

## Depoliticising bureaucracy

**BNP can show the way, but so far it hasn't**

**W**E heartily welcome the Prime Minister's commitment to rid the public service of politics and establish good governance. We also commend her stated desire to create a 'committed, competent and honest administration for people's welfare.' No doubt this is what we desperately need at the moment. But we would also expect the government she heads to practice what it preaches. Whatever we have seen in the past one year were quite contrary to what Khaleda Zia said to the Secretaries on Saturday. Ever since we got independence in 1971, we had witnessed a dangerous tendency towards politicisation of public administration by each successive regime. Every time a new government assumes power, it immediately overhauls the whole administration to suit its own political needs. And funny enough each party claims after doing so that they were de-politicising the administration which, according to the new regime, was heavily politicised by the previous one. But we all know that this is merely a cover of the parties to carry out their own political design; therefore in the name of de-politicising, the party basically puts those on important positions who would be more beneficial to them politically than the others. Whether she is aware of it or not, we would kindly request the Prime Minister to take this from us that her present government is as guilty of taking similar actions as all the previous regimes including her own in the early nineties.

Sadly the bureaucrats themselves have been equally guilty. We have witnessed over the period how some of them had taken full advantage from each of the past governments to pursue their own career further. At times they became more loyal than the King by changing their colours overnight. Particularly the inefficient bureaucrats were and will always be there to serve the political purposes of the government for their own benefits and similarly the parties also use them for their own gain. Such practice, we strongly suggest, has to come to an end. We would urge the officials not to impose their political inclination on their duties. At the same time we would expect the government to be sincere and show real commitment in restoring order, ridding the civil administration of political influence. The officials should be able to work freely and fairly, not with an axe hanging over their shoulder. We would welcome positive action more than just rhetoric. If the PM really and sincerely practices what she declared on Saturday, she will have performed one of the most essential tasks before the nation.

## BSCIC comes to senses

**But transparency needs to be ensured at every stage**

**L**ET us first deal with some facts and figures on the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) industrial estates. The state-owned enterprise has at its disposal 9,000 plots in 78 industrial estates across the country. Of these, some 7,000 plots have so far been distributed among different small and cottage industries. Only about 2,000 of the distributed plots house operative industrial units while the rest are either vacant or have under-construction or sick units. According to a recent survey, the distribution scenario in the remote areas is even more dismal, with nearly 70 per cent of the plots remaining vacant for years on end. Such a grim reality beyond doubts calls for a complete change in the BSCIC outlook as far as industrial estates and their plot distribution are concerned.

Encouragingly, belated though, the BSCIC appears to have learned the truth at last. As its chairman told this paper on Saturday, the state-run enterprise has decided to altogether ditch the concept of traditional industrial estates and now plans modern industrial parks on the basis of entrepreneurs' demand. It also plans a major switch in targeted clientele, from small and cottage industries to small and medium enterprises. Crucially still, the BSCIC appears intent on doing its homework right this time around. A feasibility study has already been initiated for a large industrial park along the Dhaka-Chittagong highway, so has been a needs analysis. Advertisements have been put out in different newspapers and letters sent to different chamber bodies and business organisations. Besides, Bangladesh missions in key cities in the world will be asked to bring the non-resident Bangladeshis into the fold.

So far, it sounds perfect, unfortunately so does every government plan before implementation. Once implementation begins, everything goes awry and corruption and mismanagement creep in. The primary reason is allocation of plots -- industrial, residential or else -- in the country is never transparent. The planned industrial parks will meet the fate of the industrial estates, unless transparency is ensured at every stage.

## Where's bin Laden?



M ABDUL HAFIZ

**W**ITHIN less than a month of terrorists' attack in the US last year when the first cargoes of deadly explosives were unloaded by the American war planes on Taliban front in Afghanistan during the early hours of the night of 7 October 2001, the obvious target was bin Laden, the prime suspect for blasting the Twin Tower and Pentagon. None other than President Bush himself wanted him -- dead or alive. The coalition force dutifully executed an overkill to ensure that the primary target would invariably be within the zone of impact. Even as Taliban front eventually crumbled with the impact of massive US bombing none of the very top leaders of al-Qaida or Taliban was affected. The western allies now extended their area of operations and started bombing all suspected al-Qaida hideouts within Afghanistan including Kandahar where bin Laden and Mullah Omar were supposed to be located. During mid-November last year when this Taliban stronghold was abandoned bin Laden left for Jalalabad where he last granted interview and was publicly seen.

Though the Americans and their western allies do not admit it publicly it is apparent that all the major military operations carried out till date in eastern and southern Afghanistan primarily sought to kill or capture bin Laden. After having detected in a radio transmission from Tora Bora caves a voice which

seemed to be that of bin Laden, the coalition forces shifted their thrust of operation towards that mountain complex in early December last year. While the special forces were employed in Tora Bora in a tedious hunt for bin Laden and his followers the US bombed Khugyan Pass to stop the al-Qaidas from escaping. Yet it appears in hindsight that during a ceasefire in Tora Bora fighting on 9 December, bin Laden

The Bush administration's frustration at failing to achieve this objective is clear from the fact that the US government functionaries from President George Bush to Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and from Tommy Frank to his spokesman Brian Hilferty -- all have virtually stopped referring to bin Laden unless they are pressed to do so by persistent reporters. Earlier no statement of theirs was

through mountainous territory in Paktia was to destroy an ammunition dump belonging to a former Mujahideen commander, Ibrahim Omari, now allied to the US. Certain section of the British media termed the whole exercise a farce. Brigadier Roger Lane, the commander of the British troops at Bagram made a faux pas when he claimed that the war in Afghanistan was all but over and was promptly replaced. The

and its jingoistic media strongly believed bin Laden and his close associates to be hiding. However, all the raids and arrests of suspected tribesmen and Afghan refugees there up till now yielded nothing.

Now after more than a year of war on terror in Afghanistan when the phenomena like al-Qaida and Taliban are only part of the history there is fresh spate of speculations

has now added India's Kashmir valley and Pakistan's northern areas to the list of his hideouts. But there are few takers of this theory.

The US, despite its reticence on Laden at a later stage has now come out with several speculations following a series of terrorists' activities that include gunning down of an US diplomat in Amman, hostage taking in Moscow theatre and carnage in Bali's night club. The US finds al-Qaida links with these terrorists' actions indicating that Osama bin Laden must be alive and behind these highly symbolic attacks. Last week the US renewed for the second time this month a worldwide caution warning her citizens abroad of the continuing terrorist threats against American interests posed by bin Laden and his al-Qaida network. The heightened tensions about impending attacks was also accentuated by the execution of Mir Aimal Kansi, a Pakistani who was convicted of 1997 murder of two CIA agents. Meanwhile, according to a recent CIA assessment al-Qaida has already returned to its pre-11 September preparedness and organisational ability. Many however doubt the assessment of CIA which, with all of its resources, cannot even catch an one-eyed Mullah Omar on the run -- let alone the question of capturing bin Laden who remains as elusive as ever.

With bin Laden nowhere in sight the US government is still under tremendous pressure to either capture him alive or retrieve his body. Until that is done the US military intervention in Afghanistan will be considered unsuccessful even if her secondary goal of the campaign -- to dislodge the Taliban regime -- has been achieved. Also the speculation and rumours about Laden will continue to proliferate until he is captured or confirmed as dead.

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

## PERSPECTIVES

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and other al-Qaida leaders might have sneaked out of the complex using the same Khugyan escape route.

Now onward bin Laden totally slipped into obscurity and any news of him was based on sheer conjecture. The allied forces, however, desperately continued with their hunt for bin Laden and to that end carried out Operation Anaconda in Shahikot near Gardez in early spring. Operation Mountain Sweep and most recent Operation Condor -- all of which were geared to capture bin Laden and his top lieutenants but to no avail. A secondary purpose of all these campaigns was to apprehend and eliminate Taliban leaders -- none yet charged with any specific crime except harbouring bin Laden. That bin Laden continues to haunt the United States is evident from the relentless search to capture him dead or alive.

complete without a customary condemnation of America's enemy number one. Now efforts are made not to mention even his name in order to avoid embarrassment.

Operation Mountain Sweep was by far the most elaborate effort to find al-Qaida and Taliban officials and, of course, their top leaders bin Laden and Mullah Omar in the border areas that link Afghanistan and Pakistan across the Durand Line. Khost, Paktia and Paktika provinces in south Afghanistan were its specific targets but the operation's another major objective was to plough the mountain passes leading into Pakistan's semi-autonomous tribal belt. The freshly arrived 1700 British marines became involved, for the first time, in a military campaign in Afghanistan when they were airlifted from Bagram airbase to the scene of action. All they managed to do during their sweep

Pentagon insisted that its war on terrorism in Afghanistan was far from over. As far as the US was concerned the war was just entering a spanking new phase.

In fact, the American telecommunication experts and elite forces were freshly assigned duties to track down fleeing al-Qaida and Taliban officials across border in Pakistan. It was an extraordinary development because, for the first time, any foreign force was allowed by the government to conduct military operation in Pakistan's tribal areas whereas till recently even Pakistani soldiers were not welcome there. The capture of Laden's aide Abu Zabaidda and more than 50 other al-Qaida and Taliban operatives in central Punjab city of Faisalabad strengthened the US case to be allowed to track down bin Laden and his top lieutenants in Pakistan's tribal areas where the US

about bin Laden's whereabouts. The officials of interim Afghan government continue to offer divergent theories on the likely abode of bin Laden. Most of them point towards Pakistan, but other like Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah believes that Laden is still in eastern or southern Afghanistan. Hamid Karzai who should know more than his ministers because of his proximity to the Americans consistently said that he had no knowledge about Laden. Meanwhile President Musharraf of the frontline state of Pakistan has now stopped commenting on the issue after giving contradictory statements about bin Laden. Islamabad however consistently denied bin Laden's presence in Pakistan. The widely quoted Israeli website DEBKA which has all along said without offering any evidence that bin Laden is holed up in snow covered Pamir mountains

## The next SAARC summit seems hanging in the balance

ZAGLUL A. CHOWDHURY.

**T**HE next SAARC summit in Pakistan seems to be hanging in the balance. The event is scheduled to take place at the beginning of the new year but no dates have so far been fixed for the conference of the heads of government of seven member countries and it appears that the summit may not be held on the right time unless whatever uncertainty looms over the event is removed soon.

Once again, Indo-Pakistan rivalry and differences may result in the delaying of the meeting of the heads of government, which is expected to take a number of important decisions as a follow-up of the last summit in Nepal, early this year. If the event fails to take place, these decisions at the highest level may be left to backburner for indefinite period. If finally the event is unfortunately postponed, the development may be construed as a setback for the 17-year-old regional forum which may not have flourished much owing to certain problems but has rendered some remarkable contribution to the quest of forging economic and other cooperation among the nations of the most densely populated region of the world.

Earlier this year, there were reasons for the seven-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to cheer about as the much-awaited and much-delayed summit took place in Kathmandu belying scepticism about the forum, and bringing it back on the right track. This meant a lot for the SAARC which was gripped by a degree of frustration and uncertainty since the postponement of the

summit, which was scheduled for November, 1999. The well-wishers of the forum, which was set up in 1985 as a vehicle for economic cooperation among the seven regional nations noted with dismay that the efforts for consolidation and expansion of the on-going cooperation in different fields suffered serious setback due to the unfavourable situation that had prevailed center-

summit could at least be held. India clearly refused to share dais with Pakistan at the highest level. Fortunately, the ambience later changed after the two countries themselves had bilateral summit in India. Whatever was the outcome of the talks of their leaders, fact remained that they established contacts and this had positively influenced the future programmes of the SAARC. The

in Bangladesh capital Dhaka is not showing anything much great but certainly it has accomplished some reasonably good jobs since inception. But it often gets embroiled in problems due to political developments in the region. Going by the SAARC charter, the conference of the heads of government of the member nations is an annual event but this could not be maintained due

This scenario obviously affects the functioning of SAARC in an effective manner since a kind of frustration coupled with inertia creeps into the organisation itself which, needless to say, cannot move much when disputes rage on holding meeting at the highest level. The sceptics feel that this unfortunate situation has occasionally dealt a body blow to the forum. The uncertainty over

Vajpayee-Musharraf summit has paved the way for holding the Kathmandu summit. Earlier, the internal matters of Pakistan, which was the presence of a military person at the helm was also cited for New Delhi's unwillingness to take part in the summit. While there must be no slackening of admiration for democracy in the region, the internal matter of a member nation should not be any reason for another country for lack of interest in the heads of government conference. In the first summit in Dhaka when the SAARC took off, the then Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi and Pakistan's military dictator Gen. Ziaul Huq, all were present.

The New Delhi-Islamabad differences are nothing new and too well-known but the SAARC was born taking into account the political problems in the South Asian region as a reality that should not deter the process of cooperation in the economic, social, cultural and other areas. Two principal players of SAARC -- India and Pakistan -- must see to it that their bilateral disputes do not affect the forum of seven nations. Bangladesh, as the principal force behind the formation of the group and Nepal, as the current chairperson of the SAARC may take some initiatives towards the direction of not allowing the next summit again to be a victim of delay. They can implore upon both New Delhi and Islamabad on this matter and for that matter any other member not keen to attend the summit on time unless there are compulsive reasons. After all, the meeting of the heads of government is a major event for the SAARC and if it suffers by inordinate delay, the whole exercise of the regional cooperation receives a setback -- no matter in a big way or small.

## MATTERS AROUND US

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ing the organisation since the postponement of the 1999 summit. For, there was no forward movement in the activities of the forum because the conference could not take place due to differences between two major countries, India and Pakistan, and this cast an adverse impact on the functioning of the forum. The summit was also to take a number of important decisions which would have gone a long way to benefit the smaller countries in the SAARC, in matters of trade and business particularly. But the summit was uncertain for a long time since two major nations could not resolve their differences to the extent that the

royal palace massacre in Nepal, the host of the last summit, was also responsible for another round of delay of the event, which was attended by all the leaders, notably the leaders of India and Pakistan. Despite certain dramatic moments and events surrounding the presence of Indian prime minister A B Vajpayee and Pakistan's President General Pervez Musharraf, the event went off fairly well. The conference took some major decisions towards strengthening the SAARC cooperation.

The SAARC that came into being in 1985 through first meeting of the leaders of seven regional countries

to lack of unanimity for the timing of the conference on a number of occasions. No summit can be held unless all members are unanimous about its occurrence. This time no confirmation was still available from India and reportedly also from Bhutan on the attendance of their leaders. This casts a shadow on the timely happening of the next summit since much time is not left for the event which requires a lot of preparatory works.

True, the SAARC summits were postponed earlier too due to certain differences but this undesirable feature portends no good for this not-nascent but not-too-old a forum.

summits causes harm psychologically and otherwise to the SAARC on which people of the region pin hopes even if such hopes are not very big for the reason that the region has many problems including resource constraints.

What cleared the decks for the last summit was the Indo-Pak summit in Agra that brought the leaders of India and Pakistan together for the first time since General Pervez Musharraf came to power in Pakistan. The aversion of Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to meet the Pakistani military ruler was a stumbling block to the regional conference.

## Is Japan going for nuclear missile defence?

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

**T**HE North Korean leadership is once again at the centre of international attention after a Pyongyang radio announcement said to have suggested last week that the country is already in possession of nuclear and other deadly weapons intended for defending the nation from outside attacks. The economy of North Korea is no doubt in utterly bad shape. But this doesn't prevent the country to come up time to time with hints that take the whole world pondering on the motives and attitudes of the leadership. Experts in Washington, Tokyo, Seoul and some other places are now trying to solve the new riddle coming out of Pyongyang -- do they have a nuclear bomb or not? The radio announcement monitored on November 18 suggested that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has nuclear and other powerful resources for resisting US aggression.

The announcement was initially taken seriously by North Korea's closest neighbors, particularly Japan and South Korea, as the

brunt of heat from any possible use of nuclear weapon in the region is bound to affect them much more seriously than the enemy that the radio announcement mentioned. However, the South Korean unification ministry later suggested that the experts analyzing the monitored radio announcement might have misread one syllable in the North Korean announcer's pronunciation where he only confirmed that the country has 'the right to' possess nuclear weapons.

But whatever the corrections and modifications might be, the early shock has already initiated fresh debates in Japan about country's preparedness to counter any such threat coming from Pyongyang. Japan is now sharply divided over the issue of dealing with North Korea as the question of abducted Japanese nationals are becoming more and more complicated after the hardliners within the government compelled the administration not to allow five returned abducted Japanese, who were in Japan on a two-week trip, to return to Pyongyang. The recent confusion surrounding North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons has further

strengthened the position of hardliners who are long campaigning for a militarily stronger Japan capable of countering North Korean threats.

Two separate statements coming from two important figures in within twenty-four hours visibly exposed the rift within the Japanese

In a separate statement next day, Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi said it was important for Japan to maintain and push forward dialogue with North Korea. But the foreign minister also made it clear that the government has not yet made a decision on its plan to hold security

Korea. He told the news agency that it was quite natural for Japan to consider a missile defence system, as the country currently had no means to protect itself from missile attacks. He saw the threat real as he pointed out North Korea's deployment of 100 Nodong missiles

ruling camp to press for Japan's missile defence programme. Earlier this month the Director General of Japan's defence agency Shigeru Ishiba said at a meeting of the lower house security committee that missile defence was one option in dealing with an adventurous state

approximately six years and cost the country 20 to 30 billion yen.

No doubt the Bush administration of the United States is pushing Japan to move forward with the project, as it wants Tokyo's funding for the programme to continue. Towing the line of the current administration, various US intelligence reports suggest the North Korean missile threat as real and defence analysts say Pyongyang already possesses a number of nuclear weapons as well as several types of chemical weapons, including nerve gas and other deadly toxic substances. Moreover, Nodong missiles deployed by North Korea are said to be capable of carrying such weapons to any part of Japan.

As the normalization talks between Japan and North Korea is moving nowhere due to the deadlock created over the issue of abduction, defence officials in Japan are keen on pressing for extra budget to move ahead with the missile defence proposal. However, the close circle of the prime minister as well as foreign ministry officials are reluctant to move much further with the missile defence project.

The Pyongyang joint declaration signed by the leaders of Japan and North Korea recognizes the importance of dialogue in dealing with national security issues. Missiles and nuclear weapons issues precisely fall into that category. Koizumi aides are saying that promoting missile defence would damage the very foundation of understanding between the two sides.

Another aspect that the government is seriously considering is China's response to such Japanese initiative. The Koizumi camp is concerned that any serious progress on missile defence could upset China.

Moreover, the current economic situation of Japan is also not favourable for the country to burden the cost of missile defence. Defence analysts estimate that the development stage of the project alone might carry a price tag as high as one trillion yen. As a result, despite the enthusiasm and upbeat mood of the hardliners, Japan's missile defence might not see the accelerated pace desired by many of them.

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government. Talking to the Reuters in Tokyo last Thursday, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe said North Korea must agree to let the abducted Japanese nationals' North Korea-born children come to Japan before normalization talks could continue. Abe is a key government figure for North Korea policy and is well known for his hard-line position on issues of vital national interest.

and normalization talks with North Korea and is still considering various options. But conspicuously absent from Kawaguchi's comment was any mention of the abducted Japanese nationals or their families, an issue Abe and his camp are always willing to cite without failing.

In the same Reuters interview Abe was also quite open about his position concerning Japan's capability of countering threat from North

against which Japan doesn't have any effective defence. The close aide to Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi was quite blunt in his assessment of responsibilities as he proclaimed that Japan has an obligation to consider missile defence and hinted that the country was moving from the research stage to actual development in that particular field.

Abe is no lonely wolf within the

that is not affected by deterrence. He also suggested if research results proved to be beneficial the country would move ahead to the development stage.

It should be mentioned that Japan entered into a joint technology research project with the United States in 1999. The three stages of the project involve research, development, and production and deployment. The research stage is to take