

Use of rehabilitation funds

Build dykes against corruption

THE devastating flooding has brought in its wake not just challenges but some good responses as well. Agriculture, including livestock, poultry and fishery; industries, medium size and small ones; and infrastructure, both economic and educational, have been laid in ruins. Almost proportionately, prospects for a huge financial undertaking to shore up the economy can be visualised.

Local donations to the PM's relief fund are rising. More importantly, grants, loans and contributions from external sources such as foreign donor countries, NGO headquarters, multilateral organisations like IMF, World Bank, IDB, ADB and UN agencies are expected to make for a sizeable total.

All of this conjures up the vision of a huge infusion of resources in addition to the allocations made to the various sectors in the budget, 2004-5.

Finance Minister Saifur Rahman emerging from a meeting with secretaries of several important ministries Thursday made this clear to newsmen: 'the on-going ADP projects and donor-funded projects will continue along with the post-flood rehabilitation programme'.

In other words, huge amounts of money will be spent in different sectors of the economy beyond the normal budgetary allocations earmarked for them. This, in all likelihood, is going to open the floodgates of corruption and malpractices unless we have dyked them reasonably well to minimise the pilferage. We suggest parliamentary bi-partisan committees be specifically formed and tasked to supervise the spending which could act as checks and balances against corruption on the one hand, and partisan spending on the other.

The finance minister seems to be seized of the risks of corruption inherent in the undertaking. He has asked the secretaries to stand guard over 'corruption and misuse of fuave been riddled with corruption and malpractice.

Bombing away

Yet again, in Sylhet

THE 7th August bomb explosion in Sylhet was the latest in a spate of explosions in the town. Apparently, some members of the opposition were the target of this attack.

We have been at pains to urge the government to take appropriate measures to eliminate this menace that is taking a dangerous turn. It must be stressed that the failure of the government to nab the perpetrators gives them greater encouragement to carry on with their activities

The series of bomb blasts in Bangladesh in general and Sylhet in particular indicate a particular pattern of activity. While it is still a matter of conjecture as to the political belief or religious agenda of these elements, the government must keep an open mind in investigating these incidents lest the culprits escape 'by default'.

While the state of investigation leaves many queries, we are dismayed by the poor surveillance mechanism of the government that these recurring bomb blasts, all over the country, underline. Also, it is with consternation that we observe the graduation in the degree of sophistication in assembling these devices, as well as its components. It is thus for the government to deal with the investigations of these incidents as well as gear up its surveillance mechanism with the utmost urgency.

We feel that the government owes to the citizens information regarding the status of investigation of these cases. We are constrained to mention that it is the government's bounden duty to provide security to the citizens. Should the people's faith in the government be sapped because of its failure to do so, the government has only itself to blame.

What we suggested in these columns on previous occasions regarding investigation bears repetition. To bear any fruit, investigations must be bereft of any political meddling or influence-peddling.

Why will an Indo-Pak peace process sustain?



M ABDUL HAFIZ

PAKISTAN'S foreign secretary, when asked recently of the feasibility about the resolution of Kashmir dispute acceptable to both India and Pakistan, wittingly replied that 'even the parallel lines intersect somewhere'. To another question he maintained that the peace process now under way was sustainable only because both sides now realised that this was the only way. The positivism and sobriety reflected in the diplomat's remark cannot but arouse hopes. They apparently mark significant departure from his country's headline position and clearly show the distance Islamabad has travelled in last five years.

In the wake of Pakistan's nuclear tests there was an upsurge of nuclear jingoism as it was in India as well. In Pakistan it stemmed from a conviction

that its acquisition of nuclear weapons would compel India to make concessions in bilateral issues including Kashmir. The conviction led Pakistan to indulge in Kargil misadventure. The attempt not only boomeranged, it resulted in the leading powers beginning to speak openly of the need to maintain the sanctity of the LOC (Line of

control) in Kashmir -- something Pakistan wasn't comfortable with. The final unravelling of Pakistan's nuclear hype came with AQ Khan's scandal. However, the key shift in the equation came even earlier -- on September 11, 2001 -- when an enraged United States compelled Pakistan to drop another pillar of its security policy -- support of the Taliban and by extension the al-Qaeda. The international reaction to the ghastly event of nine-eleven made

it clear that the days of supporting armed Kashmiri freedom fighters were no more possible. India's threat of war in the wake of December 13 terrorists' attack on Indian parliament led to General Musharraf's January 12, 2002 speech promising comprehensive crackdown on the domestic support structures of terrorists in Pakistan. This

cannot be settled unilaterally. She now recognises that there is a problem over Kashmir and it is simply not a viable strategy to exclude Pakistan from its resolution. There are, of late, elements in India who believe that once the infiltration across the LOC is stalled either physically or by military-diplomatic compellance, things would

able to compel Pakistan to either surrender 20 wanted fugitives or stop support for cross-border terrorism. India seems to have sadly learnt that it lacks the instrument to do so. Because not only Pakistan is a nuclear power it also has more than adequate force to deter an Indian attack and fight a defensive war. The Indian forces, as experienced during its much touted 'operation Parakram' had neither the doctrine nor the organisation and equipment to chastise or punish Pakistan. So it helplessly refrained from crossing suicidal nuclear threshold.

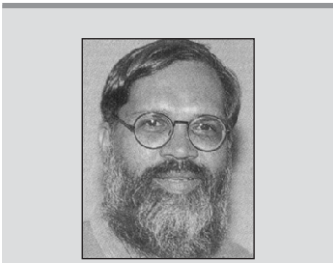
There may still be a temptation in both the countries to revert to the path of conflict. But the option is not viable for either. As regards India, it will take her an enormous managerial effort spanning decades and costing exorbitant price to put in place the range of forces that can militarily coerce Pakistan into capitulation. Pakistan's options are even more limited. With its much smaller economy it cannot indefinitely continue to try to match India.

Pakistan's options are even more limited. With its much smaller economy it can not indefinitely continue to try to match India. While nuclear weapons now provide it a measure of security it needs, a nuclear sabre-rattling of Kargil war period will no more work. Neither is it any more possible for Islamabad to back a proxy war even with a military dominated government at the helm. Moreover, an increasing popular demand for public fund for education, health care and so on are no less compelling to restrain the trigger-happy generals.

Therefore, in all likelihood the peace process now underway will be sustained with its own dynamics. Neither side has alternate options even if they seek them. It is, however, another debate as to how will it proceed and for how long.

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Say yes to affirmative action



PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

DURING the 1990 peak of the anti-Mandal agitation, *the Times of India* senior editors were divided over reserving government jobs for the backward castes (OBCs). Some of us decided to conduct a survey of the composition of our Delhi office.

The results were stunning. There were *no Dalits and just three OBCs* among the group's 300 journalists! Most were Brahmins, Kayasthas, and Banias. This was not due to policy: it was just how things were -- "naturally," as a manager put it, emphasising 'merit.'

It's astounding, and of course incredible, that the upper castes, who form a tenth of India's population, concentrate nine-tenths of its entire 'merit.' That reflects vicious discrimination in this super-hierarchical society, where caste is more important than educational achievement or talent.

This denial of social opportunity is pervasive in India. Contrast this with the frankly capitalist United States.

There, two-thirds of all major newspapers draw 15 to 20 percent of their journalists from minorities like Blacks and Hispanics. Their proportion is 16.2 percent in *The New York Times*, 19.5 percent in *The Washington Post*, and 18.7 percent in *The Los Angeles Times*.

This is the result of a decision of the American Society of Newspaper

action.

That's how we should see the reservations issue, being raised in respect of the private sector (especially in Maharashtra) and Muslims. In Andhra, 5 percent of government jobs have been reserved under a policy initiated by Mr Chandrababu Naidu.

Extending reservations to the private sector is part of the UPA's Common Minimum Programme and

because of the persistence of barbaric discrimination against them, sanctioned by the *Dharmashastras*.

The *Manusmriti* prescribes gruesome treatment towards *shudras* (including most OBCs). They must be "free from pride," and own no property other than donkeys and dogs.

Should a *Shudra* try to sit next to a *savarna*, "he shall be ... banished. If a *Shudra* threatens a Brahmin with a stick, he shall remain in hell for a

Such vile discrimination cannot be eliminated by calls for equal opportunity -- among unequal people, whose starting conditions are grossly unequal. Correcting them demands affirmative action. Its principal function is not individual betterment, but acknowledgement of historic injustice against a group.

So long as anti-Dalit and anti-OBC discrimination persists, we must continue with reservations, but recognise that reservations or quotas

ment purchases must come from minority suppliers. Thus, major corporations like Exxon-Mobil, General Motors and Wal-Mart recruit 16 to 23 percent of their workers from the minorities. IBM has 15 percent of its staff drawn from them. Over one-third of the Harvard Medical School faculty belongs to such groups.

India must emulate such methods -- to start with, to ensure jobs for Dalits and Adivasis in proportion to their 23 percent population share, up from their abysmally low representation of 7.1 percent in factories, 3 percent in transport, and 3.4 percent in domestic industry.

Finally, a word on reservations for Muslims. In recent years, many Indian Muslims have suffered discrimination. But they don't fall into the category of Dalits who face historic injustice. Nor are Muslims homogenous.

Muslims will be better served through education, modernisation of *madrasas*, opening up of special state services (e.g. RAW and police intelligence) hitherto closed to them. EEOC-type programmes will greatly help Muslim professionals.

Given India's history of communal conflict, there will be a strong backlash to reservations for Muslims -- through screams of "appeasement." Instead of reservations, Andhra should announce affirmative action for Muslims in education and job training.

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Editors to raise the minorities' representation to the same level as their population share. This was achieved through special programmes like as diversity promotion, scholarships, training schemes, and job fairs.

The key is affirmative action or positive discrimination favouring historically disadvantaged groups. This must be adopted in India.

India is marked by cascading inequalities. If you are born underprivileged, you face discrimination in education, employment, income, etc. -- each step of the way.

This destroys the very possibility of realising the human potential of millions. It can be effectively countered by levelling the originally-tilted playing-field -- through affirmative

is worthy. But reservations for Muslims may be undesirable.

The private sector has responded negatively to Maharashtra's new policy. Some magnates have threatened to relocate industries. This is bizarre coming from businessmen for whom birth and inheritance count more than 'merit.'

Indian business families jealously guard their lineage at the expense of all else. Efficiency isn't their forte. Or else, we wouldn't have 250,000 private factories lying closed, sinking tens of thousands of crores. In private business, most people are recruited on the strength of contacts, *sifarish* and loyalty, not 'merit.'

Affirmative action is necessary for marginalised groups like Dalits

hundred years; he who strikes a Brahmin for thousands years."

There's more: "A Chandala, a village pig, a cock, a dog, a menstruating woman must not look at the Brahmin when they eat. The Chandalas shall be outside the village and their dress shall be the garments of the dead."

Even today, cruel discrimination prevails: Dalits must take off their shoes and their women must uncover their faces while passing through an upper-caste area; their dead cannot be carried through it. Dalits can be banned from making *ghee*. In Andhra and Tamil Nadu, they have been forced to eat human excreta for asserting their legal rights.

Help! This is a *Dhakabashi* talking!

ERSHAD KHANDKER

DHAKA is a city amongst many in Asia, because there are some other cities also, both poor and not so poor. Visits to Bombay or Calcutta or Islamabad give you a feeling of a different kind than going to Singapore or Kuala Lumpur. The former three cities are at crossroads, still tagged as developing, and you see clear similarities with our own country, but with marked difference in law and order situation. The difference being that one city -- our own Dhaka -- is chaotic and moribund in its choking traffic congestion and the other three 'underdeveloped' cities are orderly and peaceful, with traffic running smoothly, a clear sign of planning foresight.

In Calcutta or Bombay or Islamabad, the feel is of a vibration that is to be found in cities where gold has been

discovered. Gleaming buildings, green parks, and large islands, flyovers direct traffic with order that resemble the locomotion of the cities themselves, not quite there yet but soon to reach destination. People do not have the time to look at one another as they commute in buses and other vehicles in relative discipline. There is laughter to be heard, and older people glance at younger people to gauge the changing faces and trends of the young and the upwardly mobile, the feeling is of welcome wave to the coming times, people happy with the assured security of life and even more prosperity to come. The later two cities, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, give you a vision of where the former three cities would want to go. Compact roads and managed traffic, beautiful green spaces dotted with flowerbeds, traffic police and lawmen on display keeping the order and discipline as well

fed and comfortable citizens walk or rush by in new branded cars to schools and office places. There is widespread prosperity and riches on display. The economy is strong and the basics, living and breathing in peace, have been met.

It is 11 a.m. in Dhaka, and the day had not even begun when a certain someone says: "The Eastern Bypass was supposedly stopped for lack of funds and inertia and gridlock or plain apathy and of course corruption had to have played a part." The future verbal challenge belongs to someone I would like to call a Dhakabashi. Listening to this outburst was like listening to the collective sigh of all the Dhakabashis, the sucking sound of their collective breath of intake before letting the sigh go, like the screaming of a man in a deathbed, asking why there is no hope left. Is it possible that my reaction is a little on the dramatic side. I

do not know the answer to that, and of course the answer could lie with others who read this, but please allow me to say that, living with danger, plainly willful and borne out of neglect and not of some unjust but plainly obvious catastrophe, is leaving a big psychological imprint on the faces of people who live in this city.

Dhakabashi who do not know other cities, are plain and simple but smart and observant. The access to television has given the urban a clear idea of what is going on in many other cities. This is not only in Dhaka. Talk to your driver or the man who is driving your cab. You will probably hear a man speaking from the experience of living in a Middle Eastern country. Watch outdoor interview programmes of Bangla satellite channels and you would probably share my own surprise at the tremendous insight people have about politics, good

governance, and the apparent lack of it. No doubt that the people are getting smarter. They are able to distinguish the lie from the truth.

Look at the people passing by you in rickshaws and cars or buses or just walking. There is always someone staring at you. We are a nation of people with the habit of staring at people passing by. I have often asked myself the reason behind this. The answer is borne out of my own read of the psychology of a Dhakabashi. We are in collective sigh, we stare at each other because we want to see how the other person is looking today, to see if the other person looks better than his or her own beleaguered self. We also want to reach out and talk to each other because we are a friendly people. Just to share the frustration that has set on at the very start of the day. Is there any reprieve from the myopia, neglect and degrada-

tion? The answer of the person passing you would most likely be in the negative. That may well be unfair because things will improve, but that just tells you how far the morale of the people has come down to.

Things will change because there is consensus for the need for change. But we need a catalytic change and that change is a change of work ethic in the private sector that resembles the work ethic of the private sector of other cities in Asia. That change will also will come automatically. Progress will come. There is just one precondition, the law and order situation needs to improve. Honourable Finance Minister: Sir, please make law and order a finance issue and include it in your next budget.

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What gives me hope

AFREEN ALAM

IN the international community, Bangladesh's image is that of a basket case full of poor people waiting for handouts. Bangladeshis themselves have this impression. When natural disasters strike like the floods this year, this sentiment is even more pronounced, especially among the affluent class of the society and the donors who gear up for some charity work. The pictures they have are those of "victims" who come in hordes, fight amongst themselves, and trample each other for relief materials. Never do these seasonal charity workers or the media portray the dignified fighters that are the majority of the flood-affected Bangladeshis, nor do they recognise the thousands of volunteers who are fighting the disasters side by side. I am a self-proclaimed hope hunter. It is my weapon of resistance. It is quite a daunting role to stick to for sure, especially during a crisis like the floods now. It is far easier and I suppose more conventional to resign and join forces with my archenemies -- the eternal pessimists. But I am much too young and stubborn to do so and thus I stick with my one-woman army.

My search for some semblance of hope during such an emergency brought me to the people of a particular organisation involved in what I think comes closest to nation building in Bangladesh. Here I met some rather strange people. Certainly underpaid, if not unpaid, and overworked, most of the people in this organisation work as volunteers. Their only motivation is to contribute to the onerous task of nation building in their own ways. They are inspired and driven by what they believe in and they firmly believe in people's capacities. They believe it is absolutely possible for Bangladeshis to take charge and develop their motherland on their own. When the floods hit, the water swept off thousands of homes while unaffected affluent folks remained oblivious, thousands of these volunteers across the country took matters in their own hands and began their relief and rescue efforts. Many of these volunteers are teenagers, still in school, who have dedicated their time, their very meager resources, and at times their own rooms to the flood affected people. They shared inspiring stories of courageous people fighting this life-altering crisis with great dignity and grace. They reported numerous

stories of people who have lost everything, are in miserable conditions themselves but are prioritizing and helping others. I share only a few of these anecdotes in the hope that they will perhaps inspire a few more souls or at the very least, inform those who have resigned that there is reason to have faith.

Volunteer Mamoon told me a story of

give people strength, boost morale and show their solidarity.

Hanif, a young bus conductor exemplified people's sincere compassion and concern for each other. Like all the other families in a shelter in Dhaka, his home is under water and he had to bring his family to the shelter. When the relief team offered him some food, he refused. He did not allow the children in the

teens who are well aware of people's sufferings and damages. The local volunteers identified the neediest of the families. They were then given a "token" in the form of a missive that stated their extremely vulnerable status. These families met at the local mosque, the only dry place in the area, to receive relief materials collected by the organisation. In Narayanganj, when

from this place when needed. This also helped them centralise critical information such as instructions on how to prepare saline solution, etc to ensure proper dissemination. All of this was led and executed by people we generally consider to be uneducated and hence unintelligent, resource poor and therefore miserly and criminal.

These people are the reasons I choose to have hope. During a time when inspiration is a rarity anywhere, I have found it in abundance among these young volunteers and flood survivors. Their patriotism, generosity and above all, humanity are not only contagious but also transforming.

a team of 25 young people in Manikganj, led by another young volunteer that has been traveling in a boat around the submerged area of Bariajhuri and Digchi. They have been collecting and distributing relief materials round the clock and the last I heard had not returned home in 10 days. They are a team of heroic rescuers ensuring the safety and well being of the people trapped in the water. This team, that includes local volunteers from this organization, has been singing songs of courage and inspiration, performing to

f a m i l y to accept any help either. He explained that he is still able to earn a daily income as the buses in the city are running. Instead, he brought in couple of other families that desperately needed help and asked the volunteers to give his share of relief to them.

I heard of an innovative distribution mechanism from a volunteer in the Barogram area near Dhaka. To ensure that the most vulnerable of the people are being prioritised, the staff of the organisation consulted the local volun-

reached a shelter, they asked the people there to distribute them. In a great show of unity and solidarity, people identified the neediest of the families and decided to distribute the materials to them first. They also made a secondary list of people who should receive aid from the next shipment. At the end of the night when it became impossible to continue, the people designated one place where they left the packets of undistributed oral saline and announced widely to people about it so that they can get them

Volunteer Bornali reported from Mymensingh of a family living in desperate situation, having lost their house to roaring floodwater. The family had reluctantly accepted some rice and pulses in the morning from Bornali's relief team. In the evening, the mother arrived at the team camp with the food they had prepared with that donation to share it with the rest of the team. Such a considerate, generous act of courtesy and humanity came from a family with very little material possession.

The young volunteer members of this

organization have been leading relief effort in their respective areas without any help from others. They have set up Oral Hydration Corners in shelters and flood-affected neighborhoods, and initiated systems of collection and distribution according to the needs of the areas. Members of the Mirpur unit in Dhaka even gave up one meal a day in solidarity with the hundreds of hungry flood affected people! They have decided to donate that meal to the shelters until people can return to their homes. Some teams are working as night patrols equipped with nothing more than flashlights and bamboo sticks, guarding the people in the shelters from miscreants or the homes that they had to leave behind.

Volunteer Juboraj told me stories from Kaundia Union of families with very little means, trying to survive this crisis without donations and handouts. The Dhar family, the Hossains, the Rahmans, the Shudrodhar family, all have lost their homes and are living in shelters or in other people's houses. These are only a few of many families from the Kaundia unit who have refused food assistance and/or offered them to their neighbors and other people instead. They offer to donate their

share of relief to others, even if they have enough for one meal only. Some even refuse based on the hopes of some income the next day. These are people who the world has labeled as "extreme poor," never recognising the wealth of their conscience, the richness of their hearts, and the depth of their principles. Their struggle to maintain their dignity and self-respect, their determination to survive this disaster with pride and confidence is not only respectable but examples to be copied by the rest of the world.

These people are the reasons I choose to have hope. During a time when inspiration is a rarity anywhere, I have found it in abundance among these young volunteers and flood survivors. Their patriotism, generosity and above all, humanity are not only contagious but also transforming. An Ivy League education doesn't even come close to what I have learned from the people and the young generation of Bangladesh. They are the faces that will keep me going in the uphill battle of a never-ending war against poverty.

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