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Iran next?



A British global security think-tank published a report stating that a pre- emptive military strike on Iran could accelerate Tehran's production of atomic weapons. The pre-emptive military strike may likely be carried out by the US and its ally Israel. This will put pressure on Tehran to stop uranium enrichment. However, if this attack is carried out then it would result in a high number of civilian casualties. The surprise attack will leave many people unawares and unprotected. The US and Israel want to make Iran a second Iraq. They must know that if they do attack Iran they will have to pay a huge price

for it. Israel intentionally attacked Lebanon and now they want to attack Iran. It is Israel which is the main threat to peace in the Middle East. Why does no one say anything against Israel's nuclear facilities? The answer to this question leaves us in a murky situation.

The US and Israel can only plan to gain control of the Middle East, but the plan will not succeed.

MinhajAhmed
Uttara, Dhaka

Elections and terrorism in India

If one were to blame the rout of Congress in the recently concluded elections when it tasted crushing defeat both in Punjab and Uttarkhand, while moderate defeat cum consoling win in Manipur, on the anti-incumbency factor alone, then the UP chief-minister Mulayam Singh Yadav should keep his luggage ready for shifting them to his personal bungalow immediately after the state assembly polls.

However, the notion that the recent rail tragedy near Panipat only benefited the BJP led coalition in Punjab is not tenable, too, because the elections do not seem to have links with terror incidents in the country, going by the media reports which make us believe so.

If one says that the Panipat rail incident was engineered by some anti societal forces only to benefit a particular party or coalition to to the detriment of national good, the debate can never end just like that. Facts arealways hidden from the public view. People in India who give mandate to the ruling class to rule have lost their minimum right to know what is really happening in the country.

Dr. Abdul Ruff Colachal
*Research Scholar, School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi*

World Cup Cricket 2007

I believe Sri Lanka and South Africa are the top favourites. After that I would put India, Pakistan, Aussies and the West Indies in the same bracket as far as their chances are concerned. The reason I kept Sri Lanka and South Africa on top is because of their team combination, team spirit, winning momentum/habit and self-confidence. I am putting India and West Indies next in line although they haven't had too many noteworthy wins off late. I believe on the World Cup stage those two teams would be the ones the opposing teams would fear the most, if not for anything else other than having a few greats in their ranks.

I am also not discounting Pakistan as on their day they are a force to reckon with and history would testify that they have come back being dead & buried many a time when people had all but written

them off.

West Indies have players like Brian Lara, Sarwan, Gayle, Bravo, Chanderpaul and Samuels. And they are always known to perform better on their home grounds.

I am not taking New Zealand's chances too seriously as the pitch would not suit them at all. At the same time, I must admit that this New Zealand outfit is the best that I have seen for a long time. They are well balanced with both bat & ball and have decent spinners in their ranks of the calibre of Vettori and Patel. But I do have my reservation about the New Zealand batting line-up. Most of the West Indies' pitches are going to produce runs in the vicinity of 225-240 and their batsmen maybe too carefree and inexperienced on those pitches. One batsman I am really looking forward to watching is Ross Taylor, who is known to be more than a genius.

The Aussies as always are going to be tough to beat but unlike anytime in the recent years their supremacy may be coming to an end. Especially, the aura and shock & awe factor maybe missing from them as they have lost a few of their top performers because of either injury or retirement.

England would be the proverbial "dark horse" in this race now that they have beaten the Aussies in their last few encounters. On their day, people like Freddy Flintoff, Pietersen or Collingwood may cause major headaches but I don't really foresee them succeeding as a unit. They lack crucial balance in their batting or bowling line up to be of any worry to the rivals.

I must conclude with the mention of Bangladesh's chances. I believe on their day they might cause a few flutters among the top teams like India or Sri Lanka but I am not sure as to whether they would be able to do so in such a big event, although in 1999 they proved the pundits wrong by beating the Pakis.

Shahriar Hyder
Senior Software Engineer, KAZ Software Limited

Dr. Yunus

We are proud as a nation of Noble laureate Dr. Yunus and feel all the more encouraged to see him joining politics which has been kept away from the deserving dedicated people for the reasons known to all. Dr. Yunus' entry into the field shows the beacon for the good people willing to serve their beloved country which was never considered as a possibility till he dared to show us the ray of hope. I was so much excited to hear the historic news at a time when we as a nation were sliding down the black hole with no chance of return.

The Almighty must have been very kind to us and gave an opportunity to change our fate and at the same time Dr. Yunus' decision to serve the country as a politician gave a new dimension to Bangladesh politics. Let all of us who love our country welcome this visionary without being skeptical, hoping that the man, who could bring the highest honour for this nation which is mostly known for its natural calamities and corruption, will bring some positive changes to the nation, especially the poor.

Shah Alam Khan
Dhanmondi Residential Area,

Dhaka

Jahangirnagar University

Natural beauty is the most distinctive feature of the JU campus. A number of trees, little animals and migratory birds add to the beauty. Many kinds of migratory birds land here in early winter. Migratory birds are safe on JU campus, but the students are not safe from vicious student politics.

I think the university authorities should look into the matter and make some determined efforts to bring back a congenial academic atmosphere to the campus.

Uzzal Kumar Dutta
Jahangirnagar University

Anti-crime drive

With the toll collection network smashed, and black money in hiding (along with the godfathers), cash-flow problem is faced by the criminal gangs.

Result: strong and desperate cases of snatching + robberies. Hit at the base, and the branches fall (protection removed!).

Operation wipe-out has to be maintained as a routine work; until the new, cleaned system starts working.

The armed forces appear to be doing a good job for the nation.

Md Abad
Dhaka

Don't be impatient!

The present neutral caretaker govt. came to power just one month back and by this time they have made lots of efforts to put the champions of corruption behind the bar--which was unimaginable. The whole country has congratulated the government. The Economist has written that other than politicians everyone is happy in Bangladesh with the recent moves of the govt.

LDP leader Col Oli has, however, said that people may lose patience if the present situation continues (without election). Col Oli should "hold his horse" for the time being. People don't want to see the corrupt politicians returning to power.

M Sharful Alam
*Retd. govt. officer
Dhaka*

Pagla bridge and historical records

The Pagla bridge on Dhaka-Narayanganj road was constructed in 1660 by Mir Jumla, Subedar of Bengal under the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. French traveller Tavernier noticed it in 1666 as a fine brick bridge. Bishop Heber while coming to Dhaka from Calcutta (Kolkata) in 1824 found the Pagla bridge in fairly good condition and identified it as a very fine specimen of architecture (ref:Banglapedia).

I went to see the remnants of historical Pagla bridge but returned rather confused. The dilapidated historical structures claimed as parts of a temple have striking resemblance with the images of ancient Pagla bridge of Mir Jumla printed in the book of Prof. Muntaris Mamun on Dhaka and the image and sketches of British Museum records.

I hope the Archeological Department will provide accurate information about the origin of these structural ruins at Pagla to dispel any doubt in the minds of people.

Ershad Ahmed
Eskaton, Dhaka

Setting things right

Bangladesh was identified as an archetypal example of so called failing / failed states. Most of us may recall that we were very upset with Henry Kissinger for calling our beloved Bangladesh a "basket case" back in the 70's. The point is we have been warned and the parameters are well known.

The nation cannot ignore the fact that we are not only unable to provide jobs and livelihood to our working people, we have to request others to take our workers and when they come back to the country they are fleeced at the airport, harassed by customs and immigration officers, worse than in the host countries!

Looters are found everywhere. So some looters get elected.

We do not need to make the same mistake again. What has democracy given us except what we now clearly see as our shameful thirty years. We killed our father of the nation, the warriors who put their life on the line.

Why do not we think it over and keep these hoodlums away from getting the keys to the treasures again and again, and let them feel how it is to be an ordinary wage earner.

We are not short of good people.
 Md Mahmood Hasan Choudhury
Springfield, Missouri, USA

Thinking beyond five years

One of Bangladesh's most popular political parties is drowning. In 2001, the BNP came to power for the second time under its chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia with a vow to

fight corruption and terrorism. At the time, many of us thought that the BNP would fulfill the pledges it made in front of us before the election. Also, it was a golden opportunity for them to govern the country without any significant resistance on political grounds. Two-thirds majority in the house, and common people's support were enough for them to make a mark for themselves and attain people's confidence in them. But it could not resist the greed for money and using power the wrong way-- a norm in the political arena. Within months, an 'alternate power house' started to control and manipulate everything. A young leader of the ruling party started to make use of his influence, in a wrong yet astonishing way. All business deals, all infrastructural and development tenders became a pawn to this immoral behavior from the so-called 'Young Turks' of the party. The negligence on Begum Zia's side was quite astonishing. Some leaders involved themselves in huge corruption. The govt. also tried to control business organisations for its own sake. I wish to recall the dubious role of the govt. in the BGMEA and FBCCI elections.

I wish the current caretaker government all success, and hope it will be able to contain corruption.

Arafat Islam
Dallas, USA

Change the rule

The newly reformed Election Commission is finally giving time and energy to bringing about reforms in the electoral laws. This was long over due and much wanted. For a variety of reasons reform proposals were ignored during the past 15 years.

However, I am surprised that the EC is considering allowing a candidate to run in three constituencies at the same time for the parliamentary elections. This is not reasonable. None should be given the privilege to run in three constituencies simultaneously, when the same person can retain only one of them. Such system shows disrespect to the electors (voters) in the two other constituencies. If that is allowed it could become necessary to hold by-election which will not only be inconvenient for the voters but also incur additional expenditure for the Commission as well.

There was a common consensus across the country on this issue. I join others and strongly propose that none should be entitled to run in more than one seat.

Feroz Hassan, On e-mail

Convocation boycott

A section of DU teachers boycotted the 43rd convocation because Dr. Yunus was present there. The list of persons who have so far been awarded the honorary doctorate by Dhaka University shows the name of a political leader. Where were these teachers at that time?

Dr. Yunus declared to launch a political party. Those who boycotted him themselves are involved in party politics. DU Teachers are identified as blue, white etc. What a shame!
Shawkat Hossain
One e-mail

Reduced ISD call charge

We appreciate the BTBT decision to reduce telephone call charge for 30 more countries from Bangladesh. (ref: March 1 online edition of The Daily Star). In this context, I would like to appeal to the BTBT authorities to consider extending the facility to Cambodia too.

A considerable number of Bangladeshis are working in Cambodia with different government and private sector agencies like the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, UNDP, FAO, WHO, NDI, Asia Foundation, American- British Tobacco Co, CDRI, CONCERN, Helen Keller, garments factories and other organisations.

In Cambodia there is no Bangladesh embassy as of now to seek any help from. Telephone is the only means to keep in touch with the family. It would therefore be very much appreciated if the BTBT consider our difficulties and extend the reduced charge facility to Cambodia from Bangladesh.

Sardar Syed Ahmed
*International Material Engineer
Ministry of Public Works and Transport, Cambodia*

Wind of change

Even a year back, this would not have implications or applications at the national level. However, today, things have changed. For how long we do not know. But this much is clear that in the past two months we have seen top-defaulters apprehended, top-notch eateries and malls bulldozed, princes turning to paupers.

Bangladesh is changing for the better. There is something going on that my generation has not seen before. There are administrative reforms going on.

Law enforcement is awake and the righteous are fighting back. So-called 'terrorists' are out of job-- for their employers are broke. Political pranks and diversions are off track and new faces are bound to show up now that the old ones are tainted. The question that remains to be answered is, must we bring back the trademarked 'political' faces to the scene? I, along with thousands of commoners, revel in how Bangladesh wrestles with its demon today. But you ask what about the constitution? Come to think of it, how has it been used in the interest of commoners? It is just an instrument, a weapon of political Titans.



If that is so, then who but us can mandate a change?

Raihan Amin
A citizen

Case for introduction of DST

Most of the developed countries take advantage of the available natural daylight by turning the clock forward. It is called daylight saving time or DST. This arrangement helps reduction of the peak hour of electricity consumption by delaying the sunset in terms of DST. I would like to suggest that we advance our clock by one hour in one of the nights of a convenient weekend, so that our daylight saving time becomes GMT+7 hours from the

existing GMT+6 hours. Sun will then rise at 7:00am and set at 7:00pm instead of rising at 6:00am and setting at 6:00pm. Our new peak hour will be 7:00pm to 11:00pm-- total 4 hours not the present 5 hours. If this is done then shops may be allowed to remain open till 8:00pm i.e. they will be allowed one hour of peak hour time electricity as is being allowed now. This will calm down many of the grumbling shopkeepers. Another side benefit will be that people will be forced to go to bed early and also rise early based on real time. I would urge the present

administration to consider this. Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore are at 105 degrees east of Greenwich and their natural time should have been GMT+7 but they follow GMT+8 hours and are taking advantage of the daylight all the year round. Even Sri Lanka tried it once when they had a serious power crisis. They advanced their clock by half an hour at that time.

I strongly feel that this is worth a try.
Salahuddin Ayubi
Indira Road, Dhaka

Iraq faces food shortage

Local and international aid flooded into Iraq in 2004, the year following the invasion, but much of the supply was blocked off after the kidnapping of many aid activists in the country. The food the Iraqis did get was often not what they needed, or wanted. Iraqis do not feel at ease receiving food aid when they exported food in the past. Iraq has been a field of aid NGOs since the US occupation began, and many of those NGOs brought foodstuff that Iraqis were not used to, but they had to take it due to the need they were facing. Barley, wheat, pulses and the famous Iraqi dates are staple diet in the country, and are also exported. Common meals in Iraq include rice, lamb, chicken and locally grown vegetables like cucumbers, onions and tomatoes. Under the occupation, Iraqis are getting much of their food from companies in Australia and other countries who assisted the United States during the invasion and occupation. This food has often been of low quality. During July 2006 the Iraqi Ministry of Trade rejected or destroyed thousands of tonnes of contaminated food or food past expiry date. The food had caused widespread poisoning. By the end of 2005 most international NGOs had withdrawn from Iraq on the orders of their governments, who saw the writing on the wall of increasing sectarian violence. The local farmers are often unable to get their foods to the markets. The government dropped tariffs on import of foreign products, making it impossible for Iraqi farmers to compete. Countless Iraqi farms went bankrupt. But now prices of imported goods have increased dramatically. And so most of the food in Iraqi markets today is imported, and more

expensive due to skyrocketing fuel costs and lack of government regulation. Imported foods like chicken, fruits and vegetables now cost more than locally grown foods. Local agricultural production is almost nil. The limited loans given by the ministry to farmers and planters are misused simply because it is not possible to maintain the agriculture production for reasons well known to everybody here. Now the private sector is importing everything, and the prices are too high to afford. Australia provided Iraq with wheat last year that when distributed was found to contain steel fragments. An investigation conducted by Iraqi officials has still not held any company accountable. The majority of Iraqis still remain dependent on the monthly food ration, a programme set up during the economic sanctions period in the 1990s after the first Gulf war. But a growing number of Iraqis no longer receive their monthly ration due to corruption or sectarian favouritism in the distribution channels. Statistics compiled by the Washington-based Brookings Institute during 2005 showed that nearly 60 percent of the Iraqi population regularly consumes the monthly food rations. And 25 percent, 6.5 million people, are "highly dependent" on rations to meet their nutritional needs. Only sugar, rice, flour and cooking oil remain from the original 12 foodstuffs provided by the former government. Other items such as lentils were removed from the list in May 2006 as a result of budget cuts.

The situation may worsen in the days ahead.
Nasirul Haque Sujon
Dhaka University



Fertiliser crisis

As most of the people of the country are involved in agriculture, the government must put due emphasis on this sector and see to it that the farmers get essential items such as fertilisers, seeds and so on.

We saw in the past that the authorities tried to ignore the demands of the producers. Thanks to

decades of ill treatment, the backs of our farmers are already pressed against the wall as they drag on an existence of perpetual misery.

We hope that the present regime will be mindful to their cause.

ZabedWali
On e-mail