

Rocca's comments

Time to wake up

THERE are a few more words of advice for our two top leaders -- Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina -- this time emanating from Christina Rocca, Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs. International financial institutions like the World Bank and IMF, prominent donor country representatives and the UNDP have expressed concern over the deteriorating political scenario in Bangladesh marked by an increasing confrontation between the two major players in the politics of the country.

Rocca adds her voice to what has already become something of an 'international concern' due to irresolution for a long time. Speaking to the Asia Society in New York, she has mentioned that bitter rivalries between two leading political parties in Bangladesh and the highest corruption rates going by default are weakening its democratic stability and impeding her economic growth. She advised Bangladesh leadership to 'take immediate action' on democratic, economic and legal reform agenda 'in the interest of Bangladesh and that of the entire region'.

Frankly, it is neither palatable nor desirable for any sovereign country to be told by another country what it should or should not do. However, our leaders have acted and behaved in a way that they have virtually courted such normally unwarranted comments and advice from abroad. In actual fact, we find it difficult to roundly criticise Rocca for what she has said. Can we be dismissive about hard truths we have ourselves uttered a few times over? During the last 12 and a half years through democracy and two and a half years down the BNP rule, the responsible media, important civil society figures, opinion leaders and publicists have repeatedly urged the ruling BNP and the opposition AL to constructively engage each other and not swear mutual self-destruction. But they contemptuously ignored our advice.

That an internal affair of a country should attract so much active attention overseas must be something unique in the case of Bangladesh. But it is a uniqueness we have worked for and earned as bad currency. So irrepres-sible have been the comments that even though these gave us a round of applause for a number of gains made over the last thirty years, these could not help mention our Achilles' heels which is bad politics or political culture.

Unless our leaders wizen up and behave, we are afraid, that is the way it is going to be, that's the pattern of criticism and imagining we are in for, like it or not. So, one more time we say, wake up or perish.

Disgruntled UP chairmen

They shouldn't be denied their due role

UNION Council chairmen have expressed their resentment about the way the MPs are impinging on their authority to undertake development activities and other functions that they are supposed to perform as elected representatives of the people.

Their reservations should not go unnoticed because the Union Council as the lowest tier of the local government has a definite role to play in strengthening the system --believed to be the bedrock of democratic dispensation. The constitutional provisions in this respect spell out that the state will encourage the growth of all local government institutions formed with people's representatives. The idea is to allow the local bodies to develop into self-propelled units of the local government having the authority to collect taxes and maintain funds for local uplift.

They have aired some complaints against the lawmakers and are planning to proceed along an agitational course if they are not allowed to work freely. The areas that the MPs are reportedly 'meddling' into include distribution of test relief, vulnerable group feeding cards, food for work and initiation of new projects. It seems politics of vote-catching is undermining an important local government institution.

It may not be out of place here to mention that elected women representatives at the UPs are marginalised as they are not taken onboard as far as the decision-making processes are concerned. This kind of gender discrimination can also weaken the foundation of local government. The men at the helm should address the problem as well.

The UP chairmen deserve a patient hearing because as elected public representatives they have the right to function without being inhibited by any individual or organisation. As we wrote in this column a few weeks back, the primary function of the MPs is making laws. We also said that their role in development activities should not be expanded. Obviously, the problem that the UP chairmen are facing now has a lot to do with the MPs seeking a dominant role in development programmes. There is no doubt that great confusion will arise if they mix up the role of the legislature with that of the local government.

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

ONE wonders if the Pakistani nuclear proliferation saga has ended, albeit for the present, with the pardon granted to Dr. Abdul Quader Khan, the founder of Pakistani nuclear bomb, after his televised admission of leaking nuclear arms secrets to Iran Libya and North Korea. In his confession speech Dr. Khan took full responsibility for the scandal and absolved the government and fellow scientists of any blame. President Musharraf was reported to have said that there was a written mercy appeal from Dr. Khan and there was a written pardon from the President. Though Pakistani commentators have called for a full investigation into the proliferation scandal saying that Dr. Khan has been made a scapegoat to cover up military involvement; President Musharraf has made it clear that Pakistan would not hand over any document relating to the investigation into the proliferation scandal to IAEA,whose head has warned that Dr. Khan was the "tip of the ice berg for us" in the illegal trafficking of nuclear technology. Dr. Khan had recently been removed from his post of Scientific Adviser to the Pakistani Prime Minister. Though not arrested he had been advised not to leave town without government permission. Pakistan began its investigation last November when Iranian officials told IAEA that black marketers who had aided Iranian nuclear program had ties with Pakistan. Libya told Pakistani officials that black marketers had it used for its nuclear program also had Pakistani connections. American officials had long believed that Dr. Khan had been sharing nuclear technology with other countries and had been urging Pakistani authorities for his removal. In an interview with CNN's Christiane Amanpour from Davos President Parvez Musharraf categorically denied that actions taken being taken by Pakistan had been due to American pressure. "There are vested interests" he said " who want to undermine my authority, my position, the government's position and cast us in a bad light that we are some kind of rubber stamp of the US". General Musharraf emphatically pointed out that there had been no official or governmental involvement in the transfer of nuclear technology. He also added that the accusations against some Pakistani scientists who had done so was based on grounds of personal financial benefits they were alleged to have gained just as there were accusations against some Europe-

ans as well. President Musharraf's emphasis on dissociation of any governmental authority's role in the process of transfer of nuclear technology is borne out by the reactions of people in authority at the time the transfer had taken place.

Earlier reacting to reports that some senior scientists had told investigators that any transfer of nuclear technology to Iran, for example, had been approved by General Mirza Aslam Beg, Army Chief during 1988-91 as Pakistan army tightly controlled nuclear program, General Beg angrily

tions. It is therefore not surprising to see the elation on the streets of Pakistan when the country could detonate more nuclear devices than India did on that fateful day the two countries came out of the closet as nuclear powers. President Musharraf may have to give some weightage to General Aslam Beg's public assertion that any scientist who sold Pakistan's nuclear technology should not be punished (NYT- 27.01.04). A very powerful segment of the establishment could very well oppose severe punishment if it were meted out to the

adverse consequences". Understandably because of Pakistan's role as a front line state on the war on terror and repeated attempts on the life of President Musharraf Pakistan can not be called a "rogue" state. But undeniably it is a state penetrated by Islamic extremists, and its military, intelligence and religious bodies are heavily influenced by Taliban and Al-Qaida making it, according to Stephen Cohen, one of the most unstable nations of the world. US think tank Cato Institute fears that proliferation of nuclear weapons technology by

Musharraf who came to power in a military coup d'etat and now backed by radical Islamists but praised by Washington as "courageous" and a "visionary leader". One may disagree with Leon Hader's comparison of President Musharraf with Milosevich as one would with Robert Kagan's characterization of Americans as men from Mars and the Europeans as those from Venus. Yet one can not but be alarmed at the unfolding drama linking Pakistani scientists with two members of the axis-of-evil.

In this continuing saga of war on

It is easier said than done. President Musharraf has to walk a tight rope and effect a compromise amongst disparate elements of Pakistani society. Dr. A.Q.Khan is an icon who presented Pakistan with the ultimate security blanket against presumed threat from archenemy India. Partition of India and Pakistan (and later of Bangladesh) was not an amicable divorce as was the case of separation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia and in some ways was comparable to the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

denied the allegations. But he was also reported to have said that Muslim countries should not be asked to give up nuclear programs so long Israel and India possessed nuclear weapons. Branding Pakistan as "one of the world's leading supplier of illicit nuclear technology" New York Times called on Washington not to settle for a repetition of President Musharraf's "history of strong declarations followed by weak and contradictory actions" on the issue of Pakistani investigation on the passage of nuclear technology to Iran Libya and North Korea, and to ensure that nuclear technology pipeline from Pakistan is finally closed down.

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errant scientists for sharing nuclear technology with fellow Muslim countries. An analyst of South Asia Analysis Group(Paper 685 dated 12.05.03) cited a claim by the Chief of Lashkar-e Taeba that his people control two Pakistani nuclear war heads and they were ready any moment to bring them down on the heads of Islam's enemies. The analyst also claimed that Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl was murdered because he had information on Pakistan's nuclear secrets and links with Al-Qaida. Such claims, however, become unsustainable in the light of President Musharraf's interview with Christiane Amanpour (23.01.04) that the Pakistani government had full custodial control, check and supervision, and there were a number of rings of organizations ensuring the safety and security of all the organizations and all nuclear assets. His assertion was further strengthened by President Bush's recent assurance to the world that Pakistani nukes were in safe hands.

Given the current developments in Pakistan it is difficult to assess the robustness and severity of application of non-proliferation measures recently underlined (02.12.03) at the Fletchers School by Under Secretary John Bolton. He warned "rogue" states like Iran, North Korea, Syria, Libya and Cuba that their pursuit of WMD considered hostile to the US interests would not escape either detection or consequences. "If the rogue states" he said "are not willing to follow the logic of non-proliferation norms they must be prepared to face the logic of

Pakistan could provide anti-US nations and/or non-state actors with the means to disrupt the security or blackmail western nations/interests. Given the make up of Pakistan's political landscape; marginalization of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif's parties; emergence of Muttahida- Majlis-e-Amal, a coalition of twenty six religious parties; capture of power by MMA in two provinces bordering Afghanistan Constitutional obligation to bring all laws in conformity with the injunctions of the Holy Quran and Sunnah making Pakistan an Islamic theocracy; US interests could be better served if Washington were to take a long range view of its strategy relating to the war on terror. Many did not see President Musharraf's joining the US in the war on terror as a reflective of structural transformation of Pakistani policy, rather a tactical decision to cut its losses after the collapse of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Another version is the reported choice given by Richard Armitage to President Musharraf of a rock and a hard place i.e. either cooperate or be bombed back into the stone age. The proverbial man from Mars, writes Leon Hader of Cato Institute, viewing US foreign policy after the tragic events of nine-eleven would have been astonished to see the inconsistency of Slobodan Milosevich(a butcher by any standard), a civilian politically elected at least in a quasi-democratic election being branded as "anti-American" and "war criminal" for waging war against Muslims with radical connections in Bosnia and Kosovo; while General

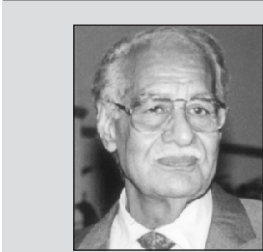
terror in which non-proliferation of WMD to both state and non-state actors plays a central role, the relevance of NATO in this age of reduced significance of the UN system can not be over emphasized. NATO's first "out of the area" operation in Afghanistan to oust the Talibans from power , a direct result of nine-eleven terrorist attacks and consequent war on terror, bring us to a brief discussion of NATO's role in the post Cold War world and its raison d'etre. The alliance was formed when the western leaders found the UN security system inadequate to protect and defend in John Foster Dulles' words "our cherished freedom" with military defense, religious faith, and a positive demonstration of western political and social system as a counter attraction to Communism. Canada's Lester Pearson was despondent enough to write " This disunity(in the UN) has now led us to the point where we must frankly and honestly admit that our hope of gaining security through the United Nations, although we do not abandon that hope, is not one which we can soon realize". So NATO came into being. The Prague Summit of November 2002 saw seven former East European and Baltic countries becoming members of the expanded NATO. So despite the fact that NATO's strategic agenda German Unification, integration of Central and Eastern Europe, partnership with Russia, and stabilization of the Balkanshad more or less been achieved; the new threats posed by the proliferation of WMD and terrorism have become new

agenda for NATO. Mixed signals from Washington notwithstandingneo-cons belief in America unbound leaving no constraints on American actions abroad vis-à-vis so-called "doves" strategy of transatlantic partnership -- danger of proliferation of WMD and possibility of their falling into wrong hands goaded a worried world to unite in the war on terror. Despite Russian misgivings over expansion of NATO into its backyard President Putin is at one with the US administration in the common belief that the real danger to international security and stability is posed by acquisition of nuclear weapons by rogue states and their possible transfer to terrorists who can not be deterred from using these weapons regardless of human costs. From this point of view the recent developments in Pakistan are so dangerous. Perhaps the rogue scientists apart from being paid exorbitant amounts could plead, say in the case of Iran, nuclearization of a Muslim country to face overwhelming Israeli military dominance in the Middle East. While the Iranian clergy's willingness to embrace nuclearisation could have been induced by the fact that the 1980s baby boom has spawned a new generation which sees neither the fundamentalists' concept of clerical supremacy nor President Khatami's "Islamic democracy" as answer to Iran's present predicament. Given Iranians' fierce sense of national independence Iranian clergy might have thought that acquisition of nuclear weapons would be able to wean away the emerging third force from an inevitable confrontation. In case of North Korea it was exchange of nuclear weapons technology for missile technology which Pakistan did not have. In the case of Libya if was possibly pure and simple greed.

How far President Musharraf's government can go in punishing the errant scientists would depend on how far he is allowed to go by the different interest groups in Pakistan. But the inescapable fact remains that unless states are made accountable for misdeeds by its citizens nuclear non-proliferation will remain a distant dream and the world, totally destroying the dream of a peaceful world dreamt by the people because of the end of the Cold War, will become a horrendously dangerous place once again.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and ambassador.

BJP lacks base in South



KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

THE Congress has a dependable base in southern India. This is what I gather after visiting some of its parts. Even when Mrs Indira Gandhi was routed in the North after the emergency (1975-77), the party retained its supremacy in the South.

In fact, Indira Gandhi's comeback trail began from the South. She fought from the Chikmanglur Lok Sabha constituency in Karnataka in 1979 and defeated Virendra Patil, former chief minister and the ruling Janata Party nominee. Electoral baptism of her daughter-in-law Sonia Gandhi also took place in Karnataka from the Bellery constituency in 1999. The BJP put up their big gun, Sushma Swaraj, to stall Sonia's formal entry into politics. Sonia won hands down.

The BJP has very little following in all the four southern states

Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. It had a substantial support in Karnataka. But that was about a decade ago when it secured in a general election around 28 per cent of votes.

The main reason for the BJP's drop in Karnataka has been the lack of leadership. Even now former Union Minister N. Ananth Kumar, inducted as the BJP state unit president, does not make waves.

He is not powerful enough even to stop the infighting in the party, much less to retrieve the lost ground. There is also a question mark against his integrity. He is said to be involved in the HUDCO scam when he was the Union Minister for Housing. The Congress, which governs the state, finds the charge coming in handy.

Compared to Ananth Kumar, chief minister S.M. Krishna is an established leader with a long record of public service. There is not a speck of scandal on him. His

have a problem if the wife of Ramakrishna Hegde, who died recently, were to be won over by the BJP. The Congress is also trying to woo her. She has the sympathy factor in her favour. Former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, heading the Janata Dal (Secular), is too arrogant to approach her or Hegde's supporters.

Even in Hegde's lifetime, Gowda considered himself a better leader with a larger base. He has a few pockets of influence but not enough to put up a fight against the Con-

K Muralidharan, also the state Congress chief. Now that he has become a minister Karunakaran has piped down. However, he hates chief minister A.K. Anthony so muchhe accuses him of projecting the Christian identity -- that Karunakaran may covertly support the Left Democratic Front. He has already appeared with the Communists on some platforms. The LDF too is depending on him to improve its present tally from 10 to 13 in a total of 20.

The Muslim League is firmly with

BETWEEN THE LINES

The BJP has very little following in all the four southern states Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. It had a substantial support in Karnataka. But that was about a decade ago when it secured in a general election around 28 per cent of votes... The AIADMK's understanding with the BJP in Tamil Nadu was a foregone conclusion after the DMK's alliance with the Congress... Andhra Pradesh still basks in the feel-good factor of its chief minister Chandrababu Naidu's solid work.

problem is that state Congress chief S Janardharn Poojary is all the time projecting himself. When Krishna was in two minds whether to go for the assembly and Lok Sabha elections at the same time, Poojary threatened to deny tickets to those who were opposed to the simultaneous polls.

S. Bangarappa, the ex-chief minister of Karnataka, wants to stage a comeback. He has been absolved of cases of corruption against him. He, like Poojary, claims a direct channel to Sonia Gandhi, not through Krishna. Bangarappa has declined the position of election campaign manager on the plea that Sonia should herself tell him to accept the post. The party would

gress which looks like improving its position both in the assembly and Lok Sabha elections. The Congress can be embarrassed if the BJP is able to rope in Virendra Patil's son who is a Lingayat. The Congress leaders and Gowda are Vokalingas. The two castes have declared the fate of Karnataka for many years. They can still do if they were to join hands. But at present they are divided and both the BJP and Congress are trying to woo them.

I was in Kerala when K Karunakaran, an octogenarian Congress leader, announced he would form a separate Indira Gandhi Congress Party. None took him seriously. All his anger was for obtaining a cabinet berth for his son,

the United Democratic Front and feels happy that the Dravida Munentra Kazhagam (DMK) has given it a seat in Tamil Nadu. It looks almost certain that the Muslim League will win the two Kerala seats but whether it would do so in Tamil Nadu is anybody's guess.

I have a feeling that many Muslims in the South, particularly in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, may vote for the BJP because of the Atal Behari Vajpayee factor. His initiative on Pakistan and the follow-up at Islamabad have gone down well with them, although their dislike for the BJP has not lessened in any way.

The AIADMK's understanding with the BJP in Tamil Nadu was a

does not have much of a following. Former finance minister P Chidambaram still ploughs a lonely furrow but he does not count for much. It will ultimately follow Sonia. She is, however, reportedly unhappy that the DMK has given some of the Congress seats to Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK). Still Sonia was very keen to have DMK chief M Karunanidhi on her side because he was the only force which withstood the pro-emergency wave that swept the South in the 1977 election. Even otherwise Sonia never liked Jayalalitha for her proximity with Rajiv Gandhi. The AIADMK would have the incumbency factor going against it. The BJP, without any base of its own, will

suffer the most.

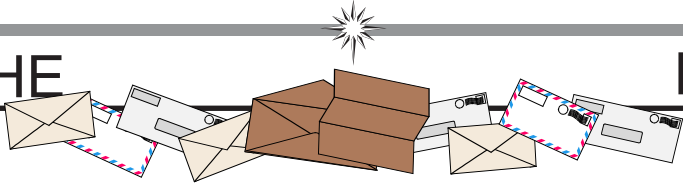
Andhra Pradesh still basks in the feel-good factor of its chief minister Chandrababu Naidu's solid work. He would have had a better showing if some of his projects had germinated early enough. But his main worry is not because of lack of visible achievements. It is the growing movement for a separate Telengana state which can cost him as many as 100 seats in the assembly, also going to the polls along with the Lok Sabha. That the People's War Group, a Naxalite movement, has joined hands with the opposition could work both ways. Its violence has alienated many voters. But its protection of poor farmers against rapacious landlords and moneylenders has deepened its support. The police excesses at certain places have specially helped it to expand. Still its pulling power in elections is limited.

What makes up for Naidu's deficiencies is the Congress infighting. There are too many leaders in the party trying to garner personal support at the expense of the party. Andhra Pradesh is one state where the Congress can have a good showing provided the party chooses its ranks.

The limited support the BJP has in the state may give Naidu's Telugu Desam the necessary edge as it happened during the last assembly election. But the BJP wants seats in its own name and believes that Andhra Pradesh can give it a break in South. If Naidu does so, it will be at the expense of Telugu Desam.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

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.

Sonali Bank group insurance

The family members of the deceased employees of the Sonali Bank are not getting the group insurance benefit for the last nine months. As per the bank rules, the family members of the employees and officers are supposed to get group insurance benefits if any employee dies while being in service. The other NCBs like the Janata, Agrani and Rupali Bank are following the rule. But the Sonali Bank is still making correspondence with the ministry of finance to get the approval. The NCBs usually keep a separate fund for the members of the deceased employees/officers. The ministry never gives any allocation of fund for such payments.

I would like to appeal to the minister of finance as well as the secretary of the ministry of finance to look into the matter.
Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury
Lake Circus, Kalabaghban

Ahmadiyya issue

It is with great regret that I came to read about religious extremists in Bangladesh putting pressure on the government to declare the Ahmadiyyas as non-Muslims. As an individual, who has studied Islam, and who has many Ahmadiyya friends, I have great respect for the teachings of Islam and for Prophet Muhammed (SM). I have learned that he never sought to declare anyone a non-Muslim unless that person openly professed the Almighty and his Prophet to be

false. I have many Ahmadiyya friends and I know that they certainly believe in one Allah and have the highest respect for the Prophet.

So, how can these religious extremists in Bangladesh pressurise the government to declare Ahmadiyyas as non-Muslims? The Holy Prophet taught us that it is only the Almighty who can see into someone's heart and thus decide whether they are Muslims or not.

I hope that the leadership in Bangladesh will not bow down to the pressure of the religious extremists.

Simeon Walker
Addingham, West Yorks, United Kingdom

Ershad barred at Zia

My attention is drawn to a news item published yesterday in the DS under the above caption.

To say the least, the government's action once again bespeaks of the retaliatory nature of its political management against anyone holding a view or an agenda away from its own. I have a feeling that in this particular instance the action has merely enhanced the image of Mr. Ershad rather than damaging it. Until the other day most people used to talk about Ershad as a spent force in the present day political arena of Bangladesh. Actions like these are only helping people to negate that image and think about him in a more positive way. In all honesty when compared to the present day political leadership,

both within the government and the opposition, the image of the retired General does not look that bad. He continues to make political statements, which are far more decent containing lesser invectives compared to those of our venerable Leader of the Opposition.

Shamsher Choudhury
Dhaka

Deaths in river

It is really unfortunate that the safety of launch passengers is still neglected in every possible way in the country. Hundreds of people have died in launch disasters in the last one year, but the operators are still as indifferent to the safety needs of the passengers as they always have been.

The launch collision in the river

Meghna was a rude shock to all of us. What was particularly tragic about it is that it was the result of gross violation of navigational rules. The launches did not have searchlights! Who would believe this story of pushing people to death?

A citizen
Dhaka

Fanatics in politics

Bangladesh has been praised for her non-communal approach so far all over the world. Although the term "secularism" is not mentioned in our constitution, it guarantees that every citizen of any religious faith has equality before the law and enjoys the freedom to profess his or her religious belief. And for a long time different communities have been co-existing in

this country and following their religions without any inhibition. But with the religious fanatics finding a place in the coalition government, secular people(not anti-religion) along with minor communities are gripped by a sense of insecurity as the fanatics are trying to dominate the political scene. Since Muslims are a large majority in Bangladesh, more or less every major political party has used 'Islam' in order to consolidate its position in the political arena. And there are quite a few religion-based political parties in the country which have their own agenda.

People in general do not believe in religion being used as a political weapon. Now the question is how the Jamaat-e-Islami

could reach the position that it enjoys now. It is because of constant failures of the major liberal political parties like the Awami league and the BNP.

Despite having a neutral outlook, the parties could not serve the interests of masses. They have created the opportunity for the religious extremists to have a position in politics which they do not deserve and which can only invite trouble for the nation as a whole.

So we must remain alert and should not allow the fanatics to have any further leeway in politics.

Rubab Abdullah
Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka