

# Will Turkey finally become an EU member?

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

**A**FTER waiting for many years, the European Union has finally invited Turkey to start negotiations from October this year for full membership of the EU. Turkey first applied for associate membership of the European Economic Community in 1957 and signed an Association Agreement in 1963 opening future possibility of full membership. Though the period of completion of the negotiations remains indeterminate, the most recently held European Council's invitation to Turkey to start negotiations could be a turning point in recent European history.

For many Turks, joining the EU is an obsession. Liberals and the business community in Turkey are keen on EU membership because it will promote basic freedoms and economic reforms. Minorities, particularly the Kurds, see EU membership as the best way to secure safety from violation of human rights. According to the State Planning Board of Turkey between 2014-20 Turkish economy will grow at six percent per annum, per capita income will be over \$9000, Turkish membership will contribute 386 billion Euros to the EU during this period, and Turkey's imports from EU will amount to more than 150 billion Euros from the current 28 billion. Besides, Turkey can offer a well trained and disciplined workforce to Europe's dwindling and aging population.

The question of Turkish membership of the EU, however, is controversial, to say the least, among Europeans themselves. Austria, which historically served as a bulwark for Christian Europe against the Ottoman Empire, may hold a referendum on Turkish membership. Austrian President Heinz

Fischer has strongly suggested a pan-European referendum on this issue. In Belgium, former Prime Ministers Willy Claes and Karel Van Miert oppose Turkish admission. Similar opposition has been expressed by Jacques Delors, the former President of the European Commission. Though the Greek government supports the Turkish candidature, the majority of the Greeks oppose it. Former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing fears Turkey's entry will spell the end of Europe. Though President Jacques Chirac has given statements supporting Turkish admission, the

ing about limiting the EU's size." Emphasising the fact that the EU is after all European, Wolfgang Schäuble argues that, though Australia and Japan could easily fulfill admission criteria, no one proposes that they should become EU members. Offering Turkey "privileged partnership" Schäuble speaks in no uncertain terms that now is no time to consider taking in more new members -- especially Turkey that could soon have a bigger population than any EU member state. He probably has in mind that as full member Turkey will be one of the five European giants in the decision

Despite Prime Minister Erdogan's impressive record of legislation to accord with European demands and Copenhagen criteria for EU membership, subordinating Turkey's traditionally strong military to civilian control by forging common cause with the reformist elements of the military establishment long committed to the country's secularism, detractors are quick to point out Erdogan's orthodox Muslim upbringing -- being a protégé of Islamist Prime Minister Erbakan -- and his conviction and imprisonment for using religion to foment disorder. Critics argue that

of civilisations between Islam and Christianity. European governments may reject such a notion pursued as a state policy, but discrimination faced by the Muslim diaspora in the West termed by Professor Prima Werbner as "spiralling progressive alienation" from the mainstream western society cannot be denied. Communalism displacing communitarian values, fear of the unknown, and a resurgent racism are undeniably current in western life today. One may recall that Samuel Huntington, while identifying western and Islamic civilisations among

Cyprus. If Turkey is relatively underdeveloped, then so are Bulgaria and Rumania. If Turkey is not sufficiently secular, then one should remember that divorce was illegal in Ireland at the time of its accession into the EU.

Rejection of EU membership to Turkey would run the risk of cementing the impression among ordinary Muslims that European Union is indeed a "club of the Christians" and the most extremist elements among them could find another excuse to spread anti-western sentiment among the disaffected and marginalised sections of the Muslim societies. On the other hand, taking Turkey in as a full member of the EU could be beneficial to the West as Turkey can effectively play the role of a bridge between the West and the Islamic world. Turkey's secular credentials are unassailable. In recent times, Turkey's leadership has grown increasingly concerned over Islamic fundamentalism and considers political Islam as a threat to the country's security. Then again, the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Conference is a Turk who can play a moderating role between the West and the Islamic world, should it become necessary.

In any case, the European Union may consider strictly following the same principles applied while taking the ten new members and in negotiating the new ones who are expected to be taken in the near future. Even any slight implication of religious discrimination in the admission process could only add to the already global turbulence and cast a shadow over Europe's post-Renaissance values so admired around the world as the only hope of countervailing the muscularity of the Colossus that has brought so much grief into the world.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

## Tragic deaths from factory fire

Past lessons unlearned

**T**HE fire at a knitting factory in Narayanganj, which left at least 22 garment workers dead, has once again exposed the horrific vulnerability of garment employees to fire accidents. The trapped men, women and children at the plant had absolutely no chance of escaping death as both the main gate and emergency exit of the factory were shut when the tragedy struck. It seems the victims had been huddled together, like anything but humans, inside a building from where there was no way to move quickly to safety.

Just to comprehend the magnitude of the disaster from fire accidents, 231 workers have died and 1100 sustained injuries during the last 15 years in garment factory mishaps, according to some unconfirmed estimates. Many factory owners may have done little or nothing to eliminate the chances of accident or improve the safety exit arrangements. The latest incident being a repetition of what we witnessed many times in the past bears testimony to that state of affairs.

We have pointed out several times that the safety arrangements in the factories are not at all satisfactory, barring notable exceptions. Most of these buildings were not designed to be used as a factory where a large number of people would work at a time. The stairs and corridors in the buildings are not spacious enough to avoid a stampede in case of fire or any other accident. Then the exit points are either too narrow or are kept shut for inexplicable reasons. Isn't all this a criminal offence? The people who fail to attach due importance to human life have no right to run any business or enterprise. It is really shocking that the deaths of so many garment workers could not sensitise some owners to the need for protecting them from fire.

We again appeal to the garment owners to improve the conditions in their factories which must include installation of effective fire-fighting equipment. And the family members of the latest tragedy must be given due compensation for the loss that they have suffered. The government, for its part, must take a fresh stock of the situation and bring to justice the people whose criminal indifference to a safety issue caused so many deaths.

## Plan to evict land-grabbers

Is Rab the answer?

**L**AST week the parliamentary standing committee on the Ministry of Land gave the press to understand that if need be, Rab would be deployed to evict illegal occupants from government land and establishments.

There is no doubt that land-grabbing and illegal occupation of land is one of the most serious problems facing the administration today, and we are gratified to see that the standing committee seems set to finally address the issue. However, we are not so sure that Rab is at all the correct law enforcement authority to bring in to tackle the matter.

It is unclear to us what role is envisaged for Rab by the standing committee. The best we can understand is that once government land has been identified Rab will be put in charge of carrying out the eviction of those who are found to be squatting unlawfully on the land.

This approach is flawed in a number of important respects. The first one is that there seems to be no good reason why regular law enforcement authorities cannot accomplish this task. The question which immediately springs to mind is whether the government will first bother to go through all the legal processes necessary before eviction, such as going to court, providing due notice and conducting the eviction in a legally permissible manner, and particularly in the case of squatters, with a humane touch.

Bringing Rab into the picture might lead some to wonder whether the authorities now wish to dispense with the niceties of due process in the matter of evictions as well as in the matter of fighting crime.

The main deficiency, though, of the proposed plan is that it does not acknowledge that the bulk of the land problem in Bangladesh is not the impoverished masses who squat on government land because they have no place else to go, but the rich and powerful who have fraudulently obtained title to land or control land they have no right or title to.

## A question of credibility



IKRAM SEHGAL  
writes from Karachi

**A**PROPOS of an understanding reached with the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) to break the impasse on the 17th Amendment, Pervez Musharraf gave what amounted to a solemn pledge in a prime time televised address in December 2003 that he would retire as COAS on or before December 31, 2004.

On December 30, 2004, a day before he was supposed to come good the President went back on his public commitment. This self-inflicted hit on his credibility may not affect him immediately, but will certainly be a problem in the future. Musharraf has not heeded the lessons learnt from late Gen Ziaul Haq's notorious "90 day commitment" which Zia did not keep (and had no intention of keeping) or the referendum Zia carried out to declare himself an elected president. The public cannot be blamed for being sceptical of military rulers making any promises.

Pervez Musharraf should have refrained from making any public pledge in the first place and if he had to he should have clearly made the doffing of his uniform conditional on the MMA keeping to their side of the bargain. While it is true that a majority of the people in the country do not care whether he stays in uniform or not, responsible leaders do have a moral obligation to support the rule of law by personal example. While for some time demo-

cratic process had to be compromised in Pakistan due to circumstances beyond anyone's control, there has to be closure.

Pervez Musharraf is popular but not popularly elected, his existence as President (and remaining a "popular leader") is wholly (and solely) dependant upon his continuing as COAS Pakistan Army. Given his personal security situation he is riding a tiger and quite happy about not getting off the tiger. The moment he doffs his uniform, the movers and

shakers in Pakistani politics, bureaucracy, business and the armed forces, etc will start beating a path to the door of the newly incumbent COAS, whoever he is.

Musharraf made out a good case about our internal and geo-political extenuating circumstances but this was skating on rather thin ice, almost all countries face some crises or the other at any given time, given Pakistan's penchant to be almost always in crisis one does not see how Pervez Musharraf can ever take off his uniform.

In a perverse way the MMA helped (1) not only to make up his mind to keep the uniform by pressuring him (Pervez Musharraf's personality reacts to threats rather than bows down before them), but (2) by their opposition persuading the US (and other western countries) that Musharraf's presence was imperative to counter the fundamentalist threat. So why should Musharraf go platonic when we are past-masters at frequently sacrifice

ing morality at the altar of necessity?

When questioned about Musharraf not leaving the post of COAS as per his public promise, the US Secretary of State referred to the Parliamentary process that had allowed Musharraf to keep both the post of President and COAS, to quote Powell: "It is not a matter for the US but of the Pakistanis" unquote.

Our present mode of "uniformed democracy" fits into their scheme of things. Though western logic is

ment at the Federal level. Retaining the Defence Ministry (and thus control of the ISI) and the NAB, he would have remained an all powerful non-executive Head of State. Regrettably his personality does not allow him to remain above the fray as a bystander.

However Pervez Musharraf's ability to compromise where and when necessary is a great asset to him personally, and by extension to the country. Politics is the cost of compromise, late Ziaul Haq (and

programme" with rewards still not "trickling down" to the downtrodden and hopelessly poor despite huge foreign interest in the real-estate and housing sector.

In not imposing martial law publicly, Musharraf gave a perception to the public of benign authority, force-multiplying this perception manifold by allowing unprecedented freedom to the media. Allowing the letting off of steam avoided a pressure cooker situation ripe for exploitation by recalcitrant

from the rank of Brigadier onwards in the present army hierarchy have been personally selected and promoted to his present rank by Pervez Musharraf albeit mostly on merit, with dishonourable exceptions. By not retiring as COAS, Musharraf is giving a profound vote of "no confidence" to the very men he rewarded on the basis of loyalty to him, and loyalty is always a two-way street. What is indeed strange is that a man possessing such supreme self-confidence as Pervez Musharraf should display such a lack of confidence in those he has personally hand-picked.

In relative comparison to earlier rulers, he has done reasonably well in the governance mode. The catch-22 is that this is certainly not a happy situation, "uniformed democracy" as a Musharraf may have been suitable for Pakistan in the short tenure, it is disastrous for our long-term survivability as a sovereign nation. We may have been lucky in the form of Musharraf, having created this precedent "constitutionally" but can he guarantee that the next military ruler will not be an ogre?

A president in uniform creates an unhealthy precedent for adventurers in the future. The next military ruler will declare martial law, call the Assemblies into session and get himself "elected" at gunpoint and we will have a "democratic" government, duly certified by the Supreme Court.

While acknowledging that he has been good for this nation at a crucial time in our history, particularly since 9/11, Pervez Musharraf must come to terms with the reality (and his place in history thereof) that "uniformed democracy" is not sustainable. Musharraf's presence on the national stage is based on credibility, neither he (or the country) can afford that it be called into question.

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

## AS I SEE IT

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satisfied that Pervez Musharraf's occupation of both the offices is necessary because of the security environment, will they countenance generals running western democracies because of the threat of international terrorism? In the face of Islamic extremism breeding terrorism in and around Pakistan and the vicinity thereof, the west has decided that to be logical is not to be always right.

Pervez Musharraf has certainly made his share of mistakes, the major being the holding of the referendum when there was really no need to do so. The second was the failure to transfer power to those elected, even after a grossly manipulated election. The net result, being forced to become beholden to the very party his intelligence men artificially created in the first place from a pretty motley lot of politicians.

Heavens would not have fallen if the PPP would have come to power in Sindh and led a coalition govern-

ment at the Federal level. Retaining the Defence Ministry (and thus control of the ISI) and the NAB, he would have remained an all powerful non-executive Head of State. Regrettably his personality does not allow him to remain above the fray as a bystander.

However Pervez Musharraf's ability to compromise where and when necessary is a great asset to him personally, and by extension to the country. Politics is the cost of compromise, late Ziaul Haq (and

now Musharraf) have made compromise into an art! There are strong indications of the possibility of a national government in the making in the future, a coalition of liberal forces to politically take on the religious parties that are ascendant in some areas on our western and northern borders.

politicians, concerted and widespread street protest never materialised. The allowing such freedoms is probably, a first for any military rule, it has singularly contributed to Pervez Musharraf's acceptability by both the intelligentsia and the masses in Pakistan, and by western democracies. It kept the country stable for foreign investors.

One of Musharraf's great achievements is the instituting of accountability, one only wishes it had been across the board and not straitjacketed by selective targeting. By-passing the shamelessly corrupt among the superior judiciary and/or the armed forces who have a vested interest in maintaining the present status quo, the credibility of National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has been badly tarnished. Moreover the "plea bargain" concept is a gilt-edged invitation for legalising corruption and white-collar crime. Which brings us to the bedrock question of trust!

All officers of senior rank, i.e.

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

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.

### Thai envoy's clarification

This refers to the letter titled "Thai Envoy Clarifies" published on December 8, 2004 through which HE the Thai Ambassador in Bangladesh stated the exact situation in response to my letter (Dec. 2) captioned -- "Unfortunate statement by Thai Queen."

Well, it appears from the Ambassador's clarification that the Thai Queen had actually delivered her speech in Thai language and the English translation according to him was erroneous which led to the misinterpretation of the speech.

### Tsunami victims

We are appalled and feeling very sad about the havoc wrought by the earthquake and tidal waves which hit South East Asia on Sunday, December 26, 2004. The loss of lives and property is so immense that one has to gasp from anguish. It is feared that more than 1,50,000 people had died and the toll is still rising as rescuers are discovering more bodies. It is speculated that more may die in the coming days from diseases.

We have no words of consolation for those who have lost everything, we can only ask why it had to happen?

Human beings are so helpless in the face of natural calamities. We are lucky to escape and should thank the Almighty for saving us from this calamity but we do not know what the future holds for us. We can only pray, seek mercy from Him.

### Corruption in income tax department

I fully endorse the views expressed by Mr Al-Mamun Zakaria from Mirpur on corruption in the income tax department, published in DS on 31 December, 2004. My case is exactly similar, so is the experience. I work in a foreign establishment in Dhaka and constructed a house here with a heavy loan from the HBFC. While assessing income tax payable by me, every year the officials concerned raise a good number of queries, make inquiries and visit my residence for on-the-spot verification of facts.

All these routinely fail to satisfy the tax collectors who are more eager to be satisfied otherwise. They insist on payments under the table. This is a perennial hassle. I am sure countless other common tax payers are harassed on various pretexts. Any effort to check corruption in the country should begin with this

department which, to my mind, is the number one corrupt organisation.

May we request the ACC to take steps to check rampant and widespread corruption in this department?  
AH Kader  
Dhaka

### Alexander's visit

History tells us that Alexander of Greece defeated King Porus in an overwhelming manner, but accorded him the honour due to him as a king. Newspaper reports inform us that Alexander of Great Britain paid a visit and bruised this country's public face in no uncertain terms. Mr. Douglas Alexander must have known that his observations on various issues, pithy as they were, were not certainly original. Because these impressions have been reflected in the news and in the views, in the sighs and in the curses

throughout this land. We may be poor, but stupid we are not. We are not cowards but get easily cowed down. We do turn a blind eye to all the crimes, all the sins and all the anguish. Our votes are publicly sought, but privately plundered. We are fools to be deceived fully every five years and robbed in instalments in between.

We have listened to the incessant speeches on the virtues of democracy, rule of law, honest work, sacrifice, patience and so much more of the good things since independence and the good work that we people need to go on doing. We do not say the leaders are corrupt, they themselves say it, of course, while not in power. Amazingly, Mr. Alexander, you have hit the old nails fair and square. But who will put the last nail and where is the coffin and when this enigma wrapped in a puzzle, encased in peoples lament will be uncased and unwrapped? A day long visit, a short sermon, a long list of

business interests, Mr. Alexander, do not make for a good recipe. At least, you could ask the new Anti-Corruption Commission to move and suo moto investigate fully without fear of favour, the public allegations brought by the leader of the opposition and former prime minister, reported in the press. But we are wise enough to know it is not you who can deliver, we pray we get the strength, the resolve to bring a spot of sunshine to the people, who deserve so much more though.  
Jamal Syed  
Banani, Dhaka

### Future of URCS

The Upazila Resource Centre (URC) is a new addition to the traditional structure of primary education. The centre is located on the campus of the model primary school in an upazila. The role of the URC, by and large, is to strive to improve the quality of primary education in

the country by offering in-service training to teachers, provide academic supervision, design and prepare appropriate teaching aids, prepare teacher-school profile for organising training, school management etc. The government of Bangladesh set up 481 URCS all over the country under IDEAL and NORAD Projects for the said purposes. But 672 employees of the Norad project are going without salary for the last 12 months. The IDEAL project started in 1996 and originally planned to expire by June 2004. It was extended for six more months. About 1252 employees of the IDEAL-controlled URC are now passing their days amid great uncertainty about their future.

The government many a time assured them that the jobs of officials and employees of URCS would be brought under the revenue budget. But this has not happened. The decision-makers should seriously consider how they could

maintain the standard of primary education without these trained and efficient officials and employees.  
Md Akhtar Hossain  
Patuakhali

### Tsunami tragedy

The unprecedented devastating tidal surge called 'Tsunami' due to the heavy earthquake in the Indian Ocean has so far left more than 1,50,000 people dead and many more injured.

Thanks to the government of Bangladesh for standing beside the disaster-hit people by sending some relief materials and two rescue copters. The crying need is to tackle the post-disaster situation. We convey our deep sympathy for the people of the affected countries. May the Almighty enable them to bear the loss of lives and wealth.  
ABM Shaful Islam  
Dept. of English, DU