

## Saifur's Tk 10 crore

## question

And it is the government that must give the answer to it

OUR hearty congratulations to Saifur Rahman, our usually outspoken, often intemperate, occasionally highly provocative, sometimes quite impolitic but almost always gusty, courageous and right on target finance minister. Once again he asked the most pertinent question of the time, a question that every government worth the paper its name is written on must ask -- "Where does all the money go?" He was obviously referring to the money that the government allocates in its budget for current and development work.

He points his finger in the road construction sector and asks "It costs Tk 10 crore to construct a mile of road which should cost between Tk 2 and 3 crore. Where does the excess money go?" He directs the same accusatory finger to the education sector where allocation has risen from Tk 550 crore in early 1990 to Tk 1,700 crore now and yet we all know that though we have achieved remarkable results on enrolment we have a disastrous situation as far as quality of education is concerned. He again specifies the case of 1000 schools from where not a single student passed any national level examination in the last three years. Why should such schools be patronised? Why shouldn't the whole set of teachers and management of such schools be not only dismissed but also punished?

The question that Saifur Rahman asks should form the most crucial query for Prime Minister Khaleda Zia herself if she really wants to bring about a change in the condition of our people. If we may hazard an answer to the finance minister's question, the money is being siphoned off by unscrupulous contractors and businessmen in league with a section of bureaucrats with the help of very powerful people belonging to the ruling party, including, in some cases, family members of ministers.

We are now experiencing a wholesale misuse of government funds as never before. Let us take the finance minister's figure as a guide. If a Tk 3 crore road costs Tk 10 crore -- more than three times in excess -- then we can easily imagine the magnitude of the misuse, or should we say theft, and the huge vested interest group that must be involved in the whole operation. While we congratulate Saifur Rahman for asking such a vital question we must insist that it is the responsibility of the government to provide us with the answer. We ask the Prime Minister to take the issue of proper utilisation of government funds as the key issue of her government and make it her number one priority. This means that she will have to get serious about fighting corruption and not just use it to discredit the government. What the finance minister's comments indicate is the extent to which corruption has now spread and how it is eating into our very future. Is the PM listening? Can she really strike against the vested interest some of which is very close to home?

## Murdered maid

Society is not doing enough to protect women

C RUELTY to women has been a major area of concern for a pretty long time now as incidents in which women fall victim to beastly male instincts are on the rise.

The slaughtering of a young housemaid in the city's Shajhampur area on Thursday is hard to accept as an ordinary crime. Though the killer has not yet been identified, it is absolutely clear that he committed a monstrous crime, the enormity of which is difficult to describe. Reports say she might have been raped before being done to death.

This combination of a sexual assault followed by a deathblow appears to have become quite common these days, though it is not exactly known how many women or girls have lost their lives owing to this kind of savage behaviour on the part of the attackers. Apparently, the murder is committed to eliminate the rape victim who might become a source of trouble if kept alive.

Now the question is what society or its law enforcing system is doing to protect the vulnerable women and girls. The attackers are, of course, not normal human beings. After all, a person cannot commit such a crime unless he is mentally sick. The sociologists and psychiatrists have identified a host of socio-economic reasons behind youths developing criminal proclivities. There is no way, however, to heal the malady overnight, though frustrated or mentally derailed youths are a big social burden.

But then it is equally true that alongside eliminating the factors contributing to brutalisation of society, a long-term proposition, we have to adopt sterner short-term measures against the criminals. Though tough laws have been enacted to deal with repression on women, the number of the culprits being brought to justice is still too small compared to the number of crimes committed. It is a matter of disgrace and shame that despite all that has been said and done girls are regularly coming under acid attacks. The same is true about rape victims. Out façade of civility will soon crumble if we fail to protect women from rapists and acid-throwers.

## WMD and the Korean peninsula



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

RECENT development in the Korean Peninsula have been a source of great concern for most countries in general and those in the Far East in particular. An impoverished nation, unable to meet its food requirement, greatly reliant on external aid, the North Korean government is seeking to establish its own identity with threats of upward graduated mobilisation of nuclear resources.

Since being branded as part of an 'axis of evil' by the United States, along with pre-war Iraq and Iran, DPRK, as North Korea is known, is refusing to dismantle its nuclear programme verifiably. The situation has assumed special significance given the basic vulnerability of its southern neighbour. For South Korea, the crisis has become one with high-stakes interest. Right on the border, it is seeking a peaceful solution to the crisis. In this context, it is willing to mix additional food aid and restore economic projects on better behaviour from the communist state, which the South says is consistent with the 1992 inter-Korean agreement to keep the Korean Peninsula nuclear-free. It would be useful to note here that South Korea is playing a patient role during the crisis. This approach is indeed welcome. The current stand-off should not disturb potential inter-Korean dialogue so necessary for that region.

However, the root of the problem appears to be more one of suspicion, anxiety and lack of confidence on the part of DPRK. As a small state it is feeling insecure after what has happened in Iraq. It feels international law and the Security Council cannot provide adequate security any more to smaller nations and so needs its own deterrent force.

North Korea's official KCNA news agency, commenting on the recently concluded talks between DPRK, China and the USA in Beijing, towards the end of April, in Beijing, as expected, the US "for posing a constant threat to other sovereign

countries". It has also pointed out that the USA "should scrap its nuclear programme before such a small country as the DPRK does". By doing so, it is by implication, equating programmes and suggesting that the DPRK also has nuclear weapons. During the Beijing talks, North Korea, it may be mentioned, claimed that it had reprocessed 8000 spent nuclear fuel rods -- a key step -- in producing nuclear weapons that could yield several more bombs within months. This might be true, this might also be another bluff.

Nevertheless, whatever be the

Stalinist country has proposed to give up its nuclear programme in return for a Non-Aggression Treaty and normalization of 'political and economic relations' with the United States. President Bush has apparently ruled out such a Treaty, but one wonders whether a watered-down substitute can be found.

Sanity asserts that we agree with US State Department Spokesman Boucher's assessment of April that 'North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons is a matter of great concern to the entire international community and especially to countries in the

ful and stable Korean peninsula free of nuclear weapons.

This is a serious issue which will affect the evolution of future events in Asia. It is as such important that multilateralism be understood from a broader perspective. It is of concern not only to the whole region, but to the world. It also involves some very fundamental aspects for all of us that include not only peace and stability but also non-proliferation.

North Korea, like any other small state today feels worried. They have only one trump card and they are reluctant to give it up through a

Defence Secretary Don Rumsfeld have been toying around for some time with military options -- surgical cruise missile strikes, sledgehammer bombing and also possible use of tactical nuclear weapons to neutralise hardened artillery positions aimed at Seoul, the South Korean capital. Apparently, here lies the rub. Analysts have claimed that any pre-emptive strike on North Korea might trigger off '13,000 artillery pieces that could fire 400,000 shells in the first hour on an attack', many allegedly outfitted with sarin and anthrax -- all aimed at the 'kill-box' metropolitan region of Seoul, inhabited by 21

make China the most important ball player for the region.

The USA needs to understand the sensitivity of North Korean perception and its anxieties. Probably, for the second round, they should use China's influence even more to overcome North Korean reluctance. There exists suitable reasons for China within the ASEAN process to be persuaded to take a more pro-active role.

The Chinese leaders know how President Kim Jong-Il thinks and also how North Korea's policy-making and power elite analyse situations. China may be wary of getting further involved but their planners recognise that in the event of a meltdown, the Korean peninsula would create millions of refugees and hundreds of thousands of them will take the road towards Beijing. They also realise that a war would eventually decimate the North and would create a united Korea under South Korean leadership backed up by continued strategic support from the US. Such enhancement of unified Korean power might eventually emerge as a rival given prospective economic factors.

China has already shown leadership. Now it needs to lend its unequivocal support for an evolutionary process within DPRK which would combine economic reform with increased interaction with the external world and a more focussed dialogue with South Korea.

It is a very complex situation where the USA and like-minded states should emphasise a slow evolution rather than the harshness of 'regime change'. This strategy will avert a precipitous break-down and possible violence.

The Bush administration might be less amenable than the Clinton administration to a deal, and North Korea might be much more economically dependent and vulnerable to economic pressure than before. However, negotiation and continued discussion should be the buzz-phrase despite recent success in the use of force by the Coalition in Iraq.

One reason China seems paralysed in the current crisis is that, among the world's major powers, it is almost alone in having a 'two Koreas' policy. Since China established diplomatic relations with South Korea in the early 1990s, economic ties have grown dramatically, and 'cultural' relations have expanded at a comparable pace.

Nonetheless, while consolidating relations with Seoul, they have also unlike Russia, taken great care in seeking to ameliorate North Korea's anxieties. China is North Korea's most important trading partner, with turnover exceeding \$700 million in 2002, up 30 per cent from 2001. Indeed, according to Robert Scalapino, China is believed to supply about 70 per cent of the North's oil, and has doubled its sales of grain and vegetables'. These statistics

## POST BREAKFAST

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status on the ground, DPRK statements have reiterated that there was no question of dismantling its nuclear capabilities before any negotiations -- as such a move would leave it defenceless. They want security guarantees before scrapping their nuclear programme.

The pressure on the neighbours and the ante have also been raised with the suggestion that North Korea "will take self-defensive measures", and consider it "a green light to a war" as Washington seeks a UN Resolution authorising economic sanctions against the DPRK.

Perhaps, it would be useful for US officials after the recent talks to take a step back and try to "separate bluster from reality". They could then find other threads that could be pursued towards a diplomatic end.

US Secretary of State has gone on record that the US would not be intimidated by "bellows statements". It has also been reported that Washington had not taken any options off the table -- a diplomatic phrase meaning that military action had not been ruled out -- and that it was looking for ways to "eliminate" the threat posed by any North Korean nuclear weapons programme. One feels that a degree of firmness is important.

However, at this point one has to carefully scrutinise what DPRK really wants. South Korea's 'JoongAng Ilbo' newspaper has revealed that the

region, all of whom are interested in participating directly in all talks'. It is understandable because inclusion of others in the multilateral talks -- South Korea and Japan above all -- would be essential for reaching agreement on substantive issues. The inclusion of China has already been a good step. I believe that if necessary, DPRK should be encouraged to accept as dialogue partners one or two other states from the ASEAN along with Security Council members -- Russia and France. This might help efforts to achieve the international community's shared goal of a peace-

'verifiable and irreversible end' of their nuclear programme. They know that because of their obduracy, they are losing out on many other opportunities that normally would have given them. However, despite such awareness, they are still willing to stick it out. Tactically, North Korea feels they have an advantage despite a possible pre-emptive military action against them.

Nicholas D Kristof writing recently in the 'International Herald Tribune' has brought up some interesting points. He has pointed out that US Vice President Dick Cheney and



## Not the war to end war

## MEGASTHENES

IN times past -- and not a very distant past either -- an enormous gap existed between developed and developing countries in respect of ready access to information and data on any topical issue. Not any more. With the advent of internet and information technology, the gap has narrowed. Narrowed but not quite closed, as only the computer-literate or computer-addicted -- and they are still limited in numbers -- can fully benefit from this boon of technology. There is no dearth of thoughtful computer-literate individuals though, who are ever so glad to circulate snippets of information among friends.

Only recently I received, courtesy of an old friend, a compendium of trivia that bears upon the situation in Iraq; a plethora of information put together concisely in a manner that affords an overview. Reproduced below is part of it in gist: 1. The US population comprises 6 per cent of the global population. 2. The US possesses 50 per cent of global wealth or resources. 3. Iraq has the second largest oil reserves in the world. 4. Annual global military expenditure is in excess of \$900 billion; the US accounts for 50 per cent of this figure. 5. 10 per cent of US annual military spending would provide the essentials of a decent life and living to all peoples of the world. 6. 86 million people have died in wars since World War II. 7. Iraq has possessed chemical and biological weapons since the early 1980s. No, Iraq did not develop these on its own; materials and technology were provided by the US, the UK and private sector corporations. 8. No, Iraq was not condemned by the US for using poison gas against Iraq. 9. 5000 people died in gas attacks in the Kurdish town of Halabja in 1988; no, the US did not condemn it at that time. 10. 17 million gallons of agent 'Orange' were used by the US in Vietnam. 11. There are no proven links between Iraq and the September 11 attacks. 12. Around 6000 retreating Iraqi soldiers were buried alive by US tanks with ploughs mounted on the front during the 1991 Gulf war. 13. 40 tons of depleted uranium munitions were left in Iraq and Kuwait after the 1991 war and according to UN sources there was an increase of 700 per cent in cancer rates in Iraq between 1991 and 1994. 14. In 1991 the US claimed to have destroyed 80 per cent of Iraq's military capacity. 15. Between Dec. 1998 and Sept. 1999, the US and the UK dropped 20 million pounds of explosives on Iraq; neither country was at war with Iraq at that time. The US has been engaged in air attacks against Iraq for 11 years. 16. Saddam Hussein did not at any time expel UN inspectors

alone can judge, dispassionately and definitively, depending on the eventual outcome, whether this was a deed deserving of accolades or opprobrium.

The UN has become a casualty of sorts, clearly diminished by the war. Kofi Annan is a peaceable person, as befits a Nobel Laureate for Peace. He means well but -- as Theodore Roosevelt said of his successor in office -- in a feeble sort of way.

President Bush has his share of defenders and detractors. His most visceral critics are in no doubt that here is a man without mind or heart. It is difficult to concur. No one of that description could ever attain the highest office in the US. On at least two occasions Bush has demonstrated publicly, undeniable qualities of heart. The only danger he has faced to his person -- that is in public knowledge -- came in the shape of nothing more lethal than a humble pretzel. The President was watching a ball game -- he is very keen on baseball -- on television, with only his pet

Bush, while condoling with the family of a soldier killed in Iraq, wept and assented with conviction that the deceased soldier was in heaven.

Casualties more than anything else are what make war so repugnant. It is sad enough when soldiers die and sadder yet when women, children and non-combatants fall victims. It must be a trial for any President to console and comfort the next of kin. By shedding tears, Bush departed from the macho tradition and image of leadership in the US -- in 1972, tears shed in public cost Senator Muskie the Democratic nomination for President. Bush made the clear point though that he was a man with a heart. The other part, however, puzzles. How could a devout born-again Christian pronounce with confidence that the dead soldier was in heaven? He is surely aware of the stern Biblical admonition: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's". The hereafter is beyond question the province of the Almighty and there is also some

he was talking about. 3. Bush was carried away and was simply 'extravagant' with the truth.

Qualities of head and heart belong to distinct categories. They are not mutually exclusive; neither is one category necessarily a concomitant of the other. PG Wodehouse once described one of his immortal and best-loved characters, Bertie Wooster, as 'mentally negligible but with a heart of gold'.

Bush's has been a far from easy Presidency. Within months of his assumption of office, came Sept. 11, a mindless attack of unprecedented malevolence and magnitude; clearly the work of an organisation. The US had to respond and robustly; to send a clear message that this was unacceptable. Just as importantly it had to safeguard against future such attacks; in other words a two pronged agenda to combat terror. The first part was easily accomplished. The perpetrators were identified, routed and put out of business. How best, however, to go about achieving the second? A

pale of international law and legitimacy, are emphatically not the answers. Such an approach can only compound the issue not resolve it.

The inescapable truth is that anything that destabilises regions or regimes or impinges adversely on legitimate security concerns of sovereign States, only weakens international peace and security, does not strengthen it. Moral certitude, a crusading zeal and corporate greed, added to pre-eminence and power that is without parallel in human history, make for a heady cocktail, something that can cloud judgment.

Americans are a great people and the USA a mighty nation, in part at least because at the end of the day they tend to do the right thing. If President Bush can make significant strides toward the Four Freedoms -- so well articulated by one of his distinguished predecessors -- for all nations and peoples, he will have waged and won a pre-emptive and preventive war against terror and will also have assured his place in history. He will have moved toward a 'clinch of civilisations'. Terror can be vanquished only by States acting in concert, not by blustering unilateralism. No other country is better equipped to give the lead in this regard than the US.

When passions will have subsided, the reassuring words of the Prophet Isaiah should find a resonance in the minds and hearts of peoples of all faiths: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" ... We are, however, living through troubled times and Isaiah's prophecy, it is safe to assume, is some time away.

## LIGHTEN UP

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dog for company, and munching on a pretzel. A piece went down the wrong way, causing him to black out for moments. His dog was standing solicitously over him as he came to. How did he react? He did not seek a ban on pretzels as a dangerous snack. He did not even insist on mandatory warnings on pretzel packages, that these must be well masticated before swallowing. He ignored it for the accident that it was and possibly still enjoys the occasional pretzel. A sapien and restrained response, befitting a statesman. For invertebrate Bush opponents, however, this could beg the question: Is the President unable to watch baseball and eat a pretzel at the same time? Decades back, President Johnson was said to have commented that Gerald Ford, then a Congressman and later President, could not walk and chew gum at the same time; only this was a sanitized version of an earthy observation not atypical of Johnson.

More recently a cable news channel, possibly BBC, reported that

thing called the Day of Judgment. Even Papal indulgences, dispensations and absolutions are largely of the past.

Abraham Lincoln, unlike Bush, did not go to Harvard or Yale; he was an auto-didact with about a year's formal schooling in his life. The most famous letter he wrote was to one Mrs Bixby, whose sons had fallen in battle. The letter was a masterpiece in miniature, in linguistic felicity and in substance. Lincoln prayed that our "heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom". No mention of an after-life. Bush's assurance of heaven may mean any of the following: 1. It was mere rhetoric or hyperbole to which some politicians are prone. 2. In this age of information superhighways, a hotline has been set up between the Oval Office and the Almighty and the President knew what

big problem with terror lies in its definition. An example will suffice to explain. Bush has had no trouble ally in his war with Iraq -- a war not unlike to the anti-terror campaign -- than Prime Minister Blair. And yet do these two kindred spirits see eye to eye on every aspect of what constitutes terror? Since the 1970s and until recently, the IRA has been synonymous with terror and terrorism in Britain. It was widely believed that sources and sympathies in the US provided much by way of moral, material and financial support to the IRA. The head of the political party of which the IRA is the military wing was even received with honour in the White House. Bush's assurance of heaven may mean any of the following: 1. It was mere rhetoric or hyperbole to which some politicians are prone. 2. In this age of information superhighways, a hotline has been set up between the Oval Office and the Almighty and the President knew what</