

Blowing some hot air?

We hope, not

It appears that the intelligence cell at the National Board of Revenue (NBR) has placed rich tax evaders under watch. Never mind the contradiction in terms between tax and evaders which should have been mutually exclusive if we are not to be amusing ourselves with a play of words. One would have thought, though that this would be a closely-guarded secret so as to take the objects of surveillance by total surprise and examine them in their most exposed conditions, as if under a microscope.

The heart of the problem is: how could the big earners, both individual and companies, have managed to understate their assessments, or altogether keep out of the collection net, at least in certain areas of their business, year after year, with complete impunity? Their lifestyle studded with multi-featured luxury cars, jeeps, posh apartments, palatial home or office sprawls bore the signature of their super-rich, eminently taxable status, leave aside their splurging abroad with huge unearned incomes stashed away in overseas banks. Why has it been so difficult to identify them and pin them down on hard facts and figures of their accumulated wealth so far?

There can be only one answer to this question: the rich-to-super rich tax evaders have had the proverbial cat's nine lives, thanks to their being in league with an equally surviving set of revenue officials. These people are spawning new generations of both tax dodgers and abettors in tax evasion. They are also discouraging honest businessmen to pay taxes. Concomitantly, what we see is the recurrence of revenue deficits.

We are fully in favour of a system modelled on the practices of some countries in the neighbourhood where revenue collection is achieved nearly to potential. Book manipulation is more of an exception than rule in their contexts. Indeed, there is no alternative to taking a leaf from their books.

The bottom line is: so long as the government fails to break the nexus of corruption and bribery between potential tax payers and revenue department officials, tax evasion will remain the order of the day. Clearly, the government is in dire need of a strong political will to turn the table on tax-dodging.

A new trend

JCD-Shibir clash

DISQUIETINGLY, a violent face-off between two groups of students at Alia Madrasa caused injuries to several of them, not sparing even some policemen on Monday. Not very long ago, incidents of similar nature had occurred in some educational institutions.

A restive environment had existed in this institution over the last few days, apparently stemming from a minor incident. But, the fact that it involved student parties affiliated to coalition partners has lent a new dimension to the matter. This is certainly a disconcerting development insofar as student politics is concerned.

One had hoped that the current coalition partners, particularly the BNP, would address this issue and bring some element of sobriety in the violent nature and rein in the wayward character of student politics that we had witnessed in the past. We are dismayed that such expectations have not been lived upto.

Violence in educational institutions, often on partisan grounds, is unfortunately a reflection of a political culture that has long been prevalent in Bangladesh; a culture that is manifested by the show of intolerance, animosity and violence, that does not eliminate the prospect of clash even between student groups that are on the same side of the political fence. Given this disposition it is little wonder that there exists an even more uncompromising and violent relationship between students belonging to the opposition political parties.

Nobody will disagree that the spate of violence in our educational institutions and the culture of student politics that we witness at present will have the most deleterious consequences on our society whose impact will last longer than one cares to contemplate. Our repeated entreaties to the political parties to address this issue in earnest had fallen on deaf ears. But we shall continue to harp on this.

We reemphasise that it is imperative for all the political parties to come together to bring a change in the culture of student politics. This can only be brought about if we change the nature and culture of politics at national level. The party in power must take the lead in this matter.

Is Kofi Annan out of the woods yet?



HARUN UR RASHID

THE running of the Oil-Food programme (\$64 billion dollar programme) by the UN for Iraq was very slack and raised many issues including conflict of interest of the Secretary General for involvement of his son Kofi Annan (31). One US Senator even called for his resignation from the post.

The programme in Iraq was the largest humanitarian aid operation the UN had ever undertaken. It allowed Baghdad a limited exemption from the UN sanctions imposed following the 1990 invasion of Kuwait to sell oil for food for the Iraqi people. The head of the programme was Benon Sevan of the UN. It is alleged that through the operations of the programme a few UN officials have been involved in serious improprieties including corruption. Benon Sevan, reportedly may face criminal charges due to his alleged involvement, depending on the final inquiry report.

The resulting corruption within the programme has been a key factor in straining the relationship between Annan and the US. Annan had to set up a credible and independent inquiry to reveal the whole story behind the alleged scandal of making illegal personal monetary profit out of the programme.

The inquiry was headed by the former US Reserve Bank Chair-

man Paul Volcker. The Secretary General appointed the high profile American to pacify the US politicians so that his report would find credibility with them. In that way Annan was wise to select Paul Volcker.

In a brief but uncharacteristically hesitant performance on March 30 at the UN, Kofi Annan said that he was exonerated by the Volcker interim report. However, to keep his position, he had to criticize his son and said: "I am

ship from Annan.

It is reported that Kojo Annan joined the Swiss Company as a trainee in Geneva when he was 22, before his father became the Secretary General of the UN. In 1998, three years after Kojo joined the company, it won a UN contract to certify goods coming into Iraq under the UN programme. There was pretence that the company and Kojo severed their relationship in 1998 when it was awarded the UN contract. In fact it contin-

a year.

Many believe that it was a serious misjudgment on the Secretary General's part not to deal as thoroughly as would be expected since his son had been an employee of the company. He should have known by then that something was wrong with the company and whether his son was involved in any way.

Volcker criticized him for an inadequate inquiry within the UN. It lasted only one day. Was Kofi

UN secretariat, of which he has been the chief administrative officer since 1997. Did he discharge his responsibilities adequately? The question of whether Kofi Annan can exercise his influence in seeing through the reforms of the UN is on everyone's lips.

Another assessment of Kofi Annan is that he represents the conscience of the international community represented by the UN. He knew that the Bush

Sergio De Mello, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Although the UN internal inquiry found UN security officials accused of not sufficiently taking security measures in war-torn Iraq, many UN officials believe the buck should stop at the table of the Secretary General. Although the UN Deputy Secretary General wanted to resign, Annan did not accept his resignation.

Conclusion

As Secretary General Kofi Annan came to the top from the secretariat ranks. He was known to be a smooth and easy person with his colleagues and not known for his vision or ideas. He won the job with the backing of the US (after US opposed another term of independent-minded Secretary General Boutros Ghali of Egypt) and Annan's second term (2001-2006) -- when it was originally Asia's turn -- was given to him by Asia under the prodding of the US.

He has confronted many administrative problems during the past year, including allegations of improprieties by his senior officials who have been either sacked or left in disgrace. However none seems to have been harder than the one involving his son.

It seems that during the tenure of Kofi Annan, the reputation of the UN to people across the globe has been seriously undermined. Whether Kofi Annan can restore it before his term expires at the end of 2006 is a moot point. Even when the Volcker report finally clears him of any impropriety, grounds for suspicion will remain, and in that environment how effective he could be as Secretary General is anybody's guess.

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

BOTTOM LINE

It seems that during the tenure of Kofi Annan, the reputation of the UN to people across the globe has been seriously undermined. Whether Kofi Annan can restore it before his term expires at the end of 2006 is a moot point. Even when the Volcker report finally clears him of any impropriety, grounds for suspicion will remain, and in that environment how effective he could be as Secretary General is anybody's guess.

deeply saddened by the evidence to the contrary that has emerged and particularly by the fact that my son failed to cooperate fully with the inquiry. I have urged him to cooperate and I urge him to reconsider his position and cooperate." When he was asked whether he would resign, he replied: "Hell, no!"

What does the interim Volcker report say?

Although the report cleared Annan on the subject of his knowledge of his son's activities, it criticized him for an inadequate internal inquiry which he initiated when the corruption claims first surfaced and which lasted less than a day.

In an interview, Paul Volcker reportedly stated that he did not "exonerate" Kofi Annan fully. The report found only that Annan had no personal knowledge of his son's activities. His son, Kojo and the Swiss company, Cotecna, concealed their financial relation-

ed until last year (in the form of "non-compete" payments) and Kojo reportedly earned \$484,492 after he left full employment from the company in 1998.

The question is raised as to whether Kofi Annan knew that his son worked in the Swiss company that got the contract. Obviously this was a conflict of interest and many believe the Secretary General should have inquired rigorously whether his son was in any way involved in the company.

Another fact that came out is that Kofi Annan met the officials of the Swiss company twice before the contract was awarded and once after the contract. Although Annan first could not recall three meetings with the officials of the Swiss company, after checking his computer records, he acknowledged this. The Volcker report says that UN procurement rules were not followed in appointing the Swiss company for the contract which was worth \$10 million

Annan rigorous enough to ask the UN internal inquiry whether his son was involved or not with the Swiss company? These questions will not go away.

The Volker inquiry continues and within a few months the inquiry report will deal with a substantive issue, namely whether Kofi Annan adequately supervised the programme or did he leave it completely to senior officials? On that issue, the jury is still out. If the charge that Kofi Annan was asleep at the wheel is proved, it could bring trouble for him.

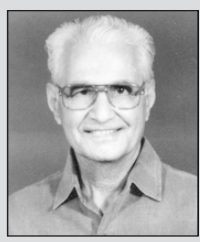
Annan and the UN

Many have questioned whether Kofi Annan has the moral standing as the Secretary General to pursue the drastic and sweeping reforms within the organization including the secretariat. Some believe that he has undermined the reputation and integrity of the

administration would invade Iraq when Kofi Annan withdrew UN inspectors from Iraq. It was palpably clear to him that the US-led unilateral invasion would be contrary to the UN charter and many believe he should have threatened to resign from his position. History might have been different. For him, after two years of war, it is no use to say that the Iraqi war was illegal.

Furthermore his lapse of judgement was reportedly manifested in two other matters: firstly, he was in charge of the UN peacekeeping operations as Under Secretary General of the UN when genocide was committed in Rwanda in 1994. He reportedly reduced UN troops in Rwanda, instead of strengthening them. Secondly, many believe he sent the UN officials to Iraq too soon after the war, as a result of which 22 UN officials were killed in a bomb blast in August 2003 including his personal envoy

Pattern of US actions vis-a-vis India and Pakistan



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

CLEARLY there are two prongs of US policy on India-Pakistan matters. They have pulled back India and Pakistan from the brink of a war twice: in the Kargil war (or semi-war), that had the potential of growing into a full-scale war, possibly nuclear, and secondly in 2002, when the two armies stood eyeball to eyeball on the border. Both countries' people should be thankful to the US for that.

The second prong comprises their facilitation behind the scenes to bring them to the negotiating table. The formulation for a desirable outcome from the talks is "normalization" of ties. From the brink of war to normal good neighbourliness, if achieved, would earn due credit for America. There is no doubt what made Mr. AB Vajpayee extend a hand of friendship to Pakistan in 2003 from which ensued the January 6, 2004 joint statement: it was US urging. Since then US advice remains that the two should go on jaw-jawing rather than resuming sabre rattling, the US should be thanked for this role too.

But gratitude for these should not mean either not examining the big picture of what the US is after and what role it is likely to assign

to the two nuclear powers of South Asia, or what precise effects will flow from its specific actions. Along the way, the two governments should consciously fix specific goals vis-a-vis each other that should be their own. Indians should have an unambiguous Pakistan policy. So should Pakistan have a long-term India policy, other than somehow taking control of Kashmir Valley and a few other parts of J and K state. Despite the natural urgency of disputes, there must be a prior goal beyond those disputes.

somehow sustain its deficits in trade and on current account. In Asia it is clearly a quest for big time domination, including of course, the containment of China and Russia.

The US has already won great victories insofar as South Asia is concerned. Pakistan and India fell over each other in supporting America's War on Terror just after 9/11. America is using four (only?) bases in Pakistan and had the offer of any amount of cooperation from India. Pakistan is supposedly proud of being made a Major Non-

nently engaged with Pakistan can turn out to be as reassuring to the Musharraf government as it can be threatening.

Americans have hit the bull's eye in both India and Pakistan. Their governments are ga ga over the American munificence. Islamabad's happiness with the prospect of buying as many F-16s as they can scrounge the money for is palpable. The two states are now more firmly yoked to the US chariot. No one seems to have stopped to think what impact will it have on the Indo-Pak relations.

led for a third try. Meantime, what is happening is an intense arms race in atomic weaponry. What is the evidence? Why over 21 missile tests during recent years? Why do they test a missile? It is done to adapt it to a new shape or dimension of the nuclear payload or weapon. It shows the nuclear weapons are being improved and the number increased. Why conclude that nuclear weapons (and probably vehicles) are being increased? Simple. Outdated ones, and their vehicles, are not being thrown on a dump heap;

Pakistan getting F-16s and look at the unease in Pakistan officialdom about India getting so much more to get far ahead. These are familiar cold war reactions.

Let's be clear-eyed. The current euphoria is not based on hard realities -- or even clearly-defined policies. Here the two countries remain engaged in talks that are still about talks. There is far too much of clever tactics and adroit articulation. Neither establishment is ready to make any serious concession of substantial nature; their attachment to maximalist stances stays unchanged. People-to-people contacts are being permitted and remain firmly under control of the two bureaucracies who do not believe that peace process, qua process, should be allowed to naturally evolve and grow.

Unless the obstructive power of the two bureaucracies is sharply reduced, hopes for a true rapprochement between Indian and Pakistani peoples, with the states being dragged along, can not materialize. Unless the vague formulation of normal ties is replaced with reconciliation -- fully owned by both sides -- as the objective, the two countries will go on moving in circles. There is also the question of anchoring this reconciliation in a wider people's reconciliation of South Asia. That would be tantamount in spirit to recreating a civilisational Historical India. Without these aims and clear-headed effort, there will be no progress.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

PLAIN WORDS

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Pattern of American actions vis-a-vis India and Pakistan will naturally be related to main American purposes. Chief purpose of American policies can only be the promotion of what it defines as its interests qua the sole superpower in economic and international fields. War on Terror is a subsidiary goal to keeping America Number One militarily and economically. Promotion of democracy, human rights observance, regime changes, drive against atomic weapons proliferation, preservation of Atlantic Alliance and NATO et al subordinate to that primary aim. The unbeatable power of America is to be used to promote America's economic interests as the world's largest debtor and a country that has to

NATO Ally of the US. India is happy with the status of a Major Strategic Partner of the US. The US is drawing both to its bosom by offering to sell its top of the line military hardware: Any number of multi-role fighters that India fancies, dual use technologies, civilian reactors and of course transfer of military technology including for fighters and probably also the anti-missile missile-making. For Pakistan, the securely hooked fish, there are to be 25 F-16 fighters with implied promise of more, and the endearing adjectives, though it has added that it wishes to see full democracy working in a sustainable way. Seen in this light, the American promise of remaining perma-

New Delhi has already let it be known that F-16s to Pakistan will endanger India's security. This protest is more pro forma than a serious development in terms of its possible impact on Indo-American ties; it will virtually have no impact on them. But what will happen to Indo-Pak ties? That must be assessed. But more on that later.

There had better be a reality check amidst the euphoria of people-to-people contacts that the two bureaucracies are micro-managing; except for a few concessions by India on the visa regime, the latter remains as cumbersome and restrictive as ever. The main Composite Dialogue has failed twice, but, Americans be praised, it remains sched-

they are merely set aside for possible use in some situations.

Make no mistake. Nuclear weapons (and missiles) races are a fact of life; the arsenals on both sides are increasing by the day. Now, there is a second fact of life adumbrated first by French President Charles de Gaulle: once a stage is reached in nuclear arms races of rough equivalence between cold warring states, they become incapable of conducting their politics through "other means." Willy nilly they have to resume a second series of arms race in conventional arms so that interstate politics can notionally be carried on by the credible threat of using notionally safer force. Look at the Indian reaction to

OPINION

Saving the Marine Academy

CAPT. MOHAMMAD ALI

THE Marine Academy, a unique institution in the country's maritime sector, was established in Chittagong in 1962 to explore and recognize the country's potential seafaring talents, to properly train them, and to groom them as future leaders in maritime fields. With the passage of time, it is a reality now that the Bangladeshi sea-farers have gradually earned a world-wide reputation as brave, world class merchant mariners of high quality.

The Marine Academy has been extensively expanded now to meet the growing demand of the country not only to train the pre-sea cadets, but also to train the country's senior merchant marine officers by the various ancillary mandatory courses, which have been introduced by the IMO (International Maritime Organization, London) in

keeping with the requirements of the International Convention on Standards of Training Certification and Watch-keeping (STCW 95) for Seafarers. As a result, the Marine Academy ranks as one of the world's foremost institutes in maritime training and education, which resulted in the Marine Academy being recognized as one of the branches of the World Maritime University, Malmö, Sweden in the year 1990.

Till date, 1083 nautical and 1086 engineering cadets have been graduated from this academy. A number in the region of 14,000 officers and ratings have received the IMO mandatory safety courses and/or training. It is estimated that the country is earning a sum of \$50 million per year due to these trained officers employed in overseas shipping companies. Besides, the country's national merchant fleet is totally run by these highly

We have such a prestigious, internationally highly acclaimed maritime educational institution, that the nation can be proud of. It is the only one of its kind in the country, and it would be a shame to lose it simply due to lack of attention on the part of the authorities.

qualified and competent merchant marine officers.

To run such a big technical centre of excellence smoothly one needs its full complement of teaching staff, better to mention as the professional instructors. As per the organogram, the academy requires a minimum of nine nautical instructors and five engineering instructors. During the last four or five years, the academy was run with only two nautical instructors instead of nine, and currently the academy has only one.

Not to mention the other prevailing problems, it is hard to visualize how it is possible to achieve the required standard

with only one professional instructor in the nautical branch. The condition in the engineering branch is the same -- not enough qualified instructors. Knowing the fact that the remuneration and related perks are on the lower side in the academy, any instructor who joins the academy with the intention of choosing a career in maritime education will find it difficult to keep up his commitment due to the bureaucratic tangles he will find in his path, and will most likely move on.

There was a good move by the government and concerned parties a few years ago to introduce a scheme by the name of the "de-

ferred credit scheme" with the intention to get some professional instructors paying them some enhanced salary (to recruit on contract basis). Some experienced master mariners joined due to this scheme and the training was kept going even though the number of instructor was lower than needed. This scheme produced a moderately good result, but the scheme is now on the verge of being abolished due to unknown or unstated reasons. The contracts are not being renewed, resulting in the instructors leaving.

Every member of the shipping community is concerned by the dwindling condition in numbers of

professional instructors at the academy, leading to deterioration of the quality of the education offered, lest our good image in the international maritime field, and the acceptance of our passed out cadets from this academy, will come into question.

In a country where thousands if not millions of young people are unemployed, and the marine academy can be a good potential avenue of attracting the youths to this profession, and when lots are just waiting to join, we cannot ignore or keep aside this simple problem of not getting the right people in the right place to do the job.

The concerned authority should

look into the matter without wasting further time:

In this regard may I suggest the following:

- 1) The "deferred credit scheme" to appoint professional instructors on contract basis should continue until the posts are filled up by permanent instructors.
- 2) Some experienced master mariners and chief engineers can be sent from Bangladesh Shipping Corporation on deputation to the Marine Academy for lecturing.
- 3) In the meantime, the authorities should arrange to recruit professional instructors through PSC (Public Service Commission).
- 4) A permanent commandant should be sent to the academy. In the last six months there have been three different commandants
- 5) The governing body of the

academy may meet with the representatives of user forum (who employ passed out cadets), some experts on this sector, retired commandants, ex-cadets forum, cadets guardians, etc. each meeting can review once or twice a year to enhance the overall quality of maritime education and remedy of prevailing problems.

6) To strictly adopt and adhere to quality management system.

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Capt. Mohammad Ali was a nautical instructor and later was promoted to Chief of Nautical Studies in the Marine Academy on contract basis.