

The curious case of the money-laden car

We demand a thorough investigation

THE case of the railway ministry car filled with cash headed for the minister's residence in the middle of the night has shocked us, to say the least. The incident is alarming on many fronts. If the driver had not intentionally strayed into the Pilkhana BGB headquarters and announced that the car contained bribe money, it may never have come to public light.

The issue raises serious questions of propriety. Clearly there is a *prima facie* case deserving in-depth investigation. Surely a vehicle containing 70 lakh taka in cash -- or at least, as confessed by the minister's assistant personal secretary (APS) who was present, 20-30 lakh taka -- with no identified source and carrying high-ranking officials of the railway ministry, must have merited serious handling of the situation by the police. In fact, BGB should not have released the money without a police presence.

Two internal probe committees with a 15-day mandate have been formed by the minister. We, however, question the level of independence of such internal committees, especially where the minister's own APS is being implicated and will be investigated by his superior, the PS. In many countries, in similar situations, the minister would have disengaged him/herself from his/her duties for the duration of the enquiry in the interests of a fair and transparent investigation. In this case, too, the minister would set a high moral standard by removing himself from the process, in fact from the ministry itself during the 15 day investigation period.

The issue is one of grave public interest and merits serious investigation. We believe that, for the purposes of a thorough and impartial enquiry, it should be taken up by the Anti-Corruption Commission. The alleged involvement of high government functionaries in such a scandal is bringing into question the integrity of the minister, ministry and the entire cabinet. In this context, we believe the prime minister herself should take a personal interest in the case and strive to ensure an unbiased probe revealing the facts and fixing those responsible. The matter, if not taken up with urgency and seriousness and brought to a quick and fair conclusion, will greatly affect the credibility of the government in the eyes of the people.

Stimulus to marginal farmers

Monitoring needed to ensure use

FOLLOWING last year's instance, the government's decision to provide inputs to the marginal farmers free of cost in the Aus season is commendable.

Provided the good weather condition persists, it is expected that free distribution of seeds and fertilizer for some 3.5 lakh farmers in 56 districts is expected to produce positive result as before.

Sown in March-April, Aus grows in April-May benefiting from summer rains and is harvested also during summer.

With the increasing use of irrigation, there has been a growing focus on another rice-growing season Boro extending during the dry season from October to March. As a result, Aus cultivation has gradually been facing decline.

Clearly, this is an attempt by the government to promote Aus cultivation among marginal farmers.

It is worthwhile to note that there has been bumper production of crops during the last few years. The credit for it goes mainly to the farmers across the country, whose relentless efforts have reduced the country's dependence on imported rice to a significant degree.

There is also no denying the fact that the incumbent government, especially its agriculture minister's prudent policies have gone to a large extent into making the success.

While appreciating the latest move, we would also stress the need to ensure that the input in the form of seeds and fertilisers reach the right people in right time.

It is good to know that the government has a database about the farmers to receive the stimulus.

But what is more important than just having the data about the farmers is to ensure that the input actually reaches them duly.

So, the imperative will be to ensure a strong monitoring of the distribution of the inputs throughout the entire

A new partnership for development

CHRISTIAN FRIS BACH

IN October last year a new government came to power in Denmark, and on January 1 Denmark took over the presidency of the Council of the European Union. Both in Denmark and in Europe we have strong international ambitions. In times of crisis, every country has a tendency to look inwards and shield its citizens from the rest of the world. However, it is vital that we in Europe, despite the severe economic crisis, stay openly and internationally committed and engaged. If we use the crisis to build an even stronger partnership with the rest of the world, we will emerge stronger together.

In Denmark we will play our part. We will remain a strong and reliable partner in international development cooperation. For decades, Denmark has been among the world's leading per capita donors, and is one of only five countries that currently provide more than 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) in development assistance. Despite our own budget constraints, we will increase our development assistance in the years to come with an aim to once again reach 1% of GNI. As a first step, Denmark will increase its development assistance this year and use the extra funds to strengthen the poverty focus of Danish development cooperation.

Both in the EU and in Denmark, we are currently revising our strategies for international development cooperation. The ambition of the current government, both in Denmark and the EU, is to shape a rights-based development strategy. Basic human rights are among the most powerful ideas in human history. They are the foundation of human coexistence. They have been instrumental in changing the world several times over, from the French Revolution to the

abolition of apartheid in South Africa, to the Arab Spring taking place today.

We in Denmark think that development is about promoting the rights of the world's poorest people. We see civil, political, cultural, economic and social rights as both individual rights and indivisible rights. Children will never be able to fully use their freedom of speech without being able to read and write, and children will never be able to learn to read and write if they are hungry.

A rights-based development strategy is about placing people at the centre of our development cooperation. Not as passive recipients, but as

hoods. An important challenge will be to ensure sustainable food production to feed the planet's projected population of more than 9 billion people in 2050. The development of agricultural production is a key to combating hunger and poverty, and to ensuring future growth and jobs. Denmark will take an active stand in working for sustainable solutions to ensure food security.

Ensuring sustainable energy is another key challenge. Around 1.4 billion poor people live without access to electricity and 2.3 billion people still depend on firewood and other traditional energy sources.

The government of Denmark through its embassy will work closely with the government of Bangladesh and obtain important comments and contributions in the coming months, during which Denmark will be revising its strategies for sustainable development. The aim is to build a strong vision for future partnership together.

central actors in charge of their own destiny. We want to promote the rights of people to have a full say in their own lives, choose their governments in free and fair elections, participate in decision-making and hold their governments accountable.

Denmark will support countries in building societies based on the rule of law with respect for human rights and democratic values. Women's rights especially will be a core focus area both internationally and with our partner countries.

Another key goal will be to support poor countries in investing in sustainable and green growth that creates employment and improves liveli-

hoods. Women all over the world toil for hours every day to collect firewood, and slave for yet more hours in smoke-filled rooms to prepare food, with serious health impacts as a result. If we can provide these women and families with modern and sustainable energy sources, we can release a powerful resource and create growth, jobs and new opportunities.

This will also be one of the focus areas at the World Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which takes place during the Danish presidency of the EU Council. Denmark will work for an ambitious result including a new set of Sustainable Development

Goals, building upon and strengthening the existing Millennium Development Goals, and extending them with new goals for water, biodiversity and sustainable energy for all. We should create a strong global vision for sustainable development.

This should go hand in hand with strong national ownership. Danish development cooperation is based on the principles of national ownership and accountability. These principles will continue to be central in all we do. And these principles should be enshrined in both the new Danish and the new EU Development Policy. We believe that the best development results are achieved through supporting our partner countries' own plans and systems, including direct support to their national budgets. But we must also put robust mechanisms in place to ensure transparency and accountability. Continuous priorities for Danish development policy will be to strengthen parliaments, create an active civil society and ensure a vibrant press, so that together they can keep us all accountable.

Bangladesh is one of our strong partner countries and is a country with many opportunities. The government of Denmark through its embassy will work closely with the government of Bangladesh and obtain important comments and contributions in the coming months, during which Denmark will be revising its strategies for sustainable development. The aim is to build a strong vision for future partnership together.

Denmark looks forward to working together with Bangladesh towards building a country where all people can live a life free from fear, and free from need.

The writer is Minister for Development Cooperation, Denmark. This article is exclusive to *The Daily Star*.

Promise of peace?

TANVIR AHMAD KHAN

BY a tragic coincidence, Pakistan President Zardari left for New Delhi just as a wave of grief over the horrific loss of life caused by a mighty avalanche in the army's encampment in the dizzying heights of Siachen swept across Pakistan.

Zardari had conferred with Gen. Kayani the evening before and, in an appropriate division of labour, the general headed for Skardu to take stock of the relief operation underway in the Gayari sub-sector while Zardari went on a journey that highlighted the imperative of peace with India.

The tragedy in Siachen was a reminder that confrontations between the two effectively stale-mated South Asian neighbours have been futile.

It is a pity that the Indian army blocks the implementation of the Rajiv Gandhi-Benazir Bhutto accord on disengagement in Siachen. By now, the need for deploying substantial forces in that snow-covered wasteland would have disappeared to mutual advantage.

It is probably academic whether President Zardari's primary motivation came from the declared intention of prayers and thanksgiving at the shrine of Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti or from his perception that, for a whole range of reasons embedded in the state of bilateral relations as well as in his domestic political needs, a conversation with Manmohan Singh could not be delayed further.

We know from the past international initiatives of our president that public and private concerns coexist and mingle effortlessly in his case.

In the history of "accidental" summits between India and Pakistan, President Zardari might have done better than the erstwhile leaders of Pakistan. I accompanied Gen. Ziaul Haq during his visit to India, undertaken to defuse the crisis on the

border created by Gen. Sunderji's massive Exercise Brass-tacks.

We watched cricket in the Jaipur stadium, went to the same hallowed *dargah* in Ajmer and, in between, experienced anguished uncertainty if a meeting with Rajiv Gandhi would at all materialise. It did and a revealing comparing of notes by the two leaders, of which I am the sole witness, helped reverse the momentum towards an armed conflict.

The meeting did not, however, open any new doors for enduring

the guest, accepted an invitation, for the nth time, to visit Pakistan and generally indulged the Pakistani president in his desire to introduce his own emerging dynasty to the Indian dynasty that created modern India, got interrupted occasionally and now seeks a renewal of its long rule across the bridge provided by his stint as prime minister under Sonia Gandhi's oversight.

In Pakistan's fractious political culture, opinions about the dynamics of Zardari's approach to India will

Building peace with neighbours is not a game; it is an undeniable demand of our times. If the interlocutors of April 8 dedicate themselves to this task, they would find the saint of Ajmer Sharif on their side. An accidental summit may become an important milestone in the quest for peace and progress in our blighted region.

reconciliation. As unilateral gestures go, Gen. Musharraf's dash to the rostrum with an outstretched palm to shake the Indian prime minister by hand at a multilateral conference is mostly remembered for its amateurish nature. Zardari's pilgrimage may produce better results.

Zardari chose Ajmer Sharif as the focal point of his visit to India, a city known for the inclusive magic of a hallowed shrine that is revered by followers of all religions and that permits saints and sinners alike to connect with its abiding spirituality.

One does not know what Manmohan Singh made of Zardari's Sufi longings but he would not have turned his face away from the secular potential of his presence on the Indian soil.

He organised a warm welcome followed by a lunch in the style of the Great Mughals, even as millions literally starve in the two countries, spoke amiably of the exclusive meeting with

continue to differ. But his readiness to walk an extra mile to replace decades of hostility by an era of cooperation is sound and timely.

The Indian foreign secretary was quick on April 8 to reassure Indian hawks that Manmohan Singh had, indeed, raised the question of Hafiz Saeed; he also clarified that his prime minister would visit Pakistan at a "convenient" time, a formulation that deserves the riposte that problems of bilateral relations, the complexity of the regional situation, the uncertainties of the endgame in Afghanistan and the interplay of regional politics with that of global powers warrant that the Indian prime minister should make it convenient to continue the dialogue in Pakistan itself.

We have also been informed that, on his part, Zardari talked of Kashmir, Siachen and Sir Creek.

The part of the bilateral spectrum that can and may be lit up soon is represented by trade. There is by now

a genuine possibility that it can be substantially built up without stoking fears of the exploitation of the vulnerabilities of either side, a consideration more applicable to Pakistan's weaker economy than to India.

Pakistan can expand commerce and India can adjust its infamous non-tariff barriers with considerable assurance that the consequence would be mutually beneficial.

It will probably be some time before Islamabad can convince New Delhi that it would be similarly advantageous to resolve more contentious issues and that, in the long run, the two countries should find a settlement in Jammu and Kashmir in close consultation with its long-suffering people.

President Zardari is usually too preoccupied with personal gain to be a political visionary. He has, however, taken an initiative that can energise the lacklustre process of normalisation of relations between Pakistan and India. Paradoxical as it may seem, he is today in a better position to deliver than Manmohan Singh.

The conversation held on April 8 would have better traction if the two leaders make it easier for the other side to move forward. Pakistan has yet to overcome the dark forces of terror that have claimed 35,000 Pakistani lives; this fact of the Pakistani situation warrants that India should not feel threatened from the Pakistani soil.

Building peace with neighbours is not a game; it is an undeniable demand of our times. If the interlocutors of April 8 dedicate themselves to this task, they would find the saint of Ajmer Sharif on their side. An accidental summit may become an important milestone in the quest for peace and progress in our blighted region.

The writer is a former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

April 12

1633

The formal inquest of Galileo Galilei by the Inquisition begins.

1927

April 12 Incident: Chiang Kai-shek orders the Communist Party of China members executed in Shanghai, ending the First United Front.

1945

U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt dies while in office; vice-president Harry Truman is sworn in as the 33rd President.

1955

The polio vaccine, developed by Dr. Jonas Salk, is declared safe and effective.