

The reforms must not fail

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WHEN a columnist writes under the caption, "Will repair do more damage?" (The Daily Star-June 13) and concludes, "Time will tell that when we restore democracy, we shall plant the seed of disruption" - he speaks the heart of many.

The political Fahrenheit is on the rise immediately, clouding the promised reforms and anti-corruption drive. God only knows who has invented this dialogue business. Many of the advisers are behaving more like members of a 'Dialogue Commission' than as responsible ministers of the government. If the compulsion of dialogue was so overpowering why was it not started immediately upon forming the government? Is the dialogue to charter a whitewash of past politics in more subtle ways abandoning the suffering people where they were before?

Release of former PM on parole for treatment abroad is a welcome development. I have all respect and sympathy for the unfortunate lady; she has gone through many tragedies in life. She reached Boston on a private visit to meet her only son. Surprisingly, the Bangladesh Ambassador to Washington was there to receive her. What demanded him to travel 450 miles from his duty station to receive a person on parole is not clear! Unfortunately, many top bureaucrats, diplomats and other professionals continu-

ously flout service ethics for personal favour. They reach the top echelon through corrupt practice and the backdoor. In any other country such violation of protocol would have resulted in severe punishment.

While civil/military professions are littered with casualties of men of honour and dignity, violation of law or professional ethics is a sure way of climbing professional ladder in Bangladesh. I recall an excellent military professional sidelined for life for refusing to give unauthorised protocol in a foreign capital to a relative of a political bigwig.

Before she departed, four advisers publicly visited Sheikh Hasina at her residence, and the chief adviser had telephone conversation with her. Her hectic post-release activity suggested that she is still physically stout. As a result the rumour mills are abuzz to suggest that she is the next prime minister of Bangladesh. If that is so, what was all this drama of long custody and trial about? Now that the highest protocol has been offered, have not the courts been prejudiced to adjudicate on the pending cases?

The custody of another former PM and her sons are also linked to the political environment by the hyperactive advisers. I am afraid people will conclude that both, taking them into custody and the cases, were fabricated if they are released without completion of the cases. It is vexing to see the trend of imperial politics still continuing in Bangladesh.

For a variety of natural calamities and poor management, people are passing through extreme hardship. Even under better management of resources when such a massive war is waged against corruption and abuse of power, paying the price is but part of the deal. The suffering of the people has multiplied due to the lack of understanding of the dire needs of the people by the market gurus in the government. The top agenda and the bottom-line of the society could not be harmonized for lessening the suffering.

The tragedy of democracy in Bangladesh is that it nearly always asked for remedy from an unexpected source. Two years were gracefully accepted by the people as a reasonable time to accomplish political reform and anticorruption drive. How are people going to take the fact of Mr. X going unpunished while Mr. Y gets the full dose of punishment? Why should forest boss Osman Gani rot in jail when so many Osman Ganis are still enjoying luxuries of life from ill-gotten wealth? The raison d'être of the present CTG is in the accomplishment of the mission - not merely in the attempt only. The failure will not admit of any excuse; infringement of the constitution is already on the court's agenda; after the shield of emergency is lifted who shoulders the blame?

The tectonic fault of democracy in Bangladesh is the bureaucratic administration in divisions, districts and upajillas that deny strong connections with the people and opportunity to the grassroots. Unless democratic

foundations are laid in upajilla, districts and divisional administrations, election for national legislature will be like building a castle without a foundation that will keep collapsing under its own weight. People have no trust left on political governments for these vitally important reforms and elections.

Every birth has its pangs, natural or caesarean; circumstances dictate the rest. We are at a crossroad. Nobody could imagine in the chaotic days of 2006 that Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed would emerge with an agenda. If there is no reform, God only knows what will spring out from the unfathomed. The vested interests, wishing the reforms to fail, can't guarantee that the politics will once again not move towards anarchy.

Violence and corruption fertilise the terrorist outfit that believe in guns rather than the power of the people. When a terminally sick society is offered no remedy, it is naturally drawn to the quacks. French and Bolshevik revolutions or any earthshaking events of history tell - corruption is the rotting process and poverty is the wrecker of a society. How long Bangladesh can possibly remain adrift without getting into further trouble is a matter of serious concern for the nation-builders and friends. When hunger snarls to eat democracy is afraid to exist.

With so much of corruption, poverty and unemployment Bangladesh will remain vulnerable to terrorism. One Bangla Bhai dead doesn't assure that many aren't waiting. We must quickly build the political and economic



health of the nation to avoid extremism. The proactive segment of the society must be engaged in upajilla, district/divisional governments to deny space for gun-barrel politics. Thirty-seven years of drifting

into dirty politics must come to an end. Vitally important reforms are a silent revolution to avoid the rumblings of a noisy one. If the chief and his team fail, the nation will feel sorry for the brilliant sons but the mission

must be accomplished.

After sustained frustration of war on terror and the toll of ongoing recession if Obama is chosen by the Democrats for the final assault for the Whitehouse to turn around, it is also time for

a change in Bangladesh. If the pre-liberation generation fails to deliver people have the right to demand an Obama to shoulder the responsibility.

The author is a freelancer.

US air strike on Pakistan

BILLY AHMED

IN a new escalation of US-Pakistan tensions, on June 11, a US air strike was performed in the Mohmand tribal region in the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA), which is in south western Pakistan bordering Afghanistan.

Pentagon officials said two US F-15E fighter-bombers and a B-1 bomber had dropped a dozen bombs, mostly 500-pound laser-guided munitions, on the location killing eleven soldiers, including

Daily Times the Afghan army, backed by US forces, tried to set up a post inside Pakistani territory but retreated on the Frontier Force's request.

Anti-US militants then attacked the Afghan troops, who called for US air cover, the official said on condition of anonymity. US forces then bombed the area relentlessly, he said. Pakistani military spokesman Major General Athar Abbas said US-led forces provided air support to the Afghan soldiers. "We believe it was a deliberate act of aggression," he

very basis of cooperation and sacrifice with which Pakistani soldiers are supporting the coalition in the war against terror."

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani condemned the attack in the parliament, saying: "We will take a stand for sovereignty, integrity and self-respect and we will not allow our soil to be attacked."

The PPP-led coalition government issued a formal protest to Washington, with a Foreign Ministry statement declaring the "senseless use of air power against

the incident would not cause Pakistan to reconsider its relationship with Washington, "but rather find ways of improving that partnership."

The bombing came as the Bush administration and the Pentagon stepped up their expressions of displeasure at the Pakistani government's efforts to strike a peace deal with the Taliban groups that have built up their influence along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

The Washington Post reported that Admiral Michael Mullen, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff warned on June 10 that "the Al-Qaeda threat from Pakistan" represented a "huge challenge for the United States" and that "Pakistan has been lacking in its execution of a strategy to eradicate the safe havens for terrorists and insurgents."

According to The Washington Post, Pakistani ambassador Haqqani admitted the US administration had warned his government that "if the United States suffers an attack that is traced back to Pakistan, Washington will have to take steps to retaliate". Haqqani added: "We want to make sure that it doesn't come to that."

The attack on the Pakistan border post came just two days after the Rand Corporation, a Washington think-tank, issued a report echoing Admiral Mullen's demands. The document, titled "Counter-insurgency in Afghanistan," stated that if Taliban bases in Pakistan were not removed, the forces supporting the government of Afghan President Hamid Karzai "will face crippling long-term consequences in their effort to stabilise and rebuild Afghanistan."

The US is facing a deepening crisis in Afghanistan. Its puppet regime of Hamid Karzai in Kabul is confronting a surge of resistance, not only from Taliban forces but also ordinary people who oppose the US-led occupation. The Bush administration is desperate because its policy has suffered a debacle in Iraq as well as in Afghanistan.

The US sees tightening its grip over Afghanistan and Pakistan as essential to controlling the oil and gas reserves in the Middle East and Central Asia.

The Bush administration has sought to keep him in power with the support of traditional bourgeois party, the PPP, but these efforts are crumbling, creating intense friction between Washington and the PPP-led government.

Last year's election in Pakistan displayed the mass opposition not only to Musharraf's autocratic rule but also the continuing US domination over Pakistani affairs.

Wednesday's air strike sent an obvious message that the US will not allow Pakistan to threaten its interests. This latest US strike in the Mohmand tribal region, however, will only intensify the mass opposition in Pakistan toward Musharraf and the US government.

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West's new Iran strategy

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

WESTERN countries, including the US, cannot handle Iran because many believe there is a double standard in their stance. They allow Israel to retain nuclear weapons (about 150 nuclear heads) but would not allow Iran to pursue nuclear programme to generate electricity. They suspect Iran, one of the world's greatest oil and gas reserves, does not need to generate electricity from nuclear reactor and their nuclear enrichment programme is to make nuclear weapons.

Iran, on the other hand, argues that oil and gas are not renewable resources and given the price of oil at almost \$140 per barrel, there is no reason why they should burn oil to make electricity for domestic purposes. Rather they would sell oil to other countries for sound economic reasons.

Furthermore, Iran finds that one pound of uranium produces 20,000 times more energy than one litre of oil and gas. Nuclear energy (uranium 235 and uranium 238-derived plutonium produce) emits no harmful gases or toxic metals into the environment. And, unlike hydroelectric dams, it does not alter a region's ecosystem. France's 77 per cent energy comes from nuclear power.

Accordingly, Iran argues that being a member of the 1970 Non-Proliferation Treaty of Nuclear Weapons it has the right under Article IV of the Treaty "to develop, research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes". It is Tehran's sovereign right to develop nuclear energy, as contemplated by the Treaty.

New Strategy

The above arguments have created a bottleneck between the West and Iran. Neither side seems willing to back down from their position. To end the stalemate, scientists of MIT have devised a new strategy. The strategy is that the US should help build an internationally run enrichment facility inside Iran to replace Iran's current facilities. This strategic plan was provided to the Bush administration three years ago but it was summarily rejected.

The administration argued that tougher sanctions and the threat of military strikes would force Iran to stop its programme to enrich uranium, a process that uses thousands of spinning centrifuges to create fuel out of rare uranium isotopes that can be used for nuclear power or weapons (5 per cent enrichment would generate electricity while 95 per cent enrichment would make nuclear weapons, technology being the same).

But now, according to some scientists, as Iran appears on the

verge of mastering enrichment technology, the call to internationalise Iran's facilities is getting more attention in Congress as a face-saving compromise.

In this connection, it is reported that Iranian officials proposed building an international enrichment plant inside Iran in a letter submitted to the UN last month but declined to say whether such a plant would be in addition to or a replacement for their own facilities. In an interview last month Iran's Ambassador to the UN, Mohammad Khazaei, reportedly said that the details should be negotiated.

It is reported that Senator Dianne Feinstein, a California Democrat called the plan "a creative, thoughtful and productive potential solution", while Presidential Candidate John McCain and Barack Obama, the presumptive Democrat nominee, have both endorsed using international consortiums to produce nuclear fuel as a way to take production out of Iran's hands.

It is further reported John Thomson, a former British Ambassador to the UN who is now at MIT and Godfrey Forden,

an MIT physicist and former UN weapons inspector in Iraq, have spent more than two years on separate research into the technology needed to safeguard such an international facility, including equipment that would prevent Iranian scientists from taking control of it or learning how it works.

International consortiums to make fuel for nuclear power plants have been around for decades. In 1973, France, Belgium, Spain and Sweden formed a joint enrichment programme and a year later the Shah of Iran lent \$1 billion to the project for a 10 per cent share in the project. But because of the revolution in Iran in 1979, the deal was cancelled and the loan was frozen.

Joseph Cirincione, a non-proliferation specialist who serves informally as an adviser to Obama's campaign, is quoted to have said: "This is nobody's first choice, but it may be the compromise we end with."

The question is whether Iran will accept the plan with conditions that Iranian scientists will be kept away from the enrichment technology. Some experts

believe that there is another way to keep Iran out of nuclear weapon technology. If the Middle East becomes a non-nuclear zone (that means Israel dismantles its nuclear weapon facilities and surrenders the nuclear weapons), Iran may not be interested in pursuing the plan in which Iran will not have control over the international facility.

One should not forget that Iran had gone through many invasions by foreigners. It was invaded by Greeks, Arabs, Mongols, Turks, Afghans, Britain and Russia. The 1953 coup removing its popular Prime Minister Mossadeq was attributed to CIA.

Iranians had overcome all these attacks and interferences. Moreover Iran can claim 2,500 years of history, civilisation and culture. Iranians are conscious of the past and have grown with an impressive cultural self-consciousness. Unless there is a proposal that is perceived as respectful to Iran's sovereignty, Iran may not accept the new strategic plan.

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an officer, and wounded ten people, including three civilians, in the strike.

The US has mounted a series of missile attacks within Pakistan this year. In March, three bombs, seemingly dropped by an American aircraft, killed nine people and wounded nine others in the tribal area of South Waziristan.

As recently as May 15, US missile attacks hit Bajaur village in Damadola, killing at least fourteen people. But this is the first time that such an assault has killed Pakistani troops since Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf signed up for Washington's so-called war on terror and helped to oust the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001.

Conflicting statements are given by Pakistani and US spokesmen of the incident. A Pakistani military official said US forces bombed the strategic Pakistani checkpoint after his country's troops repulsed 30-40 Afghan government soldiers who had attempted to occupy a strategic location on the Pakistani side of the border in the Soran Dara area. A security official told Pakistan's

insisted.

The general rejected Pentagon claims that the operation had been coordinated with Pakistan and was intended to defend Pakistani troops against "anti-Afghan forces". General Abbas told Al Jazeera: "This is an absolutely baseless allegation or explanation. We have co-ordination, we have intelligence-sharing. If there was some doubt about any post they should have informed us before taking up any strike."

Afghanistan's military has declined to comment on the incident. But the Pentagon arrogantly defended the air strike, saying that it "may have accidentally killed allied fighters".

Geoff Morrell of US Defence department spokesman cast doubt on the Pakistani claims without providing any evidence. "It's too early to know whether the strike killed any Pakistani paramilitary forces," he said, insisting the bombing was "a legitimate strike". A Pakistani military spokesman denounced the assault as a "completely unprovoked and cowardly act", and complained that "the incident has hit at the

a Pakistani border post" is "totally unacceptable". The statement demanded an investigation into the incident and asked the results be shared with the Pakistan government.

The recently elected government faces mounting public anger over the escalating US aggression in border areas. A Peshawar parliamentarian told the Associated Press (AP) that outrage among ordinary people was increasing. Local tribe members rallied near the bombed checkpoint in protest, brandishing rocket launchers and Kalashnikov rifles.

This is the first time, however, that Pakistan has openly denounced a US-led coalition attack on its territory. Despite public anger over earlier attacks, official criticism was muted under the Musharraf regime. Even as late as last month's predator strike in Damadola, Pakistan lodged a protest with the coalition forces, but stopped from hitting out in public.

Pakistan's ambassador to Washington, Hussain Haqqani, later denied that his government viewed the air strike as an intentional hostile act. He told Reuters

