

## CROSS TALK

## Expansion of the cabinet

*Lacks a substantive approach*

WE would like to ask whether the government is expanding the cabinet to ensure better governance or to assuage disgruntlement both within the ruling party and also in the grand alliance. If it is the first, we welcome the move. If however, it is the latter then the step leaves something more to be desired.

Keeping the alliance in mind, the Prime Minister decided on including some of the most vocal critics of the government in the new reshuffle. But this approach of hers appears to have partly boomeranged because Rashed Khan Menon of the Workers Party has decided to opt out, though Hasanul Haque Inu of JSD is joining in.

The name of Tofail Ahmed figured briefly and one would have thought that it had been a mistake not to have included him in the cabinet from the very beginning. However that bit of good sense too seems to have been belied as Tofail has decided to decline the offer.

With the government under fire for widespread corruption, a string of financial scams rocking the banking sector and galloping inflation, not to mention price hike of utilities, it is perhaps not too surprising that some feel the latest offer for positions in the cabinet is basically an exercise at damage control at a wrong time. We are uncertain as to what good this last moment cabinet expansion will do.

However, we feel strongly that some people should have gone in this latest move. There have been a number of non-performers. The distribution of portfolios till now has, at best, been arbitrary in nature and at worse not based on competence, with some praiseworthy exceptions. Although the PM may believe that the cabinet is collective decision-making apparatus, running a ministry well is wholly dependent on the capacity of the individual in charge.

We suggest that along with the cabinet expansion there should be a reshuffle, with some being shown the door, others downgraded and still others being given new portfolios. The Prime Minister has an opportunity now to take a total view of her cabinet, seriously judge who has done what and plan a thorough restructuring so that she can set the best example of her governance abilities in the time that is left of her tenure.

## We condemn massacre of

## US consulate in Libya

*Release of the anti-Islamic film also outrageous*

WE unequivocally condemn the rocket attack on the US Consulate in Benghazi, Libya on Tuesday that left the US envoy to Libya J Christopher Stevens, three other Americans and several Libyan security personnel dead. We are indeed aggrieved to note that the attack, which is said to have been triggered by the release of a trailer of an American film mocking Prophet Mohammad (SM), has claimed several innocent lives having nothing to do with the making of the film or the release of its trailer on YouTube. We are also apprehensive that it will set the fledgling democracy of Libya on a path of increasing internal strife and political volatility.

Having said that, we also strongly condemn the making of the American film titled 'Innocence of Muslims' which outrageously mocks the faith of Islam that nearly one and a half billion people adhere to the world over. Even after receiving objections from thousands of viewers on YouTube, Google which owns the online video site has refused to remove the film trailer from its site. In the name of upholding freedom of speech and thoughts, this is a contemptuous disregard for the believers of one of the biggest religions in the world.

We believe that this is actually a way for a vested quarter to provoke the Muslims to attack adherents of other religions. Whenever there is a possibility of peace between the Muslim and the Western worlds, we have shockingly noticed such provocative releases of cartoons or films on the part of vested quarters in the West. If anything, it proves how intolerance towards other religions is growing in the West.

In this context, we welcome the response from the Vatican that as well as slamming the deaths of the US nationals has regarded the anti-Muslim elements in the film as 'provocations' and 'unjustified'. In a globalized world where most countries are inhabited by people from diverse cultures and races, religious tolerance is the prerequisite for peaceful co-existence. The responsibility



MOHAMMAD  
BADRUL AHSAN

JOHN Maynard Keynes had predicted that by 2030, the workers would reach a high level of productivity to earn more and work less. That prediction

may have a long way to go, but some people are using workers' interest as an excuse to squander public money. Every time we discuss loan defaulters or swindlers in this country, someone wants to give them reprieve because breadcrumbs falling off their tables justify voracious eating.

This country is swarming with Robin Hoods and their bands of merry men, who think it's okay to plunder the country in the name of creating jobs. Except that these Robin Hoods rob the poor to line up their own pockets. Whether they manipulate the stock market or steal from banks or use the bait-and-switch of fraudulent marketing schemes, they laugh all the way to banks while their victims contemplate suicide or worse. The merry men are quick to argue that if the law touches their Robin Hoods, thousands of workers will be thrown out on the street.

That likens it to a hostage situation when criminals use human shields to escape the crime scene. It's true that entrepreneurs build mills and facto-

ries, and that every worker hired means his family will have three square meals. The facts are, however, not so conclusive. The consumption culture forces the workers to work more hours because income has to chase expenditure at an accelerating speed. If workers lived on subsistence wages before, they are living on subsistence wages now irrespective of what Keynes said many years ago.

Meanwhile, our micros are contradicting macros. For example, if you steal from one author, it's plagiarism, but if you steal from many, it's research. Likewise, if you steal from

a saviour, because he has created thousands of jobs.

Stolen money has its multiplier effect. Steal 100, then spend, say, 30 out of that sum to bribe bank and government officials to get 300 more, and then use 100 to bribe again to get 500, so on and so forth. Once you have piled enough fortune, the world is in your hand. You can bribe everyone to buy your way through all obstacles. Money gives enough momentum to defy gravity.

The key lesson from the recent financial crises in the world is that the more complex finance becomes, the

*Once you have piled a fortune, the world is in your hand. You can bribe everyone to buy your way through all obstacles. Money gives enough momentum to defy gravity.*

one pocket, you are a pickpocket, but if you steal from many, you can be an entrepreneur.

Our reactions to these two scenarios are dismally different. If we catch a pickpocket, we beat the daylight out of him, shave his head, force a garland of shoes around his neck and then parade him on the streets. But when a mischievous entrepreneur is caught in the act, he parades his fancy cars before us, ministers and advisors of the government rush to his rescue, and some members of the media go on television to argue that the man is

greater the information and knowledge gap between the manipulated and the manipulators. Whether brokerage houses, merchant banks, investment banks, venture capitalist firms or MLM companies, these are but new jargons in the dictionary of moral jugglery that create opportunities for the unscrupulous few to exploit the ignorance of many.

Roger Martin, a dean of the University of Toronto, is baffled by this jugglery. He talks about two markets in this context: the real market, where the company makes profit or

loss by selling products and services. Another is the "expectations market" or the stock market where people bet on company prospects. Martin is perplexed how the expectations market could be more rewarding than the real market.

The University of Chicago's Luigi Zingales hits the nail on the head. In *Capitalism for the People*, he writes that the real problems arise from special interests using government policies and regulations to create a kind of crony capitalism. That, he argues, creates the threat of plutocracy, when a democracy is taken over by the wealthy and is run for their benefit.

Now you know why every time there is a financial scam in this country, the government is reluctant to get to the bottom of it. Now you know why the finance minister engages in physical farce and extreme slapstick.

Robin Hoods and their merry men have the audacity to see virtue in bankrupting this country, and expect us to thank them for creating jobs as byproducts of their mischief. Our government doesn't even have the conscience of a night watchman, who occasionally blows his whistle during the night to show he's working.

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## Indo-Pak relations

# Some welcome progress

L.A. REHMAN

THE latest round of India-Pakistan ministerial-level parleys reminds one of the element of niggardliness in the sub-continent's culture that has given currency to quite a few sayings about the reluctant offerings of goat milk.

Given the state of relations between the two subcontinental neighbours, their foreign ministers did try to make the best of the ritual. S.M. Krishna's observations were laced with honeyed homilies and Hina Rabbani Khar generously used the term "centric" combined with various modifiers, perhaps to dispel the impression that the thinking of Pakistan's top authorities is India-centric.

That they did move towards normalisation of their foolishly soured relations by a few centimetres, if not by some feet or yards, cannot be denied.

But there is something in the joint statement and in some of the remarks made by both camps that betrays their fear of being caught in the act of establishing peace. That somebody would mention the Mumbai terrorist attack or Abu Jindal or Samjhota Express to confirm that neither side has stopped the point-scoring game. Both sides know very well that they must join hands to ensure mutual good and yet they are afraid of the elements in their respective societies that have flourished, thanks to the two establishments, by fuelling discord between the two natural allies.

Fed for decades on stories of Islamabad's resolve and capacity to force India to yield on Sir Creek, Siachen and even Kashmir, the people of Pakistan are told of disappointment at the lack of progress on these issues. The fact is that the time for resolving these issues in the manner they were sought to be settled some decades ago has passed. True, all the differences between India and Pakistan need to be resolved, but that is not going to happen in the near future. They will begin to be resolved only after the process of normalisation of relations between the two countries has become irreversible and cannot be resisted by anyone.

Meanwhile, one should welcome the accord on a liberalised visa

regime. The most important feature of the new agreement is the decision to allow visas on arrival at the Wagah and Attari checkposts to people aged 65 or above. A similar decision was announced by India some years ago but could not be implemented for reasons that remain unclear. One hopes there will be no back-peddalling this time and that both governments will make adequate arrangements for dealing with the rush of travellers.

The decision to exclude travellers by air is understandable. The governments wish to retain the power to refuse entry to persons on exit control lists; in the case of travellers by air the

exempted from police reporting.

One wonders whether the presumption that rich traders are more responsible than others can be justified as fair or correct. The granting of visas has also been made easier for pilgrims, those travelling in groups and holders of diplomatic passports.

All this is welcome, though it does not satisfy the demand for a visa-free regime for India and Pakistan that is gathering mass support. The security agencies on both sides have serious anxieties about people who stay beyond the visa period, but this problem should be dealt with through improved monitoring of aliens' move-



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return would raise questions of costs and availability of flights. True, the system of control lists can be challenged, but that is not possible at the present moment.

Also welcome are decisions to allow two-year multiple-entry visas to senior citizens and those having spouses across the border. Concessions have been made for businessmen, though not all businessmen are equal. Richer businessmen will be allowed to visit twice as many places as less affluent members of the community and will be

ment and by prescribing penalties for overstaying. The security agencies also worry, often to a greater extent than necessary, about visa abuse by criminals, spies or terrorists.

These categories include resourceful people who are usually capable of exploiting the concessions allowed to privileged citizens. Nowhere have strict visa regulations succeeded in preventing undesirable people from crossing international boundaries.

Two matters now need to be addressed. There is no indication that the conditions a visa seeker has to

meet are going to be relaxed.

Unfortunately, the two governments have a record of cooperating with each other to make the securing of a visa by a poor person extremely difficult by asking for documents that are usually only available at high prices. Besides, the disadvantaged will not be able to enjoy their right to travel across borders so long as visas are issued only in Islamabad and New Delhi and the points of entry and exit are not increased.

In short, is it possible to say that someone like Krishna Chander of Sukkur will not have to repeat the complaint he had made some time ago? "I kept going to the Indian mission in Islamabad," he wrote, "from February 2011 to May 2012 to get a visa. The documents I had obtained from India were returned by the high commission on the ground that the 45-day period of their validity had expired. When in May 2012 I went to the high commission with documents received from India by e-mail, they changed the documents required. I have two sons living in India and I have to go there in a year or two to meet them. Now instructions have been pasted on the notice board that we must secure a sponsorship certificate. I should have Rs.25,000 (\$264.36) in my bank account. I should also be paying tax to the government of Pakistan. There should be a character certificate by a police officer higher in rank than an SHO. What has the mission got to do with such documents? A poor man is put to trouble because we do not have a bank balance. We have to pay a heavy fare for going from Sukkur to Islamabad. Only people with cars or rich persons can go to India ... Note: I am 66 years old."

This letter should be read by Pakistani officials who accuse the Indian mission of trying to harm this country by generously issuing visas to Hindu Pakistanis. In any case, Krishna Chander can now get a visa on arrival at Attari. One is sure Indians applying for visas at the Pakistani mission in Delhi have many similar stories to tell. Hopefully their prayers also will be heard.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

September 14

1829

The Ottoman Empire signs the Treaty of Adrianople with Russia, thus ending the Russo-Turkish War.

1960

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is founded.

1979

Afghan President Nur Muhammad Taraki is assassinated upon the order of Hafizullah Amin, who becomes the new president.

1982

President-elect of Lebanon, Bachir Gemayel, is assassinated.

2007

Late-2000s financial crisis: The Northern Rock bank experiences the first bank run in the United Kingdom in 150 years.