

CPA delegates welcomed Opposition absence makes history

THE 49th meet of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) began yesterday in the city without the participation of the opposition lawmakers. In the nearly a century-old history of the Commonwealth as an institution of the former British-ruled nation-states, never before had there been a single instance of such an abstinence of opposition lawmakers from the host country. This is history in its vortex vintage.

However, our government may still exude hope, as did Jamir Uddin Sircar (who is president of the conference), that the opposition will change its decision and make good of the missed opportunity by joining the meet on the 7th when the formal inauguration takes place.

Meanwhile, despondent by the outcome, and, to push the ball in the opposition's court, the treasury had slotted time for the leader of the opposition's speech on the inaugural day while the preconditions set out earlier were met in their entirety. As the guests are here, the meeting progressed as per the schedule on the very first day i.e. Saturday. The opposition did not miss much as yet.

The Commonwealth member-countries know better than others that this treasury-opposition musical chair is played in a country that once formed an integral segment of the jewel tucked in the British crown. The historic legacy has bound Bangladesh and the Commonwealth together. The Bangladeshis hence happily welcome the Commonwealth lawmakers to their capital and wish the meeting a success.

We also feel gratified by the posture adopted by the CPA leadership with respect to their expressed intent 'not to interfere in the internal affairs of our country.' The move of the CPA leaders not to interfere in our 'dubious' internal wrangling, despite a spate of shuttle diplomacy by the treasury and the opposition, is indeed a laudable one.

We vividly remember how diligently one of the CW Secretary Generals acted, as an interlocutor, to bring our political leaders together a number of times over the last two decades. Such occasions were burgeoned when leaders of our main political parties refused to sit together to resolve their differences. It is no healthy feeling when the good offices of the Commonwealth, or of any other international entity, is sought time and again to resolve differences on matters that should have been resolved through reliance on our own wisdom. This happened almost 100 years after we managed to extricate ourselves from the colonial yoke.

When, however, well-intended persuasions yield inconsequential outcome on matters that are crucial to our image as a democratically governed sovereign nation, it has a different connotation.

We expect the opposition lawmakers to change their decision; for, such a move will bode well both for our country and for the image of the CPA itself.

Durga Puja

Festival of mirth and bounty

DURGA Puja, a religious festival of great significance to the Hindu community, has always been celebrated in this country with due fervour. This year is no exception -- thousands of colourfully decorated mandaps have been set up across the country. It is an occasion for the devotees to seek the blessings of Goddess Durga, a symbol of bounty and benevolence.

The social aspect of the Puja is no less important, as it brings together people in a unique convergence of fraternity and festivity. The joyous mood will persist until the goddess is immersed on the last day of the celebrations which falls today.

The Puja has traditionally been an occasion of peace and mirth which has no place for violence. But sporadic incidents of vandalism took place during the Puja celebrations over the last few years. Communal harmony is a prized possession of this society, but attacks on mandaps, though not very significant in number, laid bare the ugly face of some elements out to ruin that harmony.

There have been reports of incidents from a few places this year also. This is a problem that should be faced up to. We believe some people, who certainly do not represent the vast majority of citizens respectful of all religious faiths, have an agenda that runs counter to the norms and practices, which form the very basis of this society. They must be reined in as a matter of top priority.

Security in and around the mandaps has been beefed up by the administration. But we must also bear in mind that deployment of law enforcers, needed to avert untoward incidents, is not the long-term answer to the problem. Society must regain the maturity and level of tolerance that it had in the past to put an end to the activities which spoil the fun of Puja celebrations.

Happy Bijoya.

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

THE current United Nations General Assembly session has once again brought to the fore the basic argument relating to nation-state sovereignty vis-a-vis security. The shift of sovereignty, from a primacy of State to a primacy of global human security within and across states, from the domain of "inter-national" to a domain of "global" has been a continuing subject of debate among world leaders. Shifting ground of these arguments has been caused by the change in the definitions of the concepts of sovereignty and security. It is now being increasingly recognised that the Westphalian concept of sovereignty which partly influenced the thought-process of the framers of the UN Charter has changed considerably along with changes in the power structure in the post World War era. Till the end of the cold war either of the hegemonies could, for example, send troops to quell popular rebellion in Hungary or Czechoslovakia as any punitive action against the aggressor could be blocked by paralyzing the UNSC through the use of veto or because of the "balance of terror" which existed between the USA and the USSR.

In the post-cold war period the world has seen the unchallengeable pre-eminence of the United States and its doctrine of pre-emption demonstrated in the Iraq war and through consequent marginalisation of the UN system. The stated aim of the Anglo-US war, inter-alia, was to ensure security of the international community through anticipatory self-defence. Meanwhile political context and dimension of the definition of security has undergone changes. Former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans in his book *Cooperating for Peace* described not just collective security but three other ideas of security -- common, comprehensive and cooperative. "Common security" is defined by the need for commitment to joint survival working cooperatively to maximise interests - state dependence. "Comprehensive security" is demonstrative of the new perception of global issues being multi-dimensional and acknowledgement of not just political but also those of economic underdevelopment, trade disputes, human rights abuse, environmental degradation and terrorism. "Cooperative security" embraces the aspects of both collective and common security while capturing the multidimensionality of security (Global Policy and the United Nations Security Council Gaya 1999, 2001).

Addressing the current UN GA President Bush did not offer any additional justification for the Iraq war. But he warned the international community of the great divide between those who seek order and those who spread chaos; between those who work for peaceful change and those who adopt methods of gangsters; between those who honour the rights of men and those who deliberately take the lives of men, women and children without mercy or shame. Between these alternatives there is no neutral ground". He admitted that "some of the sovereign nations of this assembly disagreed with our actions". Yet he felt that those actions were necessary for the collective security and for the advance of human rights. Stating that the primary goal of the US in Iraq was the establishment of self-government for the Iraqis reached by orderly and democratic process, President Bush invited the UN to "contribute greatly to the cause of Iraq self-government... (and) in assisting in developing a constitu-

tion, in training civil servants and conducting free and fair elections". Referring to proliferation of WMD he called on UNSC to adopt a new anti-proliferation resolution which would criminalise proliferation of WMD, enact strict export control consistent with international standard. President Bush's call for UN help perhaps denotes the realisation of his administration that while wars can be won unilaterally peace has to be achieved through multilateral cooperation. As president Chirac told the UNGA "multilateralism is the key, for it ensures participation of all in the management of world affairs. It is a guarantee of legitimacy and democracy, especially in matters regarding the use of force or laying down universal norms". He reiterated the centrality of the UN not only in the case of Iraq but for the maintenance of global peace and security. Though French confrontational position on the use of Anglo-US unilateral use of force has been considerably toned down, it is unlikely that France will remain a bystander if the US were to resort to unilateral conduct in foreign affairs. This belief is based on President

The attempts by some to ascribe terrorism to a particular faith are not only erroneous but also harmful to its practitioners. Terrorism, in the name of religion, has been practiced by many faiths from time immemorial. One faith against another, intra-faith terrorism in the form of one sect against another, one denomination against another, one church against another church, one caste against lower caste, fundamentalists against liberals -- all these are historical sagas and are still in the making.

Chirac's agreement to the possibility of a UN multi-national force to be commanded by the "major troop contributor" i.e. the United States. In the case of Russia, President Vladimir Putin unequivocally stated that "only the direct involvement of the UN in the restoration of Iraq will give its people the chance to control their future themselves". He totally endorsed the need for the effectiveness of the UNSC which in his words "in the Security Council a concrete mechanism exists of coordinating political will. It is a mechanism to protect the national interests of the most diverse nations. And through this to protect the interest of the entire international community". In the same vein, UN Secretary General Kofi Anan found in the argument favoured by "counter-restrictionists" on article 51 of the UN Charter that the reference to the "inherent rights" in the article indicated that the Charter's framers intended for the continuation of the broad pre-Charter customary right of anticipatory self-defence, "a fundamental challenge to the principles on which, however imperfectly, world peace and stability have rested for the last fifty years". He was concerned that if the "counter-restrictionists" logic were to be adopted it would set precedents that would result in the proliferation of unilateral and lawless use of force, with or without justification. Kofi Anan announced his intention to set up a body of eminent persons to examine the current challenges to peace and security and recommend ways as to how the UN could face those challenges.

The current UNGA session has afforded an opportunity to the developed countries, particularly P-5 of the UNSC, to examine how far they have

moved away from Wilsonian idealism of collective security bringing world peace as no state wanted to re-experience the horrors of war. If Bush doctrine of pre-emption is to stay then one has to accept the premise of shifting state sovereignty from Gareth Evans' assertion that "the sovereign state remains the basic unit in international affairs and is so recognised in the UN Charter" to the shift of sovereignty from a primacy of state to a primacy of collective global security. Eminent political scientist James Rosenau and former head of policy planning of the US State Department Ambassador Richard Haas agree on the inconsistency of nation-state sovereignty. Ambassador Haas further argues that for a nation to retain its sovereignty and inviolability it has to follow a universally accepted code of conduct not only internationally but also towards its own people in order to avoid humanitarian intervention as in Kosovo. Perhaps this inconsistency of nation-state sovereignty goaded Kofi Anan (while addressing the current UNGA) to state that the UNSC needed to consider how it would deal with the possibility that individual states might

mixing and training with disparate elements ranging from Marxist Colombians to white supremacists to Hamas, Hezbollah and other terrorist organisations. Jessica Stern, however, admonishes the US administration for too often ignoring the unintended consequences of its actions, disregarding for example, the negative message sent by neglect of Afghanistan and the chaos in post war Iraq (The Protean Enemy Jessica Stern Foreign Affair July/August 2003). Bush administration, therefore, needs the cooperation of the international community, particularly of the Muslim world in order to eliminate this protean enemy.

That no degree of real or perceived injustice can justify terrorism is to state the obvious. In order to cut the Gordian definitional knot of terrorism, AP Schmidt, a terrorism expert, had suggested in 1992 to the UN crime branch that if the core of war crimes deliberate attack on civilians, hostage-taking and killing of prisoners was extended to peace time, one could simply define terrorism as "peace time equivalent of war crimes". Recently Kofi Anan addressing a Conference on Fighting Terrorism, its abhorrence notwithstanding, urged the international community "to try to understand this deadly phenomenon" and not to ignore "that the decision to resort to terrorism is unrelated to the political, social and economic situation in which people find themselves". He warned that military force alone can not defeat terrorism.

However grotesque it may appear a band of terrorists have been trying to mask their despicable acts under the cloak of a clash of civilisations. In the words of historian Bernard Lewis, "we are facing a need and a movement far transcending the level of issues and policies and governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilisations, the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present and the world wide Muslim expansion of both" (The Roots of Islam Rage The Atlantic Monthly September 1999).

The attempts by some to ascribe terrorism to a particular faith are not only erroneous but also harmful to its practitioners. Terrorism, in the name of religion, has been practiced by many faiths from time immemorial. One faith against another, intra-faith terrorism in the form of one sect against another, one denomination against another, one church against another church, one caste against lower caste, fundamentalists against liberals -- all these are historical sagas and are still in the making. The current session of the UNGA has been made well aware of these duplicious efforts by some quarters. Secular attack on terrorism regardless of the faith they appear to practice zealots and IRA were born long before al-Qaida descended upon the world and understanding the root causes that drive sane people into insanity are likely to give more dividend than parochial persecution of a particular group or blind partisan support of a people who have long ago crossed the threshold of any need for security.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is former Secretary and Ambassador

US Presidential Race

Clark versus Dean scenario unfolding

Dean remains popular and seems to have a better ear for the public mood than his critics. His vocal opposition to an increasingly unpopular president seems to have fairly durable appeal and even among those who oppose his positions he is respected as a Democrat who is willing to stand up for what he believes in -- the principal criticism leveled against his rivals for the nomination.

ZAFAR SOBHAN

A recent CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll shows General Wesley Clark outpolling President Bush in a hypothetical presidential match-up and with a healthy 10 point margin over the rest of the Democratic field for the party's nomination for president. But it was interesting to note how well other Democrats also fared against Bush. Like Clark, Massachusetts Senator John Kerry also outpolled Bush head-to-head, and all three other major candidates, Howard Dean, Richard Gephardt and Joe Lieberman, were within a few points of Bush, well within the polls' margin of error. In other words, it's too close to call. All this demonstrates not only that Bush remains vulnerable to a strong challenge from any serious Democratic candidate but that the race for the Democratic nomination is still far from over.

Clark's entry does change everything. Prior to his entry into the race, the political story of the season had been the emergence as front-runner of Vermont governor Howard Dean. Dean had been the only Democratic candidate to capture the voters' imagination. He tapped strongly into the widespread anger against the president amongst the Democratic base and made opposition to President Bush the centrepiece of his campaign back when his rivals had been successfully cowed into more muted criticism by the administration's strenuous efforts to quash dissent. His early stand against going to war in Iraq appeared principled and consistent in comparison to the tortuous waffling of the other candidates and looks ever more prescient and insightful by the day. More than anything, Dean, who has been described as by far the most talented politician the Democrats have produced since Bill Clinton, was the only candidate who has shown anything like deftness and political skill on the campaign trail.

Before Clark, the race was already narrowing down to Dean versus Anyone-But-Dean. Early on in the campaign the Democratic Leadership Council, the centrist wing of the party, took the unusual stand of opposing Dean's candidacy. Since then, a significant number of other Democrats -- together with many neutral commentators and gleeful Republicans -- have opined that Dean's nomination would be a disaster for the Democrats. The argument goes that he is too angry and too anti-Bush to appeal to the moderate swing-voters who decide most elections. Kerry, Lieberman and Gephardt all have taken this position and their campaigns were clearly focused on defining themselves in opposition to Dean. So popular had Dean become, however, that his candidacy had already begun to suck the oxygen out of Lieberman and Gephardt's campaigns and John Kerry was left looking like the only plausible alternative to Dean.

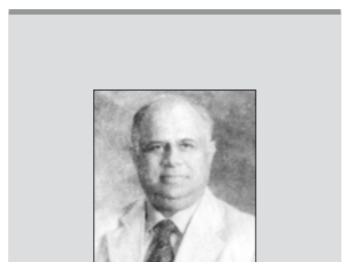
I believe that Clark's entry into the

race means the effective end of both Lieberman and Gephardt's candidacies. They were already lagging behind Dean and Kerry, and with the public and the media's preference for simple story-lines will have difficulty continuing to attract funding, support and press coverage. The question is whether Kerry will survive the arrival of Clark. On paper, Clark seems to demolish the case for Kerry's candidacy. Kerry was running as the most plausible of the Anyone-But-Dean candidates -- positioning himself in opposition to Bush but with the credentials (decorated Vietnam veteran, Senate Foreign Relations Committee) to be a credible voice on national security and foreign policy. Clark seems to be occupying roughly the same ground except that his military service outranks Kerry's considerably and he has not spent the last nine months diminishing himself in the public's eyes every time he opens his mouth. Had he run a better race, Kerry would have been the ideal candidate and would have left no opening for Clark. However, the reason Kerry hasn't taken off is that he is being advised by the same team that bought US Al Gore's disastrous 2000 campaign and his every move on the campaign trail has been creakingly obvious and painfully timid. It is hard to see how Kerry articulates a reason for his candidacy that separates him from Clark and even harder to imagine that he possesses the political deftness to do so.

Which leaves Dean. The Anyone-But-Dean faction has got their wish -- a credible, electable alternative to Dean. But Dean remains popular and seems to have a better ear for the public mood than his critics. His vocal opposition to an increasingly unpopular president seems to have fairly durable appeal and even among those who oppose his positions he is respected as a Democrat who is willing to stand up for what he believes in -- the principal criticism leveled against his rivals for the nomination. His own vulnerability is that he is seen as weak on national security and has not articulated a foreign policy vision that appeals to voters. This is Clark's opening.

Dean's critics, however, have always underestimated his political dexterity and I think that it is a mistake to write Dean off on the national security and foreign policy issue. Already Dean has been tightening up his own policy proposals and, more importantly, he has the skill to convince people that he is for real. If he doesn't falter, Clark will make a formidable rival. But it remains to be seen how well he deals with the pressures and frustrations of the campaign trail and whether he has the fire in his belly for a bare-knuckle brawl. If Clark can stand the heat, the nomination is his to lose, but running for president all-out war. It'll make Kosovo seem like a holiday in comparison.

Different strokes



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

EVEN though in the past week both the President and the PM crossed the Atlantic separately to meet the presently unchallenged Lord Manor of Earth, US President George W Bush Jr. and receive plaudits respectively, viz (1) being in the forefront of "the war against terrorism" and (2) being the torch-bearer of the "new democratic order in Pakistan", the uneasy apprehension in the mind politic of Pakistan that things are not so rosy as portrayed persists. In a contradiction one also gets the feeling that neither are they as bad as being banded about by politicians left out in the cold in the present process. One should not count the nonsense emanating from the BJP rulers of India, one can never expect anything good about Pakistan to ever originate from them.

External Affairs is a good area to start from when discussing media shortcomings. Hardly had Ariel Sharon's visit to New Delhi evoked deep apprehension about an Indo-Israeli axis (supposedly mentored by the US) against Pakistan, than we had to cope with news about US-India high altitude military exercises in the disputed territory of Jammu and

Kashmir. To top it all the Chairman of the British Defence Chiefs of Staff Gen Sir Michael Walker was in Indian-held Kashmir and seemed to agree with his Indian military hosts about cross-border terrorism emanating from Azzad Kashmir. As if on cue, TIME Magazine took out a lead story on Pakistan at about the time Pervez Musharraf was in New York, asking whether Pakistan was a "friend or foe?" TIME magazine usually depends upon an excellent source in the form of a leading hair dresser of Karachi, who can be better informed about defence and security affairs in Pakistan(?) In its widest fulmination even RAW could not have come up with more scurrilous trash

about Pakistan. One must be objective and focus on what needs criticism, not invent facts.

We need to get our act together and that means being pro-active about supporting the private sector in the print and electronic media. The President gave a great speech in the UN but most of it was disseminated to a domestic audience instead of an international audience. On the other hand, Vaipayee got more international attention in delivering a speech which was short on substantive issues but focused his rhetoric on Pakistan, including the usual deliberate "spin" given to what Gen Musharraf had said in the UN

earlier. Credible Pakistani media personalities could have been pre-positioned in New York, London, Dubai, etc to support the President's viewpoint, taking the critics head on by debating the issues on live TV. By not planning strategic media initiatives we left the media's potential open to the Indians to exploit. Moreover it is noticeable that Vaipayee is not the only one targeting Pakistan among the Indian cabinet, LK Advani, Yashwant Sinha, George Fernandes and Jaswant Singh outdo each other at attacking Pakistan on a number of issues. From time to time

one hears Shaikh Rashid taking on India, but with all due respects he has a limited nuisance value, and that too domestic. The Foreign Minister Mr Khurshid Kasuri remains diplomatic but what about the others who have an official duty to speak up for Pakistan. Unfortunately one or two do not do so to curry cheap favour with the Indians. Gen Musharraf should crack his whip and get his minions to speak up for the country at the right forums. Sometimes one has to sacrifice personal PR (Public Relations) for the good of the country one has sworn an oath to, such an oath also brings an onerous responsibility on the person taking the oath

eg., it is obligatory on anyone who knows to give the names and account numbers of those Pakistanis who took the route of "private banking". Talking about financial issues and account numbers, the country's public coffers have lost lot of money recently because of a lacuna that provided a window of opportunity to the unscrupulous and greedy. Since the mark-up kept falling and the banks were awash with liquidity, a small coterie of favourites of the banks have been loaned money at 4 per cent (and even less) against purchase of Defence Savings Certificates (DSC) at 9 per cent. After

consuming. Hopefully there will be some visible improvement in due course. But for the time being, if we consider the prevailing billing system, my experience is that the changed system of DESCO is less transparent than DESA's, namely regarding the matter of acknowledgement of payments made in the previous month. DESA bills used to show previous payments with the details of arrears (if any). This system had transparency as the

looters" could be studied by the Central Board of Revenue (CBR) for taxation purposes. If the DSCs were bought after the loan was disbursed, it is an illegal transaction, it is also not legal if the DSCs have not been declared in the individual's tax returns, viz (1) who are the influential (and others) who are benefiting from looting the public exchequer? (2) who are the bankers who have facilitated this loot? (3) who are the bankers who have violated Prudential Regulations and made individual gain either in their own name or a proxy, i.e., any other name, viz wife, son, daughter, uncle, servant, etc? (3)

not have the energy of their own or lot of servants or clerks to do errands, if you could do something to induce the DESCO to revert to the old system. If DESCO could show the current rates on their bills that would surely be considered a noteworthy improvement. P G Muhammad Gulshan, Dhaka

IkrAm Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR 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.

Weekly holidays

I agree with the views in Shahed Jamil's letter regarding weekly holidays published in The Daily Star on 30 September. I feel there will be no harm in enjoying one and a half days (Saturday and Sunday) weekly holiday and the required working days (five and a half) would be from Monday to Saturday instead of Saturday to Thursday.

To maintain international weekly holiday structure and to get maximum benefits from trades and banking, we should enjoy one and a half days (Sat and Sun) as weekly holidays. The lunch breaks on Fridays can easily be extended for Friday mandatory prayers at the mosques; and this is the usual practice of all the Muslim nations except for Bangladesh and of course the Arab world. The change from Sunday to Friday as weekly holiday was imple-

mented during the time of former president Gen. Ershad who might have thought that it was necessary. Scores of things have been changed during the last two years rule of the present government. Why not change the weekly holiday from Friday to Sunday for the greater interest of the nation. I hope the government will soon take necessary actions. May Allah bless our country.
Jamshed Taher, Banani

Sound pollution

Few days ago, during the evening I was going through the English road in old Dhaka. I heard that some noisy speeches being heard from innumerable loud speakers. Upon inquiring I came to know that a meeting was being held near Bangshal and the organisers installed speakers far from the actual meeting place which was causing irksome sound pollution. The inhabitants were annoyed. I hope in future the rally organisers will keep that in mind and won't make the life of the common people even more complicated.
Mohammed Sohel Hara Uttora

Billing system

Recently Dhaka Electricity Supply Administration in Gulshan Area has been transferred from DESA to DESCO; supposedly with a view to providing better service to the con-

sumers. Hopefully there will be some visible improvement in due course. But for the time being, if we consider the prevailing billing system, my experience is that the changed system of DESCO is less transparent than DESA's, namely regarding the matter of acknowledgement of payments made in the previous month. DESA bills used to show previous payments with the details of arrears (if any). This system had transparency as the

consumers could check if the payment in the previous month has been duly recorded. Under the DESA billing system the consumer had the chance to know whether his payments had been properly recorded in the DESA books or not. I don't see any reason why this aspect of transparency had to be discontinued. It will be doing a good service to all your readers, especially to your old retired senior citizens readers, who do

not have the energy of their own or lot of servants or clerks to do errands, if you could do something to induce the DESCO to revert to the old system. If DESCO could show the current rates on their bills that would surely be considered a noteworthy improvement. P G Muhammad Gulshan, Dhaka