LATE S. M. ALI

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Opposition reform formula

Hurry can mean delay

E are against any knee-jerk reaction to the wideranging political, electoral, election commission and caretaker government reform agenda set on the roll by the opposition and its allies. We are even far less inclined towards any hurried disposal of the demands for change in the relevant laws governing elections.

The reasons why all political parties should be wary of short-circuiting the processes of initiating and carrying out reform are obvious. First of all, the need for reform agenda. in one form or the other, has exercised the minds of the civil society, the media and the community for a long time now. The Daily Star itself started the debate as early as in January this year on political and electoral reforms by way of eliciting expert opinion on the whole range of issues inclusive of the caretaker government system. All this means that a national consensus has to emerge on the reform agenda before these are actually adopted.

Second, and perhaps more important point for consideration is that the nation cannot afford the roller-coaster ride through outcries for reform every decade or so. The electoral system is of such critical import to our democratic polity and national life that it cannot be left to the vagaries of political changes from time to time. It has to be durable.

That said, we address the opposition-suggested reform of the election commission and electoral processes separately from their formulae for caretaker government reform. What clearly enjoy wide public support in our view are the opposition demands for election commission and electoral law reforms such as independence and full financial authority for the EC, hiring and firing authority of the commission, updating the voters' list, electronic voting system and voter ID card, black-money holders' and loan defaulters' ineligibility for polls, compulsory furnishing of educational qualifications, financial and criminal records and other candidature information, etc. And, there cannot be any second opinion about the desirability of consulting the opposition parties before the CEC and ECs are appointed by the President.

The caretaker government reform questions are much more complex. The relative merits and demerits concerning the various proposals need to be further examined, more thoroughly gone into; for which, we suggest, extensive and sustained public debate should be held.

The government's outright rejection of the opposition proposals and its rigid positioning are clearly impolitic and self-defeating in approach. Their insistence that the opposition place their proposals in parliament would have carried greater credibility if they had shown sensitivity to opposition demands in the past. Given the overall necessity for taking the opposition's proposals as a starting point to come to grips with the reform issue, a dialogue must be initiated by the government.

Show of claws

High time the govt put a stop to it

OTHING could be a more obnoxious display of arrogance and abuse of power than that enacted by RAB on a socially well-placed civilian on Saturday. A few hours before being physically tortured, the ill-fated person had protested the manhandling by plain clothes elements of an elderly person whose car had barley brushed with a jeep. Now, the incident is sought to be passed off as trivial by the concerned authority; given the seriousness of the underlying issue, we cannot shrug it off

If somebody voices his or her protest peacefully out of a concern for somebody being assaulted, how could physical abuse be a 'justified' reaction to that? The man had no clue as to who the tormentors were since they were in plain clothes. Even assuming that the person had assaulted a RAB official as he is alleged to have done, does it or can it justify the physical beating and torture he was put through? Was there no other way to deal with the situation?

The whole philosophy of a law-based society rests on empowering an institution, but that invariably with adequate restraints put on the exercise of power vested in them. Weapons and power make them the 'elite force' they are, and that is all the more reason why they have to use these with extraordinary introspection, caution and restraint. The very reason for their existence is negated if

What's even more disconcerting is the way authorities try to explain away an incident like this with a concocted version in apparent self-defence. Instead of restraining themselves from abusing power, what we see is basically an endorsement of it through a fabricated account of what had happened.

In all, this is another shocker that merits not just a probe but also a deterrent punitive action.

South Asia's changing military balance



M ABDUL HAFIZ

HATEVER trappings are given by unequal allies to each other, they hardly embellish the other's position, and finally they know where they exactly stand vis-a-vis their opponents. Both the US and Pakistan are acutely aware that there is no such thing as a free lunch in international relations. Pakistan knows that the services it renders for supporting the Bush Administration's war on Islamic

militants during the current war

on terror will be suitably

rewarded, either in cash or kind.

America is no less aware that this give and take will have to be kent on an even keel for the efficacy of

Yet, the observers do spot discrepancies in the accuracy of this give and take which are at times too obvious to be obfuscated. It is not for nothing that

mote the US interests in Asia's strategic corridor in its first war on terror. Pakistan hunted down the fleeing Talibans and al-Qaeda on its own soil, much against the sentiments of its own people. Some even ironically called it an aeronautical scrap from Washington for the services that include

Even if the new F-16s are deliv-

ered, the PAF will have only 57 F-16s, over half of which will be outdated Block A or B Models. The rest of Pakistan's 243 fighters and fighter bombers are either at the end of another operational life, like its French Mirages or obsolescent

tion of F-16 Block 5 or the F-18 super hornet in a \$53.5 billion deal. The sale is just beginning. The US defence industry and Pentagon are hungrily eyeing India's booming market for imported weapons. There is already talk of the US selling state of the art command and military satellite technology

missile system -- the Arrow -- is said to be highly effective against the short and medium-range missiles that make up Pakistan's nuclear deterrent. India will soon begin deploying three Israel supplied Phalcon airborne warning control radar system mounted on Russian heavy transporter. This AWACS system will further worsen conventional arms imbalance between India

Given India's ongoing acquisition of the fleets of new French and Russian tanks, armoured vehicles. mobile heavy artillery, and rocket batteries, plus its rapid deployment new missile system. Pakistan's equipment poor armed forces are now at their worst ever military disadvantage. The wages for the services rendered by Pakistan to the US might have been determined by the employer in this case, but there can't be a shadow of doubt about the impending loss of military balance in one of the world's most volatile regions

PERSPECTIVES

Given India's ongoing acquisition of the fleets of new French and Russian tanks, armoured vehicles, mobile heavy artillery, and rocket batteries, plus its rapid deployment new missile system, Pakistan's equipment poor armed forces are now at their worst ever military disadvantage.

Pakistan does all the world's dirty works at the behest of the US -- all in the name of fighting the US war on terror. As a reward for supporting an international war on terror as a frontline state, Pakistan is being allowed at long last to buy 25 F-16s, a multi-role fighter aircraft. This can be considered a pretty poor pay off for everything Pakistan has so far done to pro-

Pakistan selling out its former friends and allies to curry favour in Washington.

The irony is this: that the US still owes Pakistan 71 F-16s it purchased in 1988. These aircrafts were never delivered after the US-Israel lobby scuttled the deal. Although Pakistan's money was eventually returned, the damage was enormous to the PAF, which

like its Q-50s or J-50s -- which are in fact little more than a poor man's copies of the 1960s vintage of Mig-21 aircraft

While Pakistan obligingly accepts aeronautical curbs from Washington with a measure of bravado, Washington is graciously offering India at least 126 of the most advanced version of it most versatile warplanes -- a combinaand equipment, and early warning missile defence systems.

Israeli arms and technology sales to India are also booming. In fact Israel is India's second largest arms supplier after Russia.

Something is even more worrying for Pakistan. Israel is in advanced stage of negotiation with Delhi about supplying India its new anti-missile system. The new

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India-US détente



KULDIP NAYAR writes from New Delhi

RIME Minister Manmohan Singh wanted to combine his official visit to Washington with a trip to New York to attend the UN General Assembly session in September. America was insistent that he should come independently of other engagements and even suggested the middle of July as the convenient time. It had its way. True, President Bush is a busy man, but the Indian Prime Minister should not have been put to the trouble of undertaking an unnecessary journey when he has undergone a heart bypass and angioplasty. Why couldn't he have traveled to Washington from London where he had gone a week earlier to attend the G-8 meeting? The importance of the US visit would not have lessened in any way.

Probably, America feared adverse fallout from the defence treaty which Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee signed at Washington last month. (He persists in calling it an agreement). America's reading was wrong. Except for a few speeches by the Left and some comments in the press, there was hardly any unfavourable voice from the public. Jingo nationalism has developed in India at the

expense of liberal thought. When consumerism takes over, defence becomes an obsession with those who matter. America should know this more than any other country

What the US wants to convey is that India is its closest ally in this part of the world. This is, in fact, in line with the suggestions the Carnegie Endowment, a think-tank in America, has made to the State Department in its latest report. To align with India, the Carnegie report recommends that America should take five steps: 1) Help India's power to grow to prevent compared the emergence of India and China to the rise of Germany in the 19th century and the US in the 20th century in mapping the global future.

"The US leaders are concerned about the growth of the Chinese military, its monetary policy, its vicious attacks on Japan, and its increasing power projection capabilities. Both Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld have sharply articulated their doubts on these grounds. An unbridled China is not in the US interest, and by bolstering India, the US

Even otherwise, the region is big enough to accommodate India and China, and there is no doubt that Beijing will one day follow the democratic way of governance to firm up relations with New Delhi.

By all means, India should take advantage of new thinking in America in the wake of Bush administration. In fact, stirrings were visible much earlier and former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee did considerable work in the field. Robert Blackwill, US ambassador in New Delhi a few years ago, forced many positive changes in the

with the US impinge on New Delhi's free say. It reminds me of the agreements or pacts during the cold war days which India vehemently opposed. Even if there is no obligation on the part of India to do what Nato, Cento, and Seato demanded from its members, the pact with America amounts to an alliance. It excludes other nations and negates the UN charter based on the one-world concept

Take a sub-clause of Article 4 of the treaty. According to it, India and America will "collaborate in multinawhom?" The matter did not proceed further. Although President General Pervez Musharraf is heavily dependent on the US, he could not have liked America's tilt towards India. At a time when India and Pakistan are in the midst of peace process, any suspicion at Islamabad can be harmful. However, Pakistan should not read too much from the effusive statements America makes. Instead, Islamabad's strategy should be to help a South Asian entity to emerge. It may be an economic union, but the entire area has to have soft borders. And there is no place for terrorism in the region.

Whatever the calculations and compulsions of the military junta in Islamabad, the common man in Pakistan feels insecure. He is terrified because he sees terrorists taking training in the midst of civilian population. A study conducted by the International Crisis Group last year said: "President Musharraf's call for an end to the promotion of an ideology of jihad was welcomed around the world. Two years on, however, the failure to deliver to any substantial degree on pledges to reform the madrassas and contain the growth of iihadi networks means that religious extremism in Pakistan continues to pose a threat to domestic, regional, and interna-

tional security. How to retrieve Pakistan from terrorism should be top priority after the meeting between Bush and Manmohan Singh. More than that they should be looking at ways to stabilise the region littered with failing

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BETWEEN THE LINES

Although President General Pervez Musharraf is heavily dependent on the US, he could not have liked America's tilt towards India. At a time when India and Pakistan are in the midst of peace process, any suspicion at Islamabad can be harmful. However, Pakistan should not read too much from the effusive statements America makes. Instead, Islamabad's strategy should be to help a South Asian entity to emerge. It may be an economic union, but the entire area has to have soft borders. And there is no place for terrorism in the region.

China's dominance; 2) End the illusory idea of military balance between India and Pakistan; 3) Endorse India's membership in the UN Security Council. G-8, APEC, and International Energy Agency; 4) Remove objections to the Iran-India gas pipeline; and 5) Allow sale of dual-use technology, including nuclear safety

The CIA analysis also describes India as the most important "swing state" in the international system a country that could tilt the balance between war and peace, between chaos and order. The National Intelligence Council, CIA's brain trust,

can arrest the growth of Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean rimlands and Chinese penetration of Myanmar," says the report.

Of course, America's emphasis is to build up India as a counter force to China, a "potential hedge against a rising China," as an American thinker puts it. This is incorrect. New Delhi, with improving relations with Beijing, may never go back to the time when the two countries were at odds with each other. There is a dispute over the boundary and it looks as if the two sides are beginning to appreciate sensitivities of each other. They may come to a settlement before long.

US policy despite stiff resistance. But it is for India to consider how far it wants to go. Manmohan Singh has rightly said that India cannot be anybody's

Yet a country, which is giving a new interpretation to non-aligned movement (NAM), should not be acting in a manner that may create doubts in the minds of third world nations. New Delhi's argument in favour of NAM is that small countries should gather on the same platform to be a moral force against big, powerful nations. How does the exclusive arrangement with America fit into such thinking?

Some of the clauses in the treaty

interests of the rest, what is the UN for? America did not care about it when it attacked Irag. A multinational operation has to have the stamp of the UN approval. This has been India's stand. The acquisition of modern weapons from America could not be the reason for a turnabout. When General Mohammed Avub

tional operations when it is in their

common interest." If the "common

interest" of two nations transcends the

Khan took over Pakistan in October 1958, he offered India a defence pact. Jawaharlal Nehru, then the Prime Minister, rightly said: "Defence against

Only way to deal with terrorism is to deal with its root cause

SHAMSHER CHOWDHURY

HE way the members and the representatives of the diplomatic missions are going about the affairs of Bangladesh is, to my mind, tantamount to interference in the country's internal affairs. Notwithstanding the various lapses and shortcomings in the so-called democratic management of the country, I would like to ask of these highly "concerned" diplomats as to how come none of their country representatives are ever known to have been "concerned" in the least about many other countries of the world who systematically continue to murder democracy and democratic traditions?

This in itself is a form of terrorising technique in subjugating a lesser nation amongst others. Would any of the country representatives, had they been in Islamabad or elsewhere, be so vocal as they are here? I have my doubts. They talk about human rights violations. of terrorism, of poverty alleviation, of failures in family planning, of failures in

upholding democratic traditions, etc. Yes we do fall short of the otherwise recognised acceptable levels in tackling all these vital issues of social and political management, but the fact remains that many other countries of the world far more modern and militarily more "powerful" than ours can be accused equally of such failures. It is this "holier-than-thou" attitude of the socalled "developed" world that is causing the problems all over the world. This attitude of the more affluent nations towards the comparatively lesser countries is making people of these countries angry, both Muslim and non-

The world's most powerful nation goes about killing innocent people and children in Iraq and provides all kinds of moral and military support to a particular state for forcibly and illegally occupying lands belonging to other peoples and then like a Good Samaritan calls for mediation in settlement of the "disputes." It is like one fine morning some unknown persons breaking into your home to occupy two of the rooms and then asking you to come to terms for a

This powerful and mighty nation who has the capability of waging seven major wars around the globe simultaneously, also trains mercenaries in the garb of intelligence agents, whose job it is to create civil disturbances and even find ways and means for overthrowing other governments so that it can "install" government of its choice. It is also a declared policy of this very government to bomb the hell out of other sovereign nations until they are subjugated to accept its own brand of "democracy and freedom." In the name of fighting and winning the war against terror, it is simply working towards giving it a permanent place. This country today is one of the leading nations in violating all forms of human rights around the globe. It has lost all moral and ethical rights to even talk of human rights.

The other day we saw the 9/11 of London. No sane person can ever condone such wanton killing of innocent lives. We are in full agreement with the Assistant Commissioner of Police of Metropolitan London who said: "We want to conclude by making it absolutely clear that no one should be in any doubt that the work last Thursday is that of extremists and criminals." indeed we could not agree with him

Yet I strongly feel that Bush and Blair are going about tackling the war on terror in the wrong way. Dealing with the symptoms of the "disease" will never cure the ailment. Unless the Iraq issue is resolved, until the so called multinational occupation forces quit Iraq, until the US troops quit Afghanistan, until a fair and equitable policy is adopted in resolving the Palestine issue, until it stops interfering in the internal affairs and raging war against sovereign nations, the scourge of terrorism will prevail and continue to gain momentum as time progresses.

Blush (Bush and Blair) must understand that it can no longer subdue terror by terror. Has the powerful world of the west including the US and Great Britain ever tried to either analyse or enter into the minds of the masterminds of terror.

These people also come from an educated background. Many of them are doctors and engineers. The Blush duo must realise that they are not fighting mere criminals, but criminals with an agenda far and beyond the cruel and senseless violence. There is also this problem of credibility

Today the entire Muslim world. including many poor nations around the globe, is suspicious of all actions of Blair and Bush. This is perhaps one of the major causes, why the two forerunners against the war on terror continue to have limited success. No less than a person of the stature of that great leader from the subcontinent Mahatma Gandhi has best described the situation in one of his speeches delivered as early as 1920: "The moment there is suspicion about a person's motives. everything he does becomes tainted." The way the duo invaded Iraq on false pretexts, its credibility continues to be questioned the world over.

I would like to conclude this brief commentary by quoting some remarks made by that renowned author Karen

Armstrong in her book, The Battle for

"Fundamentalism cannot be defeated, and, in a sense fundamentalists won a great victory. By the middle of the 20thcentury, it was generally assumed that religion would never again plav a role in great events. Today, however, no government can ignore it. Israel began as a defiantly secular state, and now the Prime Minster of Israel must go hat in hand to the religious parties to make a govern-Even in the United States politicians have to flaunt their born again credentials. We have to try to make huge imaginative effort to put ourselves in the shoes of the fundamentalists because they threaten our values as much as we threaten theirs. We can make war in a minute but peace takes a long time.

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OPINION

Naming of institutions

MOZAMMEL H. KHAN writes from

AMING of institutions to commemorate persons for their everlasting contribution to society, is a well accepted practice followed in every society. Kings, queens, politicians, scientists philosophers, artists and others who, one way or the other, made some long run differences through their contributions to any specific arena of the society are usually so

honoured. In every society where ethics has not been totally made redundant, a few norms are practiced in naming the organs of the body of national importance, especially when dealing with the names of the politicians who still occupy the helm of power. In Western democracies, no institution ever carries the name of a sitting President or Prime Minister. It is rare even to honour a living former President or Prime Minister (PM) by affixing their names to any institution, no matter how much their efforts were effective in the flourishing of the body in question. A rare exception is only exhibited in the United States where, as a traditional practice a library is set up in the ex-President's home town, mostly with private donations, bearing the name of the outgoing chief executive.

The most illustrious Canadian statesman Pierre Elliot Trudeau's name was never attached to any roads, public buildings, or organs of any academic institutions, not only during his tenure as one of the longest serving Prime Ministers of Canada, or even thereafter as a retired ombudsman of this great democracy, albeit his popularity as the principal architect of the legendary Charter of Rights and Freedom, was never surpassed. Only after his death a few years ago, was Montreal

airport named after him, and recently the University of Toronto, Canada's largest university, has glorified itself by naming an academic building Closer to home, there is not a

single establishment in Singapore that carries the name of Lee Kwan Yew, the architect of modern Singapore. There was a proposal to name the Changi Airport of Singapore, incidentally the best airport of the world for more than a decade -- and that hangs the portrait a few Asian makers of history such as Mahatma Gandhi, Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Min, and Bangabandhu -- after him, which was immediately turned down by Mr. Lee himself. No government office or institution ever carried the picture of Mr. Lee even when he was

In Canada as well, no one has ever seen the picture of the PM glorifying the walls of any office or

institutions. Turkey, a country which, like Bangladesh, has also seen a lot of ups and downs in democratic practices, has an exemplary tradition hanging only the portrait of Mustafa Kamal, the father of modern Turkey, while naming an institution after an activate political leader is a

Bangladesh is probably the only country among the Westminster democracies where the current parliament has passed a law making t mandatory for the government offices to hang the portrait of the PM. lest people dishonour their elected leader! Incidentally, Sheikh Hasina deserves the distinct honour among our PMs and Presidents as being perhaps the only one whose portrait did not dangle on the walls of office buildings, nor did any institution bear her name, during her tenure as the PM. In fact, her government's decision to hang only the portrait of

Bangabandhu, the father of the nation, was a very prudent one to bestow the long-deserved honour to the greatest national hero of the

During the presidency of the late Ziaur Rahman, in addition to two other widely-acclaimed virtues. namely his personal honesty and non-adherence to nepotism, he strictly maintained the policy of not allowing anyone to honour him by naming any institution after him. Not long after his tragic death, the government of the day went on a naming spree and by early 1996, just before the fall of the BNP government, there were around 500 institutions that carried Ziaur Rahman's name. It was not only the name of Ziaur Rahman. who must have been turning in his grave to feel how all these cherished virtues, for which he is highly regarded, have been nullified by his successors.

did not spare any opportunity to inaugurate institutions exhibiting her name. Most of the universities including Rajshahi University and Islamic University, which had a female dormitory constructed during her tenure, gave such dorms her name. Many of her ministers were not lagging behind either to glorify themselves, by ascribing their names to anything that was built during their rule. In my visit to Dhaka in the early nineties. I watched on BTV news that a minister was inaugurating an auditorium bearing his name in his home town, notwithstanding the fact that the minister was miserably defeated in the election in both of his home ridings. Two years ago, in my journey through Dhaka city, I came across a college bearing the name of a current cabinet minister whose record in no way suggests even the minimum probity

Begum Zia as the PM apparently

expected from a human soul.

The current controversy emanates from the proposed naming of a female dormitory of Dhaka University after the current PM, defying the long and highly acclaimed tradition of not naming any element of this great university after any living human being. The said dormitory was allegedly proposed to be named during the tenure of the erstwhile government after the late Begum Sufia Kamal, an eminent female icon of our nation. There are ongoing arguments and counter-arguments. in which who donated the state property for the dormitory, either the present PM or the former PM, came into play, as if it was their personal property. The PM must be enjoying the debate, since the majority of the senate members are in favour of her

During the tenure of the last AL government, seldom the names

given by the preceding BNP government were hanged. The current alliance government did not reciprocate that norm. Even the M A Hannan airport and the Syed Nazul Islam (who was he?) bridge were renamed If the BNP ever has to evacuate the

helm of authority and if a non-BNP government pays them back in the same coin, what would be BNP's option to counter that tit for tat move? It might call hartal, as it did when a pontoon bridge linking Ziaur Rahman's mausoleum was removed from the lake, or resort to a few street demonstrations. However, would it help it to regain the lost moral ground? People at the helm of power seldom address that question

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