

Saifur is right on target High tariff hampering the growth of telecom sector

THE outspoken finance minister has said something very close to our heart. While it remains unclear whether the relevant ministry shares his views, as we are yet to hear from it, we can vouch for the fact the vast majority of people of this country echoes Saifur Rahman's feelings. It is unbelievable that one of the poorest countries in the world should have one of the highest telecom tariff. The figure quoted by the finance minister as the official installation charge is only on paper. The real cost is much higher. The irony is that even at that price there are hundreds of thousands of people waiting for years to get a telephone line. The growth of the mobile telephone—surpassing the landline telephones in just a few years—is an indication of the potential of the market that the government has been sitting on.

It is our view that the government has really not taken a serious look at the telecom sector as a growth industry. It has an excellent prospect of growth and perhaps one of the highest possibilities for attracting FDI. The most heartening thing about the telecom sector is that a market already exists which can sustain its exponential growth. All we have to do is open it up to private investment. Again the mobile phone experience justifies our contention. Imagine how it would have grown, if at all, if the private sector and foreign investment were not allowed to enter the mobile phone sector.

We strongly endorse Saifur's views and suggest that as a first step the government should, as early as is feasible, lower the telephone installation and call fee in line with the finance minister's suggestion. Second, FDI should be actively sought to increase the number of telephone subscribers. With more telephones and lower rates the number of calls will enormously increase raising the overall revenue of the government. These early steps should be followed by those towards gradual privatisation of the whole sector. We think that tremendous potential exists to attract FDI in the telecom sector that will immensely increase our communication infrastructure. We must remember that the basis of modern business is telecommunications, and it will be more so in the days of e-commerce. If we are to make ourselves attractive as FDI destination we must dramatically improve our communications infrastructure, which in the real sense can only be done by privatising the whole sector as suggested above.

Indo-Pak border tense again

Let good sense prevail

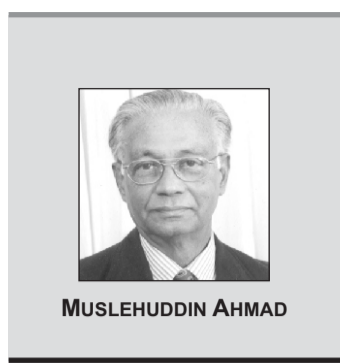
WITHIN six months of the terrorist attack on Lok Sabha premises, Indo-Pak relations have suffered another severe jolt through last Tuesday's suicide assault on an Indian army base in Kashmir. Among the 34 dead in the latest attack, civilian casualties were higher sparking widespread consternation in India. But the Indian government after a marathon parliamentary debate on the subject has stopped short of threatening any 'retaliatory attack' on its nuclear rival Pakistan. This has been sagacious on the part of New Delhi.

But that does not mean the threat of a 'calibrated war' has dissolved into the thin air. On the contrary, in view of the on-going exchanges of fire and ballistic words against the backdrop of repeated terrorist attacks, one is likely to apprehend an escalation of troubles ahead. And with the nerves gone taut, anything can happen at any time by accident. Only the top leadership on both sides exercising political option as distinguished from the military one can make a qualitative difference in the scenario.

Ever since Kargil, visit of any US dignitary to South Asia has been accompanied by a spurt in terrorist violence along the LOC in Kashmir, almost as a rule. The idea has been to demonstrate might of militant factions or make a point or two by violent means, what if innocents are killed in the process. This happened when Clinton came to the region, Colin Powell visited it, and in the latest case, when Christina Rocca, the US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia came calling New Delhi.

On the whole, however, there is a seasonal dimension to border flare-ups. Tensions have heightened in summer with the Himalayas melting and both sides eager to take control of strategic locations. The familiarity ring about their seasonal behaviour notwithstanding, with the nuclear power in their hands they have to think and act with an impeccable sense of responsibility. New Delhi and Islamabad must exercise restraint and wisdom in improving their relations in their own interest and for sake of poverty alleviation and sustainable growth in South Asia.

Likud vote against creation of a Palestinian state



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

IF Ariel Sharon is an ultra-rightist which he is, then Benjamin Netanyahu is a terrorist-rightist. He has asked for "expulsion or elimination of Arafat" (NYTimes, May 12, 2002). If a former Prime Minister of a country—Israel—can call for "elimination" of the elected leader of another nation, then the caller falls into the definition of a terrorist. It is known that Netanyahu is trying to regain the leadership of his party and the country too. Of course, he has been going round the US political circle including US Congress for some time and spreading poison against Arafat and the P A. Of course, Arafat and the Palestinian Authority (PA) deserve criticism and not the destructive one as done by Netanyahu. Though Netanyahu endorsed Oslo agreement while he was the PM of Israel, he is now saying—'Yes to a Palestinian State is No to Israel and Yes to Israel is No to a Palestinian State'. This means he and his party Likud are now totally against a Palestinian State. Therefore, Likud is Israeli Hamas as it is totally against a Palestinian state as Hamas itself is against the existence of Israel. This latest trend of Israeli politics lends support to the view of a friend of mine, who, by nature very calm and tolerant, often says—'Jews will have to go for the third diaspora'.
Likud Central Committee on

May 13 voted to reject the creation of a Palestinian state. This was piloted by Netanyahu. It was a major defeat for Sharon as he himself said—a Palestinian state is inevitable. It was a vote against the decision of the international community and Saeb Erekat said, it was "a real slap in the face" of President Bush (NYTimes) as the US vision is that a Palestine and Israel should exist side by side in

nal politics can make this process more difficult." British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said, "... safe solution to the terrible conflict in the Middle East is two-state solution, a secure state of Israel along side a viable and democratic state of Palestine."

However, the encouraging side is that there was a big rally organized by the Peace Now movement in Tel Aviv last week where about 100,000 Israelis attended. The rally

The EU Foreign Ministers are now working together to find some European countries that would accept 13 Palestinians, apparently on political asylum basis. There is a suggestion that Israel has the right to ask for deportations of these 13 Palestinians to Israel for trial. Such a right, if any at all, must not be used for the sake of peace and security. The exercise of such a right may complicate the future

suicide bombings are done by Hamas or anybody else. It's a difficult task for Arafat and PA after all these atrocities done by Israeli army under Sharon's order, but all violence including suicide bombings against Israeli civilians must stop.

Arafat himself declared that all violence against Israeli civilians must stop. Now his strong actions are necessary as the US and also the rest of the world support a two-

ness and tourism. Of course, the US is there to bail Israel out, but it has limits too. The US has already been fighting a war against terrorism that is costing the US dearly. This fight should have started even before 9/11 (September 11) as the intelligence report on the terrorist attack was reportedly available with President Bush before 9/11 (details however lacking). One has to wait and see whether this war against terrorism after the US already suffered would stop terrorism or create more terrorists. It looks like President Bush has thrown a stone into a beehive dispersing all the bees—the terrorists. One has to see how these terrorists would now behave.

Likud's open vote rejecting a Palestinian state opens up a new angle in the Middle East politics. This has obviously and rightly angered the Arabs. The White House will have to act quickly to contain Netanyahu and Likud radicals, otherwise all chances of peace in the ME would evaporate soon. This may seriously affect the US interest in the region and also in the rest of the world.

As the demand for reform of the Palestinian Authority has been growing from within and outside and particularly from the US and the EU, Arafat has ultimately, on May 15, met the Palestinian Legislative Council and announced the need for necessary reform and elections. He admitted mistakes and said it's the time for change. Though no time schedule has been announced, it's clear that he would go for the reform soon to earn the confidence of the international community. This is also necessary to stop corruption in the Palestinian administration, which has been a source of frustration of the Palestinian people.

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary and Ambassador and founder president of North South University

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

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peace and security. Arafat said—there will be a Palestinian state with or without the agreement of Israel. However, White House announced that despite Likud's vote, "the president continues to believe that the best way to peace is through the creation of a state of Palestine that can live side by side in security with Israel." After Likud's vote, Secretary Colin Powell reportedly talked to Prime Minister Sharon and said, "The Prime Minister and I discussed the decision made by the Likud committee yesterday, and of course he reaffirmed to me that he remains committed to moving forward to achieve that vision that I think most people have of a Palestinian state."

European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana said he regretted Likud's decision. "It's very sad ...

We are all engaged in trying to find peace. And everybody has recognized that the only way to peace is through a state. It is pity that inter-

relationships of the countries concerned with Israel as the deal has been a part of the overall settlement for the end of the standoff in the Church of Nativity, a place known to be the birth place of Jesus Christ.

On the issue of a Palestinian State, there is no doubt that majority of Israelis support a Palestinian state. This is the view I myself got from the Israeli side when I visited Israel and the West Bank some time ago. The latest poll shows 63 percent Israelis supporting a Palestinian state. The present violence by both sides apparently led more Israelis to believe that the only way to stop violence is to have a two-state solution. Arafat must now, despite Israeli army's atrocities and radical Likud's rejection of a Palestinian state, do everything he and his PA can to stop suicide bombings. Because it will be politically and morally reprehensible even if one peace activist is killed by a suicide bombing, whether the

state solution despite Likud's vote. One hopes that Senate's support to Israel is a general one and does not embrace Likud's concept of NO Palestinian state. Three Arab leaders—President Mobarak, Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and Bashar al Aasaad—who met in Sharm-el-Sheikh, Egypt, last week rejected violence and asked Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories as proposed earlier by Pricce Abdullah and accepted by all Arab states in Beirut summit. The leaders also asked for funds for reconstruction of Palestinian infrastructure destroyed by Israeli army. Therefore, there is a consensus that the violence must stop.

The violence has already cost many lives on both sides—the present figure stands 1345 Palestinians and 473 Israelis. Apart from this, Israeli army has destroyed virtually the entire Palestinian Authority and Palestinian security infrastructure. Israel has also suffered greatly in terms of busi-

ness and tourism. Of course, the US is there to bail Israel out, but it has limits too. The US has already been fighting a war against terrorism that is costing the US dearly. This fight should have started even before 9/11 (September 11) as the intelligence report on the terrorist attack was reportedly available with President Bush before 9/11 (details however lacking). One has to wait and see whether this war against terrorism after the US already suffered would stop terrorism or create more terrorists. It looks like President Bush has thrown a stone into a beehive dispersing all the bees—the terrorists. One has to see how these terrorists would now behave.

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Should we rely on foreign aid or resort to domestic resources?

PROF ABULHASAN M SADEQ

IT seems that the governments of almost all the less developed countries (LDCs) set out a target to receive the highest possible amount of foreign aid, which may be in the form of grants, tied aid, and loans (soft loan, tied loan, commercial loans, etc.). Expectedly, Bangladesh is not an exception in this regard, too. Discussions are going on and meetings are being held in connection of foreign assistance. The efforts of government of Bangladesh are going on in full swing to gain confidence of the donor countries in order to acquire maximum possible foreign assistance. In doing so, the governments of LDCs probably have at least two objectives in mind. Firstly, foreign assistance fills up the resource gap. Secondly, it provides a proof for the credibility and acceptability of the governments overseas. Thus there appears to have a serious effort on the part of the government for gaining highest possible foreign funding by achieving confidence of the donor countries. In this scenario one might ask: is it too bad if the government fails to attract a sizeable amount of foreign assistance?

The answer to the above question depends on the response to another question: do we need foreign aid? Or, is foreign aid desirable? Apparently, this is an old question, but this is a recurring question, and the issue emerges with new angles. And, there is no straight answer to this. We should try to address this question from two perspectives: from the perspective of the aid seekers, and

from that of donors. From the aid seekers' point of view, foreign assistance is justified if it is really to fill up the domestic resource gap (shortage of investible resources) and/or foreign exchange gap (shortage of foreign exchange) in order to contribute to economic development and the well being of the people. It is not advisable to

assistance. "The biggest single misconception about the foreign aid programme is that we send money abroad. We don't. Foreign aid consists of American equipment, raw materials, expert services, and food—all provided for specific development projects which we ourselves review and approve... Ninety-three per cent of

all US bilateral aid comes from this Fund." [K Griffin, "Doubts About Aid", IDS Bulletin 17, April 1986]. "It remains widely agreed that donor countries have utilized foreign aid largely as a political lever to prop up or underpin 'friendly' political regimes in the third world countries." [MP Todaro, *Economic Development in the Third World*,

picture of foreign aid for assistance; they are rather gloomy. Although exceptions may not be ruled out, the foreign aid is given mostly for the self-interest of the donor countries. They establish their control over the poor countries through foreign aid to interfere in their economic and political policy matters at the domestic as well as international levels to serve the political and strategic interest of the donor countries. Foreign assistance tends as well to serve their economic interest at the cost of the poor aid receiving countries. A major share of the foreign assistance does not leave the donor countries, or goes back to them for buying expertise services or materials. Debt servicing has become a serious burden and problem facing the developing countries. So, do we need such foreign aid? Not really. We don't. And, should we rely on such foreign assistance? No, we shouldn't. Therefore, the governments of developing countries, including Bangladesh or any other country, do not need to worry if they cannot gain the confidence of the donor countries to receive the desired amount of foreign assistance. Probably it is better to receive less. Instead, it is more desirable to formulate effective policies to mobilise resources from the domestic sources. The more we can rely on domestic resources, the better.

Longman, New York, 1981]. Thus, foreign assistance is rarely for the benefit of the poor countries. Instead, it may turn up as a burden for them in the form of debt servicing. LDCs have to submit to the dictates of the donor countries in international politics, and even in the domestic decision-making. Besides, a large amount has to be paid every year in interest, not to speak of the principal. "In 1985 the Third world's repayments of loans and interest amounted to US\$30 billion more than the loans it received in that year. In 1986 it received US\$14 billion in aid, but it paid out US\$54 billion on loan repayments plus interest. Over the period 1982-1985 it paid back US\$106 billion more than it received." [Ted Trainer, *Developed to Death*, Green Print, London, 1989].

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shoulder the burden of foreign assistance merely for political motives devoid of any positive economic agenda.

From the donors' point of view, we need to perceive their motives in extending foreign assistance to LDCs. In principle, there may be two different motives and objectives for this: (i) assisting the LDCs in their development, and (ii) satisfying the donors' own political and economic interests. The former objective is no doubt a noble cause and the LDCs are welcome to receive foreign aid that arises from such noble objective. The second motive often goes against the interest of the aid receiving LDCs. But, now, the question arises: what is the motive of donors in reality? Sometimes it is difficult to appreciate their motive(s) from the receiving end. It is not, however, difficult for them to perceive what their own motive is. Let us, therefore, see what they have to say about their own motive in providing foreign

AID funds are spent directly in the United States to pay for these things. Just last year some 4,000 American firms in 50 states received \$1.3 billion in AID funds for products supplied as part of the foreign aid programme." [William S Gaud, "Foreign Aid: How It Works; Why We Provide Aid", Department of State Bulletin 59, No. 1537, 1968].

K Griffin's statement suggests that foreign assistance from the donor countries is not to help the poor countries or to help fight poverty in LDCs: "In 1981 Israel's GNP per head was nearly 37 times larger than Ethiopia's. Israel received 90 times more foreign capital per head than Ethiopia ("Doubts About Aid", IDS Bulletin 17, April 1986). Israel was 37 times richer than Ethiopia. Obviously, if poverty eradication was the objective, foreign assistance to Ethiopia should have been 37 times more than Israel, but in practice it received 90 times less than Israel. An important motive behind

is doing little to promote growth in the third world and less to alleviate poverty. In the end it appears to be doing little more than sustaining corrupt and often vicious regimes in power." [K Griffin, "Doubts About Aid", IDS Bulletin 17, April 1986]. "Donor countries give aid primarily because it is in their political, strategic and/or economic self-interest to do so." [M P Todaro, *Economic Development in the Third World*, Longman, New York, 1981]. "Britain is one of the most expert 'tyres' and even boast that two-thirds of her aid never actually leaves Britain." [New Internationalist, October 1978]. "Canada requires that at least 80 per cent of aid be spent on Canadian aids and services." [L Timberlake, *Africa in Crisis*, Earthscan, 1985]. "For example, the Economic support fund of the US Agency for International Development is explicitly intended to provide support to countries on the basis of US's political and security interests and about 40per cent of

These are some analyses of foreign assistance given by the experts of foreign aid from the donor countries themselves. They do not provide any encouraging

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

Death of Rowshan Jamil: A mother lost

Rowshan Jamil, the great dame of Bangladesh theatre, cinema, television and radio, has taken her final curtain call. Best known for her mother character in tele dramas, theatres and cinemas, Rowshan Jamil made a huge impact on Bangladesh entertainment. She made a big contribution to Bangladesh art and are truly popular for it. She can be considered a part of cultural elite. The talented and much loved actor will be greatly missed. I extend my sincere sympathy to the bereaved family.
Mahmud Siddiqui
Victoria, Australia

Home Minister's fatalistic comments

It is quite understandable why the Home Minister's recent fatalistic comments have sparked controversy and irritation among many of us. Though his comments in a way reflected his profound reliance and faith in Allah - which every good

Muslim should have- however, by doing so he firstly tried to evade his responsibilities as Home Minister and secondly he has created a misconception about an important Islamic perspective on this issue.

According to many Islamic scholars there are two concepts from Islamic point of view, one is called "Tawakkul" and another is called "Tawakul". "Tawakkul" means trying one's best for a cause and complete reliance or dependence on Allah for the result, because He knows the best. From Islamic perspective this is highly recommended and desired by Allah. Because it shows one's devotion and dedication for a cause and ultimate confidence in Allah's will.

"Tawakul", on the other hand is somehow related to fatalistic ideals, means doing nothing but expecting Allah's favour for any cause. Which is highly discouraged and not liked by Allah. In Quran Allah says that He doesn't change the fate of any nation until it itself tries to do that first. I would like to conclude with a

comment by an Islamic scholar regarding people holding public posts. According to him, holding public post is a big "amanat" and keeping that "amanat" fully is a sacred duty. That person, who is responsible for such post, will be questioned for any of his negligence and irresponsibility (in his duty) on the day of judgement. So, people who are in public jobs, should be extra careful regarding their duties.
Zafar Hadi
One-mail

I don't understand how a person let alone a Home Minister could make such a ludicrous comment. I will not go into describing the array of weird comments made by our HM (if you are not familiar then please read Mr. Farjad Ahmed's letter on May 16) rather put some questions to the people to help me understand the situation.

1. If it is not possible to prevent crimes then what is the reason of having a HM and police? As they surely are not there to prevent crime then are they there to commit crime?

2. If this government believes that "Life and death is in Allah's hand" and they can do nothing about it then why do the PM has special force to protect her? Why not the HM and all other ministers get rid of the security provided to them?
Talat Islam
Research Associate, USC

"Communalism in Perspective"

This refers to ES's letter, "Communalism in Perspective" (May 15).

ES by exemplifying top Muslim personalities corroborates India as a secular country. The conclusion of my recent study on this issue reveals that India is far away from secularism. In comparison, the Hindu brethren of Bangladesh are better off, they do not have to fight the ever-hunting spectra of communal riots and threats to their religion and cultural identity. Dig in what Mr. Balraj Madhak, former Professor of History at Delhi University said in an interview to the New York Times correspondent at Delhi in 1966.

Read about the prominent Hindu writer Mr. S. Harrison, what he has to say about Muslims. Go through the white paper, prepared by All India Milli Council (AMC) that was presented to the former Prime Minister of India Mr. Inder Kumar Gujral. Skim through the 1991 India's nation-wide census and see for yourself the stunning disparity in service both in the public and private sectors. Once ES goes through these paraphernalia I am sure he too will be convinced that the top-level Muslim personalities mentioned are a case of tutulary.

Let us not be ruled by our hearts but by the head.
Billy Ahmed
Dhaka

ES in his letter (May 15) about Muslims in India has made an excellent point. India in spite of its problems can show a great deal more in the accomplishment of Muslims than we can for Hindu's in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh Hindu's are mainly prominent in the arts and culture as well as certain crafts like

jewellery. But not nearly in as wide a spectrum of activities as the Muslims in India.

That reminds me of one prominent gentleman whose name has recently come up and who is not in a stereotypical Hindu profession. He's one of the recipients of that shady 80-lakh taka Upazila Development fund handed out by the last government.
Cervantes
Dhaka

English medium schools

This is in response to "An aggrieved parent's" letter (May 15), asking for government's interference in the curriculum and fee structure of English medium schools.

I do not defend the way these schools milk money from parents, but then again I see nothing wrong in it. The fees charged by these schools is what the market deems acceptable. If the fees were too high then they would be to loose students and as a result the fees would come down again. High fees

also make it attractive for new entrants into the market, setting up better schools to cream off the top or lesser schools to take up those students who cannot afford those high fees.

In regards to the curriculum, the government should never interfere. The reason that English medium schools have done so well is because they have developed independently and the superiority of their curriculum is proven by the achievements of Bangladeshi students in higher education abroad.

What we should have however, is GCSE's introduced in Bangladesh as the O' levels are outdated and have not been used in England for over ten years now. But never ask for the government to interfere. That would be the death of English medium education in Bangladesh.
Tali
Dhaka

BDR bailout

This much-touted new National Committee to fight during criminals

etc... is a complete eyewash. All day yesterday I saw police standing by the side of the main roads stopping cars. How many criminals do they think they will catch that way? Or by neighbourhood drives? And even if they do find a criminal stupid enough not to have gone into hiding, what of it? He will be arrested under Section 54 and if he's sponsored by the 4-party alliance he will be released on bail after two days that is unless he is an AL sponsored criminal in which case he's in trouble.

Even if these criminals are eventually charged our courts will take years to convict them and if the ruling party is replaced in the meantime, their cases would be classified as political harassment and dismissed.

If you want to arrest criminals, interview every MP and ask for the names of the thugs and extortionists who at best only campaigned for them and more usually are protected by them.
Don Quixote
Dhaka