

## Bravo, cricketers!

### A victory like it never was

CONGRATULATIONS to our cricketers on their emerging from the doldrums and providing the countrymen with something very invigorating and refreshing. It's a mind-lifter.

At the Sofia Gardens in Cardiff, the babes of international cricket could take justifiable pride in beating the world champions of the limited-over version of the game in all departments of it. The emphatic manner in which victory was achieved, would, we hope, make the detractors of Bangladesh cricket shut up and think afresh.

The win has made us all proud to be Bangladeshi. This victory, we hope, is the start of a winning streak and not a flash in the pan. This was no freak win; for, it had to be wrested out of the powerful Australian side who must have played their skills out to ward off a Bangladesh victory. And, those of us who believed in the capability of our cricketers and felt that it was a matter of time before our boys came good, feel vindicated. So must also the coach and officials who had to bear the brunt of adverse criticism at home and abroad. We will not sink so low as to suggest that the critics eat their words for their cynical and often hasty outbursts from time to time, but being men of cricketing repute they know what to do under such circumstances.

The team played as a well-knit unit and the cohesion and grit were patently noticeable. One cannot but make mention of the way Bashar led the team from the front as well as of Ashraful whose approach belied his young age. And, of course, Aftab was his usual composed, yet fiery self. All deserve our kudos.

But, let not this one victory after such a long time against a strong side like Australia go to the head. This should not be a one-off flight to ecstasy to be only submerged under a pile of unprofessional performances. We must come of age going well past interminable 'historic' successes and settle down to a more consistent pattern of cricket.

Those linked to our cricket need to have patience, and so must our countrymen and allow time for our young team to graduate into a competitive side playing out the full ODI overs and fighting till the last day of a test match.

We wish for the day when wins will be more or less a regular feature rather than a sparsely experienced joy.

## All for a car!

### After resignation what?

APPARENTLY the cost of a portfolio is Tk 85 lakhs. At least that was what cost the State Minister for Energy his job.

It is not for the first time in less than four years of the current government's tenure that a minister has resigned. However, it is certainly for the first time that a minister had to quit on account of allegations that amount to what can best be described as lack of probity on his part.

The whole issue revolves around the use of a car, which apparently was not the minister's due. It became even more questionable since the car was provided by a company from whom a great deal is owed by the state on account of damages that was caused during the course of its gas exploration at Tangratilla.

It must be said that exploiting of facilities and taking undue advantage of one's position, by higher ups in the secretariat and various ministries, from establishments and corporations under them, has become a part of our exploitative feudal culture. And it appears that there is a tacit acquiescence by powers that be in this act. It defies logic that a state minister of the government would have to depend on the corporation under his ministry for his transport. After all, how many cars do top government functionaries need? And since when does a PS or the high-up's son gets to use a car exclusively, in violation of rules and regulations?

While not wishing to make any value judgement on the whole episode, it is difficult not to take note of what has appeared in the press regarding the goings on in the ministry of energy and on certain decisions of the minister regarding the company in question.

We suggest that an investigation be carried out to clear the ministry's closet of any skeletons that might still be there. It must be done not only for the sake of the transparency of the government, but also for the country's interest.

SAIFUL ALAM

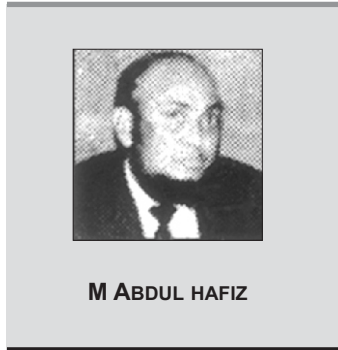
OF all earthly activities that religion approves the most hated one is divorce. Which is why it is seen that whenever circumstances compel people to resort to that undesired path it is usually done on the sly without much ado. The only exception that may go down in history is perhaps the way former President HM Ershad divorced his second/third wife fashion designer turned politician Bidisha. For a variety of reasons this has created sensational news items in the media for quite a few days. The whole episode was full of suspense till Bidisha was forcibly taken to police custody and Ershad flew to Saudi Arabia after making official announcement of their separation unexpectedly which surprised all present at the airport.

There was no need to delve into this dramatic event had it been a matter of Dick or Harry. Rather it involves hitherto a long serving President who also happens to be the leader of third largest political party of the country. Despite lots of odds after being ousted from power

through a mass upsurge in 1990 Ershad-led Jatiya Party (JP) has emerged as the second largest opposition in parliament in consecutive three elections held under caretaker government of 1991, 1996 and 2001. JP got 11.92 per cent of total votes in 1991, 16.40 per cent in 1996 and 7.26 per cent in 2001. So, on an average JP has 10-12 percent votes at its disposal that is much higher than the much-talked about vote bank of Jamaat or any other party about which none appeared to be bothered very much until the results of Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) polls that have suddenly brought JP under the spotlight once again as the victory of Mohiuddin Chowdhury had upset all political equations of BNP-led ruling alliance so far. Now it is being assumed that JP's votes shall singly be very much crucial for the two major contending parties that will be vying for power in the next general elections.

Until Chittagong mayoral elections BNP's main aim was to keep the Awami League (AL) isolated from other parties and prevent formation of another alliance of rightwing parties. So far these two

# Showdown over the choice of next UN chief?



ALTHOUGH nineteen more months have yet to go before Kofi Annan, the incumbent Secretary General of the United Nations will complete his second five-year term in December 2006, the race for the UN chief's coveted job has already picked up steam. In the meantime Kofi Annan is under increasing pressure from the US' right wingers to quit earlier because of alleged scandals involving fraud, mismanagement and sexual harassment in the UN system worldwide. Annan's son is said to have been implicated in foul play in food for oil programme during Iraq's sanction regime -- a slur the UN chief has been bearing for years. Therefore, if the Secretary General recent earlier -- either on his own volition or under strong US pressure, the changeover will obviously be advanced. Hence is a visible alac-

city over the issue of a new UN chief.

When asked recently about his likely successor the UN chief hinted at the possibility that an Asian might be replacing him. It is true that as a matter of convention the Secretary General of the United Nation is elected on the basis of geographical rotation. Kofi Annan further hinted that there was a general feeling amongst the UN membership that the next turn of an

cil recently announced its intention to back an Asian candidate for the job but has not as yet named the candidate. Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Laksman Kadirgamar said last week that China had expressed its "possible willingness" to support Dhanpala. "China has written to us saying that our candidate will be seriously considered", he told newsmen in Colombo. The sentiment of China, the proponent of an Asian century,

candidate could be a universal choice the Eastern Europeans with covert backing from the US appear poised to challenge Asian claim to the job.

The US President George W Bush "might prefer Annan's replacement to come from a region seen as more sympathetic to the US interests: Eastern Europe" according to the *Newsweek International*. In that equation one possible candidate is the current

Nations undergoes necessary reforms. "Then it would be an interesting challenge. Or else I am completely unsuitable for such a role." The observers however reckon that his conditional reluctance is simply a calculated modesty.

Meanwhile, Eastern Europe as a regional group has been disputed in various quarters. Even the UN diplomats insist on the group's non-existence -- except at the United

Ramesh Thakar, a senior vice rector at the Tokyo-based UN University said that under a long-standing convention it is Asia's turn to have the UN Secretary General. "Eastern Europeans' claim that they have never had a Secretary General and so they should get priority stand to no reason. Because Europeans have so far had three (Trigvelie of N o r w a y , 1 9 4 6 - 5 3 , Hammarskjold of Sweden, 1953-61 and Kurt Waldheim of Austria 1972-81) compared to one for other continents", he said. Thakar also said that East Europeans who have been more eager to join the EU and NATO can lay there claims within European groupings for a tilt at the Secretary General's post after the next one.

These reasonings apart what is more important is how the Washington's neo-conservatives would decide the issue. Not only a handsome largesse is due to Poland, the US also would like to invest among the hapless East Europeans. A showdown, therefore, appears inevitable over the issue portending a period of fresh bitterness in the UN system.

Brig (retd) Hafiz is former DG of BISS.

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UN chief would be for one from Asia which is without a UN Secretary General for last thirty-four years. The last Asian UN chief was U Thant of Burma who held the UN's top slot during 1961-71.

The Asians have already come up with two candidates who formally declared their intention to run for the post: former UN Under Secretary General for Disarmament Affairs Jayanta Dhanpala of Sri Lanka and ex-Thai foreign minister Surakiart Sathira Thai -- both distinguished in their fields. China, a veto-wielding Asian power and member of UN Security Coun-

is understood. Also the bona fide of an Asian candidate is above the board.

Yet the journey ahead for having an Asian UN chief is not likely to be smooth. What will critically matter is how the United States will look at the matter. Can an Asian candidate or its lobby withstand the new surge of Pax Americana which subsumes within it the future shape of things in or outside the world body? Obviously the United States would like to have its 'own man' in this vital appointment and with her power potential she can always influence it. Even if an Asian

President of Poland -- the country known for its open support to Bush's Iraq War. President Kwasniewski whose five-year term as Poland's head of the state ends in October. "Kwasniewski is a White House favourite for supporting the Iraq invasion with Polish troops and for his domestic free market policy." Among the Asian candidates there is none with such credentials.

In a newspaper interview in Warsaw, Kwasniewski also admitted that he would be willing to run for the post as an Eastern European candidate if the United

Nations. The twenty-two countries of the former Eastern Europe which range from Bulgaria and Georgia to Slovenia and Ukraine have been virtually absorbed either by the revamped European Union (EU) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) with its former identity totally diluted. "There is no reason for an Eastern European group to exist at the United Nations", says one senior third world diplomat. According to him they should now join the West European group where they rightfully belong.

# Bangladesh deserves debt relief too

SYED MUAZZEM ALI

AT the G-8 Finance Ministers Conference in London last Friday, the top industrialised countries of the world, in a historic move, decided to write off \$55 billion debt owed by 18 countries (14 in Africa and 4 in Latin America and Caribbean). The host of the forthcoming G-8 Summit, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown deserve full credit for this major breakthrough as a part of their comprehensive British package to lift Africa out of its most serious economic woes. The beneficiary countries will get immediate debt cancellation of some \$40 billion they owed to the World Bank, IMF, and African Development Bank.

It is true that the problems faced by Africa are so enormous that it would need a generous economic package and sustained international efforts to overcome the current difficulties. The debt cancellation is a small step, but it is a step in the right direction, no doubt. In addition to debt cancellation, the British plan also includes boosting development aid to Africa by \$50 billion a year, better trading opportunities, and creation of an International Finance Facility (IFF) that would borrow against future pledges from donors. London hopes agreements can be reached on these issues before the convening of the G-8 Summit in Gleneagles, Scotland from July 6 to 8.

President Bush was initially cool to the British proposal. However, after Tony Blair's recent visit to Washington, he agreed to this major debt cancellation package to give a political boost to his most loyal ally ahead of the summit. Tony Blair, on his part, played his card

well by securing agreement of other EU partners to the main theme of his proposal before coming to Washington.

What happened at the G-8 Finance Ministers Conference in London went beyond what Bush and Blair had agreed to in Washington. The total debt cancellation was estimated to be about \$16 billion and only debts owed to the World Bank and the African Bank were included in the package (not that of

resolved their conflicts.

The British Chancellor has indicated that the debt cancellation programme would be implemented in stages, and once all 38 countries become eligible the package would total \$55 billion. He has also noted that there is potential for about 60 to 80 countries to benefit from this package and the G-8 would try to further expand the programme.

There is no denying the fact that Africa desperately needs a gener-

world, both in its income and in human development levels. It is true that during the past decade, South Asia has been able to register rapid GDP growth, yet 43 percent of its people live below the poverty line. The UNDP Human Development Report puts the South Asian countries at the bottom rung of the table. The region's share in global trade is less than 2 percent and even a few years ago, the exports of Thailand alone

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) at the cost of other poor countries, mostly in Asia, who have been repaying their debts regularly. Paradoxically, debt relief is only provided to those countries who default on debt repayment. As such, the poor countries who maintain their repayment schedule are considered "good debtors" and, consequently, penalised for not defaulting. The whole argument is that, since these countries are able

of the population are illiterate and live below the poverty line. The majority of the people do not have access to safe drinking water or sanitation. During the past decade our per capita aid has dropped by 50 percent, but the repayment of external debt has increased from \$67 million to \$683 million in 2000 -- a more than ten-fold increase. Bangladesh's debt-servicing constitutes 1.5 percent of the GNP while, for example, the government's allocation to the health sector is 1.6 percent. Two-thirds of Bangladesh's debt is owed to the World Bank, IMF, and other multilateral organisations, while one-third is owed to bilateral creditors. Although some bilateral donors have agreed, in principle, to grant debt relief to Bangladesh, the multilateral bodies have refused to even consider the proposal.

The current proponent of debt relief to poor countries is none other than our past colonial master, who knows our actual socio-economic condition more than anyone else. Given the current generous mood prevailing in the G-8 circles, our government should approach Prime Minister Tony Blair and other G-8 leaders at the highest political level to consider our case for debt relief on its own merits. Chancellor Brown has indicated that the Group is amenable to expanding the debt-cancellation programme to include other poor countries. Time is of the essence here, and we have three weeks at our disposal before the convening of the next G-8 Summit. If we do not plead our own case, no one will do it for us. Let us not forget, the crying baby gets the milk.

Syed Muazzem Ali is a former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh

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IMF). Once it was realised that the IMF was in a position to meet a significant part of the cost involved from sale proceeds of gold in late-90s, Chancellor Brown persuaded other partners to broaden the package.

The eighteen countries which are getting immediate debt cancellation are Benin, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guyana, Honduras, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. This would, on an average, save them about \$1.5 billion in debt payments annually. It was also agreed that another nine countries, namely, Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Malawi, Sao Tome and Principe, and Sierra Leone would qualify for debt relief within 12-18 months, and that the total could rise to almost 40, once African countries beset by civil war

ous economic package. The UN has recently called for urgent action to avert "disaster" in Africa and has emphasised that development assistance has to be doubled if Africa is to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. This significant debt package will surely help African and some Latin American countries.

Unfortunately, it will offer no help to poor Asian countries, particularly those in South Asia who, despite resource constraints, have been paying their debts regularly. South Asia is home to one-fifth of humanity and 40 percent of the world's absolute poor live in this continent on less than \$1 a day. In terms of GNP per capita, South Asia, with its figure of \$510 is at par with that of Sub-Saharan Africa, and it is half of that of South-East Asia and Pacific countries and one-sixth of Latin American and Caribbean countries.

In the global context, South Asia lags behind all other regions of the

equaled the combined exports of all seven South Asian countries. The region, largely due to its chronic instability, has also failed to attract significant Foreign Direct Investment and lags far behind South-East Asia in this area.

The inherent weakness of the South Asian development scene is best demonstrated by the fact that although South Asia, particularly India, has made major progress in the IT sector, the region has the lowest internet use and access to personal computers among developing regions. According to World Development Indicators 2005, with 10 internet users per 1,000 people, South Asia ranks well below Latin America and South-East Asia. Compared to that, Sub-Saharan Africa has 20 users per 1,000. Access to personal computers is also low in South Asia as compared to other developing regions.

The G-8 debt cancellation campaign has primarily focused on the

to repay they must have "sustainable" levels of debt. The sustainability of debt is primarily measured on the economic matrix called Debt Sustainable Analysis (DSA) introduced by the World Bank and IMF, which lays too much emphasis on the country's exports and does not fully reflect the true nature of the debt burden on government expenses. Thus, Bangladesh and other South and South-East Asian countries are not included in the HIPC and, therefore, were not eligible for debt cancellation.

Bangladesh, in terms of population, is the largest Least Developed Country (LDC) and its external debt has grown from \$4.2 billion to about \$18.5 billion in the past two and a half decades. Our current per capita debt is about \$133. More than one-third of our national budget is allocated to debt-servicing -- at a tremendous socio-economic opportunity cost -- when nearly half

## OPINION

# Foul play of power

objectives were concerned BNP had nothing to worry about victory at CCC polls. Because the so-called formation of a grand alliance under the leadership of AL has been limping for a long time and another alliance of some rightwing parties is yet to gain ground. Despite that why candidate backed

strategy of confronting its main rival by aligning Ershad-led JP by hook or by crook to its own fold. Because, the combined strength of the AL and JP, according to political analysts based on the number of votes they received in last general elections, can create trouble for four-party alliance in the next

of BNP plus JP are 88.55 lakh, 83.12 lakh and 16.92 lakh. The voting calculation of the 181 constituencies in these three divisions indicate that the ruling alliance may face a serious trouble in the next elections if the AL and JP join hands. On the other hand the four-party alliance will win if they man-

of making an electoral alliance with AL. A total of 15 graft cases pending against the former usurper of power have provided the government with a powerful leverage to turn him into a puppet. Which is why, it appears, octogenarian Ershad was compelled first to expel Bidisha from the Presidium of JP

the extent that now while the government will keep up squeezing the second largest opposition in Parliament to join its coalition, the main opposition AL will also try hard to get it in its camp in the next general elections. Hopefully one party/alliance will win the elections and the other will lose. And then the nation may witness boycotting of Parliament by the main opposition from the very first session of new House on this pretext or that.

In fact, the nation has been facing the challenge of the main opposition party not attending parliament in a democratic set-up. It is some 14 years since parliamentary democracy was restored. During this long period most of the times the main opposition was out of Parliament. Was it the order of things to happen, as the restoration of parliamentary democracy was the result of a long and sustained popular movement? The government and the opposition forget that the first and foremost duty is to sustain the parliamentary system, in the absence of which the boycott has little meaning.

The British parliamentary system that we follow describes the

opposition as Her Majesty's opposition. It is considered to be a part of the government. There is never any boycott because it is unthinkable that a part can be separated from the whole. But what we have been witnessing in our parliament is a farce. Why AL is boycotting budget session, the most important annual business of the country, is not understandable. If it is the question of publicity -- that appears to be the primary purpose -- then they could have had demonstration outside parliament house. The BNP also cannot occupy high moral ground because it too boycotted parliament when the AL was in power. Boycotting parliament is too serious a matter to be trifled with for political purposes, which may in the long run cripple our hard earned democracy. A consensus reached in parliament is accepted by the nation. What otherwise has been going on in the country is nothing but the highhandedness of the AL and BNP, reflecting misgovernance or non-governance.

Saiful Alam is a businessman.