

Getting back smuggled out wealth and money

British assistance offer welcome

THE Anti-Corruption Commission's efforts to strike a deal with Scotland Yard to secure return of money and wealth stashed away abroad by suspected high profile corrupt Bangladeshis, with the famous law enforcement agency's help, have received an impetus. It came with British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury and Director for Asia at the UK Foreign and Commonwealth office John Dennis visiting the ACC chief and assuring him of continuing assistance in recovering smuggled wealth.

They will sign a treaty whereby a legal framework will be provided for the Yard's sustained assistance in helping us investigate trans-border financial crimes and secure return of the money having been illegally taken out of the country. The British dignitaries think if provided with specific and authentic information the assistance could materialise tangibly and meaningfully. Bangladesh had already received some of Scotland Yard's help in the investigation of bombing incidents and now they have offered to share their expertise in probing sophisticated financial crimes.

Cooperation with Great Britain would hopefully be followed up with new avenues opened to other countries, especially of the Commonwealth, for mutual assistance in recovering money laundered by top graft suspects. We should also seek the assistance of the USA, some other North American and European countries in an effort to get back stashed away money, if any. Our authorities are understandably in contact with Singapore and Malaysia where suspected ill-gotten money might have landed up.

At this stage, we need technical support and cooperation for the ACC's planned efforts for initiating a drive against institutional corruption likely to begin in December this year all over the country. It augurs well that some important foreign embassies and missions in Dhaka have expressed their willingness to come forward in extending a helping hand.

Pakistan scene

Horse-trading can't help democracy

PRESIDENT Pervez Musharraf crossed a legal hurdle when the Pakistani Supreme Court ruling on his bid to seek reelection went his way, but the General-turned-President's worries are yet to be over as his rivals look determined to thwart his plans. Eighty-five opposition MPs have resigned as part of their plan to oust Musharraf from the political arena.

Musharraf may have finally decided to give up the position of army chief as it appears by his naming a successor in former ISI chief Ashfaq Kiyani -- a move that might have given him a little more credibility to seek reelection. But he has made his stepping down as army chief contingent upon his reelection as president in a vote on Saturday. He has apparently been able to draw former prime minister Benazir Bhutto into a power-sharing deal; of course only after paying a heavy price for it. The former premier is likely to get graft amnesty when she returns home this month. The horse-trading has brought the two arch rivals together, confirming once more that politics can indeed be a strange proposition where the key players act more out of expediency than principle -- especially when individual interests seem to outweigh the collective ones. Musharraf's move might have been a clever one, but he has clearly violated his own avowed policy of giving 'corrupt elements' no place in politics. If graft charges against Benazir are withdrawn without her undergoing a legal process, it will set another bad example in Pakistan's politics. True, politics is not always guided by the principles that its major stakeholders often talk about, but some questions cannot be evaded. For Benazir, it may present an opportunity to stage a comeback, but should she be oblivious of the fact that she is striking a deal with the man who didn't allow her to return to Pakistan for so many years?

The latest developments are not a good omen for the future of democracy in Pakistan. It is the politicians who have been marginalised in this murky situation created by and large by their failure to keep politics under their control. If restoration of people's rule is what they are striving for, then they have to make politics a lot more transparent and not dominated by any individual's plan to perpetuate his or her rule.

If politics becomes a business where the leaders become more concerned about getting their share of the booty, it will be a serious setback to the political process. We want the people of Pakistan to win in their struggle for restoring democracy, but the politicians will have to play a united and assertive role to make this happen. Up till now, they have failed to neutralise Musharraf's plan to stay in power.

Likely attack on Iran?



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
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ALTHOUGH plans had been on the anvil for a strike against Iran at least since 2004, President Bush is still in a quandary over it.

Reportedly, the Bush administration had seriously considered this option but shelved it, only for the time being as experts aver. That the USAF set up a highly confidential strategic planning group by the name of "Project Checkmate" in June indicates that the option of air strikes on Iranian targets has not been forgotten.

While, so far, the likely targets in Iran were the 3 major nuclear sites, reportedly there has been a shift in US strategy, where Iran's Revolutionary Guards are now being listed as likely targets, their training, logistic depots, and command and control centers being the main focus. The change in tack is necessitated by the fact that the Bush administration hopes that the counter terrorism and "Iran in war against US" approach, rather than the nuclear threat from Iran, would at this moment appear more convincing and saleable to the American people.

The Iran attack option, in what-ever form, may seem obvious, but it is neither easy nor simple. It is not easy because evidently a ground offensive is out of the question, with nearly a quarter million of US forces engaged in Afghanistan and Iraq. And simple it isn't because Mr. Bush must find a "coalition of the willing" against Iran like he did with Iraq, to lend a moral shield to his actions. And an air strike has multiple ramifications, the least uncomfortable of which is that it may strengthen Iran's rationale for going nuclear even more.

And that is why Mr. Bush looking for allies to come on board.

It is, therefore, hard to believe that there is no connection between the currently exaggerated anti-Iran hype that was generated by the Bush administration in 2004 and the recent comments emanating from the French president as well its foreign minister that they are no longer willing to put up with a nuclear capable Iran.

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STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

Iran has been on the US radar screen since the threat of "Soviet expansionism" vanished with the demise of the Soviet Union, and as history records, US aversion to indigenous nationalism had made many countries who attempted to assert it, including Iran, US's targets. Thus, doctrinal adjustments were made in US policy, which reckoned increasingly non-soviet threats to US interest in the Middle East as its prime concern. And it is not too difficult to surmise who posed the major threat to its interest in the Middle East. That is why many observers, as far back as in the early nineties, had made a worst-case forecast of a war between Iran and US as being not impossible.

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The West, including the French, does not accept Iran's argument that its enrichment program is for

peaceful purposes, and that the worst option -- war -- may have to be adopted to see that Iran does not pose a threat to the region (read Israel). To many, the Bush administration is "recycling its hype over Hussein's supposed WMD threat into rhetoric about Iran, well aware of where the charade had got the US last time: tens of thousands of dead Iraqi civilians, a country teetering on civil war and increased global terrorism."

One

cannot say with certainty whether the French position indicates a marked change in the French foreign policy, as articulated by the newly elected French president vis-à-vis the Middle East, but that he is not willing to carry the baggage of his predecessor's Middle East policy, certainly Iran policy, is clear.

(Reportedly, France is contemplating rejoining the Nato Military Committee, which it left in 1966). The changed policy certainly shows in the French foreign minister's comments that there are but two alternatives -- allow Iran the bomb or bomb Iran. It also shows the stunning hypocrisy of the West, on two counts -- allowing Israel not only to possess the bomb, having helped it to produce about two hundred of them, but also, as recent report reveals, quite willing to allow Iran a 10% stake in the world's largest uranium enrichment plant in France (Iran has shares in Eurodif, an international enrichment plant at Pierrelatte in southern France).

And for France to posture as a protagonist of nuclear non-proliferation seems rather abject, given the French connection in developing Israel's nuclear bomb.

But coming as these statements do, at a time when reports and speculations abound regarding US preparation of taking on Iran physically if it did not rescind its uranium enrichment plans, one wonders whether the war drums are being beaten, only the world fails to take notice. Joining the US bandwagon may embolden the Bush administration in taking precipitate action against Iran, although some of its other European allies are more

cautious in their willingness to consider war against Iran a viable option, not to speak of the two other big powers Russia and China who do not only think that attacking Iran is a bad idea, they are also unwilling to endorse new sanctions on it, which the US and France are trying to slap on Iran.

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As for addressing what the US administration has claimed to be the root of all its troubles, "Iran's war" against the US in Iraq, very little conclusive evidence has been provided by the Bush administration of Iranian involvement against US troops. And as for Iranian support to various factions in Iraq a very weird situation exists. Those factions that Iran is involved with are those that support the Maliki government, which the US wants to not only survive but be strong enough to take on the security and administrative responsibilities of Iraq. It is convoluted logic to blame Iran for being not supportive enough on one hand and blame it for supporting those factions that are helping prop up the current Iraqi regime.

As for finding Iranian weapons in the hands of Iraqi factions, experts argue that there are variety of ways that such weapons could find their way into Iraq; these do not indicate a deliberate act on the part of the Iranians any more than the 190,000 American small arms gone missing indicate direction from the US administration.

Keeping the option on the back burner permanently is the best choice for Mr. Bush. Attacking Iran will be catastrophic. But the US cares very little for international opinion and is hardly worried about the possible diplomatic isolation it might face.

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Necessity and overkill



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

EN Mohammad Ayub Khan received the post of C-in-C Pakistan army in 1958 when he removed Iskandar Mirza as president, but remained in uniform as Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA), taking in 1962 the rank of Field Marshal (Field Marshals never retire).

He was elected president (obtaining 61%) by an electoral college of 40,000 Basic Democrats (40,000 each in East and West Pakistan) in a much-vilified contest against Madar-i-Millat Mohtarma Shirin Jinnah in 1964. Pervez Musharraf similarly on the verge of transition from military to civilian role, but the Electoral College is much smaller, about 700 or so parliament votes:

With the resignations of opposition MNAs/MPAs, this number (as well as the legitimacy of the elections thereof) has become even more minuscule. Since Ashfaq Kayani as the vice-chief army (to become COAS when Musharraf vacates the post) and Tariq Majeed as Chairman JCSC are to take over on Oct 8, Pervez Musharraf should fight the elections Ayub-like, without the army chief post, otherwise it creates a horrendous precedence.

To quote from an article by respected lawyer (and Tehrik-i-Insaf leader) Mr. Hamid Khan: "In

1954, with Justice Rashid retiring as CJ FCP, the obvious replacement was the senior-most judge, Justice Abu Saleh Muhammad Akram, a Bengali. The most powerful man in Pakistan since unceremoniously dismissing Khawaja Nazimuddin as prime minister and appointing Muhammad Ali Bogra in his place, Governor General (GG) Ghulam Muhammad was, luckily for Munir, an old friend belonging to his clan. The Central Law Ministry proposed that Pakistan, then being a British dominion, request the British government to nominate a Law Lord to act as CJ FCP on retirement of Justice Rashid. It was expected that Justice Akram, a true Pakistani and patriot, would not approve of this proposal. Akram asked the GG not to appoint a Britisher to head the judiciary because, he said, it was after a long struggle that we had gotten rid of

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