**DHAKA SUNDAY DECEMBER 5, 2004** 

## Why this fertiliser crisis at all?

Speedy resolution warranted

verbal duel raging between the government and the fertiliser importers over the intertwined issues of pricing of imported fertiliser and disbursement of subsidy during the last four months, the farmers are caught in the whirlpool of an artificial fertiliser crisis. It comes in the shape of input prices soaring to record levels, thereby hindering their economic recovery in the aftermath of the floods. Struggling to recoup their flood-induced crop losses in the thick of Rabi and Boro cultivation season, the farmers feel hard done by as the prices of chemical fertilisers, barring urea, have shot up by a debilitating 40 percent during

The increase in international prices and enhancement of freight charges have added to the domestic market price, according to the Bangladesh Fertiliser Association (BFA). This is understandable. But how can the high premium paid through the wrangling by the government and the BFA over fertiliser pricing and subsidy disbursement be explained away, or more relevantly, condoned?

Here is a glaring instance of insensitivity to the pressing needs of the farmers ironically where an agricultural subsidy worth Tk 271 crore was announced four months ago and yet it remains unutilised to this day. The government insists that importers release fertilisers at a rate \$15 higher a tonne than the import-price which then it proposes to cushion off by giving 25 percent subsidy to the importers. The importers' point of view is that they have five to six-monthold stocks which carried bank loan interests and godown and other establishment charges that need to be computed, even though the import prices were lower. At the same time, they will now receive the new consignments at current higher prices. So, they regard the government's suggestion of a flat rate as 'arbitrary'. That's why the BFA wanted the government 'to take the price that they are now paying to import fertiliser as the bench mark'.

A tussle is seemingly on between the government and the BFA to strike a deal based on how little each side ends up paying in terms of subsidy and sacrifice on profits respectively. But it's the farmers who are at the suffering end, a predicament which must be ended by ironing out the differ-

### **DESA'S dismal deeds**

A glaring governance failure

HE aim of increasing the efficiency of power distribution and revenue collection through creation of an appropriate body has turned out to be a dismal failure. DESA, a child of power sector reform in which donor pressure had played a great part, has come up with figures which indicate that a very large sum of money has done the vanishing act. Needless to say, the negative impact of all these would ultimately fall on the poor taxpayers.

By the admission of the state minister in charge of the ministry of power, there is an 'untraceable' amount of Tk 2500 crores from DESA funds that have vanished due to what the minister says, graft, theft and mismanagement. Welcome as the minister's expose is, we do not fail to see a sense of utter haplessness writ large on his statement.

Certain endemic systemic failures have come to light from the minister's statement. One, the whole system is plagued by our national default culture. Two, the default and theft culture is nurtured by DESA operatives by way of greasing their own palms. Three, there is a lack of resolute effort to see an end to the prevailing situation by the government itself.

Whereas we are suffering from a shortfall in power, the most important input for GDP growth, and whereas the

exchequer is suffering the gravest loss through system seepage in the power sector, the biggest single defaulter appears to be the public sector itself -- to the tune of Tk three to four hundred crore. But how does one explain the remainder Tk 1500 crore that various parties and individuals in the private sector owe to DESA? Why has it been allowed to pile up if not for the role of DESA? itself? for the role of DESA itself?

The large amount of loss, both untracked and in the form of dues, has accreted over the last decade for DESA. This only exposes a lack of supervision and failure to initiate

timely action and appropriate measures by all concerned.

It will do very little to put the blame on unscrupulous officials and workers of the organisation. However, it is never too late to take actions to retrieve the loss and hold those that are responsible for the losses to account.

On the question of selection of advisers, I did not say

that the method followed by him was illegal. In my view

he acted within the letter of the law but he violated the

spirit of the law. The caretaker concept is based on the

need to create confidence in the minds of the govern-

ment and the Opposition. Justice Latifur Rahman

missed this basic point. Since the present text of the law

does not provide for consultation with the two sides, I

suggested reform of the system. Instead of addressing

this issue, he went on to describe how he chose his

Council. There must have been individuals in the Coun-

cil who were upright and neutral, but the record of the

# Can Iran be tamed?

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

UROPEANS are reportedly angry and confused over Iran's seemingly protean policy in seeking exemption from a deal to suspend sensitive nuclear activities Iran had agreed with France, Germany and Britain only a few days back. Reportedly Iran wanted exemption for twenty centrifuge machines to conduct research with nuclear materials. Centrifuges spin at supersonic speed to enrich or purify uranium for use in nuclear reactors. Uranium enriched to a very high degree can be used in nuclear weapons. Latest news from Vienna indicates that Iran has agreed not to insist on exemption for the twenty centri-fuges on condition that Tehran's acceptance of suspension of uranium enrichment would constitute neither legal nor binding obligation. Besides, Iran's head of nuclear authority has reportedly said that Iran's suspension of uranium enrichment is contingent upon satisfactory negotiations now being carried out with the European

According to a report by Arms Control Association the European proposal presented to Iran in October contained the following: Iran would suspend the manufacture and import of centrifuges and related components, as well as assembly, installation, testing and operation of such centrifuges; Iran would freeze operation of uranium conversion facility and any con-verted uranium would be placed under IAEA safeguards; the suspen-sion would be indefinite and verifiable. In return Europeans would guarantee supply to Iran of nuclear reactor fuel from other countries but the spent fuel would have to be removed from Iran. Additionally Europeans will support Iran's acquisition of a light water research reactor Iran is planning to construct. The deal promises European support for on-going Iranian nuclear cooperation with Russia, pursuit of a pro-posed Middle East nuclear free

zone, and negotiation for a EU-Iran

trade agreement. But the Americans are not fully satisfied. Though Colin Powell expressed happiness over November 26 IAEA resolution condemning Iran's past violation of IAEA rules but welcomed Iran's new pledges of cooperation, Bush administration wanted Iran to be declared in breach of 1968 NPT and the matter to be referred to the UNSC for sanctions against Iran. But US failed to conince majority of the 35 members Board of Governors of IAEA except Canada, Japan and Australia. Bush

have fixated for years on the threat of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons. US-Iran relations have been tortured and aggrieved one from the time Reza Shah Pahlavi was restored to his throne by the CIA in the aftermath of nationalisation of British owned oil companies by then Prime Minister Mossadegh who was overthrown with American help and sufferings of US mission officials in Tehran following Islamic revolution in 1979. In the recent past the US has pressed China, Russia and others to cut off supply of vital technology, materials and know-how to Iran and

Hashemi Rafsanjani are politicians and not defence strategists. They see Western policy of nuclear ambiguity relating to possession of nuclear weapons by Israel (suspected to be over two hundred weapons) as not only inequitable but reaffirmation of western apathy towards the Islamic world which after 9/11 has taken the form of an undeclared war against Islam. In a recent survey eighty per cent of British Muslims have expressed themselves of having been victimised in one way or the other. Anthropologist Professor

need to ponder is whether possession of a few nuclear weapons would necessarily enhance Iran's security. The sheer disparity in the number and quality of conventional and non-conventional weapons possessed by the US and Israel and the ones that could be developed by Iran would ensure complete annihilation of one of the oldest civilisations of the world. Iranian leaders recognise this but some among the hardliners believe that an arsenal of 50-100 weapons could act as a credible deterrent. Regardless of the validity of such assumption it should also be

to rein in Iranian nuclear programme the West needs to address the question of Iran's potential demand for nuclear weapons. Perhaps the West in conjunction with Russia and Japan may wish to involve Israel and the greater Middle Eastern countries more actively in regional non-proliferation efforts and regional security talks; encourage Israel to join NPT; alter its policy of nuclear ambiguity; ratify Chemical Weapons Convention and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT); encourage talks for a verifiable WMD free zone in the area. And above all, find a just solution of the Palestinian crisis.

administration's stated security goals being non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and to prevent at any cost the nightmarish possibility of acquisition of WMD materials by nonstate actors, it feels a nuclear armed Iran, one of the three nations termed by President Bush as "Axis of Evil". would destabilise Persian Gulf and could give terrorist access to WMD materials. Such arguments proffered by neo-cons in Bush administration ignore the possibility that axis of evil' and 'regime change' rhetorics inflame nationalistic feeling among Iranians and help Iranian hardliners and clerics who have not particularly done well with the Iranian economy. Europeans being aware of this strand in Iranian politics have opted for reason to deny Iranian hardliners to win their argument that Iran should drop out of NPT and speed up development of nuclear weapons as North Korea

Americans, on the other hand,

interdict both overtly and covertly transfer of equipment that would have helped Iran in its nuclear programme. As George Perkovich (of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace) points out nuclear establishments around the world are too politically and symbolically important to be closed down entirely. In Iran's case the need to acquire nuclear capability is to narrow the power and status gap with Pakistan, Israel and the US. Possession of nuclear weapons by Iran would also demonstrate that Shia Iranians are not intellectually and technologically inferior to rival Sunnis. Prior to 9/11 Iranian leaders had a real fear of a Talebanised Pakistan armed with nuclear weapons. One only has to look up the number of Shia-Sunni sectarian violence in Pakistan to appreciate

In case of Israel the threat from Iranian perspective is unambiguous. It should be understood that Supreme leader Ayatollah Khameini

Prina Werbner has described this feeling of progressive alienation "as the vulnerability of the Muslim diaspora communities in the West, susceptible to being essentialised as fanatical and irrational, a potential fifth column in the clash of civilisation". Advocacy for possession of nuclear weapons by Iranian hardliners in this case becomes all the more saleable because of the experiences of the Muslim diaspora in the West where many people have been convinced of some western intellectuals' thesis on classical Islamic view of the world as being divided into the House of Islam and the House of Unbelief or House of War and of Muslims' recognition from an early date of "a genuine rival -- a competing world religion, a distinctive world civilisation" in Christendom.

Iranians are no exception in seeing Israeli unchallenged possession of nuclear weapons as a hypocritical insult to the integrity of the international non-proliferation regime. Yet the question the Iranians

considered that during the proces of acquisition of large number of weapons US and/or Israel may launch a preemptive attack on Iranian nuclear installations. Given Under Secretary of State John Bolton's declaration: "we cannot let Iran, a leading sponsor of terrorism, acquire nuclear weapons", one must take such a possibility or of Osirak option (Israeli preemptive attack on Iraqi suspected nuclear stallations in 1981) seriously.

Cooler heads in the US, not to peak of in Europe, strongly advise ainst such preemptive actions on e grounds that (a) logic of preemption would necessitate the US to wage war against 12 nations with nuclear weapons programme that Pentagon says are extant and emerging threats; (b) preemptive strikes may not be able to take out all nuclear installations as these are located in inaccessible areas out of public eyes; (c) Iran-Al Qaida links need further investigation particularly after Iraq fiasco and also

alleged Iranian involvement in the 9/11 tragedy -- an allegation most suspect in the eyes of the world; and (d) another Iraq-like misadventure will most certainly inflame anti-American sentiment globally and particularly in the Islamic world. Instead the US should concentrate on the internal dynamics of Iranian politics. Former Iranian Finance Minister Jahangir Amuzegar has written about profound challenge faced by the clerics "from a new and disenchanted generation known as the Third Force born after 1979" Iranian Islamic revolution. They question the concept of velayet-efaqih (the supremacy of Shia urists), are unimpressed by President Khatami's Islamic democracy, irreverent to the Iran-Iraq war, and aspiring for freedom and prosperity. Though Iran's march towards

secular democracy took a hard knock in February elections in which 12- members Guardian Council disallowed 3000 candidates from contesting the elections, Iran is blessed with a young (seventy per cent are under the age of thirty) and politically articulate population. Iran's Ayatollahs who have ruled the country since 1979 are demographically dead and the durability of clerical rule appears to be time-spanned. Therefore, to rein in Iranian nuclear programme the West needs to address the question of Iran's potential demand for nuclear weapons. Perhaps the West in conjunction with Russia and Japan may wish to involve Israel and the greater Middle Eastern countries more actively in regional nonproliferation efforts and regional security talks; encourage Israel to join NPT; alter its policy of nuclear ambiguity; ratify Chemical Weapons Convention and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT); encourage talks for a verifiable WMD free zone in the area. And above all, find a just solution of the Palestinian crisis. In the ultimate analysis, it is peace and notwarthat will denuclearise Iran.

# Musharraf can't decide all by himself



KULDIP NAYAR

TITHOUT mentioning the names of former Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, I asked President General Pervez Musharraf why he did not allow leaders living abroad to participate in the affairs of Pakistan and its development. This was during a meeting with him at Islamabad last month. He was visibly upset and ended the conversation with a counter question: Would their participation be in the interest of development?

I am broaching the subject at this time because the Pakistan government is in the midst of making concrete proposals on Kashmir and expecting India to respond to them. Musharraf is in such a hurry that there is threat practically every day to go back to square one. Kashmir is an important matter. The concur-

No doubt, the military is in full control and there is no challenge to Musharraf's authority. But he should not forget that both Benazir and Sharif command a large following even in their wilderness. In a freer atmosphere, they may register a much larger support. They are a reality which Musharraf cannot wish away. With the release of Asif Zardari, Benazir's husband, from

prison after eight years, the scenario may change. There can be an increasing support for a civilian rule. Musharraf may face tough opposi-

then the referendum is not his way

to determine things in Pakistan. The

rigged referendum in favour of his

presidency is too recent to be forgot-

ten. I wish Islamabad had torn a leaf out of New Delhi's book. The Janata

about what transpired between

Prime Ministers Inder Gujral and

Sharif at Male. Subsequent govern-

ments have taken the opposition

into confidence on their talks with

Pakistan. In matters like Kashmir.

the whole of Pakistan should be

involved and, as such, a bipartisan

policy is necessary. Foreign Minis-

ter Kurshid Kasuri is right when he

says that nobody can take the credit

away from former Prime Minister

Atal Behari Vajpayee for initiating

the "peace process." In the same way, no Pakistan government can minimise the role of Sharif in pushing forward the peace process. He invited Vajpayee to Lahore and signed a joint declaration. Similarly,

Reports are that both Benazir and Sharif have not reacted favourably to Musharraf's proposal. In the face of opposition from main political

It is strange that Musharraf says with a flourish that all Kashmiris, whatever their views, should participate in the talks. But this should hold good for Pakistan as well. All shades opinion should be associated be offering at some stage. The military-led government at slamabad does not represent the Pakistani opinion. Ultimately, the civil society has to accept it.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Realism is thought and action based on realities. It is strange that the reality of political situation in Pakistan does

not dawn on Musharraf. There is no doubt that he is the monarch of all that he surveys. But it is also true that the

military control has suppressed the real voice of people. Recent contacts at different levels have revived emotional

of the constitution, unless political parties decide to amend it. Such a course is difficult to imagine because parliament passed a unanimous resolution during P.V. Narasimha Rao's rule that India should get back the territories it has lost. Both Pakistan and China were

endorsement of both the houses

and it has to be within the precincts

However, it is time that India had a policy on Kashmir. So far it has

antagonism by the common mar-Galbraith had also done what he called a Harvard Exercise (named after the university where he taught). He had suggested the reopening of the road between Islamabad and Srinagar through Baramula, Uri and Murree and the resumption of trade and tourist traffic, emphasising that India's military rights in the vale of Kashmir should remain intact.

This was more or less the proposal that Sheikh Abdullah discussed with me in 1969. His argument was that the border should be 'soft' so that the Pakistanis had an easy access to the valley. Strangely enough, late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto repeated the same thing March 1972 at Rawalpindi. He said: "We can make the ceasefire line as the line of peace and let people come and go between the two Kashmirs. After all, why should they suffer? Let there be some free movement between them. Then one thing can lead to

Realism is thought and action based on realities. It is strange that the reality of political situation in Pakistan does not dawn on Musharraf. There is no doubt that he is the monarch of all that he surveys. But it is also true that the military control has suppressed the real voice of people. Recent contacts at different levels have revived emotional ties which both sides have had before partition. Left to the people, they would like to have free travel and free trade. They are sick and tired of the never-ending confronta-

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

#### with the proposals that Musharraf is making or the ones which India may e Benazir-Rajiv Gandhi accord was a step towards India-Pakistan What Musharraf says on Kashmir



writes from New Delhi

rence of the two leaders is essential.

tion, particularly when his move to retain the uniform is gathering is his point of view and that of the military in Pakistan. Political leaders like Benazir and Sharif do not agree with him. Nor do most of the people. A referendum, if held on this

ties which both sides have had before partition. Left to the people, they would like to have free travel and free trade. They are sick and tired of the never-ending confrontation. point, may surprise Musharraf. But parties, what does New Delhi do? Sharif told me at Jeddah last year that they would not accept any solution on Kashmir that the military regime had brokered. Moves to separate Shahbaz Sharif from his brother Nawaz Sharif, even if suc-Dal government kept both the Congress and the BJP informed cessful, do not mean much. The real question is to involve political parties. The Muslim League (Nawaz Sharif) is not at Shahbaz's command. The Musharraf government is banking on the Muslim League (Qaide), the King's Party, for endorsement of the Kashmir solution in the Pakistan National Assembly and the Senate. But it has only a wafer-thin majority. Whatever is decided has to have the consensus,

both the Pakistan People's Party and

the Muslim League (Nawaz Sharif)

agreeing to it.

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

That a Prime Minister is a civilian does not change things. He is only Musharraf's nominee. While in India, Shaukat Aziz could not add even a comma to Musharraf's proposals, although he was eloquent in renunciating them. What progress is possible when Islamabad sticks to its old line that the movement on confidence building measures has to keep pace with the advancement

Musharraf's impatience with India is not understandable. It is a democratic country and has to follow the norms laid down by the constitution. People's wishes are supreme. He can get away with anything in Pakistan but not Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who is answerable to parliament. Any proposal on Kashmir will need the

none. New Delhi's formulations are a reaction to what Pakistan says or does. A high-power committee of all shades of opinion should be constituted so that it is clear how far New Delhi can go to accommodate Islamabad. The Home Ministry's department on Kashmir, with a joint secretary at the top, is too inadequate for the job. For example, India should pursue the concept of a South Asian economic union to counter Musharraf's proposal of seven regions.

The US papers, now made public, tell that John K. Galbraith, US envoy in the early sixties, had warned Washington that "Kashmir is not soluble in territorial terms but by holding up the example of the way in which France and Ger-many had moved to soften their

They want to live in peace as

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

Kibria's reply to Latifur Rahman A number of articles have been written in response to sides" I was referring to. I was simply referring to the ruling party and the principal opposition party in the Parliament. Let him analyse the voting pattern in the election and he will realize what I mean by "two sides." my article on reform of the caretaker government law. I welcome a lively debate that is always useful. I had

therefore no desire to write again on the subject. However Justice Latifur Rahman leaves me with little I was also amused by his attempt to cast doubts on choice. He has made such harsh and unjustified my democratic credentials. I am proud to have been a remarks about me that some comment on his 'rebureaucrat with good reputation. I had the honour to rise to the position of ambassador of Bangladesh Latifur Rahman seemed to have been hurt by my abroad and Foreign Secretary at home. I also had the honour to serve as an Under Secretary-General of the omission to use the honorific justice before his name. UN for over a decade. Unlike what he said, I did not had no wish to hurt him by not using the honorific and suddenly turn into a politician. I have been in politics the omission was not intentional. I will not however for the last twelve years. I was elected to the present conceal the fact that I do not feel the same degree of respect for him as I do for the other two judges. Parliament after serving the country as Finance Minis-

> Justice Latifur Rahman has shown his poison fangs in the last paragraph of his response where he described the misdeeds of the Awami League government. In fact he has accused the Awami League gov ernment of 'criminality, corruption and terrorism' This venomous outburst, to my mind, clearly proves my point that he was prejudiced against the Awami League. His actions speak loudly about his bias. Small wonder that he is unable to tolerate even a fair criticism of his performance. He has belittled the high office that he happened to have held.

Council as a whole is very poor. It failed to inspire confi-dence in the Opposition. I was amused to note that Justice Latifur Rahman does not know which "two Shah AMS Kibria

# Please remove ugly

Because of the impending SAARC summit in Dhaka, brisk activities are going on to give the capital a much needed face lift. There is a structure behind Farmgate Police Box: four brick pillars supporting a rusty and broken water tank that is no longer in use. This is quite an unpleasant sight. Please remove this ugly struc-

Major QS Ahmed, psc, te (retd)

#### **BUET** admission procedure

BUET is one of the most important educational institutions for higher studies in Bangladesh. Its admission procedure and influence-free admission system are also known to all. But recently, questions have aroused regarding the exam papers of the admission test and some of the procedures. The admission test questions of BUET are set following a particular type and this has been

needs a change

We know that the HSC level syllabus has undergone a major change. The emphasis on English, in this case, is probably the most noticeable and the reason behind it is very simple -efficiency in English is a must in today's world. But the recent question papers of the BUET admission test have not focussed on this very much.

Now about the admission procedure. Previously, students had to go to some particular lab to get their medical reports (against payment, of course) and we never really understood the significance of such test. Recently, the news of paying 700 taka for medical check up has hampered the image of BUET. The latest cost of admission form has also worsened this crisis. Sweet Chowdhury Rashid Hall, BUET

### We need BRTC

bus service We, the office going people of parties. Chittagong, are badly suffering

the practice for many years. I think it from transportation problems. We need BRTC bus service here like in Dhaka. We do not mind paying a little more for a comfortable journey. The current city service is very poor in quality. The buses are always congested and stop anywhere. We hope the authority concerned would take necessary steps to start BRTC city service in Anonymous

Chittagong

### Leaders and followers

This is the season of work and also the season of parties! The leaders and followers of the political parties from the union level to the national level, should become alert and careful so that they do not waste their time engaging themselves unnecessarily in the daytime too much talking over cell phones, and in the evening attending several important and unimportant dinner

The leaders and their followers

should be cautious so that their prime time for working for the growth' of Gross Domestic Products (GDP) and 'increasing' the National Income (NI) of Bangladesh are not robbed by 'touts' and 'sycophants'.

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Golam Ashraf DOHS Baridhara, Dhaka

### CIPs?

The Daily Star reported on November 27 that no commercially important persons have been declared by the government for its third year. I don't see why it's necessary that we must declare people to be CIPs. The story says that lack of declaring people to be a CIP is causing frustration among exporters, traders, and entrepreneurs, and that 50 people "got that status" the last time. It adds that the Anisul Huq, President of BGMEA (who himself is identified as a CIP since 1989) says the government should declare CIP status to accommodate new faces to NewYork

bring dynamism in the business community, and that CIP status is announced after approval from the Cabinet Division.

I don't see any reason for that. That status should be achieved by performance and position, not by government declaration. If a person has achieved significance in business and commercial affairs, his or her contemporaries would know that the person is important. Declaring someone important doesn't make them important. Is it necessary to declare Professor Muhammad Yunus 'important'? Even if a person is considered important in Bangladesh commercial affairs that should be the result of his/her perceived importance. It should not be the result of the cabinet of a government. Doesn't the Cabinet have a more important