

## Petrobangla's woes

Failure to collect, failure to pay

**P**ETROBANGLA'S financial situation is a typical example of how government finances are managed. It is an organisation that has one of the highest rates of profit, to the tune of Tk. 1000 crore a year. Yet it is unable to pay Shell and Unocal Tk. 200 crore in overdue gas bills because it cannot collect its dues. In this particular case the reason is also that the low level of foreign exchange reserve, about US\$ 1.2 billion, has compelled the finance ministry to hold for the moment some large payments in foreign exchange. The point we would like to make today is not the delay of Shell's and Unocal's payments, though paying them on time would help strengthen foreign company's confidence in our economy, but the financial mismanagement in which Petrobangla finds itself today. The core problem is that Petrobangla is unable to realise money due to it from government bodies that purchase gas from it. For example the Power Development Board (PDB) buys gas from Petrobangla to produce power, which it sells to various utility bodies like DESA. Now PDB owes Tk. 225 crores to Petrobangla. However PDB is owed Tk. 3,500 crores by the various agencies that bought power from it. The reason why organisations like DESA does not pay PDB is because it cannot collect its dues from the end consumers, which includes many governmental bodies.

Government bodies are not used to paying up front for the services that they use. The habit of delayed payment leads to delayed collection which ultimately leads to the default in payment. Governmental institutions make book entries of the money they earn but do not make any attempt to collect it. A culture of default permeates throughout the public sector bodies. It is not properly understood that financial discipline lies at the heart of efficiency of every organisation and must be given top priority in its running. Unfortunately in the case of our government bodies it gets the least priority. Government itself is the worst offender in case of payment to public utilities. In almost every case payment of phone, gas, electricity bills the government bodies are the biggest defaulters. Various ministries owe enormous amounts in unpaid utility bills to the publicly owned utility producers.

The habit of non-payment for services received practiced by various governmental bodies also affect the habit of our private sector. This has spawned the infamous bank defaulting culture of the private sector and has stymied the growth of our economy. Government must urgently adopt measures to bring financial discipline in the workings of the various parts of the government.

## Entering the test tube era

Focus needed on ethical concerns

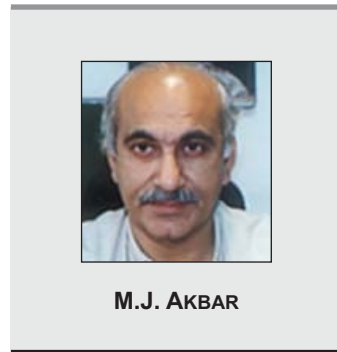
**T**est tube fertilisation has finally come to Bangladesh. The triplet girls born after *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF) at a Dhaka hospital this week are undoubtedly a source of untold joy for their parents, Mohammad Abu Hanif and Feroza Begum. Their successful birth marks a medical breakthrough in obstetrics and gynaecology in this country. We congratulate Doctor Parveen Fatima and the members of her team for their successful achievement of this challenging process. At the same time, we must inject a note of caution into the euphoria that might emerge from this event.

When the world's first test-tube baby, identified to the public as Louise Brown, was born in England, in 1978, a revolutionary era in reproductive medicine had arrived. Science had found a way of reproducing a human cell outside the womb. Since then, science has taken lightning strides in reproductive medicine, raising a host of ethical and social concerns, some of which are still being debated. The ethics of selective gene reproduction, for instance, leading to the process known as cloning, continues to elicit passionate discourse. So does the question of surrogate parenting, which raises a host of moral, social and legal questions.

It is imperative not to overlook these concerns. The success of the first IVF procedure must be accompanied by the development of knowledge-based guidelines that will guard against misuse of the process. Questions regarding commercial exploitation, sperm donors, surrogate wombs and embryos "made-to-order" must be anticipated. The government must initiate research and dialogue to frame a policy that will address these and other emerging concerns.

The test tube breakthrough, while commendable, must be viewed against a backdrop of severe challenges that "normal" births are forced to contend with in Bangladesh. This country still has one of the highest child and maternal mortality rates in the world. Let us continue to fight against these widespread drawbacks, even as we move ahead into an era of scientific marvels.

# A route map for the high road



M.J. AKBAR

**T**HE high road to peace seethes with highwaymen. The identity of these highwaymen is hardly a secret; our Prime Minister at least does not need any instructions on the dangers of this journey. He has been travelling this road since 1977. That summer of 1977 and 23 May 2001, a day on which Atal Behari Vajpayee changed, dramatically, the chemistry of India-Pakistan relations, are linked by the arc of a personal vision.

In March 1977 Morarji Desai was sworn in as the head of the first non-Congress government in Delhi. To general surprise he chose Atal Behari Vajpayee as his external affairs minister. To an extent he was forced to do so: Chaudhry Charan Singh would consider no portfolio other than home, and Morarji Desai wanted finance for his own loyalist, H.M. Patel. As one of the major parties in an evolving coalition, the Jana Sangh (as the BJP was known then) had to be given one of the big four ministries, plus a significant other. The Jana Sangh, going by the pecking order that still remains in place, allotted external affairs to Mr Vajpayee and information and broadcasting to Lal Krishna Advani.

Apprehension was the primary response to a Vajpayee in an office nurtured and nourished by the spirit of Jawaharlal Nehru. The Janata leaders managed to stay in power only a little longer than they stayed in Indira Gandhi's jail; they were better martyrs than ministers. But the spirit of Nehru could not have been served better between March 1977 and the torrid summer of 1979 when Charan Singh toppled his own government. (Charan Singh, incidentally, was never any good at toppling anyone else's government.) Mr Vajpayee's tenure in the Foreign Office was one of the major achievements of his government. To general surprise, and perhaps to the dismay of his own political constituency, foreign minister Vajpayee

developed the best relations that India had ever had with Pakistan. The unilateral relaxation in the visa regime, frozen by the Bangladesh war, that Vajpayee initiated, as well as the cricket diplomacy, was as dramatic for its time as the bus ride to Lahore.

There were some objective reasons for Pakistan's growing trust in Vajpayee and in Morarji Desai. Jawaharlal Nehru and the Congress carried the burden of Partition's complex and contentious history. Nehru may have been a dove for the rest of the world; for the Muslim

but that road is crowded not only by highwaymen but also clogged with doubt.

The Prime Minister has understood the first principle of this journey: the country will not follow you unless you lead it. So far there has been nothing to follow, except the news of a ceasefire stalemate that had putrefied with violence. For five decades now relations between decaying neighbours have been trapped in that same stagnant circle. Even a phrase has been enough to send any positive effort back into that festering circle. One instance

which Pakistan regards as a basic dispute between the two countries." One can see Chagla's elegant mind in the draft, particularly in the opening sentence. But Pakistan insisted that Kashmir was not a "problem" but a "dispute" and sent back a version whose perverse syntax seemed to reflect its intentions: "Talks would be earnest and meaningful and on a confidential basis. A sincere effort would be made by both sides to seek a solution of various disputes and problems existing between India and Pakistan including the basic dispute regard-

forward movement it has to emerge from minds that have decided to create a future, on the basis of contemporary facts, with the help of a new language.

Prime Minister Vajpayee has offered a glimpse into a new strategic culture with a letter to General Musharraf whose simplicity disguises its innovative stresses. The Vajpayee formulation follows a clear internal logic. What is the problem? War is not the real problem. The confrontation between India and Pakistan is unlikely now to lead to full, all-out war; even Kargil could

walk has begun. The starting point is hard enough. Pakistan will assert that change is the first point of call; five decades of effort have not gone into a reassertion of the status quo. India will reaffirm that sovereignty is not negotiable. But it is after that the dialogue must begin, searching for a middle ground that ends the horrific cycle of violence and waste that has visited the subcontinent because its two principal powers cannot sit across the table without smashing its legs. It is not as if options have never been discussed. The confusions of the past could even be an asset. Pakistan will not be able to give a clear answer if asked whether it wants integration of Kashmir into Pakistan or an independent Kashmir. On our side, we are not certain how flexible Article 370 can become in the search for a solution. We can stretch its meaning on that high road. In-place reality, like the presence of UN troops on the ceasefire line, can be accommodated into concepts that have been used by us to improve relations with another warring neighbour, China, like "peace and tranquillity on the border".

Once the non-negotiables are understood, and kept aside, a dialogue is all about open minds and sensible options. And there can be no dialogue better than the leader of the BJP and the chief of the Pakistan Army: they are Menachem Begin and the Anwar Sadat of the subcontinent.

But when the two walk that high road, they must remember: one horizon at a time. There is an old Sufi story that bears repetition. A child who had come to the seminary at five was told by the Sufi master when he turned fifteen that the moment had come to leave for the world outside. The child began to tremble in fear. "What shall I do, master?" he asked. Go out of the door, stand still, and look, said the master. The child did so. He saw nothing. The master told him to keep looking. At last, after two days, the answer dawned on the child. Yes, he told the master, he had seen something. He had seen the horizon. But what should he do next?

"Walk up to that horizon," replied the master. "When you reach the horizon, stand still again and look. You will see another horizon. Walk again..."

It is a good route map for a high road.

## BYLINE

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League, and later for Pakistan, he was a hawk in Brahmin colours. With Lal Bahadur Shastri there was war that Pakistan believed it could have won; with Indira Gandhi there was a war that Pakistan knew it had lost.

General Zia ul Haq, ruler (there is no other word) of Pakistan in that phase, was at ease with the inflexible straight talk of Morarji Desai, and the nuanced sincerity of Atal Behari. Of course semantics are not sufficient to build a relationship although, as between individuals, it doesn't hurt to be polite. In any case, you have to be polite before you can get affectionate. Atal Behari Vajpayee's contribution was not only that he lifted Indian foreign policy with the yeast of goodwill, but that he challenged the culture of his own political roots in the exercise of his relations with Pakistan. His stature within his party, and his sincerity of purpose enabled him to get away with an audacious shift of gear.

Which is the Vajpayee that India wants? The Vajpayee of the Lahore accord or the Vajpayee of Kargil?

It takes extraordinary courage to fight a war. It takes even greater courage to fight for peace. The Prime Minister's biggest concern is that he must carry the country with him in any step taken towards Pakistan. It is easy to find support for a war; peace may live on a higher road, as Mr Vajpayee said in his letter to General Pervez Musharraf,

from the past will serve as an indicator of the cussedness that has imprisoned the minds of the two countries.

In September 1965 came Ayub Khan's war; in January 1966 came Kosygin's peace; in January 1967 Ayub Khan made the suggestion that India and Pakistan should sit down and work out a mutual reduction of arms. Muhammad Ali Chagla, who had just been made foreign minister by Indira Gandhi, responded immediately, writing to his counterpart Sharifuddin Pirzada. Pirzada at once upped the ante: any talks should include Kashmir. This upset Delhi, but Chagla nevertheless firmly responded that India was ready "to discuss all questions between India and Pakistan, including the Kashmir question, at any time and place mutually convenient". No offer could be more categorical than that.

But highwaymen on the high road to peace come in more than one uniform. Pakistan would not accept the Indian formulation for the scope of the talks, a paragraph that could still have its uses in the paperwork that is building at this very moment: "Talks would be earnest and meaningful and on a confidential and continuing basis. A sincere effort would be made by both sides in a friendly spirit and in conformity with the Tashkent Declaration to seek solutions of various problems existing between the two countries including Jammu and Kashmir

and Jammu and Kashmir, in a friendly spirit."

That was the mangled end of that. Nor will it help much to return to the origins of the problem/dispute: we can spend the next fifty years of meetings every month and still get nowhere beyond the story narrated by Iqbal Akhund in his excellent book *Memoirs of a Bystander* (Oxford, 1997). He was serving in the United Nations in 1964, and Kashmir was being discussed in the Security Council when he bumped into Maharaj Krishna Rasgotra, then a counsellor and later to retire as foreign secretary. Rasgotra asked Akhund what exactly Pakistan wanted out of this meeting. Kashmir, Akhund replied. "It's too late now, my friend, to ask for Kashmir," Rasgotra teased Akhund, "Pakistan should have taken it when it was offered a deal in the beginning."

Was Pakistan ever offered such a deal? Certainly Pakistan's case was weakened by a contradiction: Jinnah wanted the rulers of the princely states to determine which country they wanted to join in the hope of luring Hyderabad or even Bhopal into Pakistan. How could then the principle be altered for Kashmir, whose ruler Maharaja Hari Singh, first sought independence and then signed for accession to India?

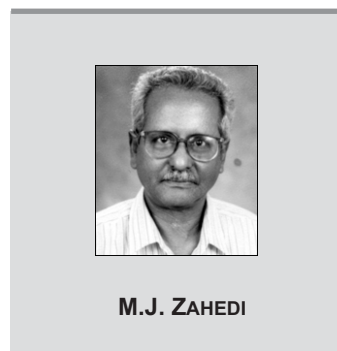
As is obvious, neither memories nor legal niceties will get us anywhere. If there is going to be any

match of it". As a repercussion at home, the PCB chairman had to face an adverse Press but he said that he was not ready to accept defeat and resign, as was being demanded by some quarters; he insisted that he would leave only after he had done something for the system. Pakistan has had three coaches and as many

captains during the last three months. The people who make the changes are never held responsible. But the General had the courage to accept the responsibility for the poor performance of the team. He thought that on that day the team's composition was wrong and their body language did not look good. But he did not elaborate on the probable reasons for such a condition.

About sidelining Mushtaq Ahmad and Saqlain Mushtaq, he said he

# A sad day for Pakistan cricket



M.J. ZAHEDI

last time it defeated Pakistan at the same venue was in 1978. Pakistan beat England in previous three encounters at Lord's, in 1982, 1992 and 1996. It was England's third win in a row on the same ground, their best sequence at Lord's since they had won four Tests between 1957 and 1960. (England's record at Lord's: played 100, won 37, lost 24

Khan had tried to lift the players by coming into the dressing room but even that did not help. Before the latest defeat, cricket in Pakistan was engulfed in wide-ranging controversies that led to the sacking of Javed Miandad as coach and Moin Khan as captain, following the disastrous tour of New Zealand in March.

What is worse, experts say that

cricket veterans thought that Pakistan demonstrated a lack of application with which they could at least better the margin of defeat. In all, sixteen wickets fell during the last day and experts say that Pakistan only had them to blame for it.

Daily 'Dawn' commented in an editorial, 'it is customary to say 'defeated but not disgraced' at the

match of it". As a repercussion at home, the PCB chairman had to face an adverse Press but he said that he was not ready to accept defeat and resign, as was being demanded by some quarters; he insisted that he would leave only after he had done something for the system. Pakistan has had three coaches and as many

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two companies were also, apparently pressurising the government to impose a ban on the import of ventolin inhalers.

I agree with the idea to impose ban on foreign inhalers, as it will help the local pharmaceutical industry to flourish. But, I can in no way support the ban before this country is able to produce equally effective and enough inhalers to meet the local demand.

If an essential article like a ventolin inhaler is banned before finding an equally effective substitute, it would not help the cause of the asthma patients, especially those from the lower income groups, rather it would be another addition to their woes.

**Hameem Muhammad**  
Uttara, Dhaka

**The DCC ride!**  
The DCC's revised effort with new rickshaw lanes in the city is laughable, because there is an easier solution to the problem go after the unlicensed vehicles and drivers (more than a lakh?). The city will look lean and clean within a week. Why can't the administration in Dhaka be tough?

**AZ**  
Dhaka.

## LETTER FROM KARACHI

The managers of the game need to do some serious soul-searching and go back to the drawing board. The high-paid foreign coaches must also deliver and help develop a strategy, which could make the team rise from the ashes.

and drew 39.)

Pakistan skipper Waqar Yunis had few excuses to offer for the defeat. He admitted that the Pakistani players did not have enough practice. "We were up against a very confident and professional side at the moment which is on a roll", was his comment after the match.

The result was all the more impressive since the match was over in three days and the first day was a complete washout. Pakistan World Cup winning captain Imran

the defeat to a large extent was self-inflicted. In fact, in the match, according to newspaper reports, England outplayed the visiting team in all departments of the game.

The Pakistani selectors had packed the side with seamers including 'Rawalpindi Express' Shoaib Akhtar whose one ball got the England skipper's right thumb injured and has sidelined him for a month or so. The fact is that England had dominated the game from start to finish. On the other hand,

end of a match but there is no reason we could say that".

In this match Pakistan fielded an all-seam attack, for the first time in a Test match, showing little confidence in Saqlain Mushtaq, a 'potential weapon' carelessly ignored. He has proved more than once that he can be a devastating off-spinner in England. The 'Dawn' editorial commented: "He might not have made the difference between defeat and victory but he might have restricted England and helped his side make a

captains during the last three months. The people who make the changes are never held responsible. But the General had the courage to accept the responsibility for the poor performance of the team. He thought that on that day the team's composition was wrong and their body language did not look good. But he did not elaborate on the probable reasons for such a condition.

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# TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

## PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.



STAR PHOTO A K M MOHSIN

### Clamp the offenders!

To solve the traffic congestion in Dhaka, the authorities must stop vehicles from parking on main roads. In Nawabpur road as this photo shows, commercial vendors unload and load goods as though they own the entire road! Offenders must be severely penalised. The traffic police should start clamping and towing away vehicles. At the same time, the DCC must start clearing away unauthorised shops to make space for designated parking lots.

### Gang-raped girl

The report about a 15-year old girl being gang raped and then being abducted again by the same people who had raped her (*The Daily Star*, May 28th) was brutal! The teenager was apparently abducted in broad daylight from the hospital where she was undergoing treatment after her traumatic experience. Her guardian tried to stop her kidnappers but they were armed and eventually managed to take her away.

Since then, your newspaper has not reported on this girl's plight. I would like to know what has happened to her? I feel torn inside with the thought that this young person is being subjected to the same abuse, perhaps worse, that she thought she had managed to elude. How can anyone be so brutal?

Worst, how can the administration dare to remain in power after allowing something like this to happen? The person who is responsible for this outrage should resign at once and let someone with honesty and dedication do the job. It does not make sense to allow a police force to wear a uniform and draw a salary from the taxpayer's money. They do not deserve to get any respect from us.

I blame the top official of law enforcement, including the home minister who is ultimately responsi-

ble for law and order.

Can he explain how the same dastardly deed can be committed on the same victim twice? What kind of an administration is he running? It is an outrage, pure and simple.

In any other country, such an incident would have led to the minister quitting in shame.  
**S. M. Dhaka**

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I cannot believe that the same girl has been abducted twice! Rape is a heinous and barbaric crime in any case, but this repeated torture surely surpasses all evil deeds. It How can these outrages continue to be committed? Is there nobody who can bring back accountability?

I have been astonished at the fact that there has been no hue and cry about this deed. Is this because we have become immune to violence? Perhaps there is a sense of resignation that has crept into our mental attitude. We have become resigned to the rising spiral of crime to such an extent that we are not even bothering to raise our voice in protest.

One of my friends remarked that there was not point in saying anything because it would make no difference. His words have made me disheartened. This is not the

way to react. How sad that this once brave and bright country has become so used to darkness that it does not have the energy to demand justice for a poor and defenceless girl.

**Fed up**  
Dhaka

### Bogra terrorism

We have been made well aware in the media about terrorism in Bogra, but the question is, what action has been taken against the Bogra terrorists?

The known terrorists of Bogra city are openly displaying their guns and arms in different areas of Bogra like Fultala, Seujgari, Kamargari, Khandar etc. Peace loving people of Bogra can't protest against these terrorists. The police act helplessly. Terrorists like Majnu of Fultala, Ibrahim of Seujgari and others have very good links with the ruling party. Some are holding important posts of the ruling party and some are also linked with opposition parties.

What is the role of the home ministry and police department of Bogra? Where is the promise of the prime minister and the home minister against terrorism? Why has no serious action been taken against this reign of terror in Bogra?

I request and urge both the prime minister and the home minis-