

Marawari scam

Some heads should roll

At least Tk 300 crores have been skimmed off from five private sector commercial banks by a pair of scam artists. Such type of flight after loan taking is not an uncommon practice. In the banking world the infamous Raighoria scandal of Chittagong is too well known to be ignored by anyone. What surprises is not that such rip-off artists exist but our lack of precautions.

The banking sector in general doesn't enjoy high esteem in the public eye. It seems too full of murky deals. The sector's reputation has also been permanently sullied by the loan defaulting culture. Given the difficulties people face while transacting business with the banking sector the feeling one has towards the banking world is that of low key hostility and deep frustration. When one hears how the deposited money is frittered away this deepens.

In this particular case, the banks involved are all from the private sector and that raises the question of supervision and regulation. The money doesn't belong to the bank directors but to the depositors, the ignored sector in the banking world.

There is also the matter of complicity between the cheats and the bank officials. It's impossible to siphon off Tk 300 crores without a large number of accomplices. Each time there have been probes the role of the accomplices inside has been exposed. Fortunately for them, the network of corruption is so wide that they get away. Obviously, this may well happen once more.

But the impact of this loss will be felt and for that the price will again have to be paid by the ordinary consumer. There are cheats in the Wall Street but also laws to catch them once in a while. We need those once in a while arrests to have some confidence in the system.

The blow that falls is not on the body of the banks but of the Republic itself. By calling them financial mishandling the authorities are actually helping the country to ruin. One presumes they don't have that right.

Investigate, arrest and punish and block the loopholes so that it doesn't happen again. The rules are simple. It's following them that's proving so difficult.

Ebbing fish resources

Sustained efforts needed to reverse trend

FIFTY species of indigenous fish are extinct today. Twelve more are in the process of dying out. The genera include a whole array of sub-species. So, what we are talking about is a very wide range of fish resources being lost forever. Most of these, once available in abundance, were of great nutritional value, too.

But eating is not all there is to the phenomenon; the extinct species were an integral part of the flora-fauna balance which is so vital for the sustenance of geomorphology on Mother Earth.

We are stretching the point just to underscore the environmental crisis underlying the dwindling fish wealth. Either we stem this ebbing away of the natural resource or bring danger upon our habitat and lives.

The rivers have silted. Natural water bodies like beels, haors, canals, tanks have gone derelict on the one hand and turned into croplands or homesteads on the other. So, these must either be reclaimed to pisciculture, or in-between cropping seasons, given to the same pursuit.

Reckless use of insecticides in agriculture will have to be replaced by application of homegrown yet time-tested antidotes to plant diseases.

The month-long fish breeding season will have to be entirely freed from any catching activity. It should not be difficult to provide the fishermen's (or women's) community with some alternative means of livelihood for a month only.

The existing law on fishing out of season needs to be given more teeth. The law against use of 'current nets' will have to be strictly enforced with a stronger penal action accompanying it. The fries caught in the net that are too small to consume are carelessly strewn around to die. As a rule, these must be released into water as soon as these are spotted on the unfolded net.

It is said that some of our indigenous fish species are being swamped by the culture of imported varieties. This matter needs to be verified in order to address the problem scientifically.

There has to be a two-pronged strategy: one for regeneration of sweet water fish and the other for marine fishery on a massive scale. Then only we can hope to see a 'silver revolution' taking place, a call for which has been given by the prime minister while inaugurating the fisheries fortnight on Saturday.

Pax Americana: Penetrating Eurasia's heartland



M ABDUL HAFIZ

by Russia in is sensitive 'near abroad'. Now in the name of fighting Islamic terrorism the Western coalition led by the world's sole superpower manoeuvred itself not only to exploit the vast energy resources of the Central Asian Republics (CARs) but also to encircle China, the US' only potential rival.

A year after 9/11 which had

also provided strategic staging posts in executing US' military campaigns against Taliban in Afghanistan.

Initially bearing the backlash of their own homegrown Islamic militants and Moscow's opposition to military cooperation with Washington the rulers of these republics were circumspect enough to declare that their extending of territorial facilities to the US was

its June, 2002 issue gave revealing informations about these alliance and agreements some of which the magazine insists were finalised during the weeks soon after 11 September 2001, indicating that the contingency plan for such partnership already existed. It may be mentioned in retrospect that the US establishment in tandem, with corporations like Unocal was desperately trying to stick up deal for

ton promised another \$100m to Tashkent with no strings attached. Sensing similar military and economic opportunity and aware of its geographical importance Kyrgyzstan also allowed the US-led forces to build large establishments at its Manas airport which was subsequently used for both offensive and humanitarian operation. According to an estimate the allied

dered. Washington's support to the authoritarian regimes of CARs, the grant of military and economic largesse and building of based suggest that the US presence in these states is going to be extended one. The US' new terms of engagements in the region ignoring human rights abuses amongst its new-found allies and its emergence as the leading foreign investor in Central Asia's energy sector also tend to reinforce this perception. Moreover the US liberal award of money to the CARs to acquire US weaponry is an attempt to bolster the US' military-industrial complex which rapidly shrank before 9/11. It is observed by the Western diplomats that Washington was greedily seizing the moment to re-enter without opposition its old cold war 'stamping ground' in Asia to maximise profits. It is apprehended that the US military presence at Manas and Khanabad bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan respectively will eventually bring Washington in an inevitable clash with Moscow and Beijing over the region awash with oil and gas deposits. However the US driven out from another end of Asia a quarter of a century back has restored its presence in the continent by holding the CAR's in its tight embrace -- thanks to its ubiquitous war on terror that has provided to be a strategic bonus for Washington.

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

PERSPECTIVES

It is observed by the Western diplomats that Washington was greedily seizing the moment to re-enter without opposition its old cold war 'stamping ground' in Asia to maximise profits. It is apprehended that the US military presence at Manas and Khanabad bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan respectively will eventually bring Washington in an inevitable clash with Moscow and Beijing over the region awash with oil and gas deposits.

successfully roped in both China and Russia on the side of west's war on terror the US seems to have moved decisively to seize the opportunity to obtain its longterm energy and security interests in the region. Today the US' military presence is palpable in strategically located CARs -- Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan -- vital to US oil companies anxious to begin laying pipeline to the Arabian Sea and US administration desperately searching for an alternative to turbulent Arab states to meet its petroleum needs. These republics

only for humanitarian purpose. But as the danger of a backlash and Russian disapproval abated they went whole hog with their military cooperation with the US-led coalition forces. The US also cleverly proceeded in gaining full advantages of these cooperations by forging alliances and entering into strategic agreements ostensibly to fight Islamic terrorism -- a common threat to all. These alliances and agreements were, of course, augmented by economic sops and military largesse, where necessary. The Jane's Intelligence Review in

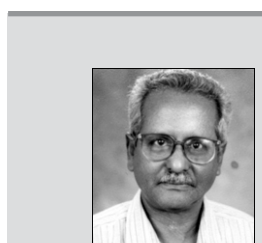
running highly profitable pipeline through Afghanistan even with Taliban in exchange of US recognition to their regime.

During the war against terrorism in Afghanistan while the CARs vied with each other to extend facilities to US-led coalition forces, Uzbekistan offering the best military and transport facilities was considered 'jewel' for the US military in the region. In exchange of granting the US access to Khanabad airbase, Uzbek President Islam Karimov was provided with \$25m to buy military hardware. Over the past six months Washing-

military presence in Kyrgyzstan has so far generated around \$14m for the country's economy. Another \$40m will be pumped into the country by the year end -- mostly from the US. Washington is also expected to spend \$8m to train and finance Kyrgyz military until 2004 -- another indication of US' extended stay in the region.

Although Tajikistan's cooperation to US' war on terror is not much publicised this country too offered its territory for covert operation against Taliban. The US awarded around \$120m to Dushanbe with no question asked for services ren-

Musharraf takes the step further



M.J. ZAHEDI

LETTER FROM KARACHI

Although we yearned, but our broken hearts

Wouldn't allow us enough time, Those were terrible moments, In our anguish of love

Those were sunless day breaks That followed tender, soothing nights.

Faiz, we sacrificed our life, t h o u g h But the words that we wanted to utter, remained unsaid after all that had been said,

To bewail after so many prayers. (Translation from Urdu by Burhanuddin Hasan)

Though the visit was welcome, it ended in a failure because talks on several issues could not make any progress. But a development of great significance took place: it was the decision to establish diplomatic relations at ambassadorial level. Mr Bhutto also took great pains to improve the atmosphere of goodwill even by condemning the brutalities perpetrated on the people of former East Pakistan during the military crackdown of 1971. President Musharraf took the step further by expressing his regrets over what happened in the past. But to bury the past should not be taken as to forget the past because, as a writer in *The News* said: 'because it is critical for a nation to remember its history, especially its wrongdoing, in order to hold the guilty responsible.'

Problems germane to all parties

WITH so many factions of the Pakistan Muslim League already there, another faction to be formed by Ejazul Huq (the son of late President Ziaul Huq) will not be a novel feature of Pakistan's political scene.

Mr Huq was defeated in the election held the other day in the faction (PML-Q) that he was in. The elections came in the wake of the polling held by several other parties well before the deadline. The PML(Q) is widely seen as president Musharraf's support organization that will set up the projected civilian government after the coming October. The exit of Huq suggested that

all was not well in the ranks. There is the usual jostling for future ministerial posts that party members who abandoned their association with Nawaz Sharif, have a legitimate expectancy of receiving. Huq had evidently made a bid for the top post knowing that the incumbent could never become a prime minister, but lost out as his usual source of support was not interested in him any more.

The incident, however, showed that matters will not be easy when the time comes to name a future prime minister. Lacking in a popularly respected leader who has the educational wherewithal to hold high ministerial posts, the PML(Q) is blighted by a problem that has the making of a major crisis in the future. Daily *The News* commented that with the fault lines having become apparent, a few more in-house coalitions in the PML(Q) will produce more factions and leave the government with the harassing task of having to pick and choose from among the large number of PML(Q) splinters claiming authenticity. Probably making intra-party elections a prerequisite for contesting elections was not such a good idea, as while it showed unity among the opposition parties the favoured organization ran into difficulties. But the problems the PML(Q) faces are germane to all parties that emerge after a change of government.

The demise of the PML(N) power created a company of the like minded who saw their future in a much clearer light than others who decided to remain with their old party. Their coming together was lining up the spoils of office rather than because Mian Azhar was better than Mian Nawaz Sharif. In fact, the GDA, now ARD with additions, had made a bid for joining the new regime as its camp followmuck before the like minded flock came together, but in those rarefied political days made no headway. The PML(Q) later emerged out of the collapsing PML(N) to find acceptance.

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Israel has little right to retain UN membership

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

THE leaders of the state of Israel received severe criticism in the Security Council on 25 July 2002 over an air strike that killed 15 Palestinians including top Hamas commander and nine children in Gaza city. All members of the Security Council practically condemned the Israeli attack and said this attack was 'unacceptable and unwarranted,' while the United States representative, an ally of Israel, did not comment on the attack but said Washington would oppose a draft resolution condemning it.

By inference the United States is encouraging Israel to continue its heinous attack on Palestinians on this or that pretext. The United Nations became the victim of veto power threat of the lone superpower, time and again, which made the world body ineffective for all practical purposes. Mere condemnations in the Security Council will not bring any good to the peoples in the region. An effective device should be evolved by the United Nations itself to stop the cycle of violence by both the parties in the conflict in West Asia.

As of now the United Nations failed to initiate peace efforts by bringing the two warring parties -- Israelis and Palestinians -- to the negotiation table since 1973 war. The UN could not stop war between Israel and the Arabs in 1973. With the intervention by superpowers resolutions were secured to halt the fight. The Security Council resolution 242 of 22 November 1967 following the war in which Egypt and Syria received severe humiliation at the hand of Israel was one of the major achievements of the world body. This resolution, however, went in favour of Israel as it called for Israel's peace and security.

The role of the United Nations in the Arab-Israeli conflict took varied forms between 1967 and 1973. The resolution 338 adopted by the Security Council on the Arab-Israeli clash was significant as it called for the parties in the conflict to engage

in negotiations to resolve the crisis. It also called for implementation of resolution 242.

In 1975 in October the third Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations voted in favour of the resolution 3379 (xxx) on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, which identified Zionism as a form of racism and

The members of the United Nations, specially Arab and Muslim states should devise a joint formula to unseat Israel in the United Nations as it has been continuing to defy the collective will of the international community, and economic sanctions should be imposed for its bellicosity.

racial discrimination. In every international gatherings the 1975 formulation i.e. Zionism is racism received prominence, which in fact condemned Israel as racist. On 3 September 2001 both the United States and Israel pulled out of a United Nations world conference against racism held in Durban, South Africa because the conference recognized 'with deep concern the increase of racist practices of Zionism.' Israel was the only country mentioned in the document, which accused the Jewish state of 'practices of racial discrimination'. The decision of the United States to pull out of the conference along with Israel damaged the image of USA.

Resolutions and condemnation against Israel and its leadership for continued violation of human rights - killing innocent civilian Palestinians by using modern arms and ammunition -- did not deter the government of Ariel Sharon in Tel

Aviv from incursion into Palestinian territories in the Gaza and West Bank, time and again. For all practical purposes Palestinians including their elected leader Yasser Arafat happen to be prisoners at the hands of Israeli soldiers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The United Nations failed to send observers' team to monitor the atrocities committed by Israeli troops in Palestinian territories. In spite of uproar in the Security Council and its decision to send a fact finding mission to Jenin to verify the massacres committed at Palestinian refugee camps in Jenin in June 2002 Secretary General of the United Nations could not succeed in dispatching the mission. This was for the first time that the United States did not exercise veto power to stop sending the fact finding mission. It would be worth taking note of the fact that resolutions adopted by the Security Council earlier in sending UN observers group were torpedoed by the veto exercised by the United States. On 29 March 2002 the Security Council resolution calling on Israel for withdrawal of troops from Ramallah was not acted upon by Israel. Instead, it intensified its unabated campaign of killing innocent Palestinians and arresting 'their listed terrorists'.

It is most unfortunate to see inaction of the world body, which was founded to save succeeding generations from the scourge of wars and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights. The world body in fact has failed to honour its fundamental principle.

The members of the United Nations, specially Arab and Muslim states should devise a joint formula to unseat Israel in the United Nations as it has been continuing to defy the collective will of the international community, and economic sanctions should be imposed for its bellicosity.

Mohammad Amjad Hossain is a former diplomat.

OPINION

Education and politics

MD. SAHED ALI

writes from Vancouver, Canada

In the face of eight days of unrelenting student protest marked by sporadic police attacks, DU Vice-Chancellor Prof. Anwarullah Chowdhury stepped down along with Proctor, Prof. Nazrul Islam. A decision of stepping down is praise worthy as this appears to have eased the tension in the University at least for now. At the same time, I wonder as to why and for whose benefit this chaotic situation was created in the first place?

Students and teachers have a glorious past in the history of Bangladesh. Reference could be made about their contribution during the then Pakistan, especially language movement of 1952, 11 points demand and participation in tumultuous movement of 1970, and securing independence of Bangladesh in 1971. Equally important was their role in the restoration of democracy in 1991 that resulted in free and fair election to form a government to rule the country. These are the examples of mass participation of students irrespective of their political affiliation. Parents, common people and the country as whole are

proud of them. Apparently, with the passage of time, politics has taken a nasty route in dividing the students and teachers into different groups and using them to meet political ends. Not that all students and teachers have interest and or involvement in politics, but they are victimised in different ways. Political anarchy, clash between rival political groups, undue influence in the administrative affairs, establishing supremacy and occupying different residential halls of students etc. are the regular features in the educational institutions, especially in the self governing public universities. As a result, the universities are to declare closure, suspend classes and reschedule exams.

A common phenomenon of politicising is the replacement of important positions in the education institutions by political appointees with the change of the government ignoring existing rules and regulations. While in power, a political party does it routinely to control the institute. The root cause of current chaos in the Dhaka University is undoubtedly political and the coalition government can't avoid its responsibility.

The Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University Prof. Anwarullah Chowdhury was a political appointee of the coalition government who reportedly joined hands with Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), student wing of BNP, to remove previous government appointee, Prof. Sultana Shafi, Provost of Shamsunnahar Hall before expiry of her contract. He was successful in his attempt, but the common students protested, and problem started there. Then came the Shamsunnahar Hall raid by riot police in the middle of the night on July 24, 2002.

With regret, the country has witnessed lawlessness in public universities on various occasions. Students belonging to different political parties are seen engaged in armed fight. To them, education does not seem a priority rather it's a way to get a ticket of entry into politics and becoming wealthy without any investment. On June 8, 2002 Sabequn Nahar Sony, a student of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology was killed in a cross fire between two armed factions of JCD on that university campus. The rivalry was over a teachers' housing project

worth Taka ten million as to who win the bidding to get the work.

Her death is a clear message to our politicians how dangerous game they are playing with the students. The nation is mournful about the incident. What consolation do we give to her parents? It is a shame that those armed factions are so-called students of the university.

Not that politicising educational environment is something new. It was there before, and will remain an active pursuit for the future, because, it has proved to be the most effective in changing the fate of our politicians! The general students and parents, nation and the state are the losers in this game. Due to political anarchy, classes could not be held and extra time is required to complete syllabus. Backlog of different sessions continue taking its toll in the form of poor performance of students and doubling the cost of education for the parents and the state itself.

There are important lessons for our politicians, but I doubt they are not interested in learning. It is not BNP and its coalition alone, rather it is the political culture in our country that patronises teachers' and stu-

dents' politics to achieve political goals.

Do we want our kids to receive good education in order to prepare themselves to be responsible citizens? Needless to say that when it comes to modern technology, we are already far behind compared to the standard of even our neighbouring countries. Do we want a good future for our country? Do we want our kids face the challenges and reality of 21<sup>st</sup> century? Then for our future generation and a prosperous Bangladesh we must give top priority to education on everything and anything else. It is time to assess what has happened and still happening in our higher educational institutions. We have lost a good deal of time already and now is the time for action and no more lip service, please!

Let us stand together and come to a consensus about students' and teachers' politics. Let us be fair and immediately discontinue political appointments to not only educational institutions, but elsewhere too. Let us distant ourselves from evil and terror and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Concern for Adibashis

BABUL RABIDAS

THE United Nations (UN) declared the year 1993 as International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples. This was an important milestone towards recognition of rights of the indigenous peoples in the world. Then the UN declaration of International Decade of Indigenous Peoples towards another auspicious move towards making all of us aware of the various issues affecting the indigenous peoples. Now many countries observe the International Day of Indigenous Peoples on August 9. This year last Friday was that occasion to assess and assert the rights of indigenous (Adibashi) communities also in Bangladesh. Some Adibashi organisations and advocacy groups observe the day on own initiatives. Some NGOs adopt special programmes to uphold the issues following the theme for the Day.

A couple of years back, on the occasion Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations, had expressed his hope that historical step would be taken to establish a forum by the year 2002. The established forum would ensure the rights

and meet the needs of indigenous peoples.

There are different opinions about the number of Adibashi communities in Bangladesh. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics has identified 29 tribal groups while Fr. Peter Rema has mentioned of 33 Adibashi communities. A proper research is needed to decide the number and identify the Adibashi communities. This will be helpful for planning and administration of development programmes. The problem also remains in giving the number of Adibashi people. The figures of government census vary a lot compared to the head-count figures in some districts.

The Adibashi people live in different districts of Bangladesh. They are divided into many groups and have their distinct pursuits languages, customs and traditions. They are mainly dependent on agricultural. They had made many uncultivable lands suitable for cultivation in earlier days. They are peace loving people. But they had to abandon many of their cultivable lands and move to another area when pushed out by non-Adibashi mainstream population. There were none to help them for legalising and

preserving land documents. This rendered many Adibashis landless.

The Adibashi people are far behind in developing themselves following the trends of modern approaches and technologies. Lack of education has caused many problems among them. It's a cruel irony that many Adibashi people have become the victims of cheating and deprivation for their simplicity, honesty and generosity.

It is appreciable that Bangladesh government is implementing some development programmes through the Special Affairs Division while some NGOs are taking different programmes for the development of Adibashis. However, the real development of Adibashis depends more on themselves. They have to be more conscious to preserve their rights and maintain their own identity. They have to be developed more through their own efforts. They have to work unitedly to change their lot. Let us promise once again to work together for our development and advancement following the occasion of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

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