LATE S. M. ALI

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River linking project

India's assurance is welcome

E welcome the assurance given by the Indian government to the effect that the river-linking project will not be implemented before discussions with Bangladesh. We also understand that all other river projects, currently under the anvil and which might have harmful potential for Bangladesh, would also go through bilateral discussions before implementation.

Needless to say, the whole concept of efficient water management in India through linking its major rivers has not only evinced a keen interest of the people of Bangladesh, it is viewed with a deep sense of wariness and consternation, given the harmful potential the project can have for us. Not only does the project raise serious concerns in Bangladesh, opinion in India is also divided on the implementibility of the multi-billion dollar project, as also on its fallout on the environment.

Experts opine that the one thing that will be in short supply in the near future is water. Ironically, we in Bangladesh suffer from too little water as well as too much of it. It thus calls for appropriate and long-term measures to manage a resource that will become scarcer by the day.

We feel that there is an urgent need for Bangladesh to manage the excess runoff in peak times so that dry season shortfall can be made up. It is for Bangladesh, being at the receiving end of the excess and scarcity of water, to take the lead in formulating plans for the mitigation of this problem. Needless to say, that would require the active support and cooperation of all the neighbouring countries, particularly those with whom we share the rivers. This is where the philosophy of active multilateralism as well as regional and sub-regional perspective can come into play in the most appropriate way.

We look forward to the participation of the Indian irrigation minister in the next JRC meeting due next October in Dhaka, and hope that the very welcome step of mutual discussions, should be carried on to the stage of mutual agreement before water management projects that have trans-border ramifications are implemented.

Shrinking of cabinet

A sensible idea

E congratulate the parliamentary standing committee for its decision to introduce a constitutional amendment in the House to permanently fix the size of the cabinet. It must be appreciated that the JS body okayed the bill which proposes to limit the number of cabinet members to thirty-five. No matter how unbelievable it may sound, both ruling and opposition lawmakers, famous for their disagreement on everything, agreed to recommend it to the House for the passage of the bill.

We think it is a very sensible idea, especially in the present context when a big cabinet like the one we have now, has not been able to deliver anything positive at all, which reinforces our belief that size has no correlation or even an inverse correlation, with efficiency.

Whether such a big cabinet is necessary is a pertinent question. Also, can the government deny that the huge amount of money being spent on the cabinet each year has only increased the pressure on our economy? There were criticisms when Prime Minister Khaleda Zia announced her team of sixty ministers in 2001, and, as the days, months and years went by, it became clear that the decision was not very wise. In fact, it wouldn't be wrong to say that the gigantic size of the cabinet could be one of the main reasons for the government not working well.

It's time the PM did some serious thinking on the matter. The proposal to shrink the cabinet in proportion to the number of seats in the parliament could be the much-needed lead for the rethinking. Not just Bangladesh, big cabinets in other countries have also not been able to perform well. We hope good sense will prevail upon the government and the issue will be discussed thoroughly both inside and outside the House.

The Democrats bringing back the prince of Camelot?

Individual deficits may matter less to the voters than huge deficits in truth telling in the Oval office regarding the war

with Iraq. Still they represent the Republicans' best chances for victory. If the voters fall in love with the handsome

Kerry-Edwards ticket and they decline to de-construct, George Bush will not be reelected. Yet dazzled by the

inherent advantages of incumbency and New York's Madison Square extravaganza of Republicans' National

Convention, a dampened Kerry team has presumably resorted to the stratagem of creating a Kennedy fever by



M ABDUL HAFE

ITH less than three months left now, as the race for White House is becoming closer and tougher the Democratic party has been desperately trying to regain its lead by creating a JFK fever. In American politics the name of the icon has an appeal of its own and even today Kerry and Edwards are together trying to produce the Kennedy symbol for their electoral gains. But can even two Johns (John Kerry and John Edwards) make a single JFK? Even if it took 40 years many believe that the Democratic party has finally found itself another John F Kennedy

-- thanks to the combination of its current presidential candidate and

his running mate. However in 2004 it

takes two men, not one, to play the

prince of Camelot.

John Kerry has the right resume (four times senator and the presidential candidate nominated last month in Democrats' National Convention) but lacks the Kannedy charisma. John Edwards has charisma but lacks Kennedy's portfolio. Like the pieces of a puzzle the two Johns might just make one Jack. That's what seems to be the party's bet for the moment.

Kerry, the presidential candidate,

brings naval war hero status as a swift boat Veteran in Vietnam -- just like the fallen president. He also has privileged upbringing like the Democrats' undisputed idol. The Democratic candidate has to his credit enormous senate experience and

combining the attributes of both Johns for a last moment favourable saving.

the JFK (John Forbes Kerry) initial.
Edwards, Kerry's running mate offers youth, vigour and adorable children. He is at ease with himself and the press. After a minute of banter he can easily switch to his elegant riff about "Two Americas." During the primaries he withstood insulting questions about his 'Breck qirl' hair with charm and pleasant

drawl.

The new JFK (John Forbes Kerry) may do or say whatever it takes to win the White House but he cannot become John Fitzgerald Kennedy -- the Kerry voters of a certain age recall from news clips. Particularly his confusing statements on war, gay marriage and now abortion clearly point to Kerry's charm deficit. Here he needs someone like Edwards to rescue him. Edwards and family look and sound more like the Kennedy's -- as preserved in the old news clips of Kennedy era. But then Edwards cannot make up heft deficit

political resume within time between now and November. On their own neither measures up to original JFK.

However, those individual deficits may matter less to the voters than huge deficits in truth telling in the Oval office regarding the war with Iraq. Still they represent the Republicans' best chances for victory. If the voters fall in love with the handsome Kerry-Edwards ticket and they decline to de-construct, George Bush will not be reelected. Yet dazzled by the inherent advantages of incumbency and New York's Madison Square extravaganza of Republicans' National Convention,

a dampened Kerry team has presumably resorted to the stratagem of creating a Kennedy fever by combining the attributes of both Johns for a last moment favourable

Edwards has repeatedly been attacked on the ground of his political lightness but it will not greatly help the Republican cause. After all, Senior Bush also picked up still more light weight Dan Quayle as his running mate. Edwards is smoother, more cerebral and much more articulate than the Indiana Senator who ended up as Vice President. It is hard to imagine Dick Cheney taking him down so easily.

The voters' ultimate comfort level with Kerry is another matter, Edwards is the sunshine on the Democratic party ticket. It remains to be seen how long the presidential candidate enjoys basking in his running mate's glow. Choosing Edwards demonstrates humility not usually associated with Massachusset's senator. Accepting the media's unqualified love affair with Edwards up untill election day requires more of the same.

Brig (retd) Hafiz is former DG of BIISS.

Great patriot or rank traitor?

Understanding Savarkar



PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

HE controversy triggered by Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar's order to remove a plaque bearing Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's poetry from the Andaman's Cellular Jail is becoming a political campaign. The Shiv Sena is converting it into a chauvinistic agitation as its supporters hit Mr Aiyar's effigy with shoes. Mr L.K. Advani has joined the chorus condemning Mr Aiyar.

The Congress, which faces elections in Maharashtra, has disassociated itself from Mr Aiyar. Savarkar's descendants accuse the sangh parivar of "exploiting" his name electorally.

In rationality's interests, we must take a cool, dispassionate look at the whole affair, in particular, Savarkar's role as *Hindutva*'s originator. Was "Veer Savarkar," as his admirers call him, a "great patriot"? Or did he collaborate with British rule? What was his agenda?

The Andamans sculpture "Freedom Torch" commemorates the Independence movement with quotations from Subhash Bose,

Bhagat Singh, and Madanlal Dhingra (a Savarkar disciple). Missing from it was the movement's greatest leader, Gandhiji.

Mr Aiyar had Savarkar's poem replaced with a Gandhi quotation. It's hard to fault this on principle, although not on tactics.

The sangh parivar has been trying to put Savarkar on a par with Gandhi and Nehru, although he's super-controversial and unacceptable to many Indians. The NDA renamed Port Blair airport after Savarkar, installed his portrait in

That very year, he petitioned for clemency, calling himself a "prodigal son" and promising to "serve the government in any capacity." The petition was abject and wouldn't have been made by most other Andaman detainees. Savarkar made similar loyalty pledges -- in

1913, 1914, 1917, 1920, and 1925. In 1924, he was released after acknowledging that "I heartily abhor methods of violence and am willing to make the [unpopular Montagu-Chelmsford] Reform a success."

helmsford] Reform a success." padpats
Savarkar gave his blessings to For Gai

given that post "in preference to an

This attitude was in sharp contrast to, say, Gandhiji's, for whom the Freedom Struggle was against colonial rule, not the British. He argued: "It's not necessary for us to have as our goal the expulsion of the English. If the English become Indianised, we can accommodate them."

For Savarkar, the purpose of freedom was to establish *Hindupadpatshahi* (Hindu overlordship). For Gandhi, Nehru, or the Left, the

that Hindu conquerors should have raped Muslim women. He admonishes Shivaji for not doing so. Savarkar described Tipu Sultan as a "savage," Akbar as "foreign, cruel, [and] intolerant." tive of any theory other than the conspiracy to murder by Savarkar and his group." Savarkar's role includes encouraging and introducing an arms dealer to the assassins and their

[and] intolerant." Savarkar passionately hated collaborators, goading them, prior Gandhiji, the apostle of nonknowledge, detailed planning, and violence, peace and Hindu-Muslim blessing the assassins: Yashaswi harmony. Savarkar mentored hovun ya (be successful and Nathuram Godse -- who was devoted to his ideology and person-Savarkar and Godse are great ality. Godse wrote to Savarkar: national heroes for Mr Bal "Since ... you were released Thackeray. On May 16, 1991, Mr a divine fire has kindled in the minds

Thackeray said: "We are proud of Nathuram. He saved the country from a second partition."

But how should we regard Savarkar? He had his differences with the RSS. But he pioneered the

Two-Nation Theory. And he fathered *Hindutva*, which the RSS carried forward through the Jana Sangh and BJP.

Savarkar was against superstition, cow-worship and *yajnas*. But

that didn't prevent him from joining hands with rank obscurantists. He thoroughly opposed cultural pluralism and secularism.

Savarkar's views can have no

place in a democracy based on an inclusive non-ethnic, non-religious conception of citizenship. Savarkar is alien to the Great Project that India embraced at Independence.

Savarkar was no "Veer" (hero) and must not be glorified. His ideological-political legacy is best left where it belongs: in the dustbin of history

Savarkar's views can have no place in a democracy based on an inclusive non-ethnic, non-religious conception of citizenship. Savarkar is alien to the Great Project that India embraced at Independence. Savarkar was no "Veer" (hero) and must not be glorified. His ideological-political legacy is best left where it belongs: in the dustbin of history.

Parliament's Central Hall, and commissioned a Lok Sabha Secretariat booklet glorifying him.

Four questions arise. Was Savarkar a legitimate part of the Freedom Struggle? What did Independence mean for him? Did he plot Gandhiji's assassination? Is his Hindutva compatible with pluralist secularism?

The young Savarkar was fired by

nationalist zeal, although that nationalism was *Hindu*, not Indian. He got involved with a secret society which believed in killing British officials. He inspired Dhingra to murder William Wylie. For this, Savarkar was sentenced to life in

the RSS's formation, but never joined it. More important, he never participated in the mainstream Freedom Struggle. Instead, in 1923, he pioneered the Two-Nation Theory in his book, *Hindutva*.

In 1939, Savarkar pledged loyalty to the Viceroy, offering friendship between "Hinduism and Great Britain." Savarkar then was president of the Hindu Mahasabha, which like the RSS, didn't join the anti-colonial mobilisation.

What did "freedom" mean to Savarkar and his acolytes? They were driven by hatred of "foreigners." One Savarkar disciple V.G. Gogate, for instance, attempted to kill Ernest Hotson, acting governor of Bombay, because Hotson was

goal was to establish a modern, plural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, democratic India. The two notions are irreconcilable. Sayarkar believed Hindus alone

could be India's legitimate citizens because their *pitrabhu* (fatherland) and *punyabhu* (holy land) converge. Muslims and Christians don't qualify.

Savarkar's was a brilliant mind, but one obsessed with violence.

but one obsessed with violence, revenge and bloodshed. He wrote: "So long as [a] divine age has not arrived ... bloodshed and revenge ["instruments created by nature"] cannot be purely sinful."

Savarkar in his Six Glorious

Hindustan is for the Hindus."

Savarkar helped Godse with ideas and funds. Their relationship

of those groups who profess that

was pivotal to Gandhiji's assassination. As Sardar Patel put it: "It was a fanatical wing of the Hindu Mahasabha directly under Savarkar that [hatched that] conspiracy and saw it through."

Savarkar escaped conviction for a technical reason; an approver's

a technical reason: an approver's (Digamber Badge) testimony couldn't be corroborated. But Justice G.D Khosla of the Simla High Court confirmed Savarkar's involvement. Later, the Justice Kapur inquiry commission recorded: "All these facts taken together were destruc-

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<u>OpiñioN</u>

The PM could easily have visited the residence of the opposition leader the night of the incident rather

than waiting for a decision from the meeting of the cabinet ministry the following morning. If done so, we

would not be living in a suffocated atmosphere now. Time is not yet up for the government. Still a good

gesture or series of actions can bring the country back to its normalcy. Otherwise, an unhealthy situation

Where is the end of it all?

SHAHED AHMED

news item titled: Injured AL leaders off to India: Harassment at ZIA alleged on the back page of The Daily Star on August 31 yet again harks back to the unsavoury attitude of the ruling party men. The Chief Whip of AL alleged that his party colleagues (among whom there were some senior presidium members as well as MPs) were asked to produce some "irrelevant documents" besides the usual referral papers from the clinics or hospitals. The immigration officers' hustling with the lawmakers resulted in the flight being delayed for three hours, and the accompanying photo showed the ailing patients keeping their fullbandaged legs raised up on tea tables, obviously not a scene to enjoy or get enjoyment from. This sort of inhuman and unthinkable sight is well precedented in our political culture. But is it acceptable when you put into consideration today's scenario of one of the worst political mayhems in the history of Bangladesh, lurking behind?

It has been nearly ten days since

awaits us. the gruesome incident took place, attempting the assassination of the leader of the opposition and former PM. The government with plenty of ministers, yet lacking the most important portfolio of Home Minister, though late, have understood the insufficiency of local police as well as unacceptability of itself running the investigation, and urged Interpol for assistance. With courtesy to media, the Interpol foreign officials are starting to make their presence felt with a view to helping out the series of bomb blast impasses, more particularly the latest one

20 people died leaving hundreds injured in the bomb blast incident before the AL office premises in

tion. During this phase there came

occasions when he had to come

under severe pressure from quar-

ters of power to allow unjust

favours to persons and groups.

But Prof. Noman did never surren-

der to those pressures, never did

he compromise with his ethical

Dhaka on August 21. There have been a series of condemnations from people of all walks of life and strata as well as status, from the US president to the Jamat leader(s). And following the daily bulletins in different news channels, people were aware that the splinter-hit injured needed to be attended at the foreign clinics especially in India or Singapore, as suggested by local doctors. There should be absolutely no reason as to why the law makers and the senior presidium members of the hugely-suffering political party with severe injuries (some of whom might never recover fully) should be interrogated at the airport by the immigration officers for hours and would be asked for

"irrelevant documents" even though the passengers' wards or political senior colleagues made prior arrangement with the airport authority. It does indicate that the ruling party, though the country is in dire straits, still sticks to its typical despotic attitudes, contributing to further deterioration of the already aggravated political atmosphere as well as giving rise to some interesting points.

It proved obvious from the blast incident in Sylhet that Mayor Kamran was the prime target and that what he had been saying for the last couple of months that he had been receiving life-threats, was true. Sheikh Hasina received threats on numerous occasions at

home and abroad. However, the government considered the threat on the leader of the opposition comic stuff and moreover did not learn from the latest incident in Sylhet. That is why the carnage of August 21 took place against Sheikh Hasina and her party men and women. If the government and its detective agencies put into use the simplest of the commonsense, they would have figured out that the attack on Sheikh Hasina was on the

We thought the government would learn from its mistakes, but unfortunately it was not the case. There is widespread criticism of the status (let alone the findings) of the investigations on recent bomb-

blasts in Sylhet and the biggest ever arms-haul issues. I believe the government think tanks should feel that it is high time for them to practice the utmost serenity as well as restraint and not to give rise to further issues like the airport incident or colliding protest day with opposition's hartal day, etc. Otherwise it would create more anarchy and unrest in the country. Also the leadership sometimes needs to bank on its own decision making capabilities and charisma.

capabilities and charisma. The PM could easily have visited the residence of the opposition leader the night of the incident rather than waiting for a decision from the meeting of the cabinet ministry the following morning. If done so, we would not be living in a suffocated atmosphere now. Time is not yet up for the government. Still a good gesture or series of actions can bring the country back to its normalcy. Otherwise, an unhealthy situation awaits us.

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LEST WE FORGET

Mohammad Noman

An unsung legendary teacher

DEEN MOHAMMAD

E was an institution in himself. A teacher who knew he is a teacher, who had the vision to read and reach his students, to meet their needs, to enrich their mental faculties, to touch their hearts.

touch their hearts.

He was Professor Mohammad Noman. He preferred to live in modesty. And modesty was his strength, a strength that attracted his students.

A very good teacher, Prof

Noman had a scholarly knowledge in English language and literature. He was always eager to disseminate the knowledge among his students. He did not limit his efforts in this line only, rather he worked hard to help his students acquire the very essential human qualities; honesty, sense of justice, discipline, punctuality and so on. He was himself very rigid and uncompromising about these values.

Mohammad Noman started his teaching career as a Lecturer in involved in education administra-

Department. Later he switched over to teaching in government colleges and eventually became the Principal of Dhaka College. He is rated as one of the most successful principals of this top educational institution. Though, Prof Noman was subsequently appointed Treasurer and Vicechancellor of Jahangirnagar University, he is best known as the principal of Dhaka College.

At a stage of his career he was

the Dhaka University English

His beloved students joined the nation in happiness when in 1994
Professor Noman was honoured with the 'Ekushey Padak' in recognition to his scholarly virtues and his outstanding contributions in

the field of education. Notwithstanding, Prof. Noman was adjudged as the best teacher in the whole of Pakistan and received 'Presidential Gold Medal' in 1970. Professor Noman was a

Professor Noman was a teacher, a complete teacher, an ideal teacher who devoted his life in sharing his wealth of knowledge with the students. He had a highly selfless bearing and the only motto in his life was to bear the torch of knowledge, illuminate the society. He held a firm conviction

that, given a sound knowledge base, the younger generation would acquire the level of competence needed to take the nation to the height of progress and prosperity.

He had never fallen to any

He had never fallen to any temptation for selfish interests. A plain living man, a gentleman, Professor Noman was always open to whoever wanted to discuss whatever topic of learning. His interaction with students and teachers was effortless, healthy and productive.

Prof. Noman remains a landmark, an ever-beaming lighthouse in our educational arena. He is not dead. Today Professor Noman is not physically present amongst us but his memory will continue to remain as a source of inspiration for all of us in the days ahead.

Deen Mohammad is Sr. Information Officer, Ministry of Environment and Forest.

