He may be a lesser person by then. But that too depends on the outcome of cases of corruption against him. The jail sentence in the subcontinent often gives a halo of suffering to the politicians. The example of Laloo Yadav, former Chief Minister of Bihar, is there. But if the corruption cases against Nawaz Sharif are proved beyond doubt, his image will indeed be shattered.

As days go by, the judgment against Sharif will have its fallout. The Muslim League, which has endorsed his leadership, may split. Dissidents are unlikely to sit idle till the outcome of the appeal which will take time, first in the High Court and then in the Supreme Court. On the other hand, there was very little protest. Only a handful of people stood outside the Anti-Terrorist Court to express their solidarity with Sharif, although the betting on his conviction was heavy. A

new telephone connections; and the long delay in going faster with the production of electric power in the country. The PDB and the other national network, with the full knowledge of the cabinet (in the decade of the 1990). Now the power stations are coming up, but the transmission lines are not enough.

Now comes the news (DS April 9) that the donor agencies are reluctant to provide the project funds for installing additional power transmission lines. The political unrest, lack of interest of a section of students to appear on exams in time and lack of administrative prudence of the authority predominate the causes of prolonged session jam.

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South Asia's 'Unipolar Moment': The Flipside

The real import of Clinton's mission and his plan for an Indo-Pakistan dialogue, if any, will begin to be felt after sometime. The US administration which has been highlighting the dangers inherent in Kashmir dispute cannot be oblivious of the fact that it warrants an immediate resolution.

There were widespread indignation among Pakistani public over President Clinton's pronouncement, particularly with regard to Kashmir. They heavily banked on what Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar called Clinton's 'healing touch' for a settlement in Kashmir. Now they seemed to be totally disillusioned. But the government took it in good stead and maintained its cool with no ad-

dition — that the nations never have permanent friends, they have only permanent interests. Today, such high prices are, therefore, exacted by an ally for paltry favour of obliging her with a four-hour stopover of its President on his way back home after almost a week's stay in India — a country both the US and Pakistan once despised.

It was a stark departure from normal practices followed during the visit of a foreign dignitary. In a 15-minute speech broadcast on the national radio and television network US President Bill Clinton performed the major function of his visit when he arrived at Islamabad on 25 March. He told Pakistan that there could be no military solution to the Kashmir problem and urged its military government to restore dialogue with India. He rejected Pakistan's appeal for mediation in the Kashmir dispute, lamented the return of military rule in Pakistan and wanted its government to prioritise economic development over the Kashmir dispute with India. Clinton also told Pakistan to stop "cross-border terrorism", create conditions for resumption of Indo-Pakistan dialogue and warned Islamabad of "more isolation if it continued to support violence." Blah, blah, blah.



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

verse comment on Clinton's speech. General Pervez Musharraf himself answered numerous questions in a press conference held soon afterwards. In response to US demand to end violence he however insisted that the step towards that goal will have to be reciprocal.

In spite of unambiguous message conveyed to General Musharraf by President Clinton there was no great expectation that Pakistan would quickly fall in line and stop its 'cross-border terrorism', if any. None expected any formal an-

ouncement from Islamabad that it was ready to abjure its 'use of force' across the line of control. As a matter of fact, to ensure Clinton's visit or stopover the military government was prompted more by its eagerness for the resumption of an IMF loan to Pakistan. As regards Kashmir, Musharraf was not much pushed by Clinton's warning because the issue would be taken care of by its immediate resolution. Like-wise, India even with its euphoria over stopping an US mediation in Kashmir is far from over. The relative quiet along the line of control for about a month does not mean that the war within Jammu and Kashmir has abated. One plausible explanation for the quiet is that the militants across the border wanted to see just how Clinton would engage with Kashmir issue before resorting to their offensive. Meantime, the attacks on Indian military installation by the militants' suicide squads which began last year, continues. What the succession of attacks on military camps have meant in practice is that Indian forces have been pushed increasingly into defensive position.

General Musharraf who has staked his future on Pakistan securing some progress in Kashmir could now become increasingly desperate as the US has not been able to initiate a peace process and not even some form of dialogue on Kashmir. The organisations like Harkatul Mujahideen who were dislodged from Kargil last year and can hardly be leashed by any authority in Pakistan have threatened similar violence elsewhere this summer. If

that happens, India which has since been threatening Pakistan with a 'limited war' is likely to respond more aggressively. The resultant escalation could well invite fresh international pressure on India to begin a process for settlement in Kashmir.

The major political players in Jammu and Kashmir already seem to be positioning themselves for such a settlement. The most significant development is the decision of the Union government to call for the State Autonomy Committee (SAC) report which demands the restoration of 1953 status of J&K. A second document, the Regional Autonomy Committee (RAC) report, which calls for the state to be divided into a series of new provinces based on communal line is now being implemented by the state government. While this may not be the stated US policy, Washington's assessment also seems to be that the best course on Kashmir is to formalise the state's partition at the line of control while persuading India to accord maximum autonomy to the Kashmiris. Is India then moving in that direction by taking up some of the steps recommended by the committees under reference? Whether or not those steps would help resolve the Kashmir dispute it is clear that the issue remains alive as before notwithstanding its downgradation during Clinton's visit.

Fallout from the Sharif Trial

Nawaz Sharif was the first one to try to clip the wings of the armed forces. At his request, Jehangir Karamat, Musharraf's predecessor put in his resignation. This time, Musharraf had the promise of most corps commanders that they would stand by him if he was asked to quit. Almost all of them did so when Nawaz Sharif dismissed him. The rest is history.

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bookie in Karachi reportedly made lakhs of rupees because he was not hanged. (Of course, people gave credit to President Clinton for that).

Another fallout from the sentence is the restoration of some institutions. International pressure on Islamabad, particularly that of America, is relentless. Whichever country Musharraf visits, he is told to hold elections and restore the National Assembly. If Pakistan does not want to stay isolated, as was the warning administered by President Clinton, it will have to resurrect democracy. The economic assistance by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund is dependent on Musharraf's response. And he has very little staying power. At one time the thinking of the military was reflected in the suggestion made by Musharraf, then the Chief of the Army Staff, before accompanying Sharif to Washington.

Musharraf conveyed that Shahbaz Sharif, then the Punjab Chief Minister, should come to the centre to 'strengthen' the hands of his brother, Nawaz Sharif. Shahbaz was visibly unhappy over the Lahore process and Musharraf knew about it. It was Aza JI (father of Nawaz and Shahbaz) who turned down the proposal. Otherwise, Nawaz Sharif might have been replaced by Shahbaz.

Can Musharraf pick up the thread from where he left off? Aza JI is a chastened person now. Even Nawaz may not

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

stand in the way, knowing well that the alternative is to cool his heels in the jail. But the arrest of Shahbaz on charges of corruption gives another message unless this too is an exercise which is being gone over to clear the ground. Shahbaz, as was clear from the trial, was in no way a target. It came as a surprise when he said in his statement before the judge that he did not know anything because he was sleeping when the coup was taking place. Significantly, during the trial he was

removed from the jail and put in "a hospital" where he was given royal treatment. The question is what will happen to Musharraf or, for that matter, to the military? Pakistan has itself provided the answer in the past. The armed forces have gone back to the barracks but have overlooked the shoulders of civilian rulers. People and politicians have accepted the situation in the past. Why will they behave differently this time? In fact, when asked by an Indian journalist how the world could reconcile itself to the military rule, Musharraf's blunt reply was: "For the past many years, the armed forces ruled Pakistan indirectly. Why should any country be so sensitive now?" However, it looks as if the military would like their role to be

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Procedural Delay in Judicial System

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Sir, Session jam at BUET now takes a deadly turn and poses a serious mayhem in the academic system. The political unrest, lack of interest of a section of students to appear on exams in time and lack of administrative prudence of the authority predominate the causes of prolonged session jam.

BUET offers four years of undergraduate engineering course consisting of eight terms each of which is supposed to be completed in less than six months. But it is very frustrating that these days every term, proceeds at least nine to ten months to be completed. Whenever an exam approaches, a number of students resort to the movement of rescheduling exams according to their preference. Recently the term final exam has been postponed in the same manner as the teachers failed to show proper judgement and to come to terms with the claim of the students. According to many students, taking exams under respective faculties and banning of the EUCSU may result in session jam free BUET. If exams are taken under the respective faculties, there would then be competition among the students to pass out early. And the EUCSU should immediately be banned as it does nothing but resort to movements for rescheduling exams.

Basically, the malaise is well recognised; the inability to resist temptation, at the top, middle, and lower levels. Discipline starts from the top, and indiscipline does not start first in the opposition! Modern governments are market-oriented, with one basic objective: the supply of goods and services must exceed the anticipated demands, now and in the near future. Controlling supply results in black-marketing; and PDB and BTTB should be judged on this criteria. How many have been prose-

cut? Bifurcation is a part solution, with the corruption factor remaining untouched. It is too late for deterrent action, as the general election is round the corner.

A Husnain
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