

## Don't politicise relief

Rise above party interests

OPPOSITION lawmakers have complained that the government is politicising the relief distribution undertaking. They claim that the constituencies having opposition MPs, despite being affected by floods, are being deprived of allocation of relief materials.

The allegations cannot be brushed aside only because these are coming from the opposition camp. The scale of devastation caused by the floods should alone be reason enough for the decision-makers to take such complaints seriously. It is absolutely necessary to reach the worstaffected people with all kinds of succour, leaving aside political considerations of any kind.

Apart from the opposition allegations that its MPs are being sidetracked, the possibility of vested interests preparing fake lists of 'victims' in a bid to misappropriate relief goods cannot be ruled out. These concerns merit serious attention if we are to stand by the multitudes of flood victims in a real sense.

The flood situation is extremely grim at the moment. There have been more than 400 deaths and crores of people are passing their days amid great uncertainty. This is certainly not the time for any party or individual to place their interests above the collective needs of the people. We should not forget that the victims themselves have nothing to do with politics.

The role of the government is crucial in mitigating the plight of the victims. So it is expected that the official relief distribution process will be kept above controversy of any kind.

The government should form joint committees with opposition MPs and local leaders to broaden the base of relief operations. The crisis we are passing through is a grave one, and collective efforts are needed to minimise the sufferings of the people. It is time a greater commitment were shown to the cause for serving the flood victims by working together, irrespective of political affiliations.

## Genocide in Sudan

Shame on the Muslim world

IT'S a Muslim, more precisely, an Arabesque manifestation of double standards. We have never tired of castigating the west for its hypocritical doublespeak, but now perhaps it's our turn to taste a bit of that pejorative. Our outpourings of sympathy for the victims of Bosnian genocide are perfectly understandable because it was perpetrated on Muslim brethren. But when the order of the perpetrator and the victimised is reversed, as in the case of Sudan, where the pro-government Arab militias are attacking Black African communities, the Muslim world's angry protestations are sorely missing. Silence is preferred to even the rudimentary requirement of self-criticism.

The long-drawn-out civil war between the Arab Muslim North and the Black Christian and Animist South has claimed two million lives so far among the black and animist minorities. Hundreds and thousands have become refugees in their own country. What sort of government it is that deliberately ignores the minority rights and sees it violated by the Arab militia? We strongly condemn the maltreatment meted out to the minorities which has not only a racist dimension but also that of actual human rights violation.

That said, we turn to the Sudanese government's panicked reaction to what they perceive as the US raring to use the Darfur crisis to topple the Khartoum regime. The Sword of Democles hangs on them with the UN and EU looking set to slap sanctions on Arab League member Sudan.

The perceived American threat may not be ruled out, given the Bush administration's track-record in regard to Afghanistan and Iraq and its proclivities towards militaristic solutions. But does the Sudanese government have any claim to sympathy after the abominable things they have done in their treatment of the minority communities? No, not until they put a stop to their brutalisation campaign. The Arabs have a crucial role to play in bringing the Sudanese government to senses.

# Iran Freedom Act 2004: Legitimising an illegal practice



Brig Gen  
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WERE it not for the mention in the bill that, "It should be the policy of the United States to support regime change for the Islamic Republic of Iran and to promote the transition to a democratic government to replace that regime," it would have appeared as any other innocuous bill for the US Senate to legislate.

Although the Congress passed a similar version of the bill in July 2003, this bill, by the very nature of its stated objectives, raises concern. The text also displays America's arrogant view of the world, and its passion for rectifying what it sees as aberrations in the political setup of other countries, particularly those of the Middle East.

The title of the bill that is being referred to is, *Iran Freedom and Support Act 2004*, introduced by Senators Santorum and Cornyn on July 16, 2004. Among other things, it seeks to deliver the Iranian people

from what the sponsors of the bill describe as its "unelected" President. The bill seeks tens of millions of dollars to fund activities of and by Iranian exiles to effect a change of regime in Iran. Although not explicit in the bill, it would be an intelligent guess that dissident activities would also be fomented, funded, and participated in by various US intelligence agencies including the CIA.

The reluctance of the regime in

polity?

The disconcerting aspect of the bill is that it authorises the US government to bring about political changes in a third country through political, diplomatic, and financial support to elements hostile to a legitimate and internationally recognised regime, whatever its form.

While one would like to see democracy and democratic institu-

This brings up a very fundamental issue of international law and norms, not that these are of any concern of the Bush administration to affect its international behaviour, i.e. the legitimacy of the act of 'regime change.' If the US arrogates to itself the right to intervene in another country to change its government, would the US, by the same token, grant a third country the right to effect similar changes in the US,

and military interventions."

However, the US record in regime-change is unenviable. In fact, according to George W. Downs and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, two US academics, of the thirty-five or so interventions by the US since the Second World War, only one country, Colombia, was able to establish a modicum of democracy. In fact the success rate of US "Operation Democracy" has been only a dismal

Naturally, the effect of foreign interventions by the US has been counterproductive. A study conducted in the US by the CATO institute, in 1998 titled *Does US Intervention Abroad Breed Terrorism?* quotes the Pentagon Defense Science Board asserting a strong correlation between increase in attacks on the US and its interventions abroad. The study very prophetically suggested that, "the US could reduce the chances of such devastating and potentially catastrophic terrorist attacks by adopting a policy of military restraint overseas." Alas, it didn't!

According to Downs and de Mesquita again, "Presidents rarely fail to trot out 'democracy' as a justification for their actions abroad. That's because it is popular with Americans, who like to feel they are on the side of the angels. But if it's democracy we're after, we are failing miserably."

Illegal practices cannot be sanctified by mere sanction of a country's legislature. Changes that are externally induced neither last long nor deliver the goods. Only those that are brought about by the sovereign will of the people of a country will endure as well as have the seal of legitimacy.

Big powers need to keep that in mind.

The author is Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

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Tehran to open up to the West and to improve ties with the US, its possession of WMD, as well as its alleged support to Al Qaeda against the US, are some of the reasons that have apparently prompted the senators to introduce the bill. All these are, of course, a part of US war on terrorism.

It is also of interest that while in the past the US had indulged in many foreign interventions, either openly or clandestinely, it has now thought fit to seek Congressional authorisation in the case of Iran. Does it forebode something more sinister than the seemingly "harmless" effort to help the Iranian dissidents, both inside and outside, to bring about a change in Iranian

flourish all over the world, it cannot be the business of one country to establish democracy in another, through means that are extrinsic and, under international law, illegal. The Iraq situation demonstrates the fact that democracy does not automatically follow in the wake of aircraft carriers or fly in on the wings of F-16s.

This bill, in other words, would allow the US administration to intervene in the affairs of, as the tenor of the bill suggests, a recalcitrant state, in this case Iran. Such a plan was perhaps in the minds of the Bush administration for at least since the plan to invade Iraq was drawn up, which, by the way, predated the 9/11 attack.

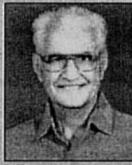
for whatever reasons and by whatever means it thinks fit or feasible? Consider just for a moment a situation where everybody sought to change everybody else's regime!

In fact, successive US governments since the end of the Second World War had made it an article of faith to intervene in third countries, with or without international sanction, mostly without, in order to further their own national interest. To quote Howard Zinn, the American historian and playwright: "The United States engaged in at least twenty military interventions in the Caribbean in the first twenty years of the last century. And then from World War II through today, we've had an endless succession of wars

three percent.

One object of this bill is to make Iran de-link itself from Al-Qaeda. While no one condones terrorist acts, a peek into the pages of history would reveal that it was the US that had at one time conducted covert operations in many parts of the globe, to install regimes of its choice, however brutal that regime might have been. Again to quote Zinn: "In its foreign policy, the United States has consigned several million people to their deaths and supported terrorist governments in various parts of the world, especially in Latin America and the Middle East." And, all these were done to change regimes and install pliant rulers, all in the name of establishing democracy.

## Dialogue and discordant notes



M.B. NAQVI  
writes from Karachi

PAKISTAN-India dialogue has barely begun and discordant notes have already been struck. Implying that undue delay in solving the Kashmir problem might be intentional, President Pervez Musharraf told Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh that Kashmir issue needs to be resolved within a "reasonable" timeframe. Mr. Natwar Singh's reply came the next day when he said that India-Pakistan dialogue "is not a 100 metres race; talks cannot be rushed."

Pakistan President has been showing signs of dissatisfaction with the pace of this dialogue for sometime. Hitherto, only Foreign Secretaries meeting has taken place in New Delhi. Six other meetings at experts level will soon be held. But the substantive give and take session will begin in early September when the two Foreign Ministers will meet in Delhi - perhaps final conclusions may be expected subsequently at the summit level. Meantime, politics has moved on. Indians are pressing ahead with their Strategic Partnership with the US and Israel, and are working to modernise their armed forces, upgrading their equipment.

Now these developments ring alarm bells in Pakistan's security establishment. Pakistan thinks that India is strengthening its conventional deterrent to a stage where Pakistan cannot match or counter it. President Musharraf has asserted on several occasions that Pakistan will anyhow maintain a balance of power - in both conventional armaments and nuclear weapons, including missiles to carry them.

Indeed he went further: he would enhance Pakistan's security to a point beyond what was earlier fixed as the minimum required.

Now both these activities constitute arms race. It is always justified by inimical propaganda against the adversary power. Which is what a cold war is and Pakistan and India have run it for over half a century, though its continuance is an anomaly. Current dialogue was intended to reverse the trend. Or was it? Let's ask the question what kind of rela-

tions are aimed at in this dialogue? In terms of January 6, 2004 statement after the meeting between President Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the purpose is normalisation of relations.

What is not clear is the definition of normalisation: which state of relationship between the two is to be taken as normal; it has taken twists and turns. Do the Indians want Pakistan to be a friend and a partner? They need to clarify for the benefit of at least the Indians. As far as Pakistanians are concerned, there is some evidence that all Pakistan officials wanted way back in January 2004 was to go back to the relationship as it was on December 13, 2001. It is an open question as to which stage of Indo-Pak relationship the two want to go back to.

There was the initial period when there were no visas required for inter-state travel. By early 1950s, visas had been introduced, but travel was free enough until 1965 war. After it, the two bureaucracies armed themselves with tremendous powers, tightening up the visa regimes. It remained so until after the 1971 war. The Shimla Accord

could warn India of a nuclear riposte. That determination to keep up with India militarily gelled with a policy of minimal contacts with India, the closest neighbour.

Well, post 1971 decisions have to be reassessed after Kargil operations. They have not made Pakistan safe. They have made it more insecure. The 2002 crisis has shown that whatever the generals on both sides may say it is now madness to go to war for both India and Pakistan; it carries totally unacceptable risks.

## PLAIN WORDS

**The aim should be to effect radical reconciliation between the peoples of India and Pakistan, extendable to all South Asians -- the way the French and Germans have done. If India and Pakistan can borrow detailed proposals on CBMs from the US, why can't they borrow from the French-German Treaty of 1963 that succeeded so brilliantly? South Asia needs such an approach. Let Pakistan graduate from futile militarism to peaceable economic and cultural enrichment.**

negotiations under the Shimla agreement. Pakistan appeared to disfavour proceeding under February 1999 Lahore process. Natwar Singh solved the problem by calling Shimla and the Lahore documents as a continuity. India is seeking good relations with free trade, economic cooperation, cultural exchanges, and regional integration. Pakistan appears to remain uncertain about its preferred nature of relationship with India.

A few general remarks are in order. The kind of policies that prevented any normal good neighbourly relationship with India for 32 years after 1971 were predicated on some assumptions: Pakistan needed time to militarily prepare itself to face India again. To reinforce the rejuvenated army, Bhutto started a crash programme for acquiring nuclear capability. India had already embarked on a big military build up programme in the 1960s -- after the 1962 war with China. Pakistan regarded that as a challenge to its own security and expanded and reequipped Pakistan army. Thirteen years after the 1971 defeat, Pakistan could boast of a nuclear capability, and in 1986 it

Period. True, Pakistan is capable of taking out at least half a dozen Indian towns. In return India can send Pakistan to Stone Age. Who gains what? Thus no go for both. Nuclear dimensions of next war are insistently relevant because one side is so vulnerable in conventional armaments that it cannot but have recourse to nuclear weapons at a fairly early stage. So the bases of pre-2002 stand offish policies have disappeared.

Pakistan's negotiating position is weak. If the 1970s, 80s, and 90s assumptions are adhered to, talks would collapse before long. India cannot accede to Pakistan's wishes after 56 years of cold and hot wars, especially when, for the first time, it showed that the Invincible Shield of nukes is not enough for Pakistan to win a war in 2002. Possession has again proved to be nine points of law as far as Kashmir is concerned. President Musharraf has clearly dropped the condition that India should agree to a Kashmir plebiscite by the UN. Indeed, he went further: he gave India a veto on all solutions of Kashmir problem that did not suit it. In other words, he wants a Kashmir solution that India can live

with. Would such a solution promote Pakistan's interests? Not that there is any agreement in the country regarding what are now Pakistan's precise interests in Kashmir. Outside world too seems to have accepted Indian claims on Kashmir.

This may shock many Pakistanis. The earlier stances were based on the logic of 1947 settlement. But after Pakistan went to war twice and later vainly stoked the fires of Islamic insurgency in Kashmir. The goal of negotiations with India should be to create maximum wealth in a bilateral cooperation that will enrich both. This will need friendship and a close working relationship. Reversing the history of 57 years will require hard work. How to start working for friendship suddenly after such spectacular examples of mutual hatred in 2002? But if there is will there is a way. Given the twin conclusions that normalisation concept is too imprecise and it by itself does not connote anything noble, Pakistan has to go beyond it to seek maximum friendship. Now, friendship itself can have many stages. Which kind of friendship does it need and why?

Short answers are: the nature of friendship, when one is moving away from arms race and cold war, has to be one that promotes economic cooperation and cultural exchanges. The aim should be to effect radical reconciliation between the peoples of India and Pakistan, extendable to all South Asians -- the way the French and Germans have done. If India and Pakistan can borrow detailed proposals on CBMs from the US, why can't they borrow from the French-German Treaty of 1963 that succeeded so brilliantly? South Asia needs such an approach. Let Pakistan graduate from futile militarism to peaceable economic and cultural enrichment.

All new thinking will need Pakistan befriending India by going well beyond simple normalisation. Pakistan needs to normalise for its own economic and cultural benefit. Since all old policy assumptions have proved to be unrealistic, it is about time to think what will work. Indians are unlikely to woo Pakistan; they would rather let it stew in its own juice in relative isolation. It is for Pakistan to chalk out a plan of action that will primarily benefit Pakistan and should not harm Kashmiris. India being the closest neighbour with a thousand and one commonalities -- and problems and a chequered history -- Pakistan can no longer ignore it or live the way it has done until now.

There are a few commonsense guidelines: If a war is out of question, cold war policies become stupid, for they were predicated on going to war if it becomes inevitable. A new kind of relationship with India is called for, distinct from what obtained between 1972 and 2004. Kashmir will have to go on a back-burner until new opportunities arise. The new policy orientation cannot but be the opposite of what sustained post-Shimla attitudes. In other words, instead of running a balance of power with India, let there be a new peaceful and peaceable race to promote mutual enrichment.

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MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

## 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.

### Remove the concrete structures

It is not new but an old issue that the pedestrians cannot walk along the footpaths of Dhaka freely due to street hawkers. It is painful that our government has also failed to eradicate this problem. But the sorrow of pedestrians is multiplied when concrete structures are built up on the footpaths. These are great barriers and causing much trouble to the pedestrians. Examples are: Y-1, Y-6, X-4, 1/6, 2/18, N-1 of Noorjahan Road and Y-14A of Razia Sultana Road of Mohammadpur, Dhaka. These are nothing but unlawful acts of the landlords.

I hope the authorities will investigate into the matter and take the necessary steps to remove these illegal constructions in the greater interest of the pedestrians as early

as possible.  
Mojahidul Islam Farazi  
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

### Reprinted documents of liberation war

A few days ago, the reprinted 15 volumes of the history and documents of our war of independence was launched. After the ceremony, the LGRD minister said in a TV interview that nothing was added or removed from the old edition, they just corrected the spellings. If it is so, then we have nothing to say. But the newspapers reported that some new information was added to the newly reprinted edition. The following day in a BTV programme (Sangbadpatra Bangladesh), a pro-BNP BFUJ leader expressed his view that it is logical to include the name of Ziaur Rahman as the declarer of independence and he praised the gov-

ernment for doing so in the reprinted issue.

If the reprinted edition includes such information then we can say it is not only reprinted but also rewritten. The history of our liberation war is not a fairy tale that it can be changed any time. The BNP leaders should not forget that history cannot be changed. Shams Md. Javed Sufian  
Sylhet

### Euthanasia

The article "The case of Euthanasia: right to die -- justice done or justice denied?" published on 11 July, 2004 in Law and Our Rights page of The Daily Star deals with an important medical and legal issue. Thanks for publishing the article. The article is precise and well informed but we are expecting more information about the medical conditions and diseases

where euthanasia is justified.

I do believe many of our fellow people are thinking seriously about euthanasia and there is an urgency for setting a common platform to express our ideas and views. How can we ignore the terrible and incurable sufferings of patients having terminal diseases like cancer and some rare neurological disorders. It is high time to create awareness and to raise public opinion about the matter.

The coordination of medical and legal experts is required for addressing the issue properly. Would you please take necessary measures so that an organisational body may be formed in future either at national or local level?  
Dr Zillur Rahman Khan  
MBBS, MPH (Epidemiology)  
HMO, Department of Psychiatry,  
BSMMU, Dhaka

### A new trend

It seems a kind of fashion to follow the lifestyle of "Bollywood" or "Hollywood" movies among our current generation. Alien culture slowly entered into our society in the early 90's through satellite TV channels. But our efforts proved insufficient to broadcast Bangladeshi culture in the air. "Hindi" and "English" movies are very popular these days.

A new trend has begun. A good number of production houses have started to produce popular TV dramas, daily serials and magazines in the VCD and DVD format which stand as an effective alternative stream. Now it is the high time to promote our culture. I feel proud as a Bangladeshi to enjoy these TV dramas (like: Ekannabarti, Kanamachie etc.) on TV.  
Rizwan-ul-huq  
On e-mail

### Noise pollution

Like other bold decisions for the development of environment including the prohibition of the production and marketing of polybags and two-stroke engine baby taxis, Mr. Shahjahan Siraj took another bold initiative to control the terrible noise pollution of the megacity and other places in the country. The ministry, in consultation with the concerned individuals and organisations, drafted some regulations in November 2003 to control noise pollution.

They distributed it amongst the concerned organisations and individuals for their review and suggestions in February 2004. On behalf of Sunder Jiban, I myself also suggested some modifications and sent it to the Department of Environment in March 2004. The Bangladesh Paribesh Andolan (BAPA), after having reviewed the regulations in a

round table discussion, also suggested some modifications. Besides, the Noise Pollution Control Coordination Committee suggested its modifications in March 2004.

While we were waiting for the regulations, suddenly the minister was changed and since then we have been in dark on the status of the regulations.

Although Sunder Jiban and other fellow organisations including BAPA, Work for a Better Bangladesh, The Hunger Project, Hunger Free World and many others individually or in collaboration with each other have been putting lot of efforts to make people aware of the consequences of the noise pollution, the government's initiative is a must for our success.

Md. Sirajul Islam Molla  
General Secretary, Sunder Jiban  
Green Road, Dhaka  
Bilateral issues

SAARC is a forum created and lunched by Bangladesh. It is designed to cater to the needs of all the members. All members can meet and exchange views and ideas for mutual benefit. Bangladesh tried many a time to broaden its scope and help all member states to resolve the bilateral issues as well in this regional forum. But objection from India has made it difficult to add steam to the forum. It is clear that India alone has problems with all the member states. It wants them to be exclusive with each other.

The smaller states have failed to counter the Indian move effectively. The situation must change if we want to get the benefits of having a regional grouping.  
A citizen  
On e-mail