

## Moribund jute sector

Robust govt. action needed to save it

At a time when the demand for jute and jute products worldwide is on the rise, the public sector jute mills in Bangladesh are facing the grim prospect of shutting down altogether. The matter takes even greater poignancy jute industry in Bangladesh is at the point of severe regression, if not extinction, when the UN has declared 2009 as the International Year of Fibre.

Reportedly, the BJMC has no fund to buy raw jute from the farmers -- it appears that it has not been able to move the finance ministry to allocate the required amount for purchase from farmers, and the farmers and jute traders have decided not to sell to BJMC on credit any more. Only 15 of the 77 jute mills in the country are now with the government while 48 have been privatised and the remaining have been either closed or leased out.

If the government jute mills are closed down due to lack of fund it is not only the 60,000 workers that will face economic uncertainty, should the imponderable situation come to pass, fewer and fewer farmers will find any motivation to grow jute in future. Even if the private and leased out mills buy up their full requirement of raw jute more than one million bales of jute will remain surplus. One hopes that the relevant authorities are alert enough to comprehend the situation.

It is ludicrous that the BJMC boss is moving from pillar to post to get the money now when one would have expected the government to have already allocated the required amount for the purchase well before the start of the jute season.

The development does not augur well for our economy at all. Once the golden fibre that fetched the major part of the country's foreign exchange, it has suffered gravely due to poor planning and neglect by our policy makers. The main cash crop had to face great challenge from synthetic products in the 70s and 80s, and the country's near monopoly of international market of raw jute and jute goods for a long time was lost.

Interestingly, there has been a renewed demand internationally with requirement of environment friendly fibre on the rise again. We must seize upon the fact that we are capable of growing 80 percent of the world's best quality jute. Government intervention is needed -- in the immediate term to save the moribund factories -- and for the long run to recoup the lost international market and add more to it.

## Fixing capital's drainage system should be top priority

There is no greater threat to inhabitants' quality of life

THE monsoon season is upon us once again, bringing with it greater pressure on the city's drainage system that is already operating under severe strain and limitation. Every monsoon season, localities within the city find themselves water-logged due to the city's drainage system being unable to cope with the enormity of the problem.

The simple fact of the matter is that the drainage system has not been able to keep pace with the explosive population growth of the city. According to officials, around 90 kms more of pipes are needed and the existing pipes need to be widened just to deal with the current situation.

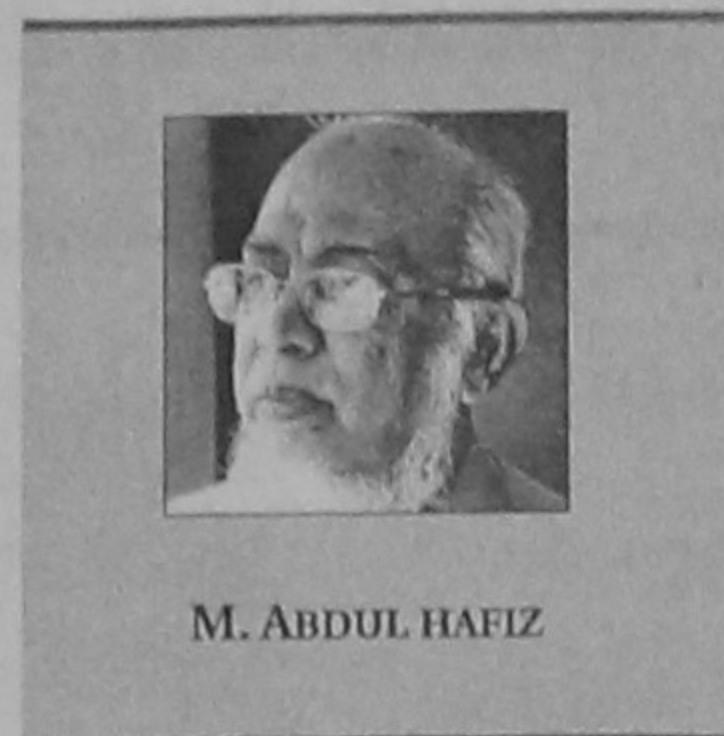
Compounding the problem has been the filling in of the canals, the city's natural drainage system, over the past three decades: 17 out of 43 canals have been filled in entirely, and the remaining 26 have been dramatically diminished due to encroachment and illegal building and dumping.

There are a number of measures needed to resolve the problem. The most pressing is to bring the entire drainage system, right now divided between WASA and DCC, under a single authority.

In addition, much more effort needs to go into cleaning up the drains and monitoring them to make sure they operate properly. There is a need for more pump houses, many more miles of pipes, more modern equipment, constant monitoring of the system, and sufficient manpower and resources to ensure that the system works as it should.

Ultimately, it is a question of priorities. Funding is available. All that is needed is the political will to address the issue with a scientific approach. Why fixing Dhaka's rickety drainage system has not been a higher priority so far is a mystery, but now it needs to be done. There is no greater threat to the quality of life of the residents of the capital city than the dysfunctional drainage system, which leads to water-logging, pollution, environmental hazards, and a variety of other ills. If this catalogue of miseries isn't worth immediate attention, what is?

## Nato's dilemma over the Georgian crisis



M. ABDUL HAEFZ

CREATED in 1949 to protect Western Europe from a likely onslaught of Soviet forces, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) is a classic case of institutional survival in the face of changing politico-strategic realities.

The Soviet threat that prompted the creation of Nato virtually vanished in 1989 with the collapse and disintegration of Soviet Union. Yet, Nato does not only exist it has also expanded, subsuming in it all the former satellite states of Eastern Europe and even Baltic republics that had been part of the Russian empire for more than 200 years. It is reckoned, however, that the current Georgian debate could finally break it.

In the eastern and central European countries that were once under the thrall of Moscow, the presence and movement of Russian armoured columns in Georgia -- no more a part of Russia, the successor state of

Even if the US successfully maneuvers to admit Georgia, or Georgia and Ukraine both, into Nato -- for which the US has been pressing for long -- it is highly unlikely that Europe would be able to guarantee their security under the Nato umbrella because, according to the intelligence consultancy Stratford, most of the alliance's members have minimal forces and are poorly armed and trained at the moment.

Soviet Union -- has reawakened all the old fears.

Last week, Poland scurried to let the US place anti-missile sites on its soil, apparently to beef up its own security. It has also demanded a full-fledged American military base -- something usually disliked by a nation in normal circumstances. Poland obviously wants the US to be involved in the fracas if it is attacked by Russia.

What drives such hysteria is only the historical memory, not any specific strategic calculation, because Russia isn't planning just now to invade Poland. But the emotions it invokes are very powerful. That's also why Estonian military volunteers are already in Georgia.

The rhetoric among the new Nato members has been almost as hysterical as that of Georgia itself. A similar rhetoric pervades the US media, where the fact that it was Georgia, which started the war by unleashing a merciless artillery barrage in South Ossetia -- a Russian ethnic enclave -- has been virtually

erased from the story line.

It's also the US State Department and Pentagon which had been building Georgia up as a key American ally on Russia's southern flank. Yet, the US Secretary of State, Ms. Condoleezza Rice, looked deeply uncomfortable last week as she stood beside ranting Georgian President Saakashvili. Perhaps she was worrying about the "old Europe" of Germany, France and Italy, which do not uncritically back Georgia and the US's commitment there. They tend to see the issue through their own prism.

This will be a problem if the US wishes to pursue her goal of bringing Georgia and Ukraine into Nato's fold, since the "old Europe" is, in fact, the core of the military alliance, with three times the population and five times the wealth of "new Europe."

The US secretary of states may however rely on the loyalty of "new labour" -- at least its present dispensation -- but none of the other great states of Western

Europe thinks that having a confrontation with Russia is good idea.

After meeting President Medvedev of Russia, Dr. Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, carefully tailored her views in the following words: "Some of Russia's actions were disproportionate, but it is rare that all the blame is on one side."

The Italian government has warned against trying to build an anti-Moscow coalition. The French foreign minister, working for the most pro-American French leader, Nicholas Sarkozy, also warned against making any moral judgment on the Georgian conflict.

However, all this will be seen as "appeasement" by the neo-conservatives who still rule the roost in Washington, but to most of Western Europe it's a matter of gumption when the countries there are deeply dependent on Russian energy.

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Russian peacekeeping soldiers sit on top of APC as a Georgian woman holds the national flag.

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It also said that there had also been a tectonic shift in the geography. From a compact West European alliance the Nato has now become a sprawling entity, ranging from an exposed and barely defended flank in the Baltics to -- if they are at all included -- totally undefended Ukraine and Georgia.

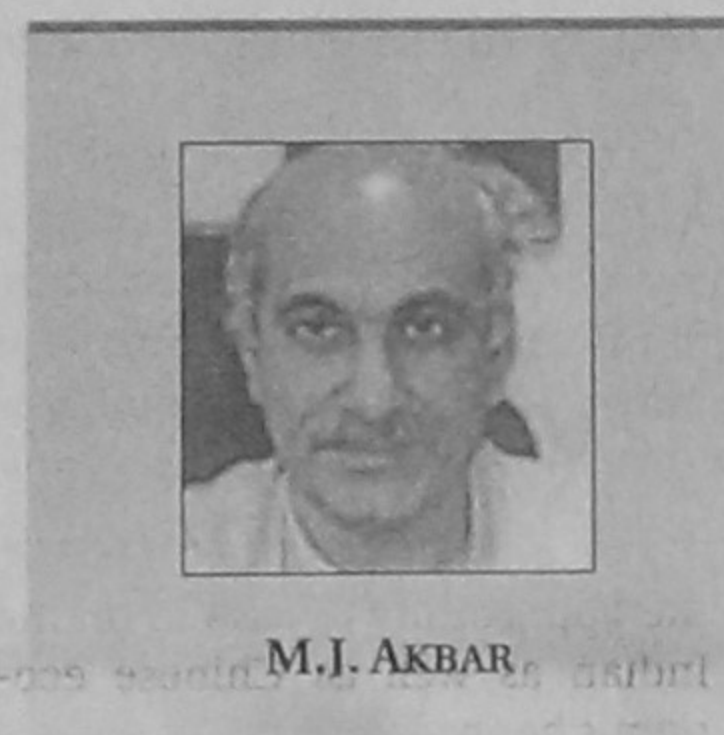
All said and done with regard to the US-provoked conflict in the Caucasus, the Russians will stay in Georgia until they have dismantled

the Georgian army and navy bases that could threaten the ethnic enclaves of South Ossetia again, and then remove all the new American weaponry that gave Georgia an offensive military capability.

Only after that will they withdraw to the enclaves, as the ceasefire brokered by none other than Sarkozy requires. This apparently anti-US term was agreed to by the French leader, who did not view Russia as an aggressor in Georgia. Moreover, Europe also has to balance its ties with Russia with concerns over the country's new offensive posture. After all, Europe has to confront its direct hit, if any. In the meantime, Nato -- for the first time -- lacked cohesion in its outlook and strategy.

Brig (ret'd) Hafez is former DG of BISS.

## A soiled past



M.J. AKBAR

REPUTATION is a comparative virtue. The most fortunate phase of a president or prime minister's tenure is the start, not because he begins with fresh energy, but because he is lucky enough to be compared to his predecessor. The past is always soiled goods.

Almost every political career ends in either crisis or confusion. The successor is permitted a brief interlude as knight-in-shining-armour. Within a year, the lustre is coated with the zinc of familiarity.

Personal limitations begin to edge into the headlines. Compromise and compulsion, inevitable in governance, add a patina of grime to the image, soon to be followed by the rather more pungent malodour of corruption.

The longer you are in power, the more putrid it becomes. Some overlords putrefy faster than others, but not they all do.

This cycle is true for both dictators and democrats. The former

has only one advantage; he can postpone accountability. Over the last decade, the three leaders of India and Pakistan, Atal Behari Vajpayee, Pervez Musharraf and Dr. Manmohan Singh, have shared one thing: a personal reputation for probity even if the environment around them is full of stench.

Dr. Singh kept his own attire clean even though his ministers were raking it in with all the unrestrained confidence of politicians who know they won't be re-elected, so why bother?

But Dr. Singh's reputation slipped when he authorised the cash-and-carry purchase of MPs, in order to save his strategic alliance with the United States. Vajpayee and Singh have had to live by legal deadlines. Musharraf's line went dead only when he was unable to manage the contradictions that eventually sabotaged his grip on power.

Is resurrection possible for a dictator? Always possible. Time is a great restorative. All you have to

do is await that moment when your successor has made an even bigger mess than you left behind.

I should imagine that the currently-reviled ex-dictator of Pakistan should be back in some demand within a year or so, given the pace at which his tormentors, Asif Zardari and Nawaz Sharif, have begun to torment each other.

Having set aside Musharraf, they have begun the far more vicious process of trying to eliminate each other. This is a power-play in which there can be only one victor. Musharraf was the semi-finals. Islamabad is not a big enough town to find space for both Zardari and Sharif.

The final resolution of this conflict will only come after another general election. In the meantime, the two will try to maximise their control over the instruments and institutions of state.

Sharif has his sights on the Supreme Court, which has become the only reserve bank of

credibility in a nation where the constitution has been amenable to the doctrine of necessity -- in simpler words, where the judiciary has legalised events rather than law being the determinant of fact.

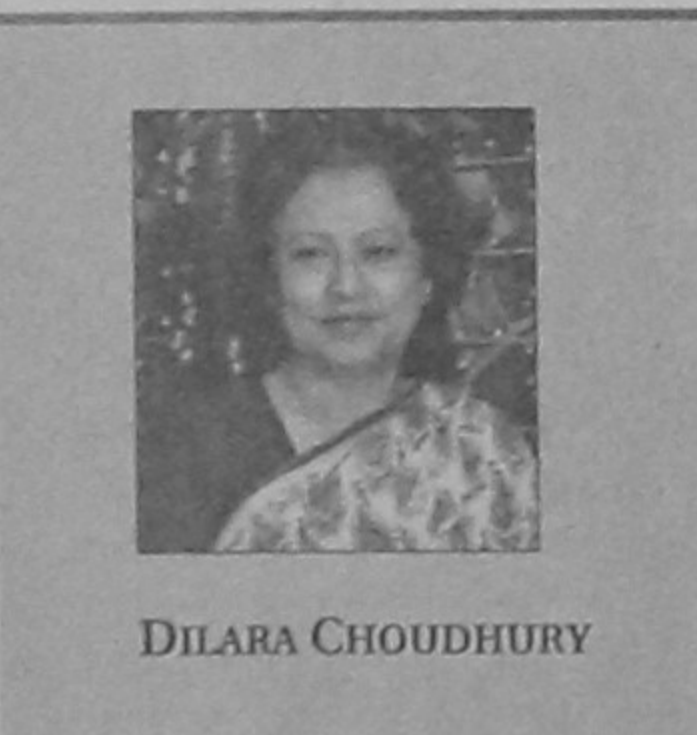
Zardari is more audacious, seeking the supreme office in the land, that of the president, since he is surely convinced that he will not get office through a popular vote. Even time has not been able to eliminate the reek of corruption and worse that clings to his reputation.

The only discipline that Musharraf needs to restore his credibility is silence. Given the garrulous ex-dictator's penchant for shooting from the lip with a silver gun, this might be asking for too much. But nothing will serve Musharraf better than a spell of silence while Zardari hogs the national microphone and Sharif waits with growing impatience for Zardari to self-destruct.

There is evidence. Consider the famous press

**BYLINE**  
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## Hopes and fears in Pakistan



DILARA CHOUDHURY

PAKISTAN President Pervez Musharraf resigned on August 18 instead of facing the threatened impeachment. Had he been impeached, he would have been the first president of the country to meet such a fate. His resignation marks the end of an era when the army's role was critical.

Musharraf was the fourth Pakistani general who seized power, by overthrowing an elected government. Though he civilised his rule through elections and party-building, he kept an iron grip over the affairs of the state with the support of

**PANORAMA**  
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military.

The reaction in Pakistan has been one of jubilation. Hopes have been raised that the PML(N) and PPP will now work together to establish democratic rule and tackle the problems that have besieged the country. Musharraf, who had retained the power to dissolve the parliament, was considered to be an impediment in the functioning of democracy. The issue at stake was so important that the coalition government spent six months deciding what to do with Musharraf.

Now that he is gone, an array of questions arises. Will there be functional democracy? Will the government be able to successfully tackle the pressing economic problems and growing militant threat in the north-west

tribal areas, as well as rising militancy within the country? In the prevailing uncertainties, there is both hope and fear.

A successful transition from authoritarian rule to democracy now depends on the PML(N) and PPP. In the past, both PPP and PML(N) were bitter foes, which gave the army leeway to impose its writ upon the country. Now, the army has distanced itself from politics because it knows that it is no longer popular with the people. But, in case the coalition government fails, an army take-over cannot be ruled out. This, and other factors, should ensure cooperation within the alliance.

First, there seems to be a realisation in Nawaz and Zardari about their past mistakes, and

both know that confrontation and animosity not only bring destruction to individual leadership but to the country as well. They know that the future of their leadership depends on the success of their government. The task is gargantuan due to the multifarious problems left behind by Musharraf. The delay in tackling pressing problems has made it even more difficult.

Second is the security issue, which is equally important. Besides the economic issues, the coalition has to take the responsibility in curbing militancy in the border along Afghanistan and within the country. The coalition has to make sure that the military conducts its operations in the way the civilian government wants, rather than the way the

military wants.

The military's present campaign in Bajaur is its first credible assault on a Taliban stronghold since similar operations in 2007. But how far they can go depends on the government. Thus, the coalition partners know that unless they have a functional government the military questions will remain in the limbo.

Third, the army question is critical. At present, the army is no longer popular with the people and should be willing to act under civilian control. In the present power vacuum, the army may act autonomously. This kind of situation must be brought under control. It is only a strong civilian government which can act in this regard.

Fourth, another compulsion for cooperation is the alliance's endeavour to address Pakistan's relations with India. Having peace with India is as important as having peace in Pakistan. The alliance must work together in dealing with this critical issue. Although India was initially suspicious of Musharraf due to the

Kargil incident, it became comfortable with dealing with him since 2004.

It was even speculated that Musharraf and Manmohan Singh were trying to find a solution for Kashmir and even dreaming of winning the Nobel Peace Prize. It is ironic that India, though a democracy, finds it easier to deal with an army ruler than a weak civilian government. Right now India is uncomfortable, not knowing who to speak to with regard to security issues. The coalition, thus, needs to quickly put its house in order to deal with India.

Lastly, the relationship with the US, Pakistan's strategic ally in the War on Terror, is another area that needs to be tackled through joint collaboration. It depended on Musharraf, who could never convince his countrymen that the war was needed not only for Washington but for Pakistan as well. Consequently, Musharraf was unable to deliver the goods.

The alliance's task is to get peoples' support in this endeavour. Washington has indicated that it is looking for-

ward to wider interaction with the civilian government, rather than depending on army rulers. The coalition, thus, has to redefine its relations with its most critical ally in the context of the changed scenario.

The people of Pakistan are hopeful that Nawaz and Zardari can unhitch the country from the army's shadow and proceed towards the consolidation of democracy. However, there are a number of pitfalls. Though Nawaz and Zardari have compelling reasons to work together, there are still issues over which they have differences.

The coalition is still very fragile, and, in May, it came close to splitting over the impeachment of Musharraf and the reinstatement of the judges who were sacked in 2007. These issues still haunt the alliance. Nawaz wants to reinstate them immediately, whereas Zardari wants to keep some judges, including the deposed Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudry, out of the restoration deal. Zardari wants such a deal because he is apprehensive that

Justice Chaudry may overturn a legal arrangement under which corruption charges against him were withdrawn.

In the post-Musharraf period, Pakistan has a genuine chance for establishing a democratic order, but it is evident that the task ahead is fraught with difficulties. There are both hopes and fears, which is not unnatural.

Usually, a country that remains under authoritarian rule for a long time fails to establish democratic culture and democratic institutions. The country concerned thus finds it hard to transcend from authoritarianism to democracy. Only mature leadership can chart a course for a country in such unfriendly terrain. So, it is now up to the leadership of the country to decide whether or not Pakistan would follow a democratic path or slip back into chaos, inviting the army once again to rule.

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