

Strangling another river flow

Isn't it choking life?

WE have heard of private parties as land, lake or river grabbers. At one time, even government-controlled Sena Kalyan Sangastha edged out into the Buriganga creating a furor of sorts, not to mention the attempted encroachments on Osmani Uddyan and parliament premises of Louis Kahn fame with nods from relevant ministries which hogged headlines, albeit for wrong reasons.

Yet, nothing perhaps could beat the governmental double standards in matters of environmental conservation more poignantly than the earth work and river filling activities going in a part of the Turag river at Aminbazar. Bangladesh Power Grid Company (PGCB) working under the Power Development Board (PDB) has already filled up a 20-acre span of the river-bed. That it is a free-flowing river with a deep draught and a natural geomorphologic quality about it, is driven home by the fact that Tk 12 crore worth of earth had to be disgorged on to the 20 acres to level these up with the bank.

Clearly, they are in breach of the wetland conservancy act, one time too many because after all this law has been honoured more in breach than in compliance across the board. Rajuk's city development master plan had also tabooed construction at the site that apparently got selected for setting up the electricity substation violating standing rules. The PDB, Rajuk and the district administration have to answer for this at some level. How could an approval be given for the occupation of 20 acres of the river knowing full well that the location is in a flood zone. As it is, we have been losing natural water channels with reckless abandon which is why the peripheries of Dhaka city, even its interiors, are so vulnerable to flooding and water-logging these days.

When the authorities themselves are in breach of environmental laws for all practical purposes, how can they have the moral right to enforce standards on other people?

The Fallujah offensive

Risk of compounding the problem

APPREHENSIONS of those that predicted a more aggressive US policy, more so in Iraq, after the US election, have been seemingly proven right by the Fallujah offensive that is currently underway.

The US forces have launched a full scale attack on the predominantly Sunni city that has so far appeared to be a thorn in the side of the illegal occupation forces, in order to, according to them, pave the way for a timely and peaceful election due in January 2005. A veneer of Iraqi participation in the attack that is provided by some Iraqi troops has given the operations a semblance of a joint undertaking.

The logic that drives the occupation forces is lost on us. While the occupation forces talk of reconciliation and understanding amongst the disparate sections of the Iraqi society, the Fallujah attack will do very little to assuage the feelings, and in fact will alienate the Sunnis in Iraq even more.

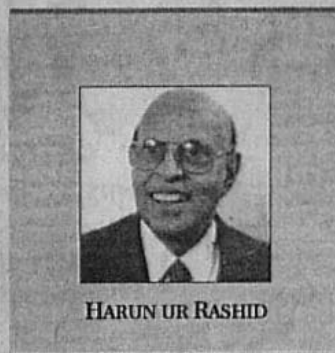
The Interim Prime Minister has been made a pawn in all the political and military shenanigans indulged in by the occupation forces in Iraq. The declaration of a state of emergency, and that too in Sunni majority areas as a strategy to stabilise the country is fraught with imponderable dangers.

We can only echo the UN Secretary General's concern at the negative fallout of the Fallujah offensive, particularly on the future of elections in Iraq. What, may we ask, happens after the city is reduced? What will happen to the civilians that are still holed up in the city, no where to go? In spite of Rumsfeld's confidence in the competence of his troops' urban warfare is costly in time, resources and human lives.

The question is, will reduction of Fallujah achieve the elusive stability?

While there is a need to arrest the spate of violence in Iraq, the wise counsel is to address the issue through dialogue and discussions rather than confrontation and violence.

Will the second Bush administration be different?



HARUN UR RASHID

PRESIDENT George W. Bush won handsomely his second term without judicial intervention and with the majority in the popular votes that he could not achieve in 2000. His first term suffered from a tainted image because of the perception that the Supreme Court put him in the White House, not the American voters.

This time his re-election is legitimate and he can be proud of his massive election victory. He not only won the majority of electoral college votes but also secured over 3 million popular votes over his contender Senator John Kerry. He also got 51 per cent of the popular vote.

Divided nation

The clear victory cannot hide the fact that Americans are bitterly divided. Although the win is massive, on the election night the result was a cliff-hanger because only one state Ohio (Florida in 2000) decided who was to win the race. No responsible media outlet in the US except Fox announced his win. It was the White House who claimed first the victory on that night. The media learnt its lesson in 2000, predicting Florida victory for Al Gore, then retracted it. This time they wanted to be completely certain before they declared the President's victory.

If Ohio's electoral college votes (20) would be for Senator Kerry, he would have been the President. That is why when Senator Kerry conceded defeat he phoned President Bush and urged him to unite America, telling him there was "a desperate

ate need for unity" in the country after the rancour of the campaign.

Such a close contest indicates that the Americans are divided. Numerically 49 per cent American voters did not vote for President Bush and he is fully aware of it. That is why in his acceptance speech, he told the voters who supported Kerry that he would reach out to them during this term and he would do everything possible to "earn" their trust.

Cool reception outside America

President Bush faces divided world

administration will be different from that of the first one? There appears to be no unanimity of views on the issue. However, many think that the second administration will likely to be different from that of the first one in tactics and nuances. Before the election, a spokesperson for the White House stated that although policies would remain the same, "tactics" would be different. The first indication of any change of policy would be visible when the President reshuffles his cabinet, especially the Secretaries of State and Defence, including the National Security Adviser.

President wanted in Iraq. As a result, it is likely that he will not be easily influenced by them this time. He has learnt his lessons in Iraq and casualties of Americans are mounting every day.

Second, although he may not publicly admit the pitfalls of policy of unilateralism, he has realized that terrorism is a global issue and it needs to be addressed globally with multilateral cooperation. The US alone is not enough to eliminate threats of terrorists who are illusive and spread over 60 countries. The recent videotape of Osama Bin Laden demonstrates that the first

policy of atrocities on Palestinian civilians policy is perceived as primarily responsible for unrest, desperation and extreme views among Arabs may assume importance during this administration under the influence and advice of the Prime Minister Blair who passionately believes in a just solution of the crucial issue.

Third, legitimacy of action is very important in foreign policy. It is easy to see the difference between the First Gulf War of 1990 initiated by his father, President Bush, the Senior and the Second Gulf War. In the first one, there was a genuine coalition of

Representatives and in the Senate (55 out of 100). The White House and the both houses of Congress are in full control of the Republican Party. This being the case, to pursue his political and social agenda will be like "a knife through butter." That is why many analysts believe that he is likely to soften his policies, both domestic and foreign, during this administration, to leave an indelible mark in history.

Finally, the first administration of Bush, to a growing concern to all countries, has withdrawn from many multilateral treaties, such as the 1997 Kyoto Protocol for environment and the 1998 Rome Treaty for International Criminal Court. The US has blocked two crucial issues, one is the Fission-Cut Material Treaty for prevention of proliferation of nuclear weapons and the amendment of the 1992 Biological Weapons Treaty for periodical verification by international inspectors on chemical plants located in countries. Although the second administration may not change its policy, it is likely to have a hard look on the issues and may attempt to address the concerns of other countries in its own way.

Conclusion

In history, chance comes once in a lifetime. This victory has provided President Bush to leave great legacy in history. The US is the lone super power and has obligations to ensure that the world become peaceful, safe and harmonious through multilateral cooperation. People all over the world expect from the US to address poverty, hunger and disease of the millions of people in developing countries. The global issues can only be resolved within the framework of the UN, initiated by the US President Roosevelt. The UN needs to be reorganised through active cooperation from the US and we all hope that the UN will not be a matter of convenience but of conviction for the incoming second Bush administration.

Barrister Harun Ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva

BOTTOM LINE

This victory has provided President Bush to leave great legacy in history. The US is the lone super power and has obligations to ensure that the world become peaceful, safe and harmonious through multilateral cooperation. The global issues can only be resolved within the framework of the UN. The UN needs to be reorganised through active cooperation from the US and we all hope that the UN will not be a matter of convenience but of conviction for the incoming second Bush administration.

opinion about his leadership. Arab countries except Kuwait remained cool and their leaders did not send their felicitations message to him as quickly as they normally do. Some of the media in Arab countries have come out with despair because of the election result. China's response was measured. The leaders of many European countries did not rush to send messages of felicitation to President Bush. Only Britain, Italy and Russia sent quickly their message of congratulations to the President. The Prime Ministers of Japan and Australia were happy to see him re-elected and both of them voiced their support even before the election. Both Japanese and Australian leaders are conservative side of politics and they agree with Bush's conservative morality-based policies at home.

Some say that the "gung-ho" approach to foreign policy issues, advocated by neo-conservatives, may not attain the same level of importance during the second administration. Some of the possible reasons may deserve mention.

First, President Bush was a novice when he occupied the White House in 2001.

His only experience was the Governorship of Texas before he became the President. He had no foreign policy experience and met hardly any major world leaders. He has now grown in his office during the last four years and especially after the September attacks in 2001.

Initially he thought that he would not commit American troops overseas as President Clinton did in Bosnia and Kosovo. That thinking dramatically changed after September 11. He has matured in his office and knows that the advice he got from his close neo-conservatives on Iraq did not go in the way as the

Bush administration did not realize the depth and extent of difficulties of eliminating Al-Qaeda network. The US mainland is not safer than before and some say it is much less safe for Americans stationed overseas.

President Bush must have realised that there is an image problem for the US overseas. His unilateral action in Iraq has provoked widespread protests across the world. His policy on environment is against the tide of the current movement for protection of ecosystem of the Earth. Whenever he visits foreign countries, large protests are held against his policy and this is not good for a country who leads the free world. This time he may pursue a policy of reconciliation and is likely to discuss more with the key powers in Europe (France and Germany) before he takes action unilaterally. He might also try to address and remove the root causes of terrorism in consultation with key major powers. His total support for Israel's

more than 50 countries including Arab countries because the military action was approved by the UN. Furthermore, the expenses were borne by Arab countries. The current war in Iraq is almost exclusively on the shoulders of the US, both in terms of troops and money.

Superior military might is not enough in a guerrilla warfare where civilians get killed and military action becomes counterproductive. The US has to win "the minds and hearts of Iraqi people" and military power may not achieve that goal. That is why soft power as distinct from military (hard) power is desirable to be pursued in Iraq.

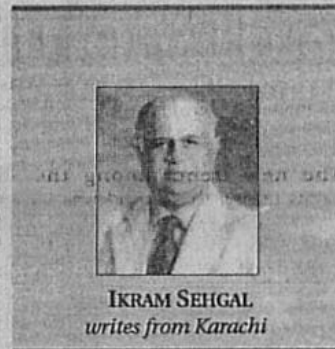
Fourth, in terms of the US constitution, this is the last term of President Bush. He will no more be concerned with winning an election again. That provides him complete freedom to do what he chooses to do for historical legacy. Furthermore, the Republican Party has secured more seats both in the House of

well-equipped buffer force on the LOC with adequate satellite and electronic back-up to cover all movements, (the best would be to have a joint buffer force consisting of units of the Pakistan and Indian Armies but that may be asking too much), (2) the buffer force will have right of pursuit on both sides of the LOC to counter any militancy, (3) free and fair elections throughout Kashmir both Azad and Indian-occupied Kashmir, (4) thereafter install a government that would govern the area, forswearing the issue of accession or independence during the freeze period, and (5) run programmes to rehabilitate the freedom fighter groups and bring them in from the cold. No solution will satisfy everybody but to obtain peace all sides will have to render meaningful sacrifices. No solution can ever be complete, there will be issues which will be devil the body politic but in the larger interest of South Asia and the peripheral regions, we must untangle the Kashmir knot, sooner rather than later."

Once the principles of settlement are agreed upon, the details can be worked out given patience and commitment. India keeps talking about the need for an economic union in South Asia, why not start with an economic union in Kashmir? Why not test the "South Asian Rupiah" as a common currency of the proposed economic union? It is important that India does not to dismiss Musharraf's bold initiative out of hand, the future of the peoples of South Asia lies in lasting peace. That is only possible when the two major countries in the region turn from rabid confrontation in the sub-continent to maximum cooperation.

Kiram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

Kashmir : Untangling the Gordian knot



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

IN the most significant policy initiative for any Pakistani leader since independence in 1947, Gen Pervez Musharraf seemingly abandoned Pakistan's long-standing demand for a plebiscite, something enshrined in the UN Security Council Resolution on Kashmir. In a major speech to media bigwigs recently, the president encouraged both India and Pakistan to move away from their off-stated positions for the sake of peace in South Asia. India's response has been rather cool, saying such negotiations should be confidential and through diplomatic channels rather than being debated in the media. Pakistan's major departure of policy, coming from a soldier, is a 180-degree change of direction in the army's thinking.

While recognising the harsh ground realities, this is certainly a courageous move to settle this outstanding dispute with India, one has to agree with India's contention that using other than quiet diplomatic channels is a risky proposition. On the other hand, what about the personal risk the president is taking domestically for having dared to touch a national sacred cow? Musharraf has thrown down the gauntlet to friend and foe

alike, both domestically and externally. On the one hand friends have been told line up and be counted or be counted out, on the other hand enemies have been provoked to come up with a better alternative to solve this bloody impasse. Above all, India has been challenged to respond with ideas of their own to untangle the proverbial Gordian knot over Kashmir.

On June 28, 2000, in an article entitled "Economically and politi-

cally," I wrote: "Considered at one time to be the region of the most concentrated misery, on a pro-rata basis the world's most industrious people come from South Asia, its entrepreneurs an optimistic bunch that tends to see more often than not an half empty glass as a glass half filled with water." The article went on, "two of the countries of South Asia possess nuclear arsenals and the means to deliver them, not as much as the US and Russia can deploy, but enough to destroy each other many times over. This is compounded by an ineffective command and control system, a sure recipe for disaster given the uncontrolled emotions that govern the actions of even our responsible citizens. Two of the largest conventional armies of the world confront each other in a daily game of playing chicken, the flashpoint threshold is very low. Money that should

be earmarked for education, health and socio-economic infrastructure facilities goes to replenish bombs and shells, an unproductive and senseless investment."

There are many problems between India and Pakistan, but none as intractable as Kashmir, that is the core dispute. In the same article I had said, "let us look at it as a South Asian problem. The Kashmir question will not go away, too much blood has been spilt for the movement across the borders. Militancy in any form not to be tolerated, SAF having the right to cross borders in hot pursuit. People on both sides to be allowed to engage in commerce but without power to purchase real estate during the period of limbo."

On Jan 19, 2001, in an article entitled "Untangling the Kashmir knot," I wrote: "The same analogy can be applied to Pakistan and India. India cannot ever hope to

negotiate the difficult Kashmir problem with any civilian leader in Pakistan, only a military regime can do that. Similarly Pakistan cannot ever hope to make any headway if the Congress Party or a Janata Dal-type alliance of the Centre-Left is in power, the only hope it has of negotiating with conviction over Kashmir is with the Hindu-extremist BJP and other right wing parties. Unless the hard-liners of both countries are an integral part of the process, dialogue will be meaningless. And to complicate issues, because of continuing atrocities by the occupying Indian Army there has been a proliferation of disparate freedom fighter groups with widely differing thought processes and objectives. Given that they could be made to settle differences between themselves, will they be prepared to accept the logic of sensible argument? On the other hand, the same

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AS I SEE IT

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OPINION

Biotechnology within the goals of national agricultural development

ZEBI I. SERAJ

MOST critiques of biotechnology seem to think that it is a Frankenstein that will take over all the agricultural research of the country (Daily Star, November 1, The Biotechnology Trap, by Nazrul Islam).

On the contrary, if used within the context of national needs, it can be used to increase crop productivity in our country.

First of all, biotechnology does not simply mean genetically modified crops or organisms. It can be used to speed up current breeding practices, as a tool for disease diagnostics as well as to catalogue the rich biological diversity of our plant species.

Secondly, all biotechnology is not

what we can import from abroad. Scientists in our country are doing biotechnological research to improve our local crops.

Thirdly, by agreeing to consider the fact that biotechnological research can benefit our agricultural sector, the government has opened the door to the legislature, which can prevent multinationals from exporting GMOs to Bangladesh, unless the policy-makers approve of it.

I would like to clear the mind of the general reader about certain misconceptions generated by The Biotechnology Trap.

First of all, farmers can make their own hybrid seeds if trained to do so. BRRI has produced its first hybrid rice, which has gained popularity with farmers in Jessore and some farmers have already

As with any technology, its proper use in a planned manner can yield benefits, while improper use can harm the public. If we can produce a flood tolerant rice variety, no writing in newspapers will prevent farmers from using such a crop in flood-prone areas, because that is his livelihood. Research has progressed to a stage, where such a crop could be produced very soon. Neither the West, not any Multinational is interested in such a crop, but a farmer would be.

been trained to produce their own seed. It just needs an extra step of having to produce the parent seeds first from which hybrid seeds will be derived, every time. Due to its genetic makeup, hybrid seeds have to be produced from specific parent because only the hybrids (and not their parents or progeny) have high yields.

As pointed out by the author, a lot of biotechnology is private, but a lot of research is being carried out by public research institutes as well. Golden Rice is one example

and then we have Bt rice as well as bacterial blight and fungus resistant rice, produced at IRRI.

Yes, in the West, the main focus is on pesticide resistant varieties -- that is because they do not need disease resistant or drought tolerant crops. We need to do this research ourselves.

Agriculture has become commercial, just as everything else has in the 21st century. This is a sign of the times and not really to do with the Green Revolution. Potato crackers are available even in the tiniest

village shops. It is however not true that seeds from GM crops cannot be saved. These are like any other seeds.

Yes, if the seeds are bought from a multinational company, they may ask royalty every time these seeds are planted. However, it is unlikely that foreign GM seeds will do well in our environment. If these seeds have qualities that we need, like say drought resistance, these will have to be introduced into farmer popular varieties of our country. So the government can enter into a

farmer-friendly deal, if the quality of the crop is beneficial to our needs.

The adverse affect of GM food reported by Mr. Islam's article is very specific and that of one type of Bt corn to which only one out of a million people were found allergic to. This product was later taken off the market. Most GM foods have to be tested under stringent criteria and are only released after safety is assured. This is unlike the scenario where our farmers spray insecticide to the eggplant crop once a

day, which surely becomes toxic and we eat it without question.

Yes, some herbicide resistant crops may become weeds, but this is only true for crops, which are cross-pollinated. Most cereal crops are self-pollinated. Then again, Bangladesh does not need herbicide tolerant crops. It needs disease resistant and drought, flood and salt resistant crops. We should aim to take what we need and after determining whether it will make a much-needed impact on increasing our productivity.

As for Bt cotton in India, the full picture of the results of such plantation is not complete yet. Some farmers have reported good yields, while others have not. Since it is the same seed, other environmental factors are probably at play here and one cannot claim that Bt

cotton has been a disaster in India.

As with any technology, its proper use in a planned manner can yield benefits, while improper use can harm the public. If we can produce a flood tolerant rice variety, no writing in newspapers will prevent farmers from using such a crop in flood-prone areas, because that is his livelihood. Research has progressed to a stage, where such a crop could be produced very soon. Neither the West, not any Multinational is interested in such a crop, but a farmer would be. Instead of being critical, let us encourage the government to fund research that would actually produce such a crop within our country for the benefit of our farmers.

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