

Businessmen's insecurity

Time to act decisively

IN broad daylight on Monday, armed muggers grabbed the entire salary package of Gems sweater factory's employees being carried by two top executives of the company riding a car. The snatchers must have had clues about when the money would be cashed, from which branch of the bank and what route would be followed to carry the cash to the factory. Without such information, no mugger would attack a car and endanger his own safety.

The same day, miscreants gunned down the owner of Jalalabad Air Express, Mokhlisur Rahman at his Taltola office in Sylhet. The incident is related to the institution of a case in the local court, which the killers wanted withdrawn. It is inconceivable why the plaintiff of a case be murdered for his refusal to heed what a group of miscreants asked him to do.

The two incidents provide a snapshot view of the danger under which the country's business community operates.

Enough has been written and spoken about the atrocious law and order situation prevailing in the country. The social impact of such a state of affairs aside, it could adversely impact on the economy by dampening investment.

The development partners have said as much, particularly since the port city of Chittagong began to witness an upsurge in the instances of criminality against business people. The crime-frenzy has developed a pattern of its own and the criminals do seem to have well calibrated tactic and strategy to achieve their objectives.

Illegal toll seekers of varied denominations have carved out their virtual fiefdom. Few people can build a house without being approached by toll seekers for fund, nor can one run a transport service or a grocery without paying toll to local *mastans!* Aren't our laws strong enough to deter such acts of criminality? The problem lies with law enforcement.

While the extortionists threaten someone not complying with their illegitimate demands with dire consequences, the money paid by an individual or a business entity is added to the overall cost of operation (production), squeezing the consumers to foot the bill in the end. Such 'extra expenses' are getting exorbitant by the day to impact upon the economy's competitiveness.

If we fail to rein in such acts of criminality to remove fears from the minds of those seeking to improve the economic health of the nation, our strivings for a better future will be negated.

CPA conference

The lapses should have been avoided

THE mess up with our national anthem and the improper hoisting of some national flags have not only reinforced the impression of inadequate preparation, but have also brought considerable shame on the hosts. After all lack of protocol and missing invitation cards can be forgiven. But how can we accept that the playing of our own national anthem had to be improvised? The goof up is unpardonable.

The CPA conference is the biggest of its kind ever held in this country. It is a point of convergence for lawmakers from so many countries and an occasion for some truly enlightening deliberations on parliamentary democracy and other related issues.

Though the organisers of the meet had to absorb the initial shock of the opposition boycott, it was not expected to overshadow the overall management. Unfortunately, some lapses caused by lack of planning and coordination called into question the efficiency of the organisers. Protocol and diplomatic norms were broken as the foreign dignitaries started arriving in Dhaka. Commonwealth Secretary General Don MacKinnon is reported to have been left alone at the airport for some time, as there was nobody to receive him. He was finally lodged at the hotel designated for him after some amateurish handling of the matter.

The problem that the deputy foreign minister of Kenya faced was rather different. He expressed his anguish at being cloistered at the hotel room with little freedom to move or communicate. Security concern was the overriding factor here, but the organisers should have been careful enough to make sure that the honourable guest did not feel offended. There were some more incidents that caused a great deal of embarrassment both to the organisers and the guests.

We would like to emphasise to our guests that the problems did not crop up due to lack of sincerity or friendly warmth on the part of the organisers. Rather, lack of experience began to tell when the organisers had to perform the task of coordinating everything. Here, they were not doing very well as the incidents of mismanagement clearly suggest.

Bangladesh has a long tradition of being a hospitable country, caring a lot about guests and visitors. The organisers should have made some special efforts to uphold the tradition through conducting everything smoothly.

The conference will continue for three more days and that is the time when the organisers will have to raise their level of performance and ensure that our guests return home with pleasant memories of their stay in Bangladesh.

AZIZ RAHMAN

FOR too long and on too many issues of critical national importance, Bangladesh politics remained sharply divided. Political dissent is natural in a democratic setup. But, is it desirable to keep the nation perennially divided, often on non-issues, hampering growth of democratic process and impeding development? Are the politicians on two sides of the great divide aware that they are obligated to the country to work unitedly at least in some matters that relate to greater national interests, and security and welfare of the people they represent and care for?

One common Bangla proverb-turned-cliché "the party is greater than the individual and the country is greater than the party" is often forgotten, regrettably, or ignored for personal and partisan convenience or in vengeance, at the peril of the country's interests. Here, hardly anyone would apparently think that national consensus is essential on matters of crucial importance to a country that owed its independence to a rare manifestation of unity and unanimity. This display of consensus vanished just on the wake of liberation. You could never find it when you needed it in more strengthened, consolidated and extended forms. Year after year, you see confrontation, opposition for the sake of opposition. Concept of consensus gives way to politics of confrontation. Politics of development, oft-repeated jargon of whatever power-that-be, is taken over by violent advance of politics of destruction. Who is responsible, the government or the opposition, of the day or of yesterday? The blame game could go on forever. The leaders and pseudo leaders are endowed with great aptitude in that. But, who is paying the price? None but the helpless millions. At some point, however, this vicious cycle has to be broken. For the prevailing situation, the ruling side and those outside the power

structure are equally responsible and answerable. Unless they give up their quarrel on this or other pretext, and show respect for the wishes and aspirations of the people, the leaders and politicians should not expect any honourable place, despite the eulogy and euphoria of the sycophants, in the pages of history.

The parties have the right to pursue own agenda and expose each other's omissions and commissions. While the party in power would govern in their own way and try to regain power through a fresh mandate, the opposition would naturally seek their return to power, provided both act legally and in popularly acceptable manners. Unfortunately, the main parties are

enables its unopposed implementation. Consensus thus involves active or passive support of all parties concerned, and requires general consent. Consensus in a society presupposes harmony of thought and action, absence of conflict and controversy, tolerance of and respect for others' views, change of attitude and mindset, compromise on debatable issues and at times sacrifice of cherished ideas. Consensus is impossible without knowledge, values and vision. Lack of consensus leads to anarchy, hostility and destruction.

It is often difficult to reach consensus on core political issues due to different ideological points of view and inter-party rivalry, although some consensual opinion may exist. It becomes incumbent

agreement", as German philosopher Max Weber puts it. Harmony is not end of ideology, basic values and goals, but there are risks of abuse, lest it becomes an instrument for suppressing dissent. Marxists used this as ideological concept to perpetuate class rule by hiding the extent of contradictions within the society. However, there is no room for Machiavellianism in national consensus process.

In postwar Britain and other western countries, consensus came up as cross-party agreement on policy objectives and strategic approaches. Consensus was resorted to in political system to minimise policy options and make them "administratively practicable, economically affordable and politically acceptable". Conflict

agreement. Sweden came out the economic crisis in about two years.

Way forward: Consensus in favour of consensus

Bangladesh's track record on the way to consensus has nothing to be proud of. Our political history is beset with series of confrontations manifested in mutual attrition, altercations, acrimony, animosity, and assault; disagreement and defiance; insinuation and insult; personal vendetta and vilification; all along a ceaseless war of words with bad taste. Difference of opinion is managed to make it irreconcilable. Only during movement against autocracy in late 1980s there was some identical, though not united, action. Another encouraging development

Let there be national policy and strategy formulated through appropriately constituted national consultative committees for each of the important sectors on the basis of broad national consensus, so that these need not be changed with every change of government... Governance is no longer confined to the traditional government. It is all pervasive. Let us settle old controversies and not create new ones, if we really desire to live with self-respect.

engaged in an endless and cynical game of seeking political mileage out of the people's miseries and misfortune. People are wary of politics, while being apprehensive of the country's future. They blame the politicians' psyche, and question the leaders' commitment and capability, quite naturally. They are watching the unnecessary dispute over Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference with great concern, and are holding both parties responsible for damaging the country's image.

Concept of consensus and international best practices

Consensus is simply a general agreement among the members of a group, while national consensus stands for agreement among various political forces of the country representing all sections of the people on certain issues and proposed course of action that

upon the government to emphasise on common grounds in foreign policy, defence and economic agenda to build up national consensus, and then it is obligatory on the opposition to respond. To achieve consensus it is essential to tolerate others' views and accommodate minor differences of opinion. There are ample examples of attaining national goals and objectives through overall national consensus. Consensus imbibes patriotism and enhances national capacity. If a nation can spontaneously stand united against the enemy at times of external aggression, there is hardly any reason why it cannot show the same amount of unity and resolution when called upon to fight poverty, the enemy number one.

Consensus exists "when expectation about the behaviour of others is realistic because the others will usually accept these expectations as valid for themselves, even without any explicit

among the parties was reduced and confined only to some highly charged issues. Some best practices of national consensus are embedded in Scandinavian political systems. Recovery of the Swedish economy from the widespread European recession of early 1990s was made possible only through consensus. Sweden was economically hard-pressed as they earlier created a welfare state allowing maximum social benefits. Conservative Party in power had to severely curtail these benefits. They did not do it unilaterally, but sat with other parties, discussed future course of action to retrieve the economy and concluded agreements with them on proposed cut-backs. Social Democratic Party that built up the welfare regime through painstaking efforts over some seventy years did not boycott the talks to agitate in the streets. The party convinced the people about need to sacrifice some benefits and signed the

was return to parliamentary democracy. Otherwise, there is no common position on critical national concerns, like diversion of river waters across the border, peace in hill tracts, ever-growing violence and criminality; and no agreement on socio-economic matters, corruption and lack of accountability and transparency. No loud voice is heard against parliamentary absenteeism and hartal though the costs are enormous. Sometimes, political confrontation needed international intervention, and diplomats meddled in our internal affairs, without much success. Lessons learnt: one, consensus must be reached through a home-grown process, to be honourable and sustainable; and two, appropriate mechanism and methodology must be evolved to resolve conflicts and bring about consensus on critical national issues. The foremost step is "consensus in favour of consensus". Sounds impossible!

The "honour and dignity of the Bush White House"

ZAFAR SOBHAN

THE Bush administration is in serious trouble. Bush ran for the presidency promising to "restore honour and dignity to the White House." This was always a bit rich given the manner in which Bush had conducted business as a Director of Harken Energy and later as the General Manager of the Texas Rangers baseball team, and that, in terms of investigations, indictments and convictions, the documented corruption of the Bush I and the Reagan administrations dwarfed the misdeeds of the Clinton administration, whom Bush was criticising by implication. But the voting public seemed to buy it and Bush entered the White House in 2001 promising that his administration would be squeaky-clean and that he would not tolerate "even the appearance of impropriety" from his administration.

According to a recent poll, Bush's approval ratings have fallen below 50 per cent for the first time since September 11,2001, as the American public has been growing increasingly dissatisfied with his

stewardship both of the economy and the war in Iraq. Now comes a scandal that seriously threatens the Bush administration's squeaky-clean image and in doing so may severely damage Bush's popularity. After all, with the economy in the doldrums and the Iraq situation heading towards quagmire, the last remaining asset

House was swift. Two as yet unidentified senior administration officials contacted *Washington Post* columnist, Robert Novak, and leaked to him the information that Wilson's wife, Valerie Plame, worked as an undercover operative for the CIA. Novak promptly reported this information in his July 14 column. This revelation did not

compromised not only Ms. Plame's status as undercover CIA operative (working, as it happens, to prevent the proliferation and distribution of weapons of mass destruction), but every contact she had ever made in her long career as an undercover agent. The gravity of the crime cannot be overstated.

President Bush did not appear

pressing for the naming of an Independent Counsel.

Bush has -- somewhat half-heartedly and certainly belatedly -- released a statement condemning the leak, but it will be difficult for him to deny that his administration has been caught red-handed smearing one of its critics -- actually the wife of one of its critics - in the most

DOJ investigation, he would not have pursued the matter further. The fact also remains that he himself has made no discernible effort to find out identity of the two leakers in his employment.

There have been unconfirmed reports that one of the leakers is none other than Karl Rove, the president's principal political adviser. If this is true and Rove is forced to resign and even stand trial it will be very bad news for Bush. Rove is widely credited with being the chief architect of Bush's political triumphs, and with the election in 2004 looming ever closer, President Bush needs Rove in his corner more than ever.

Even if Rove turns out to have had nothing to do with the leaks, however, Bush is still in trouble. Whoever the leakers are finally revealed to be -- and now it is almost inevitable that their identities will come out -- the dirty tricks of the Bush White House have been revealed for all to see. If this is restoring honor and integrity to the White House, I'd hate to see what Bush considers to be dishonourable.

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Retribution from the White House was swift. Two as yet unidentified senior administration officials contacted *Washington Post* columnist, Robert Novak, and leaked to him the information that Wilson's wife, Valerie Plame, worked as an undercover operative for the CIA. Novak promptly reported this information in his July 14 column. This revelation did not pass unnoticed. On July 16, David Corn penned a Nation column in which he pointed out that Novak's sources were clearly guilty of violating Federal law.

of the Bush administration was the public perception of its integrity.

The present scandal began with an Op-Ed piece that Ambassador Joseph Wilson, a career diplomat with extensive experience in Africa, penned for the *New York Times* on July 6 of this year, discrediting the administration's claim that Saddam Hussein had attempted to purchase yellowcake uranium from the government of Niger.

Retribution from the White

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The Intelligence Identities Protection Act of 1982 clearly states that it's a felony, punishable by a maximum of 10 years in jail and a \$50,000 fine, to reveal the name of an operative working undercover for the US government. Indeed, Novak's revelation

particularly keen to find out which two members of his administration had committed this serious felony and the docile mainstream media let the matter rest until September 26 when it was reported that the CIA has formally requested the Department of Justice (DOJ) to investigate the matter. The DOJ has begun its investigation and both the public as well as prominent voices from both sides of the political aisle are now

appalling fashion that not only has put her career in jeopardy but also violates Federal law. Perhaps the first President Bush said it best in a speech in 1999: "I have nothing but contempt and anger for those who betray the trust by exposing the name of our sources. They are, in my view, the most insidious of traitors."

Furthermore, the fact that Bush did not address the issue in July suggests that were it not for the

OPINION

By the people ... for the people...

An ideal governance still elusive

WASEEM ALIM

THE human thirst for power is a persistent reality. Ever since the dawn of civilization when people began settling down in groups in villages and towns, the question of governance prevailed and there had been people trying to be the decision makers.

In ancient times, when the protection of clustered human settlements from men, beasts and nature was more important than economic pursuits, the governance naturally was bestowed on the strongest and the ablest. After they died their place would normally be taken by a family member. That was perhaps the beginning of dynasties and class difference evolved between the ruling and the general people. Then, at later stages of human history, such ruling classes began to aspire for kingdoms and empires. Irresistible thirst for power to hold sway of life and death over greater number of people and command

over larger areas land did avail slightest provocation to war and plunder. One of the primary pretense to power was sanctity and upholding of religion. The tribes fought with each other, nations fought with nations in the name of religion. Crusades and 'holy' wars became order of the day. Quite often, the reach and power of theocracy, particularly in medieval Europe, was greater than those of the totalitarian Kings and Emperors. The destiny of a European ruler usually depended on the favour of the Pope.

Religion was, and still is, the main reason to spill human blood in war. Conspiracy and alliances of convenience were the game of ruling class and virtually had little to do with the fate and welfare of common masses. Those were the days when the rulers would exploit the ordinary people and make them pay for their luxury and maintenance of army.

With the coming of nationalism came the idea of democracy, which

promised equal rights to all, which gave the right for individuals to decide by whom they shall be governed, and the priorities be decided and acted upon. In late 18th Century, democracies first appeared in developed countries of Europe. Industrial revolution backed by Renaissance gave Europe the lead. She housed the most powerful countries -- Spain, Portugal, France and Britain. Though some of these countries practiced 'limited democracies' (voting rights were limited to elites and rich merchant class) in their own countries, they pursued worst form of imperialism in other countries. They promoted and fathered slavery in its utmost cruel form, trampled, tormented and exploited people of Asia, Africa, Latin America and any area they colonised by their might. New markets were won and controlled to feed the industrially revolutionised Europe; new places were created to procure the cheapest raw materials for their industries back home. It is by

exploitation of other countries and other people that the new democracies fed and bred. Their lower classes were satisfied by a modest standard of living so as not to rise up against the ruling class of that time. In fact initially a very small group of elite nobles were allowed to vote and then only when situations got out of hand and awareness grew, more people were enfranchised.

If this is how 'democracy' fared in the past centuries, it would look more like a trick devised by the 'privileged' class to preserve their right to rule. For it has greater resemblance to military governance or the governance by divine dictates, prerogative of handful of clerics, and it does have nearer similarities with plutocracy (government by the wealthy). The basic idea of democracy is equality for all, and how does it do that? It gives the masses the choice of saying once, in four or five years, whether a certain person or a group of persons might be allowed to rule over them. The idea of giving votes does

not make everybody equal, for only the rich, powerful and 'well-connected' people get the opportunity to compete for the parliament. It is not necessary that the elected upper level class would work only for the welfare of common people or to their best interest.

In the long honeymoon of mankind with democracy, it is simply proved that in a democratic system we choose a ruler for a four or five years' term. Some present day democracies do have striking similarities with autocracy and oligarchy. Just look and observe how two tested democracies have teamed up to devastate innocent people of Iraq and Afghanistan on false and fabricated pretexts. They acted not for the interest of humanity, but for the vested interest of oil tycoons and rich businessmen. Can the people of these democracies change their leaders *now* for their anti-people acts? Not until the next election day.

The traditional way the British Parliament acted has undergone

changes. In the old days the House of Commons exercised power directly, and an average member had a good say in the state affairs. Now it is the Cabinet or the government that decides every big question, and the House of Commons can only vote for or against it. So if the government has the majority in the house it can do almost anything. Moreover the Parliament does not define the general principles of any measure or law and therefore it has to leave it to the executive government, to fill in the details. Therefore even if the people do send their representative to the Parliament, he basically has no say in anything other than criticizing, inquiring and finally approving the government measure. I take the example of the British parliament as it is looked up as a paradigm of democracy.

The situation in the third world countries is naturally even worse. In some practicing democracies, family dynasties seem to be the choice of the people! The control over administration, the hooligans

and right equation with the vested interest groups and the sheer money power are the elements that decide who will be the next democratic 'dictator'. The history of South Asia is replete with such examples. In such countries an ordinary person stands no chance because he is not a relation of these families, nor does he have the wealth or the power to be a newcomer. Alternatively, the Chief of Army may decide that the ruling Prime Minister or President is no good and favors the country by taking over power in his own hand. He appears on the TV saying that he is just a caretaker, claims the previous government was an absolute enemy of the country and that there will be new elections within a few months. And by coincidence it happens to be that the General himself stands and wins the elections that were most obviously 'peaceful and fair'!

The communists have a very interesting theory. They say that real democracy can only exist when there is only one class of

people. To bring about this equity, they say that a period of dictatorship of the proletariat is necessary so as to protect the working from the intrigues of the capitalists. However in practice the Communist Party dominates the Government, which in turn is dominated by the top-most clique -- an *oligarchy again!* The government, as seen in communist countries, is totalitarian so far as freedom of speech and censorship are concerned. The USSR never tasted 'real' democracy even after over 70 years of communism and ultimately floundered and disintegrated.

The mankind's search for a system of governance that meets all its aspirations seems to be as elusive as ever!

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