

## You can't eat money

Such inertia at government level can land us into a position when we'll see that all the rivers around us are dead, the trees are either chopped or barren with no fruits, and all the wealth that we so fondly accumulate over the years is of no use. We'll not be able to eat money then! Or can we?

REAZ AHMAD

THE gradually narrowing rivers that surround our capital Dhaka no longer hold water; rather, all they carry are stinky, mucky liquids. We the Dhakaites are at the mercy of policy planners who, irrespective of their political colours, appear to be deaf and dumb.

They fail to see in front of their very noses how politically inclined thugs are plundering the river resources and grabbing the riverbanks. They fail to see how owners of industrial units don't care about the environment department's laws regarding treating their effluents. They are mindless in channeling all the untreated raw effluents directly to these rivers -- the Buriganga, Shitalakshya, Turag and Balu -- the last remnants of Dhaka's life-support.

A day will come when the people who are becoming rich by flushing their industrial filth into these rivers, their tributaries and other city water bodies, will realise that the money they earned over the years can't buy everything -- not to speak of pure drinking water.

We have become so oblivious about the future sources of drinking water that we are spoiling these water sources everyday. We are giving in to our greed for grabbing wetlands, water bodies, illegally occupy-

ing riverbanks, and making quick bucks without having any social responsibility whatsoever.

We are setting up industrial units, but are totally indifferent toward discharging the effluent in an environmentally acceptable manner.

So fragile are our regulatory set-ups and so reluctant are the people manning these set-ups that nobody cares much for any sort of reprisal. During the rules of several governments, including the non-elected military-aided one, we had heard that the concerned government agencies had served notices upon industrial units flouting laws regarding effluent treatment. But, that's all. We hardly saw any such industrial units facing closure, or penalties for discharging effluents into the rivers, ponds, canals etc.

There were at least 22 canals with full flow of clean, fresh water crisscrossing Dhaka not too many years back. Thanks to our mindless urban development and greed, all these canals are gone.

One of the former governments took an initiative to develop a circular waterway encircling the capital, which indeed was a good initiative. That will make communications by river within the city easier, and will keep the natural flow of clean water intact.

But, like many of our other good initia-



Turning Dhaka into an unliveable city.

tives, this was also nipped in the bud. Unlike Bangkok, we did not build elevated expressways or flyovers, nor did we keep the city's riverways operational. This is apathy.

Now that the rivers surrounding this city of over 12 million are virtually dying, some green groups, a few socially aware media outlets and a handful of civil society members are making some noises to raise awareness for saving these rivers.

But it's a matter of grave concern that we are hardly seeing any initiatives from the part of the government in protecting these rivers, keeping their natural flows intact and the water clean. The government functionaries must awaken now to save the priceless rivers. Once the rivers are dead, so are we. Without free-flowing rivers, human civilisation can never flourish.

A recent *Daily Star* report quoted a

research by Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) showing that the pollution level in the Buriganga, Shitalakshya, Balu and most parts of the Turag is so high that no living organism can survive in their waters.

A three-year research found that some invertebrates and small organisms come to life in these rivers when water flow increases in the rainy season. But these life forms completely disappear in the dry

season, the researchers add. They say the waters in these rivers are affected by industrial effluents and wastewater, and also by municipal sewage disposal contamination, agro-chemicals and large amount of suspended sediments carried by upstream flow.

If the April 26 *Daily Star* report is something to go by, river pollution around the capital has reached such a level that the groundwater system, where the aquifers are recharged from the riverbeds, is being contaminated. From November to April, virtually no water but only stinky, mucky liquid flows in.

It's very welcoming that a High Court bench on April 28 gave suo moto order to the government asking the latter to produce information in a month on what measures have been taken to control pollution at the industrial units and factories since the HC delivered a judgment on the matter in 2001.

The court fixed July 1 for further decisions on the issue. It's amazing that no action was taken to contain the unabated dumping of industrial wastes into the rivers, in spite of warnings by green groups, media reports or court's directives.

People have become captive to a state of dreadful inertia. Such inertia at government level can land us into a position when we'll see that all the rivers around us are dead, the trees are either chopped or barren with no fruits, and all the wealth that we so fondly accumulate over the years is of no use. We'll not be able to eat money then! Or can we?

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## A Pak-US game

But Pakistan remains a riveting subject for the US. It is certainly the epicentre of Islamic extremism. The ideas and political trends that emanate from here go far and wide. America had developed a logical strategy to meet the situation.

M.B. NAQVI

SERIOUS talks are going on between the US and Pakistan. The two, allies for 55 years, have complaints against each other. It looks like a scene from a film in which two middle aged lovers are doing a tango and letting out their heartfelt complaints on one side and reassurances on the other.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke to a Congressional committee recently. She conceded that America was wrong to have left Pakistan alone to clean up the mess that the Americans had left behind in Afghanistan since 1989 when the Russians withdrew. True, Pakistan has now made it a major complaint, though this writer's assessment at the time was that Pakistanis were pleased as punch at having inherited Afghanistan all to themselves.

Pakistanis had their own mini imperial dreams of utilising the Mujahideen elsewhere (in Kashmir). They did it

successfully after the Indians initially accepted the doctrine of mutual deterrence; Pakistan was able to inflict a thousand cuts on India without the latter being able to fight back properly. Clinton also admitted that the US was wrong then and, by implication it, has to do right now. Which means giving Pakistan more aid and accommodating some of its wishes.

The US is really panic-stricken. Pakistanis have, whether by design or by sheer inability to prevent, shown that American supplies through Pakistan from Karachi to Torkhum and Bagram in Afghanistan are no longer safer. There is word that the other supply line from Karachi to Chaman and Kandhar may also not remain safe for long. The Americans have seen this as Pakistani blackmail. Will it succeed, if it is contrived? No one can predict accurately.

The Americans have no real alternative to Pakistan. In theory, there are two possible routes to Afghanistan; one is

through Russian territory, and of many other former Soviet republics, on to Afghanistan. It is negotiating separate deals with the countries involved, but they are under Russian influence and Russians cannot be relied upon to be as faithful to today's commitments as Americans might want. It is a more expensive and time-consuming route. Additionally, they may not permit war equipment to pass through their territory.

The second alternative is through Iran. It would mean swallowing a huge amount of wordage emitted by the US to demonise Iran. It would mean humiliation in the US at one end and possibly anger in the most trusted ally of Americans in the Middle East, Israel. Can the American administration carry it through? America recognises that Iran is vital to many problems in the ME, particularly in Iraq. Even in Afghanistan the Iranians can be useful in other ways.

But Pakistan remains a riveting subject for the US. It is certainly the epicentre of Islamic extremism. The ideas and political trends that emanate from here go far and wide. America had developed a logical strategy to meet the situation. Noting that Pakistan's political class and its army have to hang on to the coattails of Uncle Sam, the Pakistani political class needs only plenty of dol-

lars for the mismanaged country and the economy as also for personal enrichment.

America's strategy now is to give plenty of money to Pakistan and other supplies to the army. Make them happy. Maybe they will cooperate. They have no other real option, just as America has no other choice. This is the stern logic of geography.

There is another qualification of Pakistan. As Kissinger put it the other day, Pakistan has so many nukes but "no government." The state seems to be unravelling to every outside observer, and it is vulnerable in so many ways. It is as inefficient and corrupt as Chiang Kaishek's Kuomintang government was in 1939. Pakistan is inherently more so because of its political trends.

The Taliban are displacing the Pakistan state at a faster pace than people had thought only a few months ago. The US has got to save it for the sake of India and Bangladesh also. Pakistan cannot be allowed to fail. It is only the US and the west that have got to prevent South Asia going haywire.

The problem is Pakistan's implied threat of cutting the supply lines from Pakistan to Afghanistan. The Taliban have interdicted the supply line near Peshawar many times, which could possibly be the state strategy to remind

the Americans how vulnerable they are. And it can also be an indicator of the failure of the Pakistan state to safeguard these supplylines.

The real trouble between Pakistan and America is the American desire to include India, with its Kashmir problem, in a comprehensive solution to the regional problems. Deep down, the US wants Pakistan to make up with India, and not compete as a rival.

This runs contrary to the rationale for Pakistan. It is the basis of today's foreign policy, and it is nationalism that was meant to keep Pakistan united and moving forward in an anti-Indian direction. Friendship with India might rock Pakistan in the eyes of its political class and security establishment. It has reason to be worried. This is a major hurdle.

For Americans, deep philosophical problems do not stand in the way of political solutions. Should Pakistan go its way for a variety of reasons, either as a result of its failure or for a purpose, the Americans can turn to alternatives. One is, as noted, Russia and Central Asian states that were once part of Russia. This is a time consuming and problem-ridden route, and is probably available to the US. But it requires continued Russian goodwill, which might pose a problem.

The second alternative is via Iran. This is doubtless the cheapest, safest and perhaps speediest route. But the US has demonised Iran for 30 years. To approach now, would involve considerable humiliation on its part. Israel can become angry and put difficulties in the way. In contrast, Pakistan has given some bases for the US military and a lot of its air space has been reserved for Americans.

The question is: Will Pakistan's perceived blackmail, as the Americans actually put it, succeed? Probably it can. US will have to dole out more dollars and some aircraft to keep the Pakistani political class happy. It will also have to continue to supply the Pakistan army's needs.

But India has bigger prizes to offer. India is bigger, richer, more developed and more influential than Pakistan. The US can depend on India much more than on Pakistan, whose utility from longer-term viewpoint is questionable.

This tango with Pakistan has to end soon. Who will get away with what they are trying to do is not clear. But neither can Pakistan's political class have its wishes nor can the US do without Pakistan's cooperation. When and how will they make up is the issue.

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## Nemesis catches up with Modi

Modi is now in the dock. He will have to disprove his involvement before the SIT. Many skeletons are bound to come out of the cupboard. Since then, many retired police officials have admitted the involvement of the government.

KULDIP NAYAR

THERE is a saying: Der hai, par andher nahin (it is late but never beyond the reach of justice). The wheel of fortune turns slowly to expose Chief Minister Narendra Modi of Gujarat, the state where some 4,000 Muslims were killed seven years ago. It has been an open secret that he and his Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) were involved in the pogrom, with the connivance of the state machinery, including the police.

Modi would say in defence, where was the proof? He would also say that what happened in Gujarat was in retaliation to the burning of pilgrims in a train at Godhara. There are many versions to make the Muslims solely responsible.

The dust has been somewhat cleared by the Supreme Court of India, which has asked the Special Investigating Team (SIT) to probe a complaint against Modi that he and his cabinet colleagues orchestrated the post-Godhara communal riots in 2002 in connivance with police officials and senior bureaucrats. The complaint filed by advocate Sanjay Parikh on behalf of Zakia Nisim Ahesan Hussain Jafri, the widow of an ex-Congress MP who was

killed by a mob allegedly led by Modi who was the "architect of a criminal conspiracy to subvert constitutional governance and the rule of law."

SIT, a sort of tribunal, is presided over by a retired CBI director, R.K. Raghavan, who enjoys wide respect. His probe, it is conceded, will be fair, just and independent. The BJP is uncomfortable. The Congress is overjoyed for apparent reasons. But the people feel jubilant that the perpetrators of Gujarat may be brought to book.

The state, much less Modi, expected such a turn of events in the investigation. A human rights activist, Teesta Setelvad, who has doggedly pursued the culprits in the Gujarat killings, had submitted a petition on behalf of Mrs. Jafri. The petition was filed as a First Information Report (FIR) with the police at Ahmedabad to contend that the killings were pre-planned and that the authorities did little to protect the victims.

The police refused to register the FIR. She went to the court, which took little notice of the legal lapse. The matter came up to the Supreme Court where the lawyer appearing on behalf of the Gujarat State said that all the informa-

tion, whether registered or not, could be sent to the SIT. It was part of bravado. But it has served the purpose of justice. The whole matter, including unregistered FIRs, is before the Raghavan tribunal. Modi is now in the dock. He will have to disprove his involvement before the SIT. Many skeletons are bound to come out of the cupboard. Since then, many retired police officials have admitted the involvement of the government.

The immediate reaction of Modi has been silence. The BJP's former foreign minister, Yashwant Sinha, in a TV interview, did not react to the Supreme Court's order on the probe, but praised Modi for his developmental work in the state. One cannot expect anything else. The party's youthful brigade is at a loss to make comments because it has been vying with one another in its projection of Modi as the BJP's prime ministerial candidate after L.K. Advani.

How can they or, for that matter, any sensible person think of Modi in any responsible position when there are charges of his involvement in the killing and the looting of Muslims in Gujarat? Whatever the BJP is thinking, India is a pluralistic country. The party does not appreciate the secular temperament of the people. But when the upper middle class or the corporate leaders -- there was a meeting of top industrialists at Ahmedabad to back up Modi -- threw to the wind the basic values of pluralism on which India's democratic structure stands, they preferred pelf to principle.



The day of reckoning is near.

Sitting in their air-conditioned offices, they do not know how the mind of the nation ticks. Modi may be an efficient administrator, but he has also the death of at least 4,000 Muslims on his head. For the unthinking corporate leaders, I can say only one thing: Forgive them Lord they do not know what they are doing.

I was a Rajya Sabha member when the Gujarat carnage took place in 2002. It was devastating news. Nobody could find any reason to explain Modi's role. The BJP criticised him in private, but dared not say anything in public lest the

party should take disciplinary action.

Before Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee visited Ahmedabad for the first time after the carnage, I told him that he should have dismissed Modi straightaway. After not having done so, I said, he (Vajpayee) should take Modi to task before the public whenever he visited the refugee camps. I felt relieved when Vajpayee did so. He lost his temper in many places and admonished Modi.

But the youthful brigade of the BJP, which travelled with him from Ahmedabad to Goa, brainwashed him so much that Vajpayee attacked Islam at the

meeting he addressed. He hardly talked about the pitiable conditions in the camps he had seen or the tales of murder and rape he had heard. His entire speech was to run down Islam. It seemed that the party had taken over the prime minister, whatever his feelings or impressions.

Till today, the BJP has not apologised for the killings in Gujarat. The Congress Party has behaved a bit better. It has not only apologised for the killing of 3,000 Sikhs in Delhi in broad daylight in 1984, but has also denied party tickets in the Lok Sabha elections to both Jagdish Tytler and Sajjan Kumar, reportedly involved in the riots which took place at that time. The party has given rehabilitation grants to the uprooted and to the victims of 1984. The Modi government has not given even a rupee to any Muslim for rehabilitation.

Whether the probe against Modi will affect polling in the current election is the question being asked increasingly. There is no doubt that the Supreme Court's order will dent the BJP's standing. However, it is difficult to assess the loss in terms of votes. Yet, the damage to the party's image will be immense. Other political parties have gone to town to attack BJP. The tragedy is that neither Modi nor the BJP are willing to make amends. They should realise that Gujarat, like the demolition of the Babri masjid, is a millstone around their neck. They have to carry it for years to come.

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