

## National security at stake Seek international help now

It is certainly the biggest of the huge arms hauls that we have seen in the last couple of years. The seizure of ten truckloads of lethal combat-grade weapons from the Karnaphuli coast is indeed alarming news.

The ultimate destination of the huge load of arms is not yet known. Is Bangladesh being used as a regular transit route by international arms dealers having links with terrorist groups in the neighbouring countries? Or was the latest consignment meant for some local terrorist outfit? These questions have to be answered if we want to get at the root of it.

The arms and ammunition were apparently unloaded from a ship in the outer anchorage. So the investigators should concentrate on finding out the international linkages and the possible shipping route. That could provide vital clues about the *modus operandi* of the men behind the illegal business.

The government must respond vigorously to what is surely a very potent threat to our national security. Imagine what it would really have meant if the arms landed in the hands of some terrorists within! The government should immediately seek help from international organisations like the Interpol, and specially those that keep watch on maritime arms smuggling, in order to resolve the mystery. The big jolt to national security must be neutralised with effective counter moves.

Then comes the question of how the issue should be handled by the political parties. The state minister for home has already said that opposition involvement in the arms haul cannot be ruled out. Similar charges and counter-charges were traded in the past every time there was a big arms haul. It seems national security has been relegated to a position of secondary importance, as the political parties remain busy blaming each other for such grave threats to our collective security. We believe the ammo haul cases made little headway in the past because of premature and irresponsible politicisation of the highly sensitive issue. The state minister has made his first move, a blind shot no doubt, without carefully weighing the implications of what he has actually said.

It is the terrorists and the threat that they pose to our national security which must be eliminated at any cost. The political parties must reach an understanding on how that goal can be attained. This is not the time for political and personal bickering.

## Hasina's motorcade attacked again

Does the government not care about public opinion?

Once again Sheikh Hasina's motorcade has come under attack in Barisal, allegedly at the hands of BNP activists, injuring party leaders, activists and journalists. Her previous visit to Barisal at the end of February was also marred by a more or less identical attack, and the incident on Friday is just the latest in a long line of recent ruling party attacks on its political opponents.

However, intimidation and harassment of the opposition did not begin with the present government's tenure, and the previous AL government's misdeeds while in power were very similar. It seems as though the violent repression of the opposition has become a constant feature of this country's political landscape, regardless of who is in power and who is in opposition.

But the fact that the AL indulged in similar antics when in power is no justification for what the BNP government is doing. We condemned the actions of the AL government then and we condemn the actions of the BNP government today. For this country to ever advance we need to move beyond the recriminations and accusations and counter-accusations that have dogged party politics in this country.

Many people voted for the current government precisely because of the excesses of the previous administration. Now we see the BNP government indulge in exactly the kind of anti-democratic activity it so rightly decried under AL rule.

What we need from our politicians is a true commitment to democratic ideals and principles -- not a selective commitment when it suits their purposes. But instead we have come to a stage where we are no longer even surprised when an opposition leader is attacked or harassed. This is what we have come to expect from our governments.

Our political leaders must come to the realisation that the politics of opposition party repression is destructive to the nation and ultimately counter-productive to their own self-interest. The public has repeatedly indicated at the polls that it is turned off by the authoritarian instincts of our leadership.

But what is most worrisome about the current state of the national body politic is that our successive government no longer make any effort to hide their anti-democratic inclinations and no longer seem to care much about the good opinion of the public who they are supposed to serve.

# Pakistan -- a major non-NATO ally: A wrong decision?

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

**D**URING his most recent visit to South Asia US Secretary of State Colin Powell announced the intention of the Bush administration to notify the US Congress that it would designate Pakistan as a major non-NATO ally for the purpose of future bilateral military relations. Stating that Pakistan has an important role to play in this region, he described Pakistan "as a moderate, modern Muslim nation, a nation that is becoming increasingly democratic". He allayed fears of the possibility of any sudden change in Pakistan's policy on the war on terror should President Musharraf who has been target of several assassination attempts on his life were to depart from Pakistan's political scene. Colin Powell assured that the US was working with the government of Pakistan which did not rest on any single individual and that the US was reaching out to all levels of Pakistani society.

Indian reaction to the US decision to upgrade military relations with Pakistan was measured. An official spokesman of the Indian Foreign Office said that India was studying the details of the decision "which has significant implications for the India-US relations". Indian government expressed disappointment that Colin Powell did not warn India about the decision though he was in Delhi just two days before he made the announcement in Islamabad relating to Pakistan. Perhaps to calm India down US State Department expressed the hope that the decision to upgrade military relations with Pakistan would not affect relations with India because of the strength and depth of the existing "strategic partnership" between the two countries.

The notion of "major non-NATO ally" (MNNAs) status first surfaced in 1989. For several years this status was limited to Australia, Egypt, Israel, Japan and South Korea. In 1992 a new section was added to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 giving the US President the authority to name new countries to be MNNAs. The President's designation of MNNAs takes effect thirty days after Congress is notified in writing. Though MNNAs does not enjoy the same benefits of defence and

security guarantee afforded to NATO members, yet there are defence related advantages in the upgradation of military relationship. Some of the benefits are: priority delivery of excess defence articles, stockpiling of the US defence articles, purchase of depleted uranium anti-tank rounds, participation in cooperative research and development programmes, and participation in Defence Export Loan Guarantee programme which backs up private loans for commercial defence articles.

It is obvious that the inclusion of Pakistan in the list of MNNAs is to reward Pakistan's total cooperation in the US led war on terror. Before the efficacy of the US decision is analysed beyond its very short term

question of the reliability of Pakistan as an ally of the US war on terror. Leon Haeder of the Cato Institute advised Washington to view Pakistan, with its dictatorship, failed economy, and insecure nuclear arsenal "as a reluctant supporter of US goals at best and as a potential long term problem at worst". He did not see President Musharraf's decision to join the US on its war on terror as reflecting a structural transformation in Pakistan's policy but a tactical move to cut losses resulting from the demolition of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Besides, the reported choice given to President Musharraf by Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage of either to cooperate or be bombed to stone age( reflecting President

threat in 1945 the Pakistani threat is extant. While in the case of the former it was Communism in Pakistan's case it is Islamic extremism. Since the partition of India in 1947 Pakistan has been largely dictated by the politics of religion. Except for some feeble attempts to bring about secular values, both civilian and military rulers had appealed to the religious sentiments of the Pakistanis to gain legitimacy and to ensure survival. The fact that the very creation of Pakistan was based on the ground that Indian Muslims and Hindus could not co-exist together was the most compelling religious argument which convinced the British to the creation of the two adversarial states in the sub-continent.

infidels and demand constitutional amendment to that effect. Sectarian killings are considered as jihad. One may also recall the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), established by President Ayub Khan in 1960 which received expanded powers during General Zia-ul-Huq's Islamisation campaign. In 1991 Nawaz Sharif's government made death penalty mandatory for blaspheming the Holy Prophet(sm). The Hudood ordinances and the related Qanoon-e-Shahdaat (the law of evidence) were discriminatory to women.

The central point of the above discourse is to emphasize the fact that Islamisation is an irreversible fact of life in Pakistan with its implicit anti-Western and anti-American

then Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov in 1998. Besides, Sino-Indian relations are reportedly improving.

An additional factor promoting such an alliance could be India's reasonably high growth rate. IMF calculates that by 2006 India would have a larger GDP than Italy or Britain and by 2025 could surpass those of Germany and France. Should it come to pass Indian economy would be the fourth largest in the world after the US, Japan and China. Professor Joseph Nye of Harvard Kennedy School of Government, however dismisses the possibility of India alone becoming a global challenger of the US in this century though India has considerable assets that could be added to the scale of Sino-Russian-Indian coalition. He also thinks of such a coalition becoming a serious anti-American threat to be remote.

In any case not taking India into confidence about upgrading military relations with Pakistan and making the announcement in Islamabad at a time when India is in the midst of a general election do not bode well for Indo-US strategic partnership. Such duplicity, if it was so, would portray the US to the Indian public as politically insensitive. Besides the US might not have enhanced its prestige in the world by "supping with the devil" in the backdrop of A.Q.Khan's nuclear black marketing which should have merited punishment and not reward. It remains to be seen as to how the US will make up to India for its foreign policy lapse and finally come to terms with the fact that South Asia is "India dominant" and not "Pakistan dominant" and any American attempt to equate India and Pakistan will be strategically unrealistic. Besides, the region may see another arms race as a result of the US decision relating to Pakistan. In any case, one cannot but be amazed by the serial foreign policy blunders committed by the Bush administration administering a country which strides the globe like a colossus, dominating every sphere of global activity and possessing military might second to none.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador

**US designation of Pakistan as major non-NATO ally may allow the US to have military presence in Pakistan as is the case in Japan and South Korea. US nuclear assets could also be stationed there. In return the US could expect Pakistan to send sizeable number of troops to Iraq to relieve war weary American soldiers stationed there... In all these cases popular discontent against the Pakistani government and the US administration is bound to surface with all intensity.**

goal of rewarding Pakistan despite proliferation of nuclear technology by A.Q.Khan, one may wish to trawl through US relations with other MNNAs. Australia has been tied to the US by ANZUS alliance since 1951 and as a follower of "whites only" immigration policy till seventies was a sort of apartheid South Africa in the midst of Australasia region. In 1964 Australia introduced draft to send troops to Vietnam during the war which was abolished when Labour government came to power. In the current war on terror Prime Minister John Howard has been hawkish in favour of the US position, a policy not uniformly supported by Australians. In the cases of Japan and South Korea, both of which host US troops on their soil, MNNAs status is a natural development of their military relations with the US. Inclusion of Israel on the pretext of guaranteeing its security does not need elaboration. Egypt was perhaps included because of changed Egyptian policy towards the US in post-Nasser era and in view of Camp David accord between Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin through the mediation of President Carter.

In the case of Pakistan one hopes that the Bush administration had given serious consideration to the

Bush's dictum of either you are with us or against us) helped to expedite Pakistan's decision to join the US in the war on terror. In an op-ed (March 17, 2004) Colin Powell denied that US-Pakistan relations are "a temporary marriage of convenience". He emphasised that "the US partnership with Pakistan is not just for today and tomorrow. Our partnership is for the long term". He added that American interests in Pakistan was not defined by the state of Indo-Pak relations nor driven solely by the US need to secure Pak assistance against terrorism and proliferation.

Notwithstanding Colin Powell's sacramental testimony on US-Pakistan relations State Department could have considered President Musharraf's televised speech to the nation( on 19.09.2001) in which he compared his move to cooperate with the US to the temporary cease fire Muslim leaders signed with the non-believers at early stages of Islamic history to provide the Muslims with the opportunity to gain strength and expand influence. Political analyst Matt Thundiyil has compared the US policy of cooperation with Pakistan as an alliance with a lesser evil against a greater evil. In reality, writes Thundiyil, like the Soviet

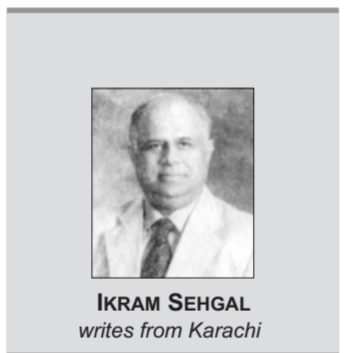
Pakistan is an Islamicocracy. Pakistan's Constitution provides that all existing laws shall be brought in conformity with the injunction of Islam as laid down in the Holy Quran and Sunnah and no law shall be enacted which is repugnant to such injunctions. According to a report by the Brussels based International Crisis Group( ICG report no 49) mullahs and military worked together against common foes during the Cold War period and have identical views on Kashmir and towards India. One should, however, be cognisant of improving Indo-Pak relations and the on-going attacks on Al-Qaida by Pakistani military in the lawless region of South Waziristan. Yet the fundamental fact remains that Muttahida-Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), a conglomerate of religious fundamentalist political parties, has a considerable presence in the centre and rules the two provinces bordering Afghanistan with a declared Islamisation agenda.

Additionally, Pakistan is bedeviled with religious sectarian conflicts. The Sunnis are divided into two groups one following Deobandi school and the other Bareilvi school of thought. The Deobandis are anti-Shia. The hard core among them, the vast majority, consider the Shias

sentiments remaining as integral parts of the Islamist agenda. Therefore rewarding countries like Pakistan despite the US administration's satisfaction over the dismantling of A.Q. Khan's nuclear proliferation network, with enhanced military support is likely to boomerang in the long run.

US designation of Pakistan as major non-NATO ally may allow the US to have military presence in Pakistan as is the case in Japan and South Korea. US nuclear assets could also be stationed there. In return the US could expect Pakistan to send sizeable number of troops to Iraq to relieve war weary American soldiers stationed there. In another scenario of US troops stationed in Pakistan could be used for intervention in Iran should such a situation arise. In all these cases popular discontent against the Pakistani government and the US administration is bound to surface with all intensity. As it is US invasion of Iraq and Pakistani military attacks on suspected Al-Qaida operatives in South Waziristan are hugely unpopular among Pakistani people. Possible Indian response to a militarily strengthened Pakistan could see an emergence of Russia-China-India strategic alliance with anti-US bias, a proposal formally put forward by

## Iraq one year after



IKRAM SEHGAL  
writes from Karachi

urban guerilla warfare. Acts of sabotage and terror are daily occurrences, the security situation in Iraq is deteriorating instead of stabilizing. Suicide bombers are involved in most of the attacks in the cities, making it difficult for the intelligence operatives to track down their origins. The urban guerillas are suspected to be mostly secular Ba'athist Sunnis, supporters of the previous regime, as well as radical religious fundamentalists, including fanatic volunteers from other muslim countries. Latent internal rival-

ally the respective fears of the different communities. However, the new Constitution leaves open crucial questions, e.g. the shape of Iraqi institutions, the electoral system and the way the Provisional Government will be formed, these have yet to be agreed upon. In fact the relations between the American forces and the Iraqi State, defining their legal and political parameters, has also to be defined.

The vast Shia majority's power to bring about radical legislation is feared by the Kurds and Sunnis.

partly because (1) they form an overwhelming majority in a contiguous region, (2) their longstanding cooperation with the Americans and (3) the maturity of their political leaders who erased their differences for sake of larger unity, and were able to work together despite their historical rivalries.

The Sunnis are for the moment the big losers since their top leaders disappeared with the exit of Saddam's regime, those in the second tier lack experience and exposure, they have had to fall back

presence in Iraq fearing that a settlement under US rule in line with American interests, will arm President Bush with the ability to turn US power against Iran.

Iraq's southern neighbors including the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia are monitoring developments in Iraq with mixed feelings, hope tinged with apprehension. A settlement under US diktat may stabilize the situation in Iraq, allow Baghdad back into the Arab fold and allow Iraq's oil revenues to support Iraq's political, economic and social

Libya has already made significant policy changes, Syria seriously feeling threatened by the US, is seeking rapprochement. Iraq's new leaders will seek new understandings and alliances in the Arab fold, this could well change the existing balance of power.

Turkey is very interested in the developments. The erosion of the identity between State and religion, as expressed in the Provisional Constitution, are in line with Turkish interests and principles. Turkey's potential influence on the water regime in Iraq could be a lever in future relations with any new regime in Baghdad. The strengthening of the Kurd region in Iraq worry Ankara, this could influence the large Kurd minority in eastern Turkey, close to the Kurd area in Iraq. They too might demand cultural and political autonomy and so undermine Turkey's domestic stability.

The setting of a timetable for a reduced American presence and an orderly transfer of power to the Iraqis as well as preventing shockwaves among America's allies in the Gulf, are essential milestones for the US President. If Bush fails to achieve any of this even partially, his Democratic rival will make use of it in his campaign and send him down Saddam's exit lane. Washington's failure to put together an agreement could seriously undermine America's ability to go on dictating the regional agenda, it will open the door to rival forces. On the other hand, a settlement achieved under American auspices will be a major strategic gain for Washington, enabling President Bush to keep up his campaign to alter the regional balance of power vis-à-vis Iraq, Syria and other radical Islamic forces. Above all it will help Bush keep his Presidency!

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

## AS I SEE IT

**If the US fails to achieve stability and create a modern democracy before leaving Iraq, it will have major implications for the Gulf states. Iran or its proxies may try and fill the vacuum and establish Shia hegemony, leaders in the Gulf and Saudi area will see this as a disruptive process threatening their regimes. Libya has already made significant policy changes, Syria seriously feeling threatened by the US, is seeking rapprochement. Iraq's new leaders will seek new understandings and alliances in the Arab fold, this could well change the existing balance of power.**

ries among the Shias have surfaced post-Saddam but have yet to reach alarming proportions.

To facilitate an orderly transfer of power from the US to the Iraqi people and clear the way for the creation of political institutions on the basis of the understandings reached between the various ethnic groups, a new Provisional Constitution has been agreed upon, this will be effective on June 30, 2004. The interim Constitution, which sets out parameters for the building of new institutions, the structure of the regime and its internal relations is a major success for the US. Reflecting the interests of three major ethnic groups, Shias, Sunnis and Kurds, the Constitution codifies future relations among the communities, and spells out their identification with the State and its Constitution. The checks and balances in the agreed Constitution are designed to

Having ruled Iraq till Saddam's exit the Sunnis are particularly affected. Both the Kurds and the Sunnis' fear that the Shias would turn Iraq into an Islamic State, the raison d'etre for enacting a clause extending legislation beyond the Shariah. A mutual determination to prevent any one of the ethnic groups being dominant at the centers of power was the reason for a shared Presidency, mandating the President and his deputies to make unanimous decisions.

The representatives of the ethnic groups set parameters determining the character of the Iraqi State for the foreseeable future, safeguarding their interests in a manner that would make it very difficult to effect changes after a new government is established and a permanent Constitution is voted upon. The Provisional Constitution reflects the current balance of power. The Kurds were able to get as much as they did

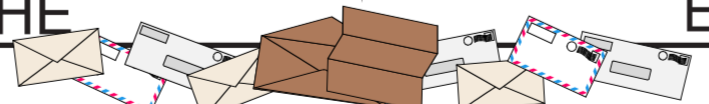
on a moderate stance to prove they had no plans to restore the old regime. The Shias have tended to compromise because some of their more militant leaders were eliminated during the long period of the Saddam regime. The leading religious figure, Ayatolla Sistani, has been surprisingly moderate, holding out for less than what they could have got.

Iran was deeply involved with the Iraqi Shias against Saddam's regime before the American invasion, Saddam's exit, followed by the US occupation, has only made the task easier for the Iranians to try and frustrate US objectives. The Iranian interest in Iraq is derived from border disputes (over the Shatt-al-Arab and Khuzestan), historical enmity, competition over oil resources and the existence of a large Shia population in Iraq. The Iranians feel threatened by the US

objectives. The monarchies and other authoritarian regimes in the area fear that the seepage of ideas undermining Iraq's Arab heritage and instituting of democratic rule into their countries could impact adversely on the stability of their regimes. The creation of a democratic regime based on civil rights, individual liberty and religious pluralism constitutes a threat to tribal regimes and to the privileged status of the monarchies. As it is the US plan for political reform has caused considerable anguish in the Middle East.

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## 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.

### Analysing politics

Forming a national government based on cooperation among the pro-liberation forces was always out of the question for the Awami League. The analysts rate this as one of the greatest weaknesses of the AL. The AL's anti-communist, anti-socialist face is not a mask, it is a reality. So far we know, the AL really does not appreciate the idea of being too close to the successors of the communists or socialists. But the party can't afford to lose their support at this juncture of time. Possible coalition partners of the AL, as has been reported in the press, would have trouble in a probable coalition

as well, should the movement succeed, because the AL leadership is opposed to the ideas of communists or socialists.

We can have the real picture within a few days, however, but to me, the AL has successfully postponed the critical moment by taking advantage of the callousness of the BNP leadership that facilitates various political and non-political groups to come closer to the anti-government movement. Certainly, the situation resulted in fierce quarrels amongst different political groups, with each side blaming the other for being perfidious (the coalition government to the opposition) or unable to man-

age anything, even such important issues of civil security and erratic market behaviour (the opposition to the coalition government).

We're in a breeding ground of civil unrest -- some politicians may have been benefited from the situation but what will happen to the people? **Sirajul Islam**  
Social sciences researcher and consultant  
Pisciculture Housing Society,  
Shyamoli, Dhaka

### Water crisis

The Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (WASA) did sink a deep-well at the former pass-

port office located at New Eskaton area six years back to mitigate the shortage in water supply around the pump location. During the past years, too many multi-storied apartments have been built and more are in the process of being built, while no other additional water supply source has been created in this area. Thus water shortage is felt acutely by the dwellers of this locality. Recently, road dividers have been demolished and built again, surface drains were totally distorted before the job was complete by laying additional telephone cables and so on. The City Corporation street lights

are neither put off in time nor lit in time as one can see street lights in broad daylight. Money thus wasted can definitely finance several deep tube-well pumps here and there in Dhaka city where water crisis is acute.

The Annual Development Plan (ADP) has an average expenditure budget of around Tk 18,000 crore but many expenditures are not for the benefit of the common masses or taxpayers. However, deep tube-wells should be sunk immediately at Eskaton and many areas in order to meet the water crisis. **Mahbubar Rahman**

Dhaka

### After April 30

What is going to happen after April 30? This has been the talk of the country as the main opposition, Awami league, has predicted that the government will not survive after that date. If it sticks to its position, which has so far been very aggressive, the month of April will undoubtedly present some gruesome and undemocratic scenes to the countrymen. The law and order situation has worsened to an unimaginable level in the last few months. The paraphernalia for running the government is in absolute disarray.

Foreign entrepreneurs are reluctant to invest here, which is a great bane for us.

By setting the deadline, the AL has paved the way for chaos and confusion only. It is also unconstitutional to compel an elected government to resign. **ABM Shafiqul Islam**  
Dept. of English, Jahangirnagar University

### Blame game

The game that is going on in the country can only be called 'Game of Blame'. The participants in the game are the government and the opposition. The opposition was, as usual,

quick enough to blame the government for the attack on Dr. Humayun

Azad. On the other hand, the government was no less quick than the opposition to launch a counter-attack. It has accused the opposition of seeking excuses for creating a chaotic situation in the country.

We, the common people, do not and cannot trust any party until it presents evidences in favour of its claims. **Peter Hossain**  
Chandanpura, Chittagong