done by the Americans who always

**DHAKA MONDAY FEBRUARY 11, 2002** 

# The case for clean air lies in a transport policy

The public need both transport

and safe air

HAKA'S air is back to its choking worst as authorities make space for old two-stroke baby taxis and derelict trucks to return to the road. Although the government had ordered pollution-spewing vehicles off the road sometime ago, they have somewhat backed down lately after their talks with transport associations centred around a strike they had called to protest. Subject to certain restrictions the high-risk old vintage transports have been allowed back. So, the police apparently have been told to ease back on enforcing the regulations. But there's a reported allegation that some cops may be relaxing the noentry hours much to the dilapidated transport owners' advantage. This needs probing, because stronger resolve undercut by corrupt practices makes a malady return with

As the pollution problem gets worse, one must however ask if the issue is central to pollution or transport management? The government has informed that they shall enforce the regulations strictly after February 18 when the baby taxis and many other vehicles will run out of their road permits. However, that leaves the root of the problem unresolved which is to ferry the people to and from destinations without causing environmental hazards. The complexity of the problem is manifested by the retreat of the government in the first phase because the city transport system would be unable to cope by providing any immediate alternatives.

This is certainly not the same as banning polythene where the alternative existed and the original was in suppression. The massive traffic demand has to be met and without that the novelty and joy of clean pollution free air will soon be replaced by resentment as the public fail to go to school, work, hospitals or shops, let alone socialise.

What Dhaka needs is an organised transport policy, which will provide enough facilities on the road. Perhaps it is worth noting that despite a Supreme Court order, Delhi buses that hadn't converted to CNG couldn't be taken off the road because of shortage of buses to meet public need. One hopes the government will be ready for the next crisis created by a city more friendly towards private vehicles than public transports while remaining negligent towards environmental dangers.

It's not an easy problem to resolve and one hopes that the solutions emerge out of a comprehensive policy framework rather than by recourse to adhoc measures. The authorities will have to provide clean air and sufficient public transports -- both. One without the other won't work.

### Second year of DS-DHL **Business Awards**

A tribute to torch-bearers in a

globalising era

UR Business Person of the Year, Outstanding Woman in Business and Enterprise of the Year awardees have done us, the economy and the nation proud. The more we think of the winners Anisur Rahman Sinha of OPEX group, Rehana Kashem of Saatrang Handicrafts and Nitun Kundu of Otobi the more we are convinced how deserving they were to receive our modest accolade. They said they felt elated over the 'recognition' we accorded to them but let's tell them again after the formal citation of Saturday that the honour and pleasure have been ours as well to recognise their services to the All of them have sterling leadership qualities. They are

risk-takers, sticklers for quality, professionally persistent and highly innovative and improvising in terms of steering their occasionally rocking boats to the shore of success, not just one but one after another. Apart from getting the basics right, they have been gritty and determined to get to the top. Yet they think they have reached a plateau, not the pinnacle and that's the stuff of which the essence of private enterprise ought to be made in a highly competitive world.

The essential thing to note is that they have operated within our infrastructural, utility service and business environment to come to the stage they have, thereby setting norms for the new-generation entrepreneurs who are sometimes easily put off by initial obstacles.

They represent success stories of a pioneering nature in a globalising era. In today's world of recession-struck big and corporate business, it is the smaller individual and groupbased enterprises that have better chances of prospering. All that's needed now is the creation of an enabling environment by the government for such entrepreneurial skills to develop with full flourish.

# Saudi-US relations: Growing rumpus over military base



M ABDUL HAFIZ

N the Middle East Saudi Arabia closely trailed behind Israel as the trusted ally of the United States, If Israel has been the US strategic outpost meant more for the future contingency to safeguard the west's interests in this energy-rich hub of the world, Saudi Arabia's unflinching lovalty as an ally was already tested on the ground by the Americans for years. During the cold war. Saudi Arabia's fierce Wahabi brand of Islam was profitably used by the US to push back the onslaught of Soviet Union, be it an Afghanistan, the Balkans, Muslim central Asian republics or even Nasser's Egypt. The American-Saudi relationship dates back to 1920s when Abdul Aziz-al Saud, the founder of the Kingdom was reigning and Israel was not yet born. In the process they developed a quid pro quo of the US providing the Kingdom its security in exchange of the former's monopolised access to the quarter of the world's oil reserves that lie buried under Saudi desert. At the height of this mutually beneficial cooperation the Saudi monarchy allowed, after the Gulf War in 1991, 4500 American troops and 1000 British to stay in Saudi Arabian base much against the approval of its subjects. As a result the Americans had the full share of the proverbial Arab hospitality almost for a century. That warm relationship is now about to flounder

in the morass of the kingdom's increasingly popular resistance to continuing American presence on its soil.

Just when the Americans are making their fresh appearances in Afghanistan and elsewhere the US President George W Bush is in no mood to disturb the status quo in Saudi Arabia and obviously wants to keep the US military presence in that country despite reported grumblings from the Saudis that the

Saud-al Faisal was reported by New York Times as expressing his deep indignation at Bush's refusal to meet Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. Saudi government, it said, was 'angrily frustrated' that Washington had failed to bring a promised initiative to forge a peace settlement between Israel and Palestinians. In addition, as revealed by a former Saudi Intelligence chief, the Crown Prince Abdullah who virtually rules Saudi Arabia since 1995 when King

Palestinian issue, remained indexes of the political mood preobsessed with his NMD debate. According to Muhammad Al-Savid. deputy director of Cairo's Al-Ahram Centre of Strategic Studies "Most Arab Leaders are really frustrated with the Bush Administration's conduct of American foreign policy in the Middle East and find the US in her choice to hit an Arab country after its swoop on Afghanistan. inherently hostile to Islam in Bush's war on global terrorism.'

vailing in the kingdom whose citizens made up 15 of the 19 men who carried out the Black September attack.

But what's about the Saudi security and that of the several thousands of the venal and corrupt princes which once prompted the royal family to befriend the Americans. The security was originally required to combat threat from within but later it was no less an imperative to fight it

found it a difficult question to be resolved, given their vast strategic interests in the region. The Americans seemed to be undeterred after 1996 attack on the Marine barracks at al-Khobar. They rather moved deeper to Prince Sultan airbase in the remote desert, preferred to stay on developed it into America's largest base in the region and only in July last upgraded it into command and control centre from where the bombings of Iraq and, more recently, Afghanistan were orchestrated. Although the female members of the base resented their wearing an 'abaya' (a traditional item of dress similar to burga) when off base in Saudi Arabia and in spite of a general complaint that the Saudis had forced the US personnel to operate at a base in a remote region seemingly to keep them 'out of sight', there are little signs of their withdrawal from the Saudi base.

Yet Carl Levin, the chairman of the Senate's Armed Forces Committee conceded last month that the time may have come to move American forces to a more hospitable base. perhaps Oman or Bahrain. The US Ambassador to Riyadh, in an interview with a Gulf newspaper, pointed out that "We were going to reduce our troops after the Gulf War any way." In the meantime there is some talk in Washington too that the US forces should pull out of Saudi Arabia, But the Air Force Secretary James Roche said that he had not been asked to look for alternatives to Prince Sultan Air base the facilities of which in coordinating data from satellites and other sensors, he grudgingly admits, will be hard to

# PERSPECTIVES

Kuwait

Carl Levin, the chairman of the Senate's Armed Forces Committee conceded last month that the time may have come to move American forces to a more hospitable base, perhaps Oman or Bahrain. The US Ambassador to Riyadh, in an interview with a Gulf newspaper, pointed out that "We were going to reduce our troops after the Gulf War any way." In the meantime there is some talk in Washington too that the US forces should pull out of Saudi Arabia.

United States has over staved their welcome. According to White House spokesman Ari Fleischer, "The president believes that the current arrangements are working and working well". It was in spite of the Washington Post carrying a report last month that the Saudi rulers were growing more uncomfortable with the US military presence in their country and might ask the US to end it. The report said that the senior Saudi rulers believed that the United States should pull out because its forces became a political liability for them. Secretary of States Colin Powell, however, dismissed the Post report saying, "There is nothing to that story that warrants my attention at the moment." On the other hand the US has insisted that all was well in the US-Saudi relationship despite some signs of strain in the wake of September 11 attacks. But the rumour did not rest at that The rift between Washington and Riyadh seems to be wider than anticipated. On November 9, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, Prince

Fahd suffered a stroke sent a letter to President Bush well before September 11, saying that the world's biggest oil exporter would be forced to review its ties with the United States unless Washington took active steps to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The bitterness that exists not just in Saudi Arabia but in entire Arab world over the issue as well as the rebuff they receive from the west was most graphically exemplified by New York Mayor's rejection of a charitable donation of \$10M because the Saudi Prince who offered the gift as a gesture of sympathy called for a change in American policy with regard to the Palestinians.

Even other pro-western Arab governments were deeply disappointed with Bush's reluctance, especially in his presidency's early months, to get more closely involved in stopping a decade of peace making from sinking into a welter of Arab-Israeli bloodshed. On the balance more Arab bloods were spilled when Bush, in a callous indifference to

military presence. Osama's primary aim has long been to evict the Americans from their 'occupation' of the holy lands of Saudi Arabia. The internal pressure from the militant clerics has been raised to a pitch of fanaticism. In fact, the brand of Islam that once benefited Americans how turned on them. Over the recent weeks the prayer leaders in Riyadh, Jeddah and Burayda are learnt to have resigned their official posts in protests at America's continued military presence. The funeral of Sheikh Hamoud bin Oqla, the author of one of the religious edicts to declare the royal family worthy of ex-communication for siding with the 'infidels' was the largest the kingdom had witnessed years. Thousands of people telephoned to console the families of al-Qaeda suspects in American hands. These are some of the

Things have changed a great deal

ever since the first troops were flown

to the Kingdom when Iraq invaded

attitude and the urgency of US

in 1990 both in Saudi

many Saudis over the presence of the US forces there. Shipley Telhami, a Middle East analyst for the Brookings Institution, however, disagrees. He believes that the Saudis have already concluded having US forces in Saudi Arabia is no longer essential to the US goal of containing Iraq and in fact had become a sore point domestically. 'The Saudis aren't fearful that an American pullout from their own territory will make them more vulnerable to Iraq or Iran", he said. But will America do as asked by the

Saudis? In fact the Saudis have

been quibbling over American

presence as much as it was also

externally. Even after the Americans

sold \$30 bn worth of arms to the

kingdom in the past decade it

resembles little more than a

Puddleduck before either of the Iragi

or Iranian forces, Indeed, Saudi

Arabia still depends on the United

States for its defence, but yet it finds

itself walking a tight rope with

increasing uneasiness among

Brig (retd) Hafiz is former DG of BIISS.

# **Davos in New York**



**IKRAM SEHGAL** writes from Karachi

LMOST 150 days to the day that the Sep 11 horror struck New York, the 31st Annual World Economic Forum (WEF) opened in the Waldorf Astoria, the first time the annual gathering had traveled outside the ski-resort of Davos. As a vote of solidarity and sympathy, Klaus Schwab rang up (then) Mayor Rudy Guiliani to initiate the logistics feat of shifting the world's "movers and shakers" to be able to discuss tangible issues under tight security. New York is not Seattle. New York Police Department (NYPD) outnumber Seattle's 6000 cops by many multiple times. Well trained, the city's finest handled protesters without resorting to violence. Over 3000 important figures from the world of business and industry, at least 30 Heads of State and Government (including a handful of monarchs), government functionaries, academics, media persons, NGO representatives, etc ran the gauntlet of protesters on Park Avenue and stringent security checks to discuss the theme of the "Leadership in Fragile

The opening Plenary Session "For Hope", had Bono, U-2's Irish singer, Archbishop Tutu of South Africa, Queen Rania of Holland, Philosopher Elie Wiesel of Boston University, President Arroyo Macapagal of the Philippines and incongruously Abdullah Abdullah, the Foreign Minister of the Afghan Interim Government (AIG), in place of Hamid Karzai who had to head home hurriedly because of the flareup of in-fighting between warlords.

In the opening session itself, the high point was a special appearance by New York's feisty former Mayor Rudy Guiliani, other than President Kaspar Villiger of the Swiss Federation, Governor George Pataki of New York State and New York's new Mayor, millionaire Michael Bloomberg

One had an opportunity to grill Samuel Huntington over two Sessions "Shared Values" and "the Root Cause of Conflict", and his was that WEF itself had invited a number of representatives from Islamic organizations, in good circulation, they managed to take the edge of most insidious attacks.

The real star of the present US Administration is Secretary of State Gen Colin Powell. With Australian PM John Howard. Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem. NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson. former NATO Secretary General Javier Solano, French Foreign shoring up the UN proposed Bonn Agreement (and therefore the AIG) and (3) that the discussions were devoid of reality on the ground. Given that Richard Haas, the US State Department's Policy Head and Lakhdar Ibrahimi were in the same room, it was more of a Mad Hatter's Tea Party in Wonderland. We heard about "possible interference" from Pakistan and Iran, on the suggestion that since Afghanistan did not have a border with India and

US \$ 28 billion to a charity foundation) and Bono (U2's lead singer), encouraged aid to critical areas in fighting AIDS, ignorance etc. Paul O'Neill, the US Secretary of Treasurv. said we have precious little to show for the aid given over the vears. We have to show more compassion and concern to make individuals' and communities' income generating as well as makng life real for the underprivileged.

In "Paradigm for the Future"

Speaker after speaker warned against labeling only Islam as the only one having the problem, one or two motivated speakers even tried to show only Islam as having the problem...However Richard Haas's comment about Pakistan being on the way of becoming a "Failed State" pre Sep 11 was disappointing and unnecessary. It reveals a hostile mindset well within the heart of the US administration.

self-fulfilling prophesying of strife between western civilizations, Islam Abdullah, he promptly lambasted Pakistan even though the forum does not permit bi-lateral attacks, alibly laving out untruths about Kashmir without the bat of an eyelash, in reply to a question saying that his grandfather Sheikh Abdullah was imprisoned for nearly two decades because of some "disagreement" with Nehru. Some disagreement! Outnumbered 35 to 1 by the Indians, it is rather a difficult task to represent a country in a forum where social contacts influence policy and where our own government functionaries conveniently put patriotism on a back burner so as to maintain their cheap popularity and social acceptability. Without genuine rapprochement South Asia has no future but where is the hope with such hate and venom in India's business community? Many westerners do speak up for Islam, including Samuel Huntington, the Indians revel in the denouement of Islam. The Arabs present left it mostly to Pakistanis to defend Islam, are we the only quardians of the faith? The saving grace

Minister Hubert Vedrine and South Korean Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Han Seung-Soo, disof building a coalition for a stable world", he easily outshone all the others, all heavyweights in their own right, Colin Powell is the President the US should have had, mature and logical, his presence gives not only stability to US foreign policy in the face of contrary world perception of a cowboy, shoot-from-the-hip image, it gives confidence to the rest of the world. Amre Moussa, formerly Egyptian Foreign Minister and now Secretary General of the Arab League gave a very emphatic reply to Islamic nations being viewed as "the enemy" though they were as much part of the USA-led Coalition. The fueling of global anger against the US has to be addressed so that it did not go out of control.

On the same table as Abdullah Abdullah, the Foreign Minister of the Afghan Interim Government, in the Session "Stability in Afghanistan. Can we avoid another Great Game?", I noted viz (1) he was very much representing the Panjsheeri Taiiks' viewpoint rather than the Afghans, (2) UN's Kieran Prendergast was desperately the AIG's rather cosy relationship with India would evoke Pakistan's concern and possible reaction, I of Afghanistan's 26 provinces bordering Pakistan, with 28 million refugees at US\$ 3 per day (UN estimates) eating up our economy, no one was prepared to discuss the US\$ 3 billion that Pakistan should be paid annually to host the refugees. Pakistan did not want to have anything to do with Afghanistan, what was the reciprocal possibility for the Afghans having nothing to do with Pakistan? About the World Economic

Outlook the developing countries felt that despite WTO there would be selective protection against their products while they would be made to open their markets without any protection whatsoever to western consumer goods. A genuine partnership could only be formed if the developed world had greater sensitivity to the needs of developing world, that aid could be replaced with trade and that debt relief could be made more meaningful by targetting the relief to health and education. In the session on "debt relief", both Bill Gates, Microsoft's owner (who has personally given

moderated by BBC's Tim Sebastian with a star- studded panel "challenged" by US Senator Hilary others, Israeli Deputy PM and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, former Chairman, US National Security Council Zbigniew Brzezinski, Professor Samuel Huntington and George Soros, the most telling observation made by Brzezinski about unscrupulous nations using the present Coalition and situation post-Sept 11 to further their own narrow animosities and label their enemy country as terrorists, a clear reference of India's posturing today vis-a-vis Pakistan.

In the discussion on "Fundamentalism", speaker after speaker warned against labeling only Islam as the only one having the problem, one or two motivated speakers even tried to show only Islam as having the problem. When it was pointed out that maybe the spread of Islam from the Philippines to Morocco counted for many of the conflicts, the density of Hindu civilization within South Asia almost wholly confined facts so that they did not come to the attention of the world e.g. the three Baptist Christian

revolts for over 50 years in Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur, the Hindu-Buddhist divide in Sri Lanka, the Hindu-Sikh divide in Indian Punjab etc. The world media remained unaware of this situation. The finest session was moderated by BBC's Nik Gowing on "Rebuilding Failed States". He kept the audience participating meaningfully. However Richard Haas's comment about Pakistan being on the way of becoming a "Failed State" pre Sep 11 was disappointing and unnecessary. It reveals a hostile mindset well within the heart of the US administration. If we were on the verge of becoming a "Failed State" why were we being requested repeatedly for UN Peace Keeping forces? Jean-Maurie Guehenno, UN's Under Secretary General for Peace Keeping Force, sitting next to Haas, was very appreciative of Pakistan's commitment and performance.

There were many distinguished leaders present, among them King Malaysia, PM Chretien of Canada, President Olusegun Obasanio of Nigeria, President Pastrana of Columbia, PM Macombi of Madagascar, President Mbeki of South Africa, President Wade of Senegal, President Toledo of Peru, former US President Clinton, PM Kasvanov of Russia, Emir Al-Thani of Qatar, etc, and a host of Foreign and Finance Ministers.

The message of this year's meeting was very clear, there was a reluctant though appreciable shift from perception to reality, an aftereffect of Sep 11. Terrorism has roots other than Islam's extremists in isolation. Reluctantly one must note however, the educated and wealthy elite do not want to hear what they were not ready to believe, facts notwithstanding.

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

TO THE EDITOR

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

### Re Otobi

I may point out that Nitun Kunda's ex-partner, Reza Ali, also came up with the name Otobi as well as the logo. And it was Mrs. Reza Ali who inaugurated the first shop of Otobi's at Elephant Road

Dhaka

#### We all took part in the Liberation War

Barring a handful of pro-Pakistanis and Razakars, About 75 million people of Bangladesh wholeheartedly supported and directly or indirectly took part in the nine months War of Liberation in 1971.

Three million people sacrificed their lives and millions of others suffered utmost pain and agony at the hands of the Pakistani army in the war. People irrespective of religion, race, colour, caste and creed equally shared every moment of sorrow, pain, agony, grief as well as happiness, joy and pleasure of the war

But now some parasites of the country are busy measuring in the scale the people of which community and religion shed more blood and suffered most in the Liberation War, which is really a very unfortunate thing indeed. The future of the country will remain bleak until and unless these pro-Indian and pro-Pakistani parasites are removed form the country

Iqbal Ahmed New Eskaton Road, Dhaka

### "About Arabic

Language"

It's a great pleasure to know that people like Mr. Mustafizur Rahman and Mr. Zafar Hadi still exist in this modern day. I realised the importance of learning Arabic language when I can't even spare a moment for this mighty yet mysterious language.

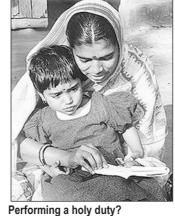
I remember those days when my

father would try his best to teach Arabic but we would pay least attention to it, as we had to give more emphasis on the subjects taught at school. So, if we had Arabic language as a compulsory subject in school, we wouldn't have to struggle for it at this age (although I do admit there is no limitation of age in case of learning but there is some problems in case of

Basmah Jasir, on e-mail

#### "Arabic language"

It's nice to hear all these gentlemen rushing to defend the learning of Arabic. By learning a language that is holy to God and our faith, we have a better chance of being better Muslims. I also wish that these and other gentlemen had expressed similar views on universal literacy as well. In a land where most children don't know how to read and write, every other learning is a luxury. Will we ever publicly admit



that by not pursuing the right of

education, we have committed a sin. That we may be forgiven by God for failing to learn Arabic but God will not forgive us for failing to impart education to all our children? It seems we are ready to defend our right to learn Arabic for religious purposes but not bother about the child's right to learn his own language for becoming a decent human being

Why this obsession with Arabic and not with literacy? If all Muslims of Bangladesh felt they had a compulsion to teach others, we could perhaps rid ourselves of illiteracy and such irrelevant debates would not have been necessary. And God would also be

Md. Hakim Ahsan Bulbul Nakhlapara, Dhaka

#### Bush's monkey business

The two important members of the Bush administration have expressed their phoney concern regarding the level of tension currently prevailing between India and Pakistan.

In his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Secretary Colin Powell has maintained that the standoff between the armies of the two

countries constituted a very dan-

**EDITOR** TO THE EDITOR

gerous situation. Speaking before the Senate Intelligence Committee the same day, CIA director George Tenet pointed out that the chances of war between the two nuclear-armed states were higher than at any point since 1971. And at the same time, its protégé Israel and the US have signed multi-billion dollars deals to supply arms to India

The "coalition against terror "has decided to make India a vast and "legitimate" market for weapon sales. On the eve of President Musharraf's current visit the US may also allow sales to Pakistan to

ensure "regional balance". Will America stop this "monkey business" so that South Asia is not pushed into a nuclear confronta-

Salman Khan

#### The plight of the Hajis I consider the recent incident with

regard to the plight of the Hajjis to be a classic example of Muslims persecuting Muslims. I believe that Muslim themselves are their own biggest enemies. In some respects the miseries caused to the Hajjis is of far bigger dimension than that of the statement made by the Khatib of the Baitul Mukarram Masjid sometime ago.

The Hajis are senior citizens of the country. To them this will be the one last major religious act of utmost importance of their lives. Finally this uncertainty of the flights has caused irreparable damage to their preparatory meditations they were in before arriving at the House of Allah. I am sure the Hajjis will ultimately be airborne and reach their much cherished destination and as time passes the matter like many other heinous crimes in this country will be forgotten.

I am not very impressed with the fact that the Passport of the Chairman of the concerned Travel Agency has been confiscated.

Various newspapers have now come up with a report that the travel agent is now also creating probems with regard to refund of airfares to concerned Hajis so that alternate arrangements could be made using other available Airlines. From what one could gather from the various reports published in most of the local dailies it is evident that all this could well be the results of accumulated failure and also mismanagement on the part of various governmental agencies. To add to all this we now hear of the physicians who accompanied the Hajis are not available. In the light of the above I would

earnestly request the Government to act swiftly on the matter and mete out exemplary punishment to each individual responsible for an act of criminal negligence.

Shamsher Chowdhury Dhanmandai, Dhaka

The full-page Letters to the Editor

will be published tomorrow.