

Indigenous peoples need dignity and space

Australian apology to ethnic minority an eye-opener

CULTURAL diversity is one of the major ideas that underpin societies in our times. There is a growing acknowledgement worldwide of the traditional rights of indigenous communities, a point that has engaged the attention of such global bodies as the United Nations. The latest instance of how ethnic diversity constitutes a crucial component of national culture as well as global realities comes through the formal apology offered by the new Australian government of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to Australia's ethnic minority. Without question, the step takes Australia to a new path in politics because it formally endorses the idea of an inclusive society that will be the priority from here on.

Interestingly enough, indeed as a matter of coincidence, the issue of cultural and ethnic diversity is what we in Bangladesh have also been emphasising over the last many years. The most recent example of it has come through the launch on Wednesday of eleven books covering eleven ethnic communities and dealing with their customary laws vis-à-vis dispute resolution. The fact that there is now a growing recognition in Bangladesh that ethnic minorities matter, that indeed a democratic and secular dispensation is all about inclusivity, is an idea that cheers all of us. It is another way of saying that the stereotyped way in which cultural and other minorities have been looked upon so long will now need to make way for a more enlightened approach. It will just not do for us to ignore the long historical traditions that Bangladesh's indigenous people have been heir to. It is from such convictions that we think the publication of the books is a major step towards building a country where all citizens, across the board, will matter. The caveat, though, is that we cannot rest complacent on a mere recognition of ethnic rights. There must be follow-up action and that can only happen through making it possible for citizens from the ethnic groups to play their full role in the various sectors of society.

We, therefore, endorse the idea that the country's ethnic minorities need to be governed on the basis of their customs and social mores. That is the principle behind the publication of the books on Wednesday. And our endorsement is strongly based on the understanding that a composite culture is one which does not promote one group of people at the expense of another. By ensuring that indigenous Bangladeshis have space for themselves and enjoy full social, political and constitutional rights, we will only be promoting a greater sense of social cohesion amongst ourselves.

Spurt in criminal activities

Rein in the godfathers

IT is disconcerting to note the increase in criminal activities in Savar industrial area, so close to the capital. This is perhaps a reflection of the general trend of law and order, despite the state of emergency.

Savar industrial area has been targeted recently by the criminals who have, reportedly, broken-in several industries and factories in the area. There are also reports of attempts to break into other factories. This situation cannot be countenanced any longer. There is a palpable sense of insecurity amongst the industrialists, factory owners and workers, the repercussions of which are likely to be felt on the economy if the criminals are not brought to book immediately.

It appears that the criminals of the area have graduated from petty crimes to large scale break-ins and burglaries, the victims blaming the spurt in criminal activities on the failure of the law enforcing agencies. The views of the locals are worth taking into consideration. There is substance in the suggestion that there is a direct correlation between the recent release of some of the local goons and criminals from police custody and the upward trend in crimes in the area. The mobsters are on the loose once again, and are now operating in big groups, and well armed.

The disturbing aspect of the matter is that these criminals are thriving under the support and sponsorship of some local bigwigs wielding both political power and money, some of whom, reportedly, hold elected position in the local government set-up.

While the affected industrialists and other victims of the criminals say that they have lodged complaints with the Savar Police Station (PS), the OC says otherwise. We do not know what to make of this situation.

We grant that the law enforcing agencies are shorthanded. But the situation is not for the local PS alone to tackle. The police authorities must realise that Savar industrial area has grown into a large complex that holds a large number of important industries. The criminal acts, if allowed to go unchecked, will have a negative impact on the economy.

We feel that there is the need for the police and other law enforcing agencies to be more proactive and, without waiting for reports, should increase patrolling and other oversight activities not only to preempt the lawbreakers but also to apprehend the masterminds and godfathers of the criminals.

Winds of change



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

THE world is watching with great interest, and a degree of amazement, the presidential primaries now being fought by the contenders for party nomination of the Republicans and Democrats. The procedure being followed is complex, and the money (in millions of dollars) and energy spent would certainly satisfy many political scientists, for example German Jorgen Habermas, who says "the state's raison d'être does not lie primarily in the protection of equal individual rights but in the guarantee of an inclusive process of opinion-and-will formation in which free and equal citizens reach an understanding on which goals and norms lie in equal interest of all."

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On the Republican side, Mike Huckabee's win in the Southern states like Arkansas, Alabama etc. is because of the support received from deeply religious people (Huckabee is credited with favouring amendment of the First Amendment to the US Constitution regarding "respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free expression thereof" to accommodate the teachings of the Bible) and from the many who are not convinced of John McCain's credentials as a "true conservative."

Religion plays a great role in the US elections, as the world saw in 2004, where Evangelical and Pentecostal votes along with rural Christian support awarded Bush

the White House for the second time.

Just imagine John McCain, to prove his conservative credentials, chooses Huckabee, who was governor of Arkansas for a decade, as his running mate. The governors of US states do not formulate foreign policy, but the vice-president has a formidable role unless he is sidetracked by the president, as had happened several times in US history. Presidents like George W Bush, tend to keep company of the likes of Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, and Donald Rumsfeld, and draw inspiration from the likes of Irving Kristol.

The Doctrine of Preemption is regarded as a matter of divine right, and the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto Protocol should be subservient to US domestic laws regardless of the size of the hole in the ozone layer through emission of carbon dioxide gas into the atmosphere.

The Democrats, on the other hand, throw up Jack Kennedy and Bill Clinton and FDR, who did more good to the world than most others. Fortunately for the world, when

racism was running riot in the US and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was fighting for the rights of the black population in the US, the Universal Races Congress held in London in 1911 promoted "mono-genism" -- the idea that there was only one species of man living in the world today -- and the 1951 Unesco Statement of the Nature of Race and Racial Differences pointed out that race, even from a strict biological standpoint, could at most refer to groups with certain distinctive gene concentrations and mental characteristics, and should never be included in racial classifications. Development of intellect was more due to upbringing and environmental factors than inherited genes.

Except for the bigots, people throughout the world rejected segregation, a concept that had gone with the wind in South Africa, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and some states in the US deep south because, with only 13% African-American population, Barack Obama could not have achieved what he already has.

Being only 46 years old (McCain is 71 and Hillary is 60), perhaps

Obama can connect with the American youth more readily than the other contenders can. Both Clinton and Obama have a long way to go before one has the support of 2025 delegates to clinch the nomination, as opposed to McCain who is more or less certain to get the Republican Party's nomination.

This US presidential election is momentous because the Americans, for the first time, will have to decide whether they would like a woman or an African-American to be the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and the president of the country. Samuel Huntington, in his famous essay Clash of Civilisations, dwelling upon the identity of civilizations, mentioned Western, Japanese, Confucian, Chinese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and African civilizations. Should Barack Obama be elected president, his political identity will be that of an American, but will his cultural identity be American? If that be so, then why do the blacks prefer to call themselves African-American and trace their roots from Africa? Why cannot they call themselves Americans, and why does the census identify people as being of Asian, Latin, Chinese or Japanese origin?

In the ultimate analysis, the two most divisive factors in human interactions are politics and religion. Politicians, to get elected, appeal to tribal, regional, or religious affinity with the electorate for short-term expediency at the cost of igniting latent pride and prejudice among people, sometimes stoking irredentist tendency. In the case of religion, the conclusion

reached was that the Thirty Years War and the Treaty of Westphalia "was not the last of the great wars of religion" as thought by historian Webster, as the world is now being reminded on a daily basis as civilians are being killed and maimed in the name of religion.

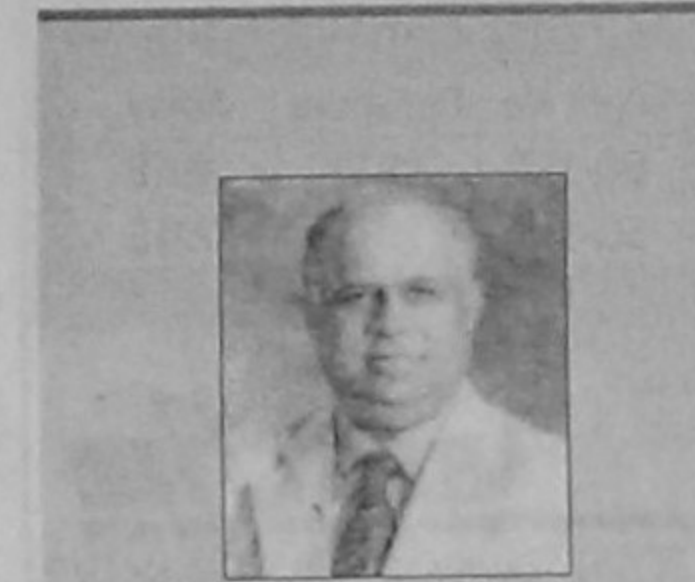
One wonders whether the present global turbulence could have been avoided had there not been a tectonic shift, described by Madeline Albright, in the US foreign and defense policy when administration changed hands from Bill Clinton to George W Bush, and had Bush's response to 9/11 been in accordance with the principle of proportionality as suggested by Professor Michael Walzer in Just and Unjust War.

While no US president can compromise on the question of security of the Americans, and John McCain has been quite explicit in his support for the "surge" of US soldiers in Iraq (he could hardly be expected to be critical of a sitting Republican president who by the way has endorsed McCain as a true conservative), many people including Americans and Europeans have started asking questions as to whether President Bush's strident policy of going it alone has made the world safer for them and their children.

Bangladesh and other developing nations tied to Western prosperity for their survival and future development have to keep close watch on the way global politics is evolving.

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The promise of October 12, 1999



IKRAM SEHGAL writes from Karachi

THE February 18 election is supposedly meant to provide a transition from an autocratic government to a more welcome democratic one. What a turnaround from October 12, 1999, when an autocratic regime was welcomed with great enthusiasm by the people of Pakistan on the overthrow of a democratic one. Less than a week before February 18, one should analyse why the expectations of the people in the great promise of October 12 were dashed, and what the future holds for Pakistan.

The seven-point agenda enunciated by Pervez Musharraf, on assuming power, included accountability of all those responsible for the economic and political straits Pakistan was in. Even with all the personality flaws in its senior hierarchy, the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) became an instant success in public perception.

Keeping the judiciary and military outside NAB's purview was a major mistake; it undermined the credibility of this great initiative; selective targeting further derailing the accountability process. Even after the political compromises of

AS I SEE IT

The army excels in "Lessons Learnt." Hopefully, it can take to heart what October 12 promised, and why we are on the edge of the precipice a 100 months later, on February 18. There are significant indications of change, and it is not all in the air. One must concede that in the last 3 months we are seeing a transformed army set on a course that gives us lingering hope that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

2002, NAB's success story remains a mixed bag.

Its real problems started with the plea-bargaining (PB) concept. Other than the sheer immorality of letting a thief go scot-free if he gave back part of the loot, PB was misused as blackmail by some in NAB to line their own pockets.

Very correctly NAB turned to "living beyond means" as the modus operandi to NAB the guilty; someone, someday should bring to book those former NAB officials living way beyond their means. The National Reconciliation Order (NRO), an open invitation to loot and plunder at will, hobbles NAB badly.

NAB's effectiveness could be further diminished after February 18. What is its future if the elected representatives set about dismantling the mechanism that targets their misdeeds and exists, even in shackles, as a deterrent against widespread corruption?

What about unmasking and prosecuting the corrupt in the military and the judiciary? The law must be fair in being applied equitably to all and sundry. While the fate of the superior judiciary will be decided by a future government, the judiciary itself has to put into place a self-cleansing process to

restore its credibility.

Similarly, the armed forces must also carry out accountability within its ranks, a credible process being a dire necessity to restore its image. Evidencing of white-collar crime requires unearthing of hidden off-shore companies and bank accounts, secret investments, and real-estate holdings in different names, and of money "invested" in stock exchanges and Dubai, through whom, etc.

The Manual of Pakistan Military Law (MPML) caters for prosecuting corruption, and professional (particularly forensic) help can be sought from NAB for bringing the culprits to justice. The anti-corruption campaign can be in phases; in the first phase the prosecutors must target only those in the period October 12, 1999 till date, those involved in crimes earlier than October 12, 1999 can wait their turn in later phases.

All developed countries require lobbyists to be registered, if their motives for lobbying are acceptable for good governance. But, if they are not known to the public they may cause for harm. In one well-known case post-1999, a senior minister actually pressured a financial institution that his lobbyist friend (who was bankrupt

not only be paid a heavy retainer but also be assured of re-scheduling/writing off all his debts.

Military procurement in every country requires, by law, that agents (or lobbyists) have to be registered by their principals, their commission (or service charge) being included and declared in the prices quoted. Any money received beyond that, and if received abroad, constitutes illegality.

The acid test for the present military hierarchy will be to apply the scalpel to the influential as a deterrent against bribery. Corruption in military purchases is not Pakistan-specific; it is rampant all over the world. The "Teelka" scam in India saw military officials being video-recorded while taking bribes.

However, in Pakistan not one arms or equipment agent has been successfully prosecuted, even with a wealth of evidence available. Influential agents (and their kin in government) ensure that it is taboo to talk about the siphoned-off millions of dollars in commissions.

Look at the F-16s and the French submarines deals; even though there is a wealth of documented evidence, those living on the French Riviera and Tuscany in Italy

off the fat of our land enjoy government patronage.

Defence Housing Authorities (DHAs) afford a clean, respectable, secure environment for our children to grow up in, providing for both education and leisure. Honest men like Maj Gen (Retd) Hedayetullah Khan (HUK) Niazi, the architect of what DHA Karachi is today (even though no one gave him the credit for the recently inaugurated power/desalination plant he initiated as far back as 1989), were an example to all, but what about "the untouchables" who give the DHAs (and by extension the whole military) a bad name by plot manipulations?

Some individuals have made billions in real estate transactions, it is well known! While Ashfaq Pervez Kayani is distancing the army from politics (and from the bureaucracy), he might also give priority to distancing the army from the undeserved perception of pervasive corruption. A stroke of the pen will "de-link" those (serving and retired) in proximity to Musharraf who still occupy semi-military offices of profit and are living symbols of corruption.

Our major problem is that intelligence reports are mostly fabricated and/or exaggerated. All those making false reports on motivated basis, either by official sanction or because of personal grudge and/or jealousy, must be prosecuted for their accusations and given the commensurate punishment their victims would have got if the reports were true.

Those who have served in the senior hierarchy of Frontier Works Organisation (FWO), National Logistics Cell (NLC), and other

semi-military departments, where white-collar crime is rumoured to be endemic, need to be cleared of accusations (even though most of it is undeserved).

FWO and NLC have done magnificent work in difficult areas where others could not even dare to go, but this is tarnished because of commercial activity in areas other than their primary mission.

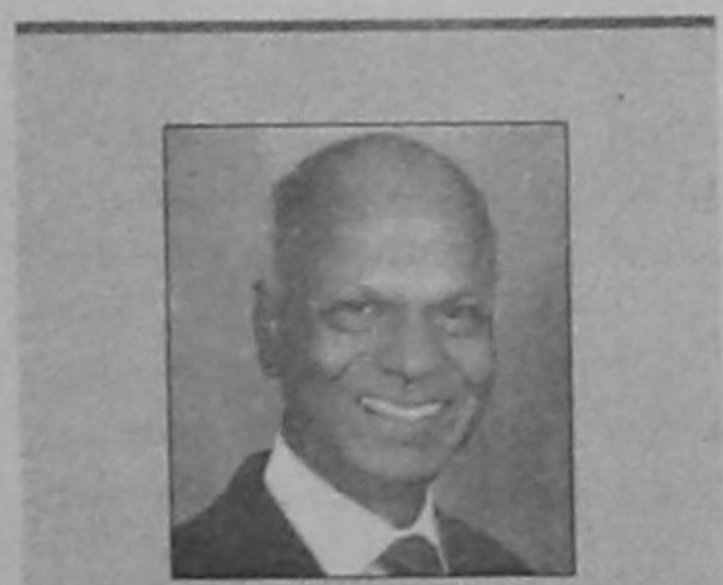
The corruption of a few reflects their lifestyles, is it fair that because of those individuals the public deems the whole military rank and file to be corrupt? More than 99% of the hard working, honest and highly professional cadre of the Pakistan army live and work in adverse conditions, but take the hit in public perception because of the avarice and greed of a handful. Why should the yoke of "military business" label be stuck around the neck of the army because of those who deserve to go to jail? Why should ammunition be given to our enemies, and those on their payroll, to embellish fact with fiction and convert fantasy into truth in public perception?

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Cross-border investment and sovereign wealth funds



CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM writes from Madrid

THE recent sub-prime mortgage market meltdown in the United States forced big investment banks like Merrill Lynch, Citibank, Morgan Stanley, etc. to announce massive write-downs, creating a huge crisis of confidence in the entire financial system.

Unfortunately, its ripple effects are still being felt across the world. In order to stabilise the Western banking system and to stave-off a looming recession, state-run investment funds from Asia and the Middle East pumped many billions of dollars into these ailing

LETTER FROM EUROPE

The questions that have been bothering the Western politicians are: What is it that drives the state-controlled investment funds from emerging countries to invest in the industrialised ones? Is it profit maximisation, prestige, access to advanced technology, or are there any ulterior motives like pursuing obscure geopolitical interests? Are they seeking a position of power to influence the world stage? Why don't they invest in their own countries?

institutions. Although this unexpected help in the form of much-needed cash came in very handy, it was received with misgivings about the investors' real intentions in certain quarters and brought the role of these investment funds under close scrutiny from Western politicians.

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In essence, thrift is what motivated the establishment of the first state-run investment funds. The idea was to put away a share of today's earnings or excess revenues from diminishing natural resources for a possible rainy day. They functioned very much like Revenue Equalisation Reserves or Stabilisation Funds.

Sovereign wealth funds run by

some of the oil-rich Middle Eastern countries are good examples of this type of funds. Some Asian countries like China and South Korea have accumulated huge current account surpluses in United States dollars from their very successful export-based economies. Most of these reserves are kept in low-yielding American Treasury bills and other bonds. The rest is managed through sovereign wealth funds, which invest the money in riskier foreign assets with the apparent objective of earning higher returns.

The total amount of potential

cash flow is significant. According to reliable estimates, although the sovereign wealth funds are now worth approximately \$3 trillion, by 2015 they may grow to \$12 trillion or more.

China currently holds nearly \$1.4 trillion in foreign exchange reserves. One of the reasons why China's foreign exchange reserves are so high is because it has been buying US dollars to keep the value of the Yuan relatively low, or at least try to slow the rise of its currency against the United States dollar, the currency of its most important customer. If China wants to invest its reserves inside the country, it will be forced to sell dollars and buy the Yuan, which will inevitably push up the value of the Yuan. This policy, if adopted, will defeat the purpose of building up the reserves in the first place.

According to Jesse Wang, a senior Chinese government official, China wants to acquire "a broad portfolio of small stakes (minority stakes) in lots of companies, instead of purchasing con-

trolling stakes in a few companies." He insisted that China was not pursuing any political agenda. Although the managers of other Asian and Middle Eastern funds have also issued similar statements, the fact remains that someone who invests such huge amounts of money in foreign countries inevitably acquires a position of influence on the world stage.

The West has often accused the emerging countries of practising protectionism, and insisted on the free movement of capital as an essential prerequisite for economic development. But now it seems that the West is veering towards protectionism. At the insistence of the Bush administration, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are critically examining the role played by these funds. They have also been asked to develop a code of "best practices" for these funds, like giving an undertaking never to speculate in currencies, as Soros did on the British pound in the early 1990s, and not to pursue national political

agendas through their investments.

Some politicians are even asking for binding regulations to include "mandatory, audited disclosures of the funds' holdings, reciprocity for American investors and caps on the share of any one company that a government investor may buy." The managers of the sovereign funds are, of course, not willing to sign a code of conduct on a unilateral basis. They think that "it is hypocritical of the West to demand regulations when the failure to regulate American and European banks and hedge funds has led to a global economic crisis" in the first place.

Some have even suggested that it would be perfectly legitimate on the part of the Asian funds to want the Western nations to abide by certain rules of conduct as far as good governance is concerned. After all, until now, when the capital used to flow from the West to the East, it was always tied to undertakings given by the developing countries to follow the rules and regulations laid down by the West.

There should not be any doubts about the overall benefit generated by cross-border investment. It "helps the world economy adjust to imbalances and give countries stakes in each other's prosperity." One should also give due consideration to Western concerns about these investments and the West's insistence on a code of conduct for these funds.

Until now, the international financial system has been controlled by Western-dominated financial institutions like the IMF, the World Bank and the G-7. It is evident that they are no longer capable of governing the "emerging 21st century world order." The West must accept this fact. The time has come for nations from the East and the West to overhaul the post World War II financial system, first by giving due representation to countries from Asia, Africa and South America and then by developing a fair international code of conduct for all nations.

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