LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA SATURDAY NOVEMBER 6, 2004

Pak PM's visit proves useful

Horizon of understanding widens

AKISTAN Prime Minister and current SAARC chairman Shaukat Aziz's brief but eventful visit to Bangladesh ended Thursday on a friendly, optimistic and forward-looking note. To have dubbed it as a routine visit of an incumbent SAARC chairman as part of his South Asian odyssey prior to the Dhaka summit in January would have been to miss out on the wider significance of the Shaukat Aziz trip. True, the gavel of chairing the next SAARC cycle will be passed on to Bangladesh but there is more to it: Dhaka SAARC summit being set against the backdrop of the Islamabad summit which marked the revitalisation of SAARC after it had gone into limbo for an uneasy length of time is billed to further energise the process. A firm decision was made at the Islamabad summit to strive towards putting SAFTA in operation from January 2006. In that scheme of things, Dhaka summit due in January 2005, doubtless assumes critical importance.

Secondly, Shaukat's trip in Dhaka coincided with a refreshing wind of change blowing into the traditionally inimical relations between two major players in the SAARC -- India and Pakistan. Consequently, the prospect of a better security ambience in South Asia should help stimulate a collective SAARC endeavour geared to accelerating poverty alleviation in the region.

This can happen in two ways. Intra-regional trade which is now abysmally below five percent of the total volume of global trade transacted by the seven SAARC countries, must be hugely increased through the SAFTA mechanism to make a difference in the poverty situation. In addition, it's crucial that SAARC has a common fund for the sake of poverty alleviation. Pakistan and Bangladesh prime ministers agree on this point.

On the purely bilateral plane, issues of trade, investment and economic cooperation featured in the interactions across the board. Much as the volume of trade between Bangladesh and Pakistan is increasing with each passing year, there hasn't been any corresponding reduction in trade imbalance for Bangladesh. Duty-free access has been allowed to jute and tea only whereas altogether 121 Bangladeshi items are on offer.

It's heartening to note though, that Pakistan is willing to help Bangladesh in the vertical integration of the country's textile sector. With her rich cotton-cum-textiles base Pakistan can provide us with the fabric we need. She can also invest in backward linkage industries which could have a positive bearing on our garments exports in view of the post-MFA regimen.

Homebound before Eid

Innocent passengers must not be

cheated again

ID is not too far away. Naturally hundreds of people who look forward to this long festive holiday will be leaving the capital for their hometowns and villages in droves soon. But we wonder whether their journeys this time would be any different from any other similar journeys in the past. Scarcity of tickets -- artificial and real --, no certain schedules of journey, over loading and above all the total mismanagement leave the passengers only in uncertainty. As if there is no escape from it.

Although the government has decided to take measures way before the rush begins so that the passengers are not harassed, but can the government actually reassure the passengers that they won't be taken for a ride again? The bus owners, representatives of various transport operators' organisations, high police officials gave their assurances of taking every necessary steps to reduce the passengers' woes at the meeting with Communication Minister last week. But there has already been reports that some transport companies had begun to sell limited number of tickets at a high price after that meeting. And the trend is that the price is going to get higher day after day. The passengers desperate to reach home before Eid become hostage to these culprits.

On the other hand the authority must ensure that alleged extortions on various points of the highways by some corrupt police officials are controlled with an iron fist, so that the bus owners cannot use it as an excuse to increase the price of ticket. At the same time, there should be enough law enforcers at the terminals to ensure that ticket black marketers do not exploit the compelled passengers. And lastly, the launch owners must not be allowed to sell extra tickets and overload the vessel with excess passengers making the journey simply risky.

The authorities have to pay attention to all these, not just by giving orders but by taking real steps. Deceiving the innocent passengers at the time of Eid has become a trend of late. We must stop this.

Musharraf's formula to resolve the Kashmir issue



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

new formulation to resolve the Kashmir issue has been introduced by President Musharraf. Speaking to guests after an Iftar reception in Islamabad on 25 October, Musharraf suggested that India and Pakistan should consider other flexible options whereby some regions of Kashmir on both sides of the Line of Control could be identified for demilitarisation and for granting of some sort of independence or being under joint control or under the UN mandate.

In this context, he proposed that Kashmir should be taken 'in its entirety'. He elaborated that "it has seven regions -- two of the regions are in Pakistan and five in India. In my view, identify a region, whether it is the whole or seven or part, I do not know, identify the region, demilitarise it for ever and change its status. The status can be independence, a condominium where there can be a joint control or there can be UN mandate which has to be defined by egal people (jurists).

Officials in Islamabad underlined he President's proposal as being consistent with the spirit of understanding that had been reached in New York last month during the neeting of the heads of governnents of India and Pakistan. They pointed out that both sides had agreed that "possible options for a peaceful, negotiated settlement of

the issue should be explored in a sincere spirit and purposeful man-

However, the Pakistani President's formula does not appear to have been welcomed either in Pakistan or India.

Various political parties in Pakistan have pointed out that the President had not taken his nation into confidence. The also indicated that the National Assembly was in session in Pakistan at that time and should have been consulted. Some formula as being 'disastrous and dangerous' and 'an effort to appease the United States. 'The hostility went up another notch in the comments of the Jammu and Kashmir People's Party leader, Sardar Khalid Ibrahim. He commented that "no ruler of Pakistan, particularly an unelected leader, had a right to demonstrate

Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri, the Pakistani Foreign Minister has Pakistani Foreign samuel attempted to soften this criticism

stand of Pakistan.'

unilateral flexibility on the principle

The BJP and the National Democratic Alliance have also opposed Musharraf's plan. The former External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh has pointed out that this Alliance has consistently 'held the view that map-making has to stop in South Asia'. He has gone on to add that 'such attempts would not be acceptable in any disguise. Nor will the Alliance accept any proposal that overrides the will of the Parliament of India'. He has also made it clear that the Alliance will not accept

panied by substantive dialogue on Kashmir;

(b) By holding out the possibility of serious options, both in terms of geography and political status, Musharraf is seeking to demonstrate that Islamabad has tangibly moved away from its traditional insistence on the holding of a plebiscite. This in turn is aimed at increasing the pressure on India to come up with its own new set of proposals;

(c) Musharraf is hoping to spark a debate in Pakistan on the alternative An important modification consists of bringing the Northern Areas back into play. After the Simla Agreement of 1972, Pakistan had administratively separated the northern areas from Pakistan administered Kashmir. By referring to the two regions of the state that now lie under Pakistan, Musharraf is possibly talking about the original State of Jammu and Kashmir in its entirety.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has the ball in his court. In New York he had reiterated that India will not accept a redrawing of borders and that there can be no independent Kashmir. This latest proposal has many connotations and will require a fresh approach JN Dixit of India and Tariq Aziz of Pakistan, the two national security advisers will now (as the 'Indian Express' put it on 28 October) be expected to vigorously dribble the Kashmir ball.

What is however clear is that the two nuclear powers are understanding that war is no solution. There now ppears to be serious thought about discovering new contours for building bridges of understanding that can reduce tension in this region.

Musharraf, one assumes, discussed his plan with his power-base - the armed forces -- before making it public. His has been a smart PR move. He was shown to the international community that he has accepted the right of Kashmiris to exist as a nation outside India and Pakistan. this position will be welcomed by the proindependence lobby among Kashmiri separatists. Musharraf's flourish is reminiscent of the past Agra Summit.

One can only hope that this time round, the back-room hardliners on both sides, will not introduce new spanners but work together to find a

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and element appears to have surfaced.

POST BREAKFAST

What is however clear is that the two nuclear powers are understanding that war is no solution. There now appears to be serious thought about discovering new contours for building bridges of understanding that can reduce tension in this region. One can only hope that this time round, the back-room hardliners on both sides, will not introduce new spanners but work together to find a solution.

of the political parties were particularly critical. The Jamaat-e-Ulema Islami (Fazlur) Secretary General and Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) Deputy Parliamentary Party Leader, Hafiz Ahmad alleged that by proposing seven zones in Kashmir, the President had rolled-back the 57 year-old policy of the country. The Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) Chairman, Raja Zafrul Haq, said that Gen. Musharraf's formula was not based on the ground realities and added that as Kashmiris had not been made a party to the talks, it would be rejected by them. The Jamat-e-Islami chief and MMA president, Qazi Hussain Ahmed said that Jammu and Kashmir was one indivisible unit and the issue could be decided only by holding a plebiscite in accordance with United Nations Resolutions. The former chief of the Inter Services Intelligence Hameed Gul termed the

He has pointed out that Musharraf's proposition should be read in the context of his statement that both sides should show flexibility and that Pakistan alone cannot act unilaterally. He has also emphasied that 'in order to have durable peace, we have to get the Kashmir (problem) out of the way. We have to find a solution acceptable to Pakistan, India and the people of Kashmir.'

India's response on the other hand has been to treat the proposals as a 'trial balloon, lacking the requisite seriousness, even to merit a formal response.' Senior officials of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs have also pointed out that Jammu and Kashmir is one of the subjects in the comprehensive dialogue process and that if Pakistan is serious about the proposal, it should bring it to the negotiating table instead of trying to discuss it through the media

third-party intervention because you cannot re-open the question'.

An Indian analyst in 'The Hindu' on 27 October (published from Chennai, India) also referred to Indian officials in New Delhi alleging that Musharraf's proposal was nothing but 'a re-hash of the Faroookh Katwari (President of Ethan Allen, a furniture company based in the USA) Plan that had been in circulation for over ten years now'. It was also suggested that 'as with the Katwari Plan, the latest proposal is aimed at extricating the Kashmir Valley from India'.

Indian analysts appear to be interpreting the Pakistani gesture in the following manner --

(a) Musharraf is implicitly underscoring the point that the current rapprochement between the two countries will come under strain unless the implementation of confidence-building measures is accom-

lem and at the same time, reduce the domestic criticism that he faces for the recent vote in the National Assembly allowing him to retain the post of President and Army Chief until 2007 and for his ongoing support for the 'war on terror'; (d) Musharraf feels that his latest

initiative would place Islamabad in

ways of resolving the Kashmir prob-

a better position to reconcile the differences between the two factions of the Hurriyat Conference -something which is essential if Pakistan is to strengthen its bargainngclout with India; and finally (e) Musharraf is likely to use his proposal to urge whichever admin-

stration emerges after the US presidential elections to facilitate a substantive dialogue between India and Pakistan on Kashmir. Whatever be the views on either side of the border, one interesting

Tell the truth and shame the devil

M. ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

OR the fourth consecutive desh's ranking in the CPI. As usual, the members in the

inner cabinet of the government have rejected the TI assessment. In his immediate reaction, the Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs M Moudud Ahmed said that the government did not accept the criteria for such an index. He offered no explanation or suggestion as to what could be a better methodology. The Minister for Health and Family Welfare Khandakar Mosharraf Hossain said that the government did no agree with such a ranking as it was not based on "correct information." In a statement on October 25, the Minister for Finance and Planning M Saifur Rahman blamed the media for making Bangladesh the most corrupt country in TI's CPI. While answering a question in parliament on November 2, he rejected the CPI. He also questioned II's authority in ranking a country as the most corrupt. In 2003, when Bangladesh was ranked for the third consecutive year the most corrupt

country among 133 nations by the TI. he guestioned the methodology the TI employed in making the Incidentally, when Bangladesh was first ranked the most corrupt country by the TI during the immediate past Awami League (AL) regime, M Saifur Rahman came out with a statement that the TI report had been timely

and based on reality. Bangladesh's ranking as the most corrupt country in the global corruption chart for the last four years has seriously tarnished the image of the country. Bangladeshis at home and abroad are highly frustrated. unscrupulous politicians, government employees and businessmen? We must stop them.' The BNP-led alliance govern-

ment is in the fourth year of its current five-year term. During its past three-year rule, Bangladesh was ranked every year the most corrupt country by TL This is the situation against BNP's election pledge in 2001 to root out corruption. It is not that BNP's top leadership is not aware of the rampant corruption in all spheres of national life. The Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has on more than one

Bank in Dhaka on October 31, the Finance and Planning Minister told the press that "Bangladesh would slide down the rank of TI's most corrupt countries once the Independent Anti-Corruption Commission starts work, the public procurement regulations are complied with in the government purchase and if the media runs objective and investigative reports." While addressing a seminar in Dhaka on February 29, the Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs revealed that corruption was holding back economic progress and eating up no occasion expressed commitment of , less than two percentage points of

past thee years of her current tenure. Presently, the people's perception is that during her previous term of office as Prime Minister, she administered the country much better. The Prime Minister should realise that during the last election people pinned their hopes more on her than on-her party. The cornipt persons, whoever they may be, must be brought to book to honour the people's faith.

It is not possible to eliminate corruption completely. In order to reduce corruption to the minimum level, the following mea-

institution of Ombudsman (the designation is differently used in different countries) has been playing an important role in minimising corruption in the public offices. The office of the Ombudsman ensures that the public offices are "responsive, adaptive and sensitive to the needs of citizens." The Ombudsman "investigates charges of illegality, negligence or misuse of official position, pays special attention to offices involving fraud, abuse of power, or those impeding the cause of justice." Our Constitutional obligation (Article 77) to establish the office of Ombudsman remains unimplemented after 33 plus years of independence. The establishment of the office of Ombudsman will significantly reduce corruption in our public offices.

. In the western countries, the

· The much talked about Independent Anti-Corruption Commission must be made functional without any further delay.

BNP's election commitment of 2001 regarding revival of zila parishad (district council) and upazila parishad (sub-district council) in order to decentralise the administration and strengthen all local bodies as well as turn them into the centre point of all development activities, needs immediate implementation. The government's recent decision to directly finance the development projects of the union parishads has been hailed by the people and the press. It is expected that this will minimise political interference in fund allocation, reduce corruption and expedite project approval and implementation

year, Bangladesh was ranked the most corrupt country among 146 nations by Transparency International (TI). The Berlinbased TI's report was released in London on October 20. In the cortuption perception index (CPI), Bangladesh scored 1.5 on a scale of 10 against her record of 1.3, 1.2, and 0.4 in 2003, 2002, and 2001 respectively. This year Bangladesh shared the position with Haiti. It was reported that in 2004 the TI assessed corruption in Bangladesh through eight surveys compared to only three in 2003. It surveyed business enterprises and reports of multilateral organisations such as the World Economic Forum were also used to determine Bangia

Their hope for a nation that would stand with its head high has been largely shattered. When in 2003, Bangladesh was ranked the most corrupt country for the third consecutive year by the TI, one citizen of the country posed the question whether funds should be raised or not to bribe TI for anything but number one spot among nations deemed to be corrupt. Then he himself answered his question asserting that only a nation let down by its politicians can come up with such a ridiculous idea out of sheer frustration. One Bangladeshi student in London has recently written: "Again number one in corruption. It is terrible and shameful for us, specially those who are living abroad. I am tired and exhausted after giving answers to my friends in university. They can't believe how a country becomes number one in corruption four times in a row. Why should we be embarrassed by some

her government to root out corruption. In her latest address to the nation over television and radio on October 10, marking three years in office for the BNP-led alliance government, she stressed on the need "to eliminate corruption from the society." The Minister for Finance and Planning has time and again put emphasis on good governance. Good governance is ""both a goal and a process." It includes, interalia, rule of law, transparency, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, and accountability. While addressing a seminar in Dhaka on December7, 2003, he said that populist or vote-oriented projects were getting priority over schemes that were really important for national development. He also named some sectors including roads and highways which had the highest incidence of fund-wastage. After his meeting with the vicepresident of the Asian Development

Bangladesh's GDP growth annually. The BNP-led alliance govern-

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country much better. The Prime Minister should realise that during the last election people pinned their hopes more on

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ment should get out of the ostrich mentality. The government should take TI's CPI seriously and come up with measures to fight the menace of corruption. In particular, the Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia should bear in mind that the good deeds of her government in the fields of macroeconomic management, education, and a few other sectors have been overshadowed by the prevailing unbridled corruption and unprecedented price hike of essential commodities including rice. The people's expectation was that with her previous experience in the high office of the Prime Minister, she would, during her current tenure, administer the country better and eliminate corruption. But the people were frustrated to see their country occupying the number one position in TI's CPI during all the

sures, inter alia, call for urgent consideration.

· BNP's election commitment of 2001 regarding disclosure of assets and properties of all elected people's representatives including the Prime Minister, ministers (ministers include ministers of state and deputy ministers) and others with the rank and status of minister, should be implemented at the earliest. It may be mentioned that in Pakistan, MPs have been brought under legal obligation to submit in a prescribed form the yearly statements of assets and liabilities of themselves and their families to the Election Commission to be published in the official gazette. Enacting similar legal provision in Bangladesh will help reduce corruption amongst elected people's representatives on the one hand and lead to fulfilment of one important election commit-

M. Abdul Latif Mondal is a former Secretary to the

thereby improvement of the law and

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

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Our political mystique

Is politics still a science, judging by the way it is being de-cultured, malnourished, abused and malpracticed by the powerful and the duffers? As a voter in an LDC practising democratic elections, I am confused, although the mass media is full of political news analyses, and statements, with countless conferences, workshops and seminars going on in every capital.

Einstein's Theory of Relativity is easier to grasp (the latest confirmation comes from the news (DS Oct 23) on the shifting of orbit of orbiting satellites). As an anonymous citizen (like myself), the mighty and respected (?) United Nations is also feeling helpless. Wrong political policies breed terrorism. The politicians know it but mumble or thunder something different.

It looks like that the political leaders have some magic wand to cast spells on the masses, and get away with it time and again, through the millenniums of contaminated histories of civilizations. There appears to be no panacea in controlling them to follow the track rules. The millions who pump up the politicians are under some spell, as the latter become immune to twoway communication and exchange The other disenchantment is

economics and its obtuse theories. which apply only arbitrarily, at irregular intervals. Societies seem to thrive on inconsistencies and incompetence of the learned. The East and the West differ, as also the North and the South. The DCs and LDC's cannot find their bearing, and the gap increases every decade (applicable in politics also). The mortality rate of human theories appears to be fragile. It is like the marketing technique of introducing pseudo new products at timed

and advertisements on tooth pastes

and cosmetics, for example). It is not fickleness or tomfoolery, but stark displays of mammonic gluttony.

Are autocratic regimes (bubbling up in all parts of the world on a regular basis) political entities or illegitimate political siblings? I cannot fathom our neighbouring country, cocooned in austere nontransparency, although human beings like us live there. This cover and isolation needs a lot of energy to maintain decade after decade -- to

what purpose? This is the problem with this 'developing' civilisations huge waste of energies. Naturally there is a frantic search for more untapped and potential energy sources, and to grab the same through pre-emptive strikes. Morality is dangling, and is, by now, hanged.

Terrorism and violence in politics show two sides of the coin, the rich and the entrenched imperialists (West) are trying to control it; while intervals (notice the commercials in the emerging nations, it is infilbase-level politics, using black currency. Failures by the local politicians are not tolerated by themselves, so powerful is the lust for ersatz power and its misuse.

The regimes in Dhaka do not allow operational space to the opposition. Perhaps this is a sign of moral cowardice of so-called virtual leaders with have-not mentality. Man seeks immortality through political ladders, however transient!

Humans seek protection from tyrants who are open and visible. Here we are culturing the invisible spiritualists. AHusnain

Oil, the real terror!

The US presidential election seems to be decided on the terrorism issue ravaging the minds of the Americans since the 9/11 strike against the rich Western domination due to imperi-

trating as tools and methods in alism, colonialism, and industrialis-

ation. The latter is due to vast use of the energy resources (oil, gas, coal) of the globe (result the Greenhouse Effect). Suppose there were no oil in Iraq and Saudi Arabia (and in the other ME countries), would US have risked military operations in Iraq and bothered about Saudi Arabia? No. Why it was so ruthless in poor Afghanistan? Oil outlet from the rich CIS to the seas for shipment. Iraq is the victim for the same reason and. Iran is considered a blockade for the routing, plus both these (Muslim) countries have energy resources. Some equations are not so complex

as the Einstein's Theory! Now the price of oil in the international market has almost tripled and is hovering around USD 60, and the upper level figure in the near future is speculated to be USD 80 (article in the DS Oct 26). That is more troublesome than Saddam or bin Laden? It means the economic

collapse of the industrialised rich nations, and the end of white supremacy. The culprit is the Islamic world of Muslim countries with such natural resources (God is partial?). Draw two lanes from the CIS region: one to the Persian Gulf, and the other to the Arabian Sea. Note the US pressurised presence in Pakistan (regardless of the nature of the

regime at Islamabad). Containment

of South Asia is the name of the other

Democracy and Islam are not the main issues. Islam is a carrier of resources, and democracy is a propaganda tool for the rich imperialists or colonialists. Looks like the British empire is coming back in the Yankee version. It is not surprising that the Yankees retain Bush for another term. Hence oil is not only a terror, but also a killer, in the long

Dhako

RAB and the law and order

The incidences of terrorism, extortion and hijacking etc have been drastically reduced in the country specially in the Dhaka and Chittagong cities. We are observing a much safer situation in the country particularly in the month of Holy Ramadan in sharp contrast to what we experienced in the past. It appears the criminals have either been eliminated or have fled the country for fear of RAB. This is a glaring example of the fact that, with good intention assisted by a dedicated force, terrorist activities in the country can be contained.

Unfortunately the vested quarters have raised their heads again. These vested quarters who have been thriving on these criminals are now have become active both within and outside the government to frustrate the Government's honest desire for eradication of crimes and

order in the country. They want to revive their evil design for personal gain by harbouring these known criminals. As a result they are now trying to resort to various tactics and conspiracies to undermine the activities of RAB which have been greatly appreciated by the countrymen, by raising various questions in the courts so that agencies like RAB cannot work freely. Everybody is aware, political godfathers of these terrors are fanning out confusions to protect these criminals so that they could carry out their nefarious activities with the help of these terrorists. It is, therefore, apparent that those godfathers also should be nabbed in national interest. The government, therefore, should remain alert against these forces otherwise all good work done will be wasted away through the drain and the countrymen will again be left at the mercy of the terrorists. MAtaul Hoque