

Knee-jerk reaction can't make a visa policy

What are we gaining from it?

MAKING intending foreign visitors feel unwelcome can neither be in keeping with our democratic traditions nor in our best pragmatic interest from tourism and investment points of view. Yet, unfortunately that's the signal we are giving lately by our impulsively clamped restrictions on foreigners who seek visa on arrival. This is not to suggest that we are for open sky arrivals throwing to the four winds our caution against undesirable entries or abdicating our sovereign right to be restrictive about them. By all means we should be regulatory where we need to. But the sole point here is that a shift in the immigration policy has more to do with the outside world than merely circulating government orders to local airport officials. It has to be not just a clear-cut set of guidelines for the officials and the intending travellers alike but must have been publicised, notified and disseminated through our missions abroad or placed on the website sufficiently ahead of their application. So fidgety have we become that even visa extension applications are being subjected to delays. The handling of income tax exemption or payment status of the investors has drawn a flak as well.

The sudden tightening of visa rules follows jitters that the horrendously slanted Far Eastern Economic Review report had sent through us. It can also be said to be linked to other countries not granting visa to our citizens on arrival. True, the number of countries doing it is on the increase. But that's something which has to be taken up and sorted out diplomatically rather than reacting in anger and losing out on goodwill.

Understandably, citizens from countries with whom we have no visa agreement are entitled to visa on arrival here. And, normally those coming from countries having Bangladesh missions are expected to procure visa from their place of origin before they arrive in Bangladesh. Surprisingly however, the immigration wing at the airport is applying the new restrictions without keeping the lists of above categories of countries handy. Resultantly, they are having to refer to the foreign ministry and home ministry as the applicants for visa on arrival wait it out on the transit lounges so thoroughly unprepared to handle such gluts.

All this runs counter to our fundamental goal of making Bangladesh attractive to foreign investors. There's no denying investments hold the key to our future. So, let's act not out of anger nor whimsically but in wisdom without even unwittingly signalling any unfriendliness bordering on hostility to those who come here to see our country or explore our investment potential.

Legal support to prisoners a dire need

Govt. must audit its performance and improve

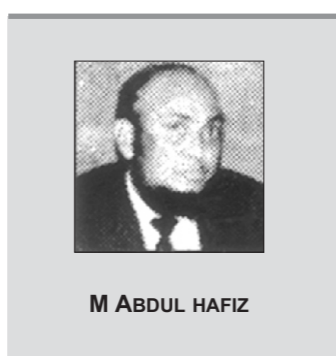
A recent meeting held to discuss legal aid to prisoners by the government revealed that the Government project set up for this purpose has been unable to spend even the 25 lakh taka allocated. This is sad considering that the jails are filled many times to their capacity with poor, wretched prisoners. While the good intentions of the authorities are displayed by their setting up of the project, their limitations are manifested by the lack of activities compared to the need.

Governments do need jails because the State can function only when it has power to incarcerate its enemies. The state needs to control the binaries of punishment and reward as well. Thus the penal system is integral to the safe functioning of the state. How the state manages its reward structure is as significant as its punishment system. It means punishment must not create more enemies for the State and that has been platform for the correctional approach of the servitude programme. However, the situation in Bangladesh runs counter to this spirit. A prisoner once inside comes out with more acrimonious notions towards the state.

In Bangladesh, the problem is that of setting up a system that will allow access to the justice system for all. The authorities have set up a number of committees and commissions to suggest improvement for the penal system over time. Yet the situation has not changed and even the authorities accept that fact. The speakers at the meeting which included the Home Minister and the State Minister for Home both mentioned that paucity of funds have held back reforms. But when this is read with the inability to spend even its allotted funds for legal support purposes, the limitations of the sector becomes obvious.

We however congratulate the Ministry of Law and the Minister for boldly facing the facts and hope that legal services provided by the state and improvement of the penal conditions will together create a situation where law and order will not simply be a matter of arrest and jail. That it will actually help the accused and make his stay in jail a learning experience and make society safe. And prisoners during internment will find the state as their best friend through the activities of this project.

The Indo-Pak stand-off: Beyond brinkmanship



M ABDUL HAFIZ

WHAT started as an angry riposte to an assault on Indian Parliament building, suspected by the Indians to have been carried out by Pakistan-sponsored terrorists, in early December last year -- India's largest ever troops mobilisation in a decade -- runs almost into its sixth month with concomitant risks of its spiralling out of control by accident, over reaction and miscalculation. After a flurry of diplomacy by the Western emissaries, Pakistan conceding to several Indian demands and under India's own financial crunch, perhaps the fatigue of deployment itself should have signalled the time to end the scarry military confrontation between the two nuclear powers and send the forces back to the barracks. But such hopes were dashed last month as leaders of both the countries hardened their position ruling out a de-escalation in near future.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee refuses to withdraw the troops from the border on the plea that Pakistan has not fulfilled the Indian conditions for such action. Defence Minister George Fernandez also ruled out a pull back unless Islamabad fulfilled the conditions laid down by New Delhi. "The forces were moved to the border in a certain situation and the situation

still exists," he said. New Delhi accuses Islamabad of remaining unyielding on its demand to hand over 20 terrorists wanted for committing heinous crime in India and is also sore about no significant reduction in cross border terrorism - especially in Kashmir.

Pakistan, which had so far been making all the conciliatory noises seems to have stopped those cooperative gestures. President

might have handsomely paid India off by forcing Pakistan to act on terrorist groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba or Jaish-e-Muhammad and in convincing other countries, especially the US about looming threat of terrorism from Pakistan, but at a tremendous cost. An estimated 1500 crores may have already been expended for maintaining so large number of troops on high alert. The troops build up by Pakistan must

independence that India has sent its forces to the border with express aim of waging war unless certain conditions are met. Since its troops' deployment in December, President Musharraf took several steps to address India's concerns to the accompanying cheers of the international community. Yet the Indian forces seem to be digging deep to be in battle-ready positions. The Pakistani forces are also bolstering

in conventional forces India can perhaps inflict substantial damage to Pakistan without having to resort to nuclear weapon. On the contrary, Pakistan, to resist it at some critical point, must be able to raise the conflict, to nuclear level in order to create uncertainties into the mind of Indian leadership. Even if the Indians can initiate a major war against Pakistan without immediately triggering nuclear conflict it can be

to number of devices, but that Pakistan would retain sufficient of them to reach anywhere in India. Moreover, Pakistan continues to modernise its nuclear weapons capability and reports suggest that they maintain a technological superiority over their larger rival.

The motivation for the threat of an Indian invasion of Pakistan stems in large part from domestic Indian consideration rather than from the extent of the threat to Indian interests from Pakistan-based militants, terrorists and insurgents. Given the nature of politics and ideological orientation of India's BJP-led coalition, there is a major surge in Indian population favouring, even demanding a 'settling of score' with Pakistan. It would be difficult for Prime Minister Vajpayee to back away from war with Pakistan at this stage without some tangible 'victory'. The Indian leadership including Atal Behari Vajpayee cannot however be oblivious of the disastrous process that can snatch that 'victory'.

However the threats of nuclear strikes by Pakistan at certain level of the conflict are real and can spell disaster for any Indian military thrust across Punjab border into Pakistan. No responsible Indian government can therefore plunge the nation in a military adventure for an elusive 'victory' without risking a nuclear holocaust. As the stalemate at the border continues it remains to be seen whether the Indian government, even at this stage, does, in fact, have correct understanding of Pakistan nuclear trigger levels. This single understanding for India will be the key to her future course of action in all of her conflicts with Pakistan.

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BIIS.

PERSPECTIVES

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Musharraf, on the other hand, stated at the end of February last that he would not make any more concession to India and that it was now India's turn to 'respond'. A new buoyancy is evident in Pakistan as the country continues to receive accolade for its role in US-led coalition's war on terror and President Musharraf's reforms package to curb terrorism within Pakistan. Musharraf himself has scaled a new height now with the US' tacit endorsement of recently-held referendum that gives Musharraf a measure of legitimacy as president and, of course, a fresh tranche of dollars making way to Pakistan. Pakistan will now be increasingly reluctant to hand over those twenty wanted men and lax on implementing its pledges on reining-in the terrorists in Kashmir.

As a result the stalemate on the border will perform persist. But keeping deployed nearly a million troops along the border indefinitely, say for India, is not an easy proposition. In terms of brinkmanship it

have financially bled her more than India, although according to Pakistan's Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz "the current military state of high alert on border with India had had minimal fiscal effect on the country's economy." The heightened state of tension with India appears not to have hit Pakistan economy badly -- thanks to Pakistan securing the economic and defence package she was looking for overhauling her government's volte face after September 11, 2001.

The stock exchange in Pakistan is now at 18 months high, the foreign exchange reserves have never been better and the property prices are coming out of a long slump. This may, however, not reflect the correct state of economy in Pakistan where defence expenditure has always been opaque and seldom open to scrutiny. Disregarding any visible or invisible financial crunch both the Armed Forces however seem to be preparing for a long haul. This is for the first time since

their defensive positions by building concrete bunkers.

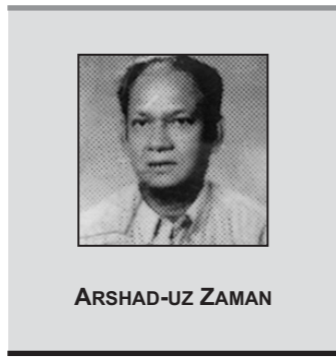
Yet the forces on either side, particularly the Indians, have been extremely circumspect in avoiding the sudden breakout of a conflagration, because they are still bereft of a vital information with regards to its adversary: Pakistan's policy and doctrinal level at which her nuclear forces -- either tactical or strategic -- will be unleashed against India's force concentration, military/strategic targets or India's population centre. At the same time Pakistan rather closely guarded the secrecy of such trigger-level knowing that India could undertake offensive operation up to, but not beyond her trigger level for a nuclear strike.

India has the advantage of such military superiority over Pakistan as well as strategic depth that New Delhi is certain that in any major war with Pakistan, the latter would be forced into first use of nuclear weapon to halt the rival's onslaught. With her overwhelming superiority

drawn into one if Pakistan is indeed pushed to the wall. This is what India is precisely concerned with.

Pakistan is known to have nuclear weapons deployed since early 1980s and had time to develop a credible operational doctrine to ensure their efficient utilisation as well as to create and refine a viable nuclear strategy. It is reported that Pakistan possesses the components vital to construct 25 to 75 nuclear weapons with a yield of 10 to 15 kilotons. Like in India it is believed that Pakistan stores its nuclear weapons in component form for security reasons and that these weapons could be easily constructed within days. It is believed that some nuclear weapons have been maintained on a far more rapid deployment schedule than that. Pakistan is also believed to have successfully miniaturized its nuclear device for delivery by either F-16, Mirage III/V aircraft or M-11 missile. President Musharraf has stated that Pakistan would not attempt to match India with respect

Chirac's victory: The French have pushed the Far Right danger back



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

JACQUES Chirac had a resounding victory in the latest Presidential elections in France. For the next five years Chirac will remain in saddle and that is good news for both France and Europe.

The latest was the second round of balloting after a fortnight of the first ballot, which saw for the first time a far right challenger Jean Marie Le Pen, emerge in the second position. Le Pen had a surprise victory over Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, leader of the leftist Socialists. According to the French Constitution only the first two emerging from the polls, battle it out in the second round. In this case Chirac with his 20 per cent of votes had to face Le Pen with his 17 per cent of votes and Jospin with his 16 per cent was eliminated from the race. The election results roused the French to action like few events did. Indeed analysts have compared the

street mobilisation to the dramatic events of 1968, when Frenchmen and women barricaded the streets and that led ultimately to the emotional departure from the political scene of Charles de Gaulle.

Frenchmen and women across the board saw the looming danger of the far right running away with state power and create havoc. Jean Marie Le Pen made no secret of his

of the Frenchmen and women. In this effort minus the diehard supporters of Le Pen, the whole spectrum of the French society joined. Thus we saw a joining of forces of centre right of Chirac with forces of the communists of the far left. Indeed Jospin in his valedictory had called upon his socialist supporters to vote for Chirac. So great was the mobilization that analysts compared

The voters, who have been interviewed by a large number of the media, have declared that they would vote for Chirac without enthusiasm but in order to stop the rightist threat represented by Le Pen. The massive nature of the vote demonstrates that the French take their citizenship duties seriously.

The Presidency, which used to be for seven years, has now been

habitation". This means that since the time of President Mitterand in the eighties, whereas the post of the President has been occupied by socialist, the Prime Minister, answerable to the National Assembly, has been from the rightist party. Similarly centre rightist Chirac had to cohabit with socialist Jospin. There is no denying the fact that this leads to frequent deadlocks and the

dent Chirac to cohabit with them. France is a stable country and there are no big issues agitating the French. The French have thrown in their lot, heart and soul, with the EU. After joining the Euro on 1 January last, there is no going back. If anything, France will have to devote her energies in strengthening the EU. Now that economic and monetary decisions are in place, France will have to devote her attention to the political aspect of EU. This, of course is the hardest thing to achieve. France and for that matter other members of the EU have recently seen the humiliating spectacle of their representative Javier Solana rebuffed by tiny Israel. The fact is that EU until now is unable to carry the kind of weight that it should, given its great economic potential.

In his victory speech President elect Jacques Chirac has spoken of uniting the entire nation and heal the wounds. After the excitement and high tension of the last several weeks, France can do with calm and sober reflection. This may not be long lasting, for alas! the National Assembly election is only a month away.

Arshad-uz Zaman is a former Ambassador.

THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

In his victory speech President elect Jacques Chirac has spoken of uniting the entire nation and heal the wounds. After the excitement and high tension of the last several weeks, France can do with calm and sober reflection. This may not be long lasting, for alas! the National Assembly election is only a month away.

programme which was highly xenophobic. He wanted to install a regime of tight control against immigrants, who for long have been coming in large numbers specially from North Africa.

Moreover he raised doubts and suspicions concerning European Union (EU), an organisation with which the French identify totally. Thus talk about the "bureaucrats of Brussels" leave them totally cold. Indeed the idea of the EU was first launched in the mid fifties by that French visionary Jean Monnet.

No sooner the result of the first round was announced that the French were roused from their apathy and for entire fortnight we witnessed remarkable mobilization

it with the vents of 1968, when barricades went up all over Paris. It ultimately led to the departure of De Gaulle from power.

It must be admitted that the French have seen the far right danger and have massively voted to push them back. Jacques Chirac has received 82.1 per cent of votes and Le Pen 17.9 per cent. In the history of the French presidential elections Chirac has received the highest score. This is the answer of the highly political French people to the right wing challenge. The massive demonstration of the public in Paris and around the country has been heart warming for all those, who stood up to defend the Republic.

reduced to five years. Indeed the present Constitution of France was enacted by the great French leader Charles de Gaulle and was tailor-made for him. In order to do away with perennial governmental instability of the fifties De Gaulle made drastic changes in the system and started what looked like royal Presidency. Stability returned to France.

With the departure of de Gaulle from the political scene in the late sixties, it has been found that the system was not very suitable for his successors. Thus during the Presidency of Chirac the tenure has been lowered to five years from seven. Also the Presidency has lost some of its lustre and the French have been used to what they call "co-

French look upon cohabitation with a feeling bordering on horror.

President Jacques Chirac has named his Prime Minister, who in his turn has named the Cabinet. As it could be expected it is a centre rightist Government. In a sense it is a caretaker Government because the matter will be finally decided through Parliamentary elections in June next. Campaign for Parliamentary elections has started in earnest and the combine which stood like a rock against Jean Marie Le Pen, has gone their separate ways.

The parliamentary elections are only a month away and there is the looking danger that the leftists will snatch victory thus forcing Presi-

OPINION

Clouds on the economic horizon

FARUQUDDIN AHMED

THERE are spectacular signs of a sorry scenario on the economic front of Bangladesh at the moment. The revised estimate of GDP for e.y 2001 has been placed at around 5 per cent while the estimate for the current year is being put at a little over 4 per cent only, thereby indicating a decline in overall output and as such income in the economy as against steady buoyancy during the preceding years. As a result, inflation which was around only one per cent a year ago is about two per cent now on a monthly average basis and is much higher on a point to point basis, just as expected from a macroeconomic mismatch tempered by an ever worsening law and order situation. The fact about Bangladesh is that if the agricultural sector records a steady growth the GDP goes up and the incumbent Finance Minister claims having followed a very sound macroeconomic policy. And if there is a marked failure, well there is the past regime to blame! This is however not to deny the impact of favourable policies pursued now and then. As our industrial base is still narrow and is shrinking due to lack of investment by local entrepreneurs and foreign investors, there is little prospect in this field in view of the hopeless present law and order situation. The services sector which supplements the agricultural sector is also

apparently suffering from lack of confidence as is evident from newspaper reports that even small traders including footpath vendors are being subjected to routine extortion all over the country.

Steady economic growth anywhere in the world is directly dependent on maintenance of steady law and order. Here we as a society have failed very conspicuously and more so very recently. We hear about high level meetings on law and order everyday and simultaneously read reports of dozens being either killed, kidnapped, raped or injured with the police being a by stander or often a party either as sympathizer of the elite criminals or as perpetrators of custodial death. All this reflects a lack of responsible governance as evident from allegations by the Far Eastern Economic Review as well as the Danish diplomat all of which cannot just be ruled out as meaningless. As a result of all these, despite some improvement in remittances and reserves and calls by the Finance Minister for increased revenue collection, the economy does not seem to show any sign of real upward movement. The present economic situation has been further weakened by the government's policy of non-recruitment in public services in general and in the B.C.S cadres in particular. It may be noted that two BCS final results have been withheld on alleged grounds of irregularity and two

others due to indecision and absence of a chairman in the PSC. This has definitely increased the already otherwise high rate of unemployment, so much to the frustration of thousands of eligible young graduates who are just nearing the maximum age limit. Who cares? This is an extreme case of state apathy towards the young generation and a deviation from the declared state principle of productive utilization of our rich national resources. The authorities seem to be unaware of the many undesirable consequences of such faulty policies.

What is strange is that instead of boosting the economy and taking production and pro-employment/income policies, the Government has been constantly urging the tax collectors to raise more revenue. How could they do it from an economy which is not expanding and is virtually shrinking? The problem of the parallel economy with the existence of nearly one-third of the GDP equivalent of black money and may be more than half the official money supply is yet another major problem as pointed out by the economists but apparently ignored by the authorities. Corruption by all those wielding power and existing near the power base is what mostly accounts for this grotesque situation. Just establishing schools and colleges on usurped land

with a small part of the looted booty seem to be enough for an atonement! What a mockery! The question is how could those who have crores of taka worth of ill-earned property catch each other on charges of corruption?

Finally, it has to be said that no time is too late for honest corrective measures to be taken to set the economy on track. This has however to be started without any further delay, without the mean tactics of witch-hunting and with an eye to the future and not continuously blaming events of the past. Just bestowing sermons on honesty and threatening of dire consequences will not yield the desired result if examples of honesty and integrity are not set at the highest levels of administration. It has to be remembered that the people of this country are politically very mature and they understand what is going on and it is not easy to misguide them through official clarifications and press releases. They have seen enough of these during the Pakistan days! So the people of Bangladesh deserve to be treated fairly, transparently and responsibly and not otherwise.

Faruquddin Ahmed is the former Economic Advisor of Bangladesh Bank

The grey realities

A HUSNAIN

FEW ministries are showing the guts to tackle the nation's cumulative problems. The ministries of law, finance, environment have made some impact with some initiative. Transport is up against great odds, due to lax practices for years (lack of operational and maintenance efficiency in the public regulating sector). PWD is sleepy as usual, because it usually works in the background. In the Stock Exchange, there is hardly any exchange. LGRD is facing problems on 'basic democracy,' derailed earlier. The energy sector is suffering from dehydration, entrenched corrupt practices, and political pincer movements.

There is no announcement to overhaul the labour unions -- the CBAs are thriving as usual, only the colour of the rainbow has changed. The education sector is in a mess for decades. The good and genuine students have no face value, and cannot influence the authorities. Be in politics or you are out, is the indirect message.

Neutrality has lost its virtue in a sycophants' society. Be with us, or.... Who dares to be different is trampled. Look at this naming hypocrisy, enforced through laws and regulations. Leave your name

behind, not works!

Neutralisation of the Opponent is a top-priority project on both sides, sapping internal energy and/or synergy, and the needed concentration for national delivery. Ad hocism is the rule of the day, because in underdeveloped countries, micro issues suddenly become sensitive and turn into macro problems for a while. We are living from crisis to crisis, firmly believing in one-way communication.

The law and order situation needs revolutionary steps, to contain and eradicate to controllable levels. It is difficult because terrorism and indiscipline in most societies are now worldwide. Tolerance levels of groups have gone down as intolerance is cultivated in virtual reality. This cold-blooded killing syndrome turns inwards at one stage, and then the internal leaders face insecurity. This stage has already arrived in the country, as daily killing at the lower field levels have become routine. It is vendetta with guns.

Who are listening to the social scientists; besides the political solutions? First the sociological approach in the correction matrix. Without change of mental orientation, logistic support will not pay ready dividend. How to re-orient mental thinking when the hidden godfathers

practice it under weak alibis? If it is party first, then the country is not second, but last; as the human resources are diverted to other infamous pursuits. If the regulators are corrupt, then how to proceed?

The telecom sector continues to be gagged officially by vested groups inside, because it is a billion dollar market, and it pays handsomely to keep the supply lower than the rising exponential demand for telecom services of many kinds. The same attitude prevails in the power sector -- monopoly. Political parties do not run the country. It is the teamwork in the public sector to provide services as the facilitator, under tight monitoring.

The judiciary is behind times, and the bureaucracy revels in muddy waters, mancha or no mancha. Politicians do not wish to poke with the pole. How to reverse the polarity (in all the sectors)?

Today it is the politicians' artificial world of dark realities and colour illusions. The black-and-white demo has to come, because life is grey, in hundreds of tones. That is the problem, we are insensitive to the shades of grey. In fact, that is the philosophical definition of democracy, if there is one working normally in any LDC.