

Saifur's swipe at donors

But the questions raised remain valid

WE are in general agreement with the finance minister that elected governments should not take orders from donor nations or anyone else. We, however, do not share his confidence that a government that has been so exclusionary in its dealings, sidelining the opposition and marginalising civil society and the media, can justifiably use this as a line of defense.

The finance minister's comments to the media during the second day of the annual Bangladesh Development Forum meeting unfortunately suffered from the government's now familiar reliance on two convenient tools of defense. First, the minister blamed the media for the country's image problem, and, second, he defended the government by drawing laughable and irrelevant comparisons between Bangladesh and other countries. The suffering of the people is real, and facile comparisons to New York or some other city are meaningless and unhelpful.

The bigger point is not whether it is the place of our development partners to raise questions about the state of the nation, but whether the concerns they have raised are valid or not.

The fact is that what they have said reflects what we in the independent media have been saying for the last several years. It is true that law and order has plummeted and that corruption is institutionalised and endemic. These facts remain true whoever brings them up. Raising these issues may hurt Bangladesh's pride, but the existence of the many problems that continue to bedevil us are far more injurious to us than the embarrassment of exposure.

Indeed some of the donor critiques were simply pointing out that the government has failed to live up to its own election pledges to separate the judiciary from the executive and to form a human rights commission. What can be the harm in reminding the government of its responsibilities to its own people?

Furthermore, when the government has made pledges to the donors to institute reforms and has dragged its foot on these, do they not have a right to mention this? The finance minister's suggestion to the media that multilateral donors should only support member countries and not issue any criticism of their policies makes little sense. A side question, would he have found these remarks as offensive if his party was in the opposition? In all likelihood he would have praised them for being so forthright.

Terror to tide over terror?

Parting with responsibility

A private armed group has reportedly been assisting the police to rid the four northwestern districts of Bangladesh of the scourge of 'Sarbaharas'. We are given to understand from what was stated by the DIG of the range that 'Bangla Bhai' and his men are supporting the police to track down the underground elements.

Certain conclusions can be drawn from this: first, the police have failed to tackle the Sarbahara on their own; second, calling upon a group of persons to do the work of the police is not an uncommon practice; and third, in effect, the local police have abdicated its bounden duty to provide security to the common man.

While the state can seek the help of the people in tackling a particular situation, the idea of employing a private armed group in apprehending elements of an underground party is rather preposterous. More so, when the group resembles a vigilante. As a matter of fact, in the name of fighting terror they are terrorising people, and in some instances, even killing them.

Their credentials are questionable, and by the reports that are available, have a particular agenda of their own. Even more disconcerting is the report that this group has also taken upon itself the tasks of ridding society of corruption and illegal weapons -- a pious desire, but a tall order for a private armed cadre.

We urge the government to realise the danger in such a venture. This will set a dangerous precedent for the future role of the police in tackling law and order situations. It is for the police to provide security to the common man. Falling back on private cadres is fraught with danger. This is unacceptable, to say the least.

What are the signposts of a failed state?

A M M SHAWKAT ALI

THE debate over failed states started in the early nineties. According to one estimate, "failed states have killed about eight million people, most of them civilians, and displaced another four million." If we add the number of people deprived of basic needs such as security, health care, and nutrition, the total number will run into hundreds of millions. This is evidenced from the fact that during the decade of the nineties, there were a number of world summits such as the World Summit for Social Development (1995) and the World Food Summit (1996). The recent Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of the United Nations (UN) has also drawn attention to the need to support and achieve development targets to reduce both economic and social dimensions of poverty.

State failure is not new

Researchers recognise that state failure is not new. But it has become more dangerous than ever because such states threaten not only themselves but their neighbour and even global security. It is the threat to global security that forms the key element of the US administration's theory of its right to intervene with military might. Some view this approach as the way to global anarchy. Others view it as a reverse case of state failure for the US. This is discussed below.

A reverse state failure

Abid Ullah Jan, columnist for *The Nation* (Pakistan), convincingly argues that the US provides an example of a reverse state failure. Jan views this from both political and historical perspectives. From a political standpoint, US Congress "are approving shifts in the balance of power away from the legislature and the state agencies." As a result, Jan argues, the underlying principle of the Declaration of Independence, the inalienable right to liberty, has disappeared from the American political landscape. From the viewpoint of history, failed states were affected by "cold war which kept shallow-rooted regimes in power [that] destroyed traditional social structures but not long enough to replace them with viable constitutional structures."

The signposts of state failure

Globally, the signposts to state failure are several and they may vary across countries. These elements can be grouped into economic and political. The signposts in case of the first group include deterioration of living standards as political elite provides access to financial rewards to their kinsmen or small groups loyal to them, food and fuel scarcities, cutting down government expenditure on public good that adversely impacts on loss of entitlements for the citizens. There is also a rise in corruption that allows

social order. This also leads to the process of erosion of the capacity of the legitimate institutions of the state to maintain public order, ensure security of citizens that are vitally necessary for rapid economic and social development. The process of erosion of capacity eventually leads to complete collapse of the machineries of the state. Consequently, the ultimate outcome is a stateless society.

State failure vs government failure

There are many who argue that state failure and failure of the government are not synonymous. The

societies have been unable to stop invaders who then establish state institutions in the hope that the threat of invasion can be mitigated in the future. By institutions of governance in a stateless society, Benson meant 'ordered anarchy'. The second part of the answer provided clearly indicates the need to have rules and institutions of governance to ensure that competition for scarce resources do not take violent forms.

This, however, is more easily said than achieved. For capture of oil resources the American invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq is a case in point. The US did it

reported in the newspapers. Cutting down expenditure on public good is foreseen in the announcement to spend on unproductive areas. Additionally, the government's Public Expenditure Review Commission, as reported in various newspapers, was very critical of public expenditure policy of the government. Corruption is endemic and needs no further elaboration as the Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB) has shown. At the other end, the government despite its declared public policy pronouncements to put in place a non-partisan institutional framework to combat corruption, it is just beginning to be visible.

those with a voice of dissent. The height of intolerance rather than tolerance, total lack of respect for dissenting voices rather than attempt to secure consent or achieve accommodation appear to dominate the political scenario.

To top it all, a recent report in *Time*, republished in *Prothom Alo*, concluded that Bangladesh is the most ineffective of all states in the South Asian region. Some other newspapers have labeled it as a one-sided report calculated to undermine the image of the country. However, the facts as demonstrated by a continuing downturn in the stability-supporting role of the state speak louder than fiction. There is an urgent need to come to terms with reality. What the reality is has been amply demonstrated by independent studies and opinions of apolitical observers. One eminent civil society activist has rightly observed that there is a clear nexus among corruption, politics, and violence. This implies that the three elements mentioned above have a symbiotic relationship. This is perhaps one of the major areas of concern.

One such study is Human Security in Bangladesh: In Search of Justice and Human Dignity (UNDP, 2002). The discussion on this report was held by the Centre for Policy Dialogue. The conclusion drawn was:

"The overall picture painted is gloomy, as the report itself characterises... the dominating public perception that remains today is one of widespread human security violations, especially against the poor and the disadvantaged, and an inefficient, complex and corrupt criminal justice system operating in an anti-poor environment... however, what is also evident in the report and emerged in numerous interviews is the existence of many determined individuals and organizations that are fighting every day to change the situation."

What needs to be done?

The signposts to a failed state vary from country to country. One only hopes that voices of reason will prevail over acts of wanton violence to prevent the slide towards Bangladesh becoming a failed state. The citizens of Bangladesh need not worry so much about the reverse state failure as Abid Ullah Jan has cited in the case of the US.

AMM Shawkat Ali is a former Agriculture Secretary.

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the ruling cadres to "skim the few resources available" and to stash away their ill-gotten gains in foreign banks that are hard to trace. The examples include Democratic Republic of Congo under Mobutu Sese Seko and Somalia under Mohammed Siad Barre. Citing these examples, Rotburg, columnist for *Foreign Affairs*, observes: "These rulers were personally greedy, but as predatory patrimonialists they also licensed and sponsored the avarice of others, thus preordaining the destruction of their states."

On the political side, it leads to tyranny in administration. Individual and political rights are trampled with impunity by using the coercive powers of the state to ensure staying in power. In this scenario, the concept of sovereignty of the state is merged and confused with personal autocratic rule rather than rule by consent. It is altogether forgotten that both the elements of power and consent are essential elements for state success. Absence of a balanced and unbiased attention to both the elements lead to supercessions of element of consent or tolerance by the element of power. It has to be recognised that ever increasing coercive powers of the state and its thoughtless application alone will not conduce to the growth and maintenance of a pluralistic political and

point made is valid in its own right.

It should be distinctly understood, however, that continued failure of successive governments irrespective of their hue and colour definitely leads to a situation of failed state. It is from this perspective that the distinction between state failure and government failure should be viewed. Again, when governments fail to make a distinction between the authority of the state and the authority of the party in power, the symptoms of failed state appear which, unless reversed, inevitably sets in the process of sliding towards a failed state not merely of the government. The distinction thus is thin.

The distinction between failed state and stateless society

The distinction between a failed state and a stateless society is very thin indeed. If the signposts for a failed state already mentioned continue for a long time, the failed state graduates into a stateless society. It is in this context, that Benson of the Libertarian Foundation raises the question: Can a Stateless Society Survive? The tentative answers proposed by Benson are that (a) the internal institutions of governance in a stateless society are inherently stable and (b) historically stateless

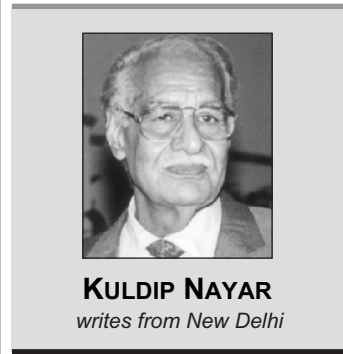
despite rules and institutions in the form of the UN charter and the UN itself. Saddam has been captured only to ignite strongest ever opposition to American Occupation of Iraq. US administration has acknowledged it to be a serious situation which is confirmed by offers for ceasefire and subsequent withdrawal from Fallujah.

Bangladesh case

In the recent past, there were a number of newspaper articles that tried to examine whether Bangladesh had become a failed state or was sliding towards the same. What do we find if we apply the signposts of a failed state mentioned earlier? First, deterioration in living standards. At this point of time, the evidence is not very strong if per capita food intake is taken into account. The per capita food intake was 886.2 grams in 1991-92.

It rose to 913.8 in 1995-96 and then fell to 893.1 in 2000 (BBS 2001). The official figures after 2000 are not yet published. This need not deter one from saying that inflation in 2002-03 had gone up to 5.2 percent while in 2000-2001 it was 1.6 percent. In 2003-2004 it is believed to have risen higher. Food and fuel scarcities are occasional as have been demonstrated by the acute "Monga" situation in the northwest last year and fertilizer and the diesel scarcities for Boro farmers as

Not a healthy concoction



KULDIP NAYAR writes from New Delhi

trifurcate the state, will never agree to the state's division on the basis of religion. Such a solution can deliver a fatal blow to its pluralistic society. This is what I said at Brussels where a discourse on Kashmir was held under the aegis of European Parliament. Sardar Abdul Qayyam Khan from the 'Azad Kashmir and Gohar Ayub Khan, former Pakistan foreign minister, were present. They raised no objection when I said that India would never accept any solution of Kashmir which was founded on religion. "We can't go

mir expatriates and the Pakistanis present at the discourse were conscious of what would happen to Kashmir if Europe were to be involved. It was satisfying to see that the offer of "good offices" by European Parliament was rejected. But that does not solve the Kashmir problem. We, in India, may honestly believe that Kashmir is the symptom and not the disease and that the disease is the mistrust between India and Pakistan. Still that mistrust will need to be removed. Isn't the lack of solution on Kashmir

Some "innovative" solutions, as Vajpayee had suggested, should be found. This would require a non-official effort like the one on the lines of people-to-people contact. Such individuals from India and Pakistan who have no political, religious or other agenda of their own or of their governments, should meet and re-meet to discuss Kashmir. They may be able to draw the contours of a proposal which has the consensus behind it. Leaders from Kashmir should be associated at some stage so that what is worked out

something that the security forces can sort out. Many army chiefs have gone on record as saying that Kashmir cannot be solved militarily. What we have to do is to devise ways to stop human rights violations. The security forces, although curbed, continue to indulge in excesses. Despite strict instructions to the armed forces, instances of brutality have been quite a few. Interrogation centers have lessened in number but they are still there. It is a pity that the gun culture has got ingrained in the psyche of the Kashmiris and those

own ambition and partly by its policy to keep the problem alive for home consumption. Pakistan has looked at Kashmir from the religious point of view, not from the Kashmiris' point of view. In the process, it has lost the pull it once had.

The lesson both India and Pakistan have to learn -- if the rulers can ever learn -- is to keep religion separate from the state. New Delhi has been making efforts off and on without much success. Islamabad has had no compunction in mixing religion with the state, although it has realised belatedly, the dangers of the nexus.

Take the attempt to reform education in Pakistan. The Sustainable Development Policy Institute, an independent body, has said in a report that books used in schools contribute to the growth of bias based on religious belief and encourage "discrimination against minorities." The government has shelved the report because it could not even put the Quranic verse from one section to another of the "sacred curriculum."

As far as India is concerned, education minister Murlu Manohar Joshi is in the midst of changing books and re-writing history. If the BJP-led coalition returns to power, he will be like a bull in the China shop. Religion will be introduced with a vengeance in the name of culture or tradition.

After elections, I hope, India will go back to its ethos of secularism and Pakistan to its founder's exhortation of not mixing religion with the state. Unless the two countries rise above parochialism, they have little future.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

The lesson both India and Pakistan have to learn -- if the rulers can ever learn -- is to keep religion separate from the state. New Delhi has been making efforts off and on without much success. Islamabad has had no compunction in mixing religion with the state, although it has realised belatedly, the dangers of the nexus. After elections, I hope, India will go back to its ethos of secularism and Pakistan to its founder's exhortation of not mixing religion with the state. Unless the two countries rise above parochialism, they have little future.

back to partition when one million people were killed and 20 million uprooted from their homes," I said. I could not understand why the representatives of European Parliament were insistent on associating themselves with the talks between India and Pakistan. They wanted a resolution to be adopted for that purpose. Europe is part of the West which has lost its credibility after what has happened to Iraq at the hands of America.

What swung the opinion at the Brussels Discourse against European Parliament's intervention was the intense hatred that the fate of Iraq had evoked in the Islamic world. The Kash-

sustaining that mistrust? It is possible that while tackling Kashmir we may stumble upon some ways to have confidence in each other. Beating the same old path or debating the discussed and re-discussed solutions may not do. This is not the job that can be left to the foreign offices or the bureaucracies in the two countries. They carry too much baggage of the past. The Pakistan Foreign Office repeated the other day "the right of self-determination." But President General Pervez Musharraf has realistically stated that the demand for implementing the UN resolutions on Kashmir was outmoded.

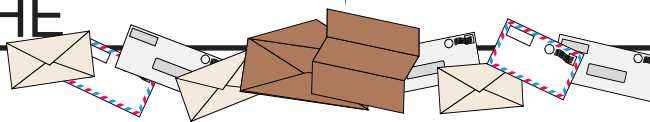
is acceptable to all the three. No time limit can be fixed. The beginning of the process is important, not the deadline.

The Indians, however, must accept the blame for messing up Kashmir. We have held no fair elections, except the one in 1977. The Election Commission has asserted itself in the last two polls, as it is doing now. The polls have been fairly honest despite violence and the pressure of boycott. The story has not been any different this time. Still, 40 per cent of voters in the state exercised their franchise. This is not a bad scenario.

But New Delhi should realise that Kashmir is a political problem, not

who are helping or fighting them. Too much time has been wasted and too many people have been alienated. Why didn't the government hold talks with the Hurriyat leaders in the 1990s when human rights activists repeatedly told it to do so? I wonder if posterity would ever forgive the successive governments at Delhi for all the harm they have done to Kashmir. Terrorists have, no doubt, disfigured what was once an honest movement for autonomy. But New Delhi's hands have not been clean. It is time for retrospection. On the other hand, Islamabad has not allowed the state to settle down from day one. It has been driven partly by its

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



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Proshika and politics

The government is yet to gather hard evidence of any conspiracy against the state by leading NGO Proshika, even after police raided its headquarters twice. If any organisation is found to be involved in any conspiracy against the state, it should be punished according to the law. But the attitude of the ruling four-party alliance towards this NGO is unacceptable. **Mallik Akram Hossain** Hong Kong

Israeli occupation must end

I do not know what to say. The surprise policy shift on the Middle East by the United States has made me flabbergasted and apprehensive of its consequences. G.W. Bush, the president of the United States, is saying 'yes' to everything that Ariel Sharon, the prime minister of Israel, is proposing. Israel's plan is to hold on to

some parts of the West bank captured in 1967, and in a meeting with Sharon, President Bush signalled his administration's backing it, which is indeed shocking.

Bush said it was unrealistic to expect Israel to pull out from all the land captured in the 1967 War and further added Palestinian refugees should not be allowed to return to the land lost to Israel in 1948, when the Jewish state was created. We just cannot believe it, is there any example like this? Power misused, helping the wrong doers? It will escalate violence and peace in the Middle East will remain a far cry.

What has got into Bush? Why is he acting unjustly on every front? His submissive attitude to Ariel Sharon is very surprising. Iraq was attacked to please Sharon. We wonder what hold Israel has over the United States that its president is bowing to the whims of the prime minister of a much smaller country. But injustice never pays, one has to give a price for it one way or the other. We have to wait for that to happen.

Nur Jehan Chittagong

American soldiers

Behaviour under combat conditions exactly reflect the morale, training and effectiveness of command channel. Intruders in Iraq are inadvertently showing their true colours through dastardly acts. This brand of soldiers never had any traditional values to their backbone.

Before defeat in Vietnam they indulged in all sorts of pleasure seeking to the extent that scores of them deserted ranks and files and stayed back there. In Iraq, under the burning reality and finding no outlet to their usual expectations -- they are indulging in perversion.

Tan C Dhaka

Why terrorism ?

In his letter "Contain terrorism" (DS, April 28), Mr. Siddiqui Rahman

pointed out that terrorism has tremendously expanded in various places of the world and that every effort should be made to contain this evil. But he did not mention the reasons behind the increase and expansion of terrorism.

The entire world now sees that at present the main reasons of the escalation of terrorism are the stationing of the US and Western troops in Saudi Arabia and some other Arab and states, invasion and illegal occupation of Iraq by the US and the continuous US support for Israeli state terrorism against the Palestinians. Moreover, most recently the world has seen the pictures of terrible and most inhuman tortures by the US and British soldiers of the Iraqi prisoners of war.

Another major reason behind the increase of terrorism is the double standard of some of the Western countries in their evaluation of different flash-points. The US and those Western countries become alert only when their own interest is at stake, but they do not bother when

the stability in other places of the world is at stake. **Mustafizur Rahman** Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Abused domestic help

Each and every person should have the right to live safely. The educated people of our society clamour for the rights of freedom for everyone. But the reality is different. The news of a doctor couple abusing a domestic help is a striking example of what is going on.

The doctors take oath while they start their medical career to serve the sick and helpless people honestly. But this doctor couple has probably forgotten their oaths and proved it wrong. They have so brutally tortured their little domestic help that it has brought shame to all civilised and cultured people of our society. The domestic help has said that she was punished even for her minor mistakes. Now the question arises, how can

educated (?) people behave so brutally with a little maid? **Hasna Hasan** Dhaka

Divider debacle!

Building and rebuilding dividers have been a common sight in Dhaka for a good period of time. The latest package of this divider game is going on at present. For the last few months, triangular shaped, crescent shaped, rectangular shaped dividers are being built randomly in every nook and corner of the city. It is ridiculous to find that these dividers are getting wider day-by-day whereas the roads are getting narrower.

These needless bulky dividers are one of the major causes of traffic congestion in the city. Even at some busy traffic circles e.g. Farmgate and Shahbag, these different shaped dividers are clogging the easy movement of vehicles. Nevertheless, earth has been piled to plant trees on these dividers, which is creating acute dust pollution. Dividers are needed for right direc-

tion and easy movement of the traffic. However, I am afraid these newly built dividers might turn out to be a boomerang for us. These hulking dividers certainly expose the hollowness of our planning. **Md. Nazrul Islam Sumon** Dept of English, DU

Military sans etiquette

We are extremely shocked and appalled at the felonies of US military in Iraq. The Iraqi prisoners have been abused by the coalition soldiers. The gruesome photos aired by the media has shell-shocked all of us. A caption published in The Daily Star on May 03 vilified the nefarious outlook of the US army in Iraq.

To Mr Bush: The US army went to Iraq to liberate Iraq, right? But what are we watching? They have terrorised the whole country and vulgarised the military decorum. What does Bush doctrine connote? The global human rights bodies

should force the Bush administration to take disciplinary actions against the guilty soldiers. **Molla Mohammad Shaheen** Dept of English, DU

Widening roads

Road widening work from Airport to Uttara area is going on in full swing and carpeting work has already started in some places. One thing that struck me is, the electric poles are standing in their original places, making the whole widening work meaningless. May be the poles will be removed later on, which not only will damage the beauty of the newly laid roads but will also be a senseless waste of public fund for re-carpeting of those damaged portions.

Is there not anybody in the government to look into all these problems? **Murshid Uttara**