

Conspiracy to oust government

Just accusing is not enough, PM must take the nation into confidence

THE Prime Minister in her budget session address has mentioned that conspiracies are on to topple the elected government spearheaded by the opposition involving ex and retired members of the armed forces and some others. The PM has directly accused the main opposition party of this conspiracy and said that timely actions had foiled these conspiratorial moves. The statement deserves utmost concern and must be dealt as a matter of highest priority.

This can't be seen as part of the typical trite rhetoric of Bangladeshi politics. It's a matter of national security and involves the future of democracy in Bangladesh. In view of our national history and the role of conspiracies in shaping it, the remarks of the PM, if true, needs to be seen as a crisis of national proportion. Given the nature of the events, it's imperative on the part of the PM that she reveal the details of the conspiracy to the nation as a whole so that everyone may unite and fight such evil designs.

The matter is so serious that it has gone beyond the realms of partisan politics, and the media, civil society and all other forces, who shall also be as affected should there be an extra-constitutional conspiracy, be fully informed and plans taken for action. Every fact must be told to the people so that they can guard themselves.

One is reminded that during the first innings of BNP rule under Khaleda Zia, we did not hear much about conspiracies. About half-way through the rule of Sk. Hasina, 'conspiracy' became a regular phenomenon in our political life. The former PM's frequent reference to conspiracies were never proven, nor any evidence shared with the public. But this is only the eighth month of her rule and Khaleda Zia has 'discovered' a plot to oust her. That's why it's such a critical matter.

National security matters ultimately belong to the people and the evidence of conspiracies must be presented publicly. It is not a crisis of a single political party, nor can the PM keep the nation in the dark about it.

This is the time to disclose all the facts before the people, expose the enemies as she has described and take prompt action taking the people along. Surely the time for making vague and politically inspired charges of such serious nature is long past gone. Charges without any evidence are mere rhetorics which must be disdainfully ignored.

Let us know all the facts. This right to know belongs to the people.

Budget prunes taxes to meet lobby demands

Consumers remain uneasy

THAT Finance Minister Saiful Rahman has an adroit finger at the calculator is driven home once again. This time he has shown it while altering the proposed budget, albeit at the peripheries, to cater for certain segmental demands without affecting its basic character and thrust.

He has made additions to and subtractions from his original taxation proposals in such a way that his projected total revenue earning at Tk 35,000 crore plus remains more or less in tact. So, he did not even have any necessity for a footnote to bemoan the so-called loss to the national exchequer that finance ministers are apt to sigh over each time they declare revision of a tax proposal. His uncanny genius in levelling the 'losses' comes right through his calculations.

The withdrawal of import duty on computer (dovetailed to 3 per cent AIT imposed plus the mandatory Pre Shipment Inspection) sits in well with the government or the private sector plans to expand usage of IT. Secondly, the suspension of 'ban' on import of maximum four-year-old vintage cars for a period of two years with 10 per cent supplementary duty on 1350-1649 CC vehicles gives the reconditioned car dealers a respite for a switch-over to other forms of business. Notably, the principle of 'ban' on import of reconditioned cars has been adopted. Thirdly, shopkeepers in the city corporation area will have to pay a minimum annual VAT of Tk 4200 instead of the proposed Tk 5400. The rate for shopkeepers outside the municipal limits has been brought down by Tk 600 from the proposed level. The small but numerically powerful business lobby has been assuaged there. Finally, the lowest slab of taxable income remains at Tk 75,000 as in the original budget but it seems somewhat tempered with a reduction of the rock-bottom tax at Tk 1200 from Tk 2400 as proposed earlier.

All that is on the debit side, so to speak; but on the credit side to the kitty the finance minister has imposed sizeable new taxes and supplementary duties on bank profits and import of cigarettes and alcoholic beverages.

The supreme irony however is, while Saiful Rahman has balanced his calculations, the poor and middle class consumers remain completely unrelieved of the high incidence of taxes the original budget had ordained on them. They will have difficulty making both ends meet. Moreover, as the inflationary pressure builds on the economy it risks reducing their purchasing power. Only productive investments can ease their plight.

The Subcontinent's deepening crisis



M ABDUL HAFIZ

the beleaguered Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party to bottle it again.

"If we do not attack now, we never will". The military in Jammu sector is visibly in a mood to strike now because to wait again after nearly six months of deployment and acts of intense provocation like guerilla action in Kaluchak garrison will be counter productive. Never had the decision makers in India been so united on taking actions

publicly declared that Pakistan would resort to her nuclear option if the country was overwhelmed by India's superior conventional forces.

The international community is nervously watching the development with a measure of trepidation at the prospect of the history's first nuclear war.

As both India and Pakistan are readying their delivery system and putting in place their nuclear-capable missiles and bombers

gent interests, expectations and, above all, perception of issues involved.

In the days after September 11 General Musharraf appeared ready to play to the West's tune. He moved quickly to cut off years of military and financial support to the Taliban, against the wishes of several of his more hardline generals. Little did the west realise that Kashmir was always going to be different. The struggle for the dis-

close to the militants say the order will apply for six weeks at first.

The following week in Islamabad Musharraf assured the British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw that 'cross border terrorism had ended'. Contrary to previous occasions he made little effort to deny that infiltration had taken place in the past. He also promised to close the militant training camps in Pakistan controlled Kashmir but was vague in his answer when Straw asked him how

ment to nuclear weapon" said General Aslam Beg, a former Army Chief, "you cannot go back after the sacrifices that have been made."

And so, appearing ashen-faced for a crucial television address on May 27, Musharraf played the defiant leader promising that Pakistan would respond with "full might" to any Indian attack implying that Pakistan's military help to Kashmiris' freedom struggle would continue. He also clearly feels he has made huge concessions. "I personally feel that I have taken actions which could not have been imagined before", he told CNN in a 'recent interview'.

Notwithstanding his liberal credentials his only problem, so far as the west is concerned, is the issue of Kashmir and particularly Kargil, the 10-week battle in the northern Kashmir mountains in 1999 which made him appear a dangerously unpredictable hard-liner. Musharraf and his generals covertly masterminded the capture of a handful of mountains in Indian-held Kashmir, secretly prepared Pakistan's nuclear warheads and militarily delivered a bloody nose to their Indian rivals. Even during the last two months' tight-rope walk Musharraf has shown that when it comes to the conflict over Kashmir he is an extraordinary risk-taker. Pakistan's adroit military ruler will be repeatedly prepared to take such risks forcing India to respond at some stage. If for nothing, just to fend off the charge that it is capable of only empty threats. The situation that may then unfold is at the core of worldwide anxiety over South Asia's crisis today.

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

PERSPECTIVES

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against the terrorists, if required, in their bases in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). In a coercive diplomacy the world opinion has already been mobilised in favour of India. Yet the members of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) are still weighing the option for a full-scale war in case Pakistan refuses to succumb to global pressure with regard to alleged infiltration across the LoC.

The nuclear dimension of Indo-

Pakistan war has so far been a

matter of speculation and a topic of

academic discourse. Now the rivals

are openly flaunting their nuclear

prospects. Pakistan has threatened

India with the first use of nukes to

balance Delhi's conventional arms

superiority. Her permanent repre-

sentative in the United Nations has

obviously an international pressure has been mounting on an isolated Pakistan on the issue of 'cross border terrorism' considered responsible for the worrisome prospect of nuclear confrontation. All major nations -- the US, EU, Russia and Japan -- insist that Pakistan must prevent the Islamist militants from crossing the LoC. A distance is also growing between the US leadership and General Musharraf whom it finds misbehavingly unwilling to comply. From President Bush to Colin Powell and Rumsfeld and even Jack Straw of Britain to Cris Patten of EU -- all seem to be in a mood to bully and balk at Pakistan for not effectively reining in its militants. This could not but happen in an alliance or coalition where its constituents have diver-

ged Himalayan state virtually defines Pakistan's national identity. The general hoped to continue unhindered the army's covert support for militants' guerrilla war in Kashmir. Only under mounting pressure from London and Washington and threat of retaliatory strikes from India has Musharraf begun to curb their activities. At a series of government meetings two weeks ago General Musharraf issued the orders to stop Islamist militants crossing the LoC. The order was discussed at the joint meeting of the cabinet and the National Security Council on May 22. At another meeting at Joint Staff Headquarters the following day the generals debated the decision for hours before agreeing to support General Musharraf. The sources

long would it take to do so. While it appears that the order to stop infiltration is temporary, intended to last just six weeks, it is unclear whether the General has complete control over his intelligence agency which runs the militants. Soon after Colin Powell, the US Secretary of State, said, "Instructions have been given to halt infiltration" adding that "it is too early to say that it has stopped". The move goes some way to meeting international demand, but it may not be enough. Yet the general who walks the razor's edge cannot do more. He is under immense pressure from the country as a whole, and from the top ranks of his army, not to concede an inch.

"No military or elected govern-

ment has ever been able to change

the policy on Kashmir or our com-

Bush's blueprint on ME conflict



HARUN UR RASHID

ian leader.

It is believed that because of the suicide-bombings the President had made harder conditions for the Palestinian leadership than before. Another factor to be weighed in is the coming re-election of his younger brother Governor Jeb Bush in Florida and it is reported that much of Governor's success will depend on the votes of sizeable Jewish electorate in Florida. President Bush cannot let down his brother in the election and he should be perceived

accept by and large the President's blueprint for peace in the region as the future road map. President Mubarak of Egypt said that "I do not see in the speech the removal of Arafat but a demand of reforms of the Palestinian Authority and the formation of a new administration." Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa (an Egyptian) said Mr. Bush's proposals deserved careful considerations. The European Union welcomed as a sign of renewed American engagement in

President Bush.

The Palestinian people were wondering whether President Bush was voicing Ariel Sharon views. This is perceived from the fact that the President was in effect urging the removal of Yasser Arafat, the man whom they consider symbolises the aspirations and hopes of Palestinian people. They think that the plan is a sugar-coated bitter pill prescribed by the US President, i.e.-removal of Arafat with hope of a Palestine state at a future uncertain date. Further

Like any one else, Palestinians don't like to be told who to vote for by a man they see as Sharon's biggest international supporter. To show their anger they might elect some person who is much more radical than Arafat, say from Hamas group. If that occurs, many believe peace in the Middle East will come to a full stop.

Third, the question of election in the Palestinian territory does not arise in view of the Israeli re-occupation of Palestinian major

BOTTOM LINE

The bottomline appears to be that Yasser Arafat has become a persona non grata to the US administration. Sharon's view that Arafat has been and is a supporter of terrorism seems to have been accepted by the US administration. Some observers believe that President Bush's earlier speech on the Middle East on April 4 effectively gave Arafat one last chance to tackle terrorism. It didn't happen.

to be tough by the Jewish voters to the Palestinian leadership.

The speech was welcomed by Israel because they were buoyed by President Bush's call for an end to Yasser Arafat's leadership. Sharon's game is to see the end of political life of Arafat as the two men have personal "hatred" for each other for more than 20 years. The President's speech was perceived to give a green light to the aggressive Israeli policy of seizing the Palestinian territory.

Several dozens of Israeli tanks and armoured vehicles moved into the six large cities including Hebron in the Palestinian territory and they are going to stay there until

terrorism stops. That implies realistic

ally not days but months or years in the occupied territory.

The Arab World appeared to

the Middle East conflict.

However President Putin of Russia has warned against sidelining the Palestinian leader Arafat from the Middle East process. At a news conference on 25 June with some 700 Russian and foreign journalists, he said "It would be dangerous and a mistake to remove Arafat from the political arena because in our view that would lead to radicalisation of Palestinian society." Iran said that it was a repetition of Washington's "hard-line and one-sided" position towards the Middle East. China welcomed the US's effort but said that Arafat's status as an elected leader was "an internationally recognised fact." The UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said that Mr. Arafat was a legitimate leader while praising the vision of

more some of the Palestinian leaders criticised the plan for several reasons.

First, no one however powerful can dictate the choice of the leadership for Palestinians. It is the sole prerogative of Palestinian people to choose their leader. Even the former US State Department senior official Pelletreau said that President's call to reject Arafat was unwarranted. In fact many observers believe that Arafat's standing has rather been boosted among the ordinary Palestinians after the President's speech and his re-election success seems to be assured unless Washington produces strong pressure to force Arafat out of seeking re-election.

Second, if Arafat is not allowed to contest election, who are the Palestinian leaders acceptable to the US?

cities. It begs the question whether there can be a free and fair election under the present climate. An election is only possible according to Palestinian leaders when Israel withdraws from its territory given to them (42% of the occupied lands) under Oslo Accord of 1993.

Fourth, the plan offers no solution to the most difficult issues, such as, the status of Jerusalem, the borders of Palestinian state and the fate of Palestinian refugees expelled from Israel after 1948.

Finally, many legal experts maintain that the concept of a provisional state as envisaged by President Bush is misconceived under rules of international law. Either a state exists or not, irrespective of recognition from other states. Provisional government may be formed in

OPINION

'Cross-border terrorism': Deployment of international force is the only way out

AMM SHAHABUDDIN

A last flash of relieving light has been visible at the end of the dark, dangerous tunnel. Both India and Pakistan seem to have felt the heat of the international pressures, exerted by world leadership, particularly, USA, Great Britain, Russia and China, besides the European Union (EU) leadership and a number of Asian leaders. The high tempo of war rhetorics, coming from both sides of the Indo-Pak borders seemed to have calmed down to a great extent, following the recent visits to the two nuclear-powered arch rivals by US Defence Secretary Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary of State Armitage. Armitage was quoted as telling pressmen, on return from his talks with Pakistan President Gen Musharraf and Indian PM Vajpayee, that he had been able to get the assurance from Gen Musharraf that he would take all possible measures to permanently end the infiltration of militants from Pakistan into Indian territories, which has been welcomed by India. In response to Pakistan's firm commitment, India had announced several de-escalation measures, including, lifting of ban on Pakistan's commercial flights over India and removal of

Indian naval ships from the northern Arabian Sea. More to come will include the return to Islamabad of India's Ambassador and restoration of cancelled railway and bus services between the two countries. Thus the leaders of the two countries, under pressure from international community, seem to have come to their senses, hopefully to take a new and positive turn from their oft-repeated sabre rattling and war cries. Now Gen Musharraf and PM Vajpayee would have to prove their mettle, shaking off their rigid and narrow approach, to take their countries out of the hot soup of their own making, in the interest not only of the people of the two countries but also of the South Asian region.

Although morning does not always show the day, at least a good and encouraging beginning has been made by the two nuclear rivals. Now it is for them to keep the balance and get set for the long march towards the goal of peace and amity.

US Defence Secretary

Rumsfeld, on return from his peace mission to India and Pakistan, had said that the danger of nuclear confrontation between the two countries was over, but he hastened to warn that the situation may slip back if India and Pakistan do not continue to make progress in bring-

ing down tensions over Kashmir. On the other hand, Gen Musharraf, addressing the 16-nation Asian Security Conference held recently at Almaty, Kazakhstan, also attended by PM Vajpayee, said that the people of South Asia were paying the price for what he termed, India's unwillingness to end the stand-off over the disputed Kashmir, in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions and the wishes of the

stance of India has been indirectly not accepted by the world leaders when they had been recently advocating for solution of the Kashmir problem in order to defuse the tense situation created by both countries, amassing lakhs of soldiers on their borders. And hardliners like Home Minister Advani, in his recent statement, had again ruled out the possibility of either withdrawal of troops from the border, or resumption of

stan. Apart from visit of peace envoys from USA, Great Britain, Russia, China and EU countries, what a tremendous effort was made by Russian President Putin at the recently concluded Asian Security Conference at Almaty, Kazakhstan. But the whole exercise ended in smoke for the rigidity and unwillingness shown by India not to meet Musharraf on the plea of cross-border terrorism.

Now time has come when India

should show courage and political farsight to call a spade, a spade. It is on record that India accepted the Maharaja Hari Singh's decision to accede to India in 1947 on the understanding that the question of Kashmir's accession to India would be 'settled' by reference to the Kashmiri people, because the other contesting party, Pakistan, declared Maharaja's accession to India as 'illegal'. Following a complaint by India to the UNSC about the 'invasion' in 1948 against Kashmir by tribesmen, aided by Pakistan, the Security Council set up a UN com-

mission for India and Pakistan. Later, the SC recommended various measures, including use of military observers to stop fighting and to create conditions for holding a plebiscite under UN. In July 1949, a ceasefire line was established in Kashmir and India and Pakistan agreed to hold a plebiscite in Kashmir under UN auspices. The SC resolution also created a UN force, comprising troops contributed by UN member countries, known as UNMOGIP (UN Military Observers for India and Pakistan).

But after signing the Simla Agreement in 1972, India made a turn about the UNMOGIP, saying that UNMOGIP had 'lapsed', following the Simla Accord, and asked UN to withdraw its forces from India's side. However, this unilateral decision was neither accepted by Pakistan, nor UN. The then UN Secy. Gen. Kurt Waldheim had categorically stated at that time that "only the Security Council can terminate the UNMOGIP mission". And the SC since then had not taken any decision whatsoever to terminate the mission. Hence, the UN