

Human cloning A wide range of ethical issues still unresolved

EVER since Dolly the Sheep, it had merely been a question of time before the first human baby was born through cloning. If the claim of French scientist and member of the Raelian cult Brigitte Boisselier were to prove right, the world might have witnessed the birth of the first human clone. In all likelihood, similar claims would be made in the next few days and weeks. In May, the United States Congress was told that five groups of scientists were racing to produce the first cloned human baby. In late November, controversial Italian gynaecologist Severino Antinori said a woman carrying a cloned human embryo was expected to give birth in early January. A new era in human reproduction may have already started. Historically, mankind is wont to greet any scientific breakthrough with disdain and scepticism. It has always been the libertarians who take the lead in accepting the discovery or the inventions and persuade others into acceptance. In case of the latest scientific breakthrough, however, the staunchest of the libertarians may think twice before taking a position. The reason: we still don't know enough about human cloning.

In principle, it is very simple (and that is why sometimes likened with, albeit incorrectly, in vitro fertilisation): find a donor egg, remove the nucleus or core, inject DNA from the person whom you wish to copy. The DNA "reprograms" the egg, transferring into it the entire genetic code of the donor. In reality, it is not as simple as it sounds. Only around one in 20 animal clones survives; many come with terrible deformities (even Dolly the Sheep, it was reported, developed arthritis). The biggest challenge, according to scientists, is to ensure that all genes in the transferred code work properly performing the dazzlingly complex business, which is the making of tissue and the repairing of it. Tests in lab animals have shown that, even though all the genes are there, many of them do not appear to switch on and off as they should. Malfunctioning genes can cause an embryo to become malformed, prompting the body to expel it in a miscarriage. Such failure in animal cloning may be tolerable; it certainly isn't when we are dealing with human beings.

However, beyond the safety concern, lies the ultimate ethical question: even if hundred per cent safe, should we tinker with, and tailor, human genes? General fear is that human cloning would lead to a form of eugenics, with the parents seeking to eradicate character traits such as homosexuality or actively selecting good genes athleticism, tallness, high IQ in their children. In the long run, it would usher in another divide: the rich parents would be in control over the genetic makeup of their offspring while the poor ones would be left out. These possibilities are all in the realm of speculation. We still don't know what human cloning would lead us to.

This is why it is imperative that there be a global ban on human cloning. Encouragingly, the United States has promised to work with the United Nations towards a global ban after a year's delay. Before the treaty takes a shape, the governments across the world should introduce and enforce prohibition on human cloning within their territories.

Tannery wastes

Yawning gap between policy and practice

A lot has been said and written about the tanneries in the city's Hazaribagh area, which are a source of pollution of the extremely damaging kind.

The presence of tannery plants in densely populated urban areas speaks volumes for our poor understanding of environmental concerns. The question is when the government's visible worry about environmental issues will finally be reflected in its actions?

If statistics are anything to go by, a staggering quantity of untreated, highly toxic effluents are discharged every day by the tanneries. And the narrow trickle of water, still known as Buriganga, is their ultimate destination. It seems nobody is aware of the harsh truth that there is a price to pay for the unplanned and unscientific disposal of industrial wastes. Residents of the areas, exposed to pollution caused by the tanneries, are showing physical symptoms of being affected by toxic substances over a long period of time. Buriganga water has already been polluted well beyond the permissible level. All forms of aquatic life have disappeared from the river, which is being squeezed from both sides by encroachers. It is good news that the government is taking some tangible steps to evict the encroachers and save the dying Burganga. But it is equally important that pollution of the river by industrial wastes is checked as a matter of top priority. The river cannot take a heavy load of tannery wastes, not less than 22,000 cubic metres a day, and still survive.

There are prescribed methods of industrial waste disposal, which are followed all over the world. Unfortunately, the rules are honoured more in the breach than in the observance in our context. Most of the industrial units do not yet have effluent treatment plants, which are needed for safe disposal of wastes. It is not clear why the department concerned could enforce the rules; nor do we know what punitive action it is taking against the industrial units that violate the rules.

Violation of rules in this particular instance, we ought to remember, is not a harmless act of ignoring our environmental needs; rather it has a great negative impact on public health. The talk of protecting the environment also loses its meaning when such potent sources of pollution are allowed to exist.

The government should act before Hazaribagh has to be abandoned as a place unfit for human habitation.

Apocalyptic disorder

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

TWO opposite processes set in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War — one of disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and the other the enlargement of NATO and European Union. Almost overnight the statues of Lenin and Marx were toppled and broken bit by bit in public expression of contempt as they represented the "backwardness" of Communism as opposed to utopian "success" of western capitalism. Leningrad reverted to its former name of St. Petersburg, its ornate palaces restored to its former grandeur.

Amongst this enthusiastic milieu the old started to become redundant; the older generation who had deified Marx, Engel and Lenin and sculpted their features and figures at public squares and in their hearts made the horrific discovery in their days of infirmity that the exuberance of the youth has swept away the comfort of the remaining days. They were not to be equated with the homeless of the affluent societies who somehow have fallen through the cracks of social safety net.

For these people there were neither bread lines nor any soup kitchens. Their retirement benefits, enough at the old price, could now barely buy a few crumbs of bread. Those who had not reached the retirement age lost their jobs, as their skills were found inadequate by the new employers. Cramped flats, small in size from the time these were built, became spacious as initially odds and ends and then furniture got sold to supplement meagre living expenses.

Passage ways of underground stations and dilapidated warehouses became permanent living quarters of millions of people who found no reason to be terribly excited about this newly bestowed "freedom". Indeed, among the very few places in the world where the victory of capitalism over communism could be seen so starkly and clearly than in Germany.

Small pieces of the Berlin Wall

are now sold at souvenir shops. Where the formidable wall once stood ferociously guarded by Honecker's hordes, one has to be very observant to find out the old fault lines. Friedrich Strasse at the heart of Berlin glitters with thousands of lights and houses the shops of top designers of the world. Alexanders Platz, heart of former East Berlin, wears a completely new look. As the cliché goes Rome was not built in a day, nor did Germany acquire this fresh look just because Berlin Wall disappeared.

Former West Germans continue to pour in billions of dollars every year to bring the living standard of former East Germany to a comparable level. Added to money are the German traits of hard work, discipline and Teutonic values. Yet the

fastr development startles the eyes of the beholder. Though much has been done, more remains to be done.

But since this article is not on Germany but a tawdry through the divergent paths resultant of the Cold War let us stay on course. It appears the pull factor leading the expansion of the EU has been caused by the expectancy of the aspirant states to share prosperity. One can discount security threat perception simply because the locus of such threat does not exist any more. Warsaw Pact is dead. Some of its former members were invited last month at Prague to begin accession talks to join NATO.

According to Prague Summit Declaration their accession would strengthen security in the Euro-

pean region, or of scale. They are looking for ever more dramatic and devastating outrages". All said and done terrorist threat alone does not adequately explain the need for expansion of NATO up to Russia's door step nor US' hawkish attitude on Iraq where even the UK is now reportedly inclined to seek explicit UN approval for military attack on Iraq.

Toning down of the British position is perhaps due to popular disquiet and unanimous House of Commons Foreign Affairs' Committee Report which found fault with Jack Straw's unaring attitude towards possible impact of a war on Iraq, on other Middle Eastern countries and the Committee's recommendation that any British military intervention should have the back-

Saudis are particularly incensed over the detention of hundreds of Muslims who went to register their names with the INS as they were asked to do evoking the painful memories of concentration camps set up for the Japanese Americans during the Second World War.

Tension over Iraq situation has been further compounded by North Korean nuclear obduracy fraught with acute danger. North Koreans have reportedly disabled IAEA installed monitoring cameras at the North Korean nuclear reactor capable of producing weapon grade plutonium. The removal of the IAEA seals and disabling of the monitors are indicative of preparatory steps to reactivate the reactor. US government estimates that North Korea

could produce up to fifty nuclear weapons a year if all three of its frozen nuclear reactors are put into operation in the coming years. In that event the issue could assume greater importance for world security than the Iraq crisis because North Korea has been developing long-range missiles capable of delivering nuclear warheads.

Despite North Korean accusation that the US hard liners are pushing the Korean peninsula to the brink of nuclear war, Washington has no indication yet that Pyongyang has gone beyond dismantling IAEA installed monitoring devices. Colin Powell presently at Tokyo stated that US administration was not anxious to escalate the problem. At the same time he reiterated US refusal to be blackmailed. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld has cautioned North Korea against nuclear brink-

manship because global attention is at the moment focused on Iraq. US, he warned, could fight and win two wars simultaneously. He, however, admitted that diplomacy still remained the best way to deal with this reclusive Stalinist state. It is unlikely that the US would take unilateral action without consulting Japan and South Korea who would be directly affected by any military conflict. If the US were to choose the UN route then China as a permanent member on the UNSC and the only substantial donor to North Korea is unlikely to pass through a resolution involving punitive military action. How does then the international community devise an equitable formula to deal with situations like in Palestine (Israel reportedly possesses more than hundred nuclear weapons); Iraq (still suspected of hiding WMD); and North Korea (given Pyongyang's admission last year to a US delegation of its programme to produce weapon grade enriched uranium)? Presuming that truant nation-states can be brought within the ambit of a strict regimen to prevent proliferation, iron-clad prescription have to be devised to prevent WMD or its technology from falling into terrorist hands. The United Nations still remains to be the only institution available through which this can be done.

It is indeed a sombre Christmas for the world bedeviled by uncertainty of apocalyptic potentials. In his Christmas Day message the Pope made his first public reference to the Iraq crisis (Vatican believes that any action on Iraq must be approved by the UN) and called on the key players "in the Middle East, to extinguish the ominous smoldering of a conflict which, with the joint efforts of all, can be avoided". One hopes that both the "delinquents" and the "interventionists" would not act in haste, which could bring down the roof of the world on its unsuspecting people.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is retired secretary to Bangladesh government and former ambassador.

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expected confluence of prosperity with relatively less affluence (former East Germany was generally recognized as the most industrialized in East Europe) has not been fully realized.

Many East German factories were locked up, their machineries found wanting by western standard, causing inevitable unemployment which even today remains higher in the East than the national average. The youth in large number has migrated to the West, which promised employment on far better terms with boundless freedom they never had.

During the last decade, the dream of unification having been achieved, the commitment to develop the Eastern part proceeded at incredible pace. True as one drives from the West towards the heartland of East Germany the need for still

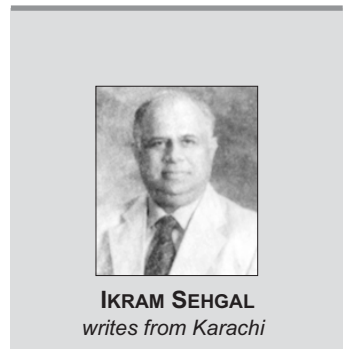
Atlantic area and help achieve "common goal of a Europe whole and free, united in peace" and committed to shared democratic values and to the UN Charter. Prague summit kept the door open for future expansion. Additionally at St. Petersburg (after the Prague summit) President Bush clearly stated that "the strategy of NATO is going to be based upon the fact that the Cold War is over; Russia is a friend; Russia is not an enemy" Then why NATO expansion? Indeed, why NATO at all?

Partially the answer could be found in the premise that with the disappearance of the old Soviet bloc enemy the centre stage has been taken over by terrorism attacking the western population, territory and forces. "Today's breed of terrorist" said British Prime Minister, "knows no bounds of geography, of inhu-

manity, or of scale. They are looking for ever more dramatic and devastating outrages".

Meanwhile Russia's Igor Ivanov has stood by Iraq by declaring that a military campaign ran counter to Moscow's national interests. He advised the US to strictly abide by the UN resolutions particularly 1441, which lays down the road map for Iraq's strict compliance to disarm itself. Danish Prime Minister, the current EU President (due to expire by the end of the year according to EU's six monthly rotating Presidency) is inclined to give diplomacy a chance without being distracted by the sounds of sabre rattling. Syria, the only UNSC Arab member, is dead opposed to military attack on Iraq as are the Saudis at this point of time. Only the unwise would disregard their advice given Saudi Arabia's tremendous influence in the Muslim world and Syria's reported influence over the radical elements.

Financial myths



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

lighted numerous economic challenges frustrating efforts to lower rising poverty in the country. However the WB report praised the steady pace of reforms and achievements on the external account, which has certainly improved the macro picture.

Governor, State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Dr Ishrat Hussain recently warned that populist measures are anathema for economic reforms, in the end they frustrate good governance. Authoritarian regimes can

regime's blind reliance on Ghulam Ishaq Khan's myopic economic policies. The Pakistan Banking Council (PBC) which ran the Nationalised Commercial Banks (NCBs) inculcated many corrupt practices but the NCBs avoided suffering the same rampant public loot as that perpetrated by un-accountable bureaucrat managers running nationalised industries and commercial enterprises during the period between 1977 and 1985. The NCBs became susceptible after

money-laundering. And who were these "private" bankers and "investment advisors", what was the lineage of these "patriotic" Pakistanis, how did they manage such easy access to the crooked and the faithless, what role have they played in beggaring Pakistan? And have they been taken to task or do they still enjoy universal power within the country?

There has been substantial "economic revival" since Oct 1999 but to give all the credit to the

Banking Council (PBC) in 1977, among the (five) financial reforms was SBP's autonomy. The government turned to expatriate Pakistani bankers, acquiring the services of the superb Moinuddin Khan from Standard Chartered to revamp the Central Board of Revenue (CBR) and two outstanding Citibank executives, Shaikat Tareen for Habib Bank and Zubyr Soomro for United Bank. Though extremely hard to attract an effective team of banking professionals attuned to modern

(political) mistake of targeting some of Mian Nawaz Sharif's friends and (fellow) politicians as major tax evaders. Shaikat Tareen was almost put on ice because he would not sanction dubious loans, worse he tried to recover loans, what cheek! Similar pressures started being applied on Zubyr Soomro. Because of Pakistan's liberal foreign exchange policies (announced to his credit by Mian Nawaz Sharif), Pakistanis abroad (and within Pakistan) had deposited about US \$10 billion in our coffers.

The extravagant spending of each of the alternate political governments of Ms Benazir and Mian Nawaz Sharif over the past decade had eaten this up. May 28, 1998 brought the Catch-22 watershed of all of Pakistan's financial problems. With Pakistan's exploding the bomb in reply to India's nuclear initiative of several weeks earlier, the economic planners braced themselves for large scale withdrawals. With nothing in the treasury to stop a "run" on the banks, the government froze "foreign exchange" accounts and thereby sent Pakistan's financial credibility into a tailspin. Money shies away from uncertainty; we became literally bankrupt. While the financial responsibility had eventually been made good, the damage was done, confidence in Pakistan's financial commitments was badly eroded.

Mian Nawaz Sharif was a populist trying to be a reformer, his populism won out to the detriment of Pakistan. Senator Ishaq Dar who replaced Senator Sartaj Aziz as Finance Minister combined with SBP Governor Yaqub to get the best deal possible from IMF. In the circumstances, it was not good enough to rescue Pakistan economically. The May 28 foreign exchange "freeze" was the final nail in Pakistan's economic coffin, we staggered along. What the military regime inherited on Oct 12, 1999 was a gigantic economic mess. The only bright spot: the reforms enacted were slowly taking hold, but many more were needed and at a more drastic pace.

Ikrām Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

AS I SEE IT

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1985 with the advent of democracy. By mid 1990, there was a general realisation that before denationalisation (or its more sophisticated term "privatisation") the NCBs badly needed to be reformed.

When loans are given without financial viability and merit it is a recipe for trouble, when the bank knows that the recipient has no intention of returning the loans then it spells financial disaster. The NCBs competed with each other to give atrocious loans, sometimes for personal financial gains by the bankers themselves, but mainly due to political and/or bureaucratic coercion and/or a combination of all three. While we got a lot of rich bankers and nouveau wealthy "businessmen", this proverbial last straw destroyed Pakistan's economy. Spending illegal money within the country would be bad enough, unfortunately for Pakistan the "private banking" play came into play i.e. how to stash illegal money in numbered accounts abroad, and earn "profit" on the sum "invested" on the advice of "investment advisors", a sophisticated means for

Musharraf regime would not be entirely fair to the political regimes that preceded it. With the economic sword of doom hanging over them, first Mian Nawaz Sharif in 1991, and then alternately Ms Benazir and Mian Nawaz Sharif, made moves to reform the economic imbalances, nudged along forcefully by the World Bank and the IMF. Ms Benazir persevered with the creeping independence of the Central Bank as mandated by former World Bank employee Moin Qureshi during his "Caretaker" stint as Pakistan's PM in 1993.

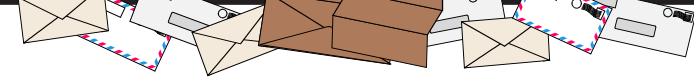
While Mr VA Jafarey did a good job as her Finance Advisor, Senator Sartaj Aziz (and his successor Senator Ishaq Dar) did an outstanding one for the Mian Nawaz Sharif government. In the face of their leader's profligacy they held their ground and thus saved the economy from irretrievable damage. Sartaj Aziz made drastic changes in the NCBs to retrieve the abysmal economic situation. With good advice from SBP Governor Yaqub Khan, he dismantled the Pakistan

practices, they managed to cajole other Pakistani expatriates enjoying excellent jobs abroad to return home to lower salaries (and perks) and rank uncertainty, using personal friendships to appeal to their patriotism and sense of duty. Some home-based jobless black sheep did slip in, for the most part the team members selected were outstanding.

Re-structuring was a totally new discipline for (late) Moinuddin Khan, known as a strategic planner par excellence and logistical genius in banking circles, nevertheless he turned CBR around to an extent. History must record that Finance Minister Sartaj Aziz enacted the first reforms by the Mian Nawaz Sharif government in 1991 but the shari, Moinuddin Khan, Shaikat Tareen and Zubyr Soomro, should also be credited for seriously starting on the road back to a semblance of economic sanity in 1997. Unfortunately for Pakistan, Mian Nawaz Sharif's sincere intent ultimately came to grief at the altar of populism.

The first to fall from favour was Moinuddin Khan, his CBR made the

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



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Censorship

This is in regards to the letters about the censorship of several pages of last weeks Economist magazine.

The Economist was kind enough to fax me the offending articles. One dealt with the recent student protests in Iran. This was not the one which was considered offensive, especially since the front-page story of last weeks Newsweek also deals with the same issue. The second one was about the Miss World related riots in Nigeria. Of course you've all now guessed what was considered offensive by our censors who obviously don't read our own local papers.

The Economist article said nothing new; it simply mentioned the article published in a local Nigerian paper allegedly insulting the prophet, which set off the riots. Almost identical reports were published in all the local papers including *The Daily Star*.

MA
Dhaka

Sedition charge

I condemn the recent arrests of journalists and writers in Bangladesh on sedition charge. I wonder if freedom of expression really does exist in Bangladesh. The successive elected governments still uses a colonial era sedition law which is

a shame for any sovereign nation. There is no doubt that the right to express views without fear is a fundamental element of democracy.

During the Pakistani military rules we have experienced this oppressive measures to deprive us from our rights. In my view, Bangladeshi politics, due to its inherent corruption, is still not mature enough to appreciate the advantages of a free society where variety of opinions strengthens democracy. The present BNP Government, if they claim that they are better than the previous AL government, must behave responsibly to prove that claim. Let them

show that they understand and respect rule of law.
Akbar Hussain
Toronto, Canada

"US talks tough..."

"The US hawks talks tough on DPRK" (December 25) and shockingly threatened them "saying US could fight and win two wars at once!"

This is not the first time that the US has been threatening this country or that country "to use force" on this or that plea--this time accusing DPRK of trying to "divert attention from its own nuclear ambitions".

This is indeed frustrating to see

the US continuing threatening or attacking the weaker. This country should have, a long time ago, been declared the number one terrorist country which have in fact kept terrorism alive globally.

I wonder why the whole world has remained silent and are not asking for disarming the US and Israel? Why the rest of the world is unable to talk tough on the USA? Why they remain indifferent when threats are rampant on weaker states like Iraq, DPRK or Iran? If USA and Israel fail to disarm themselves, they have no right or jurisdiction to ask others for disarmament.
AF Rahman
Dhaka

Over-bridge or under-pass needed

A few years ago DCC spent crores of taka for construction of several mammoth under-passes and over-bridges. Two of which collapsed, one cracked and got damaged and two were demolished as those were abandoned and not used by the pedestrians for wrong location and faulty planning.

Many a times we suggested for construction of a small over-bridge or an under-pass at Folder Street, Wyre Street-Hathkholia point, Wari or Gulistan-Dayaganj/ Saidabad-Jurain-Mawa-Demra/Narayanganj Road/bus route. But nothing hap-

pened so far.

Hundreds of students, thousands of pedestrians need to cross the crowded and ever jam-packed roads of these areas with a great risk.

We would once again request the DCC to construct an under-pass or an over-bridge at these areas for the cogent reason and strong demand of the people.

O. H. Kabir
Wari, Dhaka

"The Government is responsible!"

This is in the response of Mr. A F Rahman's letter (December 27). When I read the news about

Sheikh Hasina's comment on Mymensingh blast where she said such awe inspiring dreadful incidents could not take place without the patronage of the Government, I was so curious that I spent some time to read some other Bengali dailies. I found that Sheikh Hasina made that statement under a condition of ongoing army drive 'Operation Clean Heart'.

I am not a pressman, nor I was present there, but I thought it is our pressmen's duty to deliver the truth to us.

Sohel Hasan
Global Helpdesk Services,
Singapore