

Good work by the JS committee

The govt. must ensure follow-up measures

THE communications ministry has come up for some scathing criticism by the parliamentary standing committee on the planning ministry for its lacklustre performance. The committee expressed its dissatisfaction at the Roads and Highways Department's decision to divert funds allocated for road works to house building-- a less productive area. It has also questioned the suitability of undertaking massive road works during monsoon, which is always a wasteful exercise. Finally, the members of the committee were very unhappy with the fact that the communications ministry could not take up a single project in the first eight months of the current fiscal.

The lapses of the communications ministry need a little elaboration. Diversion of funds is indicative of the absence of proper planning and effective utilization of the money allocated for maintaining and improving the network of roads. The timing for undertaking road development and repair works, which almost invariably clashes with monsoon, is hard to take as a mere coincidence. The R&H has been totally indifferent to the issue, though rain only add to the costs of such works. So the JS committee has rightly smelt some foul play in road works during the rains, which the R&H fails to avoid for some inexplicable reasons. As for the communications ministry's failure to take up any project in eight months, it is perhaps another example of the great inertia that impedes planning and implementation of projects.

It is good news that some parliamentary standing committees are taking note of the lapses and financial irregularities on the part of different ministries. They are voicing their displeasure and suggesting action to set things right. In other words, the committees are trying to do what they are suppose to be doing. Imagine how beneficial the committee work would have been in terms of establishing transparency and accountability of the government had the opposition MPs been participating in the parliamentary bodies.

However, it is not enough to identify the problems or the men responsible for them. The government must go for a thorough probe, take corrective action where necessary and punish those responsible for resorting to malpractices.

Elevated expressway for Dhaka

Just the thing we need

TRAFFIC congestion in the nation's capital is among the worst in the world. Failure to build an adequate number of link-roads, by-pass roads, and highways, together with unchecked and unplanned development, and exponential growth in the city's population and the number of vehicles, have all created the mess we are in.

The result is that the city's streets are choked with traffic moving at snail's pace that makes even the shortest of journeys a major headache, frustrates every inhabitant of the city, and acts as an impediment to any kind of economic activity.

In this context we appreciate the initiative taken by the Roads and Highways Department to build a 20km elevated expressway from Jatrabari to Sonargaon crossing.

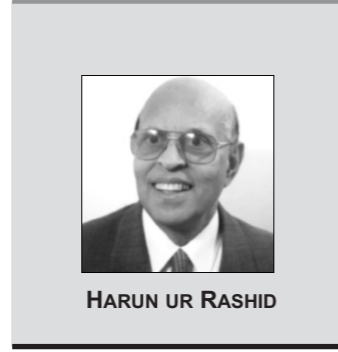
As opposed to the ad hoc measures that have been taken in the past and are currently under construction, the 20km elevated expressway promises to provide a solution for easing traffic congestion. The plan takes into account the entirety of the city's traffic problems and attempts to effect a permanent solution that encompasses all of the city's needs projected far into the future. This is the type of approach that the city's transportation morass demands.

The estimated cost of the project is Tk 20 billion and negotiations are already underway with two Thai companies that have submitted bids, and the Thai Exim Bank and Thai government, which have pledged to provide finance. The communications ministry has yet to finalise approval of the project and the Bangladesh government is negotiating to reduce the interest rate proposed by the Thai Exim Bank to finance the project.

We urge the communications ministry to prioritise its scrutiny of the project's feasibility and to give the green light to the project as soon as is practicable. This is the kind of venture that the ministry should put on a fast track. Similarly, we hope for a swift conclusion to financing negotiations, though we of course support the government's efforts to secure as favourable a financial arrangement as possible.

The important thing is that this project move forward in a timely manner. The infrastructure of Dhaka city must be improved if we are ever to transform it into a vibrant and modern metropolis that meets the needs of its long-suffering inhabitants.

John Forbes Kerry: The second coming of JFK?



HARUN UR RASHID

WHAT a difference a couple of months makes in politics? Only a few months ago, Senator (for 19 years) John Forbes Kerry (60), was politically "dead in water" and former Governor of Vermont Dr. Howard Dean stole the limelight of the media as the front-runner in the Democratic presidential race. Now Dr. Dean whose high-flying campaign collapsed in Iowa and never righted itself, finally pulled out of the race. John Kerry is the front-runner.

It seems that Kerry has been an amazing phenomenon in American politics in many decades. The election seems to be fought on personal credibility and on war records of the candidates. The Democratic voters want a man who has the best chance to defeat President Bush in November. They are rallying support for Kerry because of his war records in Vietnam. The contrast with George Bush's record is so obvious to voters that it does not need to be spelled out (Bush avoided military service in Vietnam by joining up with the Texas National Air National Guard and his controversial absence for duty in Alabama lingers on).

The movement among Democratic voters is known as ABBA: Anybody But Bush Again.

Given the mood of American voters, a person with a balanced view on national and global issues fits in with John Kerry's image. Dr. Dean appears to be too radical [to

the left] in his views for the Americans at this point of time. This simply means that electability is the prime consideration for Democratic voters.

Senator Kerry's rapid rise has aroused interest around the world to find out who this second JFK from Massachusetts really is.

Born on 11 December 1943 in Denver (Colorado), John Kerry had an upper class upbringing. His father was a diplomat posted in Europe and Kerry went to

silver Star, a bronze Star and three Purple Hearts for bravery.

In 1971, at 27 years old, Kerry joined thousands of Vietnam veterans in Washington to demonstrate against the war. He had the political shrewdness when he threw his ribbons of medals on the steps of the Capitol (Congress Building). The anti-war Democrats in Congress chose Kerry to testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Kerry did not disappoint his sponsors. In a

ably defend his clients. In one case he proved innocence of his client wrongly given a life sentence for a murder he did not commit.

Kerry lives in Boston. He married two heiresses. In 1970, his first marriage was to Philadelphia heiress Julia Thorne (US\$ 300 million fortune) that did not finally work out and divorce took place in 1988. His second marriage in 1996 took place with a wealthy Republican widow Portuguese born Teresa Heinz (her personal fortune is

Nicaragua.

Kerry voted in favour of the war against Iraq in 2002 but has since been critical of American policy. He explained recently he supported war on the condition that the US would get endorsement from the UN. He opposed the 1991 Gulf War but was in favour of military action in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Somalia and Panama. He is a strong supporter of the UN and wants to advance America's foreign policy interests in cooper-

Despite this meteoric rise as the front-runner in the Democratic race, Kerry has a few image problems. First he is known to be associated with "big business" what is usually known as "special interests" lobby. Second, he is known to be wooden campaigner with little charm. Many say that he has overcome this problem by presenting himself as someone who has done his duty for his country. He knows war firsthand and also knows the limitations of war.

If Kerry wins the super Tuesday (2nd March) round of 10 contests in big states like New York, California and Ohio that provide more than half of the required delegates to win the Democratic nomination in the July Democratic Convention in Boston, he will carry an unusually heavy load of party as well as voter expectations.

There is a lingering question as to where the Clintons throw their support? They have not shown their hands as yet. However it is believed that Clintons, like the rest of the Democratic Party and an increasing number of Americans, believe another four years of Bush presidency would be bad for the US and catastrophic for the world.

There are signs that energised Democratic voters will do whatever it takes to topple Bush. Preliminary indication looks promising as the CNN-USA Today-Gallup poll survey issued on 19th February showed Senator Kerry would get 55 per cent of the votes in a direct match up with President Bush, against the President's 43 per cent. However the poll may be considered in caution as President Bush has not as yet started his campaign with his massive funds and an incumbent President, especially in times of insecurity and threat of terrorism, is difficult to beat.

Barrister Harun Ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

BOTTOM LINE

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expensive public schools in Europe including in Switzerland, and to a good private establishment in New Hampshire and then took a law degree from Yale University in early 60s, where he was two years senior to President Bush.

Kerry's ancestors have both Anglican and Jewish roots. His grandfather was born Fritz Kohn in what is now the Czech Republic. Kohn migrated to the US and changed his name to Kerry in 1907. Kerry's grandmother later converted to Catholic. Thus Kerry is very much part of the American melting pot. Kerry is a Catholic, like the Kennedys.

Kerry's life changed in 1969 when he arrived in Cam Ranh Bay in South Vietnam as a naval officer. Six months later Kerry returned from Vietnam wounded, mourning dead comrades and deeply embittered by a war sinking into a quagmire of atrocities. He was decorated here, with a

searing indictment of the war he described not only the waste of American lives, but war crimes against the Vietnamese. Finally, Kerry's memorable words turned on the Senators with a question: "How do you ask a man to be the last man to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?"

That day made Kerry a celebrity, a household name and face of the Vietnam veterans' anti-war movement. Democratic Senator Claiborne Pell of Rhode Islands thanked Kerry for testifying before the Committee, expressing his hope that Kerry "might one day be a colleague of ours in this body."

Kerry became a top prosecutor in Middlesex County and took on organised crime and put the number two mob boss in New England behind bars. He modernised District Attorney's office and created an innovative crime unit against women's violence. As a private lawyer, he worked long and hard to

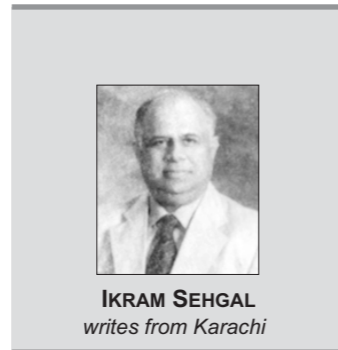
estimated at US\$675 million). Although he became one of the richest men in Congress, he reportedly did not spend a single cent from his wife's fortune for election campaign but had to mortgage his house to fund it. He has two adult daughters and Teresa has three adult sons. All of them are engaged in the election campaign.

He went into state politics and in 1982 was elected as a Lieutenant Governor in Massachusetts. Ever since he was elected as a Senator in 1984, he has focused his career on foreign affairs and intelligence policy. He took a leading role in attacking the war in Central America during Ronald Reagan's presidency. In lengthy hearings, he exposed links between CIA-backed rebels in Nicaragua and cocaine trafficking. He shone light on the great "Iran-contra" scandal where White House officials were intimately involved in trading arms for American hostages in the Middle East to help fund the war in

tion with other countries. He wants to repair relations with nations of "Old Europe" (Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld used the term for France and Germany) which did not support war against Iraq without UN authority.

Kerry is a classic Washington insider and his experience dealing with business and politics help relate to domestic issues. He supports a corporate rate reduction for manufacturers. He wants to make health care affordable to all Americans through reforms in medicare system. He also wants to reduce prescription drug prices. He supports tax cuts for middle class. He has a plan to invest in renewable source of energy and new technology that will create 500,000 jobs for Americans. He is an enthusiast to clean up environmental damages. He supports educational reforms, wants to strengthen economy and encourage the growth of the high tech new economy.

Interesting times



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

LURCHING from crisis to crisis for some time, some of our own making and some tailor-made for us, Pakistan is faced with trouble in both the domestic and external spectrums. These are further complicated by a deepening credibility gap and a worsening image problem, we lack answers to both. The fact that the world is facing on the one hand an economic recession, the backlash of which has denied us full redemption thereof, and on the other continuing attacks by terrorists with origin/links to this region and bent upon inflicting 9/11 type of carnage, makes our continued existence as a sovereign entity rather precarious. As a force-multiplication of the many problems, some of our domestic ones have tended to spill into the international arena, thereby creating a further backlash on our already tarnished image and putting additional pressure on us. Whichever major crisis the world is facing, we are somehow part of it!

Prolonged negotiations between the ruling coalition and the religious MMA grouping papered over the Constitutional impasse, we are still facing continuing political crisis. The Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD), Opposition grouping within and outside Parliament, is conducting a relentless "Remove

Musharraf" campaign. In a two track policy reflecting their ambivalence towards good governance, the MMA has now lined up with the ARD in the streets. While "politics makes for strange bedfellows", the whole situation is rather mind-boggling with the MMA contesting an alliance of PML (N), PPP and the smaller parties in opposition for the post of Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly (NA). With ideologies widely dissimilar, the only issue the Opposition is really united

case in Pakistan (and South Asia). Where political parties are based on a personality cult and ideology is given broad brush and lip-service only, it is very difficult to agree on national issues. Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan (AQK) is an acknowledged hero for giving Pakistan an essential nuclear deterrent, regrettably he used the same underground network for personal profit by engaging in nuclear proliferation. How does one support the "import" network from the "export" one?

foreign governments as an excuse to de-nuke us. If only for national security considerations, we should be presenting a united front, the present disarray in our ranks on such an important national issue is self-destructive.

Given that Musharraf did an 180 degree turn on the Taliban after 9/11, should any Pakistani leader in power have supported the Taliban in giving armed sanctuary to Osama Bin Laden and Al-Qaida given the 9/11 circumstances? Having been

in containers near Shebergan.

Is there no voice in Pakistan (even from among those who encouraged our young men to volunteer their lives) to question the Afghans about these atrocities? The result of a decade plus of a convoluted and bankrupt policy is that while the Tajiks and Uzbeks hate us anyway, even the Pashtoons are now almost evenly divided between hating us and barely tolerating us, love and friendship being a fickle memory of the past and gratitude

public emotion wants to hear ("mother of all battles" has begun) rather than giving a reasoned analytical explanation to the public as to why one must go with the head rather than with the heart. It is said that when an elephant goes mad in the forest, it is better to get out of the way lest one be trampled. While not fully subscribing to Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilisations", the fact remains that Islam has been targeted in the world, the Catch-22 is that those attacking us see the rhetoric and actions of the extremists amongst us to justify their campaign. Better sense must prevail among our religious (and political) leaders, they must not drag us into oblivion "a la Taliban" because of their own narrow vested reasoning and/or their interests.

There has been real progress in our growing amity with India. Quite unnoticed has been the cabinet level instructions by the Indian ruling regime to the Indian occupation forces within held-Kashmir to stop human rights abuses. The recent agreement in Islamabad for structured talks starting June 2004 on all major issues including Kashmir and nuclear weapons has been an acknowledged success. Instead of supporting the government in its success in engaging India in a reasonable, well structured dialogue, we are now bracing for the Opposition to denounce the whole process. Some of our problems have their genesis in our five decades-old feud with India. Unless these problems are solved, we have a pot boiling with issues but without the means (or the will) to solve them. Who says we do not live in interesting times?

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

AS I SEE IT

The recent agreement in Islamabad for structured talks starting June 2004 on all major issues including Kashmir and nuclear weapons has been an acknowledged success. Instead of supporting the government in its success in engaging India in a reasonable, well structured dialogue, we are now bracing for the Opposition to denounce the whole process. Some of our problems have their genesis in our five decades-old feud with India. Unless these problems are solved, we have a pot boiling with issues but without the means (or the will) to solve them.

on is the removal of Gen Musharraf as Head of State, more particularly as COAS. Unity in this resolve does not deter these political parties from clandestine parleys with the President to further their own political fortunes. Against the President on principle, if they can become PM such principles can be ignored! They constantly leak rumours of secret talks to keep alive the hopes of their rank and file for a windfall of political patronage that they will not miss out on the gravy train.

While the role of opposition parties is to effect accountability of the government on a whole host of issues, opposition simply for the sake of opposition is counter-productive to the democratic process, this must evoke criticism and contention on issues and principles rather than orbit only around particular personalities as is mainly the

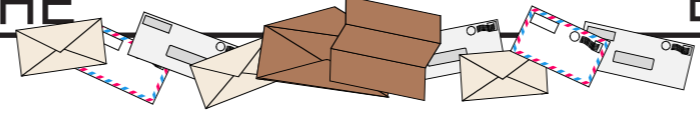
While the world has been looking askance at Pakistan for setting up our nuclear potential in a clandestine manner, there was acceptance of our legitimate defence needs given our conventional (and nuclear) disparity with India. How does one explain a "rogue" scientist engaged in such illegal nuclear proliferation activity in the world environment post-9/11? While the evidence is pretty red-handed the government is scrambling for "damage control" so that our nuclear capability does not come on the "weapon of mass destruction" (WMD) hit list, an opportunity target as some in the international community now openly want it to be. However the opposition's rhetoric is tending to put Pakistan pointblank in the gun sights of the world, the strident "strategic defiance" by the Opposition being picked up by

accused of mid-wifing the birth of the Taliban, we did try to save their hides by encouraging Mullah Umar to not take a death-wish and engage in constructive dialogue with the western powers. On the other hand our political parties, led by the MMA, vociferously protested the US and Coalition attack on Afghanistan in the streets and exhorted our young men to go and fight on the side of the Taliban. Thousands of our youth died in this effort, several thousands are still missing. The Taliban put the Pakistani volunteers in fixed defensive lines outside Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-I-Sharif, etc, they were literally obliterated from the air by carpet bombing by B-52s. The Taliban defenders of Kunduz handed over to the Pakistanis to Rashid Dostum in exchange for their own freedom, he promptly buried thousands of Pakistanis alive

not being a factor with the Afghans anyway.

While the government is not entirely blameless in the conceiving and implementation of our Afghanistan policy (the only policy should be to lay off and keep our hands off), the Opposition is complicating things by opposing military action against those harbouring terrorists in our tribal areas. Are we a "criminal" or "rogue" nation that we should give sanctuary to confirmed terrorists? Our political leaders seem to be generally satisfied that the convoluted policy taking on the military might of the world was a correct one to emulate! This fact is used by a host of our enemies to question the very existence of our nation. The same thing goes for our approach to Iraq. The problem is further exacerbated by our media analysts who regale the audience with what 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.

Boundary conditions

In every phase of life, boundary conditions are hidden troublemakers. In public governance, this is visible, and subject to criticism. But the current generation of local politicians appear to be insensitive to its implications (at the national level). Therefore, the negative practices go by default.

It is a basic operating condition of democratic practices. The give-and-take principle needs internal space for manoeuvring. Insecurity shrinks this space, and causes friction in the art of accommodation. Live and let live cannot be practised in an environment of insecurity. The latter is due to weak foundation. Or, if the foundation is adequate enough, impatience or hurry impedes cultivation of this social lubrication. Lubrication means oiling. The

latter concept is being misused by public workers; ignoring the other side of the coin. The other half of the moon cannot be seen that is cosmic design, with hidden mystical connotation. But the local political culture is based on this moon principle only one side is publicised.

Our politics lack the variations of seasons. Thus the atmosphere becomes turgid, denying variety in life. How is our politics ventilated? How the spring-cleaning is done? Such questions are not seen in the mass or specialised media, although Dhaka is notorious as a haven for seminars and anniversaries.

While on the one hand the going is 'good' for the manipulators, on the other hand the electorate (millions) suffer. Since when politics ceased to earn good testimonials? The three decades

of independence have generated a perverted conception of freedom, which is artificially confined amongst a vested group who control beyond the boundary conditions.

Bandwidth infringements are now standard practice, because it is secretly practised by the politicians at the top level. The deprived have-nots raise hue and cry, for missing their share of the grey goods and services. In the grey market, means are available to redress these grievances and silence the mouths. This generates a thriving black market, where the real value of money is distorted. Materialism denies the privileges to the economically handicapped, as noticed in the third world.

Politics, to be good and expansive, needs specifications, it is there on paper, but in the newly

emerging nations, the tolerance factor of the specifications is very broad, for control and discipline. This is due to several types of gaps in the levels, operating at different levels of society. One is the economic gap (the chasm between the rich and the poor); the other the literacy gap; and the third is the rural distance (pushed into a corner from the centre stage).

Leadership is an avocation of minorities (less than one thousand of one percent of the population), but their philosophies and activities affect 100 per cent of society. The sensitivity of responsibility is missing in the formative years of politics. Sowing wild seeds is much easier. This is the pattern in individual life, but it is fatal in public service. There are some tricks and tools for remedial measures. Sacrifice,

and have faith in plain living and high thinking (in this highly materialistic times). There are other subtle ways, but let the leaders point these out.

Md Abad
Dhaka

UNSC sanction on Saudi charity

We are puzzled to read in some of our English dailies that on the recommendation of the UN Security Council has imposed sanction on four branches of a Saudi Arabian charitable organisation, Al-Haramain Foundation, in Indonesia, Pakistan, Kenya and Tanzania in its alleged involvement with al-Qaeda.

How funny it is that the UNSC could set aside important, urgent and burning issues like oppres-

sion and suppression of the unarmed Palestinians by Israel and US invasion and occupation of Iraq, and dance to the tune of the White House on a petty matter like sanction on a Saudi Arabian charity.

Earlier on the dictation of the White House the UNSC had imposed economic sanction on Iraq for 12 years. And when Iraq languished for want of food and medicine, the US itself invaded and occupied the weak and sick Iraq telling lies to the world that Baghdad possessed weapons of mass destruction.

We wonder if the moribund UNO still has the courage to face the US. If not, let the Afro-Asian countries form a parallel AAUN (Afro-Asian United Nations) with headquarters in New Delhi or Cairo and check and balance the sinister designs of the US-UK domi-

nated UNO for protecting billions of people from the colonialism of the US.

OH Kabir
Dhaka

English syllabus

It leaves no room for any doubt that the present syllabus of English for class VI to X are excellent, but there are some flaws in them. I am trying to focus on these flaws.

First of all, it is universally acknowledged that to write a correct sentence, the role of grammar is undeniable, i.e. tense, voice, idioms and phrases, pair of words etc. These are the basic data of English language needed to write a good sentence and correct English. But it is an irony of fate that these are not taught in our schools any longer. Teachers alone cannot be blamed for this

lapse. There is no emphasis on learning grammar in the new syllabus. Our teachers are not paying due attention to grammar either.

They make their students experts in the art of memorising. As a result, every year a large number of students cut a sorry figure in English exams. Students are totally ignoring grammar.

The authorities concerned are requested to ponder over this matter and include at least 20 marks on the keynotes of grammar. Otherwise, learning good English will ever remain an elusive goal for all of us.

Md. Shafiquee
Tangail