

## FIFA's lift of ban heartening *Be in steps with the world, democratise all sports bodies*

THE FIFA has finally lifted the ban on Bangladesh causing audible sighs of relief all around. Bangladesh had been penalised because of suspending the elected football body and replacing it with a nominated body. In the established tradition, Bangladesh tried to mix sports with politics and ended up learning the hard way that local style politics conducted within the country doesn't apply when it comes to being part of international sports. But thank God, we are back to status quo-ante as far as our relations with the FIFA go.

The manner in which the Sports Ministry conducted the affair was more like managing a government office where partisanship has reached a point that there are more changes than work. However, the Football Federation is an elected body and the lesson is that one doesn't tamper with elected parts of the international football world. That the world may have gone far ahead in this regard and elected bodies can't be changed by a whim must be a rude awakening to the sports politicians of Dhaka.

However, the blame should not be apportioned to the present sports dons only. The last regime used the bodies as much and as reported by this paper, undemocratic practices including having a non-elected chief of the Football Federation was a glaring example. This time it just touched the wrong place.

If the sports dons want the various committees and federations to devote themselves to sports alone, then the idea will have to be given a radical push forward. To ensure that, democracy has to be introduced in the entire sporting arena and all the extra-sporting aspects including party politics, nepotism and buddy capitalism will have to be brushed out. Till sports becomes a matter of generating national pride and sporting achievement, it will fall into such potholes of disaster.

It should be a matter of some concern and sober thought that although we are happy because we have been allowed in to be part of the global football world, we are quite unable to generate any major success worth cheering.

We can't demand performance because the objectives of the officials and often the players aren't geared towards such goals. Unfortunately the FIFA has greater power to demand compliance than the people of Bangladesh who want serious commitment to sports and a few trophies to share.

As football slides we can only hope we will fail in sports as a part of the sports world and not in miserable isolation. For us that is something worth cheering probably. Anyway, thanks.

## Forfeiture of invalid passes at the secretariat gate

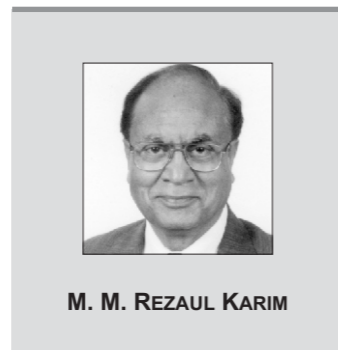
### *Gross act of indiscipline penalised*

THIS is a tell-tale story of incorrigible indifference to a routine requirement going on with impunity for months. At long last on Monday it burst forth into a noisy disturbance at the Sachibalaya gate as armed police carried out a screening operation to check on the validity of the entry passes. They found hundreds of expired passes, confiscated them and did not allow the bearers to enter the secretariat premises. Work inside the Sachibalaya suffered in consequence. But whose fault was it?

To our mind, the Home Ministry only enforced a basic rule asserting it can't be bent for anyone. The ministry's repeated reminders to the bearers of the passes and the departments and offices they belonged to having fallen on deaf ears it had to go for action. Home Ministry is the authority to issue passes for two categories of state sector employees. First, the officials who work on deputation at the various ministries within the secretariat are given renewable passes for a year. Also, renewable passes of six-month duration are issued to employees of government, autonomous and semi-autonomous organisations who need to visit the secretariat on a variety of official purposes. It is understood that their passes had expired as early as on December 31 last falling due for renewal. Although they were given a grace period of nearly six weeks they failed to renew the passes.

The home ministry could only be faulted for waiting this long to act. In other words, we basically endorse what the home ministry has done and would like it to do so again if need be. The message must now therefore get across to the individual bearers of the passes and the offices they belong to that violation of rules is more culpable if it is committed by government employees.

# First hundred days of third BNP government



M. M. REZAUL KARIM

LAST week was another eventful week. Bangladesh will perhaps go down in history as a country, which hardly deprives people of a continuing string of interesting political events. An important feature this time were speeches of the leaders of our two major political parties on one issue - performance of the present BNP government during its first hundred days of rule. Prime Minister made an exhaustive statement, naturally claiming the achievements in certain fields and advancing reasons for non-fulfilment in others. The Opposition Leader, as apprehended, sought to rebuff the claims and highlighted what were termed as failures of the government.

While holding statements of the two statesmen together, one seeks to underline the important elements of claims and counter-claims. Begum Khaleda Zia enumerated those of the 25 pledges which had been fulfilled by her government within the first hundred days of its rule. At the same time, she explained reasons why some of the unfulfilled tasks could not be accomplished, though actions had been initiated or efforts undertaken to that end. She also pointed out that in some of the areas, which had not been incorporated in the original set of pledges, notable achievements had been made. These included prohibition of use of polythene bags and introduction of CNG converted vehicles in the

environmental sector and some other measures in the communication sector. Yet, Prime Minister opined it would be unfair to judge performance of a government by reviewing its work only during the brief period of hundred days.

What had originally prompted Begum Khaleda Zia to decide announcement of her government's performance during the first hundred days? Was it merely a blind imitation of a practice followed by American and some other

fulfill the unfulfilled tasks.

Let us take the first of the foremost targets and priorities, that is to say, control of terrorism and restore law and order situation. Prime Minister did outline the actions taken by her government by giving stern warning to all those, who would abate or encourage terrorism, irrespective of party affiliation. To substantiate, the government threatened a State Minister with dismissal for failure to hand over to justice his son

and wings for compliance. The administration would also like to be provided with the list of those stated to be Awami League workers, except for those who had criminal charges against them, in order to identify political vendetta in contrast to settlement of personal scores. Anyway, BNP contends that the law and order situation, which had worsened during the past years due mainly to the infusion of massive quantity of illegal arms into the society, political patronage and the

community and Awami League workers has been postponed more than once for reported lack of co-operation from other political parties and various other reasons. The arrest of pro-Awami League noted journalist Shariyar Kabir with charges and counter-charges has gone to the court and is now sub-judice, hence inappropriate for discussion in public.

Among BNP's initiatives worthy of mention were bills for repeal of the Awami League's notorious

administration to bring it to doorsteps of the people. Parliamentary reforms, especially the issue of women membership, are awaiting participation of the Opposition in Parliament in order to render it the much-desired quality of acceptability on national issues.

The above enumerates some of the fields and issues on which the BNP government wanted sincere and effective action. They never contemplated and much less expected that actions would be completed on all these within the first hundred days. What they wanted was to do as much as they could to reach the targets within the specified period. Even failure to reach the desired goals contained an element of success; at least some progress has been made on these domains. These are no mean achievements. Further and continuing progress, however, will depend upon the degree of co-operation of the ruling party is able to secure from the Opposition.

The Opposition, on its part, should shun politics of non-co-operation and obstruction, which always produces adverse effect in public mind. Never in the history of Bangladesh had the opposition abstained from Parliament from the very first session on the allegation that there is no congenial environment for sitting in the Parliament without even entering it. The opposition criticisms need not be so subjective as its leader's speech and so specific as to malign and falsely characterize the present elected government as Taliban. Let there be political understanding and consensus so that the next hundred days of the BNP rule may establish a better democratic tradition of harmony and promote over-all interests of the people.

M M Rezaul Karim, a former ambassador, is member of BNP's Advisory Council.

## CURRENTS AND CROSSCURRENTS

Never in the history of Bangladesh had the opposition abstained from Parliament from the very first session on the allegation that there is no congenial environment for sitting in the Parliament without even entering it... Let there be political understanding and consensus so that the next hundred days of the BNP rule may establish a better democratic tradition...

governments? Or, did it represent a deliberate plan to serve some ostensible purpose? The latter is correct. The first step taken by the government was to identify the high priority pledges made in BNP's election manifesto that must be immediately taken in hand. Secondly, this being a unique practice introduced for the first time in the country it was designed to spur those responsible, both politicians and officials, to go into firm and prompt action in a spirit of challenge and missionary zeal. This would produce better quality and greater output within a prescribed period of time. Thirdly, the plan enabled the government to bulldoze realization of some of the unpopular yet highly deserving projects, such as eviction of unauthorized habitation, with relatively less obstruction from vested interest groups during what is known as "honeymoon period" of the government. Finally, the episode allows the government to learn from its shortcomings and follies through experience as to how to proceed to

allegedly involved in a relatively minor crime, and also held brother of a BNP MP in detention. The government went also to the extent of arresting the head of its powerful student front who is also an MP on charges involving submission of tender and kept him without bail for quite some time. Yet, incidents of crime, especially in Dhaka city, did not go down significantly. According to the opposition, it went up.

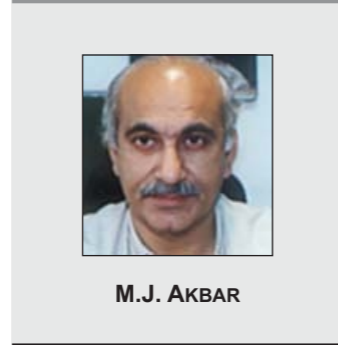
The Prime Minister, who had forbidden holding of victory celebrations immediately after election for fear of the situation going out of control, frankly admitted that she was not yet satisfied on the issue of improvement of law and order situation. Notwithstanding stern warnings from the party high command, there was no denying the fact that at the local levels some retaliatory and revengeful actions were resorted to mostly by those, who had suffered a lot in the hands of Awami League adversaries during the preceding five years. However, the BNP hierarchy has renewed instructions to their local chapters

state of unemployed youth, cannot be raised to an ideal situation but can only be stymied and gradually improved. They made strong claims that terrorism, extortion, forcible occupation and such other acts committed freely and boldly during the Awami League regime by their MPs and party stalwarts or their sons and relatives, will not be allowed by the BNP government or at least will not let go unpunished.

As for repression and torture of members of the minority community, one must admit its veracity. But some of these incidents took place at the initial stage shortly after the 1 October election. Some of the reports published in newspapers did not corroborate with truth and appeared to be motivated in a country, which takes pride on its record of religious tolerance and harmony. Awami League's charges on this issue, therefore, appear to be highly exaggerated and sought to vilify the government for obvious political purpose. The decision of the Awami League to hold a convention on repression of minority

Public Safety Act 2000 and separation of the Executive from the Judiciary, being tabled before the Parliament. One can well perceive government's earnestness in reduction of Dhaka's terrible traffic congestion by way of rationalizing transport system, construction of fly-overs and replacement of old vehicles from the streets and other useful measures. Despite present critical economic and financial situation largely inherited from the past and slow-down in global economy, Prime Minister has kept her commitment to provide free education for women till H.S.C class. Text books have been supplied in due time to school children, unlike last year, for which State Minister for Education had to make sudden adventurous forays and swoops on criminals. Reforms have been introduced in the financial and administrative sectors to prevent wastage and improve efficiency. A White Paper on Corruption has been published, as pledged. Steps have been taken for establishment of Gram Sarkar or village govern-

# Where is Osama bin Laden?



M. J. AKBAR

WHERE is Osama bin Laden? President Pervez Musharraf thinks he is dead. Maybe he just hopes he is dead. Nothing would be more inconvenient for President George Bush's newest friend than an Osama discovered, possibly clean-shaven, in a nondescript safe house in Pakistan.

Would Pakistan's President be able to hand over Osama bin Laden to America's President? Intentions are not in question; he would certainly like to. He could later go on his favourite medium, television, and explain that since Osama was not a Pakistani citizen he did not feel duty-bound to save him for a local trial. Nor have the Americans come halfway around the world to watch Osama bin Laden being tried by a Sharia court. But the reaction would be another story. The street would probably not erupt immediately, but it would smoulder. The Muslim street has been subdued by the crackle of events since September. But it is foolish to underestimate a volcano merely because it has not overflowed in front of today's television coverage.

As Hercule Poirot and Sherlock Holmes pointed out so often, there cannot be a death without a body. Osama bin Laden may not these days be presumed innocent until convicted, but he must be presumed alive till buried. The question is larger, and more intriguing, than the fate of only Osama bin Laden.

He was a political recluse, for obvious reasons, but not a hermit. He had wives and children, some living with him in Afghanistan. During the war a videotape was circulated in which two young sons of Osama were also shown with him in Afghanistan. Where is this family? They could not have disappeared into thin air, could they? The air is not so thin over Afghanistan, or Pakistan, as to enable a large family and entourage to vanish without a trace.

Where, similarly, is Mullah

permanent war. The answer is evident. The whole of Afghanistan has almost never been under the complete control of any single government. There has always been space, even if they are no more than the nooks and crannies of a large country, out of the reach of even the most powerful government. But this brings us to an uncomfortable fact. Such a large group of people, numbering in thousands, can live outside the range of a government, but they cannot live without the support of some people who pro-

surface.

These worries must be nagging an officially exuberant Washington. This columnist learns that present American assessments envisage the presence of its troops in Pakistan and Afghanistan at least till the spring of 2003. One presumes that the will to stay will not be undermined by the success of any sporadic sabotage mission: Republican Ronald Reagan and Democrat Bill Clinton both withdrew their troops, one from Beirut and the other from Somalia, after casualties. In Beirut a

but it was sharp) refused, despite his alliance with them, to let the British cross his territories on their way to Kabul. Kabul fell without a fuss. It always does. The British "coronated" Shah Shuja (at Kandahar, as it so happened) and settled down to enjoy two years of polo, champagne and hock, hermetically sealed salmon and, when they could find them, dark-eyed local beauties. Dost Mohammad took shelter with the Emir of Bukhara and handed over leadership of the Jihad to his favourite son

## BYLINE

Going by President Bush's State of the Union address, his appetite for war has increased: both Iraq and Iran are now within his target-range, with North Korea getting a nod as well to await its turn. Perhaps a few people in Washington and Islamabad are thinking through the consequences of adding an Osama trial into such a volatile scenario. Perhaps... Is Osama bin Laden safer (for America) lost in some mystery never-never land? Protected by a pronouncement of death that has never been proved?

Omar? Where are his wives and his children? Where are those who occupied his palatial residence in Kandahar? Lurid stories are occasionally put out that Mullah Omar was last seen on a motorcycle, riding off into the sunset, with his second or third wife in pillion. I do not buy such junk. Neither history nor its saucy cousin, journalism, are kind to losers. Where, indeed, is the top leadership of the Taliban Cabinet? Afghanistan had a functioning government, replete with Cabinet ministers: where are they now? So many questions, so few answers.

A good person to ask would be Hamid Karzai, although you might have to phrase the question a bit differently. Where was he, and where were many of the members of his government when Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden were in power? They were not always in exile, or on the run, or in a sanctuary provided by a neighbouring power. The Northern Alliance was at per-

vide the essentials of survival: security, food and shelter.

The current dispensation in Afghanistan is much too loose and impromptu to command the allegiance of the whole country. Mr Hamid Karzai barely has the resources to exercise his personal authority in Kabul. For other regions he must depend on the goodwill of those who, in the bad old days, were called warlords but whose designations have changed since they ended up on the winning side. The point to note is that each one of them survived not only the Taliban but also the decade during which the Russians occupied Kabul. The Soviets might not had the technological eyesight of the present American arsenal, but they were not a Third World force. There is of course a vital difference in that the Pakistan government offered a safe haven that is not on offer now. But the relevant point is elsewhere. Afghanistan is deeper than its

truck bomb killed more than two hundred soldiers, and in Somalia those familiar "warlords" sent back too many of those dreaded bodybags.

In the old days the British handled the problem of Afghanistan with more élan. They simply declared victory and got the hell out.

The British conducted their first Afghan war in 1839 in order, they said, to keep the Russians out. They were premature in their assumptions by about 140 years, but that is another matter. Their war aim was to remove the widely admired Dost Mohammad Khan, of whom it was said: "Is Dost Mohammad dead that there is no justice?" They raised the much-vaunted Army of the Indus in order to place their protégé Shah Shuja, who had been living in their care in Ludhiana, on the throne. It had to be the Army of the Indus because the sharp-eyed Ranjit Singh (he had only one eye,

Abkar Khan. He also, in an astute move, handed himself over to the British, confident that they always kept space for an alternative in their policy. The British were wise; they kept Dost Mohammad this time in India. In 1842 Akbar Khan surprised the complacent British garrison in Kabul. By the time it found "safety" in Jalalabad, some 20,000 British Army lives had been lost and, famously, only one man survived: Dr William Brydon (he was a great survivor; he also survived the siege of Lucknow). The Army of Retribution succeeded where the Army of the Indus had failed. The redcoats returned to Kabul, hanged a few people and, in a triumph of diplomacy, reinstated Dost Mohammad. It was the ultimate victory. Both sides won.

That is the way they prefer it in Afghanistan. History, denying Marx his aphorism, repeated itself in the second Afghan war fought by the British forty years later.

President Bush once said that he wanted Osama bin Laden dead or alive. Having conquered a country in search of one man, one can appreciate that President Bush cannot really declare victory until he has brought that one man to the in-camera military tribunals that have been created, at great cost to the spirit of American justice, only for him. But it is a moot point whether the Americans would actually want either Osama bin Laden or the reclusive Mullah Omar alive. What are the odds that it would be difficult to indict Mullah Omar for anything other than abatement of terrorism in an American court? A trial of Osama could be kept in camera, but could it really be kept out of the purview of a million journalists waiting at the door for anything that they could pick up? Could anyone really prevent Osama's lawyers from talking, or him from grandstanding? Would any statement he made become the inspiration for the next round of attacks on America and the American presence worldwide? America is now militarily engaged in almost all the key areas of conflict in the world. Going by President Bush's State of the Union address, his appetite for war has increased: both Iraq and Iran are now within his target-range, with North Korea getting a nod as well to await its turn. Perhaps a few people in Washington and Islamabad are thinking through the consequences of adding an Osama trial into such a volatile scenario. Perhaps.

Is Osama bin Laden safer (for America) lost in some mystery never-never land? Protected by a pronouncement of death that has never been proved? What, to return to a parallel mystery, happens to the families? Are they also to be presumed dead-disappeared? Will those boys on videotape never grow up?

So many questions. So few answers.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

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

## Biman privatisation plan

I refer to the news item published on February 3, 2002.

It appears that even after paying US \$1.44 m, out of US \$1.8 m WB loan obtained for the purpose, to the consultant City Bank N A Group ENY; the bottom line out-come on "privatisation and restructuring" turned out to be a "big" zero! Hence, naturally the question of the tax payers—stakeholders of this (poor) republic is as to what sort of investigation into the whole scenario has thus been at all initiated by the authorities concerned for the consequential "loss" of loan sum together with "interest and service and commitment charges thereon" and the "opportunity cost/benefit" that has been lost arising out of such undesirable laundering! It is pertinent to note that while the stake-holders throughout are pointing out for associating local (able) counterparts in any of such deals concerning such privatisation, restructuring

and/or development efforts funded (by aid, loan, grant) by multi-lateral funding agencies; unfortunately the people (for that matter, the bureaucrats) concerned who matters do not at all care to adhere to the prerequisites like transparency, competitiveness, prudent cost-effectiveness and appropriate accomplishment, well on time!

Had any local consultants been involved, as local counter-part in such deals, the authorities concerned could take them into full confidence for necessary follow-up on a day to day basis and terminally could also take them into real task forthwith in case of any such "failure" and thereby well protecting the national interest.

The privatisation commission is well advised to take into confidence concerned professionals (like CAs—preferably affiliated with any "big"—5 global professional firms) and the Bangladesh Merchant Bankers Association for the purpose.

While the NRB Group (say of Sylhet and/or Chittagong) could only

jolly well be impressed upon to be one of the "strategic" partners to help take over their share out of 40 per cent stake so offered, there are member of merchant bankers operating locally who could organise the foregoing NRB stake and the rest including an willing and able Airlines and also local credible and able professionals given the task of 'restructuring' should be able, if be required outsourcing overseas expertise readily available in-house with their respective "international" domain to accomplish such assignments of high national priority and interest even with a modest charges or cost, well on time.

The people at large are simply wondering as to what is really preventing the authorities concerned for not at all opting to use the practical experiences, on "privatisation" (the "cry" since 1980s) and "restructuring" occurring elsewhere in the region and the globe simply "down-loading" the basic information on the Internet or website!

The reason attributable may be

found out by simply referring to Transparency International's recent report on Bangladesh and two news items appearing in TDs of Tuesday, 5 February 2002 under the heading(s) "700 audit reports pending with Public Accounts Committee" and "Pushing a dubious deal; Re: Submarine Cable Project with Singapore."

The stakeholders' billion dollar question as to whether the "good governance" even after 30 years since the emergence of Bangladesh!

**AK Chowdhury, AICS, FCA, CFC/MIFC (USA & Canada) Managing Partner.**

## Otobi and Daily Star Business Award

Nitun Kundu deserves this award not just for his creativity but more importantly for his honesty. He is one of the few businessmen in Bangladesh who has earned his laurels through hard work and nothing else. We should also applaud him for his modesty, you have never seen him

trying to be president of various associations and such.

**Dorji Dhaka**

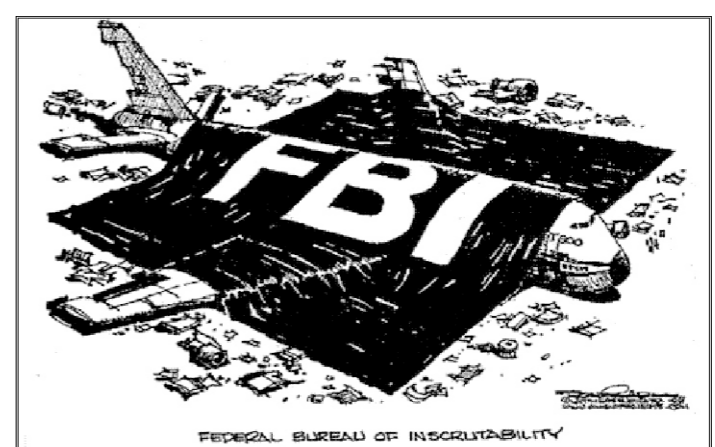
## FBI stands for - Far Behind Intelligence?

In Pakistan, some of the government sponsored columnists have tried to justify the Pakistani government's decision to give some airports and airforce bases to US forces for monetary and "national interests."

Even the Pakistani Interior Minister Moeen Haider has denied of FBI controlling the Pakistani Airports. When the President House and GHQ is directly under Central Command, why should FBI bother about controlling airports?

However, FBI has set up special immigration counters at all the Pakistani airports to catch any potential prisoners for Cuban X-ray camp.

The last month's FBI raid on a Hajj flight was on a false tip that Mullah Omar is going for Hajj on that flight.



Intelligent?

But after a three hours delay and extensive search it was found that an Imam of local mosque by the name of Maulvi Umar was one of the pilgrims on Jeddah-bound Hajj flight. Does FBI stands for - Far Behind Intelligence?

## Salman Khan Riyadh Shazneen murder case

The Shazneen murder case is going on for almost four years (April 24<sup>th</sup>

1998 February 4<sup>th</sup> 2002). And this is supposed to be justice? It's a travesty and a farce.

If our judicial system cannot prosecute criminals caught red handed then what is the fate of this country and the people?

**MA Dhaka**

## Naming the roads

In Bangkok the lanes emanating from the Sukumbhik Road are termed Soi 5, Soi 38 and so on. But at the same time the lanes are given some other names like Soi Nana (Soi5). It is easier to remember a proper name, as compared to the numerical ones. The Dhanmondi Roads may be given proper names, making it easier to remember.

**Shahabuddin Mahtab Siddheswari, Dhaka**