

Governments prove waste-ful

Financial discipline is the only way to self-reliance

THIS paper's follow-up story day before yesterday on the special and annual audit reports which the Comptroller and Auditor General's Office recently submitted to the President of the Republic might have served as another eye opener to the prodigality across the board of governmental expenditures. Economists Dr. Wahiuddin Mahmud and Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya and the immediate-past Comptroller and Auditor General Syed Yusuf Hossain voiced their concern over the waste of government resources adding that its curtailment could reduce our aid dependence significantly. In other words, they have set off the alarm bell for an early reversal of the trend to ensure if we are not to court any further bankruptcy than we are already reeling in.

Just how bad is the financial indiscipline plaguing the government, semi-government and autonomous institutions? Tk 15,000 crore was wasted and misused by 24 ministers in a space of seven years, the amount almost equalling the currently reduced allocational size of the Annual Development Plan (ADP). But this is just the tip of the iceberg; for only 15-20 per cent of the transactions of the government or sector corporations comes under the current audit system. A straightforward *pro-rata* calculation would take us into the neighbourhood of Tk 75 thousand crore drained out of the national exchequer in the seven years audited for. Besides, the underhand dealings of the government offices and sector corporations supposed to be in the order of millions every year are not reflected through the reports.

The question is: how do we plug the holes? First of all, the audit wing of the C&AG's office will have to be separated from its accounts department so that it is enabled to fully concentrate on the audit functions. Secondly, the auditing authority should have adequate, trained and well-equipped manpower to be able to deliver on its constitutional writ. Thirdly, there must be an internal auditing mechanism in each government ministry, directorate and office to enforce transparency and accountability across the board. Last but not least, the Public Accounts Committee of the Parliament must have more powers than merely a recommendatory role in ensuring that the ministries abide by its decisions.

Nepal's Maoist insurgency takes its toll

All concerned must exercise caution and work to bring calm

THE hills of Nepal are blazing with the flames of confrontation between the Maoists and the government troops. In the latest episode of violence at least 130 people died, mostly soldiers and police. But the real casualty may be happening outside the battle zones in habitats of the common man and none is talking about that.

Speculations are on that the recent attacks are due to the Maoist strategy to push the government to the negotiating table. The Deuba government has responded to this by saying that no amount of violence is going to force the government to start negotiating. It has said that the recent attacks have in fact strengthened their resolve and they shall not talk till the Maoists shun the armed path.

The negotiations have been difficult because the Maoists have demanded an end to monarchy and cutting off all contacts with various powers including India. The government isn't even ready to discuss such pre-conditions.

The international dimension of the problem has also clouded the situation. Many critics within Nepal accuse India of providing covert support to the insurgents. On the other hand, India has officially given support to the Nepal government both hard and software and is deeply involved with the economy and politics there. Since Nepal is a proxy battleground for India and Pakistan, the shadow of ISI has also been seen. Another nearly invisible but a possible player is China whose stake in the buffer state between India and itself is a reality that could be influencing what goes within. All this of course translates into blood letting and battering of the economy and critical services which have all been disrupted. Ultimately, those who have the least say in the matter -- the common man -- are the ones who suffer most though it's in their name that the battles are being fought.

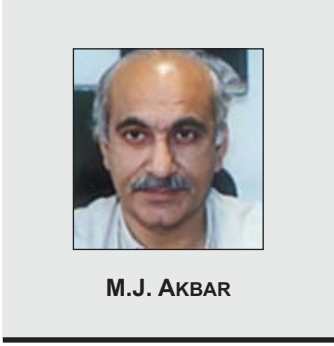
The insurgency or the problems associated with it will not disappear tomorrow. But the government and the Maoists should be able to bring together an element of calm in the situation when communist party has a legitimate place in the politics of Nepal. One can't say that the insurgency will not explode into a war beyond anyone's control. It's already time to defuse this bomb in the making.

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED
writes from Princeton

AFTER September 11, as the United States went after the Taliban and the Al Qaeda terrorists, President George W. Bush had the whole world behind him. With his "Axis of Evil," State of the Union speech on January 29, he stunned foes and friends alike, and is now in danger of losing not only international support, but global goodwill as well. So far only the Prime Minister of Australia and Margaret Thatcher have applauded Bush for his "Axis of Evil" speech. Although the campaign started off as a war against terrorists and the enemies of the US, now it has mutated into a war against the enemies of Israel.

None of the "Axis" states, Iran, Iraq and North Korea, have been implicated in September 11 terrorist acts. Not only that, according to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Iraq, Iran and North Korea have not carried out any terrorist acts against the United States in the last ten years. Moreover, Iran, a Taliban-hating staunch supporter of the Northern Alliance, had assured the US that it would pick up any US pilot shot down near its border with Afghanistan during America's air campaign in Afghanistan. Then why did the US pull a Musharraf on Iran? As the US and Iran were cozying up to each other, suddenly in January, with a miraculous timing Israel

Pollstars



M.J. AKBAR

THE first general elections in India began on 25 October 1951 and continued, in three stages, for about six months as some 17,000 candidates, on behalf of nearly 75 political parties contested for 489 Parliament seats and 3,283 Assembly places. Ballot boxes and voters moved by bullock cart. Fifty years later, despite roads and fast vehicles, elections are still a three-stage process: the problem of speed has been replaced by the demands of security. Democracy is under threat from another kind of terrorist as well, the ballot-looter. In the first elections, results were declared in between; no one thought that the announcement of results in one region would impact on the mood in another. Official results are no longer declared in between, but exit polls are. We know that polls can be rigged; the Election Commission spends a great deal of time and effort to prevent any rigging. But can exit polls be rigged as well? As they say in good parliamentarianese, this begs a supplementary.

Polls can be rigged but they rarely change the overall pattern of an election. Can exit polls, rigged or pure, change the larger mood of the voter during an election that stretches over weeks and is punctuated by predictions that claim to have the sanctity of some science

that the rest of us do not understand? The results of the elections in Uttar Pradesh will be announced at the end of this week. The results of the exit polls have begun to come in.

In a state like Punjab, it does not matter what the exit polls say. The results of Punjab have been known for a couple of years at least. Support for the Akalis weakened among the Sikhs and collapsed among the Hindus even before the last general elections, and they would not have got the seats they did two and a half years ago were it not for the cushion

is that it would also be the sixth poorest country in the world, on par with Chad.)

Governments of large states now consciously try to structure a stage-wise election in such a way that regions in which they are strongest go to the polls first. They expect a bounce from the results of favourable exit polls that will increase the enthusiasm of their support base in regions less inclined towards them. In Uttar Pradesh the BJP and its allies are strongest in the west. Chaudhry Charan Singh's son and heir Ajit Singh was made a Cabinet

tist. He is also from Uttar Pradesh, albeit from its eastern side, having lived and worked most of his life in Allahabad. But clearly he is unaware of the law that Indian politics is like physics. If the first exit polls cheered the BJP then they also had an immediate and opposite reaction from the one community that is united in its opposition to the BJP, the Muslims.

A key to the complicated and splintered electoral politics of this teeming state is whether the Muslim vote consolidates behind the Samajwadi Party of Mulayam Singh

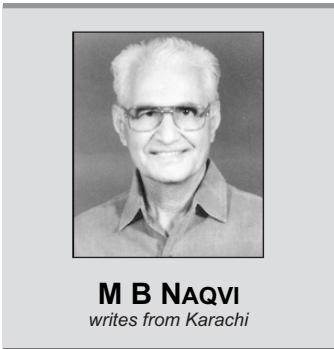
the campaign that this strategy was working. Muslims in particular were setting aside their doubts about Mayawati's intention of forming a government with the BJP after the elections, and opting for community sentiment over common sense. This was partly due to a feeling that the BJP had little chance of getting sufficient numbers to make a credible claim for participation in the next government: if the BJP for instance gets around 110 seats then even with Mayawati and Ajit Singh it will barely be able to patch a majority. But a positive first round exit poll will

counting Uttar Pradesh. By the same token they underestimated the Samajwadi performance in UP; not a single poll gave the party the 22 seats that it eventually won. The evidence indicates that the credibility of these polls -- pre-ballot or at exit point -- is uncertain where it really matters, among the voters. They have become part of election entertainment, like speeches or promises. The jury is still out on whether they manage to get anyone elected by creating a hard mood towards a frontrunner. They may have more influence of a negative kind, increasing worry levels among those hostile to any party that has become a frontrunner. The reputation of polls has not been enhanced by the arrival of serious money into the business, both from media companies as well as from political parties. There is mushroom growth of instant polling companies whose expertise is as fragile as their morality. Money has been known to purchase opinions before. To be fair, the reputed polling companies, who do market research for business houses, cannot be accused of underhand practices as they take extra care to be transparent. But this science has simply not reached a level of sophistication where the research can be treated with the confidence with which it is projected.

Nothing in any election matches the excitement of the day on which the results emerge. Thank God for that. Which opinion poll, after all, predicted that George Bush and Al Gore would finally slug it out in the Supreme Court of the United States of America? On the other hand, a respected astrologer in Jaipur, Pandit Kedar Sharma did. The next time you want an opinion, check with the stars. They could be more reliable than exit polls.

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Back to the old ways



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

ALL the talk now is of the aid America is going to provide or help obtain from others. There is familiar emphasis on common interests and values between Pakistanis and Americans as of yore, especially about democracy. The recent state visit to the US by the President of Pakistan was a great success, or so we are told by official publicists. But the point to ponder is about the meaning or extent of this 'success': whose success it is and who gets what from this visit? Also relevant is the query about the future: how will the political and economic life of the country fare after this renewal of the old American connection? Let's not forget there was a definite disconnect between the US and Pakistan's policies. The highest expression of that falling out was seen on March 25, 2001 when US President Bill Clinton visited Pakistan for just over four hours but how? The way he snubbed the CE and his government was notable; but the lesson he read to the Pakistanis in his televised address from PTV was unexceptionable from a democratic viewpoint. From that point to the recent visit of the same Gen. Pervez Musharraf is instructive.

Is all the past dead and buried? It would be odd if this were so. After all, this renewal of closer ties was the result of what was really an ultimatum from the most powerful government. That Musharraf's decision to give in was right -- because the course of action by

Pakistan, the bone of contention, were inherently unwise and wrong -- is the redeeming feature of Islamabad's current policies. But who can find it amazing that the Americans are still wary and are taking precautions in dealing with a regime that is the handiwork of the same generals who were the initiators of all that the several American governments have disliked.

This caution is writ large over what the packages of aid and cooperation that the Bush Administration is supposed to have given. Indeed it looks as if that the quantum of aid

dignity and independence that are informed with democratic aims and values?

Let us briefly note the earlier differences with the US --- and indeed with much of the west. The generals had fomented, encouraged and aided Islamic extremist parties and groups. These were even helped to set up Jihadī outfits. It was all in the name of Kashmir Jihad. This was wrong and dangerous. Introduction of the gun, circa 1990, in the otherwise non-violent protest movement of the Kashmiris that started in 1989 was unfortu-

nally intervene to administer a swift and telling punch and that will be that. Thanks to the Bomb India cannot repeat what it did in 1965. That was the basic safeguard (deterrence).

Well, the events since Dec 13 last year have shown that nuclear deterrence has worked neither for India nor --- and more importantly --- for Pakistan. India intended, or might intend again soon enough, to invade Pakistan with wholly unclear objectives. Pakistan's nuclear arsenals are not reason enough to hold it back; so says the new official

more productive. No foreign power can be expected to provide Pakistan's security. Nor can they be expected to ensure economic development with a humane face, all the current talk about poverty reduction notwithstanding. Self-reliance is unavoidable if we aim at democratic freedoms, including jobs for all, at least in theory as a start. In basic policies, the central purpose and the preferred means have to be the people of Pakistan.

Return to democracy --- without any adjective at all --- is only a preliminary step. The purpose,

PLAIN WORDS

The government run by Gen. Musharraf is one of the better things to have happened to the White House. But what about the common Pakistani? We ordinary folks can only hope that President Bush's pledge to stabilise Musharraf Presidency --- and not Pakistan --- and his demanding and getting the assurances that Musharraf will stay on to see his reforms through is not a replay of Dulles' determination of giving permanence to Ayub Khan's rule... The US has to assure Pakistanis that it will not go on always foisting dictators on them. Pakistanis need friends; they have had too many masters.

was further pruned as a result of the new misgivings resulting from the Daniel Pearl's abduction from Karachi. A lot of comment in the press has noted that the wells of American generosity are running low and the quantum of aid falls short of earlier expectations. Much of this is a regrettable manifestation of the dependency syndrome that has come to shape the thinking of the establishment types in this country; they judge the success of a ruler only in terms of how much aid he or she can manage to bring --- no matter if the aid adds to the debt services burden with its higher rates of interest. It does not occur to them that Pakistan, as a self-respecting nation of 144 million, should act in accordance with a democratic philosophy of its own in both external affairs and domestic matters, including the management of its economy. Would public policies in Pakistan never be conducted with

nate. The net result of the violent Kashmir insurgency is the tragic deaths of 70,000 young Muslim men, with India showing few signs of fatigue. Kashmir Valley is not an inch closer to Azadi --- whatever that implies --- and no end to oppression and suppression of Kashmiris is in sight.

Whoever may have actually started the violence in Kashmir, Pakistani generals cannot escape responsibility. Mischievous in their theories of Pakistan's defence having become wholly invincible with the acquisition of nuclear capability. It allowed the generals to do what they pleased in Kashmir and elsewhere; all who supported the generals and were in their good books felt emboldened. Insurgency in Kashmir could only make sense on the assumption that a protracted period of strife would weaken India's occupation Army and destroy its morale. At that stage, Pak Army

Indian thinking. In point of fact our government's unending pleas to all foreign Toms, Dicks and Harrys to mediate and persuade India to begin military withdrawals and start talking may be a tactic to win brownie points. But it is also obvious that all their policies have run into sand.

Jan 12 speech of General Musharraf was late by two years; he should have begun with some such thing. The earlier policies --- total reliance on the Bomb, encouraging the insurgency in Kashmir, not adopting a peaceable policy on India and, above all else, encouragement of religious fanaticism while always looking for foreign aid in the economic sphere --- were wrong. They need to be given up altogether --- at least now.

Few democrats welcome total, or near total, reliance on the US either for national security or for turning around the economy and to make it

apart from an all time preoccupation with being free, should be to reconstruct the economy. Its purpose has to be democratic: to ensure gainful employment to all able-bodied men and women. If jobs for all is too much to achieve in a short, measurable time, let the state accept the legal liability to pay unemployment allowance, no matter if it is small to start with. Politics as well as the economy, including its development planning, have to be participatory and people-centred. The country needs an assurance that it has made a clean break with the bad past.

What cannot be welcomed is the kind of role the US played in the past, now that the friendship with it has been renewed. The US has to answer for many evil things and trends that were started as a result of that connection. This is no place to go into all the history. But Pakistanis would be foolish to forget how

the "lessons of September 11," by aligning itself 100 per cent with Israel, and promising to mete out more punishment to Iraq.

The other day the writer was jolted upon hearing a respected commentator say that the Bush administration's nightmare scenario is that of the terrorists detonating some nuclear device on American soil. Depending on where it is, one shudders to think how many Muslim and non-Muslim American lives that will claim, for we have learnt that the terrorists do not distinguish between Americans. Even if Muslims did survive such a blast (God forbid), it is unlikely that they would survive the popular wrath in its aftermath. It appears that nations and individuals alike reap the rewards of their deeds. Israel is reaping the bitter fruits of uprooting the Palestinians from their homes in 1948. India is paying a heavy price for capturing Kashmir by force around the same time. America is the only nation to have dropped nuclear bombs on human beings (of Hiroshima and Nagasaki) in 1945. As someone who has a vested interest in America, it appears to the writer that a little humility and contrition is in order here. The best place to start is by being fair, in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Bush goes overboard, targets Israel's enemies

backer of Israel's enemies Hizbullah and Islamic Jihad, and because Iran has nuclear ambitions. Israel's aim is very clear: to neutralize Iraq and Iran and to prevent them from going nuclear, and finally to destroy Pakistan's nuclear capabilities so that within the stretch of territory from

of Israel. No one, however, was as blatantly pro-Israel as George W. Bush. Mr. Bush condemns Palestinian suicide bombers, and rightly so. Bush never condemns Israel's targeted assassinations, demolitions of the Palestinian houses, and killing of Palestinian children by

cent, and has remained there. The feeling in the Republican camp is that as long as Bush keeps on fighting terrorists on different turfs, his popularity will remain sky high. The problem is that America's resources are not inexhaustible. If Bush keeps on spending billions of

Bush later that week, asked Bush to sever all ties with Arafat! Is there any other man on earth who could come to the White House and tell the US President what his foreign policy ought to be, and get away with it? Journalists who peddle Israel's agenda, such as Tom Friedman of

Barak. It is hard to imagine that Ariel Sharon (or Benjamin Netanyahu for that matter), who has opposed every peace treaty with the Arabs, will ever make peace with the Palestinians.

The writer's main concern is not Israel, but the US. Like other Americans, Muslim Americans were blindsided by the ferocity of the September 11 terrorist attack. No one, Muslim or non-Muslim, ever thought that human beings could be so evil as to turn planes packed with human beings into missiles, smash them into buildings, bringing the buildings and human beings inside them down. God knows what other evil plot they are hatching now. What Muslims did know was that 90 per cent of the grievances of the Muslims outside the US would be satisfied if the US was seen to be more even-handed in dealing with the Palestinians, and stopped the bombing of, and lifted the economic sanctions against Iraq, that kills thousand of children every month. If the US attempts to force a change in the Iraqi regime, great. The writer is yet to meet a Muslim who supports Saddam Hussein. If the US wishes to engineer a change in the Iranian regime, that is fine too (although isn't it better left to the Iranians?). As with the Taliban, the writer has never been in favour of rule by the clerics. What worries the writer is that while there is absolutely no moral equivalence between September 11 and the above grievances, the Bush administration has decided to taunt

LETTER FROM AMERICA

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Israel to Israel-friendly India, there are no hostile nuclear-capable Muslim nations to challenge it. What's in it for George W. Bush? Reelection. Mindful of what happened to President Bush Sr. after he stood up to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir in 1992, Bush Jr. is not about to make the same mistake. Although 64 per cent of the Muslim Americans voted for George Bush, and 64 per cent of the Jewish Americans voted for Al Gore, for political expediency, George Bush has thrown his lot with the Jewish Americans and Israel. Every American President since Harry Truman has been a supporter

of Israel. After every Israeli atrocity, Bush parrots Israel's mind boggling arrogance and spin: it's all (imprisoned) Arafat's fault! Isn't Sharon the "Butcher of Shabra and Shatilla"? Isn't Israel the usurper in Palestine? Something else drives George W. Bush. A year ago, Bush's Presidency was in shambles. Installed President by the rightwing Supreme Court, Bush, who received over half a million less popular votes in the 2000 Presidential election than Al Gore, was fast becoming an object of ridicule, with plummeting popularity. After Sept. 11, as the nation rallied around its President, Bush's popularity soared to over 80 per

dollars on military missions abroad, sooner or later it will drain the treasury and intensify the already deepening recession. The danger for Bush Jr. is the same as it was for his father. America votes its pocket books. Within a year of Bush Sr.'s victory in the Gulf War with accompanying 90 per cent approval rating, the economy soured and Bush Sr. was voted out of office! The same fate may await Bush Jr.

In his February 3 article in The New York Times, Yasir Arafat agreed to sign a peace agreement with Israel if only Israel would withdraw to the pre-June 1967 boundary. As a reward, Sharon, who met

The New York Times, had dared Arafat to spell out his conditions for peace. When Arafat did exactly that, Friedman shifted the goal post. All the twenty-two members of the Arab League have to normalize relations with and engage in trade with Israel, he now says. I guess the next demand will be that the Muslims have to give up their claim to the Al Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock! Palestinians are far better off listening to their friends than their enemies. The readers of this column know that the writer has been a strong supporter of the peace-making efforts of the late Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres and Ehud