

Internet line snapping violates consumer rights

Price of govt's incompetence is paid by the internet using public

THE Bangladesh Telegraph and Telecom Board has cut off the connections of over 60 Internet Service Providers (ISP) for failing to renew licenses on time or some other reason. In the process they disconnected internet links of thousands of connections of ordinary consumers. This was done without following any due process that would warn the consumer beforehand. If anything it was a fine example of the pre-historic mindset of the authorities to whom technology is another way of establishing control and not providing services to the people.

The BTTB Chairman told this paper that they are monitoring the ISPs, which provided voice mail services illegally. This may not be the immediate cause for snapping the lines but seems to have been the trigger. The failure to do something was on the part of the BTTB who obviously knew what was going on for some time and did little about it. Now the public has to bear the burden of a government's failure to act on time.

The reason for these voice-mails is the high charge for making international calls. Obviously there is an alternative to the present system and BTTB should have explored that possibility. They could have provided the same services or could have charged extra. But the authorities seem to have been stung by the fact that this arrangement was exposed and led to the raising of genuine questions about the transparent management and efficiency of the government's telecom outfit.

As far as the ISPs are concerned, they have always been the most diligent line snappers themselves and provided the poorest level of services. They charge one of the highest anywhere, have no notion of post-connection maintenance and are in general way behind the regional level. It's only in Bangladesh that they could have survived. But even they had certain rights and this should have been taken into account. One could easily have punished them through other means but to snap the lines defy the common sense.

This problem is not about unpaid fees or renewal. It's about the rights of the consumers. The government should have in the first place tried to improve its monitoring system and reduced corruption. Unless reported in the media, this voice-mail scam too would have gone unchecked.

Please learn about basic rights, ensure consumer rights and train government officials on the matter. If not, at least sack those who have a mind which is pre-internet in approach and anti-consumer in attitude.

Armed Forces Day thoughts

Further strengthen commitment to democracy

IT was the Armed Forces Day yesterday. Today we write about it, our thoughts being with the Army, Navy and Air Force in commemoration of the great occasion going back to November 21, 1971. The day symbolises the solidarity forged between our armed forces and the people in the liberation struggle against the Pakistani occupation forces thirty years ago today. We pay our homage to the martyrs and congratulate our army, navy and airforce personnel on their inheriting such a glorious legacy.

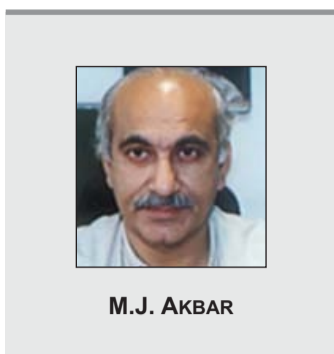
Our armed forces have earned accolades of the nation for their performance on election duties and the role they have played in the disaster management area. Internationally, they have done us proud as members of UN peace-keeping missions in various conflict-ridden zones across the globe.

What deserves special mention here is their coming of age with an unwavering commitment to democracy resoundingly established since December, 1990 marking the fall of Ershadian autocracy. This is not to forget though, the series of coups and counter-coups that came as a sequel to the dastardly murder of Bangabandhu and most members of his family committed by a segment in the army on August 15, 1975.

Then on, the armed forces have consistently earned the respect of the nation as being firmly wedded to constitutionalism and democracy. That must remain the armed forces dominant attitude and psychology in deference to the high ideals bequeathed by the Liberation War.

The nation would like to see the armed forces develop from strength to strength with professionalism, discipline, modern outlook, and above all, an unflinching commitment to democracy. Our good wishes to the sentinels of national defence.

Rise and fall of graphs



M.J. AKBAR

PRESIDENT Pervez Musharraf's graph was rising in Washington at precisely the same time that Mullah Muhammad Omar's graph was collapsing in Kabul and Kandahar. Are the two related? Were the cynics of the western world being especially nice to President Musharraf on his world tour while they took over his backyard?

The thought is not purely provocative. On Saturday (Nov 16) evening in the elegant environment of New York's Waldorf Astoria President George Bush made it a point to please his guest by saying that the Northern Alliance, which has repeatedly expressed its hostility to Islamabad, should restrict its victories to Mazar-e-Sharif and perhaps move down south bypassing Kabul. When the commanders of the Alliance bypassed the White House and went straight for the jugular, the same President Bush, now in the company of Vladimir Putin, could barely restrain his delight. Matching glee has not been forthcoming from Islamabad. This is understandable. No matter who forms the next government in Kabul, Pakistan will never have the kind of influence and even authority it possessed, as long as the Taliban was in power, over a nation vital to its strategic interests.

On the day that President Bush was supporting President Musharraf's hands-off-Kabul policy, maybe at that very moment, James Clark and Adam Nathan, on board USS Theodore Roosevelt, were reporting for *The Sunday Times* that the Northern Alliance had been "urged by Britain and America last night to mount a swift offensive towards the capital, Kabul, driving

home their advantage after a string of successes in the north". Either President Bush was fooling President Musharraf or he was fooling *The Sunday Times*. The game was rather given away by Geoff Hoon, Britain's defence minister, who told *The Sunday Times*: "I would be quite happy to see the Northern Alliance steam across northern Afghanistan and take Kabul."

Now that Kabul has fallen like a house of cards, we have to search for winners and losers in this high-

front the United States on their behalf. A ticket to, say, Bangladesh would be equivalent to a ticket to trial in the United States as Washington continues its war on terrorism.

It is probably safe to suggest that Osama bin Laden will not surrender or leave his camp in Afghanistan; he will die fighting, or be killed by incendiary bombardment as has happened to some of his companions. But most of his followers will walk through the passes to Pakistan, as will the Taliban (the latter have

total harmony with Islamabad's interests had gone a long way forward when, literally out of the blue, 11 September destroyed so many years of patience. No Afghan government in the foreseeable future will have anything but a formal relationship with Islamabad. As for the ISI's role in Kabul's decision-making; that is now effectively dead. Exclusive investigations published in *Dawn* and *Herald* prove that without the help of ISI operatives and Pakistan's military specialists in

apparent. Not too long ago President Musharraf was asking America not to continue bombing during Ramadan. He did not estimate then that there might be very little left to bomb by Ramadan. As the holy month begins, American bombing is targeted at the homes or hideouts of specific Taliban and Al Qaeda commanders. There is not much left to protest about.

Pakistan goes back to worrying about two borders rather than one. And there are a few things to

of Control, with marginal adjustments. Similarly, there will be pressure on Israel and Palestine to accept a partition of Jerusalem and get on with the rest of life. This is no assurance that India and Pakistan, or for that matter Israel and Palestine, will submit to lines drawn to their west; but any arguments against what seems reasonable, or against rational compromise, will not find too large an audience. This, by the way, is the good news. Don't ask me what the bad news could be.

The relief in Washington at the collapse of Kabul is visible; it will take longer to reassure the rest of America. In one sense the whole of America has become Ground Zero, as it remains haunted by the possibility of what could happen even more than by what did happen. The American Airlines accident renewed an ebbing nightmare. At the top, the pecking order has changed. Vice President Dick Cheney, who was once called the real president, is at the receiving end of the joke now. Each time there is any hint of a crisis, they haul him off to some "safe destination" and smile thinly as they do so. (On September 11 George Bush was sent to a "safe destination" by Cheney.) More recent is the victory of defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld over secretary of state Colin Powell. Powell has been pessimistic about the military strategy; he too overestimated the Taliban. It could be that the state department's intelligence analysis was influenced by Islamabad.

It is a Bush-Rumsfeld war now. Suits Texas.

As for Kabul itself: there used to be a joke when military operations started that the time to buy stock in razor blades had come. A whole new market was opening up. A picture sent by the agencies this week makes the point. A barber is shaving the beard of a thirty-something man who looks at the mirror with aplomb as he rediscovers his face. We can't see who the barber is, but of course we can see the hand holding the old-fashioned razor. On the barber's wrist is a flashy new watch. You can see it glinting even in the photograph. It's a good time to be a barber in Kabul.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age

BYLINE

As for Kabul itself: there used to be a joke when military operations started that the time to buy stock in razor blades had come. A whole new market was opening up. A picture sent by the agencies this week makes the point. A barber is shaving the beard of a thirty-something man who looks at the mirror with aplomb as he rediscovers his face. We can't see who the barber is, but of course we can see the hand holding the old-fashioned razor. On the barber's wrist is a flashy new watch.

stakes poker game that began on such an explosive note on 11 September. It might be stating the obvious to describe the Taliban as losers. But that depends on the definition of the Taliban. If the Taliban is a movement then it will re-space itself and wait for history to give it another opportunity. If it has acquired vested interests and become a government, then it will fragment and disappear. There could be a third option: those of the Taliban who became a government and used power to achieve personal or political purposes might disintegrate, while a new ideological core could reinvent a movement from the shreds of this moment. In all cases, the burden will fall on Pakistan; for the Taliban, in any manifestation, has nowhere else to go except to return from where it started. The situation is similar for Al Qaeda, which had charismatic leadership, *fidayeen* followers and, thus far, a safe base from where to operate. Theoretically, those of its members who were not from Pakistan could hope to return to their original Arab countries or wherever. But they will not be welcome. Their governments do not want their ideas at home, and in any case will be reluctant to con-

already begun to do so). Will Mullah Omar seek refuge in Peshawar? He, unlike Osama, has not been accused personally of masterminding the attack of 11 September. What about the ministers of the Taliban government? Will they be picked up by the Pakistan authorities and handed over for war trials? Then there will be Osama's family, an emotional resource for those who want to continue the war against the United States. Each one of these issues is a timebomb ticking at the heart of the Pakistan establishment.

In strategic terms, a decade of Pakistan policy has been decimated by the defeat of the Taliban. Civilians like Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif were as responsible as the army for the presence of the Taliban in Kabul, and why not? Foreign policy and national interest should be non-partisan. One of the more remarkable facts (and one that might make the West uncomfortable) is that the government of President Musharraf had persuaded the West to accept the Taliban government as a reality without an alternative. This was an extraordinary success of Pakistani diplomacy. The process of legitimisation of a government in Kabul that was in

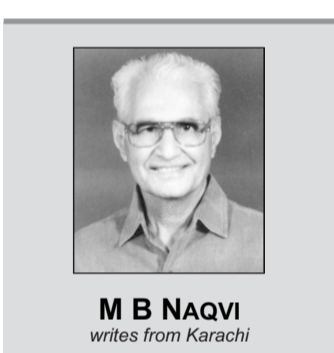
the last five years, the Taliban's successes against the Northern Alliance would have been less spectacular than they have been. M. Ilyas Khan reports, with convincing detail, in the November issue of the *Herald* that the ISI supplied massive quantities of arms to the Taliban and that these supplies continued even in October this year. He reports: "In the dead of the night on October 13, a convoy of 12 'tarpaulin-covered' trucks entered Afghanistan via the old Kurram Agency route, apparently escorted by military personnel. One wonders what the US spy satellites made of them."

No particular need to wonder; the information is almost certainly in some safe deposit, gathering interest, waiting to be sprung upon Islamabad when the West's operational forces and the Northern Alliance have completed their military operations. It is possible that Islamabad believed Mullah Muhammad Omar's claims that the Taliban could fight another ten years or a hundred years or whatever; intelligent agencies all over the world end up being gulled by their protégés. The shock in Islamabad when the Taliban punctured in Kabul was

worry about on the eastern border as well. I do not know if President Musharraf picked up a signal beeping, softly, from more than one transmitter in the West during his tour. The debate on the difference between a freedom fighter and a terrorist is nearly over. There is a new consensus that you cannot really redraw the maps of nations anymore, irrespective of past rights and wrongs. It is simply too dangerous to do so. Vladimir Putin, for instance, has picked up this signal. Washington, which used to have a few things to say about repression against the Chechens, is now happy to leave it off the agenda of either bilateral discussions or multilateral concern. When definitions were being formulated from the debris of 11 September, Sri Lanka, quite naturally, asked whether the LTTE would be considered terrorists or freedom fighters. The answer has come. Terrorists. The freeze has started with bank accounts.

This does not mean a blank cheque for Delhi in Kashmir; but it does mean something that could be unacceptable to Islamabad. Nothing would make the rest of the world happier than to see a settlement of the Kashmir dispute along the Line

A three-front situation



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

THE military regime has to fight on three-fronts fortunately not militarily. Pakistan's western borders with Afghanistan have after the collapse of Taliban power suddenly become overly sensitive with all manner of uncertainties and possibilities. Many of Taliban activists, leading members of their hierarchy, from Mulla Omar down, and above all the Al-Qaeda's Chief and its other members may head for Pakistan through the porous border. The anti-Taliban coalition is sure to infer this and once it loses hope of finding Osama and his close associates, it will press for starting an armed search inside Pakistan. That will create a first-rate crisis because it is sure to involve American and British soldiers and detectives in sensitive area from where thousands of volunteers went to fight alongside Taliban.

In the east relations with India have been traditionally bad and they have gotten even worse thanks to Kashmir Jehad. Danger of actual hostilities breaking out is not absent. The Indians seem to be contemplating to make hot pursuit forays into AJK, which would be tantamount to an attack on Pakistan, in accordance with oft-repeated stance of this country. Earlier it was thought that since both countries have acquired nuclear weapons they will not make war because of mutual deterrence. Lately the Indian Defence establishment has adumbrated a new doctrine: 'nuclear weapons of one country deter the nuclear weapons of the other; scope for armed clash with conventional weapons exists'. It is through this opening that India thinks it can punish Pakistan for its perceived

role in cross-border terrorism in Kashmir. While Pakistan has become a member of the anti-Taliban coalition it does not seem to impress India. For, the deeper and longer-term nature of Indo-American partnership seems to override other considerations; indeed the likelihood of Americans turning their attention to terrorism in Kashmir as the Indians are urging is troubling enough. The subject occasion many uncertainties and should be treated as, again, a major crisis.

and COAS, are supremely confident that they can safely handle all situations. Insofar as the nation's overall problems and challenges are concerned, there never was a period when there were so many dangers on all these three fronts. In fact, these are serious crises and they have become only worse with the passage of time because successive governments, usually in deference to generals, never seriously tried to resolve them or prevent assuming the present dimensions. Today a purposeful examina-

tion of these crises is necessary. Few can underplay the importance of what might happen on either side of Afghanistan's borders with Pakistan or along the LOC with India. All Pakistanis are justifiably anxious and apprehensive about both sets of possibilities. But one point must be heavily underscored: crises on, along or across the borders result from the internal policies of this country and tackling them requires, at bottom, changes in domestic policy orientation. Foreign policy is always a result and in many ways extension of domestic policy orientation, only secondarily influenced by foreign countries. We should, therefore focus sharply on domestic policy orientation in order to adequately resolve the crises across the borders.

The primary crisis at home takes the shape of an explosive polarisation between the pro-Taliban religious parties and the government which by making a U turn in its Afghan policy has enraged the former. It is not really a new crisis; it has been with us from the early years of independence. It is all about Pakistanis' perception of themselves based on the reasons that forced partition on India. Original Muslim League leadership all of

Islam while actually running a Martial Law or its surrogate regimes that were entirely secular, if also anti-democratic. Anyway, eventually the religious lobby found Taliban to be a good Islamic model and are now working for a Taliban-like Islamic dispensation for Pakistan, perhaps sans their excesses or rigidities. How dangerous it would be if Pakistan becomes something like the Taliban's Afghanistan is obvious. But this lobby is in full cry. Today's one-man regime is required to cope with this challenge also.

PLAIN WORDS

Regional nationalists are determined not to go on living under too powerful a centre; they want a genuine federation that gives adequate power to the provinces that coincide with perceived nationalities' homelands or none at all. It is as explosive now as it was in 1950s and 1960s. Military's interventions have only added to the exasperation of those demanding regional (and local) autonomy: the latter being the prerequisites of justice. The official devolution plan and democratic-seeming local bodies are not seen as enough compensation for the loss of genuine democracy.

At any rate, even if an all out war does not break out, India promises to keep up heavy diplomatic pressures on this country. In addition, there is a third and far more complex front: domestic politics. It is bristling with ugly possibilities. Press has been full of reports about a possible deal with the PPP chief Benazir Bhutto. A deal of sorts has been all but visible between Gen. Pervez Musharraf and the Like Minded Muslim Leaguers all along. The military regime had all but outmanoeuvred the ARD, except for two factors: continued allegiance of 35 or so MNAs and many Senators to Mr. Nawaz Sharif and secondly there is the Army's mind set: it regards these two top leaders as too corrupt who have to be kept out of the new politics the military regime has come to devise. President Musharraf's statements about his Presidency only signify that the Army wishes him to stay as an all powerful President indefinitely. It looked uncommonly like an assurance to White House that come what may the Army will not relinquish its power, though it may repeat the charade of democracy as it did in 1985 to 1999.

Doubtless the generals, especially Gen. Musharraf, as President

League used the name of Islam during Pakistan Movement, Pakistan will have to be an orthodox Islamic State. Few ML government leaders paid attention to this while Quaid-i-Azam lived. But with the passage of time, factionalism inside ML and Liaquat Ali Khan government's inability to resolve the constitution-making deadlock led to a sordid tussle for power between Punjab and Bengal groups inside the Constituent Assembly. That resulted in power being cornered by a bureaucratic-military coterie and authoritarian rulers found the Islamic State idea useful. It came handy in for condemning Bengalis' and other regionalists' demands for autonomy as mere provincialism. But Liaquat government had tried to be clever by half in getting an ambiguous Objectives Resolution passed, thinking that religious lobby's demands could be appeased by it while the normal ML types (modernists) can go on ruling using Islamic rhetoric as an icing on a basically secular cake.

That Resolution strengthened the case for an Islamic dispensation for Pakistan and the rest was done by the successive dictators' need for acquiring a semblance of legitimacy by being ever more shrill about

What the regime does not realise is that preventing strikes or containing street demonstrations is not meeting the challenge; a proper and more democratic alternative is necessarily required. This is however beyond the ken of generals. This is not the only explosive controversy in Pakistan. The country fought a civil war and was dismembered (1971) on the issue of Centre-Province relations. It has been the issue of issues since. Regional nationalists are determined not to go on living under too powerful a centre; they want a genuine federation that gives adequate power to the provinces that coincide with perceived nationalities' homelands or none at all. It is as explosive now as it was in 1950s and 1960s. Military's interventions have only added to the exasperation of those demanding regional (and local) autonomy: the latter being the prerequisites of justice. The official devolution plan and democratic-seeming local bodies are not seen as enough compensation for the loss of genuine democracy.

There are two other issues that have found no solution: disparity in incomes and opportunities between the rich and the poor, including in the

development among regions. It is significant that Authority does not give, after 1971, separate GDP figures for provinces or regional per capita incomes. Why? The poor are entitled to ask: who owns Pakistan and why? The second issue is one of foreign policy. Ever since October 1953 when Gen. Ayub Khan signed an agreement with Pentagon for military aid behind the back of the Parliament, Cabinet and certainly the people - Pakistan's foreign policy of aligning with the US has been controversial. It is now time to assess what did the country gain or lose. All the gains are to be seen in the prosperity of the elite classes, including the generals. What did the less well to do classes get is rapidly growing poverty, high taxes and equally rapidly rising debt servicing burdens, the weight of which falls heavily on the poor. The continuation of this policy orientation, especially after the restoration of Pak-American alliance, is now at issue: who will gain and who will lose?

Majority of Pakistanis is poor and deprived of equal rights. They want equality. This means equal sharing in politics too: let all Pakistanis be equal stakeholders in the Pakistan Limited. Foreign aid received in the name of the people should actually benefit the poor as it does the rich, reducing disparities. This demand has four facets: (i) a more egalitarian distribution of incomes; and (ii) state's firm and legal obligation to eradicate poverty and not merely alleviation; (iii) it must be made the first charge on the national budget through a statutory social security no matter how small the initial compensation; and (iv) no region should noticeably lag behind others. How is the military regime going to cope with this troubling situation on its two borders and the grim potentialities of domestic polarisations, made worse by frequent military dictatorships? It says it can handle it all by itself, though it is trying to employ some pliable politicians for PR purposes. They will have privileges and perks but no power. They will take most of the flak. The people shall have only one role: to stay laid back, watching the compulsions of history play themselves out under the expert supervision of generals.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

More women in politics

In politics, money and men are the two factors that are managed. People management is done well by women. In the past, politicians like Indira Gandhi, Bandernayake and recently Megawati Sukarnaputri are those women politicians who know how to manage men and money effectively.

Instead of having corrupt male politicians, we can have some honest women politicians. Generally women do not plunder money or terrorise people. If we think about the sub-continent, many successful women politicians would be found. We have seen housewife turned politicians also. There are a number

of women a politician cum writers who are successfully maintaining happy married life while remaining dedicated professionals as well. If we had a woman Mayor, we would have a clean and tidy city at least. I appreciate the administration for reserving sixty seats for women in the new parliament.

Mahmudur Rahman
Bhuiyan Academy

Timely editorial

Your editorial "Too many bone-chilling murders" and "Condemned to death" (20.11.01) seems much more inline with what the country needs now.

Thanks,
Hasan Murshed M.D.
USA

JS needs both Razzak and Tofail

In the recent JS election, one of our best parliamentarians-- Advocate Shaikh Razzak Ali (the former Speaker) was dropped from the BNP nomination list. So there was no chance for him to contest the election. Our number one Parliamentary debater, Tofail Ahmed was not voted to the JS from any of the three seats for which he contested, perhaps because of the 'tide of sheaf of paddy' this year!

However, I think there are chances of getting both of these 'competent politicians' in the JS through the ensuing bye-election of the left out seats of two leaders of two main parties.

I am tempted to add that the AL has nothing to worry at attending the 8th JS Sessions. I may remind the party of its only 39 MPs (instead of the present 63) in the 2nd JS of which Mr. Asaduzzaman was the Leader (of the Opposition). I recall how lively were his debates with the expert Parliamentarian-Shah Azizur Rahman who was the Leader of the House (being the Prime Minister).

I think, if we can have both Advocate Razzak Ali and Mr. Tofail Ahmed (and if possible also Mr. Khasru), we shall have a very strong and fruitful JS session. The Chairmanship of Parliamentary Standing Committees, if allotted exclusively to the Opposition, we may have a more fruitful JS in the beginning of a new Millennium!

M.A.S. Molla Dhaka For the sake of our country

Although never an active member, I have always been a staunch and silent supporter of the Awami League. My faith and respect for the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is unshakable. Sheikh Hasina's outright rejection of the people's verdict and her threat to take the country once more towards instability has however left me distraught.

Mr. Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, the architect of "Janatar Mancha" who had nothing to lose at the end of his career crippled the administration by politicising the bureaucracy.

There was a clear divide between "Amader"(ours) and "Tader"(yours) and rewards were doled out to the sycophants and party cadres (1973 batch) in cushy postings at home and Bangladesh missions abroad. Efficiency and honesty took the back seat and the loyalty was measured on how well the officers lapped up to the ministers and their relatives.

Even the Prime Minister became vulnerable to the intrigue of a handful of the so-called "brilliant" civil servants/diplomats who led her to believe that she would win the Nobel Peace Prize and squandered millions of the country's hard earned foreign exchange on foreign tours.

I believe it is high time for the AL to do some serious soul searching

and try to understand what went wrong.

I hope the BNP leadership has learned its lessons from their last tenure and from the mistakes of the AL rule.

Badrul Islam
Dhaka

Weekly holiday

Since the British period the government office timing was from 10 am to 5 pm. Governor Major Gen. Azam Khan introduced the office timing from 8 am to 2 pm in 1958. President Ershad introduced weekly holidays on Friday and Saturday. During the AL regime, government offices enjoyed weekly holiday on Friday and Saturday and the office time

was fixed from 9:30 AM to 4:30 PM.

When Sunday was the weekly holiday, government offices were running from 7:30 AM to 11:30 AM on Friday. As a result, the Muslim community did not face any difficulty for their Jumma prayer. Now, if we enjoy holiday on Friday and Saturday, the world market remains close for three days in each week. As a result we are bound to lose our economy in the world market.

The people of Bangladesh demand the change of office timing and weekly holiday. I would, draw the kind attention of the new BNP government to fix the government office timing from 8 AM to 2 PM and keep Sunday as a holiday.

Adv. M.A.Wahab
Bara Mogbazar, Dhaka