

## CA's address strikes a defining note

*Concentrate on the dialogue to maximise dividends from it*

**G**IVEN our context, marked by the political parties aiming to secure maximum fulfillment of their demands, the interim government in a naturally probing, cautious mode, and the people expectantly awaiting an accelerated journey to democracy, the chief adviser's address to the nation was indeed set against a daunting backdrop.

From this standpoint, and read between the lines, his speech should actually go down well for the positive elements it contained, even though it would have been ideal had he come out with a definitive promise for withdrawal of emergency.

The chief adviser has set the date for elections, subject only to finalisation by the EC, he has allowed indoor politics throughout the country, subject to certain preconditions, and in concrete terms, he has set the date for dialogue with the political parties to begin on May 22.

So, we have two tangible things to concentrate on and apply our minds to: first, the indoor politics; and second, the dialogue process.

Political parties have been complaining of the restrictions on politics leaving no room for them whatsoever to have interactions within the parties, as well as between them, to respond to the demands for intra-party reforms as well as electoral and political reforms. Now that fetter is gone for the political parties to activate themselves. And to be sure, this is hardly a stage at which political parties should feel the need for taking out processions or staging rallies.

What is the dialogue for? The answer obviously is free, fair, and credible elections. Just as the government and the EC have their responsibilities in carrying forward the task, so also the political parties have their very important share as participants in making it all happen.

People expect of the political parties to guarantee that use of black money and muscle power will not be resorted to any more and that effective and sustainable democracy will be at work.

Yes, the chief adviser has not readily responded to some of the demands of the major political parties and may have even initiated some new ideas, but these do not come through as an imposition or a dictate by any sensible interpretation.

Indeed, his approach does not preclude a discussion on the entire gamut of issues, as is borne out by the emphasis he lays on dialogue with the political parties as a vehicle for resolution of differences. His very urging for national consensus rules out any possibility of dictating terms to any partner to a dialogue.

Without being obsessed with the shortcomings of his speech, the political parties should concentrate on its positive aspects to bring about the election that the people are so eagerly awaiting.

## Earthquake casualties in China

*We appreciate the handling of the crisis by Beijing*

**T**HE magnitude of the earthquake in China has shocked people everywhere. With reports coming in of 8,500 people, perhaps more, dead and as many as 10,000 others badly injured from a tremor on a Richter scale of 7.8, we can only imagine the terrible destruction that such a disaster can have brought about. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao has described it as a major disaster, a view that we fully share. In such circumstances, it becomes the responsibility of the Beijing authorities to go full steam into the job of ensuring the rehabilitation of those affected by the earthquake. It appears, happily for everyone, that such measures have already been taken by the authorities, with the result that the risks of a bigger fallout from the earthquake have been appreciably minimised. This is in contrast to the slow, rather indifferent approach taken by the Myanmar authorities towards tackling the consequences of the recent cyclone in their country.

In recent times, natural disasters appear to have taken a wholly new dimension. Of late, there have been no fewer than four tornadoes occurring in the United States. Severe storms have lashed regions in South America and typhoons have hit coasts in Asia. We in Bangladesh have been regular witness to some of the most horrifying natural calamities, with cyclones and typhoons, to say nothing of floods, battering the country. Severe rains have laid whole villages and towns waste in a number of countries. It all goes to show the general, indeed serious changes that have been coming into the global climate system over the years. Of course, earthquakes generally fall outside such a system of worrying change. But what is important here is that the recent disasters in terms of floods, cyclones and typhoons are a warning about further dangers to the eco system. These warnings need to be taken seriously.

Our sympathies go out to the families of those who have perished in the earthquake in China and also to those who have survived the crisis. We also appreciate the disciplined way in which the Chinese authorities have been dealing with the crisis.

# Our citizens abroad -- harassed, hounded and humiliated

## GROUND REALITIES

**While you deal with that question, turn your gaze on the manifestly crude behaviour that the authorities of the host country have been demonstrating toward these workers. These workers are being herded up and carried off to deportation camps, from where they will be put on flights back home.**



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

**P**OLICEMEN in Saudi Arabia have been tearing up work-related documents of Bangladeshi migrant workers in that country. And they have been doing that without any thought to the predicament such action can and will cause to these hapless people. That is impunity of the highest order, especially when you think of the sheer high-handedness of people who are unwilling to abide by norms, by the general standards of civilised behaviour we expect from governments everywhere. And then there are the many instances in which Bangladeshi workers have been and are being mistreated in Malaysia, with really no one to speak up for them.

You could now fall back on the cliché of informing us that the problem has really to do with the state of our economy. After all, a nation that ekes out a bare existence and cannot do without the remittances of its citizens slaving away from dawn to dusk in foreign lands must pay the price for its poverty. That is the argument, albeit a spurious one, you can make as a way of

explaining away the misery that has been descending on our people in Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and other places around the globe.

We do not buy that argument, because it is a spurious one. Now, when you consider what has been happening to Bengalis in Saudi Arabia, you will agree that some of them may have been working on fake visas or on documents the validity of which has expired. If the Saudi authorities had told us that such has, indeed, been the reality and that they are cracking down on the law-breakers among Bengali workers, we would have stayed quiet. But that is not what has been happening. We were told not long ago that Bengalis are engaging in criminal activities, which is why the law is being applied to them. Are we to suppose that all of our citizens have suddenly turned to criminality in Saudi Arabia?

While you deal with that question, turn your gaze on the manifestly crude behaviour that the authorities of the host country have been demonstrating toward these workers. These workers are being herded up and carried off to deportation camps, from where they will be put on flights back home. And

what is not being done by the police is ensuring the provision of an opportunity for these poor, helpless individuals to come up with documentary evidence that they are a peaceful lot engaged in lawful employment, that they have employers who can speak for them.

But nothing of this has made sense for the authorities in Saudi Arabia. We understand that our adviser for foreign affairs has been soliciting the chance of a trip to Saudi Arabia for quite sometime, without the Saudis making any response. So much for diplomatic niceties on the part of the Riyadh authorities. But that is not really the point. The point is simply this, in the form of a question: to what extent has our Foreign Office taken up the issue of the mistreatment of Bengali workers in Saudi Arabia? You can expand that query to include the misery Bengalis have been experiencing in Malaysia, South Korea and other places.

In circumstances where your own nationals are made the target of ridicule and outright humiliation (as in Saudi police tearing up the documents of your workers), it is expected that your government will, as they say, rise to the occasion and

come forth to demand an explanation from those busily going about harassing your people. There is something of self-esteem that matters in life, for the individual as also for the society or nation he is part of. In these past few decades, or so it appears, the dignity or self-esteem of this nation has been on a slide. And who do we blame for it? Let it suffice for now to suggest that had we had the confidence, had we been supremely self-assured about our place in the global scheme of things, matters would not have come to this pass for us.

Recall the old days, when Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman brushed aside King Faisal's questions about the dismemberment of Pakistan (and that was in 1973) with the indifference, even contempt, it deserved. He told off Nigeria's Yakubu Gowon when the latter mused aloud about a weakened Pakistan after 1971. And then there was Tajuddin Ahmed, to keep us anchored to the thought that we had it in us to climb the peaks without the assistance of those who had done everything they could to prevent our rise as a free nation. Abdus Samad Azad and Kamal Hossain, as the earliest of

our foreign ministers, strode across the world stage letting everyone know we had arrived.

But that is all in the past. Things do not happen that way any more. With so many of our pre-eminent citizens regularly and happily agreeing to be guests of the Saudi government, on hajj or umrah, something of dignity appears to get compromised. With all that chunk of money coming in as remittances from the Middle East and the Far East, to say nothing of the various forms of dole we have by now become accustomed to, we are not sure if we should raise our collective voice against the patently obtuse behaviour of others toward our people.

With so many among us eager to get our hands on camel meat coming from the desert kingdom every year on Eid-ul-Adha, there is a distinctive slicing away of our self-respect. And that is not all. Here in the country, the freedom and sometimes arrogance with which representatives of the donor agencies often upbraid our government and our politicians about what we need to do to improve (?) the quality of our lives leave us all outraged. And they do that because we give these people the opportunity to proffer advice we can do without. Why must our media people, for no credible reason, ask a foreign diplomat what he thinks of the next elections or of the level of corruption in the country? What is it in us, in our administration, that makes us believe a visiting junior official from a developed nation merits meetings with

everyone who matters in the Bangladesh government hierarchy? The fault, Sir (with apologies to Shakespeare and Brutus), is not in our stars, but in ourselves that we are thus laid low. This business of our harassed citizens in Saudi Arabia calls for a firm response from the Foreign Office. We are not aware of the Saudi ambassador here being summoned to Shegun Bagicha to be informed of our sense of outrage. And we are still in the dark about the way our High Commission in Kuala Lumpur has handled, or not handled at all, the matter of our exploited migrant workers there.

Foreign policy is much more than a mouthful of platitudes. It encompasses areas where the interests of your nation are constantly monitored and endlessly upheld, and not just abroad. Here, within the country, it becomes the responsibility of the administration to inquire into the pretty serious matter of whether or not certain foreign governments, through their diplomats, may be energetically engaged in spurring our indigenous communist fringes into action against such enlightened moves as equal rights for women and demands for a trial of the war criminals of 1971. You know, you just might strike gold, or ferret out the truth.

Is our diplomatic structure morally strong enough and intellectually self-assured to do the job?

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## The rise of the rest



FAREED ZAKARIA  
writes from Washington

**A**mericans are glum at the moment. No, I mean really glum. In April, a new poll revealed that 81 percent of the American people believe that the country is on the "wrong track." In the 25 years that pollsters have asked this question, last month's response was by far the most negative. Other polls, asking similar questions, found levels of gloom that were even more alarming, often at 30- and 40-year highs. There are reasons to be pessimistic: financial panic and looming recession, a seemingly endless war in Iraq, and the ongoing threat of terrorism. But the facts on the ground -- unemployment numbers, foreclosure rates, deaths from terror attacks -- are simply not dire enough to explain the present atmosphere of malaise.

American anxiety springs from something much deeper, a sense that large and disruptive forces are coursing through the world. In almost every industry, in every aspect of life, it feels like the patterns of the past are being scrambled. "Whirl is king, having driven out

**In America, we are still debating the nature and extent of anti-Americanism. But while we argue over why they hate us, "they" have moved on, and are now far more interested in other, more dynamic parts of the globe. The world has shifted from anti-Americanism to post-Americanism.**

Zeus," wrote Aristophanes 2,400 years ago. And -- for the first time in living memory -- the United States does not seem to be leading the charge. Americans see that a new world is coming into being, but fear it is one being shaped in distant lands and by foreign people.

In America, we are still debating the nature and extent of anti-Americanism. One side says that the problem is real and worrying and that we must woo the world back. The other says this is the inevitable price of power and that many of these countries are envious -- and vaguely French -- so we can safely ignore their griping. But while we argue over why they hate us, "they" have moved on, and are now far more interested in other, more dynamic parts of the globe. The world has shifted from anti-Americanism to post-Americanism.

### The end of Pax Americana

During the 1980s, when I would visit India -- where I grew up -- most Indians were fascinated by the United States. Their interest, I have to confess, was not in the important power players in Washington or the great intellectuals in Cambridge.

People would often ask me about... Donald Trump. He was the very symbol of the United

States: brassy, rich, and modern. He symbolized the feeling that if you wanted to find the biggest and largest anything, you had to look to America. Today, outside of entertainment figures, there is no comparable interest in American personalities. If you wonder why, read India's newspapers or watch its television. There are dozens of Indian businessmen who are now wealthier than the Donald. Indians are obsessed by their own vulgar real estate billionaires. And that newfound interest in their own story is being replicated across much of the world.

How much? Well, consider this fact. In 2006 and 2007, 124 countries grew their economies at over 4 percent a year. That includes more than 30 countries in Africa. Over the last two decades, lands outside the industrialized West have been growing at rates that were once unthinkable. While there have been booms and busts, the overall trend has been unambiguously upward. Antoine van Agtmael, the fund manager who coined the term "emerging markets," has identified the 25 companies most likely to be the world's next great multinationals. His list includes four companies each from Brazil, Mexico, South Korea, and Taiwan; three from India, two from China, and

one each from Argentina, Chile, Malaysia, and South Africa. This is something much broader than the much-ballyhooed rise of China or even Asia. It is the rise of the rest of the world.

We are living through the third great power shift in modern history. The first was the rise of the Western world, around the 15th century. It produced the world as we know it now: science and technology, commerce and capitalism, the industrial and agricultural revolutions. It also led to the prolonged political dominance of the nations of the Western world. The second shift, which took place in the closing years of the 19th century, was the rise of the United States. Once it industrialized, it soon became the most powerful nation in the world, stronger than any likely combination of other nations. For the last 20 years, America's superpower status in every realm has been largely unchallenged. Something that's never happened before in history, at least since the Roman Empire dominated the known world 2,000 years ago. During this Pax Americana, the global economy has accelerated dramatically. And that expansion is the driver behind the third great power shift of the modern age: the rise of the

rest.

At the military and political level, we still live in a unipolar world. But along every other dimension -- industrial, financial, social, cultural -- the distribution of power is shifting, moving away from American dominance. In terms of war and peace, economics and business, ideas and art, this will produce a landscape that is quite different from the one we have lived in, until now none defined and directed from many places and by many peoples.

The post-American world is naturally an unsettling prospect for Americans, but it should not be. This will not be a world defined by the decline of America but rather the rise of everyone else. It is the result of a series of positive trends that have been progressing over the last 20 years, trends that have created an international climate of unprecedented peace and prosperity.

I know. That's not the world that people perceive. We are told that we live in dark, dangerous times. Terrorism, rogue states, nuclear proliferation, financial panics, recession, outsourcing, and illegal immigrants all loom large in the national discourse. Al Qaeda, Iran, North Korea, China, Russia are all threats in some way or another. But just how violent is today's world, really?

A team of scholars at the University of Maryland has been tracking deaths caused by organized violence. Their data show that wars of all kinds have been declining since the mid-1980s

and that we are now at the lowest levels of global violence since the 1950s. Deaths from terrorism are reported to have risen in recent years. But on closer examination, 80 percent of those casualties come from Afghanistan and Iraq, which are really war zones with ongoing insurgencies and the overall numbers remain small. Looking at the evidence, Harvard's polymath professor Steven Pinker has ventured to speculate that we are probably living "in the most peaceful time of our species' existence."

Why does it not feel that way? Why do we think we live in scary times? Part of the problem is that as violence has been ebbing, information has been exploding. The last 20 years have produced an information revolution that brings us news and, most crucially, images from around the world all the time. The immediacy of the images and the intensity of the 24-hour news cycle combine to produce constant hype. Every weather disturbance is the "storm of the decade." Every bomb that explodes is BREAKING NEWS. Because the information revolution is so new, were reporters, writers, readers, viewers are all just now figuring out how to put everything in context.

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# Pakistan's new tack on fighting terror

**So long as it is not accompanied by irretrievable losses in the interim -- through the discharge of terrorists in custody for example -- it promises the recovery of legitimacy for national counterterrorism efforts. This is essential if the Pakistani government is compelled to change tack in the future and resort to the use of force.**

ASHLEY J. TELLIS

**W**HILE the election of a civilian government in Islamabad has been universally welcomed as part of Pakistan's democratic transition, the new government's approach to counterterrorism has evoked misgivings in Washington. Reacting to what is viewed as President Pervez Musharraf's US-backed militarised effort to defeat terrorism, the elected government headed by Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani has sought a more balanced policy, combining force with a "civil dialogue" with misled extremists. Instead of dismissing this as yet another bound-to-fail approach, Washington should be patient and let Gillani recover the legitimacy of Pakistan's counterterrorism policy.

Memories of Musharraf's earlier failed "peace accords" lead many to fear that Gillani's call for dialogue would only end up help-

ing terrorist groups to recover, regroup and reararm. That could well be the case, but before drawing any strong conclusions, several dimensions of Pakistan's new counterterrorism policy deserve careful attention.

Although the effort at negotiating with insurgent groups has been advertised as a bold policy departure by the new regime in Islamabad -- Gillani called it fighting terrorism "our way" -- it is not unprecedented. The Gillani government is quick to point out that the new approach has three important differences from Musharraf's abortive attempts: To begin, "no talks will be held with anyone refusing to lay down arms." Further, negotiations will be conducted only with entities capable of being reconciled, and not with those whom the distinguished Pakistani diplomat Tanvir Ahmad Khan has aptly labeled "eternal warriors." Finally, negotiations

would involve neither the release of terrorist detainees nor the permanent abdication of force should discussions fail.

Gillani, in effect, thus seeks to drive a wedge between the inveterate terrorists and their tribal supporters. This particular effort may not succeed, but the campaign against terrorism will surely fail if, together with political reforms and economic assistance, it is not tried.

Although negotiating with dissatisfied groups is also packaged as if it represents a fresh unified approach, the "civil dialogue" in fact covers separate discussions with different insurgents conducted by various state actors, such as the central government, the provincial administrations, the Pakistan army or the Inter-Services Intelligence agency. These colloquies have diverse lineages; a few are new and owe their existence to the new governing coalition in Islamabad or the new Awami

National Party-led provincial administration in Peshawar, but most are much older and predate the 2008 elections.

Thus, for example, the Pakistan army has long been involved in negotiations with key insurgent groups in an effort to retrieve personnel captured at the Razmak and Latha Forts in South Waziristan. A similar effort, aimed at splitting the extremists who operate in the tribal and settled areas, has been underway in the North West Frontier Province. The only negotiation owed entirely to the present government is perhaps the recent release of the Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi leader Sufi Mohammad, though this may be a prelude to new peace agreements sought for South Waziristan and Baluchistan.

Although the government's emphasis on "civil dialogue" thus suggests some grand new initiative, it is for most part really a continuation of previous negotiations proceeding more or less independently.

Finally, the emphasis on negotiations, though viewed as an innovation of the new civilian government, is favoured most of all by the Pakistan army, including the Chief

of Army Staff, General Parvez Kayani. US skeptics of the Gillani regime sometimes overlook this crucial point.

Thanks to eight years of brutal counterterrorism operations, the Pakistani army today is a weary, spent force and the focused target of terrorist attacks. Losing hundreds of soldiers in what are widely viewed as futile military operations, losing standing in the eyes of its own populace, and at risk of losing its clarity of purpose due to its unpopular involvement in "Washington's war," the Pakistani army leadership currently is driving the momentum for dialogue to both buy itself time to recuperate from the stresses of operational employment and recover the national support necessary for the military's survival as an institution.

The new interest in negotiations, therefore, derives not from woolly-minded civilians but rather from the most powerful institution within the Pakistani state, and one that US policymakers acknowledge as their most critical partner in the war on terror.

These realities taken together imply that Washington ought to be patient with the new civilian

regime in Islamabad. The emphasis on dialogue with extremist groups no doubt embodies significant risks, including the prospect that terrorist groups could use the breathing space offered by negotiations to prepare for renewed conflict or to secure the release of extremists in custody, or trade their restraint in mounting attacks within Pakistan for increased violence against Afghanistan, India and the United States. Any of these potential hazards would not only undermine Pakistan's own long-term security but also put at risk its critical relationships with key international partners.

Thankfully, the Gillani government understands these hazards. But, it recognises equally well that however unnerving these possibilities may be, the dangers to the larger war on terror will be immeasurably greater if the Pakistani polity as a whole does not commit itself wholeheartedly to this struggle. Measured dialogue under strict conditions is thus seen as part of a larger strategy for securing the legitimacy that Musharraf's anti-terrorism efforts unfortunately lacked.

The new democratic dispensation in Islamabad thus offers the

US renewed opportunity to transform Pakistan from being a reluctant ally in the war on terror into an active collaborator determined to defeat those terrorists whom Musharraf deliberately overlooked. To enable Islamabad to pursue such a course, however, the US must respect and strengthen Pakistani democracy just as much as it seeks to encourage active Pakistani involvement in combating terrorism. A strategy obsessed with the latter and neglectful of the former will end up losing on both counts.

The US should, therefore, afford the prime minister the latitude to define his own approach to counterterrorism so that the corrosive canard propagated by the radicals -- that the war on terror is nothing other than an imperial, anti-Muslim crusade -- can be undermined. Recriminations about Islamabad's evolving engagement strategy are not helpful. Instead, the US must quietly hold the Gillani administration to implementing its own vision of how the "civil dialogue" would differ from Musharraf's ill-fated peace accords of earlier years.

If the new emphasis on dialogue produces agreements that are

transparent and enforceable, results in either the ejection or the surrender of hardened extremists both domestic and foreign, precludes the release of terrorists already in Pakistani custody, and aids the integration of dissatisfied tribal groups through laying down of arms and returning to traditional society, it could contribute more to the success of counterterrorism than some of the kinetic operations conducted by the Pakistani military over the years.

While success in this endeavour is by no means guaranteed, the effort itself is necessary at this point in Pakistan's political evolution. So long as it is not accompanied by irretrievable losses in the interim -- through the discharge of terrorists in custody for example -- it promises the recovery of legitimacy for national counterterrorism efforts. This is essential if the Pakistani government is compelled to change tack in the future and resort to the use of force.

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