

How golden is the handshake?

Create job opportunities rather than closing them

WHILE presenting the national budget recently, finance and planning advisor Mirza Azizul Islam had focused on creation of employment opportunities as one of the interim government's prime goals. One wonders whether the government has drifted from that position. For, it seems that in pursuit of some donor-driven sectoral reform programmes, several mills and factories have been ordered to shut down or downsize with termination notices having been served to employees under a so-called golden handshake scheme.

Take the instance of jute mills, the retrenched workers face acute privation with their dues yet to be paid. With no means of livelihood to fall back on, their very existence is imperilled. Their children can't go to school, they are denied minimal daily nutritional intake, healthcare is a far cry, and overall, their life has come to a paralytic halt.

Golden handshake which literally means payment of generous severance benefits to encourage older hands of an organisation to leave it, has been quite a disorganised affair. Payments were staggered and the recipients unable to pool resources to start any new business.

It's a pity that the gruel kitchen opened to feed the affected in Khalishpur allegedly had to be closed down and the flow of relief to the area is unsteady at best.

To our mind, an unplanned move has been taken in the name of reducing subsidies to the SoEs and cutting their losses, so that the reform agenda as implemented seems devoid of any human face.

While retrenchment in loss-making state-owned enterprises may be understandable, shutdown of industries is an extreme move with severe unsettling implications. The government should either open avenues of employment or facilitate creation of jobs in the private sector.

With an already high unemployment base in the country, one would have thought the government had seen the wisdom of avoiding the sudden eviction of thousands of hawkers from the city and demolition of local *haats* and bazaars that unsettled the means livelihood for many people in both urban and rural areas. No prior thought had been given to their rehabilitation in alternative locations.

The increasing numbers of unemployed have a way of pushing the country to a socio-economic disaster. Already, observers tend to believe that those who have been thrown out of jobs may have proved susceptible to joining the ranks of criminals. There must be a quick turn-around in the situation.

Curbing corruption

Social resistance is key

WE fully agree with Chief Justice Mohammad Ruhul Amin's observation that law alone is not enough to curb corruption; we do need a resurrection of moral values to banish this social ill.

The chief justice has very rightly spoken of rejection or even social isolation of the corrupt which will strengthen the anti-corruption campaign. It is a positive development that there is a growing public antipathy towards corruption as is evident from the way the present anti-corruption drive has been welcomed by the people at large. There is nothing wrong with the corpus of law but often this has been misapplied to suit political or partisan expediency in the past.

Now, something more has to be done beyond dealing with the individual cases or bringing the culprits to justice to contain corruption on a durable basis. For example it has to be recognised that the degree and nature of corruption varies widely in the government offices. We, unfortunately, have watched corruption at the highest level which could only be termed a systematic looting of national resources. The corrupt holding high public offices were devoid of any moral values and showed an inexplicable disregard for the law as well. In short, the corruption culture built over the years neutralised the law to a great extent. It is this culture of free-for-all plundering that has to be brought to an end in the interest of our survival as a civilised nation.

Down the ladder, we will find corruption among the low-paid government employees which points to the typical problem of survival with the pittance offered as salary. It is indeed a laudable initiative that the government is planning to increase the compensation package of the police. Obviously, they have to be given a bare minimum before corruption could be eliminated from the law enforcing system.

A sustained campaign against corruption both on the social and legal fronts will ultimately create a situation where it will be viewed as an unpardonable offence looked down upon in society. Ethics and morality will help us attain that goal but it is necessary to create socio-economic conditions that resist corruption.

Pakistan's 'milbus' under assault



M ABDUL HAFIZ

PERSPECTIVES

Dr. Siddiq's book is a stinging indictment of military rule. But the reason it is so effective is that it is carefully researched and rigorously argued. It's not simply a critique of Musharraf and his government. Dr. Siddiq has put the entire institution under a scholarly microscope -- not just in Pakistan but in any other country where the army calls the shots and might nourish Bonapartist aspirations.

all of these caused enough embarrassment to the government, it stomachs it as a matter of expediency and the issues involved remained hushed-up.

But the action taken with regard to the CJ was a clear assault on the judiciary -- the last resort to address issues of national import. It was a grave national political crisis. Therefore, first the legal fraternity took the lead, and thereafter, other forces of the country coalesced with them for the restoration of the rule of law, forestalling the military's second coup by assaulting the judiciary and breaking its backbone.

If the chief justice overstepped his jurisdiction, the military establishment also overstretched itself by severely man-handling the CJ. While it wanted to demonstrate its power to all and sundry, its hollowness was further exposed and it looks weakened as never before.

The president has never been so vulnerable; neither the people of Pakistan have felt so despondent. Because even the court's order to reinstate the chief justice

will not change the situation much as the desperation on the part of power centres will increase manifold. Yet a defining moment has arrived for the Pakistanis who could determine the fate and future of the country and give a shape to their democratic aspirations.

However, the long years of political vacuum in the country have left it leaderless. The people who waited all night to greet Chief Justice Iftikhar Chowdhury uncomfortably found no leader in their midst. But the people have already stepped into the vanguard of the struggle for change, leaving political leaders lagging somewhere several circuits behind. The search for new leader is on and eventually one will emerge, responding to the demand raised by the people. As such, the significance of the current struggle in Pakistan goes well beyond the immediate issues such as the survival and stability of the Musharraf regime.

When the country is apparently in turmoil there is tendency for the

paranoia to run wild. This is especially true when the ruling class is under threat. Then every voice that questions the status quo seems to be the voice of dissent. Currently, as the judicial crisis rumbles on like a smouldering volcano a number of political players have at long last jumped on the bandwagon. This was predictable as the opposition all over the world takes advantage of the government's problems.

But today's Pakistan has much more potential to break open the military stranglehold it is subjected to. It has a vibrant intellectual community, active think-tanks, and a brave media. One Ayesha Siddiq, a leading light of Pakistan's intelligentsia who has no political axe to grind, has caused great unease among Pakistan's ruling elite simply by producing her exceptionally well-researched analysis of the military's role in the political economy of Pakistan.

She was being pilloried by the government spokesmen and decided to leave the country for

London where she had done her doctoral studies earlier. She has been exposing the military's business empire that afforded them control over the national economy as well as the political clout. Her treatise has been published there by Pluto Press under the title "Military Inc."

In Pakistan, the government disrupted the launching of the book by refusing the Oxford University Press to hold any such function there. This ham-handed government step gave the book a cachet and appeal it might not have gained otherwise. It was learnt that no more copies of the book was available over the counter of Karachi and Lahore. The assumption is that the "agencies" bought up most of the first print.

It is true that General Musharraf is under tremendous pressure from multiple quarters and may succumb to his present predicament. But a potent role has been played by Siddiq's book in exposing the military's power game and its continuing grip over the levers of power through what she calls "milbus."

Coined by Siddiq herself as a short-hand term: "milbus" refers to the military's business interests. According to Siddiq it refers to military capital that is used for the personal benefit of the military fraternity, especially the officer corps. It is neither recorded nor a part of the defence budget.

In this respect it is completely

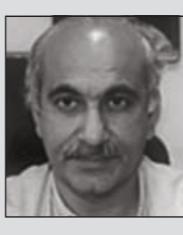
an independent genre of capital. Its most significant component is entrepreneurial activities that do not fall under scope of the normal accountability procedures of the state, and are mainly for the gratification of military personnel and their cronies. In the most cases the rewards are limited to the officer cadre and top echelons of the armed forces who are main beneficiary of "milbus" and justify the economic dividends as welfare provided to the military for their services to the state.

The financial autonomy of the armed forces establishes the officer cadre's interest in retaining the political power of the state, since political power nurtures greater financial benefits the military fraternity see it as beneficial to perpetuate it. The officer corps has thus every reason to grasp, wield, and retain political power.

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A Nilgiri diary



MJ AKBAR

BYLINE

A shrine to Our Lady of Health, followed by a wine shop, the Holy Spirit Church, a notice welcoming the imminent presence of Charing Cross and a wax museum pave the way to Ooty. A lovely British cathedral dominates one side of the city; the other side of the road is largely the property of an Afghan called Baba Seth, who arrived many decades ago, possibly along with dry fruits and built up one of the finest car collections in the South. His heirs now live in the traditional manner, by selling off their inheritance, bit by bit.

MY name Kennedy, sir!" exclaimed the chauffeur of the black Ambassador driving me up to the Defence Services Staff College at Wellington, from Coimbatore airport through blaring city, quiet woods and picture postcard valleys to a 6,000-foot high perch in the Blue Mountains. He glanced back to confirm my curiosity. "Born day Kennedy died. Father thought good man," he explained. Kennedy proved to be a driving encyclopaedia of Coimbatore's virtues: four medical colleges, 28 engineering colleges, et al, but was just a shade apprehensive about one statistic. A quarter of this Tamil city's population was from next-door Kerala. "Kerala no space for Kennedy," he added on a forgiving note.

As behaves a good chauffeur, Kennedy was an incisive analyst of national as well as regional politics. He approved warmly of Abdul Kalam, and turned 120 degrees to shrug at the worthy Tamilian scientist's successor. He had heard about only one of the candidates for vice-president, Najima Abdullah. Like any shrewd pundit, he laid out the analysis but reserved final judgment lest time

might prove him wrong. He was eloquent about his state. Jayalalithaa had polled only 15 lakh votes less than the DMK-led alliance; Vijayakanth 28 lakh votes; in many constituencies Amma (Jayalalithaa) lost by less than a thousand votes, five hundred, even two hundred! I asked about the future. "DMK, free TV, two-rupee TV. Going only to DMK worker, rice going to Karnataka, Kerala, selling twelve rupees."

I had no idea whether his figures were correct, but only a very courageous person would argue with the authority in his voice. When, like weasel journalist I did check later, these were the facts: Vijayakanth had launched the Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam in September 2005, positioned himself as the "Karuppu MGR" or "Black MGR", contested 232 of the 234 seats, picked up 8.33% of the votes, or nearly 28 lakhs, and although he was the sole person in his party to actually win a seat he had taken enough votes away from Jayalalithaa to ensure her defeat.

The Nilgiris are a gentle range,

the valleys undulating and verdant,

the hills flecked with floating gar-

lands of clouds. Builders have hammered smallpox marks on the face of nature with rows of tightly strung matchbox houses. The thirst for occasional pleasure and permanent status will of course only rise with economic growth, as greater numbers enter the holiday-home class. Aesthetics is not necessarily a handmaiden of success. Kennedy slows down and to the left spreads the green bowl above which Lawrence School, Lovedale, has been built. "Fully viewpoint," says Kennedy, and I agree. Other points are less than fully viewpoint. The town just before we enter the army haven at Wellington is a mess of modern mismanagement: roads dark with broken tar, traffic at both cross and illogical purposes, policemen bored with their thin benefits, small shops that have miraculously preserved a sense of dust despite the generous sprinkle of rain. India changes as you cross the gates into defence discipline and budget. The tar isn't different, but it is cleaner. It is a realm of order; work by the clock, leisure by the clock. Stuff happens outside. Things happen in Wellington.

Lt. Gen. Bhaskar Gupta (Gurkhas, as his distinctive soft hat confirms) offers a brisk and hospitable welcome. I learn, with added pleasure, that he is from Bengal; his father was in the Army as well. Naturally we slip into Bengali as often as circumstance and vocabulary will permit. He invites me for dinner at 2000 hours. Informal, even a kurta will do, although it is not advisable: the clouds can dissolve without notice, and the temperature can drop by ten degrees. The locals wear a sweater at all times. (Tourists from Tamil Nadu, in my considered view, come only to be able to wear a sweater.) But the lecture the next evening is tie and jacket, as is the reception at the mess later.

Abashed, I find my small suitcase is without any ties to formality. Who can conceive of a tie in half-baked Delhi? I am promised a regimental tie. Kennedy has the rest of the answers. We head off to Ooty to find a jacket.

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way to Ooty. A lovely British cathedral dominates one side of the city; the other side of the road is largely the property of an Afghan called Baba Seth, who arrived many decades ago, possibly along with dry fruits and built up one of the finest car collections in the South. His heirs now live in the traditional manner, by selling off their inheritance, bit by bit.

The jacket was the easy part; I simply didn't wear one. The regimental tie constituted summer formal. They didn't buy my bluff; they were just being decent to a thoughtless civilian. The auditorium, everyone in dark suit, was stiff with discipline, but eyes and faces were relaxed. This was both reassuring -- there was absolutely no chance of getting booted; and discomfiting -- you don't want your audience to be too polite either. There was no doubt about the interest. Islam and terrorism is not a favourite subject anymore; it seems to be the only subject anyone is interested in. I suppose the only reason I get invited is because I have some familiarity with both Islam and English grammar. Lots of people have one or the other. The questions were articulate, and rid of either ambiguity or hypocrisy, which was a relief because the answers were offered in the same vein.

Before dinner Bhaskar points to distant lights from the lawns of his glorious residence at the top of his Wellington mountain. That is where Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw lives. The army remembers its field marshal with respect and affection. The conversation with senior officers from all the services over dinner is splendidly convivial, and the morning alarm is birdsong. The past has been improved but not changed at the exquisite Wellington Club. Bhaskar Gupta was the last golfer to get a hole in one, says a scroll of honour. The librarian unearths just the book I was looking for, a 1941

biography of Gertrude Bell, the British civil servant instrumental in making Faisal king of the newly created Iraq in 1921, although Faisal had never set foot in the country before he accepted the British-sponsored crown. About 240 officers are selected each year for the Staff College course through a written examination. This splendid institution is gate to the haven of senior command.

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Early next morning, before goodbye, I put on the regimental tie, albeit briefly. Not because I had to, but because I wanted to.

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The row with Russia



HARUN UR RASHID

BOTTOM LINE

Britain and Russia had been friendly during the days of Tony Blair. Observers say the new Prime Minister Brown, ill-advised by his Foreign Secretary David Miliband, within thirty days of his government, has picked an avoidable row with Russia. Did Britain gain anything? Many commentators answer in the negative, rather Britain has displayed its diplomatic immaturity and lost the clout as it will not be likely to have any influence for sometime on Russia on any subject of global importance. Diplomatically Britain is diminished.

because it causes similar symptoms to low-level thallium poisoning, so the cause of death is easy to misdiagnose.

It is alleged that a Russian Andrei Lugovoi had caused the death of Litvinenko during one of his visits to Litvinenko and Britain wants Lugovoi's extradition from Russia, although under Russian constitution, no citizen of Russia can be extradited. Russia obviously refused to hand over Lugovoi to the British authorities.

The reaction of Britain to refusal of Lugovoi, many commentators suggest, has been extreme in

diplomatic terms. It does not show maturity of traditional British diplomacy. It has been a knee-jerk reaction from Britain.

With the change of government in Britain at the end of June, Brown appointed a young man as Foreign Secretary (Foreign Minister), David Miliband (41). Like any other new government, Gordon Brown wants to show his cabinet ministers are different from those of Tony Blair. They think that Brown might have appointed Miliband because he was opposed to Blair's Iraq botched policy.

Diplomacy is a cool calculated waiting game and has to be purposeful for national interests. It cannot be rushed or pushed by threatening action or language. Miliband has recently made statements on Iran and Russia that visibly demonstrates his immaturity and brash style of diplomacy, according to observers. He could have easily made his outbursts in a diplomatic language. One can easily create diplomatic row but it takes time to heal the rift.

It seems that Gordon Brown made an error of judgment in selecting Miliband as foreign secretary. Many insiders say that if a young person had to be chosen, it was not Miliband but Douglas Alexander, current international development secretary who has been recently chosen for Brown's election campaign strategy. He is known to have the personality who can meet the challenge of modern day complexity of diplomacy with tact, calmness and persuasion.

What is the story of Litvinenko?

The story of Litvinenko is like peeling an onion, layer after layer unfolds about him. His story demonstrates the dynamics that have in

somewhat shown KGB agent's operations. KGB (now called FSB) is known to be the second best intelligence organisation after Israel's Mossad (Hebrew for Institute).

Litvinenko was a KGB agent and in his book, *Blowing Up Russia: The Secret Plot to Bring Back KGB Terror*, remembers the KGB not as a terror organisation but as a security force whose agents were "real heroes."

In August 1997, Litvinenko was transferred from an anti-terrorist unit to a secretive wing of FSB where he was asked reportedly to carry out extra-judicial killings, eventually his friend Berezovsky was the intended target. After complaining to his superiors and holding a press conference to expose this plot Litvinenko was jailed by the FSB on trumped-up charges (as he claims) and eventually fled to Britain.

There are competing theories about Litvinenko's death. The British story is one of them. There is speculation that he has been

blackmailing Moscow's business elite or that he was killed by Berezovsky to drum up support for his dissident group in London against Putin's regime in Russia. Many commentators refuse to accept that Moscow would order his death merely because he betrayed his superiors. Kremlin is too clever for