

## Dengue strikes back, hard Authorities yet to wake up to the full threat

IF the dengue epidemic proves more serious than that of last year, the government will only have itself to blame and the blemish can't be wished away through any make-believe argument. The fact that the Dhaka City Corporation has only just managed to import the medicines after going through various formalities is a pathetic excuse which should not be offered in future. Worse, the government doesn't seem to be particularly bothered. What would be needed to make the DCC and the health authorities recognise that people no longer feel that there is sufficient competence to handle such a crisis is a big issue.

But this isn't only about incompetence, it's also about priorities. The government had all along been more keen about scoring political points and even some professional criminals managed to secure entry into the city body. When they were so busy with this kind of tasks, one can't be expected to look after routine jobs neglecting which can take lives and cause huge suffering.

Media reports have it that spraying and fogger machines are lying idle because there is no insecticide as a result of which the deadly aedes population has had a happy breeding time this season. And now the price is being paid. One must speak out and ask who is responsible. Then, the guilty must be identified and punished. Thousands have suffered since the first dengue hit a few years ago and each time there has been significant evidence of neglect on the part of those who are responsible for minimising the epidemic's impact.

It's not too late yet. We appeal to the authorities to do whatever is possible -- and there's much that still can be done -- to reduce suffering of the people afflicted, manage the cases according to established procedures and save lives. The dreadful hygienic conditions of the city and the exacerbating mosquito infestation problem need to be addressed on an emergency footing.

## A tangible success in women's empowerment

Let this be replicated

WE need tertiary growth centres to trigger a reverse migration of people from the metropolitan cities, Dhaka in particular, to the rural areas. And it should be all the more welcomed if such epicentres of development are set up for women by the women themselves.

Such a rare combination of achievements has been lauded in a recent World Bank report on good governance. It says women's participation in a useful local development project from the siting, planning and designing stages to its completion has yielded multiple benefits in terms of their empowerment through employment. This has had to do with the US\$ 141.40 million Second Rural Roads and Markets Improvement and Maintenance Project. This was completed last year with all its socio-economic targets comprising 606 kms of feeder roads, improvement of 137 growth centre markets, 15 new rural markets and 35 river terminals, 47,000 metres of structures on rural roads and flood damage rehabilitation of 915 kms of roads having been fulfilled.

The Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) after studying the socio-economic impact of the project has found out that female employment in the project area has risen from a very low level a year ago to 83.3 per cent as at present. The leapfrogging to employment has happened in the service sector encompassing housemaid jobs, teaching, midwifery and tailoring. Five hundred women have been provided with shops in the women's section of the growth centres. Apart from the civil work that kept women gainfully busy for a full year, 4000 rural destitute women are currently engaged in maintenance activities and roadside plantation.

The above is an example of what the Local Government and Engineering Directorate (LGED) could achieve in consultation with and by empowering women. The successful project can be a guide to how we provide for the powers and functions of women representatives in the union parishads, pourasabhas and city corporations.

# An Afghan transition: The Loya Jirga and beyond



M ABDUL HAFIZ

AFTER the military victory of US-led coalition forces in Afghanistan in December last a blueprint for the political transition of the war ravaged country was drafted at a UN-sponsored conference in Bonn. An interim administration headed by US-backed Hamid Karzai, created as a result, was to last only for six months. The ad hoc government crafted in Bonn obviously reflected only the military balance of power after the Taliban's demise. It was therefore decided that a Loya Jirga - the grand assembly of elders --, a three hundred years old Afghan tradition to take the pulse of the country, would be held not only to redress the ethnic imbalance of current arrangement but also to reach a consensus with regards to next head of the state, the broad outline of a future government and the direction the country should be moving.

Plumb on the expiry of the stipulated time the Loya Jirga met in Kabul on an emergency basis as discontent was fast brewing up not only among the Pashtuns, the country's majority ethnic group, but

also among other minorities over the major share of Tajik-dominated Northern Alliance in the interim government. Although the chaotic conditions that had prevailed in Afghanistan for last couple of years the Loya Jirga was held in right earnest -- thanks to the presence of American military in the country which maintained an internal order conducive enough to going ahead with the event.

The Loya Jirga evoked a great

curbing open discourse and using strong arm method to influence the delegates, where necessary.

A 21-member Loya Jirga commission constituted earlier did its home task well. The commission composed largely of unknown Afghans of which only eight were Pashtun drafted the rules that governed the selection of delegates and explained their tasks. Zahir Shah who had indicated his willingness to play a role in the new gov-

ernment was apparently pressured to forswear formally any political role. There were widespread complaint that most of the delegates had been handpicked by the warlords. Even during the Loya Jirga there were allegations that the security agents made its free functioning difficult and that the US embassy in Kabul was trying to script the decisions. From the outset it was made clear to the delegates attending the Loya Jirga that the Bush Administration wanted their man, Karzai, at the helm with his core group of senior ministers belonging to the Northern Alliance.

Even if some of the delegates

refused to be railroaded into endorsing Karzai for the Presidency as desired by the Americans and the warlords all of their efforts came to a naught when Karzai was overwhelmingly elected by 1295 out of 1575 delegates in a stage managed proceeding of the Loya Jirga. It was equally difficult to divest the Panjsheri Tajiks including the Defence Minister Qasim Faheem, Interior Minister Mohammad Qanooni and Foreign Minister

reward for its struggle against the Taliban for six years and support for America's war on terrorism. Amidst disappointment and frustration the delegates only grumbled that they were not allowed to approve or reject the candidates. As regards irregularity even the UN Undersecretary General Kieran Pendergast admitted in his briefing to the UN Security Council that the cases of intimidation in Loya Jirga were brought to the attention of Afghan

cution by International Criminal Court (ICC) and Karzai government gives written assurance that the peace-keeping troops are immune from arrest or surrender to ICC. General Menel, the commander of American troops in Afghanistan said that his main job was to "close with and destroy those who would destroy us." All these are ominous pointers to another blood bath in the country. Already there have been many allegations of indiscriminate killing of innocent Afghan civilians by American peace keepers.

The post-Loya Jirga Afghanistan is the tentative beginning of what is likely to be a long period of political and economic reconstruction, if all goes well. Even if Karzai's government seems secure at least for another 18-months during which the country's constitution will be framed to be approved by another Loya Jirga all else are gloomy and uncertain. The stability and prosperity are still a long way off. Security is still a rare luxury in Afghanistan. The ISAF is restricted only to Kabul. Coalition forces with locally recruited militia are hunting for the remnants of Taliban and al-Qaida. Rival commanders around the country have also been fighting for turf. The economic reconstruction is yet on the paper as the promised money from the donor countries is still to pour in.

In this bleak situation, as always, the tussle for influence in Afghanistan between the foreign pay masters of the different Afghan groups will continue to determine the shape of things in future.

Brig (ret) Hafiz is former DG of BISS.

## PERSPECTIVES

Even if Karzai's government seems secure at least for another 18-months during which the country's constitution will be framed to be approved by another Loya Jirga all else are gloomy and uncertain. The stability and prosperity are still a long way off. Security is still a rare luxury in Afghanistan. The ISAF is restricted only to Kabul. Coalition forces with locally recruited militia are hunting for the remnants of Taliban and al-Qaida. Rival commanders around the country have also been fighting for turf. The economic reconstruction is yet on the paper as the promised money from the donor countries is still to pour in.

deal of interests among the country's diverse ethnic groups who hoped to put right the wrongs done to them in Bonn. The Pashtun delegates in particular wanted to move in the Loya Jirga overwhelmingly in favour of King Zahir Shah assuming a leadership role in the government while the interim government and its American handlers were only interested in obtaining an endorsement of what all were done in Bonn. Precisely they wanted only to legitimise the Bonn arrangement. Once they got an inkling of the brewing resentments among the delegates it was then decided to stage manage the whole show by

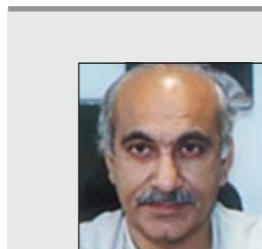
Abdullah Abdullah of their jobs. The power wielded by this triumvirate can be gauged from the fact that it raised late military Commander Ahmad Shah Massoud to the status of a national hero and made Faheem a Field-Marshal although he never served in uniform and rendered the cabinet helpless by inducting Panjsheri in key positions in every ministry and department in last six months.

Far from correcting the existing imbalance in power structure, when the Loya Jirga concluded it was found that the American backers of Northern Alliance only formalised the decisions taken in Bonn as a

government.

The end of Loya Jirga coincided with the firing of several rockets in the centre of Kabul in total disregard of the presence of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in and around the capital. Also a number of armed attacks and robberies were committed against international organisations over the last several weeks. A female international aid worker was gangraped -- something unthinkable during Taliban regime. These breaches of order are, of course, going to be met with brutal force by the troops of ISAF provided the Security Council grants them immunity from prose-

# From the future to the present



M.J. AKBAR

FOR some reason an old Talat Mahmood song has been humming in my mind: *Tasweer banata hoon, tasweer nahin banti, tasweer nahin banti...* (I paint, but the picture never forms). And then this line morphs in the mind, almost without permission from the brain: *Kashmir banata hoon, Kashmir nahin banti, Kashmir nahin banti...*

Since we have exhausted all options, and failed, when finding the way forward by starting from the beginning, let us try a different route map. Let us begin from the end. Is there an endgame? Indeed, is there any end to this utterly dangerous game?

Common-- sense or should we redefine common sense as rank optimism? suggests that any journey should end in peace. Is that the real intention of all concerned? It is necessary to address this basic dilemma at the start, because if there is any confusion about the end then every effort will be only another exercise in volatile confusion, with all its attendant consequences. Let me declare my personal interest in the matter, unambiguously and without the clutter of any higher virtue. I have two children in college; the elder has just completed her studies, the younger has two years left before he graduates. I would like both my children to return and live in their country, India, rather than in England or the United States. And I would like my India to be a peaceful home to them for the rest of their lives, where they can prosper,

succeed, and, most important, enjoy the sheer fun that life offers to the fortunate in my country. I do not want them to live in the penumbra of nuclear war. I must work on the hypothesis that this is a perfectly sane desire, and that everyone who is sane on the subcontinent, and everyone sane in the rest of the world with an interest in the subcontinent, shares this hope.

If peace is the objective, then long before it happens on the ground it must take root in the mind.

subcontinent can harness and use the greatest natural resources, from the Caspian, Iran and central Asia to the eastern waters of the Indian Ocean. If there is military cooperation, then even the United States might feel a slight twinge at having encouraged friendship between India and Pakistan, just as some Republicans might wonder today about whether helping China join the world did not actually provoke a potential that might have been best left dormant. This will never happen

on the subcontinent? Why was Donald Rumsfeld in Delhi and Islamabad? Why was Jack Straw in both capitals? It is extraordinary to suggest that Kashmir has never been discussed by any of these men on their visits to the subcontinent. If Kashmir was not on the international agenda India and Pakistan would probably have blown each other to nuclear bits by now. We may have argued for decades that we do not need international mediation, but the only

there will be no solution. The ifs of history taunt those who must suffer the consequences of mistakes; but if Pakistan had not arbitrarily sent across raiders in the third week of October 1947, there would have been a peaceful resolution of the problem fifty years ago. War, either declared or undeclared, did not succeed then, and it is not going to succeed today.

It is clear that something is needed to end the dangerous stagnation in which this problem is

tember-October elections pass off with minimum violence and maximum participation. It will tell the Hurriyat that a boycott is not an answer; it is an irresponsible waste of a rare and possibly historic opportunity. If the Hurriyat believes that it represents the will of the people, then it must prove this in the elections in order to claim a legitimate place at any future table. There cannot be progress if all sides do not move forward.

There will be a table. This much is obvious, whether anyone admits it or not. By October the process of elections in Jammu and Kashmir as well as in Pakistan, and conditions can be created, if all goes reasonably well, for a structured dialogue, this time beginning at the bottom and going up rather than the other way around (the fatal flaw of the Agra summit!).

There is a story about Saladin and Richard the Lionheart that might be considered useful for the future, and it is not apocryphal. Richard could not fulfil two ambitions on this crusade. He failed to conquer Jerusalem and he failed to meet Saladin. All negotiations on behalf of the Muslim cause were conducted by Saladin's brother Malek. After the failure of his last assault on Jerusalem, when Richard had made up his mind to return to England, he expressed a last wish to Malek: he wanted to meet the great Saladin. Saladin still refused. He had a reason that he conveyed to Richard. After kings meet, said Saladin, there must be peace. And until every condition for peace has been created, kings should not meet. Saladin was ready to exchange any and every courtesy, but not exchange a visit.

The war continued after Agra. If there is another summit, the leaders of India and Pakistan must come down from it with a smile for their countries, not press conferences for the press.

We have waited an eternity for that picture to be painted.

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## BYLINE

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This is tricky, because war, or at least confrontation, has been the dominant fact of minds fixed in the past. India and Pakistan have always gone to their messy, uncertain, tripartite origins in their search for solutions to any present problem. They have never permitted the future to shape the present. The difference is considerable. Are we still going to fight battles started in the nineteenth century, or are we going to look ahead to the rest of the twenty first century? Take one look at an imagined future and visualise the difference if there is, may I dare say it, peace and economic and military cooperation between India and Pakistan. Suddenly every equation from the Andamans to Arabia and Iran changes. This becomes the largest economic market in the world, with a potential bigger than Europe or China, and the capability of raising living standards to the levels of the twenty richest countries. Together, the

as long as we are defeated by the hatreds of our past.

To change a set mind is not easy. Two bits of evidence will suffice. Take, first, the Congress reaction to the statement made by Colin Powell in Delhi, that Kashmir was on the world's agenda. The principal Opposition party reacted as if Powell had insulted India. What else has the world been doing for the whole of last year except treating the problems arising out of Kashmir as part of its agenda? Why did Colin Powell turn up in Delhi in the first place? Not because he wanted to ease his jet lag on the way to the ASEAN meeting. Why did we accept the commitment made by General Pervez Musharraf on reducing support to cross-border terrorism and brought to us by Richard Armitage? Why are we holding Pakistan to that commitment, and doing so consistently, if we do not accept that the world has a role to play in the pursuit of peace

aeroplanes that scurry to and fro between India and Pakistan these days are the government aircraft of leaders from Britain and the United States. Did the Congress object to Powell's visit? Or Straw's? There is a new reality that must be recognised: a nuclear war is not a bilateral issue. The world does not want to talk on our behalf; that in fact would be stupid. But the world does want India and Pakistan to talk to each other when a million men are battle-ready on the border and nuclear arsenals are primed for assault. As it so happens Washington believes that these talks must be held in the framework of the Simla Agreement of 1972, which is consistent with India's position and which in turn will shape the nature of the dialogue. Delhi welcomed this statement when it was made in Washington.

Pakistan's reality check relates to a different aspect. Unless Pakistan begins to believe that there is no military solution to the problem,

trapped. There has to be change; equally change cannot be artificially engineered. It must emerge from a logic that is acceptable, not least to public opinion in India. The September elections, a Constitutional requirement of democracy, are the obvious key to change. Delhi's responsibility is to ensure that they are free and fair in the sense that there is no King's Party that must be protected by rigging if it cannot win a legitimate mandate. Both Prime Minister Vaipayee and his deputy, Mr Advani, have given such a commitment, and done so repeatedly. The world will watch and make sure that they deliver on this commitment. But free elections are not going to be possible under a hail of jihadi bullets either.

And this is where we return to basics: does Pakistan want peace in Kashmir and over Kashmir or not? If it does then Islamabad will cooperate with Delhi in ensuring, to the best of its ability, that the Sep-

## OPINION

# Ban on student politics: Boon or bane?

SYED KAMALUDDIN AHMED

IT takes me to the days of 1969. I was preparing myself for my school final examination and the whole country was in a state of disarray due to a revolutionary movement against the dictatorial rule of so called iron-man of Pakistan, General Ayub Khan. Ensuing examination could not stop even the young schoolboys of my age from coming out on the street chanting slogans full-throated and essentially emotion bound. I can clearly remember the night before 21 February. Some of my very aggressive and determined class fellows erected a makeshift Shaheed Minar inside Barisal Zilla School premises defying the 'ban' imposed by the school administration. Reminiscing the days of 33 years back I find it so amazing that the young boys merely in their adolescence were so conscious and well aware about the political and economic rights of the people and most scrupulously motivated to work for it. They were selfless, well focussed and knew very well of their cherished destination. Many of our famous and senior politicians of today were students at that time and were our real idols. I still remember how people showed their confidence on the student community and its leadership to carry through the movement against the dictatorial rule in very difficult circumstances.

I have a habit of following the interviews of the students who top

the list in education board examinations. Painfully, most of them say that they do not like student politics at all or the way it is done today. None of them says that they want to do politics and want to bring in a change in it. I tried to ask myself why this has happened. Is it a rational transformation over time or is there something wrong somewhere? Now the highest corner of the nation's government raises the question of banning the student politics. Instead of getting an answer, my confusion is rather further reinforced.

'Student' is not the only identity of students. College and university going students are adult citizens of the country. They have voting rights and rights to get affiliated to any political party. They also have rights to believe in certain ideals or political principles like any other citizen of the country. Incidentally, they are students and therefore their main domain of functioning is their own educational campus. No argument can be justified if they raise their voices when discrimination or injustice is done towards them or if their basic rights are ignored. There is nothing wrong if their political beliefs and ideals inspire their 'raised' voices. Thus if the proposed ban is renamed as a ban on 'campus politics' rather than on 'student politics', the same question of violation of basic rights of an adult citizen remains valid.

The proposed ban may have one rationale that student politics of

today and its consequences interferences enormously with the academic activities of the educational institutions. It is a big loss for the nation and its government, and the incurred loss leaves huge impact on already constrained public exchequer. True. Are not similar consequences quite evident in other functional areas where politics is ever active? What is happening in labour front? We frequently see trade unionism and its political vendetta quite often leading to closure of mills and industries or disruption of transport facilities causing a huge loss in production or even laying off of the industries. Grounds for closing down the Adamjee Jute Mills could not ignore labour unrest as one of its valid reasons. Then should we impose a 'ban' on labour politics? Would you please look at other professional organizations: What happens when doctors or lawyers go on strike to pursue their demands? Hundreds of patients remain untreated; judiciary and adjudication process comes to a halt and what else remains to be said! Would you plan to impose a ban there too? Now if you consider our national politics what we would see! How many working days we have lost due to 'hartal' over last 10 years? Would it be comparable to any of the above losses if you convert them into financial terms? Then would you also impose a ban on national politics?

We see loads of 'letters to the

editor' and columns in national dailies for and against ban on student politics ever since the issue has come into fore front. Recently, people had lots of praise for BUET authority for banning politics in the campus for the time being. It is understandable that it happened, among other reasons, out of frustration especially after the death of Sony in crossfire in the campus. Unfortunately, Sony was not truly a victim of any political violence. She was victim of exchange of fire between two groups of antisocial elements who were fighting over some construction bids of the university. Well, as media says, they have some political identity, but they belong to the same student organization at the same time. Therefore, in probability, there was no political motivation behind this fight at all. People have reasons to lose trust in student politics. We hardly see these days any well-organised and sustained student movement for any national cause or any burning problem of student community itself. But our memory need not go that far back to remember how our student community fought against a dictatorial regime and played a major role in establishing a democratic process in the country only 12 years back. I can very clearly remember the role of student organisations when the major political parties were locked into disagreements about the formation of caretaker government after the fall of an

undemocratic government in 1990. Our memory should not be that short to remember the happenings of February 1983. We have seen how our students valiantly fought against the injustice of military rule and were ruthlessly transgressed but yet kept their heads high.

Why there is a transformation in student politics? What has happened over last few years so that we have to desperately think of banning student politics? Let us be honest and truthful to us, and try not to deshoulder our responsibilities. Let us learn from our experience and see what the evidence points their fingers at. Ever since this God's earth is commissioned, one thing no body could stop its learning. People learn from each other and from their environment, and that is the way they hand down their thoughts, beliefs and ideals through generations. It is more so for younger population. They have bigger responsibility of taking over -- taking over thoughts, beliefs and ideals pursued and nurtured by their past generations. It is a huge responsibility indeed. Learning is a dynamic and continuous process. Learning itself is not enough for its appropriate application, it essentially needs to be internalised, needs to be owned. Internalisation and internalisation only can be translated into pertinent and befitting application. Internalisation of learning is all the more necessary in case of social norms and social values.

Politics in reality cannot ignore social norms and values. Politics without practice of norms and values would not have its appropriate application and cannot yield a rational or realistic outcome.

Every political system has its own way of functioning. People in politics shape their political beliefs and ideals in a way so that it fits into the existing system without distorting or skewing its originality. In order to pursue the purpose and objective of their own politics, political parties have to develop their own manpower. It needs training and personal development so that the well functioning political functionaries become active contributing citizens, not obedient passive fortune mongers. Individual development should be in harmony with the said social norms and values. Otherwise, the political system would have problem in functioning properly and perpetuating its causes uninterrupted. There is ample evidence in this part of the globe, especially in this subcontinent, that how frontline student politicians have turned into well-accomplished state politicians with guidance and blessings from leadership of political parties of their affiliation. There are however genuine arguments that there is a rapid surge of changes in the world of politics these days. These changes obviously brought about changes in

traditional social norms, ideological orientations and economic situation. The changes are always accompanied by societal stress, its population unrest and consequent functional disequilibrium. In order to overcome this state of affair, it needs a quick decision making, a decision to familiarise the political workforce to the changed circumstances well before they are moulded by undesirable demand of the situation. We need to ask ourselves before we impose a ban on student politics, did we fail to accomplish that task? Current scenario of student politics may not be a consequence of politics rather a natural outcome of changes the society, in general, is unable to endure. Our political leaders may also like to have some soul searching. Did we ever give any thought to the affairs of student politics until we reached a decision to impose a ban? Did we guide their political motivation, value judgment and behavioural norms in appropriate way at an appropriate time? Did we ever equate our voice with the student community for their own causes? Could we restrain ourselves from utilizing them for our personal and material political gains? It is time to do an exercise over the issues before the proposed ban is executed.

One can well understand the concern of our Prime Minister over

the issue of student politics. One can also understand her eagerness to have a national consensus on the matter. But there would be no harm to have some more brainstorming. Student politics of this country has a glorious past. Unparalleled contribution of student community at different hours of need cannot be abandoned just like that. Pre-independent 11-point charter of student community, one of the founding stones of our national independence, had more a national flavour than their own causes. Lives of innumerable student members martyred during different difficult periods of the nation are not just history. Why do not we reach a consensus to sit together, look for an alternative, find out a way for a change in right direction and give an effort to redress the current pathetic state of affairs in student politics? After all, student community is one of the few, if not only, selfless communities in our society. They have many more to give. Time has proved that they definitely have such potentials. Instead of doing that if we put a ban on student politics rather hurriedly, it would but only stigmatise the admirable accomplishment of our student community over the decades. It would then be a real bane indeed!

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