

## Leave the judiciary alone

*Appointment of judges should be free from political meddling*

WHILE independence of the judiciary is still an elusive goal, there are developments, which suggest that instead of emerging as an independent entity, the judiciary is increasingly coming under the shadow of politics. Appointment of High Court judges, by no means an issue that political parties should be involved in, is being delayed owing to the intense lobbying spearheaded by ministers and leaders of the ruling four-party alliance. That is cause for concern. Curiously enough, some of the lobbyists are the same political figures who consistently uphold the need for making the judiciary truly independent.

What people may find difficult to understand is why should the judges be dragged into political controversies and be subject-matter of public discourses when detachment ought to be the hall-mark of their profession. No legal expert can disagree that fair selection of judges is key to the neutrality and independence of the judiciary.

The ministers and leaders who are trying to push their own candidates have either forgotten, or are not ready to admit, that it is worse than making an administration partisan; for the highest judiciary is the ultimate hope for justice and fair-play. The sanctity, probity and neutrality of the judiciary are bound to be undermined when politically blessed elements take charge of dispensation of justice.

As per the Constitution of the country, the President shall appoint the judges of the Supreme Court. However, there is no constitutional provision that the head of the state will have to consult with the Chief Justice in this matter, though such consultation has been part of the whole process, more as a convention than a legal requirement since the days of the British rule. The ongoing lobbying over judges' appointment points to the pitfall of leaving everything to government functionaries. It is an example of the 'spoils system' being stretched out into an area hitherto thought to be immune to political interference. The government can set things right by not allowing the lobbyists to have any say in matters judicial and above all by establishing a clear precedent for consultation with the Chief Justice.

## Kumaratunga visit

*Dhaka-Colombo ties renewed*

SRI Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga's just-concluded visit to Dhaka could not have come about at a more propitious time. Internationally and regionally the overall scenario called for a contact at the highest level which had not taken place between the two countries since 1995. For one thing, there is a near-universal feeling today that the UN's given role in world affairs has been dealt with a heavy blow by the US-British invasion of Iraq. The world body feels even more hard done by following the US-led wrangling over the centrality of UN role in the reconstruction and political evolution of post-war Iraq. The Sri Lankan president and her host Bangladesh prime minister Begum Zia reaffirmed their belief in the central role of UN in present-day Iraq at their Dhaka meet.

On the other hand, political problems between India and Pakistan have been casting a shadow over the future of SAARC topped off by a concern voiced lately over the stalled summit in Islamabad. With Indian prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee making a fresh effort for talks with Pakistan, one hopes the overdue Islamabad SAARC summit would materialise now.

As a well-wisher of Sri Lanka, Bangladesh is heartened by the progress of peace talks with the separatist LTTE under the Norwegian auspices. That a ceasefire has been holding for the longest time ever is hope-giving. It was nice to hear president Kumaratunga, who does not belong to the same political party as prime minister Wickremasinghe, say in Dhaka: "I have no plans to dissolve the parliament." With Sri Lanka at peace internally, there is no telling how much Dhaka's ties with her could be strengthened.

Our friendliness is rooted in history and commonality of contemporary interests. Whilst subjectively and intent-wise, our psyche to befriend each other has advanced a good deal, there is need for some material dimension to be given to it. Both in terms of volume of bilateral trade and Sri Lankans' investment in Bangladesh economy, a vast scope exists for a radical improvement. An airlink has been established and the traditional sea-routes will be revitalised as the volumes of trade and investment grow. We should have specific bilateral trade deals with Colombo. Collaboration between the private sectors can play a pivotal role in raising the levels of bilateral trade and investment. Long term purchase of our jute and jute goods by Sri Lanka will provide an avenue for sustained interaction between business leaders of the two countries. Colombo has agreed to take two specific steps: reduce the duties on raw jute and jute goods on a non-reciprocal basis and simplify registration process for export of Bangladesh pharmaceutical products to Sri Lanka.

What could be a better way of rounding off the visit than by signing a protocol for annual consultation at the foreign secretary level to keep up the good work.

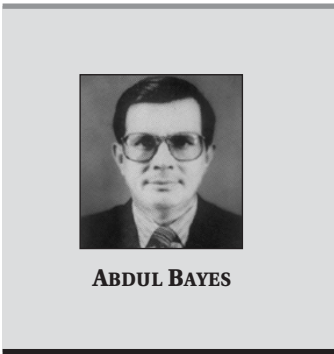
## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

**Iraq destruction**  
The US-UK invasion of Iraq was nothing but a clear reflection of their aggressive nature against a country that has been war ravaged and under sanction for far too long.  
Though the US claimed so, there wasn't any people dancing on the street welcoming the coalition force but people fleeing from their homestead looking for shelter in order to save themselves from the indiscriminate bombing. And where are those weapons of mass destruction? And most importantly, where is Saddam?  
If there isn't any weapons of mass destruction, the presence of which President Bush was so sure of, then what was the justification of waging this unjust war?  
Jahanara Begum

**Gulshan, Dhaka**  
**Rebuilding Iraq**  
Now that the war on Iraq is over, it's time to rebuild the war torn country. And the US is more than eager to give this responsibility to the best possible people-- the US businessmen and their multinational companies!  
President Bush has always claimed that the reason he waged this Gulf War II is to free the Iraqi people from the clutch of a tyrant named Saddam. Who however became so powerful with the direct help of the US itself! Complicated indeed! And now that the job of liberating the Iraqis has finally come to an end, why not make up the cost of the war by getting hold of the Iraqi oil fields? After all, it was the US force who bombed the country and now it's their turn to rebuild it!  
Amina Khan  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

# IFPRI researches and Bangladesh realities



THE International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) came into existence in 1975. It got off to a start with the sole motto of research inputs to the developing countries in their search for food security. Appreciably, it has carried out researches on panoply of policy issues pertaining to food, nutrition and employment. IFPRI has been an innovator in the field as well as an adapter and promoter of the insights of other leading thinkers in food and development policy. Partly as a result of the cumulative research experience of the past 25 years or so, there have been a number of significant paradigm shifts in food policy. For example, first, focus has been shifted from farms and smallholders to poor consumers and food security. Second, earlier importance given to agricultural production has increasingly been shared by the broad spectrum of food system including distribution and processing services. And finally, the tone tilted from general statement of food policy to specific target setting. To say the least, reducing the number of malnourished people, notably at the 1996 World Food Summit and in the Millennium Development Goals, is a pointer to this change. To me, the implications of the

shift from general to specific is of immense interest. Qualitative statements of tall order lip services have been replaced by quantification of actual achievements, however meagre it might be. Arguably, this has imposed an accountability of the job assigned to policy makers and transparency in the treatment of issues.  
Slow success: Despite faced with debilitating deterrents, the world has made remarkable progress in increasing food production and reducing food

especially challenging. " One thing is clear: This goal will not be achieved through business as usual. Research is needed on the barriers to accelerating this sluggish progress on eliminating hunger in a food-rich world".  
**IFPRI and Bangladesh:** Few words on the relationship between Bangladesh and IFPRI should be on board. Bangladesh has constantly been a recipient of IFPRI's research outputs. IFPRI recognised some of the renowned economists and institution

abolition of rationing channels, emphasis on targeted programme etc.  
**Vying for views:** Very recently, the Director General of IFPRI, Dr. Joachim von Braun and his colleague Dr. Ashok Gulati paid a visit to Bangladesh. Von Braun is a German born eminent international economist who is also the current President of the International Association of Agricultural Economists (IAAE). I recall reading some of his epic works relating to famine and commercialisation. The other guest, Mr. Gulati

There is perhaps no denying the fact that the country has long traveled traversing tracks and admittedly achieved respectable progress in the realm of agricultural production and management, infrastructural development etc. Foodgrain production reached a respectable limit. Marketable surplus increased from 15 per cent in the late 1970s or 1980s to 50 per cent at the moment. Reforms in input and output markets especially of opening up food trade reaped home some

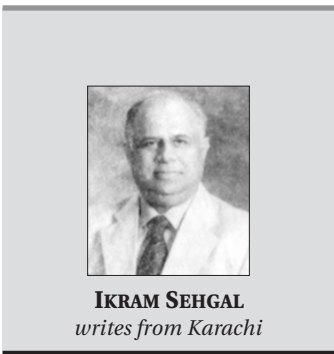
management;  
Ⓔ The productivity of factors in the non-farm sector;  
Ⓔ The role of women in agricultural fields;  
Ⓔ Globalisation, retail industry and trade regime;  
Ⓔ An analysis of policy risks in the light of global food system functioning;  
Ⓔ Linkages of agricultural growth and the changes upon labour, factor and credit markets;  
Ⓔ Political system, governance and food security, and  
Ⓔ The role of institutions in generating surplus and reducing poverty.

Concluding remarks: While glancing through the list, one should never be oblivious of the fact that the first generation of research still carries importance but not so much perhaps as it would have bagged a decade back. Some resources are obviously needed to promote them. My point is that the emerging research should primarily focus on the above mentioned issues.

IFPRI's main attention is on Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The regions have long been laggards in the race to uplift growth and development. And within South Asia, Bangladesh is poised with the challenge of a fast reducing land frontier and rapidly increasing labour force. Since IFPRI is a policy institution, not a general development institution, Bangladesh can immensely benefit from the research outputs of the institution. We can only expect that IFPRI would continue its earnest endeavor to help us grasp the impacts of growing globalisation on agriculture, food and nutrition and suggest policy alternatives to the policy makers through participatory research works.

Abdul Bayes is Professor of Economics, Jahangirnagar University

## Re-shaping maps and minds



PEOPLE in Pakistan have fallen prey to the (Indian-propagated) canard that we are next on the US hit-list. Force-multiplied by irresponsible rhetoric of some of our "fire and brimstone" leaders, this apprehension has become deep-rooted through the broad spectrum of the population. Having been "sanctioned" against intermittently over the years for various reasons, more like a rap on the knuckles of an errant child, we have never been on any US "terminate-with-extreme-prejudice" list. All roads lead to Damascus as the most likely contender for that dubious "honour", so why this sudden death-wish? Only a few months ago USA and UK hailed Syria's backing of Resolution 1441 against Iraq, in a macabre turnaround will the next UN Resolution be Syria-specific? In the meantime Syria has categorically dismissed suggestions of Iraq-type UN inspections. The Coalition declared the war in Iraq to be officially "over", portents are that unless Jay Garner (Lt Gen Retd, US Army) can tap-dance his way through a myriad number of emerging problems of various-kind, the US may become stuck in a peace quagmire.

Re-building Iraq cannot draw on the Afghan experience, who will do it, and barring the cash on the barrel for oil, where will the rest of the money come from? This, when not counting Iraq's estimated debt of over US\$ 300 billion? The US and UK are calling the shots at the moment, the European Union (EU) and Iraq's Arab neighbours will want to have some say in both the economic and political future of Iraq, using the UN as their stalking horse to get a piece of the action. For the sake of the Coalition's credibility, UN Chief Inspector Hans Blix has some unfinished business, where indeed are the Weapons of Mass

Destruction (WMD)?  
A few days post-Saddam have shown up the various (and vicious) divisions in Iraqi society in full public glare, particularly among the Shia and Sunni communities, the Kurds remaining distinctly apart, their nationalist ambitions in any case viewed with suspicion not only by fellow Iraqis but also by the adjoining

(with US Marines help) of Barzan al Tikriti, Saddam's half brother and Interior Minister of the 80s, earlier another half-brother was held. Accounting for all of the regime's leaders has to be brought to a swift and successful closure, otherwise the war will be judged to be only "partially" successful, a la Afghanistan sans Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar.

of US intention "to go after proclaimed terrorist States" in the words of Richard Armitage, "one by one". The truth lies somewhere in-between the war in Iraq may instigate some terrorism, US ability and will to wage war quickly (shown on primetime TV for visual and psychological effect) will deter others. US presence or influence in the region will never deter violent extremists or

The war may have unleashed some dormant forces in the region, destabilising prime US allies like Egypt and Jordan, it is too early to expect a re-adjustment in the Middle-East. Escalation of the Syrian situation into war, will certainly force-multiply the complications, but a major re-shaping of the map is not yet on the cards. Demographics is working against the old

**AS I SEE IT**  
**Pakistan is on a faultline dividing the Middle East from South Asia and Central Asia. What an irony that a country founded on Islam, a religion that at its inception had no concept of priesthood, now seems hostage to a vocal extremist minority because a faulty electoral process has given them an inordinate voice. Theocrats who espouse extremism are nothing without support from the in-built moderation of Islam's " great silent majority" .**

Turks, Iranians and Syrians alike. "The exiles", except for Iran-based Shia clerics, have not been exactly received with open arms. The Pentagon front-runner Ahmed Chalabi, (and a personal friend of US Vice President Richard Cheney,) returning home after 45 years is already controversial, the subject of vociferous street protests in many cities. US Marines had to open fire directly in Mosul into the mob violently shouting down a newly appointed (by the US) "Governor".  
For the moment a weak and divided Iraq will be ruled by "guided" democracy, a strong, unified country very much a distant hope in the future. Some incidents notwithstanding, coalition have leaned over backwards to be seen as "liberators" rather than "occupiers". There are not enough Coalition troops on the ground for law and order functions, a major success story has been joint patrols including partially (and hurriedly) "cleared" former Iraqi police. Such Iraqi participation will give confidence to the populace. Some of the law-enforcers may become "catchers in the rye", targeted by the public for their Saddam-era excesses. Too early to predict how the general population will ultimately view the US, Iraqis are not inclined to being ruled by those imposed upon them.

The search for Saddam Hussein, his sons and close associates, i.e. if alive, may be intensified, however the "hot pursuit into Syria" idea has to be rethought. A major success perhaps has been the US Special Forces capture

The Middle East has not yet been reshaped by the war on Iraq, what happens in the near future will be the harbinger of things to come. Mohammed al Zubeidi claimed being elected "Mayor" of Baghdad, by over 300 religious and community leaders. Notwithstanding acceptability by the cynical Baghdadis, his legitimacy has already been denied by spokesman of the US Armed Forces, other "pretenders" are likely to appear. In signs of normalcy, restaurants and bakeries are opening up, fresh fruit and vegetables are available in the markets, even supplies from adjacent countries are trickling in. With "combat operations" announced as being over, it will free troops to protect banks, government buildings, shops and private homes etc. The first priority of the law enforcement agencies will be to put a dead stop to the free-for-all looting, the worst case was the ransacking of priceless antique treasures comprising almost 170000 items from the Baghdad Museum. Mesopotamia was the virtual cradle of civilisation, the widespread looting has shown Baghdad to be the same "city of thieves" notorious through the ages.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak stated that Afghanistan created one "Osama bin Laden", Iraq will create a 100 Osamas and many more terrorist groups, multiplying terrorist attacks. This is contrary to the belief of the virulent extreme among US conservatives that Iraq will act as a deterrent for other terrorists with intent to harm the US, a potent symbol after Afghanistan

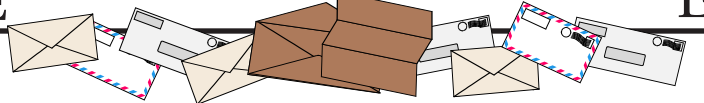
suicide bombers. Mounting casualties at the hands of terrorists may certainly act as an incentive for US Armed Forces to leave Iraq itself sooner rather than later. With US Forces already in some strength in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain etc, more bases can accommodate increased forces on a permanent basis, a deterrent to both terrorism and adventurism.

order in the region, governments must be sensitive to the demands by the growing youth population for greater human rights. Most regimes in the region are to an extent repressive, the so-called "democracies" much more so than the monarchies. Having tried a variety of ideologies, i.e. socialism, nationalism, etc, the return back to



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over to the locals, more and more children would continue to die and once again more and more Saddam would flourish and the country itself would turn into a state of complete anarchy.  
**Ahmed Jamir Chowdhury**  
**Gulshan, Dhaka**  
**Who's next for a taste of the Bush doctrine?**  
It is evident that the US military build-up in the Middle East was strategically designed to take on a lot more assignments than just to eliminate a dictator. If Saddam was the only issue, the CIA could have "smoked him out" a long time ago without stepping foot in Iraq. But President Bush and his 'Dream Team' probably have a broader plan of re-shaping the Middle East, one that suits the US' long term interests and that of Israel too.

The White House, probably, did not expect the Saddam regime to fall so quickly. Conquering Iraq now has left a huge vacuum in the 'axis of evil' and dictators aren't being created fast enough to fill the void.  
The position of 'America's most wanted' is being revised constantly adding confusion to the mindset of the American people! Osama bin Laden barely held the title for two years before Saddam took the crown, now he is gone! Bashir al Asad, President Khatemi, Colonel Gaddafi and Husne Mubarak have all been nominated for the coveted position which has sent the American people scrambling for Atlases and globes to figure out which countries these leaders belong to.  
If there ever was a time for the Arab nations to unite, that time is NOW. If there was ever a time for the Arab League to stand together and draw

their numbers and wealth into a comprehensible force to reckon with the clock is ticking and the time is NOW. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar need to realise now more than ever before that the sole allegiance to the US no longer guarantees their security or their sovereignty. So the question is who's next? The Sheikhs and Emirs of the region better wake up and realise that their 'Benevolent Superpower' guarding Arab soil may turn out to be their 'executioner'  
**Farhad Qudus**  
**Old DOHS, Dhaka**  
**Saddam's tyranny destroyed Iraq**  
After the UN failed to authorise any military intervention to remove the brutal Iraqi regime, there is now a growing clamour to let the Iraqi people decide their own future and let the

UN handle the transition to self-government. But it may be pointed out that after years of Saddam's tyrannical rule, there is no cohesive Iraqi nation left, only groups of brutalised people with many scores to settle.  
Iraq ceased to exist as a nation the day Saddam gassed the Kurdish minority in Halabja. Since then, it was a collection of mutually hostile people held together by fear. Saddam brutalised Iraq's Shiite majority through his Republican Guards drawn from the minority Sunni Arabs who are less than 20 per cent of the population. Today, with Saddam gone, the Sunni Arabs are cowering with fear because of their brutal past, Shiite majority is seething with hatred vis a vis the Sunni Arabs, and the largely Sunni Kurds have no love lost for their Arab compatriots whom they see as interlopers.  
The situation is not much different

from Afghanistan in the 1980s when the Afghan Mujahedins drove the Soviet forces out with the American support and then turned against each other once the Soviets left and the US lost interest. Today, the US military presence is keeping Afghanistan from returning to chaos as violent forces continue sporadic attacks in an attempt to destabilise the country.  
Only a significant American military presence can avert such a disaster. The US has ignored the criticism of others and liberated Iraq from a brutal tyranny and now it must ignore the present clamour to leave it to the UN and to the Iraqi people, both of which are incapable to ensure their own security.  
**Mahmood Elahi**  
**Mahmood Elahi**  
**Ontario, Canada**