

Purging criminals from politics

Time for the link to be snapped

THE expulsion of Joyanal Hazari from the AL is one of the most positive developments in Bangladesh politics in recent years, even though it is a step that was long overdue. It signals that perhaps the AL has finally understood the corrosive effect that such people have had on national politics.

Our hope is that the AL will see the process of expulsion through to the end, and that this is merely the first of a series of actions to purge criminals and musclemen, not just from the AL, but from all political parties.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jaail is on record as stating that Feni is finally rid of a bad element. Indeed it is, but the question is why it has taken so long.

It is many years since Hazari imposed his reign of terror on Feni. In fact, with the fall of the AL government in 2001, he has been more or less powerless, and action against him would have been far more meaningful had it occurred when he was at the height of his power and enjoyed the protection of government.

At the time, the AL blamed the media for the reports of Hazari's wrong-doings. If only it had accepted that the media were merely doing their job by reporting on his criminality, rather than castigating us, things would have been much better for the long-suffering people of Feni, and indeed for the AL. There can be little doubt that the party's slowness to discipline him was a contributory factor in the negative image that resulted in its defeat at the polls in 2001.

Perhaps the lesson for all parties is that instead of blaming the media, they should take our reports to heart, and act upon them rather than attempt to deny what everyone knows to be true.

However, it is better late than never. The AL is to be commended for taking this positive step to put its house in order. If the party were to be able to purge its ranks of all criminal elements this would indeed signal to the public that it has begun to learn from its past mistakes and is turning a corner.

Nor is the AL the only party that needs to purge criminals from its ranks. The other parties — specially those in the government — now need to take a leaf out of the AL's book and conduct similar purges. Nothing would be more beneficial to the people of this country than the severing of the nexus between crime and politics. The country needs good and honest politicians, and make no mistake, the electorate is watching closely to see who will provide them.

General Aurora's death

His great contribution will always be remembered

LT. General Jagjit Singh Aurora, who led the Bangladesh-India joint forces to the historic victory against the Pakistan army in December 1971, died in New Delhi on Tuesday at the age of 89. With his passing, we have lost one of our rare friends, who stood by us during the most difficult times in our history. We honour him and recall his contribution with a deep sense of gratitude.

He will be remembered for his deft handling of a highly complex military situation that arose in Bangladesh in December 1971. The advancing joint forces, consisting of the Mukti Bahini, the Bangladeshi regular forces, and the Indian troops, were facing resistance at several points, and then the thought of keeping civilian casualties at a bare minimum also weighed heavily in the minds of the late General. It was not a war in its usual sense; the retreating Pakistani soldiers were destroying everything on their way back and the entire unarmed population was still badly exposed to their brutality. So Aurora, as the man in charge of subduing the last resistance, had to proceed very carefully. And he accomplished the task with remarkable precision. The 93,000 Pakistani troops surrendered at Dhaka on 16 December, leaving behind a trail of blood.

Aurora presided over the surrender ceremony which finally ended the presence of the Pakistani troops in Bangladesh. That alone elevated him to the stature of a noble rescuer as far as people in this country are concerned. It was a great moment that the late General shared with us.

The discipline with which the post-surrender phase was conducted and the fact that there was no wholesale butchery of the collaborators or looting of their property speaks volumes for the restraint of the Mukti Bahini and the leadership of Gen Aurora. We, Bangladeshis can take great pride in this fact especially if we compare what happened in post-Saddam Iraq, and that too in the presence of the US forces.

Aurora's death has rekindled the memories of the events that shaped the destiny of this nation. The memories must be kept alive for the posterity to know about the man who certainly occupies a very special place in the history of the Liberation War.

The late General lived for another 34 years, after achieving that glorious victory. It is a shame that independent Bangladesh did not give him due honour in his life time. However, we should not allow this military hero to slip into oblivion, for that entails the grave risk of forgetting the momentous events of December 1971. Our condolences for the bereaved family members of the late General.

DR MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

IT seems to be a common practice to publicise with fanfare any loans or probable inward foreign investments without weighing their merit. Our people are seldom told that all loans, grants or inward foreign investments may not necessarily be in our national interest. Most of the developed countries of today had their painfully difficult time to solve their problems, plan their future and take initiatives to implement that with wise and educated policies — deferring consumerism in favour of savings, investment and calculated hardship under visionary leadership. Technological development has brought about material development, better global communication and propagation of information, which in turn, have spread lust for the modern amenities and their life style. The wiser leadership of ambitious nations tried to build the capacity of their people to make what they need and also to earn enough to pay for their unavoidable import.

The west developed their technological capability quite ahead of other countries which they colonised and extracted resources from. They used unequal trade treaties, conventions, multilateral and bilateral agreements and illusionary offers, etc., to woo the weaker and, in many cases, resourceful countries to their terms mostly for exploitation. There is no use lamenting for the unforgettable past, but we can capitalise on some educative experience and also take advantage of modern knowledge and technology as a late comer to develop ourselves faster by leapfrogging and keeping watchful eyes on WTO, IMF, World Bank, OECD, WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organisation), many UN or other international agencies or bodies, among others which are hardly expected to be fair with the weak backward countries.

When some newly industrialising countries started to produce some rather low tech products, the industrialised countries started to impose anti-dumping or countervailing duties on the import from such countries according to their self-designed laws to remedy their economic woes or to extract concessions.

It is again the industrialised countries which produce capital machinery needed by the developing aspirant countries. They offer them conditional aid package to sell those and to maintain economic health of their own companies. Many developing countries without wise and visionary leadership tend to succumb to allurements and conditionality, and happen to sacrifice their self-reliant development potential. Bangladesh is a typical case, though sometimes it makes some apparent, superficial quip to the contrary. Even if some people would not like to accept our backward move, the present reality after long 34 years of our independence cannot manifest any thing else. The reasons are not hard to find.

expression of intent to make an investment in Bangladesh to the tune of US\$ 2.0 billion to 2.5 billion in phases. There already comes out such exaggerated statement as: government eyes US\$ 1 billion a year out of the investment. Common wisdom can simply find it ridiculous. If our smart accounting experts put the price of gas, and coal, if any, for the proposed 1000MW power plant (estimated cost being US\$ 700 million), annual 1-million ton fertilizer plant (costing about US\$600 million), annual 2.4 million ton steel mill (costing about US\$600 million) and coal exploration and other unspecified investment of about US\$500 million, the government can earn some substantial amount. It is not an earning from the invest-

The question of power generation may be observed for sometime based on the ongoing coal extraction project.

TATA does have long experience in steel making, including recent experience of modernisation of steel industries under Indian government policy. India has iron ore and other necessary minerals which they also partly export to Japan. Though steel mill is a polluting industry, we may go for sophistication and best proven technology for efficiency, product quality and protection of environment. Bangladesh must not sell land, but necessary land may be rented out initially for 15 years or so renewable every 4 or 5 years. The advance rent may be a part of equity share of Bangla-

preferred direct purchase of technology, patent and know-how to direct foreign inward investment. They are now themselves making heavy investment outward.

When still under SCAP (Supreme Commander of Allied Power) occupation in 1949, Japan took a loan of US\$40.2 million from World Bank for power plants and later for some steel plants. This was bitterly criticised in the Diet (Japanese Parliament) as a national dishonour. In contrast, there are people in this country who boast of getting a larger loan commitment even if under humiliating terms. This is a reflection of the extent of our commitment to this nation. We are taking loans to close our industries one after another at the prescription of lending agencies which never lent

We need to boldly mould our monetary and fiscal policies with prudence and fairness and quickly enough for results and come out of euphoria of so-called loan and undesirable inward foreign investment. The earlier we act, the better it will be for the nation,

Again these are the countries which can generate enough surplus fund and resources to invest in the prospective developing countries. They, naturally want to make it sure that they are allowed to invest in any business of their choice with as much of advantage as possible. They manoeuvre their policy and force devaluation of the currency of the investment destination countries, raise their interest rate, discourage their adoption of deficit financing, liberalise import, remove restrictive measures, and cut down necessary subsidy — just opposed to what they practiced during their industrialisation and development period as their effective development policy instruments. Can we blame them in this age of competition for their use of all available exploitation tools — intimidation, sanction, political influence, loan, grant, investment, allurements, anti-dumping measures, allegation of intellectual property law violation, warning against protectionism and what not? We must understand our position and be prepared to lessen our vulnerability, accepting all calculated hardship as and when situation warrants.

There is fanfare about Indian company, TATA's preliminary

ment in real sense.

The gas-based power plant is an independent project which the government or even a consortium of local private companies can set up if the government really wants and takes bold and rational initiatives. There is no justification in allowing outsiders to handle our utility service, and for that matter any service sector. We are running a number of fertilizer plants since as early as 1956. Wrongs contract for KAFCCO also taught us a lesson. Moreover we are neither in a hurry nor have any technological advantage of allowing TATA to build a new fertilizer plant. Given finance, we are better capable of building a fertilizer plant ourselves with import of some essential parts. Finance is not a problem for a state, if government means it. It is difficult to understand what makes some people in the government so enthusiastic to consider it in the package. The question of investment in tourism industries, such as hotel, motel, etc., by any country which may create a source of cultural pollution does not arise. We are not at all in a hurry. We can very well do it ourselves. Coal exploration job can be taken up by JAPEX, if necessary, taking help of foreign consultants.

desh. Before allowing the investment in the steel plant all the technical and commercial conditions must be resolved to avoid future complication with an investor from our good neighbourly country. A reasonable formula for pricing of raw materials, gas or coal, finished products, minimum and maximum volume of export and local sale, plant machinery procurement, installation, operational manpower, testing and research facilities, labour dispute, etc. must be agreed upon beforehand. The investor shall furnish all technical and commercial information related to the project to the BOI (Board of Investment) or other relevant authorities in Bangladesh as per their requirements and as per existing and probable future laws of Bangladesh. Any investment from any country must automatically qualify Bangladeshi companies to invest in those countries.

Contrary to general belief, Japan, South Korea, and of course, India carefully resisted inward foreign investment as long as they did not acquire sufficient technological capability and financial strength to comfortably compete with the foreign investment that accompanied advance technology, particularly, production technology. They

money for rehabilitating them. They want immunity against any damage their ill advice may cause to Bangladesh. Irresponsibly enough we are converting back to real estates the very site where industries were built some 40 or 50 years ago. Industries do face economic problems at times because of a number of reasons. They are supposed to be rehabilitated not grounded to real estate. The world knows how Rolls Royce, Lockheed, Chrysler, Fairchild and many other well-known companies were rehabilitated. Japan banks disposed of US\$80 billion of bad debts with taxpayer money to save the banking system and indebted industries.

We seek help even from Thailand for making some flyovers or overhead roads in Dhaka at cost of about US\$400 million. Is it not a shame to our civil engineers, a member of whom is well known for design of skyscrapers in the USA? The policymakers must learn to trust in the ability of their people and let them accept technological challenge. Taking loan, awarding contract on turn-key basis allegedly for some kickback cannot be a development approach. We are already paying interest of about Tk. 950 crore a year on foreign loan. We are prematurely trying to raise pay of the

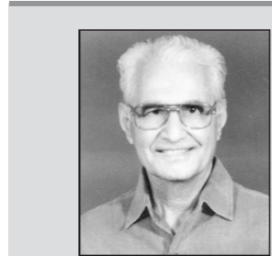
public servants, which may need an additional amount of about Tk. 6,200 crore. Is it not wiser to set aside this amount for low-interest or interest-free investment in public and private sector industries which shall generate revenue for government to raise pay later? As the industries shall need educated and skilled manpower, government can reduce its manpower, make them pay tax and raise pay as efficiency increases. Meanwhile, the government may ask the international lending agencies such as World Bank, IMF and ADB to arrange write-off of our external debts as many developed countries promised in various international forums.

We must restrain investment in service sector and keep the cost of service low enough. The utility service may partly be owned by service users. Rational control of the mobile phone service alone can save upto US\$ 1 billion to 1.5 billion a year in foreign exchange. Lowering of Bank interest rate to 4 per cent or below shall save the government about Tk. 4,000 crore a year in local interest payment. For reference, Bank interest rate is kept low at 3.25 per cent in South Korea, 3.57 per cent in Germany, 2.75 per cent in the USA, and 0.1 per cent in Japan to boost economy. Restriction on unnecessary import such as new costly automobile, say larger than 1600 cc, allowing import of at least upto ten-year old vehicles, used industrial machinery and facilities, and restriction on import of various non-essential items, and rational use of expatriate remittance of US\$ 3 billion plus can also ease pressure on foreign exchange. We must rationalise our taxation system to make tax equitable and payable by almost all on consolidated income allowing deduction for dependents and students.

We need to boldly mould our monetary and fiscal policies with prudence and fairness and quickly enough for results and come out of euphoria of so-called loan and undesirable inward foreign investment. The earlier we act, the better it will be for the nation, which has been desired for the last decades.

Mustafizur Rahman, PhD is Chairman, Institute of Development Strategy, Dhaka. The views expressed are of the author's own, and not necessarily of the organisation he represents.

How irreversible is 'irreversible'?



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

JOINT statement issued after Delhi's Indo-Pak summit described improvements in their mutual relationship to be irreversible because of sizeable peace lobbies in both countries. War mongering is no longer popular. How irreversible is this peace process?

Things are often deceptive in politics. Entrenched powerful groups in both countries do not want India-Pakistan friendship, not even trade and economic cooperation. They like freer cultural exchanges even less. The two bureaucracies, each excelling the other in rigid approaches and in being actually backward-looking, do not want to change. Bureaucracies are always meant to preserve a system. They cannot be expected to take significant initiatives 'outside the box'. It is not their job. That is the job of political leadership that should make the bureaucracies implement their 'outside the box' thinking which requires change.

The two governments are a long way from settling down as friends and have still to build many bridges. Governments can always reverse their stances. There is the sudden reversal of India's policy over Nepal, for instance. Only a few months ago, India angrily condemned King Gyanendra's wrapping up the

elect system by assuming total power himself on Feb 1 last. It stopped military aid to the Nepalese Army. Now suddenly it has decided to send him armaments against the wishes of India's leftists. One goes beyond a mere notice of this instance of a reversal for a reason.

The preferred reason was other countries would take advantage of the tiff between India and Nepalese King and would start supplying arms. The 'other country' in this case could either be Pakistan or

spreading operations from Indo-Nepalese border down to Andhra Pradesh. The logic of fighting the Maoists at home could impel India to cooperate with Nepal's anti-Maoists. But India's stoppage of military cooperation with Nepal, had no links with the decades old insurgencies in India. Pakistan's fishing in Nepal's troubled waters could only be a minor threat.

Another example is military exercises that India is about to hold near Jallandhar. Who would be the

state free trade, economic cooperation and a credible framework of a lot freer travel to permit cultural exchanges to do their magic.

The Army patronises many other forces. Among them, two need notice: first is political forces that demonise the enemy. In India there is the Sangh Parivar and parties like Shiv Sena that are anti-Pakistan and, up to a point, anti-Muslim. Bharatya Janata Party represents their political interests. The second group associated with armed forces

solution to any of the eight propositions.

The two states have fixed a 'normal' relationship as their goal, though the Composite Dialogue has so far refused to move forward. Both are still at the starting point. However many agreements on Confidence Building Measures, some along the LOC in Kashmir, may have been agreed, there needs to be some concrete agreements on disputes. These CBMs are wel-

station. Normalisation is a vague concept. It can mean Peru's relations with Mongolia. It can mean, at the other extreme, relations between France and Germany. We must know what kind of relations we want. There has to be common aims before relations can stabilise and start growing into friendship. It is common objectives that hold the key. One recommends the goal of peoples' reconciliation between India and Pakistan from grassroots up. It has to be a no holds-barred reconciliation that should be reinforced with aims of common economic and cultural objectives.

Today India is desperate for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. Here in Pakistan, supposedly working to befriend with India, openly campaigning against India being elevated. Nothing could be more absurd than the present sets of antithetical approaches: Why cant Islamabad think holistically whether it wants to change or remain in the comfort of old notions: India is the enemy. Why cannot a situation be visualised in which India and Pakistan would invite each other to enrich them culturally and economically through cooperation and trade? Here is an exciting goal: let the two jointly undertake to ensure that each Indian and Pakistani citizen becomes entitled to social security in his or her own state — a minimal but progressive one. And it can be created at the cost of their military budgets, if necessary. That will deepen the friendship, especially if combined with cultural cooperation.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

PLAIN WORDS

The two countries are fated to keep going round the mulberry bush if their aim is no more than normalisation. Normalisation is a vague concept. It can mean Peru's relations with Mongolia. It can mean, at the other extreme, relations between France and Germany. We must know what kind of relations we want. There has to be common aims before relations can stabilise and start growing into friendship. It is common objectives that hold the key.

China because America and the UK were on India's side against Gyanendra. Now China, in its own national interests, would never give an excuse to India, US, UK to unilaterally oppose China's help to Gyanendra. As for Pakistan, it would never go against the US and UK advice, all its gestures of independence notwithstanding. But even this flimsy threat of Pakistan establishing a relationship with Gyanendra was enough to unnerve South Block.

True, there could be a different reason. Maoist inroads in India itself demand that Indian government should enable Nepalese Army to prevent its Maoists from coordinating with their Indian friends. Doubtless the Indian bureaucracy is stoutly fighting against Indian Maoists. However, this Indian iron fist has not stopped Maoists from

enemy to be vanquished in this exercise? The emotional underpinnings of such exercises make the enemy known: it is Pakistan. The Indian Army is for preserving Indian borders from Pakistan; the two are designated adversary states for each other. Three wars and many skirmishes have stabilised these enemy images. These inveterate enemies have recently gone nuclear. Pakistan's nuclear stance is India specific. Thus reversing the enemy image is going to take time and much more than diplomatic bonhomie and sweet talk; something has to be shown to the people before they change their inimical attitudes. The feel good factor created by the many 'permitted' cultural exchanges cannot long be sustained on sweet words alone. There has to be evidence of inter-

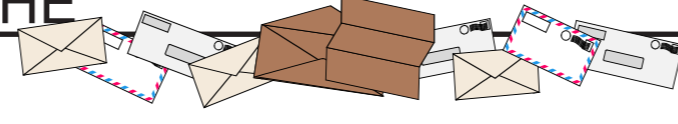
(and bureaucracies) comprises publicists. Whole battalions of them are embedded in the military establishments as well as civilian ones. Governments need special media persons to be properly guided by intelligence agencies; arrangements to this effect are in working order in both countries.

This is reality. Despite professed recent governmental desires of being friends hard progress has been slow and halting. A tribute to Americans is due for bringing India and Pakistan to the negotiating table. This has had a benign effect so far. It is for India and Pakistan to go farther than what the Americans want. They should go much beyond a mere normalisation of relations. They have tried hard to make the Composite Dialogue, agreed in 1997, productive. Despite many rounds, it has so far yielded no

come. But they are reversible. Can the bus between Sringar and Muzaffarabad not be stopped? Can Munabao-Khokhrapur line not be postponed again? The two Consulate Generals in Bombay and Karachi can be made to wait more years. The fact is the two bureaucracies are micro-managing the relaxation process. Each action is under strict control. No state is ready to give the citizens of the other the freedom of movement in its own country. The Indians in Pakistan are supposed to pose unexplained security threats. Similarly Pakistanis loafing around Indian cities constitute equally serious threat to India. The two bureaucracies remain unreconstructed and unaffected by new impulses.

The two countries are fated to keep going round the mulberry bush if their aim is no more than normal-

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.

Freedom of speech

Are we going to lose our freedom of speech? Why journalists are being killed one by one? And where is fair judgement? Perhaps the answer of all these questions is "I DON'T KNOW".

Bangladesh is an independent country. So here all should enjoy the freedom of speech. Journalists should do so even more than others. Their duty is to show all black and dark of society through reporting. None should try to prevent them from unearthing the truth. But this has not happened. They are being obstructed. Many journalists are being tortured and many were killed.

This is a very ominous situation for the country. Moreover, none of the killers have so far been punished. Our image in the outside world has been tarnished. The government should think in terms of remedial

measures without wasting any more time.
Sadat Shahriar
RUET, Rajshahi

Expulsion of Hazari

I read with interest your report on the Awami League expulsion of its member and an ex MP Zainal Hazari. While the action is laudable one wonders what took it so long for the AL to realise that he was harming party interest.

I find it abhorrent that a person like Hazari, who has several criminal cases against him, and who is an absconder now living a life of plenty in the neighbouring country, should get nomination of a party like the AL and continue all these years to hold its membership. But then it is better late than never.

I suggest that all the other political parties take note of this action by the AL and also purge their parties of the criminal and lumpen elements of whom there are many in their own parties.

We in Bangladesh deserve honest and good politicians to guide

our future and be an example, and not those that vilify the name of politics and politicians.
Ahmed N,
Dhaka

Valuable coconuts

With the growth of population, the demand is increasing day by day for green coconuts as nutritious drink, grind and flakes of dried coconuts for use in *pithas*, dressing cakes, as sweet snacks during 'wedding ceremonies' and coconut paste for preparing spicy sauces and for delicious prawn dishes.

We mostly consume green coconut water during the prolonged hot summer for maintaining good health by supplementing the lost minerals.

The city corporations and municipalities should employ trained coconut tree climbers and coconut vendors, who would assist the residents by climbing their trees and plucking the green and dried coconuts and sell them

in the market on commission basis, and also twice a year prune the dried-up pods and branches during the Bangla months of Baishakh, Joistho, Ashwin, Karthik and thus increase production of coconuts.
Golam Ashraf
DOHS Baridhara, Dhaka 1206

Well done, BCB

Cricket fans of this country were a bit worried after reading the news about Dev Whatmore's possible chance of leaving Bangladesh cricket team.

Many newspapers reported that this highly experienced coach of Bangladesh cricket team might become Indian coach after the retirement of John Wright.

However all the speculations are now over since Dev has signed a new contract of two more years with the BCB.

It is learned from a DS report that the salary and all other facilities of Whatmore have been doubled.

I think BCB has done the right thing. Because losing a highly experienced coach like Dev Whatmore only for financial reason would be a foolish idea. Dev has been a great motivator of Bangladesh cricket team for the past two years. Under the supervision of Dev, Bangladesh cricket team has already improved a lot. And the World Cup is just two years away. So to have Dev Whatmore for the 2007 World Cup is really great news for all the cricket fans of this country.

I would like to congratulate BCB for taking this bold decision for the sake of our cricket.
Nazmus Saquib
Notre Dame College, Dhaka

Religious education

I am quite a senior person and had the opportunity to see through the evolution of religious schools and liberal educational systems in this country. Over the years the religious educational institutions and degrees offered

by them are receiving almost equal publicity during result publication. The religious educational institutions are now at par with liberal educational ones. It is fair to mention that I am a believer of liberal education. By the way, I have a question-- does Bangladesh have a focal point for reference purpose on matters of religious controversy?

Radicals economy-- we expect more analysis to draw a firm conclusion about its use or misuse. We hope further reports would be available including comments from so called radical entrepreneurs.
ABangladeshi abroad
On e-mail

Bigots or terrorists?

I'm really impressed by the good quality of news you provide, but I cannot say the same about the way some of your reports are written. As a westerner, I regularly read your online news from the UK, I enjoy keeping my self-informed of the happenings in the Indian subconti-

nent. But I am unhappy with the way you report religious violence by using the word 'bigots'. Here in the west, we rather use the word terrorism to describe violence caused by people, and use the word extremists to describe those who take religious teachings to extreme to harm others.
Dr. Adam
On e-mail

Refreshing Tea!

This refers to "Refreshing Tea" by Mr. Golam Ashraf. His proposal for setting up high standard 'tea houses' (Chai Khanas) is very interesting and timely, considering the ape culture at the moment for setting up foreign style eateries.

I was wondering if Mr. Ashraf would be interested in joining with me for a business project to implement his idea in Dhaka, and maybe in London, UK.
Ahmed,
UK

Rab-- keep up the good work

This is in response to S.A. Mansoor's letter published on 22.04.05. Mr. Mansoor should visit the middle class localities of Mohammedpur, Mirpur and Kalyanpur, also Dhanmondi RA and ask the inhabitants of these areas what difference Rab has made in their lives. In these localities the mastans, terrorists, muggers, extortionists and toll collectors are on the run. It is much safer in these areas to go out after dark than it was before the arrival of Rab. By the way, Mr. Mansoor should take a survey of just the Dhaka city dwellers regarding their views on Rab. He will be surprised by the statistics.

Hats off to Rab. Keep up the good work.
Sohail
On e-mail