

Surya Sen Hall goes decrepit

Form a committee to assess safety of varsity buildings

TO chronicle the state of dilapidation that Surya Sen Hall is in, one needs to go back to 1965. Built in that year, the hall, home to one thousand university students, has had no repair work up until today. Result: the plastering is peeling off at more than hundred points of the ceilings of 50 rooms on the first to fifth floor of the hall. So fragile have the ceilings become that the electric fans had to be unhooked from them. Still, the falling materials pose mortal danger to inmates.

The most ill-maintained have been the toilets and bathrooms. Water clogging there leaks through the drainage pipes and eventually seeps through the whole building, its scaffolding and inner parts. In the process, the whole structure is weakened and higher the residential hall greater the insidious decaying of its vitals.

Dhaka University Vice-chancellor S M A Faiz says, "We will invite engineers from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology to inspect the hall and then take necessary steps". What was he waiting for; what stopped him from bringing together experts to evaluate the safety status of the hall so far?

That the Surya Sen Hall required to be done up on an emergency footing couldn't be in any doubt whatsoever. Yet, why has it been allowed to decay over time to reach a point of possible collapse? Once we raise a building, we think it will keep standing and functioning for good without the need for routine maintenance. This actually brings to bold relief the measly budgetary allocation for maintenance work. The annual allocation for the purpose, or shall we say, under the miscellany head, is Tk 1.5crore while at least Tk 11crore is required to tide over the present difficulties.

It is said we are a cashs trapped country with little to spare for the upkeep. We would like to turn around the phrase to say we are too poor not to spend money for maintenance. We cannot have new buildings for the asking; so we have to maintain the old ones for as long as they can last.

Our concern is not solely for Surya Sen Hall. Its present virtually derelict condition has served as an eye-opener to the state of other university residential halls, administrative complexes and academic buildings, some of which we may not feel secure about. So, we implore the DU authorities to immediately form a composite committee of experts to look into all aspects of safety pertaining to the university buildings and suggest corrective steps.

The law and order faultline in Ctg

Abductions continue unobstructed

THE inspector general of police has claimed that the law enforcers are now very 'close' to rescuing Chittagong businessman Jamal Uddin Ahmed abducted a month back. But the claim does not seem to have influenced the goings-on, as two boys, Simon and Sanjoy, were abducted on Saturday from the port city and the parents of one of them have been asked to pay a ransom of Tk 10 lakh. The abductors are apparently unmoved by what the police have been saying or doing.

It is the patent law enforcement failure to give the criminals a hot chase and catch them that has compounded the problem beyond measure. Citizens are feeling insecure as abductors are neatly executing their plans, with the police at best playing the role of a 'benign mediator'. The failure has clearly strengthened the abductors' resolve to repeat the crime.

Intelligence failure has also proven costly. The police must be equipped with the devices needed to track down the abductors in their hideouts. Basically we need especially trained policemen to operate in jungles where the kidnappers are usually holed up. The challenge is to outwit and outsmart them with better intelligence and greater mobility.

Quite a few cases which had not been reported to the press earlier on, were settled through negotiations. These cases certainly gave the criminals the impression that people were not ready to fight it out by seeking legal aid.

This lapse could have encouraged criminals to expand their cycle of activity. So far their abduction forays have by and large been restricted to the Chittagong region. But is there any guarantee that we will not witness a countrywide proliferation of the malaise in the near future?

The high incidence of abduction in Chittagong for ransom money must be contained here and now, so that the tendency does not spill into other metropolises.

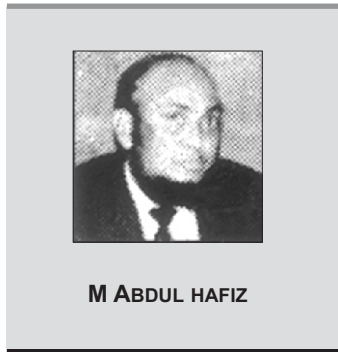
MOHAMMED IMAM UDDIN

BD is a country with enormous potential. Endowed with natural resources it also has excellent human resources. We have opted for a democratic way of governance for our progress. So the commitment of our political parties to the fundamentals of democracy is of paramount importance. Political parties publish their manifestos before elections, in which their policies and aims are spelt out as

commitments to the nation. Needless to say, it is important for our political parties to translate their commitments into realities on assuming power. Hong Kong and Singapore provide examples of how corruption can be checked and good governance ensured, honoring the execution of political commitments.

Three out of ten respondents singled out political parties as the institution from which they would like to eliminate corruption if they were given a magic wand, according to the

Peace decoys



M ABDUL HAFIZ

AFTER most of Palestine went under Israeli occupation following 1967 Arab-Israeli war the UN Security Council dutifully tabled resolution 242 asking for the "withdrawal of Israel's Armed Forces from the territories occupied in the recent conflict". The resolution clearly guaranteed the security of Israel like that for the Arab states provided the former withdrew from the land occupied in 1967 Middle East war: the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Golan Heights and Arab East Jerusalem. The 'land for peace' inherent in 242 called for the security and recognition needs of Israel which the Arabs had refused to concede since its inception in 1947. In exchange the Arabs would regain the land lost in 1967. Both sides, thus, had something to gain from 1967 UNSC resolution 242. But Israel gave a damn to the resolution and favoured a *status quo* by continuing to occupy the land captured during 1967 war presumably because she faced no challenge from any quarter -- let alone the PLO which was still then a pawn of intra-Arab politics.

Essentially a product of Nasser's Pan-Arab dream enjoying sanctuary in and support from Egypt the PLO however moved on independently after Egypt's defeat in 1967 to uphold the cause of the Palestinians by defining them as distinct nation by Yasser Arafat who also promised them Palestinian state in the whole length and breadth of historic Palestine. Notwithstanding, spectacular success both on military and diplomatic front, the Arab defeat in 1967, the infamous 'Black September' of 1970 and subsequently the Egyptian recognition of Israel in 1979 dealt PLO a mortal blow. Finally when driven out of its bases in Lebanon following the tragedies of Sabra and Shatilla during the eighties the PLO lost much of its bites and the Palestinian cause was almost lost in the maze of intra-Arab feuds. It was at this crucial juncture that a spontaneous eruption of the first intifada (uprising) took place in late 1987 and continued through early nineties to provide key bargaining chip for Arafat to carry on with his struggle for Palestinian state.

In the face of stiff resistance put up by the young veterans of intifada, Israel for the first time began to feel the burden of occupation which involved huge cost and also the ignominy. Curiously, the gesture of peace and settlement have always been linked to the show of strength. In hindsight it can be concluded today that the peace process initiated in 1991 Madrid conference, in the backdrop of 'new realities' produced by the demise of cold war which was decisively won by the west, had surely been in response to the Palestinians' growing incalitrance and aimed at breaking the momentum of intifada. With his loosening grip on the Palestinian



Neither Israel nor the US or the quartet has as yet taken any step to placate the Palestinian concerns. Rather those are intensified by number of steps taken by Israel. Both silence and inaction on the issue of Jewish settlement as well as the erection of 550 KM security fencing dubbed 'apartheid wall' by the Palestinians will only add to their concerns.

movement with the emergence of rival Hamas and Islamic Jihad Arafat had few choices but to step into the trap garbed as peace process when, consequent to Madrid, it was secretly hammered out at Oslo. Even if Oslo peace process failed as it was anticipated earlier by many the objectives of the peace brokers were fully achieved with the signing of first Oslo agreement on the south lawn of White House. So far as the interests of Israel and her allies are concerned it produced miracles. The PLO recognised Israel's right to exist thus removing the last legal hitch of Israel's legitimacy. The nagging scourge of intifada weakened, if not totally removed.

Now exactly after a decade the same drama is enacted to douse the flame of current uprising, also known as Al-Aqsa intifada sparked by the visit of the holy shrine by Ariel Sharon on 28 September 2000. Ever since the intifada has been raging with unprecedented fury taking its toll of Israeli lives. True, Israel thrashed the Palestinians with its superior war machine and caused them immense suffering but it could achieve neither peace nor security. The Israeli disappointments grew deeper when no amount of repression perpetrated by Israel with the tacit support of the world's sole superpower could cow down the Palestinians. Their stubborn refusal to submit or conform astonished Israel and its friends in the west alike. As the Israeli defence forces wreaked havoc across the occupied lands, the resistance only stiffened, suicide bombings escalated and casualties rose on both sides leading to rethinking of strategy in Washington. The Bush administration realised that the Palestinians should better be engaged with some baits dangled before them. The rethinking has apparently produced the 'road map to peace' that also envisaged the creation of a Palestinian state -- a dream of the Palestinians in Diaspora -- by 2005. What however remains at the core of the gambit is to stop or at least slowdown the Palestinian resistance. It is certainly not the priority of the US or the quartet to deliver a Palestinian state on the platter to the oppressed people of the occupied area.

Edward Said, the American-Palestinian scholar aptly explains why "the road map" has come up as an Oslo peace process came up ten years ago: "Palestinians have refused to capitulate or surrender even under the collective punishment meted out to them by the combined might of the US and Israel. It is this extraordinary reason for the existence of a road map and other previous peace plans, not because the US and Israel and international community have been convinced for humanitarian reasons

that the killing and violence must stop. If we miss this truth, we miss everything."

Yet we keep missing the truth. At least the Palestinians could be duped into believing for years that the Oslo process was leading them to their homeland by 1999. When it ended in fiasco while Israel further reinforced its scheme for greater Israel, more Jewish settlements sprouted in occupied areas and the Palestinians' positions were further marginalised, there was no remorse and no explanation was advanced by the peace brokers. Because it was all at the cost of the Palestinians!

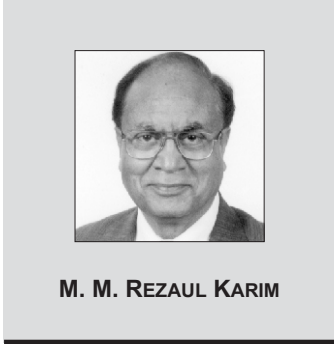
When another peace process labelled 'road map to peace' is under way, the whole world is led to believe through an orchestrated media blitz that President Bush, after having cut Iraq to size, is now set on an even-handed treatment of the festering problem of Palestinian-Israeli conflict with the help of his much-touted 'road map'. But even Henry Kissinger finds the document drafted by the US, Russia, the EU and the UN full of imperponderables and ambiguities. To him it is not a recipe for resolving Middle East deadlock. Rather it represents a reasonable compromise on general objectives. The goals are stated as if they could be achieved simultaneously by both sides acting more or less autonomously.

According to the veteran of Kissinger's stature "the ultimate problem is the deep-seated distrust existing between the parties. The Palestinians believe that Israel seeks to reduce the Palestinian state to a series of enclaves surrounded by Israeli territory and pierced by an Israeli road network -- in short a state virtually indistinguishable from limited internal autonomy." Neither Israel nor the US or the quartet has as yet taken any step to placate the Palestinian concerns. Rather those are intensified by number of steps taken by Israel. Both silence and inaction on the issue of Jewish settlement as well as the erection of 550 KM security fencing dubbed 'apartheid wall' by the Palestinians will only add to their concerns.

The peace deal -- highly asymmetrical in character -- may well collapse somewhere midway to be abandoned ultimately -- all at the cost of the Palestinians who would once more realise that even peace has to be bargained from a position of strength. President Bush will not give it on the platter without extracting a price for it. All that can be done in the meantime is only to set up peace decoys to douse the flame of widespread discontent in the Middle East.

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

Idi Amin Dada : End of a charismatic African despot



M. M. REZAUL KARIM

I got someone, very efficient, very active and ingenious, whom I am going to entrust with the responsibility of revolutionising my Army," said President Milton Obote of Uganda. The venue was the Conference Hall cafeteria reserved for delegates to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Singapore. The date was 17 January 1971. We were sitting at a table, within audible distance, close to the table shared by Obote and two other African leaders -- President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia. These three statesmen constituted the revered trio of African leadership, who were almost inseparable and always found together during the course of the Commonwealth Conference. I was member-Secretary of the delegation of my country, the then Pakistan. Bangladesh liberation war had not commenced yet.

Obote was speaking about General Idi Amin Dada and was reassuring his two friends of his pious wish and good intention. But the very next day, without awaiting return of the President, the General made a pre-emptive strike, revolutionised the country, dismissed President Obote and assumed all powers. Obote got the news on his way back home at New Delhi and later took refuge in friendly Tanzania. Besides the self-styled Emperor Bokassa of Central African Republic, who once informed his cabinet members at a banquet that they had just been fed on their missing cabinet colleague, very few African leaders evoked both awe and fun as did His Excellency President for Life, Field Marshal Al Hadji Doctor Idi Amin, VC, DSO, MC, Lord of All the Beasts of the Earth and Fishes of the Sea, and Conqueror of the British Empire in Africa in General and Uganda in Particular. This was the official title Idi Amin granted himself. His eight years of tyrannic rule witnessed blatant violation of human rights, driving of seventy thousand Uganda's Asian population away from their home and hearth, death and torture of tens of thousands of civilian and army personnel and generation of huge fun and frolics also at his own expense. He once made the British High Commissioner and some others to carry him in a chair placed on a makeshift shaft, and offered goats to Britain as Uganda's contribution to the ailing British economy.

After having assumed power, Idi Amin turned to Muammar Gaddafi of Libya and Soviet leadership for support. He succeeded in getting the valuable co-operation, for some time and to some extent, of such resourceful and powerful allies. But such help was sporadic and short-lived. He, on his part, offered assistance to Yasser Arafat on the

CURRENTS AND CROSSCURRENTS

Some people regarded him as a leader of the movement for independence of African nations. He ridiculed the West, Britain in particular, and strived to assume leadership of the African continent.

Arab-Israeli conflict. But, it represented more of a moral support than of substance. Some people regarded him as a leader of the movement for independence of African nations. He ridiculed the West, Britain in particular, and strived to assume leadership of the African continent. He partially succeeded and became President of the Organisation of African Unity, despite opposition from a number of stalwarts among African leadership.

Idi Amin Dada was born in a small Muslim tribal family in Uganda in 1925. He joined the ranks of the British Army and rose to the position of Sergeant Major and later to that of Effendi, the highest position that an African could attain in the King's African Rifles, the African Army of the British Raj. Following independence, he was promoted, in quick succession, by President Milton Obote, up to the rank of General. His greatest folly was in 1978 to invade the northern part of Tanzania, which sent Army and, with the support of the rebels and the disgruntled, captured capital Kampala. Idi Amin fled to Libya and finally took refuge in Saudi Arabia where he

breathed his last on 16 August this year. Thus ended, though disliked and criticised by many, the career of a gregarious and charismatic figure of the African continent.

So far as Bangladesh was concerned, Idi Amin's attitude was positive. In July 1972, the late Ambassador Mirza Rashid Ahmed was sent to Africa as Prime Minister's Special Envoy to solicit political recognition of Bangladesh from African nations. Ambassador Ahmed had an audience with President Idi Amin. The latter listened to the Envoy and asked him how he could expect to recognise a people who had long association with the power that had sucked blood and exploited the African people? The Envoy replied to say that the same power who had sucked blood and exploited African nations, also had done the same to the people of Bangladesh. The President pondered, but did not reply. The Envoy returned to his hotel -- grim, thoughtful and a bit disappointed, being apprehensive of a failed mission. No sooner than he entered the hotel entrance, the Manager of the hotel came forward with a big grin and congratulated him warmly. The Manager had just heard over state radio that Uganda had recognised Bangladesh as a sovereign, independent nation.

I should not end this brief story of the life of this much discussed despot without recounting one episode. It was February 1974. Lahore, the venue of the Summit of the Organisation of Islamic Conference, was bristling with delegates from member Muslim states all over the world. The occasion was memorable because of the mutual recognition of Bangladesh and Pakistan brokered by an OIC delegation led

by the then Kuwaiti Foreign Minister (now Prime Minister) Shaikh Jaber al Ahmed al Sabah. It took place on 22 February, on the eve of the OIC Summit. As a Director General in the Foreign Office, I recall vividly the prolonged and tiresome negotiations. While Bhutto reluctantly agreed to recognise Bangladesh, he found it unnecessary for Bangladesh to recognise Pakistan. But Sheikh Mujib was insistent. Finally, it was about 3 O'clock in the morning that the agreement on mutual recognition was concluded. It was also decided that within the next few hours the Bangladesh Prime Minister would lead the first ever delegation to the truncated Pakistan to attend the OIC Summit, traveling in the same special plane of Shaikh Jaber. On landing at the Lahore airport, we were in for a big surprise. On the welcoming red carpet was standing, besides Prime Minister Bhutto and next to him, Defence Minister General Tikka Khan, commonly known as the butcher of Bangladesh. He was also waiting to greet Sheikh Mujib. It was a grave decision for the Bangladesh Prime Minister to respond positively and extend hand for greetings.

However, one of the most interesting and noteworthy occurrence in the Summit was an intervention made by President Idi Amin. In one of the sessions, Idi Amin rose from his seat, got permission of the President of the session Prime Minister Bhutto, and made an announcement. The Ugandan President declared that he had been able to make a special investigation through his intelligence sources and found that the 93,000 Pakistani troops, who had surrendered in Dhaka on 16 December 1971, were no longer in Bangladesh but quartered in India. He thought he had made a profound statement and furnished some hitherto-unknown information to the participants. He actually paused for a while, awaiting applause. On the contrary, there was a pin drop silence. An incredible ignorance on the part of the Ugandan Head of State was exposed. This was followed by loud laughter and st. The President of the session, Bhutto, also burst out in laughter and even the stony-faced King Faisal, whose smile was a great rarity and witnessed only by the fortunate few, laughed with shoulders shaking. It was because of the fact that the delegates were at that very moment discussing the issue of the Pakistani war prisoners, who had been transferred to India since over a year ago and bulk of whom had already been repatriated to Pakistan. It was an interesting and unforgettable episode, indeed.

M.M.Rezaul Karim, a former Ambassador, is a member of BNP's Advisory Council.

US draws a new battle-line at Azadegan

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

OUR time is a strange time when all that we have been repeatedly reminded to follow as exemplary might suddenly be branded as rubbish by those who were trying hard to teach us the virtue of capitalist economy and its essential component that they call free market. In free market economy countries are supposed to pursue business dealings with each other without being obliged to listen to any instruction given by a third party, unless there is an international sanction imposed on one of the countries involved in the dealing. We have been taught throughout the period of capitalist expansion that this is what should be considered as the healthiest of all forms of economic dealings and states should limit their say over business dealings as much as possible.

The chief patron of this kind of free market economic policy being the United States, our expectation from the US administration is also supposed to run high and it would be very natural to conclude that Washington's obligation to abide by this basic principle of free market economy is much greater than any other nation. Now let us see what is going on somewhere in Iran concerning the development of an oil field that experts believe might turn out to be world's largest untapped reservoir of petroleum resources.

According to the basic principle of free market economic policy, countries are supposed to be free to pursue business with Iran for winning over lucrative contracts for the development of that particular oilfield, as Iran is not a country against which an international sanction is presently in force. Leading business groups of Japan were also having the same idea in mind, without taking into account that the time has changed so much since the world emerged as an unipolar entity that most of the lessons we were taught by our master earlier has been discarded by the master himself as they are increasingly running contrary to his own economic interest.

With the oil resources of Iraq firmly placed in their pockets, policy makers in Washington are becoming more self-confident that oil resources all over the world are things where they have a right to impose decisions they consider correct. The Iranian oilfield of Azadegan has turned out to be a stark reminder of this sad reality.

For more than two years a consortium of Japanese companies comprising of Tomen Corporation, Japan Petroleum Exporting

Company and few others were negotiating with the Iranian government concerning a project to develop the Azadegan oilfield, which once operational, is expected to be Iran's largest oilfield with an estimated recoverable reserve of around eight billion barrels. Tenders were supposed to be issued once the negotiation with the Japanese were completed and the Iranian side hoped to go ahead with the project sometime this year. Since the smell of eight billion barrels is something highly intoxicating to the oil barons who now virtually control the world, it didn't take time for them to step in with a different pretext that reminds us of the messy business of Iraq's WMD.

As Iran was preparing to open a second stage of its giant Azadegan oilfield to foreign investment in late July, Washington started to create pressure on Japan to delay an initial project where Japanese consortium was involved. United States has voiced concern about the project, citing a suspected nuclear weapons development by Iran. Later, at a preliminary consultation meeting for Japan-US working level energy talks last month, issues centering on Iran topped the agenda. US officials

referred to the need for Iran to sign an additional protocol to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which would allow the International Atomic Energy Agency to conduct inspection at Iran's nuclear facilities without giving any prior notice. They also proposed that Japan should withdraw from the project unless Iran agrees to sign the additional protocol.

For Japan the situation created much difficulty. Not only that the Japanese consortium that also includes two oil firms affiliated with the government has already invested significant amount of money on the project, Japan also saw its own involvement in the project as a guarantee of keeping the flow of its much needed energy supply from the Middle East uninterrupted. The oil resources of Iraq, now under exclusive US control, will naturally have less openings for outsiders to get involved in oil related projects, and initial signs do provide ample support in favour of such assumption.

A Japanese official who attended the Japan-US talks in Washington later told Japan's public broadcast-

ing corporation NHK, that the United States made it clear that it would oppose any effort by any country to get involved in the development of oil fields in Iran. Japan is worried that if Tokyo withdraws from the project under US pressure, a third country, most likely France or Russia, might step in to fill up the vacuum, which for Tokyo would mean not only missing the boat to improve country's energy supply situation, but also to lose lucrative business deals. As a result, for Tokyo the US guarantee that Washington wouldn't allow any country to get involved in Iran's oil project came as a relief and Japan now most likely would try to buy time before getting involved in Azadegan project. But how far in reality the United States will be in a position to impose its own decision on others remains to be seen.

Dealing with Iran looks like another treacherous work of US diplomacy. Washington seems to be increasingly becoming obsessed with the idea that nothing nuclear should go on in any country beyond the realm of its trusted friends. Iran is all along claiming that it's nuclear project is for peaceful purpose only and

producing nuclear energy would help the country to export more oil, which would keep the flow to the world market undisturbed. But Washington has already set a September deadline for Iran to sign the additional protocol. If Tehran fails to do so by then, US may seek UN sanctions and step up unilateral pressure.

A superpower feeling itself great with its hollow victory in Iraq, now seems to be determined to impose its will on those who show the slightest sign of defiance. Iran is calling the US demand a trap and opposing to do anything that might look like giving concessions. But there is also limitation on how far Iran can go by defying the mighty superpower, which by virtue of taking control of Iraq, is now sitting next door. Tehran is in dire need of foreign investment to ensure that its oil resources are properly used. Improving the health of country's economy is also necessary to tackle growing street unrests.

But again, we are probably encountering a treacherous time when there is indeed not much that a country like Iran or even Japan can do to defy orders coming from Washington to follow certain instruction or advice, knowing pretty well that what they have been asked to do is not only unjust but also tantamount to gross violation of any civilized diplomatic norm. This is the greatest paradox of the time that we are passing through.

Mohammed Imam Uddin is Outreach Relations Officer, Transparency International Bangladesh

Political will for development

identified by one in seven respondents worldwide, most notably in Peru and Indonesia. The police were singled out by one in nine respondents worldwide, and by one in three in Hong Kong, Malaysia, Mexico and Nigeria. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia and Poland, one in five selected medical services.

Politics in Bangladesh has increasingly become confrontational and unstable. Political parties have boycotted the Parliament that they are not being given fair time to talk and all

unable to bring their motions. Parliament is not functioning properly. It is seen from the Parliament Building report of TIB that Takta 2 crore 35 lakh 35 thousand was wasted during the 4th, 5th and 6th sessions of 8th parliament due to lack of quorum. The Parliament is likely to be effective and the parliamentary system strengthened if the members of parliament could play the role of law-makers in the real sense.

Corruption discourages local as well as foreign investments and reduces the availability of resources for improving the quality of life. As the

scope of corruption widens the authority of the state is undermined and threatened. As a consequence the ability of government to take sound decisions and implement them is seriously affected. In a country like Bangladesh where there is a clear link between political corruption and bureaucratic corruption, which has a way of increasing in benign neglect, determined remedial action is necessary.

In various countries of the world political parties, whose number is usually small in any case, play a

cooperative role in development through properly practicing democracy. In the west almost all politicians enjoy the trust of the people and the former are perceived to be working in the public interest. In a mature democratic system the leadership not only faces criticism but also commands respect. Such a political climate speaks of a proper democratic mentality. Our own political culture is mostly devoid of tolerance and courtesy nowadays.

The present state of politics has

led to an erosion of commitment of the political leaders to bring about the needed changes such as administrative reform, strengthening of watchdog agencies and strengthening of institutional checks and balances to curb corruption.

The welfare and protection of the interest of the country and the people should be uppermost in the minds of politicians.