

Saifur on graft everywhere Govt can only blame itself for the rot

FINANCE Minister M Saifur Rahman's startling acknowledgement that corruption has assumed an all-pervasive character needs to be placed in the right perspective. The minister went to the extent of saying that all the ministries, with the National Board of Revenue being among the top, were steeped in corruption of the most intractable kind. He deserves credit for having the courage to state the truth, no secret though, that has a great bearing on governance.

There have been numerous reports by both local and international organisations and the media which depicted a grim picture of corruption eating up the lion's share of our scanty resources. And it is the widely held view of the people that corruption is the single most important cause behind economic hardship and other socio-economic ills. So it seems the stark reality is being acknowledged a bit too late.

However, things cannot be set right by merely admitting the truth that the monster of corruption has grown too large. The first question that arises is why the government, which has been in place for nearly four years, allowed the situation to become so bad? What have they done to arrest the malignant growth?

Now that the finance minister himself has admitted that we are lost in the abyss of corruption, the government has to think in terms of corrective steps. It cannot any longer dismiss the media reports as an attempt to discredit the government or bruise the image of the country. The regrettable thing however is that valuable time has been lost before the government could be wakened to the ground reality. Meanwhile, the country has been paying a high price for rampant corruption.

Now, people would like to know what the government is going to do to slay the monster. As the finance minister has admitted, the job is not easy given the nature and extent of the problem. The onus now falls on the prime minister to clear the stable. She has to act with great determination because corruption charges are there against her own office, the ministers, ruling party stalwarts, not to mention her own family members.

The fight against corruption has been transformed into a crusade where no sinners, regardless of their political affiliations, will be spared.

Foreign ministry farce

More action, less talk please

THE recent address by the foreign minister in which he laid out Bangladesh's foreign policy imperatives was doubtless intended to reassure the public that the ministry has a good grasp of its responsibilities and to project its vision for the future. However, regrettably, due to the vacuity of the minister's words and the gap between them and his record in office, it has had the opposite effect.

We are glad that the foreign minister has taken the time to outline Bangladesh's foreign policy priorities. However, we would have preferred it if, instead of blandly restating the obvious, he would have been able to point to some successes in the areas that he outlined. Aspirations are all very well, but one would have hoped that after three and a half years, the foreign ministry would have more to show for itself than mere aspirations.

The foreign minister has mentioned economic touchstones such as manpower, ICT, and expanding exports. But the ministry has achieved nothing in its promotion of such measures during his tenure. Such successes as there have been can be attributed to the efforts of the private sector, not the government.

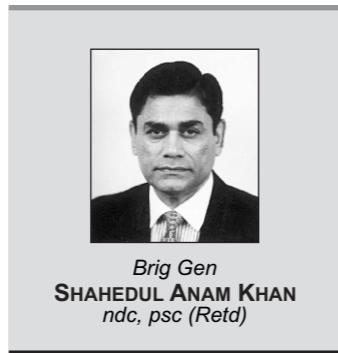
Similarly, fine words about cooperation and multi-lateral engagement is belied by Bangladesh's recalcitrance on Bimst-ec, our invisibility in other multilateral groupings, and a deterioration in key bilateral relations. And when it comes to repairing our image overseas, more is needed than the denials and accusations that have from time to time issued ritualistically from the foreign ministry.

The fact is that for the past three and a half years the nation's foreign policy has been adrift. It has appeared ad hoc at best, and completely rudderless at worst. Nor are we the only ones to have noticed this. Not long ago the cabinet even expressed dissatisfaction with the apparent directionless nature of our foreign policy. In addition, morale within the foreign office is also at rock bottom due to excessive politicisation and absence of a clear career path for officials.

What we are looking for in the foreign minister are coherent and well thought out policies and concrete achievements. Mere lip service to what the nation's foreign policy objectives should be are simply not enough. The irony is that the minister's empty words were delivered to a group who had just completed a certificate course on "Diplomacy, International Relations, and Foreign Policy." The listeners would have done well to take the minister's record as a case study in what not to do.

There seems to be strikingly little correlation between the foreign minister's handsome words and his actions. No one doubts that Bangladesh needs to improve its image in the world or consolidate existing relationships with traditional friends or to look for new allies among the emerging powers, but the question we would like to ask is: what does this mean in practice, and what has the minister actually done in furtherance of these goals?

Bragging at Bragg



THE US president's speech last Tuesday at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, in the light of the dragging conflict in Iraq and his dwindling approval rating at home, addressed to the American people and to the world with the US troops as a backdrop, was an attempt to assuage the American public that everything was not going badly in Iraq. One is not certain whether there were many takers for his arguments that continuing bloodshed in Iraq will ultimately be "worth it."

In fact, Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid's comments, "The president's numerous references to September 11 did not provide a way forward in Iraq. They only served to remind the American people that our most dangerous enemy, namely Osama bin Laden, is still on the loose and al-Qaeda remains capable of doing this nation great harm nearly four years after it attacked America," is fairly representative of the current mood in America.

The day had a special significance for the US administration, for it was the day one year ago when the sovereignty of a sovereign country was handed over to an ex-CIA agent.

No one can fault President Bush for his current PR exercise. It was principally motivated by a somewhat misplaced perception that it was not his strategy or his Iraq policy that had gone awry, but it was his spin-masters' failure to project those in the right perspective.

amply proved is that you cannot fool all the people all the time. Most Americans have perhaps seen through their president's ruse, hence the erosion of support for Mr. Bush's Iraq campaign. But when the president of the United States speaks, not only the Americans, but also the world at large listens. And the world was disappointed, not by what he said, but by what he did not. He was rhetoric personified, full of contra-

Mr Bush's speech might have passed off as an anxious leader's attempt to rally his countrymen and women to his cause, however immoral that might be, but for his vaunting of the US military might, "in every outpost around the world," that demonstrated the administration's immodest and arrogant belief that a military approach to political problems, including the current imbroglis in Iraq and Afghanistan, is the panacea for the ills of the world.

dition, and nothing in the speech contained anything that the world had not heard before. The silence that greeted Mr. Bush's speech in the 800 soldier-filled auditorium was perhaps a resonance of the reaction around the rest of the world. Missing was an exit strategy from Iraq which everyone was eagerly waiting to hear.

So, what are the contradictions in what he said? President Bush made as many as eight references to the September 11 attacks to restate his justification of war against Saddam, but as usual, as the Los Angeles Times noted, Bush failed to mention that the 9/11 commission found no credible evidence linking the former Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein and the 2001 terror

attacks. He made a complete reversal of logic by stating that success in Iraq, it being the focus of his international war against terrorism, would guarantee security to the US as well as to Europe. But, the link between Iraq and US security remains as nebulous today as when it was made the rationale for launching "Operation Iraqi Freedom" more than two years ago. Even an inveterate ostrich would

have difficulty in believing that Iraq was a threat to the US now or anytime in the recent past. Most analysts believe the threat posed to the US by al-Zarqawi is more a consequence of the 2003 invasion than a justification for it. The president's speech was merely an exercise in after-the-fact rationalisation.

The US president wants the world to believe that there is a chance that Iraq might turn out to be another Afghanistan; meaning that there is a likelihood that forces of radicalism exemplified by the Talebans might assume predominance in Iraq, fomenting and spreading terrorism in the region. But, in spite of all the terrorist activities that were prevalent in the Middle East until before the inva-

sion of Iraq, Iraq had very little to do with these. In fact it is the US invasion that has engendered terrorism in a country where there was none before. It is not Iraq turning into another Afghanistan that Bush should worry about, rather, the prospect of it becoming another Vietnam that should be his main concern.

It is also difficult to accept the unbelievable argument that there is no civil war in Iraq. Much as the

US media might deny it, what is happening today in Iraq is a conflict between two elements within it that borders on civil war. In Iraq today, one of the indigenous parties is being represented by the US forces in its fight against the other, i.e. the insurgents, composed entirely of Sunni elements. And the recent events of May and June indicate that the Shias are no longer prepared to let the US forces do the fighting for them.

While most people wanted to hear about the exit strategy of the US government from Iraq, that it was not articulated should not surprise anybody. There has never been an Iraq strategy as such -- let alone a coherent exit strategy. The only strategy that was in the minds of the US neo-con hawks was how

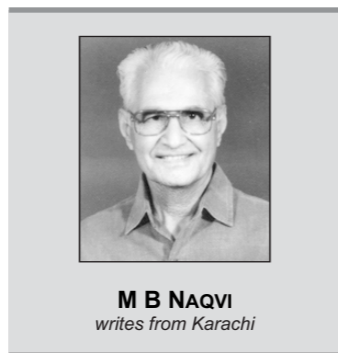
to get a foothold in the oil-rich region. It was initially achieved after the first Gulf war against Iraq, and now reinforced through its capture.

It is also no wonder that there is difference of opinion as to how long the insurgency might last. The Iraqis think that it might be ended in two years while the US thinks that somewhere up to a decade may elapse before it can be completely doused. This is a manifest indication of plans to perpetuate US presence in Iraq. The difference of opinion on the state of the insurgency is also acute within the administration itself. Despite a claim by Vice President Dick Cheney that it was in its "last throes," the commander of US Central Command, General Abizaid is of the opinion that it is anything but.

Mr. Bush's speech might have passed off as an anxious leader's attempt to rally his countrymen and women to his cause, however immoral that might be, but for his vaunting of the US military might, "in every outpost around the world," that demonstrated the administration's immodest and arrogant belief that a military approach to political problems, including the current imbroglis in Iraq and Afghanistan, is the panacea for the ills of the world.

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The way out of the woods



AMERICAN Vice President Dick Cheney has declared: "We've got a good idea of the general area that he (Osama bin Laden) is in. But I don't have the street address." This is the culmination of the old and persistent accusations by General Baro, Zalmay Khalilzad, Mr. Hamid Karzai and his underlings, and Pentagon officials. They claim that Osama and Mullah Umar may be hiding in Pakistan and that, for good measure, Pakistan is still allowing Taliban to go into Afghanistan to rekindle the war they lost in 2001.

This directly questions Pakistan's commitment to anti-Taliban cause. True, the US says it is satisfied about what Pakistan is doing regarding al-Qaeda, but American think tanks appear to regard this as serving as a safety valve for Pakistan. No one seems to take Pakistan's words at face value about not aiding and abetting Taliban and having done the maximum it could.

They do, however, recognise Islamabad's political compulsions; irrespective of which government is in office, it cannot ignore that many Taliban were Pakistanis or Afghan students in Pakistani Madrasahs; they have an extensive support base in Pakistan. Still, Americans go further and keep Pakistan under pressure "to do more." They think that pressure on Pakistan will promote American objectives better.

Domestically, Pakistanis disagree on their identity. It is an

Islamic country where the majority of people are moulded by religious orthodoxies. True, there are liberals who think that the importance of the mullahs has been exaggerated. Their share in national vote used to vary from 5 to 8 per cent. In the 2002 election, however, they have emerged as a force, with the help of the military government and its agencies. By cooking election results all these years, Pakistan has had its stat-

signed a far reaching military pact with India. Pakistanis do not like this. America is serious about nuclear disarmament -- at least of Pakistan. However, Pakistanis will do themselves a favour by becoming realists. They should see with a clear eye how Americans regard them. There is no Pakistani interest to which Americans are committed. Pakistan's residual interest in Afghanistan evokes

Let's take stock of factual achievements. Well, Afghanistan had been conquered by Pakistan's proxies, the Taliban, though only briefly. In Kashmir, Pakistan has drawn a blank. The assumed power of the Bomb that not only kept the Kashmir jihad going for long, Pakistan Army could do what it did to the 1999 Lahore Peace Process and in Kargil. Recall the overall results. Americans

objective and Pakistan lost out politically. The Bomb proved useless, a dud.

The reason for Pakistan's suffering humiliation in Afghanistan and in 2002 was because it had fixed unattainable objectives. Naturally, the achievement was no-war-no-peace with India. Much the same holds for Afghanistan, friendly rhetoric notwithstanding. But what of now? Pakistan has no firm

with India by opting out, the only way to end the race. This would involve lowering of foreign policy sights. Pakistan should not behave like a big power. It is a second-rank power; its people should be content with being left alone to cultivate their farms and work in their factories, if Islamabad can help build more factories. But doing a South Africa will immensely enhance the prestige and stature, the way it happened with Nelson Mandela.

This would invite howls of protests. What about national security? Wouldn't India march in? Observe that except for Pakistan, all neighbours of India are non-nuclear states; all states in South-East Asia are non-nuclear. How many countries has India occupied, not counting the earlier conquests of Sikkim and Goa for consolidating its homeland. A non-nuclear Pakistan would be safer from a nuclear-capable India. We would be like all the third world countries. If the Bomb cannot give either true security or the status and power that Islamabad has wanted, it has to go.

See India with a clearer eye. It is now far more Hindu than India ever was before 1947. It simply cannot have the intent to conquer or to entice away any part of Pakistan. India would refuse to add one more Muslim to its population. Hindutva advocates' recognition of Pakistan is far greater than of many Pakistanis. They need a Pakistan to blame. They would invent a Pakistan if there wasn't any to excoriate. One is less certain about Congress; but why suppose that Sonia and Kunwar Natwar Singh recognise the reality of Pakistan any the less. India is not a radical threat to Pakistan; useful business can and should be done with it.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

PLAIN WORDS

The final question is: what to do? The first thing to do is to stop depending on the Bomb. Pakistan should dispose of it scientifically and in the correct political way, as South Africa did, with no conditions or reference to anyone. Islamabad has to stop running the arms race with India by opting out, the only way to end the race. This would involve lowering of foreign policy sights. Pakistan should not behave like a big power. It is a second-rank power; its people should be content with being left alone to cultivate their farms and work in their factories, if Islamabad can help build more factories.

ure lowered and has become prone to foreign pressures.

In the Bomb-created hubris, Pakistani generals believed Pakistan's defences to have become impregnable. They then thought they could safely tweak the Indians' tail in Kashmir. Earlier they had virtually installed the Taliban government over much of Afghanistan, leaving the northern territories under Burhanuddin Rabbani. Pakistan's "success" in Afghanistan was accepted by all, though it rankled in the hearts of the Indians and the Iranians. Americans too were not amused, though they tried (unsuccessfully) to do business with the Taliban.

Relations between Pakistan and the US are thus not as friendly as claimed. The Americans find it necessary to keep Pakistan under pressure because of a deficit in convergences. America is a promoter of India's power, prestige, and role in Asia. It has

American hostility. As for Kashmir, the US is far more on the Indian side. America also favours democracy in some measure, though it says its commitment to the Musharrif regime is as strong as ever. American advocacy of democracy is always diluted by US national interests, as they define them.

In sum, the divergences with the US seem to outweigh convergences. The Bomb needs to be seen with a clear eye, especially the hubris it produces. That was why Pakistani objectives since the 1980s were punching above its weight. The Afghanistan and Kashmir commitments could not have been conceived if Pakistanis had not believed that the Bomb had made its national security unsalvageable. Pakistan also dreamt of leading the Islamic world. These are basically unachievable objectives because arms races with India preempt resources for everything else.

crushed the Taliban, forcing Pakistan to join the War on Terror against the Taliban. The sequel to Kargil was that Pakistani troops could withdraw safely through American-mediated acquiescence of India. Pakistan had to make promises to India not to allow jihadis to use Pakistani territory. After that the Agra summit met the fate of the Lahore Peace Process. Indians, taking advantage of the attack on their parliament, threatened a full-scale invasion of Pakistan.

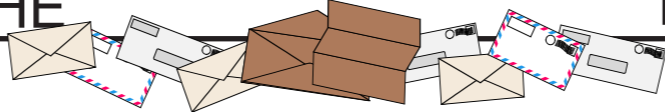
2002 is remembered for a dangerous confrontation with India. Why did the the Indians not attack? Bomb lovers assert that it was the Bomb that deterred India. Is that true? The finale actually included American mediation. Secondly, Pakistan had to undertake the cessation of jihadis going into Indian-administered Kashmir. As for the dream of leading the OIC, well, it remains a dream. In short, India gained its main

friends in the vicinity or elsewhere in the world, except a rapidly changing China.

Pakistan continues to treat America as a court of last appeal; powerful Pakistanis think nothing of doing things under American pressure. Among Pakistan's vulnerabilities, the chief one is the Bomb; it is followed closely by the dependency syndrome for economic well-being. Islamabad now depends on loans and aid from international financial institutions to an extent that exceeds what Benazir and Nawaz Sharif did. Has Islamabad reduced any of Pakistan's vulnerabilities? The answer is no.

The final question is: what to do? The first thing to do is to stop depending on the Bomb. Pakistan should dispose of it scientifically and in the correct political way, as South Africa did, with no conditions or reference to anyone. Islamabad has to stop running the arms race

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.

Learning English

English is now the most important language in the world. All types of educational materials are expressed in detail in English. So to gather knowledge in medical science, engineering, textiles, geography and scientific inventions, it is necessary to learn English. Again 80 per cent of the world computers are programmed in English. It is true that though it is essential to have proficiency in English, the average standard of it in our country is not satisfactory at all. Some students do well in all subjects except English. So, a large number of students fail in the examination every year. In seeking jobs, good command over English is needed. If a student possesses this, it is so positive for him to build up his career. It is true that the process of learning English varies from man to man. For this reason, the tech-

nique of teaching English is so important.

There are standard methods of learning the language which we should follow without being scared of the alien words and terms.

Jesmin Akhter
Joypurhat

Violation of women's rights

The main working force of RMG sectors, which are playing pivotal in earning foreign currency and sustaining our flourishing economy, is woman. But I feel very dismayed when I observe their wretched condition. I pay visit to my cousin's in Dhamrai, and I see women garment workers falling victim to hassles while getting on public buses. They feel very humiliated as the helpers and bus conductors often take the opportunity to touch them

unnecessarily. But finding no alternative, they keep silent. Besides, they are not allowed to get down at their desired places.

In this age of empowerment of women, they are subjected to such kind of harassment. How long will this continue?

Abdul Karim
Jahangirnagar University

Law taking an unusual course!

The other day I was sitting in a tea stall at Alamdanga, I was observing what the police were doing. They were looking into the necessary documents of motorcyclists. Those who had documents got permission to go. Without documents there was no permission to move. I observed the police did not stop a certain motorcyclist. That motorcyclist went away without any restriction. It was

a very regrettable matter. Is it law and administration? Why did not the police stop that motorcyclist? Do you know who that motorcyclist was? Brother of an influential politician!

Anoaruzzaman
Chudanga

Keeping up with social changes

The collapse of the 9-storey garment factory near Dhaka has triggered a post-mortem in the society amongst the professional circles. The government has been caught napping, as usual, because the ABCs of good governance are not being followed by the politicians in power.

The weaknesses of Rajuk and DCC have been revealed time and again; but huge time and energy are being conferred on political elec-

tions (viz., for the Ctg mayor). Our politics is still immature, seeking extra publicity all the time and paying attention only to big projects (for kick-backs).

None is interested in quiet, background activities. Black money has fast circulation, working in grey areas in the background, but the damages are headlined from time to time. It encourages corrupt practices, which the government cannot control through routine actions, because big, influential, high-ups are involved. This closed cycle has to be broken up, but it is not that easy without visible official commitment.

The fast rate at which the construction of high rise buildings has been allowed is neither scientific nor justified. Political nepotism is vicious, and resists eradication, as the policy makers are involved in the process and proceedings. "Political will" is weak in Dhaka, the parlia-

ment is limping, and the role of the opposition is ineffective.

Now correction has been left to Nature, and it is going to take its toll in the coming years, adding to the two categories of miseries: man-made, and natural. Tsunamis, earthquakes, and floods and not whims of Nature. There are two sides to it: one scientific, and the other mystical (the supreme Creator rules!).

Coming back to lack of parking space, the developers could not keep pace with the fast-changing mores and modes of the society. The other temptation is the high cost of the land in big cities. The solution is decentralisation and checks on urban migration. The politicians (and the bureaucrats) just cannot face the issues, for obvious reasons. What happened to political will? Answer: politics is now big business, and public interest is low down in the list (in other countries

also).

The regime has switched on a pre-election campaign, based on pre-conceived notions. The mass awareness has risen each decade, but political policies based on annihilating the opponent' areas of the society (the mores) are uncontrolled (no time to pay attention to the basics, to build up the right foundations, before pointing to the super-structures).

Urban development policies are breaking under social pressures; and the latter are changing fast. Re-active governance cannot solve problems. Foresight, judgement, and continuity have no entry points in the planning networks. We see the after-effects, and wail and holler!

It is too late for the regime to drive in corrections, as the general elections are just around the corner, and the situation tends to

encourage self-survival activities. How to reduce the 34-year gaps through truant politics? Our politics is virtually high-rise without the right foundations! Catch whom? Your guess is as good as mine!

A Bad
Dhaka

AL leadership

During the AL's five-year rule (1996-2001) many bizarre things happened. Prominent among them was the rise of godfathers like Joynal Hazari, Shamim Osman and so on.

The AL leadership did nothing to rein them in. They should have been tough on them. They have realised, rather late, that a man like Hazari is a burden to any party.

Md. Aminul Islam,
DU